

How to cite this article:
Omidvar, S., Soltani, F., Zare Ashkezari, M., & Zargar, A. (2028). A Theoretical Review of the Impact of Iranian and Turkish Foreign Policy on the Tourism Industry (2005–2026): A Comparative Approach. *Journal of Historical Research, Law and Policy, 6*(1), 1-15. https://doi.org/10.61838/jhrlp.481

Article history:
Original Research

Dates:
Submission Date: 05 August 2026
Revision Date: 07 November 2026
Acceptance Date: 15 November 2026
First Pubication Date: 23 November 2026
Final Publication Date: 01 January 2028

A Theoretical Review of the Impact of Iranian and Turkish Foreign Policy on the Tourism Industry (2005–2026): A Comparative Approach

1. Setare. Omidvar[1] : Ph.D. Student, Department of International Relations, Ka.C., Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran
2. Fakhreddin. Soltani[2*]: Department of International Relations, Ka.C., Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran
3. Mojtaba. Zare Ashkezari[3]: Department of International Relations, Ka.C., Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran
4. Afshin. Zargar[4]: Department of International Relations, Ka.C., Islamic Azad University, Karaj, Iran

*corresponding author's email: Fakhreddinsoltani@iau.ir

ABSTRACT

This article adopts a theoretical review approach and draws on the theoretical frameworks of international relations and the political economy of tourism to comparatively examine how the foreign policies of Iran and Turkey have influenced the tourism industry. Specifically, it investigates the comparative impact of the two countries' foreign policies on the development or stagnation of tourism during the period from 2005 to 2026. The study addresses the question of how the foreign policies of Iran and Turkey have affected the tourism industries of the two countries. The research employs an applied qualitative design based on thematic analysis. The findings indicate that active diplomacy, détente, and integration into the international system have played a decisive role in achieving sustainable tourism growth. The concepts derived from the analysis identify several principal components, including financial support and financial autonomy in the two countries, tourism amenities, attractions, facilitation of the tourism process, international tourism management based on international security, and media and advertising management in the tourism sector. Tourism diplomacy, destination image formation, and the reduction of perceived risk are also important mechanisms that can facilitate tourist attraction and strengthen the relative autonomy of the tourism sector. For Iran, it is recommended that priority be given to a paradigm shift from a security-centered approach toward an interaction-centered approach, thereby enabling tourism to function as a driving force for diplomacy. For Turkey, priority should be placed on strengthening resilience and improving the qualitative dimensions of tourism so that the country can maintain its market share in the face of regional political turbulence.

Keywords: *Foreign Policy, Tourism, Iran, Turkey, Tourism Diplomacy*

Introduction

Over the past two decades, tourism has evolved from a merely cultural activity into a strategic instrument in countries' foreign policy. Governments employ tourism diplomacy, visa facilitation, national branding, and international security policies to increase tourist flows and the resulting economic and political benefits. Foreign policy is one of the most complex and strategic dimensions of the political life of states, determining the orientation of their diplomatic, economic, and cultural interactions within the international system. Such policy does not emerge

© 2028 the authors. This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) License.

in a vacuum; rather, it constitutes a logical continuation of each country's domestic policy. A deep and reciprocal relationship exists between these two domains, such that foreign-policy decision-making is influenced by the structure of power, the nature of government, political ideology, and the values prevailing in the domestic environment. The greater the political system's stability, rule-based governance, and cohesion, the greater the coherence, order, and purposiveness of its foreign policy. Foreign policy can therefore be regarded as a reflection of domestic policy designed to realize national interests in the international arena. Iran and Türkiye, despite their cultural and geographical commonalities, have experienced different outcomes in attracting tourists because of differences in their foreign-policy approaches.

Review of the Theoretical Literature

Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is fundamentally concerned with a country's activities in the external environment and under external conditions. In this context, foreign policy may be defined as a strategy or program of actions undertaken by the decision-makers of one country toward other countries or international institutions in order to achieve objectives commonly referred to as that country's national interests. Foreign policy is also a process that includes specific objectives, identifiable external factors related to those objectives, the state's ability to achieve desired outcomes, the development of an effective strategy, implementation of that strategy, and its evaluation and control. "In another definition, foreign policy is a strategy or designed course of action applied by the decision-makers of a state toward other states and international units in pursuit of specific objectives" (1).

Foreign policy means pursuing a country's objectives in the international environment and in relation to other societies, governments, and states. "Foreign policy provides guidance for positioning in the world and encompasses a set of international objectives and the means of achieving them. The foreign policies of different countries differ from one another, and the foreign policy of a particular country also changes over time" (2).

Principles Influencing the Foreign Policies of Iran and Türkiye

The foundations and principles of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran are rooted in the foundations and principles of the foreign policy of an Islamic government. Following the victory of the Islamic Revolution and the establishment of the Islamic Republic, which resulted from a profound transformation in the country's political structure, a new development emerged not only in the political and social history of Iran but also across the broader Islamic world. In parallel with fundamental changes in the structure of government and state administration, foreign policy also underwent profound transformations, with the value foundations of the Revolution, inspired by Islamic teachings, becoming a major driving force in restructuring foreign policy (3). In fact, the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979 fundamentally altered the principles and foundations of Iran's foreign policy. These conditions created a situation in which Iran, for the first time in nearly two centuries, moved away from a largely passive position in its relations with the outside world and major powers and transformed patterns of friendship and hostility at both regional and international levels. "At the international level, the most significant transformation occurred in Iran–United States relations, where the dependence of the Shah's regime on the United States was suddenly replaced by an adversarial relationship" (4).

