



A darker side to decentralized banks: Market power and credit rationing in SME lending[☆]

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ABSTRACT

We use loan-level data to study how the organizational structure of banks impacts small business lending. We find that decentralized banks—where branch managers have greater autonomy over lending decisions—give larger loans to small firms and those with “soft information.” However, decentralized banks are also more responsive to their own competitive environment. They are more likely to expand credit when faced with competition but also cherry pick customers and restrict credit when they have market power. This “darker side” to decentralized banks in concentrated markets highlights that the level of local banking competition is key to determining which organizational structure provides better lending terms for small businesses.

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1. Introduction

Small banks are believed to play a critical role in financing young and small businesses in the economy. In addition to their ability to engage in relationship banking (Petersen and Rajan, 1994; Berger and Udell, 1995), their decentralized lending structure gives them an important advantage when lending to small firms. The

decentralized structure implies that branch managers in small banks have far greater autonomy over adjudication and lending decisions, giving them an incentive to collect and use “soft information” when setting loan terms (Stein, 2002). Since much of the information used in lending to small businesses may be “soft,” this gives decentralized banks an advantage in small-business lending relative to the centralized decision-making structure in large banks.

These differences in the organizational structure of banks can have important consequences for the real economy. For example, Sapienza (2002) shows that small firms are less likely to borrow from banks subsequent to mergers (that tend to make them more hierarchical) relative to firms borrowing from banks that have not merged. Berger, Miller, Petersen, Rajan, and Stein (2005) show that small businesses located in US regions with a majority of large banks were more likely to face credit constraints than firms located close to small, decentralized banks. Likewise, Mian (2008) shows that decentralized banks consistently engage

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in more lending activity to small firms in markets with weak contract enforceability. The predominant view that emerges from this literature is that decentralized banks are the better answer for credit-constrained small firms that may otherwise be excluded from bank finance.

Using a loan-level data set on Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) lending in Mexico, we find that this positive picture of decentralized banks does not always hold true. While our results are consistent with prior work in this literature, we show that the same discretion that allows branch managers of decentralized banks to act on soft information also allows them to be more responsive to their own competitive environment when setting loan terms. This can be beneficial for small businesses in competitive banking markets where decentralized banks can help alleviate credit constraints. But, in line with Rajan (1992), it also implies that decentralized banks might better-exploit their market power in concentrated banking markets by restricting credit or charging higher interest rates to small businesses.

Our empirical analyses are based on a comprehensive, loan-level panel data set on SME loans in Mexico, covering the period 2002–2006. We find that small firms and those that tend to rely more on “soft information” get larger loans from decentralized banks. These results are even stronger when using instrumental variables, indicating that the differences across banks lie not just in the terms of lending, but also in the types of firms that get approved for a loan. In concentrated banking markets, however, decentralized banks are more likely than centralized banks to cherry pick the best firms, give them smaller loans, and charge higher rates of interest. This is particularly true for firms in the services sector, that provide less “hard information” to banks, have less collateral, and hence tend to have fewer outside options for external finance.

Our results confirm the findings that decentralized banks are more likely to use soft information when setting loan terms. However, we show that this can have both positive and negative consequences for small firms. While some of our results complement prior findings by showing the benefits of decentralized banks, the results also highlight that there may be a darker side to decentralized bank lending. Put differently, the relative benefit of decentralized bank structures for small business lending may depend on the institutional and competitive environment in which banks are located.

A novel feature of our analysis is that it allows us to get direct measures of organizational structure without relying on the size of the banks. Since our results are based on banks that have large, national presences but differ in their organizational structure, we can also show that it is in fact the organizational structure of banks that drives the observed patterns in our data as opposed to some other factor that may be correlated with bank size (e.g., Brickley, Linck, and Smith, 2003).

In this way, the paper ties together two literatures that focus on small business lending but have so far remained largely separate.¹ On the one hand, it is related to studies

examining how competition in the banking industry impacts credit constraints of small startups (Petersen and Rajan, 1995; Black and Strahan, 2002; Cetorelli, 2004; Cetorelli and Strahan, 2006; Zarutskie, 2006; Kerr and Nanda, 2009). On the other, it is related to studies examining how bank structure affects lending outcomes (Stein, 2002; Berger et al., 2005). In tying together these two literatures, our findings may also explain why entrepreneurship increased significantly following the cross-state US banking deregulations from the late 1970s through the early 1990s, despite the fact that the deregulations led to a wave of M&A activity where the number of small banks fell dramatically. The increase in entry following the deregulation is seen as a puzzle by some, as a decrease in the number of small banks should have been associated with a decline in entrepreneurship. Our result highlights that the increase in entrepreneurship in this instance may have occurred precisely because small banks had been effective in exploiting their monopoly power in the period before the deregulation. In this context, the competition between large banks—a second best outcome in itself—was nonetheless a better outcome for entrepreneurs than borrowing from monopolist small banks.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: In Section 2, we outline the theoretical considerations for the paper. In Section 3, we outline our estimation design and the series of institutional features we exploit in our analysis. Section 4 provides an overview of the data and the descriptive statistics. Section 5 outlines our regression results. Finally, in Section 6 we have a brief discussion of our results, and conclusions.

2. Theoretical considerations

Bank credit is the most important source of external finance for young firms and small and medium enterprises (Berger and Udell, 1998; Robb and Robinson, 2009) and is often a key source of capital helping SMEs to substitute for expensive trade credit (Fisman and Love, 2003; Petersen and Rajan, 1997). Given that these ventures are associated with high degrees of asymmetric information, otherwise viable small businesses may still face credit constraints that prevent them from growing or force them to prematurely shut down. Since the vast majority of firms in the economy are small,² financing constraints for small businesses are an important academic and policy concern.

A large literature on bank lending to small firms has therefore focused on how the organizational structure or the competitive environment of banks may affect small firms' access to credit (Rajan, 1992; Petersen and Rajan, 1994, 1995; Berger and Udell, 1995, 2002; Black and Strahan, 2002). While much of the literature on bank structure has

(footnote continued)

Presbitero and Zazzaro (2011) examine the interaction between bank size and market structure, but their focus is on banks' ability to engage in relationship lending rather than their ability to use soft information to their advantage.

² For example, of the six million firms in the US with at least one employee, 5.3 million (89%) have less than 20 employees (United States Small Business Administration, 1996).

¹ Although not the focus of the paper, Sapienza's (2002) analysis also speaks to the interaction between bank size and market structure.

focused on the ability for smaller banks to maintain lending relationships with small businesses, more recent papers have argued that in addition, small banks may be better at alleviating credit constraints for small businesses because they are more effective at processing the “soft information” of young and small firms (Stein, 2002).

According to this view, a key distinguishing factor of small business lending is that it relies heavily on information that cannot be easily verified by others. For that reason, branch managers of decentralized banks, who have more autonomy over lending decisions, will invest more energy *ex ante* in processing the “soft information” available for small firms. Given that these managers bear full responsibility over lending choices, they have higher powered incentives to gather and react to soft information from their clients. Branch managers in centralized banks, in contrast, rely more heavily on “hard information” such as credit scoring models. As a result, banks with decentralized lending structures will have a comparative advantage in lending to young and small businesses with predominantly unverifiable information, even when larger banks can recreate some of the benefits of lending relationships that small banks have.

