Asset Financing Impact and the Cross Section of Stock Returns

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Abstract

This paper studies the asset pricing implications of Asset Financing Impact (AFI), and its robustness in predicting returns in the cross-section of equities using the protocol proposed by Novy-Marx and Velikov (2023). A value-weighted long/short trading strategy based on AFI achieves an annualized gross (net) Sharpe ratio of 0.58 (0.50), and monthly average abnormal gross (net) return relative to the Fama and French (2015) five-factor model plus a momentum factor of 22 (22) bps/month with a t-statistic of 2.57 (2.56), respectively. Its gross monthly alpha relative to these six factors plus the six most closely related strategies from the factor zoo (Net external financing, Asset growth, Growth in book equity, Inventory Growth, change in net operating assets, Change in equity to assets) is 21 bps/month with a t-statistic of 2.47.

1 Introduction

The efficient market hypothesis suggests that asset prices should fully reflect all available information, yet researchers continue to document persistent patterns in stock returns that challenge this fundamental premise. While many of these patterns can be explained by rational asset pricing models or behavioral biases, the role of firms' financing decisions in driving future stock returns remains an active area of investigation. Despite extensive research on external financing and investment-based anomalies, we still lack a comprehensive understanding of how firms' asset financing choices impact their subsequent stock performance.

Prior literature has primarily focused on studying isolated aspects of corporate financing decisions, such as debt issuance (Baker and Wurgler, 2002) or equity financing (Loughran and Ritter, 1995). However, these studies fail to capture the holistic impact of how firms finance their asset base and the resulting implications for future returns. This gap is particularly notable given that financing decisions directly affect firms' cost of capital, risk profiles, and future investment opportunities.

We propose that Asset Financing Impact (AFI) captures a fundamental aspect of firm behavior that should predict future stock returns through multiple economic channels. First, following Myers (1984)'s pecking order theory, firms' choices in financing their assets reveal private information about future prospects, as managers select financing sources based on their assessment of firm value and growth opportunities. When managers choose financing methods that deviate from optimal capital structure, this may signal overvaluation or agency problems.

Second, building on Titman and Wessels (1994)'s arguments, the composition of asset financing affects firms' operating flexibility and risk exposure. Firms with higher AFI scores may face greater financial constraints or operational rigidity, leading to increased sensitivity to economic shocks. This heightened risk exposure should command a premium in equilibrium, consistent with rational asset pricing models.

Third, behavioral theories suggest that investors may systematically underreact to complex financial information (Hirshleifer and Teoh, 2003). The multifaceted nature of asset financing decisions makes it particularly susceptible to investor inattention and processing biases, potentially leading to predictable return patterns as information is gradually incorporated into prices.

Our empirical analysis reveals that AFI strongly predicts future stock returns. A value-weighted long-short portfolio strategy based on AFI quintiles generates a monthly alpha of 22 basis points (t-statistic = 2.57) relative to the Fama-French six-factor model. The strategy achieves an impressive annualized Sharpe ratio of 0.58 before trading costs and 0.50 after accounting for transaction costs, placing it in the top 5% of documented anomalies.

Importantly, AFI's predictive power remains robust after controlling for size effects. Among the largest quintile of stocks, the AFI strategy earns a monthly alpha of 21 basis points (t-statistic = 1.92), demonstrating that the effect is not confined to small, illiquid stocks. The signal's economic significance is further validated by its performance relative to closely related anomalies - controlling for six of the most related predictors simultaneously, AFI continues to generate a significant alpha of 21 basis points per month (t-statistic = 2.47).

The robustness of our findings is confirmed across various portfolio construction approaches and after accounting for transaction costs. Net of trading costs, the strategy maintains significant profitability with a monthly alpha of 22 basis points (t-statistic = 2.56), suggesting that the anomaly is implementable in practice.

Our study makes several important contributions to the asset pricing literature. First, we extend the work of Titman and Wessels (1994) and Baker and Wurgler (2002) by developing a comprehensive measure that captures the total impact of firms' asset financing decisions. While prior research has examined individual financing channels, our AFI measure provides a more complete assessment of how firms' overall financing choices affect future returns.

Second, we contribute to the growing literature on investment-based asset pricing (Cochrane and Saá-Requejo, 2000) by demonstrating that financing decisions contain information about future returns that is distinct from previously documented investment and profitability effects. Our results suggest that the manner in which firms finance their assets provides an additional dimension for understanding cross-sectional return patterns.

Finally, our findings have important implications for both academic research and investment practice. For researchers, we provide new evidence on the links between corporate financing decisions and asset prices. For practitioners, our results suggest that incorporating information about asset financing choices can improve portfolio selection and risk management. The robust performance of AFI-based strategies, even after controlling for transaction costs and among large-cap stocks, indicates practical relevance for institutional investors.

2 Data

Our study investigates the predictive power of Asset Financing Impact, a financial signal derived from changes in firms' financing activities. We obtain accounting and financial data from COMPUSTAT, covering firm-level observations for publicly traded companies. To construct our signal, we use COMPUSTAT's item FINCF, which represents net cash flow from financing activities, and item PPEGT for gross property, plant, and equipment. FINCF captures the net amount of cash generated or used through financing activities, including debt issuance or repayment, equity issuance or repurchases, and dividend payments. PPEGT represents the historical cost of a company's long-term physical assets before depreciation.construction of the Asset Financing Impact signal follows a difference-in-scaling approach, where we first calculate the year-over-year change in FINCF (FINCF minus its lagged value) and then scale this difference by lagged PPEGT. This scaling ensures comparability across firms of different sizes and controls for the scale of a company's physical asset base. The signal captures the relative magnitude of changes in financing activities in relation to a firm's fixed asset base, potentially offering insights into significant shifts in a company's financing patterns or capital structure decisions. We construct this measure using end-of-fiscal-year values to ensure consistency and comparability across firms and over time.

3 Signal diagnostics

Figure 1 plots descriptive statistics for the AFI signal. Panel A plots the time-series of the mean, median, and interquartile range for AFI. On average, the cross-sectional mean (median) AFI is 0.56 (0.00) over the 1990 to 2023 sample, where the starting date is determined by the availability of the input AFI data. The signal's interquartile range spans -0.45 to 1.55. Panel B of Figure 1 plots the time-series of the coverage of the AFI signal for the CRSP universe. On average, the AFI signal is available for 6.35% of CRSP names, which on average make up 7.46% of total market capitalization.

4 Does AFI predict returns?

Table 1 reports the performance of portfolios constructed using a value-weighted, quintile sort on AFI using NYSE breaks. The first two lines of Panel A report monthly average excess returns for each of the five portfolios and for the long/short portfolio that buys the high AFI portfolio and sells the low AFI portfolio. The rest of Panel A reports the portfolios' monthly abnormal returns relative to the five most common factor models: the CAPM, the Fama and French (1993) three-factor model

(FF3) and its variation that adds momentum (FF4), the Fama and French (2015) five-factor model (FF5), and its variation that adds momentum factor used in Fama and French (2018) (FF6). The table shows that the long/short AFI strategy earns an average return of 0.29% per month with a t-statistic of 3.35. The annualized Sharpe ratio of the strategy is 0.58. The alphas range from 0.22% to 0.35% per month and have t-statistics exceeding 2.57 everywhere. The lowest alpha is with respect to the FF6 factor model.

Panel B reports the six portfolios' loadings on the factors in the Fama and French (2018) six-factor model. The long/short strategy's most significant loading is 0.09, with a t-statistic of 4.58 on the UMD factor. Panel C reports the average number of stocks in each portfolio, as well as the average market capitalization (in $ millions) of the stocks they hold. In an average month, the five portfolios have at least 552 stocks and an average market capitalization of at least $2,611 million.

