

Have Putin's Policies on Local Government Changed the Way Yaroslavl Is Governed?

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Abstract: In this article, the author assesses the impact of former Russian President Vladimir Putin's tenure in office on local politics in the city of Yaroslavl, Russia. The author also explores how city government has impacted the life of the city and how the city has changed. He finds that despite the adoption of the Federal Law on Local Self-Government in 2003, the city government's policies, rather than those of the Putin administration, had a greater role in changing life in Yaroslavl.

Keywords: Kozak reforms, local government, Vladimir Putin, 2003 Law on Local Self-Government, urban planning, Yaroslavl

Since 1990, the city of Yaroslavl, Russia, has provided me with a unique window for observing post-Communist Russia.¹ One of the advantages of watching the changes in post-Communist Russia through the microcosm of this city is that it is not Moscow or St. Petersburg. Moscow and St. Petersburg are the centers of political life in Russia where the reforms are made; Yaroslavl is a small city beyond Moscow's direct jurisdiction where those reforms are implemented. Moscow and St. Petersburg are cosmopolitan and ethnically heterogeneous; Yaroslavl is overwhelmingly ethnically Russian. Most important, perhaps, the pace of life moves more slowly in Yaroslavl, allowing one to see the effects of the rapid changes initiated in Moscow in more nuanced detail.

I have visited Yaroslavl more than a dozen times. I first went in the spring of 1990, when perestroika was already being felt. I was one of a team of American specialists on Russia who were among the first to observe the workings of regional politics in Soviet Russia firsthand and to conduct interviews with local officials.² I conducted survey research on political attitudes among a fully representative sample of the population in March 1990. The survey research project coincided with the first truly competitive elections in Russia. I observed the Yaroslavtsy as they came to the polls to choose their city, regional, and national deputies. The survey research was replicated in 1993, 1996, and 2004, allowing a longitudinal view of changes in public opinion about political and economic reform.³ My repeat visits enabled me to view the evolution of Yaroslavl's political institutions. Because what I was observing was unfolding on a smaller stage, I could see more easily

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what changes occurred from one year to the next. Yaroslavl became my prism. Many of the results of my research from 1990 to 2000 appeared in *Regional Russia in Transition: Studies from Yaroslavl*, which was published in 2001.⁴

In this article, I assess how Yaroslavl's political institutions have changed since 2000 and compare those changes with the transformations that took place between 1990 and 1993 and those that followed the post-1993 constitutional order. The timing is propitious in that May 2008 marked the end of Vladimir Putin's second term as Russia's president. Therefore, I examine the impact that his leadership has had on local government in Yaroslavl and how Yaroslavl's city government changed between 2000 and 2008, when Putin was president. I also explore the impact Yaroslavl's municipal government has had on the life of its inhabitants. How important are decisions taken by the city's government and has its role increased or decreased? Are politics in Yaroslavl more determined locally or by the central government's efforts to assert control?

To investigate these questions, I begin by examining the initial transformation of Yaroslavl's political institutions between 1990 and 1993. I then examine the new institutions that were introduced following the abolition of the Yaroslavl city soviet, or council, in October 1993. Next, I offer a picture of Yaroslavl's government on the eve of Putin's ascendancy as Russia's president in 2000. I also briefly discuss the 2003 Russian Law on Local Self-Government and assess its impact on Yaroslavl's municipal government. Finally, to evaluate the impact of Yaroslavl's city government on the life of the city, I analyze the long-term General Plan that the city government adopted in 2006. Information relevant to these questions was gathered during an October 2007 visit to Yaroslavl.

The First Transformation: 1990–93

Before the March 1990 elections, Yaroslavl was governed in the same manner as all other Russian cities during the Soviet era. In elections devoid of competition, deputies to the city soviet's 200 seats were elected in direct popular elections held every two-and-one-half years. At the first session after their election, the deputies would select an *ispolkom* (executive committee) from among their members. The *ispolkom* was responsible for the daily administration of the city's affairs. Although the *ispolkom* was theoretically accountable to the council that elected it, in reality, the deputies met briefly four times a year to unanimously ratify whatever the *ispolkom* put before them. As in other cities, the local branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) held the real power in Yaroslavl. The city's party committee's first secretary held this power inside Yaroslavl, although that position was subordinate to the provincial committee's first secretary. From 1961 to 1986, this latter position was held by Fedor Loshchenkov, known locally as "Tsar Fedor" because nothing in Yaroslavl happened without his approval. Among the decisions ultimately subject to the party's approval was the nomination of candidates to the local soviets—one candidate for each seat. Although only about 50 percent of the deputies were actually CPSU members, no one was chosen as a candidate who did not support the CPSU and its policies. This assured party control of *ispolkom* members, who administered the city's affairs.

The March 4, 1990, city soviet elections broke the CPSU's monopoly on political power in Yaroslavl. In accordance with Mikhail Gorbachev's reforms, introduced at the 1988 CPSU Conference, elections to legislative bodies in Russia were to be held on a competitive basis nationally in 1989, and at the republic and local levels in 1990. The elections to

the Yaroslavl city soviet provided an unprecedented degree of competition, quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, there were 565 candidates for the 200 seats in the council. Although some twenty races had between five and seven candidates, in forty-seven, the candidate ran unopposed. This did not necessarily guarantee victory, however, because voters could, and often did, cross off the names of candidates for whom they did want to vote. Among those defeated in this fashion were the first and second secretaries of the party's city committee. In addition to this qualitative element of meaningful choice, the Yaroslavl Popular Front (YPF), a political organization loosely affiliated with the Democratic Russia movement that elected Gavriil Popov as mayor of Moscow, organized active opposition. Despite their limited resources and inexperience, the YPF supported a slate of sixty-seven candidates, electing twenty-two. They also organized mass demonstrations before the March 4 elections and the March 18 runoff elections. The YPF acted like a proto-political party at a time when the only legal party in Russia was the CPSU.

