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Macroeconomic Uncertainty and Firm Leverage

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Abstract

This paper investigates the link between the optimal level of nonfinancial firms’ leverage and macroeconomic uncertainty. We develop a structural model of a firm’s value maximization problem that predicts that as macroeconomic uncertainty increases the firm will decrease its optimal level of borrowing. We test this proposition using a panel of non–financial US firms drawn from the COMPUSTAT quarterly database covering the period 1991–2001. The estimates confirm that as macroeconomic uncertainty increases, firms decrease their levels of leverage. Furthermore, we demonstrate that our results are robust with respect to the inclusion of the index of leading indicators.

Keywords: leverage, uncertainty, non–financial firms, panel data.

JEL classification: C23, D8, D92, G32.

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1 Introduction

“WASHINGTON, March 12 (Reuters) — Newell Rubbermaid Inc. (NYSE:NWL — News), a household and business products maker, on Wednesday filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission (News – Websites) to periodically sell up to $1 billion in debt securities ... company said the net proceeds of the sale would be used for general corporate purposes. These could include additions to working capital, repayment of existing debt and acquisitions, according to the shelf registration filing. Under such a filing, a company may sell securities from time to time in one or more offerings, with amounts, prices and terms determined at the time of sale.”¹

As all these changes in debt affect the leverage level, it is important to understand the driving factors leading to this variation. For this purpose one has to study the indicators that influence the “underwriters” advice with respect to the best timing for issuing debt. The motivation for this research is further illustrated by the amount of issued debt taking place nowadays. For example on March 12, 2003 Reuters informed about twelve more different debt issues, including Moore North America ($400 mln), Citigroup ($1.5 bln), Bank of America ($295 mln), Shaw Group ($253 mln), Comcast ($1.5 bln), Eli Lilly ($500 mln), Hanson Australia Funding ($600 mln), Unisys Corp ($300 mln).²

The most common purposes for borrowing are capital investment and existing debt repayment. However, some corporations change the amount of debt they issue just before the official announcement. For instance, both Citigroup and Comcast originally planned to sell $1.0 billion notes each. Therefore, we intend to shed some light on the issue why firms change their decisions about initial offerings.

The determinants of capital structure have always attracted a lot of attention in

¹Citation: Yahoo! Bond Center: Latest Bond Market News, 12 March 2003, http://biz.yahoo.com/n/z/z0400.html?htime=1047576818
²Ibid.
the literature. In their seminal work, Modigliani & Miller (1958) derived the theoretical result that under the assumption of perfect capital markets, financial and real variables are irrelevant for a firm’s capital structure. However, recent empirical research provides contrary evidence. For instance, a vast number of studies show a positive relationship between liquid asset holdings and firms’ investment decisions. Other studies show that firm leverage depends on firm-specific characteristics such as cash holdings, total assets, and the investment–to–capital ratio. However, empirical evidence on the interaction of macroeconomic level variables and capital structure indicators is rather scarce. As an exception, Baum, Caglayan, Ozkan & Talavera (2002) find a negative relationship between macroeconomic uncertainty and cross-sectional distribution of cash–to–asset ratios for US non–financial firms. Hence, their study supports the view that macroeconomic uncertainty is an important factor of firms’ decision–making. By furthering this idea, we intend to contribute to the literature on corporate debt by analyzing the impact of macroeconomic uncertainty on the optimal level of leverage.

We formulate a dynamic stochastic partial equilibrium model of a representative firm’s value optimization problem. The model is based upon a empirically testable hypothesis regarding the association between optimal level of debt and uncertainty. The model predicts that an increase in money growth uncertainty or inflation uncertainty leads to a decrease in leverage. In times of greater macroeconomic uncertainty companies will issue less debt.

For testing this prediction we utilize an unbalanced panel of non–financial firms’ data obtained from the quarterly COMPUSTAT database over the 1991–2001 period. After some screening procedures it includes more than 30,000 manufacturing firm–

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3See for example Gilchrist & Himmelberg (1998); Fazzari, Hubbard & Petersen (1988).
4See Shueterim, Lowe & Morling (1993); Auerbach (1985); Weill (2001).
5One “natural” extension would be to examine the effect of idiosyncratic firm–specific uncertainty on leverage. However, such an analysis would be beyond the scope of this paper.
year observations, with about 700 firms per quarter. We also consider a sample split, defining categories of durable–goods makers vs. non–durable goods makers. We apply the Arellano & Bond (1991) dynamic panel data approach.

Our main findings can be summarized as follows. We find evidence of a negative association between the optimal level of debt and macroeconomic uncertainty as proxied by either the conditional variance of money growth or the conditional variance of industrial production. Moreover, leverage levels of durable–goods makers are more sensitive to changes in monetary policy than those of non–durable goods makers. The results turn out to be robust to the inclusion of the index of leading indicators.

These results provide useful insights into corporate capital structure decisions. Changes in macroeconomic uncertainty, partially influenced by monetary policy, will not only affect firms’ leverage but also their costs of obtaining external finance, and in turn their investment dynamics. Moreover, monetary policy will have an effect on the discount rates of investment projects. Therefore, our results suggest that the transmission mechanism of monetary policy is much more complicated than formulated in standard models which ignore the interaction of real and financial variables’ first and second moments.

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents a simple value maximization model for a representative firm. Section 3 describes the data and discuss our results. Finally, Section 4 concludes and gives suggestions for further research.

