

**Mini-Lukashenkas in the regions:
power, control, and personnel policy
in Belarusian Regional Executive Committees**

ABSTRACT

This study examines Regional Executive Committees (*oblispolkom* in Russian, *ablvykankam* in Belarusian) as part of Belarus’s system of regional governance, analysing the appointment of senior regional officials between 2015 and 2026. Based on biographical data and interviews with experts and former civil servants, the study demonstrates that these regional institutions constitute a key element of the Belarusian power vertical, combining administrative functions with the implementation of decisions imposed from above. Appointments to Regional Executive Committees are not only determined by officials’ professional qualifications, but also by their loyalty, integration into the power vertical, and informal networks. Following the events of 2020, the control and political functions of these bodies intensified, alongside the growing influence of security structures at the local level. Overall, this study argues that the defining principle of governance in the Belarusian regions is unconditional subordination to the central authorities.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	2
TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
INTRODUCTION.....	3
1. LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BELARUS: MODEL AND FUNCTIONS.....	5
2. FROM GOVERNANCE TO CONTROL: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FUNCTIONS OF REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES AFTER 2020	11
3. FROM AGRARIANS TO SECURITY OFFICIALS: WHO GOVERNS THE BELARUSIAN REGIONS TODAY	14
4. REGIONAL SPECIFICITIES WITHIN A UNIFIED VERTICAL	27
5. LUKASHENKA’S “EYES AND EARS”: PRESIDENTIAL AIDES IN THE REGIONS	29
CONCLUSION.....	33

INTRODUCTION

Governance in Belarus is built on the principle of a rigid power vertical, where key decisions are made centrally and then implemented locally. Within this system, the regional executive committees occupy an important place, since they ensure the implementation of central government policy at the local level. At the same time, Regional Executive Committees (*oblispolkom* in Russian, *ablvykankam* in Belarusian) possess a broad range of powers, and in some areas can also be described as relatively autonomous administrative centres responsible for the socio-economic development of the regions.

After its independence in 1991, Belarus did not change the Soviet system of administrative-territorial organisation, although reforms had been in preparation. At the same time, the country was moving towards the development of local self-government in line with democratic orientations and practices. The Law “On Local Self-Government and Local Economy in the Republic of Belarus” of 20 February 1991 granted significant powers to local Councils and established their autonomy to resolve local issues. However, after Aliaksandar Lukashenka (Aleksandr Lukashenko¹) was elected president in 1994, the authorities changed course. As a result of a 1996 referendum, executive committees became part of the power vertical, local Councils gradually lost influence, and all key decisions concerning the regions began to be made from above. In the 2000s this model of local governance and self-government was institutionalised and it has not fundamentally changed since then. In its current form, this model does not comply with the key principles and norms of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (1985) and constitutes one of the obstacles to Belarus’s integration into the European community.

Under these conditions, it is particularly important to examine those institutions that ensure the functioning of the vertical system of governance in practice, above all the Regional Executive Committees. Despite the significance of regional authorities within the system of public administration, the specifics of their functioning and personnel policy remain insufficiently studied. Far greater attention has traditionally been paid to central government bodies, while the local level has often been viewed as secondary and auxiliary. Yet it is at the local level that the services most important for citizens are managed, including education, healthcare, housing and communal services, and urban improvement. Regional Executive Committees act simultaneously as executors, coordinators, and controllers of decisions taken by higher authorities. At the same time, studying the career trajectories of chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees, the factors behind their appointments, and the specifics of personnel policy within these bodies, makes it possible to identify the principles underlying the Belarusian system of governance as a whole.

This study covers the period from 2015 to 2026, including the relatively stable and liberal period before 2020 and the changes associated with the period of authoritarian consolidation that followed, bringing with it increased control and a transformation of governance practices in Belarus.

The aim of the study is to examine the structure of Regional Executive Committees as an important component of the Belarusian system of public administration and to analyse the logic behind the formation of regional administrative elites. The study analyses seven key executive committees: the Brest, Vitsebsk (Vitebsk), Homel (Gomel), Hrodna (Grodno), Minsk, and Mahiliou (Mogilev)

¹ In this paper, we employ Belarusian transliteration of names, with the Russian-based transliteration provided in brackets throughout.

Regional Executive Committees, as well as the Minsk City Executive Committee, whose status is equivalent to that of a regional executive committee.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach that combines open-source data and semi-structured interviews. To analyse the biographies and career trajectories of the heads of Regional Executive Committees and their deputies, a database was created containing biographical information on:

- Chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees (15)
- Deputy chairpersons (69)
- Presidential aides-inspectors for the regions and Minsk (31)

One limitation was that information on deputy chairpersons was often incomplete or unavailable, meaning that there is some missing data in the sample.

In February and March 2026, we conducted nine qualitative semi-structured interviews with former civil servants and experts with relevant knowledge of the specifics of Regional Executive Committees. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, interviews were initially conducted with individuals known to the researchers through existing personal contacts; subsequently, the list of interviewees was expanded using the “snowball” method. Despite these limitations, the data collected are sufficient to analyse the role of Regional Executive Committees within the Belarusian system of public administration.

1. LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN BELARUS: MODEL AND FUNCTIONS

The local governance and self-government in Belarus are formally structured as a multi-level hierarchy of authorities that includes Councils of Deputies and executive committees at different levels:

- Rural (primary level)
- District (basic level)
- Regional (voblast' level)

In legislation, this system appears as a coherent and even partially democratic structure that provides opportunities for citizens both to resolve local issues directly and indirectly through elected bodies. The system of local governance consists of two main elements:

- Local self-government, as an expression of the will of the population through elected Councils of Deputies and other forms of participation
- Local governance, as the activity of state executive bodies at the local level

In practice, however, local governance is not an autonomous level of authority, but rather a component of the state vertical that implements decisions made by the central authorities.

The principal institution of local self-government is the local Councils of Deputies (*savety deputatau* in Belarusian). Formally, the Councils serve as a platform for discussion, coordination of interests, and consideration of citizens' opinions. They carry out their activities through sessions, commissions, and deputy associations. The Councils adopt decisions on local issues, approve local legal acts, including draft budgets, and manage municipal property within the limits of legislation.

At the same time, the procedures established by law do not reflect the actual functioning of local Councils, since the authorities control elections. Councils conduct sessions in a highly formalised manner, and *de facto* the power vertical coordinates decision-making in advance. Thus, local Councils largely just institutionalise decisions already made. Still, all executive committees are hierarchical and the Regional Executive Committees are the highest level of executive authority at the local level. They coordinate the activities of lower-level executive committees while being subordinated both directly to the head of state and to the Council of Ministers (on issues within its competence).

Functions of executive committees and Regional Executive Committees

The competencies of executive committees are extremely broad and cover all spheres of regional life. Their main competencies are presented in Diagram 1.

Diagram 1. Competencies of Regional Executive Committees

Represent the interests of the respective administrative-territorial unit in relations with other state bodies, other organisations, and citizens	Develop and submit for approval to the Councils draft investment programmes and socio-economic development programmes, and ensure the implementation of these programmes	Develop and submit for approval to the Councils draft forecasts of socio-economic development, and ensure the implementation of these forecasts	Form and submit for approval to the Councils regional packages of measures ensuring the implementation of state programmes, draft concepts on issues of construction, urban improvement, social support, etc.
Prepare draft local budgets and reports on their implementation, and ensure execution of local budgets	Grant tax and fee benefits on behalf of the Councils	Manage and dispose of municipal property in accordance with procedures established by the Councils	Manage natural resources and take measures to ensure environmental protection
Adopt decisions on the establishment, reorganisation, and liquidation of organisations whose property is under municipal ownership	Submit proposals to the Councils on all matters of local importance and participate in their consideration	Organise gas supply, electricity supply, heating supply, and water supply within the relevant territory	Form commodity resources for administrative-territorial units in order to ensure uninterrupted trade
Take measures aimed at the development of industrial and agricultural production, the service sector, and small and medium-sized enterprises	Address issues of demographic security and improvement of the socio-economic conditions of family life	Participate in combating corruption and countering extremism, including terrorism	Together with law enforcement agencies, carry out activities aimed at maintaining public order and preventing offenses

Source: Summary of the [Law “On Local Governance and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus”](#)

With reference to the Regional Executive Committees, their functions can be broadly divided into several main groups as presented in Diagram 2.

Diagram 2. Functions of Regional Executive Committees

Economy. Regional Executive Committees formulate regional budgets, develop draft investment programs, participate in the management of municipal property, manage resources, and are responsible for the economic development of the region.	Social protection. Regional Executive Committees ensure the implementation of minimum social standards, oversee education and healthcare, provide support to vulnerable groups, ensure demographic security, and perform other related functions.	Construction, housing and communal services, and infrastructure. Regional Executive Committees manage the territory as a physical space: they are responsible for housing development, urban improvement, sanitary conditions, landscaping, local roads, public transportation services, and related issues.
Coordination function. Regional Executive Committees coordinate the activities of district and city executive committees, ensuring uniformity of governance.	Regulatory and executive function. Regional Executive Committees implement decisions of higher authorities and monitor their execution.	Control function. A Regional Executive Committee is, in essence, a supervisory body that monitors compliance with legislation in various spheres, from budgetary discipline to trade and urban improvement.

Source: Summary of the Law “On Local Governance and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus”.

In interviews, respondents emphasised the important role Regional Executive Committees play in the economic sphere. Although strategic decisions are formally made by central government, their practical implementation largely depends on the regional authorities. In particular, regions may effectively compete for [investment projects](#) related to the creation of new industries and infrastructure development. Their placement depends not only on nationwide priorities, but also on how well a particular head of the region is able to negotiate with investors, offer favourable conditions, and provide support for such projects. In this sense, Regional Executive Committees become important actors in the distribution of resources, while the economic dynamics of a region largely depend on the personality of its chairperson. To quote one interviewee:

“Let’s say investment projects were implemented in Belarus: the role of local authorities was actually crucial [in their implementation]. Although we always said that Lukashenka decides everything, in reality this is not entirely true. Of course, in a global sense, yes, it is him, but afterwards all the nuances and issues are resolved locally. And there were many such cases when an investment project was initially assigned, for example, to the Vitsebsk region, but was later drawn over to the Minsk region simply because they [the investors] could not reach an agreement with the governor there. In the Minsk region, they could.”

