

The French Revolution

HOW Did This Happen?

From the Storming of the Bastille to the Execution of the King (1789–1793):

1. Storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789):

- Parisians feared the king was preparing a military crackdown.
- Citizens formed a militia, seized weapons, and stormed the Bastille.
- Although the prison held few people, it symbolized the **king's absolute power** and **oppression**.

2. Aftermath – Peasant Revolts and the Great Fear:

- In the countryside, peasants attacked manors and burned feudal documents.
- This wave of panic and rebellion is known as the **Great Fear**.
- The National Assembly abolished feudal privileges in August 1789.

3. Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen (August 1789):

- Introduced principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity.
- Challenged the divine right of kings and traditional hierarchy.

4. Rise of the National Assembly and Weakening of the Monarchy:

- A constitutional monarchy was established, limiting royal power.
- The king tried to flee (Flight to Varennes, 1791), damaging his credibility.

5. Growing Radicalism (1792):

- Economic crisis continued: bread prices, war, unemployment.
- Radical groups like the **Jacobins** gained influence.
- In August 1792, revolutionaries stormed the royal palace and arrested Louis XVI.

6. End of the Monarchy and Trial of the King:

- France was declared a **republic** (September 1792).
- Louis XVI was put on trial for **treason**.

7. Execution of the King (January 1793):

- Found guilty, Louis XVI was executed by guillotine.
- His death marked the definitive end of monarchy in France.

WHY Did This Happen?

Several **underlying causes** and **immediate triggers** explain the fall of the monarchy:

1. Social Inequality:

- Society was divided into **Three Estates**:
 - **Clergy** (First Estate) and **nobility** (Second Estate) had privileges.
 - **Common people** (Third Estate) bore the burden of taxes and hardship.
- This created deep resentment.

2. Economic Crisis:

- High taxes, poor harvests, and rising **bread prices** caused hunger and unrest.
- The country was in **debt** due to lavish royal spending and costly wars.

3. Weak Leadership:

- **Louis XVI** was indecisive and disconnected from the people's suffering.
- Marie Antoinette was seen as extravagant and uncaring.

4. Enlightenment Ideas:

- Philosophers like **Rousseau, Voltaire, and Montesquieu** inspired new ideas:
 - Popular sovereignty
 - Freedom and equality
 - Criticism of monarchy and church authority

5. Political Conflict:

- The Estates-General and later the **National Assembly** challenged royal power.
- The revolution radicalized over time, especially during war with foreign powers.

❖ French Society During the Late Eighteenth Century

How and why did the events after the storming of the Bastille lead to the fall of the monarchy and the execution of Louis XVI?

1. Economic Crisis and Government Debt

- When **Louis XVI** became king in 1774, France was already **deep in debt** from:
 - Long wars (especially against Britain)
 - Supporting the **American War of Independence** (added over 1 billion livres)
 - Maintaining the **extravagant royal court at Versailles**
- To make matters worse:
 - The government had to **borrow money** at high interest rates (10%)
 - A large part of the budget went to just **paying interest**, not actual expenses

2. Tax Burden on the Third Estate

- French society was divided into **three estates**:
 - **First Estate**: Clergy (paid no taxes)
 - **Second Estate**: Nobility (paid no taxes and enjoyed feudal privileges)
 - **Third Estate**: Everyone else — peasants, workers, and middle class (paid *all* the taxes)
- Types of taxes:
 - **Direct tax (taille)** to the state
 - **Feudal dues** to the nobility
 - **Tithes** to the Church
 - **Indirect taxes** on salt, tobacco, etc.
- The **Third Estate (90% of the population)** bore the **entire financial burden** while having **no political power**.

3. Social Injustice and Resentment

- The **Old Regime** (pre-1789 system) was based on **privilege by birth**.
- Peasants:
 - Often landless or had very small plots
 - Forced to work for the nobility without pay (feudal duties)
- The **bourgeoisie** (middle class: merchants, lawyers, etc.) were wealthy but **excluded from power**.

This inequality **created widespread anger** among the common people and especially among the educated middle class, who had been inspired by **Enlightenment thinkers** (like Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu) promoting **equality and rights**.

