

# French Revolution Causes

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/french\\_revolution/causes\\_of\\_the\\_french\\_revolution.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/french_revolution/causes_of_the_french_revolution.php)



frenchrevolutioncauses.mp3

The French Revolution began in 1789 with the Storming of the Bastille. Over the next 10 years, the government of France would be in turmoil, the king would be executed, and groups of revolutionaries would battle each other for power. But what caused the revolution to occur in the first place?

## Before the Revolution



A Commoner (Third Estate) Carrying the Nobility and Clergy on his back  
*Trois Ordres* by M. P. 1789

Source: *Bibliothèque nationale de France*

To understand what caused the French Revolution, we have to understand what [France](#) was like before it all happened. France was a monarchy ruled by the king. The king had total power over the government and the people. The people of France were divided into three social classes called "estates." The First Estate was the clergy, the Second Estate was the nobles, and the Third Estate was the commoners. Most of France belonged to the Third Estate. There was little chance for people to move from one estate to another.

## Major Causes

There wasn't one event or condition that led to the French Revolution, but, rather, a number of factors came together to cause a perfect storm leading to the revolt of the people against the king.

# French Revolution Causes

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/french\\_revolution/causes\\_of\\_the\\_french\\_revolution.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/french_revolution/causes_of_the_french_revolution.php)

## Debt and Taxes

In 1789, the French government was in a major financial crisis. The king had borrowed heavily to maintain a lavish lifestyle. Also, the government had borrowed to fight Great Britain in the Seven Years' War and to help the Americans in the Revolutionary War.

With such great debt, the king had no other option than to try and raise taxes. The commoners of France (the Third Estate) had to pay the majority of the taxes. The nobles and the clergy were largely exempt from paying taxes. Higher taxes angered the common people, especially since the nobles didn't have to pay their share.

## Famine and Bread Prices

France was experiencing famine at the time. The common people mostly ate bread to survive. However, the cost of bread skyrocketed and people were hungry and starving.



*King Louis XVI by Antoine Callet*

## Changes in Culture

For hundreds of years the people of France had blindly followed the king and accepted their place in life. However, in the 1700s, the culture began to change. The "Era of Enlightenment" presented new ideas such as "liberty" and "equality." Also, the American Revolution represented a new type of government where the people ruled rather than a king.

## Politics

Before the Storming of the Bastille, King Louis XVI had been losing power within the French government. He was a weak king and didn't realize how bad the situation was for the commoners in France. The members of the Third Estate formed the National Assembly to force the king to make reforms. Not only was the king in conflict with the commoners, but the king and the nobles could not agree on reforms.

# French Revolution Causes

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/french\\_revolution/causes\\_of\\_the\\_french\\_revolution.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/french_revolution/causes_of_the_french_revolution.php)

## Interesting Facts about the Causes of the French Revolution

- The commoners resented a tax on salt called the "gabelle." They needed salt to flavor and preserve their food.
- The political system of France before the French Revolution was called the "Ancien Regime."
- Each year peasants had to work a few days for their local landlord for free. This labor tax was called the "corvee." They typically worked on improving roads or building bridges.
- The nobles held all the powerful positions in the government and the church, but didn't have to pay many of the taxes.

### Activities

Take a ten question [quiz](#) about this page.



# French Revolution Causes

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/french\\_revolution/causes\\_of\\_the\\_french\\_revolution.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/french_revolution/causes_of_the_french_revolution.php)

## Test Quiz

Questions on this quiz are based on information from [French Revolution - Causes](#).

1. What kind of government did France have before the French Revolution?
  - a. Republic
  - b. Democracy
  - c. Monarchy
  - d. Communist
  - e. Socialist
2. What were the social classes of France called?
  - a. Castes
  - b. Grades
  - c. Ranks
  - d. Estates
  - e. Stations
3. Who paid the majority of the taxes in the French government?
  - a. Nobles
  - b. Commoners
  - c. King
  - d. Wealthy
  - e. Church
4. What caused the French government to get into so much debt?
  - a. War with Great Britain
  - b. They helped the United States in the Revolutionary War
  - c. Lavish spending by the king
  - d. All of the above
  - e. None of the above
5. The price of what common food skyrocketed prior to the French Revolution?
  - a. Rice
  - b. Wine
  - c. Corn
  - d. Chocolate
  - e. Bread
6. True or False: The commoners had to pay all sorts of taxes, while the wealthy nobles were exempt from many of the taxes.

# French Revolution Causes

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/french\\_revolution/causes\\_of\\_the\\_french\\_revolution.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/french_revolution/causes_of_the_french_revolution.php)

- a. TRUE
  - b. FALSE
7. What social class did the commoners and peasants belong to?
- a. First Estate
  - b. Second Estate
  - c. Third Estate
  - d. Lower Estate
  - e. Upper Estate
8. What social class did the clergy and church leaders belong to?
- a. First Estate
  - b. Second Estate
  - c. Third Estate
  - d. Lower Estate
  - e. Upper Estate
9. What was the 'gabelle'?
- a. A tax placed on salt
  - b. A type of bread eaten by the commoners
  - c. A labor tax where peasants had to work for free
  - d. The heir to the French king
  - e. The name of the French government before the French Revolution
10. Which of the following was a major cause of the French Revolution?
- a. Debt and taxes
  - b. Famine
  - c. Changes in culture
  - d. Politics
  - e. All of the above

# French Revolution Causes

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/french\\_revolution/causes\\_of\\_the\\_french\\_revolution.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/french_revolution/causes_of_the_french_revolution.php)