

# Investigating the Effect of Personal Values and Personality Traits on Political Participation among the Citizens of Behbahan

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Research Article

## Investigating the Effect of Personal Values and Personality Traits on Political Participation among the Citizens of Behbahan

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### Abstract

The present study aimed at examining the effect of the relationship between personality traits and social values on the political participation of the youth living in Behbahan, Iran. To do so, theories were developed by Schwartz, Inglehart, and Milbrath as the theoretical framework of this study. The survey method was used in this research, and the sample size equaled 384 (n=384) based on the Cochran formula through the multistage cluster sampling method. A researcher-made questionnaire was used to collect data. In the next step, data analysis was done by using Pearson correlation coefficient and regression analysis through SPSS software. The obtained results indicated a high average rate (3.58 out of 5) of political participation among individuals. There was a direct and significant relationship between personality traits, social values, and political participation. There was a significant relationship between five dimensions of personality traits and political participation; on the other hand, there was a significant association between political participation and some dimensions of values, including universalism, benevolence, stimulation, and conformity. Regression analysis showed that these two variables could explain 26.6% of changes in political participation; however, values played a more vital role rather personality traits. Structural equation modeling (SEM) had an appropriate fit and approved the effect of personal values and personality traits on the political participation of the youth living in Behbahan. Therefore, more attention should be devoted to personality traits and personal social values to expand political participation in society. In this case, indicators and components of personal social values, such as benevolence and tradition must be at the center of attention.

**Keywords:** Political Participation, Personality Traits, Social Values, Behbahan.

### Introduction

#### Statement of Problem

Political participation is one of the substantial topics of political sociology. Regarding the importance of democracy and democratic political systems over recent years, there has been great attention to political sociology. The extant study was conducted on the political participation of Behbahan's citizens. Personal values and personality traits were considered as independent variables

while political participation was chosen as the dependent variable. Values are the most significant components of the cultural system at the macro level, as well as the personality system at the micro-level. Personal values comprise some values formed in the personality system of individuals accompanying them throughout life (Issazadegan, 2012, 8).

Personality traits include some sustained characteristics and descriptions of behavioral patterns (Issazadegan, 2012, 79). Moreover, value and personality both predict the behaviors, and evidence considers them as constructs in the impact of individual differences on the behaviors (Pakizeh et al., 2016). Political participation is highly seen in the governance context (Nazari et al., 2013). Political participation is defined as any kind of voluntary political action concerning parties, elections, choosing political positions, effective political procedures, and general programs in political systems and institutes of the society. If citizens cannot take part in participatory processes to play their role, democracy remains meaningless; hence, citizens should participate in political processes to achieve political development (Ansari, 2017). Various theories and factors have been proposed to explain why people take part in political issues but most of them introduce personal interest and rational action as the main reasons for political participation (van Deth, 2016).

Iranian development and renovation plans have ignored mechanisms related to public participation to delegate some decision-making and executive authorities to people. Moreover, instabilities and governmental dominance over the private sector have led to many problems for people's lives. On the other hand, non-universalism and individualistic attitudes of public culture have intensified the aforementioned problems (Saboktekin et al., 2016). The fundamental principle in modern communities is public participation and the presence of people in the public arena. In another case, eligible individuals with social power in the political arena may not achieve participatory social-economic opportunities, while they have various capacities with high quantity. The mentioned case may cause passive and criminal behaviors in society. Accordingly, such people may feel lonely, disappointed, inability to influence or change the current conditions, so they find life as a waste of time (Manteghi, 2004). Lack of participatory contexts in different political areas causes serious problems by wasting energy, and human-intellectual sources.

Ozkiya and Ghafari (2004), Pakizeh and Dashti (2014), Adlipour et al. (2014), Khaniki and Rahbar (2015), and Shahriari (2014) studied political participation and found the importance of political participation among individuals older than 15 particularly the youth living in Behbahan. If young people become familiar with political participation, the field will be provided for their participation in society. In this way, the way should be paved for social dynamism and political development by removing barriers and active actions among youth. Therefore, it is essential to prepare the required space for progress and public participation of all society entities, especially young people. Participation of the youth in social issues contributes to development and progress. On the other hand, actual opportunities for participation expand communicational skills, self-confidence, effectiveness, autonomy, and political awareness of the youth.

