

Identifying and Prioritizing Citizens' Regional and Local Expectations of Members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly

Arash Behnoud¹, Shahla Sohrabi^{2*}

¹MA, department of management, Shahryar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahryar, Iran

²Ph.D, Corresponding author, Department of Management, Shahryar Branch, Islamic Azad University, Shahryar, Iran

Corresponding author Email: Modiran77@gmail.com

Article Info

Volume 81

Page Number: 6445 - 6456

Publication Issue:

November-December 2019

Abstract:

The present study aims to identify and prioritize citizens' regional and local expectations of members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (MPs). This was an applied study with a mixed (qualitative-quantitative) methodology, and the data was collected using a questionnaire. The statistical sample in the qualitative section consisted of 22 political and academic experts in a town in the Tehran Province, who were selected using snowball sampling. The population in the quantitative section included all citizens visiting the MP's office in town, 242 of whom were selected as the sample according to the Krejcie and Morgan Table and convenience sampling. Accordingly, 250 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and 244 were completely filled out and returned to authors. The questionnaire validity was determined using convergent validity, and its reliability was confirmed by calculating Cronbach's alpha (>0.7) in SmartPLS. The data was statistically analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) according to average variance extracted (AVE) and partial least squares (PLS). The results indicated that pursuing regional problems was the main local and regional expectation that citizens had of MPs.

Keywords: Local and regional expectations; Members of the Islamic Consultative Assembly

Article History

Article Received: 5 March 2019

Revised: 18 May 2019

Accepted: 24 September 2019

Publication: 31 December 2019

I. Introduction:

People are considered the fundamental pillar of any system of governance, and particularly in the Islamic Republic of Iran. No political system can adequately achieve its goals without people's presence and participation. Elections are the common form of citizens' political participation in democratic societies. Voting is the most effective and practical way for citizens to express their ideas and opinions about how public and social affairs are managed. It is, in fact, a social mechanism for eliciting and identifying social options and preferences. Hence, one of the major areas of research in political sociology is to study and analyze voter behavior (Seyedemami, 2007). The term "public opinion" is one of the most important and commonly used terms in political science and judicial affairs, according to which all of those who are under the spotlight are required to participate (Dadgaran, 2014).

The present study aims to identify and prioritize citizens' regional and local expectations of MPs.

II. Literature Review:

Elections

Elections are recognized as the easiest and most common and prominent manifestation of political participation and the fundamental pillar of democratic governments. Many scholars consider electoral participation and the number of elections held in a country to be among the main benchmark of a society's political development. In addition to revealing the social foundations of political power, elections are a good model for evaluating a society's power mechanism. Although studying elections and political participation may reveal uncertainties about their quality and quantity, it can also provide a more objective picture of the interplay between government and society (Moghimi, 2012). The public's electoral participation can be a measure of a political system's legitimacy and the efficiency of its policies. In elections, people go to the polls in a short time and at a modest cost in order to establish a transient and superficial relationship with the political world. Nevertheless, elections are the most important and common opportunity for political participation (Emamjomezadeh *et al.*, 2013).

Characteristics of Representatives

Political representation includes certain unique characteristics, some of which will be discussed as follows.

1. Safeguarding People's Trust:

Robert B. Denhardt believes that what shakes the foundations of a government are not misjudgments, inefficiency, heavy taxes, restrictive rules and regulations, or even defeat in wars, but a belief in the general public that rulers and government officials put their own interests above those of the public. Self-interested behavior by officials and authorities undermines public trust in governmental institutions and organizations. Therefore, politicians and officials should be accountable for all their actions and decisions to show that they are committed to the public's interests. The people entrust the protection of their interests to representatives because they have confidence in them. Trust is central to the concept of representation, and an MP is who the people trust with their representation, and who remains loyal to their interests (Danaeifard, 2015). Scandals involving representatives contribute to the erosion of public confidence. Hence, transparency and accountability are the two major principles that not only prevent the loss of public trust in representatives but increase it (Sultani, 2011).

