

Does Social Cohesion Decline? A Study of Social Trust among the Millennials in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Social trust is a fundamental factor underpinning social cohesion and interaction among citizens. Nowadays, human interactions are much influenced and shaped by technological advancement that has taken place over the past 20 years. Therefore, it is urgent to see the current condition of social trust, particularly among young people that are often named as millennials. The millennials are usually described as tech-savvy due to their significant amount of time spent on social media and the internet compared to older groups. The reason for the urgency is because Indonesia is now entering the first phase of having a demographic bonus, and it is expected that the working-age population will reach 189 million people in 2020 [1]. It means that the vast majority of the Indonesian population is in their productive age, and social trust among them will play a significant role. This study proposes a research question: how is the dynamic of social trust among Indonesian millennials? For data collection, the survey was conducted online which was distributed in senior high school and college students. There are 852 respondents participated in filling in the online questionnaire in selected six cities in Sulawesi and Sumatera islands. The data is analysed by descriptive statistics to map the dynamic of social trust among millennials. The results show that the majority of respondents believe their family could help them when they are in trouble, while they feel more skeptical when it comes to asking help to their neighbors. The responses when asking for help from friends who are the same ethnicity are also not very convincing. The young people are not confident of receiving support from those who are from different ethnic groups. Surprisingly, when it comes to religion, they seem to be willing to help those who are the same believers. This aspect outperforms other factors, namely ethnicity and neighborhood.

Keywords: *Social trust, Millennials, Social cohesion, Youth, Indonesia*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social trust is a fundamental part of the development process in Indonesia. It functions as social glue, and for that reason, it is fair to say that social trust should become everybody's concern. With a high level of social trust, the creation of social connection and social relation would be possible, and these two aspects are likely to determine achievement of any goals [2]. For instance, high level of trust could minimise "transaction cost" in economic activities and

business [3]. In other words, cooperation between two persons who trust each other usually does not require a formal system or regulation which imposes a certain amount of time and material: negotiation process, lobbyist, lawyer and so forth.

In this study, what we mean by trust is not based on individual experience, as it leads to particular trust. Trust, here, refers to generalised trust, meaning that people are more supportive toward minorities' rights [4]. Besides, a typical attitude of social trust goes beyond face-to-face interaction, and it brings people together without personally knowing each other [5]. Generalized or social trust, therefore, functions as social glue or connection to people regardless of their religion, ethnicity, and economic background.

Another explanation of trust is associated with the so-called top-down approach. This view holds an assumption that social trust stems from the institution, the state. Although government policy is a primary instrument for creating equality, a just economic system matters and it depends on a sense of social cohesion [6]. The reciprocal relationship thus prevails between equality and trust [6].

Several studies have been conducted in this area. For instance, Wang, Min & Han found that trust had significant impact on individual behaviour in the use of social media, while culture gave little moderating influence in this case [7]. Tao et al., discovered that political trust, which refers to institutional trust, augmented social trust in China and highlighted the effect of economic modernisation [8]. Nevertheless, this finding is not always the case. There is a weak connection between social or generalised trust and reliance in political institution [4]. A study conducted by Gundelach noticed that ethnic diversity, in the long run, can enhance the quality of social trust, by raising trust across varying cultural groups [9].

Although some studies mentioned above have contributed to the understanding of social trust, little is known about the current situation of social trust among the millennials in Indonesia. This study, therefore, aims at providing empirical exploration on this issue by addressing a research question of how is the dynamic of social trust among Indonesian millennials?

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study deploys a quantitative approach by using online survey. There are 852 respondents participated with age ranging from 17 to 25 years old. We did an offline survey in one school because of the school regulation, restricting the use of mobile phone by the students in the school area.

The study was conducted in the following cities:

1. Banda Aceh
2. Binjai
3. Tebing Tinggi
4. Pematang Siantar
5. Padang
6. Makassar

The data were then analysed using descriptive statistics to map the dynamic of social trust among the millennials.

