

State of the Art

Institutions and the prevalence of nonstandard employment

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Abstract

How can we explain differences in nonstandard employment across countries? This article provides an overview of the multifaceted relationships between national-level institutions and the three dominant forms of nonstandard employment, that is, temporary, part-time and solo self-employment. The article highlights the great heterogeneity that exists among the different forms of nonstandard work, both within and between countries. Neither welfare regime approaches nor dualization and precarization theories sufficiently capture the ongoing diversification of employment relationships across countries. However, the institution-specific analyses reviewed here are also not without challenges: high-quality macro- and microlevel data are scarce; institutions interact in complex ways with their environment and exert distinct effects on different groups of workers; moreover, the demographic composition of the workforce and the role of cultural characteristics make it difficult for researchers to correctly specify such macro-to-micro links in their empirical work. In addition to outlining several avenues for future research, the article informs ongoing debates on the relevance of nonstandard work for the study of social inequality and research in comparative political analysis.

Key words: nonstandard work, institutions, international comparisons, labor markets

JEL Classifications: Z13 (economic sociology, economic anthropology, social and economic stratification), J21 (labor force and employment, size, and structure), J08 (labor economics policies)

1. Introduction

Nonstandard employment has increased in political and societal relevance over the past few decades. With the aim of giving employers more flexibility and integrating more people into the labor market, policy makers in many countries have reformed key labor market and welfare state institutions. They have deregulated labor laws, reduced unemployment benefits and increased government spending on childcare and the activation of the unemployed (see, e.g. [Viebrock and Clasen, 2009](#); [Heyes, 2011](#); [Rubery, 2011](#) for an overview). These policy

efforts have coincided with the rise of nonstandard work such as temporary employment, part-time work and solo self-employment (i.e. self-employment without any employees). It is therefore not surprising that the number of studies on the effects of labor market and welfare state institutions on the prevalence of nonstandard employment has constantly grown in recent years (e.g. Kalleberg, 2000, 2009; Giesecke, 2009; Leschke 2009; Kahn, 2012).

However, adequately theorizing, operationalizing and testing these relationships is not always an easy and straightforward thing to do. First, considerable heterogeneity exists both among the different forms of employment subsumed under terms such as atypical or nonstandard work and among individuals working in these arrangements. Second, this heterogeneity requires a differentiated approach to the institutional determinants of the various forms of nonstandard work. Third, severe methodological problems and a lack of adequate data often make it impossible to determine causality, account for institutional complexity and disentangle the interactions between institutions and demographic characteristics.

This article therefore provides a comprehensive overview of the variation in nonstandard employment that exists between countries and demographic groups and discusses the existing findings on the various institutional determinants. After elaborating on the main methodological challenges in existing studies, the article concludes with suggestions for future research on the destandardization of work.

2. Nonstandard work: empirical facts and narratives

2.1 The prevalence of and trends in nonstandard work

The multifaceted changes in the world of work in recent decades have involved enormous increases in labor force participation and a considerable diversification in forms of employment. While standard employment (i.e. permanent, full-time work) is still the dominant form of employment in most countries, nonstandard work (i.e. temporary employment, part-time work and solo self-employment) has grown in size and importance. This increasing ‘normalization’ of nonstandard employment is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the proportion of working-age individuals (15–64 years) in standard versus nonstandard employment arrangements in Europe, clustered by welfare regimes, along with the percentage point changes in both standard and nonstandard employment between the mid-1990s and 2011.

Figure 1 reveals several interesting facts. First, the prevalence of nonstandard employment greatly varies across countries—ranging from around 10% in Hungary to more than 40% in the Netherlands. Second, the relationship between changes in standard and nonstandard work is unclear. Standard employment decreased while nonstandard employment increased in Austria, Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Switzerland, the UK, Italy, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Poland. However, both standard and nonstandard work grew simultaneously in the remaining countries with the exception of Hungary and Romania. Third, there is remarkable variation in the prevalence of nonstandard work within welfare state regimes. While the proportion of the total working age population in nonstandard work is similar within the Scandinavian and Southern European country clusters, the prevalence of nonstandard employment greatly varies within the Conservative/Continental European and Eastern European/postcommunist country clusters. In the Continental European cluster—that is, Austria, Belgium, Germany, and France—nonstandard work ranges between 20% and 30%, whereas in the Netherlands it is well above 40%. The

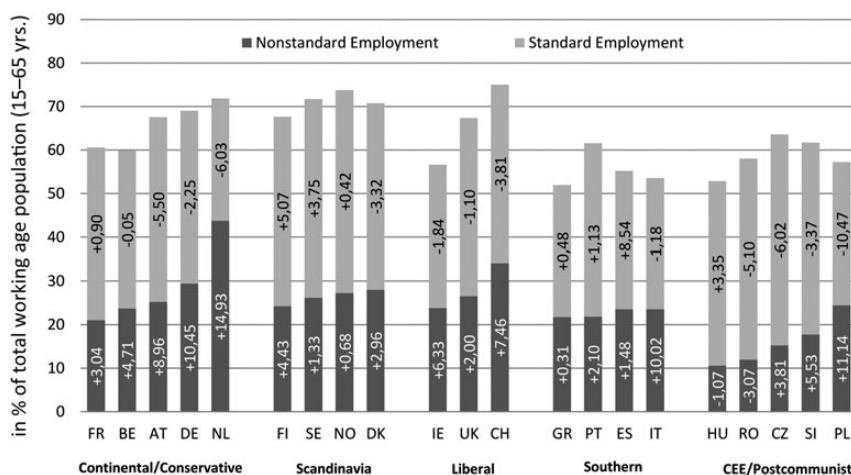


Figure 1. Standard vs. nonstandard employment (1996/1997–2011): prevalence and change over time within and across welfare state regimes. *Notes:* Figure 1 is based on data from the European Labor Force Survey (EU LFS; authors’ calculations). The sample includes individuals of working age, that is, those aged between 15 and 64 years. Definitions of standard and nonstandard employment are based on Allmendinger et al. (2013). Unemployed individuals, economically inactive individuals and individuals in vocational training are not considered employed. Individuals living in collective living quarters (monasteries/convents, hospitals, etc.) and those doing compulsory military service are excluded from the baseline sample.

differences within the postcommunist country cluster are also considerable, ranging from 10% in Hungary to almost 25% in Poland.

