



Social Networks and Participation in Elections based on Geographical and Regional Characteristics (Case study of Hormozgan Province)

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Abstract: Nowadays, social networks play a huge role in people's daily lives. Therefore, news and information published on social networks can influence people's decisions. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between social networks and participation in elections based on the geographical and regional characteristics of Hormozgan Province in 2024. The statistical population of the research also consists of all citizens of Bandar Abbas who are members of the legal minimum age for participation in the elections (over 18 years old), therefore the sample size in this regard was 384 people, randomly drawn from the four districts of the Bandar Municipality Abbas, were selected. Statistical methods using SPSS software were used to analyze the data, and Pearson's correlation coefficient formula and regression were applied to test the hypotheses. The results of the study show that there is a significant connection between social networks and participation in elections. Three demographic components, namely age, marital status and income, also had a significant impact on voter turnout. On the other hand, satisfaction with officials' performance increases voter turnout.

Keywords: *participation rate, internal social networks, correct choice.*

Introduction

Political participation is one of the most widely discussed forms of participation. One of the primary shifts in research on political participation is the decline of its traditional manifestations and the simultaneous emergence of innovative and non-institutional forms of political action (Waeterloos, et al., 2024). Political participation is a crucial topic in sociology and a significant indicator of political development in countries. As a dimension of political development, it encompasses numerous facets that can assist political systems in achieving a more democratic state. In fact, the extent and nature of political participation serve as a suitable measure for gauging the legitimacy of a government (Doolatabadi Farahani & Mohammadpour, 1399). Today, political participation has become an indispensable aspect of the political development of nations. This is particularly evident in developing countries undergoing a transition from traditional to modern societies. Governments are compelled to engage in political participation to acquire legitimacy. Moreover, high levels of public participation in decision-making and policy-making processes indicate a developed and sophisticated political culture within a society (Najat et al., 1393).

From the perspective of social and political scientists, political participation is a process embedded in a network of social relationships. These social relationships can either limit or facilitate individuals' access to resources and opportunities. A network refers to a group of individuals connected through specific relationships. Furthermore, political participation involves voluntary and intentional activities through which members of a society engage in the affairs of their neighborhoods, cities, and villages, directly or indirectly contributing to the shaping of social and political life. Therefore, a question arises: is there a connection between social networks and electoral participation? Political participation offers practical benefits to governments, and its absence can harm political systems and their long-term goals. If the political subsystem fails to create the necessary conditions for widespread and genuine public participation, power tends to become personalized, and democratic systems decline (Ahmadi, 1398).

Social media provides an additional virtual space where participation can occur outside of institutional politics. These platforms enable unique forms of citizenship and creativity (Waeterloos, et al., 2024; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), allowing citizens not only to mobilize their networks but also to increase awareness of specific political or social issues or exert pressure (Verhulst et al., 2016). Consequently, participation through social media constitutes a distinct form of political participation and, therefore, a crucial additional indicator of the health of electoral participation (Waeterloos, et al., 2021). In fact, these actions often align with purposeful definitions of political participation, as they may contribute to government decision-making processes or societal issues within the digital realm.

Based on existing research, there is limited literature on the relationship between social networks and electoral participation. Therefore, considering the aforementioned explanations, the present study aims to investigate the relationship between social networks and electoral participation based on geographic and regional characteristics in Hormozgan Province.

Theoretical Foundations and Review of Past Research

Social networks are internet-based tools that are now used for most daily activities. As channels for political mobilization, social networks have attracted the attention of researchers. For instance, social movement researchers have long recognized that social networks often draw activists and participants into movements (Gould, 2004). Although the importance of social networks as communication channels is well-documented in the literature, it is less clear which types of social networks are more effective than others. Social relationships have many dimensions, including strength, frequency, and content, which may make them more effective as recruitment channels. Understanding which social networks are more effective at recruiting is an important step toward determining the theoretical mechanisms of network effects on political mobilization (Lim, 2008).

