

Scientific Socialism, Scientifically Better?: Investigating
The Narrative of Failure Through a Comparison of
Capitalism & Socialism In The Periphery

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Introduction: Question And Importance

When the General Social Survey asked the question, “Thinking about all the different kinds of governments in the world today, which of these statements comes closest to how you feel about Communism as a form of government?” Throughout the 70’s till 1994, the overall majority of Americans saw Communism as at least a “Bad” system (GSS Data Explorer, 2025). A study of U.S polling data from throughout the Cold War shows consistently negative opinions about the actual existing socialism in the Soviet Union (Smith, 1983). Even studies from shortly before the Soviet collapse on American opinion towards the end of the Soviet Union noted U.S citizens' wariness and firm stance (Hinckley, 1989). The proposed bill H.R.5349 - Crucial Communism Teaching Act, which passed the House with relatively bipartisan support (only for that version to be crushed by committees), is a solid reflection of the modern sentiment towards Communism or actually existing socialism for many Americans. It is plainly stated that one of the purposes of the act would be “to ensure that high school students in the United States - (A) learn that communism has led to the deaths of over 100,000,000 victims worldwide; (B) understand the dangers of communism and similar political ideologies; and (C) understand that 1,500,000,000 people still suffer under communism.” (Salazar, 2024).

With U.S Hegemony in decline, many around the world are looking for an alternative. Neo-Liberalism gave capitalism a lifeline, weakening nation-states in favor of transnational capital to preserve and increase profit rates in the global north. This came with contradictions (outsourcing of industry, welfare cuts, deregulation, etc.) that have emboldened opposition, with the more established right-wing populist as the dominant opposition to neoliberalism in the political arena. This right populism, represented by figures like Trump, does not show a real way out, but a nostalgia for the old (Lauesen, 2020). I argue that, contrary to the popular narrative of

failure, socialism in the periphery of the world system has proved more successful than capitalism in crucial areas such as physical quality of life and national liberation, while offering an alternative participatory democracy worth learning from.

It is time for the Left with a genuine desire to craft an alternative to capitalism to begin formulating a socialism for the 21st century, and to begin the organizational and practical steps to bring it from theory to practice, then back to the drawing board from there. This means learning from past socialist experiments. The common conception of past socialist experiments, at least in the United States, is that of breadlines, starvation, backwardness, and totalitarianism. In short, they are viewed as failures. This view of past socialist experiments, despite their many imperfections and shortcomings, is something that should and must push back on. This must be done for the sake of the truth and proper analysis in order to construct a modern alternative to capitalism. Why learn from examples and theories that have only produced misery? This one-sided understanding of actually socialist experiments hinders our ability to create alternatives to capitalism.

This overly simple failure narrative is often created by focusing on the worst moments of socialist experiments' histories and forgetting the rest. This history is also interpreted from a Eurocentric liberal point of view, in which poor great man history is dominant; class, the wider economic, historical, and political situation, including the ravages of colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism on socialist development, are ignored. As Marx said, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are

subject to it” (Marx, 1845). We must challenge the ruling class caricature of socialism, that many of the “marxists” in academia have helped solidify as part of the bourgeois apparatus of mental production, in part to preserve their “credibility” within these establishments and further careerist goals. (Rockhill, 2025a)

The core *Question* this work aims to answer is "*Has socialism been the failure, popular consciousness deems it to be?*" Done through a comparison of Socialism and Capitalism in the Periphery, this work will hopefully serve as a step towards countering hegemonic narratives around the existing struggle for human emancipation. Narratives that claim or end up implying that the fight to end capitalist exploitation is not worth the risk, pointing to the supposed failures of those who dared fight, acting as though there was nothing good to show for it. This is not about praising the achievements of leaders/states or defending them, but providing a clear sense of the progress of socialist experiments, pointing out that the struggle of working and exploited peoples for a better society was not entirely in vain.

The struggle may not be as pure as many Marxists wish. It may take longer than expected to check off many of the loftier goals in the historical development of socialism. Still, nonetheless, it is a struggle that has achieved too much to simply be brushed over and thrown to the side in favor of a retreat to fantasy. As Lenin said, “Whoever expects a ‘pure’ social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is” (Lenin, 1916). Unfortunately, much of the Western world has responded with rejection to actual attempts at socialism, and disappointed Marxists and leftists are stuck expecting a messianic break with the old.

This defeatist rejection of actually existing socialism was born in large part due to an issue that caused the split between the socialist movement during the Second International,

Imperialism. The Western Marxists of the imperial core, held as superior by the likes of Perry Anderson, saw the USSR as an ideologically rigid failure and socialism as in decline, this was despite its active rise in much of the Third World during Western Marxism's inception. The same year Perry Anderson had proclaimed there was no socialism in the real world, revolutionaries in Burkina Faso were putting it into practice. Losurdo's rejoinder to this intellectual tradition *Western Marxism How it was born, how it died, how it can be reborn*, properly locates it within the political economy of imperialism. The Marxists associated with the Western Marxist tradition were looking for the withering away of the state, while actually existing socialism was concerned with how to avoid neo-colonialism, imperialism, and reverse centuries of maldevelopment (Losurdo et al., 2024).

As Ghassan Kanafani said, "on the one hand, a critical power; on the other, a devotion to what must not be destroyed. The distinction between these two sides of the task is an extremely precise one. If the researcher takes just one extra step in the direction of criticism, he falls into confusion of assessment. One too many steps in the direction of devotion to traditional givens, and he falls into a state of resignation in the face of the now unacceptable. The danger of a period of defeat — that carries within it both the seeds of construction in the seeds of destruction — *requires a true grasp of what must be rejected and what must be defended. Only absolute rejection is easier than absolute devotion.*" (Kanafani, 1990). Since the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, many have fallen into a paralyzing state of absolute rejection, unable to appreciate the many improvements that socialist experiments brought and are still bringing that capitalism has proven either unable or unwilling to provide. This work wishes to break the paralysis by attempting to compare socialism with capitalism in their social and historical totality.

Literature Review & Theory

The Economic and social orthodoxy of today are still much in line with the ideas put forward by Adam Smith in *Wealth of Nations*, the references to the invisible hand of the market, the pursuit of one's individual interests producing the best results for society as a whole, competition within the market sparking innovation are all core tenants of today's ideology which stem from this 1776 work (Smith, 1776). Capitalism's academic superstructure has produced and promoted a litany of economists, social scientists, and historians committed to defending the economic base. This section will review most of their most prominent arguments and works, if only to argue against them later.

Hayek is one of the more famous defenders of the status quo. Although modern research has debated whether Hayek's conclusions apply to all versions of socialism, the core of his argument is that socialism and democracy are incompatible, and economic planning leads to totalitarianism. He claims this happens regardless of intentions due to the nature of the project and the centralization of the economy in state hands. Scholars like Trantidis and Cowen claim "Hayek offers a general warning aimed at discriminatory state interventions in economic life that undermine the competitive market process with coercive commands," a critique beyond just that of socialist economic management. One which they even applied to Trump and the rights reaction against neoliberal globalization (Trantidis & Cowen, 2020). Unfortunately, Hayek's critique, offered in "The Road to Serfdom," predominates much of the conversation when it comes to socialism and democracy today.

Along with socialism's supposed lack of democracy, socialism is presented in popular memory as a state of shared poverty and breadlines. The claim tends to be that socialism lacks the economic growth and development that capitalism provides. Some argue that forced equality,

which they associate with socialism, hampers economic growth. Others make selective analysis, ignorant of imperialism and history, to claim that socialism decreases annual growth by 2 percentage points (Bergh et al., 2025). The emphasis on GDP growth is a mistake, as Hickel and Sullivan have pointed out, within the modern day a continual increase of production according to the dictates of capital will cause major ecological problems, a new more focused approach that prioritizes human development is necessary, especially as most of the world can live a relatively decent life on a fraction of today's output (Hickel & Sullivan, 2024).

Socialism is incredible at controlled development and has produced superior results for human development in much of the developing world. Still, when we look at GDP outside of the selective comparisons made in the Bergh study, socialism doesn't seem to be the failure it's presupposed to have been. For countries in the Middle East the nominally socialist, nationalist, post-independence years saw both better human development and GDP growth in Iraq, Syria, and Egypt (Kadri, 2019). Under the motto "Unity, Freedom, Socialism", Libya enjoyed its highest GDP per capita. Today, the country's GDP per capita is less than it was in 1975 (World Bank, 2025). China enjoyed a relatively high growth rate before Mao's death and accelerated growth more than double that of the United States during the 70's (Long & Herrera, 2018). To say that a socialist orientation has inherent consequences on growth, making capitalism superior, is nonsensical at this point, as according to Hickel and Sullivan's work, it doesn't have to be the most consequential on our ability to lead good lives. Socialism's ability to develop countries will be further discussed in the section *Socialism, quality of life, and poverty*.

Extraordinarily questionable scholarship, like the black book of Communism, played a crucial role in the ideological war on alternatives. A study on its origins paints it as a "pan-european" project of anti-communist scholarship, put together with ideology in mind. The

Study points out its immense impact, even contributing to the creation of anti-communist legislation, movements, and ideology more broadly. The book revived the twin totalitarian analysis and equated communism with nazism, and right wing post communist governments, and the Sighet Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of Resistance helped push the Black book (Behr et al., 2020).

In fact, the capitalist base has molded in a dialectical relationship its superstructure, meaning not only are its political, religious, and social institutions built off its foundation and logic, but so is academia and the production and distribution of ideas. As Marx said, “The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.”. A system of awards, promotions, and punishments conditions scholarship towards a more capitalist accommodationist direction. Especially due to the funding of major capitalist foundations and the early influence of the capitalist state in the university. (Rockhill, 2025a)

In fact, many of the first Sovietologists were members of the OSS, the field largely came into existence during the Cold War and was shaped by the state and intelligence services' wants and desires. The Cold War was also an intellectual war (Larson, 2000). It is not that professors are paid lackeys or agents. But, since the well of intellectual production is poisoned, socialist thought is rejected as ideological, while the ideological works that are simply pro-capitalist are much easier to find, more widely promoted, and more significantly financed.

The suppression of communist and left professors during the Red Scare helped mold the intellectual environment. To quote one study on the radical left in education, “Communist teachers faced federal and state legislative and criminal investigations long before and well after McCarthy’s brief heyday: throughout the 1920s, ’30s, ’40s, and ’50s, the “Old Left” in education was the subject of surveillance, scrutiny, and blacklisting.” (Hunt, 2015). It was a time of loyalty oaths, imprisonment, and firing for communist professors. It was this environment in which the early scholarship on actually existing socialism was curated, and which acted as the gatekeepers for the next generation.

The purging of the anti-capitalist left was done under the guise of the protection of academic freedom (Hunt, 2015), but it has had the lasting impact of crippling the diversity of academic thought in the United States and marginalizing Marxism in the university. Michael Parenti, an important influence on my own intellectual trajectory, was one such scholar, removed even later, in the 70’s, for his politics. Despite the President, the Deans, the entire department, and the chairmen of the student association pushing for renewal, student protests in his support, he was fired over his political views (The New York Times Archives, 1971). The Policing continued much later than the 50’s. His book *Against Empire* speaks in polemic fashion of widespread and systemic difficulties for leftists in academia (Parenti, 1995).

Again, Professor Gabriel Rockhill’s book, “*who paid the pipers of western marxism*” shows how, with the backing of the capitalist ruling class and the Imperialist states, an intellectual world war was launched against actually existing socialism. He shows how the United States has created “the most powerful, far reaching, and centrally controlled cultural apparatus in the history of humanity, which it has imposed, as much as possible on the entire world through cultural imperialism” (Rockhill, 2025 pg 29). Even going as far as to promote

forms of Marxism critical of actually existing socialism, funding and providing the intellectual stage for a compatible left (Rockhill, 2025a).

From Adam Smith to the black book, this work aims to deal with and offer alternative interpretations and conclusions to the ones dominating discourse around socialism today. “The End of History and the Last Man” by Francis Fukuyama and the rhetoric of neoliberals like Marget Thatcher and, recently, the Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers (CEA) under President Barack Obama's has claimed a lack of alternatives to neoliberalism (Furman & Nelson, 2025). For those unfamiliar, Francis Fukuyama’s work made the declaration that people were done with ideological evolution as they had found the superior system of Western liberal democracy and capitalism, it come on the heels of the soviet collapse. Its time to challenge that assumption, we need an alternative.

The idea that free market capitalism represents all that is good, prosperity, human flourishing, innovation, and more. While socialism represents a disorganized disaster unable to satisfy the population's basic demands or account for their wants (Rothbard, 1973) is an all too common interpretation that must be challenged. In 1986, a study compared socialist and capitalist nations at equal levels of economic development. This meant the United States was not included in the study. They used World Bank data and came to the conclusion “*In 30 of 36 comparisons between countries at similar levels of economic development, socialist countries showed more favorable PQL outcomes*”(Cereseto et al., 1986).

The Quality of Life study included measures that matter to people beyond the money in shareholders' pockets or the profit corporations can accumulate at their expense. They included things like Literacy, daily per capita calorie supply, physicians and nurses per population, and all sorts of mortality and death rates, along with educational enrollment, contradicting the popular

narrative crafted by focusing on selective historical moments to paint caricatures of Socialism (Cereseto et al., 1986).

Another study by Sullivan & Hickel (2022), on Capitalism and extreme poverty since the 16th century, is predicated on world systems theory along with the theory of unequal exchange. This historical and theoretical view says capitalism is conditioned by a constant need for growth and that, through a historical contingent process, core regions monopolize the global production and exchange process to their benefit. As a result of this process, unequal exchange arises in which the cost of labor inputs and resources of countries outside the core are cheapened, and value is transferred to the core. The Study uses data on real wages, height, and morality to argue that extreme poverty was not the common lot of much of humanity before capitalism but after, and that improvements coincide with the rise of anti-colonial and socialist political movements (*Sullivan & Hickel, 2022*). Clearly, the conventional narrative has its blind spots and deserves to be further challenged.

A dialectical and historical materialist analysis encourages us to contextualize the two socio-economic systems being compared within their national and historical development and within the global system of production and exchange, complementing the selected method. DHM engages with states' material realities while allowing us to understand their positions within the global capitalist system, thereby enabling more accurate comparisons. Comparisons that don't remove the historical background, both global and national, of its subjects to compare a socialist experiment in the periphery to a capitalist State in the imperial core, as is often done. Many of the "poorest" countries on the planet are not truly poor but are over-exploited, an underacknowledged failure of our global economic system.

As Marx said in *Capital*, vol 1, the “Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole (*Marx 1867*). Too many have ignored the global hierarchy within the international division of labor caused by capitalist imperialism; This study's methods aim to address this methodological gap. The core countries, in large part, only exist as they do today due to the accumulation of misery in their opposite poles (Sullivan & Hickel, 2022), the history of slavery, colonialism and neocolonialism has ensured their subordinate position within the international division of labor, and a dialectic of development and underdevelopment described by Walter Rodney in “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.”(*Rodney et al. 2018*).

Dialectical and historical materialism (DHM) is the guide to analysis and a tool that previous scholars used to reach their conclusions. DHM may be best explained by breaking it into its components. Dialectics understands things “in their essential connection, concatenation, motion, origin and ending” (Engels 1880), understanding that the world is not static, cyclical, or unchanging but evolving through a process of contradictions. It emphasises the need for many-sided forms of knowledge to understand a complex, changing social totality, warning against viewing things in static isolation. Historical Materialism can be best described as Materialism applied *historically*, in order to understand the dialectical process of societal transformation. materialism says the institutions, relations, and ideas of society are conditioned upon how said society provides for its material needs, not on abstract ideas, as Marx put it, “neither legal nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so called general development of the human mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life” (Marx, 1859). Engles also makes the core of the tradition clear “from this point of view, the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be

sought, not in men's brains, not in men's better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch. (Engels 1880)".

The Dialectical and Historical materialist analysis of Arghiri Emmanuel is crucial to recognizing a core feature of the Global economy that is almost never taken into account during these comparisons. The historically contingent legacy of unequal exchange between the core capitalist economies is shaped by the division of the world via European colonial powers during capitalism's birth (Emmanuel, 1972). Despite the narrative that colonial forms of extraction ended with the end of more blatant colonialism, the reality we went over before is that this simply isn't true. European capitalism divided the world into a center and a periphery within a single world system; neocolonialism replaced the old. European Capitalism's primitive accumulation, via slavery, extermination, colonialism, and destruction of the commons, paved the way for a world system shaped in its image (Emmanuel, 1972).

A study using environmental input-output data and footprint analysis to calculate the net appropriation from the South in terms of embodied resources and labour over the period 1990 to 2015 is revealing in terms of the scale of unequal exchange. Unequal exchange from these neo-colonial economies in the global south is a "major driver of underdevelopment and global inequality"(Sullivan & Hickel, 2022), with the losses for the global south outpacing aid by 30 times, a drain of almost 10 trillion per year (Sullivan & Hickel, 2022). Many of the "poorest" countries on the planet are not truly poor but are over-exploited, an underacknowledged failure of our global economic system. It is also within these "over-exploited" nations where socialism has begun to develop as a counter to said exploitation, while the capitalist core has reaped the benefits.

