In Search of a Nominal Anchor: What Drives Long-Term Inflation Expectations?

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Motivation

- Successful monetary policymaking relies on **anchored** inflation expectations.
- Yet: do not know much about what drives long-term expectations.
- Under what conditions are expectations anchored?
- In most macro-models **long-term** inflation expectations are:
  - Assumed to be constant; or
  - Assumed to drift exogenously.
- However, stability of long-run inflation expectations should not be taken for granted — not an inherent feature of the economy.

This Paper

- Simple model of expectation formation based on learning.
- Price-setting agents act as econometricians: estimate average long-run inflation.
- **Key feature 1**: **state-dependent** sensitivity of long-run inflation expectations to short-term inflation surprises.

  $\Rightarrow$ Generates drift in long-term inflation expectations in response to large and persistent surprises.
- **Key feature 2**: with nominal rigidities expected future inflation matters for current prices.

  $\Rightarrow$ Expectations are partially self-fulfilling, producing an **endogenous** inflation trend.

This Paper - ctd.

- Can such a model explain the evolution of long-term inflation expectations as measured by survey forecasts?
- Estimate the model using only actual inflation and survey-based measures of short-term inflation forecasts.
- Evaluate predictions for long-term survey forecasts for US and other countries (Japan, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, Sweden, Canada, UK, . . .).
- Find that model explains long-term inflation forecasts very well in all countries.
- Model detects episodes of unanchoring that accord with common wisdom.

A Simple Model

- Forecasting model of price-setting agents:

$$\pi_t = (1 - \gamma_p)\,\bar{\pi}_t + \gamma_p \pi_{t-1} + \varphi_t.$$

  - $\bar{\pi}_t$: long-run mean of inflation unknown to agents who estimate it from the data

$$\hat{E}_t \lim_{T \to \infty} \pi_T = \bar{\pi}_t.$$

  - φ_t: a zero mean stationary "short-run component"

$$\varphi_t = s_t + \mu_t$$

$$s_t = \rho_s s_{t-1} + \epsilon_t.$$

  - s_t, μ_t: relate to marginal cost and cost-push shocks in NK model.

A Simple Model - ctd.

- True inflation DGP:

$$\pi_t = (1 - \gamma_p)\,\Gamma\bar{\pi}_t + \gamma_p \pi_{t-1} + \varphi_t.$$

- Γ: measures **feed-back** from beliefs to actual inflation.

  $\Rightarrow$ In NK model: feed-back to price-setting decisions.

- $\Gamma < 1$: restricted to ensure π_t is stationary.

- True DGP for inflation has a constant mean which agents will eventually learn

Learning about the Inflation Trend

- We assume the following learning algorithm:

$$\bar{\pi}_t = \bar{\pi}_{t-1} + k_{t-1}^{-1} \times f_t \text{ where } \quad f_t = \pi_t - \hat{E}_{t-1}\pi_t.$$

- In the spirit of Marcet and Nicolini (2003), learning gain $k_t > 1$:

$$k_t = \begin{cases} k_{t-1} + 1, \text{ if } \frac{\left|\hat{E}_{t-1}\pi_t - \mathbb{E}_{t-1}\pi_t\right|}{\sqrt{\mathbb{E}[\pi_t - \mathbb{E}_{t-1}\pi_t]^2}} < \nu \\ \bar{g}^{-1}, \text{ otherwise.} \end{cases}$$

- $\mathbb{E}_{t-1}\pi_t$ is model-consistent forecast. "As if" interpretation:

  ⇒ Captures effort to protect against structural change.

  ⇒ Use statistical tools to detect time-variation in their model's intercept.

Learning about the Inflation Trend - ctd.

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- More intuition:

$$\left|\hat{E}_{t-1}\pi_t - \mathbb{E}_{t-1}\pi_t\right| = \left|(1-\gamma_p)(1-\Gamma)\left[\bar{\pi}_0 + \sum_{\tau=0}^{t} k_\tau^{-1} f_\tau\right]\right|, \text{ given } \bar{\pi}_0, f_0, k_0.$$

$\Rightarrow$ Large when past forecast errors are of same sign for a few periods.

Anchored Expectations?

