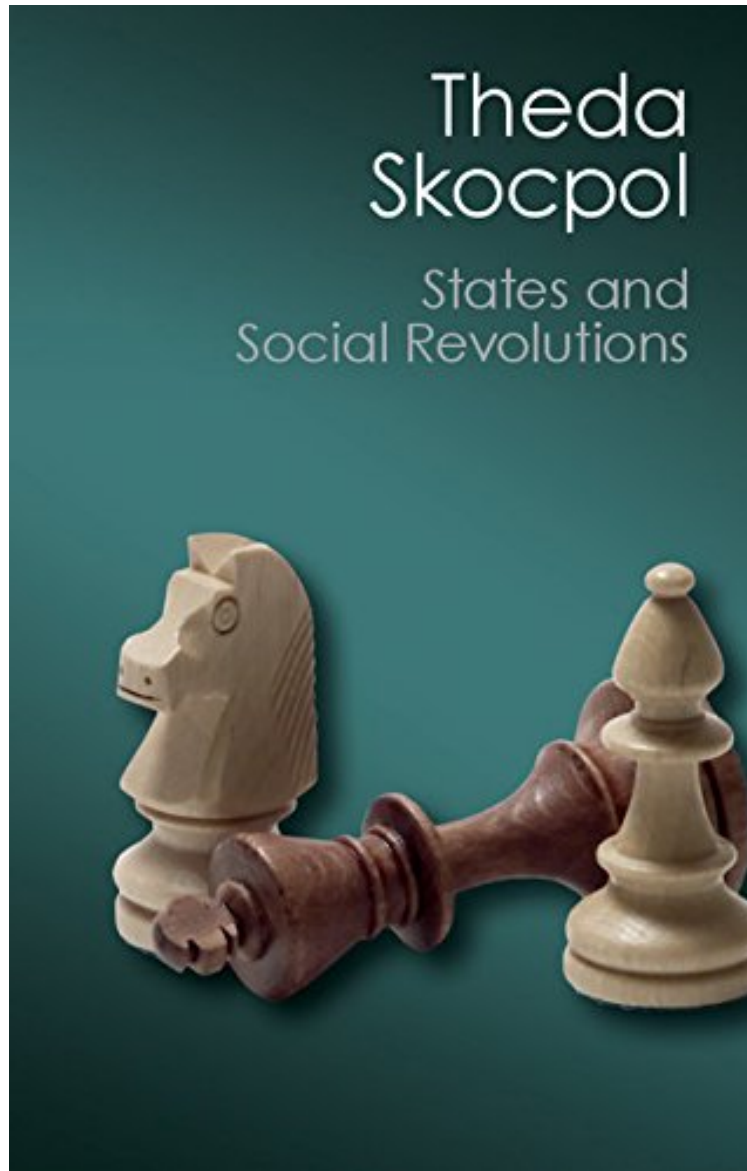


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States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Canto Classics)

Theda Skocpol

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Theda Skocpol : States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Canto Classics) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China (Canto Classics):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. This book was so fantastic!!By CustomerThis book was so

fantastic!!! It is incredibly dense, and the amount of notes I wrote in the margin could themselves produce another book (albeit much shorter). Skocpol is fantastic and so brilliant. If you're a fan of studying revolutions (and insurgencies) please read this book. It's theoretical in nature but a must read.

0 of 1 people found the following review helpful. helpful highlights

By CustomerArrived as advertised, highlighter marks emphasized the main points of the book.

17 of 18 people found the following review helpful. Revolution from a Structural Approach

