

The Fifth Generation of Revolution Studies. Part I: When, Why, and How Did It Emerge

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Abstract

There are grounds for claiming that a new ('fifth') generation of revolution studies has emerged in the 21st century. It can be noted that the characteristics of this generation are as follows: a tendency toward a macro-level outlook, encompassing both historical and geographical dimensions, coupled with a propensity toward a systemic approach; study of distinct types of revolutionary processes, such as Mark Beissinger's 'urban civic revolutions', and the pivotal revolutionary innovations, including the impact of new information technologies in recent revolutions; innovations regarding the factors and causes of revolutions and innovations in the analysis of the factors influencing the choice of revolutionary strategy and revolution outcomes; a special interest in the topic of revolutionary waves/'the diffusion of revolution'; a strong understanding that armed and unarmed revolutionary events are characterized by significantly different factors, structure, and consequences; a focus on the study of unarmed revolutionary episodes/'non-violent maximalist campaigns'; the use of global databases of revolutionary events; extensive use of modern methods of quantitative analysis.

Keywords

political science, revolution, revolution studies, generations of revolution studies, fifth generation of the theory of revolutions

Not only did the 21st century bring many revolutions, but these revolutions themselves turned out to be different from the revolutions of the 20th century. In 2011–2012, the Arab world witnessed an event unique in its scale: the Arab Spring, a series of almost synchronized revolutions, uprisings, and protests in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) that had a

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truly global echo (e.g. see the studies by Akaev et al., 2017; Grinin and Korotayev, 2022; Khokhlov et al., 2021; Korotayev et al., 2017, 2018, 2024b). The Arab Spring is an extremely interesting research topic in its own right, as it represented a powerful revolutionary wave (Beck, 2014; see also the study by Goldstone et al., 2022c; Grinin, 2022b), but in the context of political science, it is particularly intriguing as a peculiar transformation of revolutionary movements and revolutionary mechanics (Bayat, 2021; Fraihat and Yaseen, 2020; Korotayev et al., 2022a). It is also important to note that the Arab Spring served as a catalyst for a significant increase in the number of new revolutionary events around the globe. These events were observed in almost all the parts of the world, including the Americas, Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Western Europe, and Eastern Europe (Honwana, 2019; Issaev et al., 2022; Korotayev et al., 2017, 2019a, 2019b, 2022b; Roos and Oikonomakis, 2014; Shihade et al., 2012).¹

The field of revolutionary theory has a long history of attempting to elucidate the intricate dynamics that underpin social upheavals, political transformations, and the restructuring of state structures. The revolutions of the late 20th century, including the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the rise of democratic movements worldwide, came as a surprise to many scholars. These unanticipated events prompted a surge in research activity, stimulating the re-examination of prevailing paradigms and the establishment of a foundation for a reassessment of revolutionary theory. Nearly 25 years ago, Jack Goldstone's (2001) seminal article, 'Toward a Fourth Generation of Revolutionary Theory', marked a pivotal step in this re-evaluation by rethinking the paradigms that guide our understanding of revolutionary processes. Nevertheless, it is argued that revolutionary theory is currently out of step with empirical reality. For example, George Lawson observes that the four-generation model is no longer adequate and that, despite the extensive research on revolutions, the theory remains static and unenriched (Lawson, 2016). This is due, in part, to the fundamental and global nature of previous generations of research. The fourth generation of research was based on an extensive analysis of a multitude of revolutions, with the objective of encompassing the considerable diversity of revolutionary episodes that transpired during the 1990s and 2000s.

The dispute about the emergence of a new generation in the theory of revolution among researchers of revolutions arose as a result of comprehension of revolutionary trends. The point is that there was a noticeable shift away from armed to unarmed revolutions by the end of the 20th century, and this tendency has continued into the 21st (Abrams, 2019; Allinson, 2019; Bayat, 2021; Beck, 2020; Goldstone, 2001; Goldstone et al., 2022a). And then, during the Arab revolutions, this trend underwent a partial reversal, suddenly for researchers (Abrams, 2019; Allinson, 2019; Beck and Ritter, 2021; Grinin and Korotayev, 2024a).² Consequently, the events of the 2010s have fundamentally altered the prevailing academic understanding of revolutions. They required and still require rethinking (Beck and Ritter, 2021; Chenoweth, 2019).

In the aftermath of the Arab revolutions, however, the view has spread that revolutionary theory is not just lagging behind empirical reality but has stalled (Abrams, 2019; Allinson, 2019; Beck et al., 2022). George Lawson notes that despite the huge amount of research on revolutions, the theory is not being enriched and, in fact, is remaining unchanged (Lawson, 2016). The view that revolutionary theory has stalled is not unfounded.

In this context, the concept of the so-called 'fifth' generation of the theory of revolutions emerged (Allinson, 2019). It is worth noting the discussion between Benjamin Abrams and Jamie Allinson regarding the potential existence of a fifth generation. The concept was first proposed by Allinson, who stated that contemporary revolutionary events exhibit notable differences from those described within the framework of the fourth-generation theories. In particular, he highlighted the combination of broad antagonistic mobilization and relatively limited outcomes compared to past revolutions as key features of revolutionary events in the present era (Allinson, 2019).

At the same time, Abrams argues that the fifth generation cannot fully emerge without systematic and concrete models for the evolution of revolutionary movements (Abrams, 2019).

In our opinion, modern revolutions do have a number of distinctive features, and there are some reasons to say that the fifth generation has not yet been completely formed, but new approaches, including modern methods and the introduction of ‘big data’, have already significantly changed our understanding of revolutions. And this makes it possible to talk about the fifth generation of the theory of revolutions as a reality.

In order for the reader to have a clearer understanding of this discussion, it is necessary to first consider how the theories of revolutions that already exist have evolved. By now, there is a tradition to categorize theories of revolution into four conventional generations, which are associated both with changes in methodological approaches and with large-scale changes in revolutionary practice itself (Beck et al., 2022; Beissinger, 2022: 30–28, 2024; Foran, 1993; Goldstone, 2001; Goldstone et al., 2022b; Korotayev et al., 2024a; Lawson, 2016, 2019). In order to demonstrate how revolutions change the concept itself and what this means for the theory of revolution, this article should briefly review the foundations of four generations of theories of revolution. But let us note that the boundaries between generations of researchers are usually fuzzy or blurred, so both the attribution of a researcher to one or another generation and the very identification of a new generation are always debatable.

One effective strategy for introducing a new generation is to present an illustrative example of a work that shows a paradigm shift in the field of study. As previously stated, the Arab Revolutions require a rethinking. One of the most notable attempts to rethink and re-evaluate the Arab Spring is the work of Shamiran Mako and Valentine Moghadam, titled ‘After the Arab Uprisings’ (Mako and Moghadam, 2021). This work focuses on the outcomes of the events of 2011. In their book, Mako and Moghadam provide an in-depth examination of the ways in which the characteristics of social movements during uprisings influence the outcomes of revolutionary processes. Mako and Moghadam analyze state institutions, actions of civil organizations, women’s activism, and international influence as factors of future outcomes. While the authors do not discuss generations of revolutionary studies, their book is a fine example of the fifth generation of the theory of revolutions due to its various focuses, which will be discussed in further detail below: interconnectedness and influence of external actors, study of a revolutionary wave instead of singular cases, and study of movements’ characteristics.

Subsequently, we will articulate our understanding of the question concerning the existence of the fifth generation of revolutionary theory (in addition to the present article, see also two other parts of this introduction to the fifth generation of revolution studies (Korotayev et al., 2025a, 2025b)). If this generation exists, what are its distinctive characteristics? What specific substantive results have been obtained by representatives of the fifth generation? What regularities in the dynamics of revolutionary processes have been detected by these researchers?

