

Is There Any Equal Opportunity Approach in Latin America? A Systematic Review 2014-2024



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Abstract: This paper presents the results of a systematic literature review examining the evolution of contemporary Theories of Justice, Egalitarianism, and the Principle of Equality of Opportunity in Latin American countries from 2014 to 2024. It seeks to contribute perspectives from the Global South to the philosophical field, thereby enriching the dialogue on how egalitarian justice operates across diverse contexts. The study used three academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. A total of 864 articles were initially identified, and after applying the PRISMA methodology, 64 papers were selected according to the established criteria. The analysis reveals that these works reflect a distinctly Latin American approach characterized by: Intrinsic Pluralist Egalitarianism (relational-distributive), Decolonial and Feminist Theoretical Influence, and Pragmatic Equality of Opportunity.

Keywords: Theories of Justice; Egalitarianism; Equality of Opportunity; Latin America; John Rawls.

I. Introduction

Concepts are not static¹; they develop over time, reflecting different social changes in values, political issues, and economic circumstances. The continued discussion and reinterpretation of concepts ensure their relevance and applicability to changing social contexts, since “without common concepts, there is no society” (Koselleck 1982, 410). Philosophical responses to these transformations can take either a *centrifugal* or a *centripetal* direction – that is, they may emerge from political power seeking to improve the lives of the people (inside-outside), or from social movements pressing for governmental

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change (outside-inside).

Continuous evaluation is crucial for addressing emerging inequalities, adapting to new challenges, and promoting a more inclusive society. In this context, concepts such as Equality and Equality of Opportunity have been subject to persistent debate. These discussions aim to ensure that the principles and values continue to serve as an effective normative tool for addressing unjust inequalities. In recent years, criticisms have emerged in the philosophical field from academics advocating for the abandonment of the Equal Opportunity principle (EOp),² arguing that it is ineffective and excessively meritocratic (Cavanagh 2002; Puyol 2010; Rendueles 2020). However, rather than representing a settled consensus, these critiques reveal ongoing tensions regarding the role and meaning of EOp. The principle continues to retain substantial philosophical and social significance, suggesting that, rather than being dismissed, it should be continuously revisited and critically refined.

This article aims to categorize the orientation of Latin American Countries (LAC)³ regarding the theories of justice, egalitarianism, and EOp to foster an international debate with a clear regional perspective. To achieve this, the article conducts a Systematic Literature Review (SRL) of recent scholarly contributions. Literature reviews play a crucial role in academic research by evaluating the validity and quality of existing studies (Criado et al. 2018; Xiao & Watson 2019; Valle-Cruz et al. 2020) and by identifying potential biases or gaps within specific fields (Page et al. 2021).

A systematic review in philosophy and political theory also aims to broaden debates predominantly dominated by Anglophone scholarship and thus introduce more diverse perspectives. In this context, there is a growing contribution from the Global South, particularly from LAC, where scholars (especially within young democracies), have sought to move beyond the dominant paradigms of the Global North and adapt these concepts and principles to the context and demands of LAC (Vázquez 2012, 837).

This article is organized as follows. Section II addresses the principal theoretical frameworks. We aim to extend our understanding of theories of justice, egalitarianism, and EOp. Section III presents the methodological and analytical framework, defining the dimensions and categories used to analyze the articles and how they were selected. Section IV presents the research strategy and the PRISMA categories used to select the works. Section V presents the final data analysis, using descriptive statistics to examine the academic state of the art in EOp-LA⁴. Section VI discusses the results and presents ideas for developing EOp-LA. Finally, Section VII presents the conclusions of the study and

2 Building upon Roemer's foundational exploration of Equality of Opportunity, I will employ the abbreviation "EOp" throughout this text to denote the concept (Roemer 1998).

3 Although the acronym LAC is commonly used to refer to *Latin America and the Caribbean*, in this article it specifically denotes *Latin American Countries*, a categorization that will be defined in Section III.2.

4 From this point forward, the term "EOp-LA" will be used to denote the perspective on Equal Opportunity as it is understood and applied within the context of Latin America.

discusses its limitations.

II. Theoretical Framework

The equality/inequality debate has gained relevance due to the emergence of political movements opposing social justice, and particularly redistribution as a means of achieving justice. However, throughout history, there has been a continuous effort to find a system based on rules, values, and principles intended to improve people's quality of life. The debate on equality begins with Aristotle, who made two fundamental contributions to Western thought: First, equality is intrinsically linked to justice, and second, justice is a virtue characterized by an intermediate condition. Thus, if injustice represents inequality, then justice, as an intermediate state, is equality (Aristotle 1985, V.3, 1131a-1131b).

From a modern perspective, this debate leads us to the Theories of Justice and John Rawls as a starting point (Gargarella 1999; Vázquez 2019). It is necessary to clarify Rawls' relevance to the contemporary debate on justice. Both justice and equality have had multiple interpretations throughout history. However, the publication of *A Theory of Justice* marked a turning point – not so much because of the contribution itself, but because of the extensive theoretical developments it inspired, which continue to shape most academic debates today. For this reason, Rawls became – perhaps disproportionately – an unavoidable reference for any discussion on social justice. In this context, Rawls's conception of social justice seeks to correct inequalities through the basic structure of society (Rawls 2003). This means that justice aims to balance unfair inequalities (Pérez de la Fuente 2024), and concerns about justice and equality are central themes in modern movements (Fraser 2008).

II.1. Theories of Justice and Egalitarianism

There are many conceptions of justice, but what distinguishes egalitarian ones is the conviction that there is something that ought to be equalized. Nevertheless, this general position has generated several close contenders that do not dispute the importance of equality itself – such as P. Westen's critics (Westen 1982) – but rather challenge equality as a central metric. These include the well-known prioritarian, sufficientarian, and new limitarian approaches (Biddadanure & Alexen 2025). Although these conceptions play a significant role in the broader debate, they remain grounded in the fundamental idea of the equal moral worth of persons. For this reason, I will use this initial distinction to delineate the theoretical positions encompassed under the category of "egalitarian."

This ongoing debate about equality has generated two predominant conceptions (Arneson 2013). The first concerns institutions and their duty of equal treatment (formal equality), and the second is the well-known Rawlsian philosophical approach, which argues that every person inherently possesses "Equal Moral Value" (Rawls 2003, 447), establishing a universal standard for human dignity. Dworkin also contributes to this

discussion, insisting on the necessity for “Equal Concern and Respect” towards each individual (Dworkin 1997, 140). Together, these conceptions condense the core of liberal egalitarian philosophy that can be summarized as “people should get the same or be treated the same or be treated as equals, in some respect” (Arneson 2013, 1).

These egalitarian positions are relevant to normative ethics⁵. Egalitarianism has been widely recognized (Arneson 2013) as the position espoused by “those who favor equality of some kind”. This perspective maintains that people must be treated equally in some specific respect or receive the same amount of a relevant good, and it prioritizes equality over other principles such as utility (Rawls 2003). Most claims regarding equality can be organized around a threefold paradigm, as shown in Table 1 (adapted from Carbajal-Camberos 2024). Each paradigm articulates a distinct normative claim within contemporary thought:

Paradigm	Purpose	Debate
Inclusion	Equal dignity	Inclusion–Exclusion
Redistribution	Distribution of burdens and benefits derived from social cooperation	Equality–Inequality
Recognition	Culture	Equality–Identity–Difference

Table 1: Threefold Paradigm. Note: This table is based on the distinctions presented by (De la Fuente 2024).

