Reserve Accumulation, Macroeconomic Stabilization and Sovereign Risk

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Data: large holdings of int'l reserves, particularly for countries w/ currency pegs

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Our paper:

- Theory based on the **desirability** to hold reserves to manage macroeconomic stability under sovereign risk concerns

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A theory of reserve accum. based on **macro stabilization** and **sovereign risk**

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- Model of sovereign default and reserve accumulation w/ nominal rigidities

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- Why not just borrow? These are precisely the states in which spreads $\uparrow$
- Reserves give a "hedge" against having to roll-over the debt in bad times and free up resources to mitigate the recession

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Key insight: when output is partly demand determined, larger gross positions help smooth aggregate demand, reduce severity of recessions and facilitate repayment

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Policy: simple and implementable rules for res. accum. can deliver significant gains

Related Literature

Two main related branches of the literature:

Reserve accumulation: Aizenmann and Lee (2005); Jeanne and Ranciere (2011) ; Durdu, Mendoza and Terrones (2009); Alfaro and Kanczuk (2009), Bianchi, Hatchondo and Martinez (2018); Hur and Kondo (2016); Amador et al. (2018); Arce, Bengui and Bianchi (2019); Bocola and Lorenzoni (2018); Cespedes and Chang (2019)

Sovereign default models with nominal rigidities: Na, Schmitt-Grohe, Uribe and Yue (2018); Bianchi, Ottonello and Presno (2016); Arellano, Bai and Mihalache (2018); Bianchi and Mondragon (2018)

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Main Elements of the Model

- Small open economy (SOE) with $T - NT$ goods:
  - Stochastic endowment for tradables y^T
  - Non-tradables produced with labor: $y^N = F(h)$
- Wages are downward rigid in domestic currency (SGU, 2016)
  - With fixed exchange rate, $\pi^\star = 0$ and L.O.P. $\Rightarrow$ wages are rigid in tradable goods $w \geq \overline{w}$
- Government issues non-contingent long-duration bonds (b) and saves in one-period risk free assets (a), all in units of T
- Default entails one-period exclusion and utility loss $\psi_d(y^T)$
- Risk averse foreign lenders $\rightarrow$ "risk-premium shocks"

Households

$$\mathbb{E}_0 \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t \{u(c_t)\}$$

$$c = C(c^T, c^N) = [\omega (c^T)^{-\mu} + (1-\omega)(c^N)^{-\mu}]^{-1/\mu}$$

- Budget constraint in units of tradables

$$c_t^T + p_t^N c_t^N = y_t^T + \phi_t^N + w_t h_t^s - \tau_t$$

- ϕ_t^N: firms' profits; τ_t: taxes. No direct access to external credit.

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- Optimality

$$p_t^N = \frac{1-\omega}{\omega} \left(\frac{c_t^T}{c_t^N} \right)^{1+\mu}$$

Firms

- Maximize profits given by

$$\phi_t^N = \max_{h_t} p_t^N F(h_t) - w_t h_t$$

- p_t^N, w_t: price of non-tradables and wages in units of tradables
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Equilibrium in the Labor Market

Assume: $F(h) = h^{\alpha}$ with $\alpha \in (0, 1]$.

Optimality conditions imply:

$$\mathcal{H}(c^T, w) = \left[\frac{1-\omega}{\omega}\,\frac{\alpha}{w}\right]^{1/(1+\alpha\mu)} (c^T)^{\frac{1+\mu}{1+\alpha\mu}}$$

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$$\text{Equilib. employment} = \begin{cases} \mathcal{H}(c^T, \overline{w}) & \text{for } w = \overline{w} \\ \bar{h} & \text{for } w > \overline{w} \end{cases}$$

plot

Asset/Debt Structure

- Long-term bond:
  - Bond pays $\delta\left[1,(1-\delta),(1-\delta)^2,(1-\delta)^3,...\right]$
  - Law of motion for bonds $b_{t+1}=b_t(1-\delta)+i_t$
  - price is q

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- Risk-free one-period asset which pays one unit of consumption
  - price is q_a
- Government's budget constraint if **repay:**

$$q_a a_{t+1}+b_t\delta=\tau_t+a_t+q_t\underbrace{\left(b_{t+1}-(1-\delta)b_t\right)}_{i_t\text{ : debt issuance}}$$

- Government's budget constraint in **default:**

$$q_a a_{t+1}=\tau_t+a_t$$

Foreign Investors

▸ more

- Competitive, deep-pocketed foreign lenders, subject to "risk-premium" shocks:

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$$q_a = \mathbb{E}_{s'|s} m(s, s') = e^{-r}$$

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- Bond price given by: $q = \mathbb{E}_{s'|s} \{m(s, s')(1 - d') [\delta + (1 - \delta) q']\}$

$$d' = \hat{d}(a', b', s'), \quad q' = q(a'', b'', s')$$

Recursive Problem

$$V(b,a,s) = \max_{d\in\{0,1\}} \left\{ (1-d)V^R(b,a,s) + d\, V^D(a,s) \right\}$$

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$$\text{subject to}$$

$$c^{T}+q_{a}a'+\delta b=a+y^{T}+q\left(b',a',s\right)\left(b'-(1-\delta)b\right)$$

$$h\leq\mathcal{H}(c^{T},\overline{w})$$

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$\mathcal{H}(c^{T},\overline{w})\rightarrow$ summarizes implementability const. from labor mkt & wage rigidity

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Optimal Portfolio: gains from borrowing to buy reserves

Perturbation: issue additional unit of debt to buy reserves. Keep $\overline{c}$. From tomorrow onward, optimal policy.

