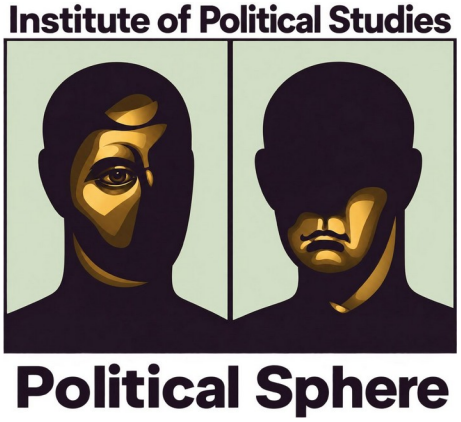


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FROM THE GROUND UP

District Leaders as a Political Group

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From the Ground Up

District Leaders as a Political Group

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Introduction

This study examines the grassroots level of Belarus's executive hierarchy: the chairs of district and city executive committees. This level of government is surrounded by numerous legends, stereotypes and popular stories. Local leaders are sometimes described as local 'princes' who exercise real control over administrative units and are entangled in networks of corporate ties and corruption. Other interpretations portray them as weak and often poorly educated officials, moved from place to place, who merely obey orders from above without exercising any will of their own.

The aim of this study is to shed light on the organisation and structure of this group, which plays an important role in Belarusian politics. We collected information on district and city leaders who held office between 2012 and early 2025. The choice of 2012 reflects data availability rather than a methodological rationale. Initially, data collection covered the entire period since independence, but the final database provided information on almost all administrative units only from 2012 onwards. The further beyond 2012, the more districts and cities dropped out of the analysis because comprehensive information was unavailable. Nevertheless, we believe that the systematic information collected for the past fourteen years enables an in-depth analysis of this political group and the identification of trends in its development.

In total, we collected information on 435 officials who served as heads of district and city executive committees, excluding the city of Minsk, which belongs to the regional tier of government. Heads of urban district administrations were also included. The minimum dataset comprised a name, an appointment date and a departure date. Wherever possible, additional career information was collected, particularly the previous position, the position held after leaving office, age, gender and place of birth. These variables form the basis of this study.

The amount of information available on individual leaders naturally varies considerably. For some, especially in the rare cases where they entered the wider national political arena, we have very detailed information and even substantial bodies of analytical writing. A prominent example is the political career of Natallia Kachanava, discussed in greater detail below. For many others, however, the available information is fragmentary, making a full analysis impossible for some variables. The characteristics of each sample are noted where relevant.

Stability of the Personnel System

Frequency of transfers within regions. An important feature of appointments to district executive committee leadership is the regional variation that has persisted for at least the past decade. The average number of appointments over the study period reveals substantial differences not only between districts but also between regions. The personnel system was most stable in Hrodna Region, with an average of 2.89 appointments per administrative unit. It was followed by Vitsebsk (3.3), Minsk (3.58) and Brest (3.63), which occupied intermediate positions. Considerably more appointments occurred in Homiel (4.14) and especially Mahiliou Region (4.52). The difference between Hrodna and Mahiliou is substantial: the latter figure is more than 1.5 times the former. For every ten appointments in the first region, there were fifteen in the second.

Table 1. Appointments per administrative unit (district or city), by region, 2012–2024

Region	Appointments
Brest	3.63
Vitsebsk	3.30
Hrodna	2.89
Homiel	4.14
Mahiliou	4.52
Minsk	3.58

Similar trends emerge from other indicators. If we consider the number of individuals who passed through leadership positions in a region rather than the number of appointments, the differences remain almost identical. In Hrodna Region, each administrative unit had an average of 2.6 leaders during the study period, compared with around four in Mahiliou Region. The national average was approximately 3.7 appointments per district.[1]

The frequency of transfers between districts—horizontal moves from one leadership position to another within a region—was also much higher in Mahiliou Region than elsewhere, and lowest in Hrodna Region. Interestingly, four transfers of managerial personnel from other regions into Mahiliou were recorded, while no such transfers occurred into Hrodna or Vitsebsk Region.

