



## **Patterns of Protest Behaviors and their Relationship with Conformity-Nonconformity among University Youth**

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this study is to identify the relationship between patterns of protest behaviors and conformity-nonconformity traits among university youth. To achieve the aim of the study, the researchers have chosen a random sample of (300) students distributed equally between males and females. The researchers used the scale of protest behaviors patterns with (18) items and the conformity-nonconformity scale with (20) items after being checked for their validity and reliability. By using the suitable statistical means, the researchers found that university youth tend to use peaceful protests and student strike in expressing their rights. They have the trait of nonconformity more than conformity. The study also found a positive correlation between violent protests behaviors and conformity, whereas peaceful protests were associated with nonconformity. Accordingly, the researchers presented some recommendations and suggestions.

**Keyword:** protest, patterns of protest behaviors, conformity, nonconformity.

### **1.Introduction**

Protests are considered a means of pressure used by people in order to achieve their demands and goals and also to achieve social justice. They are a means to retrieve people's rights and change the gloomy reality. The protest, as a form of demonstrations, is a legitimate right guaranteed by the constitution to every Iraqi citizen, but expressing it may take different forms. There are peaceful protests that tend to fulfill the demands by legitimate means, such as collecting signatures and petitions, and coming out with mass rallies calling for reform. There are some protests, on the other hand, take another form, such as clashing

with the security forces, damaging public property, and disrupting daily life, which lead to the obstruction of the Iraqi youth project in achieving their goals, obtaining their rights, and reaching their legitimate ambitions.

In this regard, psychological studies in the political field indicate that students' practice of freedom of political expression through demonstration and protest is an effective social force towards change. On one hand, it unites students and increases positive social movement among them, and on the other hand, it is a major reason for changing many ineffective political laws and alerting groups of society about important civil issues, as they are part of the process of correcting errors in the state institutions (Barker, 2008).

Some studies, such as Green, Bush, and Hahn's (1984), concluded that patterns of protest behaviors differ between individuals according to their beliefs in their ability to change, their sense of alienation, and their sense of self-control. The more individuals feel that they are similar to the group in terms of characteristics and needs, the more they will tend to do what the group does in terms of behaviors, while the more they feel unique and distinct from the members of their group, the opportunity to imitate the behaviors of the group and be led by the collective feeling is greatly reduced. Moreover, Cha (2016) found that whenever the individual's orientation is humanitarian and centered on human rights, his protest behaviors tend to be peaceful, as well as he found a correlation between the openness to experience and participation in protest demonstrations.

The expectancy-value theory is one of the most important theories that emerged from a group of psychological studies and experiments carried out by the social psychologist Klandermans (1997). It tried to find an explanation for the following questions:

1. Why do people participate in protests?
2. Why do some protesters tend to adopt one of three different types of protests that are represented by resorting to violence as a means of achieving demands and putting pressure on the authorities, peaceful

protests that tend to collect signatures, negotiation and dialogue, and an action strike that is represented by a tendency to boycott until the demands are achieved?

Klandermans found that people's protest are not only based on their feeling of injustice and relative deprivation of needs when comparing themselves to other groups, but their protest behaviors are also based on the principle of expectancy and value, choosing the most effective way to achieve their goals and change the external reality (Stekelenburg & Klandermans, 2013) ). The expectancy-value principle contributes to choosing the appropriate protest behaviors for the individual and the group

If individuals expect that engaging in violent protest behaviors bring them many gains, resources and concessions by the unjust authorities, they will tend to clash with them and put pressure on them. If they expect that the use of violence cause them so many losses and costs, they will tend to resort to peaceful protests or student strikes all the time and work away from violence. Therefore, we find that this theory focuses on the rational thinking of the protesters in the light of their use of cognitive comparisons between what they expect of appropriate behaviors, and the value that they will gain or lose in light of choosing these behaviors (i.e., individuals value choosing a particular method of protest through its costs and benefits), .

This theory has been supported by many studies conducted on labor, student and political protests (Ottati et al, 2002).

## **2. Conformity-Nonconformity Trait**

The psychological literature on personality and social psychology has been concerned with the traits that can take a role in the processes of social influence. Some studies have focused on the conformity-nonconformity trait of personality. It can be noticed that individuals who are characterized by conformity tend to approve the group and adopt its beliefs, trends, and behaviors in social situations.