In this first part of our work, we focus on the first question above. The objective of this study is to examine the background of the fifth generation of the theory of revolution. First, we examine the historical development of revolutionary studies, commencing with the initial works of the ‘Zero Generation’ and concluding with the fourth generation of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. A chronological review of previous generations enables us to ascertain the understanding of revolutions that scholars had already achieved and to identify the contributions that the current collective wisdom can make to our understanding of this phenomenon. In examining the evolution of generations, it becomes evident that the theory of revolutions is currently undergoing a period of transformation, giving rise to a debate surrounding the potential existence of a fifth generation. We examine the specifics of the debate, as well as alternative, non-generational approaches pertaining to the theory of revolution.

As previously stated, we posit the existence of the fifth generation of the revolution studies. In order to develop our argument, we will first present the distinctive features of modern revolutions

that affect the revolutionary studies. Subsequently, we present the specific features characteristic of the fifth generation of revolutionary studies, as outlined by Allinson (2019) and ourselves. In conclusion, we examine the prerequisites for the emergence of the fifth generation and the reasons behind its recent development.

The following parts of this work (Korotayev et al., 2025a, 2025b) will present a systematic review of the substantive results obtained by scholars of the fifth generation and the regularities of revolutionary processes that researchers have identified. The second part (Korotayev et al., 2025a) is dedicated to a comprehensive examination of the underlying causes of revolutions and the latest advancements in this field of study. Furthermore, it examines the various forms of revolutions and the phenomenon of revolutionary waves. In the third part (Korotayev et al., 2025b), we examine the impact of repression on revolutionary processes, identify the factors that contribute to the success of revolutions, and analyze the consequences of revolutions. In summary, the first part provides an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning the fifth-generation approach, while subsequent sections present a systematic review of empirical findings from contemporary revolutionary studies.

About the Generations of the Theory of Revolution

'Zero Generation' and the First Generation of Revolutionary Theories

As already mentioned, the division into four/five generations is already well-established in revolutionary discourse. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the identification of the beginning of the first generation was rather formal, since the history of analyzing revolutions by the 1920s had already been almost 150 years old, if we count from the French Revolution, and more than 250 years old, if we count from the first students of the English Revolution, such as Thomas Hobbes.³

Thus, we have at least three previous generations before the 'first' (according to Goldstone, 1980) generation of theories and theorists. If we characterize these generations and their approaches very roughly, it might look like this:

1. reflections of eyewitnesses and participants in the French Revolution;
2. revolution as a struggle of classes. In the first decades of the 19th century, first, Henry de Saint-Simon (Saint-Simon, 1975), and later French historians Augustin Thierry (2012 [1827]), Francois Guizot (1844 [1836]), Francois Mignet (1896 [1824]), and some others took the first steps to explain revolutions as a result of class struggle (Bazard, 1831);
3. from the mid-19th to the early 20th century. Revolution and the progress of society, revolution and the course of history, early Marxist approach; arguments for and against revolutions.⁴

Thus, by the time the 'first' generation of revolutionary scholars emerged, the literature on revolutions had already been very large (for more details, see the study by Goldstone et al., 2022b).

For the sake of simplicity, we suggested that studies of the revolutions of the authors of the 19th and early 20th centuries (from Mignet and Guizot to Lenin and Kautsky) should be classified into a distinct category, which we termed the 'zero generation' (Goldstone et al., 2022b: 40–42).

The Marxist understanding of revolutions as locomotives of history and an opportunity to move from one mode of production/socio-economic formation to another is well known (e.g., see the study by Marx, 2000 [1850], 2000 [1852], 1994 [1859]; Marx and Engels, 2000 [1848]). This understanding of revolution formed the basis of 'historical materialism' and the Soviet understanding of revolutions in general (e.g. Sukharev and Fedoseev, 1984). It is worth noting that Marx and his early followers were less interested in constructing a theory of revolution and much more

concerned with philosophy, political economy, and history. At the same time, of all revolutionary theorists, Marxists are perhaps among the few who directly participated in revolutions and led other revolutionaries (e.g. Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, etc.), and in this regard, their descriptions are of particular value. For example, Lenin was the first to shift the focus of revolutionary theory to the semi-peripheral countries, incorporating the interconnectedness of countries into his analysis and introducing geopolitics into Marxist political economy, which had not been previously taken into account (Lane, 2021). Thus, the roots of analyzing external influence (as well as many other practices) as factors of modern revolutions can be traced to Marxist revolutionaries of the past.

Another classical approach to revolution is the ‘modernization’ approach, whose founder may be identified as Alexis de Tocqueville (though he, of course, did not use the very term ‘modernization’), according to whom the Great French Revolution only accelerated the dramatic modernization that was already underway in France as a result of the natural course of economic life and reforms. Thus, in Tocqueville’s approach, the revolution appeared as a natural, but not inevitable, experience (Tocqueville, 1856, 1955 [1856]).

Only in the early 20th century (or from the 1920s, according to another periodization) did the ‘first’ generation of theories of revolution appear. The new theoretical understanding of revolution coincides with the emergence of the social sciences in their modern form. These sociologists sought to uncover how various problems and crises contributed to the radicalization of society and the emergence of revolutionary movements seeking to change the political order as a means of addressing the needs of the population and various political groups. They assumed that the emergence of revolutions is mainly due to the flaws and weaknesses of the state. This perspective diverged from the Marxist position, which ascribed revolutions to inherent contradictions in the mode of production and class antagonisms (e.g. Brinton, 1938; Edwards, 1927; Pettee, 1938; Sorokin, 1925).

Representatives of the first generation of the theory of revolution were characterized by the fact that they looked for common causes for revolutions and largely perceived them as a kind of natural phenomenon. As George Lawson (2016) writes, Crane Brinton believed that revolutions are like fever: they have symptoms and are signs that the state system is not in a state of equilibrium (Brinton, 1938). The symptoms are the inability of the state to meet the needs of the population, the emergence of new political ideologies, and the intensification of social contradictions. Lawson (2016) summarizes Brinton’s theory as follows: after the exacerbation of these symptoms, a revolutionary force challenges the state, a crisis of ‘dual power’ develops, and then the revolutionary force wins (Brinton, 1938).

Colin Beck et al. (2022) succinctly summarize first-generation (Brinton, 1938; Edwards, 1927; Pettee, 1938; Sorokin, 1925) achievements as follows:

Theorists found that several factors led to the emergence of revolutions. These included the public defection of intellectuals (including playwrights, lawyers, journalists, clergy and so forth), who voiced grievances against the old regime and withdrew their support when the state was unable to meet expectations. Additionally, in each case, the regime faced a grave political crisis that increased its vulnerability. The regime’s inability to handle the situation generated a legitimation crisis, which contributed to the state’s collapse (Beck et al., 2022: 5–6).

Beissinger (2024: 2) summarizes the first-generation approach as the approach of ‘natural history’, which identifies universal phases in the development of revolution, and the main factors in the outbreak of revolution are the work of revolutionary intellectuals and the contagion of revolutionary ideology.

It is crucial to acknowledge that it is during the first generation that concepts are formulated not only about revolutions and their role in historical context but also about reactions to them as part of the revolutionary cycle. In the discussion of revolutions, the term ‘Thermidor’ (familiar to everybody knowing the history of the Great French Revolution) and, accordingly, the ‘law of Thermidor’, which states that reaction after revolution is inevitable, appear in the discussion of revolutions in the 1920s (Grinin, 2022a). Thus, Pitirim Sorokin wrote about reaction as an inevitable stage of revolution: “‘Reaction’ is not a phenomenon beyond the limits of revolution but is an unavoidable part of the revolutionary process itself, its second half” (Sorokin, 1925: 7).