These differences suggest substantial administrative problems in the east of the country. Higher personnel turnover may indicate that jobs in these regions are less attractive and that economic and social conditions are less stable, preventing officials from meeting the targets expected by senior leadership. Weak local communities, lacking mechanisms for stabilising personnel and distributing power locally, may also play a significant role. These explanations are not mutually exclusive and probably operate together to reinforce the trends identified.

Frequency of transfers in individual districts. High turnover may therefore reflect a district's difficulties in socioeconomic development and political self-organisation. The clear leaders during the study period were Lojeu and Drybin districts, with seven appointments each—a new leader at least once every two years. They were followed by Kastsiukovichy, Zhabinka (the only example from Brest Region), Zhytkavichy and Aktsiabrski districts, with six appointments each. In sixteen districts, by contrast, there were only two appointments during this period. Five of these were in Hrodna Region.

[1] (The same individual could receive several appointments.)

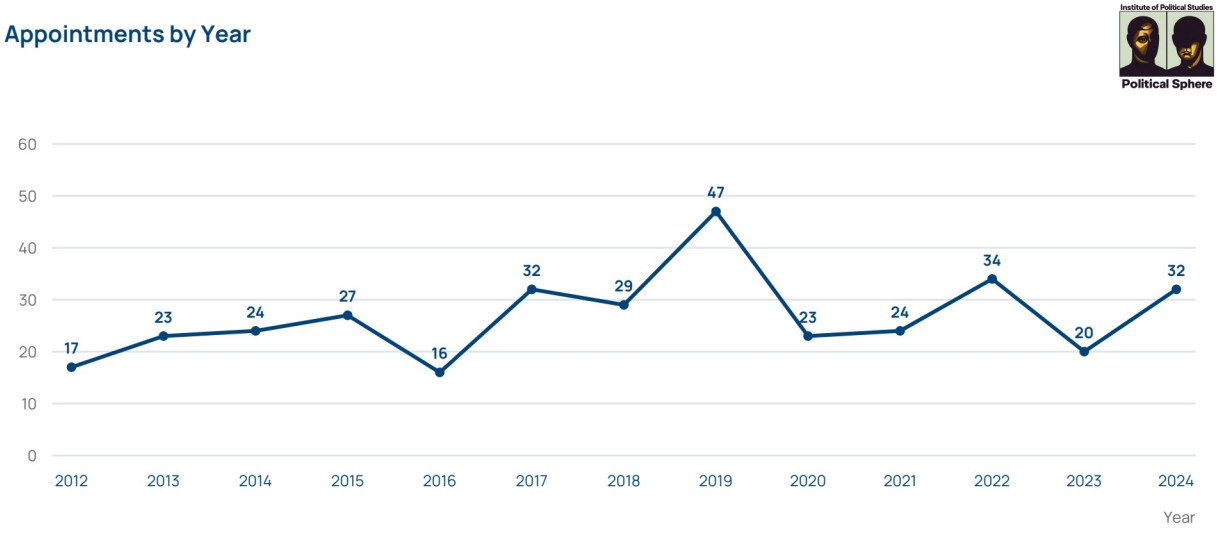
Table 2. Districts with the highest number of leadership changes, 2012–2024

District	Urban population share	Appointments
Lojeu	56.3%	7
Drybin	31%	7
Zhytkavichy	57.1%	6
Zhabinka	58.9%	6
Kastsiukovichy	70%	6
Aktsiabrski	55.6%	6

Apart from geography, no other factors substantially affecting personnel turnover were identified. Turnover was slightly higher in demographically mixed districts, where urban residents made up between 40 and 80 per cent of the population, but the differences were small: between 3 and 3.8 appointments over the entire period. No substantial relationship between the number of leadership changes and the population of an administrative unit was observed either.

Appointments over time. The annual pattern of appointments is an important indicator that allows several observations relevant to understanding the Belarusian system. Appointing leaders at the lower administrative tier may be routine administration, but it may also reflect a deliberate or intuitive strategy for disciplining the system. There were 348 appointments during the study period, an average of approximately 26.8 per year.

