

Introduction

Culture, as defined in the literature, constitutes a fundamental human characteristic that enables mutual enrichment among societies. Through the exchange of cultural practices and values, it forges strong connections between nations, even within today's heterogeneous international system characterized by cultural diversity, ideological pluralism, and uneven economic development (Al-Alali, 2006, pp. 104–105).

The cultural dimension represents the patterns of meaning that shape a society's system of values and beliefs. These patterns define civilizational orientations and influence both individual and collective behavior. Culture thus expands human horizons, fostering adaptation and interaction at both local and global levels.

Since this study examines the role of the cultural dimension in shaping external behavior—specifically, the behavior of individuals engaged in foreign policy—it is essential to assess the significance of culture as a determinant of decision-making processes in international relations.

Interest in the cultural factor within international relations intensified during the late twentieth century, particularly following events such as the Iranian Revolution. This episode reintroduced religion and culture as central drivers of political transformation, challenging earlier assumptions that these forces had lost relevance in global politics (Al-Alali, 2006, p. 109). Consequently, culture regained

analytical prominence as an essential variable influencing the behavior of international actors.

Scholars have advanced differing views on the nature and significance of cultural factors in international behavior. While some deny culture any explanatory power, others regard it as a decisive determinant of foreign policy and international conduct.

The first school, represented by Hans Morgenthau, privileges the political and material dimensions of power. He asserts that “*the foreign policy of any country is the pursuit of power*” (Al-Alali, 2006, p. 111). In his realist framework, national interest—rather than cultural identity—guides state behavior. However, Morgenthau nonetheless acknowledges that political action is embedded within broader cultural and historical contexts, suggesting that cultural content remains an integral though secondary component of foreign policy formulation.

Marxist theorists, by contrast, subordinate culture to economic structures, interpreting it as a mere reflection of the material base. In this view, culture lacks independent causal force and operates primarily as a superstructural byproduct of economic relations.

The second school, exemplified by the French scholar Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, assigns greater significance to culture. In *All Empires Are Mortal*, Duroselle emphasizes the influence of cultural values and principles on international behavior (Al-Alali, 2006, p. 111). From this standpoint, culture embodies an integrated worldview—a system of values, norms, and beliefs that governs individual and

collective conduct, shaping acceptance or rejection of specific political ideas (Iraqi Center for Research and Studies, n.d.).

Foreign policy, within this culturalist perspective, is not merely a function of material interests but also an extension of a society's value system. Cultural orientation precedes and conditions the formulation of foreign policy objectives. Development, similarly, is viewed as a holistic process aimed at building human capacities in both material and moral dimensions, rather than focusing solely on economic indicators (Iraqi Center for Research and Studies, n.d.).

Duroselle further recognizes the reciprocal relationship between cultural and economic factors. These dimensions interact dynamically—sometimes reinforcing one another, at other times existing in tension—depending on historical circumstances (Al-Alali, 2006, p. 113).

A third perspective accords the cultural factor primacy among determinants of international conduct. Culture, in this view, functions as a “*mental roadmap*” that provides the cognitive framework for political behavior (Nassif, n.d.). This worldview shapes leaders' perceptions, reactions to external stimuli, and attitudes toward international challenges.

According to Walid Abdel Hay (1994, p. 9), cultural values manifest through a *cognitive-value system*—a network of interlinked perceptions about the self, others, and the world. Human behavior thus reflects the cumulative product of cultural development, expressing how individuals and societies respond to internal and external

pressures. Behavioral diversity across states and political actors stems from variations in cultural worldviews and value systems (Nasr, n.d.).

Foreign policy, therefore, constitutes a set of political behaviors grounded in the subjective and objective realities of the state. It encompasses the outward expression of internal cultural orientations, linking societal norms and belief systems to the pursuit of political objectives. This behavioral process operates through individuals, elites, and institutions, creating reciprocal relationships between culture and politics (Maimonides, n.d.).

In this sense, civilization-building cannot be divorced from intellectual production, moral values, and cooperation. Cultural strength, coupled with scientific and technological advancement, forms the foundation of state power and leadership. As Al-Alali (2006, pp. 116–117) notes, *“a state that is strong culturally, scientifically, and technologically leads and subjugates others.”*

French economist Casanova corroborates this relationship by identifying three dimensions of state power—natural resources, capital availability, and cultural development (Al-Alali, 2006, p. 119). Cultural capital thus stands alongside material and financial resources as a key determinant of global influence.

