



Portraying The “Other”: Scrutinizing The Lexical Markers in American and Iranian Editorial Articles on Us-Iran Tensions

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Abstract

Addressing the historical and methodological gap observed in the reviewed related studies, this paper, as guided by Fairclough’s Three-Dimensional Model and Moscovici’s Social Representation Theory, has employed a Descriptive Qualitative Research design to initiate a Critical Discourse Analysis in scrutinizing the frequent lexical markers used in American and Iranian editorial articles and how these markers construct the social representations of the United States (US) and Iran within their respective cultural viewpoints. The articles included in this study were extracted from the New York Post and Mehr News Agency and were published from February 28 to April 7, 2026. The analysis revealed that the American and Iranian articles frequently used the lexical marker “regime” to portray each other negatively. Particularly, the American articles denotatively utilized this marker to illegitimize Iran as a sovereign state due to its uncontrollability and unpredictability. Meanwhile, such a marker was connotatively used in the Iranian articles to capture the perceived repressive attitude of the US towards Iran. Therefore, it is concluded that both sets of editorial articles have “othered” their respective countries in the positive polarity of the ongoing conflict. Furthermore, the social representations associated with the US flip the traditional perception of Iran as an authoritarian state. Conversely, this portrays the US as an entity that threatens global stability. With this, it is recommended for future studies to consult other media platforms as a corpus to confirm the consistency of these social representations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The rising tensions between the United States of America (USA) and Iran have been existent since the 1950s. Elaborately, Morgan (2015) documented and traced four significant geopolitical events that escalated the tensions between these countries. First, the Operation Ajax in 1953 — this is a coup d’état arranged by the USA’s Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and British Intelligence to remove the formerly elected Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh

when his government decided to nationalize Iran’s oil production. Second, the 1979 revolution — this pertains to the ferocious revolution organized by Ayatollah Khomeini to oust the last monarch of Iran (Mohammad Reza Pahlavi). Furthermore, this revolution drove the student supporters of Ayatollah to occupy the United States’ (US) embassy in Tehran with 52 hostages for 444 days. This event gravely affected the diplomatic ties between these countries, which lasted for over 35 years. Third, the Iran-Iraq war in 1980–1988 — the documentation of this conflict revealed that the US had supported Iraq with intelligence and weapons to prevent Iran from claiming victory. Simultaneously, the US was secretly selling missiles to Iran in exchange for their assistance in the release of American hostages in Lebanon. The two-pronged approach of the US in this war positioned the relationship between Iran and Iraq in deep disdain. Fourth, the Stuxnet Cyber Attack in 2010 — this pertains to the development of “Operation Olympic Games”, a computer virus alleged to have been co-developed by the US and Israel to compromise the Iranian nuclear centrifuges at Natanz. Moreover, according to Singh (2021), during Obama’s presidency, the formulation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was realized. This aimed to limit Iran’s nuclear capacity in exchange for lifting economic sanctions. However, when the Trump administration came in 2017, he withdrew from the JCPOA, viewing it as a “one-sided” agreement.

The conflict between these countries has led to the imposition of multiple international economic sanctions against Iran. As a result, Iran has constantly viewed the US as a threat, perceiving it as a nation that seeks to destabilize the Iranian government through economic pressure, which denies the “natural” supremacy of Iran in the region (Bahgat, 2023). To minimize the effects of the US’s economic pressure, Iran has resorted to investing in relations with armed groups in the Middle East. However, this has framed them as supporters of terrorism (Fawcett & Payne, 2023; Beeman, 2003). These actions of Iran have been a constant military threat to the US. Intricately, the country needed to maintain a consistent military presence in the Persian Gulf to minimize the threat of Iran’s actions (Otubu et al., 2024). The tensions between the USA and Iran have led to a power imbalance in the Middle East. Categorically, it was claimed that the regional power has been pointed towards Israel due to its strong ties with the US (Palit, 2004). Therefore, this regional power dynamic has undermined security due to its “warfare environment” (Otubu et al., 2024).

Media Representation of the USA and Iran

The tensions between these two countries have forced a varied portrayal from different media outlets around the globe. For instance, Ziani et al. (2022) documented that the US-Iran tension in 2019–2020 was viewed by the international media as a “regional Cold War-like security dilemma” where a rivalry of regional visions emerged between these countries. Furthermore, the Qatar-based media outlet Al Jazeera has portrayed Iran as a responder to external tensions within its limits, moving away from Iran being framed as an uncontrolled aggressor (Roziki et al., 2025). Meanwhile, Rastkar and Shokoohi’s (2025) content analysis of Iranian speeches, briefings, debates, and newspaper interviews revealed that the US is represented as an existential challenge to the Iranian livelihood. Moreover, it depicts the US as hostile and deceptive, viewing its diplomatic gestures as a form of “strategic deception”. Conversely, Western outlets have created a portrayal of the US as an “international police” that assumes significant roles in international conflicts. On the other hand, Iran is portrayed as a “threat” to the US’ interests in the Gulf and the Middle East (Ochim & Hassan-Haruna, 2023). Moreover, mainstream European news outlets represent Iran as a “defiant” and “unreliable” entity that makes US actions (economic and military) “necessary” and “reasonable” (Farahat, 2023; Ghavam, 2023).

