REVOLUTIONS AND WORLD POLITICS (IR206)

Course duration: 54 hours lecture and class time (Over three weeks)

Summer School Programme Area: International Relations, Government and Society

LSE Teaching Department: Department of International Relations

Lead Faculty: Dr George Lawson (Dept. of International Relations)

Pre-requisites: At least one introductory course in either social science (e.g. political science, international relations, sociology, economics), history or law.

Essential information

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Introduction

Revolutions have played a central role in the making of the modern world. From the revolutions in France, America and Haiti in the late 18th century to those in North Africa and the Middle East in 2011, revolutions have been central to debates about war and peace, justice and order, intervention and sovereignty, and more. This course explores both the theory and practice of revolutions, teasing out their effects and examining the prospects for revolutionary change in the contemporary world.

Course overview

During the course, students will learn how to make informed judgments about the ways in which revolutions have impacted on core features of the international system. Key questions we will discuss include:

- How much do revolutions change the societies in which they take place – and the wider world?
- Are revolutions best understood through the perspective of participants on the ground or through the broader symbolic, economic, and political fields in which they take place?
• What are the prospects for revolution in the contemporary world?

The course is divided into three parts. In Part 1, we establish the main themes involved in studying revolutions, distinguishing them from other forms of social change and paying particular attention to their international components. In Part 2, the course examines a series of revolutions, from those that underpinned the ‘Age of Revolutions’ in the late 18th and early 19th centuries to those that ended the Cold War in 1989. This survey provides the foundations for the final part of the course, which examines contemporary revolutionary movements, from ISIS to Occupy. Do these movements represent a reimagining of revolution? Or does the ‘age of revolutions’ belong to the past?

Topics

Part 1 Thinking about revolutions
• What are revolutions?
• Key themes in the study of revolutions
• Revolutions and world politics

Part 2 The historical experience of revolution
• The Atlantic ‘age of revolutions’
• Socialist revolutions
• ‘Third World’ revolutions
• The ‘last great revolution’
• ‘Colour’ revolutions

Part 3 Revolutions today
• The 2011 Arab uprisings
• Revolutionary Islamism
• Revolution in the West
• Rethinking revolution
Course outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Differentiate between different forms of radical change, including rebellions, revolts, coup d’états, transitions, and revolutions.
- Discuss and write knowledgeably about the ways in which revolutions have engendered core strands of modern international order.
- Assess the prospects for revolutionary change in the contemporary world.

Assessment

Formative assessment

- **Verbal**: everyone is expected to come to class prepared to participate and everyone is expected to speak in every class. Anyone struggling to participate should meet with their class teacher to discuss ways to increase participation.
- **Essay**: an essay of 1,000 words is due at the end of the first week of the course. All students should answer one of the ‘key questions’ listed under the weekly topics, pp. 7-13. Please email your essay directly to your class teacher. You are welcome, in fact actively encouraged, to develop this essay into your summative piece of work.

Summative assessment

- **Essay**: a 2,000 word essay will be due at the start of the third week of the course. This essay will count for 50% of your overall grade. Class teachers can give you advice on what is expected from the summative essay.
- **Exam**: there will be a two hour written exam at the end of the course. The exam will be made up of several questions, some relating to conceptual issues, others to themes we have explored on the course.

Teaching methods

The course consists of 36 hours of lectures and 18 hours of classes. Lectures provide an overview of a particular topic; seminars probe more deeply into these topics. This course guide lists focused readings for each topic, as well as background readings that will be useful for the essay and exam. These texts are intended to provide a basis for class discussion, to introduce key concepts and issues, and to act as a starting point for independent enquiry into the topics.

Background reading
The main readings we will be using are listed in the detailed prospectus below, pp. 7-13. Essential readings are marked with an asterisk (*). What follows are background readings, which will be useful for essays, the exam, or simply general interest. Your class teacher can give you advice about additional readings depending on which topic you’re interested in.

**Essential text**

All students are strongly recommended to buy and read Jack Goldstone’s *Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, 2014), which is a concise and inexpensive, yet thorough, guide to current thinking about revolutions written by the world’s pre-eminent expert in the subject.

**Reference books**

Three reference books might be helpful. The Goldstone and DeFronzo volumes are encyclopaedias with entries on many of the themes, concepts and experiences of revolution we will be discussing on the course. The O’ Kane book is a multi-volume text containing a number of useful articles and extracts. All three books can be found in the LSE library.


