



How to cite this article:

Shamsi, S., Amini, Y., Hesabi, A., & Dorosti, A. (2027). A Sociological Analysis of the Factors Influencing Political Orientations among Citizens of Ilam. *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 5(5), 1-17. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrhp.406>



Article history:
Original Research

Dates:

Submission Date: 06 May 2026
Revision Date: 27 July 2026
Acceptance Date: 04 August 2026
First Publication Date: 06 August 2026
Final Publication Date: 01 September 2027

A Sociological Analysis of the Factors Influencing Political Orientations among Citizens of Ilam

1. Sara. Shamsi ¹ : Department of Social Sciences, Sho.C., Islamic Azad University, Shoushtar, Iran
2. Yousef. Amini ^{2*} : Department of Social Sciences, Sho.C., Islamic Azad University, Shoushtar, Iran
3. Ahmadali. Hesabi ³ : Department of Social Sciences, Sho.C., Islamic Azad University, Shoushtar, Iran
4. Amirali. Dorosti ⁴ : Department of Social Sciences, Sho.C., Islamic Azad University, Shoushtar, Iran

*corresponding author's email: Yousef.amini@iau.ac.ir

ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to sociologically examine the factors influencing the political orientations of citizens in Ilam County. Given the county's cultural, social, and economic characteristics, identifying the factors shaping citizens' political orientations is important for social analysis and local policymaking. In terms of purpose, this was an applied study, and in terms of methodology, it employed a descriptive, cross-sectional survey design. The statistical population comprised all citizens aged 18–65 years residing in Ilam County between March 21, 2025, and March 20, 2026, totaling 125,460 individuals. Of these, 383 participants were selected based on Cochran's formula using proportionate stratified random sampling. Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire. Its validity was confirmed by a panel of experts, and its reliability was established through Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeding 0.70 for all constructs. The data were analyzed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) in SmartPLS 3. The findings indicated that, among the demographic variables, educational attainment ($\beta = 0.360$), occupation ($\beta = 0.330$), and gender ($\beta = 0.230$) had significant effects on political orientations, whereas age ($\beta = 0.042$) had no significant effect. Furthermore, civic participation ($\beta = 0.339$), political participation ($\beta = 0.682$), political parties ($\beta = 0.629$), social status ($\beta = 0.385$), economic status ($\beta = 0.571$), religiosity ($\beta = 0.711$), social capital ($\beta = 0.406$), and social media ($\beta = 0.443$) all had positive and significant effects on the political orientations of Ilam citizens. Accordingly, the most influential factors, in descending order, were religiosity, political participation, political parties, economic status, social media, social capital, social status, and civic participation. Overall, the results demonstrate that the political orientations of Ilam citizens are primarily shaped by a combination of cultural, participatory, economic, and communicative factors. Among these, religiosity and various forms of political and social participation play particularly prominent roles. The nonsignificant effect of age also suggests that differences in political orientations within this population are influenced more strongly by structural and value-based variables than by generational differences alone.

Keywords: *political orientations, citizens of Gilan, sociology*

Introduction

Choice and decision-making are among the most fundamental mechanisms of human action throughout life. Social actors continually encounter situations in which they must choose among competing alternatives, ranging from material interests and personal preferences to intellectual, ethical, and metaphysical considerations. Such



choices may remain purely individual or may be transformed into public decisions through collective action, voting mechanisms, and the aggregation of individual preferences. Accordingly, voting may be regarded as one of the most explicit forms of collective decision-making, through which individual will acquires meaning within social, normative, and institutional structures. Nevertheless, as emphasized in the literature on voter behavior, no electoral action can be regarded solely as the product of individual free will or momentary preferences. Rather, voting behavior results from a complex interaction among individual, group-level, and macrostructural factors, and this complexity has led to the emergence of largely competing theoretical approaches to its explanation (1).

The existing theoretical literature indicates that the analysis of voting motivations is generally organized around two principal logics: instrumental voting and expressive voting. Under the instrumental-voting approach, voters are assumed to be rational actors who calculate costs and benefits in an effort to maximize their expected utility from an election outcome; political choice is therefore evaluated as an instrument for obtaining benefits. By contrast, expressive voting emphasizes that the motivation for political participation is not necessarily limited to the final outcome. Instead, the act of voting may itself possess symbolic and identity-related value, in the sense that individuals use their votes to express their sociopolitical identity, moral judgments, or symbolic status (2). This theoretical distinction highlights the importance of a sociological analysis of voting because it demonstrates that, even when the final outcome produces no direct personal benefit, identity-based and meaning-oriented attachments may transform voting into a meaningful and even necessary action.

In this regard, efforts have been made to provide a coherent classification of the factors influencing voting behavior. Lundberg et al. organize the determinants of voting into three principal levels: the individual level, including income, education, gender, age, ideology, personality traits, and lived experience; the sociocultural level, including social identity, ethnicity or race, religion, media influence, and social networks; and the political level, including party identification, candidate characteristics, political positions, campaign strategies, and economic conditions (3). The central point of this framework is that these factors do not operate independently but rather function within an interconnected and interactive network, and the relative weight of each factor depends on the context, time, and characteristics of social groups (3). Therefore, although numerous studies have identified a wide range of variables, the fundamental issue remains how these factors exert influence within specific social and cultural contexts, a concern that directs research toward context-sensitive studies.

