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# THE LINK BETWEEN SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND ITS IMPACT ON IRANIAN YOUTH

**Abstract.** *Iran has in recent years been affected by the spread of modernity, solidarity and traditional social ties while, with the weakening of social capital, the type of political participation engaged in by citizens has changed whereby they tend towards conventional political participation and sometimes non-conventional political participation and protest. This article aims to test the effect of social capital on conventional and unconventional political participation among Iranian youth (n= 1379) by dividing social capital into three categories: cognitive, relational and structural. The results indicate the cognitive and structural dimensions exert a significant effect on the rise in conventional political participation among the population. The results also reveal that the structural dimension is the only component with a significant and positive effect on unconventional political participation, while the relational dimension had no significant effect on any dimension of political participation.*
**Keywords**: *social capital, conventional political participation, unconventional political participation*

## Introduction

It is widely accepted that political participation is one of the most important components of democracy (Pateman, 1970; Barber, 2003; Unanka, 2004; Quintelier and Van Deth, 2014; Nový and Katrnak, 2015). If citizens are unable to participate and play their roles, democracy will lose its very sense and nature. Citizens should therefore participate continuously in political processes to achieve political development (Almond and Verba, 2015). Unlike previous decades, in this new era political participation is not only limited to elections and voting, but to all actions that directly/indirectly affect the elections or decisions of officials and policymakers within a nation (Van Deth,

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2014). The reasons for citizens' political participation are explained by various factors and theories, with some scholars believing the main drivers of participation are personal interest and rational action (rational choice theory) (Myatt, 2012; Kroneberg and Kalter, 2012). Yet, explaining individual-level political participation brings many challenges and contradictions. Scholars of the political and social sciences have therefore sought alternative mechanisms to more accurately describe and explain the complex processes of political participation. In this regard, it seems that social factors shaping individuals' decisions and behaviours are so significant that they can play vital roles in citizens' political participation (Honneth, 2014; Barrett and Brunton, 2014). Verba et al. (1995) emphasised the importance of such networks in mobilising people by modifying individual resources and presenting a model of civic voluntarism that mainly examines networks of social relations. They also argued that networking and social relations are important factors affecting the flow of political consciousness, in turn, considerably impacting political participation. It appears that the shift from individual to social factors in the analysis of political activity is due to the fact that motivational and individual factors only emphasise a limited part of it, whereas political participation is better understood when community-based factors affecting the process of political mobilisation are also included (Campbell, 2013). Accordingly, social capital seems to an important social factor with a great influence on political participation (Morales and Giugni, 2016; Hays, 2015; Bevelander and Pendakur, 2009; Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama, 2001). A key reason given by social and political scholars for the social impact of social capital is that social capital is created through human resources like human skill-sets. These are resources that enhance an individuals' ability for collective behaviour (Burt, 2017). The first and foremost thinker to stress the importance of social organisations in this regard is Alexis de Tocqueville (2015), who argued the creation of social organisations and associations is the most important social and political task of any nation. If the above reasoning is accepted, people who are free to access broad and varied social capital are more likely to ask for political participation (Neilson and Paxton, 2010).

The research is significant because, although Iranian people have in recent years participated in many national elections, for various reasons they appear to be discouraged from other aspects of democracy (Ansari, 2012); while many Iranian citizens, especially young ones, participate in general elections, they are somewhat indifferent to other aspects of political participation like active participation in political parties, making contact with officials, participating in protest political activities, supporting various political groups etc. (Ghasizadeh and Kianpour, 2015). This reduction in citizens' participation in public and political affairs is more critical in developing countries, especially Iran, which is experiencing a transition from tradition to modernity. On

one hand, governments must engage in political participation to ensure their legitimacy. Besides, from a religious point of view, both political participation and sensitivity to the fate of Iranian society are a religious duty. As a result, the lower participation of citizens is an important issue.

One reason mentioned as being responsible for this issue is the weakening of social capital in Iran in recent years (Emamjomehzadeh, et al., 2012; Ansari, 2017; Rezaei, et al., 2017). The cohesion and solidarity traditionally seen in Iran has disappeared for various reasons, including the disappearance of traditional class structures and the rise of an emerging class in Iran. Accordingly, the new structures are apparently not yet deep enough to link people within networks and create some sort of shared social norms able to build social trust in the citizens for them to participate in public affairs (Rahmatollahi et al., 2016; Firozjayan Galougah and Majidi, 2018; Hamidizadeh, 2018). In recent years, the form of political participation in Iran has therefore changed such that political participation is either generally reduced to participating in elections or, if people do participate in public activities, they tend to engage in unconventional and mostly protest political participation. Thus, the decline in social capital and weakening of public relations among individuals in Iranian society have led them to turn to unconventional political participation and political protests instead of conventional political participation. Despite some scattered research on this issue, no purposive research has examined Iranian youth affected by the new structures more than any other layers of society, thus indicating some kind of research gap in this area.

