PART ONE

Introduction

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Comparing Revolutionary Movements

> *Scholars have offered some interesting theories on how revolution develops and why it develops, but they have generally failed to explain how similar elements have produced revolutions in some cases and not in others. 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.*
>
> – William E. Lipsky (1976: 508)

Revolutionary movements are not simply or exclusively a response to economic exploitation or inequality, but also and more directly a response to political oppression and violence, typically brutal and indiscriminate. This is the principal thesis of this book, one that I reach through an examination of revolutionary movements that emerged during the second half of what has been called the "short" twentieth century (1914–91), a period characterized by the Cold War between the United States and the former Soviet Union.

The Cold War era (1945–91) was truly an "age of revolution," even more so, arguably, than the great revolutionary age of 1789–1848 (see Hobsbawm 1962). Dozens of powerful revolutionary movements emerged across the globe during this period, mainly in the Third World, and a number of them successfully overthrew existing political authorities. In the process, some movements also radically restructured, destroyed, or replaced key institutions, social relationships, and shared beliefs. In fact, many more radical, or "social," revolutions occurred during the Cold War era than had occurred in all previous history prior to the Second World War (see Table 1.1).

This book is but the latest installment in a long line of studies that have compared revolutions and revolutionary movements in order to

Table 1.1. *Major social revolutions, 1789–1989.*

Country (or region)	Year
France	1789
Mexico	1910
Russia	1917
Yugoslavia	1945
Vietnam	1945
China	1949
Bolivia	1952
Cuba	1959
Algeria	1962
Ethiopia	1974
Angola	1975
Mozambique	1975
Cambodia	1975
South Vietnam	1975
Iran	1979
Nicaragua	1979
Grenada	1979
Eastern Europe	1989

Note: The listed dates are conventional markers, usually referring to the year in which revolutionaries overthrew extant political regimes. Revolutions, however, are best conceptualized not as events, but as processes that typically span many years or even decades.

understand better both the similarities and differences in their causes, processes, and achievements. Like other authors who have compared revolutionary movements, I begin from the assumption that understanding them better is eminently worthwhile not only because of the enormous importance of these movements for the national societies in which they occurred, but also for their effects on the configuration of power and beliefs in other societies (including, not least, the United States) and thus on the international balance of power as well. One simply cannot understand the twentieth century histories of, for example, Mexico, Russia, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, Cuba, Iran, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, or many other countries without understanding the revolutionary conflicts that occurred there; and understanding these conflicts is also crucial for comprehending a variety of important and contemporaneous transnational processes, including, for example, the

demise of colonial empires and the history of the Cold War itself. In fact, with the possible exception of international wars, revolutions have been the most consequential form of political conflict in the twentieth century and, indeed, in human history.

Social scientists in the United States, myself included, have been particularly fascinated with revolutions and revolutionary movements and in particular with the comparative analysis of these phenomena – not least, one suspects, because of the sometimes strenuous efforts by our own government to prevent or reverse revolutions abroad. Crane Brinton, Barrington Moore, Chalmers Johnson, Ted Robert Gurr, Samuel Huntington, Eric Wolf, James Scott, Jeffery Paige, and Ellen Kay Trimberger are just a few of the scholars who have made important contributions to this tradition. Following the ground-breaking work of Charles Tilly (1978) and Theda Skocpol (1979), moreover, a veritable explosion of comparative studies of revolutions has occurred. Recent works by John Walton, Terence Ranger, Jack Goldstone, John Mason Hart, Charles Brockett, Tim McDaniel, Timothy Wickham-Crowley, John Foran, Farideh Farhi, Fred Halliday, Carlos Vilas, and Eric Selbin, among others, have further enriched our understanding of revolutions. And these works are just the tip of an intellectual iceberg that includes innumerable case studies of particular revolutions and revolutionary movements.

The idea for this particular study germinated at a time when the U.S. government was attempting to destroy – brutally and largely ineffectually – revolutionary movements in Central America. Why were (some) Central Americans rebelling, and would they succeed? I began to read about and travel through the region. To get a better handle on these issues, I also plunged into the literature on previous rebellions in Southeast Asia, another region of generalized conflict and U.S. intervention (in this case, following World War II). And before I was through, popular protests in Eastern Europe necessarily forced themselves upon my thinking.

