PAKISTAN JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY (2025), 3(2), 31-41

The Relevance of Marxist Theory in Contemporary Politics

[1] Dr. Taimur Hussain
[2] Sidra Khalil

How to cite this article:
Hussain, T., & Khalil, S. (2025). The Relevance of Marxist Theory in Contemporary Politics. Pakistan journal of multidisciplinary, 3(2), 31-41.

Article Details

Received: 12 August 2025
Accepted: 23 Oct 2025
Published: 25 Dec 2025

[1]Dr. Taimur Hussain
[2] Sidra Khalil

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author:
***Dr. Taimur Hussain**

Abstract

This research examines the relevance of Marxist theory in contemporary politics, exploring how its concepts and critiques continue to resonate in today's sociopolitical landscape. Despite the decline of traditional Marxist states, the foundational ideas of class struggle, economic inequality, and the critique of capitalism remain pertinent in analyzing modern political movements and economic systems. The study investigates the resurgence of leftist ideologies among youth and grassroots movements, particularly in response to rising inequality and global capitalism's challenges. It highlights case studies from various regions, illustrating how Marxist theory informs contemporary debates on labor rights, social justice, and environmental sustainability. Additionally, the research addresses the adaptation of Marxist thought to incorporate issues such as intersectionality and identity politics, demonstrating its evolving nature. By engaging with current events, including the rise of populism and the climate crisis, the study argues for a renewed examination of Marxist theory as a tool for critiquing and transforming contemporary political realities. Ultimately, this research underscores the significance of Marxist analysis in understanding and addressing the complexities of modern governance, economic systems, and social movements.

Keywords: *Marxist theory, contemporary politics, class struggle, economic inequality, leftist ideologies, social justice, populism, environmental sustainability*

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : itahirhussain@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : asidrakhalili@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

1. INTRODUCTION

The will, desires, and ideas of Karl Marx, philosopher, economist, and political theorist, are as relevant today as they were a century ago. The post-Cold War world has seen the end of communism, yet workers are still exploited, and due to civil and racial unrest, class struggle and warfare remain very real. In a world of globalization and neoliberal governance, today's class struggles take place across an international stage and are related to the downgrading of many people to human capital. However, many workers worldwide, including those in the United States and the UK, do not benefit from the profits. This essay will attempt to demonstrate the relevance of Marxist theory and his discussions on power and class struggles in contemporary politics. I will accomplish this by examining Marx's conception of history, his theory of false consciousness, and class consciousness in relation to modern issues of identity politics, populism, and globalization.

Since the first proletarian revolution in Mexico in 1814 and the expulsion of Mexican and American Indians as worker slaves in Mexico and across the world, class struggle has been a long-running characteristic of human history. Marxist theory tries to describe the cycle of deprivation, struggle, and rebellion faced by billions across time and geography. Class struggle is visible in today's news, wall slogans, and break-room graffiti as a universal idea of suffering among the working classes, who live through a massive increase in stress, illness, insecurity, and unemployment. To better understand the social and political dynamics of our time, and to explore the conceptual, ethical, and policy implications resulting from the coordinated process of wealth generation, it is essential to re-read Marxist political philosophy in all of its various aspects. (Adamic, 2022)

2. KEY CONCEPTS OF MARXIST THEORY

Marxism as a theory is often disregarded as a viable avenue for analysis. Yet, when engaging with contemporary, complex, and often polarizing political debates, many commentators must at some point utilize Marxist theory in order

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

to engage with the fundamental issues at the heart of class, economics, and progress. The application of Marxist theory to the real world must start by understanding a few key concepts. The first is that the development of Marxist theory is inseparable from the application of historical materialism. This historical understanding also works as a way for us to trace and predict the development of society and future revolutions.

