

Conflict theories

[Politics](#), [Communism](#)



Conflict Theories According to Karl Marx in all stratified societies there are two major social groups: a ruling class and a subject class. The ruling class derives its power from its ownership and control of the forces of production. The ruling class exploits and oppresses the subject class. As a result there is a basic conflict of interest between the two classes. The various institutions of society such as the legal and political system are instruments of ruling class domination and serve to further its interests. Marx believed that western society developed through four main epochs-primitive communism, ancient society, feudal society and capitalist society. Primitive communism is represented by the societies of pre-history and provides the only example of the classless society. From then all societies are divided into two major classes - master and slaves in ancient society, lords and serfs in feudal society and capitalist and wage labourers in capitalist society. Weber sees class in economic terms. He argues that classes develop in market economies in which individuals compete for economic gain. He defines a class as a group of individuals who share a similar position in market economy and by virtue of that fact receive similar economic rewards. Thus a person's class situation is basically his market situation. Those who share a similar class situation also share similar life chances. Their economic position will directly affect their chances of obtaining those things defined as desirable in their society. Weber argues that the major class division is between those who own the forces of production and those who do not. He distinguished the following class grouping in capitalist society: The propertied upper class The property less white collar workers The petty bourgeoisie The manual working class. <http://www.sociologyguide.com>

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be arranged Sociology Ads * Sociology of Education * Sociology * Conflict
Management * Conflict Resolution * Sociology and Politics Conflict theory
emphasizes the role of coercion and power in producing social order. This
perspective is derived from the works of Karl Marx, who saw society as
fragmented into groups that compete for social and economic resources.
Social order is maintained by domination, with power in the hands of those
with the greatest political, economic, and social resources. When consensus
exists, it is attributable to people being united around common interests,
often in opposition to other groups. According to conflict theory, inequality
exists because those in control of a disproportionate share of society's
resources actively defend their advantages. The masses are not bound to
society by their shared values, but by coercion at the hands of those in
power. This perspective emphasizes social control, not consensus and
conformity. Groups and individuals advance their own interests, struggling
over control of societal resources. Those with the most resources exercise
power over others with inequality and power struggles resulting. There is
great attention paid to class, race, and gender in this perspective because

they are seen as the grounds of the most pertinent and enduring struggles in society. Whereas most other sociological theories focus on the positive aspects of society, conflict perspective focuses on the negative, conflicted, and ever-changing nature of society. Unlike functionalists who defend the status quo, avoid social change, and believe people cooperate to effect social order, conflict theorists challenge the status quo, encourage social change (even when this means social revolution), and believe rich and powerful people force social order on the poor and the weak. Conflict theorists, for example, may interpret an "elite" board of regents raising tuition to pay for esoteric new programs that raise the prestige of a local college as self-serving rather than as beneficial for students. Whereas American sociologists in the 1940s and 1950s generally ignored the conflict perspective in favor of the functionalist, the tumultuous 1960s saw American sociologists gain considerable interest in conflict theory. They also expanded Marx's idea that the key conflict in society was strictly economic. Today, conflict theorists find social conflict between any groups in which the potential for inequality exists: racial, gender, religious, political, economic, and so on. Conflict theorists note that unequal groups usually have conflicting values and agendas, causing them to compete against one another. This constant competition between groups forms the basis for the ever-changing nature of society. Critics of the conflict perspective point to its overly negative view of society. The theory ultimately attributes humanitarian efforts, altruism, democracy, civil rights, and other positive aspects of society to capitalistic designs to control the masses, not to inherent interests in preserving society and social order. References

Anderson, M. L. and Taylor, H. F. (2009). *Sociology: The Essentials*. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth. CliffsNotes. com. Three Major Perspectives in Sociology. 22 Jun 2011. [http://www. cliffsnotes. com/study_guide/topicArticleId-26957, articleId-26837. html](http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/topicArticleId-26957, articleId-26837. html). Related Articles