Social class and workplace autonomy and authority: a cross-national study

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Abstract. This paper examines cross-national differences in the level of employee’s autonomy and authority at the workplace. Both autonomy and authority are valuable resources. Autonomy captures employee’s ability to influence how their work is organised and authority captures employee’s power to impact company policy. Work-related inequalities are thought to be rooted in social class relationships, however, there is little empirical evidence on how autonomy and authority are distributed by social classes in different institutional settings. Seven waves of the European Social Survey (2004-2016) are pooled to investigate workplace autonomy and authority among social classes across 27 countries in Europe. The results show that there is a clear social class gradient in workplace autonomy and authority: working classes have less autonomy and less authority in the workplace compared to the salariat and intermediate class. However, large differences across countries prevail in how much autonomy and authority employees have and how it is distributed across social classes. Country differences remain net of a variety of important predictors, including human capital, demographic, job-related and organisational attributes. This suggests that similar employees are granted different amount of autonomy-authority depending on the institutional setting. Also, the gap between social classes varies across countries. Working classes in the Nordic welfare states are better off in both absolute and relative terms, they have more authority and more autonomy compared to the working classes in other countries and they are more similar to the salariat in their own country, hence, there is less within country class inequality in employment conditions.

Keywords: autonomy, authority, social class, workplace rewards, employment relations, institutional context.
INTRODUCTION

Workplaces are fields where various advantages and resources are distributed. While much research has focused on the distribution of wages, other types of rewards and advantages matter as well (Schneider and Harkness, 2019). The current study focuses on workplace stratification as reflected by employee’s ability to exercise autonomy and authority at the workplace. Workplace autonomy and authority refer to the degree of choice, control and influence employees have in their position in the organizational hierarchy. It is important to understand the allocation of such workplace resources for several reasons. First, it is important for descriptive purposes, to know how much autonomy and authority employees have in a workplace and how it is distributed. Second, autonomy and authority can be taken as valued attributes of jobs that also have broader implications in that they confer status and are linked with worker wellbeing and overall life satisfaction (Wright et al., 1995). Third, distribution of autonomy and authority at the workplace can be indicative of the types of social relations an employee is engaged in in the workplace. Such relational resources at the workplace – especially authority – can in turn be responsible for the allocation of other resources, particularly earnings remuneration (Dahrendorf 1959; Marx 1978; Wright 1979, 1985). Sociological research on workplace autonomy and authority deserves renewed attention as recent research on the topic is scarce (Petrie and Roman, 2004).

In this paper, we examine cross-national variation in autonomy and authority and how it is distributed between social classes. Although definitions of social class are varied, most delimitations of the concept involve a reference to a hierarchical segmentation of people in the occupational structure (Wright, 2005). That social class positions are rewarded differently in a labour market is a central theme in inequality and stratification research (Kalleberg & Griffin, 1980; Tahlin, 2007; Williams, 2017; Goldthorpe, 2002). While much of the literature assumes that social class captures workplace stratification, there is little empirical evidence on how workplace resources such as autonomy and authority are distributed between social classes and whether the conditions workers are exposed to differ between countries and institutional settings. In this paper, we look at autonomy and authority explicitly and investigate how these resources are allocated to different social class categories in different countries.

The literature suggests there is a social class gradient in workplace autonomy and authority; those higher up in the organizational hierarchy (i.e., managers and professionals) have more autonomy and authority and those towards the bottom of hierarchy (i.e., the working class) can be expected to have less autonomy and authority. Various explanations are put forward to account for such class differences in workplace rewards and conditions. One explanation is that from the
perspective of the employer, offering higher wages and promotions but also beneficial conditions such as freedom and power is a strategy to foster commitment of upper class employees that have specialised knowledge and skills (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Goldthorpe, 2002). Conversely, workers with less specific skills who are more exchangeable and more easily monitored – like the working classes – are likely to be offered fewer rewards, including less freedom and power. From a human capital perspective, people in different social classes possess different skills and vary in how productive they are, which then might explain differential rewards by social class categories (Tahlin, 2007; Williams, 2017). The relational inequality theory, however, offers a different perspective suggesting that class hierarchies in the workplace reflect the bargaining power and claims making ability of different social class actors in the work floor (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019). The upper classes might enjoy more freedom and power not because it is productive from the viewpoint of the employer or because they are more skilled and productive but because they have the bargaining power and better position to capture organizational rewards and benefits.

