

# Financial Innovation, the Discovery of Risk, and the U.S. Credit Crisis\*

Emine Boz  
International Monetary Fund

Enrique G. Mendoza  
University of Maryland and NBER

July 16, 2012

## Abstract

Financial innovation and overconfidence about asset values and the riskiness of new financial products were important factors behind the U.S. credit crisis. We show that a boom-bust cycle in debt, asset prices and consumption characterizes the equilibrium dynamics of a model with a collateral constraint in which agents learn “by observation” the true riskiness of a new financial environment. Early realizations of states with high ability to leverage assets into debt turn agents overly optimistic about the persistence probability of a high-leverage regime. Conversely, the first realization of a low-leverage state turns agents unduly pessimistic about future credit prospects. These effects interact with the Fisherian deflation mechanism, resulting in changes in debt, leverage, and asset prices larger than predicted under either rational expectations without learning or with learning but without Fisherian deflation. The model predicts a large, sustained increase in net household debt and in residential land prices between 1997 and 2006, followed by a sharp collapse in 2007.

**JEL Classification:** *F41, E44, D82*

**Keywords:** credit crisis, financial innovation, imperfect information, learning, asset prices, Fisherian deflation

---

\*We are grateful to Andrew Abel, Satyajit Chatterjee, Tim Cogley, Enrica Detragiache, Bora Durdu, George Evans, Martin Evans, Matteo Iacoviello, Urban Jermann, Robert Kollmann, Anton Korinek, Kevin Lansing, Mico Loretan, Agnieszka Markiewicz, Jim Nason, Paolo Pesenti, Vincenzo Quadrini, David Romer, Tom Sargent, and Stijn Van Nieuwerburgh for helpful comments. We are also grateful for comments by participants at the 2011 Philadelphia Macro Workshop, 2011 Midwest Macro Meetings, London Trio Seminar, the conference on “Expectations, Asset Bubbles and Financial Crises” at Erasmus University, NBER-CRIW Saving and Wealth Conference, 2011 AEA Meetings, 2009 and 2010 SED Meetings, the 2009 NBER-IFM Summer Institute, Spring 2010 Bundesbank Conference, the 12th Workshop of the Euro Area Business Cycle Network, and at seminars at Brown, UVA, Bank of Korea, Reserve Bank of New Zealand, Federal Reserve Board, World Bank, Wharton, San Francisco Fed, SUNY Albany, the IMF Research Department, and the IMF Institute. Part of this paper was written while Mendoza was a visiting scholar at the IMF Institute and Research Department, and he thanks both for their support. The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and should not be attributed to the International Monetary Fund or the National Bureau of Economic Research. Correspondence: [EBoz@imf.org](mailto:EBoz@imf.org) and [mendozae@econ.umd.edu](mailto:mendozae@econ.umd.edu).

*“Booms become busts because justifiable confidence becomes foolish optimism.”* –Robert J. Samuelson, ”Causes of the Crisis,” *Washington Post*, 3/19/2012.

## 1 Introduction

The U.S. financial crisis was preceded by sharp increases in household credit, residential land prices, and leverage ratios (see Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> Between 1996 and 2006, the year in which the crisis started as home prices began to decline nationwide, the net credit assets of U.S. households fell from -35 to -70 percent of GDP. By contrast, this ratio was very stable in the previous two decades. During 1996-2006, the market value of residential land as a share of GDP also surged, from 45 to nearly 75 percent.<sup>2</sup> Debt grew much faster than land values, however, because the ratio of the two, a macroeconomic measure of household leverage, rose from 0.64 in 1996 to 0.93 in 2006. The crisis then resulted in a sudden increase in leverage, as land prices fell faster than the ability to reduce debts, and leverage continued hovering around 1.2 after that.

As the timeline in Figure 2 shows, the U.S. credit boom started with a period of significant financial innovation characterized by two central features: First, the introduction of new financial instruments that “securitized” the payment streams generated by a wide variety of assets, particularly home mortgages. Second, far-reaching reforms that radically changed the legal and regulatory framework of financial markets.

The gradual introduction of collateralized debt obligations (CDOs) dates back to the early 1980s, but the securitization boom that fueled the growth of household debt started in the mid 1990s with the introduction of collateralized mortgage obligations (CMOs). This process was greatly amplified by the introduction of credit default swaps (CDSs) on the payments of CMOs by the mid 2000s. In addition, synthetic securitization allowed third parties to trade bets on the income streams of the new instruments. By the end of 2007, the market of CDSs alone was worth about \$45 trillion (or 3 times U.S. GDP).

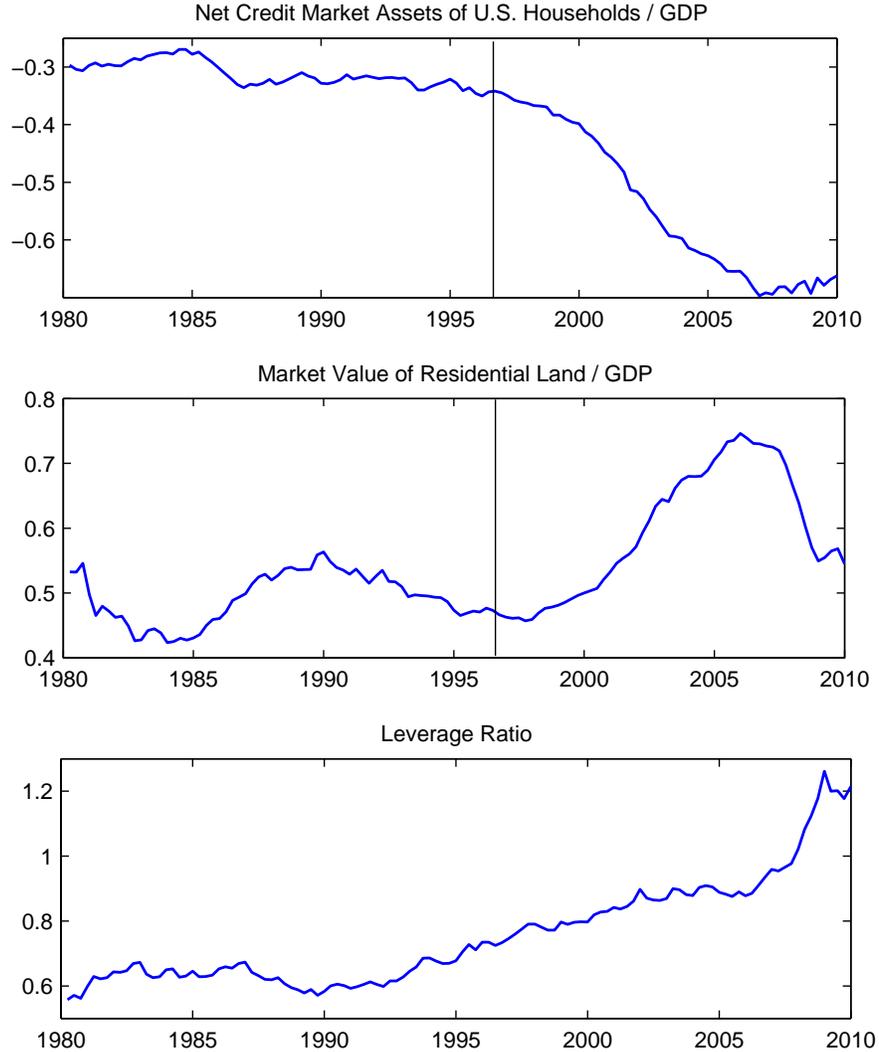
The financial reforms introduced in the 1990s were the most significant since the Great Depression, and in fact aimed at removing the barriers separating bank and non-bank financial intermedi-

---

<sup>1</sup>High leverage in financial institutions also played a critical role. Still, understanding the mechanisms that drove the household credit boom is very important, because housing-related securities were the main component of the surge in leverage of financial institutions, and these securities were anchored on mortgage origination at the household level.

<sup>2</sup> Following Davis and Heathcote (2007), we focus on residential land prices instead of housing prices. They showed that land prices are more important than prices of residential dwellings for understanding the evolution of housing prices. They decomposed U.S. housing prices into the prices of land and structures, and found that between 1975 and 2006 residential land prices quadrupled while prices of physical structures increased only by 1/3rd in real terms. Furthermore, land prices are about three times more volatile than prices of structures.

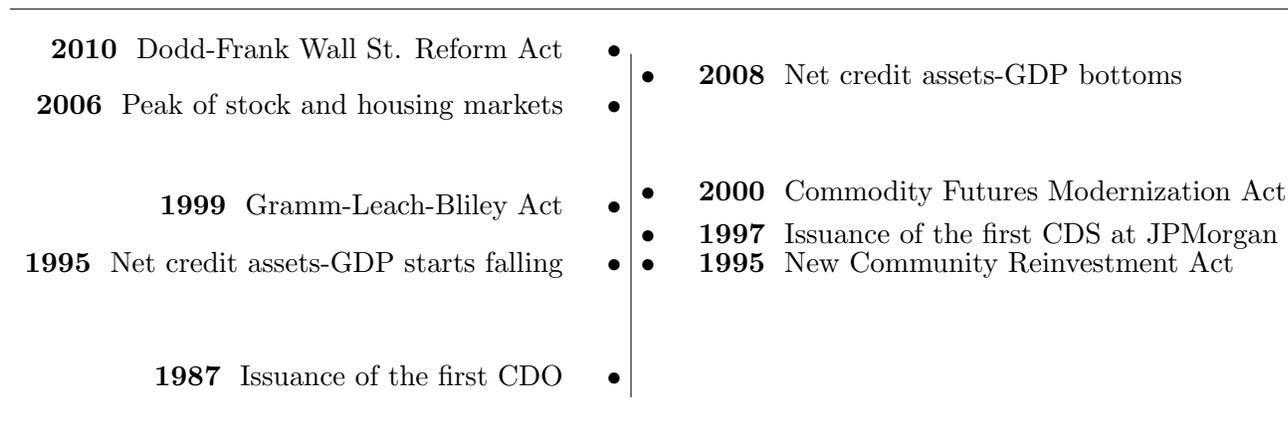
Figure 1: Net Credit Market Assets, Value of Residential Land and Leverage Ratio



Notes: This figure plots the net credit market assets to GDP ratio for the U.S. households and non-profit organizations. Sources: Net Credit Market Assets: Flow of Funds Accounts of the U.S. provided by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System. Value of Residential Land: [Davis and Heathcote \(2007\)](#).

aries set in 1933 with the Glass-Steagall Banking Act. Three Acts were particularly important for the housing and credit booms: The 1995 New Community Reinvestment Act, which strengthened the role of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac in mortgage markets and facilitated mortgage securitization; the 1999 Gramm–Leach–Bliley Act, which removed the prohibition on bank holding companies from owning other financial companies; and the 2000 Commodity Futures Modernization Act, which stipulated that over-the-counter derivatives such as CDSs would not be regulated as futures contracts, securities, or lotteries under federal law.

Figure 2: Timeline of Events During the Run-up to the U.S. Credit Crisis



The pattern connecting financial innovation, booms in credit and asset prices, and financial crises is not a phenomenon unique to the recent U.S. experience. In fact, credit booms and busts are commonly associated with large changes in the financial environment. It is well-known, for instance, that many of the countries to which the financial crisis spread after hitting the United States displayed similar pre-crisis features, in terms of a large expansion of the financial sector into new instruments under new regulations, and also experienced housing booms (e.g. the United Kingdom, Spain, Iceland, Ireland). The experiences of Eastern European transition economies in the aftermath of financial liberalization, and of the Baltic states in the mid 2000’s, just before entering the European Union, are also good examples, and there is evidence of a similar process at work before the Great Depression in the form of a securitization boom in commercial mortgages (Goetzmann and Newman (2010)). Mendoza and Terrones (2012) provide more systematic evidence of this phenomenon. They found that 35 percent of the credit booms observed in the 1960-2010 period across developed and emerging economies occurred after surges in capital flows, which were largely driven by reforms that liberalized capital accounts, and 25 percent occurred after large financial reforms. They also found that credit booms are associated with sharp cycles in economic activity and housing prices.

This paper provides an explanation for the observed relationship between financial innovation and the credit cycle. In particular, we show that financial innovation, interacting with credit constraints, can lead to a “natural” underpricing of the risk associated with a new financial environment, and that this can produce a surge in credit and asset prices, followed by a collapse. Undervaluing the risk is natural because of the lack of data on the default and performance records of the new financial instruments, and on the stability of the financial system under new laws. In

line with this argument, the strategy of “layering of risk” in the U.S. securitization boom justified the belief that the new instruments were so well diversified that they were virtually risk free. The latter was presumably being attained by using portfolio models that combined top-rated tranches of assets with tranches containing riskier assets—under the assumption that the risk of the assets was priced correctly. As [Drew \(2008\)](#) described it: *“The computer modelers gushed about the tranches. The layers spread out the risk. Only a catastrophic failure would bring the structure crashing down, and the models said that wouldn’t happen.”*

We propose a model in which the true riskiness of the new financial environment can only be discovered with time, and this learning process interacts with a collateral constraint that limits households’ debt not to exceed a fraction of the market value of their holdings of a fixed asset (i.e., land). Financial innovation is modeled as a structural change that introduces a regime with a higher leverage limit. Agents know that in this new environment one of two financial regimes can materialize in any given period: one in which high ability to leverage continues, and one in which there is a lower leverage limit. They do not know the true riskiness of the new financial environment, because they lack data with which to estimate accurately the true switching probabilities across these two regimes. They are Bayesian learners, however, and so they learn over time as they observe regime realizations, and in the long-run their beliefs converge to the true regime-switching probabilities. Hence, in the long-run the model converges to the rational expectations (RE) solution, with the risk of the financial environment priced correctly.<sup>3</sup> In the short-run, however, optimal plans and asset prices deviate from the RE equilibrium, because beliefs differ from those of the RE solution, and this leads to a mispricing of risk.

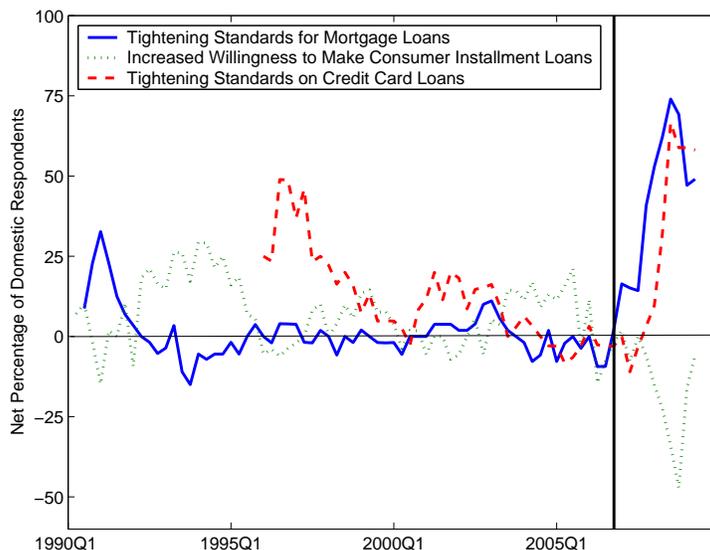
The collateral constraint introduces into the model the well-known Fisherian debt-deflation mechanism of financial amplification, but the analysis of the interaction of this mechanism with the learning dynamics is a novel feature of this paper.<sup>4</sup> In particular, the deviations of the agents’ beliefs from the true RE regime-switching probabilities distort asset pricing conditions. If the constraint binds, optimistic beliefs lead agents to assign higher probabilities to states with lower excess returns, which causes a feedback loop producing higher asset prices and higher debt, and the

---

<sup>3</sup>We follow the standard treatment in the imperfect information literature to refer to the perfect information equilibrium as the rational expectations equilibrium, even though the Bayesian learning equilibrium is also a rational expectations equilibrium.

<sup>4</sup>The debt-deflation framework as originally envisaged by [Fisher \(1933\)](#) gave a prominent role to changes in optimism and gloom of economic agents, but modern formulations of financial accelerators abstract from fluctuations in beliefs. It is also interesting to note that Fisher assigned a limited role to changes in beliefs *except* when they interact with the debt-deflation mechanism: *“I fancy that over-confidence seldom does any great harm except when, as, and if, it beguiles its victims into debt.”* ( [Fisher \(1933\)](#)).

Figure 3: Banks' Willingness To Lend



Notes: This figure plots the net percentage of domestic banks that reported tightening standards for mortgage loans and credit card loans; and increased willingness to make consumer installment loans. The banks can choose from five answers, 1) tightened significantly, 2) tightened somewhat, 3) remained unchanged, 4) eased somewhat, 5) eased significantly. Net percentages are calculated by subtracting the number of banks that chose 4 or 5 from those that chose 1 or 2, and then dividing by the total number of respondents. Source: Willingness to Lend Survey of the U.S., provided by the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System.

opposite occurs when agents are pessimistic. Thus, the over- or under-pricing of assets translates into over- or under-inflated collateral values that affect the debt-deflation dynamics.

Quantitative analysis shows that the process of discovery of risk in the presence of collateral constraints has important macroeconomic effects, and leads to a period of booming credit and land prices, followed by a sharp, sudden collapse. We conduct an experiment calibrated to U.S. data in which we date the start of financial innovation in the first quarter of 1997 and the beginning of the financial crisis in the first quarter of 2007. Hence, from 1997 to the end of 2006 we assume that the economy experienced the high-leverage regime, followed by a switch to the low-leverage regime in the first quarter of 2007.<sup>5</sup> The stock of net credit assets did not rise sharply then (see Figure 1), but the fraction of banks that tightened credit standards jumped from nearly zero to over 50 percent (see Figure 3), and the median downpayment on conventional mortgages jumped from 5 to 13 percent (see Feb. 16, *Wall Street Journal*).

The initial priors of the Bayesian learning process are calibrated to match observed excess returns on Fannie Mae residential MBS at the beginning of 1997, and the high- and low-leverage

<sup>5</sup>We take this switch to the low-leverage as exogenous. One way to endogenously generate such a switch is to explicitly model the freeze of the interbank market as in [Gertler and Kiyotaki \(2010\)](#).

limits are set equal to the observed leverage ratios before 1997 and at the end of 2006. Under these assumptions, our model predicts that agents become optimistic about the probability of persistence of the high-leverage regime very soon after 1997, and remain so until they observe the switch to the low-leverage regime. During this “optimistic phase,” debt, leverage and land prices rise significantly above what the RE equilibrium predicts.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the model accounts for 63 percent of the rise in net household debt and 44 percent of the rise in residential land prices during 1997-2006. Conversely, when agents observe the first realization of the low-leverage regime, they respond with a sharp correction in their beliefs and become unduly pessimistic, causing sharp downward adjustments in credit, land prices and consumption.

This transition to the low-leverage regime is exogenous, and thus part of the collapse in credit that the model produces is exogenous. For example, one can think of the switch of regimes as being due to a disruption in financial intermediation, as in [Gertler and Kiyotaki \(2010\)](#). Note, however, that the equilibrium declines in credit and prices in the model also reflect the endogenous amplification channel operating through the interaction of the collateral constraint and the agents’ beliefs. Quantitatively, our results indicate that this amplification mechanism is very strong and accounts for most of the drop in credit and prices predicted by the model. The results also show that the interaction between the debt-deflation financial accelerator and the learning dynamics is quantitatively significant. The model predicts effects on debt and asset prices that are nearly twice as large when we allow for these two forces to interact than when we remove either one.

We model learning following the approach proposed by [Cogley and Sargent \(2008b\)](#). They offer an explanation of the equity premium puzzle by modeling a period of persistent pessimism caused by the Great Depression. They assume high and low states for exogenous consumption growth, with the true transition probabilities across these states unknown. Agents learn the true probabilities over time as they observe the realizations of consumption growth. Similarly, in our setup, the true probabilities of switching across leverage regimes are unknown, and agents learn about them over time.

This paper is also related to the large Macro and Finance literatures on learning models. On the macro side, the literature tends to focus on learning from noisy signals (e.g [Blanchard et al. \(2008\)](#), [Boz \(2009\)](#), [Boz et al. \(2011\)](#), [Edge et al. \(2007\)](#), [Lorenzoni \(2009\)](#), [Van Nieuwerburgh and](#)

---

<sup>6</sup>The degree of optimism generated in the optimistic phase is at its highest just before agents observe the first realization of the low-leverage regime. This occurs because, when the new financial environment is first introduced, agents cannot rule out the possibility of the high-leverage regime being absorbent until they experience the first realization of the low-leverage state.