Within this framework, as posited by Samir Amin in *Unequal Development: An Essay on the Social Formations of Peripheral Capitalism* (1976), capitalism is best understood as a world system, with a single global division of labor, characterized by uneven development shaped by the history of primitive accumulation and European colonialism, where the center benefits at the expense of the periphery. Within this system, socialist experiments have developed at the margins with opposition from the capitalist center for attempts to alter this relationship. As Amin said, “there are not two world markets, the capitalist and socialist, but only one, the capitalist world market, in which Eastern Europe participates marginally” (Amin, 1976, P 26). From this point of view, a country's position in the international division of labor, its level of development, and its economic system play significant roles in determining social life and political life. This knowledge and theoretical framework will inform comparisons and the conclusions drawn from them.

Hypothesis

This work's hypothesis is that socialism has produced better results in terms of individual and national development than capitalism in the periphery of the global economy, as measured by the following areas: 1) Physical quality of life and poverty, 2) Workplace governance & democracy 3) Imperialism and national Liberation.

Methods, data & guiding theory

This research will rely on historical comparative methods and a litany of evidence. Comparing socialist and capitalist countries based on their historical position within the global world system. The data compared will be both quantitative and qualitative, as simply looking at numbers often fails to capture the complex social totality. The data collection includes peer-reviewed studies, articles, and many works of nonfiction. The bulk of the data will be

qualitative, with some quantitative measures and comparisons, primarily sourced from the World Bank and the World Health Organization, specifically the Physical Quality of Life and poverty section. The Dialectical and historical materialist framework of world systems theory and unequal exchange developed by Arghiri Emmanuel and Samir Amin mentioned above will be used to enhance my understanding of a complex social totality, avoiding the ideological pitfalls of the dominant Western liberal point of view, in which poor great man history is dominant; and class, the wider economic, historical, and political situation, including the ravages of colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism on socialist development are muted.

The work is best described as a comparative analysis with comparative historical methods. These methods examine and compare developments over time to assess how similar cases may differ in important ways. Prior work on the subject, such as Hill (2024), which compares the physical quality of life of socialist and capitalist countries, also informed my case selection. The countries this work references as “socialist” experiments guided by some interruption of Marxism are China, Cuba, and Vietnam, which are the primary cases focused on for this study. As has been done in other literature, with the aim of studying socialism, comparisons to the capitalist core of the United States, Canada, and Western Europe will generally be excluded from comparison (when these countries are included, it is often to help conceptualize the scale of what has been achieved in the periphery). The reasons have been gone over above, and scholars such as Hill agree: “All historical socialist countries have been nations coming from semi-feudal, colonial, or postcolonial backgrounds, and comparing them to nations with centuries of industrial development would skew the results” (Hill, 2024). A world-systems analysis that accounts for unequal exchange and the dialectical relationship between core

development and periphery underdevelopment is necessary to make sense of the socialist experience beyond the narrative of failure.

The Capitalist countries selected for comparison in this study are Low-and Middle-Income Countries outside of the capitalist core. The history, geography, and prior roles in the international division of labor are vital factors in the selection of comparisons. For example, China and India will often be compared. India has followed an overall capitalist development path and is often referred to as the largest democracy on earth. China has followed a Socialist model of development since the Mao era. Both are some of the most populous countries on earth, residing in Asia, with India gaining independence from colonial rule only two years before China's revolution, allowing for a similar starting point.

Another comparison this study is looking to address is Cuba compared to the Philippines, another nation that escaped Spanish colonialism, only to be swept up by the United States, and eventually become independent. There are other nations that came out of the Spanish-American War, but the Philippines and Cuba were the only two to enjoy full independence. Due to their similar histories and prior positions in the international division of labor, world systems theorists have already produced worthwhile insights that I plan on expanding upon and bringing into the modern day. The last of these core comparisons, Vietnam, will also mostly be compared to Indonesia, both powerhouses of growth regionally and export economies. These comparisons, motivated by an analysis of capitalism as a world system and an acknowledgement of unequal exchange, will make up the backbone of my analysis. It's also worthwhile to improve our understanding of socialism by comparing it to what came before and after, as no society has a one-to-one exact copy; this will be done at various points, taking a background position to the core comparison framework.

This project is, in short, a comparative analysis of socialism and capitalism. The Independent variable is the political and economic system, with countries as the unit of analysis. The dependent variables are physical quality of life, democracy/workplace governance, and national liberation. Within this work will be diving into history, politics, and economics to create a general comparison between capitalism and socialism in the prior areas. These sections will take the form of a critical review of existing literature and sources, with the above-mentioned theoretical frameworks in mind. But first, it's important to have some conception of what is meant by actually existing socialism, a disputed term in itself. What counts as socialist? This is operationalized in the section "An understanding of socialism". Along with this, it's important to justify what cases, and why, as will be done below.

case selection & areas of comparison, limitations, & bias

Here, time will be spent on why I rejected other common ways of making this comparison, as there are a number of ways to compare general concepts such as socialism and capitalism. One can retreat into the ideal and compare the theoretical underpinnings of each socio-economic system, illuminating little about the differences in reality. One may compare the former soviet states to their current capitalist forms, as is the common reflex for most. This method creates a disadvantage for a socialism stuck in history compared to modern capitalism with all the technological benefits and modern quality of life improvements that have come since the fall of the soviet bloc. It has the flaw of limiting socialism to the past, while comparing it to a capitalist society decades in the future. These comparisons also tend to have a flaw of a focus on a one rough transitional period from one socio-economic system to another.

Another common comparison is East Germany vs West Germany or North Korea vs South Korea, countries split in half between capitalist and socialist systems. For East and West

Germany, the economic gap persists today regardless of the economic system (Mertens & Mueller, 2022). After World War II, the Soviets wanted a Germany that wouldn't rise to challenge it again, while the United States preferred a Germany strong enough to assume a position in global trade. West Germany was pursued as part of the United States Cold War attempt at containment and integrated on different grounds into the international system than the isolated East. To be frank, the East and West were not split apart as equals; treating them as equals would be wrong. Researchers from the University of Warwick claim the comparisons between East and West Germany should be avoided for the three main reasons: "First, the later border is already visible in many socio-economic characteristics in pre-World War II data. Second, World War II and the subsequent occupying forces affected East and West differently. Third, a selective fifth of the population fled from East to West Germany before the building of the Wall in 1961." (Becker et al., 2020). The study provides a convincing case as to why we should be cautious of comparisons between these split countries and the conclusions drawn from them.

As for a comparison between North and South Korea, there is the advantage of existing today, but each was still integrated into the global system differently. South Korea became a key piece of American Cold War strategy, the American-sponsored governments crushed the left, and billions of dollars of aid flowed into the south from the global hegemon (Lee, 2014). South Korea became one of the first nations that the United States helped create a Free Trade Zone within. South Korea stood as an important symbol in the fight against socialism and received special treatment. During the 1950's, after the devastating war, South Korea would be given crucial aid, which the North was isolated from. As we can see for the south, "The total assistance amount accounted for about 74 percent of total government revenues, and for 85 percent of total

imports during 1953-61.” (Lee, 2014), the north did not have such an opportunity to develop in this way. Instead, the north experienced brutal sanctions, while the south enjoyed state-led development with 5-year plans (SaKong & Koh, 2010), so long as they remained a bastion against communism.

To quote a report published by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights report “the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is one of the most sanctioned countries in the world, having been subject to sanctions since its foundation in 1948.” (NODUTDOL, 2021). The amount of international aid received in comparison to the south was also negligible, as the capitalist core states isolated it internationally. Knowing this, it is difficult to make a comparison between the countries as an accurate comparison of socialism and capitalism. The same report points out “These sanctions affect the nations ability to feed its population as the same report clearly states Contrary to popular narratives that claim North Korea’s government is intentionally withholding food from its population, the UN Resident Coordinator is quite clear that “food insecurity in the country is driven by a lack of access to modern agricultural equipment and techniques; and is amplified by recurrent natural disasters and the impacts of climate change.” In fact, North Korea has a public food distribution system, but is unable to access the necessary agricultural imports from the world market.”(NODUTDOL, 2021) .

It is biased to compare a form of unusual socialism under the most intense of sieges, subject to the modern equivalent of a medieval siege attempting to starve it out, with few allies, to South Korea, a country well integrated with the imperial core due to its Cold War history. This would tell us little about socialism as it has manifested in the majority of countries that currently claim the label. It is additionally worth noting that South Korea, although capitalist, did not

develop according to the modern capitalist development dogma of free trade and open markets exclusively, and was allowed this due to its strategic position.

Another possible selection of cases was long-lasting socialist states and capitalist states in the core. This means countries like China, Vietnam, Laos, and Cuba against the likes of the USA, France, Germany, and the UK. This means comparing the beneficiaries of the historical process upon which unequal exchange is dependent to the victims of said process. This comparison of colonizer to colonized, exploiting nation to exploited nations (in the case of France and Vietnam, literally), as if they started on an equal playing field, is on its face nonsensical. Blanket empirical comparisons, which fail to take into account the historical, economic, and political context of countries, should be rejected outright. The common methods and comparisons pushed forward by dominant ideology have produced incredibly reductive literature and conclusions about socialism, which have contributed to the narrative of failure.

While my research method may not amount to a definitive and rigorous test of socialism's supposed failure vs capitalism. The complexity of the topic and the immense time frame covered make this difficult. The presented evidence does allow for comparative analysis between capitalist and socialist countries that deserves consideration, challenging dominant orthodoxy, addressing some of the largest criticisms, and hopefully encouraging others to do the same. This work aims to counter some of the pitfalls of dominant ideology, which doesn't mean it doesn't have pitfalls itself. We must study socialist experiments if we wish to build a workable one ourselves. Theory builds on practice, and if we are unable to soberly address the existing socialist practice of the past century and today, we won't be able to build a future that contends with reality.

An Understanding of Socialism

The Core differences between the capitalist states and actually existing socialist states as currently organized are as follows:

- Political & economic leadership of a communist party
- significant public ownership, especially that of the commanding heights of the economy
- Land ownership by the state/people
- Despite markets, long planning remains a core feature
- Proclaimed socialist aspirations and Marxism as the legitimizing ideology of the state

An otherwise Capitalist formation with some nationalization and economic planning would not be counted as socialist, and social democrats are not socialist. If the existing state formations do not meet the prior criteria, they could be considered capitalist. Some may take issue with this definition of socialism; an attempt to address this primitively exists in the section below.

It's been some time since Marx and Engels developed scientific socialism, better known as Marxism. The most significant difference between this and previous, more idealist conceptions of Socialism was written about by Engels in *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*, this being the method of dialectical and historical materialism. Marxist countries today use this method of analysis to develop communist societies, which are traditionally understood as moneyless, classless, and stateless. These are indeed the end goals of the communist movement. But if one limits their understanding of socialist countries to those that have achieved this vision, imposing it on a reality not yet fit, one has no examples of a socialist/communist country, and may even find the statement an oxymoron. Instead, Marxist/socialist experiments are best understood as countries that use historical and dialectical materialist analysis to guide their

development towards a communist future, or even more simply as countries attempting the transition away from a capitalist mode of production.

Breaking with a purist understanding of Marxism is something I find difficult for Western and new communists who live in developed capitalist countries, where capitalism has, in large part, outlived its limited usefulness and its ugly side has been thoroughly exposed. But unfortunately, *“new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions for their existence have matured within the framework of the old society.”* (Marx, 1859). To allow Marx’s own words clearly hammer home my point a few more times *“what we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges”* (Marx, 1891). This last quote gets at my point clearly, *“Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things.”* (Marx, 1845). These quotes, separated by decades, show a consistent understanding that socialism/communism was to be born out of the contradictions of the old system in a long historical process. This is my understanding of socialism, socialism as a historical process which builds an alternative to the current capitalist system out of the contradictions of the old, not via some utopian break into a world pre-described by some political scripture, seems to have been lost. For this reason, what fits into my understanding of socialism may be considered somewhat loose, as all are in reality attempts to transition to socialism, not socialism on its own terms. They have all come about on different terms set by material reality within a global capitalist system based on unequal exchange.

Unfortunately, many of my fellow Marxists have gotten used to a checklist version of analysis, overlooking real movements towards socialism in a way that I feel delegitimizes the historical movement towards a new mode of production happening before our eyes. Walter Rodney, during his study of the African continent, made clear that you don't simply make a leap all at once from one mode of production to another, but that there is a process of transition (Rodney, 2018). Left and academic Marxist criticism of actually existing socialism often doesn't seem to account for this, from the individual betrayal narrative reminiscent of great man history to more particular issues with them not yet achieving specific aspects of Marx's complete vision, with examples such as commodity production often brought up.

For the prior reason, many on the left have heard the claim that socialist countries were, in actuality, state capitalist. For this accusation, I'd like to point towards the work of Marxist economist Ali Kadri: "The very notion of state capitalism, however, can be simplistic or a sort of one-size-fits-all concept. It is unlikely that any state in transition out of capitalism can escape the totality of capital as a social relationship. The abolition of capital as a social relationship under state ownership of national resources, although possible (if only on account of structural shifts in history), is unlikely to occur precipitously and in a single developing country, particularly if the country in question is subjected to imperialist aggression. This is so even if civil liberties and working-class participation in the political process are freed from state control. Imperialist assaults aimed at snuffing out successful socialist models and the unevenness inherent in capitalism would necessitate a calculus of redistribution under which surplus value would still be generated and unequally allocated in the early phases of socialisation. Equalisation payments between sectors or fast-paced industrialisation would imply distorted surplus value distribution even under pristine worker democracy climates. Building security under early socialism,

redressing unequal development and maldistribution would also entail exploitation, regimentation, and protracted aspects of repression pertaining to a capitalist labour process. These symptoms of early socialism would emerge all the more so in small developing formations whose aim is to buttress security and industrialise simultaneously. An ideal state in which working-class consciousness is based on public property that society internalises as full social responsibility is a historically contingent process that is dependent upon several parameters...”(Ali Kadri, 2019).

Many Marxists make the mistake of only supporting the oppressed when they are losing and waging their revolutionary struggles. They have an anarchistic aversion to a socialist country building up power and the state in a world of capitalist encirclement and hostility, in part due to a messianic expectation that after the revolution, there will be not just a striving towards a brighter socialist future free from imperialist domination but a complete and utter break from all things old. Marxist must point out, socialist society does not get the pleasure of developing on its own from abstract thought but from the remnants of the old society and the current material conditions, to think one can will a socialist society into existence, as many “Marxists” seem to think, is a rejection of the historical materialist method and ignores the need for these countries to deal with imperialism and colonial legacies, overcoming uneven development and the many contradictions on the path to socialism/communism.

Marx was clear that the emergence of socialism would not look as these purists wish, as it would need to develop out of the material reality we are currently faced with. As Marx said, *“Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the*

living.” (Marx, 1852). The same applies to entire nations; for this reason, the path of each to socialism will look different depending on its own national circumstances.

The socialist nations today, despite many and large differences, share some key characteristics that make them fundamentally different from capitalist nations. A capitalist nation may enjoy one or even a few of these features, although unlikely, but taken as a whole, they constitute the core of socialist systems, and with them in play, they cease to be a capitalist state:

- Political & economic leadership of a communist party
- significant public ownership, especially that of the commanding heights of the economy
- Land ownership by the state/people
- Despite markets, Planning remains a core feature
- Proclaimed socialist aspirations and Marxism as the legitimizing ideology of the state

Western Marxists of the imperial core have lost a proper analysis of imperialism, denying the existence of actually existing socialism with a global capitalism no longer tethered to Western imperialism, falsely taking center stage. The socialist projects in the global south aren't considered “real” socialism to this group, capitalism is everywhere, and globalization obfuscates imperialism. Many, as a result, support Western policies and groups that undermine socialism in the real world and tend to falsely see Nordic countries as the closest thing to socialism (Ness, 2024). This form of Marxism tends to be extremely anti-actually existing socialism, disconnecting itself from Marxism's historical practice for the sake of purity and careerism, retreating into reformist movements in the imperial core. The tendency was encouraged by the promotion of a compatible left via the joint efforts of academic gatekeepers, capitalist funding foundations, the state, and a system of rewards and punishments (Rockhill, 2025a).

This helped solidify the aforementioned view that actually existing socialism was a complete failure. To the point where socialism didn't even exist in the real world, it had failed at birth, a stillborn idea that couldn't bring itself to life. Those associated with these compatible Left circles were/are given prominent stages, uplift, and audiences generally had to agree on one thing: being anti-actually existing socialism. Many in the Frankfurt school of critical theory are associated with this compatible left, like Michel Foucault, widely promoted in universities today as a radical anti-establishment scholar who claimed "*Everything* that this socialist tradition has produced in history is to be condemned." (Rockhill, 2021), degrading the real alternatives to the establishment he was so famous for criticizing. Some of the largest "Marxist" figures, such as Slavoj Zizek, make up this compatible left today.

