

# STUDYING THE PECULIARITIES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AMONG THE YEZIDI RURAL POPULATION OF ARMENIA ( FOCUSING ON THE ALTERATIONS OF SOCIAL TRUST )

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*This article is concerned with the peculiarities of social capital focusing on the alterations of social trust and the social factors that influence it among the Yezidi rural population of Armenia. Our theoretical framework has been adopted from the following theorists: the theory of social system in terms of the theory of action: Parsons and the theory of structure-agency: Giddens. Our sample contained 300 above 20-years old residents Yezidi rural population of the Republic of Armenia. When validity and reliability of our questionnaire were tested, we applied survey research to collect data for analysis. There is difference between kinds of trust and they don't have the same mean. The mean of basic trust was 16%, generalized trust-15% and abstract trust mean was 74%. Thus, our study shows that in the society under study the rate of basic trust is not less than other kinds of trust. In other words, the mean of basic trust is more than generalized trust but less than abstract trust. The findings indicate that | That is, by increasing the social values of the target society, the rate of social trust increases, and vice versa. So, the social values were not considerably affecting the state of social trust in the society under study. The value of the correlation coefficient was positive, and this shows that by increasing the rate of religious tenets, the level of social trust will increase subsequently, and vice versa.*



**Keywords:** *Social capital, Alterations of social trust, Ethno-religious minority, Yezidi, Armenia*

### **Introduction**

With respect to the history of trust, it should be noted that trust has been existing in different forms from the earlier days of the history. The historical record of trust rates back to the appearance of people on the earth. In the area of this research, too, trust has been dominant among native peoples, family members, known and strange people, and to somehow among the foreigners of this country. Without trust, social relationships rarely form and sustain. This, in turn, is in need of a culture, which Zetomka(2007) calls it "trust culture".

The transformation of human societies from their primitive form to the modern form depends on the complexity, concentration of human relations, and reciprocal relations which trust has always been crucial in their development. Unless there is trust in a given society, there will be no sign of democratic systems, social stability and order, social integrity, and balance in that society. At last, in each society, trust is a prerequisite for economic, social, political, and cultural development.

Addressing trust in a country like the Republic of Armenia, especially after its independence, proves to be very important. As through cultivating the culture of trust, we can integrate some positive ethical values such as truth, fairness, commitment, and courage in the society instead of lying, fraud, and dissention.

According to some commentators, trust is the most important aspect of social trust that can touch other aspects of which. Trust is an important facet of human relations that facilitates cooperation among the members of the society.(Valadbigi,2010) Trust, however, can be assessed in different areas of society like having trust in self, family, friends, formal and informal institutes, and social jobs.

Khodyakof(2007) has approximately mentioned such a classification. To define trust is not a simple job and numerous writings have been devoted to it. Whereas, trust is related to concepts like empathy, reciprocity, respect, integrity, tolerance, and benevolence. (Newton, 2001) social trust or universal trust includes our trust in others such as family members, peers, neighbors, the government, and social organizations. (Gliser, 2000; Newton, 2001; Delly, 2002)

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### **Research significance**

Social trust is one of the critical aspects of human relations which pave the ways for human beings cooperation and social engagement. It is why it has been always the focus of sociologists' research. Social trust is understood as a focal basis for social capital which from one hand represents individuals' trust in one another, and at the other hand it shows the citizens' trust in those who are in charge of society. In this situation, force no longer does work in guaranteeing the exchanges and realizing their goals and the exchanges among individuals take place among them at social, cultural, political, and economic levels. Accordingly, social trust represents individuals' goodwill in other members of society which in turn develop and facilitate social relations.

According to some commentators, trust is the most important aspect of social trust that can touch other aspects of which. Trust is an important facet of human relations that facilitates cooperation among the members of the society. Trust, however, can be assessed in different areas of society like having trust in self, family, friends, formal and informal institutes, and social jobs.

In the pre-modern (traditional) societies, social trust has been more in-group with its limited special trust that is today known as the "old social capital". However, the modern societies have another kind of trust that has an in-group feature with universal social trust that is called the "new social capital". In the developing societies, at the other hand, like Armenia, that the old social trust has been ruined in the cost of having communication with the modern world and implementing reconstruction programs, and the new social capital has not yet well- generated, we encounter a kind of macro and micro social chaos that indicates of emergent social splits that in turn result in all kinds of social problems. (Glaysner, 2000)

The rate of social trust in most of the societies is so low that scholars like Putnam (1995) have introduced the theory of "trust decline". Therefore, investigating social trust and its low rate among the Yezidi rural population of Armenia, as a problem, is justifiable and this research tends to identify, analyze, and clarify the elements that influence social trust in this society.

