

# Does Skill Abundance Still Matter?

## The Evolution of Comparative Advantage in the 21st Century

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Shin Kikuchi, MIT

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# Skill Abundance and Comparative Advantage

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  - Skill-abundant countries specialize in skill-intensive sectors
  - e.g. Electronics in the US v.s. Textiles in India

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  - Keys for patterns of development (Ventura 1997)
  - Implications for globalization, technology, and inequality

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- **This paper: What about the 21st century?**

# At a Glance: Skill Abundance and Comparative Advantage

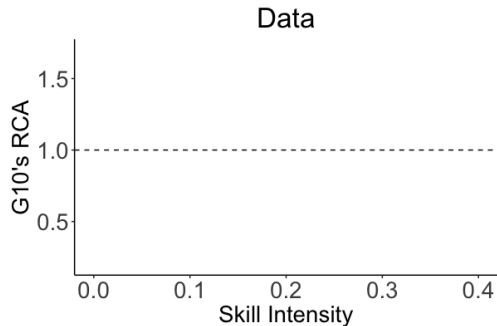
## **G10's Revealed Comparative Advantage (RCA) in Skill Intensive Sectors:**

G10's share of global exports in a sector divided by G10's share of total global exports

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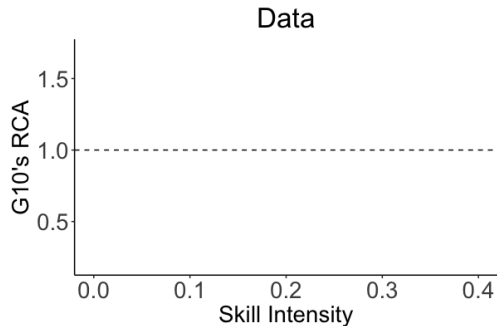


Note: Binned-scatter plots for 396 4-digit sectors. Data from UN Comtrade and NBER CES Manuf. DB

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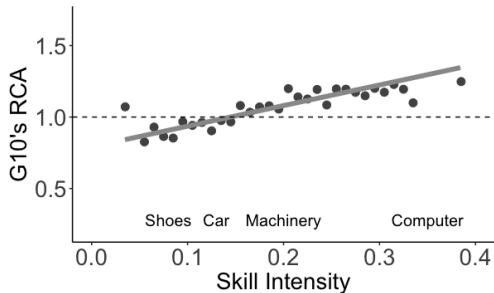
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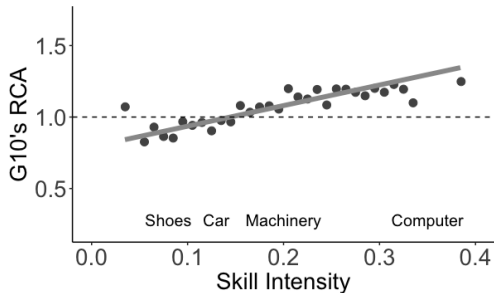
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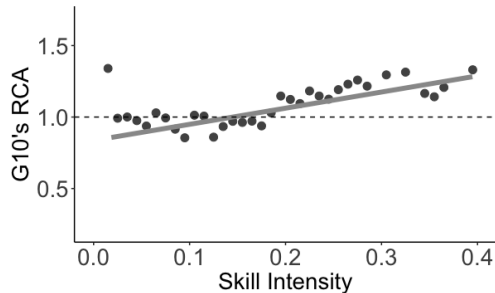
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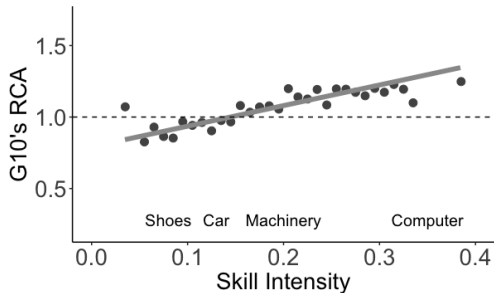
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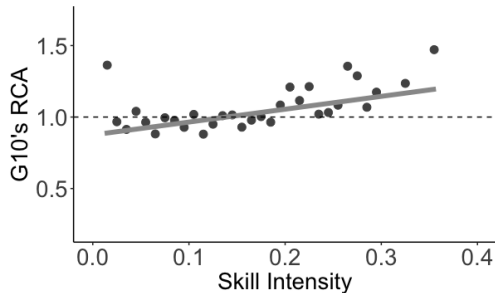
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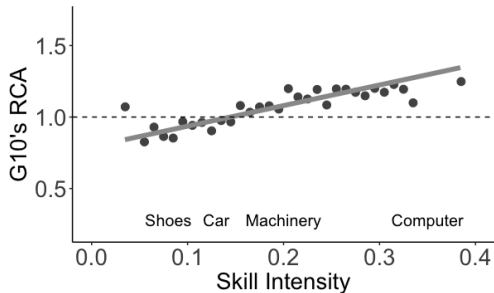
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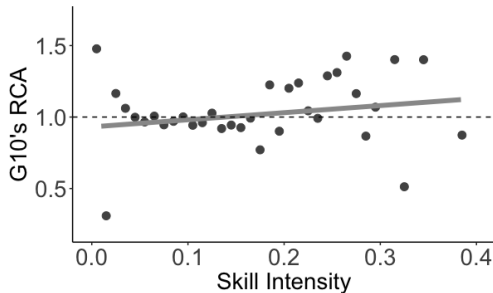
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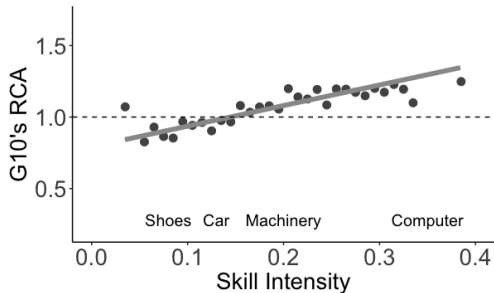
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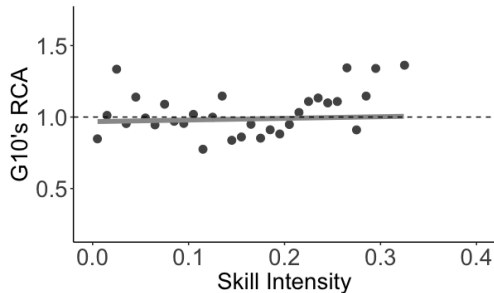
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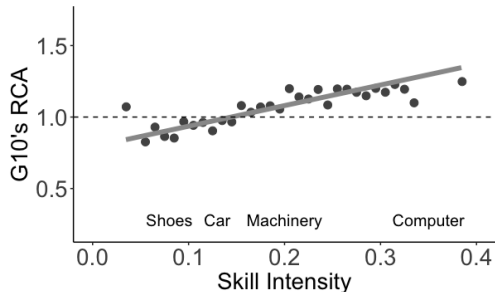
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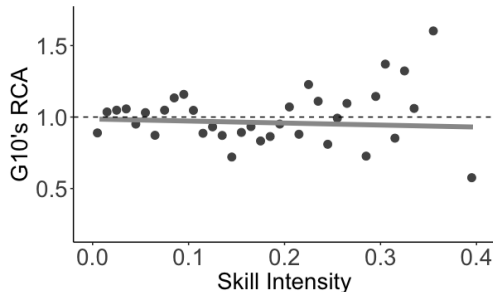
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Data in 2015



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# This Paper

- Does skill abundance *systematically* matter for comparative advantage?
  - Yes and stable until 1990, No after 2000
- What can empirically and quantitatively explain the change in the pattern?
  - Automation, not offshoring
- What are the macro implications?
  - Manufacturing shifts to North; Inequality expands within & across countries



# Preview (1/2) New Facts on Comparative Advantage

- Follow the literature's state-of-the-art specification
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- **Conditional on automation, HO-like predictions still survive**

## Preview (2/2) Automation Explains the Change

- Quantitative analysis: Eaton-Kortum model with automation & offshoring
  - Task framework: Acemoglu & Restrepo + Grossman & Rossi-Hansberg
  - Low-skill labor can be replaced by machines or foreign labor

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- **Automation, not offshoring, explains the empirical facts**
- Implications of automation
  - Shifts of manufacturing from South to North
  - Increases in skill premia in North and welfare everywhere

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- **HO:** Leamer (1980, 1984), Bowen et al (1987), Trefler (1993, 1995), Harrigan (1997), Davis & Weinstein (2001), Schott (2001), **Romalis (2004)**, Morrow (2010), **Chor (2010)**

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→ **Skill abundance matter in 1980s; Not anymore post-2000.**

# Key Contributions

1. New Facts on the sources of comparative advantage:

2. **Consequences of technology and globalization on inequality:**

- **Technology:** Katz & Murphy (1992), Berman et al (1994), Acemoglu (2002), Autor et al (2003), Acemoglu & Autor (2011), Autor & Dorn (2013), **Acemoglu & Restrepo (2018,2022)**
- **Offshoring:** **Feenstra & Hanson (1997, 1999, 2001), Grossman Rossi-Hansberg (2008, 2012)**, Hummels et al (2014), Boehm et al (2020)
- **Interaction of Tech and Trade:** Xu (2001), Acemoglu (2002), Thoenig & Verdier (2003), Burstein et al (2013), Parro (2013), Burstein & Vogel (2017), Morrow & Trefler (2022)
- **Automation and Trade:** Freud et al (2022), Artuc et al (2023), Fontagné et al (2024)

→ **Automation ⇒ Comparative Advantage and Inequality**

**FACTS: SKILL ABUNDANCE NO LONGER MATTERS**

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# Identifying Comparative Advantage: Refresher

- Multi-sector Eaton-Kortum Model (Chor (2010), Costinot et al (2012))

Exporter  $i$ , Importer  $j$ , Sector  $s$ :  $\ln \text{Export}_{i,j,s} = - \underbrace{\theta}_{\text{Trade Elas.}} \underbrace{\ln c_{i,s}}_{\text{Unit Cost}} + \underbrace{\tilde{\eta}_{i,j} + \tilde{\eta}_{j,s}}_{\text{FEs}}$

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- Unit cost ( $\alpha_s^H$ : Skill Intensity = share of skilled labor payroll in value-added)

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**Canonical specification to identify the source of comparative advantage**

# Skill Abundance as a Source of Comparative Advantage

**Do skill-abundant countries export more skill-intensive goods?**

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**Expect  $\beta > 0$ : Skill-abundant countries export skill-intensive goods more**

