

Chapter 5

Freedom Minimizes Political Violence

The more freedom a people have, the less their internal political violence; the less their freedom, the more such violence.

----This web site

The daily news always seems to be about internal (or domestic) political violence somewhere in the world. Constantly someone is trying to replace their ruler by violence, revolt against their government, rebellion against some government policy, or civil war to achieve independence. In July 2000 there were about forty nations in which these violent, political confrontations were occurring. I briefly discussed civil wars in Sudan and Burma in [Chapter 1](#); Somalia's clan wars in [Chapter 2](#); and the Civil War in Russia after the Bolshevik coup of 1917 and the numerous rebellions against Mao's collectivization and "Great Leap Forward" in the [last chapter](#). The question naturally follows: why do human beings constantly kill each other in this way?

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Before answering this, I want to give you more of a feel for how violent this internal political conflict can be. You may not realize that such violence has been more destructive of human lives than has been international war. The probability of a person being killed in an international war is less than that of dying in internal political violence, such as revolution, guerrilla warfare, rebellion, civil war, and riots. This is not even taking into consideration government genocide and mass murder like that of Hitler, Stalin, and Mao, which itself has totaled more dead than all internal and international wars together, and is so important that I will devote the [next chapter](#) to it.

China has lost tens of millions of people in her own civil wars, and her Taiping Rebellion in the mid-Nineteenth Century alone might have killed as many as 40,000,000 Chinese; and the Chinese Civil War between the Nationalist government and the communists cost almost 2,000,000 battle dead (see [Table 1.1](#) of my [China's Bloody Century](#)). Of the ten wars the United States has fought, including World War II, none killed more Americans than died in its Civil War. You have already seen the mass killing going on in Sudan and Burma. And, the Mexican Revolution was equally bloody, killing over many times the number that died in the American Civil War; and the Russian Civil War was one of the bloodiest of the Twentieth Century, killing about

1,400,000 people, not counting the famine deaths and mass murder on all sides. A close look at the Mexican and Russian revolutions should show why people who share citizenship can kill each other on such a massive scale.



*"The Shootings of May Third 1808" by Francisco Goya
1814 Madrid*

Looking at Mexico first (see contemporary [map and statistics](#), and [world map](#)), the roots of its revolution lie in the rule of Porfirio Díaz, a former general who in 1876 rebelled against President Sebastián Lerdo de Tejada and seized power. Mexicans later elected him to the Presidency and, except for one term, consistently reelected him, sometimes without opposition, until revolutionaries forced his exile in May 1911. While Mexico therefore had elections, they usually were a façade. Competition for office was not free and open, political opponents were assassinated, and the fear of government officials and their supporters limited political speech.

Díaz tried to conciliate various groups, such as the Catholic Church, landed interests, and big business, and he was particularly committed to the economic growth of Mexico. He promoted foreign investments and ownership, eased the transfer of public lands to private hands, and helped concentrate the ownership of land for more efficient usage. He caused some one million families to lose their land, including the ancestral lands of some 5,000 Indian communities. By 1910, when the revolution broke out, fewer than 3,000 families owned almost all of Mexico's inhabitable land,



Mexico

Area	1,972,550 sq km--slightly less than three times the size of Texas
Population	100,349,766 (July 2000 est.)
Ethnic groups	mestizo (Amerindian-Spanish) 60%, Amerindian or predominantly Amerindian 30%, white 9%, other 1%
Religions	nominally Roman Catholic 89%, Protestant 6%, other 5%
Languages	nominally Roman Catholic 89%, Protestant 6%, other 5%
Life expectation	71.49 years
Literacy	89.90%
Purchasing power parity	\$8,500 (1999 est.); U.S. is \$33,900 (1999 est.)
Government	federal republic dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI
Freedom rating	partly free (closer to free than unfree) for 1998

with over 95 percent of the rural population owning no land at all. Nearly half of these landless lived on large privately owned farming or ranching estates or plantations, called haciendas. These sprawled across much of Mexico, containing about 80 percent of the rural communities. Some were huge; one being so large that a train took a day to cross its six million acres.



General Díaz in 1911

Deprived of their land, impoverished and unemployed, the mass of Indians and peons (the unskilled laborers or farm workers of Latin America), were a huge pool for authorities and landowners to exploit. And so they did.

Under Díaz, profiteering police and government officials protected greedy landowners and pitiless labor contractors. This enabled the venal, corrupt, and ruthless to ensnare Indians and peons in a nationwide system of chattel slavery and indebted labor.

One of the main methods used for enslaving peons on haciendas were to advance them money. While it was usually small amount, the peon found it almost impossible to repay. His wages were abysmal because of the ready availability of impoverished peons in the countryside, and living costs were, by hacienda contrivance, high. For example, usually he only could buy his necessities at the company store, since bosses paid him in coupons or metal disks that only the company store would accept. Running away from this forced labor was not an option. If he did, the police would search for him, usually catch him, and return him to the hacienda. Then, as a lesson to others, he would be whipped publicly, sometimes even to death. Moreover, debt was by law inherited, passed down to a peon's sons on his death, so his sons also could become indebted slaves through no fault of their own.

But the peon could become indebted in ways other than through the hacienda. He was enmeshed in a system of Mexican customs and laws that encouraged, if not required, that he spend more money than he had. For example, baptism demanded a fiesta, a priest, and liquor, the cost of which the peon could only cover by pledging his future wages. This was also true for the cost of tools, a wedding, and a baby's birth. Whether on the hacienda or not, usually to the poor and landless a debt was forever; and once in debt, the peon had no rights. The debt holder by law had all the power, which on the hacienda was over life and death, as surely as though these peons were slaves in ancient Rome.

Besides indebted peons, haciendas had another source of such slaves. Hacienda bosses would entice impoverished and landless Indians and other peons into signing

contracts to work on plantations about which the workers knew nothing; upon arrival, they would discover that there was no escape. Another source was the police, who would arrest and jail the poor and those dispossessed of land for trivial or trumped-up charges, and then sell them to hacienda owners. Yet another source was a police-round up of such people, as though they were cattle, followed by their deportation to a hacienda to work until they died. In some areas, these round-ups were the routine--even a matter of government policy. Local officials would contract with a hacienda to supply so many peons per year, and district political boss, or *jefe politico*, often fulfilled his contract by kidnapping and selling young schoolboys for fifty pesos each.

There were some comparatively good haciendas, to be sure. Their owners still forced the peons to work, and would whip to maintain discipline and order, but treated them with the paternalistic civility accorded to personal slaves. These haciendas were the exception, however. Normally, they were hellish for the peon, whose life on them was usually short and miserable. The owners had them whipped for the slightest infraction, and when their work slowed for whatever reason. They were sometimes whipped to death. After all, they were cheap to replace, and the police showed no concern over their murder.

On many haciendas, the peon's misery went far beyond whipping. Hacienda bosses would often rape the peon's wives and daughters, and would force the prettier ones to be their concubines. Nor did all the haciendas provide enough nutritional food, for their peons in the field, changes of clothing, bath facilities, or toilets. Because of this ill treatment, many of these peons soon died from disease, exposure, and exhaustion, deaths that can only be classed as murder. In some places, such as Valle Nacional, the forced labor system became at least as deadly as that which afflicted the forced laborers in the Soviet gulag and Nazi labor camps at their worst, but within guarded haciendas instead of work camps surrounded by guns and barbed wire.

