

ynRoad Traffic Safety as an Element of State Security Policy

Original article

Received: 2026-07-26

Revised: 2026-09-18

Accepted: 2026-09-27

Final review: 2026-09-24

Peer review: 2026-09-10

Jadwiga Sługocka^{1, A-F}

[ORCID !\[\]\(4b7a79268f6ba26c1471d4232fffa85a_img.jpg\) 0009-0004-3109-9303](https://orcid.org/0009-0004-3109-9303)

A - Research concept and design, B - Collection and/or assembly of data, C - Data analysis and interpretation, D - Writing the article, E - Critical revision of the article, F - Final approval of the article

¹ Faculty of Finance and Management, WSB Merito University in Wrocław, Poland

Double blind

Abstract

Keywords: road traffic safety, state security policy, road traffic law, securitization.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 License

Objectives: This article treats road traffic safety as a strand of state security policy, one that reaches beyond its familiar legal and administrative framing. It traces the direction of legislative change in Poland between 2015 and 2026, asking how far this field has shaped Polish security policy over the period.

Methods: The analysis covers amendments to the Penal Code, the Road Traffic Law, the Act on Drivers, and the Road Transport Act, read against strategic documents, chiefly the National Road Safety Programme 2021–2030. The study rests on doctrinal legal analysis, supplemented by accident, fatality, injury, and drink-driving data for 2015–2025, plus a comparison with Germany, France, and Sweden.

Results: Polish policy has drifted, slowly and unevenly, from a purely punitive model toward the Safe System's assumptions, though the shift is still mostly on paper: legislative practice keeps leaning on repressive instruments. Available data will not support crediting legal change alone for better safety outcomes once infrastructure, technology, and social factors are set aside. Poland's accident-rate gap against the reference states owes more to infrastructure quality and safety culture than to criminal provisions.

Conclusions: Road traffic safety remains only partly integrated into Poland's state security policy, despite the formal adoption of the Safe System model. The article calls for clearer recognition of this field in future editions of the National Security Strategy, a stronger institutional standing for the National Road Safety Council, and legislative priorities tied more closely to systemic prevention than to the reactive, piecemeal law-making that has dominated so far.

1. Introduction

For a long time, road traffic safety sat comfortably within technical and administrative categories in Polish scholarship and legislative practice. It was treated as a by-product of road infrastructure, traffic regulations, and driver-examination procedures. The scale of road accidents, their persistence, and their social and economic fallout point toward a different reading, though: that road traffic safety is, in substance, one component of state security policy broadly conceived. It can be understood as a duty resting on public authorities to protect citizens' life, health, and property (Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1997, Arts. 5 and 38). Poland has for years remained among the EU states with a comparatively high road-fatality rate, a fact reflected both in EU-level recommendations and in domestic strategic documents (National Road Safety Council [NRSC], 2021).

The risks generated by road accidents extend well beyond the transport sector. They rank among the more pressing challenges facing contemporary public safety. According to the World Health Organization (2023), road accidents remain a leading cause of death among children and young adults, claiming roughly 1.19 million lives worldwide each year. The greatest gains accrue to states that adopt a systemic approach, one that folds legislative, infrastructural, and educational measures together rather than treating them separately.

The years 2015 to 2026 make for a particularly instructive research window. Over this period, the Polish legislature repeatedly amended the principal acts governing road traffic safety: the Penal Code of 6 June 1997 (consolidated text, Journal of Laws 2025, item 383), the Code of Petty Offences of 20 May 1971 (consolidated text, Journal of Laws 2025, item 734), the Road Traffic Law of 20 June 1997 (Journal of Laws 2024, item 1251), the Act on Drivers of 5 January 2011 (consolidated text, Journal of Laws 2025, item 1226), and the Road Transport Act of 6 September 2001 (Journal of Laws 2025, item 1490).

Some of these amendments were unmistakably repressive: mandatory vehicle confiscation from drunk drivers, lifetime driving bans. Others pursued systemic prevention, most notably the adoption of the National Road Safety Programme (NRSP) 2021–2030. The period closes with the sweeping amendment to the Road Traffic Law of 17 October 2025, which touches eight statutes at once. It introduces, among other things, a new ground for suspending a driving licence when speed limits are exceeded outside built-up areas, a helmet requirement for children under sixteen, and the criminalisation of so-called drifting as a distinct offence. The provisions take effect in stages: the bulk from 3 March 2026, the helmet obligation only from 3 June 2026. That timetable lets the first quarter of 2026 stand as a natural, if imperfect, cut-off point for the period under study, given that some protective measures from the same amendment will formally come into force after that line is drawn.

The article sets out to identify and assess the direction of legislative change concerning road traffic safety in Poland between 2015 and 2026, and to ask whether these changes add up to a coherent security policy or amount instead to something more reactive and piecemeal. This purpose translates into the central research question: to what extent has road traffic safety shaped state security policy in Poland during this period? Four subsidiary questions unpack it further. How did the standing of road traffic safety within the hierarchy of security-policy goals shift over the period studied? Which logic, repressive or preventive-systemic, dominates successive amendments? Do the legal changes remain consistent with domestic strategic

documents and with UN and EU standards? And what tensions between regulatory effectiveness and the principle of proportionality do the newest legal solutions expose?