It is time to remind people that, contrary to popular belief, Socialism is more than its worst moments. It is also time for us "Western" Marxists, most of whom have lived comparatively privileged lives in the imperial core based on the exploitation of other nations, to wake up to the achievements of past and current socialist experiments in the USSR, China, Vietnam, Cuba, and more. It is time to point out that the working class & oppressed people of these countries did not revolt in vain, that revolution, despite everything, is worth it. It's time to stop allowing social democrats to ask for a bigger piece of the imperialist pie. The path towards Socialism is a long road, and that is exactly why we can't afford to wait. For the sake of contributing to a new path for a modern socialism that learns from the past, instead of completely rejecting it, it is time to compare capitalism and actually existing socialism in an honest fashion.

Results/Discussion

The core *Question* this work aims to answer is "*Has socialism been the failure, popular consciousness deems it to be?*". The hypothesis was that socialism has produced better results in

terms of individual and national development in the periphery of the world system as measured by the following areas: 1) Physical quality of life and poverty, 2) Workplace governance & democracy, 3) Imperialism and national Liberation. For each area, the results of the study have been supportive of socialism's superior performance in the periphery.

The results section is divided into three subsections, each meant to compare socialism and capitalism within one of the aforementioned areas meant to measure individual and national development. Each subsection includes comparisons that mostly rely on qualitative data, with a slight exception to the section on physical quality of life and poverty, which includes quantitative comparisons and a chart to better conceptualize. The comparisons tend to have three elements: first, the concept being compared is conceptualized; second, a general comparison of actually existing socialism and capitalism in the area is conducted to allow for a fuller picture; then, the results of specific core comparisons are brought into focus. The second and third elements may have orders reversed in some sections for increased understanding. The Discussion will happen alongside the results in order to more comprehensively understand the argument being made.

Socialism, quality of life, and poverty

To seriously damage false narratives regarding socialism in comparison to capitalism, one only needs to look towards studies of the PQL (*physical quality of life*) under past socialist governments. A 1986 study using World Bank data to compare socialist and capitalist nations at equal levels of economic development said, "*In 30 of 36 comparisons between countries at similar levels of economic development, socialist countries showed more favorable PQL outcomes*" (Cereseto et al., 1986). Quality of Life studies include measures that matter to people beyond the money in shareholders' pockets or the profit corporations can accumulate at their expense. They include things like Literacy, a skill those reading this shouldn't take for granted.

daily per capita calorie supply, contradicting the popular narrative crafted by focusing on selective historical moments to paint caricatures of Socialism, physicians and nurses per population, and all sorts of morality and death rates, along with educational enrollment (Cereseto et al., 1986).

Another study in 1992 confirms similar conclusions:

*“socialism and socialist forces have been, for the most part, better able to improve health conditions than have capitalism and capitalist forces. In the **underdeveloped world**, socialist forces and regimes have, more frequently than not, improved health and social indicators better than capitalist forces and regimes, and in the developed world, countries with strong socialist forces have been better able to improve health conditions than those countries lacking or with weak socialist forces.”*(Navarro, 1992)

Here it's spelled out rather bluntly: Contrary to what many believe, Socialism has improved Physical quality of life outcomes better than capitalism, especially for countries outside the imperial core. The countries most exploited within the capitalist world system. The idea that free market capitalism represents all that is good, prosperity, human flourishing, growth, and more. While socialism represents a disorganized disaster unable to satisfy the population's basic demands or account for their wants as formulated by Von Mises (Rothbard, 1973), this quite frankly doesn't seem very true or to be borne out by the reality of socialism in practice. For the many who have conflated capitalism with a better physical quality of life, forgetting about the majority of capitalist nations in the periphery, it must come as a shock. According to existing studies, capitalism has been unable to raise the standard of living for most of the world in the same way as socialist states.

We also don't have to rely on studies before the collapse of the soviet bloc to acknowledge socialism's comparatively positive impact on PQL. A study conducted in 2024 said, "*this information does confirm that socialism has a significant and positive impact on physical quality of life,*". It also says, "*the newest data available for physical quality of life in the countries researched was 2008, While this shows that socialism continued to have an effect on physical quality of life after the fall of the socialist bloc in the early 1990s, the world has changed a lot since 2008*"(Hill , 2024). The success of socialism even after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc is not something to brush off, especially for countries like Cuba, which lost their most valuable trading partners and significant economic assistance.

Hill (2024) also mentions the importance of Economic Development on PQL outcomes, but economic development and socialism are not in opposition. Sociologist Manuel Castells points out that for the majority of the Soviet Union's lifespan, the pace of growth and industrialisation was faster than that of capitalist economies (*Lebedenko, 2024*). The same can be said for that of socialism in the Arab world, particularly that of Iraq, Syria, and Egypt during 1950-1980 (*Kadri, 2019*), along with China under Mao, and even more so since opening up(*Gao, 2008*). Socialism does not inherently mean deficient growth and development, but growth and development channeled and aimed towards social and political developments instead of constant accumulation.

Especially for those who are familiar with the popular but mistaken sentiment that Capitalism has massively reduced poverty globally, this failure must be hard to accept. But as pointed out in a study by Dylan Sullivan and Jason Hickel, "The common notion that extreme poverty is the "natural" condition of humanity and only declined with the rise of capitalism rests on income data that do not adequately capture access to essential goods." (Sullivan & Hickel,

2022). According to this same study before the rise of Capitalism extreme poverty was a rarity resulting from conditions of severe social and economic dislocation such as colonialism, and that the rise of Capitalism is associated with a “decline in wages to below subsistence, a deterioration in human stature, and an upturn in premature mortality.” (Sullivan & Hickel, 2022) with wages and heights still having not recovered in parts of South Asia, sub-Saharan-Africa and Latin America. Sullivan and Hickel go on to state that significant improvements have only been made in some regions since the 20th century, coinciding with the rise of anti-colonial and socialist groups.

Capitalism could not break the cycle of underdevelopment in China, nor had it in any of the other countries which choose to embark on their own socialist path; they were integrated into global capitalism as colonized/semi-colonized periphery nations in a subordinate position to the imperialist core within the global economy. Their development path was blocked by global capitalism; socialism offered the way out, as seen by its more frequent success in the underdeveloped world. Socialist experiments in the present are stuck within a hostile global capitalist system whose walls are closing in and have been exclusively in the underdeveloped part of the world. All have made varying concessions to capital on their path to socialism to develop; you must take some steps back to advance further on solid ground. Some, because of this, have tried to credit capitalism with the success stories of socialist states. But again, maintaining a socialist direction and Economic core becomes a necessity for this development to take place, as normal integration into capitalism makes development quite the hurdle. As China’s Xi says, “Our history has demonstrated that only socialism was able to rescue China, and only socialism with Chinese characteristics was able to develop China.” (Jinping & Day, 2022).

When we recognize China for what it is, a Socialist state and experiment, the argument that Capitalism has offered some amazing reduction in poverty becomes questionable, even if you take the World Bank poverty line at face value, which the prior study gives us plenty of reasons not to. Socialism can claim significant credit. According to World Bank Data, around 75% of global poverty alleviation has come from China. The nation was responsible for close to $\frac{3}{4}$ of global poverty reduction, lifting out of poverty, a larger population than Latin America, thanks to targeted efforts. (World Bank Group, 2023). China is a country that, despite the opening up and reforms, still attempts to adapt Marxism-Leninism to its material conditions today. Firmly within what this work considers a socialist experiment. This would make Socialism far superior to capitalism in terms of poverty alleviation. In fact, Vietnam and China represent some of the best countries in the world when it comes to poverty alleviation efforts (Banik & Hansen, 2016). China, Laos, and Vietnam also represent countries within the top ten fastest-growing human development indexes between 1990 and 2015 (Hansen, 2021). When it comes to eliminating poverty and ensuring development, socialism seems to be relatively more successful than the capitalist states in the periphery.

The Reform and Opening Up market reforms, contrary to popular belief, actually caused a brief but sharp rise in poverty during the wild 90s, with large percentages of Chinese people losing access to basic needs provided by the old, more tightly planned economy prior to opening up (Sullivan et al., 2023). China as a whole became richer in the end, but this alone did not address poverty, with income inequality having a major impact. Poverty in China was mostly dealt with through the use of targeted poverty programs that ensured growth was channeled effectively, not via introduction of the market alone, like many who would like to see China as capitalist prefer to say. In 2013, the “Chinese government spent 1.6 trillion yuan (US\$246

billion) to build 1.1 million kilometres of rural roads, bring internet access to 98 percent of the country's poor villages, renovate homes for 25.68 million people, and built new homes for 9,6 million others". Targeted Poverty alleviation in China wasn't done by the markets but via their unique economic model and commitment to Marxism (*Serve the people*, 2021).

China's poverty alleviation program, despite the flaws of market socialism, is unlike that seen or possible in any developing capitalist nation. There is a reason the overwhelming majority of poverty reduction globally came from China, whilst regions where shock therapy and neoliberalism were enforced by organizations like USAID, such as Latin America and Eastern Europe, saw an economy not subject to the whims of anything but capital accumulation and private enterprise (Ruckebusch, 2024). When an abundance of studies come to similar conclusions, it becomes hard to deny that socialism is better for the physical quality of life of people, at ensuring a level of minimum decency for as much of the population as possible.

It has been shown repeatedly that socialism has the ability to provide PQL benefits to society as a whole in a way capitalism can't, despite its opportunity for individual advancement. I quoted the academic literature which is important, but it is in many ways obvious that socialist states, which focus on offering health, schooling, housing, and some form of collective ownership, would enjoy more positive PQL outcomes and a greater emphasis on poverty alleviation than those whose systems proudly proclaim a focus on private accumulation for private gain. Marxism specifically and socialism more generally offers a vision for collective improvement that Liberalism doesn't substituting it instead for individual gain.

The core capitalist countries, in large part, only exist as they do today due to the accumulation of misery in their opposite poles (Hickel et al., 2022), ensuring their subordinate position within the international division of labor, and a dialectic of development and

underdevelopment described by Walter Rodney in “How Europe Underdeveloped Africa.” (*Rodney et al. 2018*). Fundamental to the modern divide between countries is “Unequal exchange,” conditioned by a historical process where rich countries and Multinational corporations use their political, military, and economic supremacy to cheapen the prices of resources and labor in the global south, enabling super profits through trade. This drain from the Global South is worth over \$10 trillion per year, outstripping aid by thirty times. Recently, by using the global south for cheap industrial production, the core is also able to pass off environmental impacts to the global South. The imperial core's historically contingent position in the International Division of Labor allows it this advantage. (Hickel et al., 2022). This is an advantage that states turned to socialism to overcome.

For all the socialist states' flaws, there exists a large amount of studies, literature, and data that run contrary to the dominant ideological representation of these states as impoverished and backwards in terms of people's living standards. These states, generally speaking, dramatically improved the quality of life. During the Mao era, traditionally conceived of as disastrous within the United States, China saw life expectancy growth, which “ranks as among the most rapid sustained increases in documented global history” (Babiarz et al., 2015). This is in large part due to public health initiatives like bare-foot doctors and educational attainment (Babiarz et al., 2015). Let us compare this with India, research taking advantage of their similar starting points in the late 1940s, and an already existing comparison from the 90s, painting a telling picture: India's life expectancy was about a decade less, the under-five mortality rate 3x worse, and literacy rate 23% lower at 43%. The study also notes this surge ahead had mostly taken place prior to the reform and opening up in 1979, during the Mao era (Drèze & Sen, 1991).

Even more shocking is the analysis from Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen that claims that his findings imply: “ that every eight years or so more people die in India because of its higher regular death rate than died in China in the gigantic famine of 1958–61. India seems to manage to fill its cupboard with more skeletons every eight years than China put there in its years of shame” (Drèze & Sen, 1991). The comparison between China and India is one between two countries on the periphery, one that ended its famines after experiencing one of the world's worst, another that suffered continuously from systemic deprivation within a world system it failed to alter its position within. The socialist path, despite its tragedies like the Great Leap Forward, saw better morality, health, and education indicators. Ironically, after the reform and open-up, death rates within China increased, although they remained superior to India’s thanks to the socialist foundation (Drèze & Sen, 1991). It's worth noting that going into the 1960s, China’s life expectancy was 40, behind India’s 46, and by 1962, India hadn't moved, while China was 52 years (World Bank, 2026).

Today, a comparison between India and China still reveals a gap in favor of the socialist nation. Life expectancy places China 6 years ahead, and if we listen to the state media's recent proclamations, 7 years (World Bank, 2025). China has also outpaced India in poverty reduction according to world bank data (World Bank, 2026), even being comparing positively to countries in the capitalist core in this regard as one journalist noted “Per head, the US’s economic output is six times China’s, and yet, inexplicably, there seem to be more abjectly poor Americans than Chinese.” (Porter, 2025). While China’s under-five mortality rate is better than the United States at 6.19, India’s is no longer just 3x as high but over 4x as high. India’s infant mortality rate is also 4x higher than China’s (UN Inter-agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation, 2026). China enjoys a higher literacy rate, almost double the secondary education enrollment rate, and a

constantly increasing investment in education. Comparing China and India on the Zero Hunger goals of the UN is even more revealing. The prevalence of malnutrition in India is 4X that of China, 35% of Children under 6 experience stunted growth compared to China's 4.8%. China also has a higher percentage of the population with access to basic sanitation services. In terms of Physicians per 1000 people, China enjoys 3.1 to India's .7, the discrepancy in normal measures of physical quality of life between the two countries remains large. China's socialist path seems to have been significantly better than the capitalist development path followed by India in terms of Physical quality of life measures like education, nutrition, mortality statistics, and poverty. It is time to move on to the next core comparison.

Socialist Cuba, and the other nation that escaped Spanish colonialism, only for the United States to attempt to, and largely succeed at, pulling them into its orbit. This nation is the Capitalist Philippines. The only two with full independence today from the Spanish-American War are Cuba and the Philippines, one socialist, one capitalist. World-system theorists have already compared Cuba and the Philippines. Brun and Elling (1987) concluded from their own study: "The last 25 years of socialist-oriented development in Cuba reversed the negative effects of the previous market economy by providing improved social and health services. Supportive conditions for the PHC approach in Cuba have resulted in the high-level health status of the people. In contrast, poverty, gross social and economic inequities, high prevalence of infectious disease, and inaccessible, inadequate, and uncoordinated health services persist in the Philippines after some 85 years of capitalist development."(Brun and Elling, 1987). Academics have recently pointed to Cuba as a possible health care example for the Philippines to follow (San Juan, 2021). Not only that, Keck and Reed (2012), pointed out that the Cuban health care system is a relative success compared to even advanced capitalist nations in the imperial core like the United States,

suggesting they may have something to learn from Cuba as well. Some have described Cuba as a Third World country with First World indicators. When comparing Cuba to Denmark's (a high income capitalist social democracy and part of the western european core) morality trends from, 1955-2020, it becomes clear the revolutionary government in Cuba quickly close the gap in terms of the healthcare and providing basic needs for citizens, truly proving itself country with first world social indicators capable of being reasonably compared to the sandivian social democracies(Brønnum-Hansen et al., 2023).

Cuba continually performs and is held to such high expectations that it is more often not compared to its peers but to developed capitalist nations within the core. As Caswell (2017) in a comparison of Cuba's education system to the United States points out, Cuba has a higher literacy rate and primary school graduation rate than the United States, but a lower proportion of graduates from secondary school. In a 1997, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) gave math and language tests to third and fourth graders. Cuba's lowest-income schools outperformed middle and high-income schools in neighboring countries. In 2007, UNESCO performed a similar test, but this time with third and sixth graders, 10 years later, and Cuban schools still outperformed the other countries. These tests include the likes of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Panama, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Costa Rica, and Uruguay (Carnoy, 2012). Although the Philippines has only been in modern UNESCO studies, it performs worse than global averages, ranking among the lowest (Juan, 2019), meaning its educational standards are far below those of Cuba's. The Philippines is worse on all education figures shown within figure 1.1 than Cuba, as well as all with sufficient data for Figure 1.2. The Philippines gained its independence in 1946, and Cuba in 1902. But Cuba still enjoyed the position of a colonized nation through the Platt agreement, where the U.S dictated the terms of

the nation's independence stating “the government of Cuba consents that the United States may exercise the right to intervene for the preservation of Cuban independence, the maintenance of a government adequate for the protection of life, property, and individual liberty,(National Archives and Records Administration, 2026) ” the agreement included special military and commerce rights. It took the 1959 Cuban revolution to break this status quo of foreign domination. Despite formal independence, the Philippines remained a neocolonial entity closely tied to the United States after 1946. Cuba’s life expectancy was higher than that of the Philippines. By the second year of the revolution, the year World Bank data on the two countries began being recorded. The gap has only expanded, from 4 to 8 years, favoring Socialist Cuba. It's worth noting that Cuba beat the Philippines in all 11 measures of quality of life shown later in Figure 1.1.