The bosses especially mistreated those Indians enslaved on the haciendas, and they often were among the first to die. We can see this with the Yaqui Indians, for example, of whom about two-thirds died in the first year on a hacienda, on some hacienda few would survive for two years. For the Mayas, another Indian nation, the haciendas were killing them at a greater rate than they were being born.

But bosses also badly mistreated non-Indian peons, and in three months on one large hacienda near Santa Lucrecia, they killed more than half of 300 new workers. In another hacienda, the Valle Nacional, out of some 15,000 new workers taken on in one year, bosses killed about 14,000 within seven or eight months. I would doubt this incredible death rate were it not for the words of Antonio Pla, general manager of a

large portion of the tobacco lands in Valle Nacional: "The cheapest thing to do is to let them die; there are plenty more where they came from." Said one of the police officers of the town of Valle Nacional, "They die; they all die. The bosses never let them go until they're dying."

Even the process of deportation to the haciendas was lethal, particularly for Indians. Soldiers seized and deported Yaqui Indians to work on haciendas as slaves at the rate of 500 a month. This was even before Díaz decreed that the War Department must capture and deport every Yaqui Indian to Yucatán, wherever found and no matter the age. As many as 10 to 20 percent died during deportation, especially if the trip were a long one, and involved the military herding the deportees over mountains by foot. Sometimes whole families would commit suicide rather than endure the deportation and slave labor that lay at the end.

Out of a rural population of nearly 12,000,000 in 1910, possibly 750,000 had unknowingly contracted themselves into slavery on haciendas in southern Mexico; possibly over 100,000 on the Yucatán peninsula. The far more prevalent debt bondage possibly enslaved an additional 5,000,000 peons, or about an unbelievable near 41 percent of the total population of Mexico. This by far exceeds the amount of outright slavery you have seen in Sudan and the forced labor in Burma. Compare this to American slavery in 1860 just before the Civil War, where there were 3,951,000 slaves, or 12 percent of the population. What in effect was slavery in Mexico is most comparable to the slavery of ancient times, and, yet, it happened in our time, during the youth of some people alive today.

Were this lethal slavery all, it would be enough to condemn this reprehensible government and provide justification for the coming revolution. But there is more. This slave system necessarily depended on a certain amount of terror and resulting fear. Each of the states of Mexico had attached to it an *acordada*, a picked gang of assassins. They quietly murdered personal enemies of the governor or *jefe políticos*, including political opponents, critics, or alleged criminals, no matter how slight the evidence against them. For example, officials gave the son of a friend of Díaz, and a member of the *acordada*, two assistants and the instructions to "kill quietly along the border" any person he thought connected to the opposing Liberal Party. But much killing also was public and directly carried out by officials. In 1909, for example, they summarily executed sixteen people at Tehuitzingo, and on a street at Velardena, officials shot several people for holding a parade in defiance of the *jefe politico*. They forced twelve to thirty-two others to dig their own graves with their bare hands before shooting them. In the state of Hidalgo, officials buried up to their necks a group of Indians who had resisted the government taking their lands, then rode horses over them. And so on and on. From 1900 to 1910, this government probably

murdered more than 30,000 political opponents, suspects, critics, alleged criminals, and other undesirables.

Díaz's policies obviously provided opportunity for the venal and corrupt, and security and help for the rich and well placed. As long as they went along with the system, bureaucrats, officials controlling government largess, and the upper middle-class and wealthy profited from Díaz's rule. Even the industrial worker was only slightly better off. Moreover, Díaz seemed to encourage foreign exploitation of the country, which angered many well-off Mexicans. Now, also, intellectuals were promoting among the lower class a sense of exploitation. And the government's muscle, its army, was small, corrupt, and inefficient.

Given all this, rebellion was inevitable, and it did happen, several times. The first successful one was led by Francisco Madero in 1910 and launched the Mexican Revolution. A member of the upper middle class, as most revolutionary leaders are, he believed in a liberal constitutional government. Indians and peons understandably supported him, and his leading general was the former bandit chief, Pancho Villa. Madero won major victories against government forces and encouraged other rebellions throughout the country. In May 1911, the government collapsed, Díaz fled into exile, and Maderos took over the presidency.



President Francisco Madero



Pancho Villa

Leading a revolution is one thing. But rebuilding a government is quite another. In office, Maderos turned out to be ineffective, especially in promoting changes to the system. He did, however, give peons and workers free reign to air their grievances and seek change. This did not sit well with the Mexican elites, who saw this freedom, added to the disorders still plaguing the country, as endangering their property. In early 1913, the general commanding the Mexican army

in Mexico City, Victoriano Huerto, rebelled against Maderos and, joining hands with other rebel groups, forced him to resign. General Huerto then made himself president, and in a few days, someone assassinated Maderos.

Huerto's presidency was even worse. He was disorganized, repressive, and dictatorial, and instigated the most violent phase of the revolution. Separate rebel forces, Villa's among them, took violent action to restore constitutional government in three northern states. In the south, Emiliano Zapata organized and generated a peon rebellion demanding land reform. President Wilson of the United States tried to help these rebellions by embargoing arms to General Huerto, resulting in the American Navy's temporarily taking over Veracruz to stop a shipment of German arms, while allowing the rebel constitutionalists to buy them. Eventually, constitutionalist forces closed in on Huerto, and he escaped into exile in July 1914.



Emiliano Zapata



Military train, 1914

Still, even the constitutionalists could not establish a stable government, nor could they agree among themselves on what was to be done and by whom. Therefore, civil war again broke out in December 1914. Finally, by the end of 1915, one of the rebel leaders, Venustiano Carranza, captured control over most of Mexico and, despite the refusal of some other rebel leaders, including Zapata (assassinated in 1918) and Villa, to accept terms, took over the government and kept control until 1920. Carranza never brought about the reforms

he had promised, and in 1920, Alvaro Obregón, one of Carranza's most effective generals during the civil war, threw him out of power and eventually had himself elected president. Though dictatorial, Obregón brought relative stability, order, and change to Mexico.

What I left out of this sketch of the Mexican Revolution is the amazing violence, ruthlessness, and cruelty on all sides. In the opening years of this rebellion, for example, in the north government forces simply shot all captured rebels, showing no mercy. When in later years of the war President Carranza ordered General González to destroy the Zapatista "rabble" in Morelos, his troops burned down whole villages, destroyed their crops, marched women and children into detention camps, looted factories, devastated the local sugar industry, and hanged every male they could find.

They left a wasteland behind them.

Rebels were equally vicious and often extended their butchery to top government officials and supporters. A case in point was their seizure of the town of Guerrero. They murdered all captured federal officers, along with the town's top Díaz supporters and officials, including the judge, *jefe politico*, and postal inspector. The rebels raped at will. In Durango, for example, the U.S. ambassador reported that fifty women "of good family" killed themselves after rebels raped them. Villa himself forced "his attentions on a Frenchwoman," creating an international incident.



Rebel women soldiers

When rebels captured and held Mexico City in 1914, they pillaged homes and businesses, and shot police officers and political opponents, and hung those they suspected of crimes. In one case, they hung three people outside a police station, with signs announcing their crime--one was a "thief," a second a "counterfeiter," but the sign on the third said, "This man was killed by mistake."

