

Central Bank Swap Lines as Bilateral Sovereign Debt

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Uses of Swap Lines

- **Swap** line: two lines of credit involving two central banks
 - ... Each makes available some of its own currency to the other, for a fixed term
 - ... Short-term arrangements (typically one year, typically renewed)
- Used to mainly involve **AEs** Fed-ECB-BoE-BoJ-SNB
 - ... to support lender-of-last-resort functions with multinational firms
- Large increase in bilateral swaps and loans involving **EMs** since early 2000s
 - ... for EM, swap resources are hard currency
 - ... for EM, swap can be used for financing BoP (or as borrowed reserves)
 - ... EMs borrowing from swap lines tend to use different counterparts

Question

How do swap lines interact with sovereign debt?

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How do Central Bank Swap Lines affect the Market Structure of Sovereign Debt?

We abstract from **currencies**, **collateral**, and focus on the **borrowing**

Tradeoff

- Borrowing with bonds
 - ... interest rate reflects **default** risk
- Borrowing from the swap line
 - ... interest rate and drawings **negotiated**

!! Defaulting on the debt does not mean defaulting on the swap

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A New Landscape for Sovereign Borrowing

- Swap lines are an *example* of a new type of sovereign borrowing arrangement
 - Short maturity but rolled over, with **renegotiation**
 - Difficult to **default** on — Central bank \neq Treasury
 - Cheaper than borrowing on the market
- Other examples: Central bank deposits, bilateral loans, IMF programs...

The Dangers of Borrowing through Swap Lines

Main findings

- Swap drawings small relative to debt, but
 - Presence of swaps affects sovereign debt markets
 - ... can provide financing when other sources dry up
 - ... can increase risk-taking
- Lending around or in default maximizes surplus in swap negotiations
 - Availability of swaps in default:
 - ... raises the value of default
 - ... which increases the default frequency
 - ... and worsens borrowing terms in bond markets
 - Without restricting swaps in default, welfare losses for the government
- Swap lines induce relational overborrowing similar to the debt dilution problem
 - Surplus requires spreads — spreads require risk

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- Central Bank swaps among advanced economies
 - ... Bahaj and Reis (2021); Cesa-Bianchi, Eguren-Martin, and Ferrero (2022)
- Data on Central Bank swaps for EMs
 - ... Perks, Rao, Shin, and Tokuoka (2021); Horn, Parks, Reinhart, and Trebesch (2023)
- Sovereign debt/default with interactions from 'official' debt
 - ... Boz (2011), Hatchondo, Martinez, and Onder (2014), Arellano and Barreto (2024), Liu, Liu, and Yue (2025)

Model

Environment


The government of a small open economy borrows from a monopolist and from markets

- Income $y(z_t)$ follows an AR(1) process in logs
 - ... Only one good, representative risk-averse household, expected utility
- **Renegotiate** the swap m each period
 - ... Involves a transfer x and a new loan size m'
 - ... Swap is non-defaultable \implies Repaying m is the natural threat point
- Should expect
 - ... Implicit interest rate r to vary over time
 - ... Interest rate to reflect **market power**
 - ... Interest rate to reflect **outside options**


$$x = \frac{1}{1 + r} m' - m$$

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Warm-up: Bargaining with monopolist only

- At income state z and loan m , solve

$$\max_{x, m'} \mathcal{L}(x, m, m', z)^\theta \times \mathcal{B}(x, m, m', z)^{1-\theta}$$

Government surplus

Lender surplus

- Government (borrower) surplus

$$\mathcal{B}(x, m, m', z) = \underbrace{u(y(z) + x) + \beta \mathbb{E}[v(m', z') | z]}_{\text{agreement: receive } x, \text{ owe } m'} - \underbrace{(u(y(z) - m) + \beta \mathbb{E}[v(0, z') | z])}_{\text{threat point: repay } m, \text{ clean slate}}$$

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- Value functions $v(m, z)$ and $h(m, z)$ encode expected outcomes of future rounds