In the current research, the social theories of scholars like Giddens, Sztomka, Tonnies, Offe, and Parsons were discussed in detail. Furthermore, theories of Coleman, Putnam, Weber, Durkheim, Zimmel, Fukuyama, and Valadbigi (2011) on social trust were

reviewed in brief. Social trust has been a controversial concept for these scholars and each one has examined some aspect of it. In other words, social trust, like other sociological concepts, is subject to dispute and complexity, and each one of these theories has approached it from one aspect

### **Justification:**

#### **Studying and promoting social trust in society will:**

- Facilitate individuals' participation in the political, social, cultural, and economic spheres;
- Contribute to launching quality social and pathological initiatives across society;
- Promote recognizing social order and discipline, cohesion, and social unity;
- Helps the governments to stay on power, stabilize socio-political order;
- Trust is the most important paradigm of social order.
- And, due to the sweeping wave of social damages across the developing societies such as Armenia, studying this phenomenon is important.

### **Literature review**

Social trust is one of the essential key concepts in the social sciences, and particularly sociology. This concept has been treated in the works of scholars as diverse as: Durkheim, Zimmel, Tonnies, Webber, Parsons, Giddens, Offe, Szetomka, Coleman, Fukuyama, Putnam, and so forth. These scholars, however, have investigated social trust in their sociological theories.

The first component of social capital relates to the type of trust among individuals. Interesting enough, the literature has investigated trust more than other types of relationship. A great deal of the theory of social capital discusses about trust; at the other side, trust is in close relationship with generalized mutual relationship and it is regarded as an appropriate for the positive mutual relations.

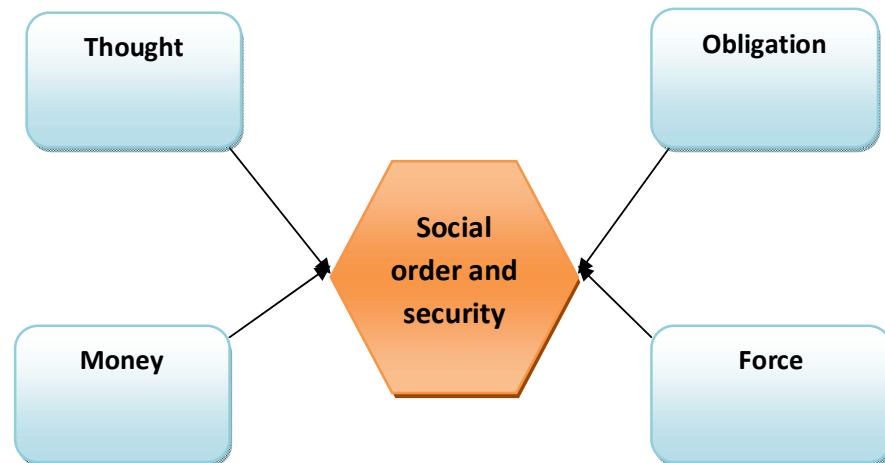
Theorists such as Giddens (1990) determine two types of trust: trust in certain individuals and trust in the abstract individuals or organizations. Abstract trust contains knowledge about the risks and the trustee individual. (Luhman, 1988) So, while the actor can judge about the value of trusting certain individual readily, he can, at the other hand, capture ideas about trusting the abstract individuals.

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People also can evaluate trusting the abstract organizations. This process can be referred to as the institutional level of trust. It is what Giddens calls trusting specialized organizations.

Max Weber, at the other hand, asserts that intellectual behavior is contingent upon trust, a trust which is based on personal and group interests. Such a trust can have a major role in different types of legitimacy. He also suggests that trust is based on the sophisticated traditional legitimacies and non-intellectual behaviors. This type of trust can also be observed in intellectual behaviors like power relations and bureaucracy.