As for Indonesia and Vietnam being key manufacturing hubs for Southeast Asia, experiencing positive growth isn't all they have in common. Both share a history of brutal colonial occupation, one by the Dutch, the other by the French. Both countries experienced violent breaks with the colonial order, yet their decolonialization processes went differently. Vietnam fought a bloody war till then end against France, then america, while Indonesia would negotiate with the Dutch. While foreign dominance of Vietnam had ended both politically and economically, with socialist nationalizing foreign industries and winning the war in Indonesia, foreign economic dominance would continue (Thuy, 2018). While Indonesia would have the advantage of gaining independence directly after World War II, Vietnam would have to wait until 1975 in its struggle against the colonial powers. In 1974, the year before Vietnam's independence and communist revolution, both countries shared a life expectancy of 55; Vietnam would pull ahead, in 2023 the gap was 4 years.

In terms of food security, Vietnam beats Indonesia in 4/5 categories for the Zero Hunger, Sustainable Development Goals, when measurements are taken at the most recent year that both have been recorded. Studies have suggested Vietnam as an example of a food security strategy which Indonesia could learn from, along with other countries (Atmoko & Wijaya, 2024). Vietnam's elderly are also depressed at almost half the rate of those in Indonesia, 17.2% vs 33.8%, a reflection of the quality of life among the elderly (Wada et al., 2005). Vietnam also pulls ahead on measures of infant and under-five mortality, although less pronounced than the other comparisons, all of which are in favor of socialism in this respect (see figure 1.1). Vietnam also fares better in terms of malnutrition and poverty, as shown in Figure 1.1, than Indonesia, as do all the socialist countries to their capitalist counterparts in this comparison.

Quality of life measures ↓	China 🇨🇳	India 🇮🇳	CUBA 🇨🇺	Phillipines 🇵🇭	Vietnam 🇻🇳	Indonesia 🇮🇩
life expectancy	78 (2023) 33 (1960)	72 (2023) 46 (1960)	78 (2023) 63 (1960)	70 (2023) 59 (1960)	75 (2023) 55 (1974)	71 (2023) 55 (1074)
Mortality rate, under-5 (per 1,000 live births)	6 (2023)	28 (2023)	8 (2023)	27 (2023)	20 (2023)	21 (2023)
Mortality rate, infant (per 1,000 live births)	5 (2023)	25 (2023)	7 (2023)	22 (2023)	14 (2023)	17 (2023)
Maternal mortality ratio (modeled estimate, per 100,000 live births)	16 (2023)	80 (2023)	35 (2023)	84 (2023)	48 (2023)	140 (2023)
Prevalence of undernourishment (% of pop)	3% (2023)	12% (2023)	3% (2006)	17% (2006)	5% (2023)	6% (2023)
Poverty headcount ratio \$3.00 a day % of pop	0.0 (2022)	5.3 (2022)	N/A	5.3 (2023)	1.6 (2022)	7.9 (2022)
Physician per 1000 people	2.4 (2020)	0.7 (2020)	9.5 (2021)	0.8 (2021)	1.1 (2021)	0.7 (2021)
Literacy rate, adult total (% of people ages 15 and above)	97% (2020)	76% 2020	98 (2019)	96 (2019)	96 (2019)	96 (2020)
Pupil-teacher ratio, primary	17 (2017)	33 (2017)	9 (2017)	29 (2017)	20 (2018)	17 (2018)
School enrollment, secondary (% gross)	92% (2012)	70% (2012)	92% (2024)	85% (2024)	93% (2022)	98% (2022)
Prevalence of stunting, height for age (% of children under 5)	4.8% (2017)	36.1% (2017)	7.1% (2019)	28.7% (2019)	18.2 (2023)	22 (2023)

Figure 1.1

Source: World Bank Data

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS COMPARISON (MOST RECENT DATE BOTH RECORDED)

China v.s India	Cuba vs Phillipines	Vietnam vs Indonesia
zero hunger: China 4/5, N/A 1/5	zero hunger: Cuba 3/5, NA 2/5	Zero Hunger: Vietnam 4/5, Indonesia 1/5
Good Health and well-being: China 4/6 NA 1/6, India 1/6	Good Health and well-being: Cuba 6/6	Good Health and well-being: Vietnam 4/6 NA 1/6, Indonesia 1/6
Quality Education: China 5/5	Quality Education: Cuba 4/5, NA 1/5	Quality Education: Vietnam 1/5 NA 1/6, Indonesia 3/5

Figure 1.2

Source: World Bank Data

As we can see in terms of poverty alleviation and physical quality of life, actually existing socialism, contrary to dominant ideology, is not a failure, nor is it the same as capitalism. The Socialist states proved superior on almost all measures recorded in charts 1.1 and 1.2, often by relatively wide margins, with Vietnam revealing itself as behind its fellow socialist

states in these measures, but ahead of the best-scoring capitalist state. According to these results, one should find less hunger, less poverty, more preventive care, superior education, and lower mortality statistics in socialist countries. As Dr. Parenti once said, “Communism, ladies and gentlemen, i say it without flinching. Communism in eastern europe, russia, china, mongolia, north korea, and cuba brought land reform and human services. A dramatic bettering of the living conditions of hundreds of millions of people on a scale never before or never since witnessed in human history.” (Parenti, 1996).

Alternative Systems of Democracy & Workplace Governance

To start, we must begin with the surprisingly difficult task of defining democracy; some have mistaken democracy for simply voting. This is an overly simplistic definition for a couple of reasons, but the only one that needs stating is that you can vote and not be a democratic country, the interests of your population could still not be represented in the system's available options, the voting system can be co-opted by those with power, and voting rights can be limited not only in de jure but in defacto ways. Michael Parenti, in his textbook *Democracy for the Few*, refers to democracy as a “*system of governance that represents in both form and content the interests of the broad populace... to govern for the benefit of the many, not for the advantages of the privileged few*” (Parenti, 2011). This is the definition of Democracy that will be used in this study.

Both actually existing Socialism and Capitalism have laid claim to being a truly democratic system. But the common understanding of democracy within the West tends to be Eurocentric; the liberal representative governments with competitive multiparty systems are seen as the ideal type of democracy from this perspective. The conception of democracy is narrowed; anything without the proper format is excluded. This, in large part, contributes to the

categorization of one-party socialist states as anti-democratic and authoritarian. Which has only gotten worse since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Lenin's democratic ambitions have been seen in a cynical light, and claims of soviet democracy fall on deaf ears (Priestland, 2002).

Popular data sets purporting to measure democracy are reminders of this chauvinism. Freedom House has an exclusive focus on these liberal democracies when measuring whether a country is democratic, making measures questionable (Herre, 2022). If we look at the often-referenced Democracy Index by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the Western-centric nature is revealed; America, Europe, and partners all score the highest; all existing socialist countries score an instant zero in many of their important conceptions, such as pluralism, as they are judged by a system that favors the multi-party standards of liberal democracy. What these rankings tell us is how closely each nation comes to a liberal democracy, this is despite having a supposedly wider conception of democracy. When we look at their methodology, a concern for liberal procedures and multi-party pluralism weighs relatively heavily, putting socialist countries at a distinct disadvantage. There is a reason India is given such a favorable comparison to China within these indexes: its capitalist nature and liberal representative institutions (EIU, 2024). This measure tells us that India is closer to what is considered an ideal liberal democracy than China, not that it is inherently more democratic.

Survey data from China also disagrees with the assertion that it lacks democracy, as Jason Hickel points out, "*the government in China enjoys strong popular support, and that most people in China believe their political system is democratic, fair, and serves the interests of the people*" (Hickel, 2025). Ironically, the data Hickel uses makes clear that a higher percentage of Chinese people think their country is democratic when compared to how people from France, the USA, and Britain feel about their own countries. A higher percentage of respondents from China,

compared to the previously mentioned countries, value democracy, think their country serves the people (by almost double the next), and agree that people have equal rights before the law (Hickel, 2025). But according to the previously mentioned indices, shouldn't the results be favorable to the world's liberal democracies? Why the gap between these people's perceived realities and the index measurements of democracy in these countries? Possibly because democratic systems "*govern for the benefit of the many, not for the advantages of the privileged few*" (Parenti, 2011), and while they can claim the practices of liberal democracy result in such governance, that doesn't make it true. They are measuring what they consider to be democratic procedure, with little concern for really democratic results.

The Alliance for democracies 2024 democracy perception index points out that socialist experiments like China and Vietnam rank within the top 3 most democratic according to surveys of their populations' perception, with 79% and 81% respectively feeling their countries were democratic, with India and Indonesia, their capitalist counterparts for this study, significantly behind (Jaspers & DeVaux, 2024). One of the reasons may be that India's liberal democratic system produces more corruption than China, along with the lack of ability to register inputs for a plan to benefit the majority, with the anarchy of capitalist production limiting democracy in an entire sphere of life, the economic sphere, which dominates and affects all others. It's worth noting that China has outdone India in terms of basic human development & sees less corruption (Joshi, 2012). An online campaign for "absorbing opinions," for the 15th five-year plan, represents a form of consultative democratic input that capitalist nations can only dream of due to their reliance on the anarchy of the markets and the whims of owners (the rejection of significant economic planning). From May 20th to June 20th, an online platform for public input received well over 3 million suggestions (Xinhua, 2025).

It could also be that socialist participatory democracy goes beyond simply having people vote on representatives, encouraging people to be active agents in governance and policy creation. Many scholars committed to an exclusivist definition of democracy that wishes not to recognize it in the socialist states advanced a different claim. Some had thought that because 90% of Chinese citizens believed democracy is good, they simply weren't ready to push for democracy because they valued economic growth. That, along the lines of modernization theory they predicted that in 15 years with sufficient growth, Chinese citizens would push for liberal democracy. It's been almost 20 years since Wang (2007), China has experienced growth, but it is certainly not a liberal democracy. But the citizens who seemed to overwhelmingly value democracy, who he predicted would only value it more in the coming years, feel their country is already much more democratic compared to people in other countries. Have these scholars ever considered that nations can enjoy differing conceptions of democracy, that liberal democracy may not always be the preference? Let us compare some of the general differences between the three socialist and capitalist cases before we go into the different specifics.

As previously mentioned, the Capitalist democracies tend to all be some form of liberal democracy. India has a parliamentary system, Indonesia a presidential system, the Philippines functions with institutions which match its former colonial power, the United States, A presidential system with 3 branches of government. The President has the executive branch, a Senate with 24 seats and a House with 250, making up the legislature, and a Judicial branch with supreme and lower courts (Philippine Consulate, 2026). The direct election of candidates from differing political parties in competition with one another to serve as representatives forms a central component of liberal democracies, which socialist countries lack. This places them in firm contrast with the system of socialist countries.

The socialist countries in our study are all one-party states, where a single party dominates governance. This means instead of multiparty competition for representation, democracy tends to mean something different. The socialist democracies all emphasize participatory democracy. What this means is that forms of active participation in the political process are offered as an alternative to the direct election of political representation; this takes varying forms in each socialist nation. Participatory democracy can be defined as “the people's ongoing, daily involvement in the political and economic affairs of the country” (August, 2013). This emphasis on participation doesn't mean there are no elections in which representatives are chosen, but that in all actually existing socialist states, the head of state is not up for direct election, and the power of the communist party is protected with participation channeled through the party apparatus.

One who is used to or in favor of the liberal conception of democracy may see this lack of political pluralism, or absence of political parties, as disqualifying socialist governments from being democratic. But for countries in the periphery of an unequal international division of labor subject to attempts at neocolonial domination, the colonizer's model of pluralistic liberal democracy can be a costly imposition. As “Control over government policy in the neo-colonial State may be secured by payments towards the cost of running the State, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy” (*Nkrumah, 1965*). The Pluralistic institutions of a liberal democratic society in the capitalist core turn into instruments of neocolonialism in the periphery, with the Core sponsoring politicians, parties, civil society, and NGOs with the hopes of creating a good comprador class, whilst sabotaging those who challenge the status quo.

The United States especially can not stand for any alternative to the capitalist world order which it sits at the head, the reaction to attempts to develop socialism can be easily

understood by reading a declassified Memorandum From the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Mallory) to the Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs (Rubottom), written on April 6, 1960, complaining of the popularity of the Cuban government and the communist influence within it and replacing the word Cuba to a more general word, socialism. *“it follows that every possible means should be undertaken promptly to weaken the economic life of Cuba. If such a policy is adopted, it should be the result of a positive decision which would call forth a line of action which, while as adroit and inconspicuous as possible, makes the greatest inroads in denying money and supplies to Cuba, to decrease monetary and real wages, to bring about hunger, desperation and overthrow of government.”* (Mallory, 1960)

As we can see, it often does not matter if a government is popular with its people; they will be given the choice of choosing a comprador, or facing brutal deprivation at best, if it's against the will of the international ruling class. This choice makes a fair, pluralistic government unlikely in the periphery. Under such siege, the socialist experiments that have managed to stay long term are those that prevented such a political opposition from forming via a participatory, not antagonistic, pluralistic or liberal democracy, ensuring the revolutionary societies debate their next steps forward without an opposition aligned with neocolonial interests creating backsliding. One must remember that socialist societies are revolutionary societies on the periphery of a hostile world system; in this situation, “you cannot carry a revolution forward without a strong and disciplined organization” (Castro, 1961), That organization is the party. As Castro said, “it suits the imperialists to dress up their domination of Latin America in a certain civilian garb, the trappings of "representative democracy (Castro, 1961)"

Oftentimes, this rejection of liberal democratic norms is portrayed as a betrayal of the democratic ideas of the revolution, as has been the case for Cuba. But democratic decision-making can, in fact, be seen within island nations' choice not to hold pluralistic elections, which can also be framed as a choice to reject a return to the old neocolonial status quo. In fact, Castro was booed when he had first suggested elections after the revolution, much of Cuba had learned from their experience with a form of liberal democracy, they had not enjoyed it, fearing the foreign influence and continued foreign subservience (August, 2013: p 102-104).

The liberal institutions that the dominant ideology wishes to force down the throats of countries are to the advantage of the rich comprador class, those who have money to own the press, cultural institutions, and decide the dominant messaging. It's why many socialist revolutions completely abandon the liberal democratic form that Marxists see as a dictatorship of the owning class. It's also why America doesn't force these institutions on dictatorships that already serve U.S. capital instead of the people. The purpose of extraction that these institutions truly serve is hidden by the fake democracy they set up and the false consciousness it creates. Scholars have noted that promoting democracy within the global south has become a calling card for the setting up of neocolonial institutions in favor of the United States and a comprador Bourgeois (Tegegne, 2024). Castro and the other socialist were right to set up a different kind of democracy, to ensure genuine liberation from foreign domination, whatever criticism one may have of its form.

When we look at the evidence regarding Liberal democracies in the core, much is left to be desired. When looking at democracy its important to ask for whom, and even in the most ideal form of liberal democracy, it seems to be for the wealthy few. When looking at over 1,700 policy

issues in the U.S, Cambridge found that contrary to taking the preferences of the average voter, the United States heavily favored the preferences of its Elite. The Pluralist framework used to understand political participation within the country is not corroborated by data (Gilens & Page, 2014). In this “Democracy,” our Elites can disregard the rest of society. Some view this as a problem exclusive to the United States and its corporate capitalism (in many ways a natural development of the system); they seem to think the Social Democracies in Europe are the pinnacle of Democracy and the best we can realistically hope for.

But yet again, even in the tamest of capitalist states, such as Sweden’s social “Democracy,” where the inequality is less and campaign contributions are lower, you see a system where the opinions of high-income citizens outweigh those of your average person by significant margins (Persson, 2023). In a more general look at “3,000 policy proposals from thirty European countries over nearly forty years,” we find the Rich still have disproportionate political influence. As the study puts it, “policies supported by the rich are more likely to be implemented than those supported by the poor”(Persson & Sundell, 2023). Another study claimed that around the “democratic” (really liberal democracies only) world, legislators’ preferences are consistently more congruent with those of affluent citizens. “*especially on economic issues*, while the poor may be represented in cultural issues” (Warner & Lupu, 2021). This global oligarchy is certainly not the democratic utopia anyone who genuinely believes in democracy should claim to aspire to.

There is relatively little reason to believe these results won't hold the same for capitalist democracy in India, Indonesia, and the Philippines. They all have similar structures to the country's tested and in some cases a more unequal society with a significantly larger amount of foreign influence in their political process by virtue of their position in the international division

of labor. Capitalist democracies allow for the political actors with the most economic clout and willingness to shape politics, while those without are left on the margins. Voting becomes a mechanism that legitimizes the executive committee of the ruling class, with different sectors sponsoring politicians who will favor their interests. How such a system can be called democratic is something I'm unsure of, even in its most charitable forms like the social democracies mentioned above, Lenin's view rings true today: "Freedom in capitalist society always remains about the same as it was in the ancient Greek republics: freedom for the slave-owners. Owing to the conditions of capitalist exploitation, the modern wage slaves are so crushed by want and poverty that "they cannot be bothered with democracy", "cannot be bothered with politics"; in the ordinary, peaceful course of events, the majority of the population is debarred from participation in public and political life" (Lenin, 1918).

