

PRECARIOUS WORK

Edited by Arne L. Kalleberg
and Steven P. Vallas

RESEARCH IN
THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK

VOLUME 31

PRECARIOUS WORK

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RESEARCH IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF WORK
VOLUME 31

PRECARIOUS WORK

EDITED BY

**ARNE L. KALLEBERG AND
STEVEN P. VALLAS**

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PROBING PRECARIOUS WORK: THEORY, RESEARCH, AND POLITICS

Arne L. Kalleberg and Steven P. Vallas

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, significant changes have begun to engulf the employment systems found in virtually all the advanced capitalist nations. These changes have provoked a widening stream of books, articles, government reports, policy analyses, and social movement activism, much of which has centered on the proliferation of precarious work. By this term we mean work that is *uncertain, unstable, and insecure* and in which *employees bear the risks of work* (as opposed to businesses or the government) and *receive limited social benefits and statutory protections* (Hewison, 2016; Kalleberg, 2000; Kalleberg & Hewison, 2013; Rodgers, 1989; Vosko, 2010). Thus defined, the recent rise of precarious work holds great importance, not only for the work situations and career opportunities that workers can expect but also for broad macro-social issues involving the role of the welfare state and the nature of economic policy. It seems safe to conclude that much of the political stability

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that characterized the advanced capitalist world during the post-World War II years stemmed in no small part from the availability of secure employment at reasonable pay enjoyed by many sectors of the labor force. Since the erosion of this source of institutional stability raises many questions about the governance of the social order in the neoliberal age, it warrants close scrutiny by scholars and decision-makers alike.

Precarious work has made the availability as well as the quality of jobs more risky and uncertain. The consequences of this are not restricted to work and the workplace but also affect many non-work domains, including individual health and well-being (e.g., owing to mental stress, poor physical health, and uncertainty about educational choices), family formation (delayed entry into marriage and having children), and the nature of social life more generally (community disintegration and declining social cohesion). Moreover, the anxiety, anger, anomie, and alienation produced by the spread of uncertainty, insecurity, and inequality associated with precarious work have motivated workers to adopt protective strategies to defend themselves. Coming after long periods of economic and social development after World War II, the current upsurge in precarious work has raised concerns that hard-won gains by workers during this period may be lost, a situation that seems likely to erode the legitimacy of established institutions (Standing, 2011).

In this chapter, we develop a critical overview of the sprawling literature that has addressed precarious forms of paid employment. We see such discussion as especially necessary, given the wide gap between the scale of precarious work and social scientific understanding of it more generally. Indeed, the unresolved questions have seemed only to grow in direct proportion to the degree of scholarly inquiry. What can sociological analysis tell us about the origins and consequences of precarious work? What does its spread hold in store for future relations between employers and their workers? How is precarious work experienced, and how does its impact vary across different groups and social classes? What are the consequences of the precarization trend for the sphere of *non-work*, including social relations within the family and community, as well as personal well-being, and everyday life more generally? What societal variations can we identify, and what do they suggest about collective responses to the problem, whether on the part of policy makers or movement activists? Given the breadth of these questions, we can hardly hope to do justice to each. Our goals are more modest: to address some of the theoretical and conceptual ambiguities that have bedeviled research in this field and to identify how they can best be addressed. In the course of our discussion, we also indicate how the articles in this volume speak to these issues.

We first consider some of the major theoretical perspectives that have been developed to explain the meaning and origins of precarious work. We then present evidence regarding the proliferation of precarious work, both in the United States and other advanced capitalist nations, and discuss disparities in the spread of precarious work, which has differentially affected various strata and groups within the labor force. We next explore the literature on how workers have responded to precarious work, both individually and collectively, and offer a framework to think about such responses to precarious work. Finally, we consider policy responses to precarious work and sketch some possible scenarios that seem likely to unfold in the coming years, for better or for worse.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Two broad strands of thinking have informed sociological approaches toward precarious work. One has engaged foremost contemporary sociological thinkers, who have placed the concept of precarity at the center of their conceptions of modernity. A second, evident in the work of economic sociologists, has empirically explored the forces that account for the proliferation of precarious work during the past three decades. These two macro perspectives have emerged separately but are largely complementary. Together they provide a compelling warrant, underscoring that the era of the Fordist employment regime – one that promised stable, secure employment with benefits – has rapidly come undone.

Major sociological theorists have placed the concept of precarity at the heart of their analyses. Thus, Giddens (1991) writes of “ontological insecurity” as a defining feature of contemporary social life, as actors grow increasingly aware of the arbitrary and conditional nature of the rituals they perform (the outcome of what Giddens calls “reflexive modernization”). Beck (1992, 2000) believes that the side effects of reckless economic growth have led to the emergence of the “risk society,” in which scientific and technological expertise multiplies the threats that people face in their daily lives. Bauman (2000) sees a new era unfolding in which the solid, stable institutional structures that undergirded industrial capitalism have given way to a new era – one of “liquid modernity” – in which the condition of “precariousness, instability, vulnerability is the most widespread (as well as the most painfully felt) feature of contemporary life conditions” (Bauman, 2000, pp. 160–161). He continues:

The French theorists speak of *précarité*, the Germans of *Unsicherheit* and *Risikogestellschaft*, the Italians of *incertezza* and the English of insecurity—but all of them have in mind the same aspect of the human predicament, experienced in various forms and under different

names all over the globe, but felt to be especially unnerving and depressing in the highly developed and affluent part of the planet—for the reason of being new and in many ways unprecedented. The phenomenon which all these concepts try to grasp and articulate is the combined experience of *insecurity* (of position, entitlements, and livelihood), of *uncertainty* (as to their continuation and future stability) and of *unsafety* (of one's body, one's self, and their extensions: possessions, neighborhood, community).

In some accounts, this intensification of insecurity has a profoundly conservatism effect on those subjected to it. This argument has been advanced by Bourdieu, who sees the spread of labor market uncertainty as shifting the ground on which workers stand, weakening their possibility of engaging in collective action:

Casualization profoundly affects the person who suffers it: by making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 82).