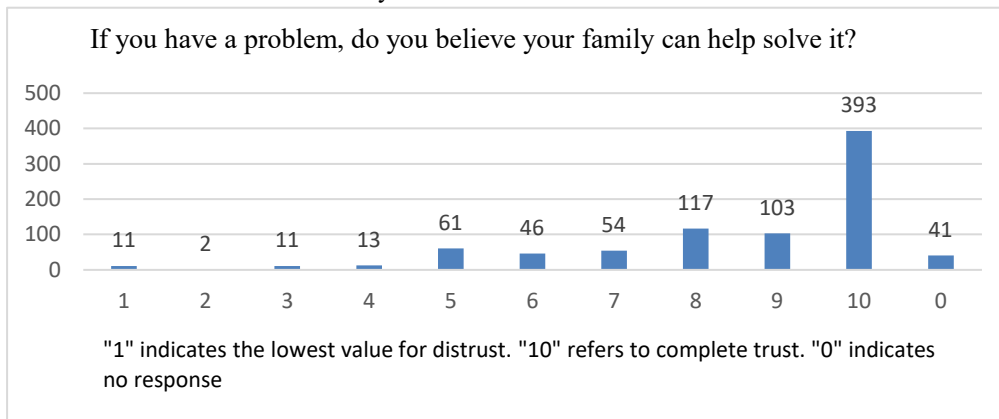
3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results of the dynamics of social trust among millennials will be presented and discussed. We received 852 responses filled by senior high school and university students. The details are discussed in the following.

3.1 Social trust among family members

If we look at the survey data below, most respondents have strong faith that their close relatives will provide them help whenever they ask.

FIGURE 1: Trust in family member

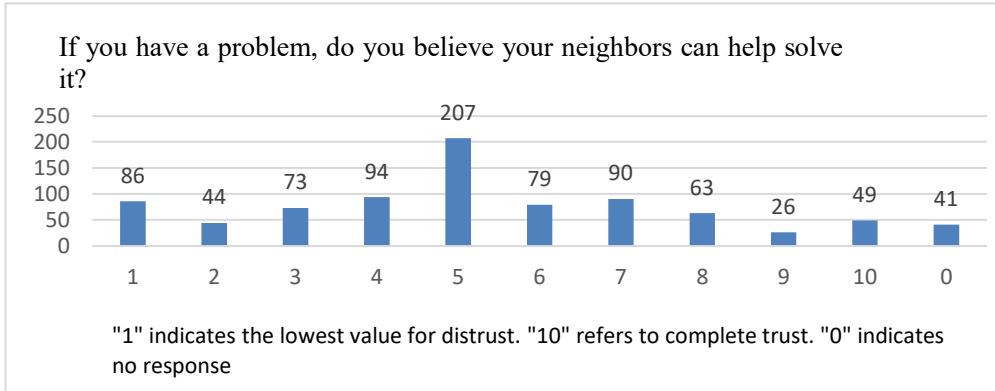


It can be clearly seen that about 393 respondents are very confident that their relatives will provide them help when they face a problem. It is followed by a significant number of young people (320), whose level of trust toward their family is high. This trend indicates that the millennials value their relationship with family members as a vital element. However, this condition does not necessarily go hand in hand with their level of political trust. In this case, the millineals may show a high score for their interpersonal trust with their family; on the contrary, they have low level of confidence for leaders or political institutions [8].

3.2 Social trust among neighbors

The chart below shows that most of the respondents have low level of confidence that their neighbors will care for them when they are in trouble.

