

Revolutions: A Very Short Introduction

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Questions for Thought and Discussion

- What makes revolutions different from other kinds of social conflict and change?
- What are some of the principal factors that make societies more or less vulnerable to revolutions?
- How important are ideas and stories and emotions to revolutions, as against poverty and inequality per se?
- If you could predict a revolution was coming in a society, what could you (or would you) do about it?
- If you were planning to lead a revolution, what signs would you look for in your society or overseas to determine if this was a good time to go forward with your plans?
- What are some of the typical ways in which revolutions develop and unfold? Does it matter in what kind of society the revolution arises?
- What do you think a revolution should accomplish to be called a “success?”
- How have the outcomes of some actual revolutions in history fallen short of what you would consider “successful”?
- What have women and minorities usually gained in revolutions? Why do you think that is?
- What role did religion play in the revolutions of the Renaissance and Reformation? What effect did these revolutions have on toleration for different religions?
- What was special about the constitutional revolutions? Can you name some features of their constitutions that were shared across different revolutions?
- What did communist revolutions have in common? How would you describe their outcome?
- Mexico, Cuba, and Iran had revolutions against dictators – how much progress did they make toward democracy after the dictators were overthrown?
- Recent revolutions in Eastern Europe, the Philippines, and the Ukraine have been described as “non-violent” revolutions. How was their pattern of events special? Why were they able to succeed without violent civil wars?
- The recent revolutions in the Arab Middle East and North Africa came as a surprise. Why do you think they were so unexpected?
- How do you think the revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa will turn out? When are we likely to know?
- Do we still need revolutions in the world today?
- If further revolutions are going to occur in the world, where do you think they are most likely to occur?
- Should the United Nations or other world bodies have a policy on how to respond to revolutions, like they have policies on genocides and human rights?
- If a revolution were to break out tomorrow in a country, how should the United States, or NATO, or the United Nation, react? Should anything in particular be done? Or how should reactions depend on the kind of regime, the kind of revolution, or other factors involved?