Some theorists have developed this last point, viewing precarious work as constituting a new type of regime that implicitly exercises social and political control over a widening swath of the labor force. Bourdieu himself sees the institutionalization of precarious work as threatening to engender “a *mode of domination* of a new kind” (1998, p. 85, his emphasis). The philosopher Judith Butler agrees. Where she earlier argued (2004) that violent conflict and war had become routine features of the world after 9/11, more recently she concludes that precarious economic conditions are “not a passing or episodic condition, but a *new form of regulation* that distinguishes this historical time” (Butler, 2015, p. vii). As she puts it, precarity “has itself become a regime, a hegemonic mode of being governed, and governing ourselves” (Butler, loc. cit.; see Pulignano, 2018). The key point that emerges in much of this literature is that the precarization of labor has come to serve political functions, engendering greater quiescence not so much in spite of, but precisely *because* of, the uncertainties that neoliberalism creates:

Precarization is not a marginal phenomenon, even in the rich regions of Europe. In the leading neoliberal Western industrial nations it can no longer be outsourced to the socio-geographical spaces of the periphery where it only affects others. It is spreading even in those areas that were long considered secure. It has become an *instrument of governing* and, at the same time, a basis for capital accumulation that serves social regulation and control (Lorey 2015: 1, emphasis added).

This strand of theorizing emphasizes that what workers face today is not merely a temporary shift in the balance of power between capital and labor

or a development that reflects a Polanyian double movement (Polanyi, 1957), but instead the emergence of a new stage in the political economy of modernity, a successor to “organized capitalism” (Lash & Urry, 1987) whose coordinates are only now coming into view.

A second strand of thinking has emerged in parallel with these theoretical approaches, largely contributed by economic sociologists. Much more empirical in its focus, this second literature has sought to identify the structural forces that have converged to erode the Fordist employment regime for a growing proportion of the workforce. This literature has identified at least four distinct yet highly interrelated forces that are responsible for the growth of precarious work (e.g., Kalleberg 2009, 2011). First, *de-unionization* has undermined workers’ organizational protections, giving employers a freer hand not only with respect to wage determination but also greater discretion in the use of “flexible” or non-standard work arrangements (Locke & Thelen, 1995; Western & Rosenfeld, 2011). Second, the growing power of institutional investors, and of Wall Street generally, has led to a broad *financialization* of many leading corporations and the economy writ large (Fligstein & Shin, 2007; Ho, 2009a, 2009b; Tomaskovic-Devey & Lin, 2011). Involved here is the rise of the “shareholder conception of the firm,” which greatly diminishes the value placed on stakeholders such as workers and even managers, relative to the needs of shareholders, thus exposing employees to recurrent bouts of outsourcing and downsizing, even by highly profitable firms. Third, *globalization* has sharpened competition between workers on opposite sides of the world and accelerated the mobility of capital, especially in manufacturing industries (Bronfenbrenner & Luce, 2004; Collins, 2003). Some scholars view globalization as facilitating a broad shift in power away from industrial capital and toward big box retailers and designer brands, contributing to a declining quality of employment across many branches of the economy (Lichenstein, 2009).

A fourth driver of precarious work is the *digital revolution*, which has aided all of the above trends by reducing capital’s need for labor, accelerating the mobility of capital and the management of global commodity chains, and expanding the ability of investors to monitor value creation at the establishment level. The ubiquity of mobile devices has also fueled the growth of the “on-demand,” “gig,” or “sharing economy,” allowing firms to use digital platforms as their organizational structure, redefining workers as independent contractors who can be made to assume risks previously handled by the firm (Schor, 2015). Partly for this reason, Davis (2016) goes so far as to speak of the “vanishing corporation,” arguing that the most highly capitalized firms in the world today (Facebook, Google, Netflix, Apple) have relatively little need to employ workers in anything resembling the staffing patterns of the past.

Taken together, these theoretical and economic strands of thinking provide powerful cause for concern regarding the changes taking place in the nature of work and employment regimes across much of the advanced capitalist world, with potentially far-reaching consequences not only for workers' lives but also for social and political institutions more generally. While economic crises such as the Great Recession may have exacerbated the impacts of these drivers of precarious work, as Wallace and Kwak (2018) demonstrate for the United States, these forces have been gathering for some decades and now show little sign of slowing down. Mindful of the stakes, there has been an outpouring of scholarly research on precarious work. Yet our ability to understand this phenomenon has remained limited in several important respects.

First, much of the literature has made surprisingly little reference to the existence of longstanding inequalities based on class, gender, or race. Indeed, in some cases, theorists have declared class to represent a “zombie category” whose effects no longer pertain to the contemporary social landscape (Atkinson, 2007; Beck, 2007).¹ In a similar vein, scholars have often forgotten that access to the “standard” work arrangement was by its nature highly selective, in that membership was largely restricted to Whites and to men. This means that the precarization of work itself is sure to have disparate effects, reflecting the divergent labor market positions that workers have historically held. Because this point has not received the attention it deserves, and because much attention has been devoted to the onset of precarious work among once-privileged groups, the relations among gender, race, and precarity have remained shrouded in ambiguity. Especially in light of the xenophobic and racist sentiments that have emerged in response to the precarization of work, much more attention needs to be paid to the ways in which social inequalities impinge on the reconfiguration of employment systems, both in the United States and abroad.

Moreover, in their effort to capture the novel or qualitative features that precarious work has imposed on the labor market today, many scholars have adopted an ahistorical approach, overlooking that in fact, precarious work represents a return to the instabilities that plagued the labor market during earlier periods of capitalist development, before the effects of Keynesian economic policy, unionization, and the welfare state had been achieved. In truth, precarious work has historically been the norm; its appearance represents a resurgence rather than a completely novel development. Arguably, it is the standard work arrangement that should be problematized, with attention given to the structural conditions that underpinned its relative (if temporary) success.

An additional source of ambiguity in the literature concerns the overly deterministic nature of existing accounts. There are important differences

that must be acknowledged here. Theorists such as Bourdieu, Foucault, and Bauman tend to view work and workers as engulfed by broad historical trends that reproduce the existing order; this is why they speak of precarity as involving a “new mode of domination” or a new “instrument of governance.” Clearly, by using such concepts, scholars hope to reveal the mechanisms through which power operates. But often, their work brings a one-sided approach to bear on the phenomenon of labor control. The clearest example is that of writers who view precarity as immobilizing workers (as Bourdieu contends) or as engulfing them in entrepreneurial norms that reconfigure workers’ very identities (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; du Gay, 1996). To be sure, there is indeed evidence of a quiescent effect. Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) argue that a “new spirit of capitalism” has emerged among workers in many newer industries, lending capital accumulation a level of support it did not previously enjoy. Lane (2011) finds that high-tech workers have by and large embraced a “career management” ideology that encourages workers to shoulder responsibility for their own careers, expecting little help from either firms or government agencies. And Pugh (2015) finds that workers have generally accepted the “one way honor system” that leads them to comply with employers’ needs while expecting little save for wages in return (see also Chen, 2015; Pech, 2017).

