ELECTORAL BEHAVIOR AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS IN IRAN: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN SHIRAZ CITY

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Abstract - The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between socio-economic status and its different attitudes that could influence voting behavior and political participation of individuals. This study posits that when the level of income, education and occupation (three main measures of socio-economic status) increase, there would be a decrease in the level of political participation.The questionnaire used to gather data in this study comprises two major sections namely: socio-economic status and political attitudes and participation in Shiraz, one of the most important cities in Iran.

Keywords - Socio Economic status, voting behavior in Shiraz, presidential election, electoral participation, case study

I. INTRODUCTION

Compressive in Iran, various elections are held regularly in which different currents and orientations participate, namely presidential and parliamentary elections, and elections for councils and assembly of experts. Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979 nearly 40 elections have been held ("Election", para. 1). The approach towards the elections, especially presidential ones, is a joint demand in terms of voter turnout, participation, intensity, and weaknesses that some would interpret as a political crisis in the Islamic Republic of Iran (Zibakalam, 2010). For more than half a century, one of the significant issues in political sociology is the academic study of voting behavior in the societies. Meanwhile, in recent years, Iran has shown an increasing interest in academic research in political sociology and election campaign analysis. Iran's presidential elections have had high volatility, sometimes accompanied with public interest in for example the presidential elections in 1997–2005 for Mohammad Khatami and Hassan Rouhani's election (2013–present) sometimes amalgamated with violent repression and critics like Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005–2013) (Ibid). In 2010, Hossein Bashiryieh described his ideas in an interview, referring to "an emancipatory current event, which shows political frustration and inefficacy mainly on the part of the urban middle classes, who found their vote and their political participation to be of no consequence in changing the political situation" (Bashiriyeh, 2010, p, 63). The recent confrontation between Iranian people, the government and public interest in presidential elections is a starting point for the autopsy of electoral behavior of social classes in Iran; however, there has been little academic discussion about that. It may however be noted that the elections with an emphasis on 1997 – the fifth President of Iran – can be understood and explained by the demands of society based on the needs of the social classes to change the "the highest popularly elected official in the country" (Darabi, 2008).

Thus the problematic issue that arises here is what factors are involved in the ups and downs of Iran's election and the rise of often conflicting currents in different periods. The role of class stands out in this matter. Iran, like any other society, is influenced by class-related factors. Moreover, the existence of upper, middle, and lower classes and also the division into modern and traditional sectors, especially in the middle class, can be influential in the voting orientation of this society. The main question is whether there is a relationship between socio-economic status and the political participation rate of the voters in Shiraz. Is it possible to predict people's demands based on their socioeconomic status? Are their voting preferences affected by their class levels? This study claims that an increase in the level of education, income, and occupation as three major indices of socio-economic status, would result in a drop in political participation, and a decrease in these indices would result in a rise in the participation rate. The objective of the present paper is to investigate the Socio-economic status approach for political participation and voting preferences and the attempts to provide a framework for it. The subject would examine a representative survey based on the Survey (2016) and reviews the Iranian civic attitude based on socioeconomic status in general towards election would be reviewed. Then, based on the outcomes of this survey, the data from the survey done in the city of Shiraz city of Iran survey will be analyzed and. The results of this research will help to find and test the theory of "relationships between social class and political participation and behavior of citizens who attempt attempting to influence to the government". The paper concludes with a discussion of the finding.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

The statistical population consists of people on different areas in Shiraz city based on their corresponding social bases in various levels who participated in elections in 2013 in Iran. At first due to the lack of access to people inside Iran in order to

conduct conventional method mainly face-to-face interviews, the subject handled Qualtrics (online survey); but the main issue in the online survey is that there is not the possibility of having data from all social levels due to the complexity of classes in Iran, as the theoretical framework of the thesis required more time and effort, hence, according to the conditions and obstacles the theoretical model and data collection underwent changes, so the change from online surveys to face to face seemed appropriate and due to the sensitivity of the issue and due to the summoning of the questioner by security of the University of Shiraz because of the distribution of questionnaires, we sufficed to collecting the minimum data required for the analysis, the data thus consists of only N= 158 (In total was 160 but 2 of them was useless and deleted) respondents who participated in the survey.

