



Minimum Wage Implementation and the Decoupling of Policy from Performance in a Nigerian Sub-National Public Service

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ABSTRACT :

This paper examines the relationship between the formal implementation of Nigeria's National Minimum Wage Acts through the 2011 and 2019 Acts, and now the 2024 Act that raised the wage floor to ₦70,000 and whose consequential adjustments reached Oyo State workers in January 2025 and measurable changes in service quality, service culture, and employee engagement within a sub-national civil service. It situates this domestic administrative question within the international political economy of labour standards, asking what happens to a globally circulating wage norm once it reaches the implementing bureaucracy of a federal state. Using a cross-sectional structured survey of 395 respondents drawn from two ministries in Oyo State through stratified sampling, the study measured implementation status and three outcome domains on five-point Likert scales and tested their association with Spearman's rank-order correlation, the appropriate statistic for ordinal survey data. The findings are read through a combined framework of policy diffusion, organisational decoupling, street-level bureaucracy, and equity theory. Rather than the uniform positive trend a simple compliance model would predict, implementation was positively associated with administrative indicators such as staff training and productivity-oriented reform but negatively associated with relational indicators such as involvement in decision-making, commitment to public service goals, and willingness to work beyond formal hours. Partial implementation produced its own distinctive, non-monotonic pattern across the service-quality and service-culture measures. Formal compliance with a nationally set wage standard, in short, does not automatically translate into the organisational change the standard was designed to produce, and a measurable gap opens between symbolic compliance and substantive practice at the frontline of the civil service. The paper contributes an empirically grounded, sub-national extension of decoupling scholarship to global labour governance and offers a replicable survey approach for tracking where standards and practice diverge as Nigeria's wage floor continues to rise toward 2025 and beyond.

Keywords: minimum wage, global labour governance, policy diffusion, decoupling, public service delivery, Nigeria, sub-national implementation

1. Introduction

The minimum wage is usually treated as a purely domestic fiscal instrument, fixed by legislatures and enforced by ministries of labour. Yet the modern wage floor also sits inside an international regime of labour standards traceable to the founding mandate of the International Labour Organization (ILO) and expressed most clearly in the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), which calls on states to establish wage-fixing machinery, apply it broadly, and protect workers from unduly low pay (International Labour Organization, 1970). The Decent Work Agenda later folded fair wages into a global standard that states are expected to pursue even without ratifying every associated instrument (Fields, 2003).

International validation of a policy idea diffuses through learning, competition, and emulation, but diffusion of the idea does not guarantee convergence in practice (Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2006). Sociological institutionalists show that states frequently decouple formal commitment from behaviour: ratifying a norm or legislating compliance can function as a low-cost signal of legitimacy while the substance of the norm is implemented only unevenly (Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, & Meyer, 2008). Recent institutional scholarship extends this logic well beyond human-rights treaties, documenting ceremonial or symbolic compliance in public procurement reform, accrual-accounting reform, and public financial-management systems, where formal adoption of a standard substitutes, for a time, for the harder organisational work the standard was meant to trigger (Saeed, 2024, as cited in Adjei, Yeboah, & Asare, 2025; Silva & Rossoni, 2024; Taheriruh & Moshtari, 2024). Labour standards are a hard case for this literature because so much of their implementation happens inside sub-national bureaucracies rather than at the level of the ratifying state itself.

Nigeria is a useful setting for probing this gap. As a federal republic, its national minimum wage has been fixed by successive Acts since 1981 most recently amended in 2011, 2019, and again in July 2024, when the wage floor rose to ₦70,000 and each Act binds thirty-six states of widely varying

fiscal capacity, political incentive, and administrative culture (Fapohunda, Atiku, & Lawal, 2013).

Recent state-level studies confirm that this unevenness has persisted into the current wage cycle: Kwara, Osun, and Lagos States have each shown that insufficient political will, rather than fiscal incapacity alone, frequently explains delayed or partial compliance with a nationally agreed floor (Bamidele, Adegroye, & Salahu, 2024; Bamidele, 2025). Oyo State illustrates the same dynamic. Its public service, a large employer and service provider in south-western Nigeria, has now moved through three wage-fixing cycles 2011, 2019, and 2024–2025 reaching a consequential wage structure of ₦80,000 with financial effect from January 2025, ahead of many peer states (Oyo State Government, 2025). This layered, contested compliance history makes Oyo an apt site for asking whether a labour standard internationalised through domestic law can survive its translation into sub-national administration.

