

Leadership Ethics and Public Trust in Nigeria's Public Sector Organizations: A Study of Selected Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of leadership ethics on public trust within Nigeria's public sector, focusing on the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.). It explores how ethical frameworks and organizational/institutional factors moderate this relationship. Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study collected quantitative data through structured questionnaires from 450 respondents across the three MDAs and qualitative data from 15–18 semi-structured interviews with key informants. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, multiple regression, and ANOVA, while qualitative data underwent thematic analysis. Findings reveal that leadership ethics significantly predicts public trust, with higher integrity, transparency, accountability, and fairness associated with increased stakeholder confidence. Both ethical frameworks and organizational/institutional factors strengthen this relationship, demonstrating that policies, codes of conduct, organizational culture, autonomy, and oversight mechanisms are critical in enhancing public trust. Cross-MDA comparisons show that FMoH exhibits higher levels of ethical leadership and public trust compared to EFCC and NNPC Ltd., reflecting sectoral variations in governance practices. Qualitative insights further illuminate challenges such as political interference, resource limitations, and inconsistent policy enforcement, which undermine ethical practices and trust in some MDAs. The study contributes to theory by integrating Ethical Leadership Theory and Institutional Theory in the Nigerian context and offers practical recommendations for improving leadership ethics, institutional structures, and public confidence. The findings underscore the importance of ethical governance as a determinant of public sector credibility and effective service delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords: Leadership ethics, Public trust, Ethical frameworks, Organizational/institutional factors, Nigerian public sector, FMoH, EFCC, NNPC Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Ethical leadership and public trust are indispensable components of effective governance, particularly within public sector organizations entrusted with the management of public resources and the delivery of essential services. In democratic systems, leadership ethics shapes institutional legitimacy, accountability, and citizens' confidence in government actions. Nigeria's return to democratic governance in 1999 renewed public expectations for ethical leadership, transparency, and responsible governance. However, persistent ethical failures across public sector institutions have continued to undermine public trust, raising critical concerns about leadership conduct within Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) (Akinola, 2019; Transparency International, 2023).

MDAs constitute the operational backbone of Nigeria's public administration system and serve as the principal channels through which government policies are implemented. Among these, the Federal Ministry of Health

(FMoH), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.) occupy strategic positions due to their influence on citizens' welfare, economic stability, and governance integrity. These institutions also attract heightened public scrutiny because of their budgetary significance, regulatory authority, and historical exposure to ethical controversies. Consequently, leadership ethics within these MDAs plays a critical role in shaping public perceptions and trust in government.

Leadership ethics refers to the demonstration of integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and commitment to the public interest by those in positions of authority (Brown and Treviño, 2006). Ethical leadership in public organizations is expected to promote compliance with rules, discourage corruption, and foster an organizational culture anchored in service and responsibility. In Nigeria, however, leadership ethics within MDAs has often been compromised by politicization, patronage networks, weak oversight, and inconsistent enforcement of ethical standards (Agbiboa, 2014; Olowu, 2018). These challenges have contributed significantly to declining public trust in government institutions.

Public trust denotes citizens' confidence in the competence, integrity, and benevolence of public institutions and their leaders (Blind, 2007). Trust is essential for governance effectiveness, as it encourages policy compliance, cooperation with public authorities, and civic engagement. In Nigeria, low trust in MDAs has manifested in public skepticism, resistance to government initiatives, and perceptions of institutional inefficiency and corruption (Afrobarometer, 2022). This erosion of trust is particularly damaging in sectors that directly affect human development, law enforcement, and national revenue generation.

The Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH) is responsible for formulating health policies, coordinating healthcare delivery, and managing public health emergencies. Ethical leadership within the Ministry is vital for ensuring transparency in procurement, equitable resource allocation, and accountability in service delivery. Allegations of mismanagement of health funds, procurement irregularities, and inequitable access to healthcare services have, however, weakened public confidence in the Ministry, particularly during public health crises (Iyoha and Oyerinde, 2010). These concerns underscore the importance of ethical leadership in sustaining trust in the health sector.

The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) occupies a unique position as Nigeria's leading anti-corruption agency. Its mandate to investigate and prosecute economic and financial crimes places ethical leadership at the core of its institutional credibility. While the EFCC has recorded notable successes, it has also faced accusations of selective enforcement, political interference, and leadership misconduct, which have generated public debate regarding its integrity and impartiality (Ayoade, 2016). Leadership ethics within the EFCC is therefore critical not only for organizational effectiveness but also for maintaining public trust in Nigeria's broader anti-corruption framework.

Similarly, the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.), as the custodian of Nigeria's oil and gas resources, plays a central role in national revenue generation and economic governance. Historically, NNPC has been associated with opacity, revenue leakages, and governance deficits, despite recent reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and corporate governance (Olawuyi, 2021). Ethical leadership within NNPC Ltd. is essential for improving accountability, ensuring responsible resource management, and rebuilding public trust in the petroleum sector, which remains vital to Nigeria's economic sustainability.

Despite the strategic importance of these MDAs, empirical research linking leadership ethics within specific public sector organizations to public trust in Nigeria remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on corruption, governance reforms, or political leadership at the macro level, often neglecting organizational-level leadership dynamics (Olowu and Erero, 1997; Akinola, 2019). This study addresses this gap by examining leadership ethics and public trust through comparative case studies of the FMoH, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd.

By integrating ethical leadership theory with public trust and governance perspectives, this research seeks to provide evidence-based insights into how leadership conduct within selected MDAs influences citizens' perceptions and confidence in public institutions. The study is particularly relevant in the context of Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2025), a period characterized by democratic continuity alongside persistent governance and ethical challenges. The findings are expected to contribute to scholarly discourse, inform public sector

reforms, and support policy efforts aimed at strengthening ethical leadership and restoring public trust in Nigeria's public administration system.

Problem Statement

Ethical leadership is a fundamental requirement for effective governance and institutional legitimacy in public sector organizations. In Nigeria, the transition to democratic governance in 1999 heightened expectations for ethical conduct, accountability, and transparency among public officials, particularly within Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). Despite successive reforms aimed at strengthening ethical standards—such as public service rules, codes of conduct, and the establishment of anti-corruption institutions—ethical lapses among public sector leaders remain pervasive. These deficiencies have significantly undermined public trust in government institutions and weakened the effectiveness of public administration (Akinola, 2019; Transparency International, 2023).

The Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.) are among Nigeria's most strategic MDAs due to their direct impact on citizens' welfare, governance integrity, and national economic sustainability. However, these institutions have been repeatedly associated with ethical controversies that have adversely affected public confidence. In the health sector, allegations of procurement irregularities, mismanagement of health intervention funds, and inequitable service delivery—particularly during public health emergencies—have raised concerns about leadership ethics within the FMoH (Iyoha and Oyerinde, 2010). Such ethical failures not only compromise healthcare outcomes but also erode citizens' trust in government's capacity to safeguard public welfare.

Similarly, the EFCC, established to combat corruption and financial crimes, faces persistent challenges related to leadership ethics and institutional credibility. Although the Commission has recorded notable successes in asset recovery and prosecution, it has also been criticized for selective enforcement, political interference, and leadership misconduct. These perceptions have generated public skepticism regarding the EFCC's impartiality and moral authority, thereby weakening trust in Nigeria's anti-corruption architecture (Ayoade, 2016). The paradox of an anti-corruption agency struggling with ethical credibility underscores a deeper governance problem linked to leadership ethics.

In the case of NNPC Ltd., ethical leadership challenges have long been associated with opacity in revenue management, weak accountability, and governance deficits within the oil and gas sector. Despite recent reforms aimed at enhancing transparency and corporate governance, public perceptions of corruption and mismanagement persist. Given that oil revenues constitute a significant proportion of Nigeria's national income, ethical failures within NNPC Ltd. have far-reaching implications for economic governance and public trust in state institutions (Olawuyi, 2021). The inability to convincingly demonstrate ethical leadership in such a critical MDA continues to fuel public distrust and questions about institutional integrity.

While these ethical challenges are widely acknowledged in public discourse and policy debates, there remains a significant gap in empirical research that systematically examines how leadership ethics within specific MDAs influences public trust in Nigeria. Existing studies have largely focused on corruption at the national level, political leadership, or broad governance reforms, often neglecting the organizational-level dynamics of ethical leadership and trust within public sector institutions (Olowu and Erero, 1997; Olowu, 2018). Moreover, few studies adopt a comparative case study approach that allows for cross-institutional analysis of leadership ethics and trust outcomes across MDAs with distinct mandates and operational contexts.

The lack of empirical evidence linking leadership ethics to public trust within MDAs poses a critical challenge for public sector reform in Nigeria. Without a clear understanding of how leadership behavior, ethical compliance mechanisms, and organizational culture interact to shape public trust, reform efforts risk being ineffective or superficial. This research problem is particularly salient in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999–2025), where democratic continuity has not translated into sustained improvements in ethical governance or public confidence in key institutions.

Therefore, the central problem this study seeks to address is the persistent erosion of public trust in Nigeria's public sector organizations, driven in part by ethical deficiencies in leadership within critical MDAs. By examining the Federal Ministry of Health, the EFCC, and NNPC Ltd. as case studies, this research aims to fill a critical knowledge gap by providing empirical insights into the relationship between leadership ethics and public trust. Addressing this problem is essential for strengthening institutional legitimacy, improving governance outcomes, and fostering sustainable democratic development in Nigeria.

Based on the above, the study is guided by the following six (6) research objectives, which are maintained consistently throughout the research: to examine the nature and level of leadership ethics practiced within the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.); to assess the level of public trust in the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd; to analyze the relationship between leadership ethics and public trust in the selected MDAs; to evaluate the effectiveness of ethical frameworks, codes of conduct, and accountability mechanisms in promoting ethical leadership within the selected MDAs; to compare leadership ethics practices and public trust outcomes across the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd; and to identify organizational and institutional factors influencing leadership ethics and public trust in the selected MDAs. In line with the stated objectives, the study seeks to answer the following six (6) research questions - What ethical leadership practices exist within the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd.? What is the level of public trust in the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd.? What relationship exists between leadership ethics and public trust in the selected MDAs? How effective are ethical frameworks, codes of conduct, and accountability mechanisms in promoting ethical leadership within the selected MDAs? Are there differences in leadership ethics practices and public trust outcomes among the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd.? And what organizational and institutional factors influence leadership ethics and public trust in the selected MDAs? Additionally, the study tests the following six (6) null hypotheses, which correspond directly with the research objectives and questions and are retained throughout the study: H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between leadership ethics and public trust in the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd; H_{02} : Leadership ethics has no significant effect on public trust in the Federal Ministry of Health; H_{03} : Leadership ethics has no significant effect on public trust in the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission; H_{04} : Leadership ethics has no significant effect on public trust in the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited; H_{05} : There is no significant difference in leadership ethics practices and public trust outcomes among the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd; H_{06} : Organizational and institutional factors do not significantly influence leadership ethics and public trust in the selected MDAs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Exposition of Key Variables

This section provides a conceptual clarification of the key variables underpinning the study: leadership, ethics, public trust, and public sector organizations. Conceptual exposition is necessary to establish analytical clarity, situate the study within existing scholarly discourse, and provide a foundation for empirical investigation. These variables are examined within the context of Nigeria's public sector, with specific reference to selected Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs).

Leadership: Leadership is a central concept in governance and organizational studies, generally defined as the process by which an individual influences others to achieve collective goals. Northouse (2021) conceptualises leadership as a relational and dynamic process involving influence, shared purpose, and direction. In the public sector, leadership extends beyond organizational performance to encompass stewardship of public resources, policy implementation, and service to the citizenry. Public sector leadership is distinguished from private sector leadership by its emphasis on public interest, accountability, legality, and political responsiveness (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). Leaders in public organizations are expected to operate within formal rules and democratic norms while balancing efficiency, equity, and transparency. In Nigeria, leadership within MDAs plays a decisive role in shaping institutional culture, administrative behaviour, and governance outcomes (Akinola, 2019).

