Social Revolutions: Their Causes, Patterns, and Phases

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of social revolutions. In this article, I take a synthetic approach and hypothesize that the three most important factors that explain the onset of social revolution are economic development, regime type, and state ineffectiveness. I also discuss the importance of domestic and external factors that trigger social revolutions. In addition, I make a distinction between the onset and success of social revolutions. Finally, I identify two distinct types of social revolutions.

Keywords

social revolution, violence, conflict research, political science, social sciences, comparative politics, political sociology, sociology

Introduction

Popular uprisings are as old as history. In classical Greece, "revolutions" were considered a normal way of assuming power by differing regimes. They occurred whenever democratic, oligarchic, and monarchic regimes alternated in assuming power, and such alternation of political power often came through violence (Arendt, 1977; Brinton, 1938; see also Kim, 1991). Yet not all political thinkers of the time believed that "revolutions" were a permanent aspect of politics. Aristotle, for instance, argued that the most stable political system was neither a democracy, oligarchy, nor a monarchy but a combination of the three. Aristotle's stable political system would have a large middle class. The middle class would be a hybrid class, which would take advantage of the wisdom and wealth of the oligarchy and monarchy but also would consist of the greatest number of people as was the case in a democracy (Sabine & Thorson, 1973). In other words, when property and power are widely distributed among individuals of a given society, there will be no good reason to ignite revolution. Indeed, modern industrial democracies, which have a large middle class, seem to be politically stable, and this evidence suggests that Aristotle's theory has stood the test of time.

Social scientists have long debated the factors responsible for revolution. Yet there seems to be no clear agreement. Some stress the importance of economic factors. Others emphasize political reasons. Still others rely on social determinants. Furthermore, interstate politics and distribution of power are assumed to play some role. In this study, I take a synthetic approach and argue that a combination of economic, political, social, and external factors is responsible for the onset of social revolutions. More specifically, I hypothesize that a below mid-level economic development, non-democratic regime, and state ineffectiveness are the three most important variables that affect the probability of the onset of revolutions. Economic development can lead individuals and groups to demand political reform and can be the cause of economic discontent. Established democratic regimes, with their pragmatic and inclusive approaches to politics, also seem to influence more political stability than autocratic or authoritarian systems. In addition, the level of state effectiveness, aside from regime type, seems to influence political violence. How the state addresses the demands of its people for political reforms and economic welfare as well as how the state uses its coercive force responsibly would matter whether or not it faces revolution. Finally, external factors influence revolution but seem to serve mainly as triggering effects. By triggering effects, I mean conditions such as wars that ignite the onset of social revolutions (see also Eckstein, 1963). External factors may also, as in the case of Soviet Union's assistance to Chinese communists in the 1930s and 1940s, facilitate revolutions.

I also identify two patterns of revolutions, which I have called spontaneous and planned. Where revolution is ignited without any significant organized effort, I call it spontaneous. An example of a spontaneous revolution is the Russian Revolution of 1917. Where guerrilla-led revolution occurs, I

refer to it as planned. An example of a planned revolution is the Chinese Revolution of 1949. Moreover, I distinguish between the onset and success of revolution. While the success of revolution heralds the transformation of the old political and economic order, onset refers to the initial popular uprisings. I contend that the success of social (and political) revolutions comes right after the onsets of revolutions. Success in spontaneous revolutions seems to occur when the military is acquiescent and/or supportive of popular uprisings. Success in planned revolutions, on the other hand, tends to happen when the military is defeated by guerrilla fighters. In addition, organizational strength, resources, popular support, and ideology seem to matter for the success of planned revolutions.

Theories of Revolution

Modern social science scholarship on revolution is vast and diverse. Davies (1962) and Gurr (1968) are two scholars who are mainly credited for the development of what is known as the sociopsychological theory of revolution. Individual behavior takes front seat in these theories. According to Davies, revolutions occur when long-term socioeconomic development is followed by short-term and sharp economic reversals. More specifically, as people experience improving economic conditions over time they come to expect that they will be able to obtain more and more. When the sharp reversal in economic fortune comes, ability to obtain goods declines while the peoples' expectations as to what they believe they should be able to obtain continue to rise. The gap between what people are able to obtain and what they believe they should be able to obtain grows and turns into a crisis of rising expectations. And unhappy, unsatisfied, and frustrated individuals then resort to political violence. While Davies' J-curve theory of revolution seems to have some value in explaining revolution, it does not clearly embrace political reasons as explanatory variables. Not all revolutionaries are affected by economic woes. Despotism, corruption, lack of political freedom, and issues of political participation may well be high in the minds of the middle classes and urban dwellers before and during revolutions. Gurr's theory of relative deprivation refers to individuals' perceptions of the discrepancy between the standard of living that they believe deserving and the standard of living they are actually capable of achieving. When the deprivation is intense, anger, frustration, and political violence follow. Gurr (1968) also includes political variables such as legitimacy and institutionalization to explain civil strife. However, while deprivation could be a factor in affecting revolution, Gurr (1968) does not clearly connect this variable with its possible cause, the economic development process.