Although the candidates supported by the YPF did not win a majority of the seats in the city soviet (they won twenty-two out of 200), neither did those supported by the CPSU, which got about twenty-five. Independents held the balance of power, and a significant number of them were sympathetic to the democratic movement. When the organizational session was held on May 10, 1990, these independents, along with a bloc of forty-four deputies called Democratic Yaroslavl, mustered the votes needed to elect one of their own, Lev Kruglikov, as chair of the soviet. His election was competitive and by secret ballot, a departure from previous elections to this position. The formation of a new ispolkom also represented a change from past practice. Here, too, several candidates competed to become chair, the functional equivalent of city mayor. The deputies chose Viktor Volunchunas, who had been ispolkom chair previously and was a member of the old party-state system. However, his election came only after the intervention of Kruglikov, who valued Volunchunas's experience as an effective manager. Moreover, it was clear that whoever sat on the ispolkom held that position not because the party secretary chose them but at the pleasure of the legislative branch that elected them and could remove them.

In the course of 1990–91, the city government in Yaroslavl underwent a significant shift in power from the party to the state, from executive dominance to an enhanced role for the legislature. The city council was no longer the rubber stamp for policies coming from the party and ispolkom. Competitive elections and the emergence of real political contestation made a difference. Compared with the old soviets, the city government in Yaroslavl in 1990–91 was far more democratic.

The failed coup attempt in August 1991 influenced the evolution of local political institutions after the Soviet Union's collapse. Broadly speaking, the trend became to strengthen executive institutions at the expense of the legislative branch. This reflected President Boris Yeltsin's perception that too many of those elected to the legislatures in 1990—however freely and fairly—were opposed to his proposed reforms.⁵ Yeltsin's response was to consolidate his control over the executive branch, and ultimately, in October 1993, abolish the soviets altogether.

Executive authority was strengthened in several ways by the end of 1991. Yeltsin appointed a presidential representative in each of the provinces, directly answerable to the president, for overseeing federal policies in the region. More important, at least for local government, was the formation of the office of governor at the provincial level and mayor at the city level. Neither the city nor the provincial soviet nominated or elected

these chief executives. Rather, the local council nominated a number of candidates and Yeltsin appointed whomever he preferred, whether it was the candidate who received the most votes or not. Furthermore, once in office, the local councils, not the legislative branch, appointed administration members. In late November 1991, Yeltsin appointed Volunchunas, the incumbent chair of the city ispolkom, as mayor of Yaroslavl. However, whereas Volunchunas had received the most city council votes among three candidates, Yeltsin's selection of governor bypassed the provincial legislature's preferred candidate in favor of Anatoly Lisitsyn, who got only a handful of votes but who was supported by Yeltsin's presidential representative, Vladimir Varukhin. The growing institutional stalemate between the legislative and executive branches, locally and nationally, was ultimately resolved by the abolition of the whole system of the soviets by presidential decree in October 1993. The Yaroslavl executive branch alone exercised power until a new system of local government was introduced in 1994.

The Second Transformation: 1994–2000

In retrospect, the initial stage of the transformation of Yaroslavl's local political institutions provided some grounds for optimism about the long-term prospects for a transition to democracy in Russia. Compared with what existed before 1990, the introduction of democratic institutions advanced considerably by 1993. Among the changes were genuinely competitive elections. Popular participation in these elections was about 60 percent. A number of political parties and organizations existed by 1993, not just one, marking an unprecedented degree of what Robert Dahl calls political contestation.⁶ Local legislative institutions that could hold local executives accountable for their actions began to emerge. The transition to a market economy, although much more difficult for many Yaroslavtsy, especially the elderly, also meant a wider choice for some and marked the beginning of the end of shortages in stores.

The move toward executive branch domination that began between 1991 and 1993 accelerated between 1994 and 2000. In many ways, this second transformation reflected the Russian constitution that was approved by referendum in December 1993. Yeltsin designed the constitution to prevent a stalemate between parliament and the president like the one that had ended violently in October. Not surprisingly, it decisively favored the executive branch over the legislative. Local governments formed in 1994 and 1995 to replace the abolished local soviets mirrored these new arrangements.

In accordance with a decree from Yeltsin in October 1993, elections to new local legislatures—to be called *dumas* rather than soviets—were to be held in the first three months of 1994. By April, most regions and cities had held them. In Yaroslavl, elections to the provincial and city legislatures (called the *duma* and the *munitsipalitet*, respectively) were held on February 27, 1994. The election procedures were simpler compared with 1990. They were held on a winner-take-all basis and required 25 percent minimum turnout instead of 50 percent. As in 1990, the contests were quantitatively competitive for city council, with 123 candidates running for 23 seats—a smaller number compared with the previous soviet. Political participation declined to 26 percent of the electorate voting. In seven of the twenty-two districts, repeat elections had to be held two months later.

