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CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AMONG IRANIANS IN THE UNITED STATES

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Since the time of de Tocqueville, civic engagement has been a central focus of sociological and political analyses of US society. Not surprisingly, however, there is a relative paucity of literature that studies the civic engagement of non-white, immigrant, and/or refugee communities in the US. The purpose of this study is two-fold: (a) to assess the civic-mindedness (civic attitudes) and level of civic engagement among Iranian immigrants and refugees in the US; and (b) to explain what factors are associated with civic mindedness and civic engagement within this group. The researchers recruited 52 participants and administered an internet-based, four-section questionnaire. They found very strong civic attitudes, as well as a high level of engagement in a variety of different civic activities. Applying multiple linear regression analysis, the results indicated that female participants and those with higher English language proficiency have a significantly higher degree of civic mindedness. Additionally, civic mindedness was the only significant factor associated with the level of civic engagement. Stronger civic mindedness among women is an opportunity to invest in civic activities in society. Improving English language competency and having flyers/prints about civic knowledge and civic engagement opportunities in refugees' and immigrants' native languages is critical.

Keywords: civic attitudes, civic mindedness, civic engagement, immigrants, refugees

Introduction

There have been many studies conducted regarding the needs and challenges of refugees and immigrants in the areas of health, employment, education, integration, and language (Bevelander, 2011; Bishop & Makki Alamdari, 2018; Kanno & Varghese, 2010; Lundborg, 2013; Schweitzer, Brough, Vromans, & Asic-Kobe, 2011). However, more studies need to be conducted regarding their strengths and capacities. One interesting topic in this case is how the diverse members of this population can benefit one another and the larger society. In this vein, this current study focuses on civic engagement. The terms civic engagement and civic involvement are used interchangeably throughout this study. Civic engagement is a concept centered around collective action to address public concerns and community challenges (Checkoway, 2009; Ehrlich, 2000; Lerner, 2004) and can be beneficial at the individual and community levels. It can increase one's social network, improve communication skills, boost confidence, and improve one's life satisfaction (Chan, 2011; Makki Alamdari & Jalaiepour, 2012; Weng & Lee, 2016). According to Gele and Harsløf (2012), civic engagement contributes the most to the categories of health and well-being. Civic engagement can especially be useful for refugees and immigrants, as it can aid them in adjusting to a new homeland and gaining social support, which can lead to improved mental health and successful integration in a new community (Chan, 2011; Handy & Greenspan, 2009; Weng & Lee, 2016). At the community level, civic engagement can influence improvements in democracy and citizenship, enhance communities' services and outcomes, and foster society's development process (Malik & Waglé, 2002; Putnam, 1995; Sundeen, Garcia, & Raskoff, 2009; Tucker & Santiago, 2013). Refugees' and immigrants' wants and interests can be supported through civic engagement, leading to influences in decision-making on local, state, and national levels (Tucker & Santiago, 2013).

Given the significance of civic engagement, the number of existing studies in this area for refugees and immigrants is limited (Tucker & Santiago, 2013; Weng & Lee, 2016). Studying civic engagement among immigrants and refugees could significantly contribute to this field's repertoire of literature. The specific group of interest for this study is Iranian immigrants and refugees in the United States (US). This population is not frequently studied (Zarpour, 2013). The purpose of this study is two-tiered: a descriptive purpose to assess the level of civic engagement among the Iranian diaspora in the US and to document their attitudes toward civic engagement or level of "civic mindedness" and an

analytical purpose to examine what factors are associated with civic attitudes and civic engagement among this group. Findings can be beneficial in improving this group's and community's well-being.