2 The $Q$ Model of Firm Value Optimization

2.1 Model Setup

The theoretical model proposed in this paper is based on the firm value optimization problem and represents a generalization of the standard $Q$ models of investment
by Gilchrist & Himmelberg (1998), Love (2003) and Hubbard & Kashyap (1992). The present value of the firm is set equal to the expected discounted stream of $D_t$, dividends paid to shareholders, where $\beta$ is the discount factor.

\[
V_t(K_t) = \max_{(I_{t+s}, B_{t+s+1})_{s=0}^\infty} D_t + E_t \left[ \sum_{s=1}^\infty \beta^{t+s} D_{t+s} \right],
\]

(1)

\[
K_{t+1} = (1 - \delta)K_t + I_t,
\]

\[
D_t = \Pi(K_t, \xi_t) - C(I_t, K_t, \varepsilon_t) - I_t + B_{t+1} - (1 + r_t)(1 + \eta(B_t, K_t, \nu_t))B_t,
\]

\[
D_t \geq 0,
\]

\[
\lim_{T \to \infty} \left[ \prod_{j=t}^{T-1} \beta_j \right] B_T = 0, \forall t
\]

(2)

The firm maximizes equation (1) subject to three constraints. The first is the capital stock accounting identity $K_{t+1} = (1 - \delta)K_t + I_t$, where $K_t$ is the beginning–of–period capital stock, $I_t$ is investment expenditures, and $\delta$ is the rate of capital depreciation. The second constraint defines firm dividends, where $\Pi(K_t, \xi_t)$ denotes the maximized value of current profits taking as giving the beginning–of–period capital stock, and $\xi_t$ is a profitability shock. $C(I_t, K_t, \varepsilon_t)$ is the real cost of adjusting $I_t$ units of capital. Note that $\varepsilon$ is a shock that occurs between periods $t-1$ and $t$ and it is assumed to be independent of firm–specific variables. We incorporate financial frictions assuming that risk–neutral shareholders require an external premium, $\eta(B_t, K_t, \nu_t)$, which depends on firm–specific characteristics such as debt and capital stock. Similar to Gilchrist & Himmelberg (1998), we also assume $\partial \eta / \partial B_t > 0$: i.e., highly indebted firms have to pay an additional premium to compensate debt–holders for additional costs because of monitoring or hazard problems. Moreover, $\partial \eta / \partial K_t < 0$: i.e., large firms enjoy a lower risk premium. The gross interest rate is equal to $(1 + r_t)(1 + \eta(B_t, K_t, \xi_t))$, where $r_t$ is the risk–free rate of return. Finally, $B_t$ denotes financial liabilities of the firm.
Financial frictions are also introduced through the non–negativity constraint for dividends, $D_t \geq 0$ and the corresponding Lagrange multiplier $\lambda_t$. The $\lambda_t$ can be interpreted as the shadow cost of internally generated funds. The last equation (2) is the transversality condition, which prevents the firm from borrowing an infinite amount and paying it out as dividends.

Solving the optimization problem we derive the following Euler equation for investment:

$$
\frac{\partial C_t}{\partial I_t} + 1 = E_t \left[ \beta \Theta_t \left( \frac{\partial \Pi_{t+1}}{\partial K_{t+1}} + (1 - \delta) \left( \frac{\partial C_{t+1}}{\partial I_{t+1}} + 1 \right) - (1 + r_{t+1}) \frac{\partial \eta_{t+1}}{\partial K_{t+1}} B_{t+1} \right) \right]
$$

Note that $\Theta_t = \frac{(1 + \lambda_{t+1})}{1 + \lambda_t}$. Expression $\beta \Theta_t$ may serve as a stochastic time-varying discount factor which is equal to $\beta$ in the absence of financial constraints ($\lambda_{t+1} = \lambda_t$).

Equation (3) relates the optimal level of debt, $B_{t+1}$, with the marginal profit of capital, $\partial \Pi(K_{t+1}, \xi_{t+1})/\partial K_{t+1}$, the marginal adjustment cost of investment, $\partial C(I_t, K_t)/\partial I_t$, the expected marginal adjustment cost in period $t+1$, $\partial C(I_{t+1}, K_{t+1})/\partial I_{t+1}$, and the relative shadow cost of external financing in periods $t$ and $t+1$.

From the first-order conditions for debt we derive:

$$
E_t \left[ \beta \Theta_t (1 + r_{t+1}) \left( 1 + \eta_{t+1} + \frac{\partial \eta_{t+1}}{\partial B_{t+1}} B_{t+1} \right) \right] = 1.
$$

In the steady state $\beta (1 + r_{t+1}) \Theta_t = \beta (1 + r_{t+1}) = 1$, which implies that $\eta_{t+1} + \frac{\partial \eta_{t+1}}{\partial B_{t+1}} B_{t+1} = 0$. Since we assume $\frac{\partial \eta_{t+1}}{\partial B_{t+1}} > 0$, $B_t$ is guaranteed to be positive only if $\eta_{t+1} < 0$. Gilchrist & Himmelberg (1998) suggest that the risk premium may be negative if $\eta$ is considered as net of tax advantages or agency benefits.

