Mortgage Innovation and the Foreclosure Boom

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Abstract

We present a model where heterogenous households select from a set of possible mortgage contracts and choose whether to default on their payments given realizations of income and housing price shocks. The mortgage menu consists of fixed rate mortgages (FRM) which require a downpayment, and mortgages with features that became popular after 2004: a high loan-to-value ratio, and non-traditional amortization schedules. The mortgage market is competitive and each contract, contingent on household earnings and assets at origination, must earn zero expected profits. Simulations calibrated to pre-2004 US data show that the introduction of non-traditional mortgages enables many households with low income and assets to become home-owners. At the same time, average default rates rise precisely because high-default rate households enter the mortgage market, and because households accumulate equity earlier when they hold FRMs than when they hold mortgages with low initial payments. We use our model to quantify the role of mortgage innovation in the recent rise in foreclosure rates by hitting the economy with an unanticipated aggregate shock to house prices after briefly introducing a non-standard mortgage option. We show that an unanticipated 20% price decline generates a 40% rise in foreclosure rates over the first two years following the price shock, and a 50% rise at the peak. By comparison, foreclosure rates roughly doubled between mid-2006 and mid-2008 in the data. A counterfactual experiment in which new mortgages are not introduced shows that the same price shock has an effect on foreclosure rates that is 50% lower on impact, and 20% lower at peak.

Preliminary and incomplete, comments welcome.

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1 Introduction

Between 2003 and 2006, the composition of the stock of outstanding residential mortgages in the United States changed in several important respects. The fraction of mortgages with fixed payments (FRMs) fell from 85% to under 75% (see figure 1.) At the same time, the fraction of "subprime" mortgages (mortgages issued to borrowers perceived to be high-default risks) rose from 5% to nearly 15%. Recent work (see e.g. Gerardi et al., 2009, figure 3) has revealed that many of these subprime loans are characterized by high leverage at origination, and non-traditional amortization schedules. These features cause payments from the borrowers to the lender to be backloaded compared to loans with standard downpayments and standard amortization schedules. By lowering payments initially, these innovations made it possible for more households to obtain the financing necessary to purchase a house and, in other papers, (e.g. Chambers, et. al. (forthcoming)) have been associated with the rise in homeownership.

Our objective is to quantify the importance of mortgage innovation for the recent flare-up in foreclosure rates. Specifically, we ask the following questions. First, how much of the rise in foreclosures can be attributed to innovation in mortgage contracts? How much does mortgage innovation magnify the effect of downturns in house values on default rates? What is the welfare gain associated with mortgage innovation?

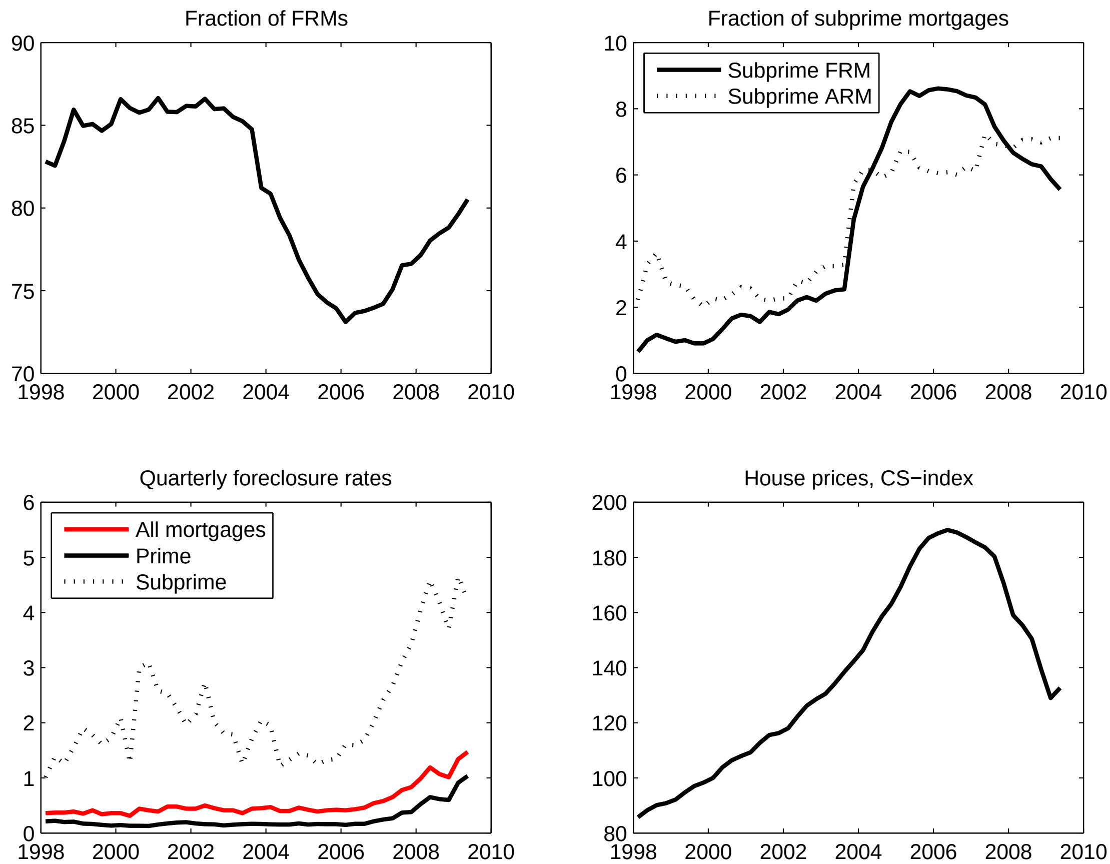
To answer these questions, we describe an economy where households value both consumption and housing services and move stochastically through several stages of life. For simplicity, agents who are young are constrained to obtain housing services from the rental market and split their remaining income between consumption and the accumulation of liquid assets. Given idiosyncratic income shocks, despite the fact that households begin life ex-ante identical in our model, there is an endogenous distribution of assets among the set of people who turn middle aged.

When agents become mid-aged, they have the option to purchase one of two possible quantities of housing capital: a small house or a large house. We assume they must finance house purchases via a mortgage drawn from a set of contracts with properties like those available in the United States. Standard fixed-rate mortgages (FRMs) feature a 20% downpayment and fixed payments until maturity. Agents can opt instead for a mortgage with no-downpayment and delayed amortization. We think of this second mortgage as capturing the backloaded nature of the mortgages that became popular after 2004 in the United States.

Mortgage holders can terminate their contract before maturity, in which case the house is immediately sold and the borrower receives any proceeds in excess of the outstanding loan principal, and transaction costs.[1] We consider a house sale to be a foreclosure if it occurs in a state where the house value is below the mortgage's balance (that is, the agent's home equity is negative), or where the agent's income realization is such that they cannot make the mortgage payment they would owe for the period. In that case, home sales are subject to

[1] Here we are assuming the default law is consistent with antideficiency (as in California for example) where the defaulting household is not responsible for the deficit between the proceeds from the sale of the property and the outstanding loan balance.

Figure 1: Recent trends in US housing



Sources: Haver analytics, National Delinquency Survey (Mortgage Bankers Association), and Statistical Abstract of the United States.

transaction costs.

Our model predicts that almost all foreclosures (99%) involve negative equity. This is because most agents with positive equity who are at a high risk of finding themselves unable to meet their mortgage payments sell before reaching that state in order to avoid transaction costs. On the other hand, most agents with negative equity (96%) choose to continue meeting their mortgage obligations to avoid losing their homes. Foreclosures are thus associated with a combination of negative equity and income circumstances that make meeting mortgage payments difficult. These predictions are consistent with the growing empirical literature on the determinants of foreclosure.[2]

Foreclosures are costly for lenders because of the associated transactions costs and because they occur in most cases when home equity is negative. As a result, intermediaries demand higher yields from agents whose asset and income position make foreclosure more likely. In fact, intermediaries do not issue loans to some agents because their default risk is too high or because the agents are too poor to make a downpayment. In particular, our model is consistent with the fact that agents at lower asset and income positions are less likely to become home-owners, face more expensive borrowing terms, and are more likely to default on their loan obligations.

Since high initial payments are prohibitively costly for asset and income poor agents, there is a natural role to play in our economy for mortgage innovation in the form of contracts with low initial payments. We find that in an economy calibrated to match key aspects of the US housing market prior to 2005, adding the option to issue non-standard contracts causes a significant rise in both home-ownership rates and default rates in the long run.

In particular, we find that contracts with low initial payments are necessary for asset and income poor households (those who could be interpreted as subprime) to become home-owners. At the same time, the availability of these contracts cause default rates to be higher for two complementary reasons, which our environment enables us to make explicit. First, they enable high-default risk households to become home-owners. Second, these contracts are characterized by a much slower accumulation of home equity than FRMs, which makes voluntary default in the event of a home value shock much more likely, even at equal asset and income household characteristics.

While these long-run predictions are interesting, the data shown in figure 1 shows that the break in the composition of the mortgage stock occured briefly before the collapse of prices. There is also growing evidence that the fraction of high-LTV, delayed amortization mortgages in originations has dwindled to a trickle since the collapse of prices. We simulate this course of events using a three-stage transition experiment. Specifically, we begin with an economy where non-standard mortgages are not available, calibrated once again to match key aspects of the US economy prior to 2005. We then introduce the non-standard mortgage option for one period which, in our calibration, represents two years. In the third stage, we cause a surprise 20% collapse in home prices and remove the non-standard mortgage option,

[2]See, among many other papers, Foote et al. (2008a,b), Gerardi et al. (2007), Sherlund (2008), Danis and Pennington-Cross (2005), and Deng et al. (2000).

and then let the economy transit to a new long-run steady state. This experiment causes foreclosure rates to rise by 50% in the third stage before converging back to a lower long-run value. To quantify the role of mortgage innovation in this increase, we then run a similar experiment where the new-mortgage option is not offered in the second stage. The increase in foreclosure rates caused by the he price shock becomes 50% lower on impact, and 20% lower at peak. Mortgage innovation, in other words, makes the economy much more sensitive to price shocks. In addition, we find that lower downpayments account for most of the contribution of new mortgages to the increase in foreclosure rates, while delayed amortization and payment spikes play a limited role.

Our calculations are conservative in two important respects. First, we assume that the price collapse is the same whether or not new mortgages are introduced. If, as is often written, the presence of new mortgages directly contributed to the price collapse, then their contribution to the foreclosure crisis is even greater than what our calculations suggest. Likewise, we assume that new mortgages only became available (and popular) over a two year period, leaving little time for these contracts to make a deep impact on the mortgage stock. A longer innovation stage would once against boost our numbers.

Our findings have a number of implications for how one should interpret current events. Mortgage innovation serves an important purpose and can raise welfare by expanding the range of choices for a number of households. The nature of these innovations, however, does make an increase in default rates unavoidable since agents are much slower to accumulate home equity. They significantly magnify the impact of negative aggregate housing price shocks on default rates.

Our paper is closely related to several studies of the recent evolution of the US housing market and mortgage choice.[3] Chambers et al. (forthcoming) argue that the development of mortgages with gradually increasing payments has had a positive impact on participation in the housing market. The idea that mortgage innovation may have implications for foreclosures is taken up in Garriga and Schlagenhauf (2009). They quantify the impact of aggregate house price shocks on default rates where there is cross-subsidization of mortgages **within** but not **across** mortgage types (e.g. FRM or LIP). A key difference between our paper and theirs is that we consider a menu of different terms on contracts **both** within **and** across mortgage types. Effectively, Garriga and Schlagenhauf (2009) apply the equilibrium concept in Athreya (2002) while we apply the equilibrium concept in Chatterjee et al. (2007). This enables us to build a model that is consistent with the heterogeneity of foreclosure rates and mortgage terms across wealth and income categories which we document in the Survey of Consumer Finance.

[3]There are numerous other housing papers which are a bit less closely related. Campbell and Cocco (2003) study the microeconomic determinants of mortgage choice but do so in a model where all agents are home-owners by assumption, and focus their attention on the choice between adjustable rate mortgages and standard FRMs with no option for default. Rios-Rull and Sanchez-Marcos (2008) develop a model of housing choice where agents can choose to move to bigger houses over time. A different strand of the housing literature (see e.g. Gervais, 2002, and Jeske and Krueger, 2005) studies the macroeconomic effects of various institutional features of the mortgage industry, again where there is no possibility of default. Davis and Heathcote (2005) describe a model of housing that is consistent with the key business cycle features of residential investment.

Along this separation dimension our paper is more closely related to Guler (2008) where intermediaries offer a menu of FRMs at different possible downpayment rates without cross-subsidization. Guler, however, assumes certain household characteristics are unobservable and studies the impact of an innovation to the screening technology on default rates.

Our paper also builds on the work of Stein (1995) and Ortalo-Magné and Rady (2006) who study housing choices in overlapping generation models where downpayment requirements affect ownership decisions and house prices. Our framework shares several key features with those employed in these studies, but our primary concern is to quantify the effects of various mortgage options, particularly the option to backload payments, on foreclosure rates.

Section 2 lays out the economic environment. Section 3 describes optimal behavior on the part of all agents and defines an equilibrium. Section 4 describes our parameterization under the assumption that the housing technology is constant returns to scale (which pins down the housing price) and then presents our main quantitative results. Section 5 concludes.

