

# Jacobins: Political Faction of the French Revolution

The Society of the Friends of the Constitution, after 1792, it was renamed Society of the Jacobins, Friends of Freedom and Equality, commonly known as the Jacobin Club or simply the Jacobins. The Jacobins became the most influential political club during the French Revolution.

The name Jacobins was derived from their meeting place of the monastery of the Jacobins in the Rue Saint-Honoré, adjacent to the seat of the National Assembly.

The period of its political ascendancy includes the Reign of Terror, during which time well over ten thousand people were put on trial and executed in France, many for political crimes.

This article will give details about the Reign of Terror which will be useful in the world history segment of the UPSC Mains exam.

## Role during the French Revolution

Initially founded in 1789 by anti-royalist from Brittany, France, the Jacobin club grew into a nationwide republican movement, with a membership estimated at a half-million or more.

The Jacobin Club was one of many organisations that were directly involved in the French Revolution. They were primarily a left-wing political organisation that enjoyed much support from the French working class.

The Jacobins faction had a significant influence in the National Convention, the government that came to power following the French Revolution. They were dubbed 'the mountain' as most of the seats held by them were located in the uppermost part of the chamber in the French parliament. Eventually, the Jacobins seized power during a series of insurrection by the working class they supported, establishing a revolutionary dictatorship in the form of joint domination of the Committee of Public Safety and Committee of General Security. The Committee of Public Safety was headed by Maximilien Robespierre, an ardent member of the Jacobin Club.

In his capacity as the head of the committee, he would send many members of the National Convention to their deaths through the false accusation of treason, eventually being elected to head the National Convention himself in 1794

The Jacobins would create a strong government at the time needed to deal with the fallout of the revolution such as war, economic chaos and internal strife. The Jacobin led dictatorship under Robespierre would become infamous for instigating the Reign of Terror which would target monarchists, right-wing factions, traitors and even fellow Jacobins who disagreed with the excesses of Robespierre.

The National Convention, tired of the routine executions and the paranoia exhibited by Robespierre, ordered for his arrest on July 28th, 1794. After a botched suicide attempt, he was executed the following afternoon.

With his execution and that of other leading Jacobites, the faction ceased to play any vital role in the French Revolution from this point on.

On 27 July 1794, orders from the new government were sent out to close the Jacobin Club, which had been gathering every Saturday evening. The Jacobin Club was finally disbanded on 12 November 1794.

## The ideology of the Jacobins

The Jacobins supported individual property rights but were more inclined towards the middle-class than any other faction of the French Revolution. Their economic policy was in line to bring about the stability and control prices for workers and the poor. They favoured a liberal market approach but their people-centric approach made them adopt a more interventionist economic policy.

The Jacobins encouraged sentiments of patriotism and liberty among the general populace of France. As a political force, there were seen as less selfish, more patriotic and more sympathetic towards the French populace.

The Jacobins were enemies of both the Church and of atheism. They set up a new religious cult to replace Catholicism. They advocated deliberate government-organized terror as a substitute for both the rule of law and the more arbitrary terror of mob violence, inheritors of a war that, at the time of their rise to power, threatened the very existence of the Revolution.

Once in power, the Jacobins completed the destruction of the old order and successfully defended the Revolution from military defeat. However, to do so, they brought the Revolution to its bloodiest phase and the one with least regard for just treatment of individuals. They consolidated republicanism in France and contributed greatly to the secularism and the sense of nationhood that have marked all French republican regimes to this day.