Class and Wealth drastically affect one's ability to access the political and legal systems and shape people's interactions with them. It also shapes the amount of time one has to become an informed participant and one's ability to access and disseminate information. This ruins the liberal ideal of "civil equality," or the idea that all people are equal before the law, as it becomes impossible under the inequality capitalism generates. We all technically play by the same rules, but these rules have explicit class dimensions that are too often overlooked. How does this extreme lack of real equality and thus civil equality affect liberal capitalist democracies, where people are assumed to be participating on equal standing in the process of debate and decisions? Capitalist democracy is one where he who pays the piper plays the tune, and only one class can generally speaking afford to pay. It is a democracy for the few.

Using data from Open Secrets, one can see that from 2000 to 2010, the data available shows that in both the House and the Senate, the top spender consistently wins. The overall win

rate of the top spender in the House is 93%, and in the Senate, the supposedly more democratic of the two, it's at 83%. Some say money doesn't buy votes, but it seems to have quite the effect (Biersack, 2012). The few smaller spenders who manage to win do relatively little to calm concerns when the average it took to win a Senate seat (the cheaper of the two) in 2018 was 15.7 million dollars, and only seems to keep going up (Evers-Hillstrom, 2019). Money and some kind of support from our capitalist class (the tiny minority of our nation) are basically a necessary condition to run a competitive race, never mind win. Thus, a prerequisite of any campaign becomes concessions and appeals to the capitalist class. While the saying vote with your dollar, is often a misguided attempt to place blame for systemic problems, which capitalist democracy gives us few pathways for solving and little agency to change, on people not consuming correctly, for the rich, it rings true. The Rich wouldn't have spent 4.1 billion on lobbying in 2022 had they not gotten something in return, a return on investment (Giorno, 2023). The richest man in the world at the time, Elon Musk, spent a quarter of a billion dollars to help another billionaire get elected president, and has since reaped benefits and had tremendous influence over policy (Griffiths, 2024).

Michael Parenti once wrote of the right to free speech in the United States

“ In its majestic equality, the law allows both rich and poor to raise high their political voices: both are free to hire the best-placed lobbyist and Washington lawyers to pressure public officeholders. Both are free to shape public opinion by owning a newspaper or television station. And both rich and poor have the right to engage in multi-million dollar election campaigns to win office for themselves or their political favorites. (Parenti, 2011) ”

When wronged at work, who has the money to hire the better legal team and pay for the dispute, who may simply not sue due to the expense, the worker or the boss? This emphasis on

formal equality before the law is out of touch with the reality of political power, which is deeply intertwined with economic power; the two simply can't be separated.

Unfortunately, capitalist democracy tends to take the economic realm outside of collective hands and into the realm of individual producers. Economics can be seen as encompassing the processes relating to the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services; these issues are at the core of politics. This is exactly why our economic system must be conducive to democratic oversight and decision-making, something capitalism prevents. An economic system based on individual pursuits, competition, greed, and private property is the antithesis of democracy, a system based on collective decision-making and the idea of a common good. Having no Democratic control of shelter, working conditions, workplaces more generally, and the distribution of the products of our extremely socialized production process, makes capitalist “democracies” inherently limited in scope, when compared to socialist democracies, despite real-world socialism's limited pluralism.

Capitalism is arguably at its best in the third world, where labor laws, regulations, and government enforcement are weak, and necessary labor and resources are extracted at low prices for the benefit of a consumer society in the core. One must remember that capitalism's goal is not to provide services for those in need, to reinforce democracy, or to protect the planet we live on. The goal is capital accumulation. As Parenti said, “From the viewpoint of the investor, capitalism is not least but most successful in impoverished Third World countries, where production costs, especially labour costs, are much lower and the value added by labour is several times higher than in the USA” (Parenti, 1995, P. 169-170). The social programs, relatively high wages, and the formalities of democracy that we have now are not inherent to capitalism, but hard-won concessions to stifle socialism's appeal in the core via kickbacks from imperialist appropriation.

These improvements had only begun to appear as socialist/progressive movements came about and engaged in class struggle; they were not give-ins, or the outcomes of a pluralistic society.

Liberal democracy has already been criticized as a tool for imperial domination imposed on the south, but its relationship with imperialism runs deeper. Ali Kardi points out that the liberal democracy in the core helps divide the working class over the spoils of imperialist accumulation, creating a certain level of stability for capitalism at the cost of the periphery, whose spoils are divided. As Ali Kadri wrote:

The material basis of social democracy and its labour aristocracy rest mainly in the pillage of the working classes in the Third World that are partly funnelled by 'democratic' concession to Western working classes. Bourgeois democracy is synonymous with the reasonability side of capital, its states, institutions and ideological structure, which through wage, bribes and identity differentials sows just the right amount of division amongst labour. In distinguishing between inter- Western working- class schisms and Western- developing world working- class rifts, questions of degree matter. The very idea that any value, in qualitative, quantitative form or as a social relationship (the state of being of value), working its way toward the centre via capital's stabilising relationship of bourgeois democracy, its capital's key mechanism of resilience (Kadri, 2019).

This analysis rightly lets us position the idealized liberal democracies of the West within their role in the international division of labor. It is an institution that allows for the division of the spoils of imperialism, acting as the arena in which a privileged segment of the global working class is able to wrest away concessions within the confines of the capitalist system, only possible due to the spoils of the rest of the world.

Despite the lack of direct representation, which we are familiar with, the socialist countries offer participatory models worth learning from. Within China, the state sector workplace democracy is ensured in law through the staff and worker representative congress. Some argue have been empowered over and against the enterprise under Xi Jinping, expanding into schools (Long et al., 2022). Unfortunately, those in state-run enterprises receive better benefits and employee rights than those in the private sector. As a result, in recent years, the CPC has become more concerned with getting labor rights, standards, and the private sector as a whole under control. They've done this by getting owners to join the CPC and then opening a CPC committee at the business. Their activities include

“recruiting new Party members, monitoring private enterprises to ensure that they comply with laws and policies, advising private enterprises on significant operational matters, guiding trade unions, defending employees' legal rights and completing tasks assigned by higher CCP organizations”(Cheng, 2022)

This is a relatively recent development that has given positive results but must be pushed further. It has been suggested that they exert organizational influence from within to better achieve their goals (Cheng, 2022). Many have pointed out very real examples of poor labor conditions in China, but the issue isn't their labor law, which in many cases is much more generous than other nations, but the willingness of local officials to enforce it, sometimes benefiting from the poor labor practices themselves, making anti-corruption campaigns a necessity. (Halegua, 2007)

China is comparably better than other developing nations like India with labor law enforcement as a socialist nation should be, with the majority of its population earning at least their legal minimum wage, something unfortunately uncommon in developing formations (Ye et

al., 2015) China and India both have minimum wage laws in place, although China enjoys a higher wage, and as mentioned before more people actually receive it. A study conducted in 2020 claimed that almost 90% of India's workers work in the informal sector, which generally lacks legal protections and benefits (Raveendran & Vanek, 2020). China has a significant informal sector, but it does not compare to India's. China also has better overtime pay and vacation benefits, along with a system of firing based more on just-cause rather than the employer's will, as India is characterized by Din, Mukhtar, and Saqib (2021).

Despite being a highly centralized state, China also has many forms of public participation. These forms of public participation are normally informative and consultative. Today, the public is involved in the local decision-making process through several methods, such as public meetings, information, taking suggestions and complaints, and empowering the public to make decisions while local agencies help. (AbouAssi & Wang, 2023) China's poverty alleviation efforts include consultative methods to diagnose the root causes of poverty in areas and find targets. An online campaign for "absorbing opinions," for the 15th five-year plan, represents a form of consultative democratic input that capitalist nations can only dream of due to their reliance on the anarchy of the markets and the whims of owners (the rejection of significant economic planning). From May 20th to June 20th, an online platform for public input received well over 3 million suggestions (Xinhua, 2025).

Despite the aforementioned poverty alleviation efforts and the aforementioned expansion of participatory democracy into schools, some have claimed that Xi Jinping has done the opposite, choking out whatever chance of democratic (liberal) transition they felt they had seen in the country. The National Endowment for Democracy supported *Journal of Democracy*, Biden, and International new outlets from the West often frame Xi Jinping as a dictator extending his

powers (Shirk, 2018). This, in large part, is politically motivated and ignores the reality of Whole-process people's democracy, which came into the fore during Xi Jinping's leadership of the party. A study looking at four different types of participation listed as participation for policy suggestion, mobilization, complaints, and supervision through fieldwork in Shanghai, shows the "WPD has helped facilitate local officials' response to people's demands and engaged more public opinion in the policy making process" despite real limitations with actors moving to preserve their power and gain promotions (Hu & Wu, 2024). There has also been a push to formalize democracy in, through a process of approval, drafting, deliberation, among other procedures. This has resulted in higher social satisfaction with policy (Boer, 2021). Widespread use of technology is also being integrated into new democratic practices with scholars identifying three different forms of "e-participative governance": disclosure, consultation, and deliberation, allowing for increased citizen influence and for the government to gain a better read on public sentiment (Xin & Huang, 2024).

China also has elections and its own representative system; The People's Congress has "the national peoples congress down to the provincial, county, district, and township people's congresses, with all levels electing their respective governmental bodies". Every Citizen over 18 has the right to vote, regardless of "ethnicity, sex, occupation, education, occupation, or religion." And anyone can run for office. Elections at the two most local levels are direct; the 3 levels above are elected through indirect elections (to describe it simply, at a certain level, you are elected by the officials elected below you) (Boer, 2021). A similar process in terms of representation, with direct election on the local levels and indirect at the top, is to be found in Cuba and Vietnam as well.

China is democratic, as the CPC claims, "China has developed a distinct model -- whole-process people's democracy -- tailored to its national conditions and historical traditions.". This concept was introduced in 2019 (many of the institutions were already there), and "Unlike election-centric Western democratic models, China's system weaves together law-based democratic elections, consultations, decision-making, management, and oversight within a structured institutional framework."(Xinhua, 2025a) .

The Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference sets up a consultative institution that reaches from the national to local levels. Although it does not directly create policy, it forms an important part of the whole process people's democracy. The emphasis on consultation is actually born out of the Mao era. As Mao said, "Quite a few comrades always keep their eyes shut and talk nonsense, and for a Communist that is disgraceful. How can a Communist keep his eyes shut and talk nonsense?". Consultation with the people is seen as extremely important for party legitimacy, as they don't want to be seen as disconnected people talking nonsense and giving dictates. His solution was that comrades would engage in "fact-finding missions"(Zedong, 1930) . Our capitalist and socialist states, China and India, converge in an interesting way as both have large issues pertaining to ethnic minority populations. Both have their origins in what the nations consider terrorism; for China, it has to do with Xinjiang and the East Turkestan separatist movement, and for India, it is ironically Maoist guerrillas. I'll begin by describing the origins of these movements and then the response.

The Naxalite movement within India has its origins in the Naxalbari uprising from almost sixty years ago, and today comprises a variety of groups unified by an ideology with appeal to those left by the sharp inequalities in India's development, disposed and marginalized by the status quo, as well as the Hindu Nationalist ideology surging in the country. The Groups include

the Communist Party of India (ML)-Liberation, CPI (Maoist), & CPI (ML). With CPI (Maoist) as the largest and most militant, inspired by Mao Zedong Thought, participating in what they call a people's democratic revolution against the Indian state. The group views the Indian Bourgeoisie as a subordinate partner to the Western capitalist class in exploiting the country. They have also taken up the cause of Dalits and minority groups against the Indian state as an issue of class, with this resulting in high membership from these groups. The group also champions the rights of peasants and farmers, gaining support amongst them. As Mohanty says, “when the state policy treats the Naxalites as an organised movement, it fails to take into account the specificity of each group. Banning an organisation, arresting or killing some cadres and leaders, or mobilising one group of people to fight a group of Naxalites or using propaganda to vilify the Naxalite as "terrorists" misses the history of the last 40 years” (Mohanty, 2006).

The Naxalites have their origins in what is considered the first peasant insurgency after independence, which developed into a movement opposed to the existing class hierarchies in India (Sarkar, 2023). Despite their association with terrorism by the Indian state, their presence is overwhelming in the poorer regions, where their support base lies, and is associated with less violent crime and crimes against women (Borooah, 2008).

Despite its characterization as a vibrant democracy, the Naxalites exist in the context of a indian state where the gap between rich and poor, urban and rural, was growing, and a state which responded to this issue with force, suicide among indebted farmers was not uncommon, as the state of affairs seemed hopeless. These are the conditions which create a movement “The Naxalite insurgency in India is the latest manifestation of peasant struggles caused by grinding poverty, exploitation and inequality that have prevailed in rural areas for centuries.” (Ahuja & Ganguly, 2007). This is not to mention the rising Hindu nationalism, which some have argued

has led to the implementation of fascist policies against minorities in India, the suppression of political opponents with illegal means & military might. The Modi-advanced Hindutva ideology has posited India as a state only for its Hindu majority, “The reelection of Modi can be called as a referendum on violence against minorities, social exclusion of minorities, lynching of people belonging to low-cost and minorities and on fascism conducted in the first tenure of Narendra Modi” (Akbar, 2022, p. 277). Many hold Modi responsible for the 2002 riot in Gujarat, which killed around 3,000 people (Akbar, 2022).

The lynching and beating of minorities is described as a part of daily life, with leadership and law enforcement even rewarding each other for their brutality. The government has also revoked what had been a constitutional right of the overwhelmingly Muslim population in Kashmir to autonomy and imposed a curfew to repress the response. This has increased tensions with neighboring Pakistan as it witnesses the attempted conversion of Muslims at its border (Akbar, 2022).

Let us ask ourselves if the liberal democratic structures are so responsive to the will of the people, why would such a movement exist beyond some kind of psychotic irrationality? This is similar to the outdated classical model of social movements, which saw social movements as psychological and stemming from individual strain rather than political, economic, and social issues. This was in large part due to its basis in a pluralist theory of politics that saw political power as widely distributed between actors in the political arena, ensuring access to all, where no one is excluded and no one dominates. This is the theory of politics that guides our engagement with liberal democracies. Doug McAdams (1982) saw that viewing social movements as irrational within liberal democracies was flawed, showing that if one abandoned the pluralist

model of an elite or Marxist theory of politics, one would begin to make sense of social movements.

The Human cost is hard to put a number on. Modi, with the Blood of around three thousand on his hands in Gujarat alone, has not hesitated to increase his numbers. Since 2000-2024, the Indian government claims more than 11 thousand civilians and soldiers dead, and at least 6,000 Rebels. Since its inception, the India government has jailed the movement's sympathizers with at least 32,000 jailed since 1972 (Putul, 2025). How India deals with the problems at the root of the movement will be a determining factor for the evolution of its state and the groups within the movement, but so far, India's democracy has responded with murderous violence, repression, and a right-wing nationalist shift. Let us see how China's Xinjiang and the East Turkestan separatist movement compare.

Even Washington-aligned think tanks like the Council on Foreign Relations acknowledge that the East Turkestan separatist movement is a separatist movement in China advocating a separate state called East Turkestan in what is today Xinjiang. A part of China since the Qing Dynasty, the Uyghur-dominated province gained statehood twice, once in 1931-1934 and again in 1944-1949, when the People's Republic of China annexed Xinjiang from the Republic of China and the new Uyghur state. They also point out that there is no Unified Uyghur agenda, with some groups advocating separatism and many others advocating more autonomy within China, or even a preservation of the status quo. For many Uyghurs, political action is not about separatism or violence, but about the preservation of national identity and culture, which some feel is being erased

But for Groups like the East Turkestan Islamic Movement, violence, terror, and separatism are the goals. Reports have claimed they have ties to groups like al-Qaeda and

international connections in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The group has Umbrella organizations that have claimed responsibility for bus explosions in Shanghai and Kunming in 2008. The links between Xinjiang's Islamist separatist terrorists and targets in the U.S war on terror, in fact, lead to some cooperation between the United States and China during the war on terror(Xu et al., 2014). The terrorist attacks in China during this period continued, many of which were mass casualty incidents, with two killing 30 plus people in 2014 (Langfitt, 2014). In response, China instituted the 2014 strike-hard campaign.

China's response has garnered harsh condemnation, especially internationally, mostly coming from the Imperial Core countries. Even CNN is forced to admit this sentiment comes from mostly Western countries, although it quite ironically frames them as the comparative champions of human rights, against the immoral countries of the Global South, who couldn't only possibly hold their positions out of anything but self-interest, unlike the core of course. While characterized as internment camps erasing culture in the West, the opposing characterization is that of vocational centers preparing Ugyhar people better for integration and returning to safety (Berlinger, 2019). The Muslim majority nations' support of China on this issue contrasts unfavorably with the actual accusations, resulting in insults and accusations of these countries' lack of solidarity, despite a clear unity and, in that sense, solidarity between the nations on this issue (Qiblawi, 2019).