- **Anchored expectations**: agents learn about a constant long-run mean of inflation (Least Squares)

  $\Rightarrow$ Sensitivity of long-term expectations to short-term forecast errors decreasing with time: $k_t^{-1} \to 0$.

- **Unanchored expectations**: agents doubt the constancy of long-run inflation and put more weight on recent inflation (Constant gain)

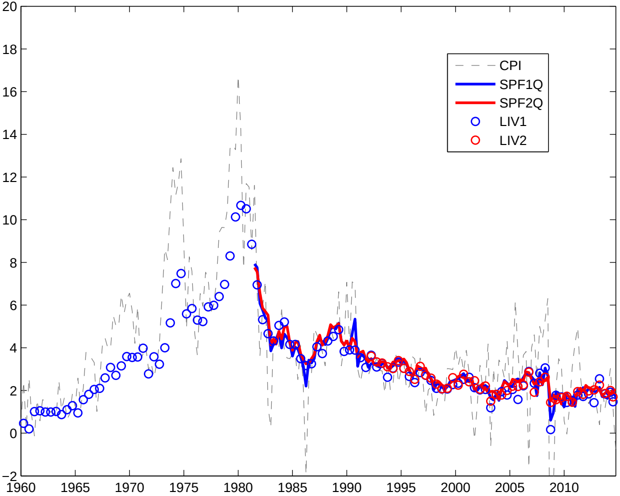
  $\Rightarrow$ Sensitivity of long-term expectations to short-term forecast errors is large and does not change over time: $k_t^{-1} = \bar{g}$.

Data: US

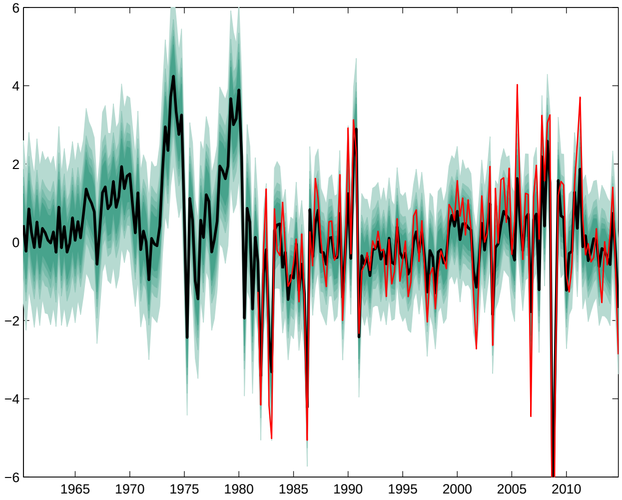
Model is estimated with Bayesian methods, using data on actual inflation and short-term inflation forecasts. Goal: evaluate its ability to explain long-term inflation forecasts.

- **Data**: CPI inflation (quarterly), 1955Q1-2014Q4.
- Short-term forecasts (consensus):
  - 6-months ahead: Livingston survey (semi-annual), 1955Q2-2014Q4.
  - 1- and 2- quarters ahead: Survey of Professional Forecasters (quarterly), 1981Q3-2014Q4.

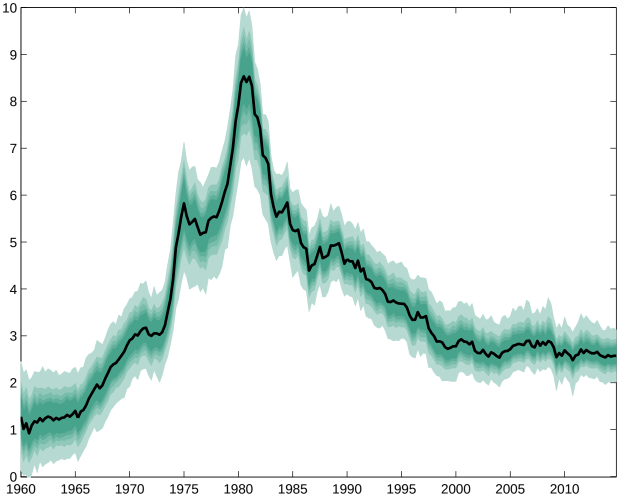
US: Actual Inflation and Short-Term Survey Forecasts