The study rests on the doctrinal-legal method, supplemented by analysis of legal acts, strategic documents, and road-safety statistics. The theoretical part situates road traffic safety within security studies. The bulk of the article then examines the legislative changes unfolding between 2015 and 2026, setting them against core Polish accident indicators and against the experience of selected European states. The article ends with conclusions and proposals bearing on the future direction of road traffic safety policy.

2. Road Traffic Safety as a Category of State Security: A Theoretical Framework

2.1. Public and internal state security: terminological groundwork

Contemporary security studies treat state security as a multidimensional category. It folds in not only classical military threats but a wide catalogue of risks to citizens' life, health, and property arising from the ordinary business of running a state (Pieprzny, 2007). Public security, on this reading, denotes a condition in which citizens can draw on shared goods, including transport infrastructure, without fear for their life or health. Ensuring the institutional, legal, and organisational conditions for that state falls to the state itself (Lisiecki, 2011). Road traffic safety fits within this category as one of its specific segments, alongside sanitary security, fire safety, or the safety of mass events. It blends elements of public security with elements of social security.

The Constitution of the Republic of Poland contains no provision devoted specifically to road traffic safety. Its constitutional footing can nonetheless be inferred from general systemic principles. Article 5 places on the Republic of Poland a duty to secure its citizens' safety, while Article 38 establishes the protection of life as a constitutional value. Constitutional-law doctrine reads these provisions as generating a positive obligation on the state to take organisational and legislative steps that minimise the risk of losing life or health in the ordinary situations of daily existence, among which the use of public roads figures prominently (Banaszak, 2012).

2.2. The securitization of road traffic safety

A useful analytical lens for describing how a social problem, here road accident rates, migrates from the register of ordinary administrative policy into the register of state security policy is the concept of securitization developed by the so-called Copenhagen School (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998). Securitization works through a speech act in which an actor, typically a public authority, defines a given phenomenon as an existential threat, thereby justifying extraordinary measures that go beyond standard political procedure.

The concept is not deployed here as a formal research instrument requiring systematic coding of speech acts or analysis of audience reception. It serves, instead, as an interpretive prompt: something to help make sense of a recurring rhetorical pattern visible in the explanatory memoranda accompanying successive amendments. Successive changes to the Penal Code and the Road Traffic Law in Poland were repeatedly justified in the register proper to security discourse, not purely administrative discourse. Lawmakers reached for categories such as "road piracy," "recidivists," or the need to "eliminate" the most dangerous offenders "from traffic." Word choices of this kind signal that the phenomenon was being framed as a threat calling

for extraordinary measures. That observation resurfaces as an interpretive thread in the empirical part of the article; it is not the product of a separate, systematically conducted discourse analysis.

2.3. The Safe System model versus the repressive approach

The literature identifies two competing paradigms for managing road traffic safety. The first, traditional approach rests on individual road-user responsibility and treats deterrence and punishment as the primary lever for cutting accident numbers. The second, the Safe System Approach, traces back to the Swedish Vision Zero concept of the 1990s. It starts from a simple premise: human beings inevitably make mistakes, so responsibility for safety ought to be distributed systemically among infrastructure designers, vehicle manufacturers, regulatory bodies, and drivers alike. This is the approach that substantially informs the National Road Safety Programme (NRSP 2021–2030, NRSC, 2021).

Poland formally adopted the Safe System model when it enacted the NRSP 2021–2030. The programme rests on five pillars: safety management, the safe road user, safe infrastructure, the safe vehicle, and post-crash care, pursued through what is described as the 4×E approach (engineering, enforcement, education, and emergency response) (NRSC, 2021). Adopting the document places Poland within the UN General Assembly's global Second Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021–2030, announced in September 2020, and within the commitments of the Stockholm Declaration of February 2020. The intermediate target set for 2030 is a 50% reduction in deaths and serious injuries against the 2019 baseline, with the elimination of road deaths and serious injuries as the horizon for 2050. Underlying this approach is the recognition that human beings remain the most error-prone element of the transport system and cannot be expected to eliminate that risk entirely. Road traffic safety, accordingly, cannot be reduced to the responsibility of individual road users. As Wegman and Aarts (2006) argue, an effective safety policy needs to act simultaneously on infrastructure, vehicle design, road-user education, and enforcement mechanisms. Responsibility for the level of safety achieved should therefore be shared among all the actors involved in designing and running the transport system.

Poland's alignment with this trend forms part of a broader, global diffusion of the Safe System model. The literature describes this shift as a move away from the traditional individual-responsibility paradigm toward a systemic approach, promoted consistently by the World Health Organization, the OECD, and UN agencies (Kristianssen, 2023). Effective implementation demands a systematic approach built on clearly defined institutional roles, quantified targets, and sustained political commitment from decisionmakers. Without that commitment, even the best-designed strategy remains a purely declaratory document (Várhelyi, 2016).