Background

The Iranian diaspora in the US is highly educated, entrepreneurial, and successful in business and science (Amanat, 1993; Hakimzadeh & Dixon, 2006; McIntosh, 2004). Although they are economically and educationally integrated into the US, they strongly maintain their language and cultural identity (Zarpour, 2013). Jalali (2005) provided helpful information regarding the unique characteristics of Iranian culture. In this culture, collectivism is valued more than individualism (Hakimzadeh & Dixon, 2006). An important piece of information to keep in mind is that culture has a large influence on common everyday life for Iranians. For instance, being welcoming and hospitable to others is viewed as being vital. Likewise, treating others with respect, particularly in public, is highly regarded in Iranian culture. Parents are viewed as key components in maintaining the family unit and keeping everyone united. Among siblings, it is common for a brother to be protective of his sister, despite her age (Jalali, 2005). In terms of adolescents' decision-making, it is common for parents, teachers, or religious officials to partake in the decision-making process when it comes to pursuing education, professional work, or getting married (Kharkhurin & Samadpour Motalleebi, 2008). For Iranian immigrants who are new to the US, the acculturation process can be quite arduous, as many adjustments typically need to be made, including language, behavior, and social adaptations (Ghaffarian, 1998). One might feel as though a part of their culture has been abandoned or lost after this process (Ghaffarian, 1998; Hormozi, Miller, & Banford, 2018). Refugees, in particular, can face trauma prior to and after fleeing their native countries to relocate to the US (Hormozi et al., 2018). According to a national survey conducted in the US, Islam is the most common religion (36%) among this group (Zogby Research Services, 2012). Given the anti-immigration current political climate, as well as negative perceptions regarding Muslims' civic participation in the US, the importance of the current study is substantial (Emami, 2018) as it can underline strengths and contributions of this sub-group of immigrants and refugees who have a considerable number of Muslims.

Literature Review

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica (2019), civic engagement is defined as a “broad set of practices and attitudes of involvement in social and political life that converge to increase the health of a democratic society.” Civic engagement can consist of the following diverse activities: political participation, volunteerism, organizational membership, monetary donation, community problem-solving, staying informed about the community, helping in one’s neighborhood, and community participation (Bobek, Zaff, Li, & Lerner, 2009; Finlay, Flanagan, & Wray-Lake, 2011; Zaff, Boyd, Li, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010).

Per a review of the existing literature about refugees’ or immigrants’ civic engagement, some literature examines the outcomes of civic engagement for the target group and factors (e.g., age, acculturation, gender, and identity) that can impact it (Chan, 2011; Handy & Greenspan, 2009, Sundeen et al., 2009; Tucker & Santiago, 2013; Weng & Lee, 2016). For instance, Chan (2011) studied the barriers, facilitators, and impacts of civic engagement and indicated that being in a network of civically engaged people and feeling a sense of common identity can provide an enabling environment that helps Asian college students with taking part in community service, voting, and activities related to student organizations. Weng and Lee (2016) studied immigrants and refugees from multiple countries and indicated that they tended to feel highly obligated to give back to their ethnic community while they assimilated into their new community. Conceptualizing civic engagement as political views, school investment, and community participation, Tucker and Santiago’s (2013) study focused on predictors, levels, and forms of civic engagement among Latino immigrants in the US and showed there was no significant difference among immigrants with different household income and employment status regarding volunteering (i.e., a form of civic engagement). Handy and Greenspan (2009) conducted a mixed-methods study in which they examined benefits and determinants impacting volunteering among 16 different ethnicities within four Canadian cities and reported immigrants who were more established and had attained higher levels of education tended to volunteer more frequently. There is a limitation to Handy and Greenspan’s (2009) work, as they considered volunteering to be the sole aspect of the concept of civic engagement, meaning it was being viewed from a narrow lens.

Despite the important and helpful information these studies provided, none of them emphasized or contributed to the existing literature surrounding immigrants’ and refugees’ civic engagement

patterns or their attitudes toward civic engagement, especially among the Middle Eastern population, including Iranians. This study is centered around the need to address this gap through examining Iranian immigrants' and refugees' civic engagement types, civic attitudes, and potential factors associated with their civic engagement and attitudes. These researchers considered key aspects of civic engagement, which include the following: staying informed regarding community and community participation, including participation in community events and meetings and volunteerism in community services, community problem-solving, and membership in organizations. The potential factors that were considered in this study included gender, parental status (having a child), health status, and English language proficiency level. Examining a bigger number of factors was out of the scope of this study. The factors of gender, health, and language are frequently highlighted in the existing literature as critical factors in refugees' and immigrants' well-being and integration (Ainamani, Elbert, Olema, & Hecker, 2020; Makki Alamdari, 2020b). Parental status is a factor less studied with this population, and therefore, it is imperative to examine. In the following paragraphs, the authors discuss the literature around these four factors in relation to civic engagement. The research questions are how civic attitudes and civic engagement are among Iranian immigrants and refugees in the US and what factors are associated with the civic attitudes and the level of engagement.