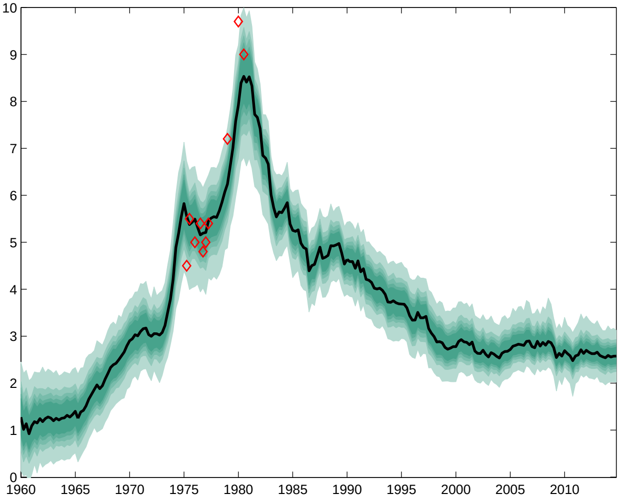
1Q Ahead Forecast Errors: Model-Implied and SPF



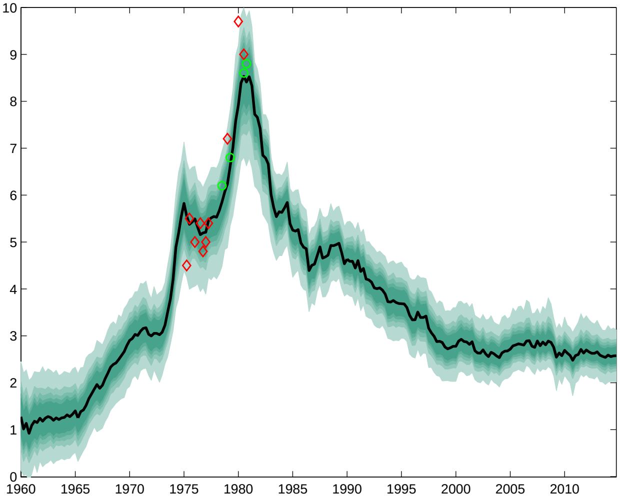
Long-term (6-10 Years) Model-Implied Inflation Forecasts



