

# THE PARADOX OF EXPLOSIVE AND GRADUAL POLICY CHANGE IN POLITICAL REVOLUTIONARY TIMES

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## ABSTRACT

Many political revolutionary theorists have argued that political revolutionary activity occurs in a dramatic fashion resulting in explosive change in the orientation of established policy regimes resulting in radically new public policy outputs and governmental organizational structures. This research, quantitatively analyzing political revolutions that culminated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, confirms that short-term political revolutionary activity and the establishment of new policy regimes were few in number. Most successful political revolutionary activities along with new policy regimes were long-term while some political revolutions were not successful. The process of political revolutionary activity to overthrow established policy regimes is a complex phenomenon with political and policy change occurring across widely varying time frames.

## KEY WORDS

political revolution, complexity theory, policy regime

## CLASSIFICATION

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## INTRODUCTION

The interplay between revolutionary activity and a political revolution resulting in new policy regimes with radically different policy outputs and governmental organizational structures have been extensively examined in a variety of scholarly studies [1-8]. Policy outputs in this article are government actions or inaction in the form of legislation, executive orders or written mandates, and judicial decisions. A policy regime is defined as governing arrangements among a political coalition or group [9, 10]. In a political revolution, which may be violent or non-violent, a policy regime is overthrown resulting in the enactment of a radically new set of permanent state institutions and policies [11, 12].

One issue of contention in the literature on political revolutions is the length of political revolutions. A number of scholars of political revolutions have postulated that revolutions occur as dramatic and short-term revolutionary change resulting in an explosive change in political power and political structures over a relatively short period of time [13-31]. For instance, Skopcol wrote:

Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below [32].

On the other hand, other scholars have indicated political revolutionary change and policy outputs may occur in a short period, long period, or not at all [13, 14, 33, 34]. In addition, Goldstone also has argued that whether or not and for what duration explosive, dramatic, and short-term revolutionary political change occurs is dependent on:

Where the state remains strong and the opposition is anchored mainly in rural areas, one may see a drawn-out guerilla war. Where the state weakens rapidly, many elites abandon it, and urban groups actively support the opposition, one may see a fairly rapid overthrow of the central authorities [13].

Goldstone also has argued that:

Efforts to change the political regime are based on competing visions of the social order; informal or formal mass mobilization; non-institutional actions including demonstrations, protests, strikes, and violence [19].

In particular, Goldstone's argues that the conditions that initiate a political revolutionary situation include a state in crisis, elites in conflict and in opposition to the state, and a large portion of the population mobilized against the state [19, 35]. In order to ascertain which of these competing theoretical perspectives are accurate, in this paper for all revolutions culminating in the 20<sup>th</sup> century I will examine and analyze all political revolutionary activity resulting in new and permanent policy regimes

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A variety of scholars examining political revolutionary change outside normal political processes have concluded that revolutionary political change can occur in an explosive manner in a short period [13-32, 34, 36]. On the other hand, some scholars of political revolution have also defined revolutionary change as occurring in short periods, long periods, or not at all [13, 14, 33, 34].

Initially in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the first generation of revolutionary political theory was conducted by scholars of natural history [18, 19, 37-39]. Here, the focus is on theories based on collective national traits and group or mob psychology based on an unconscious, as

posited by Freudian psychology, “collective mind” [18, 19, 38, 39]. People through a collective mind also initiate group actions such as revolutions. Moreover, people are quite different acting as individuals in contrast to a group or mob. A person’s personality becomes submerged thus allowing the collective mind of the mob to dominate. Based on the unconscious mob mentality, passions, often irrational and exaggerated, rather than the reason of rule is the cause of political revolutions [18, 19, 38, 39].

Beginning in the 1950s, a second generation of scholars of political revolution, following the lead of Talcott Parsons and the structural functionalist school in sociology, utilized policy equilibrium theory to explain societal functions [23-25, 40-42]. A central tenet of the structural functional school is a view of political policymaking systems being in equilibrium and homeostasis or disequilibrium due to shifting balances of power from political demands and conflicts between interest groups [23-25, 40-42]. Political systems under structural functionalism are due to a policymaking system in a holistic model based on important constituent parts. These parts included policy inputs emanating from the total social, cultural, and political environment, conversion of demands into outputs including policy implementation, and feedback [43]. Cultural norms, customs, and political institutions play a primary role in influencing these separate parts in the policy process related to the whole system. Policymaking under structural functionalism often focuses on the process of how a policy is developed. When a system is in extreme disequilibrium, then a punctuated policy reform or even a political revolution can occur [17, 18, 44].

