

# Occupational autonomy and wage divergence: Evidence from European survey data

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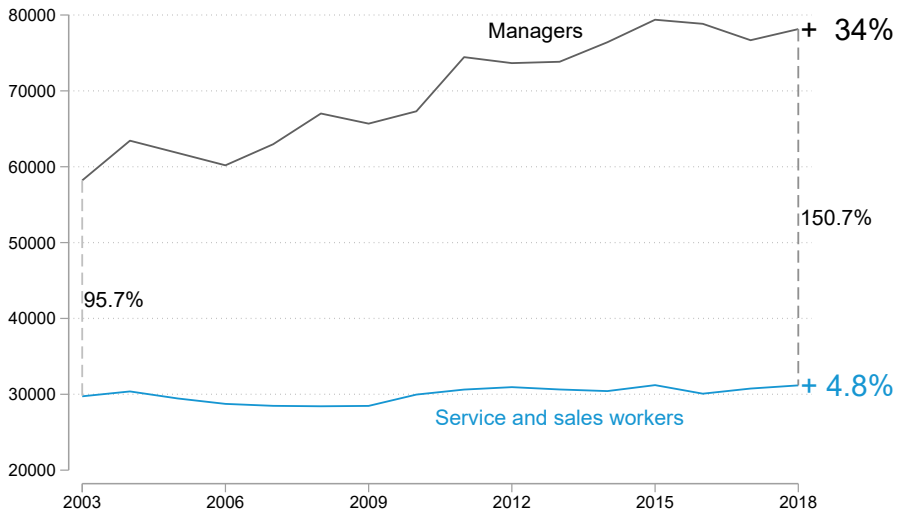


PEGFA | Institute of Political Economy,  
Governance, Finance and Accountability

# Wage growth in Western Europe

Wage growth diverges across jobs

Real wage, in 2015 €



# Research questions

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1. Is occupational autonomy related to wage growth differences in Western Europe?

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2. How are technology and institutions related to occupational wage growth differences?

## Literature and contribution I

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Low wage growth of cleaners, janitors, guards, customer-facing service and sales workers . . .

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**No power relations**

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→ **Autonomy**

# Occupational autonomy

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Degree of influence and control workers in an occupation have over the work process

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**Empirically test the relationship between occupational autonomy and wage growth**

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**Empirically test the role of institutions and technology**



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- Making Decisions and Solving Problems

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Alternative measure from European Work Conditions Survey

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Repeated cross-section, 800k observations

2003-2018, 15 countries; full-time, full-year employees, private sector only

# Empirical analysis



1. Is occupational autonomy related to wage growth differences in Western Europe?

# Empirical strategy

## Empirical strategy

$$\ln(w_{ijkct})$$

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## Main finding

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	In wage
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Routinisation	0.0004 (0.0006)
Offshoring	0.0003 (0.0004)
Education	Yes
Age	Yes
Gender	Yes
Migrant	Yes
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Occupation-industry-country	Yes
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Number of observations: 808122	
R-squared (adj.): 0.853	
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High vs. mean autonomy  
occupation: **0.27 pp**

This effect is statistically  
significant at the 1%-level



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Compounded over 12 years:

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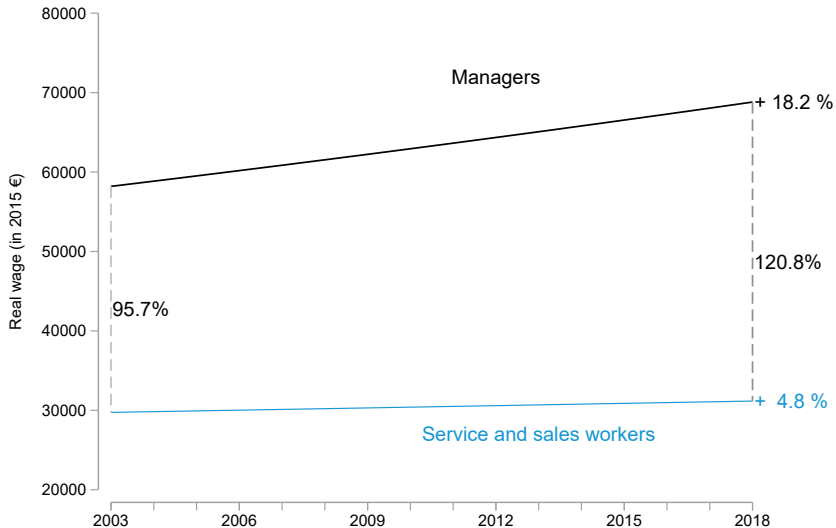
Wages in a mean autonomy occupation grow by 1%

