

The Relationship between Social Trust and Political Participation (Case Study of Iranian Youth)

Hoseyn Masoudnia¹, Zohre Marandi², Reza Mahmoodoghli³, Mahmoodreza Rahbargazi⁴

1,2,3,4 Department of Political Science, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
zohremarandi@gmail.com

Abstract: People's participation in different matters in life is an important subject in political and social sciences. One of the major groups of the society whose participation is necessary for running the society and for social, political and cultural development is the youth. Political participation of the youth who are considered the largest population group in developing countries and future managers of the society is especially important for political stability and society's dynamism. The purpose of writing this article is to investigate the relationship between the effects of social trust as one of the dimensions of social capital on the political participation of Iranian youths in the city of Mashhad. Survey method was employed for collecting and analyzing the data. This study was performed on 234 males and females; for data collection, a questionnaire was used whose validity was formally assessed and its reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's α ; data were analyzed using SPSS software. By dividing social trust into the four variables of conventional trust, unconventional trust, generalized trust and environment trust capability along with consideration of two aspects of political participation, namely, psychological-attitude factors and manner of political participation (conventional or unconventional), it is observed that significant correlations exist between social trust dimensions and the respondents' level of political participation.

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1. Introduction

Political participation as one of the many forms of participation indicates social and political development of countries. Participation is rooted in the social nature of man. Participation in social matters is a kind of obligation and accepting individual and social responsibility which all people have to get along with it. This responsibility and obligation might take different forms such as social and moral behaviors or legal and economic structure.

One of the manifests of participation is participation in political issues. In political sciences, different and numerous definitions of political participation are offered. Some thinkers like Lester Milbrath, in their definition of political participation, concentrate on different levels of participations. Milbrath introduces a hierarchy of political participation according to which definition of this concept ranges from noninvolvement to obtaining governmental posts and states that the lowest level of actual participation is voting in elections (Milbrath & Goel, 1977, p. 91).

The International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences defines political participation as "the voluntary activity of the members of a society in selecting the leaders and direct and indirect participation in general policymaking" (Smith, 1968). In his book on sociology, Michael Rash states that political participation is an individual's involvement

in different levels of activity in political system from noninvolvement to having an official political position which is unavoidably in close relationship with socialization, but they should not be seen continuation or result of socialization (Rash, 1997). According to Huntington, political participation is the activity of citizens in order to influence the decision-making procedures of the government (Huntington, 1985). In his discussion of political participation, Anthony Giddens mentions participative democracy, a system in which decisions are made collectively by people whose lives are influenced by those decisions. And Olof Petersson defines political participation as the efforts done to influence the society (Giddens, 1998).

One of the concepts much related to political participation and which positively influences it is the concept of social trust. In this regard, some researchers believe that participation in different social and political fields may be a result of social trust. Social trust and participation in different social and political arenas have are intensely correlated and necessary for each other because they are both considered as the primary elements of social capital (Putnam, 1995, p. 73).

Social trust is considered as one of the fundamental preconditions of political participation. For Barbalet, trust is the emotional basis of participation (Barbalet, 1996, p. 77). In the opinion of

Dasgupta, trust facilitates social and political participation (Dasgupta, 1998, p. 49). In distrust conditions, everyone tries to make his own way and even betray others by resorting to the most innovative tricks.

Discussing social capital, Fukuyama, Coleman and Putnam have emphasized social trust. They believe that reduced level of social responsibility, sociopolitical participation and increased level of social issues are caused by the prevalence of distrust in a society (Upright, 2004). According to Isenstadt, the most important issue in social order for Durkheim and Ferdinand Tonnies has been social trust and interdependence. It means that without solidarity and trust, stability of a social and political system is impossible (Greeley, 1974).

In Luhman's opinion, by reducing communicational complexities through its mechanism, social trust makes people extend their behavioral boundaries beyond his limited familial and relative boundaries (Luhman, 1979). Scholz and Lubell argue that social trust works as a parameter that encourages people to have more participative behaviors, especially when an individual's information is not sufficient (Scholz & Lubell, 1998, pp. 398-417). Researches done by Yamagishi and his colleagues indicate that social trust functions as a platform that helps people leave their safe but limited world and move toward more extended opportunities beyond the old world (Yamagishi, 1998). Also, from an economic perspective, Fukuyama argues that mutual trust between individuals though reduction of communication and transaction costs leads to increased participation in a society (Fukuyama, 1995).

Some other social and political scientists believe that if social trust is going to result in political participation, people should feel that the government acts according to people's normal expectations (Miller, 1974, pp. 951-972). According to the findings by Moy and Scheufele, different parts of social trust are related to each other with the sense that political trust may be seen as a continuation of the trust generalized to others (Moy & Scheufele, 2000, pp. 744-759). Lack of conventional social trust reflects an illegitimate government and people's alienation and dissatisfaction which are the main causes of people's reluctance to participate in political activities (Finifter, 1970, pp. 389-410).