Johnson's (1966) theory of equilibrium asserts that valuecoordinated behavior among the people of a given society leads to political stability. Specifically, socialization helps the perpetuation of values and norms, which lead to the presence of trust and confidence among the people, a moral community. Government also ought to be legitimized for the societal values and norms to hold. To the extent that social, economic, and political systems stay in balance and change in equal proportions as well as evolutionarily, political stability would be guaranteed. Revolutions occur only when disequilibrium in value congruence exists. Political leaders could re-stabilize the system by making some reforms. Otherwise, revolution (facilitated by accelerators such as military mutiny and guerrilla warfare) will break out and force the system to change to a new equilibrium. On the surface, Johnson's argument seems logically consistent. However, Johnson (1966) seems to overstate the existence of equilibrium in social systems. For instance, can we really say that there is value congruence among people in all kinds of regimes? In traditional societies, the peasantry could be exploited by the landed classes, but the former class (although resentful of its way of life) may still stay peaceful for a long period of time. In other words, the absence of violence may not imply the presence of value congruence. Put differently, Johnson seems to conflate value congruence or equilibrium with political stability.

Huntington (1968) relies on modernization theory to explain social revolutions. According to him, "Revolution is . . . an aspect of modernization" (p. 265). His main argument is that modernization, specifically social mobilization and economic development, leads to political awareness. Consequently, the people, being educated and urbanized, start to demand greater political participation. If political institutions do not allow or establish mechanisms for the incorporation of the mobilized people, political violence, including revolution, is possible. In other words, similar to Johnson's (1966) thesis, revolution is caused by the gap between political mobilization of the people and the inability of political institutions (or their failure to continuously adapt) to absorb the mobilized masses into politics. In addition, not inconsistent to Davies' (1962) and Gurr's (1968) analyses, Huntington (1968) also contends that the gap between people's expectations and satisfactions (aspects of social mobilization and economic development, respectively) can be used as a measure of political instability. In effect, Huntington (1968) links the equilibrium theory of Johnson and the sociopsychological theories of Davies and Gurr by stating that the gap between expectations and satisfactions is caused by the absence of opportunities for social mobility and adaptable political institutions (Goldstone, 1994). Huntington (1968) is credited for bringing the importance of political institutions in the explanation of revolution. However, one can identify at least two problems in Huntington's arguments. First, he seems to suggest that social mobilization and economic development independently and directly affect revolution. It seems to me that the causal arrow should point from economic development to social mobilization to revolution. In other words, economic development seems to influence social mobilization, and social mobilization would potentially lead to revolution. Second, Huntington seems to overstate the importance of political participation. For

instance, he credits Leninism and Lenin's communist party for making possible the political participation of millions of Soviets. It seems, to Huntington, the more people participate in a political system (and regardless of the regime type), the better. However, as Almond and Verba (1963) argue, too much popular participation may, in fact, interfere with the tasks of governance as well as the daily activities of the people.

Tilly (1978, 1994) uses what some refer to as a politicalconflict model and relies on political variables, including the pursuit of power among groups in a society, to explain collective action in general and revolution in particular. He argues that individual anger and frustration alone cannot lead to revolution. He contends that a major reason for the promotion of revolutions and collective violence is the concentration of power in national states. Such a concentration of power by states would lead to multiple sovereignty. Multiple sovereignty, according to Tilly, occurs when other groups in a society are organized to challenge the power of the state. Tilly's argument is consistent with Trotsky's (1932) idea of dual power or sovereignty (e.g., the Mensheviks and the Bolsheviks in Russia) that inevitably occurs during revolutions. Tilly argues that groups' possession of sufficient resources and strong organizations are key determinants for waging and winning revolutionary conflicts. Only when a single sovereignty, be it the government or a challenger, prevails will the revolutionary conflict be over. Tilly is credited for using political variables in explaining the process of revolution. However, Tilly not only seems to overstate the impact of political variables, but he also tends to slight or understate the importance of economic issues and factors. In addition, given Tilly's distinction between revolutionary situation (multiple sovereignty) and revolutionary outcome (power transfer), his theory seems to apply more to guerrillabased revolutions, such as those of the 1959 Cuban Revolution. As Wickham-Crowley (1991) argues, the onsets of the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917, for instance, came before political organizations and resources were established and acquired.

Using what she calls structural theory, Skocpol (1979) argues that the literature on revolution ignores the importance of politics in explaining social revolution. She forcefully contends that the state must be considered a central factor as the cause of revolution. Relying on comparative case studies of the French Revolution of 1789, Russian Revolution of 1917, and Chinese Revolution of 1911-1949 (and four other contrasting cases), she argues that the structural position and power of the state internationally, the nature of the state's relationship with the dominant classes, and class struggle among groups in society play major roles in bringing about social revolutions. International competition (both political and economic), war defeats, fiscal problems, independence of landlord's power or lack thereof, and autonomous peasant uprising are key in creating revolutionary situations. Skocpol is credited for using the state as a variable in explaining revolution. However, several problems exist in her theory. First, revolutions do not always occur after war defeats (Arjomand, 1986; Goldstone, 1994). The French Revolution of 1789, the Chinese Revolution of 1911, and the Iranian Revolution of 1979 are cases in point. Second, according to Arjomand (1986), fiscal crisis does not always precede state collapse. The Shah regime in Iran collapsed in the 1979 revolution without fiscal crisis. According to Arendt (1977), the collapse of the French state was predicted by Montesquieu 40 years before 1789. Montesquieu based his prediction on how widespread the loss of political authority had become in France in particular and Europe in general. Arendt (1977) adds that the main reason for the loss of political authority in Europe in the 18th century was the decline of religious and traditional values, which were consequences of the modern age. Thus, fiscal crisis was perhaps more of a triggering factor than the main reason for the collapse of the French state. Third, the structural or power position of the states does not always matter for revolutions. Revolutions have come in both relatively powerful states (e.g., France and Russia) and relatively weaker states (e.g., Iran and Cuba). And, as Gurr and Goldstone (1991) argue, states can and do have choices and are not, thus, helplessly constrained by international (economic and/or military) influences and structures. In addition, although external factors could trigger and facilitate the onset and success of revolutions, revolution seems, as Walt (1994) argues, to be more of a national phenomenon. Fourth, state breakdown does not always precede revolution (see also Wickham-Crowley, 1991). Examples of this are the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959. The Kuomintang and Batista regimes in China and Cuba, respectively, fell only after being defeated in revolutionary wars. Moreover, Eastern Europe's socialist states did not collapse before, but during or after, the onset of popular uprisings. Fifth, peasant uprising, autonomous or not, is not always necessary for the onset of revolution (Arjomand, 1986; Gurr & Goldstone, 1991). A case in point is the Iranian Revolution of 1979. Sixth, dominant classes were not always against the state during revolution. A case in point is the Russian Revolution of 1917. Seventh, related to some of the foregoing critiques is that Skocpol's theory does not explain all revolutions. In other words, as she herself has admitted, Skocpol has not developed a general theory of revolution (Burawoy, 1989; Kiser & Hechter, 1991; Sewell, 1996; Wickham-Crowley, 1991).

