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Learning and the Effectiveness of Central Bank Forward Guidance

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# Abstract

This paper examines the link between expectations formation and the effectiveness of central bank forward guidance. A standard New Keynesian model is extended to include forward guidance shocks in the monetary policy rule. Agents form expectations about future macro-economic variables via either the standard rational expectations hypothesis or an adaptive learning model. The results show that the assumption of rational expectations overstates the effects of forward guidance relative to adaptive learning during an economic crisis. Thus, if monetary policy is based on a model with rational expectations, the results of forward guidance could be potentially misleading.

# 1. Introduction

Once U.S. short-term interest rates effectively reached the zero lower bound (ZLB) during the 2007–09 global financial crisis, monetary policymakers exhausted the conventional policy tool as overnight interest rates could not be lowered. In response, central banks pursued “unconventional” policies. One of these alternatives pursued by the Federal Reserve was large-scale asset purchases where the central bank purchases longer term securities in hopes of lowering long-term yields. Another unconventional policy was forward guidance, where the central bank communicates to the public information about the future course of the policy rate. Forward guidance has been pursued by central banks such as the Federal Reserve, Bank of Canada, Bank of England, and the European Central Bank. An example of forward guidance was given in the September 2012 Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) statement: “the Committee also … anticipates that exceptionally low levels for the federal funds rate are likely to be warranted at least through mid-2015” (Federal Reserve **2012**). In addition, Eggertsson and Woodford (**2003**) and Woodford (**2012**) argue that committing to an interest rate path that is lower than what one would commit to under normal circumstances (i.e., when overnight interest rates are away from the ZLB) can have additional stimulative economic effects. Standard New Keynesian models (e.g., Woodford **2003**) predict consumption, investment, and pricing decisions are sensitive to the expected path of short term interest rates. If agents expect low interest rates in the future, current consumption and prices all increase. This stimulative effect can be limited by a conventional monetary policy rule that adjusts interest rates in response to target variables, such as the output gap and inflation. Households and firms may rationally expect higher interest rates in response to future expansions. If a forward guidance statement, instead, keeps a low policy rate through part of the expansion, consumption today will not be as limited.

The effectiveness of forward guidance hinges on how private sector expectations about economic state variables (e.g., output and inflation) and interest rates respond to forward guidance. Therefore, it is important to study whether the economic effects of forward guidance are sensitive to the rational expectations assumption that is the standard benchmark in macro-economic models.**1** While a reasonable benchmark that is popular among macro-economic models, rational expectations makes strong assumptions about the amount of knowledge agents possess when forming beliefs. It is natural then to examine how effective forward guidance policies can be under a more plausible theory of expectations formation.

This paper studies the effectiveness of forward guidance in an environment where rational expectations have been replaced by an adaptive learning rule similar to one proposed by Marcet and Sargent (**1989**) and Evans and Honkapohja (**2001**). In particular, the economic environment is based on Preston (**2005**), who derives a New Keynesian model with (potentially) nonrational expectations. Households and firms formulate spending and pricing decisions, respectively, that depend on their subjective expectations about future economic conditions and interest rates. The novelty of this paper is to incorporate policy communication about future interest rates into agents' subjective expectations. The central bank sets interest rates according to a monetary policy rule that responds positively to the output gap and inflation. The rule is augmented with anticipated shocks as in Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson (**2012**) and Laséen and Svensson (**2011**).**2** The anticipated shocks define central bank communication about future deviations from a normal interest rate rule that agents know today. The shocks also represent time-contingent forward guidance in which the central bank communicates a definitive forward guidance end date. In this case, communication about the future path of interest rates is for a fixed amount of periods into the future and is independent of economic conditions.**3**

Agents are assumed to form expectations via either the rational expectations hypothesis or an adaptive learning rule. The former is a strong assumption and assumes agents construct expectations with respect to the true probability distribution of the model. Rational expectations agents must know the model's deep parameters, structure of the model, beliefs of other agents, and distribution of the error terms. A popular alternative to rational expectations is adaptive learning. This approach builds from the cognitive consistency principle that agents behave as real-life economists (see, for instance, Evans and Honkapohja **2013**). An econometrician, for example, would produce forecasts of future economic variables by forming an econometric model. He or she would estimate the parameters using standard econometric techniques. As new data arrive, these forecasts would be revised. Thus, a real-life economist is engaging in a process of learning about the economy. Analogously, adaptive learning agents are assumed to behave as econometricians and formulate forecasts of future endogenous variables using standard econometric techniques. The variables in their econometric model are based on the solution found under rational expectations, but adaptive learning agents estimate the parameters using ordinary least squares. Their beliefs about future endogenous variables are appropriately revised as new data arrive.**4**

The results of this paper show that the desired effect of forward guidance depends on the manner in which agents form their expectations. This outcome is first shown during normal economic times.**5** The impulse responses of the endogenous variables under adaptive learning fail to capture the precise effects a forward guidance shock has on the economy. There exists more persistence in the paths of the output gap and inflation under adaptive learning than rational expectations. Differences also occur when the central bank communicates to both rational expectations and adaptive learning agents the same forward guidance information such that the interest rate will equal 0 for an extended period of time. The output gap and inflation return to long-run equilibrium quicker under rational expectations than adaptive learning. Under adaptive learning, the paths of the output gap and inflation overshoot and undershoot the rational expectations paths. Consequently, there exists larger variation of the paths of the output gap and inflation under adaptive learning than rational expectations. These effects occur because rational expectations agents fully understand the precise and positive effects of forward guidance on the economy. However, adaptive learning agents fail to understand the positive effects and must continually make adjustments to their beliefs causing them to overshoot and undershoot the rational expectations paths of the output gap and inflation.

The effectiveness of forward guidance is also examined under a period of economic crisis (e.g., a recession). The policy experiment includes a scenario where forward guidance is implemented to combat the effects of a downturn in the economy. The results show the effects of forward guidance under rational expectations are overstated relative to adaptive learning. Specifically, the value of the output gap is higher under the assumption of rational expectations than adaptive learning. The reason is that rational expectations agents base their expectations of future values of the endogenous variables on the true model of the economy. They understand the economic downturn and how forward guidance will precisely alleviate the economy. However, adaptive learning agents observe the economic downturn, but fail to fully understand how forward guidance will improve the economy. They are *estimating* the effects of forward guidance on the economy as their forecasts are based on an econometric model.

Overall, the results of the paper suggest a main finding: policymakers should exercise caution when recommending forward guidance policy. If monetary policy is based on a model with the standard rational expectations hypothesis, which assumes agents know the true structure of the model, the results may be misleading relative to a more plausible theory of expectations formation (e.g., adaptive learning). Specifically, during an economic crisis, the predicted effects of forward guidance under the rational expectations assumption are overstated in comparison to adaptive learning.

## Previous Literature.

This paper contributes to the growing literature on unconventional monetary policy. Eggertsson and Woodford (**2003**) explain that the expectations channel plays a key role on the economy when interest rates are at the ZLB and at any level. Specifically, they describe that the future path of short-term interest rates affects long-term interest rates and asset prices, and thus, the management of expectations about future interest rates affects agents' optimal decisions. De Graeve, Ilbas, and Wouters (**2014**) find that the effectiveness of forward guidance does not necessarily work through decreasing the long-run interest rate, contrary to previous studies. The type of forward guidance and lack of information about the underlying reasons for implementing forward guidance (e.g., monetary stimulus or sign of future economic crisis) can dampen the effects of this monetary policy tool. Levin et al. (**2010**) explain that the efficacy of forward guidance can vary with the type of structural shock affecting the economy. In addition, recent literature has found large effects from forward guidance. Carlstrom, Fuerst, and Paustian (**2012**) show that standard New Keynesian models with the interest rate fixed for a finite period of time result in extreme responses of output and inflation. McKay, Nakamura, and Steinsson (**2015**) explain that the extraordinary responses to forward guidance predicted by standard macro-economic models depend on the assumption of complete markets. The effectiveness of forward guidance at the ZLB is reduced when precautionary savings are added into a macro-economic model. Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson (**2012**) construct a Dynamic Stochastic General Equilibrium (DSGE) model with forward guidance, which produces large responses of macro-economic variables to forward guidance. Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson state that the long-term bond yield drives these unusually high responses. As will be discussed in Section **3.3**, this paper suggests that the exceedingly large responses to forward guidance found in the previously mentioned articles could be due to the manner in which expectations are modeled.

The model in this paper utilizes time-contingent forward guidance since there has been recent evidence of its effectiveness. Gürkaynak, Sack, and Swanson (**2005**) find empirical evidence that FOMC statements about the future path of the policy rate greatly contribute to the changes in the long-term interest rates. Swanson and Williams (**2014**) show that Federal Reserve forward guidance announcements affect market expectations about future policy. Woodford (**2012**) also explains that forward guidance has had an impact on market participants. Using overnight interest rate swaps (OIS) to measure market expectations about the policy rate in Canada, Woodford displays that OIS rates immediately changed upon release of the Bank of Canada's forward guidance statement. The work of Chang and Feunou (**2013**) show that the Bank of Canada's forward guidance statement in 2009 had positive effects on the economy by reducing uncertainty about future monetary policy rates. A reduction in interest rate uncertainty can affect levels of investment, output, and unemployment in the economy as described by Baker, Bloom, and Davis (**2016**). Femia, Friedman, and Sack (**2013**) show evidence that financial variables, such as Treasury yields and equity prices, reacted favorably to the Federal Reserve's time-contingent forward guidance  announcements.