Governance structure of Regional Executive Committees and the decision-making process

The structure of Regional Executive Committees in Belarus is standardised and reflects the general logic of the centralised governance. The chairperson, who is appointed by the head of state, leads the Regional Executive Committee and is the key figure in regional executive authority, bearing personal responsibility for the situation in the region.

The second level of leadership consists of deputy chairpersons. They are appointed by chairpersons with the consent of the head of state. Usually, there are several deputies - typically from three to five - each overseeing a particular sector. For example, one deputy might oversee agriculture, another the social sphere, another construction, and yet another housing and communal services.

The chairperson appoints a managing director, who is responsible for its organisational and administrative support. The position of managing director is an important but technical one; essentially, they are the chief administrative manager, responsible for organising meetings, coordinating services, and resolving operational and administrative issues. However, their political weight is limited. The managing director does not participate in decision-making and does not influence the strategic agenda.

In addition, presidential aide-inspectors for the region play an important role in its governance. Formally, they are employees of the Presidential Administration, but they oversee the activities of regional authorities and interact directly with the chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees. They also help the central authorities monitor the situation in the regions.

Besides the chairperson and deputy chairpersons, committee members also play an important role in the structure of Regional Executive Committees. Formally, they constitute the collegial body responsible for decision-making. The head of state approves the members of Regional Executive Committees. They include not only the committee’s senior leadership, but also heads of lower-level structural subdivisions (for example, heads of departments), as well as leaders of key regional organisations (for example, chairpersons of district executive committees, heads of regional departments of internal affairs, and representatives of the Belarusian Republican Youth

Union). From this perspective, the Regional Executive Committee represents a central body within the regional administration that coordinates different administrative bodies.

In interviews, respondents described the complex process of collegial decision-making. Meetings of the Regional Executive Committee themselves are often formal in nature, while from a governance perspective the stage of coordinating decisions is far more important. Decision-making requires the support of all interested members of the Regional Executive Committee and therefore involves negotiations, persuasion, and the balancing of various interests. According to one interviewee:

“If, for example, a decision [of the Regional Executive Committee] concerns youth policy, it will not pass without the signature of the head of the regional organisation of Belarusian Republican Youth Union. If the decision concerns the city, it will not pass without the signature of the chairperson of the city executive committee. It is very complicated. You have to go and carefully explain to everyone what the decision involves, what they will lose, and what they will gain from it. (...) There are decisions that are not so easy to adopt.”

If an initiative requiring collegial approval comes from the chairperson of the Regional Executive Committee, the process becomes significantly simpler, and decisions are often adopted more quickly and easily. However, if proposals come “from below”, from individual specialists or departments, they may be blocked at any stage, up to the personal refusal of the chairperson to sign the document. Thus, despite the collegial nature of the body, the key role in decision-making remains with the chairperson of the Regional Executive Committee who acts as the final arbiter.

Decisions adopted by Regional Executive Committees carry significant legal and practical weight within the Belarusian system of public administration. In accordance with the Law “On Local Governance and Self-Government”, they are binding on all executive bodies in the region, organisations, officials, and citizens within the relevant territory, and failure to comply with them entails various forms of liability.

Between broad powers and subordination: the role of Regional Executive Committees in the system of governance

Regional Executive Committees play an important role in the Belarusian system of public administration. They are universal administrative centres that effectively organise the life of a region in line with the model established at the central level. In this sense, they are often described as a kind of “state within a state”:

“You simply take the model of the country and reproduce it within the region.”

The Law “On Local Governance and Self-Government” clearly states that “local governance and self-government bodies possess autonomy and independence within the limits of their competence”. Interviewees agreed, however, that the autonomy of Regional Executive Committees is limited by their rigid integration into the power vertical and their dependence on decisions adopted at the republican level. What exists is therefore freedom of action within a predefined system rather than genuine political independence. Nevertheless, even such limited autonomy makes Regional Executive Committees relatively influential:

“Overall, they are the masters on the ground, and until they attract the attention of republican-level public administrative bodies such as the State Control Committee, the State Security Committee, or Lukashenka for some reason, they can act rather independently.”

“Undoubtedly, this is an important body. (...) Overall, it is probably third in importance after the president and the government. (...) But regarding independence, there can be no discussion about any real independence because they are very rigidly integrated into this vertical. Their main task is to implement decisions coming from above. They have a very clearly defined course of actions and prescribed conditions, especially considering that chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees are appointed personally by the president.”

“They implement the general line. If the general line is to build dairy farms – then we will build dairy farms. If it is pig farms, then we will build pig farms, as ordered.”

When implementing decisions that have been adopted at state-level, an important feature of Regional Executive Committees is their direct subordination to central government. Unlike the government, where coordination procedures and hidden resistance from various ministries may slow decision-making, the regional level operates through a rigid vertical that runs directly from the president or the Council of Ministers to the Regional Executive Committee, and from the Regional Executive Committee to cities and districts.

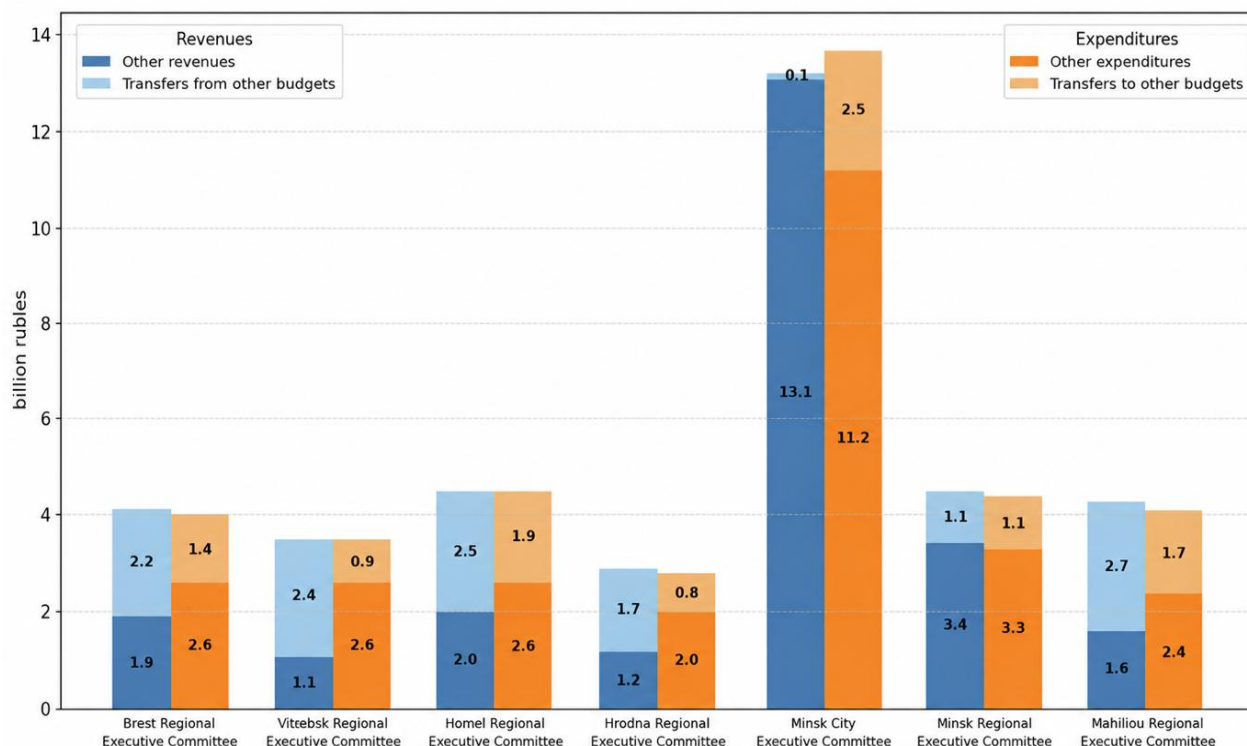
“The prime minister has the Council of Ministers and ministries, which can block or sabotage certain decisions simply because of how the coordination procedure is organised. But within the framework of Regional Executive Committees there will be no sabotage. There is a clear vertical there.”

The financial vertical: how the budgetary system functions

The budgetary system of Belarus is structured according to the principle of multi-level dependency. Regional Executive Committees receive a significant share of their resources from the republican budget, while district and city executive committees depend on the distribution of funds at the regional level. As a result, a chain of financial subordination is formed – “central government - region - district” – in which the main source of financing is located at the level of the central authorities. This strengthens the dependence of local authorities on the central government, while simultaneously making Regional Executive Committees important intermediaries through which significant financial flows pass and through which budgetary spending priorities established by the central authorities are implemented.

According to the Law [“On the Republican Budget”](#), in 2026 regional budgets will receive 12 billion Belarusian rubles (approximately €3.6 billion) from the republican budget in the form of gratuitous transfers. This constitutes approximately half of all regional budgets revenues. In turn, regional budgets will transfer 7.9 billion rubles (approximately €2.4 billion) free of charge to district and city budgets. There are dozens of districts in Belarus that, according to the latest available data (which is for 2021), [cover no more than 40% of their own expenditures](#) and critically depend on transfers from regional budgets. Most of these districts are located in the eastern part of the country – in the Vitsebsk, Homel, and Mahiliou regions. The city of Minsk stands out separately because, unlike the regions, it is not financially dependent on the republican budget and instead acts as a donor region. In 2026, 2.5 billion rubles (approximately €0.8 billion) [will be transferred](#) from the capital’s budget to the republican budget.

Graph 1. Gratuitous transfers to regional budgets and transfers from regional budgets to lower-level budgets



Source: Summary of decisions of local Councils of Deputies on regional budgets for 2026.

The existence of regional budgets and control over the distribution of funds strengthen the influence of Regional Executive Committees, making them a kind of “feeding hand” for cities and districts:

“These finances [regional budgets] – what are they intended for? If we speak cynically and frankly, they are meant to ‘bend’ all lower-level executive committees. It is tasty candy that the regional level has the right to allocate as grants, subventions, or subsidies depending on how much they bend, how loyal they are, and how unconditionally they support what is transmitted from above.”

