

17.588f13 Week 5 “Leadership”

Questions for Class Discussion

What are the central questions in the study of political leaders? What does it mean for political leaders to “matter”? In what way might they matter?

Some authors have described individual rulers as “dispensable” or “fungible”. What do they mean? Under what circumstances are rulers interchangeable with another?

One of the oldest debates in the study of political leaders concerns “structure” versus “agency”. Is this the right debate for political scientists to have? Can leadership be an important variable for political scientists in the absence of individual agency?

Consider the empirical strategies used in the readings for this week to identify the effects of leadership. What do the authors actually prove? What would make their claims more compelling?

What personal qualities make leaders more or less effective? Are these the same qualities that make them desirable to followers?

Many leaders come to power in an established political system, with structured processes for selecting leaders. Consider five systems: (a) hereditary monarchies in which the closest, eldest male relative of the king automatically becomes the next ruler; (b) elective monarchies in which the ruler is chosen by a majority vote of the nobility from within its own ranks; (c) autocratic regimes in which the outgoing ruler selects a successor who is *not* a close biological relative; (d) presidential democracies with open primaries and no restrictions on fundraising; or (e) parliamentary democracies with party-list systems and public funding. Which system would produce better leaders?

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