Based on this literature, finding a social class gradient in autonomy and authority relations would not be very surprising – what would be surprising though is cross-national variation. Currently we know little on how much autonomy-authority levels vary by social class and we know even less about how they differ across institutional settings. In this paper, we ask whether employees in the same social classes – i.e., in comparable positions in the occupational structure – enjoy different levels of autonomy and authority depending on the institutional context, and if so, what factors explain these differences. In case we do find cross-national variation, we ask whether the variation persists after accounting for compositional differences across countries in terms of individual, job-related, and organizational factors that are associated with social classes. If cross-national differences persist, we have more of a reason to believe that factors beyond compositional differences are at play, for example, differences in bargaining power or organizational culture across countries (Breen, 1997).

This is the first systematic quantitative study to document cross-national variation in employees’s autonomy and authority across social classes in 27 European countries. We will first provide a descriptive account of workplace autonomy and authority among employees in Europe and how it is distributed between social classes. This inspection will be instructive in telling us where in Europe are workers employment conditions – especially that of the working classes –

Note that while from a Marxist perspective, a core distinction in the allocation of job rewards is made based on relations of production, however, here we focus on employees and their social relations at the workplace.
better or worse and where is class-inequality higher or lower. Next to simple class-comparisons, we account for a range of compositional factors to establish whether workers in comparable positions in the occupational structure differ in their employment conditions depending on a country they live in. Second, we link the level of autonomy and authority to institutional settings. This will help us to map where in Europe are employee’s employment conditions more favourable and why. What contextual factors determine the level and distribution of workplace advantages for employees? We put welfare state regime to the centre of attention and investigate whether employees – especially the working classes – have more autonomy and authority in more egalitarian welfare regimes. Based on the literature, we have reasons to expect workers to have better conditions in the social democratic welfare regimes that have a strong welfare state in place and where workers have more bargaining power and stronger attachment to labour unions (Breen, 1997; Esping-Andersen, 1990).

To answer these questions, we pool the European Social Survey data across eight waves (2002-2016) and attain macro indicators from the Eurostat. The findings of this study show that there is a clear social class gradient in autonomy and authority at the workplace, the upper classes have most autonomy and authority and the working classes have the least. However, both the level and class gradient vary to a large extent across countries. Workplace conditions of the working classes are much better in some contexts than in others and the distribution of autonomy and authority at the workplace is more equal in some contexts than in others. These cross-national differences are not explained away by human capital or other individual, job-related or organizational attributes. Importantly, employees have more autonomy and power and there is less inequality between different social classes in richer countries and countries with more egalitarian welfare states. We conclude that working class jobs do not have to have poor conditions in terms of low autonomy and little influence over company policies – it is a matter of choice for organizations and national institutions to decide how to treat workers in different parts of the occupational structure.

