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Ways to solve the problems of integrating local self-government into the system of public authority: towards the implementation of the new law

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Abstract. This study explores the systemic challenges faced by local self-government bodies (LGBs) due to their legislative inclusion in the unified system of public authority. It analyzes key issues such as the erosion of autonomy, increased administrative burden, imbalance of powers and resources, and the risks of bureaucratization. The study proposes strategic digitalization of LGBs as a primary solution to these problems. The author proves that the introduction of digital platforms, big data technologies, artificial intelligence, and smart services can not only mitigate the negative consequences of integration, but also enhance the efficiency, transparency, and involvement of citizens in local self-government processes. The study provides specific recommendations for digital transformation.

Keywords: public authority, municipal administration, e-government, big data, artificial intelligence, administrative burden, local self-government autonomy

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Пути решения проблем интеграции местного самоуправления в систему публичной власти: к реализации нового закона

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Аннотация. Исследованы системные проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются органы местного самоуправления (МСУ) в связи с их законодательным включением в единую систему публичной власти. Проанализированы ключевые вызовы, такие как размывание автономии, увеличение административной нагрузки, дисбаланс полномочий и ресурсов, а также риски бюрократизации. В качестве основного вектора решения данных проблем предложена стратегическая цифровизация МСУ. Доказано, что внедрение цифровых платформ, технологий больших данных, искусственного интеллекта и «умных» сервисов способно не только нивелировать негативные последствия интеграции, но и усилить эффективность, прозрачность и вовлеченность граждан в процессы МСУ. Приведены конкретные рекомендации по направлениям цифровой трансформации.

Ключевые слова: муниципальное управление, электронное правительство, большие данные, искусственный интеллект, административная нагрузка, автономия МСУ

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Introduction

The adoption of Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated March 20, 2025, “On the General Principles of Organizing Local Self-Government in the Unified System of Public Power”, marks a new stage in the development of local self-government in Russia. This legislative reform, developed within the framework of the ongoing municipal reform, aims to integrate local self-government bodies (LGBs) into the unified system of public power, as enshrined in Article 4 of the new law¹. This is a fundamental change in the constitutional nature of local self-government, which was previously positioned as an institution separate from state power. The relevance of a scientific understanding of the ongoing transformations is due to the need to identify systemic problems that may arise

¹ Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated 20.03.2025 “On the General Principles of the organization of local Self-government in the Unified System of Public Authority”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_501319/ (accessed: 10.10.2025). (In Russ.).

in the process of implementing the new legislation in Moscow and to develop adequate mechanisms for their resolution.

The purpose of this study is a comprehensive analysis of potential problems related to the inclusion of local self-government in the unified system of public power and the identification of scientifically sound ways to solve them to ensure the effective functioning of local self-government under the new legal conditions considering the potential of digitalization.

The research methodology is based on the analysis of regulatory legal acts, in particular, the new Federal Law No. 33-FZ² and its predecessor Federal Law No. 131-FZ³, as well as a systematic approach to studying the problems of local self-government identified in scientific publications and expert assessments. Comparative legal analysis made it possible to identify the specifics of the new legal regulation in comparison with the previous period.

Theoretical and Legal Foundations for Integrating Local Self-Government into the System of Public Power

The constitutional reform of 2020 and subsequent legislative changes have fundamentally transformed the nature of local self-government in the Russian Federation. According to Article 1 of Federal Law No. 33-FZ, local self-government is recognized as a form of self-organization of citizens, while its bodies are part of the unified system of public power⁴. This provision radically changes the model established since the 1990s, within which local self-government was considered an independent institution separate from state power.

The evolution of the legal regulation of local self-government in Russia demonstrates a consistent movement from a strict distinction between state and municipal power towards their integration. As noted in scientific publications, detailed constitutional regulation of local self-government did not guarantee its effective development [1–3]. In practice, serious contradictions arose between the formal autonomy of local self-government and its actual dependence on state structures.

