

Syllabus

Course Objectives: The purpose of this course is to provide an introduction to and an overview of theories of revolution and contentious collective action, as well as the concrete historical experiences of societies in the modern period that have experienced these phenomena. It is worth noting that in some traditions revolution is considered positively (for example, early American society (1775-1812), 20th century Russia/Soviet Union, post-1789 France, the 20th century Arab world, early Zionism, 20th century China); whereas in other societies the view is more or less negative (England after Cromwell, continental Europe between 1815-1914, classical and medieval Islamic societies, China for much of the imperial period, Japan, India). In the West the consideration of revolution goes as far back as Aristotle, so the topic is hardly new. To my knowledge, independent generic political science courses on revolution at the university level have been on the books only since the 1950s, becoming a staple in the early to mid-1960s. Since the collapse of communist systems in the 1989-1991 era, interest in such courses has somewhat declined, but it is doubtful that the situation will reach the point where such courses will disappear.

Revolutions are historically rare, whereas contentious collective action, centered on social movements, is a broader theoretical field. The literature in this area for many years prominently featured developments in Western democratic systems, but works in this tradition began to be applied to the Soviet-type European systems in the 1980s and have since proliferated to “third” and “fourth” world authoritarian systems.

Upon successful completion of this course, students can expect to have gained a familiarity with:

- Theories of macro-social change
- Theories of stratification systems in society: political, social, economic
- Theories of revolution
 1. “Natural Course”
 2. Psychological
 3. Relative Deprivation
 4. Rational Actor
 5. Structuralist
 6. Resource Mobilization
- Wars and revolutions
- Continuities and discontinuities in major social revolutions
 1. English
 2. American
 3. French
 4. Mexican

5. Russian
 6. Chinese
 7. Vietnamese
 8. Algerian
 9. Cuban
 10. Nicaraguan
 11. Iranian
- Contentious collective action and social movement theory

Course Content. As indicated, the emphasis will be on finding ways to explain the causes and effects of revolution and contentious collective action independently of any concrete historical cases. But we will also be interested in examining the specific historical examples. Because the subject is so vast, we can only be selective in terms of actual cases. Students can expect to be introduced to materials relative to revolution in England, the USA, France, Russia, China, Vietnam, Algeria, Mexico, Cuba, and Iran. Attention will also be given to the Eastern European revolutions of the late 1980s, and the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979. As to thematic components, we will try to distinguish among revolution, revolt, anti-colonial rebellion, civil war, mutiny, coups d'état, jacqueries, urban riots, banditry, anomic violence, terrorism, and criminality. However, these various forms of civil violence are extremely difficult to keep separate and distinct from each other! Not least of the problems in this regard is that ideological positions have come to be attached to these terms, and so their analytical usefulness is sometimes difficult to appreciate. In addition to trying to distinguish among these forms of civil violence, we will examine various approaches to the study of revolution and political violence.

Method of Presentation. This is a seminar-size class, and there will be ample opportunity for discussion. I will present directed lectures when this seems necessary, but discussion will be an important aspect of the proceedings. Students should come to class prepared to participate actively in the work of the seminar, including, of course, the assigned readings, but also material that they have been exposed to from other courses that they have taken, as well as from media coverage of world developments).

Leading Seminar Discussion: Each seminar participant will lead the discussion at least once during the semester. That student will state the thesis of the author and show how the author seeks theoretically to advance that thesis. Students will have no more than 15 minutes to make these points. Please be aware that the assignment is NOT to summarize the author's points but instead to state in a sentence or two what the thesis is, and then to analyze the framework the author uses to support that thesis. There is a major difference between summarizing an argument and analyzing that argument methodologically.

Meanwhile, the student who is leading the discussion will have sent to the rest of the members of the seminar a list of at least five questions that s/he would like the class to discuss. The questions must be substantive and analytical, rather than descriptive and/or informational. For example, if this were a class on European politics, an appropriate question for a week's readings on the role of bureaucratic politics in the European Union

could be: <in what ways have coalition politics in the European parliament been impacted by bureaucratic turf battles within the European Commission in the period from 1991-present?> An inappropriate question for such readings would be <who was the President of the European Commission in 1998?> Questions must be submitted via CourseWorks and must be posted by 12:00 noon on the Tuesday before the Wednesday meeting of the Seminar. Please familiarize yourselves with CourseWorks so that the procedure outlined above can unfold without any glitches.

Method of Evaluation: Students will be evaluated in terms of the following:

- First term exam: 20%
- Second term exam: 20%
- Final exam: 35%
- Class Participation: 25%

Assigned Readings.

- Jack Goldstone, ed., Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative and Historical Studies, 3rd. ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage, 2008.
- Theda Skocpol, States and Social Revolutions. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Charles Tilly and Sidney Tarrow, Contentious Politics. Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2007.
- Stephen Walt, Revolution and War. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Course Schedule.

5 Sept: Organizational Meeting: Introduction to the Subject

12 Sept: Conceptualizing Revolution
Readings: Goldstone, pp. 1-84

19 Sept: Structural Theory: Causes
Readings: Skocpol, pp. 3-157

26 Sept: Structural Theory: Outcomes
Readings: Skocpol, pp. 161-293

3 Oct: First Term Exam

10 Oct: Theory of Contentious Politics
Readings: Tilly and Tarrow, pp. 1-109

17 Oct: Social Movements and Lethal Conflicts
Readings: Tilly and Tarrow, pp. 111-217

- 24 Oct: Revolutions and War: France
Readings: Walt, pp. 1-128
- 31 Oct: Revolution and War: Russia
Readings: Walt, pp. 129-209
- 7 Nov: Revolution and War: Iran and Other Cases
Readings: Walt, pp. 210-351
- 14 Nov: Second Term Exam
- 21 Nov: Counter-revolution
Readings: Goldstone, pp. 85-140
- 28 Nov: Republican and Marxist Revolutions
Readings: Goldstone, pp. 157-211
- 5 Dec: Anti-authoritarian and Anti-communist Revolutions
Readings: Goldstone, pp. 211-323.