**AUTONOMY AND AUTHORITY AT THE WORKPLACE**

Workplace autonomy and authority include control over various work activities. Autonomy entails control over how to organise one’s own work. This can include time (when to work) or setting one’s own work agenda. Authority includes control over other people or influence over broader activities of the organization, the extent to which people are involved in the company decision making processes (Wolf and Fligstein, 1979). Both autonomy and authority can provide workers
with greater decision-making latitude, including choice, influence and empowerment (Yu and Kuo, 2017). They are thus identified as important and favourable nonmonetary workplace rewards (Adler 1993; Jencks, Perman, and Rainwater 1988; Kalleberg, Reskin, and Hudson, 2000). Next to being workplace advantages, autonomy and authority are also associated with worker wellbeing and overall life satisfaction (Petrie and Roman, 2004). A lack of workplace autonomy and authority can be seen as a form of labour market disadvantage from the perspective of the employee (Adler 1993; Ross and Wright, 1998; Petrie and Roman, 2004). Furthermore, workplace autonomy and authority can also be seen as valuable relational types of resources. To the extent that more powerful positions in economic life are defined by social relationships within organizations or labour markets, autonomy and authority can influence the allocation of other resources, particularly earnings (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019). While the two concepts – autonomy and authority – tap at different resources at the workplace, in combination they capture a form of nonmonetary workplace advantage.

**SOCIAL CLASS AND WORK-RELATED INEQUALITIES**

In sociological literature, work-related inequalities are commonly linked with social class divisions. Although definitions of social class are varied, the concept typically involves a reference to the relationship that people have to the labour market (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992; Wright, 2005). Generally, a distinction is made between people who buy and control the labour of others (employers), those who sell their own labour directly to customers and clients (self-employed), and people who sell their labour to employers and employing organisations (employees) (Erikson and Goldthorpe, 1992). In this paper, we narrow the focus to the latter and largest group – the employees – and set aside employers and the self-employed who by virtue of their postion in the economic system are likely to have different types of autonomy and authority relations. When it comes to employees, according to Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992), a further distinction can be made based on the nature of the relationship to the employer (Erikson and Goldthorpe 1992, p. 35-45; Goldthorpe, 2007, p. 101-124). At the one extreme is the salariat class – the highest rank in the social class hierarchy – who is typically hired to exercise delegated authority or specialised knowledge and expertise on behalf of the employer (i.e., managers and professionals). The intuition with the salariat class is that they are providing a ‘service’ to the employer in exchange for compensation that next to fixed wages also entails a range of rewards and benefits. Part of a strategy of the ‘service relationship’ from the perspective of a firm is to promote cooperation and commitment of the high-skilled and less exchangeable workers by providing them with a range of
rewards and benefits (the so-called ‘efficiency wage’, see Akerlof, 1984). The lowest rank of the class hierarchy is held by the working class who possess relatively low-level, unspecialised and widely available capacities and skills (i.e., manual and routine nonmanual workers). In case of the working class, the assumption according to Golthorpe’s class schema is that effort and output are relatively easily monitored and workers are more replaceable, hence there are less incentives for employers to provide additional rewards and benefits to the employee. Mixed forms of employment relationships include workers who exercise authority, knowledge and expertise but lack promotion opportunities and other job rewards (i.e., lower administrative, technical or supervisory occupations). While Goldthorpe’s approach suggests that labour market rewards and conditions are defined by what is optimal from the perspective of the employers, others have argued that the distinction between social classes mostly comes down to occupational skill requirements and skill content of the jobs clustered into different social classes (Tahlin, 2007). This rests on human capital theory that explains and legitimates the distribution of employment rewards with productivity or contributions to production (Becker, 1964). Both Goldthorpe’s employment relations approach and human capital perspective suggest that autonomy and authority at the workplace – like other job rewards – are allocated based on some form of efficiency calculations. Those in upper social classes with more specific education, qualifications, and skills can expect to have more autonomy and power in the workplace because this is their market value and/or this is a productive way for employers to navigate and foster worker commitment.

