

Russia Un-united?

Anti-Putin Protests Startle Government

"Fraud ... crook ... scoundrel ... thief." Those are just some of the not-so-nice names Russian protesters are calling Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and members of his government.



AFP/Newscom

Between December 7 and December 11, thousands of protesters gathered in Moscow, Russia's capital, and in at least 80 other cities to denounce Putin and his government. The focus of the protests was the December 4 elections for the Duma, Russia's parliament. United Russia (UR), Putin's political party and the largest party in the country, captured 238 seats in the 450-seat Duma. Although that makes it the largest single party in parliament, it is a big drop from the 315 seats UR won in 2007.

The problem is that many Russians think the number of seats held by UR should be far fewer. They charge that UR and Putin took part in widespread voter fraud, from ballot-box stuffing (putting extra ballots in voting boxes) to "carousel voting" (people traveling from polling station to polling station to vote several times). Russians exchanged Internet videos showing ballot-box stuffing, vote stealing, and blatant forgery of the official voting results.



Gennady Shishkin/AFP/Getty Images

Election officials count votes at a polling station in the Russian city of Vladivostok.

"I realized that I can't keep silent anymore when out of about 70 of my friends and relatives, only two voted for United Russia," protester Leila Arifulina, a 35-year-old fitness instructor, told the *Los Angeles Times*. "And the next morning they tell me [Putin's] party won! I am tough and can put up with lots of things in life, but they shouldn't really have treated me as an idiot."

Caught By Surprise

The growing opposition to Putin has surprised the ruling party. Putin has called the shots in Russia for years, first as president (2000–2008) and then as prime minister (2008–present). He has filed to run for president again, with the election set for March 4. If he is elected in 2012 and reelected to another six-year term in 2018, he could be Russia's leader until 2024.



AP Images

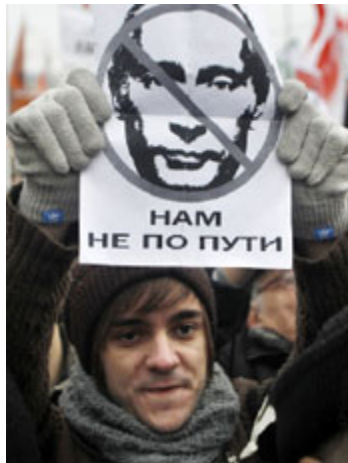
Russian Prime Minister
Vladimir Putin has been in
power for more than a decade.

Only a few years ago, Putin's popularity was high. Many saw him as the man who had saved the country from a turbulent past. Russia had been a world superpower when it was the main republic of the Soviet Union. However, life under Soviet rule was oppressive. Critics of the government were often jailed or executed. When the Soviet Union broke up into 15 independent countries in 1991, Russia became a democracy, but its economy fell apart. Poverty, crime, and disease were common in the 1990s.

Putin helped turn things around. Thanks to Russia's great riches in oil, natural gas, and other resources, the country is more prosperous today than it has ever been. But some think Putin's rule is beginning to resemble the old Soviet oppression. The government and the ruling party control the police and television while publicly declaring their support for democracy.

Role Of Facebook And Twitter

The Internet, particularly social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, has been instrumental in channeling the surge of public anger at perceived election fraud. More than 16,700 people indicated on Facebook their intention to gather in Moscow on December 10 for a massive anti-Putin demonstration. Another 5,500 agreed to attend a similar protest in St. Petersburg, Russia's second-largest city. Protests were also organized in at least 80 other cities throughout Russia.



AP Images

A protester holds a picture of Putin that reads, "We are going different ways."

The government has tried to cut down on the number of protesters. In one attempt, it ordered all Russian students between the ages of 14 and 17 to attend school on a Saturday for hastily arranged tests during the hours of the protest. They were warned they would risk flunking their courses if they failed to attend the unprecedented Saturday exams.

On December 10, however, an estimated 50,000 people organized. They braved a whipping snowstorm to make their way across the Moscow River to a secluded square not far from the Kremlin, the seat of Russian power. The protesters listened to anti-Putin speeches and chanted "Russia without Putin."

