

**UNRAVELLING  
THE THREADS OF**



**REVOLUTION**

## COMMON THEMES

1. Social Inequality and Economic Hardship
2. Political Discontent
3. Revolutionary Ideas and Radical Movements
4. Efforts at Reorganisation

# COMMON THEMES

1. **Social Inequality and Economic Hardship:** Both revolutions were, in part, responses to severe social stratification and economic instability. The French social hierarchy under the Ancien Régime paralleled the grievances of Russian peasants, workers, and urban poor.
2. **Political Discontent:** Each society faced entrenched autocracy (absolute monarchy vs. tsarist rule) and growing calls for liberty, representation, or radical systemic reform.
3. **Revolutionary Ideas and Radical Movements:** Enlightenment thought inspired French revolutionaries; Marxist and populist ideas gained ground in Russia. These ideologies catalysed grassroots organisation and militant activism.
4. **Efforts at Reorganisation:** From the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen in France to Lenin's decrees in post-1917 Russia, revolutionary governments sought to rebuild social and political orders, with mixed success and significant internal conflict.

# 1. SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

## 1. Class and Social Stratification

1. French context: The Ancien Régime's three estates (clergy, nobility, and commoners), feudal dues, and widespread peasant distress
2. Russian context: Vast economic gulf between nobility and serfs/workers, oppressive conditions in rural areas, famine episodes

## 2. Economic Factors and Crises

1. France: Fiscal collapse due to war debts, failed reforms, regressive taxation
2. Russia: Limited industrial modernisation, severe rural poverty, costly involvement in the First World War

## 3. Impact on Popular Support

1. Growing resentment among peasants, artisans, and emergent urban workforce
2. Escalating tensions around land ownership, labour conditions, and access to resources

# 2. POLITICAL DISCONTENT AND THE OLD ORDER

## 1. Absolute Monarchy vs. Tsarist Autocracy

1. France: Louis XVI's perceived ineptitude and entrenched monarchical privilege
2. Russia: Romanov dynasty's autocratic rule, Tsar Nicholas II's resistance to meaningful reform

## 2. Weaknesses of the Political Structures

1. France: Outdated Estates-General, failure to accommodate the Third Estate's demands
2. Russia: Inadequate representation through the Duma (Parliament) and top-down governance

## 3. Role of War and Military Defeats

1. French involvement in costly international conflicts (Seven Years' War, American War of Independence)
2. Russian losses in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–5), struggles in WWI, undermining Tsarist legitimacy

# 3. REVOLUTIONARY IDEAS AND IDEOLOGICAL CURRENTS

## 1. Philosophical and Enlightenment Influences (France)

1. Rise of Enlightenment ideals (e.g. liberty, equality, popular sovereignty), shaped by thinkers like Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu
2. Spread of pamphlets, salons, and public debates challenging the hierarchical social order

## 2. Marxist and Populist Ideas (Russia)

1. Socialist and Marxist doctrines among intelligentsia and urban workers
2. Role of revolutionary parties such as the Bolsheviks and Mensheviks; the influence of Lenin's adaptation of Marxism

## 3. Creating Revolutionary Momentum

1. Emphasis on human rights, democracy, and the overthrow of oppressive regimes
2. Growing public consciousness of injustice and possibility of radical change

# 4. RADICAL MOVEMENTS AND KEY FIGURES

## 1. Grassroots Activism and Mass Mobilisation

1. France: Political clubs (Jacobins, Cordeliers), sans-culottes, demonstrations, storming of the Bastille
2. Russia: Strikes, soviets (workers' councils), increasing support for Bolsheviks in cities and garrisons

## 2. Leaders and Influential Personalities

1. French Revolution: Robespierre, Danton, Marat, Lafayette
2. Russian Revolution: Lenin, Trotsky, Kerensky, Tsar Nicholas II

## 3. Methods of Revolt

1. Peaceful petitions vs. violent insurrections
2. Propaganda, revolutionary journalism, mass protests

# 5. EFFORTS AT REORGANISATION: TRANSFORMING THE STATE

## 1. Overthrow of Traditional Institutions

1. France: Abolition of feudalism, nationalisation of church lands, trial and execution of the king
2. Russia: Fall of the Tsar, provisional government's collapse, Bolshevik seizure of power

## 2. New Governing Frameworks

1. France: Constitutional monarchy (initially), then republic, culminating in the radical Jacobin regime during the Terror
2. Russia: Dual power situation (Provisional Government vs. Petrograd Soviet), followed by a one-party Bolshevik state

## 3. Radical Policies

1. France: Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, revolutionary tribunals, 'Levée en masse' (mass conscription)
2. Russia: Decrees on land, peace, and nationalities, War Communism, later the New Economic Policy (NEP)



# 6. CONSEQUENCES AND LEGACY

## 1. Revolutionary Violence and Repression

1. France: The Terror, purges and show trials, deep divisions within the revolution
2. Russia: Civil War, Red Terror, use of Cheka (secret police), forced collectivisation (post-revolution)

## 2. Social, Political, and Cultural Shifts

1. Socio-political reorganisation, challenge to monarchy and aristocracy
2. Emergence of new concepts of citizenship, class identity, and the role of state power

## 3. Long-Term Impact

1. France: Napoleonic Wars, spread of revolutionary ideals across Europe
2. Russia: Foundation of the Soviet Union, global spread of socialist/communist movements

# 7. COMPARING THE TWO REVOLUTIONS

## 1. Shared Drivers

1. Discontent over inequality, economic hardship, absolute authority, desire for rights/freedoms
2. Rapid polarisation between traditional elites and emerging revolutionary groups

## 2. Similar Trajectories

1. Initial moderate phase, radical takeover, internal factionalism, external threats
2. Government by force, centralised power structures, consolidation of authority

## 3. Contrasts

1. Distinct ideological underpinnings (Enlightenment liberalism vs. Marxist socialism)
2. Different geopolitical contexts (France in 18th-century Europe vs. Russia in early 20th-century global power rivalries)
3. Industrial vs. largely agrarian economies at different stages of modernisation

## 8. OVERALL REFLECTION

- **Complexity of Revolutionary Change:** Multiple, overlapping causes that build over time.
- **Struggle between Ideals and Pragmatism:** High-minded promises often compromised by violence, necessity, or power struggles.
- **Significance for Modern Politics:** Foundation for ongoing debates around popular sovereignty, human rights, and the role of the state.