In this paper, we build on the same intuition, but also examine the interaction between bank structure and the competitive environment in which the banks are located. In particular, we build on Rajan (1992) to hypothesize that branch managers in decentralized banks should also be more responsive to their *own* competitive environment when setting deal terms, as they are more “informed” than managers of centralized banks. In some instances, this may be beneficial to small businesses because branch managers can set terms based on a more complete set of information that better determines the actual borrower’s propensity to pay back a loan. However, in other instances, such as when banks have market power, decentralized banks may be able to extract more of the surplus from small firms than centralized banks, by charging higher rates or restricting access to credit.

3. Estimation design

Empirically testing the hypothesis that banks with different organizational structures have different lending terms—that also vary by the institutional environment—poses several challenges. First, we need a measure of bank organizational structure that allows us to distinguish between banks that use a centralized vs. a decentralized lending model. Second, we need to account for the fact that the observed lending terms are endogenous, since they are conditional on selection of firms by banks. Decentralized banks may lend to different types of firms than centralized banks. Therefore, comparing lending terms across the bank types without accounting for this selection could lead to biased results. In addition, we need to account for the fact that the distribution of bank branches for centralized and decentralized banks may vary systematically across competitive environments in relation to the SME lending opportunity. Put differently, centralized and decentralized banks may place a different weight on the SME market when rolling out new branches. Comparing

lending terms for banks across different environments may again conflate this selection of markets with the lending terms conditional on entering those markets.

In order to get an accurate measure of the banks’ organizational structure, we conducted extensive interviews in each of the major banks in Mexico, at both the corporate and the branch levels, to gain insight into the degree of autonomy that branch managers had over adjudication and the lending process. In particular, during interviews with branch managers and especially with the SME credit managers for each bank, we asked them to describe the loan approval process. Based on those interviews, we created an index that reflects the extent to which lending decisions are made at the bank’s central offices or at the branch level. We include capital budgeting, loan adjudication, client acquisition, loan amount, loan size, interest rate, and collection decisions. Table 1 shows that the index varies from a minimum of 7 for HSBC (the most centralized) to a maximum of 20 for Bajío (the most decentralized). It also shows that there is a clear split between Santander and Banorte, which allows us to use a dummy variable to group the two sets of banks into distinct categories for our analysis, where those banks with a score of 10 or below are coded as being centralized.

We rely on important historical features of the Mexican banking industry to address the issues of selection outlined above. As we outline in greater detail below, a series of factors impacting the Mexican banking market effectively wiped out SME lending across all the major banks over the decade prior to our study. In 2002, there was a renewed push from the government to initiate lending to SMEs in Mexico, which led to the re-emergence of a small business lending market subsequent to that period. We argue that the complete lack of SME lending in the decade prior to our study implies that the distribution of centralized and decentralized bank branches across markets was not driven by selection into better or worse SME markets but by other factors such as the need to collect deposits. Moreover, the attractiveness of the SME market was equally absent as a decision factor for all banks. Given this fact, we use the pre-existing distribution of bank branches in 2002 as plausibly exogenous and hence, also use the share of decentralized banks in the firm’s local banking market to instrument for the selection between bank types and firms. This identification strategy has been used in other work looking at SME lending (Berger, Miller, Petersen, Rajan, and Stein, 2005), as well in the extensive health care literature on competition and patient choice (e.g., Kessler and McClennan, 2000).

Since our identification strategy relies critically on showing that banks did not select into markets, we provide a historical account of the Mexican banking sector in the section below.

3.1. The Mexican banking sector and SME lending: 1990–2002

The Mexican banking industry has had a tumultuous history marked by a consistent restriction of credit. From its origins, Mexican banks have been at the center of the Mexican political system, and have monopolized the country’s financial resources. Their relative lack of

Table 1

Level of decentralization by bank.

This table creates a measure of bank decentralization based on the degree of autonomy granted to branch managers for various activities. The level of decentralization varies from 1 to 3 for each activity. 1 means that the decisions surrounding that activity are defined by the bank's headquarters. 3 means that they are made entirely by the branch manager.

Bank	Activity							Sum	Mean
	Capital budgeting	Loan type	Client acquisition	Adjudication	Interest rate	Amount	Collection		
Bajío	3	3	3	3	2	3	3	20	2.86
NBFI	1	3	3	3	3	3	3	19	2.71
Banorte	2	3	3	3	2	2	3	18	2.57
Santander	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	10	1.43
Bancomer	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	9	1.29
Banamex	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	1.00
HSBC	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	7	1.00
1	Centrally defined	Standardized Product	Bank-wide policy	Just parametric	Fixed rate	Parametric defined		Central office flags	
2	Negotiated P&L			Parametric plus financials	Parametric defines range	Parametric defines range		General policies, branch decides	
3	Each branch has own P&L	Potential to customize	Branch defined	Manager's decision	Customized	Full discretion (to limit)		Branch decides	

competitiveness only worsened when severe macroeconomic mismanagement led President López Portillo's government to expropriate all private banks in 1981 (Haber, 2004).³

Accordingly, when the government decided to privatize banks as part of its broader privatization strategy in 1991, there still remained a fear of expropriation among investors. Given the government's desperate need for resources due to aggressive expansionary policies, it sought to auction the existing banks at the highest possible price. To attract investors, the government granted them a protected oligopoly shielded from internal and external competition (Haber, 2004) and sold the banks to the highest bidder irrespective of managerial experience (Unal and Navarro, 1999). As a result, Mexican banks sold with a premium of 45% over the value of their equity (Unal and Navarro, 1999). This created an impenetrable oligopoly that due to moral hazard, inexperienced management, pervasive tunneling, and mis-reporting of non-performing loans, was highly volatile (Haber, 2004).⁴ The natural end result was the collapse of the banking sector in 1994 that continued the protracted years of restricted lending and Mexico's distinction as a poor financing environment.

Aside from the resultant crisis, the institutional setup had other practical implications. Between the nationalization of 1981, the privatization of 1991, and the years leading up to the 1994 crisis, most banks lost their credit analysis capabilities and the incentive to engage in commercial lending. As the banks were first expropriated

and later re-privatized, their administration was increasingly centralized. What little discretion was still available to branch managers was lost when the 1994 crisis led to a complete restriction of lending, an expensive governmental bailout of all banks, and a desperate need for capitalization of the system. Mexican banks were opened to foreign investment in 1997 and foreign ownership increased from 16% in 1997 to 83% by 2004 (Haber and Musacchio, 2005). The market was also further concentrated, where the five largest banks gained control of around 70% of the market. While the capital injection increased the centralization of practices, it did not increase lending; in fact, the opposite occurred (Haber, 2004; Haber and Musacchio, 2005).