2. Transparency:

Transparency refers to the degree to which the implementation of a particular public task is visible to the public so that government officials are prevented from abuse of power and public funds, while the public's right to expression is enhanced (Whitewood, 2003). Transparency can also underlie trust, as its absence can seriously tarnish public trust and affect people's lives. Transparency of representatives' activities refers to access to information regarding representatives' performance and economic activities, assets, and interests (of themselves or their family members). The financial transparency of representatives is so important that some argue its absence is a detriment to public trust in representatives (Mansourian, 2011).

3. Accountability:

Accountability means that people should be informed of why and how decisions are made and measures are taken by officials and politicians. The nation delegates power to its representatives to serve the public interest rather than their own. Otherwise, public confidence in representatives will be utterly lost (Zahedi, 2011). According to Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, the lack of accountability can put in question the legitimacy of representatives, because accountability is one of the principles that bring public support for and promote the position of representatives. Accountability is the ability to make representatives adhere to standards of conduct that are in the public's interest (Vakilian, 2009).

4. A Role Model of Professional Behavior to Others:

As previously mentioned, one of the aspects of political representation is to have a role within the legislative branch. Accordingly, representatives should adhere to the conventions of the legislative body and conduct themselves according to its rules and customs. If political representatives are expected to be effective in curbing corruption, they should be a reputable role model in this regard. Essentially, a parliament should be comprised of determined and impeccable representatives to be successful in the fight against economic corruption. To encourage the government, the judicial system, and other public institutions to fight economic corruption, members of a parliament should first observe the rules of professional conduct and officially disclose their wealth to ensure that they do not abuse their position for corrupt practices (Daneshjafari, 2010).

5. Ensuring the Rule of Law:

The rule of law is one of the fundamental principles that represent the lawful exercise of sovereignty. Hence, this principle controls the actions of authorities and prevents them from the arbitrary exercise of power. Since MPs exercise a part of the authority and power, there is always a concern that they act arbitrarily and abuse their authority and power. In addition, they may be lured into deviating from their duties and responsibilities for serving public interests in different ways due to their important position and functions. Therefore, for the sake of the rule of law and proper function of MPs, supervising their behavior and actions should be officially recognized. Making any exception to monitoring is considered a violation of the rule of law (Gorji, 2009).

6. Ensuring the Equality of Representatives with Other Citizens:

Equality is now widely accepted as a legal principle and has been regarded as a fundamental right. According to modern fundamental rights, one of the most important functions of constitutions is to ensure equality between citizens in various respects. Therefore, like other citizens, representatives and parliamentary bodies should also be subject to continuous monitoring in relation to the principles of professional conduct. Since the principle of equality has a constitutional value for its inclusion in constitutions, it implies that all citizens are equal before the law. It is considered imperative for representatives to observe behavioral rules as required by law. Therefore, like other officials and authorities, representatives should be subject to regulatory mechanisms regarding their performance. Such a regulatory mechanism should, however, take into account the position and dignity of representatives (Tila, 2010).

7. Regular Declaration of Interests:

Regular declaration of interests is the obligation of representatives to declare their interest at specified times. In general, representatives should be asked to do so once a year at the beginning and the end of their representative period, and whenever their interests change tangibly. Many articles on the subject, especially those by English authors, refer to asset declaration under the title of “declaration of interests,” and interests are defined to include assets, gifts, and travel expenses, among others. It seems that such a procedure is not only correct but more consistent with the philosophy of supervising representatives, which requires prevention or settlement of conflicts of interest, and earning public trust (Ratamarit, 2008).

8. Obligation to Declare Assets:

Assets include wealth, credits, and debts. The declaration of representatives’ credits and debts falls within this framework (Vakilian, 2009). Iranian laws and regulations state that the legislative branch has neglected the way MPs are expected to declare their assets as one of the rules of parliamentary conduct. Even the Parliamentary Mentoring of Representatives, approved on April 3, 2012 by the Islamic Consultative Assembly, has not dealt with asset declaration. Only Note 3 of Article 6 states that if it is proven that MPs have acquired illegal or illegitimate property, the case will be sent to the judiciary for further investigations. However, the relevant rules and regulations have specified no clear mechanism for discovering illegal and unjust increase in assets of MPs, and the legislator has discussed this matter without preamble.