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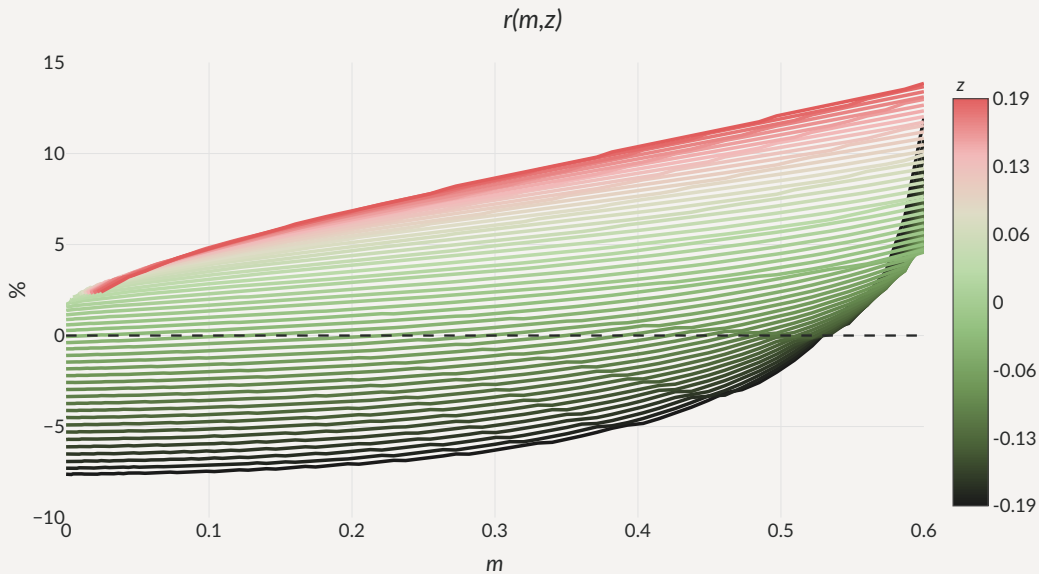
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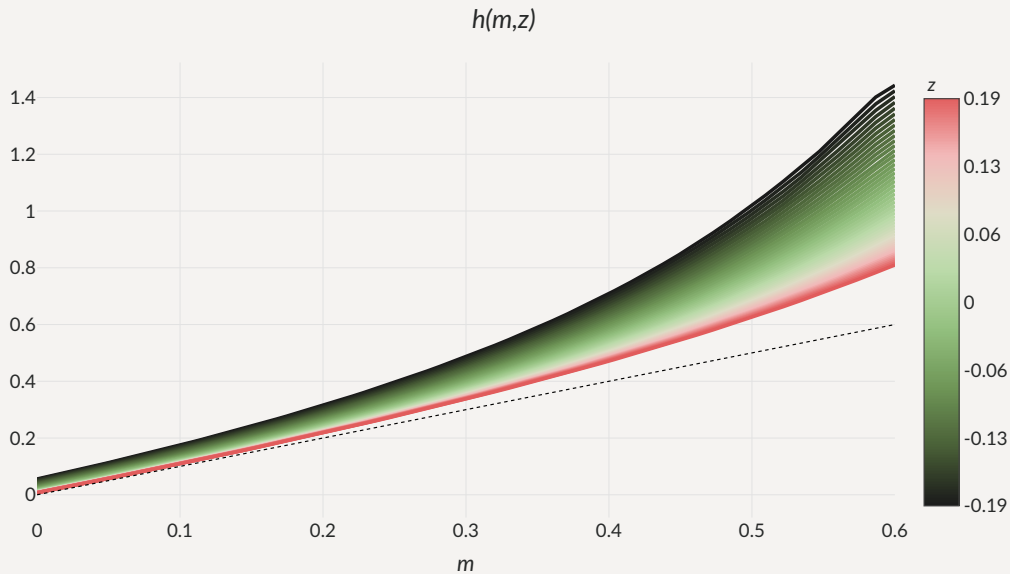
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- Value functions $v(m, z)$ and $h(m, z)$ encode expected outcomes of future rounds

Monopolist Terms: Implicit interest rate



Monopolist Terms: Lender's value function



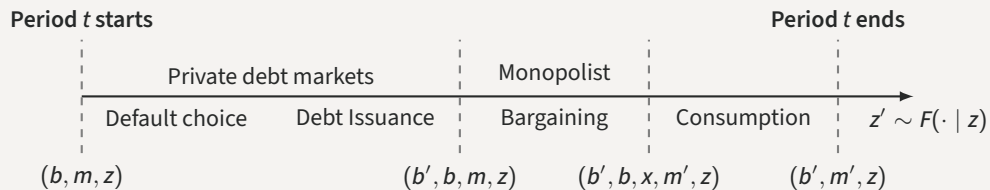
Monopolist Terms: Takeaways

The threat point is less 'credible' when m is large

key requirement:
threat point value decreasing in m

- This creates convexity in the lender's value function
... making the lender act 'as if' **risk-loving**
- The lender initially subsidizes the loan to induce indebtedness and high profits
 - **Gamble for debt overhang**
- Initial subsidy and high rates consistent with B's risk aversion – 'Participation constraint'

Timeline of events



Borrowing from markets

- Debt is a geometrically-decaying coupon
... for each unit, get q , pay $\kappa, (1 - \rho)\kappa, \dots (1 - \rho)^{s-1}\kappa$
- Government enters first stage owing b in debt, m in swaps, income state z

$$v(b, m, z) = \max \{ v_R(b, m, z) + \epsilon_R, v_D(m, z) + \epsilon_D \}$$
$$v_R(b, m, z) = \max_{b'} w_R(b', b, m, z)$$

- Lenders in competitive markets need to anticipate interactions with the monopolist

$$q(b', b, m, z) = \beta_L \mathbb{E} [(1 - 1_D(b', m', z')) (\kappa + (1 - \rho)q(b'', b', m', z')) \mid z]$$
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Bargaining stage with monopolist

- At state z , owing debt b bonds and m on the swap and having issued b'

$$\max_{x,m} \mathcal{L}_R(b', x, m, m', z)^\theta \times \mathcal{B}_R(b', b, x, m, m', z)^{1-\theta}$$

Government surplus

Lender surplus

- Lender's surplus

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- Revenues from debt issuance $B(b', b, m, z)$ modulate the value of the threat point
... When $m - B(b', b, m, z)$ is large: government willing to borrow at high rates

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Quantitative Effects of Swap Lines

Calibration

- Calibrate to Argentina without swaps (as in Roch & Roldán, 2023)

	Parameter	Value
Sovereign's discount factor	β	0.9504
Sovereign's risk aversion	γ	2
Preference shock scale parameter	χ	0.02
Lender's bargaining power	θ	0.5
Risk-free interest rate	r	0.01
Duration of debt	ρ	0.05
Income autocorrelation coefficient	ρ_z	0.9484
Standard deviation of y_t	σ_z	0.02
Reentry probability	ψ	0.0385
Default cost: linear	d_0	-0.24
Default cost: quadratic	d_1	0.3

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How do swaps affect equilibrium?