With the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, as the founder and principal theorist of the new state, emphasized two central principles of the foreign and security policy of the Islamic Republic, given the specific characteristics and position of the new government: the necessity of preserving the political system and the necessity of establishing equitable yet responsible relations with other states. “According to Articles 152 and 154 of the Constitution, the foreign-policy orientations of the Islamic Republic of Iran include rejection of domination and submission, non-alignment with hegemonic powers, reciprocal peaceful relations with non-belligerent states, and complete non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations” (5). Article 152 of the Constitution states that “the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on the rejection of all forms of domination and submission, preservation of the country’s comprehensive independence and territorial integrity, defense of all Muslims, non-alignment with hegemonic powers, and reciprocal peaceful relations with non-belligerent states.”

The principles and foreign policy of Türkiye in the Middle East during the Cold War similarly followed a traditional principle of non-intervention in conflicts and specific issues of the Middle East. Türkiye’s traditional policy was consistently based on keeping itself away from Middle Eastern conflicts. Türkiye maintained neutrality during the Iran–Iraq War, and this neutrality originated from the same traditional approach. Türkiye did not historically pursue a specific program or objective to establish an independent Middle Eastern position for itself and generally viewed the Middle East and the Islamic world through the lens of its relations with either Europe or the United States.

For several decades, Türkiye interacted with the West largely apart from developments in the Islamic world. One principle of its foreign policy was non-intervention in Middle Eastern affairs and other Islamic regions, reflecting Türkiye’s distancing from the Islamic East and its developments. Gradually, however, Islamic parties and movements grew substantially during the 1980s and 1990s. In 2002, 2007, and 2011, the Justice and Development Party, led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, came to power with decisive electoral majorities. This trajectory demonstrated the increasingly visible manifestation of Islamism in Türkiye. During this period, Türkiye’s Western-oriented strategy, rooted in Kemalism, shifted toward a combined strategy of engagement with both the West and the East (6).

Tourism

Early definitions of tourism placed greater emphasis on distance, mobility, duration of stay, and tourists’ motivations. Such definitions, despite their shortcomings and inaccuracies, were accepted mainly because they provided economic and statistical quantification of the tourism phenomenon. However, these definitions were linear and static and could not adequately capture the dynamic nature of tourism. Tourism therefore required, and continues to require, alternative definitions that explain the phenomenon across its various dimensions (7).

In fact, tourism “functions as a strong driver and instrument for achieving sustainability within cities and societies” (8). Tourism was included for the first time in the final document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, emphasizing that tourism can play a major role in different dimensions of sustainable development, is closely related to other sectors, can create decent employment, and can generate business opportunities (8).

Furthermore, tourism has received particular attention within the Sustainable Development Goals as an important field associated with poverty reduction, gender equality, environmental sustainability, and increased global partnership. “Consequently, most regions worldwide seek to benefit from tourism, particularly by obtaining a larger share of revenues and increasing employment generated by the development of this service industry. At the same time, tourism demand and tourists’ interest in new attractions and destinations have continued to increase.

Accordingly, destination planners have sought to respond to such demand while maintaining competitiveness by utilizing all available and accessible tourism resources" (9).

Tourism Policy-Making

"Tourism policy-making should be based on the principles of sustainable development, participatory governance, and resource management. These principles, particularly in developing countries such as Iran and Türkiye, play an important role in shaping policies and programs" (10). In Iran, based on the national development vision and national development programs, efforts have been directed toward increasing tourism's share in the national economy. Iran's policies have focused on improving infrastructure, protecting cultural and natural heritage, and developing less-developed regions. Türkiye, by contrast, has increasingly emphasized destination branding, transportation infrastructure development, and quality-oriented tourism. Türkiye's comprehensive tourism development programs have stressed the role of the private sector, international cooperation, and continuous monitoring (11).

The Classical Approach to the State in the Economy and the Interaction between Domestic and Foreign Policy in Shaping Tourism

Adam Smith assigned only three principal responsibilities to the state in the economy: maintaining security against external threats, establishing an effective judicial system to address domestic injustice, and providing the infrastructure and social institutions that the private sector lacks the incentive or capacity to supply. From this perspective, state intervention should remain minimal, while free competition, capital flows, and individual profit incentives can ultimately optimize public welfare. The continuation of these ideas led classical and later neoclassical approaches to emphasize economic freedom, a reduced governmental role in markets, and avoidance of interventions that distort resource allocation (12).

By contrast, socialist thought, particularly Marxist analysis, assigns the state a maximal role in directing the economy. From this perspective, public ownership and centralized planning constitute the principal instruments for regulating production, distribution, and development, and the economy should be managed under state direction according to broad collective and social objectives. The price mechanism does not occupy the primary position, and decisions are made at higher levels of planning (12).