2 The environment

We study an economic environment where time is discrete and infinite. The economy is populated by a continuum of households and by a financial intermediary. Each period a mass one of households is born. Over time, households move stochastically through four stages: young (Y), middle-aged (M), old (O) and dead. All households are born young. At the beginning of each period, young households become middle-aged with probability ρ_M, middle-age households become old with probability ρ_O, while old households die with probability ρ_D. We assume that the population size is at its unique invariant value, and that the fraction of households of each type obeys a law of large numbers.

Each period, as long as they are young or middle-aged, households receive stochastic income shocks denominated in terms of the unique consumption good. These shocks evolve stochastically according to a stationary transition matrix π, and satisfy a law of large numbers so that there is no aggregate uncertainty. Agents begin life at an income level $y \in \{y_L, y_M, y_H\}$ drawn from the unique invariant distribution associated with π. When old, agents earn a fixed, certain amount of income denoted y^O.

Until they become old, households can save in one-period bonds that earn rate $1 + r_t \geq 0$ at date t with certainty. When old, households can buy annuities that pay rate $\frac{1+r_t}{1-\rho_D}$ in the following period provided they are alive, and pay nothing otherwise. We annuitize returns in the last stage of households' life in order to rule out accidental bequests.

Households value both consumption and housing services. They order non-negative processes $\{c_t, s_t\}_{t=0}^{\infty}$ according to:

$$E_0 \sum_{t=0}^{\infty} \beta^t U(c_t, s_t)$$

where U satisfies standard assumptions.

Households can obtain housing services from the rental market or from the owner-occupied market. On the first market, they can rent quantity $h_1 > 0$ of housing services at unit price R_t at date t. In the period when agents move from youth to middle-age – and only in that period – agents can choose instead to purchase quantity $h \in \{h_2, h_3\}$ of housing capital for unit price q_t, where $h_3 > h_2 > h_1$. We refer to this asset as a house. A house of size h initially delivers $h\theta$ of housing services every period with $\theta \geq 1$.

Homeowners face a risk that their house will devalue.[4] Specifically, every period, a fraction $\lambda > 0$ of agents who own a house of size $h = h_3$ see the quantity of capital they own fall to $h_2 > 0$. Likewise, a fraction λ of agents who own a house of size $h = h_2$ see the quantity of capital they own fall to h_1. Furthermore, houses of size h_1 generate quantity h_1 of housing services, rather than $h_1\theta$, whether owned (following a devaluation) or rented. We will interpret the devaluation shock as an idiosyncratic house price shock.[5]

There are several possible interpretation for this devaluation shock. One could for instance think of it as a neighborhood shock which makes house in a given location less valuable. Note that while we assume that devaluation shocks satisfy a law of large numbers (the fraction of houses that devalue in each period is λ) we do not need to assume that these shocks are independent across households.[6] Alternatively, one could consider introducing more heterogeneity in houses and modeling taste shocks that render certain house types less valuable. Our devaluation shocks are a tractable way to capture the possibility of microeconomic events that affect house values and are difficult to insure against.

Since devalued houses of size h_1 provide no advantage over rental units, no agent who becomes middle-aged would strictly prefer to purchase a house of that size, and all homeowners whose housing capital fall to that level are at least as well off selling their house and becoming renters as they would be if they keep their house.[7]

Owners of a house of size $h \in \{h_1, h_2, h_3\}$ bear maintenance costs δh in all periods where $\delta > 0$. We assume that maintenance costs, denominated in terms of the consumption good, must be paid in all periods by homeowners. In that case, a house does not physically depreciate (other than through a devaluation shock), which in turn maintains the low cardinality of the housing state space. Once agents sell or foreclose their house, they are constrained to rely on the rental market for the remainder of their life. We also assume that in the period in which agents become old, they must sell their house immediately and become renters for the remainder of their life. We assume that house sales due to the old age shock do not entail foreclosure costs (and hence they do not get counted in foreclosures.)

The financial intermediary holds household savings. The intermediary can store savings at exogenously given return $1 + r_t$ at date t. It can also transform quantities the consumption

[4]This is similar to Jeske and Krueger (2005).

[5]In the absence of such shocks, households would never find themselves with negative equity in a steady state equilibrium.

[6]In fact, independence across agents is essentially incompatible with assuming that a law of large numbers holds. See Feldman and Giles (1985).

[7]Arbitrage implies that the present value of renting housing services each period is the same as purchasing a depreciated house. Selling the depreciated house, however, can relax an agent's liquidity constraint.

good (i.e. deposits) into housing capital at a fixed rate $A > 0$. That is, it can turn quantity k into deposits into quantity Ak of housing capital at the start of any given period, or turn quantity h of housing capital into quantity $\frac{h}{A}$ of consumption good.

Housing capital can be rented at rate R_t at date t. The intermediary incurs maintenance cost δ on each unit of housing capital rented, measured in terms of the consumption good. At date t, each unit of consumption good rented thus earns net return $R_t - \delta$. The intermediary can also sell housing capital as houses to eligible households, at unit price q_t. Note that the fact that each agent's housing choice set is discrete does not impose an integer constraint on the intermediary since it deals with a continuum of households.

We assume that households that purchase a house of size $h \in \{h_2, h_3\}$ at a given date are constrained to finance this purchase with one of two possible types of mortgage contracts. The first contract (which we design to mimic the basic features of a standard fixed-rate mortgage, or FRM) requires a downpayment of size $\nu h q_t$ at date t where $\nu \in (0,1)$ and stipulates a yield $r^{FRM,t}(a_0, y_0, h)$ that depends on the household wealth and income characteristics (a_0, y_0) at the date t of origination of the loan, and on the selected house size. Given this yield, constant payments $m^{FRM,t}(a_0, y_0, h)$ and a principal balance schedule $\{b_n^{FRM,t}(a_0, y_0, h)\}_{n=0}^{T}$ can be computed using standard calculations, where T is the maturity of the loan.

Specifically, suppressing the initial characteristics for notational simplicity,

$$m^{FRM,t} = \frac{r^{FRM,t}}{1 - (1 + r^{FRM,t})^{-T}}(1 - \nu) h q_t$$

and, for all $n \in \{0, T-1\}$,

$$b_{n+1}^{FRM,t} = b_n^{FRM,t}(1 + r^{FRM,t}) - m^{FRM,t},$$

where $b_0^{FRM,t} = (1 - \nu) h q$. Standard calculations show that $b_T^{FRM,t} = 0$.

The second contract (low initial payments mortgage, or LIP) stipulates yield $r^{LIP,t}(a_0, y_0, h)$, no down-payment, constant payments $m^{LIP,t}(a_0, y_0, h) = h q_t r^{LIP,t}(a_0, y_0, h)$ that do not reduce the principal for the first $n^{IOM} < T$ periods, and fixed-payments for the following $T - n^{IOM}$ periods with a standard FRM-like balance schedule $\{b_n^{LIP,t}(a_0, y_0, h)\}_{n=n^{IOM}}^{T}$.

In other words,

$$m_n^{LIP,t} = \begin{cases} hqr^{LIP,t} & if \quad n < n^{IOM} \\ \frac{r^{LIP,t}}{1-(1+r^{LIP,t})^{-(T-n^{IOM})}} hq & if \quad n \geq n^{IOM} \end{cases}$$

and, for all $n \in \{0, T-1\}$,

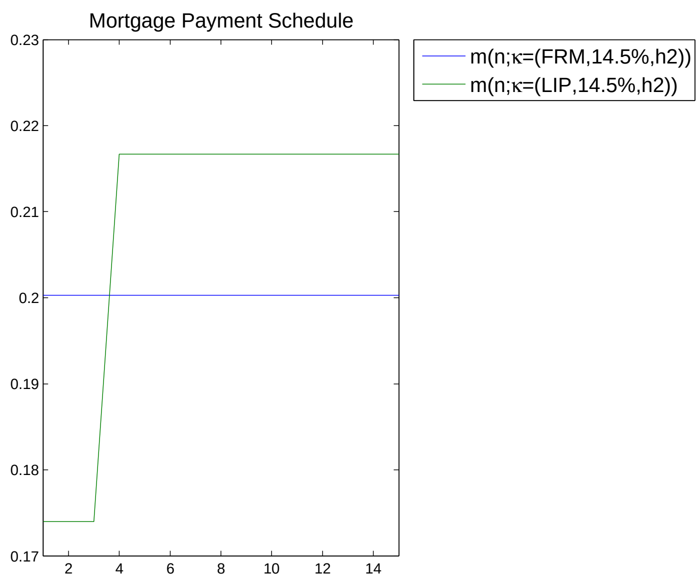
$$b_{n+1}^{LIP,t} = b_n^{LIP,t}(1 + r^{LIP,t}) - m_n^{LIP,t},$$

where $b_0^{LIP,t} = hq$, and, once again, $b_T^{LIP,t} = 0$. Notice that for $n < n^{IOM}$, $b_{n+1}^{LIP,t} = b_0^{LIP,t}$ so that the principal remains unchanged for n^{IOM} periods.

Alternative mortgages, therefore, have two main characteristics: low downpayment, and delayed amortization. These are two of the salient features of the mortgages that become highly popular after 2004 in the United States (see Gerardi et al., 2007.) Naturally, delayed amortization can take many forms. Subprime mortgages, for instance, often feature balloon payments rather than interest-only periods. We use an IOM structure for concreteness only, any device that delays amortization should yield similar results.

Figure 2 shows typical mortgage payment schedules for both mortgage types. The chart assumes a yield of 15.75% and a loan size of 0.75, a maturity of 10 periods, and an interest-only phase of 3 periods for LIPs. Payments due on LIP mortgages jump once the interest-only phase ends, while FRM mortgages feature constant payments.

Figure 2: Mortgage payments by mortgage type



Mortgages are issued by the financial intermediary. The intermediary incurs service costs which we model as a premium $\phi > 0$ on the opportunity cost of funds loaned to the agent for housing purposes.

The household can terminate the contract at the beginning of any period, in which case the house is sold. We will consider a termination to be a foreclosure when the outstanding principal exceeds the house value, or when the agent's state is such that they cannot meet their mortgage payment in the current period. In the event of foreclosure, fraction $\chi > 0$ of the house sale value is lost in transaction costs. If the mortgage's outstanding balance at the time of default is b, the intermediary collects $\min\{(1-\chi)qh, b\}$, while the household receives $\max\{(1-\chi)qh - b, 0\}$.

Agents may also choose to sell their house even when they can meet the payment and have positive equity, for instance because they are borrowing constrained in the current period. We also assume that agents sell their house when they become old. Those contract terminations, however, do not impose transaction costs on the intermediary.

The timing in each period is as follows. At the beginning of the period, agents discover whether or not they have aged, and receive a perfectly informative signal about their income draw. Middle-aged agents who own homes also observe the realization of their devaluation shock at the beginning of the period, hence the market value of their home. These agents then decide whether to remain home-owners or to become renters either via selling their house or through foreclosure. Agents who just became middle-aged also make their home-buying and mortgage choice decisions at the beginning of the period, after all uncertainty for the period is resolved. At the end of the period, agents receive their income, mortgage payments are made, and consumption takes place.

3 Equilibrium

We will initially study equilibria in which all prices are constant. For notational simplicity, we now drop all time markers.

3.1 Agent's problem

We state the household problem recursively. In general, the household value functions will be written as $V_{age}(\omega)$ where $\omega \in \Omega_{age}$ is the state facing an agent of $age \in \{Y, M, O\}$.

3.1.1 Old agents

For old agents, the state space is $\Omega_O = I\!R_+$ with typical element $\omega \equiv a \geq 0$. The value function (that is, the expected present value of future utility) for an old agent with assets $a \in I\!R_+$ solves

$$V_O(a) = \max_{a' \geq 0} \{U(c, h_1) + \beta(1 - \rho_D)V_O(a')\}$$

s.t.

$$c = a\frac{(1+r)}{1-\rho_D} + y^O - h_1 R - a' \geq 0$$

3.1.2 Mid-aged agents

For mid-aged agents, the state space is

$$\Omega_M = I\!R_+ \times \{y_L, y_M, y_H\} \times \{0,1\} \times \{h_1, h_2, h_3\} \times I\!N \times \{\{\{FRM, LIP\} \times I\!R_+ \times \{h_2, h_3\}\} \cup \{\emptyset\}\}$$

with typical element $\omega = (a, y, H, h, n; \kappa)$. Here, $H = 1$ denotes that the household begins the period as a homeowner, while $H = 0$ if they begin as renters. Further, $h \in \{h_1, h_2, h_3\}$ denotes the quantity of housing capital that the household owns at the start of a given period once the devaluation shock has been revealed.[8] We write $n \in \{0, 1, \ldots\}$ for the number of periods the agent has been mid-aged, hence the age of their mortgage when they have one.

The final argument, κ denotes the type of mortgage chosen by a homeowner - that is, $\kappa \equiv (\zeta, r^{\zeta}, h_0) \in \{FRM, LIP\} \times I\!R^{+} \times \{h_2, h_3\}$ which lists the agent's mortgage and house choice when they just become mid-aged. In equilibrium, the yield on a given loan will depend on the agent's wealth-income position (a_0, y_0) and house size choice h_0 at origination. For agents who enter a period as renters, the current house size and mortgage type arguments are undefined, and so we simply let $\kappa = \emptyset$.

Working backwards, we begin with the case where the household has already made its home purchase decision (i.e. $n \geq 1$).

