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**NOBLE ABSENTISM
IN BELARUSIAN PROVINCES
IN THE FIRST HALF
OF THE XIX CENTURY**

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**ДВОРЯНСКИЙ АБСЕНТЕИЗМ
В БЕЛОРУССКИХ
ГУБЕРНИЯХ В ПЕРВОЙ
ПОЛОВИНЕ XIX ВЕКА**

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The problem of the electoral activity of the nobility of the Belarusian provinces in the first half of the XIX century. Was not the subject of special research in domestic and foreign historiography. The article measured the level of noble absentism of the Belarusian nobility compared to that in 27 internal and 5 southwestern provinces on the basis of revision materials in 1827. Factors of low attendance of noble election assemblies in the Russian Empire in general and Belarusian provinces, in particular, were established. The features of the electoral process in certain Belarusian regions (east and central-west) are highlighted. The main proposals of governors and government bodies to solve the problem of evading the nobility from participation in elections and election services were analyzed. Based on the data obtained during the study, it was established that the level of electoral activity of the nobility of the Belarusian provinces was higher than the average for the Russian Empire.

Keywords: nobility, noble elections, noble absentism, local administration, elected from nobility employees, Belarusian governorates, Russian Empire.

Проблема электоральной активности дворянства белорусских губерний в первой половине XIX в. не являлась предметом специального исследования в отечественной и зарубежной историографии. В статье измерен уровень дворянского абсентеизма белорусского дворянства по сравнению с таковым в 27 внутрирусских и 5 юго-западных губерний на базе материалов ревизии 1827 г. Установлены факторы невысокой посещаемости дворянских избирательных собраний в Российской империи в целом и белорусских губерниях, в частности. Выделены особенности избирательного процесса в отдельных белорусских регионах (восточном и центрально-западном). Проанализированы основные предложения губернаторов и правительственных органов по решению проблемы уклонения дворянства от участия в выборах и от выборной службы. Основываясь на полученных в ходе исследования данных можно заключить, что уровень электоральной активности дворянства белорусских губерний был выше среднего по Российской империи.

Ключевые слова: дворянство, дворянские выборы, дворянский абсентеизм, местное управление, выборные от дворянства служащие, белорусские губернии, Российская империя.

Introduction. The problem of noble absenteeism in the Belarusian provinces at the end of the 18th – the first half of the 19th century was touched upon in pre-revolutionary [1-2] and modern Belarusian [3-5] historiography as part of more general studies on the history of the nobility and local government of Belarus, or individual Belarusian regions. However, in historiography there is no comprehensive development of this problem, based on the information content of the sources used, the depth of research tasks, and the territorial and chronological scope of the study. The purpose of the article is to determine the level of electoral activity of the nobility of the Belarusian provinces in comparison with other provinces of the Russian Empire, as well as to reveal the factors that prevented (or contributed to) noble absenteeism in Belarus in the first half of the XIX century.

Main part. For the first time, the problem of mass evasion of the nobility of the Russian Empire from election service and ignoring the nobility election assemblies were raised at the all-Russian legislative level on August 20, 1802 [6]. 6 years later, on July

20, 1808, a decree was issued according to which, in the event of the nobility's unwillingness to fill elected positions, vacancies should be filled by government officials from Heroldia [7]. However, in the Russian legislation itself, which regulated the procedure for holding noble elections, there were loopholes that allowed nobles to evade arrival at noble meetings in provincial cities. Since the first noble elections of deputies to the Laid Commission in 1766, absentee voting by proxy has been in effect, that is, in order to realize active and passive suffrage, it was not necessary to be personally present at the elections. It was enough either to send your vote to the place set in advance for the elections, or to indicate the nobleman whom you trust your vote [8, p. 1096]. On November 25, 1778, permission was given to elect nobles absent from the elections for all positions that were to be replaced at noble assemblies [9]. Due to frequent abuses of this right, they decided to abolish it on November 14, 1810 [10]. From now on, only those nobles who personally attended noble meetings had the right to vote.

However, despite the measures taken by the government, the problem of noble absentism remained acute. For this reason, the Ministry of Internal Affairs in 1827 undertook the largest revision of the dynamics of the number of nobles present at the last three elections, the composition of noble assemblies and the number of nobles who had electoral rights. The Minister of the Interior V. S. Lanskaya instructed the governors and provincial leaders of the nobility to collect these three data groups. In addition, the governors should have

sent reports to the Ministry of Internal Affairs on the reasons for the low turnout at noble meetings in their subordinate provinces. This revision is the most valuable source illustrating the situation with noble absentism in most provinces of the Russian Empire. It also allows you to compare the attendance of noble assemblies in various provinces and, thus, to conclude how much better the situation with noble absentism was in the Belarusian provinces compared to other provinces (Table 1–5).