In this study, the questionnaires were administered by university graduates and they were instructed to seek subjects 'of as low a social class as possible'. This instruction was meant to counterbalance the normal occurrence where administered surveys (online survey) focus predominantly on upper and middle class population. In this survey, the respondents or target group are people who are twenty two years and above (Iran voting age is eighteen years) that are qualified to take part in elections and who probably participated in the previous elections.

Questions are designed to determine the levels of income, education and occupation of individuals. Our efforts have been made to obtain an understanding and assessment of individuals' socio-economic status through understanding their levels of income, education and occupation, only respondents who answered all these statements were included, leading to a total number of 158 respondents. For data collection purpose, the study deploys the convenience sampling. Similarly, in order to select the sample of the study of the population, probability or random sampling method was utilized (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

III. CASE STUDY

An overall outlook of Shiraz' stratification condition (employment status, urbanization, literacy) and previous presidential election

Social Stratification: Fars Province with an area of 122608 square kilometers, has occupied 7.46 percent of the country's total area. Fars is divided into 21 counties, 63 cities, 64 districts, and 184 rural districts. The population of Fars Province has been announced to be 4 million and 811 thousand and 98 persons; 2 million and 422 thousand and 321 persons are men and 2 million and 388 thousand and 777 persons are women. It includes 6.11 percent of the country's total population, 1 million and 781 thousand and 707 persons (6.38 percent) of Fars Province's population lives in Shiraz city, 68 percent of which live in urban areas and 32 percent of which live in rural areas (see table below) (Oboudi, 2013; Rastegar & Gholami, 2010).(table 1)

Province	Services		Industry		Agriculture	
Year	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011	**2010**
Whole country	48.0	48.6	33.4	32.2	18.6	**19.2**
Fars	44.8	48.9	31.0	28.0	24.2	**23.0**

Source: http://shiraze.ir/fa/news, http://www.tabnak.ir/fa/news

Table 1: The Service Sector of Activities in Fars Province during Years 2010-2011

The number of illiterates in Fars, at all the levels, is 560 thousand persons; further, he stated that the literacy statistics in Iran are reported to be 94.1 percent and claimed that Fars Province is two percent above the country's average ("Statistics literacy", 2013).

It should be noted, that high literacy and urbanization rate, with 68 percent of urbanization in this county, indicates the population density in the center of the county, which increases the people's access to communications equipment and urban facilities in comparison to rural areas. As you might know, the population features in the data analysis, as an important variable, can influence the rate of political participation (Zibakalam, et al., 2010).

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The description of the results of the study based on the statistical data analysis as well as the research findings is presented in this section. The study explains the demographic variables in order to offer specific description of the characteristics of the sample.

Table 2 shows the profile of respondents who participated in this study, and they were classified based on gender, age, marital status, education and occupation of the respondents in Shiraz city who voted in the previous election. The results indicated that out of the 158 respondents in this study, 97 (61.4%) respondents are male and compared to 61 (38.6%) respondents for female.

Variable	Description	Number of Respondents	%
Gender	Female	61	38.6
	Male	97	61.4
Age	21-30 year	33	20.9
	31-40 year	41	25.9
	41-50 year	27	17.1
	51-60 year	39	24.7
	above 60 years	18	11.4
Marital Status	Married	33	20.9
	Single	115	72.8
	Divorced	3	1.9
	Separated	4	2.5

	Widowed	3	1.9
Education	Illiterate/No education	5	3.2
	Literate/Elementary	4	2.5
	Secondary School	15	9.5
	High school completion (12 years)	59	37.3
	AA - 2 years of college	46	29.1
	Bachelor - 4 years of college	21	13.3
	Master degree	7	4.4
	Doctorate Degree/Ph. D	1	.6

Note: Total number of respondents: 158

Table 2: Profile of the respondents (n=158)