To clarify a possible misunderstanding about egalitarianism, we will use Cohen’s approach to define it precisely. Egalitarian doctrines can be distinguished by the “Egalitarian Impulse,”⁶ which aims to mitigate the impact of “brute bad luck”⁷ on human well-being (1989). This view emphasizes the need to eliminate or equalize inequalities resulting from factors beyond an individual’s control, such as gender, economic background, identity, race, and ethnicity. This means that even though the variable selected as “the correct one” might differ among egalitarians, there is widespread support for equality as

⁵ Egalitarianism is a complex debate in social and political thought, with various valid approaches to addressing inequalities (Arneson 2013). Philosophers differ significantly on the form of equality and what variables are important to ameliorate. This article adopts a broad egalitarian perspective, incorporating liberal, luck, relational, capabilities, and analytical Marxist views within the broad idea that egalitarianism aims to correct and mitigate unjust inequalities, promoting fundamental moral equality for all individuals.

⁶ I adopt Cohen’s framework to elucidate the egalitarian imperative of addressing inequalities beyond individual control. This approach deeply informs our understanding but does not encapsulate the egalitarian philosophy debate. This paper deliberately sidesteps the huge egalitarian debate about the most effective view of achieving “equal dignity.” While significant, the distinction between “distributive” and “relational” egalitarianism falls outside the ambit of this study due to its broad implications. For a detailed exploration of these distinctions, see (Anderson 1999).

⁷ Dworkin’s distinction between “option luck” and “brute luck” plays an essential role in comprehensively grasping egalitarianism and its specific interpretations of equality. For further insight see (Dworkin 1981).

a “normative principle,”⁸ which, according to (Sen 1995), creates a diverse egalitarianism. This diversity is captured in Sen’s well-known question, “Equality of what?” – which focuses on what should be equalized.

II.2. Equality of Opportunity Principle Today: Conceptual Diversity

The evolution of egalitarianism emphasizes the challenge of applying philosophical principles to the complex context of contemporary societies. EOOp is the most powerful idea at the core of the egalitarian project (Fishkin 2014). This principle embodies diverse interpretations and applications. For this reason, Gideon (2023) argues that much of the philosophical work involves unpacking and distinguishing the range of ideas that fall under the label of EOOp.

The general idea of EOOp is to question the determinants of individual success, ranging from formal to substantive aspects. This involves considering a variety of relevant factors. In this context, Gideon (Gideon 2023) identifies two broad conceptions of EOOp: “teleological” and “deontological.” The former focuses on outcomes and consequences, whereas the latter concerns duties, principles, and values. De la Fuente, also states that EOOp will be broader or narrower, more or less distributed, depending on the conception of justice or the particular egalitarian position being defended (de la Fuente 2024).

EOOp is an essential part of democratic societies. Egalitarians and non-egalitarians accept the importance of this principle, and no political platform opposes this powerful instrument. However, different conceptions can clash over the meaning and application of EOOp, particularly regarding affirmative action. These differing conceptions often form the core of the arguments that both proponents and opponents present.

This breadth generates constant dispute over the concept, even among philosophers openly opposed to Rawlsian egalitarian postulates. For instance, conservative liberalism or neoliberalism, represented by early Nozick (Nozick 1974), considers any kind of distributive justice unfair and illegitimate, advocating for a minimal state. Conversely, analytical Marxism finds the Rawlsian approach insufficiently distributive. In this sense, Cohen calls for more aggressive equal opportunity schemes under the label of “socialist equal opportunity” (Cohen 2009), criticizing any theory of justice that allows some inequalities (see, e.g., Rawls’s difference principle) as inherently unjust.

EOOp refers to concepts thematically unified by the need to establish mechanisms that enable all individuals to access specific positions. Despite significant differences in determining the most robust conception of EOOp, its social value remains undisputed. Consequently, examining the academic debate in the Global South can provide valuable insights into the usefulness of the concept in highly unequal regions.

⁸ I will adopt Dworkin’s distinction between principles and law. According to Dworkin, within a normative framework, a principle should not only be considered relevant but also serve as a “directive that inclines the decision-making process in a particular direction” (Dworkin 1977, 34)

III. Methodological Framework

This section presents the research methodology for analyzing the trajectory of EO_p-LA. It outlines the research questions, establishes the dimensions and categories of analysis, and explains the data selection process. The methodological guidelines follow the PRISMA framework for systematic reviews and meta-analyses (Page et al. 2021). Due to the nature of systematic reviews in academia, we follow the steps deemed appropriate for this review's philosophical focus⁹.

The EO_p-LA database was compiled from two sources: systematic searches in databases and relevant additional texts, as explained in Section III.2. EO_p-LA addresses three key dimensions: the *Contextual Dimension*, which situates the research within its broader setting; the *Methodological Dimension*, which scrutinizes the research approaches and techniques employed; and the *Conceptual Dimension* that delves into theoretical frameworks and definitions (Criado et al. 2018).

III.1. Research Questions

The central purpose of this article is to examine the influence of the region known as "Latin America" on the philosophical debate about EO_p in political and normative philosophy. This means that general questions aim to gather a sample that reflects the perspectives of countries in this region, though they are not intended to provide conclusive findings.

- Research question 1: *What are the general characteristics of EO_p studies in LAC based on the selected academic works?* The variables covered include country of origin, affiliation, gender, language, nature of work, year of publication, and source of information. This screening is vital for profiling the studies carried out in the region and for understanding the trends and dynamics of scientific production in this particular debate.
- Research question 2: *How is EO_p-LA analyzed in methodological and theoretical terms, and what are the specific objects of study examined in the selected papers?* The answer to this question provides information on the predominant theories and philosophical approaches that support current research.
- Research question 3: *What are the most frequently explored dilemmas and key concepts emerging in the sample?* This comprehensive approach aims to contribute to current knowledge, by offering new perspectives and understandings of the role of Latin America in the context of political philosophy, theories of justice, egalitarianism, and EO_p.

⁹ Structuring this review, we have taken only those articles that coincide with the characteristics of Philosophical research articles. For the 27 items established by PRISMA guidelines, we followed 16 in conducting the research and presenting the results. We eliminated items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, and 16 because they focus on clinical studies. As well as items 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22, which focused on the critical analysis of the previous items. Adapting items to research interests is standard practice in meta-analyses. For further information, refer to "Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: the PRISMA statement" (Moher et al. 2009)

III.2. Guidelines for Creating Latin American Sample

The sample includes articles written in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, published from January 2014 to April 2024. This review adopts an explicitly political-philosophical perspective, focusing on contributions that engage with the philosophical discourse surrounding the concept of EO_P and theories of justice. Such an approach helps to mitigate potential biases inherent in addressing EO_P in overly broad or purely empirical terms. This consideration is vital, as several disciplines might invoke the principle without sustained philosophical examination.

For the purposes of this study, and to identify relevant contributions from LAC, it is necessary that the publication originates within the geographical boundaries of the region. For practical reasons, our definition of “Latin American work” includes nations of the Americas where Spanish or Portuguese is an official language, with the notable exclusion of Caribbean states. This definition acknowledges the complexity and controversy surrounding the meaning and classification of LAC, as discussed by (Vizarreta & Betta 2022). Thus, México, Central American countries (excluding Belize), and South American countries (excluding Suriname, Guyana, and French Guiana)¹⁰ are included. To be considered as a Latin American scholar, we follow Vizarreta & Betta’s (2022) criteria, which require holding a degree from a Latin American university as a requirement to be part of the sample.

