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# **International shock transmission after the Lehman Brothers collapse – evidence from syndicated lending**

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## **Abstract**

After Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy in September 2008, cross-border bank lending contracted sharply. To explain the severity and variation in this contraction, we analyse detailed data on cross-border syndicated lending by 75 banks to 59 countries. We find that banks that had to write down sub-prime assets, refinance large amounts of long-term debt, and experienced sharp declines in their market-to-book ratio, transmitted these shocks across borders by curtailing their lending abroad. While shocked banks differentiated among countries in much the same way as less constrained banks, they restricted their lending more to small borrowers.

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## 1. Introduction

After Lehman Brothers filed for bankruptcy on 15 September 2008, cross-border bank lending contracted sharply. While lending declined by 58 per cent on average, the magnitude of the reduction varied considerably between destination countries. Why? Disparities in the adjustment of economic activity and credit demand will have played a role but a curtailment of the supply of cross-border lending may have contributed too.

During the crisis, many banks faced substantial shocks to their capital and long-term debt. Such balance-sheet constraints may have induced them to deleverage abroad and thus transmit shocks across borders. In this paper we exploit heterogeneity in international banks' funding constraints to examine whether this was indeed the case and whether shocked banks retrenched from different types of countries and firms compared with non-shocked banks.

To do so we combine detailed data on syndicated lending by 75 banks to 59 countries with three exogenous measures of bank-funding constraints. We find that these bank-specific funding shocks contributed to the curtailment of cross-border credit after the demise of Lehman Brothers. In addition, while shocked banks reduced cross-border credit more, they differentiated between countries in much the same way as less constrained banks. We find, however, that shocked banks restricted their credit more to small borrowers.

This paper contributes to the small, but emerging, literature on the transmission of bank-funding shocks across borders.<sup>1</sup> A first strand of this literature studies how funding shocks to parent banks affect the lending of their foreign subsidiaries. In a seminal contribution, Peek and Rosengren (2000) show how the drop in Japanese stock prices in 1990, combined with binding capital requirements, led Japanese bank branches in the United States to reduce credit. Popov and Udell (2012) provide evidence that less capitalised western European banks reduced the credit supply of their eastern European subsidiaries during the early stages of the recent crisis. Cetorelli and Goldberg (2011a) find that US banks with high pre-crisis exposure to asset-backed commercial paper became more constrained when *off*-balance-sheet became *on*-balance-sheet commitments. This affected their foreign affiliates through an internal reallocation of funds.

A second strand of the literature looks at the impact of funding shocks on cross-border lending. Using bilateral country-level data, Cetorelli and Goldberg (2011b) show that during

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<sup>1</sup> Liquidity shocks can also constrain domestic lending. See Khwaja and Mian (2008) and Ivashina and Scharfstein (2010) for evidence for Pakistan and the United States, respectively.

the recent crisis banking systems that depended a lot on short-term US dollar funding curtailed cross-border lending more. Using bank-level data, Schnabl (2011) shows how international banks transmitted the shock of the 1998 Russian default by reducing their cross-border lending to banks active in Peru. More generally, Giannetti and Laeven (2012) find that during times of crisis international banks' home bias increases and that this is especially true for banks that rely more on non-deposit funding.

We contribute to this literature by studying the adjustment in cross-border credit due to shocks to international banks' capital and access to bond funding. Our comprehensive yet detailed dataset allows us to not only estimate the impact of funding shocks on cross-border lending but also whether funding-constrained banks retrenched from different types of countries and firms compared with less constrained banks.

## 2. Data and methodology

### 2.1. Data

To develop an identification strategy that isolates the causal impact of funding shocks on cross-border lending, we need data that cover lending to various countries by individual banks (to exploit within-bank variation) and lending by various banks to individual countries (to control for credit demand at the country level). In addition, data should ideally also contain the underlying deals. We use information on syndicated loans that fulfils these requirements.