As the article goes on to show, the declaratory adoption of a systemic model at strategic level does not always translate into coherence in current criminal and administrative legislation. In many respects, that legislation remains faithful to the traditional, repressive paradigm.

2.4. Road traffic safety within the structure of national security policy

Coordinating road traffic safety policy nationally falls to the National Road Safety Council, which operates under the minister responsible for transport. Its task is to initiate and coordinate action across the various organs of central and local government. Locating this body within the transport portfolio, rather than, say, within the internal-security apparatus, raises a fair question: does Polish administration actually treat road traffic safety as a full-fledged component of state security policy, or does it still function as a derivative of transport policy? This thread is picked up again in Section 7.

3. Methodology

The study is built on a review of the normative acts governing road traffic safety in Poland between 2015 and 2026, together with strategic documents and accident statistics. It draws on literature review, analysis, comparison, and synthesis, paying particular attention to how the reviewed regulations bear on driver safety behaviour, a question squarely within the remit of security studies.

The research material fell into four groups. The first comprised statutory instruments, chiefly the Road Traffic Law, the Penal Code, the Act on Drivers, and the Road Transport Act, together with their amendments published between 1 January 2015 and 30 June 2026. The second consisted of strategic documents, including the National Road Safety Programme 2013-2020 and the National Road Safety Programme 2021-2030. The third group covered explanatory memoranda to draft legislation and public administration documents. The fourth drew on statistical data from the Police, the National Road Safety Council, and international bodies.

4. The Evolution of Road Traffic Safety Legislation in Poland, 2015–2026: A Chronological Analysis

4.1. 2015–2017: a punitive turn against "road piracy"

The period under review opens with the Act of 20 March 2015 amending the Penal Code and certain other acts (Journal of Laws 2015, item 541), which entered into force on 18 May 2015. The amendment introduced a mandatory lifetime ban on driving any motor vehicle for a person who causes a road catastrophe or accident resulting in death or serious bodily harm while intoxicated, under the influence of drugs, or having fled the scene. An equivalent measure was extended to anyone driving despite a prior final conviction for an offence against traffic safety. A new, aggravated form of the offence under Article 178a § 4 of the Penal Code allowed for a prison sentence of up to five years for anyone caught driving again despite a court-ordered ban.

The Ministry of Justice's explanatory memorandum reached for the rhetoric characteristic of security discourse: the "war on road piracy." It cited statistics showing more than 30,000 accidents and over 3,000 deaths a year, alongside concerns about criminal cases lapsing under the statute of limitations. In response, the amendment extended the limitation period for traffic offences from two to three years and made a court-ordered driving ban mandatory for anyone driving after their licence had already been administratively withdrawn.

Alongside this tightening of criminal liability came a notable weakening of preventive oversight. Local authorities lost the power to install speed cameras on their own initiative, a decision often cited in expert debate as inconsistent with the stated aim of improving road safety. Here is the tension at the heart of this whole period: the legislature was tightening criminal sanctions at the very moment it was narrowing the scope of preventive supervision.

Rounding out this package was the Act of 16 December 2015 amending the Road Traffic Law and certain other acts (Journal of Laws 2015, item 2183), which, among other things, refined the rules governing the central register of drivers. The dominant logic of 2015–2017, then, was one of retributive severity, concentrated almost entirely on toughening criminal liability for the most dangerous offenders, with little in the way of parallel systemic-preventive action.

4.2. 2018–2020: consolidating administrative oversight and legislative lag on new Mobility

The second sub-period shows the centre of gravity shifting from criminal law toward administrative instruments. The pivotal measure was the Act of 9 May 2018 amending the Road Traffic Law and certain other acts (Journal of Laws 2018, item 957), which expanded the mechanism for administratively suspending and withdrawing driving licences, notably through the newly introduced Article 16a. That provision gave starostas (heads of county-level administration) the power to issue administrative decisions suspending a licence independently of any parallel criminal or petty-offence proceedings. This dual track of administrative and criminal liability for the same factual event raises questions about compatibility with the *ne bis in idem* principle and about the effectiveness of coordination between local authorities and the courts.

Yet the 2018–2020 sub-period also exposes a marked legislative lag in responding to a changing traffic reality. These years saw a rapid surge in the popularity of personal mobility devices, electric scooters above all, on Polish roads and pavements, operating in what amounted to a legal vacuum. There was no clear statutory basis defining their legal status, the rules for their use, speed limits, or minimum user age. Regulation of the field did not arrive until the following sub-period. A fast-growing category of road users spent close to three years without an adequate legal framework.

The year 2020, which closes this sub-period, brought the formal conclusion of the NRSP 2013–2020. Its evaluation found real progress, a 36% reduction in deaths and a 22% reduction in serious injuries between 2009 and 2019, but fell short of the targets set (50% and 40% respectively) (NRSC, 2020). This shortfall became the direct starting point for the qualitative shift in approach that followed in the next sub-period.

