



# Macroeconomic and Social Determinants of Leadership Styles: A Comparative Analysis across Historical and Contemporary Contexts

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## Abstract

Leadership does not develop in isolation but is profoundly influenced by macroeconomic conditions and social structures. Economic instability, income inequality, unemployment, and social stratification can shape how leaders exercise authority, interact with followers, and make ethical and strategic decisions. Similarly, social variables such as cultural norms, education levels, social cohesion, and demographic composition influence leadership behaviour and organisational dynamics. Despite the wealth of research on leadership traits, styles, and competencies, comparatively little attention has been paid to the structural and macro-level determinants that constrain or enable leadership. This paper addresses this gap by integrating insights from political economy, sociology, and organisational leadership studies to examine how macroeconomic and social factors influence leadership styles. Using comparative examples from postcolonial societies, industrialised economies, and emerging markets, the study explores how economic prosperity, inequality, and social stratification shape participatory, authoritarian, and transformational leadership behaviours. The paper argues that leadership is contextually adaptive: economic and social stressors incentivise centralised, risk-averse, or coercive strategies, while stable and equitable environments enable inclusive, ethical, and deliberative approaches. The study contributes to leadership scholarship by reframing leadership behaviour as a product of broader structural forces rather than solely individual traits. It also provides practical insights for policymakers and organisational leaders seeking to cultivate effective and ethical leadership under varying socio-economic conditions.

**Keywords:** Leadership styles, macroeconomic determinants, social inequality, organisational behaviour, structural constraints, ethical leadership

## Introduction

Leadership is not enacted in a vacuum but emerges at the intersection of social, economic, and institutional forces (Northouse, 2022). Macroeconomic conditions, including GDP growth,

inflation, unemployment, and inequality, influence leaders' decision-making, risk appetite, and priorities (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Leaders in economically volatile environments often adopt centralised, risk-averse, or authoritarian strategies to maintain stability, manage uncertainty, and secure legitimacy (Lukes, 2005). Conversely, leadership in economically stable and equitable societies is often characterised by participatory, deliberative, and ethical approaches, facilitated by institutional trust and resource abundance (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Social determinants, such as education levels, social norms, cultural expectations, and demographic composition, further shape leader-follower relationships and leadership effectiveness (Hofstede, 2011). Despite extensive research on individual traits and leadership styles, the structural influence of macroeconomic and social conditions remains underexplored, creating a significant gap in the literature (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This paper seeks to address this gap by analysing how macroeconomic and social factors systematically shape leadership styles across diverse contexts.

Leaders do not act independently of the societies in which they operate; economic deprivation, social inequality, and institutional fragility constrain agency and shape the strategies leaders employ (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Economic hardship often incentivises centralised authority and top-down decision-making, while social cohesion and trust encourage participatory leadership (Northouse, 2022). Social stratification, cultural expectations, and demographic composition influence leaders' perceived legitimacy, follower expectations, and capacity for ethical decision-making (Hofstede, 2011). The comparative perspective adopted in this study highlights how leadership behaviours vary in response to structural and environmental pressures rather than innate personal qualities. By integrating macroeconomic and social determinants, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of leadership that bridges individual-focused and structural analyses.

The paper draws on social psychology, organisational theory, political economy, and sociology to construct a comprehensive analytical framework (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Hofstede, 2011). It examines leadership styles across contexts marked by varying degrees of economic stability, social inequality, and institutional development. The analysis explores how macroeconomic shocks, inequality, social stratification, and cultural norms influence tendencies toward authoritarian, transactional, or transformational leadership. By situating leadership within broader structural forces, the study challenges universalist assumptions that treat leadership behaviour as largely independent of context.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is anchored in **structural contingency theory**, which posits that leadership behaviour is contingent on external environmental conditions, including economic and social factors (Fiedler, 1967). Leaders adapt their strategies and styles in response to resource availability, institutional constraints, and societal expectations, making leadership context-dependent rather than universally normative (Northouse, 2022). Economic instability, such as high unemployment, inflation, or inequality, creates pressures for centralised, authoritarian, or risk-averse leadership to maintain control and prevent social unrest (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). In contrast,

economically stable environments support participatory, transformational, and ethical leadership practices, enabled by institutional trust and resource security (Brown & Treviño, 2006).

**Social determinants theory** further explains how education, social cohesion, demographic composition, and cultural norms influence leadership behaviour and follower expectations (Hofstede, 2011; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Leaders in highly stratified or culturally hierarchical societies may adopt transactional or coercive strategies to maintain legitimacy and navigate social expectations. By contrast, leaders in more egalitarian and cohesive societies can pursue inclusive, ethical, and deliberative leadership approaches without fear of destabilising backlash.

**Ethical leadership theory** provides a normative lens for evaluating leadership across macroeconomic and social contexts (Brown & Treviño, 2006). While ethical leadership emphasises accountability, fairness, and moral agency, structural conditions shape the feasibility of ethical action. Leaders in impoverished or socially unequal societies may face significant constraints on ethical decision-making, balancing survival, legitimacy, and moral responsibility. Integrating structural contingency, social determinants, and ethical leadership theories provides a multi-level framework for understanding leadership styles as adaptive responses to macroeconomic and social environments.

**Leadership style:** Building on structural and critical theories of leadership, this study incorporates Bourne's (2023) conceptualisation of **leadership style as a social determinant** to deepen understanding of leadership under conditions of inequality. Bourne argues that leadership style is not merely an outcome of personality or training but a socially conditioned determinant that shapes leaders' health, well-being, legitimacy, and organisational dynamics. Drawing on empirical evidence from a Jamaican religious organisation, Bourne demonstrates that leadership styles exert measurable effects on leaders themselves, particularly in contexts marked by institutional pressure and social stratification. These findings challenge dominant leadership theories that focus almost exclusively on follower outcomes while neglecting the reciprocal effects of leadership behaviour. Leadership style, in this framing, functions as an intermediary mechanism linking structural conditions to both individual and institutional outcomes. Such an approach aligns closely with social determinants theory, which emphasises how social arrangements shape life chances and behavioural constraints. Integrating Bourne's work allows leadership behaviour to be analysed as both structurally produced and socially consequential.

Bourne's (2023) findings further reveal that **transformational leadership styles** are associated with more favourable psychosocial and health outcomes, while **transactional and laissez-faire styles** are linked to elevated stress and diminished well-being. Importantly, these styles are not randomly distributed but emerge in response to contextual pressures such as institutional fragility, accountability demands, and social expectations. In structurally constrained environments, leaders may adopt transactional or controlling styles as adaptive strategies for survival and legitimacy maintenance. However, these adaptations carry long-term social and health costs, reinforcing cycles of stress, defensive governance, and institutional rigidity. Bourne's work thus illustrates how leadership styles simultaneously reflect macro-social conditions and actively shape them. Leadership behaviour becomes a feedback mechanism

through which inequality is reproduced or mitigated. This insight is especially salient for postcolonial and post-slavery contexts examined in this study.

By integrating Bourne's (2023) framework, this paper extends ethical leadership theory by recognising that moral agency is unevenly distributed across social contexts. Leaders operating under oppression or economic vulnerability face higher risks when engaging in participatory or dissent-tolerant leadership styles. Consequently, leadership styles often labelled as authoritarian or ineffective may represent rational adaptations to structural insecurity rather than moral failure. Bourne's work provides empirical grounding for this claim by demonstrating how leadership behaviour affects leaders' own health and resilience. This perspective cautions against universalising leadership norms derived from privileged contexts. Instead, leadership style must be evaluated within the social ecology in which it is enacted. The integration of leadership style as a social determinant strengthens this paper's comparative and ethical analysis.

## Literature Review

Research on leadership has traditionally emphasised individual traits, competencies, and behavioural styles, with limited attention to macro-level influences (Northouse, 2022). Transformational, transactional, and servant leadership models often assume institutional stability, resource security, and social trust as baseline conditions (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Such assumptions overlook the impact of macroeconomic instability, inequality, and social stratification on leadership behaviour and decision-making. Empirical studies indicate that economic volatility correlates with more centralised and risk-averse leadership approaches, while prosperity allows for participatory and innovative strategies (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fiedler, 1967). Similarly, social determinants such as education, social cohesion, and cultural norms influence leaders' capacity to engage followers ethically and inclusively (Hofstede, 2011; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Despite recognition of these influences, relatively few studies integrate macroeconomic and social variables explicitly into leadership theory. This gap limits our understanding of leadership as an adaptive response to structural conditions rather than an abstract individual capability.

