

Studying the Relationship between National Pride and Political Participation among the Youth of Isfahan

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Abstract: Political participation as one of the various types of participation is considered as an indicator of social and political development in a country. One of the major groups whose participation in the political, social and cultural development procedures is deemed necessary is the youth. Political participation of the youth as a substantial portion of the population of developing countries is particularly important for political stability and vitality of the society. The purpose of this study is to compare the relationship between national pride as one of the dimensions of national identity and political participation of the Isfahan city's young people. The study was conducted on 188 girls and boys of Isfahan city. For data collection, questionnaires were used whose validity was evaluated using formal method and their reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) and data were analyzed using SPSS16 in Windows. By dividing national pride into two variables (special achievements and general national pride) and taking into account two dimensions of political participation, i.e., psychological-attitude factors and the manner of participation (conventional or unconventional), researchers observed that a meaningful correlation exists between dimensions of national pride and the degree and manner of political participation in respondents. Results indicated that there is a direct relationship between the level of national pride and political participation.

Key words: National identity, national pride, conventional political participation, unconventional political participation, attitude toward politics

INTRODUCTION

Political participation has always been one of the fundamental forms of social relations and has been treated as a pivotal subject in sociology. Participation has been defined as a systematic action in the interaction process relationship between the actor and his social milieu in attaining some certain, predetermined goals; members of the society consciously and collectively, bearing in mind their determined and goals which lead to their sharing in social resources, participated in that process (Parsons, 1969). As Burkley puts it, participation is a human right which in terms of value and liberation results in self-esteem and in practical terms results in the mobilization and role-playing of human beings in the scientific procedures of social life. Participation is the essential and basic part of the human development; development of self-confidence, creativity, self-respect, activity, responsibility and social cooperation. Without such development and transformation within people, efforts for eradicating poverty and underdevelopment will encounter numerous obstacles if not impossible (Burkey, 1996). In this regard, political participation as one

form of participation is considered an indicator of social, cultural and political development in countries (Nie *et al.*, 1969) and a manifestation of people's presence in determining their own destiny.

Political participation is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon which objectifies the relationship between civic society and political society. According to the definition, partaking in political procedures which lead to the selection of political leaders and setting general policies or affecting them is called political participation (Abercrombie *et al.*, 1980). In other words, voluntary, social activities of individuals in a society in which people feel they are directly or indirectly involved in general policy-makings or selection of leaders are considered within the concept of political participation (McClosky, 1968). According to Weiner, political participation is any successful or unsuccessful, organized or disorganized, periodical or continuous voluntary action including legitimate or illegitimate methods to influence selection of leaders, policies, administering public affairs in every local or national government (Weiner, 1971). In its general sense and with respect to the above definition, political participation is defined as:

Voluntary and free actions of the members of a society, individual or collective, in governmental or political matters with the purpose of directly or indirectly influencing political decision of a country. These activities might support existing policies of government authorities and government structure or they may seek to change the existing conditions

Political participation and factors influencing it have been studied from various perspectives. One of the factors associated with political participation is the internal identity of human beings. Supporters of this view believe that an individual's beliefs and identity have a determining impact on her political behavior. In other words, in politics and sociopolitical participation, unlike natural sciences, there is no distance between scientific view and beliefs, i.e., between political knowledge and political belief and the effect of one's beliefs and identity on her political behavior is undeniable (Huddy, 2003).

Accordingly, identity is defined based on the feeling of belonging. The individual considers the members to whom she belongs as ingroup and as something positive and those to whom she does not belong as outgroup. This theory is mainly used to understand the psychological roots of distinguishing between groups. Tajfel tries to identify the minimal conditions according to which members of a group determine the ingroup they belong to against the outgroup (Tajfel, 1974).