Syndicates – groups of financial institutions that jointly provide large loans – are a key conduit of cross-border debt finance to both developed and emerging countries. Balance-sheet constraints may have become particularly binding in this market as the secondary market for syndications, which largely depended on structuring collateralised loan obligations, dried up during the crisis.

Our data source is Dealogic Loan Analytics from which we download all syndicated loans to private borrowers worldwide during January 2000 to September 2009. We split each loan into the portions provided by the syndicate members and use these portions to reconstruct for each bank the volume and country distribution of its cross-border lending.<sup>2</sup> We focus on the 75 largest banks from high-income countries which jointly have a share of over 90 per cent of the cross-border syndications market. For each bank we calculate lending to individual destination countries in the pre-crisis period (July 2006 to June 2007) and the period after the Lehman Brothers collapse (October 2008 to September 2009). We disregard the period July 2007 to September 2008, which was the early stage of the crisis.

In addition, we create three bank-level funding-shock measures. First, we use the WDCI (Write Down versus Capital Infusion) function that Bloomberg introduced during the crisis. WDCI includes, inter alia, losses related to sub-prime mortgages, structured finance products and credit-default swaps. Losses due to regular operating activities are excluded to the extent that they can be separated from investments in sub-prime assets.

For each bank we calculate the log of crisis-related write-downs from the second quarter (Q2) of 2007 to Q2 2008 (*Write-downs*). Write-downs were unexpected, recorded before the Lehman Brothers bankruptcy, and pertained mainly to mortgage and real estate portfolios.

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<sup>2</sup> See De Haas and Van Horen (2011) for more details about data construction.

We therefore treat *Write-downs* as exogenous to lending to foreign firms after the Lehman Brothers default. We expect that in the presence of minimum capital requirements, large unexpected write-downs limit subsequent lending if these capital requirements are binding (Peek and Rosengren, 1995) or expected to become binding (Chami and Cosimano, 2010).

Second, we use Thomson Financial to calculate for each bank the (log) amount of long-term bonds (> 1 year) issued *before* the crisis and that matured *after* the Lehman Brothers collapse (Q3 2008 to Q2 2009). Banks with maturing loans were more constrained compared with similar banks that had rolled over their long-term debt just before the crisis. As banks made decisions about bond issues before the onset of the crisis, the variable *Maturing bonds* is exogenous to the crisis period (see Almeida et al., 2011).

Third, we use Bloomberg to calculate the log change in the ratio between the market and book value of each bank's equity from July 2007 to September 2008. This change influenced the prospective costs and ease of raising new equity. We therefore use  $\Delta Market-to-book$  as a third proxy for funding constraints after Lehman Brothers' downfall.

## 2.2. Methodology

We compare, in a cross-sectional setting, each bank's lending volume in the year after the Lehman Brothers collapse to its lending in the year before the crisis. Our first dependent variable is *Sudden stop*, a dummy variable that is 1 for each bank-country pair where a bank completely stopped lending during the crisis (but where it was active before). The second – *Volume* – is the log difference of (1 plus) the amount of cross-border lending by a bank to a country between the post-Lehman Brothers and the pre-crisis period.

We then test whether these changes in the supply of cross-border lending can be explained by the exogenous shocks *Write-downs*, *Maturing bonds* and  $\Delta Market-to-book$ .<sup>3</sup> We use country-fixed effects to control for changes in credit demand at the country level and therefore focus on differences *across* banks *within* a destination country. This approach is based on Khwaja and Mian (2008), who control for credit demand through firm-fixed effects in firm-level regressions. We also control for the following pre-crisis bank characteristics (based on BankScope data): size, solvency, wholesale funding, profitability and loan quality.

To control for the fact that during a crisis banks are more likely to continue lending to a country that is “close” (De Haas and Van Horen, 2011), we also include three bilateral

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<sup>3</sup> The three funding measures are not highly correlated with pair-wise correlation coefficients of 0.3 or less.

closeness variables. First, the geographical *Distance* between a bank's headquarters and destination country. Second, *Experience*, which equals the number of syndicated loans that a bank provided to a country since 2000 and that had matured before the crisis. Third, *Domestic lenders*, measured as the proportion of domestic banks in a country with whom the bank had cooperated before the crisis.