The age distribution reveals that 33 (20.9%) respondents are between ages 21 and 30 years old, 41 (25.9%) respondents are between ages 31 to 40 years old, 27 (17.1%) respondents are aged 41 to 50 years old, 39 (24.7%) respondents are between ages 51 to 60 years old and 18(11.4%) respondents are age above 60 years old. In term of marital status reveals that 33 (20.9%) respondents are married while 115 (72.8%) respondents are single. 3 (1.9%) respondents are divorced, 4 (2.5%) respondents are separated, and 3 (1.9%) respondents are widowed. Regarding their levels of education, 59 (37.3%), 46 (29.1%) and 21 (13.3%) respondents have high school completion (12 years), AA - 2 years of college, bachelor degree 4 years of college, respectively. Also, 15 (9.5%) respondents have secondary school whereas 7 (4.4%) respondents have master degree.

The occupation of the respondents discloses that, 17 (10.8%) 40 (25.3%) 14 (8.9%) respondents work in public services, private services and self-employed, respectively. However, 17 (10.8%) respondents are studying, 38 (24.1%) respondents are Housekeeping and 26 (16.5%) respondents are retired (table 3).

Occupation	Number of Respondents	%
Public Services	17	10.8
Private Services	40	25.3
Self-employed	14	8.9
Student	17	10.8
House Wife	38	24.1
Retired	26	16.5
Other	6	3.8
Total	158	100.0

Table 3: Job at the time of election (n=158)

The relationship between income and political participation

The results show as much as the median income level will increase their political participation is reduced (table 4 and figure1).

Average Monthly Income	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
One million and Below	57	1.26	0.444
1 million and 2 million	74	1.27	0.447
2 million and 3 million	18	1.22	0.428
3 million and 4 million	4	1.00	0.000
Other	5	1.60	0.548
Total	158	1.27	0.443

Table 4: Vote in the 2013 presidential elections

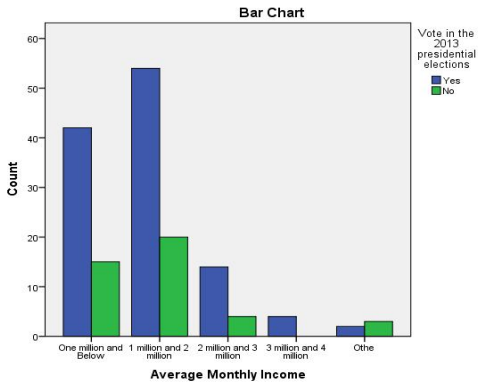


Fig. 1: Vote in the 2013 presidential elections and average income

The relationship between education and political participation

The results show as much as the average educational level reduced their political participation increases (table 5).

Last degree that you have achieved in previous presidential election in 2013	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Literate/Elementary	4	1.00	0
Secondary School	15	1.20	0.414
High school completion (12 years)	59	1.27	0.448
AA - 2 years of college	46	1.30	0.465
Bachelor degree - 4 years of college	21	1.24	0.436
Illiterate/No education	5	1.40	0.548
Doctorate Degree/Ph.D	1	1.00	0
Master degree	7	1.29	0.488
Total	158	1.27	0.443

Table 5: Vote in the 2013 presidential elections

The relationship between job status and political participation

After revealing which factors that have an influence on political participation. The data point to the fact that most respondents in Shiraz city view themselves as middle, rather than working or upper class. Class differences appear to matter a lot when it comes to attitudes to political affiliation. While the affluent and middle classes are slightly less likely to be in favour of increased the government's role to change in country or bring freedom and in the other hands they are slightly less likely to support government attitude (Zibakalam et al,. 2010). Describe themselves as belonging class Cross tabulation. 57 (36%) of the working class serve in public services and private services. Self- Employed working class only 14 (8.9%), and students are 15 (10.75%). Around 38 (24%) of the respondent are House Wife and 26 (16.45%) retired state that their job at the time of election.