The fundamental innovation of the 2025 legislation is that, while preserving the formal autonomy of local self-government (local self-government bodies are not part of the system of state authorities, according to Part 6, Article 1 of Federal Law No. 33-FZ), it simultaneously integrates it into a unified system of public power

² Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated 20.03.2025 “On the General Principles of the organization of local Self-government in the Unified System of Public Authority”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_501319/ (accessed: 10.10.2025). (In Russ.).

³ Federal Law No. 131-FZ of 06.10.2003 (as amended on 20.03.2025) “On the General Principles of the Organization of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_44571/ (date of access: 09.10.2025).

⁴ Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated 20.03.2025 “On the General Principles of the organization of local Self-government in the Unified System of Public Authority”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_501319/ (accessed: 10.10.2025). (In Russ.).

under the auspices of the President of the Russian Federation, who “ensures the coordinated functioning and interaction of bodies constituting the unified system of public power” (Part 5, Article 1)⁵. This approach is designed to overcome the dualism in understanding the nature of local self-government, which persisted throughout the entire post-Soviet period of Russia’s development (Table 1).

Table 1

Evolution of the constitutional and legal status of local self-government in Russia

Period	Legal model	Key characteristics
1993–2003	The separation model	A strict differentiation of state power and local self-government
2003–2025	The compromise model	Formal independence with the actual strengthening of state control
From 2025	The integration model	Include integration into a single system of public authority while maintaining organizational separation

Source: compiled by V.B. Zotov.

The legislative codification of the integration model for local self-government aligns with the general trends in the development of public power in Russia, aimed at ensuring unity and coordination in governance. However, such a transformation gives rise to a number of systemic problems that require scientific understanding and practical resolution.

Systemic Analysis of Local Self-Government Problems in the Context of the New Legal Reality

1. The Problem of Delimiting Powers and Competence

One of the most acute problems that may intensify with the adoption of the new law is the unclear delimitation of powers between levels of public power. As analysis of the preceding period shows, the imperfection of the conceptual model of local self-government manifested itself in the “plurality of subjective interpretations of the competence and responsibility of both state authorities and local self-government bodies”⁶ [4]. The new law, despite proclaiming the principle of local self-government’s independence “within the limits of its

⁵ Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated 20.03.2025 “On the General Principles of the organization of local Self-government in the Unified System of Public Authority”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_501319/ (accessed: 10.10.2025). (In Russ.).

⁶ Vasiliev VI. *Municipal law of Russia: textbook*. Moscow: Justitia publ.; 2021. (In Russ.).

powers” (Part 1, Article 4), lacks mechanisms for clearly distinguishing matters of local importance from state powers.

A particular concern is the persistence of the practice of so-called “unfunded federal mandates”, where local self-government bodies are obliged to fulfill state obligations established by federal laws without adequate financial provision [5]. Under conditions of integration into a unified system of public power, this problem may worsen, as the volume of delegated powers is likely to increase without corresponding resource provision. While Article 4 of Federal Law No. 33-FZ rightly states that the “delimitation of powers between levels of public power is ensured by appropriate financial resources and material assets” (Part 10)⁷, the mechanism for implementing this principle in practice remains unclear.

2. Financial and Economic Problems

The insufficiency of the local self-government financial base remains a key challenge that may hinder the effective implementation of the new legislation. As early as 2004, it was noted that “a major problem for local self-government remains the insufficiency of its own revenue base”⁸. The situation was exacerbated by the tax reform of 2000–2001, which was largely carried out by abolishing most local taxes, without compensating for the losses to local budgets.

According to statistics cited by Vologda region’s Governor V. Pozgalev, local budgets received only 10% of the revenues of Russia’s consolidated budget, while the federal budget received 60%, and regional budgets received 30% [6]. Such an imbalance in the distribution of financial resources creates systemic constraints for independently resolving matters of local importance. Under the new law, financial problems may worsen due to the possible increase in the volume of delegated powers without adequate financial provision.