At the same time, the privatization of the early 1990s led to the emergence of new regional banks which, given that they were in their emergence stage during the crisis, did not suffer from the mismanagement associated with the bidding wars of the larger financial groups. Banks such as Banco Mercantil del Norte—which later became Banorte—and Banco del Bajío, emerged as new, private, regional operations during the privatization era. As other banks collapsed during 1995 and were sold to foreign owners, these regional operations found themselves as the sole providers of credit to the government and grew vertiginously throughout the country to national or quasi-national operations. This also shielded them from the aggressive entrance of international capital during the 1997 wave, and they thus retained the decentralized structures that they grew with.

The period from 1997 to 2000 was one of greater stability, where both centralized and decentralized banks were able to maintain high levels of profitability without engaging in much commercial lending—by lending to the government, their own shareholders, and by charging extremely high fees and commissions to account holders (Haber and Musacchio, 2005). That commercial lending was not a priority for banks is reflected in the continued downward trend in the activity, with private sector lending as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP)

³ This was in fact the third time that banks were expropriated since 1915. The two previous times, however, occurred during the highly turbulent times that followed the Mexican Revolution and preceded the creation of the national economic and political pact that gave rise to Mexican corporatism and the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI's) hegemony.

⁴ Most of these managers did not have previous banking experience. Rather, they emerged out of trading companies and investment banks that developed during the stock exchange boom.

falling from 14.5% in 1997 to 9.2% in 2001—the lowest levels of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries.

The retraction of credit affected Mexican SMEs disproportionately. Up to 1985, development banks in Mexico such as NAFINSA and Banrural played a central role in business financing through several government-sponsored funds. While their aim was to complement the role of commercial banks, in most cases they actually substituted all SME financing. Due to several structural and contextual factors (including the repeated financial and macroeconomic crises), these agencies lowered their activity considerably during the decades of the 1980s and 1990s (Canales, 2008). During the privatization of the early 1990s, some credit did reach SMEs, but given the organizational factors described above, loans were mostly given with aggressive property collateral requirements and were often denominated in US dollars (Gonzalez-Hermosillo et al., 1997). As a result, the credit crunch combined with the currency crisis affected SMEs—especially those in nontradable sectors—disproportionately, further decreasing their already scant access to credit. Mexican businesses thus perfected the art of survival without financing. Around 70% of Mexican businesses finance their operations through trade and supplier credit, which carries costs of 60–150% per year (Banco de Mexico, 2010, 2011). An extra 15% of business financing comes from alternative credit sources (sometimes coded in surveys as SME loans) such as personal credit cards or personal mortgage loans, which are equally expensive (Banco de Mexico, 2010, 2011).

In sum, SME credit has historically not been a priority for any bank in Mexico. Rather, banks have based their profitability on extremely high commissions for retail banking and on government lending. Accordingly, branching decisions have been based on opportunities for retail banking. Mexican banks basically entered the new millennium with little lending to the commercial sector, but with two different—and equally successful—organizational structures for retail banking: fully centralized and decentralized. Once SME lending began, banks ported their retail lending technologies to the SME sector. This fact therefore allows us to use the bank structure and the distribution of bank branches as exogenous to the SME lending opportunity. We describe tests of this claim in the section below.

4. Data

The data for this study are drawn from a proprietary loan-level database maintained by the ministry of the economy of Mexico. In 2002, there was a renewed push from the government to initiate lending to SMEs in Mexico. The Ministry of the Economy was reformed to include a sub-ministry for the development of SMEs, which determined SME access to bank credit as one of the main priorities of the ministry. The initiatives to bring credit to SMEs were grouped under the National SME Financing System (SINAFIN, for its initials in Spanish). While the program evolved and changed considerably from its inception in 2001 and its initial implementation in 2002, its initial incarnation consisted of a government-funded guarantee system that covered banks' SME loan losses. The program included both a first-losses product

that covered a set percentage of a bank's SME loan portfolio, and a traditional guarantee that covered up to 75% of each loan that defaulted, but that had a cost of around 2% of the guaranteed amount.

The SINAFIN program provided an incentive for the banks to experiment with a segment that they had traditionally overlooked while they focused on less risky but still profitable investments. As the banks developed pilot products for SMEs and started testing the segment, they discovered that there was a much larger demand for loans, at much better repayment rates, than they had anticipated. During its first five years of operation, and even though it is a relatively small program (US\$150 million as invested between 2001 and 2006), it generated very positive results.

Over the period that we study, all SME loans given by private-sector banks through the program are included in this database. It is important to note that, given that this was the first effort by the banks at creating an SME-specific product, in fact, the database is a good approximation on all loans granted to SMEs in the period.⁵ The database includes unique firm- and bank-identifiers, basic firm-level information such as the firm size, industry, and location, as well as a set of loan-level characteristics such as the purpose of the loan (working capital vs. fixed asset investment), the amount of the loan, and the interest rate that was charged. A separate database also maintains whether a firm defaulted on its loan.

We use the information on firm size to bucket firms into one of three categories—firms with less than 15 employees are classified as “Micro,” those with more than 15 but less than 30 employees are classified as “Small,” and those with more than 30 employees are classified as “Medium.”⁶ Table 2 provides descriptive statistics on the firms in our sample. As can be seen in Panel A, 60% of the firms in this sample are Micro firms, with an average size of six employees. A further 22% are Small firms with an average size of 21 employees and the remaining 18% are classified as Medium firms with an average size of 52 employees. Panel A also highlights differences in the share of loans each type of firm takes for fixed asset loans, compared to working capital, and differences in the interest rate charged across different types of firms.

In Panel B, we provide descriptive statistics by banks' lending structure. The descriptive evidence is consistent with the hypothesis that decentralized banks are better at

⁵ Starting in 2007, the rules around the guarantee program and SME lending operations of some banks changed, so that not all loans for each bank were included in the data. However, interviews with both the ministry of the economy and officials at each of the major banks have confirmed that over the period we study, the database is comprehensive for all SME-specific credit products. Other loans were surely granted to SMEs, but they would have taken the form of mortgage loans or personal consumer loans received by the entrepreneurs and funneled to their business. These personal loans are often coded as SME loans in survey data.

⁶ As defined by the Ministry of the Economy. Not all firms in the database have an estimate of the number of employees, but branch managers were required to provide an estimate of the firm size when giving the loan. Our categorization maps onto this logic, and hence, we use the branch managers' estimates of the category for the firm in instances where we do not have the data to calculate it ourselves.

Table 2

Differences in loan terms.

This table reports descriptive statistics on the sample, based on 83,930 loans over the period January 2002 to December 2006. Panel A reports descriptive statistics by type of firm, while Panel B reports descriptive statistics by the type of bank.