Goldstone (1991, 1994) uses what he refers to as a demographic/structural model to explain state breakdown and revolution. He argues that rapid population growth can lead to the main issues that Skocpol (1979) contends to have led to revolution, state breakdowns, elite conflicts, and popular uprisings. More specifically, population growth can lead to rising prices or inflation, which undermines the finances of states. It can also create economic conflicts among the elites as they have to compete for limited opportunities. Population growth can also lead to unemployment and underemployment. Combined with other factors such as the effects of the global economy and superpower politics, population growth increases the chances for revolution. However, at least two problems can

be identified in Goldstone's (1991, 1994) thesis. First, population growth itself is, to a large extent, a function of socioeconomic development, specifically, advances in science and technology. Hygiene and proper nutrition have been the key ingredients of mortality decline and population growth (see McKeown, 1976; Riley, 2001). If, indeed, population growth affects revolution, this is because it is affected by socioeconomic development. Moreover, the impact of population growth on economic growth rate is inconclusive. While some scholars argue that population growth has positive impact on economic growth rate (Kuznets, 1960; Simon, 1981), others contend that it has a negative effect (Ehrlich & Ehrlich, 1990). Still others assert that population has, on average, no significant impact on economic growth rate (Bloom, Canning, & Sevilla, 2003). Second, rising prices tend to be part of the general cycle in the economy and more of a triggering factor than a major condition of revolution.

Defining Social Revolution

Scholars are also not in agreement as to how social revolution is defined. Table 1 shows how different scholars have defined social revolution. One area of consensus in most of the definitions provided in Table 1 is that social revolution refers to the transformation of political and socioeconomic systems. Unlike in political revolutions, where only old political regimes are replaced by new ones, in social revolutions, both political and economic systems of the old order have to be dismantled. However, one can still identify key problems in other areas of the definitions provided in Table 1. For instance, Huntington (1968) refers to revolution as a "rapid" and "violent" phenomenon. Skocpol (1979) and Wickham-Crowley (1991) include the word "rapid" in their definitions but use "revolts" instead of "violent." Paige (2003) includes the word "rapid" in his definition but excludes the word "violent." Arjomand (1986) excludes both "rapid" and "violent" in his definition. Most, if not all, of these definitions seem to imply that social revolutions are of the same kind or exhibit the same pattern. This is not the case, however. Indeed, it was Huntington (1968) who first noticed the difference in the pattern of revolutions. He identified two patterns, which he referred to as "Western" and "Eastern." He called the French Revolution of 1789, the Mexican Revolution of 1910, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 as the Western pattern. He labeled the Chinese Revolution of 1949 as an example of the Eastern pattern. A key distinction between the two patterns, according to Huntington (1968), was that the Western pattern occurred in traditional monarchial countries and the Eastern in modernizing patrimonial states. In addition, in the Western pattern, the sequence in the unfolding of events was as follows: First, traditional states collapsed; second, social mobilizations followed; and third, new regimes were institutionalized. In the Eastern pattern, social mobilizations occurred before the fall of the states, and institutionalization of new regimes came last. One can also add another distinction between the two patterns: The Western revolutions had occurred "rapidly," whereas the Eastern had come "slowly." For instance, it is clear that the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 did not occur over night. They were *slow* in coming because insurgents in both countries had to wage protracted guerrilla warfare against well-armed authoritarian regimes. This was especially true for the Chinese revolution (see also Burawoy, 1989). However, the French Revolution of 1789 and the Russian Revolution of 1917 occurred spontaneously and thus were *rapid*. In other words, social revolutions can be either *rapid* or *slow* depending on their pattern. Interestingly, even Huntington's own definition of revolution did not account for the variation in the patterns that he observed. His definition of revolution contains only the word "rapid." In sum, few scholars seem to take such a pattern into consideration when they define revolution.

Moreover, a new wave of social revolutions had occurred when communism in Eastern Europe collapsed in the late 1980s. These revolutions have transformed the communist political and economic systems into capitalist economy and democratic regimes. Eastern European revolutions had, for the most part, occurred *rapidly* but without *violence*. They also occurred without a significant participation of the peasantry. In addition, the recent Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions share the same characteristics with Eastern European's. Despite a slight distinction between the old spontaneous and new Eastern European and North African revolutions, they can be grouped together; both were spontaneous revolutions. The absence of violence in many of the Eastern European and the two North African revolutions, however, provides a further evidence for redefining social revolution. Given the foregoing, I define social revolution as *a popular uprising that transforms an existing socioeconomic and political order* (see also Tiruneh, 2010). Absent in this definition are the words "rapid" and "violent." This is because social revolutions could be either rapid or slow and either violent or peaceful.

