

# Study on the Relationship between Government Trust and Safety

Won Hee Chung

Chung Konyang University, Korea

## What does it mean to trust the government?

According to Mayer et al. (1995), trusting the government is a psychological attitude where citizens support the government despite the potential for harm, without necessarily having the ability to monitor or control it. Park Soon-ae (2006) describes it as trust formed within a specific socio-cultural context, encompassing institutional trust in the state governance system and evaluations of government officials performing governmental functions.

### 1. Trust in Policies

Believing that the policies presented by the government are for the benefit of the citizens. This includes policies in various fields such as economy, education, health, environment, and safety.

### 2. Trust in Fairness

Believing that the government treats all citizens fairly and enforces laws impartially.

### 3. Trust in Transparency

Believing that the government's decision-making process is transparent, allowing citizens to understand and participate in it.

### 4. Trust in Competence

Believing that the government has the ability to run the country effectively and respond appropriately in crisis situations.

## What happens if there is no trust?

Kim Deok-soo (2016): Lack of trust in government policies can lead to non-support, non-compliance, or even resistance, wasting time and resources, weakening the unity between government and citizens, reducing policy effectiveness, and causing citizens to rely on private networks for problem-solving. Park Purum (2017): Trust in the government strengthens its legitimacy and overall policy process. A decline in government trust can increase conflict and policy costs in the long term.

**1. Social Division: Distrust in the government can lead to division among citizens, undermining social stability and hindering national development.**

**2. Policy Failure: Without trust, effective implementation of policies becomes difficult. For example, public health policies require public cooperation to succeed.**

**3. Decreased Voter Turnout: Distrust in the government can lower voter turnout, weakening citizen participation, a core principle of democracy, and causing political imbalance.**

**4. Social Anxiety: Citizens who distrust the government may feel insecure about their safety or future, affecting their happiness and quality of life.**

## Is South Korea a trustworthy nation?

### Government at a Glance 2023

The OECD average trust in central governments is 41.4%, while South Korea's central government trust is 48.8%, ranking 7th out of 20 surveyed countries.

The OECD average trust in local governments is 46.35%, while South Korea's local government trust is 48.69%, ranking 10th out of 21 surveyed countries. OECD(2023)

### To recover social capital, transparency needs improvement.

According to the 2023 Legatum Prosperity Index, South Korea ranks 107th in social capital, significantly lower than its overall ranking of 29th. In institutional trust, it ranks 100th, with judiciary (155th), military (132nd), politicians (114th), and government (111th) showing severe deficiencies. Improvement directions include expanding transparency and establishing the rule of law to restore social trust.

### Most Secure Countries in the World 2023

South Korea ranks 17th out of 134 countries with a score of 7.5089.

Safety scores consider three basic elements: war and peace, crime rates, and the risk of new epidemics and natural disasters.

### Trust in Institutions

Source: KIPA, Social Integration Survey

Annotation: "Institutional trust is the arithmetic average of the proportion of people who responded 'slightly trust' or 'strongly trust' regarding how well the central government departments, National Assembly, courts, prosecution, police, local governments, military, labor unions, civil organizations, TV broadcasters, newspapers, education sector, medical sector, large corporations, religious organizations, and financial institutions are performing their duties."