By analyzing the role of expectations formation on forward guidance, this paper builds on the adaptive learning and policy literature. Mitra, Evans, and Honkapohja (**2012**) examine the effects of the fiscal authority giving guidance on the future course of government purchases and taxes. The results show that a temporary change in fiscal policy leads to different effects on adaptive learning and rational expectations agents. The adaptive learning output multipliers seem to match empirical data more than its rational expectations counterparts. Eusepi and Preston (**2010**) investigate the link between adaptive learning and central bank communication strategies. Increased central bank communication, such as communicating the monetary policy rule and the variables within the rule, can lead to increased macro-economic stability. Preston (**2006**) studies forecast-based monetary policy rules and adaptive learning. He finds that a central bank that understands the basis of private sector forecasts can aid in increasing macro-economic stability.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section **1** presents the New Keynesian model with forward guidance. Section **2** discusses expectations formation under both rational expectations and adaptive learning. Section **3** presents the outcomes of forward guidance under both rational expectations and adaptive learning. Section **4** examines extensions to the results of the paper. Section **5** provides additional discussion about the results of the paper. Section **6** concludes.

# 1 MODEL

The aggregate dynamics of the economy are described by a New Keynesian model derived under (potentially) nonrational expectations (see Preston 2005, 2006). There exists a continuum of households indexed by . Households maximize expected future discounted utility

(1)

where  is the discount factor and is bounded between 0 and 1. Utility depends on , which is consumption by household  of goods in the economy. Households also receive a disutility when supplying labor, , for the production of each good .  denotes an aggregate preference shock.  denotes (potentially) nonrational expectations that satisfy standard probability laws, such as . Beliefs are assumed to be homogeneous across agents, but agents do not know this fact.

A household is subject to a budget constraint that takes the following form:

(2)

where  denotes lump-sum taxes and transfers,  is money holdings, and  denotes interest paid on money balances. Asset markets are assumed to be incomplete such that households can transfer wealth between periods through a one-period riskless bond . Accordingly,  is the interest paid on bonds.  is household 's real income.  is the aggregate price index, and  denotes household 's nominal income, which is given by

(3)

A household receives wages  for hours worked toward the production of good , . Since each household owns an equal part of each firm, it receives profits from the sale of good , . Furthermore, even though it is present in the budget constraint, money does not show up in the utility function. It is assumed that money balances do not relieve any transactional frictions. However, a household may choose to hold money balances because it provides a financial return.

The aggregate variables  and  are assumed to be defined by the Dixit–Stiglitz constant-elasticity-of-substitution aggregator

(4)

(5)

where  is the elasticity of substitutions across differentiated goods,  describes household 's consumption of good , and  is the price of good .

By log-linearizing the intertemporal budget constraint and Euler-Equation (EE), the following results are obtained:

(6)

(7)

where  is current inflation,  defines the intertemporal elasticity of substitution,  denotes a preference shock, and  is share of real wealth  as a fraction of steady-state income. The “^” symbol over variables denotes log deviations from steady state. By solving (7) backward from date  to , taking expectations at time , plugging the result into (6), and integrating over , the following equation for aggregate consumption emerges:

(8)

Note that  since bonds are in zero net supply from market clearing. denotes the average expectations operator. By imposing the market equilibrium condition  and defining the resulting equation in terms of the output gap , the following equation emerges:

(9)

where

(10)

and  .  is the natural rate of output, that is, output prevailing under flexible prices, and . Equation (9) relates the current output gap  to current and future expected values of the output gap, interest rate , inflation rate , and natural real interest rate shock . Households take into account the future values of the endogenous variables infinitely far into the future when choosing optimal consumption today. Intuitively, the expected course of a household's consumption pattern matters to its optimal consumption today. A household also knows future consumption patterns are affected by future values of income, interest rates, and inflation. Thus, expectations of these variables are important for decisions today.

The production side of the economy is populated by firms that operate in a monopolistically competitive environment. Each good is produced using labor from households. A firm is subject to a Calvo (1983) pricing scheme. Each period a fraction  of producers can optimally reset their prices. The remaining urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0065 producers retain the same prices from the previous period. Furthermore, a good is produced following the production function  where  is a technology shock. The demand curve for good  is given by . The following Dixit–Stiglitz aggregate price index is assumed:

(11)

A firm maximizes its expected present discounted value of profits

(12)

where  describes the stochastic discount factor showing how firms value its future stream of income. The stochastic discount factor is given by

(13)

The profit function is defined by

(14)

Maximizing (12) with respect to  yields the following first-order condition:

(15)

where , and  is the firm's real marginal cost function. Furthermore, by substituting in the stochastic discount factor and real marginal costs into the firm's first-order condition and then log-linearizing around a zero inflation steady state, the following result is produced:

(16)

where  defines the elasticity of a firm's real marginal cost function with respect to its output and  measures the elasticity of substitution between differentiated goods. Note also that log-linearizing (11) yields

(17)

where  is current inflation. Integrating over  and plugging (17) into (16) yields the following equation for inflation:

(18)

where

(19)

and .6 Equation (18) defines the inflation rate as a function of current and future values of the output gap, inflation rate, and cost-push shock . Note that  describes the elasticity of a firm's real marginal cost function with respect to its own output, and . The optimal decisions by firms are shown to depend on the long-run expected path of macro-economic variables because of the assumption of sticky prices. A firm must be concerned that it will not be able to adjust its price in future periods regardless of future economic conditions. Thus, optimal pricing decisions today require firms to forecast future states and values of economic variables.

The model is closed by describing the central bank of the economy. The central bank follows a monetary policy rule that takes the following form:

(20)

The short-term nominal interest rate changes based on the output gap, inflation rate, monetary policy shock, and forward guidance shocks.  defines an unanticipated monetary policy shock and is i.i.d. To incorporate forward guidance into the model, the monetary policy rule is augmented with anticipated shocks following Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson (2012) and Laséen and Svensson (2011). Each anticipated or forward guidance shock () is contained in the last term in equation (20) and is i.i.d. Intuitively, the forward guidance shock can be thought of as an announcement by the central bank in period  that the interest rate will change  periods later, that is, in period . If the central bank has been communicating guidance on the interest rate for  periods ahead, there would be  forward guidance shocks that affect the monetary policy rule in period . Thus,  corresponds to the length of the forward guidance horizon announced by the central bank. The last term in equation  can also be thought of as the sum of all forward guidance commitments stated by the central bank , and  periods ago that affect the nominal interest rate in period . Following Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson and Laséen and Svensson, the system is also augmented with  state variables  . The law of motion for each of these state variables is given by

(21)

(22)

(23)

(24)

In other words, each component of  is the sum of all central bank forward guidance commitments known in period urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0119 that affect the interest rate , and  periods into the future, respectively.7 It should be noted that equations (21)–(24) can be simplified to find that . In addition, equations (21)–(24) provide a computationally tractable method to model forward guidance. Since the forward guidance shocks in equation (20) equal , the forward guidance shocks can be put into a vector of predetermined variables in standard state-space form. As described by Laséen and Svensson, standard solution techniques then can be used to solve the final system of equations. Another reason to model forward guidance in this way is that it relieves the concern of the existence of multiple solutions. As described in Honkapohja and Mitra (2005) and Woodford (2005), indeterminacy can arise if forward guidance is instead modeled as pegging the interest rate to a certain value.8 For instance, without a monetary policy that responds to economic fluctuations, real disturbances to the economy can produce a multitude of equilibrium responses of the endogenous variables.

The following example presents the case where the central bank's forward guidance horizon is 2 periods ahead, that is, . The model's system of equations consists of  and  whose laws of motion are defined as

(25)

(26)

Thus,  defines the sum of all forward guidance commitments by the central bank known in period urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0134 that affect the interest rate one period later. Note that  consists of current period forward guidance affecting the interest rate one period later, , and previous period's forward guidance affecting the interest rate two periods later,   is the sum of all forward guidance commitments by the central bank known in period  that affect the interest rate two periods later. Since the forward guidance horizon is two periods,  consists of current period forward guidance affecting the interest rate two periods later, .9

The ZLB on interest rates is also enforced. Forward guidance has gained attention due to interest rates effectively reaching the ZLB because of the 2007–09 global financial recession. Thus, it seems natural to model the ZLB on nominal interest rates when simulating forward guidance. Specifically, equations (9) and (20) become

(27)

(28)

where  is the steady-state nominal interest rate.10

To summarize, the aggregate dynamics of the economy with forward guidance are defined by the output gap, inflation rate, AR(1) shock processes, monetary policy rule with forward guidance, and the laws of motion of the sum of central bank commitments, that is, equations (9), (10), (18), (19), and (20)-(24). With enforcement of the ZLB, equations (17) and (28) are used instead of (9) and (20). To simplify notation, the “^” symbol over the variables is removed for the remainder of the paper.

# 2 EXPECTATION FORMATION

This paper assumes agents form expectations following either the rational expectations hypothesis or adaptive learning. The difference between the two types of expectations formation regards the amount of knowledge agents hold about the economy (see, e.g., Marcet and Sargent **1989**, Evans and Honkapohja **2001**, Evans, Honkapohja, and Mitra **2009**). Under rational expectations, agents know the structure of the model, parameters of the model (e.g., , , etc.), distribution of the error terms, and beliefs of other agents. They compute expectations based off the true model of the economy. Under adaptive learning, agents do not know the true model of the economy, and thus, cannot compute precise expectations as under rational expectations. Instead, they operate as econometricians by forming an econometric model to forecast values of the endogenous variables. Their model includes the variables in the rational expectations solution. Adaptive learning agents estimate the values of the model's parameters using standard econometric methods. As new information becomes available every period, they appropriately adjust their forecasts.

