

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Farm Russian President Putin's Power Grab Questioned, 12/05/07

http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/july-dec07/putin_12-05.html

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

Student Worksheet (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. What makes an election fair and democratic?

2. Where is Russia? What role has it played in American foreign policy over the years?

3. Who is Vladimir Putin and why is he important?

4. How does a parliamentary government work?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – **Student Worksheet**

1. What was the outcome of the Russian parliamentary election?

ANSWER

Russian President Vladimir Putin's power solidified this week when his supporters won control of the parliament in elections marred by reports of intimidation, fraud and harassment.

Election officials said on Dec. 3 that 393 seats in the 450-seat parliament went to parties that are supportive of Putin.

2. Why are election observers concerned about the results?

ANSWER

But European election watchers reported numerous cases of intimidation, fraud, multiple ballots and harassment.

In the southern region of Chechnya, where the United Party got 99.36 percent of the vote with turnout of 99.5 percent, witnesses reported seeing election authorities filling out ballots, reported the Associated Press.

3. What was the U.S. government's opinion of the elections?

ANSWER

President Bush told reporters he expressed his concerns directly to Putin.

"I said we were sincere in our expressions of concern about the elections," Bush said.

Even before the election took place, White House national security spokesman Gordon Johndroe said he was concerned about the bias of state-owned media in favor of Putin's supporters, and a lack of opportunity for opposition parties.

4. Why does Putin have to leave office next year?

ANSWER

Putin is set to leave office next year, the end of his two constitutionally-allowed terms. In November, Putin said a victory for his party in the election would mean he has a "moral" right to keep a political influence in the Kremlin after he leaves office.

5. How might Putin continue to influence Russian politics even after his two terms?

ANSWER

His supporters in the parliament could give him political sway, and he has a big enough majority that he could influence changes to the constitution and may use his new mandate to change the law and remain in office, reported the BBC.

Putin was also quoted by Voice of America in October saying that it was "realistic" that he might become Russia's prime minister.

6. Why is Putin such a popular leader?

ANSWER

Putin has been a popular leader in Russia and is credited with instituting economic reforms that have helped the country stabilize and take on a more prominent role in international politics.

7. Why did Putin withdraw from the arms treaty?

ANSWER

Just days before the election, Putin angered the U.S. by suspending Russia's participation in an arms treaty that restricted Russian military presence in Europe. The pact suspension came in response to U.S. plans to create a missile defense system in Eastern Europe as a safeguard against Iran.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Was the Russian election fair? Why or why not? Why does this matter?

2. Should Putin be allowed to change the constitution and stay president? Why or why not? Is it problematic that he might become prime minister?

3. What is the current relationship between the United States and Russia? Is this relationship as important as our relationship with countries in western Europe? Asia? Latin America? What criteria makes a country more or less important to the United States? Are there different opinions about this? How is your opinion different or similar to President Bush's, other leaders?

4. Research the parliamentary system in Russia. How do parliamentary elections work? How is it different from the U.S. government?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.