

## Between Insecurity and Collective Action: The Politics of Precarious Employment<sup>1</sup>

Version: 12.10.2025

### Winter semester 2025/26

Time: Mondays, 12-2 p.m. (c.t.)

Room: 23.03.01.61

Lecture period: 13.10.2025 – 02.02.2026; no sessions on 22. and 29.12.2025

Target group: Students of BA Sowi who have completed the basic modules as well as the methods and statistics module & PPE students with basic knowledge of political economy

**Johanna I. Plenter, M.A.**

[Johanna.Plenter@hhu.de](mailto:Johanna.Plenter@hhu.de)

Building 37.03, Room 00.16

Office hours by appointment by e-mail

**Content:** The 21st century world of work in almost all Western countries is characterised by many new developments and challenges – one of which is precarious and atypical employment. The seminar will comprehensively analyse the foundations of precarious work and shed light on its various manifestations and causal factors. Among other things, we will look at the links between precarious employment, gender dynamics and migration patterns in order to develop a deeper understanding of how these factors interact and contribute to social inequality. Another key aspect will be the policy response to these developments. How do precarious workers behave and what political preferences do they have, for example regarding the welfare state? How do political parties react to the increase in precarious employment? What role do the trade unions play?

The aim of the seminar is to understand why precarious employment has become such a widespread phenomenon in Western countries, what different dimensions it has and what political reactions it has provoked.

---

<sup>1</sup> Credits: I would like to thank professor Achim Goerres (University of Duisburg-Essen) for sharing his syllabus for the seminar "Political Decision-making, Political Leadership and Governance: Political Psychology from a Comparative Perspective" (WS 2022/23), and for allowing me to use some of his ideas.

#### Proof of participation (BN)

In order to obtain the participation certificate for this seminar, all students are expected to...

1. ...attend each seminar session prepared (see note below).
2. ...prepare the texts to be read and actively participate in the discussion in the seminar.

Good text preparation means that you take notes on the text, make a note of possible questions and ambiguities and summarise the central points and arguments. Active participation means that you speak at least once in each session and participate in group activities.

3. ...submit two thinkpieces (approx. 1,000 words each) on the texts of two sessions during the semester.

#### Final module examination (AP)

According to the requirements of your examination regulations either

1. a term paper of approx. 3,000-4,500 words (hard deadline: **31 March 2026, 23:59** (registration deadline corresponding to 31 January 2026; you are responsible for meeting these deadlines, I will not grant any exceptions), submission by e-mail only, or
2. an oral exam based on the entire seminar content (~20 minutes)

#### Note on participation in the seminar

Successful completion of this seminar requires that you actively participate in each seminar session. The seminar is largely based on discussion of the texts to be read – it is a highly discursive and active seminar in which we can learn a lot from each other. For this reason, it is essential that you participate and contribute on site. **If you are unable to attend a session for any reason, I expect you to notify me by email before the session.** This allows me to prepare for each session properly. Since I let you know whenever I have to cancel a session, it is only fair that you do the same!

#### Workload

- Participation in all 15 face-to-face sessions = 22.5 hours = 0.75 CP
- Meeting preparation (~1.5 hours/week) = 21 hours = 0.7 CP
- Writing two thinkpieces (~1,000 words each) = 16.5 hours = 0.55 CP

 **2 CP**

#### Learning objectives

At the end of this seminar, students will be able to...

1. ...read English-language scientific texts, recognise their main message and critically evaluate the argumentation/results.
2. ...summarise, trace and compare the historical development and current challenges of precarious employment in different countries.
3. ...name different forms and dimensions of precarious or atypical employment, critically assess their measurement and establish links between different dimensions.
4. ...present and evaluate the arguments of a scientific text in their own text.
5. ...write an empirical term paper in the field of political economy.

#### Thinkpieces

- The aim of the thinkpieces is to develop your ability to **critically reflect on arguments** and to **write academic texts**.
- The two thinkpieces are to be written **for the compulsory readings** (see seminar schedule below) of two sessions. It is up to you which sessions, i.e. texts, you write the two thinkpieces for. However, the thinkpieces **must not be on texts from the same seminar block** (see vertical column in the session plan below).
- For the first thinkpiece you receive feedback in a thinkpiece conference by the other students and me.
- Both thinkpieces have to be submitted during the semester. These are the **deadlines**:
  - **Thinkpiece 1: December 9th, 2025**
  - **Thinkpiece 2: February 6th, 2026**
  - I will not accept any late submissions. It is your responsibility to meet these deadlines.
- In the thinkpiece, you should **present and critically evaluate the argumentation or main thesis**. In the evaluation, you can and should also express your own reasoned opinion. Do you agree with the argument/thesis? Why (not)? What does (not) convinces you?
- For each thinkpiece, you must research and cite at least **5 additional academic sources** (usually journal articles or edited volumes) that support/deal with your evaluation or the argument of the text. To find these sources, I recommend that you use the Web of Science (only available in the university network or via VPN). Please also refer to my screenshot guide in the ILIAS course.
- Length: between 900 and 1,250 words; include the wordcount on the first page
- Language: Thinkpieces have to be written in English. Your English does not have to be flawless, but we have to be able to understand your argumentation.
- **Structure of the thinkpiece:**
  - Title page
    - Your name, matriculation number, e-mail address
    - Title and author(s)' of the text you are writing about
    - Wordcount of your text (only intro, main body, conclusion)
  - Introduction (approx. 250 words)
    - Why is your thinkpiece interesting?
    - Why did you choose this topic/text?
    - What is your central argument that you present in the thinkpiece?
  - Main body (approx. 500 words)
    - Summary of the argument/thesis of the text (approx. 250 words)
    - Your critical evaluation and opinion on this argument (approx. 250 words)
  - Conclusion (approx. 250 words):
    - What is the take-home message of your think piece?
    - Summary of your argument
  - Bibliography (does not count to the word limit)
  - Declaration of AI usage (see ILIAS for a template)