Wages in a high autonomy occupation grow by 1.27%

Compounded over 12 years:

Wage level difference of 3.3% (if occupations have same initial wage level)

# Autonomy: Wage gap between *Managers* and *Service workers* 25.1%↑



## Other occupational wage growth determinants

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Routineness



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Increasing return to STEM occupations (cognitive analytical)

## Other occupational wage growth determinants

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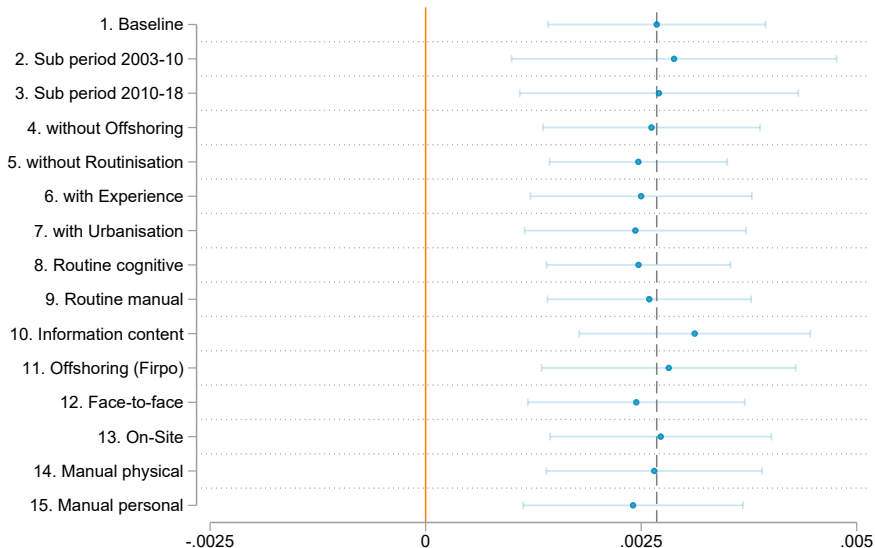
Offshoreability

~~Increasing returns to education (SBTC)~~

~~Increasing return to STEM occupations (cognitive analytical)~~

But we find increasing returns to autonomy

# Robustness



Notes: CI = 95%. The vertical dashed grey line shows our baseline autonomy estimate.

## Additional robustness checks

Different measures of autonomy

Variations of Mincer variables (experience, urbanisation, ...)

Time periods

1-digit occupation level

Alternative industry classification

Country exclusion

Industry exclusion

2. How are technology and institutions related to occupational wage growth differences?

## Potential channels

Economic theory: technological change and institutions affect the relationship between autonomy and wages



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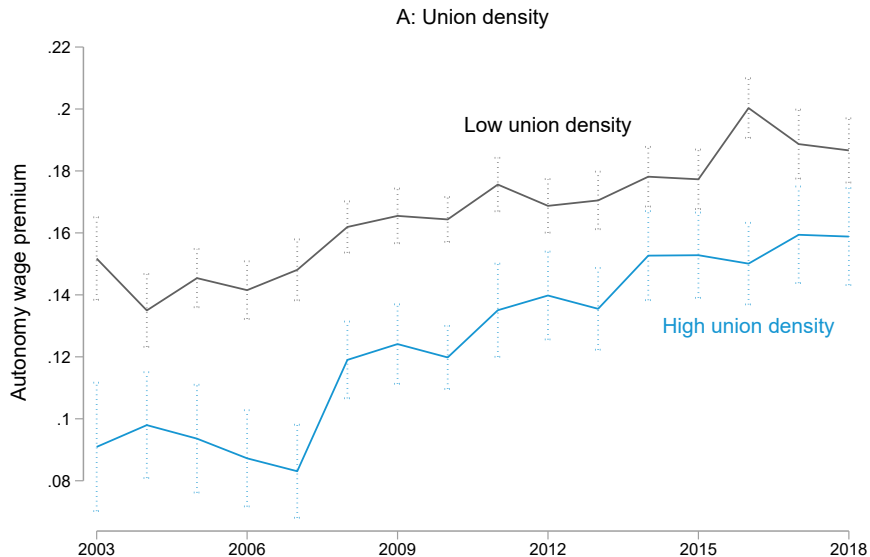
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**Data:** European Social Survey, European Working Conditions Survey, European Company Survey, KLEMS database

