

# The Role of Political and Servant Leadership on Public Transparency and Trust

Public Transparency  
and Trust through  
Leadership

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## ABSTRACT

Transparency and public trust have become essential pillars for strengthening governmental legitimacy, particularly in democratic systems facing rising complexity and declining citizen confidence. This study aims to examine how the integration of political leadership and servant leadership can enhance institutional transparency and reinforce public trust. Using a qualitative literature study, the research analyzes scholarly articles, policy reports, and empirical studies published within the last decade. Data were collected through document analysis and evaluated using qualitative content analysis to identify thematic patterns related to leadership, transparency, and trust-building mechanisms. The findings indicate that servant leadership contributes significantly to ethical governance, open communication, and participatory decision-making, thereby promoting a transparency-oriented organizational culture. Meanwhile, political leadership provides the structural authority and policy direction necessary to institutionalize transparency through formal mechanisms such as open-government initiatives and public accountability systems. The integration of these two leadership approaches produces a synergistic effect: ethical values embedded in servant leadership are strengthened by the institutional power of political leadership, resulting in more consistent transparency practices and stronger public trust. This study offers strategic implications for public-sector leaders seeking to improve institutional legitimacy, accountability, and citizen engagement.

**Keywords:** Good Governance, Political Leadership, Public Sector, Public Trust, Servant Leadership.

## INTRODUCTION

In modern democratic systems, governmental legitimacy is closely tied to the level of public trust in state institutions and political leaders (OECD, 2025). In Indonesia, a national survey by GoodStats in 2025 shows that while most citizens express moderate trust in state institutions, fewer than 25% report having a very high level of trust, indicating that public confidence remains fragile and not yet deeply rooted (Christi, 2025). This condition is strongly associated with transparency, defined as openness in policy, budgeting, and decision-making processes, which is widely recognized as a core pillar of accountability and public legitimacy (Ibrahim et al., 2024). The persistence of transparency problems is reflected in Indonesia's Corruption Perception Index in 2024, which scored only 37 out of 100 and ranked 99th out of 180 countries, signaling enduring

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perceptions of weak governance and limited openness. In line with Siahay (2023), insufficient transparency fosters public perceptions that elite interests prevail over public interests, thereby eroding confidence in government performance. These empirical conditions underscore the critical importance of strengthening transparency as a strategic foundation for rebuilding and sustaining public trust in Indonesian state institutions.

However, transparency alone is insufficient without leadership practices that genuinely embody the values of openness, accountability, and public service (Mozumder, 2022). Leadership determines how transparency norms are implemented, communicated, and internalized within governmental institutions (Jonck, 2024). When leaders demonstrate integrity, ethical conduct, and genuine commitment to serving citizens, transparency becomes more than a procedural requirement, it transforms into an organizational culture that fosters trust (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Siahay, 2024). Conversely, weak leadership commitment often results in transparency being applied inconsistently, thereby undermining public confidence.

Amid global uncertainty, including economic instability and public health crises, public trust in government has become increasingly fragile (Ji et al., 2024). Recent findings demonstrate that political trust plays a significant role in determining the effectiveness of crisis response, particularly in large-scale events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Governments with higher public trust achieve greater policy compliance and smoother governance processes, underscoring that transparency and trust are essential not only for democratic ideals but also for practical crisis management (OECD, 2025). Thus, understanding leadership approaches that can reinforce transparency and trust is increasingly crucial.

Although the literature on good governance is extensive, gaps persist in explaining how specific leadership styles, particularly political leadership and servant leadership, shape public trust through transparency and accountability mechanisms (Ibrahim et al., 2023; Siahay, 2024). Governance studies often highlight structural and institutional dimensions but pay less attention to behavioral and relational leadership factors that influence public perceptions (Buchori et al., 2023). Therefore, integrating leadership theory with transparency and trust literature is needed to address this theoretical gap (Satia, 2023).

The urgency of this study is especially prominent in countries such as Indonesia and other developing democracies, where issues like corruption, bureaucratic opacity, and limited public participation remain major governance challenges (Putri et al., 2025). Strengthening leadership approaches that emphasize transparency, accountability, and service orientation is essential for improving governmental legitimacy and public service effectiveness (Satia, 2023; Jonck, 2024). Accordingly, research that examines how political leadership and servant leadership can enhance transparency and rebuild public trust is urgently needed (Siahay, 2024).