News Media as a Venue of Intercultural Representations

The discussed variation in media representations of the long-standing US-Iran tensions proves that news media discourse carries significant weight in intercultural representations. Affirmatively, the news media are considered a core discursive practice that could shape social

perception (Moon, 2024; Ni, 2024). Therefore, it has the capacity to positively or negatively frame an entity in various cultures (Wu et al., 2025). However, Humprecht et al. (2022) noted that the digitalization of news media led to a divisive outlook that could fragment the consumers of this media. Categorically, it can establish “systematic bias” in framing cultural entities, which could amplify existing cultural stereotypes (Moon, 2024; Ni, 2024; Ono, 2024). Therefore, this extends the idea that news digitalization is no longer a linear process but a two-way interaction between the outlets and their audience. Similarly, the digitalization of news media is argued to have bridged the geographical and cultural boundaries of the world (Moon, 2024; Hwang et al., 2023; Ming, 2022). Furthermore, to efficiently embrace this change, news discourse must observe culture-sensitive and data-based reporting to avoid cultural imposition and misinterpretation (Hu et al., 2024; Hwang et al., 2023).

Lexical Markers in News Discourse

Lexical markers are linguistic units (words) that serve as spoken or written cues in organizing a discourse and negotiating the social meaning (Lahlou, 1996) of the “other”. Therefore, these operate as terms that establish a communicative context or a “common reality”, which also frame the social representations and power dynamics of the interlocutors involved in an interaction (Carranza, 2004). Furthermore, “other” in discourse is described as a foreign entity perceived by a society or its member(s) as opposite to their identity (Sarisakaloğlu, 2020). Therefore, “otherness” only exists when a community or its member(s) relates itself to another (Lams, 2017).

Based on this concept, several studies proved that lexical markers in news discourse play a pivotal role in creating or amplifying the social representation of a cultural entity. However, these are used strategically to implicitly frame a portrayal of these entities. For instance, headlines typically use nominalizations as lexical markers to condense information pertaining to their referent, creating implicitness for readers which could increase their engagement with the article (Ardianto, 2023; Hadidi et al., 2022; Krasina & Souadkia, 2020). Furthermore, existing studies reveal that lexical markers may be in the form of determiners, nouns, adjectives, and adverbs. Elaborately, determiners are used to indicate the reference type (e.g., definite, indefinite, possessive) of a noun phrase used in an article (Krasina & Souadkia, 2020). Consequently, this leads to post-modification through noun phrases, as pre-modifiers may be insufficient for the consumers to acquire contexts and descriptions about the referents (Ardianto, 2023). This echoes the dominance of phrasal markers in news articles focused on political subjects (Salih et al., 2024). Finally, the operational role of adjectives and adverbs in news discourse is to specify the polarity (positiveness or negativeness) of their referent (Marquez & Gochuico, 2025; Kadri, 2023). Therefore, these lexical markers capacitate the discursive practices of journalism to frame an ideological stance pertaining to an entity being reported (Marquez & Gochuico, 2025; Pop, 2021).

Research Gap

The reviewed related studies affirm that there is an established and ongoing discussion related to US-Iran tensions. However, it was observed that existing longitudinal studies related to this subject did not capture the recent progressions of such conflict (Singh, 2021; Morgan, 2015). Furthermore, the scoped existing studies (Roziki et al., 2025; Ochim & Hassan-Haruna, 2023) focused on the framing of the US and Iran dwelled on the content analysis of a diverse set of corpora (e.g., textbooks, journals, mass media). Therefore, this establishes a methodological gap pertaining to limited lexical-level discourse analysis that uses a single corpus category, which allows a scrutiny of the discursive practices about the portrayal of the countries involved in such conflict. To address these gaps, the present study centered on the analysis of lexical markers used in the editorial articles of selected online news outlets in the US and Iran. Elaborately, the present study has examined how these lexical markers were used in framing an ideological and social representation of the US from an Iranian perspective and an ideological and social representation of Iran from an American perspective. Thus, this study

contributes to existing knowledge related to intercultural studies as it documents how lexical markers create social representations of national identities through the lenses of diverse cultural points of view.

Statement of the Problem

This paper describes how the US is portrayed in Iranian editorial articles and how Iran is portrayed in American editorial articles. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. What lexical markers are used by American and Iranian editorial articles to construct a social representation of each other?
2. What ideologies may be extracted from these lexical markers in representing the “other”?
3. How do these lexical markers function as mechanisms of anchoring and objectification in constructing the “Other”?

Theoretical Framework

Based on the research gaps specified, the objectives of this study are addressed through the theoretical grounding of the Social Representation Theory and the Three-Dimensional Model.

Social Representation Theory (SRT)

Moscovici (1988) defined *social representations* as a horizon of concepts, ideas, and images that are interconnected through diverse forms of communication. Thus, this “interconnectedness” serves as a modality for an individual to construct meaning that translates to their reality. Moreover, this argues that “thinking” is a socially inclined activity rather than an individual process. The central argument of this theory is that social representations exist to familiarize an individual with something strange. With this, it proposed 2 key mechanisms: anchoring and objectification. *Anchoring* is a key mechanism of social representation that attaches an idea or identity to the entity being represented. On the other hand, *Objectification* is the alteration of a representation’s portrayal. Thus, this redefines an object or entity’s social representation into a concrete image.

