

Republic of Poland

Country Report

Table of contents:

Executive Summary	2
Since the end of the Cold War, Poland has made significant economic and political progress. Poland today is a democracy with a strong free-market economy. <i>Read more.</i>	
History	3
Poland’s history as a state can be traced back to the 10 th century. The Kingdom of Poland was founded in 1025, and in 1569, together with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, it formed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. <i>Read more.</i>	
Political Situation	4
The Republic of Poland is a multi-party parliamentary democracy, with executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. <i>Read more.</i>	
Economic Situation	5
Poland joined the European Union in 2004. EU membership and economic reforms have given a major boost to the economy. <i>Read more.</i>	
Foreign Policy	6
As a member of NATO and the EU, Poland is focused on further integration into European political and security structures. <i>Read more.</i>	
Relations with the U.S.	6
Since 1989, Poland has been one of the United States’ strongest partners in Europe. <i>Read more.</i>	
Relationship with Israel	7
Poland was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Israel and to establish diplomatic relations in May 1948. <i>Read more.</i>	
Jewish Community & Anti-Semitism	9
Jewish presence in Poland was first recorded in the 11 th century. By the mid-16 th century, about 80% of world Jewry had settled in Poland. <i>Read more.</i>	

Executive Summary:

Since the end of the Cold War, Poland has made significant economic and political progress. Poland today is a democracy with a strong free-market economy. The country joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004. Poland is focused on further integration into European political and security structures.

Poland has established good relations with its immediate neighbors, including Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, and Ukraine. In recent years, however, relations with Russia have declined. Poland's criticism of Russian actions in the 2008 Georgia crisis, the 2014 annexation of Crimea, the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine, and Poland's pro-Western orientation have contributed to tense diplomatic relations with Russia.

Since 1989, Poland has been one of the United States' strongest partners in Eastern Europe. The U.S. and Poland partner closely together in fostering transatlantic security and protecting NATO's eastern boundary.

Since the end of the Cold War, Jewish communal life in Poland has been undergoing a revival. Approximately 10,000-20,000 Jews reside in Poland. Anti-Semitic incidents, in particular desecrations of Jewish sites, continue to occur throughout the country. Relations with Israel remain tense due to Poland's Holocaust memory laws.

Statistics:

Population: 38,046,000 (April 2019 est.)

Size: 312,685 sq. km.

Capital: Warsaw

Major cities: Warsaw, Kraków, Łódź, Wrocław, Gdańsk, Lublin, Katowice, Białystok

Jewish population: Est. 10,000-20,000

Head of State: President Andrzej Duda

Prime Minister: Mateusz Morawiecki

Foreign Minister: Jacek Czaputowicz

Ambassador to United States: Piotr Wilczek (since Jan. 2017)

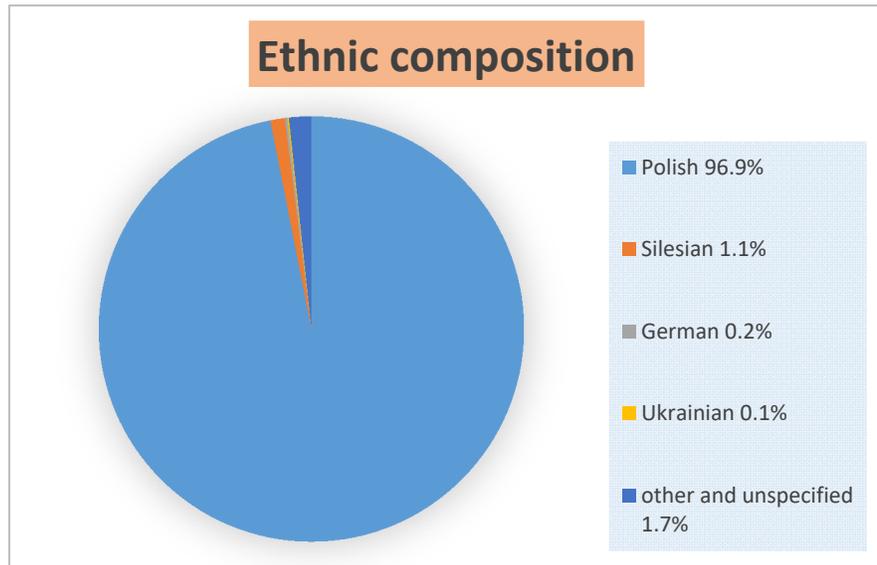
U.S. Ambassador to Poland:
Georgette Mosbacher

Freedom House Rating: Free

History:

Located in Central Europe, Poland is bordered by the Czech Republic, Germany, Belarus, Russia, Slovakia, Ukraine, Lithuania, and the Baltic Sea.

