

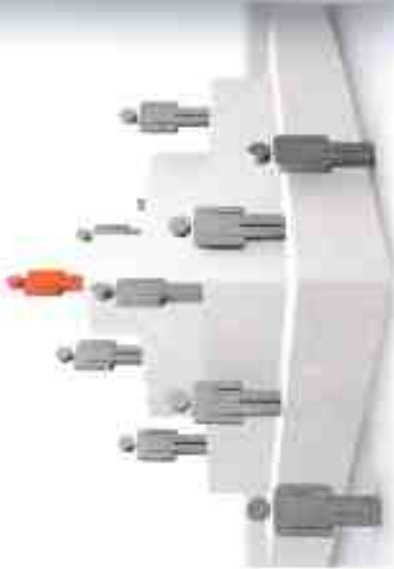
An Introduction to Social Stratification

You must be able to:

- Explain the terms social stratification and social inequality
- Identify different types of stratification
- Describe and criticise Davis and Moore's functionalist theory of stratification.

Social Stratification and Social Inequality

- The term social stratification describes the way society is structured into a hierarchy of unequal strata or layers.
 - A social hierarchy is shaped like a pyramid and each layer is more powerful than the one below it.
 - The most privileged group forms the top layer and the least privileged group forms the bottom layer.
- Social inequality refers to the uneven distribution of resources (such as money and power) and opportunities related, for example, to education, employment and health.
- Stratification involves inequality between groups in the distribution of economic and social resources such as **wealth**, **income**, status and power. The group in the top rank of the hierarchy is likely to have much more wealth, income, status or power than those beneath.
- In the UK today, social class, gender, ethnicity and age are the main criteria by which people tend to be stratified.



Different Forms of Stratification

- Stratification systems differ according to whether status (or social position) is ascribed (fixed at birth) or achieved (earned on the basis of merit).
- They also differ according to how open or closed they are. In an open system, social mobility is possible but in a closed system, it is unlikely.
- **Slavery** existed as a form of stratification in Ancient Greece and Rome, and in the southern states of the USA in the 19th century. Under slavery, one group claims the right to own another group and treats them as property.
- Other types of stratification include the **caste** system in traditional India, **feudalism** in medieval Europe, and the social class system in the UK today.

Davis and Moore: The Functionalist Theory of Stratification

- Davis and Moore (1945) argue that all societies need a way of placing individuals into the different roles or social positions that must be filled (known as role allocation).
- Some roles are functionally more important for society than others. For example, they provide essential services and ensure society's survival over time.
- Most people lack the talent to fill these **functionally important** roles or the motivation to train for them. To attract the most talented people, these roles must provide access to desirable rewards such as high pay and status.
- Stratification is functionally necessary for society because it ensures that the most talented people train for and fill the most important jobs.
- All societies must treat people differently in terms of their status and rewards. So all societies must have some degree of inequality built into them. This inequality is functional, however, because people accept it as fair.



One view is that society needs a system of unequal rewards to match highly talented and well-trained individuals to functionally important roles.

Criticisms of Davis and Moore

- Many jobs that are vital to society have relatively low pay (for example, nursing) or low status (for example, refuse collection).
- A group's high pay and status may be linked to its power rather than to the functional importance of its position.
- Davis and Moore assume that society is meritocratic but critics disagree. Rather than seeing stratification as functional, Marxists view it as a means by which a privileged minority exploit others. Neither inequality nor stratification is inevitable.
- Marxist and feminist perspectives see stratification as a system in which some groups in society (such as the bourgeoisie or men) gain at the expense of others.

Quick Test

1. Caste – in which status is ascribed – is an example of a stratification system linked to Hinduism in traditional India. True or false?
2. Social inequality refers to the division of society into a hierarchy of layers, with the most privileged at the top and the least privileged at the bottom. True or false?
3. Identify one function of social stratification.

Key Thinkers

Davis and Moore (1945)

Look out for links between the functions of education (such as selection) and the functions of stratification.

