

POLA01 – Critical Issues in Politics: Revolutions notes

Intro to course

Social revolutions:

- They are both inspiring and tragic
- They involve massive people who successfully seek change

- **Inspiration:** Inspiring examples of rapid political change
(EX: Russia masses of workers led by **Vladimir Lenin** who just a few months prior was sitting in a cafe in Zurich led a revolt that took over Russia not only that but challenged global capitalism)
- In China a librarian (search up name) led a group of rebel fighters to unite China to a modern state that today challenges the United States as a global hegemon (Having dominance over another group)
- In Iran a radical cleric who was sitting in Iraq successfully overthrew an American doctor who everyone thought would not be ousted

- **Tragedy:**
- EX: in the Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin in between 1937-1938 he killed a thousand people a day, they were shot. Just before WW2 he wiped out the entire leadership of the Soviet army
- In China Mao came into power in 1949 and decided in the 1950s to institute radical and cultural reform. What he does in that reform called the Great Leap Forward leads to the deaths of hundreds of millions of people.
- In Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge under **Pol Pot** in the 1970s Pol Pot killed a quarter of the population of Cambodia. Every fourth person in Cambodia was killed by one of these regimes.

Start of lecture

- **What is a social revolution:** You have to understand the distinction between Government, Regime, And State
- **Government:**
- The group of people who are in power at a given time Ex;
 - Barack Obama Government
 - Justin Trudeau Government
- **Regime (how people gain power):** The set of rules in which political power is gained and maintained
 - Democracy is a type of regime which where power is gained and maintained in an election

- Whoever gets the most seat in parliament that's the rule that determines who is in power
- Hereditary(passed on by blood):in a monarchy how you gain power is not through a voting system but simply is just who is the oldest son of the king that's the rule
- Possession of the largest gun
- Trump is trying to in many ways to undermine democracy in the United States by trying to alter the regime by blocking voting by reducing the people's ability to vote that is an example of people who are trying to change the regime
- The constitution is a rule

- **State:**The things that don't change from election to election So when the conservatives come into power in the next election you're not going to have a fundamental change in who the police are or who's in the military
 - The police
 - The military
 - The welfare office

To keep in mind:The distinction between State,Regime,And government is less obvious in an autocracy(an autocracy is a system of government in which one person has absolute power(Example North Korea))

Two types of revolutions:

- **Political revolution:**Instances in which **government or regime but not state** is overthrown by a popular movement in an irregular fashion
- Example:A classic example is the Arab Spring in 2011 where you have masses of people on the street
- **Quite common:**Serbia 2000, Georgia 2003, Ukraine 2004, Kyrgyzstan 2005, Egypt 2011, Tunisia 2011, Algeria and Sudan 2019.
- Right now in Belarus they are attempting a political revolution by overthrowing the dictator
- **Often peaceful:**Peaceful protests in the 21st century are shown to be more effective than a violent protest.
- **Often no impact:**Rapid return of old officials in Egypt, Ukraine,Kyrgyzstan.Sometimes they lead to democracy but often they have no impact, minimal change.
- The average person a political revolution had no impact on their lives
- **Social revolution:**Rapid, fundamental change, and often violent transformation of a country's state structure,that is accompanied by mass revolts from below

➤ **State Transformation:**

-Destruction of old army;creation of new one

➤ Transformation of **social structure**

-Class structure:

-Nationalization of private property

-Destruction of land owning class

-Religious Transformation:

-Introduction of sharia

In a social revolution it affects everyone

-Example:Pol pot empties cities in cambodia in 1975,killed a quarter of the population

What is the difference between a social revolution and a social movement to what extent is a revolution a movement?

All revolutions have to be sorted by movements or parties from outside state social movements often create social revolutions.The vast majority of time social movements lead to a bad sort of political revolution where they overthrow they overthrow the government in power but they don't lead to fundamental change

Why can't social revolutions be peaceful??Could you explain how it's different from political revolutions?

Social revolutions cannot be peaceful because its rapid and it involves the seizure of property from other people and the destruction of the whole social class that's why it cannot be peaceful. It is almost never peaceful. When you try to take property from the rich they are not just going to give it up that's why it tends to be more violent.

