

Enforcement of Code of Ethics and Legislators' Behaviour in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives, Nigeria

Kolawole Wasiu LAWAL

Institute of Governance and Development Studies
Federal University of Lokoja
Lokoja, Nigeria.
wklawal@gmail.com
07031138634

Fatai A. AREMU, Ph.D.

Department of Political Science, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria
and Research Enterprise Systems (RES), Abuja, Nigeria.

Kolapo Quadri ABAYOMI, Ph.D.

National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS)
National Assembly, Abuja, Nigeria.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7706-1678>
kolapoabayomi@gmail.com; and abayomi.quadri@nils.gov.ng

Abstract

The essential institution of a democratic administration is the legislature. Meanwhile, there have been major setbacks in its integrity and public trust due to challenges including unethical behaviours. Relying on the postulations of the Institutional Theory and the survey research design, the study investigated the extent to which the enforcement of the code of ethics was effective among members of Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. A total of 358 questionnaires were administered to stakeholders in legislative activities, including Lawmakers, Legislative Aides and Academics from the National Assembly think-tank. The data were analysed using statistical tools. The findings of the study reveal, among others, that the enforcement of ethical standards among legislators is weak and ineffective. The findings suggest that weak institutional oversight, selective enforcement and a lack of transparency in handling ethical breaches contribute to weak enforcement mechanism. It concluded that without stronger enforcement mechanisms such as the establishment of the 'Independent Ethical Standard Compliance Commission (ESCC)' for Legislators and stricter disciplinary measures, ethical violations will likely persist. The study recommends strengthening compliance, enhanced transparency, greater institutional independence and public reporting of ethical breaches. Without these, the existing measures may fall short of ensuring consistent adherence to the Code of Ethics among legislators.

Keywords: Legislators, Code of Ethics, Enforcement Mechanism, House of Representatives, Effectiveness

Introduction

Parliament is at the centre of democratic governance where elected representatives deliberate, legislate and make decisions that profoundly impact the lives of citizens (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2022). Upholding the highest standards of ethical conduct among legislators is not just a moral imperative; it is a fundamental pillar upon which the integrity and credibility of the democratic process rests. In democratic societies, legislators are entrusted with the responsibility of representing the diverse interests of their constituents. The public expects them to make decisions that align with the greater good, guided by principles of transparency, accountability and ethical behaviour. However, the experiences associated with the behaviour of legislators is marked by a complex interplay of political dynamics, personal motivations and societal expectations.

Enforcing code of ethics in the parliament is crucial in some respects. It ensures that the behaviour and conduct of legislators or parliamentarians is not only in consonance with the Constitution but also meets public expectations as regards what should be the behaviour of the legislators. In addition, the enforcement of code of ethics in regulating legislators' behaviour is important to securing public trust in the effectiveness, transparency and equity of democratic governments. It also enhances a culture of public service which places public interest above private interest. The enforcement of parliamentary ethics, encompassing codes of conduct, rules of order and legal provisions, play a pivotal role in maintaining the integrity of legislative bodies. These ethical frameworks establish norms for legislators' behaviour, including prohibitions against conflicts of interest, corruption and unethical practices. They are designed to ensure that legislators act in the best interests of their constituents and the nation as a whole. Nevertheless, the enforcement of parliamentary ethics is not without its challenges and controversies.

Questions arise regarding the effectiveness of these mechanisms in curbing unethical behaviour. Instances of ethical breaches, such as corruption scandals, conflicts of interest and unethical lobbying, continue to emerge in the legislature worldwide, eroding public trust and confidence in democracy (Lawal et al., 2025). Indeed, since the return to democratic governance in Nigeria, the legislative arm of government has been criticised for a series of lapses such as bribery and corruption, poor accountability, certificate scandals in both Chambers of the National Assembly (Orluwene, 2014). In spite of the series of reports of unethical practices and scandals that rocked the legislature at the national level such as certificate scandals (Akinloye, 2017), bribery and corruption (BBC News, February 1, 2013), misuse of power, budget padding (Ogundapo, 2025), consistent absence from sittings, etc., there is paucity of rigorous intellectual inquiry into the form, nature, processes and functionality of the enforcement mechanism put in place to ensure ethical conduct of legislators both within and out of Chambers. This paper seeks to address this gap by engaging the pressing problem of the enforcement of code of ethics and its impact on legislator behaviour. Thus, to what extent is the enforcement of code of ethics is effective among members of Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives? The other sections of the paper are organised as follows: literature review and theoretical framework; research design; result presentation and discussion of findings; conclusion and policy recommendations.

Literature review and theoretical framework

a. Conceptual clarification

Ethics as a concept

Ethics, as a branch of philosophy, is concerned with determining what is morally right or wrong, as well as what constitutes good or bad behaviour. It involves the study of moral principles that govern an individual's or group's actions. Ethics is the discipline concerned with what is morally good or bad and morally right or wrong. According to Cornell Law School, ethics is defined as what is good for the individual and for the society and establishes the nature of duties that people owe themselves and one another (2022). Various scholars have provided definitions to encapsulate the essence of ethics. Bottorff (1997) describes ethics as a body of principles or standards of human conduct that govern the behaviour of individuals and groups. Pollitt (2003) defines ethics as rules of conduct and behaviour, which relate to questions of right or wrong, good or evil. Hornby (2000) views ethics as a system of moral principles that govern or influence the behaviour of a person. Synthesising these definitions, ethics can be seen as moral codes of behaviour established by a society, organisation, individual, group, or country to protect their values.

The demand for ethical conduct among politicians and public officials is not a modern phenomenon. Hornby (2000) observes that such demands predate contemporary concerns for the rule of law and can be traced back to Greek and Roman times. From a normative perspective, Mautner (2000) posits that ethics is a rational inquiry into, or a theory of, the standards of right or wrong, good or bad in respect of character and conduct, which ought to be accepted by a class of individuals. Deigh (2010) further elaborates that ethics is the study of what are good or bad ends to pursue in life and what is right or wrong to do in the conduct of life. He emphasises that ethics is, above all, a practical discipline, aiming to determine how one ought to live and what actions one ought to undertake in the conduct of one's life.

Legislative Ethics

Within this premise is legislative ethics which has to do strictly with legislators. Legislative ethics refers to the standards and guidelines that govern the conduct of legislators, ensuring that they act in a manner befitting their roles as representatives of the people. According to the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI, 1999), legislative ethics encompasses both a set of standards and a system for enforcing those standards. These ethical codes are designed to help legislators maintain integrity, avoid conflicts of interest and uphold public trust. Given that the legislature serves as a fundamental pillar of democracy, the ethical conduct of its members is crucial for democratic stability and public confidence (Alabi & Fashagba, 2010). Without a strong ethical foundation, legislative actions may be compromised, eroding trust in the government and weakening democratic institutions.