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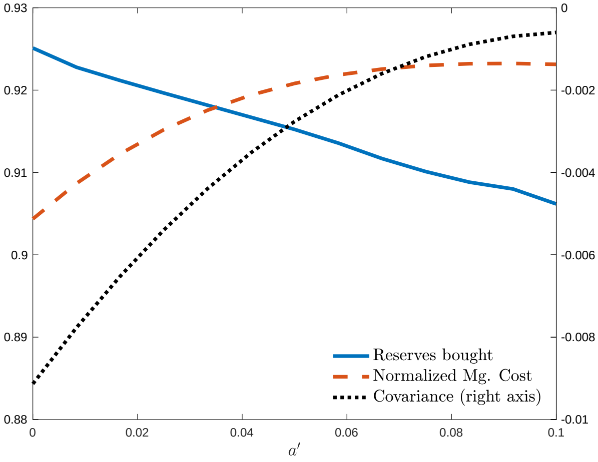
With 1-period debt ($\delta=1$): $\mathbb{COV}_{s'|s,d'=0}\left(\delta+(1-\delta)q',u'_T+\xi'\mathcal{H}'_T\right)=0$

Optimal Portfolio: gains from borrowing to buy reserves



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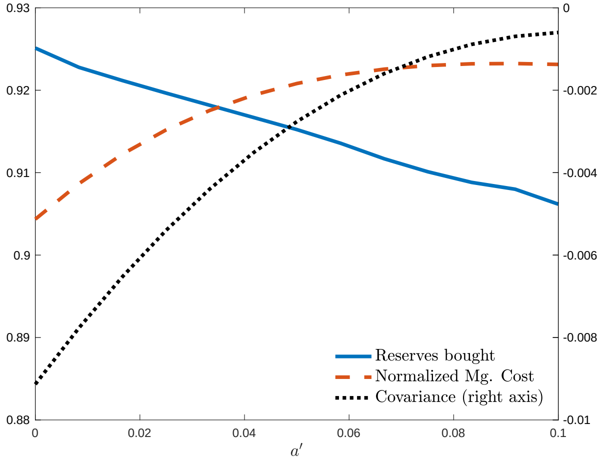

Covariance: negative (macro-stabilitization hedging) and upward sloping

Benefits of reserve accumulation

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i. Higher reserves can reduce future unemployment.

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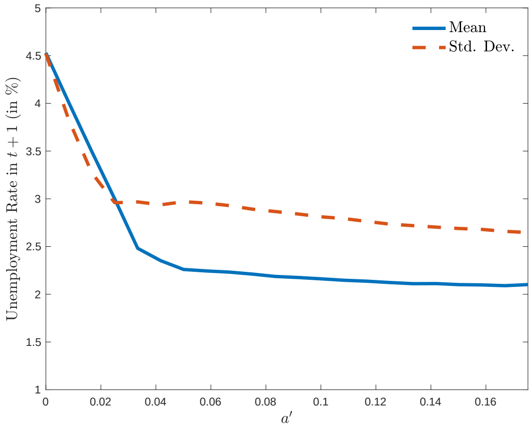
Exercise:

- Fix a point in the s.s. and a given level of consumption $\overline{c}$.
- Look at alternative a', and find b' that ensures $c = \overline{c}$.

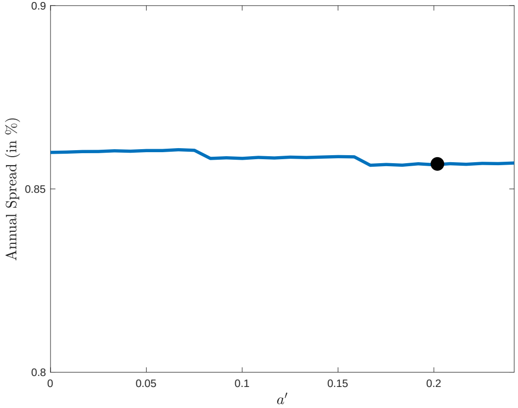
Next-period unemployment for given (a', b'): mean and std. dev.

