

Optimal Monetary Policy with Collateralized Household Debt and Borrowing Constraints

Tommaso Monacelli*
IGIER, Università Bocconi and CEPR

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Abstract

We study optimal monetary policy in an economy with nominal private debt, borrowing constraints and price rigidity. Private debt reflects equilibrium trade between an impatient borrower, who faces an endogenous collateral constraint, and a patient saver, who engages in consumption smoothing. Since inflation can positively affect borrower's net worth, monetary policy optimally balances the incentive to offset the price stickiness distortion with the one of marginally affecting the borrower's collateral constraint. We find that the optimal volatility of inflation is increasing in three key parameters: (i) the borrower's weight in the planner's objective function; (ii) the borrower's impatience rate; (iii) the degree of price flexibility. In general, however, deviations from price stability are small for a small degree of price stickiness. In a two-sector version of our model, in which durable price movements can directly affect the ability of borrowing, the optimal volatility of (non-durable) inflation is more sizeable. In our context, and relative to simple Taylor rules, the Ramsey-optimal allocation entails a partial smoothing of real durable goods prices.

Keywords. optimal monetary policy, Ramsey planner, collateral constraint, household debt, sticky prices

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*This paper was prepared for the NBER Conference "Monetary Policy and Asset Prices", 5-6 May 2006. Correspondence to IGIER Università Bocconi, Via Salasco 3/5, 20136 Milan, Italy. Email: tommaso.monacelli@unibocconi.it, Tel: +39-02-58363330, Fax: +39-02-58363332, Web page: www.igier.unibocconi.it/monacelli.

"Debt leverage of all types is often troublesome when one judges the stability of the economy. Should home prices fall, we would have reason to be concerned about mortgage debt".¹

1 Introduction

The sizeable increase in house prices combined with a unprecedented rise in household debt have been among the most important facts observed in several OECD countries in the last decade. In addition, the two facts are usually perceived as mutually reinforcing. The rise in house prices has induced households to increasingly extract equity from their accumulated assets thereby encouraging further borrowing against the realized capital gains. Dynamics of this sort have been considered important in sustaining the level of private spending in several countries, especially during the business cycle downturn of 2001. *Figure 1* displays the dynamics of total private consumption and household mortgage debt. *Figure 2* displays the joint behavior of private consumption and of (an harmonized index of) house prices. It is clear that these three variables display a significant degree of comovement at the business cycle frequency.

Large part of the observed increase in household borrowing has been in the form of collateralized debt. Hence the role of durable goods -especially housing- as an instrument of collateralization has also increased over time. *Figure 3* displays the evolution of mortgage debt (as a prototype form of secured debt) as a share of total outstanding household debt. This share has increased from about 60% in 1952 to about 75% in 2005. If one were to consider also vehicles loans, the share of collateralized debt in the U.S. would rise to about 90%.²

While developments in the housing sector and institutional features in mortgage markets (e.g., prevalence of fixed vs. variable mortgage contracts, importance of equity withdrawal, down-payment and refinancing rates) have become common vocabulary for monetary policymakers around the world, the same issues have received very scant attention in the recent normative analysis of monetary policy.

The monetary policy literature has soared in the last few years within the framework of the so-called New Neoclassical Synthesis (NNS). The NNS framework builds on microfounded models

¹Former Federal Reserve Chairman Greenspan's remarks at America's Community Bankers Annual Convention, Washington, D.C., October 19, 2004.

²Campbell and Hercowitz (2005), Aizcorbe, Kennickell and Moore (2003).

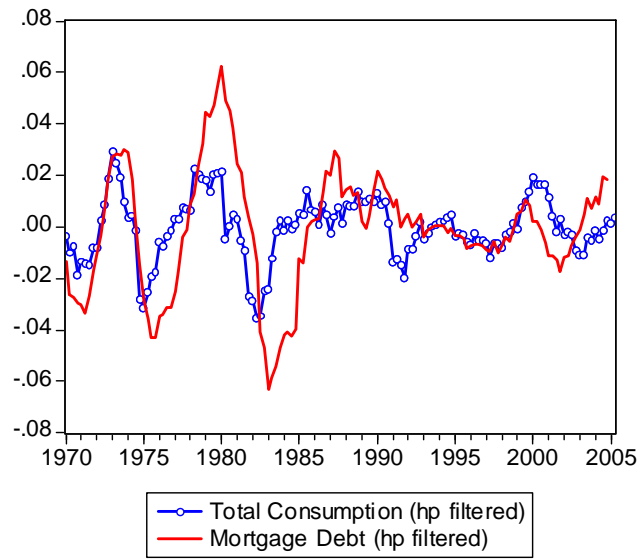


Figure 1: Consumption and Mortgage Debt

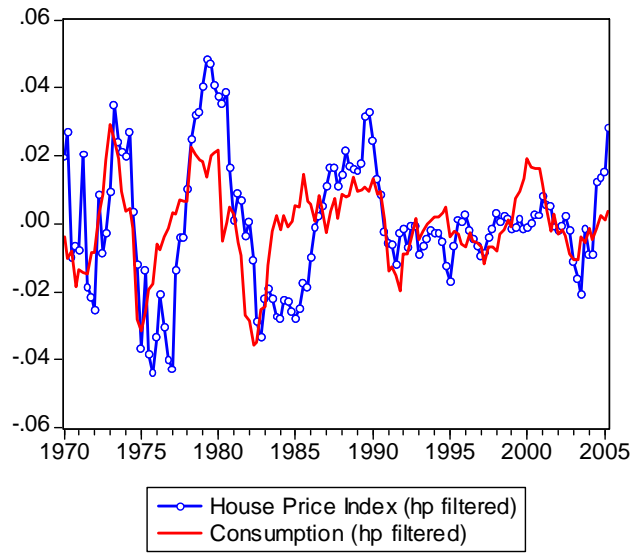


Figure 2: Consumption and House Prices

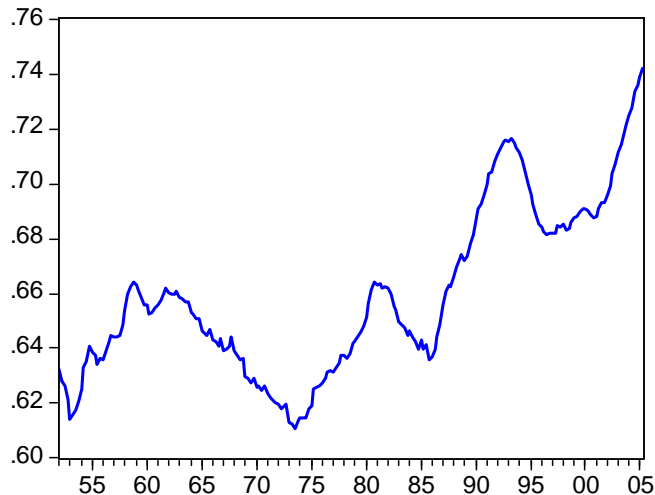


Figure 3: Mortgage Debt as a Share of Total Outstanding Household Debt.

with imperfect competition and nominal rigidities, and has currently emerged as a workhorse paradigm for the normative analysis of monetary policy.³ However, in the NNS, the transmission mechanism of monetary policy remains limited to a typical real interest rate channel on aggregate demand. The latter channel ignores issues related to credit market imperfections, wealth effects linked to the evolution of asset prices, households' heterogeneity in saving rates and determinants of collateralized debt.

Principles of optimal monetary policy within the NNS revolve around the polar star of price stability.⁴ Consider the basic argument for price stability. Suppose, for the sake of exposition, that the economy experiences a positive productivity shock and that prices are completely rigid. Firms are constrained to comply with demand at that given price. Hence they react by raising markups and reducing labor demand. This generates room for a procyclical monetary intervention that, by boosting aggregate demand in line with the higher desired production, validates the strict stability of prices as an equilibrium phenomenon.

Matters are different in a framework in which households display heterogeneous patience rates and the impatient borrowers face a collateral constraint. To understand this argument, we emphasize

³See, among many others, Goodfriend and King (1997), Woodford (2003), Clarida, Gali and Gertler (1999), King and Wolman (1999), Khan et al. (2003).

⁴In fact, much of the existing literature can be interpreted as studying the conditions under which deviating from the price stability paradigm can be consistent with efficiency. See Woodford (2003) for a complete analysis.

two distinct dimensions. First, the role of nominal private debt per se. Second, the role of durable prices in affecting the ability of borrowing by endogenously altering the value of the assets that act as collateral.

Consider the role of debt first. If debt contracts are set in nominal terms, inflation can directly affect household's net worth by reducing the real value of outstanding debt service. Thus inflation can have redistributive effects (from savers to borrowers). The key issue, then, is the extent to which a Ramsey-optimal policy would like to resort to this redistributive margin in equilibrium. Once again, consider a temporary rise in productivity. A constrained household (the borrower), whose marginal utility of current consumption exceeds the marginal utility of saving, would like to increase spending, and do so disproportionately more than an unconstrained agent (the saver), who engages in consumption smoothing. In a model with collateral requirements, the borrower faces a wealth effect on labor supply. In order to sustain the surge in consumption, the borrower needs to optimally balance the purchasing of new debt with an increase in labor supply required to finance new collateral. The tighter the borrowing constraint, the more stringent the necessity of increasing labor supply. Importantly, monetary policy can exert an influence on this margin. By generating inflation, the monetary authority can positively affect borrower's net worth, thereby allowing the constrained household to increase consumption for any given level of work effort.

Thus the presence of nominal debt per se may constitute a motivation for deviating from a price stability prescription. In fact, and to anticipate some key results, our analysis indicates that the optimal volatility of inflation is increasing in two parameters symbolizing heterogeneity: (i) the borrower's weight in the planner's objective function; (ii) the borrower's impatience rate (relative to the saver).

At the same time, though, and due to the presence of price stickiness, inflation is costly. Hence monetary policy will have to optimally balance the incentive to offset the price stickiness distortion with the one of marginally affecting borrower's collateral constraint. Our results point out that, in general, the incentive to offset the price stickiness distortion is predominant and that, already for a small degree of price stickiness, equilibrium deviations from price stability are small.

Next consider the role of durable (asset) prices. In a way similar to the credit cycle effects exposed in Kiyotaki and Moore (1997) and Iacoviello (2005), movements in the real price of durables endogenously affect the borrowing limit and in turn consumption. The mechanism is simple. A rise in the durable price induces, *ceteris paribus*, a fall in the marginal value of borrowing (i.e., a

softening of the borrowing constraint). This implies, for the borrower, a fall in the marginal utility of current (non-durable) consumption relative to the option of shifting consumption intertemporally (in other words, a violation of the Euler equation), which can be validated only by a rise in current consumption. In turn, the increased demand for borrowing further stimulates the demand for durables and its real price, inducing a cycle effect that further boosts (non-durable) spending.

In an efficient equilibrium with free borrowing and lending, the borrower would indeed like (given his impatience) to expand borrowing to finance current consumption. Yet he/she would do so *without* resorting to an increase in demand for durables. Hence collateral limits per se induce inefficient movements in the relative price of durables. On the other hand, though, a strict stabilization of durable prices is largely detrimental for the borrower and would be inconsistent with the need of realizing sectoral relative price movements. As a result, the optimal policy balances the incentive to partially stabilize relative durable prices with the one of offsetting the stickiness in non-durable prices. In fact, in our simulations, a Ramsey-type policy emerges as an intermediate case between two extreme forms of Taylor-type interest rate rules: a rule that strictly stabilizes non-durable price inflation and a rule that strictly stabilizes the relative price of durables.

Turning to the related literature, Kyotaki and Moore (1997) (KM henceforth) build a general equilibrium model in which two categories of agents (borrowers and savers) trade private debt. Heterogeneity is introduced in the form of different patience rates. As here, borrowers are more impatient than savers, and therefore hold a positive amount of debt in the steady state of the economy. KM develop a theory of credit cycles, namely of how small shocks to fundamentals can propagate in the macroeconomy through the credit market. Noticeably, in the development of credit cycles, asset prices play a crucial role. More recently, Iacoviello (2005) extends the work of KM to build a bridge with the recent New Keynesian monetary policy framework. In his analysis, the role of nominal debt and asset prices are central for the propagation of monetary policy shocks, but no normative aspect is analyzed. Campbell and Hercowitz (2005) analyze the implications for macroeconomic volatility of the relaxation of collateral requirements in the US (dated around 1980) in a general equilibrium environment. However, their real business cycle framework is not suitable for a study of monetary policy, and it abstracts from any role of asset prices. Recently, Erceg and Levin (2005) study optimal monetary policy in an economy with two sectors (durable and non durables) and similar to the one employed here. Their analysis, though, abstracts from any form of credit market imperfection.

