ARCHIVO Research LAB Fellowship: Visualising Democracy

ARCHIVO PLATFORM (online), Sep 21, 2026–Jul 30, 2027
Deadline: Sep 15, 2026

Ana Catarina Pinho

Visualising Democracy. Archiving in Times of Political Change.

How is democracy made visible? How do images participate in defining who is recognised, represented, or excluded from political life? And what happens to these images as they enter archives, institutions, collective memory, or disappear from public view?

Visualising Democracy: Archiving in Times of Political Change invites research and practice-led projects examining the relationship between photography, archives, and changing political formations. Taking democracy not as a universally shared condition but as a contested historical and political process, the 2027 ARCHIVO Research LAB considers how images participate in picturing and visualising democratic life.

Photography has long been entangled with the visual languages through which political communities imagine themselves. Photographs document elections, demonstrations, revolutions, occupations, public ceremonies, migration, war, and everyday civic life, but their political significance extends beyond what they depict. They participate in determining who becomes visible within the public sphere, whose experiences acquire historical recognition, and which events enter collective memory. Photography can provide evidence, enable political claims, mobilise communities, and expose injustice, while simultaneously operating within structures of surveillance, classification, propaganda, censorship, and institutional authority. These contradictions become particularly visible during periods of political transformation. Regime change, democratic transition, revolution, conflict, decolonisation, displacement, social movements, and the erosion of democratic institutions generate images while simultaneously transforming the systems through which those images are produced, circulated, interpreted, and preserved. Political change therefore produces not only new visual cultures but new archival conditions.

Archives are central to these processes. Decisions about what is collected, classified, preserved, digitised, exhibited, removed, or forgotten contribute to the construction of political memory. State archives, press collections, museums, community archives, family albums, and digital repositories may preserve competing versions of the same historical moment. Their gaps and silences can be as politically significant as the materials they contain.

To think about archiving in times of political change consequently requires attention to both the institutional production of historical knowledge and the alternative practices through which com-

munities and individuals preserve their own experiences. Vernacular photographs, counter-archives, oral histories may challenge established historical narratives and make visible experiences that institutional archives have neglected or deliberately suppressed. At the same time, archives are not concerned only with preserving what has already happened. The act of collecting and reactivating images can itself become a political intervention in the present. Artistic, scholarly, and community-based practices increasingly engage archival materials through appropriation, reenactment, restitution, and speculative methodologies. Such practices raise questions not only about how political histories should be remembered, but about how inherited visual narratives might be reconfigured to imagine different political futures.

Contemporary technological conditions further complicate these questions. Political events are now documented through smartphones, social networks, satellite imagery, surveillance technologies, computational systems, and increasingly artificial intelligence. Images may circulate globally within seconds while remaining dependent on privately controlled infrastructures that determine their visibility, accessibility, and preservation. Digital abundance does not necessarily produce archival permanence; images may be removed, suppressed, decontextualised, manipulated, algorithmically obscured, or simply lost. Against this background, Visualising Democracy asks how photographic and archival practices might help us understand democracy as an ongoing struggle over visibility, representation, memory, participation, and political imagination.
The 2027 ARCHIVO Research LAB Fellowship invites proposals from researchers, scholars, visual artists developing projects at the intersection of photography, archives, visual culture, and political change. Proposals may address specific political events or geographical contexts, but comparative and transnational perspectives are equally encouraged. Projects do not need to address democracy exclusively through formal political institutions. We particularly welcome proposals that critically examine how democratic values, political participation, citizenship, belonging, dissent, representation, and collective memory are negotiated through images and archival practices.

The Research LAB supports theory and practice-based projects from their development to their dissemination through the annual initiatives of ARCHIVO. With a focus on articulating artistic practice and academic research, the fellowship creates a shared space in which both scholars and artists contribute to contemporary debates surrounding images, archives, and visual culture. This Fellowship will select a maximum of ten participants: five researchers, and five artists.

This fellowship is intended to support research in development. Applicants should propose a clearly articulated project, research question, or body of material that they wish to investigate and advance during the fellowship period. The programme provides a collaborative research environment in which Fellows develop their projects through mentoring, critical discussion, reading and writing activities, and exchange with an international cohort. Projects may result in academic, artistic, curatorial, editorial, or hybrid forms of research.

The programme particularly values proposals that demonstrate conceptual ambition, methodological awareness, and a critical relationship between research questions and archival materials. Applicants are not expected to have resolved the questions posed by their projects; rather, the Fellowship is conceived as a space in which those questions can be challenged and developed.

PROGRAMME FORMAT & SCHEDULE

FORMAT
—
The ARCHIVO Research LAB is delivered entirely online through Zoom and runs annually from September to July. The programme combines mentoring, webinars, reading groups, writing sessions, and collective discussions.