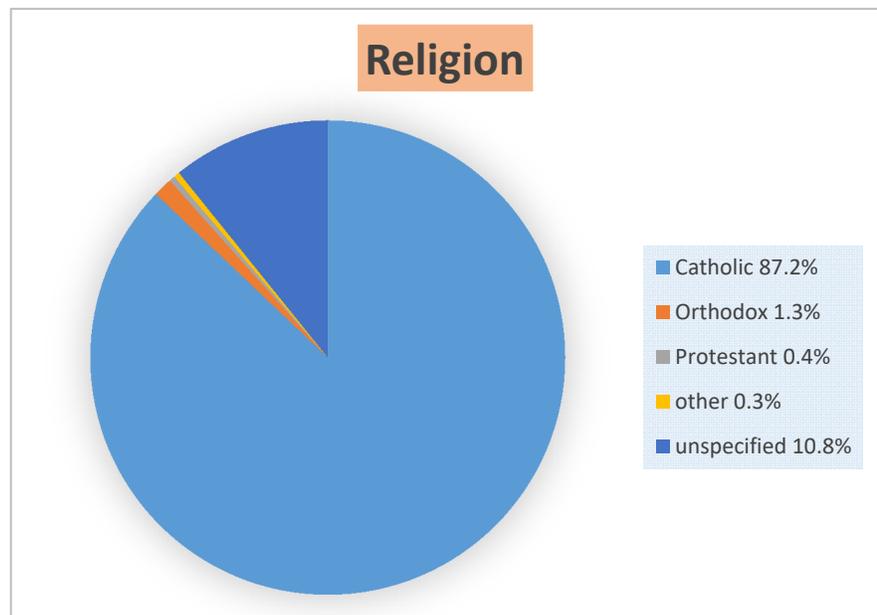
Poland's history as a state can be traced back to the 10th century. The Kingdom of Poland was founded in 1025, and in 1569, together with the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, it formed the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. This large and powerful state dominated the region throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. At the end of the 18th century, Russia, Prussia, and Austria partitioned the country, and for more than a century, no self-governed Polish state existed.



Poland regained independence at the end of World War I, until it was overrun by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union in 1939. Germany occupied all of Poland's territory in June 1941, after the Nazi attack on the Soviet Union.

Under occupation by Nazi German forces, six million Poles – of whom three million were Jewish – died during the Second World War.

Poland became a Soviet satellite state in 1947, until the revolutions of 1989 brought the Communist era to an end, and Poland adopted a new constitution.



In 1990, Poland's government introduced a package of free market reforms. Poland became a NATO member in 1999, along with the Czech Republic and Hungary, and joined the European Union in 2004.

Political Situation:

The Republic of Poland is a parliamentary democracy, with executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The president heads the executive branch and represents Poland internationally, as designated by the Polish constitution. The president is elected by popular vote for a five-year term and can be reelected once.

The prime minister is the leader of the cabinet and the head of the government of Poland. The president appoints the prime minister, who then forms the cabinet. The office of the prime minister has greater political power than the president.

The legislative branch consists of an upper house, the Senate, and the lower house, the Sejm. The Senate has 100 seats, with members elected for four-year terms in single-seat constituencies by majority vote, and the Sejm has 460 seats, with members elected for four-year terms in multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation.

The judicial branch consists of the Supreme Court, Constitutional Tribunal, State Tribunal, regional and appeal courts. The president of the Supreme Court is nominated by the General Assembly of the Supreme Court and selected by the president of Poland; other judges are nominated by the twenty-five-member National Judiciary Council, and appointed by the president of Poland. Judges serve until retirement, usually at age 65, but tenure can be extended.

Up until the 2015 elections, Poland's political arena was dominated by center-right and center-left parties. The last presidential election was held in May 2015, and the next election is scheduled for May 2020. As no candidate in 2015 received an outright majority in the first ballot, a second round was held, between Andrzej Duda, a member of the European Parliament and candidate from the Law and Justice Party (PiS), and incumbent president Bronisław Komorowski. Duda won the second round with 51.5% of the votes.

