

Collateral Shocks: A Dominant Source of U.S. Business Cycles?*

Mamoon Kader[†]

Hashmat Khan[‡]

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Abstract

Are collateral shocks the *dominant* source of U.S. business cycles? We show that the evidence is not strong enough to conclude that they are. Collateral shocks, as described in [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#), which tighten bank lending standards for *both* households and firms, account for only 7% of the cyclical variation in output, and 1% of consumption, over the period from 1985:Q1 to 2009:Q3. During this time, lending standards for both households and firms were most closely aligned in the data. Additionally, we observe a significant dampening in the comovement between consumption and output. Through counterfactual exercises, we isolate the role of estimated collateral shocks and model parameters to explain our findings. Our results suggest that identifying a quantitatively significant financial shock, which drives the U.S. business cycle and also accounts for consumption dynamics, remains a challenging task.

Keywords: collateral shocks, bank lending standards, output, consumption

JEL Codes: E21, E23, E24, E32, E44

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[†]Department of Economics, Carleton University, *E-mail:* mamoonkader@cmail.carleton.ca

[‡]Department of Economics, Carleton University, *E-mail:* hashmat.khan@carleton.ca

1 Introduction

In modern macroeconomic models, the role financial frictions—stemming from either information or commitment problems in financial markets—play in amplifying and propagating non-financial shocks to the economy has been a key area of study since the early contributions of [Bernanke and Gertler \(1989\)](#), [Carlstrom and Fuerst \(1997\)](#), and [Kiyotaki and Moore \(1997\)](#).¹ But in the aftermath of the subprime mortgage crisis of 2007 and the prolonged U.S. recession that followed, the possibility that financial shocks can themselves be primary drivers of business cycles has received much attention. Recent research has proposed a variety of financial shocks and studied their quantitative importance in accounting for the key features of the U.S. business cycle, but the results have turned out to be only partially successful.² One pervasive challenge that has emerged in the literature is that in the models, financial shocks do not adequately account for the behaviour of consumption. In particular, financial shocks account for only a small share of consumption variation over the business cycle, and they do not generate consumption-output comovement—a key property of the data.³

In light of these issues, [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#) have proposed a single financial shock, which they call the *collateral* shock, to resolve both issues highlighted above. The collateral shock captures changes in risk or sentiment in the financial markets that affect bank lending standards for households and firms simultaneously—an essential ingredient in the model—through their respective collateral constraints. Specifically, the shock reflects the costs associated with redeploying foreclosed assets. In their estimated model, the collateral shock competes with other shocks, namely, technology, investment, household (preference, housing, and redeployment of housing capital), firm (equity and redeployment of physical capital), and policy, and turns out to be the dominant one among all these shocks. Over the 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 period, the collateral shock accounts for a large share of business cycle variation in the key macroeconomic variables, namely, output (45%), consumption (41%), investment (43%), and hours (34%). The collateral shock also generates a strong comovement of consumption with output that is consistent with the data.

¹For a comprehensive survey of this literature, see [Bernanke, Gertler and Gilchrist \(1999\)](#) and [Quadrini \(2011\)](#).

²See, for example, [Gerali et al. \(2010\)](#), [Jermann and Quadrini \(2012\)](#), [Liu, Wang and Zha \(2013\)](#), [Christiano, Motto and Rostagno \(2014\)](#), [Ajello \(2016\)](#), [Iacoviello \(2015\)](#), [Negro et al. \(2017\)](#), and [Kharazi \(2022\)](#).

³For example, the financial shock in [Jermann and Quadrini \(2012\)](#) that accounts for 46.4% of output variation, accounts for only 0.6% of consumption variation, and does not generate procyclical consumption.

