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Informing the Leader: Bureaucracies and International Crises

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Whether international crises end in conflict frequently depends on the information that leaders possess. To better explain how leaders acquire information, I develop and test an informational theory of bureaucracies during crises. Time-constrained leaders delegate information collection to advisers who lead bureaucracies. A division of labor between bureaucracies breeds comparative specialization among advisers. Some emphasize information on adversaries' political attributes, which are harder to assess; others stress military attributes, which are easier to assess. Bureaucratic role thus affects the content and uncertainty that advisers provide. I use automated and qualitative coding to measure adviser input in 5,400 texts from US Cold War crises. As hypothesized, advisers' positions affect the information and uncertainty they convey but not the policies they promote as canonical theories suggest. For individuals advising leaders during crises, what you know depends on where you sit. Consequently, the information leaders possess hinges on which bureaucracies have their attention.

INTRODUCTION

As he watched Basra residents react to the 2003 arrival of coalition forces, President Bush reportedly wondered aloud, "why aren't they cheering?"[1] His surprise typifies the shortcomings that plagued prewar assessments of postwar Iraq (Bensahel 2007; Lake 2010; Lindsey 2020; Saunders 2017). Administration officials anticipated that stability would quickly follow Saddam's ouster, allowing the US stay in Iraq to be brief. Instead, sectarian divides, the public's disposition toward the US presence, and Iraqi governance capacity each proved worse than expected. Notably, these blindspots all concern Iraq's *political* characteristics—its public opinion, domestic unity, and institutional strength—rather than its *military* characteristics—such as force quantities or qualities. To explain these apparent oversights, much recent international relations scholarship might grant analytical primacy to the leader's personal traits, such as Bush's background experiences. This study expands the locus of analysis by bringing advisers and bureaucracies to the fore, suggesting that to understand leaders' beliefs it helps to know who is in the room with them. Bush's assessment emerged from a process that limited advice from the bureaucracies best equipped and most disposed to evaluate the political conditions of adversary states (SIGIR 2009). Curtailed input from bureaucracies with specialized expertise helps illuminate why Bush authorized war with an inaccurate conception of the looming conflict.

Advisers and their bureaucracies play an often overlooked role as information conduits for time-constrained leaders.[2] Beyond apparent miscalculations as preceded the Iraq War, this informational function of bureaucracies is broadly pertinent for how leaders become informed during international crises, whether it concerns missiles in Cuba or chemical weapons in Syria. This study addresses the domestic mechanics of how leaders acquire information. Specifically, how do advisers' bureaucratic positions affect the input—including content stressed, uncertainty conveyed, or policies endorsed—they provide to leaders during international crises?

I develop and test an informational theory of bureaucracies and international conflict that suggests that the bureaucratic role an adviser occupies affects the input she provides to the leader, but in a different way than previously theorized. Bureaucratic role affects the type of information advisers provide and uncertainty they express but not the policies that they promote. Leaders demand information; senior advisers can supply it. Like many principal-agent setups, agents (advisers) develop informational advantages over the principal (leader).[3] Beyond being better informed than the leader, advisers are *differentially* informed compared with one another. Functional specialization between bureaucracies causes affiliated advisers to gather distinct types of information. Military advisers in a ministry of defense develop expertise on an adversary's military attributes while foreign policy advisers in a ministry of foreign affairs develop expertise on an adversary's political attributes. Advisers, consequently, emphasize different content when participating in deliberative processes. Bureaucratic position also affects the uncertainty advisers express. Some domains are relatively information rich while others tend to be information poor. I posit that information is more readily available on an adversary's military traits, making them subject to less uncertainty. Analysts can often observe force quantities, postures, and locations. Political characteristics—such as an adversary's domestic political landscape—are harder to assess and prone to greater uncertainty.

Senior security advisers typically manage bureaucracies charged with formulating and executing national security policy. Their positions confer several

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[1] Quoted in Draper (2020, 355).
[2] Exceptions include George (1980), Janis (1982), Hermann (2001), and Saunders (2017; 2018).
[3] Bendor, Glazer, and Hammond (2001) review this literature.

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responsibilities including insuring their bureaucracies execute assigned tasks, serving as representatives for the leader's policies, and providing input to leaders. Though all important, this study restricts its attention to the final responsibility, offering theory and evidence for how advisers' bureaucratic roles affect the advice they provide. Graham Allison's canonical Bureaucratic Politics Model, or Model III, offers a very different account linking bureaucratic position and advisory input (Allison 1969; Allison and Zelikow 1999). It contends that bureaucracies' parochial interests cause advisers' preferences to diverge. Famously echoing Miles' Law, "where you stand depends on where you sit" (Allison 1969, 711). Foreign policy advisers in a ministry of foreign affairs advocate diplomatic solutions, whereas military advisers (in or out of uniform) endorse militarily aggressive policies. While joining a chorus of critics on this account's theoretical underpinnings (Art 1973; Bendor and Hammond 1992; Krasner 1972; Welch 1992), I provide new evidence on its inappropriateness during crises. Model III stresses a preference-based theory of bureaucracies; I suggest an informational one.

I assess whether bureaucratic position affects the information advisers provide or the policies they promote in US Cold War crises. I analyze documents from security deliberations at the highest levels of decision making, largely drawn from the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series. Texts span from Secretary of State Dulles advising Eisenhower on the Taiwan Straits to Secretary of Defense Schlesinger advising Ford during Saigon's fall. With qualitative approaches as well as automated text analysis tools including supervised learning and sentiment analysis, I generate measures capturing each bureaucracy's input for each crisis. Coupling speakers' original advice to presidents with capabilities to analyze texts offers a new way to measure advisers' emphases and beliefs at a previously impossible scale. I measure a bureaucracy's advisory content (political vs. military), uncertainty, and relative hawkishness. The text-as-data approach builds on studies in international relations but differs in applying the method to internal advisory processes rather than external messaging (Katagiri and Min 2019; McManus 2017).

The analysis produces three findings. First, foreign policy advisers, operationalized as State Department officials, are substantially more likely to discuss an adversary's political attributes compared with colleagues from other bureaucracies. Second, these advisers express more uncertainty than those with different affiliations. Analyses of the underlying mechanisms demonstrate that political content indeed carries greater uncertainty, confirming the informational, as opposed to purely dispositional, roots of differential uncertainty levels across bureaucracies. Third, contrary to the conventional parochial view, an adviser's bureaucratic role does not predict the policy positions she advocates. Diplomats are as likely as counterparts from Defense to endorse more militarily aggressive policy responses. The findings suggest bureaucratic role matters, but in a different way than commonly assumed. Bureaucratic affiliation affects the type of information advisers provide and the certainty accompanying that advice but not the hawkishness of the policies they champion. When advising leaders during crises, what you know depends on where you sit.

The study make several contributions at the nexus of domestic politics and international relations. First, a wave of international relations scholarship helpfully stresses the explanatory power of leaders' traits, such as their dispositions and beliefs (Kertzer 2016; Lupton 2018; Saunders 2011; Whitlark 2017; Yarhi-Milo 2014), background experiences (Carter and Smith 2020; Colgan 2013; Horowitz and Stam 2014), or institutional incentives (Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Croco 2011; Weeks 2014). This study shows the utility of widening the analytical lens to include advisers and bureaucracies. Leader beliefs frequently emerge from group processes, which suggests value to studying group inputs. Second, this study specifies the role advisers play and provides a grounding for how leaders acquire the information that guides their strategic choices. Past work on a leader's information set emphasizes the vividness of sources (Yarhi-Milo 2014), advisory ordering principles (George 1980), leader and adviser experience (Saunders 2017), and civil–military dimensions of information provision (Brooks 2008; Feaver 2003; Huntington 1957). I build upon these accounts by documenting the functional differentiation between officials, especially among civilian advisers, based on their bureaucratic position. I further theorize and show variation in information abundance between political and military attributes of the adversary. Third, disaggregating domestic information-transmission processes can yield fresh perspectives on causes of international conflict. When leaders tap into the specialized information of each bureaucracy, expectations converge with those from theories that emphasize information availability in the international strategic interaction (Fearon 1995; Powell 2017). However, advisory processes may fall short of this benchmark. Because bureaucracies bring distinct expertise, curtailing a bureaucracy's input—whether due to institutional arrangements (Jost 2021) or leaders' discretionary choices—causes leaders to neglect information as President Bush did preceding the Iraq War. Scholars can thus embed an informational account of bureaucracies into existing theories of conflict to generate new explanations for why crises resolve peacefully or devolve into war.