Figure 1. Number of appointments by year



The pattern cannot be explained by any single set of enduring factors operating throughout the period. The combination of political and purely administrative reasons probably differed from year to year.

Appointments reached their lowest level in 2016, when the relative liberalisation of political life coincided with an administrative pause following the 2015 presidential election. The peak in 2019 is particularly interesting. Approximately 50 appointments were made that year, almost twice the study-period average. This resembles a thorough purge or renewal of the regional executive hierarchy in preparation for the 2020 election, which nevertheless failed to protect the system from a profound political crisis.

The average number of appointments before and after 2019 differed little: 24 before, compared with 26.6 afterwards. This further highlights the significance of the 2019 anomaly. The reshuffle affected approximately 36% of all district- and city-level administrative positions—a very substantial share. Possible explanations include efforts to strengthen the executive hierarchy in anticipation of a political crisis, a desire to reduce the risks of regional penetration in the context of a prolonged conflict involving the authorities, and attempts to discipline the hierarchy amid discussions of a possible transfer of power. This study cannot provide a definitive answer; the phenomenon requires further investigation.

In this context, it is also worth recalling that a record-low number of opposition or independent candidates were allowed into local councils following the 2018 local elections. This can be regarded as an initial measure to reduce political risks in the regions. In 2019, the project of integrating non-system politicians associated with civil society and the political opposition into the House of Representatives also ended. Following the parliamentary elections in September 2019, candidates unconnected to the state system received no seats.

The political crisis brought a substantial decline in appointments, as officials were generally left in place. Activity revived only from 2022, as the system stabilised and new challenges emerged from Russia’s war against Ukraine.

Length of tenure. Tenure indicates how much time officials have to become rooted in their positions and whether they can represent, or even help create, local communities. Low turnover may also indicate that particular positions or districts are more attractive.

In this case, analysis is possible only for officials whose tenure has ended: 341 people in our database. The results show that terms in office are often short, which may reflect several factors:

1) generally high turnover and instability in the personnel system at district and city level;

2) the frequent use of district leadership as a stepping stone to other positions at regional, or less often national, level; the position itself is unattractive because of extensive demands and heavy responsibility, often unrelated to actual performance;

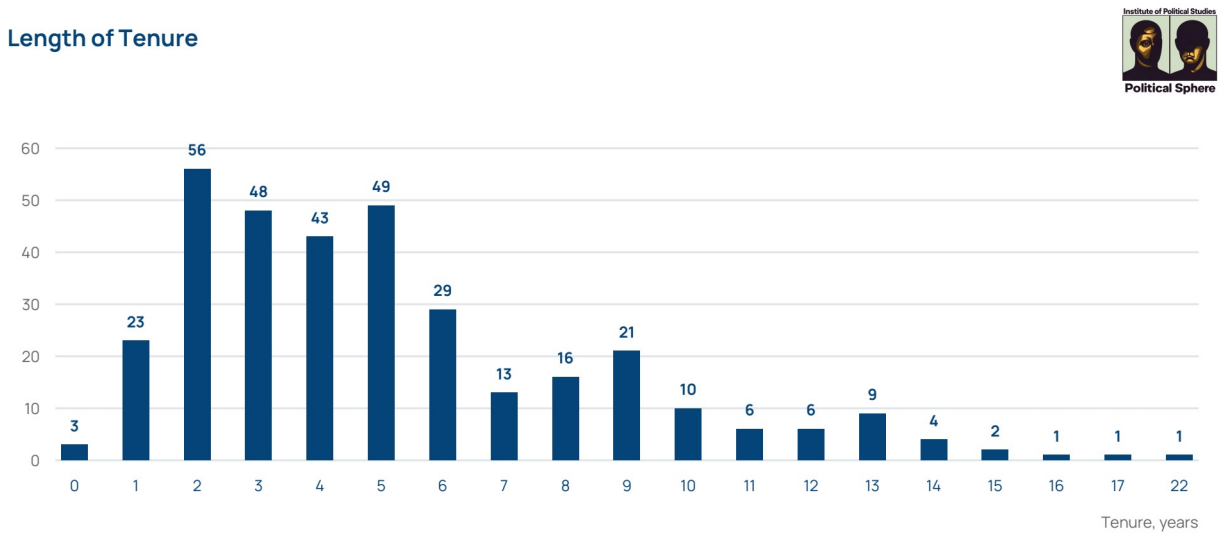
3) the possibility that frequent rotation prevents local patronage ties from forming and consolidating, while short terms weaken such ties.