Another feature that has characterized post-1994 local politics is the absence of partisanship. Although several parties were active in these elections, notably the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and Russia's Choice, almost all the candidates

elected were unaffiliated with any party, running instead as independents. Almost all those elected were middle-aged males with higher education. By occupation, they came almost entirely from the ranks of enterprise directors and local administrators. With respect to political composition, then, there was nothing like the sharp ideological differences that characterized the first elected city council of 1990, when the YPF confronted the power holders from the party-state apparatus.

The principal task of the newly elected legislatures was to draft a charter that defined the basic institutions and procedures by which the city was to be governed. In Yaroslavl, the charter adopted on October 18, 1995, provided for a legislative council called the *munitsipalitet*, composed of twenty-three deputies elected to four-year terms. It also established the office of mayor, who is directly elected to a four-year term. The mayor presides over an executive administration whose members the mayor can appoint and remove. According to the original charter, the mayor chaired meetings of the *munitsipalitet* and voted in the case of a tie. A two-thirds majority of the *munitsipalitet* can override mayoral vetoes, but, unlike in the provincial legislature, the mayor had no power to dissolve the council. Only the council could do that. Because the mayor chaired the council meetings, the deputies chose a secretary from their ranks to organize the council's work. Among the mayor's other powers were the right to issue decrees with the force of law and to appoint chiefs of administration in city's the six districts. Some of these chiefs served in the council elected in 1994. As can be seen from this description, the 1995 charter ensured that real power in the Yaroslavl city government after 1994 rested with Volunchunas, the mayor. Little changed during the rest of the decade.

The first direct popular elections for Yaroslavl's governor and mayor were held concurrently with elections to the Russian State Duma in December 1995, resulting in a 68 percent voter turnout. At the provincial level, Lisitsyn was elected governor, receiving 52 percent of the vote. His closest rival received 33 percent. Volunchunas did even better, garnering 70 percent of the vote; his nearest challenger got only 15 percent. The second elections to the provincial and city legislatures were held in February 1996.⁷ In the case of the *munitsipalitet*, 111 candidates ran for the twenty-three available seats. Turnout was about 33 percent. This time, administrators were barred from holding legislative office.

In reality, however, these elections changed little in Yaroslavl's political life. Not only were the incumbent chief executives reelected by a wide margin, but thirteen of those elected in the *munitsipalitet* in 1994 were reelected in 1996. More important, the composition of those elected was striking in its commitment to professionalism over partisanship. Those in medical professions and in business were the overwhelming majority, with the exception of one journalist and a retired military officer. Only the military man, Sergey Golubev, who was elected secretary, had full-time duties. In an interview with me in 1997, Golubev explained that in choosing him, deputies looked for someone "who could work

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with the mayor” and that the mayor had let the council know Golubev was his man.⁸ Golubev also noted with some pride that the city council lacked partisan divisions and that although two of them were nominally members of the KPRF, there were no factions in the munitsipalitet.

Politically, the period from 1996 to 2000 was characterized more by continuity than by change. Elections were held for governor and mayor in December 1999. Lisitsyn was reelected with 65 percent of the vote, and Volunchunas won a landslide against token opposition. Elections for deputies to the provincial and city legislatures were held on March 26, 2000, concurrent with the Russian presidential election. Of the twenty-three deputies elected to the munitsipalitet, nine were incumbents and four were women. Their composition continued to be distinguished by a high number of professionals (thirteen were from medical and educational institutions and eight were from business) and their virtually nonexistent partisanship.⁹ Although local government in Yaroslavl was institutionally far more democratic than in Soviet times, by 2000 it was so dominated by the executive branch that Lisitsyn and Volunchunas seem to have held power virtually without constraints. In this sense, Yaroslavl’s democracy by 2000 was at best “delegated,” in that a chief executive, once elected, made decisions unhindered by public participation, an independent media, political parties, or legislative opposition. Guillermo O’Donnell calls this *horizontal accountability*.¹⁰

In fairness, although the continuity described here could be interpreted as lacking the competition and political contestation vital to democratic construction, it could also be seen as a favorable judgment of the electorate on incumbents’ performances. If politics was comparatively quiet in Yaroslavl in this period, economic life following the collapse of the ruble in August 1998 was not. Like executives in other regions and cities, the mayor and the governor had to scramble to use their authority in the power vacuum created at the top to protect their citizens. In Yaroslavl, the city government took over all the social services that state-run enterprises had provided. They also moved quickly to secure sources of energy and to ensure that transportation services ran smoothly.

The Third Transformation: 2000–2008

When Vladimir Putin became president of Russia in May 2000, the most important domestic policy initiative he undertook was reestablishing central authority over the regions. He did this by creating seven superdistricts led by personal presidential representatives. This deprived the governors of *ex officio* representation in the Federation Council. Putin also largely ended the practice of signing bilateral treaties with regions and republics, a practice known as “negotiated” or “asymmetrical” federalism.¹¹ Regional legislation was required to conform with the Russian Constitution and federal laws. In 2004, Putin also stopped direct elections of regional chief executives. Today, the regional legislature chooses them on the recommendation of the president. Furthermore, the president can remove them from office for cause. By 2007, these reforms largely succeeded in re-creating a unified legal and economic space in Russia, replacing the chaotic relationship with the regions which had existed under Yeltsin.¹² They reestablished the *executive vertical* of government administration.¹³