EXISTING ACCOUNT: BUREAUCRATIC POSITION AFFECTS POLICY PREFERENCES

Prominent scholarship offers some guidance on how bureaucratic affiliation may affect an adviser's input to leaders during crises. In Allison's Model III, advisers' parochial interests affect the policies they endorse (Allison 1969; Allison and Zelikow 1999). Where advisers stand on policy debates depends on the bureaucratic position they occupy.[4]

[4] Bureaucratic affiliation plays little role in studies that analyze decision-making bodies (Hermann 2001; Hermann and Preston 1994; Janis 1982) or endorse arrangements including multiple

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One implication of the bureaucratic politics model bears on the link between bureaucratic position and an official's input during crisis. Advisers should endorse policies that advance their bureaucracies' interests, which requires a sense of bureaucracies' crisis interests. One might surmise that foreign policy advisers—that is, those from a ministry of foreign affairs—prefer relatively peaceful policies, whereas military advisers prefer relatively militaristic policies. A more generous reading might restrict the latter category to exclude advisers in uniform, focusing only on civilian defense advisers. Military personnel have cross-cutting considerations—such as cost sensitivities (Huntington 1957), combat experiences (Horowitz and Stam 2014), and mission preferences (Gelpi and Feaver 2002)—that might diminish the effect of parochialism. Focusing on gaps between civilian advisers affiliated with different bureaucracies skirts these complications and provides a cleaner test.

> **Parochial Expectation 1**: During crises, civilian foreign policy advisers (those in foreign affairs ministries) endorse less militarily aggressive policies than civilian advisers within military bureaucracies.

Some might view this reading of Model III as overly sweeping, noting that parochial interests are contextually dependent. Marsh and Jones (2017) documents competing State Department interests to explain Secretary Clinton's hawkish stances. This nuance, while valuable, undercuts the utility of the Bureaucratic Politics Model. At best it circumscribes our ability to make testable predictions. At worst it renders the theory unfalsifiable, forcing scholars to infer bureaucratic interests from post hoc analyses of policy prescriptions. Presuming that Allison's account generates a falsifiable implication for how bureaucratic position affects adviser input during crises, that implication should approximate Parochial Expectation 1. Model III generates additional implications—for example, bargaining rather than coordination dominates advisory processes—but these lie outside this paper's interest in how bureaucratic position affects the advice officials provide.

Like numerous critics (Art 1973; Bendor and Hammond 1992; Krasner 1972; Welch 1992), *I anticipate that the parochial expectation receives little empirical support.*[5] Leaders can select, monitor, and sanction advisers. Selecting advisers with aligned preferences can reduce the importance of bureaucratic affinities (Bendor and Hammond 1992). Krasner (1972) notes "The most important "action-channel" in the government is the President's ear. The President has a major role in determining who whispers in it."[6] Leaders can monitor advisers during high-stakes crises and limit adviser leeway to skew information. Additionally, the potential for leader sanctioning can elicit truthful input provided that advisers care whether leaders retain their services (Meirowitz 2006) rather than dismiss them as President Kennedy did to CIA officials after the Bay of Pigs.

AN INFORMATIONAL THEORY OF BUREAUCRACIES AND CRISES

To provide an alternative perspective on how bureaucratic position affects the input advisers offer, I develop an informational theory of bureaucracies that specifies the types of information leaders seek, how easy it is to collect, and who provides it.

The Military and Political Information Leaders Need

Richard Neustadt (1990, 128–9) wrote, a president's "first essential need is information." This certainly applies during international crises when leaders must assess what each side can expect to achieve with force and at what cost. With war as an outside option, optimal decisions—such as how generous to be in diplomacy—hinge upon expected payoffs to fighting. The probability of military victory and costs of fighting are primary determinants of these payoffs and affect which peaceful settlements are preferable to conflict (Fearon 1995). Both the probability of victory and war costs depend on military *and* political attributes. Although broad, a distinction along these lines—military versus political—elucidates the information leaders must collect to guide their choices during crises. I posit and empirically show that in expectation the political is harder to assess than the military and thus associated with greater uncertainty.

Military attributes include the quantity and quality of an adversary's military assets and personnel (Friedberg 1987), defense spending (Lebovic 1995), doctrine (Biddle 2004), and force posture (Narang 2014). Leaders use this information to develop a picture of the crisis landscape. The observable nature of many military characteristics simplifies the assessment process. Greater information allows advisers and leaders to form higher certainty estimates. Although they are imperfectly observable, imperfect signals yield valuable information. Military demonstrations such as North Korean missile tests and public documentation such as Soviet pronouncements of 1950s personnel reductions facilitate assessments. Aerial surveillance reveals opponent positioning, as US detection of Soviet

advocacy (George 1980), overlapping responsibilities (Rudalevige 2005), and prior experience (Saunders 2017). Consequently, they do not generate implications for how input from ministers of defense and foreign affairs might differ.

[5] This expectation applies to crises, not long-term strategy choices or daily conduct of foreign policy.

[6] The relevance and utility of adviser selection diminishes under some conditions. Adviser selection may be constrained in a parliamentary coalition government (Preston and t'Hart 1999). A competence–loyalty trade-off can also undermine preference convergence (Lewis 2011).

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missiles in Cuba exemplifies. Assessing opponent doctrine poses a tougher challenge, but states glean insights from pronouncements and budget allocations when observable. To be sure, information on military traits is not always abundant. Adversaries can strategically opt for secrecy (Meirowitz and Sartori 2008), and some military traits, such as commander quality, are subject to informational deficits. While acknowledging variation, useful military information is frequently available and obtainable.

An adversary's political attributes also affect expected war outcomes but are typically more difficult to observe. Limited observability implies a high degree of uncertainty. Although nonexhaustive, three recurring considerations illustrate the broader point regarding political attributes. *Domestic unity*, which can be a function of institutional arrangements, is one political trait. Great powers regularly attempt to influence which governments hold power abroad (O'Rourke 2018). An understanding of the leader's support helps gauge prospects for regime change. Widespread domestic opposition improves the chances for displacing incumbents. So too do hostile elite factions, particularly within powerful institutions. Military defections against Arbenz's regime proved vital for the CIA's 1954 Guatemala operation. Domestic unity is frequently difficult to observe, particularly in autocracies that mask or inflate their domestic support. A second political trait concerns efforts to *translate military accomplishments into political objectives.* Force is an instrument for achieving desired political end-states. Military success must be translated into policy objectives for which the conflict was fought. Leader beliefs about an adversary's political landscape inform estimates about translating military gains into political gains. Estimated US payoffs to the Iraq War rested on beliefs about what postwar policies could be installed in Baghdad. This depended on assessments of Iraqi military attributes crucial for *displacing* Saddam, but also Iraqi political attributes crucial for *replacing* Saddam. Translation difficulties between military and political outcomes are hard to assess beforehand. *Resolve*, an adversary's steadfastness to a policy despite "temptations to back down" (Kertzer 2016), is a third political attribute that affects crisis payoffs. Resolve encompasses an adversary's willingness to use force and the costs it will endure during fighting. These depend on political factors: a hostile leader's preferences and the will of the adversary's public. Unfortunately for interested parties, resolve is typically unobservable ex ante. A hostile leader's verbal claims and past actions only yield credible information under circumscribed conditions given incentives to misrepresent (Fearon 1995)[7] and contextual differences versus past interactions (Press 2005; Weisiger and Yarhi-Milo 2015). Assessing resolve is difficult even after conflict begins. Seven years after combat troops arrived, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Moorer was still surprised that the "North Vietnamese seem to be able to take unlimited losses."[8]

Neither military nor political information is fully observable. I contend there is a difference in the average *degree* of observability, with political traits being harder to discern. Contextual factors may exacerbate or sometimes invert this expectation. Translation uncertainties are likely elevated in insurgencies compared with conventional conflicts (Simpson 2018) and when a state wishes to install a new government as opposed to hold newly acquired territory (Edelstein 2008; Sullivan 2007). Leader resolve or domestic unity are easier to assess in transparent democracies versus closed autocracies. Political information could exceed military information, such as when fighting a conventional war over territory against a democracy with high operational secrecy and previously untested commanders. When true, some theoretical expectations below would not hold. While possible, I empirically demonstrate that typically political information is relatively scarce.