Panel A: Differences by type of firm				
	Total	Medium	Small	Micro
Fraction of loans in database	100%	18%	22%	60%
Average number of employees	16	52	21	6
Average loan size (USD)	29,315	44,341	31,227	24,109
Premium over risk free rate	11.1%	9.8%	10.3%	11.2%
Fixed asset loan share	3.7%	1.1%	0.7%	5.6%
Panel B: Differences by type of bank				
	Total	Decentralized banks	Centralized banks	
Fraction of loans in database	100%	18%	82%	
Fraction in manufacturing	100%	10%	90%	
Fraction in commerce	100%	9%	91%	
Fraction in services	100%	48%	52%	
Fixed asset loan share	4.6%	19.0%	0%	
Average loan size (USD)				
All firms	29,315	35,688	27,886	
Medium firms	44,341	41,124	44,927	
Small firms	31,227	38,600	29,832	
Micro firms	24,109	33,279	21,530	
Median spread over risk free rate				
All firms	10.1%	12.7%	10.7%	
Medium firms	10.1%	9.9%	10.1%	
Small firms	10.3%	11.7%	10.3%	
Micro firms	11.2%	14.3%	11.1%	

processing soft information. Although 18% of all the loans in the database are given by decentralized banks, they account for 48% of the loans given to firms in the service sector—which tends to be associated much more with soft information than firms that are engaged in either manufacturing or in retail and wholesale trade (commerce). Moreover, while less than half a percent of centralized banks' loans are given for fixed asset investments, nearly a quarter of decentralized banks' loans are used for this purpose. While it may seem that fixed asset loans involve less soft information as part of the approval decision, they often tend to be more risky in this context because the liquidation value of collateral that SMEs can post is usually of little value to the banks.⁷ Further, as noted in Table 2 Panel A, the vast majority of these loans are given to Micro firms which tend to be less established, less structured, and have less solid financial information.

5. Regression results

5.1. Bank lending structure and deal terms

In Table 3, we report estimates from loan-level regressions where the dependent variable is the size of loans to

small businesses. The estimations take the form

$$\ln(\text{SIZE}) = \phi_s + \tau_t + \psi_i + \beta_1 X + \beta_2 \text{SMALL} + \beta_3 \text{MICRO} + \beta_4 \text{DECENTRALIZED} + \beta_5 \text{DEC} * \text{SMALL} + \beta_6 \text{DEC} * \text{MICRO} + \varepsilon_{s,t,b,i}. \quad (1)$$

In these regressions, ϕ_s , τ_t , and ψ_i refer to state, year, and industry fixed effects, respectively. State fixed effects capture systematic differences in the lending environment across states (such as bankruptcy laws) that may affect loan sizes (Laeven and Woodruff, 2007). Similarly, year fixed effects and industry fixed effects (controlling for manufacturing, commerce, and retail firms) control for systematic differences in loan characteristics across these industry types, or across years. *DECENTRALIZED* is a dummy variable that takes a value of one if the bank is categorized as a decentralized bank.⁸ *SMALL* and *MICRO* refer to dummy variables indicating the type of firm receiving the loan, and *DEC*SMALL* and *DEC*MICRO* refer to the interaction between the dummy variable for decentralized banks with the dummy variables of firm type. In some specifications we also add bank fixed effects, to control for fixed differences in the lending policies and practices across banks. In these specifications that include bank fixed effects, the main effect of decentralized banks is absorbed by the bank fixed effects and hence is not reported. The matrix *X* refers to other

⁷ This is especially true for small manufacturing firms. There is very little a bank can do, for example, with a specialized plastic injection machine.

⁸ We do run a robustness check where we replace our dummy variable of decentralized banks with a continuous measure of decentralization outlined in Table 1. All of our results are robust to this alternative measure of decentralization.

Table 3

Loan size by banks' lending structure.

The dependent variable is the log of the loan amount. All regressions include industry controls (manufacturing, commerce or services) and year fixed effects. Models (ii)–(v) include state fixed effects and Models (iv)–(v) include bank fixed effects. IV regressions include separate instruments for both endogenous variables as outlined in the text. Note that bank fixed effects imply that the main effect of decentralized banks is not identified, and hence is not reported in the tables. A firm is coded as "Micro" if the number of employees is under 15; "Small" if the number of employees is between 15 and 30. The omitted category, "Medium", is a firm with over 30 employees. All regressions include robust standard errors, clustered by bank.

Variable	OLS				IV
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)
Log Herfindahl Index (at town level)	–0.077 (0.045)	–0.082* (0.038)	–0.081* (0.035)	–0.068* (0.033)	–0.067* (0.033)
Fixed asset loan	–0.910*** (0.160)	–0.958*** (0.187)	–1.066*** (0.218)	–1.064*** (0.236)	–1.087*** (0.230)
Borrower has defaulted before	0.089 (0.096)	0.079 (0.093)	0.078 (0.092)	0.073 (0.096)	0.068 (0.096)
Micro firm	–0.777*** (0.184)	–0.768*** (0.179)	–0.885*** (0.146)	–0.924*** (0.160)	–0.977*** (0.153)
Small firm	–0.393 (0.203)	–0.392* (0.201)	–0.468** (0.191)	–0.473** (0.191)	–0.549** (0.169)
Decentralized bank	0.457*** (0.069)	0.477*** (0.063)	–0.070 (0.170)		
Decentralized bank × Micro			0.713** (0.199)	0.800*** (0.199)	1.132** (0.388)
Decentralized bank × Small			0.467* (0.204)	0.479* (0.207)	1.066* (0.469)
Industry fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bank fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
F-statistic					370.82
Observations	83,930	83,930	83,930	83,930	83,930
R-squared	0.18	0.18	0.20	0.21	0.21

characteristics of the loan, such as whether it was a fixed asset or working capital loan as well as the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI) of bank concentration associated with the municipality in which the firm is located.

Columns (i) and (ii) of Table 3 show that even after controlling for covariates, decentralized banks are associated with giving larger loans to SMEs. Column (iii) includes the interaction with the decentralized bank dummy and shows that, consistent with the descriptive statistics, decentralized banks give larger loans to small and micro firms, although there is no meaningful difference in the loan size for medium firms. This highlights that the higher loan sizes to SME firms reported in columns (i) and (ii) are driven by differences in loan sizes to the small and micro firms. To account for the fact that these differences are not driven by compositional differences or practices of specific banks, we include bank fixed effects in column (iv). Given that the loan sizes to medium firms are comparable across bank types, the specification in column (iv) is equivalent to a difference-in-differences specification, where we examine whether decentralized banks give larger loans to small and micro firms relative to the loans given to medium firms. Our results continue to be robust to bank fixed effects.

As noted above, however, these results could still simply reflect that the different lending technologies of decentralized and centralized banks lead to systematic differences in the types of small and micro firms that are granted credit. We therefore interpret the results of Model (iv) with caution, since they are likely to be biased by these selection effects.