Case 1: $n \geq 1$

If the household enters the period as renters (i.e. $H = 0$), they must remain renters:

$$\begin{aligned} V_M(a, y, 0, h_1, n; \emptyset) &= \max_{c, a'} U(c, h_1) + \beta E_{y'|y}\left[(1 - \rho_O) V_M(a', y', 0, h_1, n + 1; \emptyset) + \rho_O V_O(a')\right] \\ \text{s.t. } c + a' &= y + a(1 + r) - R h_1. \end{aligned}$$

If, on the other hand, the household owns a home (i.e. $H = 1$), they first have to decide whether to remain homeowners or to become renters. We will write $H'(\omega) = 1$ if they choose to remain home-owners and $H'(\omega) = 0$ if they become renters.

The event $H'(\omega) = 0$ entails a sale of the house and hence a termination of the mortgage contract. As explained in the previous section, we think of that termination as a foreclosure in two cases. First, if it is not budget feasible for the household to meet its mortgage payment $m(n; \kappa)$, that is if,

$$y + a(1 + r) - m(n; \kappa) - \delta h < 0, \tag{3.1}$$

the household is constrained to become renters. Abusing language somewhat, we call this event an *involuntary default* and in that case write $D^I(\omega) = 1$, while $D^I(\omega) = 0$ otherwise. A second form of default occurs when the household can meet their mortgage payment (i.e. (3.1) does not hold) but the household chooses nonetheless to become renters and

$$qh - b(n; \kappa) < 0, \tag{3.2}$$

i.e. home equity is negative. We call this event a *voluntary default* (the household is better off turning the house over to the intermediary in that case) and write $D^V(\omega) = 1$.

If neither (3.1) nor (3.2) holds but the household decides to sell their house and become renters, we write $S(\omega) = 1$, while $S(\omega) = 0$ otherwise. In that case, the household simply sells their house, pays their mortgage balance, and their asset position is augmented by the value of their home equity.

[8] We need both H and h to differentiate a renter from a homeowner whose size h_2 received a shock down to h_1.

Note that

$$1 - H'(\omega) = S(\omega) + D^I(\omega) + D^V(\omega).$$

In other words, (S, D^I, D^V) classify a mortgage termination into three mutually exclusive events: a simple sale (in which the intermediary need not get involved), a voluntary default, or an involuntary default.

Equipped with this notation, we can now define the value function of a homeowner (i.e. a household whose $H = 1$):

$$\begin{aligned} V_M(a, y, 1, h, n; \kappa) &= \max_{c \geq 0, a' \geq 0, (H', D^I, D^V, S) \in \{0,1\}^4} U(c, (1 - H')h_1 + H'(1_{h=h_1} + \theta 1_{\{h \neq h_1\}})h) \\ &+ (1 - H')\beta E_{y'|y} \left[(1 - \rho_O)V_M(a', y', 0, h_1, n + 1; \emptyset) + \rho_O V_O(a')\right] \\ &+ H'\beta E_{(y',h')|(y,h)} \left[\begin{array}{c} (1 - \rho_O)V_M(a', y', 1, h', n + 1; \kappa) \\ +\rho_O V_O(a' + \max\{qh - b(n + 1; \kappa), 0\}) \end{array} \right] \end{aligned}$$

subject to:

$$\begin{aligned} c + a' &= y + (1 + r)(a + (1 - H') \max((1 - (D^I + D^V)\chi)qh - b(n; \kappa), 0)) \\ &\quad -H'(m(n; \kappa) + \delta h) - (1 - H')Rh_1 \\ D^I &= 1 \text{ if and only if (3.1) holds} \\ D^V &= 1 \text{ if } H' = 0 \text{ and (3.2) holds} \\ S &= 1 - H' - D^I - D^V \end{aligned}$$

There are several things to note in the statement of the household's problem. Starting with the objective, housing services (s) depend on the household's housing status, and the size of the house they occupy. Second, recall that we assumed that housing sales due to the old age shock do not entail foreclosure costs. Third, the right-hand side of the budget constraint depends on whether or not the household chooses to keep its house. When they become renters (i.e. when $H' = 0$) their asset position is increased by the value of the house net of their outstanding principal and net, in the event of default, of transaction costs. Their housing expenses are the sum of mortgage and maintenance payments if they keep the house, or the cost of rental otherwise. The final constraint states that selling the house without incurring default costs is only possible if the household is able to meet its mortgage obligations and has positive equity.

The house devaluation shock is part of the conditional expectation operator $E_{(y',h')|(y,h)}$ in the problem's statement. Given $h \in \{h_1, h_2, h_3\}$ and the assumptions we made on the devaluation process, next period's house value evolves according to a Markov Chain with transition matrix

$$P(h'|h) = \begin{bmatrix} 1 & 0 & 0 \\ \lambda & 1 - \lambda & 0 \\ 0 & \lambda & 1 - \lambda \end{bmatrix}.$$

Case 2: $n = 0$ (The agent just became mid-aged)

Agents who become mid-aged at the start of a given period must decide whether or not to buy a house, and in the event they become homeowners, what mortgage to use to finance their house purchase. Write $K(\omega_0)$ for the set of mortgage contracts available to a household that becomes mid-aged in state ω_0. The set $K(\omega_0)$ has typical element $\kappa = (\zeta, r^\zeta, h_0)$. The household's value function solves:

$$\begin{aligned} V_M(a, y, 1, h, 0; \emptyset) &= \max_{c \geq 0, a' \geq 0, H' \in \{0,1\}, \kappa \in K(\omega_0)} U(c, (1 - H')h_1 + H'\theta h_0) \\ &+ (1 - H')\beta E_{y'|y} \left[(1 - \rho_O)V_M(a', y', 0, h_1, 1; \emptyset) + \rho_O V_O(a')\right] \\ &+ H'\beta E_{(y',h')|(y,h_0)} \begin{bmatrix} (1 - \rho_O)V_M(a', y', 1, h', 1; \kappa) \\ +\rho_O V_O(a' + \max\{qh_0 - b(1; \kappa), 0\}) \end{bmatrix} \end{aligned}$$

subject to:

$$\begin{aligned} c + a' &= y + (1 + r)(a - H'\nu 1_{\{\zeta = FRM\}} qh_0) \\ &\quad -H'(m(0; \kappa) + \delta h_0) - (1 - H')Rh_1 \\ a &\geq H'\nu 1_{\{\zeta = FRM\}} qh_0 \end{aligned}$$

Households who choose to become homeowners ($H' = 1$) choose the contract $\kappa^* \in K(\omega_0)$ that maximizes their future expected utility. We will write $\Xi(\omega_0) = \kappa^*$ for this part of the household's choice, while $\Xi(\omega_0) = \emptyset$ if $H' = 0$. Note that included in the choice of the contract is the size of the house h_0.

3.1.3 Young agents

For young agents, the state space is $\Omega_Y = I\!R^+ \times \{y_L, y_M, y_H\}$ with typical element $\omega = (a, y)$. The value function $V_Y : \Omega_Y \mapsto I\!R$ for a young agent with assets a and income y solves

$$\begin{aligned} V_Y(a, y) &= \max_{c \geq 0, a' \geq 0} \left\{U(c, h_1) + \beta E_{y'|y} \left[(1 - \rho_M)V_Y(a', y') + \rho_M V_M(a', y', 0, h_1, 0; \emptyset)\right]\right\} \\ \text{s.t. } c + a' &= y + a(1 + r) - Rh_1. \end{aligned}$$

3.2 Intermediary's problem

All possible uses of loanable funds must earn the same return for the intermediary. This implies, first, that the unit price q of housing capital must equal $\frac{1}{A}$. Otherwise, the intermediary would enjoy an unbounded profit opportunity.

Arbitrage between renting and selling houses also requires that:

$$\begin{aligned} q &= \sum_{t=1}^{+\infty} \frac{R-\delta}{(1+r)^t} \\ \iff R &= rq+\delta. \end{aligned} \tag{3.3}$$

Note in particular that a change in q must be associated with a change in R in this environment. This simple observation can play a role in the analysis of the consequences of mortgage innovation for welfare in the case where $\alpha < 1$. A bit of algebra also shows that the returns to turning a marginal unit of deposits into housing capital and renting that capital ad infinitum is the same as the returns to storing that marginal unit of deposit.

Arbitrage also requires that for all mortgages issued at a given date, the expected return on the mortgage net of expected foreclosure costs cover the opportunity cost of funds, which by assumption is the returns to storage plus the servicing premium ϕ.

To make this precise, denote the value to the intermediary of a mortgage contract κ held by a mid-aged agent in state $\omega \in \Omega_M$ by $W^\kappa(\omega)$. Again, we need to consider several cases.

- If the homeowner's mortgage is not paid off, so that $\omega = (a, y, 1, h, n; \kappa)$ with $n \in (0, T-1]$, then:

$$\begin{aligned} W^\kappa(\omega) &= \left(D^I(\omega) + D^V(\omega)\right) \min\{(1-\chi)qh, b(n;\kappa)\} + S(\omega)b(n;\kappa) \\ &\quad + \left(1 - D^I(\omega) - D^V(\omega) - S(\omega)\right)\left(\frac{m(n;\kappa)}{1+r+\phi} + E_{\omega'|\omega}\left[\frac{W^\kappa(\omega')}{1+r+\phi}\right]\right) \end{aligned}$$

- If the household just became mid-aged and her budget set is not empty so that $\omega_0 = (a_0, y_0, 0, h_1, 0)$ and, for some contract κ,

$$y_0 + \left(a_0 - \nu q h_0 \cdot 1_{\{\zeta = FRM\}}\right)(1+r) - m(0;\kappa) - \delta h_0 \geq 0,$$

  then

$$W^\kappa(\omega_0) = \frac{m(0;\kappa)}{1+r+\phi} + E_{\omega'|\omega_0}\left[\frac{W^\kappa(\omega')}{1+r+\phi}\right]$$

- In all other cases, $W^\kappa(\omega) = 0$.[9]

[9] Specifically, this is the case when:

1. the agent just turned mid-aged and her budget set is empty;
2. the agent is a renter;
3. the agent has been mid-aged for more than T periods.

Then, the expected present discounted value of a loan contract $\kappa = (\zeta, r^\zeta, h_0)$ offered to a household that just turned mid-age with state $\omega_0 = (a_0, y_0, \ldots)$ is $W^\kappa(\omega_0)$. The zero profit condition on a loan contract κ can then be written as

$$W^\kappa(\omega_0) - (1 - \nu 1_{\{\zeta = FRM\}}) q h_0 = 0. \tag{3.4}$$

In equilibrium, the set $K(\omega_0)$ of mortgage contracts available to an agent who becomes mid-aged in state ω_0 is the set of contracts that satisfy condition (3.4).

3.3 Distribution of agent states

The household's problem yields decision rules for a given set of prices. In turn, these decision rules imply in the usual way transition probability functions across possible agent states. In the next section we study equilibria in which the distribution of agent states is invariant under those probability functions. This section makes this notion precise.

In our environment, the transition matrix across ages is given by:

$$\begin{bmatrix} (1-\rho_M) & \rho_M & 0 \\ 0 & (1-\rho_O) & \rho_O \\ \rho_D & 0 & 1-\rho_D \end{bmatrix}$$

since the old are immediately replaced by newly born young people. Let (n_Y, n_M, n_O) be the corresponding invariant distribution of ages. The invariant mass of agents born each period is then given by

$$\mu_0 \equiv n_O \rho_D.$$

With this notation in hand, we can define invariant distributions over possible states at each demographic stage.

3.3.1 The young

The invariant distribution μ_Y on Ω_Y solves, for all $y \in \{y_L, y_M, y_H\}$ and $A \subset I\!R_+$:

$$\mu_Y(A, y) = \mu_0 1_{\{0 \in A\}} \pi^*(y) + (1 - \rho_M) \int_{\omega \in \Omega_Y} 1_{\{a'_Y(\omega) \in A\}} \Pi(y|\omega) \mu_Y(d\omega)$$

where $\pi^*(y)$ is the mass of agents born with income y (in other words, π^* denotes the invariant distribution associated with our Markov process for income), $a'_Y : \Omega_Y \mapsto I\!R_+$ is the saving decision rule for young agents, and, abusing notation somewhat, $\Pi(y|\omega)$ is the likelihood of income draw $y \in \{y_L, y_M, y_H\}$ in the next period given current state $\omega \in \Omega_Y$.

3.3.2 The mid-aged

The invariant distribution for mid-aged households μ_M on Ω_M solves, for all $y \in \{y_L, y_M, y_H\}$, $A \subset I\!R_+$ and $(H, h, n; \kappa) \in \{0,1\} \times \{h_1, h_2, h_3\} \times I\!N \times \{\{\{FRM, LIP\} \times I\!R_+ \times \{h_2, h_3\}\} \cup \{\emptyset\}\}$:

$$\begin{aligned}\mu_M(A, y, H, h, n; \kappa) &= \rho_M \int_{\Omega_Y} 1_{\{(H,h,n)=(0,h_1,0)\}} 1_{\{a'_Y(\omega)\in A\}} \Pi(y|\omega)\mu_Y(d\omega) \\ &+ (1-\rho_0) \int_{\Omega_M} 1_{\{(H'(\omega)=H, n(\omega)=n-1, a'_M(\omega)\in A\}} \Pi(y|\omega) P(h|\omega)\mu_M(d\omega) \\ &\times \left\{ 1_{\{n(\omega)=0, \Xi(\omega)=\kappa\}} + 1_{\{n(\omega)>0, \kappa=\kappa(\omega)\}} \right\}\end{aligned}$$

where $a'_M : \Omega_M \mapsto I\!R_+$ is the optimal saving policy for mid-aged agents, $n(\omega)$ extracts the contract age argument of ω, $\kappa(\omega)$ extracts the contract type argument of ω, and $P(h|\omega)$ is the likelihood of a transition from state ω to a state where the house size is h.