Drawing on primary survey data from 395 civil servants across two Oyo State ministries Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development, and Energy and Mineral Resources this article asks whether the formality of minimum wage implementation is associated with the service quality, service culture, and employee engagement it is meant to produce. The answer is more complicated than either wage-policy optimists or sceptics would expect: some indicators move with implementation; others move against it. This unevenness, rather than being noise, is the finding, and it extends to an understudied sub-national, bureaucratic layer, a decoupling process that international relations scholars have generally observed only at the level of the state.

A brief look at the two constructs at stake helps frame the puzzle. Nigeria's statutory minimum wage has been revised five times since 1981 (Figure 1): from ₦125 under the founding 1981 Act, to ₦250 in 1991, ₦5,500 in 2000, ₦18,000 in 2011, ₦30,000 in 2019, and ₦70,000 under the 2024 Act, with several states, Oyo among them, layering a further consequential adjustment on top ₦80,000 with effect from January 2025 (BusinessDay NG, 2024; The Cable, 2024; Oyo State Government, 2025). Plotted on a logarithmic scale, the series is monotonically upward across four decades, and each revision carries the same institutional signature: legislative enactment, ministerial circular, and an expectation of automatic sub-national compliance.

It is precisely because this formal series is so clean that its relationship with performance becomes analytically interesting. Figure 2 is a conceptual illustration, not a plot of the study's cross-sectional survey data, of the relationship that motivates the analysis that follows. One line traces the rising formal implementation status of successive wage Acts enactment, gazetting, and payroll application. The other traces the slower-moving, and at times reversing, performance-side outcomes that decoupling theory predicts once a policy has achieved formal but not substantive implementation (Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, & Meyer, 2008; Meyer & Rowan, 1977). The shaded region is the decoupling gap: the widening distance, across successive wage-fixing periods, between what has been legislated and what has been organisationally absorbed. Sections 5 and 6 test this pattern against the Oyo State data.

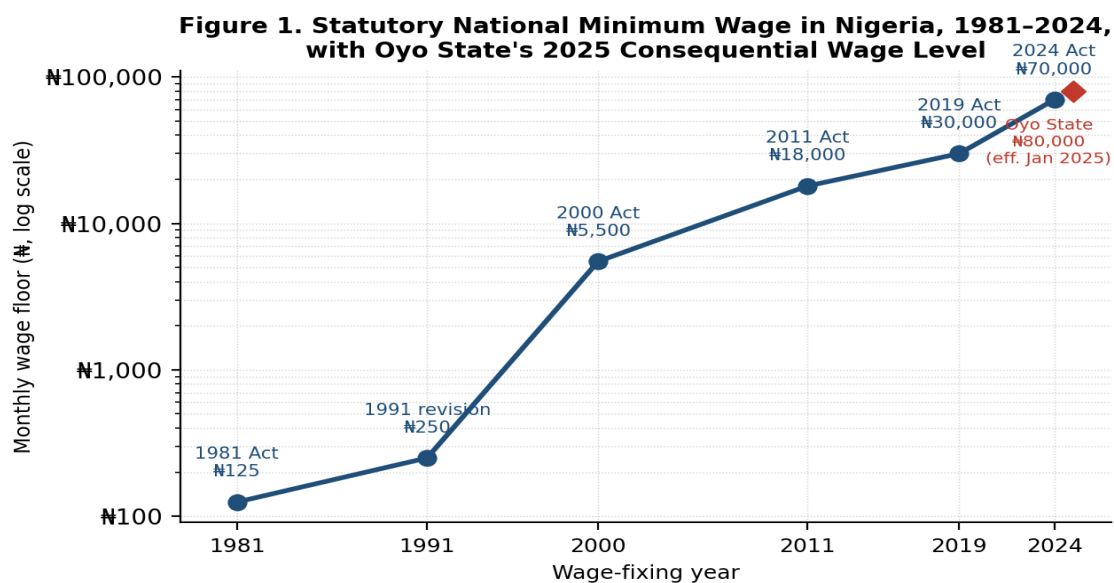


Figure 1. Statutory National Minimum Wage in Nigeria, 1981–2024, with Oyo State's 2025 consequential wage level.