Legislative ethics is further defined as a collection of laws, regulations, codes of conduct and conventions that outline acceptable behaviours for legislators (Brien, 1998). This framework ensures that legislators act within the bounds of their authority, exercising their duties responsibly and transparently. The importance of legislative ethics arises from the extensive powers vested in lawmakers, including law making, oversight and representation. Legislators must be guided by clear ethical principles to prevent abuse of power, corruption and misconduct. In this regard, a

well-defined ethical framework helps maintain legislative integrity and ensures that lawmakers prioritise public interest over personal or political gain.

Aktan (2015) emphasises that maintaining high moral and ethical standards among legislators is essential for fostering trust, respect and confidence in governance. He argues that an open and fair government requires legislators to conduct their affairs with integrity, avoiding conflicts of interest and any appearance of impropriety. Legislative ethics, therefore, operates on the principles of impartiality, accountability and transparency. Legislators are expected to refrain from using their public office for personal gain and to uphold decision-making processes that align with established government procedures. The NDI (1999) also highlights that ethical governance requires public officials to act independently, ensuring that their decisions are made in the public's best interest rather than for private advantage.

From the foregoing, the overarching goal of legislative ethics is to uphold the credibility and effectiveness of the legislative process. It is expected that by adhering to ethical standards, legislators can prevent corruption, enhance public trust and strengthen democratic institutions. Ethical lapses in legislative conduct can lead to widespread disillusionment, political instability and weakened governance structures. Therefore, legislative ethics is indispensable for ensuring that lawmakers remain accountable and committed to the principles of democracy.

However, legislative ethics in Nigeria's National Assembly is governed by multiple legal frameworks that establish principles of integrity, accountability and responsible conduct for members. These include:

1. The **Code of Ethics**;
2. The Standing Rules;
3. The **Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act**; and
4. The **Legislative Houses (Powers and Privileges) Act, 2017**.

Collectively, these instruments seek to ensure that legislators uphold the public trust and perform their duties in an ethical and transparent manner. However, while these frameworks provide a robust legal foundation, enforcement challenges often undermine their effectiveness.

The **Code of Ethics** is a self-regulatory instrument designed to guide the conduct of legislators. It emphasises the need for **exemplary behaviour, transparency and accountability**, recognising that lawmakers are public figures whose actions influence public confidence in governance. Under **Rule 1**, legislators are expected to uphold integrity, maintain courteous relationships and avoid conduct that contradicts societal moral standards. This expectation aligns with democratic principles that demand high ethical standards from public officials. Furthermore, **Rule 3** addresses conflict of interest, prohibiting legislators from using their positions for personal or financial gain. It requires members to declare any direct or indirect financial interest in legislative matters, ensuring that decision-making remains free from undue personal influence. These provisions are fundamental to preventing corruption, favouritism and abuse of legislative privileges.

The enforcement of ethical breaches under the Nigeria's National Assembly's Code of Ethics is primarily handled by the House Committee on Ethics and Privileges or the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges and Public Petitions. Rule 7 outlines the procedure for handling complaints, allowing both legislators and the public to submit petitions against unethical conduct.

The investigative process mandates that accused legislators be given an opportunity to defend themselves, reinforcing the principle of fair hearing. However, the discretionary power granted to these committees often results in selective enforcement, where politically connected members may evade sanctions. When violations are established, Rule 8 provides for a range of sanctions, from reprimands and apologies to suspensions and loss of privileges. Notably, legislators facing criminal charges for corruption or fraud may be suspended on half salary pending the outcome of their trial. While these sanctions serve as deterrents, their implementation is often hindered by political considerations and internal resistance within the legislature.

Beyond the National Assembly's internal regulations, the **Code of Conduct Bureau and Tribunal Act (Cap. C15 LFN, 2010)** provides a framework for ethical governance, covering all public officers, including legislators. **Section 5** prohibits public officials from placing themselves in situations where personal interest conflicts with official duties. This aligns with international best practices, as seen in countries with strong ethical legislative frameworks that restrict lawmakers from engaging in activities that could compromise their objectivity. Additionally, the Act **prohibits legislators from operating foreign bank accounts**, a measure designed to curb illicit financial transactions and ensure that lawmakers' financial dealings remain transparent. The **Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB)** is responsible for investigating violations, while the **Code of Conduct Tribunal (CCT)** adjudicates cases and imposes penalties such as removal from office, forfeiture of assets and disqualification from holding public positions. Despite the Act's comprehensive nature, its enforcement has been inconsistent, with many cases of asset declaration breaches and conflict-of-interest violations not receiving adequate legal attention. Political interference remains a significant obstacle, as influential legislators often leverage their positions to evade scrutiny.

Another key legislation that reinforces ethical conduct in the legislature is the Legislative Houses (Powers and Privileges) Act, 2017. This Act defines the powers, privileges and immunities of legislative houses, while also setting conduct standards for legislators. A crucial ethical provision under this law is Section 20, which criminalises the acceptance of bribes, fees, or rewards in exchange for legislative actions. Additionally, Section 21 prohibits lawmakers from obstructing or assaulting fellow legislators during parliamentary proceedings. This provision seeks to promote decorum and discipline within legislative chambers, ensuring that debates and decision-making processes remain orderly. Enforcement of this Act, however, is often weak, as cases of legislative misconduct are sometimes dismissed or ignored due to **partisan interests and political alliances**. While the law provides for criminal prosecution of offenders, the lack of independent enforcement mechanisms limits its effectiveness.

Despite these ethical guidelines and enforcement provisions, Lawal et al. (2025) noted that several challenges persist in ensuring accountability within Nigeria's National Assembly. According to them, a major issue is the selective application of sanctions, where legislators accused of misconduct may avoid penalties due to political affiliations or internal lobbying. Additionally, institutional weaknesses in bodies like the Code of Conduct Bureau and the Ethics Committees limit the effectiveness of investigations and disciplinary actions. Public perception of legislative ethics remains largely negative, with frequent allegations of corruption, nepotism and abuse of office undermining confidence in the legislature (Lawal et al., 2025).

b. Theoretical Framework

In this study, Institutional Theory provided a theoretical framework used to understand the extent of effectiveness of available code of ethics within the National Assembly's 9th House of Representatives, Nigeria. The structural and legal frameworks explanation for the persistence of ethical and unethical behaviour within legislative and public governance systems is important, meanwhile, sterilization of the available institutional frameworks using Institutional Theory is key and significant to arrive at the conclusion of the study. The theory argues that institutions not only shape and constrain behaviour but also, to some extent, influence individual preferences and decision-making processes (March & Olsen, 1995). This means that institutions, such as legislative bodies, regulatory agencies and anti-corruption commissions, establish the formal and informal rules that guide the actions of individuals within them. However, research has shown that while institutions create rules and mechanisms to curb unethical conduct, the extent to which these rules are effective in shaping behaviour depends on the institutional structures, enforcement mechanisms and the political environment (Belle & Cantarell, 2017; Down et al., 2016).