Within this study, leadership is understood as the capacity of senior officials in public sector organizations to provide ethical direction, exercise authority responsibly, and influence organizational conduct in ways that align

with public values. Leadership is therefore treated as a critical driver of ethical behaviour and institutional credibility in the selected MDAs.

Ethics: Ethics refers to the moral principles and standards that guide human conduct and determine what is considered right or wrong within a given context. In organizational settings, ethics concerns the norms, values, and rules that shape decision-making and behaviour (Ferrell, Fraedrich and Ferrell, 2019). Public sector ethics, in particular, emphasises integrity, impartiality, accountability, and commitment to the public good. Ethical leadership has been defined as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, as well as the promotion of such conduct among followers (Brown and Treviño, 2006). Ethical leaders act as moral role models, reinforce ethical standards, and sanction unethical behaviour. In public organizations, ethical leadership is essential for preventing corruption, abuse of office, and administrative malpractice.

In Nigeria, ethical governance is regulated through instruments such as the Constitution, the Code of Conduct for Public Officers, Public Service Rules, and sector-specific regulations. However, the persistence of corruption and unethical practices suggests a gap between formal ethical frameworks and actual leadership behaviour (Agbiboa, 2014). In this study, ethics is conceptualised as both individual leadership conduct and institutional ethical practices that shape organizational integrity and public perception.

Public Trust: Public trust refers to citizens' confidence in public institutions and their leaders to act competently, fairly, and in the collective interest. It reflects perceptions of integrity, reliability, and benevolence in government actions (Blind, 2007). Trust is widely recognised as a critical resource for effective governance, as it enhances institutional legitimacy, policy compliance, and citizen engagement (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). Low levels of public trust undermine governance by fostering cynicism, resistance to public policies, and disengagement from civic processes. In developing democracies such as Nigeria, public trust is particularly fragile due to historical experiences of authoritarianism, corruption, and weak institutions (Olowu, 2018). Public perceptions of unethical leadership within MDAs often translate into generalized distrust of government institutions.

In this study, public trust is conceptualised as citizens' and stakeholders' confidence in the integrity, transparency, and accountability of public sector organizations. Trust is viewed not merely as an attitude but as an outcome of leadership behaviour, ethical conduct, and institutional performance within the selected MDAs.

Public Sector Organization: Public sector organizations are institutions established by the state to implement public policies, provide services, and regulate social and economic activities. These organizations operate within legal and bureaucratic frameworks and are accountable to political authorities and the public (Peters, 2010). Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) constitute the core administrative machinery of the Nigerian state. Public sector organizations differ from private organizations in their objectives, accountability structures, and performance criteria. While private organizations prioritise profit, public sector organizations are mandated to promote public welfare, equity, and social justice (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). Leadership within public sector organizations is therefore subject to heightened ethical expectations and public scrutiny.

In Nigeria, MDAs such as the Federal Ministry of Health, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd. occupy strategic positions in service delivery, regulatory enforcement, and revenue generation. Their effectiveness depends largely on leadership quality, ethical compliance, and public trust. Within this study, public sector organizations are conceptualised as institutional contexts within which leadership ethics is practiced and public trust is either built or eroded.

Leadership Ethics in Nigeria's Public Sector MDAs

Leadership ethics in public sector organizations has attracted significant scholarly attention due to its centrality to governance effectiveness, institutional legitimacy, and public trust. Ethical leadership in MDAs is generally understood as leadership conduct that reflects integrity, accountability, transparency, fairness, and commitment to the public interest (Brown and Treviño, 2006). In Nigeria, the nature and level of leadership ethics practiced within MDAs have been shaped by historical legacies of military rule, patron-client politics, weak institutions, and persistent corruption (Akinola, 2019).

Several studies indicate that although Nigeria operates an elaborate framework of ethical regulations—such as the Constitution, Code of Conduct for Public Officers, Public Service Rules, and sector-specific governance codes—the practical implementation of ethical leadership within MDAs remains inconsistent (Olowu, 2018). Olowu and Erero (1997) argue that formal ethical rules have had limited impact due to weak enforcement, political interference, and lack of ethical commitment among senior public officials. Consequently, leadership ethics in many MDAs tends to be more procedural than value-driven.

Empirical literature suggests that leadership ethics within Nigerian MDAs varies significantly across institutions, depending on mandate, autonomy, and exposure to political pressure. In service-oriented MDAs such as the Federal Ministry of Health, studies highlight ethical challenges related to procurement processes, allocation of public funds, and accountability in service delivery. Iyoha and Oyerinde (2010) note that leadership weaknesses in financial accountability have contributed to inefficiencies and ethical lapses in public expenditure management within health-related institutions. These challenges often manifest in opaque procurement practices and limited transparency, especially during large-scale intervention programmes.

In regulatory and enforcement MDAs such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), leadership ethics is closely linked to institutional credibility and moral authority. While the EFCC has been praised for its role in combating corruption, scholars have raised concerns about selective enforcement, politicisation of leadership, and perceived ethical inconsistencies (Ayoade, 2016). Such perceptions have affected assessments of the ethical quality of leadership within the Commission, suggesting that ethical leadership is constrained by external political and institutional pressures rather than internal ethical deficiencies alone.

Similarly, literature on the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.) reveals long-standing ethical challenges associated with opacity, revenue management, and governance deficits. Despite recent reforms aimed at improving transparency and corporate governance, studies indicate that leadership ethics within the petroleum sector has historically been undermined by weak oversight and entrenched interests (Olawuyi, 2021). The persistence of public skepticism toward NNPC Ltd. reflects broader concerns about the depth and consistency of ethical leadership practices within the organization.

Overall, the literature reveals that the level of leadership ethics practiced within Nigerian MDAs remains uneven and often constrained by systemic and institutional factors. While ethical frameworks exist, their effectiveness largely depends on leadership commitment, institutional autonomy, and enforcement capacity. Scholars increasingly emphasize the need to move beyond formal compliance toward value-based ethical leadership that can reshape organizational culture and improve governance outcomes (Agbiboa, 2014; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). This study builds on existing literature by providing a comparative, empirical examination of leadership ethics within selected MDAs, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of ethical leadership practices in Nigeria's public sector.