## 2.1 Rational Expectations

The model defined by equations (9), (10), (18), (19), and (20)–(24) can be simplified under the assumption of rational expectations. Agents with rational expectations understand the beliefs of other agents and are able to compute the aggregate probabilities of the model. As shown in Preston (2005), this additional information simplifies the infinite horizon model to the “benchmark” one step ahead New Keynesian model. Specifically, equations (9) and (18) become

(29)

(30)

The model with rational expectations can be solved using standard techniques, such as one suggested by Sims (2002). The model can be written in general state-space form as suggested by Sims. This form is defined as

(31)

where

(32)

(33)

C defines a vector of constants of required dimensions.  defines the vector of expectational errors (e.g., ) of required dimensions. Using standard techniques to solve the model with rational expectations (e.g., Sims 2002) and the parameter values in Table 1, the solution to the system under rational expectations is

(34)

where the matrices , , and  are defined in the Online Appendix.11

**TABLE 1.**Parameter Values

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Parameter** | **Description** | **Value** |
|  | IES | 1 |
|  | Discount factor | 0.99 |
|  | Function of price stickiness | 0.1 |
|  | Price stickiness | 0.75 |
|  | Feedback inflation | 1.4 |
|  | Feedback output gap | 0.125 |
|  | Autoregressive demand | 0.5 |
|  | Autoregressive cost-push | 0.5 |
|  | Demand shock | 0.001 |
|  | Cost-push shock | 0.001 |
|  | M.P shock | 0.001 |
|  | 1 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 2 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 3 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 4 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 5 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 6 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 7 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 8 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 9 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 10 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 11 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | 12 Period ahead forward guidance shock | 0.001 |
|  | Forward guidance horizon | 12 |
|  | CGL | 0.02 |

## 2.2 Adaptive Learning

To evaluate the expectations in equations (9) and (18) under adaptive learning, agents act as econometricians by forming a model based on variables that appear in the rational expectations solution and estimate the coefficients. This model is labeled the “Perceived Law of Motion” (PLM) and is constructed from the minimum state variable (MSV) solution that exists under rational expectations.12 The PLM is defined as

(35)

where

(36)

(37)

The vector  is defined by

(38)

where

(39)

(40)

By rewriting equations (21)–(24), the vector urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0208 becomes

(41)

where

(42)

and  is an  x  matrix given by

(43)

(44)

Note that , , , and  are unknown coefficient matrices of appropriate dimensions that agents estimate and learn about over time.13 Furthermore, the addition of  is a necessary component of the PLM since it is present in the rational expectations solution shown in the Online Appendix and not contained in the vector .14

An important component of adaptive learning models regards the information available to agents when they form expectations. In this paper, adaptive learning agents are assumed to know the values of the regressors in the PLM and previous period's coefficient estimates when forming beliefs about the future. They update their parameter estimates at the end of the period. This assumption avoids the simultaneous determination of current period coefficient estimates and endogenous variables when forming expectations and making optimal decisions.15 The i.i.d. monetary policy shock is also assumed to be unobserved.16 Furthermore, the following is the timeline of events:

* (i)At the beginning of period , , and  are observed by the agents and added to their information set.
* (ii)Agents use , , and  as well as previous period's estimates (i.e., , , , and ) to form expectations about the future.
* (iii) is realized.
* (iv)To update their parameter estimates, agents compute a least squares regression of  on 1, , , and .

Agents update their parameter estimates of the PLM by following the recursive least squares (RLS) formula

(45)

(46)

where  contains the PLM coefficients to be estimated. The matrix of second moments of the regressors in the PLM  is given by .  is known as the “gain” parameter and controls the response of  to new information. The last expression in equation (45) defines the recent prediction error of the endogenous variables.

The gain parameter in equations (45) and (46) can either decrease over time or be fixed at certain values. In the decreasing gain or RLS case,  and past observations are equally weighted. Evans and Honkapohja (**2001**) explain that as  the coefficients in the PLM converge to the rational expectations coefficients with probability one. As is assumed in this current paper, the gain parameter can also be fixed at a certain value. Under this method called discounted or constant gain learning (CGL),  and the most recent observations play a larger role when updating agents' coefficients and expectations. Evans and Honkapohja describe that the coefficients in the PLM converge in distribution to their rational expectations values with a variance that is proportional to the constant gain parameter. CGL may be a more realistic way to model learning since it allows agents to update their beliefs every period to new information as a real-life econometrician revising his or her forecasts every period.

Agents solve for by using equation (35). For any , their expectations infinite periods ahead are given by

(47)

(48)

By noting the geometric sums and expectations of  12 periods ahead or greater equal the zero vector, equations (47) and (48) simplify to equal

(49)

(50)

Equations (49) and (50) are substituted into equations (9) and (18) to give

(51)

where

(52)

Equation (51) is called the “Actual Law of Motion” (ALM) and describes the actual evolution of the endogenous variables implied by the PLM (35).

Another approach to modeling learning and (potentially) nonrational expectations regards the “EE” method presented in Evans and Honkapohja (**2001**). In this approach, one period ahead forecasts of the endogenous variables show up in the model's equations under both rational expectations and adaptive learning. Specifically, equations (**29**) and (**30**) are utilized but the  operator is replaced by the (potentially) nonrational expectations operator . Honkapohja, Mitra, and Evans (**2013**) show that the EE and infinite horizon approaches to modeling adaptive learning expectations are equivalent if EE agents quickly learn or know the market clearing conditions, that is, . For an additional comparison between the “infinite-horizon” and EE cases, see Honkapohja, Mitra, and Evans.**17** Branch, Evans, and McGough (**2013**) also explore a middle ground between EE and infinite horizon learning called “finite-horizon learning” (p. 143).

The motivation for utilizing the infinite horizon approach over the EE approach is as follows. The former procedure is a natural way to model forward guidance and communication on the future path of interest rates. Equations (**9**) and (**18**) show that the dynamics of the model depend on the long-horizon of interest rates. However, the EE approach to modeling expectations does not contain expectations about the interest rates. Under EE learning, the model would consist of equations (**29**) and (**30**), but with  instead of . Thus, while appropriate and reasonable in other settings, EE learning would not be ideally suited to study the effects of forward guidance. In addition, Evans, Honkapohja, and Mitra (**2009**) describe that the choice of infinite horizon or EE learning typically does not affect the stability of the adaptive learning model. However, they describe that it is preferable to have a model that includes the dates of the actual change in monetary policy, that is, the time period when forward guidance is realized upon the economy.

# 3 RESULTS

## 3.1 Parameterization

This section details the calibration values for the model's parameters, which are shown in Table **1**. The discount rate, , is set to equal 0.99, which is a common value found in the literature. The parameter representing the intertemporal elasticity of substitution is fixed at one. This value has been assumed  in Smets and Wouters (**2003**).  is set to equal 0.1. This number roughly corresponds to a high degree of price stickiness, , found in empirical work by Klenow and Malin (**2010**), a value of  found in Giannoni and Woodford (**2004**), and a value of  found in the literature (e.g., Gertler and Karadi **2011**). Monetary policy positively responds to the output gap, and positively adjusts at more than a one-to-one rate to the inflation rate.  follows from Branch and Evans (**2013**). The value of  closely follows empirical adaptive learning work by Milani (**2007**). The structural disturbances are not assumed to exhibit high persistence. The distribution of the white noise shocks is not assumed to be highly dispersed. There also is no covariance between the structural shocks.

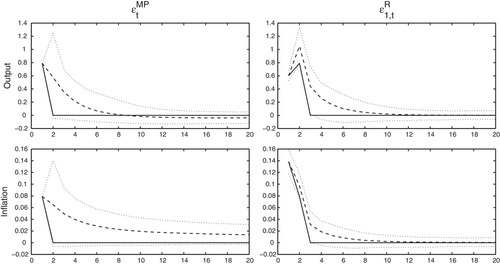
The current paper examines results for the CGL case. With regard to choosing the CGL parameter urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0287, this paper uses 0.02. This choice is close to the results used in the literature, such as Orphanides and Williams (**2005**), Milani (**2007**), and Branch and Evans (**2006**). For robustness, the current methodology also examines the results under different values of .

The value for the length of the forward guidance horizon  is chosen to match time-contingent forward guidance by the Federal Reserve. This is based off the FOMC September 2012 statement: “the Committee also decided today to keep the target range for the federal funds rate at 0–0.25% and currently anticipates that exceptionally low levels for the federal funds rate are likely to be warranted at least through mid-2015” (Federal Reserve **2012**). This announcement was one of the last FOMC statements to exclusively use time-contingent forward guidance language. By taking “mid-2015” to be at most the end of the third quarter of 2015, the number of quarters from September 2012 to “mid-2015” is 12. Thus, .

## 3.2 Normal Economic Times

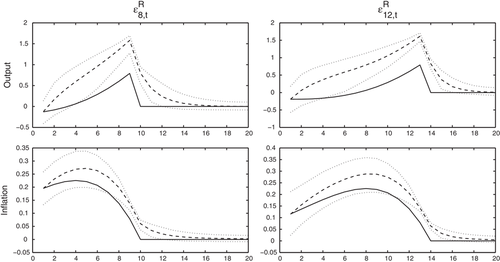
### *Impulse responses*

In this section, impulse responses of the output gap and inflation rate to negative one unit monetary policy and forward guidance shocks under different expectation assumptions are examined in Figures **1** and **2**.**18** The forward guidance shocks are the anticipated shocks found in equations (21)–(24). Since equation (51) exhibits a nonlinear structure, standard linear techniques to compute impulse responses under adaptive learning do not apply. To remedy this situation, this paper follows Eusepi and Preston (**2011**) by proceeding in the following manner. The model is simulated twice for  periods, where  is the impulse response function horizon. The impulse responses are calculated starting in period .**19** In the first simulation, time period  includes a negative one unit shock. The -period impulse response function is given by the difference between the first and second simulations over the final  periods. The shocks are the same in both simulations other than the addition of the negative one unit shock in time period  in the first simulation. The process is then repeated for 5,000 simulations and the mean impulse response across the 5,000 simulations is calculated to arrive at the final impulse response trajectory. The impulse response function horizon is chosen to be 20 periods, that is, . In addition, all other shocks are still active and drawn from a normal distribution during the simulation.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/192b494e-a0f1-4970-8243-a8a137d2032d/jmcb12696-fig-0001-m.jpg)

**Fig 1** Impulse Responses of Endogenous Variables to Unanticipated and Forward Guidance Shocks.

Note: Solid line: rational expectations; dashed line: CGL; dotted lines: 95% confidence bands.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/ca482de1-fda0-4573-84bb-5061edc60759/jmcb12696-fig-0002-m.jpg)

**Fig 2** Impulse Responses of Endogenous Variables to Forward Guidance Shocks.

Note: Solid line: rational expectations; dashed line: CGL; dotted lines: 95% confidence bands.