With respect to local government, the most important change introduced during the Putin presidency has been the Law on Local Self-Government (LLSG) passed by the Federal Assembly on September 24, 2003, and signed into law by the president on October 6.¹⁴ Whereas federal and regional political institutions are part of a single system

of state power, local government is not. Article 12 of the Russian Constitution clearly states: "Bodies of local self government are not part of the system of the bodies of state power."¹⁵ Those political institutions are to be self-governing according to federal laws on local self-government adopted in 1991 and 1995. The new LLSG superseded those acts. The law was a product of a commission set up by Putin in September 2001 and headed by Dmitry Kozak, a presidential deputy chief of staff who had worked with Putin in St. Petersburg. The commission's task was to establish a uniform and universal system of local government throughout Russia and to delimit the functions of the federal, regional, and municipal levels of government. However, the rather closed process by which the LLSG was drafted and adopted tended to favor those with a vested interest in strengthening the executive vertical by making local government more effective and more accountable to the central authorities.¹⁶

The provisions of the LLSG are far too numerous and detailed to provide more than a summary here. As John F. Young and Gary N. Wilson describe it, there are three major areas of change in the law: (1) New types of local government structures were described; (2) the responsibilities of local governments were redefined and specified in greater detail; and (3) the number of municipalities was significantly increased.¹⁷ With respect to local government structures, three levels were envisaged in Article 2. The first includes rural and urban settlements, such as towns, villages, and small cities. These will directly elect a settlement council and be administered by a chief executive, whom the council can elect or appoint. Above the settlement level is the *munitsipalny raion* (MR), which will encompass several adjacent settlements. The third level is the city district (*gorodskie okruga*, or GO), which exists outside the MR's jurisdiction and will be limited to the larger municipalities. MR councils will be composed of representatives of their constituent settlements, but the GO council will be elected by their city's residents.¹⁸ The responsibilities of the various levels were also reconfigured, and a list comparing the responsibilities of each level is spelled out in detail in articles 14, 15, and 16 of the LLSG.¹⁹ As Young and Wilson note, generally speaking, "Under the new law, local governments will have fewer responsibilities, and will receive less funding."²⁰ The number of municipalities will more than double as a result of the LLSG. Cameron Ross estimates that they have already grown from about 12,000 to around 24,000 since 2006, and other sources predict there finally will be more than 30,000.²¹

There are a number of other features worth noting in the new law. For example, the LLSG specifies the number of deputies that can be elected to municipalities at each level.²² The number ranges from seven for settlements of fewer than 1,000 people to no less than thirty-five deputies for cities of more than 500,000. However, only 10 percent of them can be full-time legislators. Local chief executives can be directly elected by voters or be indirectly chosen from among the council deputies. However, the new law requires a separation of executive and legislative authority; no longer can the chief executive also chair the council.²³ If the chief executive is chosen indirectly, he or she is also chair of the council, which means that the chief executive must be hired on a contract basis to run the administration. Another prominent feature is the expanded list of circumstances under which the regional authority can take over municipal functions or remove municipal executives.²⁴ Although the LLSG does not provide for it, there has been much discussion at the federal level about giving regional chief executives the right to appoint mayors in regional capital cities.²⁵ Such power would extend the federal executive vertical, which currently gives the president the right to appoint regional chiefs.

How has the LLSG affected local government in Russia? The full effects have yet to be felt because the final implementation of the law has been delayed. The law was originally to have taken effect on January 1, 2006, but on October 12, 2005, Putin signed an order delaying its full implementation until January 1, 2009. As Ross points out, this delay postponed many changes until after the 2007–8 election cycle, much like the Law on Self-Government, which was adopted in 1995 but was not implemented until after the 1996–97 election cycle.²⁶ Nevertheless, there is something approaching a consensus among most analysts that, if and when the law is fully implemented, the independence of local governments in Russia will be diminished and they will be more fully subordinate to the federal government.

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According to these analysts, the reform’s primary goal is to increase the efficiency of local government, not to enhance local democracy. Although Young and Wilson see “potential benefits” in the creation of greater administrative order,²⁷ Tomilia Lankina concludes: “Although the rhetoric surrounding the reform stressed its democratic aspects, the institutional changes suggest the authors were more concerned with centralizing power and strengthening vertical institutional

accountability.”²⁸ Ross is even more forthright: “It is clear that in practice this new legislation will not only lead to less autonomy for local governments, but it will also directly subordinate local governments to regional and federal bodies.”²⁹ Such a view is consistent with that of Aleksandr Blokhin, a Yaroslavl city deputy.³⁰ He saw the new law as reestablishing the pattern of subordination to higher authority that existed in Soviet times, “especially if mayors come to be appointed by regional executives” as I previously discussed.³¹

In Yaroslavl’s case, the implications of a new law for city political institutions are potentially far reaching. However, with some exceptions, I saw few signs of change during a visit to Yaroslavl in September and October of 2007. One reason for this may be the delay in the law’s implementation. As Young and Wilson note, throughout Russia’s history, it has been characteristic of local government reform that “local officials have dragged their feet and waited out the early enthusiasm for reform.”³² This is not to say, however, that no changes have taken place since 2000. The most visible change was an increase in the number of seats in the Yaroslavl munitsipalitet from twenty-four to thirty-six, in conformity with Article 35, Section 6 of the LLSG, which requires “no fewer than” thirty-five deputies in cities where the population is more than 500,000.³³

Elections to these seats took place on March 14, 2004, on a single-member district basis. Voter turnout was around 30 percent but varied by district; eleven districts in which turnout was less than 25 percent held repeat elections on May 16. Changes in the demographic composition of deputies were relatively minor. The number of women remained at four, meaning the percentage declined from 2000. The average age declined somewhat to forty-eight. Thirty-two had higher education, and virtually all were professionals. The numbers of those in small- and middle-sized business increased from three to twelve; those

in larger businesses increased from five to twelve. Those in higher education and health care declined modestly from thirteen to ten. Only three of the thirty-six deputies were full-time public servants.