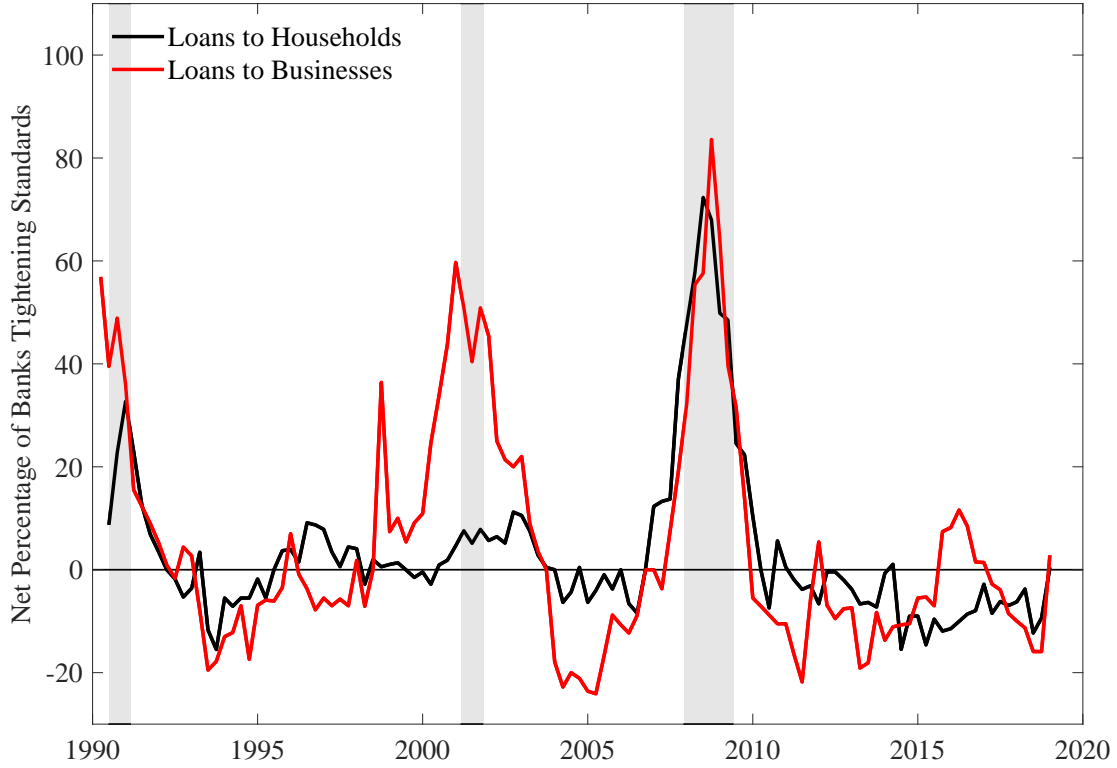


Figure 1: Bank Tightening: [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#)

In this paper, we revisit the quantitative properties of the estimated collateral shocks. Our starting point is the observation that the net percentage of banks' lending standards tightened sharply for *both* households and firms only at the onset of the Great Recession (Figure 1). In fact, after 2014, the lending standards for households have remained persistently stable, with the net percentage in the negative range most of the time, reflecting loosening standards. Another way to see this point is that while the correlation between the two lending standards for the whole period is 0.71, the correlation is 0.7 for 1990:Q3-2009:Q3, and -0.19 for 2010:Q1-2019:Q4. It is unclear, therefore, whether the dominance of the collateral shocks arises primarily due to the specific episode of financial stringency when the standards tightened for both households and businesses or whether it is a more general phenomenon. We re-examine the quantitative importance of collateral shocks and reach some rather surprising conclusions that challenge the contemporary view on the dominance of such shocks.

We estimate the [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#) model for the 1985:Q1-2009:Q3 period and find that the collateral shock accounts for only 13% of the variation in output and is not a dominant source of U.S. output fluctuations. The collateral shock accounts for 1% of the variation in consumption,

a sharp drop from 41% for the 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 period. Thus, we demonstrate that the dominance of collateral shocks derives exclusively from the years 2010 to 2019, but as mentioned above, during this period the lending standards for households and businesses are negatively correlated. The co-movement of consumption and output, after a collateral shock, is also substantially muted. We carry out two counterfactual exercises and ascertain the role of collateral shocks versus all other estimated model parameters to shed light on the source of these dramatic changes in the quantitative characteristics of estimated collateral shocks. Based on our analysis, we conclude that the search for a single dominant financial shock that drives the U.S. business cycle and accounts for consumption dynamics in estimated DSGE models remains a significant challenge.

