

# Emerging and Non-Emerging African Countries: A Statistical Exploration of the Leadership Factor

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A descriptive study conducted by Steve Radelet (2010) indicated that there are countries in Sub-Saharan Africa that have seen rapid political and socio-economic development since the mid-1990s. Radelet refers to those countries as *Emerging* countries, as opposed to *Non-Emerging* countries that have seen little or no development since the mid-1990s. The trajectory of *Emerging* countries was supported by various internal and external forces. Although all countries were most likely affected by these same forces, not all of them reached the status of an *Emerging* country. Therefore there must be other variables that ignited and supported the emergence of such countries. Leaders in post-1990s *Emerging* countries differ significantly from their predecessors in the pre-1990s era, and from leaders in *Non-Emerging* countries, with respect to their levels of education, fields of study, age, career histories and political backgrounds. This paper argues that the biographical profiles of African Executive Heads of State are variables to take into account when explaining paths of development.

### Key findings emerging from this paper are:

The following was observed with regards to leaders from *Emerging* countries in the post-1990s:

- Leaders from post-1990s *Emerging* countries have more years in education<sup>1</sup> (with an average level of education score of 9.6<sup>2</sup>) compared to their counterparts (with level of education scores ranging from 5 to 6).
- 67.4% of post-1990s *Emerging* leaders hold an undergraduate degree or higher, compared 42.1% of leaders from pre-1990s *Emerging* countries. Of the leaders who were in power in *Non-emerging* countries before the mid-1990s, 28.3% held an undergraduate degree, where in the post-1990s *Non-emerging* countries that figure stands at 52.2%. Therefore, the rapid development of *Emerging* countries after the 1990s goes alongside an increase in educational qualifications of its leaders. These leaders are therefore also more educated than their counterparts in *Non-emerging* countries.
- Although there are leaders from post-1990s *Emerging* countries who do not have any qualifications beyond secondary education, it evidently did not imply that they were not able to make a positive contribution to the development of their countries. Several of those leaders' studies were interrupted by political turmoil or liberation wars (in particular cases from former Portuguese countries). Valuing the importance of education and having the drive to develop as a leader might also be viewed as characteristics of a successful developmental-minded leader.
- The most popular fields of study of leaders from post-1990s *Emerging* countries were Law, Economics and Education (in that particular order). The number of leaders holding

degrees in these subjects increased almost three-fold from pre- to post- the 1990s. Before the mid- 1990s, none of the leaders from *Non-emerging* countries held degrees in any of the above-mentioned subjects. Since the 1990s, leaders from *Non-emerging* countries for the first time studied Law, Arts and Humanities and Economics amongst other subjects, although the number of degree holders in this group remains small in comparison.

- Leaders from post-1990s *Emerging* countries were on average 55.47 years of age when they first came to power; compared to 47.02 years pre-1990s. Leaders from *Non-emerging* countries were on average 45.64 years of age (pre-1990s) and 47.43 years (post-1990s).

The career experience of leaders from *Emerging* countries changed from before the mid-1990s to after the mid-1990s. The major observations are as follows:

- Experience in the civil service has remained relatively constant at just over 30% of the leaders.
- The percentage of leaders who had experience in the Legal and Political professions<sup>3</sup> has increased.
- The percentage of leaders who had experience in the military decreased by almost 50%.
- For the first time since the mid-1990s, leaders had experience in fields such as Business, Research and NGOs; which indicates an increased variety of fields in which leaders have experience.

With regard to changes in the career experience of leaders from *Non-emerging* countries since the mid-1990s, the following observations can be made:

- The percentage of leaders with experience in the civil service has decreased by almost 50%.
- The percentage of leaders with experience in the military has remained relatively constant.
- The percentage of leaders with experience in politics has also remained relatively constant.
- Post the mid-1990s, there was a slight decrease in the variety of fields in which leaders have experience.

Data on the political background of leaders found no link between the extent of leaders' political experiences and the status of the countries that they have led.

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1. Primary to tertiary level.

2. When scoring level of education in terms of attainment of primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. The full scoring system is explained in section 4.1.1 of the main paper, on page 10

3. Political positions include minister; member of legislature, mayor / governor, head of opposition, etc.

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