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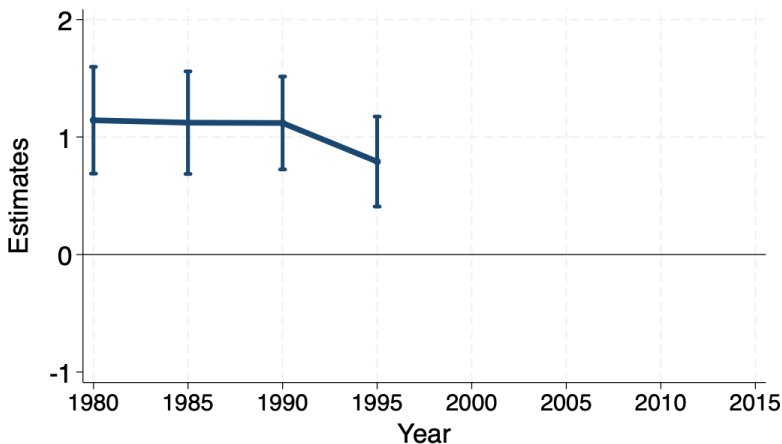
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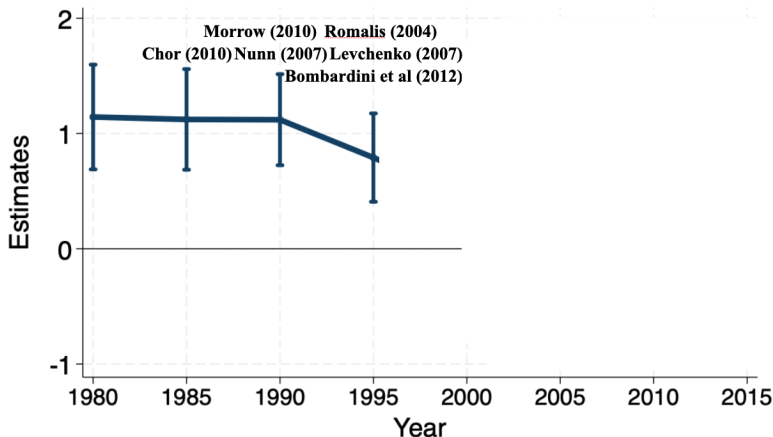
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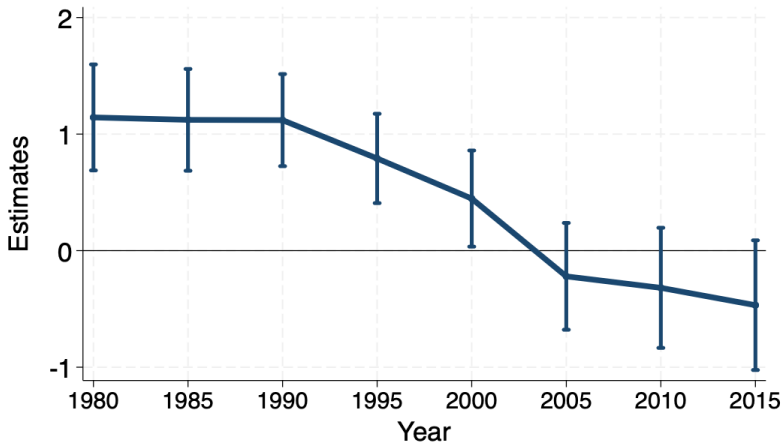
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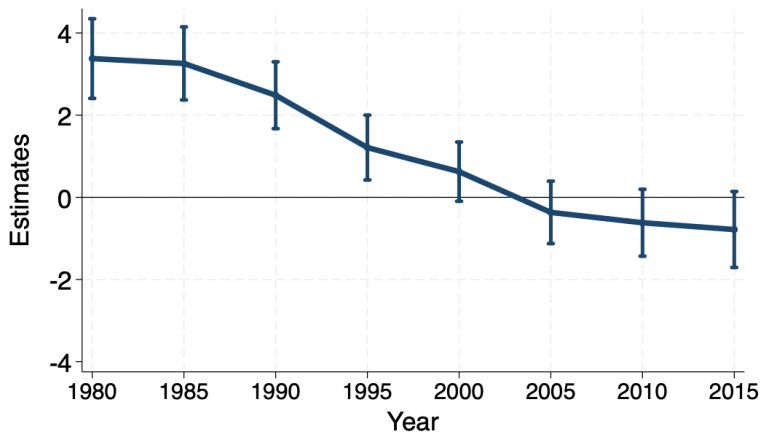
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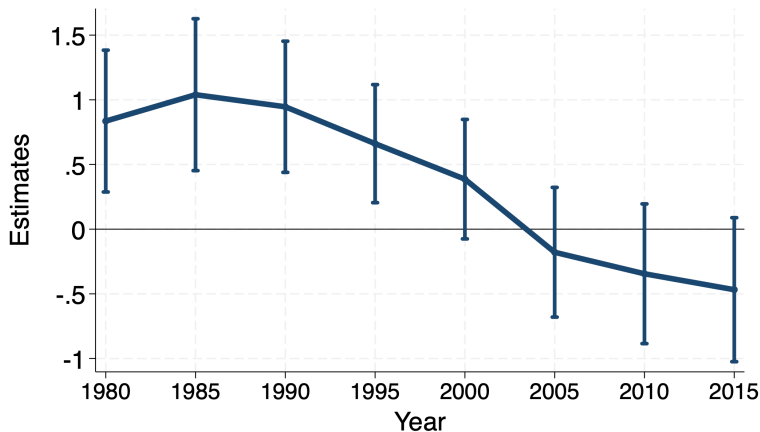
# Change in Patterns of CA Comes from Exports

$$\ln \text{Exports}_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \text{Skill Intensity}_{s,1980} \times \text{Skill Abundance}_{i,1980} \right] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t},$$



# NOT Driven by Attenuating Skill Measurement

$$\ln \text{Exports}_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t [\text{Skill Intensity}_{s,2015} \times \text{Skill Abundance}_{i,2015}] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t},$$





# Robustness Checks

- Other sources of comparative advantage? ▸ Capital ▸ Institution
- Driven by small countries? ▸ Weighted
- Some exporter-sector unobserved het., or IRS? ▸ Pool years and FEs
- Different skill measures? ▸ High School ▸ Predicted by Demographics
- Total exports, instead of bilateral exports (Romalis 2004, Nunn 2007,...) ▸ go
- Different measures of sectoral factor intensity (Chor 2010)
  - $\ln(H_S/L_S)$ , instead of  $\alpha_S^H$  ( $\equiv$  Skilled Payroll Share to Value-Added) ▸ go

## POTENTIAL HYPOTHESES: AUTOMATION AND OFFSHORING

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# Potential Hypotheses: Automation and Offshoring

- What can make domestic skill abundance less relevant for CA after the 1990s?
- Two massive technical progress, replacing low-skill labor
  - Automation: Replace low-skill labor with machines
  - Offshoring: Replace low-skill labor with foreign inputs
- This section: Explore heterogeneous effects across countries and sectors
  - Descriptive analysis for heterogeneous effects (for now)
  - Causal analysis using the model (later)

# Specification for Heterogeneous Effects: Automation

$$\ln \text{Exports}_{i,j,s,t} = \underbrace{\beta_t^0 \left( 1 + \beta_t^A HA_{i,s} \right)}_{=\beta_t} \cdot [\text{Skill Intensity}_{s,t} \times \text{Skill Abundance}_{i,t}] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t},$$

- $HA_{i,s}$ : High-automation dummy (below/above the median robot adoption)
  - Robot adoption: Robot stock per workers from IFR & WIOD

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- Expect  $\beta_t^A$  to decrease if there is a relationship btw change & automation

# Specification for Heterogeneous Effects: Offshoring

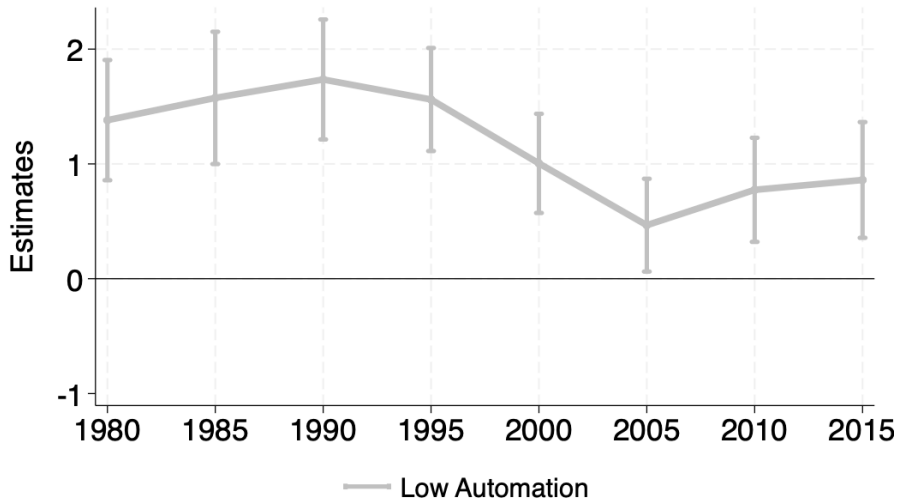
$$\ln \text{Exports}_{i,j,s,t} = \underbrace{\beta_t^0 \left( 1 + \beta_t^O HO_{i,s} \right)}_{=\beta_t} \cdot [\text{Skill Intensity}_{s,t} \times \text{Skill Abundance}_{i,t}] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t},$$

- $HO_{i,s}$ : High-offshoring dummy (below/above the median offshoring)
  - Offshoring share: (Intermediate imports) / (Total intermediates) from WIOD
- Expect  $\beta_t^O$  to decrease if there is a relationship btw change & offshoring



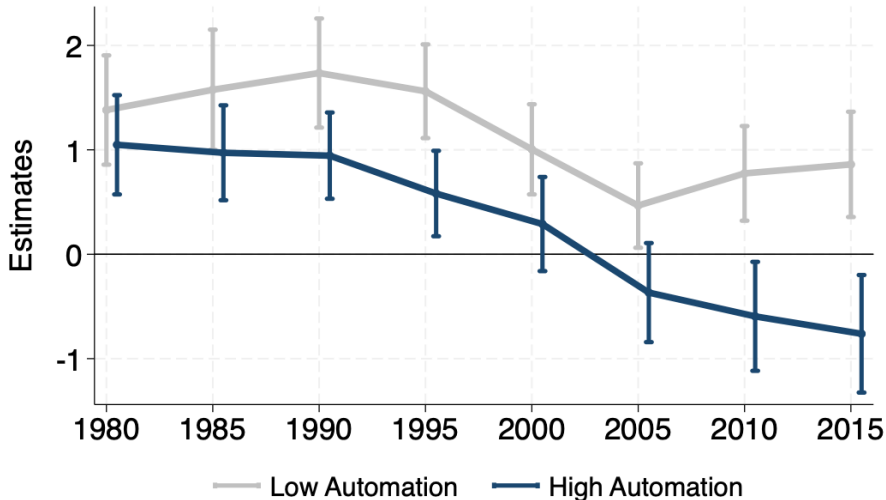
# Skill Abundance Still Matters Absent Automation

Plot  $\hat{\beta}_t^0$



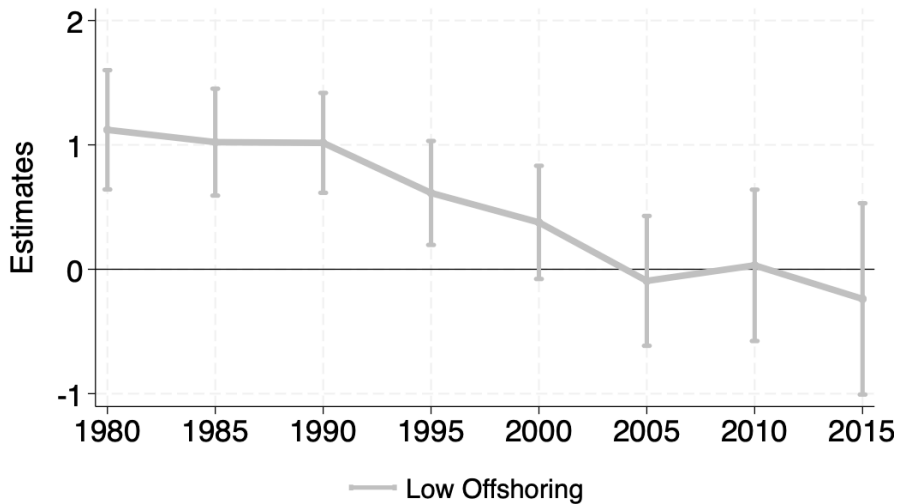
# Skill Abundance Still Matters Absent Automation