Three-Dimensional Model

Fairclough’s (1989) model of Critical Discourse Analysis is composed of three dimensions, which are all interconnected. These dimensions are Description, Interpretation, and Explanation. These dimensions were viewed as the link between language and society. They elaborated that the first dimension (*Description*) is the analysis of a corpus’s linguistic features (e.g., phoneme, morpheme, syntax, semantics, pragmatics). Furthermore, the second dimension (*Interpretation*) emphasizes how the discursive practices found in the scrutinized linguistic features of the discourse may be interpreted to reveal the ideological constructs embedded in the corpus. Finally, the last dimension (*Explanation*) provides a discussion of the societal practices and representations of a cultural entity behind the discourse examined.

The theories discussed above align with the overall objective of the present study. Particularly, Fairclough’s (1989) *Three-Dimensional Model* was used in the scrutiny of the lexical markers frequently used in the editorial articles to construct a social representation of the US and Iran (first dimension). Furthermore, these markers were interpreted at a syntactic level to infer the ideological constructs that pertain to both countries (second dimension). Finally, the third dimension, along with Moscovici’s (1988) *SRT*, is exemplified in this study through the attempt to unravel the ideological and social representations of both countries from their respective cultural viewpoints.

Conceptual Framework

As discussed in the previous section of this paper, the analysis of the lexical markers used in the American and Iranian editorial articles was guided by Fairclough’s (1989) *Three-Dimensional Model* and Moscovici’s (1988) *SRT*. The interplay between these theoretical frameworks was visually illustrated through the figure below.

Figure 1. Interplay between the Three-Dimensional Model and SRT

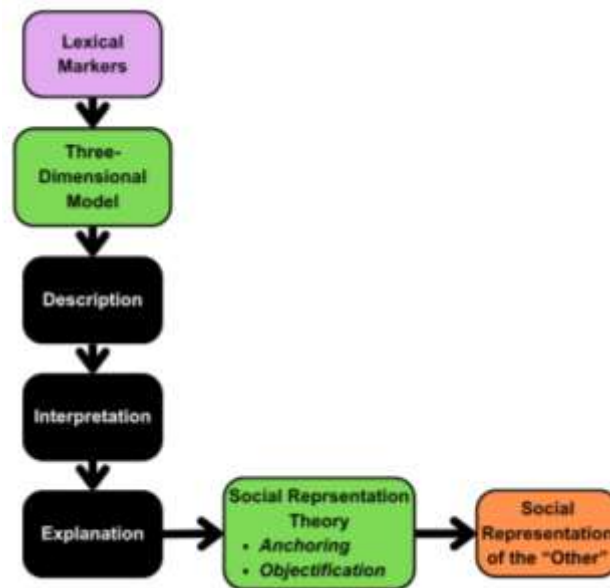


Figure 1 shows the interaction between the theoretical frameworks specified in the present study. Specifically, it visually represents how these frameworks will be used to unravel the social representations of the US and Iran from the opposing cultural viewpoint. The *lexical markers* serve as the primary input to initiate the analysis using the mentioned frameworks. Categorically, these markers will be analyzed through the guidance of the *Three-Dimensional Model*, which will involve a three-level analysis: the *description*, *interpretation*, and *explanation*. However, in the third dimension (explanation), the underlying societal practices and representations embedded in the dominating lexical markers used in the editorial articles will be extracted through the lens of *SRT*, which operates with two key mechanisms: *anchoring* and *objectification*. Through this lens, it will allow the researchers to document the *social representation of the "other"* within the context of US-Iran tensions.

2. METHODOLOGY

This section discusses the methodology followed by the researchers to address the methodological gap specified in the preliminary portions of this paper. Specifically, the research design, sampling technique, data gathering and analysis procedures, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

The present study, through the theoretical guidance of Moscovici's (1988) *Social Representation Theory* and Fairclough's (1989) *Three-Dimensional Model*, utilized a descriptive qualitative research design to analyze the frequent lexical markers used to construct a social representation of the US and Iran in selected editorial articles. According to Creswell (2013), *Qualitative Research* is poised to provide an explanation to the underlying ideologies behind a social event. Meanwhile, Dulock (1993) defined *Descriptive Research* as a research approach that aims to capture an entity's social representation in terms of its characterization. Therefore, this research design suitably fits the overall concept of the present study, which is to discuss the social representations of the US and Iran within their respective cultural viewpoints.

Sampling Technique

This paper is guided by the principles of the purposive sampling technique in choosing the editorial articles scrutinized. According to Campbell et al. (2020), purposive sampling enables the researchers to better match the research corpus to the paper's overall purpose. This indicates that this sampling technique is most suitable for the objectives of the present study. Elaborately, this ensures that the editorial articles analyzed in this study provide the necessary

data to address the curiosity specified in this paper. With this, the corpus of this study is extracted from the New York Post and Mehr News Agency. These online news outlets were selected due to their known political leanings. The *New York Post* is a known supporter of the Trump administration. On the other hand, *Mehr News Agency* is a state-owned media outlet of Iran. Therefore, the positionality of these news outlets greatly affects the argumentations of their editorial articles, which dictate the social representations of the US and Iran toward their readers (Morstatter et al., 2018).

The editorial articles included in this study are selected according to their alignment with the research objectives. All editorial articles selected are published from February 28, 2026 (the first joint military operation of the US and Israel against Iran) to April 7, 2026 (the US and Iran’s agreement to a ceasefire), which subjects the US and Iran to their ongoing tensions. A total of 61 editorial articles were included in the study. Categorically, 34 editorial articles were published by The New York Post, and 27 editorial articles were published by Mehr News Agency. These sets of corpora were analyzed separately to capture a clear social representation of Iran from an American perspective and vice versa.