4. Triggering Events and Escalation

- The king tried to **raise more taxes**, but the privileged classes resisted.
- In 1789, he was forced to call the **Estates-General**, which hadn't met in 175 years.
- The Third Estate broke away and formed the **National Assembly**, declaring themselves the voice of the nation.
- Then came the **storming of the Bastille** on **14 July 1789**, a symbol of royal tyranny. This action **emboldened the people** and **weakened the king's authority**.

5. Collapse of the Monarchy

- **Peasant uprisings** spread across France — known as the **Great Fear**
- The **National Assembly** began making big reforms:
 - Ended feudal privileges
 - Issued the **Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen**
- Louis XVI tried to **flee France in 1791** (Flight to Varennes), but was caught — seen as a **traitor**.
- France became a **republic in 1792**
- Louis XVI was **put on trial for treason** and **executed in January 1793**

❖ The Outbreak of the Revolution

How and why did the French Revolution escalate after the storming of the Bastille?

1. A Nation on the Brink: Social & Economic Breakdown

- Harsh winter + poor harvest = bread shortage and high prices.
 - Common people (especially women) queued for hours; bakers hoarded supplies.
 - Widespread hunger and anger pushed people to take action — looting, protests, riots.
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2. The Storming of the Bastille (14 July 1789)

- The king moved troops into Paris, raising fears of a military crackdown.
 - Citizens, already desperate and angry, stormed the Bastille — a symbol of royal tyranny.
 - This event became the turning point: the people now directly challenged royal power.
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3. The Great Fear in the Countryside

- Rumors spread that lords had hired brigands to destroy crops.
 - Terrified peasants revolted:
 - Attacked manor houses (châteaux)
 - Burned feudal records (proof of peasant obligations)
 - Looted grain stores
 - Result: Many nobles fled France, becoming émigrés.
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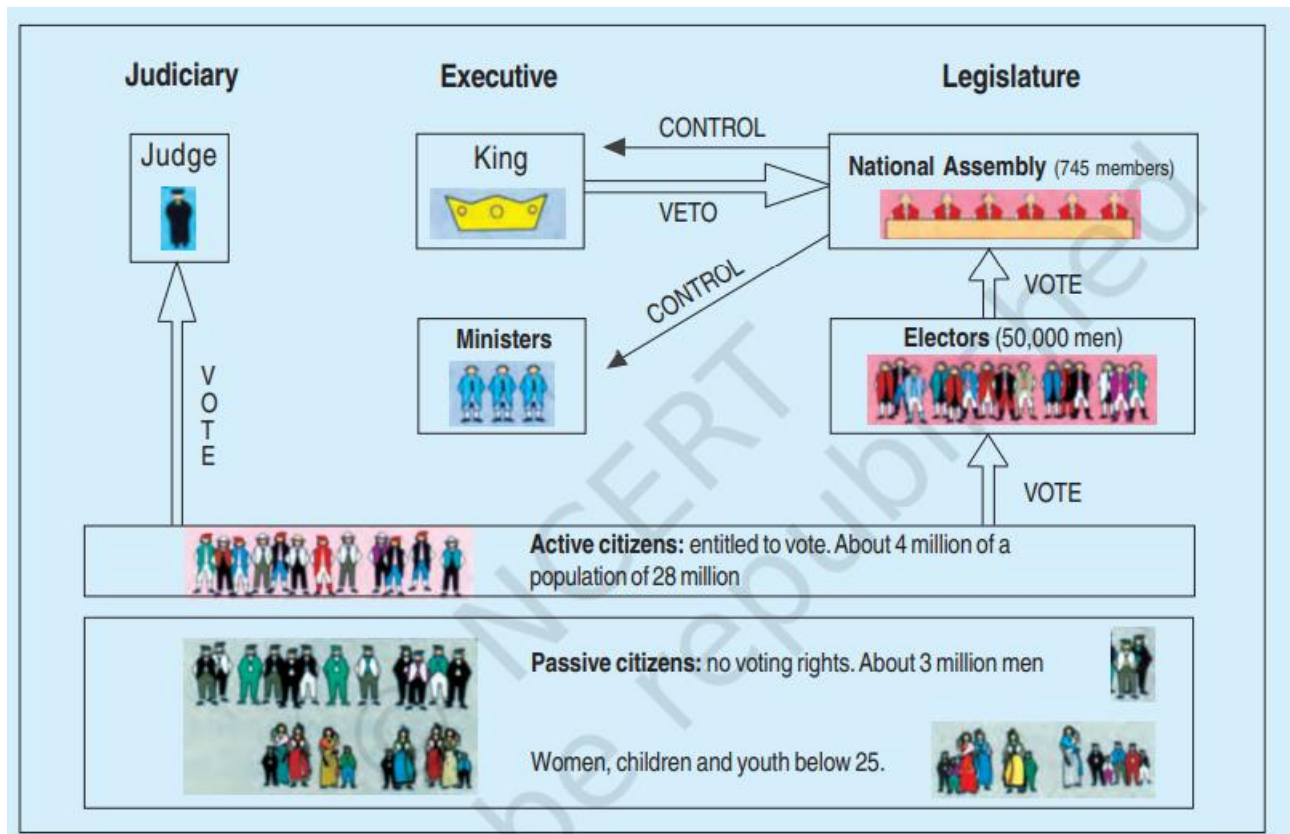
4. Political Change: National Assembly Takes Control

