



**How to cite this article:**

Maleki, M. J., Amini, A. A., & Kahrizadeh, Y. (2026). External Causes and Factors of the Rise, Decline, and Transformation of Leftist Discourse in Iran, 1941–1953. *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy*, 4(5), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrp.205>



Article history:  
Original Research

Dates:  
Submission Date: 02 December 2025  
Revision Date: 28 January 2026  
Acceptance Date: 03 February 2026  
First Publication Date: 13 May 2026  
Final Publication Date: 01 September 2026

# External Causes and Factors of the Rise, Decline, and Transformation of Leftist Discourse in Iran, 1941–1953

1. Mohammad Javad. Maleki<sup>1</sup>: Department of Political Science, ZAH.C., Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran
2. Ali Akbar. Amini<sup>2</sup>: Department of Political Science, CT.C, Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran
3. Yaser. Kahrizadeh<sup>3</sup>: Department of Political Science, ZAH.C., Islamic Azad University, Zahedan, Iran

\*corresponding author's email: [aliamini@iauzah.ac.ir](mailto:aliamini@iauzah.ac.ir)

## ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the external factors and mechanisms influencing the formation, rise, decline, and transformation of leftist discourse in Iran during the period from 1941 to 1953, a time in which the Tudeh Party emerged and became established as the most significant manifestation of this political current. The present research is qualitative in nature and is conducted using a historical–analytical approach. In order to explain causal relationships among variables, the process-tracing technique is employed. The research population consists of primary and secondary sources related to leftist discourse in Iran during the period under study, which were selected purposively based on specific criteria. Data were collected through press archives, library resources, governmental documents, and memoirs of political leaders and activists, and were subsequently analyzed using the method of historical discourse analysis. Data were gathered from press archives, libraries, government documents, and leaders' memoirs and were processed using historical discourse analysis. The findings indicate that leftist discourse in Iran between 1941 and 1953 was profoundly shaped and transformed by external factors. The occupation of Iran during World War II and the support of the Soviet Union provided the conditions for the expansion of this discourse and the organizational strengthening of the Tudeh Party. However, dependence on the Soviet Union gradually led to a decline in the social legitimacy of the leftist movement. With the onset of the Cold War, political and security pressures exerted by the United States and the United Kingdom played a significant role in the suppression and decline of this discourse. Moreover, international developments related to the oil issue influenced shifts in the orientation of leftist discourse.

**Keywords:** *Leftist discourse, Tudeh Party, external factors, discourse analysis, transformation*

## Introduction

One of the most widely used and controversial terms in recent years is *discourse*, which has been employed across various branches of knowledge and has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly in political science and philosophy. This prominence may stem from the fact that in the contemporary era this term is closely intertwined with the concept of power, often regarded as the central pillar of political science. In their study of the relationship between institutional structure and the performance of the Tudeh Party, Shafiee et al. describe this characteristic as a factor behind the party's initial success in attracting intellectuals, noting that leftist discourse



reached its peak between 1941 and 1947 and subsequently declined due to internal challenges such as repression following the coup d'état (1).

Another defining feature of leftist discourse is its connection with global ideologies. This discourse frequently draws inspiration from Russian and European models and operates on the basis of the concept of cultural hegemony. In Iran, this feature was accentuated by the presence of Russian revolutionaries and the migration of Iranians to Baku. Tajdari and Saraei, in their study of early leftist discourse in Iran, consider it a synthesis of internal and external elements that, upon entering Iran, became intertwined with local factors such as criticism of Qajar despotism (2). They emphasize that leftist discourse during the Constitutional period—which constituted the backdrop to the 1940s—emerged as a transformed phenomenon and manifested characteristics such as a focus on political and economic power. This synthesis, during the period from 1941 to 1953, benefited from political freedoms following the fall of Reza Shah and contributed to the expansion of leftist discourse, turning the Tudeh Party into its principal symbol.

Leftist discourse is also identified by its anti-colonial orientation. In Iran during this period, it functioned as an instrument to confront British and Soviet influence, although dependence on the Soviet Union constituted one of its major weaknesses. Mousavi Behbid et al., in their comparison of traditional and modern leftist discourse after the Islamic Revolution, identify the features of traditional leftism as including centralism and the training of revolutionary citizens—traits rooted in the 1940s (3). They note that while leftist discourse in Iran's educational system after the revolution emphasized Islamic ideology, in the pre-revolutionary period it was more focused on class struggle. Another characteristic is the dynamism of leftist discourse in response to social crises. In Iran between 1941 and 1953, this discourse capitalized on the postwar economic crisis to mobilize the masses and reinforce features such as internationalism. Indeed, leftist discourse is marked by a capacity for transformation. Initially radical, it adapted as it encountered political realities. Rajaei et al., in their methodological critique of the book *Leftist Discourse in Iran*, describe this transformation as an oscillation between traditional and modern historiography (4). They stress that leftist discourse during the Qajar and Pahlavi periods possessed characteristics such as a focus on cultural power, which reached its apex in the 1940s. Collectively, these features portray leftist discourse as a dynamic force in Iranian history.

The rise, decline, and transformation of leftist discourse in Iran between 1941 and 1953 were influenced by both internal and external factors. Accordingly, developments in Iranian leftist discourse during this period cannot be analyzed solely on the basis of domestic variables; rather, they must be understood within the broader context of the international system and great-power rivalry. The occupation of Iran during World War II, the presence of the Soviet Union in the northern regions, and the weakening of central state authority created conditions in which leftist discourse—particularly in the form of the Tudeh Party of Iran—found unprecedented opportunities for emergence and expansion. During this period, the Iranian left not only benefited from the political openness resulting from the collapse of Reza Shah's authoritarian order but also drew legitimacy from the global anti-fascist and anti-capitalist discourse (5).