Institutional theory has evolved into different strands, but two primary perspectives are particularly relevant to the study of legislative ethics and corruption. The historical institutionalism approach emphasises how past institutional decisions create path dependency, meaning that historical patterns of behaviour influence current and future actions. (Capoccia, 2016). In the context of legislative ethics, this suggests that corruption persists because previous institutional arrangements allowed it to thrive, making it difficult to reform entrenched practices. On the other hand, the rational choice institutionalism approach, which this study adopts, views institutions as arrangements of rules and incentives that shape behaviour through a system of rewards and penalties (Peters, 2000a, 2000b). Under this perspective, institutional membership does not fundamentally alter individual values; rather, individuals act based on the opportunities and constraints presented by the institution. This means that if an institution has weak enforcement mechanisms, individuals within it will continue engaging in unethical conduct because the benefits of doing so outweigh the risks.

A key feature of rational choice Institutionalism is that institutions are conceptualised as external to individual moral values. In other words, it assumes that ethical behaviour is not necessarily a function of personal morality but rather of institutional design and incentives (Lawton & Macaulay, 2009). This perspective is particularly relevant to Nigeria, where various institutions such as the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Code of Conduct Bureau and Public Complaints Commission have been established to promote ethical governance. Despite their existence, corruption remains a pervasive issue in Nigeria's legislative institutions. Rational choice institutionalism explains this by arguing that these institutions do not fundamentally alter the values of legislators but instead create an environment where ethical behaviour is influenced by the strength or weakness of institutional incentives and constraints.

A key strength of Institutional Theory lies in its ability to explain why certain ethical frameworks succeed while others fail. Legislative ethics in Nigeria is not solely a product of individual moral choices but is heavily influenced by institutional structures, incentive mechanisms and historical governance patterns. Institutional Theory highlights how weak enforcement mechanisms, political interference and systemic inertia contribute to unethical practices among legislators. This is particularly relevant in Nigeria, where successive

administrations have introduced ethical reforms, yet these reforms often fail to produce lasting behavioural change due to institutional resistance and a lack of proper enforcement.

Furthermore, Institutional Theory accounts for the persistence of unethical conduct despite the presence of formal legal frameworks. It explains how informal norms and practices—such as patronage politics, nepotism and the commodification of legislative processes—undermine formal ethical guidelines. Unlike theories that focus on individual agency, Institutional Theory provides a structural explanation for why unethical behaviour is deeply embedded in political institutions and why efforts at reform often meet resistance. Thus, institutional Theory served as the guiding framework for this study by helping to analyse how Nigeria's legislative ethics framework is shaped by existing institutional structures, enforcement mechanisms and informal norms.

Research design

The study adopted a survey research design (utilises quantitative – questionnaire), which is appropriate for collecting structured, quantifiable data supported by exploratory narrations of critical stakeholders, on ethical enforcement among legislators in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives. It adopted a multistage sampling technique of probability sampling in which all element of unit of analysis stands a chance of been selected. The quantitative approach employed questionnaire, surveying a total of 358 participants including Lawmakers (24), Legislative Aides (158), Academia from the National Assembly think-tank (5), Legislative Bureaucrats (140) and members of the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) (31). The rationale for concentrating on these five groups is their pivotal roles in legislative processes, which are essential for achieving the research objectives. In the analysis, it analysed the data using statistical tools such as tables, bar chart and pie chat to explain the results and dynamics of the study.

Result presentation and discussion of findings

c. Demographics of participants

The demographic characteristics of the respondents are very important in the analysis of social survey related to human behaviour. It helped in understanding the social background of the persons and extent of understanding of the subject matter. Thus, the focus here is on the discussion of the respondents' characteristics such as gender, age, educational level, marital status and extent of understanding of the subject matter by gender were discussed and operationalized.

Table 4.1: Respondents Demographic

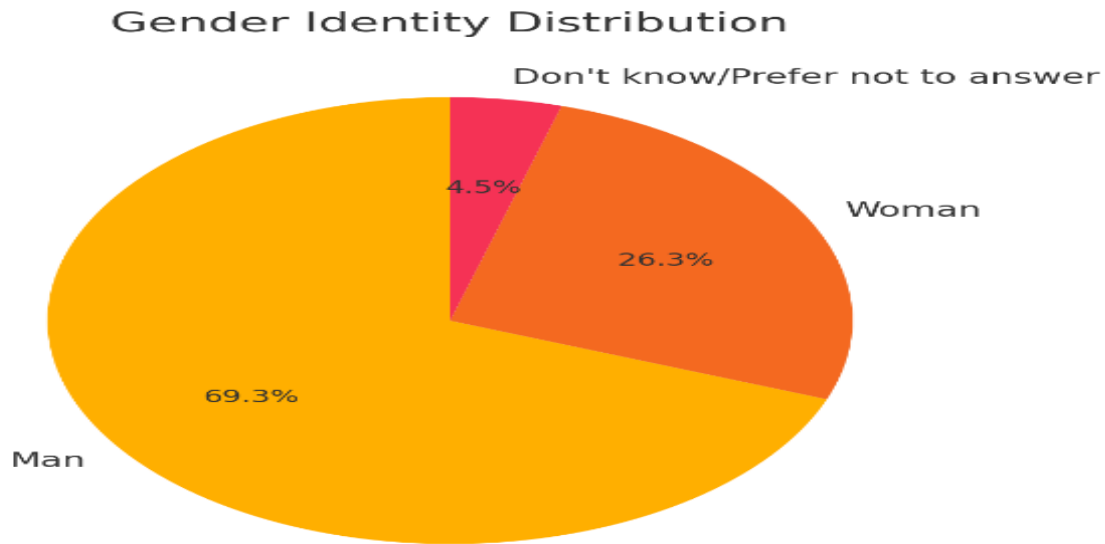
Item	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender Identity	Man	248	69.3
	Woman	94	26.3
	Don't know / Prefer not to answer	16	4.5
	Total	358	100
Age Bracket	18-24	39	10.9
	25-34	56	15.6
	35-44	138	38.5
	45-54	71	19.8
	55-64	42	11.7
	Above 64	12	3.4
	Total	358	100
Highest Qualification	No Education	8	2.2
	Arabic Studies	8	2.2
	Primary	9	2.5
	GCE/SSCE	12	3.4
	Diploma/NCE	41	11.5
	B.Sc./HND	110	30.7
	M.Sc./MBA	139	38.8
	Ph.D.	31	8.7
	Total	358	100
Employment Grouping	Academia	5	1.4
	CSO	31	8.7
	Lawmaker	24	6.7
	Legislative Aide	158	44.1
	Legislative Bureaucrat	140	39.1
	Total	358	100
Marital Status	Single	64	17.9
	Married	226	63.1
	Separated	37	10.3
	Divorced	21	5.9
	Widow/Widower	10	2.8
	Total	358	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

4.1.1 Gender identity

The gender distribution among respondents shows a significant disparity, with 69.3% identifying as men and 26.3% as women. A small fraction, 4.5%, either preferred not to disclose their gender identity or were uncertain. This suggests that the legislative environment, or the group of stakeholders surveyed, is predominantly male. The underrepresentation of women may reflect gender dynamics within governance and legislative affairs in Nigeria, where men traditionally hold a larger share of political and administrative roles.