From the beginning of the revolution, the forces of the Villistas and Zapatas had shown disregard for human life. When in 1910 Pancho Villa captured the town of Torreón he killed 200 Chinese members of a race he and his followers much despised. Nor did he have high any regard for the lives of his own troops. Once, when as an American journalist was interviewing him, a drunken soldier yelling nearby disturbed Villa. So while continuing his conversation, he pulled out his gun, looked out the window, and shot the man.

Their officers were no better, but among them stands out Rodolfo Fierro, who, it is said, once personally executed 300 prisoners, pausing only when he had to massage his bruised trigger finger. Often, these rebels were simply bandits and murderers legitimized by a cause. In one especially heinous case, a rebel leader captured a coal train in a tunnel, burned it, and then waited for a passenger train to run into the wreckage so that he could loot the train of gold and rob passengers of their valuables.

With the collapse of the Díaz regime, many state governors and federal generals no longer obeyed the central government. During the Carranza presidency they in effect became warlords, some levying their own taxes, some refusing to turn over federal revenues, some ignoring federal laws and orders they did not like. Some became

bandits, looting territory or states under their control; some bandits became generals controlling little states of their own. High military officers would loot and kill as they wished, even in Mexico City. Over all of Mexico for as long as a decade, all these warlords and rebel armies may have slaughtered in cold blood at least some 400,000 people; perhaps even over 500,000--more than have died in combat in all American foreign wars.



Rebel train

Before and during the revolution, the government used a detestable conscription system. With the choice of who would be drafted left to the local *jefe politico*, graft and bribery were endemic. If a man had the money, he could buy himself out of the draft or bribe officials. Even worse, those who criticized the regime, those who tried to strike, or those who otherwise annoyed officials found themselves drafted. The army served the function of a forced labor camp for poor and undesirables, and so became known as "The National Chain-Gang."

During the revolution, the government used press-gang methods extensively. In one case, for example, seven hundred spectators at a bullfight were grabbed for the army; in another case one thousand spectators from a big crowd watching a fire were abducted, including women that they forced to work in ammunition factories. In Mexico City people were afraid to go out after dark, even to post a letter, since it literally could result in "going to the cannon's mouth."

Soldiers so conscripted received little training, and officers threw them into combat as so much expendable equipment--there were always replacements, including even criminals, vagabonds, beggars, and, of course, Indians and peons. Rebels and Indians easily killed all. Because of the graft among their officers, these soldiers often got little medical care and little food. Some would die of starvation, many of disease. One example of this was in the territory of Quintana Roo, where before the revolution an army of 2,000 to 3,000 soldiers was in the field, continuously fighting the Maya Indians. These soldiers were almost all political suspects and therefore really only armed political prisoners. According to a government physician who served as the chief of sanitary service for the army in this territory, over a two-year period all the soldiers, over 4,000, died of starvation while General Bravo, their commanding officer, stole their unit's commissary money. This is murder. And from 1900 through the first year of the revolution, aside from combat deaths, by the army's treatment of its conscripts it so murdered nearly 145,000 of them.

In total, during the revolution because of battle, massacre, execution, and starvation, probably 800,000 Mexicans died. Nearly 1,200,000 more probably died from influenza, typhus, and other diseases. In fact, the overall toll from all causes might even be closer to 3,000,000, given the population decrease for these years. For my breakdown of the toll, see [Table 16.1](#) of my [Death By Government](#).



Some of the 2 million dead

The Russian Revolution that began while that in Mexico was still going on was no less bloody, and like that in Mexico, to understand it we will have to begin several years before it took place.

In 1894, with the death of his father, Alexander III, the last Russian czar, Nicholas II, came to power. He was a dedicated autocrat opposed to any liberal tendencies in Russia, a view strongly shared by his wife, Princess Alexandra. He was also an absolute Russian nationalist who imposed a policy of Russification throughout the empire, which in the west included Poland and Finland. He was also, as were many of his officials and Russians in general, anti-Semitic, and he overtly supported anti-Semitic activity.



Czar Nicholas II
1868-1918

Russians economically and culturally discriminated against their 5 to 7 million Jews, and government anti-Semitism encouraged and helped legitimize the periodic pogroms that swept Russian cities and towns. Officials allowed incendiary anti-Jewish propaganda to be published on government printing presses; and just stood by while gangs attacked Jews and their property. From 1900 to the abdication of the czar and the end of the Romanov dynasty in 1917, at least 3,200 Jews were murdered throughout Russia.

In line with its general suppression of freedom, officials killed and massacred others as well, such as shooting two-hundred demonstrating workers in the Lena gold field.

TABLE 16.1
Mexican Democide
1900-1920

KIND OF KILLING	DEMOCIDÉ (000) [1]
FEDERAL GOVERNMENT	1,417
pre-civil war massacres and executions	30 [2]
civil war democide	388
deportation	30
chattel slavery/peonage	825
conscription	144
REBELS/BANDITS/WARLORDS	420
TOTAL DEMOCIDÉ	1,837
CIVIL WAR/REBELLION	335

1. All estimates from table 16A.1. Unless otherwise noted, all estimates are mid-values in a low-high range.
2. Estimated low.
3. Includes pre-Revolutionary rebellions.

The most important massacre of these years occurred in January of 1905 when in St. Petersburg soldiers shot down 1,000 peaceful demonstrators. This "Bloody Sunday," as it became known, catalyzed what was a revolutionary situation into outright revolution.

In the years leading up to Bloody Sunday, Russia had been in turmoil. Strikes, student demonstrations, and peasant disturbances were frequent. Several revolutionary movements were violently seeking reform, such as the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Social Democrats, who organized protests and tried to incite the masses. Because of Bloody Sunday, student demonstrations became almost continuous, revolutionary groups organized huge strikes, and in many region peasants rebelled. Bombings and assassinations were widespread.

This culminated in a massive general strike that finally persuaded Nicholas II and his officials to compromise. They issued the so-called October Manifesto that promised civil liberties, a new дума--legislature--with actual power to pass and reject all laws, and other reforms. The manifesto went far toward turning the government into a constitutional monarchy. It split the opposition into moderates willing to accept it and radicals believing it hardly went far enough. The radicals fought on--in the next year alone terrorism by the Battle Organization of the Socialist Revolutionaries and the Socialist Revolutionaries Maximalists caused 1,400 deaths and still another 3,000 in the year following that. But the Manifesto ended the 1905 revolution.

Throughout the years leading up to and following this revolution, the monarchy fought the revolutionaries in one district or another with harsh regulations, newspaper closings, arrests of editors, and, for six months, even summary court martials with almost immediate execution. The records of overall executions tell the story of these tumultuous years and the monarchy's response. From 1866 to 1900 officials executed no more than 94 people, perhaps as few as 48; from 1901 to 1904 it executed nearly 400 people; from 1905 through 1908 the number rose to 2,200; and from 1908 through the remaining years of the monarchy, executions might have reached 11,000.

Nonetheless, considering the revolutionary activity and the bombings, assassinations, and disturbances involved, the violent deaths would have been surprisingly low for an empire this huge and diverse and with its bloody history had it not been for World War I, its treatment of ethnic Germans and POWs, and the massacre or extermination of rebellious nations and groups in the empire's southern periphery. In 1915, the Duma expropriated all the property of the 150,000 to 200,000 Germans living in Zhiton-tir Gubernia and deported as many as 200,000 to the east under such conditions that 25,000 to almost 140,000 died.