Naturally, the first generation was criticized and rightfully so, but these criticisms are just only from the standpoint of the today’s level of knowledge. For example, Lawson (2016) criticizes Brinton’s approach, rightly noting that not all revolutions follow a single pattern. Nevertheless, one of the key achievements of the ‘first generation’ cannot be overlooked: it attempted to build a comparative theory, to find the underlying internal causes of revolutions, and to do so beyond Marxist theory or subjective assessments of the past.

The Second Generation of the Theory of Revolutions

The next phase of understanding revolutions took place in the 1950s and 1960s. The most famous representatives of this generation are James Davies (1962), Seymour Lipset (1959), Ted Robert Gurr (1968, 1970), Samuel Huntington (1968), Chalmers Johnson (1968), Neil Smelser (1963), and Charles Tilly (1973, 1975, 1978, 1986). At this time, the theories of social anomie (a term introduced by Emil Durkheim) were actively used, and the first extensive new-level studies on social and internal political conflicts appeared. One of the most significant works of this time is *Revolutionary Change* by Chalmers Johnson (1968), in which the author pays much attention to the impact of external impulses on the emergence of a revolutionary situation. These can be various technological innovations, aggressive neighbors, expansion of the country, significant religious, and political changes. However, these impulses alone do not cause revolution: they have a significant impact only when the political system is in a state of dysfunction and is unable to manage a potential crisis caused by external impulses. Johnson notes that even this coincidence of factors does not guarantee revolution: the population and elites must also fully recognize the existence of problems. Finally, Johnson builds a coherent picture of revolution: the author emphasizes that revolution is first and foremost a form of social change that includes manifestations of violence in civil and social relations and may include peasant uprisings, urban revolts, military coups, conspiracies, and so on. All these processes are violent by design, and violence in this context is understood as a last resort to change the system. It is important to note that Johnson views revolutionary processes as a spectrum from ‘simple rebellion’ to ‘total revolution’. ‘Simple rebellion’ has no ideological underpinnings and leads at best to some form of change in state institutions. At the same time, ‘total revolutions’ are aimed at the complete restructuring of society according to one or another ideological stance.

A very important component of the second-generation research was the contemporary modernization theory (due to the fact that at that time, many developing countries were actively trying to modernize and westernize). Respective researchers believed that revolutions occur at a certain phase of a country’s development related to industrialization, urbanization, expansion of modern formal education, and other modernization processes (e.g., Huntington, 1968; Lipset, 1959). This phase seems to be natural and largely inevitable when the economic development of a country reaches a certain level and the political ‘superstructure’ lags behind the economy. At the same time, some researchers of revolutions of this generation, first of all Charles Tilly (1973, 1986), sought to downplay the role of modernization as an important cause (for more detail on opinions about the

role of modernization in generating revolutionary destabilization, see the studies by Grinin, 2022c; Korotayev and Zhdanov, 2023).

The second generation can be noted as a period when attention begins to be paid to the psychology of society and its potential frustrations. For instance, James Davies wrote that revolutionary destabilization follows the exaggerated expectations of the population (Davies, 1962). Other authors also wrote that inflated societal expectations and corresponding frustration inevitably follow from the processes of urbanization and modernization (Feierabend et al., 1972). Finally, Ted Gurr noted that the situation is exacerbated by systematic oppression and restrictions on particular ethnicities, social groups, classes, or communities, which is an important cause of revolutionary mobilization (Gurr, 1968).

Lawson (2016) in his review particularly highlights the work of the aforementioned James Davies (1962) and Ted Gurr (1970). Perhaps Davies' most famous finding was the inverted J-curve, which reflects the economic growth of a developing country: initial rapid growth associated with modernization is followed by economic decline. This is the cause of frustration of the population, as the initial development significantly inflates expectations that will eventually not be met (Davies, 1962; Lawson, 2016). Ted Gurr called this process 'relative deprivation': being presented with new opportunities but not having the chance to take advantage of them is a major blow to people's psyche, which in turn leads to revolutionary uprisings (Gurr, 1970; Lawson, 2016). Summarizing the above, modernization increases the level of psychological stress in society, provoking revolutionary activity.

Colin Beck et al. (2022) criticize second-generation work for focusing too much on frustration; relative deprivation is clearly not the sole cause of revolution. Beck et al. (2022) sensibly quote Teda Skocpol (1979: 34): 'What society . . . lacks relative deprivation of one sort or another?'

In the context of the second generation, much more attention was paid to the process of revolution itself in terms of its internal mechanisms—for example, the emergence of several 'sovereignities' between different socio-political groups as a result of ideological divisions (Tilly, 1975). Therefore, researchers began to better understand the inner mechanisms of the revolution.

The Third Generation of the Theories of Revolutions

The third generation of revolution studies (1970s–1980s) is represented by several researchers such as Shmuel Eisenstadt (1978), Jeffrey M. Paige (1975), Ellen Kay Trimberger (1978), and also by Jack Goldstone in the early period of his work (Goldstone, 1982, 1988, 1991). Most of all, however, this generation is associated with the works of Theda Skocpol, most notably her monograph *States and Social Revolutions* (Skocpol, 1979). In this work, she develops a framework for understanding the logic of major social revolutions, focusing on what she terms 'great' revolutions. Her definition of revolution is particularly concerned with these 'great' revolutions. Skocpol's theory states that revolutionary events emerge from the state breakdown, precipitated by external pressures (from adversaries) and internal pressures (reform demands by elites, peasant rebellions, and limited control over local communities). Although Theda Skocpol's theory is widely acknowledged and frequently referenced, it is crucial to recognize that it cannot fully account for the complexities of contemporary and past revolutions (Goldstone, 2001: 142).

Another famous theorist of revolutions, Jack Goldstone, wrote that revolutions combine elite cleavage, mass mobilization, and financial hardship (Goldstone, 1982). The depletion of state resources gives rise to social imbalance and reduces the authority of the state, which in turn fosters increased corruption. The loyalty of elites is eroded in the absence of resources, which in turn leads to the ineffectiveness of the bureaucracy and the army.

In general, the theories of the third generation are distinguished by their greater scope and systematic approach. It is impossible not to note the extensive historical cross-sections and systematic historical comparisons in the studies of scholars such as Shmuel Eisenstadt, Jack Goldstone, Theda Skocpol, and others. In consequence, the third generation attaches considerable significance to the history of states and the distinctive characteristics of their formation. New factors are introduced into the analytical process, which were previously overlooked. First and foremost, the theories of the third generation place a particular emphasis on the role of the state. In the preceding generations of revolutionary theory, the state is regarded as a static entity, serving merely as a backdrop for events. In contrast, the third generation of theory portrays the state as a fully active participant in revolutionary processes (Sanderson, 2015). The significant role of international factors, the army, and elites is also recognized. This is particularly the case for the elites, as their relations with one another and potential divisions are significant factors influencing the trajectory of the revolution and the subsequent fate of the state (Goldstone et al., 2022b).

The Fourth Generation of the Theory of Revolution

The third generation of the theory of revolutions represented a significant advancement in our comprehension of the internal mechanics of revolutions: it encompasses not only an understanding of their ‘anatomy’ (Brinton) but also, as a comparison, an insight into their ‘physiology’. It is not coincidental that numerous works published in the 1970s and 1980s have attained the status of classics. However, the political reality of the last quarter of the 20th century rapidly became incompatible with the third-generation theories of revolutions. Notably, Islamic revolutions in Iran and Afghanistan, predominantly peaceful revolutions in countries within the socialist bloc, and numerous ‘color’ revolutions did not align with the theories proposed by the first three generations. The emergence of new cases of revolutions and the inadequacy of previous theoretical frameworks to account for them gave rise to the need for a fourth generation of revolution studies, which was identified, perhaps for the first time, by John Foran (1993), and the approaches of the fourth generations were systematically explained by Jack Goldstone (2001).