The results reveal the level of the satisfaction by the performance of President Hassan Rouhani until now. The majority of the respondent is belong the upper middle class and lower middle class. They are not satisfied or somewhat satisfied (table 1, figure 2)

Job at the time of election	Describe themselves as belonging class						
	Upper Class	Upper Middle Class	Lower Middle Class	Working Class	Lower Class	None	Total
Public Services	0	7	8	2	0	0	17
Private Services	3	14	13	6	4	0	40
Self-Employed	1	3	5	3	2	0	14
Student	0	10	2	3	0	2	17
House Wife	0	15	14	4	0	5	38
Retired	0	6	17	2	1	0	26
Other	0	2	3	1	0	0	6
Total	4	57	62	21	7	7	158

Table 6: Job at the time of election

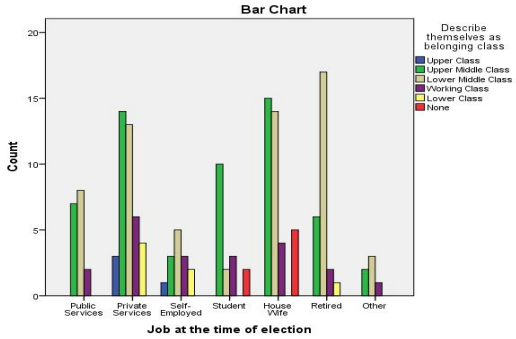


Fig. 2: Job at the time of election

CONCLUSIONS

The present study attempted to assess the political participation rate of people based on their civil attitudes and their socio-economic status. The conclusion may be drawn from this thesis that indicators of socio-economic status and political participation rate, that is, in total the rate of political participation among the high class stratum is slightly less than the lower and middle strata, and the highest rate of participation is among individuals with middle socio-economic status. In the present study, there is no significant association between socio-economic status, as the independent variable, and political participation rate as the dependent variable.

That is, the individuals possessing middle and high socio-economic status in Shiraz had a lower tendency towards participation in comparison to the individuals with low socio-economic status. In other words, people with lower status (which is mainly caused by low levels of education, income, and occupations) had the highest rate of participation. On the other hand, groups having higher levels of education and businessmen with high incomes had a lower participation rate. Perhaps the stronger tendency of lower-status individuals in traditional and religious values is the reason of their inclination towards a state that merges the religious and modern values. Meanwhile, the upper strata mainly show more tendencies towards democratic states due to their more modern tendencies. Considering the Urbanization enhancement, increase in college education, knowledge-based jobs, greater access to information-communication technologies, increase in public awareness, and ultimately improvements in the rights of citizenship during the recent years in Iran, the population of people belonging to the middle status is more than the population of the other two statuses (Naeimi, 2013).(figure 3)

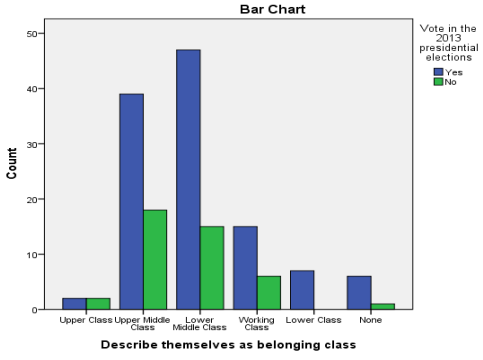


Fig. 3: Describe themselves as belonging class vote in the 2013

People with a higher family origin (status) are more interested in modern tendencies in comparison to the other two groups. These individuals due to their higher financial, cultural, and social capitals communicate, with greater ease, with a variety of internal and external social networks and

consequently are familiarized with the elements of modern thought sooner and quicker (Bashirieh, 1995). Thus, contrary to the view of Almond and Verba, who believe in the field of social interaction, individuals with upper status possess more resources to influence others and participation.

In Shiraz city the individuals possessing middle and high socio-economic status had lower tendency towards participation in comparison to the individuals with low socio-economic status. The most significant factor in this regard is the lack of socio-political confidence among these groups and the political system. It is obvious that it is the transition to democracy of social forces or the middle and upper classes of the society that plays the fundamental role; hence, effective participation in elections and political participation are of utmost importance (Zibakalam et al., 2010).

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