The role of the chairperson of the Regional Executive Committee

According to the Law “On Local Governance and Self-Government,” the chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee is the head of executive authority within the region. The chairperson bears personal responsibility for the state of affairs in the region, including the economy, the social sphere, public order, and the work of all state institutions. In this sense, the chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee acts simultaneously as a manager, personnel administrator, and coordinator of “everything and everyone” in the region – from ordinary citizens to the security bloc. Among the Regional Executive Committee head’s functions is the approval of appointments to heads of the regional departments of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Ministry of Emergency Situations, and tax authorities. The chairperson is also responsible for civil defence. Thus, the chairperson participates not only in civilian governance but also in organising the work of security agencies in the region. The term “mini-Lukashenka” rather accurately reflects the position of regional heads within the system of power:

“In practice, Lukashenka makes it clear that the governor is a kind of mini-president on this territory. The governor’s power is indeed very high; he is a very influential person who can directly call Lukashenka on one issue or another, and this is probably his key role.”

“It turns out that yes, they are mini-Lukashenkas. Absolutely. Though, you know, some are mini-Lukashenkas, while others are simply mini-reasonable people. And everyone runs to them. (...) Because if something happens, he may be able to protect you.”

However, the power of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons is not autonomous. They operate with delegated powers and remain dependent on the central authorities for their authority. Any decisions going beyond routine matters require approval at higher levels of the vertical:

“But of course there is, as they say, a defining line, and he [the chairperson of the Regional Executive Committee] must follow this line.”

“As long as there is no conflict of interests with the republican level of governance and the work is not failing, they possess full authority and can either perform very well or further destroy the region, just as Lukashenka does on the scale of the whole country.”

Interestingly, in public speeches Lukashenka often refers to Regional Executive Committee chairpersons as “governors.” Most likely, this is borrowed from Russian political practice but is not perceived either by Lukashenka himself or by Belarusian officials as something foreign or copied from another state.

2. FROM GOVERNANCE TO CONTROL: THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE FUNCTIONS OF REGIONAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEES AFTER 2020

The Law [“On Local Governance and Self-Government in the Republic of Belarus”](#) establishes a centralised model of governance with limited autonomy for local authorities. After 2020 this basic logic remained unchanged, although the system of local governance underwent gradual adjustment. Paradoxically, under conditions of increasing centralisation, militarisation, and repression, some of the changes introduced at the local level formally expanded opportunities for participation.

The first changes occurred in 2021-2022, when amendments were introduced through related legislative acts and were mainly technical and limited in nature. More significant amendments were adopted in July 2023 ([Law No. 281-Z](#)), which created a permanent legal mechanism for implementing civic initiatives aimed at resolving local issues. In essence, this mechanism represents a form of participatory budgeting through which citizens can participate in addressing local problems. Under this mechanism, initiators submit projects with justifications and calculations to executive committees, after which the proposals are reviewed at the level of regional Councils and admitted to competitive selection. Financing for successful projects is provided from the republican and regional budgets on the condition of mandatory co-financing by the initiators themselves (at least 10% of total expenditures). In 2025 the Minsk region supported [7 out of 38 applications](#), while the Vitsebsk region supported [11 out of 64](#). The selected projects, financed from the budget, mainly concerned urban improvement, public spaces, and social infrastructure.

In 2026 each region will receive 250,000 Belarusian rubles (approximately €75,000) from the republican budget for [expenses related to implementation of civic initiatives](#). The amount of

funding remains extremely small in comparison with direct budget allocations to organisations loyal to the state, and which are allocated without any competitive procedures. For example, in 2026 the Belarusian Republican Youth Union will receive 16.4 million rubles (approximately €5 million) from the republican budget. Overall, financing civic activity remains difficult due to strict limitations: the distribution of funds is fully controlled by local authorities, funding sources are limited, and support from businesses and citizens carries risks because it may be interpreted as political activity.

Interviewees noted that the introduction of the mechanism for civic initiatives became effectively the only notable innovation in the sphere of local governance in recent years. This may indicate that the authorities partially learned lessons from 2020 and attempted to create a controlled channel for expressing public demands:

“For the first time, civic initiatives are financed from the budget. And this is also an indicator that they learned certain lessons. Even if it's too late. This should have been done in 2020, and it would have worked very well and perhaps even reduced much of the dissatisfaction and so on. At the very least, it would clearly have improved the situation in 2020.”

In 2024-2025, adjustments to the law continued, but mainly in the form of separate, technical amendments. These changes were auxiliary in nature and did not affect the principles of local governance organisation. At the same time, in 2025, the head of state adopted Decree No. 74. It does not directly concern Regional Executive Committees but is notable because it expanded the powers of executive committees at the district level. They received the right to intervene in the work of enterprises, influence personnel appointments, and demand the elimination of violations. The personal responsibility of district and city executive committee heads also increased.

Governance practices

The limited and largely formal nature of legislative amendments does not mean that governance practices remained unchanged. After 2020, the activities of Regional Executive Committees shifted towards greater politicisation of their functions and increased control over the socio-political situation and the population. Whereas previously the role of Regional Executive Committees was perceived primarily through the prism of economic and administrative management, the tasks of ensuring political stability and loyalty at the local level became increasingly important:

“All that remains is to focus on the fact that any criticism of the authorities must be suppressed, because any criticism of the authorities can be equated with extremist activity.”

At the same time, the period after 2020 saw a further decline in the initiative shown by Regional Executive Committee chairpersons, who, even during more politically stable periods, tended to avoid risks and act with constant regard for the possible reaction of the head of state. The changes after 2020 only reinforced the tendency towards an “executive”, passive model of behaviour focused on implementing instructions rather than developing independent solutions.

Meanwhile, Lukashenka began to demand greater public visibility from regional leaders. Whereas previously chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees could remain primarily “administrators” working within the system, after 2020 they were increasingly expected to maintain an active public presence. Chairpersons were now expected to comment on events, react to social and political developments, demonstrate control over the situation, and communicate the position of the authorities:

“I noticed that they now have much more work with the media and social networks. And another thing appeared, I think - a political role, because governors are becoming political figures.”

“I am convinced that the administration has such a task: for the governor to become a political figure who has influence over society, influence in the region, and who, through the media, promotes state policy.”

Lukashenka’s demand that regional authorities become more publicly visible can be seen in officials’ growing use of social media, while their presence in the public sphere is gradually becoming a separate indicator of governance effectiveness (see, for example, [Ranking of Belarusian Cities](#)). Most likely, this change is connected to the fact that the events of 2020 exposed the regime’s failures in communication with society. Under the new conditions, regional officials are expected to act as public representatives of the state, explaining decisions adopted “from above”, demonstrating involvement in crisis situations, and fostering loyalty to the authorities at the local level.

This created a contradiction between the behavioural practices of officials in Regional Executive Committees and the expectations imposed on them. On the one hand, officials seek to avoid initiative and public attention from the head of state; on the other hand, they are increasingly expected to act as public figures. As a result, they find themselves in a situation in which they must remain visible and vocal, while doing so with maximum caution.

Important changes also took place in personnel policy with regard to Regional Executive Committees. After 2020 loyalty became an increasingly important factor in appointments. In some cases, this led to the replacement of more experienced administrators with politically reliable but less independent individuals:

“Of course, these events significantly influenced the situation. In particular, I think they had a very strong impact on personnel policy. Sometimes decisions are now made to the detriment of professional qualities but in favour of, so to speak, trust and loyalty.”

At an institutional level, the role of security services and ideology became more integral to the work of Regional Executive Committees. The committees became deeply involved in monitoring public sentiment. This manifested itself both in personnel policy and in everyday activities:

“The tendency became, so to speak, to place supervisors, controllers, additional security officials [in executive committees]. On the one hand, to exile people like Karaeu (Karaev) there, and on the other, to have a reliable person who understands commands and is ready to carry out any order. So that there are no so-called extremist outbreaks.”

Personnel decisions, such as appointments of security officials to regionally important positions, illustrate this tendency. One example is Yury Karaeu, the former Minister of Internal Affairs of Belarus. In 2020 Lukashenka appointed him as presidential aide-regional inspector for the Hrodna region. After the 2020 crisis, other Belarusian security officials, such as former KGB head Valery Vakulchyk (Valeriy Vakulchik) and former Deputy Interior Minister Aliaksandr Barsukou (Aleksandr Barsukov) received similar appointments. Interviewees explained the appointment of security officials to positions in the regions after 2020 primarily through the political logic of strengthening control at the local level. After the protests, the regions were viewed as a potentially vulnerable link; Lukashenka therefore preferred to send trusted representatives of the security bloc there, individuals whose loyalty was unquestionable and who had experience working in crisis situations:

“A special forces officer is now dealing with cows, construction projects, and everything else. It is obvious that he is not coping, but the fact that this was one of the most protest-active regions [the Hrodna region] in 2020 outweighs everything else.”

One of the key goals of such appointments was to prevent the very possibility of protest. Security officials in the regions serve as “guarantors of order”: they oversee the local situation, interact with local elites, and ensure that any signs of discontent are identified and neutralised in time. In this sense, their functions go far beyond formal job responsibilities.

“Hrodna almost switched to the side of the people. Both the Regional Executive Committee and the city executive committee were seriously shaken. As I understand it, security officials were simply sent there to control the situation because it was understood that civilians could not cope.”

“The priority of the authorities when appointing a security official as the top figure is not education, healthcare, or social protection. The priority is punitive action, suppression, keeping people in a stranglehold, maintaining a hard hand. And, for such purposes, former security officials at the regional level are perfectly suitable.”

“There is only one task, to hold on to power. Especially in such difficult times. (...) People who wield the stick, without any carrots, have come to the forefront.”

However, Lukashenka may also have appointed security officials to the regions after 2020 as a form of punishment for their failures and short-sightedness in relation to the protests. In this case, transfer to a region became a way of penalising them without resorting to open sanctions or publicly demonstrating conflict:

“As for Vakulchyk, it was an exile. It was an exile because, as chairman of the State Security Committee, he failed to foresee 2020. That was a failure. He should be grateful he was not imprisoned.”