In the fourth generation of the theory of revolution, there is also a tendency to study revolutions outside Europe, North America, and China, as well as outside the usual time periods of political science. The fourth generation has given rise to separate fields of study of Latin American revolutionary insurrections and guerrilla warfare, African anticolonial uprisings, and early Modern revolts (Goldstone, 2001).

As Lawson (2016) notes, within the fourth generation, one could observe the development of the fundamental understanding that revolutions occur due to diverse sets of circumstances and that there is no simple formula for revolution. At the same time, the fourth generation in many ways took an important and necessary step toward the study of the international factors and their influence on the onset of revolutions, as well as their international consequences (Lawson, 2016). Mark Beissinger (2024) also notes many new topics that emerged in the study of revolutions within the fourth generation of theory. For example, these include agency and leadership (Selbin, 1997; Wood, 2003), identities and networks (Gould, 1991; Petersen, 2001; Zhao, 1998), coalition formation, and tactical choices (Beissinger, 2013; Dix, 1984; Tilly, 1978, 1986; Traugott, 2010). Beck et al. (2022), in turn, note that a new focus on cultural factors emerged: although they cannot by themselves cause revolution, they can, together with structuralist factors, provoke revolutionary uprisings (Parsa, 2000; Selbin, 1993).

At the same time, many researchers of the fourth generation focused on analyzing individual factors or types of revolutions, but not on attempts to create a general theory. This might be due to both the typical, for some researchers, suspicion of general theories and the lack of methodology

in the creation of such theories. It is unsurprising that Benjamin Abrams (2019: 384) calls to encompass new projects and theories and to discard ontological and methodological purism (meaning aforementioned suspicion of large generalizations) in order to come back to ambitious comparisons and novel, deep theoretical research, which was characteristic for seminal works about revolution. However, these appeals have not yet found a response. In addition, the creation of a general theory of revolutions is currently hindered by the emergence of new types of revolutions, which—and this is very important—come into political and ideological contradiction with the generally accepted and established norms. Researchers are confronted with the challenge of navigating the demands of political correctness, which may impede their ability to conduct objective analysis. We are referring to a certain exhaustion of the potential of democratic revolutions and the so-called ‘authoritarian revanchism’ (e.g., see the study by Selbin, 2022). And especially color revolutions are important in this regard. It is notable that relatively few researchers have written about this topic, and even those who have, such as Lincoln Mitchell (2012, 2022), have largely avoided its geopolitical aspect. This is a significant omission given the interest of the USA and other countries in using revolutions to advance their own goals⁵ (for the definitions and analysis of color revolutions, see the study by Grinin and Korotayev, 2023). It is evident that within this ideological context, there is a significant challenge in creating a general theory of revolutions.

In light of the emergence of novel forms and types of revolutionary events in recent decades, there is a lack of comparative and theoretical studies capable of describing and integrating the ever-increasing empirical experience. As George Lawson observes, there has been a certain degree of stagnation in the theoretical discourse surrounding revolutions. It is therefore imperative that revolutionary theory aligns itself with the empirical evidence and practice that has emerged in recent decades (Lawson, 2019). Thus, we can say that the last few decades have simultaneously been the end for many regimes and for many theories of revolutions (Beck, 2018).

Thus, given the state of revolutionary theory by the current decade in the context of the above, it seems that a deep theoretical analysis of revolutionary phenomena may be in demand now more than ever. One way or another, there is a growing consensus that the fourth generation has largely exhausted its theoretical potential, while the need to respond to new revolutionary events and characteristics is increasingly pushing researchers to search for new phenomena, their explanations, and new methods of analyzing them.

Each generation, therefore, exhibited distinctive strengths, yet the potential of each generation’s approach was rapidly depleted, and the shortcomings became increasingly apparent, prompting the formulation of new theories and, on occasion, a shift in paradigms. It is evident that the existing theories are no longer sufficient to account for certain scientific problems, new facts, and phenomena.

The Fifth Generation of The Theory of Revolution: Discussions

Antagonistic Views: ‘the Fifth Generation Has Already Come and Left’ vs ‘the Fifth Generation Is Yet to Come’

Prior to addressing the primary focus of this series of articles,⁶ namely the examination of the fifth generation of the theory of revolutions, it is important to acknowledge the insights by Jamie Allinson (2019) regarding the genesis of new generations of the theory of revolutions. According to him, the second generation was founded upon the critique of the first one, which was unsystematic and rooted in subjective interpretations of revolutionary events. The second generation, in turn, exhibited the same shortcomings as behaviorism in general, prompting criticism from the third generation for its excessive focus on individual behavior and experience, with minimal consideration of institutional and structural factors. The third generation was, in contrast, the subject of criticism for its

excessive focus on institutions and macro-level structures, as well as for its inability to provide explanations that take into account multiple causal factors. The fourth generation has been subject to self-criticism for its inability to arrive at these multicausal explanations. Against the backdrop of the shortcomings of previous generations of theories of revolution, Allinson states the advent of a fifth generation of the theory of revolutions. This new generation is distinguished by (1) a shift in the object of study, which will now encompass a set of relations between goals, individuals, and structures; (2) reframing of revolutions as processes which can be fully understood in long-term perspective, rather than as events with a clearly defined beginning and end. Allinson utilizes such extensive works as the main theoretical framework for his work as *Revolution without revolutionaries* by Asef Bayat (2017), *Where did the revolution go?* by Donatella Della Porta (2016), and *The iron cage of liberalism* by Daniel Ritter (2015).

However, Allinson's most surprising conclusion, in our view, is not that the fifth generation has emerged, but that it has already passed, that is, the model of fifth-generation revolutions is already outmoded: 'Its time has come and passed' (Allinson, 2019: 143). Arab revolutions of 2011 signified the end of this generation (Allinson, 2019: 144). Therefore, according to Allinson, this generation, in words of Beck and Ritter, turned to be a short-lived one (Beck and Ritter, 2021: 135). Indeed, a few years is not enough to constitute a generation. And it is a stretch to call only a few researchers a generation. At the same time, the opponents have contended not that the fifth generation has already become irrelevant but that the fifth generation just does not exist.

Jack Goldstone believes that 'we are only now seeing the emergence of a clear Fourth Generation of revolutionary theory' (Goldstone, 2024: 1071).⁷ And there is no sharp divide between its representatives and the new generation of researchers that Allinson wrote about. Thus, the whole period from 1990s until present time is the period of the fourth generation.

The position of Allinson is met with the most vigorous opposition by Benjamin Abrams (2019) in his article, 'A Fifth Generation of Revolutionary Theory is Yet to Come', which fully encapsulates his perspective. Abrams, like Goldstone later, states that the fifth-generation characteristics deduced by Allinson are merely an extension of the fourth-generation ones, which has reached a point of stagnation. Abrams asserts that the fourth generation attempted to encompass too many diverse cases, ultimately failing to do so. At this time, there is no established fifth generation of the theory; rather, there are only conceptualizations of what it should entail to serve as a viable model for revolution. Abrams presents 'some ambitious and speculative suggestions for a genuine fifth generation of revolutionary theory' (Abrams, 2019: 378). Consequently, in his assessment, the fifth generation proposed by Allinson is not a tangible reality.

The question of the fifth generation remains a topic of interest for scholars engaged in research within this field. One of the most recent developments in this field of study was the thematic symposium published in the sixth issue of the 50th volume of *Critical Sociology*, titled 'Emerging Fifth Generation Theories of Revolution'. One of the contributions to the symposium is a work by Jack Goldstone, entitled 'The Generations of Revolutionary Theory Revisited. New Works and the Evolution of Theory' (Goldstone, 2024). Although Goldstone does not endorse the notion that the fifth generation has already developed, he asserts that there has been notable advancement in the theoretical framework, which is materialized in the areas of studying revolutionary waves, examining women's involvement, analyzing the convergence of revolutions with other forms of instability, and investigating revolutionary dynamics while breaking them down into discrete stages (Goldstone, 2024).