4.3. 2021–2023: adopting the Safe System model alongside a package of criminal law tightening

The third sub-period opens with the NRSC's adoption of the National Road Safety Programme 2021–2030, built on the Safe System concept and its five pillars. The programme was a formal response to the previous strategy's incomplete results and to Poland's participation in the UN's global Second Decade of Action 2021–2030. Its implementation runs through

two-year action programmes alongside parallel statutory amendments, which in practice largely retained their traditional, repressive character.

This is visible in the Act of 2 December 2021 amending the Road Traffic Law (Journal of Laws 2021, item 2328), passed a few months after the NRSP's adoption. The act delivered the first comprehensive regulation of the legal status of personal mobility devices, closing the legal vacuum that had persisted since 2018. The same act introduced, in Article 17, a mechanism for reducing penalty points through paid training, available no more often than once every six months and worth a six-point reduction. It remains the only instrument of an educational-remedial character in Polish law, though the 2025 amendment later restricted its use for the most serious offences.

In parallel, in September 2022, a new penalty-point tariff took effect, based on the Act of 5 August 2022 amending the Penal Code and certain other acts (Journal of Laws 2022, item 1855) and the Regulation of the Minister of the Interior and Administration of 15 September 2022 on the register of drivers who violate traffic rules (Journal of Laws 2022, item 1951). It raised the maximum number of points awarded for a single, most serious violation and lowered the threshold for licence loss during a probationary period.

The most consequential change of this sub-period in criminal-law term was the sweeping reform of the Penal Code passed by the Sejm in 2022 and signed by the President in December of that year, under the Act of 7 July 2022 amending the Penal Code and certain other acts (Journal of Laws 2022, item 2600). Among other things, it raised the maximum determinate prison term from fifteen to thirty years and introduced so-called absolute life imprisonment. On the road-safety side, it made vehicle confiscation mandatory for a driver found with a blood alcohol level of at least 1.5 per mille, regardless of whether an accident had occurred. The act took effect in December 2022. The confiscation provisions themselves, owing to a year-long *vacatio legis* later extended further through an amendment to the Code of Civil Procedure, did not actually apply until 14 March 2024. This timing matters for assessing the measure's effects, a point the article returns to in Section 5.1.

The 2021–2023 sub-period, then, is marked by the formal adoption of a systemic road traffic safety strategy running alongside the persistence, indeed the deepening, of a repressive current in day-to-day criminal legislation.

4.4. 2024–2026: the culmination of restrictions and package-based consolidation

The final sub-period closes the studied interval with the most comprehensive of all the amendments examined: the Act of 17 October 2025 amending the Road Traffic Law and certain other acts (Journal of Laws 2025, item 1676), passed by the Sejm by a vote of 241 in favour, 28 against, and 174 abstentions. The amendment touches eight statutes at once, confirming a pattern of legislating through omnibus packages across a fragmented body of road-safety regulation.

Substantively, the 2025 amendment introduces several markedly repressive measures. It extends the mandatory three-month licence suspension for exceeding the speed limit by more than 50 km/h to single-carriageway, two-way roads outside built-up areas, justified by data showing that roughly 90% of fatal accidents occur on roads of this type. It creates a new petty

offence covering so-called drifting, punishable by a fine of no less than PLN 1,500, rising to no less than PLN 2,500 where the act creates a hazard. It also substantially restricts the possibility of "clearing" penalty points for the most serious violations.

The amendment also brings preventive and protective changes. It introduces a helmet requirement for anyone under sixteen using a bicycle, an electric scooter, or another personal mobility device, justified by more than 2,700 incidents involving children in 2024, 40% of which resulted in head injury. It creates a probationary period for new drivers and allows a category-B licence to be obtained from age seventeen under the supervision of an experienced driver. Institutionally, it expands the NRSC's membership to include a representative of the General Inspectorate of Road Transport and broadens the powers of starostas.

The most recent amendment to the Code of Petty Offences of 20 May 1971 (Journal of Laws 2025, item 734) toughened penalties for the most dangerous road behaviour. It introduced new offences (drifting, organising illegal car meets, among others), raised fine ceilings (for instance for breaching rules on organised motoring gatherings), and revised the penalty-point system.

Closing out the period is the Act of 4 December 2025 amending certain acts to improve road traffic safety (Journal of Laws 2025, item 1872), whose main provisions take effect on 29 January 2026. It introduces new offences into the Penal Code concerning participation in illegal races and so-called reckless driving and clarifies the rules for ordering vehicle confiscation from drivers under the influence. A further tranche of change, flowing from the staged entry into force of the 17 October 2025 amendment and covering rules for young drivers and out-of-town licence suspension, takes effect on 3 March 2026.

That lets the first quarter of 2026 stand as a symbolic close to the period studied, though it is worth noting that two other measures within the same amendment, the helmet requirement for children under sixteen and the increase in the minimum age for riding an electric scooter from ten to thirteen, do not take effect until 3 June 2026, beyond the cutoff adopted here.

5. Road Safety Indicators in Poland Against the Backdrop of Legislative Change (2015–2026)

The analysis so far has been doctrinal-legal in character. It has not directly addressed whether the legislative evolution described actually translated into a measurable improvement in road traffic safety. This section fills that gap, setting the core accident indicators for Poland over the period against the chronology laid out in Section 4, and against the situation in three reference states: Germany, France, and Sweden.