densities



Note: higher reserves **reduce** future unemployment

Borrowing to save may improve bond prices



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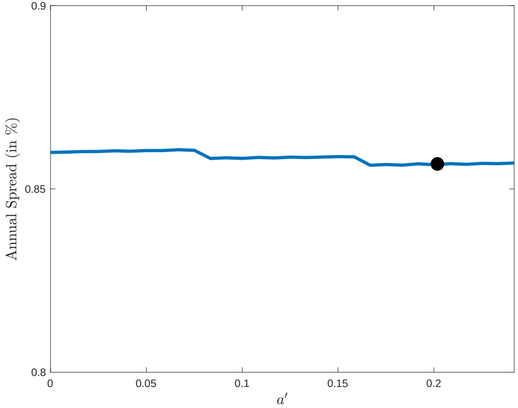
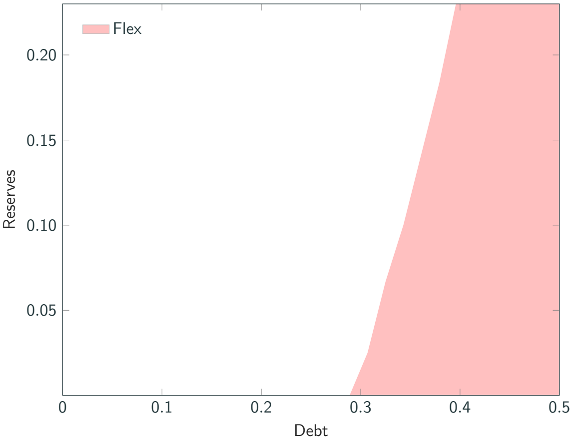


Intuition: Reserves increase V^R and V^D. If gov. is borrowing constrained (high unemployment), effect on V^R may dominate effect on V^D.

Results: default regions

▸ spread plots



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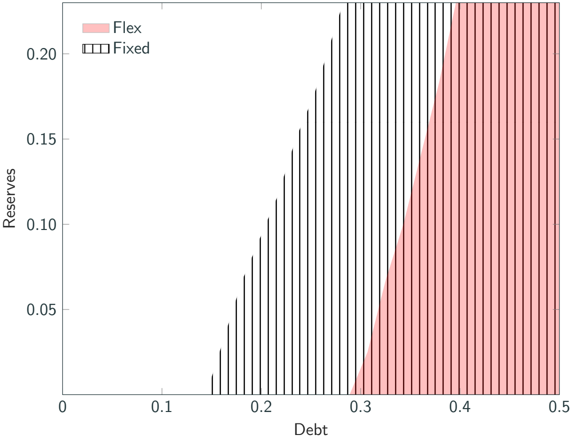

- Nominal rigidities **increase** default incentives

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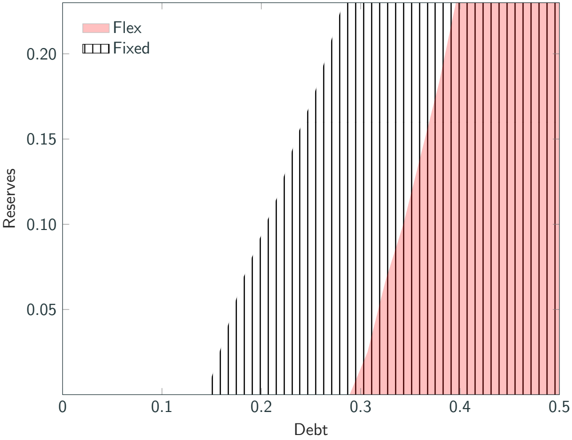

- Nominal rigidities **increase** default incentives
- Gross positions matter for default incentives

Quantitative Analysis

- Calibrate to the average of a panel of 22 EMEs (1990–2015).
- Benchmark = economy with nominal rigidities.
- 1 model period = 1 year.

Quantitative Analysis – Functional forms

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Utility function:

$$u(c) = \frac{c^{1-\gamma} - 1}{1-\gamma}, \text{ with } \gamma \neq 1$$

Utility cost of defaulting:

$$\psi_d(y^T) = \psi_0 + \psi_1 log(y^T)$$

Tradable income process:

$$\log(y_t^T) = (1-\rho)\mu_y + \rho log(y_{t-1}^T) + \epsilon_t$$

with $|\rho| < 1$ and $\epsilon_t \sim N(0, \sigma_\epsilon^2)$

Quantitative Analysis – Calibration

Parameter	Description	Value
r	Risk-free rate	0.04
α	Labor share in the non-tradable sector	0.75
β	Domestic discount factor	0.90
π_{LH}	Prob. of transitioning to high risk premium	0.15
π_{HL}	Prob. of transitioning to low risk premium	0.8
σ_{ε}	Std. dev. of innovation to $log(y^T)$	0.045
ρ	Autocorrelation of $log(y^T)$	0.84
μ_y	Mean of $log(y^T)$	$-\frac{1}{2}\sigma_{\varepsilon}^2$
δ	Coupon decaying rate	0.2845
$1/(1+\mu)$	Intratemporal elast. of subs.	.44
γ	Coefficient of relative risk aversion	2.273
$\overline{h}$	Time endowment	1
	Parameters set by simulation	
ω	Share of tradables	0.4
ψ_0	Default cost parameter	3.6
ψ_1	Default cost parameter	22
κ_H	Pricing kernel parameter	15
$\overline{w}$	Lower bound on wages	0.98

Results – road map

1. Simulations moments.
2. Welfare exercises.
3. Simple, implementable reserve accumulation rules.
4. Inflation targeting variant.
5. Costly depreciations.