The first term corresponds to agents who age from young to mid-aged, while the second integral corresponds to agents who were mid-aged in the previous period and do not get old. The indicator functions reflect the fact that agents make their mortgage choice in the first period they become mid-aged but cannot revisit that choice in subsequent periods.

3.3.3 The old

The invariant distribution μ_O on $\Omega_O \equiv I\!R_+$ solves, for all $A \subset I\!R_+$:

$$\mu_O(A) = (1-\rho_D) \int_{\Omega_O} 1_{\{a'_O(\omega)\in A\}} \mu_O(d\omega) + \rho_O \int_{\Omega_M} 1_{\{a'_M(\omega)+\max\{H'(\omega)[qh(\omega)-b(n+1,\kappa)],0\}\in A\}} \mu_M(d\omega)$$

where, for $\omega \in \Omega_M$, $h(\omega)$ extracts the house size argument of ω, while $b(n+1,\kappa)$ is the principal balance on a mortgage of type κ after $n+1$ periods. Recall that we assumed that housing sales due to the old age shock do not entail foreclosure costs.

3.4 Housing market clearing

The housing market capital clearing condition can be stated in simple terms, after some algebra. The total demand for housing (whether rented or owned) in each period is given by:

$$\int_{\Omega_Y} h_1 d\mu_Y + \int_{\Omega_O} h_1 d\mu_O + \int_{\Omega_M} h_1 1_{\{H'=0\}} d\mu_M + \int_{\Omega_M} h 1_{\{H'=1, h(\omega)=h\}} d\mu_M$$

The first two terms give the demand for housing by the young and old agents, who, by assumption, are renters. The third term is demand from mid-aged agents who choose to be renters. The last integral captures mid-aged agents who choose to be homeowners. Their use of housing capital depends on the size of the home that they own (i.e. $h(\omega) = h$.

Similarly, the total quantity of housing available in a given period is the sum of the housing agents carry over from the past period and of the new capital produced by the intermediary. It can be stated formally as:

$$Ak + \int_{\Omega_Y} h_1 d\mu_Y \ + \int_{\Omega_O} h_1 d\mu_O + \int_{\Omega_M} h_1 1_{\{H=0\}} d\mu_M \ + \int_{\Omega_M} h 1_{\{H=1,h(\omega)=h\}} d\mu_M$$

But the laws of motion for agent states in our economy imply that:

$$\int_{\Omega_M} h 1_{\{H=1,h(\omega)=h\}} d\mu_M \ = \int_{\Omega_M} h' 1_{\{H'=1\}} P(h'|\omega) d\mu_M \tag{3.5}$$

where $P(h'|\omega)$ is the likelihood that the agent's house size will be $h' \in \{h_1, h_2, h_3\}$ in the next period given current state $\omega \in \Omega_M$.

It follows that the market for housing capital clears provided

$$\int_{\Omega_M} h 1_{\{H'=1,h(\omega)=h\}} d\mu_M \ - \int_{\Omega_M} h' 1_{\{H'=1\}} P(h'|\omega) d\mu_M \ = Ak, \tag{3.6}$$

where k is the quantity of deposits the intermediary transforms into housing capital each period.

This condition has a very intuitive interpretation. It says that in equilibrium the production of new housing capital must equal the housing capital lost to devaluation. In particular, one easily shows that, in any steady state, we must have $k > 0$. Furthermore, because $q = \frac{1}{A}$ holds in equilibrium, this condition implies that both the rental and the owner-occupied markets clear since the intermediary is willing to accommodate any allocation of total housing capital.

3.5 Definition of a steady state equilibrium

Equipped with this notation, we may now define an equilibrium. A steady-state equilibrium is a set $K : \Omega_M \mapsto \{FRM, LIP\} \times I\!R^+ \times \{h_2, h_3\}$ of mortgages available to households conditional on any possible state upon entering mid-age, a pair of housing capital prices $(q, R) \geq (0, 0)$, a value $k > 0$ of investment in housing capital, agent value functions $V_{age} : \Omega_{age} \mapsto I\!R$ for $age \in \{Y, M, O\}$, saving policy functions $a'_{age} : \Omega_{age} \mapsto I\!R^+$, a mortgage choice policy function $\Xi : \Omega_M \mapsto K(\omega_0)$, a housing policy function $H' : \Omega_M \mapsto \{0, 1\}$, mortgage termination policy functions $D^I, D^V, S : \Omega_M \mapsto \{0, 1\}$, and distributions μ_{age} of agent states on Ω_{age} such that:

1. Household policies are optimal given all prices;

2. $q = \frac{1}{A}$;

3. The allocation of housing capital to rental and the owner-occupied market is optimal for the intermediary. That is, condition (3.3) holds;

4. The market for housing capital clears every period (i.e. (3.6) holds);

5. The intermediary expects to make zero profit on all mortgages. In other words, condition (3.4) holds for all $\omega_0 \in \Omega_M$ and all mortgages in $K(\omega_0)$;

6. The distribution of states is invariant given pricing functions and agent policies.

The next section simulates this economy under various calibrations. We will be particularly interested in the fraction of agents who choose to terminate their mortgages early. As we have discussed, this may occur for voluntary or involuntary reasons.

4 Quantitative analysis

Our goal is to quantify the importance of contracts with back-loaded payments for default patterns in the US housing market, and for the recent rise in foreclosure. To do so, we select parameters so that a version of our economy where LIPs are not available makes steady state predictions for key statistics that match their US counterparts prior to the explosion of new mortgages around 2004-05. We then study the quantitative impact of introducing mortgages with low initial payments in such an economy. We first study the effects of a permanent introduction by comparing steady state statistics across the two economy. Next we will study the effect of a brief period of availability of these mortgages that ends with a collapse in house prices, and compare the features of the resulting transition experiment to the patterns displayed in figure 1.

4.1 Parameterization

We choose our benchmark set of parameters so that a version of our economy with only FRM mortgages matches the relevant features of the US economy prior to 2004-05. As figure 1 shows, FRMs account for around 85% of mortgages, and the fraction is mostly stable between 1998 and 2005. Furthermore, evidence available form the American Housing Survey (AHS) suggests that mortgages with non-traditional amortization schedules accounted for a small fraction of the 15% of non-FRMs prior to 2005. Traditional FRMs and traditional (nominally indexed) ARMs account for 95% of all mortgages in the AHS sample before then. At the same time, data available from the Federal Housing Finance Board for fully amortizing loans show no increase in average loan-to-value ratios between 1995 and 2005. These numbers suggest that high-LTV, delayed amortization mortgages accounted for a small fraction of the stock of mortgages and of originations before 2005.

We will think of a model period as representing 2 years. We specify some parameters directly via their implications for certain statistics in our model. These include the parameters governing the income and demographic processes. The other parameters will be selected jointly to match a set of moments with which we want our benchmark economy to be consistent.

We set demographic parameters to $(\rho_M, \rho_0, \rho_D) = (\frac{1}{7}, \frac{1}{15}, \frac{1}{10})$ so that, on average, agents are young for 14 years starting at 20, middle-aged for 30 years, and retired for 20 years. The income process for agents in the first two stages of their life, allowing for the possibility that the process may differ across life stages, are calibrated from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) survey. We consider households in each PSID sample whose head is between 20 and 34 years of age to be young, and households between 35 and 64 years to be mid-aged. Each demographic group in the 1996 and 1999 PSID surveys is then split into income terciles. The support for the income distribution is the average income in each tercile in the two surveys, after normalizing the intermediate income value for mid-aged agents to 1. This yields a support for the income distribution of young agents of {0.2768,0.7771,1.8044}, while the support for mid-aged agents is {0.3086,1,2.6321}. We assume that income in old age is 0.4. This makes retirement income 40% of median income among the mid-aged, which is consistent with standard estimates of replacement ratios.

We then equate the income transition matrix for each age group to the frequency distribution of transitions across terciles for households who appear in both the 1996 and the 1999 survey and remain in their age category. The resulting transition matrix for young agents is:

$$\begin{bmatrix} 0.7503 & 0.2007 & 0.0490 \\ 0.2180 & 0.5688 & 0.2132 \\ 0.0317 & 0.2305 & 0.7378 \end{bmatrix}$$

while, for mid-aged agents, it is:

$$\begin{bmatrix} 0.7920 & 0.2007 & 0.0490 \\ 0.2180 & 0.5688 & 0.2132 \\ 0.0561 & 0.1356 & 0.7378 \end{bmatrix}$$

The economywide cross-sectional variance of the logarithm of income implied by the resulting distribution is near 0.72, while the autocorrelation of log income is about 0.75.[10]

We let the (two-year) risk-free rate be $r = 0.08$, and choose the maintenance cost (δ) to 5% to match the yearly gross rate of depreciation of housing capital, which is 2.5% annually according to Haring et al., 2007.

The stipulations of FRM contracts are set to mimic the features of common standard fixed-rate mortgages in the US. The down-payment ratio ν is 20% while the maturity T is 15 periods, or 30 years. The LIP contract we introduce in the second equilibrium have $n^{IOM} = 3$ and $T = 15$ so that agents make no payment toward principal for 6 years, and make fixed payments for the remaining 12 contract periods (or 24 years) unless the contract is terminated before maturity.

[10] Krueger and Perri (2005) report estimates for the cross-sectional variance of log yearly income of roughly 0.4 and for the autocorrelation of log income in the $[0.80 - 0.95]$ range. These numbers imply that log two-year income has an autocorrelation in the $[0.88 - 0.96]$ range and variance in the $[0.36 - 0.39]$ range. The details of the conversion from one year to three-year numbers are available upon request. The difficulty is that aggregating an MA(1) process leads to an ARMA(1,1) process.

Housing choices depend on the substitutability of consumption and housing services, and on the owner-occupied premium. We specify, for all $(c, h) > (0, 0)$,

$$U(c, s) = \psi \log c + (1 - \psi) \log s.$$

The intertemporal discount rate, likewise, plays a key role in our model by affecting asset accumulation. Preferences are fully described by (θ, ψ, β). We select these parameters in our joint calibration, to which we now turn.

We need to set the following ten remaining parameters: the owner-occupied premium (θ), households' discount rate (β), housing TFP (A), rental unit size (h_1), house sizes (h_2, h_3), the mortgage service premium (ϕ), the foreclosure cost (χ), the utility weight on consumption (ψ), and the house shock probability (λ). We select those parameters jointly to target: home-ownership rates, the average ex-housing to income ratio among homeowners, the average loan-to-income ratio at mortgage origination, the average ratio of rents to income in personal consumption expenditures across all households, the average rent-to-income ratio for low-income renters, the average housing spending share for homeowners, the average yields on FRMs, the average loss severity rates on foreclosed properties, the average foreclosure rates prior to the flare up, and the average market discount on foreclosed houses.

There remains to elaborate on our approach to measuring target values. Since our model only gives agents a one-time option to become owners when they just become mid-aged, we choose to target the ownership rate among households whose head is between 32 and 40. That rate is roughly $\frac{2}{3}$. The model's counterpart to that number is the rate of ownership among agents who have been mid-aged for three periods or fewer. This is the rate we will report throughout the paper.

The average non-housing assets to yearly income ratio we choose to target is based on Survey of Consumer Finance (SCF) data. The average ratio of non-housing assets to income[11] among homeowners whose head age is between 34 and 63 in the 2004 survey is 2.09, which corresponds to a ratio of assets to two-year worth of income of roughly 0.95.

The mortgage loan at origination $(1 - \nu)hq$ for FRMs and hq for LPMs, where $h \in (h_2, h_3)$ is the initial house size. Evidence available from the American Housing Survey (AHS) suggests that prior to 2005 the ratio of this original loan size to yearly income is around 2.5 on average in the US, or 1.25 in two-year terms.

According to the evidence available from the Bureau of Economic Analysis, the ratio of housing expenditures (in imputed rent terms for owners) to overall expenditures is near 20%, and we make this our fourth target. Turning to the rent-to-income ratio for poor renters, Green and Malpezzi (1993, p11) calculate that poor households who are renter spend roughly 40% of their income on housing. On the other hand, according to the 2004 Consumer

[11]Because agents only have one assets in the model, it is interpreted as net assets. The net assets do not include housing-related assets or debts, such as home equity or mortgages. Since agents are not allowed to have negative assets in the model, households who have negative non-housing assets are assumed to have zero assets in the calculation.

Expenditure Survey, expenditures on owned dwellings account for 16% of the expenditures of home-owners.

Next, we choose to target an average FRM-yield of 7.2% yearly, or 14.5% over a two-year period. This was the average contract rate on conventional, fixed rate mortgages between 1995 and 2004 according to Federal Housing Finance Board data.