The concept of political participation also occupies a central position in this discussion. Political participation refers to the individual or collective activities undertaken by members of society to improve the administration of political affairs and influence public decision-making processes (4). However, political participation is itself a consequence of the unequal distribution of resources, opportunities, and forms of capital. Both classical and contemporary literature indicate that socioeconomic status can strongly influence the capacity for participation and political orientation. For example, some studies have shown that individuals with higher incomes are more likely to participate because they possess greater resources and stronger perceptions of political efficacy (5); at the same time, they may be inclined toward policies that align with their economic interests. Education, as a form of cultural capital, increases political knowledge, critical analytical capacity, and access to information and may thereby influence both the extent of participation and the type of political orientation. In addition, gender and age produce meaningful differences in political preferences through divergent social experiences, cultural roles, and issue priorities. Some studies have reported that women are more inclined toward welfare-oriented and egalitarian policies, whereas men are more inclined toward traditional and security-related values (6). Alongside these factors,

ethnicity and religion, as powerful components of social identity, may shape intragroup solidarity and bloc voting, particularly in societies characterized by historical experiences of discrimination or strong traditional group cohesion (7).

With the transformation of communication structures, the media and social networks have also become influential actors in the political arena. Through agenda-setting, news framing, and the representation of candidates, the media shape public perceptions and may even influence voters' cognitive agendas (8). In addition to rapidly disseminating political information, social networks intensify mechanisms of social influence, normative pressure, and social learning because of their networked nature. Within these environments, individuals receive not only information but also the prevailing political climate and the identity signals of their groups (9). At the same time, the spread of misinformation, echo chambers, and the targeted delivery of political messages has made the quality of citizens' decision-making and the integrity of democratic processes a serious concern. Consequently, any explanation of electoral behavior during the past decade that fails to account for the media and network environment will remain incomplete (10).

Despite these theoretical frameworks, the issue becomes more complex when voting behavior is examined in societies that are simultaneously undergoing transition, that is, contexts in which modern elements of participation, including electoral institutions, new media, and political competition, are intertwined with traditional structures such as ethnicity, tribal affiliation, clan membership, kinship, and local hierarchies. Ilam Province is among the provinces in which modernity is experienced alongside tradition and customary norms, and a substantial portion of its sociocultural structure is based on tribal and clan systems. Within such a structure, the collective and group affiliation frequently take precedence over the individual, and social action acquires meaning through intragroup loyalties and kinship ties (11). As demonstrated by Amini et al., tribal and clan culture and ethnic diversity play a determining role in political participation in Ilam Province, a pattern that is clearly observable in elections to the Islamic Consultative Assembly (12). Their study also indicated a positive and significant relationship between the components of sociopolitical capital and the political participation of Ilam citizens. Overall, sociopolitical capital explained 42% of the variance in political participation. In particular, sociopolitical trust, sociopolitical cohesion, sociopolitical awareness, and tribal-clan attachment were significantly associated with political participation. The central question, therefore, is the extent to which modern instruments of political participation are transformed into informed and program-oriented participation within this social context and the extent to which they are reproduced within traditional patterns of solidarity and tribal competition.

Under such conditions, studying the political orientations of citizens in Ilam County is not merely a descriptive examination of electoral preferences; rather, it is an effort to understand the social mechanisms through which political preferences are produced. The central question concerns which sociological factors—including education, occupation, gender, age, social status, economic status, religiosity, social capital, civic and political participation, the role of political parties, and social media—exert the greatest influence on the political orientations of Ilam citizens and through which identity-based, normative, network-related, economic, or institutional pathways these effects occur. More specifically, the present study seeks to explain the extent to which political orientations in Ilam County arise from instrumental and calculative rationality and the extent to which they are shaped by the logic of expressive voting and the expression of collective ethnic, religious, and tribal identities. Furthermore, given the growth of social networks and the presence of new media in everyday life, it is necessary to determine whether these media have contributed to greater political awareness and weakened traditional patterns of voter mobilization or, conversely,

whether they have intensified identity-based voting by reinforcing group echo chambers and reproducing identity boundaries.

A major limitation of many previous studies is that they have focused either on microlevel factors, such as individual characteristics, or on macrolevel factors, such as party structures and economic conditions. In contexts such as Ilam, however, an accurate explanation requires simultaneous attention to kinship ties, local social capital, religiosity, social status, and the role of emerging media—that is, the mesolevel emphasized in political sociology. Moreover, some empirical findings related to this subject indicate that variables such as religiosity, political participation, the role of political parties, economic status, and social media may exert substantial effects on political orientations, whereas certain variables, such as age, may have no significant effect. These findings strengthen the need for a coherent explanatory model specifically adapted to the context of Ilam. Accordingly, drawing on the theoretical literature on voter behavior and focusing on the sociocultural context of Ilam County, the present study seeks to explain the role of sociological factors in shaping citizens' political orientations and to provide a clear account of the mechanisms influencing political choice in a province undergoing transition.

