

STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE

# Revolutions

A Worldwide Introduction to  
Social and Political Contention

SECOND EDITION

With new coverage of terrorism

STEPHEN K. SANDERSON



# REVOLUTIONS

## A WORLDWIDE INTRODUCTION TO SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTENTION

SECOND EDITION

*Stephen K. Sanderson*



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# *A Note to Students and Professors*

THIS BOOK BEGAN LIFE AS A CHAPTER IN A PROPOSED TEXTBOOK on social change. That book was never finished, but the revolutions chapter was eventually expanded to make a book of its own. In its first edition, *Revolutions* was adopted as a text in a wide variety of courses in colleges and universities in the United States, Canada, and Europe.

Because I was not originally a true specialist in the study of revolutions, I had to dig into the pertinent empirical and theoretical literature almost from scratch. This turned out to be an extremely rewarding experience, because I have found the most important work on revolutions and state breakdowns fascinating. Moreover, this work represents some of the best scholarship that my own discipline, sociology, has to offer. Sociologists of revolution are among the most intellectually sophisticated of all sociologists, and one can point to their work with great pride in the knowledge that we are members of the same discipline. At the same time, scholars from other disciplines have contributed greatly to teaching and writing on revolutions. I am pleased to say that the first edition of *Revolutions* has been adopted not only in sociology courses but also in courses in political science, history, and international studies, among others.

## **New to the Second Edition**

Because of the growing interest in terrorism since the brutal attacks of September 11, 2001, and the increase in the number of courses devoted to this topic, a major focus of this new edition is to connect the study of revolutions and revolutionary movements with the study of terrorism and terrorist movements. Chapter Eight is new to this edition and covers terrorism in a broad comparative

and historical sense, but with emphasis given to contemporary Islamic terrorism.

In addition, an updated and expanded epilogue has been added to the second edition. It makes predictions about the likely future of terrorism and connects them to predictions about the probable future of revolutions.

### **Features of This Text**

I have attempted to make this book a model of student-friendly, classroom-ready material. It

- is written in a clear, engaging, student-accessible style;
- presents an analytic framework for understanding revolutions;
- provides comprehensive coverage: Covers three major historical revolutions (France, Russia, China), four Third World revolutions (Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran, and the Philippines), and the “revolutions from above” in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union;
- critically evaluates all major theories of revolution, favoring the state-centered perspective that is currently the reigning paradigm;
- showcases the lives of ten major students of revolutions from John Foran to Eric Wolf—some in their own words—in a unique appendix;
- provides a long list of suggested readings in a concluding bibliographical essay;
- is the only book available that covers all major revolutions and the major theories explaining them—now with a new chapter on terrorism.

### **Organization of the Book**

Chapter One discusses the nature of revolutions and addresses some important background concepts and assumptions essential to the study of large-scale social and political change. Chapter Two looks at the three most prominent historical revolutions of the past two centuries, what have been called the Great Revolutions (Skocpol, 1979):

the French Revolution of 1789, the Bolshevik or Russian Revolution of 1917, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911–1949. Chapter Three follows by examining several examples of much more recent revolutions in the less-developed parts of the world, especially the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the Nicaraguan and Iranian Revolutions of 1979.

This leads to what is really the heart of the book—a discussion of some of the most prominent explanations of revolution that social scientists have proposed. Chapters Four and Five take up this discussion. Whereas social disorder and rebellion are common and frequent, actual revolutions are relatively rare, and most attempts at revolution are abortive. The various theories attempting to explain why this is so are reviewed and critically assessed.

Chapter Six examines the state breakdowns that occurred in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union in 1989 and 1991, respectively; it also tries to explain why they happened and explores whether they were genuine examples of revolutions. The issue of the outcomes of revolutions is a critical one as well. Do revolutions generally lead to the results desired and fought for by revolutionaries, or are their outcomes more modest? These outcomes are the subject of Chapter Seven. Given the massive forces of globalization and worldwide social evolution, are revolutions likely to occur in the future, or are they a thing of the past? Chapter Eight speaks to the growing interest in terrorism and terrorist movements. It surveys the range of terrorist movements since the mid-nineteenth century and gives special attention to the suicide terrorism of the past three decades. Explaining why suicide and other forms of terrorism occur is a special focus of the chapter. An updated epilogue connects an exploration of the future of revolutions with the future of terrorism and terrorist movements, and an appendix presents short biographical and autobiographical sketches of ten leading students of revolution.

I have written this book as both a contribution to scholarship and a work suitable for the classroom. I hope instructors will find it useful not only for specialized courses in revolutions but also for courses in political sociology, comparative/historical sociology, macrosociology, social change, sociology of development, Third World studies, and the like. I have tried to make the writing highly accessible to undergraduates; if responses to my previous books (including the first edition of this one) are any indication, I think I have succeeded.