The loss severity rate is the present value of all losses on a given loan as a fraction of the default date balance. As Hayre and Saraf (2008) explain, these losses are caused both by transaction and time costs associated with the foreclosure process, and by the fact that foreclosed properties tend to sell at a discount relative to other, similar properties. Using a dataset of a dataset of 90,000 first-lien liquidated loans, they estimate that loss severity rates range from around 35% among recent mortgages to as much as 60% among older loans. Based on these numbers we choose parameters so that in the event of default and on average,

$$\frac{\min\{(1-\chi)qh, b)}{b} = 0.5$$

where b is the outstanding principal at the time of default and qh is the house value. In other words, on average, the intermediary recovers 50% of the outstanding principal it is owed on defaulted loans.

We target a two-year default rate of 3% which is near the average foreclosure rate among all mortgages during the 1990s in the Mortgage Bankers Association's National Delinquency survey.

Finally, we target a market discount on foreclosed properties of 25%. We define this average discount as:

$$\int_{\Omega_M} (D^I(\omega) + D^V(\omega))q\frac{(h_0 - h)}{h_0}d\omega,$$

where h_0 is the house size at origination. Hayre and Saraf (2008) estimate that foreclosed properties sell a discount relative to their appraised value that ranges from 10% among properties with appraisal values over 180,000 to 45% among properties with appraisal values near 20,000. Other studies of foreclosure discounts (see Pennington-Cross, 2004, for a review) typically find discount rates near one quarter, with some exceptions.

4.2 Steady state results on mortgage innovation

The benchmark economy only has FRM mortgages available. Table 2 presents some key steady state equilibrium aggregate statistics for this benchmark environment, compared to an environment in which LIPs are available.

The table shows that the presence of LIPs has two main consequences on steady state statistics: home-ownership rates and average default rates are much higher when LIPs are available than when they are not. When only FRMs are available, a large number of agents are unable to become owners because they can't afford a large downpayment.

Table 1: **Benchmark parameters**

Parameter	Description	Value	Target
Parameters determined independently			
ρ_M	Fraction of young agents who become mid-aged	1/7	14 years of earnings on average prior to home purchase
ρ_O	Fraction of mid-aged agents who become old	1/15	30 years on average between home purchase and retirement
ρ_D	Fraction of old agents who die	1/10	20 years of retirement on average
r	Storage returns	0.08	2-year risk-free rate
δ	Maintenance rate	5%	Residential housing gross depreciation rate
ν	Downpayment on FRMs	0.20	Average Loan-to-Value Ratio
T	Mortgage maturity	15	30 years
n^{IOM}	Interest-only period for LIPs	3	6-years interest-only
Parameters determined jointly			
θ	Owner-occupied premium	10	Homeownership rates
λ	Housing shock probability	0.08	Foreclosure rates
A	Housing technology TFP	0.5	Average Loan-to-income ratio at origination
β	Discount rate	0.825	Average ex-housing asset-to-income ratio
ϕ	Mortgage service cost	0.04	Average mortgage yields
χ	Foreclosing costs	0.525	Loss-incidence estimates
ψ	Utility share on consumption	0.8	Average housing spending share
h_1	Size of rental unit	0.55	Rent-to-income ratio for low-income agents
h_2	Size of regular house	0.75	Owner's housing spending share
h_3	Size of luxury house	1.5	Foreclosure discount

Table 2: Steady state statistics

	Data	Benchmark	FRM +LIP
Homeownership rate	67.00	65.38	71.71
Avg. ex-housing asset/income ratio	0.95	0.91	0.89
Avg. loan to income ratio	1.25	1.20	1.30
Avg. homeowner housing expenditure share	0.20	0.19	0.19
Rents to income ratio for renters	0.40	0.37	0.37
Avg. housing spending share for homeowners	0.16	0.19	0.21
Avg. mortgage yields (FRMs, LIPs)	(14.50,NA)	(14.40,NA)	(14.32,18.55)
Loss-incidence estimates	0.50	0.41	0.40
Foreclosure rates	3.00	2.72	4.06
Foreclosure discount	0.25	0.38	0.35

Default rates, for their part, are higher when LIPs are present as a result of two complementary factors. First, LIPs enable agents at the bottom of the asset and income distributions to become home-owners. These agents are high-default risk agents because they are more likely to find themselves unable to meet their mortgage payments at some point over the life of the contract. Second, even at equal asset/income conditions at origination, LIPs are associated with higher default rates because agents build up home equity at a much slower rate. The remainder of this section makes these ideas precise.

4.2.1 Selection

This section describes the distribution of contracts in equilibrium. In particular, we show that asset and income poor agents tend to select LIPs. Table 3 displays contract selection patterns in steady state. It shows, first, that when LIPs are not available, many agents are constrained to rent because they cannot meet the down-payment imposed by mortgages and/or cannot make the first payment. This is true in particular of agents whose assets (a_0) are low when they become mid-aged. Introducing LIPs enables some agents at the bottom of the asset distribution to become home-owners instead of renting, as the bottom panel of the table shows. This is true, in fact, of all agents except those at the bottom of the income distribution.

The table also shows that the introduction of LIPs enables agents with high-income but low assets to buy bigger houses than they would without that option. These agents can afford high mortgage payments, but their assets are too low to meet high downpayment requirements.

Figure 3 displays the correlation between housing choices and asset and income levels. When the LIP option is introduced (as we go from the top to the bottom panel of the figure),

Table 3: Rent-or-own decision rules by asset and income group

Contract	Rent	LIP		FRM	
House size	h_1	h_2	h_3	h_2	h_3
Benchmark					
y_L	$a_0 < 0.36$	–	–	$0.36 \leq a_0 < 4.80$	$4.80 \leq a_0$
y_M	$a_0 < 0.30$	–	–	$0.30 \leq a_0 < 3.15$	$3.15 \leq a_0$
y_H	$a_0 < 0.30$	–	–	$0.30 \leq a_0 < 0.60$	$0.60 \leq a_0$
FRM + LIP					
y_L	$a_0 < 0.36$	–	–	$0.36 \leq a_0 < 4.80$	$4.80 \leq a_0$
y_M	–	$a_0 < 0.30$	–	$0.30 \leq a_0 < 3.15$	$3.15 \leq a_0$
y_H	–	–	$a_0 < 0.59$	–	$0.59 \leq a_0$

agents at the bottom of asset distribution become able to purchase homes. The figure also shows that LIPs are the contract of choice for agents at the bottom of the asset distribution, whereas wealthier agents take an FRM (to take advantage of lower rates, as the next section will discuss.)

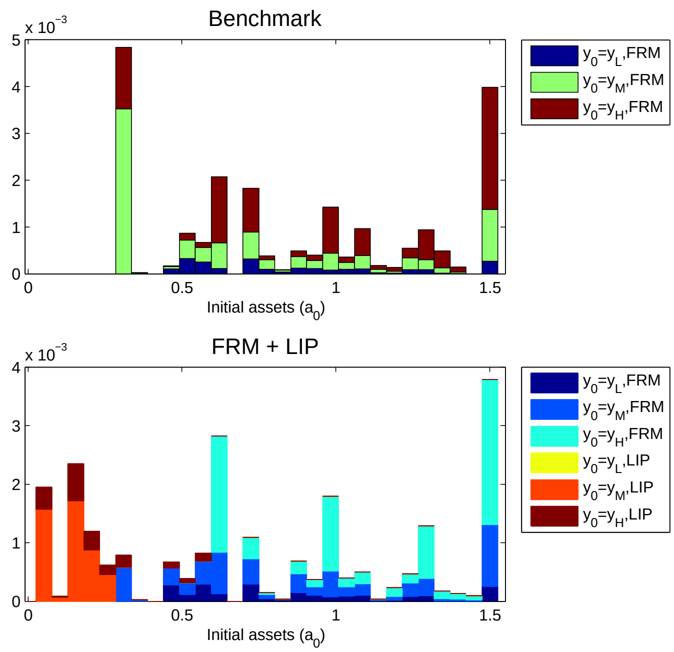
The distribution of assets at house purchase time, therefore, has direct consequences on the distribution of mortgage choices. Conversely, making LIPs available impacts the equilibrium distribution of wealth at purchase time, since a major incentive to save in the economy with FRMs only is the need to put downpayments on houses.

Figure 4 plots the endogenous distribution of assets among agents that just turned middle-aged. In the benchmark experiment, the upper panel shows that, quite intuitively, low income agents tend to have low assets, and vice-versa. The lower panel shows the change in the distribution when LIPs are introduced. There is a noticeable shift to the left in the distribution as many agents anticipate that they may resort to the LIP option and no-longer need to accumulate assets to meet downpayment requirements. In fact, the average level of assets of agents who just became mid-aged in the economy with LIPs is lower by 7% than its counterpart in the economy with FRMs only (0.5864 vs. 0.6283.)

All told, the availability of LIPs cause home-ownership rates to rise by giving agents more financing options. The fraction of newly mid-aged agents who enter housing markets and buy smaller houses rises from 59.74% to 70.69% when the LIP option is introduced. In addition, the fraction of agents who buy large houses rises from 40.26% to 45.33% as a result of the looser financial requirements imposed by LIPs.

Overall, LIPs turn out to be selected by roughly 29% of newly mid-aged households, and tend to be selected by households whose assets are low. The next section argues that, holding contract terms fixed, poor agents are more likely to default than other agents. In addition, it shows that LIPs, holding initial asset to income position fixed, are inherently more prone to default. Combined, these facts imply that LIP-holders account for a disproportionate share

Figure 3: Distribution of contract choice by asset and income level



of overall default rates, and explains why default rates are higher in the economy where the LIP option is present than in the economy where only FRMs are available.

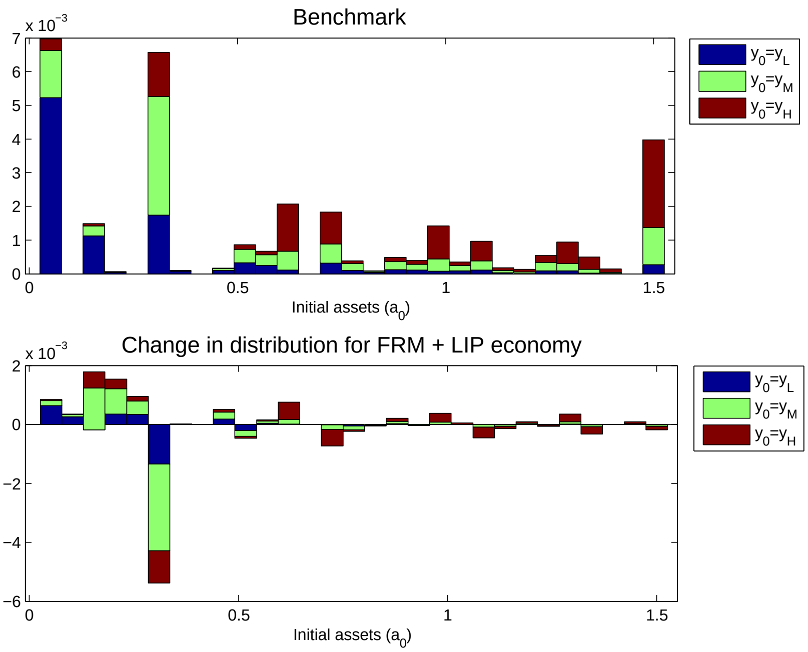
4.2.2 Default

Table 4: Default rates by mortgage type

	voluntary	involuntary
Benchmark		
FRM	2.64	0.08
FRM + LIP		
FRM	2.49	0.10
LIP	4.38	3.59

Figure 5 shows the link between initial income positions and default rates by mortgage age at the median level of assets at origination for houses of size h_2. These graphs provide similar information as hazard rates (i.e. the probability of default at time n conditional on

Figure 4: Distribution of assets upon entering mid-age



not having defaulted earlier.)[12]

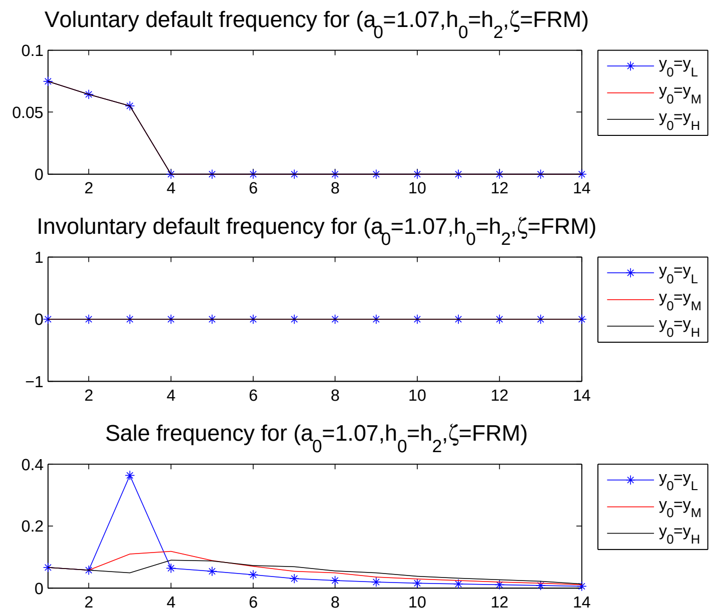
If the household experiences a house devaluation shocks (to rental unit size), home equity becomes negative unless the mortgage has fewer than four periods left to maturity. As a result, there is no voluntary default after the fourth period. Because smaller houses are inexpensive, the associated mortgage payments-to-income ratios are low, and involuntary default does not occur. However, households with lower initial assets tend to sell their houses earlier than those with higher initial assets. Selling rates peak after 3, 4 or 5 periods depending on the income level at origination. When we introduce a surprise aggregate price shock in our transition experiment, many of these sales will involve negative equity and, therefore, become foreclosures, which accounts for the fact that foreclosure rates peak a few periods after the initial shock rather than on impact.