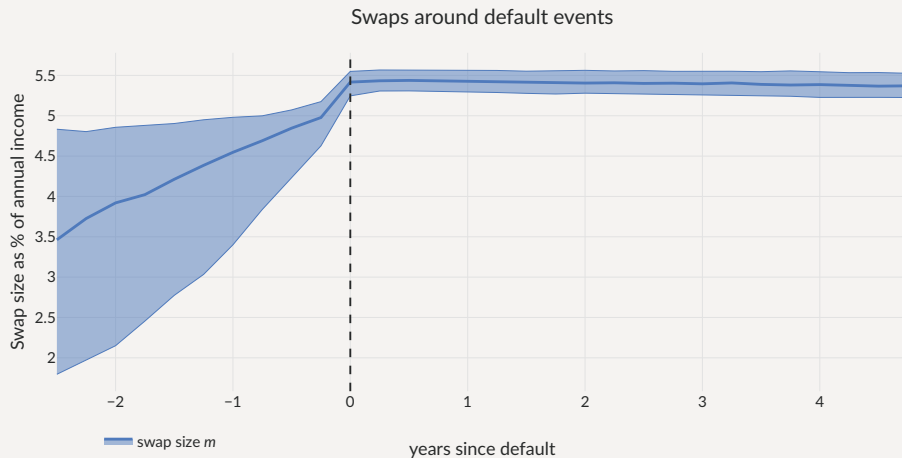
	No swap	Unrestricted, $\theta = 0.25$	Unrestricted, $\theta = 0.5$
Avg spread (bps)	804	1841	2396
Std spread (bps)	470	1099	1541
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$ (%)	111	111	110
Debt to GDP (%)	21.4	20.8	20.2
Swap to GDP (%)	0	3.74	3.32
Corr. swap & spreads (%)	–	53.8	62.2
Default frequency (%)	6.53	13.0	14.7
Welfare gains (rep)	–	-0.082%	-0.41%

When is the Swap Used?

▶ Limited

▶ More

- Swaps shoot up before *and during* defaults



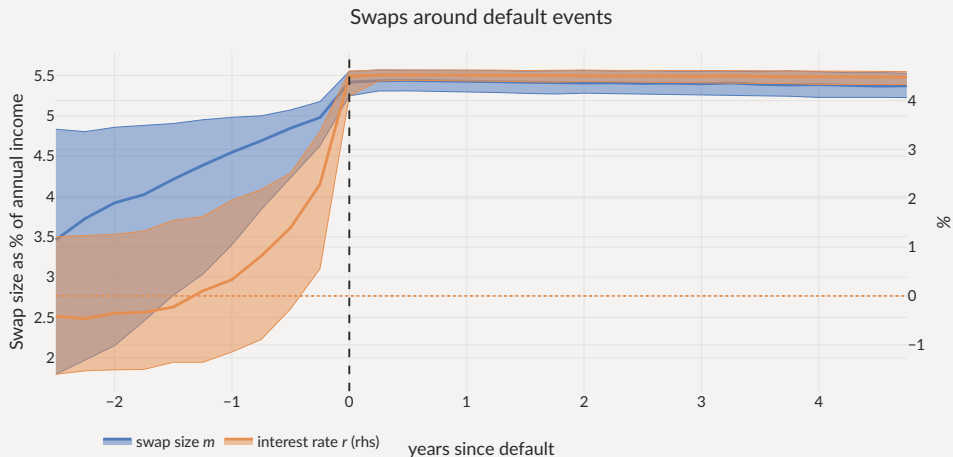
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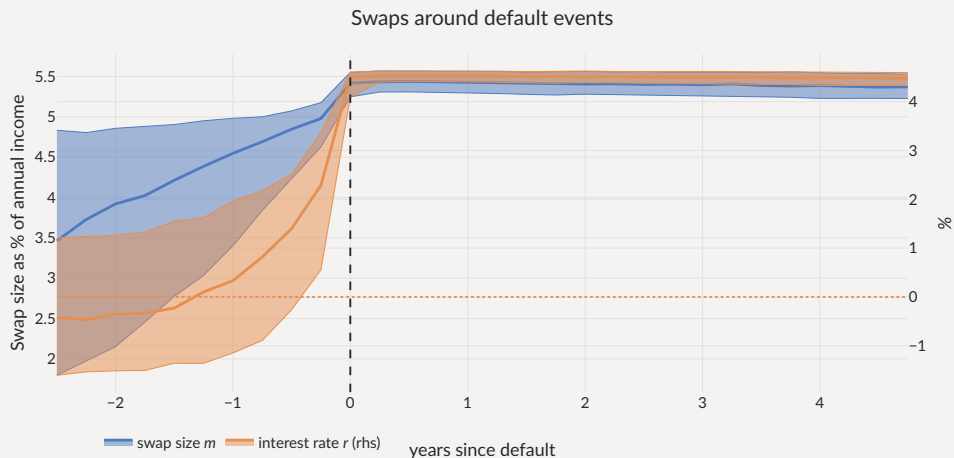
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Limiting swaps in default