2 The Model

The model builds on Iacoviello (2005) and Campbell and Hercowitz (2005). The economy is composed of two types of households, *borrowers* and *savers*, and two sectors - producing durable and non durable goods respectively - each populated by a large number of monopolistic competitive firms and by a perfectly competitive final goods producer. The borrowers differ from the savers in that they exhibit a *lower patience rate* and therefore a higher propensity to consume.⁵ Complementary to this assumption is the one that the borrowers face a *collateral constraint*. In fact, if agents were free to borrow and lend at the market interest rate, the borrowers would exhibit a tendency to accumulate debt indefinitely, rendering the steady-state of the economy indeterminate. Peculiar to the borrowers is that their preferences are tilted towards current consumption. Formally, their marginal utility of current consumption exceeds the marginal utility of saving. As a result, in the face of a temporary positive shock to income, they do not act as consumption smoothers but tend instead to reduce saving. In this vein, the presence of household debt reflects equilibrium intertemporal trading between the two types of agents, with the savers acting as standard consumption-smoothers.⁶

2.1 Final Good Producers

In each sector ($j = c, d$) a perfectly competitive final good producer purchases $Y_{j,t}(i)$ units of intermediate good i . The final good producer in sector j operates the production function:

$$Y_{j,t} \equiv \left(\int_0^1 Y_{j,t}(i)^{\frac{\varepsilon_j - 1}{\varepsilon_j}} di \right)^{\frac{\varepsilon_j}{\varepsilon_j - 1}} \quad (1)$$

where $Y_{j,t}(i)$ is quantity demanded of the intermediate good i by final good producer j , and ε_j is the elasticity of substitution between differentiated varieties in sector j . Notice, in particular, that in the durable good sector $Y_{d,t}(i)$ refers to expenditure in the *new* durable intermediate good i

⁵For early general equilibrium models with agents' heterogenous impatience rates, see Becker (1980), Woodford (1986), Becker and Foias (1987), Krusell and Smith (1989). More recently, see Kiyotaki and Moore (1997), Iacoviello (2005), Campbell and Hercowitz (2005). Here we use the categories borrower/saver as synonymous of impatient and patient household respectively. Notice, however, that the fact that the relatively more impatient (patient) agent emerges as a borrower (saver) is an equilibrium phenomenon.

⁶Gali et al. (2005) also construct a model in which agents are heterogenous along the consumption-smoothing dimension, and use it to analyze the effects of government spending shocks. In their framework, the non-smoothers are agents which are completely excluded from the possibility of borrowing (following Campbell and Mankiw (1989) those agents are named *rule-of-thumb* consumers). Hence, in that framework, private debt cannot emerge as an equilibrium phenomenon. In some respects, one can view the present setup as a generalization of the one in Gali et al. (2005).

(rather than services). Maximization of profits yields demand functions for the typical intermediate good i in sector j :

$$Y_{j,t}(i) = \left(\frac{P_{j,t}(i)}{P_{j,t}} \right)^{-\varepsilon_j} Y_{j,t} \quad j = c, d \quad (2)$$

for all i . In particular, $P_{j,t} \equiv \left(\int_0^1 P_{j,t}(i)^{1-\varepsilon_j} di \right)^{\frac{1}{1-\varepsilon_j}}$ is the price index consistent with the final good producer in sector j earning zero profits.⁷

2.2 Borrowers/Workers

The representative borrower consumes an index of consumption *services* of durable and *non-durable* final goods, defined as:

$$X_t \equiv \left[(1 - \alpha)^{\frac{1}{\eta}} (C_t)^{\frac{\eta-1}{\eta}} + \alpha^{\frac{1}{\eta}} (D_t)^{\frac{\eta-1}{\eta}} \right]^{\frac{\eta}{\eta-1}} \quad (3)$$

where C_t denotes consumption services of the final non-durable good, D_t denotes services from the stock of the final durable good at the end of period t , α is the share of durable goods in the composite consumption index and $\eta \geq 0$ is the elasticity of substitution between services of non-durable and durable goods. In the case $\eta \rightarrow 0$ non-durable consumption and durable services are perfect complements, whereas if $\eta \rightarrow \infty$ the two services are perfect substitutes.

The borrower maximizes the following utility program

$$\mathcal{W}_0 \equiv E_0 \left\{ \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t U(X_t, N_t) \right\} \quad (4)$$

subject to the sequence of budget constraints (in *nominal* terms):

$$P_{c,t} C_t + P_{d,t}(D_t - (1 - \delta)D_{t-1}) + R_{t-1}B_{t-1} \leq B_t + W_t N_t + T_t \quad (5)$$

where B_t is end-of-period t nominal debt, and R_{t-1} is the nominal lending rate on loan contracts stipulated at time $t - 1$. Furthermore, W_t is the nominal wage, N_t is labor supply and T_t are net government transfers. Labor is assumed to be perfectly mobile across sectors, implying that the nominal wage rate is common across sectors.

In real terms (units of non-durable consumption), (5) reads:

⁷Hence the problem of the final good producer j is: $\max P_{j,t} Y_{j,t} - \int_0^1 P_{j,t}(i) Y_{j,t}(i) di$ subject to (1).

$$C_t + q_t(D_t - (1 - \delta)D_{t-1}) + \frac{R_{t-1} b_{t-1}}{\pi_{c,t}} \leq b_t + \frac{W_t}{P_{c,t}}N_t + \frac{T_t}{P_{c,t}} \quad (6)$$

where $q_t \equiv \frac{P_{d,t}}{P_{c,t}}$ is the relative price of the durable good, and $b_t \equiv \frac{B_t}{P_{c,t}}$ is real debt. The left hand side of (6) denotes uses of funds (durable and non-durable spending plus real debt service), while the right hand side denotes available resources (new debt, real labor income and transfers). An important feature of (6), which follows from debt contracts being predetermined in nominal terms, is that (non-durable) inflation can affect borrower's net worth. Hence, for given outstanding debt, a rise in inflation lowers the current real burden of debt repayments.

Later we will work with the following specification of the utility function

$$U(X_t, N_t) = \log(X_t) - \frac{v}{1 + \varphi} N_t^{1+\varphi}$$

where φ is the inverse elasticity of labor supply and v is a scale parameter.⁸

Collateral Constraint Private borrowing is subject to a limit. We assume that the whole stock of debt is collateralized. The borrowing limit is tied to the value of the durable good stock:

$$B_t \leq (1 - \chi)D_t P_{d,t} \quad (7)$$

where χ is the fraction of the durable stock value that cannot be used as a collateral.

In general, one can broadly think of χ as the down payment rate, or the inverse of the *loan-to-value ratio*, and therefore an indirect measure of the tightness of the borrowing constraint.⁹ Jappelli and Pagano (1989) provide evidence on the presence of liquidity constrained agents by linking their share to more structural features of the credit markets. In particular, they find that the share of liquidity constrained agents is larger in countries in which a measure of the loan-to-value ratio is lower.¹⁰

⁸Notice that we abstract from an explicit role for money. Along the lines of Woodford (2003, chp. 2), one can think of the present economy as a cashless limit of a money-in-the-utility model, in which the weight of real balance in utility is negligible. Our maintained assumption is that the monetary authority can directly control the short-run nominal interest rate. This allows us to abstract from any monetary transaction friction driving the optimal policy prescription towards the Friedman rule.

⁹Notice, though, that $\chi = 0$ does not correspond to a situation in which the borrowing constraint is absent. That situation would obtain only in the case in which heterogeneity in patience rates were assumed away. See more on this point below.

¹⁰The form of the collateral constraint has been deliberately kept simple to facilitate the analysis. However, there are at least two important dimensions that are neglected here. First, incorporating an explicit mortgage refinancing

Notice that movements in the durable good price directly affect the ability of borrowing. It is widely believed that the recent rise in house prices in the US has induced households to increasingly extract equity from their accumulated assets thereby encouraging further borrowing against their realized capital gains. This link between asset price fluctuations and ability of borrowing has presumably played an important role in determining household spending patterns during the recent business cycle evolution.¹¹

We assume that, in a neighborhood of the deterministic steady-state, equation (5) is always satisfied with the equality.¹² We can then rewrite the collateral constraint in real terms (i.e., in units of non-durable consumption) as follows:

$$b_t = (1 - \chi) q_t D_t \quad (8)$$

Given $\{b_{-1}, D_{-1}\}$, the borrower chooses $\{N_t, b_t, D_t, C_t\}$ to maximize (4) subject to (6) and (8). By defining λ_t and $\lambda_t \psi_t$ as the multipliers on constraints (6) and (8) respectively, and $U_{x,t}$ as the marginal utility of a generic variable x , efficiency conditions read:

$$\frac{-U_{n,t}}{U_{c,t}} = \frac{W_t}{P_{c,t}} \quad (9)$$

$$U_{c,t} + \lambda_t = 0 \quad (10)$$

$$U_{c,t} q_t = U_{d,t} + \beta(1 - \delta) E_t \{U_{c,t+1} q_{t+1}\} + U_{c,t}(1 - \chi) \psi_t q_t \quad (11)$$

choice. In the US, for a while, the ability of extract equity has worked primarily through refinancing decisions linked to the downward trend in nominal interest rates. Second, a distinction between fixed and variable rate mortgage contracts. For a positive analysis of these issues, see Calza, Monacelli and Stracca (2006).

¹¹For instance, Alan Greenspan's view is summarized by the following excerpt: "*Among the factors contributing to the strength of spending and the decline in saving have been developments in housing markets and home finance that have spurred rising household wealth and allowed greater access to that wealth. The rapid rise in home prices over the past several years has provided households with considerable capital gains (...)*" (Congress Testimony, February 2005).

¹²This assumption is obviously not uncontroversial. Ideally one would like a model in which the borrowers may be free to choose to hit the borrowing limit only occasionally. Hence our assumption remains valid only to the extent that we consider small fluctuations around the relevant deterministic steady-state (see more on this below), so that standard log-linearization techniques may still be applied. This can be assured by specifying disturbance processes of sufficiently small amplitude.

$$\psi_t = 1 - \beta E_t \left\{ \frac{U_{c,t+1}}{U_{c,t}} \frac{R_t}{\pi_{c,t+1}} \right\} \quad (12)$$

Equations (9) and (10) are standard. Equation (11) is an intertemporal condition on durable demand. It requires the borrower to equate the marginal utility of current (non-durable) consumption to the marginal gain of durable services. The latter depends on three components: i) the direct utility gain of an additional unit of durable; ii) the expected utility stemming from the possibility of expanding future consumption by means of the realized resale value of the durable purchased in the previous period; iii) the marginal utility of relaxing the borrowing constraint. In the absence of borrowing constraints ($\psi_t = 0$) the latter component drops out.

Alternatively, one can interpret expression (11) as equating the *user cost* of the durable good to the marginal rate of substitution between durable and non-durable consumption. In particular, by rearranging (11), the user cost can be written as

$$Z_t \equiv q_t - \beta(1 - \delta) E_t \left\{ \frac{U_{c,t+1}}{U_{c,t}} q_{t+1} \right\} - (1 - \chi) q_t \psi_t \quad (13)$$

Notice that, via movements in the multiplier ψ_t , the presence of an endogenous borrowing limit affects the user cost expression directly. Hence the user cost of acquiring an additional unit of durables is the direct (relative) price of the durable, net of both the expected capital gain and the marginal utility of relaxing the borrowing constraint.

The interpretation of ψ_t is more transparent from equation (12), which is a modified version of an Euler condition. Indeed it reduces to a standard intertemporal condition in the case of $\psi_t = 0$ for all t . Alternatively, it has the interpretation of an asset price condition. In fact, the marginal value of additional borrowing (the left hand side ψ_t) is tied to a payoff (right hand side) that captures the deviation from a standard Euler equation. Consider, for the sake of argument, ψ_t rising from zero to a positive value. This implies, from (12), that $U_{c,t} > \beta E_t \left\{ U_{c,t+1} \frac{R_t}{\pi_{c,t+1}} \right\}$. In other words, the marginal utility of current consumption exceeds the marginal utility of saving, i.e., the marginal gain of shifting one unit of consumption intertemporally. The higher ψ_t , the higher the net marginal benefit of purchasing the durable asset, which allows, by marginally relaxing the borrowing constraint, to purchase additional *current* consumption.