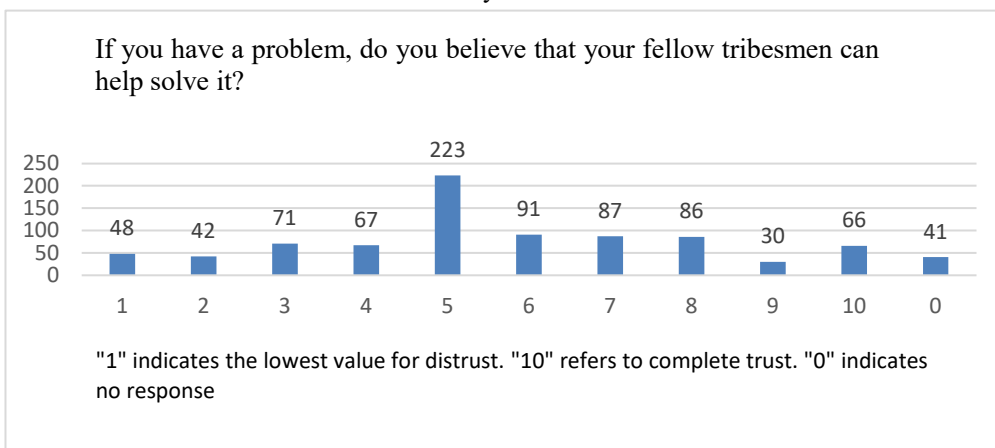
FIGURE 2: Trust in neighbors



The data from the survey above illustrates that generally, the younger generation relatively has low level of trust toward their neighbors. This means that the degree of their confidence for asking help is determined by how close the family relations they have with someone. Although they have been living with their neighbors for a long period of time, the majority of our respondents feel they do not really believe their neighbor will offer them hand to come out of their problem. In other words, the majority of the respondents express low level of trust when it comes to their neighbor.

3.3 Social trust with same ethnic groups

FIGURE 3: Trust based on ethnicity



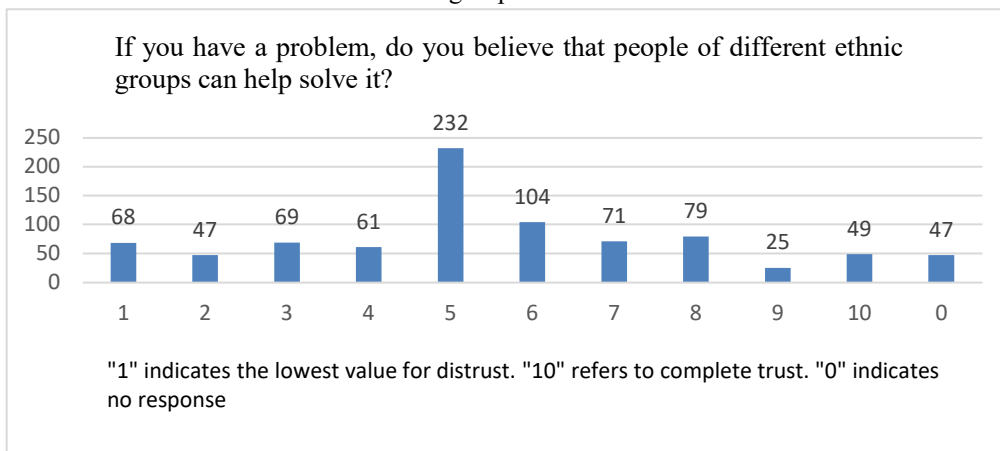
A similar result with the previous measure is shown in the graph above. A significant number of respondents (223) tend to be reluctant when asking for help from their fellow tribesmen. Another interesting phenomenon reveals that ethnic-based relationship is now considered less to influence the strength of social trust among the millennials. This could have both positive and negative outcomes. The former indicates that there would be a little potential of fragmentation in society as ethnic consideration no longer plays a significant role in shaping

trust. However, the later may illustrate loose ties among tribesman, which can lead to the decline of social cohesion in a given homogenous society.

3.4 Social trust with different ethnic groups

The graph below presents that although there are 49 respondents (6.6%) believe they can ask help to someone regardless of their ethnic background, the majority of respondents, 232, do not have faith they will be assisted by people from different ethnic groups. This figure, in relation to the previous outcome, tells us that the aspect of ethnicity has little influence on the level of social trust among the young generation. The responses are quite similar, meaning that the millennials perceive low confidence that people outside their family members can land them a hand when they are in trouble.