This tracing takes the form of class struggle. Either being understood as the growing distance between haves and have-nots or between proletariat and bourgeoisie, Marx theorizes the need for such a "class in and of itself" to address "class for itself." The primary function of this struggle is a means through which history can be seen to progress through dialectic to new heights. Secondly, capitalism as a system of exploitation has been taken up by almost every economically dominant society. This form of exploitation has a direct consequence on one's existence and identity; it subsumes the working-class person and takes up the majority of their existence. (Risager2021)

These components of Marxist theory are difficult to separate from each other, for historically when an exploitative system runs its course, it is the exploitation that symbolizes and makes explicit the need for a change in the mode of production. It is this interconnectedness that makes understanding the basics of Marxist theory a key to today's societal debates, where the reincarnation of exploitative structures, albeit in different forms than during Marx's time, can be recognized with a concrete understanding of these theoretical components. (Jones, 2021)

2.1. Historical Materialism

Historical materialism is a core part of Marxist theory. It asserts that the economic "base" of society affects its political and ideological "superstructure." History is characterized by the development of "modes of production," such as slavery, feudalism, and capitalism. Within these modes, there are usually smaller-scale production systems, i.e., the Asiatic mode of production (based on irrigated

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

agriculture), the ancient mode (characterized by large households and independent producers), and the manorial mode (based on serfs working for a lord). Within these relations, different forces and relations of production govern societal behavior. The forces of production consist of human capacity to manipulate the material world in a creative and productive way. The relations of production are the social and economic relationships we all enter into during production.

Historical materialism reveals a pattern in human history and socio-economic relations and provides us with object lessons for some current debates in the political economy. The rise and fall of different civilizations are often determined by the environmental conditions and the human societies that develop within these material conditions. Human society is structured in a certain way due to the nature of a society's foundation – its economy, which has to be productive in order to perpetuate existence. The very nature of economic systems produces the social relations that underlie an economy and are not simply the result of a human "natural element." Therefore, it is possible to analyze the economic functions and developments of any society in terms of the functions of the production base. The economy also helps to make sense of historical developments at a cultural level: for instance, "democratic" political systems and social values of nondiscrimination are all made possible by a productive economic system. (Jaffe, 2021)

2.2. Class Struggle

2.2. Class Struggle

As is the case with all of Marxist theory, class struggle stems from a materialistic point of view. History – and, consequently, society – can be characterized as nothing more than the sum total of all material conditions of people's lives. Just as these conditions can be divided into tangible factors and intangibles, so too can the concept of class. One of the more basic ways in which Marxists see the class struggle comes from the idea that society develops in a typically linear way.

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

The motivating force behind this historical transformation is a push from one social class to place itself in a better, more powerful position relative to the rest of society. By taking energy and materials from the rest of society, this class gains advantages, whether they be greater legal freedoms, autonomous political representation, or personal wealth. The struggle is taken up in turn by the disadvantaged classes, who wish to create a balance of power of their own. This power struggle between all the artificial divisions of racial and cultural groups is an integral piece of Marxist thought. Indeed, they argue that it is only when a group has either accomplished its goals and taken its place at the top of the class echelon or has been successfully pushed down to the bottom that people are free to be grouped together by characteristics unrelated to these struggles.

At present, there is an enormous power imbalance between social classes. Studies of industry and wage earning show that a huge portion of the total wealth produced by the economy is funneled upwards to people already in positions of power – the owners of business and industry, relatively few in number. This allows employers to increase their own fortunes while the people who produce the goods and services a company sells see hardly any of the profits of their work. There is a plethora of cases documenting unfair labor practices – such as wage stealing via misclassification, tipping fraud, breaking of minimum wage laws, and violation of health standards – through which the mostly working-class people who staff restaurants and other corporations are cheated out of the money their labors have earned them. (Woodcock, 2021)

2.3. Capitalism and Exploitation

Capitalism has been at the center of much of Marxist analysis, critiquing it based on its essence of exploitation. The bottom line behind the incentive for Britain's industrial revolution and the principles behind much of its work in the now-decommissioned empire are the same principles defended by capitalism: the maximization of profits. Some people have what is called "productive property," meaning that they can use their property to hire people and make profits off of

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

that, while most do not. In the modern social world, this has taken the form of a socio-economic class defined by terms such as employer and employee. The majority of the population sells themselves to those who are in possession of the productive property. (Tse-Tung, 2022)