To address potential selection biases, we need to instrument for whether a firm gets a loan from a decentralized bank. As outlined above, we use the share of decentralized bank branches in the municipality where the firm is located as an instrument for whether the firm actually receives a loan from a decentralized bank. In other words, in a municipality where decentralized banks have a very high proportion of the total bank branches, firms are much more likely to have been served by a decentralized bank, regardless of their characteristics. This identification strategy is valid because, as discussed in Section 2, the branching patterns across municipalities was driven by retail banking (deposits, checking accounts, credit cards), and not SME lending. Moreover, since the lending structures across the two different types of banks were driven by factors unrelated to the emergence of the SINAFIN program, the share of decentralized banks should proxy for the probability that a firm was matched with a decentralized bank, but should be unrelated to systematic differences in the quality of firms and the terms that a given firm would expect to receive.⁹

⁹ We also verify empirically that the share of decentralized banks across the different types of markets does not vary in ways that are statistically significantly different from variations in the share of centralized banks. Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix test these assumptions empirically and find them to be valid. Panel A of Table A1 compares the proportion of all centralized and decentralized bank activity—measured as bank branches—that is concentrated in states that have a population of SME firms above the median. Panel B of Table

We report the results of these IV regressions in column (v) of Table 3. Comparing column (iv) and column (v) of Table 3 highlights that after controlling for the selection bias, decentralized banks give even larger loans to small and micro firms. The direction of the bias suggests that decentralized banks are more likely to give loans to smaller firms within a given size category, consistent with the view that decentralized banks are better at processing soft information. In unreported regressions, we also find that this selection bias tends to be stronger for small and micro firms in the service sector (with more soft information) compared to firms engaged in manufacturing or commerce.

In Table 4, we turn to examining the interest rate that banks charge to the firms. The estimations take the form

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(\text{RATE}) = & \phi_s + \tau_t + \psi_i + \beta_1 X \\ & + \beta_2 \text{SMALL} + \beta_3 \text{MICRO} + \beta_4 \text{DECENTRALIZED} \\ & + \beta_5 \text{DEC} * \text{SMALL} + \beta_6 \text{DEC} * \text{MICRO} + \varepsilon_{s,t,b,i}. \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

In these regressions, $\ln(\text{RATE})$ refers to the premium over the risk-free rate controlling for the duration of the loan, and the set of covariates and controls are the same as those used in Eq. (1). The first three models in Table 4 suggest that firms borrowing from decentralized banks pay a higher interest rate. In Model (iv), the ordinary least squares (OLS) results show that decentralized banks charge more to small and micro firms, but not to medium firms. These results are strengthened when we include bank fixed effects in column (iv). It is possible, however, that the higher interest rates may be driven by the smaller, “riskier” firms that decentralized banks might be lending to (as noticed by results in Table 3). Comparing column (iv) and column (v) of Table 4 shows that this is indeed the case. What Model (v) suggests is that once we control for the selection bias in the types of firms that decentralized banks lend to, there is no meaningful difference in the interest rates that centralized and decentralized banks charge to small firms, while the coefficient is slightly attenuated (but still statistically significant) for micro firms.

Our results in this section map closely to prior findings (e.g., Berger, Miller, Petersen, Rajan, and Stein, 2005) that decentralized banks are far more effective at processing soft information, and hence, are better able to alleviate financing constraints for small firms. Previous research has typically relied on bank size as a proxy for decentralized lending structures. Since we are comparing banks that have national presence but have a direct measure of their organizational structure, we can confirm that it is decentralization—and not a different mechanism correlated with bank size—that

(footnote continued)

A1 shows that the proportion of decentralized to centralized bank branches in the total market, as well as within more competitive or more concentrated markets, has remained constant through time. This is true even though the total number of branches in these different markets has changed. The results indicate that both types of banks have followed similar branching strategies. All these analyses show that there does not seem to be a significant and systematic difference in how centralized and decentralized banks allocate their activity to particular states or local banking markets, with respect to the SME lending opportunity. In addition, in Table A2 in the Appendix, we show that along a number of dimensions, the two sets of banks are no different from each other in terms of overall performance.

accounts for our results.¹⁰ Interviews with credit brokers,¹¹ branch managers, credit directors, and national product managers of the different banks also confirmed these findings. Interviewees consistently referred to the comparative advantage for decentralized banks to provide more customized loans or to evaluate firms whose information was not as clear. In contrast, they suggested that centralized banks have an advantage in the standardization of their product and the speed with which their credit scoring system can determine lending decisions.

5.2. Lending terms by bank structure and the institutional environment

We now turn to the ability of banks to respond to the local environment in which they are located. Given the added discretion that branch managers of decentralized banks have, we might expect them to be more responsive to the local institutional environment compared to branch managers in centralized banks. In order to examine this further, we look at the competitive environment in each municipality to see if the deal terms offered by decentralized banks are systematically different from those offered by centralized banks across different environments. In order to do so, we estimate the following specifications:

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(\text{SIZE}) = & \phi_s + \tau_t + \psi_i + \beta_1 \text{HHI} + \beta_2 \text{SMALL} + \beta_3 \text{MICRO} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{DECENTRALIZED} + \beta_5 \text{DEC} * \text{HHI} + \varepsilon_{s,t,b,i} \end{aligned} \quad (3)$$

and

$$\begin{aligned} \ln(\text{RATE}) = & \phi_s + \tau_t + \psi_i + \beta_1 \text{HHI} + \beta_2 \text{SMALL} + \beta_3 \text{MICRO} \\ & + \beta_4 \text{DECENTRALIZED} + \beta_5 \text{DEC} * \text{HHI} + \varepsilon_{s,t,b,i}, \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

where HHI refers to the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index of market concentration as a proxy for the level of banking competition in the local market where the loan was given. We measure bank competition using the log of the HHI concentration index calculated using the share of each bank's branches in a given municipality and year. The municipality-level regressions provide a measure of the concentration in the “local” banking market in which the firm is located and go beyond measures of concentration at the state-level (which may not be a good proxy of the actual choices that firms face in their local markets). We also include an interaction between decentralized banks and our measure of local banking competition, captured by the variable $\text{DEC} * \text{HHI}$. These results are reported in Table 5.

Column (i) of Table 5 shows that although decentralized banks give larger loans to SMEs, they are likely to give smaller loans to firms in more concentrated markets relative to centralized banks. The coefficient in column (i) of Table 5

¹⁰ In Table A3, we include a robustness check where we replace our measure of bank decentralization with a proxy of bank size based on bank assets. Table A3 confirms the reasoning that these results are not driven purely by bank size, but suggest that it is decentralization that is the mechanism through which it operates.

¹¹ Credit brokers—or “extension agents”—help firms structure their loan applications and advise them through the application process. They are, in most cases, financed by the state and are paid a small commission for loan applications submitted at banks and a larger commission for approved loans. They can take a prospective client to any bank.

Table 4

Interest rates by banks' lending structure.

The dependent variable is the log of the premium over the risk free rate. All regressions include industry controls (manufacturing, commerce or services) and year fixed effects. Models (ii)–(v) include state fixed effects and Models (iv)–(v) include bank fixed effects. IV regressions include separate instruments for both endogenous variables as outlined in the text. Note that bank fixed effects imply that the main effect of decentralized banks is not identified, and hence is not reported in the tables. A firm is coded as "Micro" if the number of employees is under 15; "Small" if the number of employees is between 15 and 30. The omitted category, "Medium", is a firm with over 30 employees. All regressions include robust standard errors, clustered by bank.