But why, the reader may be asking, do we need yet *another* comparative study of revolutions? For two reasons. First, the particular set of revolutionary movements and revolutions that I analyze here is somewhat different from that which most other scholars have examined – and different, I believe, in an interesting and instructive way. In one sense, my sample of revolutions is drawn from a quite delimited universe of cases. I am interested in revolutions and revolutionary movements that occurred exclusively during the Cold War era – the period between the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. All

the cases that I examine, moreover, occurred in so-called peripheral or dependent societies of one type or another. Presumably, if revolutions share any common causes or dynamics (which can by no means be assumed), these are likely to be found among a relatively homogeneous pool of cases such as this one.

Unfortunately, there have simply been *too many* revolutionary movements, even in peripheral societies during the Cold War era alone, for one scholar or even a whole team of scholars to examine them all in more than a cursory fashion. Accordingly, a comparative study of such movements that has any historical complexity or nuance must necessarily limit itself to an examination of a sample of these movements. At the same time, such a sample should itself be as *heterogeneous* as possible to ensure a more or less adequate representation of the larger universe of cases, because, again, the opportunity to generalize about what might be called "peripheral revolutions" is certainly one which the analyst should seize if possible. (However, I reject the a priori assumption that there must be "general laws" that cover all cases of revolutions or even of peripheral revolutions of the Cold War era.)

Accordingly, this book examines instances of revolutionary movements and revolutions in three vastly different peripheral *world regions* during specific periods within the larger Cold War era: Southeast Asia from World War II to the mid-1950s (specifically, Vietnam, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Malaya), Central America from 1970 through the 1980s (focusing on Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras), and Eastern Europe in 1989. In each of these regions, transnational "cycles of protest" (Tarrow 1994: ch. 9) or "revolutionary waves" (Katz 1997) occurred during the periods that I examine, although national revolutionary movements followed quite distinctive trajectories, which I hope to explain. So if this book, unlike some comparative studies of revolutions, does not traverse centuries, it at least traverses continents and the domains of various "area experts."

A second way in which this book differs from most comparative studies of revolutionary movements or of revolutions is its refusal to compare only "successful" revolutions with one another (in statistical terms, this is known as "selecting" or "sampling on the dependent variable"). Such a strategy, in fact, can be dangerously misleading, confusing causal processes that are in fact found in a very wide range of societies with the actual (and much rarer) causes of revolutions. Accordingly, this book also examines several types of nonrevolutions or "negative" cases, as comparativists

refer to them. I consider, for example, some important revolutionary movements that, however successful in mobilizing substantial numbers of people (in some cases, for many years or even decades), ultimately failed to topple extant political regimes, let alone to transform radically the societies from which they sprang. These "failed" revolutionary movements are not only important and interesting in their own right, but their failure also sheds considerable light on why successful revolutionary movements do in fact succeed. I also examine a case of a successful revolutionary movement (the Indonesian nationalist movement) that was not especially "radical" in terms of the broader socioeconomic changes that its dominant leaders sought to bring about. (I explain the distinction between "revolutionary" and "radical" in the next section.) Finally, I look at one national society (Honduras) in which a strong revolutionary movement, radical or otherwise, did not emerge at all, despite socioeconomic conditions that were every bit as unpleasant as (and in some ways worse than) those of neighboring countries in which strong revolutionary movements *did* emerge.

This comparative strategy is driven by a belief that "counterfactual" cases in which powerful radical movements fail to take power, or fail to emerge at all – despite what various theories might lead us to expect – have not received sufficient attention in the social-scientific literature on revolutions and social movements. This neglect is somewhat surprising, moreover, since counterfactual cases are actually a major preoccupation of many social and labor historians who study the advanced capitalist "core" societies. For these scholars, the weakness or failure of radical working-class movements – despite the expectations of Karl Marx – has been an important and longstanding concern. In addition, there certainly has been no shortage of failed or "missing" revolutions in peripheral societies; scholars do not lack for data then, on this matter.