3. Organizational and Territorial Problems

The new law preserves various models of the territorial organization of local self-government, which may create additional difficulties under conditions of its integration into a unified system of public power. As shown by an analysis conducted as early as 2004, various models of territorial organization have formed in Russia: from district and settlement models to two-tier and mixed systems [3]. Such diversity creates problems for establishing uniform management standards and ensuring the coordinated functioning of public power.

A particular problem is the so-called “degenerate structure of local government bodies in cities of federal significance”, where local self-government bodies “exist only formally, their powers are insignificant, and they have no practical influence” [2]. Under the new law, the question arises of the conformity of such a model with the principle of full-fledged participation of local self-government in the system of public power.

⁷ Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated 20.03.2025 “On the General Principles of the organization of local Self-government in the Unified System of Public Authority”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_501319/ (accessed: 10.10.2025). (In Russ.).

⁸ Vasiliev VI. *Municipal law of Russia: textbook*. Moscow: Justitia publ.; 2021. (In Russ.).

4. The Problem of Personnel Potential and Management Technologies

One of the key problems that may limit the effectiveness of implementing the new legislation is the lack of effective municipal management technologies. As noted in research by the Far Eastern Scientific Center for Local Self-Government, “for not a single matter of local importance do effective technologies exist today” [3]. Particularly complex are issues that were not previously handled by power institutions, such as developing charters of municipalities, managing municipal property, and issues related to creating conditions for economic development.

The lack of effective management technologies is compounded by a shortage of qualified personnel in the local self-government system, especially in remote and sparsely populated regions. Integration into a unified system of public power will require new competencies and skills from municipal employees, corresponding to the increased demands on management personnel.

5. The Problem of Public Participation and Civic Engagement

The inclusion of local self-government into a unified system of public power may exacerbate the problem of low levels of public participation in local affairs. As research shows, one of the main problems of local government is “the population’s lack of understanding of the essence of local self-government and the need to participate in its implementation” [2]. This leads to “the alienation of the population from public power” and an increase in “electoral escapism” [3].

The new law proclaims ensuring transparency in the activities of local self-government bodies (Part 8, Article 1)⁹, but it lacks specific mechanisms to strengthen public participation. Meanwhile, as international studies show, effective local self-government requires “an equitable, inclusive approach to civic engagement” [7]. Under conditions of integration into the system of public power, there is a risk of further bureaucratization of local self-government and a weakening of its connection with the population.

Ways to Solve the Problems and Prospects for the Development of Local Self-Government

1. Improving the Mechanisms for Delimiting Powers

To address the problem of unclear delimitation of powers between levels of public power, it is proposed:

1. To develop and legally codify an exhaustive list of matters of local importance, with a clear definition of the criteria for assigning them to the competence of local self-government. This list should be stable and not subject to arbitrary expansion through the transfer of additional state powers without adequate financial provision.

⁹ Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated 20.03.2025 “On the General Principles of the organization of local Self-government in the Unified System of Public Authority”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_501319/ (accessed: 10.10.2025). (In Russ.).

2. To create an independent arbitration mechanism for resolving disputes over competence between state authorities and local self-government bodies. This will help prevent conflicts and ensure a balance of interests among different levels of public power.

3. To introduce a system of mandatory financial and economic expertise when transferring state powers to local self-government bodies, as provided for in Part 10, Article 4 of Federal Law No. 33-FZ¹⁰. The expertise should assess the adequacy of resource provision for the transferred powers.

2. Strengthening the Financial and Economic Foundation

To solve the financial problems of local self-government under the new law, it is necessary:

1. To carry out a reform of inter-budgetary relations aimed at increasing the share of local budgets in the country's consolidated budget to a level comparable with international standards (at least 20–25%).

2. To secure stable revenue sources for local budgets, including the right to establish local taxes and fees within the limits defined by federal legislation.

3. To introduce a mechanism for the automatic financial provision of transferred state powers, eliminating the possibility of unfunded mandates.