Plot  $\hat{\beta}_t^0$  and  $\hat{\beta}_t^0 + \hat{\beta}_t^A$



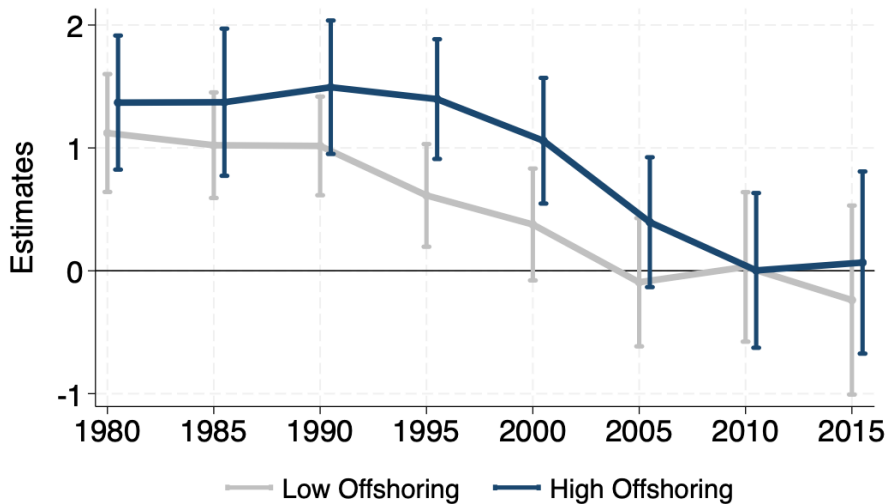
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Plot  $\hat{\beta}_t^0$



# Skill Abundance does not Matter Even Absent Offshoring

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## Same Results from Continuous Measures

$$\ln \text{Exports}_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t^0 (1 + \beta_t^A \text{Auto}_{i,s} + \beta_t^O \text{Ofs}_{i,s}) \cdot [\text{Skill Int.}_{s,t} \times \text{Skill Abd.}_{i,t}] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t}$$

	1995	2010	1995	2010
Skill Intensity x Abundance	1.26	-0.33		
	(0.23)	(0.28)		
x Automation (log robot stock)				
x Offshoring Share (×100)				

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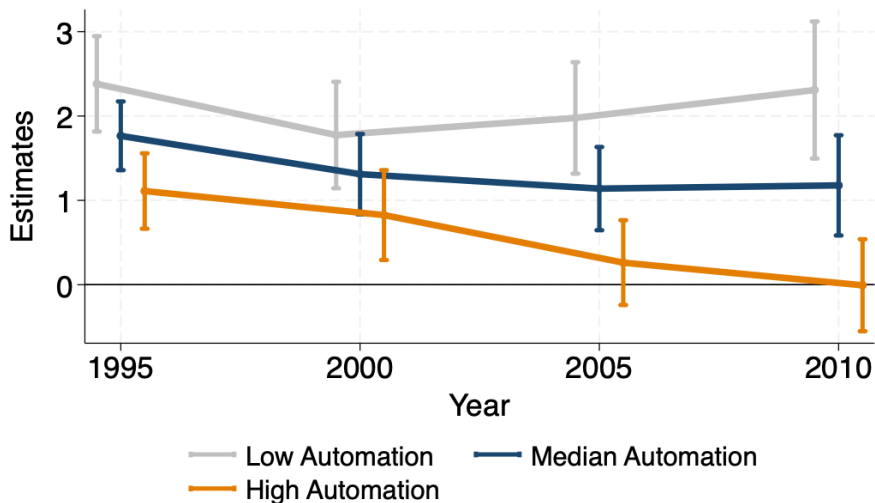
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	1995	2010	1995	2010
Skill Intensity x Abundance	1.26	-0.33	3.00	<b>3.49</b>
	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.41)	(0.57)
x Automation (log robot stock)			-0.19	<b>-0.35</b>
			(0.05)	(0.06)
x Offshoring Share (×100)			0.04	0.05
			(0.05)	(0.07)

Note: Automation measure: 12.2 for German cars, 2.3 for Indian textiles

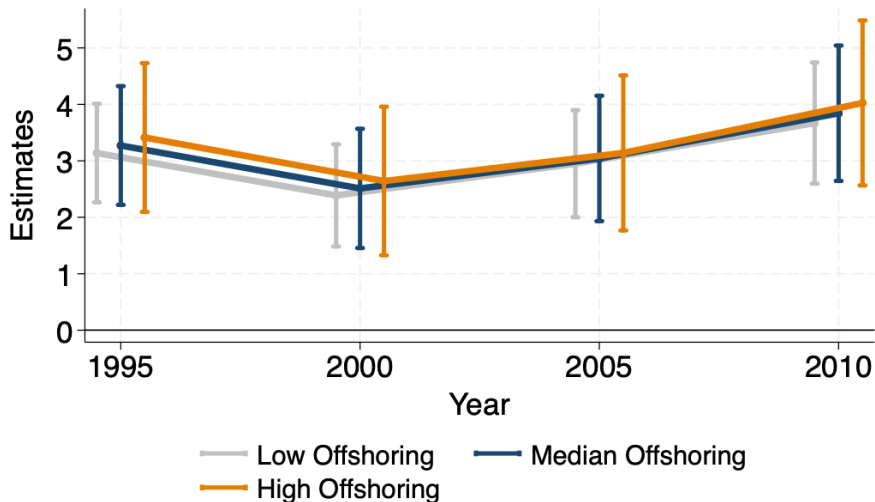
# Skill Abundance Still Matters Absent Automation

Fitted values for groups with automation of 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles



# Offshoring Seems Unrelated to Change in Pattern

Fitted values for groups with offshoring of 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles





# Controlling China Shock does not Change Results

	1995	2010	1995	2010
Skill Intensity x Abundance	1.26	-0.33		
	(0.23)	(0.28)		
x Automation (log robot stock)				
x Offshoring Share ( $\times 100$ )				
x China's RCA				

# Controlling China Shock does not Change Results

	1995	2010	1995	2010
Skill Intensity x Abundance	1.26	-0.33	2.43	<b>3.51</b>
	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.45)	(0.46)
x Automation (log robot stock)			-0.15	<b>-0.31</b>
			(0.05)	(0.05)
x Offshoring Share ( $\times 100$ )			0.03	0.11
			(0.05)	(0.06)
x China's RCA			0.20	<b>0.34</b>
			(0.12)	(0.13)

Takeaway: **China shocks strengthen the Heckscher-Ohlin force**

# Summary of Empirical Facts

- **Skill abundance becomes less important in comparative advantage** over time
  - Less important with higher **automation**
  - Offshoring has surprisingly no relationship

## MODEL: TRADE WITH AUTOMATION AND OFFSHORING

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# Overview

- Multi-sector Eaton-Kortum model with input-output linkages

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  - **New: Task framework for automation and offshoring**
- Primary factors:
  - Labor:  $H_{i,s}$  (high-skilled),  $L_{i,s}$  (low-skilled)
- Additional production factors (produced using outputs: roundabout)
  - Automation Capital:  $A_{i,s}$
  - Intermediate:  $X_{i,s}$  (domestic),  $O_{i,s}$  (foreign, offshored)
    - ★ including non-automation capital (buildings, land)



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- Country  $i, j$ , Sector  $s$
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- Country  $i, j$ , Sector  $s$
- Preference across sectors: Cobb-Douglas with expenditure share of  $\mu_{j,s}$
- Trade share (gravity equation) within sectors:

$$\pi_{i,j,s}^F = \frac{(c_{i,s} \cdot \tau_{i,j,s})^{-\theta}}{\sum_l^J (c_{l,s} \cdot \tau_{l,j,s})^{-\theta}}$$

- Unit cost:  $c_{i,s}$ —endogenously determined from production processes (next)
- Trade cost:  $\tau_{i,j,s}$
- Trade elasticity  $\theta > 0$

# Supply 1/2: Task Framework in Production

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- Production function for each task ( $\psi_{i,s}^f(x)$  task-specific tech)

$$T_{i,s}(\omega, x) = \underbrace{\psi_{i,s}^A(x) A_{i,s}(\omega, x)}_{\text{Automation Capital}} + \underbrace{\psi_{i,s}^L(x) L_{i,s}(\omega, x)}_{\text{Production Labor}} + \underbrace{\psi_{i,s}^X(x) X_{i,s}(\omega, x)}_{\text{Domestic Input}} + \underbrace{\psi_{i,s}^O(x) O_{i,s}(\omega, x)}_{\text{Foreign Input}}$$

## Suppl 2/2: Task Allocation $\mathcal{T}_{i,s}^f$ , Task Share $\Gamma_{i,s}^f$

- Task production cost using factor  $f$ :  $c_{i,s}^f(z) \equiv w_{i,s}^f / (\psi_{i,s}^f(z))$  for  $f \in \{A, L, X, O\}$

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$$\mathcal{T}_{i,s}^f = \left\{ x : f = \operatorname{argmin}_{f'} c_{i,s}^{f'}(x) \right\}, \quad \rightarrow \Gamma_{i,s}^f : \text{measure of } \mathcal{T}_{i,s}^f, \quad \text{for } f \in \{A, L, X, O\}$$



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- Unit cost of production:

$$c_{i,s} = \Lambda_s \cdot (w_i^H)^{\alpha_s^H} \cdot \left[ \left( \frac{w_{i,s}^A}{\Gamma_{i,s}^A} \right)^{\Gamma_{i,s}^A} \cdot \left( \frac{w_{i,s}^L}{\Gamma_{i,s}^L} \right)^{\Gamma_{i,s}^L} \cdot \left( \frac{w_{i,s}^X}{\Gamma_{i,s}^X} \right)^{\Gamma_{i,s}^X} \cdot \left( \frac{w_{i,s}^O}{\Gamma_{i,s}^O} \right)^{\Gamma_{i,s}^O} \right]^{1-\alpha_s^H}$$

# Equilibrium Conditions ▸ Two Country

Given factor endowments  $\{H_i, L_i\}$ , an equilibrium is a set of wages  $\{w_i^H, w_i^L\}$

- Consumers maximize utility by choosing from which countries to buy  
→ trade share  $\pi_{i,j,s}$ , as a function of unit cost  $\{c_{i,s}\}$
- Unit cost,  $c_{i,s}$ , as a function of  $\{w_i^H, w_i^L\}$ 
  - $\{w_{i,s}^A, w_{i,s}^X, w_{i,s}^O\}$  are functions of  $\{w_i^H, w_i^L\}$  with IO coef.
- Goods and Labor Markets Clear

# QUANTIFICATION

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# Quantitative Analysis: Hat Algebra

- Two Exercises:

1. Can changes in  $\Gamma_{i,s,t}^A$  (automation) and  $\Gamma_{i,s,t}^O$  (offshoring) explain  $\hat{\beta}_t$ ?
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$$p_{i,s,t}^A A_{i,s,t} = \underbrace{p_{i,s,t0}^K K_{i,s,t0}}_{\text{Capital Income}} \cdot \underbrace{\frac{p_{US,s,t0}^M M_{US,s,t0}}{p_{US,s,t0}^K K_{US,s,t0}}}_{\text{Machine-Capital Ratio}} \cdot \underbrace{\frac{p_{i,s,t}^R R_{i,s,t}}{p_{i,s,t0}^R R_{i,s,t0}}}_{\text{Increases in Robots}} \cdot$$

# Quantitative Analysis: Hat Algebra

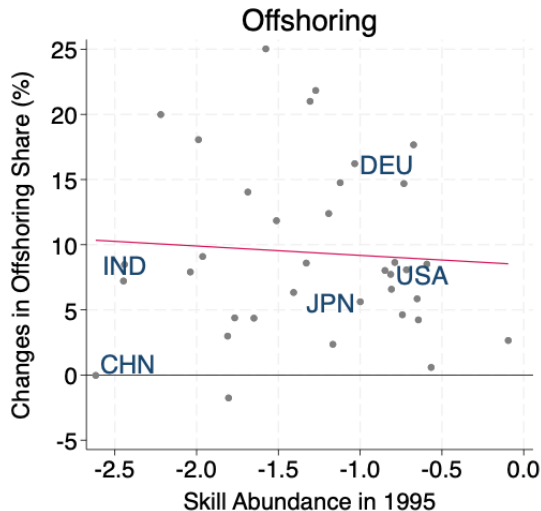
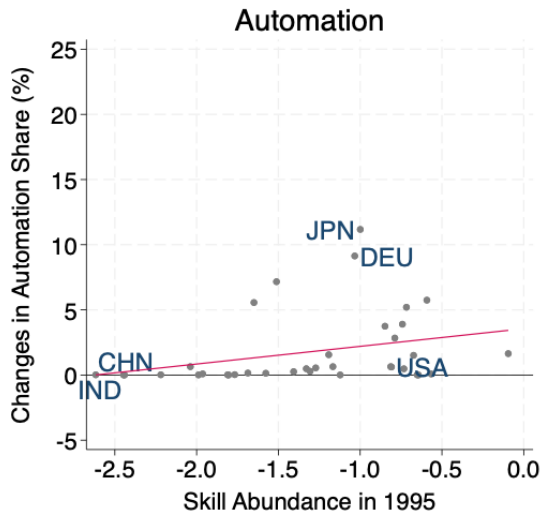
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  - Adjust  $\Gamma_{i,s,t}^L$  (low-skilled labor share) to make  $\sum_{F=L,A,X,O} \Gamma_{i,s,t}^F = 1$

# Data: More Automation in Skill-Abundant Countries



# Calibration

Description	Parameter	Value & Source
Panel A: Time-Invariant Parameters (fixed in 1995)		
Trade Elas.	$\theta$	4 (Standard)
Expenditure Share	$\mu_{i,s}$	Data (WIOT)
Factor Endowment	$H_i, L_i$	Data (WIOT)
Factor Share	$\alpha_{i,s}^H$	Data (WIOT)
Input-Output Coef.	$\alpha_{i,r,s}^X, \alpha_{i,r,s}^A$	Data (WIOT) & Ding (2023)
Panel B: Time-Variant Shocks		
Automation Productivity	$\overline{\psi_{i,s}^A}$	Match $\Gamma_{i,s}^A$
Offshoring Cost	$\overline{\tau_{i,s}^X}$	Match $\Gamma_{i,s}^O$

## RESULTS: CHANGES IN COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

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# 1. Automation and Offshoring on Changes in $\hat{\beta}$

- Question: How much can  $\Gamma_{i,s,t}^A$  and  $\Gamma_{i,s,t}^O$  explain the path of  $\hat{\beta}_t$ ?

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  1. Calibrate the model to 1995 and shock the economy
  2. Construct counterfactual trade flow:  $(X_{i,j,s,t})'$ 
    - Data (World Input-Output Database, incl. Service)
    - Case 1. Only Automation: Change  $\Gamma_{i,s,t}^A$
    - Case 2. Only Offshoring: Change  $\Gamma_{i,s,t}^O$

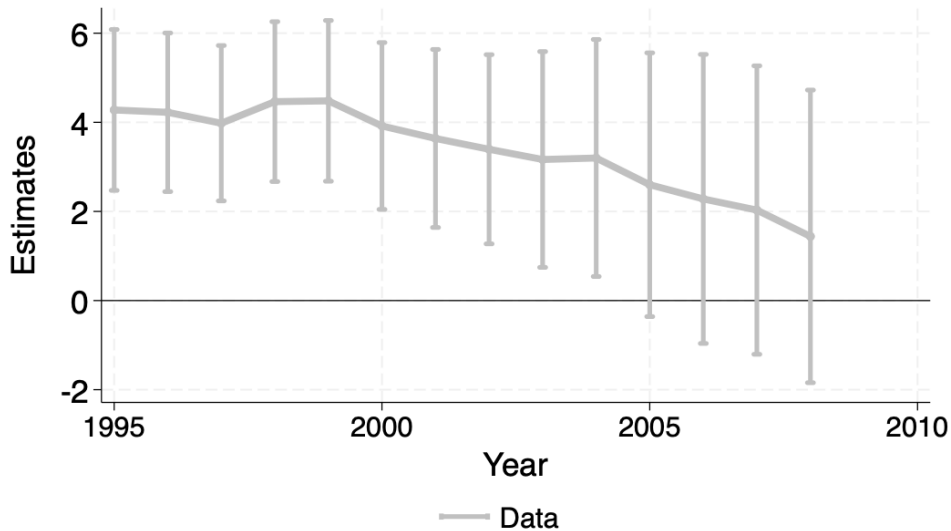
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  3. Run the same regression as in data but for counterfactual economies

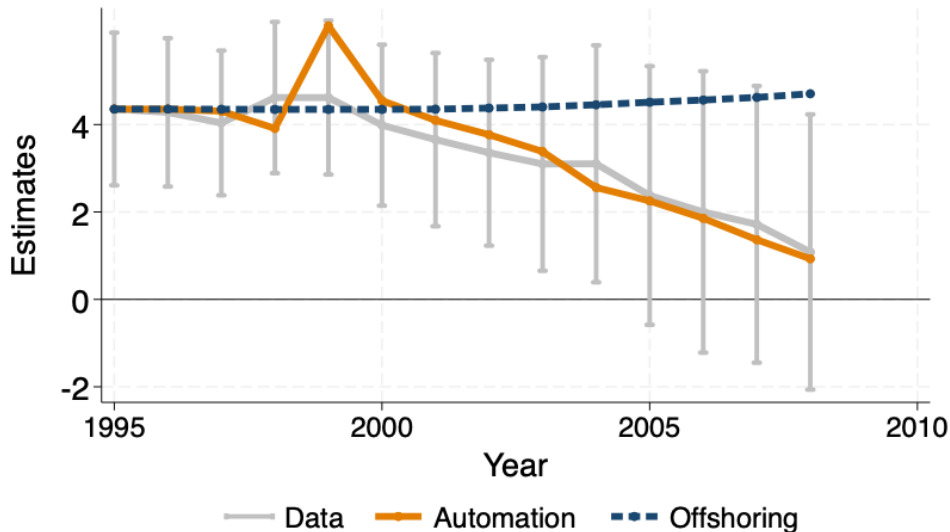
$$\ln(X_{i,j,s,t})' = \beta_t \left[ \alpha_{s,t_0}^H \times \ln \left( \frac{H_{i,t_0}}{L_{i,t_0}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t} + \varepsilon_{i,j,s,t}.$$



# $\hat{\beta}_t$ Decreases Even Using WIOD



# Automation, Not Offshoring, Causes the Decline



# Why Automation?

- Sizes of automation are smaller than offshoring
- Why does automation, not offshoring, matter?

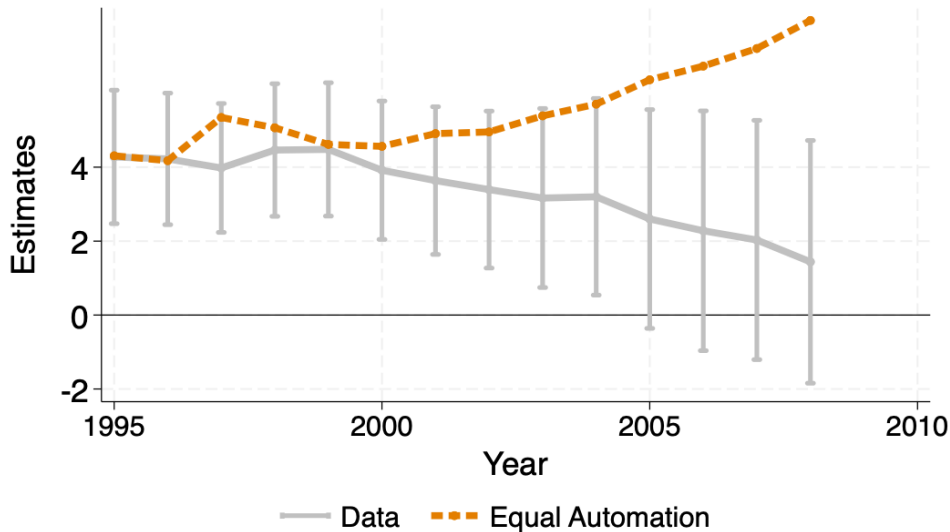
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- One observation: Automation happens disproportionately in  $L$  – scarce countries
- Experiment: Suppose all the countries increase automation equally...

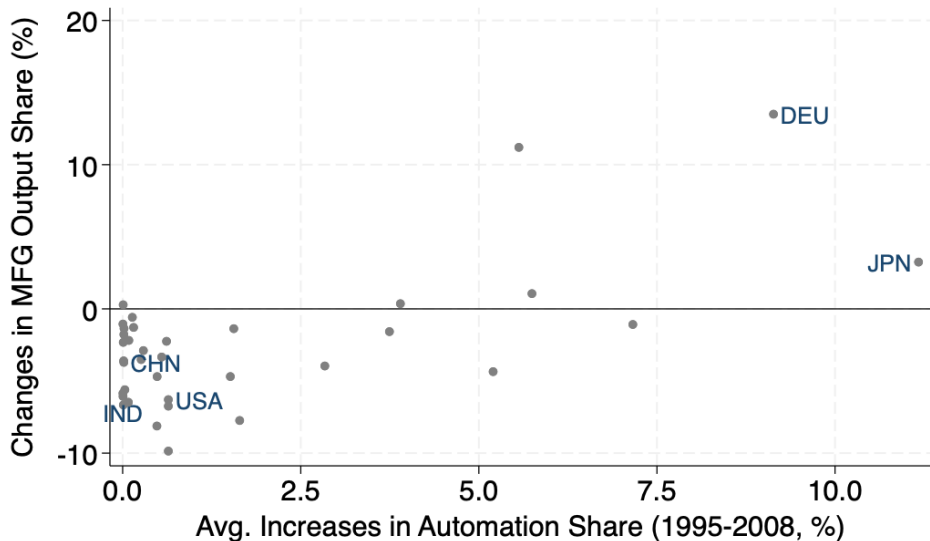
# Equal Automation Cannot Explain the Decline