The comparison offered here is descriptive. It does not attempt to demonstrate a direct causal link between any particular statute and a change in a given indicator, since a rigorous assessment of a single regulation's effectiveness would call for quasi-experimental methods capable of controlling for confounding factors: shifts in traffic volume, economic cycles, or extraordinary events such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Wegman et al., 2015). The figures below are best read as a starting point for deeper quantitative analysis, a direction flagged in the concluding section.

5.1. Accidents, victims, and drink-driving in Poland, 2015–2025

Table 1 sets out the number of road accidents and their victims in Poland between 2015 and 2025, drawing on the annual reports of the Police Road Traffic Bureau and on the National Road Safety Programme 2021–2030. The definition of a "seriously injured" victim underwent methodological revision during this period, which limits full comparability of data from before and after roughly 2020.

Table 1. Road accidents, fatalities, and injuries in Poland, 2015–2025

Year	Accidents	Fatalities	Injuries, total (of which serious)
2015	n/a	2,938	n/a
2016	n/a	3,026	n/a
2017	n/a	2,831	n/a
2018	n/a	2,862	n/a
2019	30,288	2,909	35,477 (10,633)
2020	n/a	2,491	n/a
2021	22,816	2,245	26,415 (8,276)
2022	21,322	1,896	24,743
2023	20,936	1,893	24,125 (7,595)
2024	21,519	1,896	24,782 (7,796)
2025*	n/a	1,660	24,590 (7,866)

Source: 2025 figures are drawn from the annual Police report available at the time of writing. Police Headquarters, Road Traffic Bureau (2020–2025); National Road Safety Council (2021).

A few things stand out here. The fatality count held broadly steady between 2015 and 2019 (2,831–3,026 deaths a year), with a marked decline setting in only in 2020–2022, years shaped by pandemic-related mobility restrictions. Between 2022 and 2024 fatalities settled at a plateau of 1,893–1,896 a year, before another sharp fall to 1,660 in 2025 (down 12.4% year on year). The timing only partly overlaps with the repressive instruments described in Section 4.3. The tightened penalty-point tariff has been in force since September 2022 and could plausibly have shaped the whole subsequent period. The mandatory vehicleconfiscation provisions, on the other hand, did not take effect until 14 March 2024, so they cannot account for the results recorded in 2022–2023, and could have had at most a limited effect in 2024 with a fuller one in 2025. None of this supports a firm claim that the individual criminal-law amendments produced an additional, distinct effect on fatalities beyond what structural factors, an ageing vehicle fleet, better infrastructure, more roadside checks, or shifting traffic volumes, would predict on their own. Further quantitative research, as noted in Section 8, would be needed to settle the point.

Table 2 presents data on accidents caused by drivers under the influence of alcohol between 2022 and 2024, spanning the period both before and, in part, after mandatory vehicle confiscation took effect (14 March 2024).

Table 2. Accidents caused by drivers under the influence of alcohol, Poland, 2022–2024

Year	Accidents	Fatalities	Injuries
2022	approx. 1,684	approx. 203	n/a
2023	1,600	251	1,741
2024	1,201	151	1,428

Source: accidents caused by drivers under the influence of alcohol. Sources: Police Headquarters, Road Traffic Bureau (2023, 2024); Polish Road Safety Observatory (2024).

The number of accidents caused by drivers under the influence fell markedly over this period, from around 1,684 in 2022 to 1,201 in 2024, with a comparable fall in the associated fatality count. The trend cannot be attributed wholesale to tighter criminal sanctions, though. Mandatory vehicle confiscation did not take effect until 14 March 2024, so the decline already visible in 2022–2023 predates it and needs a different explanation. A more plausible driver over that stretch was the steady growth in sobriety checks carried out by the Police, from roughly 8.2 million in 2021 to more than 16 million in 2024, together with a long-running decline, predating the study period, in social tolerance for drink-driving. Any additional effect attributable to confiscation itself would be expected to show up earliest in the 2024–2025 data. Disentangling the effect of the criminal sanction from that of heightened preventive enforcement would require separate quantitative analysis, beyond what this article sets out to do.

5.2. Poland compared with Germany, France, and Sweden

An international comparison helps calibrate the scale of Poland's problem. Table 3 sets out road fatalities per million inhabitants in Poland, Germany, France, and Sweden for 2023–2024, against the EU average.

Table 3. Road fatalities per million inhabitants, 2023–2024

Country	2023	2024
Sweden	22	20
Germany	34	33
France	approx. 46	approx. 47
Poland	approx. 50	approx. 50
EU average	46	45

Source: road fatalities per million inhabitants. Figures for France and Poland are estimated from fatality counts and Eurostat population data. Sources: European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport (2024, 2025); Statistisches Bundesamt (2025).