With the end of World War II and the onset of the Cold War, Iran's position within geopolitical equations underwent a fundamental transformation. As a country situated on the boundary between the Eastern and Western blocs, Iran became one of the principal arenas of ideological and security competition. Within this framework, Iranian leftist discourse—previously perceived as a progressive and anti-colonial force—was gradually redefined in the foreign policy discourse of the United States and its allies as a potential threat to the capitalist order and Western

interests (6). This international-level shift directly affected Iran's domestic political environment and curtailed the scope of action available to leftist forces. Consequently, the importance of external causes and factors in the rise, decline, and transformation of leftist discourse in Iran between 1941 and 1953 is decisive; without understanding the international context and external pressures, any account of the trajectory of the Iranian left remains incomplete. Accordingly, the present study, drawing on systematic discourse analysis and simultaneous attention to external factors, seeks to comprehensively examine the causes underlying the fluctuations of leftist discourse in Iran.

### Theoretical Foundations of the Study

Given the title of the study, the main discussions include discourse theory, the historical background of the left in the world and in Iran, and finally leftist discourse itself. Each of these themes is addressed below.

#### *Discourse Theory*

Hall's discourse theory is grounded in the Gramscian idea of hegemony. Hall conceptualizes discourse as a set of meanings that reproduce power and emphasizes that cultural studies must investigate these relationships. Sender and Decherney, in their article *Stuart Hall Lives*, note that Hall kept cultural studies alive in the age of digital media and introduced discourse as a tool for critiquing dominant ideologies (7). They emphasize that by focusing on encoding and decoding, Hall demonstrated how audiences can generate oppositional discourses—a feature observable in Iranian leftist discourse through the activities of the Tudeh Party. In an interview, Hall describes cultural studies as a synthesis of semiotics and power and notes that the field has drawn upon schools of thought such as Foucault and Gramsci (8). From Hall's perspective, cultural studies emphasizes contextual analysis, viewing culture as a dimension of power embedded in social relations.

Gokgul, in his discussion of Hall's contributions to cultural theory, characterizes this perspective as an integration of ethnicity, racism, and ideology, emphasizing that Hall transformed cultural studies into a tool for examining political identities (9). He notes that through his focus on media and subcultures, Hall presented discourse as a dynamic process—an approach that can explain transformations in Iranian leftist discourse during the 1940s. Hall regards cultural studies as a response to global changes such as Thatcherism and stresses that the field must pose critical questions about cultural power. One of the key aspects of Hall's theory is the concept of decoding. Hall identifies three decoding positions: dominant, negotiated, and oppositional. Lu, in his response to Hall, extends this concept by proposing *creative decoding*, whereby receivers can themselves become producers (10). This perspective aligns with Hall's cultural studies framework and suggests that leftist discourse in Iran, particularly through the media activities of the Tudeh Party, represented a form of oppositional decoding. Hall further argues that cultural studies must address cultural diversity and view discourse as an instrument of resistance. He conceptualizes cultural studies as an interdisciplinary field drawing upon sociology, semiotics, and politics. From this standpoint, Hall's framework can explain the rise of leftist discourse in Iran in 1941 as a cultural response to colonial power (11).

#### *An Overview of the Background of the Left in the World and Iran*

The historical use of concepts such as *left* and *right* to describe political factions dates back to events following the French Revolution. After the revolution, a serious debate emerged in the French parliament regarding the extent of the monarch's authority vis-à-vis the legislature, resulting in a division among representatives. Those who

supported the king's right to veto parliamentary legislation sat on the right, while those who favored a constitutional monarchy and minimal royal authority sat on the left. Consequently, these groups came to be identified by their seating positions. From the nineteenth century onward, with the emergence of socialism and Marxist thought, supporters of these ideas were likewise labeled as the left. In Iran, these concepts entered political discourse with the formation of the first political parties during the Constitutional Revolution (12).

### *The Concept of Leftist Discourse and Its Characteristics*

Leftist discourse, as one of the prominent intellectual and political currents in modern history, is rooted in critiques of capitalist structures and social inequalities. Often associated with socialist and Marxist ideologies, it is founded on ideas such as class equality, opposition to exploitation, and social transformation. In Iran, leftist discourse reached its peak between 1941 and 1953—a period marked by the Allied occupation and the fall of Reza Shah—and displayed characteristics such as reliance on external ideologies, a focus on labor issues, and criticism of domestic despotism. Ahmadi Hajikelai, in his analysis of leftist trends in Iran, describes this discourse as a radical opposition that originated in the early twentieth century and, under the influence of the Tudeh Party during the period under study, evolved into a political force (13).

Leftist discourse is thus characterized by adaptability and transformation. Initially radical, it evolved in response to political realities. Rajaei et al., in their methodological critique of *Leftist Discourse in Iran*, describe this evolution as a fluctuation between traditional and modern historiographical approaches (4). They emphasize that during the Qajar and Pahlavi eras, leftist discourse exhibited features such as a focus on cultural power, which reached its zenith in the 1940s. Collectively, these characteristics present leftist discourse as a dynamic and influential force in Iranian history.

### **Review of the Research Literature**

With respect to the external causes and factors behind the rise, decline, and transformation of leftist discourse, both domestic and international studies have been conducted. Among these, Ahmadi Hajikelai examines the ideological and organizational roots of the left from the Constitutional period to the Islamic Revolution. He argues that in the 1940s, internal factors such as economic dissatisfaction and external factors such as Soviet support contributed to the rise of leftist discourse, whereas internal factional splits and external pressures led to its decline (13). This work highlights the role of the Tudeh Party as the central locus of transformation in leftist discourse and shows how Marxist ideology became interwoven with Iran's specific conditions. The difference between this study and the present dissertation lies in its broader temporal scope and its lack of exclusive focus on the 1941–1953 period.