Another contribution to the Symposium is an article entitled 'Revolutions and the World-System', authored by Valentine Moghadam (2024). In this work, Moghadam presents a discussion of the recent revolutionary destabilization in the MENA region, specifically based on the volume *New Wave of Revolutions in the MENA Region: A Comparative Perspective*, edited by

Leonid Issaev and Andrey Korotayev (2022). Moghadam's inquiry delves into the prospective evolution of the concept of revolution. Will it evolve into a more diffuse phenomenon, encompassing 'revolutions', 'coupvolutions', and horizontal protests, or will it revert to a more ideologically and hierarchically structured form? This question is particularly important in light of the current state of revolutionary theory, where the nature of revolutions is undergoing a transformation. Scholars are confronted with cases that increasingly diverge from the traditional characteristics of social revolutions.

Grinin and Korotayev discuss the fifth-generation characteristics brought up in the Symposium (Grinin and Korotayev, 2024a; 2024b). These include the tendency to historical analysis, the problems of defining revolutionary events, and the presence of a geopolitical dimension. A significant question addressed by the authors is how a researcher of revolutions should approach them, considering their impact on society and the world. The answer is to maintain impartiality in analysis, but given the growing interconnectedness of the world, it is reasonable to anticipate that this question will be raised with increasing frequency.

In light of the aforementioned discussions, the question of the fifth generation is a complex one. Given the diversity of perspectives among scholars of revolutions, reaching a consensus on the new generation would be an almost impossible task. Consequently, it is evident that discussions on generations will persist. It is crucial to acknowledge, however, that the generational approach is not universally accepted.

Criticism of Generational Approach

Despite the considerable attention and debate surrounding Allinson's article, it is notable that the question of whether the fifth generation has already emerged remains largely unaddressed in the research community. First of all, of course, this is because of the limitations of the generational approach and the difficulty of drawing a boundary line between the fourth and fifth generations. The aforementioned fear of making large generalizations (which are absolutely necessary for such a shift) also manifests itself. Nevertheless, we believe that it is extremely important and stimulating for the field of political science to reasonably express our opinion on new approaches and characteristics of the fifth generation. In particular, the discussion of the fifth generation allows us to focus more clearly on the changes that have taken place in the World System and in the characteristics of revolutionary events, as well as on what methods and directions will be the most fruitful ones for the most profound analysis of these changes.

Prior to embarking on the aforementioned topic, it is important to look at a critique of generational approach as a whole.

For instance, Radu-Alexandru Cucută (2013) discusses 'generational deadlock' and writes that 'the generational perspective remains impermissibly flexible and elusive, ignoring the main paradigmatic debates within the field of study' (Cucută, 2013: 1107).

Colin Beck and Daniel Ritter (Beck and Ritter, 2021) in their article 'Thinking beyond generations' critically assess the generational approach which creates a false premise. Beck calls for looking at ideas rather than at generational categorization. Let us take a closer look at Colin Beck's critique of generational approach (Beck, 2020).

First of all, Beck criticizes the generational division for overgeneralization. In the previous sections, we have formulated the main motives of each generation, but Beck rightly points out that there were researchers in the designated time periods who wrote works on revolutions based on completely different principles in contrast to the works of their contemporaries. For example, Beck mentions the work of Roger Merriman (1938), who, in 1938, wrote about revolutions in a frame of structuralist approach focusing on the role of the state, which is a characteristic feature of the third

generation and not the first one, which encompasses Merriman's contemporaries Sorokin, Brinton, and Edwards. In the same year that Theda Skocpol's foundational work, *States and Social Revolutions*, was published, an article by American sociologist Walter Goldfrank (1979) was also released. This article presented a theoretical framework that emphasized the role of the world-system interaction between states in revolutionary processes (Beck, 2020: 564).

There is a reasoned argument in this criticism. It would be erroneous to restrict our analysis to this approach or to absolutize the division into generations of researchers. Nevertheless, it would be erroneous to absolutize any approach as the sole correct one. Each approach has its shortcomings and advantages. It is therefore essential to gain a clear understanding of the advantages and disadvantages inherent to the approach and the limits of its applicability. In defense of the generational approach, which relies on an obviously very conditional division into generations, it can be argued that, despite this, it has an important basis. This basis is the change in the types of revolutions and world-system conditions in the period of one, two, or three decades (that is, the period of fruition and advancement of a specific generation of researchers and their methodologies). It is evident that new forms and types of revolutionary events necessitate a theoretical response to the changes observed in research. This shift in approaches to analyzing and researching revolutions in many respects determines the beginning of the rise of a new generation of researchers.

In the context of the fifth-generation argument, Beck also sees the need to break out of the paradigm of 'generational' thinking. Together with Daniel Ritter, he identifies several major developments in the most recent studies of revolutions (Beck and Ritter, 2021). The authors note their diversity and the need for research both in building a unified model of revolutions and in narrower areas focused on the specifics of revolutionary movements, social narratives, and the role of individuals (Beck and Ritter, 2021: 140).

In particular, we are inclined to agree entirely with the following statement by Colin Beck and Daniel Ritter:

Another potentially unfortunate and inadvertent consequence of generational thinking is that it may promote the idea that past generations have been proven to be 'incorrect'. The consequence of this is that the baby—specific insights—is thrown out with the generational bathwater, perhaps due to a scholarly fear that returning to past understandings indicate both a lack of knowledge of the field's history and, worse yet, an absence of theoretical vision. In other words, key insights from past generations may become damaged goods that one should preferably avoid engaging . . . The result of such an approach is detrimental to our collective effort to understand revolutions, as theory construction often occurs from the synthesis of pre-existing ideas, insights, and concepts (Beck and Ritter, 2021: 136).

Indeed, we also tend to believe that Crane Brinton's (1938) phases/stages of great revolutions (the first generation), social psychological factors of revolutionary destabilization described by James Davies (1962) and Ted Gurr (1970) (the second generation), or structural comparison of great revolutions in the framework of the third generation conducted by Theda Skocpol (1979) fully retain their significance up to the present time and must necessarily be taken into account in the development of theories of revolution of new generations. Within this approach, new generations of theories of revolution do not negate previous ones but complement them, allowing us to make our understanding of revolutionary events more and more complete and multidimensional.

It is hard to deny the contribution of generations to our conceptualization of revolutions. Even critics of the generational approach do not deny the fact that generations have become a focal point in the scientific discourse on revolutions (Beck, 2020; Cucută, 2013). There are many different ways to describe revolutions and their changes, but the generations of revolution theory constitute a tool that allows us to refer the reader directly to an important period of their study, during which

new knowledge was gained. Thus, the argument about the fifth generation in the theory of revolutions has every right to exist: at the moment, researchers of revolutions possess a huge methodological toolkit (primarily a number of open databases and methods of studying them), as well as a large number of new cases of revolutions, significantly different from the past.

A review of the preceding generations reveals that the paradigms of revolutionary theory underwent changes at varying points in time, but in all cases, these changes were ultimately shaped by the prevailing political circumstances. The empirical reality of revolutions has diverged significantly from its historical counterpart, as has the toolkit available to contemporary scholars. The following section will present a preliminary account of the key characteristics and features of the fifth generation.