		2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Institutional Trust (Average %)		41.3 <span>↔(0%)</span>	40.4 <span>▼(-2.2%)</span>	39.7 <span>▼(-1.7%)</span>	40.8 <span>▲(2.8%)</span>	41.2 <span>▲(1%)</span>	41.5 <span>▲(0.7%)</span>	48.3 <span>▲(16.4%)</span>	55.4 <span>▲(14.7%)</span>	52.8 <span>▼(-4.7%)</span>	51.1 <span>▼(-3.2%)</span>
Institutional Trust	Central Government Departments	32.9 <span>↔(0%)</span>	31.9 <span>▼(-3%)</span>	24.6 <span>▼(-22.9%)</span>	40.8 <span>▲(65.9%)</span>	45.3 <span>▲(11%)</span>	38.4 <span>▼(-15.2%)</span>	49.4 <span>▲(28.6%)</span>	56.0 <span>▲(13.4%)</span>	50.0 <span>▼(-10.7%)</span>	53.8 <span>▲(7.6%)</span>
	National Assembly	18.0 <span>↔(0%)</span>	15.3 <span>▼(-15%)</span>	12.6 <span>▼(-17.6%)</span>	15.0 <span>▲(19%)</span>	15.0 <span>↔(0%)</span>	19.7 <span>▲(31.3%)</span>	21.1 <span>▲(7.1%)</span>	34.4 <span>▲(63%)</span>	24.1 <span>▼(-29.9%)</span>	24.7 <span>▲(2.5%)</span>
	Courts	37.6 <span>↔(0%)</span>	35.0 <span>▼(-6.9%)</span>	29.8 <span>▼(-14.9%)</span>	34.3 <span>▲(15.1%)</span>	33.0 <span>▼(-3.8%)</span>	36.8 <span>▲(11.5%)</span>	41.1 <span>▲(11.7%)</span>	51.3 <span>▲(24.8%)</span>	47.7 <span>▼(-7%)</span>	48.5 <span>▲(1.7%)</span>
	Prosecution	36.0 <span>↔(0%)</span>	34.3 <span>▼(-4.7%)</span>	27.4 <span>▼(-20.1%)</span>	31.3 <span>▲(14.2%)</span>	32.2 <span>▲(2.9%)</span>	32.2 <span>↔(0%)</span>	36.3 <span>▲(12.7%)</span>	50.1 <span>▲(38%)</span>	45.1 <span>▼(-10%)</span>	44.5 <span>▼(-1.3%)</span>
	Police	40.1 <span>↔(0%)</span>	40.1 <span>↔(0%)</span>	37.6 <span>▼(-6.2%)</span>	40.7 <span>▲(8.2%)</span>	41.2 <span>▲(1.2%)</span>	36.5 <span>▼(-11.4%)</span>	46.4 <span>▲(27.1%)</span>	55.3 <span>▲(19.2%)</span>	49.6 <span>▼(-10.3%)</span>	51.4 <span>▲(3.6%)</span>
	Local Governments	39.9 <span>↔(0%)</span>	42.0 <span>▲(5.3%)</span>	41.6 <span>▼(-1%)</span>	45.4 <span>▲(9.1%)</span>	49.8 <span>▲(9.7%)</span>	44.9 <span>▼(-9.8%)</span>	57.1 <span>▲(27.2%)</span>	58.5 <span>▲(2.5%)</span>	58.8 <span>▲(0.5%)</span>	58.6 <span>▼(-0.3%)</span>
	Military	34.5 <span>↔(0%)</span>	47.7 <span>▲(38.3%)</span>	43.8 <span>▼(-8.2%)</span>	43.2 <span>▼(-1.4%)</span>	45.1 <span>▲(4.4%)</span>	48.0 <span>▲(6.4%)</span>	51.5 <span>▲(7.3%)</span>	56.1 <span>▲(8.9%)</span>	53.8 <span>▼(-4.1%)</span>	54.5 <span>▲(1.3%)</span>
	Labor Unions	38.4 <span>↔(0%)</span>	36.7 <span>▼(-4.4%)</span>	39.5 <span>▲(7.6%)</span>	38.0 <span>▼(-3.8%)</span>	36.5 <span>▼(-3.9%)</span>	36.8 <span>▲(0.8%)</span>	43.7 <span>▲(18.8%)</span>	47.8 <span>▲(9.4%)</span>	43.1 <span>▼(-9.8%)</span>	37.7 <span>▼(-12.5%)</span>
	Civic Groups	48.1 <span>↔(0%)</span>	44.9 <span>▼(-6.7%)</span>	47.2 <span>▲(5.1%)</span>	46.3 <span>▼(-1.9%)</span>	43.6 <span>▼(-5.8%)</span>	44.1 <span>▲(1.1%)</span>	46.7 <span>▲(5.9%)</span>	53.3 <span>▲(14.1%)</span>	48.8 <span>▼(-8.4%)</span>	43.6 <span>▼(-10.7%)</span>
	TV Broadcasters	46.9 <span>↔(0%)</span>	44.7 <span>▼(-4.7%)</span>	46.4 <span>▲(3.8%)</span>	40.9 <span>▼(-11.9%)</span>	44.3 <span>▲(8.3%)</span>	38.0 <span>▼(-14.2%)</span>	45.1 <span>▲(18.7%)</span>	55.3 <span>▲(22.6%)</span>	56.5 <span>▲(2.2%)</span>	49.6 <span>▼(-12.2%)</span>
	Newspapers	46.3 <span>↔(0%)</span>	42.5 <span>▼(-8.2%)</span>	43.9 <span>▲(3.3%)</span>	39.0 <span>▼(-11.2%)</span>	39.7 <span>▲(1.8%)</span>	34.2 <span>▼(-13.9%)</span>	41.8 <span>▲(22.2%)</span>	50.1 <span>▲(19.9%)</span>	47.8 <span>▼(-4.6%)</span>	44.4 <span>▼(-7.1%)</span>
	Education	52.7 <span>↔(0%)</span>	48.8 <span>▼(-7.4%)</span>	52.9 <span>▲(8.4%)</span>	55.6 <span>▲(5.1%)</span>	49.6 <span>▼(-10.8%)</span>	55.1 <span>▲(11.1%)</span>	65.5 <span>▲(18.9%)</span>	69.1 <span>▲(5.5%)</span>	67.7 <span>▼(-2%)</span>	66.9 <span>▼(-1.2%)</span>
	Health Sector	53.2 <span>↔(0%)</span>	52.4 <span>▼(-1.5%)</span>	56.9 <span>▲(8.6%)</span>	57.9 <span>▲(1.8%)</span>	54.9 <span>▼(-5.2%)</span>	62.0 <span>▲(12.9%)</span>	71.7 <span>▲(15.6%)</span>	72.3 <span>▲(0.8%)</span>	76.4 <span>▲(5.7%)</span>	72.1 <span>▼(-5.6%)</span>
	Large Corporations	37.8 <span>↔(0%)</span>	33.8 <span>▼(-10.6%)</span>	34.3 <span>▲(1.5%)</span>	31.2 <span>▼(-9%)</span>	33.9 <span>▲(8.7%)</span>	41.4 <span>▲(22.1%)</span>	50.4 <span>▲(21.7%)</span>	56.7 <span>▲(12.5%)</span>	57.6 <span>▲(1.6%)</span>	54.5 <span>▼(-5.4%)</span>
	Religious Organizations	46.5 <span>↔(0%)</span>	44.8 <span>▼(-3.7%)</span>	45.1 <span>▲(0.7%)</span>	40.9 <span>▼(-9.3%)</span>	42.7 <span>▲(4.4%)</span>	41.7 <span>▼(-2.3%)</span>	45.8 <span>▲(9.8%)</span>	54.2 <span>▲(18.3%)</span>	49.9 <span>▼(-7.9%)</span>	48.5 <span>▼(-2.8%)</span>
	Financial Institutions	51.8 <span>↔(0%)</span>	51.4 <span>▼(-0.8%)</span>	52.0 <span>▲(1.2%)</span>	51.6 <span>▼(-0.8%)</span>	52.2 <span>▲(1.2%)</span>	53.5 <span>▲(2.5%)</span>	58.9 <span>▲(10.1%)</span>	66.2 <span>▲(12.4%)</span>	67.1 <span>▲(1.4%)</span>	63.8 <span>▼(-4.9%)</span>