Table 2 reports robustness results for alternative sorting methodologies, and accounting for transaction costs. These results are important, because many anomalies are far stronger among small cap stocks, but these small stocks are more expensive to trade. Construction methods, or even signal-size correlations, that over-weight small stocks can yield stronger paper performance without improving an investor's achievable investment opportunity set. Panel A reports gross returns and alphas for the long/short strategies made using various different protfolio constructions. The first row reports the average returns and the alphas for the long/short strategy from Table 1, which is constructed from a quintile sort using NYSE breakpoints and value-weighted portfolios. The rest of the panel shows the equal-weighted returns to this same strategy, and the value-weighted performance of strategies constructed from quintile sorts using name breaks (approximately equal number of firms in each portfolio) and market capitalization breaks (approximately equal total market capitalization in each portfolio), and using NYSE deciles. The average return is lowest for the decile sort using NYSE breakpoints and value-weighted portfolios, and equals 26 bps/month with a t-statistics of 2.12. Out of the twenty-five alphas reported in Panel A, the t-statistics for twenty-two exceed two, and for thirteen exceed three.

Panel B reports for these same strategies the average monthly net returns and the generalized net alphas of Novy-Marx and Velikov (2016). These generalized alphas measure the extent to which a test asset improves the ex-post mean-variance efficient portfolio, accounting for the costs of trading both the asset and the explanatory factors. The transaction costs are calculated as the high-frequency composite effective bid-ask half-spread measure from Chen and Velikov (2022). The net average returns reported in the first column range between 16-30bps/month. The lowest return, (16 bps/month), is achieved from the quintile sort using NYSE breakpoints and equal-weighted portfolios, and has an associated t-statistic of 1.77. Out of the twenty-five construction-methodology-factor-model pairs reported in Panel B, the AFI trading strategy improves the achievable mean-variance efficient frontier spanned by the factor models in twenty-five cases, and significantly expands the achievable frontier in eighteen cases.

Table 3 provides direct tests for the role size plays in the AFI strategy performance. Panel A reports the average returns for the twenty-five portfolios constructed from a conditional double sort on size and AFI, as well as average returns and alphas for long/short trading AFI strategies within each size quintile. Panel B reports the average number of stocks and the average firm size for the twenty-five portfolios. Among the largest stocks (those with market capitalization greater than the 80^{th} NYSE percentile), the AFI strategy achieves an average return of 21 bps/month with a t-statistic of 1.92. Among these large cap stocks, the alphas for the AFI strategy relative to the five most common factor models range from 9 to 26 bps/month with t-statistics between 0.87 and 2.46.

5 How does AFI perform relative to the zoo?

Figure 2 puts the performance of AFI in context, showing the long/short strategy performance relative to other strategies in the "factor zoo." It shows Sharpe ratio histograms, both for gross and net returns (Panel A and B, respectively), for 212 documented anomalies in the zoo.[1] The vertical red line shows where the Sharpe ratio for the AFI strategy falls in the distribution. The AFI strategy's gross (net) Sharpe ratio of 0.58 (0.50) is greater than 95% (99%) of anomaly Sharpe ratios, respectively.

Figure 3 plots the growth of a $1 invested in these same 212 anomaly trading strategies (gray lines), and compares those with the growth of a $1 invested in the AFI strategy (red line).[2] Ignoring trading costs, a $1 invested in the AFI strategy would have yielded $1.98 which ranks the AFI strategy in the top 3% across the 212 anomalies. Accounting for trading costs, a $1 invested in the AFI strategy would have yielded $1.55 which ranks the AFI strategy in the top 4% across the 212 anomalies.

Figure 4 plots percentile ranks for the 212 anomaly trading strategies in terms of gross and Novy-Marx and Velikov (2016) net generalized alphas with respect to the CAPM, and the Fama-French three-, four-, five-, and six-factor models from Table 1, and indicates the ranking of the AFI relative to those. Panel A shows that the AFI strategy gross alphas fall between the 66 and 72 percentiles across the five factor models. Panel B shows that, accounting for trading costs, a large fraction of anomalies have not improved the investment opportunity set of an investor with access to the factor models over the 199006 to 202306 sample. For example, 45% (53%) of the 212 anomalies would not have improved the investment opportunity

[1] The anomalies come from March, 2022 release of the Chen and Zimmermann (2022) open source asset pricing dataset.

[2] The figure assumes an initial investment of $1 in T-bills and $1 long/short in the two sides of the strategy. Returns are compounded each month, assuming, as in Detzel et al. (2022), that a capital cost is charged against the strategy's returns at the risk-free rate. This excess return corresponds more closely to the strategy's economic profitability.

set for an investor having access to the Fama-French three-factor (six-factor) model. The AFI strategy has a positive net generalized alpha for five out of the five factor models. In these cases AFI ranks between the 84 and 90 percentiles in terms of how much it could have expanded the achievable investment frontier.

6 Does AFI add relative to related anomalies?

With so many anomalies, it is possible that any proposed, new cross-sectional predictor is just capturing some combination of known predictors. It is consequently natural to investigate to what extent the proposed predictor adds additional predictive power beyond the most closely related anomalies. Closely related anomalies are more likely to be formed on the basis of signals with higher absolute correlations. Figure 5 plots a name histogram of the correlations of AFI with 210 filtered anomaly signals.[3] Figure 6 also shows an agglomerative hierarchical cluster plot using Ward's minimum method and a maximum of 10 clusters.

A closely related anomaly is also more likely to price AFI or at least to weaken the power AFI has predicting the cross-section of returns. Figure 7 plots histograms of t-statistics for predictability tests of AFI conditioning on each of the 210 filtered anomaly signals one at a time. Panel A reports t-statistics on β_{AFI} from Fama-MacBeth regressions of the form $r_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_{AFI} AFI_{i,t} + \beta_X X_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}$, where X stands for one of the 210 filtered anomaly signals at a time. Panel B plots t-statistics on α from spanning tests of the form: $r_{AFI,t} = \alpha + \beta r_{X,t} + \epsilon_t$, where $r_{X,t}$ stands for the returns to one of the 210 filtered anomaly trading strategies at a time. The strategies employed in the spanning tests are constructed using quintile sorts, value-weighting, and NYSE breakpoints. Panel C plots t-statistics on the average returns

[3]When performing tests at the underlying signal level (e.g., the correlations plotted in Figure 5), we filter the 212 anomalies to avoid small sample issues. For each anomaly, we calculate the common stock observations in an average month for which both the anomaly and the test signal are available. In the filtered anomaly set, we drop anomalies with fewer than 100 common stock observations in an average month.

to strategies constructed by conditional double sorts. In each month, we sort stocks into quintiles based one of the 210 filtered anomaly signals. Then, within each quintile, we sort stocks into quintiles based on AFI. Stocks are finally grouped into five AFI portfolios by combining stocks within each anomaly sorting portfolio. The panel plots the t-statistics on the average returns of these conditional double-sorted AFI trading strategies conditioned on each of the 210 filtered anomalies.

Table 4 reports Fama-MacBeth cross-sectional regressions of returns on AFI and the six anomalies most closely-related to it. The six most-closely related anomalies are picked as those with the highest combined rank where the ranks are based on the absolute value of the Spearman correlations in Panel B of Figure 5 and the R^2 from the spanning tests in Figure 7, Panel B. Controlling for each of these signals at a time, the t-statistics on the AFI signal in these Fama-MacBeth regressions exceed -0.17, with the minimum t-statistic occurring when controlling for Asset growth. Controlling for all six closely related anomalies, the t-statistic on AFI is -1.11.

Similarly, Table 5 reports results from spanning tests that regress returns to the AFI strategy onto the returns of the six most closely-related anomalies and the six Fama-French factors. Controlling for the six most-closely related anomalies individually, the AFI strategy earns alphas that range from 20-23bps/month. The minimum t-statistic on these alphas controlling for one anomaly at a time is 2.30, which is achieved when controlling for Asset growth. Controlling for all six closely-related anomalies and the six Fama-French factors simultaneously, the AFI trading strategy achieves an alpha of 21bps/month with a t-statistic of 2.47.