Table 1 – Dynamics of attendance at noble elections in the Russian provinces in 1819–1827
[11, l. 134-149, 169-172, 359-454, 456-544, 762-781, 783-803, 804-830, 834-871; 12, l. 2-90, 95-114, 184-243, 245-270, 272-284, 289-325, 341-368, 388-423, 426-449, 496-518, 524-592, 593-627, 631- 648, 650-668; 13, l. 4-27, 49-84, 132-159, 205-235, 369-426]

Province	The number of nobles who had the right to vote	The number of nobles who were personally present at the elections in:			The average number of nobles absent from the elections for three three-year periods	The ratio of absent to the total number of nobles who had the right to vote (in %)
		1820 ^{1 2}	1823	1826		
St. Petersburg	553	185	214	212	349	63.1
Moscow	524	231	262	270	270	51.5
Tverskaya	646	238	185	182	444	68.7
Pskovskaya	865	89	95	133	759	87.7
Smolensk	1336	327	317	326	1013	75.8
Vologda	254	93	116	107	149	58.7
Yaroslavskaya	520	250	206	224	293	56.3
Kostroma	484	246	248	248	237	49.0
Vladimirskaya	684	273	239	267	424	62.0
Kaluga	597	172	133	169	439	73.5
Tula	835	208	242	214	614	73.5
Ryazan	854	290	264	379	543	63.6
Tambov	674	236	296	283	402	59.6
Orlovskaya	1163	271	270	308	880	75.7
Kursk	1742	504	536	638	1183	67.9
Voronezh	822	214	250	244	586	71.3
Sloboda-Ukrainian	871	388	360	312	518	59.5
Yekaterinoslavskaya	471	129	132	134	339	72.0
Kherson	619	90	125	71	524	84.6
Tauride	462	114	84	69	373	80.7
Caucasian	114	59	51	69	54	47.4
Saratov	236	160	169	165	71	30.1
Penza	374	186	223	205	169	45.2
Nizhny Novgorod	236	125	111	163	103	43.6
Kazanskaya	166	102	81	102	71	42.8

¹ In 1819, 1822, 1825 elections were held in Tambov, Saratov, Nizhny Novgorod, Moscow, Simbirsk, Voronezh, Penza provinces.

² In 1821, 1824, 1827 elections were held in the Kaluga, Vladimir, Tver, Yaroslavl, St. Petersburg, Tauride, Kazan, Kostroma, Ryazan provinces.

Province	The number of nobles who had the right to vote	The number of nobles who were personally present at the elections in:			The average number of nobles absent from the elections for three three-year periods	The ratio of absent to the total number of nobles who had the right to vote (in %)
		1820 ¹²	1823	1826		
Simbirskaya	316	207	225	235	94	29.7
Orenburg	252	110	65	73	169	67.1
In total in 27 provinces	16700	5497	5499	5802	11101	66.5

Table 2 – Dynamics of attendance at noble elections in the southwestern provinces in 1820–1826 [11, I. 211-355rev, 552-570; 12, I. 452-494; 13, I. 87-127, 162-200, 430-700]

Province	Number of nobles who had the right to vote	The number of nobles who were personally present at the elections in:			The average number of nobles absent from the elections for three three-year periods	The ratio of absent to the total number of nobles who had the right to vote (in %)
		1820	1823	1826		
Kyiv	606	273	327	281	312	51.5
Chernihiv	1930	569	515	501	1402	72.6
Poltava	1650	585	490	506	1123	68.1
Podolskaya	695	668	585	675	53	7.6
Volyn	1808	922	962	823	906	50.1
In total in 5 provinces	6689	3017	2879	2786	3796	56.7

Table 3 – Dynamics of attendance at noble elections in the Vilna province in 1820–1826 [13, I. 237-367rev.]