### *Impact.*

As seen in Figures **1** and **2**, the initial response of the macro-economic variables is approximately the same under both adaptive learning and rational expectations. This result is not surprising since Evans and Honkapohja (**2001**) state that CGL coefficients converge to a Normal distribution centered around its rational expectations counterparts. Thus, the initial impact under adaptive learning could be greater or less than the initial impact under rational expectations.

### *After impact.*

Figures **1** and **2** also display the impulse responses after the forward guidance announcement is known to agents. From the household's perspective, they must optimally allocate consumption across time based on their expectations of future variables. Since they know that the interest rate will decrease in the future, a household changes its optimal consumption across time and increases current consumption. In addition, firms know they may not be able to change their price in the future regardless of the state of the economy. Thus, they take into account expectations of future variables as seen in equation (18). When the central bank announces that the interest rate will increase in the future, a firm knows that the future output gap and inflation will be affected, and thus, this action affects current pricing decisions. Furthermore, there exists a larger and more delayed effect on the economy under a forward guidance shock than under an unanticipated monetary policy shock. This result is similar to Milani and Treadwell (**2012**).

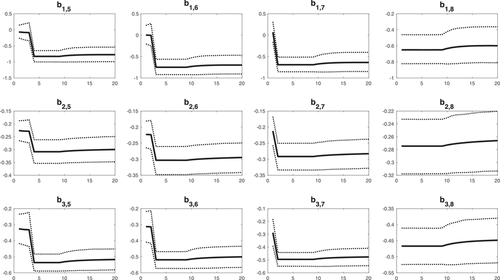
The impulse responses show that adaptive learning agents fail to understand the precise effect an announcement to lower the future interest rate will have on the economy. Adaptive learning agents know the forward guidance announcement announced by the central bank. However, since they do not understand the precise effect this shock will have on the economy, adaptive learning agents are continually readjusting their forecasts each period causing the impulse responses to exhibit more persistence than under rational expectations. In addition, when the forward guidance shock has been realized upon the economy, there exists a greater substitution effect under adaptive learning than rational expectations. Adaptive learning agents substitute into more consumption than rational expectations agents. The former agents overshoot their rational expectations counterparts. This conclusion occurs because rational expectations agents precisely know how the anticipated changes in monetary policy will affect the endogenous variables at later dates. However, adaptive learning agents imprecisely understand how a commitment to lower the future interest rate will have on the economy since they do not know the true model of the economy.

### *After shock realized*

The impulse response graphs of rational expectations and adaptive learning do not follow the same path after the shock is realized upon the economy. The impulse responses with rational expectations agents converge quicker to 0 percentage deviation from the unshocked series. Rational expectations agents understand that the shock will not occur in the future and they quickly adjust their expectations. However, the impulse responses under adaptive learning exhibit more persistence than the impulse responses under rational expectations. This outcome is present because the dynamics of the impulse responses under adaptive learning are driven by adjustments in the beliefs of the agents. Adaptive learning agents revise their estimates of the parameters of the economy each period, while rational expectations agents fully understand the model's parameters. The impulse responses of a conventional monetary policy shock shown in the first column of Figure **1** also display the same difference in persistence.

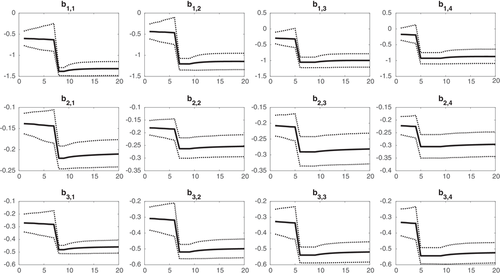
The results coincide with the literature on adaptive learning. The outcomes match Eggertsson (**2008**) who found that temporary policy shifts do not have as large of an effect on the economy as permanent policy shifts under the assumption of rational expectations. The persistence results also coincide with Milani (**2007**) who found that a DSGE model with CGL generates persistence in the macro-economic variables.

The reasons for the larger magnitude and persistence of the adaptive learning impulse responses relative to rational expectations are also due to adjustments in beliefs. As stated above, adaptive learning agents fail to understand the precise effect of forward guidance on the economy as they base their forecasts of the macro-economic variables on an econometric model. When they observe the favorable forward guidance shock, adaptive learning agents adjust their beliefs upward creating a bigger discrepancy between adaptive learning and rational expectations. This reasoning is displayed in Figures **3** and **4**, which show the evolution of the coefficient  in response to an eight-period ahead shock.**20** This shock first affects the coefficients on , that is, , , and  as seen in column 4 of Figure **3**. The coefficients adjust downward starting in the first period to a negative one unit shock creating the larger magnitude of the adaptive learning impulse responses relative to rational expectations. The downward adjustment implies expectations adjust upward to a negative one unit forward guidance shock. The forward guidance shock then subsequently influences , , urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0314  in the following periods as shown by equations (**21**)–(**24**). For instance, the coefficients on  first adjust downward, then the coefficients on  adjust downward in the next period, etc. The columns referring to , , urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0314 in Figures **3** and **4** show the progressive movements in the coefficients, which result in the bigger magnitude and persistence of the adaptive learning impulse responses relative to rational expectations.**21**

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/4b596873-b5bd-49bc-a031-af9d3b717b0a/jmcb12696-fig-0003-m.jpg)

**Fig 3** Evolution of Belief Coefficients across Impulse Response Function Horizon.

Note: Solid line: CGL; dotted line: 95% confidence bands

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/ea999084-e5c1-499c-8a62-1837671269b3/jmcb12696-fig-0004-m.jpg)

**Fig 4** Evolution of Belief Coefficients across Impulse Response Function Horizon.

Note: Solid line: CGL; dotted line: 95% confidence bands.

The direction and magnitude of the adaptive learning belief coefficients occur because of the error made by agents. This error is seen in more detail when examining the last part of equation (**45**). When the forward guidance news is announced, the forecast error () enlarges causing the increased change in the coefficient magnitude as seen by Figures **3** and **4**. This increase multiplied by the values of the regressors, which contain the component of  turning negative due to the shock, causes the respective coefficients to become negative as seen in Figures **3** and **4**. Since the standard deviations of the shocks are set to 0.001,  is relatively larger and more weight is placed on previous observations. This increase in weight contributes to the growth in the magnitude of the coefficients as well.

To summarize, the message from this section is that adaptive learning agents fail to understand the precise effect a forward guidance announcement has on the economy. When the forward guidance shock is known to agents, the output gap and inflation rate under adaptive learning proceed in a different path than under rational expectations. After the shock has been realized, rational expectations agents quickly adjust their expectations to the knowledge that the shock is gone, while adaptive learning agents' beliefs are more persistent. These results are attributed to rational expectations agents precisely understanding the effects forward guidance has on the economy, while the beliefs of adaptive learning agents slowly adjust.

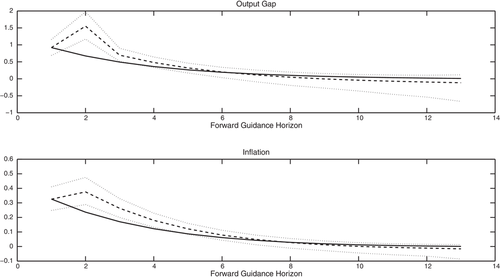
## Policy exercise

The results displayed by the impulse response functions showed that adaptive learning agents failed to understand the precise effects forward guidance has on the economy. This current section shows this conclusion through a different scenario. Specifically, the central bank would like to keep the interest rate fixed at a certain level  for  periods. The experiment is described next and is motivated by the policy exercise described in Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson (**2012**).

Suppose at the beginning of period , the central bank implements forward guidance such that the interest rate will be fixed at  in period  and  periods into the future. This announcement corresponds to an unanticipated shock in period  and news about the future interest rate  periods into the future. In this scenario, the monetary policymaker's job is to choose  and  such that the interest rate in periods  to  equals . The central bank also believes that agents hold rational expectations, which is a common assumption in macro-economic literature. To show that adaptive learning agents respond differently to the same forward guidance information, the adaptive learning agents are given the same guidance on the interest rate as under rational expectations. Furthermore, the exercise is assumed to start in period urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0338.**22** The model is then simulated from  to the end of the forward guidance horizon . The process is then repeated 5,000 times and the mean across the 5,000 simulations is calculated.

