



## NEWS AS IDEOLOGY: A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF WESTERN AND EASTERN MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE IRAN PROTESTS

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### Abstract

The present study examines how Western and Eastern international news discursively construct the Iranian protests using Teun A. van Dijk's framework of News as Discourse (1988). The nature of the protests is widely reported as a political and humanitarian crisis. There is very little research present on the comparative exploration of the structure of the media coverage at multiple discursive levels in different geopolitical media outlets. A qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis is applied to the research for analyzing the four English-language news articles that are published during the peak of the protest in Iran by CNN, BBC News, Al Jazeera, and TRT World. The analysis process consists of five interrelated levels: first, macrostructures (the global thematic priorities), superstructures (the news schemata), microstructures (the lexical choices and the agency), rhetorical strategies (problem selection and epistemic positioning), and the interpretation of ideological structures. The findings of the study reveal there are systematic differences in how the presentations of protests are across different outlets. The Western media emphasizes the moralized and politically charged narratives that forefront the international intervention, repression, and legitimacy of the situation. Eastern media, on the other hand, prioritizes the regional context, the structural causality, and state sovereignty. These ideological interventions are realized by a specific organization and pattern of discourse, not by the overt editorial commentary. This research contributes to the critical media scholarship by applying Van Dijk's discourse model to a comparative geopolitical context. It helps in illustrating how international news reporting serves as a key site of the production of ideological structures. The findings show the role of international media in shaping public perceptions regarding political protests. These findings emphasize the importance of discourse-based approaches to analyzing the representation of power and ideology in global media.

**Keywords:** Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk, Social Cognitive Approach, News as Discourse, Iran Protest Representation, Global South, Global North.

### Introduction

In recent years, Iran has witnessed repetitive waves of mass protests on the issues of human rights, inflation, and corruption. The protests increased manifold after the death of Mahsa



Amini. She was a 22-year-old Iranian girl who died in police custody due to a violation of the “Hijab law.” Massive protests appeared in cities across Iran in 2022.

In late December 2025, the most recent protest emerged rapidly across all provinces of the country. The protests escalated in response to overtaxation, rising inflation, currency devaluation, and spiking living costs, in addition to the women’s rights. The protests initially started as economic issues, but soon the public started demanding regime change. The demonstrators started challenging the Iranian regime. The protests intensified as there was a significant increase in reports of violent crackdowns, mass arrests, and an extensive Internet shutdown. These protests and riots got significant attention and became a huge issue in international media coverage. The intensity of Iranian protests elicited strong Western media interest, but it was partially due to Iran’s geopolitical position and the strained diplomatic ties of Iran with Western powers. Iran occupies a politicized position in the global news space as a key actor in Middle Eastern politics. It has long-standing issues of international sanctions, regional conflicts, religious distinctions, and nuclear negotiations. Thereby, Iranian protests are prompted by significant media coverage and are often embroiled in broader ideological, religious, social, and geopolitical narratives.

Therefore, protests can no longer be regarded as purely political phenomena occurring within the spatial context but also as **discursively constructed phenomena**, the meaning of which is constructed, negotiated, and contested through international news representation. The news media serve as active agents in the construction of news narratives through the choice of what features of the events to emphasize, whose involvement to legitimize, and whose interpretations of the events to emphasize. Moreover, the news media do not have the role of mere fact transmitters but are actively engaged in the process of meaning construction concerning the explanation of the underlying causes of the events and the responsibility for the violence, as well as the definitions of protesters, those in power, and foreign involvement. News discourse is structured through the choices of the news texts, and the power relations and ideologies within which news texts are situated serve as contexts for the construction of meanings concerning the way reality is depicted.

The theoretical underpinning of this analysis draws upon the view of news as discourse as conceptualized by van Dijk (1988). Van Dijk’s view of news as discourse highlights the structured and social nature of news discourse. News discourse has different levels as conceptualized by van Dijk. News discourse has macrostructures that include global themes and local themes. Some superstructures include news schemata such as headlines and leads. There are also microstructures that include different aspects, such as lexics and syntax. Other levels include ideologies and strategies. Ideology in news discourse is not presented through opinion. The above theoretical stance has been particularly effective in analyzing news of protest and democracy.