Results: data and simulation moments

	Data	Model Benchmark
Targeted		
Mean debt (b/y)	45	44
Mean r_s	2.9	2.9
Δr_s w/ risk-prem. shock	2.0	2.0
Δ UR around crises	2.0	2.0
Mean y^T/y	41	41
Non-Targeted		
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$	1.1	1.0
$\sigma(r_s)$ (in %)	1.6	3.1
$\rho(r_s, y)$	-0.3	-0.6
$\rho(c, y)$	0.6	1.0
Mean Reserves (a/y)	16	16
Mean Reserves/Debt (a/b)	35	35
$\rho(a/y, r_s)$	-0.4	-0.4

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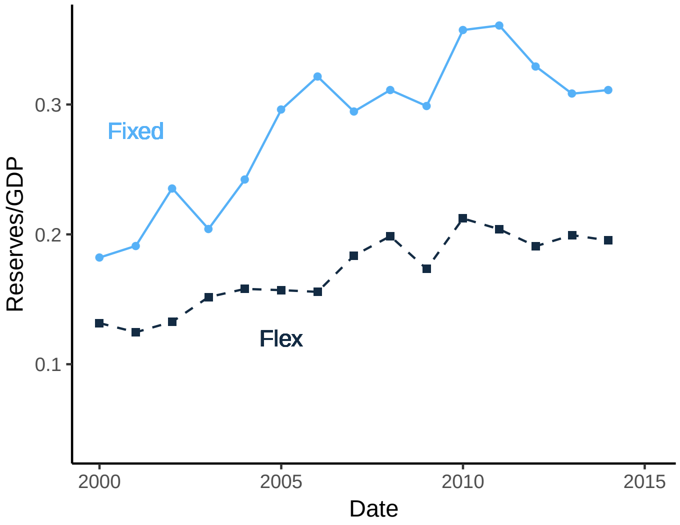
	Data	Model Benchmark
Targeted		
Mean debt (b/y)	45	44
Mean r_s	2.9	2.9
Δr_s w/ risk-prem. shock	2.0	2.0
Δ UR around crises	2.0	2.0
Mean y^T/y	41	41
Non-Targeted		
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$	1.1	1.0
$\sigma(r_s)$ (in %)	1.6	3.1
$\rho(r_s, y)$	-0.3	-0.6
$\rho(c, y)$	0.6	1.0
Mean Reserves (a/y)	16	16
Mean Reserves/Debt (a/b)	35	35
$\rho(a/y, r_s)$	-0.4	-0.4

Results: data and simulation moments

	Data	Model Benchmark	Model Flexible
Targeted			
Mean debt (b/y)	45	44	46
Mean r_s	2.9	2.9	3.0
Δr_s w/ risk-prem. shock	2.0	2.0	1.9
Δ UR around crises	2.0	2.0	0.0
Mean y^T/y	41	41	41
Non-Targeted			
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$	1.1	1.0	1.1
$\sigma(r_s)$ (in %)	1.6	3.1	2.9
$\rho(r_s, y)$	-0.3	-0.6	-0.8
$\rho(c, y)$	0.6	1.0	1.0
Mean Reserves (a/y)	16	16	7
Mean Reserves/Debt (a/b)	35	35	15
$\rho(a/y, r_s)$	-0.4	-0.4	-0.6

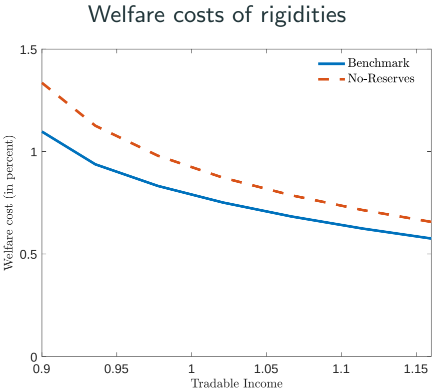
Reserves in the data: fixed vs. flex

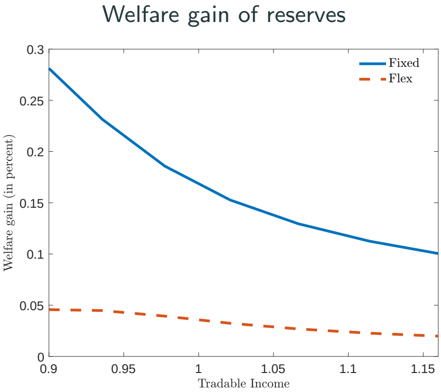
▸ more



Welfare implications

▸ more





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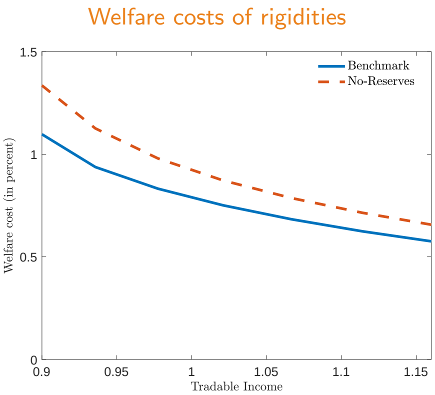
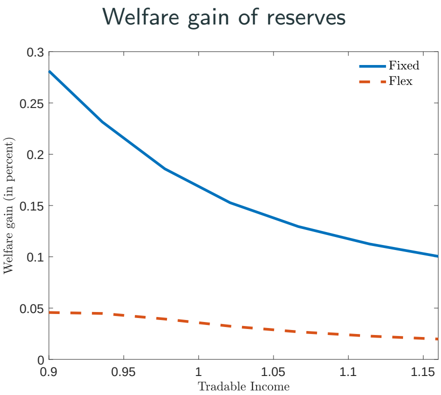
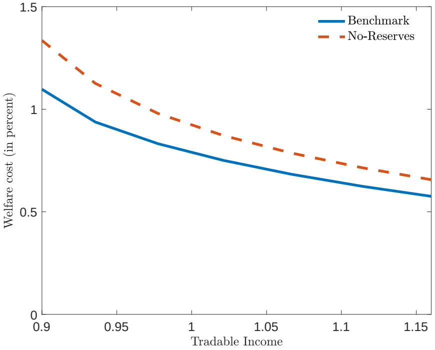


