

The expected returns of ESG excluded stocks. Shocks to firms costs of capital? Evidence from the Worlds' largest fund.

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Research issue

- ESG - Environmental, Social and Governance aspects of corporate decisions.
- Institutional investors unwilling to invest in “bad” ESG firms.
- Generally – Does ESG affect companies?
 - Cost of capital/stock return?
 - Pecuniary view (The BlackRock Argument)
Firms preparing for the new sustainable economy
→ will do better (doing well by doing good).
(Mispricing argument)
 - Non-pecuniary view.
Investors care about sustainability in addition to returns.
→ Sustainable firms have lower cost of capital.
 - Company Behaviour?
 - Do companies take actions to avoid being excluded?
- How best to save the planet?

Research issue ctd

Our research: The exclusions by Norway's GPFG “(The oil Fund)”
– Huge Sovereign Wealth Fund.

- Exclusions ethically motivated – “worst offenders”
- Investigate:
 - The return of the portfolio of excluded firms
 - Lead to estimate of Green Return Premium
 - Firm reactions to their exclusions
 - Behavioural changes?

Our Analysis – Preview

Construct portfolio of excluded firms.

- Is there a return premium (alpha) on this portfolio?
→ **Yes**
- Is this due to short-term overreactions, or long term cost of capital?
→ **It is the long term cost of capital**
- Implication: Premium on being ethical (“Green Return Premium”)
→ $\approx -5\%$

After firms get on the exclusion list

- Are firms happy with their high cost of capital?
→ **No, they try get their exclusions revoked to get back to a lower cost of capital.**
- If a firm’s exclusion is revoked, what happens to cost of capital?
→ **It Falls**

Literature etc

Modelling differences in cost of capital due to ESG

- The pecuniary view.
 - Stock prices do not fully reflect future ESG consequences (e.g. climate).
 - Short-termism (Stein, 1989)
- The non-pecuniary view
 - Equilibrium models – tradeoff ESG/Cost of Capital
 - Pástor et al. (2021) Pedersen et al. (2021)
 - Question magnitude exclusion effects (Berk and van Binsbergen, 2024)
 - ESG ranking uncertainty muddle tradeoff (Avramov et al., 2022)

Estimates of Green Return Premium

- Evidence support non-pecuniary view (Green Return Premium < 0)
Examples (estimated return difference)
 - Sin (Hong and Kacperczyk, 2009) (−3.5%)
 - Environment (Chava, 2014) (−0.7% to −1.4%)
 - Green vs Brown (Pástor, Stambaugh, and Taylor, 2022) (−1.4%)

Literature ctd – The magnitude of the green premium

Cost of improving ESG argument

The return difference is a tradeoff between:

- Cost of removing reasons for exclusion (becoming more ethical)
- Benefits from lower cost of capital.

Example from (Hong, Wang, and Yang, 2023) (decarbonization):

Equilibrium return difference (green premium) = $-m/q$,

(m – cost of mitigation per unit of production, q – price of firm capital.

→ If green premium reflects costs of mitigation,
green return premium can be large

Arbitrage type counterargument (Berk and van Binsbergen, 2024)

Investors not concerned with ESG jump on return premium

→ Green premium should be small in magnitude.

Literature ctd – Prior analysis of the oil fund's exclusions

- Event studies. Negative CAR when exclusion announced
 - Atta-Darkua (2022),
 - Ayoubi and Enjolras (2020),
 - Eriksen, Lindset, Nguyen, and Skara (2020).
- Long term performance of excluded portfolio.
(Hoepner and Schopohl, 2018) Shorter time period.

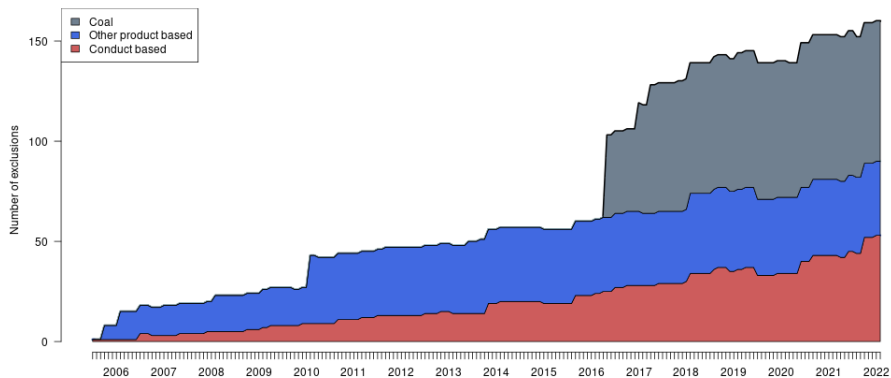
Norway's GPF (The Oil Fund)

