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# The Future of ER as an Academic Field

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# Is ER relevant?

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- Decreasing union density and collective bargaining coverage in developed countries (not necessarily in developing countries)
- Growing doubts that ER is relevant to the changing employment environment
- Is ER at a crossroads?
- This presentation examined how ER researchers have responded and discussed implications for the field

# Three views about the future of ER as an academic field

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1. Wait for unions and collective bargaining to return
  - Maintain the status quo
  - Union-focused research revitalized in repeated historical cycles
2. Back to the Original Industrial Relations (OIR)
  - Widen research focus to restore the original IR
  - OIR includes all aspects of employment relations – private and public, union and non-union, and formal and informal
3. Embrace the new world
  - Turn attention to newly emerging labor problems
  - Artificial intelligence, 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, emotional labor, immigrant workers, contingent workers, etc.

# Empirical analyses and results

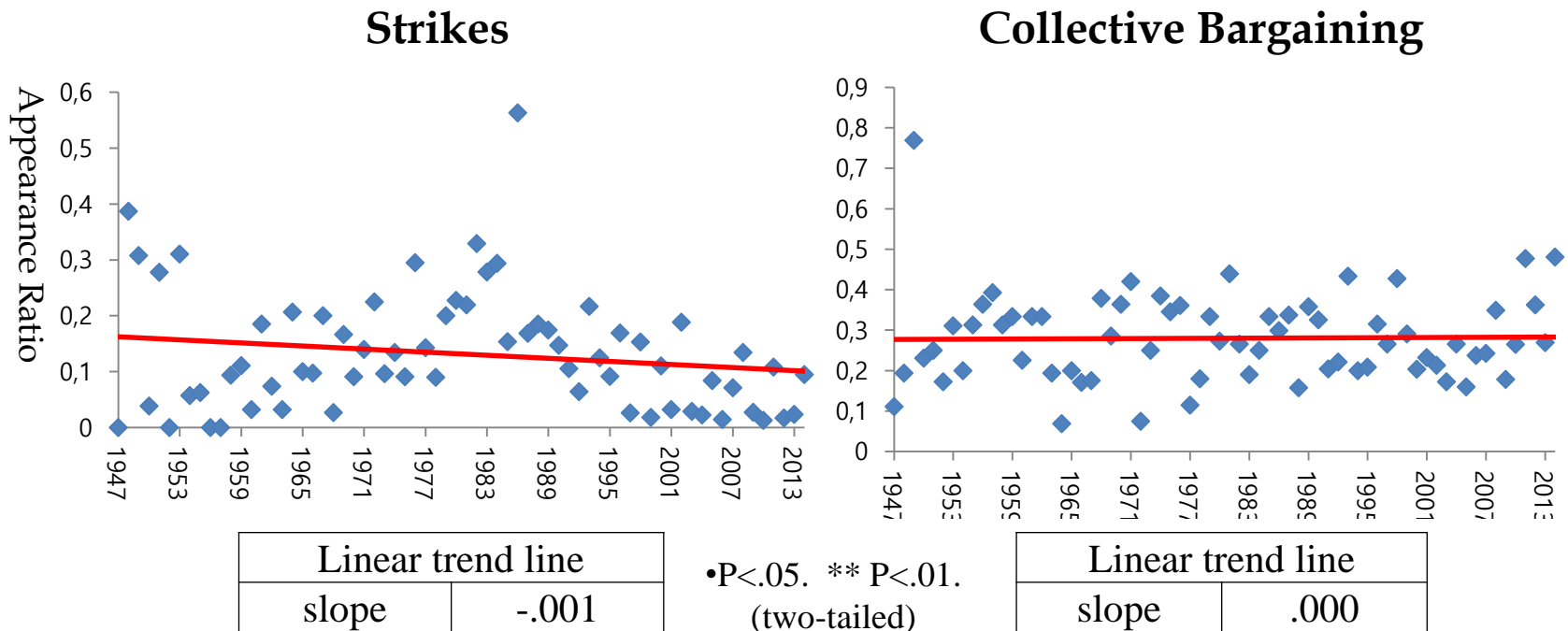
- Research methods to examine how ER research accommodates reality<sup>1</sup>

<b>Object of analysis (period)</b>	Analyzed all abstracts in 5 major ER journals  1) <i>British Journal of Industrial Relations</i> (1990-2014) 2) <i>Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society</i> (1987-2014) 3) <i>Industrial &amp; Labor Relations Review</i> (1947-2014) 4) <i>Journal of Industrial Relations</i> (1975-2014) 5) <i>Relations industrielles / Industrial Relations</i> (1964-2014) * From the dates when each journal started to provide abstracts
<b>Measure</b>	Appearance Ratio = $\frac{\text{The number of keyword appearances in the 5 journals within a year}}{\text{The number of total abstracts in the 5 journals within a year}}$

<sup>1</sup> Kim, Ki-Jung. 2015. "Trends of IR Research in Four Western Countries: Does Research Adapt to the Changing World of Work?", Master's Thesis, Korea University Business School.