Karimi et al. address the discourse-analytic method in leftist studies and argue that, in order to understand the transformation of leftist discourse during 1941–1953, both internal linguistic factors and external social factors are critical; however, insufficient attention to discursive elements results in analytical decline (14). This article evaluates the method as interdisciplinary. Its difference from the present dissertation is its focus on methodology without an empirical application to a specified historical interval.

In the same vein, Rafi'zadeh analyzes external factors such as Soviet demands during the 1940s and demonstrates that the Tudeh Party's support for a "positive balance" contributed to transforming leftist discourse, whereas the rejection of an oil concession led to its decline (15). This article foregrounds the role of oil in ideological

rise. Its difference from the present dissertation is its concentration on the oil issue rather than an analysis of the entirety of leftist discourse.

Similarly, Shafiee et al. provide an institutionalist analysis of the rise and decline of the Tudeh Party and argue that internal factors such as organizational complexity and external factors such as the post-1941 political opening contributed to discursive transformation, whereas the failure in 1947 led to decline (1). This article employs Huntington's indicators in its analysis. Its difference from the present dissertation lies in its institutionalist framework without a discourse-analytic approach.

Rajaei et al. also examine methodological heterogeneity in a related book and show that in analyses of the 1940s, internal historical factors and external ideological factors facilitated discursive rise, but oscillation between social and political history produced analytical decline (4). This article stresses that the work under critique fluctuates between traditional and modern approaches. Its difference from the present dissertation lies in its meta-critical nature and its focus on evaluating another text.

On the other hand, Leonchofsky analyzes external factors such as Soviet influence in the rise of leftist discourse in Iran during 1941–1953, arguing that Soviet policies, mediated through the Tudeh Party, contributed to ideological transformation, while Western competition led to decline (16). This work highlights geopolitics as a driver of the expansion of Marxist discourse. Its difference from the present dissertation lies in its one-dimensional emphasis on foreign influence without attention to internal dynamics.

In another study, Lu examines Hall's concept of creative decoding in relation to leftist discourse and argues that during 1941–1953, internal factors such as ideological creativity contributed to rise, whereas external factors such as repression contributed to decline (10). This article describes discursive transformation as a creative process. Its difference from the present study lies in its decoding-centered approach without a historical–structural analysis.

Based on this body of research, it can be argued that external factors in this period played a central role both in the rise of leftist discourse (through the occupation of Iran, Soviet support, and the political opening) and in its decline (with the onset of the Cold War, Western pressure, security repression, and the failure of projects aligned with Soviet interests) (5). The transformation of leftist discourse likewise took shape in continuous interaction with these external variables and shifted in meaning from a liberation-oriented and justice-centered discourse to a movement accused of foreign dependence (17).

The synthesis of the reviewed literature indicates a research gap regarding the external causes and factors behind the rise, decline, and transformation of leftist discourse in Iran (1941–1953), because prior studies have not examined external factors in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Moreover, most studies lack a discourse-oriented approach to analyzing the rise, decline, and semantic transformation of the leftist current in the 1941–1953 period. Accordingly, an integrated study that, within a discourse-analytic framework, focuses systematically on external factors in this period has remained neglected. Therefore, the present study was conducted with emphasis on the external causes and factors shaping discursive rise, decline, and transformation. A summary of the reviewed studies and their comparison with the present study is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of the Reviewed Studies**

Author / Year	Research Focus	Effective External Factors	Most Important Finding	Difference from the Present Study
Ahmadi Hajikelay (2008)	Ideological and organizational roots of the left from the Constitutional period to the Islamic Revolution	Soviet support; external pressures	The rise of the left in the 1940s was facilitated by Soviet support, while its decline resulted from internal divisions and external pressure	Broader time span; no exclusive focus on 1941–1953
Karimi et al. (2018)	Discourse-analytic method in leftist studies	External social factors	Transformation of leftist discourse requires simultaneous attention to internal and external factors	Methodological focus without a specific empirical historical application
Rafi'zadeh (2020)	Role of the oil issue in transforming leftist discourse	Soviet demands; foreign policies	Support for a “positive balance” contributed to discursive rise, while rejection of the oil concession contributed to decline	Limited focus on oil rather than the entirety of leftist discourse
Shafiee et al. (2023)	Institutionalist analysis of the Tudeh Party	Political openness	Institutional factors contributed to rise; the 1947 failure contributed to decline	Institutionalist framework without discourse analysis
Rajaei et al. (2025)	Meta-critique of a historical work	External ideological factors	Methodological heterogeneity weakened analytical coherence	Meta-critical review of another text
Leonchofsky (1953)	Soviet influence on leftist discourse in Iran	Soviet policies and influence; Western rivalry	Geopolitics was the main driver of the rise and decline of Marxist discourse	One-dimensional emphasis on external factors
Lu (2022)	Creative decoding of leftist discourse	Political repression	Ideological innovation facilitated rise; external pressure led to decline	Decoding-oriented approach without historical–structural analysis

## Research Method

The research method in this dissertation is qualitative and historical–analytical in type. To explain causal relationships among variables, the process-tracing technique is used. This method enables step-by-step tracking of external causes and the manner in which they influenced transformations in leftist discourse across the period under study. The study population consists of all primary and secondary sources related to leftist discourse and political developments in Iran from 1941 to 1953. Sampling is purposive and criterion-based. The sample includes major publications of leftist parties (such as Tudeh Party newspapers), governmental and intelligence documents and reports, memoirs and biographies of political leaders, and the most important historical studies and scholarly articles—both domestic and international—relevant to the topic. Data were collected through library research and document analysis, drawing on press archives, reference libraries, and the analysis of political and historical documents. Data analysis is conducted using historical discourse analysis. In doing so, events and external factors shaping the leftist current are first identified in chronological and causal sequence through historical method. Subsequently, using the theoretical tools of Stuart Hall's discourse theory, the elements and boundaries of leftist discourse, the manner of their articulation, and the reasons for discursive ruptures and transformations are explained, and finally the study's hypotheses are tested.