County	The number of nobles who had the right to participate in elections in:			The number of nobles who were personally present at the elections in:			The average number of nobles absent from the elections for three three-year periods	The ratio of absent to the total number of nobles who had the right to vote (in %)
	1820	1823	1826	1820	1823	1826		
Braslavsky	102	104	96	75	76	77	25	24.7
Russian	341	326	315	160	326	315	60	18.3
Zawileisky	133	155	140	93	119	109	36	25.2
Oshmyansky	156	148	226	156	148	165	21	11.9
Kovno	119	137	129	86	111	100	29	22.6
vilensky	227	262	266	175	205	217	53	21.0
Vilkomirsky	421	421	421	275	317	318	118	28.0
Upitsky	301	301	301	188	237	223	85	28.2
Shavelsky	190	203	184	138	154	152	44	22.9
Trotsky	132	132	132	96	103	103	31	23.5
Telshevsky	136	136	136	65	104	111	43	31.6
Total in 11 counties	2258	2325	2346	1507	1900	1890	545	23.6

Table 4 – Dynamics of attendance at noble elections in Vitebsk, Mogilev, Grodno, Minsk provinces and in the Bialystok region in 1820–1826. [5, p. 137; 11, I. 23-99, 153-165 rev., 175-208, 574-754; 12, I. 116-175; 14, I. 13; 15, I. 2-20, 75-90, 127-131, 136-149, 162-166, 200-204, 222-232, 264-274, 288-289]

Province (region)	Number of nobles who had the right to vote:		Number of nobles personally present at the elections in:			The average number of nobles absent from the elections:		The ratio of those absent to the total number of nobles who had the right to vote (in %):	
	before 1825	from 1826	1820	1823	1826	before 1825	from 1826	before 1825	from 1826
Vitebsk	1063	545	756	432	269	469	269	44.1	50.6
Mogilevskaya	898	556	513	351	230	466	326	51.9	58.6
Grodno	1479	984	1090	1130	807	369	177	24.9	18.0
Minsk	1302	1154	947	940	752	358	402	27.5	34.8
Bialystok	223	215	102	81	102	131	120	58.7	55.8
In total in 5 provinces	4965	3454	3454	2934	2160	1793	1294	36.1	37.5

Table 5 – The level of noble absenteeism in the Belarusian provinces, in comparison with the southwestern and domestic ones [11, I. 23-99, 134-149, 153-165rev., 169-172, 175-208, 211-355rev., 359-454, 456-544, 552-570, 574-754, 762-781, 783-803, 804-830, 834-871; 12, I. 2-90, 95-114, 116-175, 184-243, 245-270, 272-284, 289-325, 341-368, 388-423, 426-449, 452-494, 496-518, 524-592, 593-627, 631-648, 650-668; 13, I. 4-27, 49-84, 87-127, 132-159, 162-200, 205-235, 237-367rev, 369-426, 430-700; 14, I. 13; 15, I. 2-20, 75-90, 127-131, 136-149, 162-166, 200-204, 222-232, 264-274, 288-289]

Province (region)	Average number of nobles who had the right to vote	Average number of nobles personally present at the elections	Average number of nobles absent from elections	The ratio of absent to the total number of nobles who had the right to vote (in%)
Vilenskaya	2310	1766	544	23.5
Grodno	1232	959	273	22.2
Minsk	1228	848	380	30.9
Vitebsk	804	435	369	45.9
Mogilevskaya	727	331	396	54.5
Bialystok	219	95	124	56.6
Total 6 provinces	6516	4433	2083	32.0
27 inner Russian provinces	16700	5802	10898	65.3
5 southwestern governorates	6689	2786	3903	58.3

At our disposal were the results of the audit of 38 provinces (and regions) of the Russian Empire from 55 existing at that time (without the Grand Duchy of Finland and the Kingdom of Poland), which is 69.1 % [16, p. 2-13]. However, due to the small number of nobility, noble elections were not held in the Arkhangelsk, Olonets, Vyatka, Perm, Yenisei, Irkutsk, Tobolsk, Tomsk provinces and the Omsk region. Thus, taking into account the number of provinces and regions where there was no noble corporate organization, we had at our disposal the audit of the attendance of noble assemblies in 79.2 % of the regions of the Russian Empire (without

the Grand Duchy of Finland, the Kingdom of Poland, the Don Region, three Otzei provinces, Novgorod province, Georgian and Caucasian regions).