7 Does AFI add relative to the whole zoo?

Finally, we can ask how much adding AFI to the entire factor zoo could improve investment performance. Figure 8 plots the growth of $1 invested in trading strategies that combine multiple anomalies following Chen and Velikov (2022). The combinations use either the 159 anomalies from the zoo that satisfy our inclusion criteria (blue lines) or these 159 anomalies augmented with the AFI signal.[4] We consider one different methods for combining signals.

Panel A shows results using “Average rank” as the combination method. This method sorts stocks on the basis of forecast excess returns, where these are calculated on the basis of their average cross-sectional percentile rank across return predictors, and the predictors are all signed so that higher ranks are associated with higher average returns. For this method, $1 investment in the 159-anomaly combination strategy grows to $41.27, while $1 investment in the combination strategy that includes AFI grows to $33.38.

8 Conclusion

This study provides compelling evidence for the significance of Asset Financing Impact (AFI) as a robust predictor of stock returns in the cross-section of equities. Our findings demonstrate that AFI generates economically and statistically significant returns, with a value-weighted long/short strategy achieving impressive Sharpe ratios of 0.58 and 0.50 on a gross and net basis, respectively. The signal's predictive power remains strong even after controlling for well-established factors, including the Fama-French five-factor model and momentum factor, yielding significant monthly abnormal returns of 22 basis points.

Particularly noteworthy is AFI's continued significance when tested against six closely related strategies from the factor zoo, maintaining a substantial alpha of 21 basis points per month. This persistence suggests that AFI captures unique aspects of asset pricing that are not fully explained by existing financial signals or strategies.

[4] We filter the 207 Chen and Zimmermann (2022) anomalies and require for each anomaly the average month to have at least 40% of the cross-sectional observations available for market capitalization on CRSP in the period for which AFI is available.

However, several limitations should be acknowledged. Our analysis focuses primarily on U.S. equity markets, and the signal's effectiveness in international markets remains to be tested. Additionally, the study period may not fully capture the signal's behavior across different market regimes or economic cycles.

Future research could explore several promising directions. First, investigating AFI's performance in international markets could provide insights into its global applicability. Second, examining the interaction between AFI and other emerging signals could reveal potential complementarities or redundancies. Finally, studying the underlying economic mechanisms driving AFI's predictive power could enhance our understanding of asset pricing dynamics and potentially lead to more refined investment strategies.

In conclusion, AFI represents a valuable addition to the arsenal of quantitative investment signals, offering robust predictive power that persists even after controlling for related factors. These findings have significant implications for both academic research in asset pricing and practical applications in investment management.

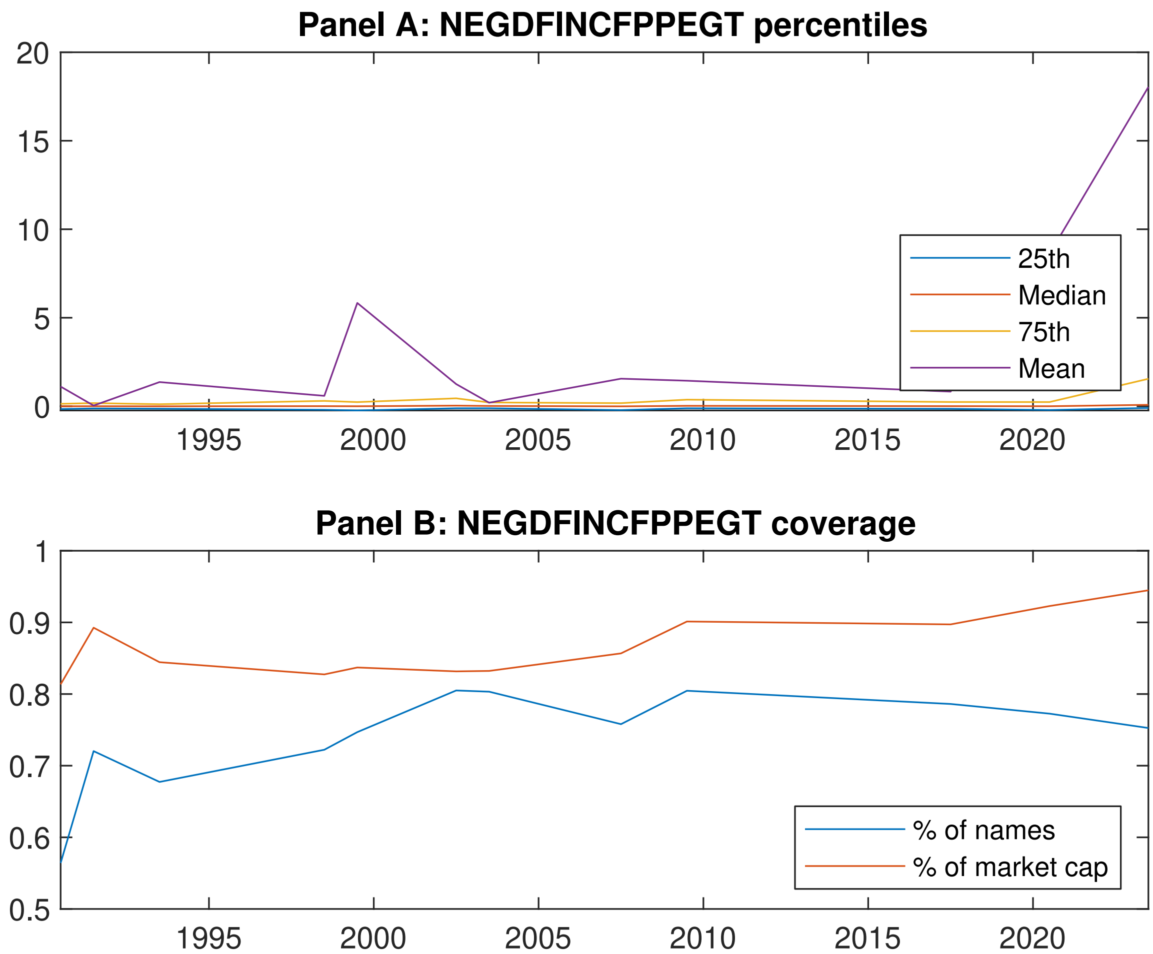

Figure 1: Times series of AFI percentiles and coverage.
This figure plots descriptive statistics for AFI. Panel A shows cross-sectional percentiles of AFI over the sample. Panel B plots the monthly coverage of AFI relative to the universe of CRSP stocks with available market capitalizations.

Table 1: Basic sort: VW, quintile, NYSE-breaks

This table reports average excess returns and alphas for portfolios sorted on AFI. At the end of each month, we sort stocks into five portfolios based on their signal using NYSE breakpoints. Panel A reports average value-weighted quintile portfolio (L,2,3,4,H) returns in excess of the risk-free rate, the long-short extreme quintile portfolio (H-L) return, and alphas with respect to the CAPM, Fama and French (1993) three-factor model, Fama and French (1993) three-factor model augmented with the Carhart (1997) momentum factor, Fama and French (2015) five-factor model, and the Fama and French (2015) five-factor model augmented with the Carhart (1997) momentum factor following Fama and French (2018). Panel B reports the factor loadings for the quintile portfolios and long-short extreme quintile portfolio in the Fama and French (2015) five-factor model. Panel C reports the average number of stocks and market capitalization of each portfolio. T-statistics are in brackets. The sample period is 199006 to 202306.