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6For simplicity, we ignore the derivative of the investment adjustment cost function with respect to the capital stock, $\frac{\partial C}{\partial K_t}$. In our data the mean of $\frac{I_t}{K_t} = 0.04$, and the squared term will be 0.0016 which $\frac{\partial C}{\partial K_t} = \left( \frac{I_t}{K_t} \right)^2$. Therefore, its effect is unimportant.
Our parametrization approach roughly follows Love (2003) and Gilchrist & Himmelberg (1998). The level of financing constraint for a representative firm \( i \), \( \Theta_{it} \), is a function of their stock of cash and level of debt:

\[
\Theta_{it} = a_0 + a_1 \frac{\text{Cash}_{it}}{K_{it}} + a_2 \frac{B_{it}}{K_{it}}
\]

(5)

where \( \frac{\text{Cash}_{it}}{K_{it}} \) is the cash-to-total assets ratio, \( \frac{B_{it}}{K_{it}} \) is the debt level and \( a_0 \) is a firm-specific indicator of financial constraints. Debt generates interest and principal obligations and increases probability of financial distress, while the availability of liquid assets decreases the external finance constraint (see also Hubbard, Kashyap & Whited (1995); Almeida, Campello & Weisbach (2004)). Therefore, the ratio \( \frac{a_2}{a_1} \) is expected to be negative, and its value may be either greater or lesser than unity depending on whether the source of financial constraints are existing debt or liquidity problems.

We utilize a traditional adjustment cost function given by

\[
C(I_t, K_t) = \alpha \left( \frac{I_t}{K_t} - \nu_i \right)^2 K_t.
\]

The parameter \( \nu_i \) might be interpreted as a firm-specific optimal level of investment. The marginal adjustment cost of investment is given by:

\[
\frac{\partial C_t}{\partial I_t} = \alpha \left( \frac{I_t}{K_t} - \nu_i \right)
\]

(6)

In order to introduce macroeconomic uncertainty into the model, we parameterize expected adjustment cost \( E_t C(I_{t+1}, K_{t+1}) = E_t \left\{ \frac{a}{2} \left( \frac{I_{t+1}}{K_{t+1}} - \nu_i \right)^2 K_{t+1} \right\} = E_t \left\{ \frac{a}{2} \left( \frac{I_{t+1}}{K_{t+1}} - \nu_i \right)^2 \right\} K_{t+1} + \frac{\alpha b^2}{2} E_t \left\{ \varepsilon_{t+1}^2 \right\} I_{t+1} \right\}
\]

where \( \varepsilon_{t+1} \) is a macroeconomic shock independent of \( \frac{I_{t+1}}{K_{t+1}} \) and \( \nu_i \). \( E_t \left\{ \varepsilon_{t+1}^2 \right\} \) could be written as \( E_t \left\{ \varepsilon_{t+1}^2 \right\} = \tau_t \). Then the expected marginal adjustment cost is:

\[
E_t \left\{ \frac{\partial C_{t+1}}{\partial I_{t+1}} \right\} = \alpha \left( E_t \left\{ \frac{I_{t+1}}{K_{t+1}} \right\} - \nu_i \right) + \frac{\alpha b^2 \tau_t}{2}
\]

(7)
The marginal profit of capital is parameterized using a sales–based measure

\[ \frac{\partial \Pi}{\partial K} = \theta \frac{S}{K} \]  

where \( S \) is the firm’s sales, \( K \) is the capital stock, \( \theta = \frac{\alpha_k}{\mu} \), \( \alpha_k \) is the capital share in the Cobb–Douglas production function specification and \( \mu \) is the markup (defined as \( 1/(1+\kappa^{-1}) \), where \( \kappa \) is the firm–level price elasticity of demand).

Finally, we linearize the product of \( \beta_t \), \( \Theta_t \) and \( A_t \), where \( A_t = \frac{\partial \Pi_{t+1}}{\partial K_{t+1}} + (1 - \delta) \left( \frac{\partial C_{t+1}}{\partial t_{t+1}} + 1 \right) - (1 + r_{t+1}) \frac{\partial \eta_{t+1}}{\partial K_{t+1}} B_{t+1} \). We utilize a first–order Taylor approximation around the means. Ignoring constant terms, the approximation is equal to:

\[ \beta_t \Theta_t A_t = \bar{\beta} \gamma \Theta_t + \bar{\beta} A_t + \gamma \beta_t \]  

where \( \bar{\beta} \) is the average discount factor and \( \gamma \) denotes the unconditional mean of \( A_t \). We assume rational expectations in order to replace expected with realized values plus a firm–specific error term, \( e_t \), assumed to be orthogonal to the information set available at the time when optimal investment and borrowing are chosen. Our final model specification takes the form

\[ \frac{B_{it}}{TA_{it}} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \frac{B_{it-1}}{TA_{it-1}} + \beta_2 \frac{Cash_{it}}{TA_{it}} + \beta_3 \frac{S_{it}}{TA_{it}} + \beta_4 \frac{I_{it+1}}{TA_{it+1}} + \beta_5 \frac{I_{it}}{TA_{it}} + \beta_6 \tau_{t-1} + f_i + Ind_i + e_{it} \]  

where the parameters are defined as

\[ \text{The discussion in Gilchrist & Himmelberg (1998) suggests that a sales–based measure of the marginal profit of capital is more desirable comparing to operating income measure.} \]

\[ \text{The level of the capital stock } K \text{ is proxied by total assets, } TA. \text{ Moreover, we scaled debt by total assets in order to decrease the effect of heteroscedasticity, and changed time indices for } B/TA_{t+1}, \text{ which is determined at time } t. \]

\[ \text{We assume that in equilibrium } \bar{\beta}(1 + r_{t+1}) = 1. \]
\[ \beta_1 = \frac{\overline{\beta} \gamma a_2}{d}, \beta_2 = \frac{\overline{\beta} \gamma a_1}{d}, \beta_3 = \frac{\overline{\beta} \theta}{d}, \]
\[ \beta_4 = \frac{\overline{\beta}(1 - \delta) \alpha}{d}, \beta_5 = -\frac{\alpha}{d}, \beta_6 = \frac{\overline{\beta}(1 - \delta) \alpha b^2}{2d} \]