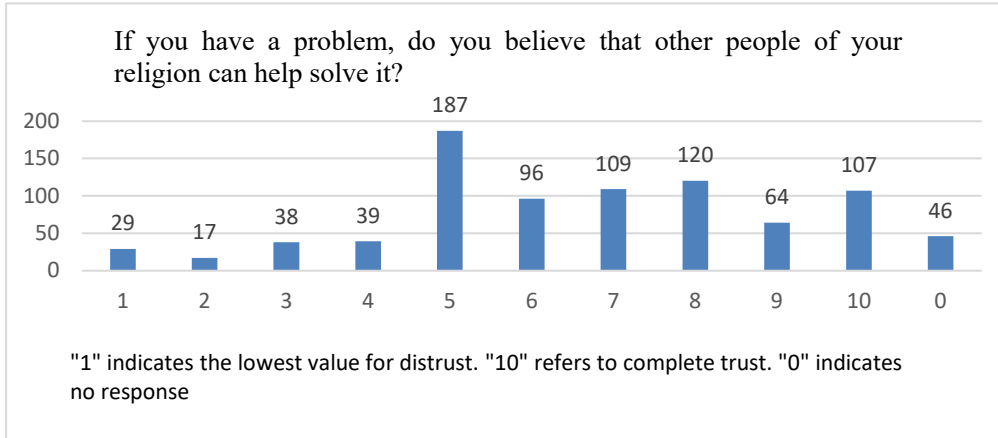
FIGURE 4: Trust across cultural groups



3.5 Social trust with the same religious faith

The result of the data analysis shows that the young generation is relatively sure with their fellow believers who will provide assistance if needed. They tend to show a high level of social trust when it comes to the similarity of religious beliefs. In this particular situation, respondents are more willing to help others, none family members, on the basis of the same faith. The details can be seen in the following graph:

FIGURE 5: Trust based on religious faith

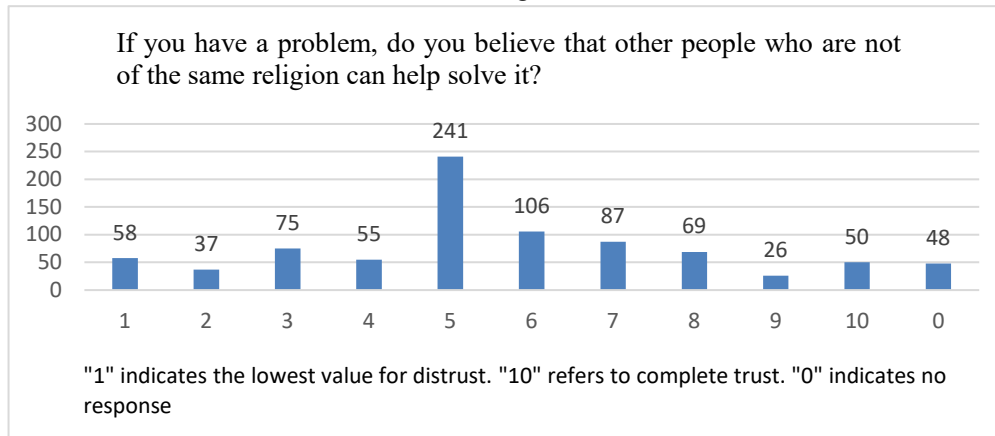


About 496 respondents are positive in seeking help from their fellow believers. However, a significant number of 310 young people feel doubt when asking for help from this group. Another possible outcome of this data notices that religion is still considered influential for the millennials in their social interactions. On the contrary, it posts a question of whether they can work collaboratively with those who have different religious faith or even with an atheist.

3.6 Social trust and cooperative attitudes

Similar to the previous section, the attitudes of the young generation for providing assistance to other people are much determined by religious identity. The majority of respondents do not believe that help will be offered by those who are from different religious beliefs. The following chart has the details:

FIGURE 6: Trust based on different religious belief

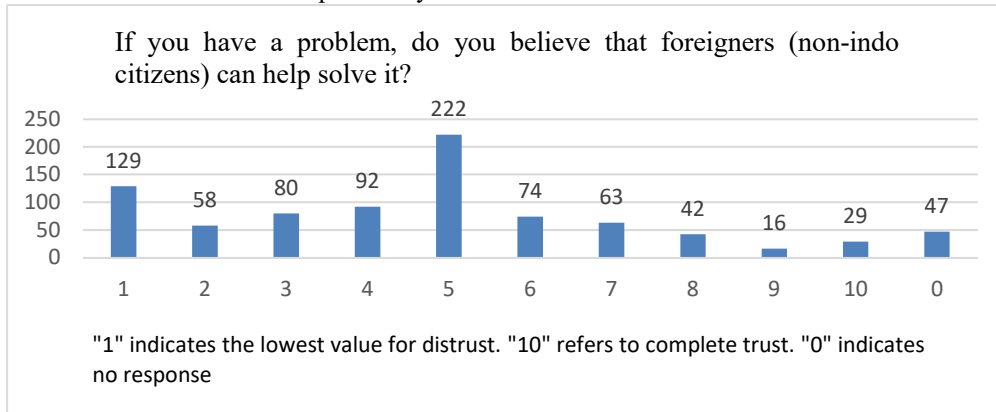


It is clear that 466 respondents are not confident for help from people who have different religion. In comparison, although the number does not show the majority, a relatively significant number of the young generation (386 responses) show more positive attitudes toward asking for help regardless of differences in religious faith.

3.7 Social trust with foreigners

It can be seen from the chart below that there are 581 respondents are not confident that foreigners can help them when they have a problem. However, 224 recorded positive responses that they believe foreigners will support them.

FIGURE 7: Trust to personally not known

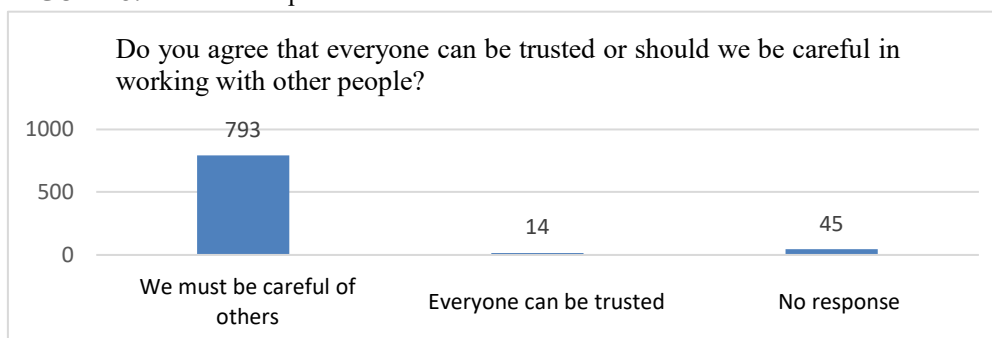


The attitude of the young generation towards foreigners in terms of giving or receiving assistance shows a low level of trust. The result indicates that the perceived situation felt by the millennials show that there seems to be a significant challenge when it comes to global cooperation. This means that globalization, where the mobility of people and goods massively takes place, may not be utilized optimally by the millennials due to a low level of trust toward foreigners. This may hinder collaborative projects at a transnational scale [10].

3.8 Social trust and cooperative attitudes

The graph below tells us that the vast majority of respondents, 793, are more skeptical in terms of trusting and working with other people. By contrast, only 14 responses recorded to have positive attitudes toward cooperation that everyone can be trusted. In this section, about 45 have no answer.