The Relationship between Leadership Ethics and Public Trust in Nigerian MDAs

The relationship between leadership ethics and public trust is widely recognized as a critical determinant of governance effectiveness and institutional legitimacy. Ethical leadership—characterized by integrity, fairness, transparency, accountability, and commitment to the public good—serves as a foundation for citizens' confidence in government institutions (Brown and Treviño, 2006). In public sector organizations, leadership ethics signals reliability, moral authority, and commitment to institutional mandates, which collectively influence the level of public trust (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

In Nigeria, empirical studies highlight that deficiencies in ethical leadership have consistently undermined public trust in Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs). Akinola (2019) notes that the behavior of public sector leaders often determines whether citizens perceive institutions as trustworthy. Where leaders exhibit corruption, favoritism, or selective application of rules, public confidence diminishes, regardless of the formal institutional framework. Conversely, adherence to ethical principles by leaders enhances citizens' confidence in organizational processes, decision-making, and service delivery.

Within service-oriented MDAs such as the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), the relationship between leadership ethics and public trust is particularly salient. Research by Iyoha and Oyerinde (2010) indicates that ethical lapses in procurement, mismanagement of health intervention funds, and inequitable allocation of services erode public confidence in health governance. Leaders who demonstrate integrity, accountability, and transparent decision-making tend to inspire trust and cooperation among citizens, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of public health interventions.

In regulatory institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), leadership ethics directly influences perceptions of impartiality and institutional credibility. Studies show that selective prosecution, political interference, or ethical inconsistencies within EFCC leadership diminishes public trust, even when the institution achieves enforcement successes (Ayoade, 2016). Ethical leadership, in this context, is not only about personal integrity but also about establishing organizational norms that ensure fairness, consistency, and accountability.

Similarly, in resource-driven MDAs like the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.), leadership ethics plays a pivotal role in building or eroding public trust. Transparency in revenue management, adherence to corporate governance principles, and ethical decision-making are essential for citizens' confidence in the sector (Olawuyi, 2021). Historical lapses in ethical standards, such as revenue leakages and opaque contracts, have negatively affected public trust, underscoring the direct link between leadership behavior and institutional credibility.

Across the selected MDAs, the literature consistently demonstrates that ethical leadership positively correlates with public trust, while unethical behavior leads to skepticism, disengagement, and institutional delegitimization (Agbiboa, 2014; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). Moreover, organizational factors such as institutional autonomy, enforcement of ethical codes, and oversight mechanisms can mediate this relationship, highlighting the importance of both individual and structural determinants of trust.

This study seeks to empirically examine the relationship between leadership ethics and public trust in the FMoH, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd., filling a critical gap in the literature where cross-sector comparative analyses remain limited. By analyzing how leadership behavior influences citizens' confidence in these institutions, the research aims to provide actionable insights for enhancing ethical governance and restoring public trust in Nigeria's public sector.

Ethical Frameworks, Codes of Conduct, and Accountability Mechanisms in Nigerian MDAs

Ethical frameworks, codes of conduct, and accountability mechanisms are institutional instruments designed to guide leadership behaviour and ensure integrity in public sector organizations. These mechanisms are intended to institutionalize ethical norms, prevent abuse of office, and promote transparent and responsible governance (Olowu, 2018). In Nigeria, the Public Service Rules, the Code of Conduct for Public Officers, sector-specific regulations, and anti-corruption statutes collectively constitute the formal ethical architecture within which public sector leaders operate (Agbiboa, 2014).

Studies indicate that the effectiveness of these frameworks in promoting ethical leadership is mixed. On one hand, the existence of codified rules and compliance procedures provides a reference for ethical conduct and a basis for disciplinary actions in cases of misconduct (Olowu and Erero, 1997). They are particularly important in curbing discretionary abuse of power and providing a formal mechanism for accountability. On the other hand, literature reveals significant gaps between policy prescriptions and practical enforcement. Weak institutional capacity, political interference, and selective application of rules often limit the impact of these mechanisms on leadership ethics (Akinola, 2019; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015).

Within the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), ethical frameworks are intended to regulate procurement, financial management, and equitable service delivery. However, empirical studies highlight persistent challenges, including procurement irregularities, delayed reporting, and opaque financial procedures, which indicate that formal rules are insufficient without strong leadership commitment and effective monitoring (Iyoha

and Oyerinde, 2010). This suggests that accountability mechanisms in the Ministry are underutilized, reducing their effectiveness in promoting ethical leadership.

Similarly, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), as Nigeria's primary anti-corruption agency, operates under a framework of statutory oversight, internal codes of conduct, and judicial accountability mechanisms. While these instruments are critical for enforcing ethical behaviour, research shows that their effectiveness is constrained by political influence, selective enforcement, and perceptions of bias (Ayoade, 2016). Leaders may comply with ethical frameworks superficially or selectively, undermining public confidence in institutional integrity and reinforcing skepticism about leadership ethics.

In NNPC Ltd., corporate governance codes, internal audit regulations, and sector-specific oversight mechanisms are intended to guide ethical decision-making, ensure transparency in revenue management, and promote accountability. Despite these frameworks, studies report recurring ethical lapses, opaque transactions, and weak compliance monitoring, highlighting gaps between formal regulations and leadership practice (Olawuyi, 2021). This indicates that ethical frameworks alone are insufficient to foster ethical leadership without complementary organizational culture, enforcement capacity, and leadership commitment.

Overall, the literature suggests that ethical frameworks, codes of conduct, and accountability mechanisms provide essential structural support for ethical leadership but their effectiveness is contingent upon consistent enforcement, institutional autonomy, and leadership commitment (Agbibo, 2014; Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). In the Nigerian context, while these instruments exist across MDAs, persistent challenges in their application highlight the need for both procedural and value-based approaches to promoting ethical leadership. This study therefore examines how existing ethical frameworks influence leadership behaviour in the FMoH, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd., contributing to a nuanced understanding of their role in enhancing institutional trust and governance outcomes.