**Edited volumes**

Several edited volumes summarise the main scholarly debates on revolutions:

- Foran, John ed. (1997) *Theorizing Revolution* (London: Routledge). Compare and contrast the chapters by Goodwin and Selbin. Those interested in gender and revolution, a subject that is very poorly served by existing literatures, should read the chapter by Val Moghadam and, thereafter, follow the footnotes.
• Foran, John ed. (2003) *The Future of Revolution* (London: Zed). A curious book, as Fred Halliday’s conclusion makes clear. However, the contributions by Foran and Selbin are useful for thinking about the changing features of revolutionary movements in the contemporary world.

**Thinking generationally**

Scholarly work on revolution is often considered to have developed through four ‘generations’. Although this can foster an overly tidy picture of the development of revolutionary theory, there are two benefits to thinking in generational terms: first, it works as a device by which to compare theories of revolution; and second, it helps to illustrate the build-up of a self-conscious canon in the study of revolutions.

Some useful resources for thinking in generational terms are:


The following are paradigmatic representatives of each ‘generation’:

**First generation**


**Second generation**


**Third generation**

- Skocpol, Theda (1979) *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: CUP).

### Fourth generation


### International Relations

As a discipline, IR has provided relatively little to the study of revolutions (we will explore why this is the case during the course). Nevertheless, the below repay attention:


### Unarmed revolutions

Perhaps the most important current debate in revolutionary studies is around the role of violence. When and where are non-violence uprisings likely to succeed? And can they be combined with a violent ‘radical flank’? On these issues, and more, see:


**Revolutionaries**

The texts listed above are concerned primarily with scholarly, often theoretical, debates about revolutions. To understand revolutions more fully, you need to immerse yourselves in the thinking and writing of revolutionaries themselves:

The Putney Debates (1647)
http://www.constitution.org/lev/eng_lev_08.htm

Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man* (1791)
http://www.ushistory.org/paine/rights/

Mary Woolstonecroft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792)
www.bartelby.com/144

The Constitution of Haiti (1805)
http://www2.webster.edu/~corbetre/haiti/history/earlyhaiti/1805-const.htm

Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1848)
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Manifesto.pdf

Vladimir Ilich Lenin, *The State and Revolution* (1917)
www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/

Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution* (1918)
http://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/index.htm

Mao Zedong, *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* (1927)
http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/

Ho Chi Minh, *Vietnamese Declaration of Independence* (1945)

Course content is subject to change. Last updated: January 2019
Fidel Castro, *History Will Absolve Me* (1953)

Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)


Ernesto (Che) Guevara, *Message to the Tricontinental* (1967)


Occupy Wall Street, *A Shift in Revolutionary Tactics* (2011)

Srdja Popovic, *How to Topple a Dictator* (2011)

Hardt and Negri, *Declaration* (2012)

Part 1: Thinking about Revolutions

The first three sessions examine the main debates in the study of revolution, differentiating revolutions from other forms of social change, examining whether revolutions ‘come’ or are ‘made’, and discussing whether revolutions should be understood as primarily international or domestic processes.

Lecture 1: What are revolutions?

This lecture differentiates various forms of radical change: rebellion, revolt, coup d’état, transition and revolution. It critiques views of revolutions that see them as static, timeless entities in favour of a dynamic view of revolutions that seeks to combine understanding of the diversity of revolutionary experiences with a sense of the common causal logics through which revolutions arise. This, in turn, provides a baseline through which to explore the theory and practice of revolution in weeks to come.

Readings


Key questions

- What are the main similarities and differences between revolutions, rebellions, transitions and coup d’états?
- In what ways has the meaning of revolution changed over time and place?

Lecture 2: Key debates in the study of revolution

This lecture surveys the main debates in the study of revolutions: a) processes of continuity and change – that revolutions promise social transformation, yet are constrained by domestic and international pressures; b) the question of whether revolutions contain general tendencies, or whether they must be studied on a case-by-case basis; and c) the degree to which revolutions are made by people on the ground and how much they are the product of broader symbolic, economic, and political fields.
Readings


Skocpol, Theda (1979) *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): Chapter 1.

Key questions

- Can there be a single theory of revolutionary change?
- Do revolutions need revolutionaries?
- Why do some revolutions succeed and others fail?

Lecture 3: Revolutions and world politics

Most revolutionaries have emphasized the international elements of their uprising. And most revolutionary movements run counter to the ground-rules of international order, disrupting existing patterns of trade and inter-state alliances, and questioning underlying rules, norms and principles. Yet the discipline of International Relations has usually treated revolutions as problems to be solved or as noisy interlopers rather than as events that are constitutive of international order. The central tasks of this lecture are to: a) make clear the multifaceted role played by international dynamics in the causes, trajectories, and outcomes of revolutions; and b) demonstrate the many ways in which revolutions influence international relations.