Bureaucratic Position Affects Who Provides Military or Political Information

Leaders use information on the adversary's military and political attributes to assess what can be achieved through force and at what cost. Time and attention constraints mean leaders cannot do this alone. Instead, leaders (principals) delegate information collection and provision tasks to advisers (agents). Compared with leaders, agents become better, though not necessary completely, informed about adversary attributes. Advisers know more than leaders but are still frequently uncertain about adversary traits because uncertainty permeates international politics. Building on prior literature (Brooks 2008; Feaver 2003; Saunders 2017), I derive new implications for how information asymmetries between a principal and agent affect crisis advisory processes. The theory does not assume that all advisers enjoy equal influence with leaders. Instead, the implications hold across a variety of advising structures, including those that privilege certain advisers, operate via hierarchy, or encourage multiple advocacy (George 1980).

Beyond being better informed, advisers are *differentially* informed. Senior advisers lead the core bureaucracies of the national security apparatus. A prototypical setup entails a division of labor between bureaucracies to foster expertise and efficiency (March and Simon 1958). Functional specialization between bureaucracies causes advisers to become differentially informed about adversary attributes (Jost 2021). Military advisers study opponents' doctrines, arms development programs, force locations, and fighting power. Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky reportedly

[7] Cheap talk occasionally credibly conveys information (Sartori 2002; Trager 2010). Adversaries can send costly signals to convey resolve (Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018) but may struggle to provide them during crises.

[8] Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting, May 1, 1972, *FRUS*, Volume VIII, Vietnam, 1969–1976, Document 107.

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stressed to Khrushchev that Cuban forces could withstand a US assault for only three or four days during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Foreign policy advisers acquire a distinct information set to perform their tasks. Embassies abroad provide insights into jockeying among domestic factions. US Ambassador to Iran Sullivan's 1978 cable, "Thinking the Unthinkable," casting (belated) doubt on the Shah's viability offers a famous example.[9] Amidst the Dien Bien Phu crisis, British Foreign Secretary Eden warned US officials that "Communism in Asia cannot (repeat not) be checked by military means alone. The problem is as much political as military."[10] Due to their substantive portfolio, foreign policy advisers specialize in adversaries' political characteristics.

An adviser's informational expertise and emphasis follows from the substantive mission of her bureaucracy.[11] An adviser's assigned task shapes what they emphasize to leaders due to an adviser's "push" and leader's "pull." Limited time with the executive incentivizes advisers to address issues in which they have specialized knowledge. Those most informed on domestic factions within the adversary push this information to leaders. Moreover, leaders pull the information that they expect advisers to collect and reprimand advisers who stray beyond their expertise. President Obama reportedly criticized Secretary of State Kerry for bringing military plans regarding Syria (Goldberg 2016), which was outside the purview of Kerry's role. The process of providing information to the leader reinforces information divergences between military and foreign policy advisers.

> **Informational Expectation 1**: The more a bureaucracy specializes in issues of foreign policy rather than military policy, the more that affiliated officials discuss political (as opposed to military) attributes of the adversary when advising leaders.

This expectation may strike readers as intuitive given statutory codes dictating bureaucracies' functions and prior scholarship (March and Simon 1958). Portions of Allison's work touches on related issues. His organizational process model (Model II), which emphasizes organizations' routines and policy outputs, discusses "factored problems," or the divvying of information processing across specialized bureaucracies. For Allison, information specialization matters insofar as it guides organizations' outputs. These outputs, or policy actions, are the actual "happenings of international politics" including the positioning of military units or sending of diplomatic messages (Allison 1969, 699). My informational account builds upon, and departs from, Allison's in three ways. First, it assesses the implication at a broader scale than prior research. Second, information itself is the organizational output of interest. An organization's information guides *leaders'* decisions in my theory as opposed to *organizations'* decisions in Allison's. Third, Model II contends organizations pursue uncertainty avoidance (Allison 1969, 700). I instead argue below that bureaucracies convey uncertainty to reflect limits of their knowledge.

In addition to discussing more political content, advisers in bureaucracies specializing in foreign policy convey greater uncertainty when speaking to leaders. Two informational mechanisms underlie this expectation. The first is an *informational content composition mechanism*: advisers who discuss high-uncertainty topics more often will convey more uncertainty in aggregate. For this mechanism to hold, foreign policy advisers must discuss political content more often than other advisers (as Informational Expectation 1 hypothesizes) and political content must carry greater uncertainty than military content (as posited earlier). If true, then increasing the amount of political content an adviser discusses mechanically increases their uncertainty. The second driver is an *informational expertise mechanism*: advisers specializing in foreign policy have expertise in recognizing informational gaps on the adversary's political traits and conveying commensurate uncertainty. Military advisers who stray beyond their competency may convey excess certainty, failing to recognize what they do not know. These two informational explanations stand in contrast to a *dispositional/cultural mechanism* in which advisers with different dispositions toward uncertainty select into distinct bureaucracies[12] or the bureaucracy's culture socializes advisers to express more/less uncertainty. The three mechanisms are not mutually exclusive, and later analyses attempt to apportion importance between them. Regardless of its foundations, a hypothesis linking bureaucratic affiliation to adviser uncertainty follows.

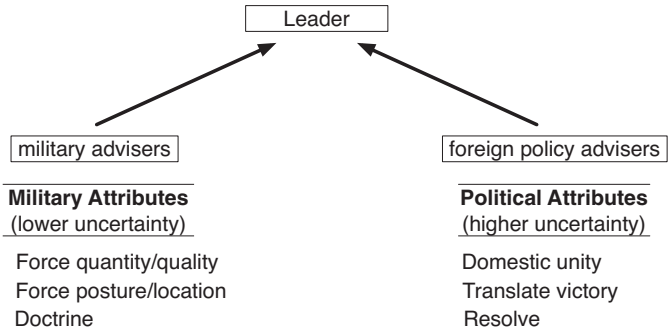
> **Informational Expectation 2**: The more a bureaucracy specializes in issues of foreign policy rather than military policy, the more that affiliated officials express uncertainty when advising leaders.

Figure 1 summarizes an ideal type arrangement and variation in uncertainty levels for assessing adversary attributes. Consider the US context to fix ideas for the testable claims. State Department officials are a useful proxy for those I term foreign policy advisers. The first expectation claims they are more likely to discuss political dimensions of an adversary, and the second posits that this substantive emphasis, coupled with their expertise in recognizing the inherent difficulty of forming high-certainty assessments on the matter, makes State Department officials express a low degree of certainty. Neither content emphasis nor degree of

[9] Telegram from American Embassy Tehran to Secretary of State, November 29, 1978, NLC-16-57-3-21-6, Jimmy Carter Library.
[10] State Department Telegram from Geneva to the Secretary of State, April 30, 1954, Dulles–April 1954 (1), Box 2, Dulles-Herter Series, Eisenhower Files, Eisenhower Presidential Library.
[11] As discussed below, some bureaucracies fall between the military and political ideal types.
[12] Diplomats tend to be more liberal (Clinton et al. 2012; Milner and Tingley 2015).

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FIGURE 1. Ideal Type Delegation of Information Provision Tasks to Advisers with Differentiated Domains of Expertise



Note: Uncertainty varies across domains. Arrangement does not assume leaders grant equal access to advisers.

uncertainty directly affects policy hawkishness. Bureaucracies thus diverge in the information they provide, not the policies they champion.

Although agnostic on advising structures, the theory partly relies on two leader functions. First, leaders can select and sanction advisers, which limits advisory skew and parochialism. Second, leaders encourage advisers to stick to their competencies, which reinforces content differences across bureaucracies.

CASES, CORPUS, AND MEASURES

Testing the theoretical expectations requires three components: (1) cases, (2) evidence on advisory processes, and (3) measures of advisory content, certainty, and policy prescriptions.[13]

Cases

The analysis draws on US crises during the Cold War from the Eisenhower to Carter administrations. Bounding the analysis to US Cold War crises holds potential confounding variables relatively constant. Keeping the state fixed mitigates concerns that variation in institutional structures drives the results. US institutional arrangements remained stable between the 1947 National Security Act and 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act. Demographically, advisers were remarkably homogeneous. Gender, education, and race, all of which could affect advisory input, were near constants. Finally, bipolarity prevailed throughout this period, albeit with stretches of relative detente. Practical considerations—such as evidence availability—also recommend a US Cold War focus. The analysis requires access to the highest levels of decision making. Classification considerations mandate a lag between events and their study. The US provides a rich documentary record with pertinent materials available through the Carter administration. Moreover, the global ramifications of US behavior make its characteristics of general interest. An emphasis on crises, which inherently involve high-stakes policy choices, helps insure leader engagement in the decision-making process. Leader engagement is necessary for evaluating the theorized expectations that concern the input advisers provide to leaders. Substantively, crises merit attention as pivotal moments prone to the initiation or escalation of conflict. A later section addresses generalizability concerns.