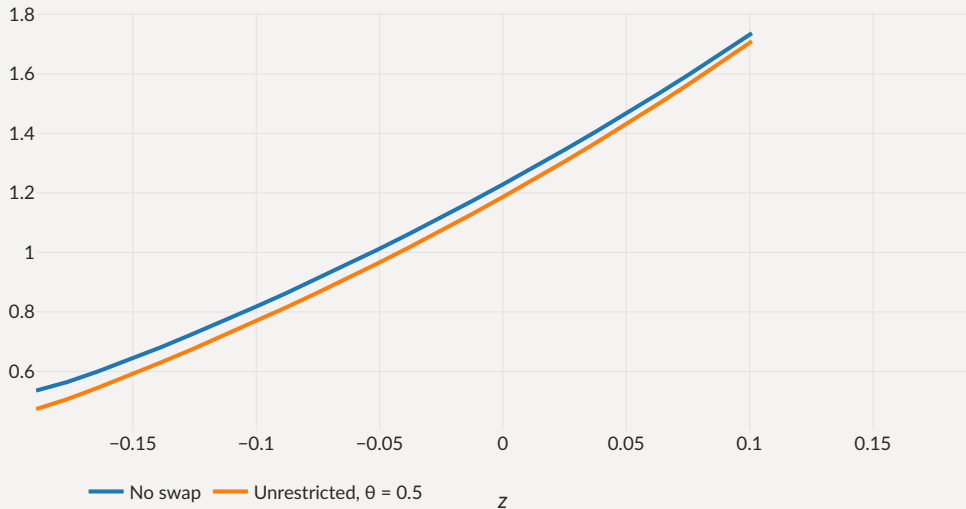
- **Limited:** entire swap must be repaid while in default $\Gamma(m) = 0$

	No swap	Unrestricted, $\theta = 0.5$	Limited, $\theta = 0.5$
Avg spread (bps)	804	2,396	1,216
Std spread (bps)	470	1,541	779
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$ (%)	111	110	113
Debt to GDP (%)	21.4	20.2	21.7
Swap to GDP (%)	0	3.32	1.05
Corr. swap & spreads (%)	–	62.2	69.4
Default frequency (%)	6.53	14.7	9.34
Welfare gains (rep)	–	-0.41%	-0.084%

Default Barriers with Swaps

- **Unrestricted:** default barrier moves inward, **Limited:** marginal impact

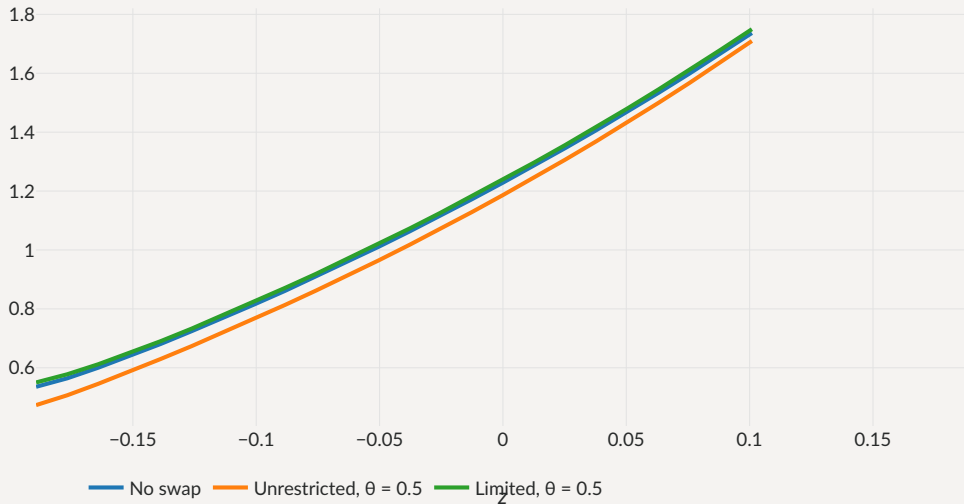
Debt levels at which $\mathcal{P}(b,m,z)$ crosses 50%



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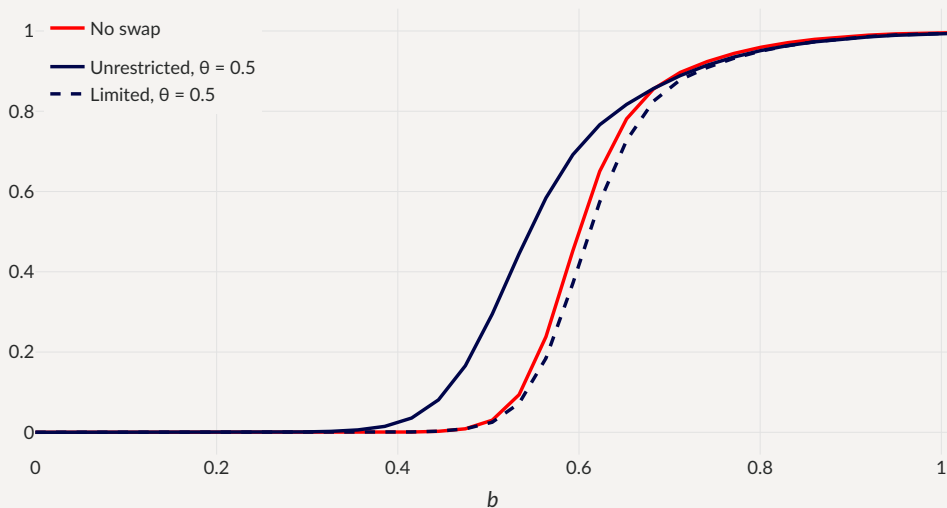
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Debt Tolerance with Swaps