The important point, however, is that both approaches—whether classical, with its emphasis on minimal intervention, or socialist, with its emphasis on planning—are in practice influenced by the manner in which domestic and foreign policies are interconnected. Particularly in contemporary economies, the boundary between the domestic economy and the international environment is permeable, and governmental decisions in foreign policy can shape or undermine domestic market performance, capital flows, economic security, and even the international perception of a country.

In the tourism sector, this relationship is more evident than in almost any other economic field. Tourism is inherently international, image-based, and dependent on global perceptions of security, culture, openness to interaction, and foreign relations. Therefore, domestic policies concerning security, services, infrastructure, media, social freedoms, and governance quality can achieve their full effect only when accompanied by a compatible, open, predictable, and interaction-oriented foreign policy.

Türkiye, by adopting an approach relatively close to the classical model during certain periods—particularly in attracting foreign capital, maintaining relative market freedom, conducting international marketing, and linking

domestic and foreign policies in the service of economic development—has been able to use active foreign policy as an instrument for strengthening tourism marketing, attracting airlines, and constructing a favorable destination image. The relative coordination between domestic orientations, including infrastructure, transportation, and advertising, and external orientations, including economic diplomacy, visa policy, and regional cooperation, has enabled tourism to become one of the engines of economic growth in Türkiye (3).

Iran, despite possessing considerable cultural, civilizational, and natural capacities, has experienced difficulties during certain periods in achieving coherence between domestic and foreign policy. Restrictions on external interaction, complexities in international relations, and discontinuities between domestic economic policy and the international environment, combined with structural problems within the tourism sector, have prevented Iran's destination image from being fully represented internationally. Consequently, the domestic–foreign policy nexus has not become an engine of tourism growth comparable to that of Türkiye, and the sector has not expanded in accordance with its actual potential (1).

It can therefore be concluded that, whether within classical economic logic emphasizing minimal state intervention or socialist logic emphasizing maximal state intervention, an essential condition for positive tourism-sector performance is coordination between domestic and foreign policy. In the absence of such coordination, domestic infrastructure, investment, advertising, or economic liberalization alone cannot ensure competitiveness in the global tourism market.

The Keynesian Approach and the Impact of Domestic–Foreign Policy Coherence on Economic Structure and Tourism

In countries such as Türkiye, synergy between domestic policies—including infrastructure investment, national brand development, and private-sector participation—and foreign policies—including economic diplomacy, visa policy, and regional cooperation—has enabled tourism to become one of the engines strengthening the economy. In this country, active foreign policy functions as part of the state's mechanism for managing effective demand at the international level and has contributed to increased tourist arrivals, foreign-exchange earnings, and the strengthening of leading economic industries. In Keynesian terms, Türkiye has used the state as an instrument for demand management, investment direction, and enhancement of external relations (11).

In Iran, however, discontinuity between domestic and foreign policies has constrained tourism policy-making. The state-centered administrative structure, weakness of independent institutions, absence of a long-term strategy, and multiplicity of decision-making centers, combined with complexities in international relations and limitations on external engagement, have prevented the government from fully performing its coordinating role in the tourism market—a market that specifically requires coherent integration of domestic and foreign policy. Existing studies similarly emphasize structural policy-making constraints in Iran's tourism sector (10). Under these conditions, the relationship between domestic and foreign policy has also weakened: domestic tourism policy seeks to develop infrastructure and services, whereas foreign policy does not provide a sufficiently enabling international environment to capitalize on these capacities. This lack of coordination has caused Iran's tourism development objectives to be realized below their actual potential, whereas comparable countries such as Türkiye, Malaysia, and Egypt have pursued different trajectories by coordinating their domestic and foreign policies.

In Iran, the institutional structure of tourism has developed in a way that gives the private sector only a limited role, while many decisions remain state-centered, centralized, and weakly connected to broader national

development objectives. This condition, together with incomplete coordination between domestic and foreign policy, has reduced the effectiveness of tourism development and constrained policy efficiency. Türkiye, by contrast, offers an example of combining domestic policies—economic reforms, national branding, and investment attraction—with foreign policies based on active regional relations, visa facilitation, and tourism diplomacy (3).

Accordingly, the Keynesian approach to the necessity of state intervention in tourism can produce developmental outcomes only when the state performs its role not merely in regulating the domestic economy but also in coordinating domestic and foreign policies. Tourism is an industry that cannot become an engine of economic growth in the absence of this linkage. Therefore, the divergence between Iran and Türkiye in tourism development arises less from the scale of government intervention than from the quality of the domestic–foreign policy linkage—a relationship that has been more structured and development-oriented in Türkiye and more fragmented, multilayered, and insufficiently coherent in Iran.

The Neoliberal School: The Domestic–Foreign Policy Nexus and Its Implications for Tourism

This framework has explained the role of the market within classical literature as well as in political, economic, and public-policy studies. When domestic policy focuses on attracting investment, developing service exports, and increasing competitiveness, foreign policy also generally moves toward trade and investment agreements, travel facilitation, tourism visas, marketing cooperation, international standards, and engagement with global financial and commercial institutions. This logic is particularly prominent in the literature on neoliberal globalization, market-based governance, and international political economy (13).