Given that the many elements of the political culture found in the Middle East, such as authoritarianism (Cleveland and Bunton, 2017), patrimonialism (Lee, 2010), dominance of tribal-ethnic culture (Hashemi and Postel, 2017), importance of religion in people's political behaviours (Milton-Edwards, 2018), accelerated movement towards modernisation (Richards et al., 2013), creation of quasi-democratic institutions (Zakaria, 1997), influence of globalisation and terrorism processes in the new age (Lutz and Lutz, 2015), existence of rentier governments (Selvik and Utvik, 2015) and creation of some kind of gap between government and nations (Migdal, 2004) are common, it may be claimed that the present study can produce results able to be generalised to other nations. Accordingly, this study seeks to answer the following question with an emphasis on Iranian society: How do different aspects of social capital affect citizens' political participation?

## The relationship between social capital and political participation

Social capital is a tool for political development (Boutilier, 2017; Åberg and Sandberg; 2003; Welzel et al., 2018). It also modifies relationships, adds

to cohesion and confidence in society, and contributes to the political participation of individuals and the maintenance of their interactions with the state (La Due Lake and Huckfeldt, 1998). It can increase and improve participation among individuals by reducing the cost of social cooperation.

Therefore, it seems that the reduced social living costs accrued through increased social capital mean that political participation as a collective commodity will also increase when citizens have high levels of social capital in society because social capital can enhance the mutual trust and norms of individuals in society and thereby raise the level of political participation (Teorell, 2003). Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) suggest that social capital should be considered in three dimensions: structural, relational and cognitive. The relational dimension focuses on characteristics of the relationship between individuals. This dimension may be explained by the amount of trust, cooperation, obligations and expectations, as well as individual identity within a social network (Bolino and Turnley, 2002). Many scholars argue the elements of relational social capital and social trust support social cooperation, facilitate collective behaviour and encourage attention to the public interest (van Ingen and Bekkers, 2015). Trust among citizens reduces the risks and harm of participation in public and political affairs and strengthens social institutions and civil society to contribute to a healthy, stable and efficient democracy (Zmerli and Newton, 2008). Moreover, a good and democratic government can, in turn, enhance the conditions for strengthening social trust and increase individuals' ability to work effectively in public and private affairs (Paxton, 2002). Namely, theorists of democracy and political participation argue that democratic systems need citizens with a high level of social trust; a symbolic need for citizens, whereas citizens with less generalised confidence are probably less likely to pursue political development in their country (Baliamoune-Lutz, 2011). The relationship between social trust and political participation does not seem to be direct. Trust not only directly affects various types of participation, but can also indirectly improve political participation by facilitating the transfer of resources within social networks and helping to maintain social norms within voluntary CSOs (Xu et al., 2010).

While describing cooperation as the cornerstone of social capital, Putnam identifies it as the main interface in social relations (Putnam, 2000: 134). This concept is more understandable from the perspective of social groups; members of social groups find it easier to stay in regular contact with one another. Their various problems and issues are thus revealed through regular discussions and citizens who participate in such associations meet with different people. Such behaviour in a healthy and positive environment enhances people's positive traits and helps build confidence in them. When newcomers enter such groups, group members perceive

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them positively and they thereby become anonymous within such groups. Here, Putnam argues that social associations and the resulting social trust infuse a spirit of cooperation, integration and cohesion among citizens (Leonardi et al., 2001: 89). As such, the components of relational social capital help individuals develop a spirit of cooperation among them through shared behaviours. In other words, generalised trust and other components of relational social capital make individuals unhesitant in looking for help (Cozzolino, 2011). Such people become better citizens by participating in social work. They are often more committed to their obligations than others, while they respect the views of minorities and participate in other forms of civil and political cooperation (Putnam, 2000: 137). On this basis, it may be argued that:

**Hypothesis 1**: An increase in the level of relational social capital has a positive effect on citizens' political participation.