Key Point

The American sociologists Davis and Moore (1945) are key thinkers, so it is important that you are familiar with their functionalist perspective on stratification.

Key Words

wealth
income
slavery
caste
feudalism
functionally important
roles

Different Views of Social Class

You must be able to:

- Describe Marx's key ideas on social class
- Describe Weber's key ideas on social class
- Explain social class as a type of stratification.

Karl Marx: Social Class in the 19th Century

- Karl Marx identified two main classes in capitalist society: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.
- Class membership is determined by economic factors – by ownership and non-ownership of the means of production.
- The wealthy bourgeoisie own the means of production and the proletariat sell their labour to the bourgeoisie in order to survive.
- The proletariat experience **alienation** under capitalism because they lack control over production and the products of their labour.
- Other classes include the lumpenproletariat (such as the 'drop-outs' and criminals of society) and the petty bourgeoisie (such as the owners of small businesses).
- The two main classes have opposing interests. The bourgeoisie want ever-increasing profits and the proletariat seek higher wages. The bourgeoisie exploit the proletariat, leading to class struggle or conflict.
- The bourgeoisie's position is justified by **ruling-class ideology**; for example, ideas about competition and the free market disguise the reality of exploitation. This ruling-class ideology leads to **false class consciousness** among the proletariat, who, for example, are unaware of the true nature of social relationships under capitalism.
- Marx argued that, over time, the bourgeoisie would get smaller and much richer. The petty bourgeoisie, unable to compete, would sink into the proletariat. The proletariat would get bigger and increasingly poor. Eventually, the proletariat would rebel, leading to a revolution. Following this, the means of production would be communally owned, resulting in a classless society.

Weber: Social Class in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

- Max Weber argued that classes are formed in the labour market, where one class of people hires labour and another class sells their labour. The processes of hiring labour and the rewards (or **life chances**) from this are crucial in explaining class.

Key Thinkers

Marx (1818–1883) and Weber (1864–1920)

Key Point

Marx and Weber are key thinkers, so it is important that you understand their ideas on social class.

- Weber argued that a class is a group of people who have similar life chances; that is, chances of being successful (or otherwise) in life and opportunities in education, health, and so on. Weber identified four main social classes: property owners, professionals, the petty bourgeoisie (for example, shopkeepers) and the working class.

- These different classes have different **market situations** or life chances in the labour market. Working-class people, for example, all share similar life chances in the labour market. However, they have different life chances from property owners.
- Like Marx, Weber saw class as based on the distribution of economic resources such as wealth. However, Weber also stressed the importance of non-economic factors such as status and power (political influence) in determining life chances.
- Status groups are identified by the prestige attached to their lifestyle. Each of the four classes had a different amount of status, wealth and power.
- A person's status may differ from their class (or economic) position. For instance, even though members of the **aristocracy** (such as a Lord or Lady) may not be wealthy property owners, their title gives them status.



Stratification Based on Social Class Today

- In Britain today, social class (or socio-economic class) is seen as the main form of stratification.
- Social class is based on economic factors such as occupation (how people earn a living). Occupation is used to measure class because it is linked to levels of pay, working conditions and status.
- **Subjective class** refers to how people see themselves in class terms.
- There are three social classes in Britain: the working, middle and **upper class**. Some **New Right** commentators argue that Britain also has an underclass (see pages 104–105).
- In class-based societies, gender, ethnicity and age are also sources of inequality.
 - For example, middle-class men and women may have different life chances in relation to pay and promotion at work.

Quick Test

1. Identify one difference between Marx's and Weber's views on social class.
2. In Weber's view, what do members of a social class have in common?
3. Why is occupation usually used to measure social class today?

Key Words

alienation
ruling-class ideology
false class
consciousness
life chances

market situation
aristocracy
subjective class
upper class
New Right

Key Point

In Marx's view, ownership was the most significant division in society. Other inequalities (such as status) arose from class divisions. Weber, however, saw class and status as two separate aspects of stratification.



Members of the Royal Family gain status from their title.