Variable	OLS				IV
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)
Log Herfindahl Index (at town level)	0.005 (0.006)	0.024** (0.009)	0.025** (0.010)	0.013 (0.010)	0.013 (0.010)
Fixed asset loan	0.499** (0.181)	0.493** (0.176)	0.447** (0.170)	0.086 (0.059)	0.082 (0.075)
Borrower has defaulted before	0.048* (0.023)	0.041* (0.019)	0.042* (0.020)	0.016 (0.034)	0.017 (0.034)
Micro firm	0.170* (0.086)	0.164* (0.082)	0.114 (0.071)	0.070 (0.108)	0.073 (0.100)
Small firm	0.076* (0.032)	0.075* (0.031)	0.049** (0.020)	0.033 (0.021)	0.049 (0.030)
Decentralized bank	0.182*** (0.046)	0.197*** (0.040)	–0.022 (0.087)		
Decentralized bank × Micro			0.297** (0.100)	0.361** (0.133)	0.334** (0.123)
Decentralized bank × Small			0.142 (0.096)	0.175* (0.097)	0.036 (0.122)
Industry fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bank fixed effects	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
F-statistic					370.82
Observations	83,930	83,930	83,930	83,930	83,930
R-squared	0.15	0.16	0.17	0.21	0.21

suggests that an increase in banking concentration from the median to the 75th percentile will lead decentralized banks to give loans that are 60% smaller than those given by centralized banks. The results are robust to the inclusion of bank fixed effects, and comparing the results from the IV regressions in column (iii) to column (ii) again shows the selection present in decentralized-bank lending across markets. Decentralized banks give smaller loans in concentrated markets than centralized banks and moreover, the nature of selection suggests that they are lending to larger, safer firms in concentrated markets. This hypothesis is further corroborated by looking at the interest rates charged by banks. Although it seems as if decentralized banks charge the same in concentrated markets, this is in fact driven by selection. IV regressions show that they charge more in concentrated markets to an equivalent firm, implying that the null result in the OLS regressions was driven by the fact that they lend to safer firms.

We provide further descriptive evidence of cherry-picking in Tables 6 and 7. Since our hypothesis is that decentralized bank managers are more reactive to the institutional environment than those in centralized banks, we should find that measures of lending activity should be more constant across markets in centralized banks than in decentralized banks. In Table 6, we show the share of lending activity for the different types of banks, broken down by firm type and market concentration. We segment markets by those that are the 25% most concentrated, the 25% most competitive, and

those in the middle 50% of concentration. Table 6 shows that for centralized banks, the share of their loans across these market types tracks closely to the share of branches and moreover, is very similar for medium, small, and micro firms. On the other hand, decentralized firms are more likely to be aggressive in lending in competitive markets, but to restrict credit access in concentrated markets. This is most true of micro firms (whereas for medium firms, the pattern looks much more similar to the pattern in centralized banks). This "difference-in-differences" descriptive evidence where medium firms look similar but micro firms do not, suggests that this pattern for decentralized banks is not driven by a different relative share in branches for decentralized and centralized banks, but rather by the actual lending decisions of branch managers. In Table 7, we break down our results from Table 5 by type of firm. Table 7 highlights that, similar to Table 6, our results for credit rationing are most pronounced for the small and micro firms and much less so for the medium firms, where the OLS and IV results are relatively similar.

5.3. Robustness checks

One potential concern with our results is that decentralized banks are inherently better at all they do and, accordingly, our results only reflect these systematic performance differences rather than the differential ability to process soft information. Table A2 highlights that in

Table 5

Lending terms by bank structure and the strength of the competitive environment.

The dependent variables are log of loan size and log of the loan's premium over the risk free rate. All regressions include industry controls (manufacturing, commerce or services), year fixed effects and state fixed effects. Models (ii)–(iii) and (v)–(vi) include bank fixed effects. Note that bank fixed effects imply that the main effect of decentralized banks is not identified, and hence is not reported in the tables. The variable “Log Herfindahl Index” is a (time-varying) HHI index of bank competition based on the number of branches of different banks in each town in each year. A firm is coded as “Micro” if the number of employees is under 15; “Small” if the number of employees is between 15 and 30. The omitted category, “Medium”, is a firm with over 30 employees. All regressions include robust standard errors, clustered by bank.

Variable	Log amount			Log rate		
	OLS	OLS	IV	OLS	OLS	IV
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)
Log Herfindahl Index (at town level)	–0.061** (0.024)	–0.054* (0.024)	–0.027 (0.040)	0.028** (0.009)	0.012 (0.009)	–0.011 (0.028)
Fixed asset loan	–0.969*** (0.184)	–0.944*** (0.203)	–0.958*** (0.210)	0.491** (0.176)	0.143* (0.072)	0.154* (0.073)
Borrower has defaulted before	0.081 (0.093)	0.076 (0.096)	0.078 (0.096)	0.042* (0.019)	0.016 (0.034)	0.015 (0.033)
Micro firm	–0.769*** (0.179)	–0.779*** (0.196)	–0.780*** (0.196)	0.163* (0.082)	0.137 (0.112)	0.137 (0.112)
Small firm	–0.392* (0.201)	–0.39 (0.203)	–0.39 (0.203)	0.075* (0.031)	0.065 (0.037)	0.065 (0.037)
Decentralized bank	0.253*** (0.060)			0.159** (0.043)		
Decentralized bank × Log Herfindahl Index	–0.137** (0.050)	–0.099*** (0.020)	–0.265* (0.126)	–0.024 (0.017)	0.002 (0.010)	0.143** (0.046)
Bank fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
F-statistic			88.01			88.03
Observations	83,890	83,890	83,890	83,890	83,890	83,890
R-squared	0.23	0.23	0.23	0.60	0.61	0.59

Table 6

Share of total loans by market concentration and bank structure.

This table reports the share of loans that were originated across firm types and banking markets, by bank type. It shows that while the share of loans across market concentration is relatively even for centralized banks. For decentralized banks, the share is relatively even for medium firms, but skewed towards competitive markets for small and micro firms.

Portfolio metric	Centralized banks				Decentralized banks			
	25% most concentrated markets	Intermediate markets	25% most competitive markets	Total	25% most concentrated markets	Intermediate markets	25% most competitive markets	Total
Share of loans to medium firms	23%	49%	28%	100%	25%	46%	28%	100%
Share of loans to small firms	24%	50%	26%	100%	25%	47%	29%	100%
Share of loans to micro firms	27%	51%	22%	100%	22%	39%	39%	100%

a bivariate analysis, decentralized banks seem no different from centralized banks along measures of return on equity (ROE) and efficiency, and may fare slightly worse than centralized banks in terms of return on assets (ROA). This suggests that our results are not due to systematic differences in bank performance on all fronts.

