**Elections Without Change, Olena Nikolayenko, June 8, 2012***Nikolayenko is assistant professor of political science at Fordham University. Her* [*full article*](https://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/articles_papers_reports/0129.html) *was published on the Carnegie Council website. The following excerpt has been modified for the classroom.*
**Is Russia an Illiberal Democracy?**

Vladimir Putin's inauguration ceremony on May 7, 2012 took place amid a series of mass protests against the president. One of the largest protest events—the March of the Millions (Marsh millionov)—occurred on May 6. Although the protest did not live up to its name since it did not attract a million protesters, a record number of 100,000 people participated, according to the event organizers. Representing a wide spectrum of ideological views, protesters denounced the elections as fraudulent and demanded Putin's resignation. They chanted the slogans "Russia without Putin" and "Putin Must Go."

In response to the protests, the Russian government deployed a plethora of repressive methods. One of the first victims was the independent media. The websites of the newspaper Kommersant and the radio station Echo of Moscow were subject to DDoS attacks (Distributed Denial of Service attacks), impeding citizens' access to information during the protest events. Another state countermove was the blockage of routes to the protest sites. Moreover, the Moscow draft board announced that any young men of draft age who were detained would receive a notice to serve in the army.

Nevertheless, opinion polls suggest that the majority of Russians still favor Putin as the country's president. The Levada Center [found](http://www.levada.ru/27-04-2012/grazhdane-poshli-na-chetvertyi-srok) that only one-fifth of Russians supported the slogan "Russia without Putin" in April 2012. Opinion polls further indicate that Putin remains the most popular Russian politician. Had elections been [held in May 2012](http://www.levada.ru/31-05-2012/maiskie-reitingi-odobreniya-doveriya-i-polozheniya-del-v-strane-elektoralnye-reitingi), 39 percent of Russians would have voted for Putin, while the second most popular option was "against all candidates."

*\*Editor’s note: Putin won the election in March 2012 with 64 percent of the vote\**

**Suggested questions:**

1. Based upon this information, is Russia a functioning democracy? Why or why not?
2. Based on this information, would you consider Russia to be an illiberal democracy? Why or why not?
3. How is the information above consistent with trends in 20th and 21st century Russian history?