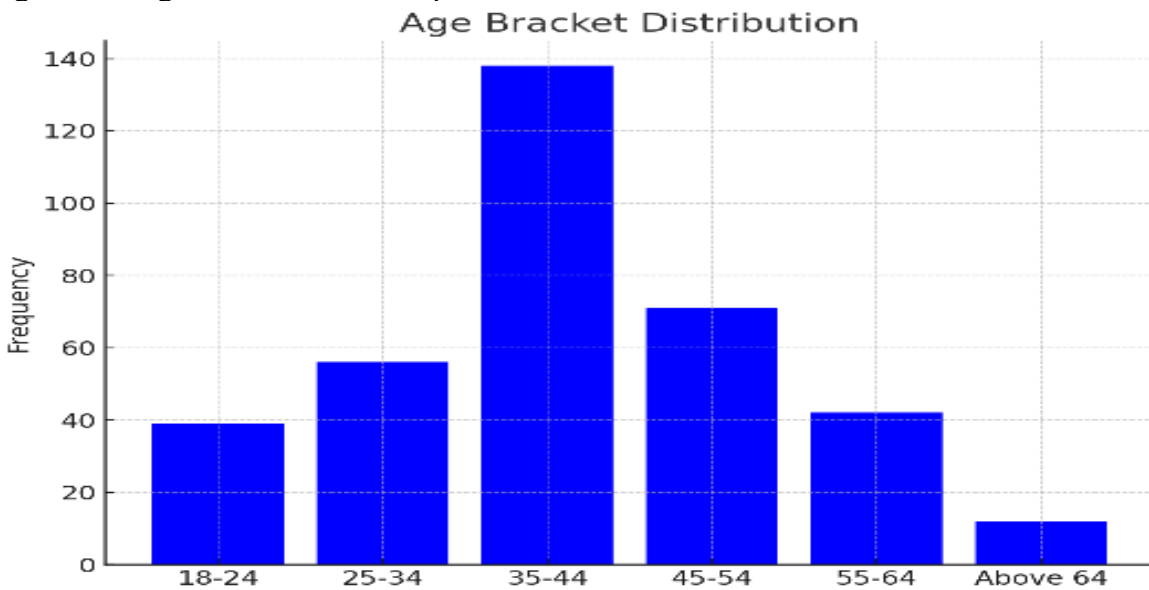
Figure 4.1: Gender distribution of the respondents



4.1.2 Age bracket

The data reveals that the majority of respondents fall within the 35-44 age group (38.5%), followed by those aged 45-54 (19.8%). This indicates that middle-aged professionals form the largest segment in legislative or governance-related roles. The younger demographics, including 18-24 (10.9%) and 25-34 (15.6%), have relatively lower representation, suggesting limited early-career participation in legislative affairs. Meanwhile, older respondents aged 55-64 (11.7%) and above 64 (3.4%) are also a minority, which may indicate retirement trends or less direct engagement in legislative processes at advanced ages. The dominance of individuals aged 35-54 years aligns with the peak working and leadership period in many professional sectors.

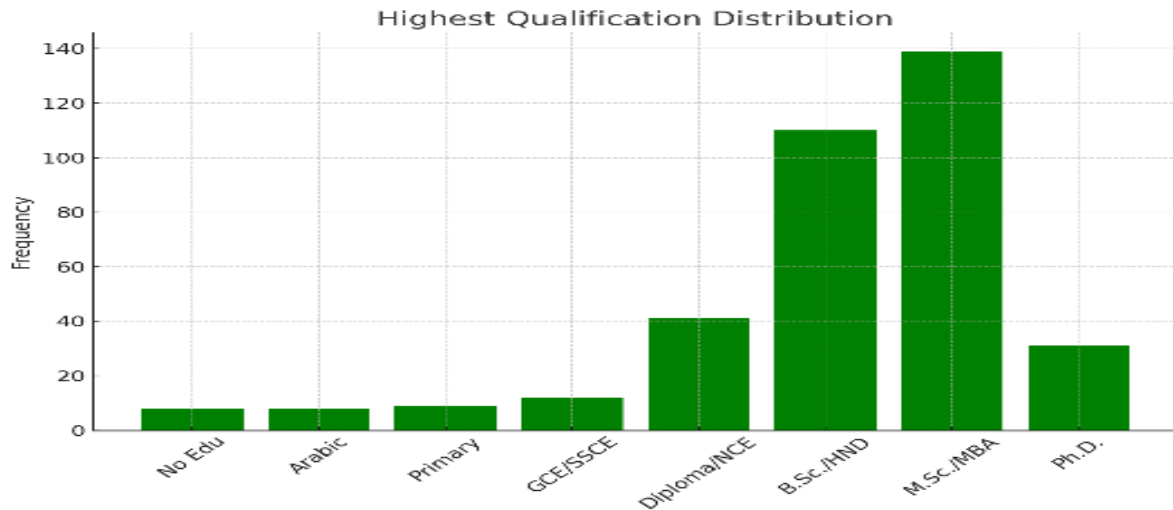
Figure 4.2: Age Bracket of the Respondents



4.1.3 Highest educational qualification

The respondents exhibit a high level of educational attainment, with 38.8% holding M.Sc. or MBA, making postgraduate degrees the most common qualification. This is followed by B.Sc./HND holders (30.7%), indicating that higher education is a critical requirement for individuals working in or around legislative activities. Diploma/NCE holders (11.5%) form a smaller percentage, while Ph.D. holders account for 8.7%, reflecting the presence of highly specialized experts within the group. A minor segment has only GCE/SSCE (3.4%), Primary education (2.5%), or Arabic Studies (2.2%), with 2.2% having no formal education. These statistics emphasise that most respondents have undergone advanced academic training, reinforcing the idea that legislative and governance-related work requires a strong educational foundation.