- **Unrestricted:** default more often, **Limited:** marginal impact

Default Probability $\mathcal{P}(b,m,z)$

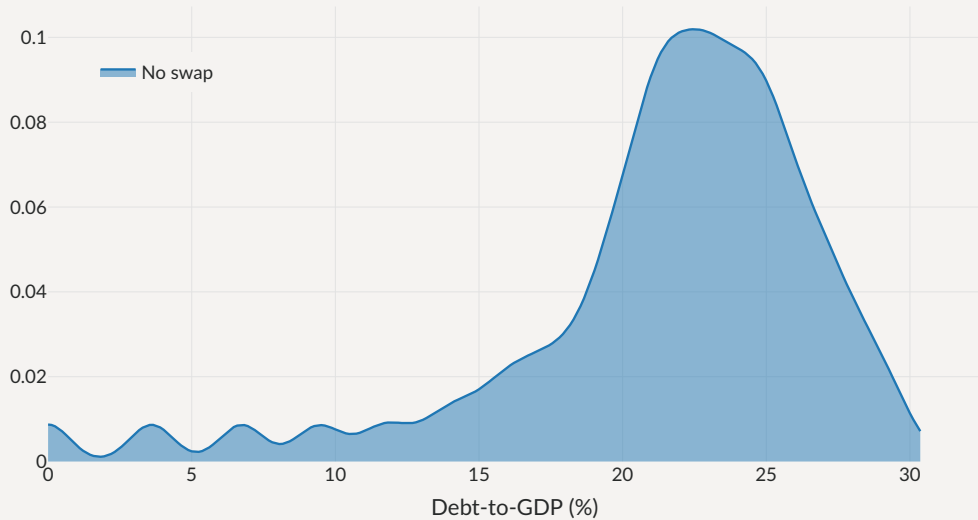


If **Limited** swaps help repay the debt,

Why are there **more** defaults with swaps?

