

(Article)

System of Trust as a Basis for a Safe and Secure Society*

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Abstract

Quest for safety and security is increasing in our society. However, will the safer and more secure society be attainable if only we succeed in solving problems directly? Does not the true crisis lie elsewhere? Are we still be able to believe in the solvability of the problem? If not, what sort of social system lies behind this insecurity. Isn't it trust that is missing in relation to security and safety? Without trust safety may not bring about security.

Thus the purpose of this study is to locate the importance of social trust in the quest for safety and security. Moreover, if the quest for safety and security led to a stagnant society, or if it did not enhance people's happiness, it would be meaningless. Safety and security, though it may merit as an independent value concept, need to be balanced against justice, fairness and equity consideration. For example, policies to enhance safety and security are often predisposed to "surveillance society" and lead to fear, doubt and exclusion of others. Publishing a local map for crime prevention may provoke people's anxiety in return.

The study made use of an internet questionnaire survey and obtained 1000 samples focusing on people's subjective evaluation as well as objective characteristics of the panel. Panel's residential information was collected on the basis of postal code since it was expected that environmental and cultural regionality might define resident's anxiety, concern and trust.

* This is an abridged and slightly modified version of the report, "System of Trust as a Basis for the Safer and More Secure Society," HEM21, March 2007. For full version of the report, go to <http://www.hemri21.jp/kenkyusyo/seika/detail.asp?id=5006>.

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Main findings from the survey were as follows. 1) People who evaluate their locality as safer and more secure than other localities tend to show a higher degree of satisfaction and happiness, and are prone to believe that people are good at heart and trustworthy, and their neighborhood is less exposed to environmental degradation, juvenile delinquencies and crimes. 2) Though it cannot be said that the people living in the area of higher safety and security tend to trust the local government in normal times, but they tend to believe that their local administration will be dependable in times of disasters. 3) People living in the area that was heavily affected by the 1995 earthquake tend to show a higher degree of trust to their local government.

By means of the analysis of covariance structures, the study could also verify that the subjective degree of people's livelihood satisfaction is correlated with such elements as general trust, neighborhood trust, and the subjective belief on neighborhood safety and security. Also it was found that the starting point of people's general trust was the subjective belief that the local administration would come to rescue for sure in times of emergencies such as natural disasters.

Another interesting finding was that many people who find their neighborhood community relatively safe and secure tend to believe that the country as a whole was similarly disposed. However, there are some who believe that their localities are safe and secure but the whole country is not. Taking this possible contradiction between the subjective belief and the objective conditions into consideration, the study gives policy recommendations on six fronts.

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