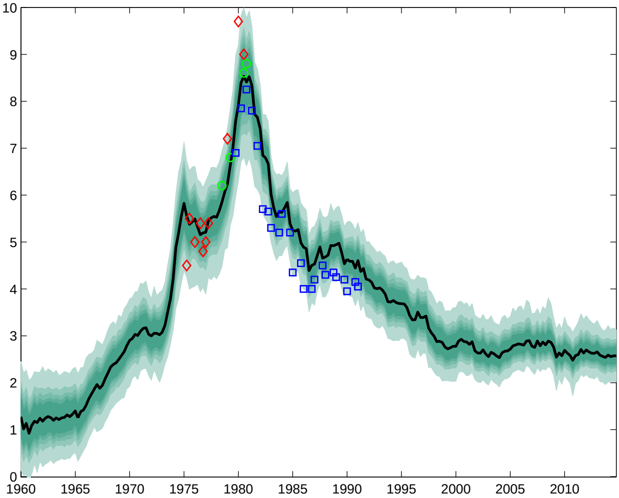
Adding Michigan Survey 6-10 Years



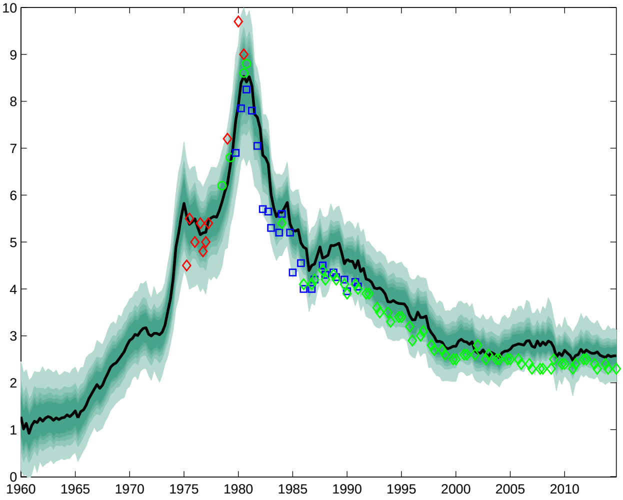
Adding Decision Makers Poll 1-10 Years



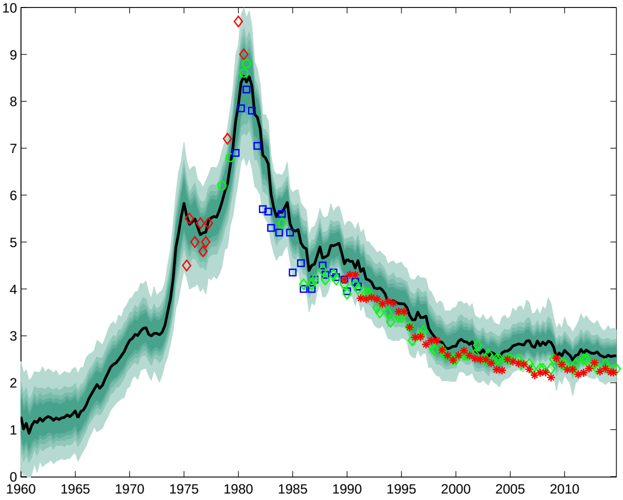
Adding Blue Chip Economic Indicators 1-10 Years



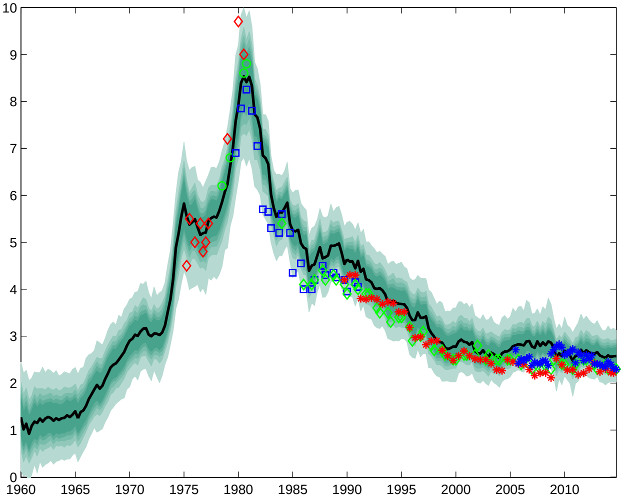
Adding Blue Chip Economic Indicators 6-10 Years



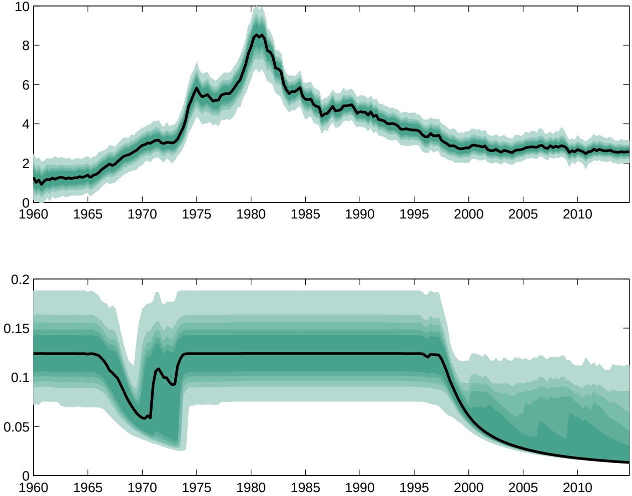
Adding Consensus Economics 6-10 Years



Adding Survey of Professional Forecasters 6-10 Years



Estimated Gain k_t^{-1}



Estimation: Other Countries

- **Data**:
  - Consumer Price Indices: late 1950s to 2014Q4.
  - Short-term forecasts from Consensus Economics (1991-2014Q4).
- **Data limitations**:
  - Limited sample of surveys + year-over-year forecasts.
- **Solution**:
  - Model predictions using parameters from US posterior distribution.

