

Leadership Styles and Structural Transformation: Cross-Country Evidence

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Abstract

Political leadership is increasingly recognized as an important determinant of economic development, yet systematic approaches to measuring and comparing leadership across countries are limited. In this paper, we develop a new framework for analyzing political leadership in relation to structural transformation and industrial development. Leadership is conceptualized along two dimensions: structure, ranging from personalized to institutionalized authority, and orientation, ranging from transactional to transformational governance. Using indicators from the V-Dem database, four leadership indices are constructed for 79 countries over the period 1960-2023 and combined into a typology of leadership styles. We identify four broad leadership configurations: institutional-transformational, personalized-transformational, institutional-transactional, and fragmented-transactional. Examination of global patterns and country trajectories reveals substantial variation across regions and historical periods, alongside a gradual shift toward more institutionalized and transformational forms of leadership. Countries that achieved sustained industrial upgrading and structural change are more frequently associated with institutional-transformational leadership, whereas fragmented-transactional configurations are often linked to developmental stagnation. The paper contributes to the literature by providing a new dataset and conceptual framework for studying leadership in development. We argue that leadership should be understood as a broader configuration of authority and developmental orientation that shapes the capacity of states to pursue long-term economic transformation.