The opposition Law and Justice Party LAO won the October 2015 parliamentary elections, a major political shift rightward for the country. The Law and Justice Party is Eurosceptic, opposes joining the euro zone, and advocates for a strong NATO stance in dealing with Russia. In November 2015, President Duda swore in the new conservative government of Prime Minister Beata Szydło.

In December 2015, President Duda approved a controversial reform that makes it harder for the constitutional court to make majority rulings, despite large protests and European Union concerns about the implications for oversight of government decisions.

In December 2016 anti-government protestors across Poland demonstrated against the perceived illiberal agenda of the ruling right-wing Law and Justice Party, which threatened to reverse democratic gains made since 1989. A key concern of demonstrators was government proposals under consideration by the Polish parliament to restrict the right to free assembly.

In April 2017, Poland welcomed NATO troops deployed in the northeast, as part of efforts to enhance security following Russia's annexation of Crimea. In May 2017, tens of thousands of people marched in Warsaw to protest against perceived curbs on democracy imposed by the governing Law and Justice Party.

In July 2017, President Duda vetoed controversial laws that would have given the government extensive power over the judiciary.

In 2018, President Duda's government attempted to consolidate its political control over the country's Supreme Court by stacking it with appointees and forcing others to retire. Following a European Court of Justice ruling in October 2018 ordering Poland to suspend its judicial overhaul, Duda's Law and Justice Party quickly complied.

Economic Situation:

Poland joined the European Union in 2004. EU membership and economic reforms gave a major boost to the economy. Between 1989 and 2007, Poland's economy grew by 177%, showing the fastest progress in Eastern and Central Europe.

Poland's economy ranks 19th out of 43 countries in Europe and above the world average. Poland was the only EU member to avoid a recession during the 2008-2009 economic crisis, and the country's economy grew during the EU downturn.

Poland's economic strengths include its agricultural, pharmaceutical, aviation, steel, and machinery sectors. Poland's economic advantages also include a low level of public debt.

Poland's real GDP growth accelerated in the first half of 2017 to 4.0% from 2.7% in 2016. In 2018, Poland's GDP grew by 4.5%. The general government deficit, however, is set to widen again in 2018-19 to around 2.6-2.7% of GDP. The deficit increase is due to higher spending on retirement benefits and the higher co-financing of EU-funded capital spending.

Currency: 3.82 Polish Zloty = \$1.15

GDP: \$524 billion (2018 est.)

GDP per capita: \$15,751 (2018 est.)

GDP Real Growth: 4.9% (2018 est.)

Polish laws encourage foreign entrepreneurs and offers various forms of state aid. Most foreign direct investment comes from Germany, France, and the Netherlands. Germany remains Poland's biggest export market, accounting for 30% of exports. Since the beginning of 2014, the ongoing conflict between Ukraine and Russia has led to a dramatic reduction of Polish trade with Russia.

Foreign Policy:

As a NATO and EU member, Poland is focused on further integration into European political and security structures. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Poland established good relations with its immediate neighbors, signing friendship treaties with Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia.

In recent years, relations with Russia have worsened. Poland's criticism of Russian actions in the 2008 Georgia war, the annexation of Crimea, the ongoing crisis in Eastern Ukraine, and Poland's pro-Western orientation have contributed to tense diplomatic relations with Russia. Poland strongly supports EU sanctions against Russia. Poland has declared that it will never recognize Russia's annexation of Crimea.

Poland supports Ukraine. However, attempts by Ukrainians to glorify the World War II-era Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) and Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA), who were responsible for massacre of Poles in 1940s has met fierce criticism in Poland.

Wary of any increased powers for Brussels, Poland has been lobbying for an overhaul of the EU's fundamental treaties, to return some power to member states. The Eurosceptic government of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) appears more cautious regarding EU matters, signaling it wants to improve ties with Germany and France that have been strained by questions of reform.

Multilateral security cooperation through NATO and consolidating U.S.-European cooperation are among Poland's foreign policy priorities. Other priorities include bolstering bilateral cooperation with the United States, UK, and Germany, pursuing a dynamic regional policy, and expanding Poland's diplomatic presence in the world.

