

Documentary Analysis of the Relationship between Citizenship Rights and Social Capital in Iran

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Problem Statement and Research Necessity

In recent decades, theoretical reflections and empirical evidence in the fields of social and political sciences have clearly demonstrated that sustainable development and social cohesion, beyond quantitative economic growth and technical advancements, require the strengthening of the soft and cultural foundations of societies. Among these, the two pivotal concepts of "citizenship rights" and "social capital," as fundamental pillars of political stability, public trust, and collective participation, play a determining role in organizing the relationship between the state and the nation. The institutionalization of citizenship rights not only serves as an indicator for measuring democracy and social justice but also, by reinforcing the sense of belonging and mutual trust, paves the way for the formation of social capital. On the other hand, social capital, as a network of trust, cooperation, and shared norms, enhances the capacity for collective action and improves the context for constructive interaction between the state and civil society. Comparative studies in various societies indicate that the aforementioned relationship has a bidirectional and mutually reinforcing nature; meaning that in societies where citizens' rights are effectively respected, higher levels of social trust and civic participation are observable, and conversely, the neglect or restriction of these rights leads to the erosion of social capital and the rupture of communal bonds. In such a context, analyzing this relationship in Iranian society gains double importance due to specific structural characteristics, the gap between laws and executive practice, as well as the social transformations of recent decades. Although the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Charter of Citizenship Rights ratified in 2016 have outlined relatively comprehensive legal frameworks for guaranteeing citizens' rights.

Theoretical Foundations and Conceptual Framework

To explain the relationship between citizenship rights and social capital, each of these two concepts must first be clarified theoretically. In the social science literature, citizenship rights are mainly defined based on T.H. Marshall's theory, which distinguishes three main dimensions: civil rights (including freedom of speech, property rights, judicial security, and access to fair trial), political rights (including the right to vote, participation in public decision-making, forming political parties, and access to public office), and social rights (including the right to education, health, social security, and access to public services). Marshall believes that the historical realization of these three spheres constitutes the process of the evolution of citizenship in modern societies, and each in turn lays the groundwork for the next. Regarding social capital, prominent theorists have each defined and explained it from a specific angle. Bourdieu defines social capital as a network of stable relationships based on mutual recognition and trust, which provides individuals and groups with access to resources and the enhancement of social status. Coleman, with a functionalist approach, considers social capital as resources embedded in the structure of social relations that actors can utilize to facilitate their goals. The relationship between citizenship rights and social capital can be analyzed in the form of a bidirectional and dialectical cycle. On the one hand, the practical and equitable realization of citizenship rights in all three aforementioned spheres provides a suitable context for the growth of public trust, the development of civic participation, and the consolidation of social cohesion. Civil rights, by guaranteeing individual security and independence of judgment, expand the basis for trust in others and institutions; political rights, by opening the space for participation and competition, invigorate the network of civic relations; and social rights, by reducing inequalities and increasing access to opportunities, strengthen the sense of justice and national solidarity. On the other hand, strong and institutionalized social capital increases the capacity of civil society for monitoring, advocacy, and defending citizenship rights, thus ensuring the efficiency of formal institutions and the sustainable realization of rights.

Empirical Background and Research Gaps

In recent years, numerous studies in Iran have examined the relationship between citizenship rights and social capital. Some of these studies have shown that social capital, civic commitment, and social participation have a significant relationship with citizenship rights. Other studies have concluded that social capital and awareness of citizenship rights are directly related to concepts of sustainable development. Research has also indicated that social trust and political and economic

capital have a significant effect on awareness of citizenship rights, with political capital playing an important mediating role in this relationship. In studies related to adolescents, it has been found that the sense of enjoying various dimensions of citizenship rights and social capital significantly contributes to explaining prosocial orientation. Meta-analytical investigations have also shown that social participation, socioeconomic status, and media consumption have played the greatest role in increasing awareness of citizenship rights, and that social capital has a significant impact on citizens' political participation. Despite these studies, considerable gaps remain in the existing literature. Many previous studies have been limited to survey data on specific groups and have paid less attention to documentary analysis of laws, official reports, and upstream policy documents. Furthermore, the precise distinction between different dimensions of social capital and the various domains of citizenship rights has been neglected in most research. In addition, the impact of regional, ethnic, and class differences in this relationship has been less explored. Therefore, the present study, employing a documentary-analytical approach, aims to systematically examine laws, national reports, and authoritative research to partially address these gaps and provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between citizenship rights and social capital in Iran.