Another trajectory within this school concerns market-oriented institution-building and dependence on external rules. When domestic reforms are aligned with external standards and conditions, foreign policy indirectly affects the design of domestic policy. Another dimension involves a change in tourism regulation from direct government administration toward making the sector more investable. In tourism, neoliberalism generally requires the state to reduce its direct administrative role and increasingly act as a market regulator, facilitate the entry of capital and foreign operators, and establish frameworks for competition and investment attraction. This linkage between economic policy and tourism has also been addressed in tourism policy and planning studies (14).

Therefore, across the various frameworks developed in classical and neoliberal literature, the market, political studies of tourism, and international competition in Iran and Türkiye are of substantial analytical importance.

Decision-Making Theories and the Domestic–Foreign Policy Nexus in Explaining Differences in Tourism Development

“Models of decision-making in foreign policy were first considered in 1954 within a basic assumption concerning international decisions. By classifying external and internal forces, this perspective demonstrated that decision-makers are influenced by three categories of factors: the structure and objectives of spheres of competence; information, values, and priorities; and motivations as well as personal and psychological factors” (15).

On the other hand, the rational or rational-choice model of decision-making seeks to explain optimal choice based on assumptions of complete access to information, transparent preferences, and comprehensive analytical capacity. This model was later developed in game theory, systems analysis, and military sciences but was increasingly criticized from the late 1950s onward because of its unrealistic assumptions. From another perspective,

power-structure models regard decision-making as the product of social classes, wealth, pressure groups, and institutional forces.

All of these theories indicate that decision-making is the product of a “multi-factor process” in which domestic and external variables simultaneously exert pressure on political leaders. Countries possess different levels of development, distinct political structures, divergent cultural values, and varying interests. Consequently, it is natural for them to adopt different and sometimes conflicting policies regarding a common issue such as tourism.

Political leaders, whether adopting proactive or reactive policies, consistently seek to realize national objectives while minimizing political costs and risks. This is precisely the point at which the economic and tourism trajectories of Iran and Türkiye diverge. In tourism- and economy-related decision-making, Turkish leaders have used a combination of domestic capacities, including the private sector, infrastructure, and market mechanisms, together with external opportunities such as openness to interaction, active diplomacy, and visa policy. In Iran, interaction between these two levels—domestic and external—has often been characterized by limitations and discontinuities, producing different policy outcomes in the fields of the economy and tourism.

Foreign-Policy Decision-Making Models

Based on the critiques and evaluations developed in the field of international relations, this model is presented within a two-stage framework.

Cognitive Approach

In the first stage of decision-making, decision-makers act within a cognitive approach, through which the mental processes and origins of their preferences become apparent. At this stage, the decision-maker first collects available information concerning the “conditions and nature of tourism.” This information is interpreted and evaluated on the basis of a set of subjective and situational factors, including available capabilities, the beliefs and convictions of the decision-maker, past experiences, and time constraints.

The decision-maker then applies a process of cognitive simplification in order to reach a conclusion. This means eliminating certain options, overlooking others, and modifying some alternatives until reaching an option that satisfies the decision-maker’s perception of “satisfaction” and “desirability.” At this point, the decision-maker relies on a compensatory model, weighing costs, benefits, consequences, and priorities in order to make the final decision.

This decision-making logic becomes particularly important when governance-level decision-makers seek to establish a connection between domestic and foreign policy—a linkage that has affected the formulation of foreign policy and, consequently, tourism differently in Iran and Türkiye. Because tourism is highly dependent on international image, perceived security, political stability, and governance quality, every decision in domestic and foreign policy directly affects this sector.

In Iran, the concentration of a substantial part of the decision-making structure on foreign-policy and security concerns has meant that, within the compensatory decision-making process, tourism- and domestic economic-development-related options are often assigned lower priority. Consequently, some alternatives are eliminated during the cognitive simplification stage because of domestic constraints, ideological pressures, or foreign-policy requirements. This prevents domestic and foreign policies from operating as an integrated system, and such discontinuity ultimately has adverse effects on international perceptions of Iran, tourist arrivals, destination attractiveness, and tourism investment. In other words, within the “compensatory model,” Iranian decision-makers

often give greater weight to political or security costs than to short-term economic and tourism benefits. As a result, numerous tourism opportunities, despite Iran's cultural, historical, and natural attractions, have not reached their full potential.

In Türkiye, however, cognitive and compensatory decision-making has operated differently. Decision-makers gather information regarding economic opportunities, cultural capacities, domestic needs, and probable reactions from the international environment and then weigh policy options. During the cognitive simplification stage, they retain options capable of simultaneously strengthening domestic and foreign policy. This coordination, which became particularly prominent from the 2000s onward, enabled Türkiye to utilize tourism as an instrument for economic growth, increased regional influence, enhanced soft power, and improvement of its international image. In the compensatory model, Turkish decision-makers assign greater weight to economic interests, national branding, tourist arrivals, and international engagement. Accordingly, domestic and foreign policies in Türkiye's tourism sector have functioned synergistically.