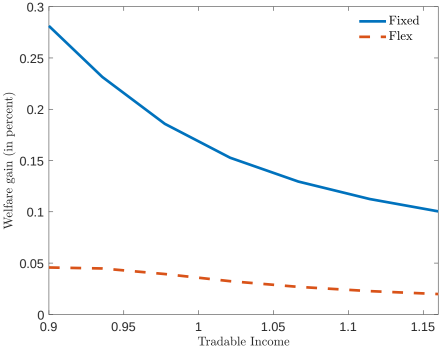


- Nominal rigidities decrease welfare by around 0.9% and are costlier if cannot accumulate reserves

Welfare implications

▸ more





- Nominal rigidities decrease welfare by around 0.9% and are costlier if cannot accumulate reserves
- Having access to reserves is welfare improving, especially w/ nominal rigidities

Simple and implementable reserve accumulation rules

- Policy discussion: what constitutes an “adequate” amount of reserves?

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1 p.p. increase in spreads, controlling for other factors, should lead to reserves declining 1.69% of mean (tradable) output (roughly 0.70% of GDP)

Simple and implementable reserve accumulation rules

	Benchmark	Rules	
		Best Rule	Greenspan-Guidotti
Targeted			
Mean debt (b/y)	44	42	19
Mean r_s	2.9	2.8	2.4
Δr_s w/ risk-prem. shock	2.0	1.9	1.7
Δ UR around crises	2.0	2.0	1.8
Mean y^T/y	41	41	40
Non-Targeted			
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$	1.0	1.0	1.0
$\sigma(r_s)$ (in %)	3.1	3.0	2.7
$\rho(r_s, y)$	-0.6	-0.6	-0.7
$\rho(c, y)$	1.0	1.0	1.0
Mean Reserves (a/y)	16	15	6
Mean Reserves/Debt (a/b)	35	38	31
$\rho(a/y, r_s)$	-0.4	-0.7	0.5
Reserves/S.T. liabilities	112	139	100
Welfare gain (vs. No-Reserves)	0.18	0.07	-0.22

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Inflation Targeting

(more)

Inflation Targeting

▸ (more)

	Data	Model	
		Fixed Exchange Rate	Inflation Targeting
Targeted			
Mean debt (b/y)	45	44	51
Mean r_s	2.9	2.9	2.8
Δr_s w/ risk-prem. shock	2.0	2.0	2.1
Δ UR around crises	2.0	2.0	0.5
Mean y^T/y	41	41	42
Non-Targeted			
$\sigma(c)/\sigma(y)$	1.1	1.0	1.1
$\sigma(r_s)$ (in %)	1.6	3.1	3.0
$\rho(r_s, y)$	-0.3	-0.6	-0.7
$\rho(c, y)$	0.6	1.0	1.0
Mean Reserves (a/y)	16	16	12
Mean Reserves/Debt (a/b)	35	35	23
$\rho(a/y, r_s)$	-0.4	-0.4	-0.3

Inflation Targeting

(more)

	Data	Model: Fixed Exchange Rate	Model: Inflation Targeting
Targeted			
Mean debt (b/y)	45	44	51
Mean r_s	2.9	2.9	2.8
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Key: some form of monetary inflexibility is enough to create demand for reserves

Costly one-time depreciations

- Implication of the model: countries with a **lower degree of exchange rate flexibility** find it optimal to use a **larger portion of the reserves** to deal w/ shocks.
- **Suitable episode:** GFC. Notable decline in the accumulation of reserves and a large dispersion in depreciation rates across countries.
- Ask whether in the cross-section, the larger drop in reserves was associated with a lower depreciation in the exchange rate. Answer: yes.
- Does the model predict something similar?

Costly one-time depreciations

Consider a variant of the model w/ flexible e but costly depreciations

$$u(c^T, F(h)) - \kappa(y^T) - \Phi\left(\frac{e-\bar{e}}{\bar{e}}\right), \qquad \Phi(0) = 0 \text{ and } \Phi'(0) = 0$$

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Exercise:

- Focus on the response to a negative income shock and consider a one-time adjustment cost.
- Economy under fix, avg. (b, a) and hit by $\downarrow y$ such that spreads $\uparrow$ 300 bps.
- How much reserves are used as a functions of Φ ?

