

**Neighborhood as a site of policy and activism:
Exploring citizenship, belonging, and identity building in Tehran's neighborhoods**

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Urban initiatives and practices in Tehran, Iran, in the past decade have focused on neighborhoods as the key part of a newly-adopted localism approach in city government. This focus on neighborhoods – seeing them as important sites for addressing social, cultural, and material problems– is transforming Tehran's urban governance. This shift to greater citizen participation in decision-making and claims-making may have impacts beyond the city borders to influence the socio-political context of the country and create a more democratic environment for political engagement of the public in the future.

Recognizing similar patterns of attending to the neighborhood level of social and political life in other Northern and Southern cities, this research investigates the social and political meanings of neighborhood and examines its potential and capacities as a site of policy and activism. Considering neighborhood as a site for both top-down and bottom-up initiatives, this research studies the influences of neighborhood policy/activism practices on the socio-political context constituting neighborhoods via a focus on the highly debated issues of citizenship, identity, and belonging. Employing a case study approach to Tehran's neighborhoods, this research will examine 1- How do neighborhood policy/activism practices influence new forms and spaces of a) citizenship, b) identity, and c) sense of belonging; and 2- what is the geography of the neighborhood policy/activism practices and their processes/outcomes; are they restricted to the local or do they extend beyond it?

Drawing on a combination of document content analysis, participant observation, semi-structured and roving interviews in six Tehran neighborhoods, this research explores new conceptualizations of neighborhood and its capacities and refines our understanding of forms and spaces of citizenship, identity, and belonging. In addition, through a focus on a Global South city, it contributes to the diversification of sources of knowledge on urban theories, policies, and practices. It also provides concrete insights for both policy-makers and activists for their future policies and initiatives, especially regarding citizen engagement and participatory forms of urban governance that may lead to alternative environments that influence democratic involvement of citizens in urban settings.