I identify 61 *opportunities to use force* during which the president and advisers considered and discussed using US force to strike abroad. The sampling criteria is closest to Betts (1991), which similarly studies adviser behavior when both peace and conflict were realistic options. Two sources contribute the majority of cases. First, I include crises from the International Crisis Behavior dataset when the US was an actor (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1982). Second, I include major military mobilizations from Blechman and Kaplan (1978).[14] Directing many military assets toward hot spots indicates consideration of using force. Importantly, asset mobilization does not imply the actual use of force as some ended peacefully. Together, these two sources contribute 46 cases. Additional observations include some lower-level military mobilizations, some militarized interstate disputes (Ghosn, Palmer, and Bremer 2004), and opportunities to strike the Soviet Union and China's nascent nuclear programs.[15]

The Supporting Information (SI) §1 lists the opportunities to use force (which I use interchangeably with "crises") and describes the precipitating context. Some concern potential new uses of force—such as the 1958

[13] See Schub (2022) for replication materials.

[14] I include level one and two uses of force (Blechman and Kaplan, 1978, 50) with *level one* being "use of strategic nuclear unit plus at least one 'major' force component," and *level two* is "two or three 'major' force components used, but not strategic nuclear units," where a "major" unit is two or more aircraft carrier task groups, more than one army battalion, or any combat wings.

[15] SI §5 shows results hold when dropping the nuclear program cases that may lack time pressures and numerous Vietnam War cases that may introduce autocorrelation concerns.

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turbulence in Lebanon. Others capture opportunities to expand ongoing conflicts—such as invading Laos during the Vietnam War. Sample censorship, in the sense of excluding cases where using force never received leader-level scrutiny poses little inferential threat barring some reason that advisers' *relative* areas of specialization switch when under presidential scrutiny.

Corpus

Measuring advisory input requires details about crisis advisory processes. Building on rich qualitative cases that reconstruct advisory processes, (e.g., Hermann and Preston 1994; Saunders 2017), I collect documentary evidence from presidential-level deliberations to capture the *private* words of senior advisers at scale. Documents published through the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series constitute the core sources. The FRUS volumes incorporate materials from presidential libraries, the Departments of State and Defense, National Security Council (NSC), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and other agencies and individuals involved in creating US foreign policy. Documents include National Security Council meetings, intraelite memos (such as from Kissinger to Nixon), and minutes from elite conversations in unstructured (ad hoc meetings) and structured (briefings from the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS]) settings. Because Carter-era FRUS volumes are incomplete, I gathered documents from the Carter Presidential Library and National Security Archive. These sources provided documents akin to those in FRUS.[16] I supplement FRUS with transcripts from the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) from the Cuban Missile Crisis. Collectively, these texts provide access to private statements that likely reflect sincere beliefs. Before intervening in Laos in 1964, Johnson told advisers "we should go ahead with the mission but that he had doubts about the action."[17] Presidents rarely voice such reservations publicly.

I select and prune documents to only include portions pertinent to the theory. Retained portions address considerations relevant for assessing potential diplomatic and conflict outcomes. Less cautious approaches that include all FRUS documents risk letting irrelevant documents undermine measurement validity. Given presidential primacy in decision making and the theory's focus on input provided to leaders, I restrict the corpus to memos sent to the president and transcripts from meetings that the president attended.[18]

All transcripts are split into speaker-specific texts; thus, a Nixon–Kissinger dialogue produces Nixon texts and Kissinger texts. The corpus includes 5,404 speech acts, defined as uninterrupted communication from a single individual which could be a lengthy memoranda or brief interjection in a meeting. These come from 382 documents, with 176 unique speakers. SI §2 provides corpus details and shows that text volume accurately reflects the prominence of key advisers, such as Dulles, Kissinger, and Brzezinski. The amount of text available varies across crises, typically reflecting crisis salience (e.g., Cuban Missile Crisis has over 20,000 words in the corpus; Shaba II has over 1,000). Tests of the informational expectations include case fixed effects to guard against the possibility that unobserved variables affect crisis salience and adviser content or uncertainty and thereby confound the relationships of interest. Fixed effects guard against apples-to-oranges comparisons that pit State's Cuban Missile Crisis advice against CIA's Shaba II advice.

FRUS has several drawbacks as a data source, but these generally pose limited inferential threat. Redacted segments within texts typically concern targeting details or covert sources rather than core assessments. Another concern is that entire documents remain classified or that FRUS historians excluded certain types of documents. Assessing either possibility is difficult at scale. However, SI §2 describes spot-checks that use online finding aids from presidential libraries to gauge how comprehensively FRUS volumes incorporate presidential-level texts. Although far from exhaustive, these checks suggest high coverage of the relevant texts. FRUS volumes privilege the historically salient over the mundane,[19] which is advantageous when studying leader-level crisis decision making. That said, slower and more restrictive declassification at the Pentagon or CIA could skew the composition of FRUS volumes. Such discrepancies, however, are sometimes later rectified when especially egregious and only generate bias favoring the hypotheses under precise conditions. We must suspect that State officials emphasize political (vs. military) content and express high uncertainty compared with others in documents included in FRUS and not those excluded from FRUS. Even if FRUS historians harbor a pro-State disposition, it is unclear why this would manifest with retaining high-uncertainty State texts. Presidents often bemoan State's elliptical responses, which suggests that including documents displaying State's elevated uncertainty does not flatter the department.

Measuring Advisory Input

I generate measures at the bureaucracy-crisis level by aggregating input from advisers affiliated with five bureaucracies that span the spectrum from specializing in issues of foreign policy to issues of military policy: State, CIA, NSC or White House staff,[20] the JCS, and non-JCS Defense. The State Department provides the ideal type of foreign policy specialization, as Jervis

[16] Partial exceptions include limited records immediately preceding the Iran Hostage rescue attempt.

[17] Memorandum of Conference with President Johnson, June 8, 1964, *FRUS*, Volume XXVIII, Laos, 1964-1968, Document 83.

[18] The 1976 North Korean Tree Trimming Incident meets the sampling criteria but is excluded because FRUS contains no pertinent president-level documents for this specific crisis.

[19] See McAllister et al. (2015) on the politics of FRUS.

[20] This category includes vice presidents. On NSC responsibilities over time, see Destler (1980).

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(2010, 41) notes, "the Embassy provide[s] the bulk of political reporting" on foreign states. *State Department* thus serves as the main explanatory variable. The JCS and non-JCS Defense, which I distinguish between for reasons noted below, serve as the ideal type for military policy specialization. The NSC and CIA occupy a middle position between the ideal types. The broad substantive remits of these bureaucracies make the empirical implications for them less stark.

I expect an increase in political content and uncertainty when moving across the continuum from the ideal type military policy bureaucracies to the ideal type foreign policy bureaucracy. Text analysis tools, which provide a replicable means of distilling advisory input from many documents, provide measures of advisory content and certainty. Because these tools are less suited for measuring policy prescriptions, I qualitatively code the policy stances of State and non-JCS Defense officials.

Political versus Military Adviser Content

Theory testing requires a measure of whether advisory input concerned military or political content. Supervised learning techniques, which classify texts into prespecified categories, offer an accurate and scalable method for this measurement task (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). Supervised methods follow a straightforward process. Human coders classify a subset of texts as political or military. An algorithm uses this *training set* to "learn" which text features (words) are associated with each category. The algorithm uses these features to sort the remaining texts between the categories.

Speaker texts in the full corpus range from a single word spoken during a meeting to memos exceeding 4,000 words. For uniformity in the training set, I use shorter texts and split longer texts into portions containing 30 to 250 words, which proved optimal for hand-classifying texts. The training set includes a random subset of memos and transcripts with 475 texts representing approximately 20% of the corpus' total word count. Classification rules followed from the theory and were refined through iteratively applying these rules. Military texts address military capabilities, the quality of forces, and force locations. Political texts address the opponent's domestic political landscape, challenges translating battlefield outcomes to desired political end states, or adversary resolve. Example texts in SI §3.1 typify content from each category. Overall, I coded 61% and 39% of the training set as military and political, respectively. A research assistant produced identical codings for 82% of the 475 texts, with further measures of intercoder reliability provided in the SI. Several standard preprocessing steps—removing numbers and punctuation and stemming to reduce words to common roots (e.g., "operate" and "operation" to "oper")—preceded the analysis.

