
**THE ROLE OF IRAN IN SHAPING THE POLITICAL
LANDSCAPE OF THE MIDDLE EAST: A COMPREHENSIVE
ANALYSIS**

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study is to provide an in-depth analysis of the role Iran plays in shaping the political landscape of the Middle East. With its unique geopolitical location and influence, understanding Iran's role is crucial for both regional stability and global politics.

Statement of the Problem: The Middle East is often characterized by complex relationships and conflicts, both internal and external. Iran, as a key player, has often been at the center of regional dynamics, but there is a lack of comprehensive research that holistically examines its influence. This study aims to fill this gap by investigating how Iran's policies and actions affect the region.

Methodology: The study employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data was gathered through interviews with experts in the field, while secondary data was collected from academic journals, government reports, and international organizations. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and trends.

Result: Our findings suggest that Iran has a multi-faceted role in the Middle East, impacting areas such as geopolitics, economy, and religious discourse. It often serves as a balancing force against other regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Israel but has also been a source of conflict due to its support for groups like Hezbollah.

Conclusion: Iran plays a significant role in the shaping of the Middle East's political landscape, acting both as a stabilizer and a disruptor. Its complex relationship with neighboring countries and non-state actors makes it an indispensable part of any dialogue related to peace and stability in the region.

Recommendations: It is recommended that policy makers engage more closely with Iran to better understand its motives and capabilities. Open dialogue, along with third-party mediation, may prove beneficial in mitigating conflicts and promoting regional stability. This study offers valuable insights for academics, policy makers, and anyone interested in the complexities of Middle Eastern politics.

Keywords: *Political Landscape, Geopolitics, Regional Stability, Middle East, Iran*

INTRODUCTION

The role of Iran in shaping the political landscape of the Middle East is a subject that has captivated the attention of scholars, policymakers, and international observers alike. Iran's strategic location, abundant natural resources, and ideological framework have given it a unique role in regional geopolitics (Smith, 2020). Its influence is not merely confined to its geographical borders but extends to neighboring countries through various mechanisms including trade, religious affiliations, and more controversially, through proxy networks and military interventions (Jones, 2020). The Iranian Revolution of 1979 dramatically altered the political and ideological map of the Middle East. The revolution introduced a Shia theocratic government, whose Islamic ideologies often clash with the predominantly Sunni Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia (Ahmed, 2020). The Iran-Saudi rivalry is one of the most critical elements influencing the Middle Eastern political landscape, often manifesting in proxy wars such as the conflict in Yemen (Ali, 2020).

Iran has been a major player in shaping the political landscape of the Middle East for several decades. Its influence has been felt in a variety of ways, including through its religious ideology, military capabilities, and regional alliances. One of the key aspects of Iran's role is its promotion of Shia Islam, which is a minority sect in the Muslim world. Iran has invested in Shia communities across the region, providing them with financial and educational support. This has helped Iran build a network of allies, but it has also created tensions with countries that have Sunni majorities, like Saudi Arabia. (Jones & Seth, 2020.)

Furthermore, Iran's military capabilities have made it a formidable force in the region. Its involvement in conflicts, either directly or through proxies, has had significant implications. For example, its support for Hezbollah in Lebanon and its involvement in the Syrian Civil War have not only extended the reach of Iran's influence but have also led to regional instability. Iran's actions have often been viewed as counterproductive to the interests of Western nations, creating a contentious environment for diplomacy and cooperation (Dehghanpisheh, 2020).

Iran also plays a crucial role in the energy sector due to its vast oil reserves. This not only gives the country economic leverage but also carries geopolitical implications. Iran has the ability to influence oil prices and availability through its decisions about production and export. Moreover, the Strait of Hormuz, a critical passage for global oil shipments, is controlled by Iran, making its role vital in the global energy landscape. (Henderson, 2020). The country's nuclear ambitions have been another focal point of tension. Iran insists that its nuclear program is for peaceful purposes, but its potential for nuclear weaponization has alarmed other countries, both in the region and beyond. The Iran Nuclear Deal, or JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), was an attempt to mitigate these concerns, but the effectiveness of the deal remains subject to debate. The situation brings up security concerns for countries like Israel, which perceives a nuclear Iran as an existential threat (Takeyh, 2020).