The main research question is: What were the external causes and factors behind the rise, decline, and transformation of leftist discourse in Iran between 1941 and 1953? External factors include foreign components such as international conditions and the effects of regional developments.

## Research Findings

External factors are categorized into two groups: (1) an examination of international conditions, including World War II and its impact on Iran's political developments, the occupation of Iran and the role of foreign forces in shaping leftist discourse, Soviet foreign policy and ideological influence in Iran, and the role of the United States and the United Kingdom in countering Soviet influence; and (2) the impact of regional developments, including the influence of Marxist revolutions worldwide on Iran, the connections between leftist movements in the Middle East and Iranian leftist discourse, and international economic factors. Below, each factor is explained.

### *Examination of International Conditions*

International conditions between 1941 and 1953 played a decisive role in transforming leftist discourse in Iran. This period began with World War II and continued with the Allied occupation of Iran, both of which—as external factors—created domestic conditions conducive to the formation and expansion of leftist ideologies. From the perspective of Stuart Hall's discourse theory, which conceptualizes culture as an instrument for organizing power and social relations, these international conditions not only imposed political change but also transformed cultural discourses. Hall emphasizes that discourses are ensembles of meanings that reproduce power and operate within relations of power (8).

Within this framework, World War II and the occupation of Iran by foreign forces shaped leftist discourse as a discourse of resistance against authoritarian and colonial power, in which culture became a means of challenging dominant hegemonies. By influencing political and cultural identities, these developments created a context for the expansion of Marxism in Iran, the subcomponents of which are examined below.

### World War II and Its Impact on Iran's Political Developments

World War II, as a defining event of the twentieth century, produced profound effects on Iran's political, economic, and cultural structure. Due to its strategic location and the importance of oil, Iran became a focal point of global powers. From the standpoint of Stuart Hall's cultural studies, this war constituted a historical moment in which global discourses of power were reconfigured and local cultures were affected; Hall's approach emphasizes analyzing such moments through discourse and global change (7). The occupation of Iran in 1941 by Britain and the Soviet Union, under the pretext of countering Nazi German influence, contributed to weakening Reza Shah's regime and ultimately to his abdication. This shift destabilized the political power structure and created a more open environment for the activity of parties and oppositional discourses, especially the left (18).

In this context, World War II contributed to the strengthening of oppositional discourses and the emergence of what Hall conceptualizes as an "oppositional decoding," that is, the challenging of dominant discourses (10). The economic impact of the war was also significant. War-related crises—such as inflation, food shortages, and unemployment—heightened social discontent and facilitated the spread of leftist ideologies (19). From Hall's perspective, such crises demonstrate that culture is embedded in relations of power within society (9). Consequently, resistant subcultures emerged in Iran that promoted leftist discourse as a response to colonial power (13).

Moreover, World War II transformed Iran's international relations. Iran functioned as the Allied "Persian Corridor," and this role increased Soviet influence in northern Iran. Hall stresses that cultural studies must examine political

identities within the context of global transformations (9). Within this framework, Soviet influence reinforced leftist discourse as a resistant political identity. **Eqbali**, in his discussion of Iranian political parties, argues that World War II, by producing an Allied alignment, facilitated the entry of communist ideology into Iran (20). Overall, World War II, by creating political and economic crises, provided the groundwork for the transformation and expansion of leftist discourse in Iran and—through Hall's lens—turned culture into an interactive instrument of resistance (7). These developments laid the foundation for the occupation of Iran and the role of foreign forces, which is examined in the next subsection.

### The Occupation of Iran and the Role of Foreign Forces in Shaping Leftist Discourse

The Allied occupation of Iran in 1941 played a decisive role in transforming leftist discourse. This event, carried out under the pretext of providing logistical support to the Soviet Union, altered Iran's political structure and created a more open space for ideological activity. From the perspective of Stuart Hall's discourse theory, the occupation can be understood as reproducing relations of power and turning culture into an instrument for challenging hegemonies (8). The entry of Soviet forces from the north and British forces from the south, together with Reza Shah's abdication, strengthened the conditions for communist ideological influence. This process can be analyzed through Hall's encoding/decoding framework, insofar as Iranian society interpreted communist discourse as an alternative to authoritarianism (10).

The Soviet Union, by supporting the Tudeh Party, expanded Marxist culture and ideology as political instruments (11). The Tudeh Party, founded in 1941, rapidly became one of the main political actors (21). By contrast, Britain regarded leftist discourse as a threat to its interests and resisted it, which in turn reinforced the resistance dimension of the discourse (8). This context, together with rising public dissatisfaction produced by the occupation, made leftist discourse more salient as a political alternative (22).

From Hall's cultural studies perspective, occupation contributed to the redefinition of political identities, because identity is discursive and continuously in formation (9). In Iran, these conditions strengthened leftist institutions (1), while the economic crisis caused by occupation increased social discontent and intensified receptivity to leftist discourse (23). Overall, the 1941 occupation of Iran—through the intervention of foreign forces—created the historical conditions for the emergence and consolidation of leftist discourse, and consistent with Hall's framework, it turned discourse into a tool of resistance against structures of power (9). These developments laid the groundwork for the subsequent fluctuations of leftist discourse in Iran.