However, critics argue that both the social class theory and human capital theory might be too heavily drawn on efficiency arguments and not enough consideration is given to the balance of power between employers and employees (Breen, 2005). Next to pragmatic considerations, salariat classes might enjoy some elements of the ‘service relationship’ not because it maximises efficiency from the viewpoint of the employer or because they are more productive but because they have the bargaining power to capture such benefits as a form of rent and reward. This is the central premise of the relational inequality theory (Tomaskovic-Devey, Avent-Holt, 2019). From this perspective, people in the higher ranks of organizational hierarchy have more bargaining power to make claims on a range of organizational resources. According to Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019), it is a negotiation as to what constitutes as value, who produces most value and who has the strongest legitimate, even moral, claim on organizational resources. Actors are more or less powerful in such arguments depending on the extent they have various forms of cultural, status, material resources. The theory posits that while the distribution of resources is commonly explained and justified by discourses regarding individual skill, productivity, and ‘market forces’, the actual distribution of rewards is a function of the power of actors in specific
relationships. What this perspective then implies is a form of circular causality, that people who have attained high-rank positions are in a better position to make additional claims on various resources. Furthermore, people who have more pre-existing authority are in a better position to reach the top of an organizational hierarchy. Social class can be seen as one example of relational inequality because different positions in the class hierarchy reflect varying levels of power to influence decisions of how resources and benefits should be distributed in organizations and labour markets.

The relational inequality theory also links up with a more discursive explanation of how class inequality comes about and why it persists. Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019) argue that producing inequality entails making categorical distinctions between people and then reserving more resources for the advantaged group. Actors in more marginalized positions are treated as less important, and their needs and contributions are less respected and recognized. This hinders their capacity to legitimately claim organizational resources. In addition, what might play a role in how job rewards are distributed are employees own notions of their value, ability, and what they deserve (Ridgeway, 2014). Such notions depend on a range of factors, including whether people are socialized into thinking that they are fit to assume more power and autonomy (Wolf and Fligstein, 1979). Hence, class differences might stem from the attitudes, behaviours, and preferences of both employers and workers. While the underlying mechanisms are not easy to disentangle, empirical research provides some support to the idea that factors beyond skill and productivity play a role in the distribution of job rewards. For example, job autonomy varies by gender even after human capital variables are taken into account (Jaffee, 1989). Also, Petrie and Roman (2004) show that white men are relatively advantaged in having more workplace autonomy. Inequality in work conditions is stratified also by race net of human capital and structural location (Smith, 2002).

The view that social class matters does not go uncontested, for example, the ‘death of class’ perspective predicts that the value of class as an analytical concept to understand social inequalities is in decline (Clark and Lipset, 1991). However, in the more recent literature there is a general agreement that social class is still a useful descriptive tool that captures inequalities in the labour market positions and broader life outcomes (Grand and Tahlin, 2013; Tahlin, 2007; Williams, 2017; Wodtke, 2016; Wodtke, 2017). Although there is no consensus as to what are the reasons behind class differences, the intuition is that people that fall toward the bottom of the workplace stratification hierarchy – working classes – have disadvantaged employment conditions.

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2 Next to class, other relevant categorical distinctions within the relational inequality framework include gender, race, ethnicity, education, occupation, and so forth.
compared to the upper class – the salariat. We thus expect a social class gradient in the autonomy and authority afforded to different social classes.

_Hypothesis 1:_ Workplace autonomy and authority are unevenly distributed between social classes; the working classes have the least and the salariat class has the most autonomy and authority, the intermediate class falls between the two class categories.

**CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATION IN AUTONOMY AND AUTHORITY**

In addition to class differences within countries, we are interested in variation between countries. At the first instance, we are interested in descriptive questions: how much autonomy and authority social classes in different counties have and how large are the class differences across countries? Are the overall levels of employee autonomy and authority different across countries? Does the working class have more autonomy and authority in some countries compared others? Does the social-class gradient in autonomy and authority differ across countries? By addressing such descriptive questions, we can learn about cross-national variation in work conditions but also inequalities in work conditions within countries. Higher level of autonomy-authority is indicative of better employment conditions for employees. Furthermore, stronger class gradient in autonomy and authority can be taken as a reflection of heightened class inequality while flatter hierarchies between social classes would be indicative of more class equality. Next to more equal class hierarchy, higher rates of autonomy and influence in the workplace – especially among the working classes – could potentially promote more equal outcomes in other dimensions, especially incomes and overall employee empowerment and wellbeing. According to Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt (2019), in order to understand the processes that generate inequalities, we need to focus on relations between people and positions and the relative power that people in different positions have to extract resources and legitimate their advantages. It will therefore be instructive to provide such a descriptive account of the distribution of autonomy and authority in the workplace.