➤ **Rejection of the past**

-Social revolutions overwhelming involve the rejection of the past

-The french revolution created a new calendar

-Russidan communists turn churches into warehouses

-Isis destruction of monuments

-New social mores:”comrade”rather than “sir” (In russia instead of calling eachother “sir”they call each other “Comrades”

➤ **Violence and social revolution**

➤ **La marseillaise**

-Written after the french revolution to inspire troops against purssian invaders of France

-The anthem of social revolutions its very bloody it was made by the french revolution in the 1790s to inspire the troops againsts prussian invaders

➤ It was very bloody

-”raise the bloody banner!”

-”let the impure blood water our land!”

-”Tremble, tyrants, and traitors”

Social revolutions are extremely overly violent because if you're going to change the fundamental way in which wealth is distributed people don't like to give up their property.

-In russia for example in the 1917 revolution they decided to distribute apartments of the rich and give it to the poor so there not going to if i ask if i like your car can i have it please the person is not going to give it up without a fight to keep it. So these are inherently violent cases.

Does the civil rights movement count as a revolution because of the great social reform its caused?

In that case that is very gradual and it was through the law we were talking about cases In where it was not through the law. Theres a lot of things that can change society but very slowly.

Are social revolutions possible in the first world countries or the global north?

In principle yes karl marx expected social revolutions to happen in industrialized societies it turns out that this was not the case but they tend to happen in war developed countries

➤ **Do social revolutions result in democracy**

➤ **Almost never result in democracy**

-In the short term social revolutions almost never result in democracy

-If your going to attack large groups and seized their property that inherently involves the violates the integral rights that are in democracy

-people are never going to vote for their elimination

-So overwhelmingly in the short term at least social revolutions ends in dictatorship not democracy

-The fundamental change in who gets wealth and who doesn't is a violent process that is not consistent with the respect of human rights and individual rights that is the heart of democracy

To summarize social revolutions in the primary issue is the rich vs the poor?

Overwhelmingly that's the case but it's also about forcing people to abide by sharia law as in iran and afghanistan

Is a military coup considered a social revolution?

A military coup is not considered a social revolution because it has to come from outside the state

➤ **Extremely uncommon**

- Radical transformation of state and society is rare
- The vast majority of states never experience revolutions
- Of 355 authoritarian regimes since 1900 just 20 revolutions

➤ **Impact of social revolutions**

-**Create durable authoritarian regimes**

-examples USSS 74 years;mexico 80 years, china 69+ years

-**Humanitarian catastrophes**

-examples 25% of population in cambodia 1975-1979,\$0 million in China's great Leap Forward

-**Foster new global ideologies**

- French revolution :Nationalism
- Russian revolution: Communism
- Iranian revolution: Islamism

They aren't many of these cases but they dramatically changed modern history so they are with studying

Clear examples of social revolutions

- France in 1789
- Russia in 1917
- China in 1949
- Cuba in 1959
- Cambodia in 1975
- Iran and Nicaragua in 1979
- Taliban 1996

➤ **What is not a social revolution**

- Belarus is not an example of an emerging social revolution
- Ukraine 2014/Arab spring
- Overthrow of regime but preservations of existing social/state structures
- US in 1776 is not a social revolution but a political revolution why? Because the fundamental class structure was not altered and they did not have a fundamental redistribution of property

What's going on in belarus?

There was an attempt on a political revolution people are protesting

Which one of revolutions were the worst as in the bloodiest?

The worst one would be cambodia in 1975 where a quarter of the population was killed basically pol pot tried to turn the country into a labour camp and killed 25% of the population

Structural versus voluntarist explanations(Theoretical distinction a way of understanding the world)

➤ Structural explanation

- Very slow moving
- Very difficult for any individual to alter
- very predictable
- focus on historical long term variables
- such as culture,geography,National character

Examples religious tradition

➤ Voluntarist explanation

- Depends on the action of a particular individual or random event
- Unpredictable/contingent
- (almost) any outcome possible

Examples:

