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On the Persistence of the China Shock

In this paper, we build on previous research regarding how greater import competition from China has affected U.S. local labor markets. By extending the time period under study, expanding the set of outcomes considered, and incorporating insights from recent literature on shift-share research designs and the connection between reduced-form and general-equilibrium impacts, we evaluate the duration of the China trade shock, the relative and absolute effects of greater trade exposure on local economic well-being, and the robustness of the results to alternative specifications, outcome measures, and sample periods. We first document that the China trade shock plateaued in 2010, which allows us to examine its effects for nearly a decade past its culmination. Adverse impacts of greater import competition on manufacturing employment, employment-population ratios, and income per capita in more trade-exposed U.S. commuting zones are still present out to 2018. Reductions in population headcounts, which indicate net outmigration, register only for workers 25-39 years old. Although more negatively affected regions see larger increases in the uptake of government transfers, these transfers replace only a small fraction of the loss in personal income and primarily take the form of increased Social Security and Medicare benefits. The results are consistent with the exit from work being a primary means of adjustment to tradeinduced negative labor demand shocks and with prolonged adverse outcomes in the U.S. local labor markets most exposed to China's rise.