

# HOW ELITES SHAPE UNEQUAL DEMOCRACIES: PERCEPTIONS OF REDISTRIBUTION IN BRAZIL AND SOUTH AFRICA

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## Description

The role of elites in the reproduction of inequalities has received increasing attention in recent years. The current literature has focused on measuring the growth of income and wealth inequality at the top, identifying how policy outputs are biased toward the preferences of wealthier voters, and analysing elite practices of reproduction. Nevertheless, the vast majority of these studies explicitly or implicitly assume that it is always in the interest of elites to increase inequality and oppose redistribution. Far less attention has been given to the conditions under which elites are likely to support and promote redistributive agendas.

This project will contribute to the debate about elites and inequality by shifting the focus from how elites benefit from inequality to how elites may support redistribution. In particular, we focus on elite perceptions as mechanisms that may enable or constrain support for redistributive policies. The project will collect and analyse data in two of the most unequal democracies in the world, Brazil and South Africa, where redistribution has been a key issue of political debate. The research will rely on a multi-method design, combining (1) estimation of the average effects of perception on elite support for redistribution and (2) identification of the cultural processes that enable this support.

We define “elites” as individuals capable of influencing political life due to their positions in powerful organizations and institutions. Based on such a power-based conceptualization of elites, this project will analyse the perceptions of individuals in leadership positions in influential market and political institutions. We will focus on three main groups of elites in each country: businesspeople (CEOs, CFOs, and Chairpersons of the Boards of major companies), elected officials (at national level), and top-tier civil servants.

