

CHAPTER SIX

SOCIAL STABILITY VERSUS SOCIAL INSTABILITY

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INTRODUCTION

In subsequent units, we will discuss some social institutions in the Nigerian society. These institutions can work effectively only if and when the society is stable. They work in the societies where people know what to do, when and where to do them, and how to do them. And they work effectively in the societies where people cooperate to operate within the various institutions. A society exists because members agree to relate to one another by keeping the rules of the society (Mboho and Udo (2019). When members no longer keep these rules, law and order the society becomes unstable and chaotic.

Kinds of Social Stability

Politics: Societies that assign authority and make decisions in a reasonable way free of disruptions and conflict.

Civility: Civility is the practice of resolving differences in a manner prescribed by society as opposed by creating conflict. This can include methods of generating creative tension such as peaceful protest.

Public Services: Government provides services such as healthcare and education. From an economic perspective, public services create human capacity by ensuring populations are healthy, educated and productive. From a social perspective, public services help individuals and families to live a stable life free of need or excessive debt.

Infrastructure: Efficient and robust soft infrastructure and hard infrastructure such as canals are a basis for economic, political and social stability.

Justice Systems: Laws, enforcement of laws and services that enhance public safety. This assumes that laws and enforcement are widely perceived as fair. Enforcement of repression can be destability.

Economic Stability: Productivity and efficient economy systems such as free markets are the basis of all social stability as they provide the instability of poverty. Economies often demonstrate a cyclical pattern of boom and bust that can be made more stable with instruments such as interest rates, bank liquidity and government spending. For example, in an economic boom a government can increase interest rates and reduce borrowing to banks to discourage things like asset price speculation that can contribute to economic instability.

Religion, Culture and Tradition

Beliefs, values, practice and traditions that are passed from one generation to the next.

Social Change

Societies and cultures change with time due to factors such as new ideas, technology and demographics. In practice, this doesn't cause instability where the institutions society flexes with this change. A society that tries to repress a change that has already occurred may face significant instability.

Quality of Life

The more people who feel they have a high quality of life in a society, the more people who have incentive to maintain the stability of that system. Generally speaking, societies with the highest quality of life are also the most stable.

Peace and Diplomacy

War is vicious instability that can have broad global impacts. As such, institutions and strategies such as diplomacy that sustain peace are basic elements of stability. Generally speaking, societies that are vastly interconnected are less likely to be led into serious conflict.

Resilience

Resilience is the capacity for a society, social group or individual to endure stress in a positive way. For example, a city with sufficient water infrastructure is resilient to flooding. This also implies that a society cannot conduct itself in a self-destructive way such as producing excessive economic bads.

Social Instability

This is the degree to which a society and its institutions remain predictable and reliable. This is important because it allows participants in society such as individuals and groups to plan and conduct their affairs without disruption. In fact, it

is common for sociologists to state or assume that stability is a primary or, in some cases, the only goal of society. In practice, societies have other goals such as freedom and growth.

The following are illustrative examples of social stability.

1. Basic Rules and Laws of a Society

It is very important that everybody obeys the rules and regulations of his society or the group to which he belongs. There are many benefits that the members of a community get when rules and regulations of the community are kept. For instance, everybody will be protected, people will do their work well without fear of criminals, the entire society will be safe and everyone will be happy as law and order would prevail. This will ensure the progress of the society. But when we refuse to keep the rules, law and order will break down and the society will be thrown into confusion.

What are Rules and Laws?

Rules are practices and laid-down policies meant to control and regulate the behavioural conduct of individual members of the society. These rules are made by the members of the community and are also enforced by the members, for example, rules which guide family living are made by the members and enforced also by the members.

Laws are rules made by an authority for the proper regulation of the conduct of the people in certain aspects of the life of the society. Unlike rules which individual group make to satisfy their needs, laws are made by a selected group in authority, for example, members of parliament in a democracy or military rulers making decrees during a military regime. Rules are when the opinions of people have been considered, but laws are made without necessarily consulting the people. Unlike rules which are enforced by members of the groups, laws are enforced by law enforcement agents, e.g. the police.

Which rules and where?

All stable groups or societies have their rules and regulations. They have their laws. These groups include the family where the first basic rules of living together are learnt. These are carried over to living in the large society of school, town or village community, state, country and the world community. There are also rules to be kept within social group, religious group and other places of work. Family rules, for example, include greetings, especially in the morning, at work, when one returns from somewhere and at the end of the day. It also includes assignments to various family members, respect, rules of hygiene and how to behave within the larger communities such as school, village and town. These rules are meant to direct and make us conform to approved ways of behaviour. The rules of the larger society are more formalized. Some of these are even laws which carry severe penalties if we disobey them. Such rules are spelt out in the constitution of the society.

2. **Lack of Cooperation**

When members of a group agree to associate, work together for the common good, and give assistance to one another, we usually have cooperation. In such a situation, the need of each member is, to a great extent, usually met. On the other hand, when there is no agreement, when members work in opposite directions, when people are not willing to assist the less privileged or needy, the collective goals of members would not be achieved and individual needs would not be met. People would then not cooperate to obey the rules and regulations which guide behaviour patterns in the society.