The attempt to simplify the complex and varied cultural, geographic, historical, and ethnic perspectives embodied in the term “Latin Americanism” is inherently imperfect and weak. Limiting the complex reality embodied in the region to a mere geographic issue is therefore not accurate. Additionally, the fact that the author satisfies the criteria does not guarantee that the scholar identifies as having a Latin American perspective – an aspect that lies beyond the scope of this study. According to Vizzarreta and Betta, “the concept of Latin Americanism will always be susceptible to criticism and refutation” (Vizzarreta & Betta 2022, 344). However, the category of university education helps us to avoid simplifying nationality as the single factor of Latin American identity. It recognizes the significant influence of higher education on the formation of scholarly perspectives in the region.

To capture a wide range of views on EO_P-LA issues, it is necessary to facilitate the research criteria to broaden the participation of Latin American authors, particularly going beyond peer-reviewed journals. The entrenched practices of the academic publishing industry, – particularly the biases and access restrictions prevalent in Global North journals (Razakamaharavo 2023) – systematically marginalize the contributions from the Global South. As a result, much of the research labeled as “Latin American Studies” is neither produced in the region nor written by Latin American authors (Mu

¹⁰ This delineation reflects a conscious decision to address the Ethno-cultural divisions that colonial legacies have engendered, which arguably necessitate a distinct scholarly examination of these nations with unique experiences in specific regional contexts (see Cavlak 2021).

& Pereyra-Rojas 2015). This condition perpetuates epistemic injustice and restricts valuable contributions from LAC, particularly through “mechanisms associated with publishing” (Collyer 2018, 14). Furthermore, structural barriers and editorial biases that disadvantage scholars from LAC and Africa underline the obligation for inclusive practices (Mokhachane et al. 2024; Wasserman & Richards 2005).

To ensure a comprehensive and robust foundation, this review systematically includes a wide range of works and peer-reviewed articles from recognized academic journals, relevant sections from authoritative books, and insightful working papers presenting preliminary research findings. This set of inclusion criteria ensures a multidimensional understanding of the topic, incorporating consolidated findings and cutting-edge knowledge that might be available only in less restrictive publications. By integrating these varied sources, the research achieves greater in-depth accuracy and offers a broader perspective on the evolving discourse in the field.

IV. Analytical Strategy

To classify and analyze the articles systematically, a database was constructed and organized according to the three dimensions described in Section III: contextual, methodological, and conceptual. Each dimension corresponds to one of the research questions. Determining specific categories of analysis facilitates a deeper exploration of the articles' content. This approach ensures a comprehensive structure and understanding of the selected academic works.

IV.1. Selection Criteria

The selection criteria detailed in Table 2 align with the research scope defined in Section II and the methodological framework designed to encompass the contextual, methodological, and conceptual dimensions identified in the study. These criteria are essential for ensuring that the research inquiries are addressed with both precision and relevance.

Inclusion Criteria (IC)	Exclusion Criteria (EC)
<i>Based on Metatada (contextual dimension)</i>	
IC1. The work focuses on Equality of Opportunity from the perspective of theories of justice.	EC1. The publication date falls outside the range January 1, 2013 - March 31, 2024.
IC2. The principal author or at least one co-author holds a degree from university in LAC (except the countries indicated in Section III.2).	EC2. The document is not written in English, Spanish, or Portuguese.
<i>Based on abstracts and resumes (methodological dimension)</i>	

IC3. The work is an academic article, conference paper, or book chapter.	EC3. Documents elaborated by political organizations, educational resources, doctoral theses, undergraduate and master dissertations, and those generated by NGOs without academic peer review standards.
	EC4. The work does not engage with the philosophical issues of justice, egalitarianism, or EOp.
Based on full-text revision (conceptual dimension)	
	EC5. The work discusses EOp, justice, or egalitarian approaches only superficially, without substantive engagement with the underlying concepts.

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

IV.2. Search Strategy

The primary sources used to obtain the database are Web of Science (WoS), SCOPUS, and Google Scholar (GS). Given the regional focus, GS will be our main source, as SCOPUS and WoS do not cover LAC extensively (Chavarro et al. 2018). In addition to the underrepresentation, there is a deep bias in the Social Sciences and Humanities (Mongeon & Paul-Hus 2016; Van Leeuwen et al. 2001). The searches were conducted through different keyword combinations, as in Table 3.

Source	String	Keyword	Link	Keyword	Link	Keyword	Link	Region
WoS and SCOPUS	1	Equality of Opportunity"	AND	Theory of Justice	AND	Egalitarianism	AND	Latin American
	2	Equal Opportunity	AND	Theories of Justice	AND	Egalitarianisms	AND	Latin America
	3	Igualdad de Oportunidades	AND	Teoría de la Justicia	AND	Igualitarismo	AND	América Latina
	4	Oportunidades Iguales	AND	Teorías de la Justicia	AND	Igualitarismos	AND	América Latina
	5	Igualdade de Oportunidades	AND	Teoria da Justiça	AND	Igualitarismo	AND	América Latina
	6	Oportunidades Iguais	AND	Teorias da Justiça	AND	Igualitarismos	AND	América Latina
GS	7	Equality of Opportunity	AND	Theory of Justice	AND	Egalitarianism	AND	Latin American
	8	Igualdad de Oportunidades	AND	Teoria de la Justicia	AND	Igualitarismo	AND	América Latina
	9	Igualdade de Oportunidades	AND	Teoria da Justiça	AND	Igualitarismo	AND	América Latina

Table 3: Research combinations.

Using the different combinations in each of the platforms, it is possible to use the exclusion criteria *EC1* automatically. After applying the date filter, the results obtained are presented in Table 4.

Searches results (EC1)		
Source	Language	Search Results
Web of Science (WoS)	EN	90
	ES	2
	PT	0
SCOPUS	EN	39
	ES	0
	PT	0
Google Scholar (GS)	EN	233
	ES	385
	PT	145
TOTAL	(EN+ES+PT)	894

Table 4: Systematic research results (April 20, 2024).

To detail the process of creating the database for analysis, we applied the *Inclusion Criteria* (IC) and *Exclusion Criteria* (EC) set out in Table 2. These criteria were applied in three stages of the study analysis. In the first stage, we analyzed contextual information such as document type, year of publication, country of origin, affiliation country, and language. The second stage addressed the methodological dimension, analyzing approaches and theoretical frameworks based on article titles, abstracts, keywords, topics, and geographical focus. The final stage involved an in-depth review of each text to determine its theoretical alignment with the aims of our study. A summary of the data collection process is presented in Figure 1.

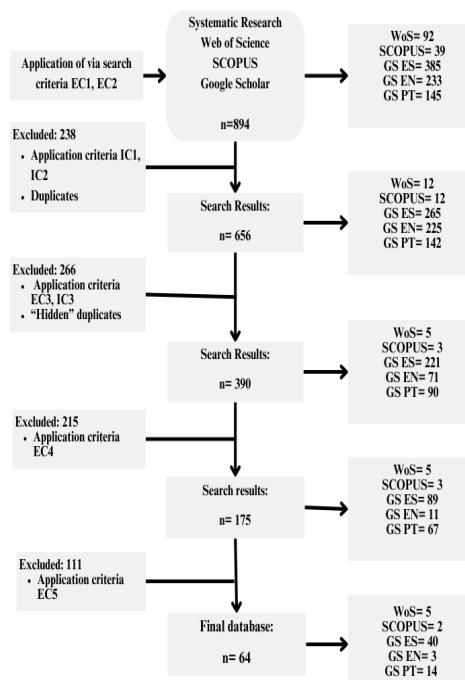


Figure 1: Data collection process.

