

Ist year Social Stratification:

Theories of stratification

### **Karl Marx**

*Main articles: [Marxism](#), [Historical materialism](#), and [Base and superstructure](#)*

In Marxist theory, the modern [mode of production](#) consists of two main economic parts: the base and the superstructure. The base encompasses the [relations of production](#): employer–employee work conditions, the technical [division of labour](#), and property relations.

Social class, according to Marx, is determined by one's relationship to the means of production. There exist at least two classes in any class-based society: the owners of the means of production and those who sell their labor to the owners of the means of production.

At times, Marx almost hints that the ruling classes seem to own the working class itself as they only have their own [labor power](#) ('[wage labor](#)') to offer the more powerful in order to survive. These relations fundamentally determine the ideas and philosophies of a society and additional classes may form as part of the superstructure. Through the ideology of the ruling class—throughout much of history, the land-owning [aristocracy](#)—[false consciousness](#) is promoted both through political and non-political institutions but also through the [arts](#) and other elements of [culture](#). When the aristocracy falls, the [bourgeoisie](#) become the owners of the means of production in the capitalist system.

Marx predicted the [capitalist](#) mode would eventually give way, through its own internal conflict, to revolutionary consciousness and the development of more egalitarian, more [communist](#) societies.

Marx also described two other classes, the petite [bourgeoisie](#) and the [lumpenproletariat](#). The petite bourgeoisie is like a small business class that never really accumulates enough profit to become part of the bourgeoisie, or even challenge their status. The lumpenproletariat is the [underclass](#), those with little to no social status. This includes prostitutes, beggars, the [homeless](#), or other [untouchables](#) in a given society. Neither of these subclasses has much influence in Marx's two major classes, but it is helpful to know that Marx did recognize differences within the classes.

Marx expanded on these ideas, he still emphasized an economically oriented culture, with [property](#) defining the fundamental relationships between people. Issues of [ownership](#) and property are arguably less emphasized in hunter-gatherer societies. This, combined with the very different social and economic situations of hunter-gatherers may account for many of the difficulties encountered when implementing communism in industrialized states. As Ingold points out: "The notion of communism, removed from the context of domesticity and harnessed to support a project of social engineering for large-scale, industrialized states with populations of millions, eventually came to mean something quite different from what Morgan had intended: namely, a principle of redistribution that would override all ties of a personal or familial nature, and cancel out their effects.

The counter-argument to Marxist's conflict theory is the theory of structural functionalism, argued by [Kingsley Davis](#) and [Wilbert Moore](#), which states that social inequality places a vital role in the smooth operation of a society. The [Davis–Moore hypothesis](#) argues that a position does not bring power and prestige because it draws a high income; rather, it draws a high income because it is functionally important and the available personnel is for one reason or another scarce. Most high-income jobs are difficult and require a high level of education to perform, and their compensation is a motivator in society for people to strive to achieve more.

### **Max Weber**

*Main articles: [Three-component theory of stratification](#) and [Tripartite classification of authority](#)*

[Max Weber](#) was strongly influenced by Marx's ideas but rejected the possibility of effective communism, arguing that it would require an even greater level of detrimental social control and bureaucratization than capitalist society.

Weber criticized the [dialectical](#) presumption of a proletariat revolt, maintaining it to be unlikely<sup>1</sup>

He develops a [three-component theory of stratification](#) and the concept of [life chances](#). Weber held there are more class divisions than Marx suggested, taking different concepts from both [functionalist](#) and [Marxist](#) theories to create his own system.

He emphasizes the difference between class, status and power, and treats these as separate but related sources of power, each with different effects on [social action](#).

Weber claims there to be four main social classes: the [upper class](#), the [white collar workers](#), the [petite bourgeoisie](#), and the manual [working class](#). Weber's theory more-closely resembles contemporary [Western](#) class structures, although economic status does not currently seem to depend strictly on earnings in the way Weber envisioned.

Weber derives many of his key concepts on social stratification by examining the social structure of [Germany](#). He notes that, contrary to Marx's theories, stratification is based on more than simple ownership of [capital](#). Weber examines how many members of the aristocracy lacked economic wealth yet had strong political power. Many wealthy families lacked prestige and power, for example, because they were [Jewish](#). Weber introduced three independent factors that form his theory of stratification hierarchy, which are; class, status, and power:

- **Class:** A person's economic position in a society, based on birth and individual achievement.<sup>[15]</sup> Weber differs from Marx in that he does not see this as the supreme factor

in stratification. Weber notes how corporate executives control firms they typically do not own; Marx would have placed these people in the [proletariat](#) despite their high incomes by virtue of the fact they sell their labor instead of owning capital.

- **Status:** A person's prestige, social honor, or popularity in a society. Weber notes that political power is not rooted in capital value solely, but also in one's individual status. Poets or saints, for example, can have extensive influence on society despite few material resources.
- **Power:** A person's ability to get their way despite the resistance of others, particularly in their ability to engage [social change](#). For example, individuals in government jobs, such as an employee of the [Federal Bureau of Investigation](#), or a member of the [United States Congress](#), may hold little property or status but still wield considerable [social power](#).<sup>[16]</sup>