The Individuals with a nonconformity trait tend to maintain their personal identity, enjoy independence, and resist group pressures, we find that they do not adhere to the behaviors, opinions and beliefs pushed by the group (Sowden et al, 2008; Nail et al, 2013; and Cialdini &Goldstein,2004)

The theory of the psychologist Bernacka (2009) is considered one of the most comprehensive and experimental psychological theories in the study of these two traits. He concluded in his research at the Institute for Personality Assessment and Research in Berkeley that personality is divided into two independent dimensions that affect the individual's social interactions and his ability to achieve, innovate and work with the group, as each dimension has different personal characteristics which allows us to find individual differences between people (Bernacka et al, 2009). The first dimension is represented by conformity, which refers to the individual matching his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors with the group, conforming to its standards, participating with it in all its social processes, and choosing what people want instead of pursuing his own desires, so we find that individuals in this dimension submit to group pressure quickly and directly, and show weak resistance in challenging its orders and restrictions.

They feel alienated and guilty when they do not obey its social norms (Forsyth, 2013). The second dimension is nonconformity, which appears in light of the individual enjoying relatively independence of his thoughts, feelings, and behaviors from the group. It appears in the ability to resist social pressures, the tendency to oppose opinions, evaluations, the opinions of others, independence in thinking, enjoyment of openness to new opinions, cognitive flexibility, courage to challenge traditional beliefs, a tendency to work independently of the group, and perseverance in achieving personal goals (Marcin, 2018).

Thus, Bernaca found that these two dimensions have different effects on the activity of the individual, his compatibility with the group, and the ability to face psychological pressures. He concluded that nonconforming individuals feel

active and able to accomplish and liberate and move towards actions and think rationally whenever they feel independent and non-compliant. When they are faced with intense pressure by the group, they feel depressed, worried, and unable to accomplish. The conforming individuals, on the other hand, tend to imitate their group, and to feel comfortable and safe when they are among them, and resort to social support whenever they feel weak (Bernacka et al, 2009).

In light of the above studies, we found some results about the relationship between protest behaviors and some personality traits. The study of Brandstätter & Opp (2014) found that the disaffected protest movements were associated with the characteristic of social orientation, and the awakening of conscience, which are represented by the preservation of social duty with a high positive degree. They were associated with the attribute of acceptability and openness to experience in a negative degree. The study of Green, Bush, and Hahn (1984) concluded that patterns of protest behaviors differ between individuals according to their beliefs in their ability to change, their feeling of alienation, and their sense of self-control. When the individuals feel that they are similar to the group in terms of characteristics and needs, they will tend to carry out the same behaviors of the group. When they feel unique and distinct from the members of their group, the chance of imitating group behaviors and being committed to the collective feeling decreases greatly. In addition, Cha (2016) found that whenever the individual's orientation is humanitarian and centered around human rights, his protest behaviors tend to be peaceful, as well as he found a correlation between the openness to experience and participation in the protest demonstrations.

Accordingly, the two researchers try to answer the following important questions:

1. What makes some protesters drive to the use of violence in demonstrations while others refuse to resort to it?

2. What is the extent to which personality traits contribute to violent or peaceful protest behaviors? Do the correlational relationships differ between the types of protest behaviors and the conformity- nonconformity trait?

### **3. Study Hypotheses**

1. What are the types of protest behaviors among university youth at the level of statistical significance (0.05)?

2. Is there a statistically significant difference at the level (0.05) on the types of protest behaviors due to the gender variable?

3. What is the prevailing feature of university youth (conformity – nonconformity) at the level of statistical significance (0.05)?

4. Is there a statistically significant difference at the level (0.05) on the conformity – nonconformity trait due to the type variable?

5. Is there a statistically significant relationship at the level (0.05) between the types of protest behaviors and conformity – nonconformity traits?

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1 Participants**

The sample of the study comprised of (300) students who were between the ages of 18 and 22 (150 females and 150 males) from Al-Qadisiya university. They were selected randomly from six various colleges: Engineering, Biotechnology, Sciences, Arts, Education, and Archeology.