2 Collateral Shocks: Quantitative Results

We examine two key questions. Are collateral shocks a dominant source of U.S. business cycles? Do collateral shocks account for U.S. consumption dynamics?

We re-estimate the model developed in [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#) for the 1985:Q1-2009:Q3, using Bayesian methods.⁴ The model has 58 parameters, out of which 42 are estimated. The data used in the estimation are the standard eight time series used in the literature (for example, [Justiniano, Primiceri and Tambalotti \(2010\)](#)), namely, output, non-durable consumption, investment (including durable consumption), hours, inflation, federal funds rate, and the relative price of investment (RPI). In addition, [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#) uses four financial variables: credit to households, credit to non-financial businesses, interest spread on household mortgage loans, and interest spread on business loans. The model has 13 shocks, namely, collateral, technology (three types of shocks), investment (two types of shocks), household (three types of shocks), firm (two types of shocks), and policy (two types of shocks). Table 1 provides a summary of these shocks.

⁴Since we do not modify any aspect of their model we do not reproduce the formal model and equations here and refer the readers to [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#).

Table 1: **Shocks Under Each Category**

Collateral	Technology	Investment	Household	Firm	Policy
ν	$\epsilon, \lambda_p, \mu_{z^*}$	μ_Y, ζ_i	ζ_c, ζ_h, η^i	γ^e, η^e	g, ϵ^p

Note: See in text for a description of these shocks under each category. The notation for each of these shocks follows [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#).

Table 2 presents the forecast error variance share of output to a collateral shock. Column (2) and row ‘With RPI’ show that the contribution of the collateral shock for the 1985:Q1-2009:Q3 period in accounting for the output variation is only 13%, substantially smaller than the 45% share estimated for the sample period 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 (Column (1)).

Table 2: **Is Collateral Shock the Dominant Shock? Forecast Error Variance Share of Output**

	(1)	(2)
Model Estimation	1985:Q1-2019:Q4	1985:Q1-2009:Q3
With RPI	Yes (45%)	No (7%)
Without RPI	No (18%)	No (17%)

Note: The variance share of output is computed at the posterior mode. Business cycle frequency encompasses periodic components with cycles of 6–32 quarters.

Early work on Bayesian estimation of DSGE models by [Smets and Wouters \(2007\)](#) and [Justiniano, Primiceri and Tambalotti \(2010\)](#) did not include RPI in the set of observables. In subsequent work, however, it has become customary to include the RPI series (see, for example, [Justiniano, Primiceri and Tambalotti \(2011\)](#), [Schmitt-Grohé and Uribe \(2012\)](#), [Khan and Tsoukalas \(2011\)](#), [Khan and Tsoukalas \(2012\)](#), among others). One of the well-known implications is that when RPI is not included in the set of observables, the investment-specific shock turns out to be the most dominant shock. In the present context, this means that we would not expect the collateral shock to dominate. The second row ‘Without RPI’ in Table 2 confirms this point. When RPI is not included, the collateral shock

no longer is the dominant shock even for the sample period 1985:Q1-2019:Q4. This sensitivity of variance share is noteworthy because, unlike the case of investment-specific shocks which have a direct relationship with RPI, there is no direct relationship between RPI and the theoretical mechanism generating procyclical consumption described in the [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#) model.

We now examine the contribution of collateral shocks in accounting for the variation in consumption over the business cycle, along with their contributions to investment and hours.

