



Laboratory of Knowledge

Confronting Inequalities in Latin America: Perspectives on Wealth and Power

Call for research fellowships: "Studying Wealth and the Elites"

Deadline: February 14, 2021

Compared to other world regions, Latin America is characterized by high levels of social inequality. Although past governments have tried to address this condition through different social policies, the highly unequal distribution of income and wealth has remained persistent. Some economic sectors such as finance, telecommunications, commerce and agro-industry are highly concentrated and dominated by a handful of corporations (*grupos economicos*). Similarly, and in the light of expanding agricultural frontiers, the ownership of land shows an increasingly unequal distribution. Lately, the Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated the existing inequalities in Latin America and has demonstrated how unevenly different social strata are affected by the crisis.

While academic efforts in recent years have increasingly focused on the consequences of this constellation for the marginalized and the poor, the constitution and concentration of wealth in the hands of small economic elites remain largely unexplored. To cope with this lacuna, CALAS aims to comprehensively examine wealth and economic elites in Latin America. Therefore, we invite researchers to contribute to this project with new ideas, fresh perspectives as well as extraordinary, experimental and innovative approaches. Thus, the line of research "Studying Wealth and the Elites", seeks to expand current knowledge and points towards new methodological and theoretical impulses that enrich, expand and transcend existing studies.

Apart from historical analyses, especially politico-economical approaches have engaged with studying the factors that enable and sustain the concentration of income and wealth. Here, examining the specific integration of Latin America into the world market, the heterogeneity of the national economies, and the frictions and internal conflicts between different social groups have produced valuable insights. However, empirical and comparative analyses that present a deep and comprehensive



measure of wealth in the region are lacking. Existing research has focused mainly on measuring income inequality and analysing its historical evolution. In contrast, and due to unavailable data, private property, land distribution and business ownership are insufficiently mapped. Therefore, it seems necessary to refine statistical indicators, to access new data sources and to scrutinize wealth in the region in a comparative manner.

Sociological analyses have shown how economic elites in Latin America have formed formal or informal networks and clubs, also demonstrating ways how they exert influence over society. Above all, the debate centers around the fluid transitions between politics and economy. These are discussed in terms of 'interlocking directorates', 'revolving doors', or 'multipositionality'. Therefore, in addition to classic research methods – such as biography and business studies – the network analysis has emerged as a promising approach. However, existing theoretical perspectives and methodological approaches need to be reviewed and further refined. In this context, a relational perspective on economic elites promises advances for a more accurate mapping of wealth in the region. This implies analysing elite strategies and positions in relation to the state as well as to other economic and social actors. In particular, approaches combining the analysis of wealth with habitual and cultural factors are lacking. Examining lifestyles and consumption patterns, professional preferences and educational biographies, as well as family constellations would allow for a deeper perspective on the reproduction of wealth and elites in the region.

In view of these research gaps, CALAS pursues the objective of mapping wealth in Latin America through empirically saturated and theoretically sophisticated research projects. The goal is to investigate the interconnection between wealth, the forms of its reproduction, as well as related actors and their strategies. To this end, the research axis "Studying Wealth and the Elites" focuses on two clear-cut dimensions:

1. Measuring and qualifying wealth in Latin America

The CALAS-laboratory of knowledge aims to establish new theoretical and, above all, methodological approaches that contribute to the empirical study of the distribution of wealth in the region. In addition to historical perspectives on the development of wealth, this includes not only the statistical measurement of income, wealth, taxes, land and business ownership, but also the varied constellation of economic elites in different countries. CALAS is interested in tracing and making visible the complex network of relationships between different actors, sectors and companies, and in understanding their integration into Latin American societies.



2. *Reproduction and representation of wealth*

This dimension focuses on the dynamics, processes and mechanisms that help explain the reproduction of both wealth and economic elites. Firstly, this applies to political, social, and economic structures that engender the concentration of wealth in the hands of an economic elite. However, also relevant are the political, social, economic, cultural and discursive strategies of the elites themselves, with which they secure and perpetuate their wealth. Therefore, in addition to classical political-economic analyses, this dimension of research focuses explicitly on habitual and cultural factors.

CALAS promotes the exchange between different knowledges at a horizontal level and invites applications from researchers, intellectuals and social actors that take up these two dimensions. The call is open to experts in the fields of social sciences and humanities. Research projects can address a wide range of topics, either through case studies and/or within comparative designs. We invite to explore new methodological and theoretical paths and encourage to present experimental and original research designs. Fellows have access to CALAS' various publication formats and actively participate in the research network. They also have the opportunity to publish the results of their research in an edited volume linked to the laboratory of knowledge "*Confronting Inequalities in Latin America: Perspectives on Wealth and Power*".

Conditions of the scholarships:

- A maximum of 8 scholarships will be awarded, distributed between two categories of researchers according to their qualifications and academic experience: senior and junior.
- Fellows must carry out research at CALAS at the University of Guadalajara, Mexico between September and December 2021. During this period, they may make short stays outside of Guadalajara e.g. to collect data relevant to the research project.
- Applicants must have a PhD and/or have published at least two international academic papers of high quality relevant to the topic of the call.
- Fellows have to participate in the activities and events of CALAS during the period of their fellowship. An interest in a structured exchange with other fellows in regular meetings and working groups is expected.
- Fellows have to publish the results of their projects in the form of a working paper or at least two academic articles and present their findings in public presentations at the CALAS Headquarters and/or its Regional Centres.



- Senior and junior fellows will receive competitive remuneration. They have all the infrastructure of CALAS at their disposal and – if necessary – will receive family support and a fund for research trips.
- CALAS is committed to inclusion and the goal of gender parity and promotes affirmative action policies. We especially welcome applications from qualified individuals with disabilities.

Requirements

- Fill out the [application form](#)
- Motivation letter explaining how the project fits into the Laboratory's research program "Confronting Inequalities in Latin America: Perspectives on Wealth and Power"
- Two-page curriculum vitae, including a list of relevant publications.
- A proposal for the research project, including a brief statement of the issue, objectives, methodological strategy, work plan, and timeline. The proposed project should focus on ONE of the dimensions sketched out above. Total length of the proposal: between 3000-4000 words.

Submission of documents:

- Applications (in Spanish or English) must be sent as a single pdf-file to the following email address: convocatorias@calas.lat, Reference: Research Grant: Wealth and Power.
- Deadline: February 14, 2021
- Announcement of selected proposals: April 16, 2021

The fellowships are subject to funding from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research. Due to the expected number of applications, non-acceptances will not be justified.

For more information:

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