2.3 Savers

The economy is composed of a second category of consumers, labeled savers. They differ from the borrowers in the fact that they have a higher patience rate. We assume that the representative saver is the owner of the monopolistic firms in each sector. The saver does not supply labor. Saver's utility can be written:

$$E_0 \left\{ \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \gamma^t \tilde{U}(\tilde{C}_t, \tilde{D}_t) \right\} \quad (14)$$

Importantly, preferences are such that the saver discounts the future more heavily than the borrower, hence $\gamma > \beta$. The saver's sequence of budget constraints reads (in nominal terms):

$$P_{c,t} \tilde{C}_t + P_{d,t} \left(\tilde{D}_t - (1 - \delta)\tilde{D}_{t-1} \right) + R_{t-1}\tilde{B}_{t-1} \leq \tilde{B}_t + \tilde{T}_t + \sum_j \tilde{\Gamma}_{j,t} \quad (15)$$

where \tilde{C}_t is saver's non-durable consumption, \tilde{D}_t is the saver's utility services from the stock of durable goods, \tilde{B}_t is end-of-period t nominal debt (credit), \tilde{T}_t are net government transfers and $\tilde{\Gamma}_{j,t}$ are nominal profits from the holding of monopolistic competitive firms in sector j .

The efficiency conditions for this program are a standard Euler equation:

$$\tilde{U}_{c,t} = \gamma E_t \left\{ \tilde{U}_{c,t+1} \frac{R_t}{\pi_{c,t+1}} \right\} \quad (16)$$

and a durable demand condition (in the absence of borrowing constraints)

$$q_t \tilde{U}_{c,t} = \tilde{U}_{d,t} + \beta(1 - \delta) E_t \left\{ \tilde{U}_{c,t+1} q_{t+1} \right\} \quad (17)$$

In this case, being a permanent-income consumer, the saver will equate the marginal rate of substitution between durable and non-durable consumption exactly to the standard user cost expression prevailing in the absence of borrowing constraints.

2.4 Production and Pricing of Intermediate Goods

A typical intermediate good firm i in sector j hires labor (supplied by the borrowers) to operate a linear production function:

$$Y_{j,t}(i) = A_{j,t} N_{j,t}(i) \quad (18)$$

where $A_{j,t}$ is a productivity shifter common to all firms in sector j . Each firm i has monopolistic power in the production of its own variety and therefore has leverage in setting the price. In so doing it faces a quadratic cost equal to $\frac{\vartheta_j}{2} \left(\frac{P_{j,t}(i)}{P_{j,t-1}(i)} - 1 \right)^2$, where the parameter ϑ_j measures the degree of sectoral nominal price rigidity. The higher ϑ_j the more sluggish is the adjustment of nominal prices in sector j . In the particular case of $\vartheta_j = 0$, prices are flexible.

The problem of each monopolistic firm is to choose the sequence $\{N_{j,t}(i), P_{j,t}(i)\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ in order to maximize expected discounted nominal profits:

$$E_0 \left\{ \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \Lambda_t \left(P_{j,t}(i) Y_{j,t}(i) - W_t N_{j,t}(i) - \frac{\vartheta_j}{2} \left(\frac{P_{j,t}(i)}{P_{j,t-1}(i)} - 1 \right)^2 P_{j,t} \right) \right\} \quad (19)$$

subject to (18). In (19), $\Lambda_{j,t} \equiv \gamma E_t \left\{ \frac{\tilde{\lambda}_{t+1}}{\lambda_t} \right\}$ is the saver's stochastic discount factor and $\tilde{\lambda}_t$ is the saver's marginal utility of nominal income. Let's denote by $\frac{P_{j,t}(i)}{P_{j,t}}$ the relative price of variety i in sector j . In a *symmetric* equilibrium in which $\frac{P_{j,t}(i)}{P_{j,t}} = 1$ for all i and j , and all firms employ the same amount of labor in each sector, the first order condition of the above problem reads:

$$\begin{aligned} ((1 - \varepsilon_j) + \varepsilon_j mc_{j,t}) Y_{j,t} &= \vartheta_j (\pi_{j,t} - 1) \pi_{j,t} \\ &\quad - \vartheta_j E_t \left\{ \frac{\Lambda_{t+1}}{\Lambda_t} \frac{P_{j,t+1}}{P_{j,t}} (\pi_{j,t+1} - 1) \pi_{j,t+1} \right\} \quad (j = c, d) \end{aligned} \quad (20)$$

where $\pi_{j,t} \equiv \frac{P_{j,t}}{P_{j,t-1}}$ is the gross inflation rate in sector j and

$$mc_{j,t} \equiv \frac{W_t}{P_{j,t} A_{j,t}} \quad (21)$$

is the real marginal cost in sector j .

Rearranging equation (20) one can obtain the following price setting constraints, assuming the form of forward-looking Phillips curves

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_{j,t} (\pi_{j,t} - 1) &= \gamma E_t \left\{ \frac{\Lambda_{t+1}}{\Lambda_t} \frac{P_{j,t+1}}{P_{j,t}} \pi_{j,t+1} (\pi_{j,t+1} - 1) \right\} \\ &\quad + \frac{\varepsilon_j A_{j,t} N_{j,t}}{\vartheta_j} \left(mc_{j,t} - \frac{\varepsilon_j - 1}{\varepsilon_j} \right) \end{aligned} \quad (22)$$

for $j = c, d$, and where

$$\begin{aligned}\frac{\Lambda_{t+1}}{\Lambda_t} \frac{P_{j,t+1}}{P_{j,t}} &= \frac{U_{\tilde{c},t+1}}{U_{\tilde{c},t}} \quad (\text{if } j = c) \\ \frac{\Lambda_{t+1}}{\Lambda_t} \frac{P_{j,t+1}}{P_{j,t}} &= \frac{U_{\tilde{c},t+1}}{U_{\tilde{c},t}} \frac{q_{t+1}}{q_t} \quad (\text{if } j = d)\end{aligned}$$

and

$$mc_{j,t} = \frac{-U_{n,t}}{U_{c,t} A_{c,t}} \quad (\text{if } j = c) \quad (23)$$

$$mc_{j,t} = \frac{-U_{n,t}}{U_{c,t} A_{d,t}} q_t^{-1} \quad (\text{if } j = d) \quad (24)$$

In the particular case of *flexible prices* the real marginal cost must be constant and equal to the inverse steady-state markup $\frac{\varepsilon_j - 1}{\varepsilon_j}$, for $j = c, d$. Notice that, in the durable sector, variations in the relative price of durables (possibly due to sectoral asymmetric shocks) drive a wedge between the marginal rate of substitution between consumption and leisure on the one hand and the marginal product of labor on the other. Hence the real marginal cost is directly affected by movements in the relative price.

2.5 Market Clearing

Equilibrium in the goods market of sector j requires that the production of the final good be allocated to expenditure and to resource costs originating from the adjustment of prices

$$Y_{c,t} = C_t + \tilde{C}_t + \frac{\vartheta_c}{2} (\pi_{c,t} - 1)^2 \quad (25)$$

$$Y_{d,t} = D_t - (1 - \delta)D_{t-1} + \tilde{D}_t - (1 - \delta)\tilde{D}_{t-1} + \frac{\vartheta_d}{2} (\pi_{d,t} - 1)^2 \quad (26)$$

Equilibrium in the debt and labor market requires respectively:

$$B_t + \tilde{B}_t = 0 \quad (27)$$

$$\sum_j N_{j,t} = N_t \quad (28)$$

2.6 Equilibrium

For any specified policy process $\{R_t\}$ and exogenous state vector $\{A_{c,t}, A_{d,t}\}$, an (imperfectly) *competitive allocation* is a sequence for $\{N_t, N_{c,t}, N_{d,t}, b_t, D_t, \tilde{D}_t, C_t, \tilde{C}_t, \pi_{c,t}, \pi_{d,t}, \psi_t, q_t\}$ satisfying (6) and (8) with equality, (9)-(12), (16), (17), (22), (25), (26), (28).

3 Steady State of the Competitive Equilibrium

In this section we analyze the features of the deterministic steady state associated to the competitive equilibrium. It is a general results of models with heterogenous discount rates and borrowing constraints that patient agent will end-up owning all available assets.¹³ In the steady-state, the saver's discount rate pins down the real rate of return. Given the assumed heterogeneity in patience rates, the shadow value of relaxing the borrowing constraint is always positive. In other words, the borrower will always be constrained in the steady state. To show this, we simply combine the steady state version of (16), which implies $R = \frac{\pi_c}{\gamma}$, with (12), obtaining:

$$\psi = 1 - \frac{\beta}{\gamma} > 0 \quad (29)$$

where π_c is the steady-state rate of inflation in non-durables. Notice that $\beta = \gamma$ implies $\psi = 0$. In other words, absence of heterogeneity entails that the borrowing constraint does not bind. That would correspond to the standard scenario in a representative agent economy.

In a flexible price steady-state for both sectors, taking the ratio of (23) and (24) the relative price of durables reads

$$q = \frac{\frac{\varepsilon_d - 1}{\varepsilon_d}}{\frac{\varepsilon_c - 1}{\varepsilon_c}} \quad (30)$$

Assuming equal markup in both sectors, we have $q = 1$. By evaluating (11) in the steady state (and given our preference specification) we obtain the relative consumption of durables by the borrower:

$$\frac{D}{C} = \frac{\alpha}{1 - \alpha} [1 - \beta(1 - \delta) - (1 - \chi)\psi]^{-\eta} \quad (31)$$

Notice that the relative demand for durables is increasing in the marginal value of borrowing ψ .

¹³See Becker (1980), Becker and Foias (1987). For instance, this would happen to the existing stock of capital if we were to introduce capital accumulation in the model.

The steady state leverage ratio, defined as the ratio between steady state debt and durable assets owned, can be written:

$$\frac{b}{D} = (1 - \chi) \quad (32)$$

To pin down the level of debt we proceed as follows. We set parameter v in order to pin down a given level of hours worked in the steady state¹⁴ ($N = \bar{N}$). By combining (6), (8), (32) we can write:

$$D = \frac{\bar{N}}{\mu^c \Phi} \quad (33)$$

where $\mu^c \equiv \frac{\varepsilon^c}{\varepsilon^c - 1}$ is the (steady-state) markup in the non-durable sector and

$$\Phi \equiv \left\{ \frac{1 - \alpha}{\alpha} [1 - \beta(1 - \delta) - \psi(1 - \chi)]^\eta + \delta + \frac{(1 - \gamma)(1 - \chi)}{\gamma} \right\}$$

Once obtained D , it is straightforward, using (32), to solve for the unique level of borrower's debt associated to the steady state of the competitive equilibrium.¹⁵

4 Optimal Monetary Policy

Next we study the optimal conduct of monetary policy. The optimal monetary policy literature in the context of DSGE models with nominal rigidities has soared in the last few years.¹⁶ However, these developments have neglected a number of features that are central to the present context: the presence of nominal private debt and heterogeneity; the role of collateral constraints and the role of durable prices in affecting the ability of borrowing endogenously.

4.0.1 The Ramsey Problem

We assume that *ex-ante commitment* is feasible. In the classic approach to the study of optimal policy in dynamic economies (Ramsey (1927), Atkinson and Stiglitz (1980), Lucas and Stokey (1983), Chari, Christiano and Kehoe (1991)), and in a typical public finance spirit, a Ramsey planner maximizes household's welfare subject to a resource constraint, to the constraints describing

¹⁴In particular, we will require that the borrower devotes to work one third of the time unit.

¹⁵This steady state level of debt would be indeterminate in the special case in which agents did not exhibit heterogeneity in preference rates (see Becker, (1980)).

¹⁶To name a few, Adao et al. (2003), Khan et al. (2003), Schmitt-Grohe and Uribe (2005), Woodford (2003), King and Wolman (2001), Clarida et al. (1999), Benigno and Woodford (2005).

the equilibrium in the private sector economy, and via an explicit consideration of all the distortions that characterize both the long-run and the cyclical behavior of the economy.¹⁷

A point of particular concern in defining the planner's problem in an economy with heterogeneity is the specification of the relevant objective function. Let's define by ω the weight assigned to saver's utility in the planner's objective function. Then we assume that the planner maximizes the following weighted utility functional:

$$\mathcal{W}_0 \equiv (1 - \omega) \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t U(C_t, D_t, N_t) + \omega \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \gamma^t U(\tilde{C}_t, \tilde{D}_t) \quad (34)$$

The Ramsey problem under commitment can be described as follows. Let $\{\lambda_{k,t}\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ ($k = 1, 2, \dots$) represent sequences of Lagrange multipliers on the constraints (6), (8), (9)-(12), (16), (17), (22), (25), (26), (28) respectively. For given stochastic processes $\{A_{c,t}, A_{d,t}\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$, plans for the control variables $\{N_t, N_{c,t}, N_{d,t}, b_t, D_t, \tilde{D}_t, C_t, \tilde{C}_t, \pi_{c,t}, \pi_{d,t}, \psi_t, q_t, R_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$, and for the costate variables $\{\lambda_{k,t}\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ represent a first-best constrained allocation if they solve the following maximization problem:

$$\max E_0 \{ \mathcal{W}_0 \} \quad (35)$$

subject to (6), (8), (9)-(12), (16), (17), (22), (25), (26), (28).