Readings


Key questions

- ‘There are no domestic revolutions’. Discuss.
- Are all revolutions equally ‘international’?
Part 2: The historical experience of revolution

The middle section of the course uses the themes outlined in the first part of the course to probe various experiences of revolutions, from the Atlantic revolutions of the late 18th and early 19th centuries to 21st century ‘colour revolutions’. We use specific experiences of revolution to explore general themes: revolutionary waves (lecture 4); the systemic challenge offered by revolutions (lecture 5); debates about structure-agency (lecture 6); the vulnerability of certain types of regime to revolutionary pressures (lecture 7); and the relationship between violent and non-violent strategies (lecture 8).

Lecture 4: The Atlantic ‘age of revolutions’

The last quarter of the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century witnessed a transatlantic ‘wave’ of revolutions. The primary aim of these revolutions was to establish republics, or reconfigure imperial rule, through written constitutions. That these revolutions took place over a long period of time and in a diverse range of territories makes clear the necessarily international dimensions of revolutionary change. At the same time, within the Atlantic ‘wave’ lie many of the dynamics that underpinned world politics over the ensuing two centuries: the extension of capitalism and the development of movements intended to counter its inequities; the expansion of European colonialism and the many forms of resistance that rose up against it; contestation over ideas of sovereignty: imperial, national, racial; and the circulation of contentious scripts, particularly around rights, independence, and equality, which served as rallying cries for revolutionary movements around the world.

Readings


Key questions

- Why do some revolutions take place in ‘waves’?
- What has been the long-term impact of the Atlantic age of revolutions on the formation of modern international order?

Lecture 5: Socialist revolutions

If dynamics of international order during the 19th century are best understood through the prism fostered by the Atlantic revolutions, so the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia established many of the contours of 20th century world politics. In a two-stage overthrow of the Tsarist Regime, the Bolshevik faction led by Lenin and Trotsky succeeded not only in overturning Tsarism, but also in challenging monarchies and liberal capitalist
regimes around the globe. Over the next eighty years, an ideological and geopolitical struggle between the Soviet Union and Western states was exported to every corner of the planet. No continent bar Australasia has been spared a revolution conducted in the name of socialism. Yet much of the socialist bloc unravelled in 1989 just as quickly as it had appeared in 1917. So what was the challenge offered by the Bolshevik Revolution and the broader model of socialist revolution it inspired? And how successful was this challenge?

Readings


Key questions
- What were the main causes of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution?
- Why was socialism such a catalyst for revolutionary uprisings around the world?
- What has been the impact of the socialist project on international order?

Lecture 6: ‘Third World’ revolutions
In early 1959, Fidel Castro and Ernesto ‘Che’ Guevara led a successful uprising against the Cuban dictator, Fulgencio Batista. This unlikely revolution – carried out initially by fewer than 100 committed supporters – proved to be an event of immense international significance. The Cuban revolution was the clearest possible demonstration that revolutions could be made against the odds, and that they could be led by a rural peasantry rather than an urban proletariat. The Cuban case also demonstrated the power and possibilities of waging a sustained guerrilla campaign against an incumbent regime. This example was followed, both successfully and unsuccessfully, by a number of revolutionary forces in the ‘Third World’, many of them supported by the Cuban regime, which provided assistance for revolution from Angola to Bolivia.

Readings


Key questions

- Do ‘Third World’ revolutions contain distinct dynamics?
- Why was the Cuban revolution particularly ‘internationalist’ in outlook?
- What has been the long-term significance of revolutions in the ‘Third World’?

Lecture 7: The ‘last great revolution’

In Iran during 1978-9, an urban, cross-class movement centred in Tehran’s bazaars and mosques allied under the cloak of a 7th century religious doctrine in order to oust Shah Reza Pahlavi, widely seen as a corrupt stooge of Western governments. The outcome of this insurrection was the institution of an Islamic Republic led by Ruhollah Khomeini. During the 1980s, revolutionary Iran fought a decade-long war with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, and supported radical Shi’ite groups around the region. Over the past generation, Iran and its allies have provided a concerted challenge to liberal international order. At the same time, the Iranian revolution has laid bare the vulnerabilities of ‘Sultanist’ regimes that combine personalistic rule with a reliance on coercive power.

Readings


Key questions

- Did the Shah’s regime fall because it was ‘Sultanist’?
- Why do some commentators see Iran as the ‘last great revolution’?
- What have been the international consequences of the Iranian revolution?

Lecture 8: Colour revolutions

Between 1989 and 1991, a series of revolutions swept away Soviet control of Eastern and East-Central Europe, culminating in the end of the Cold War itself. And yet, despite the dramatic scenes from the Baltics to the Balkans – the replacement of a one-party state with multi-party democracy, the shift from centralised, command economies to open markets, and the rebirth of civil society from the shackles of state socialism – many observers did not see these transformations as ‘proper’ revolutions. Rather, they were seen as cases of reform from above, imperial collapse, democratic transition, or perhaps a new category of social change – what the British writer Timothy Garton Ash calls ‘refolution’. Of particular importance to these assessments was the lack of violence in
the 1989 revolutions. The question of whether revolutions can take place without violence has become a major point of discussion in the post-Cold War era.

