

Special Issue:
Understanding Latin America and the Caribbean:
Current and Upcoming Developments

Editorial Afterword:
Celebrating 60 years of publishing ERLACS
Trends and gaps in Latin American and Caribbean Studies

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Since its inception in 1965, the *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies / Revista Europea de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe* (ERLACS) has sought to advance global academic knowledge of Latin America and the Caribbean. To commemorate the 60th anniversary of ERLACS, the Editorial Board decided to organise a special issue on “Understanding Latin America and the Caribbean: Current and Upcoming Developments”. We are very pleased with the critical and creative ideas and timely proposals presented in the nine explorations of this special issue (ERLACS issue 120, 2025). Hopefully, this collection will inspire new debates and lines of research and result in innovative articles in the coming issues of ERLACS.

In this editorial afterword, as is customary on anniversaries, we pause from the day-to-day affairs to reflect on recent developments in Latin American and Caribbean studies and publishing, including our concerns and aspirations. We begin by briefly reviewing the main trends in ERLACS content and readership over the past ten years. Next, we highlight how the current special issue, beyond important new directions and concepts, also offers interesting new connections between established fields and approaches. Finally, we briefly reflect on the role of technology and partnerships in our work and close by expressing our gratitude to the people and institutions that allow ERLACS to flourish, year after year.

Patterns in what we publish and whom we reach

On ERLACS 60th anniversary, we have been curious to see how ERLACS has developed over the past ten years. In 2015, to commemorate its 50th anniversary, we published a brief history of ERLACS since 1965 (Hogenboom & Willingham, 2015). And in his editor's view on Latin American Studies in ERLACS, Michiel Baud (2015) identified five trending themes in the journal since the turn of the century: politics and social movements; ethnicity and ethnic policy; collective memory of dictatorship, conflict and human rights violations; rural and agrarian studies; and (socio-) environmental issues. In this editorial afterword, to see the main trends since then, we decided to first let the readers 'speak', by reviewing the 60 ERLACS publications that have attracted the most attention. We retrieved usage reports from our ERLACS website (www.erlacs.org) and from the JSTOR database - in terms of readership numbers, the most important platform for ERLACS - to see which ERLACS pieces were the most downloaded and (presumably) read in the ten years from 2016 until 2025.

In addition to research articles, the top 60 include two explorations – on green extractivism (Dorn 2022) and on commoning (Baud et al. 2019) –, a review essay on extractivism (Goudsmit 2019), two book reviews – on foreign policy (Schulz 2023) and on class struggle (Gürcan 2019) –, and a film review – *When worlds collide* (Li 2017). Before reviewing the key topics of this top 60, we want to point out that two-thirds of these most-read contributions are written in English and one-third in Spanish. As this is roughly in line with the share of English and Spanish content in ERLACS, this seems to indicate that both Spanish and English ERLACS publications receive a wide readership. The top five issues were 109 (2020), 108 (2019), 106 (2018), 107 (2019), and 110 (2020). Next to some of these being topical special issues (see below), the COVID-19 pandemic likely gave readers more time during this period. Of the top 60 most frequently accessed articles, we extracted and reviewed key metadata, including topics, keywords, and cited geographic regions, and examined the geographic distribution of readers.

The five main themes in the most-read ERLACS articles of the past ten years are *politics, democratic retreat and authoritarianism; extractivism; migration and mobility; gender and sexuality; and indigenous peoples and territorial justice*. While these resonate with previous thematic trends, they also reflect some shifts in the region's concerns. The theme of politics, democratic retreat and authoritarianism encompasses topics such as institutional instability, hyper-presidentialism, populism, corruption and the role of economic elites. In particular, the special issue on Venezuela's crisis from global perspectives (guest-edited by Benedicte Bull and Antulio Rosales, ERLACS issue 109, 2020) and the one on elite and popular responses to a left in crisis (guest-edited by Thomas Le Bel and Manuel Laburre, ERLACS issue 108, 2019) attracted many readers. Extractivism is another key theme, with articles on energy matters such as oil and gas extraction, hydro dams, lithium mining, related infrastructure projects and broad

