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**ORIGINAL ARTICLE**

### **The Role of Media in Political Participation in the Context of Modernization and Development: The Case of Revolutionary Iran**

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### **EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

#### **Interdiction:**

Media have long been among the most central democratic institutions in mobilizing electoral resources, promoting political participation, and facilitating transitions toward modernization and development. They have played a vital role in enhancing the quality of electoral systems, political parties, and civil institutions. As the so-called "fourth pillar of democracy," the media serve as a critical intermediary between the people and the state, significantly shaping public opinion.

Mass media, both before and during transitions to modernization and development, have functioned as legitimizing agents and key players in defining political discourses and conflicts. Beyond encouraging political and civic participation, the media have also laid the groundwork for the emergence of a developmental and modernizing state. As products of the modern world, mass

communication tools have proven influential in driving social, political, cultural, and economic phenomena.

The media provide a space for dialogue and exchange in the public sphere. Through news, commentary, analysis, and information dissemination, they can exert either positive or negative impacts on political participation. Consequently, the content and coverage offered by the media significantly shape public perception and the formation of public opinion.

Within the literature of political sociology, it is fundamentally assumed that political behaviors and phenomena result from broader social factors. From this perspective, political participation—its nature and scope—is closely tied to communication media. Both traditional and modern media have influenced political participation, political development, political parties, political movements, and civil society institutions, and are often described as driving forces across cultural, social, political, and economic domains.

Domestically, mass media provide political information and news, fostering intellectual and attitudinal transformations that raise citizens' awareness of societal challenges and political-social developments. On this cognitive and ideological basis, individuals are driven toward civic and political engagement. Additionally, the tools offered by media platforms shape political inclinations, as users increasingly express support for peers and causes through their presence on social media.

This article aims to investigate the role of mass media in political participation by employing modernization theory. It seeks to answer the following research question: How have mass media influenced political participation within the framework of development and modernization? This question essentially applies a theoretical framework to an empirical subject, focusing on the significant role of media in facilitating political engagement.

### **Method:**

This study employs modernization theory as the analytical framework to examine the relationship between mass media and political participation.

### **Findings:**

Based on the existing literature, the role of media in political development and modernization is significant and undeniable. In the context of political and social transformations, media have served as instruments for collective action and as communication channels linking citizens to one another and to the state. They have played a decisive role in political and electoral participation and in shaping public opinion. As the fourth pillar of democracy and a vital link between politicians and the public, media act as powerful social and cultural tools that influence public attitudes, behaviors, and political socialization.

In essence, media are powerful agents in the formation of public opinion and have demonstrable influence on political and social changes. Their impact, however, is contingent upon societal structure, the nature of the political regime, and the strength of civil society. Through media, citizens gain awareness, and media assume a central role in informing, raising consciousness, and mobilizing resources for political engagement.

Media serve not only as producers of discourse but also as distributors of ideological content that fuels political participation. As one of the most fundamental democratic institutions, mass media are pivotal in mobilizing electoral resources and facilitating the transition toward development and modernization. They have contributed substantially to the improvement of electoral systems, political parties, and civil institutions.

Moreover, media define discursive headlines and political debates. As products of the modern and industrial world, they have demonstrated their influence across social, political, economic, and cultural phenomena. As such, they have played both constructive and, at times, detrimental roles in political participation and are often referred to as driving forces in these domains.

Domestically, mass media provide political news and information that foster intellectual transformation and shift citizens' perspectives toward societal challenges and political developments. This attitudinal foundation ultimately leads citizens to greater political and electoral participation. By enhancing awareness, breaking state monopolies over political discourse, and promoting civic engagement, media facilitate participation, domestic political dialogue, the strengthening of civil institutions and political parties, and the direction of social movements.

Within this framework, development is understood as the outcome of modernization, which itself is a process of transforming a traditional society into a modern, industrial one. Every political order is built upon social trust and public will, and its legitimacy and continuity depend on citizen participation in shaping their destiny and selecting their leaders. Scholars argue that the primary function of media in the modernization process is to respond to public expectations and generate motivation for progress and development. This is achieved by presenting developed countries as models—highlighting their strengths and weaknesses—thereby enabling citizens to make informed choices.

Given that development is a collective endeavor requiring national cohesion between intellectual and instrumental elites, mass media play an essential role in clarifying goals, policies, and plans, and in creating a shared understanding of challenges. If modernization is understood as the transformation from traditional to modern societies, then such change occurs through the symbols of modernization, including urbanization, education, and technology.

### **Conclusion:**

Accordingly, the social context of Iranian society in recent decades—shaped by modernization-oriented policies and cultural shifts—has undergone considerable change. The influence of mass and social media on political, social, cultural, and economic modernization is evident, having brought significant changes to family and community structures, sometimes challenging their integrity. With the advent of modern and digital media, emotional and value-based bonds have weakened, individualism has taken precedence over collectivism, and political and social modernization has led to increased exposure to diverse cultures and traditions.

#### **Data Availability Statement**

Data available on request from the authors.

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#### **Ethical considerations**

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**Conflict of interest**

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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