Veldkamp (2006), and the survey by Evans and Honkapohja (1999)). The informational friction in models like ours, and Cogley and Sargent (2008b) is different, because there is no signal extraction problem. Agents observe realizations of the relevant variables without noise. Instead, there is imperfect information about the true transition probability distribution of these variables. The U.S. credit crisis provides a natural laboratory to study the effects of this class of learning models, because the new financial products and the new regulatory regime under which they were traded lacked the time-series data needed to infer the true probability of “catastrophic failure” of credit markets (i.e., the probability of switching to a low-leverage regime). Our work is also reminiscent of the literature on Knightian uncertainty where the agents do not know the true model with which to assess the future. A recent application of Knightian uncertainty is Caballero and Krishnamurthy (2008), who emphasize unusual events and new financial instruments in increasing uncertainty and potentially leading to crises.

The work of Zeira (1999) is closer in spirit to this paper. He argued that financial liberalization or structural changes in productivity could be followed by booms and crashes because of “informational overshooting.” The similarity with our work is in the idea that agents need to learn the true characteristics of a new asset pricing environment. In Zeira’s model, this is captured by an increase in dividend growth with an unknown duration and by assuming that agents update their beliefs about a future date in which high dividend growth will end. As long as they observe high dividend growth, their beliefs about future dividend realizations increase, leading to a boom in stock prices. Then when agents finally observe the end of the dividend boom, expectations of future profits fall and hence asset prices collapse. In more recent related work, Adam et al. (2011) study housing booms and current account imbalances in G7 countries using a learning model with a collateral constraint in which Bayesian learning about housing prices amplifies the effects of interest rate cuts.

The credit constraint used in our model is similar to those widely examined in the macro literature on financial frictions and in the international macro literature on Sudden Stops. For example, Jermann and Quadrini (2006) propose an RE model in which asset prices affect borrowing ability, and use it to study the effects of financial innovation. Mendoza (2010) and Durdu et al. (2009) develop models in which credit constraints linked to goods or asset prices produce Sudden Stops of capital inflows. When credit constraints like these are used in RE stochastic environments, precautionary savings reduce significantly the long-run probability of states in which the constraints bind. In our learning model, however, agents have much weaker incentives for building precautionary savings than under rational expectations, until they attain the long-run equilibrium in which they

know the true riskiness of the financial environment. Since agents borrow “too much” during the optimistic phase, the economy is vulnerable to suffer a large credit crunch when the first switch to a low-leverage regime occurs. In addition, our model differs from most financial crisis models in that it aims to explain both the boom and bust credit cycles, whereas crisis models typically focus only on the latter.

Our credit constraint also features the “systemic” pecuniary externality present in several models of financial crises. In particular, agents do not internalize the implications of their individual actions on credit conditions because of changes in equilibrium prices, and this leads to “overborrowing” relative to debt levels that would be acquired without the externality. Studies on overborrowing like those by [Uribe \(2006\)](#), [Korinek \(2008\)](#), and [Bianchi \(2011\)](#) explore whether credit externalities can generate excessive borrowing in decentralized equilibria relative to a constrained social optimum. Our paper makes two contributions to this line of research. First, we show that the discovery of risk generates sizable overborrowing (relative to the RE decentralized equilibrium), because of the unduly optimistic expectations of agents during the optimistic phase of the learning dynamics. Second, we provide a new analysis of the interaction between the credit externality and the underpricing of risk driven by a process of “risk discovery.”

Finally, our paper is also related to some of the recent literature on the U.S. crisis that emphasizes learning frictions, financial innovation and deregulation, particularly the work of [Howitt \(2011\)](#), [Favilukis et al. \(2010\)](#) and [Ferrero \(2012\)](#). Howitt studies the interaction of expectations, leverage and a solvency constraint in a representative agent setup similar to ours, and he shows that adaptive learning about asset returns leads to periods of “cumulative optimism” followed by “cumulative pessimism,” and this can lead to a crisis. Our analysis differs in that we study Bayesian learning, instead of adaptive expectations, and we model learning about the persistence of a financial regime, defined in terms of the maximum leverage ratio specified by a collateral constraint.<sup>7</sup> [Favilukis et al. \(2010\)](#) analyze the macroeconomic effects of housing wealth and housing finance in a heterogeneous-agents, DSGE model with credit constraints. They study transition dynamics from an environment with high financial transaction costs and tight credit limits to one with the opposite features. [Ferrero \(2012\)](#) has a similar flavor in that he studies the macroeconomic implications of relaxation of an LTV requirement. Similar to these two studies, our paper emphasizes the role

---

<sup>7</sup>There is also an interesting contrast across the two studies in terms of the motivation for focusing on learning to study the financial crisis. Howitt argues that the learning friction matters because agents learn in adaptive fashion about the behavior of asset returns, in a financial regime that is in fact unchanged, while we argue that it matters because agents learn gradually the true persistence of a new financial regime, while they have perfect information about the random process that drives dividends.

of a relaxation of borrowing constraints, but we focus on the effects of imperfect information and learning, while they study environments with rational expectations.

To close this Introduction, we do recognize that several factors beyond the scope of this paper were at play in causing the credit booms and crises observed in the United States and elsewhere, including excessive leverage and exposure to counterparty risk amongst financial intermediaries, moral hazard in financial markets and rating agencies, reckless lending practices, growing global financial imbalances, and the lack of government supervision and regulation. In this paper, however, we focus exclusively on the role of financial innovation affecting households' ability to leverage assets into debt in an environment with imperfect information and imperfect credit markets. Our aim is to show how these frictions alone can result in a pronounced boom-bust cycle in household debt and housing prices.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows: Section 2 describes the model and the learning process. Section 3 examines the model's quantitative implications. Section 4 concludes.

## 2 A Model of Financial Innovation with Learning

We study a representative agent economy in which risk-averse individuals formulate optimal plans facing exogenous income fluctuations. The risk associated with these fluctuations cannot be fully diversified because asset markets are incomplete. Individuals have access to two assets: a non-state-contingent bond and an asset in fixed supply (land). The credit market is imperfect, because individuals' ability to borrow is limited not to exceed a fraction  $\kappa$  of the market value of their land holdings. That is,  $\kappa$  imposes an upper bound on the agents' leverage ratio.

The main feature that differentiates our model from typical macro models with credit frictions is the assumption that agents have imperfect information about the regime-switching probabilities that drive fluctuations in  $\kappa$ .<sup>8</sup> Specifically, we model a situation in which financial innovation starts with an initial shift from a low-leverage regime ( $\kappa^l$ ) to a regime with higher ability to leverage ( $\kappa^h$ ). Agents do not know the true regime-switching probabilities between  $\kappa^l$  and  $\kappa^h$  in this new financial environment. They are Bayesian learners, and in the long-run they learn these true probabilities and form rational expectations. In the short-run, however, they form their expectations with the posteriors they construct as they observe realizations of  $\kappa$ . Hence, they “discover” the true riskiness

---

<sup>8</sup>In previous work we studied a similar informational friction but in a setup in which the credit constraint does not depend on market prices. In that scenario, the distortions produced by the learning process in the aftermath of financial innovation do not interact with the credit externality present in the model we study here.

of the new financial environment only after they have observed a sample with enough regime realizations and regime switches to estimate the true regime-switching probabilities accurately.

We assume that the risk-free interest rate is exogenous in order to keep the interaction between financial innovation and learning tractable. At the aggregate level, this assumption corresponds to an economy that is small and open with respect to world capital markets. This is in line with recent evidence suggesting that in the era of financial globalization even the U.S. risk-free rate has been significantly influenced by outside factors, such as the surge in reserves in emerging economies and the persistent collapse of investment rates in South East Asia after 1998 (see [Warnock and Warnock \(2006\)](#), [Bernanke \(2005\)](#), [Durdu et al. \(2009\)](#), [Mendoza et al. \(2009\)](#)). Moreover, post-war U.S. data from the *Flow of Funds* published by the Federal Reserve show that, while pre-1980s the United States was in virtual financial autarky, because the fraction of net credit of U.S. nonfinancial sectors financed by the rest of the world was close to zero, about one half of the surge in net credit since the mid-1980s was financed by the rest of the world (see [Mendoza and Quadrini \(2010\)](#)). Alternatively, our setup can be viewed as a partial equilibrium model of the U.S. economy that studies the effects of financial innovation on household debt and residential land prices, taking the risk-free rate as given, as in [Corbae and Quintin \(2009\)](#) and [Howitt \(2011\)](#). Still, we will evaluate later on the robustness of our main results to relaxing the assumption of a constant real interest rate by allowing it to fall as financial innovation starts, in line with what was observed in U.S. data.

## 2.1 Agents' Optimization Problem

Agents act atomistically in competitive markets and choose consumption ( $c_t$ ), land holdings ( $l_{t+1}$ ) and holdings of one-period discount bonds ( $b_{t+1}$ ), taking as given the price of land ( $q_t$ ) and the gross real interest rate ( $R$ ) so as to maximize a standard intertemporal utility function:

$$E_0^s \left[ \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t u(c_t) \right] \quad (1)$$

It is critical to note that  $E_t^s$  represents expectations conditional on the representative agent's beliefs formulated with the information available up to and including date  $t$ . As we explain below, these beliefs will differ in general from the rational expectations formulated with perfect information about the persistence of the financial regime, which are denoted  $E_t^a$ .

The agents' budget constraint is:

$$c_t = z_t g(l_t) + q_t l_t - q_t l_{t+1} - \frac{b_{t+1}}{R} + b_t \quad (2)$$

Agents operate a concave neoclassical production function  $g(l_t)$  subject to a stochastic TFP shock  $z_t$ . A linear production technology could also be used, but we will use the curvature of  $g(l_t)$  to calibrate the model so that the condition that arbitrages returns across bonds and land is consistent with U.S. data on the risk-free interest rate and the value of residential land as a share of GDP (see Section 3 for details).

TFP shocks follow an exogenous discrete Markov process, about which agents have perfect information. That is, they know the Markov transition matrix  $\pi(z_{t+1} | z_t)$  and the corresponding set  $Z$  of  $M$  possible realizations of  $z$  at any point in time (i.e.,  $z_t \in Z = \{z_1 < z_2 < \dots < z_M\}$ ). Alternatively, we could assume that TFP shocks are also affected by imperfect information.

Frictions in the credit market that we don't model explicitly force agents to comply with a collateral constraint that limits the value of debt (given by  $b_{t+1}/R$  since  $1/R$  is the price of discount bonds) to a time-varying fraction  $\kappa_t$  of the market value of their land holdings:

$$\frac{b_{t+1}}{R} \geq -\kappa_t q_t l_{t+1} \quad (3)$$

In this constraint,  $\kappa_t$  is a random variable that follows a "true" Markov process characterized by a standard two-point, regime-switching process with regimes  $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$ , with  $\kappa^h > \kappa^l$ , and transition probabilities given by  $F^a = p^a(\kappa_{t+1} | \kappa_t)$ .<sup>9</sup> The continuation transition probabilities are denoted  $F_{hh}^a \equiv p^a(\kappa_{t+1} = \kappa^h | \kappa_t = \kappa^h)$  and  $F_{ll}^a \equiv p^a(\kappa_{t+1} = \kappa^l | \kappa_t = \kappa^l)$ , and the switching probabilities are  $F_{hl}^a = 1 - F_{hh}^a$  and  $F_{lh}^a = 1 - F_{ll}^a$ . The long-run probabilities of the high- and low-leverage regimes are  $\Pi^h = F_{lh}^a / (F_{lh}^a + F_{hl}^a)$  and  $\Pi^l = F_{hl}^a / (F_{lh}^a + F_{hl}^a)$  respectively, and the corresponding mean durations are  $1/F_{hl}^a$  and  $1/F_{lh}^a$ . The long-run unconditional mean, variance, and first-order

---

<sup>9</sup>One could also specify a continuous AR(1) process for  $\kappa$  such as  $\kappa_t = m_t + \kappa_{t-1} + \epsilon_t$ . The different regimes could be captured with a shift in the mean:  $m \in \{m^h, m^l\}$  and the agents could learn about the process governing  $m$ . We conjecture that this specification would yield similar results as agents could turn optimistic about the persistence of the high mean regime for  $\kappa$ .

autocorrelation of  $\kappa$  follow the standard regime-switching formulae:

$$E^a[\kappa] = (F_{lh}^a \kappa^h + F_{hl}^a \kappa^l) / (F_{lh}^a + F_{hl}^a) \quad (4)$$

$$\sigma^2(\kappa) = \Pi^h(\kappa^h)^2 + \Pi^l(\kappa^l)^2 - (E[\kappa])^2 \quad (5)$$

$$\rho(\kappa) = F_{ll}^a - F_{hl}^a = F_{hh}^a - F_{lh}^a \quad (6)$$

As explained earlier, agents know  $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$  but do not know  $F^a$ . Hence, they make decisions based on their beliefs characterized by  $E_t^s$  which evolve over time. Using  $\mu$  to denote the Lagrange multiplier on the credit constraint, the agents' optimality conditions for bonds and land are:

$$u'(c_t) = \beta R E_t^s [u'(c_{t+1})] + \mu_t \quad (7)$$

$$q_t(u'(c_t) - \mu_t \kappa_t) = \beta E_t^s [u'(c_{t+1}) (z_{t+1} g'(l_{t+1}) + q_{t+1})]. \quad (8)$$

With the key caveat that agents use subjective beliefs to form expectations, these conditions are standard from models with credit constraints. Following [Mendoza \(2010\)](#), we can show that the second condition implies a forward solution for land prices in which the future stream of land dividends is discounted at the stochastic discount factors adjusted for the shadow value of the credit constraint:

$$q_t = E_t^s \left[ \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} \left( \prod_{i=0}^j M_{t+i}^{t+1+i} \right) z_{t+1+j} g'(l_{t+1+j}) \right], \quad M_{t+i}^{t+1+i} \equiv \frac{\beta u'(c_{t+1+i})}{u'(c_{t+i}) - \mu_{t+i} \kappa_{t+i}} \quad (9)$$

Defining the return on land as  $R_{t+1}^q \equiv (z_{t+1} g'(l_{t+1}) + q_{t+1}) / q_t$  and the period marginal utility of consumption as  $\lambda_{t+1} \equiv \beta u'(c_{t+1})$ , the excess return on land can be expressed as:

$$E_t^s [R_{t+1}^q - R] = \frac{(1 - \kappa_t) \mu_t - cov_t^s(\lambda_{t+1}, R_{t+1}^q)}{E_t^s [\lambda_{t+1}]} \quad (10)$$

Thus, as in [Mendoza \(2010\)](#), the borrowing constraint enlarges the standard premium on land holdings, driven by the covariance between marginal utility and asset returns, by introducing direct and indirect effects. The direct effect is represented by the term  $(1 - \kappa_t) \mu_t$ . The indirect effects are represented by the fact that the credit constraint hampers the agents' ability to smooth consumption, which reduces  $cov_t^s(\lambda_{t+1}, R_{t+1}^q)$ , and tilts consumption towards the future, which lowers  $E_t^s [\lambda_{t+1}]$ . Moreover, since the expected land returns satisfy  $q_t E_t^s [R_{t+1}^q] \equiv E_t^s [z_{t+1} g'(l_{t+1}) + q_{t+1}]$ ,

we can rewrite the forward solution for the agents' land valuation as:

$$q_t = E_t^s \left[ \sum_{j=0}^{\infty} \left( \prod_{i=0}^j \left( \frac{1}{E_t^s [R_{t+1+i}^q]} \right) \right) z_{t+1+j} g'(l_{t+1+j}) \right]. \quad (11)$$

The expressions in (10) and (11) imply that the collateral constraint lowers land prices because it increases the rate of return at which future land dividends are discounted. Note also that land valuations are reduced at  $t$  not just when the constraint binds at  $t$ , which increases  $E_t^s [R_{t+1}^q]$ , but also if agents expect that the constraint can bind at any future date, which increases  $E_t^s [R_{t+1+i}^q]$  for some  $i > 0$ .

While the above effects are at work even when expectations are formed rationally, with knowledge of the true Markov process of  $\kappa$ , condition (11) also suggests that the learning process and the collateral constraint interact in an important way. For instance, suppose the credit constraint was binding at  $t$ . It follows that excess land returns must be lower in states with  $\kappa^h$  than with  $\kappa^l$ , since the constraint must bind more in the latter. Hence, if beliefs are optimistic, agents assign more probability to states with lower expected returns than under true rational expectations, and this, via condition (11), translates into higher land prices, which in turn via the collateral constraint results in higher debt. The opposite is also true: If beliefs are pessimistic, agents assign higher probability to states with higher land returns, which depress current land prices more than under rational expectations, and via the collateral constraint this results in even lower debt.

The economy has a fixed unit supply of land, hence market clearing in the land market implies that the land holdings of the representative agent must satisfy  $l_t = 1$  for all  $t$ , and the rest of the equilibrium conditions reduce to the following:

$$u'(c_t) = \beta R E_t^s [u'(c_{t+1})] + \mu_t \quad (12)$$

$$q_t(u'(c_t) - \mu_t \kappa_t) = \beta E_t^s [u'(c_{t+1}) (z_{t+1} g'(1) + q_{t+1})] \quad (13)$$

$$c_t = z_t g(1) - \frac{b_{t+1}}{R} + b_t \quad (14)$$

$$\frac{b_{t+1}}{R} \geq -\kappa_t q_t 1 \quad (15)$$

## 2.2 General Features of the Learning Setup

Following [Cogley and Sargent \(2008b\)](#), our learning setup features two-point passive learning without noise, so that the belief transition probability matrix denoted by  $p_t^s(\kappa_{t+1} \mid \kappa_t)$  converges to

its true value  $p^a(\kappa_{t+1} \mid \kappa_t)$  for sufficiently large  $t$ . With this setup, agents learn about the true regime-switching probabilities of  $\kappa$  only after observing a sufficiently long set of realizations of  $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$ .<sup>10</sup>

This learning setup fits nicely our goal of studying a situation in which financial innovation represents an initial condition with the arrival of a new state  $\kappa^h$  and with imperfect information about the true riskiness of this new environment. Agents are ignorant about the true transition distribution of  $\kappa$ , since there is no data history to infer it from. Over time, if they observe a sequence of realizations of  $\kappa^h$  for a few periods, they build optimism by assigning a probability to the possibility of continuing in  $\kappa^h$  that is higher than the true value. We refer to this situation as the “optimistic phase.” Such optimism by itself is a source of vulnerability, because it is quickly reversed into a “pessimistic phase” with the opposite characteristics as the first few realizations of  $\kappa^l$  hit the economy. In addition, during the optimistic phase, the incentives to build precautionary savings against the risk of a shift in the ability to leverage are weaker than in the long-run RE equilibrium. This increases the agents’ risk of being caught “off-guard” (i.e., with too much debt) when the first shift to the low-leverage regime occurs.

Modeling imperfect information in this fashion implies a deviation from rational expectations in the sense that agents form expectations having only “partial” knowledge of the true stochastic process driving fluctuations in  $\kappa$ .<sup>11</sup> This is a key feature of our model, because it highlights the role of the short history of a new financial regime in hampering the ability of agents to correctly assess risk. This approach seems better suited for studying the role of financial innovation in causing the financial crisis, as opposed to a standard signal extraction problem.

Since  $\kappa$  is exogenous, we are modeling a passive learning structure from *and* about exogenous variables, which facilitates significantly the analysis and numerical solution of the model. In particular, it allows us to separate the evolution of beliefs from the dynamic optimization problem that agents solve, because agents cannot benefit from experimenting with the latter in order to improve the former. In light of this, we follow a two-stage solution strategy to analyze the model.

In the first stage, we use Bayesian learning to generate the agents’ sequence of posterior density functions  $\{f(F^s \mid \kappa^t)\}_{t=1}^T$ . Each of these density functions (one for each date  $t$ ) is a probability distribution over possible Markov transition matrices  $F^s$ . Since agents do not know the true

---

<sup>10</sup>Time alone does not determine how fast agents learn. The order in which  $\kappa$  realizations, and switches between realizations, occur also matters.

<sup>11</sup>In a more general sense, however, agents in our model are rational inasmuch as Bayesian expectations are rational given the incomplete information on which they are based.

transition matrix  $F^a$ , the density function changes with the sequence of realizations observed up to date  $t$  (i.e.,  $\{\kappa^t, \kappa^{t-1}, \dots, \kappa^1\}$  where  $\kappa^t = (\kappa_t, \kappa_{t-1}, \dots, \kappa_1)$ ) and with the initial date-0 priors, as we explain below. If date  $T$  is high enough to accommodate sufficient sampling of regime switches across  $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$ , the sequence  $\{f(F^s | \kappa^t)\}_{t=1}^T$  converges to a distribution with all its mass in  $F^a$ .

