Power Behind the Ballot

Read how elections, arrests, and information controls can protect a government's power.

7.C.6.3.C "Describe how contemporary authoritarian governments maintain power over citizens (e.g., denial of civil rights, illegitimate elections, restrictions on free speech and the free exercise of religion, refusal of due process protections..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline actions officials took, then circle words that explain how those actions could help leaders stay in power.

How Leaders Hold Power in Belarus

1. In Belarus, a country in eastern Europe, President Alexander Lukashenko has held power since 1994. After the 2020 presidential election, many Belarusians protested the official results. Human rights groups and other governments challenged the election's fairness. Authorities had kept several would-be opponents off the ballot, limiting voters' choices before anyone voted. When officials can block strong rivals and declare a winner despite serious doubts about the vote, an election may appear to give citizens a choice while helping leaders stay in office.

2. Street protests brought another test of power. Police detained thousands of people, including peaceful demonstrators, after the 2020 election. Human rights groups reported beatings and poor conditions in detention. Some detainees struggled to see a lawyer or receive a fair hearing. A person who expects arrest for speaking out may stop attending protests, even without a direct order to stay home. Denying due process also makes it harder to challenge an arrest. The threat can silence people who disagree with the government.

3. Independent news outlets could have helped citizens compare official claims with other accounts. Instead, Belarusian authorities blocked news websites and arrested journalists. They also forced some independent groups to close. These actions reduced places where citizens could share evidence, organize, or question officials in public. Elections, arrests, and limits on speech work together: voters have fewer choices, critics face punishment, and neighbors may hear only the government's account. This does not mean every citizen agrees with the leaders. It means speaking and acting against them carries serious risks.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did keeping would-be opponents off the ballot help leaders hold power?

2. How could denying detainees a lawyer or a fair hearing help the government keep control?

3. How did blocking news websites make it harder for citizens to question officials?

4. Why might arrests after a protest silence people who were never arrested?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a fictional country where officials approve every election candidate and only government newspapers can report on elections. Write four sentences explaining how each rule could help leaders stay in power, how the rules work together, and one thing voters might not know.

ANSWER KEY

Power Behind the Ballot

GRADE 7 · 7.C.6.3.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline actions officials took, then circle words that explain how those actions could help leaders stay in power. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did keeping would-be opponents off the ballot help leaders hold power?	**It limited voters' choices by preventing some rivals from running.**
2	How could denying detainees a lawyer or a fair hearing help the government keep control?	**It made arrests harder to challenge and increased the risk of speaking out.**
3	How did blocking news websites make it harder for citizens to question officials?	**Citizens had fewer places to find accounts that differed from official claims or to share evidence.**
4	Why might arrests after a protest silence people who were never arrested?	**People who expect arrest for speaking out may stop attending protests.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Officials could reject candidates who might defeat the current leaders. Government newspapers could leave out criticism of those leaders. Together, the rules would limit both voters' choices and the information they have about the election. Voters might not know why a popular candidate was barred from running.

Accept other passage-supported explanations that connect a government action to its effect on citizens' choices, speech, or ability to challenge officials. The Your Turn response should explain both rules and their combined effect, not just name them.