I tested a variety of algorithms, including random forest models and support vector machines, and achieved the best performance with a simple naive Bayes classifier, which accurately classified 88% of texts in 10-fold cross-validation checks. SI §3.2 provides additional details on the classifier and performance metrics such as *F* statistics. Beyond high accuracy, the analysis shows that inaccurate classifications were clustered close to the cut point between the two categories. Figure 2 plots the 25 terms with the highest *relative* frequency for each category, generated inductively from the training set codings. These terms can be used for both categories (e.g., "believ"), but in practice within the training set they are far more likely to be used with one over the other. Word stems that most distinguish military texts include "forc," "attack," "nuclear," and "general." Word stems to the right are indicative of political texts. State leaders —"Khrushchev," "Nasser"—help distinguish these texts, as do references to "govern" and "talk." Invoking foreign leaders suggests a concern with that state's domestic politics or the individual's preferences. Nonetheless, tests in SI §5.2 demonstrate that results hold when excluding leader names from the training set. The most telling term for political texts, "will," concerns projections of how actors will respond to stimuli and their willpower or resolve. A follow-up coding evaluated how speakers employed "will" in practice. Within a random subset of the training data, "will" preceded political (vs. military) content in 59% of uses, which is high given that only 39% of texts were classified as political.

I apply the algorithm to the full corpus at the bureaucracy-crisis level of analysis. I aggregate all speech acts from a bureaucracy's officials during a crisis—for instance, State officials during the *Mayaguez* seizure —and apply the classifier to the resulting text block. Each bureaucracy-crisis observation receives two scores—a continuous *Political Content Score* (mean = 0.55) and binary *Political* content indicator (mean = 0.43). The continuous measure, described further in SI §3.2, standardizes scores to span between zero and one, with greater values indicating more political content.

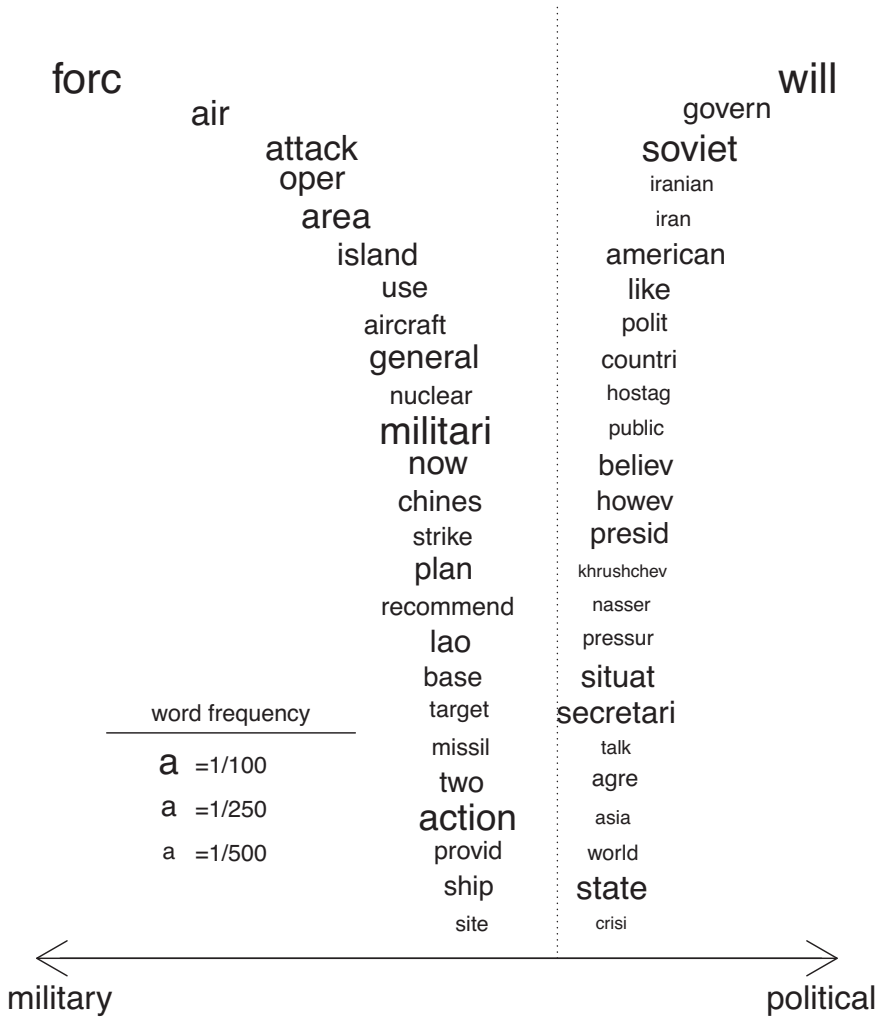
Adviser Uncertainty

Evaluating Informational Expectation 2 requires a measure of assessment uncertainty. Prior political science scholarship employs sentiment analysis using a specified wordlist to summarize text attributes (Driscoll and Steinert-Threlkeld 2020; McManus 2017). The critical step is identifying a dictionary that suits the substantive context. Although several dictionaries of uncertainty exist, I opt for the "If" Lasswell dictionary from General Inquirer, which measures concepts pertinent for political analysis and includes terms suited for crisis deliberations (Namenwirth and Weber 2016). Words include "approximately," "possibility," and "unpredictable."[21] The relative subtlety of uncertain sentiments, as compared with military content, favors a dictionary method over a supervised learning method. Words delineating between military and political content are frequent and stark. Words distinguishing

[21] Dictionary is available at http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/inquirer/. I add "risk" to the dictionary.

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FIGURE 2. Terms with Greatest Frequency Differences between Military and Political Documents



Note: Text size indicates overall frequency in training documents.

certain from uncertain assessments are less frequent and obvious, making it harder for a learning method to discern distinguishing features. The 96 words in the uncertainty dictionary constitute just over 5% of the words in the corpus. In comparison, the 96 words that most distinguish military texts constitute nearly 24% of the words in the corpus. The relative scarcity of uncertainty words means that other textual features likely swamp the uncertainty features, thus limiting classification accuracy with supervised methods.

The sentiment measure is the number of uncertain words as a percentage of total words. Like the content measure, the uncertainty measure is generated at the bureaucracy-crisis level. SI §4 provides an example text and scoring. Bureaucracy-crisis observations have a mean uncertainty score of 5.2%. SI §4 describes four validation approaches that use a hand-coded subset of texts, paired comparisons, qualitative knowledge, and an alternative uncertainty dictionary.

Adviser Policy Prescriptions

Assessing the competing parochial theory requires measures of bureaucracies' policy stances during crises. I take a qualitative approach, measuring *relative* hawkishness to evaluate whether bureaucratic affiliations drive advisers' policy prescriptions. The concept is less amenable to automated text measurement because words representing the aggressive policy in one crisis may represent the dovish posture in another. Advocating for conventional force is dovish when others suggest nuclear force but hawkish when others suggest sending arms. I evaluate the positions of the secretaries of State and Defense as well as senior officials in each bureaucracy. I restrict the focus to *civilian* advisers from State and Defense. These bureaucracies represent the ideal cases in terms of parochial benefits to diplomacy versus force. The CIA and NSC have mixed interests that produce ambiguous implications. A strictly civilian approach sidesteps the aforementioned complicating

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issues for military officers and disaggregates the "civil" side of civil-military dynamics.

I code *Relative Aggressiveness* primarily based on corpus documents. Sources beyond the corpus proved helpful for confirming codings when either FRUS contained limited text from one of the bureaucracies or when officials stipulated their preferences more clearly outside of the president's earshot, which would not qualify for corpus inclusion. In such cases I used additional FRUS texts, secondary literature, and participant memoirs.[22] The parochial expectation should hold even below the leader-level because parochial accounts do not suggest leader oversight tames organizational self interest. An evaluation of parochialism can thus evaluate advisers' policy stances even when not directly expressed to the president.

Following Betts (1991), the measure takes one of three values: Defense is more hawkish, no substantive difference, or State is more hawkish. SI §1 describes all sources, methods, and codings. A simple test compares how often Defense versus State adopts the relatively aggressive stance. A *t* test treating the relative aggressiveness measure as linear assesses whether Defense is substantially more likely to adopt aggressive positions. The analysis does not include crisis-level covariates because the outcome measure already compares policy positions when holding the crisis fixed.