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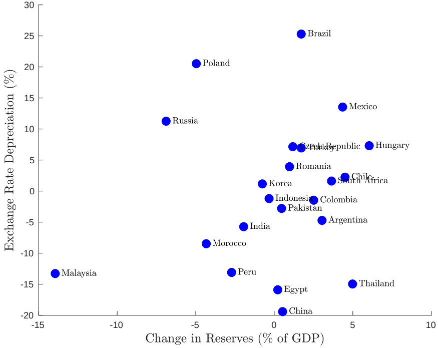
Result:

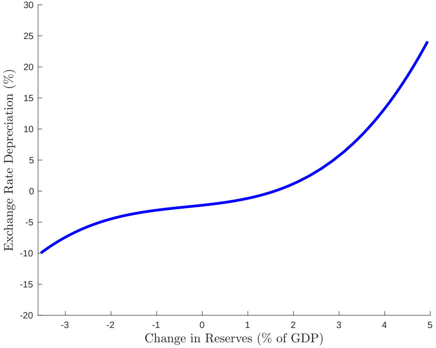
- As $\Phi \searrow$ we see a higher depreciation rate and a lower decline in reserves.
- In line w/ data: a gov. that depreciates more doesn't use as many reserves when hit by a $(-)$ shock.

Costly one-time depreciations

(a) Data



(b) Model



In line w/ data: a gov. that depreciates more doesn't use as many reserves when hit by a negative shock.

Conclusions

- Provided a theory of reserve accum. for macro-stabilization and sovereign risk
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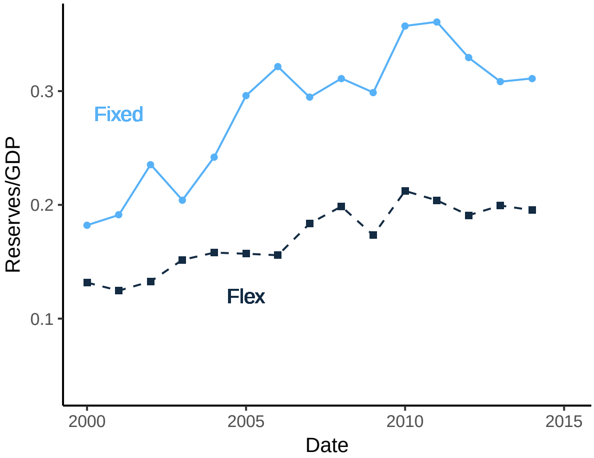
- Simple and implementable rules for res. accum. can deliver significant gains
- Agenda:
  - Equilibrium Multiplicity
  - Temptation to abandon pegs—how reserves can help

THANKS !

Reserves in the data: fixed vs. flex

(back)

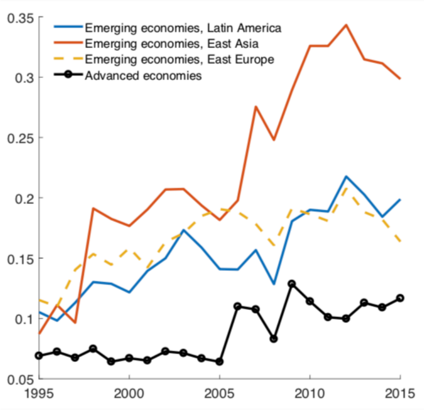


Massive holdings of international reserves, particularly for countries with fixed exchange rates

Reserves around the world

(back)

Over the past 20 years massive increase in reserves around the world, specially EMEs.



(from Amador, Bianchi, Bocola and Perri, 2018)

Reserve accumulation – Regressions

(back to motivation) (back to simulations)

	Dependent variable: log(*Reserves*/*y*)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
ERV	**−0.647***	**−0.656****	**−0.662****	**−0.281***	**−0.206***
	(0.367)	(0.332)	(0.334)	(0.152)	(0.121)
log(*Debt*/*y*)		0.245	0.250	0.349	0.324
		(0.214)	(0.244)	(0.240)	(0.203)
$\hat{y}$			−0.069	1.158	1.389
			(1.227)	(1.326)	(1.007)
log(*Spread*)				−0.155	−0.063
				(0.095)	(0.093)
r^{world}					−0.119***
					(0.038)
Number of countries	22	22	22	22	22
Observations	459	459	458	314	314
R^2	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.12	0.24
F Statistic	7.28***	8.97***	6.53***	9.43***	18.24***

Note: All explanatory variables are lagged one period. $\hat{y}$ is the cyclical component of GDP. All specifications include country fixed effects. Robust standard errors (clustered at the country level) are reported in parentheses. $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$.

