

Perceptions of International Business Students on Presidential Rhetoric in Latin America

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Abstract

This study analyzes the perceptions of International Business students regarding presidential discourses in Latin America, with particular emphasis on narratives related to security and democratic governance. A Likert-type survey was applied to 128 students, assessing seven dimensions associated with political orientation, security rhetoric, and international perceptions of governance. The results indicate that participants perceive presidential speeches as prioritizing security over governance, especially during periods of crisis. Likewise, a strong perception was identified regarding the influence of political orientation on the discursive management of security, as well as a positive evaluation of the impact of these speeches on the international image of the countries. The study contributes to understanding the role of political communication in legitimizing security strategies in Latin America.

Introduction

Presidential discourses constitute a fundamental tool for understanding the political and social dynamics of Latin America. In recent decades, the region has undergone significant transformations in matters of security and governance, where political discourse has been consolidated as an instrument of legitimation and symbolic control. In this regard, presidential communication fulfills a strategic function in shaping collective perceptions, as political leaders design their messages to persuade, mobilize, and consolidate their support base, especially in contexts of high political and social tension (Quimis Arteaga, 2024).

In Latin America, electoral campaigns have been characterized by the intensive use of discursive strategies aimed at influencing electoral behavior and shaping public opinion (Quimis Arteaga, 2020). This communicational dimension has consolidated political discourse as a key mechanism in the construction of legitimacy, the generation of citizen adherence, and the definition of governmental agendas. Within this framework, populist discourse articulates a logic of confrontation between “the people” and “the elites,” which is particularly evident in the region’s electoral campaigns (Ramos, 2018). These discursive strategies seek to simplify political complexity and generate emotional bonds with citizens, fostering personalistic leaderships that influence public opinion.

In recent years, Latin America has witnessed the emergence of governments with a strong presence of business-oriented profiles in the executive sphere, which has transformed the way power discourses are articulated. These experiences represent a novel element in Latin American political history, since although the relationship between business and political power is not new, seldom has such a number of presidents and cabinets with a pronounced business bias been observed (Nercesian, 2021, p. 7). This trend reveals that contemporary presidential rhetoric combines technocratic, populist, and entrepreneurial elements to reinforce the authority and credibility of leaders before public opinion.

According to Waisbord (2020), presidential discourses not only communicate decisions but also construct symbolic frameworks that legitimize power and generate consensus. In the same line, Foucault (2008) argues that political language operates as a mechanism of governmentality through which rulers produce narratives that regulate social behavior and thought. Thus, presidential discourse emerges as a form of

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discursive power that shapes the relationship between the State, citizenship, and public opinion, projecting not only an image of leadership but also a vision of social order and democratic governance.

Furthermore, as Van Dijk (2015) asserts, political discourse functions as a space where social knowledge is constructed and controlled by defining which issues are considered relevant and how they should be interpreted within a given ideological context. Complementarily, McNair (2017) emphasizes that modern political communication not only informs but also molds citizens' perceptions and attitudes through strategies of symbolic influence and manipulation.

Within this context, it becomes pertinent to understand how citizens—and particularly university students—interpret the political narratives that shape their perceptions of security and governance. The perceptions of International Business students provide a valuable standpoint, as they represent a generation immersed in digital and media environments where presidential discourses circulate with great symbolic influence. Their analysis makes it possible to identify how the rhetoric of power is internalized, questioned, or reinterpreted within the academic sphere, contributing to the strengthening of a critical citizenship aware of the discursive mechanisms that influence democratic legitimacy and the construction of contemporary governance.

Theoretical Framework

The analysis of political discourse in Latin America has become an essential tool for understanding the dynamics of power, legitimation, and the symbolic construction of the State. From the Foucauldian perspective of governmentality, political language operates as a social control device that defines what is considered “security” and who holds the legitimate authority to guarantee it (Foucault, 2008). In this sense, presidential discourse not only informs decisions but also shapes realities and guides behaviors through narratives that appeal to protection, threat, or national cohesion.