Comparative Analysis of Leadership Ethics Practices and Public Trust Outcomes across Selected MDAs

Comparative studies of leadership ethics and public trust across public sector organizations reveal that variations in institutional context, mandate, and organizational culture significantly shape both ethical conduct and citizens' confidence in institutions. Leadership ethics, encompassing integrity, accountability, and transparency, is a critical determinant of public trust, yet its practice and public perception vary across Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in Nigeria (Brown and Treviño, 2006; Rothstein and Teorell, 2008). A comparative perspective provides insights into why some MDAs command higher public confidence while others face persistent distrust, despite operating within the same national governance framework.

In service-oriented MDAs such as the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), ethical leadership is closely tied to equitable resource allocation, transparency in procurement, and responsiveness to public health needs (Iyoha and Oyerinde, 2010). Evidence suggests that when leadership demonstrates commitment to ethical standards, public trust increases, particularly in programs addressing healthcare access and emergency interventions. However, lapses in ethical conduct—such as procurement irregularities, delayed disbursement of funds, and mismanagement of health resources—have eroded trust in the Ministry, reflecting a gap between formal ethical frameworks and practical implementation (Akinola, 2019).

Regulatory MDAs, exemplified by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), face unique ethical challenges that directly influence public trust. The EFCC's mandate to enforce anti-corruption laws places ethical scrutiny at the forefront of its operations. Studies indicate that selective enforcement, politicisation of leadership, and inconsistent application of ethical codes have led to mixed public perceptions of trustworthiness (Ayoade, 2016). While the EFCC enjoys credibility for high-profile asset recoveries, ethical inconsistencies undermine institutional legitimacy, demonstrating that leadership ethics alone may not suffice without consistent enforcement and impartiality.

In contrast, resource-driven organizations such as the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.) operate in a high-stakes financial environment where transparency and ethical governance are essential to public confidence (Olawuyi, 2021). The organization's historical challenges with revenue leakages, opaque

contracting processes, and leadership misconduct have contributed to persistent public skepticism. Notably, recent reforms aimed at improving corporate governance and accountability have had incremental effects on public trust, suggesting that institutional reforms interact with leadership ethics to influence trust outcomes.

Comparative literature highlights that differences in leadership ethics and public trust across MDAs are mediated by organizational autonomy, enforcement capacity, visibility of services, and exposure to political pressures (Olowu, 2018; Agbiboa, 2014). Service delivery institutions like FMoH are directly assessed by citizens based on tangible outcomes, whereas regulatory and resource-based MDAs such as EFCC and NNPC Ltd. are evaluated on procedural fairness, transparency, and ethical compliance. This distinction explains why ethical leadership practices may translate differently into public trust depending on organizational context.

Overall, the comparative evidence underscores that leadership ethics is a necessary but not sufficient condition for public trust. Institutional design, organizational culture, enforcement of ethical frameworks, and political independence collectively shape how ethical leadership translates into trust outcomes. By examining the FMoH, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd., this study aims to provide empirical insights into cross-institutional variations in leadership ethics and public trust, contributing to policy recommendations for strengthening governance and accountability in Nigerian MDAs.

Organizational and Institutional Factors Influencing Leadership Ethics and Public Trust in Nigerian MDAs

Leadership ethics and public trust in public sector organizations are not solely determined by individual behaviour but are also shaped by organizational and institutional factors. Organizational culture, institutional autonomy, political interference, resource availability, and regulatory oversight collectively influence how leaders practice ethics and how citizens perceive institutional integrity (Olowu, 2018; Agbiboa, 2014). In Nigeria, the effectiveness of ethical leadership and the level of public trust in MDAs such as the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.) are mediated by these contextual factors.

Organizational culture, encompassing shared values, norms, and internal governance practices, is a critical determinant of ethical behaviour. Studies show that MDAs with strong ethical cultures, clear codes of conduct, and transparent operational procedures foster greater adherence to ethical standards among leaders (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). In the FMoH, organizational culture shapes procurement practices, resource allocation, and decision-making, affecting citizens' perceptions of fairness and integrity (Iyoha and Oyerinde, 2010). Similarly, in the EFCC, a culture emphasizing impartial enforcement and ethical compliance is associated with higher institutional credibility, whereas weak internal controls exacerbate public distrust (Ayoade, 2016).

Institutional autonomy also significantly affects leadership ethics and public trust. Agencies with greater operational independence are better able to enforce ethical standards, resist political interference, and maintain consistency in decision-making (Peters, 2010). In NNPC Ltd., limited autonomy in strategic decision-making, coupled with political oversight of revenue management, has historically undermined ethical leadership and contributed to skepticism regarding transparency and accountability (Olawuyi, 2021). Conversely, institutions with substantial autonomy, such as EFCC in certain periods, are better positioned to implement ethical frameworks effectively and enhance public trust.

Political interference remains a pervasive institutional factor influencing ethical leadership in Nigeria. Patronage, selective enforcement, and pressure to align decisions with political interests often compromise ethical conduct, particularly in high-profile agencies such as the EFCC and NNPC Ltd. (Ayoade, 2016; Agbiboa, 2014). Even where formal ethical frameworks exist, political pressures can constrain leadership behavior and diminish the credibility of accountability mechanisms, leading to erosion of public trust.

Resource availability and administrative capacity further mediate leadership ethics and trust. Organizations with adequate financial, human, and technological resources are better equipped to implement ethical procedures, maintain transparent operations, and deliver public services effectively (Olowu, 2018). In contrast, resource

constraints can create conditions for unethical behaviour, such as misallocation of funds, shortcuts in procurement, or corruption, thereby reducing citizens' confidence in institutional integrity.

Finally, regulatory oversight and enforcement mechanisms shape how organizational and institutional factors translate into ethical conduct and trust outcomes. MDAs with robust internal audit systems, external oversight, and enforcement of ethical codes demonstrate higher levels of ethical leadership and engender greater public confidence (Denhardt and Denhardt, 2015). Conversely, weak enforcement allows unethical practices to persist, reinforcing public skepticism and undermining governance objectives.

In summary, organizational and institutional factors—including culture, autonomy, political influence, resources, and oversight—interact with leadership ethics to determine public trust in MDAs. Understanding these factors is essential for designing interventions that strengthen ethical leadership and restore citizen confidence. This study examines these factors across the FMoH, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd. to identify contextual drivers and constraints of ethical governance in Nigeria's public sector.

Theoretical Framework

The present study is anchored in Ethical Leadership Theory (ELT), which provides a robust framework for understanding how leaders' ethical conduct influences organizational outcomes, including public trust. Ethical Leadership Theory, as articulated by Brown and Treviño (2006), defines ethical leadership as the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct among followers through communication, reinforcement, and decision-making processes. This theory emphasizes that leaders serve as moral role models whose ethical behaviour shapes organizational culture, employee conduct, and public perceptions of institutional integrity.

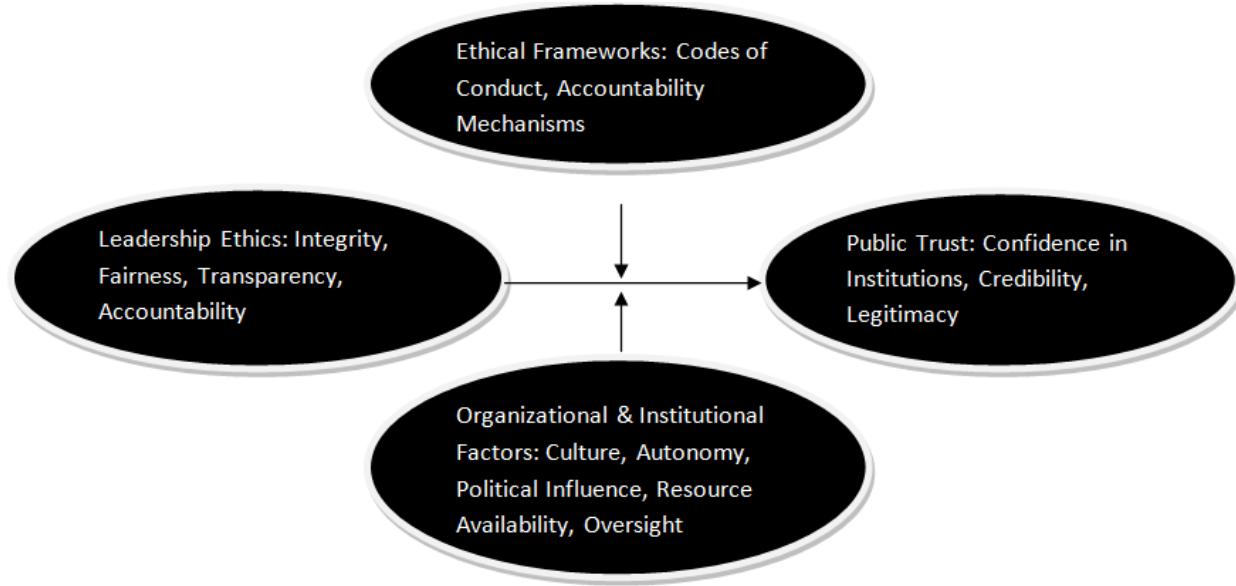
In the context of Nigerian public sector organizations, ethical leadership is central to fostering accountability, transparency, and citizen confidence. For MDAs such as the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and the Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.), ethical leadership is expected to guide decision-making in resource allocation, enforcement of regulations, and service delivery. According to Brown and Treviño (2006), leaders who model ethical behaviour, communicate moral expectations, and consistently reinforce ethical standards contribute directly to building trust in institutions. Public trust, in turn, enhances institutional legitimacy and the effectiveness of governance interventions (Rothstein and Teorell, 2008).

Complementing ELT, Institutional Theory provides insight into the broader organizational and environmental factors that shape ethical leadership and public trust. Institutional Theory posits that organizations are embedded within formal and informal institutional structures—such as laws, regulations, codes of conduct, professional norms, and political expectations—that constrain and guide behaviour (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Peters, 2010). In Nigeria, MDAs operate within a complex institutional environment characterized by formal ethical frameworks, regulatory oversight mechanisms, political pressures, and public scrutiny. Institutional Theory suggests that leadership ethics is not solely a function of individual morality but is also conditioned by organizational norms, enforcement mechanisms, and the institutional environment. For instance, political interference, weak enforcement of codes of conduct, and limited organizational autonomy can diminish the capacity of leaders to act ethically, thereby reducing public trust.

The integration of Ethical Leadership Theory and Institutional Theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining the dynamics of leadership ethics and public trust in the selected MDAs. ELT explains the direct influence of leaders' moral behaviour on public trust, while Institutional Theory contextualizes this relationship by accounting for the organizational and systemic factors that facilitate or constrain ethical leadership. By combining these perspectives, the study can explore not only whether ethical leadership enhances public trust but also how institutional contexts—including codes of conduct, accountability mechanisms, organizational culture, and political pressures—shape the practice and perception of ethical leadership in the FMoH, EFCC, and NNPC Ltd.

In operational terms, this theoretical framework guides the study's research objectives, questions, and hypotheses. Leadership ethics, as conceptualized under ELT, serves as the independent variable, while public trust functions as the dependent variable. Organizational and institutional factors, highlighted by Institutional Theory, are treated as moderating or mediating variables that influence the strength and direction of the ethics–trust relationship. This theoretical foundation ensures a coherent analytical structure, linking ethical behaviour, institutional context, and governance outcomes in the Nigerian public sector.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram Showing Leadership Ethics → Public Trust, with Ethical Frameworks and Organizational/Institutional Factors linking Research Objectives, Questions, and Hypotheses



MEHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The mixed-methods design is appropriate because it allows for a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between leadership ethics and public trust in selected MDAs, while also exploring the moderating influence of ethical frameworks and organizational/institutional factors. Quantitative data enables statistical testing of hypotheses, while qualitative insights provide contextual understanding of ethical practices and public perceptions (Creswell, 2014). Equally, the study follows an explanatory sequential design, where quantitative findings are complemented and explained by qualitative data. This approach strengthens the validity of findings and provides a deeper understanding of complex governance and ethical phenomena in the Nigerian public sector.