Next to a descriptive account, our second goal is to shed light on the factors that might help understand country differences in employee’s autonomy and authority relations. There are various reasons to why countries might differ in the employment conditions social classes are afforded. Differences across countries might emerge due to compositional factors. Although we use the same social class schema across countries, in reality there might be differences between countries in the characteristics of people and jobs that constitute these social class categories. For example, the salariat class might be more educated or more experienced in one country compared
to the next, and that might explain different levels of autonomy and authority afforded to the salariat in one country compared to another. Similarly, the intermediate class might have more or less autonomy and power depending on whether people belonging to the class category work for the public or private sector or whether they work for a small or large organizations. We are interested to establish whether cross-national differences in employee’s autonomy and authority remain net of individual, job-related, and organizational factors. If country differences persist, this would be indicative that workers in comparable positions in the labor market and occupational structure face different employment conditions and rewards depending on the country they live in. Such findings could also be taken as a comparison of social relations at the workplace across different social classes and how these class employment relations and conditions differ across countries. Observing employment relations and conditions in a comparative perspective allows us to see variation in workplace inequalities between and within countries. Furthermore, distribution of workplace autonomy and authority can be seen as indicative of a relational type of inequality that arises when individuals’ positions of more or less advantaged kind derive from certain social relations in which they are involved in (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019).

We argue that there are good reasons to expect that cross-national differences persist net of compositional controls. People face different social structures and relational fields that empower or limit their opportunities to claim resources and advantages. As discussed earlier, the theory of relational inequality posits that worker autonomy-authority could emerge due to the relative power of different social class categories, which in turn depends on institutional factors but also local organizational culture (Breen, 1997; Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019; Tilly, 1999). There are also cross-country variations in laws and practices (Brady, 2009). For example, the ability of powerful actors to exploit weaker actors depends on national labour market institutions, which can set limits on exploitation and closure mechanisms (e.g., Hall and Sokice, 2001). The generosity of welfare state can increase the bargaining power of employees by providing income support and services to the household and making people less dependent on the market (Esping-Andersen, 2013). Local organizational culture matters as well, for example, the extent to which “the management is enlightened” regarding long-term benefits of giving employees more power and say versus focus on the shorter-term predatory practices. Research shows that employee involvement in decision-making does not harm productivity and probably increases it because such involvement increases employee and managerial well-being (Doucouliagos, 1995; Freeman

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3 They do so either by denying some groups access to resources (social closure, including opportunity hoarding and exclusion) or they use their ability to exploit weaker actors in production and exchange relationships. Social closure means that opportunities are reserved for the in-group (opportunity hoarding) or denial of opportunity to the out-group (exclusion).
and Kleiner, 2000). While more equal status relationships in the work floor seem to be more economically efficient longer term, exploitation, threats and predatory practices are used to reach short-term goals. Thus, employee ability to govern could be kept at a minimum because of organizational culture and power dynamics. Also command and control in the hands of the management could be functional in the short term because it primarily benefits the powerful who can exploit and exclude subordinates from organizational resources (Tomaskovic-Devey and Avent-Holt, 2019). To summarize, the literature suggests that there are good reasons to expect workers whose jobs have similar occupational statuses have differing amounts of autonomy and authority depending on the country.

**Hypothesis 2a:** There are cross-national differences in how much autonomy and authority different social classes are afforded.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Cross-national differences in autonomy-authority among social classes are not explained away by compositional factors, including individual human capital, job-related and organizational characteristics.