Table 1. Some Definitions of Social Revolution.

Source	Definition
S. P. Huntington (1968, p. 264)	A rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies
T. Skocpol (1979, p. 4)	Rapid, basic transformation of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below
S. A. Arjomand (1986, p. 383)	The collapse of the political order and its replacement by a new one
T. Wickham-Crowley (1991, p. 152)	Rapid, basic transformation of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by mass-based revolts from below
J. Paige (2003, p. 24)	Rapid and fundamental transformation in the categories of social life and consciousness, the metaphysical assumptions on which these categories are based, and the power relations in which they are expressed as a result of widespread popular acceptance of a utopian alternative to the current social order

Causes of Revolutions

Before I discuss their causes, I intend to make a distinction between the onset and success of revolutions. While the success of revolution heralds the transformation of the old political and economic orders, onset refers to the initial popular uprisings; these uprisings have to be widespread across rural and/or urban areas and a vast number of people (often in millions) have to be involved. It is my firm belief that we cannot understand the concept of revolution better unless we make such a distinction. For instance, we would be able to account for the factors that lead some revolutionary uprisings to become successful revolutions while others do not. More often than that, scholars study revolutions that have succeeded. Despite thousands and even millions of people might have participated in revolutionary uprisings that did not become successful revolutions, little attention is often given to them. An example of the foregoing is the 1905 Russian Revolution. Millions protested over several days against the economic and political hardships that had occurred under the Tsar's repressive regime, and thousands were believed to have been shot to death. Why is such a revolutionary uprising not taken seriously? As Lipsky (1976, p. 508; see also Goodwin, 2001) argued, "Research in the field should begin to examine 'failed revolutions' and 'revolutions that never took place' as well as successful ones to determine the revolutionary element or elements."

A second point that I intend to make before I discuss the causes of social revolutions is that we need to pay attention to the two patterns that we have identified earlier. What Huntington (1968; see also Brinton, 1938) calls the Western and Eastern pattern, I rename them as *spontaneous* and *planned* revolutions, respectively (see also Tiruneh, 2010). By spontaneous, I mean revolution occurring without deliberate planning but with rapid speed. Skocpol (1979) is correct in arguing that the social revolutions that she reviewed had occurred involuntarily. This does not suggest, however, that leaders and organizations did not emerge once revolutions were ignited. And, of course, they did. The Jacobins in France and the Mensheviks and Bolsheviks in Russia are cases in point. The groups in both countries were coalitions of middle and lower classes (Brinton, 1938). The point is that nobody would be able to anticipate or predict, before the onset of a spontaneous revolutionary uprising, that popular opposition and resentment against the state would be exploding and catching fire across a given country. The French Revolution of 1789, the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 satisfy the "spontaneous" pattern.

On the other hand, the guerrilla-based revolutions such as the Chinese Revolution of 1949 and the Cuban Revolution of 1959 will be referred to as "planned." By "planned" I mean these types of revolutions were deliberately organized by a group of revolutionaries. Their success also seems to take a longer time and treacherous roads, and this was especially true with the Chinese Revolution of 1949.

It should be noted that the Iranian Revolution of 1979 is probably one that does not fit neatly in the "involuntary" or "planned" category. According to Skocpol (1982), "Indeed, . . . if there has been a revolution deliberately 'made' by a mass-based social movement aiming to overthrow the old order, the Iranian Revolution against the Shah surely is it" (p. 27).

Be that as it may, a distinction between spontaneous and planned revolutions could help us in clearing up the confusion in the literature about the involuntary or voluntary/purposive nature of social upheavals. The debate over the involuntary or voluntary nature of revolutions is not, of course, new. As early as the 19th century, Wendell Phillips claimed, "Revolutions are not made; they come" (as cited in Cohen, 1973, p. 336). To Stadelmann (1975), the Berlin events in March during the German Revolution of 1848 were " . . . a compelling example of the unintentional, almost obligatory course of critical events, where individuals recognizable by name played only an incidental role . . . " (p. 49). Skocpol (1979) is adamantly opposed to the idea of voluntary revolutions. She argues that " . . . historically no successful social revolution has ever been 'made' by a mass-mobilizing avowedly revolutionary movement" (Skocpol, 1979, p. 17). Sewell (1994) contends, "Although I would allow a somewhat greater role than Skocpol does for conscious choice, I think her distrust of naïve voluntarist explanations is well placed." Hobsbawm (1962, p. 172) contended that the French Revolution of 1789 was spontaneous, whereas those revolutions that came after it (e.g., the German Revolution of 1848) were intentional or planned. Revolutionaries of the latter revolutions, according to Hobsbawm, use the French Revolution as a model. To Brinton (1938; see also Hagopian, 1974), revolution is both

spontaneous and planned. On the other side of the argument, Tilly (1978) contends that revolutions are voluntary. Wickham-Crowley (1991) also thinks that revolutions are voluntary but calls the debate "[one of] the most important unresolved issues in the study of revolution . . . " (pp. 151-154).