In addition to the great heterogeneity in the size of nonstandard employment that exists both across countries and within welfare state regimes, Figure 2 also shows important cross-country differences with regard to the dominant subform of nonstandard employment. While solo self-employment is the dominant form of nonstandard work in Greece, Romania, Italy, and the Czech Republic, temporary employment is common in Poland, Portugal, Spain, Finland, Hungary, and Slovenia (all data for 2011). However, part-time employment is the dominant form of nonstandard work in most countries (Allmendinger et al., 2013). Again, the ‘typical’ regime clusters do not capture these cross-country variations (e.g. Esping-Andersen, 1990; Esping-Andersen and Regini, 2000). While temporary employment is the dominant form of nonstandard work in Spain and Portugal, solo self-employment is the most common form in Greece, which is another member of the Southern regime cluster. Likewise, part-time work dominates in Denmark, Norway and Sweden, but in Finland, the fourth member of the Scandinavian, Social-Democratic regime type, temporary work prevails.

2.2 Narratives and explanations

To explain such cross-country variations and trends over time, scholars have predominantly drawn on two narratives: precariousness and dualization. Although labor markets in the past were also characterized by cleavages between workers with ‘good’ and ‘bad’ jobs



Figure 2. Prevalence of subforms of nonstandard employment (2011) within and across welfare state regimes. *Notes:* Figure 2 is based on data from the the European Labor Force Survey (EU LFS; authors' calculations). The sample includes individuals of working age, that is, those aged between 15 and 64 years. Definitions of temporary, part-time and solo self-employment are based on Allmendinger *et al.* (2013). Unemployed individuals, economically inactive individuals and individuals in vocational training are not considered employed. Individuals living in collective living quarters (monasteries/convents, hospitals, etc.) and those doing compulsory military service are excluded from the baseline sample.

(e.g. Piore and Doeringer, 1971; Reich *et al.*, 1973; Kalleberg and Sørensen, 1979), work has become increasingly insecure for many individuals, and inequalities in unemployment risks, wages and social protection between labor market insiders and outsiders have considerably grown in recent decades (e.g. Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989; Rueda, 2007; Kalleberg, 2011; Standing, 2011; Emmenegger *et al.*, 2012).

This trend is problematic enough in itself, but its consequences are exacerbated because employment in second-tier jobs, a category to which many nonstandard work arrangements belong, is unevenly distributed between different demographic groups (see, e.g. Gash and McGinnity, 2007 for temporary employment; OECD 2010b for part-time work; Schulze-Buschhoff and Protsch, 2008 for solo self-employed workers). Temporary employment is a youth phenomenon; throughout Europe a greater proportion of young than old people work on temporary contracts (Allmendinger *et al.*, 2013). Part-time work, by contrast, is a highly gendered phenomenon. In Europe, even in the countries with the lowest proportions of part-time work, such as Romania or the Czech Republic (1.4% and 2.9% of the working age population), women are two to four times more likely to work part-time than men. A similar pattern—though with reversed gender ratios—can be observed for solo self-employment. With the exception of Switzerland, Portugal, the Netherlands and Austria, men are at least twice as likely to be solo self-employed as are women (Allmendinger *et al.*, 2013). In addition, the different forms of nonstandard employment are increasingly occurring in combination. For example, many young workers in the Netherlands (around 19%), Sweden

(around 12%), and Spain and Finland (around 6% in both countries) work part-time on temporary contracts (*ibid.*).

To describe these developments and their labor market consequences, some scholars have referred to an increase in overall precariousness (e.g. Bourdieu, 1998; Fevre, 2007; Kalleberg, 2011; Standing, 2011 for a critique), whereas others have argued that a process of dualization is underway among both jobs and workers (e.g. Davidsson and Naczyk, 2009). Both—admittedly closely related—approaches are useful for studying institutional explanations for country-level differences in the prevalence and development of nonstandard employment. Approaches that refer to increasing precariousness capture the insecurity associated with nonstandard work arrangements, whereas dualization theories provide insights into the compositional effects of the growing divides between individuals in regular and nonstandard jobs (e.g. men versus women, young versus old, low-skilled versus high-skilled).

Precarious jobs are typically described as those that lack security in one or even several dimensions: precarious workers have no control over the duration of their jobs, they have poor income and advancement prospects and they are insufficiently covered by labor laws, collective bargaining arrangements and welfare state benefits (Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989; Standing, 2011). Scholars have argued that work has become more precarious due to rising economic competition and the associated deregulation of labor markets, the dismantling of social protection arrangements and the decline in the power of unions (Bourdieu, 1998; Kalleberg, 2011; Standing, 2011; Thelen, 2014). Although permanent, full-time employment can also be associated with low wages and poor job security (e.g. Bernhardt and Krause, 2014 for Germany, Cranford and Vosko, 2006 for Canada), the analysis of nonstandard work has been a central concern of this literature. This focus is reflected in the use of expressions such as ‘precarious’ and ‘insecure’ work, capturing the instability and low remuneration of temporary, part-time and solo self-employment (e.g. Tucker, 2003; Nienhüser, 2005; Standing, 2011). Part-time work, particularly part-time work with few hours worked over an extended period of time, does not ensure sufficient wages and pension incomes. Temporary work and solo self-employment may also be associated with insufficient income but go hand-in-hand with a lack of job permanency, which has major consequences for individuals’ subjective well-being and affects their family planning and positions on the housing market (e.g. Kalleberg, 2009, 2011; Standing, 2011).

Studies on dualization, by contrast, have stressed the segmented character of labor markets. While the early literature on dualization focused on how employment regulations and collective bargaining created a duality between employed workers as insiders and unemployed workers as outsiders, recent contributions have also considered atypical workers to be labor market outsiders (see, e.g. Davidsson and Naczyk, 2009 for an overview; Eichhorst and Marx, 2012; Häusermann and Schwander, 2012). Terms such as ‘flexible’ and ‘contingent’ work reflect the fact for which, in order to provide employers with flexibility, employees at the margins are deprived of organizational benefits and do not necessarily qualify for health care or other social policy programs (such as the German ‘minijobbers’ or part-time workers in the USA), while the core workforce is provided with job security and the full range of benefits (for an overview on the terminology see Kalleberg, 2000, p. 341). Labor market dualization can hence be the result of an explicit intention on the part of governments, unions and organizations to protect the core workforce, that is, those individuals who constitute an important pillar of electoral and organizational success. Moreover, it can also be the consequence of seemingly neutral policies that have distinct

(and sometimes even unintended) impacts on different demographic groups (Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Estevez-Abe, 2005, 2006; Rueda 2005; DiPrete *et al.*, 2006; Polavieja 2006; Palier and Thelen 2010; Eichhorst and Marx, 2011; Fleckenstein *et al.* 2011; Emmenegger *et al.*, 2012).

