

# [Marx and weber’s ideas of class, power, and](https://assignbuster.com/marx-and-webers-ideas-of-class-power-and/)

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Marxand Weber’s Ideas of Class, Power, and Capitalism Conflict is a natural trait thatcharacterizes interpersonal interactions. Various factors promote thedevelopment and maintenance of this phenomenon. In capitalist populations, thisstruggle is often attributed to the existence of social classes with varyinglevels of access to economic and political resources.

Consequently, variousscholars have attempted to examine the interaction between socioeconomicclasses with the aim of understanding the core elements that underpin theoperations of capitalist societies. Concepts posited by Karl Marx and MaxWeber’s provide the most significant insights into this economic form. Due tohis emphasis on both political and economic elements, Weber’s stratification theorypresents a more comprehensive analysis of capitalism. There is a marked difference inthe definitions of the class systems proposed by both scholars.

According toKarl Marx, the class system is maintained by disparities in access to andownership of means of production and labor. These discrepancies result in theestablishment of three distinct societal civilizations slave societies, feudalsocieties, and capitalism (Holt 2014, p. 92).

The first two civilizations arecharacterized by ownership of the labor of other humans. For instance, infeudal societies, lords owned the work of their serfs, and in slave societies, slave owners directed the activities of their slave. Due to the enactment ofvarious policies that recognize fundamental human rights, feudal and slavecivilizations are almost non-existent today. Interestingly, Marx’s view aboutthe ownership of forces of production offers a continuum that facilitatesincreased quality of access to resources. Consequently, the third element inthe continuum, capitalism, outlines significant levels of equality whencompared to the first two civilizations described above.

According to Marx, this transitory mode of production contains internal contradiction thatthreatens its efficacy and sustainability (Callinicos 2012, p. 122). Similar toits predecessors, the class system in this form of society is tied to wages andcontrol. According to Marx, this phase is characterized by increasedcompetition that fosters conflict between the two primary society classes, thebourgeoisie, and the proletariat. Due to the conflict indisparities in political and economic power, the bourgeoisie and theproletariat exist in a constant state of struggle. This struggle is a result ofthe antagonism in objectives and discrepant levels of control of states.

Whilethe proletariat class seeks increased access to forces of production, thebourgeoisie is intent on maintaining its established socioeconomic statusprimarily via economic means. Max Weber, on the other hand, provides a more complex view of social stratification. In his works, he outlinesfour distinct groups created by varying levels of mobility. The broaderclassification offered in his work presents a more comprehensive view ofsociety and stratification compared to the view shown by Karl Marx. Notably, Weber’s definition of social classes allows for a less polarized light ofsociety. According to Karl, capitalist mechanisms only allow for theestablishment of the rich and the poor socioeconomic classes.

To some extent, this view is reflected by the widening wage gap demonstrated by the worseningeconomic condition of the underprivileged and the improving financial situationof the rich. Recent statistics indicate thatthere is a marked disparity in access to factors of production. Thisdiscrepancy is evident in the current income gap, which indicates thatindividuals from affluent backgrounds, on average, earn approximately 88% morethan those from low socioeconomic backgrounds do (Chu 2017). While thisdifference in earnings illustrates the view posited by Karl, it also reflects tenetsof Weber’s arguments. Notably, Weber’ social stratification model provides ameans of understanding this wage gap. However, unlike Karl’s theory, thisframework accounts for differences in wealth fostered by family wealth. Bydoing so, it implies that observed differences in society are inherent elementsof capitalism that are maintained by primarily political factors. Moreover, Weber accounts for theemergence of the middle class.

Karl’s framework as mentioned above emphasizesthe development of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, creating the perceptionthat these are the only classes that exist in capitalist nations. Arguably, thebroader definition provided by Weber allows for the exploration of anin-between class, the global middle-income population. According to Kharas, theglobal middle-income population is growing, primarily due to improved economicgrowth in developing and emerging countries (2017). While this population’saccess to forces of productions fails to rival that of the rich, it is stillsignificant. Arguably, the economic and political autonomy fostered by thisaccess is demonstrated by the fact by 2030, the global middle-income populationis anticipated to spend approximately a third of the expected GDP growth(2017). Besides, Weber’s definitiontranscends economic stratification.

To some extent, his society stratificationtheory takes into consideration the fact that individuals in capitalistcountries share different cultural aspects. The appreciation of culturaldifferences promotes examination of capitalism from different perspectives. Therecognition of this diversity provides a feasible platform for understandingand resolving economic challenges fostered by increased immigration due toglobalization and other factors. Additionally, the perspectivesadopted by both scholars in their examination of capitalism differ. Asillustrated above, Karl Marx adopts a historical context in his analysis of thephenomena. Notably, in this continuum, which includes slavery and feudal societies, he explores the increasing access to elements of production and labor. Thisview leads him to conclude that capitalism is a transitional civilization phaseand that communism is the end stage of this evolution as it facilitates equalaccess to means of production and distribution of wealth. Weber, in turn, views capitalismas a persisting form of civilization.