# The autonomy wage premium and labour unions

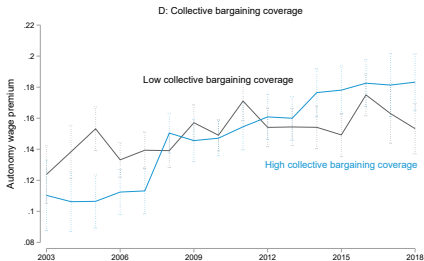
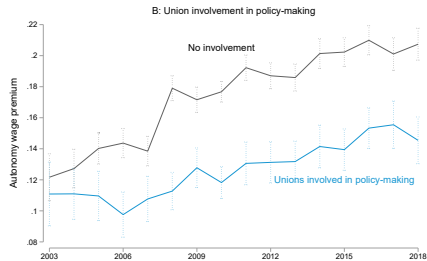
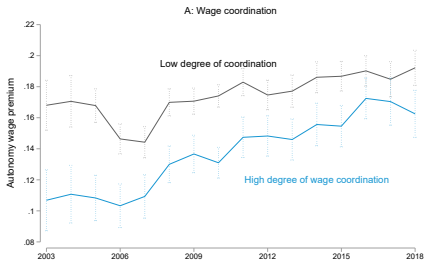


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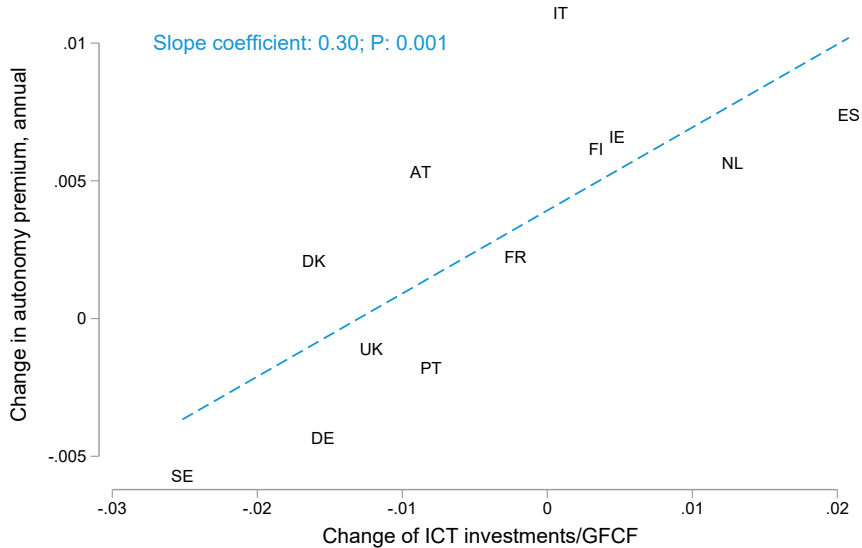
# The autonomy wage premium and collective bargaining

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# The autonomy premium and technological change

# The autonomy premium and technological change



# The autonomy premium and computer use

Table: Computer use and the autonomy wage premium

	(1)
	$\Delta$ Autonomy wage premium
$\Delta$ Computer use	0.0265** (0.0131)
Observations	90
r2	0.2911
Country FE	Yes

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Bottom line

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Higher occupational autonomy is related to higher wage growth



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→ Wage inequality increases

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Collective bargaining: *lower* autonomy premium

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Technological change: *rising* autonomy premium

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(but can everyone have a high-autonomy occupation?) → direct tech change towards creating *good* jobs

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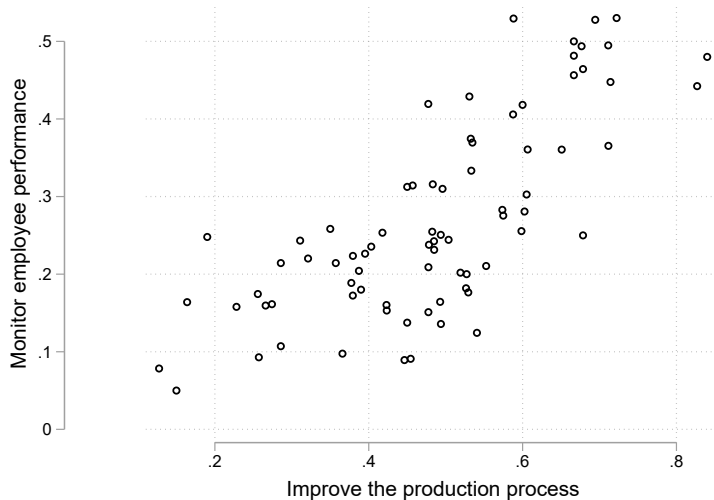
Why does the autonomy premium increase in high-bargaining countries?