The Fifth Generation of Studies and Its Key Features

Specifics of Revolutionary Events of the 21st Century

Revolutions of the Fifth Generation. What Are They? First, it is evident that certain trends that originated in the latter decades of the 20th century have persisted into the 21st century. Among the multitude of such trends, we identify the following:

1. **the increase in the number of revolutions**, which has been going on since the end of the 20th century and has intensified in the 21st century. The average number of revolutions per year in the 21st century as compared to that in the 20th century has generally increased (e.g. see the study by Beissinger, 2022; Chenoweth and Shay, 2022; Goldstone et al., 2022c, 2023);
2. **the weakening of a social component of revolutions**. The depth of revolutionary events and transformative changes has been significantly diminished. The frequency of social revolutions has strongly declined. ‘It is sometimes said that the age of revolutions is over’. Mark Beissinger states and adds—‘Certainly this is true with respect to one type of revolution—social revolutions’ which were studied by Theda Skocpol (Beissinger, 2022: 3; see also the study by Allinson, 2019: 142);
3. **the downscaling of revolutions**. The growing number of revolutions and the increasing instigation of revolutions from the outside (e.g. see the study by Beissinger, 2007)—that is, the increasing number of color revolutions—logically led to the downscaling of revolutions. Colin Beck et al. figuratively say that revolutions with a capital ‘R’ have been replaced by revolutions with a small ‘r’ (Beck et al., 2022: 3; see also the study by Ritter, 2019);
4. **the increasing share of unarmed revolutions**—see, for example, the article by Chenoweth and Shay, 2022; see our next articles in this series (Korotayev et al., 2025a, 2025b) for more details;
5. The defining characteristics of the ‘fifth generation’ of revolutions include *the notable absence of a powerful and centralized revolutionary leadership*, the reliance on *social networks and cyberspace for coordination*, and the *lack of a clearly articulated revolutionary ideology* (Bayat, 2017; Kasraie, 2023; Saylab, 2024).

These and other characteristics of the 21st century revolutions are widely recognized and utilized in academic discourse. However, there are aspects of these revolutions that are not adequately addressed in the existing discourse, and there are others that are mentioned only intermittently or very little. We will now provide a summary of these characteristics:

1. the spread of **color revolutions**. We could additionally say that the fourth generation dealt with peaceful but real revolutions. And then they were replaced by color revolutions, and this is already another form of revolutions (which is largely symbolic);
2. **waves of revolutions** became more frequent. Accordingly, the theory of waves is developed, and new views on their nature and causes are expressed (Albrecht and Koehler, 2020; Beck, 2011, 2014; Keller, 2012; Lawson, 2019; Mako and Moghadam, 2021; Ritter, 2015; Weyland, 2012; see also the study by Beck et al., 2022: 161; Goldstone et al., 2022a, 2022c; Grinin and Grinin, 2022a, 2022b; Grinin et al., 2022; Rozov, 2022). As Mako and Moghadam (2021) show, waves can be an object of study in the theory of revolutions, and it allows for better understanding of specific revolutions through comparisons inside a wave;
3. the **growth of globalization, world-system influence, and interconnectedness**. This was already perceptible at the end of the 20th century, but the full integration of former communist countries into the global system occurred in the 21st century, accompanied by the expansion of economic globalization and its associated mechanisms. Accordingly, both positive and negative phenomena (especially important for the emergence of revolutions) spread very quickly. It is not an accident that the global economic crisis served as the catalyst for the Arab Spring (e.g. Ortmans et al., 2017). Moreover, in the case of the Arab Spring, the evidence shows that external influence affected the course of revolutions with direct coercive interventions leading to more violent trajectories while noncoercive influence led to less violent trajectories (Mako and Moghadam, 2021).
4. **The transition of the revolutionary process to the semi-periphery and deep periphery is being felt more and more strongly**. The above-mentioned growth of world-systemic is also reflected in the fact that the revolutionary process, on the one hand, has been noticeably exhausted in Europe, and on the other hand, it has been increasingly intensified in the semi-periphery, the periphery, and the deep periphery, which is Sub-Saharan Africa. In our next articles in this series (Korotayev, 2025a, 2025b), we will discuss the differences in approaches to violent and nonviolent revolutions. But, in our opinion, this world-systemic and peripheral aspect of the revolutionary process in the 21st century is not sufficiently taken into account in the discourse (for more details on this and, specifically, on revolutionary processes in Africa, see the studies by Grinin and Korotayev, 2024a; Korotayev et al., 2023, 2022c; Liokumovich and Korotayev, 2022). The world-system approach in regards to revolutions can allow for fruitful study of regional destabilization with a big geographic scope, and it can also provide new contexts for revolutionary studies (Moghadam, 2024).
5. We would like to mention separately such a feature as the **convergence of different forms of protest**. Strengthening of nonviolent and ‘negotiated’ (Lawson, 2004) revolutions has led to the fact that revolutions are increasingly becoming forms of change of government and political course, and in this respect, they are converging with other forms of destabilizing events. This convergence of social movements and revolutions was noted as early as the end of the last century (e.g. see the studies by Goldstone, 2001; Tilly, 1995: 142; Abrams, 2019: 382–383). Jack Goldstone and Daniel Ritter speak of the ‘paradoxes of movement-revolution convergence’, which are explained by the spread of nonviolent forms of revolutionary action (Goldstone and Ritter, 2019: 693). We also wrote about it and, specifically, introduced the concept ‘revolutionary movement without revolution’ (Grinin and Grinin, 2022b; Grinin and Korotayev, 2023).

Some Characteristics of Approaches and Methods of the Fifth Generation of the Revolution Studies

Despite all the objections described earlier about the emergence of a new, fifth, generation of theories of revolutions in the 21st century, we are still inclined to assert that such a generation of research has nevertheless emerged.

It is a set of studies of revolutions that has emerged in the 21st century, with the following characteristics.

First, let us recall the features that Allinson emphasized and with which (with reservations) we agree:

1. A shift of revolution studies from painful and violent change through revolutions to nonviolent revolutionary change. Although this trend came from the fourth generation, it has become especially important for the fifth generation.
2. Change of the object of study: in the fifth generation, it is a set of relations between goals, individuals, and structures.
3. Viewing revolution not as a singular, self-contained phenomenon that has its own structure and laws but as a process (*as an open historical process*), a chain of consecutive events. In other words, in the fifth generation, revolutions are no longer perceived as events with a clearly defined end and beginning but as processes whose outcomes can be fully understood only in the long term.
4. Blurring the lines between revolutions and other forms of revolutionary events and mere protest events (see above).

In this section, we will also present our own observations. In our opinion, the following characteristics of the fifth generation of research should be noted:

1. reliance on global databases of revolutionary events;
2. extensive use of modern methods of quantitative analysis;
3. a fundamental understanding that armed and unarmed revolutionary events are characterized by fundamentally different factors, structures, and consequences;
4. a focus on researching specifically unarmed revolutionary events/‘non-violent maximalist campaigns’;⁸
5. the aspiration for a macro approach, encompassing both historical and geographical considerations, and the systematic approach. We agree with Beissinger’s assertion that a multitude of issues cannot be adequately addressed at the micro level (Beissinger, 2022: XIX; as an example of such approach, see the article by Chase-Dunn and Nagy, 2022);
6. the study of certain important types of revolutionary process (such as Beissinger’s ‘urban civic revolutions’) and important revolutionary innovations, such as the role of new information technologies in recent revolutions. Thus, the Arab Spring and many other revolutions of the 21st century (their rapidity and initial success) have been rightly linked to social networks (e.g. see the study by Akaev et al., 2017; AlSayyad and Guvenc, 2015; Bayat, 2017; Beissinger, 2017; Levin et al., 2018);
7. innovations regarding the factors and causes of revolutions, as well as in analyzing the factors influencing the choice of revolutionary strategy and the results of revolutions (see our next articles in our series—Korotayev et al., 2025a, 2025b—for more details).