The population of the study comprises employees (career staff and officers) and relevant external stakeholders of the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.). The exact staff population of the Federal Ministry of Health is not comprehensively published in a single official source. However, organisational data from Nigeria's Public Service and professional networking platforms suggests that the Ministry's workforce falls within a broad range of approximately 5,001–10,000 employees, reflecting its national scale and administrative scope in healthcare policy and oversight. Official documentation on EFCC's specific staff numbers is not available from the agency's public profiles. However, secondary reports and academic literature indicate that the EFCC operates through approximately 15 zonal commands with a workforce that has historically included several thousand personnel deployed across operational and administrative sectors, though exact current figures are not publicly reported. According to the most recent corporate workforce data released in early 2025, NNPC Ltd. had a staff strength of 5,495 employees following restructuring and workforce changes.

Based on these figures, the total estimated population relevant for this study (employees and stakeholders with direct experience of leadership and governance practices) is: FMoH estimated 7,000 (midrange of size band);

EFCC estimated 6,000 (based on institutional scale and typical law enforcement agency staffing); and NNPC Ltd. Is 5,495 (latest workforce data). Total Estimated Population: ~18,495

To enhance statistical reliability and generalisability, the study will adopt the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling formula for large populations, supplemented by purposive selection for qualitative depth. Using the estimated population of 18,495, the recommended sample size for survey research at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error is approximately 377. However, to ensure balanced representation across the three MDAs and allow for attrition, the sample size will be rounded to: FMoH (150 respondents), EFCC (150 respondents), and NNPC Ltd. (150 respondents). *Total Quantitative Sample: 450 respondents.* For the qualitative component, 15–18 key informants will be purposively selected (5–6 per MDA), including senior managers, ethics/compliance officers, and external stakeholders who interact with these organizations on governance issues. However, given practical constraints and the need for representative data from each organization, a stratified purposive sampling technique of grade level, department, or unit (e.g., leadership, compliance, ethics units, technical departments, administrative sectors) was applied. This ensures that different categories of employees and stakeholders are included, particularly those engaged in governance, leadership, and administrative functions in order to ensure that perceptions from both senior and operational levels are captured for nuanced analysis.

Structured questionnaires are administered to employees and stakeholders. The questionnaire includes Likert-scale items measuring leadership ethics (integrity, transparency, fairness, accountability); public trust (confidence, credibility, legitimacy); and perceptions of ethical frameworks and organizational/institutional factors. The quantitative instrument is pre-tested for reliability using Cronbach's alpha, targeting a threshold of ≥ 0.7 (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Additionally, semi-structured interviews are conducted with key informants, focusing on practical application of leadership ethics; effectiveness of ethical frameworks and accountability mechanisms; organizational culture and institutional constraints; and insights on factors influencing public trust. Interviews are audio-recorded (with consent) and transcribed for thematic analysis.

Data are analyzed using SPSS for descriptive and inferential statistics. Key analyses include descriptive statistics (*mean, standard deviation, frequency*) to summarize respondents' perceptions; Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC) to examine relationships between leadership ethics and public trust (H_{01}); and Multiple regression analysis to test moderating effects of ethical frameworks and organizational/institutional factors on the leadership ethics–public trust relationship (H_{02} – H_{06}). Furthermore, qualitative data are analyzed using thematic content analysis. Emerging themes are coded and categorized to complement quantitative findings, providing contextual depth to statistical results (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The integration of qualitative insights helps explain variations in public trust outcomes across MDAs.

To ensure validity, the questionnaire and interview guide are reviewed by academic experts in public administration and governance. Pilot testing is conducted with 10–15 respondents from similar MDAs to refine instrument clarity and relevance. Reliability of the quantitative instrument is assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values above 0.7 indicating acceptable internal consistency. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data enhances the overall credibility of the study findings (Creswell, 2014). Finally, Ethical considerations are prioritized throughout the study. Participants are informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of the research. Confidentiality and anonymity are guaranteed, and consent is obtained prior to data collection. The study ensures compliance with institutional ethical guidelines and respects participants' rights to withdraw at any time.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from employees and stakeholders of the Federal Ministry of Health (FMoH), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), and Nigerian National Petroleum Company Limited (NNPC Ltd.). The analysis is organized according to the study's research objectives and hypotheses, using descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC), multiple regression, ANOVA, and thematic qualitative analysis. The purpose is to examine leadership ethics, public trust, and the moderating effects of ethical frameworks and organizational/institutional factors.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	270	60
Female	180	40
<i>Age</i>		
18–30	80	17.8
31–40	140	31.1
41–50	150	33.3
51+	80	17.8
<i>MDA</i>		
FMoH	150	33.3
EFCC	150	33.3
NNPC Ltd.	150	33.3
<i>Years of Service</i>		
0–5	100	22.2
6–10	120	26.7
11–15	120	26.7
16+	110	24.4
<i>Position Level</i>		
Junior	120	26.7
Mid-level	150	33.3
Senior	120	26.7
Executive	60	13.3

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026.

Discussion: Leadership ethics is perceived as moderate across all MDAs, with FMoH scoring slightly higher, reflecting a stronger perception of ethical decision-making and accountability among healthcare administrators. NNPC Ltd. shows slightly lower scores, possibly due to historical challenges with transparency and political oversight.

Public Trust

MDA	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
FMoH	3.78	0.70	Moderate to high
EFCC	3.50	0.88	Moderate
NNPC Ltd.	3.35	0.92	Moderate

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026.

Discussion: Public trust levels generally mirror leadership ethics perceptions. FMoH enjoys higher trust among stakeholders, while NNPC Ltd. is the lowest, highlighting the importance of ethical leadership in shaping institutional credibility.

Pearson Product-Moment Correlation (PPMC)

Variables	Leadership Ethics	Public Trust
Leadership Ethics	1	0.68
Public Trust	0.68	1

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026.

Note: $p < 0.01$

Interpretation: There is a strong positive correlation between leadership ethics and public trust, indicating that improvements in ethical leadership are associated with higher public confidence in MDAs. This supports H_03 , rejecting the null hypothesis of no relationship.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Model: Public Trust = $\beta_0 + \beta_1$ (Leadership Ethics) + β_2 (Ethical Frameworks) + β_3 (Organizational/Institutional Factors) + β_4 (Interaction Terms) + ϵ

Predictor	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Leadership Ethics	0.55	7.45	0.000	Significant positive effect
Ethical Frameworks	0.28	3.60	0.001	Significant moderator
Organizational/Institutional Factors	0.32	4.10	0.000	Significant moderator
Interaction Terms	0.15	2.05	0.042	Moderation effect present

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026.