Another reason for transferring security officials to the regions may have been an attempt to reduce their influence in Minsk. Lukashenka may have viewed the concentration of strong and ambitious representatives of the security bloc in the capital as a potential risk and therefore sought to “disperse” them across the regions. This served as a mechanism for balancing the system and preventing an excessive concentration of influence in the hands of particular individuals:

“The task was to send Vakulchyk out of Minsk, and the others as well. (...) The issue was not who would oversee the region, but that this person should not remain in Minsk, where at that moment he had very serious influence. The same scheme applied to Karaeu. The Ministry of Internal Affairs was genuinely loyal to him.”

3. FROM AGRARIANS TO SECURITY OFFICIALS: WHO GOVERNS THE BELARUSIAN REGIONS TODAY

When examining the current state of regional authorities, it is important to consider who exactly governs the regions today. The leadership of Regional Executive Committees currently consists of a group of administrators who combine experience in the state sector with personal loyalty to the system and a readiness to carry out political tasks. Chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees are figures embedded in the vertical of power and enjoying Lukashenka’s personal trust.

The Brest Regional Executive Committee is headed by Piotr Parkhomchyk (Petr Parkhomchik), appointed in August 2024. He had previously served as a deputy prime minister and Minister of Industry, having spent many years working in mechanical engineering. He is best seen as an industrial manager focused on enterprise development. Indeed, Lukashenka emphasised Parkhomchyk's role as an administrator who should address industrial problems, "engage with issues that are difficult to resolve," work with enterprise directors, and [assist the Minister of Industry](#).

Since January 2026, Aliaksandr Rahochnik (Aleksandr Rogozhnik) has headed the Vitsebsk Regional Executive Committee. He represents the industrial elite and previously served as Minister of Industry. Since the Vitsebsk region is considered problematic economically, Lukashenka traditionally assigns local authorities tasks related to improving economic indicators. Rahochnik is likely perceived as an anti-crisis manager. He is expected to restore order in industry and increase the effectiveness of the regional economy. Lukashenka dismissed his predecessor, Aliaksandr Subotsin (Aleksandr Subbotin), in January 2026, ostensibly for a "lack of initiative". At the same time, the dismissal of Subotsin, whom independent experts described as one of the potential successors to the head of state, [may indicate](#) that Lukashenka has abandoned the strategy of forming a "pool of successors." The real reason for the dismissal may have been Lukashenka's desire to restore control over regional elites, since he had expressed concern about Subotsin's popularity.

Ivan Krupko has headed the Homel Regional Executive Committee since 2021. He comes from the agricultural sector and previously served as Minister of Agriculture. He is a typical representative of the "agrarian" administrative group traditionally in demand within the Belarusian system of public administration. When receiving reports from Krupko, Lukashenka usually [focuses on the condition of agriculture](#) in the region.

Yury Karaeu, former Minister of Internal Affairs, has headed the Hrodna Regional Executive Committee since March 2025. His appointment is directly linked to the events of 2020 and state efforts to strengthen control over the region. For Lukashenka, Karaeu likely appears to be someone capable of ensuring order and governability in a region that was among the most active during the 2020 protests.

In 2020, Lukashenka appointed Uladzimir Kukharau (Vladimir Kuharev) as chairperson of the Minsk City Executive Committee. He had previously served as deputy prime minister and worked within the state control system. Kukhareu's role is slightly different, since he governs the capital city, the country's key political and economic centre, and not a region per se. He is responsible for demonstrating prosperity, stability, and loyalty in a city where resources, population, and potential risks to the authorities are concentrated.

Aliaksei Kushnarenka (Alexey Kushnarenko) has headed the Minsk Regional Executive Committee since March 2025. He came from the energy sector, where he served as Minister of Energy. Kushnarenka's appointment may be interpreted as a kind of [personnel experiment](#) aimed at testing the effectiveness of leaders not connected to the agricultural or industrial spheres.

Anatol Isachanka (Anatoliy Isachenko) has headed the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee since 2021. He is an administrator with experience in agriculture who previously served as a presidential aide--regional inspector. Before that he headed the Minsk Regional Executive Committee. His experience both at the regional level and within the Presidential Administration

makes him a familiar and predictable figure for the central authorities. His appointment to the Mahiliou region can be viewed as the use of a trusted administrator.

This section analyses the biographies of both current chairpersons and deputy chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees, as well as those who held these positions between 2015 and 2026 but were subsequently dismissed. In total, the study examined the biographies of 15 chairpersons and 69 deputy chairpersons.

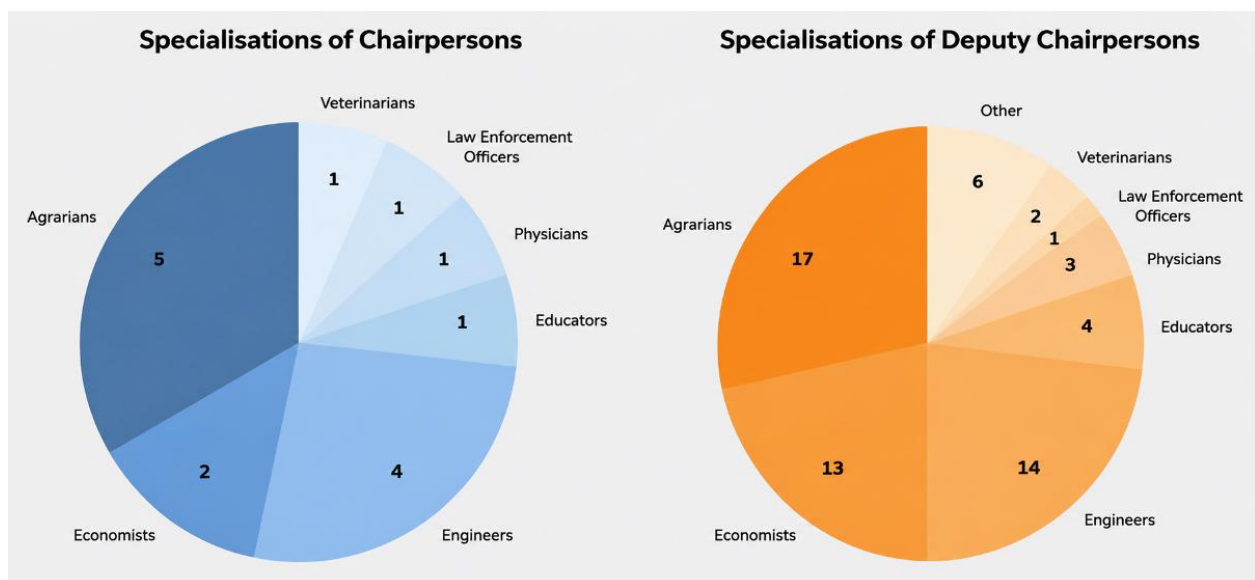
Professional composition and competencies

The Regional Executive Committees comprise representatives from many different spheres of activity. This is different from the ministries, where one professional specialisation typically dominates (for example, economists in the Ministry for the Economy). Future leaders of Regional Executive Committees may begin their careers in hospitals, schools, housing, media, security agencies, or elsewhere. Based on data about first higher education degrees and places of employment at early career stages, the following professions are the most common among the leadership of Regional Executive Committees:

- Specialists from the agricultural sphere (five deputy chairpersons, 17 chairpersons)
- Engineers (four chairpersons, 14 deputy chairpersons)
- Economists (two chairpersons, 13 deputy chairpersons)

In addition, among senior officials there are doctors, teachers, athletes, musicians, journalists, security officials, veterinarians, and other specialists.

Graph 2. Professional backgrounds of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons and deputy chairpersons



Source: Authors' summary of data from open sources.

Commenting on the professional competencies required from Regional Executive Committee leadership, interviewees agreed that a chairperson is first and foremost a broad-profile administrator possessing practical experience, communication and coordination skills, as well as loyalty towards the current authorities. Professional specialisation itself is not considered especially important. Such a leader must effectively manage a complex and diverse system and

understand a broad range of issues, from economics and finance to the social sphere and infrastructure, while also being able to coordinate the work of various structures:

“Ideally, this should be a good administrator, a manager who understands how all sectors of the national economy function.”

One of the key professional requirements is practical management experience, especially at the local level. For Regional Executive Committee officials, it is important not only to know formal procedures but also to understand how the governance works in practice: how decisions are made, resources distributed, and relations between different actors organised.

“Of course, this should be a manager, a good manager, who can maintain discipline, make tough decisions, dismiss people, and make personnel decisions. In other words, someone capable of pursuing a fairly independent policy within the territory under his supervision.”

Communication skills also play an important role in appointments. A Regional Executive Committee chairperson must be able to interact both with the central authorities and locals - including elites, businesspeople, and citizens. This requires the ability to negotiate and balance interests. After 2020 the importance of the public dimension increased: the ability to speak publicly, explain decisions, and demonstrate control became more significant.

However, professional skills alone are insufficient. The key factor in appointments remains personal loyalty to the system and the country’s senior leadership. Reliability, predictability, and readiness to follow the established line are often viewed as more important qualities for Regional Executive Committee leaders than competence. In this sense, the ideal leader is not only an effective manager but also a politically reliable figure:

“[A chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee must] know how to click his heels and look into the boss’s mouth. The essential quality is to be obedient and carry out the will of the higher authorities.”

In addition, the previous professional experience of a Regional Executive Committee chairperson may influence their administrative priorities and initiatives. Unlike ministries, where a leader usually works within familiar fields, chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees come from different sectors and focus on areas in which they possess expertise and professional connections. For example, individuals from the construction sector devote their efforts to infrastructure, while those with transport backgrounds attach greater importance to transport. As a result, the regional agenda becomes partially personalised, and priorities may change depending on who occupies committee positions.

“Everyone does what is closest to them and promotes projects where they have connections and opportunities for implementation.”

The large number of “agrarians” among Regional Executive Committee chairpersons reflects, on the one hand, the characteristics of the Belarusian economy, where agriculture has traditionally been important. On the other hand, it also reflects Lukashenka’s personal attitude towards agriculture. His heightened attention to the agricultural sphere and his perception of it as a strategically important sector directly influence personnel policy:

“Lukashenka pays enormous attention to agriculture. He personally likes dealing with it. And this is demanded from the heads of district executive committees and, accordingly, Regional Executive Committees. The sowing campaign is the key issue.”