Factors Affecting Life Chances

You must be able to:

- Explain factors affecting life chances including gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality and religion.

Life Chances

- Life chances refer to people's chances of having positive or negative outcomes (such as being healthy or ill) over their lifetime in relation to, for example, their health, education, employment and housing.
- Life chances are distributed unequally between groups because they are affected by factors such as class position, gender and ethnicity.
 - For example, middle-class people (such as lawyers) have more chance of accessing good quality healthcare than working-class people.
- Life chances are shaped by inequalities in wealth, income, power and status.

Inequalities Based on Gender

- Feminists focus on gender inequalities in society. Over the last 50 years, anti-discrimination legislation (such as the Sex Discrimination Act 1975) has addressed aspects of gender inequality in education and employment.
- Despite this, feminist approaches argue that gender is still a key division in society. For example, the gender pay gap persists because women are more likely than men to work in low paid and part-time jobs. Women are held back by a **glass ceiling** which acts as an invisible barrier to promotion. Some occupations are either male-dominated or female-dominated. For example, although the proportion of female fire fighters in England is increasing, it was only 3.9 per cent in 2010.
- Explanations for the persistence of gender inequalities at work include sex discrimination in the workplace, women's triple shift (combining paid work, domestic labour and emotion work) and inadequate childcare provision.
- Some feminist approaches argue that society is patriarchal in that men have power within families, politics and the workplace, and generally receive a bigger share of rewards such as income, wealth and status.

Inequalities Based on Ethnicity

- Over the last 50 years, laws (such as the Race Relations Act 1976) have addressed inequality based on ethnicity in areas including education, employment and criminal justice.
- Many employers have equal opportunities policies to support equality and diversity. Awareness of institutional racism has been raised within organisations such as the police service.

Key Point

Many sociologists see class, gender and ethnicity as interrelated rather than separate aspects of inequality. White, middle-class men may experience advantages based on class, gender and ethnicity, while black working-class women may experience disadvantages.



- Many sociologists argue, however, that little has changed in the fields of employment, education, politics and criminal justice.
 - For example, UK unemployment rates are higher among people of Asian and Black Caribbean heritage than among White people. Men and women of Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage have much worse chances of getting professional and managerial jobs than their white peers of the same age and educational level.
- Explanations for the persistence of inequality at work include **racism** and discrimination in the labour market.
- Marxist approaches see racism (and sexism) as built into the workings of capitalism. Some groups (including people from minority ethnic groups and working-class women) are hired during economic booms and fired during recessions when capitalism no longer needs them.

Inequalities Based on Age

- Sociologists argue that age (like gender and ethnicity) is socially constructed and that expectations surrounding age vary historically and cross-culturally.
 - For example, child labour was the norm among working-class families in 19th-century Britain and exists in some parts of the world today.
- The term **ageism** (or age discrimination) describes a situation in which someone is treated differently and less favourably based on their age. For example, a person in their 60s may be denied promotion at work because their employer believes that they are too old to learn new skills.
- Young people and older people are more vulnerable to ageism and stereotyping than other groups.
- In Britain, there are now regulations against age discrimination in employment and training.
- The Equality Act 2010 protects people from age discrimination at work and when accessing services in places such as banks or hotels.
- The unemployment rate for young people aged 16 to 24 years is higher than for older groups.

Disability, Sexuality, Religion and Beliefs

- Despite legislation such as the Equality Act 2010, people's life chances can be influenced by disability, sexuality, and religion and beliefs, if they experience discrimination in education and the workplace.
- Some groups experience hate crime that is motivated by hostility or prejudice related to their religion, sexuality or disability.

Quick Test

- Identify one way in which governments have tried to tackle discrimination.
- The glass ceiling refers to invisible walls between different occupations. True or false?

Key Point

Marxist approaches see social class in capitalist societies as more significant than gender or ethnicity. Feminist approaches see gender inequalities in patriarchal societies as more significant.



Legislation now protects people from age discrimination.