Vijay Prashad and Ting Chak have noted that the origins of the claims that brought international attention to the issue have their own problems. Shady funding networks and organizations are bound up with the United States government. An Inability to confirm the authenticity of the "China Cables" and the "Karakax List," which provided Adrian Zenz the material needed to make his initial report of Xinjiang. He also points out that the accusations

have been progressively dialed down even by the most committed to them, going for at the extreme end Genocide to cultural genocide, due to the lack of actual killing, unlike in India. The framing has been mostly one of religious oppression, assimilation, and an inability to practice. With a one-element focus on being the closure of mosques and religious sites, despite China maintaining more mosques per person than the accusing party of Australia (Prashad & Chak, 2026).

Some scholars and activists have argued that China's Ethnic minority policy is a unique blend of respect for traditional cultures while attempting to provide an opportunity for participation in China's wider economy. They acknowledge contradictions between old religious authorities, nationalism, and the Chinese state, but point to Chinese actions to dispel the conflict as actions of deradicalization focused on employment and job training, arguing against accusations of forced labor (Hammond et al., 2023). China also has preferential policies in place that are often overlooked. The 56 different recognized nationalities receive temples, churches, and mosques for their various religions, often supported with state funds. Local languages are preserved via children receiving classes in local languages, and educational policy, such as extra points on the gaokao exam, is also meant to benefit minority persons. Those who point this out accuse America of creating astorcity propaganda to push its own interests and ethnic tensions in the nation (Boer, 2021).

The Uyghur minority group does face real and unique problems and challenges, such as barriers to full participation in modern life, discrimination, arbitrary detention, and those revolving around religious issues, that have increased since the 2014 crackdown. But studies argue that the youth are aiming for economic prosperity rather than independence from China and face a different set of challenges than those often promoted in the media. The youth face the

challenge of an education system that teaches in their native language only to switch later on, as Uyghur schools are currently ill-equipped to prepare students for higher education in China, resulting in a strong preference for Han schools. The separatist music is played less among younger generations, the ideas are less appealing, and they are increasingly seeking serenity (Jafarynejad, 2009). In the end, both India and China face issues with groups made up largely of minority populations, which in part (succession) or in whole (Maoist revolution) wish to topple their respective states, although India's response seems to have generated more casualties and lacks the development orientation, reintegration, and poverty alleviation aspects often cited in defense of China's more repressive actions against separatism.

While India has the feature of a representative democracy, and China does not, China has many participatory and consultative measures India lacks, and a capitalist government generally does not take suggestions from the public for its 5-year plans, a plan meant to dictate the direction of the economy. The following statement “the essence of planning consists in interventions aimed at changing what, would be the ‘spontaneous’ outcome of Market forces. The purpose To induce policy led-resource transfers that benefit sectors, subsectors, and population groups at the expense of others. Achieving distributive, social and environmental goals” (Gabriele & Jabbour, 2023) gets at the fact that we are missing an important piece of our democracy in capitalist countries, the ability to even somewhat democratically guide our economies.

For Cuba and Vietnam more generally, a similar analysis and description to that made between China and India can be made. Especially in regards to representative pluralism vs democracy through the party, participatory vs representative structures, and economic planning vs an emphasis on the anarchy of the markets. As the Liberal democracies are generally liberal

democracies and all the socialist states are led by Marxist Leninist parties, a lot remains alike between comparisons. Because of these similarities, I only quickly go over some key differences pertaining to Cuba, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia.

Cuba's Socialist participatory democracy is shown in the crafting of its constitution with the unique practice of 70,812 neighbourhood discussion meetings with 2,064,755 participants, according to the committees of defense of the revolution, registering new input and helping craft the document. The constitution also went through a process of referendum or direct democracy in which the entire country was able to vote on its implementation in 1976, with 98% of the country turning out and 97.7% voting in favor of the constitution (August, 2013).

While Constitutional are often thought of as hard to come by another round "of complex processes of popular consultation and popular affirmation ... marked the Cuban constitutional reform process of 2018-2019" and scholars have pointed to it as model which can avoid the pitfall of liberal democracy in developing countries, specifically that of democracy being limited to popularity contest between the elites (Backer & Sapio, 2020). Professor helen Yaffe has claimed she feels badly for those who have limited their conception of democracy to one in which you vote on which member of the elite gets to govern, claiming "the Cuban's have set up their own system of representation and participation which is extremely grassroots" (Yaffe, 2026) an example she gives is the months of nation wide debate on the democratically approved family code, one of the most progressive in latin america giving cubans the opportunity to participate in the formation of the law, dismissing the caricature of dictatorship often painted.

One study of Cuban democracy charged that accusations that Cuba is undemocratic come from "an erroneous theoretical belief that Cuba's avowed form of democracy cannot in fact deliver democracy, or a misunderstanding of how the Cuban political system functions" (Ward,

2022). A comparative analysis of drafts before and after public comment shows that both the recent constitution and the *Lineamientos* (set of guidelines to reform Cuba's socialist model) consultations produced significant changes based on the will of the people and their suggestions. From laws concerning cooperatives, private property, the ration book, labor code, and government structures, the influence of the Cuban population is immense, and the Cuban state has been able to inspire its own form of mass participation in governance, which has been aimed for since the Castro days (Ward, 2022).

Interestingly, the liberal multi-party system associated with capitalist democracies has allowed undemocratic elements to rehabilitate themselves and attempt to regain power in Cuba's comparison nation, the Philippines. Ferdinand Marcos rose through the structures of the liberal democratic institutions in the country, only to become an infamous dictator. Ironically, he had come after a line of puppet governments in the country allied with US imperialism (Carlo & Parel, 2014). In large part due to the way the Philippines was granted independence without a real break from their colonizers, control of the politics and economics of the Philippines was managed by a comprador elite that hides subservience by making a pro-American orientation a cornerstone of their policy.

Ferdinand was not a break with this US-subservience with the nations dominated by a comprador elite class, by the time Marcos was declaring martial law in 1972, "American neocolonialism had reached staggering proportions. Americans had acquired 'parity rights' with Filipino citizens in economic enterprises under the 1946 amendment to the Philippine Constitution and the 1954 trade agreement between the United States and the Philippines. This made a cruel mockery of Philippine sovereignty. By 1972, American investors controlled about 75% of foreign investment in the Philippines." (Mahajani, 2019). From this position, it would be

incredibly difficult to have a sovereign democratic state representing the interests of its citizens in the economic sphere.

When Marcos decided on martial law in 1972 to repress both political opponents (One of his first actions was to arrest opposition politicians in Congress and the Constitutional Convention) and communist insurgents assuring Americans owning land and business in the Philippines that they would be allowed to continue doing so even after the provisions of the U.S.-Philippine trade pact of 1954 expired in 1974; and that he welcomed U.S. investment especially in oil exploration and mining. Earlier, he had publicly opposed demands for nationalization of American-owned land (Mahajani, 2019). Thousands would be arrested and tortured during this period. During this the regime got rich on US funds while Filipinos dealt with heavy-handed repression, eventually resulting in the people power revolution of 1986, where the United States and Marcos' patron at the time Regan decide it would be too problematic internationally to continue backing his government; instead, he was flown to Hawaii. Corazon Aquino, leader of the electoral opposition that had still been willing to run in elections most were skeptical of, was sworn in as President. The event was seen as an example of peaceful revolution and the restoration of democracy. Unfortunately, it wouldn't spell the end of troubles for the Philippines. Aquino failed to institute called for economic reforms, likely due to the countries subservience to American capital, and faced coup attempts, many from the base that had initially brought her to power. Peace talks with the communist party also dissolved under her lead. Through this deterioration, a revision and rehabilitation of the Marcos government began, and with the radicalization of the left (Sanchez, 2021) .

The Los Angeles Times notes that in 1986, after the people power revolution, the United States "Secretary of State George P. Shultz arrived in Manila, about 100 demonstrators waving

red flags and shouting anti-American slogans greeted his motorcade from the airport. Many carried signs denouncing 'U.S. Imperialism' in the Philippines, demanding the dismantling of two U.S. military bases here and declaring, 'Shultz Go Home.' ” (Fineman, 1986). Despite this rejection according to the article “officials in both governments agree that relations have not suffered in the least from the departure of a man some U.S. presidents considered to be the champion of American interests in Southeast Asia.” (Fineman, 1986) notably contrary to the “anti-american sentiment” that dominated both the Filipino left and right according to the same article, revealing the extent of American domination of the national sense. The article even points out that the Regan administration told Marcos when to leave the palace and threw support behind their preferred leader (Fineman, 1986).

Eventually, Rodrigo Duterte went on to become one of the few presidents to challenge American dominance over Filipino politics, specifically in the area of foreign policy, using a right-wing populist narrative of security concerns to shift towards both China and Russia (Magcamit & Arugay, 2024). Duterte also centralized power and created a pretext for repression through a war on drugs that was in reality just as much a war on the left, environmentalists, and his political opponents (Holden, 2022). The United States, viewing the Philippines as a key to their foreign policy calculations against China, was fine to support this action, which claimed thousands of lives. Obama gave roughly a billion dollars in aid to Duterte, with significant amounts going to the military and national police force. Trump continued in the same direction even more zealously (Pardo, 2025).

27,000 people were killed by Duterte's Drug war, which some have pointed out as eerily similar to that of Ferdinand Marcos' own war on drugs, which “the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration provided

the Marcos regime with \$1.28 million in narcotics control and training, and a new anti-narcotics unit within the Philippine Constabulary police force. The “war on drugs,” both then and now, has been used to control the poor and police political dissent.” (Sales, 2020) and remains apart Americas colonial legacy with the Philippines relying on foreign aid to maintain elites privileges and colonial structures of repression (Sales, 2020). Duterte's stint in power paved the way for the return of the Marcos family with elections functioning to mobilise popular hopes for change in order to reproduce the existing hierarchies and elite power, “*It is within this paradoxical conjunction of popular desires for radical change and elite attempts at containing and channelling those desires for conservative ends that we can see the rise of authoritarian figures such as Duterte*”, the study goes on to describe the democracy existing in the Philippines as an “*elite democracy*” (Rafael, 2022). It's worth noting that the “democracy” in the Philippines could only be created on the corpses of indigenous struggles for real national liberation which were killed by a comprador elite fighting hand in hand with its former colonizer (Lumba, 2022).

When compared with Cuba, the elite power struggles and neocolonial government of the Philippines seems to be a significantly worse model of democracy, with little change, instability, and maintained anger from significant segments of the population, along with elite repression of the lower classes. Worth noting before continuing to another comparison is that both of our two capitalist countries have had to confront significant communist movements for decades, inspired by the formation of one of the socialist states in this study.

Indonesia, our last Capitalist country, is no different in this sense, but the way in which this movement was repressed tells us a deeper story about the relationship between capitalism and democracy that cannot be overlooked. Vincent Bevin's work (2021) goes over the U.S.-produced operation, which subverted democracy in Indonesia due to the growing power of

the communist party within the relatively democratic Sukarno government, along with how it inspired a method of covert operations that the United States would employ elsewhere. This is the story of the death of almost one million people in an attack on the largest communist electoral party in the world, installing a military dictator who would go on to commit further horrors like the genocide in East Timor. As liberal democracies in the global south drop the facade when the left begins winning, often due to the neo-colonial demands of foreign powers.

At the time, a significant portion of Indonesian youth were involved in activities set up by the PKI (Indonesia's communist party), and nearly 1/3 of registered voters were PKI affiliates; this couldn't stand. The Ambassador, who was soon to be switched out due to his more diplomatic approach, "Howard Jones himself told State Department officials behind closed doors in the Philippines, 'From our viewpoint, of course, an unsuccessful coup attempt by the PKI might be the most effective development to start a reversal of political trends in Indonesia.'" (Bevins, 2021). This is exactly what they overstated with Surkarno blaming the PKI for a failed coup attempt, which isolated him from progressive elements in his base, and resulted in the rise of Saharto with U.S support and propaganda behind him, along with a massacre of the left, eliminating it as a political force. This quote by Bevins given us a sense of the violence and its chilling effect on the left:

"This was organized state violence with a clear purpose. The main obstacles to a complete military takeover were eliminated by a coordinated program of extermination—the intentional mass murder of innocent civilians. The generals were able to take power after state terror sufficiently weakened their political opponents, who had no weapons, only public sympathy. They didn't resist their own annihilation because they had no idea what was coming. 43 In total, it is

estimated that between five hundred thousand and one million people were slaughtered, and one million more were herded into concentration camps. Sarwo Edhie, the man who ambushed Sukarno in March, once bragged that the military had killed three million people. 44 There's a reason we have to settle for estimates. Because, for more than fifty years, the Indonesian government has resisted any attempt to go out and record what happened, and no one around the world has much cared to ask, either. Millions more people were indirect victims of the massacres, but no one came around to inquire how many loved ones they had lost. Their silence was the point of the violence. The Armed Forces did not oversee the extermination of every single communist, alleged communist, and potential communist sympathizer in the country. That would have been nearly impossible, because around a quarter of the country was affiliated somehow with the PKI." (Bevins, 2021).

The capitalist democracy of Indonesia was squashed by foreign powers and a local elite when communism began to rise, as these structures would rather revert to dictatorships than betray the class interest they constantly serve. After the dictatorships in both the Philippines and Indonesia, a study points out that a process of dynastic regime recovery has occurred, where the old elite protects and maintains their privileges during democratization, seeking to control discursive spaces. In Indonesia, it points out a system of interconnected elites that are well-suited to dominate the multi-party system (Tyson & Nawawi, 2022).

As Marx said “neither legal relations nor political forms could be comprehended whether by themselves or on the basis of a so-called general development of the human

mind, but that on the contrary they originate in the material conditions of life, the totality of which the eighteenth century, embraces within the term “civil society”; that the anatomy of this civil society, however, has to be sought in political economy.” (Marx, 1859). The Political economy of both the Philippines and Indonesia are subject to neocolonial domination, as one study states “the Indonesian government has embraced a position of colonial subordination whereby their resources and goods serve to benefit the developed world at a near total expense of the ecological and social wellbeing of Indonesia (Parciany, 2009)”, when the economy is still based in the old colonial order it becomes extraordinarily difficult for the politics to manifest as anything but an extension of the those material circumstances.

As Kerkleit (2015) points out, “One can credibly say that democracy and politics in contemporary Vietnam go hand in hand. Such a claim, however, is likely to be incredulous to a reader of international press coverage about the country today. Even in scholarly literature, the two words “democracy” and “Vietnam” are rarely paired. Nevertheless, democracy as a concept, aspiration, and form of government has figured in the country’s political evolution from its struggles against French colonial rule in the first half of the twentieth century until debates today about its future.” Kerkleit (2015).

Vietnam has a constitution and laws in place which enshrined democratic management of co-operatives and communes into law, with participation not limited to representatives, but with representative organs existing. Although at times management can be top-down, with Vietnam seeming to lack the same level of consultation as other socialist democracies (Mai & Tuyet, 2015). Still, Vietnam's Participatory Village development and commune development planning (VDP/CDP) has local people identify

problems and come up with solutions, empowering their participation in the political process. Though improving equity and transparency, and democratic control in resource allocation, high cost and planning issues needed to be overcome before its widespread implementation (Yen & Luong, 2008). Since the late 2000's, the VDP/CDP, has come to exist alongside a variety of participatory measures, many allowing for the planning and democratic control over economic life which capitalism generally lacks (Trung et al., 2016).

While the Capitalist democracies allow you to vote and elect representatives, a step in the right direction, it seems to relatively consistently fail to translate into substantive results for the majority, with the wealthy ruling class maintaining a disproportionate say. The influence of money is felt extensively, with election funding being seriously correlated with victory. The ability to democratically influence the economy is comparatively minimal. This Procedural Democracy that in reality lacks substance, rings even more hollow in the periphery. This is in large part due to neo-colonialism control and subservience that socialist states have managed to overcome, as discussed in the next section. The participatory models and extension of democratic decision-making into the economy demonstrated by the socialist state are worth learning from, especially in developing countries.

Imperialism vs national liberation

Amilcar Cabral, a revolutionary thinker and fighter against fascist Portuguese colonialism in Guinea and Cape Verde, saw the world's capitalist powers as the driving force of imperialism, with socialism stepping in to break its hegemony. Looking at capitalism and imperialism's history, Cabral knew that flag independence would never be enough to break the chains of

colonial domination, so long as the old economy remained. His conception of imperialism under the capitalist mode of production is astute:

We will simply state that imperialism can be defined as a worldwide expression of the search for profits and the ever-increasing accumulation of *surplus value* by monopoly financial capital, centered in two parts of the world; first in Europe, and then in North America. a historical necessity, a consequence of the impetus given by the productive forces and of the transformations of the means of production in the general context of humanity, considered as one movement, that is to say a necessity like those today of the national liberation of peoples, the destruction of capital and the advent of socialism. (Cabral, 1966).