Table 3: Collateral Shocks: A Comparison of Variance Decompositions

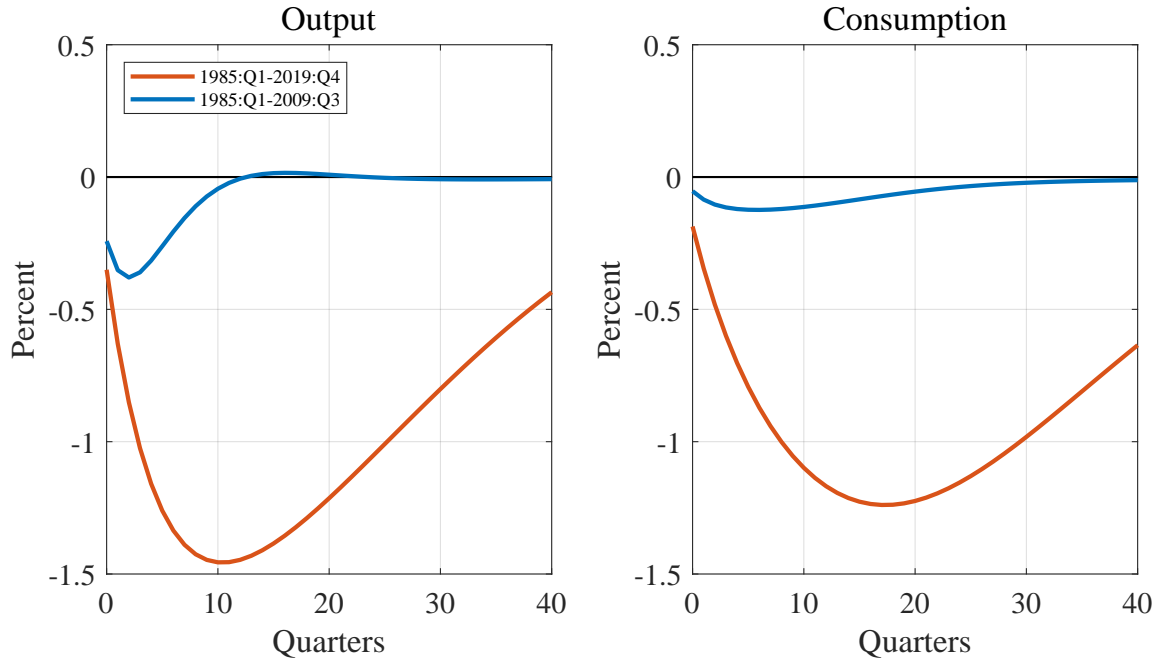
	(1)	(2)
	1985:Q1-2019:Q4	1985:Q1-2009:Q3
Output	45%	7%
Consumption	41%	1%
Investment	43%	12%
Hours	34%	3%

Note: The variance decompositions are computed at the posterior mode. Business cycle frequency encompasses periodic components with cycles of 6–32 quarters.

Column (2) in Table 3 reveals a striking finding: the collateral shocks hardly contribute towards accounting for the business cycle variation in consumption. The forecast error variance is one percent, a sharp decrease from the full sample finding of 41%.

Figure 2 shows the impulse responses of output and consumption to a collateral shock. Relative to the 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 sample, the responses of both output and consumption for the 1985:Q1-2009:Q3 sample, respectively, are quite muted. The comovement property is still observed as both output and consumption decrease upon impact, but it is not strong.

Figure 2: Impulse Responses of Output and Consumption to a One Standard Deviation Adverse Collateral Shock