My comparative strategy is also driven by a concern with discovering those causal processes that *differentiate* cases from one another. This concern springs from the explicitly *comparative* questions that I hope to answer in this book: Why have radical groups mobilized large followings in *some* peripheral societies, but not in others? Why have *some* revolutions involved prolonged popular mobilization and extensive violence and bloodshed, but not others? And why have *some* revolutionary movements successfully toppled extant states, but not others? I have chosen to focus in this book on *world regions*, in fact, because doing so makes it relatively easier to discern (at least in principle) those causal factors that account

for these distinctive types of outcomes. Logically, that is, any historical, social-structural, political or cultural traits that are *shared* by the national societies that comprise such regions cannot explain these societies' divergent historical trajectories. At any rate, the attempt to discover these differentiating causal factors (and to understand how they work) is a primary goal of this book. I certainly do not presume to develop exhaustive or "total" explanations for the many revolutions and revolutionary movements that I examine in the following pages, and I have concluded, moreover, that there can be no such thing as a general theory of peripheral revolutions, let alone a general theory of revolutions as such.[1] My goal in this book, however, is still ambitious: to discover the general causal mechanisms that do the most to explain the origins and trajectory of several important revolutionary movements.

This is a book, in sum, that is centrally concerned with why radical revolutionary movements became important forces in some peripheral societies but not in others during the Cold War era, and why some but not all of these movements successfully toppled the states that they confronted. My wager is that the diverse political fortunes of revolutionary movements in peripheral societies during this era were not fortuitous nor randomly distributed, but were the result of general (if not universal) causal mechanisms.

Defining Terms

These introductory remarks beg for clarification. Accordingly, before proceeding to a discussion of the major theoretical approaches to revolutions and to the analytic framework that animates this particular book, I want to define formally some of the basic concepts that I employ – most of which I have already used in the preceding discussion. Defining these concepts clearly is not simply a formal, "academic" exercise in hair splitting, but a necessary effort to spell out as clearly as possible just what this book is, and is not, attempting to explain. Getting that right, in fact, is half the battle.

An initial ambiguity that all studies of revolution must invariably confront is that the word *revolution* has at least two general meanings, neither of which is inherently more correct or accurate than the other. (Concepts

[1] On the logics of comparative analysis, see Paige 1999, Mahoney 1999, Lieberson 1991, Ragin 1987, Skocpol 1984, Tilly 1984, Skocpol and Somers 1980, and Eckstein 1975.

as such are not more or less true, but more or less *useful* for generating falsifiable explanations of interesting phenomena.) According to one (broader) definition, *revolution* (or *political revolution*) refers to any and all instances in which a state or political regime is overthrown and thereby transformed by a popular movement in an irregular, extraconstitutional, and/or violent fashion; this definition assumes that revolutions, at least those truly worthy of the name, necessarily require the mobilization of large numbers of people against the existing state. (Some scholars, however, have analyzed so-called "revolutions from above" that involve little if any popular mobilization prior to the overthrow of the state [see, e.g., Trimberger 1978].) As Leon Trotsky (1961 [1932]: xvii) once wrote,

> The most indubitable feature of a revolution is the direct interference of the masses in historic events. In ordinary times the state, be it monarchical or democratic, elevates itself above the nation, and history is made by specialists in that line of business – kings, ministers, bureaucrats, parliamentarians, journalists. But at those crucial moments when the old order becomes no longer endurable to the masses, they break over the barriers excluding them from the political arena, sweep aside their traditional representatives, and create by their own interference the initial groundwork for a new regime.

According to the other (more restrictive) definition, revolutions entail not only mass mobilization and regime change, but also more or less rapid and fundamental social, economic, and/or cultural change during or soon after the struggle for state power. (What counts as "rapid and fundamental" change, however, is a matter of degree, and the line between it and slower and less basic change can be difficult to draw in practice.) Revolutions in this latter sense – revolutions "involving . . . the refashioning of the lives of tens of millions of people" (Lenin 1997 [1917]: 80–1) – are sometimes referred to as "great" or "social" revolutions, and I shall use the term *social revolution* after this fashion (Huntington 1968; Skocpol 1979).[2]

In the chapters that follow, I generally employ the concept of revolution in the first and more general sense described above. This is primarily a study, that is, of revolutions in the sense of irregular, extraconstitutional, and sometimes violent changes of political regime and

[2] According to a third (and extremely broad) definition, revolutions include *any* instance of relatively rapid and significant change – hence, the industrial revolution, the academic revolution, the feminist revolution, the computer revolution, the revolution of rising expectations, etc.

control of state power brought about by popular movements. More specifically, this book mainly attempts to explain why and how such revolutions occur – why they "succeed" in this specific sense – and why they occur in some peripheral societies but not in others.