Sessions are held every two weeks. As the Fellowship is built around dialogue, peer exchange, and collaborative learning, participants are expected to attend at least 80% of the scheduled sessions.

SCHEDULE
—
Applicants should ensure they are able to attend the online sessions, which take place every other week, on Wednesdays or Thursdays between 9:00 am - 12:00 pm, and 5:00 pm - 7:00 pm (UK time), depending on the scheduled activity.

MODULE 01: 21 SEPT - 08 OCT 2026
MODULE 02: 22 OCT - 17 DEC 2026
MODULE 03: 14 JAN - 25 FEB 2027
MODULE 04: 25 FEB - 06 MAY 2027
MODULE 05: 20 MAY - 29 JUL 2027

WHO CAN APPLY
—
The Fellowship welcomes applications from emerging and established researchers, scholars, visual artists, educators, and practitioners working across photography, art history and theory, visual and media studies, cultural studies, artistic research, curatorial studies, and related fields. Both institutionally affiliated and independent applicants are welcome.

The programme encourages applications from different geographical and cultural contexts and particularly values projects that bring underrepresented histories, archives, visual practices, and political experiences into dialogue with broader debates around photography and political change.

 FUNDING
The ARCHIVO Research LAB Fellowship is a remote fellowship and provides fully funded participation in the programme.
There are no application or programme fees, and all selected Fellows participate in the programme free of charge.

The Fellowship does not constitute a financial grant.
Accordingly, it does not provide direct financial support to participants, unless explicitly stated in the annual call.
As a research fellowship, the programme is designed to support the development of projects through dialogue, critical exchange, and mentorship. Participants gain access to an international research environment and the resources necessary to develop and advance their work.

Throughout the Fellowship, participants engage in online mentoring sessions, seminars, workshops, reading groups, public events, and collaborative discussions, while also benefiting from access to the ARCHIVO platform and its Media Library, including recordings of previous lectures, seminars, and scholarly activities.
The programme brings together an international community of researchers, artists, curators, and practitioners working across photography, archives, and visual culture.
As places are limited, applicants are encouraged to apply only if they are able to commit to the full duration of the Fellowship and its participation requirements.

 ELIGIBILITY AND REQUIREMENTS
Eligibility
—
The ARCHIVO Research LAB Fellowship is open to researchers, artists, curators, and interdisciplinary practitioners whose work critically engages with photography, archives, and visual culture through artistic, theoretical, curatorial, research-based, or practice-led approaches.

Applicants must:
Be at least 18 years of age.
Demonstrate an established research, artistic, curatorial, or professional trajectory relevant to the Fellowship.
Propose a project that responds to the annual theme and would benefit from engagement with ARCHIVO’s research environment and mentoring programme.
Demonstrate proficiency in written and spoken English.

Participation Requirements
—
Participation in the ARCHIVO Research LAB is voluntary and conducted entirely online.

* Fellows are expected to:
Attend at least 80% of the scheduled sessions.
Participate actively in mentoring sessions, project presentations, webinars, reading groups, writing sessions, and collective discussions.
Engage constructively with the work of other Fellows through discussion and peer feedback.
Undertake independent research and project development between scheduled sessions.
Ensure access to a stable internet connection and suitable audio-visual equipment for online participation.
Maintain appropriate conditions for participation, including a functioning microphone and camera and minimal background noise.
The use of headphones or a headset is recommended. Fellows are encouraged to keep their cameras on whenever possible in order to support dialogue, interaction, and collective engagement.

Programme Outputs
—
By the end of the Fellowship, all Fellows are expected to:
Present the work developed during the programme at a public online event organised by ARCHIVO.
Submit a final report documenting the project’s development, methodologies, and outcomes.

* Research Fellows are additionally expected to:
Submit a research paper based on the project developed during the Fellowship.

* Artists / practice-based Fellows are expected to:
Produce a visual essay or equivalent artistic outcome based on the project developed during the Fellowship.
Contribute one picture from the project to the ARCHIVO LAB Limited Edition Print Collection.

SUBMISSION OF APPLICATIONS
—
Applications should be submitted as a single PDF file named [Surname_LAB27], to lab@archivoplatform.com, containing the following materials:

1. Application form (https://9c64ef44-1ee9-4f84-9257-363ea23aaeed.usrfiles.com/ugd/9c64ef_25982dd2675649159aaeb67c27fa7632.pdf)
2. Motivation Letter (maximum 500 words)
3. Project abstract (maximum 500 words)
4. Indicative bibliography (optional)
5. Biographical note (maximum 150 words)
6. Short CV highlighting relevant experience from the last five years (maximum two pages)

DEADLINE: 15 September 2026

Reference:
CFP: ARCHIVO Research LAB Fellowship: Visualising Democracy. In: ArtHist.net, Sep 12, 2026 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/54206>.