The worst killing took place in the Kirghiz Kazak Confederacy. Following Russian orders local authorities murdered Turkish-speaking Central Asian nomads outright, or after robbing them of their animals and equipment, drove them into the winter mountains or desert to die. Except for some who escaped across the border into China, authorities may have murdered as many as 500,000 nomads.

There also was the killing by Armenian volunteers wearing Russian uniforms, but serving as irregulars with the Russian army. When Russia invaded the eastern provinces of Turkey during the war, these Armenian irregulars sought revenge against the Kurds for their murder of Armenians in Turkey, and possibly murdered hundreds of thousand Kurds between 1915 and 1916. The responsibility of the Russian army for this is unclear, but at least it bears some onus for these deaths.

Worst of all, and for which the Russian Monarchy bears full responsibility, was its treatment of 2,300,000 German, Austro-Hungarian, Czech, and Turkish prisoners of war. Surely the Russian people suffered greatly during the war. There were wide-scale shortages of necessities, and resulting localized famines; medical services had always been poor and deteriorated during the war, resulting in the spread of disease. Moreover, Russian soldiers themselves suffered from hunger, poor medical care, and unsanitary conditions, perhaps 1,300,000 alone dying of disease. Russia was in no shape, therefore, to treat POWs with the care Britain, for example, could give them.

Nonetheless, even taking this into account, Russian-held POWs were abysmally mistreated and died in transit to camps and in the camps themselves by the tens of thousands. Just consider that during the transportation of POWs to camps they might be locked in railroad cars or wagons for weeks. In one case, for example, officials kept two hundred Turkish POWs suffering from cholera in sealed wagons for three weeks until they reached their destination--140 died, sixty were scarcely alive in the filth.

Weakened by hunger and sickness during the long trip, prisoners then might have to plod 10 to 30 miles to their final camp, with some dying on the way. Reaching camp provided no security, since the conditions in many were lethal. During the winter of 1914-15, just on one camp 1,300 men died, over half of the camp's POWs. When the doctors complained about the number of deaths to a general who came on a tour of inspection, his answer was that still more men died in the trenches.

During this same winter in the Novo Nikolayevsk camp, the prisoners were lucky even to be able to sleep on rotten straw and especially to get a blanket. Camp doctors had no medicines or surgical appliances; they did not even have soap. Sick and healthy lay together indiscriminately, and often water was not to be had for days, or

would drip from icicles onto their straw beds. No wonder that when typhus broke out it spread rapidly and prisoners died in huge numbers. Only when these epidemics threatened the Russians themselves did they finally allow captive officers to help their men.

In total, the Russian monarchy probably was responsible for the deaths of 400,000 POWs. Since officials knew about the conditions in the camps and could have done much to alleviate them, this was as much murder as the death of 3,000,000 Soviet POWs in Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

By 1917, the war was going so badly for the Russians that many troops refused to fight and whole units were deserting, while on the home front there was continuous turmoil, including general strikes, and massive demonstrations against the war and the monarchy--just on March 8 alone 30,000 people were on the streets demonstrating. Nicholas II's cabinet tried to dismiss the Duma it had called into session to deal with the crisis and thought responsible for much of the unrest, but instead of dissolving some members set up a provisional cabinet, in effect a rebel provisional government. Nicholas II and his Cabinet had lost all power to effect events--the Russian Revolution had begun.



Some killed in pro and anti-Bolshevik street violence

Events moved fast as one military unit after another joined the rebels, including the czar's own guards that under orders from the provisional government took the Empress and her children into custody. And on March 14, France and England, Russia's allies in the war, recognized the provisional government as the legal government of all Russia. Thus under tremendous pressure, having lost crucial support of the aristocracy, his troops, and foreign powers; no longer able to control the streets, Nicholas II abdicated.

The day before the abdication, the provisional government formed a new one to be headed by Prince Georgy Lvov. This government and the subsequent one of Aleksandr Kerensky, a democratic socialist who took over as Prime Minister in July, inherited a country in economic and political chaos, with a near total breakdown in



**Pro-Tsarist militia in Odessa.
Would battle the Red Army**

government authority and military morale, frequent strikes, plots, and the opposition of diverse, radical revolutionary groups. Not the least of these were the Bolsheviks founded and led by Vladimir Ilich Lenin, who already in July had organized an unsuccessful uprising in Petrograd. Kerensky's government itself was disorganized, feared a coup from the right, and was quite unable to move against those openly plotting to seize power from the left.

Originally the left wing of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, Lenin's Bolsheviks were a small, uncompromising,

and militant group of dedicated Marxist communists.

Their incredibly small number, considering subsequent events, was clear when the first all-Russian Congress of Soviets had been held, and in which only 105 out of 1,090 delegates declared themselves as Bolsheviks.



Lenin revolutionizing

In November 1917, with the powerful Petrograd garrison remaining neutral, Lenin seized the Winter Palace in Petrograd. Since this was the seat of Kerensky's shaky government, and he had only 1,500 to 2,000 defenders to match the 6,000 to 7,000 soldiers, sailors, and Red Guards Lenin's Bolsheviks had thrown together, they easily overthrew the government. Widely unpopular, however, and faced with strong political opposition, Lenin at first made common cause with the Left Social Revolutionaries, a militant, socialist group, in order to survive, centralize power, and consolidate this communist revolution; and in 1919 Lenin adopted the name *Communist Party* for the Bolsheviks and their political allies.

To fight this forceful takeover of the government, generals throughout the Russian empire created whole armies; some led by anti-Russians and nationalists, some by anti-communists, some by pro-monarchists or pro-authoritarians, some by advocates of democracy. These so-called White armies were a direct threat to the new Communist Party and its so-called Red Army. Moreover, in the areas the communists controlled the clergy, bourgeoisie, and professionals opposed them. The urban

workers, who had been communist allies at first, also soon turned against them when they saw that the communists had taken over the Soviets (elected governing councils) and would not yield power to worker unions or representatives; and peasants, who also were especially supportive when the communists began to divide among them land taken from the aristocrats' estates and rich landowners, turned to outright rebellion when the communists forcibly began to requisition their grain and produce.

In the first year-and-a-half of Lenin's rule, in 20 provinces alone, there were 344 peasant rebellions. Up to early 1921, there were about 50 anti-communist rebel armies. For example, in August 1920, the starving peasants of the Kirsanov District, Tambov Province, rebelled against the further extortion of grain by the communists. The rebellion soon spread to adjoining districts and destroyed Party authority in five of them. Under the command of Aleksandr Stepanovich Antonov, the rebellion became a full-scale, armed insurrection. He created two armies of Red Army deserters and revolting peasants, and by February 1921, he had as many as 50,000 fighting men, including even internal guard units. Until defeated in August 1921, he controlled Tambov Province and parts of the provinces of Penza and Saratov.



Communist Civil War poster



Lenin's Red Army

Many such rebellions broke out throughout the now named Soviet Union, although few were as dangerous to Communist Party control. Even in 1921, the Cheka (secret police) admitted 118 risings. This *Peasant War*, which just as well could be called a *Bread War*, continued even after the White armies were defeated. It was so serious that even in 1921 one Soviet historian noted that the "center of the [Russian Republic] is almost totally encircled by peasant insurrection, from Makno on the Dnieper to

Antonov on the Volga."