Indeed, the effect of political trust on political participation has always been controversial. According to Newton's ideas, political trust stands in a lower order than social trust where risks are higher and possibilities for predictions are less (Newton, 1999, pp. 169-187) and since politicians are often judged based on second-hand information, trusting

political authorities is not necessarily similar to social trust (Cragic, 1993). In addition, Wilkins argues that conventional trust or trust in the political system is by no means related to political participation or even political discouragement (Wilkins, 2000, pp. 569-580).

Some of the thinkers who support moralization and have a moral standpoint toward the subject of trust consider social trust to be incapable of resolving group issues or improving participative behaviors in human beings (Uslaner, 2002). They argue that belief in social trust is formed in childhood and it is born out of an optimistic attitude toward the world, i.e. being satisfied with one's life (Shah, 1998, pp. 469-494). In this regard, Scheufele believes that without considering the function of trust as a moral foundation or as a motivational factor, it will have no effect on political participation (Scheufele, 1999, pp. 25-28).

2. Methodology

The present research is a survey study in terms of controlling of research conditions and it is an applied study in terms of its goal. The statistical population of the study included the entire Iranian youth of the city of Mashhad. Sample volume, using Cochran sampling formulation with the estimation precision of $d=0.05$ and maximum variance of $=0.25$ s^2 ($s^2 = pq$) and confidence level of 95 per cent, was determined to be 265 people and an actual number of 234 questionnaires were analyzed after the spoiled questionnaires were discarded. In this study, two instruments are used for evaluation of the variables:

1. Researcher-built political participation questionnaire: For the evaluation of political participation, this questionnaire with Likert scale was used. The questionnaire contains 19 questions. It includes four different dimensions of political participation, namely conventional political participation, unconventional political participation, attitude toward political participation and actual participation. Reliability coefficients of this scale were found to be 0.75 using Cronbach's α .

2. Researcher-built social trust questionnaire: For the evaluation of social trust, this questionnaire with Likert scale was used. The questionnaire containing 26 questions was built by the researchers using Likert scale. It includes four different dimensions of conventional trust, unconventional trust, generalized trust, environment trust capability. Reliability coefficients of this scale were found to be 0.78 using Cronbach's α .

3. Findings

Findings are provided here in two descriptive and deductive parts. Descriptive findings are presented here.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of the Participants' Scores in Each Dimension of Social Trust and Political Participation

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	
unconventional trust	12.71	4.10	manner of political participation	conventional political participation	22.45	5.45
conventional trust	16.78	3.84		unconventional political participation	21.72	3.86
generalized trust	23.03	3.10	attitude toward political participation	16.16	3.84	
environment trust capability	28.95	5.45	political participation	60.34	7.01	
social trust	81.61	6.09				

Table shows the mean and standard deviation of the participants' scores in each social trust and political participation dimension. The mean and standard deviation of conventional trust were found to be 16.78 and 3.84, respectively and the mean and standard deviation of unconventional trust were found to be 12.71 and 4.10. In addition, the means and standard deviations of generalized trust and environment trust capability were obtained 23.03, 28.95, 3.10 and 5.45, respectively. It shows that the mean of environment trust capability score among individuals is higher than other dimensions. In political participation questionnaire, the mean of actual participation dimension and political attitude dimension with the above values is given in table 1. The mean of the overall political participation score and its standard deviation were found to be 60.34 and 7.01 and the same values for the overall social trust were obtained 6.09 and 81.61, respectively.

Table 2. The Correlation between Political Participation Dimensions and Social Trust Dimensions

Variables		unconventional trust	conventional trust	generalized trust	environment trust capability
manner of political participation	conventional political participation	0.33**	0.61**	0.42**	0.57**
	unconventional political participation	0.29**	0.48**	0.37**	0.44**
attitude toward political participation		0.36**	0.573**	0.40**	0.55**
political participation		0.34**	0.59**	0.38**	0.52**

Table two shows the simple (Pearson) correlation between each social trust dimensions with political participation dimensions. As it can be seen,

all correlations are significant within $p < 0.01$. The highest level of correlation was found for the relationship between conventional political participation and conventional trust and the lowest level was found for the relationship between unconventional political participation and unconventional trust. In order to investigate the relationship between social trust and every political participation dimension, multiple regression analysis was employed. Table 3 shows the regression model results for the relationship between social trust and each dimension of political participation and the overall political participation level.

