

JCPOA's Online Discourse: A Meta-Analysis

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Original Article</p> <p>Main Object: Political Science</p> <p>Received: 03 April 2025 Revised: 12 April 2025 Accepted: 12 April 2025 Published online: 19 April 2025</p> <p>Keywords: critical discourse analysis, diplomatic communication, Iranian domestic politics, JCPOA, transatlantic relations.</p>	<p>Background: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) signed in 2015, limited Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief. The U.S. withdrew in 2018, but talks continue to revive the deal.</p> <p>Aim: This meta-analysis examines how academic research from 2017 to 2024 has analyzed the JCPOA through the lens of critical discourse studies, revealing the interplay of language, power, and identity in constructing meaning around the agreement.</p> <p>Methodology: This meta-analysis synthesizes 27 peer-reviewed studies (2017–2024) to examine the discursive construction of JCPOA through critical discourse analysis (CDA) frameworks.</p> <p>Discussion: The study reveals how competing narratives shaped the agreement's trajectory, focusing on three key dimensions: (1) <i>transatlantic policy divergences</i>, where EU multilateralist discourses clashed with U.S. unilateralist "America First" rhetoric under Trump, exacerbating diplomatic rifts; (2) <i>domestic Iranian narrative battles</i>, where reformist and conservative factions framed the JCPOA as either pragmatic diplomacy or ideological betrayal, leveraging media and social media to delegitimize opponents; and (3) <i>diplomatic communication strategies</i>, where translational asymmetries and linguistic negotiation underscored the politicized nature of interstate dialogue.</p> <p>Conclusions: The study demonstrates how discourse not only reflected but actively produced geopolitical realities, generating new identities (e.g., Iran as "resistant"), policies (e.g., maximum pressure), and material outcomes (e.g., renewed uranium enrichment).</p>

Cite this article: Emamzadeh Z. (2025). "JCPOA's Online Discourse: A Meta-Analysis". *Cyberspace Studies*. 9(2): 447-464. doi: <https://doi.org/10.22059/jcss.2025.392829.1137>.



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Website: <https://jcssl.ut.ac.ir/> | Email: jcss@ut.ac.ir | EISSN: 2588-5502
Publisher: University of Tehran

1. Introduction

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in 2015 between Iran and the P5+1 nations, was one of the most significant diplomatic developments and contentious political issues in contemporary Iranian political history. Designed to limit Iran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief, the agreement became a focal point for competing narratives about security, sovereignty, and global order. Its subsequent unraveling—particularly after the U.S. withdrawal under the Trump administration in 2018—exposed deep fissures in transatlantic relations, ideological divides within Iran, and the evolving role of discourse in shaping foreign policy. This meta-analysis examines how academic research from 2017 to 2024 has analyzed the JCPOA through the lens of critical discourse studies, revealing the interplay of language, power, and identity in constructing meaning around the agreement. By synthesizing 27 studies employing frameworks such as Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA), van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach, and Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory, this paper illuminates three key dimensions of the JCPOA's discursive life: *transatlantic policy divergences*, *domestic Iranian narrative battles*, and *diplomatic communication strategies*.

The JCPOA's trajectory—from celebrated diplomatic breakthrough to politicized "failure"—underscores the centrality of discourse in international politics. As Schiffer (2017) and Hajimineh and Salehi (2018) demonstrate, the agreement became a litmus test for transatlantic unity, with European multilateralist narratives clashing with Trump's unilateralist "America First" rhetoric. This divergence was not merely procedural but rooted in competing discursive constructions of Iran: as a potential partner in nonproliferation (the EU view) or an existential threat requiring coercion (the Trump administration's framing). Such divisions were amplified through media and political speech, where lexical choices (e.g., "worst deal ever") and argumentative strategies (e.g., moral evaluation of Iran's compliance) served to legitimize policy shifts (Nourani et al., 2020; Udum, 2018). These studies reveal how discourse not only reflects but actively shapes geopolitical realities, as the erosion of shared transatlantic narratives weakened the JCPOA's normative and material foundations.