Data Gathering and Analysis Procedures

In searching for editorial articles, keywords such as “US-Iran”, “US-Iran War”, “US”, “USA”, “America”, “Iran”, “American”, and “Iranian” were used. Inclusion criteria were also considered in the selection of the editorial articles to be included in the paper’s corpus. First, the editorial articles must have a central discussion related to the US-Iran tensions. Second, these articles must have been made public from February 28 to April 7, 2026. Finally, the articles must be written in English to avoid the dangers of mistranslation, which may affect the reliability of the paper’s results. Furthermore, this study chose to focus on editorial articles as its corpus, as these articles are rich in descriptive language, which enables an explicit social representation of an entity (Blanco, 2020).

Following the procedure of Marquez and Gochuico (2025), the data gathered went through a three-phase data analysis, which includes the Data Preparation Phase, Linguistic Analysis Phase, and Thematic Analysis Phase. These phases ensure a systematic scrutiny of the paper’s corpus, which allowed the researchers to capture the social representations of the US and Iran within their respective cultural lenses. During the first phase (*preparation*), each piece of data included in the corpus was transferred to its respective Microsoft Word document to ensure that unnecessary data, such as advertisements, comments, website features, and other unrelated terms, would be excluded from the analysis. Proceeding to the second phase (*linguistic analysis*), the prepared dataset was uploaded and analyzed using the AntConc computer software. This is a corpus analysis software that can document the frequency of word use in a corpus. This software was used to enumerate the lexicons used in the editorial articles included in this study. After identifying the most frequent lexical markers, the final procedure was to provide a connotative interpretation of these markers, achieved during the third phase (*thematic analysis*). The purpose of this phase is to examine how these lexical markers were used and extract the persisting themes based on their utilization. Furthermore, this phase also allowed the researchers to identify whether the lexical markers were used in an anchored or objectifying manner.

Ethical Considerations

The present study considered the ethical principles of research by ensuring that the editorial articles included in this paper were used only for academic purposes, which complies with the principles of fair use. Furthermore, the analyzed editorial articles were publicly available for consumption by anyone. The extracts presented in this study were anonymized to hide the identities of their authors. As a replacement, the researchers used numbers to identify the extract’s editorial article. Furthermore, the news agencies from which the editorial articles were extracted are explicitly mentioned in this paper since they are considered “public” entities.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This portion of the present study documents the results, discussions, conclusions, and recommendations the researchers reached after the analysis of the editorial articles through the guidance of Fairclough’s (1989) *Three-Dimensional Model* and Moscovici’s (1988) *SRT*.

Lexical Markers in American and Iranian Editorial Articles

The analysis revealed that the American editorial articles frequently used the lexical markers “regime”, “nuclear”, and “Islamic” to portray a social representation of Iran. These results show that American articles viewed Iran as an authoritarian Islamic entity. Furthermore, this portrayal is due to Iran’s nuclear objective, which concerns the US. This explains why American editorial articles referred to Iran using the markers “threat” and “terrorist”. This is elaborated in the table below.

Table 1

Lexical Markers in American Editorial Articles

Lexical Markers	Frequency	Range
Regime	163	31
Nuclear	88	22
Islamic	37	16
Terrorist	31	13
Threat	31	16

Table 1 shows the frequent lexical markers in American editorial articles, which indicate a social portrayal of Iran. It shows that the most frequent marker associated with Iran is the word “regime” (163 frequencies). This is followed by the terms “nuclear” (88 frequencies) and “Islamic” (37 frequencies). Meanwhile, the words “terrorist” and “threat” garnered the same number of frequencies (31). Cianetti et al. (2025) defined “regime” as a non-democratic term that refers to a society where the creation and implementation of rules are only dictated by a select few. On the other hand, the word “Islamic” is connoted in Iran as a community with shared faith and belief (Mazinani, 2024). Therefore, it may be concluded that the American editorial articles create a portrayal of Iran as an authoritarian Islamic entity. This is affirmed through the excerpts below.

American Article 5: “The Islamic Republic easily beats North Korea for the title of most abominable regime on earth.”

American Article 7: “Mojtaba Khamenei to succeed his father, it violated the Islamic Republic’s own founding principles, which bar hereditary succession. A regime built on rejecting dynastic rule reached for a dynasty the moment it came under real pressure.”

These excerpts show that Iran is consistently referred to as a “regime” and an “Islamic” republic, which transcends an underlying American perception that Iran is a “corrupt dictatorship” entity (Khalaf, 2024). Furthermore, this image of Iran is amplified by associating it with the word “nuclear”. The combination of these terms extends the argument that Iran’s nuclear goal could bring regional instability, which concerns the US and its allies in the Middle East (Pradana, 2023). This is confirmed through the excerpts below.

American Article 31: “Dismantling that regime’s nuclear, missile, and terror infrastructure is not a favor to Israel. It is core American national security.”

American Article 23: “Going nuclear was the only sure way to ensure the regime’s survival.”