### **4.2 Scales**

#### **a. The Protest Behavior Scale**

The researchers formulated (18) paragraphs distributed into three patterns of protest behaviors, with (6) paragraphs for each pattern: violent protests, peaceful protests, and student strikes, according to the expectancy-value theory of Klandermans (1997) about the protests. These patterns are answered through five

alternatives, which are: strongly agree = 5 degrees, agree = 4 degrees, neither agree/disagree = 3 degrees, reject = 2 degrees, strongly reject = 1.

The validity of the scale was verified in the light of taking the opinions of a group of referees in psychology. The internal consistency of the scale was verified by extracting the relationships of scores for the paragraphs of the scale and the total score that ranged between (0.673-0.791) for the scale of violent protest behaviors, (0.232- 0.613) for the scale of peaceful protest behaviors, and (0.546-0.775) for the student strike scale

In this scale, the condition of reliability was achieved by the method of Vackronbach. The degree of reliability of the scale of violent protest behavior was ( $\alpha = 0.792$ ), the degree of reliability of peaceful protest behavior ( $\alpha = 0.719$ ), and the degree of stability of the permanent strike was ( $\alpha = 0.770$ ).

## **B. Conformity – Nonconformity Scale**

The researchers constructed for this scale (20) items according to Bernacka theory (1990) on conformity – nonconformity in personality, (10) items for the conformity, and (10) items for nonconformity . They are answered through five alternatives: always = 5 degrees, often = 4 degrees, sometimes = 3 degrees, rarely = 2 degrees, and never = 1 degree. The validity of the scale was verified in the light of taking the opinions of a group of referees in psychology, and the internal consistency of the scale by extracting the relationships of scores for the scale paragraphs and the total score that ranged between (0.246-0.829) for the scale of conformity, and (0.493- 0.736) for the nonconformity scale .

In this scale, the condition of reliability was achieved by the method of Fakronbach. The degree of reliability of the conformity scale was ( $\alpha = 0.760$ ), the nonconformity was ( $\alpha = 0.758$ ), the student strike was ( $\alpha = 0.770$ ). All the degrees of reliability were good compared to the critical value of the Fakronbach factor of (0.70) or more.



### 4.3 Procedures

The researchers contacted the participants via the Internet. The participants' answers were analyzed using the SPSS statistics. The following statistical equations were used: The T-test for one sample, the T-test for two independent samples, the Pearson correlation coefficient, the Fakronbach stability equation, and the Pearson correlation coefficient test).

## 5. Results and Discussion

### 5.1 Results

The first hypothesis is:

What are the patterns of protest behaviors among university youth at the level of statistical significance (0.05)?

To identify the patterns of protest behavior in the research sample, the researchers used the T-test for one sample at the level of statistical significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (299), as shown in table (1):

Table 1. T-test for identifying the patterns of protest behaviors

patterns	sample	Means of each pattern	Standard deviation	Hypothesized mean	T-value calculated	T-value Tabular	Freedom degree	Sequence according means	Level of significance 0.05
Violent protest behaviors	300	18.4200	5.45185	18	1.334	1.96	299	3	function
Peaceful protests	300	23.1800	3.27771	18	27.373	1.96	299	1	function
Student strike	300	21.2000	4.33621	18	12.782	1.96	299	3	function

It is evident from the above table that university students use protest behaviors according to the contexts and events that suit the protest situation.

The second hypothesis:

Is there a statistically significant difference at the level (0.05) on the patterns of protest behaviors due to the gender variable?

To identify the patterns of protest behaviors according to the gender variable, the researchers used the T-test for two independent samples in order to compare the means on these patterns, as shown in table (2):

Table 2. T-test for two independent samples to identify the significant difference in the protest behaviors patterns according to the gender variable

pattern	sample	number	means	Standard deviation	T-value		Level of significance
					calculated	Tabular	
Violent protest behaviors	Male	150	18.8387	5.55131	1.768	1.96	function
	female	150	17.7368	5.23780			
Peaceful protests	Male	150	23.1774	3.39566	0.018	1.96	function
	female	150	23.1842	3.09028			
Student strike	Male	150	21.5645	4.16012	1.902	1.96	function
	female	150	20.6053	4.56539			

Accordingly, it is found that there are no significant statistical differences between males and females in their protest behaviors at the significant level of (0.05).

