

# Types of Societies

## Before You Read

### Main Idea

Sociologists classify societies according to how each uses technology to meet the needs of its members. Sociologists recognize three broad categories of society—preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial.

### Reading Focus

1. What are the types of preindustrial societies?
2. What is the main economic activity in industrial societies?
3. How do postindustrial societies and industrial societies differ?
4. What concepts have sociologists used to contrast societies?

### Vocabulary

group  
subsistence strategies  
preindustrial society  
division of labor  
barter  
industrial society  
postindustrial society  
mechanical solidarity  
organic solidarity  
*Gemeinschaft*  
*Gesellschaft*

### TAKING NOTES

Use a graphic organizer

like this one to take notes on the different types of societies.

Types of Society	Characteristics
Preindustrial	
Industrial	
Postindustrial	

## People on the Move

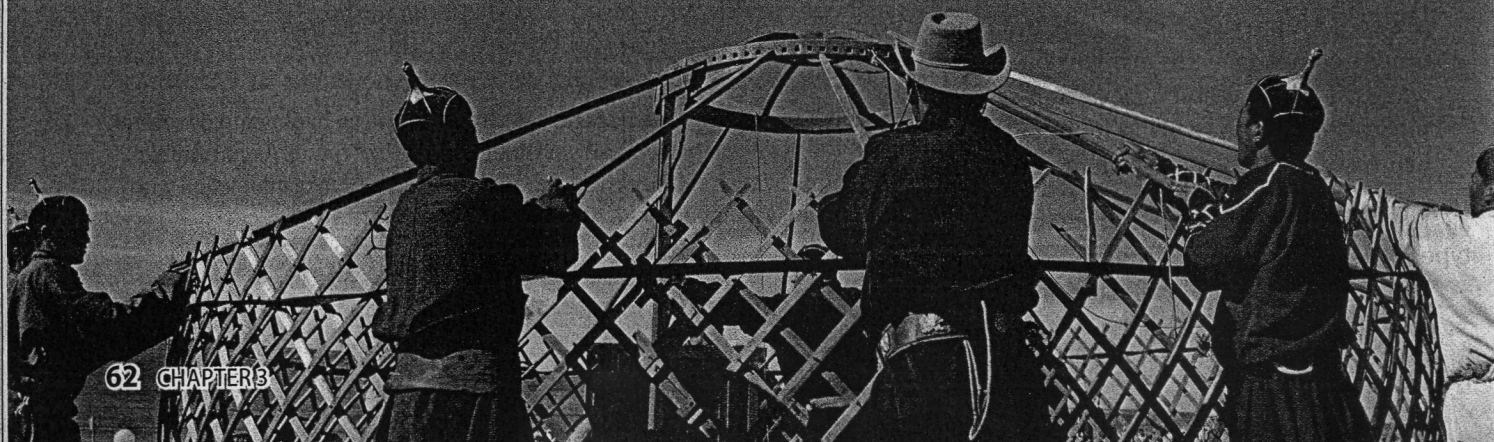
### SOCIOLOGY CLOSE UP

**What is life like in a preindustrial society today?** Some Mongolians still follow a traditional pastoral lifestyle. Living in small

groups, they drive their “five treasures”—herds of cattle, sheep, goats, horses, and camels—from pasture to pasture as the seasons change. Since they are constantly on the move, everything they own has to be portable. Even their tentlike homes, or yurts, can be folded and stowed on the backs of pack animals. Yurts are made of felt stretched over a wooden frame and can be erected or dismantled in minutes.

Mongolian herders follow a way of life that has been practiced for centuries. The modern world, however, has begun to intrude on their traditional culture. Cell phones are popular, and jeeps and motorcycles have gained favor as a means of transportation. Some yurts have been redesigned to support solar panels that power electric lights, televisions, and radios. It may be only a matter of time before the herders abandon their nomadic ways in favor of these modern conveniences. ■

By dismantling a yurt, these Mongolian herders prepare to move their home to a new location.