Authors such as Van Dijk (2015) argue that political discourse functions as a mechanism of cognitive power by influencing the construction of social knowledge and defining the interpretive frameworks that guide public opinion. Along the same lines, McNair (2017) points out that contemporary political communication integrates symbolic strategies of persuasion, spectacle, and media control, becoming a process of deliberate meaning construction rather than mere information transmission.

In Latin America, this phenomenon acquires particular characteristics due to the historical tensions between democracy, populism, and discursive authoritarianism. According to Waisbord (2020), Latin American presidential communication is distinguished by its ability to generate consensus through the emotionalization of discourse, the appeal to nationalism, and the simplification of complex dilemmas into dichotomous narratives (people vs. elite, security vs. chaos). This contributes to what Tokatlian (2022) calls “democratic insecurity,” a paradox in which discursive policies aimed at strengthening security ultimately weaken institutional trust and participatory governance. In addition, Schuster (2019) notes that public policies, especially social ones, possess a symbolic dimension: “social policies, in addition to their programmatic content, communicate visions about society and the role of the State in citizens' lives” (p. 37). In this way, presidential discourses can be understood as instruments of communicative governance in which values, objectives, and narratives are articulated to guide state action and shape public perceptions of power and legitimacy.

O'Donnell (1998) argues that the legitimacy of democratic regimes in Latin America depends on the existence of horizontal accountability, in which leaders must justify their decisions before institutions and citizens. However, when presidential discourses become unilateral mechanisms for interpreting reality, public deliberation erodes, and forms of rhetorical hyper-presidentialism are consolidated.

In recent years, securitization theory has made it possible to analyze how governments frame certain issues—such as migration, drug trafficking, or social protests—as existential threats, thereby justifying exceptional or authoritarian measures (Buzan et al., 1998; Hernández & Pérez, 2021). This discursive logic

is evident in Latin America through presidential narratives that associate security with order and economic stability, displacing debates on democratic governance and citizen participation (Quimis Arteaga, 2024).

Moreover, in the digital era, presidential discourses acquire immediate and transnational visibility, amplified by mass media and social networks. As Castells (2018) and Chadwick (2020) indicate, contemporary mediatized politics is characterized by the hybridity between institutional and emotional communication, where virality and immediacy shape the public perception of leaders. In this context, university students—particularly those enrolled in programs such as International Business—emerge as critical observers who reinterpret power narratives from a global and informed perspective (Martínez & López, 2023).

Thus, the theoretical framework of this study articulates three analytical dimensions:

1. Discursive power as a tool for political legitimation (Foucault, 2008; Van Dijk, 2015).
2. Securitization as a rhetorical strategy in presidential communication (Tokatlian, 2022; Buzan et al., 1998).
3. Student perception as a space for critical reception of political discourse in digital environments (Castells, 2018; Martínez & López, 2023).

These dimensions make it possible to understand how presidential discourses not only reflect political decisions but also shape imaginaries of governance and security that influence public opinion formation and the democratic legitimacy of Latin American states.

Methodology

The study was developed under a quantitative descriptive approach, aimed at identifying and analyzing the perceptions of International Business students regarding presidential discourses in Latin America. This approach is appropriate when seeking to examine social phenomena through the measurement of variables and the identification of general trends within a population (Hernández-Sampieri et al., 2022).

Design and Study Population

The research adopted a non-experimental and cross-sectional design, since data were collected at a single point in time without manipulating the study variables. The target population consisted of students enrolled in the International Business program at a private university in Bogotá, Colombia.

The final sample included 128 participants, selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling, based on their availability and willingness to respond to the instrument. Although the sample size is limited, it is sufficient for an exploratory descriptive study of an academic nature (Malhotra, 2019).

Data Collection Instrument

Information was collected using a structured questionnaire composed of seven five-point Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The items were grouped into four analytical dimensions derived from the theoretical framework:

Security: perception of the centrality of presidential discourse concerning national order and protection.

Political Orientation: degree of ideological influence in the construction of presidential **narratives**.