A third generation of scholars of political revolution introduced several new and important variables to understand political revolutions including class and class struggle, the state, international relations and conflicts between states, international capitalist economics, and rural revolts [18, 19, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34]. The focus of this approach was on class conflict and structures. Another key feature of this approach was analyzing class revolution from below. This was manifest in studies of conflicts between peasants or workers and elites who dominated the state. Other foci of this approach was identifying various factors that initiated political revolutions including the role of international capitalist economics and the state as a basis for administrative and coercive power for domestic ruling elites and classes [18, 19, 22, 26, 28, 32, 34].

Goldstone and Foran have argued that since the 1980s a fourth generation of revolutionary political scholarship has emerged [18, 19]. This large and diverse group of scholarship has expanded upon the third generation of political revolution scholarship with a focus on the role of culture, ideology, and leaders in political revolutions [18, 19]. Many fourth generation political revolution scholars have also concluded that there are a wide and complex range of factors that may cause and explain why political revolutions do or do not occur and for what duration [14, 18, 19, 33, 34]. Among these factors that cause political revolutions are the interconnection between state administrative, police and national security structures, ideology, culture, political elites and classes, political leadership, interest groups, mobilizations, and foreign interventions [18, 19]. In addition, Emirbayer and Goodwin argue that important independent factors are the transformation of a political culture including social-psychological and human agency to assess alternative course of action that converts normative views of the world [35].

## **SUMMARY**

With respect to the time period and policy regime change caused by political revolutions, many scholars of political revolution have argued that political revolutions occur in a short period leading to explosive policy change. Some others have asserted that political revolutions may occur in a short period, long period, or not at all. This article will determine

whether political revolutionary activity that attempts to overthrow a political regime are all short-term and explosive in nature leading to dramatic policy output change in the form of a new policy regime.

## **METHODS**

The basic underlying assumptions in measuring the temporal extent of political revolutions that confront political regimes is that political revolutions are based in an “eventful sociology” where the revolutionary process is based on a variety of contingent and complex variables in an ongoing political revolution [45]. What constitutes an eventful sociology can only be determined by historical analyses based on hindsight of revolutionary activity in which a new policy regime was established and not fundamentally changed. The period of 1900 to 1999 was chosen to analyze political revolutionary activity as this represents a suitably long enough recent time period and sample to ascertain trends with respect to whether or not political revolutions occurred explosively and rapidly.

Data on the time period of revolutionary activity and establishment of permanent policy regimes for this analysis was obtained from articles from major newspapers contained in LexisNexis Academic, *New York Times* historical archives, peer reviewed articles obtained from JSTOR, EBSCO, and WorldCat online searches, and from the comprehensive and authoritative encyclopedic history of world revolutions by Goldstone and Defronzo [12, 21, 46, 47].

Measurement of the data from 1990 to 1999 of the eventful sociology of political revolutions will occur in two parts. First, a measurement will be conducted that includes the name of the political revolution, the year the revolution ended, the chronological period in months in which the revolution occurred, the primary groups and opponents involved, and whether the revolution was successful or not. This assessment will determine whether political revolutionary activity is ordinarily short term or not.