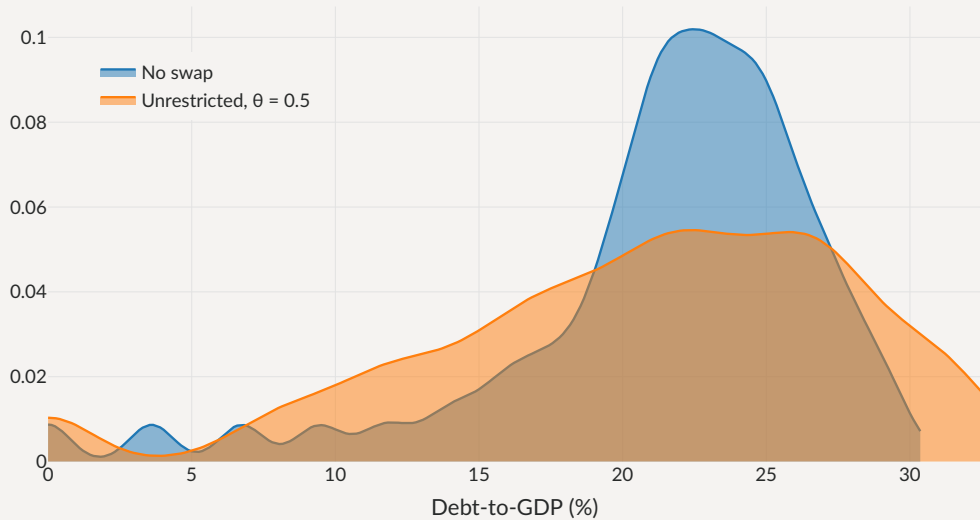
Debt Levels with Swaps

Distribution of debt levels



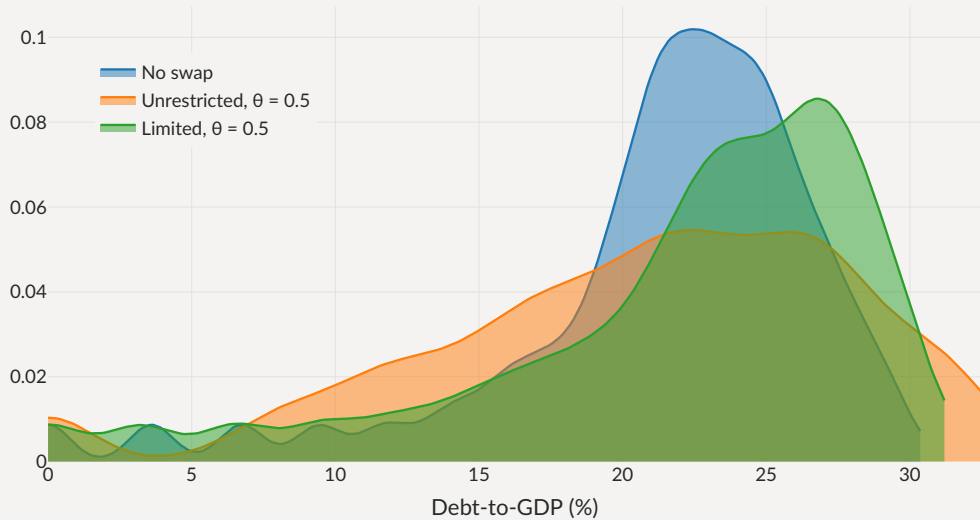
Debt Levels with Swaps

Distribution of debt levels



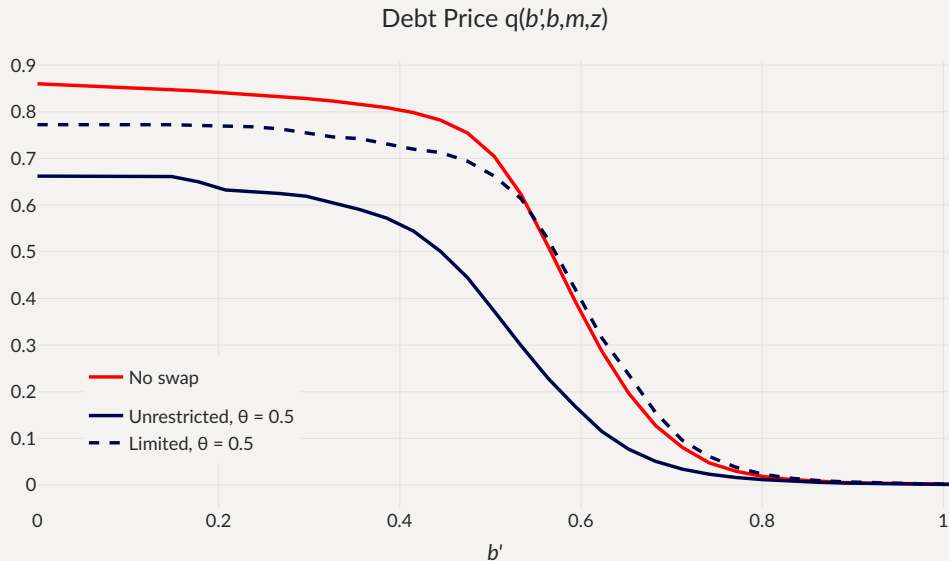
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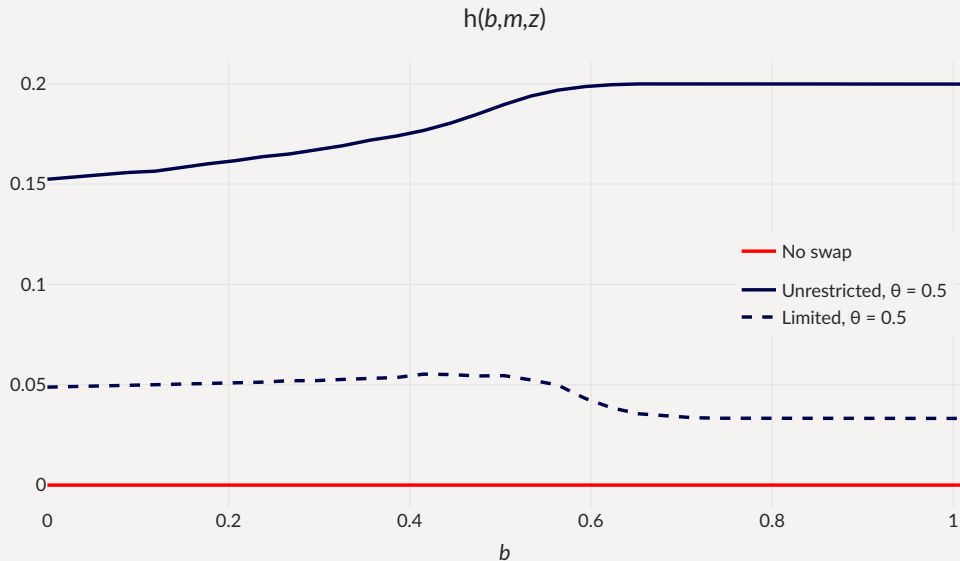
Debt Prices with Swaps

Lower prices with same default rates: [relational overborrowing](#) similar to debt dilution



Monopolist's profits

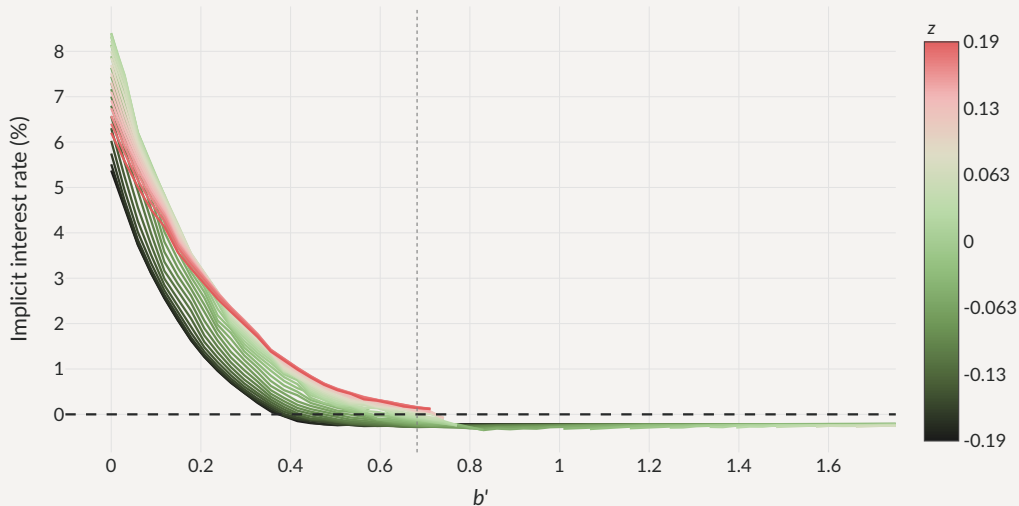
Monopolist's profits **increasing** in debt (cond. on repayment) – surplus requires spreads > 0