The causes and effects of lack of cooperation can then be identified as follow:

a. **Conflict**

One of the effects of lack of cooperation is conflict. Conflict leads to division within a group when there is division, things no longer work well. Instead of teamwork, there would be quarrel and, sometimes, serious fight. Normal life is disrupted. Things fall apart and no meaningful progress and development can take place.

b. **Selfishness**

One of the causes of lack of cooperation in society is selfishness. It has no limit or bounds. A selfish person is one who thinks about himself only. Within the family, a selfish person is one who wants to satisfy himself before thinking about other members of the family. A selfish Person will only help with things which are of direct benefit to himself. For example, a selfish member of the family might want to eat the best piece of meat, which should be shared among all members of the family, he might want the most expensive clothes or the best room in the house. But, where work is concerned, he will probably make the least effort to help. In times of general illness or misfortune, for example, a flood or fire disaster, the selfish member will want to save himself.

In school, a selfish person may not want other pupils to know as much about a particular subject as he does. Once he has gathered information from the library or laboratory, he might hide his source of information. When it is time to work, for example, clearing the compound, cutting the grass, making a garden, the selfish person may find excuses to be absent or to do as little as possible. A selfish person may also be a liar. He may tell a lie against another person to benefit himself. In society at large, selfish people generally want to have everything their own way. They want the best of all the good things in society, but they contribute the least. A selfish attitude can cause much instability within the community. When people notice such an attitude, especially in the leaders, they become unhappy. They may become anxious and, in extreme cases, start to push for change through the use of force.

c. **Inefficiency**

Failure to carry out certain tasks according to time and set objectives is inefficiency. People are considered inefficient when they are unable to carry their duties out properly. For example: technicians, or technical engineers in the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) might be considered inefficient if electricity does not reach houses, factories and offices regularly; hospital doctors might be considered inefficient if they do not struggle to cure their patients; teachers could be considered inefficient if most of their students fail their subjects/courses, especially in public examinations, class captains could be considered inefficient if they cannot control the students in their classes. In most cases, inefficiency is caused by the wrong person being employed to do a job. Lack of interest in a job can mean that workers do not carry out their duties well. Some employees are more interested in the things they do outside of work and do not concentrate hard enough on their job. This attitude, if it is allowed to spread, can cause instability in society through regular breakdown in facilities and services.

3. **Deviance**

Any form of behaviour which disagrees with the customs and expectations of a given group or society is deviance. However, deviant behaviour is relative to time, place and situation. For example, if one appears in just pants (and, for women, with brassieres and pants) in a swimming pool or at the beach, no one would frown. That mode of dressing is acceptable to that place and that situation (of having cool bath), the same mode of dressing becomes unacceptable or a deviance in a classroom situation or at a social function like a wedding or naming ceremony. There are many aspects and kinds of deviant behaviour. These include juvenile delinquency, drug addiction, and different forms of crime, alcoholism and suicide.

a. **Juvenile delinquency**

Young people under the age of eighteen are regarded, in law, as juveniles. When they commit certain offences, they are not made to face the full wrath of the law, rather, they are sent to remand homes. The offences taken as deviant behaviour in society include stealing; refusal to go to school in a system of compulsory education; willful damage to other people's property; fighting, which might cause injury to other people; smoking of drugs and drinking of alcohol beyond their normal capacity. Young people who indulge in all these cannot be useful to themselves or the society in which they live. They might grow to be criminals who cause havoc in society and, therefore, cause instability.

b. **Drug addiction**

This is the abuse or wrong use of drugs which are dangerous to health. Those who use medical drugs without the prescription of qualified medical practitioner could cause harm to their health and damage their brains. Other

people enjoy smoking dangerous drugs like cocaine, heroin or Indian hemp. These drugs “cool nerves” and give the smokers temporary relief from their worries, anxieties or mental torture. They also give temporary but unusual power to do certain things which the smokers would normally not be able to do. They, however, damage health, damage the brain, and make those who smoke them (i.e. the drug addicts) misbehave, cause damage to other people and harm the society. Because the addicts render themselves useless, they can no longer contribute meaningfully to the progress of society.

c. **Crime and punishment**

Perhaps the greatest threat to stability within Nigeria’s society today is the increase in crime and the punishment which follows. Committing a crime is anti-social behaviour. It is acting against the wishes and objectives of society. It is causing harm and unhappiness to others. Crimes can take many forms. It may involve killing others without good cause; armed robbery; causing bodily harms to others, for example, through rape, or it could be reckless use of social services to the extent that harm may be caused to other people. Those who smuggle goods into the country, and those who embezzle public funds are also criminals. All forms of anti-social behaviour can be described as crimes against society.

In the past, most groups have had their own ways of punishing people who committed crimes. For example, under Islamic law, (Sharia), people who stole other people’s property could have a finger or a hand cut off. Some groups might have to exclude a person and even his or her family from their social group for committing a serious crime against their society. Today, the laws of the land state clearly the kinds of punishment which await all forms of crime against a citizen or against society.