Within Iran with its complex political constellation (*see for example* Shahghasemi, 2023), the JCPOA became a battleground for ideological struggles between reformist and conservative factions, each employing distinct discursive tactics to claim ownership of the agreement's outcomes. Iranians are generally massive users of the social media (Nosraty et al., 2020) and hence the debate was hot in social media as well. Reformist-aligned media like *Shargh* framed the deal as a pragmatic victory enabling economic integration, while conservative outlets such as *Keyhan* depicted it as a security threat requiring resistance (Mozaffari, 2017; Nateghi et al., 2022). This polarization was

exacerbated after the U.S. withdrawal, as Masoudi and Hamiani (2024) show through narrative analysis of Iranian elite discourse. The initial “success” narrative—emphasizing sanctions relief and international reintegration—gave way to a “failure” storyline that likened the JCPOA to historical betrayals (e.g., the Turkmenchay Treaty), leveraging historical analogies to discredit reformist diplomats like Zarif. Such discursive contests were not confined to traditional media; as Nourani et al. (2023) illustrate, Iranian conservatives weaponized Twitter to delegitimize the agreement through religious-authoritative appeals (*authorization*) and anti-Western rationalizations. These studies collectively highlight how domestic discourse mediates international agreements, transforming technical arrangements into symbols of ideological legitimacy or betrayal.

At the level of interstate communication, discourse analysis reveals the JCPOA as a site of linguistic negotiation and translational asymmetry. Beh-Afarin and Deris Hemadi (2023) expose how discrepancies between the English and Persian texts of the agreement—such as verb-choice variations—subtly altered legal interpretations, reflecting power imbalances in diplomatic drafting. Similarly, Taleghani (2018) demonstrates how Iranian translators strategically adapted nuclear-related texts to align with state narratives, underscoring translation as a political act. Even the agreement’s persistence after U.S. withdrawal, as Mozaffari (2022) argues, hinged on discursive practices that reconstituted the JCPOA as a normative benchmark in multilateral forums. Such findings challenge conventional IR theories that prioritize material over discursive factors, showing how language sustains or undermines international regimes.

Iranian online discourse has significantly shaped the political life of the JCPOA by transforming a technical diplomatic accord into a highly contested ideological symbol. Social media became a critical arena where domestic factions projected competing narratives, in which different social groups might come into play (Hosseini et al., 2025). Studies such as Nourani et al. (2023) demonstrate how conservative users invoked religious authority and nationalist rhetoric to frame the JCPOA as a betrayal of revolutionary values, portraying the deal as morally and strategically flawed. These tactics served to erode public support and weaken the internal legitimacy of the agreement, contributing to its discursive redefinition as a “failed” or “imposed” deal. The intense digital engagement by Iranian users, who are among the most active social media participants in the region (Arsalani et al., 2025), amplified these polarizing narratives beyond traditional media boundaries.

This online polarization reverberated into Iran’s formal political discourse and influenced the international framing of the JCPOA. Reformist media attempted to counterbalance conservative narratives by emphasizing the deal’s diplomatic gains and its potential to

reintegrate Iran into the global economy. However, the digital proliferation of antagonistic framing—particularly analogies to historical humiliations like the Turkmenchay Treaty—resonated strongly with public memory and political identity, intensifying the ideological rift. As studies like Masoudi and Hamiani (2024) show, the initial “success” narrative of the JCPOA eventually gave way to a dominant “failure” narrative within online and elite discourse. These dynamics illustrate how Iranian online discourse not only mediated public perceptions of the nuclear agreement but also actively reshaped its symbolic value, influencing both domestic political alignments and Iran’s posture in international negotiations.

This meta-analysis bridges discourse studies and IR scholarship by systematizing three decades of research on the JCPOA’s discursive dimensions. It advances two core arguments: first, that the agreement’s fate was shaped not only by geopolitical interests but by competing narrative strategies that rendered it legible (or illegitimate) across audiences; second, that these discourses were *productive*—generating new identities (e.g., Iran as “resistant” or “compliant”), policies (e.g., maximum pressure), and even material realities (e.g., renewed enrichment).

2. Methodology

This is a meta-analysis study. Meta-analysis is a research method that systematically combines and analyzes data from multiple independent studies addressing a common research question. It is commonly used in fields such as medicine, psychology, education, and the social sciences to aggregate quantitative findings, enhance statistical power, and derive more robust conclusions than any single study can provide (Paterson et al., 2001). By pooling effect sizes and applying statistical techniques, meta-analysis allows researchers to identify overall trends, test the consistency of results across different contexts, and resolve discrepancies in the literature (Borenstein et al., 2009).