In summary, a considerable and apparently growing proportion of individuals today work in nonstandard employment. To capture important differences between countries and demographic groups, researchers need to distinguish between the three subforms of nonstandard employment—temporary work, part-time employment and solo self-employment—and take note of their co-occurrence. Given the great heterogeneity within nonstandard employment and welfare state regimes, the broad frameworks and narratives that are used to explain general labor market trends—including theories of precariousness and dualization—need to be supplemented by institution-specific analyses.

3. Subforms of nonstandard employment

3.1 Temporary employment

Temporary employment refers to contracts and jobs of limited duration, that is, fixed-term contracts, temporary agency work, seasonal jobs or training contracts¹ (Eurostat Statistics, OECD database). The risks and uncertainties associated with temporary employment—poor job security, unstable and low income or exclusion from organizational benefits—constitute major disamenities for all workers, but they are particularly severe for workers planning to have a family or seeking to buy a home (e.g. Kalleberg, 2000; Tucker, 2003; Nienhüser, 2005). Temporary contracts are most common in the construction and service-sector industries, including in the hospitality, wholesale and retail sectors, and in the public services (Cebrián *et al.*, 2003; Fagan and Ward, 2003; Polavieja, 2006; Baranowska and Gebel, 2010). The prevalence of temporary employment fluctuates across economic cycles (e.g. Holmlund and Storrie, 2002 for Sweden; OECD, 2012), particularly in countries where workers on permanent contracts have high levels of dismissal protection (Bentolila and Bertola, 1990; Polavieja, 2006) and temporary workers can be employed without extensive restrictions (Kahn, 2010).

The main institutional determinants used to explain the prevalence of temporary employment are the regulations on hiring temporary workers and firing permanent workers. In theory, high levels of dismissal protection for regular workers and low entrance barriers for temporary workers should be associated with a large proportion of the workforce being hired on a temporary basis. Legal regulations regarding dismissal procedures, notice periods, and severance payments provide permanent workers with job security and thereby make lay-offs costly for employers; they have thus been criticized for their potentially detrimental effects on hirings (Lazear, 1990; Nickell, 1997; Siebert, 1997; Lindbeck and Snower, 2001; OECD, 2004). In response, policy makers in many countries have loosened restrictions on hiring temporary workers but retained the protections for permanent employees (Cahuc and Postel-Vinay, 2002; Giesecke and Groß, 2003; DiPrete *et al.* 2006; Barbieri, 2009). These

1 Temporary employment associated with vocational training contracts, which only exist in a few countries (such as Germany, Denmark or Switzerland), substantially differs in its character from other types of temporary work and is therefore not considered in this overview.

reforms aimed to provide employers with the flexibility to cope with fluctuating business demands and help labor market outsiders get jobs.

The empirical evidence on the impact of employment regulation is mixed, depending on whether the studies in question focus on partial deregulation or employment protection as a whole. Studies on partial deregulation provide unequivocal evidence: Research based on both aggregated data (OECD, 2004) and cross-national, longitudinal data (Kahn, 2010; Gebel and Giesecke, 2011) has shown that temporary employment increased in the countries that relaxed restrictions on the use of temporary contracts. In addition, analyses of Italian panel data have shown that although loosening the restrictions on hiring temporary workers increased the likelihood of holding a temporary contract, particularly for low-skilled workers, it did not increase employment overall (Boeri and Garibaldi, 2007; Barbieri and Scherer, 2009). Partial deregulation has thus resulted in the substitution of permanent with temporary contracts rather than the intended inclusion of disadvantaged labor market groups; it may even have increased the divide between labor market insiders and outsiders (Eichhorst and Marx, 2012). However, the evidence from empirical research on employment protection overall is inconclusive. Studies based on aggregated data found that the proportion of temporary workers tends to be higher in countries where permanent employment is more strictly regulated (Grubb and Wells, 1993; OECD, 2004; Booth *et al.*, 2002; Polavieja, 2006; Hevenstone, 2010), whereas studies that combined individual and country-level data to analyze the risk of temporary contracts among different labor market groups could not consistently confirm this relationship (see Kahn, 2007; Baranowska and Gebel, 2010).

Unions and collective bargaining systems are also likely to directly or indirectly affect cross-country differences in temporary employment (e.g. Eichhorst and Marx, 2012, p. 85). On the one hand, unions may oppose flexibilization because the ongoing spread of nonstandard employment weakens their negotiation power (see, e.g. Eichhorst and Marx, 2011 for Germany). On the other hand, unions may support flexibilization at the margins in order to preserve the core workforce's job security (Rubery, 1989; Palier and Thelen, 2010). In addition, unions can also indirectly influence the prevalence of temporary work. If unions represent the interests of permanent workers (i.e. labor market insiders) rather than the interests of new entrants or those having difficulties finding a job (i.e. outsiders), and if the negotiated wage level exceeds what firms would offer workers with little experience and low skills, labor market outsiders may be less likely to be hired on a permanent contract (Lindbeck and Snower, 1988). While a number of studies have indeed shown that temporary contracts are more prevalent in countries with higher union densities or higher collective bargaining coverage, particularly with regard to young and low-skilled workers (see Kahn, 2007; Baranowska and Gebel, 2010; Hevenstone, 2010), the argument that unions generally pursue insiders' interests is nonetheless deficient.

A more refined argument refers to the flexibility of a country's wage structure and thus its collective bargaining system (Polavieja, 2006; Baccaro and Simoni, 2007). The centralization and coordination of collective bargaining systems influence the degree to which unions represent different groups of workers and industries. Based on macrolevel data, Polavieja (2006) found that temporary employment is less prevalent in countries where bargaining is either highly decentralized and uncoordinated (as is the case in the USA) or highly coordinated and centralized (such as in Ireland; see also Baccaro and Simoni, 2007). Both constellations appear to ensure wage flexibility and therefore limit the number of temporary workers. By contrast, in countries where collective bargaining agreements are made at industry level

(e.g. in Germany today or in Sweden during the mid-1990s), unions may find it more difficult to identify wage arrangements that disadvantage labor market outsiders than in centralized systems and to correct imbalances than in decentralized systems. This in turn may explain the higher prevalence of temporary employment in these countries (Calmfors, 1993; OECD, 1997, ch. 3; Polavieja, 2003, 2006; Traxler, 2003 for information on countries' bargaining systems).

