

Social institutions arise because of a felt need of the members of society. It is an established and integrated set of social norms that primarily function to help preserve basic societal values.

In this article, we will look at the different social institutions—their roles and impact on society. Let's jump right in.

Family.



A society is built on family, considered as the most basic social unit because it serves as the primary institution for an individual's socialization.

The traditional concept of family is having a man and woman with a child, but this view has been evolving fast and is now more encompassing than ever. These days, one may see a single-parent household as a family. A modern family may also include homosexual couples or partners without children.

The concept of family is usually defined in terms of structures where each family member performs the roles of father, mother, and child. **Roles** are the expected behavioral patterns that represent a person's **status** (one's social position within a group).

This socially recognized group is connected by blood, marriage, or adoption. A **family of orientation** is the family where a person is born; whereas a family that is formed through marriage is referred to as a **family of procreation**.

Others deem families in terms of relationship—how each member relates and forms an emotional connection with one another. Such a notion echoes from a **symbolic interactionist theory** and looks at close friends as potential families.

From a **critical sociology perspective**, a family is a response to the historical changes in the economic and political structures in society. This explains different family configurations over time (e.g., from large extended family to nuclear family).

Meanwhile, a **structural-functionalist perspective** focuses on family and its vital functions in helping maintain the balance in the larger society and within its group. The universal function of the family is to ensure the continued existence of society through procreation (biologically) and socialization (socially).

Typical marriage is where a person is married to only one (**monogamy**). But in some cultures, **polygamy** is accepted. This practice of having multiple spouses is widely observed in Muslim-majority countries like Algeria, Sudan, and Uganda.

A **nuclear family** (also known as a conjugal family) is a structure that includes married parents and children. On the other hand, **extended family** is a structure where parents and grandparents are present, and this can also consist of the uncles, aunts, and cousins.

When considering **kinship**, the common way of tracing one's ancestry is done through the pattern of **bilateral descent** where both the paternal and maternal ancestors are considered. In some areas, the tracing of kinship is with one parent only (**unilateral descent**)—either **patrilineal** (father's side) or **matrilineal** (following mother's side).

There is also a concept of **patrilocal residence**. According to customs, it is a system where the wife is supposed to live with or near the husband's relatives. The opposite of this is the **matrilocal residence**, where it is the husband who is expected to live with his wife's relatives.

Religion.



Religion is a social institution that can be found in all societies across the world.

Long before, religion has been used to explain and understand the world, as well as the meaning and purpose of life. Founded on basic social needs and values, **religion** is an organized and integrated set of beliefs, norms, and behaviors.

People have different **religious beliefs** or the specific ideas of a particular faith that members believe in. This is evident in the difference in the stories in terms of how the world came to be.

There are also **religious rituals** or practices that are expected from members of a particular religious group. In addition, people claim to have **religious experiences**, which refer to the sensation that they feel as they connect to the 'divine'.

It was [Durkheim, Weber, and Marx](#) who were the first to analyze how religion affects society. All of them concluded that religion performs a key function in maintaining society's stability.

Durkheim described religion as *"a unified system of beliefs, values, and practices relative to sacred things."* Religion for him is the separation of the sacred and profane. **Sacred things** are those collective representations that are set apart and forbidden, while **profane** is simply mundane things. He believed that religion helps bind people together and regulate their behavior. It is therefore a form of social cohesion and social control.

Durkheim also argued that the source of religion and morality is the collective mindset and values of society. Thus, as a social creation, **religion is a representation of society** and its power over its people.

For Weber, **religion** is a force—a **precipitator for social change**. In his large-scale studies of religion, he stated that religious beliefs, specifically that of Calvinist Protestants, have greatly influenced the development of capitalism.

Since Calvinists motivate their members to work hard and teach them about material wealth as a sign of God's favor, this somehow supported the pursuit of material gain. Their work ethics such as values of hard work and savings, according to Weber, were reflective of capitalist ideology.

Another view of **religion** is that it is **the opium of the people**. This belief of Karl Marx was based on German philosopher and anthropologist **Ludwig Feuerbach** (1804-1872), who said that religion is just the projected norms and values of society onto separate entities like gods and spirits and that it emphasizes the afterlife.

Per Marx, religion contributes to the social inequalities by teaching people to accept their current situation and to look forward to the rewards in the afterlife. It perpetuates that status quo and

prohibits social change as it discourages resistance. Moreover, Marx held that religion serves as a sanctuary for the oppressed creatures (in his case, these are the working class or proletariat).

There are three types of religious organizations: church, sect, and cult.

A **church** can either be a denomination or an ecclesia. A **denomination** is a mainstream and large religious organization that is not sponsored by the state, while an **ecclesia** is a religious congregation that is closely allied with the state and is recognized on a national level.

A **sect** is a smaller and less organized religious group. Most of the known denominations today came from sects. Lastly, a **cult** or new religious movement is the most informal among all religious organizations. They are groups who reject the accepted norms and values of the larger society.