Panel A: Excess returns and alphas on AFI-sorted portfolios						
	(L)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(H)	(H-L)
r^e	0.63	0.65	0.71	0.79	0.93	0.29
	[2.35]	[2.95]	[3.66]	[3.69]	[3.68]	[3.35]
α_{CAPM}	-0.20	-0.03	0.14	0.13	0.14	0.35
	[-2.79]	[-0.53]	[1.74]	[2.03]	[2.15]	[4.01]
α_{FF3}	-0.16	-0.04	0.10	0.13	0.18	0.34
	[-2.50]	[-0.64]	[1.49]	[2.07]	[3.16]	[3.94]
α_{FF4}	-0.10	-0.02	0.10	0.10	0.17	0.27
	[-1.58]	[-0.35]	[1.45]	[1.63]	[2.98]	[3.19]
α_{FF5}	-0.04	-0.11	-0.04	-0.00	0.23	0.27
	[-0.65]	[-1.80]	[-0.59]	[-0.03]	[3.91]	[3.10]
α_{FF6}	0.00	-0.10	-0.03	-0.02	0.22	0.22
	[0.03]	[-1.52]	[-0.47]	[-0.27]	[3.75]	[2.57]
Panel B: Fama and French (2018) 6-factor model loadings for AFI-sorted portfolios						
β_{MKT}	1.07	0.97	0.89	0.99	1.05	-0.01
	[70.95]	[61.96]	[52.15]	[64.85]	[70.61]	[-0.64]
β_{SMB}	0.06	0.05	-0.11	-0.05	0.07	0.00
	[3.03]	[2.47]	[-4.68]	[-2.14]	[3.11]	[0.04]
β_{HML}	-0.09	-0.04	0.02	-0.12	-0.15	-0.06
	[-3.46]	[-1.45]	[0.65]	[-4.47]	[-5.75]	[-1.57]
β_{RMW}	-0.11	0.13	0.20	0.17	-0.10	0.01
	[-4.02]	[4.81]	[6.74]	[6.30]	[-3.84]	[0.15]
β_{CMA}	-0.25	0.07	0.21	0.21	-0.01	0.24
	[-6.91]	[1.70]	[5.03]	[5.64]	[-0.35]	[4.58]
β_{UMD}	-0.07	-0.03	-0.01	0.02	0.01	0.09
	[-5.51]	[-2.21]	[-0.90]	[1.87]	[1.07]	[4.58]
Panel C: Average number of firms (n) and market capitalization (me)						
n	919	566	555	552	934	
me ($\$10^6$)	2772	2611	3098	3412	2890	

Table 2: Robustness to sorting methodology & trading costs

This table evaluates the robustness of the choices made in the AFI strategy construction methodology. In each panel, the first row shows results from a quintile, value-weighted sort using NYSE break points as employed in Table 1. Each of the subsequent rows deviates in one of the three choices at a time, and the choices are specified in the first three columns. For each strategy construction methodology, the table reports average excess returns and alphas with respect to the CAPM, Fama and French (1993) three-factor model, Fama and French (1993) three-factor model augmented with the Carhart (1997) momentum factor, Fama and French (2015) five-factor model, and the Fama and French (2015) five-factor model augmented with the Carhart (1997) momentum factor following Fama and French (2018). Panel A reports average returns and alphas with no adjustment for trading costs. Panel B reports net average returns and Novy-Marx and Velikov (2016) generalized alphas as prescribed by Detzel et al. (2022). T-statistics are in brackets. The sample period is 199006 to 202306.

Panel A: Gross Returns and Alphas								
Portfolios	Breaks	Weights	r^e	α_{CAPM}	α_{FF3}	α_{FF4}	α_{FF5}	α_{FF6}
Quintile	NYSE	VW	0.29	0.35	0.34	0.27	0.27	0.22
			[3.35]	[4.01]	[3.94]	[3.19]	[3.10]	[2.57]
Quintile	NYSE	EW	0.40	0.41	0.41	0.38	0.36	0.34
			[5.36]	[5.46]	[5.52]	[5.09]	[4.98]	[4.75]
Quintile	Name	VW	0.28	0.31	0.30	0.23	0.25	0.20
			[2.54]	[2.84]	[2.75]	[2.14]	[2.25]	[1.84]
Quintile	Cap	VW	0.34	0.39	0.39	0.32	0.29	0.24
			[3.57]	[4.13]	[4.08]	[3.38]	[3.01]	[2.53]
Decile	NYSE	VW	0.26	0.30	0.30	0.21	0.26	0.21
			[2.12]	[2.51]	[2.42]	[1.77]	[2.15]	[1.70]
Panel B: Net Returns and Novy-Marx and Velikov (2016) generalized alphas								
Portfolios	Breaks	Weights	r^e_{net}	α^*_{CAPM}	α^*_{FF3}	α^*_{FF4}	α^*_{FF5}	α^*_{FF6}
Quintile	NYSE	VW	0.25	0.31	0.31	0.27	0.25	0.22
			[2.91]	[3.61]	[3.57]	[3.15]	[2.86]	[2.56]
Quintile	NYSE	EW	0.16	0.18	0.18	0.17	0.10	0.10
			[1.77]	[1.99]	[1.97]	[1.85]	[1.16]	[1.17]
Quintile	Name	VW	0.23	0.28	0.27	0.23	0.22	0.19
			[2.13]	[2.56]	[2.51]	[2.15]	[2.09]	[1.84]
Quintile	Cap	VW	0.30	0.35	0.35	0.31	0.26	0.23
			[3.19]	[3.76]	[3.73]	[3.35]	[2.82]	[2.54]
Decile	NYSE	VW	0.21	0.26	0.26	0.21	0.23	0.20
			[1.74]	[2.20]	[2.15]	[1.76]	[1.94]	[1.67]

Table 3: Conditional sort on size and AFI

This table presents results for conditional double sorts on size and AFI. In each month, stocks are first sorted into quintiles based on size using NYSE breakpoints. Then, within each size quintile, stocks are further sorted based on AFI. Finally, they are grouped into twenty-five portfolios based on the intersection of the two sorts. Panel A presents the average returns to the 25 portfolios, as well as strategies that go long stocks with high AFI and short stocks with low AFI .Panel B documents the average number of firms and the average firm size for each portfolio. The sample period is 199006 to 202306.

Panel A: portfolio average returns and time-series regression results

Size quintiles	AFI Quintiles (L)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(H)	AFI Strategies r^e	α_{CAPM}	α_{FF3}	α_{FF4}	α_{FF5}	α_{FF6}
(1)	0.36	1.03	1.14	0.93	0.86	0.50	0.50	0.51	0.47	0.44	0.43
	[0.94]	[3.14]	[3.25]	[2.74]	[2.18]	[3.77]	[3.69]	[3.76]	[3.45]	[3.29]	[3.13]
(2)	0.52	0.85	0.93	0.86	0.90	0.38	0.42	0.40	0.33	0.35	0.30
	[1.51]	[2.75]	[3.26]	[2.91]	[2.65]	[3.05]	[3.32]	[3.20]	[2.61]	[2.82]	[2.42]
(3)	0.67	0.82	0.88	0.84	0.95	0.28	0.30	0.30	0.24	0.35	0.31
	[2.09]	[2.94]	[3.53]	[3.08]	[3.01]	[2.16]	[2.33]	[2.30]	[1.88]	[2.68]	[2.36]
(4)	0.67	0.75	0.88	0.85	1.02	0.35	0.43	0.39	0.35	0.23	0.21
	[2.17]	[2.91]	[3.92]	[3.40]	[3.64]	[2.92]	[3.60]	[3.38]	[3.01]	[2.02]	[1.83]
(5)	0.70	0.52	0.71	0.77	0.90	0.21	0.26	0.26	0.17	0.16	0.09
	[2.62]	[2.46]	[3.50]	[3.83]	[3.68]	[1.92]	[2.46]	[2.39]	[1.59]	[1.44]	[0.87]

