

Mark R. Beissinger. *The Revolutionary City: Urbanization and the Global Transformation of Rebellion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2022. \$99.95 (hardcover), \$35.00 (paper).

Jack A. Goldstone
George Mason University

Mark Beissinger's *The Revolutionary City: Urbanization and the Global Transformation of Rebellion* is perhaps the most important new book on revolutions to appear in decades. Beissinger's focus is on color revolutions, which he labels "civic revolutions" (p. 8) to distinguish them from social revolutions. He defines civic revolutions by their goals and tactics: their goal is not to overturn the class structure of society, but to replace a corrupt and ineffective or oppressive regime with one that is hoped to be more accountable and just. Their tactics consist of demonstrating the ineffectiveness and illegitimacy of the current regime by "concentrating large numbers of unarmed protesters in central urban spaces" (p. 8), and to persist in occupying those central spaces against the regime until the latter folds.

Social revolutions have occurred in low-income agrarian countries with great inequality of landholding, highly authoritarian rulers, and privileged elites. By contrast, civic revolutions usually arise in lower-to-middle income countries with majority urban populations, and target authoritarian, hybrid, or sometimes even democratic governments. As the world has become far more urbanized and middle-income since the late twentieth century, so in the last forty years social revolutions have become increasingly rare—in Beissinger's listing, the only social revolutions to have occurred after 1990 are the Chiapas rebellion in Mexico (1994) and the Maoist revolution in Nepal (1996). However, civic revolutions have proliferated, becoming more common with every passing decade.

The tactic of concentrating large numbers in central public spaces is, of course, common to social movements, as well; in fact, if a target regime were to issue major reforms, and the protesters were satisfied and dispersed, such an event would be a successful social movement, not a civic revolution. Beissinger is very clear that the development of civic revolutions is thus contingent and probabilistic (though not wholly unpredictable). He likens them to hurricanes, which start as a circulating disturbance, and may be dispersed by wind shear, fade into a modest tropical depression, or—under the right conditions—gain strength upon strength and develop into a major storm.

For a civic revolution to occur, the interactions between the regime and protestors must follow a particular dynamic: the regime must resist or fail to make changes that satisfy the protestors, while the protestors' numbers grow, and their occupation of the space persists to become a disruption to the activities of the regime or society. An additional step is necessary for the civic revolution to succeed; the regime must be either unable or unwilling to deploy sufficient force to clear the protestors from the space and discourage their return. Beissinger points out the mutual risks in this situation: by massing in city centers instead of hiding in mountains or forests, the regime's opponents make themselves acutely vulnerable to the regime's repressive forces. However, at the same time, if the regime or its forces are unwilling or unable to clear the space, or clumsily attempt to do so (e.g., shooting into a crowd and killing or wounding a number of protestors but not enough to crush the revolt), their failure is clear to all and the momentum quickly shifts to the protestors, leaving the regime with no recourse but to capitulate or flee.

At the core of Beissinger's arguments is a new global data set he has created of revolutions—their causes, goals, outcomes, and effects—from 1900 to 2014. Using a variety of statistical models—which, despite their sophistication, are very clearly explained—with the results presented in a series of clear graphs, Beissinger draws out both the basic patterns and the variations in revolutionary events. He demonstrates that revolutions have clearly evolved, not only shifting from social to civic, but also shifting in their outcomes and effects. Beissinger's mastery of this material is stunning, as he smoothly moves from discussing his global data analysis to tracing the details of cases ranging across South Korea, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America.

His findings complement those of Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's *Why Civil Resistance Works*. Nonviolent civic revolutions have been, at least up to 2014, far more successful in changing regimes than more violent social revolutions. They also do less economic damage and bring much larger gains in civil and political liberties and government accountability. Yet, these benefits are beset with problems. Because civic revolutions come to power more quickly, on the back of peaceful demonstrations and broad but weak coalitions, they usually do not fully transform government or produce a unified leadership. Instead, they tend to struggle with persistent corruption and internal divisions, which lead to policy paralysis and economic decline. The failures in these regards of Ukraine's Orange Revolution

(2004) and Tunisia's Jasmine Revolution (2010) are typical.

Moreover, the greater success of nonviolent civic revolutions may be short-lived. In his concluding chapter, Beissinger looks beyond his data set to comment on urban civic revolutions from 2014 to 2019. He finds that while such events doubled in frequency (to 5.4 per year!) in this half-decade compared to the 1900-1990 period, their rate of success fell by more than half—to 24% compared to 59% in the 1985-2014 period. Regime learning and new technologies, in everything from crowd control to surveillance to monitoring and flooding the Internet, have allowed authoritarian regimes to monitor incipient opposition and control public space more closely, removing some of the tactical advantages that civic revolutionary movements had versus earlier, less prepared regimes.

It is impossible in a brief book review to do justice to the sweep and depth of Beissinger's analysis. He sheds light on the nature of revolution (contingency and waves are typical), on the participants (drawing on surveys from Egypt, Tunisia, and Ukraine), and on how global economic and political change have interacted to shape the dominant forms of contention. As a rigorous, data-driven study of revolution around the world and across the last century, this book has no peer.