### Soviet Foreign Policy and Ideological Influence in Iran

Soviet foreign policy in the 1940s played an essential role in the formation and expansion of leftist discourse in Iran. These policies, grounded in Marxist-Leninist ideology and geopolitical interests, created conditions for the acceptance of leftist ideas through cultural and social influence. From the perspective of Stuart Hall's discourse theory, this influence can be analyzed as a hegemonic discourse that reproduced ideological meanings within relations of power (8). The Soviet occupation of Iran in September 1941 constituted a turning point in this process and created a favorable opportunity for the promotion of communism.

According to Abrahamian, the Soviet Union established ideological bases in northern Iran that contributed to the formation of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party—an organization that, through emphasizing social justice and anti-imperialism, helped expand leftist discourse (18). From Hall's perspective, this dynamic can be interpreted as a form

of “ideological encoding” operating through media and local publications, and it can be linked to the broader role of cultural production in shaping political meaning (7). Soviet influence was also reinforced through the migration of Iranian workers to the Caucasus. Having become familiar with communist ideology, these workers formed the early nucleus of leftist organizations upon returning to Iran (19). In Hall’s terms, such groups can function as resistant subcultures that strengthen leftist discourse against authoritarian state power (9).

Direct Soviet support for the Tudeh Party of Iran was another principal mechanism of ideological influence. The party, drawing on the Soviet model, promoted programs such as land reform and the nationalization of industries (17). Hall interprets such processes as forms of cultural hegemony in which external ideology, through the reconstruction of local meanings, contributes to the formation of political coalitions (8).

The Azerbaijan crisis in 1945–1946 provides a clear example of the impact of Soviet foreign policy. In this episode, Soviet support for the Azerbaijan Democratic Party produced a discourse centered on ethnic autonomy and social justice, and land reforms contributed to substantial peasant mobilization (24). Within Hall’s cultural studies framework, these developments can be read as part of the reproduction of a discourse of power in the context of ethnic diversity (9). Soviet media—such as Radio Moscow and ideological publications—also played a major role in disseminating leftist discourse, while intellectual figures, including Ehsan Tabari, sought to localize it by articulating Marxism in relation to Iranian cultural contexts (25). Hall regards media as a key instrument in the reproduction of power relations (7).

At the same time, the Tudeh Party’s dependence on the Soviet Union contributed to nationalist criticism and weakened its legitimacy (22). Hall’s framework can conceptualize this as a form of discursive negotiation between external influence and local resistance (10). Overall, Soviet foreign policy—through military occupation, party support, labor migration, ideological training, and media—generated extensive influence in Iran during the 1940s and made leftist discourse part of the country’s political culture. From Hall’s perspective, this process represents a case of cultural hegemony through which power is reproduced in the form of social meanings (9).

### The Role of the United States and the United Kingdom in Countering Soviet Influence

While Soviet foreign policy contributed to the expansion of the left’s ideological influence in Iran, the United States and the United Kingdom—within the broader Cold War strategy—played the primary role in containing and weakening that influence. From the perspective of Stuart Hall’s discourse theory, these measures can be understood as an attempt to construct a counter-hegemony, whereby Western powers reconstructed ideological meanings and framed leftist discourse as an external threat (8).

The United Kingdom, through economic control—especially via the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company—and through support for the Pahlavi regime, suppressed Tudeh Party activities in oil-producing regions and contained labor strikes through military intervention (26). Within Hall’s framework of “dominant encoding,” these practices cast leftist discourse as a disruptor of economic order (7). At the same time, the United Kingdom restricted leftist publications and leaders through intelligence surveillance and media censorship (27, 28).

The United States, through the Truman Doctrine and economic assistance, strengthened the Iranian state against Soviet influence and pressured the Tudeh Party by portraying it as an agent of Moscow (18). This containment strategy also operated through media messaging that represented leftist discourse as a threat to liberal democracy, a dynamic that can be read in terms of the construction of ideological meaning and audience reception (10). During the Azerbaijan crisis, British diplomatic pressure and U.S. political support contributed to the collapse

of the Pishvari government and thereby weakened leftist discourse (23). During the oil nationalization movement, the West marginalized the Tudeh Party and positioned leftist discourse against nationalism (22). The apex of this confrontation appeared in the coup of August 19, 1953, when, with U.S. and British involvement, the Mosaddegh government was overthrown and the Tudeh Party was severely repressed (18). From Hall's perspective, this event can be interpreted as the consolidation of Western hegemony through cultural and political power (8).

Beyond political and military tools, the West also confronted leftist discourse through economic development initiatives and cultural programs. U.S. technical and developmental investments reduced the appeal of the Soviet model (29), while British-supported media amplified anti-communist narratives. In addition, the suppression of labor unions, restrictions on leftist literature and art, and the weakening of women's organizations affiliated with the Tudeh Party constituted further dimensions of this strategy (27, 30, 31). Overall, the United States and the United Kingdom contained Soviet influence and leftist discourse through a combination of political, economic, cultural, and security pressures, presenting it as a foreign and threatening ideology. Consistent with Hall's analysis, this trajectory illustrates the use of culture and discourse to maintain Western hegemony in Iran (9).