There is, thus, a lack of consensus among scholars on this issue. My contention is that revolutions are either spontaneous (that is, involuntary) or planned (that is, voluntary). Thus, only in planned revolutions does Tilly's (1978, 1994) prescription of the need for strong organization and sufficient resources seem to matter. And Skocpol's (1979) argument that revolutions are involuntary seems to apply only to spontaneous revolutions. In spontaneous revolutions, as Skocpol (1994) aptly argues, organizations or individual leaders did not create revolutionary crises. Indeed, scholars' criticism of Skocpol's (1979) work (see Burawoy, 1989, for instance) on this issue has to do only with the failure of the literature in making the distinction between spontaneous and planned revolutions clear. Interestingly, even Skocpol herself has not clearly done so except to suggest that her theory would not apply to different historical circumstances. Simply put, scholars seem to be arguing past each other on this issue.

Nevertheless, we also need to identify the common variables that affect revolutions in both spontaneous and planned ones. Indeed, a major criticism of Skocpol's (1979) work is that her theory is applicable only to a few cases; it does not apply across space and time (Burawoy, 1989; Sewell, 1996). So, what variables can explain the onset of revolutions? I contend that the three most important variables that increase the probability of the onset of revolutions, both for spontaneous and for planned ones, are economic development, regime type, and state ineffectiveness (see also Tiruneh, 2010). Moreover, I posit that external factors and domestic economic setbacks serve as triggering factors for the onset of spontaneous revolutions. For planned revolutions, I hypothesize that those things that inspire revolutionary leaders like political ideology and the success of other revolutionary movements as well a promise for or securing the shipment of armaments and other resources from external sources could be the triggers. The success of revolutions (both social and political), however, could not be explained by the foregoing variables only. In addition, to the variables that we have listed above, military acquiescence and/or support and military defeat would also need to be present in spontaneous and planned revolutions, respectively.

Economic Development

Economic development is believed to stand for the wealth, education, urbanization, and industrialization of a given country (Lipset, 1959). Because of the intimate connection among these variables, many scholars tend to rely on the gross domestic product per capita (GDP/C) to capture the four attributes of economic development. In this study, I will also use economic development and socioeconomic development interchangeably. Economic development changes traditional societies to a modern way of life. This has been particularly true since the advent of the Industrial Revolution, which started in Great Britain in the 18th century. With modern way of life, people tend to become more educated and are more aware of their political, social, and economic conditions. This means that the values that have sustained traditional societies for hundreds of years would start to change. New and more secular values would emerge among the people. These may include ideological orientations (see also Farhi, 1991; Sewell, 1994). Ideologies, a consequence of educational and economic advancement (see also Parsa, 2000), seem to give greater conviction to revolutionaries. People start to question the legitimacy of traditional regimes and their bureaucracies (see also Huntington, 1968). As more people get educated and become wealthy, they tend to demand the achievement of political rights, such as the right to vote and run for office. They also tend to demand the presence of civil liberties, such as equality before the law, freedom of speech, and organizational rights (see also Hagopian, 1974; Lipset, 1959; Olson, 1963). If such popular demands are not addressed, discontent will likely surface in the minds of many people (see also Kruijt, 2008). Such discontent may not come into the open for a long time but could be suddenly triggered by some other factors at any given moment. In sum, as de Tocqueville (1971) argued, revolutions could come during economic progress.

Moreover, economic development tends to bring much more urban and industrialized ways of life. As people migrate from rural areas to towns and cities, they may find themselves without jobs or without sufficient incomes (see also Goldstone, 1994; Kruijt, 2008). Workers, a product of industrial life, may also feel exploited or not getting paid fairly by capital owners. Thus, as Karl Marx argued, economic misery could make workers revolutionaries (Kamenka, 1983). Unless the government steps in to deal with economic issues, many people could find themselves unhappy and resentful (see also Huntington, 1968; Olson, 1963) and could join others if and when a revolution is triggered. Moreover, peasants who have been exploited by the landed interest or government bureaucracy could take advantage of revolutionary situations to rise up and demand for land ownership, a fair share of the crops they harvest, or a lower rate of taxation (see also Huntington, 1968; Moore, 1966; Skocpol, 1979; Wickham-Crowley, 1991; Wolf, 1994). Even some in the landed interest may find their privilege, status, and property encroached by the ever expanding capital-based economy (Moore, 1966; Skocpol, 1979). When that happens, they may hold some resentment against the state. People also could resent if the economy is mismanaged by the government and the overall quality of life in a society is declining or not improving as expected. For instance, Chirot (1994) contends, "There is no question that the most visible, though certainly not the only reason for the collapse of East European communism has been economic" (p. 166). However, it should be noted that it is a below mid-level of economic development that tends to increase the chances for revolution. Once countries reach mid-level of development, they transition to democratic rule, and democracy is least liable to revolution.

In sum, a variety of reasons including the absence of social equality, lack of political rights and opportunities, and economic hardships could create discontent among many groups of people in a given society. In other words, economic development seems to affect different groups of people differently (see also Olson, 1963). Those who would be affected by economic development and be supportive and participants of revolutions are likely to be the middle and working classes as well as the peasantry. The upper class is less likely to involve itself in a radical revolutionary environment. If we have, however, to pick one single class of citizens whose grievances would be most important for the onset of revolution, it would be the middle class. Intellectuals, professionals, artisans, small business owners, mid-size and independent farmers belong to the middle class (see also Huntington, 1968). Until the landlord class ceased to exist in economically developed countries, the bourgeois also belonged to the middle class. While the peasantry and the workers may be mainly interested in economic issues, the middle class is likely to demand drastic political reforms and transformations. In addition, the demands of the workers and the peasantry have often been sidestepped or given little attention by the state. Moreover, it is a historical fact that neither the peasantry nor the working class is known to have waged a successful revolution without the vital support and leadership of the middle class (see also Parsa, 2000). Given the constant nature of economic grievances among the lower and working classes throughout history, we may argue that the most important factor in the onset of social revolutions is the role of the middle class. For instance, Brinton (1965; see also Huntington, 1968) considered the intellectuals, who belong to the middle class, as playing a leading role in opposing autocratic state in countries like prerevolutionary France. Brinton (1965) also argued,

> The people who got the lion's share of it [France's wealth] seem to have been merchants, bankers, businessmen, lawyers, peasants who ran their own farms as businesses—the middle class. . . . It was precisely these prosperous people who in the 1780's were loudest against the government, most reluctant to save it by paying taxes or lending it money. (pp. 30-31)

It is, thus, when its legitimacy is challenged by the middle class that the state completely or nearly completely loses its legitimacy to rule and the fabric of its social support is shattered, increasing the chances for the onset of revolution.

