

# Marx's conflict theory and the fundamentalist theory essay sample

[Politics](#), [Marxism](#)



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

### 1. Name and outline one theory of social change.

The Conflict Theory of social change centers upon the premise that radical change in society is constant and inevitable, as existing social conditions will always contain the beginnings for a different future. The conflict theory has its origins in the writings of Karl Marx. Working in the late nineteenth century, Marx believed that all societies were primarily influenced by their economic base, and specifically by the relationships that exist between the different economic classes. He argued that the potential for social change was built into these relationships because it was these which evolved as individuals and groups struggled to maximise their benefits.

Marx believed that control in society was held by elite and economically-powerful groups who maintained social order for as long as it suited their own interests. However, this social dominance would eventually lead to a crisis point where the “exploited” (the working class) would challenge the “exploiting” (the elite groups) and the existing social order. It is at this point that conflict between the classes becomes the mechanism for social transformation. According to Marx, this class conflict would eventually lead to both the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of a communist society.

Modern conflict theory is based upon the same principles as Marx's theory; however modifications have been made. While Marx focused on class conflict as the catalyst for social change, modern theorists believe that conflict based upon other sources – such as political, ethnic or ideological disputes – can also play a part. Although these conflicts are not class-based, they can

result in change when dissatisfied groups assemble their resources to achieve their aims.

The three primary assumptions of modern conflict theory are:

1) Competition – modern theorists believe that competition is at the heart of all social relationships.

2) Structural inequality – inequality is built into all social structures.

Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure struggle to see this inequality maintained for as long as it suits their own interests.

3) Revolution – change occurs as a conflict between competing interests. It is often abrupt, and although it changes society, it seldom leads to complete social evolution (as Marx believed).

The major strength of the conflict theory is that it provides a clear mechanism for social change in the form of conflict between different groups within society. The theory is also more effective than others when explaining how important historical events – such as the 1960s women's rights movement – resulted in social transformation. However, the conflict theory is seen by some to overemphasise the tensions and divisions that exist between the classes, and between other social groups. It is limited because it treats conflict as the sole catalyst for change, and thus cannot explain the occurrence of change which is not rooted in conflict – for example, it cannot explain why technological advancements are transforming society. As well as this, another weakness of the theory is that it gives us little information on

the future direction of social change, as theorists can seldom predict when and where conflict between competing interests will occur.

2. Choose one other social theory and discuss its applications to one sector of Indonesian society and analyse how it explains either continuity or change.

Sector chosen: Family life and population changes

I have used the Functionalist Theory to explain the changes in Indonesian family life and population throughout the New Order period – i. e. from 1965-1999. Towards the beginning of President Soeharto's New Order regime (1967-70), the fertility rate per Indonesia family was 5.6 children, considerably high when compared with both its neighbours and the Western world. The previous President, Sukarno, had neglected to modify laws inherited from the Dutch prohibiting the import or sale of contraceptives, and had rejected community requests for the implementation of a family planning program. As a result, the Indonesian population was growing rapidly and was fast overtaking its means of subsistence.

Soeharto recognised this population problem, and after signing the 1967 World Leaders' Declaration on Population; he attempted to gradually introduce a family planning program into Indonesian society as a means of controlling the nation's growth. Through implementing this program, the President and his government aimed to reduce population growth rates, reduce fertility (in particular the number of high risk pregnancies) and provide women with control over their reproduction. If successful, this

scheme would lead to drastic changes in both population growth and family life.

The functionalist theory states that changes in society only come about through complete consensus. Although it is rare that absolute consensus regarding a Government initiative will exist in any society, it can be said that in 1968, the majority of Indonesians were prepared to accept Soeharto's new scheme. This widespread acceptance was primarily due to the approach that Ali Sadikin, governor of Jakarta, took to the problem.

Early in his governorship, Sadikin acknowledged that both Jakarta's people and its facilities were suffering from rapid population growth. As a potential solution to this problem, he introduced the " Jakarta Pilot Project" – a government-funded family program – into the city in 1967. Sadikin was a devout Muslim, and his enthusiastic support for birth control helped overcome Jakarta's initial religious objections to the Project. His presence at the openings of clinics and seminars, the strong link that he created between family planning and Government responsibility, and his evident passion for birth control gave Sadikin and his Project credibility with both Jakarta and subsequently the rest of Indonesia. He played an important role in fostering widespread consensus regarding family planning; and thus, according to the functionalist theory, he was effective in creating an arena for social change to occur.

The basic concept behind functionalism is that all parts of society have an essential function, and change occurs as a result of these functions being

disturbed. During Sukarno's presidency, Government initiative regarding population control did not exist; thus meaning that one of the family's essential functions was, in effect, to manage the population. However, Soeharto disturbed this function by creating a Family Planning Institute (LKBN) in 1968, later known as the BBKBN in 1970. This Institute was in charge of bringing birth control directly to Indonesian homes, as well as educating people about family planning.

Functionalists believe social change frequently occurs in the form of differentiation – as a society becomes more complex, its institutions will become more specialised. The implementation of the BBKBN is an ideal example of this: as Indonesian society became more modern under Soeharto, its institutions became more specialised. For example, the family was no longer the sole controller of population management. Instead it was the Government institution, the BBKBN, which had specialised in family planning, and which was able to adopt this particular social function.

The BBKBN encountered different levels of success throughout Indonesia. In regions such as Bali, East Java, Sumatra and Kalimantan, where women were well-educated and tended to postpone marriage, birth control received widespread acceptance. Subsequently, population change in these areas was dramatic – for example, the fertility rate in Bali changed from 5.96 per woman in 1967 to 2.28 in 1990. Change was less apparent in areas such as West Java; however overall, the Government program was effective in changing the Indonesian population during the New Order period.

Current conditions have followed the same path. Even under Sukarnoputri's Government, family planning continues to be one of Indonesia's enduring success stories. Her Government is still in charge of providing birth control to the people, particularly in the form of "health ministry" condoms which are handed out free to Indonesia's poor. The fertility rate in Indonesia, as of 2003, is 2.5 children per woman, a far cry from 1967's figures.