This policy exercise also assumes that the central bank is committed to its goal of  every period during the forward guidance horizon. Rational expectations agents precisely understand the central bank's guidance, and thus, the interest rate each period implied by rational expectations equals . Since the adaptive learning process is different than rational expectations, the same forward guidance will not give a model implied  during the forward guidance horizon. To model a commitment to , the central bank chooses  each period over the forward guidance horizon to ensure the interest rate equals .**23**

Figure **5** compares the dynamics under rational expectations and adaptive learning for the output gap and inflation. The values of the output gap and inflation during the forward guidance horizon are averaged across simulations. The solid line represents rational expectations while the dashed line displays the adaptive learning path. Under both expectations assumptions, forward guidance has an obvious stimulative effect on impact. Since interest rates are lowered, the output gap and inflation increase. As time elapses and the forward guidance horizon draws to an end, the stimulative effects of this central bank policy fade away. In addition, since adaptive learning agents' beliefs are distributed around its rational expectations counterparts, the initial effect is approximately the same under both series. However, the effect under adaptive learning could vary from rational expectations depending on adaptive learning agents' beliefs used at time  to forecast future variables.

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**Fig 5** Dynamics of the Output Gap and Inflation in Response to Forward Guidance.

Note: Solid line: rational expectations; dashed line: CGL; dotted lines: 95% confidence bands.

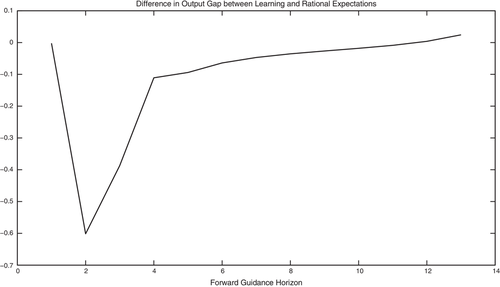
Figure **5** also shows that adaptive learning agents fail to understand how the same forward guidance commitments made under rational expectations will impact the economy under learning. This results in larger variation in both the output gap and inflation and a slower speed back to long-run equilibrium under adaptive learning than under rational expectations. The adaptive learning agents observe the unanticipated lowering of the interest rate in period . In the next period, they adjust their expectations of the output gap and inflation upward due to this previous information. The adaptive learning path then continues at a downward path quicker than under rational expectations. Furthermore, the effect from central bank forward guidance results in more pessimism under adaptive learning than under rational expectations at longer horizons. By having only partial information about the true model of the economy, adaptive learning agents fail to foresee the precise positive impact the forward guidance information has on the dynamics of the output gap and inflation. Thus, this aspect leads to a period of undershooting on the part of adaptive learning agents. The output gap and inflation under adaptive learning fall short of the paths of rational expectations at longer horizons. Rational expectations agents, however, precisely understand the effects of forward guidance on the output gap and inflation. They understand the stimulative effect forward guidance has on the economy, and thus, the output gap and inflation is higher than under adaptive learning over this latter period.

The source of this difference between the two paths regards the assumptions made under rational expectations and adaptive learning. The rational expectations agents know the true model and aggregate probabilities. They can infer the precise effect forward guidance has on the economy. However, the expectations of adaptive learning agents do not respond in the same way. Adaptive learning agents do not know the true model of the economy, and thus, cannot infer the proper aggregate probabilities and expectations. Even though they know the changes in the future path of interest rates implemented by the central bank, adaptive learning agents imprecisely understand how that guidance impacts the economy. Since they readjust their forecasts each period, adaptive learning agents overshoot and undershoot the paths implied by rational expectations. Moreover, this result shows a consequence of the decision of monetary policymakers. If the central bank assumes agents have rational expectations, which is standard in the macro-economic literature, the predicted outcomes seem to be misleading. The more realistic assumption of adaptive learning displays a different path than what would occur under rational expectations.

## 3.3 Economic Crisis

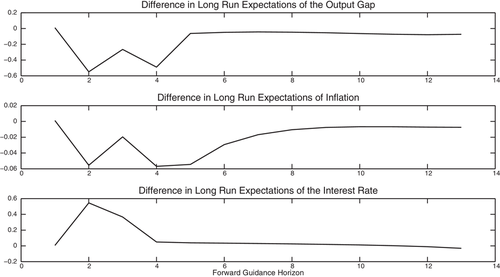
In response to the 2007–09 Great Recession, forward guidance was implemented by central banks around the world. With that event in mind, this section builds upon the previous subsection's exercise by considering forward guidance during an economic recession. The economy is assumed to start in period , that is, after a period of economic stability (corresponding to say the period before the recent Great Recession).**24** The model is then simulated from  to the end of the forward guidance horizon . As in the previous subsection, the central bank implements forward guidance by choosing the unanticipated monetary policy and anticipated forward guidance shocks such that the nominal interest rate equals 0 from periods  to . To capture features from the recent Great Recession, a large negative demand shock impacts the economy in period , and causes a recession. A sequence of five more negative demand shocks follows, so that the recession lasts six periods.**25** In the following periods, the shocks are drawn from a normal distribution. Thus, the forward guidance horizon spans a recession and normal times. The process is then repeated 5,000 times and the mean across the 5,000 simulations is calculated.

Figure **6** displays the macro-economic effects of forward guidance during an economic recession. The graph shows the value of the output gap under adaptive learning minus the value of the output gap under rational expectations.**26** Under both expectations formation assumptions, the negative demand shocks cause the output gap to drop below its steady state value. However, the positive effects of forward guidance are overstated under the assumption of rational expectations relative to adaptive learning. Throughout the forward guidance horizon, the value of the output gap under rational expectations is higher than under adaptive learning. The former agents know the economy is in a recession and precisely understand how forward guidance will alleviate the economy as their expectations are based on the true model of the economy. However, adaptive learning agents observe the economic downturn, but fail to completely understand the positive effects of forward guidance. They must *estimate* the effects of forward guidance on the economy as their forecasts are based on an econometric model. Thus, adaptive learning agents are slower to understand how forward guidance will alleviate the downturn in the economy.

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**Fig 6** Macro-Economic Effects of Forward Guidance during an Economic Crisis.

Figure **7** displays how the forecasts of rational expectations and adaptive learning agents react to forward guidance news. This figure shows the values of adaptive learning minus rational expectations of the discounted long-run expectations of the output gap, inflation, and the interest rate across the forward guidance horizon. The adaptive learning agents are more pessimistic about the future output gap and inflation as their long-run expectations are lower than under rational expectations. The former are overestimating the ramifications of the downturn in the economy and their estimates of the effects of forward guidance are not strong enough to overcome this negative reaction. However, rational expectations agents understand the effects of the economic downturn and how forward guidance will precisely alleviate the economy. Consequently, the greater amounts of expected output gap and inflation under rational expectations create the larger levels of current output gap relative to adaptive learning as seen in Figure **6**.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/edbe8b3e-9bbd-4f48-ba49-7c3267f24041/jmcb12696-fig-0007-m.jpg)

**Fig 7** Difference between Adaptive Learning and Rational Expectations Infinite Horizon Expectations of the Macro-Economic Variables.

Note: A positive value indicates the value under adaptive learning is higher than under rational expectations. A negative value indicates the variable's value under adaptive learning is lower than under rational expectations.

The results in Figure **7** also relate to the empirical findings of Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson (**2012**). Their model, which was solved under the assumption of rational expectations, produced an exceedingly large reaction of the macro-economic variables to forward guidance statements. Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson argued that the source of the excessive responses was an unusually large drop of the long-run interest rate to forward guidance statements relative to the data. In this current paper, the bottom panel of Figure **7** shows a comparable result: the long-run expectation of the interest rate is lower under rational expectations than adaptive learning. This produces larger responses of long-run expectations of the output gap and inflation, and consequently, the current output gap and inflation under rational expectations than adaptive learning. Thus, this result suggests two additional takeaways. A forward guidance model better matches the data under the assumption of adaptive learning than rational expectations. In addition, unusually large responses of the macro-economic variables to forward guidance found in Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson may be due to the way in which expectations are modeled.

The reason why Figures **5** and **6** produce different dynamics of the macro-economic variables regards the assumed state of the economy. A recession is not assumed in the former figure, while Figure **6** shows the effects of forward guidance when a downturn in the economy is present. In the latter case, adaptive learning agents observe the negative demand shocks and adjust their beliefs downward. They also do not realize precisely how the adverse shocks influence the economy. The value of the belief coefficient that measures the effect of the demand shock on the output gap (i.e., ) is larger than its value under no recession and its rational expectations counterpart.**27** Furthermore, the effects of forward guidance are not strong enough for adaptive learning agents to overcome the ramifications of the adverse demand shocks on the economy. This result is evident when examining expectations as forward guidance operates through the expectations channel. In Figure **7**, expectations under adaptive learning do not react as favorably as under rational expectations. Rational expectations agents observe the adverse demand shocks and precisely understand how forward guidance will affect the economy. Thus, during a recession, the dynamics of the model are such that rational expectations overstate the effects of the forward guidance on the economy relative to adaptive learning.

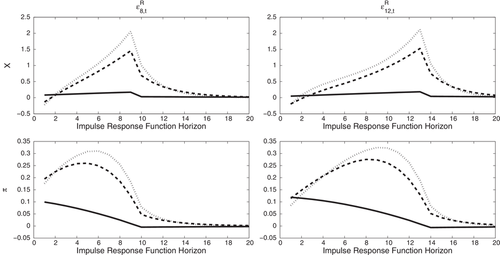
Overall, the results suggest a main finding for policymakers. If monetary policy is based on a model with rational expectations, which is the standard assumption in the macro-economic literature, the results may be misleading. This section shows that the assumption of rational expectations overstates the effects of forward guidance relative to adaptive learning during an economic recession. The adaptive learning results also match the data better than rational expectations.

# 4 EXTENSIONS

## 4.1 Alternative Parameterization

The results of this paper are investigated under different values of , the intertemporal elasticity of substitution parameter.  measures the effect current and future real interest rates have on current consumption and output. This parameter is important since forward guidance involves statements about future nominal interest rates, and consequently, the real interest rate. Furthermore, this paper investigates the outcomes of the model when , , and .**28** These results are displayed via adaptive learning impulse responses of the output gap and inflation to negative one unit forward guidance shocks similar to Section 3.2.1.

