**Fiscal Facts: Lack of Local Choices May Fuel Low Voter Turnout**

The lack of contested races for local government offices may be one reason why turnout for spring elections in Wisconsin is typically much lower than in the fall. Voters who do not have a choice of candidates are not as likely to view the election as important or go to the polls.

There is no specific data source to reveal how many local races go uncontested statewide each spring, but surveys and anecdotal evidence indicate the number is substantial and increasing.

In a 2017 survey by Wisconsin Policy Forum researchers, officials in 52% of 188 cities and villages said they averaged zero to one candidate per seat over the past three years. Only 4% reported an average of two or more candidates per seat.

The lack of competition for these offices cuts across rural and urban communities. In municipalities with 15,000 or more residents, only 5% said contested races were the rule. Small communities reported about the same, with only 4% of seats regularly contested.

The trend appears to be getting worse. Among the municipal officials surveyed, 46% said that competition for governing boards has decreased over the past five to 10 years. Only 11% said competition had increased.

*This information is a service of the Wisconsin Policy Forum, the state’s leading resource for nonpartisan state and local government research and civic education.*