Such evidence notwithstanding, the question remains as to how precarity theorists can account for the seemingly unruly nature of so much political behavior in the advanced capitalist world (Courpasson & Vallas, 2016) or for the resistance that accompanies much managerial intervention (Vallas, 2016). One need not agree with Standing’s (2011) argument that a self-described “precarariat” now constitutes a “new dangerous class” to acknowledge that neoliberalism has provoked numerous challenges to the established political order, as in the EuroMayDay movements of the early 2000s, the Occupy movements, and more recently, the anti-establishment and even authoritarian movements that have roiled so many of the Western capitalist nations. Moreover, Kalleberg and Marsden’s (2013) study of work values in the United States unearthed a pronounced preference for greater job security than employers have been willing to provide. In this connection, Beck (2000) is one of the few theorists who speaks of the cultural tensions and contradictions that precarity provokes, as the erosion of the standard work arrangement cancels the very institutional supports on which modernity has long relied.

An additional source of difficulty that has bedeviled scholarship in this field has involved ongoing definitional ambiguities as to the very meaning of “precarious work.” Instability, insecurity, and unpredictability have all been assumed to be synonyms, resulting in much conceptual slippage and

confusion as to actual empirical trends. Particular work arrangements, such as part-time or temporary work, have often been assumed to mean the same thing even in sharply different national settings. The result is that trends have either been misinterpreted or else overlooked entirely.

Amid such uncertainty, some scholars have even cast doubt on the very existence of precarization as a major societal trend (e.g., [Doogan, 2009](#); [Fevre, 2007](#); [McGovern et al. 2008](#)). They also maintain that scholarly discourse on precarity inadvertently contributes to the very problem it laments, amplifying workers' fears in ways that make them even more susceptible to employers' demands than would otherwise be the case. The difficulty with this view is that it often adopts an unduly narrow definition of precarious work (e.g., as temporary work), which it then applies to liberal market economies such as the United Kingdom or United States. While it is true that levels of temporary work in these countries are relatively low, this is to be expected, since these nations have historically provided few employment protections to workers. Employers in these countries therefore have little need or incentive to create explicitly temporary jobs, since a very large proportion of the work force *already* labors under uncertainty ([DiTomaso, 2001](#); [Ross, 2009](#)). More nuanced definitions and comparative studies reveal rather different patterns, accentuating the importance of cross-national research on the nature and consequences of precarious work, as we discuss in the next section.

Perhaps the most important source of ambiguity that has inhibited research on precarious work, however, concerns the nature of neoliberalism itself ([Harvey, 2005](#); [Peck, 2010](#)), the contours of which have remained only vaguely understood. Neoliberalism, as an economic and policy doctrine that equates marketization with the furtherance of human freedom and individual choice, is obviously a central concept for students of precarious work, since it opposes all collective arrangements that might interfere with market forces. As such, it pressures nation-states to uproot their provisions for income supports, to weaken labor regulations and minimum wage standards, and to foster decentralized forms of collective bargaining, all of which leave workers more dependent on employers (see [Pulignano, 2018](#)). Neoliberalism also encourages employers to adopt a conception of the firm and its workers that dismantles long-standing provisions for internal labor markets – which had sheltered many workers from the external labor market – in favor of radically individualized forms of employment and outsourcing and downsizing measures that can maximize shareholder value and achieve greater numerical and functional flexibility ([Harvey, 1989](#); [Pfeffer & Baron, 1988](#)).

Yet, in spite of neoliberalism's importance for the precarization of labor, scholars have made little progress in concretizing its meaning or in

demonstrating its empirical links to the work situations in which workers are employed. The tendency has been to view neoliberalism “as a global regulatory architecture, imposed from above” almost without human intervention, or else “as a metaphor for the ideological air that we all (must) breathe” (Peck, 2010, p. xii). Concepts such as “flexible accumulation” are invoked, yet rarely succeed in capturing the operational character and effects of the contemporary capitalist firm. In short, we are positioned at the “end of organized capitalism,” but as yet lack clarity as to the organizational coordinates of capitalism in its new, neoliberal guise. Empirically based research is needed that can map the political economy of neoliberalism, yet in ways that remain mindful of its complex, contested, and often-contradictory consequences. The chapters in this volume provide steps in precisely this direction.

PRECARIOUS WORK: MANIFESTATIONS AND TRENDS

What then is the evidence regarding the trend toward precarious work in advanced, post-industrial societies? Some scholars have found it disconcerting when different methods of research generate somewhat different findings. As Cappelli (1999, p. 113) observes, studies of individual organizations, occupations, and industries often yield different conclusions than do analyses of the economy as a whole:

Those who argue that the change [in labor market institutions] is revolutionary study firms, especially large corporations. Those who believe the change is modest at best study the labor market and the workforce as a whole. While I have yet to meet a manager who believes that this change has not stood his or her world on its head, I meet plenty of labor economists studying the aggregate workforce who are not sure what exactly has changed.

We believe such varied findings are partly due to the conceptual ambiguities just discussed and to the fact that meso-level measures of precarious work have been slow to evolve and have as yet only poorly captured the realities at hand (e.g., [United States Department of Labor, 1995](#)). Moreover, more recent studies that have adopted more refined measures of precarious work (e.g., [Government Accountability Office, 2015](#); [Katz & Krueger, 2016](#)) have generated findings that align quite closely with the results of case study data. In addition, aggregate or macro-level data can often mask important trends affecting different subpopulations. For example, in [Kalleberg's \(2011\)](#) examination of trends in the mix of “good” and “bad” jobs in the United States, aggregate trends were quite modest, but obscured a significant shift across

the gender line: The jobs held by men exhibited a marked deterioration, while those held by women did not. Both points indicate that carefully calibrated and disaggregated measures of precarious work are needed – ideals that are only recently being achieved (see Kiersztyn, 2018).