Based on the data in Tables 1–5, several conclusions can be reached. On average, 66.5 % of the nobles of 27 internal provinces were absent from the noble elections in the 1820s. In 5 southwestern provinces of the Russian Empire, which were included in the category of «provinces on special rights and privileges,» this figure was 56.7 %. As for the 6 northwestern provinces, which included the Belarusian, and which, like the previous ones, had a special institutional and legal system based on their

own tradition of statehood, here in the noble elections, on average, 32.0 % of voters were absent (in the Vilna province – 23.5 %, Vitebsk – 45.9 %, Mogilev – 54.5 %, Grodno – 22.2 %, Minsk – 30.9 %, Bialystok – 56.6 %).

The high turnout for noble elections in the West Belarusian provinces (Vilenskaya, Grodno) is partly due to the rules for organizing noble assemblies in force in these territories. On October 6, 1810 and July 5, 1811, at the initiative of local noble societies, a new procedure for holding noble elections was extended to the Vilna and Grodno provinces, respectively, according to which elections for county-level employees should be held in district cities, and the provincial level in the provincial city. The first group of officials was elected at county noble meetings by all the nobles of the county who had active suffrage. As for the elections of the second group of employees, 10 delegates (deputies) from each county, previously elected at county noble assemblies, had this prerogative. It was not forbidden for nobles who did not become delegates to take part in the elections in the provincial city, since «the election of deputies is not done in order to constrain the will of the nobility during the elections, but to constrain the inconvenience of the insufficient number of nobles going to the provincial cities for elections» [17, l. 11-12rev.]. This procedure for organizing noble elections was more convenient for the local nobility, since it completely removed the problem of a long departure from the estate to the provincial city. The distance between the provincial city of Grodno and other large cities of the province averaged 162.3 versts, in the Vilna province this figure was 162.3 versts, in Minsk – 178.6, Mogilev – 115.5 versts [18, p. 269-272; 19, p. 182-184; 20, p. 133; 21, p. 94].

At that time, the maximum distance that one horse was able to pass was 30 versts (28.1 km). After that, transplantation should be carried out [22]. The speed of riding on «postal» crosshorses was in winter no more than 12 versts per hour, in summer – 10, in autumn – 8 [23, p. 124]. Payment of runs in the Grodno province for a mile and a horse amounted in 1847 from 1.5 to 2.5 rubles silver [18, p. 273]. Thus, the arrival of the Belarusian small gentry in the provincial city for noble meetings was burdensome.

In January 1826, Vitebsk, Mogilev, Smolensky and Kaluga Governor-General N. N. Khovansky petitioned the Minister of the Interior to extend the order of noble elections to the provinces entrusted to him, which operated in the Western Belarusian provinces. N. N. Khovansky believed that such an order could, firstly, contribute to the growth of participants in noble assemblies, «the arrival of which, in the remoteness of the provincial city, can be really painful for many,» and secondly, to level the influence on the outcome of elections between counties with more and less nobles, with greater and less distance from the provincial city, «which is now exclusively used by counties that have a predominant number of nobles.» The Minister of Internal Affairs V. S. Lanskaya considered that the requested

election procedure could be extended to the Mogilev and Vitebsk provinces, «the situation of which is largely similar to the Lithuanian provinces,» while the Smolensk and Kaluga provinces, «being Great Russian, are guided by the general provision on elections in the Great Russian provinces.» The key condition for the introduction of a new election procedure was to be the consent of the nobility of the two Belarusian provinces and the corresponding request on their part. As a result, the nobility of 10 out of 12 counties of the Vitebsk province gave its consent, the Mogilev province refused, indicating as a reason a small number of nobles who had electoral rights, which could lead to a lack of quorum at county noble assemblies. Despite Khovansky's persistence, his request was not granted not only due to the refusal of the nobility of the Mogilev province and the lack of unanimity in Vitebsk, but also because of the upcoming release of a new «Regulation on Noble Elections» [24, l. 320-323].

In addition, in the provinces of eastern Belarus (Vitebsk and Mogilev) there was an additional aggravating factor of low electoral activity (compared to Vilnius, Grodno and Minsk provinces). The acting leader of the nobility of the Vitebsk province, the Vitebsk district leader of the nobility P. G. Milkevich, as one of the reasons for the low turnout at noble meetings, called the permanent residence of local landowners in other provinces and in metropolitan cities. The data for 1836 on the number of nobles included in the Vitebsk provincial noble genealogy book, but who did not permanently live in the province, are contained in Table 6. Information on 9 counties of the province has been preserved. Based on the table data, 7.5% of nobles in 9 counties of the Vitebsk province did not live in the province, but were the owners of 28813 roars. showers. Thus, despite the fact that relative to the total number of nobles included in the Vitebsk provincial noble genealogy book, the number of nobles who constantly lived in the province was not large (157 people), however, the vast majority of them were large landowners who had enough funds and influence to contribute to noble estate self-government in the square.