# Empirical analyses and results

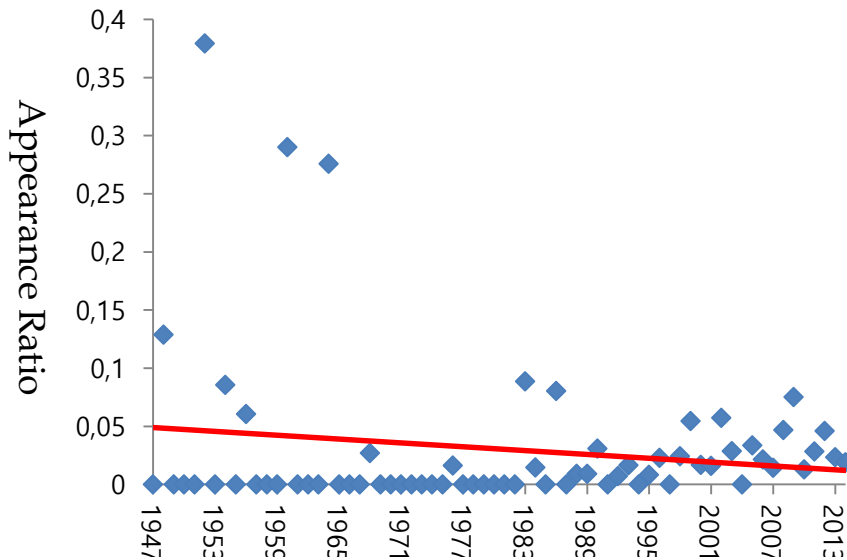
- Traditional topics have not withered away, but slightly declined over time



Blue dots = frequency; Red line = linear trend

# Empirical analyses and results

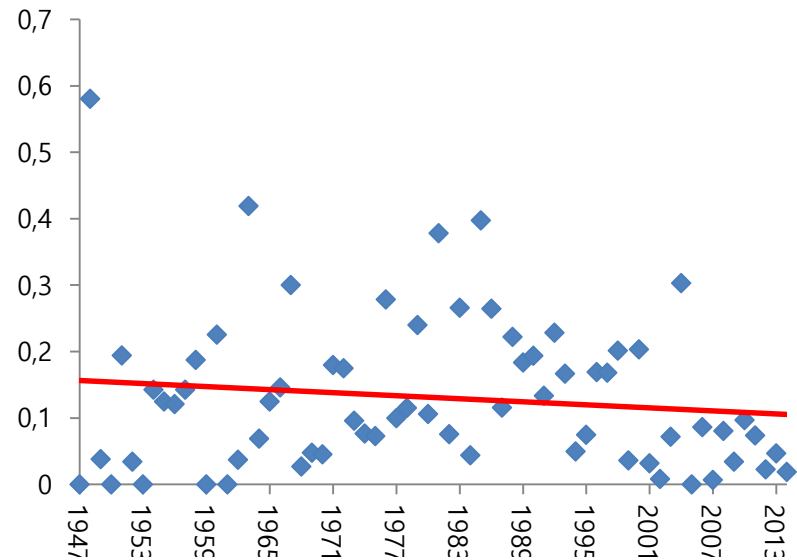
## Mediation



Linear trend line	
slope	-.001

•P<.05. \*\* P<.01.  
(two-tailed)