White armies and peasant rebellions aside, even in the urban industrial areas communist control was precarious, at best. What saved Lenin and the Party was their *Red Terror*. By 1918, Lenin already ordered the wide use of terror, including inciting workers to murder their "class enemies." According to Pravda, the Party organ,

workers and poor should take up arms and act against those "who agitate against the Soviet Power, ten bullets for every man who raises a hand against it.... The rule of Capital will never be extinguished until the last capitalist, nobleman, Christian, and officer draws his last breath." Understandably, there was a wave of arbitrary murders of civil servants, engineers, factory managers, and priests wherever the communists controlled the country. Mass shootings, arrests, and torture were an integral part of covert communists policy, and not simply a reaction to the formation of the White armies. Indeed, the Red Terror preceded the start of the Civil War.

After an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Lenin in August 1918, he legalized the terror, and directed it against "enemies of the people" and "counter-revolutionaries," defined primarily by social group and class membership: bourgeoisie, aristocrats, "rich" landowners (kulaks), and clergy. The Party's organ *Pravda* helped launch this expanded Red Terror with this cry for blood: "Workers, the time has come when either you must destroy the bourgeoisie, or it will destroy you. Prepare for a mass merciless onslaught upon the enemies of the revolution. The towns must be cleansed of this bourgeois putrefaction. All the bourgeois gentlemen must be registered, as has happened with the officer gentlemen, and all who are dangerous to the cause of revolution must be exterminated.... Henceforth the hymn of the working class will be a hymn of hatred and revenge."

Lenin's Red Terror operated through a variety of official organs, including the People's Courts for "crimes" against the individual, the Revolutionary Courts, and the various local Chekas for "crimes" against the state. Lenin also gave the right of execution to the Military Revolutionary Tribunals, Transport Cheka, Punitive columns, and the like. Communists jailed actual or ideologically defined opponents, tortured many barbarously to force them to sign false confessions, and executed large numbers.

For example, communists executed a butcher in Moscow for "insulting" the images of Marx and Lenin by calling them scarecrows (a clear "enemy of the people"); or threatened to shoot anyone in Ivanovo-Vornesensk who did not register their sewing machines (obvious "counter-revolutionaries"). A communist functionary issued an order in Baku that local officials should shoot any telephone girl who was tardy in response to a call (doubtless "sabotage"). With information that an Aaron Chonsir in Odessa was engaging in "counter-revolutionary activities," the Cheka looked through the street directories to find his address. Finding eleven people with the same name, they arrested all, interrogated and tortured each several times, narrowed it down to the two most likely "counter-revolutionaries," and since they could not make up their mind between them, had both shot to ensure getting the right one. Obviously,

the Revolution was still immature--in the late 1930s Stalin would have had all eleven shot.

And so communists shot vast numbers of men and women out of hand: 200 in this jail, 450 in that prison yard, 320 in the woods outside of town; even in small outlying areas, such as in the small Siberian town of Ossa Ochansk in 1919, they massacred 3,000 men. And this went on and on. As late as 1922, the communists executed 8,100 priests, monks, and nuns. This alone is equivalent to one modern, jumbo passenger jet crashing, with no survivors, each day for 32 days.



The Czar and his family, all shot and stabbed to death by the communists in July 1918

Moreover, the communists showed no merci to prisoners taken in clashes with the White armies and often executed them. They even shot the relatives of defecting officers, as when the 86th Infantry Regiment went over to the Whites in March 1919, and the communists killed all the relatives of each defecting officer. Places reoccupied after the defeat of one White army or another suffered systematic blood baths as the Cheka screened through the population for aristocrats, bourgeoisie, and supporters of the Whites. When The Red Army captured Riga in January 1919, for example, communists executed over 1,500 in the city and more than 2,000 in the country districts. When defeated White General Wrangel finally fled with his remaining officers and men from the Crimea, the Red Army and Cheka may have slaughtered from 50,000 to 150,000 people during reoccupation. Undeniably, the Whites themselves carried out massacres, killed prisoners, and were guilty of numerous atrocities. But these were either the acts of undisciplined soldiers or ordered against individuals by sadistic or fanatical generals. Lenin, however, directed the Red Terror, against entire social groups and classes.

Then there was the *Peasant War*, which although it tends to be ignored in the history books, was no less vicious than the Civil War. In village after village, in the guise of requisitioning food, communists tried to plunder the peasants, which understandably resulted in pitched battles, massacres, and frequent atrocities. Just in July 1918, twenty-six major uprisings began; in August forty-seven; and in September thirty-five. The communists fiercely fought the Peasant War over the full length and breadth of the new Soviet Union from 1918 through 1922, and at any time there were apparently over one hundred rebellions, involving thousands of peasant fighters. If, of course, any "enemies of the people" were captured or surrendered, the communists

were likely to kill them out of hand; they also massacred those who had helped the rebels, provided food and shelter, or simply showed sympathy; they leveled some villages "infected with rebellion," slaughtered inhabitants; and deported remaining villagers north, many to die in the process. About 500,000 people were killed in this Peasant War, half from combat and the other half murdered by the communists. The effect on food production was catastrophic and, as described in [Chapter 4](#), was the main cause of a severe famine in which 5,000,000 people starved to death or died of associated diseases.

The number of combat deaths in the Civil and Peasant Wars, and not a result of mass murder, was likely about 1,350,000 people. Although a fantastic toll by normal standards, this was a fraction of the total killed during this period, as I will show.

With the growing strength and generalship of the Red Army, and the lack of unity and a common strategy and program among the opposing White armies and peasant rebels, by 1920 Lenin and Communist Party had surely won the Civil War. And through the Red Terror they also had secured the home front. The terror eliminated or cowed the opposition and enabled Lenin to stabilize the Party's control, assure its continuity and authority, and above all, save communism. (Here is a map of the resulting [western Soviet Union](#) for 1921-1929, and the present [world map](#))



Typhus emaciated Ukrainian family in front of destroyed home.

Lenin bought the success of the Red Terror at an added huge cost in lives. Not only did the communists shoot political opponents, class "enemies," "enemies of the people," former rebels, and criminals, but they shot even those poor citizens guilty of nothing, fitting under no label but hostage. For example, in 1919 the Defense Council commanded the arrest of members of the Soviet executive committees and Committees of the Poor in areas where snow clearance of railway lines was unsatisfactory. Officials were to shoot these hostages if the snow were not soon cleared away.

The number murdered throughout Soviet territory by the Red Terror, the execution of prisoners, and revenge against former Whites or their supporters, as a conservative estimate, was about 500,000 people, including at least 200,000 officially executed. All

these are added to the probable 250,000 murdered in the Peasant War. Lest you dismiss all those communist executions during these years as the traditional Russian way of handling opposition, Czarist Russia executed an average of 17 people per year in the 80 years preceding the Revolution--17! From 1860 to 1900, Soviet sources give only 94 executions, although during these years there were dozens of assassinations. And in 1912, after years of revolts, assassinations of high officials, bombings and anti-government terrorism, there was a maximum of 183,949 imprisoned, including criminals; less than half the number executed, not imprisoned, by the communists during the Civil War period. Lenin and his henchmen did not shrink from their carnage. They not only accepted this incredible blood toll; they proclaimed the need for one many times higher. Consider the September 1918, speech by Grigory Zinoviev, Lenin's lieutenant in Petrograd: "To overcome our enemies we must have our own socialist militarism. We must carry along with us 90 million out of the 100 million of Soviet Russia's population. As for the rest, we have nothing to say to them. They must be annihilated."

