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Global Influence and Leadership Adaptation: The Role of US Policy in Shaping Leadership Behaviour in Developing States of the Caribbean, Africa, and Latin America

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Abstract

This study examines the influence of contemporary United States (US) leadership on political and organisational leadership behaviours in developing states across the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and South America. US leadership, exercised through economic policy, military engagement, diplomatic strategies, and soft power mechanisms, shapes both institutional structures and normative expectations of governance abroad. Developing states often adapt leadership styles in response to US strategic interests, conditional aid, and global economic pressures, resulting in hybrid forms of authority that blend local political traditions with externally influenced practices. Using a qualitative, comparative, and narrative-analytic methodology, the current study draws on case studies, historical analysis, and policy documentation to explore the mechanisms through which US leadership impacts domestic leadership behaviour. The findings indicate that US influence fosters both adaptive innovation and dependency-driven constraints, producing leaders who emulate strategic, transactional, or coercive approaches depending on local context. Caribbean and Latin American leaders frequently exhibit populist and developmentalist adaptations, while African leaders often blend external-oriented pragmatism with traditional authority structures. This study addresses a gap in the literature concerning the global diffusion of leadership norms and the agency of developing-state actors in negotiating US influence. Implications include the need for context-sensitive leadership scholarship, recognition of structural pressures in shaping behavioural repertoires, and critical attention to the ethical dimensions of externally mediated leadership. By analysing the interplay between global leadership and local adaptation, this study contributes to understanding how hegemonic influence shapes governance and leadership behaviour worldwide.

Keywords: US leadership, Global influence, Developing states, Leadership behaviour, Political authority, Contextual adaptation

Introduction

The interaction between dominant powers and developing-state actors increasingly shapes leadership in the global context. The United States, as a global hegemon, exercises leadership through economic policy, military interventions, multilateral organisations, and normative promotion of governance models (Nye, 2004; Ikenberry, 2011). Developing states in the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and South America experience varying degrees of influence, often modifying domestic leadership behaviour in response to US expectations. Leadership adaptation may occur through institutional reform, foreign policy alignment, or strategic mimicry of US-style governance and managerial practices. While US influence can promote democratic and administrative improvements, it may also reinforce dependency, corruption, or coercive approaches to authority. Existing scholarship frequently focuses on state-level policy outcomes rather than examining the behavioural dimensions of leadership within influenced nations (Acharya, 2014). This study addresses this gap by analysing the behavioural patterns of leaders in developing states as shaped by US global leadership.

US leadership is not monolithic; it encompasses soft power, hard power, and smart power strategies that interact differently across regional contexts (Nye, 2004). In the Caribbean, economic aid and trade agreements often condition leadership decision-making, encouraging leaders to prioritise US-aligned economic and political agendas. In Africa, US military partnerships and counter-terrorism initiatives shape leadership priorities and reinforce certain security-oriented behaviours. Latin American and South American leaders are influenced through a combination of trade incentives, diplomatic pressure, and international organisational engagement. The cumulative effect is a complex leadership ecology in which leaders respond to external pressures while negotiating domestic legitimacy. Yet, the behavioural consequences, such as emulation of strategic decision-making, transactional leadership, or coercive control, remain underexplored. This study seeks to illuminate these behavioural patterns.

Leadership behaviour is shaped not only by external influence but also by local institutional, cultural, and historical conditions. Leaders in developing states must balance domestic expectations, regional cooperation, and global pressures, creating hybrid leadership styles. US influence interacts with these domestic structures, producing emergent behaviours that may diverge from classical models of leadership or governance. Understanding these interactions requires a biosocial and contextual lens, recognising the interplay between structural opportunity, external coercion, and individual agency. While the US promotes certain normative standards, local leaders exercise discretion in how these standards are implemented, sometimes adopting strategic mimicry without internalising underlying principles. This dynamic complicates assessments of leadership effectiveness and ethical governance. Therefore, comparative analysis is necessary to capture both convergence and divergence in leadership behaviours across regions.

Existing literature on global leadership influence is largely state-centric and policy-focused, leaving a behavioural gap in understanding how hegemonic leadership affects domestic leadership norms. Few studies explore the lived behaviours, decision-making styles, or

ethical orientations of leaders operating under US influence. Additionally, scholarship often overlooks cross-regional comparisons that illuminate both adaptive and maladaptive leadership responses. There is limited integration of leadership theory, political science, and international relations frameworks to explain how global influence shapes behavioural repertoires. By focusing on behavioural outcomes, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of leadership in developing contexts. It also addresses the paucity of research linking global power dynamics to micro-level leadership decision-making. This approach highlights the agency of local actors within structurally constrained environments.

The study emphasises the role of adaptive leadership, transactional decision-making, and coercive strategies as responses to external pressures. Leaders may emulate US practices selectively, integrating managerial and strategic behaviours that enhance domestic authority while securing international favour. Such adaptations are contextually mediated, with variations reflecting regional histories, cultural expectations, and institutional strength. Caribbean leaders often display a blend of populist and diplomatic leadership, African leaders mix security pragmatism with traditional authority, and Latin/South American leaders navigate populist, developmentalist, and economic imperatives simultaneously. By analysing these patterns, the study identifies both opportunities and constraints presented by US influence. Leadership behaviour, therefore, is not simply imitative but strategically adaptive.

This study addresses a critical gap in leadership scholarship: the behavioural impact of global hegemonic influence on developing-state leaders. By analysing leaders across the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and South America, the current study highlights the interplay between external pressures and domestic agency. The research situates leadership behaviour within socio-political, economic, and cultural frameworks, offering a multidimensional perspective. Comparative analysis across regions elucidates both common behavioural adaptations and context-specific strategies. Findings are expected to inform leadership theory by integrating global influence, local agency, and institutional constraints. The study also provides practical implications for leadership development, governance, and policy design in contexts affected by external hegemonic power. Ultimately, it contributes to understanding how leadership behaviour evolves under complex, multi-level pressures.

Theoretical Framework

Understanding the influence of US leadership on developing-state leadership behaviour requires an integrative theoretical lens that combines international relations, leadership studies, and behavioural analysis. Hegemonic Stability Theory (Keohane, 1984) posits that dominant global actors shape international norms, economic systems, and institutional arrangements, thereby influencing the strategies and decision-making of less powerful states. Leaders in developing countries respond to this influence through a combination of emulation, resistance, and adaptation, reflecting both structural pressures and personal agency (Krasner, 1999). While traditional leadership theories often prioritise traits, styles, or situational contingencies, global influence necessitates consideration of external structural determinants alongside internal behavioural dynamics. By integrating theories of charismatic and transformational leadership with contextual and institutional frameworks, this study

captures the multi-level processes through which US actions shape leadership behaviour abroad. Furthermore, this approach highlights the interaction between normative pressures—such as the promotion of democracy—and practical imperatives, including economic aid or security cooperation. The framework, therefore, situates leadership behaviour at the intersection of domestic agency and global systemic influence.

Transformational leadership theory (Bass & Riggio, 2006) provides insight into how leaders internalise and emulate externally modelled behaviours, such as strategic vision, ethical rhetoric, or developmental priorities promoted by US policies. Leaders influenced by US soft power may adopt language, practices, and governance strategies aligned with democratic and developmental ideals, seeking both legitimacy and international favour. In Caribbean and Latin American contexts, transformational behaviours may be evident in populist appeals framed in developmentalist narratives, reflecting the hybridisation of domestic and external models. In Africa, leaders navigating counter-terrorism or security assistance programmes similarly adapt strategic and managerial behaviours to align with US expectations while retaining domestic legitimacy. However, the adoption of transformational elements does not occur in isolation; leaders negotiate these behaviours with local norms, institutional capacity, and socio-political histories (Northouse, 2022). By combining transformational theory with contextual analysis, the study examines the selective internalisation and adaptation of external leadership models. This approach addresses the gap in understanding how global norms are behaviourally operationalised in diverse domestic settings.

Transactional leadership theory complements this perspective by emphasising the contingent and reciprocal nature of leader-follower or leader-system interactions (Burns, 1978). Leaders in developing states may engage in transactional behaviours to secure US support, such as policy compliance, strategic alignment, or resource mobilisation, in exchange for economic or security benefits. Transactional adaptation may be constrained by domestic institutional capacity, political opposition, or societal expectations, producing hybridised leadership patterns. For instance, a leader may accept US aid conditionalities while maintaining symbolic national sovereignty through rhetorical or performative acts. This dynamic illustrates that transactional leadership is not inherently coercive but a strategic response to multi-level pressures. By analysing transactional behaviours, the framework captures the pragmatic dimensions of leadership influenced by hegemonic power. It also clarifies how material incentives interact with ideological and ethical considerations in shaping leadership behaviour.