Finally, addressing this issue is important because the quality of political participation and patterns of electoral orientation are not merely reflections of individual preferences. They are also indicators of how social capital operates, the degree of identity-based cohesion or division, the level of political trust, and the mechanisms of social mobilization. Understanding these dynamics may generate both scientific and practical value for policymakers seeking to design policies that promote informed participation and reduce social divisions and for political sociologists seeking to develop indigenous and context-sensitive explanatory models. Therefore, by focusing on Ilam County, the present study seeks to answer the following question: "What sociological factors influence citizens' political orientations?"

Theoretical Foundations

Empirical Background of the Study

Domestic research indicates that, within provincial and local contexts, political orientations and political participation are influenced not merely by individual variables but also, to a significant extent, by social capital, institutional trust, communication networks, and citizens' lived experiences. In a study of Ilam citizens, Amini et al. demonstrated that sociopolitical capital was positively associated with political participation through the reinforcement of a sense of belonging, mutual trust, and network ties, and that this relationship was more pronounced in local contexts characterized by stronger social bonds (12). This finding is important to the present study because Ilam is also among the social settings in which kinship structures, informal networks, and local norms may influence citizens' political orientations (12).

In another study, Aliakbari et al. focused on university students in Ilam and found that social capital and the quality of interpersonal relationships were significantly associated with political participation (11). The findings emphasized that individuals with higher levels of social trust, voluntary interaction, and collective belonging demonstrate greater readiness for political participation and civic action. From a theoretical perspective, these findings indicate that political participation is not merely the product of awareness or ideology but also results from individuals' connections with the surrounding social and cultural networks (11).

At a broader theoretical and empirical level, some domestic studies have emphasized the role of religiosity and religious identity in shaping political participation. Using structural modeling, Rahmani found that religiosity was associated with political participation through the mediating role of philosophical mindset and could orient citizens toward more meaningful and responsible political action (13). Although the statistical population of that study consisted of student teachers, its implementation in East Azerbaijan Province makes it relevant to regional analyses in Iran and indicates that religiosity remains an important variable in explaining political orientations in local communities (13).

Overall, the domestic literature indicates that, in Iran, particularly in provinces characterized by dense social structures and face-to-face relationships, social capital, trust, religiosity, and local ties are among the most important factors influencing political participation and political orientations. Nevertheless, most domestic studies have focused either on political participation or on a single variable, such as social capital or religiosity, whereas political orientations require a multidimensional analysis that simultaneously integrates social, cultural, and communicative factors. This gap highlights the necessity of the present study in Ilam County (11-13).

In recent international research, the relationship between social capital and political participation has remained one of the principal themes in studies of political behavior. Liu, Yang, and Wang, in a study of neighborhood social capital in Beijing, found that neighborhood social capital was positively related to participation in local governance and voting, although the magnitude of this effect varied across neighborhoods (14). This finding demonstrates that local structures and the quality of social networks may shape political behavior at the microlevel and interpersonal level. From the perspective of the present study, this result confirms that an analysis of political orientations in local communities such as Ilam would be incomplete without considering social capital and local structures of solidarity. In an earlier but still highly influential study of platform affordances, Theocharis, Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, and Bimber demonstrated that social media and platform architecture can reorganize patterns of political participation and generate new forms of political interaction (15). This effect is important for understanding the role of digital media in political orientations because it indicates that political participation in the digital age is not limited to voting but also includes diverse forms of opinion expression, symbolic action, and political networking.

In another study of Jordanian youth, Alodaat, Al-Qur'an, and AbuHmud found that social media use had a positive and significant relationship with political participation and that gender moderated this relationship (16). Although this study was published in 2023, its conceptual precision and direct relevance to social media and youth political participation make it particularly useful for explaining the literature on the subject. Its findings indicate that social media may serve as an important channel for transmitting political information, facilitating political mobilization, and shaping political attitudes, particularly among younger generations.

Tutar examined algorithmic interaction in public administration and data-driven communication and found that digital and algorithmic mechanisms influence political participation within public institutions and may strengthen digital democracy (17). The importance of this study to the present article lies in its demonstration that contemporary political behavior is not shaped exclusively through traditional media or direct communication; algorithms, data-driven processes, and the digital lifeworld are also involved. This issue is especially important for understanding changes in the political orientations of younger generations, particularly in regions undergoing a communication transition.

From the perspective of identity, religion, and politics, Raitparvar, in an ethnographic study of transnational Christian networks and the conversion of Iranians, found that religious identity and belief-based boundaries may be

accompanied by the redefinition of national and political identities (18). Although this study did not directly concern voting or political participation, it indicates that religion and religious identity continue to shape political and identity-based orientations in both transnational and local contexts. This finding is relevant to the present study because religiosity and religious identity may also form part of the mechanisms through which political orientations are shaped in Ilam County.