Poland remains among the EU states with a fatality rate well above the Union average, and roughly two and a half times that of Sweden, the country that originated the Safe System model (see Section 2.3). Germany's rate is worth pausing on: despite a far longer regulatory tradition and the absence of speed limits on part of its motorway network, it also sits well below Poland's. The gap, it seems, owes more to infrastructure quality, safety culture, and systematic enforcement than to the substance of criminal law itself. Between 2019 and 2024 Poland achieved one of the largest relative falls in road fatalities anywhere in the EU, close to 35%, a genuine improvement by any measure. Yet the country's high starting point of risk means that, even after this fall, it still sits well down the EU safety ranking. Comparative research covering EU states finds that economic growth alone does not guarantee improved road safety without deliberate accompanying investment in enforcement, infrastructure, and healthcare (Al-Mahamid and Török, 2026). Poland's continued place among the higher-risk states, in other words, cannot be explained solely by its lower level of economic development relative to the reference countries.

International analysis bears this out. The International Transport Forum (2024) notes that only a subset of states are currently on a trajectory consistent with halving deaths and serious injuries by 2030. Sustained improvement, its authors argue, requires not only legislative change but the systematic use of empirical data and a durable place for road safety at the centre of public policy.

The data assembled in this section do not undercut the article's central argument so much as round it out. The fall in fatalities over the period studied is real, and it partly coincides in time with successive waves of criminal-law tightening. What it does not come with, though, is a comparable improvement in Poland's standing relative to the reference states, nor clear evidence that changes to the Penal Code, rather than other factors, drive the improvement observed. This reinforces the diagnosis set out in Section 7: road traffic safety functions in Poland as a field of high media visibility and intense legislative activity, without clear evidence that this activity itself, rather than structural change (an ageing fleet giving way to newer vehicles, improving infrastructure, demographic shift), is the principal driver of improvement.

6. Assessing Change in Road Traffic Safety Policy

The chronological analysis reveals a common thread running through the whole period studied, differences between sub-periods notwithstanding: the steady tightening of criminal and administrative liability. Repressive instruments are not withdrawn or softened at any later stage. They accumulate, building an ever-denser web of sanctions. Tightening penalties in this field looks, on this evidence, like a kind of cross-party consensus, consistent with the logic of securitization, under which a threat once framed as existential is rarely desecuritized.

A second recurring pattern is the reactive character of legislative intervention. Regulation tends to arrive after the fact, once a problem has been amplified by media coverage or ministry statistics, rarely in anticipation of it. The clearest illustration is the near three-year legal vacuum surrounding personal mobility devices.

A third thread is the gradual centralisation of administrative oversight, visible in the expanding powers of starostas, the growth of the central driver register, and the broadening membership of the NRSC. Enforcement responsibility is shifting away from the ordinary courts

and toward the administration, which raises its own questions about the procedural guarantees available to the individual.

The analysis also uncovers a recurring constitutional dilemma. How far do extraordinary instruments, mandatory vehicle confiscation, lifetime driving bans, the dual track of administrative and criminal liability, remain compatible with the principle of proportionality and with *ne bis in idem*? The need for a corrective mechanism, in the form of compensation payable to a vehicle owner who was not the offender, is itself telling: it means the original provision did not fully anticipate situations in which the sanction falls on third parties.

Set against the Safe System model, these observations support a fairly blunt conclusion. Of its five pillars, statutory legislation concentrates almost exclusively on the safe road user, and chiefly in its repressive dimension. The pillars of safe infrastructure and the safe vehicle remain largely the province of implementing measures and investment programmes, rarely the subject of high-visibility statutory amendment.

Poland is not alone in this. Research on countries widely regarded as models of Safe System implementation shows that even there, current policy falls well short of full alignment with the model's principles, and that fuller compliance could cut fatalities by as much as 50- 70% (Elvik, 2023). The gap between strategic declaration and legislative practice looks, then, like a fairly universal condition, though in Poland's case it is compounded further by the repressive character of recent amendments. Quantitative research on the Polish context specifically confirms the neglect of the infrastructure pillar: expanding the network of expressways and motorways is associated with a marked reduction in accidents, while the density of paved roads on its own, absent accompanying traffic segregation, correlates with a rise in their number (Gorzelańczyk, 2026). Infrastructural intervention, it seems, may carry a larger safety payoff than criminal-sanction tightening alone, even as it stays at the margins of the legislative debate examined here.

The focus on the repressive dimension of the safe-road-user pillar also overlooks systemic inequality in exposure to road risk. International research finds that the risk of accident among children, young pedestrians, and cyclists runs markedly higher in poorer communities with weaker safety infrastructure, pointing to a need for systemic intervention that goes beyond sanctioning drivers (Christie et al., 2025).

7. The National Road Safety Council within Poland's National Security Strategy

The National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland (2020) focuses chiefly on areas such as state resilience and total defence, the Polish Armed Forces, cybersecurity, and the information space. It does not carve out road traffic safety as a distinct element within its thematic structure, even though Poland remains among the EU states with one of the highest road-fatality rates (65 deaths per million inhabitants in 2020, the fourth-highest figure in the EU). In Polish institutional practice, road traffic safety still functions as a derivative of transport policy rather than as a fully integrated component of national security policy.