The second part of the solution characterizes the agent’s optimal plans and the recursive equilibrium by adopting Kreps’s Anticipated Utility (AU) approach to model dynamic optimization with Bayesian learning. The AU approach focuses on combining the sequences of posterior densities obtained in the first part,  $\{f(F^s | \kappa^t)\}_{t=1}^T$ , with chained solutions from a set of “conditional” AU optimization problems. These problems are conditional on the posterior density function of  $F^s$  that agents form with the history of realizations up to each date  $t$ . In contrast, full Bayesian dynamic optimization takes into account projections of the effect of future  $\kappa$  realizations on the evolution of beliefs, but this is generally of limited tractability because it requires a large state space that includes counters carrying the observed number of switches across regimes. [Cogley and Sargent \(2008a\)](#) show, however, that the optimal consumption plans and asset prices obtained using AU are very accurate approximations of those obtained with full Bayesian optimization, even in an environment with incomplete markets, CRRA preferences (which induce precautionary savings), and large regime-switching income shocks.<sup>12</sup> The remainder of this Section examines in more detail the Bayesian learning setup and the construction of the model’s recursive AU equilibrium.

### 2.3 Learning and the Sequence of Beliefs

The learning framework takes as given an observed history of  $\kappa$  realizations for  $T$  periods, denoted  $\kappa^T$ , and a prior of  $F^s$  for date  $t = 0$ ,  $p(F^s)$ , and it yields a sequence of posteriors  $\{f(F^s | \kappa^t)\}_{t=1}^T$ .<sup>13</sup> At every date  $t$ , from 0 to  $T$ , the information set of the agent includes  $\kappa^t$  as well as the possible values that  $\kappa$  can take ( $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$ ).

Agents form posteriors using a beta-binomial probability model. Since information is imperfect only with regard to the Markov transition matrix across  $\kappa^l$ s, and because  $\kappa$  can only take two values, this boils down to imperfect information about  $F_{hh}^a$  and  $F_{ll}^a$ . The other two elements of the transition matrix of  $\kappa$  are recovered as the complements to these two.

---

<sup>12</sup>The quality of the approximation begins to deteriorate when the CRRA coefficient is set higher than 5. In our calibration it will be set at 2. On the other hand, the model examined by [Cogley and Sargent \(2008a\)](#) does not feature a borrowing constraint, so we cannot guarantee that the approximation is as accurate as theirs even with the CRRA coefficient set at 2.

<sup>13</sup>In describing the learning problem, we employ the notation used by [Cogley and Sargent \(2008b\)](#).

The agents' posteriors about  $F_{hh}^s$  and  $F_{ll}^s$  have Beta distributions as well, and the parameters that define them are determined by the number of regime switches observed in a particular history  $\kappa^t$ . As in [Cogley and Sargent \(2008b\)](#), we assume that the priors for  $F_{hh}^s$  and  $F_{ll}^s$  included in  $p(F^s)$  are independent and determined by the number of transitions assumed to have been observed prior to date  $t = 1$ . More formally,

$$p(F_{ii}^s) \propto (F_{ii}^s)^{n_0^{ii}-1} (1 - F_{ii}^s)^{n_0^{ij}-1} \quad (16)$$

where  $n_0^{ij}$  denotes the number of transitions from state  $i$  to state  $j$  assumed to have been observed prior to date 1.

The likelihood function of  $\kappa^t$  conditional on  $F_{hh}^s$  and  $F_{ll}^s$  is obtained by multiplying the densities of  $F_{hh}^s$  and  $F_{ll}^s$ :

$$f(\kappa^t | F_{hh}^s, F_{ll}^s) \propto (F_{hh}^s)^{(n_t^{hh}-n_0^{hh})} (1 - F_{hh}^s)^{(n_t^{hl}-n_0^{hl})} (1 - F_{ll}^s)^{(n_t^{lh}-n_0^{lh})} (F_{ll}^s)^{(n_t^{ll}-n_0^{ll})}. \quad (17)$$

Multiplying the likelihood function by the priors delivers the posterior kernel:

$$k(F^s | \kappa^t) \propto (F_{hh}^s)^{(n_t^{hh}-1)} (1 - F_{hh}^s)^{(n_t^{hl}-1)} (1 - F_{ll}^s)^{(n_t^{lh}-1)} (F_{ll}^s)^{(n_t^{ll}-1)}, \quad (18)$$

and dividing the kernel using the normalizing constant  $M(\kappa^t)$  yields the posterior density:

$$f(F^s | \kappa^t) = k(F^s | \kappa^t) / M(\kappa^t) \quad (19)$$

where

$$M(\kappa^t) = \iint (F_{hh}^s)^{(n_t^{hh}-1)} (1 - F_{hh}^s)^{(n_t^{hl}-1)} (1 - F_{ll}^s)^{(n_t^{lh}-1)} (F_{ll}^s)^{(n_t^{ll}-1)} dF_{hh}^s dF_{ll}^s.$$

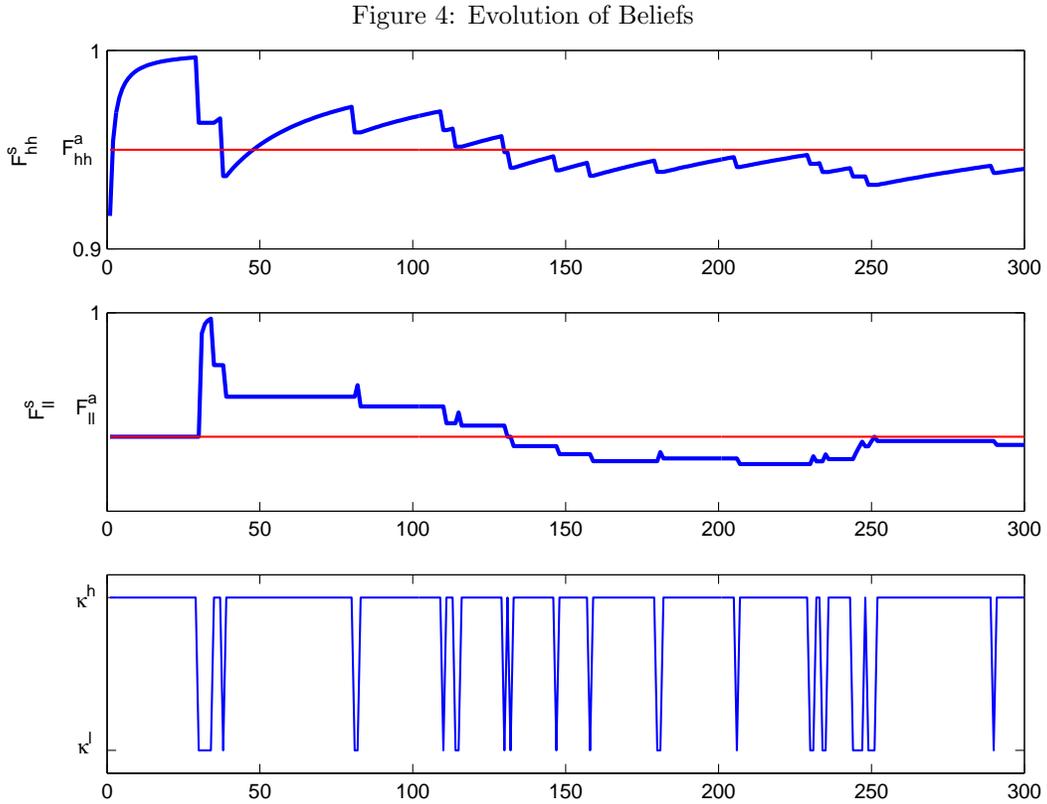
The number of transitions across regimes is updated as follows:

$$n_{t+1}^{ij} = \begin{cases} n_t^{ij} + 1 & \text{if } \kappa_{t+1} = \kappa^j \text{ and } \kappa_t = \kappa^i, \\ n_t^{ij} & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

A feature of this setup that is key for our solution method is that the agents' posteriors  $F_{hh}^s \propto \text{Beta}(n_t^{hh}, n_t^{hl})$  and  $F_{ll}^s \propto \text{Beta}(n_t^{lh}, n_t^{ll})$  have means that satisfy:

$$E_t[F_{hh}^s] = n_t^{hh} / (n_t^{hh} + n_t^{hl}), \quad E_t[F_{ll}^s] = n_t^{ll} / (n_t^{ll} + n_t^{lh}) \quad (20)$$

These properties are important because they show that the posterior means of the continuation probability of a particular regime change only when that same regime is observed at date  $t$ . Since in a two-point, regime-switching setup continuation probabilities also determine mean durations, it follows that both the persistence and the mean durations of leverage regimes can be learned only as the economy actually experiences  $\kappa^l$  or  $\kappa^h$ .<sup>14</sup>



Notes: This figure plots the evolution of beliefs about  $F_{hh}^s$  (top panel),  $F_{ll}^s$  (middle panel), and the associated realizations of  $\kappa$  (lower panel). The horizontal red lines in the upper two panels mark the true values of the corresponding variables.

<sup>14</sup>If priors, as well as  $F_{hh}^a$  and  $F_{ll}^a$ , are correlated, learning would likely be faster, because agents would update their beliefs about both  $F_{hh}^s$  and  $F_{ll}^s$  every period, instead of updating only one or the other depending on the regime they observe. But this is akin to removing some of the informational friction by assumption. In an extreme case, imagine that  $F_{hh}^a = F_{ll}^a$  and that the agents know about this property of the model. In this case, agents know an important characteristic of the transition probability matrix (i.e. that is symmetric), which weakens the initial premise stating that they do not know any of its properties. Agents would learn about the persistence of both regimes no matter which one they observe.

The potential for financial innovation to lead to significant underestimation of risk can be inferred from the evolution of the posterior means. If financial innovation is defined as the arrival of a brand new environment in which credit conditions can shift between  $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$ , we should assume that the learning process starts from values of  $n_0^{ij}$  that are close to zero.<sup>15</sup> Given this assumption and the conditions governing the evolution of posterior means in eq. (20)), it follows that the first sequence of realizations of  $\kappa^h$  generates substantial optimism (i.e. a sharp increase in  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  relative to  $F_{hh}^a$ ). Moreover, it also follows that the magnitude of the optimism that any subsequent sequence of realizations of  $\kappa^h$  generates will be smaller than in the initial optimistic phase. Intuitively, this is because it is only after observing the first switch to  $\kappa^l$  that agents rule out the possibility of  $\kappa^h$  being an absorbent state. Similarly, the first realizations of  $\kappa^l$  generate a pessimistic phase, in which  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  is significantly higher than  $F_{ll}^a$ , so the period of optimistic expectations is followed by a period of pessimistic expectations.

We illustrate further the learning dynamics of this setup by means of a simple numerical example. We choose a set of values for  $F_{hh}^a$ ,  $F_{ll}^a$ , and initial priors, and then simulate the learning process for 300 quarters using a hypothetical sequence of  $\kappa$  realizations produced by a stochastic simulation of the true Markov-switching process. The results are plotted in Figure 4, which shows the time paths of  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  and  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  based on the beliefs formed at each date  $t$  in the horizontal axis, after observing the corresponding  $\kappa_t$  shown in the bottom panel, and with the date-0 priors set to  $F_{hh}^s \sim \text{Beta}(0.1, 0.1)$  and  $F_{ll}^s \sim \text{Beta}(0.1, 0.1)$ . The true regime-switching probabilities are set to  $F_{hh}^a = 0.95$  and  $F_{ll}^a = 0.5$ , which are shown as the horizontal lines in the same plots as  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  and  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$ . All of these parameter values are used only for illustration purposes (they are not calibrated to actual data as in the solution of the full model in Section 3).

The most striking result evident in Figure 4 is that financial innovation can lead to significant underestimation of risk. Specifically, the initial sequence of realizations of  $\kappa^h$  observed until just before the first realization of  $\kappa^l$  (the first “optimistic phase”) generates substantial optimism. In this example, the optimistic phase covers the first 30 periods. The Figure shows that a high level of optimism builds very fast during the optimistic phase. In fact, agents update their beliefs about the persistence of the high-leverage regime from 0.5 to 0.916 just after observing  $\kappa_1 = \kappa^h$ , and then in the subsequent 29 periods  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  continues rising to peak at around 0.999. Optimism never grows as large during other optimistic phases that occur later on. For example, even though

---

<sup>15</sup>A truly new environment would have  $n_0^{ij} = 0$ , but since the binomial distribution is not defined for  $n_0^{ij} = 0$ ,  $n_0^{ij}$  close to zero provides the best approximation to a truly new regime.

the economy remains in  $\kappa^h$  from around date 40 to date 80, the optimism that this generates is much smaller than in the initial optimistic phase. This is because, as noted above, it is only after observing the first switch to  $\kappa^l$  that agents rule out the possibility of  $\kappa^h$  being an absorbent state. Hence,  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  cannot surge as high as it did during the initial optimistic phase. Notice also that the first realizations of  $\kappa^l$  generate a strong “pessimistic phase,” in which  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  is significantly higher than  $F_{ll}^a$ , so the period of unduly optimistic expectations is followed by a period of unduly pessimistic expectations.

Figure 4 also reflects the result showing that the beliefs about  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  and  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  are updated only when the economy is in the high- or low-leverage state. This is evident, for example, in the initial optimistic phase, when  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  does not change at all. This feature of the learning dynamics also explains why in this example  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  converges to its RE counterpart faster than  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$ . Given that the low-leverage regime is visited much less frequently, it takes longer for the agents to learn about its persistence.

## 2.4 Recursive Anticipated Utility Competitive Equilibrium

We define the model’s AU competitive equilibrium in recursive form. Since in the quantitative analysis we solve the model by policy function iteration on the equilibrium conditions (12)-(15), we formulate the recursive equilibrium using these conditions instead of a Bellman equation (Appendix A describes the solution method in detail). The state variables in the recursive equilibrium are defined by the triple  $(b, z, \kappa)$ .

The solution strategy works by breaking down the problem into a set of AU optimization problems (AUOP) that are conditional on the beliefs agents have each period. We add time indices to the policy and pricing functions in the recursive equilibrium so as to identify the date of the beliefs that match the corresponding AUOP. This solution strategy works because the law of iterated expectations still holds (see Appendix B in Cogley and Sargent (2008b)).

In each AUOP, agents form expectations about the future conditional on the information and beliefs they have in the current planning period as summarized in the corresponding mean posteriors. As noted before, however, this is not the same as full Bayesian optimization, because this requires carrying as additional state variables for date  $t$  the four-dimensional vector  $n_t$  that includes every possible permutation of the counters that can be observed up to date  $t$ . By contrast, the AUOPs are analogous to solving a sequence of policy functions and Bellman equations one for each

set of beliefs obtained at each date  $t = 1, \dots, T$ . This is still a demanding computational problem, but less vulnerable to the curse of dimensionality than the full Bayesian problem.<sup>16</sup>

Consider the date- $t$  AUOP. At this point agents have observed  $\kappa_t$ , and use it to update their beliefs. Thus, we pull  $f(F^s \mid \kappa^t)$  from the sequence of posterior density functions solved for in the first part of our solution strategy. This is the posterior about the distribution of  $F^s$  that agents form, given that they have observed  $\kappa_t$  and given their initial priors. Using (20), we compute  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  and  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  and construct the date- $t$  transition probability matrix  $E_t^s[\kappa' \mid \kappa] \equiv \begin{bmatrix} E_t[F_{hh}^s] & 1 - E_t[F_{hh}^s] \\ 1 - E_t[F_{ll}^s] & E_t[F_{ll}^s] \end{bmatrix}$ . The solution to the date- $t$  AUOP is then given by policy functions  $(b'_t(b, z, \kappa), c_t(b, z, \kappa), \mu_t(b, z, \kappa))$  and a pricing function  $q_t(b, z, \kappa)$  that satisfy the equilibrium conditions (12)-(15) rewritten in recursive form:

$$u'(c_t(b, z, \kappa)) = \beta R \left[ \sum_{z' \in Z} \sum_{\kappa' \in \{\kappa^h, \kappa^l\}} E_t^s[\kappa' \mid \kappa] \pi(z' \mid z) u'(c_t(b', z', \kappa')) \right] + \mu_t(b, z, \kappa) \quad (21)$$

$$q_t(b, z, \kappa)(u'(c_t(b, z, \kappa)) - \mu_t(b, z, \kappa)\kappa) = \quad (22)$$

$$\beta \left[ \sum_{z' \in Z} \sum_{\kappa' \in \{\kappa^h, \kappa^l\}} E_t^s[\kappa' \mid \kappa] \pi(z' \mid z) u'(c_t(b', z', \kappa')) (z'g'(1) + q_t(b', z', \kappa')) \right]$$

$$c_t(b, z, \kappa) = zg(1) - \frac{b'_t(b, z, \kappa)}{R} + b \quad (23)$$

$$\frac{b'_t(b, z, \kappa)}{R} \geq -\kappa q_t(b, z, \kappa)1 \quad (24)$$

The time subscripts that index the policy and pricing functions indicate the date of the beliefs used to form the expectations (which is also the date of the most recent observation of  $\kappa$ , which is date  $t$ ). Equations (21)-(24) incorporate the market-clearing condition in the land market, which requires  $l = 1$ . Moreover, given (21)-(22), the pricing function  $q_t(b, z, \kappa)$  satisfies the asset pricing equation (11).

It is critical to note that solving for date- $t$  policy and pricing functions means solving for a full set of optimal plans over the entire state space  $(b, z, \kappa)$  and conditional on date- $t$  beliefs. Thus, we are solving for the optimal plans agents “conjecture” they would make over the infinite future acting under those beliefs. For characterizing the “actual” equilibrium dynamics to match against the data, however, the solution of the date- $t$  AUOP determines optimal plans for date  $t$  only. This

<sup>16</sup>Intuitively, the AU approach captures the risk of fluctuations in future  $\kappa$ 's but not the uncertainty about future changes in their transition probabilities, while the Bayesian optimization captures both.

is crucial because beliefs change as time passes, and each subsequent  $\kappa_t$  is observed, which implies that the policy and pricing functions that solve each AUOP also change. Thus, history matters for the full solution of the model because assuming different histories  $\kappa^t$  yields different sequences of beliefs, and hence different sets of policy functions. If at any two dates  $t$  and  $t + j$  we give the agents the same values for  $(b, z, \kappa)$ , they in general will not choose the same bond holdings for the following period because  $E_t^s[\kappa'|\kappa]$  and  $E_{t+j}^s[\kappa'|\kappa]$  will differ.

We can now define the model's recursive AU equilibrium as follows:

**Definition** Given a  $T$ -period history of realizations  $\kappa^T = (\kappa_T, \kappa_{T-1}, \dots, \kappa_1)$ , a recursive AU competitive equilibrium for the economy is given by a sequence of functions  $[b'_t(b, z, \kappa), c_t(b, z, \kappa), \mu_t(b, z, \kappa)]_{t=1}^T$  and pricing functions  $[q_t(b, z, \kappa)]_{t=1}^T$  such that: (a)  $b'_t(b, z, \kappa), c_t(b, z, \kappa), \mu_t(b, z, \kappa)$  and  $q_t(b, z, \kappa)$  solve the date- $t$  AUOP conditional on  $E_t^s[\kappa'|\kappa]$ ; (b)  $E_t^s[\kappa'|\kappa]$  is the conjectured transition probability matrix of  $\kappa$  produced by the date- $t$  posterior density of  $F^s$  determined by the Bayesian passive learning process summarized in Equation (19).

Intuitively, the complete solution of the recursive equilibrium is formed by chaining together the solutions for each date- $t$  AUOP. That is, the equilibrium dynamics at each date  $t = 1, \dots, T$  for a particular history  $\kappa^T$  are given by  $[b'_t(b, z, \kappa), c_t(b, z, \kappa), \mu_t(b, z, \kappa), q_t(b, z, \kappa), E_t^s[\kappa'|\kappa]]_{t=1}^T$ . At each date in this sequence,  $b'_t(b, z, \kappa), c_t(b, z, \kappa), \mu_t(b, z, \kappa), q_t(b, z, \kappa)$ , are the recursive functions that solve the corresponding date's AUOP using  $E_t^s[\kappa'|\kappa]$  to form expectations. Hence, the sequence of equilibrium decision rules for bond holdings that the model predicts for dates  $t = 1, \dots, T$  would be obtained by chaining the relevant decision rules as follows:  $b_2 = b'_1(b, z, \kappa)$ ,  $b_3 = b'_2(b, z, \kappa)$ , ...,  $b_{T+1} = b'_T(b, z, \kappa)$ .