A group may exist merely because of the assumption that there is a group. A group is nothing but a number of individuals who assume themselves as members of a shared social issue (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). A nation which is the central analytic point of this research is nothing more than a group. Indeed, there are many definitions of nation, nationalism and national identity but most of them have in common the definition of nation as imaginary groups. Nations are groups with common feelings, a belonging consciousness and mutual obligation. In other words, a nation is individuals' allegiance to solidarity and integration of the group (Brubaker, 2004).

Studies show that people attribute more positive personality qualities to national members than they do to outgroup members (Brewer, 1979). National members are people characterized by friendly, reliable and trusty behaviors (Caporael *et al.*, 1989). In describing the role of national feelings in resolving social and political issues, Brewer and Kramer maintain that membership in common groups in an attempt to reduce social differences between group members, decreases the probability of potential, serious differences to emerge among individual resources.

This indicates that with high level of collective identity, negative effects of individualism are overcome and thereby people move toward participating in social and political arenas (Brewer and Kramer, 1986).

Using the same viewpoint, Huddy and Khatib also hypothesize that individuals with stronger national feelings are more likely to participate in social and political issues. They argue that national identity positively influences both the political outlook and individual behavior of people (Huddy and Khatib, 2007). According to this view, people with a higher feeling of patriotism and pride in their nation are expected to be more involved in issues associated with their group.

National pride then is not only one of the dimensions of national identity but one of the most essential parts of national identity which as a result reveals the national identity, positive emotions and general feelings of a nation's people toward their country (Smith and Kim, 2006). National pride is associated with patriotic and nationalistic feelings. In every country, national pride is formed by the unique, historical and social circumstances of that country and by the socio-demographic situation of each individual in that society and it influences individuals' attitudes toward many subjects (Muller-Peters, 1998). This study attempts to analyze the effect of national pride feeling on the mental and active political participation of Iranian citizens.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The method used in this study was of survey type. The statistical population of the present study included the entire young population of the city of Isfahan in 2012. Sample volume contained 188 people selected by cluster sampling. The mean and standard deviation of age for females were 23.12 and 8.34, respectively and 22.14 and 6.19 for males, respectively. Income mean and standard deviation for the whole sample were obtained 345267.12 and 215807.74, respectively.

Testing instruments included two questionnaires

Political participation questionnaire: This questionnaire was created by the researcher using Likert scale which contains 22 questions. The questionnaire was built using the political participation model of Barnes *et al.* (1979) and the Political Participation Model of Emamjomezadeh. The Peterson reliability coefficient of this questionnaire fluctuated between 0.44 and 0.69. Reliability coefficient of the research based on Cronbach's α was found to be 0.78. In order to improve the accuracy of the results and with respect to the conditions of the Iranian society, participation was divided into two levels: attitude toward

political participation (psychological-attitude factors) and form of political participation (conventional or unconventional). This scale is an instrument for the evaluation of the political participation of individuals and scoring of each question is based on a continuum from 1 (completely agree) to 5 (completely disagree).

National pride questionnaire: In this research, national pride was assessed using the International Social Survey Program (ISSP) which is designed by the University of Chicago with the collaboration of some creditable international, social evaluation institutions and carried out in several countries. The test designed in Likert scale contains 14 categories and measures national pride in two special achievements and general national pride dimensions. This program is implemented in 24 countries with the result of national pride regarding special achievements and general, national pride in all countries ranging from 0.72-0.81 and 0.33-0.70, respectively (Smith and Jarkko, 1998). This instrument was translated and validated in Iran by Mojtahedi and then assigned to 30 examinees (15 females and 15 males) who conformed to his research's statistical population conditions. Cronbach's α for the 14 categories was found to be 0.70. In the present study, validity of national pride instrument was calculated and Cronbach's α was found to be 0.77.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the participants' scores in both dimensions of national pride and political participation (number of statements is the same for each parameter). Conventional and unconventional political participation means are found to be 2.95 and 2.56, respectively; conventional, political participation is to some extent higher than unconventional, political participation. The mean of psychological-mental political participation is found to be 3.63 according to which the level of psychological-mental political participation among young people is higher than

conventional or unconventional, political participations. In feeling of national pride questionnaire, the means of special achievements and general, national pride dimensions are 3.14 and 3.63, respectively. The mean of the total political participation score (obtained by summing up different fields of participation) and its standard deviation were found to be, respectively 6.38 and 1.29. The same values for the total score of the national pride were found out to be 6.77 and 0.78, respectively.