Increasingly, studies have been conducted on the framing of media (Pulk, 2024) and protest and how the news often is complicit in the marginalization of protest by coverage emphasizing disorder, violence, and the threat to order and stability (Esmaeili, 2024). Research has been conducted into the Western presentation in the media of the Middle East in terms of patterns in moralizing, simplification, and geopolitical orientation (Adegbola, 2022). Though informative, much of this research has been based on either framing studies or content analysis and has been Western-media-centric.

Furthermore, despite the utility of van Dijk’s model in examining ideology in media discourse, its utility in examining the present discourse related to Iranian protests is rather limited. Present studies tend to examine a specific linguistic item or a media group. There is a



need to fill the gap in an examination from a macro-structural to an ideological perspective. This is critical in comprehending the ways in which divergent global storylines are made to prevail concerning issues in Iran.

With this context taken into consideration, the current research aims to investigate the way international news discourse is constructed by Western and Eastern international news channels concerning the Iranian protests. By carrying out a comparative analysis between the news coverage of CNN and the BBC, as Western international news channels, and Al Jazeera and TRT World, as Eastern international news channels, the research will explore the way these channels differ concerning the prioritization of themes, the structure of the news schema, the social representation schema, and the underlying ideology. By applying the News as Discourse framework proposed by van Dijk, the current research will make a significant contribution to the field of critical studies of media.

#### **Research Questions:**

- 1) How are the Iranian protests represented discursively by Western and Eastern news organizations?
- 2) In what ways do BBC and CNN contrast with TRT World and Al Jazeera in terms of thematic macrostructure (primary topics and relevance rankings)?
- 3) In what way are news schemata (headlines, lead, background, consequences, reactions) structured in Western vs. Eastern news media?
- 4) In what ways do social actors (protesters, Iranian government officials, and international actors) appear at the microstructural level?
- 5) How are ideological stances embedded by such rhetorical devices as source selection, lexical choice, or emphasis?

#### **Literature Review**

Critical discourse analysis is an interdisciplinary approach that thoroughly explores the relationship between language, power, and ideology in discourse. Discourse is the main ground for promoting or challenging the dominant powers (Fairclough, 1998). Critical Discourse is a multidisciplinary approach developed by Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, van Dijk, and many others. This research explores Van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach in media studies. The study, employing this methodology, dissects the representation of the Iranian protests in newspapers.

#### **Critical Discourse Analysis**

Fairclough states that Critical Discourse Analysis emerged from Critical Linguistics, pioneered by Fowler et al. (1979) at the University of East Anglia (Fairclough, 1989). Critical Discourse Analysis was later developed by the Three-Dimensional Model of Fairclough, which consists of three stages: the description stage, the interpretation stage, and the explanation stage, to expose the concealed asymmetrical power dynamics. Concurrently, Ruth Wodak elucidates the triangulated data (text, context, and intertextuality) by giving the Discourse-Historical Approach. Wodak believed that the historical context and sociopolitical background are equally important for analyzing any genre of discourse (Wodak, 2015). On the other hand, Van Dijk holds a different standpoint about the dependency of analysis on context. He believes that context is not objective, but discourse is a socio-cognitive mediated process. It operates through the cognitive mental models that participants construct through social representations, thereby operationalizing ideology as a belief system of members of social groups.



### **Van Dijk's Socio-cognitive Approach**

Teun A. Van Dijk regards discourse as a display of a variety of meanings. Van Dijk accorded significant importance to textual linguistics and cognitive linguistics and developed an approach called the Social Cognitive Approach (Van Dijk, 1998). According to van Dijk, the discourse is not just language and text combined; it is a representation of ideology and power. The discourse influences society through cognition, and audiences interpret the discourse through their shared mental models. Ideological structures and dominant groups that control the discourse shape these mental models. By combining sociopolitical context with cognition, Van Dijk provides a methodology for analyzing the ideologically loaded narratives that are produced, promoted, or challenged across the media discourse.