9. Obligation to Declare Gifts and Travel Expenses:

At first glance, it appears that declarations of gifts and travel expenses cannot be considered a regular declaration of interest. However, MPs should be required to declare the gifts or travel expenses they receive. Declaration of gifts, travel expenses, and donors is aimed at preventing the influx of donors into the parliament. Concerns regarding the donation of such gifts and travel funds are primarily related to the lobbying groups that extra-parliamentary groups and institutions establish with MPs to advance their own interests in legislative and regulatory areas. This is why the gifts and travel expenses received by MPs are considered a major concern in this regard (Lindbergh, 2009).

10. Mechanisms for Supervising the Principle of:

The extension of the principle of Barring MPs from Additional Employment to the parliamentary law stems from the view that parliamentary representation is itself considered a full-time job and that MPs should fully focus on their duties and functions as representatives and avoid involvement in other businesses. Although MPs are banned from having some jobs and businesses, some countries recognize the second job of MPs provided that it is declared and registered (Ameri, 2011).

11. Obligation to Declare Extra-Parliamentary Employment:

Although MPs are banned from having certain jobs, there are other jobs that the MPs are authorized to undertake. John Alder believes that having extra-parliamentary jobs is one of the factors that endanger the independence of MPs. Although such a right is recognized for MPs, there should be a mechanism for supervising extra-parliamentary jobs and business activities of MPs. Therefore, if MPs undertake a job or business activity other than their representative duties, they should declare details such as title,

duration, services provided, and clients. However, it should be noted that in countries where such a mechanism is applied, MPs are not obliged to declare all of the details above and the job title suffices. In other countries, MPs are required to introduce their employers, either natural or judicial, and declare their income from extra-parliamentary jobs or business activities (Alder, 2002).

12. Obligation to Periodically Declare Interests:

MPs should periodically declare their interests before negotiations on a certain issue begin. When the personal interests of MPs are in contrast with the issues addressed in the parliament or specialized commissions, the MPs are required to report any possible conflict of interests to the relevant authorities (Lochrie, 2003). After declaring personal interests and reporting any possible conflict of interests, what matters is to exclude the MP from the topic under discussion, including negotiations and voting. That is why some argue that periodical declaration of interests can bar MPs from attending parliamentary meetings.

13. Restrictions on MPs on Receiving Extra-parliamentary Incomes:

When public officials act within their area of competence and receive benefits from a non-governmental source for their governmental action, their decisions and actions may be influenced. There is more of a concern regarding MPs since their functions are often related to the general public's interests. Therefore, it is reasonable to impose restrictions on receiving extra-parliamentary benefits and incomes (Clark, 2001). This aims to assess how MPs are prohibited from receiving extra-parliamentary benefits. In other words, considering the affirmative nature of mechanisms for declaration of interests, what is central to the previous discussion is that MPs should be obliged to declare the interests they are benefiting from. In the present discussion, however, if MPs are restricted or barred from enjoying certain interests, they should not receive such interests or exceed the specified limits, according to the prohibitive nature of such mechanisms (Amer, 2009).

14. Public Complaints of Violations of Codes of Conduct:

Supervision is known to have a precedential nature and is not feasible without being informed of its quality or quantity. Public supervision of MPs' adherence to or violations of professional codes of conduct is no exception. Therefore, there should be no hesitation in presenting a report to the public that takes into account the interests of MPs in parliamentary oversight practices. The only consideration in this regard is the scope of such supervision, since the disclosure of MPs' information will not yield the desired results without public access to relevant reports. In most countries, people can easily access MPs' financial information including assets, received gifts, travel expenses, and positions. Others, however, take great care in protecting the privacy of MPs. In Germany, for example, it is forbidden to disclose MPs' financial information (Alder, 2002).