Key Words

glass ceiling
racism
ageism

Studies of Affluent Workers

You must be able to:

- Describe the affluent worker study
- Describe Devine's work on revisiting the affluent worker
- Explain the term social mobility.

The Embourgeoisement Thesis

- In the late 1950s and early 1960s, some sociologists suggested that affluent working-class families were becoming middle class in their norms and values.
- According to this **embourgeoisement thesis**, their **affluence** led them to adopt privatised lifestyles centred on home and family, and to have aspirations based on consumerism.

The Affluent Worker Study

- Goldthorpe et al. (1969) tested the embourgeoisement thesis in the early 1960s. They interviewed affluent workers and their wives from three companies in Luton (including Vauxhall Motors) about their attitudes to work, lifestyles, aspirations and political views.
- Goldthorpe rejected the embourgeoisement thesis but argued that affluent workers may be part of a 'new' working class that resembled the middle class in terms of their privatised, home-centred lifestyles.
- Affluent workers had an instrumental attitude to paid work – their work was a means to an end (a way of earning money to improve their living standards) rather than an end in itself (to get job satisfaction or make friends).
- Affluent workers supported the Labour Party for individual gain and their attitude to trade unions was instrumental. Unlike the traditional working class, they were not motivated by working-class solidarity and the idea of 'sticking together'.

Fiona Devine: Affluent Workers Revisited

- Fiona Devine (1992) revisited Luton to explore how far working-class people's lifestyles were privatised (centred on the nuclear family within the home) in the 1980s.
- Devine compared her own findings with those of Goldthorpe's study. She argued that working-class lifestyles, norms and values have not changed as much as Goldthorpe suggested.
- Her sample did not have purely privatised and home-centred lifestyles and social relationships.
- The interviewees were not purely instrumental or motivated solely by the desire to improve their living standards.
- Their aspirations and their social and political values were not solely individualistic. There was plenty of evidence of solidarity among the interviewees rather than individualism.



Key Point

A **privatised nuclear family** is cut off from the extended family – the lifestyle focuses on the home. **Privatised instrumentalism** refers to social relationships centred on the home. There is an instrumental attitude to work – it is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself.

Key Thinker

Fiona Devine (1992)

Key Point

Devine carried out intensive interviews with 62 Luton residents when she revisited Luton between 1986 and 1987. The men worked in shop-floor jobs at the Vauxhall car factory and some of the women also worked there.

Think about how Devine's work links to families.

Social Mobility

- The term 'social mobility' refers to people's movement up or down a society's strata, for example between social classes.
- **Inter-generational** social mobility refers to movement between the generations of a family and occurs when a child enters a different class from their parents.
- **Intra-generational** social mobility refers to the movement of an individual between social classes over their lifetime as a result, for example, of promotion.
- Routes to upward mobility include educational credentials and marriage. Changes in the occupational structure (such as a growth in white-collar work) may increase the chances of upward mobility.
- Barriers to upward social mobility include discrimination based on ethnicity or gender, and lack of skills and educational credentials.

Social Mobility in the UK

- Research indicates that children from working-class backgrounds have less chance of moving into professional occupations than children from professional backgrounds. Evidence suggests that social mobility fell towards the end of the 20th century in the UK. Children born into manual working-class families in 1958 had a better chance of moving into higher occupations than children born into similar families in the 1970s.
- This decrease in mobility is partly due to changes in the occupational structure. Skilled manual jobs have declined and the growth in professional jobs has slowed down.
- Statistical evidence from 2005 suggests that the UK has lower rates of social mobility than countries such as Canada, Norway and Denmark.
- Sociologists know more about what has happened to social mobility in the past than what is happening today. This is because an individual's outcome or destination cannot be known until they reach middle age.

Problems in Measuring Social Mobility

- Some studies of inter-generational mobility focus on males and reveal nothing about women's mobility.
- Research participants may not remember their employment histories, or those of their parents.
- There are problems in deciding which point in a person's career to measure mobility from.