To those killed in the Red Terror and Peasant War we must add those that died from the brutal regime in the new concentration and labor camps or in transit to them. Lenin created these camps in July 1918, with a Party decree that officials must compel inmates capable of labor to do physical work. This was the beginning of the deadly, communist forced labor system--gulag--which we could as well call a slave labor system, and which became as deadly as some of the most lethal haciendas for forced laborers in pre-revolutionary Mexico. Within a year, Party decrees established forced labor camps in each provincial capitol and a lower limit of 300 prisoners in each camp. The communists established the first large camps on the far north Solovetsky Islands. In August 1919 telegram, Lenin made the criteria for imprisonment in such camps clear: "Lock up all the doubtful ones in a concentration camp outside the city." Note the word "doubtful," rather than "guilty."

From the beginning, the communists intentionally made the conditions in some of these camps so atrocious that prisoners could not expect to survive for more than several years. If prisoners were not executed, they often were caused to die from beatings, disease, exposure, and fatigue. The communists occasionally emptied camps by loading inmates on barges and then sinking them. With all this misery, you would think that at least a court had tried and sentenced prisoners, but no. Reread Lenin's telegram, above. A simple bureaucratic decision sent people to these camps. By the end of 1920, official figures admitted to 84 such camps in 43 provinces of the Russian Republic alone, with almost 50,000 inmates. By October 1922, there were 132 camps with about 60,000 inmates. During this revolution period, 1917-1922, the communists probably murdered 34,000 inmates in total.

Overall, in the Red Terror, the Peasant War, the new concentration and labor camps, and the famine reported in [Chapter 4](#) of which, conservatively estimated, the communists are responsible for half the deaths; Lenin and Party probably murdered 3,284,000 people, apart from battle deaths. When these are included, this revolution cost about 4,700,000 deaths, or about 3 percent of the population. This is almost twice that from all causes in the American Civil War--1.6 percent I give a full accounting of the this Civil War toll in [Table 2.1](#) from my [Lethal Politics](#).

**TABLE 2.1
CIVIL WAR PERIOD
DEMOICIDE AND OTHER KILLED***

FACTORS	DEAD ESTIMATES (000)		
	LOW	MID EST.	HIGH
DEMOICIDE	1	3	8
PERIOD RATE	0.54%	2.13%	5.26%
ANNUAL RATE	0.11%	0.43%	1.05%
FOREIGNERS	?		
DEMOICIDE COMPONENTS			
TERROR	320	750	4,300
DEPORTATIONS		?	
CAMP/TRANSIT	12	34	72
FAMINE	500	2,500	3,750
OTHER KILLED	3,430	6,210	9,460
WAR/REBELLION	930	1,410	2,710
FAMINE/DISEASE	2,500	4,800	6,750

* From Appendix 2.1.

Although few have been as violent, twentieth century revolutions, civil wars, violent coups, and rebellions number in the hundreds.¹ What sense can we make out of all these? Does the fact that the Mexican and Russian people were not free have anything to do with this revolution? To answer these questions, I have listed in [Table A.19](#) (from the [Appendix](#)) those nations with violence in 1998-1999. Table 5.1 here (also from the [Appendix](#)) provides a contingency count of the level of a nation's freedom versus its violence, almost all internal.

To determine the tables, I divided 190 nations into four groups in terms of their level of freedom; and similarly, but independently, in terms of their level of violence. The table then answers the question as to how the level of a nation's freedom matches up with its level of violence. We can then answer this by looking at Table 5.1. From it we then can see that out of the 47 nations that had extreme violence, 31 of them, or 66 percent, were unfree ([Table A.19](#) lists these nations). This, while no free nations had any high violence.

TABLE 5.1
Observed Frequencies for Freedom and Violence Ratings

Freedom Ratings	Violence Ratings				Totals
	Low	Low Medium	High Medium	High	
Free	35	10	2	0	47
Partly Free	11	27	7	3	48
Partly Unfree	1	7	27	13	48
Unfree	0	4	12	31	47
Totals	47	48	48	47	190

Percents of Overall Total for Freedom and Violence Ratings

	Low	Low Medium	High Medium	High	Totals
Free	18.42	5.26	1.05	0	24.7
Partly Free	5.79	14.21	3.68	1.58	25.3
Partly Unfree	0.53	3.68	14.21	6.84	25.3
Unfree	0	2.11	6.32	16.32	24.7
Totals	24.7	25.3	25.3	24.7	100

Chi Square = 173.8

Chi Square significance = $p < .0001$

Then consider who had none or low violence. It was mainly the free nations: of the 47 nations with none or low violence, 74 percent were free. All unfree nations had some sort of violence, none at the low level. To see especially the relationship between freedom and violence, look at the count of nations in the diagonal cells from the low for free nations to the high for unfree. By far, they always have the highest count, as they should if there is the close relationship between freedom and violence pointed out in this chapter. Of course, all this may be by chance. But this is tested by the chi square statistic at the bottom of the table, which shows that the odds of getting these results by chance is greater than 10,000 to 1.

By now, it seems obvious. The one ingredient that bloody internal violence has in common is that the people that usually suffer from it also must endure being enslaved. Liberal democracies had little internal political violence.

But, you may object, these results were only for one year and that could have been an odd year. To answer this objection, I have collected internal conflict statistics for 214

governments (regimes), 1900 to 1987, selected to best represent the variation among nations in their development, power, culture, region, and politics; calculated the average number killed for democracies, authoritarian regimes (people are partly free), and totalitarian ones (no freedom), and listed the results in [Table 5.2](#) from my [Power Kills](#); and plotted the results in Figure 4.1 shown here. As you can see, the stark difference in average internal violence between democracies and those nations whose people have no freedom holds up even over these eighty-eight years. For internal violence, therefore, there is this very important correlation.

The more democratic freedom a people have, the less severe their internal political violence.

This is a statistical fact. To assert that freedom minimizes such violence does not mean that freedom necessarily ends it. Some rioting, terrorism, and even civil war, might still happen. Freedom is no guarantee against this. But in the world at large, with all the issues people and governments may fight over, we have no proven and useful means of ending every kind of internal political violence forever, everywhere. But, we now know that we can sharply reduce such violence to the mildest and smallest amount possible, and that is through freedom.

