The Study of the Moderating Role of Social Capital on Ethnocentrism among Youths in Tabriz

Mohammad Bagher Alizadeh Aghdam
Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Tabriz University, Tabriz, Iran

Mohammad Abbaszadeh
Associate Professor, Department of Social Sciences, Tabriz University, Tabriz, Iran

Raviyeh Abedini
MA in Sociology, University of Tabriz, Tabriz, Iran

Received: 28 May 2016    Accepted: 8 January 2017

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The issue of inter-ethnic relations and interactions is considered as one of the most important social and political issues in multi-ethnic countries. The reason is that weakening or strengthening of relations between ethnic groups, and as a result, weakening or strengthening of national integrity in a country is affected by the intensity of the ethnic tendencies of different groups (ethnicity). Therefore, it is important to study such an issue in Iran, as a country that has hosted multiple ethnic groups with different cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds for so long, and whose integration is largely due to the peace and coexistence of these ethnic groups.

The present article investigates the following issue. While the young population of the region faces a variety of new collective identities as a result of facing with the modern world and its implications including the spread of communication technologies, and the expansion of real and virtual communication between different cultures, this study seeks to investigate the degree of ethnicity among young people aged between 18 and 29, and to examine how important the role of social capital is.

2. Theoretical Framework

Putnam (2000), with a simple analogy, uses the terms intra-group and inter-group associations (Adibi Sadeh, Yazdkhast, Rabbani Khorasgani, & Abbaszadeh, 2009) to distinguish between the two main types of social capital. The limited or old

1 Corresponding author, r.abedini19@gmail.com
social capital, which is introduced as the social capital of interconnectedness, links members of homogeneous groups (from collective aspects, such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, etc.), and ultimately leads to the formation of exclusive, limited and specific identities (Gadgarzadeh & Shafienia, 2012). In contrast, new or bridge-forming social capital (i.e., intergroup) refers to social networks that link and connect unconnected individuals of different parts of society and cause unbiased and open identities (Putnam, 2000).

As outlined above, the topic of intra-group and inter-group social capitals has a relationship with the network concepts that emerged in sociology, during the 1970s. Granovetter’s (1973) work on the strength of weak ties is one of the good examples of network relationships. He distinguishes between strong ties, which is the bond between close friends with close connections, and weak links, which is the bond between a set of distant acquaintances (Granovetter, 1973, 1982). Indeed, Granovetter believed that the cohesive relationship among the members of the group leads to poor relations with members of foreign groups, and reduce social capital. In contrast, weak intra-group ties create relationships with outside individuals and groups, and thus create social capital (Salehi Amiri, 2006).

3. Method

This study is a cross-sectional survey. The statistical population consisted of all young people aged between 18 and 29 years old living in Tabriz. For this study, 384 out of 381551 individuals were selected as sample (Statistical Center of Iran in 2011). The instrument used to collect the data was a closed-ended questionnaire, whose validity and reliability were estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient with the help of a sample of 30 people before the final implementation.

4. Results

Findings show that the level of ethnicity in the society is moderate. Furthermore, the rate was significantly higher among men than women. The results and findings of the first research question showed that there is no significant relationship between social cohesion and ethnicity while the significance level of the other two dimensions of social capital (p<0.05) indicates a significant and positive relationship between institutional trust, ethnicity and social participation, and ethnicity.

In the end, the results of path analysis also show that the variable of institutional trust has affected youth's ethnicity through the variable of social cohesion and social participation. The variable of social cohesion has a both direct and indirect effect on the dependent variable through the social participation variable.
5. Conclusion

A series of key concepts in the relation of ethnicity and social capital can be found in the network of interactions, limited correlations, trust, intra-group social commitments, social cohesion, social participation, etc. Social capital facilitates identification by providing people with the necessary knowledge about sensitive issues such as inter-ethnic relations and clarifying the boundaries of differences and similarities between self and other groups, while providing strategies for action on the macroeconomic level of society. It also increases participation and consolidates social cohesion.

In other words, the relationships of individuals with each other in the society result in a kind of commitment and mutual responsibility between them, which in turn, leads to the emergence of mutual trust. The result of this sense of commitment, mutual responsibility and trust among people in a community is the emergence of coherence and integrity among them. This, in turn, creates the spirit of participation among people in society, and individuals can work together in groups, associations and other group activities. Evidence suggests that social capital, while moderating relationships, contributes to solidarity, unity, and trust within ethnic groups and organizations. It also contributes to active human resources in the community and maintains their mutual relations.

Keyword: Ethnicity, Social cohesion, Social participation, Institutional trust, Young people

References (in Persian)


References (in English)