"Putin ... made a shocking discovery today," opposition leader Sergei Mitrokhin said. "Russia has people." The crowd, which included many young people, roared back: "We are the people."

U.S. Role?

The protests ended peacefully, but the outrage and concern has continued. Mikhail Gorbachev, the former Soviet president who oversaw the end of the Soviet Union, called on Russian authorities to annul the election results and hold a new vote. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton also called for new elections.

In televised remarks, Putin strongly criticized Clinton for encouraging the protesters. He said the United States is spending “hundreds of millions” of dollars to influence Russian politics and to weaken a rival nuclear power.

Will the protests hurt Putin’s chances of being elected president on March 4? Boris Makarenko, the head of a political think tank in Moscow, believes that the protests will not bring down Putin or jeopardize his 2012 election. But Putin needs to address the needs of the Russian people, says Makarenko.

“I do not belong to any political movement,” Daniil Klubov, a student who attended the anti-Putin protests in St. Petersburg, told the BBC. “I am just a student who is tired of all these lies.”

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What was U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's call to action?

- A start a protest
- B endorse Putin and keep him in power
- C new elections
- D sign a petition on Facebook

2. The author describes Putin as a leader who once had the strong support of the people of Russia but now

- A faces opposition and criticism
- B is working to create allies
- C sees the importance of understanding the desires of the people in his country
- D wants to be liked by the United States government

3. How might the author describe the future of Russian politics and Putin's rule?

- A Putin will remain in power for many years into the future.
- B The Russian protestors will win out and overthrow Putin.
- C The U.S. will take over and control the political scene until it stabilizes.
- D It is too difficult or complicated to say.

4. Read the following sentences and answer the question below: "The problem is that many Russians think the number of seats held by UR should be far fewer. They charge that UR and Putin took part in widespread voter fraud."

What does the word **charge** mean?

- A attack
- B ask for payment
- C assert
- D request for information

5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe

- A how social media can be a powerful tool for political purposes
- B the power of a mobilized and motivated group of people to affect political change in their country
- C the complicated history of Putin's role and changing nature of Russians' feelings towards him
- D electoral politics and form of government in Russia

6. What is "carousel voting"?

7. What does the students' presence at the protest (despite the threats that they'd be flunked in their classes if they didn't attend the Saturday class) say about their beliefs?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Facebook and other social media were powerful tools _____ they allowed people to indicate their beliefs as well as their plans to attend protests and demonstrations.

- A instead
- B but
- C before
- D because

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Because he was viewed as the one who "saved" the country from oppressive Soviet rule, Putin was popular in Russia.

What? Putin

What? _____

Where? _____

Why? _____

10. Read the vocabulary word and definition below and complete questions 10a, 10b, and 11.

Vocabulary Word: prosperous (pros · per · ous): having a lot of money.

10a. Read the sentences below and underline the word **prosperous**.

1. Winning the lottery left them prosperous, with money to spend on trips and fancy clothing.
2. Because of its natural resources, like oil, that are needed and purchased by other countries, Russia could be a prosperous country.
3. She was prosperous after years of hard work and saving money.
4. Chief Executive Officers and those running a successful business are often the most prosperous employees at the company.
5. When I saw the large house and fancy cars, I inferred that this person was prosperous.

10b. Which picture best demonstrates the word prosperous?



11. What might it mean if someone says a country or community is prosperous?

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 1140

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: The “Russia Un-united” article chronicles protests against Russian leader Putin and explains the rationale for the anti-Putin and anti-United Russia government sentiments. It describes the role social media has played as well as other countries’ involvement in the anti-Putin trend, and closes with a discussion of whether the movement and sentiments are strong enough to alter whether he would be re-elected.

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 - A start a protest
 - B endorse Putin and keep him in power
 - C **new elections**
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2. The author describes Putin as a leader who once had the strong support of the people of Russia but now
 - A **faces opposition and criticism**
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3. How might the author describe the future of Russian politics and Putin’s rule?
 - A Putin will remain in power for many years into the future.
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4. Read the following sentences and answer the question below: “The problem is that many Russians think the number of seats held by UR should be far fewer. They charge that UR and Putin took part in widespread voter fraud.”