III. Methodology:

The present study was applied in terms of objective and descriptive and convergent in nature. This study used two qualitative and quantitative methods of induction and comparison. The data was collected using field and survey methods, the Delphi method and a Likert scale questionnaire.

The statistical sample in the qualitative section consisted of 22 political and academic experts. The population in the quantitative section included visitors to the representative office in the third quarter

(autumn) of 2018, including 650 people. The snowball method and the convenient method were used for sampling in the qualitative and quantitative sections. To determine the minimal size of the sample, the saturation principle was used in the qualitative section and the Krejcie and Morgan table was used in the qualitative section. According to the population, this study required 242 samples, so 250 questionnaires were distributed to ensure a sufficient number was collected. These questionnaires were filled by present members of the sample. Finally, 246 questionnaires were returned to researchers. Among them, 2 questionnaires had abnormal and unreliable data and were thereby eliminated. In the end, 244 questionnaires were analyzed.

Validity and reliability were evaluated separately using various tests for structures and references.

The partial least squares regression method (PLS) was used for data analysis.

Findings:

The criteria and sub-criteria presented in Table 2 were extracted in the qualitative section using the three-stage Delphi method.

Table 1: The criteria and sub-criteria obtained from the Delphi method

Criteria	Sub-criteria
Competence	Vigilance
	Shrewdness
	Resourcefulness
Management skills	Planning
	Organizing
	Guidance and control
Devotion	Devotion (Applying religious commands and requirements in management)
Commitment	Dependence
	Accountability
	Resoluteness and prudence
Proficiency	Policymaking knowledge
	Ability to utilize technological knowledge
	Scientific expertise
Pursuing people's personal problems and requests	Addressing the livelihood of low-income families and orphans
	Creating new jobs and reducing unemployment
	Providing advances and bank loans
	Addressing the personal problems of all clients in executive agencies
	Following up on the implementation of development projects, investments, and enactments (hospitals, subway, factories, etc.) and monitoring their physical and financial progress
	Monitoring and correcting the irregularities

Pursuing regional problems and requirements	caused by decisions and measures of regional executives and political officials
	Introducing qualitative and quantitative regional capabilities and capacities to state and provincial officials
	Taking advantage of thoughtful, prudent, and expert regional consultants
	Effective attendance at meetings of administrative councils and specialized working groups for describing general policies and short-term and long-term government goals to regional officials and authorities
	Honesty and accountability to their clients and constituents

The findings were divided into two general categories. The first category was related to assessing the reliability of constructs and indicators and testing the model's fitness. Cronbach's alpha, hybrid coefficient, and factor loading were employed for this purpose (Houshangiet *al.*, 2016). The results showed that Cronbach's alpha coefficient and hybrid coefficient were greater than 0.718 and 0.83 for all constructs. Table 2 shows the values for the hybrid value and the Cronbach's alpha for each construct.

Table 2: Assessment of the reliability of variables

Variable	Cronbach's alpha	Hybrid coefficient
Proficiency	0.815	0.89
Commitment	0.819	0.892
Devotion	1	1
Management	0.718	0.839
Pursuit of people's personal problems and demands	0.73	0.83
Pursuit of regional problems and demands	0.799	0.857
Competence	0.767	0.867

Figure 1 shows the factor loading of variables. Factor loading is a value between 0 and 1. If the factor loading is less than 0.3, there is a weak correlation between variables and it is disregarded. In addition, a factor loading between 0.3 and 0.6 is acceptable, while one greater than 0.6 is favorable (Houshangiet

al., 2017). The factor loading of all research variables was greater than the minimum of 0.3, which indicates that the research variables had an acceptable level of reliability.

In partial least squares structural equation modeling, the Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value is employed to assess the model's fitness. Developed by Stone and Geisser (1975), this index represents an evaluation criterion for the cross-validated predictive relevance of the PLS path model. The Stone-Geisser's Q^2 value for the endogenous variable in this study (citizens' regional and local expectations of the MPs) was 0.327.