Overall, the cognitive decision-making process and the compensatory model demonstrate how decision-makers' mental structures and preferences determine policy trajectories. Differences between Iran and Türkiye in combining domestic and foreign policies, particularly during cognitive simplification and final selection, have contributed to tourism becoming an engine of economic development and soft power in Türkiye, whereas in Iran the discontinuity between these two domains has prevented tourism from fully utilizing its actual potential. Based on the logic of cognitive decision-making and the compensatory model, as well as available theoretical evidence, it can therefore be concluded that the quality of the domestic–foreign policy linkage plays a decisive role in the success or failure of tourism development, and that differences between Iran and Türkiye in this linkage constitute one of the principal explanations for the divergent performance of their tourism sectors.

Rational Framework Model

In the second stage of decision-making, the decision-maker enters the rational framework model, in which selection among the remaining alternatives is based on a rational calculation of costs and benefits. At this stage, the decision-maker attempts to select the option that provides the greatest benefit and the lowest cost for the state. Unlike the first stage, which focuses more heavily on understanding domestic conditions, subjective preferences, values, experience, and information constraints, the second stage emphasizes the logical evaluation of instruments, capabilities, and the objective consequences of each alternative.

In other words, if the objective of the cognitive stage is "simplification" in order to achieve satisfaction, the objective of the rational framework stage is "maximization" of benefits among the screened alternatives.

There is also an important difference in the field of attention. In the first stage, decision-making is shaped more strongly by the domestic environment, whereas in the second stage greater weight is assigned to the international environment, the structure of the global system, opportunities, threats, and external costs. At this stage, the decision-maker seeks to make a choice that generates the highest return for the country through a balance between "domestic policy" and "foreign policy." It is at this point that the relationship between these two spheres becomes particularly tangible.

This rational logic plays an important role in understanding differences in tourism policy-making between Iran and Türkiye. In Iran, when decision-makers enter the rational stage, calculations of costs and benefits are often influenced by political and security costs within the international environment. Restrictions resulting from sanctions,

regional tensions, ideological sensitivities, and pressures originating in the domestic structure lead Iranian decision-makers to select alternatives that are more consistent with “reducing political costs” than with “increasing economic and tourism benefits.” Consequently, even at this stage, the domestic–foreign policy relationship functions in such a way that options aimed at strengthening tourism or expanding international interactions are less frequently selected because their external costs are estimated to be greater. This situation helps explain why Iran, despite its substantial tourism capacities, has been unable to secure an appropriate share of the international market.

By contrast, Türkiye applies a different decision-making mechanism at the rational stage. Its political, economic, and foreign-policy structures have been configured in a manner that produces a certain degree of synergy between domestic needs and international opportunities. Therefore, when calculating costs and benefits, Turkish decision-makers often conclude that expanding tourism, broadening international engagement, and improving the country’s external image produce the highest economic, political, and even security returns. Their final choices at the rational stage consequently favor options that support national branding, tourist attraction, foreign investment, and soft power, thereby aligning domestic and foreign policy toward strengthening the tourism sector.

Accordingly, examination of the “rational framework model” demonstrates that the way costs and benefits are calculated and the manner in which domestic and foreign policies are integrated directly determine the tourism trajectories of the two countries. Türkiye, through coordination between these two spheres, has been able to transform tourism into a sustainable source of growth and international influence, whereas Iran, because of systemic constraints and different weighting of domestic and external costs, has not been able to utilize the rational stage to maximize its tourism potential.

Foreign Policy and Tourism in Iran, 2005–2026

Iranian foreign policy during this period was characterized by several features, including intensified international sanctions between 2006 and 2015 and again after 2018, tensions with the United States and certain Western countries, and an increased emphasis on the Look East policy. These factors contributed to limitations on international flights, reduced foreign investment in tourism, and increased perceived risk associated with Iran as a tourism destination (1). Nevertheless, the period of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action between 2015 and 2018 demonstrated that improvement in foreign relations could rapidly increase inbound tourism to Iran.

Foreign policy and tourism in Türkiye between 2005 and 2026 were characterized by policies such as “zero problems with neighbors,” active NATO membership, tourism diplomacy, visa liberalization, and international branding. Although crises such as the 2016 coup attempt and tensions with Russia reduced tourism in the short term, the flexibility of Türkiye’s foreign policy and rapid restoration of diplomatic relations contributed to the swift recovery of the tourism sector (11).

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design and thematic analysis of scholarly articles and scientific reports as the study population. Using purposive sampling and focusing on the foreign tourism policies of Iran and Türkiye, a selected number of articles were reviewed and analyzed. To extract and analyze the findings, initial or open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were applied. The time frame for the inclusion of studies was 2006–2025, covering studies published in scientific-journal databases. The inclusion criterion consisted of studies most

closely related to the tourism policies of Iran and Türkiye. Following review of abstracts and assessment of thematic relevance, the full texts of 21 articles were included in the study.

Findings

Following the initial screening, 21 articles were purposively selected for analysis and classified into thematic categories.

