

## Age of Revolutions: 1600 to Present

Fareed Zakaria, 'Age of Revolutions: 1600 to Present,' (Penguin Publishers, 2024); 365

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We are currently witnessing one of the most significant eras of change in history. Marked by advancements in technology, economy, and politics, especially with the arrival of Artificial Intelligence, Economic dominance, instead of military might has acquired the central stage. Zakaria argues that the traditional left-right political spectrum is being 'upended to an open-closed divide' (page no. 21). While these transformations offer opportunities such as the gateway to innovation, -thinking, and social and economic progress, these also raise some concerns. Will robots replace us and take our jobs? Is this change even good for nations or the societies it fosters? Are revolutions inevitable in periods of progress? What constitutes a revolutionary period? In *The Age of Revolutions*, Fareed Zakaria, an American journalist, political commentator, and host of CNN's *Fareed Zakaria GPS*, attempts to answer these fundamental questions. The book mainly deals with the theme of revolutions. The author has tried to examine the historical causes of their occurrence in response to technological, economic, and political progress. The author stresses that when he uses the term 'Revolution,' he refers to an uprising that has 'fundamentally transformed' a society's social, political, and economic structure and had a globally significant impact.

Zakaria starts with the "Dutch Revolution" and reflects on the "Glorious Revolution," the (Failed) French Revolution (page no.71),

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and the Industrial Revolution in Britain and America. He expounds on these events, explaining why they occurred, how they unfolded, and how there was a 'backlash' in every nation experiencing 'progress,' eventually leading to societal, economic, and political restructuring. He then compares these events and analyses them to identify the key characteristics of their causes and the revolutions themselves.

The book's second part deals with the contemporary revolutions in the realms of the economy, technology, and geopolitics, and what lessons we can draw from the past to help us understand the recent one. Zakaria astutely explains the current revolution, characterised by technological advances, the introduction of Big Data, and ideological shifts. He compares historical and modern periods, drawing a well-rounded conclusion pertaining to various aspects. He suggests that, despite these major revolutions, there was continuity amidst the change, and certain aspects of the old order were preserved, which helps us understand how societies evolve. Additionally, Zakaria links the age of revolutions with the present world by identifying patterns of change that may help in evaluating the unfolding of present and future revolutions.

Zakaria delves into these socially transformative events, concluding why they failed and how they remain relevant to the new world. Nonetheless, they all point to the same thing: backlash in the face of inevitable development and progress. The author's focus is mainly on Europe, with limited discussion on revolutions in other parts of the world, such as the Bolshevik Revolution. This shows that Zakaria's research is focused and targeted, but lacking global perspective.

Zakaria provides an in-depth explanation of the historical context of the events, supplemented by interesting specific details that reinforce the arguments. These relevant examples, including the inventions during Britain's Industrial Revolution, support the claims that technological advancements enhanced economic development and

interconnectivity. However, these details can sometimes distract readers from the book's main purpose.

Zakaria makes insightful observations about how the Industrial Revolution in Britain faced backlash from the Luddites, and similarly, with the advent of Artificial Intelligence and Meta, we can expect a similar reaction. The author connects this to today's politics, arguing that economic development, albeit beneficial, inevitably creates 'losers' leading to social upheaval. This argument aligns with Zakaria's point of view on how these factors have fostered the rise of populism, drawing parallels from Robespierre to more recent figures like William Bryan Jennings and Trump. A scarlet thread running as a leitmotif in Zakaria's narrative is the effect of technological and economic revolution on societies and cultures. The people who are affected by the changes associated with these revolutions get fearful of losing their identity and status and therefore oppose the changes in the form of an organised backlash. The seamier side of the backlash is the vulnerability of the people to populism and fascism.

However, some aspects of the book could be improved. Zakaria compares the English Revolution (1642) with the Glorious Revolution (1688), suggesting that revolutions need to take place organically, with the Civil War serving as a prelude to the Bill of Rights. Through this logic, the Russian Revolution also reached its peak with Glasnost. Moreover, while Zakaria defines a revolution as a fundamental transformation of society, he omits the Bolshevik Revolution, which not only transformed Russian society but also transformed global economic and political thought.

Zakaria also posits that revolutions should always emerge from the bottom up instead of the top down, which he cites as one of the main reasons for the failure of the French Revolution. However, it could also be argued that the Glorious Revolution, which was largely orchestrated by the Whigs and Tories against the crown, also came

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from top down. Therefore, top-down revolutions are not always inherently flawed.

Overall, *The Age of Revolutions* is a thought-provoking and enriching read. Despite some gaps, it provides valuable insights into past revolutions and their important details, while also offering a unique perspective on contemporary global developments. This book is recommended for students of history and politics as well as for those interested in the subject, as it presents a useful perspective on global developments. ■