In this section, I'll begin with our core comparisons, but as alluded to in the quote above, the imperial core must be touched on at length as the prime beneficiaries of capitalism's imperial ordering of the world. A cursory look at capitalism in the imperial core compared to socialism shows that, while capitalism in the core and imperialism have become interlinked in a fashion in which one cannot survive without the other. socialism, for all its blunders and atrocities on the international stage, has proven to be a force for national liberation globally, and one that capitalist powers would like to repress. The two in this regard are incomparable, although many still try. To overlook this in a comparison of Capitalism and Socialism, is to overlook the *raison d'etre* for many countries turning to Marxism-Leninism, as Ho Chi Minh said "At first, patriotism, not yet communism, led me to have confidence in Lenin, I gradually came upon the fact that only socialism and communism can liberate the oppressed nations and the working people throughout the world from slavery." (Chi Minh, 1960) . The Slavery the Vietnamese were fighting was that of French colonialism, that of a capitalist core country.

Many may question what is meant by national liberation, as all the countries listed are nominally independent. Kwame Nkrumah, the first prime minister of Ghana, whom the current president accuses the CIA of helping kill, in “the most regrettable and darkest moment” (*Mahama, 2025*) in their nation’s history, was a leader in Marxist and Anti-colonial thought. He expanded on Lenin’s analysis of Imperialism in his 1965 book *Neo-Colonialism, the Last Stage of Imperialism*, the title indicating that he thought Neocolonialism represented a new development or adaptation of imperialism to the decolonization taking place in Africa.

Nkrumah thought that as decolonization took place in Africa, more traditional colonialism would be replaced by neo-colonialism. These were states that were “in theory, independent and had all the outward trappings of international sovereignty,” but “In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from outside.” (Nkrumah,1965). It is normally the case that the former imperial power exercises control of an economy that is still based in the colonial order; but this is not always the case “Control over government policy in the neo-colonial State may be secured by payments towards the cost of running the State, by the provision of civil servants in positions where they can dictate policy” (Nkrumah,1965). Kwame Nkrumah also uses South Vietnam as an example where the former imperial power, France, didn’t become the neo-colonial power; instead, the United States did (Nkrumah,1965).

The significance of neocolonialism lies in the old colonial economies, which were based on economic systems that allowed massive exploitation of the colonial subjects for the benefit of the colonial power. “Independence” was often handled in a way that allowed colonial powers to retain economic power, and after the collapse of the soviet union and the end of the Cold War, things have only gotten worse, with America spearheading neocolonial efforts as a global hegemon. As Nkrumah had pointed out before, it was necessary for newly independent countries

to “alter the economic and political structures they obtained from the colonizers”

(Nkrumah, 1965), or else enter the stage of neocolonialism. Where previous colonial regimes ensured the new independent nations continued to depend on them for economic and political supervision, while using foreign capital to continue plundering instead of developing (Tegegne, 2024). Unfortunately, after nations began to decolonize, new leaders often found it personally beneficial to retain those same exploitative institutions, allowing the country to enter neocolonial relations (Smilak & Putnam, 2022). This is exacerbated by covert and overt operations against leaders who aren't friendly to neocolonial interests, as seen in Indonesia during the democracy section.

Ironically, Western talk of freedom and liberal democracy has become a warning sign for coming imperial domination and exploitation. A limited framework of democracy which excludes alternative models, is promoted while ignoring the negligible impact of citizen participation in the examples they promote. Those promoting this rhetoric and model are often those who are most likely to benefit from the imposition of Western democracy due to their own relative privilege. The western capitalist model of democracy has structural deficiencies creating hierarchies and governance models which exclude the poor, racialized, and other marginalized communities, creating a competitive elitist regime that shouldn't be seen as the sole or only real democracies. In fact, these competitive elitist governments outside the imperial core have been worse at serving their people time and time again, succumbing to neo-colonial elites subveirtant to foreign interest (Sa'di, 2025). Much of Africa is under the influence of a comprador bourgeoisie that has played the role of agents of imperialism, keeping Africa linked to Europe and North America. Latin America and the Middle East, and much of the periphery, also has its own comprador class, enriching itself at the cost of national development. This class is

effectively a part of the international financial class, but is the subordinate partner to the core in the imperialist ordering of the world system. (Kardi, 2016, p. 11).

In the Philippines, a *compadre* class was established during the period of U.S. colonial rule, and America, in a similar fashion to manifest destiny, had a civilizing mission, bringing Western democracy to the Philippines. During this process, the U.S consolidated a domestic landowning class and introduced elections in which less than 1.5% of the population could vote, creating an oligarchic elite. “This oligarchic elite, created and enabled by American colonial authorities, built the state and geared it towards their own patrimonial and comprador interests.” (Kovacs and Lynch, 2016). While the Filipino elite paints a picture of a Philippines united regardless of class, in order to do so, it must simplify the history of American colonialism, conveniently hiding its neocolonial role (Kovacs and Lynch, 2016). The following description of the Neocolonial situation in the Philippines gives an adequate picture:

Although formally independent today, the Philippines has remained a neocolonial polity, thus its subordination to neoliberal policies of US-dominated agencies such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, WTO, etc. In the last three decades it has become one of the largest suppliers of quasi-enslaved ‘warm bodies’, its labour-export policy functioning as a central mechanism for defending the oligarchic, comprador ruling bloc and its foreign links from local insurgencies (primarily Marxist and Islamic). While the state has ‘brokered’ this dependence on remittances from 9–10 million overseas Filipinos, its orientation has been to serve primarily US geopolitical interests and transnational profiteers. (San Juan Jr, 2011)

A significant part of the reason Brun & Elling (1987) compare Cuba to the Philippines is Cuba’s comparative escape from Neocolonial domination. Cuba’s break with Neo-colonial domination

and the capitalist world system is the reason why the Mallory memorandum exists for Cuba (*Mallory, 1960*) but not the Philippines.

In Indonesia, the neocolonial nature of the state is equally as clear, with Suharto acting as an agent of the Indonesian comprador class and U.S imperialism in order to dismantle the left along with Sukarno's government, which had pressed too hard against U.S. interests (Bevins, 2021). To repeat what was said in the democracy section as these issues are inseparable “the Indonesian government has embraced a position of colonial subordination whereby their resources and goods serve to benefit the developed world at a near total expense of the ecological and social wellbeing of Indonesia (Parciany, 2009)”, when the economy is still based in the old colonial order it becomes extraordinarily difficult for the politics to manifest as anything but an extension of the those material circumstances. Pointing to this fact, some have argued Indonesia's neo-colonial status affects its self-sufficiency and paths for its future development. They also claim the situation is getting worse with laws more oriented towards foreign needs than domestic development and well-being for all people. What can be described as a comprador elite ensures growth isn't channeled towards poverty alleviation or social goals, and that the economy remains centered around foreign interests. Poverty remains relatively unaddressed compared to the socialist countries despite high growth, showing how that growth serves to benefit the former colonial powers rather than Indonesians (Nurbiasyah, 2018).

Neo-colonial domination over India today is not as clear-cut as in our other two capitalist countries. But some have argued that Modi's party has acted as an instrument of neocolonialism, putting down indigenous movements like the Naxalites and using heavy-handed violent repression against minority muslim communities (Champaneria, 2024). Others have focused on the aforementioned revoking of Kashmir's special status in 2019 and the reclassification of land

and legal residents in order to alter the demographics and disempower Kashmiris, to impose a neo-liberal model of destroy and replace (Hussain, 2024). The actions of the Indian state against these groups are often overlooked in the discussion of national liberation, but within these conversations, a bigger mistake is made. India is sometimes framed as a state free from the grip of neocolonialism. Some have even gone as far as to frame India as a post-colonial state with Kashmir as its own colony (Haselby, 2024)

The lack of interest in neo-colonialism domination over India, in large part, has to do with the period of capitalist state-led industrialization, where India attempted to pursue an independent path within the non-aligned movement under the Nehru government. Although sometimes called socialist, the Nehru government avoided threatening elite interests, meaning agrarian reform and significant taxation were avoided; the capitalist class also maintained state power. India began to liberalize its state assets in 1991 after the collapse of the soviet union shook the foundations of its developmental ideology, and opened up space for neoliberalism. This left India increasingly vulnerable to neocolonial pressures that almost all developing countries feel, increasing ties to international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund and World Bank (Tricontinental, 2026).

A neocolonial economic situation does still exist in the country, hidden within a complex migrant and remittances system. Highly skilled migrant workers generally leave and continue to work for the same US and European companies when and if they ever return to India. India, while supplying labor for foreign countries, has one of the highest unemployment rates in the world, and occupies a spot as a top receiver of remittances. Those who benefit from this are the Indian elite and the highly skilled migrants; the vast majority of Indian and low-wage migrant workers (majority) do not see the benefits. This system of remittances also stunts development

while giving empty calories to the nation's GDP, normally spent on immediate household consumption, often of expensive global north products or basic necessities instead of national development (Ness, 2023). It reinforces a dependence on foreign remittance, the loss of Indian workers, and the neo-colonial order of the global economy, and maintains India's subservient economic position. India, as an origin state, has the largest number of migrants abroad at 18 million, the vast majority of whom are employed in poor conditions in the Gulf Countries. To overlook how imperialism and neo-colonialism still shape the Indian economy would be like trying to understand why a patient's problem continues without looking at their medical history (Ness, 2023).

In some sense, the socialist countries can be understood in juxtaposition to the capitalist ones, which gained flag independence but made little attempt to alter their colonial economic structure and position within the world system. But we must also remind ourselves that it is one whole system in which these countries are apart; it is impossible to act completely independently of this world system. While different modes of production can exist at the same time as one struggles to create the new out of the old, one mode of production will come to be the dominate within the international system, as Amin said, “there are not two world markets, the capitalist and socialist, but only one, the capitalist world market, in which Eastern Europe participates marginally” (Amin, 1976, P 26). Socialist states have always had to make various concessions to a world system dominated by the capitalist mode of production, but often participate in a process of de-linking and strategic transformation.

For Samir Amin, de-linking meant the refusal to submit to the dictates of globalization, the national development of a nation. It means rationally rejecting the international capitalist law of value to build one with a national and popular content in order to develop according to the

needs of a population. Despite popular misconception, this did not mean an isolated development strategy but a proactive and sovereign one (Amin, 1987). Samir Amin, in fact, offered a look at specific policies in China that had achieved subordinating the domestic market to internal development. Today China seems to be challenging unequal exchange, and “the Chinese economy seems to have played a key role in safeguarding the country from two typical pathologies affecting the peripheral capitalist countries in which the development of productive forces is subordinated to the pursuit of profitability: the halting of the growth in formal employment and wages, and the regression of the country’s productive structure towards the non-tradable sector.” (Macheda & Nadalini, 2021).

Cuba has also gone through its own efforts to undo the effects of imperialism and bring the law of value under sovereign control, with this allowing it to navigate the special period after the collapse of the soviet union, and continue to bring services to the majority of their population today. “Cuba faced real threats from the United States in its attempts to harm the population through the blockade, terrorist attacks, and assassination attempts against Fidel Castro These obstacles had to be confronted to provide the social services Cuba did. As a matter of survival and anti-systemic objectives, maximizing delinking” (Smolski, 2022). Our last socialist country, Vietnam, was highlighted by Samir Amin as a model of agricultural development and sovereignty in food production (Ajl, 2021). Samir has reiterated time and again that China’s trajectory since 1949 has been one of the best examples of delinking, along with Vietnam and Cuba (Lau, 2020). The superior Physical quality of life in socialist states, as shown in this study, is indicative of this.

These facts regarding socialism are largely ignored; instead, a narrative that socialism/communism has killed one hundred million people has spread like wildfire, poisoning

debate. It has even inspired legislation against communist ideologies in a variety of countries. This is despite capitalism causing tens of millions more deaths in India alone during a shorter period, if we use the same methods as the source of this claim. If we count in the same way, the colonialism, neocolonialism, imperialism, and so on of capitalist powers, the death tolls become even more incomparable (saed, 2021).

What is the source of socialism's famous 100 million body count, one may ask? “The Black Book of communism: Crimes, Terror, Repression” written in 1997, is the origin of the claim, with “Centrist” Washington thinktanks such as the Center for Strategic & International Studies publishing works which cite the claims today, giving the book a sense of legitimacy. The CSIS paper uses this work to claim “In all, it is estimated that communism killed around 100 million people, which is four times those killed by Adolf Hitler and more deaths than in World War I and II combined” (Bandura & Kosta, 2018). Establishment politics not only uses this fraudulent “scholarship” to frame communism for excess deaths, but also to equate Communism and Nazism, some go even further elevating communism to history’s ultimate evil with the statement communism is “the greatest catastrophe in human history” (Bandura & Kosta, 2018) making sure to remind us that there are still communist mistakes yet to be overthrown in china, cuba and a few other countries, and these are our supposed “centrist” in terms of american political discourse.

The black book was written under the direction of Stéphane Courtois. Many of the co-authors were enraged that their work was being used to draw a moral equivalency between nazism and communism, saying, “death camps did not exist in the soviet union”. Some tried to retract their contributions from the book as a whole. $\frac{3}{4}$ of the book’s main authors had distanced themselves before the book’s release. Historians pointed out that the undercount of Nazi victims

in the book serves to indirectly absolve Hitler and Nazism of responsibility for World War II, which on its own claimed between forty and sixty million lives. The book counts deaths from imperialist invasion of the soviet union as deaths caused by communism and nazis as their victims. The fact that an ahistorical book that whitewashes nazism and has been disavowed by its authors for its obsession with getting to the 100 million mark is cited so often is disgusting and disappointing, among many other things. I mean, the authors claimed the editor would add millions of deaths to incidents. (Gužvica, 2025).

In this popular equation of nazism and existing socialism, it conveniently loses sight of the role of Capitalism in the rise of Fascism via imperialism. Instead, a proper analysis is replaced with that of twin totalitarianism between the soviets and nazis. This is how you end up with politicians like Harris and liberal citizens confused by Capitalist societies' capitulation to Trump, representing a fundamental misunderstanding of fascism's historical role in the service of the capitalist class. Titans of industry did not come to save democracy like Harris suggested because she is mistaken in her assertion that capitalism needs democracy (Ray, 2025). In fact, during the rising fascist tides of the 1930 america was faced with the Business Plot in which Wall Street bankers and members of the capitalist class planned a fascist coup against the United States government, with some even using their media influence to report on events favorably (Galka, 2017). Americans in this equation of fascism during WWII to Socialism in the Soviet Union miss fascism's racist character, its class character, and its roots in capitalist imperialism's colonial crisis.

Nazism has many unique aspects, but it was not a historical abstraction born of thin air from the hate of the German people. To understand Germany this way is an act of idealism that contrary to the methods of this study not to be forgiven, especially by those committed to never

seeing the rise of facism again. The liberal tradition often understands Germany this way, as a historical abstraction and aberration created in large part by a single man, hitler. In fact this is how liberalism consistently interprets fascism, when found in the core, the problem of individuals not systems. This is exactly how people are treating the rise of Trump as well, a historical aberration, riding on the waves of irrational hate. It couldn't possibly be a sign of systemic rot. The analysis of this liberal understanding of fascism given by Dr Gaberial Rockhill is incredibly useful. He points out that the particular historical manifestations of fascism (nazi Germany and Italy) often understood in this idealist greatman fashion are used to serve as the cornerstone of a general understanding of fascism. Rather than Germany's Hitler and Italy's Mussini being recognized as the face of a system and movement, as a specific manifestation of the general, they as individuals become the ideal type against which fascism is tested in the modern day.

If and when fascism fails to match these particular examples, it's not fascist according to the understanding of many. Something that doesn't make sense for any other political concept, this is in large part due to the lack of a materialist understanding of fascism and how it comes about. Is a revolution only a revolution if it looks like the Haitian revolution? Is French colonialism the only colonialism? We know the answers to these questions. It is far more useful to use the general understanding of the concept of revolution, knowing the specific instances are extremely varied, often even complicating the general, than to narrow our understanding of a concept down to a well-known particular instance, then comparing in a checklist fashion to identify without real analysis. The general should help us identify the specific, the specific manifestation should not replace the general conceptualization.

The common understanding of fascism, its obsession with a Mussolini or a Hitler, Nazi salutes and obvious symbols, allows only for a surface level of understanding (Specific before the general) and also encourages us primarily to see fascism in individuals instead of the systems that produced them, creating a kind of “fascist exceptionalism” that tends to only apply to the capitalist world’s leading powers. In Socialism it is not individual actors but systemic, fascism is generalized to the utmost through the twin totalitarianism comparison.