concerns over environmental justice. Several articles approach dynamics in the traditional energy and mining sectors or the energy transition in Latin America as forms of extractivism that intensify local conflicts and present policy challenges, such as in the Special Issue on Mega-projects, contentious action, and policy change in Latin America (guest edited by Eduardo Silva, Maria Akchurin, and Anthony J. Bebbington, ERLACS issue 106, 2018). In addition, Felix Dorn's (2022) widely cited exploration examines green colonialism in relation to the geopolitical dimensions of the energy transition. Articles on migration and mobility (including social mobility) were also popular, ranging from research on migratory trends and experiences in Central America and Mexico (cf. Cortés 2019) to South-South circuits and xenophobia (e.g. Venezuelans in Colombia and Ecuador). The fact that gender and sexuality have become a key theme in ERLACS indicates that innovative research articles on topics such as gender relations, gender violence, feminism, reproductive rights or LGBT rights are in high demand (cf. Mensa & Grow 2019). Finally, various ERLACS articles on indigenous peoples and territorial justice – including studies of socio-environmental conflicts and environmental justice – received a large readership (cf. Delamaza, Maillot & Martínez Neira 2019).

Looking at download locations (via JSTOR), we see that ERLACS readers are concentrated in the Global North and Latin America. Since 2016, the Global North region has dominated, with the United States (294,393 downloads) leading, followed by the United Kingdom (63,628) and Canada (37,338). In Europe, the Netherlands (23,348), Germany (21,372) and Spain (12,484) stand out. Another country that deserves mentioning is Australia (12,941). In Latin America, usage is robust but shows a marked concentration in Mexico (45,370), the Andean region (Colombia, 26,570; Peru, 17,454; Chile, 15,277), Argentina (12,186) and Brazil (7,814). Finally, an indicator of the journal's global relevance is its significant audience in the Global South beyond Latin America, with notable downloads in India (10,148), Indonesia (6,227), China (10,325) and the Philippines (5,599). While we hope to further expand our readership, we are very satisfied with these numbers and the spread of readers, which, alongside the relevance and quality of the content, is a result of ERLACS being a Diamond Open-Access journal offering free-for-all global access.

Analysis of the frequency with which certain countries appear in the article corpus reveals a geographic concentration of ERLACS. The primary geographic focus of the most downloaded articles (on our website and JSTOR) was six countries: Venezuela, Chile, Argentina, Mexico, Ecuador, and Colombia. Yet there is also strong demand for research on countries that receive limited coverage in ERLACS, such as Brazil and Peru. And this is even the case for articles on parts of the region that are only incidentally covered in our journal: the Caribbean (beyond Cuba), Central America (except migration), and parts of the Southern Cone (Uruguay, Paraguay). In short, while we receive more papers on certain countries than on others, and while finding expert reviewers for some less-

studied countries may present a challenge, it remains important for ERLACS to strive for geographic coverage of all Latin American and Caribbean countries.

New developments and connections

For this special issue, we asked a diverse group of experts who have supported the journal in various capacities to identify the most important emerging themes in academic research and debate. Which innovative approaches do they applaud or propose? And which new developments in Latin America and the Caribbean merit more or different scholarly attention? The result is a kaleidoscope of inspiring explorations that urge us to update our perspectives and understandings for several reasons. First, while the themes are often familiar, new developments in the region and globally call for a fresh perspective. This is very clear in the pieces on populism by Javier Corrales (2025), on oligarchies by Benedicte Bull (2025) and on post-truth by Soledad Valdivia Rivera (2025), who review the implications of recent shifts in these fields for democracy and development. Second, new conceptual and theoretical perspectives aim to address the limitations and blind spots of previous perspectives. The explorations on Caribbean ecologies by Alana Osbourne et al. (2025), on ethnic identity by Victor Bretón Solo de Zaldívar (2025), on collective rights to justice by Rachel Sieder (2025), and on urban indigenous territoriality by Dana Brablec all do so in their own ways. Third, zooming out, the world and academia are changing in such a way that we also need to reconsider our views on area studies, as is suggested in the pieces on Latin American Studies by Rossana Castiglioni and Guzmán Ibarra González (2025) and on the Caribbean in Latin America by Bert Hoffmann (2025).