RESULTS: ADVISER CONTENT, UNCERTAINTY, AND PRESCRIPTIONS

The findings strongly support an informational theory of bureaucracies rather than a parochial theory. Three results show that foreign policy advisers discuss more political content, convey greater uncertainty, and advocate for substantively indistinguishable policies compared with advisers from other bureaucracies. The three measures described in the previous section constitute the outcome variables, whereas foreign policy advisers, operationalized as *State Department*, serve as the explanatory variable (SI §5.1 provides summary statistics). I use ordinary least squares regression with the bureaucracy-crisis as the unit of analysis and present specifications without and with case fixed effects, which account for unobserved invariant components of each case. The models with fixed effects show how bureaucratic affiliation affects advisory input when holding the case fixed, meaning that differences are not attributable to selection into crisis participation. These models are bivariate because case-level control variables are collinear with the fixed effects. Separate specifications without fixed effects control for variables that could affect uncertainty levels or content emphases. Variables include the US share of dyadic capabilities, adversary regime type, geographic proximity, the president's political party, and whether the adversary was a non-state actor, such as a rebel group. SI §5.2 and §5.3 further describe the covariates and present full results. To ensure adequate inputs for text-based measures, I limit the sample to the 168 bureaucracy-crisis observations with at least 100 words, though results are robust to using alternative cutoffs. Potential observations have insufficient text due to corpus limitations or lack of participation during crises. Fixed effect specifications account for differential participation patterns.

Bureaucratic Position Affects Advisory Content

The results presentation first shows that State Department officials emphasize political attributes more often than counterparts from other bureaucracies. Differentiated functional responsibilities between bureaucracies encourages specialization. Tasked with guiding foreign policy, State Department officials specialize in adversaries' political characteristics. Figure 3's left panel plots the *Political Content Score* for all observations. For presentational clarity, I pool ideal type military policy bureaucracies (JCS and non-JCS Defense) and mixed remit bureaucracies (NSC and CIA).[23] The panel confirms that as a bureaucracy's mission increasingly concerns foreign (vs. military) policy, advisers increasingly emphasize political content to leaders.

Regression results align with the descriptive patterns. Table 1 reports results from specifications with content as the outcome variable and *State Department* as the explanatory variable. Models vary the outcome variable coding (*Political Content Score* in 1–4, *Political* in 5–8), the inclusion of case controls, and use of case fixed effects, which guards against the possibility that State only participates in cases with elevated political concerns. Models 4 and 8 prune the sample to ideal type bureaucracies—State, non-JCS Defense, and JCS. Divergences should be especially pronounced within this subset.

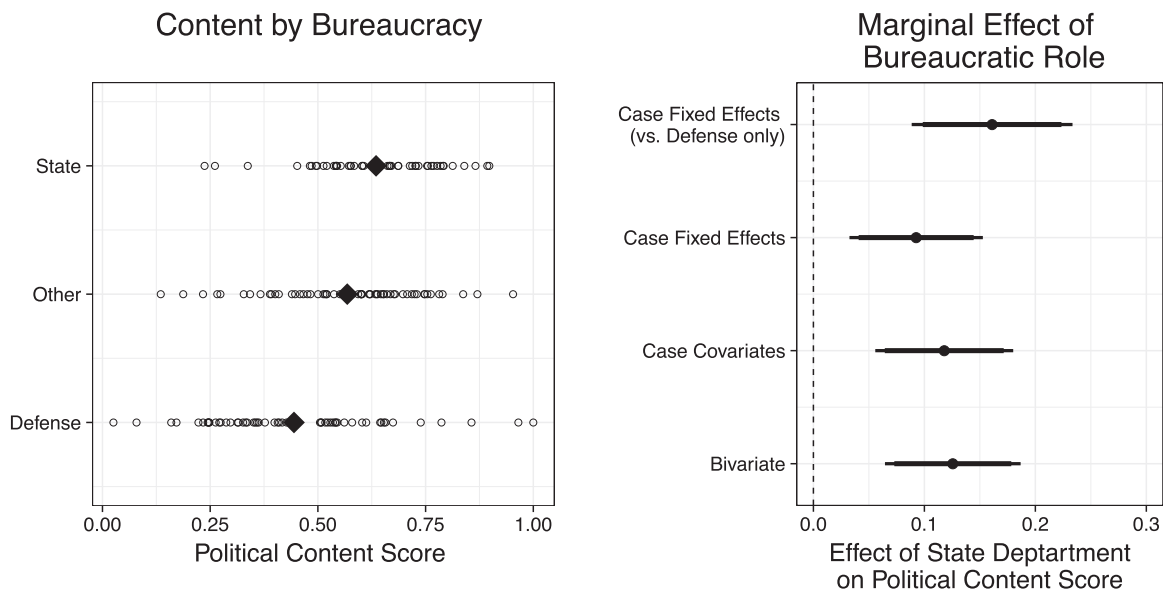
The *State Department* explanatory variable has a positive coefficient, indicating more political content, across all specifications. The relationship is statistically significant in all models using the continuous measure. Whereas the average bureaucracy input concerns neutral content (*Political Content Score* = 0.55), State Department officials stress, on average, more political content (coefficients ≥ 0.09). This effect becomes more pronounced when restricting the comparison to Defense and JCS officials, as Model 4 reports. Consider the crisis sparked by North Korea shooting down an EC-121 reconnaissance plane. Defense and JCS had an average *Political Content Score* of 0.35. Model 4 predicts a State score of 0.51, or substantially more tilted toward political content. State's actual input was even more politically oriented, with a score of 0.89. These patterns accord with the historical record. Defense officials discussed advantages of airstrikes compared with mining North Korean harbors, whereas State officials considered Soviet reactions and North Korean responses to

[22] In six of the 61 cases, corpus texts alone were insufficient to reliably code hawkishness. Results do not change when dropping these cases.

[23] A plot separating all five bureaucracies is in SI §5.2.

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FIGURE 3. Text Content by Bureaucracy



Note: Political Content Score observations (*left*), with diamonds indicating the bureaucracy mean. The defense category includes JCS and non-JCS observations; the Other category includes NSC/White House and CIA observations. Marginal effect of shifting bureaucracy to State (*right*), based on Models 1–4 in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Bureaucratic Role and Advisory Content

	Political Content Score				Political Class			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
State department	0.13***	0.12***	0.09***	0.16***	0.22**	0.19**	0.11	0.30***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Constant	0.51***	0.77***	0.70***	0.61***	0.37***	0.57	0.78***	0.57**
	(0.02)	(0.20)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.04)	(0.53)	(0.20)	(0.23)
Observations	168	168	168	105	168	168	168	105
Case fixed effects	N	N	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y
Case covariates	N	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	N
Only 'ideal' types	N	N	N	Y	N	N	N	Y
Outcome mean	0.55	0.55	0.55	0.53	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.38

Note: Ordinary least squares with bureaucracy-crisis observations as unit of analysis. Fixed effects and case covariates not shown. Models 4 and 8 limit the sample to State, Defense, and JCS observations. Full results for Models 2 and 6 provided in SI Table A7. *$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

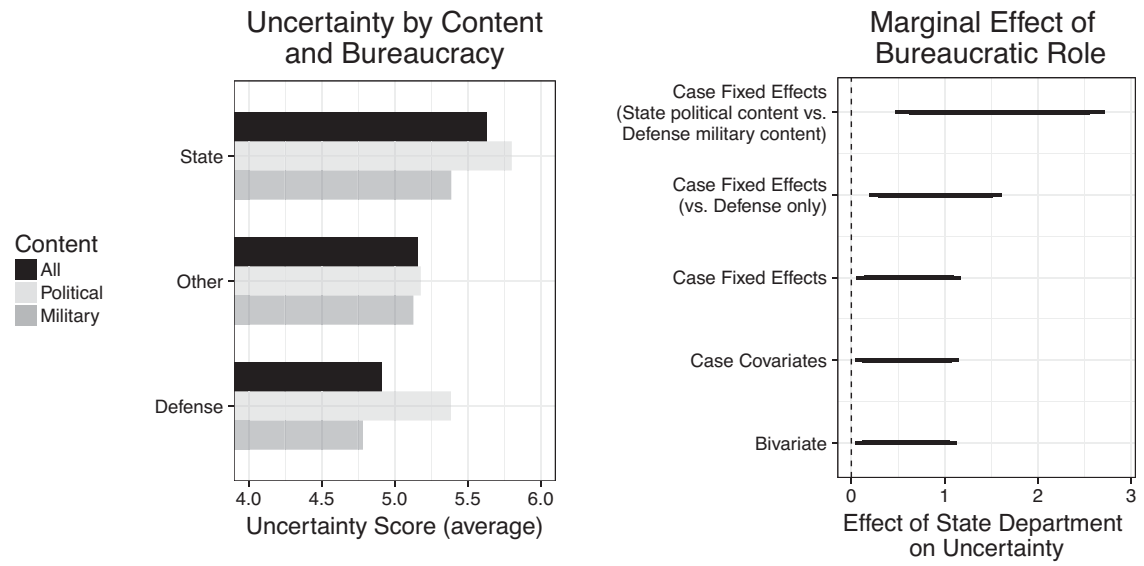
diplomatic overtures. Figure 3's right panel plots marginal effects based on Models 1–4. It provides point estimates and 90% and 95% confidence intervals on the increase in *Political Content Score* when moving to the State Department from bureaucracies that do not specialize in foreign policy.