A second concern with our results is that they reflect differential risk tolerance across bank types. Again, in Table A2 we show that while mortgage default rates are similar across banks, commercial default rates are lower for decentralized banks in aggregate, suggesting that the observed patterns are not due to differential risk tolerance across bank types. However, we examine this concern further by looking at firm-level defaults across the different types of banks. One limitation with our default data is that it has patchy information on the bank associated with the default. That is, the database informs us whether

a firm defaulted on a loan, but for firms holding several loans, we do not know which particular loan they defaulted on. We therefore restrict our sample to firms that received a loan from only one bank. These constitute 92% of the firms in our sample. The results from these regressions are reported in Table 8.

In order to facilitate comparisons with the IV regressions, we first run linear probability models where the dependent variable is a dummy variable that takes the value of one if the firm defaulted on its loan. As can be seen from Table 8, small and micro firms tend to have higher default rates, highlighting the fact that they are more risky. However, the results also show that there are no differences in the propensity for loans given by either type of bank to default. These results suggest that the differences in the lending terms being observed across banks are a function of their lending technologies rather than differences in overall risk tolerance.

Table 7

Lending terms by bank structure, strength of the competitive environment and firm size.

The dependent variables are log of loan size and log of the loan's premium over the risk free rate. All models include industry controls (manufacturing, commerce or services), year fixed effects, state fixed effects, and bank fixed effects. Note that bank fixed effects imply that the main effect of decentralized banks is not identified, and hence is not reported in the tables. The variable "Log Herfindahl Index" is a (time-varying) HHI index of bank competition based on the number of branches of different banks in each town in each year. A firm is coded as "Micro" if the number of employees is under 15; "Small" if the number of employees is between 15 and 30. The omitted category, "Medium", is a firm with over 30 employees. All regressions include robust standard errors, clustered by bank.

Variable	Log amount				Log rate			
	Small and micro firms		Medium sized firms		Small and micro firms		Medium sized firms	
	OLS	IV	OLS	IV	OLS	IV	OLS	IV
Log Herfindahl index (at town level)	-0.056* (0.026)	-0.014 (0.062)	-0.018 (0.019)	0.032 (0.064)	0.014 (0.008)	-0.004 (0.023)	-0.005 (0.007)	-0.054 (0.047)
Fixed asset loan	-1.129*** (0.215)	-1.152*** (0.220)	0.279* (0.118)	0.271* (0.123)	0.150* (0.075)	0.159* (0.076)	-0.01 (0.142)	0.564*** (0.150)
Borrower has defaulted before	-0.079 (0.125)	-0.082 (0.125)	-0.021 (0.064)	-0.021 (0.063)	-0.001 (0.027)	-0.003 (0.026)	0.073 (0.057)	0.074 (0.043)
Micro firm	-0.455*** (0.081)	-0.456*** (0.080)			0.048 (0.084)	0.049 (0.084)		
Decentralized bank × Log Herfindahl Index	-0.087*** (0.023)	-0.356** (0.136)	-0.186*** (0.020)	-0.210 (0.144)	0.005 (0.008)	0.106* (0.045)	0.048** (0.015)	0.348* (0.142)
F-statistic		146.3		34.8		71.9		17.9
Observations	68,727	68,727	15,203	15,203	68,727	68,727	15,203	15,203
R-squared	0.20	0.20	0.17	0.13	0.62	0.62	0.56	0.55

Moreover, they suggest that, holding firm characteristics and risk preferences stable, decentralized banks actually grant larger loans and manage to keep their default rates at the same level in competitive markets. The fact that loan size is associated with higher default rates also indicates why decentralized banks choose to restrict credit in uncompetitive environments in addition to cherry-picking their loans.

Finally, one possible explanation for our findings may be the distinction between foreign and domestic banks as opposed to the lending structure per se. While we cannot rule out this possibility since foreign banks tend to have centralized lending structures while most of the domestic banks do not, we believe that our results point to a specific mechanism related to the organizational structure of foreign versus domestic banks (distinct from risk preferences) that might explain the differential results related to bank lending that have been found in prior work looking at bank lending in emerging markets (Mian, 2008; Detragiache, Tressel, and Gupta, 2008).

6. Discussion and conclusions

Young and small firms are especially dependent on external finance for their growth and survival. The vast majority of their financing—especially in developed markets—tends to come from banks (Berger and Udell, 1998; Robb and Robinson, 2009). Given the size of such businesses, credit is often concentrated at a single intermediary where the borrower has a lending relationship (Petersen and Rajan, 1994; Fluck, Holtz-Eakin, Rosen, 1998; Sapienza, 2002). Small businesses, and particularly young small businesses, have little internal cash flow to finance their operations and are also associated with significant asymmetric information. Accordingly, a potential concern for policy-makers is that these businesses face credit constraints. This is certainly the case in Mexico,

where smaller firms mostly have to rely on expensive trade credit or the owners' personal credit cards to finance their operations (Fisman and Love, 2003).

A large body of academic research has therefore focused on how the structure of the banking industry, both in terms of the competitive environment for banks and in the organizational structure of banks themselves, is associated with product market outcomes for small businesses. However, the two streams of study—one focused on banking competition and the other on bank structure—have remained largely independent of each other, and in fact, generated potentially contradictory findings. On the one hand, research on the organizational structure of banks has focused on the benefits of a decentralized banking structure in the context of small business lending. On the other hand, research looking at small business lending suggests that banking deregulation led to a widespread increase in entrepreneurial activity despite the wave of mergers that led small, decentralized banks to fall significantly following the deregulations (Black and Strahan, 2002; Kerr and Nanda, 2009). Our approach in this paper brings together the literature related to the organizational structure of banks with the one looking at banking competition to look at how the *interaction* between these two factors impacts the deal terms offered to small businesses. Our results show that branch managers in decentralized banks are more sensitive to the local environment than branch managers in centralized banks. They give more attractive terms to firms in competitive banking markets, but are more likely to cherry pick firms and restrict credit in areas where they have market power. Thus, the extent to which decentralized banks alleviate credit constraints depends critically on the competitive environment for banks.

Viewed in the context of our results, previous findings that appeared contradictory now make sense: while decentralized banks are indeed better than centralized

Table 8

Loan defaults by bank structure.

The dependent variable takes a value of one if the firm defaulted on the loan. All regressions include industry controls (manufacturing, commerce or services) and year fixed effects, state fixed effects and bank fixed effects. Note that bank fixed effects imply that the main effect of decentralized banks is not identified, and hence is not reported in the tables. The number of observations in these regressions are lower because the default database does not have consistent data on the bank associated with the default. We therefore restrict these regressions to those firms that only took a loan from a single bank. This constitutes the vast majority of firms, although a few firms are seen to take multiple loans from different banks. The variable “Log Herfindahl Index” is a (time-varying) HHI index of bank competition based on the number of branches of different banks in each town in each year. A firm is coded as “Micro” if the number of employees is under 15; “Small” if the number of employees is between 15 and 30. The omitted category, “Medium”, is a firm with over 30 employees. All regressions include robust standard errors, clustered by bank.