IV.3. Tools, Limitations, and Accessibility

The final database was analyzed in *RStudio*, a program well-suited for qualitative and quantitative analysis of this kind. This software was chosen on the basis of Fernández (2020), who highlights its relevance for data researchers due to its versatility, ease of use, and accessibility –particularly within the social sciences and humanities. The results are presented according to the three dimensions outlined in Section 3: *Contextual, Methodological, and Conceptual*.

A potential limitation that we need to address concerns the selection of search engines and the scope of inclusion. Specifically, generating a database of *Latin American scholars* is a crucial aspect of our research. This approach was necessary given the well-documented academic hegemony (Collyer 2018; Razakamaharavo 2023) and the overrepresentation of scholars from the Global North in prestigious journals. For this reason, the criterion for selecting Latin American authors for our study entails excluding influential authors in the discussion of obligation theory and focusing exclusively on scholars from Latin American sub-regions. While this exclusion may appear restrictive, it prevents conceptual discussions of justice, equality, or egalitarianism from becoming detached from the region's urgent challenges – such as the erosion of democracy and the capture of political power by economic and political elites (Gargarella 2021).

This situation demonstrates two interrelated situations: First, economic and language barriers continue to limit access to leading research journals. Second, these obstacles often compel Latin American authors to engage with “finished” or “closed” theoretical problems defined by the Global North. However, this very constraint also compels scholars to formulate conclusions from their own perspectives and apply them to local and regional contexts, thereby generating several interesting questions and approaches.

Finally, it is important to highlight the accessibility of the documents included in the database. Full-text access was indispensable for the conceptual analysis. Of the 175 papers initially selected before applying EC5, 167 were freely accessible, while the remaining 7 were obtained through institutional access to Scopus and WoS. Remarkably, Google Scholar generated 96% of the total corpus. Thus, the dataset was exceptionally accessible, and no document was excluded due to inaccessibility.

V. Findings

V.1. Contextual Dimension (Metadata)

This section begins by reviewing the main publishing outlets used by Latin American authors, the types of articles they publish, and the dominant languages of their publications. This information is essential for describing how discussions of theories of justice, egalitarianism, and EO_p have developed within Latin American scholarship.

These contextual findings are presented in two categories: (1) the characteristics and accessibility of publications, and (2) the demographic and publication trends over the last decade.

V.1.1. Publication, characteristics, and accessibility

Of the 64 papers selected for our analysis, Figure 2 shows that 89.1% were retrieved via the GS search engine, 7.8% via WoS, and only 3.1% through Scopus. These data confirm that GS serves as a valuable platform for enhancing the visibility of authors from regions with limited access to academic publishing opportunities (Lateef et al. 2016). Moreover, GS plays a crucial role in increasing the visibility of scholars working in resource-limited contexts such as LAC (Zientek et al. 2018).

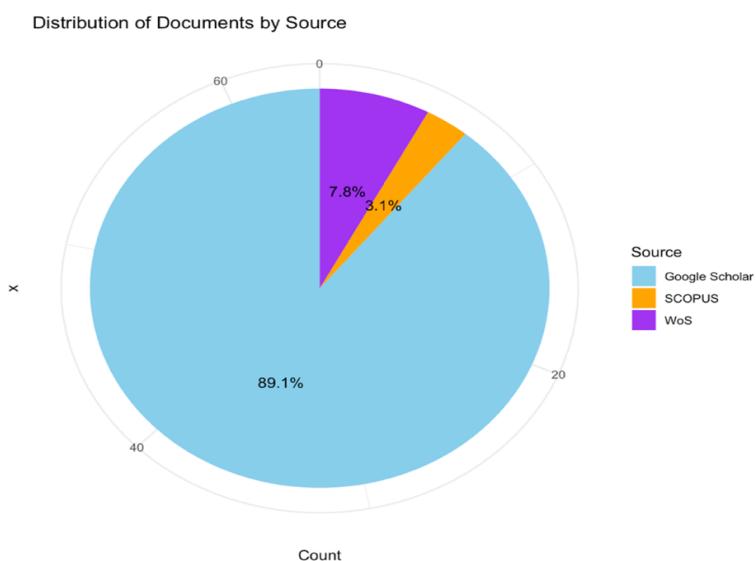


Figure 2: Documents by source.

Figure 3 illustrates that, of the total sample, 59 items were classified as journal articles, 2 as book chapters, and 3 as working papers. Regarding the publication language, 67.2% of the sample was in Spanish, 23.4% in Portuguese, and 9.4% in English. This distribution reflects two interrelated phenomena: first, English represents a constraint for authors seeking to publish in high-impact journals; and second, it reveals the linguistic diversity of the region. For example, among the 19 Brazilian authors, 5 published in Spanish, and 2 in English. This pattern illustrates the ongoing philosophical dialogue among Latin American subregions.

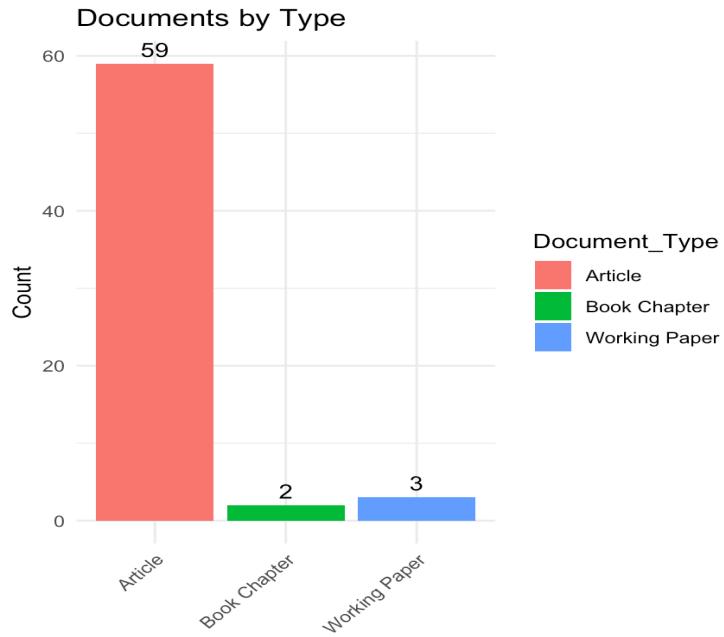


Figure 3: Publication types.

V.1.2. Demographic, geographic, and distribution over the time

Regarding the gender representation in the sample, it is notable that male authors are overrepresented, accounting for 69% of all contributors, while female authors make up the remaining 31%. This discrepancy has been widely explained by feminist theory, which highlights the structural problems faced by women, such as gender stereotypes and the challenge of balancing unpaid care work with scientific participation. Nevertheless, despite this discrepancy, the feminist approach has significantly influenced recent debates on egalitarianism and theories of justice in recent decades (Vázquez 2019). This topic will be developed in detail in Section VI.

Figure 4 presents publication trends. This 10-year time series illustrates changes in publication patterns over the past decade, up to the date on which the searches were conducted. It is possible that further publications will emerge in the coming years. Notably, the countries of Central America, including El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, and South America, including Uruguay and Paraguay, are not represented in the sample.