The extracts show that the deterrence of Iran’s nuclear objective is vital to the US’s national security. Moreover, it argues that such a goal is merely a move to retain the dictatorial regime in Iran. This echoes the argument of Eneyo et al. (2022) that the US feels the need to dismantle Iran’s nuclear goal, as the realization of it may disrupt the existing international order. Moreover, it was noted that the US is concerned that a nuclear-enabled Iran may

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disseminate such technology to various terrorist groups (Pradana, 2023; Eneyo et al., 2022). As a result, Iran has been consistently viewed by the US as a supporter of terrorism (Al-hadithe, 2024), which explains why American articles have referred to Iran as a “threat” and “terrorist”. This is seen through the extracts below.

American Article 17: “We need a conclusive outcome that addresses Iran’s full range of threats: nuclear capabilities, missiles, drones, terror proxies, and blockades of international sea lanes.”

American Article 26: “After all, if a terrorist regime is developing a nuclear weapon and says it is going to use that weapon, what exactly is the world to do?”

Meanwhile, Iranian editorial articles usually used the words “war”, “regime”, and “power” to socially represent America. Therefore, Iranian articles perceived the US as an initiator of war. Moreover, the “aggressor” portrayal of the US is rooted in its confusing objectives in the Middle East and perceived illegal military activity in Iran. This led the Iranian articles to portray a regime-like behavior of the US. This is elaborated in the table below.

Table 2

Lexical Markers in Iranian Editorial Articles

Lexical Markers	Frequency	Range
War	60	16
Regime	40	14
Power	33	15
Threat(s)	28	12
Pressure	24	12
Aggression(s)	24	10

Table 2 presents the frequent lexical markers used in Iranian editorial articles. Evidently, the word “war” is the most frequent lexical marker used in the articles (60 frequencies). This is followed by the words “regime” (40 frequencies), “power” (33 frequencies), and “threat(s)” (28 frequencies). Finally, the words “pressure” and “aggression” have accumulated an identical frequency (24). The frequent association of the term “war” with America indicates a portrayal that the US is the aggressor in the war against Iran. Furthermore, this indicates a perceived betrayal in the Iranian perspective due to the US’s confusing rhetoric towards Iran (Chandio et al., 2026). This is affirmed through the extracts below.

Iranian Article 17: “In relation to Iran, one day he speaks of reaching a good decision through negotiation, the next day he threatens war and destruction, and another day he talks about determining leadership for Iran.”

Iranian Article 18: “Stopping the attacks and also aggressions of aggressors is the way to normalize the situation, he said, adding that cessation of war must be accompanied by guarantees that prevent the repetition of these aggressions.”

The quoted extracts exemplify that the Iranian editorial articles used the terms “war” and “aggression” to establish a portrayal of the US as an “aggressor”. Moreover, the evident inconsistent and implicit objectives of the US towards Iran explain why the Iranian articles have framed the US as a “regime”, which aligns with the documented outlook of Iran towards the US as an imperial or external force that needs to be violently resisted (Hokayem, 2026). This is further justified through the succeeding extracts.

Iranian Article 3: “The US and the Israeli regime launched a large-scale unprovoked military campaign against Iran following the assassination of the then-Leader of the Islamic Revolution.”

Iranian Article 12: “It was supposed to be a mechanism — we know that the seventh chapter of the United Nations charter was the mechanism that any possible armed

conflict could be legalized. And you know these two regimes, especially the regime of the United States, they damaged and they broke all those mechanisms.”

These passages reflect the Iranian perception that the war launched by the US against them is groundless. Conversely, such a war is perceived to have violated the United Nations’ mechanisms for legalizing an armed conflict. Therefore, the perceived inconsistent goals and illegal military activity of the US against Iran align with the expected behavior of a regime state (Cianetti et al., 2025). Arguably, the military threats and economic pressures brought by the US’s behavior towards Iran only led to the unification of its citizens (Mazinani, 2024), which the US failed to anticipate. This is evident in the excerpts quoted below.

Iranian Article 1: “Iran is unified and resistant against external pressure and threats.”

Iranian Article 11: “Within this framework, the ‘maximum pressure’ policy is seen not as one tool among other options, but as the main solution... This type of view usually underestimates cultural and historical complexities and networks of social resistance.”

Iranian Article 7: “But the reality is that Iran’s power is not confined to its territorial borders; it is rooted in regional linkages, asymmetric capabilities, and popular capacities.”

The excerpts above explicitly state that the US’s pressures and threats towards Iran are a clear indication that the US was not able to anticipate the citizens and other allies that support the Iranian Republic, which led to the failure of the US’s “maximum pressure”. Furthermore, the Iranian articles’ portrayal of US behavior expands Iran’s rejection of US power and dominance in the Middle East (Eneyo et al., 2022).

Ideological Representations in American and Iranian Editorial Articles

Ideological Representations in American Editorial Articles

Theme 1: Iran as an Illegitimate Sovereign State

Given the authoritarian and non-democratic connotation of the word “regime” (Cianetti et al., 2025), its frequent use is inferred to have created an ideological representation that the American editorial articles view Iran as an illegitimate and non-existent state. This aligns with the observations of Dinler (2026), which documented that the US tends to use several stigmatizing terms (e.g., rogue state, outlaw) to illegitimize Iran’s existence as a sovereign state. Therefore, these lexical markers create an ideological construct of Iran as a detestable entity (Rastkar & Shokoohi, 2025). This is affirmed by the quotations below.

American Article 1: “It is a regime putting women and children in danger. At the same time, credible reports confirm that Iran is recruiting children as human shields...”

