

The French and Russian Revolutions and Their Impact on Human Rights Development in Europe and Indonesia

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Abstract

This study analyzes the historical significance and long-term impacts of the French Revolution (1789) and the Russian Revolution (1917) on the evolution of human rights, democracy, and ideological frameworks in Europe and their contextual adaptation in Indonesia. Using a comparative-historical method, the research examines primary historical documents, scholarly monographs, and legal texts to trace how these revolutions dismantled absolutist regimes and catalyzed paradigm shifts in political legitimacy, social justice, and individual freedoms. Findings indicate that the French Revolution laid the philosophical and institutional groundwork for modern liberal democracy and universal human rights, epitomized by the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789). Conversely, the Russian Revolution advanced a collectivist, socialist vision of rights, prioritizing economic equality and class emancipation. In the Indonesian context, human rights are interpreted not as a secular construct but as a divine endowment, embedded in Pancasila and local wisdom thus demonstrating a dynamic synthesis of universal principles and national-cultural specificity. This article highlights the enduring relevance of these revolutions in shaping 21st-century discourse on rights, governance, and ideological pluralism.

Keywords: French Revolution, Russian Revolution, Human Rights, Pancasila, Ideological Adaptation

Introduction

The French and Russian Revolutions stand as twin pillars of transformative upheaval in modern history events that not only reconfigured their respective nations but also sent seismic waves through global political consciousness. Despite occurring over a century apart and under vastly different socio-economic conditions, both revolutions shared a common genesis: profound structural injustice, elite detachment, economic distress, and the catalytic force of new political ideas. The French Revolution emerged from the ossified hierarchy of the Ancien Régime, fiscal collapse, and Enlightenment rationalism; the Russian Revolution, from Tsarist incompetence, wartime devastation, and the rising appeal of Marxist critique (Fitzpatrick, 2020; Schama, 2022).

Scholars widely recognize these revolutions as foundational to modern political ideologies liberalism and communism, respectively (Snyder, 2021; Service, 2023). Yet, less attention has been given to how their legacies were selectively appropriated, contested, and indigenized outside Europe particularly in postcolonial states like Indonesia, where human rights are philosophically anchored in Ketuhanan (Belief in One God) and Gotong Royong (mutual cooperation) rather than secular individualism (Hadiz & Robinson, 2022; Komnas HAM, 2023). Recent studies (e.g., Nurlaila et al., 2024; Prasetyo & Wibowo, 2023) emphasize Indonesia's "contextual universalism": upholding international human rights norms while grounding them in Pancasila and customary (adat) values.

This study addresses a critical gap: the lack of comparative analysis linking European revolutionary legacies to Indonesia's unique rights paradigm. While Western historiography often presents human rights as linearly evolving from Magna Carta → Enlightenment → 1948 UDHR (Moyn, 2020), Indonesian scholarship increasingly challenges this teleology, arguing for plural genealogies of rights (Rahardjo, 2021; Heryanto, 2024). The novelty of this paper lies in its transcivilizational lens: rather than treating Indonesia as a passive recipient of Western norms, it positions the nation as an active interpreter, synthesizing revolutionary ideals with local epistemologies. This reframing contributes to decolonial discourse in human rights studies (Changwong et al., 2024).

Methods

Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan deskriptif-analitis untuk memahami secara mendalam pengaruh Revolusi Prancis dan Revolusi Rusia terhadap perkembangan hak asasi manusia di Eropa dan Indonesia. Pendekatan kualitatif dipilih karena memungkinkan peneliti menggali makna historis, sosial, dan ideologis dari kedua revolusi tersebut melalui kajian literatur, dokumen sejarah, serta analisis naratif. Data dikumpulkan dari sumber-sumber primer seperti teks deklarasi, konstitusi, arsip sejarah, serta sumber sekunder berupa buku, jurnal ilmiah, dan artikel akademik. Analisis data dilakukan secara induktif, dimulai dari pengelompokan informasi hingga penarikan kesimpulan berdasarkan pola dan tema yang muncul. Validitas penelitian diperkuat melalui triangulasi sumber dan interpretasi kritis terhadap konteks sejarah. Dengan metode ini, penelitian berupaya menafsirkan hubungan antara nilai-nilai kebebasan, keadilan, dan kesetaraan yang lahir dari kedua revolusi dengan proses perkembangan hak asasi manusia di Indonesia dan Eropa modern. Thematic coding was applied to identify recurring motifs: sovereignty, equality, secularism vs. sacralism, individual vs. collective rights. Cross-case comparison enabled triangulation of ideological continuities and divergences. Analytical rigor was ensured by referencing at least two independent sources for each historical claim. The

framework avoids presentist bias by contextualizing each revolution within its material and intellectual milieu (Riley, 2024:18).

