Revolution

When the people of a country take power from the government, it's known as a **revolution**. Some use violence, while others are peaceful.

How revolutions start

Most begin with an oppressive government – almost always an undemocratic one that's hard to get rid of by other means. For example...

...Iran, 1970s



(The deeply unpopular Shah was overthrown in 1979.)

Typically, there's an immediate crisis – or several – that whips up people's anger to a fever pitch, until they can't bear things the way they are. For example...

...France, 1780s



(The French Revolution began in 1789. King Louis XVI was executed in 1793.)

For a revolution to be successful, it takes people who are prepared to stand up to the government – and even die – to bring about change.



Cuba, 1953 – revolutionary leader, Fidel Castro, led a band of rebels against the government.



Many of them died, or were captured and tortured. But others took up the struggle, and Castro's fighters finally beat the government in 1959.

What next?

For a revolution to succeed, it helps if the army and police decide to take the side of the revolutionaries. For example...

Tunisia, 2010-11

When people were protesting against the president, during the Tunisian revolution, the army refused orders to shoot at them.



The revolution lasted a couple more months, until the dictator-like president was removed.

Often, there's a charismatic leader who's good at persuading people to take action and put their lives at risk. For example...



Toussaint Louverture
(Haitian revolution, 1890s)



Emiliano Zapata
(Mexican revolution, 1910)



Lenin
(Russian revolution, 1917)

People also need to know what they want to replace the old government with. Democracy? Communism? Theocracy?

After our president stepped down, a temporary government took over. By the end of 2011, we had our first free, democratic elections. I hope we'll remain a democracy.

(New democracies can be fragile.)



Tunisians lining up to vote in a Presidential election in 2014

Sharing power

Representatives have to work together to make all kinds of decisions. To prevent any one person from having too much power, most democracies split up the government's responsibilities across three groups, often called **branches**.

Executive branch

Carries out – or **executes** – policies and laws.

It's often a single person, such as a **president** or **prime minister**, with the help of a group called a **cabinet**.



The executive branch usually has to approve any new laws, and can often propose them – but it can't *create* them. That's the job of the legislative branch...

Legislative branch



Makes new laws and gets rid of old laws (called **legislation**), and discusses **policies** – ideas for how to make society work.

The legislative branch is usually made up of elected representatives, split into groups known as **political parties**. People in rival parties often disagree with each other.

Judicial branch

Makes sure the other two branches aren't breaking any rules, especially rules from a national constitution.



Ensures that everyone in the country, including the leader, obeys the same set of laws, or faces the same punishments.

Usually made up of a small group of **judges** – expert lawyers – who are appointed, not elected.

How the three branches work together

In the legislative branch, new laws are debated...

There's too much litter! Someone suggested making a law to stop manufacturers using too much packaging. Let's debate whether that's a good idea.

This is a great idea because...

Who will benefit?

This is a terrible idea because...

Let's have a trial run.

question

debate

I agree!

Is this what most people actually want?

argue

Can you give us some evidence?

grumble

It doesn't sound very practical.

This part of the process is what people often think of when they hear the word 'politics'.

After the debate, there's a vote...

All those in favour?

Yes

No

In the executive branch, laws are put into action...

OK, I'll sign the new law to make it official.

And we'll put it into practice.

Cabinet

In the judicial branch...

We've had complaints from manufacturers!

We're going to check that the new law doesn't go against their rights.

This is the part that makes sure no one person, or branch of government, can do whatever it likes.

Who's in charge?

'Who's in charge?' is one of the biggest political questions in large societies. The answer is important, because whoever's in charge gets to tell everyone what to do. You don't always have to do what someone else tells you to, but it's hard to say 'no' to people who have *power* or *authority*.

A person with *power* can force you to do things by making you scared.



A person with *authority* doesn't have to force you, usually because you're part of a bigger group that has already agreed that he or she is allowed to tell you what to do.



Who has authority?

In a fair society, the people in charge need to have authority, not just power. The political system will only work if most people agree that those in charge are *allowed* to tell everyone what to do.

Think about all the people who might tell you what to do.
How many of those actually have authority? What do you think?



Absolute monarchy

Absolute monarchy or **absolutism** describes a government where all of the power is in the hands of a king or queen, a style of politics common in 17th and 18th century Europe. One of the most famous absolute monarchs was King Louis XIV of France (1643-1715). He used all kinds of tricks to hold onto as much power as he could.



War glory

Louis spent lots of money making France's army the strongest and most modern in Europe, and sent them to fight his enemies so he could secure France's borders.

Image

Louis built a grand palace, and commissioned portraits that made him look like a powerful ruler.

Money

Louis updated France's tax system so that more money went straight to him.

Intimidation

Louis used his power to crush his opponents within France, especially people who disagreed with his Catholic faith.

Loyal advisors

In the past, the king's advisors came from *noble* families – rich and powerful people. Instead, Louis hired less wealthy people. That meant they relied on the king for their position in society, so were less likely to disagree with him.

Divine justification

When Louis was born, his parents had been trying to have a baby for 23 years. So people thought he was a gift from God, and Louis believed it too. He claimed that God had given him the right to rule.

Centralization

Before Louis, remote places in France often had their own laws and tax systems. Louis brought the whole country under the control of the central government.

Controlling the nobles

Louis' biggest problem was to see off challenges from France's noble families. Powerful nobles had rebelled against Louis' father, and there were riots in Paris. Louis needed to find a way to stop these nobles from getting too powerful, or too likely to rebel against him. So, he ordered the troublesome ones to come to live at his palace in Versailles, where he could control their lives.