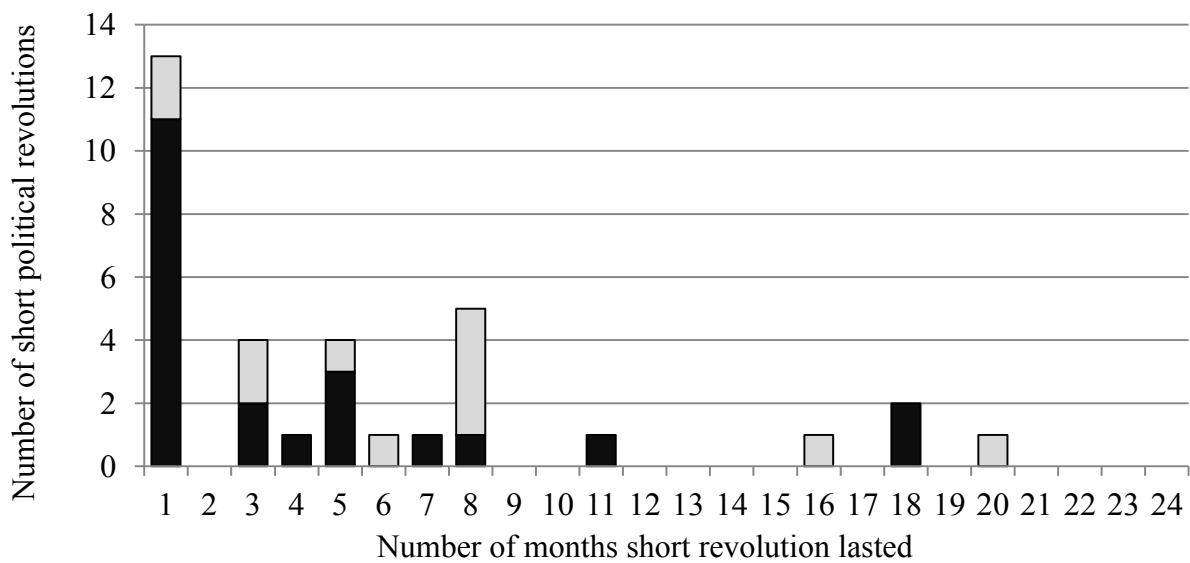
In order to determine whether political revolutionary activity has been rapid and explosive or not, descriptive empirical statistics were generated on the length of each successful or non-successful political revolutionary activity including median, mean, and mode. The time period for each political revolutionary activity was based on the month and year the political revolutionary activity began and ended. For this paper political revolutions are considered relatively short-term if they occurred in 24 months or less. In this paper, two years was utilized as this represents a fairly short period of time while providing a period that does not underestimate short-term political revolutions. Utilizing this approach, I will then determine the nature of the tempo of revolutionary activity that culminated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **RESULTS**

Appendix provides an overview of each political revolution that ended in the 20<sup>th</sup> century including the number of months of the revolution. As illustrated by Figures 1 and 2, of the 85 instances of political revolutionary activity ending in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, 40 cases or 49 % of political revolutionary activity was short term lasting two years or less while 44 cases or 51 % of political revolutionary activity lasted two or more years and was long term. Additionally, long term revolutionary activities resulting in new policy regimes occurred in 34 out of 45 cases or 75,6 % of the time.

Additionally, with the exception of 21 instances of political revolutionary activity lasting one month or less, all other instances of political revolutionary activity randomly occurred in two instances or less per month. The shortest duration of political revolutionary activity was one month or less and the longest duration manifest in the Indian Independence Movement lasted

751 months. The mode was one month or less as 21 was the greatest number of political revolutionary activities occurring in one time period. The average number of months that political revolutionary activity occurred was 92 months while the median point for political revolutionary activity was 30 months. This indicates that while the number of short-term and long-term political revolutionary activity events were numerically divided almost evenly, the collective length of long-term political revolutionary activity skewed the overall average length and median indicating political revolutionary activity can be quite lengthy in relation to short-term political revolutionary activities. These results confirm that classifications of political revolutions as short-term and dramatic is not accurate in a large majority of cases. In addition, explosive political revolutionary activity and change in a minority of short-term cases to overthrow political regimes was unsuccessful. Finally, the nature of the tempo of political revolutions, overall, represented a complex pattern of time frames in which short and long term political activity occurred.



**Figure 1.** Number of short political revolutions that occurred around world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by duration in months. Black bars denote successful, and grey unsuccessful political revolutions.



**Figure 2.** Number of long political revolutions that occurred around world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, by duration in months. Black bars denote successful, and grey unsuccessful political revolutions.

## DISCUSSION

The basic premise of many political revolutionary theorists is that political revolutionary change occurs in a dramatic and short-term fashion. This research in the area of revolutionary political activities resulting in new policy regimes confirms that in the rare instances when violent and turbulent political revolutionary struggle occurs, most successful political revolutions establishing a new policy regime were not short-term. This description of political revolutions is in line with the arguments of Goldstone and other fourth generation political revolution scholars that political revolutions can be short-term, long-term, or not successful. Political revolutions demonstrate a complex variety of time periods.

In that regard, the study of political revolutionary activity resulting in new policy regimes and public policy outputs and governmental organizational structures needs to come into sync with the conclusion that has now been reached for quite some time by fourth generation scholars of political revolutions. That is, political revolutionary activity linked to the establishment of new policy regimes is a highly varied and even complex matter and often not short-term. Some factors such as culture, ideology, capitalism, corporate actions or the role of classes and elites may have a particularly significant role in causing policy regime changes. Ultimately, business as usual when it comes to comprehending the nature of political revolutionary activity linked to new policy regimes requires analyses that account for complex system behavior as a key feature in ascertaining the nature and scope of political revolutionary actions linked to the policy process.