Figure 6 shows how default rates are affected by initial asset positions (for the median level of income). Agents with higher initial assets have a later spike for sales. Rates of voluntary defaults are similar across asset categories. Once again, no involuntary default happens for households who purchase smaller houses.

The evolution of the principal balance and home equity as a function of maturity for each type of contract is displayed on figure 7. While FRM contracts feature a progressive reduction of mortgage debt and a corresponding increase in home equity, LIP contracts only begin this

[12]Specifically, if x_n for n in {1, 2,...,T-1} is the value in Figure 5, then the hazard rate is $\frac{x_n}{1-\sum_{t=1}^{n-1} x_t}$.

Figure 5: Default rates by contract period and income level



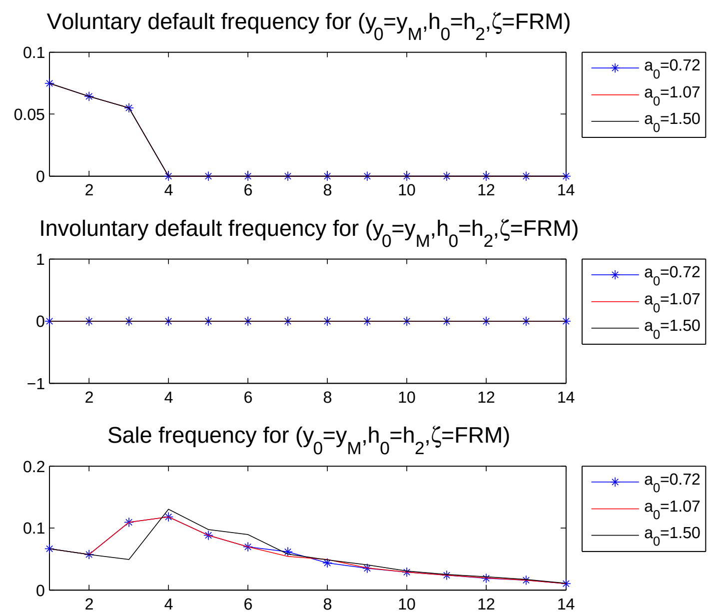
process after three periods. The result is a much greater risk that agents will find themselves with negative equity following a devaluation shock. The dotted lines at the bottom of the figure show home equity following a devaluation from h_2 to h_1 as a function of maturity. The shock cause equity to become much more negative at any given maturity for LIPs than for FRMs.

Figure 8 illustrates the impact of contract choices on overall default hazard rates for an agent whose initial asset-income position when she becomes mid-aged is $(a_0, y_0) = (0.28, 1)$, the median values of both arguments. If agents experience a housing devaluation shock, home equity is more likely to become negative for agents with LIPs than for agents with FRMs, which is reflected in the voluntary default pattern. Neither type of contract displays any voluntary default at these median origination characteristics. However, LIPs are selected by some agents with very low initial assets, and involuntary defaults do occur on LIPs in equilibrium, as table 4 will reveal. Sale rates, for their part, peak between periods 3 and 5 of both types of mortgage contracts.

Selection and home-equity accumulation effects imply that, in equilibrium, the frequency of default is much higher among LIP-holders than it is among FRM-holders. Table 4 provides a breakdown of default frequencies by contract type across experiments. Each entry gives the fraction of mortgages of each type that go into default in steady state in each of the two economies we consider.[13]

[13]In the notation we introduced in section 3.1.2, involuntary and voluntary default rates on a FRM contracts

Figure 6: Default rates by contract period and asset level



The table also shows that involuntary defaults – defaults occuring when the agent is unable to meet current obligations – are rare in the benchmark economy, but account for around a quarter of defaults in the economy with LIPs. However, even in the second economy, the vast majority (99%) of defaults involve negative equity. Agents with recently issued LIPs who find themselves with negative equity continue to meet payments as long as they are low, and wait until the payment reset to default. Because the payment jumps up markedly in that period, a non-negligible of agents are effectively in an involuntary default situation. But negative equity plays the determinant role, even in those cases. Agents who have positive equity in their house and foresee that they may find themselves in an involuntary default situation tend to sell rather than run the risk of losing their equity to transaction costs.

Several steady state statistics illustrate this behavior. Consider for instance the set of households who, should they choose to keep their house, face a positive probability of being in an involuntary default situations in the next period. Almost 82% of these high-risk households

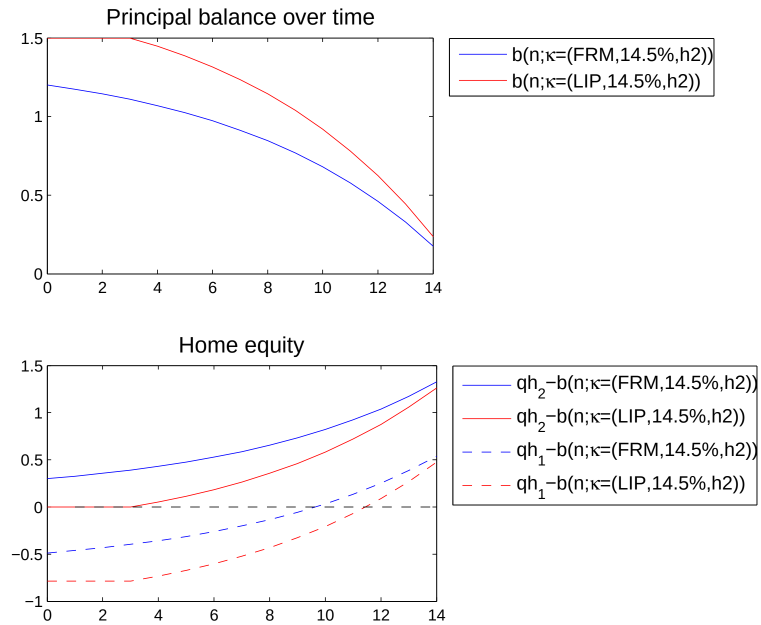
are given by, respectively:

$$\frac{\int_{\Omega_M} D^I(\omega) 1_{\{\zeta=FRM, n\leq T, H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)}{\int_{\Omega_M} 1_{\{\zeta=FRM, n\leq T, H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)}$$

$$\text{and} \qquad \frac{\int_{\Omega_M} D^V(\omega) 1_{\{\zeta=FRM, n\leq T, H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)}{\int_{\Omega_M} 1_{\{\zeta=FRM, n\leq T, H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)}.$$

Similar expressions give default rates for LIPs.

Figure 7: Mortgage debt and home equity by contract type



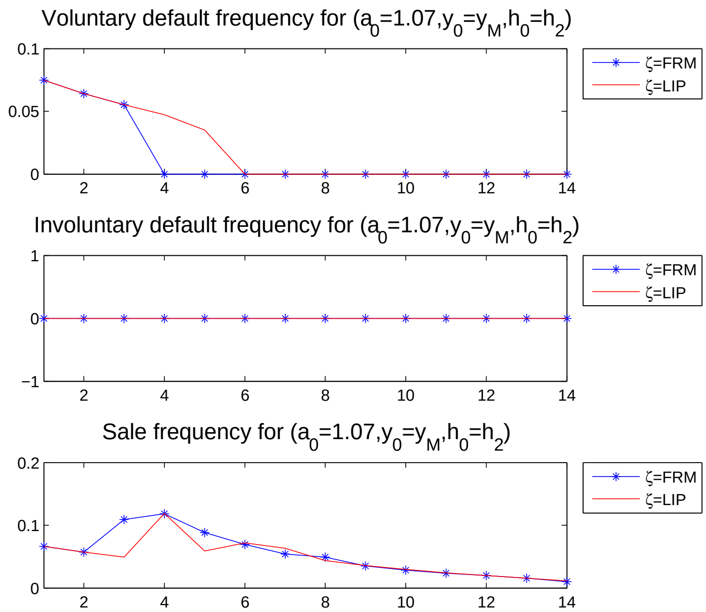
choose to sell their house, while selling rates are below 6% among other mortgage holders. Conversely, among agents who choose to sell in a given period, the probability that they would be in an involuntary default situation in the next period should they choose not to sell is 80%. Among households who do not sell, that probability is 38%. In other words, almost all households at a risk of imminent involuntary default choose to sell. Since households with positive equity stand to lose the most by defaulting for involuntary reasons, it is not surprising that most households who do end up in a situation of involuntary default have negative equity.

While the vast majority of foreclosures involve negative home equity, many households (roughly 96%) with negative home equity choose to keep their house and continue meeting their mortgage obligations. While defaulting would entail a net worth gain for these households, they would be forced to rent a smaller housing unit and would forego the ownership premium.

These model predictions are consistent with the empirical literature on the determinants of foreclosure (see, e.g., Gerardi et al., 2007.) Available data suggest that most foreclosures involve negative equity but that, at the same time, most households with negative equity choose not to foreclose. Our model captures the fact that most foreclosures involve a combination of negative equity and adverse income shocks.

Since LIPs are characterized by much higher default rates than FRMs, they account for a disproportionate fraction of the overall default rate. Table 5 shows the contributions of

Figure 8: Default frequency patterns by contract type



each contract type to each type of default rate in each of the scenarios we consider.[14] The table shows that LIPs account for nearly 53% of overall default rates even though they only represent 27% of all mortgages.

4.2.3 Interest rates

A distinguishing feature of our model is that mortgage terms depend not only on mortgage types but also on the initial asset and income position of borrowers. Figure 9 plot the equilibrium FRM and LIP rates agents can obtain from the intermediary when they become middle-aged, depending on the house size they opt for and their asset-income position at origination.

Note first that all schedules are left-truncated because agents whose income and assets are low do not get a mortgage in equilibrium. This occurs for several reasons. First, asset and income poor agents cannot meet the down-payment requirement and/or mortgage payments. Second, these agents are more likely to default, hence receive less favorable borrowing terms.

[14]For instance, the contributions of FRM contracts to involuntary default rates is given by the share of FRM mortgages in the total stock of mortgages in steady state times the rate of involuntary default on FRMs:

$$\left(\frac{\int_{\Omega_M} 1_{\{\zeta=FRM,n\leq T,H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)}{\int_{\Omega_M} 1_{\{\zeta\in\{FRM,LIP\},n\leq T,H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)} \right) \times \left(\frac{\int_{\Omega_M} D^I(\omega) 1_{\{\zeta=FRM,n\leq T,H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)}{\int_{\Omega_M} 1_{\{\zeta=FRM,n\leq T,H=1\}} d\mu_M(\omega)} \right).$$

Table 5: Share of overall default rates

	voluntary	involuntary	total
Benchmark			
FRM	2.64	0.08	**2.72**
FRM + LIP			
FRM	1.82	0.07	1.89
LIP	1.19	0.98	2.17
Total	3.01	1.05	**4.06**

In some cases in fact, there is no yield such that the intermediary would expect to break even on the mortgage, even when the agents have the means to finance the initial down-payment.[15]

Among agents who do receive a mortgage offer, yields fall both with assets and income. This prediction accords well with the well-documented mortgage industry practice of including overall debt-to-income ratios in their rate sheets. It is also borne out by the statistical evidence available from the Survey of Consumer Finance. Figure 9 also shows that conditional on a given asset-income position at origination, yields are higher for agents who opt for large houses than agents who opt for small houses. This prediction of our model is consistent with the well-documented fact that mortgage rates rise with borrowers' loan-to-income ratio.

When LIPs are not available, agents face only the FRM interest rate schedule. Yields offered on FRMs are unchanged. Several facts are immediately apparent. First, a glance at the vertical scale of the figure reveals that LIP rates exceed FRM rates at all possible asset-income positions. This is because LIPs entail a greater risk of default since home equity is slower to rise. The likelihood that an agent will find herself with negative equity in her home is higher when she holds an LIP than when she holds an FRM. Furthermore, LIP payments are concentrated over a lower number of periods hence become large after three contract periods, which makes involuntary default a greater possibility.