### *The Impact of Regional Developments*

Regional developments, as an external factor, played a decisive role in shaping and expanding leftist discourse in Iran during 1941–1953. Iran's proximity to the Soviet Union and the conditions created by World War II facilitated extensive penetration of Marxist ideology. This penetration occurred not only through Soviet policies, but also through communist revolutions and regional leftist movements in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, which transmitted intellectual and practical models into Iran. In this context, the Tudeh Party of Iran—as the most significant representative of leftist discourse—was drawn toward ideological and political alignment with the Soviet Union and drew inspiration from global Marxist developments. Connections with leftist parties and movements in neighboring states such as Iraq, Turkey, and Syria also reinforced the organizational and ideological linkages of Iranian leftist discourse (32-34).

At the same time, this strong dependence on external models—while contributing to the rapid short-term expansion of leftist discourse—generated long-term vulnerability, because many of these models were not compatible with Iran's cultural, social, and economic conditions. Consequently, leftist discourse was influenced more by external developments than by internal dynamics, and this became one factor in its weakening when confronted with political crises, including the 1953 coup (5).

### The Impact of Global Marxist Revolutions on Iran

Global Marxist revolutions—especially the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia—had a foundational impact on the emergence and expansion of leftist discourse in Iran, and this influence reached its peak during 1941–1953. The October Revolution not only provided a practical model for social transformation, but also projected Marxism-Leninism as an instrument for combating capitalism and colonialism in peripheral societies (35). The Tudeh Party of Iran, founded in 1941, drew directly on this revolutionary legacy and—by emphasizing the role of the working class—shifted leftist discourse from elite intellectual circles toward mass organization; in parallel, this deepened ideological dependence on the Soviet Union and, over the longer term, weakened the party's domestic position (5).

The concept of "proletarian revolution," articulated by Marx and Engels, was appropriated and presented as a viable template for Iran through the success narrative of the Russian Revolution (36). However, this strong

dependence on foreign models exposed the party to criticism and accusations of political dependence, which undermined its legitimacy (17). Post–World War II Marxist revolutions in Eastern Europe, through the promotion of “people’s democracy,” also pushed the Tudeh Party toward organizing labor movements and advocating policies such as industrial nationalization (37). Yet sustained reliance on Soviet support tended to discourage the development of locally grounded strategies and contributed to failures such as the collapse of the Azerbaijan movement (21).

The Chinese Revolution of 1949, with its emphasis on the revolutionary role of peasants, offered an alternative model for agrarian societies, which the Tudeh Party attempted to adapt in rural mobilization efforts; nevertheless, structural and cultural differences reduced its viability in Iran (38, 39). Lenin’s theory of imperialism as the highest stage of capitalism further contributed to framing Iranian leftist discourse as anti-colonial, particularly during the oil crisis (35). However, an excessive focus on the external enemy could dilute attention to internal authoritarian structures and contribute to political isolation (40). Overall, global Marxist revolutions strengthened Iranian leftist discourse and helped make the Tudeh Party an influential force in the 1940s, yet heavy dependence on external models and their imperfect fit with local realities ultimately contributed to the weakening of the discourse and its repression after the 1953 coup (5).

#### Connections Between Middle Eastern Leftist Movements and Iranian Leftist Discourse

Leftist movements in the Middle East, as a regional network of communist and socialist parties, played an important role in strengthening and expanding leftist discourse in Iran during 1941–1953. These connections were largely maintained through transnational communist networks, regional conferences, and the exchange of organizational and ideological experiences, linking Iran to broader communist circuits. Such linkages helped move Iranian leftist discourse beyond isolation, while simultaneously increasing its external dependence and creating conditions for later political pressure and repression (41).

The most significant regional relationship of the Tudeh Party was with the Communist Party of Iraq, which had been active since the 1930s against monarchical authority and colonial influence (32). Through regional conferences and political cooperation—especially in anti-imperialist mobilization and labor strike organization—the Tudeh Party drew upon Iraqi experience (42). These models contributed to labor organization efforts in Iran, though ethnic complexity and state repression limited their scope (43).

The Turkish left also exerted important organizational influence. The Communist Party of Turkey, operating under conditions of repression, provided a model of clandestine activity and resistance that the Tudeh Party attempted to emulate; however, such tactics could also contribute to political isolation over time (33, 44). In Syria and Lebanon, the Syrian–Lebanese Communist Party’s emphasis on ethnic coalition-building provided a partial template for collaboration with ethnic minorities, although local nationalism often limited sustained success (34, 39).

Regional communist conferences in the 1940s facilitated the circulation of anti-imperialist ideas and enriched Iranian leftist discourse, yet also deepened its dependence on Soviet-aligned policies, later reinforcing allegations that the Tudeh Party functioned as an external proxy (41). Regional movements transmitted not only ideology but also practical tools, including trade-union organization, media activism, and women’s mobilization (17, 32, 34). Regional leftist media likewise strengthened anti-imperialist narratives in Iran (42).

Nevertheless, cultural and political divergences—especially between Arab nationalism and Marxist internationalism—generated tensions within Iranian leftist discourse (45). These incompatibilities became visible in

episodes such as the Azerbaijan crisis and the oil nationalization movement, reducing the effectiveness of regional linkages. In addition, global Marxist revolutionary experiences were transmitted into Iran through regional pathways, but frequently failed due to inadequate adaptation to Iranian conditions (5, 17, 35, 38, 46). Overall, Middle Eastern leftist movements and regional networks strengthened and internationalized Iranian leftist discourse and enhanced the organizational dynamism of the Tudeh Party in the 1940s; however, heavy reliance on external models and support, together with cultural and political mismatches, increased the discourse's vulnerability and ultimately facilitated its repression after the 1953 coup (5).