In our view, all these factors matter, although their relative importance may vary across individual cases and districts. If these positions were elective, substantially longer tenures could be expected.

Our data show an overwhelming predominance of short and very short terms. Half of all tenures did not exceed four years, while the most common duration was two years (56 cases, or 16% of the total). Terms of less than one year were not unusual, and these involved substantive heads rather than acting officials.

Thus, tenure is usually shorter than a standard electoral cycle, and leadership is less stable than is generally the case in democratic countries. Only one-third of officials remained in their positions for more than five years, and just 11.7% for ten years or longer.

Figure 2. Number of tenures by duration, 2012–2024



Only five record-holders led their districts for fifteen years or longer. The longest-serving official in our database was Valery Shliaha, who headed the Naroulia executive committee from 1996 to 2018, or 22 years. Adam Kavalka led Astravets District for seventeen years, Yan Vasileuski led Hrodna District for sixteen, and Mikalai Artsiushkevich and Volha Mokharava remained in office for fifteen years in Dziarzhynsk and Dobrush districts respectively. The reasons for these leaders' success cannot be established without further research, but appear to have more to do with individual circumstances than with the regional or demographic characteristics of their administrative units.

Nevertheless, tenure depends strongly on the region, which is naturally consistent with the analysis of appointment frequency. Terms were substantially shorter in Mahiliou and Homiel regions. More than half of leaders there served no more than three years, and two-thirds no more than four. The most common term was two years, accounting for 27–28% of appointees, while long tenures of ten years or more represented only 6–9% of the total.

The situation in Hrodna Region was quite different. Only 12% of officials served no more than three years, and fewer than one-third (29%) no more than four. The most common durations were four and five years (17.7% each), while tenures of ten years or more accounted for over 26%.

The other regions fell between these extremes. Tenures of no more than three years accounted for 25–33%, and those of no more than four years for 40–47%. Terms of ten years or longer represented approximately 19% in Brest Region and 13.7% in Vitsebsk. Only Minsk Region, at 6.5%, was close to Mahiliou and Homiel on this indicator.

Sociodemographic Characteristics

Age at appointment. Precise birth-year information is not available for every leader; it is known for 401 officials in our database. The overall age profile shows that district and city executive committee heads are mainly appointed at the peak of their career potential. District leadership is therefore far from their first career position, and the role involves substantial but local responsibilities. Otherwise, the age profile would be tilted towards either younger or older groups.

Candidates for district leadership must have spent at least 10–15 years climbing the career ladder, while remaining below retirement or pre-retirement age, with at least another 10–15 years of active professional life ahead. According to the available database, in 80% of cases local executive committee heads were older than 35 and younger than 52 at appointment.

Appointments of people younger than thirty were exceptional, accounting for no more than 1% of cases; those younger than 36 accounted for 7%. The dominant group was aged 36–45, representing over 50%, followed by those aged 46–55 at around 38%. Officials older than 55 were appointed in only 4.5% of cases.

Table 3. Age at appointment by region, 2012–2024

Age group	Brest	Vitsebsk	Hrodna	Homiel	Mahiliou	Minsk
Under 30	1.67%	0	0	1.25%	1.22%	0
30–35	1.67%	7.58%	6.25%	8.75%	4.88%	7.69%
36–45	58.33%	36.36%	47.92%	57.5%	53.66%	49.23%
46–55	30%	40.91%	45.83%	31.25%	40.244	40%
Over 55	8.33%	15.15%	0	1.25%	0	3.08%

Age by region. One notable regional difference is the particularly small share of appointments of people aged 35 or younger in Brest Region: 3.3%. Elsewhere, the share ranged from 6% to 10% and was highest in Homiel Region.