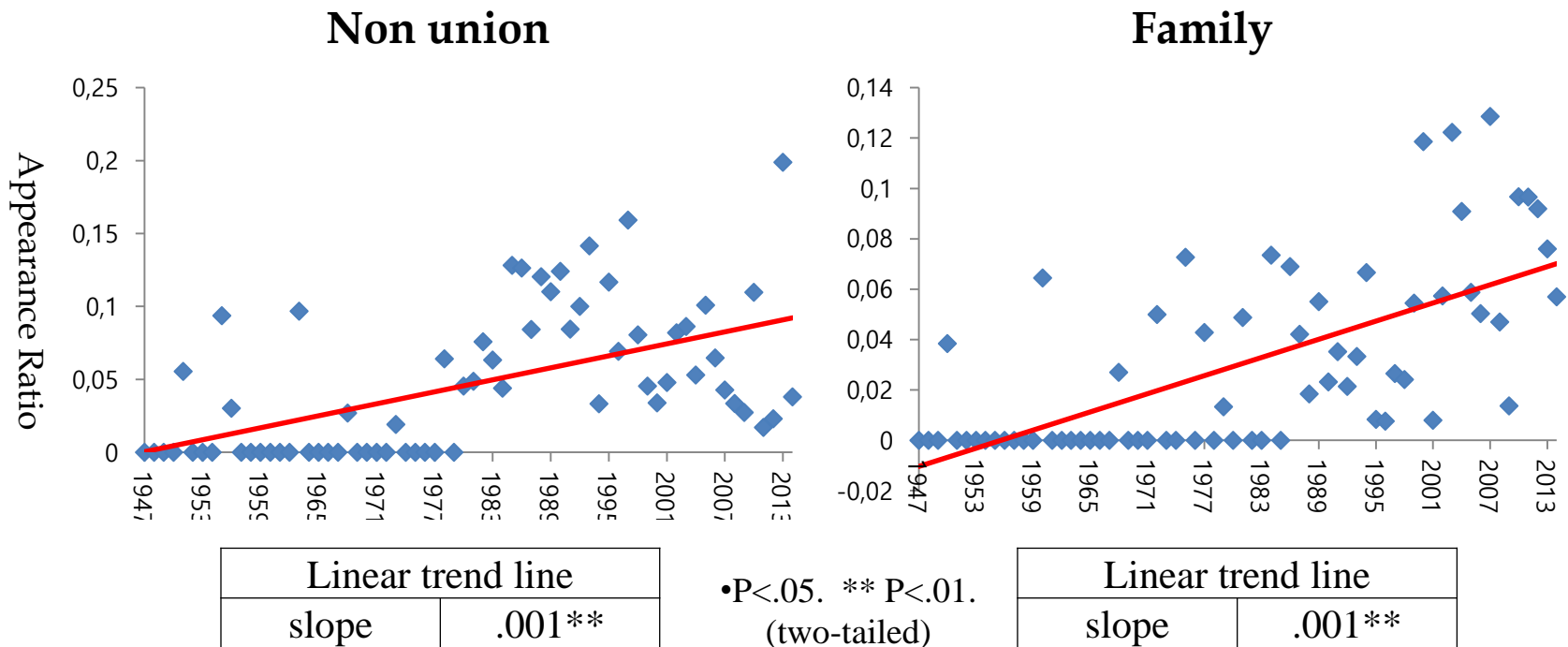
## Arbitration



Linear trend line	
slope	-.001

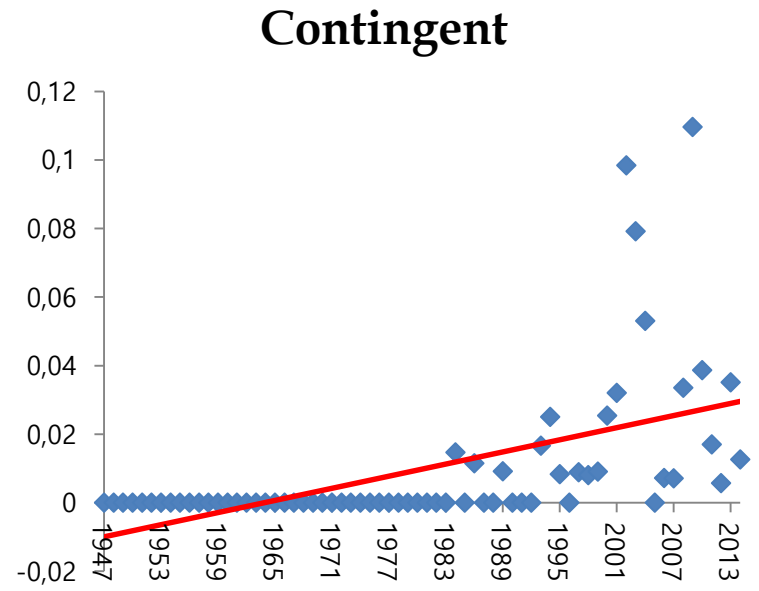
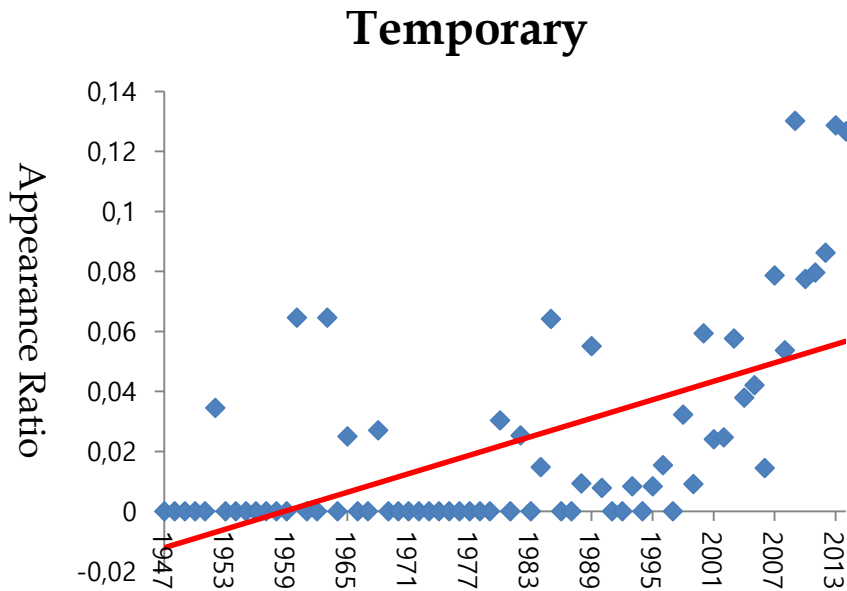
# Empirical analyses and results

- Research in ER closely embraces new world and new reality





# Empirical analyses and results

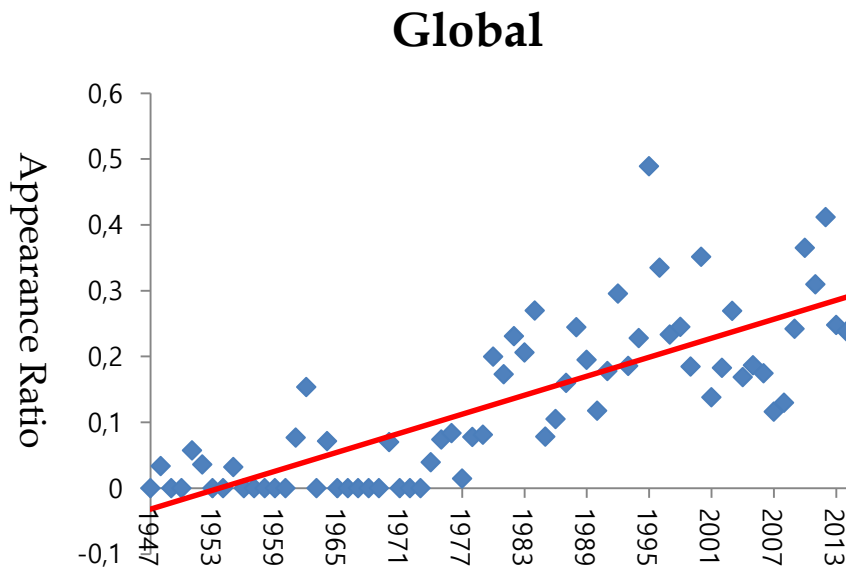


Linear trend line	
slope	.001**

•P<.05. \*\* P<.01.  
(two-tailed)