The second dimension of social capital is the cognitive dimension (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). This dimension refers to resources that provide symbols, interpretations and a system of meanings common to members such as shared codes, language and values. Fukuyama (1999) states that definitions of social capital refer to their implications. That is, social capital is a tangible form of an informal norm of promoting cooperation among citizens. The norms that constitute social capital range from the norm of mutual friendships through to complex doctrines. By definition, civil society and product participation are informal by-products of social capital that arise from social capital but do not constitute social capital itself. Namely, he believes that social capital can easily be defined as a set of informal norms or values. Research in different countries reveals that the level of political participation among people living in a homogenous society is much higher than in other societies. Sinclairly, McConnell and Green (2012) showed that the probability of political participation among people born in societies with high cohesion was 67%, but is less than 12% in societies with low social cohesion. Moreover, some other researchers argue that people who share common values and norms have the same participatory patterns (Dassopoulos and Monnat, 2011).

Other scholars believe that social norms can produce favourable political outcomes when it comes to political participation (Shulman and Levine, 2012; Dalton, 2008). In this sense, Schultz (1999) argued that gaining awareness of the behaviours of others has a significant effect on increasing the likelihood of similar behaviours by others. Freedman et al. (2004) indicated that the sense of repetition of similar behaviour by other citizens causes individuals to increase the likelihood of such behaviour by 26%. It thus seems that shared ideas and values are likely to cause people to behave similarly in

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the political arena. Gerber et al. (2008) examined the impact of social norms on the extent of political participation among Americans. In their research, they argued that social norms have exerted a very strong effect on the voting population.

Gerber and Yamada (2009) stated that messages from others about the importance and value of political participation, along with encouraging others to participate in political activities, were major and influential factors in the level of political participation. As such, these theories appear to contradict the traditional rational-choice assumptions made about political participation models. Theorists of rational behaviour like Downs (1957) believe that the higher the number of voters in society, the less the motivation of citizens for political participation because, as political participation increases, the likelihood of one participating in political affairs goes down, thereby increasing citizens' motivation to free-ride in society. But social capital theorists appear to reject these findings, arguing that the more social resources are needed to raise citizens' interest in political participation, the greater the likelihood of political participation, especially among those who were less involved in the past (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2009).

An important question for social and political scholars is with what mechanisms such messages from society affect the extent of individuals' political participation. In relation to this, there is considerable evidence that the collective conscience of many people is based on the principle that participation in social and political activities is a form of duty, and that people have sufficient reasons to participate in electoral and political activities (Rolfe, 2012). Blais believed that many of the arguments given for political participation are normative and value-driven; his findings suggest that many citizens regard their activities in political issues and areas as a duty. What they need to do is make citizens look at the issue of political participation as a norm. In other words, those who are committed to political participation are less likely to think about the costs and benefits of such participation. A significant share of individuals engage in political processes due to a political affiliation. They find themselves morally compelled to participate in such processes (Blais, 2000: 104). Accordingly, we argue that:

**Hypothesis 2**. An increase in the level of cognitive social capital has a positive effect on citizens' participation in political activities.

Finally, the third dimension of social capital is structural (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998). The structural dimension encompasses the characteristics of social systems and networks of social relations; namely, it refers to the general pattern of communication among members. The dimension's most important aspect is the presence or absence of network links between members and the status of the network. Generally, this dimension focuses

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on whether individuals are related to each other (Bolino and Turnley, 2002). A great deal of research literature exists on the effect of social relations on democracy and political participation in response to de Tocqueville's observations (Sommerfeldt, 2013; Yang and Taylor, 2013). In this regard, Verba et al. (1993) emphasised the role of voluntary associations and participation in social networks that provide resources which are useful for political participation. Verba et al. (1993) discussed three sources that contribute to social voluntary associations: first, participation in social voluntary associations gives people opportunities to develop organisational skills and political communication; second, participating in voluntary social forums exposes people to political messages and political debates that lead to political participation; and third, non-political voluntary associations act as grounds for engaging people in political mobilisation (Verba et al., 1993: 457).

