

Call for Papers

Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 65 (2025)

Participation and Representation – A Democratic Lovestory?

Modern democracies are characterised by a fundamental tension: on the one hand, they promise to realise the rule of »the people«, that is the exercise of power by the many, through the widest possible political and social participation, and base their legitimacy on this. On the other hand, even if they are committed to a participatory understanding of democracy, they cannot avoid delegating the rule of the many to representatives who stand for a group or a party: the many then only have the power to vote for their representatives in elections or on specific political issues in referendums. The representative system has therefore been repeatedly criticised, if not condemned, for its lack of participation. The experimentation with (consultative) citizens' councils currently underway in several countries, including at subnational and supranational levels, is a response to the current demand for additional forms of participation in representative democracy. In addition, extra-parliamentary actors have for some time been asking who is actually represented, what the »representation« of certain groups looks like. This is not a new question in the history of democracy, but it has been discussed with increasing intensity over the last 20 years – including, for example, in relation to the prospect of a loss of trust.

Against the backdrop of the 75th anniversary of the Basic Law and the Federal Republic of Germany, we would like to take this stocktaking as an opportunity to take a systematic look at the (tense) relationship between and complementarity of representation and participation. What role have social or political protests, that is non-representative practices of participation, played in the emergence of modern democratic forms of representation? How specific are the problems of legitimation of political representation for democratic systems and their promise of participation compared to dictatorships that developed authoritarian, plebiscitary forms of political participation of the many? How can the quality of representational relations in democratically organised republics be described in concrete terms and distinguished from those in (constitutional) monarchies, for example? How did democratic relations of

representation differ according to time, region, ideological orientation and institutional framework, and what specific or universal understandings and problems of participation were associated with them? Which social classes participated to what extent, who was excluded, and what role did gender roles and ethnicity play in the development of democratic forms of participation? How exactly did participation (symbolic, consultative, decisive) work and how was it represented? How was and is participation specifically limited and restricted by representation; what processes of change can be identified in this respect? And finally: which notions – in the cultural-sociological sense – of participation and political representation, of »people« or party base, of representatives and political leaders characterise the history of modernity? These questions aim not least to shed light on the historicity of terms, concepts and practices in modern democratic societies.

For the 65th volume of the Archiv für Sozialgeschichte, we are looking for contributions that address these questions, focusing on the relationship between participation and representation in modernity and discussing them comparatively or on the basis of a specific case. Of interest is the period from the late eighteenth century to the present, with European and global historical as well as interdisciplinary perspectives explicitly encouraged.

The Friedrich Ebert Foundation will host a conference in Bonn on 13 and 14 June 2024 to develop ideas, topics and questions for contributions on the subject of Archiv für Sozialgeschichte 65 (2025) as outlined above. We invite all those interested to submit proposals to afs@fes.de by 10 February 2024. The proposals should not exceed 3,000 characters and, like the papers and subsequent texts, may be submitted in German or English. The articles subsequently selected by the editors for inclusion in the volume should be approximately 60,000 characters (including footnotes) and should be completed by 31 December 2024.

The Archiv für Sozialgeschichte is edited by Claudia Gatzka, Kirsten Heinsohn, Thomas Kroll, Anja Kruke, Philipp Kufferath (Managing Director), Friedrich Lenger, Ute Planert, Dietmar Süß, Nikolai Wehrs and Meik Woyke.

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