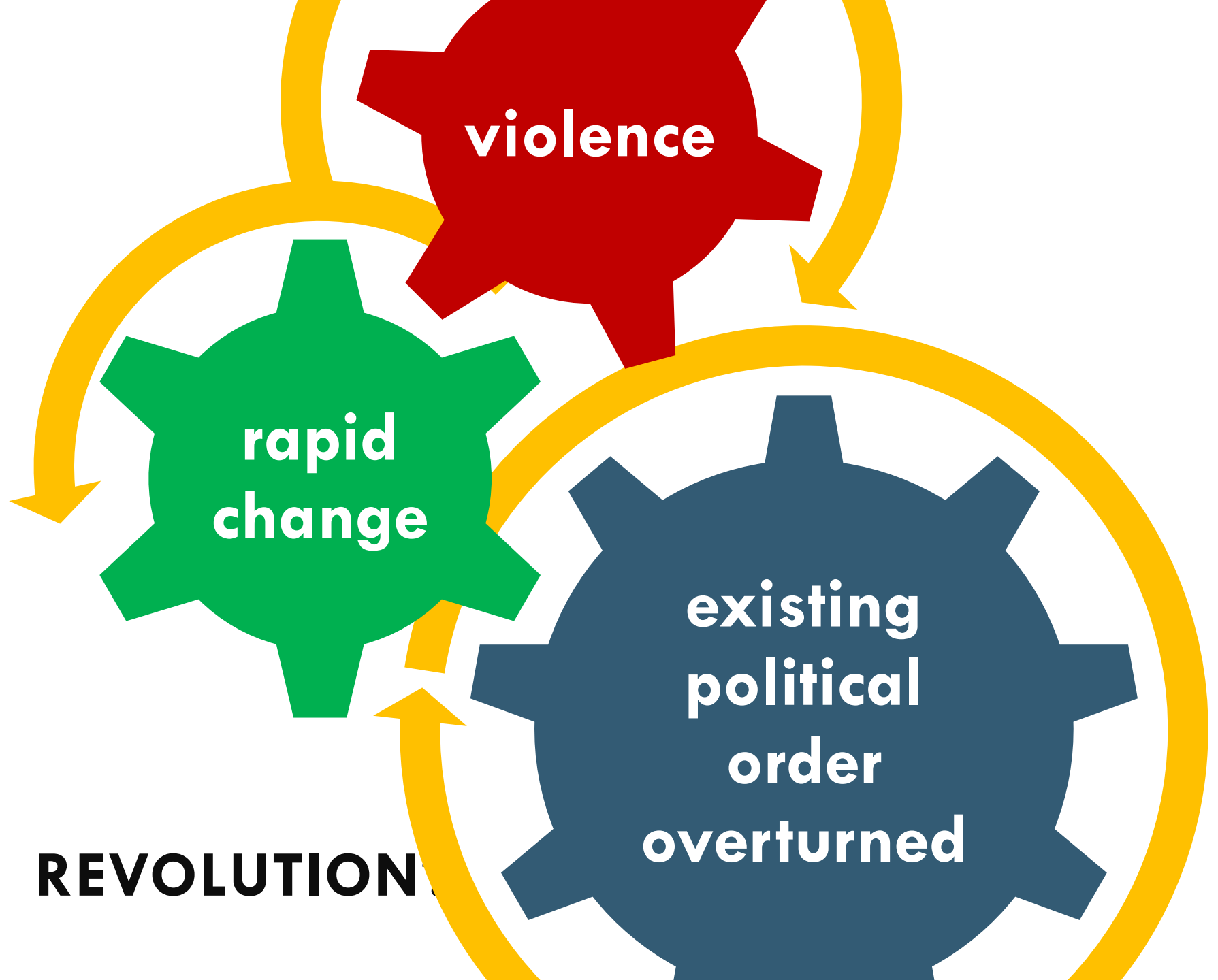
# HOW TO USE THIS IN THE CLASSROOM

- **Teaching & Learning:** Frame discussions around each theme, prompting students to compare and contrast French and Russian experiences.
- **VCE:** Tie these themes to areas of study focusing on causes, consequences, and conflicting historical interpretations of revolutionary events.
- **Further Inquiry:** Encourage deeper investigation into specific turning points (e.g. Bastille Day, October Revolution) or figures (Robespierre, Lenin) within each theme.

**The principal issue facing the Bolsheviks in 1917 was not merely the seizure of power but the seizure of meaning.**

— Victoria E. Bonnell





# transformation

*political*

- How and who governs

*civic & legal*

- Citizens' rights

*international*

- International alliances

*social &  
cultural*

- Structure of the society:
  - roles of classes
  - roles of men and women

*economic*

- Property ownership









Sacrifice to the International

СВЕРДЛОВЪ

ЗИНОВЬЕВЪ

ЛЕНИНЪ

ЛЕНИНЪ

ТРОЦКІЙ

КАМЕНЕВЪ

РАДЕКЪ

Zinoviev

Trotsky

Sverdlov

Lenin

Kamenev

Radek



ITS TIME!