Using the binary outcome coding produces similar, though less robust results. In Model 5, moving from another bureaucracy to the State Department produces a 60% increase in the relative probability of political content (22% ± 16% at the 95% confidence interval). When including fixed effects, the effect diminishes and is no longer statistically significant. However, when restricting the sample to the ideal types (Model 8), I again find a strong and statistically significant effect. Whereas JCS and non-JCS Defense provide political rather than military content in 21% of cases, shifting to State more than doubles the probability of discussing political content, even when holding the case fixed. Further analysis confirms that although State Department provides the most political content, the gap compared with NSC is limited when using the binary outcome and fixed effects.

Robustness checks in SI §5.2 use randomization inference to address small sample concerns, logistic regression for the binary outcome coding, clustered

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FIGURE 4. Uncertainty by Bureaucracy



Note: Average uncertainty by bureaucracy (*left*). The Defense category includes JCS and non-JCS observations; the Other category includes NSC/White House and CIA observations. Color distinguishes between all observations, political content observations, and military content observations. Marginal effect of shifting bureaucracy to State (*right*), based on Models 1–5 in Table 2.

errors, and the individual speaker as the unit of analysis where individuals are nested within bureaucracies ($n = 629$) to address aggregation concerns and to account for whether advisers communicated via a memo or meeting. Following the lead of Wasserstein and Lazar (2016), another test moves away from p values by comparing Model 2 with one without the *State Department* variable and produces a Bayes factor of 116. Results hold across all specifications, corroborating that bureaucratic role drives adviser informational specialization.

Bureaucratic Position Affects Adviser Uncertainty

Consistent with Information Expectation 2, foreign policy advisers express greater uncertainty than counterparts during crises. *Uncertainty* is 12% higher in State Department observations compared with other agencies (5.6% vs. 5.0%). Figure 4's *left panel* decomposes the sample by bureaucracy and content to yield additional insights. I again pool JCS and non-JCS Defense together and NSC and CIA together (see SI §5.3 for a plot without pooling). State is the most uncertain of all bureaucracies when averaging across the full sample (*black bars*). Defense observations offer the starkest contrast with an average score of 4.9%. My informational theory posits that this result stems from the substance that bureaucracies emphasize (State stresses political content) *and* the requisite expertise to recognize informational deficits. Consistent with the expertise expectation, the *lighter gray bars* show that State Department officials express greater uncertainty than others when discussing political matters. For military content (*darker gray bars*), which I posit is prone to greater certainty due to higher observability, Defense officials recognize the relative informational abundance and convey certainty accordingly. Competency widens the political–military uncertainty gap. When the ideal type bureaucracies—State and Defense—discuss their areas of expertise, they provide dramatically different degrees of uncertainty.

Models 1 through 3 in Table 2 employ the full sample without and with case controls and case fixed effects. Fixed effects guard against the possibility that State officials only participate in information-poor cases. All specifications produce similar results: State officials express 12% (± 11%) more uncertainty relative to other advisers. Deliberations before the 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic typify overall patterns. The average bureaucracy *Uncertainty* score was 5.4%. Model 2 predicts a State Department score of 6.0%. In reality, State officials expressed even more uncertainty (7.8%), representing a 45% relative increase over others. Documents from the crisis corroborate this pattern. Defense officials expressed certainty that two or fewer US divisions could stabilize the island. State Department officials, attuned to political factions on the ground, conveyed a lack of certainty with Undersecretary of State Mann noting that "loyalties of the troops outside the capital are still uncertain."[24]

[24] Telephone Conversation between the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Mann) and President Johnson, April 26, 1965, *FRUS*, Volume XXXII, Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana, Document 22.

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TABLE 2. Bureaucratic Role and Uncertainty

	Uncertainty				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
State department	0.59**	0.60**	0.61**	0.91**	1.59***
	(0.28)	(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.36)	(0.57)
Constant	5.04***	7.04***	6.24***	5.11***	4.21***
	(0.15)	(1.75)	(0.66)	(0.89)	(1.09)
Observations	168	168	168	105	73
Case fixed effects	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Case covariates	N	Y	N	N	N
Only "ideal" types	N	N	N	Y	Y
Only "expert" types	N	N	N	N	Y
Outcome mean	5.21	5.21	5.21	5.24	5.17

Note: Ordinary least squares with bureaucracy-crisis observations as unit of analysis. Fixed effects and case covariates not shown. Models 4 and 5 limit the sample to "ideal" types—State, Defense, and JCS observations. Model 5 further restricts the sample to "expert" observations where "ideal" types discuss their areas of expertise. Full results for Model 2 provided in SI Table A12. *$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

State's relative uncertainty becomes more pronounced when subsetting the sample to ideal type bureaucracies. JCS and non-JCS Defense serve as the Model 4 baseline. Substantively, State advisers convey 18% (± 14%) more uncertainty than military advisers. Limiting the sample to "expert" observations—that is, State discusses political and Defense/JCS discuss military attributes—produces even larger relative effects (38% ± 27%). Figure 4's right panel plots marginal effects from Models 1–5, showing the increase in expected uncertainty when moving to the State Department from other bureaucracies that are not specialists in foreign policy.

SI §5.3 shows results hold when employing randomization inference, an alternative uncertainty dictionary measure, clustered errors, and the individual speaker as the unit of analysis which can control for whether advice came from a memo or meeting. Comparing Model 2 with one without the *State Department* variable produces a Bayes factor of 2.6. Appropriately, the results do not persist in a placebo dictionary test.

Mechanisms. Analyses thus far corroborate Informational Expectation 2 but only hint at underlying mechanisms. This section helps apportion relative importance between three theorized candidate mechanisms. For the *informational content composition mechanism* to hold, advisers specializing in foreign policy must discuss political content more than other advisers and political content must carry greater uncertainty than military content. The results in Table 1 establish the first point, and the results in Table 3 Models 1 and 2 establish the second. Both models, which include case covariates, find that increasing *Political Content Score* is associated with increasing *Uncertainty* score. Model 2 includes bureaucracy fixed effects, indicating that even when holding fixed the bureaucracy (e.g., NSC), increasing uncertainty accompanies political content. The results support the content composition mechanism. If bureaucracies

TABLE 3. Sources of Uncertainty Differences across Bureaucracies

	Uncertainty		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Political content score	1.97***	1.31*	1.59**
	(0.67)	(0.76)	(0.78)
State Department			0.05
			(1.11)
Political content × State dept.			0.57
			(1.77)
Constant	5.72***	5.73***	5.83***
	(1.81)	(1.80)	(1.84)
Observations	168	168	168
Case covariates	Y	Y	Y
Bureaucracy fixed effects	N	Y	N
Outcome mean	5.21	5.21	5.21

Note: Ordinary least squares with bureaucracy-crisis observations as unit of analysis. Case covariates and bureaucracy fixed effects not shown. Full results provided in SI Table A18. *$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

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TABLE 4. Counts of Relative Aggressiveness by Bureaucracy

	More aggressive bureaucracy		
	Defense	Similar	State
Overall count	18	28	15
One sample test: *p*			
t test	0.61		

Note: Test does not preclude the null hypothesis of no difference between the bureaucracies. The *t* test codes outcomes as 0, 1, and 2.

discuss political content more frequently, they convey greater uncertainty.