Panel B: Portfolio average number of firms and market capitalization

Size quintiles	AFI Quintiles, Average n (L)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(H)	AFI Quintiles, Average market capitalization ($\$10^6$) (L)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(H)
(1)	378	379	380	378	374	43	45	42	44	42
(2)	115	115	116	115	115	78	81	80	80	79
(3)	80	81	80	81	80	140	139	140	140	138
(4)	69	69	69	69	69	311	311	309	316	307
(5)	63	63	63	63	63	1975	2304	2657	2853	2129

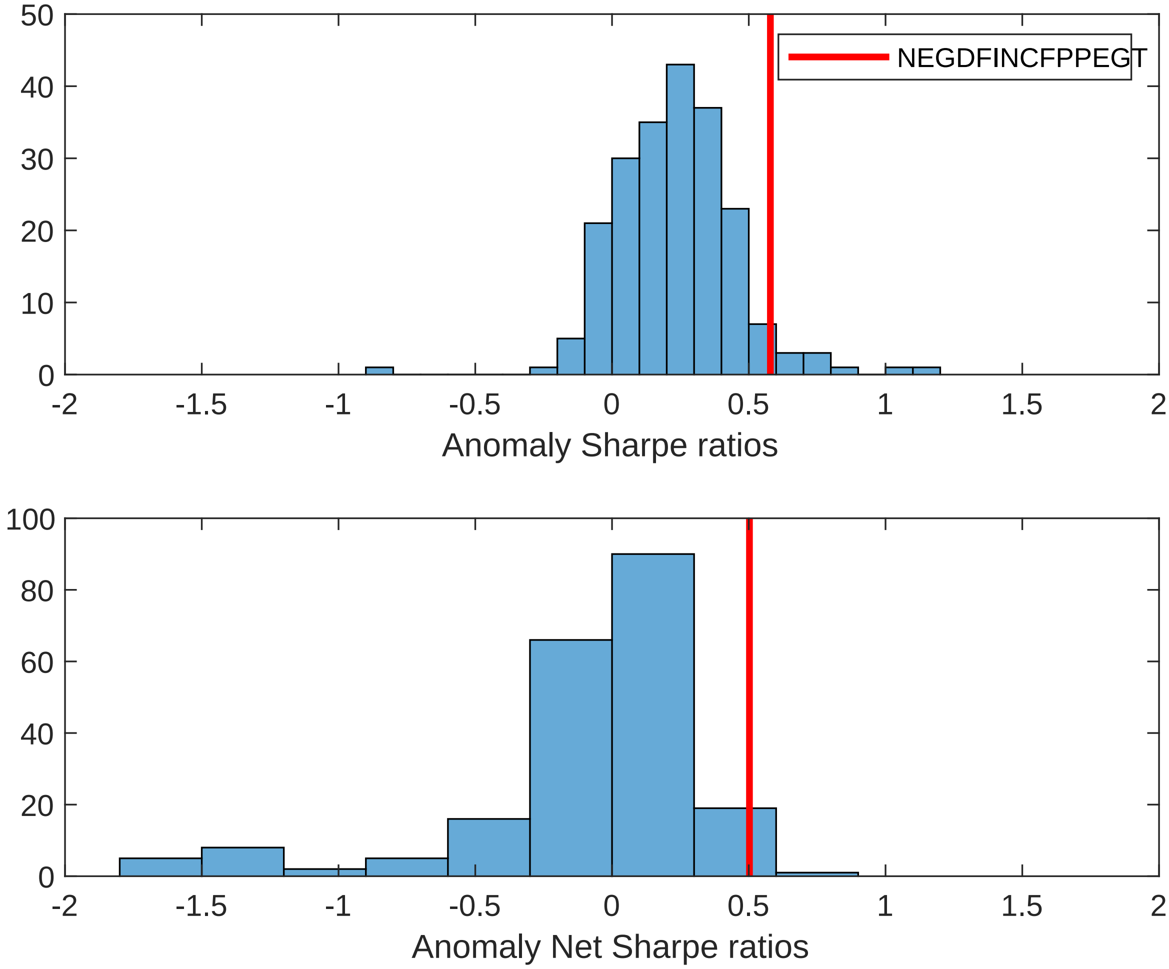

Figure 2: Distribution of Sharpe ratios.
This figure plots a histogram of Sharpe ratios for 212 anomalies, and compares the Sharpe ratio of the AFI with them (red vertical line). Panel A plots results for gross Sharpe ratios. Panel B plots results for net Sharpe ratios.

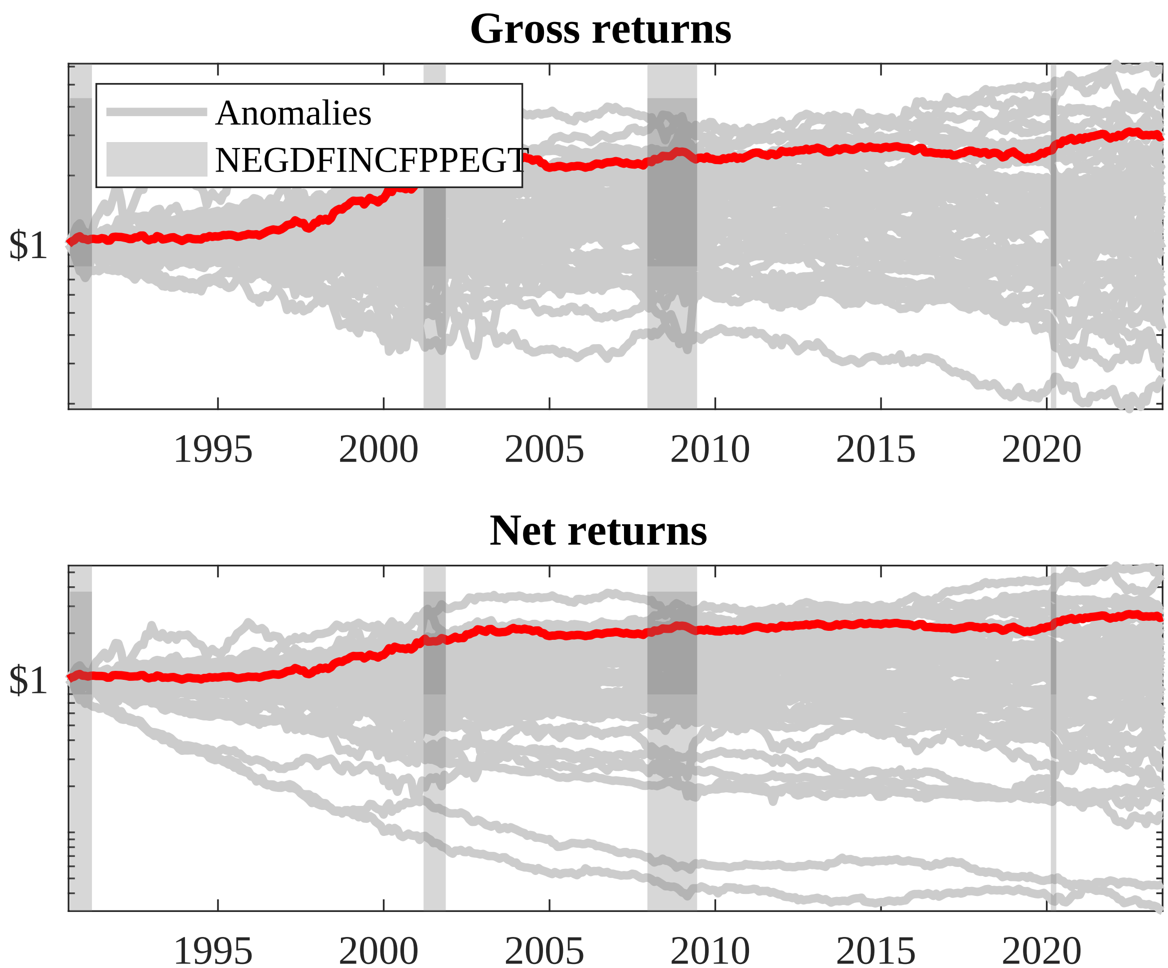

Figure 3: Dollar invested.
This figure plots the growth of a \$1 invested in 212 anomaly trading strategies (gray lines), and compares those with the AFI trading strategy (red line). The strategies are constructed using value-weighted quintile sorts using NYSE breakpoints. Panel A plots results for gross strategy returns. Panel B plots results for net strtaegy returns.