Countries in our dataset

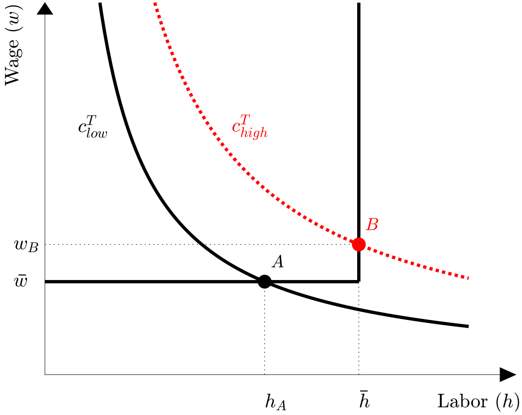
(back to motivation) (back to simulations)

We use the IMF Classif. of Exch. Rate Arrangements (fixed = 1 and 2)

We follow Kondo and Hur (2016) and focus on 22 EMEs:

Argentina	India	Poland
Brazil	Indonesia	Romania
Chile	Malaysia	Russia
China	Mexico	South Africa
Colombia	Morocco	South Korea
Czech Republic	Pakistan	Thailand
Egypt	Peru	Turkey
Hungary		

Plot of the Labor Market Equilibrium



Foreign Investors' SDF – details

back

- Pricing kernel: a function of innovation to domestic income (ε) and a global factor $\nu = \{0, 1\}$ (assumed to be independent of ε)

$$m_{t,t+1} = e^{-r-\nu_t(\kappa\varepsilon_{t+1}+0.5\kappa^2\sigma_\varepsilon^2)}, \quad \text{with} \quad \kappa \geq 0,$$

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- Functional form + normality of $\varepsilon \rightarrow$ constant short-term rate:

$$\mathbb{E}_{s'|s} m(s, s') = e^{-r} = q_a, \qquad \text{with} \quad s = \{y^T, \nu\}$$

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- Functional form + normality of ε $\rightarrow$ constant short-term rate:

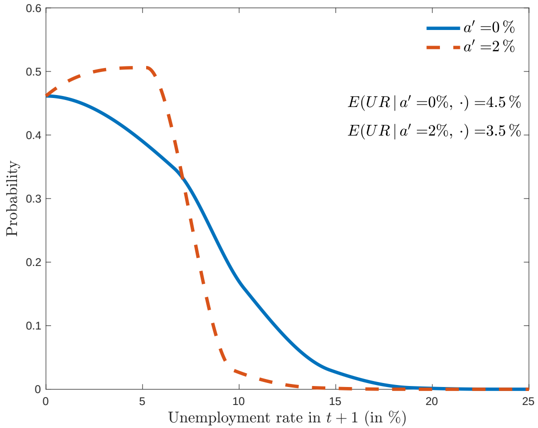
$$\mathbb{E}_{s'|s} m(s, s') = e^{-r} = q_a, \qquad \text{with} \quad s = \{y^T, \nu\}$$

- Bond price given by: $q = \mathbb{E}_{s'|s} \{m(s, s')(1 - d') [\delta + (1 - \delta) q']\}$
- Bond becomes a worse hedge if $\nu = 1$ and gov. tends to default with low ε

$\implies$ positive risk premium

Distribution of next-period unemployment for given (a', b')

back

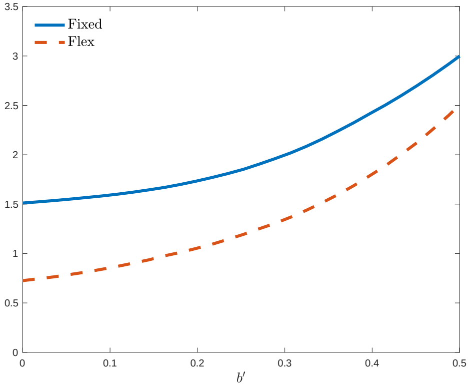


Note: higher reserves **reduce** future unemployment

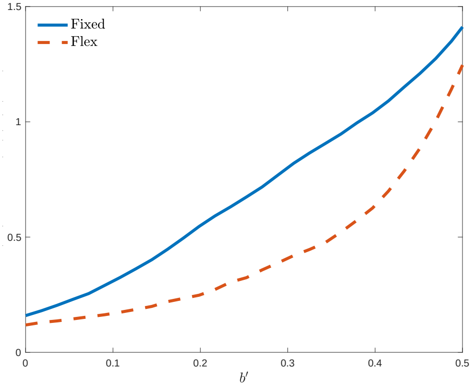
Results: spreads, reserves and nominal rigidities

(back)

Spread schedule (avg. reserves)



$\uparrow r_s$ if zero reserves



Results: spreads, reserves and nominal rigidities

▸ (back)

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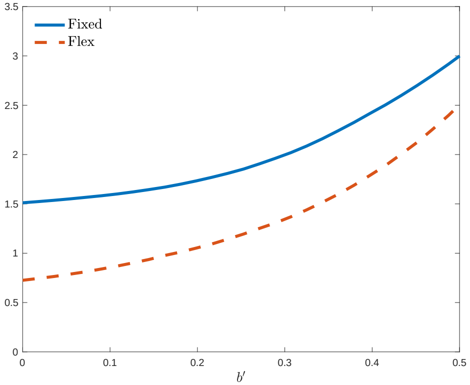

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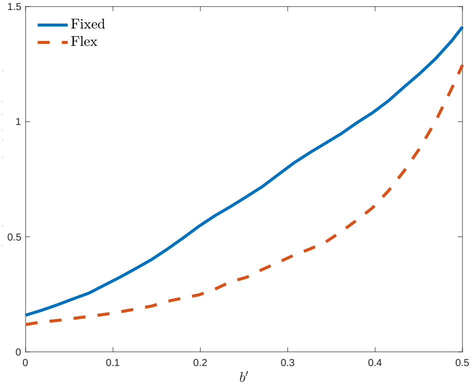

- Nominal rigidities **increase** spreads.