Macroeconomic determinants, such as GDP per capita, unemployment, inflation, and income inequality, have been linked to variations in leadership behaviour across political and organisational contexts (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Easterly, 2001). Leaders facing economic stress are more likely to prioritise stability, centralisation, and hierarchical control to prevent social unrest and maintain legitimacy (Northouse, 2022). Conversely, leaders in affluent contexts can adopt participatory, deliberative, and ethically expansive approaches due to lower existential pressures and stronger institutional support (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Economic inequality also affects public expectations and leader-follower interactions, shaping perceptions of fairness, authority, and legitimacy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Despite these insights, leadership research has rarely operationalised macroeconomic variables alongside traditional leadership measures. Integrating these factors offers a more robust understanding of how external constraints influence leadership style and effectiveness.

Social determinants exert a similarly strong influence on leadership behaviour. Cultural norms, demographic composition, social trust, and education levels shape leaders' perceived legitimacy and the strategies they employ to maintain authority (Hofstede, 2011; Northouse, 2022). Highly stratified societies often reward transactional or coercive leadership, while cohesive and egalitarian societies facilitate inclusive, ethical, and transformational leadership (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Social norms regarding gender, race, and class further constrain or expand leadership options, affecting both ethical decision-making and participatory engagement (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Studies in organisational and political contexts indicate that leaders in unequal or fragmented societies must continuously navigate structural pressures that influence style, communication, and moral behaviour (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Fiedler, 1967). Yet leadership literature often treats these social factors as peripheral rather than central determinants. Addressing this oversight is critical for developing context-sensitive models of leadership that reflect real-world constraints.

Historical analyses reinforce the interplay between macroeconomic conditions, social structures, and leadership behaviour. For example, post-war reconstruction periods in Europe revealed that leaders operating under economic scarcity prioritised stability, centralisation, and risk aversion (Lukes, 2005). In contrast, periods of economic growth and institutional trust encouraged leaders to adopt more participatory and ethical approaches (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Similarly, in postcolonial societies, inherited institutional weaknesses, social stratification, and economic dependency shaped leaders' preference for hierarchical and survival-oriented governance (Mamdani, 1996; Rodney, 1972). These historical case studies demonstrate that leadership is a structurally conditioned phenomenon rather than a purely individual or psychological trait. They underscore the need for comparative approaches that integrate macroeconomic and social determinants into leadership analysis.

Emerging research has begun to address this integration by examining leadership under crisis conditions, economic shocks, and social upheaval. Scholars note that leaders adapt to macroeconomic stressors by recalibrating risk, centralising authority, or employing coercive strategies when social cohesion is weak (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Northouse, 2022). Ethical and transformational leadership is more feasible in contexts where institutional support, economic resources, and social trust are available (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Despite these advances, there remains a lack of systematic, cross-contextual studies that explicitly link macroeconomic indicators and social structures to leadership styles. Comparative analyses across countries, historical periods, and organisational contexts are especially limited. Such analyses are essential for understanding leadership as an adaptive response to structural pressures rather than a universal, decontextualised phenomenon.

In summary, existing scholarship confirms that macroeconomic and social conditions significantly influence leadership behaviour, legitimacy, and ethical capacity. Economic scarcity, inequality, and social stratification promote centralised, risk-averse, and survival-oriented leadership. Conversely, stability, equity, and institutional trust enable deliberative, participatory, and ethical leadership. However, the literature remains fragmented, often treating macroeconomic and social factors as secondary to individual traits. This study addresses this gap by adopting a comparative, multi-level framework that situates leadership styles within historical,

economic, and social structures. By doing so, it advances leadership theory beyond universalist assumptions and contributes to practical insights for leadership development in varied contexts.

## Methods

This study adopts a **comparative, multi-level approach** to examine how macroeconomic and social factors shape leadership styles across historical and contemporary contexts. Given the conceptual and structural focus, the methodology centres on a **theoretical synthesis and critical analysis of secondary literature** from political science, sociology, economics, and organisational studies (Northouse, 2022; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). The research integrates historical case studies, cross-national analyses, and empirical findings to identify patterns linking economic and social conditions to leadership behaviours. Sources include peer-reviewed articles, books, government and institutional reports, and datasets on economic indicators, social inequality, and demographic composition. This approach enables triangulation across data types and contexts, enhancing the robustness and generalisability of the analysis.

The study focuses on five comparative contexts: **post-slavery America, African nations, Jamaica, Britain, and post-war Germany**. These cases were selected to illustrate leadership under varying degrees of oppression, economic instability, and social stratification, as well as contexts relatively free from structural constraints (Mamdani, 1996; Beckles, 2000). Each case is analysed for economic indicators such as GDP growth, unemployment, and inequality, alongside social variables including education, social cohesion, and cultural norms. The interaction between these macro-level determinants and observed leadership styles, including transformational, transactional, participatory, and authoritarian approaches, is systematically examined. Historical trajectories and structural legacies are emphasised to highlight how inherited conditions constrain or enable leadership behaviour.

Data synthesis follows a **qualitative content analysis framework**, enabling thematic coding of macroeconomic and social determinants and their effects on leadership. Leadership behaviours are categorised according to established typologies, and contextual factors are mapped to observed outcomes (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Hofstede, 2011). Comparative analysis identifies recurring patterns, divergences, and adaptive strategies employed by leaders in response to structural constraints. This method allows for the identification of causal mechanisms without relying solely on quantitative correlation, which may overlook historical and social nuances. Triangulation across sources ensures credibility and mitigates bias.

Ethical considerations are central to this study, given the historical sensitivity of cases involving oppression, slavery, and systemic discrimination. All sources were critically assessed for accuracy, cultural context, and author positionality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). The analysis maintains a balanced and non-deficit perspective, avoiding pathologising leadership in structurally constrained contexts. Instead, leadership behaviours are interpreted as adaptive responses to structural and social pressures. This approach aligns with ethical research principles and promotes a contextualised understanding of leadership effectiveness and moral responsibility.

Finally, the study acknowledges limitations inherent in secondary analyses. While case selection is designed for comparability, differences in data availability, historical documentation, and interpretive perspectives may affect conclusions. Quantitative macroeconomic indicators are used descriptively rather than inferentially, as their explanatory power must be interpreted in conjunction with qualitative social and historical data.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

### ***Post-slavery America***

Leadership among African Americans in post-slavery America was profoundly shaped by structural racism, economic marginalisation, and social exclusion (Foner, 2015). Leaders such as Booker T. Washington prioritised strategic accommodation, emphasising education, discipline, and collective protection to navigate systemic oppression (Washington, 1901). Macroeconomic constraints, including limited access to capital, employment discrimination, and segregated economic systems, further narrowed leadership options, incentivising cautious and survival-oriented governance (Du Bois, 1935). Social pressures reinforced hierarchical and community-focused leadership, as leaders sought legitimacy within both Black communities and predominantly White power structures (Morris, 1984). Even during the Civil Rights Movement, leaders had to balance assertive advocacy with calculated non-confrontation to avoid violent reprisals (Branch, 1988). This context demonstrates how structural inequality, poverty, and systemic discrimination shaped leadership behaviours toward pragmatism, resilience, and incremental change. Leadership styles in this context were adaptive responses to macroeconomic deprivation and social marginalisation rather than individual deficiencies.

### ***African Nations***

Postcolonial leadership in many African nations reflects the legacies of colonial extraction, weak institutional frameworks, and ethnically stratified societies (Mamdani, 1996). Leaders inherited administrative systems designed for control rather than inclusive governance, constraining leadership options and fostering centralised or authoritarian styles (Herbst, 2000). Macroeconomic pressures, such as debt dependency, low industrialisation, and inequality, incentivised survival-oriented strategies prioritising political stability over participatory decision-making (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Social variables, including ethnic divisions, education disparities, and a weak civil society, further reinforced hierarchical leadership norms (Englebert, 2000). In some cases, leaders employed patronage networks and coercive strategies to maintain legitimacy and prevent social unrest. These adaptive behaviours reflect structural constraints rather than personal authoritarian predispositions. Consequently, leadership in African postcolonial contexts illustrates the interplay between economic fragility, social stratification, and constrained governance.

### ***Jamaica***

Jamaican leadership has been shaped by a history of plantation slavery, colonial governance, and post-independence economic dependency (Beckles, 2000). Political and organisational leaders operate in a context of persistent inequality, limited institutional resources, and social

stratification, which shapes leadership style and decision-making. Economic constraints, including high unemployment and dependency on external markets, incentivise pragmatic, centralised, and sometimes populist leadership approaches (Bourne, 2021). Social factors, such as entrenched patronage systems, colourism, and class hierarchies, influence leader-follower relationships and expectations of authority. Leaders must balance ethical imperatives with political survival, often prioritising stability over deliberative inclusivity. These macroeconomic and social pressures have led to leadership styles characterised by risk aversion, symbolic authority, and strategic control. Jamaican leadership demonstrates how structural and social determinants shape behavioural patterns more than individual personality traits.

### ***Britain***

In post-imperial Britain, leadership has largely operated within stable democratic institutions with relatively strong social cohesion and economic security (Hobsbawm, 1994). Leaders benefit from institutional continuity, legal protection, and social legitimacy, enabling more deliberative, participatory, and ethically flexible approaches. Macroeconomic stability and resource availability allow leaders to engage in policy experimentation and consultative governance without existential threats to authority (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Social determinants, including education, social trust, and cultural norms promoting the rule of law, support inclusive leadership practices (Hofstede, 2011). Despite persistent inequality and discrimination, structural constraints on leadership are less severe compared to postcolonial or economically fragile societies. This environment allows leaders to prioritise long-term ethical goals and social innovation. Britain illustrates how favourable macroeconomic and social conditions expand leadership capacity and moral agency.

### ***Post-war Germany***

Post-war German leadership provides a unique example of ethical and participatory leadership emerging from moral reckoning rather than racial oppression (Fulbrook, 1991). Following the collapse of Nazism, leadership structures were reconstructed around accountability, institutional reform, and democratic participation. Economic reconstruction and social cohesion facilitated transparency, collaboration, and long-term planning, creating conditions conducive to transformational leadership (Northouse, 2022). Macro-level stability, combined with institutional legitimacy and legal protection, enabled leaders to pursue inclusive and deliberative strategies. Cultural emphasis on collective memory and historical responsibility further shaped ethical leadership norms (Jaraus, 2006). In this context, leadership was less constrained by structural oppression and more directed by normative and moral imperatives. Germany demonstrates how historical reckoning, combined with macroeconomic and social stability, enables leaders to prioritise ethical, participatory, and transformational styles.

## **Leadership styles**

Bourne's (2023) doctoral research makes a significant contribution to leadership scholarship by explicitly conceptualising **leadership style as a social determinant**, rather than merely a managerial preference or behavioural outcome. Drawing on empirical evidence from a religious organisation in Jamaica, Bourne demonstrates that leadership styles exert measurable effects on

leaders' own health status, well-being, and psychosocial functioning. This framing challenges dominant leadership models that treat leadership behaviour as value-neutral or universally transferable across contexts. Instead, Bourne situates leadership style within broader social, cultural, and institutional environments that shape both leader behaviour and its consequences. By positioning leadership style as a determinant, the study reframes leadership as a socially embedded force that both reflects and reproduces structural conditions. This insight is particularly relevant for contexts marked by inequality, historical oppression, and institutional fragility. Bourne's work, therefore, extends leadership theory beyond performance outcomes to encompass social and health-related implications.

A key contribution of Bourne's (2023) study is its demonstration that leadership styles not only affect followers but also feed back onto leaders themselves. Transformational leadership styles were associated with more favourable health and psychosocial outcomes, while transactional and laissez-faire styles were linked to higher stress exposure and diminished well-being. This finding underscores the reciprocal relationship between leadership behaviour and social environment, suggesting that leadership styles are adaptive responses to contextual pressures rather than purely individual choices. In structurally constrained settings, leaders may adopt more controlling or transactional approaches as survival strategies, even when such styles carry long-term costs. Bourne's findings thus align with structural power theory, which emphasises how institutional contexts shape behavioural incentives and risks. Leadership style becomes both a response to and a producer of social conditions. This dual role reinforces the argument that leadership must be analysed as structurally situated rather than individually abstracted.

Importantly, Bourne's (2023) work resonates strongly with scholarship on postcolonial and racially stratified societies, where leadership is frequently exercised under conditions of heightened scrutiny and limited legitimacy. In such environments, leadership styles may be shaped by fear of institutional instability, reputational damage, or social sanction. Bourne's findings suggest that leadership styles often emerge as coping mechanisms within unequal systems, rather than as expressions of moral deficiency or incompetence. This perspective challenges deficit-based interpretations of leadership in marginalised contexts, which often pathologise leaders without acknowledging structural constraint. By identifying leadership style as a social determinant, Bourne provides a framework for understanding why certain leadership behaviours persist even when they appear suboptimal. The study, therefore, strengthens the case for contextualised leadership evaluation. Leadership behaviour must be interpreted in light of the social risks and structural pressures leaders face.

Within the broader scope of this paper, Bourne's (2023) research reinforces the argument that leadership styles should be treated as **both outcomes and determinants** of macroeconomic and social conditions. Leadership styles shape organisational culture, trust, and health outcomes, while simultaneously being shaped by inequality, institutional legitimacy, and historical context. This reciprocal relationship is especially salient in post-slavery and postcolonial societies, such as Jamaica, where leadership operates within enduring legacies of hierarchy and exclusion. Bourne's empirical evidence bridges leadership studies, social epidemiology, and organisational sociology, offering a rare integration of leadership behaviour with social determinants theory. The inclusion of leadership style as a determinant strengthens this paper's comparative

framework by highlighting leadership as an active social force. Ultimately, Bourne's work supports a more ethically reflexive and structurally informed leadership scholarship. It underscores that leadership styles are not merely choices but socially conditioned practices with profound individual and societal consequences.

## **Ethical and Normative Considerations**

Leadership in contexts shaped by macroeconomic instability and social inequality raises profound ethical questions about responsibility, moral agency, and justice (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Leaders operating under structural constraints must navigate the tension between survival-oriented governance and ethical imperatives, balancing risk management with the welfare of followers (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). While structural pressures such as poverty, social stratification, and weak institutions limit options, leaders remain accountable for decisions that reinforce or challenge systemic inequality (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Ethical leadership requires recognising these constraints while actively seeking to mitigate harm and promote fairness. Silence, coercion, or opportunistic behaviours, even under structural pressure, carry moral consequences that extend beyond immediate organisational or political outcomes (Northouse, 2022). Normatively, societies must consider historical and structural contexts when evaluating leadership effectiveness, avoiding one-size-fits-all judgements that risk pathologising adaptive strategies. Ethical assessment, therefore, demands sensitivity to both constraints and the creative strategies leaders employ to navigate them.

From a normative perspective, macroeconomic and social determinants complicate conventional understandings of leadership accountability (Hofstede, 2011). In contexts of economic deprivation or social marginalisation, leaders are often compelled to prioritise stability, hierarchy, or patronage to maintain legitimacy (Englebert, 2000). Evaluating leadership without attention to these conditions risks reinforcing inequities by imposing standards that are unattainable or contextually inappropriate. Structural and historical awareness allows for more nuanced moral judgements that recognise both constraints and opportunities for ethical action (Mamdani, 1996). Leaders in relatively stable, egalitarian contexts have broader latitude for moral and participatory decision-making, highlighting the interplay between structural advantage and ethical behaviour (Fulbrook, 1991). Normative frameworks should therefore integrate both historical and socio-economic factors when assessing leadership ethics. By doing so, ethical scholarship can differentiate between constrained adaptation and moral failure.

Leadership behaviour is also influenced by social norms that mediate ethical and participatory engagement (Eagly & Carli, 2007). In stratified societies, social expectations may limit the legitimacy of dissent or innovation, shaping leaders' ethical choices (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Leaders must negotiate these norms while attempting to uphold fairness, accountability, and social justice. Ethical lapses may occur not solely from personal deficiency but from structural pressures and cultural constraints. Understanding the interaction between macro-level determinants and normative expectations illuminates why leadership in unequal societies often appears defensive, cautious, or hierarchical (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Leadership ethics, therefore, cannot be evaluated in isolation from the social and economic context. Recognising

these dynamics fosters a more historically and structurally grounded approach to moral leadership evaluation.

Finally, ethical and normative considerations underscore the importance of systemic reform alongside individual accountability (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Leaders are more likely to act ethically when institutional frameworks support transparency, participation, and protection from retaliation. Conversely, weak institutions and economic fragility increase the moral and practical risks of ethical decision-making. By acknowledging these factors, ethical scholarship can better identify interventions that support moral and effective leadership. Policies promoting education, social cohesion, and economic opportunity not only enhance leader capacity but also strengthen follower agency and societal resilience. Ethical leadership, therefore, is both a product of personal virtue and structural opportunity. This dual perspective highlights the interconnectedness of moral agency, social determinants, and macroeconomic context in shaping leadership ethics.

## **Recommendations**

To enhance leadership effectiveness under varying macroeconomic and social conditions, policymakers should prioritise institutional reform that strengthens legitimacy, accountability, and social protection (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Establishing transparent governance structures reduces the need for survival-oriented or coercive leadership, allowing leaders to engage in ethical and participatory decision-making (Northouse, 2022). Civic and leadership education programmes can equip leaders and followers with skills to navigate complex social hierarchies, enhancing adaptive capacities while promoting ethical norms (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Economic policies that reduce inequality, expand employment opportunities, and stabilise resources create conditions conducive to deliberative and inclusive leadership (Hofstede, 2011). Social interventions, such as community-building initiatives and programmes addressing discrimination and exclusion, can mitigate structural pressures that encourage authoritarian tendencies (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). Comparative learning from historical and cross-national contexts can guide best practices, illustrating how leaders successfully balance ethical responsibility with structural constraints (Mamdani, 1996). Collectively, these measures foster environments where leadership can prioritise long-term societal benefit rather than reactive, risk-averse strategies.

Leadership development initiatives should explicitly address the influence of macroeconomic and social determinants on decision-making. Programmes targeting postcolonial or economically fragile contexts can emphasise adaptive leadership while reinforcing ethical frameworks (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Mentoring and peer networks enable leaders to share strategies for managing risk, inclusion, and public accountability (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Organisations should implement mechanisms that encourage transparency, reporting, and feedback to reduce structural constraints on ethical behaviour (Fukuyama, 2014). International partnerships and knowledge exchange can support leaders in contexts with weak institutions or high social inequality. Policy and organisational reforms must recognise the interaction of historical legacies, social stratification, and economic pressures in shaping leadership options. By integrating structural awareness with

practical tools, leaders can be better positioned to enact ethical, participatory, and context-sensitive governance.

Finally, research and policy should be oriented towards proactive prevention of leadership failures under structural stress. Early identification of economic, social, or institutional fragilities allows for targeted interventions to support leaders and communities (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Promoting social cohesion and civic engagement enhances leader legitimacy while empowering followers to participate in governance processes. Addressing historical legacies of oppression or exclusion can create pathways for ethical and transformative leadership (Mamdani, 1996). Policymakers and institutions should monitor inequality, discrimination, and exclusion as ongoing factors affecting leadership behaviour. Embedding ethical frameworks into leadership training ensures moral accountability is maintained even under adverse structural conditions (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Recommendations should therefore be multi-level, addressing structural, social, and individual determinants concurrently. Such an integrated approach maximises the potential for leadership that is both effective and ethically grounded.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that leadership behaviour is profoundly shaped by macroeconomic and social determinants, with structural conditions influencing style, ethical decision-making, and authority legitimacy (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). In contexts marked by oppression, economic fragility, and social inequality, leaders often adopt risk-averse, centralised, or survival-oriented strategies to maintain legitimacy and cohesion (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Conversely, leadership in more egalitarian and institutionally secure societies allows for participatory, ethical, and transformational approaches (Northouse, 2022). Comparative analysis across post-slavery America, African nations, Jamaica, Britain, and Germany illustrates that leadership is an adaptive response to structural pressures rather than solely a reflection of individual traits. These findings highlight the necessity of integrating historical, social, and economic context into leadership theory and evaluation. Ethical and normative assessments must consider the constraints under which leaders operate, avoiding deficit-based or universalist judgements (Brown & Treviño, 2006). Ultimately, understanding macroeconomic and social determinants enriches leadership scholarship and informs policies aimed at promoting ethical, effective, and context-sensitive governance.

