

Week 6: Revolution (Note: depending on fatigue from the paper, maybe just discuss the theories in broad terms, play some revolution-inspired game, and hand out copy of notes)

What is a revolution?

For Skocpol (p.4): Social revolutions are "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below." They are different from rebellions or (merely) political revolutions because political and social transformations happen together, and because large structural changes in society coincide with class upheaval.

Marx: Class-based movements growing out of structural contradictions of modes of production and forces of production; a transfer from one mode of production to another

What about Davies? His cases are Dorr's rebellion 1942 (US), Russian Revolution (1917), and the Egyptian Revolution of 1952; would all of these cases fit Skocpol's or Marx's conception of revolution?

What do you think of these definitions of revolution? Would you consider the American Revolutionary War a Revolution? How about the American Civil War?

Note: When thinking about theories of revolution, keep in mind the potential for "collective action problems." The logic of collective action says that people, acting in their self-interest, will often have inefficient outcomes. Like: tragedy of the commons, leaving your shopping cart in the parking lot, littering. These are free riders. For example, you want a public park to be built because you think it would be nice; you don't devote your time to lobbying for it and building it. You just take advantage of it once it's built. However, if everyone does this, then the park is not built at all and nobody gets to enjoy it.

We need collective action to address social problems. Can do that through: small groups, leaders, selective benefits (like if you pay to join Amnesty Int'l, you get a t-shirt, bumper sticker, and newsletter).

When we think of social movements, we need to invoke this logic. Why is it that some ideas, or causes, get millions of people behind them while others don't? Can identifying certain causes, like economic or "structural," explain behavior?

For Marx, where do revolutions come from?

Marx is a historical materialist; for him, all history is a matter of class relations. Can we think of pieces that we've read thus far that take a similar position?

So, if class relations are the drivers of history for Marx, how/why do class relations inevitably lead to revolution for Marx? The mode of production outgrows the society that holds it (you'll want to read to have a better idea on what this actually entails); note that for Marx this is how we got to capitalism in the first place, the Bourgeoisie outgrowing and revolting against the feudal system. What is it about capitalism leads to revolution for Marx?

First, who are the main actors involved? The proletariat and bourgeoisie

Marx talks a lot about labor and systems of production; what are these and why are they important? For Marx, a key component of the age of capitalism, and one that is key in driving capitalist societies to revolution is the alienation of labor. What's this? A good place to start looking on this is in Marx's discussion of the crucial role of labor in human lives and capitalism's system of division of labor. [Side note: Marx views labor as the essence of humanity; for instance, he says, "life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things," and that "the first historical act is thus the production of the means to satisfy these needs, the production of material life itself." When he discusses capitalism's division of labor, in which, "intellectual and material activity—enjoyment and labor, production, and consumption—devolve on different individuals"]

What is capital and what is it about capitalism that is problematic for Marx? An overview: Industrialization leads to growth of working class; for Marx, labor is what makes us human; workers in capitalism become detached from the product of their labor; work becomes self-defeating, workers working to produce capital for the capitalist to buy more labor; the only thing they get out of it is sustenance; but the bourgeoisie plants the seeds to its own destruction through the need to constantly grow and expand production; growth of factories brings with it the capacity for workers to organize, which they do to overthrow the capitalist system.

Is revolution inevitable for Marx? This one is up for debate. Levitsky said yes, since all systems have winners and losers. This could be challenged. One could argue that for Marx, the proletariat revolution was the last one because it would lead to the end of the class system (and thus the class conflict that leads to revolution).

How is Davies' argument similar to that of Marx? How does it differ? Both of them focus on economic variables to explaining revolution, but their mechanism for explaining revolution is different.

When does Davies think that revolutions are going to happen? Revolutions, for Davies, are most likely to occur when a prolonged period of objective economic and social development is followed by a short period of sharp reversal. The J-curve. Why is this the case? Hint, it has to do with the issue of relative deprivation. An expectation of the continued ability to satisfy needs—which continue to rise—and during the sharp reversal, a mental state of anxiety and frustration when manifest reality breaks from anticipated reality. The actual state of socio-economic development is less significant than the expectation that past progress, now blocked, can and must continue in the future) The crucial factor is the vague or specific fear that ground gained over a long period of time will be quickly lost.

How does Skocpol's overall argument differ from those of Marx or Davies?

Critiques of Marx: Doesn't take international capitalism into account, or the state, or the relationship between central state and regional governments. Not oppression, but weakness (of state, and of mode of social control) led to revolution

Economic variables are still a part of Skocpol's argument; what role does economics play a role for her? Economic variables are crucial in as much as they contribute to the strength or weakness of the state.

Why is the international context important for Skocpol in explaining the occurrence of social revolution? Look here for the role of military and economic competition. Nations left behind by their neighbors are forced to squeeze money from their aristocrats and their peasants in an effort to maintain their defenses against modernizing threats. This international pressure may cause the crises that lead to social revolutions.

