

The Changing Nature of Work and Our Troubled Democracy: Two Sides of the Same Coin?

Aspen Ideas Festival, Tuesday, June 28, 2022, 9:00-9:45 MDT

Both American jobs and American democracy are in crisis. Working people show up in political discourse in discussions of “the white working class” or “essential workers,” but our politics does little to improve their lot. Why has policymaking become divorced from the interests of working people, and what does this mean for our democracy? How does the nature of work influence how working people participate in civic and economic life? Can reimagining work put the nation on a better path?

This conversation features Maureen Conway (Vice President, The Aspen Institute; Executive Director, Economic Opportunities Program) and Shelly Steward (Director, Future of Work Initiative, Economic Opportunities Program, The Aspen Institute).



The Job Quality Crisis

- More than 70 percent of workers are in the service sector, 55 percent are in hourly jobs, and 44 percent earn low wages (BLS, Brookings).
- Women and workers of color are overrepresented in low-wage jobs, and are twice as likely to have minimum wage jobs (BLS).
- Private-sector union membership has fallen from 24.5 percent in 1973 to 6.3 percent today (BLS).



Democracy at Risk

- Since 1985, voter turnout has gradually declined around the world, averaging five percentage points (World Bank).
- Turnout in the US has been declining for much longer, from over 80 percent 150 years ago to around 60 percent today (Vital Statistics of American Politics).
- Currently, 64 percent of Americans believe democracy is in crisis and at risk of failing (NPR).

“Democracy has to deliver. People have to recognize that other people not only want to vote but they want to eat.”
–Madeleine K. Albright

About the Economic Opportunities Program

The Aspen Institute Economic Opportunities Program (EOP) advances strategies, policies, and ideas to help low- and moderate-income people thrive in a changing economy. We recognize that race, gender, and place intersect with and intensify the challenge of economic inequality and we address these dynamics by advancing an inclusive vision of economic justice. For over 25 years, EOP has focused on expanding individuals’ opportunities to connect to quality work, start businesses, and build economic stability that provides the freedom to pursue opportunity. Learn more: [as.pn/eop](https://aspeninstitute.org/eop)