Beyond the evident diversity of subjects and proposals, the contributions in this special issue share a common message: through their forward-looking perspectives, they point to what can be gained from establishing new or stronger connections among themes and/or disciplines. The explorations that at first sight are mainly about politics, political culture and democracy, point at the need to also look into economic and social effects when analyzing populism and oligarchy (Corrales 2025; Bull 2025) and to pay greater attention to the role of new technologies and tech-based power (Bull 2025) as well as to the role of academia as generator of knowledge (Valdivia Rivera 2025). Beyond previous ERLACS articles on indigenous peoples and territorial justice, this issue's explorations propose to connect studies on indigenous and afro-descendant peoples to climate justice (Sieder 2025), climate urbanism (Brablec 2025) and non-human agency (Osbourne et al. 2025), and to (re) examine the role of (neo)colonialism (Osbourne et al. 2025) and the dialectical connection between modernity and identity (Bretón Solo de Zaldívar 2025). And almost all contributions stress the need to connect Latin American and Caribbean studies to global(ization) shifts – both recent and of the past decades and centuries –, not only to better understand regional dynamics, but also to acknowledge that the region is at the heart of global change. The strongest call for this connection is expressed by Bert Hoffmann

(2025, p. 28), who states that “the Caribbean is central to understanding how the world, Europe and Latin America have evolved over the past 500-plus years and continue to evolve today”.

For us as editors, a key new development and challenge is artificial intelligence (AI). In scientific publishing today, it supports editorial tasks (e.g., plagiarism checks, reviewer recruitment, metadata management), but it also poses ethical risks to authorship and may introduce algorithmic biases that affect the fairness of scholarship. Depending on further technological development and how authors and users apply it, the expansion of AI could, for instance, be advantageous or disadvantageous for non-Western epistemologies or the scholarly diversity inherent in Latin American and Caribbean Studies. Assessing if a submitted paper is the result of human research and thinking rather than an artificial product is likely to become increasingly challenging, but at the same time, we will need to keep investigating and discussing if and how AI can be responsibly used in our line of work, such as for high-quality translations to further facilitate global reach and dialogue.

For this special issue, we wondered whether a large-language tool could provide insight into important and emerging changes in Latin America and the Caribbean that are underrepresented in ERLACS. For this, we used Google Gemini to compare our metadata of recent ERLACS content – specifically keywords – with critical issues and emerging trends in the region. Many of the AI-suggested themes and trends are already evident in the explorations published on this issue, including climate and ecology, race and identity, and power and governance. Equally, geopolitics (including China-LAC relations and South-South cooperation) and digital power and authoritarianism (including algorithmic disinformation and surveillance technologies) emerged as key themes that warrant greater attention in ERLACS. Finally, the AI answer did point at an underrepresented theme that is hardly discussed in this special: security and illicit acts, including transnational (criminal) economies such as “mining mafias” and cyber-crime networks. Still, while responsibly developed and used AI may offer some useful services, our work as editors remains centred around the original academic contributions and support of numerous researchers.

Acknowledgments

Before closing this special issue, we want to acknowledge the many indispensable partners worldwide who enable us to continue publishing and improving ERLACS. Let us address you directly, because even though there are some of you whom we have never met in person, you have all helped us to bring new academic research and insights to a higher level and share them with tens of thousands of readers each year:

- *To the authors of articles, explorations, book reviews and film reviews:* thank you for sending your original input, for addressing the reviewers’ comments and suggestions, and for trusting your work with us.

- *To the many reviewers*: thank you for graciously sharing your expertise and your valuable time.
- *To current and past members of our Editorial Board*: a big thank you for constantly working with us, not only on the big picture – the changes, problems and opportunities for our journal – but also on the various day-to-day editorial tasks.
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- And last but fundamentally, *to the Centre of Latin American Research and Documentation (CEDLA)*: we are immensely grateful for your publishing and supporting ERLACS since 1965; and *to the CEDLA team*: thank you for your collegiality and your role as ‘ambassadors’ of ERLACS, wherever you go.

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