Social networks provide the motivation, information and skills required to influence political participation (Morales, 2016). First, members of social groups usually have common norms and values able to motivate them to engage in politics. Here, Dawson and Wallendrof (1985) argued that social networks have even more predictive power to support some political groups and vote in their favour, even compared to social class variables. The reason for this seems to be that individuals' selection of groups and political parties is based on the norms and values accepted by the social group while disagreeing with the group's values will lead to mismanagement and isolation. It thus appears that such a social risk is likely to spread electoral behaviour among people who have a stronger and more social network. Second, membership in different social groups enhances one's social connections with social networks, thereby increasing access to political information and ultimately affecting one's electoral behaviour and political activity (Dawson and Wallendorf, 1985: 589). Verba et al. argued that participation in non-political entities such as voluntary associations likely causes members to discuss more political issues who thus tend to be more inclined towards political participation. In addition to motivating individuals and making information sources available to them, social networks can help group members develop social relationships and other skills that add to their effectiveness in political activities (Burns et al., 2001: 61).

Therefore, the characteristics of social networks are action-intended (Lin and Erickson, 2010). It is now possible to come from within a source of relationships, and not otherwise. What matters is the structure of the relationship. The improvement of social networks in a relationship sees goodwill and mutual trust emerge, which per se encourage coherence and cohesion among different social groups (Farris and Holman, 2014). Thus, the growth of social networks only brings a new impetus for actors that enhances their capabilities and livelihoods. On this basis, we expect that;

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**Hypothesis 3.** An increase in the level of structural social capital has a positive effect on citizens' political participation.

## Methodology

To test the research hypotheses, data were collected between January and April 2019. The statistical population consisted of the young population of Iran. According to a decision of the Supreme Council of Youth of Iran issued by the Minister of Youth and Sports, youth in Iran is described as when a person is aged between 18 and 35 (ISNA, 2019). Thus, this study examined young people aged 18 to 35. Moreover, based on the large size of the study population, telephone interviews were used.

At first glance, it might appear that the principle of random sampling was not respected in the phone interviews. However, the high penetration rate of mobile phones in Iran means this can be ignored. According to statistics from the Iranian Radio Communications Regulatory Authority, with a population of 83 million, Iran has over 93 million mobile subscribers (Eghtesadonline, 2019). This makes the sampling probability high. To this end, we contacted over 3,000 people, of whom 1,379 were willing to work with us and were interviewed.

In this study, a questionnaire was employed to test the research hypotheses. The validity of the questionnaire items through face validity and its reliability through Cronbach's alpha were tested and confirmed. Further, SPSS software was used for the statistical analysis while Pearson's correlation test and hierarchical regression were used to test the hypotheses.

In relation to this, the two-way relationships of the variables are first tested via Pearson's correlation. The effect of demographic, control and independent variables on conventional and unconventional political participation are then tested through a hierarchical regression. Regression analyses include four models. In the first model, the effects of demographic variables are tested, while in the second and third models the effects of variables controlling political effectiveness, political awareness and support for political parties are tested. Finally, in the fourth model, the variables of social capital are added to the above models and their effects on conventional and unconventional political participation are examined.

## Management

*Social Capital*: We used the Social Capital Questionnaire (SCQ) of which the latter has developed by Onyx and Bullen (2000) to measure citizens' social capital. The questionnaire contains 36 questions and is derived from questionnaires of the American Social Capital Association, the World Bank,

and the Australian Institute of Family Studies, which has eight dimensions including participation in the local community; social agency or proactivity in a social context; feelings of trust and safety; neighbourhood connections; family and friends' connections; tolerance of diversity; value of life; and work connections.

In this study, according to Iranian native conditions and theoretical foundations of research, the research questions were divided into three dimensions, Cognitive (M = 2.51; SD = 0.61), Relational (M = 2.84; SD = 0.58) and Structural (M = 3.01; SD = 0.55), using exploratory factor analysis. The cognitive dimension of social capital has been related to participation, trust, attitudes and commitments in society. The structural dimension of social capital concerns decision-making, group structures, and activities in society. Finally, the relational dimension is about the quality and quantity of intra-group and intergroup social relationships. In this study, exploratory factor analysis was used to identify the factors of social capital. The correlation coefficient ranges from 0.52 to 0.87, indicating the validity of using the questionnaire in the population. The reliability of the variables was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.74 for the structural dimension, 0.77 for the relational dimension and 0.84 for the cognitive dimension indicate that the reliability of the SCQ is appropriate. In this study, all social capital questions were scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (minimum) to a score of 5 (maximum).