Presidential Narrative: recognition of predominant themes, styles, and rhetorical strategies.

International Impact: assessment of the effect of presidential discourse on external image and foreign investment.

The questionnaire underwent a content validation process through the review of three experts in political communication and social sciences, who evaluated the relevance, clarity, and coherence of the items. Based on their feedback, adjustments were made to the wording and order of the questions. Subsequently, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated, yielding a value of $\alpha = 0.34$, which indicates low but acceptable internal consistency for exploratory purposes (George & Mallery, 2019), considering the limited number of items and the pilot nature of the instrument.

Application Procedure

The instrument was administered virtually via an online form, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of responses. Participants were informed about the academic purpose of the study and provided informed consent prior to answering. Data collection took place during the first semester of 2024 over a three-week period.

Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were processed using SPSS version 25, applying descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and relative frequencies) to identify perception trends across each dimension. The results are presented in tabular format, complemented by a qualitative interpretation of the observed patterns. Additionally, response distributions per item were verified, and bivariate relationships between dimensions were explored through exploratory correlational analysis, without establishing causal inferences.

Results

The results of the study reveal a general trend toward a critical perception of presidential discourses in Latin America. Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations of the seven analyzed variables, which allow identifying the dimensions with higher and lower evaluations among the 128 surveyed International Business students.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Perceptions of Presidential Discourses in Latin America

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Emphasis on security over governance	3.18	0.67
Recurring themes in speeches	3.00	0.00
Predominant narrative	2.82	0.86
Political influence	3.79	0.99
Change in crisis contexts	3.93	0.90
International impact	4.18	0.77
Effect on foreign investment	3.39	0.50

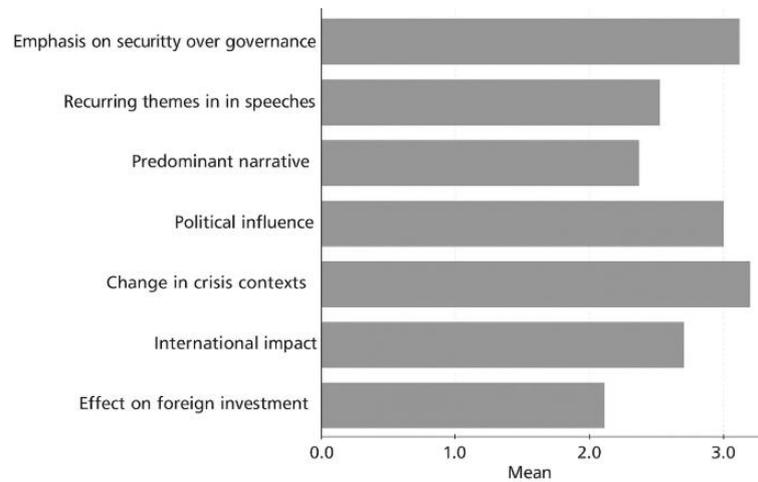
Note. Author's elaboration based on survey data collected from 128 International Business students (2024).

The analysis of the results highlights several relevant findings. First, the highest mean corresponds to the variable *international impact* ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.77$), indicating that students perceive a strong influence of presidential discourses on the external image of Latin American countries. This perception suggests an acknowledgment of the role of political communication as a tool of public diplomacy and international positioning, consistent with the arguments of Castells (2018) and Martínez & López (2023), who emphasize the growing relevance of presidential narratives in globalized and media-driven contexts.

Second, the variable *change in crisis contexts* ($M = 3.93$, $SD = 0.90$) shows that respondents identify substantial modifications in the tone and content of presidential discourse when countries face periods of instability. In line with Tokatlian (2022), this result confirms the regional trend toward discursive securitization, in which governments prioritize messages oriented toward stability and order over those promoting participation and transparency. Conversely, perceptions regarding *political influence* ($M = 3.79$, $SD = 0.99$) reflect the conviction that a president's ideological orientation significantly conditions how issues of security and governance are addressed. This finding aligns with the propositions of Waisbord (2020) and Van Dijk (2015), who argue that political discourses are not neutral but expressions of cognitive frameworks that legitimize power positions and shape public opinion.