Statutory minimum wage regulations are another important institution to consider, as they provide incentives for employers to hire workers on temporary rather than permanent contracts. For example, based on her qualitative comparative analysis, Lee (2013a,b) found that nonstandard employment (defined as temporary and part-time work) is more prevalent in countries that are characterized by a combination of low or no minimum wages on the one hand and weak regulation on hiring temporary workers or stringent regulation on firing permanent workers on the other. She argued that if temporary workers can easily be appointed, low or no minimum wages allow firms to hire nonstandard workers at lower costs than standard workers. This complementary relationship may particularly apply to workers in low-skilled jobs, which are more strongly affected by downward wage inflexibility (see Eichhorst and Marx, 2012).

Nonwage labor costs, such as unemployment insurance contributions, may also affect the prevalence of temporary employment. Unemployment insurance may provide incentives for employers to use temporary contracts as a cost saving strategy and may make it easier for workers to accept insecure jobs (Kahn, 2010; see Hevenstone, 2010 for supportive evidence based on macrolevel data). The effects of unemployment benefits and partial deregulation may even reinforce each other, as generous unemployment insurance subsidizes employers' strategies of substituting permanent with temporary contracts (Kahn, 2010). However, the empirical evidence on this relationship is still scarce and mixed (see Lee, 2013a,b for her configurational analyses).

3.2 Part-time employment

In international comparisons, part-time work is usually defined as employment with a regular working time of less than 30 hours per week (OECD, 2010b, p. 252). To take country-specific differences into account, researchers have used different cutoffs (Kalleberg, 2000, p. 343) or identified part-time workers based on self-ascription (e.g. van Bastelaer *et al.*, 1997). There are reasons to view part-time work as a mixed blessing. On the one hand, part-time employment allows employees to combine work with family obligations, education and community activities and facilitates transitions into retirement. On the other hand, it may also be the second-best option for many employees. Employers may decide to only offer part-time jobs to increase internal flexibility or because they cannot afford to offer full-time positions (Tilly, 1996). It is therefore not surprising that the service sector has the highest prevalence of part-time work, because these industries—such as health- and eldercare, retail, finance, hospitality, insurance and real-estate sectors (Appelbaum, 1992; Houseman, 1995; Nardone, 1995; Pitts, 1998; Cassirer, 2003; Buddelmeyer *et al.*, 2005; Anxo *et al.*, 2011, p. 1059)—may allow for and even require flexible working times to meet customers' needs (Sightler and Adams, 1999). As is the case for temporary employment, part-time work also fluctuates across economic cycles. In economic upturns, the increased need for labor may result in the activation of a 'reserve army' of workers. Inactive workers may take on part-time jobs and part-time workers may switch into full-time jobs (e.g. Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997, p. 8;

Hevenstone, 2010). During economic downturns, governments and organizations may implement policies to reduce individuals' working time to avoid downsizing and reduce costs ('short-time worker programs'; see Vroman and Brusentsev, 2009 for an overview; Brenke *et al.*, 2011 for Germany; Shelton, 2011 for the USA; Calavrezo *et al.*, 2010 for France; van Audenrode, 1994).

Working time regulations and the legal provisions regarding the use and rights of part-time workers are important explanations for the prevalence of part-time work. Legal regulations on working hours may influence the prevalence of part-time work, either because they reduce the statutory working hours for full-time employment and hence lower the threshold of what is considered to be part-time work or because they give employees the right to reduce their weekly working hours (Rubery *et al.*, 1998; Sheridan, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Ibanez, 2011). In France, for example, the introduction of the 35-hour week led to an equalization of men's and women's working hours and to a reduction in part-time work (Fagnani and Letablier, 2006). Moreover, many European countries have established legal guarantees to ensure part-time workers do not encounter organizational disadvantages in the form of reduced pay, vacation time or opportunities to participate in training (European Working Time Directive from 2001; ILO Part-Time Work Convention from 1994), which makes part-time employment more attractive for employees and hence potentially contributes to increases in (voluntary) part-time work. Likewise, when part-time employees are excluded from access to organizational fringe benefits or public social insurance systems—as is the case for marginal part-time employees in Germany ('Minijobber') and for workers not covered under the provisions of the Federal Family and Medical Leave Act in the USA—(involuntary) part-time work may also increase as it becomes more attractive for employers (e.g. Houseman, 1995; Fagan and O'Reilly, 1998; Rubery *et al.*, 1998; Smith *et al.*, 1998; Fagan and Ward, 2003; Hoffmann and Walwei, 2003; Steiner and Wrohlich, 2005; Buddelmeyer *et al.*, 2008).

Income taxation systems also determine the prevalence of part-time work (Dingeldey, 2001; Rubery, 2001, p. 153; Jaumotte, 2004; Dearing *et al.*, 2007; OECD, 2010b; Steiber and Haas, 2012). In countries with joint filing systems for income taxes, married individuals earning less than their partners—usually women—have a de facto disincentive to working full-time. Dearing *et al.* (2007), for example, showed that differences in full-time employment among mothers between Austria and Germany can be attributed to differences in the countries' taxation systems. In Austria, everyone is taxed individually, whereas in Germany, the income of married couples is split and only taxed afterward, which leads to a lower marginal tax rate for the primary earner and a higher marginal tax rate for the secondary earner. Houseman and Osawa (1998) have made similar arguments for Japan and the USA.

The availability of high-quality and affordable childcare is another determinant of the prevalence of part-time work (e.g. Daune-Richard, 1998; OECD, 2010b). Affordable and high-quality childcare is positively associated with mothers' employment rates and working hours; when childcare is scarce, expensive or of low quality, mothers tend not to work at all or only work part-time (e.g. Del Boca and Vuri, 2007; Breunig *et al.*, 2011; Haan and Wrohlich, 2011; Hennig *et al.*, 2012, on the perceived opportunities to combine work and family duties). Although few studies have directly examined the relationship between the availability of affordable childcare and the prevalence of part-time work, studies on women's working hours (Fagan, 2002) and women's labor force participation (Pettit and Hook, 2005; Uunk *et al.*, 2005; Del Boca *et al.*, 2009; Steiber and Haas, 2009) have indirectly

assessed the importance of childcare. The positive relationship between affordable childcare and mothers' working hours seems to be robust across countries (e.g. [Andrén, 2003](#) for Sweden; [Kornstad and Thoresen, 2007](#) for Norway; [Wrohlich, 2006](#) for Germany; [Powell, 1997](#) for Canada; [Del Boca and Vuri, 2007](#) for Italy; [Gong *et al.*, 2010](#) for Australia).