Quick Test

1. A privatised nuclear family's lifestyle and social relationships focus on the home and the immediate family. True or false?
2. Privatised instrumentalism refers to social relationships centred on the home rather than work. Paid work is a means to an end. True or false?

Revise

Key Point

Social mobility is an important measure of how open society is. High rates of mobility suggest that status is achieved and society is meritocratic.



Working-class children born in the late 1950s in the UK had better chances of upward social mobility than those born in the 1970s.

Key Words

embourgeoisement thesis
affluence
privatised nuclear family
privatised
instrumentalism
inter-generational

Wealth, Income and Poverty

You must be able to:

- Explain the terms wealth, income and poverty
- Outline different ways of defining and measuring poverty
- Describe Townsend's work on relative deprivation
- Describe some groups who are at risk of poverty

Wealth and Income

- Stratification involves the unequal distribution of resources such as wealth and income. Wealth refers to the ownership of assets such as houses and land as well as savings and shares. It is often inherited within families.
- Income refers to the flow of resources that individuals and households receive over a specific period of time. People receive income in cash (for example, wages) or in kind (for example, petrol allowances).

Defining Poverty

- There are two broad approaches to defining poverty – the absolute and relative approaches.
 - People experience **absolute poverty** when their income is insufficient to obtain the minimum needed to survive.
 - People experience **relative poverty** when their income is well below average, so they are poor compared with others in their society.
- Poverty can involve **social exclusion** when people are shut out from everyday activities and customs. In this case, poverty is not just about low incomes. It is also about excluding people from activities that most people take for granted.
- The definition of poverty adopted by the state is important because it determines how far government accepts that poverty exists and the policies to address it.

Measuring Poverty

- There are several different measures of poverty. The main official UK government measure is in terms of low incomes. Low incomes are those below 60 per cent of the median (middle point) income of the population after housing costs.
 - **Subjective poverty** is based on whether people see themselves as living in poverty.
 - **Environmental poverty** measures deprivation in terms of conditions such as inadequate housing and air pollution.

Townsend: Poverty in the UK

- Peter Townsend (1979) aimed to discover how many people were living in poverty in the UK.

Revise



Not eating meat may be linked to religious beliefs or vegetarianism rather than to deprivation.

Key Point

Townsend used a face-to-face survey of UK households in his landmark study of poverty. He was a pioneer in the study of poverty because he focused on deprivation and viewed it in relative terms.

Key Point

Poverty is linked to age, with children and pensioners more at risk of poverty than other age groups. People with disabilities are also more at risk of poverty.

Key Words

absolute poverty
relative poverty
social exclusion
subjective poverty
environmental poverty
relative deprivation
state standard of poverty
relative income standard of poverty

- He developed a deprivation index to measure **relative deprivation**. His index listed 12 items such as 'Household does not usually have a Sunday joint (3 in 4 lines)'.
- Townsend found that almost 23 per cent of the UK population were in poverty. This proportion was much higher than that based on the **state standard of poverty** (at 5.1 per cent) and the **relative income standard of poverty** (at nine per cent).

Criticism of Townsend's Deprivation Index

- Critics question some of the items in Townsend's index (for example, a Sunday joint) and how they were selected. Not eating meat regularly is not necessarily linked to deprivation.
- If the index is inadequate, then the statistics based on it will also be questioned.

Groups at Risk of Poverty

- The chances of experiencing poverty are distributed unequally.
- **Ethnicity and Poverty**
 - People in UK households headed by someone from a minority ethnic group (particularly Pakistani or Bangladeshi heritage) are at risk of living in low-income households.
 - Minority ethnic groups, for example, are generally disadvantaged in terms of unemployment, pay and the quality of their jobs.
 - Explanations for this include racism and discrimination in the labour market.

Gender and Poverty

- Women are more at risk of poverty than men. There are several reasons for this.
 - Women have longer life expectancies than men but are less likely to have an occupational pension.
 - Women are more likely than men to head lone-parent families with low incomes.
 - The gender pay gap: many female-dominated jobs (for example, in sales and customer service) are relatively poorly paid.
 - Women are more likely than men to work in part-time employment.

