



Sage Advice? The Effect of Relative Adviser Experience on Hawkish Foreign Policy Decisionmaking

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Research Question

Who determines foreign policy, and *to what extent* do their personal dispositions influence the final policy direction?

Decisionmaking is rarely an independent process, with information and input provided by a leader's circle of advisers. As a result, advisers shape the policies the leader chooses to pursue, both directly and indirectly. However, is the influence of advisers and leaders always constant, or does the **relative experience** of one actor give them greater sway over the final policy direction?

Theoretical Expectations

Adviser Model

Advisers shape the leader's information environment of the situation, resulting in the personal **dispositions of both** (the leader's individual and the advisers' aggregate) **having independent, systematic influence** on policy outcomes.

Assuming the adviser model holds, are these disposition effects constant, or relative?

If the advisers are more experienced, do leaders rely on them **more**, giving their disposition greater weight on the outcomes? Assuming the **heuristic of experience**, where more experienced individuals are given greater consideration because they shape the information provided and less-experienced individuals defer to their judgment, the most experience voice in the room should have a greater effect.

Hypotheses

H1: *If leaders are more experienced than their advisers, the resulting foreign policy recommendations are more hawkish.*

H2: *If leaders are more experienced than their advisers, the marginal effect of leader hawkishness will increase.*

H3: *If advisers are more experienced than their leaders, the marginal effect of adviser hawkishness will increase.*

Data and Methods

Data: Jost et al. (2024) dataset on United States high-level foreign policy meetings from 1947-1988

Models: OLS and Poisson regressions with robust standard errors

Dependent Variables:

OLS: Relative number of conflictual (hawkish) decisions resulting from a meeting ($nConf - nCoop$)

Poisson: Total number of conflictual decisions advised ($nConf$)

Independent Variables:

Aggregate Adviser Hawkishness, Leader Hawkishness, Leader-Adviser Experience Difference

Controls: Number of attendees, number of attendees by type, meeting topics, CINC score, and number of MIDs the US was involved in within a 5-year period

$$\text{Hawkish Policy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 (\text{advHawk}) + \beta_2 (\text{presHawk}) + \beta_3 (\text{leadAdvDiffExp}) + \beta_4 (\text{presHawk} * \text{leadAdvDiffExp}) + \beta_5 (\text{advHawk} * \text{leadAdvDiffExp}) + \beta_6 (\text{controls}) + u_i$$

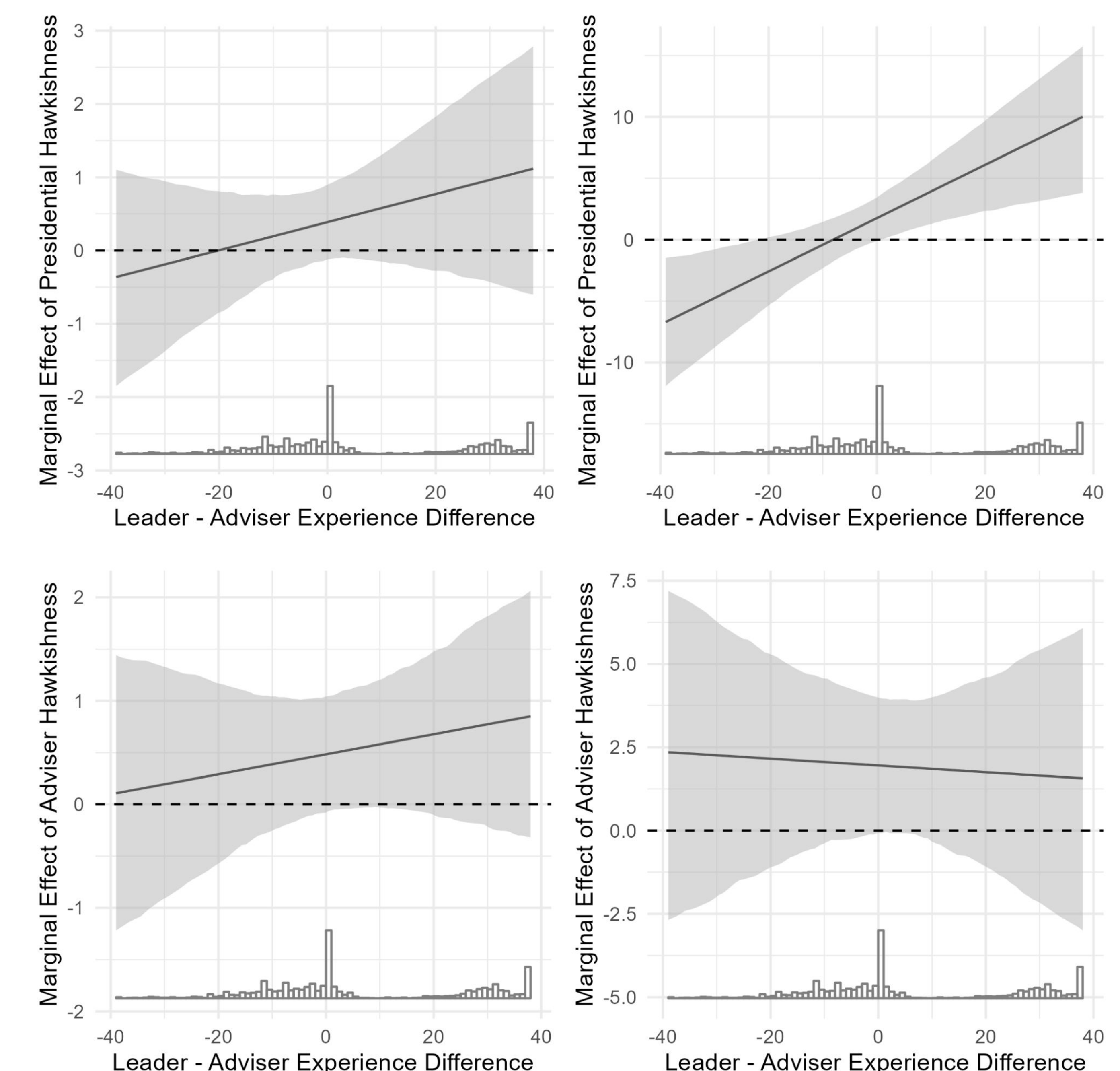
Table 8: Exploratory Analyses - Multiplicative Effect of Experience (Robust Errors)

	Dependent variable:	
	Conflictual - Cooperative	Conflictual Decisions
	OLS	Poisson
	(1)	(2)
Advisers' Hawkishness (Acts)	0.485** (0.232)	1.924* (1.148)
President's Hawkishness	0.388 (0.260)	1.768* (1.041)
Experience Difference	-0.011 (0.008)	-0.077* (0.043)
President's Hawkishness x Experience	0.018 (0.016)	0.214** (0.090)
Adviser Hawkishness x Experience	0.010 (0.012)	-0.010 (0.056)
Constant	-0.835*** (0.222)	-6.237*** (0.886)

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Marginal Effect Results

Figure 1: Marginal Effect of Hawkishness on Outcomes, Given Experience



Panels on the left are OLS models, on the right are Poisson. Positive values for experience indicate the number of years of experience the leader holds more than that of the average adviser, and negative values indicate the reverse (advisers with more years). 95% CI bands are included.

Discussion

There is **suggestive evidence** that experience difference between leaders and advisers influences which actor's disposition has the greater effect on the policy outcomes of a meeting.

More work must be done to disentangle the **endogenous relationship** of advisers and counsel provision, as both adviser selection and meeting participation are non-random processes.

A **complementary relationship** between the adviser model and the leader model may be the best path forward for understanding the formation of international policy.