According to survey statistics of Iranian values and attitudes, political participation is a critical issue for Iranian people. The challenging point is low political participation among young people who are the most active walks of society with high sensitivity to political issues of the society (Tahmasebi Ganjvar, 2000, 45). Statistics indicate low-level political participation in Behbahan, Iran. Why is political participation low in this city, and how do personality traits or personal values affect political participation?

### **Literature Review**

Various Iranian and foreign studies have been conducted on social values and political participation. Yazdanpanah and Panahi (2004) found that personality traits of activeness, social trust, belonging, social commitment, hopefulness, education, and nonmaterial values had a direct and significant association with the level of social participation. Tabatabaie Mir (2018) concluded that about 38% of political participation was explained by personality traits and ego identification.

## **Investigating the Effect of Personal Values and Personality Traits on Political Participation among the Citizens of Behbahan**

Moreover, personality traits had a direct and significant effect on political participation, while personality traits had an indirect effect on political participation by mediating the role of identification. Ha, et al. (2014) found a statistically significant relationship between personality and several political participation modes. There was a positive relationship between personality traits, protest participation, rally attendance, financial contributions to political causes, news media contacts, and political activities via the Internet. Molaei (2015) determined the role of altruistic behavior and religious orientation in predicting social and political participation. Results indicate a significant correlation between altruistic behavior and religious orientation with social participation, while there was only a positive significant correlation between altruistic behavior and political participation. Moreover, altruistic behavior and religious orientation determined 21.8 percent of the variance of social participation and 11.1 percent of political participation. Increases number of altruistic behaviors and improved religious orientations lead to a higher level of social-political participation.

Maddahi, Tabatabaie Mir, and Ahadi (2019), Zarei (2010), Ha et al. (2014), Vance Cheng (2017), Yazdanpanah, and Panahi (2004), and Tabatabaie Mir (2018) proved a significant relationship between characteristics and political participation. Also, Masoodnia et al. (2014), Darabi (2015), Badsico et al. (2004), Basak (2003), Kirbiš (2013), Hashemi, Fooladian, and Fatemi Amin (2009), Seyed Emami, Eftekhari, and Abdollah (2006), Gerber and Rogers (2009), Masoodnia et al. (2012), Ghaneirad and Hosseini (2006) found the effect of some personal and social values on social and political participation. According to the literature review, sociologists have not studied values, characteristics, and political participation. Although political participation or the considered independent variables have been examined separately, sociologists have not investigated the effect of values and personality traits on political participation.

George Casper Homans assumes the more valuable to a person is the result of his action, the more likely he is to act. Value change may be positive or negative. Therefore, increased positive value or reward may lead to a higher possibility for doing an action. Accordingly, the higher the negative value (punishment), the less likely the person is to act (Tavasoli, 1994, 2015). Almond, Powell, and Mundt point to individuals' independence from others' intervention. They consider this level of freedom as a value that gives freedom of action, independence from rules, and support private life (Almond, Powell, Mundt, 2002, 9-256). According to Milbrath, the political action of individuals in daily life is affected by the group they belonged to; hence, persons do not perform political activity based on their thoughts by families and friends direct their political behaviors. Therefore, people think based on their social status (Hashemi et al., 2009, 207).

Vafadar (1996) introduced social situations, such as social security and economic issues as effective factors so that "security" is one of the basic needs in practice and viewpoint of people.

Schwartz and Sagie (2000) concluded that acceptance of changes in some values, such as motivation and stimulation, autonomy and self-direction, hedonism, and self-transcendence including universalism and benevolence highly depend on the economic growth and democracy expansion in the society. They believe that economic development enhances value agreement while political democracy weakens value consensus in the society (Schwartz & Sagie, 2000, 469).