Rahmani also found that religiosity, through the mediating role of philosophical mindset, may facilitate more active political participation (13). This finding is important because it demonstrates that religiosity does not necessarily lead to political conservatism. Depending on individuals' perceptions and modes of reflection, it may also produce informed and responsible political participation. Consequently, an analysis of political orientations that disregards the epistemic and value-based dimensions of religiosity will remain incomplete (13).

Overall, international research demonstrates that social capital, social media, algorithms, religiosity, and identity all contribute to the formation of political participation and political orientations. However, most of these studies have either concentrated on a specific dimension or been conducted in different cultural contexts. Therefore, there remains a need for studies that examine these factors in an integrated manner within a specific local and cultural context, such as Ilam County. The present study may address this existing knowledge gap.

A review of domestic and international studies indicates that citizens' political orientations are not a single-factor phenomenon but are influenced by the interaction of variables such as social capital, trust, religiosity, identity, social media, and local structures. Nevertheless, several important gaps are evident in the existing literature. First, many studies have concentrated on political participation rather than political orientations in their broader sense. Second, most studies have examined a single variable independently. Third, research conducted outside Ilam cannot necessarily be fully generalized to Ilam County. Accordingly, adopting a multidimensional and context-sensitive approach, the present study seeks to examine the relationship between sociological factors and the political orientations of Ilam citizens within a coherent analytical framework.

Theories

Conflict Theory and Class Position

Under this approach, political orientation directly reflects class interests and an individual's position within the structure of inequality. According to conflict perspectives, society is divided into groups with conflicting interests and unequal access to resources, power, and wealth. Based on this theory, individuals belonging to privileged or upper classes tend to adopt conservative orientations because they benefit from preserving the existing order. By contrast, members of lower and disadvantaged classes, who perceive themselves as victims of inequality, are more likely to adopt change-oriented, reformist, or radical positions. Political orientation is therefore regarded as a response to existing conflicts in the distribution of social resources (19, 20).

Relative Deprivation Theory: Ted Robert Gurr

This theory emphasizes the gap between value expectations—what individuals believe they deserve—and value capabilities—what they are actually able to obtain. As perceived injustice in the distribution of economic and political opportunities increases, relative deprivation intensifies. From Gurr's perspective, relative deprivation does not necessarily mean absolute poverty; rather, it is a subjective perception of inequality that generates dissatisfaction

(21). When this dissatisfaction extends into the political sphere, it produces political cynicism, reduced loyalty to the existing structure, and an inclination toward protest-oriented or radical actions intended to change prevailing conditions.

Political Culture Theory: Almond and Verba

Within this framework, political orientation is the product of a system of individual psychological orientations toward politics, consisting of three dimensions: cognitive orientation, referring to awareness; affective orientation, referring to feelings; and evaluative orientation, referring to judgment. Almond and Verba identify three cultural patterns (22):

- **Parochial political culture:** A lack of awareness of and expectations from the political system.
- **Subject political culture:** Political awareness exists, but individuals perceive themselves as subordinate to the system and unable to influence decisions.
- **Participant political culture:** Individuals perceive themselves as active agents who have the right to intervene in and change politics.

Accordingly, citizens' political orientations depend on the extent of their political socialization and their perceptions of their own role within the hierarchy of power.

Social Capital and Civil Society Theory: Robert Putnam

This theory emphasizes the role of networks, norms, and mutual trust in shaping political behavior. Putnam argues that social capital and civic ties strengthen cooperation and tolerance (23). In societies with high levels of social capital, political orientations are more likely to move toward democratic and reform-oriented patterns because participation in associations and networks of trust provides individuals with greater civic bargaining power. Conversely, declining social capital and the erosion of out-group trust may lead to isolationist or cynical political orientations.

In summary, the theoretical foundations of this study adopt an integrated approach. Perceived injustice and class position, as structural factors, shape citizens' political orientations through the mediating influence of political culture and social capital, as cultural and communicative factors. In other words, the political orientations of Ilam citizens result from the extent to which they perceive the distribution of resources as fair, the types of social networks in which they participate, and the degree to which they perceive themselves as capable of influencing their political destiny.

The theoretical framework of the present study is based on the proposition that the political orientations of Ilam citizens, including conservatism, reformism, and partisanship, result from the interaction of multiple levels of structural, cultural, and communicative factors. At the first level, sociological theories of voting and elections, including the sociological approach of the Columbia School, together with theories of sociopolitical position, emphasize that background and demographic characteristics and an individual's position within the social structure—namely, education, occupation, age, and gender—influence identity formation, awareness, and ultimately political orientations. Therefore, relationships between these variables and political orientations are hypothesized. At the second level, drawing on Putnam's social capital theory and civil society theory, civic participation, including involvement in local associations, voluntary organizations, and formal and informal social