Gender

Mesch, Rooney, Steinberg, and Denton (2006), Bryant, Jeon-Slaughter, Kang, and Tax (2003), as well as Sundeen et al. (2009) examined patterns of giving and volunteering among a variety of groups and reported women's greater likelihood to volunteer. Single women are also more likely to donate larger amounts of money for philanthropic purposes than single men (Mesch et al., 2006). The motivating factors for civic engagement vary between men and women, in general, and gender should be taken into consideration when assessing this type of topic. Women are reportedly more likely to donate money for the purpose of influencing social change, whereas men are more likely to donate in order to bolster their own status (Mesch et al., 2006). There is a gap in the literature when it comes to the experiences of Arab Muslims, especially women, within the US with regard to civic engagement (Read, 2014). Read (2014) used national survey data with more than one thousand Arab Muslims in the US to examine gender differences in civic engagement and reported insignificant differences in engagement level

in most categories of civic organizations. Women, though, were more likely to participate in school/youth organizations, whereas men were found more civically engaged in professional organizations.

English Language Proficiency

Unsurprisingly, local language proficiency is associated with higher levels of civic engagement (Baer, 2008; Boyd, 2009). This is due to having the ability to successfully reach out and communicate with others, whether it is for volunteering purposes, community involvement, or politically motivated reasons. Regardless of the individual situation, English language proficiency is obviously a key ability that needs to be acknowledged when it comes to people's ability to be civically involved. By understanding the language that is spoken in one's host country, immigrants can be knowledgeable about employment options, schools they or their children can attend, social service agency locations, along with a host of other resources. This type of knowledge is very advantageous when living in a new, foreign area. Language proficiency's correlation with civic engagement was assessed in Canada via the Ethnic Diversity Survey (EDS) (Boyd, 2009). This survey had 42,476 participants. The survey's civic engagement-related questions centered on asking respondents about their participation in differing organizations, groups, and voting. The findings from this study indicated that lower levels of official language proficiency indicated lower levels of civic engagement (Boyd, 2009).

Having Children

Bryant et al. (2003), as well as Sundeen et al. (2009), conceptualized civic engagement as donating money and time and indicated parents with children are more likely to volunteer. Rotolo and Wilson (2007), on the other hand, discussed the difficulty that having younger children, particularly preschool-aged children can have on mothers having the time and ability to participate in civic activities. They mentioned how working part-time can be ideal in terms of mothers having access to their social network, yet still being able to take part in volunteer activities, if desired (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007). These findings are important to take into account when considering the time and responsibility that innately come along with parenthood. In other words, depending on their home life, civic engagement might be quite difficult for immigrants.

Health Status

It is important to consider facets of health when attributing their impact on civic engagement. The available literature connecting health with civic engagement is admittedly limited, according to Burden, Fletcher, Herd, Jones, and Moynihan (2017). Burden et al. (2017), though, used a longitudinal survey to analyze the linkage between cognitive and physical health with voting in elections and donating to political campaigns. These researchers reported that better cognitive and physical health indicated a minimal impact on making donations for political campaigns (Burden et al., 2017). Ding, Berry, and O'Brien (2015) assessed informal social connectedness, civic engagement, and political participation in Australia. They found that individuals who were mentally healthy were more likely to participate in community activities than those who were not mentally healthy (Ding et al., 2015).

Theoretical Frameworks*Social Network Theory*

Social Network Theory can be helpful for this study. This theory was established by Jacob Moreno (Daly, 2015) and emphasizes the importance of humans' personal relationships with others (Durland & Fredericks, 2005; Ehrich, Hansford, & Tennent, 2001; Krause, Croft, & James, 2007; Liu, Sidhu, Beacom, & Valente, 2017). People's unique "networks" consist of the individuals within their social groups (Liu et al., 2017; Specht, 1986). According to this theory, it is important for people to have social networks, as well as social resources (Ehrich et al., 2001). This theory relates to the current study because, for Iranian immigrants and refugees, it is undeniably vital to have a social network after leaving their homeland, as this could help them establish a sense of community in their adopted home. By expanding their social networks, they can enhance their individual well-being, improve their social integration into the new community, and increase their social resources, whether it comes to accessing community centers, recreational centers, or places of worship.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory espouses the notion that resources can be received via social relationships (Engbers & Rubin, 2018; Riedel, 2015). Social capital can be considered the trust, cohesion, and support that members

of one's social network provide for each other (Engbers & Rubin, 2018). Social Network Theory and Social Capital Theory are interrelated because the expansion and deepening of one's social network can help one increase her/his own social capital. These concepts directly relate to the basis of this research, as it explores civic engagement. It has been claimed that social capital among one's social network can directly have an effect on increasing one's own advancements in life, such as through work and money-earning opportunities (Engbers & Rubin, 2018; Riedel, 2015). For example, members of one's social network can spread relevant job openings via word of mouth (Riedel, 2015). Aside from helping with money-earning opportunities, increasing one's social capital through their social network can help immigrants psychologically, as having strong bonds or connections with others can raise one's self-image (Riedel, 2015).

