

Week 6: Explaining Social Revolution: Competing Approaches (October 8, 10)

Revolutions require collective action, and this activity illustrates the collective problem to students (from active learning web site):

"Take out a small piece of paper, and put your name on it. You have two options for how section will end this week. Your first option is that you may leave five minutes early, no questions asked. I will not be covering any material in the last five minutes, so students who remain in class will gain no advantage either from substantive discussion or from participation. To take this option, write "5 min" on your sheet of paper. The second option you have is to gamble for the opportunity to leave 10 minutes early. If you choose to gamble, write "gamble" on your sheet of paper. After everyone has made a decision, I will collect all of the sheets of paper. I will count the number of people who chose to gamble, and I will roll a die that many times. If I roll a 6 in any of those tries, EVERYONE may leave 10 minutes early. As should be obvious, the more students who choose to gamble, the better your odds are of leaving 10 minutes early. If I do not roll a 6, those who gambled must stay the entire section, while those who chose to leave 5 minutes early may do so." **I only tried this in one of two sections. Students figured it out pretty quickly and EVERYONE gambled (probably because I have one hyper-active student who roused everyone up – which speaks to voluntarism & how charismatic leadership can overcome collective action problem).**

Afterwards, students find out the results and discuss why some of them chose (not) to free ride.

1. Clarify collective action problem
 - If everyone in a group shares interests, will they act collectively to get there? ***The Logic of Collective Action*** by Olson
 - "Tragedy of the commons", battles over dishes with roommates today. **In one section, this was too easy while in other really clarified things for people.**
 - Bring them back to Bates' market boards: why did urban voters were of more concern to the leaders than the rural voters? How do we resolve collective action problems?
2. Discuss how each of the readings addresses collective action problem that needs to be resolved for resolution to happen (notes on questions to address below)

Marx & Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*

- Argument: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles;" In the course of history, classes realign themselves with changing means of production. In Marx's time, bourgeoisie vs. proletariat & bourgeois society is turning on itself.
- What is the purpose of the Communist Manifesto? Do we need the manifesto if the revolution is inevitable?
- Is Marx entirely critical of capitalism, or does he think there are good things about it, too?
- What factors play no role in Marx's theory [culture, ideology, individuals]?

James Davies, Toward a Theory of Revolution

Argument: Revolutions are caused by the prolonged period of objective economic & social development followed by sharp reversal. **Why**: people fear that ground gained with great effort will be lost. Introduces the **J-curve**.

- Who is Davies responding to?
- How do you empirically assess the mood of the people?
- Are Davies' cases truly revolutions? [Dorr's Rebellion of 1842, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Egyptian Revolution of 1952]

Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, (Cambridge University Press 1979)

"Revolutions are not made; they come" (W. Philipps)

- Defines social revolutions as rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures. How useful is this definition today?
- Discuss three key features of Skocpol's argument:
 - Structuralism.
 - Interaction between international and domestic factors. Nations that are threatened either economically or militarily by competitors need to raise new forms of revenue and promote faster economic development → failure to adjust to these pressures is why crises can lead to social revolutions. What other arguments emphasized the interaction of international and domestic context in previous readings?
 - Autonomy of the state.
- **Background conditions determine the resulting structure of the state – do we agree?**
Based on discussion in my section students came to conclusion that while structure may be responsible for the onset of revolution, leaders determine the shape of the state following a revolution.
 - What can we learn from 3 cases? Why is selecting on the dependent variable a bad thing?
 - Why are there so few revolutions?
 - What are the parallels to Moore's argument and what are the differences?
 - How useful is Skocpol's theory for later revolutions [Iran] ? *I think this question is better for next week actually & students didn't really know much about Iran.*

Eric Selbin, "Revolution in the Real World: Bringing Agency Back In," In John Foran, ed. *Theorizing Revolutions* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 123-136.

Argument: revolutions are due to people and their actions. Leaders organize a population and describe the vision around which a revolution is built; they do so by invoking ideas, ideals, symbols, and revolutionary mythology. Without a powerful "revolutionary story", there will be no revolution.

- How parsimonious is Selbin's theory?
- Can leaders override structural conditions and create revolution where Skocpol wouldn't predict it? Examples?

So are you more convinced by the structuralist or the voluntarist approaches? **This question initiated a very passionate discussion, and people who didn't seem to care about the readings in the past have really spoken and got excited.**