In conclusion, it is analytically untenable to separate cultural variables from political strategy. Culture fundamentally shapes the behavior of international actors—whether individuals, elites, states, or international organizations—by providing the normative and cognitive frameworks within which decisions are made. Its influence extends

beyond diplomacy and international law to the very structure of global governance, as evidenced by its implicit presence in numerous international agreements and conventions, such as the Maastricht Treaty and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Al-Alali, 2006, p. 120).

Culture, therefore, constitutes not only a background variable but a strategic instrument of soft power that guides, constrains, and legitimizes the political actions of states within an increasingly interdependent international system.

1 Culture in the European Union's historical development

The European Union's integration project—economic and political—emerged from layered political, social, and cultural interactions among its member states. From a psychological perspective, culture operates as an intrinsic motivator that translates into purposive behavior. As a variable, it incorporates moral concerns, spiritual needs, and value determinants that shape preferences and collective action.

In line with Ernst B. Haas's neofunctionalist expectations, the Union's evolution reflects gradualism and functional-political diffusion, culminating in a shared, if contested, European identity despite the heterogeneous composition of European societies (Johansson-Nogués, 2008, p. 34). Class differentiation did not preclude integration because recurrent cross-border exchanges produced mutual cultural formation among distinct societal segments. Values, ideas, and norms that underpin European culture reinforced this trajectory. Many scholars, therefore, contend that peace, democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and economic freedom have served as guiding cultural principles in the construction of a "new Europe" (Johansson-Nogués, 2008, p. 31). This position aligns with constructivist insights that identity and norms constitute prerequisites for defining interests and behavior. Culture does not impose a fixed perceptual map; rather, it supplies principles that help actors specify goals and interests (Aggestam, 1999).

Historically, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) embedded European polities within a classical international legal order grounded in a shared European culture. Its principles applied primarily to the members of the European "club," not to polities beyond it (Al-Alali, 2006, p. 302). The cultural sphere in Europe thus acquired complex, distinctive dimensions. European culture contained common elements and comparable experiences during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, including intellectual struggles against ecclesiastical domination and, later, the spread of secular thought. The battles waged by secular ideas before and after the French Revolution to build a modern, liberal model marked most countries in the European continent from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. From the rise of Christianity and the power of the clergy and absolute monarchies to the emergence of individualist culture and liberal values in modern times, shared cultural components can be identified across Western Europe (Al-Shobaki, 2001).

The Enlightenment catalyzed an intellectual and cultural revolution that challenged authoritarian political structures and their supporting ideational orders. Under this approach, European culture fits within political and social culture: it concerns public life and vital questions of freedom of opinion, of voting, and of religious exercise—and it mobilizes people toward change and reform. It also comprises customs and traditions through which society organizes daily life to promote collective welfare under European Union law, while encouraging cooperation and interdependence as civic ideals (Ajkou, n.d.).

Peter M. Haas's notion of *epistemic communities*—networks of experts with recognized authority in specific policy domains—clarifies how specialized knowledge can shape policy outcomes when uncertainty is high and decision-makers seek credible guidance (P. M. Haas, 1992). At the domestic–societal level, European publics can be treated as agents in Alexander Wendt's sense, while European society, constituted by social and cultural relations, functions as a structure. Within this agent–structure dynamic, epistemic communities and intellectual elites acted purposively and influenced the transformation and reproduction of European social orders (Wendt, 1999).

During the industrial era, Europe experienced an accompanying “mental” revolution influenced by Enlightenment thinkers, including Immanuel Kant. Through intellectual movements of moral and civic renewal, European societies pursued phased political goals—national and international—grounded in prior social and humanitarian objectives that promoted freedom, democracy, emancipation, civic consciousness, and partnership at a civilizational scale (Arsan, n.d.). Cultural change penetrated individual dispositions and culminated in a wider collective orientation, forming the general will of the active majority in European societies (Arsan, n.d.).

This cultural process supported Europe's transition from relative backwardness to sustained progress. Liberal values, ideas, and norms encouraged opportunity seeking and a sense of duty. These features characterized Europe in the eras of capitalism and the Enlightenment, during which democratic institutions took shape—equal rights, accountability in the exercise of power, and popular sovereignty—