- World's largest SWF. Market value of equity 1 trillion USD at the end of 2021.
- One of the most transparent such funds, model for many institutional investors.
- Near index fund.
- Exclusions handled by external "Council of Ethics", established 2004.
 - 2004–2021: 189 firms in total excluded, shorter or longer time periods.
 - At yearend 2021, fund invested in \approx 10 thousand companies
 - \rightarrow exclusions are truly exceptional

Norway's GPFG – The reasons for exclusions

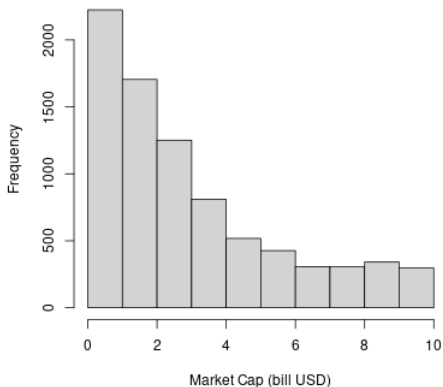
Exclusion reasons	Events
Conduct	67
Environmental damage	28
Individuals' rights in war or conflict	12
Violation of human rights	12
Environmental damage / Violation of human rights	4
Violation of ethical norms	5
Greenhouse gas emissions	4
Gross corruption	2
Product	122
Coal or coal-based energy	75
Weapons	26
Tobacco	21

Norway's GPFG – The number of exclusions

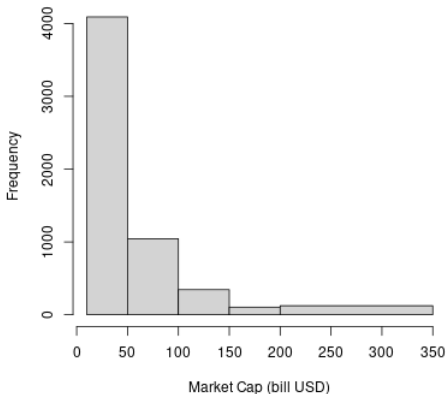


Norway's GPFG – Size (market cap) distribution of excluded firms

B.1: Mkt Cap \leq 10 bill USD



B.2: Mkt Cap $>$ 10 bill USD

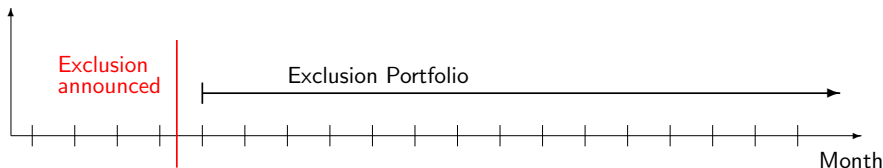


Empirics Part I: Estimating the green return premium

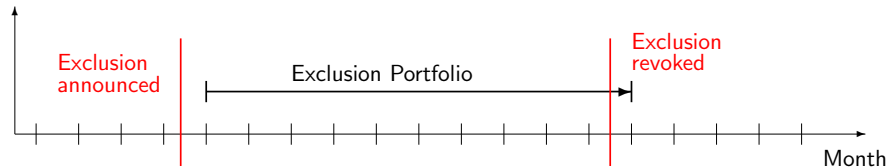
- Construct the returns of Exclusion portfolio
- Asset pricing evaluation of return difference (alpha)
- Robustness.
- Consequences for the green return premium.

Empirics I: Constructing the Exclusion Portfolio

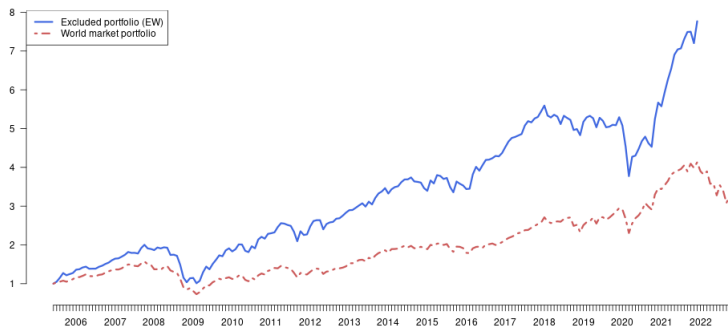
- Firms enter portfolio month after exclusion



- If exclusion revoked, firms leave exclusion portfolio next month.