As in previous elections to the city council in Yaroslavl, partisanship appears to have been nonexistent. Out of the thirty-six elected, thirty-three were self-nominated (e.g., not members of a party). At the first organizational session held soon after the May repeat elections, the deputies formed three factions. According to Vladimir Golov, the chair of the *munitsipalitet* elected at that session, the United Russia faction had sixteen members, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia had five, and a local group called *Novyi Gorod* (New City) had seven. Golov made it clear that there was little or no partisan difference between the factions.³⁴ Similarly, Blokhin, an independent and one of the younger deputies, told me that there really was no partisanship. The LDPR faction, he said, always voted with the United Russia faction and the *Novyi Gorod* faction was less a political organization than it was an “interest group” of small businessmen.³⁵

A number of factors can explain the absence of partisanship among the deputies; one is that party support is not important in getting elected. In an opinion survey conducted in May 2007, a representative sample of Yaroslavl city residents were asked whether the support of one or another party or social organization would have an impact on their vote for city deputies in the municipal elections to be held in October 2008.³⁶ In every case except one, 80 percent or higher responded that it would have “no effect at all.” The only exception was for United Russia, and in that case, 70 percent said it would have no effect. Between 4 and 9 percent said it would have a negative impact.³⁷ On balance, given the continued absence of partisanship among deputies and the prevalence of professional and commercial interests in the composition of the deputies, it is probably fair to conclude that continuity rather than change has been the principal characteristic of the city council since 2000. Moreover, that is likely to continue to be the case even after the fall 2008 elections because, as other data from the aforementioned survey indicate, the great majority of Yaroslavl voters have no idea who their representatives are and are not interested in what they do.

Aside from the factions, the structure of the new Yaroslavl City Council is similar to the previous one, but with some significant changes. As noted in the preceding paragraph, the deputies chose to elect a chair and a vice chair from their members. Previously, the mayor acted as chair, but in accordance with the LLSG, whether he or she is directly elected or hired by contract, the chief executive may not chair the legislative council.³⁸ There are other subtle changes in the relations between the representative and executive branches. According to Tatiana Rumiantseva, the director of the city’s Center for the Study of Public Opinion and Sociological Research (TsIOMSI), the mayor was more constrained by the *munitsipalitet* in allocating funds than previously was the case. As she told me, “If in the past the mayor was able to do things on his own, since 2004, in many ways, he no longer can. He must proceed through one of the standing commissions which then make a recommendation to the council as a whole.”³⁹ Because Rumiantseva is the head of a municipal enterprise (*munitsipalnoe uchrezhdenie*) that receives most of its income from the city’s administration, she finds this arrangement inconvenient; instead of getting support solely through the mayor she now has to work through the deputies, who are not always as easy to deal with.

This new relationship was visible in the session of the Standing Commission on the Budget, Finances, and Taxes that I attended on September 26, 2007. It was one of four

standing commissions formed at the first organizational session. Of the other three, one deals with the economy, municipal property, and city development; another works on social policy; the third is for self-government, legality, and public order. Sessions of the commissions are held every other Wednesday. The commission is composed of fourteen deputies. All were present at the session that I attended. The issues addressed included a proposal, opposed by the city administration, to change the way small businesses were taxed. After a vigorous but orderly debate in which it was apparent that deputies from small businesses had a direct interest in the outcome, the proposal was narrowly defeated, with six opposed, four in favor, and four abstentions. The council chair, Golov—although not the mayor—attended the session, and members of the city administration were called on to testify. In my interview with Blokhin, he confirmed the perception that the deputies' roles had grown. He argued that this is because of the emergence of new economic elites in the city whose interests do not always coincide with the administration's. These elites include those in the medical profession who, in his view, are primarily businesspeople themselves. He also distinguished between the participation of these elites and the broader population, which he insisted participated little or not at all.⁴⁰

Despite the increased influence of deputies in the past few years, the executive branch continues to be the dominant force in Yaroslavl. With respect to executive authority, the principal differences between 2003 and 2007 have occurred at the regional level. The incumbent governor, Lisitsyn, was reelected in December 2003 with 73 percent of the vote. However, following Putin's September 2004 abolition of elections for chief executives in all the regions, Lisitsyn's status as governor depended not on the voters but on his relationship with the president. After reassuring Putin of his loyalty, Lisitsyn was nominated by Putin to be governor for another four-year term, a nomination approved with only three dissenting votes of the forty-five members of the regional legislature on November 2, 2006. However, Putin's favor was withdrawn following the parliamentary elections in December 2007, and Lisitsyn was removed from his post on December 19. The provincial legislature then approved Putin's new choice for governor, Sergey Vakhrukov, on December 25, 2007. Vakhrukov is a proven presidential loyalist, having served as first assistant to the presidential representative for the Urals District from 2000 to 2007. Before that he served as president of the Yaroslavl Oblast Duma and as first vice-governor from 1996 to 2000. It seems probable that Putin wanted to secure his hold on Yaroslavl before turning the reins of the presidency over to Dmitri Medvedev. Lisitsyn was expendable.