### 3 Quantitative Analysis

In this section we calibrate the model to U.S. data and study its quantitative predictions for the following financial innovation experiment: At  $t = 1$ , financial innovation begins with the first realization of  $\kappa^h$ , followed by an optimistic phase in which  $\kappa^h$  continues for  $J$  periods. At date  $J + 1$  the first realization of  $\kappa^l$  occurs, and the financial regime remains in state  $\kappa^l$  from dates  $J + 1$  to  $T$ .

#### 3.1 Baseline Calibration

The functional forms for preferences and technology are standard:  $u(c_t) = \frac{c_t^{1-\sigma}}{1-\sigma}$  and  $g(l_t) = l_t^\alpha$ . The calibration requires setting values for the parameters  $(\alpha, \beta, \sigma, R)$ , the Markov process for  $z$ , and the

parameters of the learning setup, which include  $\kappa^h$ ,  $\kappa^l$ ,  $n_0^{hh}$ ,  $n_0^{hl}$ ,  $n_0^{ll}$ ,  $n_0^{lh}$ ,  $J$  and  $T$ . We propose a set of baseline calibration parameters based on U.S. data, and later we conduct sensitivity analysis to evaluate the robustness of the results to changes in the baseline calibration.

We calibrate the model to a quarterly frequency at annualized rates. The beginning of the financial innovation experiment is dated as of 1997Q1. This is in line with the observations that 1997 was the year in which the first CDS was issued at JPMorgan and the first publicly-available securitization of loans under the New Community Reinvestment Act took place. Moreover, 1997 is also the year in which the net credit assets-GDP ratio shown in Figure 1 started on its declining trend. We date the start of the financial crisis as of 2007Q1, to match the early stages of the subprime mortgage crisis after the Fall of 2006. This is also in line with the observation that the net fraction of banks reporting tighter standards for mortgage loans jumped significantly to 16 percent in 2007Q1, as shown in Figure 3.<sup>17</sup>

The above timing assumptions imply that the first realization of  $\kappa^h$  occurred in 1997Q1 and  $\kappa^h$  continued to be observed through 2006Q4. Hence, the optimistic phase lasts  $J = 40$  quarters. The first realization of  $\kappa^l$  occurred in 2007Q1 and  $\kappa^l$  continued to be observed through at least 2008Q4. Thus, the learning period has a total length of  $T = 48$  quarters, in which the first 40 realizations of  $\kappa$  are  $\kappa^h$  and the remaining 8 are  $\kappa^l$ .

In the pre-financial-innovation period, before 1997, we assume that there was only one financial regime with  $\kappa = \kappa^l$ , and hence the only source of uncertainty were TFP shocks. The values of  $(\alpha, \beta, \sigma, R)$  and  $\kappa^l$  are then set so that the model's stochastic stationary state under these assumptions is consistent with various averages from U.S. data from the pre-financial-innovation period reported next.

We set the real interest rate to 2.66 percent annually. This is the average ex-post real interest rate on U.S. three-month T-bills during the period 1980Q1-1996Q4.

Our data proxy for  $b$  are the net credit market assets of U.S. households and non-profit organizations in the *Flow of Funds* data set, and our proxy for  $ql$  is the series on the value of residential land estimated by Davis and Heathcote (2007). These are the data plotted in Figure 1 as shares of GDP. The 1980Q1-1996Q4 average ratios of the value of residential land and net credit market assets relative to GDP are 0.477 and -0.313 respectively. The two ratios are fairly stable around these

---

<sup>17</sup>These dates are broadly in line with those assumed by Campbell and Hercowitz (2009), who study the welfare implications of a transition from a high- home-equity-requirement regime to a low-equity-requirement regime. They assume that the former corresponds to the 1982-1994 period, while the latter starts in 1995.

averages throughout the 1980Q1-1996Q4 period, in contrast with the sharp trends they display after 1996.

As described in the Introduction, we construct a macro estimate of the household leverage ratio, or the actual loan-to-value ratio, by dividing net credit market assets by the value of residential land. Then, we set the value of  $\kappa^l$  by combining the 1980Q1-1996Q4 average of this ratio with the calibrated value of  $R$  (assuming also that the collateral constraint was binding in the pre-financial-innovation era). This yields  $\kappa^l = 0.659/1.0266 = 0.642$ . The fact that net credit assets and land values were fairly stable prior to 1997 (see Figure 1) supports the idea of using this constant value of  $\kappa^l$  to characterize the pre-financial-innovation regime, and the fact that by end 2010 the median downpayment on conventional mortgages had bounced back to what it was a decade earlier (see Feb. 16, 2011 *Wall Street Journal*) supports idea of setting  $\kappa^l$  in the new regime to be the same as in the pre-financial-innovation era.

The value of  $\kappa^h$  is set equal to the 2006Q4 leverage ratio, hence  $\kappa^h = 0.926$ . This represents the largest leverage ratio that the economy was able to support in the new financial regime just before the financial crisis hit.<sup>18</sup> Note, however, that  $\kappa^h$  does not always bind in the new regime. First, as the economy moves from the pre-financial-innovation regime to the regime with stochastic  $\kappa$ , agents build up debt over time, and hence the equilibrium leverage ratio does not jump to its new ceiling immediately as the new regime begins. Second, the new regime features two possible realizations of  $\kappa$  that are occasionally binding, so  $\kappa^h$  only binds with some probability in the long-run.

The value of  $\sigma$  is set to  $\sigma = 2.0$ , the standard value in quantitative DSGE models, and  $\beta$  is set so that the pre-financial-innovation model matches the observed standard deviation of consumption relative to output over the 1980Q1-1996Q4 period, which is 0.8. This procedure yields  $\beta = 0.91$ . Notice that, given the calibrated value of  $R$ , the rate of time preference exceeds the real interest rate (i.e.,  $\beta R = 0.934 < 1$ ). This is important because it ensures the existence of an ergodic distribution of bond holdings given that asset markets are incomplete. Intuitively, this occurs because of the interaction between the precautionary savings motive, which pushes for increasing bond holdings, and the incentive to tilt consumption towards the present, and hence reduce bond holdings, because  $\beta R < 1$ . Consumption tilting and precautionary savings will also play a key role later in our analysis of the macro dynamics induced by financial innovation.

---

<sup>18</sup>Our calibrated values of  $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$  are in line with the parameter values that Favilukis et al. (2010) chose to calibrate their collateral constraint (0.75 in their tight credit regime and 1 in their loose credit environment).

Using the 1980Q1-1996Q4 average of the value of residential land to GDP, the value of  $R$ , and the condition that arbitrages the returns on land and bonds, which follows from the optimality conditions (12)-(13), we obtain an implied value for  $\alpha$ .<sup>19</sup> This yields  $\alpha = 0.0251$ .

We normalize mean output to 1 (since  $L = 1$  and the unconditional mean of  $z$  also equals 1), and calibrate the model so that the observed average pre-financial-innovation ratios of consumption ( $\bar{c}$ ) and bonds ( $\bar{b}$ ) to GDP are consistent with the resource constraint in the average of the stochastic stationary state for that financial regime.<sup>20</sup> The observed average ratio of net credit assets to GDP in the 1980Q1-1996Q4 period yields  $\bar{b} = -0.313$ . In the case of the consumption-GDP ratio, the data show a slight trend, so we use the last observation of the pre-financial-innovation regime (1996Q4). This implies  $\bar{c} = 0.670$ . To make these values of  $\bar{b}$  and  $\bar{c}$  consistent with the resource constraint in the average of the stochastic steady state, we need to take into account the fact that investment and government absorption are included in the data but not in the model. To adjust for this discrepancy, we introduce a fixed, exogenous amount of autonomous spending  $A$ , so that the long-run average of the resource constraint is  $1 = \bar{c} + A - \bar{b}(R - 1)/R$ . Given  $\bar{b} = -0.313$ ,  $\bar{c} = 0.6707$  and  $R = 1.0266$  the value of  $A$  follows as a residual  $A = 1 - \bar{c} + \bar{b}(R - 1)/R = 0.321$ .

Table 1: Baseline Parameter Values

$\beta$	Discount factor (annualized)	0.91
$\sigma$	Risk aversion coefficient	2.0
$c$	Consumption-GDP ratio	0.670
$A$	Lump-sum absorption	0.321
$r$	Interest rate (annualized)	2.660
$\rho$	Persistence of endowment shocks	0.869
$\sigma_e$	Standard deviation of TFP shocks	0.008
$\alpha$	Factor share of land in production	0.025
$L$	Supply of land	1.0
$\kappa^h$	Value of $\kappa$ in the high securitization regime	0.926
$\kappa^l$	Value of $\kappa$ in the low securitization regime	0.642
$F_{hh}^a$	True persistence of $\kappa^h$	0.964
$F_{ll}^a$	True persistence of $\kappa^l$	0.964
$n_0^{hh}, n_0^{hl}$	Priors	0.0205

<sup>19</sup>Since the model with a single financial regime set at  $\kappa^l$  (i.e., the pre-financial-innovation regime) yields a collateral constraint that is almost always binding and a negligible excess return on land, we use the approximation  $E[R^q] \approx R$ , and then conditions (12) and (13) imply:  $\alpha = (ql/zl^\alpha)[R - 1 + \beta^{-1}(1 - \beta R)(1 - \kappa^l)]$

<sup>20</sup>Consumption and GDP data are from the *International Financial Statistics* of the IMF.

The Markov process for  $z$  is set to approximate an AR(1) process ( $\ln(z_t) = \rho \ln(z_{t-1}) + e_t$ ) fitted to HP-filtered real U.S. GDP per capita using data for the period 1965Q1-1996Q4. The estimation yields  $\rho = 0.869$  and  $\sigma_e = 0.00833$ , which imply a standard deviation of TFP of  $\sigma_z = 1.68$  percent. We use [Tauchen and Hussey \(1991\)](#)'s quadrature method to construct a Markov approximation to this process assuming a vector of 9 realizations. The transition probability matrix and realization vector are available on request.

The remaining parameters to calibrate are the initial priors of the learning process (the  $n_0^{ij}$  counters). As shown in the previous Section, these priors are a key component of the model because, together with the realizations of  $\kappa$ , they drive the magnitude and the speed with which optimism and pessimism fluctuate. The Bayesian learning imposes analytical discipline on how optimism and pessimism evolve, while the calibration of the priors imposes quantitative discipline on how much the model is allowed to rely on these fluctuations for explaining credit booms and busts.

For simplicity, we impose the symmetry condition  $n_0 = n_0^{hl} = n_0^{hh} = n_0^{ll} = n_0^{lh}$ , so that there is only one counter to calibrate. We calibrate  $n_0$  so that the model matches an estimate of the observed excess return on land relative to the risk free rate for 1997Q2, which corresponds to the one-period-ahead expected excess return in the first date of the financial innovation experiment (date 1 in the experiment corresponds to 1997Q1). The data proxy for this excess return is the 1997Q2 spread on the Fannie Mae residential mortgage-backed securities (RMBS) with 30-year maturity over the T-bill rate. The *Bloomberg* data service reports this excess return at 47.6 basis points, and the model matches it if we set  $n_0 = 0.0205$ .<sup>21</sup>

Two caveats about the above approach to calibrate the priors: First, “raw” spreads on 30 year RMBS include prepayment risk that tends to widen spreads, but *Bloomberg* reports also “option-adjusted spreads” that are adjusted for this risk. We chose to use this measure because we do not explicitly model prepayment risk (the raw spread is 117.6 basis points). Second, since the model calibration is at a quarterly frequency, ideally we would have liked to use excess returns for securities with a quarterly maturity. However, RMBSs do not have such short-term maturities, because the underlying assets tend to be long-term mortgages. Still, using the spread for the 30-year RMBS is useful because it should actually make it harder for the model to generate optimism. This is because

---

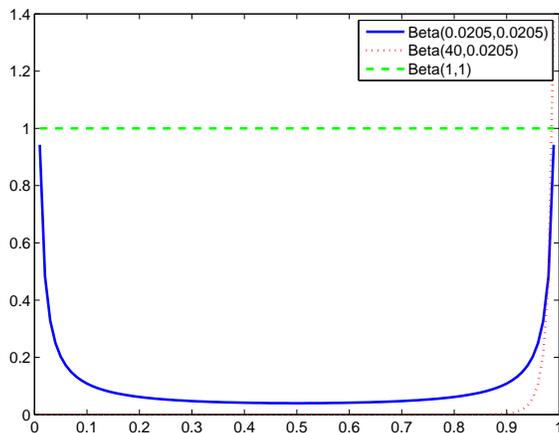
<sup>21</sup>An alternative calibration strategy would be to set  $n_0$  such that the model matches the increase in household debt or leverage observed in the data. In a previous version of this paper we found that matching the former yields an  $n_0$  lower than 0.0205, which strengthens the buildup of optimism and the surge in land prices and debt during the optimistic phase.

30-year RMBSs generally have higher spreads than securities with a quarterly maturity, and higher spreads are associated with higher values of  $n_0$ , which weakens the mechanism generating optimism and pessimism in the learning process. Thus, by calibrating the priors to match the excess returns of the 30-year RMBS we are looking at a “lower bound” of the optimism that the model can generate.

Figure 5 shows the density functions of the initial priors of  $F_{hh}^s$  and  $F_{ll}^s$  for Beta distributions with three different  $(n_0^{ii}, n_0^{ij})$  pairs. The  $Beta(0.0205, 0.0205)$  distribution corresponds to the baseline calibration we just described. In this case, the priors have a U-shaped distribution with most of the mass concentrated around 0 and 1. Since this case assumes  $n_0 = n_0^{ii} = n_0^{ij}$ , the distribution is symmetric with a mean of 0.5 (and a variance of 0.240). By contrast, consider the  $Beta(1, 1)$  distribution, which implicitly assumes that at least one observation of switch and continuation of each  $\kappa$  regime has been observed. This distribution also has a mean of 0.5, but the distribution is uniform over the (0,1) range, and it has a much lower variance (0.083 v. 0.240).

Figure 5 also plots the  $Beta(40, 0.0205)$  distribution, which matches the beliefs about  $F_{hh}^s$  that the learning process generates at period 40 of the financial innovation experiment. At this point, agents have observed 40 transitions from  $\kappa^h$  to  $\kappa^h$  and thus form beliefs characterized by a distribution that is highly skewed to the right, with most of the mass concentrated around 1. This reflects the high degree of optimism that the learning process creates.

Figure 5: Beta Distributions



Notes: This figure plots the probability density function of the  $Beta$  distribution with different  $n_0^{ii}$  and  $n_0^{ij}$  where  $Beta(n_0^{ii}, n_0^{ij})$ .

We illustrate further how the calibrated initial priors influence the evolution beliefs by studying how  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  and  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  change over time as the sequence of realizations of  $\kappa$  is observed. The U-shaped distributions of  $F_{hh}^s$  and  $F_{ll}^s$  supported by the calibrated priors imply that agents conjecture that there are four “most likely” scenarios before the first realization of  $\kappa$  is observed: *a)* Both the high- and low-leverage regimes are extremely persistent, i.e.,  $F_{hh}^s \approx 1$  and  $F_{ll}^s \approx 1$ ; *b)* The high-leverage regime is extremely persistent and the economy switches to the low-leverage regime rarely and for a short time, i.e.,  $F_{hh}^s \approx 1$  and  $F_{ll}^s \approx 0$ ; *c)* The low-leverage regime is extremely persistent and the high-leverage regime occurs rarely and has a short duration, i.e.,  $F_{hh}^s \approx 0$  and  $F_{ll}^s \approx 1$ ; *d)* Neither regime is persistent and the economy constantly moves between the two, i.e.,  $F_{hh}^s \approx 0$  and  $F_{ll}^s \approx 0$ . After observing the first few realizations of  $\kappa^h$ , however, the agents can rule out scenarios *c)* and *d)*.

Beyond the initial realization of  $\kappa^h$ , observing the long initial spell of  $\kappa^h$  leads agents to become optimistic about the persistence of this regime very quickly. In the baseline  $Beta(0.0205, 0.0205)$  case,  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  jumps to about 0.98 in just one quarter, while with  $Beta(1, 1)$  the buildup of optimism is more gradual, but still after 8 quarters  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  approaches 90 percent. This rapid adjustment of beliefs also occurs with the surge of pessimism that follows the first observation of  $\kappa^l$  in period 41: With  $Beta(0.0205, 0.0205)$ , agents update  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  from 0.5 to almost 1 in period 41, and with  $Beta(1, 1)$  the change is slower but again by period 48,  $E_t[F_{ll}^s]$  approaches 90 percent.

It is important to note that neither  $Beta(0.0205, 0.0205)$  or  $Beta(1, 1)$  bias the initial priors in favor of optimism or pessimism. This differs from the approach followed by [Cogley and Sargent \(2008b\)](#), who studied the implications of inducing initial pessimism into the agents’ priors. In our calibration, agents are not optimistic prior to period 1 because  $Beta(0.0205, 0.0205)$  yields initial beliefs such that  $E_t[F_{hh}^s] = E_t[F_{ll}^s] = 0.5$ .

A second important feature of the evolution of beliefs is that, even though the changes in  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  between periods 1 and 40 are small, they still imply nontrivial changes in the agent’s perceived riskiness of the financial environment. For example, for  $t = 1$  we obtained  $E_1[F_{hh}^s] = 0.98$ , which implies that the perceived mean duration of  $\kappa^h$  is 50 quarters and the coefficient of variation of  $\kappa$  is about 5.9 percent. In contrast, for  $t = 40$  we have  $E_1[F_{hh}^s] = 0.999$ , which is not that different from 0.98, but implies a much higher perceived mean duration of  $\kappa^h$  (1000 quarters) and much lower coefficient of variation of  $\kappa$  (1.3 percent). As we show below, this reduces incentives for precautionary savings significantly. Moreover, these effects are very nonlinear, with the mean duration exploding to  $\infty$  as  $E_t[F_{hh}^s]$  approaches 1 from below.

At this point we have calibrated all of the parameters that are needed for solving the model. Notice in particular that the true transition probability matrix  $F^a$  is not needed. Solving the AUOPs requires the sequence of beliefs  $(\{f(F^s | \kappa^t)\}_{t=0}^T)$ , which is determined with the parameters we already set, but does not require  $F^a$ . Still, calibrating  $F^a$  is necessary if we want to compare the solutions of the learning model against the standard RE solution.

We calibrate  $F_{hh}^a$  so that the mean duration of high-leverage regimes is in line with the estimated duration of credit boom episodes in industrial economies, which [Mendoza and Terrones \(2012\)](#) estimated at about 7 years. This implies  $F_{hh}^a = 0.964$ . With this calibration of  $F_{hh}^a$  and conditional on observing  $\kappa^h$  at date 1, the probability of observing  $\kappa^h$  the following 39 periods is 0.241. Thus, the “true” probability of observing the long spell of  $\kappa^h$  that we assume in our financial innovation experiment, which produces substantial optimism, is about 1/4. We assume a symmetric process by setting  $F_{ll}^a = 0.964$ .

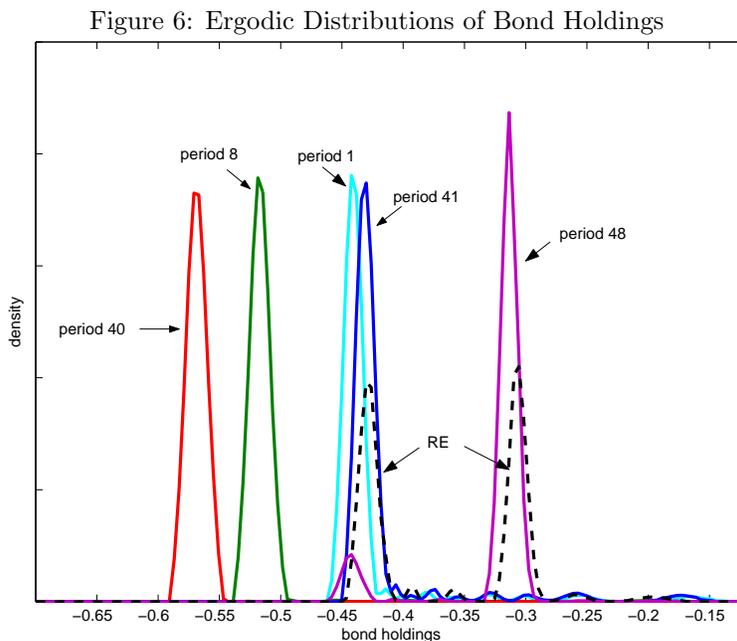
An interesting implication of calibrating the “true” process of  $\kappa$  in this way is that the model features a long-run credit cycle consistent with average duration features of actual credit cycles, so that agents eventually learn that the economy will display a credit cycle with the duration and frequency that is typical of industrial countries. In the short-run, however, their expectations can deviate sharply from these regularities, along the lines of [Reinhart and Rogoff \(2009\)](#) “this-time-is-different” argument.