Previous studies highlight the positive contribution of servant leadership to employee performance, organizational commitment, and service quality in public-sector institutions (Buchori et al., 2023; Usman et al., 2024). Research in the healthcare sector shows that servant leadership enhances trust in leaders and organizational performance through psychological empowerment (McCann et al., 2014). These findings demonstrate that servant leadership creates relational conditions conducive to trust-building and improved service delivery (de Waal & Sivro, 2012). However, few studies explore how servant leadership interacts with political leadership in shaping transparency and public trust, indicating a need for further investigation.

Although previous studies have examined transparency and trust as well as leadership styles separately, empirical evidence on how political leadership and servant leadership jointly shape transparency and public trust, particularly in the context of developing democracies such as Indonesia, remains limited. Given the persistently moderate level of public trust and ongoing governance challenges, this gap highlights the urgency of identifying leadership approaches that can effectively institutionalize transparency and rebuild public confidence. Based on the above background, this study aims to analyze

how the integration of political leadership and servant leadership can strengthen institutional transparency, examine the impact of these combined leadership approaches on public trust, and provide practical recommendations for public-sector leaders to improve accountability, transparency, and legitimacy.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Political and Servant Leadership**

Political leadership refers to a leadership style centered on policymaking, conflict management in the public sphere, and the ability to mobilize institutional and political support for collective goals. Political leaders navigate complex public arenas involving party actors, media, and public opinion, requiring strong communication and negotiation skills. Recent political science research highlights the significance of leader characteristics such as integrity, vision, and rhetorical competence, as well as institutional capacity, in shaping effective political leadership (Pohan et al., 2024).

Servant leadership, by contrast, emphasizes placing followers' needs above the leader's self-interest, prioritizing empathy, ethical conduct, community development, and service orientation. Contemporary empirical studies report that servant leadership contributes to improved employee well-being, organizational commitment, and job satisfaction, particularly in public and educational institutions (Buchori et al., 2023). Additional recent scholarship also shows that servant leadership supports ethical climates and organizational adaptability, making it increasingly relevant in dynamic work environments (Haidarravy & Ismail, 2023).

Although distinct in nature, political leadership and servant leadership can complement each other in governance contexts. A political leader may combine political competencies, such as policy decision-making and strategic negotiation, with servant-leadership principles that enhance accountability, empathy, and public trust. Scholars argue that hybrid leadership models integrating both political acumen and servant-oriented values can strengthen governmental legitimacy and improve institutional performance (Kwaka & Mumbo, 2011).

### **Public Transparency**

Public transparency refers to the principle of openness in which government institutions provide access to information that enables citizens to understand, monitor, and evaluate public decision-making processes (Hood & Heald, 2006). However, transparency does not automatically lead to higher public trust. Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2014) demonstrate that the effect of information disclosure on citizens' trust depends largely on how the information is communicated and perceived. Open access to data that is poorly framed or difficult to interpret may create misunderstanding and even skepticism. Therefore, transparency should not be viewed merely as the availability of information, but also as an effective communication process that allows citizens to meaningfully interpret governmental actions and intentions.

Information technology further strengthens the implementation of open government by expanding data accessibility and encouraging public participation through e-government platforms (Bertot et al., 2010). In this sense, transparency becomes interactive, facilitating not only information provision but also collaboration between government and society. Eaosinsup and Kulachai (2025) find that transparency enhances trust by promoting accountability and reducing perceptions of corruption; however, excessive transparency without proper communication may lead to confusion and diminished trust. Political stability can reinforce institutional confidence through consistent governance, yet it must be balanced with adaptability. Strong political leadership is therefore essential, particularly in contexts characterized by organizational and cultural resistance. Szabo et al. (2016) argue that political, organizational, and cultural barriers are often more difficult to overcome than technological challenges, highlighting the importance of strategic leadership in ensuring that transparency initiatives are effectively implemented and trusted by the public.

## **Public Trust**

Public trust constitutes a fundamental source of governmental legitimacy, as citizens' acceptance of authority is shaped not only by policy outcomes but also by perceptions of moral conduct and transparency. Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) argue that high levels of trust and satisfaction do not always equate to "good governance," indicating that legitimacy is socially constructed through broader evaluations of integrity, openness, and accountability. Yang and Holzer (2006) further explain that public trust emerges when governments demonstrate competence, integrity, and transparency in delivering public services. However, the relationship between transparency and trust is complex. Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2014) show that perceptions of competence tend to change mainly among citizens who already possess high trust but limited knowledge, while perceptions of benevolence are more likely to shift among those with low knowledge and low trust. This suggests that trust formation is mediated by both cognitive understanding and prior attitudes toward government (Adriansyah et al., 2025; Nursanto et al., 2025).

Leadership quality also plays a critical role in strengthening public trust. Amoah and Dzordzormenyoh (2025) find that leader performance, satisfaction with democratic processes, perceptions of corruption, and general social trust significantly influence citizens' confidence in government. From a behavioral perspective, leaders who are appreciated by followers, build collaborative teams, and consistently uphold servant leadership values are more likely to foster trust and commitment (Saleha & Hina, 2023). Servant leaders, by guiding, empowering, and supporting others, model honesty and integrity within organizations, thereby reinforcing ethical climates and credibility (Nastiezaie et al., 2016). These studies indicate that public trust is shaped by an interaction between institutional transparency, perceived leadership competence, and ethical, service-oriented behavior.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative research design using a literature study approach. A literature study allows researchers to systematically collect, evaluate, and synthesize theoretical concepts, empirical findings, and academic debates related to political leadership, servant leadership, transparency, and public trust. This approach is appropriate because the research aims to deepen conceptual understanding rather than measure variables empirically. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative literature studies enable researchers to interpret meaning from textual sources and construct analytical insights grounded in existing knowledge.

The data in this research derive from secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, policy reports, and credible institutional publications relevant to leadership, transparency, and governance. The primary criteria for source selection include publication within the last five to ten years, relevance to political leadership or servant leadership, relevance to transparency and public trust, and publication in reputable academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, or Google Scholar. The use of secondary data is aligned with the guidelines suggested by Snyder (2019), who emphasizes that literature-based research should rely on systematically curated sources to ensure depth and credibility.

Data were collected using a documentary analysis technique, which involves identifying, selecting, reviewing, and extracting key information from academic documents. The researcher used keyword combinations such as political leadership, servant leadership, public trust, government transparency, and public administration ethics. The data collection process followed the steps proposed by Bowen (2009) are locating relevant documents, selecting documents based on inclusion criteria, reviewing and highlighting significant content, and organizing extracted information into thematic categories.

The research applies qualitative content analysis, which allows the researcher to interpret textual data through systematic categorization and thematic coding. The analysis followed the stages outlined by Erlingsson and Brysiewicz (2017) are reading and

familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, grouping codes into themes, interpreting the themes, and synthesizing findings into a coherent narrative. This method is suitable for identifying conceptual patterns and relationships between political leadership, servant leadership, transparency, and public trust. The analysis also includes comparative and integrative synthesis to connect theories and findings across different studies.

## **RESULTS**

### **Political and Servant Leadership in Strengthening Institutional Transparency**

The integration of political leadership and servant leadership creates a powerful synergy that reinforces institutional transparency within the public sector. Political leadership, with its strategic and policy-oriented nature, provides the authority and structure needed to institutionalize transparency, while servant leadership contributes the ethical and human-centered values essential for sustaining openness and trust (Hartley & Benington, 2011). Together, these approaches balance the pragmatism of governance with the moral responsibility of serving the public interest.

Servant leadership has a greater impact on institutional transparency than political leadership. This indicates that while political leaders provide structure and authority, servant leaders foster openness and ethical accountability, making their integration essential for stronger institutional transparency. Servant leadership emphasizes moral integrity, empathy, and community orientation, all of which are central to transparent and accountable governance. Canavesi and Minelli (2022) highlight that servant leadership aligns naturally with the mission of public service because it prioritizes the well-being of citizens and ethical decision-making over personal or political gain. This alignment fosters a culture of openness and mutual respect, enabling institutions to act as facilitators of public dialogue rather than mere executors of policy.

Within organizational settings, servant leadership encourages open communication, participatory decision-making, and empowerment of both employees and stakeholders (Syafaruddin, 2024). These practices contribute to an environment where information flows freely and decisions are made collaboratively, which in turn strengthens internal accountability and external transparency. By empowering subordinates and involving them in policy implementation, servant leaders help dismantle hierarchical barriers that often obstruct openness and responsiveness.

Empirical evidence supports this connection between leadership style and transparency outcomes. In a study of local governments, servant leadership was found to significantly enhance public trust and service quality by fostering ethical conduct and responsiveness among officials (Pasolong et al., 2025). This evidence reinforces the idea that servant leadership does not merely influence internal morale but also shapes the public's perception of governmental integrity and legitimacy.

Political leadership, on the other hand, introduces the necessary structural and institutional mechanisms that transform the values of servant leadership into sustainable governance practices. Leaders with political authority can enact open-government policies, create transparent data systems, and institutionalize mechanisms for citizen participation (Syafaruddin, 2024). Through these actions, transparency becomes more than a personal virtue, it becomes an institutional norm embedded in governance processes. Ultimately, the integration of political and servant leadership allows for a governance model that is both ethically grounded and strategically effective. While servant leadership embeds the moral and relational aspects of transparency, political leadership ensures these values are codified into policies and structures. As such, the partnership between these leadership styles represents a comprehensive approach to strengthening institutional transparency and restoring public confidence in government.

### **The Impact of Political and Servant Leadership on Public Trust**

The integration of political and servant leadership plays a crucial role in strengthening public trust by balancing authority with ethical service orientation. Servant leadership,

rooted in empathy, humility, and community commitment, nurtures the perception of integrity and moral governance, which are essential for fostering trust between citizens and public institutions. According to Canavesi and Minelli (2021), servant leadership aligns naturally with the mission of public service because it prioritizes ethical values and citizen well-being over political or personal ambition. This value-driven approach cultivates transparency and moral accountability, allowing the public to perceive leaders as trustworthy stewards rather than self-interested actors.

The integrated leadership approach, combining political and servant leadership, achieves the highest level of public trust compared to either style alone. Servant leadership demonstrates a strong positive influence due to its ethical and people-centered values, while political leadership shows a moderate impact, reflecting its focus on structure and authority (Haidarravy & Ismail, 2023). This suggests that when moral integrity and participatory values from servant leadership are reinforced by the institutional mechanisms of political leadership, the result is greater transparency, accountability, and ultimately, stronger public trust.

Empirical research consistently demonstrates that servant leadership positively influences both internal organizational trust and external public confidence. For instance, a quantitative study conducted in local governments found that servant leadership significantly improved public trust and service quality by fostering ethical conduct, responsiveness, and empathy among public officials (Pasolong et al., 2025). Similarly, research in China's public sector revealed that servant leadership enhances employees' trust in their leaders, which in turn reinforces their organizational commitment and improves the institution's reputation for reliability (Liden et al., 2014). This internal trust subsequently translates into public confidence, as citizens experience consistent, transparent, and respectful service delivery.

Political leadership complements this dynamic by providing the institutional legitimacy and structural mechanisms needed to sustain trust at the systemic level. Leaders who possess political authority can institutionalize open-government policies, improve information transparency, and establish participatory governance frameworks that reflect servant leadership values in practice (Syafaruddin, 2024). When ethical intent is reinforced by structural accountability, public trust grows more resilient because citizens can observe both integrity in leadership behavior and institutional transparency in governance.

Real-world cases support this relationship between leadership style and trust formation. In a study of public hospitals in Pakistan, servant leadership was shown to significantly increase employees' trust in leadership and organizational performance, demonstrating that ethical and service-oriented leadership behavior translates into higher institutional credibility (Saleem et al., 2022). Similarly, evidence from local governments in Ethiopia found that transparency, accountability, and responsiveness, principles that resonate with servant leadership, were key predictors of public trust in government institutions (Beshi & Kaur, 2020). These findings highlight that the combination of servant leadership's ethical foundation and political leadership's structural influence can create a sustainable environment of transparency and trust within the public sector. Integrating political and servant leadership not only strengthens the moral legitimacy of leaders but also institutionalizes trust-building mechanisms. While servant leadership builds the ethical and relational dimensions of trust, political leadership ensures that these values are embedded within formal governance structures. Together, they offer a balanced and holistic framework for cultivating public confidence and ensuring government legitimacy.

### **Practical Recommendations for Public-Sector Leaders**

Based on the analysis, several strategic directions can be proposed to guide public-sector leaders in strengthening accountability, transparency, and institutional legitimacy. First, it is essential to foster a service-oriented organizational culture by embedding values of empathy, public responsibility, and transparent performance into everyday

administrative practices (Rojak, 2025). This can be achieved through value-based leadership development programs that emphasize the principles of servant leadership, enabling civil servants to internalize ethical standards, enhance responsiveness, and place public interest above personal or political considerations.

Second, transparency needs to be institutionalized through the systematic use of digital technologies (Pavel & Nikita, 2025). The development of e-government platforms and open data portals can significantly expand citizens' access to information, allowing them to monitor decision-making processes, policy implementation, and budget utilization in real time. Such mechanisms not only encourage active public participation but also reduce opportunities for corruption and strengthen institutional accountability by making government actions more visible and traceable.

Third, political authority should be strategically combined with ethical service values in the formulation and implementation of public policies. Public leaders are encouraged to use their political influence to promote inclusive and participatory policymaking while consistently demonstrating integrity and a commitment to serving the public (Abels, 2007; Michels & De Graaf, 2010). This entails fostering dialogue-based governance, preventing conflicts of interest, and creating channels through which citizens can provide feedback and take part in policy evaluation. Through this balanced integration of political strategy and servant-oriented ethics, public institutions can enhance their credibility and reinforce public trust in governance processes. The integration of political and servant leadership has proven effective in strengthening institutional transparency and rebuilding public trust in government. This combined approach fosters a form of governance that is more open, ethical, and responsive to citizens' needs, ultimately enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of public institutions over the long term.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study demonstrate that the integration of political leadership and servant leadership plays a decisive role in strengthening institutional transparency and public trust. This result is consistent with the literature that views political leadership as a source of structural authority and strategic direction, while servant leadership provides the ethical and relational foundation necessary for sustaining openness and accountability. As emphasized by Pohan et al. (2024), political leaders possess the capacity to mobilize institutional support, manage policy processes, and navigate complex public arenas. These competencies enable leaders to formalize transparency through regulations, information systems, and participatory mechanisms. However, as shown in the results, political leadership alone exerts a more moderate influence compared to servant leadership, indicating that formal authority must be complemented by moral credibility and service orientation (Ahmad & Islam, 2024)

The stronger contribution of servant leadership to transparency aligns with the argument of Buchori et al. (2023) and Haidarravy and Ismail (2023), who underline the role of empathy, integrity, and ethical conduct in creating open and adaptive organizational climates. Servant leadership encourages participatory decision-making, empowerment, and open communication, which are crucial for transforming transparency from a procedural requirement into a lived organizational culture. This supports Hood and Heald's (2006) conception of transparency as more than information disclosure; it is a process that allows citizens to understand and evaluate public decision-making. The results further resonate with Grimmelikhuijsen and Meijer (2014), who contend that transparency only builds trust when information is communicated in ways that are meaningful and credible. Servant leaders, through their relational and communicative orientation, are better positioned to frame information, foster dialogue, and reduce misinterpretation, thereby enhancing the perceived sincerity of openness.

The discussion of public trust in the results also reflects the complex interaction between leadership, transparency, and legitimacy highlighted in the literature. Bouckaert and Van de Walle (2003) argue that trust is not merely an outcome of good performance but is socially constructed through perceptions of integrity and accountability. The

empirical evidence in this study, showing that integrated leadership yields the highest level of public trust, reinforces Yang and Holzer's (2006) assertion that competence, integrity, and transparency must coexist to generate confidence in public institutions. Servant leadership contributes directly to perceptions of benevolence and moral conduct, while political leadership enhances perceptions of competence and institutional reliability through policy coherence and stability.

Moreover, the results are consistent with the findings of Amoah and Dzordzormenyoh (2025), who identify leader performance, corruption control, and satisfaction with democratic processes as key predictors of trust. By embedding servant leadership values within politically legitimate structures, leaders can address both ethical and performance-based expectations. This integration also reflects the hybrid leadership perspective proposed by Kwaka and Mumbo (2011), which argues that combining political acumen with servant-oriented values strengthens governmental legitimacy and institutional performance. The presence of servant leadership behaviors such as empowerment, appreciation, and team collaboration, as discussed by Saleha and Hina (2023), further supports the development of trust by reinforcing internal commitment and external credibility.

Finally, the findings correspond with Eaosinsup and Kulachai's (2025) conclusion that transparency enhances trust through accountability and reduced perceptions of corruption, but only when accompanied by effective communication and adaptive leadership. Strong political leadership is required to overcome organizational and cultural resistance, as noted by Szabo et al. (2016), yet servant leadership ensures that transparency initiatives are implemented in an inclusive and ethical manner. Together, these leadership styles create a governance environment in which openness is institutionalized, information is meaningfully communicated, and public trust is reinforced through both structural accountability and moral stewardship.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that integrating political and servant leadership provides a comprehensive foundation for strengthening institutional transparency and rebuilding public trust. While political leadership establishes the structural mechanisms for openness, such as policy frameworks, regulatory instruments, and participation channels, servant leadership embeds ethical behavior, empathy, and citizen-centered values into organizational culture. The synergy of these leadership styles produces more consistent transparency practices, fosters responsive governance, and enhances the legitimacy of public institutions.

Public-sector leaders should cultivate a service-oriented culture grounded in empathy, ethical conduct, and responsible decision-making. Governments must institutionalize transparency mechanisms through digital governance tools, open data platforms, and participatory policy forums. Political leaders should use their authority to support transparency initiatives while adopting servant-leadership values to ensure that implementation remains citizen-focused, accountable, and inclusive.

Future studies should incorporate empirical methods such as interviews, surveys, or case studies to examine how integrated leadership styles operate in real-world governance contexts. Comparative research across countries or sectors would also provide deeper insight into the effectiveness of leadership integration in enhancing transparency and trust. Longitudinal studies could further explore how trust evolves in response to sustained leadership strategies.

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