### Do people who trust the government perceive it as safe?

While general perceptions of safety are not low, perceptions of social safety are not very positive, likely due to recent social violence issues. Trust in local governments is higher than in the central government, likely influenced

by media portrayals. No significant difference was found in the perception of safety among those who trust the government. However, overall trust levels and perceptions of safety are not high.

Category		2020	2021	2022	Average
Perception of Safety (out of 10)	Neighborhood Safety	6.0	6.6	6.6	6.40
	Regional Safety	5.7	6.5	6.5	6.23
	Social Safety	5.2	6.2	6.0	5.80
Perception of Trust (out of 4)	Central Government	2.4	2.6	2.4	2.47
	Local Government	2.6	2.6	2.6	2.60

## Trust in Local Governments and Safety

Classification	Local Government Trust Perception (2013–2022)	Regional Safety Index	Regional Decline Risk Index	Disaster Risk Score	Local Government Trust (Rank)	Regional Safety Index (Rank)	Regional Decline Index (Rank)	Disaster Risk Score (Rank)
Seoul	2.433	2.00	0.985	4.10	8	2	5	16
Incheon	2.392	3.00	0.989	4.10	12	6	4	16
Daejeon	2.498	3.00	0.957	3.58	3	6	7	10
Daegu	2.467	3.67	0.755	3.85	6	11	9	13
Busan	2.340	4.00	0.653	3.96	15	13	10	14
Ulsan	2.405	2.67	1.002	2.51	11	4	3	2
Gwangju	2.429	2.83	0.962	3.03	9	5	6	6
Sejong	2.548	2.83	1.485	2.15	1	5	1	1
Jeju	2.337	3.17	0.774	2.60	16	8	8	3
Gyeonggi	2.455	1.50	1.038	3.78	7	1	2	12
Gangwon	2.351	3.67	0.511	3.15	14	11	14	7
Chungcheong buk-do	2.483	3.00	0.645	2.85	5	6	12	5
Chungcheong nam-do	2.543	3.33	0.595	3.56	2	9	13	9
Jeollabuk-do	2.411	2.50	0.506	3.20	10	3	15	8
Jeollanam-do	2.486	3.83	0.418	4.07	4	12	17	15
Gyeongsangb uk-do	2.483	3.50	0.472	3.65	5	10	16	11
Gyeongsangna m-do	2.390	3.03	0.652	2.69	13	7	11	4

Source: KIPA, Social Integration Survey

## Need for a Broader Perspective on Trust

As reviewed so far, most of the concepts and perspectives on government trust are based on political trust and participation.

- The individual-level influencing factors are interpersonal trust, subjective well-being, political participation, and social participation (Hee-bong Park, 2006; Putnam et al., 1994).
- The national-level influencing factors include perceptions of the political and economic situation, and perceptions of fairness of opportunity (Min-a Sung & Sook-yeon Won, 2021; Hibbing & TheissMorse, 2001).

**In the case of local governments, many regions with high extinction and risk indices appear regardless of trust.**

- Despite the various factors affecting the safety of the region appearing locally, the actual comparison results show that many regions with high local trust are distributed regardless of local safety. It is very important to measure trust from a multi-dimensional perspective, considering both macro and micro aspects.

**Social capital, seen as intangible assets such as trust, communication, cooperation, norms, and networks, based on the voluntary participation of local residents to solve the problems facing the local community and move towards common goals, has aspects that make it difficult to explain the current trust from various perspectives**

**of the state and local communities.**

- Furthermore, trusting the government and local governments encompasses not only political and economic aspects but also contents that can guarantee practical safety in life, such as disasters, health, and crime. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the concept and perspective of trust."