Authoritarian leadership theory provides a necessary counterpoint by examining how external pressures may encourage or reinforce centralised power structures in developing states (Geddes et al., 2018). In contexts of economic dependency, security threats, or political fragility, leaders may consolidate authority to navigate international expectations while maintaining domestic control. US interventions, whether through military assistance, sanctions, or diplomatic pressure, can inadvertently legitimise coercive practices if leaders perceive a concentration of power as necessary for survival. Authoritarian tendencies, therefore, are not merely a function of individual disposition but emerge from the interaction between structural constraints and global influence. Comparative study across regions shows

variation: Caribbean states may adopt soft-authoritarian approaches to meet external economic expectations, while African states with ongoing security threats may exhibit more coercive responses. Integrating authoritarian theory allows the study to account for these divergent behavioural outcomes. This hybrid theoretical lens situates leadership behaviours within both global influence and domestic contingency.

Contextual leadership theory further strengthens this framework by emphasising the role of institutional, cultural, and historical environments in shaping behaviour (Osborn, Hunt, & Jauch, 2002). Leaders' responses to US influence are mediated by the strength of domestic institutions, historical legacies of governance, and societal expectations of authority. For example, leaders operating in fragile states with weak institutions may prioritise adaptive and coercive behaviours simultaneously to balance global compliance with domestic legitimacy. Conversely, states with more robust civil societies or democratic norms may show selective adoption of US-inspired leadership models, emphasising symbolic alignment rather than substantive coercion. Contextual analysis ensures that behavioural interpretation is not ahistorical or decontextualised. It highlights that global influence is filtered through the specificities of local conditions. By integrating contextual theory, the framework captures the complex negotiation between external pressure and internal structural capacity.

Finally, this study utilises a comparative contextual-behavioural framework, integrating charismatic, transformational, transactional, and authoritarian perspectives with structural and historical analysis. This approach enables systematic comparison of leadership behaviours across the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and South America, identifying both patterns of convergence and divergence in response to US influence. It highlights how global hegemonic strategies interact with domestic priorities, institutional constraints, and cultural expectations to produce distinctive leadership behaviours. This multi-theoretical lens addresses the gap in the literature concerning the behavioural mechanisms of global influence on leadership. By situating leaders as both agents and respondents to global systems, the framework contributes to theory development in international leadership studies. It also provides a foundation for analysing the sustainability, effectiveness, and ethical implications of externally mediated leadership. Ultimately, the framework allows the study to evaluate whether US influence produces adaptive, coercive, or hybrid leadership behaviours across different contexts.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, comparative research design to examine the influence of US leadership on leadership behaviour in developing states across the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and South America. Qualitative methods are particularly suited to exploring complex, context-dependent phenomena, allowing for rich, interpretive analysis of leadership behaviour shaped by global influence (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study employs secondary narrative analysis, synthesising existing literature, policy documents, speeches, and reports to examine how US foreign policy, diplomatic engagement, and military interventions influence leadership styles and decision-making. Comparative historical analysis is integrated to contextualise behavioural patterns within each region's socio-political, economic, and institutional environment (Mahoney & Rueschemeyer, 2003). This approach allows for cross-

regional identification of convergent and divergent responses to US influence, highlighting both adaptation and resistance. By combining textual and contextual analyses, the study captures the interaction between hegemonic pressures and domestic leadership agency. The methodology emphasises interpretive depth, ensuring that observed behaviours are understood within complex multi-level systems rather than simplified causal models.

Data collection involves the systematic review of scholarly sources, government and intergovernmental reports, and media analyses that document leadership decisions, policies, and rhetoric in response to US influence. Sources include peer-reviewed articles on leadership theory, international relations, and case studies of US interventions, alongside policy briefs from the Organisation of American States (OAS), African Union (AU), and Caribbean Community (CARICOM). Primary sources, such as speeches, press releases, and official statements by national leaders, are included to assess behavioural and rhetorical patterns. Data were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to US influence, leadership behaviour, and policy outcomes in developing states. Inclusion criteria required explicit reference to US interaction or policy impact on leadership actions within the past three decades. This approach allows the study to balance scholarly rigour with contextual relevance. Ethical considerations included careful interpretation to avoid misrepresentation of leaders' motivations and behaviours.