- Abbé Sieyès, a priest, had published "*What is the Third Estate?*" — arguing that the Third Estate was the nation itself, and should hold all power.
 - His ideas helped fuel the revolutionary movement and inspire the National Assembly.
 - As protests grew, King Louis XVI was forced to acknowledge the Assembly and agreed to a constitutional monarchy.
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5. Abolition of Feudalism (Night of 4 August 1789)

- National Assembly passed sweeping reforms:
 - Feudal obligations and dues abolished
 - Church tithes ended
 - Clergy lost their privileges
 - Church land confiscated (raising over 2 billion livres for the state)

This marked the official end of the Old Regime — a social system that had lasted for centuries.



The Political System under the Constitution of 1791

The **Constitution of 1791** was a **major milestone** in the French Revolution. It marked the end of absolute monarchy and established a **constitutional monarchy** where the king's powers were limited by a constitution.

1. End of Absolute Monarchy

- Louis XVI was no longer an **absolute ruler**.
- His authority was **limited by the law**.
- He had to **share power** with elected representatives.

2. Separation of Powers

The Constitution introduced the **separation of powers** into three branches, inspired by Enlightenment ideas:

Branch	Role
Legislative	Made the laws - handled by the Legislative Assembly
Executive	Enforced the laws - handled by the King and his ministers
Judiciary	Applied the laws - handled by independent courts

3. The Legislative Assembly

- Consisted of **745 elected members**

- Had the power to:
 - Make laws
 - Decide on taxes
 - Control the budget
 - Declare war and peace
 - The king could **not dissolve** this Assembly.
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4. Powers of the King

- The king remained the **head of state**.
 - He had a **suspensive veto** (he could delay laws, but not block them permanently).
 - He still appointed ministers, but **they were accountable to the Assembly**, not to him alone.
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5. Citizens and Voting Rights

The Constitution divided citizens into two categories:

A. Active Citizens

- Men **over 25** years old
- Paid taxes equal to at least **3 days' wages**
- Had the **right to vote**
- Could elect **Electors**, who then chose the Assembly members

B. Passive Citizens

- Had **civil rights** (freedom of speech, equality before the law)
- **Could not vote**
- Women and the poor were excluded from the political process

Only about 4 million out of 28 million French people qualified as active citizens.

6. Independent Judiciary

- Judges were to be **elected by the people**
- Judiciary was **separate from the king and the legislature**
- It was a move toward **fairer trials and equal justice**

❖ Reading Political Symbols of the French Revolution

Symbol	Image/Description	Meaning
Broken Chain	A snapped iron chain	Freedom — end of slavery, tyranny, or oppression
The Bundle of Rods (Fascies)	A group of rods tied together with an axe in the middle	Unity is strength — individual rods are weak, but together they are strong
The Eye Within a Triangle (Eye of Providence)	A single eye in a triangle, often with rays of light	Knowledge, enlightenment, God watching over liberty
Sceptre	A staff carried by kings	Power of monarchy — when broken, it symbolizes end of royal authority