Methods

Participants and Procedures

Inclusion criteria were immigrants and refugees from Iran who live in the US and are 18 years old or older. Being a permanent resident or a US citizen was another inclusion criterion. The ability to read the English language was an inclusion criterion as well. Due to inaccessibility of this group, the researchers applied non-probability sampling through convenience sampling. For the purpose of this study, an Internet-based survey was administered. Recruitment was implemented through two Facebook pages that belong to Iranian groups in different states throughout the US. One page is called Iranian Community, with more than 10,000 members, and the other is called Iranians of America, with more than 1,000 members. In this type of recruitment, it was not possible to identify the response rate, as the number of individuals who saw the messages was not easy to determine. Several screening questions were put at the beginning of the survey, and if respondents were eligible, a study information sheet was presented to them. After agreeing to participate, the main survey was shown to participants. Prior to conducting this study, the researchers obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to ensure the protection of the participants in this study. After the main flyer was posted to the Facebook pages, two reminders were posted throughout two sequential weeks. The researchers recruited 52 respondents. The lack of generalizability is a limitation, as the sample size was small, and the recruitment happened through Facebook pages. In this kind of recruitment, individuals who do not have

access to Facebook were excluded from participation, which poses a sampling bias.

Measure

The researchers developed four sections for the questionnaire. The first was to screen participants in terms of inclusion criteria. To screen eligibility, age was an open-ended question. Also, residency status with two options of either US citizen or permanent resident entered as a refugee versus non-refugee were included in the first section of the survey. Demographic questions were asked in the second section of the questionnaire. The third and fourth sections were, respectively, to measure civic attitudes, as well as level of civic engagement.

Demographic Questions

The researchers asked about gender with three options of male, female, and other. One open-ended question was included to measure the length of stay in the US. Participants were asked to indicate the year and month they entered the US. Their level of education was asked using a seven-point scale ranging from “less than high school” to a PhD-level degree. Parental status was measured using a question regarding whether the participant has a child. English language proficiency and health status were asked using a five-point Likert scale with options ranging from very poor to excellent.

Civic Mindedness

Attitudes toward civic engagement or “civic mindedness” was operationalized as sense of social responsibility and self-efficacy and measured using six statements. The statements were derived from existing scales developed by Bobek et al. (2009), Doolittle and Faul (2013), and Zaff et al. (2010). Example items included “I often think about doing things so that people in the future can have things better” (Zaff et al., 2010, p. 742) and “I can make a difference in my community” (Bobek et al., 2009, p. 620). Table 2 illustrates all the items. Face and content validity were confirmed using the feedback of experts in this field. For this purpose, the researchers consulted five academic colleagues who are familiar with the subject matter of civic engagement or Iranian culture. High internal consistency, Cronbach’s alpha of 0.85, was found for these items. A five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (code = 1) to strongly agree (code = 5) was applied. A

summary score was calculated for each participant. Higher scores indicated higher degrees of civic mindedness.

Level of Civic Engagement

Civic engagement was operationalized as any level of involvement in areas of staying informed about the community, helping neighbors, donating money, community problem-solving, volunteering, participation in community meetings, and membership in organizations during the past 12 months. Seven items were derived from the scales developed by Doolittle and Faul (2013), Finlay et al. (2011), Keeter, Jenkins, Zukin, and Andolina (2003), and Zaff et al. (2010) to measure this concept. If respondents had volunteer experience, they were asked to identify the area of volunteering. For this purpose, several options were provided, including child-related programs, health programs, refugee and immigrant services, educational programs, and homeless services (Keeter et al., 2003). Example items include “How often have you been a member of any organization?” (Keeter et al., 2003) and “How often have you participated in events, such as meetings, celebrations, or activities in the community?” (Finlay et al., 2011, p. 1732). The items are presented in Table 3. Consulting with experts in this subject matter, the researchers confirmed face and content validity. Cronbach’s alpha of 0.82 proved strong internal consistency. Using a five-point Likert scale, response choices were never (code = 1) to always (code = 5). A summary score was calculated for each participant. Higher scores indicated greater civic engagement. The questionnaire used for data collection was in English. These researchers did not use Persian as a survey language to decrease errors resulting from the translation process.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were reported for all variables (Table 1). Multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine factors associated with civic attitudes and civic involvement. Examining factors associated with civic attitudes, potential factors included in the regression model were gender, English language proficiency, health status, and parental status. Examining factors associated with civic involvement, a civic attitudes variable was also added to the model as an additional independent variable. Based on the number of participants (N = 52) and a statistical test of multiple linear regression, the study’s power is 0.57.