The third hypothesis is:

What is the prevailing feature of university youth (conformity – nonconformity) at the level of statistical significance (0.05)?

To identify conformity – nonconformity in the research sample, the researchers used the T-test for one sample at a level of statistical significance (0.05) and a degree of freedom (299) , as shown in table (3):

Table 3. T-test for identifying conformity –nonconformity trait

Trait	Sample	Means of each trait	Standard deviation	Hypothesized mean	T-value		Freedom degree	Sequence according means	Level of significance
					Calculated	Tabular			
conformity	300	30.7000	7.60940	30	1.503	1.96	299	2	function

nonconformity	300	37.9300	6.18649	30	22.202	1.96	299	1	function
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In light of the scores of the above table, it becomes evident that university students tend to have the conformity trait with a statistically significant difference at a significant level of (0.05).

The fourth hypothesis:

4. Is there a statistically significant difference at the level (0.05) on the conformity – nonconformity trait due to the type variable?

To identify the conformity – nonconformity trait according to the type variable, the researchers used the T-test for two independent samples in order to compare the means on these traits, as shown in table (4):

Table 4. T-test for two independent samples to identify the significant difference in conformity-nonconformity according to the gender variable

trait	sample	number	mea ns	Standard deviation	T-value		Level of significance
					calculated	Tabular	
conformity	Male	150	30.3226	7.84121	1.142	1.96	function
	female	150	31.3158	7.20658			
Nonconformity	Male	150	37.000	6.63895	3.597	1.96	function
	female	150	39.4474	5.03631			

It is found according to table (4) that there is a statistically significant difference between males and females on the trait of nonconformity according to the significance level (0.05).

The fifth objective is:

Is there a statistically significant relationship at the level (0.05) between the types of protest behaviors and conformity – nonconformity traits?

To identify the correlation between the two research variables, Pearson correlation coefficient was used, and Table (5) shows the correlation coefficients.

Their scores were tested with the T - value at the level of significance (0.05) and the degree of freedom (298), as shown in table (5):

Table 5. correlation coefficient between the degrees of protest behaviors patterns and conformity – nonconformity

Protests patterns		conformity		nonconformity	
Violent protest behaviors	correlation coefficient	0.332		correlation coefficient	0.195
	T- value	0.08		T- value	3.43
Peaceful protests	correlation coefficient	-0.171		correlation coefficient	0.247
	T-value	3.00		T-value	4.4
Work strike	correlation coefficient	0.083		correlation coefficient	0.125
	T-value	1.44		T-value	2.17

According to this result, it is found that there is a positive correlation between violent protest behaviors and the trait of conformity, as well as a positive correlation between peaceful protest behaviors and the conformity trait at the level of statistical significance (0.05). Work strike behaviors tend to correlate with the nonconformity trait to a greater degree than the conformity trait.

## 5.2 Discussion of the Results:

Table (1) shows that there is a statistical significance in the use of peaceful protest behaviors and student strike as a means to achieve legitimate demands when comparing their calculated T value with the tabular value of 1.96, while we find that they are unwilling to use violent protest behaviors to express their rights. The interpretation of this result according to the theory of expectation and value is that university youth are well aware that peaceful means and student strike can achieve good gains and results for them more than the use of violent means, and

that violence can waste their demands and put them in a weak position in front of the authorities. This result is consistent with the studies of Al-Masoudi (2018) , Qahtan (2018), Dement'eva, (2013) and Gusfield (1971).

Table (2) above indicates that there is no difference between males and females in expressing different protest behaviors, when comparing the calculated T values with the tabular value of 1.96, and this is due to the similarity between the beliefs of university youth of both sexes about how to express the protest and to the convergence of their views on the interpretation of the social, political and university situations they suffer from. Therefore, it is found that university youth in the recent protests have supported each other, expressing the same demands and rights, and using the same methods such as carrying banners, calling for slogans, expressing by drawing and representation, and supporting protesters with food and medical equipment. This result differed from the study of Al-Masoudi (2018), which indicated that there are differences in protest behaviors in favor of males.