The analytical framework employs narrative analysis to identify recurring themes, patterns, and deviations in leadership behaviour across regions. Leaders' responses to US influence are coded according to behavioural dimensions derived from transformational, transactional, charismatic, and authoritarian leadership theories (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Geddes et al., 2018). Coding categories include policy alignment, rhetorical adaptation, symbolic acts, institutional reform, and coercive strategies. This allows identification of how leaders operationalise external influence within domestic constraints. Comparative coding further highlights regional differences in adaptation strategies, revealing patterns shaped by institutional capacity, historical legacies, and cultural norms. Narrative analysis is supplemented by historical contextualisation, situating behaviours within specific geopolitical and socio-economic conditions. This ensures that observed leadership patterns are interpreted holistically, recognising both external pressures and domestic agency.

Reliability and validity are addressed through triangulation, combining multiple data sources, methods, and theoretical perspectives. Cross-referencing policy documents, academic analyses, and media reports reduces potential bias and strengthens the credibility of behavioural interpretations (Yin, 2018). Theoretical triangulation, integrating transformational, authoritarian, transactional, and contextual leadership theories, allows for multidimensional analysis of complex leadership behaviours. Peer review of coding and interpretation was conducted to ensure consistency and mitigate researcher subjectivity. Transparency is maintained through documentation of data sources, coding decisions, and analytical procedures. Limitations of secondary qualitative analysis, such as potential gaps in source coverage and interpretive bias, are acknowledged. These limitations are mitigated by systematic selection and careful contextualisation of all analysed material.

Comparative analysis is conducted both within and across regions to identify patterns of convergence and divergence in leadership behaviour. Within-region comparisons highlight how leaders facing similar US interventions respond differently based on domestic institutional strength, cultural norms, or political history. Cross-region comparisons illuminate broader patterns of adaptation, resistance, and hybridisation in response to US influence. This dual-level comparison provides insight into both structural determinants and behavioural agency. It also allows the study to distinguish between generalisable trends and context-specific responses. Emphasis is placed on understanding the mechanisms through which US influence is translated into leadership practice rather than mere descriptive accounts. This approach facilitates theoretical contributions to both international leadership studies and global governance literature.

Ultimately, this methodology allows the study to address gaps in leadership research concerning global influence on developing-state leadership behaviour. By combining qualitative narrative analysis, comparative historical methods, and multi-theoretical coding, the study examines how US leadership shapes domestic leadership behaviours in diverse contexts. The approach provides explanatory insight into the behavioural, strategic, and symbolic adaptations leaders undertake under hegemonic pressure. The method also facilitates the identification of emergent leadership patterns that blend domestic norms with externally modelled behaviours. Findings generated through this methodology offer implications for leadership theory, international relations, and policy formulation. The study's design ensures that observed patterns are interpreted within socio-political and historical contexts, avoiding reductionist causal assumptions. In doing so, it contributes both empirical data and conceptual clarity to the study of global influence on leadership.

Findings

The analysis reveals that US leadership exerts significant influence on political and organisational behaviours of leaders in developing states, often shaping decision-making, strategic alignment, and international positioning. Across the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and South America, leaders respond to US policies through both cooperative and adaptive strategies. Cooperative strategies include aligning economic, security, or diplomatic priorities with US expectations, sometimes to secure aid, investment, or legitimacy (Campbell et al., 2022; Dominguez, 2007; Eakin & Lemos, 2006; Ellis, 2019; Goodman & Schneider, 2023). Adaptive strategies, by contrast, involve symbolic assertions of sovereignty, rhetorical resistance, or selective engagement with regional institutions to maintain domestic legitimacy (Destradi, 2010; Dixon, 2017; Fung, 2020; Halliday et al., 2010). Leaders' responses are mediated by domestic political institutions, historical legacies, and civil society expectations, demonstrating the complex interaction between external influence and internal constraints. Notably, leaders often blend compliance and resistance, reflecting strategic calculation rather than purely ideological alignment. These findings underscore the duality of US influence: it shapes leadership behaviour while simultaneously provoking context-specific adaptation.

In the Caribbean, leaders often demonstrate pragmatic engagement with US economic and security programmes while emphasising national identity and regional cooperation. For

example, policy alignment with US trade or development initiatives is often accompanied by symbolic support for CARICOM or anti-imperialist rhetoric (Jessop, 2022; Reeder, 2019). Leaders in this region tend to cultivate dual legitimacy, seeking both domestic support and international recognition. Historical experiences of colonialism and external interference shape cautious engagement strategies, where overt compliance may generate domestic political risk. Consequently, Caribbean leaders' behaviour reflects a hybrid approach combining transactional alignment with performative assertions of sovereignty. This blend highlights the importance of context in mediating leadership response to hegemonic influence. The finding illustrates that US influence is neither monolithic nor deterministic but interacts with domestic norms and political culture.

In African states, US influence is particularly evident in security and counterterrorism contexts, where military aid, intelligence cooperation, and diplomatic pressure shape leadership behaviour. Leaders operating in fragile states often align military and governance strategies with US priorities to secure resources and legitimacy (Williams, 2021). At the same time, regional and nationalist pressures drive selective resistance, such as emphasising African Union-led initiatives or pan-African narratives. Behavioural adaptation often manifests in strategic prioritisation of domestic stability alongside externally encouraged reforms. Leaders' decisions reflect complex calculations balancing coercion, persuasion, and coalition-building. The hybridisation of leadership styles-blending authoritarian tendencies with strategic diplomacy-is especially pronounced in these contexts. These findings demonstrate that external influence interacts dynamically with internal structural conditions to produce context-specific leadership behaviours.

In Latin America, US influence is closely tied to economic and trade policies, with leadership behaviour shaped by alignment or opposition to US-driven neoliberal agendas. Leaders in countries such as Venezuela or Bolivia have historically adopted anti-US rhetoric to bolster domestic legitimacy while resisting policy conditionalities (Buxton, 2020; Dodson& Dorraj, 2008; Evan Ellis, 2024; Gill, 2018; Meunier, 2010; Weyland,2024). Conversely, leaders in smaller or more economically dependent states demonstrate pragmatic compliance, balancing national sovereignty with the benefits of US aid. This duality reflects leadership adaptability, where rhetorical independence coexists with operational alignment. The findings suggest that leaders' strategic communication plays a critical role in mediating perceptions of autonomy and external influence. Behaviour is contingent not only on economic leverage but also on historical patterns of US engagement and domestic political contestation. Consequently, leadership in Latin America exemplifies the complex interplay of power, symbolism, and strategic decision-making.

In South America, patterns of US influence manifest through both diplomatic engagement and political pressure, affecting leadership behaviour in governance, policy prioritisation, and institutional reform. Leaders adopt a mixture of alignment and resistance to navigate geopolitical pressures, often using nationalist narratives to sustain domestic legitimacy. Behavioural responses include selective institutional reforms, coalition-building, and public messaging to convey autonomy while maintaining access to US resources. Social movements and civil society expectations further shape leaders' behavioural choices, highlighting the

interplay between external influence and domestic accountability. Leaders in this region also demonstrate adaptability in responding to shifting US priorities, such as changes in trade policy or military cooperation. The findings indicate that leadership behaviour is co-constructed by domestic pressures and international influence rather than being externally imposed. This underscores the importance of multi-level analysis in understanding leadership in globally connected but contextually distinct environments.

Across regions, the study identifies recurrent themes in leadership adaptation to US influence, including hybridisation of style, symbolic assertion of sovereignty, and strategic compliance. Leaders rarely exhibit uniform alignment or total resistance; instead, they blend behavioural repertoires to navigate competing domestic and international pressures. Charismatic and transformational elements emerge when leaders mobilise popular support to legitimise selective engagement with the US. Authoritarian or coercive behaviours appear when leaders prioritise regime survival amid perceived external threats or internal dissent. Transactional behaviours dominate in contexts where US incentives directly affect state capacity or political stability. The analysis indicates that leadership behaviour is contextually mediated, reflecting a continuous negotiation between external influence, institutional constraints, and political legitimacy. These patterns highlight gaps in traditional leadership theory, which often underestimates the global dimension of leadership adaptation in developing states.

Finally, the study demonstrates that US influence operates as both a catalyst and constraint on leadership behaviour in developing states. The behavioural outcomes are not uniform but shaped by historical legacies, domestic institutions, societal expectations, and geopolitical positioning. Leaders' strategic responses illustrate that influence is mediated through domestic agency rather than imposed externally. These findings reveal that global leadership is co-constructed, where hegemonic actions interact with local conditions to produce diverse leadership behaviours. Comparative analysis across regions provides insight into generalisable patterns and context-specific adaptations. Importantly, the study addresses a literature gap by linking international influence with leadership behaviour empirically across multiple regions. Overall, these findings provide a foundation for theorising the mechanisms through which external actors shape leadership in developing contexts while highlighting the critical role of domestic agency.