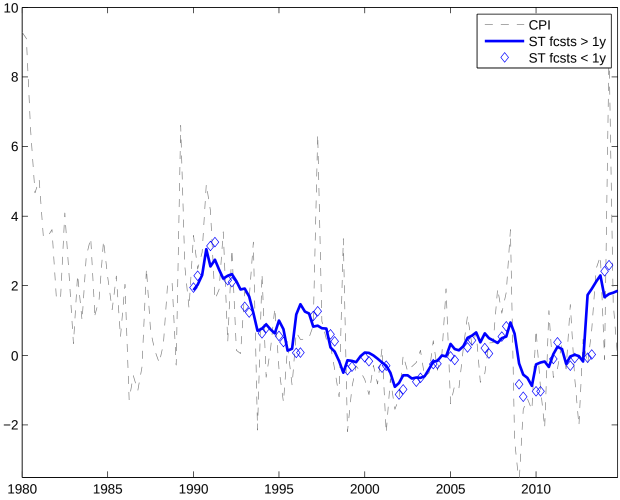
Summary Results: Foreign Countries

1. Model characterizes well the evolution of long-term forecasts.
   - Survey-based forecasts are inside the 95% bands for most of the sample.
   - Italy and Spain are the exceptions.

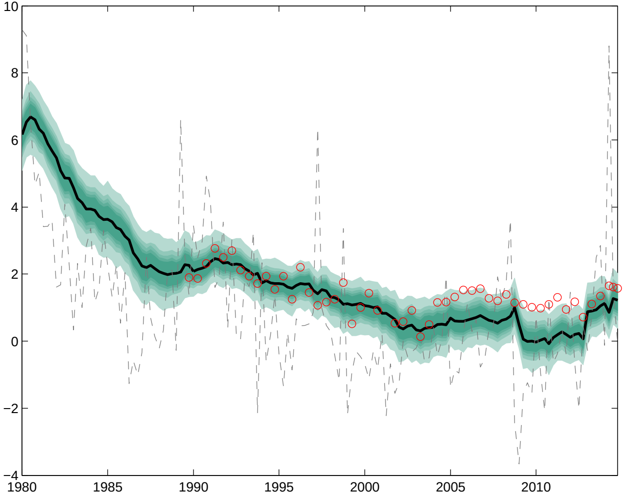
2. More stable expectations beginning in the 1990s.
   - Japan and Switzerland: episodes of unanchoring in the past 15 years.
   - Canada, France, Sweden and the UK: more stable expectations.

3. Beyond inflation surprises: announcement effects?
   - Examples: some episodes in Canada, Japan and Sweden.

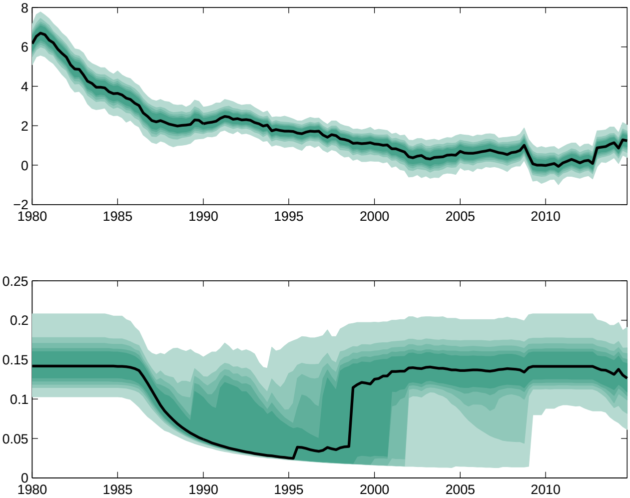
Japan: Consumer Price Inflation and Short-Term Forecasts