How do we understand this power of democratic freedom? Many believe that the answer to this is psychological and personal. They think that free societies educate people against the mass killing of their neighbors; that free people are not as belligerent as those elsewhere; that they have deep inhibitions to killing others, as went on in Mexico and Russia, for example, or as you saw in Burma and Sudan; and that free people are more tolerant of their differences. There is much truth in all this, but commentators often neglect the social preconditions of this psychological resistance to political violence. The answer is that *the social structure of a free, democratic society, creates the psychological conditions for its greater internal peace.*

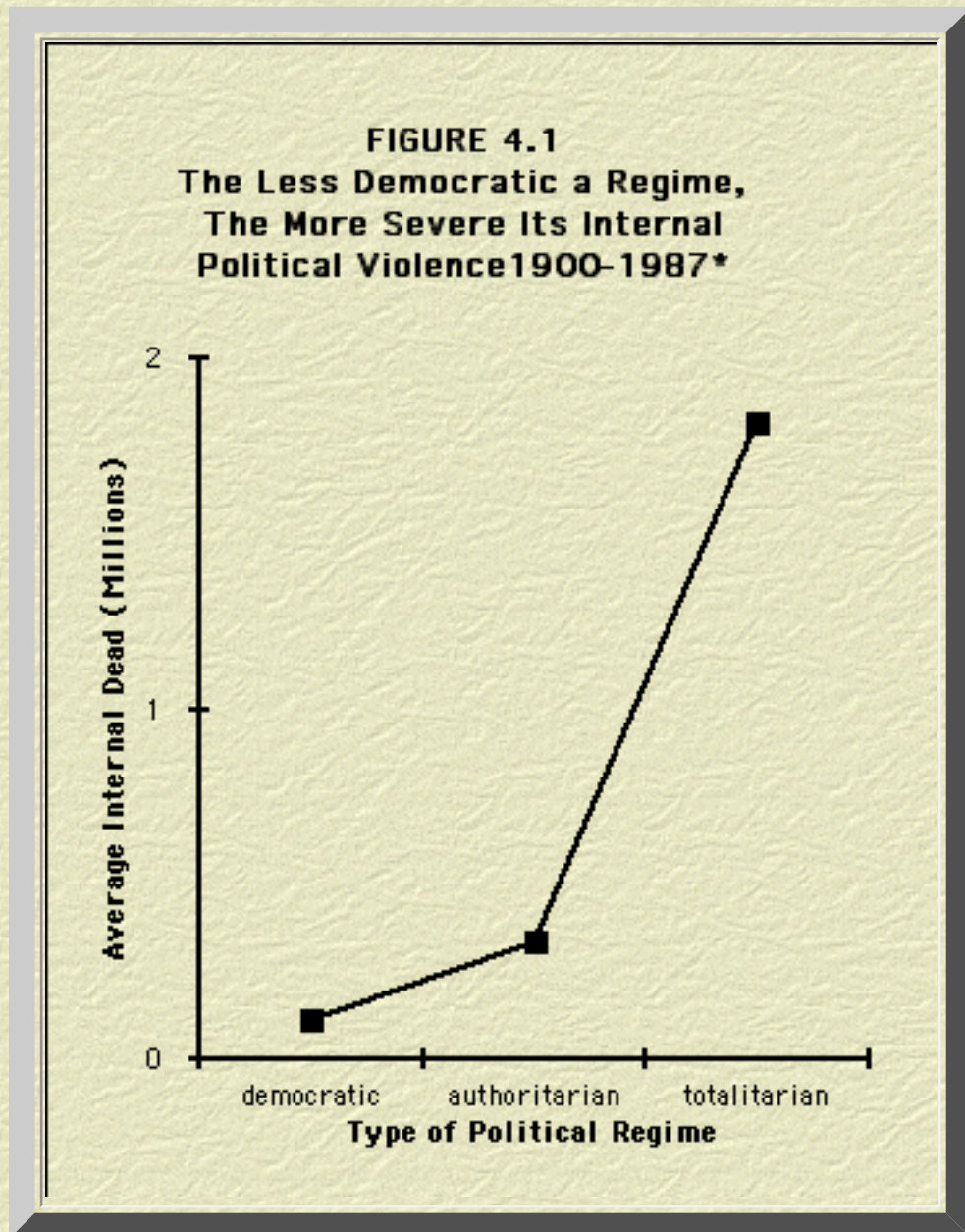
You will recall from earlier chapters that where freedom flourishes, there are relatively free markets, and freedom of religion, association, ideas, and speech. Corporations, partnerships, associations, societies, leagues, churches, schools, and clubs proliferate. Through your interests, work, and play, you become a member of these multiple groups, each a separate pyramid of power, each competing with the others and with government for your membership, time, and resources.

You can liken these pyramids to what you would see from a low flying plane looking across the downtown of a city and out to the suburbs. Some buildings are very tall, some short, and others away from the downtown area, are close to the ground. If you

imagine each building standing for some group's power in a free society, you have a good analogy to how a free people disperse power. Surely, in contemporary societies the government will be the tallest and largest building of all, with some other buildings close in size. One might be a church, as in Israel or a Catholic democracy; another big building might be some

corporation, like Microsoft in the United States. Other buildings might be some powerful political party, wealthy and influential family, or some group like a labor union.

While each group is distinct and legally separate, their memberships overlap and crosscut society. As stockholder, political party member, contributor to an environmental group, worker, tennis player, churchgoer, you belong to many of these groups. Your friends and coworkers probably belong to some of the same groups, but also to some different ones.



Similarly, in a free society the critical social distinctions of wealth, power, and prestige are subdivided in many ways. Few people are high on all three. More are low on all three, but these people are not close to a majority. Most people have different amounts of wealth, power, and prestige. Even Bill Gates, while the highest on wealth, does not have the prestige of a top movie actor or popular musician, or the power of the judge that has now decided to break up his Microsoft because of its "monopolistic practices." Even the President of the United States, despite his great power and prestige, is only moderately high on wealth. And the adored movie actor will be high in prestige and moderately high in wealth, but low in power.

All this pluralism in your group memberships and in wealth, power, and prestige cross pressures your interests and motivations. That is, your membership in separate groups cuts up into different pieces what you want, your desires, and your goals, each satisfied by a different group, such as your church on Sunday, bowling or tennis league on Tuesday night, factory or office for 40 week-day hours, parent teacher association meeting on Wednesday, and, family at home. These interests differ, but overlap, and all take time and energy. Moreover, you share some of these interests with others, and which others will differ depending on the group. For all free people across a society, there is a constantly changing criss-cross of interests and differences. For you, therefore, to satisfy one interest requires balancing it against other interests that you have. Do you take the family on a picnic this weekend, play golf with your friends, do that extra work that needs to be done around the house, or help your political party win its campaign?

This cross pressuring of interests is true of a democratic government as well. After all, a democratic government is not some monolith, a uniform pyramid of power. Many departments, agencies, and bureaus, make up the government, each staffed with bureaucrats and political appointees, each with their own official and personal interests. Between all are many official and personal connections and linkages that serve to satisfy their mutual interests. The military services coordinate their strategies and may even share equipment with other departments and agencies. Intelligence services will share some secrets and even sometimes agents. Health services will coordinate their studies, undertake common projects with the military, and provide health supplies when needed. So multiple shared and cross-pressured interests sew together a democratic government itself. And these interests are shared with nongovernmental interest and pressure groups, and will be cross-pressured by them as well.

Because of all these diverse connections and linkages in a democratic society, politicians, leaders, and groups have a paramount interest in keeping the peace. And

where a conflict might escalate into violence, as over some religious or environmental issue, people's interests are so cross pressured by different groups and ties, that they simply cannot develop the needed depth of feeling and single-minded devotion to any interest at stake, except perhaps to their families and children. Keep in mind that for a person to choose in concert with others in a group to kill people or destroy their property demands that they have an almost fanatic dedication to the interest--the stakes--involved, almost to the exclusion of all else.