It is noteworthy that a clear anticipation of this generation of research can be seen in several works by Colin Beck. Thus, in his important theoretical review article, ‘Revolutions: Robust Findings, Persistent Problems, and Promising Frontiers’ (Beck, 2017), he notes:

The adoption of event history and path-dependent modeling to account for temporal sequences, Bayesian statistics for inference, instrumental variables for identifying causality, and rare events logistic regression for uncommon phenomena all have direct application in providing statistical tests of revolutionary theory. Further, new sources of event data, such as the Political Instability Task Force, Nonviolent Actions and Outcomes Database⁹, the Global Terrorism Database, and Beissinger’s (in preparation) future catalog of revolutionary events¹⁰, could be used for quantitative or mixed-methods analysis. Yet, so far, the social science of revolution has not widely adopted these tools. In all areas, methodological and empirical tools have changed substantially in social science. There is now a great opportunity for revolution studies, long a bastion of historical and comparative analysis, to become less parochial in its methodology and move towards rapid knowledge accumulation (Beck, 2017: 179).

Paradoxically, as we shall see in our next articles in this series (Korotayev et al., 2025a, 2025b), studies of revolutions of the type described by Beck,¹¹ the appearance of which he was so eagerly awaiting, had already appeared by the time Beck wrote his article. However, the theorists of revolutions did not notice these studies for a very long time because their authors preferred to call the objects of their research not revolutions but ‘maximalist campaigns’ (e.g. see the study by Bayer et al., 2016; Braithwaite et al., 2014, 2015; Butcher and Svensson, 2016; Celestino and Gleditsch, 2013; Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013; Chenoweth and Schock, 2015; Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Chenoweth and Ulfelder, 2017; Cunningham, 2013; Gleditsch and Rivera, 2017; Lutscher, 2016; Pinckney, 2016; Schaftenaar, 2017; Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008; Stoddard, 2013; Sutton et al., 2014; Svensson and Lindgren, 2010).

At the same time, following Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler (Ackerman and Kruegler, 1994), Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan define ‘campaign’ as ‘a series of observable, continual, purposive mass tactics in pursuit of a political objective’ (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011: 14). Moreover, the aforementioned studies look at ‘maximalist campaigns’, that is, campaigns ‘with goals that are perceived as maximalist (fundamentally altering the political order); . . . we deliberately choose campaigns with goals commonly perceived to be maximalist in nature: regime change, antioccupation, and secession’ (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011: 68). Thus, the above-mentioned works study ‘a series of observable, continual, purposive mass tactics in pursuit of a political objective: regime change, antioccupation, and secession’ (a similar definition can be found in *Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes*’s codebook [Chenoweth and Shay, 2020b: 2, 5, 8]).

It is not difficult to see that this definition is virtually identical with those definitions of revolution used within the fifth generation of revolution studies: ‘revolution is a collective mobilization that attempts to quickly and forcibly overthrow an existing regime in order to transform political, economic, and symbolic relations’ (Lawson, 2019: 5);

‘revolution is anti-government (very often illegal) mass actions (mass mobilization) with the following aims: (1) to overthrow or replace the existing government within a certain period of time; (2) to seize power or to provide conditions for coming to power; (3) to make significant changes in the regime, social or political institutions’ (Goldstone et al., 2022b: 50–51; 2022c: 109);

or ‘an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine existing authorities’ (Goldstone, 2001: 142).

A comparison of these definitions shows that ‘maximalist campaigns’ are nothing but revolutions (including national liberation revolutions); hence, the aforementioned works do study revolutions (rather bizarrely labeled as ‘campaigns’). In favor of this is the fact that in the Erica Chenoweth’s database *NAVCO: Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes*, ‘campaigns’ include all indisputable revolutions since 1900—including Russian revolutions of 1905–1907 and 1917, Constitutional Revolution in Iran, Xinhai Revolution in China, Mexican Revolution of 1910–1917, and so on (Chenoweth and Shay, 2020a).¹² Thus, the results of the research on ‘maximalist campaigns’ turn out to be quite relevant for our analysis of the study of revolutions within the ‘fifth generation’ as well.¹³

On Some Prerequisites for the Emergence of the Fifth Generation of Revolutionary Theory

It is important to acknowledge that prior to the 21st century, the emergence of this generation of research on revolutions was impossible due to a number of factors.

1. A necessary prerequisite for the emergence of the fifth generation of revolutionary studies was the emergence of global databases of revolutionary events. Meanwhile, the first full-fledged database of this kind (NAVCO 1.0) only appeared in 2008.¹⁴
2. A necessary prerequisite for the emergence of the fifth generation of revolution studies was the emergence of adequate methods of applied statistical analysis of global databases of revolutionary events. Indeed, revolutions are extremely rare events, so in the corresponding columns of databases, ‘zeros’ (denoting the absence of revolutions) absolutely prevail over ‘ones’ (denoting their presence). In other words, the distribution of the dependent variable will be absolutely different from normal. Meanwhile, the statistical methods that dominated the social sciences of the last century (such as OLS regression) were designed to study dependent variables with normal distribution. On the other hand, statistical methods that are designed to study rare events, such as revolutions,¹⁵ as well as the corresponding user-friendly software, have become widespread in the social sciences only in this century. Thus, we are dealing with the second factor that made it impossible for the fifth generation of revolutionary studies to emerge earlier than the 21st century.
3. Finally, a very important prerequisite for the emergence of the fifth generation of revolutionary studies was a fundamental change in proportion between armed and unarmed revolutionary events.

Indeed, the change in the dynamics of the share of armed (‘violent’) and unarmed (‘non-violent’) revolutionary episodes by decade for the period 1900–2019 is as follows (Figure 1):

As evidenced by historical analysis, up until the 1990s, armed revolutionary events were more prevalent than unarmed ones. It is therefore unsurprising that the initial three generations of revolutionary theory concentrated on the examination of armed revolutionary episodes. In the 1980s and 1990s, the proportion of armed and unarmed revolutions became approximately equal.¹⁶ This correlates with the fact that fourth-generation theories of revolution paid approximately equal attention to both forms of revolutionary events. Finally, the vast majority of revolutionary episodes that began in the 21st century have been unarmed; therefore, it is not surprising that the last, fifth, generation of revolutionary studies turned out to be almost entirely focused on the study of unarmed revolutionary events.

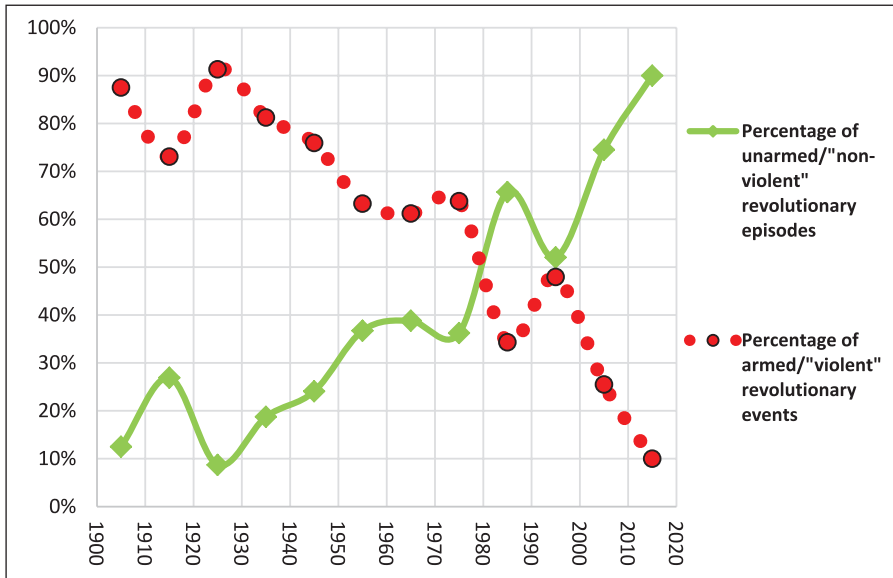


Figure 1. Proportion of armed ('violent') and unarmed ('non-violent') revolutionary episodes that began in the respective decades.