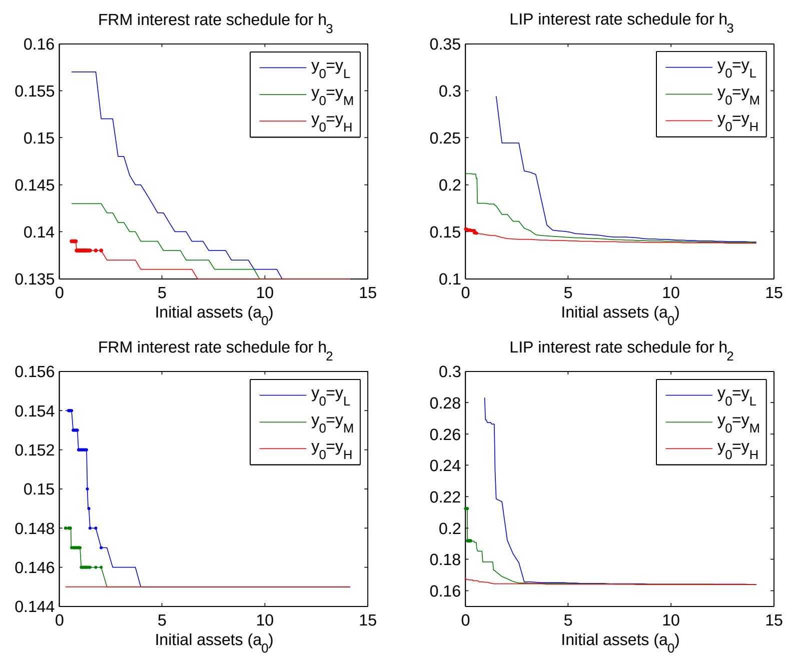
Figure 11 and 10 graph the distributions of equilibrium interest rates by mortgage type. When only FRMs are available, interest rates vary from 13.75% to 15.5% Once LIPs are introduced, the variation in FRM rates does not increase much but the distribution of LIP yields displays a clear bimodal pattern. Agents who take advantage of the new mortgage to become home-owners – that is, agents at the bottom of the income distribution who represent a high-risk of default – incur rates in excess of 19%. One could think of this segment of borrowers as the subprime market. On the other hand, agents who switch from FRMs to

[15] In that period (i.e. when $n = 0$), the budget set is empty when $c = a' = 0$ and

$$m(0; \kappa) > y_0 + (a_0 - vqh \cdot 1_{\{\zeta = FRM\}})(1 + r).$$

Since $m(0; \kappa)$ is strictly increasing in r^κ, we know there is an interest rate $\overline{r}^\zeta$ that depends on y_0 and a_0 such that for any $r > \overline{r}^\zeta$ the bank cannot break even.

Figure 9: Equilibrium yield schedules for the benchmark economy



Notes: Dots show the contracts selected with positive probability in equilibrium.

LIPs either to purchase bigger homes or because they find it optimal to delay payments receive rates not unlike those offered on FRMs, because their default risk does not rise much as a result of the change.

The "no separation" red bar on figure 11 shows the yield that would prevail in equilibrium if intermediaries were not allowed to make yields contingent on asset and income at origination. We will discuss the associated equilibrium further in section 4.2.4.

The correlation of yields on various contracts with assets and income is qualitatively consistent with the statistical evidence available from the Survey of Consumer Finance, as table 6 shows. To compute these moments in the data, we looked at all the mortgages issued within the two years prior to the 2004 survey. We restrict the sample to recently issued mortgages so that current income and assets are reasonable proxies for their counterparts at origination time. We also restrict our attention to households whose head age is between 30 and 45 since mortgages are only issued at the middle-age stage in our model. These data show that origination yields are negatively correlated with both net worth and income, particularly with income.[16] Restricting the sample to FRMs reduces the correlation with assets, but the

[16] We define net worth as liquid assets, CDs, stocks, bond, vehicles, primary residence, real estate investment, business interest minus housing debts, credit card, installment debts, and line of credits. This notion of net worth includes housing equity because we observe agents shortly after the mortgage origination. Housing

Figure 10: Distribution of equilibrium interest rates for benchmark model

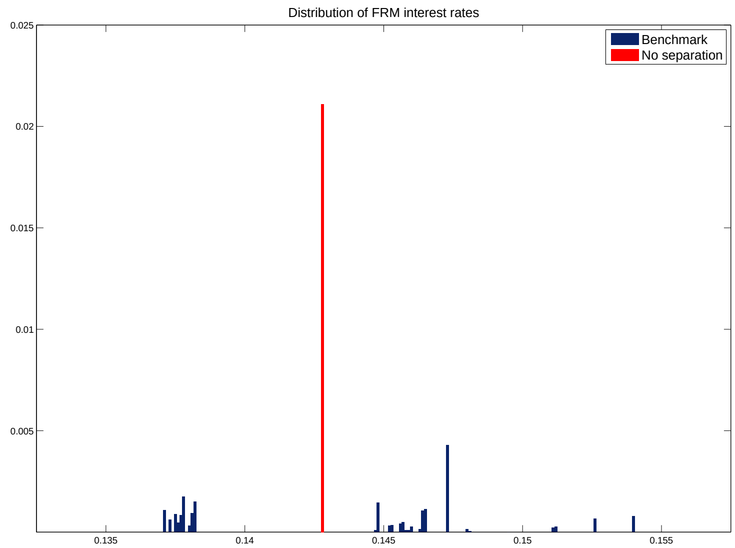


Figure 11: Distribution of equilibrium interest rates for FRM + LIP model

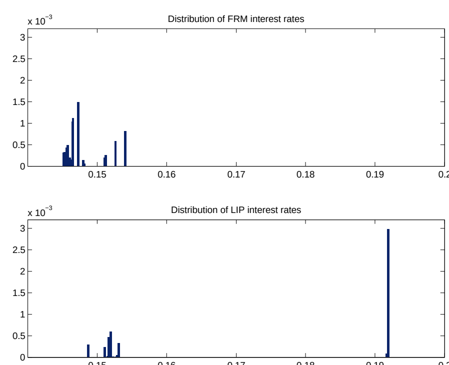


Table 6: Contract terms moments

	Data	Benchmark	FRM + LIP
$CV(yield)$ for FRMS	0.153	0.0184	0.0207
$CV(yield)$ for other	0.341	NA	0.2958
$\rho(yield, income)$ on FRMs	-0.12	-0.9272	-0.9857
$\rho(yield, income)$ on other	-0.18	NA	-0.9391
$\rho(yield, net\quad worth)$ on FRMs	-0.023	-0.4666	-0.3691
$\rho(yield, net\quad worth)$ on other	-0.141	NA	-0.5379

correlation with income remains strong.

Notice that the model predicts less volatility in yield in the FRM sample than in the LIP sample, despite the fact that the range of FRM yields is much broader than its counterpart for LIPs. One reason for this (see the bottom panel of figure 3) is that the distribution of wealth is more highly concentrated among agents who hold an FRMs than among agents who hold an LIPs.

The table shows however that our model understates the variation in yields suggested by these data, and overstates the degree to which income and yields are correlated. A key reason for both findings is that the SCF sample of both FRMs and other mortgages are characterized by much heterogeneity in maturity and initial loan-to-value ratios which we do not model, and which SCF data do not enable one to control for. This heterogeneity raises the volatility of yields and reduces the correlation with asset and income for reasons which our model cannot replicate.

Given the monotonicity of rates and mortgage availability in asset and income, ownership rates are also monotonic in assets and income, as the top panel of table 3 illustrates. Overall, home ownership-rates are near 72% as the third column of table 2 shows.

4.2.4 Separation

In this subsection, we conduct a counterfactual experiment to examine the importance of allowing intermediaries to offer mortgage contracts that separate households on the basis of income and asset characteristics at the time the household takes out the loan (as we do in this paper) rather than offering only noncontingent or "pooling" FRM and LIP contracts (as in Garriga and Schlagenhauf (2009)). In order to answer this question, we construct an equilibrium by taking our parameterization from the benchmark model but restricting the set of available mortgages to be only an FRM or an LIP, both independent of income and asset position at the time of the loan.

equity, at that time, reflects mainly the down-payment made at origination by the borrower. That downpayment, in turn, was part of assets prior to the origination.

The equilibrium mortgage rate is then determined by a zero profit condition across all possible households selecting into that contract (and hence the distribution of households directly affects the calculation of mortgage rates). The resulting yield is shown in red on figure 11 and falls, quite intuitively, in the range of the yields offered in the separation equilibrium. In this case, the households with high incomes and assets (who have low probability of default on the given contract) are indirectly subsidizing households with low incomes and assets (who have high probability of default on the contract). Such cross-subsidization is unlikely to survive in competitive environments since an intermediary can simply offer a contract with lower interest rate to households with observable high income and/or assets and skim those good customers away from the pooled contract.

Table 7: Steady state statistics

	Benchmark	No separation
Homeownership rate	65.38	65.86
Avg. ex-housing asset/income ratio	0.91	0.91
Avg. loan to income ratio	1.20	1.21
Avg. homeowner housing expenditure share	0.19	0.19
Rents to income ratio for renters	0.37	0.37
Avg. housing spending share for homeowners	0.19	0.21
Avg. mortgage yields (FRMs, LIPs)	(14.40,NA)	(14.28,NA)
Loss-incidence estimates	0.41	0.41
Foreclosure rates	2.72	2.73
Foreclosure discount	0.38	0.37

4.2.5 Welfare

The introduction of LIPs unambiguously improve the welfare of all agents when $\alpha = 1$ because it affords them a new financing option without altering any prices. However, the welfare consequences of innovation are bound to differ across agents. Agents whose homeownership prospects at birth are not significantly improved by the introduction of LIPs will not benefit much, while agents whose ownership prospects do rise significantly are likely to see their welfare rise markedly. This section verifies this intuition. To determine the gains, we calculate what agents would be willing to pay at birth with an income draw of y_i in an FRM only economy to obtain the same welfare they can expect in a FRM+LIP economy. To calculate such consumption equivalent welfare gains under our FRM-only parameterization, consider agents born with income at birth y_i where $i \in \{L, M, H\}$ and let $U^{FRM-only}(y_i)$ and $U^{FRM+LIP}(y_i)$ denote the lifetime utility they expect at birth in the benchmark and $FRM+LIP$ economies, respectively. Denote the optimal consumption and housing service plans in the benchmark economy by $\left\{c_{t,i}^{FRM-only}, s_{t,i}^{FRM-only}\right\}$ for an agent born with initial income y_i. Then, let $1+k_i$ be the multiple one has to apply to the consumption of agents born in the benchmark economy to make their welfare equal the same agents born in an economy with only FRMs. That is, k_i solves for all $i \in \{L, M, H\}$:

$$\begin{aligned}
U^{FRM+LIP}(y_i) &= E_0\left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty}\beta^t u(c_{t,i}^{Benchmark}(1+k_i), s_{t,i}^{Benchmark})\right] \\
&= E_0\left[\sum_{t=0}^{\infty}\beta^t \left\{\ln(c_{t,i}^{Benchmark}) + \ln(1+k_i) + \ln(s_{t,i}^{Benchmark})\right\}\right] \\
&= U^{Benchmark}(y_i) + \frac{\ln(1+k_i)}{(1-\beta)}
\end{aligned}$$

It follows that:

$$\begin{aligned}
(1-\beta)\left[U^{FRM+LIP}(y_i) - U^{Benchmark}(y_i)\right] &= \ln(1+k_i) \\
\Longrightarrow k_i &= \exp\left((1-\beta)[U^{FRM+LIP}(y_i) - U^{Benchmark}(y_i)] - 1\right)
\end{aligned}$$

We calculate that, on average,:

$$\begin{aligned}
k_L &= 0.035\% \\
k_M &= 0.053\% \\
k_H &= 0.175\%
\end{aligned}$$

making the average welfare gain associated with availability of the LIP option around 0.07% in consumption-equivalent terms. Agents who receive intermediate incomes at birth suffer the highest welfare gain. This is because these agents are the most likely to opt for homeownership when they become mid-aged, and make use of LIPs either to make a downpayment if their income history turns out to limit their asset accumulation, or buy a bigger house.

Somewhat surprisingly at first glance, agents born with low income prospects benefit the least from mortgage innovation. The reason for this is that they anticipate that in all likelihood, they will remain renters their entire life. The gains are so small, in fact, that in a model where house prices respond to demand for housing, mortgage innovation is likely to have a negative impact on agents who are born poor. Mortgage innovation primarily benefits the agents who are at the margin between renting and owning or need some financial help to buy bigger houses.

4.3 Transitional effects of mortgage innovation

The previous section shows that mortgage innovation has significant long-run effects on foreclosure rates. We will now describe a quantitative experiment designed to evaluate the role of these new mortgages in the foreclosure crisis depicted in figure 1. Figure 1 suggests that the course of events leading up to the collapse of house prices and the foreclosure crises can be decomposed into three basic stages. Prior to 2004, the composition of the mortgage stock is stable and traditional mortgages are the dominant form of home financing. Around 2004-05, the composition of the mortgages stocks changes noticeably as non-traditional mortgages start accounting for a high fraction of originations. After mid-2006, prices start collapsing, foreclosure rates rise sharply, and the importance of traditional mortgages begins rising once again as originations of non-traditional mortgages slow to a trickle.[17]

We will use our model to simulate this course of events and quantify the role of non-traditional mortgages using a three-stage experiment. In the first stage (the pre-2004 period), the economy is in our benchmark, FRM-only steady state. In the second stage of the experiment, we introduce the option for newly mid-aged agents to finance their house purchase with a low initial payment mortgage. We assume that this introduction is unanticipated by agents, but perceived as permanent once it is made. One period later, in the third stage, we hit the economy with a surprise 20% aggregate price shock, and take away the LIP option. This stage is meant to approximate the state of the US housing market in 2008, a state characterized by home prices 20% below their peak, and the end of the availability of non-traditional mortgages.

In the third stage, we cause home-prices to fall by assuming that the productivity of the housing technology rises. This drop in prices catches agents as a complete surprise so that, at the time of the shock, the distribution of states across agents is the one implied by the first two stages of the experiment.