To Parsons, however, trust is a component that gives rise to social unity and cohesion. He argues that trust gives this insight to individuals that in order to accomplish a collective success, people ignore their own interests. Trust causes people to expect others to accomplish their obligations and understand the situation of others. He believes that a cohesive system has actors in whom one can trust and this in turn contributes to a sustainable order in the society. (Valadbigi, 2001)



**Fig 1: Elements that build social order and security in the theory of Parsons**

### **Theories of social capital and social trust**

The purpose of theoretical framework is to produce a model to extract hypotheses, concepts, and variables from it, and test them in the society under study, here the Yezidi rural population of Armenia. It is only after the final demonstration of the hypotheses and reaching to the stage of authenticity that the theoretical framework is revised and becomes a theory along with some robust rules. This research reviewed different theories each of which tried to investigate trust from a certain point of view. For example, Giddens was said to classify trust into three types: basis, generalized, and abstract.

This research adopts as its theoretical framework the theory of social system borrowed from Parsons' action theory or Giddens's agency/structure theory.

A principle in the evaluation of any theory is that those theories which are readily testable have higher values. Parsons's theory of social action system is of such characteristic, as it is general and very accurate. Testability of a theory is in relation with its generality and the amount of its accuracy. In other words, when a theory is general, it can explain more events; when more events are explained, then the possibility of its experiment rises. In addition, when the statements of a theory are more accurate, it is more likely to be tested or denied or otherwise. (Saraee, 2003:132)

With respect to the syncretistic theory of structure-agency, Giddens's typology of social trust suits well to his time and place. So, we should conduct this study while considering the spatial-temporal conditions of the community under study as well as its social, economic, and cultural characteristics. In other words, social conditions and spatial-temporal situations intervene in the social phenomena, events, and realities.

So, shifting the level of trust from basic to abstract and the spread of different risks in the current society motivate us to adopt the theory of structure-agency as the theoretical framework of this research.

Along with the theory of Giddens, we have also applied construct-function theory as well as Parsons's action system theory. Social system, according to Parsons, is composed of four sub-systems: cultural, social, personal, and economic. Social trust is the function of these four items which contains social correlation and cohesion, pattern keeping, determining and achieving to goals, and adaptation.

According to Parsons, symbols of thought, force, obligation, and money in these four sub-systems protect social order and security. If every action system functions properly in the social systems, then one can expect a sustainable secure social order.

If social trust falls short of its functions in establishing correlation, social order and security encounter threats and doubt spreads across the society. Accordingly, social security, as the core of trust, and specially abstract and generalized trust, will be at stake.

### **Elements of social trust**

#### **Generally trust is of three types:**

**Basic trust:** one's attitude toward himself or the world around. This attitude is the result of one's experiences from the earlier years of life. This can be understood in terms of having relaxation with family and friends, positive attitude toward life, future and the others, having occupational satisfaction, and trust in the family members.

**Generalized trust:** in this type of trust, one trust the others based on his knowledge of them. In other words, here one is dependent on the information he obtains from others. Generalized trust can be illustrated through items such as having trust in colleagues, citizens, having obligation toward the external individuals, trust in the relatives, and peers.

**Abstract trust:** Giddens asserts that those who enjoy an industrialized lifestyle, higher education, and higher social classes can be characterized as having higher rates of abstract trust. (2004) This type of trust is defined in terms of having trust in the political and organizational authorities, administrations, city councils, police, domestic broadcast, market men, teachers, and the athletes.

### **Methodology**

Survey study was adopted as the methodology of the present study. This approach focuses on making hypothesis and identifying the relationships among the variables. This study deals with statistical samples which have been taken with special methods from the original society. With regard to our facilities, personnel, and expenses involved in completing the questionnaires and conducting the interviews, we used Cochran formula to determine our sample size.

This method is adopted as it allows us to render the quantitative data into qualitative, and then we will analyze the existing correlation among them. Consequently, their results can be generalized to the statistical universe. In doing so, use will be made of the Cronbach alpha.

Analysis level consists of each individual, group, class, or social phenomenon or subject whose features are to be examined. With regard to the fact that our research is intended to examine social trust and the elements influencing it among the Armenian Yezidi-populated rural areas, our analysis is decided to be the individual respondent, and then it is conducted at a micro-level.

In the case of examining the relationship between those variables whose evaluation level is synthetic we will use the appropriate statistical tests (e.g. X<sup>2</sup>, Spearman, and Kendall B, and V-Cramer). In the case of having distance or relative variables, we adopt Pearson correlation coefficient.

With regard to the fact that our research is intended to examine social trust and the elements influencing it among the Armenian Yezidi-populated rural areas, our analysis is decided to be the individual respondent, and then it is conducted at a micro-level.

