Political Leadership Performance: Definition & Analysis

Political leadership is a socio-political phenomenon that is determined by four core elements: First, it is a behavioral concept; second, it is contextual; third, it indicates a dynamic, reciprocal process between leaders and their environment; and fourth, it is about attaining mutually desired political goals through influence rather than coercion (Blume 1993; Durlauf 2005). Based on Blume’s analysis of political leadership, the international approach combines the different elements into one analytical framework, as it takes into account the personal characteristics of the leader, the instruments they have at their disposal, and the situations they face. (Hughey/Gillmer/Copry 1992: 91).

Recent studies in economics have provided empirical evidence that the performance of national leaders does, indeed, have an effect on the economic growth of their respective countries. (Jones/Olkem 2005; Jones 2008). However, studies that systematically analyze the impact of the political performance of national heads of government and state on the economic development of their respective countries continue to be rather rare.

This research project seeks to close this gap by exploring the causal mechanisms and the way in which different patterns of political leadership influence economic development in relation to its institutional design (democracy, semidemocracy, nondemocracy).

It investigates the performance of national executives across several regions, their strategies of political communication, and the role of their counterparts as well as their multifaceted relations with the economic sector.

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The general basis of this premise is that the interactions of these three independent variables (the leader, the political environment structure, and the third situational setting) equally determine the political leadership style and that each positively contribute to a better understanding of the “emergence, functioning, change, and decline […] of political leadership.” (Ibid.)

Since the research focus lies on national heads of government and state, three central leadership demands can be identified that essentially shape the performance of national executives. They encompass, first, strategies of political communication, agenda-setting and rhetoric. Second, the political demands also entail strategies of political relations with other actors in the society – in the case of this research project, this means above all economic actors. Third, the demands also encompass the provision of political representation to the respective (inter-)national public spheres.

Whereas decision-making powers/demands of national executives vary across regime types, these three political demands on behalf of national heads of government and state generally apply across all institutional designs (despite their different manifestations in each case), thus transcending democracies, semi- and nondemocracies as well as different cultural and regional traditions.


02 Economic Growth & Regime Type

H1: Democratic leaders tend to act more democratically in the realm of economic policy.

H2: Authoritarian leaders tend to act more democratically in the realm of economic policy.

H3: The patterns of performance of democratic and authoritarian leaders tend to converge in the realm of economic policy.

Whereas a consensus might be easily reached that extreme poverty should be fought by the means of rising per capita income, the variety of objectives and means regarding economic development increases with more improved and diversified living conditions. The “seemingly simple objective of economic growth [...] poses central challenges to anyone aspiring to an executive office whether in a democracy or democracy” (Arnold 1984: 58). Hence, the relationship between political leaders and the national economy becomes central to the development of any society. Recent studies in economics suggest that economic growth lies substantially within “contemporary hands.” (Jones 2008; Jones/Olkem 2005)

At the same time, Jones and Olkem (2005) suggest that a huge divide in terms of a leader’s effect on economic growth can exist between national democracies in democracies and authoritarian, with a leader’s impact being stronger in authoritarian settings. However, Magle and Dorca (2013) argue that authoritarian regimes indeed promote economic growth, but that it is not as good as advertised and (to, H.M.) no better than (in) democracies. (Magle/Dorca 2015: 233) In the authors’ analysis, authoritarian regimes tend to exaggerate their growth rates in official data, e.g. from the World Bank or IMF. The authors therefore conclude that “democratic regimes not only report more data; they also report more truthful data.” ( Ibid. 234) While it is evident that the influence of political leadership on economic development is shaped by the institutional structure, it may not be a priori clear that there is less individual influence or impact in democratic settings but that the difference rather lies in the respective strategies, modes of influence and, as a result, in a different kind of leadership performance.

On the one hand, most scholars argue that economic growth is fostered by certainty and institutional stability, and as such the government that constrains its political executive (De Long/Shleifer 1993; 467, 700). Consequently, long-term democracies develop a strong positive effect on growth rates. Hence, authoritarian states tend to, at least to a certain extent, mimic democratic rules (e.g. liberalization, property rights) to equate growth rates. On the other, the institutional stability of a “democracy has a statistically significant effect on economic growth […] in a given year.” (Gerring et al. 2005: 349). This, however, indicates that the institutional structure of democracies and authoritocracies can have potentially both direct positive and negative effects on a country’s economic development in the short term (5-10 years). It thus relatively equates the potential impact of political leaders on economic growth in both regime types, since the impact even of democratic leaders cannot systematically be ruled out.


A Comparative Analysis of the Gulf Region, Western Europe and Southeast Asia

03 Research Design & Methods

1) Descriptive Analysis: Political Cultures Across Regions.
   - Comparing the Gulf Region, Western Europe and Southeast Asia.

2) Quantitative Analysis: Comparing Economic Growth Rates, Regime Types & Government Indicators Across Regions 2000-2015 (see country selection)

3) Qualitative Analysis: Content & Discourse Analyses of Leaders in Times of Crisis (International Financial Crisis 2007-2010) (see single case studies)
   1) Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA)
   2) Cognitive Mind Mapping (CMM)
   3) Agenda-Setting/Public Representation Analysis
   4) Leadership Strategy Analysis

Single Case Studies

Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Prime Minister of the UAE (2006 - present)

Angela Merkel, German Chancellor (2005 - present)

Lee Hsien Loong, Prime Minister of Singapore (2004 - present)

Asia

- Gulf Region
- Western Europe
- Southeast Asia

Country Selection

High Ranking GCC

Qatar (14)
UAE (17)

Low Ranking GCC

Oman (62)

Ranking in Western Europe

Qatar (8)
Oman (56)

Group of 14

Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Spain.

Region Type

Democracies
- Saudi Arabia
- United Arab Emirates
- United Kingdom

Democracies
- Singapore
- Thailand

Demosocracies
- Vietnam

Non-Democracies

- Bahrain
- Bahrain, the national

the national

of the Gulf Region, Western Europe and Southeast Asia

Evaluative Judgments

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“Faster growth […] entrenches incumbent leaders, whether dictators or democrats.”

(Trisemian 2014: 928)

“Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth.”

(Burns 1978 [2010]: 2)