Who holds the governor's post is important to Yaroslavl city politics. It will be especially important if the regional chief executive eventually appoints mayors. For now, the mayor of Yaroslavl continues to be directly elected. Volunchunas was reelected on December 7, 2003, receiving 73 percent of the vote to his nearest rival's 17 percent. The next mayoral election was held on March 2, 2008. It coincided with the presidential elections and the elections for deputies to the regional legislature. Once again, Volunchunas easily triumphed, this time receiving 76 percent of the vote in a field of four candidates. In the previously discussed opinion poll, 55 percent of the respondents opposed replacing direct elections for mayor with a system by which he would be appointed. Another 6 percent felt it would be illegal to do so. Only 18 percent supported the idea, and most of them would only support an appointment made by the president of Russia. As in the case of the

legislative branch of the city munitsipalitet, it seems fair to conclude that continuity, not change, has been a characteristic of the executive branch since 2000.

The Impact of City Government on City Life: Long-Term Planning

It should be clear from the preceding that political institutions have undergone a significant transformation since 1989. The most dramatic changes occurred in the initial period of transition from the Soviet period in 1990–93. Institutional evolution after the reconstruction of local government in Russia starting in 1994–95 has been more gradual and, in many ways, local government in Yaroslavl in 2007 has changed very little since then. In the remainder of this article, I focus on the general plan to examine the impact of city government on its citizens.

Arguably, the most important decision the city government has made in the past decade has been the Yaroslavl munitsipalitet's April 5, 2006, adoption of a long-term general plan for city development that projects what the city will become through the year 2020 and beyond.⁴¹ In any community, long-range planning reveals quite a bit about how people imagine their city, about how they want to live, and about who decides what, when, and where. In Yaroslavl, how this is done can tell us a lot about the transformation of political institutions in Russia in the post-Soviet era. As Blair Ruble writes in *Money Sings: The Changing Politics of Urban Space in Post-Soviet Yaroslavl*, his book about urban reconstruction in Yaroslavl, "Land-use planning promises to be one arena in which the issues of urban space will determine the shape of post-Soviet politics in Yaroslavl."⁴²

The first city plan in Yaroslavl was adopted in 1778. It defined the historic city center in ways that remain in evidence and which in 2005 earned the city center a place on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The shape of contemporary Yaroslavl, like other Russian cities, is largely the product of decisions made by the Soviet Union's central planning agencies in Moscow during the period of industrialization between 1928 and 1939. These plans broadly specified that economic objectives drove the city's development for as long as thirty years. Although each city was required to adopt a plan, city soviets in Stalin's time had little to say about the urban development of their cities. The shape of Yaroslavl to this day is marked by the division of the city into heavy industrial and adjacent residential zones in ways that bisect the city to the north and to the south. In Yaroslavl, the last of these plans was approved by the Russian Socialist Federated Soviet Republic Council of Ministers in 1971. It established huge residential apartment buildings in previously underdeveloped districts to the north (Bragino) and to the east (Zavolzhsky), but failed to address the location of neighboring industrial centers.⁴³

Even before the collapse of the Soviet Union and its centrally planned economy in 1991, the policies of perestroika began to loosen the grip of central agencies over local planning and gave planners more flexibility. In 1990, officials in Yaroslavl took advantage of the greater opportunities for local planning initiatives and contracted with a Moscow-based institute to draft a long-term plan.⁴⁴ The institute prepared a draft plan with three variants, depending on projected population growth, and presented it to the city's mini-council for discussion in September 1993.⁴⁵ Any decisions on city planning, however, had to be postponed until the reconstruction of local government in 1995, following the abolition of the soviets by Boris Yeltsin in October 1993. Nevertheless, during this time, Yaroslavl city officials responsible for planning and finance continued to compile an inventory of existing land use patterns and assess their economic value to determine potential territorial reserves for future growth.

On the basis of this information, the Yaroslavl munitsipalitet adopted a conceptual general plan on December 20, 1995.⁴⁶ This plan proposed three variants for future city development based on population projections of 700,000, 650,000, and 580,000. For each population estimate, three variants were considered relative to types of housing: planned free-standing housing would constitute 10, 20, or 40 percent of new housing construction. The conceptual plan was the basis for a proposal from Volunchunas, approved by the munitsipalitet in 2003, to draft a new long-term general plan. This plan, also drafted with assistance of the same institute, was adopted by the city council on April 5, 2006, and signed into law by the mayor the next day. It is one of only a handful of such plans among Russian cities, and in early 2007, it was awarded a gold medallion from the Russian Academy of Architects and City Planning. The plan was adopted only after public hearings were held from January to March 2006. Approximately 107,000 citizens participated and the results were summarized by TsIOMSI and reported to the municipal council and to the administration.⁴⁷

What does the general plan tell us about how the government of Yaroslavl foresees the city's future? The plan contemplates three different periods of implementation. In general, the timetable for completion is 2020, but there is a subset of tasks to be carried out before the celebration of Yaroslavl's one-thousandth anniversary in 2010. There is also a long-term plan for development between 2020 and 2030.⁴⁸ According to Arkady Bobovich, the city's chief architect, demography drives the current plan.⁴⁹ The city had accepted the population estimate of 650,000 in the conceptual plan with a volume of new housing around 10 percent.⁵⁰ However, as Bobovich pointed out Yaroslavl's population, like other Russian cities', was in severe decline and such an estimate was unrealistic.⁵¹ Yaroslavl's population decreased nearly 5 percent from 633,000 in 1989 to about 604,000 in January 2005. Of the current residents, about 63 percent are working age, and 14 percent are younger than fifteen. The current figure of about 23 percent for retired persons is projected to increase to between 25 and 30 percent by 2020. Although in recent years the birth rate was slightly greater than the death rate, Yaroslavl's population still suffered a slow decline (almost 5,000 people in 2005) because of residents leaving. The assumptions of the general plan are now based on a population estimate of about 600,000. The plan's principal task is to stabilize Yaroslavl's population by making it more attractive for families to live there.