Why do firms adapt digital technologies?

# Why do firms adapt digital technologies?

Firms use data analytics to improve the production process AND to monitor employees

Share of firms using data analytics for ... , by industry-country group



# Get in touch

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Alexander Guschanski

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# Appendix

## Related literature

Occupations matter (Autor et al. 2003)

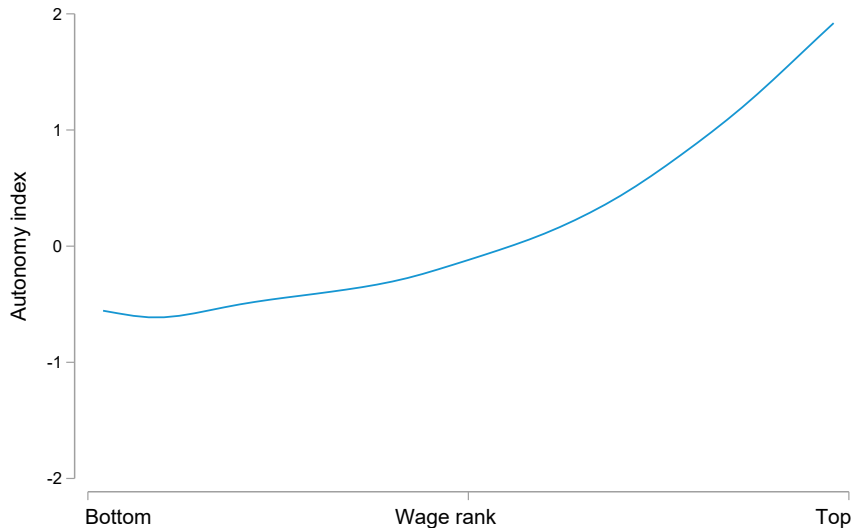
Focus on routinisation and offshoring (Acemoglu and Autor 2011, Firpo et al. 2011)

Increasing importance of worker autonomy for labour market outcomes (Blundell et al., 2022; Deming, 2021)

Collective bargaining as important determinant of the wage distribution (Farber et al., 2021)

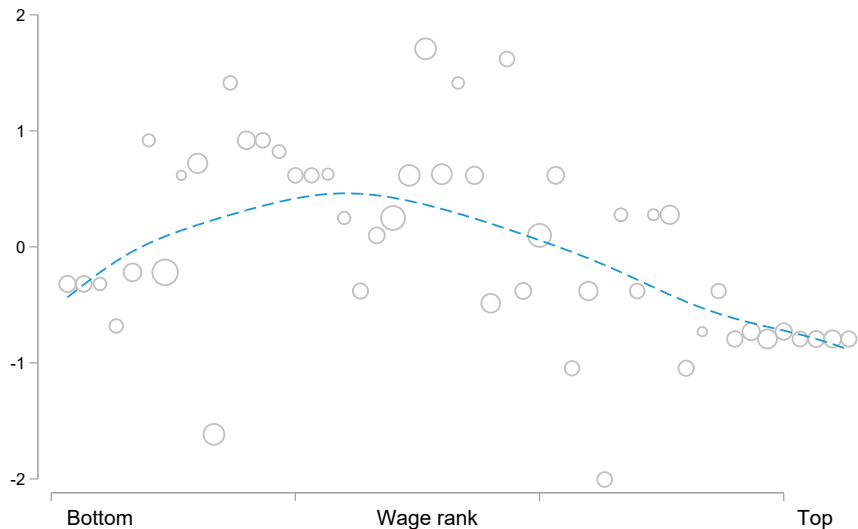


# High autonomy occupations are at the top of the wage distribution



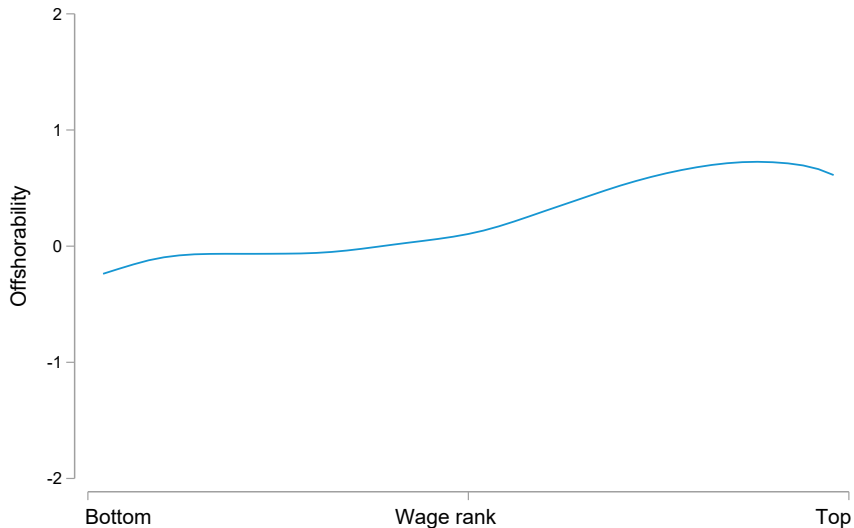
EU SILC, own calculation. Wage ranking is based on average occupation-industry wages across countries.