Research Methodology

The present study is classified as qualitative research conducted with a documentary-analytical approach. In this approach, instead of collecting field data, a set of written and official sources has been utilized, which fall into three categories: first, the country's laws and upstream policy documents, including the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Charter of Citizenship Rights, and related regulations; second, national reports and data derived from surveys of Iranian values and attitudes and other reliable statistical projects; and third, domestic and international scientific-research articles, dissertations, and specialized books. After collecting the sources, the data were examined and categorized using the qualitative content analysis method. For this purpose, the selected texts were carefully studied, and propositions related to each dimension of citizenship rights and components of social capital were extracted and coded. Data analysis was conducted inductively and comparatively; meaning that first, each dimension was identified and described in the documents and previous studies, and then, by comparing the findings from various sources, the patterns of relationship and dominant trends in the relationship between these two domains in Iran were explained.

Research Findings

A review of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran reveals that numerous articles are explicitly dedicated to citizens' rights and emphasize principles such as equality before the law, freedom of speech, the right to education, health, social welfare, and political participation. Despite this relatively comprehensive legal framework, numerous reports indicate that the practical implementation of these rights faces serious and persistent challenges; particularly in the areas of political and civil liberties, restrictions such as media control, limitations on the activities of political parties and groups, and restrictions on the freedom of assembly have severely constrained the space for the realization of citizenship rights. The Charter of Citizenship Rights, published in 2016, drawing from international human rights documents and the Constitution, outlines a comprehensive list of citizens' rights. However, scientific research has emphasized the lack of sufficient enforcement guarantees for this charter and has assessed it more as a symbolic and recommendatory document rather than an operational one. The study of legal documents, official reports, and field research indicates that the status of citizenship rights in Iran is closely related to the level of social capital. In the civil dimension, extensive restrictions in the area of freedom of speech and access to information have led to a decline in public trust in official institutions. In the political dimension, political participation in recent years has faced a significant recession and decline. In the social dimension, despite considerable achievements in education and health, increasing economic inequality and a wide class gap have intensified the sense of injustice and led to a decrease in social cohesion. An examination of official reports over the past decade shows that the lack of institutional transparency and accountability has caused a decline in public trust and deepened the gap between the people and governmental institutions. Legal restrictions on the activities of civil institutions have reduced their capacity to enhance social capital. The rising trend of inflation and declining purchasing power have also led to increased economic inequalities and the weakening of social cohesion. Thus, a vicious cycle has been formed in which the weakness in the implementation of citizenship rights and the low level of formal social capital reproduce each other.

Conclusion and Overall Outcome

The results of the present study showed that there is a deep, bidirectional, and influential connection between citizenship rights and social capital in Iran. Although relatively comprehensive legal frameworks exist in the country, significant shortcomings are observed at the executive level. Restrictions on political freedoms, weaknesses in enforcement guarantees, and institutional inefficiency have caused a considerable portion of rights to remain at the level of documents. Social capital has also faced a declining trend, with public trust in official institutions and the level of

civic and political participation having decreased significantly. The bidirectional relationship between these two concepts is clearly evident. The practical realization of citizenship rights can contribute to the reproduction of social capital, and active social capital also provides a suitable context for advocacy and the more efficient implementation of citizenship rights. The weakening of each negatively affects the other and creates a vicious cycle. The continuation of this situation can lead to an increase in the state-nation gap, a decline in political participation, and a further decrease in social capital.

Keywords:

Citizenship Rights, Social Capital, Social Trust, Civic Participation, Iran