Empirics I: Value evolution – exclusion portfolio vs market



Cumulative returns of equally weighted exclusion and global market portfolios

Empirics I: Estimates of the green return premium

Brown return premium (return premium for excluded firms) estimated as

- Alpha (the risk-adjusted excess return) of the Excluded Portfolio.
- Estimated using: Fama-French international five factor model

$$(r_{p,t} - r_{f,t}) = \alpha + \beta(r_{m,t} - r_{f,t}) + b^{SMB}SMB_t + b^{HML}HML_t + b^{RMW}RMW_t + b^{CMA}CMA_t + \varepsilon_{p,t},$$

- This model necessary to control for business cycle effects (Bansal et al., 2021)
- (do show estimates with alternative asset pricing models)

Empirics I: Estimates of alpha for (EW) Exclusion Portfolio

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Alpha	0.004*** (0.002)	0.004** (0.002)	0.004*** (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)
Rm-Rf	0.961*** (0.040)	1.021*** (0.049)	0.993*** (0.042)	0.962*** (0.049)
SMB	0.173 (0.115)		0.178 (0.115)	0.177 (0.123)
HML	0.467*** (0.115)		0.310*** (0.074)	0.224*** (0.089)
RMW	0.155 (0.156)			
CMA	-0.257 (0.233)			
WML				-0.138*** (0.076)
Annualized Alphas(percent)	5.170	4.420	5.220	5.980
Adj. R ²	0.809	0.788	0.808	0.813

Empirics I: From alpha to green return premium

- Alpha: $> 5\%$ in annual terms — economically and statistically significant
- Finding robust to
 - asset pricing model
 - weighting scheme (equal, value weighted)
 - subportfolios: reason for exclusion, country (US).

Conclude:

The alpha is the premium on unethical excluded firms.

The green return premium then the negative of this.

→ We estimate a (negative) green premium of $\approx -5\%$.

Empirics I: Concern: Short term announcement effect

Potential contribution to the high estimate (5%)

- Short term price pressure from exclusion?
- Changes to long term cost of capital?

Various estimates to show this is not only a short term effect

- Wait longer before enter exclusion portfolio
- Look at exclusion portfolio *before* oil funds exclusion
- Event study estimates $\approx 1.5\%$ (one time event).

→ The estimated return is chiefly due to long-term return differences.

Empirics I: Conclude: Green premium estimates

- The green premium is negative, in line with
 - a non-pecuniary explanation,
 - the majority of estimates in the literature.
- The point estimate of -5% is larger in magnitude than most other estimates
 - Possibly due to the sample being only the “worst offenders”

Empirics Part II: Firms deciding whether to improve to get exclusion revoked

Point when an exclusion is announced

– from potential to actual exclusion

→ Revision of expectations

– expected cost of capital increase?

Time to revisit the firm's evaluation of the tradeoff?

Sample: Exclusions revoked due to:

Cause	no
Change of product mix	11
Cease of activity	7
Sale of subsidiary	4
Other reasons	6
Total	28

Empirics II – Revoking exclusions – analysis

Actions to improve ESG leading to exclusion revoked

→ Endogenous action by firms

Trading off

- Cost of improving ESG (Cause of exclusion)
- Benefits from a lower cost of capital (cheaper to raise capital)

Motivate empirical investigations – proxies

- A. Costs of improving – ESG score when excluded.
- Benefits of low cost of capital –
 - B. Capital needs
(Revenue increase → Need for scale investments)
 - C. Actual capital raising.
- D. Result of action – cost of capital after exclusion revoked.

Empirics II.A: What determines time till exclusion is revoked?

Duration (survival) analysis of exit from Exclusion Portfolio.

Allows estimation of how e.g. cost of improvement affects time till exit.

Estimates

- ESG score when excluded – (negative coefficient)
 - Low ESG score when entering exclusion portfolio
 - lower time till exit.

Possible interpretation: Cost of improving ESG low when starting from a low (ESG) base.

Controls:

- Conduct based exclusion dummy (easier to fix conduct based than product based reasons for exclusion)
- Firm Market Capitalization

Empirics II.B: Benefits from cheaper cost of capital

Benefits of low cost of capital arise when firm needs to raise new external capital.

Argue: Higher likelihood of raising capital – increased benefits.