Brest Region led in appointments of people aged 36–45 (58%), while the next major age group, 46–55, accounted for only 30%. The region also had a relatively large number of appointees older than 55.

The leadership corps in Vitsebsk Region can be considered the oldest. It was the only region where the 46–55 group outnumbered the group ten years younger, by 41% to 36%. The share of appointees older than 55 was also by far the highest, at 15.2%.

Hrodna Region displayed a balance between the two dominant groups, each accounting for 46–48%, with no appointees older than 55. In Homiel, the proportions of the main age groups roughly resembled Brest's (56% to 31%), but with virtually no appointees older than 55. Mahiliou and Minsk showed similar patterns, with the two main age groups accounting for 54% and 40%, and 49% and 40%, respectively.

Gender balance. Men's overwhelming dominance in key executive positions is a longstanding feature of contemporary Belarusian government. Many women build successful careers in the system, particularly in finance, healthcare, culture and certain other fields, but executive committee heads are almost exclusively men. Only ten appointments of women occurred during our study period, approximately 2% of the total. Four women were appointed in each of Mahiliou and Homiel regions, possibly reflecting greater turnover and personnel variability there; another two were appointed in Vitsebsk Region. No such appointments occurred elsewhere.

In terms of tenure, however, the women appointed were not merely transitional figures. Volha Mokharava headed Dobrush District in Homiel Region for ten years (2005–2015). This stands out against the region's personnel instability and places her among the five longest-serving district leaders during the period studied.

The best-known figure in this group is undoubtedly Natallia Kachanava, who headed the Navapolatsk city executive committee for seven years before entering national politics and eventually becoming one of Belarus's most influential politicians.

Vieranika Baikova headed the Lojeu district executive committee for five years (2017–2022), also a relatively long tenure. Four women remained in office at the end of the study period.

District and city leadership thus remains an almost exclusively male world, with women accounting for no more than 2%. Although successful female careers do exist, they are clear exceptions. Women remain extremely underrepresented in regional executive positions, especially considering that they account for 45% of district council members.

Place of birth. It is useful to examine the extent to which district leaders are linked to their regions by origin. Being born in a region may of course have no political significance, especially after higher education elsewhere. Nevertheless, local personnel within regional government may indicate regional elite reproduction, or at least continuing connections with the local environment, as well as easier access to elite positions through local origins, patronage and family ties.

Whatever the political significance of this phenomenon, the study shows a clear relationship between leadership appointments and place of birth or origin. This applies to all regions, but especially to the western and northern ones—Hrodna, Homiel and Brest.

The birthplaces of all district executive committee heads are not known: information could not be found for approximately 18% of appointees, so the data are not entirely complete. Nevertheless, the available information allows the main trends to be identified.

Table 4. Share born within the region, 2012–2024

Region	Born in the region, %
Brest	71%
Vitsebsk	59%
Hrodna	71%
Homiel	73%
Mahiliou	51%
Minsk	37%

As noted above, the highest shares of local appointees occur in western and southern Belarus. In Hrodna, Homiel and Brest regions, the proportions are approximately equal, at 71–73%—clearly more than two-thirds of the total. People born in other regions or outside Belarus are represented by only a few individuals. The largest external source for Hrodna was Minsk Region (three leaders), for Homiel it was Mahiliou Region (four), and for Brest it was Homiel Region (just two).

Somewhat fewer local-born officials headed districts in Vitsebsk (59%) and Mahiliou (51%), and the fewest in Minsk Region (37%). The largest source of personnel for Vitsebsk was Mahiliou Region (six people); for Mahiliou it was the Russian Federation (also six); and for Minsk it was Brest Region (seven).

Minsk Region's lower share is understandable and readily explained by its proximity to Minsk, which attracts personnel from across the country. The closer a district is to the capital, the more attractive it becomes for the redistribution of personnel from the centre. Among the other regions, Hrodna again stands out for combining a stable personnel system with functioning mechanisms for reproducing local cadres. Mahiliou, by contrast, again demonstrates weak internal organisation.