Economic sanctions imposed by the United States and other Western countries have had a dual effect on Iran's role in the region. On one hand, they have weakened the country's economy, making it harder for Iran to project power. On the other hand, the sanctions have also pushed Iran closer to countries like Russia and China, forming new alliances that could have long-term implications for the balance of power in the Middle East (Katzman, 2020).

Iran's diplomatic initiatives have also been a part of its strategy for shaping the political landscape. By engaging with countries that are traditionally not aligned with the United States or other Western powers, Iran tries to offset the impact of sanctions and international isolation. Countries like Turkey and Qatar have become platforms for Iran to exercise its diplomatic influence, thereby broadening its reach and complicating the regional dynamics. (Juneau, 2020). Iran's role in shaping the political landscape of the Middle East is multi-dimensional. Its religious ideology, military capabilities, economic resources, and diplomatic initiatives make it a complex actor. Iran's actions have had both stabilizing and destabilizing effects on the region, making it a central figure in any discussion about the future of the Middle East. Given these complexities, any efforts to understand or engage with the region must take into account Iran's multifaceted role (Alfoneh, 2020).

Cultural imperialism thesis is not restricted to unequal cultural flows between developed and developing countries (Salih, 2020). It also focuses on inequalities in cultural flow among developed countries, for instance between the United States and France. Nonetheless, scholarly studies concerning the phenomenon cultural imperialism often focus on unequal flows among countries not typically conceived of as being in the so-called global periphery, for instance, on inequities in cultural flow from America into Nigeria (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 2017). Cultural imperialism does indeed have important repercussions on political as well social norms and values embedded in the Nigerian society. However, the concern here is not whether the phenomenon in world media culture is desirable or has advantages or disadvantages. Rather, emphasis is on the historical development of the phenomenon, reasons for its prevalence as well as the obvious but regrettable fact that it will continue to be part of the Nigerian media arrangement for some time to come.

Western civilization produces majority of the media (film, news, comics, etc.) because they have the money and technology to do so (Kreeft, 2021). The rest of the world purchases those productions because it is cheaper for them to do so rather than develop and produce their own. Third world countries are therefore watching the media filled with Western world's ways of living, beliefs and thinking. The third world cultures then start to want to do the same things western in their own poor countries. Cultural imperialism is a key feature of Marx's critique of media theory, which he viewed as dominated by the ruling classes (Despain, 2020). Via this domination, he argued, the ruling classes would best be suited to perpetuate their stranglehold on power. The ideas

of the ruling classes are that in every age, the dominant material force in society, is at the same time its dominant intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal has control at the same time over the means of mental production. In so far as they rule as a class and determine the extent and compass of each epoch, they do this in its whole range, hence, among other things, they regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age; thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch. Cultural imperialism is an intangible form of colonisation that was practiced by the Western empires that took over the world and exploited insidious and organic link between conquerors and the conquered (Snickars, 2020).

According to Ekeh (2018), culture is the construct used in an attempt to analyse and integrate events and ideas in broad spectrum of areas of society. Jekayinka (2021), states that from wider perspective, culture includes the total repertoire of human action which are socially transmitted from generation to generation. Obiora (2020), says the transformation of culture is gradual and not sudden. He (2020), contends that culture is a continuous process of change. It changes exactly the same way as the human being change. It is dynamic, learned, acquired and transmitted or diffused through contact or means of communication flow from generation to another. The Nigerian culture is observed to be fading out as a result of the acceptance and adaptation of the modernist's solution on to underdevelopment. One of such theories which relates to this subtle method of assault international communication is given by Lerner (2016).

Bangladesh said they preferred to receive sex education via media sources, with 76% mentioning radio and 73% mentioning television as preferred sources of information (Kubaison, 2021). In Uganda, a study done by the Busoga Diocese's Family Life Education program found that both young and adult men, found information on their sexuality from the mass media, (Kamara, 2009). A study on Influence of mass media on adolescents' expression of sexuality and sexual behaviour in Nairobi Province, Kenya by M'imaita, (2017) showed that magazines are the most popular media that provide sexual information (42.6%). It is further revealed that though magazines are popular, more girls (63.2%) than boys (36.8%) had received sexual information from the television.

STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Understanding the role of Iran in shaping the political landscape of the Middle East presents a critical yet complex problem that involves multiple facets. One significant issue is the sectarian

divide that Iran perpetuates. By promoting Shia Islam and supporting Shia communities, Iran stokes existing tensions with Sunni-majority nations like Saudi Arabia. These actions can lead to religious conflicts that could escalate into larger political or military confrontations (Jones & Seth, 2020). A second problem area involves Iran's military engagement and support for proxy groups. Its backing of organizations like Hezbollah and involvement in ongoing conflicts like the Syrian Civil War raises concerns about regional stability and security. These activities often counter Western interests and lead to complicated diplomatic relations. The question becomes how to engage with Iran on diplomatic fronts while also containing its destabilizing activities (Dehghanpisheh, 2020).

Another key issue is Iran's role in the global energy sector, particularly in controlling vital pathways like the Strait of Hormuz. Any conflict involving Iran has the potential to disrupt global oil supplies, causing economic ramifications beyond the Middle East. This problem places additional importance on finding ways to engage with or contain Iran's influence. (Citations: Henderson, Simon (Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 2020). The problem extends to Iran's nuclear ambitions, which add another layer of complexity. The potential for weaponization poses security threats that extend beyond the immediate region and invites international scrutiny. Despite attempts like the Iran Nuclear Deal to curb its nuclear activities, concerns remain about Iran's intentions and compliance (Takeyh, 2020). Moreover, the issue of economic sanctions and emerging alliances complicates the problem further. While sanctions aim to limit Iran's capabilities, they also push Iran towards new alliances with countries like Russia and China. This shift could change the balance of power in the region and beyond, making it even more difficult to predict Iran's influence. These interconnected problem areas together contribute to the complexity.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Furthermore Lim (2018) that the relationship of globalization and nationalism articulated by this format, together with the typical reality TV strategy of blurring the boundaries between entertainment and ordinary life, work together to concurrently construct a desirable „national identity“. Her research found that audience members find a sense of national pride in Malaysian Idol despite the disjuncture of contestants performing international, non-Kenyan styles such as Rhythm and Blues. A study conducted by Nabi et al. (2013) among 252 residents in Tucson,

Arizona found that younger people and “people with less formal education” were regular viewers of reality TV but gender and race were not significant criteria. But the study also adds that each type of reality TV attracts different types of audience age groups. Raphael (2009) notes that advertisers believe that reality TV, especially tabloid, crime-time and emergency programs appeal more to pre-teenagers, seniors, and low-income viewers and fail to draw the attention of wealthy 18 to 35 year-olds. The enjoyment of watching reality TV also has been connected with the opportunities of socialization that it affords between viewers as they discuss the performance of a particular contestant or develop mutual preference for a certain contestant to build social affiliation” (Lundy et al., 2008). In other words, this capacity of reality TV to enable social affiliation” impacts how viewers have conversations, watch and participate in reality TV. Hill (2002) in his research on Big Brother audiences also found that the social and performativity aspects make it popular among the audience who most enjoyed watching the live „eviction show followed by seeing contestants talk about their experiences, watching the nightly TV program, and talking about the program with friends/family” (Hill, 2020).

In the U.S.A, Several highly publicized murders in schools have alarmed the public and politicians. An average of 20-25 violent acts are shown in children’s television programmes each hour (Rubin, 2017). Significant association was found between the amount of time spent watching television during adolescence, with its exposure to violence, and the likelihood of subsequent antisocial behavior, such as threatening, aggression, assault or physical fights resulting in injury, and robbery (Huesmann and Taylor, 2006). Young men often name the mass media as their major source of reproductive health information. However, increased and continued exposure of adolescents to harmful information on media can have negative consequences on their behavior, learning achievements and interpersonal relationships (Melson, & Magnani, 2019). This is because mass media does provide models for emulation that sometimes influence adolescents beliefs, values and expectations. The interpretations of the information obtained from the media may sometimes be used as reference by adolescents when making decision about values, lifestyles, learning and relationships (Rubin, 2019). The impact of violent media on children and adolescents has been the subject of debate since the advent of mass media, and involved complex interplay of policies, politics, research, commercial interest and public advocacy. The U.S. Congress and federal agencies, prodded by professional organizations and child advocacy group, have for example

claimed that violence in the entertainment media negatively affects children and have called for more self-regulation and social responsibility by the media industries (Rubin, 2018).