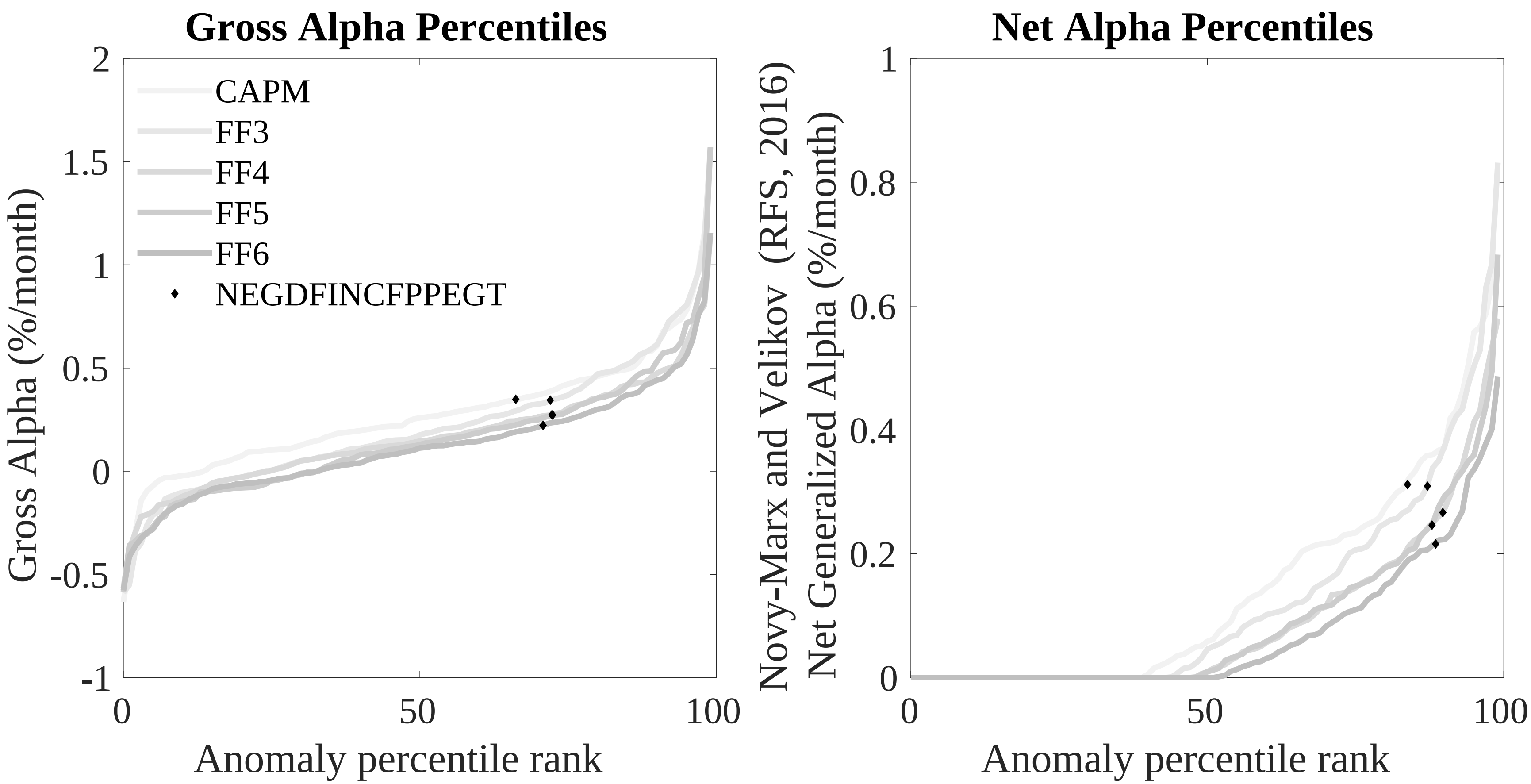

Figure 4: Gross and generalized net alpha percentiles of anomalies relative to factor models
This figure plots the percentile ranks for 212 anomaly trading strategies in terms of alphas (solid lines), and compares those with the AFI trading strategy alphas (diamonds). The strategies are constructed using value-weighted quintile sorts using NYSE breakpoints. The alphas include those with respect to the CAPM, Fama and French (1993) three-factor model, Fama and French (1993) three-factor model augmented with the Carhart (1997) momentum factor, Fama and French (2015) five-factor model, and the Fama and French (2015) five-factor model augmented with the Carhart (1997) momentum factor following Fama and French (2018). The left panel plots alphas with no adjustment for trading costs. The right panel plots Novy-Marx and Velikov (2016) net generalized alphas.

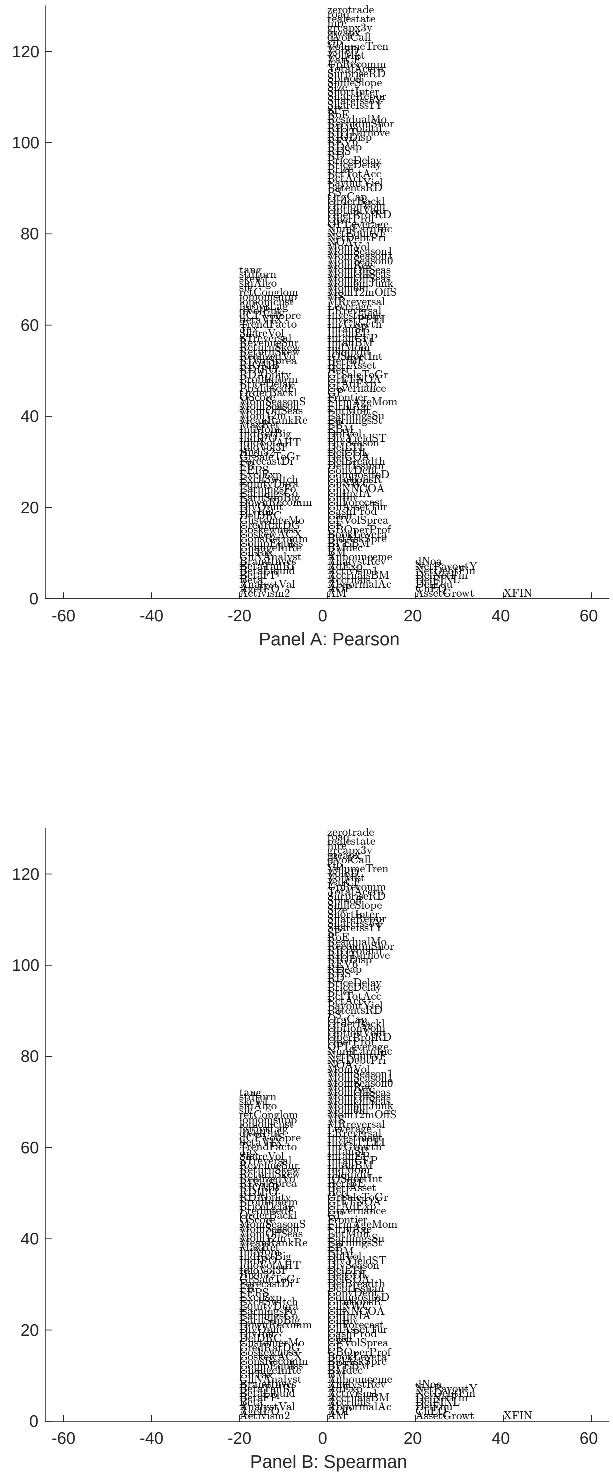

Figure 5: Distribution of correlations.
This figure plots a name histogram of correlations of 210 filtered anomaly signals with AFI. The correlations are pooled. Panel A plots Pearson correlations, while Panel B plots Spearman rank correlations.