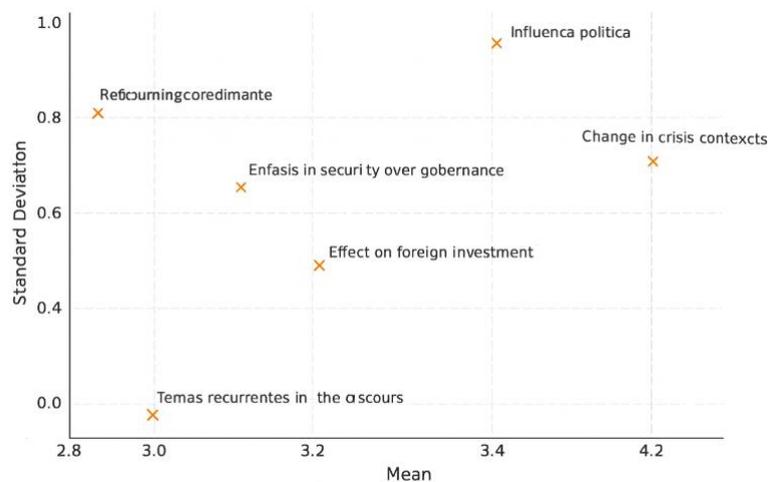
The variables *emphasis on security over governance* ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 0.67$) and *effect on foreign investment* ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.50$) show intermediate values, suggesting that students recognize a prioritization of security within presidential agendas, though not with an explicitly negative assessment. This balanced interpretation can be explained by the coexistence of dual narratives: one of control and authority, and another of institutional legitimation—a phenomenon described by Foucault (2008) and O'Donnell (1998) in relation to governmentality and democratic accountability.

As shown in Figure 1, the highest perceptions correspond to *international impact* ($M = 4.18$) and *change in crisis contexts* ($M = 3.93$), suggesting that students acknowledge the influence of presidential discourses both on the external projection of countries and on the communicative management of critical situations.

Figure 1: Average Student Perceptions of the Analyzed Variables

Note. Author's elaboration based on the results of the survey applied to 128 International Business students (2024).

As shown in Figure 2, there is a clear relationship between the means and standard deviations of each variable. The perceptions with the greatest dispersion correspond to *political influence* (SD = 0.99) and *change in crisis contexts* (SD = 0.90), revealing more heterogeneous opinions among students regarding the ideological weight of presidential discourse and its adaptation to situations of instability.

Figure 2: Relationship Between Means and Dispersion of Student Perceptions

Note. The figure shows the variability in student perceptions, elaborated based on the results of the questionnaire (2024).

Overall, the results reflect a critical and informed understanding among students regarding the role of presidential communication in shaping public opinion and democratic governance. The predominance of the security component within the narratives, together with the high valuation of international impact, suggests that presidential discourses remain central instruments of political legitimation in Latin America.

Finally, the lowest scores were observed in the variables *recurring themes* (M = 3.00, SD = 0.00) and *predominant narrative* (M = 2.82, SD = 0.86). These figures reveal a moderate perception of coherence and thematic stability in presidential speeches. Such variability may be associated with the communicative fragmentation

of current leaderships in a digital environment where media exposure demands continuous adaptation of political messages (Chadwick, 2020).

Taken together, the results indicate that International Business students possess a critical and informed perspective on the role of presidential communication in shaping public opinion and regional governance. Their interpretation of these discourses combines elements of political, media, and international analysis, demonstrating a complex understanding of the interaction between rhetoric, power, and democratic legitimacy in Latin America.

Discussion

The results obtained indicate that students recognize the centrality of presidential discourse in shaping perceptions of security and governance. This finding reinforces the idea that political language not only communicates decisions but also produces symbolic frameworks of power (Waisbord, 2020). In this sense, presidential discourses function as instruments of governmentality, as they guide social behavior and legitimize decisions under the guise of technical rationality (Foucault, 2008).