networks, is explained as a mechanism that promotes more informed political choices and clearer political orientations by increasing generalized trust, enhancing awareness, and strengthening political skills. A relationship between civic participation and political orientations is therefore hypothesized. At the third level, rational choice theory and political socialization theory explain that political participation, including voting, electoral activity, and party-based action, both reflects individuals' political preferences and contributes to the consolidation and reinforcement of those preferences. In other words, individuals are encouraged toward greater or lesser participation through cost–benefit calculations and political learning, and this process is meaningfully related to their political orientations. At the fourth level, theories concerning political parties, particularly Downs's approach, and social identity theory demonstrate that parties help citizens channel and stabilize their orientations by presenting coherent programs and producing collective identities. Therefore, the role and functioning of political parties are expected to be significantly related to citizens' political orientations. At the fifth level, drawing on Max Weber's theory of status and prestige and theories of social cleavages, social status—including prestige, credibility, and social respect—is explained as a resource that influences political efficacy and group belonging. Depending on their status, individuals may be inclined either to preserve or change the existing order; therefore, a relationship between social status and political orientations is hypothesized. At the sixth level, Marxist and Weberian class theories and theories of economic cleavages argue that economic status and the distribution of resources and economic power shape material interests and perceptions of distributive justice, and these interests generate different political orientations regarding issues such as justice, redistribution, taxation, and welfare. Accordingly, a relationship between economic status and political orientations is expected. At the seventh level, the sociology of religion and politics, including approaches associated with Marty, suggests that religiosity, as a source of values, norms, and worldview, plays a determining role in cultural and social positioning and consequently in political orientations, particularly within Iranian society. Therefore, the relationship between religiosity and political orientations constitutes a fundamental and significant connection within the model. At the eighth level, following the perspectives of Putnam, Coleman, and Bourdieu on social capital, social capital—including trust, networks, and norms—enhances individuals' capacity for political judgment, more rational choice, and the active expression of political orientations by increasing institutional trust, facilitating the circulation of information, and strengthening collective action. Consequently, a relationship between social capital and political orientations is hypothesized.

At the ninth level, drawing on communication theories such as information gatekeeping and cultivation theory, as well as Habermas's concept of the public sphere, social media are conceptualized as a new ecosystem of political socialization. By changing access to information, shaping political dialogue, and operating through mechanisms such as the reinforcement of orientations within echo chambers or their moderation through exposure to diverse perspectives, social media influence political orientations. Accordingly, the relationship between social media and political orientations is proposed as the final hypothesis.

Research Method

Research Type and Method

In terms of purpose, the present study is applied because it seeks to provide practical knowledge for understanding political orientations within the context of Ilam County. In terms of nature and methodology, it is a descriptive survey conducted using a quantitative approach. The data were collected at a specific point in time

through a cross-sectional design to test hypotheses concerning the current status of the phenomenon under investigation using statistical procedures.

The statistical population consisted of all citizens aged 18–65 years residing in Ilam County. According to official statistics from the Statistical Center of Iran, this population comprised 125,460 individuals. Using Cochran's formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, the final sample size was estimated at 383 participants. Multistage cluster sampling was employed. In the first stage, the population was divided into urban and rural strata. In the urban sector, sampling focused on the two municipal districts of Ilam, with 150 questionnaires distributed in District 1, comprising the central and northern areas, and 120 questionnaires distributed in District 2, comprising the southern and peripheral areas. In the rural sector, 113 questionnaires were completed through in-person visits to selected villages in the affiliated rural districts, including Chavar and Mishkhas.

Data were collected through two procedures. First, theoretical foundations and the research background were extracted using library and documentary methods. Subsequently, a researcher-developed questionnaire was used as the principal instrument in the field study. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first section addressed demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education, and occupation. The second section included specialized items designed to measure the independent variables—civic participation, political participation, political parties, social status, economic status, religiosity, social capital, and social media—and the dependent variable, political orientations. Responses were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

In the present study, the dependent variable, political orientations, was measured using 10 items, including items concerning the monitoring of political news and inclination toward political factions. Each independent variable was also operationalized using specific indicators. Social capital was measured using seven items addressing trust and social ties; religiosity was measured using five items addressing beliefs and religious practices; political participation and civic participation were each measured using five items; and social media were measured using five items concerning usage and political influence. Background variables, including education, occupation, age, and gender, were categorized at nominal and ordinal levels to analyze their role in explaining political orientations.

To ensure the quality of the instrument, the face and content validity of the questionnaire were confirmed through consultation with five to seven professors and experts in sociology and political science. Cronbach's alpha was also used to assess the instrument's internal consistency. The reliability results indicated that the instrument possessed high reliability. Cronbach's alpha was .918 for the dependent variable of political orientations, .889 for social capital, .880 for religiosity, .786 for political participation, and .731 for economic status. Because all coefficients exceeded the .70 threshold, the reliability of the research instrument was fully confirmed.

Questionnaire data were analyzed at both descriptive and inferential levels. Descriptive analyses included frequencies, percentages, means, and charts. SPSS and SmartPLS were used for data processing and hypothesis testing, with SmartPLS employed for structural equation modeling.