American Article 15: “Iranians want the end of the Islamic Republic, not its reform. They have said so clearly and repeatedly.”

It is evident in the chosen selections that the use of the words “regime” and “Islamic” was not associated with the idea that Iran is an independent and legitimate sovereign state. Rather, these lexical markers pertain to the alleged unethical activities of the Iranian government, which led some Iranians to want the conclusion of the “Islamic Republic”. This aligns with the documentation made by Conduit (2025), which noted that some of its citizens call for the end of their authoritarian government. Therefore, these extracts extend an ideological framing that Iran’s government commits to “illiberal” governance (Ghavam, 2023), which deviates from Fukuyama’s (2013) claim that an authoritarian state may still be well-governed if it strikes a balance between officials’ autonomy and their public service. These contradicting viewpoints explain why the American editorial articles have framed Iran as an illegitimate state. This illegitimacy has been amplified with the frequent labeling of the Iranian “regime” as a “terrorist”, which can be seen in the excerpts below.

American Article 26: “Aside from the military successes, it is causing a change across the region. It is uniting countries and parties against the terrorist regime in Iran.”

American Article 33: “To say that the radical terrorist regime in Iran is now weak and isolated is to vastly understate things.”

These excerpts explicitly show that the term “regime” is being modified by the lexical marker “terrorist”. Through this, Iran’s illegitimacy as a sovereign state is emphasized in the American editorial articles, as these words establish a stereotype of Iran as a criminal entity rather than a political state. This extends a reflection of the US’ official categorization of Iran as a patron of terror in 1986, when Iran supported terrorist groups such as Hezbollah and Palestinian resistance movements (Dinler, 2026).

Theme 2: Iran as an Uncontrolled Nuclear Threat

It is observed that the American articles’ frequent use of the term “nuclear” in a negative polarity frames Iran as a rogue entity (Syarifuddin & Damirchi, 2025), extending an ideological construct that stigmatizes Iran as an unpredictable and uncontrollable entity (Dinler, 2026). This inference agrees with the results reported by Roziki et al. (2025), which confirmed that the frequent association of Iran with the word “nuclear” increases public anxiety and amplifies the ideology that Iran is an evident danger to world peace. This is affirmed by the excerpts quoted below.

American Article 12: “The Iranian regime also focused heavily on its nuclear program, installing thousands of additional centrifuges and enriching uranium to ever-higher levels.”

American Article 22: “In the face of Iran’s refusal to forswear nuclear weapons and evidence that it was rapidly increasing the number, sophistication and range of its missiles, Trump began the current military campaign.”

The excerpts above present how the lexical marker “nuclear” is associated with Iran. Evidently, it is clear that Iran rejects the idea of forswearing its nuclear program. This creates a stereotype that justifies the aggressive ideology framed by the US against Iran (Roziki et al., 2025). This echoes the commentary of Koleva and Rusev (2026), which identified Iran as a regime that commits to criminal acts to achieve its geopolitical goals. Furthermore, Iran’s negative association with nuclear activities and its established stereotype as a rogue entity intensify the American ideology of it being a “threat” to global stability. This is observed through the excerpt below.

American Article 18: “This crowd ignores the fact that an unrestrained Iran is not just an imminent threat; it is an existential threat.”

This extract strengthened the portrayal of Iran as an unpredictable and uncontrollable entity (Dinler, 2026). Conversely, this uncontrollability designates Iran as an “imminent” and “existential” threat. Therefore, it is inferred that Iran’s continuous defiance towards the US’s geopolitical objectives has formulated an American ideology of Iran as a global threat, which is reflected in the American articles.

Ideological Representations in Iranian Editorial Articles

Theme 3: America as a Regime and Aggressor

The observed frequent use of the word “regime” as a lexical marker associated with the US indicates a framing of criminal-like behavior that describes the actions of the US towards Iran. Therefore, it is inferred that the Iranian articles’ association of the word “regime” with the US is due to the word’s negative connotation, which is linked to repression (Cianetti et al., 2025). This means that the analyzed editorial articles attempt to establish an ideological construct of the US as a repressor that aims to exert control over the Iranian region to achieve its geopolitical objectives (Rastkar & Shokoohi, 2025). This is affirmed through the excerpts below.

Iranian Article 3: "The US and the Israeli regime launched a large-scale unprovoked military campaign against Iran."

Iranian Article 12: "What these two outlaw savage uncivilized regimes of the US and Israel are doing in the region, the consequences will not stay in the borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

These excerpts show that the word "regime" was associated with the US to capture its "unprovoked", "outlaw", and "uncivilized" behavior towards Iran. This proves the repressive ideology established in the Iranian articles (Cianetti et al., 2025). Furthermore, this outlook, exemplified in the Iranian articles, echoes Bahgat's (2023) argument that Iran perceived the American presence as a factor that denies the natural Islamic supremacy of Iran, which clarifies why the Iranian articles used "regime" as a lexical marker in framing the US's repressive behavior. Moreover, the regime-like ideology linked to the US is amplified by the "aggressor" label used in the Iranian articles. This can be seen through the quotations below.

Iranian Article 9: "This aggression is not limited to Iran but threatens any nation seeking to use science for progress while resisting external hegemonic pressures."

Iranian Article 12: "This was the first step and also domestically we have done everything that we could in preparing for a possible act of aggression by the enemy and then after the beginning of the war, after this illegal, unprovoked savage aggression began against Iran."