## Conclusion

The transformations of leftist discourse in Iran during the period from 1941 to 1953 cannot be analyzed solely on the basis of internal factors; rather, external forces and conditions played a decisive role in the formation, expansion, and eventual decline of this discourse. These external factors did not merely function as a structural background for Iran's political developments, but were actively involved in the processes of identity construction, discursive articulation, and the orientation of political action within leftist discourse. Within the framework of discourse theory—particularly through the application of Stuart Hall's approach—these external forces can be understood as elements that contributed both to the initial strengthening of leftist discourse and to the emergence of its internal constraints and contradictions.

The most significant external factor during the period under review was the Soviet Union. The occupation of northern Iran by Soviet forces in September 1941, alongside the collapse of political repression under Reza Shah, created conditions that enabled the free activity of leftist forces. In this context, the Tudeh Party of Iran was established with direct and indirect Soviet support and rapidly became the most important organizational carrier of leftist discourse in the country. This support included the training of party cadres, financial and media assistance, and the transmission of Marxist–Leninist ideology, which provided a coherent theoretical framework for interpreting Iran's social problems. By relying on concepts such as class struggle, worker exploitation, and anti-imperialism, leftist discourse was able to give meaning to the economic and political crises that followed Reza Shah's fall and to gain significant influence among segments of intellectuals, workers, and students.

Nevertheless, the Tudeh Party's strong dependence on Soviet policies and interests gradually became one of the major weaknesses of leftist discourse. This dependence became evident in the issue of the northern oil concession, where the party—contrary to its earlier anti-concession positions—supported Soviet demands for oil exploitation, thereby undermining its credibility as a defender of national interests. The crisis of the autonomous government of Azerbaijan in 1946 also dealt a heavy blow to the legitimacy of leftist discourse, as Soviet backing of this movement and the involvement of some forces affiliated with the Tudeh Party exposed the left to accusations of separatism. This situation highlighted the deep contradiction between Iran's national interests and Soviet foreign policy and led to internal fractures within the leftist current. The defection of figures such as Khalil Maleki and the emergence of more independent currents were manifestations of this identity and political crisis.

On the other side, Western powers—particularly the United Kingdom and the United States—entered the scene as countervailing forces to Soviet influence and communist discourse in Iran. Britain, which possessed substantial economic interests in Iran's oil industry, viewed leftist discourse as a direct threat to its position and, through its traditional networks of influence within the army, the court, and the government, sought to contain Tudeh Party activities and suppress labor movements. A clear example was the repression of oil workers' strikes in southern

Iran, which delivered a practical blow to the mobilizing capacity of leftist discourse. The United States, following World War II and within the framework of the Truman Doctrine, also transformed Iran into a key arena of communist containment. American economic and military assistance to the Iranian government, combined with anti-communist cultural and media activities, strengthened the central state and narrowed the space for leftist activism. At the discursive level, these measures increasingly portrayed leftist discourse as a “foreign-dependent” force and a threat to national independence. The culmination of this containment policy was the coup of August 19, 1953, carried out with direct U.S. and British involvement, which not only overthrew the national government of Mosaddegh but also dismantled the organizational infrastructure of leftist discourse through the severe repression of the Tudeh Party.

International geopolitical developments likewise provided a dynamic context for shifts in the position of leftist discourse. The occupation of Iran during World War II opened the political space, but the end of the war and the onset of the Cold War rapidly curtailed it. Within the new bipolar order, any leftist activity was interpreted through the lens of East–West rivalry, drastically reducing the possibility of a stable alliance between leftist discourse and nationalist forces. Regional developments and the suppression of communist movements in neighboring countries were simultaneously sources of inspiration and of psychological and security pressure on Iranian leftist forces. International economic factors—particularly the oil crisis and the economic competition between the two global blocs—also shaped the fate of leftist discourse. The dominance of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company over Iran’s resources created an opportunity for strengthening leftist anti-imperialist slogans, and leftist discourse initially supported the oil nationalization movement. However, the nationalist leadership of this movement and the intensification of economic pressures resulting from Western sanctions placed the Tudeh Party in a contradictory position. Its inability to offer practical solutions to the economic crisis made nationalist discourse appear more attractive and effective in public opinion.

In sum, external factors operated as a network of both enabling and constraining forces. The Soviet Union provided leftist discourse with initial organizational capacity and interpretive coherence, but dependence on it weakened the discourse’s political autonomy. Western powers, through active containment policies and political, economic, and security pressures, created the conditions for its decline. International geopolitical and economic transformations generated a volatile environment to which leftist discourse was unable to adapt in a sustainable manner. Ultimately, the failure to effectively reconcile the global ideology of Marxism with the identity-based demands of Iranian society—combined with mounting external pressure—meant that leftist discourse, despite its early achievements, was unable to attain political hegemony and was marginalized after the 1953 coup.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to express our appreciation and gratitude to all those who helped us carrying out this study.

### **Authors’ Contributions**

All authors equally contributed to this study.

### **Declaration of Interest**

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

## Ethical Considerations

All ethical principles were adhered in conducting and writing this article.

## Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

## Funding

This research was carried out independently with personal funding and without the financial support of any governmental or private institution or organization.