Child Poverty

- Children are particularly vulnerable to poverty if they live in a family with four or more children, or where the head of household is a lone parent, from a minority ethnic group or workless.
- Poverty has a negative impact on children's life chances including their life expectancy, health, housing, educational attainments and job prospects.

Quick Test

1. Identify one way of measuring poverty.
2. Identify one criticism of Townsend's deprivation index.

Key Thinker

Townsend (1979)



Different Explanations of Poverty

You must be able to:

- Outline the culture of poverty and the cycle of deprivation
- Describe and criticise Murray's key ideas on the underclass, including links to New Right theories
- Describe functionalist, Marxist and feminist perspectives on poverty
- Outline other approaches to poverty

The Culture of Poverty and Cycle of Deprivation

- People from the poorest section of society are socialised within a sub-culture of poverty. They develop a way of life and a set of values to cope with their situation. For instance, they live for the moment (immediate gratification) and see no point in planning ahead.
- However, these values discourage them from staying on at school or saving money for the future and, in this way, escaping poverty.
- Poverty involves both material and cultural deprivation. It persists from one generation to the next, locking families into a **cycle of deprivation**.
- Critics argue that while this explanation may describe how poverty persists between generations, it fails to explain why some groups fall into poverty in the first place.

Murray and New Right Explanations

- Murray (1984) examined US governments' social policies since the late 1960s that aimed to reduce poverty. He focused on the impact of these policies on the behaviour of members of the underclass.
- In his view, the policies actually produced poverty and encouraged more people to become dependent on **welfare benefits**.
 - For example, they led to an increase in unmarried young mothers and encouraged a hard core of unemployed young people to have no interest in finding jobs and to become welfare dependent.
- Murray associated the underclass with poor African-American and Hispanic people. He argues that the underclass is growing and poses a threat to society's well-being because its members are responsible for increases in crime rates and are a burden to taxpayers.

The Underclass in the UK

- Murray (1996) argued that the UK's underclass is growing rapidly.
- He focused on the behaviour of the 'undeserving poor' and examined three measures of the underclass:
 - rising crime rates
 - an increase in the number of 'illegitimate' births
 - drop-out from the labour force among working-age men.
- He argued that **welfare reform** encouraged crime, single parenthood and unemployment, and took away the incentive to work.



Key Point

Many sociologists argue that explanations of poverty should focus on the way society is structured rather than the behaviour of individuals or families.

Key Thinker

Charles Murray (1984)

Key Point

The American political scientist Charles Murray (1984) focuses on the underclass from a New Right approach. He draws on official statistics including unemployment, crime and extra-marital birth rates.

Criticisms of the New Right Approach

- Critics reject the idea that an underclass with different attitudes actually exists.
- The term is used to 'blame the victims' for their misfortunes.
- The underclass are used as a scapegoat for the problems in society.
- When explaining poverty, sociologists should focus on the structure of society and the 'overclass' – the rich and powerful groups in society.

Sociological Perspectives on Poverty

Functionalism and Poverty

- Poverty performs positive functions for some groups in society; e.g. it helps ensure that dirty and dangerous work gets done cheaply.
- Critics argue that functionalism tries to defend the existence of poverty rather than explain it.

Marxism and Poverty

- Poverty is the inevitable outcome of the class-based divisions in capitalist society. Capitalism generates extreme wealth for the bourgeoisie and poverty within the proletariat.
- Poverty serves the bourgeoisie's interests as they can hire and fire workers as needed. The fear of poverty and unemployment can be used to discipline the workers, keeping wages down and profits up.

Feminism and Poverty

- Women (particularly lone mothers and older widows) face a greater risk of poverty than men. Possible reasons include the gender pay gap and inequality in the division of caring responsibilities. Women are also more likely to outlive their partners.

Other Approaches to Poverty

- During economic recessions, unemployment levels rise and poverty increases.
- Welfare benefits are too low and the value of benefits and state pensions should be increased.

