

## Unit 3

### Social Control – Meaning and Definition

#### Meaning

Social control refers to the various mechanisms, strategies, and institutions through which a society regulates the behavior of its members to ensure conformity with established norms, values, and laws. It is essentially the way in which order and stability are maintained within a social system. Through social control, individuals are guided to behave in ways that are acceptable to the community, reducing deviance and promoting social cohesion.

#### At its core, social control involves:

- Influencing human behavior
- Maintaining social order
- Ensuring adherence to cultural norms and values
- Preventing disruptive or deviant behavior

**“Albion Woodbury Small and George Edgar Vincent introduced the concept of social control to sociology in 1894. However, this introduction had been foreshadowed in Thomas Hobbes’ discussion of the state.”**

**Much later, Talcott Parsons (1937) and Travis Hirschi (1969) played a vital role in the illumination and development of ‘social control.’**

Different sociologists have defined social control in slightly varied ways, reflecting its complex nature:

**E.A. Ross (1901)-** "Social control refers to the system of devices whereby society brings its members into conformity with the accepted standards of behavior."

**Morris Ginsberg-** "By social control, we mean the way in which the entire social order coheres and maintains itself — how it operates as a whole as a changing equilibrium."

**Kimball Young-** "Social control is the process by which society secures compliance with its standards and maintains social order."

**Ogburn and Nimkoff-** "Social control is the influence exerted by society in modifying the behavior of its members."

### **Types of Social Control (by Thinkers)**

#### **1. E.A. Ross (1901)**

- **Formal Social Control** – Codified rules, laws, and regulations enforced by official agencies like the state, police, and judiciary.
- **Informal Social Control** – Norms, customs, religion, public opinion, and traditions enforced through social approval or disapproval.

#### **2. Kimball Young**

- **Positive means of social control-** involve the provision of positive incentives to procure the compliance of individuals with societal norms. The promise of reward herein may range from pecuniary benefits to the public approval of conformity stemming from the internalization of various social norms.
- **Negative social control-** discourages nonconformity by penalizing deviant conduct. Incurring harsher curfews from one's parents by violating relatively lenient ones, is an evident example.

#### **3. Karl Mannheim**

- **Explicit Social Control** – Open and deliberate attempts to regulate behavior, e.g., education, law, propaganda.
- **Implicit Social Control** – Unplanned, unnoticed influences like traditions, customs, or group norms.

#### **4. Ogburn and Nimkoff**

- **Formal Control** – Institutionalized control through law, police, military, courts.
- **Informal Control** – Non-institutionalized influence through family, religion, customs, and peer groups.

#### **5. Peter Berger**

- **Control through Socialization** – Internalizing norms so individuals regulate themselves.
- **Control through Sanctions** – Using rewards and punishments to ensure conformity.

## **Agencies of Social Control**

### **Meaning**

Agencies of social control are the institutions, groups, and mechanisms through which society regulates the behavior of its members. These agencies enforce norms, values, and laws, ensuring social order and reducing deviance. They may function formally (codified and official) or informally (customary and unwritten).

### **1. Formal Agencies of Social Control**

These are organized and officially recognized institutions established by the state or other authorities to regulate conduct.

#### **a. Law**

**Definition:** Codified rules and regulations enacted by the legislative authority and enforced by the judiciary.

**Function:** Specifies acceptable behavior and prescribes penalties for violations.

**Example:** Criminal law, civil law, labor laws.

#### **b. Police**

- Enforces laws, prevents crime, and maintains public order.
- Acts as an immediate agency to check deviance and safeguard citizens.

#### **c. Judiciary**

- Interprets and applies laws in cases of disputes or offenses.
- Ensures justice, fairness, and protection of rights.

#### **d. Government / State**

- Frames policies, laws, and administrative rules.
- Maintains political and administrative order.

### **2. Informal Agencies of Social Control**

These operate through unwritten norms, customs, and traditions, and are not backed by legal sanctions, but by social approval or disapproval.

#### **a. Family**

- Primary agency of early socialization.
- Instills values, moral standards, discipline, and respect for authority.
- Uses rewards, affection, and sanctions (approval/disapproval) to regulate behavior.

**b. Peer Groups**

- Friends, colleagues, and companions exert influence through peer pressure.
- Encourage conformity to group norms.

**c. Community**

- Neighborhood groups, village panchayats, caste councils.
- Use social sanctions like praise, gossip, or ostracism to enforce norms.

**d. Religion**

- Provides moral codes, doctrines, and rituals.
- Uses concepts of sin, virtue, and divine reward/punishment to guide behavior.

**e. Public Opinion**

- Collective views of society on issues or behaviors.
- Acts as an invisible regulator through approval, criticism, or ridicule.

**f. Media**

- Shapes ideas, attitudes, and values through information and representation.
- Can promote conformity or challenge norms.

**3. Semi-formal Agencies**

**These agencies combine both formal and informal elements.**

**Educational Institutions:** Schools and universities teach discipline, citizenship, and values through rules (formal) and moral guidance (informal).

**Workplaces:** Maintain codes of conduct, reward systems, and disciplinary actions.