Our cross-sectional baseline specification is:

$$(1) \quad \Delta L_{ij} = \beta_1 \cdot F_i + \lambda' \cdot X_i + \gamma' \cdot C_{ij} + \varphi_j + \eta_{ij}$$

where  $\Delta L_{ij}$  is *Sudden stop* or *Volume* and subscripts  $i$  and  $j$  denote banks and destination countries, respectively;  $\beta_1$  is a coefficient;  $\lambda'$  and  $\gamma'$  are coefficient vectors;  $F_i$  is a funding-shock variable;  $X_i$  is a matrix of bank-level controls;  $C_{ij}$  is a matrix of closeness variables;  $\varphi_j$  is a vector of country-fixed effect coefficients, and  $\eta_{ij}$  is the error term.

We also estimate *firm-level* regressions on a sample of firms that before the crisis borrowed from at least two banks in our dataset and that borrowed at least once during the crisis. The dependent variable is *Drop-out probability*, the probability that bank  $i$  – a pre-crisis creditor of firm  $k$  – decided not to participate in a syndicated loan to firm  $k$  during the crisis. We now include firm fixed effects to more precisely control for credit demand.

We use OLS for *Volume* regressions and a linear-probability model for the *Sudden stop* and *Drop-out probability* regressions. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity robust and clustered by bank. Results are robust to clustering at the country level.

### 3. Results

Table 1 provides baseline regression results. We find that funding shocks had a negative impact on the supply of cross-border lending during the crisis. Columns [1]–[3] show how international banks with higher sub-prime losses, more maturing bonds and sharper declines in their market-to-book ratio were more likely to fully cut credit to a country (compared with less constrained but otherwise similar banks lending to the same country). Columns [4]–[6] show that funding-constrained banks also reduced their overall credit supply faster than less constrained banks.

**Table 1–Bank funding shocks and international crisis transmission**

	Sudden stop			Volume		
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]
Write-downs	0.006** (0.050)			-0.049*** (0.001)		
Maturing bonds		0.016*** (0.006)			-0.084*** (0.009)	
$\Delta$ market-to-book			-0.144** (0.041)			0.880** (0.023)
Pre-crisis bank controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bilateral closeness controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Destination country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,338	1,260	1,130	1,315	1,238	1,112
R-squared	0.38	0.39	0.38	0.30	0.30	0.31

*Notes:* This table shows estimates to explain the decline in cross-border lending from bank  $i$  to destination country  $j$  after the Lehman Brothers default. *Sudden stop* is a dummy that is 1 if bank  $i$  stopped lending to country  $j$  after the default. *Volume* is the log change in 1 plus the amount of cross-border lending by bank  $i$  to country  $j$  in the post-Lehman Brothers period compared with the pre-crisis period. *Write-downs* is the log of total crisis-related write-downs by bank  $i$  from Q2 2007 to Q2 2008. *Maturing bonds* is the log of the amount of long-term bonds (> 1 year maturity) issued by bank  $i$  before the crisis that matured during Q3 2008–Q2 2009.  $\Delta$  *market-to-book* is the log change in the market-to-book ratio of bank  $j$  during July 2007–September 2008. We use a (linear probability) OLS model for the *Sudden stop* and *Volume* regressions. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity robust and clustered by bank. Robust p-values appear in parentheses. Sources: Dealogic Loan Analytics, Bloomberg, Thomson Financial.

\*\*\* Significant at the 1 per cent level.

\*\* Significant at the 5 per cent level.

\* Significant at the 10 per cent level.

The economic magnitude of these supply-side effects is substantial. For example, a one standard deviation increase in write-downs or maturing bonds increases the probability of a full lending stop with 3.8 and 4.5 percentage points, respectively (compared with a mean probability of 42 per cent). Likewise, a one standard deviation decline in the market-to-book ratio leads to an increase in the probability of a sudden stop of 3.7 percentage points.