Risk-taking incentives

Surplus on swap requires spreads > 0 : monopolist provides **incentives** for risk taking

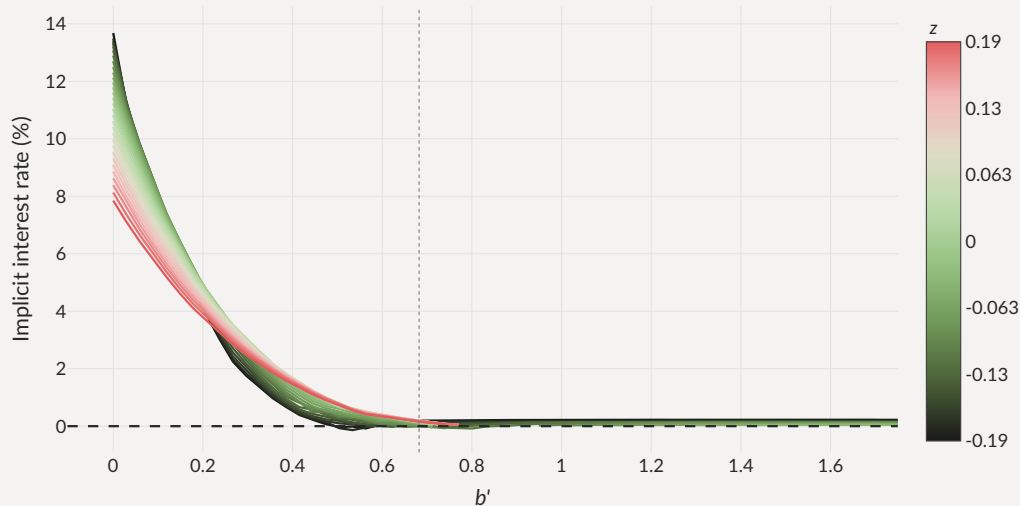
Interest rate on the swap (Unrestricted)



Risk-taking incentives

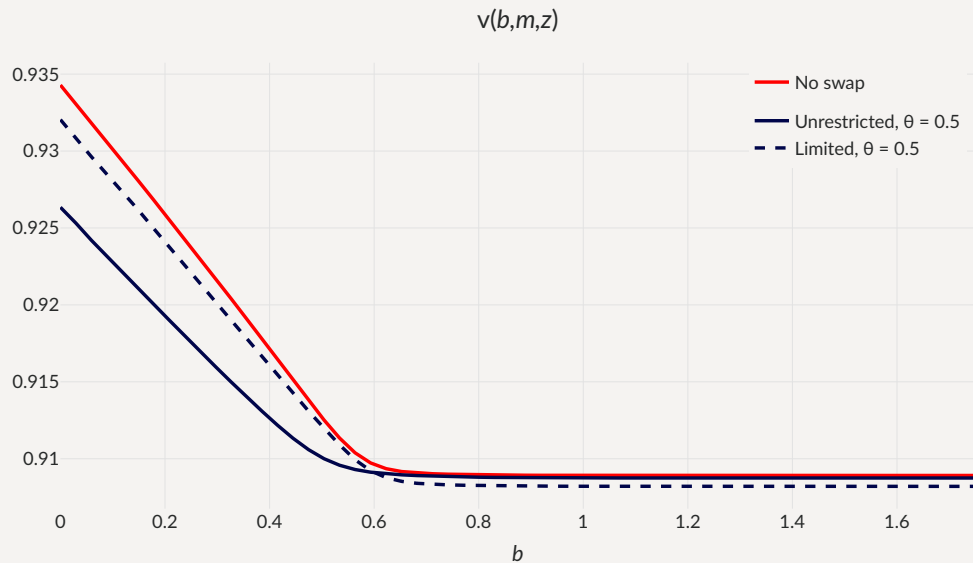
Surplus on swap requires spreads > 0 : monopolist provides **incentives** for risk taking

Interest rate on the swap (Limited)