Results and Discussion

Ideological Legacies of the French and Russian Revolutions

The French Revolution institutionalized the triad Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité as both slogan and governing principle. Its centerpiece, the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789), asserted that “men are born and remain free and equal in rights” (Art. 1), establishing rights as natural, inalienable, and sacred a radical break from subjecthood under monarchy (Doyle, 2022). This document became the prototype for modern constitutional rights globally, embedding popular sovereignty, legal equality, and property rights as non-negotiable (Hunt, 2021). In contrast, the Russian Revolution redefined rights through a Marxist lens. The Bolsheviks rejected “bourgeois formalism” in favor of substantive equality: “Peace, Land, and Bread” was not rhetorical but programmatic. Article 18 of the 1918 Soviet Constitution guaranteed work, rest, and social security not as privileges, but as obligations of the socialist state. Crucially, rights were conditional on class alignment; the bourgeoisie were explicitly excluded (Fitzpatrick, 2023). This inaugurated the socialist rights tradition, later enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966).

Table 1. Comparative Ideological Outputs of the Two Revolutions |

Dimension	French Revolution (1789)	Russian Revolution (1917)
Core Principle	Natural rights (Lockean)	Class-based rights (Marxist)
Sovereignty	Popular (nation)	Proletarian (Soviets)
Key Rights	Life, liberty, property, free expression	Work, housing, education, healthcare
Role of Religion	Secularization (Civil Constitution of Clergy, 1790)	Militant atheism (anti-religious campaigns)
Global Influence	Liberal democracy, nationalism, UDHR Art. 3–21	Socialist states, welfare models, ICESCR

Source: Authors' synthesis from Schama (2022), Service (2023), Komnas HAM (2023)

Human Rights in Indonesia A Dynamic Synthesis

Indonesia's human rights framework explicitly rejects purely secular or purely individualistic models. Article 28I(1) of the 1945 Constitution states: "The rights to life, freedom from torture, freedom of thought and conscience, freedom of religion, and the right not to be enslaved are human rights that cannot be curtailed under any circumstances." Notably, these are framed as granted by God, aligning with Pancasila's first principle, Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa.

This integration of divine grounding and universal standards manifests in three ways:

1. **Collective Rights Recognition:** Unlike Western emphasis on individual autonomy, Indonesia constitutionally protects indigenous peoples' rights (Law No. 6/2014 on Villages) and cultural rights reflecting Bhinneka Tunggal Ika (Unity in Diversity).
2. **Duties-Balanced Liberty:** Article 28J(2) asserts: "In exercising his/her rights and freedoms, every person shall observe the restrictions established by law for the sole purposes of guaranteeing the recognition and respect of the rights and freedoms of others..." embedding musyawarah (deliberation) and tanggung jawab sosial (social responsibility).
3. **Post-Reformasi Institutionalization:** The 1998–2002 constitutional amendments created the Human Rights Court (Law No. 26/2000) and empowered Komnas HAM to investigate gross violations (e.g., 1965–66, Trisakti 1998), showing dynamic responsiveness to historical trauma (Komnas HAM, 2024). Critically, Indonesia's approach resonates more with the Russian emphasis on socio-economic rights (e.g., right to decent work, Art. 27[2]) than with the French liberal model yet rejects class struggle and atheism. This reflects what Nurlaila et al. (2024) term "Pancasila Social Democracy": social justice without proletarian dictatorship.

Contemporary Challenges and Ideological Tensions

Today, both revolutionary legacies remain contested in Indonesia. Conservative Islamic groups cite the French Revolution's secular excesses (e.g., de-Christianization, Terror) to resist "Western-style" pluralism (Fealy, 2023). Conversely, progressive NGOs invoke its *égalité* principle to advocate for LGBTQ+ inclusion though state policy remains restrictive, citing public order and religious values (Prasetyo & Wibowo, 2023). Meanwhile, the Russian legacy surfaces in debates over state-led development: Jokowi's food estate and downstreaming policies echo Soviet-style planning but within a capitalist framework. The rise of digital authoritarianism (e.g., ITE Law enforcement) challenges procedural rights, revealing tension between security and freedom a dilemma inherited from revolutionary "emergency

governance" (Reign of Terror, Red Terror). Thus, Indonesia does not simply "choose" between French or Russian models. Rather, it engages in critical bricolage: adopting the French rights language, tempering it with communal ethics, and integrating the Russian welfare commitment without totalitarian control a uniquely Indonesian path toward Merdeka (freedom with responsibility).

Conclusion

The French and Russian Revolutions were not merely national events but global ideational turning points that redefined the relationship between state, society, and the individual. Their competing visions liberal-universalist versus socialist-collectivist continue to shape human rights discourse worldwide. In Indonesia, these legacies have been neither wholesale adopted nor rejected; instead, they are dynamically reinterpreted through the prism of Pancasila, adat, and Islamic ethics. The nation's constitutional affirmation of inalienable, God-given rights coexists with strong emphasis on social harmony and collective welfare demonstrating that human rights universalism need not imply cultural homogenization. This adaptive synthesis offers a viable model for plural societies navigating globalization without abandoning identity.

Suggestions

Future research should empirically investigate how local communities especially in Aceh, Papua, and Kalimantan perceive and negotiate universal rights norms in light of customary law and religious authority. Comparative studies with Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines could further clarify Southeast Asia's distinct rights epistemologies. Additionally, digital ethnography on youth activism (e.g., #ReformasiDikorupsi) may reveal emerging hybrid rights frameworks that blend revolutionary ideals with digital-age demands for transparency and participatory governance.

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