By Matthew P. Arsenault

Theda Skocpol seeks to explain the causes of social revolution through a structural paradigm. Her level of analysis is the state. This paradigm, holding the state as the level of analysis and concentrating on structure, is defined well by Migdal. "This is a system-dominant perspective in which structuralists see states as interchangeable to the degree that they expect them to act similarly if facing the same array of forces" (215). Skocpol contends that external forces can lead to economic and military instability within a state. This instability weakens both the structure of the state, and subsequently the nation's societal structure. In turn, this creates an environment well-suited for social revolutions. Skocpol defines social revolution as causing two important changes which separate it from other forms of political upheavals: "societal structural change with class upheaval" and "the coincidence of political with social transformation" (5). In order to discover similar phenomena common across states which lead to social revolution, Skocpol uses a method of comparative historical analysis. She seeks to establish relationships between "causal variables referring to the strength and structure of old regime states and the relations of state organizations to class structures" (35). Her analysis spans three revolutions: France 1789, China 1911 and Russia 1917. In looking for commonalities across state boundaries, Skocpol is using what she referred to in *Bringing the State Back In* as the Tocquevillian approach. In this case, Skocpol is using the Tocquevillian point of view to explore how "state structures and the activities of states" influence social revolution. Skocpol asserts that revolutions emerge from "political crises centered in the structures and situations of old regime states" (47). The author argues that in the cases of France, China and Russia, all regimes faced similar threats which affected state, and consequently, societal structures. According to Skocpol, a number of transnational and internal events can lead to changes in state structure: threats of invasion, defeats in war, political dependency and economic inequalities. In discussing state failure, Migdal writes, "States crack when they are hit simultaneously by three sorts of crises - a state financial emergency, severe elite divisions, and a potential and propensity for popular groups to mobilize" (216). In Skocpol's historical analysis, all three old regimes suffered similar pressures. First, pre-revolutionary regimes could not compete economically with their industrializing neighbors. All three old regimes experienced difficulty making the transition from agrarian economies to industrialized societies. This created economic inequality between states. As Skocpol writes, "Modern social revolutions have happened only in countries situated in disadvantaged positions within international arenas" (23). In addition to economic disequilibrium, all three old regimes encountered military threats from abroad. These regimes were unable to compete militarily with their neighbors due to their economic disadvantage and lack of industrialization. These pressures lead to Migdal's second type of crisis, "state financial emergency." Secondly, in response to these external pressures, the structure of the old regimes weakened, and conflict between the state and elites emerged. The international pressures began to drain the state economically. In France and Germany, wars with industrialized rivals nearly bankrupted the state (65, 81). In China, the Imperial court was unable to counter the intrusion of foreign powers and the successive changes imposed to the economic structure (74). This in turn placed pressure on the elites. In France, the state faced bankruptcy due wars and the lack of an industrialized economy. The state attempted to impose tax reform which would have increased taxation for an elite deeply engrained in the state structure. The elites no longer felt that the state could adequately protect their interests, and began to seek a more representative regime. In turn, this call for more representation weakened the Crown, and coupled with a disillusioned peasant class, was able to change state structure. Similar events in Russia and Manchu China illustrate Migdal's "severe elite divisions." Thirdly, the weakening of the state/elite relationship and divisions in the dominant class were not the sole catalyst for social revolution. Rather, Skocpol argues that in all three revolutions peasant rebellions against landed elites were necessary conditions for successful change in society's structure. In addition, specific organizational structures found in the peasant class were important in providing the revolutionary potential of the peasant (117). Skocpol writes, "Rentier agrarian systems, where small holder peasant families possess and work the land on their own, are notoriously susceptible to peasant revolts" (117). Peasants under such a system find themselves economically tied together against landlords. In other words, the peasants suffer collectively under the yoke of the land holding class. As such, the peasants develop "some organized capacity for collective action against their exploitative superiors" (115). The author uses the example of Russian *obshchina* as an organizational structure that provides a means to collective action and ensuing peasant revolution. The *obshchina* was a communal village which administered commonly held lands and disseminated the right to use among the villagers. In turn, the members of the *obshchina* were "collectively responsible for payment and labor obligations to service-nobles who possessed nearly exclusive jurisdiction over them" (128). Because of the closely knit relationships and responsibilities of peasants in the *obshchina*, the structure was conducive to collective action. Similar organizational structures of the peasant classes in France and Manchu China illustrate Migdal's "potential and propensity for popular groups to mobilize."

State structures, international forces, and class relations: Theda Skocpol shows how all three combine to explain the origins and accomplishments of social-revolutionary transformations. Social revolutions have been rare but undeniably of enormous importance in modern world history. *States and Social Revolutions* provides a new frame of reference for analyzing the causes, the conflicts, and the outcomes of such revolutions. It develops a rigorous, comparative historical analysis of three major cases: the French Revolution of 1787 through the early 1800s, the Russian Revolution of 1917 through the 1930s, and the Chinese Revolution of 1911 through the 1960s. Believing that existing theories of revolution, both Marxist and non-Marxist, are inadequate to explain the actual historical patterns of revolutions, Skocpol urges us to adopt fresh perspectives. Above all, she maintains that states conceived as administrative and coercive organizations potentially autonomous from class controls and interests must be made central to explanations of revolutions.

"With lucidity and care, Skocpol has laid out a challenging comparison of three great revolutions ... Here is a book worth studying, refuting, testing, elaborating, and emulating." Charles Tilly "I am convinced that *States and Social Revolutions* will be considered a landmark in the study of the sources of revolution." Lewis A. Coser, *The New York Times Book About the Author* Theda Skocpol is Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology at Harvard University. Her previous works include the prize-winning "*States and Social Revolutions*".