### **Application in Media Discourse**

Van Dijk renounces approaches that focus on meanings at the surface level and ignore the sociocognitive ideological context. This elucidates how selected discourse, particularly the journalistic paradigm, propagates polarized Us-Them divisions through lexical choices and inferred content (van Dijk, 2006). In conflict reportage, the cognitive models' bias towards the hegemonic narratives is present (Van Dijk, 2008). The audience's internal cognitive schemata affect the selection of sources. It shapes their ideology, too. This standpoint focuses on the role of cognitive mediation that shapes and propagates the power dynamics, especially in news and media discourse.

### **Ideology and News Reporting**

Ideology plays a pivotal role in the reporting of news media. It is a core site for the construction of meanings that perpetuate or disrupt the existing power dynamics. News reporting holds a prominent place within the global media system. "The Propaganda Model" of communication theory, given by Herman and Chomsky (1988), argues that news reporting is filtered by structural factors like ownership, sourcing, and geopolitical interests. Although at that time their research was not popular, later it was proved by the following research that media coverage is rarely neutral; most of the time, news reports are highly loaded with ideology.

The international selection of news is shaped by factors such as negativity, elite actors, and cultural proximity, as demonstrated by studies on news value (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). These factors are highly influential even in contemporary journalism, particularly in conflict reportage. News reporting often naturalizes the perspectives of dominant groups by using lexical nominalization and with the help of the historical context (Fairclough, 1995).

Van Dijk (1998, 2000) extends this idea and emphasizes the role of elite discourse in news reporting. He argues that journalism often relies on the official institutional voices. As a result, the reproduction of dominant geopolitical ideologies and asymmetrical power relations is common in news coverage, e.g., the Global North and the Global South.

### **Representation of Protests in News Coverage**

News representation is key to cultivating support for or opposition to any protest movements. Protest paradigm theory is one of the influential frameworks that describes the repetitive patterns that the media uses to marginalize protestors. The media coverage emphasizes conflict, violence, and deviance with biases towards the official viewpoints (McLeod and



Hertog, 1998). The protest paradigm is observed across various protests internationally or nationally.

Protestors are often characterized as deviants and criminals (Hall et al. 1998). The overt ideological framing and deeper discourse shape the protest reporting structures. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1992) argue that the protests and protesters often struggle to gain legitimacy, particularly when they challenge the dominant political and ideological interests. The representations of protestors are frequently shown by the constructions of passives, collective labeling, and depersonalization of alternative agency, and authority is given to the state actors. This representation helps in creating the image of protest as a problem of order rather than the expression of political participation. These studies emphasize the relevance of Van Dijk's Social Cognition Approach in analyzing thematic prioritization and linguistics.

### **Western Media News of Iran Protest**

Western coverage of Iranian protests emphasizes the dominant discourse of authoritarianism and repression. The suffering of individuals, moral condemnation, and binary oppositions are present between the state and the people. The Western media lacks the socio-historical and regional context and often highlights the lack of human rights in Iran. They prioritize the Western officials' and the dominant groups' voices, shaping the ideological framing of the events.

From a critical discourse point of view, these predispositions are revealed in macro-structural and schematic choices. The confrontations and repression are frequently foregrounded by headlines and news articles. On the contrary, the economic conditions, regional politics, or internal diversity are minimized. Especially after the death of Mahsa Amini, the Western media outlets are constantly highlighting the lack of human rights and women's rights in Iran. They emphasize the slogan of "Women, Life, Freedom" and often describe the protests as protestors' calls for justice and freedom. (Esmaeili, 2023). The Western media portrays the Iranian protests as a movement for basic human rights, freedom, and women's rights. The Western coverage criticizes the Iran Regime openly as violent and repressive in the name of defending the citizens. Western media reporting casts a liberal-democratic ideology that sympathizes with the Iranians and portrays them as righteous victims while the regime is culpable. (Wintour, 2022).

### **Non-Western Media Representation**

Non-Western broadcasters are regarded as producers of the other side of the coin, discourses on a global level. Seib (2008) noted that Al Jazeera challenges the hegemony of Western news reporting by emphasizing the perspectives of the indigenous people. Non-Westerners focus on the background information of the situation and do not publish the binary approaches. Still, we cannot conclude that they do not exhibit their own political and institutional contexts in their news reporting (Seib, 2008).

Gulf State media often tone down the focus on the seriousness and mix it with regional politics to save face in front of the Iranian Regime. Pro-Iran outlets like Press TV are biased towards the Iranian Regime and reject the riots and chaos (Hashemi, 2022). Western journalists' schemas prioritize individual liberty and gender equality, so their headlines lead with "brutal" policing of women; state media in Iran or Russia have schemas that focus deeply on national security and conspiracy, so their reports focus on foreign enemies.



## Research Gap

Studies about the Iranian protests and the socio-cognitive approach are limited in nature. Alghamdi et al. (2025) analyze Iran's official news agency (IRNA) discourse representation of the Yemeni proxy war (2018–2019) in relation to van Dijk's social/cognitive move analysis. It analyzed the way the state media frames its role and legitimates Iran's presence. Another study applied van Dijk's sociocognitive model of CDA to the analysis of CNN and Al-Jazeera news reporting. It took news from these channels of a certain period, not of something specific.

The research on how the media frames protests in Iran has grown significantly, but certain analyses are still missing. Quantitative studies on framing, such as Adegbola et al. (2022) and recent content analyses by Esmaili (2023) and Neama (2025), show differences among various outlets. However, none have used van Dijk's socio-cognitive critical discourse analysis (CDA) for coverage after 2022. Specifically, no research published between 2025 and 2026 has applied van Dijk's framework to explore the narrative construction of the Iranian protests. Most existing work either comes before the most recent protests or uses different analytical frameworks, like pragmatics or semiotics. As a result, a detailed CDA study of the ideological frameworks in current Iranian protest discourse has not yet been done. Addressing this gap will improve our understanding of how power dynamics and ideology shape international reporting on Iran.

## Research Methodology

### 4.1 Research Design and Approach

This study is a qualitative, comparative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research design to investigate how international news media discursively construct the Iranian protests. The analysis in this research is based on Teun A. van Dijk's socio-cognitive model of news discourse (van Dijk, 1998). It represents news as an institutional form of discourse shaped by ideological, cognitive, and social constraints. CDA is particularly appropriate for examining news reporting on political protests. It helps in the systematic analysis of how power relations, ideology, and dominance are reproduced through language in ostensibly objective texts.

This research uses a qualitative approach to data analysis, as the study aims to uncover implicit meanings, discursive strategies, and ideological positioning hidden in news texts. The study shows how media outlets construct particular interpretations of protest events while apparently looking neutral. It is done by focusing on discourse structures and linguistic choices. The present study is comparative in nature, and it analyzes the commonalities and differences in reporting of the same events of the Iranian protest between Western and Eastern media. It also shows that there is a major influence of the geopolitical positioning of countries in news discourse.

### 4.2 Theoretical Framework

The analysis uses van Dijk's theory of news as discourse, which proposes the fact that ideology in news reporting is expressed through textual organization instead of explicit opinion or overt editorials. According to this framework, news discourse uses multiple interrelated levels that together shape meaning and interpretation. At the macrostructural level, news texts are organized around global topics. News produce relevance hierarchies determine what is considered most important. At the superstructural level, news reports follow conventional schematic patterns, such as headlines, leads, verbal reactions and



background information. They get readers' to think in a specific way about events. At the microstructural level, ideological meaning is given through local linguistic features, including lexical choices, syntactic constructions, agency assignment, and coherence relations.

These levels of analysis are better than surface-level framing analysis. It reveals the deeper structural mechanisms through which ideology operates in international news discourse.

#### **4.3 Data Selection and Corpus**

We selected four English-language news articles from popular international broadcasters. BBC News and CNN represent Western international media. TRT World and Al Jazeera represent Eastern international broadcasters. These outlets were selected due to their global status and also because they continuously report on political developments in the Middle East. Their status as transnational news organizations makes them suitable for examining how protest events are constructed for international audiences.

These articles are comparable for several reasons. All articles are reporting on the same wave of protests in Iran starting at the end of December 2025 and were published during the first week of January 2026. Only hard news reports were included. We did not add opinion pieces, editorials, and commentary, as they represent personal ideology rather than institutional. All the selected news articles are in the English language to ensure consistency in linguistic analysis. Also, we lose nuances when translation is done. Furthermore, the selected articles focus on protest developments and state responses instead of peripheral geopolitical or cultural topics. Each article is treated as an individual case within a small comparative corpus in order to do both in-depth textual analysis and cross-textual comparison.

#### **4.4 Unit of Analysis**

The individual news article is treated as the primary unit of analysis. Within each article, multiple textual units are examined to analyze both global and local discourse structures. The textual units include headlines and lead paragraphs, as they are necessary for establishing thematic priorities. It also includes paragraph-level thematic units. They develop the narrative in the minds of the readers. It includes individual sentences and clauses as well. They reveal micro-level linguistic choices. The researchers also included quoted speech and attributed sources by leaders of countries which play a central role in constructing authority and credibility.

#### **4.5 Analytical Procedure**

This analysis follows van Dijk's model of news discourse through a systematic, multi-step process. In the first step, we conducted a macrostructural analysis to look at the overall theme of each article. We derived macropropositions from the content of each paragraph, identifying main and supporting topics. This step considers the relevance of information, especially what is highlighted in headlines and leads, compared to what is downplayed or left out. We examined how each outlet defines the core issues of the protests and which aspects they find most newsworthy.

The second step involved superstructural analysis, where we interpreted each article based on its organizational structure. We categorized textual segments into news schema elements, including headlines, leads, main events, background information, outcomes, and verbal reactions. We looked at how these components were ordered, emphasized, and their relative importance. We also noted whether certain schema elements were present or absent. This



analysis showed how narrative structure influences reader interpretation and assigns responsibility for the protests.

In the third level of analysis, we performed a microstructural analysis to explore local meaning and form. We analyzed word choices, focusing on the use of evaluative versus neutral language. We also examined sentence structure, such as active and passive voice. Additionally, we considered how these factors impact agency and the representation of social actors, including protesters, Iranian authorities, and international figures. We analyzed patterns of quotation and attribution to assess how authority, legitimacy, and credibility are constructed in the discourse. This level of analysis demonstrates how ideological meanings are expressed while maintaining an appearance of objectivity.

The final analytical stage looks at the rhetorical and ideological strategies used by news broadcasters. These strategies aim to enhance the persuasion and credibility of the news organization. They include the selection and prioritization of authoritative sources and the incorporation of numbers and statistics. The use of emotional or moral evaluations also adds an emotional appeal to the news. We analyzed these strategies in relation to broader ideological viewpoints and geopolitical contexts. These textual choices reflect larger structures of power and knowledge.

#### **4.6 Comparative Analysis**

After analyzing each article individually, we conducted a comparative analysis to find systematic similarities and differences between Western and Eastern media. This comparison is done on four levels: thematic priorities, news schema organization, representation of social actors, and the ideological implications of recurring discourse patterns. The study also highlights how media from the same bloc share similarities in their news reporting.

In this study, we established clear analytical categories based on van Dijk's theoretical framework. We provide detailed textual evidence for transparency in our findings, including specific word choices and structural patterns. While discourse analysis is inherently interpretive, grounding the analysis in van Dijk's framework enhances methodological clarity. For the same reason, it is easier for other researchers to replicate this research.

#### **4.8 Ethical Considerations**

This study was done on the news articles publicly available on the internet. It does not involve human subjects. So no ethical approval was required. However, we ensured that no personal bias intervenes in the process of analysis. That is why textual evidences are included in the findings section. We have also provided a link to the original news articles in the appendix section.

#### **4.9 Limitations**

This study has several limitations. The small corpus size limits the generalizability of the findings, and the focus on English-language reporting excludes perspectives expressed in other languages. Additionally, the selection of four international outlets does not capture the full diversity of global or domestic Iranian media discourse. This study is based on a more in-depth analysis rather than breadth. It demonstrates the explanatory power of qualitative discourse analysis for uncovering ideological structures in international news reporting.

## Findings

The following are the findings of the study that includes Critical Discourse Analysis of four international news articles, i.e., CNN, BBC News, Al Jazeera, and TRT World, that report on the Iran protests. Following van Dijk's (1988) model of news as discourse, we structured the analysis across five interrelated levels: macrostructural (global themes), superstructural (news schema), microstructural (lexical and syntactic choices), rhetorical strategies, and ideological interpretation. This analysis is done not only on an individual article level but also compares Global North and Global South news channels to show how similar discursive mechanisms are represented differently across Western and Eastern media contexts.

### 5.1 Macrostructural Level: Global Topics and Thematic Priorities

At the macrostructural level, all four outlets construct the protests as a significant national crisis. However, they differ significantly in **how the protests are thematically defined and what is foregrounded as their primary meaning**.

The macroproposition of CNN's article frames the protests as a **regime-threatening and moral crisis**. The headline and lead foreground repression, casualties, and external intervention, e.g., "*Anti-government protests have erupted across all 31 of Iran's provinces... marking the biggest challenge to the regime in years.*" Economic causes are mentioned, but they function as a background trigger. The dominant theme questions political legitimacy and shows that the Iranian regime is vulnerable and can be crashed easily.

BBC News constructs a more **institutionally oriented macrostructure**. All the factors, e.g., economic decline, political authority, and international relations, are balanced. The article contextualizes the protests through inflation statistics, sanctions, and governance structures; for example, "*inflation has soared to 40%, resulting in crippling price rises for everyday items.*" The protests are framed more as a cumulative institutional crisis and less as an immediate moral rupture.

Al Jazeera's macrostructure is organized around the principles of **structural causality and historical continuity**. The research shows that the protests are thematically related to long-term economic deterioration, sanctions, war, and historical grievances. Al Jazeera did it by discussing the 1953 coup, the 1979 revolution, and the sanctions regimes. The dominant topic is not regime collapse but systemic failure: "*The grievances... are not going to be quieted this time around.*"

TRT World constructs the protests within a **security–economy–geopolitics macrostructure**. While inflation and currency collapse are highlighted, the protests are thematically linked to foreign pressure and regional instability. The headline's attribution—"*rights group says*"—immediately introduces epistemic caution. It signals that the protests are serious but contested.

We see two distinct ideological priorities in our findings: Western media foreground political morality and legitimacy, while Eastern media emphasize structural causation and geopolitical consequence.

### 5.2 Superstructural Level: News Schema Organization

The **news schema organization was considerably different in all four articles**. This was evident in the sequencing of headlines, leads, background information, and verbal reactions.

CNN's article had a crisis-oriented schema. The research reveals that escalation is foregrounded early. The lead in the article immediately introduces nationwide unrest and US threats. On the other hand, background economic explanations appear later. The early

placement of US President Trump's statement "*help is on its way*" gives importance to international intervention. It makes it a central narrative driver and highlights the importance of Western leaders.

The BBC News article has a more **explanatory superstructure**. It has clearly segmented sections such as "*Who is in charge of Iran?*" and "*Why is it difficult to get information?*" These sections institutionalize explanation and guide the reader toward systemic understanding. It does not let emotional urgency come their way. The schema draws the attention of the reader across causes of protests, responses by the international audience, and constraints due to which this problem cannot be averted.