## Preindustrial Societies

Role behavior often takes place in groups. In sociological terms, a **group** is a set of people who interact on the basis of shared expectations and who possess some degree of common identity. The largest and most complex groups that sociologists study are societies. Sociologists tend to classify societies according to **subsistence strategies**, or the ways societies use technology to provide for the needs of their members. There are three broad subsistence categories: preindustrial, industrial, and postindustrial.

In a **preindustrial society**, food production, which is carried out through the use of human and animal labor, is the main economic activity. Preindustrial societies can be subdivided according to their level of technology and their method of producing food. These subdivisions are hunter-gatherer, pastoral, horticultural, and agricultural.

**Hunter-Gatherer Societies** The method of producing food used in hunter-gatherer societies is the daily collection of wild plants and the hunting of wild animals. Hunter-gatherers move around constantly in search of food. As a result, they do not build permanent villages or create a wide variety of artifacts. The need for mobility also limits the size of hunter-gatherer societies. Such societies rarely exceed 100 people. Statuses within the group are relatively equal, and decisions are reached through general agreement. The family forms the main social unit, with most societal members being related by birth or by marriage. The family also carries out most social functions.

**Pastoral Societies** Pastoralism is a slightly more efficient form of subsistence. Rather than searching for food on a daily basis, members of a pastoral society rely on domesticated herd animals to meet their food needs. Pastoralists live a nomadic life, moving their herds from pasture to pasture. Because their food supply is far more reliable, pastoral societies can support larger populations. Since there are food surpluses, fewer people are needed to produce food. So the **division of labor**—the specialization by individuals or groups in the performance of specific economic activities—becomes more complex. For example, some

## THE FIRST SOCIAL REVOLUTION

QUICK  
FACTS

The domestication of plants and animals marked the first great social revolution, which completely transformed the way people lived.

Domestication of plants and animals



More reliable food supply



Larger populations can be supported



Division of labor



Production of goods encourages trade



Through trade, some families  
acquire great wealth



With wealth comes power;  
new leadership systems develop

people become craftworkers, producing tools, weapons, and jewelry.

The production of goods encourages trade. This trade, in turn, helps to create inequality, as some families acquire more goods than others do. These families often acquire power through their increased wealth. The passing on of property from generation to generation helps to centralize wealth and power. In time, hereditary chieftainships—the typical form of government in pastoral societies—emerge.

**Horticultural Societies** Fruits and vegetables grown in garden plots that have been cleared from the jungle or forest provide the main source of food in a horticultural society. Horticultural societies have a level of technology and complexity similar to pastoral societies. Some horticultural groups use the slash-and-burn method to raise crops. The wild vegetation is cut and burned, and the ashes are used as fertilizer. Horticulturists use human labor and simple tools to cultivate the land for one or more seasons.



When the land becomes barren, horticulturists clear a new plot and leave the old plot to revert to its natural state. They may return to the original plot several years later and begin the process again. By rotating their garden plots, horticulturists can stay in one area for a fairly long period of time. This allows them to build semipermanent or permanent villages. The size of a village's population depends on the amount of land available for farming. Villages can range from as few as 30 people to as many as 2,000.

As with pastoral societies, surplus food leads to a more complex division of labor. Specialized roles that are part of horticultural life include those of craftspeople, shamans—or religious leaders—and traders. This role specialization allows horticulturists to create a wide variety of artifacts. As in pastoral societies, inequalities in wealth and power eventually develop within horticultural societies, and hereditary chieftainships are prevalent. Economic and political systems may be better developed in horticultural societies than in pastoral societies because of the more settled life.

**Agricultural Societies** In an agricultural society, animals are used to pull plows to till the fields. This technological innovation allows agriculturists to plant more crops than is possible when only human labor is used. Irrigation further increases crop yields, as does terracing, the practice of cutting fields into the sides of hills.

Higher crop yields allow agricultural societies to support large populations. Most people still work in food production, but many are able to engage in specialized roles. In turn, specialization leads to the development of cities, as individuals engaged in specialized roles come together in central areas. As the number of cities within a society increase, power often becomes concentrated in the hands of a single individual. This power is transferred from generation to generation, usually in the form of a hereditary monarchy.