Despite rules and regulations, crime and punishment are causes of instability within society. Some criminal acts cause bodily harm or even death, but some punishments also cause harm families. For example, if a person who commits a serious crime is the head of a family; his or her execution could ruin the family left behind. Viewed either way, society can only be stable once its members become law-abiding.

4. **Social Inequality**

The people in any society can be viewed as belonging to different social classes. This classification is done by looking at the kind of work they do, and the prestige, income and power that they possess. Hence, social inequality refers to the unequal distribution of these attributes among individuals and groups in a society. The existence of social inequality and its consequences contribute to social instability. The social system that exists in Nigeria seems to divide people into two major classes of the rich and powerful, and the poor and powerless. The rich and powerful have a greater share of prestige, wealth and political power than the weak and powerless. This makes one class to have more privileges and advantages than

the other. This seems to be one of the major causes of social unrest, such as mass protests, strikes, and students demonstration in the country.

5. **Ethnic grouping**

In Nigeria, it is no longer common to use the tribe, or tribalism. These words actually refer to a group or group of people who share a language and culture. Such groups are ethnic groups. There are many ethnic groups in Nigeria, for example, Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Ijaw, Edo, Efik, Ibibio, Tiv Nupe. It has been estimated that there are more than 300 such groups in the country. When a decision is to be made as to who should be appointed to a new position, who should be promoted or who should receive a scholarship or contract, some people prefer to choose a person from their own ethnic group. Such action, regardless of the ability or qualifications of the other candidates, cannot be considered fair to all concerned. Attitudes such as this can cause divisions within the Nigerian community which may lead to instability. It is wise at all times, to remember Nigeria's motto: Unity and faith, peace and progress.

6. **Lack of sovereignty**

Lack of sovereignty is the situation whereby a country is not in proper control of its affairs in most aspects of life. Hence, the citizens of the country are dominated and oppressed by foreigners who control the wealth and power in the country. For example, many countries in Africa suffer from lack of sovereignty because their economic wealth is controlled by foreigners through banks, insurance companies, and manufacturing and construction industries which they own. Through the control they have over the news media, the foreigner's even influence the way Africans think about themselves. Many African countries also depend on loans from foreign institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. At the same time, their industries depend on the importation of raw materials, while their mineral and agricultural products depend on foreign markets. All these show that there is little sovereignty and self-reliance in many developing countries.

The main result of lack of sovereignty, as indicated earlier, is that a country cannot adequately rate for the interests of majority of its members. This is because much of its wealth and resources are exported to other countries for the benefit of other peoples or are in hands of foreigners (Mboho, Udo and Udo 2014). Sometimes, when such a country demands for genuine independence and justice from foreign powers or investors, they try to defend their interests at all costs. They may do this by threatening to impose on popular and oppressive regimes on such countries (Mboho and Tahirih (2014). This situation of lack of sovereignty usually leads to social instability in the countries where it obtains. For example, people in the oil-rich Niger Delta in Nigeria have had several serious conflicts with multi-nationals exploiting oil in their areas, but leaving little or no social benefits for the people of the area. The people take laws into their hands and damage properties of the multi-nationals. They believe their country is not sufficiently protecting their interest.

7. **The way out**

We have seen a lot of causes of social instability in society. We have also seen that social instability is not a good thing in society. To ensure a more stable society, we must find the way out. Some suggestions are:

- a. It is necessary to properly socialize all members of the society so that they can work as a team in the realization of the goals of the society. We have just seen that one of the major cause of lack of cooperation and deviance is the failure to properly socialize individuals and integrate them into the society. One main way, therefore, of getting all members of the society to conform to its expectations is by getting everyone properly socialized.
- b. Social inequality will be reduced if there is democracy and justice in society. If all the essential rights of the members of the society are catered for, as spelt out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, then a stable undivided society would be achieved. A society that is divided into privilege and unprivileged classes will tend to experience social instability. So, one of our main objectives in Nigeria should be to build a society where everybody will be catered for, everyone will be able to have a say in government, and nobody shall be oppressed.
- c. All forms of tribalism must be avoided. We must encourage talents and put the right people in the right positions – regardless of where they come from – especially in a multi-cultural group like Nigeria. When you encourage merits, contributions to national development would be great.
- d. The problems of lack of sovereignty would be reduced if our country begins to depend less on foreign countries. The people must ensure that Nigerians control the economy of the country, and that the majority of the people benefit from the wealth of the country. This can be done if Nigerians join in owning and controlling banks and other financial, construction and manufacturing businesses in the country. Agriculture and industry must be developed so as to adequately cater for all the members of the society, without depending on importation or foreign loans.

Also, on all international issues, Nigerians should take positions that defend the interests of the majority of her people. Foreigners must not dictate what to say and do on most issues. That would be unpatriotic and unpardonable. It is only when Nigerians are self-reliant that they can take good care of the affairs of their country, instead of depending on others.

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