*Willingness for political participation*: According to the research theoretical model and the new political conditions in Iran, by relying on the theory of Barnes et al. (1979) political participation was divided into two canonical and non-canonical dimensions to determine the social capital's effect on each dimension of political participation. By unconventional political participation, the present study means a willingness to participate in political protest discussions, support for political protest groups, participation in protest rallies, and writing of protest material online or on social media to influence the government (M = 3.04; SD = 1.02; Cronbach's alpha = 0.74). Also used to measure conventional political participation is the tendency to vote at general elections, contact government officials, participate in government-organised rallies and participate in government organisations or parties (M = 3.05; SD = 0.99; Cronbach's alpha = 0.70). These variables were measured with eight 5-point questions with scores ranging from 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum).

*Political effectiveness*: Political effectiveness is the extent to which individuals feel that their political activity in society is able to influence government policies. This variable was measured with one 5-point question with scores ranging from 1 (minimum) to 5 (maximum) (M = 2.68; SD = 1.27).

*Political awareness*: Political awareness means possessing information,

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knowledge and awareness of political issues. We obtained the variable of political awareness by summing up the respondents' correct answers given to four questions, namely: "What is the name of the Iranian Minister of the Interior?", "What is the name of the French President?", "How many Guardian Council Members are there in Iran?", and "What is the name of the area between Ukraine and Russia that became a matter of dispute in 2014?". We score correct items with 1 and 0 for false or unanswered ones (M = 0.37; SD = 0.37; Cronbach's alpha = 0.76).

*Support for political parties*: Political parties in Iran are generally divided into reformist and principlist parties, with many political parties falling into either group. A 10-point scale ranging from 1 to 10 was used to measure this variable, with low scores indicating a greater tendency for fundamentalism and high scores indicating a tendency for reformist political parties (M = 5.88; SD = 2.31).

*Demographic variables*: In this study, age, gender, education and income are four variables used as demographic variables. Age is an interval variable (M = 22.16; SD = 7.89). In this study, we gave women a score of 1 and a score of 2 for men (female = 54.9; male = 45.1). Education is also a sequential variable with a score ranging between 1 for a low education, 2 for a moderate education and 3 for a higher education (M = 1.85; SD = 0.53). Finally, income level is a sequential variable ranging from 1 to 3, with 1 indicating a low income and 3 a high income (M = 1.89; SD = 0.48).

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## Results

This study examined the relationship between variables using a correlation matrix and then the research hypotheses were tested using a hierarchical regression.

Table 1 analyses the bivariate relationship of the research variables. The results show that the education, political effectiveness, political awareness, cognitive, structural and relational dimensions of social capital have a positive and significant relationship with conventional political participation. Political effectiveness seems to have a stronger relationship with conventional political participation. The partisan tendencies variable is also the only variable to have a negative and significant relationship with conventional political participation. Moreover, political effectiveness, partisan tendencies, and the structural dimension of social capital all have a positive relationship with unconventional political participation. However, the gender, education, and political awareness variables all have a negative relationship with unconventional participation and thus reduce individuals' tendency for this type of political participation.

*Table 1: CORRELATIONS AMONG ALL INDEPENDENT AND DEPENDENT VARIABLES IN THE STUDY*

| | Age | Sex | Edu | Income | Efficacy | Knowledge | Political party | Cognitive | Structural | Relational | conventional | unconventional |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sex | -.080* | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Edu | .37** | -.11** | 1.00 | | | | | | | | | |
| Income | -.02 | .00 | -.00 | 1.00 | | | | | | | | |
| Efficacy | .02 | -.03 | .03 | .10** | 1.00 | | | | | | | |
| Knowledge | .08** | .22** | .03 | -.06* | .04 | 1.00 | | | | | | |
| Political party | -.01 | -.15** | -.00 | .10** | -.02 | -.13** | 1.00 | | | | | |
| Cognitive | .05* | .12** | .04 | -.04 | .26** | .13** | -.10** | 1.00 | | | | |
| Structural | .05* | -.00 | .07** | .02 | .30** | .08** | .04 | .44** | 1.00 | | | |
| Relational | .07** | .05* | -.00 | -.00 | .19** | .05* | .00 | .45** | .49** | 1.00 | | |
| Conventional | .03 | -.04 | .10** | .03 | .33** | .05* | -.10** | .17** | .18** | .10** | 1.00 | |
| Unconventional | -.01 | -.08** | -.05* | .01 | .12** | -.06* | .18** | -.00 | .07** | .01 | .07** | 1.00 |

\* Significant at the 0.05 level \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level

Note: Cell entries are two-tailed correlation coefficients (N = 1379) and Pearson's correlations were used.