According to Table 1, the highest data dispersion is related to the mean of unconventional, political participation with standard deviation of 0.85 and the lowest data dispersion is related to the mean of special achievements with standard deviation of 0.37.

Table 2 shows the simple (Pearson) correlation between national pride and political participation dimensions. As it can be observed, all correlations are significant in $p < 0.001$. The highest level of correlation is related to the relationship between conventional political participation and general national pride and the lowest level of correlation is related to the relationship between general national pride and unconventional political participation.

In order to examine the multivariate relation between national pride and dimensions of political participation, multivariate Regression Models was used. Table 3 shows Regression Model results for the relationship between national pride (special achievements, general national pride) and each dimension of political participation and total level of participation.

As Table 3 shows, special achievements and general, national pride variables are good predictors for political participation parameters. Multiple correlation value (R) of special achievements and general, national pride with conventional political participation is 0.56 and determinative coefficient of 38% shows the explainable value of conventional political participation variances from special achievements and general national pride dimensions. Multiple correlation value (R) of special

Table 1: The means and standard deviations of participants' scores in national pride and political participation dimensions

National pride	Mean	Standard deviation	Political participation	Mean	Standard deviation
Special achievements	3.14	0.37	Conventional political participation	0.95	0.84
General national pride	3.63	0.41	Unconventional political participation	2.56	0.85
National pride (total)	6.77	0.78	Psychological-political participation	3.63	0.45
			Political participation (total)	6.36	1.29

Table 2: Correlation between national pride dimensions and political participation dimensions

Variables	Conventional political participation	Unconventional political participation	Psychological-political participation
Special achievements	0.25	0.13	0.32
General national pride	0.48	-0.08	0.65

$p < 0.001$

Table 3: Regression Model results for the relationship between national pride and political participation

Predicting variables	Basic variables	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard Error of Estimation (ΔR)	F	Level of significance
Special achievements, general national pride	Conventional political participation	0.56	0.38	0.38	1.50	5.63	0.000
Special achievements, general national pride	Unconventional political participation	0.23	0.11	0.10	4.11	0.80	0.64
Special achievements, general national pride	Psychological-political participation	0.49	0.33	0.33	5.74	4.69	0.000
Special achievements, general national pride	Political participation	0.35	0.20	0.19	10.67	3.49	0.000

Table 4: Standard (B) and nonstandard (b) regression coefficients for the regressions of each national pride dimension on political participation dimensions

The dependent variables	The independent variables	Unstandardised coefficients		Standardised coefficients (Beta)	t-value	Sig.
		B	SE			
Conventional political participation	Special achievements	0.10	0.04	0.35	2.25	0.001
Unconventional political participation	General national pride	0.09	0.08	0.49	3.20	0.001
Psychological political participation	Special achievements	-0.04	0.13	-0.21	-0.80	0.152
	General national pride	-0.07	0.05	-0.29	-1.20	0.031
Conventional political participation and unconventional political participation	Special achievements	0.11	0.04	0.16	1.85	0.004
	General national pride	0.12	0.03	0.31	2.68	0.001
Psychological political participation	Special achievements	0.24	0.09	0.28	1.60	0.012
	General national pride	0.30	0.06	0.41	2.98	0.001

achievements and general national pride dimensions with unconventional political participation is 0.23 which indicates that the statistical value of F in the range of $p < 0.001$ is insignificant. Multiple correlation value (R) of special achievements and general national pride with psychological-mental political participation is 0.49 and the explainable coefficient of 33% shows the explainable value of psychological-mental political participation variances from special achievements and general national pride dimensions. Multiple correlation value (R) of special achievements and general national pride with political participation is 0.35 and determinative coefficient of 0.20 indicates the explainable value of the total political participation score from special achievements and general national pride dimensions. The significance of the values of F shows that all coefficients are meaningful in $p < 0.001$ except for unconventional political participation with national pride dimensions.