Empirically: Higher Revenue – Higher investment needs

Empirical formulation:

Probit - Model probability of having exclusions revoked as a function of

- Revenue growth – negative relation:
High revenue growth → higher probability of exclusion revoked.
- Earnings growth – no relation

Empirics II.C: Another estimate of benefit of low cost of capital

Actual equity deals – raising new equity capital

- High probability of raising capital after exclusion revoked

	Firms raising capital	
	Number	Percent
Firms still excluded	56	37.1
Firms with exclusion revoked	11	57.9

Empirics II.D: Do cost of capital fall after exclusion revoked?

Estimates of alpha for the post-exclusion portfolio

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Alpha	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.002 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.003)	0.000 (0.003)
Rm-Rf	1.080*** (0.077)	1.085*** (0.073)	1.061*** (0.073)	1.033*** (0.076)
SMB	0.335 (0.221)		0.250 (0.209)	0.245 (0.208)
HML	0.271 (0.215)		0.235* (0.123)	0.128 (0.144)
RMW	0.326 (0.292)			
CMA	0.107 (0.345)			
WML				-0.192 (0.136)
Annualized Alphas(percent)	-2.230	-1.970	-0.860	0.300
Adj. R ²	0.604	0.596	0.606	0.609
Num. obs.	149	149	149	149

Key takeaways

- ① *Green return premium* estimate $\approx -5\%$.
 - Negative in line with most of literature
 - *Magnitude* of the return difference linked to ESG higher than most estimates, possibly due to sample of “worst offenders.”
- ② *Dynamics* of corporate reactions to exclusion.
More likely to see exclusion revoked if
 - ESG “really bad” at exclusion (cheaper to rectify?)
 - Revenue growth high (investment needs?)

Extra tables and results

Extra material - data - Exclusions over time

Year	New Exclusions	Exclusions Revoked	Re-exclusions
2005	9		
2006	11	1	
2007	2		
2008	4		
2009	5	2	
2010	21	1	
2011	5	1	
2012	1		
2013	9	3	
2014	1	1	
2015	4		
2016	61		
2017	11	1	
2018	13	2	1
2019	5	6	
2020	15	3	
2021	12	5	
Total	189	26	1

Extra material - data - Exclusions by industry

Industry	TRBC Code	Exclusions	Exclusions Revoked
Electrical Utilities & IPPs	591010	56	2
Aerospace & Defense	521010	20	7
Food & Tobacco	541020	18	
Coal	501010	14	
Metals & Mining	512010	14	3
Construction & Engineering	522010	10	1
Oil & Gas	501020	9	3
Chemicals	511010	6	2
Paper & Forest Products	513010	5	
Pharmaceuticals	562010	5	
Freight & Logistics Services	524050	4	1
Textiles & Apparel	532020	4	1
Consumer Goods Conglomerates	544010	3	1
Multiline Utilities	591040	3	
Real Estate Operations	601010	3	
Automobiles & Auto Parts	531010	2	1
Homebuilding & Construction Supplies	532030	2	1
Machinery, Equipment & Components	521020	2	
Professional & Commercial Services	522030	2	
Communications & Networking	571020	1	
Diversified Industrial Goods Wholesalers	522020	1	
Diversified Retail	534020	1	1
Food & Drug Retailing	543010	1	1
Hotels & Entertainment Services	533010	1	
Insurance	553010	1	1
Specialty Retailers	534030	1	
Total		189	26

Extra material - data - Exclusions by country

Country	Exclusions	Exclusions Revoked
United States	51	10
China	27	2
India	13	
United Kingdom	11	5
Israel	10	
Canada	9	1
Japan	8	
Malaysia	8	
South Korea	7	1
Brazil	5	
Australia	4	
Poland	4	1
South Africa	3	1
Taiwan	3	
Thailand	3	1
Chile	2	
Czech Republic	2	
France	2	1
Mexico	2	2
Netherlands	2	
Philippines	2	
Egypt	1	
Germany	1	
Greece	1	
Indonesia	1	
Ireland	1	
Italy	1	1
Peru	1	
Russian Federation	1	
Ci	1	

Extra material - data - Sample of stocks

Status	Events
Total exclusions	189
Exclusion revoked	26
Excluded again	1
Not matched with Refinitiv	5
Total sample	184
Conduct-based exclusions	67
Product-based exclusions	122

Overview of the exclusions, revocations and sample content. Data from the Ethical council, GPFG and Refinitiv.