Arguably, his perception is more attunewith society today. Most states and organizations are working towards creatingmore equity within capitalist mechanisms rather than establishing an entirelydifferent form of production. Furthermore, the 20th century effortsaimed at promoting communism rather than illustrate its merits, – as indicatedby the limited growth of Cuba and the eventual collapse of East Germany, -demonstrated its shortcomings and consequently, undermined its adoption. However, the disparities inaccounts aimed at tracing the origins of capitalism indicate that Weber’sexplanation is more attune to modern capitalism. While Karl emphasizes theimpact of economic inequality in fostering the emergence of capitalism, Weber examinesthe role of American Protestant cultural values in bolstering the developmentof modern capitalism. By referencing the works of religious leaders such asMartin Luther, Weber argues that the Church’s preoccupation with money ratherthan spiritual matters precipitated the establishment of the fundamental tenetsof capitalism (Weber 2012).

Arguably, Weber’s explanation reflects thepolitical processes that create and maintain economic inequality. Thispolitical orientation facilitates understanding of gender and racialdisparities in the workplace. The disparity in the theoriesposited by both theorists is also evident in their perception of thephenomenon. Karl’s view of capitalism also encompasses the commodification thatdefines the production type. According to him, rather than create value andfacilitate the satisfaction of human needs, the system is primarily orientedtowards the realization of monetary values via the exchange of commodities(Ingham 2013, p. 15).

Today, corporations in various sectors have to contendwith competitive pressures from existing companies and new entrants. Due tothis significant level of competition, the focus across all industries is oncommodifying all aspects of life in a bid to maintain a competitive advantage. However, Weber, assertion that capitalism provides an avenue that facilitates therealization of human needs and wants (2013, 25) is not wholly without merit. Tosome extent as indicated by the success of social networking sites such asFacebook and Twitter, capitalism promotes both economic viability and meetsfundamental needs. Interestingly, both theoristsacquiesce that exploitation is inherent to this form of production. Karl arguesthat employees in this type of production have the freedom to determine whereto work.

However, they are often compelled to sell their labor to a segment ofthe population that encompasses the traits of the bourgeoisie. Consequently, they are likely to experience exploitation. Undoubtedly, this exploitation isillustrated by labor and tax policies that merit the corporate rich at theexpense of the workers. Weber, on the other hand, asserts that disparity inpower and control are essential in ensuring the sustainability of capitalism(Ingham 2013, p. 28). According to him, accurate cost calculations are crucialto ensuring the achievement of the overall objectives of meeting basic needsand guaranteeing favorable profit margins.

Arguably, this cost calculation isexemplified by the significant number of layoffs during economic downtimes. Moreover, both Marx and Weber, tovarying extents, use their models to expound on financial crises. Variousnations in the world including the US and Greece have experienced economiccrises in recent times.

Marx ties the occurrence of these crises to theexistence of social classes. He posits that inequality in income, fostered byvarying access to resources, promotes the creation of conditions where there isan imbalance between production and consumption due to surpluses (Ingham 2013, p. 28). Today, these situations due to the advent of banking may undermine thecurrency value resulting in inflation. Though Weber does not go into detailsabout this phenomenon, he does refer to debt deflation in his works. Arguably, Weber’s theory accountsfor the co-existence between the classes.

While Karl asserts that socialclasses are in constant disharmony, Weber suggests a more harmonious view. Heargues that the state and economic elite accommodate each other to facilitatethe accomplishment of specific objectives (Ingham 2013, p. 32).

Undoubtedly, this accommodation is demonstrated by the involvement of philanthropists suchas Bill Gates in government efforts aimed at alleviating the condition ofcitizens across the world. In conclusion, both Karl and Weberpresent useful insights into the working of capitalism. The theorists via theirrespective models of social classes examine the characteristics, and primarily, the limitations of the mode of the production.

However, Weber’s perspective ismore comprehensive. This is because apart from focusing on both the economicand political elements of the system, it also provides a more extensivedefinition of social stratification that accounts for the emergence of theglobal middle-income population.  ReferencesCallinicos, A 2012, The revolutionary ideas of Karl Marx, Haymarket Books, Illinois. Chu, B 2017, Incomegap between people from rich and poor backgrounds has almost doubled, IFSfigures reveal, Independent, viewed December 8, 2017, Holt, J 2014, The social thought of Karl Marx, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA. Ingham, G 2013, Capitalism: With a new postscript on thefinancial crisis and its aftermath, Polity Press, Cambridge. Kharas, H 2017, Theunprecedented expansion of the global middle class, Brookings, viewedDecember 8, 2017, Weber, M 2012, The Protestantethic and the spirit of capitalism, Unabridged Edn., Dover, New York.