This study also underscores the importance of structural reform, social equity, and institutional strengthening as preconditions for effective and ethical leadership. By addressing inequality, fostering civic participation, and enhancing social trust, societies can create conditions that enable leaders to prioritise deliberation, inclusion, and long-term societal benefit (Hofstede, 2011; Fukuyama, 2014). Comparative insights reveal that historical legacies, economic pressures, and social hierarchies shape both the opportunities and constraints faced by leaders. Leadership behaviours often misinterpreted as authoritarian or ineffective in oppressed contexts may reflect adaptive strategies under constrained conditions (Mamdani, 1996). Integrating ethical frameworks, structural awareness, and historical knowledge into leadership evaluation enhances moral and practical accountability. Future research should explore empirical links between macroeconomic indicators, social determinants, and leadership outcomes to validate and expand

these findings. The study reinforces that context-sensitive, historically informed leadership scholarship is essential for understanding both the challenges and possibilities of governance in unequal societies.

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## Appendix: Determinants of Leadership Style

Determinant	Source/ Reference	Meaning/Implications for Leadership
<b>Economic Inequality</b>	Acemoglu & Robinson (2012); Hofstede (2011)	Leaders in economically unequal contexts prioritise stability, control, and resource management over participatory or ethical decision-making. Scarcity pressures shape risk-averse and hierarchical leadership styles.
<b>Structural Oppression / Racism</b>	Delgado & Stefancic (2017); Sidanius & Pratto (1999)	Leaders from marginalised groups face heightened scrutiny and delegitimisation, compelling defensive or authoritarian behaviour. Conversely, leaders from dominant groups benefit from assumed legitimacy, expanding ethical and participatory capacity.
<b>Historical Legacies (Colonialism, Slavery)</b>	Beckles (2000); Mamdani (1996); Du Bois (1935)	Historical inequalities shape institutions and leadership norms. Leaders in post-slavery or postcolonial societies operate under structural vulnerabilities, emphasising order, cohesion, and symbolic authority.
<b>Social Stratification / Prejudice</b>	Eagly & Carli (2007); Alcadipani & Calás (2012)	Social hierarchies influence leader-follower trust, expectations, and accountability. Leaders navigate complex social norms, often constraining participatory engagement and ethical risk-taking.
<b>Institutional Legitimacy</b>	Northouse (2022); Jarausch (2006)	Strong institutions support ethical, deliberative, and inclusive leadership. Weak or delegitimised institutions incentivise centralisation, coercion, and survival-focused governance.
<b>Political and Social Instability</b>	Englebert (2000); Herbst (2000)	Fragile states or societies under stress shape leadership behaviour towards maintaining cohesion and authority, often at the expense of participatory processes or moral idealism.
<b>Ethical Norms and Accountability</b>	Brown & Treviño (2006); Bass & Riggio (2006)	Ethical frameworks guide leaders in prioritising fairness, moral responsibility, and accountability, though structural constraints may limit practical implementation.
<b>Cultural Norms / Social Expectations</b>	Hofstede (2011); Sidanius & Pratto (1999)	Cultural expectations shape acceptable leadership styles and behaviours. Leaders must conform to dominant norms while balancing ethical and strategic imperatives.
<b>Historical Reckoning and Memory</b>	Jarausch (2006); Fulbrook (1991)	Societies confronting past injustices (e.g., post-war Germany) create opportunities for

		ethical, participatory, and transformational leadership. Memory and accountability influence leadership legitimacy and moral agency.
<b>Leadership Style (e.g., transformational, transactional, laissez-faire)</b>	Bourne (2023, ProQuest diss.)	Leadership style itself functions as a social determinant, influencing outcomes such as well-being, legitimacy, and organisational culture. Transformational styles are associated with empowerment and better follower outcomes, while transactional or laissez-faire styles correlate with lower engagement. Leadership style shapes followers' perceptions, organisational trust, and leaders' capacity to mobilise or respond to macro-social pressures.