(Non-)Recursivity and Solution Approach As a result of (some of) the constraints in problem (35) exhibiting future expectations of control variables, the maximization problem as spelled out in (35) is intrinsically non-recursive.¹⁸ As first emphasized in Kydland and Prescott (1980), and then developed by Marcet and Marimon (1999), a formal way to rewrite the same problem in a recursive stationary form is to enlarge the planner's state space with additional (pseudo) costate variables. Such variables bear the crucial meaning of tracking, along the dynamics, the value to the planner of committing to the pre-announced policy plan. In *Appendix B* and *C* we show how to formulate the optimal plan in an equivalent recursive lagrangian form.

¹⁷Recently there has been a resurgence of interest for a Ramsey-type approach in dynamic general equilibrium models with nominal rigidities. Khan et al. (2003) analyze optimal monetary policy in an economy where the relevant distortions are imperfect competition, staggered price setting and monetary transaction frictions. Schmitt-Grohe and Uribe (2004), and Siu (2004) focus on the joint optimal determination of monetary and fiscal policy. However, the issue of optimal policy in the face of households' credit constraints has been largely neglected.

¹⁸See Kydland and Prescott (1977), Calvo (1978). As such the system does not satisfy per se the principle of optimality, according to which the optimal decision at time t is a time invariant function only of a small set of state variables.

We then proceed in the following way. First, we compute the stationary allocations that characterize the deterministic steady state of the efficiency conditions of problem (35) for $t > 0$. We label this as deterministic Ramsey steady-state. We then compute a log-linear approximation of the respective policy functions in the neighborhood of the Ramsey steady state.

The spirit of this exercise deserves some further comments. In concentrating on the (log-linear) dynamics in the neighborhood of the Ramsey steady state we are in practice implicitly assuming that the economy has been evolving and policy been conducted around such a steady state for a long period of time. Technically speaking, this amounts to assuming that the initial values of the lagged multipliers involved in problem (35) are set equal to their initial steady state values. Khan et al. (2003) apply this strategy to an optimal monetary policy problem in a closed economy. Under certain conditions, one can show that this approach is equivalent to evaluating policy as invariant from a timeless perspective, as described in Woodford (2003) and Benigno and Woodford (2005).

4.1 Calibration

In this section we describe our benchmark parameterization of the model. This will be useful for our quantitative analysis conducted below. We set the saver's and borrower's discount factors respectively to $\gamma = 0.99$ and $\beta = 0.98$. This implies an annual real interest rate (which is pinned down by the saver's degree of time preference) of $\left(\frac{1}{\gamma}\right)^4 = 1.04$.

Throughout we are going to assume that the Ramsey planner sets the preference weight $\omega = \frac{1}{2}$, although we will report sensitivity results on the value of this parameter.

We wish to work under the assumption that all outstanding debt is collateralized (hence we ignore the role of unsecured debt, e.g., credit cards) and that durables are long-lived. Thus, in this context, durables mainly capture the role of housing. The depreciation rate for houses is much slower than the one usually assumed for physical capital, and is comprised between 1.5% and 3% per year. Since our model is parameterized on a quarterly basis, we set $\delta = 0.025 \hat{=} (1/4)$.

The annual average loan-to-value (LTV) ratio on home mortgages is roughly 0.75. This is the average value over the 1952-2005 period. This number has increased over time, as a consequence of financial liberalization, from about 72% at the beginning of the sample to a peak of 78% around the year 2000. The same parameter is only slightly higher when considering mortgages on new houses.¹⁹ Hence we set the LTV ratio as $(1 - \chi) = 0.75$, which yields $\chi = 0.25$.

¹⁹The source for these numbers is the Federal Housing Finance Board, <http://www.fhfb.gov>.

The share of durable consumption in the aggregate spending index, defined by α , is set in such a way that $\delta(D + \tilde{D})$, the steady-state share of durable spending in total spending, is 0.2. This number is consistent with the combined share of durable consumption and residential investment in the NIPA Tables. The elasticity of substitution between varieties in the non-durable sector ε_c is set equal to 8, which yields a steady state mark-up of about 15%. As a benchmark case, we set the elasticity of substitution between durable and non-durable consumption $\eta = 1$, implying a Cobb-Douglas specification of the consumption aggregator (3).

In order to parameterize the degree of price stickiness in *non-durables*, we observe that, by log-linearizing equation (22) around a zero-inflation steady-state, we can obtain an elasticity of inflation to real marginal cost (normalized by the steady-state level of output)²⁰ that takes the form $\frac{\varepsilon_c - 1}{\vartheta}$. This allows a direct comparison with empirical studies on the New Keynesian Phillips curve such as Galí and Gertler (1999) and Sbordone (2002) using a Calvo-Yun approach. In those studies, the slope coefficient of the log-linear Phillips curve can be expressed as $\frac{(1-\hat{\vartheta})(1-\beta\hat{\vartheta})}{\hat{\vartheta}}$, where $\hat{\vartheta}$ is the probability of not resetting the price in any given period in the Calvo-Yun model. For any given values of ε_c , which entails a choice on the steady-state level of the markup, we can thus build a mapping between the frequency of price adjustment in the Calvo-Yun model $\frac{1}{1-\hat{\vartheta}}$ and the degree of price stickiness ϑ in the Rotemberg setup. Traditionally, the sticky price literature has been considering a frequency of four quarters as a realistic value. Recently, Bils and Klenow (2004) argue that the observed frequency of price adjustment in the U.S. is higher, and in the order of two quarters. As a benchmark, we parameterize $\frac{1}{1-\hat{\vartheta}} = 4$, which implies $\hat{\vartheta} = 0.75$. Given $\varepsilon_c = 8$, the resulting stickiness parameter satisfies $\vartheta = \frac{Y \hat{\vartheta} (\varepsilon_c - 1)}{(1-\hat{\vartheta})(1-\beta\hat{\vartheta})} \sim 17.5$, where Y is steady state output. In general, however, we will conduct sensitivity experiments on the role of non-durable price stickiness.

A critical issue concerns the assumed degree of price stickiness in *durables*. The comprehensive study by Bils and Klenow (2004) does not report any direct evidence on the degree of stickiness of long-lived durables, and housing in particular. It may appear reasonable to assume that house prices are in general more flexible than non-durable goods prices. Barski et al. (2005) argue that sales prices of new houses are flexible. One reason may be that, since the price of new houses can be negotiated, the role of fixed components such as menu costs can be more easily neutralized. In addition, *Figure 2* shows that house prices feature a pronounced business cycle component.

²⁰To produce a slope coefficient directly comparable to the empirical literature on the New Keynesian Phillips curve this elasticity needs to be normalized by the level of output when the price adjustment cost factor is not explicitly proportional to output, as assumed here.

To simplify matters we will then work under the extreme assumption that durable prices are flexible. This assumption is not immaterial. Barski et al. (2005) argue that the assumption of flexible durable prices dramatically affect the ability of standard sticky price models to reproduce the empirical effects of monetary policy shocks on durable and non-durable spending. In particular, if durable prices are flexible, and against the observed VAR-based evidence, durable spending contracts during expansions. In addition, and regardless of the assumed degree of stickiness in non-durables, flexible durable prices tend to impart a form of neutrality to policy shocks to the entire economy. However, in Monacelli (2005) we argue that the introduction of borrowing constraints and the consideration of durables as collateral assets help in reconciling the model with the observed empirical evidence. In this vein, borrowing constraints act as a substitute of nominal rigidity in durable prices. In an extreme case, when also non-durable prices are assumed to be flexible, borrowing constraints can even partially act as a substitute of nominal rigidity altogether in generating non-neutral effects of monetary policy.

Table 1 summarizes the details of our baseline calibration:

Parameter	Description	Value
β	borrower's discount rate	0.98
γ	saver's discount rate	0.99
δ	durable depreciation rate	0.05/4
χ	inverse LTV	0.25
ω	Ramsey preference weight	0.5
ϑ_d	price stickiness in D sector	0
ϑ_c	price stickiness in ND sector	17.5
ε_c	price elasticity of demand in D sector	8
ε_d	price elasticity of demand in ND sector	8
η	elasticity of substitution btw. D and ND	1

5 The Role of Nominal Debt

We begin our analysis by focussing on the role of durable goods and nominal private debt in shaping the optimal policy problem. To that goal, we first analyze the optimal policy problem in a simplified version of our model featuring no borrowing constraints. We conclude that durability per se does not alter the basic price stability prescription of recent optimizing sticky price models. We then proceed by introducing heterogeneity and a role for private debt. We show that the presence

of nominal debt generates a redistributive margin for monetary policy which induces the policy authority to generate deviations from price stability. In equilibrium, though, we find that those deviations are small.

In both cases, we work with a simpler goods market structure, featuring only *one final good sector*. In particular, the competitive final good producer assembles intermediate goods purchased from a continuum of monopolistic competitive producers who run a linear production function as in (18) and set prices optimally subject to quadratic adjustment costs. In this simpler economy, the final good can be costlessly transformed into both non-durable and durable consumption. Hence the relative price between durable and non-durable goods is always $q_t = 1$. As a result, movements in the relative price of durables do not affect the ability of borrowing directly.

The reason for first concentrating on this simpler case is twofold. First, it allows us to study the role of nominal debt per se in shaping the normative conclusions of a standard sticky price New Keynesian model. Second, it allows to abstract from an additional distortion inherent to the two-sector economy and stemming from fluctuations in the relative price of durables. In fact, with two sectors, asymmetric sectoral shocks necessarily require an adjustment in relative prices that cannot be brought about efficiently if prices are sticky in one or both sectors.²¹

5.1 Benchmark: Price Stability with Durable Goods and Free Borrowing

In order to understand the role of durable goods in the monetary policy problem, we begin by assuming that agents can borrow and lend freely at the market interest rate. This amounts to assuming away heterogeneity in patience rates. To obtain such benchmark version of our model it suffices to evaluate the system of first order conditions (9)-(12) in the particular case of $\psi_t = 0$. In *Appendix A* we describe the structure of the competitive equilibrium in this case and the corresponding simplified form of the optimal policy problem.

Figure 4 displays impulse responses to a productivity shock in the benchmark economy with sticky prices, durable goods and free borrowing under the Ramsey equilibrium.

We compare the case $\delta = 1$ (i.e., no durability) with the one of $\delta = 0.025/4$ assumed in our parameterization. It is evident that the benchmark result of price stability under the Ramsey policy is robust to the introduction of durable goods. With higher productivity (and income), the agent would like to increase both durable and non-durable spending. Since durables can only

²¹See Aoki (2003) and Woodford (2003) for an analysis of optimal monetary policy in the face of sectoral asymmetric shocks.