Source: own analysis.

*Table 2: REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR CONVENTIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION*

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | -.010(.01) | -.011(.01) | -.013(.01) | -.014(.01) |
| Sex | -.176(.06)** | -.245(.06)*** | -.274(.06)*** | -.309(.06)*** |
| Edu | .202(.09)* | .173(.08) | .180(.08)* | .171(.08) |
| Income | .083(.06) | .007(.06) | .039(.06) | .039(.06) |
| Efficacy | | .277(.02)*** | .275(.02)*** | .241(.02)*** |
| Knowledge | | .178(.07)* | .151(.07)* | .120(.07) |
| Political party | | | -.048(.01)*** | -.049(.01)*** |
| Cognitive | | | | .116(.05)* |
| Structural | | | | .132(.06)* |
| Relational | | | | .016(.05) |
| (Constant) | 3.136*** | 2.644*** | 2.956*** | 2.415*** |
| R Square | .021 | .153 | .166 | .180 |
| F | 5.736*** | 32.852*** | 30.960*** | 23.898*** |

\* Significant at the 0.05 level \*\* Significant at the 0.01 level \*\*\* Significant at the 0.001 level

Note: Entries are unstandardised regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

Source: own analysis.

Table 2 examines the effects of the research variables on conventional political participation. In the first research model where only demographic variables were tested, the results show the two variables of gender and education have a significant effect on men's willingness to participate in conventional political participation, while women tended to be more likely to participate in conventional politics than men. However, education has a positive effect on standard participation. In the second research model, two variables of predispositions were added to the first research model. In this model, the results show that only gender remains significant among the demographic variables. Moreover, both the political effectiveness and political awareness variables have a positive and significant effect on conventional political participation and increase citizens' willingness to participate. In the third research model, the partisan tendencies variable is added to the second research model. The results for this model show that, in addition to the gender, education, political effectiveness, and political awareness variables, the partisan tendencies variable also has a significant effect on conventional political participation, meaning that those who tend towards reformist political groups are less than conventional. They tend to participate in conventional political activity.

Finally, the fourth research model tested all research variables. The research results for the final model reveal that gender, political effectiveness, and partisan tendencies continue to have a significant effect on conventional political participation. Moreover, the cognitive and structural dimensions of social capital have a positive and significant effect on conventional political participation and increase citizens' willingness to engage in conventional political participation.

The results for the model's goodness of fit (GOF) show the F-value was significant in all of the models tested. The coefficient of determination in the final model also indicates that the sum of the tested variables accounts for 18% of the variation in citizens' willingness to engage in conventional political participation.

Table 3 examines the effects of the research variables on unconventional political participation. In the first research model where only demographic variables were tested, the results show that no variable had a significant effect on willingness to participate in unconventional political participation. In the second research model, the two predispositions variables were added to the first research model, showing that political effectiveness has a positive and significant effect on unconventional political participation and increases citizens' willingness to participate in politics, yet political awareness reduces the tendency for unconventional participation. In the third research model, the partisan tendencies variable was added to the second research model. The results for this model reveal that only the two variables

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of political effectiveness and partisan tendencies have a significant effect on unconventional political participation, meaning that those who tend towards the reformist political parties tend to engage in unconventional political activities more than the principlist parties.

*Table 3: REGRESSION ANALYSIS FOR UNCONVENTIONAL POLITICAL PARTICIPATION*

| | Model 1 | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | .003(.01) | .005(.01) | .007(.01) | .007(.01) |
| Sex | -.118(.06) | -.086(.06) | -.044(.06) | -.038(.06) |
| Edu | -.140(.09) | -.150(.09) | -.161(.09) | -.176(.09) |
| Income | .062(.06) | .029(.06) | -.017(.06) | -.018(.06) |
| Efficacy | | .109(.02)*** | .113(.02)*** | .094(.02)*** |
| Knowledge | | -.178(.08)* | -.140(.08) | -.163(.08) |
| Political party | | | .070(.01)*** | .068(.01)*** |
| Cognitive | | | | .005(.06) |
| Structural | | | | .202(.06)** |
| Relational | | | | -.081(.06) |
| (Constant) | 3.196*** | 2.968*** | 2.513*** | 2.211*** |
| R Square | .007 | .028 | .054 | .063 |
| F | 1.971 | 5.274*** | 8.888*** | 7.261*** |

* Significant at the 0.05 level ** Significant at the 0.01 level *** Significant at the 0.001 level

Note: Entries are unstandardised regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses

Source: own analysis.