Officials born outside Belarus form a small share of district and city leadership, ranging from 1.5% to 7.7% across regions, with a national average of 4.6%. Interestingly, the highest share is in Mahiliou Region, which again displays the most diverse and heterogeneous leadership corps: 8% of the total, including officials born in what are now the Russian Federation, Latvia and Armenia.

Overall, however, the local executive hierarchy is tied to the region of birth, suggesting the existence of regional family and partnership ties, as well as patronage networks.

How Do Officials Enter the System?

To understand local leaders as a political group, it is important to examine where they come from before appointment. This reveals the extent to which appointments are driven by processes within an executive committee or district, rather than at regional or national level. It also helps establish whether district leadership represents career progression, a final career position, or even a punishment.

Our analysis focuses on the previous job: the position that served as a stepping stone to heading a district or city executive committee. Information on the previous position was recorded for 429 appointments, or 87% of the total. The findings are therefore incomplete but allow the main trends to be identified.

The most obvious recruitment pattern is the selection of district heads from local executive committees themselves. The data confirm that this is a very important channel and the most likely route into office. District leadership is thus usually a bureaucratic rather than a political position. Of all appointments, 58% were made from positions within district executive committees, sometimes through internal reshuffles and sometimes through transfers between districts.

The traditional rank-based appointment pattern remains strong: the most likely candidate is the first deputy chair, who also heads the district executive committee's agriculture and food department. Beyond tradition, this is a rational bureaucratic choice for many districts, where agriculture and related industry and infrastructure form a substantial part of the economy. Appointments from the agricultural deputy position are the most important route not only within district executive committees but overall, accounting for more than one-quarter of appointments (25.6%). Candidates sometimes occupy this preparatory position only briefly, even for less than a year, although much longer periods of experience also occur.

This mechanism may be even more important given that another 9.8% of transfers in our database were from positions described in biographies simply as 'first deputy chair'. Depending on urbanisation and economic structure, first deputies may have different responsibilities in different districts. A substantial proportion, however, probably oversee agriculture, meaning that their contribution to appointments may be considerably greater than one-quarter.

After first deputies responsible for agriculture, the next most important route is transfer from leadership of another district, accounting for 14.5% of all appointments. This demonstrates the importance of reshuffling the local executive hierarchy. Other district and city executive committee posts—ordinary deputies and heads of departments or other units—account for 6.3% of appointments.

Directors of various enterprises and associations are another substantial source of personnel. These include collective and state farms, as well as entities reorganised as public or closed joint-stock companies, unitary enterprises and other forms. The overwhelming majority are state-owned; private-sector cases are exceptional. Their main activities are agriculture and food processing, although forestry enterprises, building-materials plants, trading organisations and industrial enterprises also occur. This category accounts for 15.2% of all appointments.

Alongside upward and horizontal movement within the executive hierarchy, movement also occurs in the opposite direction: from regional structures into district and city administrations. This channel is much smaller but still important, accounting for 9.3% of all transfers.

As with district executive committees, these moves most frequently follow the agricultural track, with heads of regional agriculture departments appointed as district leaders. Our analysis identified at least 20 such transfers. In exceptional cases, even first deputy chairs of regional executive committees were sent to head district executive committees. Ordinary deputy chairs and heads of various structural units could also be transferred.

In most cases, a transfer from regional to district level can be interpreted as a demotion, prompted either by problems in a particular district requiring decisive intervention or by a form of ‘exile’. In a few cases, however, it provided a fresh start followed by a triumphant return to regional office or even promotion to national level.

Transfers from national office into district and city positions deserve particular attention. In the overwhelming majority of cases, they appear to constitute substantial demotions and occur rarely. Our dataset contains only 16 such transfers, or 3.73% of the total.

Recruitment from the security and law-enforcement agencies should be considered separately. This was never characteristic of the Belarusian administrative system. In the post-Soviet period, and even more so in Soviet times, security personnel were clearly separated from the local executive hierarchy and circulated within their own personnel system. This arrangement has largely survived, but since the 2020 crisis there has been limited entry by security-sector representatives into district and city leadership.