**Readings**


**Key questions**

- Do revolutions have to be violent?
- How meaningful is it to see the collapse of communism as revolutionary?
- Does the concept of ‘colour revolution’ have any significance beyond the 1989 revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe?

**Part 3: Revolution today**

The final part of the course examines the place of revolution in the contemporary world, paying particular attention to the 2011 Arab Uprisings, the challenge presented by militant Islamism, and the contemporary experience of revolution in the West, including the rise of populism as a radical, perhaps even revolutionary, force.

**Lecture 9: The 2011 Arab Uprisings**

The 2011 uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East have helped to re-invigorate scholarly interest in revolutions. But what kind of revolutions do these uprisings represent? This lecture situates the Arab uprisings within the context of post-Cold War revolutions, paying particular attention to the role played by information and communication technologies (ICTs). Contra those who see ICTs as offering a new means by which to conduct revolutions, the lecture argues that ‘the message’ is more important than ‘the medium’. In this respect, the 2011 uprisings sit within a family of revolutions that is not only broadly familiar in terms of post-Cold War revolutions, but also bears resemblance to pre-1989 instances of ‘self-limiting’ revolutions.
Readings


Key questions

- What were the main causes of the 2011 Arab uprisings?
- How important were ICTs to the revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East?
- Why have there been such diverse outcomes to the 2011 Arab uprisings?

Lecture 10: Revolutionary Islamism

One of the most striking developments in recent years has been the emergence of revolutionary Islam. A bricolage of Salafi, Wahhabi, and Deobandi influences, blended with local contexts and quintessentially contemporary technologies, this ‘movement of movements’ conducts its struggle in multiple arenas: a transnational conflict against ‘unbelievers’; various attempts to form regional ummah; and specific struggles in places as diverse as Pakistan, Bosnia, and the Philippines. This lecture explores the rise and, potentially, the fall of revolutionary Islam.

Readings

Atran, Scott (2015) ‘ISIS is a Revolution’

Key questions

- How new is the challenge presented by revolutionary Islamism?
- What are the main contours of ‘militant Islamism’?
- Does revolutionary Islamism have a future?
Lecture 11: Revolution in the West: From Occupy to Populism

In recent years, a range of groups advocating radical change have waged campaigns against a variety of ills: neoliberalism, globalisation, austerity, militarism, environmental degradation, inequality, corruption, greed, and more. There has also been a surge in populism, of both left and right, around the world. Do these movements constitute a reimagining and reinvigoration of revolutionary politics? Or does the ‘age of revolutions’ belong to the past?

Readings

* A useful website on populism, ‘Team Populism’, can be found [here](#).


Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri (2012) *Declaration*.


Key questions

- What is new about contemporary revolutionary movements?
- Do populist movements of the left and right have anything in common?

Lecture 12: Rethinking Revolution

This lecture, largely intended as a revision aid for the exam, looks back at the main themes covered by the course and examines the place of revolution in the contemporary world. Its main argument is that theories of revolution need to keep pace with the actual experience of revolution. Otherwise although revolutions will have a future, most theories of them will not.

Readings

There is no particular reading to do for this session. But please do come prepared with questions – I will do my best to answer them.

Key questions

- What are the prospects for revolution in the contemporary world?
- Should the concept of revolution be consigned to the ‘dustbin of history’?
And finally

Something a bit different – the course soundtrack (very much a work in progress):

*Atlantic Age*: Hamilton!; The Abyssinians – ‘Declaration of Rights’.


*Angola*: Cesaria Evora – ‘Angola’.

*Cuba*: Alborosie: ‘La Revolucion’.

*Algeria*: Rachid Tara – Aie Aie Aie; Abdel Kader.


*1968*: Gil Scott Heron – ‘The Revolution Will Not be Televised’.


Suggestions welcome …
Credit Transfer: If you are hoping to earn credit by taking this course, it is advisable that you confirm it is eligible for credit transfer well in advance of the start date. Please discuss this directly with your home institution or Study Abroad Advisor.

As a guide, our LSE Summer School courses are typically eligible for three or four credits within the US system and 7.5 ECTS in Europe. Different institutions and countries can, and will, vary. You will receive a digital transcript and a printed certificate following your successful completion of the course in order to make arrangements for transfer of credit.

If you have any queries, please direct them to summer.school@lse.ac.uk