In capitalism, the worker is paid less in wages compared to the amount of work he or she has produced with that money, thus creating capitalist profit. A part of the surplus received by the capitalist goes into enlarging the capitalist's business, triggering an ostensibly never-ending cycle of expansion and new wage labor. In other words, the wages that capitalists pay workers do not perfectly match the labor that workers put into producing a valuable commodity, because if they did, capitalists would not make any profit. It is this key concept, surplus value, that makes capitalist society an exploitative one. This leads to the inequalities that are critical of. Women, racial and ethnic minorities, and children are often the worst-paid workers who work in the darkest corners of society. It is not because they lack the ability that others who are well off do, but rather, there are systems in place to keep them from those opportunities. Exploitation is not only a historical issue, but also a present reality. (Cohen et al., 2021)

3. APPLICATION OF MARXIST THEORY IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

3.1. Economic Inequality

3.2. Globalization and Imperialism

3.3. Social Movements and Protests

4. CRITIQUES OF MARXIST THEORY IN CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT

Critiques of Marxist theory in the contemporary moment often center around the waning relevance of its foundational concepts to current politics. For example, Marxism is considered by some to be insufficient as a theory of politics, particularly for feminist and postcolonial concerns, as well as for identity politics more generally. Others claim that the original formulation of a class-based concept of politics silenced the myriad complex social relations that inflict oppression and discrimination beyond the economic realm. Some maintain that

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

Marxist theory collapses social conflict and dissent into economic categories in a reductionist and simplifying way, whereas others argue that power relations manifest not necessarily through structures but rather are 'everywhere' and thus are less subject to totalized theory. Marxism is also critiqued for being 'outdated' as society continues to industrialize and the production of commodities is globalized. Its emphasis on the role of class within capitalism, others argue, has minimized other ways in which people identify, or forces that produce exploitation, such as gender and sexual normativities, race, and religious intolerance. (Feltrin & Sacchetto, 2021)

In response to potential critiques, scholars have worked to reevaluate Marxism in the face of the theoretical and political shifts concerning the movement of people or migration. Marxism has offered substantial insights into the nature of capitalism and the exploitation that depends on a dispossessed class of workers to prop up the profit margins of the few. In the rise of proletariats during the 19th century, it indeed appeared that the poor would rise to overthrow the comfortable and utopian world of the rich. However, it has become clear that the impact of the proletariat in overthrowing the bourgeois has been less than revolutionary than hoped, and communism was supposed to be. (Huber, 2022)

5. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

The preceding five chapters have weighed the relevance of Marxist theory in light of contemporary conceptions of political life. What they have revealed is that Marxism retains something vital to contribute to twenty-first-century politics. Despite the pronounced cultural turn in political thought, Marxism refuses to succumb entirely. Characters of class struggle remain abundantly present in contemporary societies. After all, economies are still significantly marked by the deep chasms between transnational corporations, states, social classes, and the triad of core, semi-periphery, and periphery countries. There are still widespread feelings of impotence and contractility more endemic in populations marginalized from mainstream economic status, just as there are legions of burning

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

discontents fueled by a systemic stealing from accumulation by dispossession, wage losses, layoffs, curtailed benefits, and megaproject development. Current social movements are informed by struggles, such as low-paid workers or marginalized communities, that are at least reminiscent of the class struggle that preoccupied classical Marxism. Moreover, marches for immigrant rights, Black Lives Matter, and the centrality of racial injustice in everyday settings are themselves, still more pronouncedly, the products of capitalist societies in their greed and prejudice.

This leads me to a modest suggestion about what comes after all of this is carried out. In these chapters, I have persistently argued that we must continuously revisit our metaphor of Marxism. We have to keep on asking what in the structure of Marxism is worth preserving if we want to use the method naturally associated with Marxism to develop policies applicable to contemporary problems. These chapters, again, are not digital persons rearranging bookshelves or angels wrestling with foundational framing. They are not only about discussion and critical reflection. Rather, they are about the pragmatic urgency that drives political activism. What, then, do we have left when we decide Marxism is our best chance of arriving at a meaningful and coherent political trajectory? The answer comes in the opening chapters: we have a commitment to social justice. The question shifts from an axiological one—what may we reasonably hope for—to a moral, revolutionary one: where do we go from here? What comes after we agree that people are worth more than profit?