## RESULTS: MACRO IMPLICATIONS OF AUTOMATION

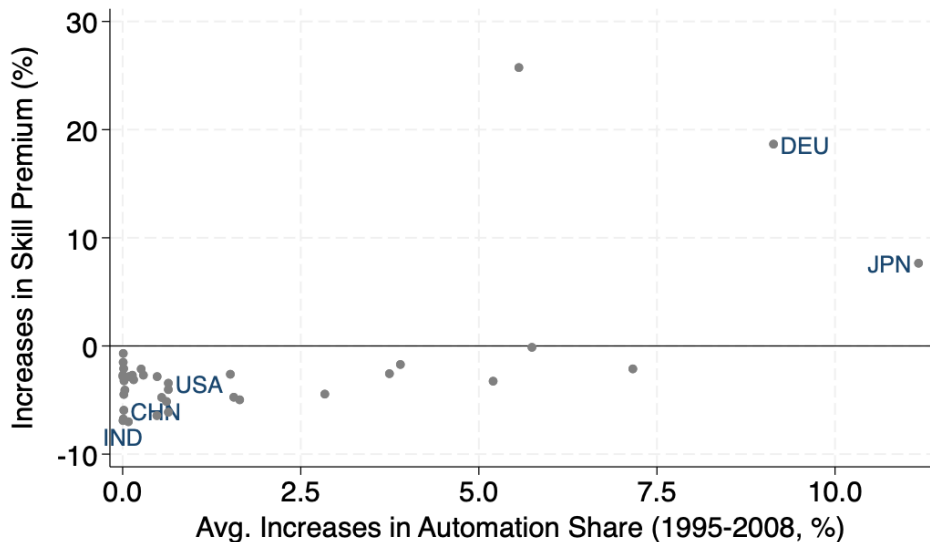
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# Manufacturing Shifts to High-Automation Countries

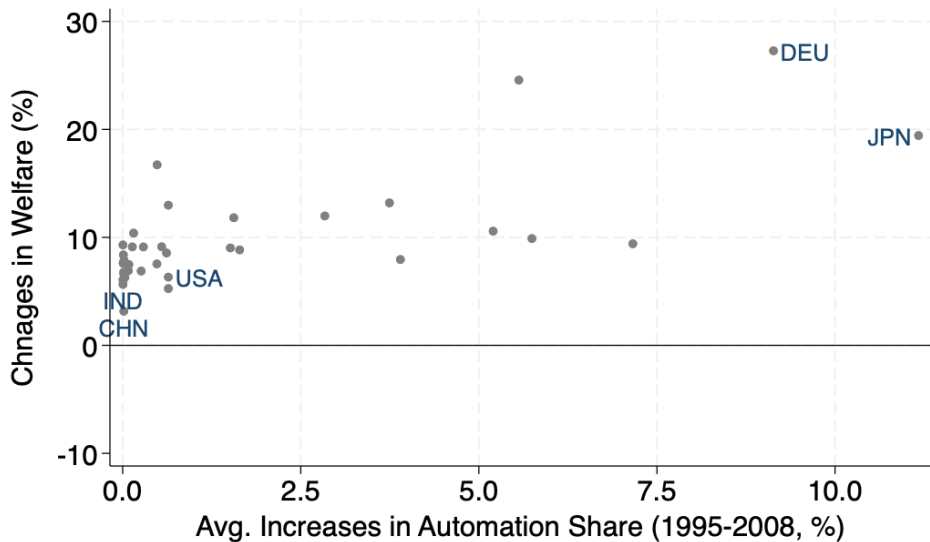




# Skill Premia Increases Only in High-Automation Countries



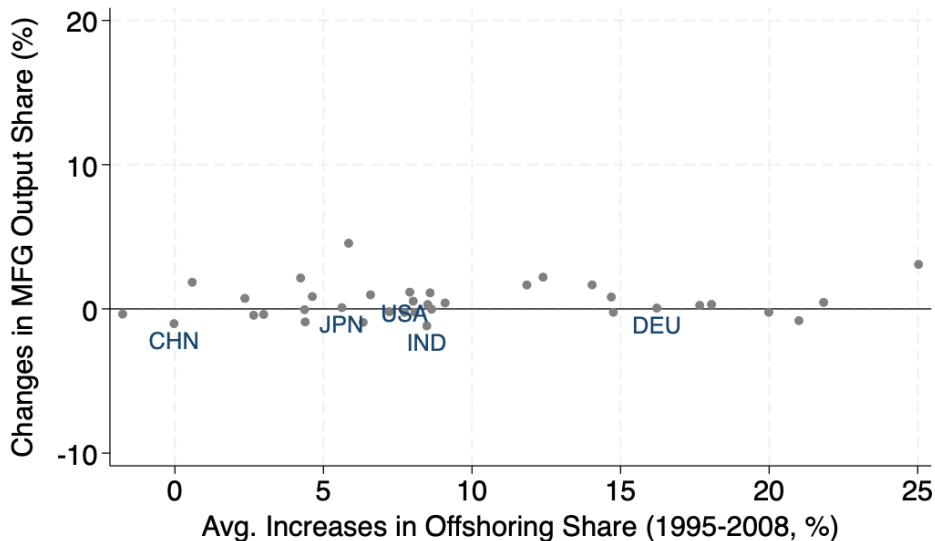
# Welfare Increases Everywhere



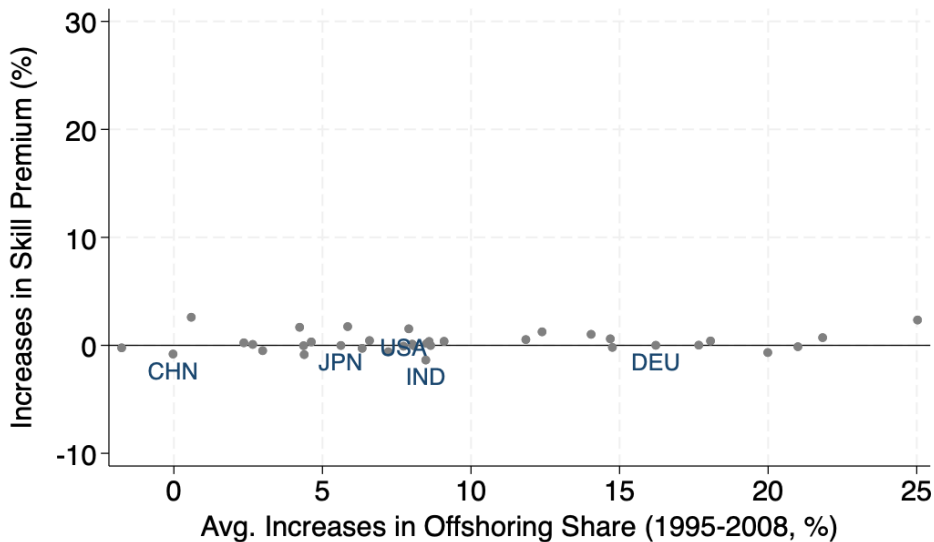
## RESULTS: MACRO IMPLICATIONS OF OFFSHORING

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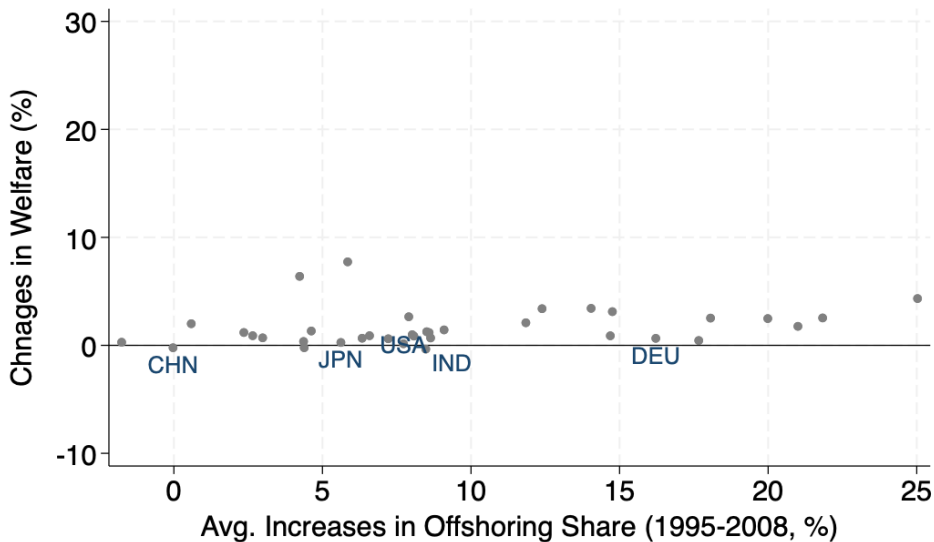
# Manufacturing Shifts Less



# Skill Premia Increases Everywhere, but Less



# Welfare Increases Everywhere, but Less



# CONCLUSION

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  - **Automation** causes the decline; Offshoring has small effects

# Conclusion

- Did a pattern of comparative advantage change in the 21st Century?
  - **It did.** Skill abundance no longer matters for comparative advantage
  - **Automation** causes the decline; Offshoring has small effects
- Automation relocates manufacturing from South to North
  - Inequality within & across countries increases

# Conclusion

- Did a pattern of comparative advantage change in the 21st Century?
  - **It did.** Skill abundance no longer matters for comparative advantage
  - **Automation** causes the decline; Offshoring has small effects
- Automation relocates manufacturing from South to North
  - Inequality within & across countries increases
- Work in progress:
  - Does a robot tax *import* China shocks and backfire in an open economy?
  - Does automation facilitate reshoring and reduce the costs of decoupling?
  - Will clean technology erode the comparative advantage of oil-rich countries?

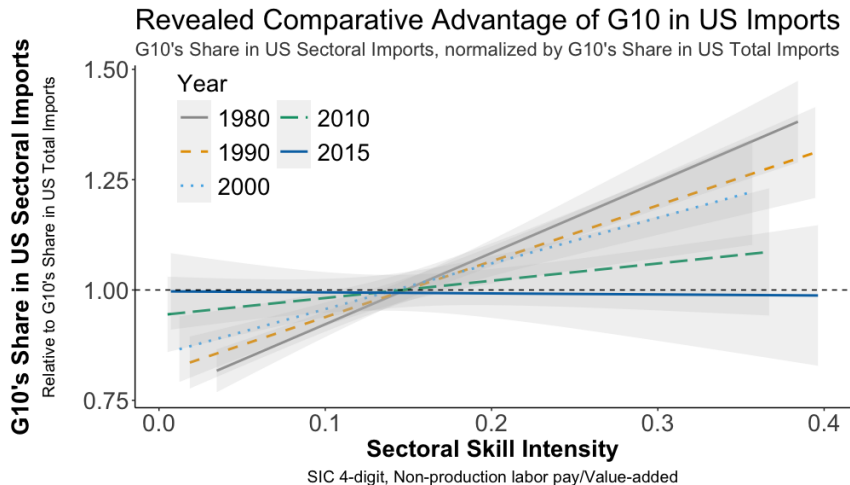
# APPENDIX

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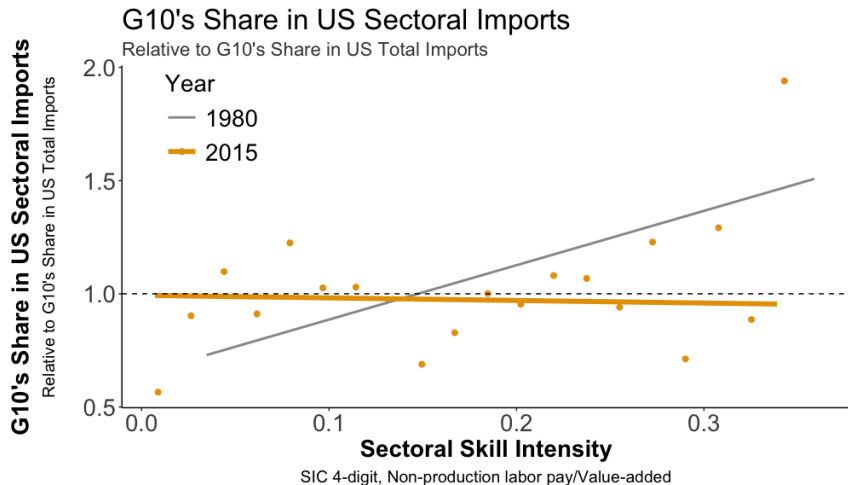
# FACTS

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# It's Not Just 1980 vs 2015. It's the Trend!