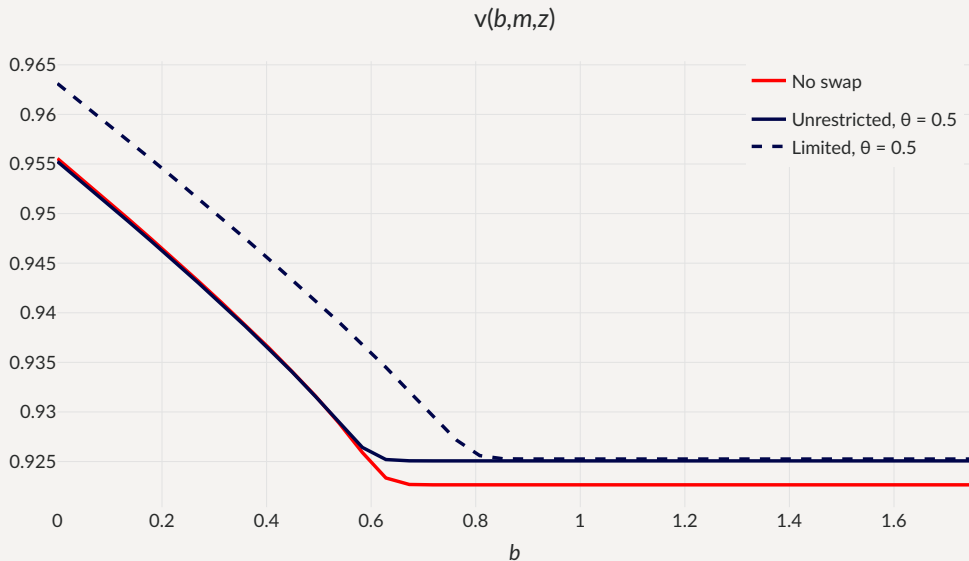
Welfare effects of swap lines

Limited \succcurlyeq Unrestricted, but...



Welfare effects of swap lines — Short-term debt

Short-term debt: swaps beneficial – interest on the swap **small** wrt to *whole* debt stock



Exogenous terms for bilateral loan

Possible rules

- Bargaining over bilateral terms endogenously leads to punishment for deleveraging
- Explore interest rate rules of the form

$$r(b', m') = \max\{r, \alpha_0 + \alpha_b b' + \alpha_m m'\}$$

- Two versions
 - Risk-inducing rule: $\alpha_0 > 0, \alpha_b < 0$
 - Size-dependent (similar to surcharges): $\alpha_0 > 0, \alpha_m > 0$

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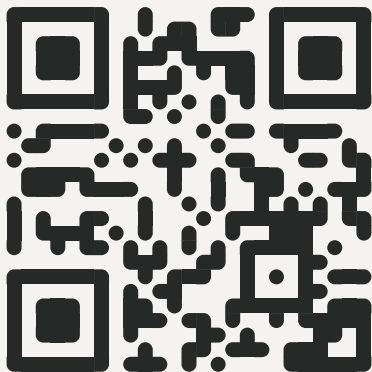
Equilibrium with exogenous rules

	No swap	Size dependent r	Risk inducing r	Limited, $\theta = 0.5$
Avg spread (bps)	802	635	1,118	1,211
Std spread (bps)	454	241	1,051	753
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$ (%)	112	120	118	113
Debt to GDP (%)	21.5	25.8	21.9	21.8
Swap to GDP (%)	0	2.32	1.37	1.05
Swap spread (bps)	–	836	2,267	408
Corr. swap & spreads (%)	–	50.2	43.6	70.1
Default frequency (%)	6.27	5.13	7.56	9.17
Welfare gains (rep)	–	0.61%	-0.094%	-0.084%

Concluding remarks

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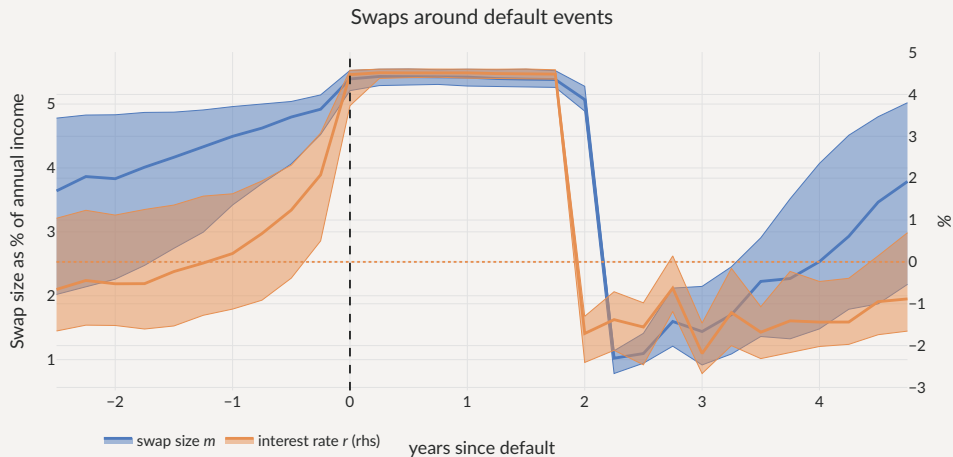
- Simple model with monopolist/fringe structure
- Strong interaction between two markets for sovereign debt
 - ... even if swaps are not used intensely on the equilibrium path
- Market power crucial in model
 - ... how to discipline in model?
 - ... how to affect in reality?
- Large welfare effects, policy challenges
 - How to limit their use during defaults?
 - Relational overborrowing – more gains from fiscal rules, state-contingent debt?
- Simple test to determine welfare gains of a new instrument



Scan to find the paper

When is the Swap Used?

- Further conditioning on default events lasting exactly two years



When is the Swap Used?

- With Limited: $\Gamma(m) = m$

