During his reign, Peter the Great changed the very basis on which Russia was built and paved the way for future autocratic rule. In order to do this, he changed the distribution of power and strengthened the position of the ruler, not only by ensuring absolute control through legislation, but by attempting to win over those whom were not in power. His ability to do so was not solely made possible through forceful rule, but through his character in personality, experience, and intelligence.

Peter the Great had a vision for Russia, and it wasn’t one of a ruler trying to madly grasp for as much power as possible, but one of a better Russia where the government worked for its people. Instead of trying to create a better Russia through policies created from scratch, he looked to the nearest neighbor for wisdom pulling many European aspects into the country to better itself. Due to the fact that he looked to the outside world for ideas, he was able to sell the changes to the people, almost by saying “Look how much happier everyone is there, this works!” In addition, he had a passion to complete his vision, and this passion would help sway people and have them believe he knows what is best, further cementing his position. Once his goal was coming to fruition, he attempted to secure his dream of a modern Europeanized state through several systems of control.

As discussed from our readings and in class, he changed laws to bring in money for the state through poll taxes, and implemented these so they would be more equal for the people. Most importantly, he declared the Law of Succession that would allow him to hand pick the next in line ensuring his vision would carry on. These facts allowed Peter’s reign to follow through history allowing absolute autocratic rule as people were less likely to fight back, and checks were in place to ensure power remained with only the Tsar.

Following his death in 1725 and still not having named a successor, Catherine I came to power. For the most part his legislation remained intact and his vision carried on, primarily due to the fact that Catherine was his wife and shared many of the same ideals. It is also important to note that his son, who disliked everything his father had done, was exiled to protect the state and the autocratic rule. Throughout her reign and the many to follow, the basic principles of gathering money for the state, ensuring the autocrat has absolute rule over everyone, and the vision of a modernized Russia did not waver. There were several grabs for power, most notably the Conditions set forth for Anna, but even this did not succeed in limiting the autocrat’s power.

All in all, even through many leaders with slight variations in their vision for Russia, the autocrat’s power stayed consistently strong. This is due to the fact that Peter I was able to win over the people with his worldly experiences, driven personality, and intelligence. Once the power was established, the future rulers were reluctant to give it up, and ensured through further legislation that it would remain that way. Even with Peter’s laws being changed and revoked in many cases, the basis of autocratic power remained strong throughout the history of Russia.