It is evident in the quotations above that the term "aggression" was used in the Iranian articles to categorize the repressive behavior of the US towards Iran. Intricately, this lexical marker was used within the context of the Iranian belief that the ongoing tensions between these countries are unprovoked and therefore illegal. This agrees with the argumentation of Singh (2021), which revealed that Iran perceives the US's behavior as an act of terrorism, which caused the strangulation of the Iranian people and economy. Therefore, the so-called "aggression" of the US towards Iran ideologically framed America as an entity that destabilizes the power dynamics in the Middle East (Farahat, 2023).

Theme 4: America as a Declining Superpower

It was observed in the Iranian editorial articles that the frequent use of the words "pressure" and "threats" was associated with the economic and military strategies initiated by the US against Iran. However, these strategies were claimed to have failed and have only resulted in national unification. This creates an underlying Iranian ideology that the US is an external force that needs to be resisted (Hokayem, 2026). Thus, the US's unanticipated unity of the Iranian people is the strategic miscalculation that made their "maximum pressure" (Singh, 2021) fail. This is proven through the excerpts below.

Iranian Article 1: "Iran is unified and resistant against external pressure and threats."

Iranian Article 8: "What is being proposed against Iran today is no longer a limited war, but a kind of 'structural pressure' on the entire society; pressure whose effects will continue for years and even decades."

The quotations above prove the earlier claim that the economic pressures and military threats, which could gravely affect the whole Iranian society, only resulted in the unification of the country. Consequently, these pressures and threats failed to conquer the unified Iranian community. This led the Iranian articles to claim that the global dominance and power held by the US is already declining, establishing an ideology that the Iranian influence in the Middle East region is more dominant than the US (Tierney, 2021). This is evident in the quotations below.

Iranian Article 1: "Power is no longer confined solely to advanced equipment, military technologies, or security operations; it also manifests in countries' ability to mobilize and align their people, create internal cohesion, and demonstrate national resilience."

Iranian Article 10: “There was a claim that the greatest military power in the world was America, and the greatest military power in the Middle East was Israel. Now we see that both of them are trapped and have failed today.”

The quoted passages above show that America, claimed to possess the strongest military in the world, has failed to conquer Iran (Bahgat, 2023). Therefore, this amplified an ideology that global power dynamics should not only be measured based on a country’s military might. Rather, a nation’s power is determined through national unity and fortitude to withstand external pressures and threats.

Social Representations of the US and Iran

The persistent lexical markers and ideological representations extracted from the Iranian editorial articles extended a regime-like social representation of the US. This is amplified by associating this framing with other markers such as “war”, “pressure”, and “threat(s)”. Therefore, this lexical combination portrayed the US as the aggressor and repressor in the ongoing conflict between the US and Iran, framing Iran as a victim of US aggression (Bahgat, 2023; Singh, 2021). These arguments are justified through the table below.

Table 3

Social Representation of the US

SRT Mechanism	Lexical Marker	Ideological Representation
Anchoring	War, Pressure, Threat(s), Power	America as a Declining Superpower
	Aggression	America as a Regime and Aggressor
Objectification	Regime	America as a Regime and Aggressor

Table 3 shows how Moscovici’s (1988) *SRT* mechanisms, through Fairclough’s (1989) *Three-Dimensional Model*, are operationalized in the Iranian editorial articles to portray a social representation of the US. Intricately, it is evident that the Iranian articles have objectified the US as a “regime”, which they anchored to the terms “war”, “pressure”, and “threat(s)” to intensify this regime-like representation by framing the US as the aggressor in the ongoing conflict. However, this perceived aggression is claimed to have failed, which led to the narrative of the US as a declining superpower (Singh, 2021). This is justified through the excerpts below.

Iranian Article 18: “The current tension in the Persian Gulf and Hormuz Strait is the result of hostile and aggressive acts by the United States and Israeli regime against Iran.”

Iranian Article 22: “The current regional environment is defined by direct confrontation and mounting military pressure by the United States and Israel against Iran.”

It is shown in the quoted excerpts that the Iranian articles have explicitly referred to the US as a “regime”. To extend this portrayal, the articles have also referred to the US as one of the initiators of the military conflict, ideologically framing the US as an aggressor. This affirms the argument of Elmohadybellah (2026), which claimed that the US’ military operations towards Iran may be characterized as an “act of aggression” since the US failed to provide a legal justification for these operations. Conversely, these so-called aggressions of the US are claimed in the Iranian articles as failed external pressures, which only resulted in the increasing popularity of Iran in the Middle East. Thus, the articles have categorized the US as a declining power. This is seen in the excerpts below.

Iranian Article 7: “If this trajectory continues, this war, instead of weakening Iran, will become a turning point in consolidating its position as an influential power in the international system.”

Iranian Article 13: “The path back to diplomacy is not blocked. It has been abandoned. Reclaiming it will require more than technical negotiation. It will require a fundamental shift in how power is exercised and understood.”

The excerpts explicitly claim that the war’s ongoing trajectory, which was allegedly initiated by the US, amplifies the increasing influence of Iran in global politics. Thus, this entails a shift in the power dynamics between the US and Iran, where the US is framed as the weaker side (Tierney, 2021). Similarly, the American editorial articles have also framed a regime-like social representation to intensify the illegitimate framing of Iran as a sovereign state. This is evident in the table below.