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no financial, professional, technological, commercial, institutional, or personal conflicts of interest that could have influenced the content, interpretation, or conclusions presented in this article.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

Data Availability

No new clinical, experimental, or patient-level datasets were generated or analysed during this study. All information discussed in the review was obtained from the published literature and publicly available sources cited in the manuscript. Additional information relating to the review may be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Informed Consent

Not applicable. No patients or other human participants were recruited, and no identifiable personal or clinical information was collected or analysed for this review.

Use of Generative AI

The authors declare that no generative artificial intelligence tools were used to conduct the literature review, generate the scholarly content, interpret the evidence, or formulate the conclusions presented in this article. The discussion of generative AI, artificial intelligence, and machine-learning technologies in the manuscript relates solely to their applications in healthcare resource optimization and does not constitute their use in preparing the article.

References:

Adamic, L. (2022). Dynamite: The story of class violence in America. [HTML]

Cohen, R., Gutkind, P. C. W., & Brazier, P. (2022). Peasants and proletarians: the struggles of Third World workers. [HTML]

Feltrin, L. & Sacchetto, D. (2021). The work-technology nexus and working-class environmentalism: Workerism versus capitalist noxiousness in Italy's Long 1968. Theory and society. springer.com

Huber, M. T. (2022). Climate change as class war: Building socialism on a warming planet. [HTML]

Jaffe, S. (2021). Work won't love you back: How devotion to our jobs keeps us exploited, exhausted, and alone. [HTML]

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

Jones, P. (2021). Work without the worker: Labour in the age of platform capitalism. [HTML]

Risager, B. S. (2021). Financialized gentrification and class composition in the post-industrial city: A rent strike against a real estate investment trust in Hamilton, Ontario. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 45(2), 282-302. [HTML]

Tse-Tung, M. (2022). Quotations from chairman Mao Tse-tung. [HTML]

Woodcock, J. (2021). The fight against platform capitalism: an inquiry into the global struggles of the gig economy. oapen.org

Marx, K., & Engels, F. (1848). The Communist manifesto.

Marx, K. (1867). Capital: A critique of political economy (Vol. 1). Hamburg: Otto Meissner.

Gramsci, A. (1971). Selections from the prison notebooks (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers.

Poulantzas, N. (1973). Political power and social classes. New Left Books.

Wright, E. O. (1997). Class counts: Comparative studies in class analysis. Cambridge University Press.

Lafferty, G. (1996). Class, politics, and social theory: The possibilities in Marxist analysis. Critical Sociology, 22(2), 51–65.

Harvey, D. (2005). A brief history of neoliberalism. Oxford University Press.

Robinson, W. I. (2004). A theory of global capitalism: Production, class, and state in a transnational world. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Bruff, I. (2014). The rise of authoritarian neoliberalism. Rethinking Marxism, 26(1), 113–129.

Tsolakis, A. (2010). Opening up open Marxist theories of the state: A historical materialist critique. The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, 12(3), 387–407.

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

Online ISSN : 2959-8362
Print ISSN : 2959-8354

Maher, S., & Aquanno, S. M. (2018). Conceptualizing neoliberalism: Foundations for an institutional Marxist theory of capitalism. New Political Science, 40(1), 33–50.

Manley, J. F. (2015). Globalization, welfare states, and socialism's future. Rethinking Marxism, 27(4), 508–526.

Vidal, M., Smith, T., Rotta, T., & Prew, P. (Eds.). (2018). The Oxford handbook of Karl Marx. Oxford University Press.

Przeworski, A. (2021). What have I learned from Marx and what still stands? Politics & Society, 49(4), 433–450.

Soener, M. (2022). Class power in hard times: Excavating Nicos Poulantzas's theory of the capitalist state through the history of the 2007–2008 crisis. Critical Historical Studies, 9(2), 195–220.

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com
[2] MPhil Scholar, Department of Political Science, Islamia College University Peshawar, Peshawar.
Corresponding Email : arslanqadir@gmail.com

Copyright (c) 2025 Author(s)
This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.