If countries differ net of individual compositional factors, can some institutional factors help to explain the variation? In this paper, we take an institutional approach and assume inequalities are generated within broader institutional regimes. As an intuitional setting, we focus on the role of welfare state arrangements, making a distinction between the more generous welfare state regime (i.e., the social democratic Nordic regime) versus the less generous and more market oriented regimes (i.e., the liberal and corporatist regimes). In some countries, the welfare state insures against risk in the labour market, thus strengthening the bargaining power of labor, especially of low skilled labor. Some welfare regimes are highly unionized and take for granted that labor has legitimate claim on organizational resources. In other countries organized labor is very weak and wage bargaining occurs at the individual or job level. State intervention is crucial in influencing the bargaining power of different groups (women, minorities, lower classes to be treated with respect in workplaces). In welfare regimes with a social democratic ideology, employees should overall have more autonomy and authority and the working classes should have a better relative position. We might also expect this to hold in the post-socialist regime. The state socialist project aimed at providing more power to the working class. However, considering the large transformation and transition into capitalist societies, workers position might not be very good. Welfare regimes might also define a broader culture. According to Charles Tilly (1999) organizations are borrowing from
the larger society cultural solutions to problems of social organization (e.g., when recognizing the value of people at work). Such cultural status hierarchies generate and help legitimate inequality in respect and rewards at work. Institutional contexts can legitimate or delegitimate claims and can magnify or mute the exploitation, social closure, and claims-making consequences of any categorical distinction. Overall, regime differences in class-inequality could reflect differences in the specific roles and industries, however, they could also reflect differences in status, respect, the extent to which exploitation is happening across the lines of social class. Coming back to the discursive argument, what is seen as a fair reward for a given productivity or skill level is also a social construct that again might differ across contexts (Mueller, Melinge, and Glass, 2002). According to Breen (1997), overall uncertainty in a context defines the extent to which employment relationships are offered to employees. However, it also depends on employer’s calculation on the advantages and disadvantages of certain employment relationships. We look at the welfare regimes as they include various relevant dimensions, including broader ideological and political orientation in terms of whether or not the welfare state neutralizes the effects of the market and reduce the dependency of the workers on markets through welfare policies (Esping-Anderson, 1990).

**Hypothesis 2c:** Workers – the working class in particular – have more autonomy and authority in countries with more generous welfare regimes.

**METHODOLOGY**

**Data**
The analyses are based on a data of the European Social Survey (ESS). We pool seven waves of the ESS that were collected biennially between 2004 and 2016. We restrict the sample to a population in the age-bracket of 25 and 65 at the time of the data collections who are in paid employment at the time of the survey and we leave out the self-employed and people working for family business who have by definition a different employment relation in terms of power and autonomy. By definition, the sample is restricted to those for whom social class position is observed, however, missingness for social class is low, at around 2.7%. In total, we include 27

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4 We leave out the survey round of 2002 as it did not include a question on authority.
countries in our sample, some countries from the original survey are left out due to small sample size. The countries included are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

Variables
There are two central dependent variables in this study. Autonomy at the workplace is measured using a variable “Please say how much the management at your work allows/allowed you to decide how your own daily work is/was organised?” Authority at the workplace is measured using a survey item that asks “Please say how much the management at your work allows/allowed you to influence policy decisions about the activities of the organisation?”. Both items are measured on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 indicates “I have no influence” and 10 indicates “I have complete control”. Missingness for both of these items is small at around 1%. The two items are combined into an index, two variables correlate at 0.57 and the Cronbach’s alpha is .73.

The key independent variable on the micro level is social class. We measure social class based on the European Socio-Economic Classification (ESeC) (Rose and Harrison, 2010), making a distinction between three class categories of employees: 1) Salariat, 2) Intermediate, 3) Working class. There proportion of missing cases is 2.7%.