## APPENDIX

**Table 1.** Political revolutions of the world ending in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sources: [12, 21, 46, 47] (continued on pp.410-416).

Name	Years occurred	Time period, month	Revolutionary groups	Opponents	Outcome
Philippine Independence Wars	1872-1910	463	Soldiers, Workers, Catholic Priests	Spanish Colonial Government	did not succeed
Egyptian Revolts	1881-1919	458	Nationalists	Egyptian Government, Ottoman Empire	succeeded
Indian Independence Movement	1886-1947	751	Nationalists, Islamists	British Colonial Government	succeeded
Chinese Boxer Uprising	1900-1901	16	Boxers, Chinese Government	Christians	did not Succeed
Russian Revolution of 1905	1905-1907	31	Workers	Aristocrats, Monarchy, Tsarist Government	did not succeed
Iranian Constitutional Revolution	1906	4	Radical Deputies, Social Democrats, Workers	Iranian Government, Monarchy	succeeded
Turkish Revolution	1908-1922	124	Intellectuals, Workers, Women, Constitutionalists	Turkish Government	succeeded

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Years occurred</b>	<b>Time period, month</b>	<b>Revolutionary groups</b>	<b>Opponents</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Mexican Revolution	1910-1940	368	Peasants, Workers, Ranchers, Urban Political Reformers, Socialists, Anarchists	Mexican Government, Armed Forces, Landowners, Employers	Succeeded
Chinese Republican Revolution	1911	3	Faction of Military, Merchants	Chinese Government	Succeeded
Arab "Great Revolt"	1916-1918	29	Hashimites, Nationalists, British	Ottoman Empire	Succeeded
Irish Revolution	1916-1923	82	Irish Nationalists	British Government	Partially succeeded
Russian Revolution of 1917	1917	8	Bolsheviks, Trotskyites	Monarchy, Tsarist Government	Succeeded
German Revolution	1918-1919	8	Communists, Admirals, Sailors	German Government, Social Democrats	Did Not Succeed
Hungarian Revolutions	1918-1919	5	Communists	Hungarian Government	Did Not Succeed
Chinese May Fourth Movement	1919	1	Modernists, Anti-Corruption Advocates, Nationalists, Intellectuals	Chinese Government	Partially Succeeded
Chinese Nationalist Revolution	1919-1927	91	Nationalists	Chinese Government	Succeeded
Italian Fascist Revolution	1919-1945	314	Italian Fascists	Italian Government, Leftists	Succeeded
Chinese Communist Revolution	1921-1949	339	Communists, Intellectuals, Workers, Peasants	Chinese Government	Succeeded
German Nazi Revolution	1923-1945	148	German National Socialists, Fascists	German Government, Leftists	Succeeded
Chinese May Thirtieth Revolution	1925	6	Unions, Workers, Merchants, Students	Chinese Government	Did Not Succeed
Thai Revolution	1932	1	People's Party	Thailand Government	Succeeded
Spanish Civil War	1936-1939	34	Nationalists, Fascists	Spanish Government, Anarchists, Communists, Socialists	Succeeded

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Name	Years occurred	Time period, month	Revolutionary groups	Opponents	Outcome
Palestinian Anti Colonial Revolt	1936-1939	40	Palestinian Nationalists	British Colonial Government, Zionist Organizations	Did Not Succeed
Pakistani Independence Movement	1940-1947	90	Muslim Nationalists	Indian Government, British Colonial Government	Succeeded
Yugoslav Partisans and Communist Revolution	1941-1948	85	Communists	Yugoslav Government, Ustache (Fascists)	Succeeded
Guatemalan Revolution	1944-1954	122	Students, Peasants, Unions, Dissident Military Officers	Guatemalan Government, Employers, Landowners, Military, Catholic Church, Professionals	Succeeded
Indonesian National Revolution	1945-1950	61	Nationalists, Islamic Revolutionaries, Communists	Netherlands Colonial Government	Succeeded
Venezuelan Democratic Revolution	1945-1958	149	Unions, Dissident Military Officers, Industrialists, Political Parties	Venezuelan Government, Military, Landowners, Employers	Succeeded
Vietnamese Revolution	1945-1975	348	Nationalists, Communists	French and U.S. Colonial Rule	Succeeded
Philippine Huk Revolts	1946-1955	114	Peasant, Tenant Farmers, Laborers, Communists	Philippine Government	Did Not Succeed
Israeli Independence Revolt	1947-1948	26	Zionist Organizations	British Colonial Government, Arab	Succeeded
Madagascar War of Independence	1947-1948	20	Nationalists	French Colonial Government	Did Not Succeed
Ghanaian Independence Movement	1947-1957	117	Nationalists, Unions, Farmers, Populists	Ghana Government, British Colonial Government	Succeeded
Costa Rican Revolution	1948	3	Communist Party	Military, Oligarchy Employers, Costa Rican Government	Succeeded
Malayan Communist Insurgency	1948-1960	136	Communists	British Colonial Government	Did Not Succeed