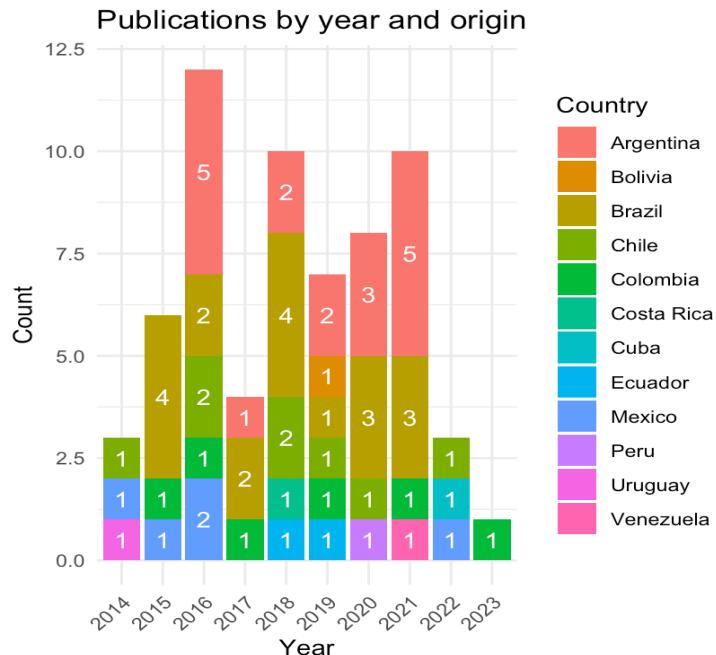


Figure 4: Publications by year and origin.

Figure 5 illustrates the relationship between the country of origin of the authors, their country of affiliation, and intensity of academic production within the total sample. Notably, some sub-regions – such as Brazil, Argentina, and Mexico – show clear patterns of academic retention. One possible explanation for this retention is the existence of solid public policies on science and research. The chart also shows that scholars who remain in academic institutions in their home countries develop specialized, consistent research agendas. For example, Argentine scholars associated with Argentine institutions have continued to develop their research agendas and arguments over time.

This trend may reflect a tendency among scholars who migrate to adopt the academic orientations of their host countries, gradually shifting away from a regional perspective. However, this dynamic is not observed at the regional context, where scholars with regional affiliations show a strong theoretical tendency, continuing to discuss egalitarian postulates from distinctly regional viewpoints. Similarly, scholars from Chile and Brazil are particularly distinguished by their higher levels of international collaboration, especially with institutions in the United States and the United Kingdom. These international interactions reflect a trend toward regional academic diversification and expansion.

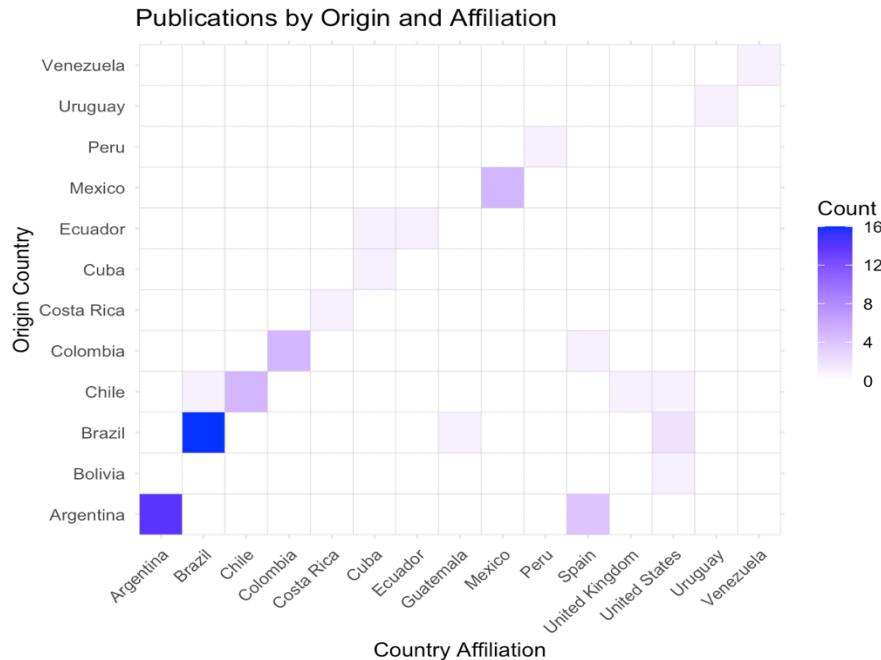


Figure 5: Publications by origin and affiliation.

V.2. Methodological Dimension

The nature of philosophical research, particularly concerning EOp-LA, is predominantly theoretical. Consequently, the abstracts of most articles do not present an explicit methodological categorization or detailed descriptions of the tools employed. Nevertheless, by systematically organizing elements such as titles, keywords, and abstracts, it is possible to identify three fundamental aspects:

- I. The most frequently used terms in EOp-LA research;
- II. Categories designated by journals; and
- III. The geographic focus of the research.

Together, these elements provide a foundational theoretical baseline and highlight key conceptual components that are critical for this issue.

V.2.1. Frequently applied terms

Figure 6 illustrates how scholars approach their research on social justice issues from a Rawlsian perspective. This perspective provides a framework for evaluating the distributive aspects of the basic structure (Rawls 2003). This intuitive notion of social justice is based on the recognition that social structures are composed of various social positions that influence well-being expectations. Considering this evident imbalance, discussing social justice means acknowledging the influence of such factors beyond the control of individuals and their positive or negative impact on their daily lives.



Figure 6: Keyword map.

The *Keyword map* analysis reveals that the most frequent terms associated with EOP in the Latin American context are: *Social Justice, Equality, Egalitarianism, Opportunities, John Rawls*, and *Inequalities*. This pattern confirms that the research on EOP-LA aligns with debates in political philosophy, such as *choice-circumstances, equality-inequality, distribution-recognition-representation, and opportunity-merit*. This map also shows a connection between these debates and topics such as *health, education, and gender*. Moreover, it demonstrates a strong command of egalitarian liberal theory, reflected in the extensive use of concepts drawn from across the broader spectrum of egalitarian justice.

V.2.2. Journal categories, theoretical approach, and geographical focus

Another relevant dimension of analysis is the combination of two variables: the official classifications of journals and the theoretical focus of the articles, as defined by the authors in the abstracts and summaries. Figure 7 indicates that most papers relevant to our subject are published in philosophy and law journals. Philosophy journals exhibit the most diversified coverage and visible tendency toward theoretical debates. In contrast, law journals concentrate on egalitarianism and equal opportunity debates.

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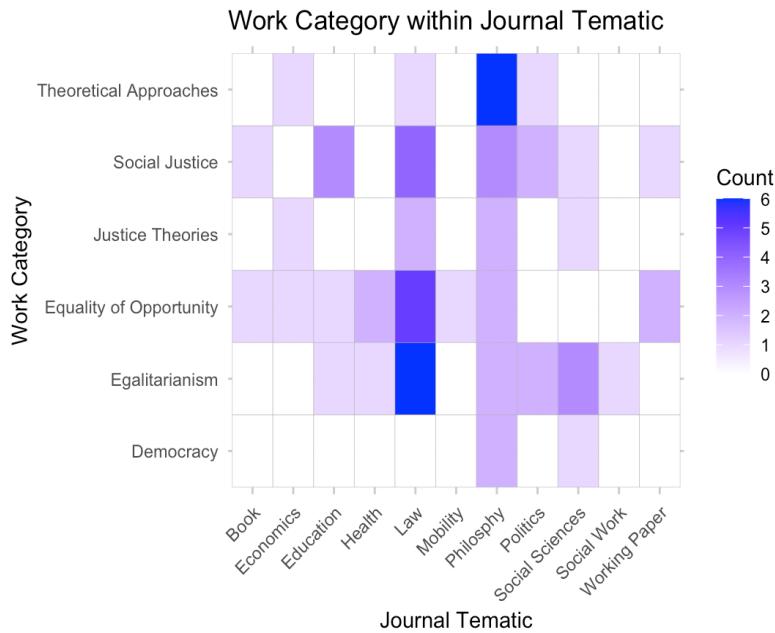


Figure 7: Journal category and article theoretical focus.