3 What Breaks the Dominance of Collateral Shocks?

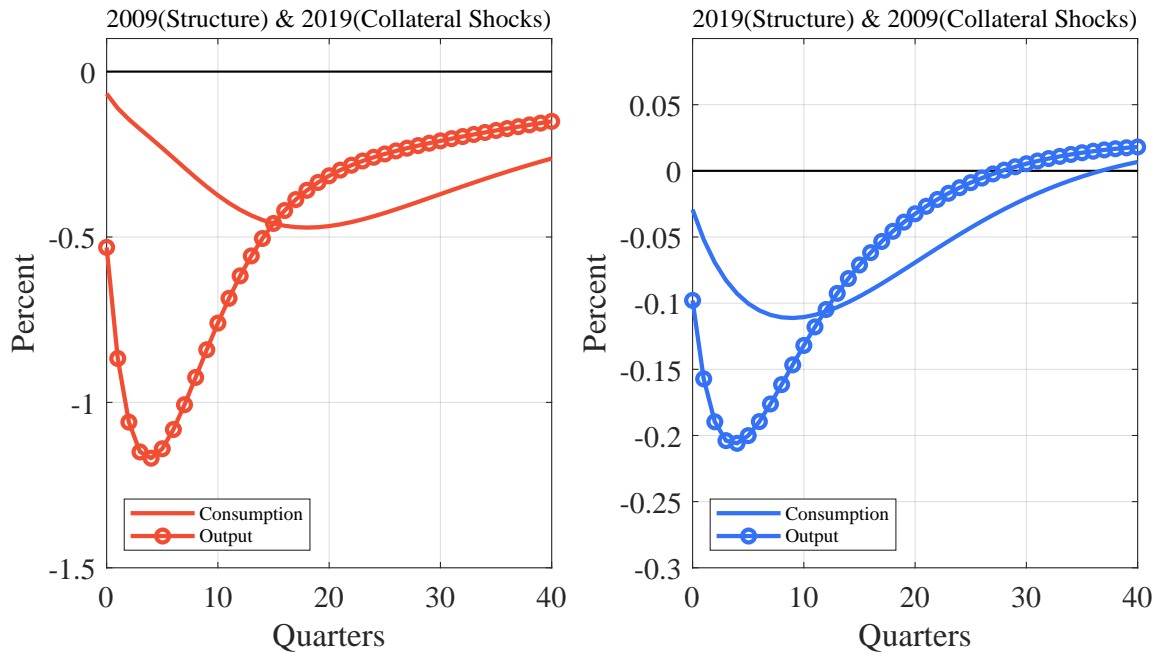
What are the key factors driving (a) the sharp drop in the variance shares displayed in Table 3 and (b) the muted comovement between consumption and output shown in Figure 2? To provide answers to these questions, we consider the role of the model's estimated parameters associated with the model structure versus the estimated parameters of the shock processes and conduct two counterfactual exercises.

Counterfactual exercise 1: Except for the collateral shock parameters, which are estimated from the entire sample (1985:Q1-2019:Q4), we employ the estimated posterior mode of all model parameters based on 1985:Q1-2009:Q3 in our first counterfactual experiment. For convenience, we refer to this as *2009-structure* and *2019-collateral shocks*, respectively. We expect the results to be somewhere in between those shown in Figure 2 and Table 3 for the two sample periods, respectively. Specifically, this exercise isolates the influence of 2019-collateral shocks on the 2009-structure. The left panel in Figure 3 shows the results. In comparison to the results produced from the estimated model for the

1985:Q1-2009:Q3 sample in Figure 2, we find that the output and consumption impulse responses are amplified and more persistent. The peak output response goes from 0.4 percent below the steady state in the third quarter to 1.2 percent in the fifth quarter after a negative collateral shock. Similarly, the peak response of consumption is 0.5 percent below the steady state, which is more magnified than the 0.2 percent response obtained for the 1985:Q1-2009:Q3.

As it turns out, house prices rise after a negative collateral shock, which produces a strong enough wealth effect to dampen consumption for both patient and impatient homeowners.⁵ We conclude that *2009-structure* contributes towards the dampening of both output and consumption responses.

Figure 3: **Counterfactual Impulse Responses to a Collateral Shock**



Counterfactual exercise 2: Except for the collateral shock parameters, which are estimated from the sample 1985:Q1-2009:Q3, we employ the estimated posterior mode of all model parameters based on 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 in our second counterfactual experiment. For convenience, we refer to this as *2019-structure* and *2009-collateral shocks*, respectively. The right panel of Figure 3 shows that both output and consumption responses are substantially muted, with the peak output response of 0.2 percent below the steady state and the peak consumption response of about 0.11 percent below the steady state. This

⁵See Figure B.1 in the Appendix.

exercise shows that 2009-collateral shocks do not produce the amplification as 2019-collateral shocks. A key reason for this is that the estimated persistence of 2009-collateral shock is smaller (0.73) than the 2019-collateral shock (0.96).⁶ Under the counterfactual, the decrease in wages and house prices after a negative collateral shock are substantially muted, so the negative wealth effect on consumption is not large enough to produce a strong decrease in consumption.⁷

We conclude that *2009-shocks* deliver a dampened response in the 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 sample. Put differently, including the 2009:Q4-2019:Q4 period in the model estimation is essential for obtaining the dominant role of collateral shocks. The counterfactual variance decomposition results based on the simulations reinforce this conclusion. Table 4 shows that under *2009-structure* and *2019-collateral shocks*, the collateral shocks remain dominant in accounting for the variation in output, investment, and hours. Their contribution to the variance share of consumption decreases to 2%. By contrast, under the *2019-structure* and *2009-collateral shocks*, the dominance of collateral shocks is sharply lower for output, investment, and hours.