## Routinisation index vs wage rank, lowess smooth



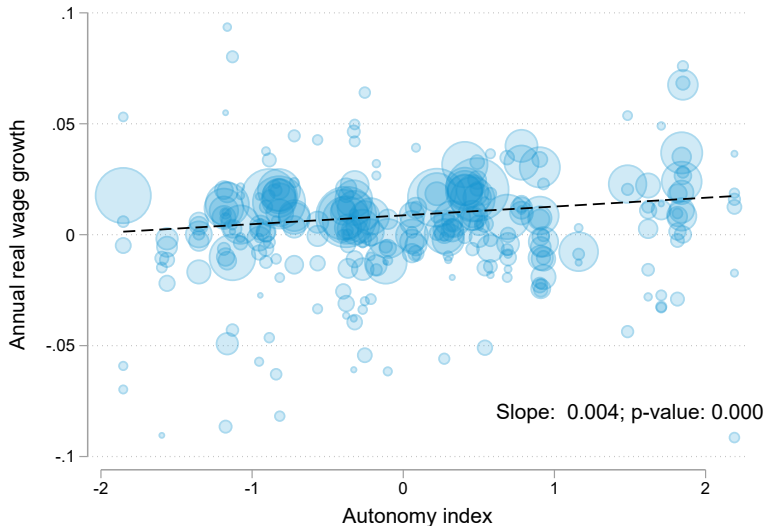
EU SILC, own calculation. Wage ranking is based on average occupation-industry wages across countries. Circle sizes reflect employment shares.

# Offshoring index vs wage rank, lowess smooth



EU SILC, own calculation. Wage ranking is based on average occupation-industry wages across countries.

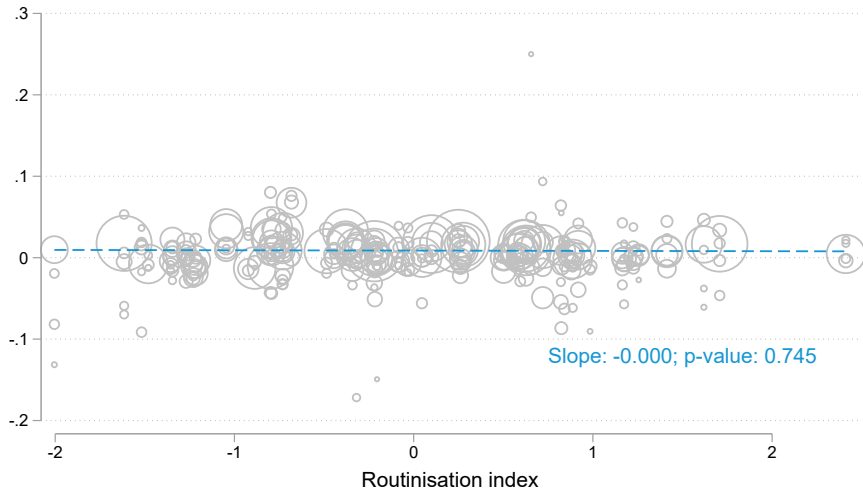
# Annual wage growth vs autonomy index, 2003 - 2018



The linear fit is weighted by employment shares. Circle sizes represent employment shares.