Because the intermediary is also surprised by the price shock, it experiences unforeseen revenue and capital losses. To see this, note that steady state net profits on the intermediary's mortgage activities are given by:

$$\int b(\omega)\left(1 - D^I(\omega) - D^V(\omega) - S(\omega)\right)\frac{(r^\zeta(\omega) - (r+\phi))}{(1+r+\phi)^{n(\omega)+1}}d\mu_M(\omega)$$
$$-\int (b(\omega) - \min\{(1-\chi)qh(\omega), b(\omega))\left(D^I(\omega) + D^V(\omega)\right)\frac{(1+r+\phi)}{(1+r+\phi)^{n(\omega)+1}}d\mu_M(\omega)$$

The first term gives the net return on active mortgages that are not terminated in the current period, while the second term is the cost (direct capital losses and opportunity cost) associated with the capital lost in the event of foreclosure.

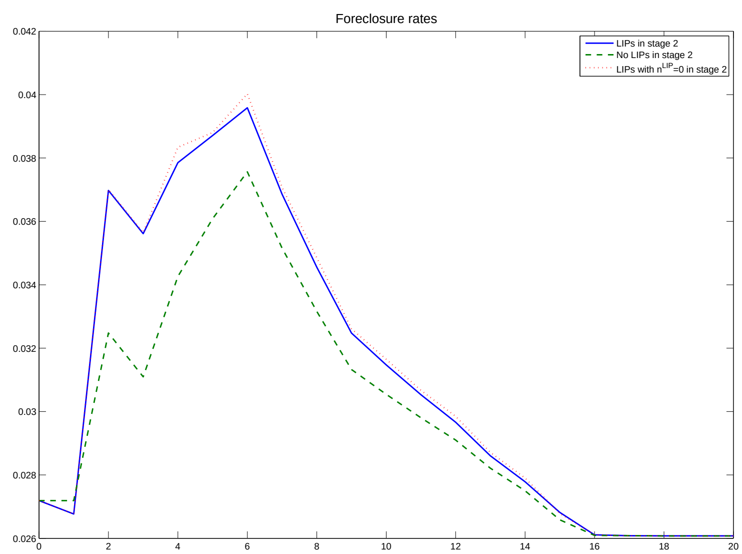
In steady state, those profits are zero. However, the unexpected drop in prices causes default rates to rise which reduces revenues and raises foreclosure losses, causing profits to become negative until contracts written before the price shock disappear. One has to be explicit about who bears these losses. We assume that constant lump-sum taxes are imposed on all agents following the price shock in such a way as to exactly cover the intermediary's

[17] In the most recent Mortgage Origination Survey data, traditional FRMs account for 90% of all originations.

losses in present value terms. Computationally, this involves guessing a value for the constant and permanent tax, solving for the new steady state equilibrium and the transition to this new state, evaluating the present value of the intermediary's transitory losses, and updating the permanent tax level until losses and tax revenues match.[18]

Figures 12 and 13 show the outcome of this three-stage experiment. Roughly a quarter of newly midaged agents take advantage of the LIP option once it becomes available in the second stage, immediately raising the fraction of LIPs in the mortgage stock from 0 to 4%. The home-ownership rate also rises as more agents are able to purchase homes thanks to mortgage innovation. Because we do not give home-buyers the option to default in the first period of their life and the number of originations rises in stage 2, default rates fall slightly.

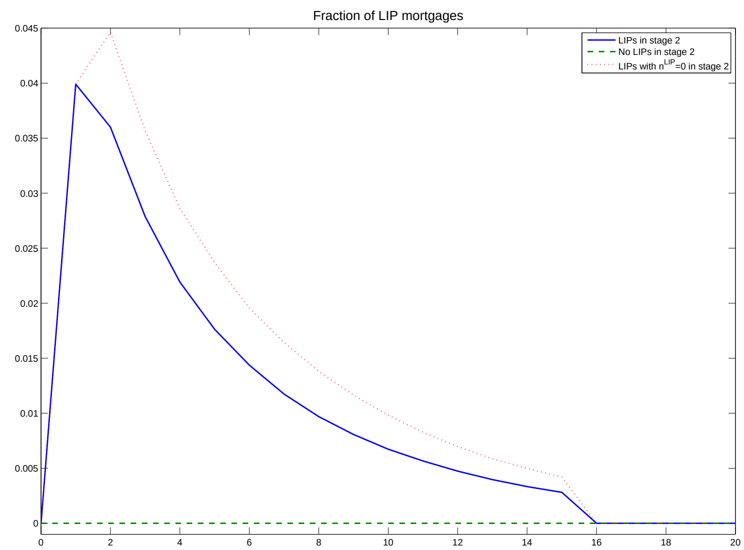
Figure 12: Foreclosure rates during transition



Once the price shock strikes in stage 3, foreclosure rates jump up to almost 3.7%. The aggregate shock pushes a number of agents with contracts written prior to the shock (when houses were expensive) into negative equity territory. Furthermore, until agents with old contract disappear from the sample of active mortgages, devaluation shocks become more likely to make equity negative on a given house. In the second period after the shock, foreclosure shocks fall slightly but they begin to rise again towards a peak of around 4% as agents who took LIPs in the second stage enter the high-payment part of their mortgages. When the

[18]See the computational appendix for details. There are obviously many possible ways to redistribute the intermediary's losses. Per capita losses are negligible in practice and barring extremely concentrated tax schemes, their exact distribution cannot have large effects on the results we present.

Figure 13: Fraction of LIPs in mortgage stock during transition



shock strikes, all of these agents have negative equity, but they can continue enjoying ownership rents at a fairly low cost as long as they do not have to make large mortgage payments. As a result, many of these agents wait until high payments kick in to formally default.

The price shock causes foreclosure rates to rise by around 50% from start to peak, and 40% on impact. In the data displayed in figure 1, foreclosure rates more trippled in the data to a quarterly rate of roughly 1.4%, which implies a two-year default rate of over 11%. Our three stage experiment captures about 25% of that peak increase. Between mid-2006 and mid-2008, foreclosure rates roughly doubled. Our model captures roughly 40% of this initial impact.

To quantify the importance of new mortgages in the foreclosure boom, we run a counterfactual experiments where in stage 2, LIPs are not offered. We hit the economy with the same price shock in stage 3. The result is shown in the dotted lines on figure 12. The increase in foreclosure rates become noticeably smaller, because the price shocks now strikes an economy where agents have more investment in their homes. Specifically, the increase on impact is 50% lower in when LIPs are not introduced, and the foreclosure rates peaks at a level that is while the peak 20% below its level when mortgage innovation takes place in stage 2.

We can also quantify the relative importance of low downpayments and delayed amortization – the two key features of our LIPs – by running a third experiment where in stage 2, LIPs feature a zero downpayment, but no IOM period. As figure 13 shows, LIPs become even more popular in stage 2 in part because, without an IOM period, the default risk on those mortgages falls as do, therefore, yields. Figure 12 shows, more importantly, that the impact on foreclosure rates of the price shocks in stage 3 is very similar to what obtained in the first experiment (even somewhat higher because LIPs are more popular in stage 2), suggesting that the fact that agents with LIPs enter in their contract with zero equity is the principal factor behind their role in the foreclosure increase.

5 Summary

- In steady state in our model, default frequencies are more than twice as high on LIPs than they are on FRMs, as a result of two complementary forces. Mortgages with low initial payments tend to be selected by high default risk agents, and they are characterized by a much slower accumulation of home equity.
- As a result LIPs account for nearly 53% of overall default rates, even though then only account for 27% of all mortgages.
- A transition experiment designed to mimic the events that have unfolded in the mortgage market over the past few years suggest that LIPs contributed significantly to the foreclosure crisis. In our simulations, when mortgage with low initial payments do not become available before the price collapse, the increase in foreclosure rates becomes 50% lower on impact, and 25% lower at the peak of the crisis.

A Computational appendix

A.1 Steady State Equilibrium

1. The asset space consists of thirty equally spaced asset grid points between 0 and 0.3, thirty equally spaced asset grid points between 0.3 and 1.5, and another ninety equally spaced asset grid points between 1.5 and 30.
2. We use value function iteration to find $V_O(a)$ on the asset grid from which we obtain decision rules $a'_O(a)$ for old agents. The value functions are approximated by using linear interpolation.
3. Given the value functions for old agents, use value function iteration to find $V_M(a, y, 0, \cdot)$ on the asset grid from which we obtain decision rules $a'_M(a, y, 0, \cdot)$ for mid-aged renters for each y. The value functions are approximated using linear interpolation.
4. Given the value functions for old agents and mid-aged renters, use value function iteration to find $V_M(a, y, 1, h, n > T; \kappa)$ on the asset grid from which we obtain asset choice decision rules $a'_M(a, y, 1, h, n > T; \kappa)$ and homeownership decisions $H'(a, y, 1, n > T; \kappa)$ for mid-aged homeowners who have paid off their mortgage for each (y, h). The value

functions are independent of the original mortgage contract terms κ. The value functions are approximated using linear interpolation.

5. For every pair of h_0 and (a_0, y_0), if a household does not have enough assets to make the downpayment, $\alpha q h_o$, no FRM contract will be offered. Set an initial guess of mortgage interest rate for each contract, given the value functions for old agent, mid-aged renters, and mid-aged homeowners with one less period of mortgage payments to make $V_M(a, y, 1, h, n = t + 1; \kappa)$, solve for $V_M(a, y, 1, h, n = t; \kappa)$ by backward induction for each $(y, h, t = \{1, ..., T\})$. For each path of possible realization of incomes and housing capital given κ, keep track the household decisions along the path. Calculate the present value according to the decision rules from each path and the probability of this path being realized. If this present value is not equal to the initial loan size, update the interest rate and repeat this step. Otherwise, the equilibrium interest rate is found. The value functions are approximated using linear interpolation.

6. Given the value functions for old and mid-aged agents, use value function iteration to find $V_Y(a, y)$ on the asset grid from which we obtain decision rules $a'_Y(a, y)$ and contract selection decisions $(\zeta(a, y), h_0)$ on mortgage terms and initial housing capital. Because of the potential discontinuity caused by the downpayment requirements, the value functions for young agents are solved by grid search.

7. Solve for the equilibrium stationary distribution μ given the implied law of motion.

A.2 Transition Dynamics

1. Solve for the initial steady state equilibrium with price q^o using the algorithm above with zero lump-sum tax.

2. Start the initial guess of lump-sum tax $\tau_{i=1} = 0$. Solve for the final steady state with a new house price q^n with the lump-sum tax implemented.

3. Solve for the optimization problems for homeowners who have purchased the house before the unanticipated house price shock occurs by backward induction. If households choose to sell their houses, they sell at the new price q^n. If households choose to remain a homeowner, they have to follow the original mortgage terms (if they have not paid off their mortgage debts).

   - If the agent is a homeowner but it is not budget feasible for her to make her mortgage payment $m^o(n; \kappa)$, which he obtained before the unanticipated price shock, or:

$$y + a(1 + r) - m^o(n; \kappa) - \delta h - \tau_i < 0, \tag{A.1}$$

then the value function solves:

$$V_M^o(a, y, 1, h, n; \kappa) = \max_{c,a'} U(c, h_1) + \beta E_{y'|y}\left[(1-\rho_O)V_M^n(a', y', 0, \ldots) + \rho_O V_O^n(a')\right]$$
$$\text{s.t. } c + a' = y + a(1+r) + \max\{(1-\chi)q^n h - b^o(n;\kappa), 0\} - R^n h_1 - \tau_i.$$

- If it is budget feasible for a homeowner to make her mortgage payment then, if the household chooses to sell her house and become a renter (so that $H' = 0$), define the value function by

$$V_M^{o,H'=0}(a, y, 1, h, n; \kappa) = \max_{c,a'} U(c, h_1) + \beta E_{y'|y}\left[(1-\rho_O)V_M^n(a', y', 0, \ldots) + \rho_O V_O^n(a')\right]$$
$$\text{s.t. } c + a' = y + a(1+r) + \max\{q^n h - b^o(n;\kappa), 0\} - R^n h_1 - \tau_i.$$

- If the agent is able to meet her current mortgage payment and chooses to keep her house ($H' = 1$), define the value function by

$$V_M^{o,H'=1}(a, y, 1, h, n; \kappa) = \max_{c,a'} U\left(c, h\left[1_{\{h=h_1\}} + (1 - 1_{\{h=h_1\}})\theta\right]\right)$$
$$+\beta E_{(y',h')|(y,h)}\begin{bmatrix} (1-\rho_O)V_M^o(a', y', 1, h', n+1; \kappa) \\ +\rho_O V_O^n(a' + \max\{q^n h - b^o(n+1;\kappa), 0\}) \end{bmatrix}$$
$$\text{s.t. } c + a' = y + a(1+r) - m^o(n;\kappa) - \delta h - \tau_i.$$

4. Select a large integer N to be the number of periods during transitions. In the first period of transitions, start the economy with the initial steady state distribution. Starting from the second period, apply the decision rules to solve for the distribution one period ahead. For renters, use the decision rules solved for the final steady state. For homeowners, if they purchase the house before the transition starts, use the optimization problems solved in the previous step. If they purchase the house after the transition starts, use the decision rules in the final steady state. Young agents who turn mid-aged during the transition purchase houses at the new price q^n. Continue to solve for the distribution in every period of the transition path.

5. Given the decision rules and distribution along the transition path, calculate the discounted present value of the net profits for the financial intermediary over the transition path. Update the lump-sum tax τ_{i+1} such that $\frac{\tau}{r}$ is equal to the discounted present value of the net profits. Return to step 3 and repeat using τ_{i+1} until the discounted present value of the net profits equals the discounted present value of the lump-sum tax.

6. Check if the distribution converges to the final steady state in N periods. If not, increase N and repeat all the steps above.

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