In our notation, 
\[ d = \left( \frac{\partial \eta_{t+1}}{\partial K_{t+1}} \right)^{-1} < 0, \]
\[ f_i \text{ is a firm-specific fixed effect which is a function of } a_{0i} \text{ and } \nu_i. \]
Moreover, we control for industry specific effect using industry dummies \( \text{Ind}_i \).

Since COMPUSTAT gives end–of–period values for firms, we include lagged proxies for uncertainty in the regressions instead of contemporaneous proxies. Thus, we can say that recently–experienced volatility will affect firms’ behavior. The main hypothesis of our paper can be stated as:

\[ H_0 : \beta_6 < 0 \]

That is, macroeconomic uncertainty affects optimal level of leverage and this effect is negative. In other words, when firms anticipate “bad times” then they carry a lower level of debt. Our model specification also predicts that \( \beta_3 < 0 \) and \( \beta_4 < 0 \). The optimal level of firm leverage increases in response to a decrease in liquid assets or sales. Moreover, given the existence of multi–period liabilities, we expect to find persistence in the leverage ratio, \( \beta_1 > 0 \).

### 2.2 Identifying Macroeconomic Uncertainty

The macroeconomic uncertainty identification approach resembles that of Baum et al. (2002). Firms’ debt decisions depend on anticipation of future profits and investments. The difficulty of evaluating the optimal amount of debt issuing increases with the level of macroeconomic uncertainty.

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\(^{10}\)The firm–specific effect is equal to \( f_i = (1 - \overline{\beta}(1 - \delta)) a \nu_i + \overline{\beta} a_{0i} \).

\(^{11}\)In our analysis we also employ the lagged value of the detrended index of leading indicators as a control variable.
The literature suggests candidates for macroeconomic uncertainty proxies such as moving standard deviation (see Ghosal & Loungani (2000)), standard deviation across 12 forecasting terms of the output growth and inflation rate in the next 12 month (see Driver & Moreton (1991)). However, as in Driver, Temple & Urga (2002) and Byrne & Davis (2002) we use a GARCH model for measuring macroeconomic uncertainty. We argue that this approach is better suited in our case because disagreement among forecasters may not a valid uncertainty measure and it may contain measurement errors.

Two proxies for macroeconomic uncertainty are derived: first, the conditional variance of money growth, which is a measure influenced by monetary policymakers. As an alternative we employ the conditional variance of the detrended log of industrial production to capture the uncertainty emerging from the real economy.\(^{12}\) We employ arithmetic weighted lags of the conditional variances of money growth \((WCV_{MON})\) and industrial production \((WCV_{IP})\), respectively.\(^{13}\) This approach allows us to capture the combined effects of contemporaneous and lagged levels of uncertainty.\(^{14}\)

We draw our series for measuring macroeconomic uncertainty from monthly real monetary base (DRI series \(FMBASE\)) and from industrial production (International Financial Statistics series \(64IZF\)). For each of these cases we build a generalized ARCH \((GARCH(2,1))\) model for the series, where the mean equation is an autoregression. Details of the estimated model are described in Table 1. We have significant ARCH and GARCH coefficients for both time series. The conditional variances derived from these GARCH models are averaged to the quarterly frequency and then used.

\(^{12}\)We regress \(\log(I_{t})\) on trend and constant. The generated residuals from this equation are used as the detrended log of industrial production.

\(^{13}\)The weights are 0.4, 0.3, 0.2, and 0.1 corresponding to \(\sigma_{t-1}^{2}, \sigma_{t-2}^{2}, \sigma_{t-3}^{2}\) and \(\sigma_{t-4}^{2}\) respectively.

\(^{14}\)We also employed a single lagged value of conditional variance of industrial production and money growth and received quantitatively similar results.
3 Empirical Implementation

3.1 Dataset

We work with the COMPUSTAT Quarterly database of U.S. firms. The initial databases include 173,505 firms’ quarterly characteristics over 1991-2001. The firms are classified by two-digit Standard Industrial Classification (SIC). The main advantage of the dataset is that it contains detailed balance sheet information. However, one potential shortcoming of the data is the significant over-representation of large companies.

We also apply a few sample selection criteria to the original sample. First, we set all negative values for all variables in the sample as missing. Second, we set observations as missing if the values of ratio variables are lower than 1st percentile or higher than 99th percentile. We decided to use the screened data to reduce the potential impact of outliers upon the parameter estimates. After the screening and including only manufacturing sector firms we obtain on average 700 firms’ quarterly characteristics.

In order to construct firm-specific variables we utilize COMPUSTAT data items Long-term debt (data9 item) and Total Assets (data6 item) for leverage ratio, Cash and Short-Term Investments (data1 item), Capital Expenditures (data90 item), Sales (data12 item) for Cash-to-Asset ratio (Cash/TA), Investment-to-Asset ratio (I/TA) and Sales-to-Asset ratio (S/TA).