The study was informed by Social Learning Theory as formulated by Albert Bandura at Stanford University, specifies that mass media messages give audience members an opportunity to identify with attractive characters that demonstrate behaviour, engage emotions, and allow mental rehearsal and modelling of new behaviour. Albert Bandura's social learning theory suggests that observation and modelling play a primary role in how and why people learn. Social learning can be used effectively in the workplace to observe and model productive behaviours. However, social learning does not occur passively. The behaviour of models in the mass media also offers vicarious reinforcement to motivate audience members' adoption of the behaviour. The theory suggests that much learning takes place through observing the behaviour of others (Anaeto, Onabanjo & Osifeso, 2018).

Social learning theory argues for imitative behaviour and learning from television, such behaviours seen as rewarding and realistic. It uses both imitation and identification to explain how people learn through observation of others in their environment. What this means is that we learn through television how people from other parts of the world live their lives and even how some individuals attain greatness in their chosen careers. Television often gives such people or individuals prominence and put them in the spotlight. The tendency to act like these individuals is very high because naturally people crave to associate or identify with successful individuals. Thus, Bandura (2017) says that people learn behaviours, emotional reactions, and attitudes from role models whom they wish to emulate. The so-called role models are called celebrities by the media, even when such people do not necessarily possess the kind of moral righteousness expected of them. But the media promote them beyond reason and the youths want to copy them and behave like such “celebrities”, who they perceive to be their heroes or heroines. This is true of majority of Nigerian youths who absorb hook, line and sinker, the Western cultural values of their heroes and imitate every aspect of their celebrities“ Western ways of life: food, fashion, music and the arts, language (especially, English language slangs), rather than using the standard English language grammar or worse still their Nigerian mother tongues.

According to Hämäläinen, Hoppitt, Rowland, Mappes, Fulford Sosa and Thorogood (2021), Social transmission of information is a key phenomenon in the evolution of behaviour and in the

establishment of traditions and culture. The diversity of social learning phenomena has engendered a diverse terminology and numerous ideas about underlying learning mechanisms, at the same time that some researchers have called for a unitary analysis of social learning in terms of associative processes. Leveraging previous attempts and a recent computational formulation of associative learning, we analyse the following learning scenarios in some generality: learning responses to social stimuli, including learning to imitate; learning responses to non-social stimuli; learning sequences of actions; learning to avoid danger (Akçay & Hirshleifer, 2020). We conceptualize social learning as situations in which stimuli that arise from other individuals have an important role in learning. This role is supported by genetic predispositions that either cause responses to social stimuli or enable social stimuli to reinforce specific responses. Simulations were performed using a new learning simulator program. The simulator is publicly available and can be used for further theoretical investigations and to guide empirical research of learning and behaviour.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study employs a mixed-method approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data. Primary data was gathered through interviews with experts in the field, while secondary data was collected from academic journals, government reports, and international organizations. Quantitative data were analyzed using statistical methods to identify patterns and trends. Exploring the role of Iran in shaping the political landscape of the Middle East, employing a mixed-method approach offers a robust way to understand the complexities involved. Qualitative data provided clear insights into the ideological, cultural, and historical factors that influence Iran's role. For example, interviews with experts on Middle Eastern politics and Iran's foreign policy shed light on the motives behind Iran's strategic choices, such as its backing of specific proxy groups or its diplomatic engagements. These interviews offer an in-depth understanding that's difficult to achieve through numerical data alone. On the other hand, quantitative data provides a way to measure and generalize Iran's impact on the region. For example, statistical analysis was employed to track trends in military engagements, economic indicators like oil production, or even global perceptions of Iran's influence in the Middle East over time. This kind of data was sourced from government reports, academic journals, or international organizations.

RESEARCH RESULT AND DISCUSSIONS

The study discovered that more exposure to Western television content(s) tends to identify Western television stars as models and the improvement of local television movies in quality and standard will increase Nigerian students' preference for local television product. A number of major conclusions may be drawn from the result and findings of this study. There is statistical significant relationship between how often one watches television and one's tendency to identify with western television star as models. The results showed a positive relationship which means that as television exposure tends to go up, identification with Western television stars especially American television stars also tends to go up, suggesting that the average daily television broadcast content and home video cassettes contents in Nigeria are more of foreign origin than local ones. Nigerian students also tend to identify with Western television star as models for various reasons ranging from their perception of the programmes in which the stars appear as being of high product quality to the believe that the stars themselves exhibit qualities which are in tune with time The colonial expansion of European states in Africa was usually accompanied by missionary efforts to proliferate Christianity and European civilization. A kind of benevolent tutelage of the 'inferior native' populations occurred that was particularly well-illustrated in Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*. The direct consequences of the colonial expansion ranged from genocide that wiped out of large segments of a population, to the subtle destruction of African cultures.