Union strength is another determinant of part-time work, particularly the degree to which trade unions or other collective bargaining institutions represent part-time workers and influence the enactment and enforcement of the relevant laws. The theoretical argument underlying this relationship goes as follows: unions that pursue an inclusive strategy have an interest in minimizing the proportion of workers with fewer statutory rights in comparison to the core workforce. They therefore seek to either limit the number of part-time workers or increase the quality of part-time work. The empirical research on unions and part-time work, however, is relatively scarce. [Rasmussen *et al.* \(2004\)](#) used aggregated OECD data on Denmark, the Netherlands and New Zealand to argue that unions can influence the number of part-time employees either through collective bargaining arrangements or through bi-/tripartite arrangements. [Hevenstone \(2010\)](#) conducted random regression analyses based on pooled aggregates of the OECD and Eurostat data and found that the proportion of individuals working part-time increases with decreasing numbers of strikes and lockouts.

3.3 Solo self-employment

Terms such as small or solo self-employment, own-account work and one-person businesses are all used to describe the work of freelancers and other self-employed people without employees. While self-employment provides individuals with autonomy and potentially also with high profits, solo self-employment tends to be associated with low income (e.g. [Smeaton, 2003](#)), insufficient health insurance and small old-age pensions ([Schulze-Buschhoff and Protsch, 2008](#)). This applies particularly to individuals whose self-employment is characterized by a substantial dependence on one particular client and who are therefore also called 'dependent self-employed' or 'quasi self-employed' (see [Kautonen *et al.*, 2010](#), p. 113). As the highest prevalence rates for self-employment are in the agricultural, wholesale and retail, trade and repair, hospitality sectors and among professionals ([OECD, 2000](#), pp. 159–160), it is reasonable to expect similar concentrations of the solo self-employed in these sectors (although this has not yet been documented). Economic growth can 'pull' individuals into starting a new business; poor economic conditions, by contrast, tend to 'push' individuals into self-employment, despite the fact that they would rather be in dependent employment (e.g. [Storey, 1991](#); [Meager, 1992](#); [Blanchflower, 2000](#); [Clark and Drinkwater, 2000](#); [Moore and Mueller, 2002](#); [Hughes, 2003](#); [Torrini, 2005](#)). This distinction between 'push' and 'pull' factors is also useful in classifying the contextual factors determining the extent and development of solo self-employment (e.g. [Gnyawali and Fogel, 1994](#); [Tolbert *et al.*, 2011](#)).

One major explanation for the prevalence of solo self-employment relates to the costs associated with starting and having a business. Low barriers to market entry, easy access to capital and high expected gains may 'pull' individuals into self-employment (for example, due to low tax loads, [Parker, 2004](#); [van Stel *et al.*, 2007](#); [Braunerhjelm and Henrekson, 2013](#)). Policy makers have therefore sought to encourage entrepreneurial activities by keeping administrative requirements for new businesses at a minimum, lowering taxes, investing in R&D and providing subsidies to small businesses and start-up incentives to the

unemployed or young people (Meager, 1996; OECD, 2010a; World Bank, 2013). While studies on the relationship between opportunity costs and starting a new business are scarce, some evaluations of start-up programs for the unemployed suggest that subsidies are successful at increasing self-employment (and decreasing unemployment) (Cueto and Mato, 2006; Baumgartner and Caliendo, 2008). Other subsidy programs, by contrast, such as those targeted toward young people, do not seem to have an effect (Meager *et al.*, 2003). However, both the costs of starting a business and the potential gains from having a business are likely to influence the prevalence of solo self-employment. Studies based on OECD panel data, for example, showed that self-employment is high when taxes are low and opportunities for tax evasion are high (Fölster, 2002; Torrini, 2005).

Welfare state provisions, such as unemployment benefits or childcare support, are important examples of ‘push factors’ fostering (solo) self-employment. In countries where the unemployed do not receive sufficient financial support following a layoff, starting a business is one viable option allowing people to ensure their material well-being (Storey, 1991; Staber and Bogenhold, 1993; Moore and Mueller, 2002; Malchow-Moller *et al.*, 2010). Likewise, in countries where childcare is scarce, self-employment, with its flexible work schedules, can be a way for parents, particularly mothers, to combine work and family duties (e.g. Budig, 2006; Wellington, 2006).

Another relevant macrolevel predictor for self-employment is employees’ protection against layoffs. Higher levels of dismissal protection make it more costly to give up a regular job and thereby indirectly increase the opportunity costs of starting a business for those already in employment. For labor market outsiders, that is, the unemployed or the inactive, starting a business may be the only way to join the labor market in countries with stringent dismissal protection. However, the results of empirical work on the subject are inconclusive. Torrini (2005), for example, did not find a statistically significant association between dismissal protection and self-employment when analyzing OECD and Eurostat data, whereas Robson (2003) and van Stel *et al.* (2007) found that more rigid labor market regulations are negatively associated with self-employment in their analyses of the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) data. Hevenstone (2010), who also used data from the OECD and Eurostat, by contrast, found a positive association. Based on their analysis of the ECHP data, Román *et al.* (2011a,b) showed that the strength of dismissal protection seems to have a positive effect on transitions from employment to ‘dependent self-employment’ (i.e. self-employment by workers contracted by their former employer to do the same tasks they previously did as an employee) but a negative effect on ‘real’ self-employment. Using cross-sectional data from the European and World Value Survey, Bauman and Brändle (2012) showed that in countries with strong dismissal protection, high-skilled workers are less likely to be self-employed than low-skilled workers.