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for the firm specific variables. The median long-term debt as a percentage of total assets is 19% compared to the mean of 21%.

We subdivide the data of manufacturing-sector firms (two-digit SIC 20–39) into producers of durable goods and producers of non-durable goods on the basis of SIC firms’ codes. A firm is considered DURABLE if its primary SIC is 24, 25, 32–39.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{15}These industries include lumber and wood products, furniture, stone, clay, and glass products, primary and fabricated metal products, industrial machinery, electronic equipment, transportation
SIC classifications for NON–DURABLE industries are 20–23 or 26–31. As a control variable, we also use the detrended index of leading indicators \((Leading_t)\). It is computed from DRI-McGraw Hill Basic Economics series DLEAD. In order to detrend we regress the index on trend and constant and generated residuals consider as a detrended index.

3.2 Empirical results

In this section we present the estimation results on the link between the leverage level of the firm and both firm–specific and macroeconomic variables. Based on the predictions of the dynamic stochastic partial equilibrium model, we hypothesize that non-financial firms decrease the level debt as uncertainty increases.

The results of estimating Equation (11) are given in Tables 3, 4 and 5 for all manufacturing firms, durable–goods makers and non–durable goods makers respectively. Column (1) of Table 3 represents the Arellano–Bond one–step GMM estimator with weighted conditional variance of industrial production and weighted conditional variance of money growth as proxies for macroeconomic uncertainty. Column (2) contain results from the two–step GMM estimator. We include the detrended index of leading indicators \((Leading_{t-1})\) in order to control for the macroeconomic environment. The models are estimated using an orthogonal transformation instrumented by all available moment restrictions starting from \((t − 2)\). As instruments we use \(B/TA_{t-2}\) to \(B/TA_{t-7}\), \(CASH/TA_{t-2}\) to \(CASH/TA_{t-7}\), \(I/TA_{t-2}\) to \(I/TA_{t-7}\), and \(S/TA_{t-2}\) to \(S/TA_{t-7}\).

\[x_{i,t} = \left( x_{i,t} - \frac{x_{i(t+1)} + \ldots + x_{iT}}{T - t} \right) \left( \frac{T - t}{T - t + 1} \right)^{1/2}\]

where the transformed variable does not depend on its lagged values.

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16 These industries include food, tobacco, textiles, apparel, paper products, printing and publishing, chemicals, petroleum and coal products, rubber and plastics, and leather products makers.

17 The orthogonal transformation uses
Columns (3) and (4) include one–step and two–step system GMM results with the same proxies for macroeconomic uncertainty. In addition to instruments for transformed equations \((B/K)_{t-2} \text{ to } B/TA_{t-7}, \text{ CASH/TA}_{t-2} \text{ to } CASH/TA_{t-7}, I/TA_{t-2} \text{ to } I/TA_{t-7}, S/TA_{t-2} \text{ to } S/TA_{t-7}\) we also use instruments for level equations \((\Delta S/TA_{t-1} \text{ to } \Delta S/TA_{t-2}, \Delta \text{ CASH/TA}_{t-1} \text{ to } \Delta \text{ CASH/TA}_{t-2}, \text{ and } \Delta I/TA_{t-1} \text{ to } \Delta I/TA_{t-2}).\) All regressions include a constant and industry dummies. Moreover, two–step results are estimated using (Windmeijer 2000) finite sample correction.

The Sargan test results for one–step DPD estimates are not successful. However, Sargan test has an asymptotic chi–squared distribution only in the case of homoscedastic error terms. In order to correctly interpret the results coming from the Sargan test, it is imported to understand the reason why the null hypothesis of correct specification of the model may be rejected.\(^\text{18}\) The validity of instruments is checked using two–step results, and we cannot reject the validity of overidentifying restrictions.

Our main finding is that there is a negative and significant relationship between leverage and macroeconomic uncertainty. The coefficients for the uncertainty variables takes values from -0.0305 to -0.0458 for industrial production proxy and from -0.0632 to -0.0663 for money growth proxy respectively.

The results also suggest significant positive persistence in leverage ratio \((0.8261 \text{ – } 0.9283).\) The coefficients for \(\text{Cash/TA}_t\) and \(\text{Sale/TA}_t\) ratios are negative and significant and correspond to our model predictions. The coefficients are marginally significant for \(I/TA_{t+1}\). However, the coefficient for \(I/TA_t\) is perversely signed, but weakly significant. Finally, overall “economic health” denoted by the index of leading indicators positively affects the leverage ratio of US non–financial firms.

We receive an interesting contrast in results for durable good makers and non–durable goods makers reported in Tables 4 and 5. Durable goods makers exhibit

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\(^\text{18}\) Arellano & Bond (1991) mention that the Sargan test on the one–step estimation often leads to rejection the null hypothesis that the overidentifying restrictions are valid.
negative significant effects for macroeconomic uncertainty proxied by weighted conditional variance of money growth. The coefficient for durable good makers is larger in absolute value coefficients than those estimated for all firms. As these companies have larger inventories of work in progress and have longer production cycle they are more sensitive to volatility in monetary policy, including money growth. At the same time, they are not affected by uncertainty from industrial production side, while non–durable goods makers are mostly affected by this type of uncertainty only.

The results for firm–specific variables for durable/non–durable goods–makers follow the pattern of all firms sample. The puzzle of significance of negative coefficient for $I/TA_t$ still exists for durable goods–makers but disappears when we use data for non–durable goods–makers.

