

US Daily: Q&A on the Fed's Jackson Hole Conference (Mericle)

- The Fed's Jackson Hole conference will take place Thursday through Saturday. The theme of this year's conference is "Reassessing the Effectiveness and Transmission of Monetary Policy." The key event is Chair Powell's speech on the economic outlook at 10am New York time on Friday.
- Powell's past remarks at Jackson Hole have shed valuable light on his thinking and have sometimes affected market pricing. We expect Powell to express a bit more confidence in the inflation outlook and to put a bit more emphasis on downside risks in the labor market than in his press conference after the July FOMC meeting, in light of the data released since then. A speech along these lines would be consistent with our forecast of a string of three consecutive 25bp cuts in September, November, and December. A dovish surprise could be any hint that the level of the funds rate is inappropriately high, while a hawkish surprise could be highlighting instead that broad financial conditions are still quite easy.
- We have written at length about the conference theme in our research over the last two years. In particular, we have argued that several factors unique to the pandemic cycle have dampened or delayed the transmission of the Fed's rate hikes to the economy. We have also argued that the lag time with which interest rate changes affect GDP growth is shorter than widely believed, though the lag time from changes in the output gap to changes in inflation can be quite long.

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Q&A on the Fed's Jackson Hole Conference

Q: What is the agenda for the Fed's Jackson Hole conference?

A: The theme of this year's conference is "Reassessing the Effectiveness and Transmission of Monetary Policy." The key event for markets is Chair Powell's speech on the economic outlook at 10am New York time on Friday, August 23. The rest of the conference on Friday and Saturday consists of research presentations, panel discussions, and policymaker speeches. The Fed will release the conference agenda on Thursday at 8pm and will release the papers and presentations just before each event begins.

Q: What is your current Fed forecast?

A: We expect an initial string of three consecutive 25bp cuts in September, November, and December, followed by quarterly rate cuts starting next year to a terminal rate of 3.25-3.5%. We think the increase in the unemployment rate to date and other softer signs in the labor market are enough for the FOMC to accelerate the initial pace from the plan implied by the dot plot to cut every other meeting to instead cut at consecutive meetings, but not enough to cut by 50bp. We see comments from Fed officials since the July employment report as consistent with our forecast of a 25bp cut in September. A weaker August employment report than we expect would be the most likely catalyst for a larger cut in September.

Q: What do you expect Chair Powell to say?

A: We expect Powell to offer a more dovish version of his message from the press conference after the July FOMC meeting in light of the soft CPI report, the weak job growth numbers, and the further increase in the unemployment rate since then. This might mean expressing a bit more confidence in the inflation outlook and putting a bit more emphasis on downside risks in the labor market. Powell might also reiterate that the FOMC is watching the labor market data carefully and is well positioned to support the economy if necessary. Comments along these lines would likely reinforce market expectations of a rate cut in September while deferring the 25bp vs. 50bp question to the August employment report.

Possible dovish surprises could include a more concerned take on the labor market or any suggestion that the high level of the fed funds rate is inappropriate in light of the progress made on inflation, either of which could lower the bar for a larger cut or a longer string of consecutive cuts. A possible hawkish surprise might be highlighting instead that broad financial conditions are still quite easy, which could imply that the high level of the funds rate, while perhaps unnecessary, is not an urgent problem.

Q: Does Jackson Hole matter? Has Powell provided useful monetary policy guidance in the past?

A: Powell's remarks at Jackson Hole have often shed valuable light on his thinking and have sometimes affected market pricing, as Exhibit 1 shows. Powell argued for quarterly cuts and outlined his skepticism about focusing too much on estimates of r^*

and u^* (the neutral fed funds rate and the unemployment rate compatible with 2% inflation) in 2018, hinted at the need to deliver cuts that the market had already priced in order to keep financial conditions easier and support the economy in 2019, announced the by then largely expected outcome of the FOMC's framework review in 2020, reinforced expectations of an upcoming taper in 2021, reiterated that it would be appropriate to slow the pace of tightening "at some point" but said that policy would likely have to remain restrictive "for some time" in 2022, and said the FOMC would "proceed carefully" in 2023, which wound up signaling that it would not hike at the next meeting.