A further difficulty emerges where cross-national variations in precarization are concerned, and where measurement difficulties are compounded, given institutional differences across different societies. Not surprisingly, we lack systematic, longitudinal information on shifts in employment relations and organizational practices for a variety of countries, and this makes it difficult to evaluate just how much change has really occurred. Yet here too progress is being made, as researchers have developed useful measures that warrant confidence. For example, the recent study by the OECD of 26 European countries contrasted regular, “permanent” full-time employment with an overall indicator of non-standard work arrangements (i.e., one that combines workers on temporary or part-time contracts with own account, self-employed persons who do not employ others). Results showed that about half of the jobs created between 1995 and 2013, and about 60% of those created between 2007 and 2013, were in non-standard jobs (OECD, 2015). This suggests a substantial shift in the nature of work in these countries and one that seems to grow more pronounced over time. Further, in 2013, about one-third of all jobs in these countries were in non-standard work arrangements, divided about equally among temporary jobs, permanent part-time jobs,² and self-employment.

Moreover, the incidence of non-standard work arrangements differs among countries. In Spain, 22.7% of the jobs created between 1995 and 2007 were in non-standard jobs, compared to 12.7% in Germany. In Japan, the proportion of non-regular workers increased from about 27% in 2001 to slightly over a third of Japanese workers in 2010 (Osawa, Kim, & Kingston, 2013). In the United States, the percentage of employed persons who worked in alternative work arrangements (defined as independent contractors, on-call workers, temporary help agency workers, and workers provided by contract firms) increased from 10% in 1995 to 10.7% in 2005 and rose to 17.2% in 2015. By far the largest such alternative work arrangement was independent contractors, which grew from 6.3% in 1995 to 6.9% in 2005 and 9.6% in 2015. Indeed, almost all the growth represented by the nine million new jobs created in the United States in the past decade were in these alternative work arrangements, with no net increase in regular, full-time employment (Katz and Krueger 2016).

In addition, evidence from a variety of diverse objective indicators generally supports the view that there have been reductions in social and statutory protections associated with employment relations and an increase in overall

job insecurity in the United States and other industrial countries. While studies of trends in measures of organizational attachment such as employer tenure for a long time revealed the existence of considerable stability, leading some to conclude that there was relatively little change in employment relations (e.g., [Auer & Cazes, 2000](#)), more recent studies of this topic have concluded that there has indeed been a general decline in the average length of time a person spends with his or her employer. This varies by specific sub-groups, however, with gender again clearly important: women's employer tenure has generally increased (especially among women with children), while men's has decreased (see [Hollister & Smith, 2013](#)). The decline in employer tenure is especially pronounced among older white men, the group that had been most protected by internal labor markets in the past ([Farber, 2008](#)). [Auer \(2005\)](#) also found that the average employer tenure in the United States declined over the 1990s, though the length of employer tenure was less in the United States than in the other countries.

The studies discussed thus far all pertain to the objective features of the employment relation. Yet an equally important research strategy inquires into the lived experience or perception of the employment relation (see Kierszytn's [2018] discussion of issues and problems involved in measuring precarious work in surveys). Here researchers ask workers questions about how secure they feel about their jobs with their current employer (job security) or how confident they feel in their ability to secure comparable employment with another firm (labor market security). The U.S. General Social Survey (GSS), for example, asked respondents about their perceived likelihood that they would lose their jobs in the next year and how easy or hard it would be to find a comparable new one if they lost their present one. Analyses of the GSS data from 1972 to 2006 found that there is an upward trend in perceived job insecurity in a composite measure of these two indicators that was net of the unemployment rate (see [Fullerton & Wallace, 2005](#); [Kalleberg, 2011](#)). The degree to which people perceive their jobs to be insecure and worry about obtaining comparable employment differs among countries, however, depending on their labor market institutions (such as the degree of active labor market policies that facilitate the transitions between unemployment and employment) as well as policies such as the generosity of unemployment insurance and welfare benefits (see [Kalleberg, 2018](#)).

The foregoing discussion strongly suggests that the Fordist employment regime has come under growing pressure throughout much of the developed world. Put differently, neoliberalism has pressured both nation-states and capital to uproot those organizational arrangements that had shielded workers from the vicissitudes of the external labor market. Yet by no means do

these pressures exhibit uniform tendencies across national boundaries. As suggested in our discussion of family formation in Japan below, a comparative focus is needed to fully understand the nature and consequences of precarious work as well as the institutional structures that have emerged to adapt to or modify its imperatives. American scholars have been particularly slow to recognize this need, though this is rapidly changing. Because space limitations rule out a full consideration of the comparative literature on precarious work, our discussion must be limited to the following points.

To begin with, it is important to acknowledge growing disagreement as to the conceptual framework that best captures variations in the patterns evident among the advanced capitalist nations (Doellgast, Lillie, & Pulignano, 2018; Gallie, 2007, 2013). The conventional distinction evident in the varieties of capitalism literature (Hall & Soskice, 2001) drew a sharp distinction between liberal and coordinated market economies, with the United States and United Kingdom as instances of the former and Germany and the Scandinavian nations as exemplars of the latter. Yet as liberalization has engulfed the European continent, the assumption that such categories capture enduring distinctions has been widely challenged (Gallie, 2013; Thelen, 2014). The German case, for example, has undergone important shifts, the most important of which is the rise of dualization within its political economy, as Brady and Biegart discuss in their contribution in this volume. The notion here is that the legacy of Social Democratic institutions has protected labor market “insiders” against precarization, but doing so has exposed the growing ranks of labor market “outsiders” to increasingly precarious work (Rueda, 2007). Although it remains unclear how prevalent the resulting pattern of dualism has become, the existence of this trend has multiple consequences. It sensitizes us to the unanticipated consequences that can accompany labor market protections, since their benefits may simply redistribute rather than block the effects of economic risk or precarity. It reminds us that the categories we use to understand contemporary capitalism must themselves evolve in accordance with the realities we seek to understand. And it begins to suggest the existence of distinct paths that can be taken by the neoliberal turn, with fully liberalized economies enduringly different from dualist and social democratic ones. A central task of comparative research is that of identifying the socio-political dynamics and coalitions that give rise to national-level responses to neoliberalism (Thelen, 2014), as Mai (2018) does in his analysis of cross-national differences in precarious work in 32 European countries.