Results: spreads, reserves and nominal rigidities

(back)

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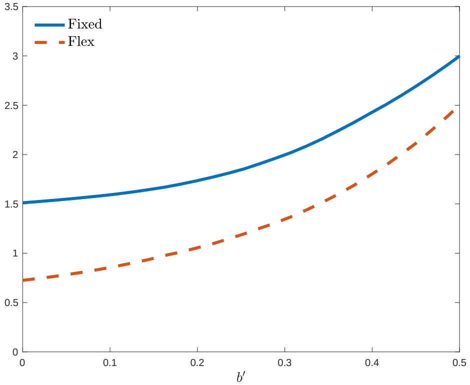

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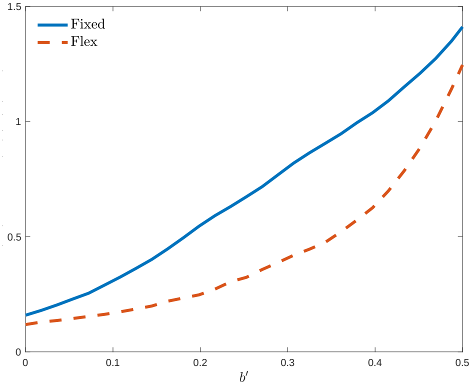

- Nominal rigidities **increase** spreads.
- Reserves **decrease** spreads, and **more** with nominal rigidities.

Appendix – Welfare

(back)

We'll compute **welfare costs** of 'moving' from a **baseline** economy to an **alternative** economy:

$$\text{Welfare gain } = 100 \times \left[\left(\frac{(1-\gamma)(1-\beta)V_{baseline} + 1}{(1-\gamma)(1-\beta)V_{alternative} + 1} \right)^{1/(1-\gamma)} - 1 \right]$$

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(back)

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We're interested in studying:

- Costs of nominal rigidities
- Costs of not having access to reserves

To do this: define a "No-Reserves" economy (which can be under "fixed" or "flex").

Appendix – Welfare

(back)

Benchmark under fixed	Benchmark under flex
No-Reserves under fixed	No-Reserves under flex

Appendix – Welfare

(back)

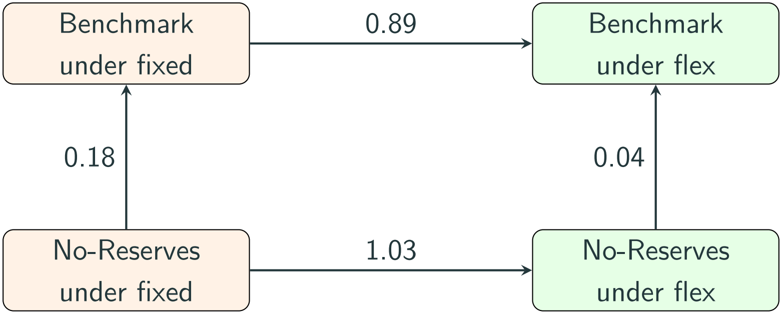
Benchmark under fixed $\xrightarrow{0.89}$ Benchmark under flex

No-Reserves under fixed $\xrightarrow{1.03}$ No-Reserves under flex

- Eliminating nominal rigidities is **welfare enhancing**, and more so when **reserve accumulation is not possible**.

Appendix – Welfare

(back)

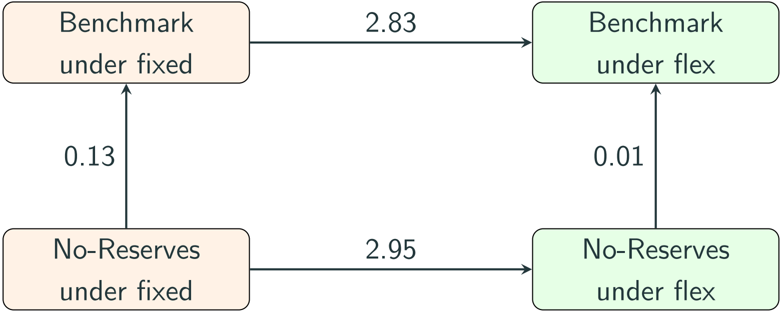


- Eliminating nominal rigidities is **welfare enhancing**, and more so when **reserve accumulation is not possible**.
- Being able to accumulate reserves is **welfare enhancing**, and more so under **fixed**.

Appendix – Welfare

(back)

Initial debt = Avg. in simulations. Initial reserves= zero.



Appendix – Inflation Targeting

(back)

- Define price aggregator as

$$P\left(P^T, P^N\right) \equiv \left(\omega^{\frac{1}{1+\mu}}\left(P^T\right)^{\frac{\mu}{1+\mu}} + (1-\omega)^{\frac{1}{1+\mu}}\left(P^N\right)^{\frac{\mu}{1+\mu}}\right)^{\frac{1+\mu}{\mu}}.$$

- Instead of fixing $e = 1$, gov. targets $P = \overline{P} > 0$

- All this yields an exchange rate policy

$$e = \overline{P}/\mathcal{P}\left(c^T, h\right) \tag{1}$$

- Replace fixed e for (1).