Yet there is also something about democratically free societies that is even more important than these violence reducing links and cross pressures. This is their culture. Where people are free, as in a free market, exchange dominates and resolves conflicts. "You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours." "You give me that, and I'll give you this." Money is often the currency of such exchange, but also so are people's privileges of one sort or another, benefits, positions, and so on. But except where such exchange is so standardized that there is little room for bargaining, as in buying a hamburger at the local fast food restaurant, in a democracy people soak up certain norms governing their conflicts. These are that they tolerate their differences, negotiate some compromise, and in the process, make concessions. From the highest government officials to the lowest worker, from the consideration of bills in a legislature to who does the dishes after dinner, there is bargaining of one sort or another going on to resolve an actual or potential conflict. Some of this becomes regularized, as in the bargaining of unions and management in the United States structured by the Labor Relations Board, or that given by tradition that dictates in some families that the wife will always wash the dishes. But so much more involves bargaining.

Therefore, in a free society a culture of bargaining, what you might call an exchange or democratic culture, evolves. This is part of the settling in that takes place when a nation first becomes democratic. Authoritarian practices, doing things by orders, decrees, and commands sent down a hierarchy, gradually gets replaced by many hierarchies of power and the use of bargaining and its techniques of negotiation and compromise to settle conflicts. Free people soon come to expect that when they have a conflict, they will negotiate the issues and through concessions and the splitting of differences, they will resolve it. The more years a democracy exists, the more its people's expectations become hardened into social customs and perception. No matter the conflict, people who have been long democratically free do not expect revolution and civil war. For most important, *they see each other as democratic, part of one's in-group, one's moral, democratic universe.* They each share not only socially, in overlapping groups, functions, and linkages, but also in culture.

The result of this structure of freedom, this *spontaneous society*, as F.A. Hayek called

it in his *Law, Legislation, and Liberty*, is then to inhibit violence as you have seen, and to culturally dispose people to cooperation, negotiation, compromise, and tolerance of others. Just consider the acceptance and application of the Constitution of the United States and Congressional rules in settling in 1999 that most serious of political conflicts, whether President Clinton would be fired from office. This supremely contentious dispute that I sketched in [Chapter 3](#), this most potentially violent issue, was decided with no loss of life, no injuries, no destruction of property, no disorder, no political instability. Similarly for the even more potentially violent, month long dispute over the outcome of the 2000 American presidential election. Above all examples I might give, these two more than any other, show the sheer power of a democratic institutions and culture to cause you to peacefully resolve your social and political conflicts.

But this is, so to speak, one end of the stick. This spontaneous society explains why a free people are most peaceful in their national affairs, but why should those societies in which people are commanded by absolute dictators, where people are most unfree, be most violent? The worst of these dictators rule their people and organize their society according to ideological or theological imperatives. Be it Marxism-Leninism and the drive for true communism as in the Russian Revolution, socialist equalitarianism as in Burma, racial purity as in Nazi Germany, or the realization of God's will as in Sudan, the dictators operate through a rigid and society-wide command structure. And this polarizes society.

First, the competing pyramids of power--church, schools, businesses, and so on-- that discipline, check, and balance each other and government in a free society do not exist. There is one solid pyramid of power, with the dictator or ruling elite at the top, with various levels of government in the middle and near the bottom, and with the mass of powerless subjects at the bottom.

Second, where in a free society separate cross-cutting groups service diverse interests, there is now, in effect, only one division in society: that between those in power who command and those who must obey. In the worst of these nations, such as Pol Pot's Cambodia, to be exemplified in the [next chapter](#), Kim Il-sung's North Korea, Mao's China, and Stalin's Soviet Union, as seen in the [last chapter](#), you could only work for the Communist Party, buy food from its stores, read newspapers it publishes, see its movies and television programs, go to its schools, study its textbooks, and pray at a church it controlled. This sharply divides society into those in power and those out of power, into "them" versus "us." This aligns the vital interests of us versus them along one conflict fault line traversing society, as a magnet aligns metal filings along its magnetic forces. Any minor gripe about the society or politics is against the same "them," and when one says "they" are responsible for a problem or conflict, friends

and loved ones know exactly whom is meant--the whole apparatus of the dictator's rule: his henchmen, police, officials, spies, and bureaucrats.

Since this regime owns and runs near everything, any minor issue therefore becomes a matter of the dictator's power, legitimacy, or credibility. A strike in one small town against a government owned factory is a serious matter to the dictator. If he shows weakness in defense of his policies, no matter how localized, the strike can spread along the us versus them fault line and crystallize a nation wide rebellion. So the dictator must use major force to put it down. For the people, such a strike may be symbolic, and a display of resistance they should support, and therefore, the strike still may spread along the fault line between the dictator and people. Anyhow, the regime cannot afford to let any resistance, any display of independence, anywhere in the country by anybody, go unchallenged. Even a peaceful demonstration, as in Burma and China, must be violently squashed, with leaders arrested, tortured for information, and often killed.

So rule is by the gun; violence a natural concomitant. But, there is more to this. As a culture of accommodation is a corollary of freedom, a culture of force and violence is a theorem of dictatorial rule. Where such rule is absolute, this is also a culture of fear--not knowing when someone might perceive you as doing something wrong and report you to the police, doubt whether authorities will use your ancestors or race or religion as a black mark against you; and insecurity about the lives of your loved ones, who authorities may drag off to serve in the military, cause to disappear because of something they said, or make some sexual plaything. The fear exists up and down the dictator's command structure as well. The secret police may shoot a general because of his joke about the "Great Leader," or they may jail and torture top government functionaries because of a rumored plot. The dictator himself must always fear that his security forces will turn their guns on him.

Where power becomes absolute, massive killing follows, and rebellion is a concomitant. There also are partly free regimes like a monarch ruling according to tradition and custom, as in Kuwait or Saudi Arabia; or an authoritarian one, as in Mexico before its revolution in which arranged elections and compliant military, police, and rich landowners kept the dictator in power. Power in this case is more dispersed, and some freedoms do exist. And therefore, the average violence is less than in those nations in which the people have no freedom. If, however, the authoritarian rule is especially unjust and despicable, as it was in Mexico, the resulting violence can be quite bloody. Regardless, as you have seen, the correlation holds. The less free a society and the more coercive commands dominate it, then the greater the polarization and culture of fear and violence, and the more likely extreme violence will occur.

In the last chapter, I showed that by promoting wealth and prosperity, your freedom is a moral good. Here, you see that freedom also promotes nonviolence and peace within a nation. This is also a moral good of freedom. *It is another moral reason why you should be democratically free.*

Political violence within nations is only one form of violence, however. There is another form, far more deadly than any other form of violence, and that is genocide and mass murder. I need a separate chapter to deal with this.

NOTES

* Written for this web site. I am indebted to Judson Knight for his careful editing and helpful comments on a portion this chapter. For the statistics and details on the Mexican and Russian Revolution covered here, see Chapters 16 and 17 of my [Death By Government](#); for those on the post-revolutionary period in Russia, soon to be the USSR, see my [Lethal Politics](#). For the tests of the general relationship between internal political violence and democracy, see [Chapter 35](#) of [The Conflict Helix](#); ["Libertarianism, Violence Within States, and the Polarity Principle"](#); ["Libertarianism, Violence Within States, and the Polarity Principle"](#); [Power Kills](#); and this book's [Appendix](#).

1. See a [list](#) of present conflicts, those concluded since WWII, and a conflict map. On my [links](#) page I provide links to data sources on conflict and war.