Education.



The **education system** is next to the family in terms of socializing an individual to his society.

It is a social institution through which one learns the basic academic knowledge, cultural norms, and learning skills in a given society.

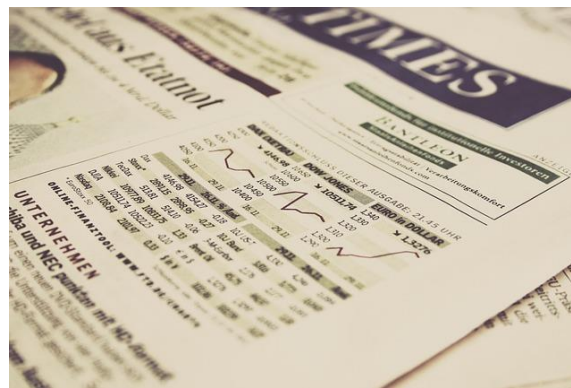
Informal education begins at home through the parents, relatives, and close community. Matters of practical living and expected behaviors are instilled in the individual's mind.

Learning experiences become formal through schools. Academic facts, concepts, and skills are instilled in an individual through **formal education** with the use of a curriculum. Cultural expectations and norms are also taught and reinforced by the teachers, textbooks, and curriculum.

Schools promote **homogenization, social integration, and social sorting**. Students are introduced to a standardized curriculum and are educated with similar knowledge and common culture. Despite having different backgrounds, they all encounter mainstream culture and values. And while learning, those who do less are set on lower positions in society and those who do better are staged for higher status positions.

Schools also serve either as agents of change or conformity—providing students with the skills that can pave the way to both independence and obedience.

Economy.



The **economy** is a social institution that manages society's resources. It is responsible for its production, distribution, and consumption—ensuring the provision of basic needs and opportunities among its members.

Goods are the physical things individuals discover, make, or nurture to meet one's own needs or those of others. These can be the essentials or luxuries. When these goods are put on sale in the market, they are now referred to as **commodities**.

Delivery, health care, and food preparation are activities where people benefit. These activities are called **services**. There are also **public goods** that are provided for everyone (non-excludable) and no rivalrous in terms of consumption. Government services such as national defense, police protection, and public health funding are examples of this.

Societies cannot survive without the economy. Scarce resources call for proper management and stewardship so that societies will continue to exist and flourish.

Every economy mirrors the needs and cultural attributes of its society. Just by looking at the top goods and services in a society, one can easily identify the major traits of that civilization.

Politics and Government.



Another social institution is the **government**, which makes and enforces laws for society. It directs the behaviors and actions of its citizens. This manifests the relations of power between the government and its people.

Power, as simply defined by Weber, is the individual's ability to exercise his will on the other person. Moreover, **politics** is the activity of sharing this power and influencing its distribution among groups in a society.

Politics comes from the Greek word, *polis*, which means city-state and it covers managing all the concerns related to the *polis*.

The most common forms of government are the following:

- **Monarchy** – a political system where a single person serves as the head of the state. Power is usually passed on through one family across generations.
- **Democracy** – a government form that is characterized by the rule of the people. Citizens participate in the political sphere and elect their representatives and leaders who will run the government.
- **Oligarchy** – is a government by the few, which is usually composed of the elite group
- **Authoritarianism** – in contrast to democracy, authoritarianism allows limited people's participation in the political process.
- **Totalitarianism** – the state possesses unlimited power and control over its people. In this type of government, there is strict censorship among the press.

Regardless of the type of political system a society has, people recognize some extent of **authority** (or the power that a person agrees to follow).

People adhere because of many reasons.

For **traditional authority**, a person obeys because it has been part of the tradition. Its legitimacy is based on the acceptance of people in the past.

A **rational-legal authority** is the power vested in a particular system and is made legitimate by written rules and regulations.

Very different from the first two types of authority, **charismatic authority** is grounded on the leader's 'charisma' and personality. People follow because they find the person extraordinary and inspiring.

However, among the three, power based on charisma is the most unstable and only lasts for a short period of time.

Mass Media.



Mass media are communication channels, particularly electronic and print media.

Due to technological advancement, it has started to massively influence people's socialization and shape their perspectives of social realities. It not only provides news and information, but it also educates people and informs the public of government policies and programs. It can even act as an agent of change.

From a **structural-functionalist perspective**, mass media helps maintain the stability of society. It keeps people informed of what is happening, entertains people, and supports the transmission of cultural values through its content.

A **conflict perspective** highlights how the media conditions people to accept current power structures in society. It also recognizes the great divide that it creates between the wealthy and poor in relation to the accessibility of information through its channels.



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Social Institutions

As for the **symbolic interactionist perspective**, mass media modifies social interactions. Some see it as a new and advanced way of social interaction while for others, it poses a threat to social and community life as it replaces face-to-face interactions.



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To God be the glory!