Results

Study Participants

Overall, 52 Iranian immigrants and refugees participated in the study. The study is admittedly small. For those participants who might be inaccessible, it is also a hard-to-reach population in terms of recruitment efforts, as they could understandably be wary of the research process (Fete, Aho, Benoit, Cloos, & Ridde, 2019). Forty-two (80.8%) of them migrated to the US as non-refugees, while the rest entered as refugees. Respondents had an average age of 37.6-years-old. Females (55.1%) constituted the majority of the participants. About 72% of the respondents had no children. Approximately 13.1 years was the average length of stay in the US. The majority of the respondents had a master or doctorate level of education (54.0%), a high degree of English language proficiency (86.0%), and good or excellent health status (82.0%). The respondents’ demographic information is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Valid N (%)	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Permanent resident/ U.S. citizen entered as					
a non-refugee	42(80.8%)				
a refugee	10(19.2%)				
Age	52(100%)	21	62	37.6	9.6
Gender	49				
Female	27(55.1%)				
Having children	50				
Yes	14(28%)				
Length of stay (year)	48	0.3	39.2	13.1	11.9
Education					
High school/ GED	1(2.0%)				
Some college	3(6.0%)				
Bachelor’s degree	19(38.0%)				
Graduate degree	27(54.0%)				

Health status					
	Excellent	16(32.0%)			
	Good	25(50.0%)			
	Fair	8(16.0%)			
	Poor	1(2.0%)			
English language proficiency					
	Excellent	18(36.0%)			
	Good	25(50.0%)			
	Fair	7(14.0%)			
Civic mindedness		52	10.0	30.0	25.5 3.9
Civic engagement		51	11.0	33.0	21.7 5.6

Civic Attitudes

The average of civic attitudes among participants was 25.5 (N = 52; SD = 3.9) (Table 1). The potential response range for attitudes was between 6 and 30. This number indicates very strong civic attitudes. Table 2 presents the mean, frequency, and standard deviation (SD) of each item. The items in the table are ordered in terms of their popularity. Each has a mean (M) equal or greater than 4.0 and is endorsed by at least 73% of the participants.

Civic Engagement

In this study, civic engagement could range from 7 to 35. The participants reported a high level of civic involvement (N = 51, M = 21.7, SD = 5.6) (Table 1). Table 3 illustrates the mean, frequency, and SD for each item. They are sorted by the mean, which is between 2.2 and 3.7. Staying informed about the community and donating money were the most frequently cited types of civic engagement. Twenty-seven (52.9%) had volunteering experiences in community services during the past 12 months. Many of them were a volunteer in multiple areas of service. As presented in Table 4, the most popular areas of volunteering were, respectively, educational programs (N = 11, 40.7%), services for poor or homeless individuals (N = 10, 37.0%), children’s programs (N = 10, 37.0%), and health programs (N = 8, 29.6%).

Table 2
Attitudes toward Civic Engagement

Items	Frequency			M(SD)	Valid N
	Disagree/ Strongly disagree	Undecided	Agree/ Strongly agree		
It is important to “make sure all people are treated fairly” ¹	---	3(5.8%)	49(94.2%)	4.6(0.6)	52
It is important to “make the world a better place to live in” ²	3(5.8%)	---	49(94.2%)	4.5(0.9)	52
“I often think about doing things so that people in the future can have things better” ³	2(3.8%)	4(7.7%)	46(88.4%)	4.3(0.8)	52
It is important to help out at your local community. ⁴	2(3.8%)	7(13.5%)	43(82.7%)	4.2(0.9)	52
“I can make a difference in my community” ⁵	3(5.8%)	7(13.5%)	42(80.8%)	4.0(0.9)	52
“I have a responsibility to help the poor and the hungry” ⁶	3(5.8%)	11(21.2%)	38(73.1%)	4.0(0.9)	52

Table 3
Frequency and Type of Civic Engagement

Items	Frequency				M(SD)	Valid N
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often/ Always		
<i>How often have you:</i>						
stayed informed of what is going	3(5.9%)	4(7.8%)	12(23.5%)	32(62.8%)	3.7(1.1)	51