She also discusses the makeup of those in the agrarian state bureaucracy; what is the agrarian state bureaucracy and how does this relate to the chances for revolution? Here, a major consideration for Skocpol is whether the bureaucrats are tied to or come from the landed elite. Why might this be important for the prospects of revolution? (For one, if bureaucrats are tied to/come from the landed elite, unable/unwilling to make reforms necessary for extraction and thus unable to get the resources to maintain the health of the state in a competitive environment)

These factors can lead to a weaker state, but the peasantry still plays a major role for Skocpol; what type of organization of the peasantry is most conducive to social revolution? Why is the case? A peasantry that has close ties to one another and is relatively autonomous from overseers. As administrative and military controls broke down in the modernizing bureaucracy, widespread popular revolts took advantage of the hiatus in supervision. For this to occur, peasants had to have some form of collective solidarity and autonomy from day-to-day supervision and control by landlords.

However, the peasantry by itself does not bring social revolution, who are the other crucial actors (low ranking state bureaucrats who are not tied to landed elite and see need for reform) Why are they necessary?

Part of the logic of her argument is that, "Revolutions are not made; they come." What does this mean? Agree? Disagree?

How does Selbin differ from all of these? "Revolutions are human creations." Leaders use ideals of liberty, justice, to compel people, and also use symbols and images from shared histories and culture. The role of stories is key, and we examine revolutions with attention to individual action and choices

What are the prospects for future revolutions? Are the prospects different in industrializing countries versus industrialized countries?

(Additional Skocpol notes): Cases: all had fiscal problems (France couldn't fund wars and lots of agrarians meant no development of industry; China land tax was fixed and had population growth; Russia had slow growth, no money for infrastructure developments, and was fighting wars). All had suffered humiliating/symbolic wartime defeats. All tried to implement modernizing reform (taxes in France, railroads in China), which led to resistance by well-organized class forces

Russia: Czarist regime fighting wars, heavy industrialization, and War→1917 revolution

France 1789: Competing with land powers on the continent (Austria and Prussia), plus maritime foe of Britain, also backlash of new coercive tax system. Estates-General allied with peasants against Crown

China 1911: Manch Dynasty facing many imperialist intrusions, also trying to put down local rebellions by devolving control to "representative assemblies" that brought on the Constitutionalist movement

Skocpol's theory is different from the alternatives in three ways. First, it explains revolutions wholly from a structural perspective. The purposive image of revolutions is wrong because it assumes that a social order can't last without the society's consensus, forgets that revolutionary masses often act without guidance or a clear sense of direction, and falsely suggests that revolutionary processes can be understood in terms of the interests of the revolutionary groups. Skocpol agrees with Wendell Phillips: "Revolutions are not made; they come." The second way Skocpol's theory is different is that it emphasizes the importance of international forces. She thinks that all modern social revolutions are reactions to the fact that different nations modernize and develop capitalist economies at different rates. Nations left behind by their neighbors are forced to squeeze money from their aristocrats and their peasants in an effort to maintain their defenses against modernizing threats. This international pressure is what causes the crises that lead to social revolutions. The third distinctive feature of her theory is its insistence on the potential autonomy of the state. Whereas previous theories viewed political struggles as secondary signs of the deep economic or structural problems, Skocpol does not assume that politics can always be reduced to conflicts over economic interests. The state has interests of its own, such as stability and order, that may lead it into conflict with the upper classes. For instance, the state may make concessions to lower classes to quell uprisings even if those concessions threaten privileges of the aristocracy.

In states where revolution took place, the first development of interest to Skocpol is the collapse or incapacitation of central gov't. machinery. This was driven by two factors: (1) the magnitude of foreign pressures brought to bear on the state; and (2) the structural characteristic of a particular society that affected the capacity of leaders to respond to foreign pressure and internal unrest. She then covers the three cases in far more detail than I will provide here. In essence, Russia faced overwhelming foreign pressure which cut short its process of reform and industrialization. Russia's participation in WWI and years of costly fighting contributed to administrative paralysis, demoralization, and unrest in the army, the cities, and among the peasants. The story for China and France is different. In these cases, the agrarian bureaucracy was largely filled with representatives of the landed upper class making it impossible to implement needed modernizing reforms. As France fought in all of the European wars, her resources were strained to the limit as the defenders of property and privilege within her administrative structures prevented the reforms that would strengthen the state. In China, the central government found itself unable to respond to wave after wave of imperial intrusion, and ceded much of its power to local, gentry-dominated associations and provincial armies. These groups received powers to allocate and collect taxes, strengthening their authority over the central gov't. As the central government continued to attempt reform, the gentry power groups asserted their power and the state was further incapacitated.

A second key development in these three cases that contributed to social revolution was peasant insurrection. Like many analyses we read this week, we cannot forget the individual-level disaffection, and subsequent mobilization of peasants in these modernizing states. Central to Skocpol's analysis, is the argument that as administrative and military controls broke down in the modernizing bureaucracy, widespread popular revolts took advantage of the hiatus in supervision. For this to occur, Skocpol argues, peasants had to have some form of collective solidarity and autonomy from day-to-day supervision and control by landlords. This was the case in France and Russia and she presents evidence of widespread revolts driven by the peasants' solidarity and autonomy. However, in China, the story is one of accelerating rural violence and social banditry in outlying areas, because the provincial gentries exerted such rigid control over the peasants. However, her general conclusion holds: peasants need a "tactical space" for insurrection to translate administrative breakdown into social revolution.