Regarding the geographic focus, Figure 8 illustrates a clear inclination toward philosophical debates within a regional context. Of the sample, 49 addressed regional matters, representing 76.6%, while the remaining 15, representing 23.4%, adopted a global approach. The distribution of regional articles is as follows: The LAC – 19 articles, Argentina 9, Brazil 8, Chile 5, Colombia 4, Mexico 2, Ecuador 1, and Uruguay 1. This regional prevalence shows the relevance and urgency perceived by scholars in connecting abstract philosophical debates with concrete contexts. Moreover, it underscores the importance of cultural, social, and political particularities in contemporary discussions of egalitarianism and justice.

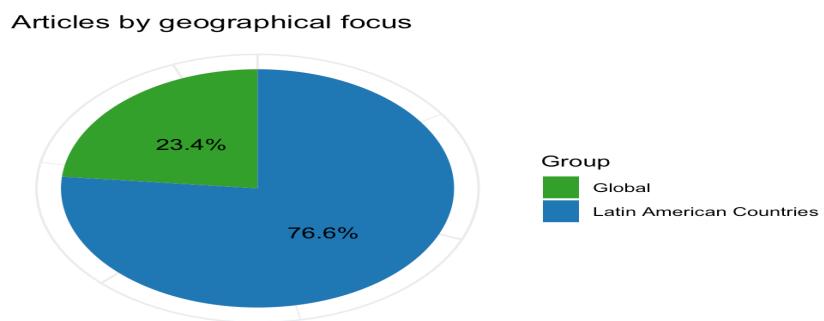


Figure 8: Articles by geographical focus.

V.3. Conceptual Dimension

The database enables us to examine crucial aspects of theories of justice, egalitarianism, and EOp, adopting a Rawlsian perspective on social justice. The discussion of these egalitarian frameworks is concerned with establishing what (Cohen 1989) called the “currency of egalitarian justice”, namely, the goods necessary to redistribute in order to achieve the egalitarian aim of ensuring equal moral value among individuals. However, this position which, focuses on material goods, was strongly criticized by several philosophers (Anderson 1999; Honneth 2007; Walzer 2001), who argued that people should be treated as equals not only in the redistribution of resources but also in terms of respect and dignity. This academic battle represents the classical relational and distributive dilemma.

Later, this two-fold conception of justice was criticized from a broader framework encompassing three elements: a distributional element related to goods (*what?*), a relational element (*who?*), and a representative element (*how?*) (Fraser 2008; De la Fuente 2024). This broadly accepted threefold paradigm made it possible to organize the dataset, as all works were framed around these three pillars.

V.3.1. Theories of justice, egalitarianism, and EOp

A synthesis of the data presented in Figure 9 indicates that in LAC, there is a notable effort to make visible the redistribution of specific goods; 46 articles identify material redistribution as a fundamental egalitarian objective. Conversely, 16 articles argue for the redistribution of relational issues as the key to preventing domination.

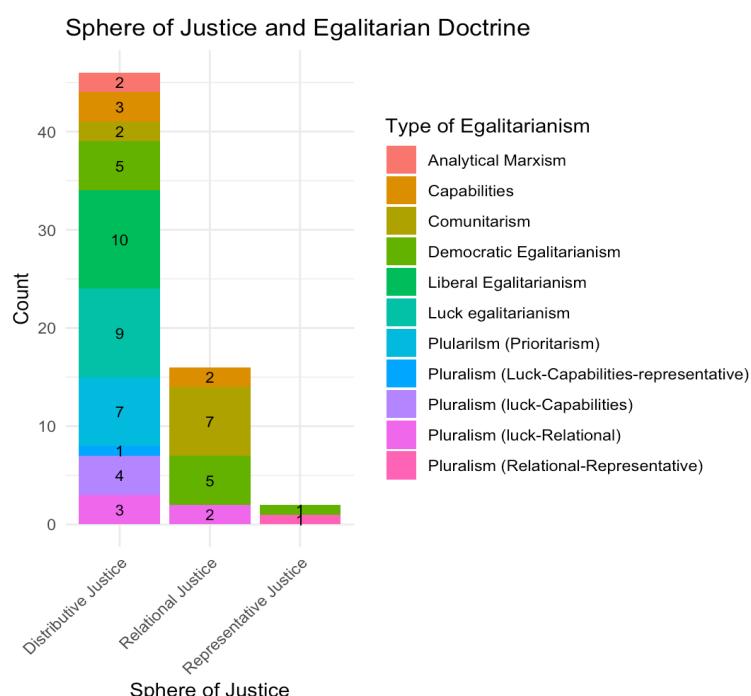


Figure 9: Spheres of Justice and Egalitarian Doctrine.

Another noteworthy aspect concerns egalitarian justice theories. From the dataset, it can be observed that there are many conceptions of how to achieve egalitarian justice. However, there is no predominant theoretical conception; instead, a pluralist narrative regarding egalitarianism stands out. The debate surrounding value pluralism is extensive and complex and therefore lies beyond the scope of this analysis. In the context examined here, when authors refer to a plural dimension, they are not invoking the multiplicity of values within egalitarianism but rather the diversity of claims to equality that egalitarian theories must address. In other words, an egalitarian theory may be considered pluralist not because it endorses several competing values, but because it recognizes that equality manifests through distinct types of demands – redistribution, recognition, and representation – that respond to specific contexts.

Under this interpretation, the findings of the sample reveal the emergence of a distinctly *Latin American pluralism*, characterized by the simultaneous articulation of these claims around the region's social, cultural, and political particularities. This indicates that the region is characterized by ongoing debate over the subject of justice (*who?*). This pluralism focuses on critiquing the role of effort, merit, and responsibility in people's situations, and the redistribution of burdens and benefits. In addition, the diversity of concepts used in academic works is another critical element. Figure 10 shows the concerns, concepts, and themes that Latin American scholars have addressed in their reflections on EOp. These contributions identified concepts, problems, and opportunities for further work.