Model 3, which includes an interaction between State Department and political content, helps distinguish between the *informational expertise mechanism* and a competing *dispositional/cultural mechanism.* For the expertise mechanism to hold, the uncertainty gap between State and other bureaucracies should increase as the topic becomes increasingly political. State holds relative expertise in political content and thus recognizes blind spots for this content. The positive coefficient on the interaction term offers some support for this mechanism. As content becomes increasingly political, the effect of *State Department* on uncertainty becomes larger. If the *dispositional/cultural mechanism* applies, then State officials should convey more uncertainty regardless of the topic under consideration. Model 3's lower order *State Department* offers some evidence supporting this mechanism. When the topic is purely military (*Political Content Score* = 0), State officials still express more uncertainty, though this difference is quite small (0.05). At more realistic content score values indicating strongly military topics, State officials do convey more uncertainty than others but the substantive difference remains relatively limited (0.19). SI §5.3 provides an extended discussion.[25] Evidence corroborates the two informational mechanisms this study emphasizes while also providing some support for alternative mechanisms linked to dispositional sorting or organizational culture.

Parochialism and Policy?

For Allison and Zelikow (1999, 307), "[k]nowledge of the organizational seat at the table yields significant clues about a likely stand." Are State Department officials less militarily aggressive than civilian counterparts at Defense? I expect parochialism dissipates in crises because leaders wield tools—adviser selection and sanctioning—that encourage honest communication.

Consistent with my expectation, bureaucratic "seat" does not predict where advisers "stand." Table 4 shows State and Defense advocating substantively indistinguishable positions in nearly half the cases. When diverging, Pentagon civilians call for more aggressive actions in 30% of cases while State officials do so in 25% of cases. Statistical tests confirm that State Department officials are not especially dovish. A *t* test that treats the outcome variable as linear fails to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between the bureaucracies.

Bureaucratic position did not foreordain an adviser's policy aggressiveness. What then explains divergent policy stances? Though speculative, advisers' policy suggestions could reflect their dispositions on using force or the information they collected while executing their reporting functions. Advisers likely hold preexisting views on the nature of international politics that affect their policy prescriptions (Jost et al. 2021). Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, for instance, never adopted the most aggressive posture during a crisis, reflecting his dovish disposition. Other officials though varied depending on the context. Secretary of State Rogers opposed bombing Cambodia in 1969, but Secretary of Defense Laird approved.[26] They flipped positions three years later. Laird opposed using B-52s against industrial complexes in Hanoi and Haiphong whereas Rogers consented to it.[27] In such cases, advisers collect different information and the perceived wisdom of aggressive policies depends on what they learn. A State official who discerns waning resolve among the adversary's elites may endorse aggression while a Defense official who perceives limited chance of stymying the adversary's flow of supplies may eschew aggression. Though requiring more study, expanding upon Allison's Model II may offer a promising guide to a bureaucracy's policy stance. An organization's specialized information processing could underlie its policy preferences in addition to its policy outputs. This possibility differs from Model III parochialism in which a bureaucracy's broad substantive remit (e.g., diplomacy) supersedes particulars of the crisis.

[25] A fourth possibility is that military officials withhold uncertain information from presidents but foreign policy officials do not. An evaluation of sub-presidential-level texts finds no evidence of a reporting bias (SI §6).

[26] Editorial Note, *FRUS*, Volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969–July 1970, Document 41.

[27] Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon, December 12, 1972, *FRUS*, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972–January 1973, Document 166.

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DISCUSSION

Leaders seek information during crises to optimize strategic choices that have the potential to lead to war. They look to senior advisers heading the state's national security bureaucracies to provide that information. By expanding the analytical lens to encompass those at a leader's side, this study develops an informational theory of bureaucracies. Bureaucracies matter during crises, but not in the way suggested by some canonical scholarship. A division of labor fosters differentiated expertise and emphasis across advisers and their respective bureaucracies. Where you sit affects the type of information you collect and provide. Adopting a text-as-data approach, new measures show that foreign policy advisers (State Department officials) are 60% more likely to emphasize the adversary's political traits compared with counterparts from other bureaucracies. Partly due to differences in emphasized content, advisers differ in the uncertainty they express. Specializing in an information-scarce domain, foreign policy advisers convey greater uncertainty than peers in other bureaucracies. Contrary to the parochial view, bureaucratic position does not consistently guide advisers' policy stances.

The study's findings on advisory input provided to leaders during crises likely apply for many, but not all, states beyond the US. Four theoretical conditions are crucial for the implications to hold elsewhere. First, the state has multiple bureaucracies that enjoy access to the leader. Second, these bureaucracies have differentiated specializations. Third, the leader enjoys authority to select and sanction advisers and thus minimize parochial bias and limit advisers from straying beyond core competencies. Fourth, leader sanctioning of advisers is not so severe as to stifle input. While likely to hold quite broadly, several institutional arrangements could undermine certain conditions. Military juntas, though rare today, subvert the first condition by limiting the bureaucracies leaders hear from and increasing the likelihood that military advisers encroach into nonmilitary domains. The widespread presence of military institutions and ministries of foreign affairs suggests the second condition mandating bureaucratic differentiation holds quite broadly. Some institutions could curtail the third condition regarding leader discretion over advisers, especially compared with the US presidential system. Leaders of parliamentary coalitions may have circumscribed power to choose and dismiss advisers. Though even here leaders can minimize the consequences of preference divergences within their cabinet (Diermeier and Feddersen 1998). Personalist dictators who engage in extreme sanctioning of advisers, such as executions, likely violate the fourth condition and suppress the dynamics this study documents. Former regime members in Iraq indicate that no one dared challenge Saddam's narrative before the Iraq War (Lake 2010). In summary, the near global ubiquity of differentiated national security bureaucracies suggests the results likely extend far beyond the US, though there are reasons to doubt the applicability to military juntas and personalist regimes.

External validity questions also apply to whether the findings hold outside of crises and for bureaucratic information provision *below* the leader level. I find that "where you stand depends on where you sit" is a dubious heuristic for analyzing advisory processes during crises. However, this straightforward mapping from bureaucratic role to policy prescription may be appropriate outside of crises either because leader oversight slackens or policy choices carry clearer bureaucratic rewards. This study's results are based on input advisers provided *to the leader* and cannot address whether similar patterns apply to internal bureaucratic communication below the leader level. Theoretically, differentiated expertise provides one reason to expect that advisory content and uncertainty might look similar even without the leader present. While meriting further study, a preliminary analysis in SI §6 examines internal State and Defense communications from the *Mayaguez* seizure. It shows that State officials were more likely to emphasize political content and convey heightened uncertainty, akin to this study's results at the leader level. However, parochialism could be more rampant in internal communication that typically lacks leader oversight. Consistent with recent work (Lindsey 2017; Malis 2021), bureaucratic agents further removed from direct communication with the leader—such as diplomats stationed abroad—may exhibit more skewed policy preferences than I find.

Future scholarship may fruitfully assess the theorized external validity considerations. Documenting whether these results hold across regime types, outside of crises, and below the leader level would enhance our understanding of the informational role bureaucracies play in international politics. Another topic demanding further inquiry is how adviser-level inputs aggregate to form leader-level beliefs. I document the information that advisers provide but not how leaders use it. Aggregation problems present a long-standing challenge for theories linking group practices to state outcomes (Powell 2017).

The findings offer several implications for bureaucracies and conflict. First, advisers serve as the conduit through which information about adversaries moves from the international environment to leaders. The domestic process by which leaders collect available information on their adversaries is an essential part of the causal chain linking informational environments to leader beliefs to strategic choices and ultimately to war. Placing information-transmission processes on firmer ground reveals conditions—such as a dysfunctional bureaucracy or advisory process—that can distort information collection in a state receiving signals about adversaries. Second, this study shows differences in information abundance across adversary attributes. Reduced observability of the adversary's political traits compared with its military traits makes the political realm subject to heightened uncertainty. Domain expertise may be critical for knowing what you do not know when it comes to these political attributes. Third, the findings hint at dangers of curtailing a bureaucracy's involvement during advisory processes. Due to comparative specialization, marginalizing any

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institution can mean forfeiting unique information and expertise. Such cases sever the connection between the information that is conceivably available about the adversary and the information a leader actually possesses. President Bush sidelined the State Department before the Iraq War, which arguably limited his exposure to concerns regarding postwar stability and the myriad associated uncertainties. Marginalization can thus foster neglect of important considerations. Emerging ignorant from cursory advisory processes, leaders risk blundering into conflict.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit http://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000168.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the APSR Dataverse at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PXXUCO.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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