The above circumstance is explained by the land policy of the Russian government in the territory of the Mogilev and Polotsk (since 1802 – Vitebsk) provinces in 1772–1801. During this period, 120 nobles (mainly Russian) from the land fund of the former crown elders were transferred to the hereditary possession of 143 815 roars. showers. Most of the land distributions (66.2%) fell on eastern Belarusian lands. New owners as gifts and rewards for royal economy, private spiritual estates also received service. On the territory of the Mogilev and Polotsk provinces during the reign of Catherine II, 38,856 roars were distributed from the royal economy fund. shower [26, p. 86-87]. Overwhelmingly, the new owners did not live on the lands they donated, leasing them to temporary owners, or leaving the housekeepers on the farm.

Table 6 – The number of nobles of nine counties of the Vitebsk province, who had real estate in the province, but did not permanently live in it [25, l. 2-228]

County	Total number of male nobles (excluding their families)	Nobles who did not permanently reside in the county		The ratio of those absent in the county to the total number of nobles (in%)
		quantity	quantity roar. shower	
Vitebsk	422	1	97	0.2
Polotsk	219	34	2637	15.5
Surazhsky	253	21	5425	8.3
Gorodok	42	7	1102	16.7
Sebezhsky	332	29	7640	8.7
Velizhsky	367	–	–	–
Lepelsky	802	22	1198	2.7
Drisensky	401	7	1493	1.7
Nevelsky	265	36	8621	13.6
Total in 9 counties	3103	157	28213	5.0

Among the reasons that limited the number of participants in the noble elections was the current system of qualification restrictions of active and passive suffrage. This was indicated by the already mentioned P. G. Milkevich, as well as the leaders of the nobility of the Mogilev province I. I. Golynsky and Bialystok region Schuka. P. G. Milkevich, in particular, noted that many worthy representatives of the local noble society did not meet the excessive number of qualification barriers [11, l. 18].

However, despite the factors that restrained the electoral activity of the local nobility, the level of attendance of noble assemblies in the Belarusian provinces was higher than in the internal or southwestern provinces. One can agree with the thesis of pre-revolutionary authors that the main reason for the low level of noble absenteeism was the presence in the Belarusian region of a long-standing tradition, originating in the 16th century, to participate in solving issues at the county level, as well as influence national decisions through povet gentry seymiks and gentry deputies in the national «vale» Sejm.

The results of the 1827 audit were not used in the development of any decisions on the organization of noble election assemblies. Nicholas I further tightened the qualification restrictions on the voting rights of the nobility, which was supposed to lead to a decrease in the number of participants in noble assemblies. The problem of the noble absenteeism in the Russian Empire remained relevant. It again became the focus of the government's attention in the 1840s. In 1844, the Minister of the Interior L. A. Perovsky instructed the governors to determine the reasons for the nobility's evasion from elected service in the territories entrusted to them, as well as to develop proposals to increase the electoral activity of the nobility. Based on the reports of the governors, the problem of noble absenteeism took place in the Vitebsk and Mogilev provinces. The governors of the Vilnius, Grodno and Minsk provinces, on the contrary,

stated that they did not record excessive evasion of the nobility from participation in the elections in the territories under their jurisdiction.

Vitebsk Governor N. M. Klementyev pointed out the following as the reasons for noble absenteeism: noble ambition (unwillingness to be publicly unelected for a particular position, or to receive more indiscriminate points), unwillingness to quit doing their own village affairs [27, l. 5]. Mogilev Governor S. P. Engelhardt called such reasons as «insignificance and rarity of awards received by election officials, insignificance of salaries received in some places, and the rest did not pay salaries at all, indifference to the common good» [27, l. 4rev-5]. The Minsk governor G. G. Doppelmeier believed that the factors of the low turnout at the noble meetings were the low status of some positions elected from the nobility in the eyes of the local noble society, the rude and insulting attitude of the provincial authorities and its representatives towards persons who held some positions elected from the nobility [27, l. 5]. Other governors of the Russian Empire named the following main reasons: 1) the costs associated with the performance of service elected from the nobility; 2) many functions assigned to some positions elected from the nobility; 3) fear of responsibility; 4) unwillingness to be the object of complaints («yabed») by employees of the offices of public places where the elected official served; 5) fear of being the object of oppression by the authorities; 6) a spirit of factionalism and partisanship associated with intrigue, which always has an advantage in elections; 6. dislike of subordination to officials of provincial boards; 7) the ability to freely and effortlessly receive awards, holding the elected position of honorary trustee of county schools; 8) unwillingness to participate in noble folds, etc. [27, l. 4-6].