Table 3. Regression Model Results for the Relationship between Social Trust and Political Participation

Predicting Variable	Basic Variable	R	R ²	Adjusted R ² Square	Standard Error Of Estimation ΔR	F	Level of Significance
Social Trust Dimensions	manner of political participation	0.51	0.26	0.25	3.21	40.11	0.001
	unconventional political participation	0.37	0.13	0.14	2.08	33/74	0.001
Social Trust Dimensions	attitude toward political participation	0.31	0.09	0.11	4.70	26/41	0.001
	political participation	0.41	0.18	0.18	4.11	39/32	0.001

As table 3 indicates, social trust dimensions are good predictors of political participation parameters. The value of multivariate correlation (R) between social trust dimensions and conventional political participation is 0.51 with the determinant coefficient of 26% which shows the degree of describing conventional political participation variances from social trust dimensions. The value of multivariate correlation (R) between social trust dimensions and unconventional political participation is 0.37 with the determinant coefficient of 13% which shows the degree of describing unconventional political participation variances from social trust dimensions. The significance level obtained for F values indicates that all coefficients are significant within $p < 0.05$.

Table 4 shows the nonstandard regression (B) and standard (b) coefficients for the regressions of each social trust dimension on political participation dimensions. As standard regression coefficients show, conventional trust is the more important predictor in all dimensions of political participation and has a b with higher weight and it is more related with political participation parameters. On the whole, the relationships between conventional social trust and all political participation dimensions

are significant ($p < 0.05$). As it can be observed, all regression coefficients are positive which shows that there is a positive relationship between conventional social trust and political participation dimensions.

Table 4. Standard (b) and nonstandard (B) Regression Coefficients for the Regression of Each Political Participation Dimension on Social Trust Dimensions

Basic Variable	Predicting Variable	Nonstandard Coefficients		Standard Coefficients	t	Level of Significance	
		B	Standard Error				
manner of political participation	conventional political participation	unconventional trust	0.27	0.045	0.26	3.27	0.001
		conventional trust	0.41	0.069	0.35	6.50	0.001
		generalized trust	0.11	0.087	0.18	2.41	0.001
		environment trust capability	0.34	0.028	0.29	4.73	0.001
	unconventional political participation	unconventional trust	0.19	0.044	0.22	3.64	0.001
		conventional trust	0.37	0.046	0.38	5.27	0.001
		generalized trust	0.26	0.052	0.28	4.61	0.001
		environment trust capability	0.34	0.076	0.31	4.88	0.001
attitude toward political participation	unconventional trust	0.28	0.063	0.30	3.11	0.001	
	conventional trust	0.29	0.081	0.29	3.01	0.001	
	generalized trust	0.12	0.036	0.14	2.59	0.001	
	environment trust capability	0.23	0.047	0.25	4.18	0.001	
political participation	unconventional trust	0.09	0.071	0.10	2.75	0.001	
	conventional trust	0.34	0.055	0.35	4.68	0.001	
	generalized trust	0.21	0.049	0.23	3.19	0.001	
	environment trust capability	0.295	0.065	0.27	4.15	0.001	

4. Conclusion

According to Putnam, social trust is the most important social capital parameter and where there is a substantial reserve of social capital in the form of civil obligation networks, voluntary collaboration and cooperation is more easily available. Social capital implies forms of social constructs such as trust, principles and networks which are able to facilitate the efficiency of the society through proportional actions. Voluntary collaboration is achieved through social capital. As mentioned before, trust is the precondition for collaboration as well as a product of successful collaboration. As some writers have said, trust facilitates cooperation; in other words, trust is the emotional basis of cooperation. In this regard, Fukuyama believes that almost all economic efforts including running a small store to creating a gigantic computer corporation are not done by individuals but by bodies which require social collaborations. Economists believe that the ability to organize economic bodies not only relies on institutions such as contract business rights and so forth, but it also requires a set of unwritten principles and laws which we regard as social trust. The existence of trust among members of an economic body can substantially reduce its costs and increase its efficiency. For Fukuyama, the ability to achieve success in a society and making people interested in the social issues, economic and political issues of their country depends, firstly on the durability and

strength of civil society, and secondly on observing moral standards such as trust, honesty and reliability. Where hypocrisy, duplicity, and cunningness dominate social relations, social trust will have no place and instead of togetherness, synergy and cooperation, people will pursue selfish individualism.

The data collected from the case society (The youth of the city of Mashhad) in this study also corroborated the existence of a significant relationship between the two variables of social trust and degree of political participation. Respecting the fact that the correlation degree between these two variables is positive, the relationship between these two variables is of a direct type meaning that political participation increases with social trust. In addition, as the statistics show, the relationships between all social trust dimensions and all the dimensions forming the dependent variable of the research are significant and positive.

In conclusion, as the data in this study show, by social trust transcending the confine of familial and relative systems and moving to more extensive areas in extra-local scales, political participation consequently increases. Increasing of participation affects reproduction and improvement of social trust. In other words, by improving moral community and practical responsibility toward moral obligations in interpersonal, individual-institutional, and institution-institutional levels, social trust will improve in the form of trust between individuals, between social institutions and the agents and responsible people in those institutions and this will pave the way for political participation.

Corresponding Author:

Zohre marandi
Department of Political Science
Esfahan University, Esfahan, Iran
E-mail: zohremarandi@gmail.com

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