Source: made by the authors on the basis of data from Chenoweth and Shay, 2020a.

For example, the combination of markers '36%' for unarmed and '64%' for armed episodes for the 1970s means that 36% of the revolutionary uprisings that began in the 1970s were unarmed, and 64% were armed.

Conclusion to Part I

In this study, we have sought to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of the theory of revolutions and the factors that have led to the emergence of the fifth generation. Modern revolutions are more numerous, have less social content, have a smaller scope, are predominantly unarmed, lack centralized leadership, and exhibit a multitude of other distinctive characteristics. These transformations are influencing the theory, which is also undergoing significant changes.

The basis of the fifth generation of the theory of revolution is the change of focus from violent armed revolutions to nonviolent unarmed revolutions; the change of the object of study to a set of relations between goals, individuals, and structures; viewing revolution as a process rather than event; synthesis between revolutions and other destabilizing events; reliance on global databases of revolutionary events; extensive use of modern methods of quantitative analysis; different approaches to armed and unarmed revolutions in regards to their factors, processes, and consequences; focus on factors of choice of revolutionary strategies, using the macro approach; and studying specific types of revolutions. There is a notable emphasis on unarmed revolutions, which are often referred to as 'nonviolent maximalist campaigns'. This is particularly evident given that the majority of modern revolutions follow this precise format.

A comprehensive examination of the history of revolutionary studies reveals that the current convergence of evolving reality of revolutions and transformative developments in the field of revolutionary studies is without precedent. In light of these developments, we can assert with confidence that the modern theory of revolutions is markedly distinct from its predecessors, warranting the recognition of the existence of the fifth generation.

A systematic review of substantive findings of the fifth generation of revolution studies will be offered in our next articles of the present series (Korotayev et al., 2025a, 2025b). In the second part

(Korotayev et al., 2025a), we provide a summary of the results of the fifth generation of the theory of revolution in regards to the causes of revolutions, its types, and the choice of strategy. Furthermore, we examine how the fifth generation of revolutionary studies encompasses the analysis of revolutionary waves and ‘coupvolutions’, which were not addressed in previous generations of research in this field. In the third part (Korotayev et al., 2025b), we provide a review of how repression affects revolutions, how revolutions become successful, and what the consequences of revolutions are. Furthermore, the third part concludes with remarks on the possible future development of the theory of revolutions.

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Notes

1. To a certain extent, this wave is researched and known: events in Egypt and in Tunisia in 2011 were an important trigger for such movements as ‘Occupy’ (from ‘Occupy Wall-Street’ to ‘Occupy Abai’) or Black Lives Matter (Galián, 2019; Kerton, 2012; Korotayev et al., 2018). Revolutionary protests in various countries in 2011–2013 are quite well studied and were directly inspired by pro-democratic protests of the Arab Spring and by the development of social networks (Enikolopov et al., 2020; Kerton, 2012; Ortman et al., 2017; Tremayne, 2014).
2. Aside from that, Arab revolutions had other important features (Bayat, 2021; Fraihat and Yaseen, 2020; Grinin and Korotayev, 2022; Korotayev et al., 2022a).
3. In general, much research has been devoted to the historical, moral, and political analysis of the problem of revolution since the English Revolution by authors of the 17th and 18th centuries (e.g., Clarendon, 1888 [1641 published in 1702–1704]; Hume, 1773). It is not necessary to examine these views in great detail; it is sufficient to note that they differed a lot from each other. Nevertheless, it is evident that these theories already exhibited characteristics that would become prominent in subsequent, more modern theories.
4. Theorists of revolution of the classic period are such figures as Alexis de Tocqueville, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Thomas Bailey, George H. Yeaman, Joseph Clark, Karl Kautsky, Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Brooks Adams, Gustave Le Bon, Charles A. Ellwood, Emil Lederer, Gustav Landauer, and others (e.g. see the studies by Adams, 1913; Bailey, 1830; Clark, 1862; Ellwood, 1905; Kautsky, 1899, 1903; Landauer, 1912; LeBon, 1913; Lederer, 1918; Lenin, 1993 [1917]; Marx and Engels, 2000 [1848]; Marx, 2000 [1850], 2000 [1852], 1994 [1859]; Tocqueville 1856, 1955 [1856]; Trotsky, 2016 [1908], 2008 [1930]; von Stein, 1848, 1934; Yeaman, 1986 [1861]). But in this generation, it seems also possible to highlight two sub-generations: (1) from mid to late 19th century; (2) from the late 19th century until the end of the Russian Revolution.
5. However, utilization of such revolutions by Western countries for their geopolitical goals is noted, for example, by Ilker Kalin, Marie Olson Lounsbury, and Frederic Pearson (Kalin et al., 2022).
6. That is, this article together with that of Korotayev et al., 2025a, as well as Korotayev et al., 2025b.
7. From our point of view, while Goldstone does not believe that the fifth generation exists, he, in fact, has already made a transition to this generation.

8. It should be emphasized that Mohammad Ali Kadivar and Neil Ketchley have shown quite convincingly that the participants of most of the so-called 'non-violent maximalist campaigns' resorted to violence to a significant extent (here we can recall the Egyptian revolution of 2011, or Ukrainian Euromaidan (2013–2014) which Erica Chenoweth quite confidently qualifies as 'non-violent maximalist campaigns'; Chenoweth and Shay, 2020a). For this reason, Kadivar and Ketchley believe that it is inaccurate to call such revolutionary episodes 'non-violent' and suggest that they should be rather labeled 'unarmed' (Kadivar and Ketchley, 2018). It is noteworthy that Erica Chenoweth and Christopher Shay themselves acknowledge the presence of 'violent flanks' within most 'nonviolent campaigns' when a significant proportion of individuals engaged in largely unarmed revolutionary events resort to an equivocal use of violence (Chenoweth and Shay, 2022: 886).
9. Colin Beck names this database *Nonviolent Actions and Outcomes Database*. The more correct name is *Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes* (NAVCO [e.g. see the study by Chenoweth and Shay, 2020a]). The first version of this database was published in 2008 (e.g. see the study by Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013).
10. It was published in 2022 as an online appendix to the book *The Revolutionary City* (Beissinger, 2022) at <https://mbeissinger.scholar.princeton.edu/revolutionary-episodes-dataset>.
11. We believe that they are the part of the fifth generation.
12. It is also worth mentioning that the most famous researcher of 'maximalist campaigns', Erica Chenoweth, was a contributor to the collective monograph *On Revolutions*, published in 2022 (Beck et al., 2022), thereby effectively admitting that she had spent her life researching revolutions.
13. Nevertheless, we believe that such a substitution of concepts not only fails to facilitate a more profound examination of revolutionary destabilization but also serves to obfuscate it. Indeed, this substitution results in the dismissal of the accomplishments of all four preceding generations of revolutionary theory, without any justifiable rationale.
14. About this, see the study by Chenoweth and Lewis, 2013. Since then, several more such databases have emerged, including several versions of NAVCO. The most recent version encompasses revolutionary events/'maximalist campaigns' that occurred worldwide from 1900 to 2019 (Chenoweth and Shay, 2020a). There are also a global database of revolutionary episodes from 1900 to 2014 published as an online appendix to the book *The Revolutionary City* (Beissinger, 2022), a database of revolutionary events of the 21st century published as an online appendix to the article 'Waves of Revolutions in the 21st century' (Goldstone et al., 2022c), and a database of revolutionary events of the 20th century published as an online appendix to the article '20th century revolutions: characteristics, types, and waves' (Grinin et al., 2022).
15. Such as *rare events logistic regression* mentioned by Colin Beck (2017: 179).
16. Note that the same pattern is also observed in the data of Mark Beissinger (2022).

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