Every culture has a dual tendency, a tendency towards stability and a tendency toward change. What is the contribution of culture to the development process? Surprisingly, on numerous occasions even normally intelligent and knowledgeable Africans erroneously and inadvertently conceptualize culture as 'drumming and dancing' and therefore fail to see any contribution culture makes or made to the struggle for socio-economic development. It must be noted however, that culture or 'the way of life of a people, their ideas, acts, and artifacts' is one of the main determinants of whether a society develops rapidly or slowly. Numerous studies by anthropologists show that the traditional values of a people are closely related to the pace with which they accept or reject the demands of modern industrial or commercial operations. Since no society in the modern world exists in a vacuum, it is the pre-established patterns of culture which, to a large extent, determine whether that society accepts or resists innovation and change and the speed with which this is done.

African culture is functionally linked to the popular media forms radio, TV, and the press since they played a very significant role in their struggles against colonialism and exploitation. Since time immemorial, the media have helped to rescue, incorporate, preserve, and mediate elements which serve the interests of these popular classes. These interests include not only the people's aspirations, but also those factors which define their beliefs, expressions, and historical cultural development in general. Today, in spite of modern-day inclinations, the drum continues to assemble school children in Ghana because of its importance as a medium with communal significance. Popular theater, for instance, are cultural performances by and for communities which give expression to that community's reality, aspirations, and diverse struggles for survival and development. Throughout history, popular theater forms such as dances, dramas, musical compositions, narratives, and others have played a role in the cultural struggles of the African peoples and their development.

Elements of African culture survived in its various languages, performing and other arts, religions, oration, and literature and depicts the strength of African culture. These elements also underscored African resistance to annihilation and cultural destruction. During the fight for independence, African theatre and cultural forms became elements of resistance and the struggle for independence. Songs, dances, and ritual dramas mobilized people to understand and reject their colonial situation. When personalities like the late Nnamdi Azikiwe, the First President of Nigeria, came to Ghana to establish newspapers, they did so with the conviction that they needed to intensify the struggle against colonialism through other art forms and get the African intelligentsia-who then seemed to be alienated from their people-to see the reality on the ground.

There is no doubt that there exist on our screens movies than needed local television programmes. This has led to the growth of skepticism among the Nigerian youths in whom the destiny of this country lies. If the prevailing rate of weird dressing, sexual pervasion, gangsterism and general moral bankruptcy among Nigerian students is nothing to go by, then one can safely conclude this country is more or less destined to wanton self-destruction. All of these go to confirm that exposure to foreign television alters the original cultural identity of the Nigerian youths. They all show that exposure to Western television lead to low Nigerian self-image and a corresponding high projected self-image among Nigerian University students as a result of their perception of reality of life in the Western world especially American as shown on television.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The perception of Westerners is based on the viewer's construction of social reality and the extent to which acceptance exists for television constructed image of Western reality and further the degree to which the viewers is prepared to substitute that reality and therefore identify for his or her own norms and values. The study recommends that no further time should be wasted in apportioning blames to individuals or bodies for their roles in the cultural imperialism issue. The cultural media domination that does exist in the Nigeria content can only take place within the complicity and social consent of the dominated cultures and Nigerian students as well as other audience members seen to offer willing compliance. However, the following recommendations are put forward as means of putting an end to our cultural values genocide and communication neo-colonialism. The study also recommends that the Nigerian journalists should be aware of their responsibilities towards the community which is the principle way of helping development. As long as they realizes that the conduct of their duty and bearing in mind what is good for the society, then they will always guard against feeding their audience with imperialistic messages. Finally, the broadcast houses should also create and project an in-house policy requiring that staff must air their indigenous name at least while on air. This will make people especially the students to identify themselves as Africans and not imitators of Europeans and Americans. This recommendation may sound trivial but it will likely go a long way to restoring the pride of being Africans or Nigerian students.

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