### 3.2 Quantitative Findings

The quantitative analysis is based on four sets of results derived from the numerical solutions: Long-run distributions of bond positions, forecast functions of macroeconomic aggregates, average changes in these aggregates at the “turning points” of the learning experiment, and expected excess returns. We compare the results of the baseline learning model (BL) with the RE model (i.e., a model which retains the collateral constraint but does not have a learning friction) and with a fixed land valuation-learning (FVL) model in which land in the collateral constraint is valued at a constant price set to the long-run average (i.e., a model that retains the learning friction but removes the credit externality and the Fisherian deflation channel). In this case, the collateral constraint becomes  $\frac{b_{t+1}}{R} \geq -\kappa_t \bar{q} l_{t+1}$ .

### 3.2.1 Ergodic distributions

Figure 6 plots “conjectured” ergodic distributions of  $b$  for dates 1, 8, 40, 41 and 48 in the BL model and the true ergodic distribution of the RE model. We label the former as “conjectured” because the actual ergodic distribution of the BL model is the same as the one of the RE model, since in the long-run agents learn  $F^a$ , and thus the long-run equilibrium is the same as under rational expectations. The “conjectured” ergodic distributions for the other dates in the learning experiment are the agents’ projections of what the long-run equilibrium would look like if they forecast the dynamics of the financial regime using their current beliefs. Plotting the conjectured and RE long-run distributions together is useful for illustrating the impact of the optimism and pessimism driving the model’s dynamics on the agents “willingness” to borrow or save. Appendix B provides details on the computation of these long-run distributions.



Notes: This figure plots the ergodic distribution of bond holdings implied by the learning model in periods 1 (initial period), 8, 40 (peak of optimism), 41, and 48 as well that of the rational expectations model marked by “RE.”

Consider first the conjectured distribution for period 1. Recall that the mean of bond holdings pre-financial-innovation was -0.31. Hence, already by period 1 agents conjecture that the support of the long-run distribution of bonds will shift sharply to the left (i.e. support higher debt levels). But comparing the period-1 distribution with the new RE distribution for the regime-switching  $\kappa$  process post-financial-innovation, it is clear that agents are also projecting to be saving much less than they eventually will in the new stochastic steady state. The RE distribution has the typical

bimodal shape of a two-point regime-switching process with high persistence. In this case, agents are assessing the risk of the financial environment correctly, and in particular they are aware that long spells of *both*  $\kappa$  regimes are possible.

Compare now the RE ergodic distribution with the conjectured ergodic distribution for period 40 in the BL model. Large debt ratios (bond holdings in the interval  $[-0.59, -0.54]$ ) are *never* a long-run equilibrium outcome in the RE model, but they take most of the mass of the long-run distribution of bond holdings that is projected on the basis of the agents' period-40 beliefs. Something similar happens also much earlier than date 40 because, as shown before, it takes observing only the first few realizations of  $\kappa^h$  for agents to turn very optimistic relative to the RE transition probabilities. By period 8 agents already conjecture that debt positions in the  $[-0.54, -0.49]$  range are most likely long-run equilibria, while in the RE ergodic distribution they have zero probability.

As optimism builds, the highest debt conjectured to have positive long-run probability rises, and the mass of probability assigned to debt levels larger than the largest debt under rational expectations also rises. This process peaks at the peak of the optimistic phase in date 40. In short, during this phase, agents are willing to “overborrow” (take on more debt at the averages of the conjectured ergodic distributions of  $b$ ) than what is ever optimal in the RE model, and “undersave” (build less precautionary savings, or conjecture they can attain a lower average of  $b$ ) than what is optimal in the RE model. When the first realization of  $\kappa^l$  hits and the pessimistic phase starts, the opposite effects take over and they peak at date 48. By then, agents are “underborrowing” and “oversaving” substantially. However, they have learned from their experience that shifts to  $\kappa^h$  are possible, so the period-48 conjectured distribution is now two-peaked.

### 3.2.2 Forecast functions

Forecast functions are useful for illustrating the model's equilibrium dynamics during the 48 periods of the learning experiment. We construct these forecast functions by using the sequence of beliefs and decision rules of each AUOP to trace the dynamics of the expected values of the endogenous variables along the model's AU recursive equilibrium path. Intuitively, the algorithm that computes the forecast functions uses a law of motion for the evolution of the probability of the economy being in each triple  $(b, z, \kappa)$  as we move from date 0 to date 48. This law of motion can be computed for any triple of initial conditions  $(b, z, \kappa)$ , but we are interested in the triple that approximates the state of the U.S. economy in 1996Q4 (i.e. the initial conditions at the beginning of date 1 in the financial innovation experiment). Thus, we start at date 1 with all the probability concentrated in

the coordinate of initial conditions  $(b_1, z_1, \kappa^h)$  where  $b_1 = -0.345$  (the observed net credit assets as a share of GDP for 1996Q4) and  $z_1 = 1$ . Then, for each subsequent date, the value of  $\kappa$  is set to the corresponding realization in the  $\kappa^T$  sequence ( $\kappa^h$  for  $t = 2, \dots, 40$  and  $\kappa^l$  for  $t = 41, \dots, 48$ ), the transitions across values of  $z$  are computed with the Markov process of  $z$ , and the transitions across points in the state space of  $b$  are governed by the policy function  $b'_t(b, z, \kappa)$  of the corresponding date- $t$  AUOP. The procedure is similar to the standard forecast functions of a RE model, except that the policy function is time-varying because it varies with each set of beliefs in the sequence  $[f(F^s | \kappa^t)]_{t=1}^{48}$  (see Appendix B for details).

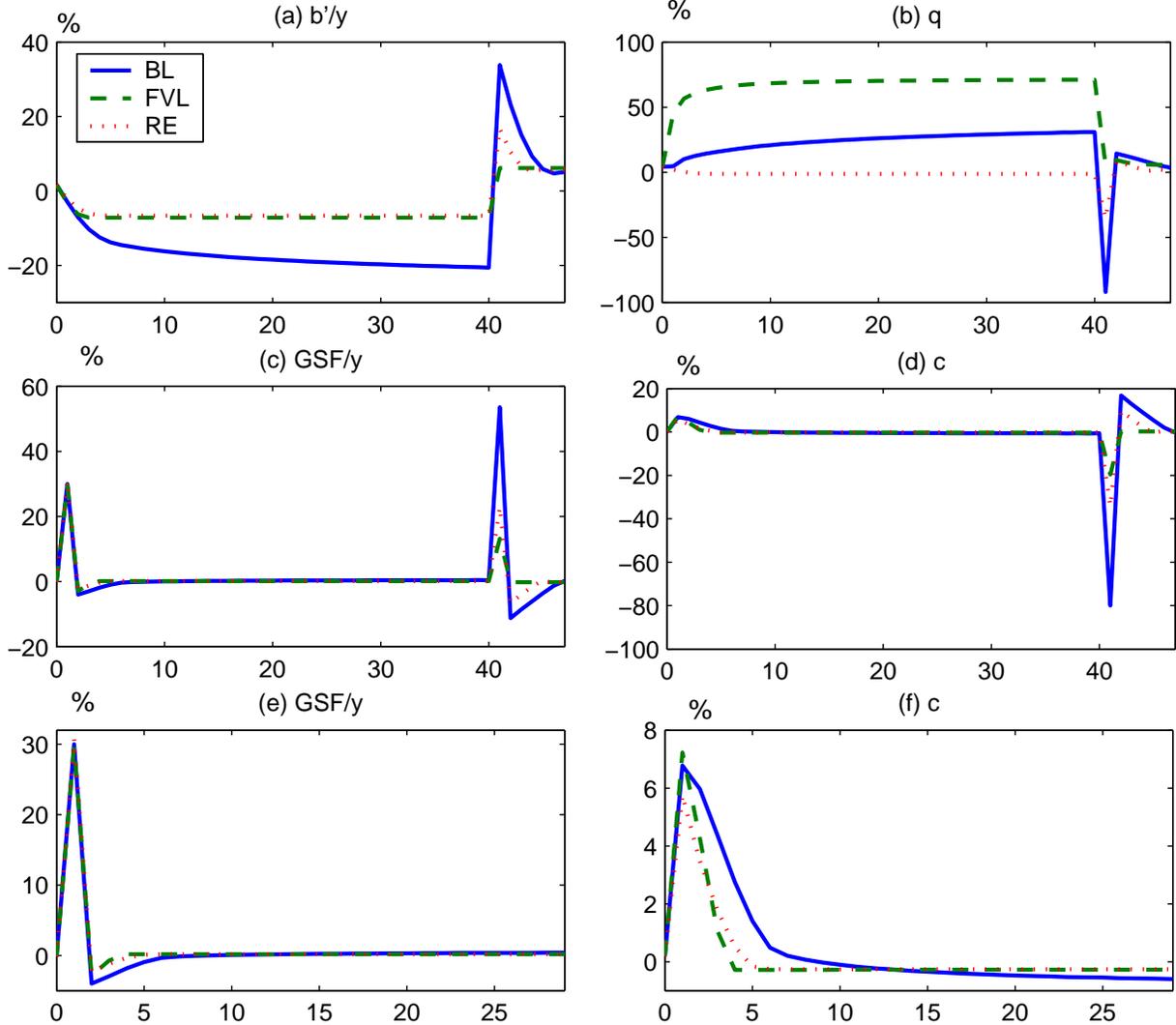
Figure 7 plots the forecast functions for the choice of bond holdings as a share of output ( $b'/y$ ), consumption, the price of land, and the savings rate ( $GSF/y$ ) as percent deviations from their long-run means in the BL, RE and FVL models. Recall that long-run means in the learning and RE models are identical because the ergodic distributions of the two are the same. The solid (blue) lines correspond to the BL model, the dashed (green) lines are for the FVL model, and the dotted (red) lines represent the RE model. Note that even the RE model generates some dynamics in this exercise, because the initial condition  $b_1$  is not the long-run mean of the new financial regime with stochastic  $\kappa$ , and also because we are using a particular time series of realizations of  $\kappa$  (instead of averaging across possible  $\kappa$  realizations at each date  $t$ ). Thus, these forecasts functions are conditional on the particular history  $\kappa^T$  that we assumed.

The forecast functions for bonds in Panel (a) show that during the optimistic phase agents consistently borrow more in the BL model than in both the RE and FVL models. In the first two periods after financial innovation is introduced, the three models predict similar debt dynamics, but after that the optimism and the debt-deflation feedback loop at work in the BL model produce a much larger decline in bond holdings, while the bond dynamics in the RE and FVL models are similar.<sup>22</sup>  $b'/y$  declines by as much as 21 percentage points below the long-run average at the peak of optimism of the BL model in period 40. These dynamics are in line with the downward trend in household debt observed in the data (see Figure 1). Interestingly, the combination of the learning friction and the debt-deflation channel delivers a much stronger decline in assets than the alternatives that retain only one of the two mechanisms. In the RE model there is no buildup of optimism to push for overborrowing, and in the FVL model there is no endogenous feedback from higher land prices into higher collateral and thus higher borrowing ability.

---

<sup>22</sup>This occurs because (a) in the FVL model the price is fixed at the long-run average of the RE model, and (b) the RE price displays very small deviations from its long-run average. As a result, and since the values of  $\kappa$  are the same in both models, the debt allowed by the collateral constraint in both models is about the same.

Figure 7: Forecast Functions



Notes: This figure plots the forecast functions of bond holdings-output ratio, price of land, consumption, and gross saving flow-output ratio ( $GSF/y$ ) as percentage deviations from their long run means implied by the rational expectations scenario.  $GSF/y$  is calculated as  $((b'/R) - b)/y$ . Realizations of  $\kappa$  are as described in the text,  $\kappa^h$  in the first 40 periods and  $\kappa^l$  in the remaining 8. Date-0  $b'/y$  is the 1996:Q4 observation from data (since debt data are end of period basis), so that the date-1  $b'/y$  is the first endogenous choice of  $b'$  under  $\kappa^h$ , given an initial state determined by the data point from 1996:Q4. “FVL” refers to the scenario with the asset price on the right hand side of the credit constraint fixed at 0.456 which is the long run average of prices.

The switch to the pessimistic phase in period 41 brings about a large correction in bond holdings, which bounce back about 54 percentage points in the BL model. An adjustment of this magnitude is an equilibrium outcome, despite CRRA preferences and incomplete markets, because the arrival of the first realization of  $\kappa^l$  at date 41 is almost like a large, unexpected shock, in the sense that by date 40 agents believe that the state  $\kappa^h$  in which they have been living is almost absorbent (i.e.,  $E_{40}[F_{hh}^s]$  is very close to 1). Moreover, the  $\kappa$  shock triggers a large Fisherian deflation effect (see below), which contributes to enlarge the debt adjustment. Bond holdings also jump up in the RE and FVL models, because of the switch from  $\kappa^h$  to  $\kappa^l$  in a state in which the collateral constraint was binding. But the adjustments are much smaller. The debt reversal in the RE case is about half the size of that in the learning model, and it reflects the effect of the debt-deflation mechanism in the absence of a switch to pessimistic beliefs. The FVL model yields the smallest correction, which isolates the effect of the switch to pessimistic beliefs without amplification due to the Fisherian deflation channel.

As agents overborrow during the optimistic phase in the BL model, they also bid more aggressively for the risky asset. This increases the price of land significantly, as shown in Panel (b) of Figure 7. This contrasts with the RE case, in which the price of land *declines* slightly relative to the pre-financial-innovation price that prevailed at date 0. This occurs because the price of land in the RE model is falling to a lower long-run average in the financial innovation regime. In turn, the mean price of land in the RE model (with stochastic  $\kappa$ ) is lower than in the pre-financial-innovation regime (with constant  $\kappa^l$ ) because, even though agents know the true distribution of  $\kappa$ , they now face uncertainty about  $\kappa$ , since it is now a random variable. Hence, financial innovation implies a higher mean  $\kappa$  but also a higher variance of  $\kappa$ . The former enables the agents to borrow more, and therefore demand more of the risky asset and bid up its price, but the latter gives them an incentive to hold less of the risky asset, because the new financial environment is riskier and they are risk averse. We find that, if the gap between  $\kappa^h$  and  $\kappa^l$  is small, the “mean effect” dominates leading to higher land prices in the RE model, but as the gap widens, the “variance effect” becomes stronger and the mean land price in the RE model is lower than in the pre-financial-innovation equilibrium (as is the case in our baseline calibration).

The FVL model generates a larger asset price boom during the optimistic phase and a smaller price crash compared with the other two models. This is because the FVL model rules out the Fisherian deflation by construction, and hence at date 41 the downward spiral on land prices, collateral values, and debt that is at work in the other two models is not active here. Moreover, the

fixed land valuation for collateral also serves as a limited asset price guarantee, which produces a larger price boom during the optimistic phase than in the learning and RE models. The guarantee is limited because it applies only for the valuation of land used as collateral. Accordingly, the FVL model produces a smaller reversal in debt in period 41, as agents are able to borrow more than in the other two models because of the constant collateral price. For the same reason, the larger land price increase in the optimistic phase does not feed back into a large debt expansion.

Panels (c) and (d) of Figure 7 show the forecast functions for the savings rate and consumption. Because of the large magnitude of the changes that occur at date 41, Panels (e) and (f) “zoom-in” on the dynamics of these variables in the first 30 periods.

To understand the consumption dynamics, consider first what these dynamics would look like in a perfect-foresight model where we switch from the constrained pre-financial innovation steady state with  $\kappa^l$  to a hypothetical financial innovation deterministic steady state for a regime with  $\kappa^h$ . These two steady states are corner solutions because  $\beta R < 1$ , and hence the steady state of bonds is  $b = -\kappa q(\kappa)$ , where  $q(\kappa)$  is the steady state land price, which is increasing in  $\kappa$ .<sup>23</sup> Thus, the increase in  $\kappa$  yields a lower steady state for  $b$  (higher steady state debt) because both  $\kappa$  and  $q(\kappa)$  increase. But higher steady state debt means lower steady state consumption, since the non-financial wealth of the economy is invariant to changes in  $\kappa$  and the debt has to be serviced. Thus, financial innovation tilts the time profile of consumption. On impact, when  $\kappa$  is first increased, and for a few periods after that, consumption rises above the pre-financial-innovation level as the collateral constraint is relaxed, but then it drops monotonically until it reaches its new steady state below the pre-financial-innovation level. This consumption tilting effect is also at work in the stochastic model, but is weaker because of the precautionary savings motive, which implies a smaller decrease in bond holdings and a smaller drop in consumption.

Now consider the consumption dynamics of the BL, RE and FVL models in Panels (c) and (e) of Figure 7. The fact that the dynamics for the first 40 periods are similar in all three models indicates that the consumption tilting effect dominates these dynamics. This is because consumption converges quickly to its new long-run average (which is identical in the BL and RE models, and very similar in the FVL model). There is over-consumption in the BL model relative to the RE and FVL models in the early stages after the switch to  $\kappa^h$ , because of the larger increase in debt (i.e., decline in bond holdings). In the first two periods, consumption is about the same in all

---

<sup>23</sup>The closed-form solution for the steady state land price with the collateral constraint binding is:  $q(\kappa) = (\alpha\beta) / [\beta(R - 1) + (1 - \beta R)(1 - \kappa)]$ .

three models, but the overconsumption in the BL model is clear between the 3rd and 10th periods. After period 10, however, the dynamics driven by consumption tilting dominate in all three models. Consumption then remains smooth (as we are averaging across TFP and keeping  $\kappa$  constant at  $\kappa^h$ ), until we arrive at date 41 and  $\kappa$  switches to  $\kappa^l$ .

At date 41, as explained earlier, the  $\kappa$  switch is almost like a large, unexpected shock in the BL and FVL models. In the BL model, which also has the Fisherian deflation, this produces a dramatic collapse in consumption. This is in line with the findings in [Mendoza \(2010\)](#) and [Mendoza and Smith \(2006\)](#), showing that in Fisherian deflation models there are equilibria outside the ergodic distribution of wealth, where the economy could land as a result of unexpected shocks, in which the impact response of consumption can be around -80 percent. In those models, however, precautionary savings and perfect information about the Markov processes of shocks rule out consumption drops of that magnitude from the equilibrium dynamics, while in our model the learning friction allows us to support them as short-run AU equilibria.

The RE and FVL models also produce large consumption declines when the economy switches to  $\kappa^l$ , but both are significantly smaller than in the BL model. In the RE model this is again because precautionary savings and the lack of overborrowing prevented a large accumulation of debt in the optimistic phase. In the FVL model the smaller consumption drop occurs because there is no Fisherian deflation of collateral values, which yields the smallest correction in debt, and hence implies the smaller consumption drop.

Figure 8 illustrates the dynamics of key asset pricing variables. Panel (a) plots the model's implicit endogenous interest rate premium that measures the difference between the stochastic intertemporal marginal rate of substitution in consumption ( $u'(c_t)/\beta E_t^s[u'(c_{t+1})]$ ) and the real interest rate  $R$ . This is also a measure of the shadow value of the collateral constraint, because using condition (12) the interest premium is equal to  $\mu_t/(u'(c_t) - \mu_t)$ . Thus, if the constraint does not bind, there is no interest rate premium, and when it binds the premium rises as the constraint becomes more binding.