Table 4

Social Representation of Iran

SRT Mechanism	Lexical Marker	Ideological Representation
Anchoring	Nuclear, Threat, Islamic	Iran as an Uncontrolled Nuclear Threat
Objectification	Regime, Terrorist	Iran as an Illegitimate Sovereign State

Table 4 specifies the social representation of Iran through the mechanisms of Moscovici’s (1988) *SRT*. Due to Iran’s uncontrollability and unpredictability, the American articles anchored the idea of “nuclear threat” towards Iran. Furthermore, these authoritarian and dictatorial descriptions of Iran’s behavior have objectified its regime-like social representation (Cianetti et al., 2025). This is affirmed in the excerpts below.

American Article 3: “It remains to be seen whether Trump should have continued bombing the Iranians to increase his leverage against a regime expert at lying, cheating, and obfuscating.”

American Article 33: “They pretended that the regime wasn’t enriching uranium to weapons-grade levels. Then, as late as recent weeks, they had the gall to tell their US counterparts that the regime did indeed have vast stores of uranium ready to make nuclear weapons.”

The excerpts above explicitly show the American articles referring to Iran as a regime. Moreover, this lexical marker is used in the context of Iran’s unpredictability. Particularly, the excerpts perceive Iran as an untrustworthy entity, which is a contributing perception in molding a representation of Iran as an unpredictable community (Dinler, 2026). This also justifies the underlying American ideology that Iran is an evident threat to world stability and peace (Roziki et al., 2025). This regime-like representation of Iran in the American editorial articles was further intensified by anchoring it to the lexical markers “Islamic” and “terrorist”, which is intended to illegitimize its existence as a sovereign state (Syarifuddin & Damirchi, 2025).

American Article 20: “Indeed, the Islamic Republic now seems destined to fall — even if not by the war’s end; at the least, it will be completely defanged, including the loss of any ability to close the Strait.”

American Article 26: “It also killed almost all the heads of the Iranian terrorist regime and its foul military and terrorist groups.”

The quotations above show the association of the lexical marker “regime” with other markers like “Islamic” and “terrorist”. This combination of lexical markers creates a representation of Iran as a sponsor of terror (Dinler, 2026). Therefore, these markers contribute to the illegitimization of Iran as a sovereign state. Furthermore, the word “Islamic” is documented to have a negative connotation, such as being a “traitor” or “dishonest” (Akmad & Akmad, 2024). Thus, the reference to Iran as an “Islamic” republic intensifies the regime-like social representation of Iran in the American editorial articles.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The present study has scrutinized the lexical markers used in American and Iranian editorial articles in constructing a social representation of each other within their respective cultural viewpoints. Through the ideological representations extracted from the editorial articles, it is concluded that the American and Iranian articles’ use of the lexical marker “regime” varies. Specifically, the American articles used it denotatively as it explicitly refers to the authoritarian government of Iran. Meanwhile, the Iranian articles operationalized such a marker connotatively since it refers to the perceived repressive behavior of the US towards Iran. Furthermore, it was observed that there is a balanced distribution of *objectification* and *anchoring* in the American editorial articles, which socially concretizes the representations of Iran as a “regime” and a “terrorist”. This means that American articles have “othered” the US in the positive polarity of the US-Iran tensions. Hence, the Iranian framing marks the behavior of the US towards Iran as necessary. On the other hand, the dominant use of *anchoring* in the Iranian editorial articles indicates the persistence of ideological framing towards the US. Thus, the regime-like social portrayal of the US is concluded to be constructed through the subjective interpretations of the articles’ authors. Elaborately, Iran has been “othered” in the Iranian articles as a reactive entity against the US’s behavior, which is categorized as “acts of aggression”. Moreover, the Iranian social representation of the US as a regime reverses the conventional Western ideology of Iran as a rogue state. Conversely, it frames the US as an entity that directly violates international law, which, as a result, destabilizes global peace. Finally, it is inferred that the negative depiction of both countries from their respective cultural points of view indicates a manifestation of conflicting regional objectives.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Further exploration of the present study could dwell on its conceptual and methodological dimensions. Intricately, it is recommended that future studies related to this topic should apply this paper’s conceptual framework to other intercultural communicative contexts (e.g., US-China, China-Philippines, Russia-Ukraine, US-Russia). In doing so, it could strengthen the theoretical grounding of the present study’s conceptual framework. Moreover, future papers could also follow the methodology employed in this research, which could affirm or negate the methodological reliability and validity of the present study. Expanding on this topic, the succeeding papers could utilize editorial articles written in the official language of Iran (Farsi) to confirm if the social representations of the US in English-written Iranian articles are similar to those written in Farsi. Furthermore, future studies are recommended to employ a diachronic analysis of these social representations to document how these representations change over time. Finally, later papers related to this topic could confirm the consistency of the social representations identified in this study by conducting a critical discourse analysis using other kinds of media platforms as corpus (e.g., television, social media, news reports).

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

One of the central objectives of this paper is to capture the recent developments of the US-Iran tensions, which justifies the study’s limitation to the scrutiny of lexical markers used in the context of US-Iran tensions. The same reason was applied when the paper’s corpus was limited to those American and Iranian editorial articles published from February 28 to April 7, 2026.

7. AI-DECLARATION STATEMENT

The author used NotebookLM in extracting the gist of the pieces of literature reviewed in this paper. The rest of the paper was originally written and organized by the author.

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