The general plan for the city of Yaroslavl is an ambitious and, in many ways, progressive vision of what the city should try to become. How likely is it that this vision will become reality? As Ruble writes in *Money Sings*, "All post-Soviet planning projections in Yaroslavl have had an air of unreality about them," and he may well be right about this one.⁵² Nevertheless, on paper at least, there are clear instructions about how the plan is to be implemented. Volunchunas signed a resolution on August 2, 2006, specifying what is to be done before the city's one-thousandth anniversary in 2010. Among the items in this resolution of potentially great importance is the drafting and adoption of a zoning code by the end of 2007.⁵³ Moreover, in 1994, when he was writing his book, Ruble could point to a number of concrete obstacles to success in the planning then underway that seem less daunting now. For example, financing is readily available. Mortgages are now obtainable for a 14-percent down payment and can last as long as thirty years. Banks are everywhere. So, too, are contractors and construction materials. As a result, private housing is being constructed all over the city, especially in areas designated for residential growth. Traffic jams are now commonplace. Cost no longer seems to be a major obstacle to the entrepreneurs and the growing professional middle and upper-middle classes that have emerged in Yaroslavl over the past decade.

The environmental degradation inherited from Soviet times certainly remains a problem, but the city appears to be aware of it and has concrete plans for dealing with it.

The new plan's success depends not only on the government of Yaroslavl but also on what the center does and on how the LLSG discussed earlier is implemented. Will the resources needed to make the plan a reality be forthcoming? Will the city retain its independence in the face of possible encroachment by the regional government? Answers to these questions will determine the fate of Yaroslavl's general plan. Nevertheless, what this analysis of the general plan clearly demonstrates is that those governing the city of Yaroslavl, both in the executive and legislative branches, have since 1990 taken an active role in shaping their city for decades to come. It is also clear that they have done so regardless of actions taken at the center since 2000.

Conclusion

Looking once more through the prism of political developments since 1990 in one Russian city, Yaroslavl, what tentative answers can be offered to the questions asked at the beginning of this article? With respect to the evolution of political institutions, certainly, city government in 2008 differs greatly from the one that existed until 1990. Especially during the initial period of transition from the old city soviet system during 1990–93, progress in introducing democratic forms of government was clear. However, during the second transformation following Yeltsin's abolition of all city soviets in October 1993, the reconstruction of local government in Yaroslavl in 1994–95, as elsewhere in Russia, was characterized by the clear dominance of the executive branch and its chief executives over the representative bodies of power. It remained so at the end of his presidency in 2000.

Nevertheless, there is some evidence to suggest that by 2008 the balance of power may be moving somewhat in the direction of greater equilibrium. The mayor's ability to run the city's affairs without the participation of the *munitsipalitet* has been diminished. He no longer can chair meetings of the city council and must get the council's approval for spending public money. The council's composition no longer includes administrators, but instead includes representatives of the new economic elites in the city. The participation of the council with the mayor in preparing and implementing the general plan continues to be crucial to its success. These are modest but significant moves toward increasing the representative branch's influence.

With this said, however, one of the principal conclusions of this article is that despite the sweeping legislation on local government that the Putin administration introduced in 2003, political institutions in Yaroslavl had changed comparatively little by 2008. With some exceptions, continuity rather than change was more characteristic of city government in Yaroslavl at the end of Putin's presidency. At the same time, although federal policies regarding local government appear to have had a minimal effect on how Yaroslavl is governed, the city government has demonstrated, through its development of the general plan, a determination to take an active role in shaping its own destiny. It has done so not by confronting the central government, but by quietly taking advantage of existing opportunities to seize the moment. In this sense, the life of the city is being determined more by policies made locally than by those from the center.

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NOTES

1. Yaroslavl, founded in 1010 by Prince Yaroslavl the Wise on the banks of the Volga River (about 175 miles northeast of Moscow), has approximately 600,000 inhabitants and is the provincial capital of the Yaroslavl region, which has a population of around 1.5 million. Although it became a major industrial center during the Soviet era, the city is also one of the principal tourist stops on the Golden Ring of ancient cities surrounding Moscow; in 2005, its historic city center was placed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.

2. This team also included Timothy Colton, Jerry Hough, and Blair Ruble and was financed by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. Details can be found in Jeffrey W. Hahn, ed., *Democratization in Russia: The Development of Legislative Institutions* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1996).

3. Jeffrey W. Hahn, "Yaroslavl' Revisited: Assessing Continuity and Change in Russian Political Culture since 1990," in *Political Culture and Post-Communism*, ed. Stephen Whitefield, 148–79 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

4. Jeffrey W. Hahn, ed., *Regional Russia in Transition: Studies from Yaroslavl'* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001). The factual material used in the sections of this article dealing with the first and second transformations of Yaroslavl's political institutions comes from chapters 3 and 9 of this book.