Inglehart believes that non-materialists have had economic security before their puberty, so they have some needs such as self-actualization and love. On contrary, materialists have materialistic preferences fur to their economic insecurity during puberty (Inglehart et al., 2004, 11).

**Table 1. Factors affecting political participation**

| Variable | Theorist  | Theory   |
|----------|---|--|
| Values   | Inglehart, Talcott Parsons,<br>Schwartz, Rokich | Effect of values on social and political participation |

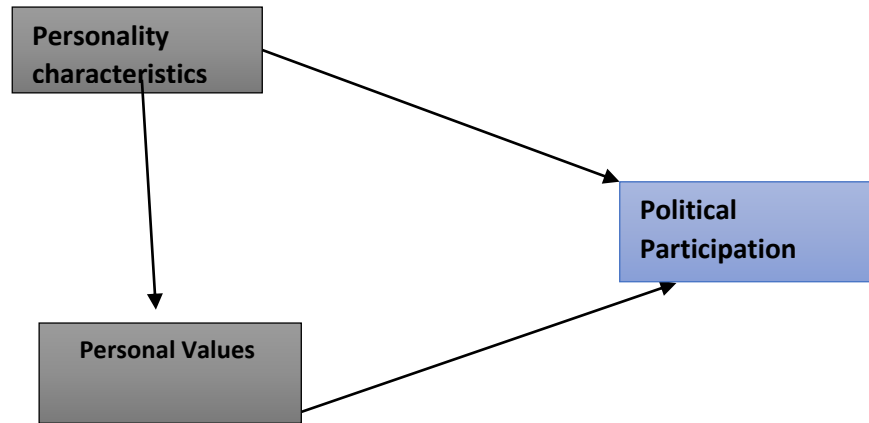
|  |                   |  |
|--|-------------------|--|
| Personality traits                         | Milbrath and Goel | Effect of personality traits on political participation of individuals in society              |
| Values                                     | Émile Durkheim    | Values create emotional feelings in society making people participate in political issues      |
| Materialistic and non-materialistic values | Ronald Inglehart  | These values create economic growth and democracy by expanding social-political participations |

Various theories proposed by political scientists and sociologists have been used to study political participation in extant papers. Two main theories have been used. The first theory extracted from Inglehart and Schwartz's theories explains the relationship between values and political participation. The furs theory assesses the relationship between personality traits and political participation. The second one was adopted from theories developed by Milbrath, Goel, and Robert Dahl.

**Table 2. Theoretical Framework**

| <b>Theory</b>                                      | <b>Theorist</b>                 | <b>Description</b>   | <b>Previous Studies</b>   |
|--|---------------------------------|--|---|
| Personal values affect the political participation | Inglehart and Schwartz          | Different types of values, including ultimate and instrumental values, security, collectivism, and the need for success increase the probability of participation in social and political actions.         | Molaei (2015), Masoodnia et al. (2014), Darabi (2015), Hashemi, Fouladian, and Fatemi Amin (2009), Seyed Emami, Eftekhari, and Abdollah (2006), Ghaneirad and Hosseini (2006) |
| Personality traits affect political participation  | Milbrath, Goel, and Robert Dahl | Milbrath and Goel introduce seven factors to explain political participation. A personality trait is one of these factors. People who are sociable and extroverted make them involved in political issues. | Maddahi, Tabatabaie Mir, Ahadi (2019), Zarei (2010), Ha et al. (2014), Vance Cheng (2017), and Tabatabaie Mir (2018)  |

# Investigating the Effect of Personal Values and Personality Traits on Political Participation among the Citizens of Behbahan



**Figure 1. Theoretical Model**

## Method

The present study was conducted using the survey method. The questionnaire was employed to collect data. The statistical population comprised all 15-39 years old young people living in Behbahan. According to statistics published by Statistical Centre of Iran 2016, 22500 young people are living in Behbahan. The multistage cluster sampling method was used in this research. In the first step, Behbahan city and young people (at the age range of 15-39) participated in the election only once were chosen. To do so, Behbahan was divided into three central, southern, and northern areas. In the next step, two streets were chosen from each district, and then these streets were converted to partial blocks. The sampling procedure was done based on the data obtained from census blocks adopted from the Statistical Centre of Iran 2016. To this end, 384 subjects were selected as a sample size from each statistical block based on the number of populations living in every district.