- **Notes on academic writing** (not only related to the thinkpieces):
  - (Scientific) writing is a craft that can be learnt and practised.
  - The more scientific texts you read, the better your writing will be.
  - Use subheadings and individual paragraphs. Each paragraph should only contain one argument and should be summarised in one sentence if possible.
  - Start by collecting keywords, ideas and arguments and then sorting them.
  - Write a first draft. Take a break before revising the text and do something completely different. Read the text (out loud). Revise the text into a second version.
  - Ideally, have a second person read and comment on your text. Revise your text to a final version with the help of the feedback.
- **Plagiarism:** I assume that you are honourable students who are here to learn and appreciate the ideas of others. If someone plagiarises in their thinkpiece/term paper, I am however required to punish with the full array of instruments (failing of class, report to the exam board etc.). This explicitly includes the undeclared use of AI, e.g. via ChatGPT.

## Meeting schedule

	<b>13.10. Introduction</b>
<b>Definition &amp; Development</b>	<b>20.10. Basics: Atypical and precarious employment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Shin, Kwang-Yeong; Kalleberg, Arne L.; Hewison, Kevin (2023): Precarious work: A global perspective. <i>Sociology Compass</i> 17(12): 1-14.</li></ul>
	<b>27.10. Development of atypical employment in Western countries</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Oesch, Daniel (2015): Occupational structure and labour market change in Western Europe since 1990. In: Beramendi, Pablo et al. (eds.): The Politics of Advanced Capitalism. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 112-132.</li></ul>
<b>Forms &amp; Measurement</b>	<b>03.11. Forms and measurement of atypical employment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Padrosa, Eva et al. (2021): Comparing Precarious Employment Across Countries: Measurement Invariance of the Employment Precariousness Scale for Europe (EPRES-E). <i>Social Indicators Research</i> 154: 893-915.</li></ul>
	<b>10.11. Precarious employment in the 21st century: The gig economy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Vallas, Steven; Schor, Juliet B. (2020): What Do Platforms Do: Understanding the Gig Economy. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 46: 273-294.</li></ul>
	<b>17.11. Academic Writing: Thinkpieces, Term Papers and AI usage</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>➤ Please bring all your questions regarding thinkpieces and term papers.</li></ul>

Dimensions of precarious employment	<p><b>24.11. Precarious employment and gender</b></p> <p>➤ Mhlana, Siviwe (2023): Precarious Work and the Gendered Individualisation of Risk in the South African Manufacturing Sector. <i>Global Labour Journal</i> 14(2): 165-184.</p> <p><b>01.12. Precarious employment and age</b></p> <p>➤ Kalleberg, Arne L. (2020): Labour Market Uncertainties and Youth Labor Force Experiences: Lessons Learned. <i>The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> 688(1): 258-270.</p> <p><b>08.12. Precarious employment and migration</b></p> <p>➤ Ryabov, Igor (2024): Employment, Precarious Employment, and Unemployment Among Female Immigrant Youth in the United States. <i>Journal of Immigrant &amp; Refugee Studies</i>. Epub ahead of print: 1-15.</p>
	<p><b>15.12. Thinkpiece Conference</b></p> <p>➤ Deadline for submission of thinkpiece 1: 09.12.2025</p> <p>➤ Students are allocated a certain number of thinkpieces to read before the session and to give feedback and mark at least one thinkpiece.</p>
Collective Action	<p><b>05.01. Collective action: Trade unions</b></p> <p>➤ Lewchuk, Wayne (2021): Collective bargaining in Canada in the age of precarious employment. <i>Labour &amp; Industry: a journal of the social and economic relations of work</i> 31(3): 189-203.</p>
	<p><b>12.01. Collective action: Parties</b></p> <p>➤ Plenter, Johanna I. (2025): The Gig Economy in Party Manifestos: Analysing Salience Across Europe. <i>Working Paper</i>.</p>
The politics of precarious employment	<p><b>19.01. Is precarious employment a problem for democracy?</b></p> <p>➤ Azzollini, Leo; Macmillan, Ross (2023): Are "bad" jobs bad for democracy? Precarious work and electoral participation in Europe. <i>Frontiers in Political Science</i> 5: 1-17.</p> <p><b>26.01. Policy preferences of precarious workers</b></p> <p>➤ Marx, Paul (2014): Labour market risks and political preferences: The case of temporary employment. <i>European Journal of Political Research</i> 53(1): 136-159.</p>
	<p><b>02.02. Closing session (Q&amp;A)</b></p>

Are you missing something?

→ If possible, I am happy to adjust my seminar schedule according to your wishes and preferences!