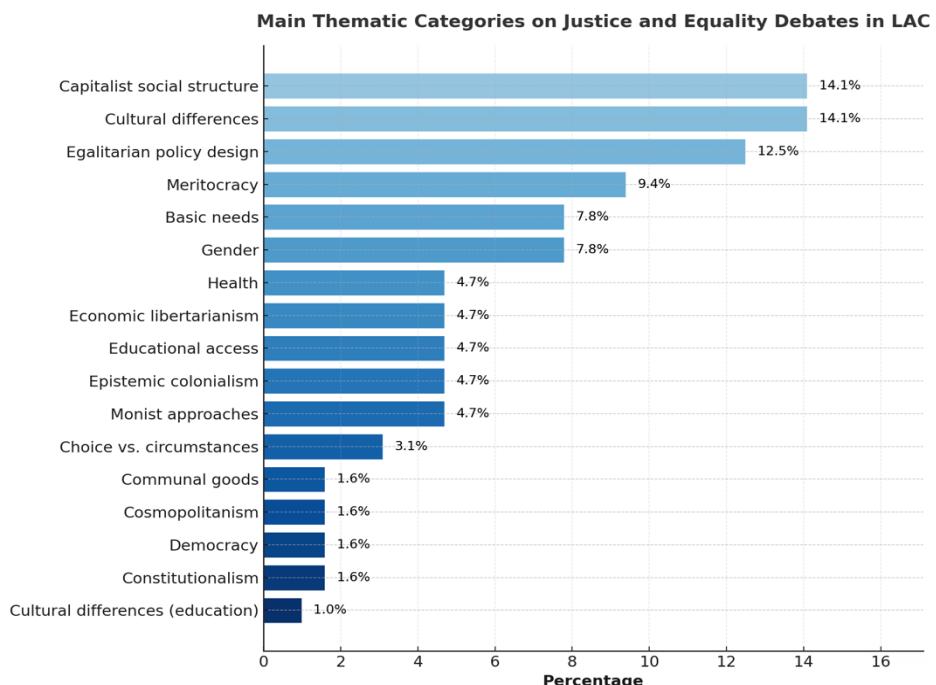


Figure 10: Conceptual elements to EOp in LAC.

The results reveal elements that are relevant to authors in the region. The main critiques were directed at *capitalist social structure* (14.1%), *meritocracy* (9.4%), and (4.7%) *libertarianism*. These critiques address the detrimental effects on effective access to opportunity for all. On the other hand, they emphasize factors that are not yet accessible to people, such as *basic needs* (7.8%), *health* (4.7%), and *education* (4.7%). Other elements necessary for the construction of the subject of justice were *gender* (7.8%) and *cultural identity* (14.1%).

Finally, it is relevant to note that 12.5% of the articles called for the building of an *egalitarian policy design*. This call is essential because public policy is the primary instrument through which institutions analyze, plan, implement, and evaluate programs. However, after an in-depth analysis of the design of these programs, different authors note that they are unequal, meritocratic, and utilitarian.

VI. Discussion

VI.1. Latin American Contributions to EOp-LA

The sample illustrates the multidimensional nature of inequality in LAC. On one hand, it highlights economic disparities, marked by significant inequalities compared to other OECD member countries (Busso & Messina 2020). On the other hand, it highlights the broader social and cultural consequences of these economic gaps. Scholars address these negative dynamics from different perspectives, with studies in normative philosophy advocating for EOp as an effective means for achieving fairer societies. Latin American contributions to this discourse can be organized into three interrelated levels of debate, each aligned with the purposes and research questions established earlier:

1. The pluralist egalitarian claims of justice.
2. Regional egalitarianism grounded in decolonial and feminist foundations.
3. The contributions to EOp go beyond purely philosophical discussions to offer a structural critique of how fair opportunities are generated and distributed.

VI.1.1. Latin American Pluralism

In contemporary Anglophone literature, the justice debate has centered on the threefold distinction between distributional, relational, and representative justice. Despite its theoretical relevance, this debate has had little impact on the sample we analyzed. Different authors critique monistic perspectives as insufficiently egalitarian (Costa 2018). In contrast, works such as (De Hoyos 2016; Von Vacano 2019; Huanca-Arohuanca et al. 2020; Huertas-Hernández 2022) advocate for a distribution that, regardless of what “currency of justice” required, remains sensitive to the region’s cultural background. This approach is supported by the inherent complexity of constructing a universal subject (Martin & Ravest 2016) and the intrinsic value of the multicultural approach, in which

each dimension complements the others rather than opposing them (Lobatón 2018; Martínez 2022).

Beyond this normative pluralism, the Latin American debate also reveals a more analytical approach – one that reframes the classic distributive-relational dilemma. While Anglophone discussions often treat this distinction as a fundamental theoretical fault line, Latin American scholarship tends to integrate both dimensions pragmatically. Rather than positioning distribution and relation as competing logics, many authors treat them as interdependent components of a broader justice project rooted in the region's social realities. In this sense, the distributive–relational debate appears less as an abstract theoretical opposition and more as a question of emphasis within a shared commitment to overcoming structural inequality.

Latin American Pluralism, then, is inherently cosmopolitan, recognizing that issues related to injustice transcend local and sub-regional boundaries (Arias-Achío 2019). From an international perspective, pluralism is necessary to address and tackle development problems that do not distinguish between domestic and international law. This perspective views inequality as a complex, interdependent phenomenon, urging authors to “develop alternatives that engage in dialogue, weave and unweave possible options to understand (and transform) the contemporary global reality” (Duimich & García-Gualda 2020 158).

The importance of developing and implementing pluralist conceptions of justice at different levels of theory in the LAC is twofold. First, it highlights the need for scholars to strengthen the link between theory and practice in order to build fairer societies. Second, it shows the capacity of Latin American authors to contribute to global debates on egalitarianism. The epistemic imposition of external conceptions of justice often ignores complex and multiple realities across the region. By fostering local-regional approaches, scholars and policymakers can develop frameworks that are more attuned to their communities' different needs and local perspectives. Moreover, this perspective allows the region to contribute new insights and solutions to the global justice debate.

VI.1.2 Feminist and decolonial egalitarianism

Although prioritarian proposals have emerged in the Latin American debate, they are not conceived as critiques of equality as a parameter of justice. Instead, they arise within egalitarian positions as a pragmatic extension of egalitarian principles – an attempt to operationalize equality under conditions of material scarcity and structural inequality. In this sense, the debate in LAC reflects a practical reformulation of egalitarianism rather than its theoretical rejection. The well-known prioritarian objection of “leveling down” remains one of the main criticisms directed at the egalitarian ethos, particularly against doctrines that uphold equality as a distributive principle (Ribotta 2017). However, this objection is materially untenable as it is impossible to reduce the welfare levels of the most advantaged: those in better positions are unlikely to lose their economic and social status over time (Barone & Mocetti 2021). Nevertheless, this argument does not resolve

the more fundamental question of how to redistribute goods when they are scarce.

Within this context, scholars in the region propose a twofold potential solution: *democratic* and *prioritarian* conceptions. The democratic approach departs significantly from *luck egalitarianism*. At the same time, luck egalitarianists ground justice in compensating for inequalities arising from brute luck – while holding individuals responsible for outcomes tied to their choices – the democratic perspective questions both the moral and practical feasibility of this distinction. Latin American scholars argue that such a view individualizes inequality and obscures the structural conditions that shape people's options from the outset. In contrast, democratic egalitarianism emphasizes collective responsibility and the political construction of equality, focusing on the institutions and social arrangements that enable individuals to stand as equals in practice. This approach thus reframes equality as a shared social commitment rather than as a matter of individualized compensation. Numerous works in the sample advocate for this view, affirming that all individuals deserve equal consideration in both redistribution and respect (Di Piero 2017; Núñez & Di Piero 2018; Valverde 2016b).

The prioritarian perspective, widely supported by scholars such as (Alarcon 2017; Basombrío 2018; Da Silva & Saccardo-Branco 2015; Ribotta 2017; Ribotta 2020; Ribotta 2021b), does not contest equality as a parameter of egalitarian justice but seeks to translate it into practice by emphasizing the moral urgency of improving the condition of the worst-off. In addition, other authors reject social exclusion and marginalization by recognizing the importance of people's participation in society under Amartya Sen's approach (Costa 2018; Ferreira 2017; Pereira 2014; Pereira et al. 2017; Sahuí 2014), although some authors who recognize the value of this approach also express reservations about it. These critics are based on the need for a solid and measurable normative theory (Valverde 2016; Valverde 2018).