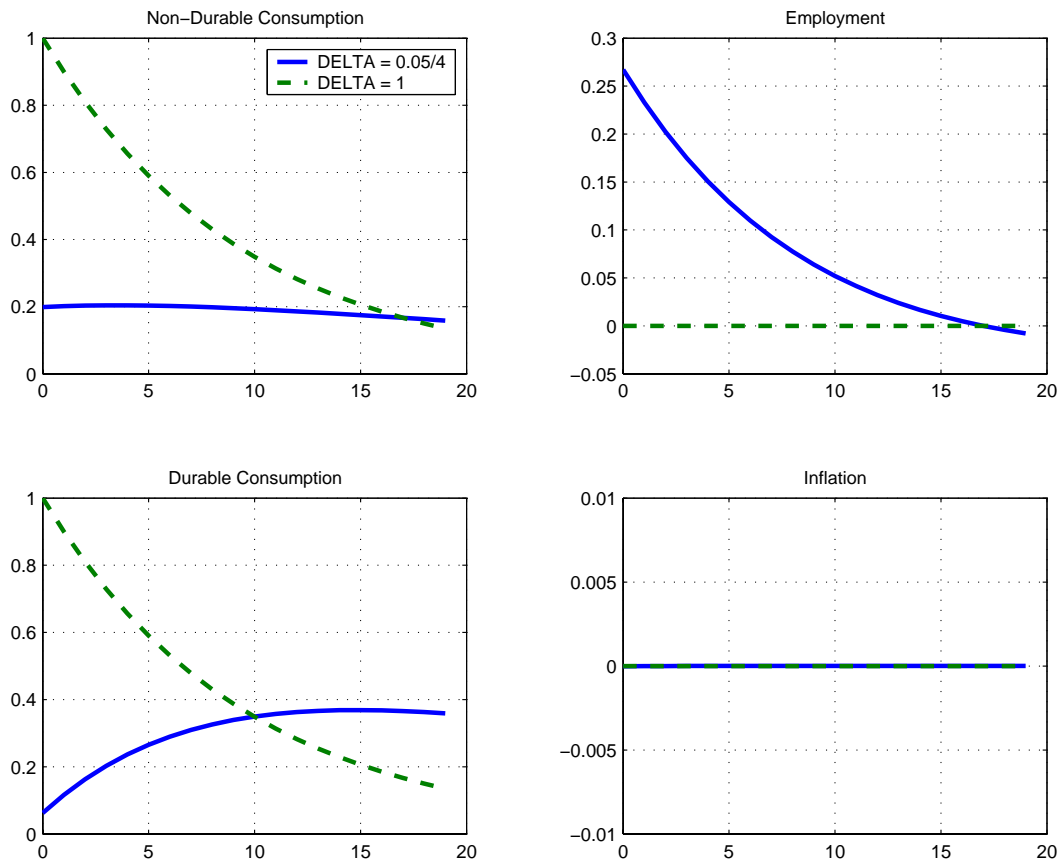


Figure 4: Responses to a Productivity Shock under the Ramsey Equilibrium in the Model with *no* borrowing constraints: with durability (solid line) and without durability ($\delta = 1$, dashed line).

be accumulated slowly (recall that the household wishes to smooth the end-of-period stock D_t and *not* durable spending), and since efficiency requires to equate the marginal utility of current consumption to the expected discounted marginal value of acquiring a new durable, non-durable consumption also moves more gradually, relative to the case $\delta = 1$. Inflation, however, is completely stabilized in both cases. The intuition is simple. The presence of durables does not introduce per se any additional distortion that the planner wishes to neutralize. Hence, as it is well understood in the standard case, the planner induces the economy to behave as if prices were completely flexible. This is obtained via monetary policy generating an expansion in demand, which induces firms to smooth markup fluctuations completely, thereby validating unchanged prices as an equilibrium outcome.²²

5.2 Optimal Inflation Volatility with Nominal Debt

Next we wish to consider the role of nominal private debt. In this version of the model, we re-introduce two critical features: (i) heterogeneity (in patience rates); (ii) a collateral constraint (on the impatient household). Still, we continue to work within the one-sector model (whose details are reported in *Appendix B*). In this context, we wish to understand whether the possibility of using inflation to affect borrower's net worth, and therefore to marginally redistribute wealth from the saver to the borrower, may induce the planner to deviate from a strict price stability policy.

Figure 5 illustrates how the introduction of borrowing constraints affects the equilibrium dynamics. Once again, we show impulse responses to a rise in productivity. We compare two alternative cases, corresponding to two values of parameter χ . A higher value of χ implies a lower LTV ratio and therefore a reduced ability to collateralize the purchase of durables (hence, broadly speaking, a tighter borrowing constraint). Unlike a standard permanent-income consumer, the borrower has preferences tilted towards current consumption. Hence, in the face of higher productivity (income), the borrower wishes to increase current consumption (reduce saving) and do so to a larger extent than the saver. In equilibrium, the two agents find it optimal to trade debt, with the saver ending up lending resources to the borrower, thereby financing the surge in consumption of the latter.

²²The implication of durability in response to productivity shocks are relevant for another dimension, namely the equilibrium response of employment. One can show that whereas employment tends typically to fall in sticky price models in response to a rise in productivity (as a result of a downward shift in labor demand, see Galí (1999)), the introduction of durables reverses the sign of that response (see Monacelli (2006) on this particular point). This is also evident in *Figure 4*.

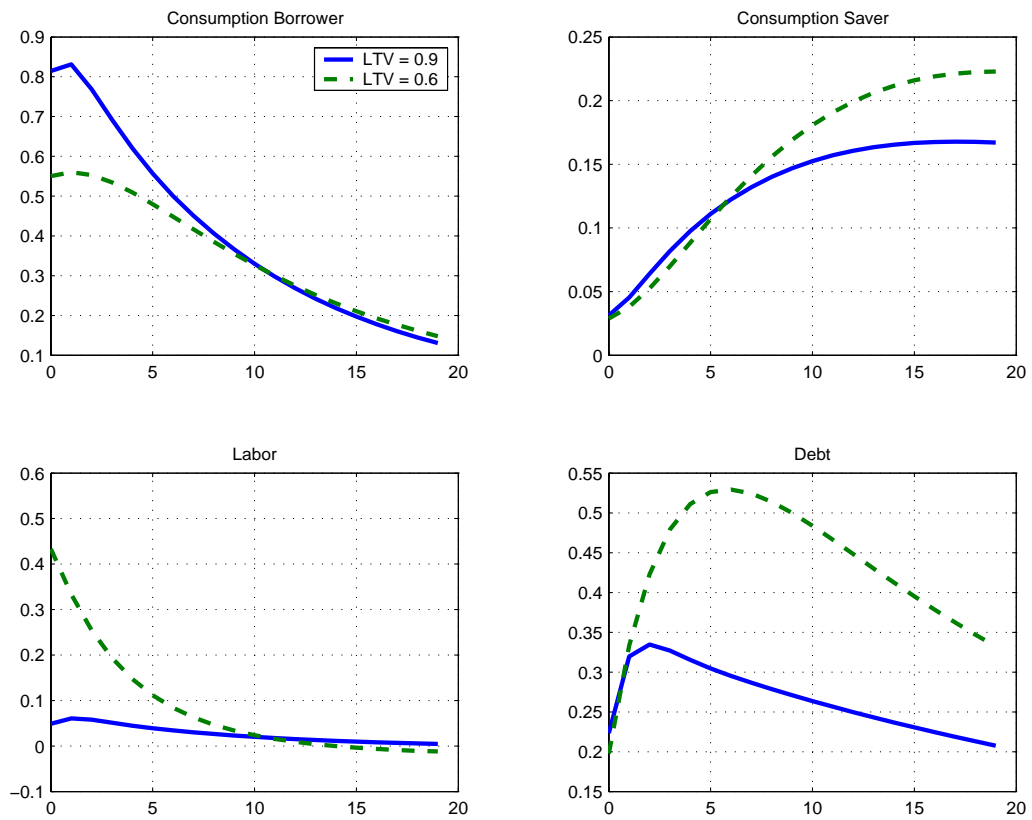


Figure 5: Productivity Shock under the Ramsey Equilibrium: Model with Borrowing Constraint (low vs. high Loan-To-Value Ratio $1 - \chi$).

Notice that the presence of a collateral requirement (whose strength is indexed by χ) induces a wealth effect on borrower's labor supply. In order to expand consumption, the borrower needs to optimally balance the purchasing of new debt with an increase in labor supply necessary to finance new collateral. The tighter the borrowing constraint (i.e., the higher χ), the more stringent the necessity of increasing labor supply. This debt-labor supply margin is indeed a general feature of models with collateral requirements.²³

In principle, since debt is predetermined in nominal terms, monetary policy can affect borrower's net worth by altering the real value of the outstanding debt service. Hence it is interesting to understand whether movements in inflation are part of the Ramsey equilibrium. In *Figure 6* we show impulse responses of inflation to the same productivity shock. We report paths for inflation under alternative values of ω , the weight attributed to saver's utility in the Ramsey optimization problem. It is clear that the introduction of nominal debt alters the conclusions of the benchmark model, in that it constitutes a motivation for deviating from a price stability prescription.

5.3 Heterogeneity

Notice that the amplitude of the inflation movements is decreasing in the saver's weight ω . Intuitively, the larger the Ramsey weight on saver's utility, the smaller the inflation redistributive motive and, supposedly, the smaller the variability in inflation. This conjecture is confirmed in *Figure 7*, which plots the volatility of inflation as a function of ω . Under the Ramsey equilibrium, larger values of ω correspond to a smaller volatility of inflation.

Analyzing the effects of alternative values of ω is one way to address the role of heterogeneity. Another way is to look at the effect on inflation variability of different values of the borrower's patience rate β . For values of β approaching γ , we should observe a vanishing of the role of heterogeneous patience rates which is key in driving the consumption-saving preferences of the two agents over the business cycle. *Figure 8* plots optimal inflation volatility as a function of β .

The support of β is limited to the right by γ , which corresponds to the saver's patience rate. Thus we see that inflation variability falls for larger values of β . In particular, as the borrower's patience rate converges to the one of the saver, inflation volatility approaches the benchmark value of zero. In other words, when heterogeneity in patience rates vanishes, the borrowing constraint

²³For instance, Campbell and Hercowitz (2005) emphasize this channel as a vehicle for business cycle expansions/contractions. In their analysis, the reduction in equity requirements brought about by the financial reforms of the early eighties is a candidate theory of the so-called "great moderation" (Stock and Watson (2002)).

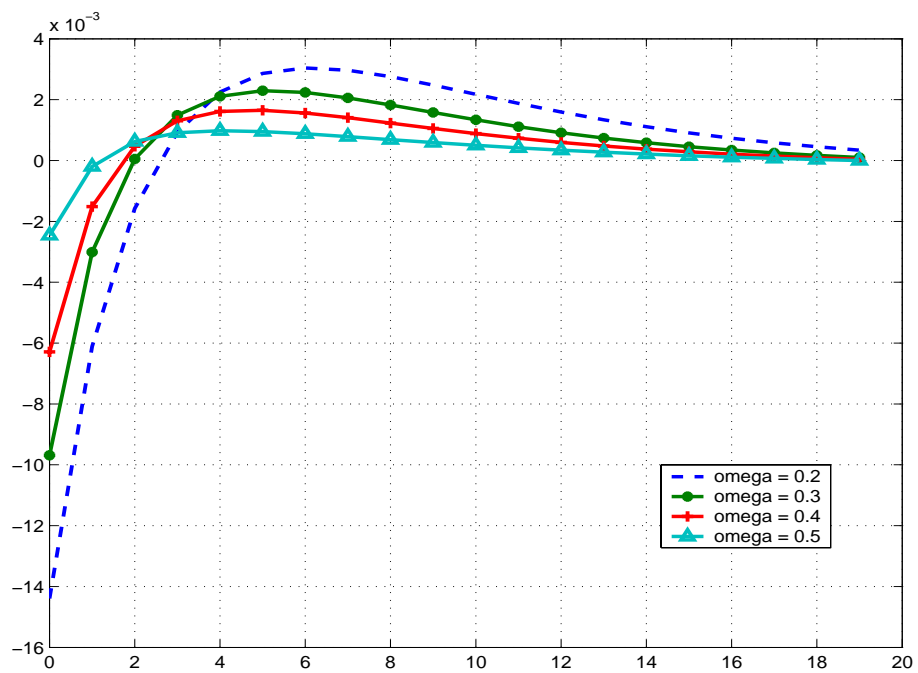


Figure 6: Optimal Response of Inflation to a Productivity Shock: Effect of Varying Saver's Weight ω in Planner's Objective.

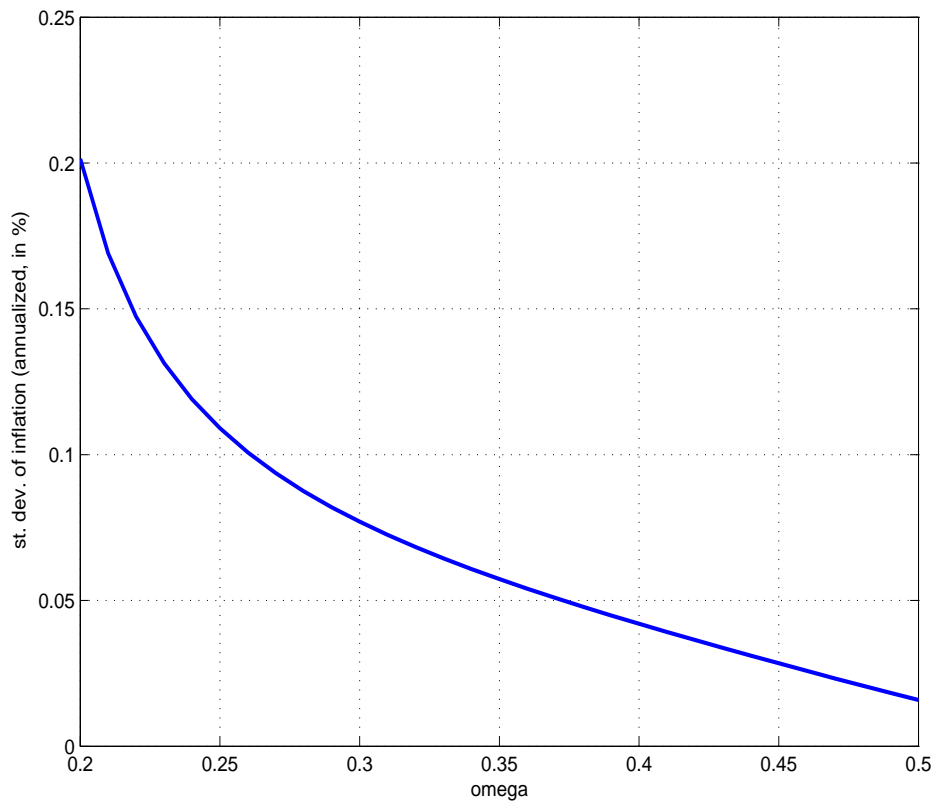


Figure 7: Optimal Inflation Volatility: Effect of Varying Saver's Weight ω in Planner's Objective Function.