Symbol	Image/Description	Meaning
Red Phrygian Cap (Cap of Liberty)	A soft red hat with the tip bent forward	Freedom from slavery — worn by freed Roman slaves; became a symbol of liberty
Blue-White-Red Tricolour	Three-colour French flag	Revolutionary France — liberty (blue), equality (white), fraternity (red)
The Guillotine	A device used for executions	Justice and equality before the law — though it also came to symbolize terror
The Revolutionary Cockade	A round rosette with red, white, and blue layers	Worn on hats and clothing to show support for the Revolution
Snake Biting Its Tail (Ouroboros)	A serpent forming a circle by biting its tail	Eternity or continuity of the revolution
The Law Tablet	A stone or slab with writing	Equality before the law — laws are made by the people, not monarchs

❖ France Abolishes Monarchy and Becomes a Republic

Why Did the Revolution Enter a More Radical Phase After 1791?

Although the **Constitution of 1791** had limited the power of the king and established a constitutional monarchy, the **revolution did not stop there**. Tensions continued to rise, and several key factors led to **more extreme changes**:

1. The King Betrayed the Revolution

- **Louis XVI secretly negotiated** with the **King of Prussia** to **restore his absolute power**.
- Other European monarchs were also alarmed by the French Revolution and wanted to **intervene militarily** to stop it.
- In **April 1792**, the **National Assembly declared war** on **Austria and Prussia**, starting the **Revolutionary Wars**.
- The war brought **hunger, fear, and hardship** — which made people more radical.

2. The Rise of Patriotism

- Volunteers from all over France joined the army to defend the revolution.
- They sang "**La Marseillaise**", composed by **Rouget de L'Isle** — it became the **national anthem** of France.
- The war was seen as a fight of the **people vs. kings** and **freedom vs. tyranny**.

3. Growing Inequality & Popular Anger

- The **1791 Constitution** still gave voting rights **only to wealthy men**.

- The poor, working classes, and **women** were **left out** of the political system.
 - This led to the formation of **political clubs**, like the **Jacobins**, where people demanded more radical changes.
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The Jacobins and the Sans-Culottes

Who Were the Jacobins?

- A **radical political club** named after their meeting place (a former Jacobin convent).
- Led by **Maximilien Robespierre**.
- Members included:
 - **Artisans, small shopkeepers, workers, servants**
 - **Mostly from poor and working-class backgrounds**

Who Were the Sans-Culottes?

- Literally means "**without knee breeches**"
 - Refused to wear aristocratic clothing, choosing **long trousers** instead.
 - Wore **red caps of liberty**, showing support for the Revolution.
 - Represented the **urban poor** and became a powerful revolutionary force.
 - **Women**, though active, were **not allowed** to wear these symbols.
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4. Fall of the Monarchy - August 10, 1792

- Angry about **food shortages, high prices, and betrayal by the king**, the Jacobins and sans-culottes led an **uprising**.
 - **Stormed the Palace of the Tuileries** and **massacred the king's guards**.
 - The royal family was **imprisoned**, and the **monarchy was suspended**.
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The Republic Is Born

- New elections were held — **all men over 21** (regardless of wealth) could now vote.
 - The new government was called the **Convention**.
 - On **21 September 1792**, the Convention **abolished the monarchy** and declared France a **republic**.
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Trial and Execution of Louis XVI

- **Tried for treason** (plotting with foreign monarchs against France)
- **Found guilty** and **executed** on **21 January 1793** by guillotine at the **Place de la Concorde**.
- His wife, **Marie Antoinette**, was also executed soon after.

Why Was This Important?

Event	Significance
War against Austria & Prussia	United the revolutionaries, but increased hardships and pressure
Fall of the monarchy	Marked the end of 1,000 years of royal rule in France
Rise of Jacobins & sans-culottes	Gave voice to the working class and poor
Formation of the Republic	Established a new system based on elected government , not birthright
Execution of the king	Shocked Europe and radicalized the Revolution further

❖ Did Women have a Revolution?

Women's Roles During the French Revolution

- From the start, women were **active participants** in the revolution.
- Most women belonged to the **Third Estate** and worked as:
 - Seamstresses, laundresses
 - Flower, fruit, and vegetable sellers
 - Domestic servants
- They had **no access** to proper education or job training.
- They also managed **household duties**, such as:
 - Cooking, fetching water, standing in bread lines, and childcare.