Leaders of agricultural societies build powerful armies to provide protection from outside attack. The leaders also construct roads. Efficient transportation systems help increase trade, and this, in turn, leads to a number of significant cultural advances. For example, many agricultural societies abandon **barter**—the exchange of goods or services—to facilitate trade. In its place, they use money as the medium of exchange. Many agricultural societies also develop a system of writing to assist in keeping records.

Sharp status differences arise in agricultural societies. Most people belong to one of two groups: landowners or peasants. The small group of landowners controls the wealth and power in society. The large peasant group provides the labor on which the landowners' wealth and power depend.

#### **Reading Check** Identify Supporting Details

What two developments changed life in preindustrial societies?

### **INTERACTIVE** \*

## **The Transformation of Society**

Society was transformed by four revolutions—the domestication of plants and animals, the development of agriculture, industrialization, and the information age.

*Why do you think the rate of societal change is increasing?*



**The Domestication Revolution** The earliest humans were nomadic hunter-gatherers who constantly moved in search of food. About 10,000 years ago, some hunter-gatherers learned how to domesticate plants and animals. This led to a more settled life. ▲

**The Agrarian Revolution** The invention of the plow about 6,000 years ago ushered in the second great social revolution—the development of agriculture. Permanent settlements and larger food surpluses contributed to the growth of cities. In turn, cities brought new forms of leadership. ▼





## Industrial Societies

In an **industrial society** the emphasis shifts from the production of food to the production of manufactured goods. This shift is made possible by changes in production methods. In preindustrial societies, production is based on human and animal labor. Production is slow, and the amount that can be produced is limited. In industrial societies the bulk of production is carried out with machines. Thus, production can be increased by adding more machines or by developing new technologies.

Industrialization affects population size by increasing food production. The more food produced, the more people the society can support. Industrialization also changes the nature of the economy by reducing the demand for agricultural laborers. These workers are free to transfer their labor to the production of goods. The size of the industrial workforce also increases as new technologies make it possible to manufacture a wider variety of goods.

With industrialization, the location of work changes. In preindustrial societies most economic activities are carried out within the home setting. With the development of machines, production moves from the home to factories. As factories are built in cities, many people move to these areas. This trend leads to urbanization—the concentration of the population in cities.

The nature of work changes, too. In preindustrial societies, craftspeople are responsible for manufacturing an entire product. With

the use of machines, the production process is divided into a series of specific tasks, with each task being assigned to a different person. This process greatly increases productivity. However, it serves to reduce the level of skill required of most workers and tends to create boredom on the job.

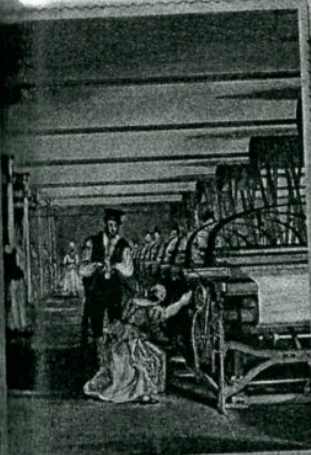
Industrialization also changes the role of various institutions in society. In preindustrial societies the family is the primary social institution. However, in industrial societies social processes such as education take place outside the bounds of the family. The need for mass literacy leads industrial societies to establish programs of compulsory education.

One positive effect of industrialization is that it brings more freedom to compete for social position. In preindustrial societies most social statuses are ascribed. In industrial societies, however, most statuses are achieved. As a result, individuals have more control over their position in the social structure.

**Reading Check** Identify Cause and Effect How does industrialization lead to urbanization?

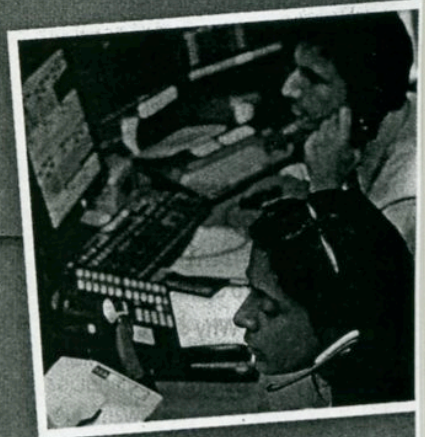
## Postindustrial Societies

The United States, like many Western countries, is no longer an industrial society. Rather, it is a **postindustrial society**, where the **economic emphasis is on the provision of information and services rather than on manufacturing**. Some **76 percent** of workers in United States are involved in **information and services**.