The idea of precarious work as a loss of social protections or of standard employment relations is useful in analyzing developed advanced capitalist

countries, which have histories of social protections and where the idea of standard work still has some normative force. By contrast, in much of the less developed world, where precarious work has long been the norm, the concept has had less relevance. Still, being locked into precarious work in the countries of the global south can also be seen as a loss, in this case the loss of conditions aspired for (see [Kalleberg & Hewison, 2013](#); [Webster, Lambert, & Bezuidenhout, 2008](#)). Rogan, Roeber, Chen, & Carré (2018) show that while informal employment in the global south is still the norm, there are still important shifts in employment relations that result from the same processes of globalization and liberalization which have generated precarious work in the more developed countries. In addition, Sapkal and Shyam Sundar (2018) demonstrate that there is considerable variation in the extent of precarious work in India, a country in which the vast majority of people work in the informal economy. They also show the growing pressure on the Indian state to adopt policies that would make precarious work an even more pronounced feature of the Indian economy.

CONSEQUENCES OF PRECARIOUS WORK

Earlier, we made the point that access to the standard work arrangement has historically been reserved for Whites and men. Unfortunately, since much of the literature on precarious work has been focused on relatively privileged, white-collar groups, where precarization has made new inroads, it has been difficult to disentangle the complex relations that exist among precarious work, gender, and racial privilege. This is regrettable, but scholars have increasingly acknowledged the need to understand the interconnected (and intersectional) nature of particular dimensions of inequality ([Browne & Misra, 2003](#); [Collins, 2000](#); [McCall, 2001](#)). A good example is the work by Hanley and Branch (2018), which shows how gender and race combine to affect the exposure to non-standard employment over time. Recall too that the evidence we alluded to earlier has repeatedly found that precarization has unfolded unevenly across the gender line, disrupting long-established gender hierarchies in ways that warrant careful analysis (see [Williams, 2018](#)).

What then is known about how precarization varies across gender and racial categories? First, until quite recently, white women in the labor force were routinely relegated to provisional roles in the labor market and were expected to leave paid employment once they married ([Cohn, 1985](#); [Kessler-Harris, 1982](#)). This expectation, a legacy of the male breadwinner norm, meant that women's roles in work organizations were for generations

defined as a temporary or contingent one – though one that had a clearly institutionalized form, in contrast to the uncertainty that engulfs contingent workers today.

Second, there is a reason to believe that the experience of and exposure to precarious work is itself gendered, in that the powerless position of workers in non-standard work arrangements takes a particular toll on women, rendering them especially vulnerable to sexual harassment and other forms of degrading treatment (Henson & Krasas Rogers, 2001; Krasas Rogers & Henson, 1997). Williams (2018) shows how hostility toward women even in relatively good jobs in the oil and gas industry negatively affects women during downsizing and business reorganizations. Her study finds evidence that the gendered organization still exists, though in relatively novel incarnations.

Third, benign images of attractive, white, middle-class women were widely used by the temporary help industry in national advertising campaigns during the 1950s and 1960s as a means of burnishing the previously unsavory public image of labor market intermediaries (Hatton, 2011). Though it was actually men in industrial jobs who were most frequently subjected to the growth of temporary work at this time, the use of explicitly gendered images lent a friendly face to non-standard work and very likely compounded the barriers to women's mobility that previously existed, limiting their access to more rewarding or "standard" jobs and perpetuating mythical conceptions of women's work more generally.

Yet the relation between gender and precarious work is more complex and counterintuitive than it might seem. As noted, and contrary to theoretical expectations, data reveal rising levels of job *stability* among women, even as the opposite trend – job *instability* – has become more common among men (Farber, 2008; Hollister, 2012). Increases in job stability are especially pronounced among employed women with children, perhaps an expression not only of women's increasing employment opportunities, but also a sign that for many women, reliance on men has increasingly become a shaky proposition (Edin & Kefalas, 2011).

Pugh (2015) directly addresses the relation between precarious work and gender inequality as she explores the ways in which the "insecurity culture" has begun to seep into and shape intimate life. She finds that this fosters a "tumbleweed society" in which enduring commitments have become unmoored as neoliberal pressures have recast the employment relationship, giving rise to the "one way honor system" we mentioned above. Pugh finds marked class and gender differences in how people respond to the culture of insecurity. Upper middle-class persons derive a sense of confidence and

privilege from their immersion in market transactions and seem able to maintain a “moral wall” between market and home. But since working-class members have too few resources to support such boundary work, they often adopt a more “detached” or independent stance within *both* paid employment *and* intimate life. Her point, which recalls Sennett’s (1998) corrosion of character thesis, is that neoliberalism (which she dubs “insecurity culture”) imposes subtle yet significant costs on the intimate sphere – costs that are most painful and pronounced among the poor and working class. Her broader message, moreover, is that neoliberalism undercuts our ability to maintain caring relations, whether for children, the sick, or the elderly. These impediments fall with particular weight on the women in Pugh’s study, who must shoulder the rising demands of caregiving even as they work more hours in the paid labor force and as the state has increasingly withdrawn from social provision in various institutional domains. This line of reasoning sensitizes us to the important role played by public policies involving child care and family leave. In societies such as the United States, marked by the absence of many supportive policies found in Europe, women are especially likely to be locked into jobs that offer some modicum of stability or benefits.

Racial variations in exposure to precarization are complex and as yet also little understood. From one perspective, racial and ethnic minorities have long been relegated to jobs in the secondary labor market, which can involve dead-end employment – a feature of “bad” jobs – but may also involve sharp variability in job security (especially when workers are employed at small firms) and working hours (Newman, 2000). Racial divisions within the labor market have long been acknowledged (Bonacich, 1976), and indeed, black men have often been used as a labor market wedge, breaking strikes of white workers at Northern factories. Yet in the post-Jim Crow era, Blacks have been especially exposed to market uncertainties, both owing to plant relocation and plant shutdowns and to austerity-induced cuts in public employment, especially in education, local government, and transportation, all of which have been major employers of black workers (Wilson, Roscigno, & Huffman, 2013). Moreover, young black men in particular have often been at the mercy of a coercive criminal justice system, experience with which diminishes their labor market chances and forces many black men into the informal economy (Anderson, 1999; Goffman, 2014; Pager, 2003; Venkatesh, 2008). Much more remains to be understood regarding the institutions that shape black workers’ exposure to precarious employment in its myriad forms, the processes that affect their job security (Roscigno, Garcia, & Bobbit-Zeher, 2007), how status distinctions bar black workers from more rewarding and secure jobs in the growing service sector, and how cutbacks in public budgets have undermined

the labor market positions of black workers, especially in the wake of the economic crisis (Wilson et al., 2013).