Discussion

The findings indicate that US leadership exerts a profound, yet contextually mediated, influence on leaders in developing states across the Caribbean, Africa, Latin America, and South America. Leaders do not merely replicate US policy preferences; they strategically adapt behaviour to balance domestic legitimacy with international expectations (Smith, 2021). This adaptation highlights the dual role of US influence as both enabling and constraining, shaping leadership behaviour without determining it outright. The study demonstrates that leaders' responses are contingent on historical, political, and socio-cultural factors unique to each region. For instance, nationalist rhetoric in Latin America and pan-African narratives in West Africa illustrate how leaders symbolically assert autonomy while engaging with US-driven agendas (Dybska, 2025; Rockhill, 2025; Targ, 2011; Williams,

2021). Such hybridity challenges traditional leadership theories that assume linear effects of external influence. It also underscores the necessity of examining leadership through multi-level lenses that integrate international and domestic pressures.

In the Caribbean, leaders' pragmatic alignment with US initiatives coexists with assertions of regional solidarity and cultural identity (The Gleaner, 2026). This demonstrates that compliance is often performative, intended to secure material benefits while signalling independence to local constituencies. Leaders leverage symbolic acts, such as emphasising CARICOM cooperation, to negotiate legitimacy in both domestic and regional spheres. The findings suggest that leadership behaviour is heavily influenced by small-state vulnerabilities, including economic dependence and susceptibility to international sanctions. This interplay between strategic compliance and symbolic resistance illustrates the complex behavioural repertoire that leaders adopt under global influence. It also indicates that external influence does not operate in isolation but interacts with institutional capacity and societal expectations. Consequently, Caribbean leadership provides a model of hybridised behaviour shaped by structural dependence and normative agency.

In African states, US influence intersects with national security imperatives, particularly in contexts of terrorism and civil unrest (Williams, 2021). Leaders often adopt coercive and authoritarian strategies to stabilise fragile states while aligning with US counterterrorism priorities. Simultaneously, nationalist and pan-African rhetoric provides a discursive buffer that maintains domestic legitimacy. This dual approach reflects a hybrid leadership style, blending transformational rhetoric with practical authoritarian control. Leadership behaviour is thus not solely dictated by external actors but emerges from strategic negotiation of competing pressures. Moreover, the study highlights how US aid and diplomatic engagement act as catalysts for behavioural adaptation, incentivising compliance while allowing selective resistance. This dynamic reinforces the argument that leadership in developing states is inherently context-dependent, shaped by both domestic vulnerabilities and global influence.

In Latin America, leaders' interactions with the US are shaped by historical experiences of intervention and economic dependence (Cardoso & Faletto, 2024; Cottam, 1994; Grow, 2008; Lewis, 2005; Sunkel, 1969; Valenzuela & Valenzuela, 1978). Anti-US rhetoric and selective compliance coexist, producing complex behavioural strategies that combine symbolic defiance with pragmatic engagement. These behaviours illustrate leaders' attempts to reconcile domestic expectations for sovereignty with the material realities of international interdependence. The findings highlight the strategic use of communication and rhetoric to shape both domestic and international perceptions of leadership competence and autonomy. Leaders employ hybridised strategies that encompass both transactional alignment and performative independence. This reflects the broader principle that leadership behaviour is constructed through negotiation between external pressures and internal legitimacy imperatives. Consequently, the study reveals that US influence is not uniform, but is filtered through historical memory, societal expectations, and institutional capacities.

In South America, US influence manifests similarly, but with a stronger emphasis on institutional reform and political alignment (Lowenthal, 1988). Leaders adopt selective

compliance with US policies while using nationalist narratives to reinforce domestic support. Behavioural adaptations include strategic coalition-building, controlled policy reforms, and public messaging to convey sovereignty. Social movements and civil society further shape these behavioural outcomes, illustrating the multi-level determinants of leadership in globally connected contexts. The study demonstrates that leadership behaviour is co-constructed, emerging from the interaction between external influence and internal constraints. Leaders strategically navigate these pressures, balancing compliance with symbolic independence to preserve legitimacy. This highlights the necessity of integrating global and local perspectives in leadership analysis.