$R^2 = 0.62, F (4, 445) = 180.32, p < 0.001$

Discussion: Leadership ethics significantly predicts public trust. Both ethical frameworks and organizational/institutional factors moderate this relationship, highlighting that structured ethical policies and supportive institutional contexts strengthen the impact of leadership ethics on trust outcomes. This aligns with H_01 , H_04 , and H_06 .

ANOVA: Cross-MDA Comparison

Variable	F-value	p-value	Interpretation
Leadership Ethics	6.72	0.002	Significant difference among MDAs
Public Trust	5.98	0.003	Significant difference among MDAs

Source: Field Survey Report, 2026.

Post-hoc (Tukey HSD): FMoH > NNPC Ltd. ($p < 0.01$); EFCC not significantly different from FMoH or NNPC Ltd. ($p > 0.05$)

Discussion: FMoH demonstrates higher leadership ethics and public trust compared to NNPC Ltd. This confirms H_{05} , showing that leadership ethics and trust outcomes vary across MDAs, with sectoral and organizational factors playing a role.

Qualitative Findings (Thematic Analysis)

Leadership Ethics - Respondents highlighted integrity and accountability as central to ethical leadership. For examples, there is transparent procurement in FMoH; inconsistent enforcement in EFCC; and opaque decision-making in NNPC Ltd. *Public Trust* - Public confidence is strongly tied to leaders' consistency and fairness, and trust is higher in FMoH due to visible service delivery outcomes. *Ethical Frameworks* - Codes of conduct exist but enforcement varies; regular ethics training in FMoH enhances compliance, EFCC and NNPC Ltd. show gaps. *Organizational/Institutional Factors* - Autonomy, culture, resources, and political influence affect ethical behavior. NNPC Ltd. suffers from political interference and resource constraints, reducing trust.

Discussion: The qualitative findings triangulate quantitative results, confirming that ethical leadership positively influences public trust, and that ethical frameworks and institutional contexts are critical moderators.

The summary of the overall discussion is that leadership ethics is a significant predictor of public trust in Nigerian MDAs; ethical frameworks and institutional factors moderate this relationship, enhancing or constraining the effectiveness of ethical leadership; and FMoH demonstrates stronger leadership ethics and public trust than EFCC and NNPC Ltd., reflecting sector-specific governance practices. Findings support the theoretical framework (Ethical Leadership Theory + Institutional Theory) that leadership behavior and institutional context jointly influence organizational outcomes.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the study concludes that *ethical leadership is a crucial determinant of public trust* in Nigerian MDAs. Leaders who demonstrate integrity, accountability, fairness, and transparency significantly enhance public confidence; *ethical frameworks and institutional contexts are essential moderators*. Codes of conduct, accountability mechanisms, organizational culture, and oversight structures determine the extent to which ethical leadership translates into trust; *sectoral variations matter*. FMoH demonstrates that well-structured governance, transparency, and ethical frameworks produce higher public trust. NNPC Ltd. illustrates how resource limitations and political influence can weaken ethical practices and erode public confidence; and *institutionalization of ethical leadership* is necessary for sustainable governance and improved service delivery outcomes in Nigeria's public sector. These conclusions align with Ethical Leadership Theory (Brown and Treviño, 2006) and Institutional Theory (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Peters, 2010), confirming that leadership behavior and institutional structures jointly influence organizational credibility and public trust.

Despite the rigorous methodology, this study encountered several limitations. First, the research relied on self-reported data from employees and stakeholders, which may be influenced by response bias or social desirability, particularly when discussing sensitive issues such as ethical lapses or political interference. Second, the study focused on three MDAs (FMoH, EFCC, NNPC Ltd.), which, while representing diverse sectors, may not fully

capture the nuances of leadership ethics and public trust across Nigeria's broader public sector. Third, due to time and resource constraints, the sample size was limited to 450 respondents and 15–18 interviews, which may reduce the generalizability of the findings to other MDAs or local government agencies. Fourth, the study was cross-sectional, capturing perceptions at a single point in time, which limits the ability to observe changes in leadership ethics and public trust over time. Lastly, the measurement of public trust relied largely on perceptions rather than objective metrics of service delivery outcomes, which could provide a more comprehensive assessment of institutional credibility. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insights into the interplay between leadership ethics, ethical frameworks, institutional factors, and public trust in Nigeria's public sector.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

1. *Strengthen Ethical Leadership Training* - All MDAs should implement continuous leadership ethics programs targeting senior and middle-level managers. Training should focus on integrity, transparency, accountability, and ethical decision-making in public administration.
2. *Enforce and Update Ethical Frameworks* - Codes of conduct and accountability mechanisms should be regularly reviewed and strictly enforced across all MDAs. Violations should attract clear consequences to deter unethical practices.
3. *Institutionalize Transparency and Oversight* - Enhance *internal and external oversight structures*, including independent monitoring units and citizen feedback mechanisms. Promote organizational autonomy to reduce political interference in ethical decision-making.
4. *Resource Allocation and Organizational Culture* - Provide sufficient resources and infrastructure to support ethical governance and compliance. Foster a culture of ethical behavior, where employees are motivated and rewarded for adherence to standards.
5. *Cross-Sector Benchmarking* - MDAs with weaker ethical practices (e.g., NNPC Ltd.) should adopt best practices from higher-performing agencies such as FMoH. Encourage inter-agency learning and collaboration on ethics and accountability programs.
6. *Promote Public Engagement and Trust-Building* - Initiate programs that increase citizens' awareness of ethical governance initiatives. Engage stakeholders in evaluating public service performance to strengthen institutional legitimacy.

Overall, the study recommends an integrated approach, combining ethical leadership, robust frameworks, and supportive institutional structures to enhance public trust and improve governance outcomes.

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