As a way to solve the problem of noble absenteeism, the Mogilev governor proposed to increase the

salary of employees elected from the nobility: leaders of the nobility and trustees of bread spare stores, respectively, to 1000 and 100 rubles. silver per year from the amount of the zemstvo fee, judges of county courts – up to 700 rubles. silver, assessors of the council court – up to 300 rubles. silver [27, l. 7, 46]. The Vitebsk governor considered it necessary to propose better to stimulate the nobles to the service elected from the nobility: «to reward on equal terms with the crown without the restrictions that now exist» [27, l. 45]. At the same time, he opposed the restriction of the right of the nobility to refuse to replace an elected position. In addition, the Vitebsk governor took the initiative to ensure that the nobles serving in the judicial and administrative institutions... «are not replaced after the expiration of their service, if they themselves wish to continue serving and if they are approved by the authorities» [27, l. 9]. The Minsk governor, as a solution, proposed in all provinces to temporarily appoint government officials to some positions elected from the nobility (police officers, camp bailiffs)... «until the significance of these positions is restored in the general opinion and the nobles deprived of one of the important advantages, through their own fault, will try to elect for the future the time of more worthy brethren of their own» [27, l. 47-48]. As for the governors of the Vilna and Grodno provinces, they, along with the Minsk governor, drew attention to the difficulties of filling the necessary number of worthy persons with all positions elected from the nobility, due to the strict electoral restrictions in force in the provinces entrusted to them (Table 7). Based on the data of Table 8, in the central-western Belarusian provinces in 1845, only 1.0 % of the nobles met the qualification conditions. In 1849 this figure dropped to 0,7 %. Consequently, the Grodno vice-governor F. S. Yanevich-Yanevsky and the Minsk governor G. G. Doppelmeier proposed to introduce relaxation of the qualification restrictions on the electoral rights of nobles of the western provinces [27, l. 12]. Only the Vilnius governor A. V. Semenov believed that the problem of the lack of the required number of candidates for filling positions elected from the

nobility was temporary and would gradually be smoothed out, since «young nobles seek to get the right to serve in elections by entering the crown service» [27, l. 11].

Having collected and analyzed the reports of the governors of the Russian Empire, the Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs developed recommendations for solving two main problems: noble absenteeism and the lack of candidates for filling positions elected from the nobility in full. It was proposed to strengthen the motivation of the nobility to serve in positions of class self-government elected from the nobility (leaders of the nobility, noble deputies, secretaries of noble assemblies) by extending to these employees all the rights and privileges that government officials and employees of provincial judicial administrative institutions who were elected from the nobility possessed (rank, payment of salaries and pensions, awarding with insignia and orders, etc.). In addition, it was recommended to protect elected noble employees from the pressure of the provincial authorities, and also limit the right of nobles to refuse to be elected to office, since... «noble service... is obviously duty» [27, l. 124-125].

Specific steps were envisaged to implement these recommendations. In particular, according to the Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, a law should be issued obliging a nobleman to serve for a certain time in a post elected from the nobility, unless circumstances arise that prevented the person from doing so. This proposal was put forward several times, but the State Council did not support it due to the fact that the nobility would further sabotage the service elected from the nobility if it became mandatory. The Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs counted on a different effect of the measure he assumed: «when sending (mandatory – Yu. L.) the noble service, everyone will experience the importance of conscientiously fulfilling the duties associated with this service and therefore will fully oppose the instructions of these people unreliable» [27, l. 126-127]. However, the opinion of the Council of State eventually prevailed.