Extra material - data - Equity data - Descriptives

	min	mean	med	max
Monthly Return (percent)	-72.8	1.1	0.6	166.2
Market Cap (bill USD)	0.0	20.4	6.0	315.8

Extra material - exclusion portfolio - Descriptives

Panel A: Equally weighted exclusion portfolio

	gmn					
	Market	All	EW Exclusion Portfolios			
			Conduct	Product	Coal	US
Average return (%)	0.79	1.17	1.44	1.00	1.02	1.24
Std.dev	0.79	5.21	7.73	4.92	4.33	5.06
Average excess return (%)	0.01	1.07	1.35	0.91	0.94	1.14
Sharpe Ratio	0.15	0.21	0.17	0.18	0.22	0.23
n	199	199	199	196	69	199

Panel B: Value weighted exclusion portfolio

	VW Exclusion Portfolios					
	Market	All	Conduct	Product	Coal	US
Average return(%)	0.79	1.37	1.67	1.22	1.27	1.37
Std.dev	0.79	4.23	5.64	4.77	3.47	4.11
Average excess return (%)	0.01	1.28	1.58	1.13	1.19	1.28
Sharpe Ratio	0.15	0.30	0.28	0.24	0.34	0.31
n	199	199	199	196	69	199

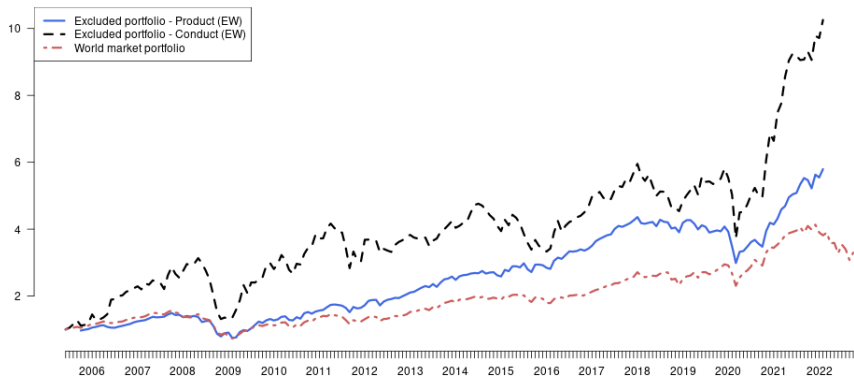
Describing portfolio returns for the various exclusion portfolios. All returns in USD. Returns and

Extra material - exclusion portfolio - Estimates of alpha for (VW) Exclusion Portfolio

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Alpha	0.006*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)	0.007*** (0.002)
Rm-Rf	0.871*** (0.040)	0.801*** (0.038)	0.809*** (0.037)	0.817*** (0.038)
SMB	-0.313*** (0.113)		-0.421*** (0.116)	-0.421*** (0.111)
HML	0.183* (0.102)		0.264*** (0.078)	0.287*** (0.100)
RMW	0.340*** (0.143)			
CMA	0.373*** (0.139)			
WML				0.036 (0.064)
Annualized Alphas(percent)	6.850	9.000	9.010	8.810

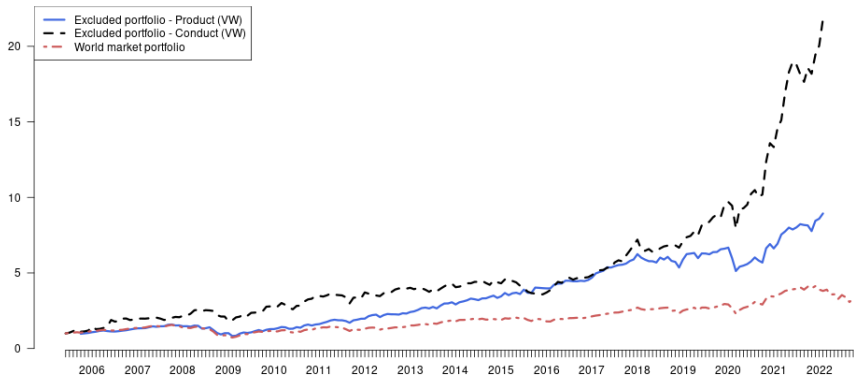
Extra material - exclusion portfolio - Conduct and product based value evolution (EW)

Panel A: Equally weighted exclusion portfolio



Extra material - exclusion portfolio - Conduct and product based value evolution (VW)