In summary, the institutional determinants of temporary employment, part-time work and solo self-employment are numerous and interrelated as is shown in Table 1. To date, most studies on temporary employment (first column) have focused on the role of employment protection. However, in its explanations of the prevalence of temporary work, the existing research has insufficiently examined the complementary role of institutions. How do strong employment protections for regular workers, relaxed entry barriers for temporary workers, industry-level collective bargaining, and minimum wage regulations interact with each other? Do these institutions, as they exist in Germany, for example, reinforce each other, or are their effects additive? Based on the empirical evidence on the interplay between dismissal

Table 1. Empirical evidence on the institutional determinants of nonstandard employment

	Temporary employment	Part-time employment	(Solo) Self-employment
Legal regulations	<p><i>Level of dismissal protection for regular workers</i></p> <p>+ (Grubb and Wells, 1993; Booth <i>et al.</i>, 2002; OECD, 2004; Polavieja, 2006)</p> <p>+ for young workers, women, and immigrants (Kahn, 2007)</p> <p>~ either in general or for young people in particular (Baranowska and Gebel, 2010)</p> <p><i>Partial deregulation of employment protection</i></p> <p>+ in general and for low-skilled workers in particular (Boeri and Garibaldi, 2007; Barbieri and Scherer, 2009; Hevenstone, 2010; Kahn, 2010; Gebel and Giesecke, 2011)</p>	<p><i>Right to work part-time</i></p> <p>+ (Lee <i>et al.</i>, 2007; Ibanez, 2011)</p> <p><i>Equal rights for part-time workers ('good' part-time)</i></p> <p>+ (Rubery <i>et al.</i>, 1998; Fagan and Ward, 2003; Buddelmeyer <i>et al.</i>, 2008)</p> <p><i>Exclusion from social benefits ('bad' or marginal part-time)</i></p> <p>+ (Houseman, 1995; Fagan and O'Reilly, 1998; Houseman and Osawa, 1998; Smith <i>et al.</i>, 1998; Hoffmann and Walwei, 2003; Steiner and Wrohlich, 2005)</p> <p><i>Lowered statutory working-hour thresholds</i></p> <p>– (Fagnani and Letablier, 2006)</p>	<p><i>Level of dismissal protection for regular workers</i></p> <p>+ (Hevenstone, 2010)</p> <p>~ (Torrini, 2005)</p> <p>+ for transitions from dependent employment to dependent self-employment (Román <i>et al.</i>, 2011a,b)</p> <p>– in general and for high-skilled workers in particular (Robson, 2003; van Stel <i>et al.</i>, 2007; Román <i>et al.</i>, 2011a,b; Bauman and Brändle, 2012)</p> <p><i>Partial deregulation of employment protection</i></p> <p>– (Hevenstone, 2010)</p>
Industrial relations system	<p><i>Strikes and lockouts</i></p> <p>~ (Hevenstone, 2010)</p> <p><i>Union density</i></p> <p>+ (Kahn, 2007; Hevenstone, 2010)</p> <p><i>Collective bargaining coverage</i></p> <p>+ in general and for young workers in particular (Kahn, 2007; Baranowska and Gebel, 2010; Hevenstone, 2010)</p> <p><i>Centralization and Coordination</i></p> <p>U-shaped relationship (Polavieja, 2006)</p>	<p><i>Strikes and lockouts</i></p> <p>– (Hevenstone, 2010)</p>	<p><i>Strikes and lockouts</i></p> <p>~ (Hevenstone, 2010)</p> <p><i>Union density</i></p> <p>~ (Hevenstone, 2010)</p>

Continued

Table 1. *Continued*

	Temporary employment	Part-time employment	(Solo) Self-employment
Taxation system		<i>Joint income taxation systems</i> + (Dearing <i>et al.</i> , 2007; see Dingledey, 2001 for mixed evidence; Jaumotte, 2004; OECD, 2010 <i>b</i> ; Rubery, 2001, p. 153)	<i>Tax rates on starting a new business</i> – (Parker, 2004; van Stel <i>et al.</i> , 2007; Braunerhjelm and Henrekson, 2013) <i>Opportunities for tax evasion</i> + (Fölster, 2002; Torrini, 2005)
Social policies	<i>Unemployment benefits</i> + (Hevenstone, 2010)	<i>Unemployment benefits</i> ~ (Hevenstone, 2010)	<i>Unemployment benefits</i> ~ (Hevenstone, 2010) – (Storey, 1991; Staber and Bogenhold, 1993; Moore and Mueller, 2002; Malchow-Moller <i>et al.</i> , 2010) <i>Startup subsidies</i> + (Cueto and Mato, 2006; Baumgartner and Caliendo, 2008) ~ for young people (Meager <i>et al.</i> , 2003) <i>Availability of childcare</i> – (Budig, 2006; Wellington, 2006)
		<i>Availability of childcare</i> + for participation and working hours (Andrén, 2003; Wrohlich, 2006; Del Boca and Vuri, 2007; Kornstad and Thoresen, 2007) <i>Childcare costs</i> – for participation and working hours (Powell, 1997; Andrén, 2003; Wrohlich, 2006; Del Boca and Vuri, 2007; Gong <i>et al.</i> , 2010; OECD, 2010 <i>b</i>)	

Notes: + empirical evidence for positive association, – empirical evidence for negative association, ~ empirical evidence for nonsignificant association; empty cells indicate a lack of empirical evidence.

protection for permanent workers and union strength, such interactions are highly plausible, at least for particular demographic groups and industries (see [Bentolila and Dolado, 1994](#) for the general argument and [Baranowska and Gebel, 2010](#) and [Kahn, 2007](#) for the empirical evidence). Future research should therefore tackle such institutional complementarities and interactions.

Studies on part-time work (second column) have predominantly analyzed the role of working time regulations, income taxation systems, and the availability of childcare. This focus is not surprising given that part-time work is most prevalent among women with children. Few studies have thus far sought to disentangle individual and country-level factors to explain cross-national variations in part-time work (see [Gash, 2008b](#) as one of the few noteworthy exceptions). Is a high proportion of part-time workers due to the combination of joint income taxation, insufficient child care and income thresholds—which make part-time work a second-tier job—as is the case in Germany, or is it the result of a combination of equal rights legislation for part-time workers and a high minimum wage—which indicate high-quality jobs—as is the case in the Netherlands ([Hevenstone, 2010](#))? Policies and regulations may hence affect not only the prevalence of part-time work but also its nature. Researchers are therefore well advised to examine not only interactions between institutions but also how voluntary part-time work really is.

The third column summarizes the institutional determinants of solo self-employment. Despite its growing size and importance in many countries, few empirical studies on solo self-employment have been conducted to date ([Román *et al.*, 2011a,b](#); [van Stel *et al.*, 2012](#)). As the solo self-employed are often difficult to identify in comparative data sets and as sample sizes are often too small, it is therefore not surprising that complementary relationships between institutions have also not yet been examined. However, it is highly relevant for both researchers and practitioners to better understand the institutional configurations under which individuals start their business. Is the high proportion of solo self-employment in Greece, for example, due to the combined presence of stringent employment protection, a high statutory minimum wage, and the industry-level collective bargaining system (see also [Hevenstone, 2010](#))? What institutional configurations explain the high proportion of solo self-employment in Romania and Italy? Moreover, it is important to know about individuals' motives for starting their own business. Do people work as freelancers because they want to or because they have no other alternative employment opportunities? Given the scarcity of studies on the topic, more research on solo self-employment is needed to further advance the field.