The dynamics of the interest premium are in line with our previous argument stating that, when financial innovation starts, the constraint becomes nonbinding, and then it begins to bind after some time. In particular, in the BL model the constraint begins to bind after period 5. Then the interest premium rises monotonically, at a decreasing rate, to converge to about 5.5 percent at the peak of the optimistic phase. In contrast, the FVL model generates a larger premium of up to 7 percent, while the RE model generates a premium of just above 2 percent in the optimistic

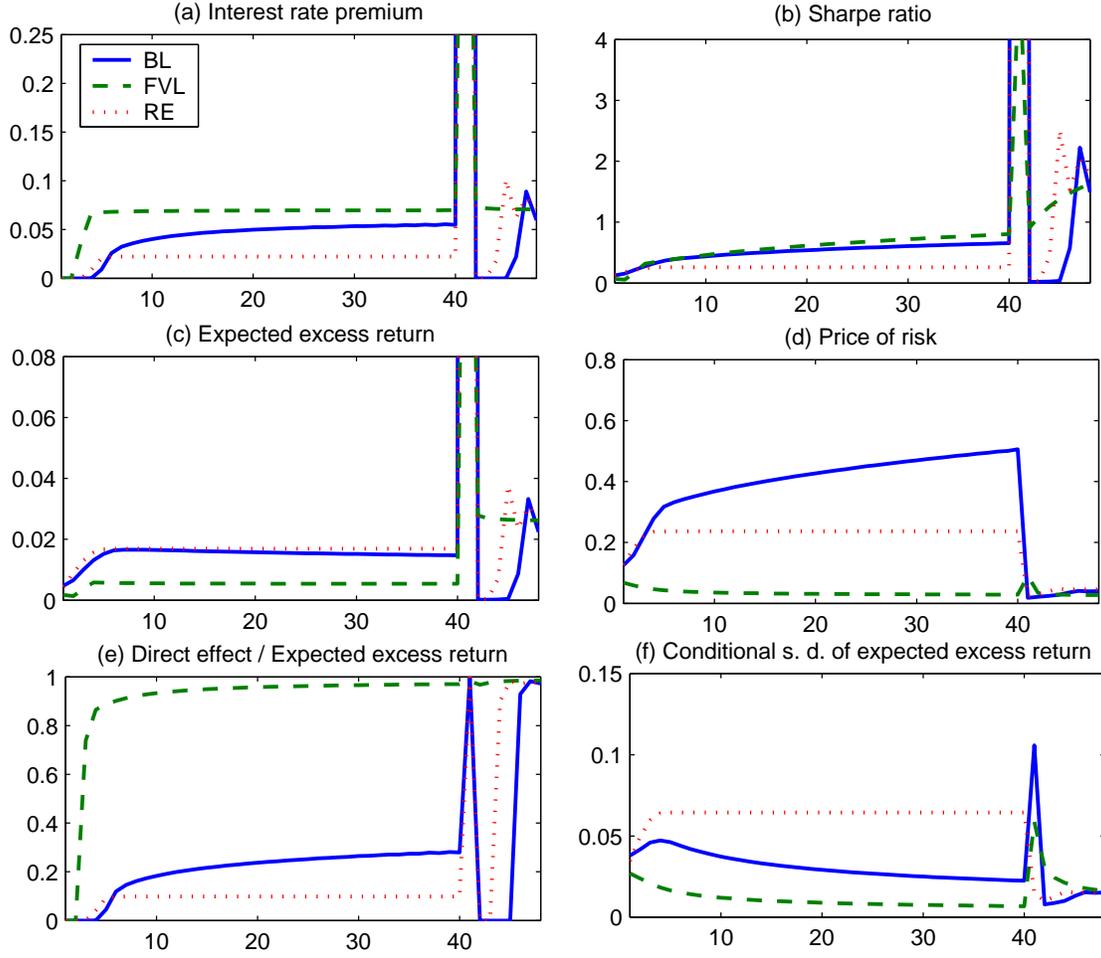
phase. This is natural because in the FVL model rising land prices do not contribute to relax the borrowing limit, and in the RE model the constraint is less binding because individuals desire to save more with rational expectations than with optimistic beliefs.

When the switch to the pessimistic phase takes place at date 41, there is a large jump in interest premia as the collateral constraint becomes severely binding, in line with the large reversals in debt and consumption. This jump in part due to the exogenous shift in  $\kappa$ , but in the BL and RE models it is also heavily influenced by the endogenous dynamics driven by the Fisherian deflation and, in the BL model, the learning friction. This explains why the surge in the interest premia is the largest in the BL model, followed by the RE model, and the FVL model last. After the crisis at date 41, however, the constraint becomes nonbinding for 4 periods in the BL model and for 1 period in RE. Afterwards the interest premia become positive again, hovering around 7 percent in the FVL model throughout the rest of the experiment and gradually increasing to reach 8.9 and 8.2 percent in the BL and RE models respectively.

Panel (b) plots the compensation for risk-taking as measured by the Sharpe ratio ( $S_t \equiv E_t^s[R_{t+1}^q - R]/\sigma_t^s(R_{t+1}^q)$ , where  $\sigma_t^s$  is the conditional standard deviation of land returns evaluated using subjective beliefs).  $E_t^s[R_{t+1}^q - R]$  and  $\sigma_t^s(R_{t+1}^q)$  are also plotted separately in panels (c) and (f) respectively. The evolution of the Sharpe ratios shows that the compensation for taking risk increases in all three models during the optimistic phase, but the increase in the BL and FVL models is larger and more gradual than in the RE model. Moreover, plots (c) and (f) show that the gradual increase in the Sharpe ratio in the FVL and BL models is driven by the gradual declines in  $\sigma_t^s(R_{t+1}^q)$  during the optimistic phase, since  $E_t^s[R_{t+1}^q - R]$  remains largely stable. Thus, these results indicate that the buildup of optimism in the two models with imperfect information contributes significantly to reduce the perceived riskiness of land and increase the over-compensation of risk-taking, putting upward pressure on asset prices. Note, however, that even though up to period 40 the Sharpe ratios of the BL and FVL models are very similar, both the mean excess returns and the variability of returns are higher in the BL model. In contrast, excess returns show fairly similar behavior in the RE and BL models. These results are in line with the previous result showing that the FVL economy yields the largest land price increase, and reflect again the implications of the limited price guarantee that fixed land valuation for collateral provides.

Panel (d) shows the market price of risk, defined as  $s_t = \sigma_t^s(M_t^{t+1})/E_t^s[M_t^{t+1}]$ . The dynamics of this variable in the optimistic phase differ sharply across the three models, and they are largely driven by the dynamics of  $\sigma_t^s(M_t^{t+1})$ , because we found that  $E_t^s[M_t^{t+1}]$  is fairly stable for  $t = 0, \dots, 40$ .

Figure 8: Asset Price Dynamics



Notes: Top left panel plots the interest rate premium that represents the difference between the intertemporal MRS and the risk-free rate which can be simplified to  $\frac{\mu_t}{u'(c_t) - \mu_t}$ . The premium in period 41 is 38.03, 1.99, and 0.81 in baseline, RE, and FVL scenarios, respectively. Period 41 values for the Sharpe ratio (expected excess return) are 134.71 (13.94), 48.59 (0.73), and 5.16 (0.30) in BL, RE, and FVL scenarios, respectively.

This changes abruptly in period 41, when both  $\sigma_t^s(M_t^{t+1})$  and  $E_t^s[M_t^{t+1}]$  fall sharply, but the fall in the former is larger, and hence the price of risk falls.

The price of risk increases initially in both RE and BL models, but after a couple of periods it settles at about 0.22 in the RE model while in the BL model it continues to rise gradually until it reaches about 0.5 by period 40. In contrast, in the FVL model the price of risk is lower initially and falls slightly during the optimistic phase. Thus, the effects of optimism on the price of risk are the opposite when optimism and the Fisherian deflation channel interact than when collateral assets are valued at a constant price. This is in line again with the intuition that the FVL embodies an

implicit land price guarantee, which reduces the price of risk, while the price of risk rises in the BL model.

Panel (e) shows the direct effect of the borrowing constraint on expected excess returns (defined in Equation (10)) expressed as a ratio of the latter.<sup>24</sup> Looking at panels (a) and (e), we find that the scenario where the collateral constraint binds the most and produces the largest interest rate premia (the FVL scenario), is also the scenario in which the direct effect of the collateral constraint contributes the most to the excess land returns (more than 90 percent by period 40). In the BL model, the direct effect rises gradually to reach about 30 percent by period 40. In the RE model, the contribution remains stable at about 10 percent from periods 5 to 40. The contribution of the direct effect grows very large in all three models when the first switch to  $\kappa^l$  occurs, as the credit constraint becomes very binding, and after that it remains large in the FVL model and falls back to zero in the other two models as debt is adjusted sharply, but then it rises again as the constraint becomes very binding.

The relatively small contribution of the direct effect to mean excess returns in the optimistic phase of the BL and RE models, coupled with the nontrivial mean excess returns (as high as 500 basis point in the BL model by period 40), indicates that the indirect effects operating via  $cov_t^s(M_t^{t+1}, R_{t+1}^q)$  also play an important role. Moreover, in the very early stages of this phase, when the collateral constraint does not bind, mean excess returns in the RE and BL models increase *only* because  $cov_t^s(M_t^{t+1}, R_{t+1}^q)$  is becoming more negative. Thus, perceived riskiness of land holdings is declining because both  $\sigma_t^s(R_{t+1}^q)$  and  $cov_t^s(M_t^{t+1}, R_{t+1}^q)$  are falling. In addition, the fact that in the early stages of the experiment the only driving force of increasing excess returns is the fall in  $cov_t^s(M_t^{t+1}, R_{t+1}^q)$  implies that the undervaluation of risk is the only mechanism at work when the model is used to produce the calibrated initial priors that matched the observed 47.5 basis points RMBS spread at  $t = 1$ . The direct effect of the borrowing constraint is not at work because the constraint is not binding at  $t = 1$ .

### 3.2.3 Turning Points

Table 2 lists changes in average bond-output ratios and land prices, calculated with the data of the forecast functions, at the key turning points: the *peak of optimism* at  $t = 40$  relative to the financial-innovation initial conditions, and at the end of the learning experiment ( $t = 48$ ) relative

---

<sup>24</sup>Note that a similar direct effect can also be obtained for the Sharpe ratio because it can be rewritten as:  $S_t = \frac{\mu_t(1-\kappa)}{(u'(t)-\mu_t\kappa)E_t^s[M_t^{t+1}]\sigma_t^s(R_{t+1}^q)} - \rho_t^s(R_{t+1}^q, M_t^{t+1})s_t$ , where  $\rho_t^s(R_{t+1}^q, M_t^{t+1})$  is the conditional correlation between land returns and the stochastic discount factor based on date- $t$  beliefs.

to the peak of optimism (which we label as *financial crisis*). The figures shown in this table are the differences in the levels of  $b/y$  and  $q$  projected by the forecast functions, but not expressed in deviations from long-run means (as was the case in the plots of Figure 7).

Table 2: Average Changes at the Turning Points

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Data	RE	FVL	BL
<i>Peak of Optimism:</i>				
$E[(b/y)_{40} - (b/y)_0]$	-0.355	-0.083	-0.089	-0.223
$E[(ql/y)_{40} - (ql/y)_0]$	0.280	-0.025	0.305	0.122
<i>Financial Crisis:</i>				
$E[(b/y)_{48} - (b/y)_{40}]$	0.023	0.122	0.133	0.254
$E[(ql/y)_{48} - (ql/y)_{40}]$	-0.149	0.013	-0.305	-0.121

Note: Data column reports the difference between 2006Q4 and 1996Q4 observations in the top panel and the difference between 2008Q4 and 2006Q4 observations in the bottom panel. In columns 2-4 the realizations of  $\kappa$  are set to the path described in the text. Period 0 in all three scenarios corresponds to the 1996Q4 data observations, which are the initial conditions.  $qL/y$  is the aggregate market value of residential land divided by output.

This table illustrates two main results. First, the BL model can explain a significant part of the increases in debt and land prices before the financial crisis. Second, the BL model generates significantly higher debt in the optimistic phase than the RE or FVL models, and a much larger land price increase than the RE model.

The BL model can explain 63 percent of the increase in household debt observed in the data (in the model  $b/y$  falls by almost 23 percentage points v. 36 percentage points in the data). Moreover, the decline in bond holdings in the BL model is about 14 percentage points of GDP larger than in the RE or FVL models. The comparison with the RE model shows again that financial innovation, when agents are uncertain about the true nature of the new financial environment, produces significant overborrowing. The comparison with the FVL model shows, also in line with our previous findings, that the interaction of the learning friction with the debt-deflation channel has significant quantitative implications for the size of the credit boom that the model can produce.

Comparing the changes in land prices, we find that the BL model accounts for about 44 percent of the land price boom observed in the data (the increase in  $q$  in the model reaches almost 13 percentage points at date 40, v. 28 percentage points in the data). In line with what we noted in

the comparison of forecast functions, the RE model yields a slight fall in  $q$ , instead of an increase, and the FVL model generates a larger price increase than the BL model.

Consider now the changes in bond holdings and land prices during the financial crisis. The BL model generates a large debt reversal of about 25 percentage points (and this after an even larger reversal between periods 40 and 41, as shown in Figure 7). By contrast, in the data the correction was only 2.3 percentage points. The model clearly overestimates the reversal in debt, but part of the discrepancy is due to the fact that bonds in the model are one-period bonds while the average maturity of household debt is significantly higher than a quarter. Thus, agents in the model repay and re-finance their debt every period, but in the data this is not the case, particularly with long-term debt contracts such as 30-year mortgages. As a result, the switch to  $\kappa^l$  leads to an abrupt decline in debt in the model, while in the data this has an effect that is spread over time. Indeed, as shown in the top panel of Figure 1, the reversal in the household debt ratio has continued, and the more recent data show that it has reversed by about 10 percentage points of GDP.

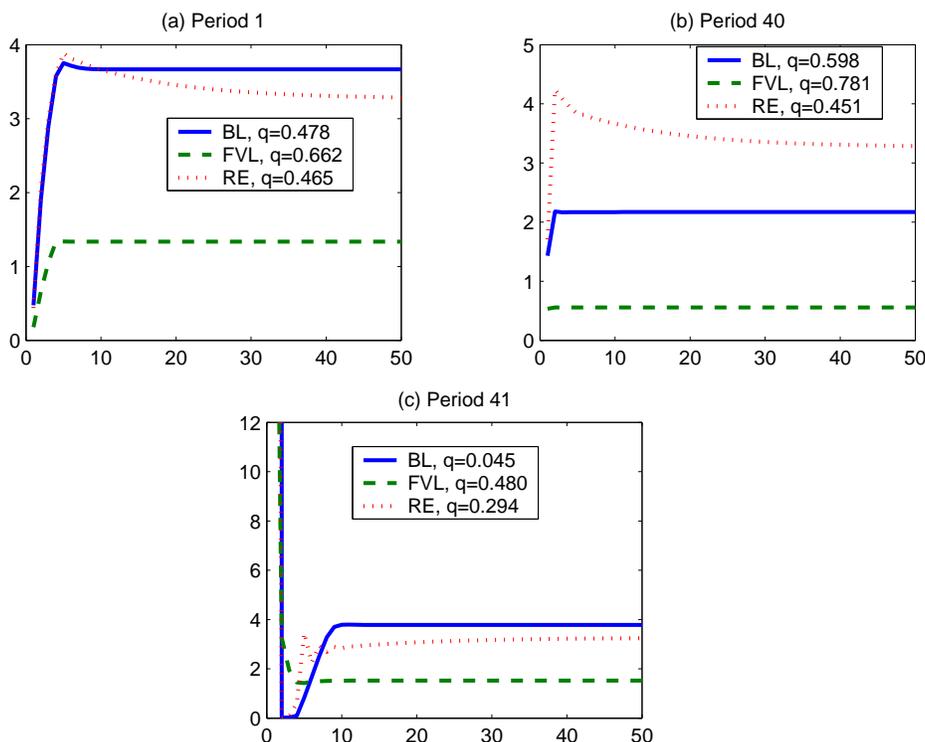
The BL does a nice job at matching the observed decline in land prices during the financial crisis (12.1 and 14.9 percentage points in model and data respectively). This is after an initial price collapse between periods 40 and 41 that is significantly larger than what the model predicts between periods 40 and 48. In contrast, the FVL model now produces a larger price decline, about twice as large as in the data, and the price change in the RE model is again small and in the opposite direction from the BL and FVL models.

### 3.2.4 Projected Excess Returns on Land

Next we investigate the projections of future excess land returns that underlie the discounting of future land dividends for the computation of  $q$  at key dates in the model's dynamics. Looking at these projections illustrates further the agents' perception of the riskiness of land during the optimistic and pessimistic phases. Figure 9 plots the  $t + j$ -period-ahead expected excess returns for up to 50 periods ahead of  $t = 1, 40,$  and  $41$  (in panels (a), (b) and (c) respectively). These are expectations that agents form looking into the future given beliefs and decision rules as of periods 1, 40 or 41. In each scenario, we set the initial state of nature so that  $b$  is at the mean bond holdings predicted by the forecast function in Figure 7 for the corresponding date,  $\kappa$  to its corresponding value in the history  $\kappa^t$ , and TFP to its mean value.

Focusing on expected excess returns projected as of date 1 in panel (a), the excess returns in the RE model exceed slightly those of the BL setup up to the 10th period, and afterwards the ordering

Figure 9: Excess Returns



Notes: Expected excess returns for 50 periods ahead of initial dates  $t = 1, 40$ , and 41, computed using the beliefs and associated equilibrium pricing function of the each date's optimization problem. The expected returns are conditional on the bond holdings predicted for each initial date by the forecast functions of Figure 7, the mean value of TFP ( $z = 1$ ), and the value of kappa indicated in the history of realizations for each date  $t$ . The one period ahead expected excess return in period 41 (bottom panel) is 1418, 74, and 30 percent in baseline, RE, and FVL scenarios, respectively.

reverses and the BL model projects slightly higher returns. This pattern justifies the result showing that the land price at date 1 is slightly lower in the RE model (because agents in the RE model expect relatively higher excess land returns in the first 10 periods, which carry more weight in discounting land dividends—and recall that land dividends are simply driven by the exogenous TFP process, which is the same in all three models). The FVL model yields expected excess returns that lie significantly below both the RE and BL models, and this is consistent with the sharply higher date-1 land price produced by the FVL model. The FVL model has lower excess returns because the removal of the debt-deflation channel weakens the direct and indirect effects of the collateral constraint on excess returns shown in Equation (10).

As agents reach the peak of the optimistic phase after observing  $\kappa^h$  for 40 periods, expected excess returns ahead of date 40 (panel (b)) are significantly lower than they were predicted to be as of date 1 in the two models that incorporate the learning friction (BL and FVL). As explained

in Section 2, this is because once the constraint binds at  $\kappa^h$ , land returns are lower in the states with  $\kappa^h$  than with  $\kappa^l$ , and optimistic agents assign higher probabilities to the former than the true probabilities. Given lower projected excess returns, these two models also produce sharply higher land prices at date 40 than at date 1. Moreover, comparing now the projected returns paths in the three models as of date 40 itself, projected returns in the BL model become significantly smaller than in the RE model, and the FVL model predicts even smaller excess returns than the RE and BL models. This is because in the FVL model beliefs turn as optimistic as in the learning model, but the removal of the debt-deflation mechanism reduces land risk premia.

At date 41, when the switch to  $\kappa^l$  takes place, the ordering of projected excess returns across RE and BL models reverses (panel (c)). Projected excess returns for period 42 are very high in all three models, because they reflect the strong direct effect of the borrowing constraint tightening sharply as  $\kappa$  switches. This direct effect includes both an exogenous effect, simply because of the switch to  $\kappa^l$ , and an endogenous effect, because of the surge in the shadow value of the borrowing constraint (for the excess return at  $t = 42$  expected as of  $t = 41$ , the direct effect in the right-hand side of (10) is given by  $(1 - \kappa^l)\mu_{41}$ ). Moreover, this direct effect is the strongest in the BL model that combines both learning and Fisherian deflation, followed by the RE model that retains Fisherian deflation, and with the FVL model last. This is also in line with the size and ordering of interest rate premia displayed in period 41 in Figure 8.

After the initial severe tightening of the borrowing constraint, and the abrupt debt adjustment that follows, the borrowing constraint is not projected to bind in the BL and RE models for a couple of periods, before enough debt is built up to make the constraint bind again. In the FVL model the constraint is projected to remain binding, but still the debt adjustment reduces the tightness of the constraint sharply and hence the projected returns. Beyond the adjustment phase of the first 10 periods, projected returns in the BL model exceed those of the other two models, and those of the FVL model are sharply lower. This pattern of projected excess returns is consistent with the results showing that at date 41 the value of  $q$  is the highest in the FVL model, followed by the RE model, and with the BL model price sharply lower than the other two.

It is also interesting to note that during periods 2 to 7 ahead of date 41, the projected excess returns of the RE model exceed those of the BL model. This reflects the fact that the pessimistic expectations of the BL model result in a slower build up of debt, so that the collateral constraint is expect to start binding a period later than under RE, and then to bind with lower shadow values (i.e. lower  $\mu$ 's) than under RE until period 10. However, since as of date 41 beliefs still favor

overborrowing over the long run, relative to rational expectations (compare the projected long-run debt distribution of bonds for period 41 with the ergodic RE distribution in Figure (6)), agents project that the borrowing constraint will eventually become more binding in the BL model than in the RE model, and hence they project that land returns will converge to a higher level.