#### **Research hypotheses:**

1. It is supposed that familial sociability is the most important source of generating social trust;
2. The religious tenets are a meaningful and influential element in rising social trust;
3. The social values are meaningful and influential elements in rising social trust;

#### **The conceptual and operational definitions of the terms:**

##### **Social trust:**

In the current research, social trust is treated as an independent variable. According to Durkheim, however, social trust has its roots in collective spirit and ethical conscience. In the event that the sense of commitment toward others is created based on knowledge, this concept, then, can serve as the most essential mechanism in establishing and accepting intra-generational values.



In measuring social trust, then, items in connection with generalized trust (trust among the citizens), abstract trust (people's trust in the administrative organizations), and the rate of self-trust which indicates of one's trust in himself, will be adopted.

**Generalized trust:** in this type of trust, one trust the others based on his knowledge of them. In other words, here one is dependent on the information he obtains from others. Generalized trust can be illustrated through items such as having trust in colleagues, citizens, having obligation toward the external individuals, trust in the relatives, and peers.

**Familial sociability:** Theories of socialization regard family and especially the parents as the most influential element in familiarizing the children with the received values of society. In this viewpoint, however, along with the process of socialization, parents teach their children how to understand the familial values, how to institutionalize the values of the larger society through learning norms, social patterns, and orders.

This variable could be identified through the following indicators: having trust in the others, cooperation with others, living a disciplined and ordered life, learning the norms of society, respecting the adults, considering the regulations, and having emotional relationships.

**Social values:** Social value is one of the essential conceptions of the social sciences and it has drawn the attentions of different scholars. Sociologically speaking, social value is agreed by all the members of society. Social value constitutes realities and matters which are desirable and most of the people are in search of it.

Therefore, the variable of social value can be operationalized in terms of indicators such as: truthfulness, keeping promises, social justice, social cohesion, commitment, creativity, self-confidence, and competition

**Religious tenets:** It refers to a set of religious beliefs and tenets that result in increasing faith in religion and social life and finally links society' members to each other. In light of faith, however, self-interest, as the cause of social interruption, decreases in the social spheres and then social relationships will continue their life in the course of knowledge and trust.

This variable is to be operationalized with regard to indicators such as: practicing the religious rituals during week or month, engagement in the religious activities, participating in the voluntary sympathetic activities, and so on.

**Results:**

- Generalized trust among Yezidi rural population of Armenia was measured by 9 items. Generally 2.5% reported a very low generalized trust. The percentages for low, mean, high, and very high were 8%, 20.9%, 30.4%, and 38.2% respectively.
- 6.9% of the respondents had a very low amount of abstract trust, 10.4% low, 20.4% mean, 26.8% high, and 35.6% very high. Generally, one can suggest that 62.4% of the respondents had a high or very high rate of abstract trust.
- 21.4% of the respondents reported a very high rate of basic type of trust, 26.7% high, 28.7% mean, 13.1% low, and 10.1% very low rate. That is to say, in comparison with other two types of trust (abstract and generalized) had a higher rate, as 48.7% of the respondents had a high or very high rate of this trust.

Rate of Basic trust	Number	Percentage	Aggregated percentage
Very low	30	10.1	10.1
Low	39	13.1	23.2
Mean	87	28.7	51.9
High	80	26.7	78.6
Very high	64	21.4	100.0
Total	300	100.0	

**Table 1. Distribution of the respondents by their trust in the indicators of basic trust**

- 10 items were at work to measure social values. 2.8% of the respondents implied the sense the social values at a very low level, 6.3% low, 28.3% mean, 37.2% high, and 25.4% very high.
- 8 items were derived to measure the state of religious tenets. As it is shown below, 2% had very low religious commitment, 5.1% low, 23.6% mean, 36.4% high, and 32.9% very high.
- In the society under consideration, the rates of generalized and basic trusts were higher than abstract trust. In other words, due to the developments in peoples' educations, culture, communications, and technologies, they were not living more complex lives which required them to respect the value of time and

trust the specialized organizations to contribute to the cohesion and order of society.

- The correlation coefficient of Spearman, which is usable in the ordinal variables, indicated of a relationship between these two variables. It was fixed at 0.24, with the significance of 0.01 level. Accordingly, one can argue that by a probability of 99% or higher, there was correlation between familial sociability and social trust. That is, when the parents and the family as a whole strengthen the sociability of the children, their rate of social trust increases and vice versa. This point shows that trust is acquired through the process of sociability at the earlier stages of life, and develops through the experiences to be transmitted to the next generations.