In summary, we find strong support for our hypothesis (11). Firms decrease their borrowing in more uncertain times. The results differ for durable good makers and non–durable manufacturers. When the macroeconomic environment becomes more uncertain companies become more cautious and borrow less, even when they might expect to face decreased revenues and potential cashflow shortages. Note that these results confirm the results regarding the impact of uncertainty on investment reported in Bloom, Bond & Reenen (2001).

4 Conclusions

This paper investigates the relationship between leverage of manufacturing firms and macroeconomic uncertainty using quarterly COMPUSTAT data. Based on the theoretical predictions developed using the well-established $Q$ model of investment, we anticipate that firms decrease their use of debt when macroeconomic uncertainty increases. In order to empirically test our model we employ dynamic panel data methodology. The results suggest negative and significant effects of macroeconomic uncertainty on leverage for US non–financial firms during 1991–2001.
There are significant differences in results for durable good makers and non-durable goods manufacturers. The former exhibit a larger sensitivity to macroeconomic uncertainty reflected by money growth, while the latter reacted more vigorously to changes in industrial production volatility. Our results are shown to be robust to inclusion of the index of leading indicators.

From the policy perspective, we suggest that macroeconomic uncertainty has an effect on nonfinancial firms' capital structure which in turn affects their dynamics of investment. Other studies (see Bernanke & Gertler (1989)) have shown that balance sheet shocks may affect the amplitude of investment cycle in a simple neoclassical model. Moreover, in many countries monetary policy tends to be persistent in the direction of change of the monetary instrument, with rare reversals (perhaps reflecting central banks' interest rate smoothing objectives). Therefore, firms' sensitivity to macroeconomic uncertainty should be taken into account if any more activist monetary actions are contemplated.
References


Appendix A: Construction of leverage, macroeconomic and firm specific measures

The following variables are used in the quarterly empirical study.

\textit{From the COMPUSTAT database:}
\begin{itemize}
  \item DATA1: Cash and Short–Term Investments
  \item DATA6: Total Assets
  \item DATA9: Long-Term Debt
  \item DATA12: Sales
  \item DATA90: Capital Expenditures
\end{itemize}

\textit{From International Financial Statistics:}
\begin{itemize}
  \item 64IZF: Industrial Production monthly
\end{itemize}

\textit{From the DRI–McGraw Hill Basic Economics database:}
\begin{itemize}
  \item DLEAD: index of leading indicators
  \item FMBASE: real monetary base
\end{itemize}
Table 1: GARCH (2,1) proxies for macroeconomic uncertainty.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>log($IP_t$)</th>
<th>$MON_t$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>log($IP_{t-1}$)</td>
<td>0.9812***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0099]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$MON_{t-1}$</td>
<td>1.0172***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0026]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0006</td>
<td>0.0002*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0006]</td>
<td>[0.0001]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AR(1)</td>
<td>0.8076***</td>
<td>0.0030</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0680]</td>
<td>[0.0278]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA(1)</td>
<td>-0.5904***</td>
<td>-0.9779***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0968]</td>
<td>[0.0038]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCH(1)</td>
<td>0.2915***</td>
<td>1.0512***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0542]</td>
<td>[0.0377]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARCH(2)</td>
<td>-0.2039***</td>
<td>-0.9973***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0497]</td>
<td>[0.0361]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GARCH(1)</td>
<td>0.8888***</td>
<td>0.9717***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0305]</td>
<td>[0.9717]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>0.0000**</td>
<td>-0.0000*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0000]</td>
<td>[0.0000]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Observations 535 677