Regime Type

Although regime type itself may, in large part, be a function of economic development, it seems to have some independent impact on the onset of revolution. A case in point is that democratic political systems or regimes have not so far experienced revolutions (Huntington, 1968). Democracies, once consolidated, tend to have a political culture that promotes negotiations, give-and-take compromises, redistributive mechanisms, and institutions that deal with group demands; they also tend to be legitimate (see also Goodwin, 2001, 2003; Wickham-Crowley, 1991). The foregoing suggests that if all countries establish democratic regimes at some point in time, violent revolution will likely cease to exist (Tiruneh, 2010). Social revolutions have rather occurred in traditional autocracies such as in France, Russia, and Ethiopia and in modern authoritarian regimes, such as Kuomintang's China and Batista's Cuba. Many autocratic and authoritarian regimes may not adjust themselves with timely reforms when faced with massive and rapid changes wrought by economic development. Communist regimes do not often allow the presence of alternative parties and civil liberties. Such regimes could lead to popular discontent and are more vulnerable to revolution.

State Ineffectiveness

The fact that not all autocratic and authoritarian regimes have faced revolution suggests that it is not regime type per se that would lead to the onset of revolution. Autocratic or authoritarian states that are quite ineffective may have a higher chance of facing revolutions. The state is often defined as the political institutions that govern a given society. According to Nordlinger (1987), the state can also be defined as the political leaders who govern a given society. To Nordlinger (1987), it is individual leaders who act and govern, not institutions. This study will use Nordlinger's conception of the state. Given that the state in this study refers to the political leaders who govern countries, political leadership may be used as a variable in place of state effectiveness or lack thereof.

There are also two approaches to the state in the social science literature. Some scholars consider the state as an independent entity that attempts to maximize its control over society and maximize its power against other states (Krastner, 1984; Lentner, 1984). While the state may attempt to maximize its power against other states, the extension of the same analogy to domestic politics, between the state and the people, seems inaccurate. As Migdal (1987) argues, "We must move away from a perspective that simply pits state against society" (p. 396). Indeed, other scholars have considered the state as an entity that is entrusted by the people to maximize their welfare (see Krastner, 1984). Without denying the level of autonomy or power states may possess (Lentner, 1984; Nordlinger, 1981), this study follows the latter approach. It can be argued that as regimes become more democratic overtime, the state is likely to become less autonomous and more responsive to the interests of the people. The fact that revolutions and major violence do not occur in democratic regimes suggests that democratic states are more effective in dealing with and managing societal concerns and well-being. Given the foregoing, state ineffectiveness refers to the weakness of the state or political leadership in satisfying the needs and desires of the people (see also Gurr & Goldstone, 1991). State ineffectiveness may occur when an autocratic or authoritarian state mismanages an economy or fails to come up with appropriate and efficient socioeconomic and political policies and reforms that would benefit the majority of the people. The middle classes would be more willing to support the state if they have greater access to the political system by having the

right to vote, run for office, and freedom to speak and organize. The workers might be interested in securing voting rights, but their main concern would be economic benefits such as wage hikes, union rights, and good working conditions. The peasantry may be interested in avoiding excessive taxation as well as securing land ownership. How the state handles the foregoing issues would matter whether it is vulnerable to revolution or not. States that are ineffective and tend to be vulnerable to revolution are those that consistently reject societal demands for political reform and economic welfare and resort to violence to quell dissent (see also Hagopian, 1974). The fact that Great Britain was able to avoid violent revolution during its early modernization era while France did not in 1789 suggests that the leaders of the former (although they had equal or greater coercive power to crush dissent) were more effective and pragmatic than the latter that they resorted into making gradual sociopolitical reforms.

Some ineffective states also tend to create patron–client relationship, which benefit only a certain group or segment of a given society. For instance, the leaders of neo- patrimonial regimes in Latin America, such as Batista in Cuba and Somoza in Nicaragua, created individualized patronage politics that was susceptible to revolution (Wickham-Crowley, 1991; see also Goldstone, 1994; Goodwin, 2001; Skocpol, 1994). Moreover, state ineffectiveness could occur when a state declares or is engaged in unnecessary wars. Thus, the state, as Skocpol (1979) argues, seems to have some independent effect on revolution. State ineffectiveness could indirectly but empirically be measured by the level of support that the people have to the state.

