



AP Government & Politics: Comparative 1999 Sample Student Responses

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Ethnic conflict can be disastrous for any political system, whether it is in a third world country or an advanced western nation. The conflicts often weigh heavily on those in government, as has been the case in Russia and Mexico. The Russians have fought numerous ethnic civil wars since the downfall of the Soviet Union, most importantly against the Chechens. Mexico's politics are plagued by the enduring Zapatista rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas.

Both Mexico and Russia have done their best to put down ethnic rebellions. Images of Russian troops bombing Chechnya's capital are still haunting, and Mexico continues to fight a losing battle against the Zapatista guerillas. While the ethnic conflict in itself is disturbing, the political repercussions can be enormous and destabilizing.

The war in Chechnya had a great impact on the Russian Presidential elections. It caused disillusionment amongst the Russian people regarding Boris Yeltsin's capacity to rule. It brought out fractured partisan conflict, most notably the candidacy of Aleksandr Lebed, a general in the Chechnyan conflict. People sick of the war reverted to the Communists, and the ailing Yeltsin faced

a runoff against his communist challenger. Only with rebels' support was president Yeltsin able to win reelection and hold Russia back from the brink of communism.

The Zapatista rebellion in Mexico also had serious political implications in a nation already torn by corruption and economic despair. The most notable consequence of the prolonged rebellion has been the further weakening of the PRI, Mexico's longstanding dominant party. The PRI has ~~the~~ ^{won} every Presidential contest and most regional governorships since its inception in 1929.

However, instability, corruption, and economic collapse in addition to the government's inability to defeat the rebels, has led to an increase in support for the rival parties, the PAN and PRD. In fact, in the last decade, the PRI has lost a number of crucial governorships and the mayorship of Mexico City.

Ethnic conflict in Russia and Mexico has been a political migraine that neither country could completely handle. It remains to be seen if these conflicts will bring about the collapse of the political establishment.

Ethnic conflict has always been a problem in world politics as various nations of people have been encompassed into countries under single governments. Since 1991 both Mexico and Russia have had serious ethnic conflicts that they have dealt with in similar ways.

Mexico had a major conflict in its southernmost state of Chiapas recently. It involved the indigenous people who wanted more rights and reform in land policy. The people formed a group called the Zapatistas and temporarily captured a small city in '94. Since then the Mexican government has ~~also~~ had to deal with more violence and struggle. The principle method that the Mexican government used to resolve the conflict was military occupation of the area. However, this strategy was not highly effective and the government grew violent too. The response has lowered stability in Mexico by causing the people to question the party that has ruled for over 50 yrs, the PRI. Because of the unwillingness of the PRI to negotiate and because of the militarization of Chiapas, ~~Mexico~~ the PRI is losing what has been a stable government. Similarly in Russia, the area in the south called Chechnya has recently tried

to leave the Russian Federation. The people that live there are not ethnic Russians but Chechnyans. This ethnic group conflicted with the rest of Russia and mostly ethnic Russians. Like Mexico, Russia sent military units to Chechnya to stop the rebellion. The tactic was effective as Chechnya did not leave. This move actually helped stability within most of Russia because Russia needed Chechnya as an area of resources and territory for trade. People gained a little bit of trust in the government. Although other ethnic groups also wanted to leave, most of Russia supported the government in its decision.

Both Mexico and Russia have used military power to suppress ethnic revolt in the southern portions of their countries. The Chiapas region in southern Mexico has been torn by civil war for many years as the central government has attempted to suppress the revolutionary movement. The republic of Chechnya attempted to declare independence in the early 1990s but Boris Yeltsin used strong military force to keep the small ~~republic~~ republic inside of the Russian Federation.

The Chiapas problem in Mexico has calmed down recently but the problem is largely unsolved. The Chiapas region is poor, and of a more predominant Indian heritage than the rest of Mexico. The handling of Chechnya has not shown well of the administration of Boris Yeltsin. Many feel that the strong use of force was not warranted and that Yeltsin is directly responsible for the loss of many lives both civilian and military. It has been ~~at~~ one of the factors that has led to the public's mistrust of Yeltsin and his government. Because of the isolation of Chiapas both economically and ethnically from the rest of Mexico many Mexicans from other regions of the country are unsympathetic to their cause.