The process of conducting a meta-analysis typically involves several key steps: formulating a clear research question, establishing inclusion and exclusion criteria, systematically searching for relevant studies, extracting and coding data, and applying statistical methods to synthesize results. The outcomes of a meta-analysis often include a summary effect size, measures of heterogeneity, and assessments of publication bias. Beyond its statistical utility, meta-analysis also plays a critical role in evidence-based decision-making by offering a high-level overview of the existing knowledge on a topic (Cooper et al., 2019).

In this study we were interested in examining academic works about JCPOA which were accessible “online”. This meta-analysis employs a systematic qualitative synthesis of 27 peer-reviewed studies examining discourse surrounding JCPOA from 2017 to 2024. Studies were

selected based on their use of critical discourse analysis (CDA) frameworks (e.g., Fairclough, van Dijk, Laclau & Mouffe) to examine political, media, or diplomatic texts related to the nuclear agreement. The analysis focused on identifying recurring discursive strategies (e.g., framing, nominalization, antagonism), ideological patterns, and cross-study themes in three domains: *transatlantic policy discourses* (e.g., U.S.-EU divergence under Trump), *domestic Iranian narratives* (e.g., reformist vs. principlist media), and *diplomatic/interstate communication* (e.g., translation practices, presidential rhetoric).

To ensure methodological rigor, the synthesis followed a two-stage coding process. First, studies were categorized by their primary analytical focus (e.g., media representation, policy legitimization, linguistic devices) and geopolitical context (e.g., U.S., Iran, EU). Second, emergent discursive tactics—such as *securitization* in U.S. tweets (Nourani et al., 2020), *empty signifiers* in Iranian media (Nematollahi et al., 2020), or *ontological security narratives* (Cebeci, 2019)—were mapped to theoretical frameworks from discourse studies and international relations. Comparative analysis highlighted how power structures (e.g., state influence on media) and material conditions (e.g., sanctions) shaped discourse production. Limitations include the predominance of Western theoretical frameworks and uneven geographic coverage, with fewer studies analyzing Global South perspectives.

3. Findings

Schiffer (2017) analyzed transatlantic relations through discourse analysis of EU and U.S. positions on Iran's nuclear program across three presidential administrations. The study developed an original framework of convergence, divergence and drift, finding significant policy alignment under Bush and Obama that deteriorated under Trump, particularly regarding the JCPOA. Results showed Trump's rejection of the nuclear deal and differing security values created a "transatlantic drift"—representing deeper rifts than previous disagreements. The research highlighted how Iran policy became a key indicator of broader transatlantic relationship dynamics, with the Trump era marking a departure from traditional cooperation patterns on nonproliferation diplomacy.

Mozaffari (2017) analyzed competing Iranian media representations of the JCPOA (Barjam) using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis framework. The study examined texts from reformist-aligned *Shargh* and fundamentalist-leaning *Keyhan* newspapers from July 2015 to January 2016. Findings revealed distinct linguistic strategies: *Keyhan* employed quantity exaggeration, punctuation emphasis, and selective quotations to delegitimize the agreement, while *Shargh* used more positive representations without direct attacks. Both discourses utilized collocations and sarcasm, demonstrating how ideological divisions

manifest in media language. The study highlighted how rival political factions employed different discursive tactics- with fundamentalist media more aggressively attacking opponents- in framing the nuclear agreement, revealing underlying power structures in Iran's media landscape.

Moks (2018) examined Iran's decision to sign the JCPOA through three non-proliferation frameworks, finding domestic political dynamics and normative pressures played a more significant role than traditional security considerations. The study revealed how economic sanctions created public opposition that threatened regime stability, while growing anti-nuclear factional influence pressured leadership toward diplomatic solutions. Notably, the research challenged conventional security model assumptions by showing Iran's perception that nuclear weapons might decrease rather than enhance national security. These findings suggest successful non-proliferation requires simultaneously increasing the costs of weaponization while reducing security incentives, with domestic politics serving as a crucial mediating factor in nuclear decision-making.