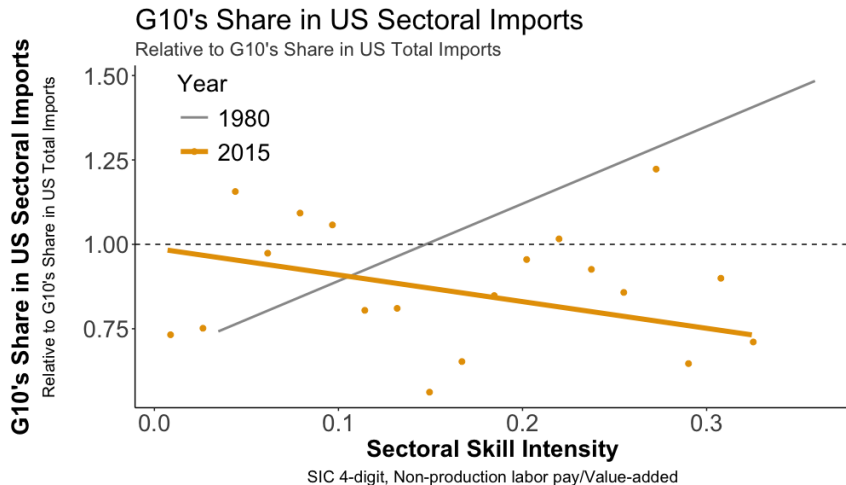


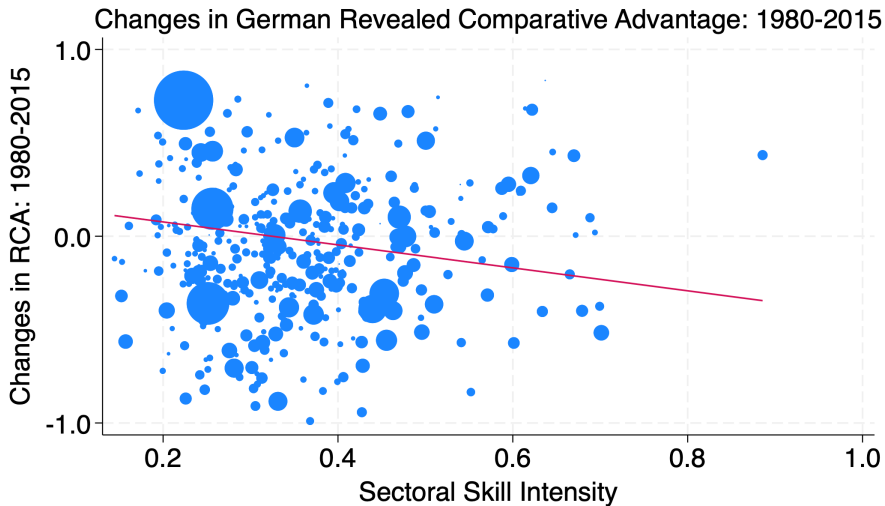
# Dropping China Does Not Change the Result



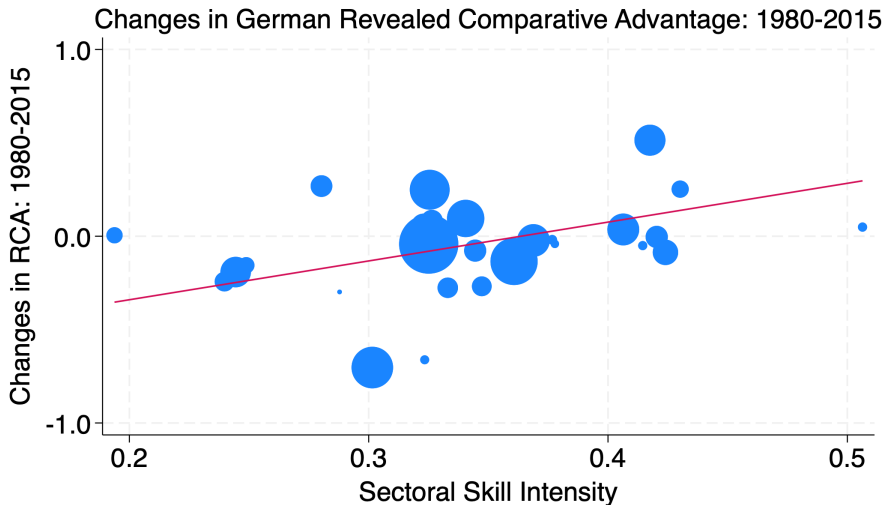


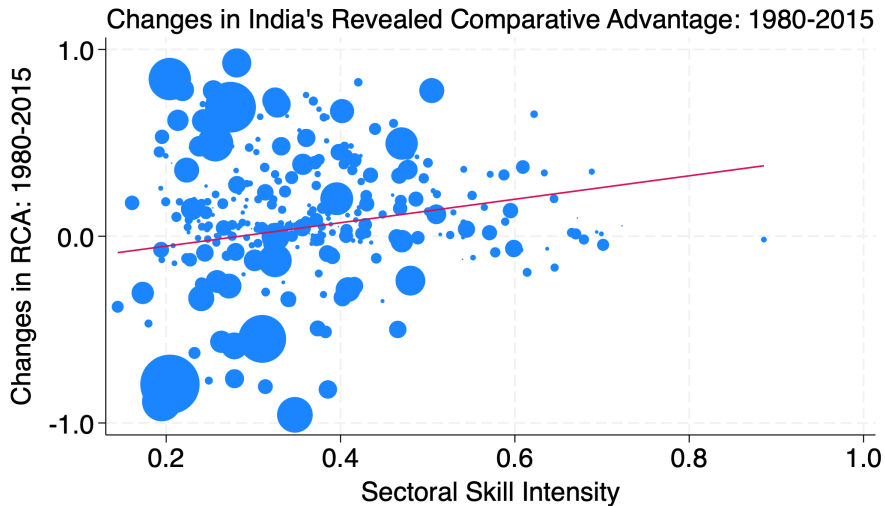
# Dropping Japan Does Not Change the Result (if any, cleaner)



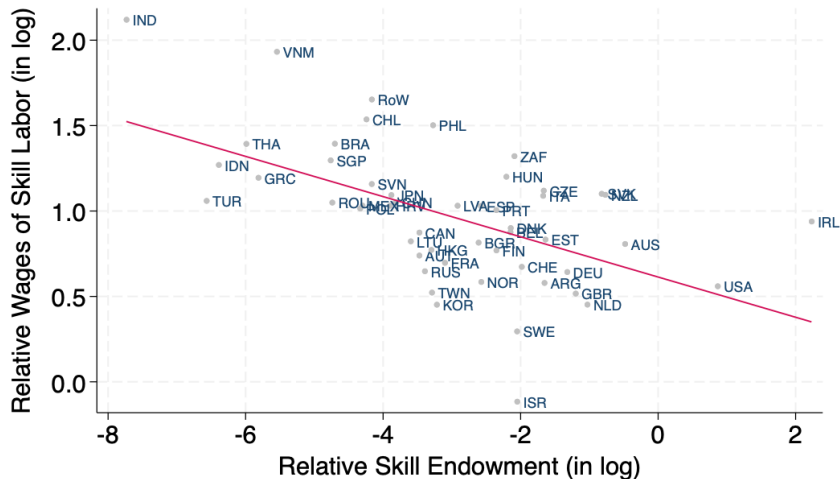


# Germany (Low-Automation) ▸ [back](#)



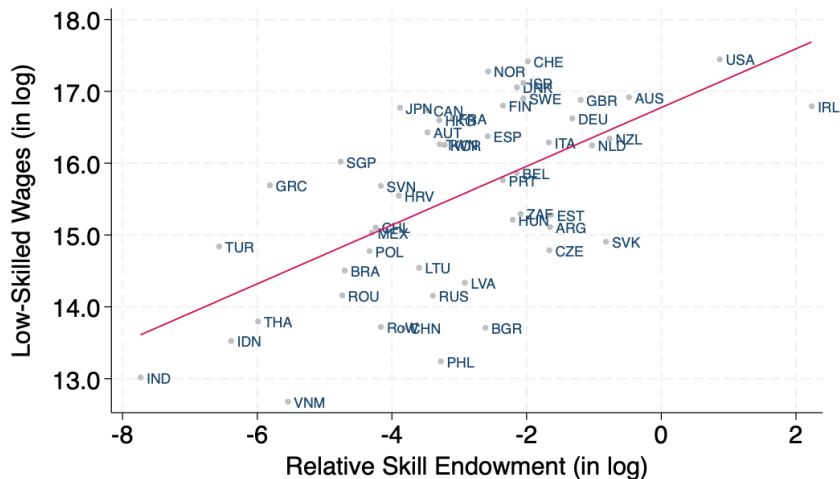


# Relative Skilled Wages Decreasing in Skill Endowment [▸ back](#)



Note: Data from GTAP, 2004

# Unskilled Wages Increasing in Skill Endowment [▸ back](#)



Note: Data from GTAP, 2004

# REGRESSION

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# Simplified Structural Interpretation

- Gravity Equation + Unit Production Cost

$$X_{i,j,s} = ((c_{i,s}\tau_{i,j}\tau_{j,s}))^{1-\sigma} \cdot (P_{j,s})^{\sigma-1} X_{j,s}, \quad \ln X_{i,j,s} = (1-\sigma) \cdot \ln c_{i,s} + \mu_{i,j} + \mu_{j,s}$$

$$c_{i,s} = (w_i^H)^{\alpha_s^H} (w_i^L)^{1-\alpha_s^H}, \quad \ln c_{i,s} = \underbrace{\frac{d \ln(w^H/w^L)}{d \ln(H/L)}}_{\equiv \epsilon^w: \text{Rel. Wage Elas.} < 0} \cdot \alpha_s^H \cdot \ln \left( \frac{H_i}{L_i} \right) + \ln w_i^L$$

- Regression

$$\ln X_{i,j,s} = (1-\sigma) \epsilon^w \left[ \alpha_s^H \times \ln \left( \frac{H_i}{L_i} \right) \right] + \mu_{i,j} + \mu_{j,s} + \ln w_i^L$$