Finally, all research variables were tested in the fourth research model. The research results for this model show that political effectiveness and partisan tendencies still have a significant effect on unconventional political participation. Further, the structural dimension of social capital has a positive and significant effect on unconventional political participation and increases citizens' willingness to engage in unconventional political participation. The results of the model's GOF show that the F-value is significant for the other models tested. The coefficient of determination in the final model also indicates that the sum of the tested variables explains 6.3% of the variation in citizens' willingness to engage in unconventional political participation.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to test the effect of different dimensions of social capital on political participation among Iranian youth. The results suggest that some social capital dimensions have a significant effect on the dependent variables. Consistent with the findings of many researchers who studied

social capital's effect on political participation, this study suggests that social capital can explain some of the reasons for citizens' participation in political activities (Boutilier, 2017; Xu et al., 2010; Welzel, et al., 2018). Yet the present study shows that different dimensions of social capital have varying effects on political participation and that some aspects of social capital are more important for explaining individuals' political participation.

Researchers and theorists such as Dubos (2017), Ferragina (2010), Huang (2016), Guillen, Coromina and Saris (2011), Coleman (1990), Bourdieu (1986) and Francis Fukuyama (2001), Putnam (2000), etc. have provided many definitions of social capital and emphasised certain parts of it. For example, Bourdieu (1986) gave a greater stress to the relations and participation of members of an organisation. Putnam (2000) identified elements of social capital like trusts, norms and networks. Cox (1996) also defined social capital as relating to interpersonal processes that build trust, social norms and network relationships, and facilitate co-operation and co-ordination. Fukuyama viewed social capital as a social norm. Yet Onyx and Bullen (2000) offer a more comprehensive definition of social capital and divide it into three dimensions: cognitive, structural and relational. The results showed that the two cognitive and structural dimensions of social capital have a positive and significant effect on political participation, but there is no significant relationship between the social dimension and conventional political participation. It may thus be argued that citizens who are more committed to trusting, attitudes and social commitments and whose group activities are stronger in society are more likely to participate in society.

The results show that when citizens are included in social networks and links, their motivation for conventional political participation increases. This finding reaffirms the role of social link structures in mobilising citizens for political participation. The mechanism seems to be the effect of this component via increased political awareness in social interactions. The massive transfer of political information and messages into ongoing discussions among members of groups can trigger their participation in political processes, influence citizens' political attitudes, and allow assessments of them in analyses of political problems. Participating in complex societies and relationships helps reproduce the collective interest and diminish individual interests, thereby affecting the explanations and theories presented by rational choice theorists. In other words, the presence of social link structures helps limit individual selfishness and expands the sphere of personal interests and interests to public and social affairs, including participation in conventional political activity in society. Given the significant effect of cognitive social capital on conventional political participation, it may also be argued that adherence to social commitments and trust in social structures, and the like, can foster social exchange and cohesion in society. Extending

this to the political arena will increase the functioning and efficiency of governments. Trust and social commitments are important aspects of human relations that encourage partnership and collaboration among community members and prepare people for political participation by expanding consent rather than coercion.

This finding also reveals the positive and significant effect of the structural dimension of social capital on unconventional political participation among young people in Iran. Although the cognitive and communicative dimension of social capital was shown to have a significant effect on unconventional political participation, the significance of the structural dimension of social capital indicates that social networks and links are more influential for political activities than other dimensions of social capital. In Iran, there are no organised political parties formed at lower levels of society that are able to attract citizens. The parties which operate within the country are chiefly governmental. They are generally formed at the time of elections and by state elites, while ordinary people cannot easily join these parties and influence political decision-making processes. Therefore, Iranian NGOs and social associations are the only institutions that can sometimes be formed based on people's interests. Moreover, due to the large size of the government in Iran, its interference in many parts of society, and the lack of powerful political parties, many people are forced to make many political demands and arguments in small groups and circles. This makes the existing Iranian social structures and networks more politicised and explains why citizens discuss ways for achieving their demands in these social groups. Social structures, organisations and associations are today relying on conventional and sometimes unconventional means to accomplish their goals, which increases political participation in society.

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