¹ Zaff et al., 2010, p.742.
² Zaff et al., 2010, p.742.
³ Zaff et al., 2010, p.742.
⁴ Zaff et al., 2010.
⁵ Bobek et al., 2009, p.620.
⁶ Doolittle & Faul, 2013, p.4.

on in your community? ⁷						
donated money to groups? ⁸	3(5.9%)	10(19.6%)	13(25.5%)	25(49.0%)	3.4(1.2)	51
helped out your neighbors? ⁹	2(3.9%)	12(23.5%)	17(33.3%)	20(39.2%)	3.2(1.1)	51
been a member of any organization? ¹⁰	5(9.8%)	12(23.5%)	15(29.4%)	19(37.3%)	3.2(1.3)	51
“participated in events such as meetings, celebrations, or activities in the community?” ¹¹	1(2.0%)	11(21.6%)	23(45.1%)	16(31.3%)	3.1(0.9)	51
“worked together informally with someone or some group to solve a problem in the community where you live?” ¹²	6(11.8%)	10(19.6%)	25(49.0%)	10(19.6%)	2.9(1.1)	51
volunteered in community services for no pay? ¹³	24(47.1%)	5(9.8%)	11(21.6%)	11(21.5%)	2.2(1.4)	51

⁷ Doolittle & Faul, 2013.

⁸ Keeter et al., 2003.

⁹ Zaff et al., 2010.

¹⁰ Keeter et al., 2003.

¹¹ Finlay et al., 2011, p.1732.

¹² Keeter et al., 2003, p.21.

¹³ Keeter et al., 2003.

Table 4
Volunteering by Areas (Total N=27)

Volunteering Area	N(%)	Volunteering Area	N(%)
Educational programs	11(40.7%)	Refugees' and immigrants' services	5(18.5%)
Services for poor or homeless individuals	10(37.0%)	Youth programs	3(11.1%)
Children programs	10(37.0%)	Religious groups	3(11.1%)
Health programs	8(29.6%)	Environmental programs	3(11.1%)
International charity services	6(22.2%)	Labor unions	2(7.4%)
Programs for the elderly	5 (18.5%)	---	

Factors Associated with Civic Attitudes

To examine potential factors (i.e., gender, language proficiency, health status, and parental status) associated with civic attitudes, multiple linear regression analysis was conducted. The assumptions of this test were met. The civic attitude variable was measured at an interval level, had a linear relationship with the independent variables, and had normal distribution. The assumptions of independence of observation, multicollinearity, and no outliers were all met. However, the assumption of homoscedasticity was not met, which needs other researchers' caution in interpreting the data. Pearson bivariate correlation was also examined (Table 5). The results showed that the civic attitudes variable is correlated with health status ($r(50) = 0.4, p < 0.01$) and English language proficiency ($r(50) = 0.5, p < 0.01$).

Table 5
Pearson Correlation

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.Gender ¹	1	0.1	-0.1	-0.4**	0.1	0.1
2.Having children ²		1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
3.Health			1	0.5**	0.4**	0.3*
4.English language				1	0.5**	0.1
5.Attitude					1	0.6**
6.Engagement						1

Notes. ** p<0.01; * p<0.05.

1.Gender (Male=0; Female=1).

2.Having child (No child=0; Have child=1)

The regression model was significant ($F(4, 44) = 6.6, p < 0.01$) and explained 37% of variance in attitudes by including these four independent variables ($r = 0.6, r^2 = 0.37$). English language proficiency ($t = 3.3, \text{Beta} = 0.5, p < 0.01$) and gender ($t = 2.8, \text{Beta} = 0.4, p < 0.01$) were significant factors associated with civic attitudes (Table 6). The coefficients show that for each unit increment in language proficiency, civic attitudes improve 2.3 units. Further, women have a 2.3 units stronger civic attitude compared to men.

Table 6
Regression Analysis (Dependent variable: Civic Attitudes)

	<i>B</i>	<i>Std. Error (SE)</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Gender	2.3	0.8	0.4	2.8	P<0.01
Parental status	-0.4	0.9	-0.1	-0.5	0.6
Health status	1.1	0.6	0.2	1.8	0.1
English language proficiency	2.3	0.7	0.5	3.3	P<0.01