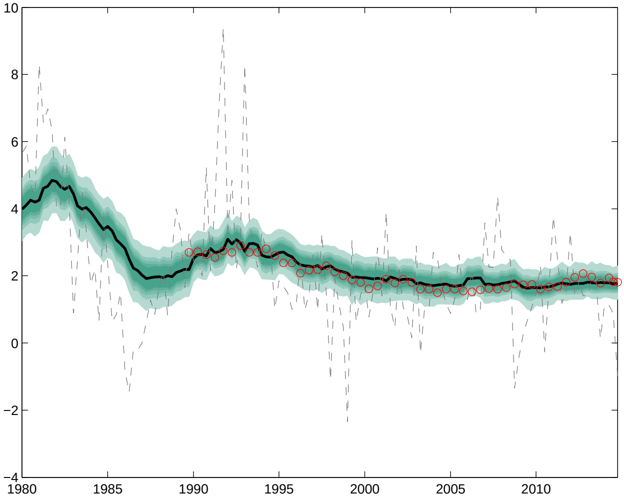
Japan: Model-Implied and Obs. 6-11 Years Forecasts



Japan: Learning Gain



Germany: Model-Implied and Obs. 6-11 Years Forecasts



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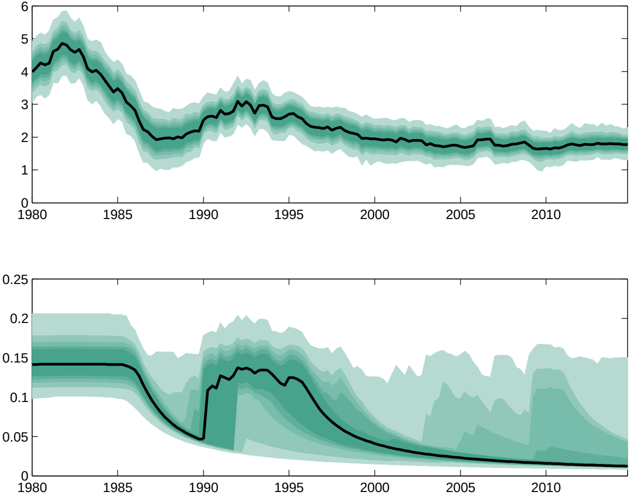
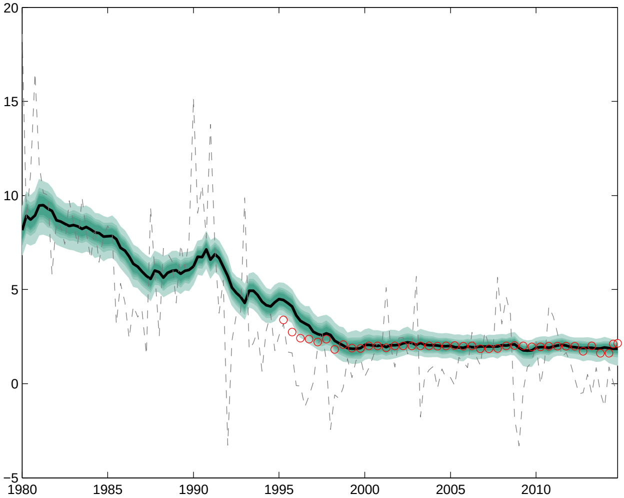
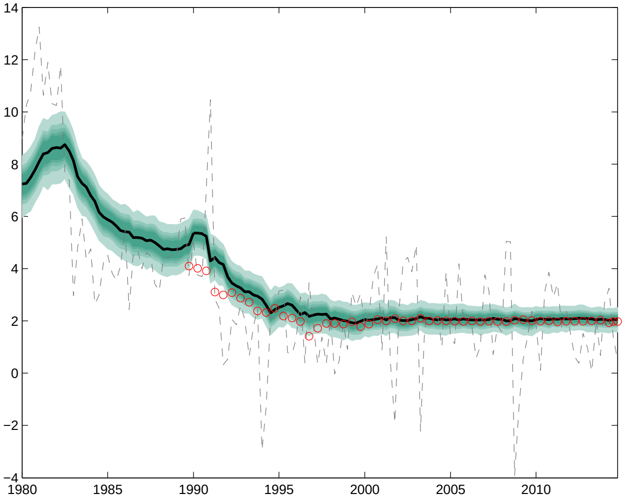