The second set of findings relates to testing the structural model and the research hypotheses. To this end, the path and determination coefficients were calculated in SmartPLS using PLS regression. The path coefficient indicates the share of each predictive variable in determining the criterion variable variance (Fazliet *al.*, 2013). Table 3 presents path coefficients and T-value along with the results of hypotheses testing. In addition, figures 1 and 2 show the SmartPLS outputs.

Table 3: Results of testing the hypotheses

Variables	Path coefficient	T-value	Result
Pursuit of regional problems and requirements- Citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs	0.318	13466	Confirmed
Pursuit of people's personal problems and requests- Citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs	0.210	13143	Confirmed
Competence- Citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs	0.168	10901	Confirmed
Commitment- Citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs	0.200	10681	Confirmed
Proficiency- Citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs	0.181	9901	Confirmed
Management skills- Citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs	0.178	9557	Confirmed
Devotion- Citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs	0.045	4683	Confirmed

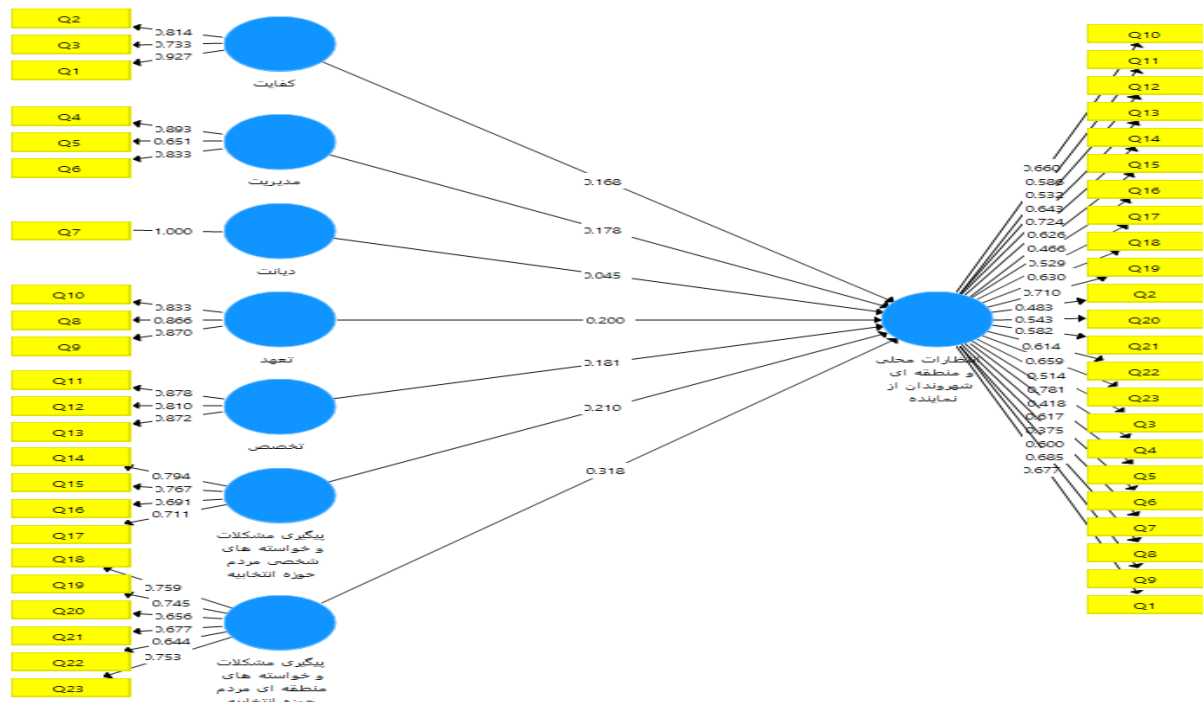


Figure 1: Path and determination coefficients between the research variables

