

WealthTalks: The (re-)production of wealth inequality in everyday talk

Initiative: Perspektiven auf Reichtum: (Aus-)Wirkungen von Reichtum

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The project offers a novel perspective on the production and reproduction of wealth by examining how ordinary citizens discuss wealth and inequality in everyday conversations. The project is based on the assumption that everyday talk reproduces grand narratives of meritocracy and is, thus, prone to make the accumulation of wealth seem desirable and wealth inequality unavoidable. The project describes the prevalence, topics, frames, and sequences of arguments of wealth and inequality in online and offline conversations in five countries: Botswana, Brazil, South Africa, Germany and the US. Subsequently, the project examines how the form and content of these conversations vary across individuals, situations, and the larger social context. The countries under study allow it to study how conversations on wealth and inequality differ between the Global South and Global North, and vary with the salience of race in the national discourse on wealth inequality. In the final step, the project tests how the nature, form, and sequence of conversations influence people's perceptions of inequality and their attitudes toward wealth redistribution. WealthTalks answers its research questions through two empirical lanes. First, the project will produce a large corpus of transcripts of everyday conversations on wealth and inequality in the five countries. This corpus will comprise data from social media debates, deliberative focus groups, and moderated dialogues that will be run in public places. These data will allow it to study everyday talk as it occurs in natural settings and as it is conditioned by the situational context. Drawing on the research insights so generated, iterative rounds of online experiments will subsequently test how varying frames and argument sequences affect people's beliefs and attitudes about wealth inequality and redistribution.

Projektbeteiligte

Dr. David Schieferdecker

Freie Universität Berlin
Department of Political and Social Sciences
Institut für Publizistik und
Kommunikationswissen
Berlin

Prof. Dr. Chana Teeger

London School of Economics &
Political Science
Departement of Methodology
London
Grossbritannien

Prof. Dr. Flavio Alex de Oliveira Carvalhaes

Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro
Sociologia
Instituto de Filosofia e Ciencias Sociais
Rio de Janeiro
Brasilien

Prof. Dr. Jonathan Mijs

Boston University
Department of Sociology
Boston
USA

Prof. Dr. Jeremy Seekings

University of Cape Town
Centre for Social Science Research
Cape Town
Südafrika