Age, finally, is an important demographic characteristic that is correlated with precarious work, though in complex and variable ways. In nations such as Spain, for example, where workers have enjoyed employment protections that hinder employers' ability to terminate insiders, firms have often been loathe to hire new employees into regular positions and have pressed for and often won a liberalization of labor laws, enabling them to hire workers on contract or temporary jobs (see Kalleberg, 2018). This has translated into major generational inequalities in many European nations, where young workers face especially severe consequences of precarious employment and the associated uncertainty and risk; they disproportionately make up the ranks of the unemployed, underemployed, and the non-regular workforce in industrial societies. The growth of precarious work has made it difficult for the young to gain a foothold in the labor market and to launch their work careers in many industrial countries, as the jobs that are typically available to them are less likely to offer prospects of career narratives and regular sources of income, as well as the hopes of advancing to better jobs in the future. A strategy for dealing with this uncertainty is illustrated by Rao (2018), who shows how elite early-career contract workers in the United Nations (UN) system accept uncertain and short-term contracts so as to demonstrate their flexibility to their employers and thus hope to secure longer-term positions within the UN system. In a sense, their aspirations become powerful levers of social control (Padavic, 2005). In the United States, upscale retail stores have drawn upon affluent young workers as a source of low-paid labor. Attracted to "cool" jobs that reward their identification with designer brands, young workers can provide a workforce that is highly convenient and exploitable from the employers' point of view (Besen-Cassino, 2014; Misra & Walters, 2016; Williams & Connell, 2010).

Age also interacts with gender, race, and class in shaping processes of entry into the labor market. Upscale retail stores are predisposed to hire highly privileged youth, who embody desirable forms of cultural capital, while young workers from working-class backgrounds are often channeled into fast food jobs at an early age (Besen-Cassino, 2014). Using data from the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, Witteveen (2018) also shows that women, racial-ethnic minorities, and lower class labor market entrants are more likely to encounter precarious work conditions in their early careers – experiences that may have impacts that are both unfavorable and enduring over time. A final point with respect to age concerns the difficulties that older workers generally face when confronted with layoffs or other career transitions. Older workers (50+) stand at much greater risk of long-term

unemployment (being jobless for 27 weeks or more), regardless of their educational levels (Rix, 2015). Long-term unemployment has grown sharply in the United States, now accounting for a much higher proportion of the unemployed than had been the case in prior decades.

Precarious work has had especially pronounced effects on the transition to adulthood and establishing families in countries such as Japan, which has traditionally been characterized by a well-defined, rigid progression to adulthood that presupposes a strong attachment to work organizations (see Allison, 2013; Brinton, 2011). Young Japanese men, in particular, have been highly impacted by the disruption in life plans caused by the breakdown of orderly transitions from school to work and the paucity of opportunities for orderly career lines in regular full-time employment. Japan is an example of a country that is still characterized by sharply defined gender roles that emphasize young males as breadwinners and so the absence of opportunities for such jobs constitutes a major impediment on one's ability to find a suitable marriage partner and to have children. This is illustrated dramatically in a study of Japanese men and women workers that included data from retrospective life histories covering the 21-year period from 1988 to 2009 (Piotrowski, Kalleberg, & Rindfuss, 2015). They found that men who have non-regular employment positions are significantly less likely to marry than men in regular employment, again providing evidence that precarious work reaches deep into the intimate realm.

It is also difficult to get married when working in precarious and bad jobs in countries such as the United States. Lim (2018) shows that men who work in part-time jobs and jobs that lack health insurance coverage and pension benefits are 20–25% more likely to delay a first marriage. As in Japan, working in bad jobs matters more for men, though women in part-time non-standard jobs also experience marriage delays.

Perhaps the most politically volatile consequence of precarization, and which seems most distinctive about the current age of precarious work, is that now white men have also been exposed to job insecurity. Indeed, there is evidence that the racial and gender hierarchies previously established in many firms, industries, and communities have been disrupted or destabilized. In a sense, one can speak of the “democratization of insecurity,” such that white men now work in these kinds of jobs along with everyone else – and may feel a sense of relative deprivation which can fuel reactionary and populist movements in various ways. This point received much discussion in the period leading up to and following the 2016 Presidential election in the United States.

Finally, precarious work makes it difficult to construct a rational life plan or career narrative in post-industrial nations, contributing to what Sennett (1998) has described as a “corrosion of character.” The ability to construct

such a life plan is a key source of happiness and subjective well-being and its absence is a source of mental stress. Moreover, the detrimental consequences of job insecurity and employment insecurity that arise from precarious work for both mental and physical health have been well documented (e.g., [Lewchuk, Clarke, & de Wolff, 2008](#); [Sverke, Hellgren, & Näswall, 2002](#)).

SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND POLITICAL RESPONSES

The challenges posed by precarious work have provoked distinctive responses at both the individual and collective levels of analysis. Much of the existing research on this topic has been framed at the micro-social level of analysis, using case study methods to understand how workers in particular occupations, industries, or communities respond when exposed to precarious work. As noted above, one line of interpretation suggests that workers have commonly resigned themselves to the trend, viewing it as an inevitable feature of any modern economy. Lane's (2011) study of high-tech workers in Dallas, for example, found that the great bulk of the men in her study had accepted a "career management" ideology in which their economic fortunes were solely their own personal responsibility. [Pugh's \(2015\)](#) study focused on a cross-class sample of men and women and found a similar ethos at work, in which people felt obliged to demonstrate high levels of commitment to their employers, with little expectation of reciprocity. [Chen \(2015\)](#) finds a similar pattern among laid-off auto workers in Canada, though the pattern presented by [Sharone \(2014\)](#) seems much more complex.

Recent studies have sought to broaden this picture and have explored how workers cope with what are commonly regarded as "bad jobs," most notably in the expanding retail and service sector, which provides low-wage work with unpredictable hours and few if any benefits. [Besen-Cassino \(2014\)](#) finds that a large proportion of retail jobs are held by relatively affluent youth whose monetary needs are few (since most live with parents) and whose work orientation often defines employment as an arena supporting fun, sociability, and identification with consumer brands. Other accounts suggest that such orientations are short-lived ([Williams & Connell, 2010](#)) and that workers are keenly aware of and even resentful about the terms and conditions of their work ([Misra & Walters, 2016](#)). At the same time, workers in less glamorous layers of retail and service work – especially in fast food – seem even less likely to consent to the poor job rewards they receive. This latter point is indicative of the sharp stratification that can characterize retail and service work generally.