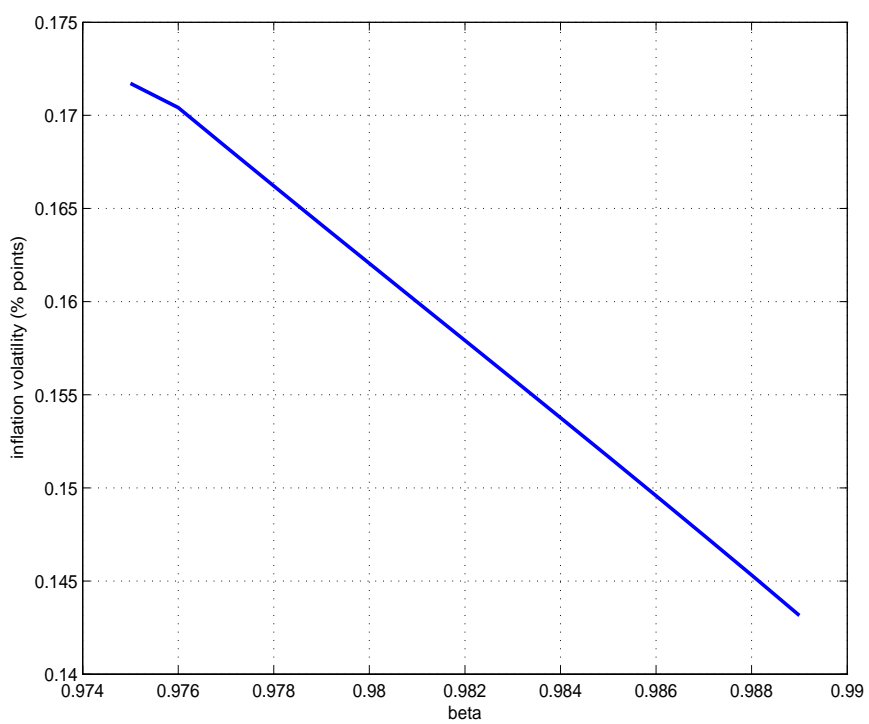


Figure 8: Optimal Inflation Volatility: Effect of Varying Patience Rate β .

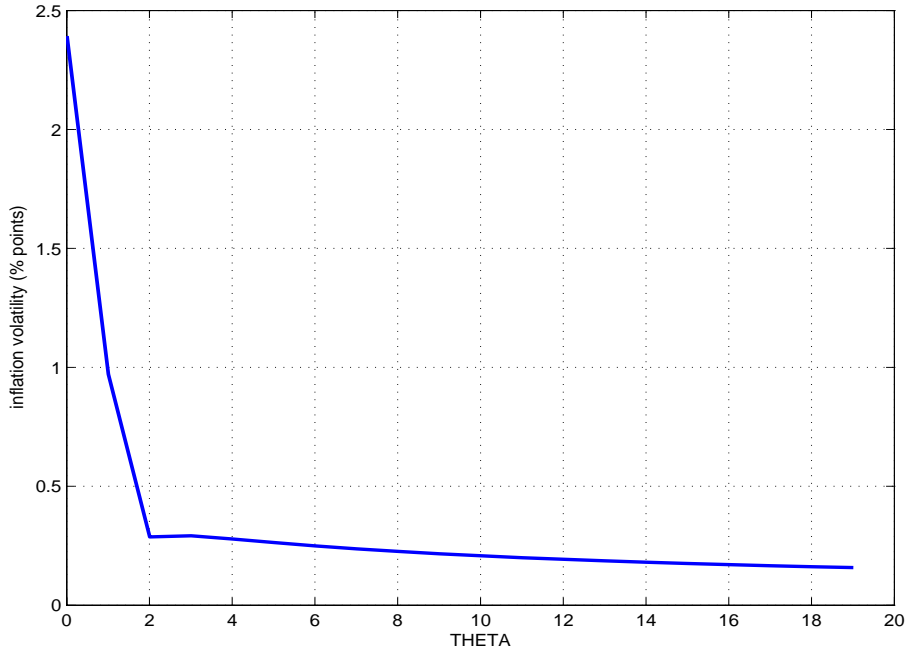


Figure 9: Optimal Inflation Volatility: Effect of Varying Price Stickiness ϑ .

ceases to be binding (in and in the vicinity of the steady state), and the Ramsey equilibrium tends to mimic the optimal dynamics of a representative agent economy with price stickiness represented in the previous section.

5.4 Price Rigidity

It is important to emphasize that movements in inflation in the Ramsey equilibrium are overall very small. Due to the presence of price stickiness, in fact, inflation is costly. Hence monetary policy has to optimally balance the incentive to offset the price stickiness distortion with the one of marginally relaxing borrower's collateral constraint via the redistributive effect of inflation. To explore how this tradeoff is resolved, in *Figure 9* we plot the volatility of inflation in the Ramsey equilibrium against the degree of nominal price stickiness ϑ . The extreme case of ϑ approaching zero corresponds to full price flexibility. Hence we see that changes in the the price stickiness parameter have a dramatic effect on the equilibrium volatility of inflation. In the case of flexible prices, inflation volatility (on an annualized basis) is around 2.5%. Yet already for small values of ϑ , the volatility of inflation drops significantly and remains barely positive.

This result points to a general feature shared with a large array of equilibrium business cycle models recently employed for optimal monetary policy analysis: namely, the important quantitative role played by the price stickiness distortion in driving the optimal monetary policy prescription towards stable inflation. One may notice the resemblance of this result (despite the very different environment) with the one of Schmitt-Grohe and Uribe (2003) and Siu (2003), who analyze a joint problem of optimal monetary and fiscal policy. In that case, and in the presence of nominal non-state contingent government debt, the planner balances the incentive to generate inflation variability, in order to reduce the finance cost of debt, with the cost of price variability due to price stickiness. Like here, optimal monetary policy points to resolving the tradeoff in favor of minimizing the price stickiness distortion.

6 Durable Prices and Collateral

So far we have worked with a specialized version of our model featuring only one final good sector. In so doing, we have neglected any role for endogenous fluctuations in the relative price of durables in directly affecting the ability of borrowing. Our normative analysis has so far highlighted the role of two distortions. On the one hand, the planner tries to minimize the cost of price variability due to the presence of price adjustment costs. At the same time, with nominal debt, the presence of a collateral requirement induces the planner to resort to inflation variability in order to marginally affect the borrowing constraint. However, the specification of a two sector model introduces further distortions. With sectoral asymmetric shocks, the equilibrium dynamics requires an adjustment in the relative price of durables. In the presence of price frictions and/or borrowing constraints, these relative price movements may be brought about in a way non consistent with efficiency.²⁴ We investigate this point below.

6.1 Inefficient Movements in Relative Prices

Let us define the *natural* relative price of durables as the relative price prevailing with full price flexibility *and* free borrowing. In addition, we can define the relative price *gap* as the deviations of the relative price from that natural benchmark.

Figure 10 illustrates how the introduction of price stickiness and/or borrowing constraints alters the equilibrium dynamics. We plot selected variables in response to a rise in productivity in

²⁴For an analysis of the distortion introduced by sectoral asymmetric shocks see Aoki (2001) and Woodford (2003).

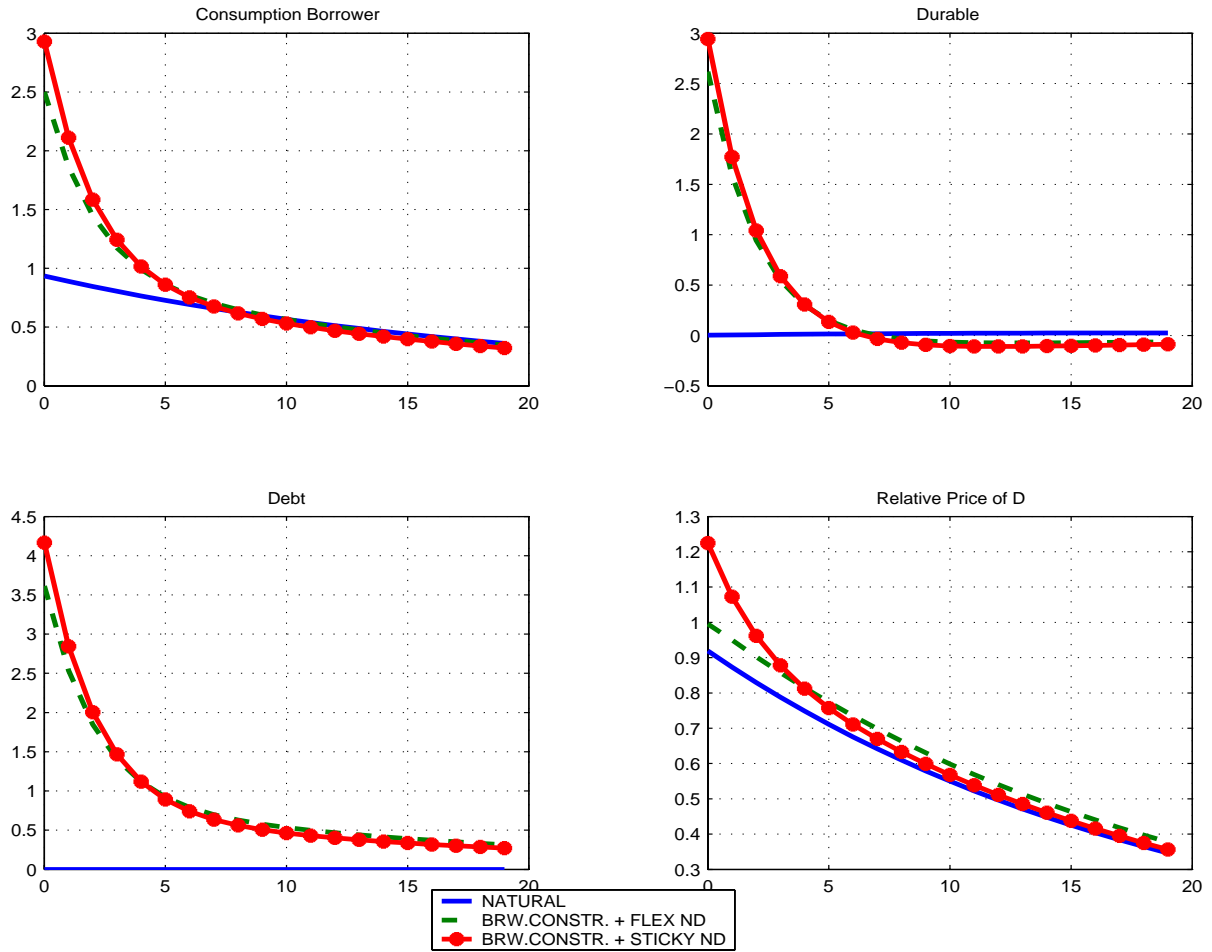


Figure 10: Responses to a Productivity Shock: (i) Natural vs (ii) Borrowing Constraints with Flexible Non-Durables vs. (iii) Borrowing Constraints with Sticky Non-Durables (Two-Sector Model)

the non-durable sector for three alternative cases. (i) the solid lines report responses in the natural case, i.e., fully flexible prices and free borrowing; (ii) the dashed lines display the equilibrium in the presence of collateral requirements only (therefore with full price flexibility in both sectors); (iii) the dotted lines display the dynamics when the two-sector model with borrowing constraints is augmented with price stickiness in non-durables.

Consider the behavior in the natural case, which constitutes our benchmark. In the absence of borrowing frictions and with price flexibility in both sectors, the rise in productivity in non-durables is completely absorbed via a rise in the relative price of durables and an expenditure

switching towards non-durables. Consistently, equilibrium demand for durables is unchanged, and a rise in consumption is observed only in the non-durable sector.