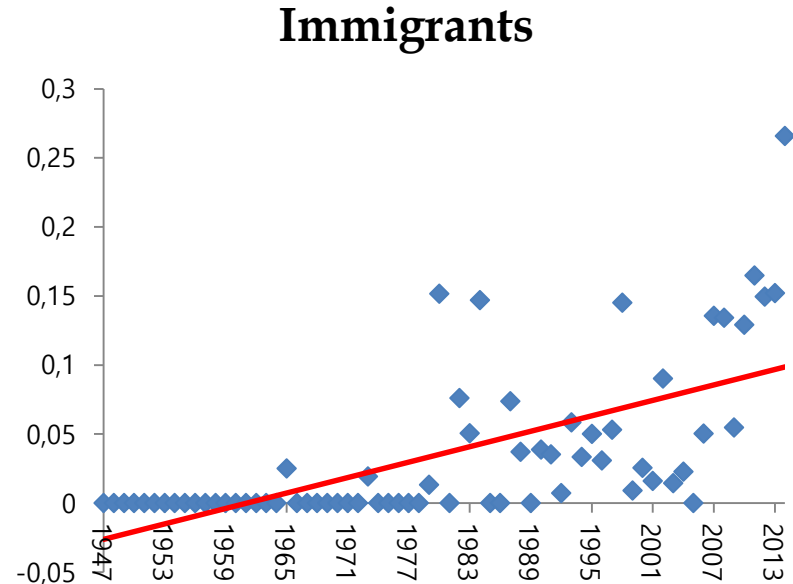
Linear trend line	
slope	.001**

# Empirical analyses and results



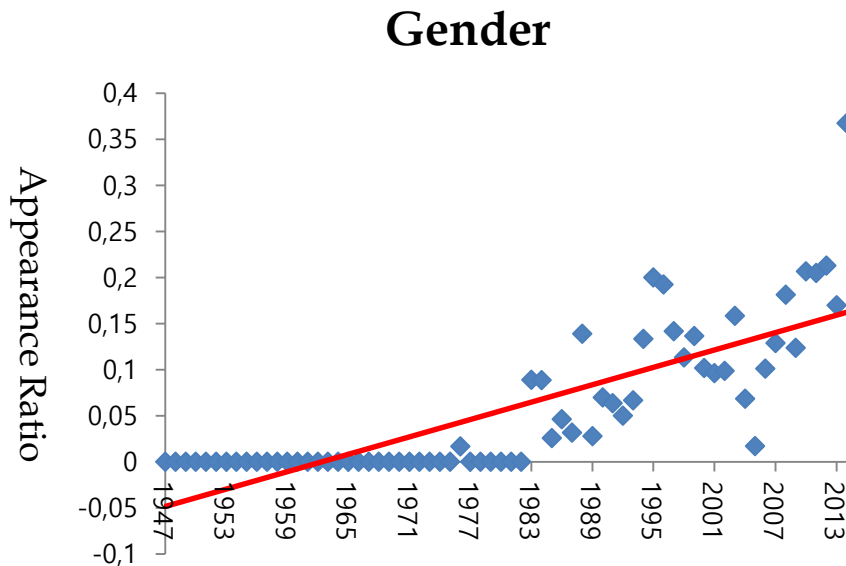
Linear trend line	
slope	.002**

•  $P < .05$ . \*\*  $P < .01$ .  
(two-tailed)



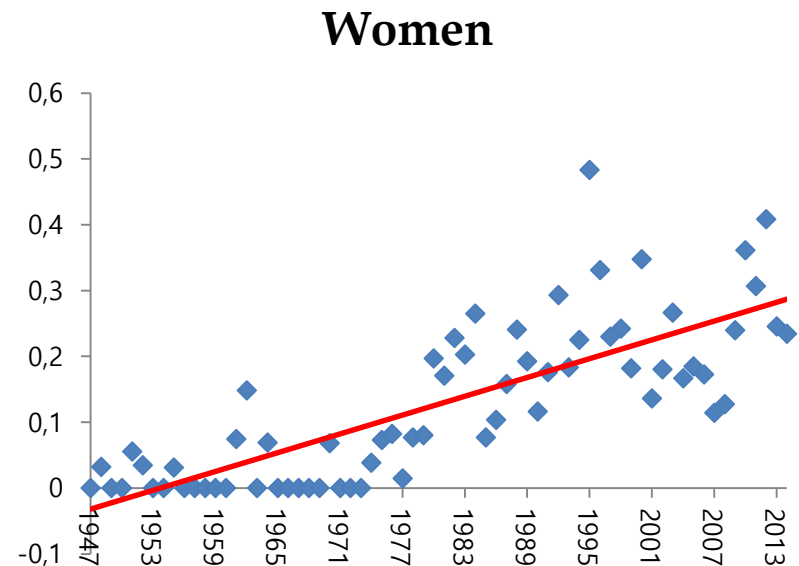
Linear trend line	
slope	.002**

# Empirical analyses and results



Linear trend line	
slope	.003**

•  $P < .05$ . \*\*  $P < .01$ .  
(two-tailed)



Linear trend line	
slope	.005**

# Empirical analyses and results

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- Empirical results: “Collective intelligence”
  - 1) Weakly supports the 1<sup>st</sup> view:  
ER research has not ignored traditional topics
  - 2) Tends to support the 2<sup>nd</sup> view:  
ER research covers private and public, union and non-union, and formal and informal sectors
  - 3) Strongly supports the 3<sup>rd</sup> view  
ER research continuously refocuses on the most recent topics and steadfastly follows new world and new reality

