

RESEARCH SUMMARY

Opportunities for Women in the Gig Economy: The Growing Threats to Independent Work

New technologies and digital platforms have ushered in a rise of gig, freelance, contract, and other types of independent work. How do women choose *between* these work opportunities? And what makes some independent work more male or female dominated? Liya Palagashvili and Paola A. Suarez seek to answer those questions in “[Women as Independent Workers in the Gig Economy](#).”

THERE IS A LARGE VARIATION ACROSS DIFFERENT INDEPENDENT WORK OPPORTUNITIES

- Men constitute a greater share of the independent workforce than do women.
- Participation in independent work has grown since 2000, with significantly more growth among women than among men.
- There is a large variation across different independent work opportunities. For example, in 2014–2015, some 87 percent of independent workers on the Etsy platform were female, while 14 percent of workers on Uber’s platform were female.

WOMEN SELF-SELECT INTO INDEPENDENT WORK JOBS THAT HAVE GREATER TEMPORAL FLEXIBILITY

- Women favor jobs with greater independence and shorter work weeks (as they do in traditional employment).
- Women also self-select into independent jobs that provide more freedom to make decisions, offer less structure for the worker, and place greater importance on contact with others and establishment of interpersonal relationships.
- Such work extends opportunities to women who would otherwise be unable to take on employment.

TWO MAIN IMPLICATIONS EXIST FOR POLICY AND LABOR LAW

Many digital platforms are facing legal challenges for “misclassification” of employees as 1099 contractors. Some state policies (such as California’s Assembly Bill 5) are attempting to severely limit what kind of work can be classified as independent. National legislation, such as the Protecting the Right to Organize Act (PRO Act) introduced in Congress in February, attempts to reclassify independent workers as employees. Such developments could disproportionately affect women’s participation in independent work and the labor force more broadly.

Most labor regulations and most healthcare benefits, retirement plans, and other worker benefits apply to individuals who are legally defined as employees—but not to those who are defined as independent contractors. Further research on portable benefits may help meet this challenge posed by the growth in independent workers.