Udum (2018) critically examined the Trump administration's policy shift regarding the JCPOA, analyzing how the agreement transitioned from being celebrated as a nonproliferation success to being labeled the "worst deal ever". Through discourse analysis of official statements, the study revealed how the Trump administration reconstructed the narrative by prioritizing concerns over Iran's ballistic missile program and regional activities while downplaying the deal's nonproliferation achievements. The research highlighted the agreement's technical successes in enhancing IAEA safeguards and maintaining Iran's non-nuclear status, contrasting these with the political framing that led to U.S. withdrawal. Findings suggested the withdrawal risked undermining both the nonproliferation regime and U.S. credibility, potentially leading to reduced transparency and renewed enrichment activities in Iran. The study concluded that addressing broader security concerns required separate diplomatic channels rather than abandoning the nuclear agreement's verified benefits.

Wolf (2018) analyzed four potential U.S. grand strategy options toward Iran following the Trump administration's decision to not recertify the JCPOA agreement. The study systematically evaluated the merits and drawbacks of rollback (actively countering Iranian influence), offshore balancing (relying on regional allies), retrenchment (reducing commitments), and engagement (diplomatic cooperation) approaches. Each strategy was assessed for its ability to address core security challenges while considering implementation risks and regional consequences. The analysis provided a framework for understanding the strategic trade-offs in U.S.-Iran relations during a period of diplomatic uncertainty, highlighting how different approaches might shape regional stability and nuclear non-proliferation efforts.

Vafaei and Asgari (2018) examined the discourse shift in Iran's

nuclear negotiations under Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif before the JCPOA implementation. Analyzing Zarif's public statements and diplomatic approaches, the study identified a transition from idealist discourse to more realist positions as Western parties failed to fulfill JCPOA commitments and expanded demands to include missile programs and regional policies. The findings revealed how Iran's diplomatic rhetoric became increasingly critical and pessimistic when faced with these additional conditions, reflecting a strategic adaptation to negotiation realities. This discourse analysis highlights the dynamic relationship between diplomatic language and political realities in international nuclear negotiations.

Kadkhodae and Ghasemi Tari (2018) analyzed the discursive construction of Iran as a security threat in U.S. political discourse through a critical examination of post-JCPOA Senate hearings. Applying van Dijk's critical discourse analysis to the May 2016 Senate Committee on Banking hearings, the study revealed how lexical choices and argumentation strategies framed Iran as a threat to the U.S., its allies (particularly Israel), and the international community. The findings demonstrated how orientalist stereotypes and Othering rhetoric—characterizing Iran as "irrational", "radical", and "barbaric"—served to legitimize continued sanctions and hostile policies despite the nuclear agreement. This discursive pattern reinforced existing ideological frameworks that justify discriminatory policies against Iran.

Taleghani (2018) examined the role of Iranian translators in shaping discourse on nuclear issues through a critical discourse analysis (CDA) framework. The study aimed to uncover ideological influences embedded in translations of political and media texts related to Iran's nuclear program. By analyzing translations from Persian to English, the research focused on lexical choices, syntactic structures, and discursive strategies that reflected underlying biases. The findings suggested that Iranian translators employed specific linguistic techniques to align translated texts with domestic or international narratives, thereby influencing the perception of Iran's nuclear policies. The study highlighted translation as a socio-political act, demonstrating how discourse strategies could reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies. Taleghani concluded that translation played a crucial role in international political communication and emphasized the need for a critical approach when assessing translated materials in politically sensitive contexts.

Hajimineh and Salehi (2018) conducted a comparative discourse analysis of European and American positions on the JCPOA following Trump's presidency, revealing fundamental divergences in their approaches. The study found European discourse consistently supported maintaining the original agreement framework through multilateral engagement and verification mechanisms, while the Trump administration's discourse sought either radical modification or

complete abandonment of the deal. Through combined discourse analysis and descriptive-explanatory methods, the research demonstrated how these conflicting positions emerged from differing conceptualizations of nonproliferation (cooperative vs. coercive) and distinct threat perceptions regarding Iran's regional role. The analysis highlighted the diplomatic tensions created when traditional transatlantic partners adopt incompatible discursive frameworks for addressing shared security challenges.

Ghaseminasab, Zeighami, and Mirahmadi (2019) conducted a linguistic analysis of *Al-Arabiya* (Saudi) and *Al-Manar* (Lebanese) coverage of the U.S. JCPOA withdrawal using van Dijk's discourse model. The study revealed how these ideologically opposed networks employed contrasting "foregrounding" and "marginalization" techniques through lexical choices (repetition, hyperbole, contrast) to construct competing narratives. *Al-Arabiya* emphasized U.S. strength and Iranian vulnerability, while *Al-Manar* highlighted resistance narratives and American unreliability. Findings demonstrated how both channels manipulated linguistic devices like selective emphasis and syntactical structures to implicitly convey ideological messages while maintaining surface objectivity in news reporting.