Note: Models fit to detrended log($\text{Industrial production}$) and to money growth. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.
Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All firms</th>
<th>μ</th>
<th>σ²</th>
<th>p25</th>
<th>p50</th>
<th>p75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( B_t ) / TA_t</td>
<td>0.2140</td>
<td>0.0258</td>
<td>0.0872</td>
<td>0.1896</td>
<td>0.3083</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( I_t ) / TA_t</td>
<td>0.0372</td>
<td>0.0357</td>
<td>0.0131</td>
<td>0.0269</td>
<td>0.0495</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash / TA_t</td>
<td>0.0747</td>
<td>0.0097</td>
<td>0.0117</td>
<td>0.0329</td>
<td>0.0969</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St / TA_t</td>
<td>0.3064</td>
<td>0.0211</td>
<td>0.2117</td>
<td>0.2832</td>
<td>0.3721</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Durable</th>
<th>μ</th>
<th>σ²</th>
<th>p25</th>
<th>p50</th>
<th>p75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( B_t ) / TA_t</td>
<td>0.2047</td>
<td>0.0252</td>
<td>0.0792</td>
<td>0.1771</td>
<td>0.2969</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( I_t ) / TA_t</td>
<td>0.0360</td>
<td>0.0355</td>
<td>0.0126</td>
<td>0.0258</td>
<td>0.0472</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash / TA_t</td>
<td>0.0797</td>
<td>0.0102</td>
<td>0.0136</td>
<td>0.0376</td>
<td>0.1054</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St / TA_t</td>
<td>0.0205</td>
<td>0.0211</td>
<td>0.2177</td>
<td>0.2881</td>
<td>0.3734</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Non–Durable</th>
<th>μ</th>
<th>σ²</th>
<th>p25</th>
<th>p50</th>
<th>p75</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>( B_t ) / TA_t</td>
<td>0.2268</td>
<td>0.0264</td>
<td>0.1017</td>
<td>0.2059</td>
<td>0.3215</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>( I_t ) / TA_t</td>
<td>0.0387</td>
<td>0.0359</td>
<td>0.0139</td>
<td>0.0285</td>
<td>0.0524</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash / TA_t</td>
<td>0.0676</td>
<td>0.0090</td>
<td>0.0098</td>
<td>0.0275</td>
<td>0.0873</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St / TA_t</td>
<td>0.2995</td>
<td>0.0217</td>
<td>0.2023</td>
<td>0.2763</td>
<td>0.3693</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: p25, p50 and p75 represent the quartiles of the distribution, while σ² and μ represent its variance and mean respectively.
Table 3: Determinants of Leverage: All Firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>GMM 1-Step</th>
<th>GMM 2-step</th>
<th>GMM-System 1-step</th>
<th>GMM-System 2-step</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$B/TA_{t-1}$</td>
<td>0.8261***</td>
<td>0.8261***</td>
<td>0.9274***</td>
<td>0.9283***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0166]</td>
<td>[0.0166]</td>
<td>[0.0054]</td>
<td>[0.0054]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$C/TA_t$</td>
<td>-0.0744***</td>
<td>-0.0739***</td>
<td>-0.0480***</td>
<td>-0.0478***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0101]</td>
<td>[0.0101]</td>
<td>[0.0055]</td>
<td>[0.0055]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I/TA_t$</td>
<td>-0.0286*</td>
<td>-0.0283*</td>
<td>-0.0186</td>
<td>-0.0189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0162]</td>
<td>[0.0162]</td>
<td>[0.0148]</td>
<td>[0.0147]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I/TA_{t+1}$</td>
<td>-0.0205</td>
<td>-0.0206</td>
<td>0.00766</td>
<td>0.00718</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0138]</td>
<td>[0.0136]</td>
<td>[0.0138]</td>
<td>[0.0138]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S/TA_t$</td>
<td>-0.0864***</td>
<td>-0.0865***</td>
<td>-0.0418***</td>
<td>-0.0411***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0089]</td>
<td>[0.0089]</td>
<td>[0.0039]</td>
<td>[0.0040]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$CV_{MON, t-1}$</td>
<td>-0.0644***</td>
<td>-0.0632***</td>
<td>-0.0663***</td>
<td>-0.0628***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0173]</td>
<td>[0.0172]</td>
<td>[0.0159]</td>
<td>[0.0158]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$CV_{JP, t-1}$</td>
<td>-0.0321**</td>
<td>-0.0305**</td>
<td>-0.0458***</td>
<td>-0.0423***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0150]</td>
<td>[0.0148]</td>
<td>[0.0145]</td>
<td>[0.0144]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading$ _{t-1}$</td>
<td>0.0008***</td>
<td>0.0007***</td>
<td>0.0009***</td>
<td>0.0008***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0002]</td>
<td>[0.0002]</td>
<td>[0.0001]</td>
<td>[0.0001]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sargan 0.000 0.384 0.000 0.999

Note: Every equation includes constant and industry dummy variables. Asymptotic robust standard errors are reported in the brackets. Estimation by GMM using DPD package for OX. "Sargan" is a Sargan–Hansen test of overidentifying restrictions (p-value reported). "LM (k)" is the test for k-th order autocorrelation. Instruments for GMM estimations are $B/TA_{t-2}$ to $B/TA_{t-7}$, $CASH/TA_{t-2}$ to $CASH/TA_{t-7}$, $I/TA_{t-2}$ to $I/TA_{t-7}$, and $S/TA_{t-2}$ to $S/TA_{t-7}$. Instruments for GMM-SYSTEM estimations are $B/K_{t-2}$ to $B/TA_{t-7}$, $CASH/TA_{t-2}$ to $CASH/TA_{t-7}$, $I/TA_{t-2}$ to $I/TA_{t-7}$, $S/TA_{t-2}$ to $S/TA_{t-7}$ and $\Delta S/TA_{t-1}$ to $\Delta S/TA_{t-2}$, $\Delta CASH/TA_{t-1}$ to $\Delta CASH/TA_{t-2}$, and $\Delta I/TA_{t-1}$ to $\Delta I/TA_{t-2}$.* significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.
Table 4: Determinants of Leverage: Durable goods–makers Firms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>GMM</th>
<th>GMM-System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1-Step</td>
<td>2-step</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$B/TA_{t-1}$</td>
<td>0.8174***</td>
<td>0.8182***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0222]</td>
<td>[0.0219]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$C/TA_t$</td>
<td>-0.0775***</td>
<td>-0.0725***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0141]</td>
<td>[0.0131]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I/TA_t$</td>
<td>-0.0660***</td>
<td>-0.0555**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0242]</td>
<td>[0.0233]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I/TA_{t+1}$</td>
<td>-0.0286</td>
<td>-0.0301*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0191]</td>
<td>[0.0180]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S/TA_t$</td>
<td>-0.1047***</td>
<td>-0.1021***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0126]</td>
<td>[0.0123]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$CV_{MON_{t-1}}$</td>
<td>-0.0812***</td>
<td>-0.0672**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0224]</td>
<td>[0.0219]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$CV_{JP_{t-1}}$</td>
<td>-0.0232</td>
<td>-0.0166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0206]</td>
<td>[0.0196]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading_{t-1}</td>
<td>0.0008**</td>
<td>0.0006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0004]</td>
<td>[0.0003]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sargan | 0.000 | 0.282 | 0.000 | 0.982 |