Relations with the United States:

The United States first formally established diplomatic relations with Poland in 1919. Since 1989, Poland has been one of the United States' strongest partners in Europe. The U.S. and Poland cooperate closely in fostering transatlantic security and prosperity. Areas of bilateral focus include NATO capabilities, counterterrorism, nuclear proliferation, missile defense, human rights, economic growth, energy security, and regional cooperation.

Poland contributes soldiers to the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, maintains troops in the Balkans, and is contributing a full battalion to the NATO Response Force. In November 2012, the United States opened a full-time aviation detachment in Poland. Waiving visas for Polish citizens visiting the U.S. remains a central subject of bilateral talks. Currently, Polish citizens require a visa to visit the United States.

In December 2010, President Bronisław Komorowski met with President Barack Obama in Washington to discuss economic, military, and technology cooperation issues. President Obama

visited Poland in May 2011, and met with Prime Minister Donald Tusk, President Komorowski, and other officials.

In July 2015, U.S. House of Representatives Speaker John Boehner led a Congressional delegation to Poland. The delegation met with President Komorowski, Foreign Minister Schetyna, Marshal of the Sejm Kidawa-Błonska, and other high-level officials to discuss bilateral cooperation.

In March 2016, new Polish President Andrzej Duda visited Washington for the Nuclear Security Summit and met with President Obama.

In July 2017, President Donald Trump visited Poland on his second official international trip. He praised Poland as a defender of Western values and democracy. During the trip, he met with President of Poland Duda in Warsaw to discuss bilateral energy projects and their vision of further strengthening the North Atlantic Alliance. They agreed that NATO allies have a duty to spend at least 2% of GDP on defense. Security and defense cooperation, which is foundational to U.S.-Polish strategic relations, is being increasingly supplemented by initiatives in other areas.

Advocating for strengthening NATO's presence in Eastern Europe, President Duda discussed the construction of a new permanent U.S. military base in Poland with President Trump during a visit to the United States in September 2018.

In January 2018, U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Warsaw to strengthen the strategic partnership with Poland. He also attended a commemoration marking the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising.

During his visit to Poland in February 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo urged the Polish government to pass Holocaust restitution legislation.

Relations with Israel:

Poland was one of the first countries to recognize the State of Israel and to establish diplomatic relations in May 1948.

Relations deteriorated during the Cold War and were severed completely after the Six-Day War in 1967. In March 1968, Polish authorities cracked down on the country's dissident movement and increased their persecution of Polish Jews, accusing them of "dual loyalty" to Poland and Israel, and urging immediate emigration. As a result, an estimated 13,000-30,000 Jews left Poland between 1968 and 1972, losing their Polish citizenship in the process.

In 1986, partial diplomatic relations were restored and in February 1990, diplomatic relations between Israel and Poland officially resumed. In May 1991, Polish President Lech Wałęsa visited Israel, and outlined a new approach to Polish-Jewish relations in a speech at the Knesset. Official visits between the countries have been frequent since then.

After talks between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk in Warsaw in January 2010, the two leaders pledged to deepen Polish-Israeli relations. In 2010, the Israel Council on Foreign Relations and the Polish Institute of International Affairs marked 20 years of bilateral relations between the countries with a Foreign Policy Conference held in Jerusalem.

In October 2014, President Reuven Rivlin held an official meeting with Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz in Warsaw.

In June 2016, Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski held talks with Israel's Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman during a visit to Israel. Waszczykowski and Lieberman discussed the situation in the Middle East and the NATO summit in Warsaw.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu hosted Polish President Andrzej Duda at his residence in Jerusalem in January 2017. During the visit, Duda remarked that unlike in France or other parts of Western Europe, Jews in Poland can openly wear religious garb safely. However, Duda equivocated about Polish involvement in the atrocities of the Holocaust, saying Poles also suffered under the Nazi regime.

In late December and early January 2017, members of Poland's 'NEVER AGAIN' Association participated in meetings in Israel, including an international educators conference on 'The Shoah and Jewish identity' at the Yad Vashem Institute.