**The Industrial Revolution** With the Industrial Revolution in the late 1700s, the emphasis of society shifted from food production to the production of manufactured goods. Industrialization changed the location and nature of work. It also changed the social structure, since in industrial societies most statuses are achieved. ◀

**The Information Revolution** The development of the computer in the second half of the 1900s brought about postindustrial society. In this type of society, information is the chief commodity. Most people do not produce any concrete goods; rather, they use or apply information to provide services. ▶



Interactive Feature

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Less than 1 percent work in agriculture and about 23 percent in manufacturing.

Many significant social changes result from the transition to a postindustrial society. For example, the standard of living improves as wages increase for much of the population. In general, postindustrial societies place strong emphasis on roles of science and education in society. Technological advances are viewed as the key to future prosperity. The rights of individuals and the search for personal fulfillment also take on added importance. Belief in these rights leads to a strong emphasis on social equality and democracy.

**Reading Check Find the Main Idea** On what economic activity are postindustrial societies based?

### Contrasting Societies

Sociologists have long been interested in how the social structures of preindustrial and industrial societies differ. Émile Durkheim used the concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity to contrast societies. According to Durkheim, preindustrial societies are held together by **mechanical solidarity**. By this Durkheim meant that when people share the same values and perform the same tasks, they become united in a common whole. As the division of labor within societies becomes more complex, mechanical solidarity gives way to **organic solidarity**. This refers to the impersonal social relationships

that arise with increased job specialization. Individuals can no longer provide for all of their own needs, and they become dependent on others for their survival. Thus, many societal relationships are based on need rather than on values.

The German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies (TUHRN-yuhs) distinguished two ideal types of societies based on the structure of social relationships and the degree of shared values among societal members. He called these two types of societies **Gemeinschaft** (guh-MYN-shahft), the German word meaning “community,” and **Gesellschaft** (guh-ZEL-shahft), the German word meaning “society.”

In a *Gemeinschaft*, most people know one another. Relationships are close, and activities center on family and community. In a *Gemeinschaft*, people share a strong sense of group solidarity. A preindustrial society or a rural village in a more complex society are examples of a *Gemeinschaft*. In a *Gesellschaft* most social relationships are based on need rather than on emotion. Thus, relationships are impersonal and often temporary. Traditional values are generally weak, and individual goals are more important than group goals. A modern urban society such as the United States is an example of a *Gesellschaft*.

**Reading Check Contrast** How are social relationships in a *Gemeinschaft* different from those in a *Gesellschaft*?

## SECTION 3

Online Quiz



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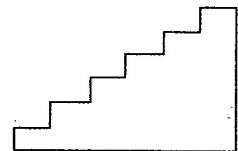
### Reviewing Main Ideas and Vocabulary

1. **Identify** What feature do sociologists tend to use to classify societies?
2. **Identify Cause and Effect** What developments led to a more settled life in horticultural and pastoral societies?
3. **Recall** What system of exchange was replaced by the use of money in many agricultural societies?
4. **Define** What does the term *barter* mean?

### Thinking Critically

5. **Make Generalizations** How do the statuses held by people tend to change as societies become more complex?
6. **Infer** Why do you think some sociologists refer to postindustrial societies as information societies?

7. **Sequence** Using your notes and a graphic organizer like the one here, arrange the six types of society in order of complexity. For each entry, add a brief description of the society's level of complexity.



### FOCUS ON WRITING

8. **Expository** Write a brief essay contrasting the social structures of simple and complex societies. In writing your essay, consider Émile Durkheim's concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity and Ferdinand Tönnies's concepts of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*.