Table 7 – The number of nobles of the Minsk, Grodno and Vilna provinces, who had in 1844-1846. active suffrage [18, p. 266; 19, p. 168-169; 20, p. 127; 28, p. 91; 29, p. 163; 30, p. 717; 31, p. 7]

Province	The total number of male and female nobles according to the IX revision (1850)	The quantity of nobles who had voting rights in:		Relation to the total number of nobles (in%)	
		1845	1849	1845	1849
Minsk	62218	584	380	0,9	0,6
Grodno	46034	415	174	0,9	0,4
Vilenskaya	55908	671	667	1,2	1,2
Total	164160	1670	1221	1,0	0,7

To strengthen the motivation of the nobles to serve in positions elected from the nobility in the field of noble self-government («on the affairs of the nobility»), it was necessary to remove the restriction on the need to serve for a full three years in one department for awarding service. According to the Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, it was enough for the nobleman to serve at least 3 years in the elections, without distinguishing the place of service. In addition, ... «for distinctions worthy of special respect, present to the award orders and those in the noble service who have not yet received the distinction of immaculate service» and, thus, reduce the path to receiving the order [27, l. 131rev-132]. The Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs emphasized, firstly, that the functionality of officers in noble elections in the field of noble estate self-government has increased significantly in the last decade, and many of the new duties assigned to these employees were not related to issues of the noble class. Secondly, it was noted that many worthy nobles avoided serving in these positions because... «having served in them for several three years remain in the previous ranks.» Thirdly, the argument was made that if the leaders of the nobility were promoted to ranks for seniority, they would become the best candidates («by perfect knowledge of the position and needs of it and in general by their experience») to replace government posts in the province. The only obstacle to the implementation of this proposal was the slow rank of the leaders of the nobility. Fourth, it was noted that despite the presence of laws according to which employees «in the noble part» could be awarded «for special distinctions and merits,»... «but special cases are also needed to provide such, which are not always there.» In addition, as an additional argument for the adoption of proposals by the Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to improve the rules for awarding employees elected from the nobility «in the noble part,» the petitions of the majority of governors of the Russian Empire to extend to these employees the right to receive ranks for service were cited [27, l. 131].

The State Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs condemned the pressure exerted on employees elected from the nobility by governors and other provincial government officials. In June 1836, the emperor approved the proposal of the State Council, according to which the governors were secretly ordered to put on trial officials for the election of nobles with special discretion and caution, having previously confidentially consulted with the provincial leaders [27, l. 132 of]. This order was again sent to the governors on April 25 1846, However, judging by the data of the Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, this measure did not bring the expected results. The humiliating treatment of governors with employees elected from the nobility (especially with employees of the lower zemstvo courts) and strict penalties from them continued. This behavior of the provincial authorities

demotivated representatives of the noble society to serve in the elections.

The proposals of the Council of the Ministry of Internal Affairs did not form the basis of any regulatory act and did not affect the existing government course [27, l. 143]. The policy and legislative activities of Nicholas I were aimed at improving the regulatory framework of the institution of government civil servants. Priority was given to the formation of a new public class of professional bureaucracy. The government course was aimed at gradually reducing the influence on the local administration of the elected noble element by involving the nobility from an early age in civil government or military service. In this regard, the legal status of employees elected from the nobility who held positions in the local judicial and administrative apparatus was equalized with that of government officials. As a result, employees elected from the nobility who replaced positions in the field of noble estate self-government were in the most vulnerable position. This policy was fully implemented in the territory of the Belarusian provinces, and in the central-western region, due to the unstable socio-political situation, it was carried out in a more accelerated format.

Conclusion. Based on an analysis of the attendance of noble election assemblies in the Belarusian provinces in 1820–1826 and comparison of this indicator with the same in 27 internal and 5 southwestern provinces, it can be concluded that the level of electoral activity of the Belarusian nobility was above the average for the empire. It was especially high in the central-western region. There were both objective and subjective factors of low attendance of noble assemblies in the Vitebsk and Mogilev provinces compared to the Minsk, Vilna and Grodno provinces. The first group of reasons included the policy of land colonization of eastern Belarus, carried out by the Russian government in 1772–1801, the procedure for noble elections, in which it was burdensome for nobles to get to the provincial city. Subjective reasons, according to the governors, were noble ambition and the associated fear of being unelected, the preference to engage in economic affairs in their estates, the low prestige of the service for noble elections measured by salary, awards, attitude on the part of the provincial authorities, neglect of public life. For the Vilnius, Grodno and Minsk provinces, the main problem boiled down to high qualification restrictions on the electoral rights of the nobility, which made it difficult to replace all positions elected from the nobility. Despite the fact that certain government structures, based on information received from the provinces, developed measures to combat noble absentism, however, the focus of attention of the Russian government from the second third of the 19th century. Was focused on improving the institution of government civil service and merging with the last service elected from the nobility.

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