A standard questionnaire was used to collect data related to hypotheses. Schwartz's Portrait Values Questionnaire (2006) included personal values (benevolence, traditional, conformity, security, power, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, self-direction, universalism) making up 68 items. The standard questionnaire measure of the Five-Factor Model, NEO was used to examine personality traits (Nilforoushan, 2010). Political Participation Survey includes two objective and subjective dimensions. Pearson correlation coefficient and regression were used to test the relationship between variables at the distance measurement level. Moreover, face validity was used, and results indicated the high reliability of the measurement tool. Alpha coefficients of personality traits, political participation, and social values equaled 0.836, 0.934, and 0.906, respectively.

**Table 3. Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) based on variables**

| Variables               | Number of items | Cronbach's alpha | Result   |
|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------|----------|
| Personality traits      | 60              | 0.863            | Reliable |
| Personal values         | 68              | 0.906            | Reliable |
| Political participation | 20              | 0.934            | Reliable |

Definition of Variables

**Table 4. Operational and theoretical definition of variables**

| <b>Variable</b>            | <b>Theoretical definition</b>  | <b>Operational definition</b>   | <b>Assessment levels</b>   |
|----------------------------|--|---|--|
| Political participation    | A set of actions and activities performed by citizens to influence the governance and support the political system                       | Two objective and subjective dimensions of political participation  | Assessment in Likert Scale at distance measurement level with 20 items       |
| Social and personal values | Personal values include some values that are formed in the personality system of individuals that may remain for the rest of their lives | Assessment based on 10 values of Schwartz   | Assessment Based on Likert scale at distance measurement level with 68 items |
| Personality traits         | Personality traits define individuals and determine their character type   | Using standard NEO questionnaire, including five characteristics of extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, openness to experience | Assessment Based on Likert scale at distance measurement level with 60 items |

**Findings**

According to findings, the mean value of personality traits was relatively high among people (3.24 out of 5). About 5.8% considered their personality traits at a very low level, about 15.1% estimated it at a low level, about 30.7% estimated it at an average level, about 36.7% estimated it at a high level, and about 11.7% estimated their personality traits at a very high level. The mean value of personality dimensions equaled 3.14-3.63 that was approximately similar with low dispersion.

About 13.8% considered their personal values at a very low level, about 20.3% estimated it at a low level, about 28.7% estimated it at the average level, about 21.6% estimated it at a high level, and about 15.6% estimated their personal values at a very high level. The mean value of personal values equaled 3.05 out of 5. Power and self-direction values had the lowest mean values of 2.58 and 2.78, respectively, while universalism and benevolence had the highest mean values of 4.08 and 3.14, respectively.

## Investigating the Effect of Personal Values and Personality Traits on Political Participation among the Citizens of Behbahan

About 13.5% considered their political participation at a very low level, about 18.8% estimated it at a low level, about 29.7% estimated it at the average level, about 25% estimated it at a high level, and about 13% estimated their political participation at a very high level. As seen in Table 10, the mean value of political participation equaled 3.58 out of 5.

According to the subjective dimension of political participation, the subjective dimension of political participation was at low, average, and high levels among 25.3%, 29.2%, and 45.5% of subjects. The mean value of the subjective dimension of political participation was at a very high level of 3.96. According to the objective dimension of political participation, the objective dimension of political participation was at low, average, and high levels among 39.9%, 29.9%, and 30.8% of subjects. The mean value of the subjective dimension of political participation was at the level of 3.22. Although the mean value of the objective dimension is greater than 3, this is lower than the subjective dimension of political participation.