▸ back

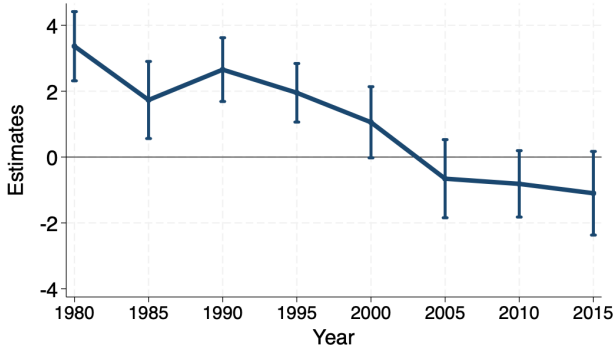


# ROBUSTNESS

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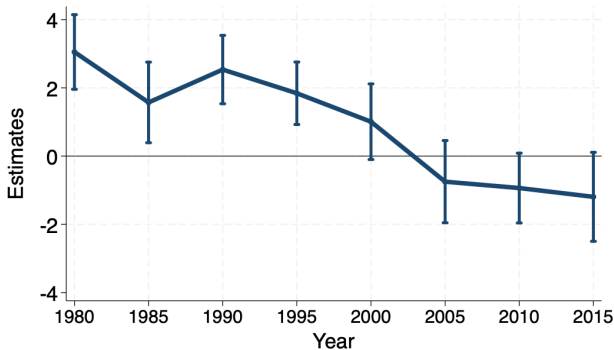
# Controlling Capital Intensity ▸ [back](#)

$$\ln X_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^H \times \ln \left( \frac{H_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \beta_t^K \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^K \times \ln \left( \frac{K_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t}$$

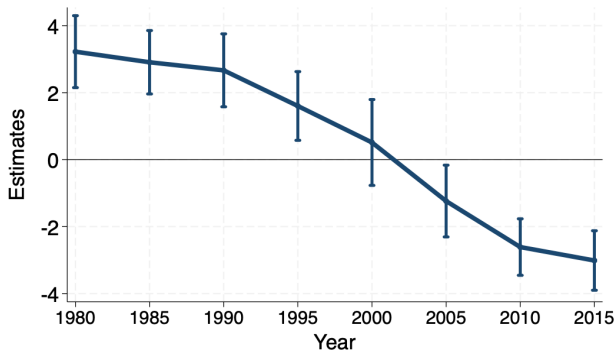


# Controlling Capital Intensity and Institutions ▸ [back](#)

$$\ln X_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^H \times \ln \left( \frac{H_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \sum_{f \in \{K, I\}} \beta_t^f \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^f \times \ln \left( \frac{F_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t}$$

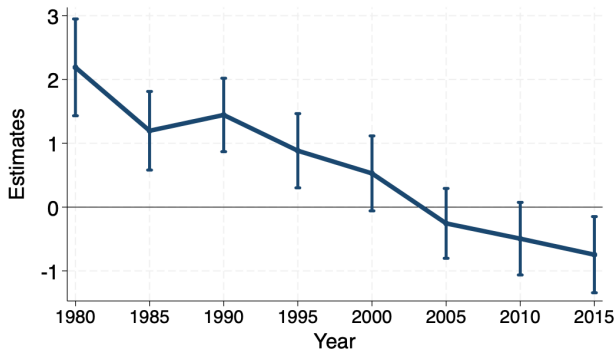


## Weighted by Country Export [▸ back](#)



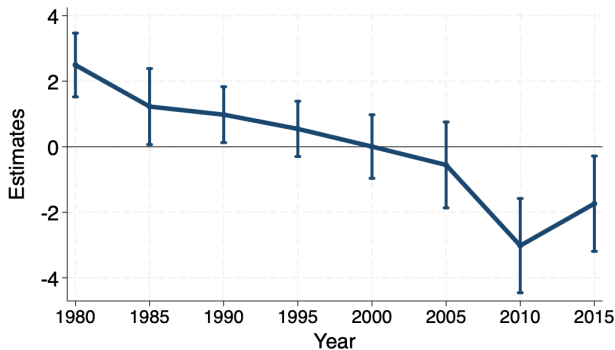
## Pool and control Origin-Sector FEs ▸ back

$$\ln X_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^H \times \ln \left( \frac{H_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,s} + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t}$$



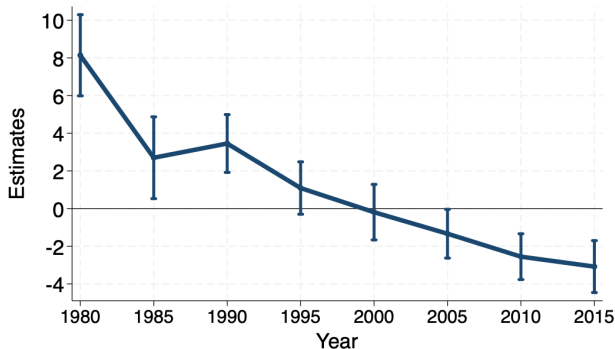
# High-school Graduates as Skilled ▸ [back](#)

$$\ln X_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^H \times \ln \left( \frac{HS_{i,t}}{NHS_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t}$$



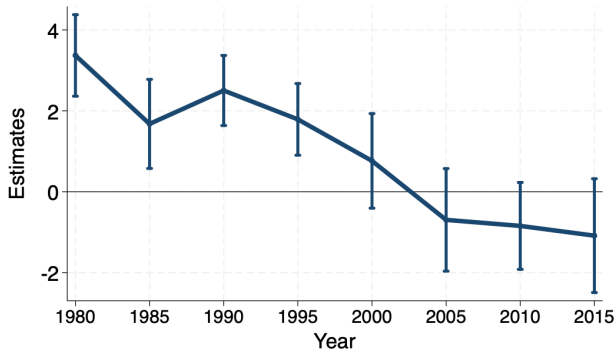
# Instrument Skill Endowment by Cohort IV [▸ back](#)

$$\ln X_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^H \times \ln \left( \frac{H_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t}$$



## Romalis (2004): Total Export [▸ back](#)

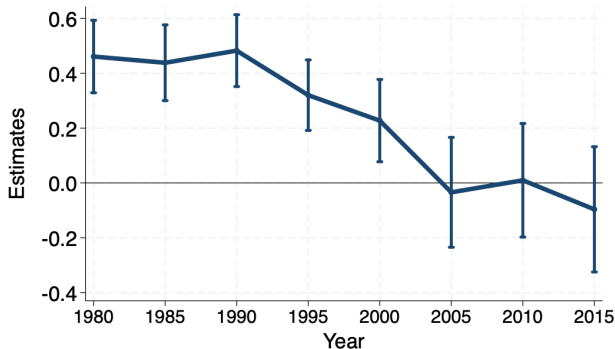
$$\ln X_{i,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \alpha_{s,t}^H \times \ln \left( \frac{H_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,t} + \eta_{s,t}$$





## Chor (2011): Num of Workers as Factor Intensity [▸ back](#)

$$\ln X_{i,j,s,t} = \beta_t \left[ \ln \left( \frac{H_{s,t}}{L_{s,t}} \right) \times \ln \left( \frac{H_{i,t}}{L_{i,t}} \right) \right] + \eta_{i,j,t} + \eta_{j,s,t}$$



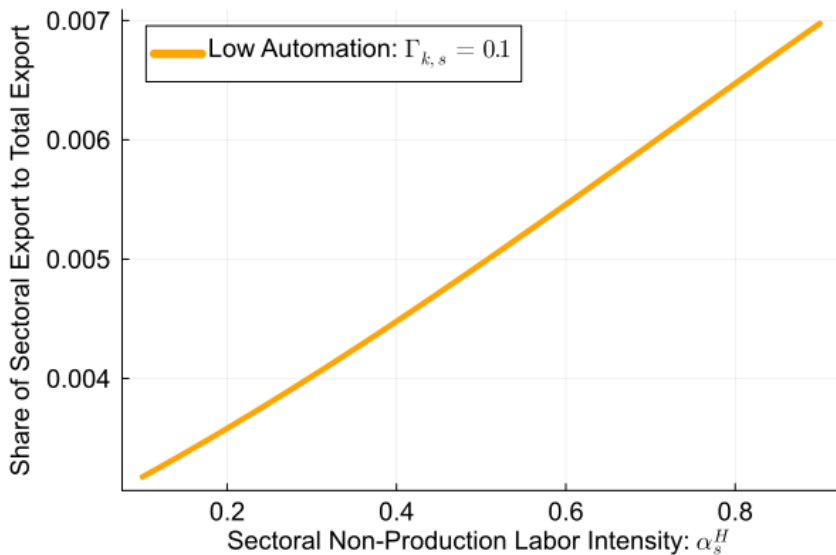
## TWO COUNTRY ILLUSTRATION: AUTOMATION

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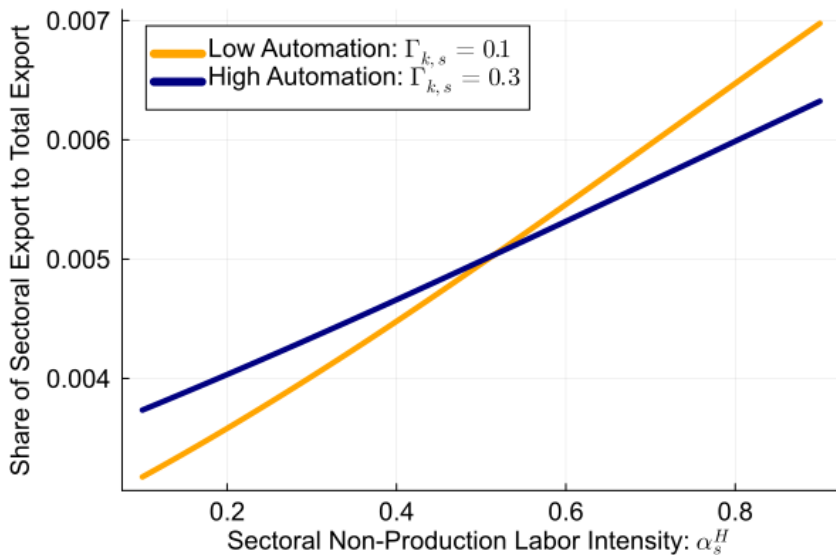
# Two Country Illustration: Automation

- North (40% are H) and South (25% are H)
- Actual factor intensity across 397 SIC sectors
- Set  $\alpha_S^G = \alpha_S^M = 0$  (focus on value-added)
- Exogenous changes in factor intensity common across sectors & countries
  - Automation: Increase  $\Gamma_{i,S}^K = 0.1$  to 0.3
- Show export share of each sector in North against  $\alpha_S^H$  – Slope is  $\beta^H$

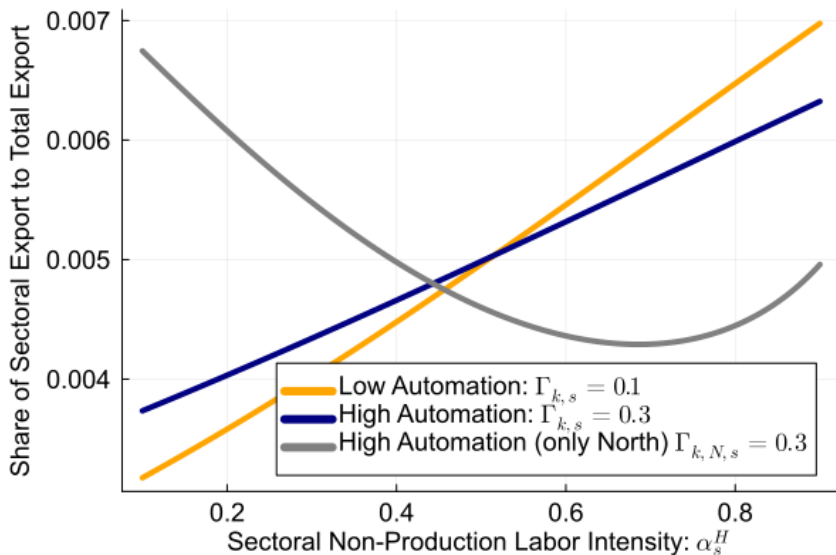
# North Specialize in Skill-Intensive Sectors