## References

1. Shafiee M, Mahboobi M, Mahdiyoun SA. The Relationship Between Institution and Performance of the Tudeh Party of Iran, 1941–1953. *Iranian Political Sociology*. 2023;3(4):129-51.
2. Tajdari A, Saraei H. *Early Left Discourse in Iran: Global Ideas in an Iranian Context*: University of Tehran Press; 2010.
3. Mousavi Behbid SB, Hesabi AA, Eider NA. A Comparative Study of Traditional and Modern Leftist Discourse in Iran's Educational System After the Islamic Revolution. *Iranian Journal of Comparative Education*. 2021;4(3):1262-81.
4. Rajaei Z, Sheyganfar N, Marouf G. A Methodological Critique of the Book "Leftist Discourse in Iran (Qajar and Pahlavi Periods)". *Critical Studies in Humanities Texts and Programs*. 2025;25(1):105-32.
5. Abrahamian E. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: Princeton University Press; 1982.
6. Katouzian H. *State and Society in Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajars and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*: I.B. Tauris; 2003.
7. Sender K, Decherney P. *Stuart Hall Lives: Cultural Studies in an Age of Digital Media*. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 2016;33(5):381-4. doi: 10.1080/15295036.2016.1244725.
8. Hall S. Culture and Power (Interview). *Radical Philosophy*. 1997(86):24-41.
9. Gokgul AN. Stuart Hall's Contributions to Cultural Theory. *4 Boyut Journal of Media and Cultural Studies*. 2022;21:55-70. doi: 10.26650/4boyut.2022.1224733.
10. Lu Z. A Response to Stuart Hall: Towards a Creative Decoding. *Signs & Media*. 2022;2(1):23-33. doi: 10.1163/25900323-12340014.
11. Karamollahi N, Dehghani R. Fundamental Methodology of Stuart Hall's Cultural Theory: A Critical Approach. *Religion and Cultural Policy Letter*. 2014;3:129-56.
12. Ayubi H. *The Emergence of Political Parties*: Soroush Publications; 2000.
13. Ahmadi Hajikelai H. *Trend Analysis of the Left in Iran: Islamic Culture and Thought Research Institute*; 2008.
14. Karimi MR, Dashtestani Z, Goziri M, editors. *A Brief Overview of Discourse Analysis Method*. *Proceedings of the National Conference on Modern Achievements in Education, Psychology, Law, and Socio-Cultural Studies*; 2018: SID (Scientific Information Database).
15. Rafi'zadeh A. The Formation of the Tudeh Party and Its Efforts to Grant the Northern Oil Concession to the Soviet Union. *Scientific-Research Quarterly of History*. 2020;16(62):92-121.
16. Leonchovsky G. *Russia and the West in Iran*. Kiyamehr F, editor. Tehran: Ministry of Foreign Affairs; 1953.
17. Behrooz M. *Rebels with a Cause: The Failure of the Left in Iran*: Ghoghnoos Publishing; 2005.
18. Abrahamian E. *Iran Between Two Revolutions*: Ney Publishing; 2004.
19. Shakeri K. *The Background of the Left in Iran*: Cheshmeh Publishing; 2005.
20. Eqbali A. *Iran's Political Parties: From the Constitutional Revolution to the Islamic Revolution*: Kavir Publications; 2010.
21. Ebrahimov A. The Tudeh Party of Iran: From Foundation to the 28 Mordad Coup. *Historical Studies*. 1995;4:45-51.
22. Zibakalam S, Rostami M. The Ideological Approach of the Tudeh Party Toward Civil Society: 1941–1953. *Political Studies Quarterly*. 2018;10(39):187-212.
23. Nejati G. *Twenty-Five-Year Political History of Iran: From the Coup to the Revolution*: Ney Publishing; 1992.
24. Najafi M. *History of Political Developments in Iran*: Institute for Contemporary Iranian Historical Studies; 2012.

25. Tabari E. *Seven Years of Struggle*. 1988.
26. Foran J. *Fragile Resistance: Social Transformation in Iran from Safavid to the Post-Revolutionary Era: Cultural Services*; 1998.
27. Ghani A. *Britain's Confrontation with Leftist Discourse in Iran*. Tehran: University of Tehran Press; 1998.
28. Elahiari A. *Narrative of Censorship: A Journalist's Notes on Censorship and Review in the Pahlavi Era*: Kayhan; 2006.
29. Madani JA. *Contemporary Political History of Iran (Vol. 1)*: Eslami Publications; 2007.
30. Dehbashi A. *Iranian Labor Movements: Social-Democratic and Communist*: Ney Publishing; 1989.
31. Mahmoudi J. *The Desire for a Great Leap: The First Labor Unions in Iran*: Ghatreh Publishing; 2010.
32. Ismael TY. *The Rise and Fall of the Communist Party of Iraq*: Cambridge University Press; 2008.
33. Ulus OM. *The Army and the Radical Left in Turkey: Military Coups, Socialist Revolution and Kemalism*: I.B. Tauris; 2011.
34. Rabinovich I. *Syria under the Ba'th, 1963-66: The Army-Party Symbiosis*: Israel Universities Press; 1972.
35. Lenin VI. *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*: International Publishers; 1917.
36. Marx K, Engels F. *The Communist Manifesto*: Penguin Classics; 1848.
37. Tokes RL. *Bela Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*: Praeger; 1967.
38. Mao T. *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (Vol. 4)*: Foreign Languages Press; 1961.
39. Vali A. *Kurds and the State in Iran: The Making of Kurdish Identity*: I.B. Tauris; 2011.
40. Cronin S. *Armies and State-Building in the Modern Middle East*: I.B. Tauris; 2014.
41. Overstreet GD, Windmiller M. *Communism in India*: University of California Press; 1959.
42. Sluglett P. *Britain in Iraq: Contriving King and Country*: I.B. Tauris; 2007.
43. Ladjevardi H. *Labor Unions and Autocracy in Iran*: Syracuse University Press; 1985.
44. Ahmad F. *The Making of Modern Turkey*: Routledge; 1993.
45. Dawisha A. *Arab Nationalism in the Twentieth Century: From Triumph to Despair*: Princeton University Press; 2003.
46. Beevor A. *The Battle for Spain: The Spanish Civil War 1936-1939*: Penguin; 2006.