Findings

During the descriptive analysis of data collected from 383 citizens of Ilam County, respondents' demographic characteristics were first evaluated. The distribution of gender indicated that 256 participants, or 66.8% of the sample, were men, whereas 127 participants, or 33.2%, were women. This distribution reflects the greater representation of men in the field phase of the present study. Regarding age, the findings indicated the

predominance of young and economically active groups. The largest group consisted of respondents aged 26–35 years, comprising 116 individuals or 30.3% of the sample. This group was followed by respondents aged 36–45 years, comprising 92 individuals or 24.0%, and those aged 25 years or younger, comprising 72 individuals or 18.8%. Respondents aged 56 years or older, comprising 54 individuals or 14.1%, and those aged 46–55 years, comprising 49 individuals or 12.8%, represented the smallest proportions of the sample.

An examination of respondents' educational attainment indicated a predominance of individuals with higher and university education. Participants holding bachelor's degrees constituted the largest group, with 113 individuals or 29.5% of the sample. They were followed by respondents holding master's degrees, with 84 individuals or 21.9%, and those holding high school diplomas, with 83 individuals or 21.7%. The remaining educational groups included respondents with lower-secondary education, with 35 individuals or 9.2%; primary education, with 23 individuals or 6.0%; associate degrees, with 22 individuals or 5.7%; doctoral degrees, with 18 individuals or 4.7%; and no formal literacy, with five individuals or 1.3%. Regarding occupational status, self-employed respondents constituted the largest group, with 110 individuals or 28.7%. They were followed by homemakers, with 64 individuals or 16.7%; private-sector employees, with 62 individuals or 16.2%; university students, with 46 individuals or 12.0%; public-sector employees, with 41 individuals or 10.7%; retired individuals, with 35 individuals or 9.2%; and unemployed respondents, with 25 individuals or 6.5%.

In the second stage of the descriptive analysis, the means, standard deviations, and ranges of the principal research variables were examined to provide a clear representation of the distribution of the sociological components. Civic participation, measured using five items, had a mean of 17.13 and a standard deviation of 2.30, with scores ranging from 12 to 22. Political participation, also measured using five items, had a mean of 17.16 and a standard deviation of 2.28, with scores ranging from 12 to 22. Attitudes toward political parties, measured using five items, had a mean of 16.15 and a standard deviation of 2.30, with scores ranging from 9 to 19. These values indicate moderate-to-high levels of respondents' orientation toward participatory behavior and party structures within the region.

Regarding structural dimensions and forms of social capital, social status, measured using five items, had a mean of 18.23 and a standard deviation of 1.93, with scores ranging from 14 to 23. Economic status, measured using three items, had a mean of 8.51 and a standard deviation of 1.42, with scores ranging from 5 to 13. Social capital, assessed using seven items, had a mean of 25.78 and a standard deviation of 2.79, with scores ranging from 19 to 30, representing the highest numerical level among the independent variables. Religiosity and social media, each measured using five items, had means of 20.38 and 20.11, respectively. Religiosity had a standard deviation of 2.32, whereas social media had a standard deviation of 2.35, and both variables had score ranges of 15–25. These results indicate the prominent role of religious values and emerging media environments in the everyday lives of Ilam citizens.

Finally, the dependent variable, political orientations, which was operationalized using 10 items, had a mean of 35.42 and a standard deviation of 4.70, with scores ranging from 28 to 42. The relatively high mean of political orientations compared with the scale midpoint indicates considerable political sensitivity, attentiveness, and clarity of political orientation among respondents in Ilam County. The sociological explanation of this finding is pursued through inferential analyses and hypothesis testing.

Inferential Findings

An important stage in evaluating the structural model is the assessment of the path coefficients among the model's latent variables at a minimum significance level of 5%. This assessment is conducted by examining both the *t* statistics and the path coefficients (β). A *t* statistic greater than 1.96 indicates a statistically significant effect.