Cebeci (2019) analyzed the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA through ontological security theory, revealing how Trump's decision reflected deeper identity narratives rather than material interests. The study contrasted Obama's multilateralist approach with Trump's unilateral exceptionalism, demonstrating how the latter's reliance on American hegemony narratives created long-term ontological insecurity despite short-term identity reinforcement. Findings suggested this shift from cooperative security frameworks toward exceptionalist posturing ultimately constrained U.S. foreign policy options while undermining international credibility. The research provided an alternative to traditional IR explanations by highlighting how identity maintenance and anxiety management drove nuclear policy decisions independently of strategic calculations.

Nourani et al. (2020) analyzed Donald Trump's Twitter discourse to examine how he sought to delegitimize the JCPOA following the U.S. withdrawal in May 2018. Applying van Leeuwen's legitimation framework, the study identified two primary discursive strategies: moral evaluation (portraying the agreement as fundamentally flawed and unethical) and rationalization (framing it as strategically unsound for U.S. interests). Through systematic examination of Trump's tweets, the research revealed how these rhetorical tactics attempted to justify rejecting an internationally-endorsed agreement by constructing it as both morally objectionable and pragmatically ineffective. The analysis demonstrates how social media platforms became key sites for challenging established diplomatic norms and articulating alternative foreign policy rationales.

Nematollahi, Rasouli, and Nejati Hosseini (2020) analyzed competing Iranian media discourses about the JCPOA using Laclau and Mouffe's Discourse Theory. The study examined content from five media outlets across three periods (2015-2018), comparing "official/State" and "Conservative" discourses at micro (linguistic) and macro (discursive) levels. Findings revealed both discourses relied heavily on empty signifiers, with Conservative media initially employing more ideological framing before adopting elements from State discourse. In later stages, both discourses shifted to floating signifiers. The analysis demonstrated how each constructed legitimacy through referential strategies that foregrounded positive self-representation while negatively portraying opponents. This discursive competition reflected evolving political positions on the nuclear agreement within Iran's media landscape.

Sardar and Nisar (2021) conducted a critical discourse analysis of Iran's foreign policy behavior following the United States' withdrawal from JCPOA. The study examined how Iranian political discourse adapted to shifting geopolitical dynamics, particularly in response to renewed U.S. sanctions and diplomatic isolation. Using a critical discourse framework, the authors analyzed official statements, media narratives, and policy documents to identify dominant themes in Iran's post-withdrawal rhetoric. The findings indicated that Iran's discourse emphasized resistance, self-reliance, and multilateral engagement, portraying the U.S. as an unreliable actor while seeking stronger ties with European and regional partners. The study also highlighted how Iranian leadership used strategic language to frame its nuclear policy as peaceful while justifying countermeasures such as uranium enrichment. The authors concluded that Iran's foreign policy discourse post-JCPOA withdrawal was characterized by a dual strategy of defiance and diplomacy, aimed at managing both domestic legitimacy and international negotiations.

Ustiazhvili (2021) conducted a critical discourse analysis of political statements by U.S. President Donald Trump and Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei regarding the JCPOA, using Fairclough's analytical model. The study revealed how both leaders employed language strategically to frame the nuclear agreement as fundamentally flawed, despite their opposing political positions. Findings demonstrated a clear interconnection between ideological perspectives and linguistic choices, with both leaders using discourse to reinforce adversarial relations rather than promote diplomatic cooperation. The analysis showed that their rhetorical strategies similarly characterized the JCPOA as a fragile arrangement between enemies rather than a foundation for improved relations, highlighting how political language serves as a tool for shaping power dynamics in international negotiations.

Jamali (2022) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the political

and economic implications of the JCPOA using a neoclassical realist framework and comparative methodology. The study examined the divergent perspectives between the Obama administration's diplomatic approach and Trump administration's security-focused rejection of the agreement. Findings revealed complex trade-offs: while the deal offered Iran economic relief through sanctions reduction and provided international oversight of its nuclear program, critics argued it failed to address regional security concerns including missile development and alleged terrorism sponsorship. The research highlights how the agreement's ambiguous cost-benefit balance for both primary actors (Iran and the U.S.) fueled ongoing political debates, with consequences extending beyond bilateral relations to affect broader Middle East geopolitics and global non-proliferation efforts.