Eleven such transfers were recorded over the study period, or 2.7% of the total. Five came from the Ministry of Internal Affairs, all after the events of 2020. The first police appointment occurred in autumn 2020, when Siarhei Yermalitski was appointed head of Homiel District. Before joining the ministry, he had graduated from the Belarusian State Agricultural Academy, but he entered district leadership from the position of head of the ministry’s Department of Corrections directorate for Homiel Region. He remained in the new post until 2023, when he was transferred to lead Kruhlaye District.

Three appointments from the Ministry of Internal Affairs occurred in 2021. Aleh Malysheuski, previously head of the combat service directorate within the Main Directorate of the Commander of the ministry’s Internal Troops, took charge of Cherykau District. Ihar Henets became head of Iuje District. From 2010 to 2012 he had headed a district internal affairs department, and from 2017 served as deputy head of an internal affairs directorate responsible for ideology and personnel. The final appointment was even more interesting: Braslau District was entrusted to Viachaslau, who had headed the same district’s police department between 2011 and 2018, illustrating an experiment in merging local policing with the executive hierarchy. Only one appointment, however, can be considered major: the 2024 transfer of Ihar Burmistrau, first deputy commander of the ministry’s Internal Troops, to chair the Navapolatsk executive committee. The other cases concerned small districts. Nevertheless, these precedents reveal very new trends in personnel policy in recent years.

Career Prospects

Tenure as head of a local executive committee eventually ends. As noted above, it usually ends quickly or even very quickly: officials rarely remain in one place for long. Where do they go next? Our database allowed us to analyse 280 subsequent career trajectories. Unfortunately, information is unavailable for a substantial share of officials, who often simply disappear from public view. Many others remain in office, making their next career move impossible to predict.

Arrest and retirement. Executive committee chairs are usually appointed relatively young, so leaving office rarely ends in retirement. Such cases represented only 2% of our sample. Interestingly, a substantial number were removed as a result of criminal prosecution, suggesting elevated exposure to criminal proceedings in these positions. We recorded more than twenty such cases, or 7.5% of the total. The true figure may be considerably higher, since not all criminal cases are publicly reported, and not all offences

attributed to leaders result in proceedings: some end only in dismissal or a move to another job. Even the number of identified cases is striking.

Leaving the executive hierarchy. Retirement and arrest account for relatively few endings to district leadership careers. What are the main routes? Statistically, the most common move is neither upwards nor horizontally, but 'sideways': into work, overwhelmingly as directors, in various state-owned enterprises. In our sample, 29.3% made this next career move. People often become established in these positions, hold them for decades and eventually retire from them.

The range of enterprises is very broad, from agricultural holdings and forestry enterprises to genuinely large industrial plants. Most, however, belong to food processing: bakeries, dairy plants and canneries. They may also include furniture factories, building-materials plants, and organisations in energy, land reclamation, education and other fields. Interestingly, despite many leaders' pronounced agricultural backgrounds, they move relatively rarely into agricultural production enterprises themselves. This may reflect a desire for a quieter and more stable position.

Another relatively common move 'sideways' out of the executive hierarchy is into what the Belarusian authorities define as 'civil society structures', specifically trade unions. This route accounts for 5.7% of subsequent careers and usually involves trade-union work at regional level.

Horizontal movement. Continued horizontal movement within the district executive committee system is the second most likely route, at 22.5%. For a leader, this almost never means remaining in the same executive committee, but moving to another within the region. The most common transfer follows the logic of personnel reshuffling: appointment as chair of another district or city, retaining formal status and powers, in 16.8% of cases. Examples include a move from the Polatsk to the Vierkhniadzvinsk district executive committee (Ihar Markovich, 2019), or from Karma to Zhlobin (Ivan Navumenka, 2017).

Much less often, a leader moves to another district as a deputy or, more rarely, as head of a directorate, department or other administrative unit. Such clear demotions account for 3.2% of cases. Examples include a transfer from chair of the Shklou district executive committee to deputy chair in Horki (Andrei Kamko, 2021), or from head of Rasony District to head of the finance department in the Miory district executive committee (Aliaksandr Shubski, 2017).