Political participation is at the heart of political life and embodies an element of responsibility, conscious and free action, and is one of the major indicators of political and social development in modern and democratic societies. Political participation refers to the actions and reactions of individuals (individually or collectively, organized and voluntary or involuntary) aimed at influencing and impacting government policies, electing political leaders, or acting in a way that can influence the political outcomes of programs (Kenani Nasab et al., 1399). Definitions of political participation vary greatly, even when focusing on contemporary approaches developed in the second half of the 20th century. Early studies of political participation were limited to election-related behaviors (Berelson et al., 1954). Verba and Nie (1972) define political participation as including all activities undertaken by citizens "activities that are more or less directly aimed at influencing the selection of personnel and/or the actions they take once selected." Milbrath and Goel (1977) define political participation as "those actions of private citizens by which they seek to influence or support government and policy." The traditional emphasis in studies of political participation on active behavioral modes focused on influencing government decisions is a major point of contention in the newer conceptual literature (Ruess et al., 2023). As noted above, a rich stream of research has since applied the concept of political participation to unconventional political actions, such as protest, and even various forms of civic engagement that are not overtly political in nature (Theocharis & van Deth, 2018).

One pressing issue in Bandar Abbas is the level of political participation among its residents. There is a need to understand the factors that influence individuals' participation in the political process, especially in terms of elections and civic activities. Moreover, with the emergence of social networks, both locally and internationally, the use of these platforms for communication and information sharing has increased. However, the impact of social media use on political participation remains unclear. In addition, demographic characteristics such as age, gender, occupation, marital status, education, and income are known to shape individuals' attitudes toward political participation. Therefore, it is essential to examine the relationship between demographic factors and political participation in Bandar Abbas. By examining these aspects, including the extent of social media use, electoral preferences, participation in critical demonstrations, and satisfaction with the performance of officials, we can gain a reliable understanding of the dynamics of political participation in this city. This knowledge is crucial for policymakers and relevant institutions to develop effective strategies for promoting active citizenship and democratic participation in Bandar Abbas.

Ahmed and Gil-Lopez (2024) examined the characteristics of social networks and political participation inequality among adolescents and young adults. The results indicate that politically interested individuals take advantage of the benefits of using online media, thus exacerbating the participation gap between low- and high-interest groups. These gaps become more pronounced for both adolescents and adults in heterogeneous networks. In contrast, politically interested adolescents are more

likely to be politically embedded in broader social networks and thus are similar to politically independent young adults.

Jeronense and Spierings (2023) conducted a study on political participation. The results showed that loyal voters are numerous but not particularly engaged. And citizens who are systematically dissatisfied tend to disengage - only a small number try to change the system. Kim and Hoewe (2023) developed contemporary factors of political participation in their research. This study used five components: (1) traditional political participation, (2) interpersonal political discussion, (3) voting, (4) social media participation, and (5) online information seeking. With convergent and discriminant validity testing, each of the political participation factors was positively related to political efficacy and political interest. Only traditional political participation was negatively related to political cynicism. These results show that forms of political participation have become more diverse and individualized following the development of communication technologies. Theocharis et al. (2023) studied the affordances of the platform and political participation with a focus on the role of social media. The analysis shows that actions activated by social media do not align with traditional factors in the structure of participation. Political actions that use Twitter and Facebook are distinct in the factorial structure of participation. Intyaswati and Fairuzza (2023) examined the impact of social media on online political participation among university students, mediated by political discussions. The results showed that online political discussions, rather than face-to-face political discussions, act as a mediator. Moreover, politics and the use of social media had a positive impact on online political participation.

Khajhe Sarvari and Norbakhsh (1397) examined the impact of the mass media on the political participation of citizens in Tehran. The hypothesis test showed that, with 95% confidence, there is a significant relationship between the independent variables of the study (consumption of domestic media, Farsi-language satellite networks, and social networks) and the dependent variable of the study (political participation of citizens) with indicators such as "participation in elections or political rallies and gatherings," "campaigning for a political party," "discussing political issues with others," and "interest in following political events and news." The results also showed that the impact of consuming political programs on national media on the political participation of Tehran citizens is direct, and the impact of political programs on satellite networks on their political participation is inverse. In addition, the data showed that the impact of consuming political content on social networks on citizens' political participation was direct. Shahram Nia and his colleagues (1396) examined the impact of social networks on political participation. The aim of this article is to examine the relationship between social networks and electoral behavior among students of Mazandaran University. By dividing social networks (social network capital) into three dimensions of interaction, structure, and function, and political participation (electoral behavior) into three levels of spectator, intermediate, and active, the findings of the study showed a completely positive relationship between social networking (hierarchy of networks and types of participation) and political participation, and the structural dimension of social networks had the greatest impact on students' electoral behavior. Abbasi Sermadi et al. (1393) examined the impact of social capital on electoral participation. The results of the analysis of the main hypotheses indicate that, on the one hand, social trust and social norms have an impact on strengthening social networks, and on the other hand, social trust and social networks also have a positive and significant impact on increasing the level of electoral participation. The findings of the study show that there is a significant relationship between social norms and electoral participation.

