

Call for Papers

Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 63 (2023)

## Right-Wing Extremism Since 1945

Discussions of right-wing populist and extremist politics and activities tend to pay little attention to the historic continuity of far-right thought and action. The far-right milieu is often considered as something alien, standing apart from society and its fundamental political culture. This tendency was even more pronounced in the GDR, which derived its political legitimacy from anti-fascism. Yet recent electoral campaigns across Europe reveal ever more clearly that there is a considerable pool of votes from which far-right, nationalist parties may draw. To shrug off these often populist movements as mere accidents in the normal operation of democratic politics is to ignore both the manifold historical continuities within the far-right milieu as well as its social ruptures and ideological realignments.

In order better to contextualise and above all to historicise this political movement, a worthwhile approach is therefore to work towards a social history of right-wing extremism in a comparative perspective taking in developments across Europe. Such an approach not only enquires into the origins of a politically marginalised far-right milieu and the developments within it. It also seeks to explore the deep-seated attitudes underlying right-wing extremism and, above all, its social meanings and functions. One conclusion we may anticipate at this point is that the connotations of concept itself have differed widely over time. Was right-wing extremism in the 1950s the same thing it is today? Who set the terms, and how were categories and criteria defined? What relationship obtained between self-descriptions and descriptions by others? This is the place to ask not least what part the observers of political movements had to play in shaping our understanding of key concepts.

In terms of society's confrontation with right-wing extremism, the executive and decision-making organs of the state and its institutions are as significant as civil society actors, associations of former victims of persecution or of people threatened by racist violence and discrimination. Who participated in society's discourse on right-wing extremism, what were the dominant interpretations and which were marginalised? What functions did right-wing extremism serve in the discourse of Germany's political self-understanding – even beyond the confrontation between the two German states? How was it observed and categorised? This might, for instance, be analysed more closely in the context of elections, the outcomes of which had a strong effect on research trends, with multiple shifts and expansions observable over the course of recent history. An additional factor to be considered is the internationalisation of right-wing extremism and populism since 1945 and the transnational networks in which its organisations and protagonists operate. With these observations in mind, *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* is looking to explore the historical genesis of far-right extremism in the second half of the twentieth century and in the twenty-first century – along with its transformations, meanings and social

functions. Within this framework, we invite contributions which may choose to consider the following aspects:

### Social history

Taking a decidedly social-historical perspective on the phenomenon of right-wing extremism will contribute to its understanding in the context of the wider history of society. Who were the principal supporters of far-right politics or right-populist schemes? Can historical shifts within the far-right milieu since 1945 be observed, and how might we account for them? Is there even such a thing as a far-right »milieu« or might other categories prove more helpful? How can the self-descriptions and products of right-wing extremism be made useful for scholarly analysis? Does the common assumption hold true whereby right-wing extremism draws its support above all from specific social circumstances? Can this claim be substantiated with reference to empirical research in contemporary history? And from where did far-right politics and terrorism draw their funding? In this regard, we would encourage both studies of links to the world of business and commerce, and its significance in encouraging professionalisation and internationalisation, and analyses of the self-organisation of right-wing extremism within civil society.

### Europe and North America

It strikes us as necessary to adopt a specific spatial perspective – defined here as encompassing Europe and North America – if we are to identify national peculiarities as well as common far-right attitudes and politics. What national traditions and continuities could far-right politics build on after 1945? Where can we identify ruptures – and were they necessary to gaining societal support? What part was played by ideas of Europe and European cooperation? What forms of right-wing extremism emerged in western and eastern Europe, respectively? What forms of transnational far-right cooperation are observable – with regard, for instance, to the strategies of far-right terrorism?

### Comparison

In a historical perspective, right-wing extremism builds on various national traditions while also displaying certain supranational features in its thought and political styles. How, then, can we make systematic comparisons – in terms, for instance, of supporters, sponsors or activities? What are the sources on which historians of right-wing extremism in Europe may draw? Does it make sense to draw comparisons between forms of far-right politics in different continents?

### Responses

A key part in society's discourse on right-wing extremism is played by its opponents, by the police, the legal system and other actors. They contribute to determining who is to be considered far-right – and when and why. How did the organs of state and civil society in Europe respond to far-right activities? How was awareness of right-wing extremism generated, and with what consequences? What was considered far-right and when? What were the groups that took a stand against far-right politics and attitudes, and what means did they choose? How did individuals and social groups threatened by far-right agitation

and violence organise, and in what form? is there an observable correlation between waves of reckoning with National Socialism and fascism on the one hand and the fortunes of right-wing extremism on the other?

We hope to explore proposals and discuss further questions at a conference hosted by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung in Berlin on 29-30 September 2022, in preparation for an issue of the journal *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* (vol. 63, 2023) dedicated to this general topic. We invite all interested researchers to submit their proposals by 30 June 2022 (by email to [afs\[at\]fes.de](mailto:afs[at]fes.de)). Proposals should not exceed 3,000 characters and may – like the finished texts – be written in German or English. The proposals chosen by the editors for inclusion in the projected issue should be developed as articles of approximately 60,000 characters, to be completed no later than 31 January 2023.

Das Archiv für Sozialgeschichte is edited by Kirsten Heinsohn, Thomas Kroll, Anja Kruke, Philipp Kufferath (managing editor), Friedrich Lenger, Ute Planert, Dietmar Süß and Meik Woyke.

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