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<b>Name</b>	<b>Years occurred</b>	<b>Time period, month</b>	<b>Revolutionary groups</b>	<b>Opponents</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Columbia's La Violencia	1948-1964	125	Political Parties	Columbian Government, Political Parties, Military	Succeeded
South African Anti-Apartheid Movement	1948-1994	534	African National Congress, Communist Party	South African Government	Succeeded
Korean Civil War	1950-1953	38	North Korean Government, Communists	South Korean Government, Conservatives	Did Not Succeed
Bolivian National Revolution	1952	1	Unions, Workers, Peasants, Socialists	Bolivian Government, Military, Police	Succeeded
Egyptian Revolution	1952	1	Free (Military) Officers, Nationalists	Egyptian Government	Succeeded
Kenyan Mau Mau Movement	1952-1960	89	Sharecroppers, Urban Unemployed, Homeless, Unions	British Colonial Government	Succeeded
Algerian Revolution	1954-1962	93	Nationalists, Religious Activists, Social Democrats, Socialists, and Communists	French Colonial Government	Succeeded
Sudanese Civil War	1955-1972	199	Sudan People's Liberation Movement	Sudan Government, Anglo-Egyptian Condominium	Succeeded
Omani Revolution	1955-1975	267	Tribal Omanis, Marxists, Nationalists	Oman Government	Did Not Succeed
Cuban Revolution	1956-1970	161	Communists, Students	Military, Cuban Government, U.S Companies, Catholic Church	Succeeded
Polish Solidarity Movement	1956-1990	415	Workers, Intellectuals, Writers, Catholic Church	Polish Government, Communists	Succeeded
Iraqi Revolution	1958	1	Military, Free (Military) Officers	Iraq Government, Monarchy	Succeeded
Guinean Independence Movement	1958	1	Nationalists	French Colonial Government	Succeeded

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Years occurred</b>	<b>Time period, month</b>	<b>Revolutionary groups</b>	<b>Opponents</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Tibetan Revolt	1959	1	Tibet Nationalists	Chinese Government	Did Not Succeed
Rwandan Civil War	1959-1994	178	Hutus, Peasants	Rwandan Government, Tutsi	Partially Succeeded
Korean Democracy Movement	1960-1998	455	Democracy Movement Workers, Students	South Korean Government	Partially Succeeded
Guinea-Bissau Independence Revolt	1962-1974	152	African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde, Communist Party	Portuguese Guinean Colonial Government	Succeeded
Yemeni Revolts	1962-1990	333	Military, Nationalists, Peasants, Marxists	Yemen Government	Succeeded
Eritrean Revolution	1962-1991	346	Eritrean Liberation Front, Communists	Eritrean Government	Succeeded
Syrian Revolution	1963	1	Military, Baathist Socialists, Nasserites, Populists	Syrian Government	Succeeded
Benin Revolutions	1963-1996	391	At First: Military, Marxists; Later: Students, Workers, Unemployed	Benin Government	Succeeded
Zanzibar Revolution	1964	1	Umma Political Party	British Colonial Government	Succeeded
Indonesian Upheaval	1965-1966	7	Military, Communists, Nationalists	Indonesian Government	Succeeded
Chinese Cultural Revolution	1966-1969	36	Red Guards, People's Liberation Army	Bureaucrats, Intellectuals in Chinese Government, Counterrevolutionaries	Succeeded
Zimbabwe Revolt	1966-1980	169	Nationalists	Rhodesian Government	Succeeded
Nigerian Civil War	1967-1970	32	Ethnic Nationalists	Nigerian Government	Did Not Succeed
Cambodian Khmer Rouge	1967-1979	142	Communists, Khmer Rouge	Cambodian Government	Did Not Succeed
Czechoslovakian "Prague Spring"	1968	8	Writers Union, Advocates of "Socialism With a Human Face"	Soviet Union, Warsaw Pact	Did Not Succeed

