

Who is the Enemy Here?

Political Delegitimization: Definition, Sources, and Analysis

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Abstract

Despite the central role of discursive delegitimization in the political debate over supremacy, little is known about the processes through which social agents attempt to de-establish legitimacy for contested political camps. The use of delegitimization to de-establish the legitimacy of the political rival is present even in societies with high support for democratic norms. This paper presents a new conceptualization of political delegitimization, based on Huddy's (2001) four factors for identity formation. Subsequently, it investigates these processes of political delegitimization in the context of the 2019-2021 political crisis, using a novel computational algorithm that successfully identifies and measures political delegitimization from approximately 900,000 Hebrew mass-media articles and social media posts. The paper emphasizes the destructive potential of political delegitimization discourse, which may create a sense of shame and repudiation of political identities. The endpoint of these processes may be the eradication of certain ideas from public discourse and the prevention of any ideological objection – an antithesis to a functioning democracy.

Keywords: Political Communication, Elite Discourse, Text Analysis, Israel.