# Annual wage growth vs routinisation index, 2003 - 2018

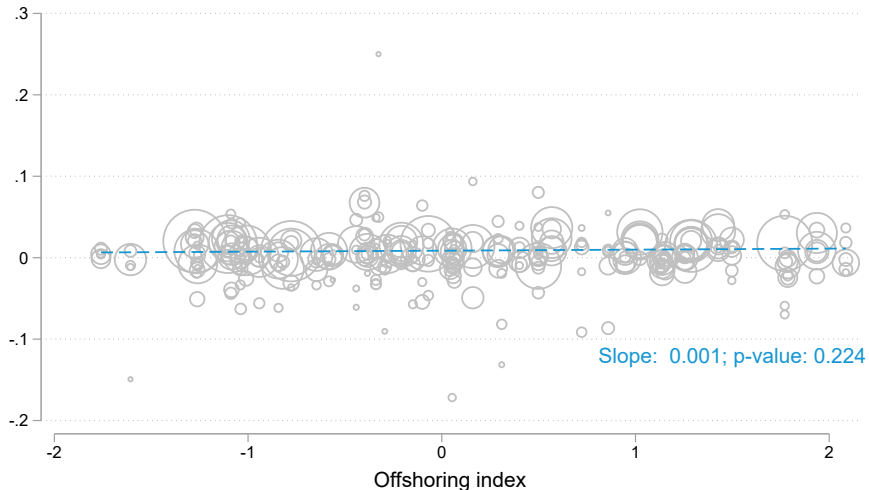
## Routinisation and real wage growth



The linear fit is weighted by employment shares. Circle sizes represent employment shares

# Annual wage growth vs offshoring index, 2003 - 2018

## Offshoring and real wage growth



The linear fit is weighted by employment shares. Circle sizes represent employment shares

## Alternative autonomy index I

The decision-making index from Deming (2021) includes the following elements:

- 4.A.2.b.1 Making Decisions and Solving Problems
- 4.A.2.b.4 Developing Objectives and Strategies
- 4.A.2.b.6 (Organizing), Planning and Prioritizing Work

## Alternative autonomy index II

The extended autonomy index includes the following nine elements:

- 4.A.2.b.1 Making Decisions and Solving Problems
- 4.A.2.b.2 Thinking Creatively
- 4.A.2.b.4 Developing Objectives and Strategies
- 4.C.3.a.2.b Frequency of Decision Making
- 4.A.2.b.6 Organizing, Planning and Prioritizing Work
- 2.A.2.a Critical Thinking
- 2.A.2.d Monitoring
- 4.C.3.d.3 Pace determined by Speed of Equipment (reversed)
- 4.C.3.a.4 Freedom to make decisions



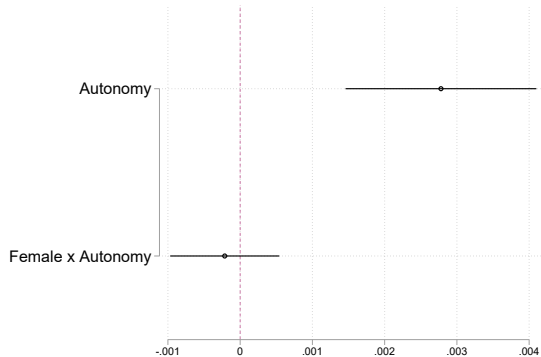
# The autonomy wage premium and gender inequality

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The autonomy wage premium does not affect women and men differently

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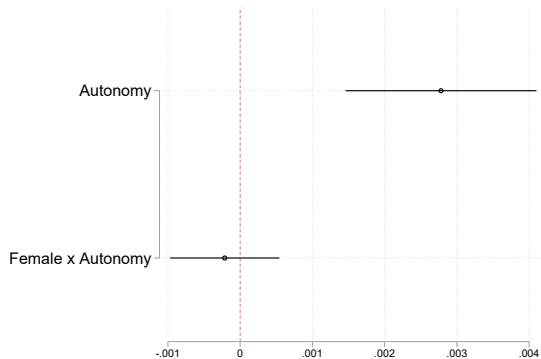
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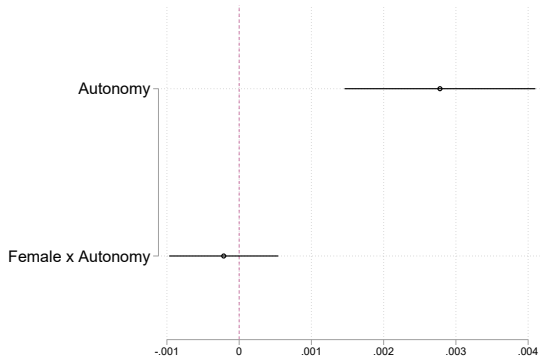
The autonomy wage premium does not affect women and men differently

But women are more often employed in low-autonomy occupations



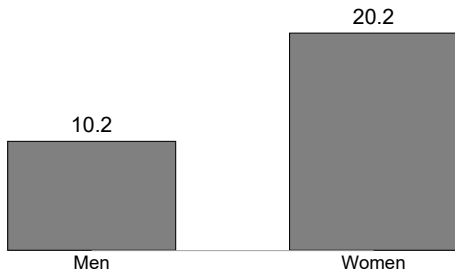
# The autonomy wage premium and gender inequality