The results displayed in Figure **8** show that higher values of urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0366 produce greater forward guidance effects than lower values of . As  increases, the output gap responds more to current and future real interest rates. Thus, since forward guidance involves information about future nominal interest rates, demand responds more to news that the interest rate will decrease in the future. As  decreases, the output gap does not respond as much to changes in current and expected future interest rates. Therefore, the impact of policy shocks on the economy is less pronounced. Overall, the impulse responses of the output gap and inflation are not as responsive to forward guidance news in comparison to results under a higher value of .

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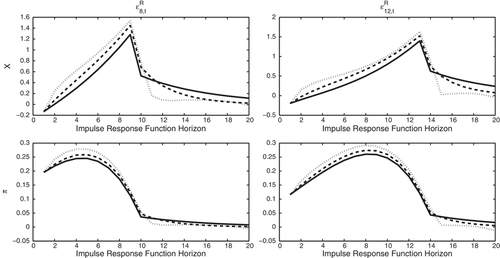
**Fig 8** Adaptive Learning Impulse Response Functions to Forward Guidance Shocks under Different Values of .

Note: Solid line: ; dashed line: ; dotted line: .

## 4.2 Alternative Constant Gains

In this section, a robustness exercise is simulated to examine the effects of forward guidance policy when adaptive learning agents vary the degree in which they discount previous observations. Specifically, higher and lower values of the gain parameter, , are used. In addition to , the other constant gains assumed are  and .

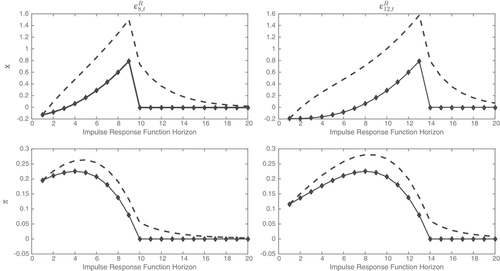
The results in Figure **9** show that the responses of the macro-economic variables to forward guidance under adaptive learning depend on the value of . From the time of the forward guidance announcement to when the shock is realized, agents with higher constant gains seem to misvalue more the effects of forward guidance than agents with lower constant gains. Under higher values of , agents place more weight on new information, and thus, exhibit a stronger reaction to forward guidance news. Each period's estimates and beliefs should vary more from the previous period's estimates. However, under lower values of , agents do not misvalue the effects of forward guidance as much as under higher values of . They do not exhibit as strong of a reaction to forward guidance news as agents with a higher value of . Moreover, after the shock is realized on the economy, agents with a higher  are quicker to realize the shock is not present as they weight previous observations more than agents with a lower . Thus, the impulse responses under higher values of  are quicker to return to 0 percentage deviation from the unshocked series than under lower values of .

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/d2cc2f96-0772-4c15-90dd-cf47d43c39ab/jmcb12696-fig-0009-m.jpg)

**Fig 9** Adaptive Learning Impulse Response Functions to Forward Guidance Shocks under Different Values of urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0388.

Note: Solid line: CGL with ; dashed line: CGL with ; dotted line: CGL with .

It is also helpful to examine the behavior of the adaptive learning impulse responses as the gain parameter decreases further than . Figure **10** displays the impulse responses of output and inflation to forward guidance shocks under rational expectations and adaptive learning. The solid line denotes the rational expectations response while the dashed line represents the benchmark adaptive learning case (). To understand the behavior of the impulse responses as the gain parameter decreases further than , adaptive learning results are examined under . This case is represented by the diamond line in Figure **10**.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/b2641c0b-e598-40ab-861a-2ca4e9cd4563/jmcb12696-fig-0010-m.jpg)

**Fig 10** Impulse Response Functions to Forward Guidance Shocks under Smaller Values of .

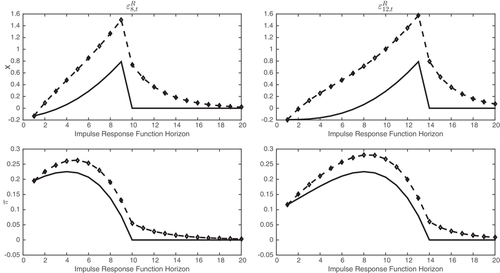
Note: Solid line: rational expectations; dashed line: CGL with ; diamond line: CGL with .

The results show that as  decreases further, the adaptive learning responses become closer to their rational expectations counterparts. Under smaller values of , agents do not misvalue new information as much as under higher values of . Overall, as the gain parameter continually decreases, the adaptive learning impulse responses converge to their rational expectations counterparts.

## 4.3 Estimation of Serial Correlation Parameters

The results of this paper have assumed that agents know the values of the serial correlation parameters of the AR(1) shocks, that is,  and . These two parameters play an integral role in the formation of expectations as  and  are present in equations (**49**) and (**50**). Since adaptive learning agents are estimating the parameters in the PLM, a natural question is if learning can also apply to the serial correlation parameters. To answer this question, I reexamine the results of Section 3.2.1 by relaxing the assumption that adaptive learning agents know the values of  and . By following Evans and Honkapohja (**2001**), agents will estimate these parameters with a separate regression of  on .

The main results do not change if adaptive learning agents are required estimate  and . Figure **11** displays the impulse responses of the output gap and inflation to forward guidance shocks under rational expectations (solid line), benchmark adaptive learning (dashed line), and adaptive learning with agents estimating the serial correlation parameters (diamond line). The output gap and inflation exhibit essentially the same impulse responses regardless of whether or not adaptive learning agents estimate  and . The dashed and diamond lines follow virtually the same path. Since adaptive learning agents observe  and  and the shocks are exogenous, agents will quickly learn the values of the serial correlation parameters.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/fae3332d-8374-4341-825f-1286f8b942b3/jmcb12696-fig-0011-m.jpg)

**Fig 11** Impulse Response Functions when Adaptive Learning Agents Estimate Serial Correlation Parameters.

Notes: Solid line: rational expectations; dashed line: benchmark adaptive learning; diamond line: adaptive learning w/estimation of serial correlation parameters. The dashed and diamond lines follow essentially the same path.

## 4.4 Simulated Moments and Sensitivity Analysis

This section examines how the model's retained calibration compares to U.S. data. As described in Section **4.1**, the values of the structural parameters are largely chosen based on previous studies. The standard deviations of the exogenous shocks are also set to 0.001 for simplicity. However, this low value may not generate realistic moments of the macro-economic variables in comparison to the data. Therefore, this section will utilize values of the standard deviations of the shocks that have been found via estimation. Specifically, , , and  are set to 1.067, 1.146, and 0.933, respectively.**29** These values are taken from Milani (**2007**), who estimates a New Keynesian model under both rational expectations and adaptive learning.

Tables **2** and **3** show the standard deviations and cross-correlations for the main macro-economic variables across rational expectations, adaptive learning, and U.S. data. Data for output, inflation, and the interest rate are retrieved from the FRED database of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. The acronyms of the series used for real GDP, inflation, and the interest rate are GDPC1, GDPDEF, and FEDFUNDS.**30** The moments of the U.S. data span the following time period: 1954:Q3–2016:Q3. Following Sinha, the rational expectations and adaptive learning models are simulated for 100,000 periods.

**TABLE 2.**Standard Deviations of the Macro-Economic Variables

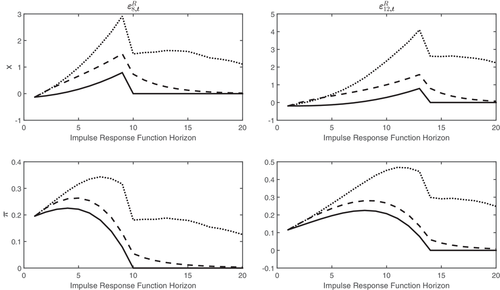
|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Moments** | **Rational Expectations** | **Adaptive Learning** | **U.S. Data** |
| Output | 5.0055 | 5.4500 | 0.8793 |
| Inflation | 2.6324 | 2.6547 | 2.2793 |
| Interest rate | 4.4267 | 4.4744 | 3.5867 |

**TABLE 3.**Cross-Correlations of the Macro-Economic Variables

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Moments** | **Rational Expectations** | **Adaptive Learning** | **U.S. Data** |
|  | −0.2040 | −0.1595 | −0.1503 |
|  | −0.4354 | −0.3498 | −0.0661 |
|  | 0.7247 | 0.7285 | 0.6947 |

The results show that the model generates moments that largely match the data and do not qualitatively change the results when more realistic values of the standard deviations of the shocks are utilized. Tables **2** and **3** display that the rational expectations and adaptive learning standard deviations of inflation and interest rate are close to their U.S. data counterparts. The cross-correlations of the macro-economic variables under the New Keynesian model also generate the same signs as the U.S. data. However, the only exception is the standard deviation of output, which is larger under rational expectations and adaptive learning than the U.S. data. This dissimilarity may be attributed to the small-scale version of the New Keynesian model employed in this paper. Larger scale models with additional shocks and frictions (e.g., Smets and Wouters **2007**) have been shown to match the data more than the simple New Keynesian model. Indeed, Cole (Forthcoming) utilizes a medium-scale DSGE model with financial frictions to examine the effects of forward guidance across rational expectations and adaptive learning.