In February 2018, Polish-Israeli relations entered an ongoing period of tension as a result of the Poland's new law that criminalized blaming Poland for crimes committed during the Holocaust. That month, Poland cancelled a visit by Israeli education minister Naftali Bennett amid uproar over his remarks regarding the Polish legislation. A year later, in February 2019, Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Yisrael Katz stated that Poles collaborated with Nazi Germany during the Holocaust and "suckled anti-Semitism with their mother's milk." Katz's statement led Poland to cancel its participation in the 2019 February Visegrad summit in Jerusalem, which Prime Minister Netanyahu was to host. The leaders of the other members of the Visegrad Group—Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia—still traveled to Israel and met with Netanyahu.

In March 2019, Poland accepted Israel's request to ban noted Holocaust-denier David Irving from entering the country. Irving had planned a nine-day tour of several concentration and extermination camps around the country. The countries also continue to view each other as important security partners. In November 2019, Poland's Military Attaché in Israel Col. Adam Gryzmkowski referred to Israel as a main ally of NATO, and therefore of Poland.

Jewish Community:

Jewish presence in Poland was first recorded in the 11th century. After suffering great losses in the Mongol invasion, the country encouraged immigration in the 13th century, and Jews flocked to Poland from Bohemia-Moravia, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Crimea.

By the mid-16th century, about 80% of world Jewry had settled in Poland. During the 16th to 18th centuries, a Jewish Parliament known as the Council of Four Lands (Va'ad Arba Aratsot) was the governing body for Polish Jews.

From 1648 to 1649, Bogdan Khmelnitsky led a Ukrainian Cossack uprising against Polish rule of Ukraine, killing between 100,000 and 200,000 Jews.

Much of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's Jewish community became part of the Russian Empire following the partition of the country at the end of the 18th century. The Russian government designated part of the territory as a "Pale of Settlement" in which the Jews of the Empire would be confined.

In the Pale of Settlement, the majority of Jews lived in shtetls or within major population centers like Warsaw and Kraków. However, Russian authorities restricted Jewish economic development in the region through anti-Semitic policies that prohibited Jews from joining many professions.

Toward the end of the 19th century, a great wave of Jewish emigration from Poland occurred. Many Polish Jews travelled to the United States, Canada, Argentina, Germany, France, and the British Mandate for Palestine (now Israel), as Jews continued to be subject to anti-Semitism under the tsars and in Poland.

During the interwar period of the early 20th century, Polish Jews were *de jure* protected under the Treaty of Versailles. In reality, their legal rights were sometimes not honored by Poland and many Jews were massacred in pogroms. The Jewish community in Poland remained strong, however. In many urban centers of the Polish republic, Jews formed a strong minority of the population and operated numerous major factories and businesses.

When the World War II began, some 3,300,000 Jews lived in the country, making Poland home to the world's second-largest Jewish community. Poland's Jewish population after the Holocaust was approximately 200,000 Jews. Nearly 85% of Polish Jewry perished in the Holocaust, and many Jews from other countries were deported to Poland and killed in Nazi extermination camps. At the war's end, many survivors refused to return to or remain in Poland.

During anti-Jewish riots, ethnic Poles murdered hundreds of Jews in Poland in 1944-1946. From 1945 to 1959 more than 150,000 Jewish Poles emigrated, mostly to the United States and Israel, to escape rising anti-Semitism and Communism. The last mass emigration took place in 1968, following the 1967 Six-Day War between Israel and Arab states, during a forceful anti-Jewish campaign by Polish authorities.

Since the fall of Communism in Poland, Jewish communal life has been undergoing a revival. Poland's government has implemented legal provisions to combat anti-Semitism and contributed to rebuilding Jewish cultural, social, and religious life.

The Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture and the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation sponsor many projects and programs focused on advocacy, education, and the rebuilding of Jewish community life in Poland.

Approximately 10,000-20,000 Jews currently live in Poland. Warsaw has Poland's largest Jewish community. Smaller communities are located in Kraków, Łódź, Szczecin, Gdańsk, Katowice, and Wrocław.

The Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland (UJRCP) is the umbrella organization of Jewish communities across the country, providing educational activities and social aid for Holocaust survivors, operating kosher cafeterias, renovating derelict buildings, and maintaining Jewish cemeteries.

Some of the synagogues are historic monuments, such as the Remu Synagogue, the Tempel Synagogue, and the Nozyk Synagogue. The 14th-century Stara Synagogue is the oldest in Poland. Before the German invasion of Poland, the Stara Synagogue was the main religious and social center of the Kraków Jewish community. It currently operates as a museum.

The POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a cultural and educational center on the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto. The Museum opened in April 2013 and the core exhibition opened in October 2014, depicting the thousand-year history of Polish Jewry. The core exhibition, occupying 43,000 square feet, consists of eight galleries.

In April 2017, Prime Minister Beata Szydło and other leading politicians, including the head of the opposition Civic Platform party Grzegorz Schetyna, attended commemorations at the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto. POLIN Museum volunteers handed out tens of thousands of paper daffodils on the street. The initiative was begun by the museum in 2013, on the 70th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, which began after the Germans launched the second large wave of deportations from the ghetto in January 1943.

The Krakow Jewish community will host its 29th Jewish Cultural Festival from June 21-30, 2019 in the city's historical Jewish district of Kazimierz. The event will promote Israel and educate participants on the community's traditions. For over a week, tourists can ride through Jerusalem streets in a virtual taxi, taste traditional Jewish cuisine, and listen to concerts by folk bands. Every year the festival culminates in a giant open air concert. The festival is seen as a symbol of tolerance, pluralism, and celebration of Jewish culture.

There is currently no law in Poland on Jewish property restitution, and Poland is the only EU nation and former Soviet bloc country that has not passed a law on the restitution of private

property. After numerous repeated appeals from Jewish organizations, draft legislation has been completed, calling for 15% of the properties' current value to be returned to family heirs.

Eastern European countries, in particular Poland, have failed to live up to their pledges to ensure the return of property taken from Jewish people during World War II. The only recourse to restitution in Poland has been longstanding provisions in Polish law, rather than any specific legislation designed to help Jewish communities. Polish authorities refer to this law as evidence of their inability to advance the issue of restitution further.

Anti-Semitism:

There is no state discrimination against the Jewish community. The Jewish community has good relations with the government and other religious groups. However, though direct attacks are rare. Anti-Semitic incidents continue to occur, and often involve desecration of Jewish sites.

In August 2011, a monument in the town of Jedwabne commemorating the mass killing of Jews by Poles was defaced with Nazi swastikas and SS signs, and covered with the words, "I don't apologize for Jedwabne!" and "They were easy to burn."

Anti-Semitic incidents have occurred during sporting events. During a September 2013 soccer match in Poznan, fans of the local club shouted anti-Semitic slogans at the visiting Łódź team and its fans. Prosecutors failed to identify the fans who shouted these slogans, and shortly discontinued the investigation. In October 2013, a Warsaw district court found 17 soccer fans guilty of hate speech for chanting in German "Hamas, Hamas... Jews to the gas [chambers]" during a 2011 soccer match between the Łódź and Warsaw teams.

In February 2013, unknown persons painted over a Star of David in a Jewish cemetery in western Poland with the inscription "Kalisz without Jews."

In 2013, the Białystok district prosecutor initiated a procedure to dismiss the head of the Białystok-North prosecutor's office. After reviewing almost 30 cases involving xenophobia or racism that occurred in Białystok between May 20 and June 26, the district prosecutor determined that the local prosecutor's office made mistakes in eight of the cases by discontinuing them or refusing to initiate an investigation.

In January 2014, police arrested six people for hanging anti-Semitic posters in Lublin, charging them with operating in a criminal group promoting fascism. One of the six arrestees, worked at the museum at Majdanek, a former Nazi concentration camp. The posters featured the Star of David displayed next to pictures of individuals, including the editor-in-chief of a local newspaper, the mayor of Wrocław, and several well-known civil society activists.

The Center for Research on Prejudice at the University of Warsaw's most recent study on anti-Semitism has found a significant increase in negative attitudes toward Jews since 2015. The

research, covering the years 2015-2018, shows that anti-Semitic hate speech is increasingly acceptable and enjoys a growing popularity on the internet and on Polish television. The study took actual examples of anti-Semitic statements found in different media and asked respondents if they found these statements offensive. In all cases, the statements were found to be less offensive in 2016 than in 2014. The difference was most pronounced among young people.

In July 2016, a Polish lawmaker from the Modern Party, which has a strong anti-racism agenda, said party leader Ryszard Petru had received a handwritten, anti-Semitic death threat whose author signed it "Sniper."