The critiques and theoretical conceptions emerging from LAC are based on two fundamental axes: *critical feminism* and *epistemic-decolonial critique*. The works in the sample show scholars proposing that distributive justice theory should be sensitive to both the dynamics of gender and the need to construct a normative framework theory grounded in diverse realities, challenging the presumptions of *universality* in mainstream egalitarian theories.

Feminist criticism in this context has as its theoretical framework the postulates of Nancy Fraser (Arias-Achío 2019; Duimich & García-Gualda 2020; Ferreira 2017; García-Gualda 2021; Lima 2015; Lobatón 2018; Sousa 2021). A wide range of authors use the gender paradigm to analyze policies in different countries, concluding that many of them reinforce stereotypes about women (Lima 2015). These state-confirmed stereotypes simultaneously impose a traditional caregiving role on women and, at the same time, seek to “empower” them without considering the asymmetries between men and women that persist (Duimich & García-Gualda 2020; García-Gualda 2021). From this perspective, feminist egalitarianism in LAC aims not only to expand the distributive dimension of

justice but also to redefine participation and representation as essential conditions for equality.

Conversely, the *epistemic-decolonial critique* represents one of EOP-LA's most distinctive contributions to understanding and addressing the dynamics of power and inequality. This approach challenges the very idea of "universal welfare." It introduces the notion of "Buen Vivir" (*Living Well*) (Córdoba 2020) as a decolonial ethic that recognizes and makes visible the diversity of ways of life (Basombrío 2018). Rather than opposing Western traditions outright, this critique exposes the epistemic tension between Western-derived standards of justice and the plural belief systems that coexist in the region. In doing so, it reframes the pursuit of equality as an epistemic emancipation rooted in local knowledge and collective well-being.

VI.1.3. Critique to EOp structure

Despite the complexity of conducting research on theories of justice, egalitarianism, or the analysis of principles such as EOp, the authors in the sample present a wide range of current theoretical debates. However, they go beyond purely conceptual approaches to critique the very structures that design, generate, and distribute opportunities. This orientation reflects the regional context (Gargarella 2021). It underscores the need for theories that are not only conceptually rigorous but also grounded in social and political realities capable of confronting structural inequality – something is often absent in Western approaches.

This philosophical impulse – to use principles, values, and tools to tackle the region's deep inequalities through social policy – is particularly significant. Public Policy emerges from an established government purpose to address or remedy specific situations that impact collective well-being. Nevertheless, (Hernández-Bazán 2020) observes, social policy is also guided by "universal" considerations that guide these interventions through principles and values that configure cognitive realities. This means that such considerations allow the interpretation of problems, and causes, and the formulation of possible solutions. Making this connection between normative theory and social policy is therefore a recurring theme in scholarship (Ferreira & Peragine 2015; Pereira 2014; Pinheiro 2020; Valverde 2016), aiming to confront the region's profound inequalities through conceptually informed and contextually grounded interventions.

Education emerges as one of the most critical domains in which this theoretical-practical convergence is evident. Several studies recognize its importance not only for economic development but also for the relational dimension in promoting equal self-esteem (Zagurski 2016). From different perspectives, the recommendations include the development of educational pedagogies inspired by Rawls' *Theory of Justice* (Bakker & Pinheiro 2018; Díaz 2016), while others critique meritocratic models implemented by a large part of educational systems across different sub-regions. For instance, (Di Piero 2016; Di Piero 2017; Núñez & Di Piero 2018) present a collection of studies related to

admissions and grant distribution schemes in secondary and higher education and conclude that public schemes often reproduce and intensify inequalities through merit-based selection and funding criteria.

Meanwhile, Chilean scholars contribute to the debate on accessibility, emphasizing the need for a robust legal framework that recognizes education as a public good and an inseparable element of democratic society (Bologna 2016). These findings collectively illustrate how Latin American egalitarian thought extends beyond abstract moral reasoning, advancing a structural critique of opportunity that links justice to institutional design, policy implementation, and the lived realities of inequality.

VII. Conclusions

The data presented and analyzed in this paper provide an evidence-based response to the initial research questions, shaping a regional response to philosophical debates that in other world regions remain primarily theoretical. This study identifies several areas of opportunity and intellectual pathways for a distinct Latin American epistemic community engaged in egalitarian, justice-oriented research.

The first research question (RQ1), which examined the characteristics of related studies, revealed two periods of increased scientific production: the first from 2014 to 2016, and the second from 2019 to 2020. The initial wave coincided with major political transformations in Colombia, Chile, Argentina, and Mexico (Freidenberg & Uribe-Mendoza 2019), while the latter corresponded to the global crisis triggered by COVID-19. These findings demonstrate that contemporary theories of justice serve as interpretative tools for understanding, analyzing, and critiquing the region's changing social and political realities.

Likewise, the available information confirms that Latin American authors' studies present a clear regional focus linked to institutional affiliation. This means that affiliation with a Latin American university is associated with greater production of regional studies. It also highlights the diversity of journals that publish this type of study. There is a wide prevalence of Law and Philosophy journals, although other research areas include Social Sciences, Education, Health, Social Work, Urban Mobility, and Economics.

The second question (RQ2) analyzed the region's theoretical orientations and predominant topics. Regarding the theoretical approach, Figure 9 demonstrates that all the articles focus on the well-known trilemma of distribution, relationship, and representation. However, there is a strong preference for addressing problems related to distributional issues (46) over relational topics (16), with a minor presence of representative issues (2). In this sense, egalitarian theories of justice present a wide range of conceptions about the most appropriate approach for LAC. Nevertheless, there is a marked insistence on non-monistic conceptions of egalitarianism. Evidence for this can be found in the analysis of the different articles, where pluralist conceptions are prominent (45) in comparison

with strict or narrow conceptions (19). Based on this, Latin American egalitarianism is, in essence, pluralistic; that is, both relational and distributive.

Finally, research question three (RQ3) aimed to discover the author's central dilemmas and concerns in the Latin American region. Thus, egalitarianism in LAC is essentially feminist and decolonial. Two key variables were found in the region: gender and a decolonial critique. These variables are fundamental to determining who the subjects of justice are. We also saw several criticisms of elements that undermine real equality of opportunity, such as the capitalist structure (14.1%), cultural differences (14.1%), (un)egalitarian public policies (12.5%), meritocracy (7.8%), and libertarianism (4.7%). In addition, the relevant goods were defined, highlighting three over others, namely education (12.5%), health (4.7%), and common goods (1.6%).

Overall, this review confirms that Latin American authors use these theoretical frameworks during moments of profound social crisis, which shows the relevance and utility of political philosophy as a tool for diagnosing and confronting inequality. The persistent connection between theory and practice emerges as a defining feature of Latin American scholarship in this field.

Finally, the study highlights enduring inequities in the global publication system. Latin American scholars face structural barriers to publishing in high-impact journals, and those who succeed often shift away from regional perspectives to align with international debates. Significantly, none of the papers indexed in WoS or Scopus engage explicitly with regional issues or localized problems. This finding underscores the urgency of developing inclusive epistemic spaces that value and amplify the region's original contributions to global debates on justice and equality.

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