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<b>Name</b>	<b>Years occurred</b>	<b>Time period, month</b>	<b>Revolutionary groups</b>	<b>Opponents</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
French Student Revolt	1968	3	Students, Workers	French Government, Communist Party, Unions	Did Not Succeed
Peruvian Revolution	1968-1975	84	Army, Social Reformers, Peasants, Poor	Peruvian Government, Peruvian Navy	Succeeded
Libyan Revolution	1969	1	Military, Nationalists, Socialists	Libyan Government	Succeeded
Chilean Revolution	1970-1973	38	Socialist Party	Military, C.I.A., Landowners, Employers	Succeeded
Bangladeshi War of Independence	1971	11	Independence Movement, Military	Bangladesh Government	Succeeded
Portuguese Revolution	1974-1975	8	Portuguese Military	Portuguese Government	Did Not Succeed
Ethiopian Revolution	1974-1991	141	Military, Ethiopian People's Liberation Front, Ethiopian People's Democratic Revolutionary Front, Anti-Communists	Ethiopian Government	Succeeded
Mozambican Revolution	1974-1994	247	Front for the Liberation of Mozambique, Nationalists	Portuguese Colonial Government	Succeeded
Angolan Revolution	1974-1996	243	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola, Anti-communists	Portuguese Colonial Government, Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola	Did Not Succeed
East Timorese Independence Movement	1975-1999	181	Students, Catholic Church, Nationalists	Indonesian Government	Succeeded
Afghan Revolution	1978-1995	242	Communists, Islamists, Nationalists	Afghanistan Government	Succeeded
Nicaraguan Revolution	1979	5	Sandinista National Liberation Front	Nicaraguan Government	Succeeded
Iranian Islamic Revolution	1979	1	Nationalists, Business Owners, Professionals, Students, Intellectuals	Iranian Government	Succeeded

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Name	Years occurred	Time period, month	Revolutionary groups	Opponents	Outcome
Grenada New Jewel Movement	1979-1983	56	Peasants, Youth, Unions, Workers, Women, Large Landowners, Community Organizations, Opposition Politicians	Grenada Government	Succeeded
Philippine People Power Revolution	1986	1	Philippine Citizens	Philippine Government	Succeeded
Haitian Democratic Revolution	1986-1996	119	Professionals, Workers, Unions, Women's Organizations, Youth Groups, Peasants, Neighborhood Organizations, Religious Organizations	Haitian Government, Military	Succeeded
Yugoslav Communist Collapse	1987-1992	53	Nationalists	Yugoslavian Government	Succeeded
Palestinian Intifada	1987-1996	70	Nationalists	Israeli Government	Did Not Succeed
Chinese Tiananmen Square Uprising	1989	3	Pro-Democracy Movement	Chinese Government	Did Not Succeed
Romanian Revolution	1989	1	Democracy Advocates	Romanian Government, Communist Party	Succeeded
Hungarian Anti-Communist Revolutions	1989	5	Party Reformers, Intellectuals, Christian Democrats, Populists, Liberals, Nationalists	Hungarian Government, Communist Party	Succeeded
East German Revolution	1989-1990	5	Perestroika Advocates, Intellectuals, Workers	East German Government, Communist Party	Succeeded
Czechoslovakian "Velvet Revolution" and "Divorce"	1989-1993	40	Writers, Students, Poets, Intellectuals, Nationalists	Czechoslovakian Government, Communist Party	Succeeded
Bulgarian Anti-Communist Revolution	1989-1997	91	Human rights activists, environmentalists, unions, Perestroika advocates, Democracy advocates	Bulgarian Government, Communist Party	Succeeded

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Name	Years occurred	Time period, month	Revolutionary groups	Opponents	Outcome
Baltic Revolutions	1990-1991	18	Democracy Advocates	Latvian, Estonian, and Lithuanian Governments, Communist Party	Succeeded
Albanian Anti-Communist Revolution	1990-1992	18	Intellectuals, Students, Unions	Albanian Government, Communist Party	Succeeded

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