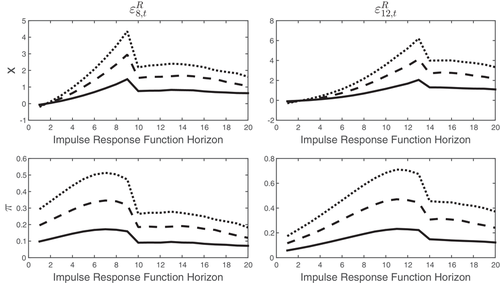
Figure **12** compares the impulse responses between rational expectations, adaptive learning with baseline standard deviation values, and adaptive learning with standard deviation values of Milani (**2007**). The adaptive learning impulse responses do not qualitatively change under the new standard deviation values.**31** Even when utilizing realistic standard deviation values that are closer to the size of the shock (i.e.,  for  relative to a negative one unit decrease to the forward guidance shock), the adaptive learning impulse responses exhibit a similar path relative to the baseline results found in Section 3.2.1.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/f7e7119f-0bfc-4c81-9a6a-97c3d37bc460/jmcb12696-fig-0012-m.jpg)

**Fig 12** Impulse Response Functions to Forward Guidance Shocks under Different Standard Deviation Values.

Notes: Solid line: rational expectations with baseline standard deviation values found in Table **1**; dashed line: benchmark adaptive learning with baseline standard deviation values found in Table **1**; dotted line: adaptive learning with standard deviation values of Milani (**2007**).

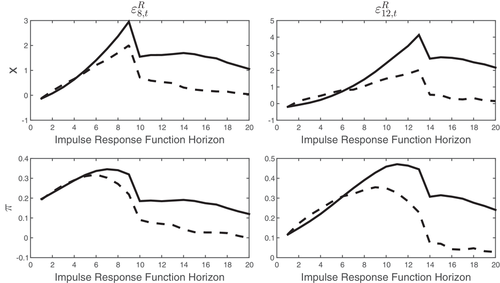
The results also show that the belief adjustments of the adaptive learning agents depend on the size of the forward guidance shock relative to the volatility of that shock. Figure **13** displays the impulse responses to smaller and larger values of the forward guidance shocks under realistic standard deviations values from Milani (**2007**). The dotted line indicates a negative one and a half unit shock, dashed line represents negative one unit shock, and the solid line means a negative one-half unit shock. As the forward guidance shock's size decreases relative to the overall volatility of that shock, the belief adjustments are not as great. This outcome is demonstrated by the solid line being below the dashed line. However, if the size of the forward guidance shock is larger relative to the overall volatility of that shock, the forecasts of agents change more compared to the baseline case. This result is observed as the dotted line is above the dashed line. Overall, the impulse responses are more responsive to forward guidance shocks in comparison to results under a smaller shock value.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/d47190f5-a349-4c2d-a632-79e38a52a2b1/jmcb12696-fig-0013-m.jpg)

**Fig 13** Adaptive Learning Impulse Response Functions under Different Shock Values.

Note: Solid line: CGL under negative one-half unit shock; dashed line: CGL under negative one unit shock; Dotted line: CGL under negative one and a half unit shock.

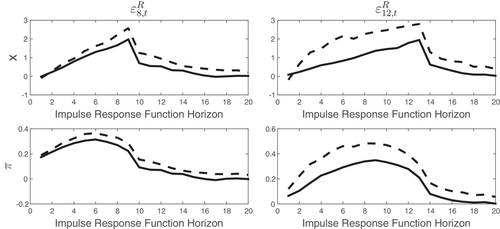
The adaptive learning beliefs also depend on the persistence of the structural shocks. Figure **14** displays the impulse responses of the output gap and inflation to forward guidance shocks under different values of the persistence parameters. Note that this exercise is under the realistic values of the standard deviations of the structural shocks from Milani (**2007**). The solid line indicates the adaptive learning results under the baseline values of the serial correlation parameters (i.e.,  and ). The dashed line represents the adaptive learning impulse responses under more persistent structural shocks, that is,  and . Figure **14** shows that the baseline results do not qualitatively change as the dashed line follows a similar path as before. However, as the persistence of the structural shocks increases, the reaction of adaptive learning responses to forward guidance shocks is dampened. Overall, the dashed line is below the solid line. As the output gap and inflation become more persistent due to the higher values of  and , these variables are not as responsive to forward guidance statements as in the baseline case.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/a3126ab9-3a82-4fe7-8bdd-5a9a62219c0c/jmcb12696-fig-0014-m.jpg)

**Fig 14** Adaptive Learning Impulse Response Functions under Different Values of  and .

Note: Solid line: CGL w/ and ; dashed line: CGL w/ and .

The extra parameters that are included in this model relative to a benchmark New Keynesian model are the standard deviations of the forward guidance shocks, that is,  for . The cases above assumed these numbers equaled the value of the standard deviation of the unanticipated monetary policy shock . This assumption was for simplicity and followed Del Negro, Giannoni, and Patterson (**2012**). However, it is of interest to compare the results of the value used for urn:x-wiley:00222879:media:jmcb12696:jmcb12696-math-0439 in this section to a lower value of  for . Figure **15** shows the impulse responses under these two scenarios. The solid line uses realistic standard deviation values found in Milani (**2007**) with  for . The dashed line denotes realistic standard deviation values of Milani (**2007**) but with  decreased by one-half unit to 0.433 for . The adaptive learning responses display qualitatively the same results as the benchmark case. The solid and dashed lines show similar paths in Figure **15**. However, as the  decreases, the differences increase. The dashed line is above the solid line. As the volatility of the forward guidance shock becomes smaller relative to the size of the forward guidance shock, there is greater change in the adaptive learning beliefs and impulse responses.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/f03704f0-4ab3-4717-8f8c-7ed671616814/jmcb12696-fig-0015-m.jpg)

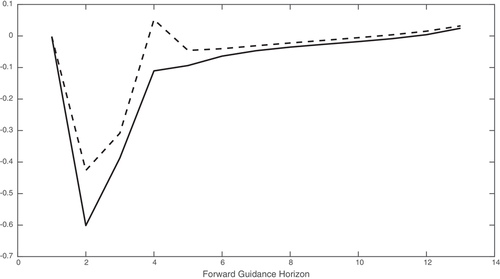
**Fig 15** Adaptive Learning Impulse Response Functions under Different Values of  for .

Note: Solid line: adaptive learning with standard deviation values of Milani (**2007**) w/; Dashed line: adaptive learning with standard deviation values of Milani (**2007**) w/

## 4.5 Contribution of Additional Unanticipated Monetary Policy Shocks

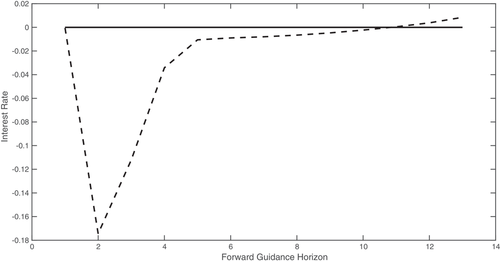
The constant interest rate exercises in Sections 3.2.2 and **3.3** assume that the central bank is committed to its goal of  across the entire forward guidance horizon. Rational expectations agents understand precisely how forward guidance will affect the economy, and thus, the interest rate each period is . Since the adaptive learning process is different than rational expectations, the same forward guidance will not give a model implied  across the forward guidance horizon. A consequence is that the interest rate can be negative under adaptive learning. To model a commitment to , Sections 3.2.2 and **3.3** assume the central bank chooses the unanticipated monetary policy shock  each period over the forward guidance horizon to ensure the interest rate equals . However, a natural question regards the addition of these unanticipated shocks. Specifically, what is their contribution toward the differences between rational expectations and adaptive learning? To answer the previous question, the main results of Section **3.3** are reexamined when the central bank is not committed to  under adaptive learning.**32**

Figure **16** displays the main results of Section **3.3** with and without the central bank choosing the unanticipated monetary policy shocks. The solid line represents the baseline adaptive learning case of commitment to constant interest rate found in Section **3.3**, that is, the central bank choosing the unanticipated monetary policy shocks to ensure . The dashed line denotes no commitment to a constant interest rate, that is, the central bank not choosing the unanticipated monetary policy shocks. As a reminder, each line represents the value of the output gap under adaptive learning minus the value of the output gap under rational expectations. Overall, the dashed line follows the solid line. However, the former is above the latter indicating that the differences between the two expectations formation schemes decrease under the no commitment scenario. The reason is as follows. The interest rate is allowed to be negative under adaptive learning with no commitment. Figure **17** displays that the interest rate is negative for most of the forward guidance horizon. Since the interest rate can be negative, output is positively affected under adaptive learning, and thus, closer to its rational expectations counterpart. In addition, Figure **16** shows a relatively large increase in period four under the no commitment case. This feature occurs because of expectations of the interest rate. Figure **18** displays the difference of expectations of the interest rate between adaptive learning and rational expectations under both no commitment (dashed line) and commitment (solid line). Under the former case, expectations of the interest rate are lower under adaptive learning than rational expectations in time period four. These adaptive learning agents know that interest rates can be negative now and into the future. This information favorably affects interest rate expectations, and thus, the value of the current output gap in time period four under the no commitment case.

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/d2812a41-5e5e-4fa9-8e7f-ae4396e32072/jmcb12696-fig-0016-m.jpg)

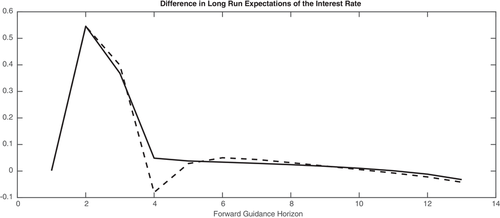
**Fig 16** Effects of Forward Guidance w/and w/o Choosing Unanticipated Monetary Policy Shocks.

Notes: Each line denotes the value of the output gap under adaptive learning minus the value of the output gap under rational expectations. The solid line represents the baseline case from Section **3.3**. The dashed line indicates the same exercise without the central bank choosing the unanticipated monetary policy shocks, so that .