df | 443 | 443 | 607 | 607 |


LM(2) | 0.7790 | 0.7777 | 0.7816 | 0.7758 |

N. Obs | 14176 | 14176 | 14731 | 14731 |

Note: Every equation includes constant and industry dummy variables. Asymptotic robust standard errors are reported in the brackets. Estimation by GMM using DPD package for OX. “Sargan” is a Sargan–Hansen test of overidentifying restrictions (p-value reported). “LM (k)” is the test for k-th order autocorrelation. Instruments for GMM estimations are $B/TA_{t-2}$ to $B/TA_{t-4}$, $CASH/TA_{t-2}$ to $CASH/TA_{t-4}$, $I/TA_{t-2}$ to $I/TA_{t-4}$, and $S/TA_{t-2}$ to $S/TA_{t-4}$. Instruments for GMM-SYSTEM estimations are $B/K_{t-2}$ to $B/TA_{t-4}$, $CASH/TA_{t-2}$ to $CASH/TA_{t-4}$, $I/TA_{t-2}$ to $I/TA_{t-4}$, $S/TA_{t-2}$ to $S/TA_{t-4}$ and $\Delta S/TA_{t-1}$ to $\Delta S/TA_{t-2}$, $\Delta CASH/TA_{t-1}$ to $\Delta CASH/TA_{t-2}$, and $\Delta I/TA_{t-1}$ to $\Delta I/TA_{t-2}$. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%
Table 5: Determinants of Leverage: Non durable goods-makers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>GMM 1-Step</th>
<th>GMM 2-step</th>
<th>GMM-System 1-step</th>
<th>GMM-System 2-step</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$B/TA_{t-1}$</td>
<td>0.8726***</td>
<td>0.8727***</td>
<td>0.9401***</td>
<td>0.9421***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0208]</td>
<td>[0.0203]</td>
<td>[0.0066]</td>
<td>[0.0065]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$C/TA_{t}$</td>
<td>-0.0667***</td>
<td>-0.0619***</td>
<td>-0.0499***</td>
<td>-0.0483***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0129]</td>
<td>[0.0125]</td>
<td>[0.0076]</td>
<td>[0.0078]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I/TA_{t}$</td>
<td>0.0262</td>
<td>0.0221</td>
<td>0.0247</td>
<td>0.0292*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0187]</td>
<td>[0.0177]</td>
<td>[0.0175]</td>
<td>[0.0169]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$I/TA_{t+1}$</td>
<td>0.0061</td>
<td>0.0083</td>
<td>0.0049</td>
<td>0.0038</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0193]</td>
<td>[0.0195]</td>
<td>[0.0184]</td>
<td>[0.0180]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$S/TA_{t}$</td>
<td>-0.0624***</td>
<td>-0.0623***</td>
<td>-0.0329***</td>
<td>-0.0322***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>[0.0112]</td>
<td>[0.0115]</td>
<td>[0.0057]</td>
<td>[0.0057]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$CV_{MON_{t-1}}$</td>
<td>-0.0380</td>
<td>-0.0377</td>
<td>-0.0363</td>
<td>-0.0405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0270]</td>
<td>[0.0242]</td>
<td>[0.0242]</td>
<td>[0.0234]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$CV_{IJP_{t-1}}$</td>
<td>-0.0491**</td>
<td>-0.0489**</td>
<td>-0.0522**</td>
<td>-0.0487**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0211]</td>
<td>[0.0196]</td>
<td>[0.0207]</td>
<td>[0.0201]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leading$_{t-1}$</td>
<td>0.0006</td>
<td>0.0008*</td>
<td>0.0005**</td>
<td>0.0006**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[0.0004]</td>
<td>[0.0004]</td>
<td>[0.0002]</td>
<td>[0.0002]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sargan     0.000     0.358     0.000     1.000
df         295      295       459       459
LM(1)      -10.52*** -9.912*** -10.37*** -10.13***
LM(2)      0.04574   0.04491   0.0456    0.0469
N. Obs     9930      9930      10311     10311

Note: Every equation includes constant and industry dummy variables. Asymptotic robust standard errors are reported in the brackets. Estimation by GMM using DPD package for OX. “Sargan” is a Sargan–Hansen test of overidentifying restrictions (p-value reported). “LM (k)” is the test for k-th order autocorrelation. Instruments for GMM estimations are $B/TA_{t-2}$ to $B/TA_{t-3}$, $CASH/TA_{t-2}$ to $CASH/TA_{t-3}$, $I/TA_{t-2}$ to $I/TA_{t-3}$, and $S/TA_{t-2}$ to $S/TA_{t-3}$. Instruments for GMM-SYSTEM estimations are $B/K_{t-2}$ to $B/TA_{t-3}$, $CASH/TA_{t-2}$ to $CASH/TA_{t-3}$, $I/TA_{t-2}$ to $I/TA_{t-3}$, $S/TA_{t-2}$ to $S/TA_{t-3}$ and ∆$S/TA_{t-1}$ to ∆$S/TA_{t-2}$, ∆$CASH/TA_{t-1}$ to ∆$CASH/TA_{t-2}$, and ∆$I/TA_{t-1}$ to ∆$I/TA_{t-2}$. * significant at 10%; ** significant at 5%; *** significant at 1%.