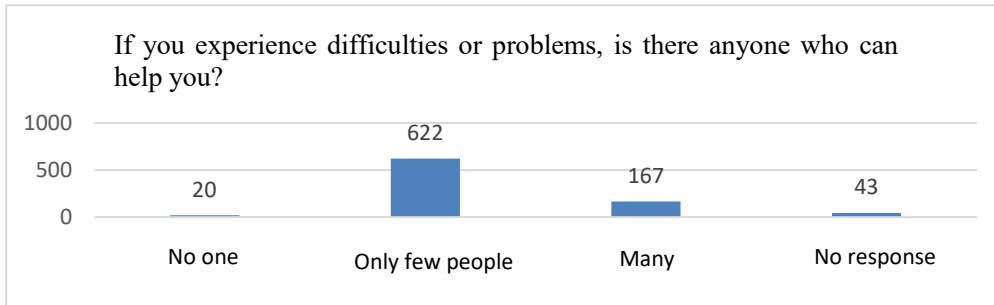
FIGURE 8: Trust for cooperation



3.9 Social trust and cooperative attitudes

This section describes the expressions of the millennials when encountering the question, “If you experience difficulties or problems, is there anyone who can help you?”. This question is designed to see the level of trust.

FIGURE 9: Trust as optimism

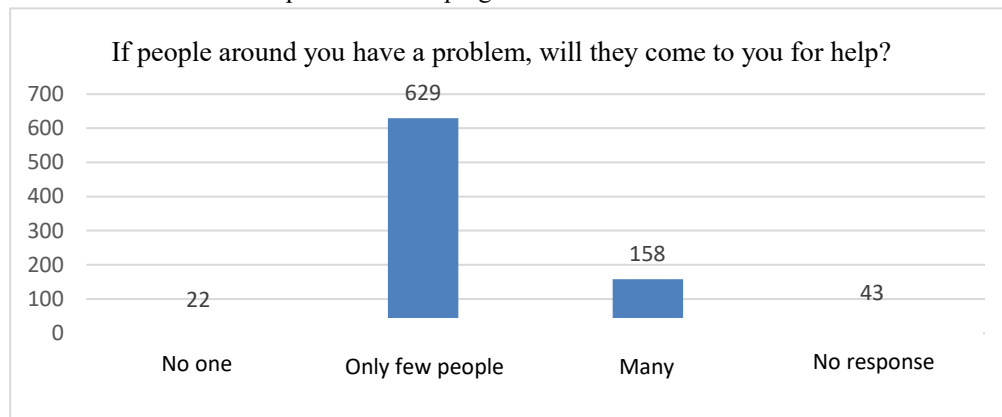


The graph above shows that the more significant number of respondents (622) believe only a few people they can count on when experiencing difficulties or facing problems. On the contrary, 167, which is lower than the former figure, are convinced that many people can and will help them. Then It is followed by 20 responses, stating that no one can help them when they are in trouble.

3.10 Social trust and personal experience

The graph below confirms the previous section, stating that the millennials believe only a few people can help them out of their problem. The majority of respondents have experience regarding the people around them who come for help. Six hundred twenty-nine say that they are seldom to encounter the people in their environment who come to them for help. Those who experienced many of their surroundings are not reluctant to ask assistance are recorded by 158 responses. There are 22 who never have such experiences, while 43 respondents did not give any answer.

FIGURE 10: Personal experience of helping



4. CONCLUSIONS

A high level of social trust is a vital element for ensuring social cohesion, particularly among the millennials. Regarding the demographic bonus, it can bring a positive impact on economic, political and social aspects unless all the stakeholders can work together to enhance the level of social trust among the young generation. The reason is pretty apparent. First, when the level of social trust is high, the millennials are likely to be able to work collaboratively across existing differences (culture, ethnicity, religion, so forth) without significant challenges. Second, social cooperation and the extent to which it maintains integration and stability of modern society are determined by the level of social trust.

After all, having the same religion has much influence in determining people to help others who are not their family members. This aspect surpasses other variables, namely ethnicity and neighborhood.

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