Panel B: Value weighted exclusion portfolio

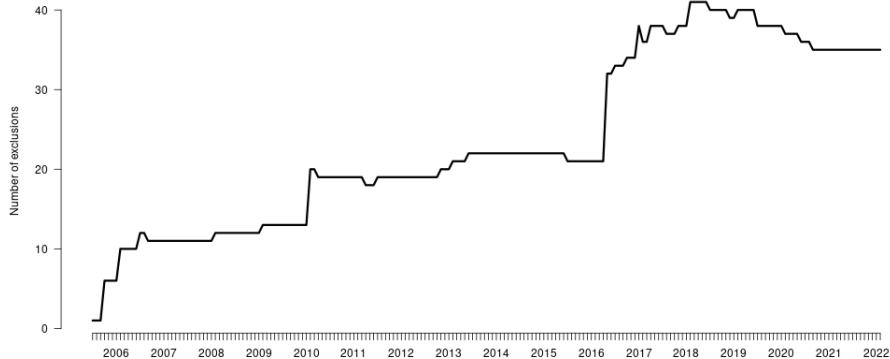


Extra material - exclusion portfolio - Conduct and product based exclusion

	Conduct		Product	
	EW	VW	EW	VW
Alpha	0.007* (0.004)	0.009*** (0.003)	0.003 (0.002)	0.004** (0.001)
Rm-Rf	1.061*** (0.130)	0.793*** (0.077)	0.926*** (0.037)	0.935*** (0.037)
SMB	0.139 (0.293)	-0.269 (0.255)	0.167 (0.136)	-0.280** (0.128)
HML	0.967*** (0.214)	0.293 (0.165)	0.295*** (0.107)	0.208* (0.107)
RMW	0.231 (0.349)	0.419 (0.285)	0.164 (0.174)	0.345* (0.211)
CMA	-1.241*** (0.412)	0.306 (0.244)	0.070 (0.167)	0.305* (0.157)
Annualized Alphas(percent)	8.540	11.310	3.370	4.680

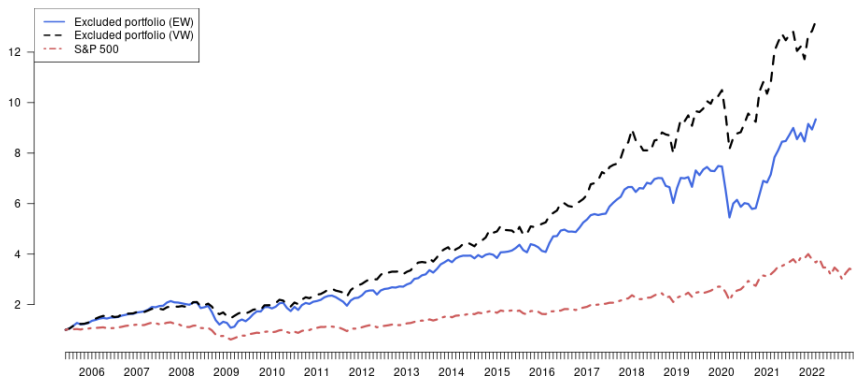
Extra material - exclusion portfolio - US Exclusion Portfolio

Panel A: Number of exclusions



Extra material - exclusion portfolio - US Exclusion Portfolio

Panel B: Cumulative returns



Extra material - exclusion portfolio - US Exclusion Portfolio

	Equally Weighted	Value Weighted
Alpha	0.004* (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)
Rm-Rf	0.925*** (0.050)	0.783*** (0.045)
SMB	0.012 (0.089)	-0.280*** (0.080)
HML	0.239*** (0.081)	0.168*** (0.073)
RMW	0.050 (0.117)	0.258*** (0.106)
CMA	0.073 (0.146)	0.173 (0.132)
Annualized Alphas(percent)	4.870	7.200
Adj. R ²	0.710	0.644
Num. obs.	200	200

Extra material - exclusion portfolio - Alpha estimation for Subperiods

Panel A: Equally weighted exclusion portfolio.

	(2005–15)	(2016–21)
Alpha	0.006*** (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)
Rm-Rf	0.955*** (0.057)	0.930*** (0.071)
SMB	0.070 (0.130)	0.372* (0.165)
HML	0.331** (0.188)	0.231 (0.145)
RMW	-0.027 (0.297)	0.197 (0.176)
CMA	-0.623*** (0.154)	0.458* (0.252)
Annualized Alphas(percent)	7.860	3.320