### 3.2.5 Sensitivity Analysis

We now conduct a sensitivity analysis to study how changing the model’s key parameters alters our main findings. To simplify the exposition, we focus only on the turning point effects. We examine first in Table 3 various scenarios changing the initial priors, because, as we argued earlier, the initial priors play a central role in the model. Then we study in Table 4 changes in the values of  $\kappa^h$ ,  $\kappa^l$ ,  $\beta$  and  $R$ . The second column of both tables shows the results for the BL model for comparison. Note that, in general, the parameterizations that generate larger booms during the optimistic phase also generate larger busts in the financial crisis.

Scenario (1) in Table 3 shows the results obtained by setting uniformly-distributed initial priors ( $n_0 = 1$ ). In this scenario, debt dynamics are qualitatively the same as in the BL model but the debt buildup is smaller (9 percentage points v. 22 in BL). Moreover, the price of land falls to a level about 2 percentage points lower in period 40 than in period 1, which is sharply at odds with the nearly 12 percentage points increase produced in the BL model. The reason for this is that, throughout the optimistic phase, the beliefs about the persistence of  $\kappa^h$  with the uniform priors are always lower than in the BL model. As explained before, the initial means of the two distributions

Table 3: Sensitivity on Priors

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	
BL	$n_0 = 1$	$n_0 = 0.01$	$n_0^{hh} = 0.54$ $n_0^{ll} = 0.54$	$n_0^{ll} = 68$ $n_0^{hh} = 1$	
$E[(b/y)_{40} - (b/y)_0]$	-0.223	-0.087	-0.243	-0.222	-0.221
$E[(ql/y)_{40} - (ql/y)_0]$	0.122	-0.020	0.142	0.121	0.121
$E[(b/y)_{48} - (b/y)_{40}]$	0.254	0.137	0.274	0.253	0.254
$E[(ql/y)_{48} - (ql/y)_{40}]$	-0.121	-0.006	-0.141	-0.120	-0.123

Note: The first column reproduces the baseline scenario results. The exercise conducted is the same as that explained in the note for Table 2 with different parameter values as indicated in column headings.

of priors are the same (0.5), but with the BL priors agents turn optimistic faster after starting to observe  $\kappa^h$ s and reach a higher level of optimism.

Examining the forecast functions of land prices we found that prices with uniform priors follow a u-shaped trajectory in the optimistic phase, instead of the monotonically increasing path displayed in the BL case. The reason for this is the more gradual buildup of optimism with the uniform priors, which affects the relative magnitude of the effects of higher mean and higher variance of  $\kappa$  on land prices after financial innovation. In the early years, the effect of higher variance dominates that of higher mean, causing a decline in the price of land, until agents have turned optimistic enough. As agents observe more  $\kappa^h$ s, and sufficient optimism builds up, the higher mean dominates the higher variance, but under uniform priors this requires a longer sequence of  $\kappa^h$  than in the baseline case. Thus, if we look at an optimistic phase of more than 40 periods with the uniform priors, we again find that at the peak of the optimistic phase the price of land is higher than in period 1.

The financial crisis effects on land prices and debt are also much weaker under the uniform priors than in the BL scenario, again because of the more gradual adjustment of beliefs (now in the switch to pessimistic beliefs and the buildup of pessimism). Debt adjusts by 14 percentage points instead of 25, and the price of land falls only by 0.6 of a percentage point, instead of nearly 12 percentage points.

Reducing the initial priors to  $n_0 = 0.01$  in Scenario (2) moves the model further away from uniform priors than in the BL case (which was calibrated to  $n_0 = 0.0205$ ), with even more of the mass of the initial distributions of beliefs concentrated around 0 and 1. Consequently, when agents observe the first  $\kappa^h$  they turn more optimistic than in the BL case, and hence they borrow more and demand more of the risky asset. This produces larger debt and land price booms. The size of the debt buildup is about 24 percentage points and the boom in the price of land reaches 14 percentage points. Similar effects are at work, but in the opposite direction, in the pessimistic phase, and hence with  $n_0 = 0.01$  we find a larger correction in debt and a larger drop in land prices in the financial crisis.

In Scenario (3) we increase  $n_0^{hh}$  and  $n_0^{ll}$  so that  $E_0^s[F] = E_0^a[F]$ , which requires  $n_0^{hh} = n_0^{ll} = 0.54$ , while keeping  $n_0^{hl}$  and  $n_0^{lh}$  at the BL calibration values of 0.0205 (i.e. in this case the continuation counters and the switching counters differ). The aim here is to start agents off with distributions of priors that have means that happen to be equal to the true persistence parameters of the  $\kappa$  regimes. Since agents have no way of knowing that this is the case, however, they still update their beliefs as they observe subsequent realizations of  $\kappa$ . This scenario yields results very similar to

the BL model. This is because with  $n_0^{hh} = n_0^{ll} = 0.54$  and  $n_0^{hl} = n_0^{lh} = 0.0205$  agents still face significant uncertainty about the true regime-switching structure of the credit regimes, and hence they still turn quite optimistic. In fact, their initial beliefs about  $E^s[F_{hh}]$  are more optimistic in Scenario (3) than in the BL case (in the latter they start with  $E_0^s[F_{hh}] = 0.5$  v.  $E_0^s[F_{hh}] = 0.964$  in Scenario (3)). This does not, however, translate into significantly more borrowing because these differences in initial optimism become small after a few periods, since the BL model also generates a substantial amount of optimism relatively quickly.

Next we investigate a scenario that assumes that the  $\kappa^l$  realizations observed during the pre-innovation period are “informative” (Scenario (4)). This runs contrary to our assumption that a true structural financial innovation took place in the beginning of 1997, so that any information about the financial environment prior to that date became useless. Since the BL calibration sets  $\kappa^l$  at the value of the pre-financial-innovation era, However, one could argue that  $\kappa^l$  had been observed for a while before financial innovation, and thus agents could have learned about its persistence. Accordingly, Scenario (4) sets the initial priors such that agents take into account the realizations of  $\kappa^l$  during 1980-1996 ( $n_0^{ll} = 68$  observations) and 1 transition from  $\kappa^l$  to  $\kappa^h$  right at the beginning of innovation ( $n_0^{hh} = 1$ ). This scenario is also akin to a formulation in which we could bias the initial priors so as to make agents perceive a much higher probability of continuation of a low-leverage regime.

The priors in Scenario (4) imply  $E_0^s[F_{ll}] = 0.985$  v.  $E_0^s[F_{ll}] = 0.5$  in the BL model. With the modified priors, agents believe that when or if the economy transits into the  $\kappa^l$  regime, it will stay there for some time. As a result, during the earlier periods of the optimistic phase the conjectured ergodic distributions of bonds are double-peaked with a large mass around the mean conditional on  $\kappa^l$ . This implies that unconditional mean debt is smaller than in the BL model during the optimistic phase. Conversely, we find higher debt levels during the pessimistic phase in Scenario (4) because, having observed one transition from  $\kappa^l$  to  $\kappa^h$ , the agents turn less pessimistic compared to the BL case. Despite these differences in conjectured long-run distributions, the turning-points dynamics reported in Table 3 do not differ much across Scenario (4) and the BL case. This is because, despite the differences in unconditional means, the means conditional on  $\kappa$  do not differ much, and this occurs because the forecast functions used for the turning points use the history  $\kappa^T$  described earlier and we also kept  $n_0^{hl}$  and  $n_0^{lh}$  unchanged. Thus the evolution of  $E_t^s[F_{hh}]$  is also the same and this results in similar dynamics for the first 40 periods in which  $\kappa^h$  is observed.

Summing up, the sensitivity analysis covered in Table 3 illustrates the importance of the initial priors. In particular, what is crucial for the size of the booms and busts in debt and land prices is that the new financial regime is truly a structural change, in terms of agents having very limited knowledge about the transition and continuation probabilities of  $\kappa^h$ . To be precise, for the model to generate sizable booms and busts, agents having never observed  $\kappa^h$  being ignorant about the likelihood of transitions from  $\kappa^h$  to  $\kappa^l$  is crucial. This is evident in the fact that the results for Scenario (1) with uniform priors are far less favorable than the BL model and the other three scenarios. In this scenario, agents have “stronger” priors about the persistence of  $\kappa^h$ , because  $n_0=1$  implies that they have observed one transition from  $\kappa^h$  to  $\kappa^l$  and also one from  $\kappa^h$  to  $\kappa^h$ . Hence, they can rule out the possibility of  $\kappa^h$  being close to absorbent. In addition, Scenario (4) shows that we can allow the priors about  $\kappa^l$  to reflect a high number of observed realizations of that regime, but as long as  $n^{hh}$  and  $n^{hl}$  are low, the magnitude of the boom and crash in debt and land prices remain about the same as in the BL case. The same applies to scenarios (1) and (2), because both of these use initial counters that are distant from 1.

The above results also highlight the importance of our criterion to calibrate the initial priors in the BL exercise to match the observed excess return in the 1997:Q1 RMBS. Clearly the initial counters can be set arbitrarily low enough to generate large effects or high enough to minimize the effects of optimistic and pessimistic expectations, so having a data-based criterion to discipline the values of the initial counters is very useful in helping us assess the potential relevance of the model.

We now turn to Table 4 which reports the turning-point effects in scenarios that change  $R$ ,  $\kappa^h$ ,  $\kappa^l$ , and  $\beta$ . Scenario (1) considers a lower value of  $R$ , and is motivated by the observation that interest rates declined at around the same time as the beginning of financial innovation, and remained very low since then. Hence, one may argue that, because of U.S. financial innovation, or because of other forces like the large purchases of U.S. T-bills from China, the real interest rate fell along with the increase in the U.S. agents’ ability to borrow.<sup>25</sup> Accordingly, we changed  $R$  to the average interest rate for the period 1997-2008 in the data, which is 0.98 percent (as opposed to the 1980-1996 average of 2.66 percent used in the BL case).

With the lower  $R$ , the new long-run means of debt and land price are considerably larger,  $E[b/y]$  goes down from -0.36 in the RE and BL to -0.41, and the land price increases from 0.45 to 0.53.

---

<sup>25</sup>This experiment is also motivated by the fact that in the model  $R$  is exogenous. Clearly if we maintained the same setting of the BL model and endogenized  $R$ , the boom in debt would be weakened by an endogenous increase in  $R$ . But in the data the opposite was observed, so we opted for an alternative in which we keep  $R$  exogenous but allow it to change to approximate its observed decline.

Table 4: Sensitivity on Other Parameters

		(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	BL	$R=1.0098$	$\kappa^l=0.75$	$\kappa^h=0.8$	$\beta=0.95$
$E[(b/y)_{40} - (b/y)_0]$	-0.223	-0.248	-0.240	-0.143	-0.237
$E[(ql/y)_{40} - (ql/y)_0]$	0.122	0.158	0.140	0.120	0.140
$E[(b/y)_{48} - (b/y)_{40}]$	0.254	0.208	0.157	0.175	0.175
$E[(ql/y)_{48} - (ql/y)_{40}]$	-0.121	-0.038	-0.059	-0.120	0.098

Note: The first column reproduces the baseline scenario results. The exercise conducted is the same as that explained in the note for Table 2 with different parameter values as indicated in column headings.

Intuitively, since  $R$  falls, the asset price needs to go up in equilibrium in order for the expected returns of these two to be equated. In addition to these changes in long-run averages, Scenario (1) in Table 4 shows that lower  $R$  generates larger increases in debt and asset prices than the BL case during the optimistic phase. Lower interest rates support higher asset prices which in turn relax the borrowing constraint allowing the agents to borrow more.<sup>26</sup> Note, however, that in the crisis the correction in debt is about 5 percentage points smaller, and the decline in the price of land is significantly smaller. Thus, considering falling real interest rates that coincide with the arrival of financial innovation enlarges the size of the debt and land price booms predicted by the model, but it makes the reversal of both smaller.

Increasing  $\kappa^l$  in Scenario (2) increases the size of booms in debt and land prices slightly. Note that the change only applies to the value of  $\kappa^l$  in the new financial regime, while the pre-innovation value of  $\kappa$  remains unchanged at its baseline value of 0.642. The larger debt and price booms occur, even though we still have the same sequence of 40 realizations of  $\kappa^h$  as in the BL case, because agents take into account the fact that with the higher  $\kappa^l$  the low-leverage regime is not as low as in the BL case. This results in both a higher mean and a lower variance of  $\kappa$ , which support both larger debt and higher land prices. The size of the reversals in debt and land prices are smaller because  $\kappa^l$  is higher than in the baseline, and thus allows agents to borrow more than in the BL

<sup>26</sup>In calculating turning points we measure the size of the boom relative to the 1996Q4 values in the data. If we were to measure the size of the boom as deviations from long run means, the boom during the optimistic phase would be smaller in this scenario compared to the BL case, because the long-run means of debt and land price are higher, as explained in the previous paragraph.

case, and the resulting direct and indirect effects of the collateral constraint on asset prices are weaker.

Reducing  $\kappa^h$  to 0.8 (Scenario (3)) reduces the size of the debt buildup, because of the tighter credit constraint in the high-leverage regime in this experiment, and reduces also the size of the debt reversal in the crisis, because debt falls from a lower level at the peak of the boom. The land price boom and crash change only marginally.

Finally, Scenario (4) shows results for a higher value of  $\beta$  (0.95 v. 0.91 in the BL case). The higher discount factor supports higher asset prices, because agents discount the future less. Since the collateral constraint becomes binding early in the optimistic phase, these higher asset prices translate into higher debt levels.<sup>27</sup> Hence, this scenario delivers slightly larger debt and land price booms than in the BL case during the optimistic phase. In contrast, the financial crisis effects with higher  $\beta$  are weaker than in the BL model, particularly in the case of asset prices (which recover quickly after a decline in period 41 and reach levels higher than pre-crisis by period 48).

## 4 Conclusion

The U.S. financial crisis was preceded by a decade of fast growth in household debt, residential land prices, and leverage, accompanied by far-reaching financial innovation with the introduction of new instruments and deep changes in the regulatory framework. In this paper, we argued that financial innovation in an environment with imperfect information and credit frictions was a central factor behind the credit and land price booms that led to the crisis, and in the transmission mechanism that drove the crisis itself. To make these points, we examined the interaction between financial innovation, learning, and a Fisherian collateral constraint in a stochastic equilibrium model of household debt and land prices.

We used the model to study the quantitative implications of an experiment calibrated to U.S. data in which financial innovation begins with a switch to a high-leverage regime, but agents do not know the true regime-switching probabilities across high- and low-leverage regimes. Agents are Bayesian learners, however, so in the long-run, after observing a long history of realizations of leverage regimes, they learn the true regime-switching transition probabilities. The collateral constraint introduces Fisher's classic debt-deflation amplification mechanism, providing a vehicle for the waves of optimism and pessimism produced by Bayesian learning to have amplification

---

<sup>27</sup>By contrast, in the long run, as the model converges to RE and the constraint does not bind, the higher  $\beta$  brings  $\beta R$  closer to 1, which strengthens precautionary savings incentives and *reduces* debt.

effects on debt and land prices. In this regard, this paper offers a novel analysis in which the Fisherian feedback loop between debt and asset prices interacts with the formation of beliefs, both of which we are at the core of Fisher's original arguments on the debt-deflation theory.

In our setup, a buildup of optimism is a natural consequence of financial innovation, because agents start without enough data to correctly evaluate the riskiness of the new environment. Calibrating the leverage regimes to data on the ratio of household debt to residential land values, and the initial priors to the excess returns on the 30-year Fannie Mae RMBS in early 1997, the model predicts that agents would turn very optimistic very quickly between the mid-1990s and the mid-2000s, after observing only a few quarters of the high-leverage regime.

The debt-deflation channel plays an important role because, as optimism builds up and land prices rise, the agents' ability to borrow also grows. Similarly, when optimism turns to pessimism, after the first observation of the low-leverage regime, which we dated at the beginning of 2007, after the start of the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the Fall of 2006, the debt-deflation channel amplifies the reversals in debt and asset prices. This occurs because fire-sales of land drive down land prices and reduce the agents' ability to borrow.

The interaction of the learning friction and the debt-deflation mechanism generates substantial overborrowing, which accounts for almost two-thirds of the increase in net debt of U.S. households, and about two-fifths of the boom in residential land prices, observed between 1997 and 2006. Moreover, the model also predicts a credit crunch, a crash in land values, a collapse in consumption and a surge in private savings after the first realization of the low-leverage regime. In contrast, the size of the debt and price booms, and the subsequent collapses, are significantly smaller in variants of the model that remove the learning friction or the debt-deflation mechanism.

Our work has important implications for the ongoing debate on financial reforms to prevent future crises. First, since by definition the true riskiness of a truly brand-new financial regime cannot be correctly evaluated when the new regime starts, and little or no data is available on its performance, exposure to the credit boom-bust process we studied in this paper comes along with the potential benefits of financial innovation. Hence, close supervision of financial intermediaries in the early stages of financial innovation is critical.

Second, the interaction of information frictions and collateral constraints can strengthen the case for macro-prudential policies. Using the model developed in this paper, [Bianchi et al. \(2012\)](#) conduct normative analysis and find that macro-prudential policies have potential to contain boom-bust cycles if regulators have access to better information than the private agents. Conversely,

assuming that policymakers are as uninformed as households about how financial markets will perform after radical structural changes, taxes on debt can address overborrowing due to the credit externality, but not due to optimistic beliefs.

Third, the ongoing financial reform process (e.g. Basle III, the Dodd-Frank act) is a new round of radical innovation in capital markets, now tightening the legal and regulatory framework, which will affect the types of securities that will be available and the size of the markets in which they will trade. Hence, agents once again will have to evaluate the riskiness of the new financial environment with beliefs based on imperfect information. As a result, the risk exists that a few years of slow credit growth and poor performance in asset markets can lead to the buildup of pessimistic expectations that will hamper the recovery of financial markets.

## References

- Adam, K., Kuang, P., and Marcet, A. (2011). House price booms and the current account. mimeo.
- Bernanke, B. (2005). The global saving glut and the u.s. current account deficit. Sandridge lecture, Virginia Association of Economics.
- Bianchi, J. (2011). Overborrowing and systemic externalities in the business cycle. *American Economic Review*, 101:3400–3426.
- Bianchi, J., Boz, E., and Mendoza, E. G. (2012). Macro-prudential policy in fisherian model of financial innovation. *IMF Economic Review*, 60:223–269.
- Blanchard, O. J., L’Huillier, J.-P., and Lorenzoni, G. (2008). News, noise and fluctuations: An empirical exploration. mimeo, MIT.
- Boz, E. (2009). Can miracles lead to crises? the role of optimism in emerging market crises. *Journal of Money, Credit, and Banking*, 41:1189–1215.
- Boz, E., Daude, C., and Durdu, B. (2011). Emerging market business cycles: Learning about the trend. *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 58:616–631.
- Caballero, R. and Krishnamurthy, A. (2008). Collective risk management in a flight to quality episode. *Journal of Finance*, 63:2195–2230.
- Campbell, J. R. and Hercowitz, Z. (2009). Welfare implications of the transition to high household debt? *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 56:1–6.
- Cogley, T. and Sargent, T. J. (2008a). Anticipated utility and rational expectations as approximations of bayesian decision making. *International Economic Review*, 49:185–221.
- Cogley, T. and Sargent, T. J. (2008b). The market price of risk and the equity premium: A legacy of the great depression? *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 55:454–478.
- Corbae, D. and Quintin, E. (2009). Mortgage innovation and the foreclosure boom. mimeo, University of Texas at Austin.
- Davis, M. A. and Heathcote, J. (2007). The price and quantity of residential land in the united states. *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 54:2595–2620.

- Drew, J. (2008). The frezy. *the Washington Post*. 12/16/2008.
- Durdu, C. B., Mendoza, E. G., and Terrones, M. (2009). Precautionary demand for foreign assets in sudden stop economies: An assessment of the new merchantalism. *Journal of Development Economics*, 89:194–209.
- Edge, R. M., Laubach, T., and Williams, J. C. (2007). Learning and shifts in long-run productivity growth. *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 54:2421–2438.
- Evans, G. W. and Honkapohja, S. (1999). *Learning Dynamics*. Elsevier.
- Favilukis, J., Ludvigson, S. C., and Van Nieuwerburgh, S. (2010). The macroeconomic effects of housing wealth, housing finance, and limited risk-sharing in general equilibrium. mimeo.
- Ferrero, A. (2012). House price booms, current account deficits, and low interest rates. Technical Report 541, Federal Reserve Bank of New York Staff Reports.
- Fisher, I. (1933). The debt-deflation theory of great depressions. *Econometrica*, 1:337–357.
- Gertler, M. and Kiyotaki, N. (2010). Financial intermediation and credit policy in business cycle analysis. *Handbook of Monetary Economics*, 3:547–599.
- Goetzmann, W. N. and Newman, F. (2010). Securitization in the 1920's. Working Paper 15650, NBER.
- Howitt, P. (2011). Learning, leverage and stability. mimeo, Brown University.
- Jermann, U. and Quadrini, V. (2006). Financial innovations and macroeconomic volatility. Working Paper 12308, NBER.
- Korinek, A. (2008). Excessive dollar borrowing in emerging markets: Balance sheet effects and macroeconomic externalities. mimeo, University of Maryland.
- Lorenzoni, G. (2009). A theory of demand shocks. *American Economic Review*, 99:2050–2084.
- Mendoza, E. G. (2010). Sudden stops, financial crises and leverage. *American Economic Review*, 100:1941–1966.
- Mendoza, E. G. and Quadrini, V. (2010). Financial globalization, financial crises and contagion. *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 57:24–39.

