



Faculty of Legal Sciences

School of International Studies

Delegitimization of the Adversary as a Tool for
Consolidating Power: A Case Study of Nicolás
Maduro, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and Nayib
Bukele in Latin America

**Project prior to obtaining a Bachelor's Degree in
International Studies**

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Cuenca – Ecuador

2026

I dedicate this research to my family, especially my
dad, mom, brother, and pet.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my family, especially my mom, dad, and brother, who have always supported me in achieving my goals.

I would also like to thank Dr. Ana Isabel Malo for her guidance as my research advisor.

I would also like to thank all the professionals who participated in the interviews.

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**Delegitimation of the Adversary as a Tool for Consolidating Power: Case Study
Nicolás Maduro, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and Nayib Bukele in Latin America**

ABSTRACT

According to political theory, leaders seek to prolong their time in power. By employing delegitimizing discourse, they manage to discredit their opponents, position themselves before society, and strengthen their supporting coalition. This study focuses on understanding and identifying the categories, stages, strengths, and weaknesses of delegitimizing discourse, using the cases of Nayib Bukele (El Salvador), Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Mexico), and Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela) as examples. These cases allow for reflection on information manipulation and the role of the media and social media, particularly during times of crisis, as well as the polarizing effects generated by their delegitimizing discourse. A mixed method was employed, integrating six semi-structured interviews with experts in communication, discourse, and political science, with the analysis of twenty-four speeches by these leaders using the software NVivo. The indicators CIVICUS, Varieties of Democracy, and Latinbarómetro were also used to determine public opinion toward the government on areas related to each leader. Google Trends and posts on X were also reviewed to understand the stages of delegitimization and the enemies at whom the discourse was directed. Primarily, the findings of the study contribute to the categories of delegitimization by identifying and labeling “distancing” as a representative area within leaders’ discourses. Similarly, it highlighted the limitations of delegitimization in public opinion and the influence of contemporary external geopolitical pressures

Keywords: Latin America, delegitimization, discourse, leader, polarization.

Deslegitimación del Adversario como Herramienta para Consolidar Poder: Análisis de Caso de Nicolás Maduro, Andrés Manuel López Obrador y Nayib Bukele en América Latina

RESUMEN

Según la teoría política, los líderes buscan prolongar su permanencia en el poder. Al emplear discursos deslegitimadores, consiguen desacreditar a sus adversarios y posicionarse ante la sociedad y fortalecer a sus grupos de interés. El presente estudio está enfocado en comprender y visualizar las categorías, etapas, fortalezas y debilidades del discurso deslegitimador, tomando como ejemplo los casos de Nayib Bukele (El Salvador), Andrés Manuel López Obrador (México) y Nicolás Maduro (Venezuela). Estos permiten reflexionar acerca de la manipulación informativa y el rol de medios de comunicación y redes sociales, principalmente en momentos de crisis y qué efectos polarizantes su discurso deslegitimador generó. Se empleó un método mixto que integró seis entrevistas semiestructuradas a expertos en comunicación, discurso y ciencia política, con el análisis de veinticuatro discursos de estos mandatarios mediante el software NVivo. Simultáneamente, se utilizaron indicadores como CIVICUS, Varieties of Democracy, y Latinbarómetro para determinar la opinión pública hacia el gobierno en temáticas relacionadas con cada líder. También se repasaron tendencias de Google Trends y publicaciones en X para entender las etapas deslegitimadoras y los enemigos a los cuales el discurso estaba dirigido. Principalmente, los hallazgos añaden a las categorías de la deslegitimación al encontrar y denominar a la “desmarcación” como un área representativa dentro de los discursos de los líderes. De igual manera, se demuestra las limitaciones de la deslegitimación en la opinión colectiva y factores de presión geopolítica externa contemporánea.

Palabras clave: América Latina, deslegitimación, discurso, líder, polarización.