Matters are different when a borrowing constraint is added (although still under the assumption of full price flexibility in both sectors). In this case (dashed line) the demand for durables must rise due to the need of financing further borrowing, with this expansion in durable demand being amplified for larger values of the inverse loan-to-value parameter χ . Importantly, in an efficient equilibrium with free borrowing and lending, the borrower would indeed like (given his impatience) to expand borrowing to finance current consumption, but in that case without resorting to an increase in demand for durables. Hence we observe that the relative price of durables rises above its natural level in the presence of collateral constraints, with this effect being driven by a collateral motive on durable demand.

Figure 10 also illustrates that the adding of stickiness in non-durable prices introduces a further source of deviation from the natural relative price. With sticky non-durable prices, the demand for debt rises more and so does the demand for durables, inducing a larger increase in the relative price gap. Overall the results indicate that both frictions contribute to generate inefficient movements in the relative price q_t from its natural level.

6.2 Collateral Effects

In the two-sector model, movements in the relative price of durables are important for they exert an endogenous effect on the ability of borrowing. In this section we highlight the importance of this transmission channel linking durable (asset) price variations to consumption. We define as *collateral effect* the acceleration on borrowing and consumption that derives from the price of durables directly affecting the right hand side of equation (8). The intuition is akin to the "credit-cycle" phenomenon emphasized in Kyotaki and Moore (1997) and Iacoviello (2005). The mechanism is simple. The rise in productivity in the non-durable sector boosts the relative price of durables and therefore the value of the asset that can be used as a collateral. The resulting increase in borrower's net worth rises the demand for borrowing which is necessary to finance a surge in consumption. In turn, the higher demand for collateral boosts durable prices even further, inducing a self-sustained cycle effect.

To illustrate this effect on borrowing and consumption, we compare responses to a productivity shock (in the non-durable sector) in two cases: with and without collateral effect. The absence of

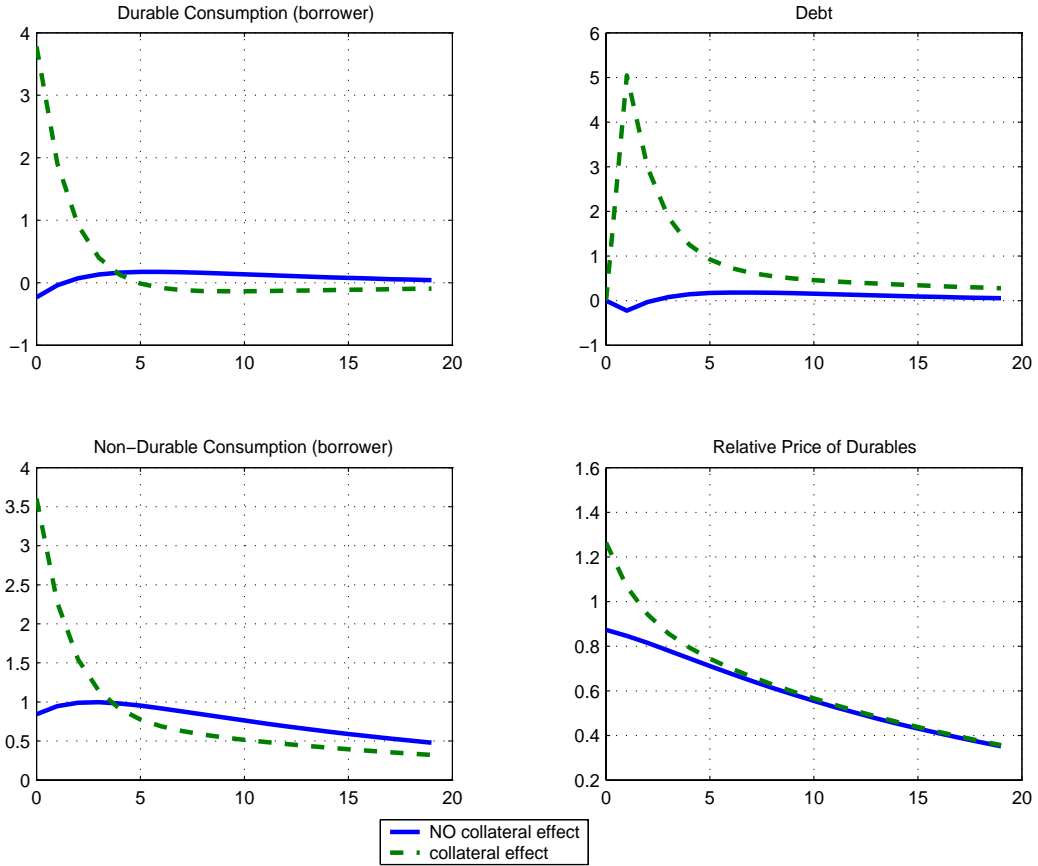


Figure 11: Durable Prices and The Role of Collateral Effect on Borrowing (Responses to a Productivity Shock in ND Sector).

a collateral effect is obtained by specifying the borrowing constraint in the slightly modified form:

$$b_t = (1 - \chi) D_t q_t^\xi \quad (36)$$

where $\xi \in [0, 1]$. We can broadly define ξ as a parameter measuring the ability of the constrained household to convert a rise in his net worth in ability of borrowing. The case with full collateral effect corresponds to $\xi = 1$, while the case without collateral effect corresponds to ξ small and close to zero. *Figure 11* displays that movements in durable prices are crucial for the amplification of the joint dynamics of borrowing and consumption. With a collateral effect at work, the rise in durable consumption and debt is much larger relative to the case in which the collateral effect is (although artificially, and for the sake of argument) shut down.

Importantly, the collateral effect produces also an acceleration in borrower's non-durable consumption. The intuition works as follows. The rise in the real price of durables, via its direct effect on the collateral value, induces a *fall* in the marginal value of borrowing (ψ_t in our model). This implies, for the borrower, a fall in the marginal utility of current (non-durable) consumption relative to the option of shifting consumption intertemporally (in other words, a violation of the Euler equation, see equation (12)), which can be validated only by a *rise* in current consumption. In turn, the increased demand for borrowing further boosts durable demand and in turn the real price of durables, inducing a circle that positively feedbacks on (non-durable) consumption.

6.3 Durable Prices: Ramsey vs Taylor

In this section we investigate the behavior of the relative price of durables in the Ramsey equilibrium. In this case we proceed by solving the more general version of the Ramsey problem, as outlined in (35). In particular, we wish to understand whether dampening the volatility of durable (asset) prices should be of any concern for monetary policy in this context. It is important to recall, as suggested above, that two are the reasons for why the relative price of durables fluctuates in deviation from its natural benchmark: (i) the presence of a collateral requirement; (ii) price stickiness in the non-durable sector.

To this goal, we compare the dynamics in the Ramsey equilibrium with a simple generalized Taylor type rule of the following form:

$$\frac{R_t}{R} = \left(\frac{\pi_{c,t}}{\pi_c} \right)^{\phi_\pi} \left(\frac{q_t}{q} \right)^{\phi_q} \quad \phi_\pi > 1, \phi_q \geq 0 \quad (37)$$

where R , π_c , q correspond, respectively, to the steady state values of R_t , $\pi_{c,t}$, q_t . A rule such as (37) encompasses several alternative policy regimes, including the extreme cases of: (i) strict non-durable inflation targeting ($\phi_\pi \rightarrow \infty$, henceforth *ND-targeting*), and (ii) strict durable price targeting ($\phi_q \rightarrow \infty$, henceforth *q-targeting*).

In *Figure 12* we compare the effects of a productivity in the non-durable sector under the Ramsey equilibrium with the extreme cases of ND targeting and q-targeting. One central finding is immediately worth noticing : the amplitude of the response of the relative price of durables in the Ramsey equilibrium is intermediate between the extreme cases of ND targeting and q-targeting. In general, this feature of the Ramsey allocation is common to the equilibrium behavior of the entire set of variables displayed.

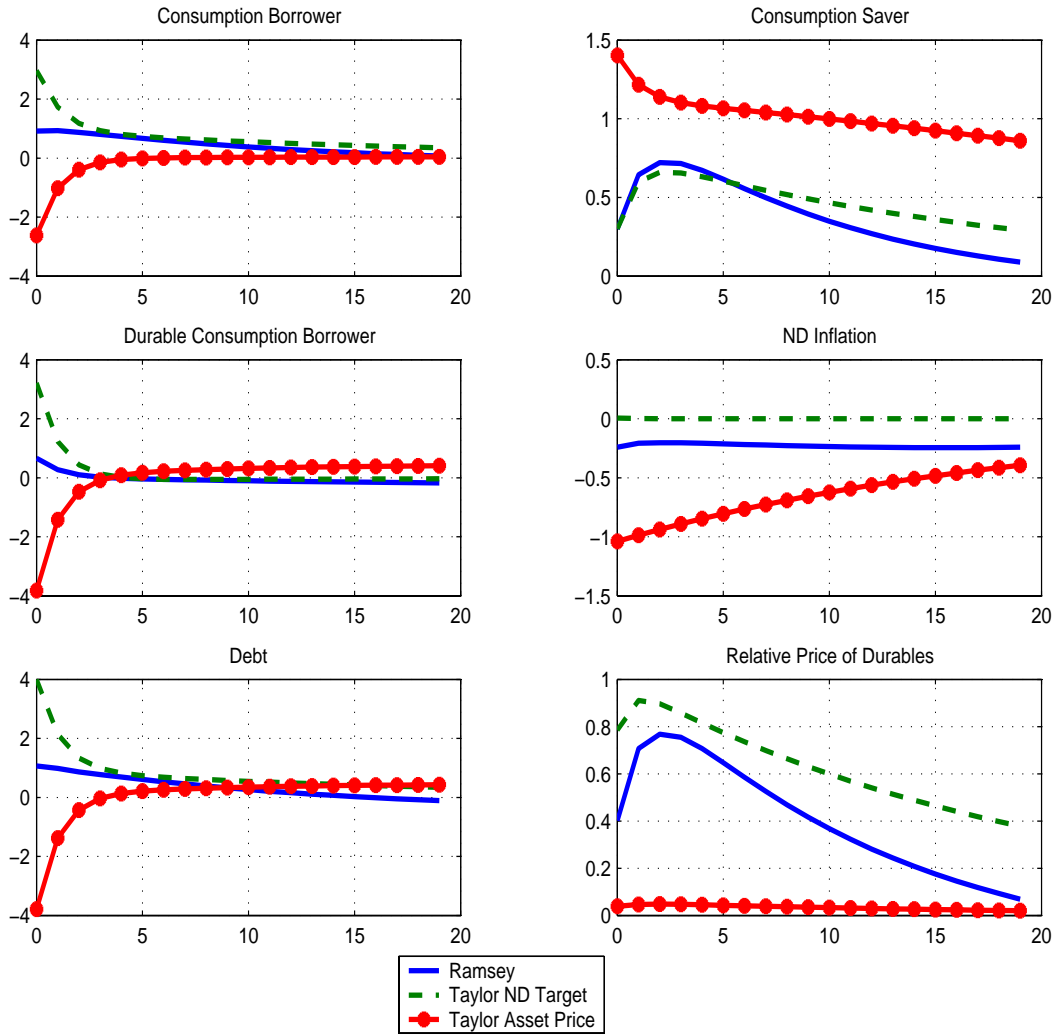


Figure 12: Ramsey vs. Strict ND-targeting vs. Strict q-targeting: Responses to a Productivity Shock in ND Sector.

Consider a strict *q-targeting* rule first, and compare it with the outcome under the Ramsey equilibrium. Evidently, this type of policy rule is largely detrimental for the borrower. Not only it does induce a shut-off of the collateral effect on borrowing outlined above, but it hinders the necessary relative sectoral adjustment, thereby generating a sizeable drop in the demand for collateral and borrowing, and therefore, in turn, for non-durable consumption by the borrower. At the same time, since debt falls in equilibrium, this reduces the consumption-smoothing possibilities by the saver, whose consumption volatility is in fact amplified relative to the Ramsey-optimal allocation.

Consider next a *ND-targeting* rule. In that case, the effect is somewhat symmetric. Relative to a Ramsey equilibrium, strict stabilization of non-durable inflation induces an acceleration in the relative price of durables and in turn an amplified rise in borrowing and durable demand. This, in turn, is also reflected in an amplified surge in consumption by the borrower.