Table 4: Collateral Shocks Comparison for 2009 vs. 2019: Counterfactual Variance Decompositions

	(1)	(2)
	Structure: 2009 and Collateral Shocks: 2019	Structure: 2019 and Collateral Shocks: 2009
Output	37%	4%
Consumption	2%	1%
Investment	53%	5%
Hours	34%	2%

Note: The variance decompositions are computed at the posterior mode. Business cycle frequency encompasses periodic components with cycles of 6–32 quarters.

⁶The estimated volatility, however, is very similar at 0.0039 vs 0.0031.

⁷See Figure B.2 in the Appendix.

4 Conclusion

Motivated by evidence on tightening cycles of bank lending, [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#) have proposed collateral shocks that affect lending standards for both households and firms. Unlike the recent literature on financial shocks, this shock appears to be the dominant one in driving output and also generates consumption comovement. We, however, demonstrate that the evidence is not strong enough to conclude that collateral shocks are a dominant source of U.S. business cycles. Collateral shocks account for only 7% of output variation and 1% of consumption variation over 1985:Q1-2009:Q3. These numbers increase to 45% and 41% when the sample includes 2009:Q4-2019:Q4 period. But over this period, lending standards for households and businesses did not comove strongly—the correlation is -0.19 . This sits oddly with the underlying motivation for such shocks. The favorable evidence for the dominance of collateral shocks also requires including the relative price of investment in the set of observables for model estimation. However, there is no direct link between bank lending standards and the relative price of investment in the estimated model, and the latter is included in the observables based on other reasons noted in the previous literature. The search for a quantitatively important financial shock that drives the U.S. business cycle and also accounts for consumption dynamics, therefore, remains a major challenge.

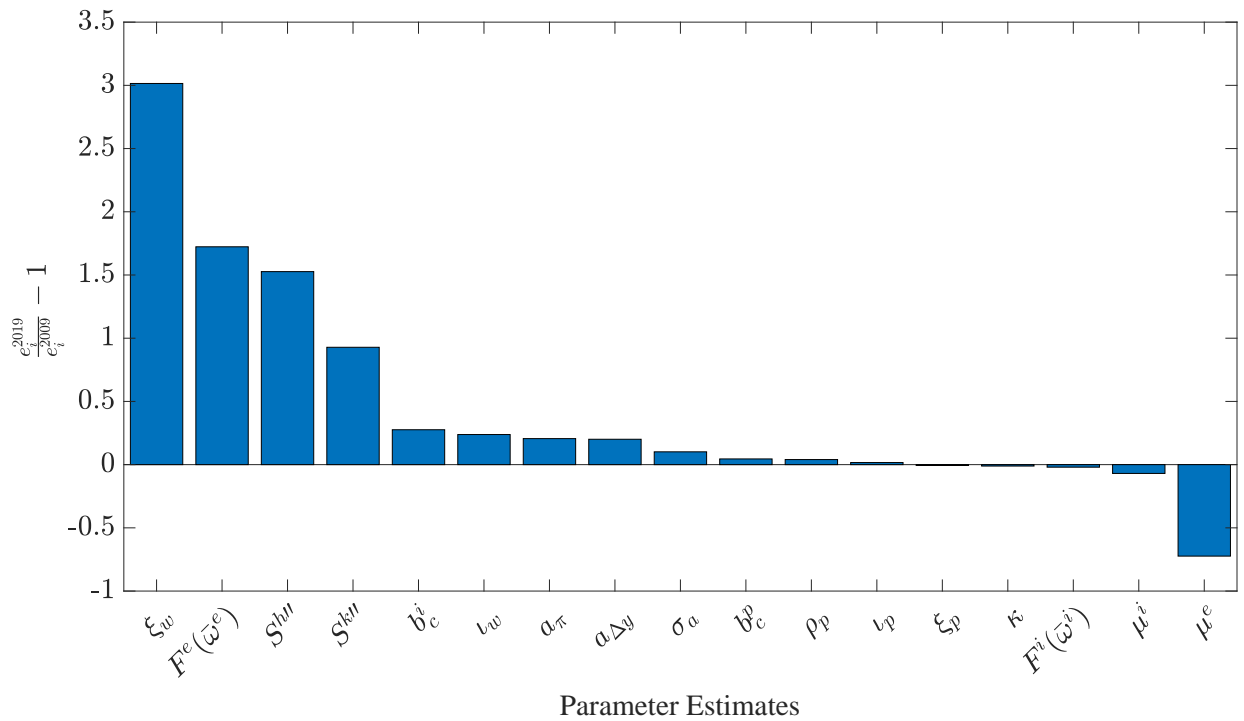
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A A Comparison of Parameter Estimates: 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 versus 1985:Q1-2009:Q3