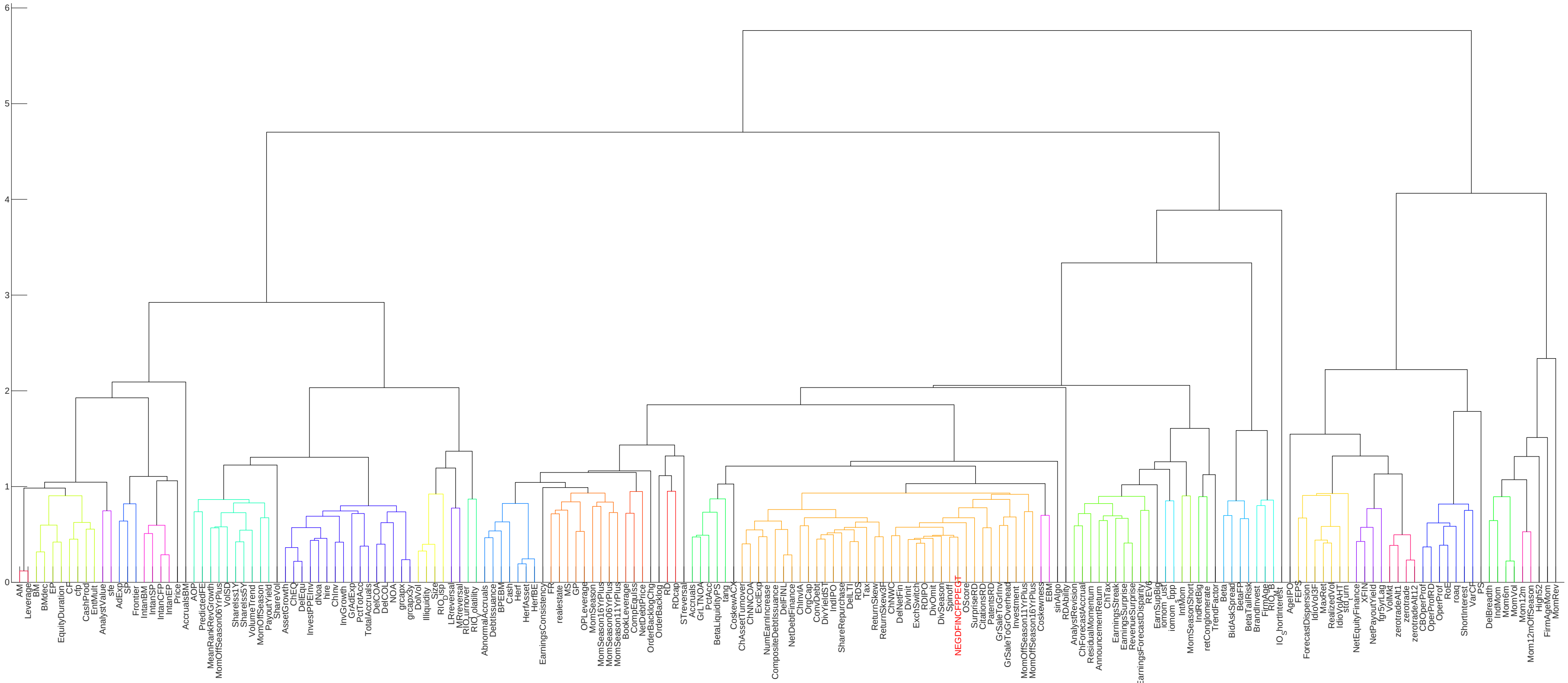

Figure 6: Agglomerative hierarchical cluster plot
This figure plots an agglomerative hierarchical cluster plot using Ward's minimum method and a maximum of 10 clusters.