It can be concluded from Table (3) that university youth have the nonconformity trait when comparing the calculated T value of (22.202) with the tabular value of (1.96) and with a statistical significance of (0.05), whereas there was no statistical significance for the attribute of conformity when comparing the calculated T value (1.593) with the tabular value of (1.96). This result can be explained according to Bernacka theory (2009) that university youth tend to enjoy independence, and the desire to express themselves away from the influences and pressures of the group, as well as to challenge traditional beliefs, and perseverance in achieving personal goals. The researchers consider this result important, as it is one of the true indicators that explain why the protesting youth refused to form leaders or groups calling for their rights and demands, and preference for freedom of expression in an individual way despite the commonalities between them. This result is consistent with the study of Al-Sharif

(2011) and Abu Maraq and Abdullah (2009), whereas it differed from the study of Maktoof and Al-Obaidi (2008).

Table (4) shows that there is a difference between males and females on the nonconformity trait in favor of females, while there was no difference between both sexes according to the conformity trait, and this result can be explained by the fact that the females who participated in the protests had a great desire to be free from social restrictions, and take back their rights as compared with the rights of men, which led to the emergence of a strong tendency among the protesters to independence from the group, assert themselves, and express themselves and their demands to a greater degree than males. This result is consistent with the study of Al-Sharif (2011) and Abu Maraq & Abdullah (2009) which indicated that there is a difference in the nonconformity trait according to the gender variable in favor of females.

Table (5) indicates that the violent protest behaviors are associated with the conformity trait with a greater degree of correlation coefficient than the nonconformity trait, and the peaceful protest behaviors were correlated with the conformity trait to a negative degree, while the nonconformity trait was associated with a positive degree. The work strike was not associated with the conformity trait versus its association with nonconformity trait to a weak degree. It can be concluded that young protesters tend to use violence in protest whenever they follow the behavior of their group. In this type of protests, individuals follow the group, and the identity of the protester among his group becomes unknown in exchange for the emergence of the collective identity that exerts its psychological influence on them, and once feelings of anger dominate the group, and the desire to clash with the authorities, these behaviors quickly spread to all members, and the absence of the rational evaluations are absent in the protest situation, which motivates young people in the earliest to violent protest behaviors, on the other hand, we find that these behaviors decrease significantly when the nonconformity trait appears among the protesters because individuals act according to their

personal identity, and use cognitive comparison processes according to what they expect from the behaviors and the results they will obtain, so we will find that the protesters will be careful in using violence, and they will only do so when defending themselves.

As for the results of the correlation between peaceful protests and the conformity-nonconformity trait, it is found that this type of protest was negatively associated with the conformity trait, while it was positively associated with the nonconformity trait.

Accordingly, it can be concluded that peaceful protests are based on the personal identity of the protester and his rational choice, and the adoption of legitimate methods in achieving private demands such as marching, collecting signatures, and using the media and social communication as means of pressure on government authorities to a greater degree than being affected by the collective identity.

Finally, it is found that the work strike did not correlate with the coefficient of conformity with a statistically significant correlation coefficient, but it recorded a weak and statistically significant correlation coefficient with the nonconformity, and despite this low coefficient, it is an indication that the work strike is one of the rational options in achieving the demands and rights. Young people only turn to it when the authorities do not respond to their needs through peaceful demonstrations and marches.

## **6. Recommendations and Suggestions**

### **6.1 Recommendations**

According to the previous results, the researchers recommend the following:

1. Supporting youth and working to satisfy their needs, meet their demands, and develop their own capabilities and skills, and this can be done by providing job opportunities, absorbing their energies, and supporting their creative ideas.

2. Providing young people with the opportunity to participate in the political process, in the elections, to express their opinions, and to make them part of the political process.
3. Supporting student unions and societies by universities, and making them a means of attracting young people and developing their future projects.
4. Issuing laws that provide more freedoms, respect human rights and religious communities, and enhance the sense of independence.

## **6.2 Suggestions:**

The researchers suggest the following:

1. Conducting a correlation study between patterns of protest behaviors and emotional management.
2. Conducting a comparative study on protest behavior patterns among the youth and the elderly.
3. Conducting a correlation study between conformity – nonconformity trait and participation in the elections.

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