We control for a range of variables that might be relevant to the relationship between social class and autonomy-authority. First, we account for individual attributes, including education as an indicator of human capital and demographic attributes such as age, age squared, gender, ethnic minority status, whether respondent lives with partner and children in household. Second, we control for the following job-related attributes: whether an employee has an unlimited or limited contract and whether he or she works full-time or part-time. Third, we control for firm attributes: industry, firm size, and whether it is a public or a private organization. Finally, we also account for whether an employee has ever been a part of the trade union and whether they have

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5 Tomaskovic-Devey, Avent-Holt (2019) suggest that one should compare across organizations and firms since comparisons across countries hide substantial heterogeneity. Nevertheless, in this paper we resort to cross-national comparison but make a finer distinction within countries across industries. By looking at mean levels of groups-based inequality hides potentially important variation, for example, by comparing class-based inequality across countries we miss important variation within countries and between organizations. Much of this variation might be on a workplace level.

6 Information on the type of organization is only available from 2008 onwards, hence, we control for that only in limited sub-analysis.
experienced continuous labor force participation (i.e., whether employee has experienced unemployment). Human capital theory suggests that differences in rewards are a result of educational differences, job experience, or choice of household commitments (e.g., women working part time or having children are expected to have less autonomy and authority at the workplace). We therefore account for a range of these factors that might influence autonomy and authority rates across countries.

On the macro level, our explanatory variable is welfare state regime, which we measure in terms of welfare regime category but also through social expenditure. We account for GDP per capita as a control for economic prosperity of a country.

A summary of all variables is provided in Table 1.

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<tr>
<th>Table 1. Descriptive statistics</th>
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<td>Variable</td>
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<td>Minority</td>
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<td>Children in household</td>
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<td>Lives with a partner</td>
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<td>Education</td>
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<td>Public organization</td>
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Analytic models

Our analysis proceeds in two parts. First, we present average autonomy-authority scores by class across all 27 countries in our sample country-specific ordinary least squares (OLS) regression. We present raw differences between social classes across countries and differences after accounting for compositional factors such as human capital, demographic, job-related and organizational
variables. From the latter approach, the estimates can then be interpreted as the average autonomy-authority level per social class in a country if the human capital, demographic, job-related, organizational composition was the same in all countries. This will help detect whether differences across countries persist after accounting for underlying composition of the incumbents of the social classes in different countries. The second part of the analysis is focused on studying the role of institutional context in accounting for autonomy and authority rates across countries and inequality within countries. For that purpose, we run multilevel models (Rabe-Hesketh and Skrondal, 2008).