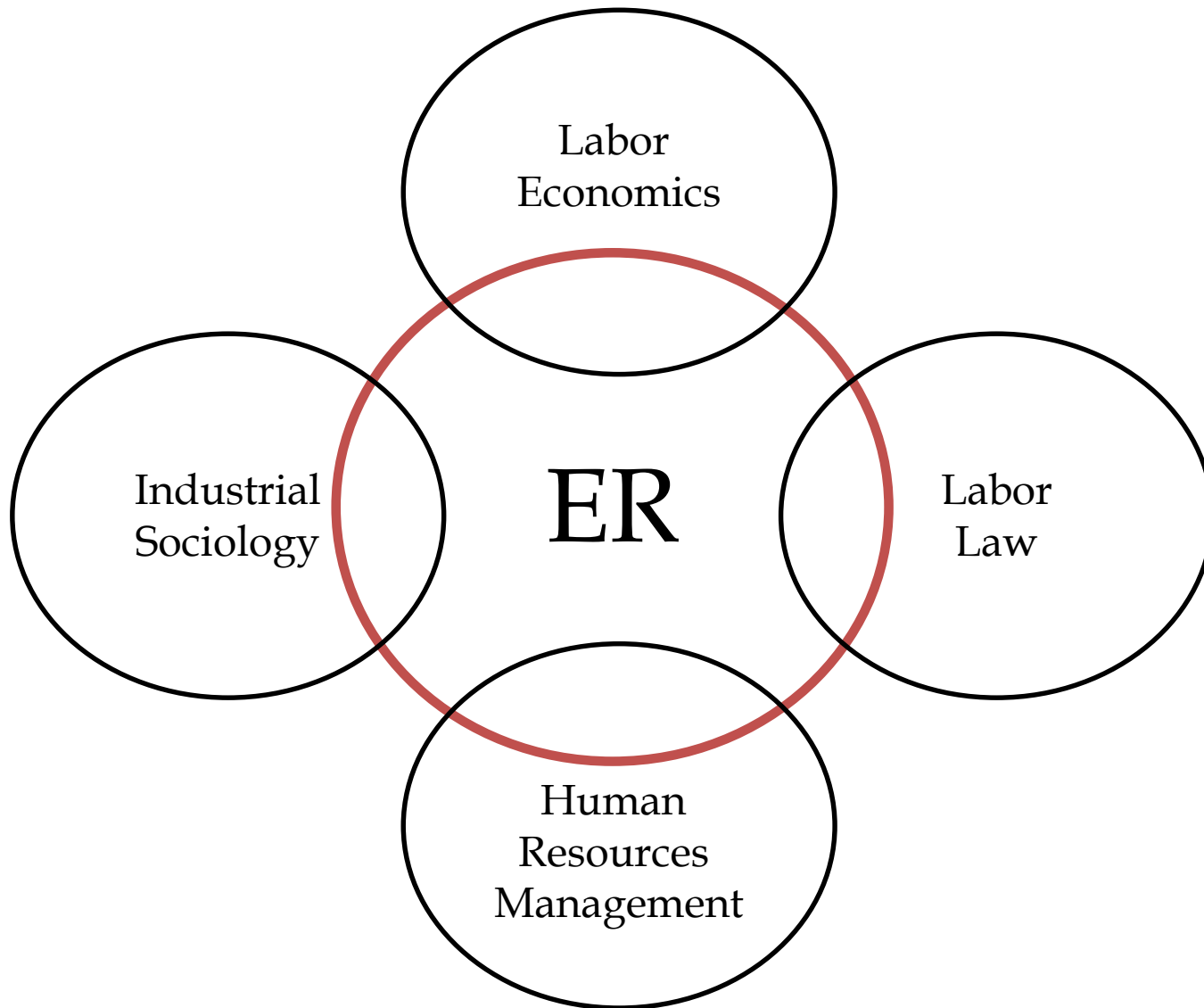
# Implications for ER research

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- ER is a unique field that deals with the core subjects of employment relationships
- Other related fields/disciplines cover only parts of the entire domain of employment relationships (e.g., labor economics, labor law, human resource management, industrial sociology)
- However, to make value-added contributions to social science as a distinctive field, ER should be unique in 3 dimensions: subjects, theories, and methodologies

# Map of the ER field

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# Implications for ER research: Subjects