Mozaffari (2022) employed a practice theory approach to analyze the unexpected persistence of the JCPOA after the U.S. withdrawal in 2018. The study distinguished between the agreement's material and normative dimensions, demonstrating how diplomatic practices transformed it into an enduring international norm. Through discourse analysis of diplomatic interactions from 2015-2020, the research identified key mechanisms of norm production (2015-2016) and reproduction (2017-2020) that sustained the agreement despite mounting challenges. The findings revealed a synergistic relationship between discursive practices and structural factors in maintaining the JCPOA's normative force, challenging purely instrumentalist views of diplomacy. This case provides empirical evidence for diplomacy's constitutive power in international relations, showing how routine diplomatic interactions can generate and sustain normative frameworks that transcend their original material conditions.

Malmir et al. (2022) conducted a critical discourse analysis comparing Iranian (IRINN, Press TV) and Western (VOA Persian, BBC) media coverage of JCPOA developments from the U.S. withdrawal to Iran's final commitment reductions. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods with Halliday's functional linguistics framework, the study revealed how each side employed ideological framing in news headlines. Findings showed opposing attribution of blame- Iranian media faulted Western violations while Western outlets emphasized Iranian non-compliance. Both discourses utilized linguistic strategies to foreground positive self-representation while marginalizing or negatively portraying opponents. The analysis demonstrated systematic patterns of selective emphasis, actor highlighting, and information biasing that reinforced respective political narratives about the agreement's collapse. These discursive practices served to legitimize each side's policy positions while delegitimizing adversarial claims.

Menton (2022) investigated the contradictory U.S. behavior toward JCPOA, analyzing why the agreement was successfully negotiated

under the Obama administration but later abandoned by the Trump administration despite systemic pressures for continuity. The study employed a narrative analysis approach to examine the tension between collective state identity and sovereign authority in U.S.-Iran relations. Findings revealed that while the JCPOA's initial success demonstrated the potential for diplomatic engagement, its unraveling exposed fundamental contradictions in state ontology. The author introduces the concept of "narrative enforcement" to explain how deeply ingrained identity narratives about Iran constrained policy options, ultimately incentivizing the agreement's collapse despite strategic interests in maintaining it. The study highlights how narrative constructions of adversarial identities can override pragmatic considerations in international relations.

Emamzadeh (2022) examined the role of elite media in shaping political narratives during international crises, using JCPOA negotiations as a case study. The study compared editorial strategies in US and Iranian newspapers to analyze how these outlets legitimized or delegitimized government actions, applying Hall's Representation Theory and van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The dataset comprised editorials published during the JCPOA negotiations, with a focus on rhetorical and discursive patterns. Findings revealed stark contrasts: US editorials relied on argumentation to frame Iran's nuclear program as a threat, while Iranian editorials employed storytelling to emphasize national sovereignty and resistance to Western hegemony. The study identified a "third factor"—state influence—mediating representation beyond Hall's original modalities, highlighting how editorial discourse aligns with national political agendas.

Kavousi and Goodarzi (2022) examined Iranian media representations of the U.S. JCPOA withdrawal through critical discourse analysis of four newspapers with different ideological orientations. The study revealed a clear discursive divide: reformist-aligned *Shargh* and *Etemad* promoted an "interaction discourse" emphasizing continued multilateral diplomacy and EU engagement, while fundamentalist-oriented *Keyhan* and *Resalat* advanced a "resistance discourse" advocating self-reliance and reciprocal actions. Findings showed how each camp employed distinct framing strategies - reformist papers documenting Iranian compliance versus U.S. violations, while conservative outlets highlighted historical U.S. untrustworthiness to justify confrontational postures. This research demonstrates how domestic media narratives become contested terrain in foreign policy debates, with competing visions of international engagement versus resistance shaping public understanding of the nuclear crisis.

Nateghi, Mazaheri, and Fazel (2022) conducted a critical discourse analysis of Iranian reformist and principlist media representations of the JCPOA using Fairclough's three-dimensional model. The study

revealed how these competing political factions constructed opposing narratives through discursive strategies of antagonism and integration-reformist outlets framed the agreement as enabling peace and economic openness, while principlist media portrayed it as threatening national security. Analysis of newspaper headlines demonstrated how each discourse systematically attributed positive or negative outcomes to their ideological opponents, using linguistic markers to reinforce their political positions. This research highlights how domestic media became battlegrounds for interpreting international agreements, with competing truth claims reflecting deeper ideological divides in Iran's foreign policy orientation.