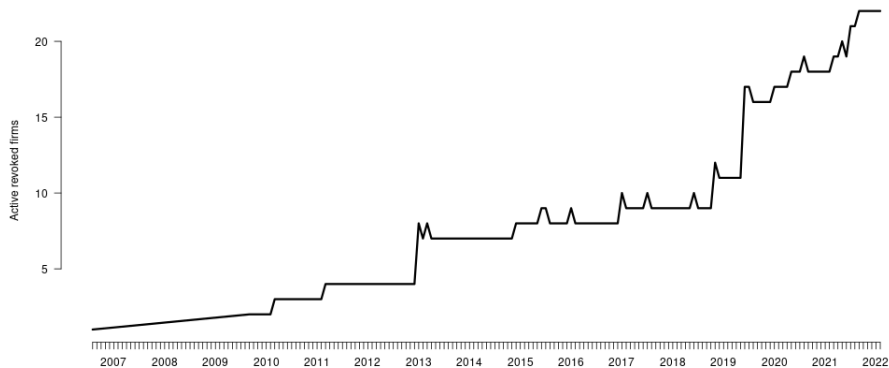
Extra material - exclusion portfolio - Alpha estimation for Subperiods

Panel B: Value weighted exclusion portfolio.

	(2005–15)	(2016–21)
Alpha	0.007*** (0.002)	0.004* (0.001)
Rm-Rf	0.840*** (0.040)	0.958*** (0.046)
SMB	-0.402*** (0.134)	-0.317* (0.161)
HML	-0.064 (0.141)	0.128 (0.178)
RMW	0.274 (0.195)	0.183 (0.203)
CMA	0.168 (0.144)	0.704*** (0.264)
Annualized Alphas(percent)	8.440	5.010

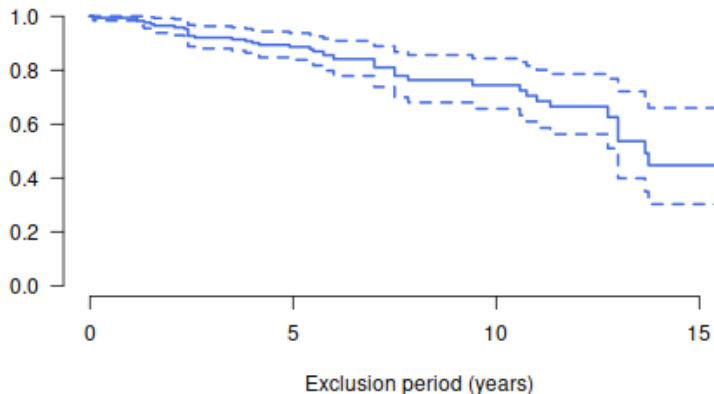
Extra material – Revoking exclusion – Post-Exclusion portfolio

Panel A: Number of stocks with exclusions revoked and still listed



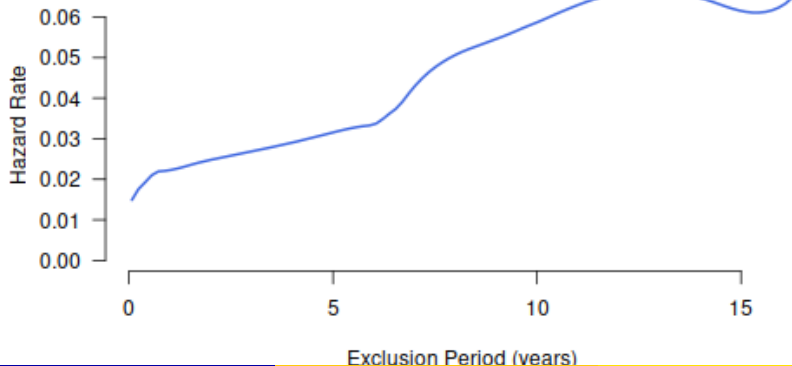
Extra material – Revoking exclusion – Duration (survival) analysis of exit from Exclusion Portfolio

Panel A. Survival curve



Extra material – Revoking exclusion – Duration (survival) analysis of exit from Exclusion Portfolio

Panel B. Instantaneous hazard curve (smoothed)



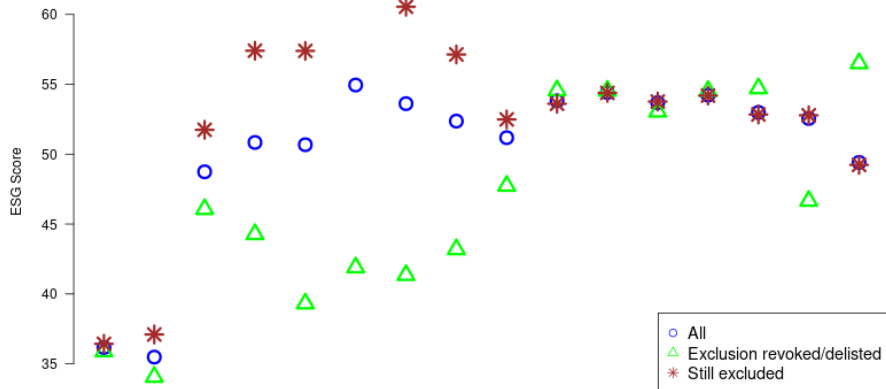
Extra material – Revoking exclusion – Duration (survival) analysis of exit from Exclusion Portfolio