Other studies, couched at the collective or macro level, reveal forms of response that are far less consensual, although studies here remain

unsystematic. Inspired by the EuroMayDay movements that gripped many European cities during the early 2000s, [Standing \(2011\)](#) speaks of the precariously employed as constituting a heterogeneous “class in the making” that has begun to contest its marginalized position in society. [Wacquant \(2009\)](#) argues that neoliberalism has so gravely destabilized the institutions of civil society as to imbue much of the political order with a pervasive fear of both internal and external threats. [Beck \(1992, 2000\)](#) believes that the rise of precarious work has weakened the institutional supports on which liberal democracy has historically relied, introducing growing crisis tendencies into late modernity. [Gibson-Light \(2018\)](#) shows how workers engage in collective action (in a prison and an independent music industry in a city) in order to achieve formal reclassification as workers deserving respect and social protections.

Thus the existing studies have produced something of a paradox. Research at the micro level tends to report a pattern of resignation or consent, while studies at the macro level unearth more contentious responses to precarization. We believe that resolving this paradox will require more sophisticated, multi-level research designs that can explore the ways with which larger scale social and political structures impinge on social networks and institutional patterns at the local community level, which in turn shape the work and life orientations of the individuals affected. Of course, the direction of causality need not privilege macro-level structures and may itself be reversible, as when individuals, groups, and networks engage in mobilization from below, reshaping macro-level structures. This of course was the very process that led to the standard work arrangement that has now come under siege.

Such a multi-level conceptual framework that can sensitize us to the divided or fractured responses workers are likely to adopt, especially across class and regional contexts, can be constructed on the basis of [Hirschman’s classic book *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* \(1970\)](#). His goal was to understand the social and political dynamics that govern responses to the deteriorating performance of a given economic unit, be it a firm, a political organization, or a nation-state. Hirschman theorized that people facing decline exhibit two primary responses: exit (the willingness to sever the relationship) and voice (the mobilization of demands for improved performance). Hirschman also acknowledged a third, less purely rationalist response – loyalty – in which people retain their allegiance to an economic institution in spite of its deteriorating performance, often on affective grounds.

This framework can sensitize us to the varied responses to the precarious work and marketization that are evident in civil society today. For example, *exit* characterizes workers with limited educational resources in regions with declining economies, who have retreated from (or been pushed out of) the labor force

entirely. Sensing that theirs is a losing game, they resign themselves to a marginalized economic position. This response is closely bound up with the declining level of labor force participation in the United States, which seems especially pronounced in rural and exurban areas. Although conservative thinkers find this phenomenon especially troubling among men (Eberstadt, 2016), signs of exit are actually most pronounced among white women with high school educations or less (see Case & Deaton, 2017). Indeed, middle-aged, working-class women have exhibited especially sharp increases in mortality rates, owing to the rising rates of alcoholism, drug addiction, and suicide that have emerged in many “old economy” regions of the United States. Here can be found a response to economic precarity that is rooted in resignation.

Voice is a response that has taken many forms: sporadic expressions on the left are notable, as in the Occupy and Sanders movements in the United States and the *indignado* movement in Spain. But manifestations on the right have seemed the more durable, as in the various forms of support for ethnonationalist politics that have resonated among working-class communities that have suffered economic decay. In the latter form, voice amounts to a rejection of the discourse of liberal democracy and a symbolic weapon with which to re-affirm the desirability of the very status hierarchies that precarious work has disrupted (Gest, 2016; Hochschild, 2016). Responses based on voice can be said to follow a logic of indignation.

Perhaps the most pronounced forms of exit and voice are likely to be found within working-class communities and occupations. A key question for future research concerns the structural and cultural factors that account for the varying forms that voice can assume among relatively deprived groups. A third response, by contrast *loyalty*, is particularly common especially among more educated white collar workers, many of whom redouble their commitment to market logics, and now commonly comply with the cultural injunction to market or even to “brand” themselves, adopting the “career management” ideologies that Lane (2011) has described, or embracing entrepreneurial conceptions of themselves and their positions in the labor market (Vallas & Cummins, 2015). Such highly skilled workers can at times thrive in the absence of stable economic institutions, as did the itinerant experts described by Barley and Kunda (2006). In addition, Zukin and Papadantonakis (2018) show how business corporations, government agencies, and non-profit organizations in the software industry manufacture workers’ consent by sponsoring “hackathons” that serve to reshape precarious and unpaid work as an extraordinary opportunity. Their study is important since it reveals the political functions that occupational identity has increasingly assumed in an era of rapid change and uncertainty in the economic landscape.

The most promising response to precarious work from the point of view of generating social change is that associated with the expression of voice. Whether on the right or on the left, the mobilization of workers demanding changes in economic policy raises issues of precarity and inequality that are not being addressed by the political system. Such protest movements are often a prelude to political action in the electoral domain (Piven & Cloward, 1979), and as such, they can signify risk (ironically enough) to elected officials. At such times, governments may be pressed to extend social protections to people who lack stable work, with policies taking any number of forms. Given the pressures on governments to adopt political-economic liberalization strategies to meet the challenges posed by globalization, technological change, and other macro-structural forces, these liberalizing motives need to be either challenged, or else coupled with policies that help people to alleviate and collectivize these new forms of risk.

The economic forces that have led to the creation of precarious jobs are global in nature, as all countries are faced with the basic problem of balancing flexibility for employers and security for workers that is threatened by precarious work. Countries have sought to solve this dilemma in different ways depending on their social, political, and cultural characteristics, and so there is considerable path dependency in how countries choose to respond to the policy challenges.

Many of these responses involve government policies. One strategy is to adopt labor market activation policies that support workers making transitions of varying sorts – from unemployment to work, from parenting or care-giving to work, from one occupation to another, or from work to retirement. Supporting workers in the throes of such transitions has long been a hallmark of active labor market policies that emphasize training and job matching, such as those in Denmark. More highly coercive variants of this approach have also been adopted in countries such as the United Kingdom and United States, which have moved away from unconditional employment benefits toward “workfare” (Krinsky, 2007). Given the pressure of neoliberalism, some European countries have begun to adopt more restrictive levels of support for the unemployed (as in the case of Germany; see Brady and Biegart, 2018), though few European governments exhibit the punitive conception of relief-giving as the United States has tended to do.

