

APSA LUEBBERT BOOK PRIZE CITATION, 2023

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Mark Beissinger's *The Revolutionary City: Urbanization and the Global Transformation of Rebellion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2022) is a big and ambitious book. It is an inspiring model of theoretical, conceptual, and empirical innovation. It takes on a central subject in the study of politics—revolutions—and in one stroke reshapes and will likely reactivate a field of study that has been languishing in political science for several decades: the study of revolution. Beissinger's work is centered around an original and impressive dataset of revolutionary episodes in the world from 1900 to 2014 (n=345) along with revealing opinion surveys from recent revolutionary moments in Ukraine, Tunisia and Egypt, and qualitative case studies. This rich empirical grounding is supplemented with a deep engagement with classical theories of revolutions. Beissinger comes to important findings: over the course of the past century, the location, character, and consequences of revolutions have changed. As societies have undergone large-scale urbanization, the nature of revolution has changed. In the early 20th century, peasant societies predominated and so most revolutions were the classic Skocpolian social revolutions against agrarian bureaucratic states. The urbanization of most societies over the twentieth century has rendered the classical rural-based social revolution increasingly obsolete. Most revolutions today, according to Beissinger's data, are urban-based rebellions, what Beissinger calls "civic revolutions." Rather than peasants, the participants in revolution have also changed—increasingly urban and middle class citizens. Finally, the character of revolutions has also changed: social revolutions rooted in the countryside tended

to be violent whereas the contemporary “civic revolutions” tend to be unarmed, leveraging the power of numbers in the city as the chief tool of rebellion. To explain this transformation, Beissinger develops a compelling spatial theory of revolution, noting that what he calls a “proximity dilemma” marks revolutions: cities are where governments possess the greatest repressive capacity but it is also in cities where revolutionaries can be most disruptive. The implications of Beissinger’s book are far-reaching. He compares the consequences of urban civic revolutions and social revolutions for a range of important outcomes. More broadly, a significant implication of the work is that no single universal theory of revolution may in fact be possible. Instead, the task for political scientists today is to explain the evolving nature of revolutions, a research program this book will undoubtedly launch.