Variable	OLS		IV	
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)
Log Herfindahl index (at town level)	0.003 –0.002	0.003 (0.002)	0.003 (0.002)	–0.002 (0.008)
Fixed asset loan	–0.014 (0.011)	–0.012 (0.010)	–0.025 (0.027)	–0.009 (0.005)
Log amount	0.003* (0.001)	0.003* (0.001)	0.002 (0.001)	0.003* (0.002)
Log rate	–0.011 (0.008)	–0.01 (0.008)	–0.017 (0.014)	–0.009 (0.006)
Micro firm	0.004** (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	–0.003 (0.004)	0.006* (0.002)
Small firm	0.003 (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)	0.004 (0.003)	0.004* (0.002)
Decentralized bank × Micro	0.008 (0.005)		0.043 (0.046)	
Decentralized bank × Small	0.006 (0.004)		–0.024 (0.059)	
Decentralized bank × Log Herfindahl Index		0.000 (0.002)		0.044 (0.097)
Industry fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bank fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
F-statistic			20.3	20.3
Observations	69,344	69,344	69,344	69,344
R-squared	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.02

banks at alleviating credit constraints for small businesses in competitive markets, they are in fact *worse* than centralized banks in concentrated banking markets. Thus, an increase in banking competition alongside an increase in the presence of centralized banks due to M&A activity would still have had a positive impact on entrepreneurship as a result of the reduction in monopoly power of small decentralized banks. Our findings may also shed light on the mechanism behind the findings by [Berger, Saunders, Scalise, and Udell \(1998\)](#) that bank mergers in the US tended to increase small business lending by competitors to the merging banks, as well as the finding by [Erel \(2009\)](#) that the M&A activity following the US branch banking deregulations led to a sharp fall in the interest rates for firms, particularly for small businesses.

Our results build on the empirical work of [Sapienza \(2002\)](#) and [Berger, Miller, Petersen, Rajan, and Stein \(2005\)](#) who find that the organizational structure of banks can have important consequences for the small businesses that seek credit in a given market. While they proxy for the decentralized nature of the lending technology using bank size, our in-depth qualitative interviews with the major banks in Mexico allowed us to identify large banks with decentralized lending structures. Our results therefore also speak to the hypothesis that [Berger, Miller, Petersen, Rajan, and Stein \(2005\)](#) raise in their conclusion that “a large

organization might, at least to a degree, be able to enjoy the best of both worlds if it sets up the internal structure that achieves the right level of decentralization.” We are also able to look at the rates of default for the different types of banks, so that we can show more directly that the differences in deal terms seem to be driven more by the lending technology of banks rather than other factors such as their inherent risk preferences.

Our findings also have implications for public policy. Prior work has identified the relative benefit of decentralized (small) banks in alleviating credit constraints among small businesses—in the context of more competitive environments. It thus has argued that the key issue from a public policy standpoint may not be market power in the traditional Herfindahl Index sense, but more about the choice of banks that firms have access to. Our results suggest that both the organizational structure and the localized market power of a bank are relevant for SME lending, and they should not be considered independently. This implication is also related to other work looking at the importance of examining organizational structure within the context of the institutional environment and not treating it in isolation (e.g., [Raith, 2003](#)).

Appendix A

See Tables A1–A3.

Table A1

Distribution of bank branches.

This table reports descriptive statistics on the distribution of bank branches by decentralized and centralized banks. Panel A compares the share of branches in states with above median SME businesses per capita, while Panel B compares the ratio of decentralized to centralized bank branches across municipalities.

Panel A: Share of branches in states with above median SME businesses per capita		
Year	Decentralized	Centralized
2002	76.2%	73.8%
2003	73.9%	73.7%
2004	81.7%	80.8%
2005	81.9%	81.1%
2006	82.3%	80.9%

Panel B: Ratio of the number of decentralized to centralized bank branches		
Year	All municipalities	Municipalities with above median HHI
2002	23.7%	21.0%
2003	24.1%	17.1%
2004	23.8%	16.0%
2005	24.4%	16.2%
2006	24.3%	15.5%

Table A2

Comparison of aggregate performance.

This table reports descriptive statistics on key measures of aggregate performance for decentralized and centralized banks in 2002.

Performance metric	Centralized (Mean)	Decentralized (Mean)	t-Test difference (p value)
ROA	1.808	1.396	0.074
ROE	17.653	16.176	0.432
Efficiency	4.929	5.151	0.125
Mortgage defaults	0.075	0.083	0.638
Commercial defaults	0.066	0.035	0.006

Table A3

Lending terms by bank size and the strength of the competitive environment (using 1/bank assets to proxy for bank size).

This table replicates the regressions in Tables 1 and 2, but with 1/bank assets as a measure of decentralization rather than the direct measure of decentralization reported through our field work. This test therefore helps to distinguish decentralization as a mechanism for our results from bank size as a mechanism. The dependent Variable is the log of the loan amount and the log of the premium over the risk free rate. All regressions include industry controls (manufacturing, commerce or services) and state fixed effects. Models (ii)–(iii) and (v)–(vi) include bank fixed effects. IV regressions include separate instruments for both endogenous variables as outlined in the text. Note that bank fixed effects imply that the main effect of decentralized banks is not identified, and hence is not reported in the tables. A firm is coded as “Micro” if the number of employees is under 15; “Small” if the number of employees is between 15 and 30. The omitted category, “Medium”, is a firm with over 30 employees. All regressions include robust standard errors, clustered by bank.

Variable	Log amount			Log rate		
	OLS		IV	OLS		IV
	(i)	(ii)	(iii)	(iv)	(v)	(vi)
Log Herfindahl index (at town level)	–0.079 (0.046)	–0.069* (0.036)	–0.064* (0.032)	0.022** (0.009)	0.013 (0.010)	0.015 (0.011)
Fixed asset loan	–0.782** (0.216)	–0.956*** (0.197)	–1.240** (0.365)	0.626** (0.181)	0.150* (0.065)	0.053 (0.126)
Borrower has defaulted before	0.088 (0.100)	0.076 (0.097)	0.091 (0.107)	0.053** (0.019)	0.027 (0.031)	0.038 (0.032)
Micro firm	–0.798*** (0.190)	–0.814*** (0.204)	–1.354*** (0.348)	0.163 (0.086)	0.144 (0.117)	–0.064 (0.171)
Small firm	–0.437* (0.203)	–0.422* (0.207)	–0.777** (0.219)	0.076*(0.033)	0.077* (0.037)	0.039 (0.053)
1/bank assets(i.e. “smaller banks”)	0.004 (0.003)			0.001* (0.001)		
Smaller bank × Micro	0.006 (0.004)	0.005 (0.003)	0.076 (0.067)	0.001 (0.002)	–0.001 (0.002)	0.025 (0.025)
Smaller bank × Small	0.006 (0.005)	0.005 (0.003)	0.055 (0.046)	0.001 (0.001)	–0.002 (0.001)	0.003 (0.007)
Industry fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Year fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
State fixed effects	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bank fixed effects	No	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	83,930	83,930	83,930	83,930	83,930	83,930
R-squared	0.20	0.21	0.21	0.17	0.21	0.21

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