

# Labour Market Dualisation in France: Assessing different Explanatory Approaches

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## **Abstract**

The dualisation literature has identified the divide between standard and non-standard workers as a new form of inequality in European labour markets. However, there is no agreed upon explanation for this process. On a general level, the literature is divided between approaches stressing political or institutionalist explanations and those focussing on the rationale of employers to use non-standard workers. The article explores and disentangles explanations on both levels in a historical case study on the growth of fixed-term employment in France. The French case shows a clear divergence between formal institutional changes (which largely aimed at enforcing regulation) and actual labour market developments (growth of fixed-term employment). While partisanship, short-term socio-economic problem pressure and union involvement are found to be important explanatory variables for the French reform trajectory, actual employment and hiring practices seem to follow a logic which is rather independent of public policy. The paper therefore argues that the growth of fixed-term employment in France cannot be explained by deregulation, but should be seen as part of a broader change toward flexibility-oriented management styles. Finally, the article considers interactions between micro and political level. As it shows, the growth of fixed-term employment affected the politics of labour market reform in France by forcing policy makers to respond to the changing behaviour of firms and job seekers.

**Keywords:** France, temporary employment, labour market reforms, dualisation, institutional change