◆ Their Demands and Political Involvement

- Women started **political clubs** and **published newspapers** to express their interests.
- Around **60 women's clubs** were formed across France.
- The **Society of Revolutionary and Republican Women** was the most famous.
- They demanded:
 - **Equal political rights** (voting, holding office)
 - Representation in government

◆ Early Gains and Reforms

- The revolutionary government made some improvements:
 - **Compulsory schooling** for girls
 - **Legal rights in marriage** (consent required, civil registration)
 - **Divorce legalized** for both genders
 - **Career opportunities** expanded (arts, business)

◆ Backlash and Suppression

- During the **Reign of Terror**, women's clubs were **banned**.
 - **Political activities by women were outlawed**.
 - **Many activist women were arrested or executed**.
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◆ Long-Term Struggle

- Even after the revolution, the **struggle for equal rights** continued.
- The **suffrage movement** (late 1800s-early 1900s) carried the torch.
- The legacy of French revolutionary women remained a symbol of hope.
- **Women in France finally gained the right to vote in 1946.**

❖ The Abolition of Slavery

◆ Background: French Colonies and the Slave Trade

- French colonies in the **Caribbean** (Martinique, Guadeloupe, San Domingo) produced:
 - **Sugar, coffee, indigo, and tobacco**
 - There was a **labour shortage** since Europeans did not want to work there.
 - A **triangular slave trade** began in the 1600s:
 - French merchants sailed from **Bordeaux or Nantes to Africa**
 - Bought slaves from African leaders
 - Slaves were shipped to the **Caribbean** under horrible conditions
 - Sold to **plantation owners**
 - The economy of **French port cities** (like Bordeaux, Nantes) grew from this trade.
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◆ Slavery and the French Revolution

- During most of the 1700s, **slavery was not seriously challenged** in France.
 - The **National Assembly** debated extending rights to slaves but:
 - **Did not pass any laws**
 - Feared resistance from **slave traders and plantation owners**
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◆ Abolition Under the Jacobins

- In **1794**, during the **Jacobin rule (The Convention)**:
 - **Slavery was abolished** in all French colonies.
 - This was a **revolutionary social reform**.
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◆ Setback Under Napoleon

- In **1804**, Napoleon reintroduced slavery
 - Plantation owners wanted the "freedom" to **continue enslaving Africans**
 - So, the abolition in 1794 was **temporary**.
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◆ Final Abolition

- **Slavery was finally abolished in 1848** in all French colonies.

❖ The Revolution and Everyday Life

- ❖ **Did the Revolution affect daily life? Yes!**

After **1789**, the French Revolution brought **major changes** to how people:

- **Dressed**
- **Spoke**
- **Read and thought**

Abolition of Censorship

- Before 1789 (Old Regime), the king's censors controlled:
 - **Books, newspapers, plays, and other cultural content**
- After the **storming of the Bastille**, censorship was **abolished**
- The **Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen** guaranteed:
 - **Freedom of speech and expression as a natural right**

Freedom of the Press

- Huge growth in **newspapers, pamphlets, books, and images**
- These **spread revolutionary ideas** to cities and the countryside
- People could now **read different opinions**
- Print was used to **debate, educate, and persuade**

Popular Culture

- **Plays, songs, and festivals** helped ordinary people understand:
 - Ideas like **liberty, justice, equality**
 - These cultural events made complex political ideas **accessible** to the masses
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Conclusion - Impact of the Revolution

Napoleon Bonaparte (1804)

- Crowned himself **Emperor of France**
- **Conquered** parts of Europe, replaced kings with his own relatives
- Introduced reforms:
 - **Protected private property**
 - **Standardised weights and measures** (decimal system)
- At first, seen as a **liberator**, but later viewed as an **invader**
- **Defeated at Waterloo in 1815**

Legacy of the French Revolution

- **Ideas of liberty, equality, and democratic rights** spread across Europe
- Inspired the **end of feudal systems**
- Influenced movements in **colonies**:
 - Example: **Tipu Sultan** (India), **Rammohan Roy** (India) were influenced by revolutionary ideas