4. To stimulate the development of the municipal economy by creating conditions for attracting investment and developing entrepreneurship within the territories of municipalities.

3. Optimizing the Territorial Organization

To address organizational and territorial problems, it is proposed:

1. To develop scientifically based criteria for determining the optimal model of territorial organization of local self-government, considering geographic, demographic, economic, and other regional characteristics.

2. To ensure uniform standards for organizing local self-government throughout the country while maintaining a differentiated approach to determining the competence of different types of municipalities.

3. To eliminate “degenerate” local government structures in cities of federal significance by expanding their powers and increasing their real influence on resolving matters of local importance.

4. Developing Personnel Potential and Introducing Modern Management Technologies

To address the problem of personnel potential and management technologies, it is necessary:

1. To create a system of continuous education for municipal employees, focused on developing the competencies required for working under conditions of integration into a unified system of public power.

¹⁰ Federal Law No. 33-FZ dated 20.03.2025 “On the General Principles of the organization of local Self-government in the Unified System of Public Authority”. URL: https://www.consultant.ru/document/cons_doc_LAW_501319/ (accessed: 10.10.2025). (In Russ.).

2. To develop and implement standard management technologies for main matters of local importance, adapted to the specifics of different types of municipalities.

3. To form a system for exchanging best practices among municipalities, including creating a repository of successful management decisions.

4. To apply digital technologies for managing municipal economies, ensuring transparency and efficiency in the use of resources.

5. Stimulating Public Participation and Developing Civic Engagement

To enhance public participation under the new law, it is advisable:

1. To introduce mechanisms of participatory budgeting, allowing citizens to directly participate in the allocation of part of the budgetary funds [8]. The experience of Porto Alegre (Brazil) shows the effectiveness of this approach: “the percentage of districts with water supply increased from 75% to 98%; access to sewerage increased from 45% to 98%” [8].

2. To develop practices of public deliberation as a form of “public discussion that seeks collective solutions to complex social problems” [8–10].

3. To utilize approaches based on the principles of human-centered design, as done in Oakland, California, when developing a housing inspection program [9–12].

4. To create a system for stimulating civic engagement through the institutionalization of forms of direct citizen participation in the implementation of local self-government.

Let’s summarize in Table 2.

Table 2

The main problems and ways to solve them in the context of the new legislation

Scope of problems	Key challenges	Proposed solutions
Differentiation of powers	Vagueness of competence, unfunded mandates	An exhaustive list of issues of local importance, arbitration mechanism for dispute resolution
Financial autonomy	Insufficient revenue base	Reform of inter-budgetary relations, stable sources of income
Territorial organization	Heterogeneity of models, “degenerated” structures	Uniform standards with a differentiated approach
Managerial potential	Lack of effective technologies, staff shortage	Continuing education system, standard management technologies
Public participation	Low civic engagement, alienation	Participating budgeting, public discussions

Source: compiled by V.B. Zotov.

Conclusion

The adoption of the Federal Law “On the General Principles of Organizing Local Self-Government in the Unified System of Public Power” opens a new stage in the development of local self-government in Russia. The integration of local self-government into a unified system of public power creates both new opportunities and serious challenges. The conducted analysis allows us to conclude that the successful implementation of the new legislation will require a comprehensive solution to the systemic problems accumulated in the sphere of local self-government.

The key directions for improving local self-government under the new conditions should be clear delimitation of powers with adequate resource provision, strengthening of the financial and economic foundation, optimization of the territorial organization, development of personnel potential and the introduction of modern management technologies, as well as the stimulation of public participation and civic engagement.

Prospects for further research are associated with monitoring the practice of applying the new legislation and developing specific mechanisms for implementing the proclaimed principles based on it. Special attention should be paid to studying the regional specifics of implementing the integration model of local self-government and developing adaptive approaches to managing this process. The scientific community is called upon to play an important role in developing scientifically based recommendations for improving local self-government under the conditions of its integration into the unified system of public power.

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