Figure A.1: Comparing the Magnitude of Estimated Parameters: 1985:Q1-2019:Q4 versus 1985:Q1-2009:Q4



B Counterfactual Impulse Responses

Figure B.1: Impulse Response to Collateral Shocks: [Becard and Gauthier \(2022\)](#) vs. Counterfactual of 2009-Structure and 2019-Collateral Shocks

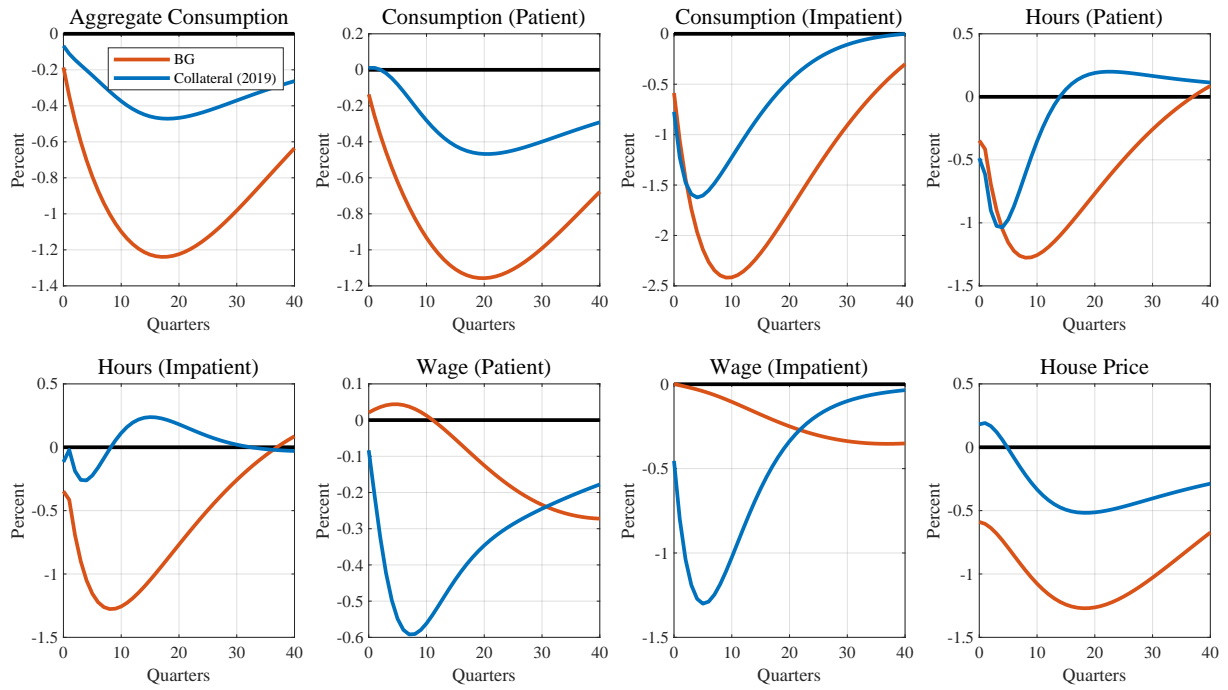


Figure B.2: Impulse Response to Collateral Shocks: **Becard and Gauthier (2022)** vs. Counterfactual of 2019-Structure and 2009-Collateral Shocks