Across all regions, the study identifies hybridisation as a key behavioural pattern, where leaders blend compliance, resistance, and symbolic assertion to manage domestic and international pressures (Schemeil, 2013; Smith, 2021; Yavuz, 2009). Charismatic and transformational elements emerge when leaders mobilise popular support to legitimise engagement with the US, while authoritarian or coercive behaviours surface in response to security threats or internal opposition. Transactional behaviours dominate in resource-dependent contexts, demonstrating the instrumental dimension of US influence. Importantly, leadership adaptation is contextually mediated, illustrating that behaviour is a function of multi-level interactions rather than unilateral external imposition. This hybridisation challenges conventional leadership theories that fail to incorporate global structural influence. It also emphasises the role of agency, demonstrating that leaders are active interpreters rather than passive recipients of external influence. These insights expand the analytical scope of leadership scholarship in developing states.

Finally, the study addresses a critical gap in the literature by providing a systematic, comparative analysis of US influence across diverse developing regions. By integrating Caribbean, African, Latin American, and South American contexts, it demonstrates both generalisable patterns and region-specific adaptations in leadership behaviour. The findings reveal that external influence is neither deterministic nor uniform but operates within constraints imposed by domestic institutions, societal expectations, and historical legacies. Leaders actively navigate these constraints, producing adaptive, hybridised forms of leadership that balance compliance, symbolic resistance, and strategic autonomy. These dynamics suggest that international influence is inseparable from domestic political, social, and institutional contexts. The study provides empirical support for hybrid theoretical frameworks combining charismatic, authoritarian, and contextual leadership models. Overall, the discussion underscores the importance of multi-level, comparative analysis in understanding leadership behaviour under global influence.

Recommendations

The study highlights that leadership in developing states is significantly shaped by external influence, particularly from the United States, but mediated by domestic political, social, and historical contexts. Policymakers in both developing states and the US should consider these contextual nuances when designing engagement strategies. Blanket prescriptions or coercive incentives may reinforce dependency, exacerbate domestic tensions, or produce superficial

compliance rather than genuine institutional reform (Fallon et al., 2018; Merrey et al., 2013; Olson, 1979). Strategic partnerships should prioritise capacity-building, local leadership development, and culturally informed frameworks for governance. International organisations can facilitate dialogue platforms that enable leaders to negotiate external expectations while preserving domestic legitimacy. Additionally, recognising hybridised leadership behaviours can improve the effectiveness of foreign aid, diplomatic pressure, and security cooperation (Smith, 2021). A nuanced approach to influence ensures that leadership behaviour evolves adaptively rather than reactively.

Training programmes and leadership development initiatives in developing states should integrate global perspectives while grounding learning in local realities. Leadership curricula must address the dual pressures of international expectations and domestic legitimacy, equipping leaders to navigate hybridised roles. Emphasis on ethical decision-making, transparency, and strategic negotiation can help mitigate authoritarian tendencies while enhancing adaptive capacity. Simulations, scenario planning, and transnational mentorship may foster reflexive leadership practices. Programmes should also cultivate skills in symbolic communication and coalition-building, which leaders employ to balance external engagement with local identity (Engin & Kasap, 2025). International actors should support these initiatives without imposing prescriptive leadership models. The goal is to strengthen leadership resilience, not replicate foreign frameworks.

Given the evidence of regional variation, policy recommendations must be sensitive to local security, economic, and social conditions. In the Caribbean, small-state vulnerabilities require carefully calibrated interventions that respect sovereignty while addressing structural dependence (Williams, 2021). African states with fragile institutions need support in strengthening governance capacity, mediating security threats, and balancing external partnerships with pan-African commitments. Latin American and South American leaders benefit from interventions that consider historical legacies of intervention and economic dependency (Bodenheimer, 1970; Cardoso & Faletto, 2024; Cottam, 1994; Germani & Silvert, 1961; Grow, 2008; Lewis, 2005). Regional organisations, such as CARICOM or ECOWAS, can facilitate coordination between external partners and domestic stakeholders. By contextualising engagement, US influence can reinforce adaptive leadership rather than coercive compliance. This approach helps avoid unintended consequences, including social unrest or legitimacy crises.

Leadership research should prioritise longitudinal and comparative studies to capture the dynamic nature of influence over time. Understanding how leaders in developing states internalise, resist, or adapt to external pressures requires multi-year observation and cross-regional comparison (Smith, 2021). Mixed-method approaches combining qualitative interviews, case studies, and quantitative governance indicators can provide richer insights into behavioural adaptation. Tracking outcomes such as policy innovation, legitimacy, and social stability allows for assessment of the effectiveness of external engagement. Additionally, comparative analysis of different US engagement strategies may reveal which approaches support sustainable leadership development. Research should examine both elite-

level leadership and local governance actors to capture the full spectrum of influence. These insights can inform more effective, context-sensitive leadership interventions.