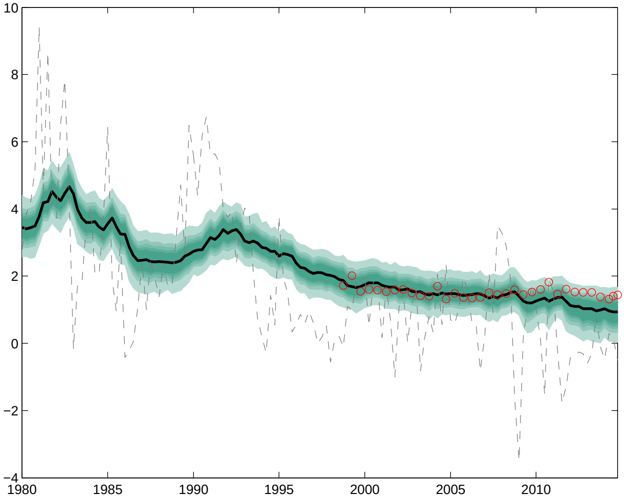
Sweden: Model-Implied and Obs. 6-11 Years Forecasts



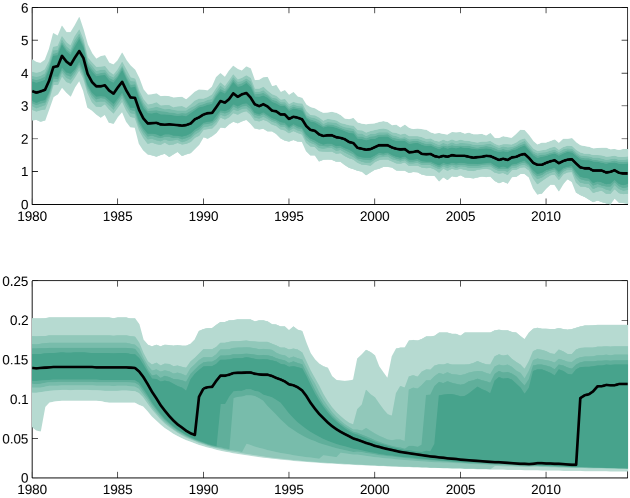
Canada: Model-Implied and Obs. 6-11 Years Forecasts



Switzerland: Model-Implied and Obs. 6-11 Years Forecasts



Switzerland: Learning Gain



Conclusion

- Simple learning model which links long-term inflation expectations to short-term forecast errors.
- In model, inflation and inflation expectations can become unmoored in response to large and persistence short-term forecast errors.
- Model describes long-term survey forecasts of inflation well for number of countries, even using only posterior distribution for the US.
- In our model short-term forecast errors are treated as exogenous...
- ...but in general equilibrium model they depend on macroeconomic policies.

The New Keynesian Phillips Curve

- Firm i maximizes the present discounted value of profits

$$E_t \sum_{T=t}^{\infty} \alpha^{T-t} Q_{t,T} \left[Y_T(i) \left(\frac{P_t(i)}{P_T} - MC_T \right) \right],$$

where $Q_{t,T}$ is the discount factor, MC_t is the real marginal cost and

$$Y_t(i) = \left(\frac{P_t(i)}{P_t} \right)^{-\theta_{p,t}} Y_t$$

the demand the firm faces with time-varying elasticity $\theta_{p,t}$.

- Each period the firm's price is reset optimally with probability α, and with prob $(1-\alpha)$ is indexed to a weighted average of past inflation and the perceived long-run inflation rate:

$$\bar{\Pi}_t^p = \bar{\pi}_t^{1-\gamma_p} \pi_{t-1}^{\gamma_p}.$$

The New Keynesian Phillips Curve - ctd.

- Optimal price in a model with Calvo pricing and indexation to past inflation and estimated inflation mean

$$\hat{p}_t^* = \hat{E}_t \sum_{T=t}^{\infty} (\alpha\beta)^{T-t} \left[(-\alpha\beta)\,\varphi_T + \alpha\beta\,(\pi_{T+1} - \gamma_p \pi_T - (1-\gamma_p)\bar{\pi}_t)\right]$$

- Aggregating

$$\begin{aligned} \pi_t &= \gamma_p \pi_{t-1} + (1-\gamma_p)\bar{\pi}_t + \\ & \quad \hat{E}_t \sum_{T=t}^{\infty} (\alpha\beta)^{T-t} \left[\kappa\varphi_T + (1-\alpha)\,\beta\,(\pi_{T+1} - \gamma_p \pi_T - (1-\gamma_p)\bar{\pi}_t)\right] \end{aligned}$$