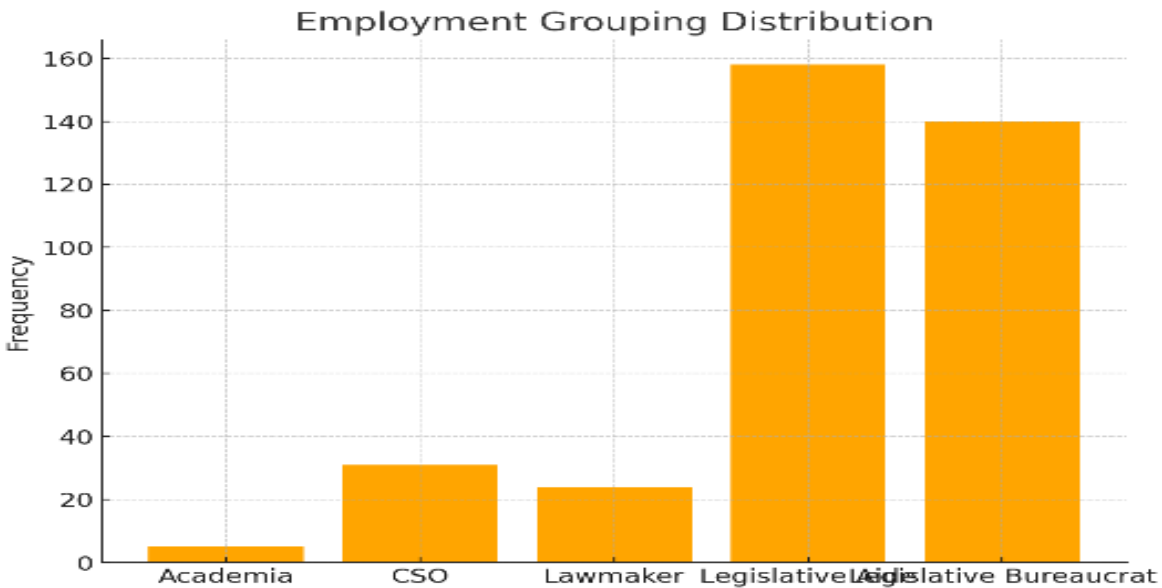
Figure 4.3: Educational qualification distribution of the respondents



4.1.4 Employment grouping

Employment distribution highlights that the majority of respondents work directly within the legislative system, with Legislative Aides (44.1%) and Legislative Bureaucrats (39.1%) making up the largest share. This suggests that the surveyed individuals are deeply embedded in the operational and administrative aspects of the legislative process. Civil Society organisation (CSO) representatives (8.7%), Lawmakers (6.7%) and Academia (1.4%) have lower representation, indicating that while external stakeholders such as CSOs play a role, the majority of insights come from those actively working within the legislative environment. The dominance of bureaucratic and administrative personnel implies that the data largely reflects institutional perspectives rather than external oversight or academic analysis.

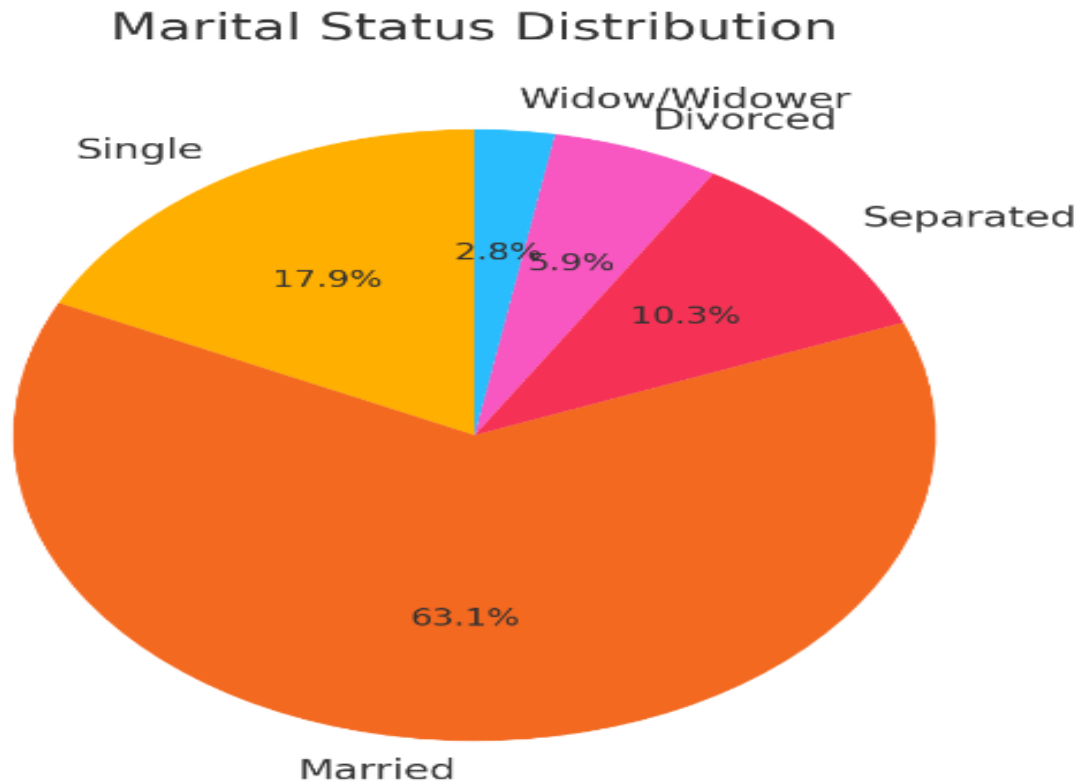
Figure 4.4: Employment grouping distribution of the respondents



4.1.5 Marital status

The marital status distribution shows that 63.1% of respondents are married, suggesting stability in personal life among those engaged in legislative affairs. Single respondents account for 17.9%, which could include younger professionals or individuals prioritising career over marriage. Separated (10.3%), divorced (5.9%) and widowed (2.8%) respondents form a smaller fraction of the total population. This breakdown aligns with common professional demographics, where marriage is often associated with career stability and maturity. The presence of divorced and separated individuals, though a minority, also suggests that work-life balance challenges may exist within the legislative environment.

Figure 4.5: Marital status of the respondents



d. Assessment of participants' knowledge and awareness of code of ethics and ethical standard in the 9th House of Representatives

Table 4.2 assesses the level of awareness among respondents regarding ethical standards guiding the conduct of members of the 9th House of Representatives. The findings indicate that 47.5% of respondents are aware of these ethical standards, suggesting that nearly half of the surveyed individuals recognize the existence of rules governing legislators' behaviour. However, a significant proportion of respondents either lack awareness (30.7%) or are unsure (21.8%) about these standards. This raises concerns about the effectiveness of ethical sensitization and communication within the legislative environment. The fact that over half of the respondents are either unaware or uncertain about these standards suggests that ethical guidelines may not be adequately disseminated or emphasised among legislative stakeholders.

Table 4.2 Awareness of the availability of ethical standards guiding the conduct of Members of the 9th House of Representatives

Awareness of Ethical Standards	Frequency	Percent
No	110	30.7
Not Sure	78	21.8
Yes	170	47.5
Total	358	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

Meanwhile, respondents' knowledge of specific ethics standard manuals was also sort of as highlighted in the Table 4.3. The most frequently mentioned manuals include the Code of Conduct for Public Officers (17%), National Assembly Rules and Procedures (17%), the House of Representatives Code of Conduct (16.7%) and the Legislative Ethics and Conduct Handbook (16.6%). This suggests that multiple ethical frameworks exist to guide legislators' behaviour, covering various aspects of conduct, procedural rules and ethical expectations. However, 32.6% of responses fall under "N/A," indicating that a substantial proportion of respondents either lack knowledge of specific manuals or did not provide an answer. This reflects a need for better dissemination and reinforcement of these manuals among legislators and relevant stakeholders to ensure that ethical guidelines are well understood and consistently applied.