This understanding allows liberals to claim that fascism in the liberal capitalist societies of the imperial core is extremely rare and only happens through and within individuals. It claims these societies are structurally devoid of fascism, while for socialist countries, fascism is generalized to the utmost, and communism and Nazism get the twin category of totalitarianism as described by Hannah Arendt. Preventing us from seeing how Fascism is born from contradictions within Liberal capitalist democracies. Spain had a fragile democratic system that fell to Franco, Estado Novo came out of a supposedly liberal capitalist society, as did Germany and Italy’s fascist movements. In fact, semi-liberal Germany had put down a socialist revolution in 1919 on its quick detour to liberalism, then fascism (Rockhill, 2025b) .

While treated as a unique manifestation under capitalism, fascism is generalized under communism to the point where the two are equated in the form of totalitarianism. Arendt warped Totalitarianism from a concept that described “the power exercised by the so-called superior races over the peoples of color of the colonial world” (Losurdo et al., 2024) to apply it to those at the forefront of resisting colonialism, failing to link fascism, imperialism, and colonialism together as a proper analysis should. Linking fascism most to the countries that were actually attempting to resist imperialism and fascism for resisting the “free world” in the form of totalitarianism. A category Arendt had once used to draw a connection between Germany and

colonialism, that is, until the Cold War, and the end of the book *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, where she seems to have purposely forgotten about the link between colonialism and nazism by the final section, in order to draw one between Germany and the Soviet Union (Losurdo et al., 2024). I'm not alone in noting the difference in tune for the last section of *Origins of Totalitarianism*. Unfortunately, Arendt's analysis of Totalitarianism became bound up with the Cold War wants of intellectual production in capitalist society at the time.

The myth of the "good war," with the United States & Europe heroically opposed to fascism during World War II, defending freedom, was used to cement this analysis of fascist exceptionalism, despite the United States entering late with an eye towards benefiting and having ignored the prior USSR request for a United front (Rockhill, 2025b). It seems to be forgotten that the inter-imperialist contradictions between capitalist societies are what led to the brutal chapter of history, which produced two World Wars. By 1914, it was every country with the exception of Ethiopia and Liberia (Kulik, 2025). The Berlin conference of 1884 negotiated Europe's colonial claims amongst themselves (Anghie, 2007). During this period of imperialist expansion reaching its limits, there was a growing danger of war between the core powers. This period was marked by competition between the imperialist powers, specifically Germany and Britain. World War I was ultimately an Inter-Imperialist war. The imperialist nature of these European capitalist states was the cause of the friction "The similarities of these imperial approaches caused strife between the powers and led to the total rivalry which presaged total war." (Coté, 2022).

Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* offers us an analysis of the capitalism that led us into the First World War. In Lenin's analysis, "it was a war for the division of the world, for the partition and repartition of colonies and spheres of influence of finance

capital, etc.” (Lenin, 1917). Let us not forget the aforementioned imperial rivalry of Britain and Germany, two capitalist powers, is to blame for the First World War. The opium wars, in which China was forced to accept the sale of British/European drugs and goods through unequal treaties with the imperialist powers, forced the ports open, and Hong Kong was formally colonized. China was divided into spheres of influence between Japan, Britain, Germany, and Russia, until the United States came up with an open-door policy, which acted to allow America a piece of the loot, while lessening the nationalist tensions between the imperialist powers present in the old model of exploiting China. Although China itself attempted to resist, and anti-imperialist sentiments in the country grew as a result (Office of the Historian, 2026) . Chinese historians considered China a semi-colony until 1949 (Li, 2021).

With the aforementioned scramble for Africa, Europe was beginning to reach the limits of its imperialist expansion, leading to growing intra-imperialist rivalry. In Lenin's analysis, he says, “imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism” (Lenin, 1917). This is worth unpacking. Lenin does not claim that imperialism started with capitalism, but that under capitalism, imperialism is an inherent characteristic developed to its fullest extent by monopoly capitalism, which gives impetus to expansion on an enormous scale for the domination of new markets. A 1913 work published in a U.S magazine made clear the intense imperialist rivalry between countries, specifically Britain and Germany prior to the outbreak of the war, “what with trade rivalry and economic competition they were jostling each other in the market-places of the world, and meeting with jealousy and dislike in the few districts which remained to be apportioned” (Turner, 1913). It is this imperialist rivalry for colonial expansion that led to World War I.

During the period of World War I, an often overlooked blow to colonial domination would take place. The October Revolution, which would go on to serve as an inspiration for national liberation movements on virtually every continent (Prashad, 2020). Independence struggles in Cuba, China, Vietnam, Angola, Mexico, Ghana, and more all looked to the October Revolution as an example, even leaders like Gandhi drew some inspiration from the revolution in Russia (Komarov, 1970), a Mexican independence leader once said “I don’t know what socialism is, but I am a Bolshevik, like all patriotic Mexicans.” (Prashad, 2020). China’s Sun Yat-sen claimed revolutionary Russia as the only ally of China in its quest for independence (Prashad, 2020). This may have to do with the Karakhan Manifesto, in which the new Soviet government gave up the special rights and privileges the Tsarist government enjoyed in China. The first Unilateral offer of friendship and equality to China by a European power (Britannica Editors, 2025b).

The world’s first Socialist experiment was born during the inter-imperialist contradictions of World War I. Lenin's writings on the national question reveal that he saw the October Revolution not only as socialist but as a national liberation movement, both domestic and international. For Lenin, the socialist revolution was required to lead the country out of imperialist war and economic disintegration (Lenin, 1918). Self-determination for different ethnic groups was emphasized as a core key principle. But it is Stalin who best emphasizes the global significance of the revolution in that “It has widened the scope of the national question and converted it from the particular question of combating national oppression in Europe into the general question of emancipating the oppressed peoples, colonies and semi-colonies from imperialism” (Stalin, 1918).

Fighters in Senegal and South Africa also took inspiration from the Bolshevik Revolution (Prashad, 2020). The October Revolution was a watershed moment in human history; it showed that the working and oppressed could assert control over the old exploiting classes and challenge the old order, producing positive results for those engaged in the process of liberating themselves. Walter Rodney praised the imperfect socialist projects for their development without recourse to the brutal tactics imposed in the colonies of the “civilized” West (Rodney, 2018). During this period (1917 on), Colonialism was stagnating and preparing for a retreat. As mentioned prior, colonization had hit its limit; no new colonial empires were being established, and nationalism was rising. The First World War had reorganized Europe's colonies and significantly weakened its hold. Despite this, Britain and France had managed to escape with their imperialist empires intact (Kitchen, 2014). Germany did not; it was forced to give up its colonies to other European powers (Showalter, 2025).

The loss of German status and colonies imposed by the Treaty of Versailles set Europe up for an implosion of colonial violence, this time within its own borders. The Class struggle in Germany had gotten to the point where Lenin was genuinely banking on a German revolution: “if the German revolution does not come, we are doomed” (Lenin 1918b). This revolution would eventually fail. The American loans from the Dawes plan, meant to combat the hyperinflation and other economic issues that inspired such strife, were eventually called in on short notice. Germany went through an economic depression (BBC 2025) without the colonies that many of the most prosperous capitalist powers could use to shelter themselves from its worst effects. Countries like Nigeria bore the brunt of the depression for the British, facing brutal exploitation (Ochonu 2006). Germany had no such option.

The depression led to a rise of communism in the Reichstag, along with the rise of fascism (BBC 2025). With support from the capitalist ruling class, nazism won in Germany. Professors such as Michael Parenti have attempted to highlight this class link “Is fascism merely a dictatorial force in the service of capitalism? That may not be all it is, but that certainly is an important part of fascism’s *raison d’être*, the function Hitler himself kept referring to when he talked about saving the industrialists and bankers from Bolshevism. It is a subject that deserves far more attention than it has received” (Parenti, 2020). With the rise of Nazism, “the idea of a return of the former colonies became closely associated with a revival of Germany itself ...” (Steinbach 2017). During Hitler’s rise to power, his speeches and the Nazi program contained references to “land and territory (colonies) for the maintenance of our people” and played on the “humiliation” of the Treaty of Versailles (Hitler, 1923). This gained him popularity with the ruling class.

The Empire of the Rising Sun in Japan also went through its own depression, which inspired a thirst for colonial expansion. Japan would also go on to display the racism necessary to commit and justify such actions (Asia for Educators, 2025). Less Eurocentric Thinkers like Aimé Césaire, a French Martinican poet, who had the displeasure of living through WWII, pointed out the connection between fascism and colonialism, thus fascism and capitalism, pointing out that nazism was not new to Europe, but a reflection of the capitalist core’s own actions, seeing nazism in the capitalist West’s treatment of the world throughout its history. These are his most memorable lines on the subject, perfectly capturing this relationship between liberalism and fascism through imperialism:

The crowning barbarism that sums up all the daily barbarisms; that is nazism, yes, but that before they were its victims, they were its accomplices; that they tolerated that

nazism before it was inflicted on them, that they absolved it, shut their eyes to it, legitimized it, because, until then it had been applied to only non European peoples; that they have cultivated that Nazism, that they are responsible for it, and that before engulfing the whole edifice of western, Christian civilization in its reddened waters, it oozes, seeps, and trickles from every crack. Yes, it would be worthwhile to study clinically, in detail, the steps taken by Hitler and hitlerism to reveal the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that with his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler inhabits him, that Hitler is his demon, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is crime against the white man, humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe the colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively ... (Césaire, 2001)

The connection between liberalism and fascism through capitalism is worth pointing out; without doing so, we fail to understand fascism.

Without telling this history, we also miss socialism's emergence as a force for national liberation. In one concise passage of *Black shirts and Reds*, Parenti makes clear if it wasn't already fascism's class orientation and opposition to socialism, big business played a role in getting the fascist into power, and in return Hitler and Mussolini lowered taxes on the rich, subsidized business, assumed their risk, decreased wages, and increased corporate profit throughout a time of corporate hardship squeezing the population. Germany was resistant to income level trends during the 30's. Unfortunately, as Parenti (2020) notes:

Despite this record, most writers have ignored fascism's close collaboration with big business. Some even argue that business was not a beneficiary but a victim of fascism. . . . Thus fascism is misrepresented as a mutant form of socialism. In fact, if fascism means anything, it means all-out government support for business and severe repression of antibusiness, pro-labor forces. Is fascism merely a dictatorial force in the service of capitalism? That may not be all it is, but that certainly is an important part of fascism's *raison d'être*, the function Hitler himself kept referring to when he talked about saving the industrialists and bankers from Bolshevism (Parenti, 2020).

The connections between fascism, colonialism, and capitalism become clearer when you find out that Nazi Germany was most inspired by a particular settler colony, the United States.

“In the 1920s and 1930s Adolf Hitler and Nazi scholars, lawyers, and officials were studying United States law while developing Germany's policies and laws concerning Jews and the conquest of Eastern Europe.” (Miller, 2020). They were inspired by the United States' policy regarding racial minorities, with instances where they felt certain policies were too harsh to adopt. The same scholar also claims, “It appears without question that the American dogma of Manifest Destiny and Nazi *Lebensraum* were intimately related.” (Miller, 2020). America was still a literal racial apartheid state after the defeat of Nazi Germany, but this is rarely brought up in the totalitarianism conversation, as if the purpose of the comparison is often not honest analysis but to take socialism off the table by equating it to Nazism.

Lebensraum was a plan for the colonial expansion of Germany by the Nazis, one which included the destruction of socialism in Eastern Europe. American imperialist expansion and hegemony still exist, but it is again the countries resisting it that are most often equated with fascism via totalitarianism in an Orwellian inversion of the truth, ignoring any analysis of

imperialism and class. Blanket condemnations of totalitarianism are made as socialist and nationally oriented states use and sometimes misuse repressive powers while attempting to survive the onslaught against them by reactionary forces, the very reactionary force that would be called totalitarian if the word hadn't become co-opted .

The brutality of World War II marked the beginning of the end for the now globally disgraced colonialism, especially as the former colonial powers could no longer afford to secure their colonies from struggles for national liberation. Japan's control over Korea and parts of China was lost (Britannica Editors, 2025a). Vietnam began its national liberation struggle against the French; India, and much of Africa gained independence. Many of these struggles professed socialist leanings inspired by the country that had defeated colonialism's mutant form in Nazism. The USSR would also provide support to many of these movements (Prashad 2020). A capitalist power, the United States also supported Decolonization under certain conditions at this point, seeing it as a way to open markets.

In this onslaught aboard by US-led Western imperialism, the words of Aimé Césaire again echo. When the United States kills through its brutal sanctions regime, a “annual toll of 564,258 deaths....similar to the global mortality burden associated with armed conflict,” is that not exporting its fascism abroad? When the United States murders leftists through the Jakarta method in the name of capitalism, is that not fascism? Or are the up to 2 million dead in Indonesia, not human enough? What about the countless dead in Latin America? What about the massacres we committed in the Middle East after 9/11, was not a form of fascism projected abroad? Around a million dead from direct causes, and almost 4 million dead from indirect causes, do these not represent unforgivable crimes (Rodríguez et al., 2025; Bevins, 2021; McGregor, 2009; Waterson School of International and Public Affairs, 2026)? What about the

dictators we sponsored/sponsored in too many countries to name? Rockhill notes, using conclusions from William Blum's work, that the United States has attempted to overthrow over 50 governments, the majority of which were democratically elected, and that this only scratches the surface of the state's imperialist actions on behalf of capital, its projection of fascism abroad (Rockhill, 2025a).

The United States has always been a fascist nation to those who experience it aboard, “the steps taken by Hitler and hitlerism to reveal the very distinguished, very humanistic, very Christian bourgeois of the twentieth century that with his being aware of it, he has a Hitler inside him, that Hitler inhabits him, that Hitler is his demon, that if he rails against him, he is being inconsistent and that, at bottom what he cannot forgive Hitler for is not the crime itself, the crime against man, it is not the humiliation of man as such, it is crime against the white man, humiliation of the white man, and the fact that he applied to Europe the colonialist procedures which until then had been reserved exclusively” (Césaire, 2001).

A broad historical overview of European Colonialism and imperialism, which has shaped our globe, shows that it is the capitalist process of accumulation at its center, with the developed capitalist nations as its prime beneficiaries. Socialism has been the primary force against colonialism and especially neo-colonialism in the modern era, with leaders of national liberation movements at times seeing it as the only path to sovereignty. The first socialist experiment on the world stage made significant contributions to anti-colonialism and imperialist struggles, and the legacy has since continued. For example, Cuba's selfless contribution to ending apartheid in Africa (Saney, 2025). Socialist states have managed better than capitalist states to delink from the global dictates of capital in order to serve their own national interests. Ultimately, the socialist states are far more sovereign than the capitalist states in this comparison.

Conclusion

Socialism has bettered the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the periphery of the world system in ways capitalism has proved unable or unwilling. In our three areas of comparison meant to measure individual and national development, the socialist countries outperformed their counterparts. Be it Physical quality of life, Democracy and workplace government, or National liberation, substantive arguments can be advanced for socialist superiority contrary to the dominant ideology. The socialist countries, although representing a primitive form of socialism operating within the capitalist world system, represent an advancement in the mode of production, where social needs are better met, democracy is extended in significant ways to the economy, poverty reduction is a priority, and the international law of value is subordinated to national development.

With U.S Hegemony in decline, many around the world are looking for an alternative. Neo-Liberalism gave capitalism a lifeline, weakening nation-states in favor of transnational capital to preserve and increase profit rates in the global north. This came with contradictions (outsourcing of industry, welfare cuts, deregulation, etc.) that have emboldened opposition, with the more established right-wing populist as the dominant opposition to neoliberalism in the political arena. This right populism, represented by figures like Trump, does not show a real way out, but a nostalgia for the old as it becomes increasingly untenable (Lauesen, 2020).

It is time for those committed to the struggle for human emancipation to begin formulating a socialism for the 21st century for their national context. This means learning from past socialist experiments. The overly simple failure narrative focuses on the worst moments of socialist experiments' histories and forgetting the rest, we must reject this lest we forget about the tools that can help us forge a new path. As Marx said, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every

epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society, is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it” (Marx, 1845). We must challenge the ruling class caricature of socialism, that many of the “marxists” in academia have helped solidify as part of the bourgeois apparatus of mental production, in part to preserve their “credibility” within these establishments and further careerist goals. (Rockhill, 2025a)

The core *Question* at the core of this work "*Has socialism been the failure, popular consciousness deems it to be?*" can be answered with a resounding no. This comparison of Socialism and Capitalism in the Periphery will hopefully serve as a step towards countering hegemonic narratives around the existing struggle for human emancipation. Narratives that claim or end up implying that the fight to end capitalist exploitation is not worth the risk, pointing to the supposed failures of those who dared fight, acting as though there was nothing good to show for it. This is not about praising the achievements of leaders/states or defending them, but providing a clear sense of the progress of socialist experiments, pointing out that the struggle of working and exploited peoples for a better society was not entirely in vain. As Lenin said, “Whoever expects a ‘pure’ social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is” (Lenin, 1916). Those committed to Marxism have made real progress at changing the global capitalist order; it’s time to recognize and build on it, before it's too late.

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