The autonomy wage premium does not affect women and men differently



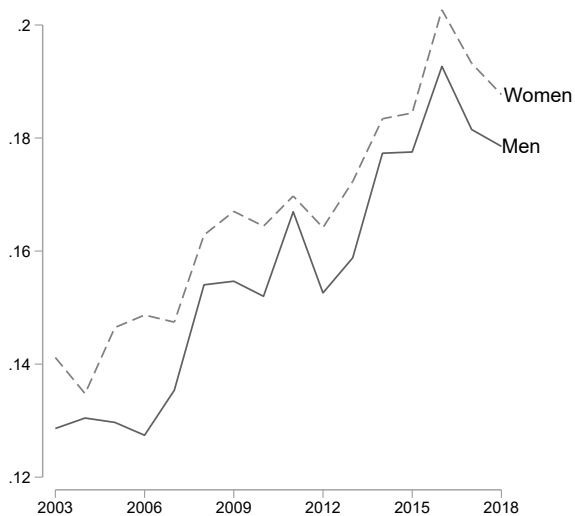
But women are more often employed in low-autonomy occupations

Share in low autonomy jobs in %

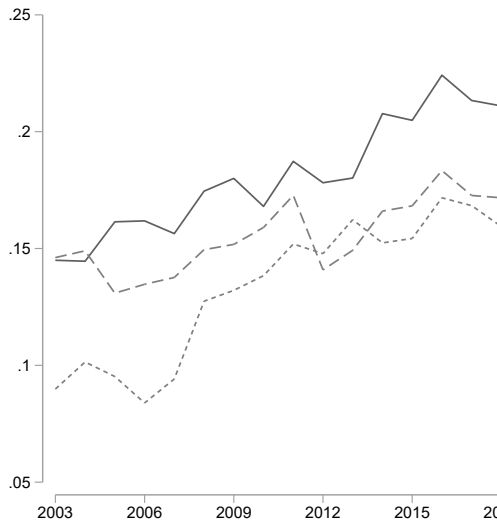


# The autonomy premium over time for gender and population density

A: Autonomy premium by gender

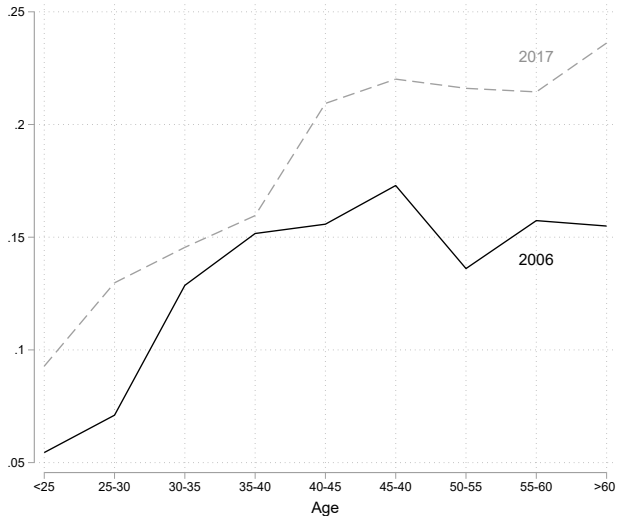


B: Autonomy premium by population density

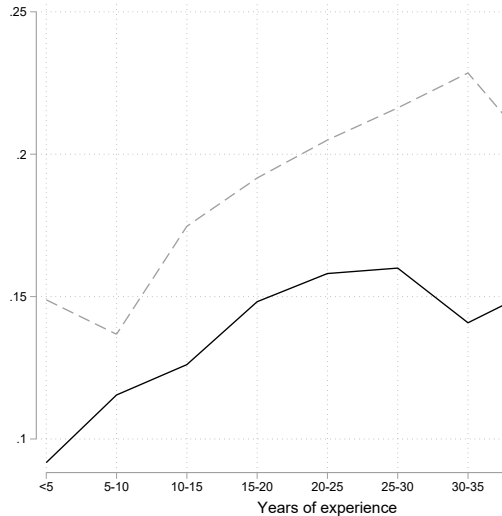


# The autonomy premium along age and experience

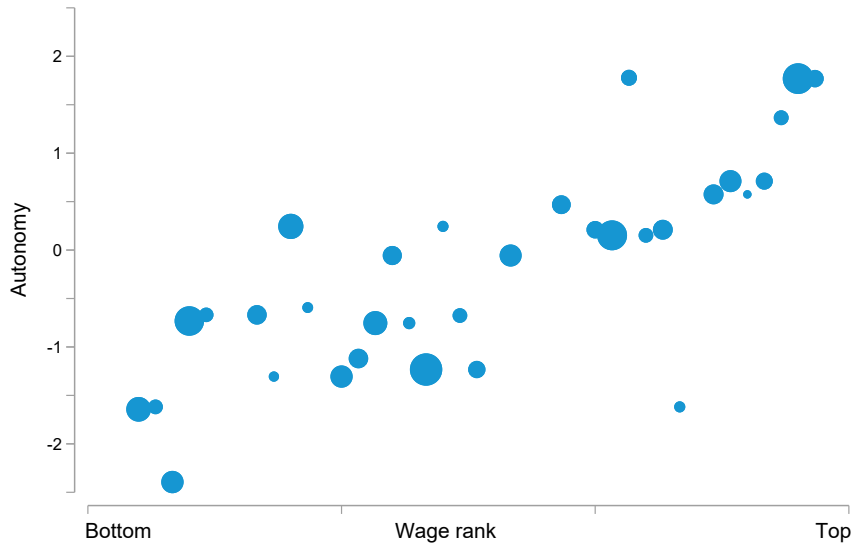
A: The autonomy wage premium across age bins



B: The autonomy wage premium across experience bins

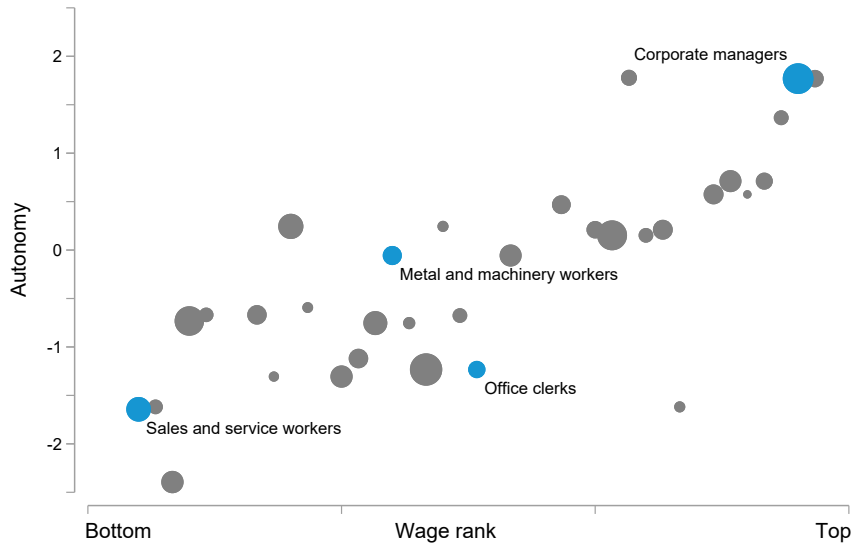


## High autonomy occupations are at the top of the wage distribution





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# Robustness

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Table: Robustness 1

