

Research Article

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Public officials' Leadership competencies and Public trust during the 2019–2026 Economic crisis in South Sudan

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Keywords

Accountability,
Transparency,
Public Trust,
Leadership
Competencies,
PrincipalAgent
Theory,
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Abstract

This study looked into how the abilities of public officials, especially accountability and transparency, affected public trust during the 2019 to 2026 economic crisis in South Sudan. The research was based on Principal-Agent Theory and Institutional Theory, which explain how leaders' actions and the way institutions work influence how citizens see the government's legitimacy, credibility, and reliability. The study focused on how leaders' behavior impacted public confidence in government institutions, people's views on the honesty of public officials, and citizens' willingness to follow government policies in a politically unstable and resource-dependent country. The research used a pragmatist approach, which allowed for both quantitative and qualitative methods. Data was gathered through surveys and in-depth interviews, giving the researcher both statistical information and detailed insights from participants. The study focused on public officials and ordinary citizens in Juba. Using the Yamane (1967) sampling formula with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error, 80 out of 100 participants were selected. Citizens were chosen through simple random sampling to ensure fair selection, while public officials were selected through purposive sampling to include those with relevant experience in governance and public administration. Quantitative data was analysed using SPSS, which provided descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression results. Qualitative responses from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to find common patterns and themes that explained and supported the quantitative finding. The results showed a clear link between leadership qualities and public trust. More transparency, following legal rules, responsible use of public money, and being responsive to public concerns were linked to higher trust in government, better perceptions of officials' integrity, and greater willingness to follow government policies. On the other hand, weak accountability systems and lack of transparency, especially during times of falling

oil revenue and economic instability, led to lower public confidence, negative views on leadership, and less effective institutions. The study concludes that accountability and transparency are key to maintaining public trust during economic crises. It suggests strengthening oversight bodies, improving financial disclosure, promoting clear communication with the public, and encouraging more citizen involvement in governance to boost transparency, credibility, and accountability in South Sudan's public administration.

Introduction

Public confidence in government institutions is seen as a key part of good governance. When people trust their leaders and the systems they work within, it helps keep politics stable, supports economic growth, and brings people together in society. Trust means that citizens are more likely to support government plans and comply with laws and regulations. This trust helps government institutions work better and stay respected. However, in recent years, many countries have seen a drop in public trust in their governments and political leaders. Several major global events have contributed to the decline in public trust in governments worldwide. One of the most significant was the 2007–2008 global financial crisis, which exposed serious weaknesses in financial regulation and governance systems in many countries. In the United States, for example, the collapse of major financial institutions and the government's bailout of banks led many citizens to question the fairness and effectiveness of economic leadership. Similarly, in Greece, the financial crisis resulted in severe economic recession, high unemployment, and strict austerity measures, which caused widespread public dissatisfaction with government leaders and institutions. More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for governments as they attempted to manage public health emergencies while also addressing economic disruptions. In countries such as Italy and Brazil, citizens criticized government responses for being slow, inconsistent, or lacking transparency during the early stages of the pandemic. These situations raised concerns about government accountability and crisis management capacity. In addition, factors such as increasing economic inequality, the rapid spread of

misinformation through social media, and growing perceptions of ineffective governance have further weakened public confidence in political leadership across many societies.

The decline in public trust is also evident across many African countries, where governance challenges and institutional weaknesses affect the credibility of government institutions. In Nigeria, for instance, corruption scandals and concerns about mismanagement of oil revenues have repeatedly undermined citizens' confidence in political leaders. Similarly, in Kenya, several corruption cases involving public funds have raised public concerns about transparency and accountability within government institutions. Across the continent, governments often struggle with corruption, weak oversight systems, and limited capacity to deliver quality public services. In some countries, such as Ghana and Uganda, surveys have shown that citizens sometimes place greater trust in traditional or religious leaders than in political institutions. Furthermore, because many African economies rely heavily on natural resources like oil and minerals, economic downturns often lead to increased dissatisfaction with government leadership, further weakening public trust in state institutions.

In East Africa, issues like transparency, accountability, and effective governance are very important. Even though many countries in the region have made changes to improve their democratic systems, there are still many challenges when it comes to how well these systems work. Problems such as corruption, not enough financial openness, and weak accountability measures continue to weaken public institutions and make people less trusting of the government. Research shows that people's trust in government in East Africa depends a lot

on how honest leaders are seen to be, how well public services are provided, and how leaders are held responsible for their actions (Kanyane and Sausi, 2020; Transparency International, 2023). For example, in Kenya, several corruption cases involving the misuse of public money have greatly reduced people's trust in the government. One big case was the National Youth Service (NYS) scandal, where a lot of funds meant for youth programs were reportedly taken by officials. This led to public demonstrations, investigations, and strong criticism of the government's accountability systems (Transparency International, 2023). In countries like Uganda and Tanzania, political disputes and questionable election results have raised worries about the health of democratic systems and the reliability of institutions in the region (Afrobarometer, 2024). Because of these economic and governance problems, public confidence in political institutions in East Africa has been going down. As a result, making government more transparent, improving accountability, and making public services more effective have become key goals for restoring trust between governments and citizens in the area (Afrobarometer, 2024; World Bank, 2023).

South Sudan is one of the most challenging economic and management crisis contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa. Since gaining independence in 2011, the country has faced constant political and economic problems, including long-lasting conflict, fragile institutions, and serious corruption. Despite having large oil reserves, the country has struggled to use this resource for sustainable development and to improve living conditions. Governance issues and reports of mismanagement of public funds have significantly damaged public trust in government. For example, in 2012, reports suggested that nearly four billion US dollars in public money had been wrongly used by top officials, which further hurt trust in political leaders. More recently, an economic crisis from 2019 to 2026, mainly caused by disruptions to oil exports to port Sudan, has made things harder and reduced the government's financial ability. Since oil revenue

is the main source of income, these disruptions have greatly limited the government's ability to fund public services and maintain economic stability. In this fragile situation, improving the leadership skills of public officials, especially in areas like transparency and accountability, has become essential for rebuilding public trust and improving the legitimacy of government institutions. The author contends that the combined effects of the 2013 conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2016 devaluation of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) against the US dollar, its ongoing decline in value from 2019 to 2026, and sustained high inflation have greatly reduced economic growth, hindered the delivery of public services, and worsened governance issues, emphasizing the importance of strong management in preserving public confidence during times of crisis.

Statement of the Problem

Public trust is essential for the legitimacy and effective operation of government institutions, especially in fragile states like South Sudan, where systems of governance are still underdeveloped. Since independence in 2011, public confidence has continued to decline because of limited transparency, weak accountability processes, and poor responsiveness to citizens' concerns. Economic problems particularly interruptions in oil exports beginning in 2020 have worsened financial instability and revealed deep-seated weaknesses, including gaps in leadership's ability to manage public resources transparently and responsibly (Ngor, 2022).

Reports from the National Audit Chamber and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning (2023) highlighted major failures in financial oversight, such as unaccounted oil revenues, delayed financial disclosures, and poor monitoring systems. Similarly, the Ministry of Petroleum was criticized for a lack of transparency in handling oil contracts and insufficient release of production data, which further lowered public confidence in the integrity of the government (Lado and Jok, 2023). These governance weaknesses highlight the urgent need

to improve leadership capabilities focused on accountability and transparency. Leadership qualities like ethical behavior, openness, responsibility, and accountability are widely recognized as essential for building public trust (Ayee, 2021; Kanyane and Sausi, 2020).

Leaders who are transparent ensure that information is shared openly and promptly, while accountable leaders take responsibility for their decisions and their outcomes (Mawere and Nyamunda, 2021). In South Sudan, the weak enforcement of accountability systems and limited transparency frameworks have increased the gap between citizens and the state (Amuwo, 2023). Although research on governance and corruption in fragile states has expanded, there is still a lack of empirical studies that examine the direct link between leadership skills in accountability and transparency and public trust during economic crises in South Sudan. Therefore, exploring this relationship is important for guiding governance reforms that aim to improve institutional credibility and restore public confidence in post-conflict areas across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to examine how public officials' leadership competencies influence public trust during the 2019–2026 economic crisis in South Sudan

Specific Objectives

- i. To investigate the patterns of information imbalance that occurred during periods of oil export disruption in South Sudan.
- ii. To assess the occurrence of moral hazard and agency loss among public officials during times of economic crisis.
- iii. To explore the effects of weaknesses in accountability and transparency systems on public trust in governance.
- iv. To determine the influence of South Sudan's 2012 oil export disruption on global economic performance.

Scope of the study

Geographical Scope: This study specifically looked at South Sudan, a country dealing with serious issues in governance and weak institutions. The analysis of public trust and leadership skills was based on a national view. Although the disruption in oil exports was a national problem, the data was collected mainly in key cities like Juba, which is the main political and administrative centre. This allowed for a focused look at national leadership while recognizing that the economic effects were felt across the whole country.

Content Scope: The main topic of this study was based on Principal-Agent Theory and how it applies to governance during an economic crisis. The research looked closely at the leadership skills of public officials, especially in areas like accountability and transparency, and how this influenced public trust.

Time Scope: The research covered a specific time period related to the economic crisis caused by the oil export issues. This time frame was from early 2024 to mid-2025. This period was chosen because it included the start of the oil export crisis, the peak of its economic impact, and the first government responses. This made it possible to closely examine specific events and public reactions, keeping the research focused and manageable.

Significance of the study

To Policymakers: This study provides research-backed recommendations to enhance governance reforms, especially in promoting transparency, accountability, and effective crisis management in vulnerable, resource-reliant countries. For instance, policymakers might require the regular publication of oil revenue reports on a quarterly basis, create independent review bodies to supervise spending during financial difficulties, or introduce digital tools for managing public funds to minimize the risk of misuse.

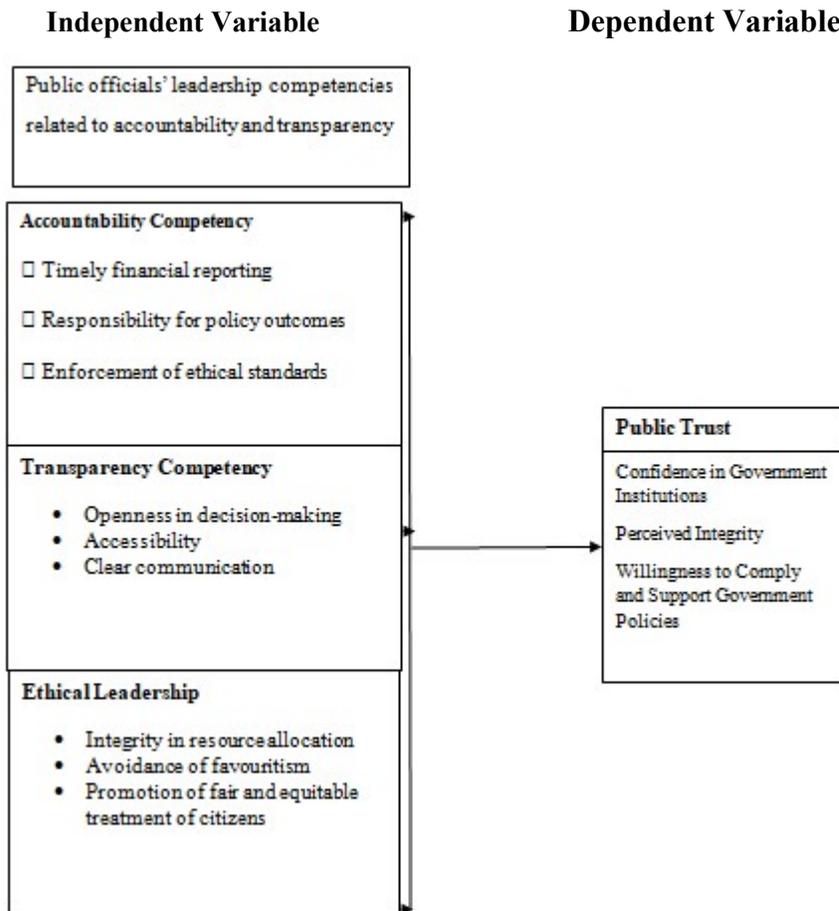
To Researchers and Scholars: The study contributes to academic knowledge by applying Principal-Agent Theory to the situation in South Sudan during an economic downturn, offering a specialized framework for analysing crises. For example, future scholars could use this framework to compare South Sudan with other oil-dependent nations like Nigeria or Angola, or examine how unequal access to information affects public confidence in different post-war settings.

To Public Finance Institutions: The results highlight gaps in financial supervision, oil revenue handling, and reporting processes, which can support improvements in public financial management. For example, organizations such as the Ministry of Finance or the National Audit Chamber could implement real-time tracking of spending, bolster their internal audit departments, or impose more rigorous rules for how oil revenue is distributed and reported.

To International Financial Institutions: The research offers practical guidance for organizations that provide development funding and work on governance improvements. For instance, entities like the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund might tie financial support to standards for fiscal transparency, assist in training programs for managing public finances, or sponsor efforts to monitor and prevent corruption related to oil revenue management.

Conceptual frame work

The conceptual frame showing how public officials’ leadership competencies, specifically accountability and transparency, influence public trust during the 2019–2026 economic crisis in South Sudan.



Source: adopted from Jensen & Meckling (1976) and adapted by researcher 2025

Applying the Principal-Agent Theory, this conceptual framework suggests that citizens (principals) delegate authority to public officials (agents), expecting them to act in the public's best interest. However, a fundamental information asymmetry and potential conflict of interest, the agency problem, can arise, as officials may be motivated by self-interest rather than the public good. The framework posits that public officials' competencies in accountability and transparency, directly influence public trust. By reducing the information gap, transparency enables citizens to effectively monitor officials, thereby strengthening accountability and increasing public trust.

Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review examines how public officials' leadership competencies particularly accountability and transparency affect public trust during South Sudan's 2019–2026 economic crisis. Drawing from peer-reviewed journals, textbooks, institutional reports, and policy documents, it analyzes these dynamics in fragile, oil-dependent contexts marked by revenue volatility and institutional weakness (Jensen & Meckling, 1976; World Bank, 2022).

The review anchors on Principal Agent Theory, where citizens (principals) delegate authority to officials (agents), facing information asymmetry and divergent interests that foster moral hazard and adverse selection (Jensen and Meckling, 1976). In nations, weak oversight amplifies these risks during crises, eroding trust. Recent studies (2019–2026) highlight accountability (e.g., resource justification, legal compliance) and transparency (e.g., open fiscal reporting) as key to rebuilding confidence, though reforms must yield tangible outcomes to avoid skepticism (OECD, 2024; IMF, 2024). This study addresses the gap in context-specific, mixed-methods research on South Sudan's crisis.

Theoretical Framework

Principal–Agent Theory explains delegation challenges, with asymmetry and conflicts undermining trust in fragile states (Jensen & Meckling, 1976). Institutional Theory adds that legitimacy stems from norm adherence like transparency and accountability; failures during crises delegitimize institutions (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Scott, 2014).

Empirical Review

Empirical evidence links leadership competencies to trust, moderated by implementation quality: These affirm the competencies-trust nexus but underscore South Sudan-specific gaps (Transparency International, 2024). These findings highlight a positive link between leadership competencies and trust but reveal a research gap on South Sudan's 2024–2025 crisis (Transparency International, 2024).

Methodology

This chapter explains the method used to look at how leadership traits, especially accountability and transparency, affect public trust during the 2019–2026 economic crisis in Juba, South Sudan. This research is based on Principle-Agent Theory (Jensen and Meckling, 1976), which studies the relationship between public officials (agents) who manage resources and citizens (principals) who expect fair and responsible leadership. In a setting marked by high inflation, unstable oil income, and weak institutions, honest and ethical leadership plays a key role in keeping people confident in the government and its systems (World Bank, 2025). Research Design and Approach, the research used a mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to get a more complete understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study first tested theoretical ideas linking accountability, transparency, and public trust using deductive reasoning. It also used inductive analysis to let

key themes arise naturally from what participants shared. This combination made the results more detailed and trustworthy. Population and Sample Size, the research aimed to include 100 people, including both public officials and citizens in Juba. Using the (Yamane, 1967Table (1970), a sample of 80 participants was chosen with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. Citizens were selected through simple random sampling, while officials were picked using purposive sampling (Patton, 2015). This made sure the sample was both fair and relevant to the study. Data Sources and Collection, the main data came from structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Additional data was gathered from academic papers, policy documents, government reports, and other publications about governance and public trust (e.g., Transparency International, 2024). Data

Analysis, Quantitative data was coded and analysed using SPSS (Version 27), which provided descriptive statistics like frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. Inferential tests, including Pearson correlation and regression (Field, 2018), were used to examine how accountability, transparency, and public trust are related. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis through systematic coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which helped uncover patterns that added depth to the quantitative findings. Ethical Consideration, the research followed ethical guidelines: participation was optional, people were given clear information about the study and agreed to take part, and their identities were kept private. Data was stored securely and all personal details were anonymized to protect participants and follow research standards (APA, 2020).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Statement	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	Total
Public officials provide clear and accurate financial information.	23	28.75	26	32.5	6	7.5	22	27.5	3	3.75	80	100.0
Officials are accountable for the use of public resources.	20	25	30	37.5	16	20	5	6.25	9	11.25	80	100.0
Government decisions are communicated transparently	28	35	32	40	6	7.5	10	12.5	4	5	80	100.0

Source: Primary Data, (2026)

The first statement looked at whether public officials provide clear and accurate financial information. The results showed that 28.75% (23 people) strongly agreed and 32.5% (26 people) agreed, meaning most people think officials give clear financial details. But 27.5% (22 people) disagreed and 3.75% (3 people) strongly disagreed. Also, 7.5% (6 people) said they weren't sure. This shows while many believe financial info is clear, a big part still has doubts about its reliability and accuracy. The weighted score of 176.25 shows a somewhat positive view of

financial transparency among officials. The second statement checked if officials are accountable for how public money is used. It found that 25% (20 people) strongly agreed and 37.5% (30 people) agreed that officials are responsible. However, 20% (16 people) were neutral, and 6.25% (5 people) disagreed while 11.25% (9 people) strongly disagreed. This suggests that even though most think accountability exists, some are unsure or skeptical. The overall weighted score of 168.75 shows a moderate level of trust in how public

resources are managed. The third statement focused on whether government decisions are communicated clearly. Results showed that 35% (28 people) strongly agreed and 40% (32 people) agreed that decisions are shared transparently. But 12.5% (10 people) disagreed and 5% (4 people) strongly disagreed, with 7.5% (6 people) being neutral. The weighted score of 175 shows most people believe government communication is fairly transparent, though some still worry about how open the decision-making process really is.

Overall, the results show that people generally have positive views about transparency, accountability, and communication in government. But there are still concerns about how consistent and reliable financial information is and how well accountability practices are working. These mixed feelings point to the need for better governance, especially in making public financial data more open and improving accountability systems in government.

Table 2. Leadership Competencies, Accountability and Transparency

Interpretation Level	F	%		%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	Total %
	SA (5)		A (4)		N (3)		D (2)		SD (1)			
Very High Competency	29	36.3	20	25.0	2	3	26	32.5	3	3.8	80	100.0
High Competency	20	25.0	30	37.5	16	20	5	6.3	9	11.3	80	100.0
Moderate Competency	30	37.5	30	37.5	4	5	12	15.0	4	5.0	80	100.0
Low Competency	29	36.3	33	41.3	7	9	11	13.8	5	6.3	80	100.0
Very Low Competency	30	37.5	34	42.5	8	10	12	15.0	6	7.5	80	100.0

Source: Primary Data, (2026)

Respondents were asked about their views on how well public officials show accountability and transparency. Their answers were on a five-point scale, from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, for different levels of leadership skills. The results show that in the Very High Competency group, 36.3% (29 people) strongly agreed that officials are accountable and transparent, while 25.0% (20 people) just agreed. On the other hand, 32.5% (26 people) disagreed and 3.8% (3 people) strongly disagreed. This means that although many recognize strong leadership, there’s still a noticeable group that doubts the level of accountability and transparency. In the High Competency category, most people had a positive view. 37.5% (30 people) agreed and 25.0% (20 people) strongly agreed that officials show good accountability and transparency. However, 20% (16 people) said they weren’t sure, and 6.3% (5 people) disagreed, with 11.3% (9 people) strongly disagreeing. This suggests that while many think officials have good skills, there are still concerns

about how consistent transparent practices are. For Moderate Competency, the responses were balanced. 37.5% (30 people) strongly agreed and 37.5% (30 people) agreed that officials show a moderate level of accountability and transparency. 15.0% (12 people) disagreed, and 5.0% (4 people) strongly disagreed, with 5% (4 people) neutral. This shows that people believe accountability is there but not consistently strong in all public institutions. In the Low Competency category, 41.3% (33 people) agreed and 36.3% (29 people) strongly agreed that officials show low competency in accountability and transparency. 13.8% (11 people) disagreed, and 6.3% (5 people) strongly disagreed. This means that a big part of the group thinks there are problems with transparency and accountability. In the Very Low Competency group, 42.5% (34 people) agreed and 37.5% (30 people) strongly agreed that officials show very low competency in accountability and transparency. Only 15.0% (12 people) disagreed and 7.5% (6 people) strongly

disagreed. This shows that a large group is concerned about the lack of transparency and accountability in public leadership. Overall, the responses show mixed feelings about the leadership qualities of public officials. While some believe in high levels of accountability and transparency, a large portion sees low or very low

competency, pointing to ongoing issues in governance. These findings suggest that improving accountability, increasing transparency, and building better leadership skills in public administration are needed to build more trust and effective governance.

Table 3. Leadership Competency Statement

	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	Total %
Interpretation Level	SA (5)		A (4)		N (3)		D (2)		SD (1)			
Public officials clearly explain how public funds are allocated and spent.	29	36.3	20	25.0	2	3	26	32.5	3	3.8	80	100.0
Officials accept responsibility for policy failures during the economic crisis.	20	25.0	30	37.5	16	20	5	6.3	9	11.3	80	100.0
Government financial reports are accessible to the public.	30	37.5	30	37.5	4	5	12	15.0	4	5.0	80	100.0
Anti-corruption mechanisms are effectively implemented by leaders.	29	36.3	33	41.3	7	9	11	13.8	5	6.3	80	100.0
Leaders provide timely updates regarding economic challenges.	30	37.5	34	42.5	8	10	12	15.0	6	7.5	80	100.0
Decision-making processes are transparent and participatory.	29	36.3	37	46.3	6	8	15	18.8	7	8.8	80	100.0
Public complaints are handled fairly and efficiently.	38	47.5	30	37.5	10	13	14	17.5	8	10.0	80	100.0
Leaders demonstrate integrity in managing national resources.	30	37.5	40	50.0	11	14	15	18.8	9	11.3	80	100.0
There is clear disclosure of oil revenue and public expenditure data.	32	40.0	38	47.5	12	17	16	20.0	8	10.0	80	100.0
Officials communicate honestly about economic risks and policy trade-offs.	35	43.8	39	48.8	13	16	15	18.8	13	16.3	80	100.0

Source: Primary Data, (2026)

Table 3 shows what people think about how well public officials showed leadership during the economic crisis. The survey looked closely at things like transparency, taking responsibility, and how well officials communicate. People answered using a five-point scale, from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree," and 80 people took part in the survey.

The results show that most people believe public officials explain how public money is spent. About 36.3% strongly agreed and 25% agreed, which means 61.3% think the explanations are good enough. But 32.5% disagreed and 3.8% strongly disagreed, so a big group still has concerns about how transparent officials are with financial matters. When it comes to taking responsibility for policy failures during the crisis, 25% strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed, making 62.5% think officials take responsibility. On the other hand, 6.3% disagreed and 11.3% strongly disagreed, showing that some people are still unsure about the level of accountability.

People had positive views about financial transparency. For the statement that government reports are available to the public, 37.5% strongly agreed and another 37.5% agreed, which adds up to 75% who think the information is accessible. However, 15% disagreed and 5% strongly disagreed, showing that some people still find it hard to get this information.

Most people also believe that leaders are doing a good job with anti-corruption efforts. 36.3% strongly agreed and 41.3% agreed, which means 77.6% think these measures are being implemented. Still, 13.8% disagreed and 6.3% strongly disagreed, showing that a small group has concerns. Leaders are generally seen as keeping people informed about economic issues. 37.5% strongly agreed and 42.5% agreed, meaning 80% think updates are timely. However, 15% disagreed and 7.5% strongly disagreed, suggesting that some feel updates are delayed or not detailed enough.

Transparency in decision-making was also seen as positive. 36.3% strongly agreed and 46.3%

agreed, which totals 82.6% who think decisions are transparent and involve the public. Still, 18.8% disagreed and 8.8% strongly disagreed, showing that some are unsure about how inclusive the process. When it comes to handling public complaints, 47.5% strongly agreed and 37.5% agreed, meaning 85% think complaints are handled well. But 17.5% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed, indicating that some people are not satisfied with how things are handled.

Public officials are generally seen as honest and ethical in managing national resources. 37.5% strongly agreed and 50% agreed, which means 87.5% think leaders show integrity. However, 18.8% disagreed and 11.3% strongly disagreed, showing that some still have concerns about honesty. Transparency in the management of natural resources, like oil revenue, was also studied. 40% strongly agreed and 47.5% agreed, adding up to 87.5% who think the information is clear. Still, 20% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed, indicating that some people question the accuracy of the information.

Finally, the study looked at how officials communicate about economic risks. 43.8% strongly agreed and 48.8% agreed, meaning over 90% think officials are honest about risks and trade-offs. But 18.8% disagreed and 16.3% strongly disagreed, showing that some still doubt the transparency of government communication. These findings are supported by previous studies. Scholars have shown that transparency and accountability are key in effective leadership, especially during crises. Peter G. Northouse (2019) says that strong leaders need to be clear, responsible, and ethical, which helps maintain public trust. Bernard M. Bass and Ronald E. Riggio (2006) believe that transformational leaders are transparent, ethical, and focused on the public good, which builds trust and improves performance. In public administration, these traits are important for accountability and better service.

Transparency International (2022) says that clear financial reporting and strong anti-corruption efforts are essential for good governance, which

increases public confidence and reduces the misuse of public funds. Donald F. Kettl (2015) explains that during economic crises, governments need to be open and involve citizens more in decision-making. When people are included, they are more likely to accept and support policies. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2021) highlights that accountability, financial openness, and

responding to public concerns are key to improving governance and better public sector performance. Overall, people think public officials show a good level of leadership in transparency, accountability, and communication. However, there are areas that need improvement, especially in making sure everyone is involved and that all financial and economic information is shared consistently.

Table 4. Public Trust Indicators During the 2024–2025 Economic Crisis

	F	%		%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	Total %
Interpretation Level	SA (5)	A (4)	N (3)	D (2)	SD (1)		D (2)		SD (1)			Total %
I trust public officials to manage national resources responsibly.	21	26.3	20	25.0	2	3	26	32.5	3	3.8	80	100.0
Government communications about the economic crisis are accurate and transparent.	30	37.5	20	25.0	10	13	11	13.8	9	11.3	80	100.0
Officials act in the public interest rather than for personal gain.	27	33.8	33	41.3	4	5	12	15.0	4	5.0	80	100.0
I feel confident that salaries, pensions, and essential services are prioritized.	32	40.0	30	37.5	7	9	11	13.8	5	6.3	80	100.0
Anti-corruption measures have increased my trust in government institutions.	28	35.0	36	45.0	8	10	12	15.0	6	7.5	80	100.0
I believe government responses to economic shocks are timely and effective.	38	47.5	30	37.5	4	5	17	21.3	7	8.8	80	100.0
Citizens have opportunities to provide feedback on government decisions.	38	47.5	30	37.5	10	13	14	17.5	8	10.0	80	100.0
I feel safe expressing opinions about government actions without fear of reprisal.	30	37.5	40	50.0	11	14	15	18.8	9	11.3	80	100.0
I believe public funds are allocated fairly across sectors and communities.	32	40.0	40	50.0	10	17	16	20.0	8	10.0	80	100.0
Overall, I have confidence in the leadership during the economic crisis.	39	48.8	35	43.8	13	16	15	18.8	13	16.3	80	100.0

Source: Primary Data (2026)

Table 4 shows what people think about how much they trust government institutions and officials during the 2019–2026 economic crisis. The survey used a five-point scale from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree, and 80 people took part. The results show different levels of trust in government leaders and what they do during the economic downturn. When asked if they trust officials to manage national resources properly, 26.3% strongly agreed, and 25.0% agreed. That means just over half feel confident that resources are being handled responsibly. However, 32.5% disagreed, and 3.8% strongly disagreed, showing that many people are still unsure about whether officials are accountable in managing resources. A similar pattern is seen when people are asked if government messages about the economic crisis are accurate and clear. 37.5% strongly agreed, and 25.0% agreed, showing a moderate level of confidence. Still, 13.8% disagreed, and 11.3% strongly disagreed, meaning some people doubt the transparency and reliability of the information shared during the crisis. There is relatively more trust in the ethical behavior of officials. When asked if officials act in the public interest instead of for their own gain, 33.8% strongly agreed, and 41.3% agreed. This means about 75.1% of people have a positive view of officials acting in the public's best interest. On the other hand, 15.0% disagreed, and 5.0% strongly disagreed, showing lower levels of distrust in this area. Most people also feel that the government is focused on important services like salaries, pensions, and basic needs. 40.0% strongly agreed, and 37.5% agreed, meaning 77.5% believe the government prioritizes these services. However, 13.8% disagreed, and 6.3% strongly disagreed, meaning some people are not satisfied with how these areas are being handled. People had a largely positive view of anti-corruption efforts. About 35.0% strongly agreed, and 45.0% agreed that these efforts have increased their trust in government institutions. With 80.0% giving positive responses, it seems that such initiatives help build more confidence in the government.

There is strong approval of the government's response to economic challenges. 47.5% strongly agreed, and 37.5% agreed that the government's

actions during economic shocks are timely and effective. That means 85.0% of people think the government's responses are good. Still, 21.3% disagreed, and 8.8% strongly disagreed, showing that some people feel the government is slow or not effective enough.

Public involvement in decision-making was another topic. When asked if people have opportunities to provide feedback, 47.5% strongly agreed, and 37.5% agreed. This means most people believe they can share their views, although 17.5% disagreed and 10.0% strongly disagreed, suggesting that there is room for improvement in how people are involved in governance.

Another question asked if people feel safe expressing opinions without fear of being punished.

37.5% strongly agreed, and 50.0% agreed, meaning most feel it's safe to share their views. However, 18.8% disagreed, and 11.3% strongly disagreed, showing that some still worry about risks in expressing their opinions openly. When it comes to the fairness of public resource distribution, 40.0% strongly agreed, and 50.0% agreed that public funds are spread fairly across different sectors and communities. This means 90.0% of people feel public resources are distributed fairly. However, 20.0% disagreed, and 10.0% strongly disagreed, suggesting some still worry about whether resources are being handled fairly.

Finally, when asked about overall confidence in leadership during the economic crisis, 48.8% strongly agreed, and 43.8% agreed, meaning more than 90% of people have a positive view.

However, 18.8% disagreed, and 16.3% strongly disagreed, showing that a small group still has concerns about how well leaders are doing. Overall, most people have a positive view of government leadership, transparency, and how well the government is responding to the crisis. But there are still concerns about accountability, transparency, and fair resource distribution. These

findings suggest that while public trust in government is strong, more work is needed to improve governance, increase transparency, and involve the public more in decision-making.

Recommendations

Based on the study's findings about leadership, transparency, accountability, and public trust during the 2019–2026 economic crisis, here are some suggestions to make governance stronger and boost public confidence:

Make Public Institutions More Transparent:

Government agencies should focus on being open and clear. They should share detailed and up-to-date information about how public money is spent and how national resources are used. This includes making financial reports easy to understand for everyone. When government actions are open, people can watch what's happening, there's less chance of misuse, and trust in public institutions grows. Also, being clear about economic plans and spending priorities helps avoid false information and rumors during tough times.

Build Stronger Accountability Systems:

Public officials need to be responsible for their decisions and how they handle public money. This can be done by setting up strong internal checks, independent watchdog groups, and regular monitoring systems. These help catch and fix any problems quickly. Accountability can also be supported by regular performance checks, audits, and clear rules about what happens if someone breaks the rules. These steps stop bad behavior and show people that officials are acting with responsibility, which builds trust in the system.

Communicate Better During Economic Crises:

Leaders should speak openly with the public when the economy is struggling. They should share regular updates on financial policies, challenges, and risks through various channels like media briefings, official websites, and social media. Clear communication stops the spread of false news, reduces anxiety, and gives people

accurate info to make smart choices. It also shows leaders are open and responsive, which is important for keeping public trust during hard times.

Train Leaders Effectively: Good leadership is key to dealing with complicated economic and governance issues. Officials should get training in areas like making smart decisions, leading ethically, managing crises, and being accountable. This can include workshops, mentorship, and practice exercises. Better training helps leaders manage economic problems, work well with public services, and make decisions that people can trust.

Encourage People to Participate in Governance:

Having citizens involved in decision-making is important for a fair and responsive government. Officials should create chances for the public to take part, like town hall meetings, community discussions, and feedback systems. When people are involved, it makes the process more open, ensures policies meet public needs, and makes officials more responsible. More participation also helps connect government actions with public expectations, building mutual trust.

Fight Corruption More Seriously:

Corruption damages trust in public institutions and weakens governance. Governments should pass tougher anti-corruption laws, enforce them well, and protect people who report wrongdoing. Regular audits, independent investigations, and strict punishments for corrupt behavior are necessary to stop misuse of public funds. Showing a strong stance against corruption signals to citizens that integrity is a top priority, which helps build trust and respect.

Use Technology to Improve Transparency and Accountability:

Digital tools and online government services can make transparency and accountability easier. Governments can use websites to share financial reports, track service delivery, and collect public feedback. Technology reduces the chance of incorrect information, gives real-time data access, and allows people to

monitor government work better. Digital solutions can also make administrative tasks faster, reduce delays, and improve how people feel about government services.

Plan Better for Economic Crises: The study found that economic crises create more challenges and reduce public trust. Governments should create detailed plans to handle financial shocks, resource problems, and other crises. Having these plans helps leaders respond better, keep public services running, and show they are capable, which boosts public confidence. Following these recommendations will help improve governance by making things more transparent, responsible, and citizen-focused. Especially during tough economic times, like oil export issues, currency problems, and high inflation, these steps are vital. By taking these actions, public institutions can build a stronger, more trusted system that manages the country's resources and development goals more effectively.

Conclusion

This study looked into how the public views leadership qualities, transparency, accountability, and trust in government during the 2019–2025 economic crisis. The Author surveyed 80 people using a five-point scale and found that, on the whole, the public has a positive view of government transparency and accountability. Many of the respondents said that officials clearly explain how public money is used, communicate about economic challenges, and take steps to prevent corruption. A large number also said that government financial reports are easy to access and that leaders clearly share information about economic risks and policy choices.

These results match what Northouse (2019) said about leadership. He believed that good leadership depends on being open, taking responsibility, and communicating clearly, especially when public trust is low. When leaders explain their decisions and provide information

on how public resources are managed, they can keep people's confidence and build trust in the

government. However, the study also found some worries about how consistent and reliable government actions are. Respondents were unsure about financial disclosures, holding people accountable for mistakes, and how clearly resources are managed. Opinions on leadership skills were split: some thought leaders were very capable, while others felt that transparency and accountability still need work. These views line up with Kettl (2015), who said that governments during economic crises must improve transparency and accountability to keep their legitimacy and public confidence.

Trust in the government during the crisis was generally moderate to high, especially when it came to being responsive, focusing on key services, and fighting corruption. This supports the ideas of Bass and Riggio (2006), who said that ethical, responsible, and people-centered leadership is important for building trust and making government work better.

The findings also agree with the recommendations from Transparency International (2022) and the OECD (2021), which stress the importance of clear financial reporting, strong anti-corruption efforts, and leadership that responds well to the public. Even so, some people still worry about fair resource distribution, financial transparency, and how the government communicates during tough economic times. These are areas that need improvement. Overall, the study shows that public officials have a moderate level of leadership effectiveness and government capability. But to build stronger public trust and improve governance, especially during economic crises, it's important to enhance accountability, improve transparency in financial management, and involve citizens more in the process.

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