Another issue is denial by some Polish officials of individual Poles' responsibility for massacres of Jews during and after World War II. In July 2016, Polish Education Minister Anna Zalewska came under fire for remarks appearing to deny Polish responsibility for the Jedwabne massacre of 1941 and the Kielce massacre in 1946. Polish President Andrzej Duda holds opposing views to the minister and has openly admitted that ordinary Polish citizens participated in the Jedwabne massacre. In 2011, President Bronisław Komorowski "begged forgiveness" for the actions of his countrymen at Jedwabne.

In March 2017, a group of Warsaw residents celebrated the first day of spring by burning the effigy of a Jewish woman. A recording of a group called the Conscience of the Nation TV showed the burning and drowning of the effigy in the Vistula River. The puppet symbolizes what is ugly, cold, and bad, the Warsaw group wrote in describing the event. The custom of drowning a puppet depicting Marzanna, symbolizing winter, on the first day of spring is a popular element of Polish folklore practiced especially in small towns. Marzanna has never been connected to any national minority living in Poland.

In July 2017, the prosecutor's office in the western Poland city of Wrocław indicted former priest Jacek Międlar for "public incitement to hatred based on religious and national differences." In November 2016, during Polish Independence Day, Wrocław hosted a "March of Patriots." According to the prosecutor's office, in his speech to the march, "under the guise of promoting patriotic attitudes," Międlar publicly called for hatred against Jews and Ukrainians. Międlar pled not guilty, and said that he was defending the good name of Poles, whom he said the Jews call "worms." In April 2016, Międlar in a sermon referred to Jews as a "cancer which swept Poland." The Prosecutor's Office in Białystok later found that no hate crime had been committed. He has twice been banned from entering the United Kingdom to take part in anti-immigrant marches.

In August 2017, the museum at Auschwitz criticized a right-wing television station in Warsaw that adapted the infamous "Arbeit macht frei" sign above the gates of the Nazi death camp into an illustration for a story about German reparations. The story on Republika TV, about the call by some Polish lawmakers for Germany to compensate Poland for its losses in World War II, changed the signs' words from "Work sets you free" to "Reparations set you free." Following complaints, Republika removed the graphic from its Twitter account but not from its website.

In August 2017, President of the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland Leslaw Piszewski and Warsaw community head Anna Chipczynska sent an open letter to Jaroslaw Kaczynski, a founder of the ruling right-wing Law and Justice Party. The co-authors wrote that they are “appalled by recent events and fearful for our [communities’] security as the situation in our country is becoming more dangerous.” The letter came amid growing concern about right-wing incitement against Jews and perceived inaction by authorities on a string of high-profile incidents featuring anti-Semitic rhetoric – including by people affiliated with Law and Justice. Earlier that month, a lawmaker for Law and Justice, Bogdan Rzonca, wrote on Twitter: “I wonder why there are so many Jews among those performing abortions, despite the Holocaust.”

In November 2017, the annual “Independence March” in Warsaw drew more than 50,000 marchers, including some from extremist groups elsewhere in Europe. The march was organized by a coalition of groups, including the extremist groups National Radical Camp and All Polish Youth. The main theme of the march was “We Want God!” Most participants marched with Polish flags. Some participants displayed anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim imagery, chanted slogans calling for a “white Europe,” and performed Nazi salutes. Polish political leaders, including President Andrzej Duda and Law and Justice Party chairman Jaroslaw Kaczynski condemned the racist banners and chants. A Foreign Ministry statement condemned “racist, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic ideas” and stated that the march was “largely patriotic.”

Piotr Rybak, convicted in 2017 of burning an effigy of a Jew at an anti-immigration demonstration, led a separate Independence Day march in the western city of Wrocław with approximately 2,000 participants. Jacek Międlar, a former priest who co-led the march, called on the crowd to take “extreme action” against “forces of evil,” including Jews who “threatened” the state.

On January 26, 2018 members of the Polish parliament passed an amendment to the country’s 1998 Act on the Institute of National Remembrance that has since been dubbed “the ‘Polish death camp’ law” or the “Holocaust Law”. The amendment to the law, which was established in 1998 to maintain World War II-era archives, made it a crime, punishable by fine or imprisonment for up to three years, to accuse the Polish state or nation of responsibility or complicity in Nazi atrocities during World War II. It also gave the country’s Institute for National Remembrance power to bring charges against anyone who defames or tarnishes the reputation of Poland or the Polish people.