Beh-Afarin and Deris Hemadi (2023) investigated the translation of legal discourse structures in the JCPOA agreement using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model. The study compared the original English text with its official Persian translation, identifying significant discrepancies in discursive structures. Findings revealed an 11% error rate in the Persian translation at the discourse practice level, including untranslated segments and unexplained English terms. Quantitative analysis showed notable differences in verb usage (6% variation) and adjective/adverb/noun usage (1.6% variation) between language versions. These translation choices were found to impact the construction of power relations within the legal document. The study demonstrates how translation strategies can subtly alter the discursive knowledge and legal interpretations of international agreements.

Arghavani Pirsalami, Moradi, and Alipour (2023) investigated the identity-foreign policy disconnect in Iran following the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA, employing an ontological security framework. The study revealed how intensified sanctions amplified anti-Western identity narratives while marginalizing other historical identity layers, creating tensions between Iran's revolutionary discourse and pragmatic foreign policy actions (particularly regarding relations with Russia and China). Findings demonstrated how this identity crisis led to a growing divergence between Iran's biographical narrative and actual international behavior, as security pressures compelled compromises with ideological principles. The research highlights the complex interplay between sanctions, identity construction, and foreign policy adaptation in post-JCPOA Iran.

Valadbaygi (2023) offers a political economy analysis of the JCPOA, challenging conventional interpretations by examining its embeddedness within neoliberal global capitalism. The study presents a tripartite framework connecting: (1) Western powers' regional neoliberalization projects to sanctions and Iran's nuclear program; (2) post-2008 imperial dynamics including US-China competition and capital accumulation needs; and (3) Iran's internal neoliberal restructuring that produced competing capitalist factions. The analysis highlights how the internationally-oriented faction of Iranian capital

facilitated the deal, while situating the agreement within broader geopolitical and economic transformations. This approach reveals the JCPOA as both product and driver of intersecting global and domestic capitalist developments, rather than an isolated diplomatic achievement.

Nourani et al. (2023) examined how Iranian conservative Twitter accounts delegitimized the JCPOA and President Rouhani's nuclear diplomacy using van Leeuwen's framework of discursive legitimation. Analyzing three prominent conservative accounts, the study identified three key delegitimization strategies: authorization (invoking religious and political authorities), moral evaluation (framing negotiations as unethical), and rationalization (portraying the deal as irrational). These discursive tactics systematically undermined the agreement by attacking its legal foundations, questioning the competence of reformist politicians, and promoting an anti-Western worldview without proposing diplomatic alternatives. The research revealed how conservative social media discourse reinforced hardline foreign policy positions by constructing the nuclear deal as fundamentally incompatible with revolutionary values and national interests.

Malmir et al. (2023) investigated the ideological use of nominalization as grammatical metaphor in Iranian and U.S. presidential speeches about the JCPOA, applying systemic functional grammar and critical discourse analysis. The study analyzed post-2015 statements by Hassan Rouhani and Barack Obama to examine how nominalization strategically foregrounded or backgrounded actions in political narratives. Contrary to typical assumptions about agent-concealing functions of nominalization, findings revealed both leaders employed this linguistic device primarily to emphasize their own side's positive actions rather than obscure agency. The analysis demonstrated how nominalization patterns systematically constructed "us vs. them" distinctions, serving ideological purposes in diplomatic discourse by selectively highlighting favorable representations of each nation's nuclear policy positions.

Masoudi and Hamiani (2024) conducted a narrative analysis of competing Iranian perspectives on the JCPOA's foreign policy outcomes, identifying three distinct interpretive frameworks. The study revealed how the initial "Success" narrative (emphasizing war prevention and international reintegration) gradually lost ground to a "Failure" narrative (framing the deal as a modern Turkmenchay Treaty that compromised security), with an "Intermediate" position emerging that acknowledged diplomatic achievements while criticizing concessions. Through examination of setting, characterization, and emplotment structures, the research demonstrated how historical analogies (comparing Zarif to Mosaddegh or Amir Kabir) and attribution of motives became key battlegrounds in this discursive struggle. The findings illuminate Iran's domestic foreign policy debates,

showing how narrative power shifts reflected changing assessments of the agreement's tangible benefits versus ideological costs following the U.S. withdrawal.