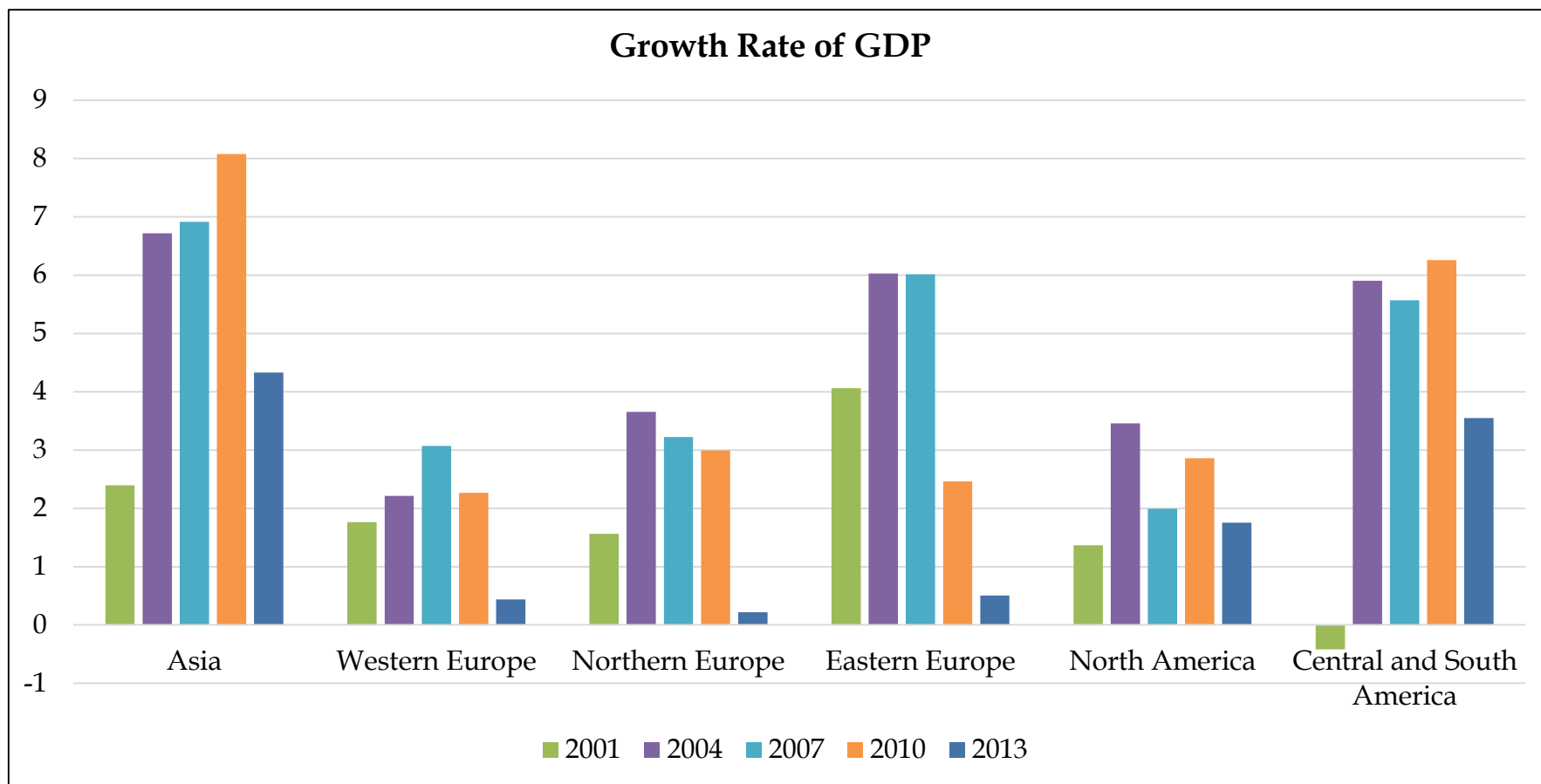
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## 1. Embrace new world of work

We cannot be 21<sup>st</sup> century Luddites

- We need more active research on the following
  - Artificial Intelligence
  - 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution
  - Immigrants
  - Developing countries
    - In 2030, two-thirds of global middle class will reside in Asia

# Regional comparison of GDP growth rates



**Asia:** China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam

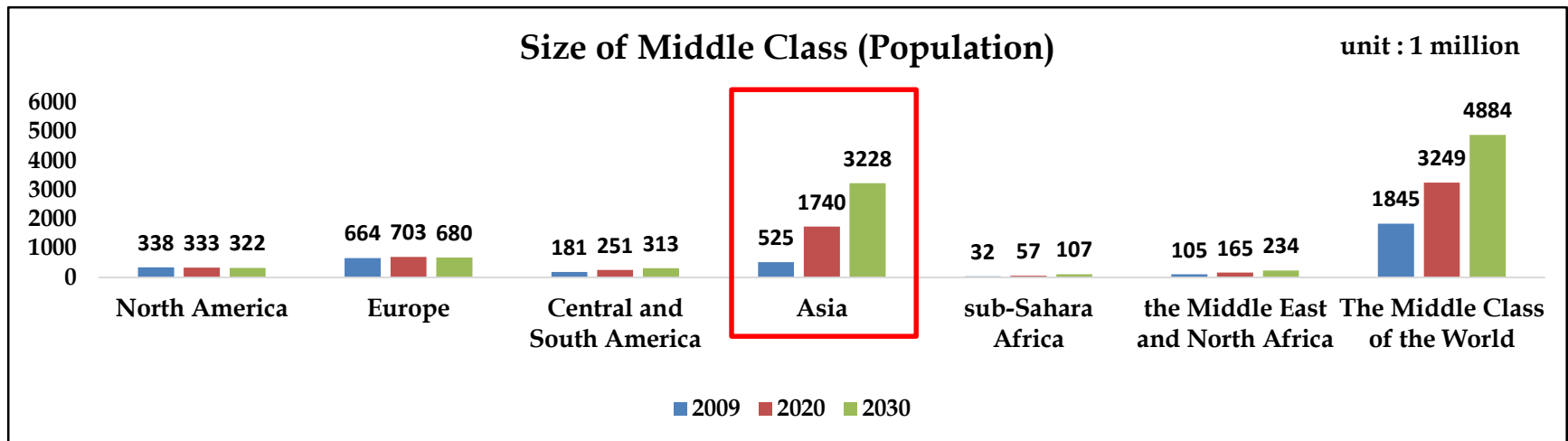
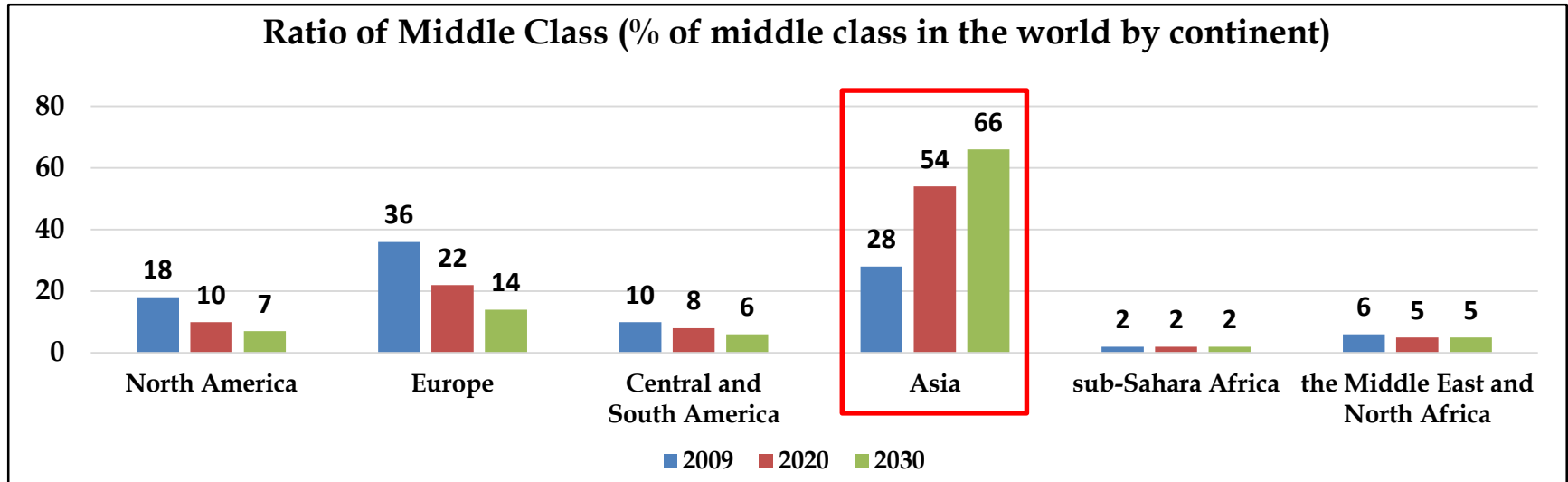
**Central and South America:** Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico

**Western Europe:** United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands    **Northern Europe:** Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway

**Eastern Europe:** Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia    **North America:** United States, Canada



# Increasing ratio of middle class population in Asia



Source : Homi Kharas (2010). "The Emerging Middle Class in Developing Countries" Working paper No. 285, OECD Development Center

Definition of the middle class: all those living in households with daily per capita incomes of between USD10 and USD100 in PPP terms. (PPP: Purchasing Power Parity)

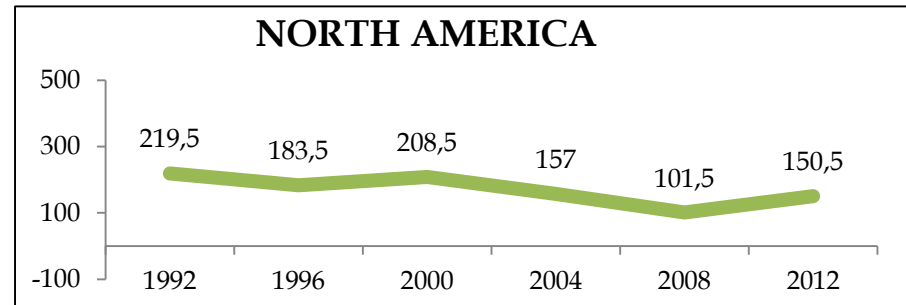
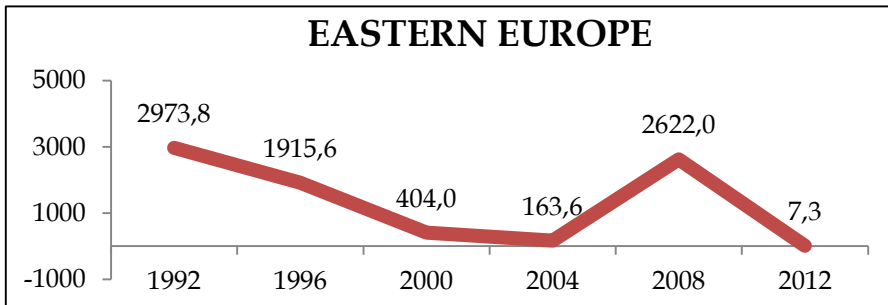
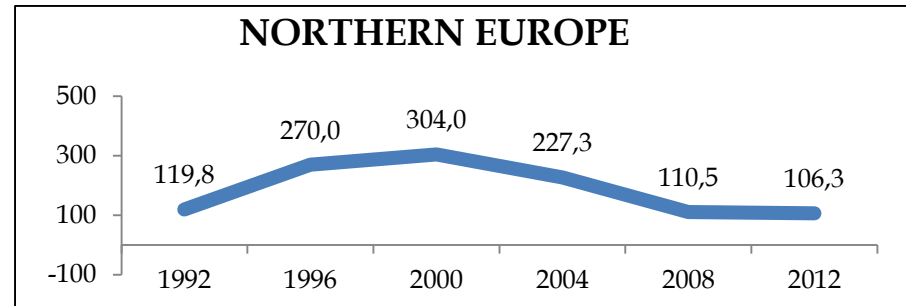
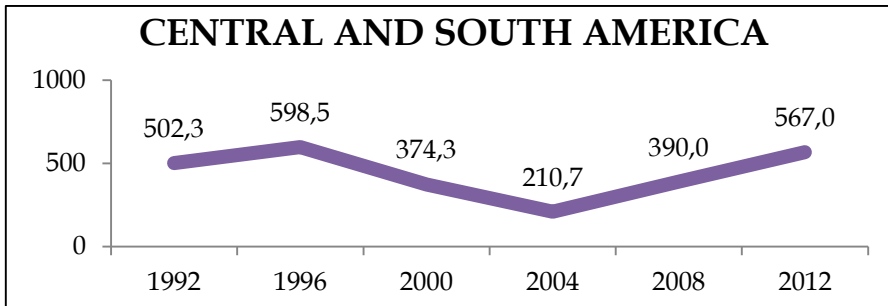
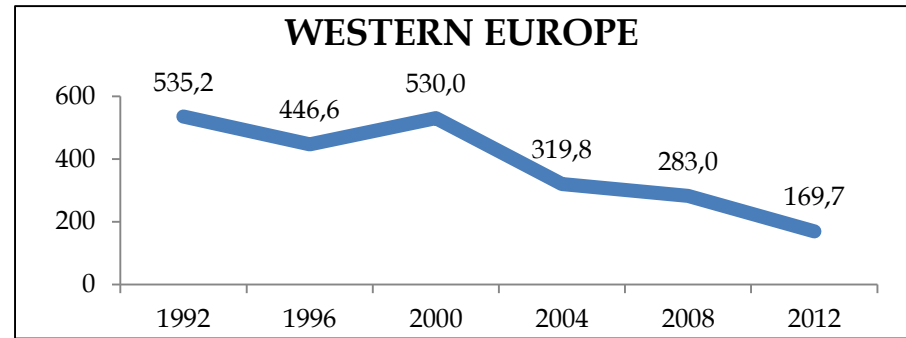
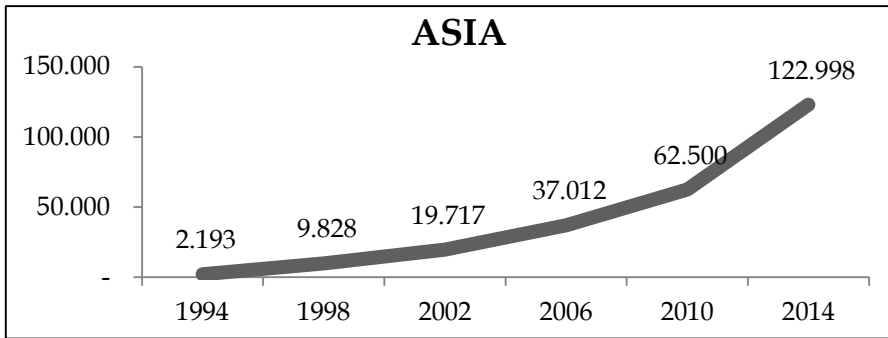
# Implications for ER research: Subjects