Table 1. General Concepts Extracted from the Articles

No.	General Concept	Number of Articles
1	Financial support and financial autonomy of the two countries	3
2	Amenities and attractions	3
3	Facilitation of the tourism process (visas)	4
4	International tourism management based on international security	5
5	Media and advertising management in tourism	6

Question 1. How did the foreign policies of Iran and Türkiye affect the development or stagnation of the tourism industry in these countries from 2005 to 2026?

Table 2. The Foreign Policies of Iran and Türkiye and Tourism Industry Development

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
International sanctions and financial and transportation restrictions; tensions with Western actors and increased perceived risk; periods of improved relations through negotiations and agreements producing sudden effects on tourist arrivals; active and multi-track diplomacy in Iran and Türkiye, albeit in different directions; visa cancellation or facilitation and travel policies; insecurity, regional crises, and reduced tourism demand; national branding and international image-building; role of regional and international institutions in facilitating cooperation	Sanctions and international cooperation; infrastructure capacity, visa policy, and air connectivity; reduced inbound flows, fluctuations in investment, and changes in perceived risk	The level of risk management and the quality of foreign diplomacy determine the trajectory of tourism development

Based on the codes presented, international sanctions that restricted Iran's access to financial systems and air transportation reduced its ability to attract tourists. At the same time, regional security fluctuations affected both countries, although the effect was more pronounced in Iran. Within the operation of foreign policy, confrontational policies contributed to the formation of a high-risk and insecure image of the country, which in turn discouraged tourists. In Iran, periods such as implementation of the nuclear agreement led to short-term increases in tourist arrivals, while Türkiye also benefited from periods of reconciliation with neighboring countries.

Regarding visas, Türkiye was able to attract new markets through visa facilitation. Iran implemented comparable measures only to a limited extent during many periods, whereas periods of heightened tension remained more dominant, particularly affecting Iran. Political activities collectively also contributed to national branding and the construction of secure and economically attractive destinations. Iran, however, lacked a stable international image, and continuing restrictions on tourism investment constrained the sector. Overall, the synthesis of the identified components indicates that the level of risk management and the quality of foreign diplomacy determine whether tourism follows a trajectory of growth or stagnation.

Question 2. In which areas are the differences and similarities between Iranian and Turkish foreign policy in their effects on tourism during this period observable?

Table 3. Differences and Similarities between the Foreign Policies of Iran and Türkiye Affecting Tourism

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding

Both countries affected by regional security developments; differences in foreign-policy governance styles—security- and ideology-oriented in Iran versus pragmatic and economy-oriented in Türkiye; differences in soft-power instruments such as branding and public diplomacy; differences in travel-facilitation mechanisms such as visas and international marketing; similarities in efforts to attract tourism investment during periods of political improvement	Exposure to regional crises and fluctuations in demand constitutes a similarity between the two countries; differences involve the intensity of sanctions, legal and political risk, and the use of soft-power and travel-facilitation instruments; Türkiye demonstrates greater stability in managing tourist expectations, whereas Iran experiences greater volatility because of foreign-policy constraints	Foreign-policy model, travel-facilitation instruments, and soft power

Based on the findings presented in the table, both countries share experience with regional crises, but differ in their foreign-policy approaches and in their use of soft-diplomacy instruments. Türkiye has been more successful in producing a positive image and conducting extensive international marketing. Differences in visa policies—Türkiye's facilitative policies versus Iran's more restrictive policies—illustrate differing outcomes of formal tourism policies. As a result of these policies, the intensity of restrictions and access to global markets differs between the two countries. Türkiye has placed economic interaction at the center of its foreign policy, whereas Iran has focused more strongly on regional security. Strategic differences are therefore evident in the foreign policies of both countries: Türkiye relies more heavily on economic engagement, while Iran places greater emphasis on security. Nevertheless, both countries have experienced notable tourism growth during periods of political stability.

Question 3. Which factors in Iran's foreign policy have impeded or facilitated tourist attraction compared with Türkiye's policies?

Table 4. Factors in Iran's Foreign Policy Affecting and Facilitating Tourist Attraction

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Financial restrictions and constraints on international transfers; difficulties in obtaining visas and travel procedures for certain nationalities; high-risk destination image and concerns regarding security or laws; periods of relaxation followed by increased tension and spillover effects on tourism; lower foreign-policy stability compared with Türkiye; Türkiye's focus on connecting with diversified markets and continuous marketing; Türkiye's multilateral diplomatic capacity to repair relations	Sanctions + perceived risk + connectivity constraints; facilitation through improved relations during specific periods plus domestic and supportive policies where available; Türkiye employs de-risking more rapidly, while Iran experiences greater volatility	Stability and predictability of foreign policy function as prerequisites for attracting tourists

The findings indicate that financial and banking sanctions, limitations on airlines and travel, the perception of Iran as a high-risk destination, fluctuations in foreign relations, and the absence of continuous international tourism marketing constitute major foreign-policy obstacles to tourism in Iran. Nevertheless, short periods of détente, visa waivers with selected countries, and Iran's substantial cultural and natural heritage capacities indicate considerable potential for overcoming these constraints.

Question 4. What roles have been identified for tourism diplomacy in improving international image and attracting tourists in Iran and Türkiye?

