

Robots, Digitalization, and Worker Voice

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The interplay between labour institutions and the adoption of automation technologies remains poorly understood. Specifically, there is little evidence on how the nature of industrial relations shapes technological choices at the workplace level. Using a large sample of more than 20000 European establishments located in 26 countries, this paper documents a positive association between the presence of employee representation (ER) and the use of automation technologies. We account for the endogeneity of ER bodies by using instrumental variables and exploiting size-contingent regulations in the context of a local-randomization regression discontinuity design. We extensively dig into the mechanisms through which ER may foster the use of automation technologies by exploiting rich information on the de facto role played by ER bodies in relation to well-defined decision areas of management. Greater automation in establishments with ER does not seem to be driven by employers' strategic bargaining considerations in the context of adversarial labour-management relationships (as measured by past strike activity) or constraints on labour flexibility imposed by the interference of employee representatives with dismissal procedures. We find suggestive evidence that ER influences work organization and certain workplace practices, such as training, working time management and information sharing, that may be complementary to new technologies.