- Mendoza, E. G., Quadrini, V., and Rìos-Rull, J.-V. (2009). Financial integration, financial development, and global imbalances. *Journal of Political Economy*, 117:371–416.
- Mendoza, E. G. and Smith, K. A. (2006). Quantitative implications of a debt-deflation theory of sudden stops and asset prices. *Journal of International Economics*, 70:82–114.
- Mendoza, E. G. and Terrones, M. (2012). An anatomy of credit booms and their demise. mimeo, University of Maryland.
- Reinhart, C. and Rogoff, K. (2009). *This Time is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*. Princeton University Press.
- Tauchen, G. and Hussey, R. (1991). Quadrature-based methods for obtaining approximate solutions to nonlinear asset pricing models. *Econometrica*, 59:371–396.
- Uribe, M. (2006). On overborrowing. *American Economic Review Papers and Proceedings*, 96:417–421.
- Van Nieuwerburgh, S. and Veldkamp, L. (2006). Learning asymmetries in real business cycles. *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 53:753–772.
- Warnock, F. and Warnock, V. C. (2006). International capital flows and u.s. interest rates. International Finance Discussion Paper 840, Federal Reserve Board.
- Zeira, J. (1999). Informational overshooting, booms, and crashes. *Journal of Monetary Economics*, 43:237–257.

## Appendix A Solution Method

We solve each AUOP using an Euler equation method that combines price and policy function iterations using the land pricing equation and the general equilibrium conditions (12)-(15). By proceeding in this way, instead of solving the agents' Bellman equation, we avoid using aggregate states and iterations to converge on the representative agent condition matching individual and aggregate laws of motion for bond holdings.

The full algorithm for solving the recursive AU equilibrium proceeds in these steps:

1. Define a history of realizations  $\kappa^T$  and calculate the sequence of posteriors  $\{f(F^s | \kappa^t)\}_{t=1}^T$ .
2. Take  $\kappa_1$  and the date-1 posterior  $f(F^s | \kappa^1)$  from the sequence in Step 1 and compute  $E_1^s[\kappa'|\kappa] \equiv \begin{bmatrix} E_1[F_{hh}^s] & 1 - E_1[F_{hh}^s] \\ 1 - E_1[F_{ll}^s] & E_1[F_{ll}^s] \end{bmatrix}$ .
3. Using  $E_1^s[\kappa'|\kappa]$  and a guess for the land pricing function  $q_1(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$ , solve for the date-1 equilibrium conditions using a policy function iteration algorithm.
4. Use the resulting policy functions  $[b'_1(b, z, \kappa), c_1(b, z, \kappa), \mu_1(b, z, \kappa)]$  from Step 3 and the asset pricing equation (11) to compute a new pricing function  $\hat{q}_1(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$ .
5. Compare  $\hat{q}_1(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$  and  $q_1(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$ , if they satisfy a convergence criterion then the decision rules  $[b'_1(b, z, \kappa), c_1(b, z, \kappa), \mu_1(b, z, \kappa)]$  and the pricing function  $q_1(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$  are the solutions of the date-1 AUOP. If not, construct a new guess of the pricing function using a Gauss-Siedel rule and return to Step 3.
6. Move to the date-2 with history  $\kappa^2$  and posterior  $f(F^s | \kappa^2)$  from Step 1. Compute the Markov transition matrix  $E_2^s[\kappa'|\kappa]$ , and return to Step 3 in order to solve for the date-2 AUOP. Repeat for each date- $t$  history  $\kappa^t$  and posterior  $f(F^s | \kappa^t)$  for  $t = 1, \dots, T$  solving each time for the corresponding date- $t$  AUOP.

The passive Bayesian learning has important implications that can be useful in implementing the above algorithm:

1. The solutions to each date- $t$  AUOP are not functionally related (i.e., solving a particular date- $t$  problem does not require knowing anything about the solution for any other date). Thus, the model can be solved by solving each date- $t$  AUOP independently.<sup>28</sup> Still, we can speed

---

<sup>28</sup>This fact can be used to develop a strategy to speed up the full solution of the model, because in a computer with  $n$  number of cores, we can solve  $n$  AUOPs for  $n$  different dates simultaneously.

convergence if, whenever  $\|f(F^s | \kappa^{t+j}) - f(F^s | \kappa^t)\|$  is small enough under some metric, we use for the date  $t + j$  AUOP initial guesses given by the date- $t$  AUOP.

2. If  $j \leq T$  is large enough for  $f(F^s | \kappa^{t+j})$  to converge to  $F^a$  (for some convergence criterion), the solutions for all dates  $t \geq j$  collapse to a standard recursive RE equilibrium using the true Markov process  $F^a$ .
3. Since the full equilibrium solution of the intertemporal sequence of allocations and prices from dates 1 to  $T$  is obtained by chaining the solutions of each date- $t$  AUOP (for  $t = 1, \dots, T$ ), one can think of solving the recursive equilibrium for a set of different histories  $[\kappa_i^T]_{i=1}^I$ , each supporting a different sequence of posterior densities  $f(F^s | \kappa_i^t)_{t=1}^T$ . We consider only one history  $\kappa^T$  because we take the stance that the financial innovation experiment we look at in the data can be represented by a particular history  $\kappa^T$ , intended to match the observed financial regimes between 1997 and 2007. The alternative would be to generate a set of  $I$  “potential” histories  $[\kappa_i^T]_{i=1}^I$ , which could be done using the true Markov process  $F^a$ , solve the model for each, and then take averages across these different solutions at each date  $t$ .

## Appendix B Computation of Ergodic Distributions, Forecast Functions, Excess Returns

### B.1 Ergodic Distribution and Forecast Functions under Rational Expectations

Define the *date  $t$  probability distribution* over bonds, productivity and collateral coefficients in the RE model as  $\lambda_t(b, z, \kappa)$ . The law of motion that governs the evolution of this distribution over time is:

$$\lambda_{t+1}(b', z', \kappa') = \sum_z \sum_{\kappa} \sum_{\{b': g(b, z, \kappa)\}} \lambda_t(b, z, \kappa) \pi(z' | z) p(\kappa' | \kappa)$$

where  $g(b, z, \kappa)$  is the policy function that sets the optimal decision rule for bonds,  $\pi(z' | z)$  is the Markov transition probability for productivity shocks, and  $p(\kappa' | \kappa)$  is the true Markov transition probability of  $\kappa$  (with the two Markov processes assumed to be independent). The unconditional limiting distribution of bonds, productivity and collateral coefficients is given by  $\lambda(b, z, \kappa)$ , and it represents the fixed point of the above law of motion. The algorithm computes the ergodic distribution exactly in this way, by performing iterations of the law of motion until  $\lambda_t(b, z, \kappa)$  and  $\lambda_{t+1}(b', z', \kappa')$  satisfy a convergence criterion.

*Forecast functions* are averages of the model's endogenous variables computed at each date  $t$  using the corresponding distribution  $\lambda_t(b, z, \kappa)$ , starting from any initial condition  $(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0)$  with distribution  $\lambda_0(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0) = 1$ . By construction, just like iterations on the above law of motion of probabilities converge to the long-run distribution, forecast functions converge to unconditional long-run averages computed with the ergodic distribution, regardless of the initial conditions (as long as the ergodic distribution itself is unique and invariant).

Given  $\lambda_t(b, z, \kappa)$ , the *date- $t$  conditional probability distribution* over  $\kappa^i$  for  $i = h, l$  is defined as follows:

$$\tilde{\lambda}_t(b, z | \kappa^i) = \frac{\lambda_t(b, z, \kappa^i)}{\sum_b \sum_z \lambda_t(b, z, \kappa^i)}$$

*Conditional forecast functions* are averages for the models endogenous variables computed at each date  $t$  using the corresponding distribution  $\tilde{\lambda}_t(b, z | \kappa^i)$ . By construction, as  $\lambda_t(b, z, \kappa^i) \rightarrow \lambda(b, z, \kappa)$ , the date- $t$  conditional distribution  $\tilde{\lambda}_t(b, z | \kappa^i)$  converges to the corresponding long-run conditional distribution  $\tilde{\lambda}(b, z | \kappa^i)$ . Moreover, conditional forecast functions of any endogenous variable converge to the corresponding conditional long-run average.

## B.2 AU Forecast Functions in the Learning Model

The learning model has dynamics in the beliefs about the transition probability matrix of  $\kappa$ , and hence the RE definitions of conditional and unconditional forecast functions do not apply. Intuitively, one can construct a set of forecast functions and ergodic distributions by using the corresponding date- $t$  beliefs to form all the expectations about future states. In light of this, we define forecast functions in the AU learning model by averaging only over productivity shocks and tracking the decision rules produced at each date by the corresponding set of beliefs and the corresponding date's AU optimization problem. Specifically, we compute forecast functions in the learning model as follows: Take as given  $(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0)$ , then the relevant values of the forecast function of bonds in a

learning period of length  $T$  with a sequence of realizations  $[\kappa_t]_{t=0}^T$  are:

$$\begin{aligned}
\hat{b}_1 &= E [b_1 | (b_0, z_0, \kappa_0), f(F^s | \kappa^0)] = h_0(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0; f(F^s | \kappa^0)) \\
\hat{b}_2 &= E [b_2 | b_0, f(F^s | \kappa^1)] = \sum_{z^1} \sum_{\{b_1: b_2 = h_1(b_1, z_1, \kappa_1)\}} \pi(z^1 | z_0) h_1(b_1, z_1, \kappa_1; f(F^s | \kappa^1)) \\
\hat{b}_3 &= E [b_3 | b_0, f(F^s | \kappa^2)] = \sum_{z^2} \sum_{\{b_2: b_3 = h_2(b_2, z_2, \kappa_2)\}} \pi(z^2 | z_0) h_2(b_2, z_2, \kappa_2; f(F^s | \kappa^2)) \\
&\dots\dots \\
\hat{b}_{T+1} &= E [b_{T+1} | b_0, f(F^s | \kappa^T)] = \sum_{z^T} \sum_{\{b_T: b_{T+1} = h_T(b_T, z_T, \kappa_T)\}} \pi(z^T | z_0) h_T(b_T, z_T, \kappa_T; f(F^s | \kappa^T))
\end{aligned}$$

where  $\pi(z^t | z_0) = \pi(z_t | z_{t-1})\pi(z_{t-1} | z_{t-2})\dots\pi(z_1 | z_0)$  is the probability of a particular history of realizations of productivity up to date  $t$  (for  $t \geq 0$ ),  $[f(F^s | \kappa^t)]_{t=0}^T$  is the sequence of beliefs, and  $h_t(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t; f(F^s | \kappa^t))$  is the optimal decision rule for bonds determined by the date- $t$  AUOP using the date- $t$  beliefs and evaluated for the states  $(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$ . Note that because of the recursive structure of the  $\hat{b}_t$ 's, the expectations that form these forecast functions are conditional not just on date-0 states (i.e.,  $(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0)$ ), but on the history of realizations  $[\kappa_t]_{t=0}^T$  and the history of beliefs  $[f(F^s | \kappa^t)]_{t=0}^T$ .

The equivalent objects to compare with in the rational expectations model are:

$$\begin{aligned}
\tilde{b}_1 &= E [b_1 | (b_0, z_0, \kappa_0)] = g(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0) \\
\tilde{b}_2 &= E [b_2 | b_0] = \sum_{z^1} \sum_{\{b_1: b_2 = g(b_1, z_1, \kappa_1)\}} \pi(z^1 | z_0) g(b_1, z_1, \kappa_1) \\
\tilde{b}_3 &= E [b_3 | b_0] = \sum_{z^2} \sum_{\{b_2: b_3 = g(b_2, z_2, \kappa_2)\}} \pi(z^2 | z_0) g(b_2, z_2, \kappa_2) \\
&\dots\dots \\
\tilde{b}_{T+1} &= E [b_{T+1} | b_0] = \sum_{z^T} \sum_{\{b_T: b_{T+1} = g(b_T, z_T, \kappa_T)\}} \pi(z^T | z_0) g(b_T, z_T, \kappa_T)
\end{aligned}$$

We can also express the forecast functions of the learning model with a slight modification of the treatment used under rational expectations. Define the probability distribution of TFP shocks and bond holdings at date  $t$  in the learning model as  $\chi_t(b, z)$ . The law of motion for the evolution of this probability over time, given the history  $\kappa^T$  of realizations of the leverage regimes, is defined as follows:

$$\chi_{t+1}(b', z') = \sum_b \sum_z \chi_t(b, z) \pi(z' | z) I_t(b', b, z, \kappa_t)$$

where  $I_t(b', b, z, \kappa_t)$  is a binary indicator such that  $I_t(b', b, z, \kappa_t) = 1 \leftrightarrow b' = h_t(b, z, \kappa_t; f(F^s | \kappa^t))$  and zero otherwise.

At date-0, for example, we have  $\chi_0(b_0, z_0) = 1$  for the particular initial conditions  $(b_0, z_0)$ , and  $\chi_0(b, z) = 0$  for all other pairs  $(b, z)$ . We also have that:

$$I_t(b', b, z, \kappa_t) = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } b' = h_t(b, z, \kappa_t; f(F^s | \kappa^t)), \\ 0 & \text{otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

We could add the indicators for all other possible initial conditions, but since they satisfy  $\chi_0(b, z) = 0$  they wash out from the law of motion from date 0 to 1. Hence we get  $\chi_1(h_0(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0; f(F^s | \kappa^0)), z')$   $= \pi(z' | z_0)$  for each  $z'$  and zero otherwise (for all pairs  $(b', z')$  such that  $b' \neq h_0(b_0, z_0, \kappa_0; f(F^s | \kappa^0))$ ).

Now we can compute the expected bonds chosen at date 1 for beginning of period 2 as:  $\hat{b}_2 = E[b_2 | b_0, f(F^s | \kappa^1)] = \sum_b \sum_z \chi_1(b, z) h_1(b, z, \kappa_1; f(F^s | \kappa^1))$ . At this point we can add over all values of bonds in the state space because the probabilities already have incorporated the information relevant for the “correct” bond positions that the system can land on in period 2 in the learning model.

Alternatively, we can define the probability law of motion as:

$$\chi_{t+1}(b', z') = \sum_z \sum_{\{b: b' = h_t(b, z, \kappa_t; f(F^s | \kappa^t))\}} \chi_t(b, z) \pi(z' | z)$$

In writing it this way, we take out the indicator function but keep track of only the relevant initial states that can land in each  $b'$  by constraining the set of  $b'$ s over which the summation is taken.

### B.3 Expected Returns $j$ Periods Ahead of Date $t$

Choose an initial triple  $(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$  with initial bond holdings set to  $b_t = \hat{b}_t$ .  $t$  is the period for which we are going to calculate the sequence of expected returns  $j$  periods ahead.  $\hat{b}_t$  stands for the mean bond holdings at period  $t$  obtained from the forecast functions.  $z_t$  is set equal to 1.  $\kappa_t$  is set to its value used in the forecast function calculations for the corresponding period  $t$ . We calculate expected returns for any date  $t + 1 + j$  as of date  $t$ . This calculation involves a numerator with the sum of dividends and price of date  $t + 1 + j$ ,  $[q_t(b_{t+j+1}, z_{t+j+1}, \kappa_{t+j+1}) + d(z_{t+j+1})]$ , and a denominator with the price as of date  $t + j$ ,  $q_t(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j})$ , all of which are projected as of the initial date  $t$ .

We proceed in two steps. First, we calculate the probability tree of possible states in which the economy can land conditional on the initial triple  $(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$  up to  $J$  periods ahead. The events that we are capturing in this probability tree are the combinations of TFP and  $\kappa$  shocks. Second, we construct the  $E_t^s[R_{t+1+j}^q]$  sequence for  $j = 0, 1, \dots, J$ . Finally, as a cross check we recover the asset price in state  $(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$  of date  $t$ , i.e.,  $q_t(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$ , using the sequence  $E_t^s \left( \frac{1}{E_{t+j}^s[R_{t+1+j}^q]} \right)$  to recalculate the date- $t$  price as the present discounted value of dividends discounted by expected returns.

In the first step to calculate the probability tree we put all the mass on the initial state that we are conditioning our calculations on for  $j = 0$ . In other words,

$$\lambda_t^t(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t) = 1.$$

Going forward these distributions evolve according to:

$$\lambda_{t+j+1}^t(b_{t+j+1}, z_{t+j+1}, \kappa_{t+j+1}) = \sum_{z_{t+j+1}} \sum_{\kappa_{t+j+1}} \sum_{b_{t+j+1} \in H_{t+j+1}} \lambda_{t+j}^t(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j}) \pi(z_{t+j+1} | z_{t+j}) E_t^s(\kappa_{t+j+1} | \kappa_{t+j})$$

for  $j = 0, 1, \dots, J$ .  $H_{t+j+1}$  is the set of bond holdings chosen conditional on a triple  $(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j})$ , which is defined as  $H_{t+j+1} = \{b_{t+j+1} : b_{t+j+1} = h_t(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j} | f(F^s | \kappa^t))\}$ . The superscript  $t$  of  $\lambda_{t+j+1}^t$  highlights the fact that this is the date- $t+j$  element for the law of motion that started with initial conditions  $\lambda_t^t(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$  as of date  $t$ , so that the probabilities are conditional on date  $t$ .

In the second step, to compute the expected returns, we first take the date  $t+j$  element of the sequence of  $\lambda$ 's,  $\lambda_{t+j}^t(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j})$ . Intuitively, this is the equilibrium probability of landing in a particular state  $(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j})$  in period  $t+j$ ,  $j$  periods ahead of the initial period. We then compute expected returns for any  $t+1+j$  conditional on date  $t$  as:

$$\begin{aligned} E_t^s[R_{t+1+j}^q] &= \sum_{z_{t+j+1}} \sum_{\kappa_{t+j+1}} \sum_{b_{t+j+1} \in H_{t+j+1}} \sum_{z_{t+j}} \sum_{\kappa_{t+j}} \lambda_{t+j}^j(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j}) \pi(z_{t+j+1} | z_{t+j}) \\ &\quad \times E_t^s(\kappa_{t+j+1} | \kappa_{t+j}) \frac{q_t(b_{t+j+1}, z_{t+j+1}, \kappa_{t+j+1}) + d(z_{t+j+1})}{q_t(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j})} \end{aligned}$$

where  $d(z) = zg'(l)$ . Note that  $E_t^s[R_{t+1+j}^q]$  is in fact  $E_t^s[R_{t+1+j}^q](b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j})$ . In other words, the one period ahead expected returns depend on the date- $j$  triple  $(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j})$ .

To confirm that the calculations in the first two steps are correct, in the third step we recalculate  $q_t(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t)$  as the sum of expected present discounted value of future dividends where discounting

is done using the equity returns (see Equation 11 in the text):

$$\begin{aligned}
q_t(b_t, z_t, \kappa_t) &= \sum_{j=0}^J \sum_{z_{t+j+1}} \sum_{\kappa_{t+j+1}} \sum_{b_{t+j} \in H_{j+1}} \sum_{z_{t+j}} \sum_{\kappa_{t+j}} \lambda_{t+j}^j(b_{t+j}, z_{t+j}, \kappa_{t+j}) \pi(z_{t+j+1} \mid z_{t+j}) \\
&\quad \times E_t^s(\kappa_{t+j+1} \mid \kappa_{t+j}) \left( \prod_{i=0}^j \left( \frac{1}{E_t^s[R_{t+1+i}^q]} \right) \right) d(z_{t+j+1}).
\end{aligned}$$

To discount date- $t+j+1$  dividend, we divide it by the sum of all one-period-ahead expected returns up to that date. The calculation of expectations in this step utilizes the probability tree computed in the first step.