RESULTS

Level of autonomy and authority and class gradient across countries

Left panel of Figure 1 presents the average scores on autonomy-authority scale for employees in European countries. Countries are ranked by average scores in autonomy-authority scale. What we learn is that there are large differences across countries in how much autonomy-authority employees are afforded. Employees report more autonomy-authority in the Nordic countries, followed by the Western European, then Southern European countries, and the scores are much lower in Eastern European countries. While there is some gradient between the salariat and the intermediate social class, the working class clearly stands out with much lower scores of autonomy-authorities and that holds in all countries. next to the class-gradient, what is remarkable, however, is that countries differ substantially in how much autonomy-authority is afforded to employees overall and to the working classes, in particular. The working class in the Nordic countries reports more autonomy and authority than in other countries. The Nordic countries are followed by a cluster of mostly Western and Southern European countries. In this cluster, the salariat class appears to have comparable levels of autonomy-authority as in the Nordic cluster, however, the scores for the working class are much lower. For example, the salariat in Spain and Portugal reports nearly as much autonomy-authority as the salariat in Sweden or Finland but the Spanish and Portuguese working class has much less autonomy-authority as compared to the Swedish and Finnish working class. Finally, there is a cluster of Eastern European countries with the lowest scores on the autonomy-authority scale, especially for the working class. These statistics suggest that there is support for Hypothesis 1 and a social class gradient in employee’s autonomy-authority. There is also preliminary support for Hypothesis 2 in that countries appear to differ substantially in the level of autonomy-authority among the employees.
Several underlying factors could explain country differences in autonomy-authority scores between social classes. We thus control for human capital measures in terms of education together with a range of demographic variables (capturing self-selection due to caring responsibilities of people with children, for example) but also specific characteristics of a job and organization – including establishment size, industry, working full time, having a permanent contract, whether someone is part of a trade union and has experienced continuous employment. This is to see whether country-class differences in autonomy-authority scores persist after accounting for various individual and job or organizational level characteristics. The right panel of Figure 1 depicts the class differences after accounting for all these factors. We see that country differences still persist. The Nordic countries still stand out with much higher scores on the autonomy-authority scale followed by the Western and Southern European countries, the Eastern European countries have lower levels of autonomy-authority, this holds especially for the working classes. This suggests that country differences in autonomy-authority by social class are not explained away by compositional factors – how much autonomy and influence similar employees are afforded does seem to differ across countries and the country differences are particularly stark when it comes to autonomy-authority afforded to the working classes. While it is always possible that we have left out some crucial control variables, these results suggest that cross-national differences in autonomy-authority scores are not primarily the result of compositional differences across countries. Hence, we reject the possibility that the differences across countries in the level of autonomy and authority can be attributed to differences in compositional factors. This provides support for Hypothesis 2b.
We are also interested in the within country social-class gradient in autonomy and authority relations. Figure 2 plots the ratio between the salariat and the working-class autonomy-authority scores across countries (y-axis) and the same ratio after accounting for control variables (x-axis). It appears that the differences are larger in some countries than in others. Differences are much smaller in the Nordic countries together with France and the gap is larger in the Eastern European countries together with Cyprus where the salariat scores twice as high on the autonomy-authority scale than the working class. Again, the difference in the strength of the class-gradient are not explained away by human capital or the job-related and organizational factors. Hence, we conclude that in some countries the working class is more equal with the salariat in terms of autonomy-authority while in other contexts the difference between the class categories is much larger. Overall, we conclude that country-differences in the absolute and relative levels of autonomy-authority among social class persist after controlling for compositional factors again confirming Hypothesis 2b.
The role of welfare regime arrangements

We now move on to investigate whether institutional factors in addition to individual factors account for country differences in autonomy and authority rates. In Figure 3 we cluster countries into four welfare regime categories. The figure is based on multilevel models and illustrates that net of individual, job-related and organizational characteristics, employees in the Social Democratic welfare regime have most autonomy and authority in the workplace. There are no real differences between the Liberal, Conservative and Southern welfare regimes that rank in the middle in terms of employee autonomy and authority. Eastern European countries have the lowest scores on autonomy-authority. While differences in the salariat autonomy-authority levels are rather small and in most cases statistically non-significant after adding all the controls, differences in case of the working classes are much larger. The working class in the Social Democratic regime is doing clearly better than anywhere else even if they are in the same position in the class hierarchy and have very similar individual, job-related and organizational characteristics. These models also control for GDP per capita suggesting that welfare regime matters net of overall prosperity of a country.
CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Several conclusions emerge from this study. First, like the theory predicts, social class captures hierarchical clustering of workers. Employees in upper classes (i.e., the salariat) have more autonomy and authority at the workplace, employees in a lower rank (i.e., the working class) have less of such resources. This social class gradient holds across all countries. Second, however, the amount of autonomy and authority employees have and how it is distributed differs vastly across countries. Cross-national differences in the level and gradient of autonomy and authority do not disappear when controlling for compositional differences across countries, including attributes of individuals, firms, and jobs. This gives a reason to believe that there are real differences across countries in the autonomy and authority at the workplace. In the social democratic welfare regime autonomy-authority is higher and also the class gradient is smaller compared to the Western, Southern, and Eastern European countries. In more generous welfare states, employees have more autonomy and power – especially the working classes. Although state socialist project aimed at providing more power to the working class, what these findings show is that the working class in the former post-socialist states is faring worse than the working class in capitalist-corporatist counterparts.
Appendix A1. Percentage distribution in autonomy and authority across social class, pooled sample