The National Road Safety Council's institutional position bears this out: it operates under the minister responsible for transport, not within any security-focused ministry. The NRSC's own evaluation of the 2013-2020 programme pointed explicitly to insufficient staffing dedicated to road safety at regional level, a tangible marker of structural underinvestment in the field (NRSC, 2020). The institutional separation of road traffic safety from the health sector is further confirmed

by the EU's official country profile for Poland, which notes plainly that the Ministry of Health does not sit on the NRSC, despite playing a significant role in the post-crash-care pillar (European Commission, 2023). A further symptom of insufficient preventive oversight is Poland's below-EU-average number of speeding fines per capita, and this despite excessive speed remaining the leading cause of death on Polish roads (European Commission, 2023).

Taken together, these observations suggest a working analytical category: road traffic safety as a sector of security marked by high media visibility but low strategic priority. Every high-profile accident prompts a swift, typically repressive, legislative response. Yet the absence of a durable presence for road traffic safety in the highest-order strategic documents tells a different story, one in which the field is not accorded, over the long run, the priority its scale would seem to warrant.

The natural implication is a call for fuller integration of road traffic safety into the strategic architecture of national security: giving the field clear standing in future editions of the National Security Strategy, strengthening the NRSC's institutional position, and tying legislative priorities more systematically to the NRSP's five pillars than the current pattern of ad hoc, event-driven response allows. Strengthening the NRSC's institutional standing echoes a recommendation found elsewhere in the literature, which calls for a body with a strategic-coordinating role, one that links the diagnosis of accident causes to the design, implementation, and evaluation of remedial measures. The last two of these, design and evaluation, remain the weakest link even in countries with mature road safety management systems (Talbot et al., 2024).

8. Conclusions and Recommendations

Returning to the research question posed at the outset: between 2015 and 2026, road traffic safety shaped Polish state security policy to a growing but still incomplete degree. It gradually acquired the status of an issue that reaches beyond traditionally understood transport policy. The clearest expression of this shift was the adoption of the National Road Safety Programme 2021-2030, grounded in the Safe System model. That did not amount, however, to the full incorporation of road traffic safety into the architecture of state security, nor to a fundamental restructuring of the dominant legislative logic.

The analysis of successive amendments points to a consistent pattern: the legislature's principal instrument has remained repressive and administrative-repressive in character. Each sub-period identified brought measures tightening the legal liability of road users, while preventive, educational, and infrastructural instruments played a distinctly secondary role. The declared, strategic-level shift from a repressive to a systemic model has been, at best, partial.

Coherence between strategic documents and legislative practice also turns out to be limited. The NRSP 2021-2030 takes shared responsibility for safety as its reference point, yet successive amendments concentrate chiefly on tightening criminal sanctions and expanding administrative powers. Measures such as mandatory vehicle confiscation, and the coexistence of administrative and criminal liability, carry particular weight here. They raise real questions about the limits of proportionality and about their relationship to the constitutional principle of *ne bis in idem*.

Setting the normative analysis alongside the accident data leads to a further conclusion: the observed improvement in safety indicators cannot be attributed unambiguously to legislative change alone. Contemporary road traffic safety is also shaped by structural processes, infrastructure development, technological change, fleet modernisation, and social transformation.

Road traffic safety should accordingly be understood as a sector of security marked by intense legislative activity and considerable media exposure, one that does not always occupy a correspondingly prominent place within the strategic management of state security.

These findings support several proposals *de lege ferenda*. First, road traffic safety deserves clearer recognition in future state strategic documents, including successive editions of the National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland. Second, the National Road Safety Council's institutional standing needs strengthening, along with its coordinating capacity, including through deeper cross-ministerial cooperation. Third, extraordinary mechanisms should be subject to closer scrutiny against constitutional standards. Finally, future legislative initiatives should be tied more closely to the assumptions of the Safe System model, curbing the reactive, piecemeal law-making that has dominated so far.

This study is limited by its qualitative, doctrinal-legal character. The statistical material presented serves an illustrative function and does not support firm causal conclusions. Future research should turn to quantitative methods capable of assessing the actual impact of individual legislative interventions on road traffic safety, controlling for confounding factors such as traffic volume, demographic change, or economic conditions. A further valuable contribution would be a deeper comparative-legal study covering the European states that achieve the best results in reducing road-accident fatalities.