Al Jazeera devotes large schematic space to background and context before accounting foreign reactions. The protests are represented as caused by economic statistics and policy changes. The US involvement is framed later. This ordering reduces the immediacy of the protests and frames the escalation of the protests as something contingent rather than inevitable.

TRT World's schema foregrounds casualties and unrest, but it also quickly shifts to statements and responses of foreign state leaders. The article ends with statements given by Iran's Supreme Leader asserting that the country "*will not yield to the enemy,*" giving away discursive authority to the state and reinforcing a sovereignty-centered closure.

These schematic patterns show that van Dijk's argument about **news structure controlling relevance and interpretation** is valid by shaping how readers understand causality and responsibility.

### 5.3 Microstructural Level: Lexical Choices and Agency

At the microstructural level, ideological positioning becomes apparent through specific lexical choices, grammatical agency, and quotation patterns.

#### 5.3.1 Lexicalization

The lexis used by the CNN article is strongly evaluative lexis, such as "*deadly unrest,*" "*violent crackdown,*" and "*waging war against God.*" It shows moral judgment by the media. Protesters are associated with suffering and courage. The authorities are linked to coercion and threat.

The BBC uses comparatively restrained language. It favors institutional terms such as "*authorities,*" "*judiciary,*" and "*security forces.*" Evaluative language is given to sources rather than asserted directly. It helps in maintaining journalistic distance.

Al Jazeera used economic and structural vocabulary, for example, "*currency collapse,*" "*subsidy cuts,*" and "*sanctions.*" It shifts interpretation away from individual blame toward systemic failure.

TRT World used a security-oriented lexicon. Examples are "*violent clashes,*" "*retaliation,*" and "*targeting protest leaders.*" Protest is linked to the instability of the state rather than moral resistance by protestors

#### 5.3.2 Agency and Actor Representation

In CNN, protesters are frequently assigned active agency ("*crowds chanted,*" "*protesters blocked streets*"), while authorities are depicted as initiators of violence. This asymmetrical agency reinforces moral polarization.

BBC distributes agency more evenly, often using passive constructions ("*protesters are reported to have been killed*") that foreground events over actors.



Al Jazeera puts the state and protestors in the constraints of structural issues of the state, which reduces individualized agency. Economic or political pressure is made responsible for what is happening in Iran.

TRT World mitigates protester agency

by using collective labeling (“*demonstrators*,” “*unrest*”) and emphasizing state responses as reactions to disorder.

#### **5.4 Rhetorical Strategies: Sources, Numbers, and Credibility**

The rhetorical strategies play an important function in the legitimization of particular interpretations. CNN gives weightage to the liberal-interventionist ideology, and it prioritizes the US human rights advocacy groups and Western political leaders. For the dramatization of repression, the statistics are used (“*more than 2,400 protesters have been killed*”), often accompanied by several constraints that accentuate the suspicions of the transparency of the Iranian government. The institutional credibility is bolstered in the BBC, as there is a pronounced emphasis on verification and transparency, repeatedly noting the limits to independent confirmation.

Al Jazeera perpetuates the historical explanations and academic voices, as they do not dramatize the events of protest; rather, they focus on the expert testimonies to contextualize the situation. On the other hand, TRT World mitigates the moral escalation and uses attribution and epistemic distancing. The study notes that they frequently use figures that are contested or unverified.

#### **5.5 Ideological Interpretation: Discursive Worldviews**

The structural and linguistic choices combine to create a coherent worldview at the ideological level. Al Jazeera foregrounds the historical injustices and systemic correlation in their texts. It propagates the **post-colonial and structuralist ideologies**. TRT World prioritizes the geopolitical consequences, management, order, and stability of the state, focusing on **sovereignty-centered realist ideology**. On the contrary, the Western media, like CNN, advances a **liberal-interventionist ideology**. They justify the protests as moral and normalize the external pressures on the state. The BBC outlet emphasizes state accountability, governance, and procedural explanation, promoting a **liberal-institutionalist ideology**.

The analysis reveals, in accordance with van Dijk’s approach, that the ideologies are not expressed by explicit stances but rather through the recurrent patterns of emphasis, selection, and organization.

#### **5.6 Summary of Discursive Differences**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the international new media coverage is highly contaminated with ideological structures across all five analytical levels. The coverage of all outlets reports the same events of the Iranian protests while constructing fundamentally different hidden meanings through their discourse. The differences in the findings highlight that the role of the international news media is not just a disseminator of discourses. In fact, it serves as an active participant in a symbolic struggle concerning power, legitimacy, and socio-political change.



## Conclusion

The present study intends to explore the way Western and Eastern international news outlets discursively construct the Iran protests 2025-26 discourse by using the framework of Teun A. van Dijk's (1988) News as Discourse. The study is about qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis of renowned international news channels CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, and TRT World. The study shows that there are major differences in representations of ideological stances that are embedded within their discursive strategies in international news. The research observes that the claim of the news media that they are neutral is problematic; they are actively encoding the meanings through schematic structuring, source hierarchies, linguistic choices, and thematic prioritization.

The findings of this study reveal that there are significant differences at the macro-level in the Eastern and Western news coverage. Western media put great emphasis on the politics of Middle Eastern affairs, often portraying their crisis as a form of oppression. BBC News has liberal ideologies that apparently emphasize human rights and political responsibilities. In reality, their texts have more institutional bias and are more explanatory in nature. Meanwhile, CNN especially portrays the moral and political crisis in the protests, often highlighting the oppression and violence of the regime. They ignore the stances of victims and the regional conflicts. The protests in Eastern media were, by contrast, placed in a more macro-level focus. Al Jazeera emphasized economic suffering and intervention, while TRT World highlighted security, regional, and sovereignty perspectives.

On the level of superstructure, the results of this study reveal that news schemata are crucial in constitutive processes. While news schemata in the Western media system focused more on immediacy, escalation, and foreign reactions at the beginning of news articles to produce a sense of urgency and moral dichotomy, Eastern news schemata focused more on background and causality in news articles to produce news schemata that cannot be dichotomized as oppressor and oppressed. These choices of news schema structure vindicate van Dijk's ideological view that news discourse itself is an ideological practice.

Micro-structural analysis further revealed that the representation of social actors was crucial to the discourse about legitimacy and responsibility. The humanization and moral legitimization of the protestors, compared with the association with repression/coercion for the authorities, occurred regularly in the Western media. By contrast, both protestors and government authorities were regularly attributed to structural conditions in the Eastern media. The representation of non-domestic actors, especially the United States, was a crucial ideological split, with the Western media normalizing the moral authority of the United States, whereas the Eastern media suggested that United States involvement was destabilizing/escalatory.

Taken together, these findings illustrate the crucial role of international media in the enactment of symbolic power. News discourse performs global interventions related to perceptions of political legitimacy, state power, and popular opposition by shaping the way the protests are understood, contextualized, and evaluated. Thereby, the findings contribute to existing literature on news discourse by revealing that there are differences in news ideological representations that are more than matters of framing and are instead embedded within discourse structure.

## Future Insights

Future studies may expand upon such a study by using a broader text base, whether multilingual research or longitudinal data, to investigate changes in discourse with the



passage of time. Further research could be conducted to investigate audiences' reception of alternative narratives of a protest and/or a comparison of news media with social media sites. Such research will help untangle the complexities of relationships among discourse, ideology, and power in global communication.

Cumulatively, this study illustrates that the Iranian protests as an incident are, at the same time, discursively framed through competing ideological frames. This paper applies van Dijk's model of news as discourse to bring out how international media in a globalized news environment participate in symbolic struggle over meaning, legitimacy, and power. The understanding of the discursive strategies is essential for audiences, scholars, or journalists seeking to engage with international news and the narratives it produces critically.

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### Appendices

<https://www.trtworld.com/article/3f7c43594e56>

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