Table 4.3 Knowledge of availability of specific ethics manuals in the 9th House of Representatives meant to guide the behaviour of the legislators

If 'yes' to the question above, kindly list the ethics standard manual (s) known to you. =		
Knowledge of Ethical Manuals	Count	Percent
Code of Conduct for Public Officers	106	17
House of Representatives Code of Conduct	104	16.7
Legislative Ethics and Conduct Handbook	103	16.6
National Assembly Rules and Procedures	106	17
N/A	203	32.6
Total	622	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

e. Institutional measures and structures for monitoring and evaluating ethical standards in the 9th House of Representatives

Table 4.4 identifies the key institutional measures and structures responsible for the overseeing and enforcing ethical standards within the 9th House of Representatives. The responses are evenly distributed on the three structures except Ethics and Privileges Committee which has highest of 308 counts and 34 per cent as the primary institutions responsible for enforcing ethical codes of the 9th House of Representatives. The responses are distributed thus:

Code of Conduct Bureau Oversight (23.0%)

1. Ethics and Privileges Committee (34.0%)
2. Internal Audit and Ethics Review Panel (22.0%)
3. Legislative Compliance Office (21.0%)

Although, this distribution indicates a multi-layered approach in the monitoring ethical compliance in the House of Representatives, however, Ethics and Privileges Committee received a perception as a structure with overwhelming influence. Meanwhile, each institution plays a critical role in ensuring accountability, suggesting a well-structured framework exists on paper.

Table 4.4 Institutional measures and structures for ethical standards in the 9th House of Representatives

Category	Count	Percent
Code of Conduct Bureau Oversight	207	23.0
Ethics and Privileges Committee	308	34.0
Internal Audit and Ethics Review Panel	198	22.0
Legislative Compliance Office	203	21.0
Total	916	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

Despite the available structure and mechanisms as highlighted in Table 4.4, 62.6% of respondents believe that these institutional measures are weak and inadequate, while only 37.4% consider them sufficient (see Table 4.5). This significant dissatisfaction suggests that, although the mechanisms exist, their enforcement, transparency, or effectiveness is questionable. The high level of concern about inadequacy may stem from weak implementation, lack of independence, or inefficiency in addressing ethical breaches. These findings highlight the need for reform and strengthening of existing oversight structures to enhance compliance with ethical standards among legislators.

Table 4.5 Respondents understanding of the adequacy of institutional measures guiding ethical behaviour of members 9th House of Representatives

Adequacy of Institutional Measures	Frequency	Percent
No	224	62.6
Yes	134	37.4
Total	358	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

In the meantime, there are key processes of the administration of the Code of Ethics enforcement among legislators. Table 6 outlined those processes alongside the distribution of responses which relatively balanced ranges across six layers.

Table 4.6 Respondents understanding on the process of the administration and enforcement of code of ethics and standard

S/N	The process of administering code of ethics among legislators in Nigeria's House of Representatives
•	Submission of the petition on breach of ethics
•	Reading of the petition in the house of representatives and referral to the Committee on Privileges and Ethics for investigation
•	Ethics Committee Investigation
•	Public Hearing and Testimonies
•	Committee on Ethics and Privileges submission of report and recommendation
•	Sanction and Disciplinary Measures

Source: Field survey data, 2024

The data suggests that the respondents understand the process of such code of ethics practices in who and what involves. While these mechanisms are in place, their effectiveness remains

questionable, given the high percentage of respondents in Table 4.5 who believe institutional measures are inadequate.

f. The current level of ethical standard of legislators in Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives

In the data derived from the survey, the participants considered the current status of the legislators' ethical standards as poor, noncompliant and widespread disregard for the code of ethics. Table 4.7 evaluates perceptions of ethical conduct among members of the 9th House of Representatives. The results indicated significant concerns about ethical compliance in the legislature. A majority (50%) rate ethical compliance as poor, with widespread disregard for ethical standards. This suggests a prevailing lack of accountability and adherence to ethical guidelines among lawmakers. Another 19.8% described the ethical landscape as mixed, where some legislators comply while others violate ethical standards, indicating inconsistency in enforcement. Meanwhile, only 15.1% of respondents view legislators as highly ethical and committed to transparency and accountability, while an equal percentage acknowledges ethical efforts with occasional lapses in compliance.

Table 4.7: Ethical legislators

Ethical Conduct of Legislators	Frequency	Percent
A) Highly ethical and committed to transparency and accountability	54	15.1
B) Generally ethical but with occasional lapses in compliance	54	15.1
C) Mixed, with some members adhering to ethical standards while others violate them	71	19.8
D) Poor ethical compliance, with widespread disregard for ethical standards	179	50
Total	358	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

These findings suggest that while some members of the House uphold ethical standards, a large portion of legislators fail to meet expected ethical guidelines, raising concerns about integrity and governance within the legislative body. These inadequacies resulted in a lower rating as indicated in Table 4.8.

Table 4.8: Respondents' rating of the ethical standards of members of the 9th House of Representatives

How do you rate the ethical standard of members of the 9 th House of Representatives?	Frequency	Percent
High	103	28.8
Low	255	71.2
Total	358	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

Respondents' perceptions of the ethical standards upheld by members of the 9th House of Representatives. The data reveals a significant negative perception, with 71.2% of respondents rating ethical standards as low, while only 28.8% perceive them as high. This overwhelming majority suggests widespread dissatisfaction with the ethical conduct of legislators, reinforcing concerns about accountability, transparency and adherence to ethical principles. The findings

indicate that ethical breaches may be a systemic issue, possibly rooted in weak enforcement mechanisms, inadequate oversight, or a lack of political will to uphold ethical governance. Meanwhile, there is an identification of the most noticeable ethical breaches by members of the 9th House of Representatives by the respondents, which was largely captured in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9: Respondents’ most noticeable ethical breaches by members of the 9th House of Representatives

What are the most noticeable ethical issues breached by members of the 9th House of Representatives?	Count	Percent
Abuse of office and misuse of public resources	212	17.2
Bribery and unethical lobbying practices	208	16.9
Conflict of interest in decision-making and legislative processes	214	17.4
Lack of transparency and accountability in financial matters	184	14.9
Negligence of legislative duties and absenteeism	211	17.1
Nepotism and favouritism in appointments and policymaking	204	16.5
Total	1233	100

Source: Field survey data, 2024

This table identifies the most prevalent ethical violations observed among members of the 9th House of Representatives. The data highlights multiple ethical breaches, with percentages distributed relatively evenly across six key areas:

- Conflict of interest in decision-making and legislative processes (17.4%) – This was the most commonly reported issue, suggesting that legislators may be prioritising personal or political interests over national concerns.
- Abuse of office and misuse of public resources (17.2%) – A closely related issue, this highlight concerns about legislators using their positions for personal gain, which undermines public trust.
- Negligence of legislative duties and absenteeism (17.1%) – This suggests that a lack of commitment to parliamentary responsibilities is a major concern, potentially affecting the effectiveness of law-making and governance.
- Bribery and unethical lobbying practices (16.9%) – This underscores issues of corruption and undue influence, where financial incentives or external pressures may shape legislative actions.
- Nepotism and favouritism in appointments and policymaking (16.5%) – The prevalence of this issue reflects patronage politics, where appointments and policies are shaped by personal relationships rather than merit.