Significance levels of political participation, personality traits, and personal values were greater than 0.05 based on the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. Therefore, the normality of these variables was confirmed, so parametric tests, such as linear regression and Pearson correlation can be used to test hypotheses.

**Table 8. Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test**

**Hypothesis 1:** personal values affect political participation among the youth living in Behbahan.

Regarding normality and assessment level of personal values and political participation, the Pearson coefficient was used. There was a direct and positive relationship between personal values and political participation. The more personal values, the higher the political participation will be. This positive correlation was significant at a probability level of 99%.

**Table 9. Pearson correlation coefficient between personal values and political participation**

| Variables               | Pearson correlation coefficient | Sig.  | Result    |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-----------|
| Political participation | 0.428**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |
| Subjective dimension    | 0.372**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |
| Objective dimension     | 0.410**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to regression results of social values and political participation, the multiple correlation coefficient equaled 0.428 indicating the low-level relationship between personal values and political participation. The determination coefficient equaled 0.183 indicating that 18.3% of the change in political participation is explained by personal values. Regression coefficients indicated the significance of personal values at a level of 99%. One unit change in personal values leads to about 0.428 unit shift in political participation.

**Table 10. Regression coefficients of political participation and personal values**

| Variables        | Regression coefficients |       | t-value     |       |
|------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------------|-------|
|                  | B                       | Beta  | T           | Sig   |
| Constant         | 23.34                   |       | 4.411       | 0.000 |
| Personal values  | 0.225                   | 0.428 | 9.256       | 0.000 |
| Summary of model | R                       | R2    | Adjusted R2 |       |
|                  | 0.428                   | 0.183 | 0.181       |       |
| ANOVA            | F                       | Sig   | D-W         |       |
|                  | 85.67                   | 0.000 | 2.28        |       |

There was a positive and significant relationship between stimulation, universalism, benevolence, conformity, tradition, and political participation at a level of 99%.

**Table 11. Pearson correlation coefficient between social values and political participation**

| Dimensions of social values | Pearson correlation coefficient | Sig.  | Result    |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-----------|
| Power                       | 0.008                           | 0.883 | Rejected  |
| Achievement                 | 0.051                           | 0.317 | Rejected  |
| Hedonism                    | 0.032                           | 0.532 | Rejected  |
| Stimulation                 | -0.331**                        | 0.000 | Confirmed |
| Self-direction              | 0.005                           | 0.922 | Rejected  |
| Universalism                | 0.441**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |
| Benevolence                 | 0.404**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |
| Tradition                   | -0.512**                        | 0.000 | Confirmed |
| Conformity                  | 0.265**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |
| Security                    | -0.050                          | 0.325 | Rejected  |
| Social values               | 0.428**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

**\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

For instance, universalism affected political participation among the youth living in Behbahan. According to the results, there was a positive and direct correlation between these two variables. The more universalism, the more political participation among Behbahan's citizens will be. Pearson correlation coefficient between universalism and political participation equaled 0.441 at the significance level of zero.

**Hypothesis 2:** Personality Traits affect political participation among the youth living in Behbahan.

**Table 12. Pearson correlation coefficient between personality traits and political participation**

| Variables               | Pearson correlation coefficient | Sig.  | Result    |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-------|-----------|
| Political participation | 0.288**                         | 0.000 | Confirmed |



## Investigating the Effect of Personal Values and Personality Traits on Political Participation among the Citizens of Behbahan

|                      |         |       |           |
|----------------------|---------|-------|-----------|
| Subjective dimension | 0.162** | 0.001 | Confirmed |
| Objective dimension  | 0.370** | 0.000 | Confirmed |

