

# The revolutions of 1848 and those taking place in the middle east in 2011

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



A revolution is “ a fundamental change in political organisation especially the renunciation or overthrow of one government or ruler and the substitution of another by the governed.” (Merriam - Webster dictionary) Revolutions are not new, the world has witnessed revolutions throughout its history. This is an age old phenomenon that is resorted to when people can no longer bear the sufferings caused by the oppressive rule of a system of government. Every uprising or revolution is unique, however some patterns of conflict are repeated. The revolutions of 1848 and those of 2011 are no different. There are many similarities but also some fundamental differences unique to each of the countries involved. The revolutions of 1848 were caused due to the widespread discontent with the ruling establishments in Europe. The same reasons caused unrest in the Middle East. However, the European revolutions were fueled by a starving peasantry and the working urban poor; whereas in the middle east today, in addition to complaints about poverty and unemployment, is a strong desire to end corruption in high places and accountability from their rulers. “ If you're a minister, you are a civil servant, you are an employee of the government. With all due respect, my taxes pay for your salary.” is the people’s message to their rulers. The revolutions in Europe aimed to overthrow monarchies, those in the middle east want to overthrow the rule of powerful dictators who are ignorant or insensitive to the aspirations of their subjects. It is a truism in political science that successful revolutions are born in the streets. This is true of both the uprisings in Europe as well as those we are seeing today in the Middle East. When people gathered in large numbers in the streets or protested before the symbols of power, they were put down by brute force by those at the

helm. The uprisings of 1848 as well as those of 2011, spread quickly across different neighbouring nations, who faced similar problems. All of these had autocratic regimes that used a combination of police and military to retain power, and came down with a heavy hand on freedoms such as those of free speech. New technology and new ideas also played a very significant role in both these revolutions. New ideas of socialism, nationalism and liberalism were firing the minds of the people of Europe in the 1840s and the invention of the telegraph and railroads allowed the spread of the news of the revolution that began in France to other European nations. Although newspapers were not common, an increase in literacy and the cafes that subscribed to the newspapers to attract clients, provided people with a public space to read about and discuss events. As Nobel Peace laureate Shirin Ebadi observes " When people are informed, they gradually become aware, and when they become aware, they begin to object. No change happens in society unless people become aware." (Ebadi) In 2011, the Internet has been responsible for allowing people access to news despite other forms of the media being controlled by those in power, in the Arab and African nations that are witnessing popular uprisings today. Popular sites like face book and twitter allow discussions and comments on the ongoing political situation, and spread awareness. As Wael Ghonim the young Google employee who became a hero of the revolution in Egypt says " If you want to free society, just give them Internet access. This is the Internet revolution." (Ghonim ) The revolutions in Europe fizzled out for lack of support and the old rulers returned to power. This was because there did not seem to be enough support to the revolution from the peasant classes who formed the

bulk of the population and due to disunity among the leaders of the revolution. In the revolutions taking place in the middle east today the outcome is still uncertain. However one thing is clear that although people want change there is no alternative to those who were in power because the formation of a workable alternative was never allowed. Whether revolutions succeed or not, the seeds of new beginnings are sown, and new ideas take root. They may not be put into practice immediately but every revolution results in a transition to a better tomorrow. The revolutions of 1848 sowed the seeds of democracy in the European nations. When the dust settles after the present revolutions in the Middle East and North Africa, it is hoped that they too will see the dawn of a new era. An era of equal opportunities and of freedom - freedom to choose the kind of government they want and freedom to choose who governs them. Works Cited Page Ebadi Shirin in an interview to Roxana Saberi an Iranian-American journalist for CNN 23rd. April 2011 Web 24th. April 2011 <http://edition.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/04/22/iran.saberi.ebadi/index.html?iref=allsearch> Ghonim Wael in an interview to CNN February 9th. 2011 Web 24th. April 2011 <http://edition.cnn.com/video/#/video/world/2011/02/09/wael.ghonim.interview.cnn?iref=allsearch> The Merriam - Webster Dictionary <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/revolution>