Moreover, the summary table suggests several interrelations between the three types of nonstandard work and their institutional determinants, which have not yet been systematically analyzed in the existing research. For example, the institutions that promote temporary employment—the deregulation of temporary contracts and generous unemployment benefits—seem to inhibit self-employment. If the hiring of temporary workers is strictly limited, as is the case in Greece, employers tend to circumvent high employment protection by hiring freelancers (see also [Eichhorst and Marx, 2012](#)). Conversely, if the regulation on hiring temporary workers is weak, employers may circumvent high employment protection by hiring not only temporary workers but also part-time workers ([Buddelmeyer *et al.*, 2008](#)). Such complementarities and interactions may thus affect the degree to which different forms of nonstandard employment emerge as functional equivalents and should therefore be addressed in future studies.

4. Methodological challenges and open questions

The methodological approaches used in studying nonstandard employment have been quite diverse and have changed over time. The early research on atypical employment provided in-depth descriptions and analyses of institutions and national labor markets in individual countries (e.g. [Nardone, 1995](#)) or comparisons of a small number of countries and policy regimes (e.g. [Houseman, 1995](#); [Fagan and O'Reilly, 1998](#); [Houseman and Osawa, 1998](#); [Pfau-Effinger, 1998](#); [Smith *et al.*, 1998](#); [Dingeldey, 2001](#); [Fagan and Ward, 2003](#)). More recent research has adopted a greater range of approaches, including longitudinal analyses of individual or small numbers of countries (e.g. see [Barbieri, 2009](#) for an overview; [Sightler and Adams, 1999](#); [Cassirer, 2003](#); [Boeri and Garibaldi, 2007](#); [Gash, 2008b](#)), large-*N* comparisons based on aggregated data (e.g. [Robson, 2003](#); [Buddelmeyer *et al.*, 2005, 2008](#); [van Stel *et al.*, 2007](#); [Schulze-Buschhoff and Protsch, 2008](#); [Hevenstone, 2010](#); [Allmendinger *et al.*, 2013](#)), multilevel approaches (e.g. [Kahn, 2007](#); [Baranowska and Gebel, 2010](#); [Gebel and Giesecke, 2011](#); [Román *et al.*, 2011a](#)) and qualitative comparative and fuzzy-set analyses (e.g. [Lee, 2013a,b](#)). While each of these different methodological approaches has its specific advantages and limitations, they all share a set of four major challenges that need to be dealt with in future research.

The first problem for researchers from all disciplines and methodological fields relates to the scarcity of high-quality data. Suitable macrolevel indicators for different types of institutions are often unavailable. Researchers therefore have to exclude countries from outside the OECD and have to rely on less than ideal proxies (e.g. childcare enrollment rates rather than costs and availability of childcare, see [Keck *et al.*, 2009](#)). Moreover, most of the studies reviewed in this article used cross-sectional or aggregated data. They therefore cannot address the issue of causality, and their findings need to be interpreted with caution. At present, researchers have the choice of either comparing a few countries over a long period of time or a large set of countries at one single point in time (even longitudinal data such as the ECHP and the EU-SILC or the cross-national equivalent files for the American PSID and the German SOEP have limitations). Hence, to further advance the field we need to develop suitable macrolevel indicators and collect longitudinal data over a large number of countries and years.

Another challenge that will also need further investigation in future studies relates to the complex interplay between institutions as well as the interplay between institutions and other contextual factors, such as a country's economic situation or occupational and industry characteristics. Regulations and policies do not evolve independently but are actually highly correlated and contingent on each other (e.g. [Esping-Andersen, 1990](#); [Hall and Soskice, 2001](#); [Hicks and Kenworthy, 2003](#)). Their interplay and their interactions with contextual factors influence the emergence of different forms of nonstandard employment (as is also indicated in [Table 1](#)). In theory, there is a range of methodological approaches that can capture such institutional complementarities and interactions, but they are difficult to implement in practice and have therefore rarely been considered in empirical analyses. Some recent attempts to understand how interactions of macrolevel conditions shape the prevalence of nonstandard employment have used QCA and fuzzy-set analyses (e.g. [Lee, 2013a,b](#))—this may be one way to overcome this challenge. Another way of dealing with this issue is analyzing the interplay of a couple of wisely chosen institutions for subsets of workers, such as [Baranowska and Gebel \(2010\)](#) or [Kahn \(2007\)](#) have done for the interplay of unions and dismissal protection

for young and low-skilled workers; researchers should further pursue this approach in future studies.

Future research also needs to consider the differentiated effects institutions may have on demographic subgroups. Although studies on nonstandard employment have increasingly analyzed the distinct impact of institutions on specific population groups, such as the likelihood of young workers being in temporary jobs or women working part-time, they have neglected important differences that exist within these groups. For example, can we really assume that the same sets of institutions affect the prevalence of part-time work among high-skilled and low-skilled women and that these women choose part-time work for the same reasons? Studies on part-time work among men (e.g. [Sheridan, 2004](#)) or among occupational groups (e.g. [Hipp and Stuth, 2013](#) on managers) suggest that this is actually not the case. Similar concerns also apply to solo self-employment and temporary jobs. To advance the research on nonstandard employment and identify new dimensions of social inequality, it is therefore crucially important to examine how institutions influence the prevalence of nonstandard work across and within different demographic groups.

Demography also comes into play on a more general level: in cross-country comparisons researchers should take demographic group sizes into account. For instance, in times of labor shortage, employers are less likely to hire their workforce on part-time or temporary contracts, whereas an increase in labor supply may have the reverse effect. Likewise, the relative size of certain demographic groups and economic sectors is also relevant in correctly determining the influence of institutions on the prevalence of nonstandard work. For example, educational up-scaling can alter group-specific risks of working in nonstandard employment. When there is a general increase in educational levels, high-skilled workers may become more likely to be hired on temporary contracts. However, it is not easy to adequately incorporate compositional effects into statistical analyses; in particular, studies based on aggregated data cannot consider differences and changes in the size of the various demographic groups. In a multilevel framework, by contrast, this issue can be addressed by examining how much variance on the country level can be explained by the composition of the workforce (e.g. [Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2012](#)) as well as by allowing central covariates to differ in their effects. Researchers working on large-*N* comparisons should therefore consider using random slope models, adding group sizes as predictors on the country level or applying two-step regression approaches (see, e.g. [Gebel and Giesecke, 2011](#) for a concrete example; [Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2012](#) for a more technical discussion of the problem).