The Impact of Globalisation on UK Poverty

- The downturn in the global economy led to a financial crisis and recession in the UK between 2008 and 2010. This resulted in increased job insecurity and unemployment.
- Rising global fuel and food costs led to increases in the costs of living, which particularly affects people on low incomes.
- Some commentators argue that **globalisation** has increased inequality within the UK.

Quick Test

1. Identify one individual account of poverty.
2. Which approach is Charles Murray associated with?



Capitalism generates extreme wealth for the bourgeoisie.

Key Point

Individual accounts of poverty (such as the cycle of deprivation and New Right) examine the behaviour or lifestyles of individuals and groups in poverty. Structural accounts (such as Marxism) examine how economic, social and political structures generate poverty.

Key Words

cycle of deprivation
welfare benefits
welfare reform
globalisation

Power and Authority

You must be able to:

- Describe the key ideas of Weber on power and authority
- Outline Marxist and feminist approaches to power
- Describe the key ideas of Walby on patriarchy
- Outline power relationships in everyday situations.

Weber on Power and Authority

- Max Weber (1947) argued that an individual or group exercises power when they get what they want, despite any opposition.
- Power is based on either coercion or **authority**.
 - Coercion involves the threat or use of force including physical violence. People obey because they feel they have no choice – they are forced into obeying against their will.
 - Authority is exercised over people when they willingly agree to obey an individual or group because they see it as the right thing to do. Force is unnecessary because people consent to power being exercised over them.

- Weber identified three types of authority: **traditional authority**, **rational legal authority** and **charismatic authority**. In each case, the people who are subjected to authority (such as students in classrooms) accept the exercise of power (in this case by the teacher) as legitimate.

- Traditional authority is based on custom and tradition. In the UK, for example, the authority of the **monarchy** is based on tradition.
- Rational legal authority is based on people accepting a set of laws or rules. People obey an individual or group because they agree with the laws or rules on which their power rests. Rational legal authority operates within a **bureaucracy**, that is, an organisation with a hierarchy and a clear set of rules.
- With charismatic authority, people obey a leader who they believe has extraordinary personal qualities that inspire them.

Marxist Perspectives on Power

- Marxist approaches see power as closely linked to social class relationships. The bourgeoisie's power is based on their ownership of the means of production. They use their power to exploit the proletariat.
- Political power comes from economic power so the bourgeoisie, by virtue of their economic power, also hold political power.

Key Thinker

Max Weber (1864–1920)

Key Point

Max Weber (1864–1920) is a key thinker, so it is important that you understand his ideas on power and authority.



Feminist Perspectives on Power

- Feminists see gender inequality as the most important source of division in society. Some feminists argue that society is patriarchal. In other words, it is controlled mainly by men who have considerable power within politics and the workplace. Men generally have a bigger share of wealth and social status.
- Women are under-represented among holders of political power, decision makers and within the top levels of the judiciary in Britain.

Walby on Patriarchy

- Walby (1990) defines patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate and exploit women. She highlights six patriarchal structures.

- Paid employment:** women typically earn less than men and are excluded from better types of paid work.
- The household:** husbands and partners exploit women by benefitting from their unpaid labour in the home.
- Culture:** culture differentiates between masculinity and femininity (which is defined in terms of being sexually attractive to men).
- Sexuality:** the **double standard** is an aspect of male dominance. For example, sexually active young women may be viewed as 'slags' while sexually active men may be admired.
- Male violence against women:** male violence affects women's actions and is a form of power over them.
- The state:** state policies are biased towards patriarchal interests. There has been little effort to improve women's position in the public sphere, for example in the workplace.

Everyday Power Relationships

- Power may be exercised in relationships between people in everyday settings such as homes, workplaces and classrooms. This is because people enter into power relationships when they try to control or influence other people's behaviour, or when others try to control them.
- Power relationships operate when there are inequalities in power between individuals and groups. They may operate, for instance, between children and parents, students and teachers, and the public and the police.