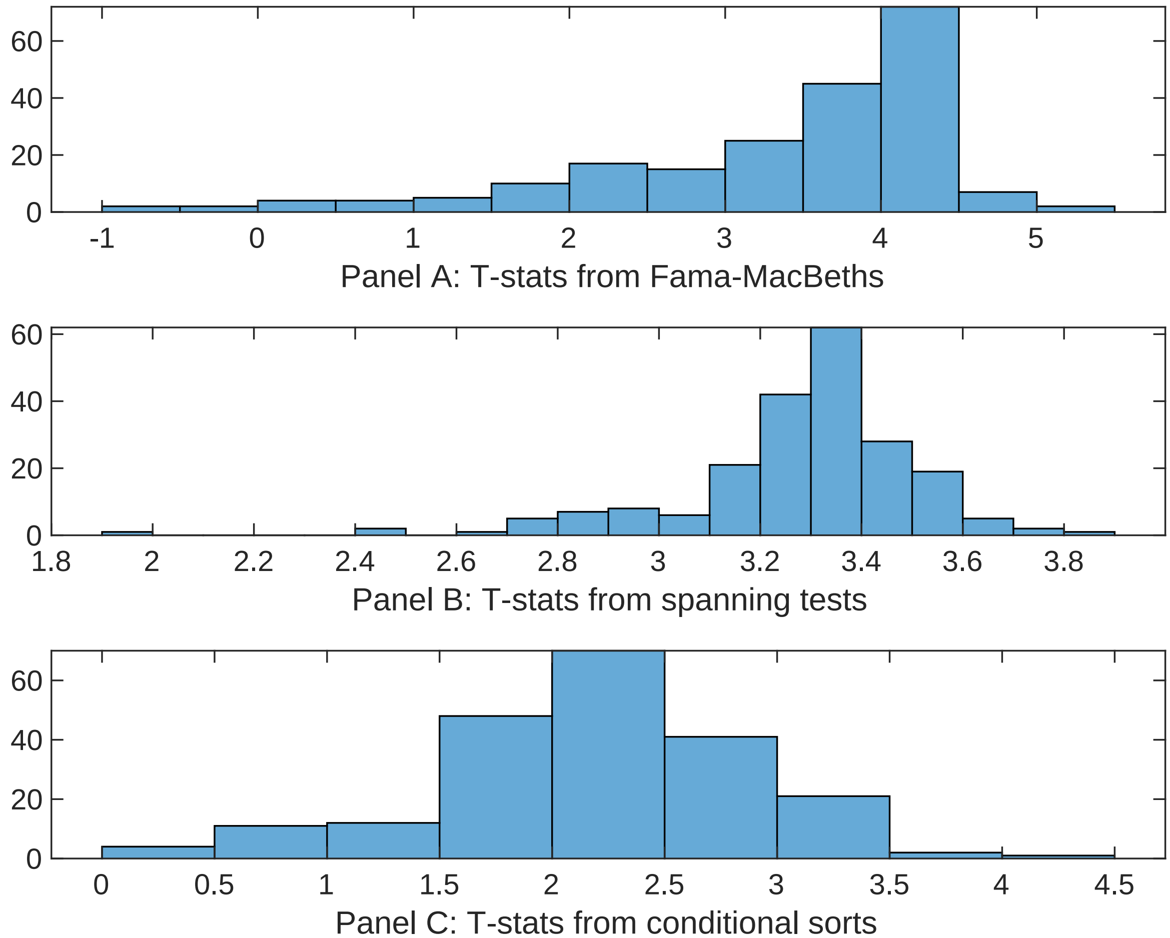

Figure 7: Distribution of t-stats on conditioning strategies
This figure plots histograms of t-statistics for predictability tests of AFI conditioning on each of the 210 filtered anomaly signals one at a time. Panel A reports t-statistics on β_{AFI} from Fama-MacBeth regressions of the form $r_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_{AFI} AFI_{i,t} + \beta_X X_{i,t} + \epsilon_{i,t}$, where X stands for one of the 210 filtered anomaly signals at a time. Panel B plots t-statistics on α from spanning tests of the form: $r_{AFI,t} = \alpha + \beta r_{X,t} + \epsilon_t$, where $r_{X,t}$ stands for the returns to one of the 210 filtered anomaly trading strategies at a time. The strategies employed in the spanning tests are constructed using quintile sorts, value-weighting, and NYSE breakpoints. Panel C plots t-statistics on the average returns to strategies constructed by conditional double sorts. In each month, we sort stocks into quintiles based one of the 210 filtered anomaly signals at a time. Then, within each quintile, we sort stocks into quintiles based on AFI. Stocks are finally grouped into five AFI portfolios by combining stocks within each anomaly sorting portfolio. The panel plots the t-statistics on the average returns of these conditional double-sorted AFI trading strategies conditioned on each of the 210 filtered anomalies.

Table 4: Fama-MacBeths controlling for most closely related anomalies

This table presents Fama-MacBeth results of returns on AFI. and the six most closely related anomalies. The regressions take the following form: $r_{i,t} = \alpha + \beta_{AFI} AFI_{i,t} + \sum_{k=1}^{s} ix\beta_{X_k} X_{i,t}^k + \epsilon_{i,t}$. The six most closely related anomalies, X, are Net external financing, Asset growth, Growth in book equity, Inventory Growth, change in net operating assets, Change in equity to assets. These anomalies were picked as those with the highest combined rank where the ranks are based on the absolute value of the Spearman correlations in Panel B of Figure 5 and the R^2 from the spanning tests in Figure 7, Panel B. The sample period is 199006 to 202306.

Intercept	0.13	0.13	0.18	0.12	0.13	0.12	0.14
	[4.37]	[4.31]	[5.73]	[3.93]	[4.16]	[3.95]	[4.95]
AFI	0.13	-0.17	0.15	0.52	0.22	0.20	-0.16
	[0.11]	[-0.17]	[1.64]	[4.16]	[2.37]	[2.16]	[-1.11]
Anomaly 1	0.19						0.18
	[4.53]						[3.53]
Anomaly 2		0.95					0.11
		[7.83]					[0.61]
Anomaly 3			0.50				0.62
			[6.71]				[0.57]
Anomaly 4				0.33			0.34
				[5.16]			[0.49]
Anomaly 5					0.12		0.61
					[7.98]		[2.85]
Anomaly 6						0.15	0.35
						[4.99]	[0.72]
# months	396	396	396	396	396	396	396
$\bar{R}^2$(%)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 5: Spanning tests controlling for most closely related anomalies
This table presents spanning tests results of regressing returns to the AFI trading strategy on trading strategies exploiting the six most closely related anomalies. The regressions take the following form: $r_t^{AFI} = \alpha + \sum_{k=1}^{6} \beta_{X_k} r_t^{X_k} + \sum_{j=1}^{6} \beta_{f_j} r_t^{f_j} + \epsilon_t$, where X_k indicates each of the six most-closely related anomalies and f_j indicates the six factors from the Fama and French (2015) five-factor model augmented with the Carhart (1997) momentum factor. The six most closely related anomalies, X, are Net external financing, Asset growth, Growth in book equity, Inventory Growth, change in net operating assets, Change in equity to assets. These anomalies were picked as those with the highest combined rank where the ranks are based on the absolute value of the Spearman correlations in Panel B of Figure 5 and the R^2 from the spanning tests in Figure 7, Panel B. The sample period is 199006 to 202306.

Intercept	0.20	0.23	0.22	0.23	0.21	0.22	0.21
	[2.30]	[2.67]	[2.50]	[2.65]	[2.43]	[2.55]	[2.47]
Anomaly 1	14.88						10.83
	[3.55]						[2.50]
Anomaly 2		17.66					11.26
		[3.45]					[1.71]
Anomaly 3			9.65				8.79
			[2.06]				[1.12]
Anomaly 4				10.60			8.66
				[3.46]			[2.66]
Anomaly 5					9.83		0.41
					[2.04]		[0.08]
Anomaly 6						7.14	-10.96
						[1.46]	[-1.32]
mkt	0.11	-1.60	-1.63	-2.04	-2.27	-1.85	-0.05
	[0.05]	[-0.75]	[-0.76]	[-0.96]	[-1.06]	[-0.85]	[-0.02]
smb	4.70	-1.26	-0.72	0.96	0.14	-0.10	2.97
	[1.43]	[-0.42]	[-0.24]	[0.32]	[0.05]	[-0.03]	[0.88]
hml	-4.64	-8.14	-7.35	-7.35	-7.57	-7.24	-6.53
	[-1.27]	[-2.24]	[-2.01]	[-2.04]	[-2.06]	[-1.97]	[-1.78]
rmw	-7.53	2.34	1.28	3.40	2.01	2.02	-4.03
	[-1.65]	[0.62]	[0.33]	[0.89]	[0.53]	[0.53]	[-0.86]
cma	14.35	2.85	15.11	15.24	16.69	16.82	-1.13
	[2.44]	[0.35]	[2.21]	[2.62]	[2.61]	[2.31]	[-0.13]
umd	8.07	9.18	8.23	7.75	8.17	8.46	7.90
	[4.39]	[4.95]	[4.43]	[4.20]	[4.39]	[4.54]	[4.22]
# months	396	396	396	396	396	396	396
$\bar{R}^2(\%)$	17	16	15	16	15	14	19

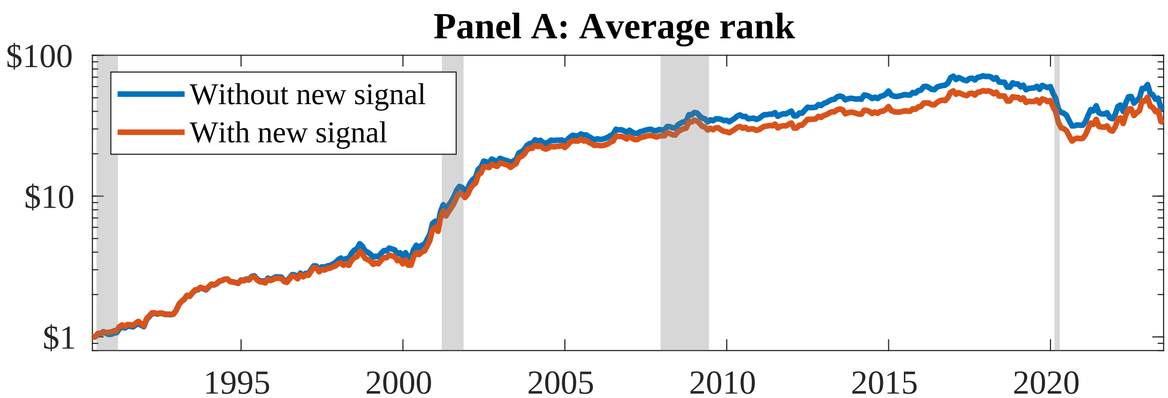

Figure 8: Combination strategy performance
This figure plots the growth of a $1 invested in trading strategies that combine multiple anomalies following Chen and Velikov (2022). In all panels, the blue solid lines indicate combination trading strategies that utilize 159 anomalies. The red solid lines indicate combination trading strategies that utilize the 159 anomalies as well as AFI. Panel A shows results using "Average rank" as the combination method. See Section 7 for details on the combination methods.

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