“Mr. Lukashenka himself is an agrarian, and he sees this as perhaps the most important sector.”

An additional reason for the dominance of “agrarians” among Regional Executive Committee leadership is the limited personnel pool. Representatives of other professional groups, such as financial specialists, are more likely to pursue alternative careers in business and the private sector. Civil service offers them fewer opportunities in terms of income and independence. As a result, the personnel reserve for local governance is small, and “agrarians” who have advanced through the system from below become the most accessible and trusted resource:

“The others simply see other social elevators, other goals, want independence, and want to earn money.”

Career trajectories

Several common patterns can be identified in the system of selection and promotion of regional-level leaders in Belarus. Two basic models of career advancement are particularly visible (see Diagram 3).

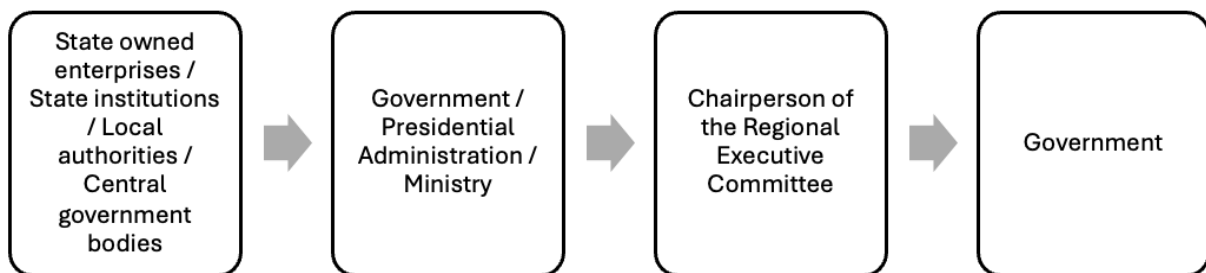
Model 1. Through the republican level

Under this model, the early career stages of future Regional Executive Committee leaders may begin from almost any professional starting point. Over time, an individual enters public service at the republican level, for example within ministries or the Presidential Administration, rise to senior positions such as minister or deputy prime minister, and then be appointed to a Regional Executive Committee. This is the classic “top-down” career track and is characteristic of chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees. After dismissal from office, such officials are often transferred back to the government to positions such as deputy prime minister.

Model 2. Through the local vertical

Within this model, the career of a Regional Executive Committee leader often begins at state industrial or agricultural enterprises, after which the individual receives a position in local executive authorities, usually in district executive committees. This is followed by transfer to a senior position within a Regional Executive Committee. This “internal” trajectory within the vertical is more characteristic of deputy chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees. At the same time, after dismissal from office, such officials may find themselves appointed to almost any authority at the republican or local level, or to state enterprises or public institutions. These appointments often involve senior posts, such as minister or deputy minister, head of a district executive committee, or director of a public institution.

Diagram 3. Career trajectories of chairpersons of regional executive committees and their deputies



Source: Authors' summary of data from open sources.

Thus, when we look at the leadership of Regional Executive Committees, we find a body where officials on different career trajectories converge. Some come from the central government departments, some from the local vertical of power, and some from the real sector of the economy.

At the same time, industrial and agricultural state-owned enterprises play a particularly important role. They crop up in a significant share of officials' career trajectories (both for chairpersons and deputies), reflecting the specifics of the Belarusian model: a Regional Executive Committee administrator is first and foremost an "economic manager".

Analysis of the career trajectories of Regional Executive Committee officials demonstrates that transfers between different positions do not always signify promotion or demotion: officials may move from a region to the government, from the government to a region, and back again. Often these are not hierarchical career advancements but rather horizontal rotations in which officials are simply moved within the system to maintain governability and control.

In interviews, the position of chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee was described as one of the peaks of an official's career. Although higher positions do exist, real power is concentrated at the regional level: the chairperson controls the regional budget, influences the distribution of investments, and can make certain decisions without complex coordination with the central government.

"In reality, everyone dreams of becoming a governor because it is a prestigious position. It has real power over the territory of the region. You are absolutely the main person there – your word is law."

When an official is transferred from a government position to a Regional Executive Committee, the administrative tasks become more complicated. Work in government provides an understanding of formal procedures and the logic of the government apparatus, but it does not adequately prepare officials for practical work "on the ground". Governance at the regional level requires a different type of competence: knowledge of the local economy, informal relationships, and the specifics of a particular region. Personal connections and unwritten rules are especially important in this context. Individuals coming from local governance, for example former heads of district executive committees, are often better prepared to govern a region than officials coming from the central government departments. The former already understand the logic of local governance and adapt more quickly to regional specifics.

“If you work in a ministry and are suddenly thrown into some region, it is even more difficult. Because from the centre you see much less clearly. (...) You need to understand how the system of power inside the region is organised. Therefore, so to speak, the optimal rotation is rotation between regions.”

“If you work in a region, it will be easier for you to understand how everything is organised. Even if you were a strong head of a district executive committee, you are a better candidate for a Regional Executive Committee than some person from the centre.”

It is noteworthy that an internal career path to the highest positions is generally uncharacteristic in Regional Executive Committees. Among chairpersons, only Henadz Solavei (Gennadiy Solovey, chairperson of the Homel Regional Executive Committee) directly held the position of first deputy chairperson before his appointment. All the other chairpersons were external appointments, although in some cases those officials had previously worked within Regional Executive Committees. For example, Uladzimir Kukharau, appointed head of the Minsk City Executive Committee in 2020, had served as first deputy chairperson of the Minsk City Executive Committee from 2012 to 2016. There was, in other words, a four-year gap between the occupying the positions of deputy chairperson and chairperson, during which Kukharau served as deputy head of the State Control Committee and deputy prime minister. Similar gaps can be observed in the careers of Aliaksandr Turchyn (Aleksandr Turchin, Minsk Regional Executive Committee), Leanid Zayats (Leonid Zayats, Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee), and Anatol Isachanka. The latter case is particularly notable because he headed two Regional Executive Committees: the Minsk Regional Executive Committee from 2017 to 2019 and the Mahiliou Regional Executive Committee from 2021 to the present.

Among deputy chairpersons, external appointments also predominate. In fact, internal promotions to deputy chairperson were recorded in only about one-quarter of cases.

The role of personal connections in personnel appointments

The role of personal connections in Regional Executive Committees’ personnel policy manifests on two levels:

- The internal level: the formation of the “chairperson’s team” and the promotion of personnel within the region
- The external level: the appointment of the leaders themselves

These levels function differently, but in both cases informal networks remain an important, though differently operating, resource. At the regional level itself, the scope for using personal connections within local governance is relatively broad. A Regional Executive Committee is a complex system with numerous departments, committees, and subordinate institutions, a kind of “state within a state”:

“In a region, there are essentially many mini-ministries, committees, and departments where people with very different qualifications can work.”

Under these conditions, Regional Executive Committee chairpersons seek to form administrative teams consisting of people they trust. Unlike ministries, where there is a high degree of external control and competition, there is greater freedom at the regional level in personnel decisions. It is easier to promote “one’s own people”, especially at middle and lower levels, where the attention of the central authorities is minimal.

“It seems to me that it is easier [to promote your own employees in Regional Executive Committees], because many people want to get into ministries, and the administration interferes heavily there. In the regions it is simpler; there is no such external force there. Who in the Minsk administration is interested in appointing someone as head of an agricultural department? Nobody cares. They do not interfere there. Therefore, yes, it is completely realistic to form a strong personal team in local authorities.”

At the upper level of the regional governance vertical, however, this logic begins to break down. The appointment of chairpersons and their deputies is under the direct control of the central authorities: key decisions are made by Lukashenka, while candidates are approved by the Presidential Administration and security structures. Under these conditions, the direct promotion of “one’s own people” becomes more limited. A Regional Executive Committee chairperson cannot simply appoint a deputy because that person is a convenient choice for them. Instead, they must consider the position of the central authorities and go through an approval process that assesses not only formal qualifications but also the candidate’s reputation in the eyes of different actors within the system.

This is where personal connections begin to function in a broader, systemic sense. It is less about personal friendships and more about how a candidate is perceived within the Presidential Administration, by the security agencies, and by other state bodies. Much depends on the candidate’s reputation within the system and on the type of feedback about them that reaches the highest leadership.

“Who has ‘access to the body,’ who whispers in whose ear, and what exactly is whispered about them there. I think this is a very important factor that can help advancement.”

Consequently, personal connections become a channel of communication and influence through which perceptions of candidates for Regional Executive Committee positions are formed at the highest level of power.

Analysis of the data shows that overlaps in employment histories of chairpersons and their deputies are extremely rare. Only in one case did a chairperson and deputy work together earlier. Uladzimir Kukharau, chairperson of the Minsk City Executive Committee since 2020, and his deputy Aleh Korzun (Oleg Korzun), appointed in 2022, had both previously worked in the State Control Committee. This finding confirms that the system is not based on simple patronage ties in the narrow sense of the term, but on a more complex system of reputational and institutional connections. What matters is not so much personal loyalty to a specific leader as integration into the system and recognition by various state structures.

Other informal factors in appointments

The key criterion in appointing chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees is the candidate’s personal loyalty to the head of state.

“The first basic thing is loyalty to Aliaksandr Lukashenka. A chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee is Lukashenka’s person, someone he trusts and whom he believes can cope. That is the first thing. Loyalty is now important at all levels. At the level of the Regional Executive Committee chairperson, it is absolutely central.”

An important role is also played by the candidate’s integration into the system of public administration. As a rule, individuals appointed to the positions of Regional Executive Committee

chairperson have already passed through several levels of civil service, including work in the ministries, local authorities, and Presidential Administration. Such a career path allows them to undergo a “loyalty test” across different state institutions.

Another important and related factor is the ability of the central authorities to maintain control over candidates for leadership positions in committees. The system of public administration seeks to ensure governability through potential vulnerabilities that can be used as leverage when necessary. As a result, the existence of compromising material on a candidate may even become an “advantage” during appointment, since it can later serve as a mechanism of pressure.

“People appointed to these positions are openly compromised, stained by various dealings, making them easy to manipulate and easy to control.”