Factors Associated with the Level of Civic Engagement

To examine factors associated with the level of civic engagement, in addition to the aforementioned factors, a civic attitudes variable was included. The assumptions of the multiple linear regression test were checked. The level of civic engagement was measured at an interval level and had a normal distribution. There was a linear relationship between

civic engagement and the other variables. Other assumptions, including independence of observation, no outliers, and multicollinearity, were met. The assumption of homoscedasticity was not met. Therefore, researchers should be cautious in interpreting results. Pearson correlation was examined (Table 5) and showed that frequency of civic engagement was correlated with health status ($r(49) = 0.3, p < 0.05$) and civic attitudes ($r(51) = 0.6, p < 0.01$). The regression model was significant ($F(5,42) = 5.3, p < 0.01$) and explained 39% of variance in level of civic engagement with variables of gender, parental status, health status, English language proficiency, and civic attitudes ($r = 0.6, r^2 = 0.39$). Civic attitude was the only significant factor associated with the level of civic engagement ($t = 4.2, \text{Beta} = 0.6, p < 0.01$). For a one-unit improvement in civic attitudes, the level of civic involvement increases by 1.2 units (Table 7).

Table 7
Regression Analysis (Dependent variable: Civic Engagement)

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Gender	-0.4	1.6	0.0	-0.2	0.8
Parental status	0.9	1.5	0.1	0.6	0.6
Health status	1.1	1.1	0.1	1.0	0.3
English language proficiency	-1.8	1.4	-0.2	-1.3	0.2
Civic attitudes	1.2	0.3	0.6	4.2	P<0.01

Discussion

These researchers examined the status of and factors associated with civic attitudes and engagement among Iranian immigrants and refugees in the US. This was a unique study, as an understudied sub-population of immigrants and refugees were assessed. Also, the study was novel in terms of the varying factors that were investigated. Examining civic attitudes, as opposed to just physical activities, and assessing the concept of “civic engagement” in multiple dimensions also made the study unique. Strong attitudes toward civic engagement were reported by the participants. Other studies with refugees and immigrants in this area indicated similar results (Jensen, 2008; Makki Alamdari, 2020a). The respondents also demonstrated great levels of civic engagement, especially in staying informed about the community, as well as monetary donations. The existing literature around immigrants’ and refugees’ civic participation confirms these findings (Jensen, 2008; Makki Alamdari, Alhajeri, & Kim, 2016; Read, 2014; Tucker & Santiago, 2013; Weng &

Lee, 2016). Studies with the Iranian diaspora also support these results. Elahi and Karim (2011) and Mostofi (2003) discussed that although Iranians in the US maintain their cultural identity in the private domain, in the public domain, they embrace the American civic culture and are civically engaged. Those participants who expressed volunteering experiences during the last year highlighted educational programs, services for poor or homeless individuals, and children's programs as the most popular areas of volunteering. This level of civic engagement of Iranian immigrants and refugees in the US highlights that this group is not isolated and contributes to the well-being of the community that can mutually benefit these individuals as well. This also resonates with Iranians' cultural background, which acknowledges collectivism, respect, and hospitality (Hakimzadeh & Dixon, 2006; Jalali, 2005).

Gender and English language proficiency were associated with attitudes toward civic engagement. These findings are in line with the existing literature. Crocetti, Jahromi, and Meeus (2012), Mesch et al. (2006), and Luengo Kanacri et al. (2016) studied civic attitudes, giving and volunteering, and money donation patterns, respectively. They reported that women are more likely to have higher scores in such activities than men. Similarly, Emami (2018) studied civic engagement among 350 Iranians in the US and reported that women are more involved than men in civic advocacy groups. In addition, Handy and Greenspan (2009) and Tucker and Santiago (2013) studied minor ethnicities in Canada and Latino immigrants in the US, respectively, and found a significant relation between newcomers' integration in the new community and civic engagement. Taking into account local language proficiency as a dimension of integration (Lochmann, Rapoport, & Speciale, 2019), the current study's finding is consistent with the existing literature. Other studies also showed the positive association of local language proficiency with refugees' and immigrants' civic involvement (Boyd, 2009; Makki Alamdari, 2017; Van Londen, Phalet, & Hagedoorn, 2007). This finding becomes more important considering it is in alignment with what Hakimzade and Dixon (2006) reported. Compared to other foreign-born people, Iranians in the US have higher rates of speaking non-English languages at home (Hakimzade & Dixon, 2006). Despite strong educational and economic integration of Iranians into the US, they keep their language and cultural heritage (Zarpour, 2013). Higher language proficiency exposes newcomers to opportunities in which they can communicate and explore civic engagement opportunities in the host community. Likewise, this ability can help them engage with other community members and broaden their existing social networks, which is in alignment with Social Network Theory.