5. Gavin Helf and Jeffrey Hahn, "Old Dogs and New Tricks: Party Elites in Russian Regional Elections of 1990," *Slavic Review* 53, no. 3 (1992): 511–30.

6. Robert Dahl, *Polyarchy: Opposition and Participation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1971).

7. The provision giving deputies a four-year term applied to those elected in 1996 and later. Deputies elected to the first convocation in 1994 held office for only two years.

8. Sergey Golubev, interview with author, June 23, 1997.

9. There were also two jurists.

10. Guillermo O'Donnell, "Delegative Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 5, no. 1 (1994): 59–62.

11. Cameron Ross, "Putin's Federal Reforms," in *Russian Politics under Putin*, ed. Cameron Ross, 183–210 (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 2004).

12. Cameron Ross, "Federalism and Electoral Authoritarianism under Putin," *Demokratizatsiya* 13, no. 3 (2005): 347–71.

13. *Executive vertical* refers to executive officials in the administrative hierarchy, including governors and mayors.

14. All references here are to the federal law "Ob obshchikh printsipakh organizatsii mestnogo samoupravleniia v Rossiiskoi Federatsii" (LLSG), *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, October 8, 2003.

15. A translation of the Russia's constitution can be found in Donald D. Barry, *Russian Politics: The Post-Soviet Phase* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 187–213.

16. Tomila Lankina, "The Kozak Commission's Local Government Reforms" (paper, AAASS Annual Meeting, Boston, MA, December 4–7, 2004); Vladimir Gel'man and Alfred B. Evans, Jr., "Conclusion: Towards a New Politics of Local Government in Russia," in *The Politics of Local Government in Russia*, ed. Alfred B. Evans, Jr., and Vladimir Gel'man, 274–88 (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

17. John F. Young and Gary N. Wilson, "The View from Below: Local Government and Putin's Reforms," *Europe-Asia Studies* 59, no. 7 (2007): 1071–88.

18. *Ibid.*, 1078; Lankina, "The Kozak Commission's Local Government Reforms"; Cameron Ross, "Municipal Reform in the Russian Federation and Putin's 'Electoral Vertical,'" *Demokratizatsiya* 15, no. 2 (2007): 191–208.

19. "LLSG."
20. See Young and Wilson, "The View from Below," 1078, table 1.
21. Ross, "Municipal Reform in the Russian Federation," 193.
22. "LLSG," art. 35, § 2.
23. *Ibid.*, art. 36, § 4.
24. Lankina, "The Kozak Commission's Local Government Reforms," 22–25.
25. Ross, "Municipal Reform in the Russian Federation," 196–97.
26. *Ibid.*, 193.
27. Young and Wilson, "The View from Below," 1085–86.
28. Lankina, "The Kozak Commission's Local Government Reforms," 27.
29. Ross, "Municipal Reform in the Russian Federation," 204.
30. Aleksandr Blokhin, interview with author, September 26, 2007.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Young and Wilson, "The View from Below," 1073.
33. "LLSG."
34. Vladimir Golov, interview with author, September 27, 2007.
35. Blokhin, interview with author.
36. Tatiana Rumiantseva, "Obshchestvenno politicheskaia obstanovka v g. Yaroslavle" [Social and Political Circumstances in the City of Yaroslavl], *Analiticheskaia zapiska po rezultatam sotsiologicheskogo issledovania* [Analytical Notes for Results of Sociological Research] (Yaroslavl, Russia: TsIOMSI, 2007). This report has not been officially published.
37. *Ibid.* Data are from a representative survey of Yaroslavl city residents conducted in May 2007 by Center for the Study of Public Opinion and Sociological Research (TsIOMSI).
38. "LLSG," art. 36, § 5.
39. Tatiana Rumiantseva, interview with author, September 26, 2007.
40. Blokhin, interview with author.
41. The Yaroslavl General Plan actually consists of five volumes with supplementary materials and appendixes. The information about the plan reported in this paper comes from a government publication titled "Yaroslavl After 1000: An Ancient City Aiming at the Future," a compilation of the city's legislation pertaining to the plan, with pictures, data, and schema intended to illustrate the text. See Office of the Mayor of Yaroslavl, *Drevnii gorod, ustremlyenni v budushchee* [Ancient City, Aiming toward the Future!] (Yaroslavl: Yaroslavl Municipal Government, 2006). The text itself consists principally of the General Plan of the City of Yaroslavl (*Yaroslavl Generalnyi Plan*), adopted in April 2006, and a resolution from the mayor's office on how the plan will be realized through 2010.
42. Blair Ruble, *Money Sings: The Changing Politics of Urban Space in Post-Soviet Yaroslavl* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 126.
43. *Ibid.*, 109–10.
44. This institute, the Central Scientific Research and Design Institute for City Construction, is part of the Russian Academy of Architecture and Construction.
45. For an extended discussion of this draft, see Ruble, *Money Sings*, 115–17.
46. Office of the Mayor of Yaroslavl, *Yaroslavl Generalnyi Plan: Kontsepsia* (Yaroslavl, Russia: Informatsionnyi vypusk, 2000).
47. *Drevnii gorod*.
48. *Yaroslavl Generalnyi Plan*, Section 1.7, 6.
49. Arkady Bobovich, interview with author, September 27, 2007.
50. *Yaroslavl Generalnyi Plan*.
51. Bobovich, interview with author.
52. Ruble, *Money Sings*, 121.
53. *Drevnii gorod*, 78–79.