The results for the (unreported) control variables show that larger and more solvent banks were in a better position to keep lending. Moreover, banks reduced their lending less to nearby borrowers and to countries where they had more pre-crisis experience and where they had cooperated more with domestic banks (cf. De Haas and Van Horen, 2011).

Table 2 shows regression estimates to assess whether banks that faced more severe funding constraints not only withdrew *more* from abroad but also withdrew *from different types of countries* compared with less constrained banks. We expect that constrained banks in particular may have “fled to quality” to reduce unsafe lending, for instance by mainly curtailing credit to countries with risky macroeconomic or institutional environments.

**Table 2—International crisis transmission and destination-country characteristics**

	Volume						
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]	[7]
	Experience	Legal difference	Emerging market	Weak institutions	Weak contract enforcement	Large current account deficit	FX reserves to GDP
Write-downs	-0.078*** (0.000)	-0.054*** (0.004)	-0.047*** (0.003)	-0.045*** (0.004)	-0.048*** (0.005)	-0.044*** (0.003)	-0.048*** (0.004)
Write-downs * X	0.011** (0.029)	0.011 (0.577)	-0.004 (0.790)	-0.009 (0.597)	-0.003 (0.876)	-0.025 (0.137)	-0.005 (0.926)
Pre-crisis bank controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bilateral closeness controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Destination country FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,315	1,315	1,315	1,315	1,315	1,315	1,315
R-squared	0.30	0.31	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30	0.30

*Notes:* This table shows estimates to explain the decline in cross-border lending from bank  $i$  to destination country  $j$  after the Lehman Brothers default. The dependent variable is *Volume*. *Experience* is the number of loans provided by bank  $i$  to country  $j$  since 2000 that had matured by July 2006. *Legal difference* is a dummy variable that is 1 if the legal origin of the bankruptcy law in the home country of bank  $i$  is different from the legal origin in destination country  $j$  (La Porta et al. 1998). *Emerging market* is a dummy that is 1 if the destination country is not a high-income OECD country. *Weak institutions* is a dummy that is 1 if the quality of governance in destination country  $j$  is weaker than in the median country (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi, 2010). *Weak contract enforcement* is a dummy that is 1 if the costs of using the judicial or administrative system in country  $j$  to collect overdue debt is above the median cost level (Doing Business database). *Large current account deficit* is a dummy that is 1 if the destination country's current account showed a deficit of more than 6 per cent of GDP in 2007 (IMF). *FX reserves to GDP* measures official FX reserves as a percentage of GDP in 2007 (IMF). We use an OLS model with heteroskedasticity robust standard errors clustered by bank. Robust p-values appear in parentheses. Robust p-values appear in parentheses. Sources: Dealogic Loan Analytics, Bloomberg.

\*\*\* Significant at the 1 per cent level.

\*\* Significant at the 5 per cent level.

\* Significant at the 10 per cent level.

To analyse the relationship between funding shocks and destination-country characteristics, we continue to include country fixed effects while sequentially interacting *Write-downs* with various proxies for institutional and macroeconomic country risk (see Table 2 for variable definitions and sources). The dependent variable is *Volume*.

We find that while funding-constrained banks reduced cross-border credit more – see the first line – the interaction terms indicate that they did so in much the same way as less constrained banks. Interestingly, however, we find that funding-constrained banks are particularly sensitive to their prior lending experience in a country. Such pre-crisis lending experience partially shields countries from the negative impact of shocks to their creditors.

Lastly, Table 3 presents firm-level regressions to investigate whether funding-constrained banks not only withdrew from the same type of countries but also from the same type of borrowers (compared with less affected banks). In line with a flight to quality, we expect that funding-constrained banks rationed credit more to smaller, less transparent borrowers.