A final challenge for researchers seeking to understand the determinants of nonstandard employment relates to the role of cultural characteristics and ‘informal’ institutions (see [Tolbert and Zucker, 1996](#) for a comprehensive sociological approach). For example, some studies found that in countries where men tend to work long hours because they seek to adhere to the norm of the male breadwinner, women with children are more likely to work reduced hours or not work at all (e.g. [Blossfeld and Hakim, 1997](#); [Pfau-Effinger, 1998](#), pp. 177–98; [Raghuram *et al.*, 2001](#); [Fortin, 2005](#); [van der Lippe *et al.*, 2011](#)). This in turn influences individual attitudes toward and the societal acceptance of gender-specific working hours (e.g. [Tijdens, 2002](#); [Lee *et al.*, 2007](#), ch. 4; [Thébaud, 2010](#); [Hipp and Stuth, 2013](#); [Wielers and Raven, 2013](#)). Likewise, the push and pull factors influencing solo self-employment may also relate to cultural characteristics. Starting a new business is facilitated if self-employment is generally perceived to be a viable career option ([Weiss and Fershtman, 1998](#); [Tolbert and Hiatt, 2010](#)). Countries characterized by high levels of individualism, low levels of risk aversion,

low uncertainty avoidance and flat hierarchies also seem to favor entrepreneurial activities (Thomas and Mueller, 2000; Hofstede *et al.*, 2004), as does the prevalence of postmaterialist values and a country's postcommunist past (Freytag and Thurik, 2007; Uhlaner and Thurik, 2007). However, as the results of the various empirical studies on the subject are by no means unequivocal, future studies should develop and test indicators to capture cross-national differences in prevailing norms and their interplay with policies and regulations.

5. Summary and conclusion

In this article, we distinguished between temporary work, part-time employment and solo self-employment to review the literature on how labor market policies and welfare state institutions have contributed to the prevalence and rise of nonstandard employment. Institutional explanations of temporary employment have pointed to the relevance of partial deregulation—flexibilization at the margins while maintaining job protection for core workers—in explaining the increase of jobs with limited duration. The literature on part-time work has highlighted the great variation in institutional factors explaining cross-country differences, such as working time regulations, taxation systems or the availability of childcare. Studies on solo self-employment have drawn attention to the institutional push and pull factors, such as regulations on market entry, tax systems or start-up subsidies. Although enormous advances have been made in identifying the relevant institutional factors, robust evidence on how different configurations of institutions affect nonstandard employment is still scarce and the field faces substantial challenges. The future research agenda on nonstandard work should therefore center on the following questions and issues.

First, given that nonstandard employment has risen considerably in recent decades and is increasingly becoming 'standard' or 'typical' for certain demographic groups, we need a general debate on the adequacy of the existing terms and a collective effort by scholars to find new terminology. The existing alternatives—flexible, precarious or insecure work (see Kalleberg, 2000, p. 341 for an overview)—all fall short. Although it deviates from what is empirically and normatively considered to be 'normal,' nonstandard employment is not necessarily 'bad' or 'precarious' (Kalleberg *et al.*, 2000, p. 273). Temporary work can be a stepping stone to a permanent job (Gash, 2008a), much part-time work is stable employment (see Rodgers and Rodgers, 1989; Auer, 2006) and independent contractors often earn higher wages than regular workers (see Kalleberg, 2000). A semantic reorientation is therefore needed.

Second, as studies on nonstandard employment often lack a coherent theoretical framework, researchers should draw on the insights from different disciplines to further advance the field. Why do we observe distinct effects of institutions on different demographic groups? What are the political configurations under which social inequalities between the holders of nonstandard employment contracts and those in regular jobs emerge? How does such dualization in turn influence attitudes, preferences or voting behaviors and thus feed back into the political process (e.g. Rueda, 2005, 2007; Emmenegger 2009a,b; Hipp and Anderson, forthcoming for some initial evidence)? By further going down the road that has already been paved by recent work on liberalization (e.g. Thelen, 2014) and dualization (e.g. Emmenegger *et al.*, 2012), studies on nonstandard employment have the potential to advance ongoing debates in the study of social inequality and the comparative political economy research.

Third, future research should more systematically tackle the question of how precarious nonstandard employment actually is—particularly in comparison with standard employment.

Whether or not these jobs are precarious is contingent on a variety of factors, such as the actual earnings, the time spent in these jobs and the support by family members or welfare state provisions. These factors should be considered and empirically captured to better understand the nature of nonstandard work. Do nonstandard employment arrangements have the potential to integrate individuals into the labor market and reduce their dependency on their families and welfare state provisions, or are they second-tier jobs that do not ensure a decent living? To examine the precariousness and increasing labor market dualization associated with nonstandard work, scholars need data that provide comparative information on individuals and households for many countries and over time.

A fourth challenge relates to the adequate operationalization and measurement of both institutions and nonstandard employment. More and better data are required. Researchers need to be able to differentiate between the various subtypes of temporary employment, voluntary and involuntary part-time work and solo self-employment and dependent self-employment. Further advances in the development of high-quality and comparable macrolevel indicators are necessary to avoid measurement errors and derive valid policy implications. Ideally this would include indicators that distinguish between formal rules and informal practices and provide measures of entitlement to and coverage by specific programs and benefits. Moreover, we need cross-country comparative longitudinal data to test causal claims about the impact of institutions, track workers' transitions between different labor market statuses and examine the consequences of nonstandard employment in different institutional settings. To attain this goal, long-term and cross-country engagement in data development and collection will be necessary.

Fifth, while this article explicitly focused on institutional explanations for the prevalence of nonstandard employment, institutions also shape the long-term consequences of nonstandard employment. To what degree do institutions mitigate or reinforce inequalities with respect to job stability, unemployment risks and income security—in both the short and the long run? Comparative research on this topic, however, is still relatively sparse. Future research therefore needs to focus more systematically on how social protection systems and recent processes of policy dualization—along with their interactions with market regimes and family structures—affect the nature of nonstandard jobs. This is also where actors from the political sphere should come in: the empirical shift from standard to nonstandard work and the policy goal of integrating an ever-increasing number of individuals into the labor market has not yet been accompanied by new normative standards for social protection. In addition to examining the consequences of nonstandard work, we need a policy debate on how to minimize its negative effects for individuals and societies.

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