What does the word **charge** mean?

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5. The primary purpose of this passage is to describe
 - A how social media can be a powerful tool for political purposes
 - B the power of a mobilized and motivated group of people to affect political change in their country
 - C **the complicated history of Putin’s role and changing nature of Russians’ feelings towards him**
 - D electoral politics and form of government in Russia

6. What is “carousel voting”?

Suggested answer: It’s when people travel from polling station to polling station to vote more than once.

7. What does the students’ presence at the protest (despite the threats that they’d be flunked in their classes if they didn’t attend the Saturday class) say about their beliefs?

Suggested answer: They felt strongly enough about wanting to shift the political power away from Putin and the United Russia government that they were willing to risk their academic well-being.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

Facebook and other social media were powerful tools _____ they allowed people to indicate their beliefs as well as their plans to attend protests and demonstrations.

- A instead
- B but
- C before
- D **because**

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Because he was viewed as the one who “saved” the country from oppressive Soviet rule, Putin was popular in Russia.

Who? **Putin**

What? **was popular**

Where? **in Russia**

Why? **he was viewed as the one who “saved” the country from oppressive Soviet rule**

10. ReadWorks recommends that you teach this vocabulary word to the whole class out loud using the four steps listed below.

Vocabulary Word: prosperous

Step 1: Introduce the word

- a. Teacher writes the word on the board and divides it into syllables: (pros · per · ous)
- b. Teacher says: “This word is prosperous. What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “prosperous.”]

Step 2: Provide a child-friendly definition

- a. Teacher says: “Prosperous means having a lot of money.”
- b. Teacher says: “The word prosperous is usually used to describe people or entities that are well-off financially, or wealthy. In the passage, the word prosperous is used to describe Russia’s improved economic status due to oil, gas, and other resources.”
- c. Teacher says: “What is the word?” [All students reply together out loud: “prosperous.”]

Step 3: Practice the word

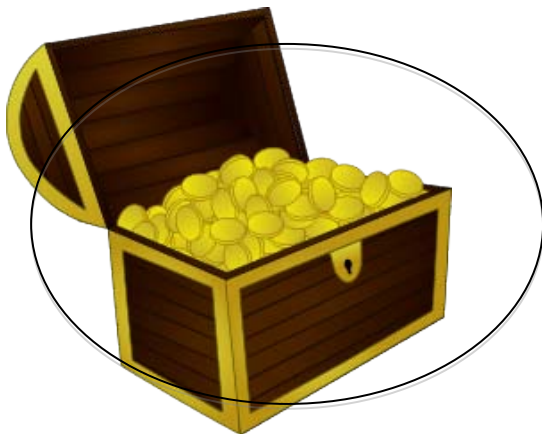
Teacher provides examples and additional opportunities to repeat the word. Read the 1st sentence out loud to your students. Begin reading it again and when you come to the vocabulary word prompt students to say the vocabulary word out loud. Then, finish reading the sentence out loud to your students.

- 10a.**
1. Winning the lottery left them prosperous, with money to spend on trips and fancy clothing.
 2. Because of its natural resources, like oil, that are needed and purchased by other countries, Russia could be a prosperous country.
 3. She was prosperous after years of hard work and saving money.
 4. Chief Executive Officers and those running a successful business are often the most prosperous employees at the company.
 5. When I saw the large house and fancy cars, I inferred that this person was prosperous.

Step 4: Check for student understanding

This step can be completed as a whole class activity or as an independent practice.

- 10b.** Which picture best demonstrates the word prosperous?



- 11.** What might it mean if someone says a country or community is prosperous?

Suggested answer: If someone says a country or community is prosperous, it might mean that it is flourishing economically with abundant food and jobs for all of its citizens.

Suggested Additional Vocabulary: fraud, scoundrel, denounce, blatant, oppressive, unprecedented, annul