	(1) excl. Rou and Off	(2) Return to education	(3) Cognitive anal.
Autonomy	0.0025*** (0.0005)	0.0029*** (0.0007)	0.0042*** (0.0010)
Routinisation		0.0003 (0.0006)	
Offshoring		0.0004 (0.0004)	
College return		-0.0006* (0.0003)	
Cognitive analytical (AA)			-0.0019** (0.0009)
Women	-0.1919*** (0.0035)	-0.1918*** (0.0035)	-0.1919*** (0.0035)
Lower sec. educ.	0.0720*** (0.0071)	0.0764*** (0.0074)	0.0719*** (0.0071)
Upper sec. educ.	0.1704***	0.1706***	0.1702***

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Table: Robustness 2: Alternative measures

	(1) Autonomy (EWCS)	(2) Decision (Deming)	(3) Autonomy alternative	(4) Supervisory tasks
Autonomy (EWCS)	0.0047*** (0.0010)			
Decision-making (Deming)		0.0027*** (0.0006)		
Autonomy altern. index			0.0032*** (0.0008)	
Supervisory tasks				0.0025*** (0.0006)
Routinisation	0.0001 (0.0006)	0.0004 (0.0006)	0.0010 (0.0007)	-0.0004 (0.0005)
Offshoring	-0.0010** (0.0005)	0.0003 (0.0004)	-0.0003 (0.0004)	0.0003 (0.0004)