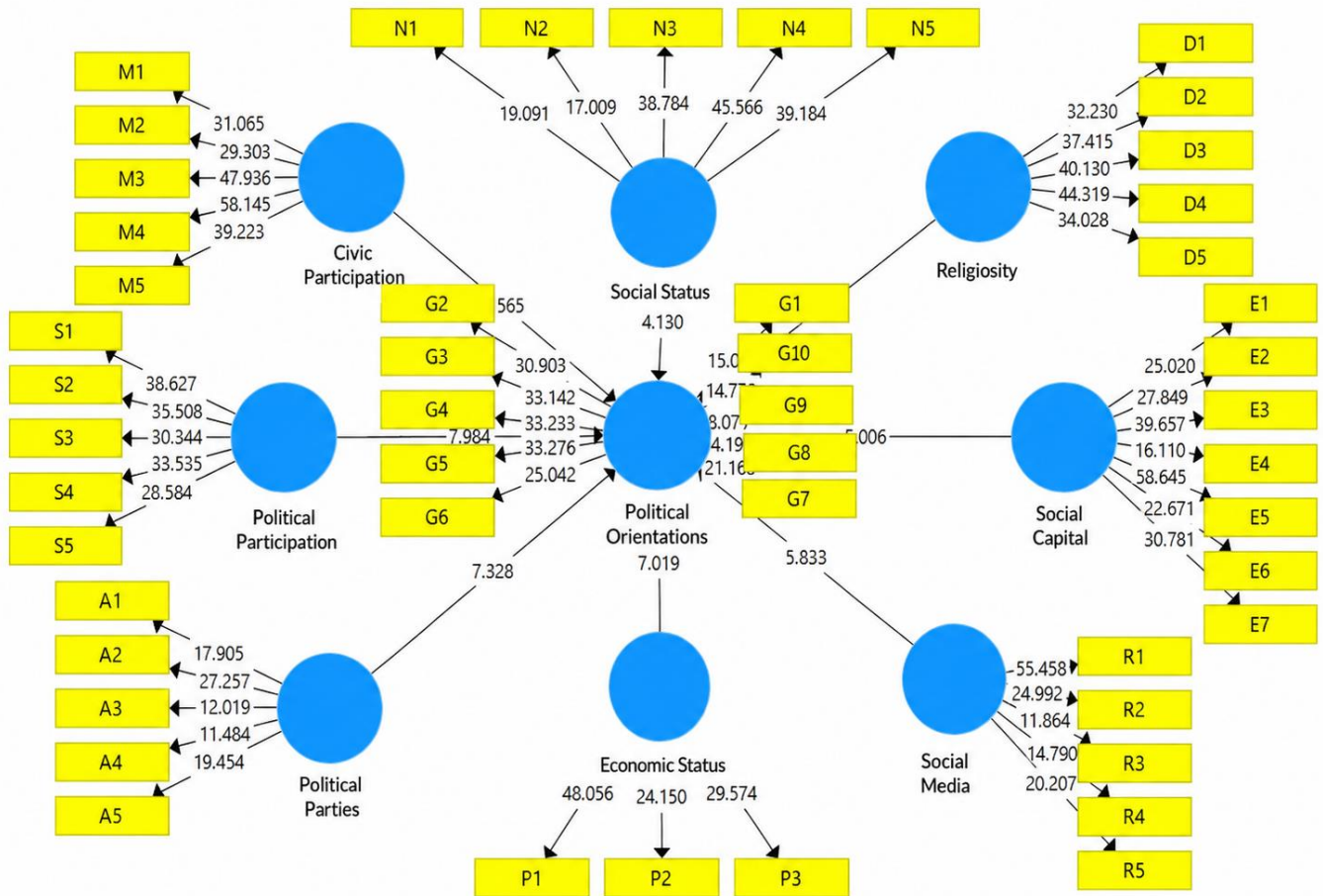


Figure 1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model With *t* Statistics

Hypothesis 1: Education, occupation, age, and gender affect the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 1. Results of Hypothesis 1

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Education	Political orientations	.360	7.329	< .001
Occupation	Political orientations	.330	6.791	< .001
Age	Political orientations	.042	0.733	.464
Gender	Political orientations	.211	4.292	.001

The findings indicated that the standardized path coefficients and *t* statistics for the effects of education, occupation, age, and gender on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were .360 and 7.329, .330 and 6.791, .042 and 0.733, and .211 and 4.292, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistics for education, occupation, and gender exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and their significance levels were below .01, it can be inferred that education, occupation, and gender exert significant effects on the political orientations of Ilam citizens. The effect of age was not statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2: Civic participation affects the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 2. Results of Hypothesis 2

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Civic participation	Political orientations	.339	6.974	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of civic participation on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 6.974 and .339, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that civic participation exerts a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Hypothesis 3: Political participation affects the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 3. Results of Hypothesis 3

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Political participation	Political orientations	.682	17.551	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of political participation on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 17.551 and .682, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that political participation exerts a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Hypothesis 4: Political parties affect the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 4. Results of Hypothesis 4

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Political parties	Political orientations	.629	16.665	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of political parties on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 16.665 and .629, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that political parties exert a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Hypothesis 5: Social status affects the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 5. Results of Hypothesis 5

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social status	Political orientations	.385	7.444	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of social status on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 7.444 and .385, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that social status exerts a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Hypothesis 6: Economic status affects the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 6. Results of Hypothesis 6

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Economic status	Political orientations	.571	15.569	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of economic status on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 15.569 and .571, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic

exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that economic status exerts a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Hypothesis 7: Religiosity affects the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 7. Results of Hypothesis 7

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Religiosity	Political orientations	.711	19.027	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of religiosity on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 19.027 and .711, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that religiosity exerts a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Hypothesis 8: Social capital affects the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 8. Results of Hypothesis 8

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social capital	Political orientations	.406	8.166	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of social capital on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 8.166 and .406, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that social capital exerts a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Hypothesis 9: Social media affect the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Table 9. Results of Hypothesis 9

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	Path Coefficient (β)	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Social media	Political orientations	.443	9.238	< .001

The findings indicated that the *t* statistic and standardized path coefficient for the effect of social media on the political orientations of Ilam citizens were 9.238 and .443, respectively. Because the calculated *t* statistic exceeded the critical value of 1.96 and the significance level was below .01, it can be inferred that social media exert a significant effect on the political orientations of Ilam citizens.