Transfers to other regions, whether as heads or deputies, are exceptional. Other indicators likewise show that district executive committee personnel systems are strongly concentrated within individual regions. One unusual example was the transfer from the Polatsk district executive committee to head the administration of Minsk's Savetski District (Aliaksandr Pazniak, 2013).

Regional prospects. Moving 'upwards' into regional executive committee administrations is a natural and realistic prospect for successful district leaders, although less common than moving between districts or leaving the hierarchy. Such transfers account for 15% of the total. As with district-level moves, transfers outside the region are rare: we recorded only nine. One atypical example was the transfer from the Uzda district executive committee to first deputy chair of the Mahiliou regional executive committee (Siarhei Savitski, 2022).

The most common upward move for district leaders is to deputy or first deputy chair of a regional executive committee. Approximately as many become heads of structural units, such as education directorates, transport and communications departments, state property committees and others.

The national level. District and city leaders also have some prospects of entering national political and administrative office, although such cases are rare and involve a very limited range of recruitment channels.

The House of Representatives is the leading destination, accounting for 6.4% of the total. Regional representation in the lower chamber is a stable policy, suggesting the existence of informal quotas for the local executive hierarchy. This practice became established in the early 2000s. Regular presence in Minsk allows local leaders to broaden their informal networks and, to some extent, lobby for their region or sector. Above all, however, selection for the House of Representatives appears to reward regional personnel. The position involves relatively few duties and little responsibility, especially compared with executive committee leadership, and often offers an opportunity to reach retirement age quietly. Some deputies nevertheless return to their regions and continue working, for example as enterprise directors.

Another notable route to national office is appointment as a presidential aide responsible for a region. We recorded eleven such transfers, and district leaders are a significant source of personnel for these positions. Importantly, whereas careers within the executive hierarchy are strongly tied to a particular region, the opposite applies to presidential aides. All appointments were to regions in which the official had not previously worked. Evidently, this rule helps prevent the consolidation and use of corporate ties accumulated by the aide or inspector during their career.

Local executive committee heads also have some chance of entering central government structures, although this is rare. Only seven such transfers were recorded, four linked to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food. For example, the head of Minsk District became Minister of Agriculture and Food (Ivan Krupko, 2020), while a leader of Niasvizh and Kletsk districts became the ministry's first deputy minister (Aliaksandr Lomski). Another example was the chair of the Khoiniki district executive committee, who took charge of a department under the Ministry for Emergency Situations (Aliaksandr Tsitok).

The most atypical, but also triumphant, appointment was that of Navapolatsk leader Natallia Kachanava as Deputy Prime Minister, beginning her subsequent career as head of the Presidential Administration and chair of the Council of the Republic.

Conclusions

Regional differences: Substantial differences between western and eastern Belarus in the frequency of district executive committee leadership appointments have persisted for at least the past decade. Hrodna Region is the most stable (an average of 2.89 appointments and 2.6 leaders per district), while turnover is highest in Mahiliou (4.52 appointments and approximately four leaders per district) and Homiel (4.14 appointments), against a national average of approximately 3.7.

Horizontal and interregional mobility: Mahiliou Region has a substantially higher frequency of transfers between districts, and four transfers of managerial personnel from other regions were recorded there. Horizontal transfers in Hrodna Region are minimal, and no transfers from other regions into Hrodna or Vitsebsk were recorded.

Causes of personnel instability: High turnover in the east points to administrative and socioeconomic problems, less attractive jobs and difficulty meeting the targets expected by senior leadership. A decisive factor is the weakness of local communities, which lack mechanisms for stabilising personnel and distributing power locally.

High-turnover and stable districts: Lojeu and Drybin had the most leadership changes, with seven appointments each—at least one every two years. Kastsiukovichy, Zhabinka (the only case from Brest Region), Zhytkavichy and Aktsiabrski followed with six each. Sixteen districts, by contrast, had only two appointments, five of them in Hrodna Region.

No demographic effect: Apart from geography, other factors, such as a district's total population or its share of urban residents, do not substantially affect personnel turnover.

The role of rotation in governance: Appointments at the lower administrative tier combine routine administration with a deliberate or intuitive strategy aimed at disciplining the system.

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