Long terms in office, little rotation: personnel dynamics in Regional Executive Committees

Chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees can be described as long-serving officials: they may remain in office for five years or even longer. This is very different from the central government ministries where, in some cases, new ministers are appointed every one or two years. The less frequent turnover of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons is largely connected to the nature of their work. Governing a region requires deep immersion in a wide range of areas, including the economy, the social sphere, and local infrastructure. Acquiring such knowledge requires a significant investment of time, and only after several years does a leader fully understand the specifics and begin demonstrating tangible results. For this reason, frequent rotation of officials would be ineffective, because it resets accumulated experience and slows governance processes.

“More time is needed to build relationships within the system (...) In a ministry it is faster. You sit down, understand the situation, and move forward. Because a ministry is a somewhat different level of governance, while in a region you need to understand all the districts.”

“Probably because in a region you need time to understand things. You cannot just arrive and solve everything quickly.”

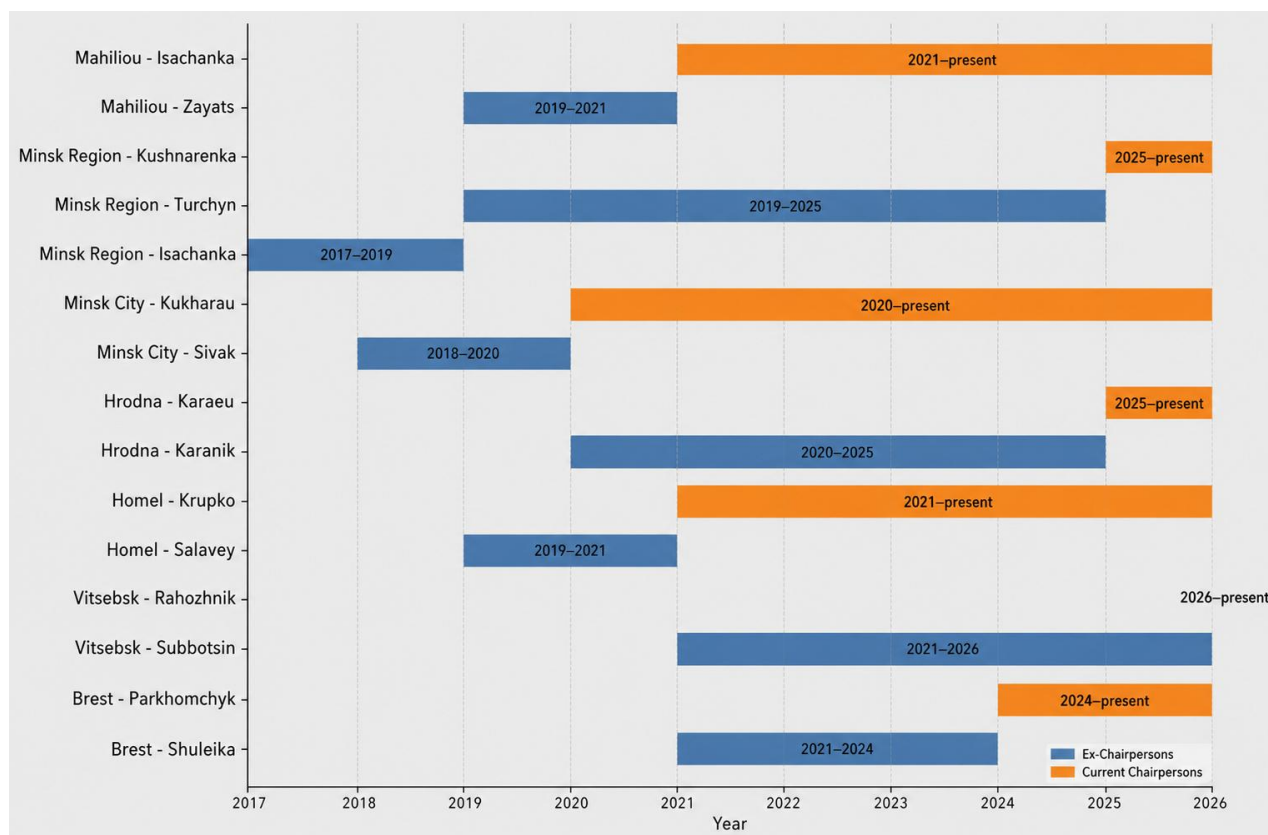
At the same time, personnel shortages also play an important role in the infrequent rotation of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons. The system requires a chairperson to combine loyalty, ability to be governed, experience, and integration into the vertical. Finding a candidate who meets all these requirements is difficult, which is why administrators who have already proved themselves are retained as a valuable resource.

“I think the personnel situation in the system is not that good. There are not so many willing candidates.”

There may also be political reasons for the low frequency of personnel rotations. The term of office of chairpersons is connected to the presidential term and, in effect, the chairperson is given their own “presidential term” to demonstrate their abilities. In this sense, the head of a Regional Executive Committee is perceived as the president’s representative in the region and their long stay in office reflects the presumed stability of the power vertical.

“Five years [as chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee] is a presidential term. [The chairperson] is the president of a specific territory. Over five years you can see whether he succeeded or failed.”

Graph 3. Chronology of changes among Regional Executive Committee chairpersons



Source: Authors' summary of data from open sources.

Rotations of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons who have not served long in the role are exceptional. In most cases, when it does happen it is because there is demand for a given official in another role. Only five chairpersons held their posts for two to three years: three of them - Zayats, Sivak, and Shuleika (Shuleyko) - moved to positions of deputy prime minister; the fourth, Isachanka, returned from the Minsk Regional Executive Committee to once again head a Regional Executive Committee, this time in the Mahiliou region.

Against this background, only Henadz Salavei (Gennadiy Solovey, Homel Regional Executive Committee) stands out. After two years leading the region, he was transferred to head the Haradzeya Sugar Factory. The likely reason for Solavei's dismissal and transfer was Lukashenka's dissatisfaction; the head of state considered Solavei's work "insufficiently effective."

Interviewees identified three main groups of reasons for potential removal of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons from office.

1. Failures in performance, especially the failure to fulfill tasks publicly assigned by Lukashenka

"If the region fails to meet the required indicators, that is already a formal reason [for being moved]. Conditionally speaking, Lukashenka gives an instruction, saying it is important to revive a certain enterprise, and you are responsible for it... [so] come up with something. If the enterprise becomes profitable - well done; if not – you will be blamed and sent to manage some collective farm. A specific instruction from Lukashenka may fail, and this may become grounds for removing a person from office."

2. Ordinary personnel rotation

This does not concern punishment but movement within the system, for example a transfer to the government or other significant position. Such decisions reflect the logic of redistributing personnel within the vertical.

“Now they are all immediately reassigned. Upwards, downwards, sideways, diagonally. It is just some kind of Brownian motion.”

“For a governor to lose his position and end up nowhere – one really has to try hard.”

3. Preventing the excessive strengthening of regional leaders

Long tenure in one position allows Regional Executive Committee chairpersons to build networks, form their own circles of influence, and accumulate political weight. To avoid the emergence of overly independent figures at the local level, Lukashenka periodically carries out rotations even when there are no formal complaints about performance. In such cases, leadership changes serve as a tool for controlling officials and preventing the emergence of autonomy or excessive independence among regional elites.

“From the point of view of the current authorities, it is dangerous to let one person stay in one place for too long.”

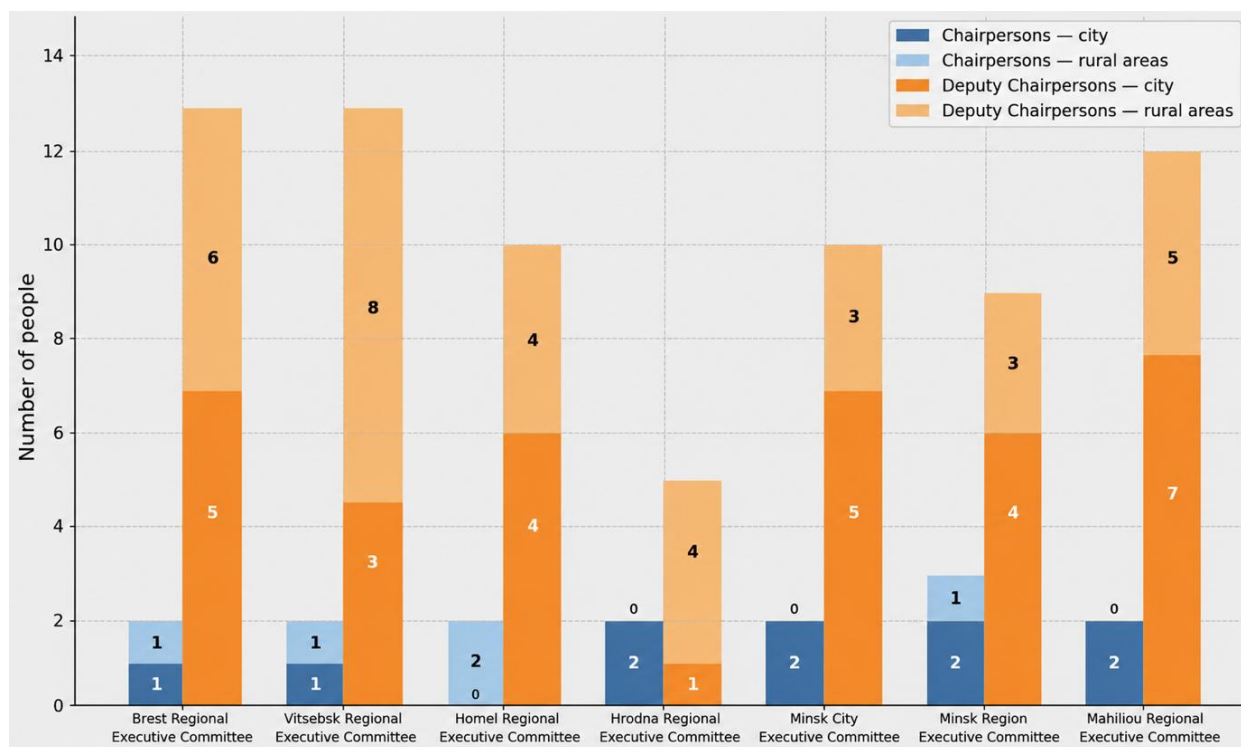
“Because if you settle too comfortably into a regional position, Lukashenka does not like that either. He tries to replace such people. This influence genuinely worries him. There must only be one Lukashenka in the country.”

