

Who creates the future?



The future is not yet set. This is what makes it uncertain. In times of multiple crises, when wars and other catastrophes dominate the headlines, uncertainty, for many, becomes a real "crisis of assurance". People deal with this in very different ways: some trust the reliability of scientific prediction; others believe in the visions of political decision-makers or in religious promises of salvation. At the interdisciplinary and interdepartmental research centre "Genealogy of the Present", we look at the different narratives that are emerging about the future, how they compete for authority, and how they shape present-day thinking and action.

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For example, in the discourse on the future of Western industrialised nations, one side regards migration as critical to addressing the problem of ageing populations and shortages of skilled laborers, whereas the other side sees it as a danger that must be averted. These two narratives about the future compete with one another, informing the opinions and decisions of today.

Alarmingly, in this battle for attention, the impact of a narrative is not necessarily tied to its factual accuracy. So a tweet by the US president, posted while he is on the golf course, may have more societal influence than a scientific study. Therefore, how and why a specific vision of the future prevails, depends on who is involved in creating it, or in what context and with what reach it is disseminated, among other things.

Our research looks at all these aspects: our aim is to uncover the mechanisms that create and popularise visions of the future, and in so doing, shed light on the relationship between future narratives and present-day action. At a time when the institution of science and the authority of its prognoses are being questioned more than ever before, this perspective is of particular significance.