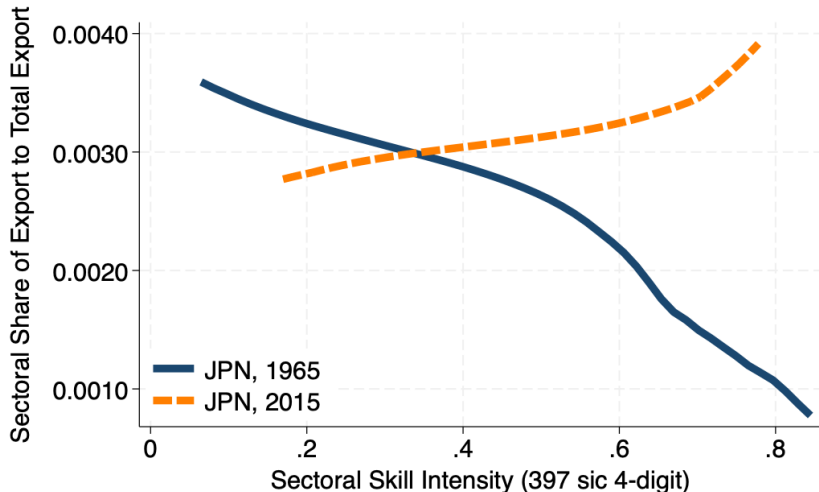
# Automation Makes Skills Less Important



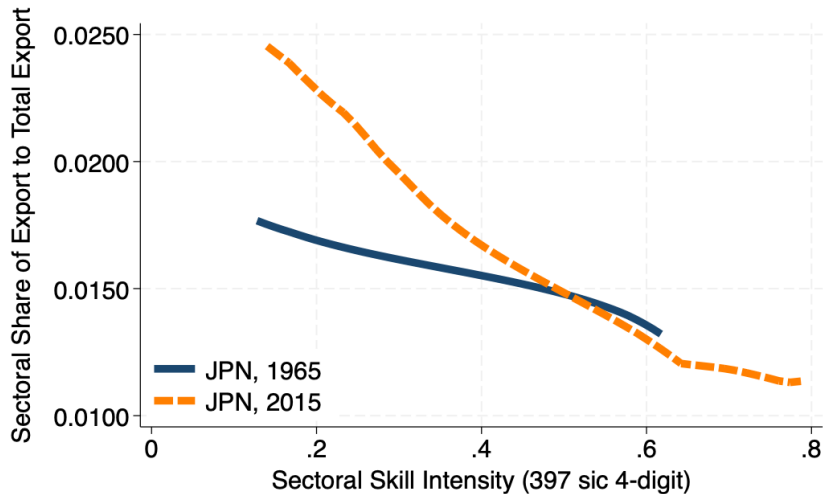
## If Only North Automates, Sign Flips



## Example: Within Low-Automation Sectors, Japan Specializes in Skill Intensive Industries [Back](#)



## Example: Within High-Automation Sectors, Japan Specializes in Low-Skill Intensive Industries [▸ Back](#)





## TOY MODEL: TASK AND COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE

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# Model

- Small open economy with two sectors ( $s = 1, 2$ )
- Demand

$$q_s = (c_s)^{1-\sigma} \cdot \overline{Q}_s$$

- Production (micro-foundation = task framework)

$$Y_s = \zeta \cdot (H_s)^{\alpha_s} \left( (L_s)^{\Gamma} (M_s)^{1-\Gamma} \right)^{1-\alpha_s}, \quad \alpha_1 = 1 - \alpha_2 = \alpha > 1/2$$

–  $M_s$ : machines or foreign factors supplied at a fixed price  $r$

- Factor market clearing

$$\sum_{s=1,2} H_s = H, \quad \sum_{s=1,2} L_s = L$$

# Equilibrium

- Wages  $\{w^L, w^H\}$  that satisfy

$$w^L L = \Gamma(1 - \alpha)(c_1)^{1-\sigma} + \Gamma\alpha(c_2)^{1-\sigma}, \quad w^H H = \alpha(c_1)^{1-\sigma} + (1 - \alpha)(c_2)^{1-\sigma}$$

- Unit cost

$$c_s = \left(w^H\right)^{\alpha_s} \left((w^L)^\Gamma (r)^{1-\Gamma}\right)^{1-\alpha_s}$$

# Comparative Advantage

- A change in factor endowment  $\widehat{H} = -\widehat{L}$  (=compare two small countries)
- Up to 1st order, CA in H-intensive sector ( $s = 1$ )

$$\widehat{c}_2 - \widehat{c}_1 = \underbrace{-(2\alpha - 1)\widehat{\omega}}_{\text{Skill Premium} < 0} \underbrace{-(1 - \Gamma)(2\alpha - 1)\widehat{w}^L}_{\text{Task Displacement}}$$

- Skill premium ( $\widehat{\omega} \equiv \widehat{w}^H - \widehat{w}^L$ ) and wages

$$\widehat{\omega} = \underbrace{-2\widehat{H}}_{\text{Labor Supply}} + \underbrace{(2\alpha - 1)(\sigma - 1)(\widehat{c}_2 - \widehat{c}_1)}_{\text{GE Effect}}, \quad \widehat{w}^L = \frac{(\sigma - 1)(2\alpha - 1) - 1}{2 + (1 - \Gamma)(\sigma - 1)(2\alpha - 1)}\widehat{\omega}$$

# Comparative Advantage if $\Gamma = 1$

## Proposition 1: Rybczynski (1955)

An increase in skilled labor  $\hat{H} > 0$  strengthens comparative advantage in a skill-intensive sector.

$$\hat{c}_2 - \hat{c}_1 = \frac{2(2\alpha - 1)}{1 + (2\alpha - 1)^2(\sigma - 1)} \hat{H}$$

# Comparative Advantage if $\Gamma < 1$

## Proposition 2: Acemoglu-Restrepo meets Rybczynski

An increase in skilled labor  $\hat{H} > 0$  strengthens comparative advantage in a skill-intensive sector. However, the elasticity is lower when labor share  $\Gamma$  is lower.

$$\hat{c}_2 - \hat{c}_1 = \frac{2(2\alpha - 1)}{\frac{1}{\eta(\Gamma)} + (2\alpha - 1)^2(\sigma - 1)} \hat{H} \quad (1)$$

where  $\eta(\Gamma) = 1 - \frac{1 - (\sigma - 1)(2\alpha - 1)}{\frac{2}{1 - \Gamma} + (\sigma - 1)(2\alpha - 1)} \in (0, 1)$  is increasing in  $\Gamma$ .

# Automation, Globalization, and Inequality

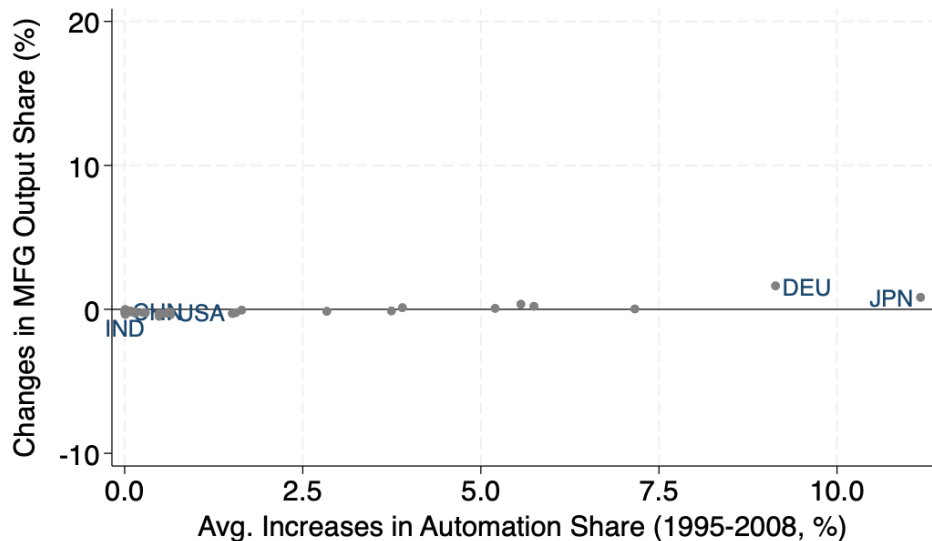
- Automation  $\rightarrow$  shifts MFG to High-Automation countries
- Demand for  $H$  increases in High-Automation countries
- Demand for  $L$  increases in Low-Automation countries
  - Move to Service sectors, which are more  $L$ -intensive

# Automation, Globalization, and Inequality

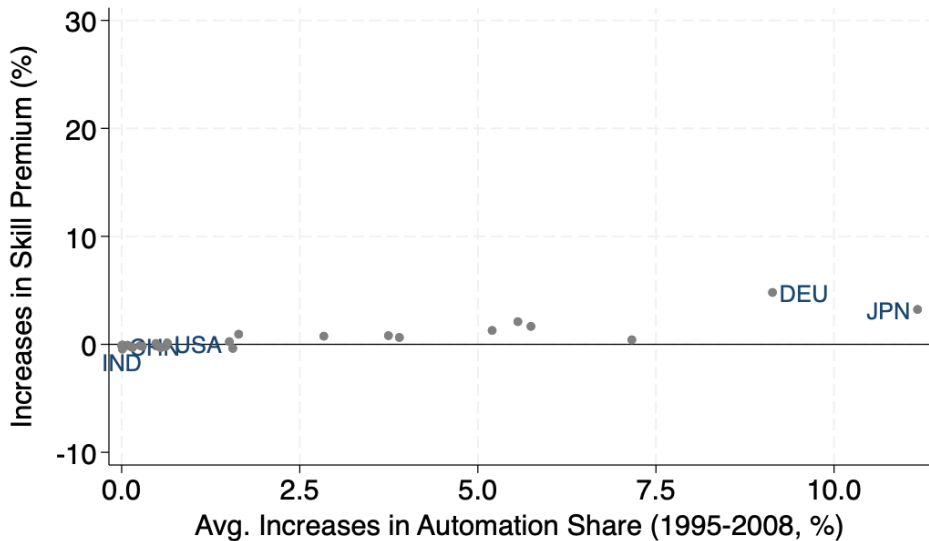
- Automation  $\rightarrow$  shifts MFG to High-Automation countries
- Demand for  $H$  increases in High-Automation countries
- Demand for  $L$  increases in Low-Automation countries
  - Move to Service sectors, which are more  $L$ -intensive
- Roles of Trade?
  - Now, set the trade elasticity  $\theta = 1$ , instead of  $\theta = 4$
  - This kills sectoral reallocation via expenditure switch across countries



$\theta = 1$ : Lower Elas. Makes MFG Shifts Less



## $\theta = 1$ : Skill Premia Increases Everywhere



## $\theta = 1$ : Welfare Increases Everywhere, but Less