Quick Test

- Identify one similarity between authority and coercion.
- What is power based on according to Marxist approaches?
- Identify one patriarchal structure that Walby highlights.

Revise



Women are under-represented among politicians.

Key Thinker

Sylvia Walby (1990)

Key Point

Sylvia Walby (1990) is a key thinker, so it is important that you understand her feminist approach to patriarchy, gender inequalities and women's inferior position in society.

Think about how Walby's ideas link to the topics of families, and crime and deviance.

Key Words

authority
traditional authority
rational legal authority
charismatic authority
monarchy
bureaucracy
double standard

Power and the State

You must be able to:

- Explain how power operates in the political process
- Explain different views on the role of the state and pressure groups.

Politics, Power and Power Relationships

- Politics involves the exercise of power and power relationships.



Key Point

In the UK, the state exercises authority over England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Some state powers, however, have been passed to the Welsh Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly.

Term	What it means
Democracy	• In many nations, including the UK, the political system is based on democracy, i.e. government by the people. • In a democratic society, power is distributed widely and the government's power is based on rational legal authority rather than on coercion.
Dictatorship	• Political power is concentrated in the hands of a dictator who rules by force. • Censorship of the media (tight governmental control of media content) occurs under a dictatorship and propaganda campaigns are used to promote the dictatorship's views and win people's loyalty.
Representative democracy	• Citizens elect representatives who make political decisions on their behalf. • In UK general elections, voters in a constituency each cast one vote. Most candidates belong to a political party such as the Labour or Conservative Party. The candidate with the most votes becomes the Member of Parliament (MP) for that constituency and sits in the House of Commons. • This type of electoral system is known as first-past-the-post or winner takes all.
Proportional representation (PR)	• Seats are allocated according to the total number of votes that each party receives. • PR is used to elect Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).
The state	• A central part of the political process; refers to the various institutions (such as the police, civil service and judiciary) that organise and regulate society. • The role of state institutions is to make, implement and enforce laws.
The government of the UK	• Refers to MPs who are Ministers, selected by the Prime Minister, who is the leader of the governing political party. • Although the legal system, the military and the police force are all part of the state, they are independent of the government of the day.

The Role of the State

- There are two broad approaches to the study of power and the state: **pluralism** and the conflict approach. They differ in their views on the **distribution of power** in society and how power is used.

The pluralist approach argues that a range of competing interests and **pressure groups** (or **interest groups**) exists in society. Political power is shared between these groups. No single group dominates decision-making or always gets its own way. The state's role is to act as a neutral referee, to regulate the different interests and serve the needs of all citizens.

Sociologists from the Marxist or conflict approach argue that those in powerful positions within the state (such as top judges and senior civil servants) tend to come from privileged backgrounds. The owners of the means of production have power in capitalist society and the state's role is to protect their interests.

The Role of Pressure Groups

- Pluralists argue that pressure groups, trade unions, **protest movements** and **new social movements** are crucial to democracy. Pressure groups, for example, allow like-minded citizens to join together and put forward their views.
- Protest movements organise **direct action** to protect the environment, for instance, or to focus attention on companies that avoid taxes. In this way, all opinions and interests can be represented and heard. Such groups provide opportunities for citizens to participate in the political process.
- The conflict view argues that society is based on conflicting interests between different groups.
- Some key groups, such as big business, have enough power, staff and financial resources to be able to influence government policies.
- Some groups' power is based on their ownership of property, wealth and resources. This gives them status and they can exert more influence on policy makers than other groups and dominate decision-making.

Quick Test

1. Identify one factor that influences power relationships.
2. What term refers to the institutions that organise and regulate society?
3. How is power distributed according to the pluralist view?

Revise

Key Point

Some social groups have more power than others. Power relationships are influenced by factors such as social class, gender, ethnicity and age.



Some trade unions have over one million members.

Key Words

democracy
dictatorship
censorship
propaganda
constituency
political party
Member of Parliament
first-past-the-post
proportional representation
Prime Minister
pluralism
distribution of power
pressure groups
interest groups
protest movements
new social movements
direct action