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
<b>(Constant)</b>	.267	.802		.333	.739
<b>Familial sociability</b>	.431	.066	.339	6.519	.000
<b>Social values</b>	.025	.064	.020	.396	.693
<b>Religious tenets</b>	.316	.077	.214	4.127	.000
<b>Social security and order</b>	-.034	.067	-.027	-.509	.611

**Table 2. The regression coefficients of the independent variables and social trust**

That is, by increasing the social values of the target society, the rate of social trust increases, and vice versa. So, the social values were not considerably affecting the state of social trust in the society under study.

The rate of social trust	No	Percentage	Aggregated percentage
Very low	20	6.5	6.5
Low	31	10.5	17.0
Mean	70	23.3	40.3
High	84	28.0	68.3
Very high	95	31.7	100.0
Total	300	100.0	

**Table 3. Distribution of the respondents by their trust in social trust**

#### 11. Analytic and indicative results:

- There is difference between kinds of trust and they don't have the same mean. The mean of basic trust was 16%, generalized trust- 15% and abstract trust mean was 74%. Thus, our study shows that in the society under study the rate of basic trust is not less than other kinds of trust. In other words, the mean of basic trust is more than generalized trust but less than abstract trust.
- In the society under study, the rate of basic trust and generalized trust was in low level, while for abstract trust we had high level.
- There is correlation and meaningful relation between social trust and familial sociability, as the higher the socialization of children by their families is, the higher the rate of social trust will be and vice versa.
- Based on Durkheim theory if the rate of correlation within one group is low the rate of social order and social trust will also be low. In other words, if the correlation and solidarity among the family members are high, it will result in high social trust. In other social groups such as colleagues, friends, relatives or acquaintances, even in bigger groups, if the homogeneity and correlation is low, we can observe the case of low rate of social trust.
- According to the correlation coefficient of Spearman, there is relation and solidarity between religious tenets and social trust, i.e. the higher the religious commitments is, the higher the social trust is, and vice versa, the lower the religious interests is, the lower the social trust is.
- There is meaningful relation between social values of society and social trust, i.e. if social values increase in the society, there is increase in social trust as well, and vice versa, if there is decrease in



social values, there is decrease in social trust. Thus, social values are meaningful and effective factors in the increase or decrease of social trust in the society

## 12. Conclusion:

Social trust is one of the critical aspects of human relations which pave the ways for human beings cooperation and social engagement. It is why it has been always the focus of sociologists' research.

With regard to the fact that our research is intended to examine social trust and the elements influencing it among the Armenian Yezidi-populated rural areas, our analysis id decided to be the individual respondent, and then it is conducted at a micro-level.

There is correlation and meaningful relation between social trust and familial sociability, as the higher the socialization of children by their families is, the higher the rate of social trust will be and vice versa.

That is, by increasing the social values of the target society, the rate of social trust increases, and vice versa. So, the social values were not considerably affecting the state of social trust in the society under study.

The value of the correlation coefficient was positive, and this shows that by increasing the rate of religious tenets, the level of social trust will increase subsequently, and vice versa.

<b>Independent variables</b>	<b>Indirect impacts</b>	<b>Direct impacts</b>	<b>Total effect of direct and indirect impacts</b>
<b>Familial sociability</b>	-	Direct	0.34
<b>Social values</b>	-	Direct	0.02
<b>Religious tenets</b>	-	Direct	0.21
<b>Social security and order</b>	Indirect	-	-0.30
<b>Human relationships</b>	-	Direct	0.11

**Table 4. The total amount of the direct and indirect impacts of the independents variables on social**

**Research limitations:**

**This study limits itself in terms of the following issues:**

- Lack of financial support from the side of respective organizations;
- Some respondents may fill the questionnaire out incorrectly, and this can have negative impacts of the results of research;
- Lack of standardized questionnaires or items about social trust;
- Potential difficulties in obtaining demographic information from the respective authorities; and

**Research implications:**

**While taking the following suggestions into account, further research on social trust is encouraged:**

- Investigating social trust among other ethnical groups and minorities in order to reach better results about the contributions of social trust to whole society;
- Conducting nation-wide or international surveys of social trust as the most important component of social capital;
- Laying more emphasis on increasing social trust and decreasing distrust may create stable order and security across society

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