Conclusion

The primary objective of the present study was to investigate the sociological factors influencing the political orientations of citizens in Ilam County. The results of structural equation modeling demonstrated that the proposed model had an acceptable fit and that the selected variables explained 65.2% of the variance in political orientations. This section provides a detailed analysis of the findings in light of the theoretical foundations and previous research. Regarding demographic variables, the findings demonstrated that education, occupation, and gender significantly affected political orientations, whereas the effect of age was not statistically significant. The significant effect of education indicates that increases in knowledge and awareness transform citizens' analytical frameworks for political choice. This finding is consistent with theories of political development that regard education as a driving force behind political awareness. However, the nonsignificant effect of age indicates that political divisions in Ilam society are structural and epistemic rather than primarily generational. This result is inconsistent with studies that

regard age as a principal source of differences in political attitudes and suggests that shared social and economic experiences in this region outweigh age-related differences.

Religiosity, with a path coefficient of .711, was identified as the strongest predictor in the model. This finding is fully consistent with Rahmani's results (13). As Rahmani observed, religiosity in local Iranian communities does not necessarily imply political withdrawal; rather, through the mediation of value-based mindsets, it may provide political action with direction and meaning. In Ilam County, religiosity functions as an identity-forming resource that provides citizens with frameworks for political judgment. This finding indicates that in traditional-modern contexts such as Ilam, religious values continue to constitute the principal filter through which political ideologies are assessed and accepted. This result is also consistent with Raitparvar's emphasis on the role of belief-based boundaries in redefining political identities (18).

The findings concerning political participation ($\beta = .682$) and political parties ($\beta = .629$) demonstrated that active engagement in formal processes constitutes the second most influential determinant of political orientations. This finding is consistent with the results of Aliakbari et al., who emphasized that political participation is a product of individuals' connections with institutional networks (11). The effect may be explained by the fact that when Ilam citizens become involved in party structures and electoral activities, their political orientations become clearer and more stable. In effect, political parties, as intermediaries between the public and political power, have contributed to organizing citizens' attitudinal patterns in this region.

Economic status, with a path coefficient of .571, also exerted a significant effect on political orientations. This finding supports conflict theories and class-based approaches in political sociology. Individuals' economic positions determine their interests and expectations regarding the political system. Consequently, the political orientations of Ilam citizens are strongly influenced by their livelihood conditions and their positions within the hierarchy of resource distribution. This result is fully consistent with approaches emphasizing the role of economic foundations in shaping political superstructures and demonstrates that political analysis in this region cannot be completed without considering economic realities.

Regarding social media, the path coefficient of .443 indicates the growing role of the digital lifeworld in political change in Ilam. This finding is consistent with the results of Alodaat, Al-Qur'an, and AbuHmud, who emphasized the positive relationship between social media and youth political participation (16). The present findings are also consistent with Tutar's perspective on data-driven communication management and with Theocharis et al.'s findings concerning platform architecture (15, 17). These results suggest that social media in Ilam have disrupted the monopoly of traditional media and, by creating informal spaces for dialogue, have shifted citizens' political orientations from monologic patterns toward more pluralistic and networked forms.

Social capital, with a path coefficient of .406, exerted a positive and significant effect on the dependent variable. This result is fully consistent with the findings of Amini et al., who emphasized the role of network ties and trust in Ilam, as well as with Liu, Yang, and Wang's study of neighborhood social capital (12, 14). Because Ilam County is characterized by a dense social structure and strong tribal and kinship ties, social capital functions as a catalyst that directs political orientations through networks of trust. This finding demonstrates that politics in Ilam remains a collective and network-based phenomenon rather than a purely individual and atomized one.

Social status ($\beta = .385$) and civic participation ($\beta = .339$) also exerted significant effects on political orientations, although their effects were comparatively weaker. The significance of these variables indicates that Ilam citizens reconsider their political positions on the basis of their perceptions of their social standing and through participation

in nonpolitical organizations. This finding is consistent with the theoretical foundations of civic sociology, which regard intermediary institutions as arenas for practicing democracy and shaping political attitudes.

The results of the present study address the previously identified gap in the literature. Unlike studies that have focused on only one variable, such as social capital or media, the present research assessed the relative weight of each factor within an integrated model adapted to the local context of Ilam County. The findings demonstrated that political orientations in this region emerge from a dialectical interaction among religious values, social networks, economic status, and the media ecosystem. The study demonstrated that the political orientations of Ilam citizens are systematically influenced by sociological structures. Religiosity, as a value foundation, and political and party participation, as operational mechanisms, make the greatest contributions to the formation of these orientations. The explanation of the findings and their comparison with previous research demonstrated that political orientations in Ilam constitute a context-dependent phenomenon in which traditional ties and modern communication instruments simultaneously influence citizens' political perceptions. Therefore, an understanding of political behavior in this region must account for the central role of religious institutions and social-capital networks, while also recognizing that changes arising from digital media and transformations in economic status are rapidly redefining the boundaries of political orientations in the county. By explaining more than 65% of the variance in the dependent variable, the structural model of the present study provides a strong framework for social and cultural policymaking that emphasizes the strengthening of social capital and the development of conditions conducive to informed participation.

Acknowledgments

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

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