- Soving for expectations, the DGP is

$$\pi_t = \gamma_p \pi_{t-1} + (1-\gamma_p)\Gamma\bar{\pi}_t + \frac{(1-\alpha\beta)(1-\alpha)}{(1-\alpha\beta\rho_s)} s_t + \mu_t$$

Estimation: US

- Model in state-space form:

$$\xi_t = F(k_{t-1}^{-1})\xi_{t-1} + S_C \epsilon_t.$$

- Observation equation:

$$Y_t^{US} = \begin{bmatrix} \pi_t \\ \mathbf{E}_t^{SPF} \pi_{t+1} \\ \mathbf{E}_t^{SPF} \pi_{t+2} \\ \mathbf{E}_t^{LIV_1} \left(\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^{2} \pi_{t+i} \right) \\ \mathbf{E}_t^{LIV_2} \left(\frac{1}{2} \sum_{i=1}^{2} \pi_{t+i} \right) \end{bmatrix} = \pi^* + H_t' \xi_t + o_t.$$

- Estimate with Bayesian methods — structural parameters:

$$\bar{\theta} = \begin{pmatrix} \pi^* & \nu & \bar{g} & \gamma_p & \Gamma & \rho_s & \sigma_s^2 & \sigma_\mu^2 \end{pmatrix}'.$$

US Estimates - Table of Priors and Posteriors

	Prior				Posterior				
	Dist.	Mean	SD	Mode	Mean	SD	5%	Med.	95%
$4\pi^*$	Normal	2.0	1.2	2.21	2.49	.29	1.96	2.50	2.90
ν	Gamma	.02	.006	.019	.022	.006	.013	.022	.033
g	Gamma	.10	.050	.124	.126	.028	.083	.124	.174
Γ	Beta	.7	.150	.952	.906	.041	.823	.914	.957
γ_p	Beta	.5	.260	.124	.140	.029	.095	.138	.191

Comparing to Model with Exogenous Inflation Drift

- Popular approach both in reduced-form and DSGE models

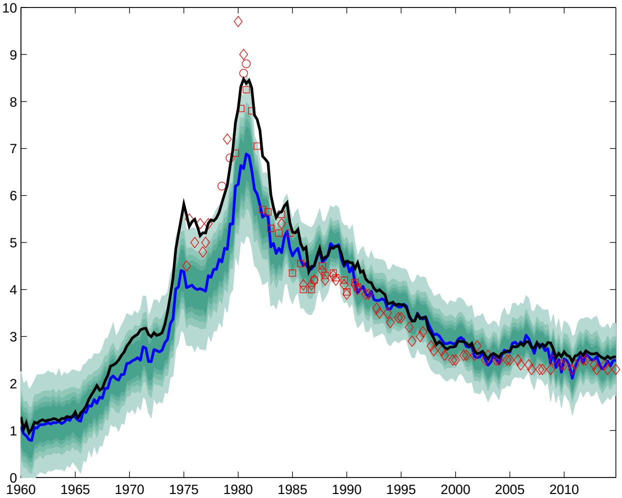
$$\bar{\pi}_{t+1} = \rho_{\bar{\pi}} \bar{\pi}_t + e_t; \rho_{\bar{\pi}} \approx 1.$$

- To compare, our model implies

$$\begin{aligned} \bar{\pi}_{t+1} &= \bar{\pi}_t + k_t^{-1} \left(\pi_t - \hat{E}_{t-1} \pi_t \right) \\ &= \underbrace{\left[1 + k_t^{-1} (1 - \gamma_p) (\Gamma - 1) \right]}_{\rho_{\bar{\pi},t}} \bar{\pi}_t + \underbrace{k_t^{-1} (\epsilon_t + \mu_t)}_{\tilde{e}_t}. \end{aligned}$$

- Key differences:
  - Persistence and volatility are time-varying and state-dependent.
  - Innovations to $\bar{\pi}_t$ depend on inflation forecast errors: *endogenous drift.*

Model Comparison: Exogenous Drift



Model Comparison: Constant Gain