On February 6, 2018 following an international outcry, Polish President Andrzej Duda expressed concern that some provisions of the bill might violate Poland’s constitution. However, instead of vetoing the bill, he signed it into law and referred the provision regarding criminal penalties to the country’s Constitutional Tribunal for evaluation. The law’s provision establishing potential civil penalties took effect on February 28, 2018. The law generated significant criticism from the U.S. State Department, the Congressional Bipartisan Anti-Semitism Task Force, the Government of Israel, and numerous Jewish and human rights organizations around the world, who feared that it would have a chilling effect on discussion about the Holocaust in Poland.

In June 2018, the Polish government removed the criminal punishments, though prosecutors can still issue financial fines.

In April 2018, Polish nationalists protested in front of the U.S. Embassy against the restitution of Jewish property. Protest was held under the slogan “Stop Jewish property claims” and was related to a new U.S. law on restitution.

On November 11, 2018, Polish authorities held a march in Warsaw commemorating the 100th anniversary of the country’s independence. Polish President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki walked in the front of the march. Far-right groups from Poland and around the world joined the celebration despite a ban by the Polish government. Participants in the March included the National Radical Camp, which has engaged in Holocaust denial, as well as the Independence March Association, whose leader recently called Polish Jews a “fifth column.” Self-avowed fascist groups from other European countries were also present.

In December 2018, police in the Polish city of Czestochowa found anti-Semitic graffiti on the gate of the local Jewish community. Inscriptions read “Jews to the sand” and “cyclone B.”

Amid tensions between Israel and Poland over Israeli Foreign Minister Yisrael Katz’s statement that Poles collaborated with Germany in perpetrating the Holocaust, another Jewish cemetery was vandalized. Vandals wrote “Jesus is King” on the side of the fence. Even though authorities removed it, vandals reposted the graffiti once again hours later.

In March 2019, a Polish right-wing newspaper appeared in the Polish parliament as part of the daily press kit with the front page headline “how to recognize a Jew,” which included a picture of Holocaust historian Jan Gross.

Developments in Polish Jewish Relations

The Polish government works to commemorate the country’s Jewish history and support the revival of Jewish cultural life. Its efforts have included improving Holocaust education in schools, recognizing the contribution of Polish Jews to the nation’s culture, and providing financial support to Jewish organizations. Former Ambassador to Israel Jacek Chodorowicz is the government’s Envoy for Jewish Affairs and Contacts with the Jewish Diaspora, as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

In December 2017, the Polish government pledged \$28 million to restore the Warsaw Jewish Cemetery, making the preservation project one of the largest of its kind in Europe. The measure passed Poland’s lower house of parliament, the Sejm, by a vote of 400-4.

In May 2018, a 120-member delegation of Israeli police officers, along with members of the Polish government, commemorated the victims of the 1946 Kielce Pogrom. The Deputy Mayor of Kielce welcomed the visit of the Israeli police officers and stressed the open cooperation between his town and its Israeli partners.

In February 2018, members of the Polish government spoke out against the creation of a “Polocaust” museum dedicated to the non-Jewish victims of the Nazis. Deputy Culture Minister Jaroslaw Sellin argued that the initiative “would hurt Jewish sensitivity and unnecessarily provoke more tension between our nations. The Polocaust museum will not be built.”

In August 2018, authorities in Warsaw allocated \$41 million to adapt a five-story building into a new home for the Warsaw Jewish Theater. A Warsaw City Council member called the theater “one of the most important guardians of Jewish culture in Warsaw, and all over Poland.”

In November 2018, the Polish parliament adopted a resolution commemorating Yiddish novelist Isaac Bashevis Singer, who 40 years ago received the Nobel Prize for Literature. The resolution stressed that Singer’s work – in Yiddish – is an integral part of Polish cultural heritage.

Polish and Israeli tourism has also improved. In 2017, travel from Israel to Poland increased from 139,000 the previous year to 250,000, according to Israel’s ambassador to Poland. During the same period, almost 100,000 Poles visited Israel. In first ten months of 2018 alone, 123,000 tourists from Poland have arrived in Israel. The Polish government has also worked with the Israeli government on cross-cultural events, including holding a 70th anniversary commemorative reopening of the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw.