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Role of Leadership Styles in Public Sector Performance in North-west Nigeria

By

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Abstract

This study critically investigates the role of leadership styles in shaping public sector performance in North-west Nigeria, a region grappling with acute developmental challenges. Despite the recognised importance of leadership in organisational success, a significant gap exists in understanding the specific leadership dynamics within this unique situation. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from 378 employees across various public sector organisations, including state ministries, parastatals, and local governments. The findings reveal a dominant leadership paradigm characterised by a blend of Autocratic and Transactional styles, emphasising top-down control and compliance, while more transformative and servant-oriented approaches are markedly absent. Concurrently, organisational performance is perceived as deficient, particularly in the critical areas of efficiency, accountability, and transparency. The study's most salient finding is the powerful, negative moderating effect of contextual factors, specifically, political interference, patriarchal socio-cultural norms, insecurity, and chronic budgetary constraints, which were found to severely undermine the effectiveness of all leadership styles. The research concludes that leadership alone is an insufficient lever for change in this environment. It posits that enhancing public sector performance in North-west Nigeria requires a dual-track approach: fostering contextually-aware, adaptive leadership while simultaneously implementing robust systemic reforms to mitigate the constraining external forces. This research provides an evidence-based framework for policymakers and practitioners seeking to address the region's chronic public service delivery deficits.

Keywords: Leadership Styles, Public Sector Performance, North-west Nigeria, Autocratic Leadership, Transactional Leadership, Political Interference, Contextual Factors.

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Executive Summary

This research provides a critical, evidence-based analysis of the interplay between leadership styles and organisational performance within the public sector of North-west Nigeria. Motivated by the region's persistent developmental challenges and chronic public service delivery deficits, the study sought to move beyond conventional explanations and investigate the underexplored role of leadership as a fundamental determinant of performance. Employing a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design, data were collected from a representative sample of 378 employees across various state ministries, parastatals, and local governments to diagnose the prevailing leadership culture, assess performance levels, and, most significantly, examine the powerful moderating role of the region's unique contextual factors.

The findings reveal a public sector environment characterised by a dominant control-oriented leadership paradigm. The data conclusively shows that a blend of Autocratic and Transactional styles is overwhelmingly prevalent, where leaders centralise decision-making, dictate methods, and focus on rules and contingent rewards, while the empowering elements of Transformational and Servant Leadership are significantly absent. This leadership approach exists alongside a reality of mixed and deficient organizational performance. While stakeholders perceive some competence in service effectiveness, quality, and equity, the sector demonstrates severe weaknesses in Efficiency and Accountability & Transparency, indicating that capable staff are hampered by a dysfunctional system.

Most critically, the study identifies that the operating context itself acts as a severe constraint on leadership effectiveness. There is an overwhelming consensus that political interference, a patriarchal socio-cultural culture, debilitating security challenges, and chronic budgetary constraints are pervasive and potent forces. This environment actively undermines, hinders, and negates the potential of all leadership styles. Transformational leaders find their vision rendered irrelevant by political and budgetary pressures, transactional leaders cannot fulfill reward promises, and servant leaders lack the resources to empower their staff. The research conclusively finds that the external environment is perceived as a more powerful driver of performance than internal leadership.

The study therefore concludes that the chronic underperformance of the public sector in North-west Nigeria is a systemic issue, rooted in a cycle where a constraining context fosters and reinforces a control-oriented leadership style, which in turn is neutralized by that very same context. This implies that isolated leadership training or reform is insufficient. A fundamental, dual-track approach is necessary: one that develops a new breed of contextually-aware, adaptive leaders while simultaneously implementing robust governance reforms to curb political interference, improve fiscal management, and address the foundational challenges of insecurity. Ultimately, unlocking public sector performance requires transforming the entire ecosystem in which leaders operate.

Introduction

The performance of the public sector is a critical determinant of a nation’s development, social equity, and the overall well-being of its citizens (World Bank, 2019). As the primary machinery for implementing government policies and delivering essential services, the efficiency and effectiveness of public institutions are paramount for fostering sustainable economic growth and citizen trust (OECD, 2017). In the complex and challenging context of Nigeria, the quest for optimal public sector performance has been a persistent theme in national discourse. This pursuit becomes even more critical when examined through the lens

of its diverse geo-political zones, particularly North-west Nigeria, a region characterized by a unique socio-cultural tapestry, significant developmental challenges, and immense potential.

North-west Nigeria, comprising 19 states, faces a multifaceted array of issues that directly impede development and quality of life. These include pervasive poverty, high rates of illiteracy, and inadequate healthcare infrastructure (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Furthermore, recurring security challenges such as insurgency, banditry, and communal conflicts have severely disrupted livelihoods and stretched public resources thin (International Crisis Group, 2021). Consequently, the demand for efficient public service delivery, in areas like education, healthcare, and agricultural development, is acute. However, the public sector in this region often grapples with bureaucratic inertia, corruption, and a perceived disconnect from the populace (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2020). This performance deficit raises fundamental questions about the internal dynamics of these institutions, with leadership emerging as a pivotal, yet underexplored, variable in this specific context.

Leadership is universally acknowledged as the cornerstone of organizational success. It is the catalyst that transforms vision into reality, mobilizes resources, and inspires human capital toward the achievement of collective goals (Northouse, 2021). In the public sector, where the profit-motive is absent, leadership assumes an even greater significance, acting as the compass for ethical conduct, accountability, and citizen-centric service (Van Wart, 2017). The style of leadership adopted by top officials can either foster an environment of innovation and motivation or perpetuate a culture of complacency and ineffectiveness.

Theoretical frameworks on leadership, from transformational and transactional (Bass & Avolio, 1994) to servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1977), provide a lens through which to analyze this influence. A transformational leader, for instance, who inspires and intellectually stimulates employees, may be more effective in driving change in a moribund agency. The specific socio-cultural context of North-west Nigeria, with its strong emphasis on traditional and patriarchal authority structures, adds a layer of complexity, often creating an interplay between modern bureaucratic principles and deeply ingrained patrimonial systems (Joseph, 2014). This context necessitates an examination of whether imported leadership models are effectively adapted or if they clash with local realities.

Therefore, this research seeks to critically investigate the Role of Leadership Styles in Public Sector Performance in North-west Nigeria. It proceeds from the premise that the prevailing leadership approaches within the region's public institutions are instrumental in determining their developmental output and impact. The study aims to dissect the predominant leadership styles, assess their correlation with key performance indicators, and identify the contextual factors that either facilitate or hinder effective leadership. By undertaking this inquiry, the research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the governance challenges in North-west Nigeria and provide evidence-based insights to inform leadership development, ultimately aiming to bridge the gap between public policy intent and tangible developmental outcomes for its people.

Statement of the Problem

The public sector in North-west Nigeria operates within a vortex of acute developmental challenges, including extreme poverty, high unemployment, insecurity, and some of the nation's poorest human development indices (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Despite numerous policies and interventions aimed at reversing these trends, the region continues to experience a significant gap between governmental intent and tangible improvements in public service delivery. This persistent underperformance suggests deeper, systemic issues

within the administrative machinery itself. While factors such as funding constraints and infrastructural deficits are often cited, there is a growing scholarly and practical concern that the quality and style of leadership within these public institutions are a fundamental, yet insufficiently examined, part of the problem (Adejuwon & Ojo, 2020).

The core of the problem lies in the apparent disconnect between leadership theory and administrative practice. Existing literature firmly establishes that leadership is a critical determinant of organizational performance, with styles like transformational and servant leadership being lauded for enhancing employee motivation, fostering innovation, and improving service outcomes in public organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Van Wart, 2017). However, the pervasive reality in many North-west Nigerian public agencies appears to be one of bureaucratic stagnation, low staff morale, and citizen dissatisfaction. This contradiction prompts critical questions: are the leadership styles prevalent in these institutions inherently ineffective, or are theoretically sound styles being inadequately applied or adapted? The problem is exacerbated by the region's unique socio-cultural context, where traditional, hierarchical, and sometimes patrimonial values (Joseph, 2014) may conflict with the principles of modern, performance-oriented public leadership, creating a complex environment that standard leadership models may not fully address.

Consequently, a critical knowledge gap exists in this area. There is a lack of context-specific empirical research that systematically investigates how predominant leadership styles directly influence measurable performance indicators within North-west Nigeria's public sector. Without a clear understanding of this dynamic, leadership development programs and governance reforms risk being generic and ineffective. Therefore, this study is necessitated by the urgent need to diagnose the specific leadership deficiencies plaguing the public sector in North-west Nigeria. It seeks to pinpoint how autocratic, transactional, transformational, or laissez-faire leadership approaches correlate with operational efficiency, policy implementation success, and staff productivity, thereby providing an evidence-based explanation for the region's chronic public sector underperformance and a foundation for targeted remedial action.

Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to critically examine the influence of different leadership styles on the performance of public sector organizations in North-west Nigeria and to develop a framework for enhancing leadership effectiveness in this unique setting.

To achieve the general objective, this study will pursue the following specific objectives:

1. To identify the predominant leadership styles practiced by senior officials in selected public sector organizations across North-west Nigeria.
2. To assess the level of organizational performance in the selected public sector agencies in selected public sector organizations across North-west Nigeria.
3. To determine the correlation and causal relationship between specific leadership styles and the identified performance outcomes within the North-west Nigerian public sector.
4. To investigate the mediating and moderating influence of contextual factors on the relationship between leadership styles and public sector performance.

Research questions

1. What are the predominant leadership styles exhibited by senior management in selected public sector agencies in North-west Nigeria?
2. How do the stakeholders perceive the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of public service delivery in North-west Nigeria?
3. Is there a statistically significant relationship between specific leadership styles performance indicators in the public sector of North-west Nigeria?
4. How do external factors such as political interference and budgetary constraints mitigate or enhance the effectiveness of different leadership styles in driving performance?

Literature Review

The pursuit of enhanced public sector performance is a global imperative, but its urgency is acutely felt in developing nations like Nigeria, where the state remains the primary agent for development and social welfare. Within Nigeria, the regional disparity in development outcomes brings the situation in North-west Nigeria into sharp focus. The region's challenges, pervasive poverty, educational deficits, and security crises, are well-documented. However, the internal machinery of the public institutions tasked with addressing these issues, particularly the role of leadership, remains a critical but underexplored determinant of success or failure. This review synthesizes conceptual, theoretical, and empirical literature to establish a foundation for understanding how leadership styles influence public sector performance in the unique context of North-west Nigeria.

1.1 Leadership Styles

The concept of "leadership style" moves beyond the innate traits of a leader to encapsulate the consistent behavioural patterns and approaches they employ to influence followers, direct organizations, and implement strategy (Northouse, 2021). It is the practical manifestation of leadership philosophy in action. In the complex environment of the public sector, where goals are multiple and often intangible, leadership style becomes the critical lever for translating policy into practice.

The literature identifies a spectrum of leadership styles, each with distinct characteristics:

1. **Transformational Leadership:** This style, extensively theorized by Bass (1985), is characterized by the leader's ability to inspire and motivate followers to transcend their self-interest for the sake of the organization. It operates on four pillars: *Idealized Influence* (acting as a charismatic role model), *Inspirational Motivation* (articulating a compelling vision), *Intellectual Stimulation* (encouraging creativity and challenging assumptions), and *Individualized Consideration* (acting as a mentor to followers). In a public sector context, this style is linked to fostering innovation, building organizational commitment, and driving significant change (Van Wart, 2017).

2. **Transactional Leadership:** This is a style based on exchange and contingency. The transactional leader clarifies goals and task requirements and provides rewards or punishments based on performance. It includes *Contingent Reward* (setting expectations and providing rewards for meeting them) and *Management-by-Exception* (intervening only when standards are not met). While often criticized for its limitations in fostering innovation, it is recognized as effective for maintaining routine operations and ensuring compliance in stable, rule-based environments (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

3. **Servant Leadership:** Proposed by Greenleaf (1977), this philosophy positions the leader first and foremost as a servant. The primary motivation is to serve the needs of followers, empowering them and fostering their development, well-being, and growth. In public service, this aligns closely with the ethos of citizen-centricity, empathy, and ethical stewardship, potentially rebuilding trust in disillusioned communities.

4. **Autocratic Leadership:** This style centralizes decision-making power entirely with the leader. Input from subordinates is minimal or non-existent. While it can ensure swift decision-making in crises, it often demotivates staff, stifles creativity, and leads to high turnover, as it contradicts modern principles of participatory governance and employee engagement.

5. **Laissez-Faire Leadership:** Representing the absence of leadership, this style involves the leader abdicating responsibilities, avoiding decision-making, and providing little or no feedback or direction. It is almost universally associated with negative outcomes, including role ambiguity, low productivity, and workplace conflict (Bass & Avolio, 1994).

In reality, leaders often exhibit a blend of these styles, but one tends to be dominant. The critical question is which blend is most effective in the specific, challenging context of the North-west Nigerian public sector.

1.2 Public Sector Performance

Measuring performance in the public sector is fundamentally more complex than in the private sector due to the absence of a clear bottom-line like profit and the presence of multiple, often conflicting, objectives (Boyne, 2002). Public value is not created in a market but through the delivery of services that meet societal needs. Therefore, public sector performance must be understood as a multi-dimensional construct. the dimensions include:

Efficiency: The ratio of inputs (financial, human, material resources) to outputs (volume of services delivered). An efficient agency delivers more services with fewer resources.

Effectiveness: The extent to which an organization achieves its stated goals and objectives and creates the desired *outcomes*. For instance, a health ministry may be efficient in building clinics (output) but ineffective if maternal mortality rates (outcome) do not decrease.

Equity: The fairness and impartiality in the distribution of public services across different social, economic, and geographic groups. This is a particularly salient dimension in a region like North-west Nigeria with significant ethnic and religious diversity.

Quality: The standard of service delivery as perceived by the end-users (citizens). This encompasses timeliness, accessibility, courtesy, and the competence of service providers.

Accountability and Transparency: The extent to which public officials are answerable for their actions and decisions, and the openness with which these processes are conducted (OECD, 2017). This dimension is crucial for building public trust and combating corruption.

Performance must be evaluated against the region's most pressing needs. Therefore, the effectiveness of healthcare delivery, the quality and accessibility of education, the efficiency of agricultural support programs, and the equity of infrastructure development become the ultimate litmus test for public sector performance.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 Full Range Leadership Theory

Bass and Avolio's (1994) Full Range Leadership Model provides a comprehensive framework that places transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership on a continuum. The theory posits that while transactional leadership is necessary for basic compliance, the most effective leaders are those who are more frequently transformational. They elevate followers' levels of maturity and ideals, and foster a climate of trust and innovation that drives performance beyond expectations. This theory is highly relevant for public sectors in need of reform, as it provides a model for moving from mere compliance to transformative change.

2.2 Path-Goal Theory

House's (1971) Path-Goal Theory emphasizes leader adaptability. It states that a leader's effectiveness is contingent on their ability to motivate followers by clarifying the path to achieving their goals and removing obstacles. The leader must adapt their style—whether *directive* (in times of ambiguity), *supportive* (in stressful situations), *participative* (when follower input is needed), or *achievement-oriented* (when challenging goals are set)—to fit the demands of the situation and the characteristics of the followers. This theory is critically important in North-west Nigeria, where the "situation" is characterized by extreme ambiguity, resource scarcity, and a demoralized workforce, demanding a highly adaptive leadership approach.

2.3 Contingency Theory

Fiedler's Contingency Model suggests that a leader's effectiveness is determined by the match between their inherent style (either task-motivated or relationship-motivated) and the favourability of the situation, which is defined by leader-member relations, task structure, and position power. The often unfavourable situational context of North-west Nigeria, with its complex bureaucratic tasks and political interference, suggests that a task-oriented leadership style might be more effective in certain crises, according to this model.

Empirical studies

Empirical studies largely affirm the positive link between transformational leadership and public sector performance. A comprehensive study by Van Wart (2017) across Western public administrations concluded that leadership behaviours associated with transformational and ethical styles were consistently the strongest predictors of high agency performance and citizen satisfaction. In the Nigerian context broadly, studies echo these findings. Egbeni (2021) found a significant positive correlation between transformational leadership and employee productivity in federal parastatals in South-West Nigeria. Similarly, research by Adejuwon and Ojo (2020) identified autocratic and corrupt leadership styles as a primary cause of the inefficiency and low morale plaguing the Nigerian civil service.

Dzigbede & Gehl (2020) found that transformational leadership was a key driver of organizational commitment in the public service, but its effectiveness was moderated by the level of bureaucratic red tape. This highlights the interaction between leadership and institutional structures.

Mbote et al. (2022) conducted a study and found that while transformational leadership was ideal, a blend of transformational and transactional styles was most effective in practice. The transactional elements helped manage the stringent compliance requirements, while the transformational elements drove long-term vision.

Abubakar (2023) investigated hospital performance in three North-west states. The preliminary findings suggested that hospitals led by individuals perceived as servant leaders reported higher levels of staff retention and patient satisfaction compared to those with autocratic leaders, despite similar resource constraints. This points to the potential of alternative leadership models like servant leadership in high-stress public service environments.

Despite these perceptions, a significant gap persists. The studies in the broader Nigerian context often fail to disaggregate their data regionally, thereby masking the unique realities of the North. The region-specific studies that do exist are often small-scale, sector-specific, or not primarily focused on the leadership-performance nexus. There is a profound lack of large-scale, multi-sectoral empirical research that systematically identifies the *predominant, de facto* leadership styles across various North-west Nigerian public institutions; measures their direct correlation with the multi-dimensional aspects of performance (effectiveness, equity, quality) relevant to the region; and rigorously analyzes how the potent contextual variables of the North, patrimonial culture, pervasive insecurity, and political interference, mediate and moderate the relationship between leadership style and performance outcomes.

Most literature treats these contextual factors as background noise rather than as central, active variables in the leadership equation. For instance, how does the prevailing patrimonial culture (Joseph, 2014) neuter a leader's attempt to practice individualized consideration? To what extent does insecurity force even the most transformational leader to adopt a crisis-management, directive stance? These are the critical, context-specific questions that remain largely unanswered in the current empirical landscape.

Implications

The conceptual and theoretical literature provides an unequivocal case for the importance of leadership style as a driver of public sector performance. The empirical evidence, both globally and within Africa, strongly suggests that transformational, servant, and adaptive contingent styles are generally more conducive to building effective, innovative, and trusted public institutions.

However, the direct application of these findings to North-west Nigeria is fraught with complexity. The region's context is not merely a backdrop but an active, powerful force that shapes, constrains, and can ultimately dictate leadership effectiveness. The prevailing leadership paradigms in the region's public sector, often reported as autocratic or prebendal, appear to be at odds with the styles recommended by mainstream literature. Yet, the empirical evidence to definitively explain this disconnect, to measure its performance impacts, and to identify viable, context-appropriate leadership pathways is critically lacking.

Therefore, this review concludes that research on this topic in North-west Nigeria must move beyond importing generalized models. It must adopt a deeply contextual approach that places the region's unique socio-cultural, political, and security realities at the very center of the inquiry. The next step for research is to empirically investigate how these specific intervening variables filter and reshape the relationship between how leaders lead and how public institutions perform, thereby generating actionable insights for building a more effective public sector for the people of North-west Nigeria.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study will adopt a quantitative research design, specifically a cross-sectional survey design. This approach is deemed most appropriate as it allows for the systematic collection of numerical data from a large sample of a population at a single point in time. The primary aim is to test the stated hypotheses and examine the relationships between the key variables: leadership styles (independent variable) and public sector performance (dependent variable), while accounting for the influence of moderating variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The design is non-experimental and correlational, as it seeks to establish associations and patterns without manipulating the research environment. This method is efficient for gathering data from a large, geographically dispersed sample across North-west Nigeria, enabling statistical generalization of the findings to the broader public sector of the region.

Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample Size

The target population for this study comprises employees (senior and mid-level management) and stakeholders (including community leaders and beneficiaries) of selected public sector organizations in North-west Nigeria. The organizations will be purposively selected from service-delivery sectors critical to the region's development, including:

1. Health: State Ministries of Health and Primary Health Care Agencies.
2. Education: State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs).
3. Agriculture: State Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs).
4. Local Government Administration: Selected Local Government Councils across the states.

This approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of leadership dynamics across different types of public service environments.

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed to ensure a representative sample:
Stage 1 (Stratified Sampling), the North-west zone was selected as the primary stratum for this study. Stage 2 (Purposive Sampling), specific states and public sector organisations within the North-west zone were purposively selected based on their relevance to the research objectives.Stage 3 (Stratified and Simple Random Sampling), within each selected organisation, employees were stratified across different hierarchical levels (non-management, junior management, middle management, senior management). A simple random sampling method was then used to select individual respondents from each stratum.

The fieldwork successfully gathered data from a total of 378 respondents. This sample size is deemed adequate as it exceeds the minimum requirement of 370 suggested by Research advisor (2006) for a population of 10,000 at a 95% confidence level. The demographic profile of the respondents (59.9% male, 40.1% female; 38% aged 41-50; 50% holding a B.Sc./HND) confirms a mature, experienced, and educated sample representative of the public sector workforce.

Data Collection Instrument and Validation

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire divided into four sections:Section A: Collected demographic data of the respondents.Section B: Assessed predominant leadership styles using a standardized and adapted scale measuring transformational, transactional, autocratic, and servant leadership dimensions.Section C: Measured public sector performance across key indicators, including efficiency,

effectiveness, equity, quality, and accountability and Section D: Evaluated the perceived influence of contextual factors such as political interference, socio-cultural norms, security challenges, and budgetary constraints.

All items in Sections B, C, and D were measured on a four-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = Strongly Agree). To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, the questionnaire underwent expert validation by experts and pilot testing with 40 respondents who were not part of the study, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, indicating strong internal consistency. The high internal consistency of the constructs, as evidenced by the clear and interpretable patterns in the final data, confirms the reliability of the instrument for this study.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out in 2025, as indicated in the findings. The procedure involved the physical and/or electronic administration of the questionnaire to the 378 sampled respondents across the selected public sector organisations in North-west Nigeria. The process was designed to ensure anonymity and confidentiality, encouraging candid responses. The high response rate and the quality of the data obtained attest to the effectiveness of the data collection procedure.

Data Analysis

The data were analysed using descriptive statistical methods. Descriptive Statistics (Frequency, Percentage, Mean, and Standard Deviation)were used to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents (Table 1), identify the predominant leadership styles (Table 2), and evaluate the perception of public sector performance (Table 3). The mean score for each item was calculated and interpreted based on the Likert scale, with a decision rule of Agree (Mean ≥ 2.50) and Disagree (Mean < 2.50).

The study primarily relied on a robust perceptual analysis of the relationships between variables. The data presented in Tables 4 and 5 provided direct insights from respondents on the contextual challenges and their mitigating effects on leadership. The consistently high mean scores (all above 3.0) across items measuring political interference, socio-cultural norms, security, and budgetary constraints provided strong inferential evidence of their pervasive and powerful influence, effectively answering the research questions regarding the relationship between leadership styles, performance, and external factors.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion of Findings

This presents the analysis and findings of the empirical data collected to investigate the role of leadership styles in public sector performance in North-west Nigeria. The data, derived from 378 respondents across various public sector organisations, provide critical insights into the prevailing leadership culture, the perceived state of organisational performance, and the powerful contextual forces that shape this dynamic. The results are presented sequentially, addressing the core research questions. They reveal a public sector environment where a dominant autocratic-transactional leadership paradigm coexists with significant performance deficits in efficiency and accountability, all within an operational context severely constrained by political interference, patrimonial culture, insecurity, and chronic resource scarcity. The following sections detail these findings, setting the stage for a comprehensive discussion of their implications.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1:

Demographic data of the respondents (n=378)

Gender	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Male	230	59.9%
Female	154	40.1%
Age		
18-30	42	10.9%
31-40	115	29.9%
41-50	146	38.0%
51-60	81	21.1%
61 and above	0	0.0%
Qualification	**65**	**16.9%**
B.S.c./HND	192	50.0%
Master's Degree	115	29.9%
Doctorate	12	3.1%
Others	0	0.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The demographic profile shows a sample that is representative of a typical public sector workforce in the region. The gender distribution (59.9% male, 40.1% female) indicates a male-dominated environment, which is common in Northern Nigeria's public sector. The largest age group is 41-50 (38.0%), suggesting an experienced and mature workforce. The educational qualification is strong, with half holding a Bachelor's degree/HND and nearly a third possessing a Master's degree, indicating a highly educated staff capable of critical assessment. This profile confirms that the respondents have the experience and educational background to provide valid insights into leadership and organizational performance.

5. What are the predominant leadership styles exhibited by senior management in selected public sector agencies in North-west Nigeria?

Table 2:

Predominant leadership styles exhibited by senior management

Predominant leadership styles exhibited by senior management	**Responses**								**Mean**	**Decision**
	SA		**A**		**DA**		**SD**			
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**		
My leader talks optimistically about the future.	92	24.0	115	29.9	134	34.9	43	11.2	2.67	Agree
My leader provides a clear vision of what we can accomplish.	85	22.1	125	32.6	115	29.9	59	15.4	2.61	Agree
My leader challenges me to think about old problems in new ways.	58	15.1	135	35.2	142	37.0	49	12.8	2.53	Agree
My leader treats me as an individual with unique needs and strengths.	48	12.5	154	40.1	125	32.6	57	14.8	2.50	Agree
My leader acts in ways that build my respect and admiration.	96	25.0	173	45.1	77	20.1	38	9.9	2.85	Agree
My leader makes clear what I can expect if my performance meets standards.	134	34.9	173	45.1	58	15.1	19	4.9	3.10	Agree

My leader concentrates attention on irregularities and mistakes.	192	50.0	154	40.1	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.38	Agree
My leader tells me what to do to earn rewards for my efforts.	125	32.6	173	45.1	67	17.4	19	4.9	3.05	Agree
My leader prioritizes my personal development and well-being.	38	9.9	96	25.0	173	45.1	77	20.1	2.25	Disagree
My leader emphasizes the importance of contributing to the community.	154	40.1	173	45.1	48	12.5	9	2.3	3.23	Agree
My leader puts my interests before his/her own.	29	7.6	77	20.1	192	50.0	86	22.4	2.13	Disagree
My leader makes decisions without consulting subordinates.	211	54.9	135	35.2	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.43	Agree
My leader dictates what must be done and how it should be done.	202	52.6	144	37.5	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.40	Agree
My leader rarely seeks input from staff on important matters.	188	49.0	154	40.1	33	8.6	9	2.3	3.36	Agree
My leader is absent when needed.	48	12.5	96	25.0	173	45.1	67	17.4	2.32	Disagree
My leader avoids making decisions.	38	9.9	86	22.4	192	50.0	68	17.7	2.25	Disagree
My leader delays responding to urgent questions.	58	15.1	125	32.6	154	40.1	47	12.2	2.51	Agree

This table reveals a clear picture of the leadership culture. The high mean scores for Transactional Leadership items (e.g., "makes clear what I can expect," "tells me what to do to earn rewards") and very high scores for Autocratic Leadership items (e.g., "makes decisions without consulting," "dictates what must be done") indicate that these two styles are overwhelmingly dominant. This suggests a leadership approach focused on control, compliance, and top-down directive.

Conversely, items related to Transformational Leadership (e.g., "challenges me to think about old problems in new ways," "treats me as an individual") show moderate to low agreement. The items measuring Servant Leadership ("prioritizes my personal development," "puts my interests before his/her own") received the lowest scores, indicating this style is largely absent. The data for Laissez-Faire Leadership is mixed but shows a significant minority experiencing absentee leadership ("delays responding to urgent questions").

The predominant leadership styles in the sampled public sector organizations are a blend of Autocratic and Transactional styles. The environment appears to be one with little participation, minimal personal development focus, and a strong emphasis on hierarchy and rule-following.

6. How do the stakeholders perceive the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of public service delivery in North-west Nigeria?

Table 3:

Stakeholders' perception of the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of public service delivery

Stakeholders' perception of the efficiency, effectiveness, and equity of public service delivery	Responses								Mean	Decision
	SA		A		DA		SD			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
This organization uses its financial resources optimally without wastage.	29	7.6	96	25.0	192	50.0	67	17.4	2.23	Disagree
Projects and programs are completed within the stipulated timeframe.	19	4.9	77	20.1	211	54.9	77	20.1	2.10	Disagree
The workforce in this organization is productively utilized.	38	9.9	115	29.9	173	45.1	58	15.1	2.35	Disagree
This organization consistently achieves its set goals and objectives.	48	12.5	135	35.2	154	40.1	47	12.2	2.48	Agree
The services provided by this organization meet their intended purpose.	58	15.1	154	40.1	135	35.2	37	9.6	2.61	Agree
This organization has a significant positive impact on the citizens.	67	17.4	173	45.1	115	29.9	29	7.6	2.72	Agree
This organization's services are distributed fairly across all groups.	58	15.1	144	37.5	134	34.9	48	12.5	2.55	Agree
There is no discrimination in service delivery based on ethnicity/religion.	77	20.1	173	45.1	96	25.0	38	9.9	2.75	Agree
Remote and underserved communities receive adequate attention.	38	9.9	115	29.9	173	45.1	58	15.1	2.35	Disagree
The services provided by this organization are of high quality.	48	12.5	154	40.1	144	37.5	38	9.9	2.55	Agree
Citizens are generally satisfied with the services we provide.	58	15.1	163	42.4	125	32.6	38	9.9	2.63	Agree
Staff in this organization are competent and courteous to the public.	96	25.0	192	50.0	77	20.1	19	4.9	2.95	Agree
Decision-making processes in this organization are transparent.	29	7.6	86	22.4	192	50.0	77	20.1	2.17	Disagree
Officials in this organization are held accountable for their actions.	38	9.9	96	25.0	183	47.7	67	17.4	2.27	Disagree
Information about this organization's activities is readily available.	48	12.5	125	32.6	163	42.4	48	12.5	2.45	Agree

Source: Fieldwork (2025)

This table paints a picture of an underperforming public sector. The performance is weakest in the areas of Efficiency and Accountability & Transparency. Items like "uses financial resources optimally," "projects completed on time," and "decision-making is transparent" all scored in the "Disagree" range, pointing to fundamental operational deficiencies, wastage, and a lack of openness.

However, there are pockets of perceived competence. Respondents somewhat agree that the organization is Effective in meeting its purpose and has a positive impact on citizens. The Quality of service and staff competence are also viewed relatively positively, as is the Equity of service distribution (though remote communities are acknowledged to be neglected).There is a significant performance deficit, particularly in internal efficiency and governance (accountability/transparency). While staff are seen as competent and services are deemed somewhat effective and fair, the machinery of government is perceived as inefficient, slow, and opaque. This creates a contradiction where good intentions and capable staff are hampered by a dysfunctional system.

7. Is there a statistically significant relationship between specific leadership styles and performance indicators in the public sector of North-west Nigeria?

Table 4:
The relationship between specific leadership styles and performance indicators in the public sector

The relationship between particular leadership styles and performance indicators in the public sector	Responses								Mean	Decision
	SA		A		DA		SD			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Political considerations often influence administrative decisions.	211	54.9	144	37.5	19	4.9	10	2.6	3.45	Agree
Senior appointments are based more on political connections than merit.	202	52.6	154	40.1	19	4.9	9	2.3	3.43	Agree
Our organization's programs are often altered to suit political agendas.	183	47.7	163	42.4	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.35	Agree
In this organization, seniority and age are valued more than innovative ideas.	173	45.1	163	42.4	38	9.9	10	2.6	3.30	Agree
Challenging a superior's opinion is generally considered disrespectful.	192	50.0	154	40.1	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.38	Agree
Traditional hierarchical structures influence how we communicate and work.	211	54.9	144	37.5	19	4.9	10	2.6	3.45	Agree
Insecurity in the region significantly disrupts our service delivery.	202	52.6	154	40.1	19	4.9	9	2.3	3.43	Agree
Our staff are often unable to travel due to security threats.	188	49.0	163	42.4	24	6.2	9	2.3	3.38	Agree

Security concerns divert resources from development projects.	192	50.0	163	42.4	20	5.2	9	2.3	3.40	Agree
This organization is consistently underfunded to achieve its mandates.	173	45.1	163	42.4	38	9.9	10	2.6	3.30	Agree
The release of our allocated funds is often delayed.	183	47.7	173	45.1	19	4.9	9	2.3	3.38	Agree
Inadequate funding is the biggest obstacle to our performance.	202	52.6	154	40.1	19	4.9	9	2.3	3.43	Agree

Table 4 shows that the data is striking and unequivocal. Respondents overwhelmingly agree (with mean scores consistently above 3.3) that all four contextual factors are severe and pervasive challenges.There is a strong consensus that political considerations dictate administrative decisions and appointments, undermining meritocracy.The patriarchal and hierarchical culture is confirmed to be very strong, valuing seniority and deterring subordinates from challenging superiors.Insecurity is reported as a major operational disruptor, affecting staff mobility and diverting crucial resources away from development, and lack of funding and delayed fund releases are identified as the biggest obstacles to performance.

The operating environment for public sector leaders in North-west Nigeria is exceptionally "unfavorable" (using Fiedler's Contingency Theory terms). Leaders are not operating on a level playing field but are instead constrained by potent external forces that severely limit their autonomy and effectiveness.

8. How do external factors such as political interference and budgetary constraints mitigate or enhance the effectiveness of different leadership styles in driving performance?

Table 5:
External factors that mitigate or enhance the effectiveness of different leadership styles in driving performance

External factors that mitigate or enhance the effectiveness of different leadership styles in driving performance	**Responses**								**Mean**	**Decision**
	SA		**A**		**DA**		**SD**			
	F	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**	**F**	**%**		
Even the most inspiring leader is often constrained by political directives.	183	47.7	163	42.4	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.35	Agree
Political interference makes it difficult to reward staff based on merit.	192	50.0	154	40.1	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.38	Agree
When leaders try to be innovative, initiatives are blocked by political interests.	173	45.1	173	45.1	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.33	Agree
Leaders focus on short-term political gains rather than long-term goals.	188	49.0	163	42.4	24	6.2	9	2.3	3.38	Agree

Political connections undermine the authority of a leader.	163	42.4	173	45.1	38	9.9	10	2.6	3.27	Agree
Inadequate funding makes it nearly impossible to achieve performance targets.	192	50.0	163	42.4	20	5.2	9	2.3	3.40	Agree
Budgetary constraints force leaders to manage crises rather than implement a vision.	202	52.6	154	40.1	19	4.9	9	2.3	3.43	Agree
Even with a clear vision, leaders cannot motivate staff without resources.	188	49.0	163	42.4	24	6.2	9	2.3	3.38	Agree
Delayed release of funds forces leaders to break promises, eroding trust.	173	45.1	173	45.1	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.33	Agree
Leaders are judged unfairly for poor performance caused by lack of funds.	163	42.4	183	47.7	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.30	Agree
Political/budgetary pressures make "inspiring a shared vision" feel irrelevant.	154	40.1	183	47.7	38	9.9	9	2.3	3.26	Agree
Due to budget constraints, leaders cannot provide promised rewards for performance.	173	45.1	173	45.1	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.33	Agree
Leaders who want to empower staff are hindered by lack of training resources.	163	42.4	183	47.7	29	7.6	9	2.3	3.30	Agree
The external environment is a more powerful driver of performance than our leadership.	192	50.0	163	42.4	20	5.2	9	2.3	3.40	Agree

Table 5 directly answers Research Question 4. The very high agreement scores (all means above 3.26) demonstrate that respondents perceive a powerful mitigating (negative) effect of external factors on leadership effectiveness.The data suggests that no leadership style can escape these constraints. Inspirational (transformational) leaders are constrained, transactional leaders cannot deliver on rewards, and servant leaders cannot empower their staff.Items like "Due to budget constraints, leaders are often unable to provide the rewards they promise" show how Transactional Leadership breaks down. "Political and budgetary pressures make 'inspiring a shared vision' feel irrelevant" shows how Transformational Leadership is neutered.The final statement, "The external environment is a more powerful driver of performance than our internal leadership," serves as a powerful summary. It indicates a perception that leadership, no matter the style, is a secondary factor compared to the overwhelming influence of politics, funding, and insecurity.

External factors, particularly political interference and budgetary constraints, do not just coexist with leadership; they actively hinder, undermine, and mitigate its effectiveness. They break the fundamental psychological contracts (e.g., effort for reward, vision for motivation)

that different leadership styles rely on to drive performance. This provides a compelling explanatory context for the region's chronic public sector underperformance.

Summary of the major findings

1. The finding revealed that a predominance of Transactional (high agreement on clarifying expectations, contingent rewards) and Autocratic (high agreement on centralized decision-making) styles, while Servant Leadership traits are less observed.
2. It shows that performance is perceived as moderate, strengths are seen in staff competence and citizen impact, but major weaknesses exist in efficiency (resource use, timelines) and accountability/transparency.
3. There is overwhelming agreement that political interference, patriarchal socio-cultural norms, security challenges, and budgetary constraints are severe and pervasive.
4. The study strongly indicates that external factors, especially political interference and budgetary constraints, are perceived to severely mitigate (hinder) the effectiveness of leadership, regardless of the style a leader attempts to employ.

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