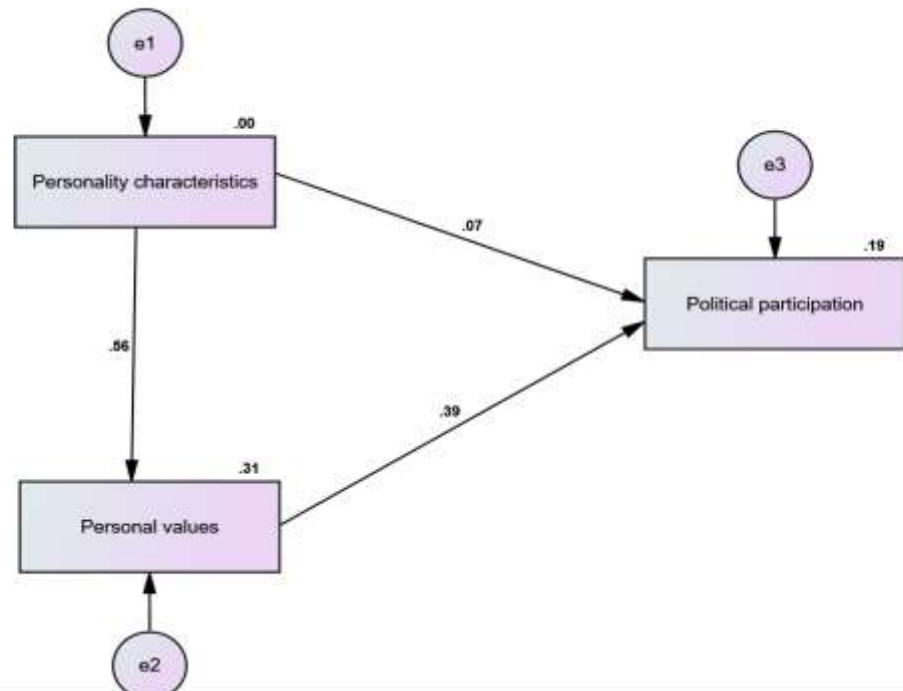
\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

According to the assessment level of personality traits and political participation, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used. There was a direct and positive relationship between the variables mentioned above. The more the personality traits, the higher the political participation will be. Pearson correlation coefficient equaled 0.288 at the significance level of zero. According to the significance level of the correlation coefficient (<5%),  $H_0$  was rejected, and  $H_1$  was confirmed.

**Table 13. Regression coefficients of personality traits and political participation**

| Variables          | Regression coefficients |       | t-value     |       |
|--------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------------|-------|
|                    | B                       | Beta  | T           | Sig   |
| Constant           | 8.81                    |       | 0.820       | 0.413 |
| Personality traits | 0.324                   | 0.288 | 5.877       | 0.000 |
| Summary of model   | R                       | R2    | Adjusted R2 |       |
|                    | 0.288                   | 0.083 | 0.081       |       |
| ANOVA              | F                       | Sig   | D-W         |       |
|                    | 34.54                   | 0.000 | 2.15        |       |

Figure 2 depicts the theoretical model of research. Findings indicate no difference between a sample and observed variance matrices. On the other hand, model fit indicators (GFI=0.93, TLI=0.97, CFI=0.98, NFI=0.97, Chi-square=185.8, df=58) proved relatively good fit of model. Moreover, the RMSEA value of 0.038 indicated a relatively good fit. Indicators of the model indicated a good fit between theoretical structure, and observed data, as well as construct validity of measurement tool.



**Figure 2. Final standardized model based on the SEM technique to predict factors affecting political participation in Behbahan**  
 Chi-square= 185.8, df= 374, NFI= 0.97, CFI= 0.98, GFI= 0.93, RMSEA= 0.038