Contributions to survival of exclusion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
ESG Score	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.03** (0.01)
Ind(Conduct)		0.85** (0.39)		0.98*** (0.44)
ln(Mkt Cap)			-0.05 (0.09)	-0.11 (0.10)
AIC	219.27	217.21	221.05	218.16
R ²	0.03	0.06	0.04	0.07
Max. R ²	0.77	0.77	0.77	0.77
Num. events	28	28	28	28
Num. obs.	150	150	150	150
PH test	0.47	0.76	0.55	0.68

*** $p < 0.025$; ** $p < 0.05$; * $p < 0.1$

Extra material – Revoking exclusion – ESG Scores for firms with/without exclusion revoked

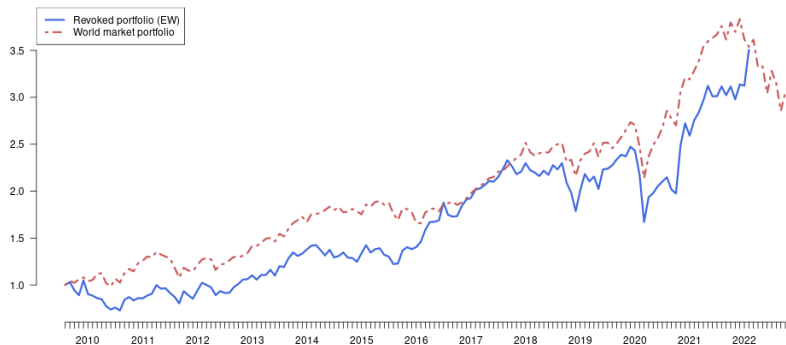


Extra material – Revoking exclusion – Probit estimation of determinants of discontinuation of exclusion

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
(Intercept)	-3.53*** (1.12)	-2.26*** (0.13)	-2.24*** (0.13)	-3.38*** (1.13)
Growth EPS	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)		
Ind(Conduct)	0.69*** (0.19)	0.66*** (0.19)	0.52*** (0.19)	0.54*** (0.19)
ln(Mkt Cap)	0.06 (0.05)			0.05 (0.05)
Growth Revenue			0.46* (0.26)	0.45* (0.26)
Log Likelihood	-97.86	-98.51	-99.08	-98.55
Num. obs.	981	981	969	969

Extra material - The Post-Exclusion portfolio

Firms enter the post-exclusion portfolio month after exclusion is revoked.



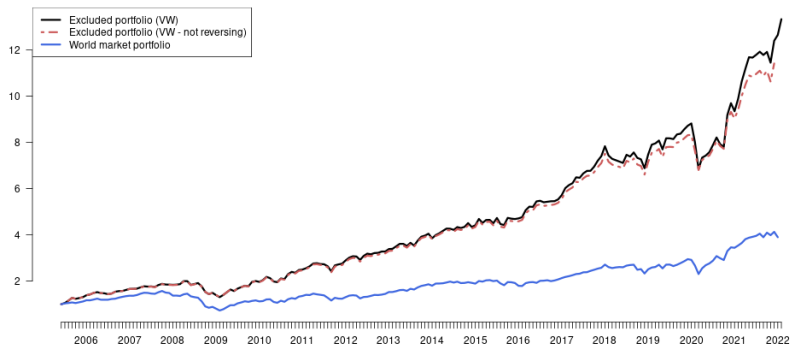
Cumulative returns for the Post-Exclusion Portfolio

Extra analysis - Is revocation a selection issue?

- The Exclusion portfolio – firms only in portfolio *while* excluded.
- Remove firms *post* exclusion. Selection problem?
 - What is the return on the portfolio of post-excluded firms?
 - What if we keep firms in the portfolio even if the exclusion is revoked?

Extra analysis - Is revocation a selection issue? – Keeping the firms with exclusion revoked

Compare Exclusion Portfolio with corresponding portfolio where firms whose exclusion is revoked is kept



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