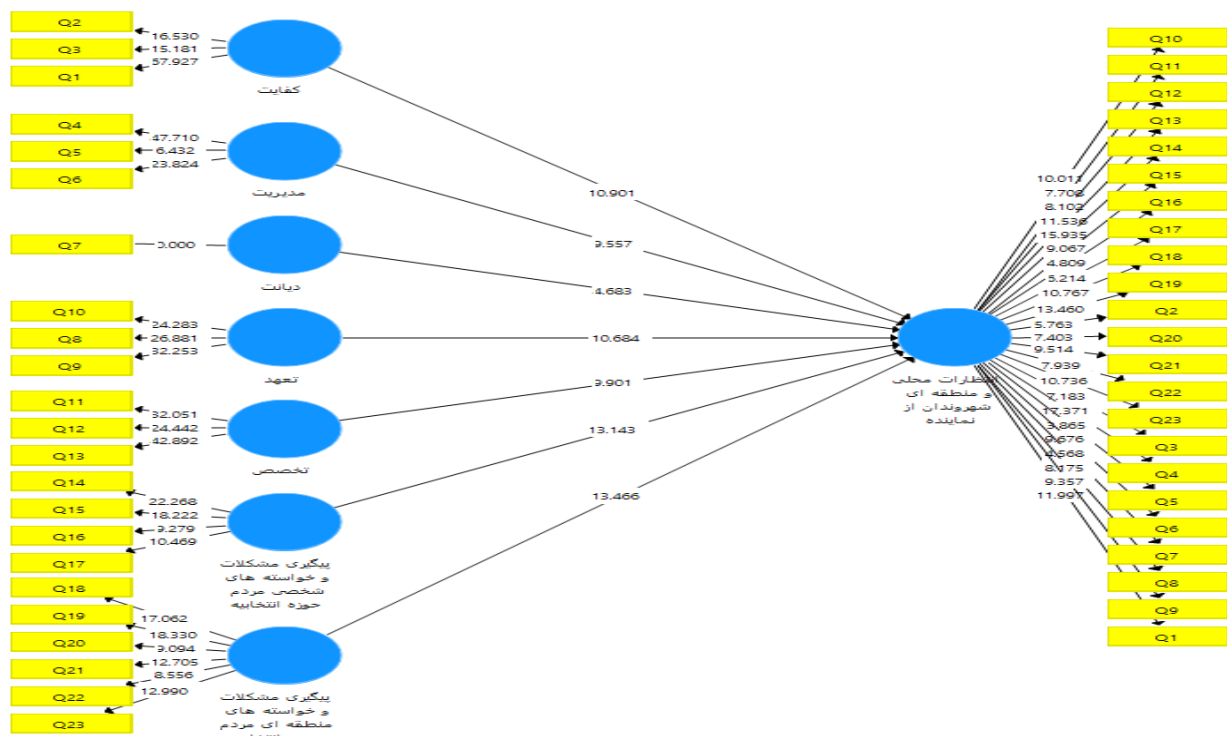


Figure 2: T-values between the research variables

IV. Conclusion and recommendations:

Result 1: MP Competence has a significant effect on citizens' local and regional expectations.

The results showed that the path coefficient for the relationship between MP competence and citizens' local and regional expectations was 0.168, which indicates a direct relationship. Since the test statistic (10.901) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 5% degree of confidence, one can conclude that the correlation between these two variables was statistically significant. With a path coefficient of 0.168, "competence" ranked sixth among the citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs. This reveals the low importance of MPs' competence to citizens visiting the MP's office in the town under study. However, it should be noted that there is a slight difference between management skills, proficiency, and competence. This is consistent with Hamilton's (2000) findings, who stated that the constitution is responsible for approving the nomination of individuals for the federal office according to the affirmation of such agreements with an executive order by a federal judge. Candidates are required to provide proven executive competence to be confirmed eligible for the Senate.

Result 2: Management skills of MPs have a significant effect on citizens' local and regional expectations.