Exhibit 1: Chair Powell's Speeches at Jackson Hole Have Shed Valuable Light on His Thinking and Have Sometimes Affected Market Pricing

Date	Impact on 2y Yield*	Key Messages from Chair Powell's Speech at Jackson Hole
8/24/2018	-1bp	Argued for gradual—interpreted to mean quarterly—rate hikes as a reasonable compromise. Expressed skepticism about focusing too much on estimates of r^* (the neutral fed funds rate) and u^* (the unemployment rate compatible with 2% inflation). Noted that overheating risks include destabilizing financial excesses, not just high inflation.
8/23/2019	-4bp	Argued for additional rate cuts in response to a long list of downside risks and hinted at the need to deliver cuts that the market had already priced in order to keep financial conditions easier and support the economy. China announced retaliatory tariffs on US exports the same morning as Powell's speech. We nudged up our odds of further rate cuts.
8/27/2020	+0.4bp	Announced the adoption of flexible average inflation targeting to conclude the monetary policy framework review. The announcement was a significant dovish long-term shift but was roughly in line with expectations. We pulled forward our forecast of when changes to the forward guidance and asset purchase program would be announced by one meeting.
8/27/2021	-2bp	Offered a balanced acknowledgement of both strong recent employment gains and the downside risks posed by the Delta variant. Reinforced expectations of an upcoming announcement of the tapering of asset purchases.
8/26/2022	+4bp	Reiterated that it would be appropriate to slow the pace of tightening "at some point" but balanced that by saying that policy would likely have to remain restrictive "for some time" in order to bring inflation down and that another 75bp hike "could be appropriate" and would depend on the data (two had already occurred and two more would follow).
8/25/2023	+4bp	Said the FOMC would "proceed carefully" when deciding whether to hike at future meetings, which wound up signaling that it would not hike at the next meeting or again this cycle. Gave an incrementally more hawkish assessment of risks to the outlook and noted that the FOMC was "attentive to signs that the economy may not be cooling as expected."

* We show the change in 2-year Treasury yields from 30 minutes before to 1 hour after the release of Powell's remarks.

Source: Goldman Sachs Global Investment Research

Q: What are your views on the conference theme, "Reassessing the Effectiveness and Transmission of Monetary Policy"?

A: We view the transmission of monetary policy to the economy through the lens of our financial conditions index (FCI) and use our FCI growth impulse model to estimate how changes in broad financial conditions driven by Fed policy or other forces affect GDP growth. Last fall, we summarized our views on the magnitude and timing of the impact of the Fed's rate hikes on the economy and why both might be somewhat different during the unique pandemic cycle.

We have argued since 2022 that several factors dampened or delayed the impact of rate hikes on the economy this cycle: surprisingly resilient risk sentiment has reduced the transmission to broad financial conditions; the two most rate-sensitive sectors—housing

and autos—were constrained mainly by supply and were consequently less responsive to reduced demand; adjustable-rate mortgages are rare today; elevated corporate debt issuance at the start of the pandemic has so far limited corporates' refinancing needs and delayed the transmission from higher market interest rates to corporate interest expense; and the biggest net debtor in the economy, the federal government, has so far chosen not to cut spending or raise taxes in response to its higher projected interest expense. We also highlighted one factor that amplified the impact of rate hikes: runs on a few regional banks sparked an even sharper tightening in bank lending standards than would usually be associated with hikes of the magnitude delivered.

On the speed of transmission, we argued that the lag time with which monetary policy tightening affects GDP growth is shorter than widely believed. However, we also argued that the lag time from changes in the output gap to changes in inflation can be fairly long because some wage and price contracts are quite long-lasting, social norms can limit the speed with which sellers pass along increases in costs or market prices to loyal customers such as long-standing tenants, and the need to receive approval for price hikes from government regulators in some industries can also create delays.

The conference theme will likely be presented in a mostly backward-looking context. But a related forward-looking question is whether similar forces might also dampen the impact of potential future rate cuts if the Fed needs to stimulate a weak economy at some point. We see some reasons why the answer might be yes—for example, interest rate cuts will initially provide less of a cash flow boost through the refinancing channel than usual because so many homeowners already have such low mortgage rates. But in light of how much room the Fed has to cut, we are not very worried about this.

David Mericle

Disclosure Appendix

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