Ramazani (2024) conducted a comparative discourse analysis of U.S. presidential rhetoric on Iran's nuclear program, examining securitization patterns in Trump and Biden's speeches. Applying securitization theory and structured focused comparison, the study found Trump's discourse exhibited higher degrees of threat framing and emergency measures justification, while Biden's approach demonstrated more desecuritizing tendencies through diplomatic normalization. The analysis revealed how these discursive differences reflected broader foreign policy shifts, with Trump emphasizing existential threats to justify maximum pressure and Biden favoring negotiated solutions through the JCPOA framework. These findings contribute to understanding how presidential rhetoric shapes nuclear policy options and U.S.-Iran relations.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The meta-analysis of 27 studies on the discursive dimensions of the JCPOA reveals how language, power, and identity intersected to shape the agreement's trajectory—from its celebrated inception to its politicized unraveling. Three overarching themes emerge: transatlantic policy divergences, domestic Iranian narrative battles, and diplomatic communication strategies. Collectively, these findings underscore discourse as a constitutive force in international politics, not merely a reflection of material realities.

First, the transatlantic rift over the JCPOA exemplifies how competing narratives can fracture multilateral cooperation. Studies like Schiffer (2017) and Hajimineh and Salehi (2018) highlight the stark contrast between the EU's multilateralist framing of Iran as a potential partner and the Trump administration's securitized "America First" rhetoric, which cast the agreement as a threat. This discursive divide was amplified through lexical choices (e.g., "worst deal ever") and moral evaluations of Iran's compliance, which legitimized the U.S. withdrawal and undermined the normative foundations of the deal. The erosion of shared transatlantic narratives demonstrates how discourse can dismantle diplomatic achievements, even when technical compliance (e.g., IAEA verification) remains intact.

Second, within Iran, the JCPOA became a proxy for ideological struggles between reformists and conservatives, as shown by Mozaffari (2017) and Nateghi et al. (2022). Reformist-aligned media framed the deal as a pragmatic victory, while conservative outlets weaponized historical analogies (e.g., the Turkmenchay Treaty) to depict it as a betrayal. The U.S. withdrawal intensified these battles, with conservatives leveraging social media to delegitimize reformist diplomacy through religious-authoritative appeals (Nourani et al.,

2023). This polarization illustrates how international agreements are domesticated through discursive contests, transforming technical arrangements into symbols of ideological legitimacy or surrender.

Third, diplomatic communication itself was a site of power struggles. Beh-Afarin and Deris Hemadi (2023) reveal how translational asymmetries in the JCPOA's English and Persian texts altered legal interpretations, while Taleghani (2018) exposes translation as a political act that reinforced state narratives. These findings challenge traditional IR theories that prioritize material over discursive factors, showing how linguistic nuances can sustain or undermine agreements. Mozaffari's (2022) practice theory approach further demonstrates how routine diplomatic interactions reproduced the JCPOA as a normative benchmark, even after U.S. withdrawal, highlighting discourse's role in maintaining institutional resilience.

The JCPOA's discursive life also reveals broader theoretical insights. The agreement's fate was not solely determined by geopolitical interests but by narrative strategies that rendered it legible—or illegitimate—across audiences. Discourses were *productive*, generating new identities (e.g., Iran as “resistant” or “compliant”), policies (e.g., maximum pressure), and material realities (e.g., renewed enrichment). This aligns with Cebeci's (2019) ontological security framework, which shows how identity narratives (e.g., Trump's exceptionalism) can override strategic calculations.

However, limitations persist. The predominance of Western theoretical frameworks and a focus on U.S.-Iran-EU dynamics marginalize Global South perspectives. Future research could explore how regional actors like China or Russia discursively engaged with the JCPOA. Additionally, the meta-analysis underscores the need to bridge discourse studies and IR theory, particularly in understanding how language constructs the very categories—threats, compliance, sovereignty—that shape policy.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

The author has completely considered ethical issues, including informed consent, plagiarism, data fabrication, misconduct, and/or falsification, double publication and/or redundancy, submission, etc. This article was not authored by artificial intelligence.

Data availability

The dataset generated and analyzed during the current study is available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Funding

This research did not receive any grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or non-profit sectors.

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