In the case of deputy chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees, personnel dynamics are even more conservative than those of chairpersons themselves. Deputies often remain in office for six to eight years, and in some cases for ten years or more. Such stability may be explained by the functional role of deputies within the system. If the chairperson is primarily a political figure, integrated into the vertical, deputies ensure operational stability and continuity. They are more deeply immersed in specific areas, such as agriculture, the social sphere, or infrastructure issues, and act as carriers of institutional memory about how the region functions “from within”.

Appointees' place of birth

The background someone comes from does not appear to be an important factor in appointments. Among Regional Executive Committee chairpersons, 10 come from urban backgrounds and 5 from rural backgrounds. Among deputy chairpersons, there is almost parity in this respect: 29 have urban origins and 33 rural origins (among officials whose place of birth is known).

Graph 4. Birthplaces of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons and deputy chairpersons



Source: Authors’ summary of data from open sources.

Regions in Belarus are rarely governed by people native to them. Among the 15 Regional Executive Committee chairpersons, only two were born in the same regions they currently govern or governed in the past (Aliaksandr Subotsin in the Vitebsk Regional Executive Committee and Uladzimir Karanik (Vladimir Karanik) in the Hrodna Regional Executive Committee). Among deputy chairpersons, there are significantly more “locals”: 38 were born in the regions where they work or previously worked, while 26 are natives of other regions.

The appointment of an “outsider” to govern a region is often viewed as a way of strengthening control by the central government. Leaders parachuted into a region are usually less connected to local influence groups. This allows them to make decisions without regard to local arrangements while also ensuring greater subordination to the vertical.

“Rotations between regions – I think this is a deliberate policy intended to prevent the formation of any alternative viewpoint differing from the general line. This shuffling of personnel is therefore part of the personnel policy pursued by the current authorities.”

However, such leaders also face limitations. They require time to understand the specifics of the region and establish working relationships, which may slow processes during the initial stage. In addition, the absence of deep roots in the region can complicate communication with local elites and reduce administrative effectiveness.

“In order to work effectively in a region, you need to understand the specifics of that region. Every region has its own rather serious peculiarities.”

At the same time, a “local” leader may possess a better understanding of the region, its characteristics, and its problems. Such chairpersons usually have a stronger grasp of the local

economy, social issues and infrastructure. They may also possess established ties with local elites and business circles, which facilitate decision-making and accelerate implementation. At the same time, this has a downside: the risk of excessive involvement in local interests and the existence of entrenched ties and obligations that may limit a leader's independence. In such cases, governance may become oriented to compromises, and decisions may depend on balancing interests within the regional elite. Corruption risks also increase. As one interviewee said:

“It is a delicate balance; you do not want people who are too personally loyal to you; everyone must understand that there is only one hand that feeds them. (...) There should not be overly strong clan-like connections. And that is naturally obvious if a person comes from one region and gradually builds networks of acquaintances, family ties, and financial flows. This is not what the state wants overall.”

Age at the time of appointment

It is rare to find people under 40 in the Regional Executive Committees leadership: none of the chairpersons was under 40 at the time of appointment and only seven deputy chairpersons. The youngest Regional Executive Committee chairperson was appointed at the age of 44 (Aliaksandr Turchyn in the Minsk Regional Executive Committee in 2019), while the oldest was appointed at the age of 67 (Piotr Parkhomchyk in the Brest Regional Executive Committee in 2024). Chairpersons are generally older than their deputies, which appears logical from the perspective of administrative hierarchy and accumulated experience.

Meanwhile, the upper age limit for appointing deputy chairpersons is lower. Within the analysed sample, there were no cases involving the appointment of individuals older than 57. This may indicate stricter age limitations for deputies, with people of retirement age generally not appointed to these positions.

Level of education

The overwhelming majority of Regional Executive Committee leaders possess two higher education degrees: 11 chairpersons and 46 deputy chairpersons in our sample, in fact. Three chairpersons and six deputy chairpersons hold three higher education degrees. Only one chairperson and seven deputy chairpersons have a single higher education degree. The most common institution for obtaining a second higher education degree is the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus.

Despite the fact that Regional Executive Committee leaders may formally be considered well educated, interview respondents noted a systemic problem related to professional training for local authorities. As a result, regional leaders may lack a clear understanding of the functions, tasks, and instruments of local governance and instead acquire professional skills “on the job”. The key reason is the absence in Belarus of a specialised training system. Unlike in many foreign countries, where separate schools or programmes prepare officials for local governance, Belarus lacks such an institutionalised model. This role is partially fulfilled by the Academy of Public Administration, but its role remains limited and cannot be compared to a full-fledged system of professional education.

“Unfortunately, people who enter local authorities often do not possess the knowledge necessary to perform these functions. (...) They do not understand what local government is and what its goals, tasks, and instruments are. No one in our country trains people specifically to become officials in local authorities.”

As a result, the personnel system within local authorities is built less on professional preparation than on practice, loyalty, and experience working within the power vertical itself.

Gender

Interviewees also drew attention to the pronounced gender imbalance within the local authorities. All Regional Executive Committee chairpersons without exception are men. Women are present among deputy chairpersons, but their share is extremely small, amounting to only four out of 69 people.

Nevertheless, women largely staff executive bodies at the local level: according to 2023 data, their share was around 70%; while at the rural level women almost completely dominate. However, as one moves upwards through the hierarchy, the picture changes: leadership positions, including those of Regional Executive Committee chairpersons, remain overwhelmingly occupied by men. This is unsurprising given that Lukashenka has publicly stated that women are “not created” for managerial work. This distribution is also explained by the logic of personnel recruitment: men more often view work in local authorities as a temporary stage of their career or a “springboard” towards more prestigious positions in central authorities or business. In addition, the low attractiveness of such positions, including in terms of salary and status, reduces male interest in them, leading to a de facto “imbalance” towards female employment at the executive level.

Under conditions of a rigid power vertical, the gender composition may have administrative consequences. Women working within the public administration are often more dependent on leadership and less inclined towards conflict or arguing for alternative solutions. Combined with the general logic of subordination, this strengthens conformism and reduces initiative at lower levels of governance.

“Socially, many women are much more dependent on their superiors, less active in defending their own position or promoting innovations and so on. And this may affect the work of local authorities.”

4. REGIONAL SPECIFICITIES WITHIN A UNIFIED VERTICAL

Even though Regional Executive Committees in Belarus are institutionally similar, they differ in their governance priorities, which are shaped by local specifics. In some regions, economics tops the agenda, while in others the political and societal control functions are more pronounced. For example, the Mahiliou and Homel regions face significant problems in the agricultural sector. In these regions, Lukashenka appoints officials with agricultural experience as chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees.

The Vitsebsk region is economically weak. In 2025, for example, it recorded the largest industrial decline (-4.2%) of any region; this helps to explain the appointment of a former Minister of Industry as chairperson. In the Hrodna region, which has a reputation for being the most protest-active, ideologically unstable and relatively pro-Western region, the head of the Regional Executive Committee is a former Minister of Internal Affairs. Minsk City and the Minsk region are governed by a former deputy head of the State Control Committee and a former Minister of Energy respectively, likely with the aim of ensuring discipline and control.

According to interviews, there are no “secondary” regions for Lukashenka. Every region falls within his field of attention, although the reasons for that attention may differ.

“You cannot say that one region is very important while the others are not. But every region has some specific characteristic that influences its importance.”

Minsk and the Minsk region occupy a special position as the country’s economic and administrative centre. The main resources, financial flows and key institutions are concentrated there, which makes control over the capital region a matter of utmost importance. It is a space of heightened attention and, simultaneously, heightened expectations.

“Economically, I would single out Minsk and the Minsk region as the most important. In terms of population as well, again it is Minsk and the Minsk region – that is basically half the population.”

Other regions stand out because of their own specific characteristics. The Vitsebsk region has traditionally been perceived as economically weaker, requiring constant attention and efforts to “improve” its indicators.

“I think I even remember from childhood, from all these speeches, that the Vitsebsk region seemed to be his [Lukashenka’s] least favourite. Whatever problem came up at a meeting, it was always the Vitsebsk region.”

The Brest and Hrodna regions are viewed through the prism of their geographical position and historical and cultural specificity. As the westernmost regions, the authorities perceive their political sensitivity to be higher than in the other regions.

“The Brest region (...) after 2020 began receiving more attention because pro-Western sentiments there were stronger. And the Pole’s Cards – both in Brest and in Hrodna, every second person seemed to have one, and for him this was a risk factor.”

The Mahiliou region has special significance because of the personal factor: it is connected to Lukashenka’s biography, giving it symbolic importance and additional attention from the central authorities:

“There is a special affection – that is, for the Mahiliou region. So much money is poured there that nowhere else receives such amounts. It is difficult to explain. I do not know, maybe nostalgia or something like that.”

The Homel region has gained importance in recent years due to geopolitical circumstances, above all its proximity to the Ukrainian border:

“If we talk about the importance of regions, I think this is now largely explained by the war and the situation in Ukraine. The Homel region is acquiring a particular significance and additional responsibilities.”

5. LUKASHENKA'S "EYES AND EARS": PRESIDENTIAL AIDES IN THE REGIONS

Alongside the leadership of Regional Executive Committees, another important group of actors exists within the regional governance: presidential aides-regional inspectors for the regions and the city of Minsk. These positions are located within the Presidential Administration and are not formally part of the local executive authorities. In practice, however, their role in the regions is highly significant.

Presidential aides-regional inspectors appeared in Belarus after the 1996 referendum, when presidential powers expanded significantly and the institutionalisation of the control system over the regions began. In 2001, [Decree No. 21 "On Approval of the Regulations on the Aide to the President of the Republic of Belarus"](#) established the status and main functions of presidential aides. Over time, however, these functions were repeatedly revised. In 2020, Decree No. 503 expanded the powers of presidential aides: they received the right to intervene directly in the work of state bodies, conduct inspections, and [initiate disciplinary measures against officials](#).