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/9191c8d7-4519-44d3-b6ce-3112aa9e8915/jmcb12696-fig-0017-m.jpg)

**Fig 17** Adaptive Learning's Interest Rate under Exercise of Section **3.3**.

Notes: The solid indicates the baseline case from Section **3.3**. The dashed line denotes the same exercise without the central bank choosing the unanticipated monetary policy shocks, so that .

[](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/cms/asset/ad2b59c4-0ca6-4b57-ac61-57c8dbe7f5ca/jmcb12696-fig-0018-m.jpg)

**Fig 18** Difference between Adaptive Learning and Rational Expectations Infinite Horizon Expectations of the Interest Rate.

Notes: A positive value indicates the value under adaptive learning is higher than under rational expectations. A negative value indicates the variable's value under adaptive learning is lower than under rational expectations. The solid line indicates the baseline case from Section **3.3**. The dashed line denotes the same exercise without the central bank choosing the unanticipated monetary policy shocks, so that .

# 5 ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION

The amount of information adaptive learning agents possess is an important assumption and has been analyzed in the previous literature. For instance, Evans and Honkapohja (**2013**) explore adaptive learning under different assumptions about the information set of agents. Heterogeneous expectations may exist or adaptive learning agents may not know the correct structural form of the economy. Furthermore, the current paper has assumed that adaptive learning agents are near rational when forming expectations as the focus regards the effects of forward guidance when relaxing the rational expectations hypothesis. An implication of this assumption is that agents know the precise nature and size of the shocks. However, they may not know this information in reality and would have to filter the shocks that are affecting the economy.**33** This uncertainty might affect the transmission mechanism through which forward guidance operates. Since the current paper focuses on the effects of forward guidance across different expectations formation schemes, uncertainty about the precise nature and size of the shocks is beyond the scope of this paper. However, this topic would be interesting to explore in a further study.

# 6 CONCLUSION

To combat the effects of the 2007–09 global financial crisis, central banks around the world have instituted forward guidance. Because the effectiveness of forward guidance hinges on how expectations respond to forward guidance, it is of interest to investigate the link between expectation assumptions and forward guidance. The standard way to model expectations in the macro-economic literature is the rational expectations hypothesis. However, if agents form expectations using a more plausible theory of expectations formation (e.g., adaptive learning), the forward guidance results are different.

This paper presents an infinite horizon New Keynesian model with forward guidance and compares the results under two types of expectation assumptions. Under the assumption of rational expectations, Evans and Honkapohja (**2001**) state agents form expectations based on the true model of the economy. However, adaptive learning agents do not know this information, and instead, act as real-life economists and construct their expectations using standard econometric techniques. The results of this paper show that the desired effect of forward guidance depends on the manner in which agents form their expectations. When the central bank gives the same forward guidance information such that the interest rate equals 0 for an extended period of time to both types of agents, the adaptive learning paths of the output gap and inflation overshoot and undershoot the ones of rational expectations. In addition, the impulse responses of the macro-economic variables show that adaptive learning agents miss the precise response to forward guidance shocks. The impulse responses under adaptive learning display a more persistent effect than its rational expectations counterparts. During a period of economic crisis (e.g., a recession), the effects of forward guidance under rational expectations are overstated relative to adaptive learning. Specifically, the output gap is larger under the assumption of rational expectations than adaptive learning. These results occur because rational expectations agents precisely understand the effects forward guidance has on the economy as they form their expectations from the true model of the economy. However, adaptive learning agents must *estimate* the effects of forward guidance on the economy as they do not know the true model of the economy. Furthermore, these latter results have implications for policymakers. If the effects of forward guidance are based on a model with rational expectations, which is the standard assumption in the macro-economic literature, the results may be misleading relative to a more plausible theory of expectations formation (e.g., adaptive learning).

There are other modifications to the model presented in this paper that are worth noting. For instance, this paper allows agents to know the end date of forward guidance. Another type of forward guidance policy allows the central bank to link the expiration date of forward guidance to economic conditions. For instance, the unemployment rate is a criterion that the Federal Reserve has used to link to its forward guidance policy. The RLS formula also could be altered to include a gain parameter that changes based on recent forecast errors as discussed in Milani (**2014**) and Marcet and Nicolini (**2003**). This formation of the gain parameter allows agents to better track structural breaks in the economy. In addition, agents can be assumed to have heterogeneous expectations as in Branch and McGough (**2009**). Branch (**2004**) uses survey data and shows evidence that respondents have heterogeneous expectations. Overall, the role of expectations formation is especially crucial to understand the effects of forward guidance.

# Biography

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# Notes

1. A related issue is the credibility of policymakers to commit to a future path of interest rates (see, for instance, Woodford 2012). In part, because of credibility concerns, Woodford (2012) prefers forward guidance policies that explicitly state the criteria that will underlie future policy rules. This current paper abstracts from this subject.

2. The anticipated shocks are similar to the news shocks of Schmitt-Grohé and Uribe (2012).

3. This type of forward guidance is in contrast to state-contingent forward guidance where the duration of a constant interest rate path is linked to economic conditions.

4. Adaptive learning agents do not take into account they will update their beliefs in future periods. They believe that the beliefs they form every period are optimal. This methodology follows from the anticipated utility discussion from Kreps (1998).

5. As will be discussed in Section 3, forward guidance is assumed to start after a large number of periods have passed, that is, after a period of economic stability.

6. As in Preston (2006), a supply shock is added.

7. In the terminology of Laséen and Svensson, are described as central bank “projections” (p. 10) of what will be and periods into the future, respectively.

8. Carlstrom, Fuerst, and Paustian (2012) show that determinacy can arise from an interest rate peg if terminal conditions are known and a standard monetary policy rule is followed after the interest rate peg. However, unusually large responses of the output and inflation are found through this process.

9. A constant interest rate path can still be achieved by modeling forward guidance with equations (20)–(24). As will be described in Section 3.2.2, the forward guidance shocks can be chosen such that the interest rate equals a certain value for a fixed amount of periods into the future.

10. In a zero steady-state inflation rate, . The model implied steady-state real interest rate .

11. Discussion of the parameter values can be found in Table 1.

12. This paper focuses on a version of the model that is determinate, so that the PLM is based on the unique nonexplosive rational expectations equilibrium. The parameter values in Table 1 verify that the rational expectations solution is determinate. In addition, while the PLM may be formed in other ways, this paper follows the standard in the literature of disciplining adaptive learning agents’ forecasting model to the MSV solution. This method ensures that it nests the rational expectations equilibrium (see Evans and Honkapohja 2001). While beyond the scope of the current paper, future work could examine the effects using a forecasting model not based on the rational expectations solution.

13. In the PLM, the time subscript is left off the coefficients to emphasize that adaptive learning agents believe current period forecasts are optimal and do not take into account they will be updating their beliefs every period. However, as will be described later, the PLM coefficients will evolve over time.

14. Since this paper restricts attention to fundamentals solutions and does not appear in equations (9), (18), and (20), the PLM does not contain .

15. An alternative is to assume that agents use the coefficient estimates from the current period when forming expectations. This results in expectations and current period parameter estimates determined simultaneously when making optimal decisions.

16. This is similar to Milani (2007).

17. In both cases, adaptive learning agents would need to know or estimate the serial correlation parameters, that is, and . The reason is that adaptive learning agents’ forecasting model (i.e., PLM) is based on the rational expectations solution and the model includes serially correlated exogenous processes that are observable. Knowledge of the persistence parameters is further examined in Section 4.3.

18. A projection facility is utilized to ensure beliefs are not explosive.

19. is chosen to be a large number, so that the adaptive learning coefficients converge to its stationary distribution.

20. The coefficient is found in equation (35). Since Figures 3 and 4 regard an eight-period ahead shock, columns 1–8 of the coefficient are shown in these figures. The Online Appendix shows the evolution of the , , and belief coefficients. In addition, the coefficients converge to the rational expectations equilibrium in the periods after the end of the impulse response function horizon.

21. The adaptive learning impulse responses of output and investment to a technology shock found in Eusepi and Preston (2011) also displayed a larger magnitude relative to rational expectations.

22. is chosen to be a large number, so that the adaptive learning coefficients converge to its stationary distribution.

23. This adjustment seems fair since agents’ expectations in real life about the future interest rate might not respond as exactly as the central bank would want, and thus, the interest rate might not equal a model implied .

24. This strategy also ensures the adaptive learning coefficients converge to its stationary distribution.

25. This length is based on the duration of the Great Recession as defined by the National Bureau of Economic Research.

26. A positive value on Figure 6 indicates the output gap under adaptive learning is higher than under rational expectations. A negative value implies the output gap under rational expectations is higher than under adaptive learning.

27. This coefficient is located in the first row and first column of the matrix in equation (35).

28. is the baseline case used in this paper. For illustrative purposes, this paper chooses the two other values of to be 0.15 and 1.5.

29. For simplicity, the standard deviations of the monetary policy forward guidance shocks are set equal to the standard deviation of the unanticipated monetary shock, that is, 0.933.

30. As in Sinha (2016), inflation and the interest rate are expressed at an annual rate.

31. The greater response of the impulse responses under the new standard deviation values can be attributed to uncertainty. Since the standard deviation values used in this section are higher than the baseline case and all other shocks are active in the simulation, there exists greater uncertainty causing adaptive learning agents to misvalue more the effects of forward guidance.

32. In Sections 3.2.2 and 3.3, it is unnecessary to enforce the ZLB as modeled by equation (28). The setup of the constant interest rate exercises results in . In addition, to understand the contribution of choosing the unanticipated monetary policy shocks, this current section focuses on the effects of removing a commitment to . Thus, a consequence is that the interest rate can be negative in this current section under adaptive learning.

33. A related topic regards credibility of a central bank’s forward guidance statements. This has been recently examined by Dong (2014).