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## 2. Don't ignore traditional topics

- Unions and collective bargaining can rebound in developed countries
  - Historically, unions and collective bargaining show long-term cyclical trends
- Becoming ever more important in emerging economies (China, India, Indonesia, South Africa, Brazil, Eastern Europe, etc.)

# Regional comparison of labor disputes



**Asia:** China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Vietnam

**Central and South America:** Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Mexico

**Western Europe:** United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Netherlands    **Northern Europe:** Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Norway

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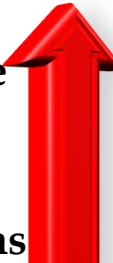
# Implications for ER research

## Old Labor Problems


## New Labor Problems

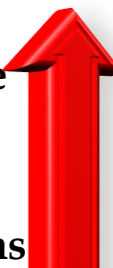
### Developed Countries

- ✓ Declining trade union density
  - ✓ Declining collective bargaining
- Cyclical ?**

- ✓ Need for non-union employee representation
  - ✓ Contingent worker problems
- 

### Developing Countries

- ✓ Strong influence of trade unions
  - ✓ Intensifying labor disputes
- 

- ✓ Need for non-union employee representation
  - ✓ Contingent worker problems
- 

# Implications for ER research: Theories

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## 1. Widen scope of ER for better theoretical developments

- From 1930 the field gravitated toward a more narrowed focus on unions and collective bargaining
- The world of work has become too complicated; we need a broader and more comprehensive approach by returning to the OIR framework
  - Law
  - Economics
  - Human resource management
- More interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary approaches leading to rich theoretical contributions
  - Increasing initiatives and calls to create knowledge through approaches from various disciplines

# Implications for ER research: Theories

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2. Embrace all ideologies and theoretical foundations:
  - Marxists and radical theorists
  - Feminists
  - Unitarists
  - Neo-classical economists
  - Pluralists
- Historically ER has been a field, not a discipline
  - Early role of labor economics in the field of ER
  - Current influence of HRM on the field of ER
- Too much emphasis on normative unity might make the field similar to an advocacy/interest group

# Implications for ER research: Theories

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3. Update the theoretical framework of ER:  
A task long overdue
  - Current theoretical framework (e.g., Dunlop, 1958) was largely based upon the stable situation in the post-war period:
    - Strong existence of labor unions and homogenous interests among workers
    - Organizations with bureaucratic internal labor market

# Implications for ER research: Theories

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3. Update the theoretical framework of ER: A task long overdue
  - Globalization, the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution, and economic and social polarization are leading to new employment patterns and consequently new employment relations
    - Networked, fissured, decentralized organizations through franchising, subcontracting, third party management, global supply chain, and outsourcing
    - Emergence of new ER actors and diverse interests among them
      - Advent of alternative representation forms (e.g., Sherpashare for Uber drivers, Glassdoor, Coworkers.com) other than union/nonunion
      - Emerging social identity groups (e.g., immigrants, feminist groups)
      - Labor policy/advocacy groups, labor NGOs in China, religious groups protecting foreign workers in Korea



# Implications for ER research: Methodologies

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## 1. Diversify research methodologies

- Research methodologies in ER became increasingly quantitative, losing its unique, qualitative research traditions originated from German historical school and Wisconsin school
- ER research needs to be closer to workplaces
  - Ethnography
  - Case study
  - Narrative study
  - Participant observation
  - fsQCA (fuzzy set/Qualitative Comparative Analysis)

Thank you!