- f) Lack of transparency and accountability in financial matters (14.9%) – This points to financial misconduct and weak accountability structures, reinforcing concerns raised in previous tables about institutional inadequacies in monitoring financial ethics.

The relatively even distribution of responses suggests that ethical breaches are widespread and not limited to a single area. This indicates a systemic failure in enforcing ethical standards, as legislators appear to engage in multiple unethical practices without sufficient deterrence.

- g. Extent of effectiveness of the enforcement of code of ethics among members of Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives

Table 4.10 was extensively discussed while dissecting the respondent's opinion on the level of effectiveness of the enforcement of code of ethics among members of Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives as follows.

- The Enforcement of the Code of Ethics Among Lawmakers in the 9th House of Representatives Was Very Effective (Mean = 2.12)

The data shows low agreement with the idea that enforcement was very effective, with only 16.5% of respondents (SA: 5.6%, A: 10.9%) supporting this statement. In contrast, a majority (70.8%) either disagreed (31.6%) or strongly disagreed (39.2%), highlighting widespread dissatisfaction with enforcement mechanisms. The mean score of 2.12, which is below the midpoint, reinforces the perception that ethical oversight in the legislature is largely inadequate or ineffective. The small number of respondents who rated enforcement as effective suggests that if any enforcement occurs, it is likely selective, inconsistent, or influenced by external factors.

- The Enforcement of the Code of Ethics Among Lawmakers in the 9th House of Representatives Was Average (Mean = 2.05)

This statement received an even lower mean score of 2.05, indicating that respondents generally disagree with the idea that enforcement was moderately effective. Only 12.4% (SA: 5.1%, A: 7.3%) rated it as average, while 72.4% (D: 32.7%, SD: 39.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. The high level of disagreement suggests that respondents view enforcement as either ineffective or severely lacking rather than functioning at an acceptable level. The fact that the mean score is even lower than the previous item indicates a strong belief that the enforcement mechanisms in place fail to uphold ethical standards in any meaningful way.

- The Enforcement of the Code of Ethics Among Lawmakers in the 9th House of Representatives Was Very Poor (Mean = 3.88)

Table 4.10 Level of effectiveness of the enforcement of code of ethics among members of Nigeria’s 9th House of Representatives

Which of the following in the table below represent your opinion on the level of effectiveness of the enforcement of code of ethics among members of Nigeria’s 9 th House of Representatives?	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean
The enforcement of code of ethics among lawmakers in the 9 th House of Representatives was very effective	20(5.6%)	39(10.9%)	46(12.9%)	113(31.6%)	140(39.2%)	2.12
The enforcement of code of ethics among lawmakers in the 9 th House of Representatives was average	18(5.1%)	26(7.3%)	55(15.4%)	117(32.7%)	142(39.7%)	2.05
The enforcement of code of ethics among lawmakers in the 9 th House of Representatives was very poor	135(37.8%)	115(32.2%)	54(15.1%)	39(10.9%)	15(4.2%)	3.88

Source: Field survey data, 2024

This item received the highest level of agreement, with 70% of respondents (SA: 37.8%, A: 32.2%) stating that enforcement was very poor. Only 15.1% were undecided, while only 15.1% disagreed (D: 10.9%, SD: 4.2%). The mean score of 3.88, significantly higher than the other two items, clearly demonstrates that the majority of respondents believe that the enforcement of ethical guidelines in the House of Representatives is fundamentally ineffective. The high level of agreement with this statement reinforces previous findings that weak institutional mechanisms, political interference and poor enforcement contribute to widespread ethical violations.

- h. Major lessons learnt in the enforcement of code of ethics among legislators in the Nigeria’s 9th House of Representatives

Table 4.11 was discussed and analysed in understanding the respondents' opinion on the major lessons learnt in the enforcement of code of ethics among members of Nigeria's 9th House of Representatives as follows:

Table 4.11 Major lesson learnt in the enforcement of code of ethics among legislators in the 9th House of Representatives

Items	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean
Strict institutional measures are indispensable in the effective enforcement of code of ethics in the legislature	144(40.3%)	109(30.5%)	50(14%)	39(10.9%)	16(4.5%)	3.91
The current process of the Committee depending on the referrer of the complaint by the House to the Committee and the implementation of the Committees' recommendation of the disciplinary action is undermining the enforcement of code of ethics	146(40.8%)	106(29.7%)	49(13.7%)	32(9%)	25(7%)	3.88
Strengthening the Legislative Ethics Committee by ensuring complete independence of operations is a strong vehicle in engendering effective enforcement of code of ethics in the legislature	156(43.6%)	92(25.7%)	60(16.8%)	37(10.4%)	13(3.7%)	3.95
Zero tolerance of corruption and corrupt activities in the House of Representatives is a huge factor in enforcing code of ethics in the legislature	162(45.3%)	106(29.7%)	45(12.6%)	25(7%)	20(5.6%)	4.02
Legislators should prioritise actualising House legislative mandate in order to avoid the undue pressures to take care of the private needs of their constituents	144(40.3%)	92(25.7%)	66(18.5%)	38(10.7%)	18(5.1%)	3.85
Legislative autonomy and healthy inter-chamber relations must be guaranteed in order to effectively enforce code of ethics in the legislature	143(40%)	109(30.5%)	61(17.1%)	26(7.3%)	19(5.4%)	3.92

Source: Field survey data, 2024

- Strict Institutional Measures Are Indispensable for Effective Enforcement (Mean = 3.91)

A strong 70.8% of respondents (SA: 40.3%, A: 30.5%) agree that strict institutional measures are crucial for enforcing ethical standards. This indicates that effective enforcement requires clear guidelines, independent oversight and non-negotiable ethical compliance mechanisms. The mean score of 3.91 suggests a widespread belief that without strong institutional frameworks, ethical violations will continue. Only 15.4% of respondents disagreed, showing that a well-defined institutional structure is seen as a fundamental requirement for ethics enforcement.

- The Committee's Dependence on Referrals Undermines Enforcement (Mean = 3.88)

A majority (70.5%) of respondents (SA: 40.8%, A: 29.7%) believe that the current process, where the Ethics Committee relies on the House to refer complaints before taking action, weakens enforcement. The mean score of 3.88 suggests that the current complaint-handling system lacks independence, making it difficult to investigate and discipline legislators effectively. Only 16% of respondents disagreed, reinforcing the argument that delays, political interference and selective referrals undermine ethical accountability.

- Strengthening the Legislative Ethics Committee with Full Independence is Essential (Mean = 3.95)

This item received strong agreement, with 69.3% of respondents (SA: 43.6%, A: 25.7%) supporting the need for a fully independent Legislative Ethics Committee. The mean score of 3.95 highlights a widespread consensus that ethics enforcement must be free from legislative interference, ensuring fair and unbiased investigations. Only 14.1% of respondents disagreed, emphasizing the need for structural reforms to grant the committee operational autonomy.

- Zero Tolerance for Corruption is Key to Ethical Enforcement (Mean = 4.02)

With the highest mean score (4.02) in the table, this item reflects a strong belief that corruption must be completely eradicated to enforce ethical standards effectively. A significant 75% of respondents (SA: 45.3%, A: 29.7%) agree that tolerating corrupt practices weakens ethical enforcement mechanisms. Only 12.6% disagreed, confirming that anti-corruption measures, strict punishments and transparency initiatives are critical for improving ethical governance in the House of Representatives.

- Legislators Should Prioritise Legislative Mandates to Avoid Private Constituency Pressures (Mean = 3.85)

This item received 66% agreement (SA: 40.3%, A: 25.7%), suggesting that personal demands from constituents place undue pressure on lawmakers, potentially leading to ethical violations. The mean score of 3.85 indicates that respondents believe legislators should focus on fulfilling their legislative duties rather than engaging in unethical acts to satisfy private or political expectations. A notable 18.5% were undecided, possibly due to the complex nature of constituency representation in Nigeria, where lawmakers are often expected to provide personal assistance beyond legislative functions.

- Legislative Autonomy and Healthy Inter-Chamber Relations are Crucial for Enforcement (Mean = 3.92)

A strong 70.5% agreement (SA: 40%, A: 30.5%) suggests that ensuring legislative independence and maintaining good relationships between legislative chambers is key to ethical enforcement. The mean score of 3.92 reinforces the idea that political influences and power struggles within the legislature can obstruct ethical oversight. Only 12.7% of respondents disagreed, suggesting that autonomy is essential to prevent undue interference and foster a culture of ethical governance.

2. Conclusion and policy recommendations

Legislatures are ubiquitous political bodies with members voted from various backgrounds, with the political settings created to approve measures that will form the law of the land and other functions such as oversight and representation of people of those segments and regions. Because of these functions and composition, the legislature is considered an important democratic institution expected to be upright and transparent, with good character that should enjoy the highest level of public support and trust. However, some scholars have claimed the decline of legislatures in modern democratic politics because of indecency and obvious unethical behaviours and corrupt practices of the legislators which, to a large extent, affect public support and trust for the legislature. The behaviour and conduct of legislators are pivotal in upholding the integrity of parliamentary institutions and ensuring public trust in the political process. In this, ethical standards and codes of conduct are the foundational framework for regulating legislators' behaviour and fostering accountability.

Findings from the study have important implications for institutionalisation of legislatures in Africa and importantly in Nigeria. Hence, the following are key policy recommendations to address the various challenges identified as contributors to the effectiveness of code of ethics and ethical standard in the legislatures and parliaments:

1. The process of the administration of code of ethics in the 9th House of Representatives indicated that there is institutional measures “Committee on Ethics and Privileges” instituted by the Nigeria’s House of Representatives to monitor, evaluate and investigate a perceived or reported breach of ethical standard by legislators. The Committee on Ethics and Privileges requires absolute independence to operate. The leadership of the House of Representatives needs to strengthen the Committee while prioritising its operational and financial autonomy.
2. The National Institute for Legislative and Democratic Studies (NILDS) in collaboration with the National Assembly bureaucracy should be deliberate in orientating and re-orientating the legislators, Legislative Aides and the public on the causes and the consequences of not adhering to the code of ethics by the legislators especially during the orientation programme at the beginning of each Assembly.
3. The National Assembly is recommended to establish an independent enforcement and regulatory body such as ‘Independent Ethical Standard Compliance Commission (ESCC) for Legislators, which operate outside the legislative body to ensure impartiality. Citing Taiwan’s Control Yuan an example of such a system, where an independent, quasi-judicial body investigates cases of misconduct, imposes fines and refers unresolved matters to the courts, this approach enhances objectivity. The Commission should be headed by either

retired Member, House of Representatives or a retired Senate Member and co-headed by either serving Member or Senator in the National Assembly. To uphold its integrity, its membership should be drawn from Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), legislators, academia, media, Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Trade Union Congress (TUC), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) and other related union and establishment;

4. The House of Representatives should strengthen ethical standard mechanism with stronger institutional frameworks, independent oversight and strict enforcement mechanisms for improving ethical compliance among legislators.

References

- Aktan, C. (2015). Ethics in Government: Anti-Corruption measures. *International Journal of Social sciences and Humanity Studies*, 8 (39): 267 –364.
- Alabi; M.O.A, & Fashagba, J.Y. (2010). The Legislative and Anti – Corruption Crusade under the fourth Republic of Nigeria: Constitutional imperatives and practices. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 1 (1, 2),1 -39.
- Bellé, N. and Paola C. (2017). What Causes Unethical Behavior? A Meta-analysis to Set an Agenda for Public Administration Research. *Public Administration Review* 77(3): 327–39.
- Bottorff, D. L. (1997). How Ethics Can Improve Business Success. *Quality Progress*, 30, 57-60.
- Brien, A. (1998). Business Ethics. *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 34 (27): 312 – 3160.
- Capoccia, G., (2016). When do institutions “bite”? Historical institutionalism and the politics of institutional change. *Comparative Political Studies*, 49 (8): 1095-1127.
- Deigh, J. (2010). An Introduction to Ethics. <http://icavcu.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Cambridge-Introductions-to-Philosophy-John-Deigh-An-Introduction-to-Ethics-Cambridge-University-Press-2010.pdf>. 10.1017/CBO9780511750519.
- Hornby, A. (2000). *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (6th ed., pp. 1072). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2022). Indicators for democratic parliaments – Sub-target 2: accountable parliament.
- Lawal, K.W., Aremu, F.A., & Abayomi, K.Q. (2025). Causes and Consequences of Ethical Breaches in Nigeria’s 9th House of Representatives. *Ilorin Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, Vol. 27 (1): 38 – 60.
- Lawton, A., & Macaulay, M. (2009). Ethics Management and Ethical Management. In R. Cox (Ed.), *Ethics and Integrity in Public Administration: Concepts and Causes*. New York: Sharpe, Inc.
- March, J.G. & Olsen, J.P. (1995). *Democratic Governance*. New York: Free Press.

- Mautner, T. (2000). *The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy*. London: Penguin Books.
- NDI (1999). Legislative Ethics: A Comparative Analysis. *NDI Legislative Research Series*, Paper No. 4.
- Orluwene, O.B. (2014). Nigerian Legislature and Public Accountability in Presidential Democracy: An Overview. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (27): 1411 – 1420.
- Peters, G. (2000a). Institutional Theory: Problems and Prospects. *Political Science Series*. Vienna: Institute for Advanced Studies.
- Peters, G. (2000b). *Institutional Theory in Political Science: The New Institutionalism*. London: Continuum.
- Pollitt, C. (2003). *The Essential Public Manager: Public Policy and Management*. UK: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education.