References

- Al-Mahamid, H., & Török, Á. (2026). Road and social safety in Europe: How economic growth and regional dynamics shape mortality trends. *European Transport Research Review*, 18, Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12544-025-00751-8>
- Banaszak, B. (2012). *Konstytucja Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Komentarz* [Commentary on the Constitution of the Republic of Poland] (2nd ed.). C. H. Beck.
- Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Christie, N., Jones, S., & O'Toole, S. E. (2025). Systemic inequalities in road safety outcomes in high income countries and lessons from intervention approaches. *Journal of Transport & Health*, 41, Article 102006. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jth.2025.102006>
- Elvik, R. (2023). What would it mean for road safety if road safety policy complied fully with Safe System principles? *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 193, Article 107336. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2023.107336>
- Gorzelańczyk, P. (2026). Analysis of the impact of road infrastructure and economic and transport factors on road safety in Poland. *Sustainability*, 18(3), Article 1313. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su18031313>
- Kristianssen, A.-C. (2023). Towards a potential paradigm shift: The role of Vision Zero in global road safety policymaking. In K. Edvardsson Björnberg, S. O. Hansson, M.-Å. Belin, & C. Tingvall (Eds.), *The Vision Zero handbook* (pp. 647–672). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76505-7_24

- Lisiecki, M. (2011). *Zarządzanie bezpieczeństwem publicznym* [Managing public security]. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Łośgraf.
- Pieprzny, S. (2007). *Ochrona bezpieczeństwa i porzdku publicznego w prawie administracyjnym* [The protection of public security and order in administrative law]. Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Rzeszowskiego.
- Talbot, R., Filtness, A., & Morris, A. (2024). Proposing a framework for evidence-based road safety policy-making: Connecting crash causation, countermeasures and policy. *Accident Analysis & Prevention*, 195, Article 107409. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aap.2023.107409>
- Várhelyi, A. (2016). Road safety management: Need for a systematic approach. *The Open Transportation Journal*, 10(Suppl. 1), 137–155. <https://doi.org/10.2174/1874447801610010137>
- Wegman, F., & Aarts, L. (2006). *Advancing sustainable safety: National road safety outlook for 2005–2020*. SWOV Institute for Road Safety Research.
- Wegman, F., Berg, H.-Y., Cameron, I., Thompson, C., Siegrist, S., & Weijermars, W. (2015). Evidence-based and data-driven road safety management. *IATSS Research*, 39(1), 19–25. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.iatssr.2015.04.001>

Other sources

- Act of 16 December 2015 amending the Road Traffic Law and certain other acts. (2015). *Journal of Laws*, Item 2183. [In Polish].
- Act of 17 October 2025 amending the Road Traffic Law and certain other acts. (2025). *Journal of Laws*, Item 1676. [In Polish].
- Act of 2 December 2021 amending the Road Traffic Law and certain other acts. (2021). *Journal of Laws*, Item 2328. [In Polish].
- Act of 20 March 2015 amending the Penal Code and certain other acts. (2015). *Journal of Laws*, Item 541. [In Polish].
- Act of 4 December 2025 amending certain acts to improve road traffic safety. (2025). *Journal of Laws*, Item 1872. [In Polish].
- Act of 9 May 2018 amending the Road Traffic Law and certain other acts. (2018). *Journal of Laws*, Item 957. [In Polish].
- Act on Drivers of 5 January 2011. (2011). *Journal of Laws*, No. 30, Item 151, as amended. [In Polish].
- Act on Drivers of 5 January 2011. (2025). *Journal of Laws*, Item 1226 (consolidated text). [In Polish].
- Code of Petty Offences, Act of 20 May 1971. (2025). *Journal of Laws*, Item 734 (consolidated text). [In Polish].
- Constitution of the Republic of Poland of 2 April 1997. (1997). *Journal of Laws*, No. 78, Item 483, as amended. [In Polish].

- European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport. (2024, March 8). *2023 figures show stalling progress in reducing road fatalities in too many countries*. <https://transport.ec.europa.eu>
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport. (2025, October 17). *EU road fatalities drop by 3% in 2024, but progress remains slow: Road safety statistics for 2024*. <https://transport.ec.europa.eu>
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Transport. (2023). *Road safety country profile: Poland*. Road Safety Observatory. <https://roadsafety.transport.ec.europa.eu>
- Eurostat. (2026). *Road safety statistics in the EU*. Statistics Explained. <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained>
- International Transport Forum. (2024). *Road safety annual report 2024*. OECD Publishing.
- National Road Safety Council. (2020). *National Road Safety Programme 2013–2020: Final evaluation*. <https://www.krbrd.gov.pl>
- National Road Safety Council. (2021). *National Road Safety Programme 2021–2030*. <https://www.krbrd.gov.pl>
- National Security Strategy of the Republic of Poland. (2020). *National Security Bureau*. <https://www.bbn.gov.pl>
- Penal Code, Act of 6 June 1997. (1997). *Journal of Laws*, No. 88, Item 553, as amended. [In Polish].
- Police Headquarters, Road Traffic Bureau. (2020–2025). *Road accidents in Poland* [Annual reports for 2019–2025]. <https://statystyka.policja.pl>
- Road Traffic Law, Act of 20 June 1997. (2024). *Journal of Laws*, Item 1251, as amended. [In Polish].
- Road Transport Act of 6 September 2001. (2025). *Journal of Laws*, Item 1490, as amended. [In Polish].
- Statistisches Bundesamt (Destatis). (2025). *Unfallbilanz 2024: 59 Verkehrstote weniger als im Vorjahr; durchschnittlich 8 Tote und fast 1000 Verletzte pro Tag bei Verkehrsunfällen im Jahr 2024*. <https://www.destatis.de>
- World Health Organization. (2023). *Global status report on road safety 2023*. World Health Organization