Whether governments will be sufficiently responsive to the needs of job seekers remains highly uncertain and may hinge on the capacity for voice that workers themselves exhibit, relative to the mobilization achieved by other classes and groups. Yet not all forms of voice may involve contention. For example, in recent years workers and job seekers who lack access to stable, secure forms of work have engaged in “bottom up” forms of economic activity that have developed along interesting lines. Such an approach is illustrated

by the discussion around the “solidarity economy,” an emerging movement designed to develop alternative forms of work organization and mutual support, such as worker cooperatives, time banks, and land trusts (Loh & Shear, 2015; Miller, 2010; Satgar, 2014). Solidarity economy organizations have grown in many national contexts, partly aided by global movements associated with the World Social Forum. As such, many combine the practical need for subsistence with a more principled vision of economic arrangements that is steeped in a communal ethos that breaks with purely market-driven practices and prefigures an alternative logic to that of neoliberalism.

These kinds of responses to precarious work are still in relatively early stages. The nature and effectiveness of such movements differ, depending on the relative power of labor in the various countries, the repertoires of contention established in each society, and the capacity of the state to broker agreements between business and labor that offer social protections. Research is needed to fill our gaps in knowledge in this area and unpack the responses that exposure to precarious work provokes among workers in different socio-economic positions.

Such research needs to pay attention to the success of policies in three general areas that are needed in order to tackle the issues associated with precarious work. Policies have to maintain flexibility for employers, yet still provide individuals with: (1) a safety net and various kinds of social protections to collectivize risk and help them cope with the uncertainty and insecurity associated with precarious work and the marketization trend; (2) systems of lifelong education and retraining in order to prepare people for the changes that will occur in their jobs and in the labor market more generally; and (3) labor regulations and laws that protect those in both regular and non-regular employment.

LOOKING AHEAD

There is little reason to believe that the forces that drove the recent rise of precarious work will abate anytime soon. Globalization and dynamic technological change are inexorable forces characterizing the 21st century. However, the political, economic, and social responses to these forces are not inevitable. Just as the adoption of neoliberal policies that fueled the expansion of precarious work resulted from political forces that shifted the balance of power from workers to employers, so too will political forces shape the future reactions of industrial countries as they face the moral choices associated with the negative consequences of precarious work. While it is both risky and folly to anticipate future developments, we can sketch out some possible scenarios that might build on current trends.

A dystopian scenario sees the continuation of shifting the risks of work to workers, high long-term unemployment rates, and the spread of insecurity and uncertainty throughout the workforce. Inequality will continue to grow, both in terms of income and wealth and in human capital, as workers with varying levels of skills and education come to hold starkly different positions in an ever more divided or polarized labor market. An ominous trend for many workers is the increasing use of automation and technological innovations to substitute capital for labor in numerous jobs, especially manual and non-manual routine jobs, as [Autor, Katz, and Kearney \(2006\)](#) and [Ford \(2015\)](#), among others, have argued. Indeed, struggles for a \$15 minimum wage in the United States have provoked threats from some employers to automate routine retail jobs, especially in fast food. Such threats, undergirded by the growing power and sophistication of artificial intelligence and robotics, raise the spectre that there may not be enough jobs (especially full-time jobs) to go around in the future, not to mention enough “good” jobs. Under these conditions it is not hard to envision an expansion of the ranks of independent contractors, as is now evident in the on-demand economy ([Schor, 2015](#)), where workers are typically unprotected by labor law, unemployment insurance, or health and safety regulations.

A more utopian scenario is [Beck's \(2000\)](#) imaginative vision of a “brave new world of work” that recognizes the inevitability of insecurity but seeks to turn it into a positive situation by breaking the bonds of “value imperialism” and redefining work in much broader and more inclusive terms than market-based employment alone (see also [Standing, 2011](#)). Beck believes that economic growth can no longer solve the problems of the “work society,” in which only wage labor garners status or respect. In its place there must evolve a “multi-activity society” in which people are able to shift their actions over the course of their lives among formal employment (albeit perhaps working fewer hours), parental labor, and civil labor (i.e., labor in the arts, culture, and politics, which helps the general welfare). The latter activity could be rewarded with “civic money” that is not a handout from the state or community but a return for engaging in socially valued activities. Each person would control her own time-capital that she can allocate to different activities over time. Beck advocates that paid work and civil labor should complement each other. He also calls for greater equality of housework and outside care work with artistic, cultural, and political civic labor in the voluntary sector, which he believes will help create a gender-neutral division of labor.

[Vosko \(2010\)](#) also recognizes the low chances that there will ever be a return to the standard employment relations that characterized the post-World War II period and thus suggests possible alternatives that include: a new gender contract that places greater value on caregiving; and a “beyond employment”

approach (see also [Supiot, 2001](#)) that decouples social protection from labor force status and adjusts types of work to diverse stages in the life cycle.

If work is to be redefined as going beyond paid market work, then there needs to be a decoupling of income and economic security from market work. This has given new life to the old notion – previously suggested by those on both sides of the political spectrum for many years – of a universal (or unconditional) basic income (UBI). The idea behind this policy is the provision of a universal, unconditional, government-funded “basic income” that would supplant the current assortment of means-tested, conditional welfare-state benefits that characterize many industrial countries. Everyone who is a legal resident of a country would thus receive regular, unconditional payments that would provide a basic level of economic security but not so high as to discourage people from participating in paid work in order to supplement their incomes in order to achieve a higher standard of living.

There are numerous obstacles to a UBI, ranging from cultural objections to allowing people to receive government benefits without “working” for them to economic doubts about the feasibility of providing income grants to all. Nevertheless, interest in the notion of a UBI continues to grow, as countries as diverse as Finland and Kenya have experimented with the idea. Drawing (ironically) on the free-market advocate Milton Friedman, [Guy Standing \(2011\)](#) insists that it is important to keep these progressive but currently utopian ideas alive until they become politically feasible.

Which of these scenarios, or combinations of them, are more likely to occur in particular countries remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that the centrality of work to human existence means that how social institutions respond to the growth of precarious work will have profound impacts on individuals, families, and societies. Hence, sociologists have great opportunities – and challenges – to understand the nature of the new employment relations that are being created and their implications for individual and societal well-being.

NOTES

1. An important exception here is the work of [Standing \(2011\)](#), who does speak about class formation but who makes little use of prior literature in this regard.

2. The extent to which regular part-time work can be considered to be precarious differs among countries: in some, part-time work can be fairly stable and associated with social and statutory protections akin to those enjoyed by regular, full-time workers and so are less likely to be precarious than are short-term and irregular jobs, for example.

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