Future studies should explore the role of digital and transnational networks in shaping leadership behaviour. Leaders increasingly communicate, mobilise, and negotiate via social media, international conferences, and diaspora connections (Loader & Mercea, 2011). These platforms create both opportunities and vulnerabilities, amplifying US influence while enabling leaders to assert autonomy. Understanding how hybridised leadership behaviours manifest in digital arenas is essential for contemporary leadership theory. Comparative research across regions can identify patterns in online mobilisation, rhetorical framing, and symbolic resistance. This also provides insight into the generational evolution of leadership norms under globalised influence. Digital literacy, strategic communication, and narrative management should therefore be integrated into leadership development programmes.

Scholars and practitioners should adopt hybrid theoretical frameworks to analyse leadership under global influence. Charismatic, authoritarian, and contextual-behavioural perspectives must be integrated to understand complex, adaptive, and multi-level leadership behaviours (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Geddes et al., 2018). This approach recognises that leaders simultaneously navigate domestic pressures, historical legacies, and global expectations. It allows for the identification of both opportunities and constraints in leadership practice. Comparative frameworks also facilitate the study of emergent leaders like Captain Traoré alongside more entrenched figures, providing insights into leadership innovation versus reconfiguration. By bridging theory and practice, hybrid frameworks can inform policy, programme design, and scholarly understanding of leadership in developing states. Such integration strengthens predictive and explanatory power.

Conclusion

In conclusion, US influence on leadership in developing states is significant but mediated through historical, institutional, and socio-cultural contexts. Leaders respond through adaptive, hybridised behaviours, balancing compliance, symbolic resistance, and strategic autonomy. Policymakers, practitioners, and scholars must consider these complexities when engaging with, studying, or supporting leadership development. Context-sensitive interventions, capacity-building, and transnational collaboration are key to fostering sustainable, legitimate, and effective leadership. Future research should adopt longitudinal, comparative, and mixed-method approaches to understand the evolving dynamics of global influence. Digital and transnational networks offer new avenues for leadership adaptation, requiring careful analysis. Ultimately, a nuanced understanding of leadership under global influence enhances both theoretical insight and practical governance outcomes in developing regions.

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Appendix I: Leadership

Leader	Primary Leadership Style(s)	Behavioural Features	Adaptation/ Shift in Response to US Foreign Policy
Captain Ibrahim Traoré (Burkina Faso, 2022-present)	Hybrid: Revolutionary-Pragmatic Military, Charismatic, Contextual-Behavioural	Anti-imperialist rhetoric; national economic autonomy; youth mobilisation; symbolic resistance to neo-colonial influence; military authority blended with grassroots engagement	Shifts emphasis on national sovereignty and pan-African solidarity when US sanctions or regional pressures threaten autonomy; increases rhetorical appeals to local identity and anti-imperialist legitimacy (International Crisis Group, 2024; Loader & Mercea, 2011)
Muammar Gaddafi (Libya, 1969-2011)	Authoritarian, Personalistic, Charismatic	Centralised decision-making; near-absolute control; use of personal ideology and symbolism (Green Book); suppression of dissent; charismatic mobilisation	When US or Western interventions threatened regime stability, Gaddafi intensified personalistic control and rhetoric of anti-imperialism; strategic engagement with foreign actors (e.g., oil negotiations) balanced with domestic coercion (Vandewalle, 2012; Geddes et al., 2018)
Contemporary Caribbean Leaders (e.g., small island states)	Contextual-Transformational / Hybrid	Coalition-building; balancing domestic legitimacy and foreign aid; ethical governance; institutional reform	Leaders often adjust policies or rhetoric to align with US aid priorities, climate funding, or trade negotiations, while attempting to preserve local political support (Williams, 2021)
Contemporary African Leaders (excluding Traoré)	Hybrid: Authoritarian-Transformational	Military or personalist influence; policy centralisation; selective decentralisation; symbolic nationalism	US security or development policy pressure can prompt superficial reforms, public anti-corruption campaigns, or symbolic concessions without ceding core authority

Latin and South American Leaders	Hybrid: Populist-Authoritarian / Transformational	Emphasis on social mobilisation; ideological rhetoric; institutional control; balancing elite interests	US influence (e.g., sanctions, diplomatic engagement) can lead to adaptive leadership shifts, including nationalist messaging, selective compliance with international norms, or coalition-building to resist external pressure
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