Material and Methods

This study employs a survey method, and a field study was conducted to collect data related to the variables. The questionnaire was based on the Likert scale (closed-ended questionnaire) and was compiled from experts and specialists in sociology and political science. The validity of the research was content validity, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the reliability of the research. Therefore, using the SPSS econometric software, Cronbach's alpha for the 36-item questionnaire was calculated to be above 0.80, indicating the suitability of the data collection tool in terms of reliability. It should be noted that the literature review section of this research is based on library studies and applied research. Therefore, given the focus of the topic, this research is descriptive and correlational, and Pearson correlation and regression methods were used to examine the relationship between the variables. Considering that the aim of this study is to examine the relationship between social networks and electoral participation based on geographic and regional characteristics in Hormozgan Province during the period of 1403, the statistical population of the study consists of all citizens of Bandar Abbas who are of legal age for political participation (over 18 years old), totaling 240,000. Therefore, due to the large population, a random sampling method was used to select a sample size of 384 people from the neighborhoods of four districts of Bandar Abbas. It should be noted that the average of 18 questions about domestic and foreign social networks is used as the social network variable.

Table 1: Questionnaire Reliability

Variables	Number of Questions	Cronbach's Alpha
Foreign Social Networks	8	0.90
Domestic Social Networks	10	0.81
Electoral Participation	9	0.78
Choosing the Best Option	4	0.82
Critical Demonstrations	5	0.80
Total	36	0.83
Export to Sheets		

Source: Research Findings

Research Hypotheses

1. It is expected that there will be a negative relationship between the level of use of foreign social networks and electoral participation.
2. It is expected that there will be a positive relationship between the level of use of domestic social networks and electoral participation.
3. It is expected that there will be a relationship between demographic characteristics (age, gender, occupation, marital status, education, migration, income) and attitudes towards political participation.
4. It seems that there is a relationship between the level of use of social networks and the choice of the best option in elections.

5. It seems that there is a relationship between the level of use of social networks and participation in critical demonstrations.
6. It seems that there is a relationship between the level of satisfaction with the performance of officials and political participation.

Results

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics

Percentage	Frequency		
81.2	312	Male	Gender
18.8	72	Female	
28.9	111	18 to 25	Age
57.6	221	25 to 35	
8.3	32	35 to 45	
5.2	20	Over 45	
2.6	10	Diploma	Education
7.3	28	Associate's Degree	
46.1	177	Bachelor's Degree	
44.0	169	Master's Degree and above	
31.5	121	Below 10 million	Income
33.0	127	Between 10 to 15 million	
16.7	64	Between 15 to 20 million	
18.8	72	Above 20 million	
28.6	110	Single	Marital status
71.4	274	Married	

The above table shows the demographic status of the interviewees. For example, according to the statistical table, 110 respondents were single and 274 were married.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Research Variables

	Domestic Social Networks	Foreign Social Networks	Electoral Participation	Choosing the Right Option
Mean	۲.۳۶	۲.۶۲	۲.۳۸	۲.۶۳
Minimum	۱	۱	۱.۱۵	۱
Maximum	۳.۷۱	۴.۲۵	۳.۶۰	۴.۲۵
Standard Deviation	۰.۴۵	۰.۶۴	۰.۷۱	۰.۷۵
Count	۲۶۳	۲۶۳	۲۶۳	۲۶۳

Source: Research Findings

As the table above shows, the status of the variables is presented in a disaggregated manner. For example, the variable of domestic social networks has an average value of 2.36, which, based on the Likert scale of the questionnaire, corresponds to the second option (Agree). Result of the first hypothesis test of the research: It is expected that there is an inverse relationship between the level of use of foreign social networks and participation in elections.