Table 5. The Role of Tourism Diplomacy in Improving International Image and Attracting Tourists

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Tourism diplomacy as an instrument of soft power; destination branding, international events, and cultural cooperation; visa facilitation and marketing; differences in foreign-policy messaging and official narratives; direct effects including increased trust and reduced perceived risk; indirect effects including increased investment and infrastructure development	Tourism diplomacy strategy: cultural interaction + travel connectivity + assurance of perceived security; mediator: international image, trust, and perceived risk; outcomes: increased demand and stronger presence in target markets	Tourism diplomacy = image production + reduction of perceived risk, thereby enabling tourist attraction

The findings indicate that tourism diplomacy can function as an instrument for presenting a positive image of the country, while international and cultural events, visa facilitation, and the production and dissemination of positive official narratives through media instruments and branding can help reduce perceived risk. After facilitating access to a coherent and positive destination image, trust may be established, leading ultimately to greater willingness to undertake tourism-related risk, increased investment, and diversification of tourism markets. In other words, tourism diplomacy facilitates tourist attraction by strengthening destination image and reducing perceived risk.

Question 5. What policy recommendations can be proposed to improve Iran's tourism industry based on a comparative foreign-policy approach?

Table 6. Policy Recommendations for Improving the Tourism Sector

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Need to redesign foreign interactions to reduce destination risk; diversification of tourism markets, including non-traditional markets; tourism-diplomacy packages involving visas, transportation agreements, and aviation cooperation; strengthening foreign-policy narratives around security, hospitality, and travel accessibility; using international events and regional cooperation; aligning domestic policies concerning infrastructure, services, and standards with foreign-policy objectives; establishing a tourism risk-monitoring system covering security, laws, and transportation	Reducing travel barriers + stable information provision; transportation agreements and regional cooperation; institutionalization of tourism diplomacy and predictable foreign policy; selective transfer of effective Turkish instruments rather than simple imitation	Institutionalization of tourism diplomacy and soft power

The themes identified in the findings emphasize the need to reduce external travel barriers, develop regional cooperation and transportation agreements, use soft-power instruments and international events, and reform visa policies and tourism infrastructure. Improving the media narrative concerning Iran as a destination and establishing a risk-monitoring system for foreign tourists are also identified as foundations for reducing external barriers and institutionalizing tourism diplomacy as part of the transformation of Iran's tourism sector. Accordingly, the findings point to visa facilitation, stable information provision, assurance of travel security, development of regional exchanges, stronger aviation connections, institutionalization of tourism diplomacy, and the use of soft power.

Discussion and Conclusion

The overall results of the coding process and comparative analysis of Iranian and Turkish foreign policy in the tourism sector during 2006–2026 indicate that foreign policy plays a fundamental and decisive role in the development or stagnation of tourism. The principal findings of this study emphasize the reciprocal relationship between foreign policy and tourism and tourism diplomacy as an instrument of soft power. Taken together, they indicate that foreign policy is a determining factor and key variable in the success or failure of national tourism industries, particularly within the complex geopolitical environments of the Middle East and Eurasia.

Both countries possess substantial potential to become major tourism destinations because of their historical heritage, geographical diversity, and cultural attractions. Nevertheless, Türkiye has been able to connect these capacities to the global tourism market through a coherent foreign and economic policy strategy, whereas Iran has been unable to utilize these opportunities on a sustainable and institutionalized basis (3).

On the one hand, through a pragmatic, flexible, and economy-oriented foreign policy, Türkiye has been able to maintain relations with diverse actors and keep the tourism sector relatively open even during periods of crisis. Visa facilitation, development of transportation infrastructure, extensive international advertising, and active use of soft power have contributed to establishing Türkiye in tourists' perceptions as a secure, accessible, and predictable

destination. This situation has contributed to foreign investment, sustained growth in tourist arrivals, and increased resilience of the country's tourism industry (14).

On the other hand, Iran, because of extensive sanctions, political and security tensions, and repeated fluctuations in foreign relations, has been unable to establish a stable and reliable image in the global tourism market. Even during periods when Iran's domestic capacities could have supported tourism growth, foreign-policy restrictions, financial and banking difficulties, and high perceived risk prevented realization of these capacities. Consequently, tourism in Iran has grown primarily in intermittent and unsustainable periods and has lacked a continuous and institutionalized trajectory (1).

Each of the studies reviewed identified different groups of components in its findings. Research has emphasized the importance of presenting an appropriate image of host communities to tourists, increasing social capacities for hospitality, using local cultural potential to enhance destination attractiveness, promoting goal-oriented tourism development, and learning from the experiences of countries such as Türkiye. Other studies have also highlighted international issues such as migration and human outflows, political and economic support, and the use of media in tourism (9).

A substantial proportion of the studies addressed economic issues, financial support, provision of tourism services, and the development of marketing processes. Other studies highlighted the role of foreign policies across different time periods, while comparative research has emphasized tourism as a relatively autonomous field within broader national-development structures (3). Tourism policy in Iran has also been examined in terms of the relative autonomy of tourism from other international issues. Economic dimensions of tourism policy, economic growth resulting from tourism development, and financial support for tourism-service provision have likewise been identified as important considerations (16).