Ultimately, the members of one's social network can help increase social capital. Health status and having children were found insignificant in association with civic attitudes and behavior. One limitation of the study was the lack of identifying if the children were dependent or school-aged, as studies showed the status of children is significantly associated with parents' civic engagement (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007).

Further, civic attitudes were associated with the level of civic engagement among Iranian immigrants and refugees. Many studies have shown a mutual relationship between civic attitudes and behavior (Crocetti et al., 2012; Gastil & Xenos, 2010). Ahmadu, Don, and Hamzat (2016) and Hope and Jagers (2014) specifically articulated the significance of attitudes in the level of civic participation in their studies with populations in Nigeria and the US. O'Leary (2014) also reported that not only did attitudes improve the level of civic engagement, but involvement in civic activities also enhanced civic attitudes because of exposure to diversity.

This study has important implications. It is positive that this population is seemingly willingly and open to be civically engaged, as this can bring benefits to their lives, including expanding their social networks and increasing their social capital. In an ethnography study with Iranians in the US, Zarpour (2013) highlighted how ethnic organizations act as activators for their civic engagement and political participation through providing a learning opportunity. In this vein, Iranian organizations in the US can enhance the target group's civic attitudes, which will lead to higher levels of civic engagement. Stronger civic attitudes among women is an opportunity to invest civic activities in society. Encouraging women to involve male members of their family or social networks in civic and community participation is recommended. Further, more awareness-raising around civic attitudes should be considered among men.

In addition, improving English language competency among immigrants and refugees should be a high priority. Given that refugees are forced to migrate, and migration is not their choice, refugee resettlement programs should put more effort on effective English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. Whether English-speaking paid staff, volunteers, or other members of the Iranian immigrant and refugee communities are assisting with efforts to improve the individuals' English-speaking capabilities, this is of the utmost importance. Consistent with what Social Network Theory and Social Capital Theory espouse, these types of efforts could help members of the Iranian immigrant and refugee communities to broaden their own networks, as well as assist them with obtaining skills that would enable them to take

the next steps in becoming more civically involved. Having flyers/prints about civic knowledge and civic engagement opportunities in refugees' and immigrants' native languages is critical, as this can address some language barriers and improve their civic knowledge and attitudes, leading to higher levels of civic engagement. Finally, some forms of civic engagement, such as volunteering or informal community problem-solving, need more attention among immigrants and refugees. Some areas of volunteering, such as labor unions or environmental programs are the least popular. Thus, more awareness around the importance of such programs should be developed.

The study had some limitations. The researchers examined a few factors including gender, language proficiency, health status, and parental status. There are many other potential factors that may be associated with civic attitudes and behavior, such as personal and social capital, age, family income, networks of civically engaged friends, etc. (Chan, 2011; Sundeen et al., 2009; Van Londen et al., 2007). Further, this study did not take into account a comprehensive list of all forms of civic engagement, including political participation. As mentioned, this study included a small sample size. The recruited sample was not diverse, as only 19% were refugees. Additionally, the majority reported a high level of education, English language competency, and health status. The researchers did not provide incentives for participants; thus, it is more likely that those who responded to the survey had a higher degree of civic attitudes. These indicate that the sample was not representative of the actual population. Social desirability bias is one limitation of the study. That is, participants were more likely to respond to the questions in a way that is desired by society. The measure used for data gathering could have had stronger forms of validity, such as construct or factor validity.

For future studies, it is recommended to conduct qualitative studies to explore how civic attitudes among refugees and immigrants can be improved. It would also be interesting to investigate the areas of civic engagement that are of interest to this population. Discovering the barriers and facilitators of civic participation among refugees and immigrants is also critical to examine. Conducting studies using the native language(s) of immigrants and refugees has some advantages, such as recruiting those who may lack English language competency and, therefore, having participants who are more diverse. A pilot study, especially when the research involves working with minority groups, is recommended to ensure the cultural/contextual validity and reliability of the survey.

Conclusion

These researchers examined civic attitudes and civic engagement among Iranian immigrants and refugees in the US and reported very strong civic attitudes, as well as a high degree of engagement in a variety of civic activities. They also found English language proficiency as a significant factor associated with civic attitudes. Civic attitudes were found to be significantly higher among women than men, as well as a significant factor affecting the level of civic engagement. The study provided implications to improve civic attitudes and engagement among Iranian diaspora, an understudied group of population in the US. Improving civic attitudes will enhance this group's involvement in civic activities. For this purpose, investing in improvement of local language proficiency among this population is recommended. Iranian women also have a great potential to be civic agents in society.

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