Table 4: Testing the Results of the First Hypothesis

Correlation Coefficients			
		Use of Foreign Social Networks	Participation in Elections
Use of Foreign Social Networks	Pearson	۱	-۰.۰۹
	Significance Level		۰.۰۰۰
	Number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴
Participation in Elections	Pearson	-۰.۰۹	۱
	Significance Level	۰.۰۰۰	
	number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴

Source: Research Findings

Based on Table 4, since the significance level of the test (0.00) is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the two variables: use of foreign social networks and participation in elections. Therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed with a confidence level of 0.95. The coefficient for the variable of using domestic social networks is -0.09, indicating an inverse relationship. This means that as the use of foreign networks increases, participation in elections decreases by approximately 0.09. Result of the second hypothesis test of the research: It is expected that there is a positive relationship between the level of use of domestic social networks and participation in elections.

Table 5: Testing the Results of the Second Hypothesis

Correlation Coefficients			
		The Use of Domestic Social Networks	Participation in Elections
The Use of Domestic Social Networks	Pearson	1	0.42
	Significance Level		0.00
	Number	384	384
Participation in Elections	Pearson	0.42	1
	Significance Level	0.00	
	number	384	384

Source: Research Findings

Based on Table 5, since the significance level of the test (0.00) is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the two variables: use of domestic social networks and participation in elections. Therefore, the second hypothesis is confirmed with a confidence level of 0.95. The coefficient for the variable of using domestic social networks is 0.42, indicating a direct relationship. This means that a one-unit increase in the use of domestic networks results in an increase of approximately 0.42 in participation in elections. Result of the third hypothesis test: It is expected that demographic characteristics (age, gender, occupation, marital status, education, income) will have an impact on attitudes toward political participation.

Table 6: Testing the Results of the Third Hypothesis

model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standard Coefficients	t-Test	Significance Level
	B	Standard Deviation	Beta		
Intercept	1.181	0.401		2.949	0.003
age	-1.284	0.418	-1.290	3.08	0.00
gender	-0.003	0.022	-0.004	0.137	0.82
occupation	0.120	0.167	0.128	0.72	0.28
Marital status	0.23	0.474	0.29	11.04	0.00
education	-0.014	0.45	-0.020	0.04	0.92
income	1.09	0.25	1.15	4.37	0.00

Source: Research findings

Based on Table 6, regarding the variable of age, since the significance level of this variable is 0.00, which is less than the 0.05 significance level of the present research, it can be concluded that age influences political participation. Therefore, given that the coefficient for this variable is -1.284, it can be stated that for each one-

unit decrease in age, political participation decreases by 1.284. Referring to the table for the variable of gender, since the significance level of this variable is 0.82, which is greater than the 0.05 significance level, it can be concluded that gender does not impact political participation.

For the variable of occupation, since the significance level is 0.28, which exceeds the 0.05 significance level, it can be concluded that occupation does not influence political participation. Regarding the variable of marital status, since the significance level of this variable is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that being married affects political participation. Given that the coefficient for this variable is 5.23, it can be stated that for each one-unit increase in the number of married individuals, political participation increases by 5.23. Looking at the table for the variable of education, since the significance level is 0.92, which is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that the level of education does not influence political participation.

Regarding the variable of income, since the significance level is 0.00, which is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that income level affects political participation. Given that the coefficient for this variable is 1.09, it can be stated that for each one-unit increase in income, political participation increases by 1.09.

Thus, based on these results, it can be concluded that the third hypothesis is confirmed. Result of the fourth hypothesis test: It appears that there is a relationship between the level of use of social networks and the selection of the most suitable options in elections.

Table 7: Testing the Results of the Fourth Hypothesis

Correlation Coefficient			
		Use of domestic social networks	Choosing the right option
Use of domestic social networks	Pearson	۱	۰.۰۰۳
	Significance Level		۰.۵۸
	Number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴
Choosing the right option	Pearson	۰.۰۰۳**	۱
	Significance Level	۰.۵۸	
	number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴

Source: Research findings

Based on Table 7, since the significance level of the test (0.58) is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between the two variables: the use of social networks and the selection of optimal options. Therefore, the fourth hypothesis is rejected.