Today, many activities in the fields of economics, marketing, and tourism are carried out through media and information tools. Previous studies have highlighted differences in temporal and content-related media elements across different platforms and the way tourism facilities and recreational sites are represented through visual, image-based, and audio elements (17). Tourism can therefore be explained and analyzed across multiple dimensions.

It can consequently be concluded that Türkiye's superiority over Iran in the tourism sector derives less from natural resources or cultural heritage than from the relative stability of its foreign policy, active diplomacy, and capacity to manage its international image. By contrast, in order to capitalize on its extensive tourism potential, Iran requires reduced foreign tensions, stronger facilitative policies, and the institutionalization of tourism diplomacy as part of its broader foreign-policy strategy. Based on the combined policy experiences of Iran and Türkiye, several recommendations can be proposed for tourism development, including institutionalization of tourism diplomacy, targeted détente strategies, structural facilitation of entry, and greater stability in foreign policy. Such measures would contribute to the stability of international agreements and increase foreign investors' confidence in tourism infrastructure sectors such as transportation and hotel development.

With regard to Turkish foreign-policy experience, the maintenance of resilience is also recommended across several dimensions, including diversification of target tourism markets, qualitative rather than merely quantitative upgrading, strengthening digital governance in tourism, and maintaining the stability of the national tourism brand in order to preserve the relative autonomy of tourism promotion from sudden changes in foreign policy. Overall, for Iran, priority should be given to a paradigm shift from a security-centered approach toward an interaction-centered

approach so that tourism can become a driving force of diplomacy. For Türkiye, priority should be placed on resilience and qualitative upgrading in order to preserve its market share in the face of regional political turbulence.

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. Imani A, Bijani A. The Role of Foreign Policy in the Process of Attracting Tourists in the 2025 Vision. Geography and Regional Planning. 2022;12(2).
2. Rashidi M, Askarkhani A, Moradi M. The Complexity of Foreign Policy in the Middle East: Advancement in a Chaotic Order. Political Research of the Islamic World. 2020;10(4).
3. Roumiani A, Shayan H, Gheidari H, Rezvani MR. A Comparative Analysis of Spatial Planning for the Development of Tourism Destinations in Iran, Turkey, Portugal, and Serbia. Tourism Management Studies. 2021;14(48).
4. Fereydoun H, Ghavam A. Factors Affecting the Discourse of Moderation in Public Policy-Making: A Case Study of the Foreign Policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran Based on James Rosenau's Pre-Theory. Public Policy. 2018;4(1).
5. Vaezi M, Jannati A, Karbasian M. Foreign Policy Strategy for Enhancing the Economic Position of the Islamic Republic of Iran under New International Conditions. Tehran: Publications Unit of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture; 2014.
6. Tahaei SJ. Kemalism and Elements of Crisis in the Perspective of Turkish Foreign Policy. Rahbord. 2007(21).
7. Mirtaghian Roudsari SM, Pourfaraj A. Tourism: From Definition to Its Redefinition in the Modern Era. Tourism Planning and Development. 2023;12(46):7-45.
8. Akbarian Rounizi S. The Role of Tourism in Urban Sustainability: A Case Study of Sisakht City, Dena County. Urban Tourism. 2017;4(4).
9. Jalalian E, Niki P. Analysis of Factors Affecting the Development of Cultural Tourism in the Metropolis of Shiraz. Urban Tourism. 2023(1).
10. Saeidi AA. Fundamental Obstacles to Tourism Policy-Making from the Perspective of Elites. Tourism Planning and Development. 2012;1(2):33-56.

11. DrznerB, Esenkal Cozeli F. Dis Politika ve Turizm Iliskisi Baglaminda Turkiye'nin Avrupa ve Balkan Ulkeleri ile Yaptigi Turizm Antlasmalari ve Degerlendirilmesi. Catalhoyuk International Journal of Tourism and Social Research. 2010(1):107-30.
12. Ghadiri Asli B. The Evolution of Economic Thought: University of Tehran Press; 2000.
13. Ghavam SA. International Relations: Theories and Approaches. Tehran: SAMT Publications; 2009.
14. Rezaei P. A Comparative Study of Tourism Higher Education in China, Turkey, and Iran and the Presentation of an Appropriate Model for Tourism Education in Iran. Tourism and Leisure Quarterly. 2023;3(5).
15. Labkhandeh E, Karimifard H. The Function of Think Tanks in U.S. Foreign Policy toward Iran. Political Research of the Islamic World. 2016;6(1).
16. Moharrampour G, Fahimi H. The Impact of Implementing the Policies of Article 44 of the Constitution on the Financial Performance of State-Owned Companies. Strategic and Macro Policies. 2017;5(20):93-109.
17. Ziaei M, Delshad A, Taghavifard MT, Tajzadeh Namin A. Tourism Destination Competitiveness: A Qualitative Meta-Analysis of Studies Using Blakey's Triple Index. Physical Development Planning. 2020;7(4):75-92. doi: 10.30473/psp.2021.51661.2271.