

## **DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

### **The objective of the project**

Democratic elections should enable voters to compare different options and, as a result, to select the best representatives. The essence of democracy is that elected officials are accountable to the people, and they must turn to the voters in the subsequent elections to seek their support to continue in office. In turn, if the number of candidates on all ballots is not satisfactory, which means that the number of candidates is less than or equal to the number of total seats, representatives are elected ex officio, often without formal balloting. Races in which one candidate runs for office are won by default (the result is a foregone conclusion). Uncontested races are the most striking aberration of democratic doctrine which assume that voters have a chance to give approval or disapproval for given candidates. The goal of the project is to advance significantly knowledge of what reasons/factors determine the phenomenon of so-called uncontested seats/elections. In general, this problem appears when the number of registered candidates in an election is less than or equal to the number of total seats.

Previous studies have neglected the phenomenon of uncontested elections so far. Hence, the reasons of the phenomenon still remain unclear.

### **Reasons for choosing the research topic**

The idea of the project is to reveal reasons of occurrence of uncontested elections on the basis of the Polish local elections employing quantitative and qualitative methods. In particular, the project is aimed to advance understanding of why people do not want to run for offices.

The preliminary study, I have already conducted, shows that the substantial number of Polish communes had experienced the phenomenon of uncontested elections. For example, in the recent local elections in Poland (2014), approximately 25% of communes had at least one seat uncontested (sic!). Moreover, my preliminary study reveals, that:

- one uncontested race leads to another. In other words, uncontested seats appear sequentially in the same districts and in the same communes.
- there are many communes in which the number of uncontested seats exceeds more than 50 % of total seats.
- there are also communes (e.g. Rutka-Tartak commune) in which balloting is not held because all candidates run for offices unopposed (sic!). It means that unchallenged candidates win their races by default.

### **The research to be carried out**

In this project I am going to take a new innovative look at the problem of incidence of uncontested seats (including field research in selected municipalities/communes) to shed new light on the reasons referring to that phenomenon. Hence, I am going to conduct the first in-depth-analysis applying data on the number of uncontested seats in Polish local elections in the period of 1998-2018. I would like to stress that the choice of the Polish case plays only the supportive role in this research. However, on the basis of the Polish case I will be able to compare similar administrative entities (communes/municipalities) in terms of electoral competitiveness. As a result, I will create the unique database, which - for the purpose of carrying out field research - will make possible to select only these municipalities where the proportion of uncontested seats violates principles of 'healthy' democracy.