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# Privatization and the Private Psychology of Social Security

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Abstract. This article describes a crucial psychological nexus that mitigates against governmental attempts to privatize social security programs.

Throughout history many political entities--from empire to country to terrorist group--have effected variants of social security programs for various proportions of those entities' members. In fact, a broad definition of "political entities" would include military organizations, companies, and labor unions as well. The publicly reinforced premise of these programs is that there would be a source of financial and/or material support for some entity members (members of a society). The support would be available sometimes before and during, but almost always after, the so-called "best years" of members' lives--after the zenith of work productivity, earning power, or physical zest and as the encroachment of impending death looms.

Society's members construct private psychologies concerning social security programs--sometimes congruent with their public discourses, sometimes incompatible. The nexus of these psychologies is that there's a sure thing--at least as sure as a thing can be--to somewhat help with the material challenges of daily living. Depending on one's material situation and self-perception of this situation, the help may be unnecessary, necessary, sufficient, or even grossly inadequate. But it's there. And that's what social security is all about.

However--with the United States as an example--there are moves afoot to partially or totally privatize social security. Through various mechanisms each individual would be responsible for investing in stocks, bonds, or other instruments. Such empowerment might yield greater gains than would otherwise be obtained, but greater losses would be possible as well, including the loss of everything labeled as social security. Whatever might result, the privatization of social security would clash with the private psychologies of social security. In fact, the result would not be social security at all--even if it inevitably provided more financial security for financial advisors, brokers, and the like. Policymakers who think otherwise are ensnared in the strands of a political entity's social safety net as it is cut piece by piece. (See Bar-Tal, D., & Jacobson, D. (1998). A psychological perspective on security. Applied psychology: An International Review, 47, 59-71; Cummings, E.M., & Davies, P. (1996). Emotional security as a regulatory process in normal development and the development of psychopathology. Development and Psychopathology, 8, 123-139; Day, C.L. (1993). Public opinion toward costs and benefits of Social Security and Medicare. Research on Aging, 15, 279-298; Furnham, A. (1985). The determinants of attitudes towards social security recipients. British Journal of Social Psychology, 24, 19-27; Pepper, C. (1983). Social Security: The challenge of the 1980s. American Psychologist, 38, 308-310.) (Keywords: Private, Public, Social Security.)