The tendency to consider that presidents emphasize security over governance suggests a critical interpretation by participants regarding the instrumentalization of political rhetoric. This perception coincides with the arguments of Tokatlian (2022), who warns that Latin American presidential rhetoric often associates security with stability and control, displacing debates on democratic participation. Similarly, Van Dijk (2015) argues that political discourse shapes social knowledge by defining what is considered a threat and who holds the legitimacy to confront it.

The recognition of the international impact of presidential discourses—one of the highest mean scores in the study—shows that young people perceive presidential communication as a tool for projection and symbolic diplomacy. This finding is related to Castells (2018), who asserts that in the era of global communication, leaders construct power through media visibility. Likewise, Chadwick (2020) highlights that the hybridity between traditional and digital media has multiplied governments' capacity to influence transnational public opinion.

The results also reveal that the most variable perceptions correspond to *political influence* and *change in crisis contexts*, suggesting interpretative differences among students. This phenomenon can be understood from the perspective of securitization theory (Buzan et al., 1998), according to which leaders transform ordinary problems into existential threats to justify exceptional measures. In Latin America, this type of discourse has been recurrent in times of crisis, where the use of fear and polarization becomes a resource for political legitimation (Hernández & Pérez, 2021).

Moreover, the intermediate valuation of *emphasis on security over governance* may be interpreted as a recognition of the duality between authority and participation, as identified by O'Donnell (1998) in his concept of horizontal accountability. Students seem to perceive that presidential leadership oscillates between the need to maintain order and the obligation to render accounts, reflecting a structural tension within Latin American democracies.

Finally, the participants' critical understanding reveals a more reflective university citizenship capable of identifying the symbolic mechanisms of power and their impact on democratic legitimacy. As Martínez and López (2023) argue, new generations of university students develop media competencies that enable them to question official narratives and construct more complex interpretations of the role of political discourse in contemporary governance.

Taken together, the results reinforce the thesis that presidential communication constitutes a space of contestation over legitimacy and meaning, where securitization, ideological rhetoric, and media diplomacy converge. Understanding how young people perceive these phenomena provides a key insight for strengthening political education and fostering critical awareness within the university environment.

Conclusions

The study revealed that presidential discourses in Latin America are perceived by students as instruments of symbolic power that contribute to shaping public opinion and perceptions of state legitimacy. The results confirm the predominance of *security over governance* within presidential narratives, reflecting a regional tendency toward the securitization of political management, in accordance with the arguments of Buzan et al. (1998) and Tokatlian (2022). This discursive inclination shows how political leaders tend to justify their decisions in times of crisis by appealing to stability and order rather than to transparency and democratic participation.

Furthermore, the research highlights that the ideological orientation of presidents significantly influences the tone and content of their messages, reaffirming the relationship between discourse, power, and legitimation proposed by Foucault (2008) and Van Dijk (2015). Students demonstrated an increasing critical capacity to identify these communicative strategies, revealing progress in civic formation and in the understanding of political communication as a tool for the symbolic construction of power.

The recognition of the international impact of presidential discourses suggests that young people perceive presidential communication as a central element of *nation branding* and contemporary *public diplomacy*, consistent with the views of Castells (2018) and Waisbord (2020). This perspective reinforces the idea that presidential discourse operates not only within the national political sphere but also projects strategic representations to the international community.

From a methodological standpoint, the study confirms the relevance of a descriptive approach to explore citizen perceptions within the university context, although it acknowledges the need to expand the sample size and diversify the populations analyzed. Future research should develop comparative studies across countries and presidential periods, as well as longitudinal analyses to examine the evolution of political discourse and its impact on perceptions of governance.

Finally, the findings underscore the importance of strengthening critical education in political communication and digital citizenship within higher education, so that future professionals—such as International Business students—can interpret, question, and respond in an informed manner to the discourses of power that shape the contemporary public sphere. In this regard, the research provides valuable evidence to understand how new generations analyze presidential rhetoric and its influence on the consolidation of Latin American democracy.

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