Interestingly, the Ramsey-optimal policy emerges as an intermediate case between the two extreme targeting cases outlined above.²⁵ In fact, the planner wishes to optimally balance two margins. On the one hand, the incentive to partially stabilize inefficient movements in the relative price of durables due to the presence of a collateral constraint. On the other hand, the planner has also the objective to stabilize non-durable inflation due to the presence of a sticky price distortion in that sector. Hence a monetary policy that aimed at strictly targeting non-durable inflation would lead to an excess volatility in real durable prices and to an excess volatility in borrower's consumption and debt.

7 Conclusions

We have laid out a framework for the analysis of optimal monetary in the presence of nominal private debt and of a collateral constraint on borrowing. The emergence of a borrowing-lending decision in the equilibrium of our economy requires heterogeneity between a patient and an impatient agent. At the margin, and relative to a standard representative agent economy with price stickiness, optimal policy in this context requires a partial use of inflation volatility with a redistributive motive. However, the fact that, due to the presence of price stickiness, inflation movements are costly, heavily biases the optimal policy prescription towards low inflation volatility. When durable prices have the additional effect of altering the value of the collateral and in turn the ability of

²⁵Notice that the behavior of the relative price of durables q_t is exactly symmetric in the case of a productivity shock in the *durable* sector. In that case (not displayed here), q_t tends to fall under ND-targeting, while it falls less in the Ramsey equilibrium.

borrowing, optimal policy has a motive for partially stabilizing the relative price of durables. This is due to the fact that the model incorporates a demand for durables (and therefore a pressure on prices) which is only motivated by the presence of an inefficient collateral requirement.

There are several other features that have remained unexplored in the current context and that would deserve a more thorough normative analysis. First, detailed institutional characteristics of mortgage markets should be more adequately incorporated. For instance, the presence of an equity withdrawal margin, the possibility of resorting to mortgage refinancing, as well as the decision of opting for a flexible vs. fixed rate mortgage structure. Second, the analysis should contemplate the possibility that borrowing constraints may be only occasionally binding, and that, in the presence of uncertainty, the borrower's decisions may be driven by a precautionary saving motive. Third, one may wish to extend this framework to the presence of collateral requirements on other forms of spending, such as business investment. Fourth, one may think of extending the present context to comprise the interaction between monetary and fiscal policy. The analysis of the latter, in particular, may fruitfully take advantage of the implications of the assumed heterogeneity and of the presence of a collateral constraint, in order to emphasize, in particular, transmission channels of fiscal policy alternative to the typical ones embedded in the standard neoclassical growth model.

A Competitive Equilibrium with Durable Goods and Free Borrowing

The (symmetric) equilibrium in the one-sector economy with free borrowing, durable goods and sticky prices can be described (in compact form) by the following set of equations:

- efficiency condition on non-durable and durable consumption

$$1 = \frac{U_{d,t}}{U_{c,t}} + \beta(1 - \delta)E_t \left\{ \frac{U_{c,t+1}}{U_{c,t}} \right\} \quad (38)$$

- standard Euler equation

$$1 = \beta E_t \left\{ \frac{U_{c,t+1}}{U_{c,t}} \frac{R_t}{\pi_{t+1}} \right\} \quad (39)$$

- Phillips curve

$$(\pi_t - 1) \pi_t = \gamma E_t \left\{ \frac{U_{c,t+1}}{U_{c,t}} (\pi_{t+1} - 1) \pi_{t+1} \right\} + A_t N_t \frac{\varepsilon}{\vartheta} \left(-\frac{U_{n,t}}{A_t U_{c,t}} - \frac{\varepsilon - 1}{\varepsilon} \right) \quad (40)$$

- resource constraint

$$A_t N_t = C_t + D_t - (1 - \delta)D_{t-1} + \frac{\vartheta}{2} (\pi_t - 1)^2 \quad (41)$$

where π_t is CPI (final goods) inflation. For any policy sequence $\{R_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ and stochastic process $\{A_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$, an (imperfectly) competitive equilibrium in the one-sector economy with sticky prices and durable consumption is a sequence $\{N_t, D_t, C_t, \pi_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ solving (38) - (41). A Ramsey equilibrium in this economy can be obtained by maximizing $E_0 \left\{ \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t U(C_t, D_t, N_t) \right\}$ subject to (38), (40) and (41).

B One (Final Good) Sector Economy

Here we briefly describe the equilibrium in the one-sector economy, featuring sticky prices, heterogeneous patience rates, and borrowing constraints:

- borrower's efficiency condition on non-durable and durable consumption

$$U_{c,t} = U_{d,t} + \beta(1 - \delta)E_t \{U_{c,t+1}\} + U_{c,t}(1 - \chi) \psi_t$$

- deviation from Euler equation

$$\psi_t = 1 - \beta E_t \left\{ \frac{U_{c,t+1}}{U_{c,t}} \frac{R_t}{\pi_{t+1}} \right\}$$

- Phillips curve

$$(\pi_t - 1) \pi_t = \gamma E_t \left\{ \frac{\tilde{U}_{c,t+1}}{\tilde{U}_{c,t}} (\pi_{t+1} - 1) \pi_{t+1} \right\} + A_t N_t \frac{\varepsilon}{\vartheta} \left(-\frac{U_{n,t}}{A_t U_{c,t}} - \frac{\varepsilon - 1}{\varepsilon} \right)$$

- resource constraint

$$A_t N_t = C_t + D_t - (1 - \delta) D_{t-1} + \frac{\vartheta}{2} (\pi_t - 1)^2$$

- saver's efficiency conditions

$$\tilde{U}_{c,t} = \gamma E_t \left\{ \tilde{U}_{c,t+1} \frac{R_t}{\pi_{t+1}} \right\}$$

$$\tilde{U}_{c,t} = \tilde{U}_{d,t} + \beta(1 - \delta) E_t \left\{ \tilde{U}_{c,t+1} \right\}$$

B.1 Recursive Ramsey Problem in the One-Sector Economy

Let's define by $\Delta \equiv \beta^\omega \gamma^{1-\omega}$ the discount factor relevant for the viewpoint of the Ramsey planner problem, where ω is the weight attached on savers's utility. Below we describe the form of the optimal policy program in recursive form. This is necessary because the original problem is not time-invariant due to the fact that some constraints exhibit future expectations of control variables. The recursive lagrangian problem in the economy with one final-good sector can be written as follows;

$$\max E_0 \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} ([(1 - \omega) \beta^t U(C_t, D_t, N_t) + \omega \gamma^t U(\tilde{C}_t, \tilde{D}_t)])$$

$$\begin{aligned}
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{1,t} [(U_{c,t}(1 - (1 - \chi)\psi_t)) - U_{d,t}] - \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{1,t-1} \beta(1 - \delta)U_{c,t} \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{2,t} \left[(\psi_t - 1) \frac{U_{c,t}}{R_t} \right] + \Delta^t \lambda_{2,t-1} \frac{U_{c,t}}{\pi_t} \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{3,t} \left(\frac{U_{\tilde{c},t}}{R_t} \right) - \gamma \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{3,t-1} \frac{U_{\tilde{c},t}}{\pi_t} \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{4,t} \left(A_t N_t - C_t - \tilde{C}_t - D_t - \tilde{D}_t - \frac{\vartheta}{2} (\pi_t - 1)^2 \right) + \Delta^{t+1} \lambda_{4,t+1} (1 - \delta) (D_t + \tilde{D}_t) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{5,t} (b_t - (1 - \chi)D_t) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{6,t} \left(C_t + D_t + \frac{R_{t-1} b_{t-1}}{\pi_t} - b_t + \frac{U_{n,t}}{U_{c,t}} N_t \right) - \Delta^t \lambda_{6,t+1} \left((1 - \delta)D_t + \frac{R_t b_t}{\pi_{t+1}} \right) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{7,t} (\tilde{U}_{c,t} - \tilde{U}_{d,t}) - \gamma \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{7,t-1} (1 - \delta) \tilde{U}_{c,t} \\
& + (\Delta^t \lambda_{8,t} - \gamma \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{8,t-1}) (\tilde{U}_{c,t} (\pi_t - 1) \pi_t) - \Delta^t \lambda_{8,t} \frac{\varepsilon A_t N_t}{\vartheta} \left(\frac{-U_{n,t}}{A_t U_{c,t}} - \mu^{-1} \right)
\end{aligned}$$

where $\mu \equiv \frac{\varepsilon}{\varepsilon-1}$ is the steady-state markup and π_t is final good inflation. This maximization program is recursive saddle-point stationary in the amplified state space $\{A_t, Z_t\}$, where $Z_t \equiv \{\lambda_{1,t-1}, \lambda_{2,t-1}, \lambda_{3,t-1}, \lambda_{7,t-1}, \lambda_{8,t-1}\}$. The corresponding (log-linearized) set of first order conditions describe a time-invariant system on difference equations to the extent that the initial condition $Z_0 = \bar{Z} \equiv [\bar{\lambda}_1, \bar{\lambda}_2, \bar{\lambda}_3, \bar{\lambda}_7, \bar{\lambda}_8]$ is added, where $\bar{\lambda}_j$ denotes the steady state value of multiplier λ_j , for $j = 1, 2, 3, 7, 8$.

C Recursive Ramsey Problem in the Two-Sector Economy

The recursive lagrangian for the Ramsey problem in the two sector economy can be written

$$\max E_0 \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} ([(1 - \omega)\beta^t U(C_t, D_t, N_t) + \omega \gamma^t U(\tilde{C}_t)])$$

$$\begin{aligned}
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{1,t} [(q_t U_{c,t} (1 - (1 - \chi) \psi_t)) - U_{d,t}] - \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{1,t-1} \beta (1 - \delta) q_t U_{c,t} \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{2,t} \left[(\psi_t - 1) \frac{U_{c,t}}{R_t} \right] + \Delta^t \lambda_{2,t-1} \frac{U_{c,t}}{\pi_{c,t}} \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{3,t} \left(\frac{U_{\tilde{c},t}}{R_t} \right) - \gamma \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{3,t-1} \frac{U_{\tilde{c},t}}{\pi_{c,t}} \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{4,t} \left(A_{c,t} N_{c,t} - C_t - \tilde{C}_t - \frac{\vartheta_c}{2} (\pi_{c,t} - 1)^2 \right) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{5,t} (b_t - (1 - \chi) D_t q_t) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{6,t} \left(C_t + q_t D_t + \frac{R_{t-1} b_{t-1}}{\pi_{c,t}} - b_t + \frac{U_{n,t}}{U_{c,t}} N_t \right) - \Delta^t \lambda_{6,t+1} \left((1 - \delta) D_t q_{t+1} + \frac{R_t b_t}{\pi_{c,t+1}} \right) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{7,t} (q_t \tilde{U}_{c,t} - \tilde{U}_{d,t}) + \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{7,t-1} (-\gamma (1 - \delta) \tilde{U}_{c,t} q_t) \\
& + (\Delta^t \lambda_{8,t} - \gamma \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{8,t-1}) \left(\tilde{U}_{c,t} (\pi_{c,t} - 1) \pi_{c,t} \right) - \Delta^t \lambda_{8,t} \frac{\varepsilon_c A_{c,t} N_{c,t}}{\vartheta_c} \left(\frac{-U_{n,t}}{A_{c,t} U_{c,t}} - \mu_c^{-1} \right) \\
& + (\Delta^t \lambda_{9,t} - \gamma \Delta^{t-1} \lambda_{9,t-1}) \left(q_t \tilde{U}_{c,t} (\pi_{d,t} - 1) \pi_{d,t} \right) - \Delta^t \lambda_{9,t} \frac{\varepsilon_d A_{d,t} N_{d,t}}{\vartheta_d} \left(\frac{-U_{n,t}}{A_{d,t} U_{c,t} q_t} - \mu_d^{-1} \right) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{10,t} \left(A_{d,t} N_{d,t} - D_t - \tilde{D}_t - \frac{\vartheta_d}{2} (\pi_{d,t} - 1)^2 \right) + \Delta^{t+1} \lambda_{10,t+1} (1 - \delta) (D_t + \tilde{D}_t) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{11,t} (N_t - N_{c,t} - N_{d,t}) \\
& +\Delta^t \lambda_{12,t} \left(\frac{\pi_{d,t}}{\pi_{c,t} q_t} \right) - \Delta^{t+1} \lambda_{12,t+1} q_{t+1}^{-1}
\end{aligned}$$

This maximization program is recursive saddle-point stationary in the amplified state space $\{A_{c,t}, A_{d,t}, Z'_t\}$, where $Z'_t \equiv \{\lambda_{1,t-1}, \lambda_{2,t-1}, \lambda_{3,t-1}, \lambda_{7,t-1}, \lambda_{8,t-1}, \lambda_{9,t-1}\}$ and with the initial condition $Z'_0 = \bar{Z}'$.

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