

## **Does the novelty bring changes? New parties in the Polish party system**

Polish parties for a long time have been perceived as extremely unstable and fluid. The disappearance of some parties from the political scene and the emergence of new ones influence other political phenomena such as the level of electoral volatility or the changes within the whole party system. Since the formations to which the voters gave their support in the previous elections have ceased to exist, the electorate transfers its votes to other entities, what increases electoral volatility and leads to the changes of political actors which comprise party system. However, the appearance of the new party does not always mean a new quality on the political scene. Sometimes the change concerns only the name, while the other elements of the previous organization: ideology, program, structure, personnel (i.e. leader or the party elites) or even electorate remain the same. Unambiguous qualification of a party as new or old causes many problems, therefore the main goal of the project is to analyze subsequent groupings appearing at the Polish political scene and answer the questions of how much novelty there is in new parties, to what extent they are a continuation of existing ones, in which areas (e.g. program, organization, personnel, electorate) we are dealing with continuation and in which with changes. Further analysis will focus on the questions concerning the way conditions arising from political system (including e.g. electoral system, party financing from public funds) affect electoral support for new parties and their chances to enter parliament. New parties will also be analyzed in terms of their genesis (genuinely new *versus* 'rooted newcomers') in order to address the question of its impact on party chances to survive on the political scene.

The subject of the analysis encompasses all groups that obtained at least 3% votes in all subsequent elections to the Sejm, starting with the first completely free election in 1991, which is considered to be the so-called 'founding election'. The analysis will be of a comparative nature. The parties that overcame the mentioned threshold in 1993 will be compared with those of 1991 in order to determine whether, to what extent and in which areas they should be regarded as a continuation of pre-existing groups and to what extent they can be considered as new parties. This procedure will be repeated for the elections of 1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2015 and 2019. The groupings will be analyzed in terms of program, organization (formal status, organizational structure) and personnel (leader, party elites, MPs, electoral lists) as well as electorate. The results of the research will allow to address the question that is essential for the project, namely: whether the emergence of new parties causes that the Polish political scene is undergoing real change or – despite the replacement of parties – we are dealing with stabilization and continuity of certain political options (trends), within which new parties are created. It is also important whether parties that are a continuation of pre-existing groups have a better chance of survival than parties completely new. A part of the analysis will be focused on chosen elements of political system (electoral law, legal determinants of the party functioning etc.) and their influence on the process of the party emergence and their chance to survive. The results of the research can contribute to the development of the different way of measuring the index of electoral volatility for the consecutive Polish elections, helping to show that the real level of electoral volatility is lower than it is often claimed as not all parties that are regarded as new are really new.

The project is innovative for several reasons. Firstly Polish parties have not been examined so far in terms of the level of novelty presented by them. Secondly, the research will not only allow to look at the dichotomy old *versus* new parties in Poland in a new perspective, but it also may contribute to the reassessment of such phenomena as electoral volatility or party system change in other political systems which experienced increased instability connected with democratic transition.