In August 2025, [Decree No. 303 "On the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Belarus"](#) introduced new responsibilities for presidential aides. Their duties include meeting regularly with citizens, visiting local areas to inspect problems, and monitoring the implementation of decisions made by the head of state. This document currently defines the status, functions, and main directions of activity of these officials. The head of the Presidential Administration coordinates the work of presidential aides. An aide is appointed and dismissed by decree of the head of state upon recommendation of the head of the Presidential Administration. In practice, the inspector acts as a conduit for policy "from top to bottom". They assess effectiveness, ensure administrative discipline, and perform the function of political monitoring by tracking public sentiment, economic dynamics, and identifying potential internal and external risks at the local level.

Personnel issues also occupy an important place in the work of aides-inspectors. They participate in the selection and evaluation of administrators, including deputy chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees, provide assessments, and shape perceptions of who is loyal and effective, or vice versa. In addition, the inspector monitors the implementation of development programmes and participates in their drafting and adjustment. The aide's functions also include a public communication aspect: handling citizens' appeals and participating in discussions about their problems.

Diagram 4. Main Formal Functions of Presidential Aides-Inspectors for the Regions



Source: Decree No. 303 of 14 August 2025, “On the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Belarus”.

Thus, officially, the aide-inspector is a universal controller and intermediary through whom the vertical of power keeps regional governance “on alert.” In interviews, the position of presidential aide was characterised as an element of Lukashenka’s direct control over the regions, with inspectors repeatedly described as “overseers” supervising local authorities, including Regional Executive Committee chairpersons. To cite one interviewee:

“They keep an eye on the governors. They watch them so that they do not go too far, do not start building their own teams too aggressively, and do not begin pursuing some kind of independent policy.”

The main role of the aide-inspector is to be Lukashenka’s “eyes and ears” in the region. They gather information about the real situation, assess the work of local authorities, signal problems, and transmit an alternative picture of events upwards, one that may differ from the official reports of Regional Executive Committees. In this regard, they function as a parallel communication channel:

“This is Lukashenka’s informant on the ground. Lukashenka built his entire system on having many different sources of information, and he makes decisions by comparing and cross-checking these sources. He has several security services collecting information, he works the same way with the

government, takes information from the National Bank, from the government, and receives notes from the administration. It is the same at the local level.”

“It is very bad when there is only one source of information. Every self-respecting dictator therefore strives to obtain information from several sources in order to draw conclusions.”

It is also noted that the presence of aides-inspectors strengthens control over Regional Executive Committee chairpersons and limits their autonomy, since their activities remain under constant informal supervision. This creates an additional level of authoritarian accountability and discipline within the system:

“If the situation is calm, they will serve as a link closer to Lukashenka for delivering operational instructions (...). But if the situation looks like someone needs to be disciplined, pressured, punished, or shortcomings need to be identified, then the inspector switches into an intensified mode of work and turns from an aide and intermediary into a critic and inspector.”

In parallel, there is likely partial duplication of functions and even hidden competition between Regional Executive Committee chairpersons and aides-inspectors. On the one hand, there is a formal distinction in status: the chairperson is responsible for governance, while the aide is responsible for control functions. In practice, however, these boundaries may become blurred, especially when an aide actively intervenes in governance processes. As one interviewee said:

“An inspector can either suggest where something should be corrected or improved, give warnings, or, on the contrary, undermine the chairperson of the Regional Executive Committee. First and foremost, he is Lukashenka’s person. He is not the chairperson’s person. He is neither a friend nor a comrade to him.

“The best thing is to find a person who is interested in your failure. Then he will monitor you more closely and will find a way to catch you if necessary.”

Personnel profile and career trajectories of presidential aides-inspectors

Thirty-one people have been appointed to the position of presidential aide-inspector since 2015, either responsible for a region or the city of Minsk. All are men. The average age at appointment was 49.

In most cases (21 people), presidential aides possess two higher education degrees, five have three higher education degrees, and two have one higher education degree. Only five people did not graduate from the Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Belarus. As among the leadership of Regional Executive Committees, the majority of aides-inspectors are agrarians by profession (10 people). Six have engineering backgrounds, and another six come from security structures (the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the State Security Committee). There are only two economists; the group also includes teachers, a veterinarian, a lawyer, and a programmer.

All appointments to the position of presidential aide-inspector are external; no one built a long-term career within the Presidential Administration itself. The main sources from which inspector positions are recruited are the ministries and local authorities. In 13 cases, former heads of local governance and self-government bodies (most often chairpersons of district executive committees) were appointed as aides-inspectors, while in seven cases former heads of ministries (most often ministers) received these positions.

The tenure of aides-inspectors is generally short: in approximately half of all cases, aides-inspectors remained in office for only one year. Only 9 out of 31 people held the position for three years or longer. Among the “long-serving” inspectors were Karaeu (former Minister of Internal Affairs) and Vakulchyk (former head of the State Security Committee); both held the position for five years.

Career trajectories are highly diverse after leaving office. Former aides-inspectors have gone on to obtain senior positions in local authorities, ministries, the Apparatus of the Council of Ministers, and head state enterprises.

Diagram 5. Career trajectories of presidential aides-inspectors



Source: Authors’ summary of data from open sources.

There is some rotation of staff between the Regional Executive Committees and the Presidential Administration, but it is not particularly intensive. Among the 15 heads of Regional Executive Committees, five (Subotsin, Isachanka, Turchyn, Shuleika, and Karaeu) worked as aides-inspectors in the recent past. In addition, Sivak had such experience ten years before becoming head of the Minsk Regional Executive Committee.

Only two individuals, Linevich and Liavkovich (Levkovich), moved from the position of presidential aide to the post of deputy chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee. Two others, Parkhamovich and Rahashchuk (Rogaschuk), by contrast, received positions as aides-inspectors after previously serving as deputy chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees.

CONCLUSION

The position of Regional Executive Committees within the Belarusian system of governance is built on a combination of power and dependence. On the one hand, they possess sufficient authority to act as “masters on the ground”. On the other hand, their autonomy is strictly limited and does not allow them to become independent political actors. Chairpersons of Regional Executive Committees have broad room for manoeuvre, but only as long as their activity does not begin to generate independent political influence.

The Belarusian power vertical relies not so much on institutions as on a carefully constructed system of semi-formal and informal dependencies. Budgets, channels of control, and personnel appointment procedures are organised in such a way that each level of authority is embedded within the vertical, meaning it is dependent on the higher levels while simultaneously controlling the lower ones.

After 2020, local governance did not undergo major legislative changes, but in practice priorities shifted towards strengthening control. Oversight intensified at all levels, both over the population and over local leaders themselves. Their activities remain under constant supervision from the central authorities with active participation by security structures. Whereas previously Regional Executive Committee chairpersons were expected primarily to deliver economic results, now political reliability, discipline and the ability to publicly communicate and advocate decisions made at the republican level have come to the forefront. Under these conditions, the head of a Regional Executive Committee ceases to be merely an administrator and increasingly becomes a kind of “red commissar” of their territory - simultaneously a manager, controller, and ideologist.

Presidential aides-inspectors for the regions play a special role within this system. Their existence demonstrates that no single information channel is considered fully reliable within the Belarusian public administration. Consequently, all channels are duplicated. By establishing close oversight over the work of Regional Executive Committees, the system protects itself against the excessive strengthening of regional elites. As a result, the power vertical functions not only as a system of top-down subordination but also as a network of mutual control in which information is constantly verified from different sides.

After 2020, authoritarian accountability within the regional governance intensified. Regional Executive Committee chairpersons are increasingly brought into the public sphere and required to comment on and advocate for decisions adopted at the central level. As a result, regional officials become public “bearers” of responsibility for decisions that are de facto not made by them. Presidential aides-inspectors found themselves in a similar situation after 2025, when their responsibilities came to include regular meetings with citizens and field visits to monitor responses to problems reported in the media and citizens’ appeals.

Interestingly, whilst the events of 2020 led overall to centralisation and intensified oversight of the political apparatus, the local level developed formal democratic mechanisms at this time, most notably participatory budgeting. Their appearance can be an attempt by the system to adapt to the new socio-political conditions after 2020. In essence, authorities created a controlled channel for expressing social demands, allowing them to partially diffuse public dissatisfaction without affecting the political foundations of the regime.

The criteria for appointing Regional Executive Committee leadership extend far beyond professionalism. The ideal candidate is a manageable administrator: sufficiently effective to produce results, yet sufficiently dependent not to claim an independent political role. The career

trajectories of members of the Regional Executive Committees' leadership are multidirectional. Regional authorities include people coming from central government bodies and representatives of the local vertical. Regional Executive Committees serve as points of intersection for people of different career trajectories and also function as suppliers of personnel for future promotion to senior government positions. The position of chairperson of a Regional Executive Committee itself is often perceived as the pinnacle of a professional career in the civil service, since real authority and control over resources are concentrated at the regional level.

Personal connections in personnel policy within Regional Executive Committees play a dual role. At the regional level, they allow chairpersons to form their own teams and promote "their own people" to different positions both within the Regional Executive Committee itself and within subordinate organisations. When it comes to senior appointments, however, connections function differently. The key factor becomes the candidate's personal contacts and good reputation across different agencies at the central level. Candidates pass through approval procedures in the Presidential Administration and security structures, making positive evaluations from these bodies critically important.

Formally, all regions of Belarus are integrated into the same model of local governance, but in practice the central authorities assign them different tasks. In some places economic stabilisation is required; in others, intensified political control; elsewhere, attention to symbolically significant territories. As a result, each region receives not simply an administrator, but a figure responding to a specific demand from the central authorities.

The structure and logic of activity of Regional Executive Committees and their leadership reflect the principles underlying the functioning of the country's power vertical. They are characterised by a combination of delegated powers and a high level of dependence on the central government, with officials' pliancy and loyalty prioritised over independence. The formation of administrative elites in the regions follows the same logic: through the selection of figures tested for loyalty and capable of ensuring the implementation of the central authorities' objectives. All of this means that Regional Executive Committees function as a pillar of the regime's stability and consolidation.