

Call for Papers

Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 66 (2026)

Social and Cultural History of the Present

Social Change since 1990

Developments since 1990 are increasingly becoming the focus of historical research. For the issue 66 (2026) of the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, we invite authors from the fields of history and the historical social and cultural sciences to reflect with us on the processes of social change that have taken place from the 1990s to the immediate present. We are interested in the manifold upheavals *after* the great »epochal change« of 1989/90, a history of transformation and co-transformation that is currently the subject of intense debate. Using four analytical axes, we aim to fathom the dynamics of social change in recent contemporary history from a broader perspective.

Capitalist transformation and shifts in labour and inequality

While neoliberal ideas of order already gained influence before the caesura of 1989/90, they came to dominate the political agenda in the transformation process after the collapse of communism. But who exactly steered this process? How powerful were neoliberal interpretations for political parties and institutions, but also for trade unions or the International Labour Organisation? How did they shape the debates on the nature of capitalism in East and West? Above all, how has the neoliberal transformation of corporate policy and economic governance affected the relationship between capital and labour – whether in the context of welfare state reforms since the end of the 1990s, in the course of the European Economic and Monetary Union, through various privatisation policies, or in the disputes over deindustrialisation and competition between East and West, and North and South? In addition to changes in collective bargaining and wage policy, and attempts to respond to the challenge of unleashed financial market capitalism with new forms of strike and protest, we are also interested in changes in the industrial world of work, and in particular the role of class, gender and ethnic inequalities in the emergence of a new »service class«, as well as the increasing digitalisation of work.

Legitimation processes of the democratic political model

At the time, the upheavals of 1989/90 were seen as the expression of a comprehensive democratic success story. There was hardly a speech that did not refer to Francis Fukuyama's declaration of the »end of history«. In order to fathom the upheavals since the 1990s, however, it seems necessary to question and historicise this narrative of success. What has underpinned the legitimacy of democratic systems in the context of socio-economic and socio-cultural change? Where did democracies prove to be stable, how did forms of political participation, communication, representation and problem-solving change, not least as a result of forced European integration – where, and by whom, was parliamentary democracy as a whole perceived to be in crisis? Here, too, the institutional change in the political systems responded to long-term shifts in social and moral milieus that took place long before 1989. Against this backdrop, the volume aims to encourage a particular focus on the pluralisation of the party system in Europe since 1990: the history of the emergence of new parties as well as the disappearance of old parties (such as the communist parties in Eastern and Central Europe). Also relevant in this context are debates about »party disenchantment«, the relationship to the »new« social movements and the combination of state and party criticism

from different camps, which, for example, fed the mixed chorus of Eurosceptic voices – right up to the rise of right-wing populist and far-right parties. Last but not least, the plurality of democratic paths in Europe and the continuation and repercussions, or rather the revival, of East-West specificities must be analysed, whether at the institutional level or at the level of political perceptions.

International cooperation and competition

In the field of foreign and security policy, the euphoria over the end of the East-West conflict in 1989/90 did not last long. The bipolar threat scenario of the Cold War was replaced by new international and security policy challenges that had a considerable impact on society. For this subject area, we invite contributions on the history of military interventions by Western states in the 1990s and 2000s (in Somalia, Yugoslavia and elsewhere), especially with a socio-historical focus – for example, on the debates, particularly in Germany, about NATO and the increase in »out-of-area« missions by the Bundeswehr. Of particular interest are the political and social reactions to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, for example with regard to the far-reaching anti-terrorism measures. What was the tension between the threat of new forms of terrorism and the restriction of civil liberties?

After »9/11« and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the foundations of the international order gradually shifted. For example, the need for reform of the United Nations became apparent, where the veto power of the five permanent members of the Security Council often perpetuated inter-state conflicts rather than helping to resolve them. The complex problem of how multilateral organisations can become more assertive is – along with the European Union's initial coordination in the field of foreign and security policy - another thematic area of the planned volume that could be interpreted in socio-historical terms. However, the socio-political dimensions could also be examined, for example, on the basis of the demands for participation of non-governmental organisations dating back to the 1970s. How did non-state actors enter the scene in an increasingly politically unstable world? How did these organisations network nationally and transnationally in order to strengthen comparatively powerless groups of the world's population (refugees, people affected by climate change, etc.) and propagate resource-saving economic concepts, for example in the field of migration policy and in combating the climate crisis?

The digital revolution and the diversification of everyday culture

A central moment of social upheaval since 1990 has been the rapid transformation of the media world and communications technology. Since the late 1980s, private television, with its new talk, casting and game shows, so-called reality formats, and its own music and pay TV channels, has initially enjoyed enormous popularity, but has also reinforced social parcelling. However, the global triumph of the digital revolution began in the 1990s. Thanks to ever faster data connections, the Internet and mobile phones exponentially expanded the number of and access to communication channels and information of very different types and qualities. Contributions that analyse these changes from a cultural-historical perspective are just as welcome, as are proposals that address questions of production conditions, participation and inequalities in the new media world.

The pluralisation of lifestyles, pressure for change and new social inequalities shaped everyday life in various ways. Within Europe, restrictions were removed not only for labour markets but also for travellers. The liberalisation of air, rail and bus transport gave rise to new travel habits, characterised by low-cost airlines and package holidays, comparison portals and car-sharing platforms. Supermarket displays and, above all, the range of products offered by large online marketplaces reflect the increasing diversity of international goods production,

the resounding dynamics of global price and location competition, and the widening gap between rich and poor. We are also grateful for ideas for contributions that go beyond pure discourse analysis and place recent youth and pop culture phenomena such as hip hop, techno, gaming or cosplay, with their specific live events, fan rituals and dress codes, in the context of social, everyday and media history.

At a conference to be hosted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Berlin on 26/27 June 2025, we would like to discuss and further develop ideas for contributions, topics and general questions on the subject of the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 66 (2026) outlined above. We invite all interested scholars to submit proposals to afs@fes.de by 31 January 2025. They should not exceed 3,000 characters (including spaces). Abstracts, conference papers and subsequent contributions may be submitted in German or English. Subsequently, the editors of the *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* will select contributions for the inclusion in the volume, which should be approximately 60,000 characters (including footnotes). The submission deadline for contributions is 31 December 2025.

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