Result of the fifth hypothesis test: It appears that there is a relationship between the extent of social media use and participation in critical demonstrations.

Table 8: Testing the Results of the Fifth Hypothesis

Correlation Coefficient			
		Use of Social Networks	Participation in Critical Demonstrations
Use of Social Networks	Pearson	۱	۰.۰۲
	Significance Level		۰.۷۹
	Number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴
Participation in Critical Demonstrations	Pearson	۰.۰۲	۱
	Significance Level	۰.۷۹	
	number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴

Source: Research findings

Based on Table 8, since the significance level of the test (0.79) is greater than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between the two variables: the use of social networks and participation in critical demonstrations. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis is rejected.

Result of the sixth hypothesis test: It appears that there is a relationship between the level of satisfaction with the performance of officials and participation in elections.

Table 9: Testing the Results of the Sixth Hypothesis

Correlation Coefficients			
		Satisfaction with Officials' Performance	Political Participation
Satisfaction with Officials' Performance	Pearson	۱	۰.۶۴
	Significance Level		۰.۰۱
	Number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴
Political Participation	Pearson	۰.۶۴	۱
	Significance Level	۰.۰۱	
	number	۳۸۴	۳۸۴

Source: Research findings

Based on the provided table, since the significance level of the test (0.00) is less than 0.05, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between the two variables: satisfaction with officials' performance and participation in elections. Therefore, the sixth hypothesis is confirmed with 95% confidence. The coefficient for the variable of satisfaction with officials' performance is 0.64, indicating a direct relationship. This means that a one-unit increase in satisfaction with officials' performance results in an increase of (0.64) in participation in elections.

Discussion

In this study, the examination of social networks and electoral participation based on geographical and regional characteristics in Hormozgan province during the year 1403 has been conducted. As the results indicated, the use of domestic social networks can have a direct effect on electoral participation, while the use of foreign social networks can have an inverse impact on electoral participation. Additionally, three demographic variables—age, marital status, and income level—were confirmed. It was found that the younger individuals are, the lower their participation in elections tends to be. Conversely, as the number of married individuals increases, so does participation in elections. Furthermore, an increase in income can also influence participation in elections. The satisfaction with officials' performance can maximize electoral participation. Many of the news and events mentioned in the virtual space are characterized by rumors, unreality, and fabrication. Therefore, providing accurate and correct news can neutralize these false narratives.

Given that the engagement of young people, especially students, in social networks is not merely a technological issue but involves various social, cultural, and political factors, it is appropriate to establish a professional task force composed of experts, specialists, and researchers in social sciences to examine the various aspects related to the virtual space in the context of approving comprehensive media legislation in the Islamic Consultative Assembly. The research findings of experts in policymaking, decision-making, and future orientations can be instrumental for the virtual space, particularly regarding the policy of restricting user access to certain networks. Education is one of the strategies that focuses on the audience element—namely, the countless users present in

social networks—and aims at enhancing individuals' media literacy (Hosseinzadeh et al., 1393). Users, including young people and adolescents, need to be educated to adopt appropriate behaviors in social network environments.

Given the novelty of social networks and the lack of familiarity with all the implications of using these platforms, further research is essential regarding other influential aspects of these networks on students' lives, including their impact on mental health and well-being. The creation and expansion of traditional social organization alongside virtual communities, such as Islamic associations, student organizations, youth groups, and the Red Crescent, can significantly influence the education of future citizens, shaping and nurturing beliefs, and facilitating the development of civil relationships among youth to strengthen their social actions in the real world.

It is important to note that every study has limitations that can affect the research outcomes. Acknowledging these limitations can assist other researchers in conducting a more precise study in this area. Given that conducting any research depends on having material and moral resources, collecting information, and consulting organizations related to the research topic to obtain accurate, direct, and verifiable information is undeniable and has a significant impact on the scientific richness of the study. However, bureaucratic systems, the work commitments of some officials, and the specific nature of certain research topics can hinder researchers from fully acquiring the necessary information from these organizations and agencies.

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