Triggering Factors

It is my contention that the main conditions —economic development, regime type, and state ineffectiveness— would need one or two triggering factors to produce the onset of revolution. The triggering factors tend to ignite a long resentment that seems to have been boiling in the heads of the people. Examples of triggering factors include war defeat, fiscal crisis, and rising prices. These are variables that tend to occur suddenly and unexpectedly. What I call triggering factors are similar to some of Johnson's (1966; see also Hagopian, 1974; Reed, 2004) accelerators (e.g., war defeat and army mutiny). As Johnson (1966) argues, triggering factors (similar to his accelerators) are single events (not sets of conditions) and serve as a catalyst or immediate causes of revolutionary uprisings. He seems, however, to imply that his accelerators affect primarily military forces and some revolutionary individuals. To me, although the military and some civilian revolutionaries could be affected, the primary role of triggering factors seems to be influencing the civilian population. Here, it is important to make a distinction between the two patterns of revolution. In spontaneous revolutions, the triggering factors may be war defeat (e.g., Russian in 1905 and 1917), fiscal crisis (e.g., France in 1789), rising prices (e.g., high oil cost in Ethiopia in 1974), or Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost ideas/the beginning of the end of the Cold War (e.g., Eastern European countries). In planned revolutions, however, the triggering factors seem to be those things that initially inspire the minds of revolutionary leaders. One of such triggers may be when a leader or leaders is (are) influenced by a revolutionary movement (s). Another trigger may be when a leader is exposed to an ideology. A promise for or getting initial armaments or financial assistance from external sources could also trigger revolutionary leaders to start revolution. In other words, the triggers of planned revolutions could be both events (e.g., revolutionary movements) and ideas (e.g., exposure to ideology or being promised of support; see also Reed, 2004). In temporal sequence, the triggering factors tend to come after the main variables have long surfaced. In fact, a leader may have to be, to use Reed's (2004) phrase, "morally outraged" by bad political and economic conditions before he or she is affected by any of the triggering factors and start planning a revolution. If the main variables responsible for the onset of revolution are not present, the presence of a triggering factor would fail to ignite revolutionary uprising because the legitimacy of the political system and the state would make people tolerate the temporary crisis. In other words, triggering factors are not sufficient conditions for producing revolutionary uprisings.

In sum, revolutionary situations seem to occur when massive and rapid social, economic, and political factors reshape the people's sociopolitical value systems and affect their economic welfare. But for a revolutionary uprising to start, an ignition may have to be provided by a triggering factor.

> However, it should be noted that because revolution is a rare phenomenon, a *combination* and *severity* of the main variables as well as one or two triggering factors may have to be present to increase the likelihood of its occurrence (see also Foran, 2005; Sanderson, 2005).

Success of Revolutions

Let us next discuss and distinguish between the variables that lead to the failure and success of revolutionary uprisings. Good examples of failed and successful revolutionary uprisings are the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions, respectively. The onsets of both the 1905 and the 1917 Russian Revolutions seemed to have been affected by similar major and triggering factors. Economic development seemed to have led to popular discontent in the country in both years. The regime was both autocratic and the state ineffective at both times. The triggering factor for the 1905 Revolution may have been the defeat of Russia by Japan. And the triggering factor for the 1917 Revolution may have been the defeat of the country by Germany. Why then did the 1905 Russian Revolution fail, while the 1917 revolution succeeded? The success of the 1917 Russian Revolution had to do with the acquiescence of the military and the support it gave for the revolutionary uprising. Indeed, in every successful spontaneous revolution, the military had been acquiescent and/or supportive of the revolution (see also Tiruneh, 2010). This had happened during the French Revolution of 1789, the

Chinese Revolution of 1911, the Russian Revolution of 1917, the Ethiopian Revolution of 1974, and Eastern Europe, 1989. Conversely, the 1905 Russian Revolution failed because the military obeyed the Tsarist regime and was able to crush the uprising.

In contrast, in planned revolutions like those of China in 1949 and Cuba in 1959, the military was defeated or nearly defeated (see also Tiruneh, 2010). To defeat the military, however, resource mobilization, as Tilly (1978; see also Parsa, 1989, 2000) argued, seems to matter. Specifically, popular support and resources (both from domestic and external sources) seem to influence the success of planned revolutions. The physical and moral support that the Chinese communist guerrillas received from the Chinese peasantry and the Soviet Union are cases in point. Organizational strength (a function of skillful leadership) also seems to matter to withstand and defeat government attacks and counter attacks as well as popularize the revolutionary movement in planned revolutions. In addition, ideology may facilitate revolutionary movements. Revolutionary leaders such as Che Guevara and Mao Zedong were armed with Marxist ideas. In general, ideology could help leaders come up with a set of objectives and goals needed in waging planned revolutions. It could also give leaders and supporters the commitment and conviction required in battling (and defeating) government forces.

In planned revolutionary uprisings that did not succeed, as in the case of Venezuela, the insurgents were not able to defeat the military. In other words, the causal variables involved in the success of spontaneous and planned revolution are quite distinct.

Interestingly, Brinton (1938) and Arendt (1977) have made similar arguments. Brinton (1938) argues that " . . . no government has ever fallen before revolutionists until it has lost control over its armed forces or lost the ability to use them effectively . . . " (pp. 110-11). To Arendt (1977),

> Generally speaking, we may say that no revolution is even possible [successful?] where the authority of the body politic is truly intact, and this means, under modern conditions, where the armed forces can be trusted to obey the civil authorities. (p. 116)

As Table 2 shows, no acquiescence or support of the military, no successful spontaneous revolution. And as Table 3 indicates, no defeat of the military, no successful planned revolution. Note that I have, to some extent, relied on Goodwin's (2001) list of successful revolutions to come up with the countries listed in Table 3. I have, however, excluded anti-colonial revolutions (such as those waged in Algeria and Vietnam) from the list in Table 3, for they are distinct from social revolutions.