The results showed the path coefficient for the relationship between MP management skills and citizens' local and regional expectations to be 0.178, which indicates a direct correlation. Since the test statistic (9.557) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 5% degree of confidence, one can conclude that the correlation between these two variables was statistically significant. With a path coefficient of 0.178, "management skills" ranked fifth among the citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs. This suggests the moderate importance of MPs' management skills to citizens who visit their office in the town under study. Hosseinpour (2016) concluded that there is a direct relationship between people's electoral expectations and behavior and MPs' management records and policies, which is consistent with the findings of the present study.

Result 3: Devotion of MPs has a significant effect on citizens' local and regional expectations.

The results showed that the path coefficient for the relationship between the devotion of MPs and citizens' local and regional expectations to be 0.045, which indicates a direct correlation. Since the test statistic (4.483) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 5% degree of confidence, one can be concluded that the correlation between these two variables was statistically significant. With a path coefficient of 0.045, "devotion" ranked seventh among the citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs. This suggests the very low importance of the MP's devotion to citizens who visit the MP's office in the town under study. Babivand (2001) reported that MPs' belief in, and performance of, religious practices were important to most respondents.

Results 4: MPs' commitment has a significant effect on citizens' local and regional expectations.

The results showed the path coefficient for the relationship between the commitment of MPs and citizens' local and regional expectations to be 0.200, which indicates a direct correlation. Since the test statistic (10.684) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 5% degree of confidence, one can conclude that the correlation between these two variables was statistically significant. With a path coefficient of 0.200, "commitment" ranked third among the citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs. This suggests the considerable importance of MPs' commitment to citizens who visit the MP's office in the town under study. Hosseinpour (2016) stated that people are more willing to vote for

parliamentary candidates who are responsible for them and appear committed and accountable, which is consistent with the findings of the present study.

Result 5: MP proficiency has a significant effect on citizens' local and regional expectations.

The results showed the path coefficient for the relationship between MPs' proficiency and citizens' local and regional expectations to be 0.181, which indicates a direct relationship. Since the test statistic (9.901) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 5% error level, one can conclude that the correlation between these two variables was statistically significant. With a path coefficient of 0.181, "proficiency" ranked fourth among the citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs. This reveals the moderate importance of MP proficiency to citizens who visit the MP's office in the town under study. In his study of the Chaloos constituency, Lashki (2009) concluded that the majority of people regarded higher education and expertise as greatly important for parliamentary candidates, which is consistent with the findings of the present study.

Result 6: Pursuing people's personal problems and demands by MPs has a significant effect on citizens' local and regional expectations.

The results showed the path coefficient for the relationship between pursuing people's personal problems and demands by MPs and citizens' local and regional expectations to be 0.210, which indicates a direct correlation. Since the test statistic (13.143) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 5% degree of confidence, it can be concluded that the correlation between these two variables was statistically significant. With a path coefficient of 0.210, "pursuit of people's personal problems and requests by MPs" ranked second among the citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs. This shows the significant importance of MPs' follow up of people's personal problems and requests to citizens who visit the MP's office in the town under study. Consistent with the findings of this study, Hosseinpour (2016) reported that the respondents expected their constituency's MPs to always work toward solving people's problems and meeting their demands.

Result 7: Pursuing regional problems and requirements by MPs has a significant effect on citizens' local and regional expectations.

The results showed the path coefficient for the relationship between MPs' pursuit of regional problems and requirements and citizens' local and regional expectations to be 0.318, which indicates a direct correlation. Since the test statistic (13.466) was greater than the critical t-value (1.96) at the 5% degree of confidence, one can conclude that the correlation between these two variables was statistically significant. With a path coefficient of 0.318, "MPs follow upon regional problems and requirements" ranked first among the citizens' local and regional expectations of MPs. This shows the very special importance of MPs following up on regional problems and requirements to citizens who visit the MP's office in the town under study. Hosseinpour's (2016) inferential findings indicate that people are looking for parliamentary candidates who always follow up on public demands and regional development projects, which is consistent with the findings of the present study.

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