Table 4 shows nonstandard (B) and standard (b) regression coefficients for regressions of each national pride dimension on political participation dimensions. As standard regression coefficients demonstrate, national pride is the more important predictor in all political participation dimensions and it has weightier b and it is more related with political participation parameters. In sum, the relationship between national pride with all dimensions of political participation is significant ($p < 0.05$). As it can be observed, all regression coefficients except the relationship between national pride dimensions and unconventional political participation are positive and it shows that there is a positive relationship between national pride dimensions

and political participation dimensions. However, the regression of special achievements on unconventional political participation is not significant and indicates no significant relationship with these dimensions.

Results from the data analysis in examining the relationship between the two main variables of the study, i.e., national pride (as one of the dimensions of national identity) and political participation (as one of the main constituents of democracy), demonstrated that there is direct and significant relationship between these two variables in the target statistical population (young people of Isfahan). Accordingly although, psychological-mental, political participation and general, national pride are more compatible and significant and considered better predictors, the relationship between all political participation (except for unconventional political participation) dimensions and all national pride dimensions is significant. Research hypotheses are thus corroborated.

As results indicate even though the relationship of both national pride dimensions and conventional political participation is significant and positive, general, national pride has the highest relationship with conventional political participation. This implies that the higher the degree of national pride is in individuals, the higher is the probability that they exhibit conventional, normal political behaviors. These findings are in agreements with Tajfel's Theories of Social Identity. Tajfel believes that the more the degree of intergroup identity, the more will the individuals be interested in their groups and therefore will try to react to the events occurring in their group and seek out solutions for their problems. As a result, individuals

will move toward participation in society in order to be able to maintain their group's solidarity. Now, one of the dimensions of participation is political participation in which people have stronger national feelings and try to participate in deciding the future of their country and improve the position of their country through conventional means such as voting, etc.

Results also show that the relationship between national pride dimensions and unconventional political participation is negative. Therefore, even through the relationship between special achievements and unconventional political participation is negative and insignificant, general national pride has a reverse relationship with unconventional political participation. This fact is also consistent with Social Identity Theory because according to this theory, individuals consider ingroup members as reliable, honest and trustworthy. As a result even if individuals take politicians' plans and policies wrong, they will still follow the policies and will avoid resorting to violent solutions.

Furthermore, data indicate that national pride dimensions have positive impact on people's attitude toward political participation (mental participation). In other words, people's interest in national, political issues will increase with the degree of their pride in their national identity and their patriotism. These findings are also consistent with the theoretical framework of the research. As mentioned before, social identity theoreticians believe that people with stronger group and collective identity tend to care more about the social norms of their groups than others and are more concerned about different issues of their society.

CONCLUSION

According to these findings, researchers may expect higher political participation of individuals in societies with high national pride feelings. It is needless to say, of course that national pride is one of the factors influencing political participation and it is not changeable and flexible easily and in a short time since national feelings are rooted in the inner layers of a society such as culture and religion and therefore national identity and pride are good predictors of political participation.

It is obvious that this study does not claim to explain the issue of political participation by only referring to one factor (national pride). In fact as it is mentioned in many studies, no one-factor pattern can be considered as effective on political participation but a large array of factors together and in interaction with each other may explain the phenomenon of political participation. The present study, along with other studies, showed that one

of the most crucial of these factors is the degree of national pride in individuals. Any action that damages and hurts the national pride of a society's individuals is in fact damaging their social self-esteem and national respect which is the basis of their national identity as a fragment of their individual identity. One of its consequences is the growing feeling of inferiority and alienation toward compatriots and the country and decreasing of political participation.

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