It should be noted, however, that the success of revolutions comes only *after* the onset of revolutions. In spontaneous revolutions, for instance, the people had to rise up against the state and only after that did the military acquiesce. Although the timing between the initial popular uprisings and the acquiescing of the military may not be very long in spontaneous revolutions, it is mainly the people, not the military, who start these uprisings. More often than that, most people in a society, including the military, ought to be fed up with the state, due to past repressive practices or ineffectiveness of its government and the economy (the necessary conditions of revolution), before the people rise up and the military decides to disobey the state. Planned revolutions do not, however, have huge popular support initially. Consequently, the defeat of the military comes only long after the guerrillas rise up (onset of planned revolution), gain popular support over time, and wage series of battles. Thus, perhaps the more important step in a social (or political) revolution is the onset of revolution, not its success. This is not to diminish the importance of the success of revolution. Indeed, without success, a revolutionary uprising might bring little or no change. It is rather to simply argue that without the first step, there may not be a second one. Indeed, revolution in this work refers to the entire sequence of the revolutionary situation, including the initial popular uprisings (onset of revolution) and the brief or long struggle leading to the collapse of the old sociopolitical order (success of revolution).

Table 2. Spontaneous Revolutions.

Country	Military acquiescence/ support?	Success of revolution?
France, 1789	Yes	Yes
Russia, 1905	No	No
China, 1911	Yes	Yes
Russia, 1917	Yes	Yes
Ethiopia, 1974	Yes	Yes
Eastern Europe, 1989	Yes	Yes
Tunisia, Egypt, 2011	Yes	Yes

Table 3. Planned Revolutions.

Country	Military defeat?	Success of revolution?
Mexico, 1910	Yes	Yes
China, 1949	Yes	Yes
Bolivia, 1952-1964	Yes	Yes
Cuba, 1959	Yes	Yes
Guatemala, 1960, 1970-1990	No	No
Cambodia, 1975	Yes	Yes
Nicaragua, 1979	Yes	Yes
Grenada, 1979	Yes	Yes
Venezuela, 1962-1968	No	No
Colombia, 1964-present	No	No
El Salvador, 1975-1991	No	No
Peru, 1980-present	No	No

It is interesting to note that because Skocpol (1979) does not differentiate between the variables that impact the onset and success of revolutions, respectively, her state collapse or administrative/military breakdown variable is given greater explanatory power than what it deserves. This is probably why Kiser and Hechter (1991) disapprove of the methodology

Skocpol (1979) uses by arguing, "Instead of relying on necessary explanations, historians are willing to use sufficient ones, in which an event is taken to be a natural outcome of a sequence" (p. 2). More importantly, Skocpol (1979) does not clearly differentiate among state ineffectiveness (which is a condition for the onset of revolution), fiscal crisis (which is only a trigger for onset of revolution), military acquiescence or support (which is a condition for the success of revolution), and state collapse (which is the success of revolution). In other words, as Kiser and Hechter (1991) argue, some of Skocpol's (1979) main explanations of revolution are vaguely and loosely stated. In sum, without the *prior existence* of the necessary conditions for the onset of revolution (e.g., social discontent and loss of legitimacy), social (or political) revolution is, even with a disobeying military, unlikely to occur. And rarely, if at all, will the state collapse as long as the necessary conditions for the onset of revolution are absent.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the causes of social revolutions. I hypothesized that the three most important determinants of the onset of revolution are economic development, regime type, and state ineffectiveness. Economic development fosters people's demand for political reforms and makes some groups to become discontent with their economic conditions. Democratic regimes, with their pragmatic and inclusive approaches to politics, also seem to influence political stability than do autocratic or authoritarian systems. In addition, state effectiveness or lack thereof, aside from regime type, would matter for avoidance or presence of political violence. Repressive or unresponsive states will likely incite violence. Finally, external factors, such as war defeats and rising prices, seem to facilitate revolution, but their main role tends to be to serve as triggering effects.

I defined social revolution as a popular uprising that transforms an existing socioeconomic and political order. Building on Huntington's (1968) work and previous research, I then identified two patterns of social revolution: spontaneous and planned. Where revolution was ignited without any significant organized effort, I called it spontaneous. Where guerrilla-led revolution occurred, I referred to it as planned. I also distinguished between the onset and success of revolution. Onset of revolutions is determined by economic development, regime type, and state ineffectiveness. It is also sparked by some triggering effects. I contended that the success of social revolutions comes right after the onset of revolutions. Success in spontaneous revolutions seems to occur when the military is acquiescent and/or supportive of popular uprisings. On the other hand, success in planned revolutions seems to exist when the military is defeated. In addition, organizational strength, popular support, resources, and ideology seem to influence planned revolution. I also noted that because revolution is a very rare phenomenon, a combination and severity of the main conditions as well as triggering factors must be present to increase the likelihood of its occurrence.

In sum, as Arendt (1977), Huntington (1968), Tilly (1978, 1994), Skocpol (1979), and others have argued, politics in general and the state in particular may play some role in explaining social revolutions. Effective and visionary leaders of states do seem to avoid revolutions by making necessary reforms. Revolution seems to occur only in the states that are ineffective, undemocratic, repressive, and lose their legitimacy. However, as Arendt (1977) argues,

> Even where the loss of authority is quite manifest, revolutions can break out and succeed only if there exists a sufficient number of men who are prepared for its collapse and . . . willing to assume power . . . (p. 116)

To be sure, even the states that had found themselves in the middle of popular wrath seemed to have been surprised and overwhelmed by the watershed of change that the Industrial Revolution has wrought onto them. Without the Industrial Revolution and its aftermath, states, even those ineffective ones, might not have feared and faced enlightened publics who had risen up during revolutions.