**Table 14. Summary of model fit indicators of political participation in Behbahan**

| Indicators                 | Indicator                      | Abbreviation | Acceptable fit | Obtained value | Result     |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|------------|
| Absolute fit indicators    | Chi-square                     |              | >5%            | 0.94%          | Acceptable |
|                            | The goodness of fit index      | GFI          | >90%           | 93%            | Acceptable |
|                            | Adjusted Goodness of fit index | AGFI         | >90%           | 89%            | Acceptable |
| Comparative fit indicators | Non-normed fit index           | NNFI         | >90%           | 90%            | Acceptable |
|                            | Normed fit index               | NFI          | >90%           | 97%            | Acceptable |
|                            | Comparative fit index          | CFI          | >90%           | 98%            | Acceptable |
|                            | Relative fit index             | RFI          | >90%           | 89%            | Acceptable |
|                            | Incremental fit index          | IFI          | >90%           | 90%            | Acceptable |

## Investigating the Effect of Personal Values and Personality Traits on Political Participation among the Citizens of Behbahan

|                        |  |         |       |       |            |
|------------------------|--|---------|-------|-------|------------|
| Parsimonious Fit Index | Parsimonious Normed Fit Index              | PNFI    | >50%  | 65%   | Acceptable |
|                        | Root Mean-Square Error of Approximation    | RMSEA   | <0.8% | 0.38% | Acceptable |
|                        | Normed chi-square to the degree of freedom | CMIN/df | 1-5   | 3.20  | Acceptable |

According to results obtained from AMOS24 software, the model had the goodness of fit. Moreover, personal-social values affected political participation in Behbahan, and personality traits had a significant effect on political participation in Behbahan.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Many factors may affect political participation among individuals of a society. The political participation of citizens plays a vital role in political stability and social dynamism. Hence, it is essential to investigate the political attitude of citizens by paying more attention to social factors affecting political participation. Results of this study indicated a significant relationship between personal-social values and political participation. Values indeed form those behaviors expressing personality. Moreover, value and personality both predict behavior so that these two constructs must be considered in the personal effects on the behavior.

Also, Inglehart assumes that ultimate and instrumental values, security, universalism, achievement, and progress create a higher probability of individuals in social-political actions. The obtained results were consistent with findings obtained by Molaei (2015), Masoodnia et al. (2014), Darabi (2015), Hashemi, Fooladian, and Fatemi Amin (2009), Seyed Emami, Eftekhari, and Abdollah (2006), Ghaneirad and Hosseini (2006). Therefore, the more personal and social values, the higher the political participation. Accordingly, personal-social values and their indicators, particularly benevolence and tradition must be at the center of attention to increase political participation in society. Political participation will be expanded if there is greater attention to respect, commitment, traditions, and ideas proposed by the traditional religion.

Another finding of the study indicated a direct association between personality traits and political participation. It is worth noting that the stability of political systems is based on the participation level of people in the community. The participation rate depends on the unique personality and interaction characteristics. Many theorists have tried to explain political participation regarding specific aspects and various dimensions of the topic. Maddahi, Tabatabaie Mir, and Ahadi (2019) concluded that almost half of the political participation (43%) is explained by personality characteristics and thematic relations. Moreover, personality traits and thematic relations had a direct effect on political participation so that personality traits had an indirect effect of political participation mediated by thematic relations. Results of this study emphasized the necessity of thematic relations in the context of inner features of individuals in macro social and national actions. Therefore, the obtained results were in line with findings obtained by Maddahi, Tabatabaie Mir, and Ahadi (2019), Zarei (2010), Ha et al. (2014), Vance Cheng (2017), Yazdanpanah and Panahi (2004), and Tabatabaie Mir (2018). Robert Dahl assumes that social and personal characteristics affect the efficiency rate of a person. The higher the social class, income, experience, and knowledge of a person, the higher the

sense of his/her effectiveness and efficiency will be. Therefore, personality traits affect political participation.

Education and educational centers play a vital role in the development and enhancement of participation. In this case, education organizations can effectively create a culture in this context. If the educational system of society considers a comprehensive social-political framework, there will be more social responsibility in society, and higher participation in political, economic, social, and cultural actions. Moreover, many civil-training workshops should be set up formally and informally to improve political knowledge in the field of legitimate performance of government and political associations. Accordingly, it is essential to increase political knowledge and motivation to take part in political actions.

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