**Table 3–International crisis transmission: Firm-level evidence**

	Drop-out probability					
	Write-downs		Maturing bonds		$\Delta$ market-to-book	
	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]	[6]
Funding shock	0.005 (0.139)	0.007** (0.029)	0.013* (0.052)	0.019*** (0.003)	-0.118 (0.162)	-0.208** (0.010)
Funding shock * Large firm		-0.005*** (0.008)		-0.011*** (0.002)		0.171*** (0.005)
Pre-crisis bank controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bilateral closeness controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Firm FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,671	1,671	1,572	1,572	1,472	1,472
R-squared	0.16	0.16	0.17	0.17	0.16	0.16

*Notes:* This table shows estimates to explain the variable *Drop-out probability*, the probability that bank  $i$  discontinued lending to firm  $k$  after the Lehman Brothers default. The sample includes all firms that borrowed from at least two different lenders in our sample during the pre-crisis period. The funding variables are defined in the Notes to Table 1. *Large firms* are firms with an above-median aggregate syndicated borrowing volume from January 2000 to July 2007. We use a linear probability model. All specifications include a dummy that indicates whether bank  $i$  acted as an arranger for firm  $k$  in the past. Standard errors are heteroskedasticity robust and clustered by bank. Robust p-values appear in parentheses. Sources: Dealogic Loan Analytics, Bloomberg, Thomson Financial.

\*\*\* Significant at the 1 per cent level.

\*\* Significant at the 5 per cent level.

\* Significant at the 10 per cent level.

The odd columns confirm our earlier result that constrained banks reduce lending more. All else equal, constrained banks display a higher probability of dropping out of a syndicate, although the coefficients are imprecisely estimated for *Write-downs* and  $\Delta$ *Market-to-book*. Reassuringly, the size of the coefficients for these *firm-level* “sudden stop” effects corresponds closely to the coefficients in the *country level* regressions (as reported in columns [1]-[3] of Table 1).

In the even columns, we interact the funding shock with a dummy variable *Large firm* which is 1 for firms of above-median size (proxied by the total amount of syndicated borrowing between January 2000 and July 2007). We find that compared with less constrained banks, constrained banks reduced their lending more to relatively small borrowers. The disparity between the supply-side effects on small versus large borrowers is considerable. For large firms, the probability that a bank with high sub-prime write-downs did not re-engage with a firm was only 29 per cent of the probability that the bank would stop lending to a small firm. These numbers are 42 and 18 per cent in case of shocks from maturing bonds or reduced market-to-book ratios, respectively.

## 4. Discussion

In the wake of the 2008-09 global financial crisis, the virtues and vices of financial globalisation – and of cross-border banking in particular – are being re-evaluated. On the one hand, international banks may reduce macroeconomic volatility in recipient countries if the size, strength and diversified nature of their balance sheets make them relatively stable sources of credit in the case of local shocks. On the other hand, as the 2007-09 crisis has shown, the financial strength of international banks can quickly dwindle if they assume large and concentrated risks in a few highly correlated markets. This may impede their role as stable providers of cross-border credit and can cause financial crises to spread across borders, potentially exacerbating output declines in destination countries.

This paper shows that international banks that had to write down sub-prime assets, refinance large amounts of long-term debt in an illiquid market, and experienced sharp declines in their market-to-book ratio, transmitted these shocks across borders by reducing their cross-border lending. Moreover, at the firm level we find that these shocked banks restricted their lending especially to small borrowers.

Our results do not bode well for firms, such as in many countries in emerging Europe, that depend on cross-border lending from western European banking groups. The 2007-09 crisis merged almost seamlessly into the 2010-12 eurozone crisis and the transmission mechanisms highlighted in this paper appear to be at the core of the current crisis too. Large and unexpected write-downs now stem from exposures to sovereign risk in the eurozone periphery. In addition, banks are once more experiencing difficulties in rolling over maturing bonds. Our findings suggest that both types of balance-sheet shocks will translate into substantial reductions in cross-border lending, hurting smaller companies with few alternative funding options in particular.

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