By this definition, the revolutions examined in this book were the result, to a greater or lesser extent, of the actions of revolutionary movements, which are a special type of social movement. A *social movement* has been defined as a "collective challenge" to "elites, authorities, other groups or cultural codes" by some significant number of "people with common purposes and solidarity in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities" (Tarrow 1994: 3–4). A revolutionary social movement, or what I shall simply call a *revolutionary movement*, is a social movement "advancing exclusive competing claims to control of the state, or some segment of it" (Tilly 1993: 10). Few social movements attempt to gain control of the state as such, but this is a necessary (and sometimes exclusive) goal of that subset of social movements that are revolutionary. There is no hard and fast line, furthermore, that separates revolutionary movements from reform-oriented social movements. Under certain circumstances (which I hope this book will illuminate), social movements may become revolutionary, and revolutionary movements may become social movements (or political parties). I am primarily concerned in this book, then, with understanding why revolutionary movements sometimes become powerful forces and sometimes gain control of state power in peripheral societies.

Not all social movements, revolutionary or otherwise, are necessarily, or equally, "radical." Most social movements, including some revolutionary movements, seek directly or indirectly to reform the state or to utilize state power in order to reform existing economic, social, or cultural arrangements. Most social movements, that is, do not attempt to restructure national societies in truly fundamental ways. (Although, again, the distinction between reform and "fundamental" change can be difficult to draw.) A radical social movement, on the other hand, seeks the destruction or fundamental transformation of (at least) several important institutions. A *radical revolutionary movement*, as I use the term, not only seeks to control the state, but also aims (among other things) to transform more or less fundamentally the national society or some segment thereof, ruled by that state. To speak of radical revolutionaries, then, is not redundant. Of course, whether and under what conditions a radical revolutionary movement can actually bring about

such a social revolution is another question altogether, and one that lies largely beyond the scope of this book (but see Foran and Goodwin 1993). In any event, while the term "conservative social revolution" would clearly be an oxymoron, based on my definition of terms, it is certainly possible to speak of a conservative or reformist revolutionary movement, that is, a movement that seeks state power but which also wishes (or whose dominant leaders desire) to preserve or at most to modestly reform existing economic, social, and cultural arrangements, without changing them fundamentally. (For example, many leaders of the American War of Independence, sometimes called the American Revolution, and of the Mexican Revolution may be accurately described as "conservative revolutionaries.") This book focuses on the trajectory of radical revolutionary movements.

A significant change in the control and organization of state power is a sine qua non of both revolutions and social revolutions, as I am using those terms. By *state* I mean those core administrative, policing, and military organizations, more or less coordinated by an executive authority, that extract resources from and administer and rule (through violence if necessary) a territorially defined national society (the term *national society* is defined later in this section). As Lenin put it, by "state" or "apparatus of government is meant, first of all, the standing army, police and officialdom" (1997 [1917]: 38). (I make no assumption, however, that states are unitary actors that are not themselves potentially riven by conflicts of interest, identity, and vision.) Generally, states claim the right to exercise final and absolute authority (i.e., *sovereignty*) within national societies. By *state power* or *infrastructural power* I mean the capacity of these core organizations to carry out their projects, and to enforce extant laws, throughout the territories that they claim to govern, even in the face of opposition from the population that they rule or from other states (see also Chapter 7, Appendix 2, for more on this concept).

Generally, modern states are organized in either a bureaucratic or patrimonial fashion, to use Max Weber's terms, with many combinations of these ideal-types in between. A *bureaucratic* or "rationalized" state organization is characterized by the appointment of officials, based upon achievement in a course of appropriately specialized training, to positions (or "offices") with clearly defined responsibilities. A *patrimonial* state, by contrast, is staffed by officials who have been appointed on the basis of political loyalty to a leader or party, kinship, ethnicity, and/or some other characteristic, ascribed or achieved, that has no specific connection