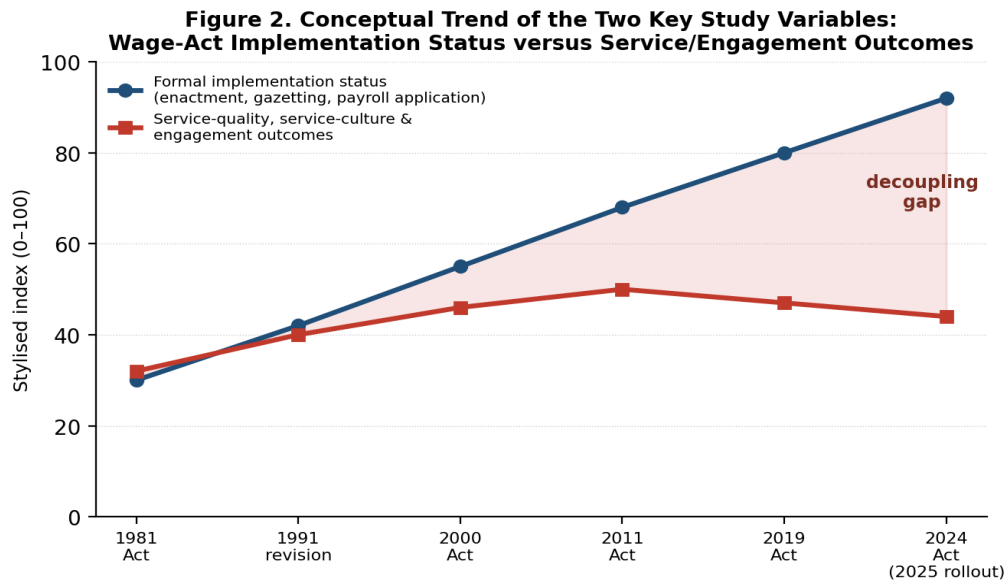


Figure 2. Conceptual trend of the two key study variables formal wage-Act implementation status and service/engagement outcomes illustrating the widening decoupling gap. Values are stylised for exposition and are not measured survey scores; the measured association is reported in Section 5.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. Section 2 situates minimum wage policy within the international political economy of labour standards and reviews the Nigeria-specific and organisational-behaviour literature, now updated through 2025. Section 3 sets out the combined macro–micro theoretical framework. Section 4 describes the survey design and analytic method. Section 5 presents correlational findings. Section 6 interprets these findings as sub-national decoupling visible at the frontline of implementation. Section 7 discusses implications for global labour governance scholarship and policy; Sections 8 and 9 address limitations and conclusions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The International Minimum Wage Regime and Global Labour Governance

ILO Convention No. 131 asks ratifying states to establish wage-fixing machinery that is broadly applied, periodically adjusted through consultation with employers and workers, and, crucially, effectively enforced (International Labour Organization, 1970). By the mid-2010s barely fifty member states had ratified the Convention (International Labour Organization, 2016), itself a first-order decoupling: many states run minimum wage regimes that resemble the Convention's terms without being formally bound by them. Nigeria's own wage floor has always been a matter of domestic legislation the 1981, 2000, 2011, 2019, and 2024 Acts rather than treaty ratification.

The empirical literature on developing-country wage compliance has long shown that formal coverage rarely translates automatically into payment into practice, particularly where labour-inspection capacity is thin and the consequences of non-compliance for sub-national or informal employers are weak (Rani, Belser, Oelz, & Ranjbar, 2013). More recent country-level work reinforces this point for Nigeria specifically:

Bamidele, Adegrooye, and Salahu (2024) found, in a mixed-methods study of Kwara State's civil service, that insufficient funds were not in fact the binding constraint on implementing the 2019 Act the state's own revenue and VAT receipts were adequate and that unwillingness among political officeholders better explained the delay.

Bamidele (2025), comparing Lagos and Osun States under the 2024 Act, similarly found that Lagos's higher internally generated revenue produced steadier compliance while Osun's fiscal constraints and delayed payments eroded the welfare gains the wage increase was meant to deliver, even where the headline rate had been formally approved.

Together these studies confirm, in the current wage cycle, the article's founding claim: a minimum wage law is a poor predictor of whether workers experience its substance.

The wage-fixing regime sits inside the ILO's broader Decent Work Agenda, launched in 1999 around four pillars standards and rights at work, employment creation, social protection, and social dialogue (International Labour Organization, 1999, as cited in Ghai, 2003). A decent minimum wage belongs to the first pillar, and the agenda treats it as one indicator of decent treatment among several that most governments, Nigeria included, endorse in principle even without committing to every associated convention. It is this softer, norm-level diffusion that travels easily, and that decoupling theory expects to be hardest to trace once it reaches a single workplace.

2.2 Policy Diffusion and Decoupling in International Political Economy

Two related bodies of scholarship anchor the analysis. Policy diffusion theory (Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2006, 2008) holds that jurisdictions influence one another through coercion, competition, learning, and emulation, without any direct enforcement chain; a wage-floor vocabulary can therefore spread among jurisdictions with very different capacities to implement it, moving first as legislative template and only later, if at all, as administered practice.

The second stream, sociological-institutionalist decoupling theory, is most fully developed in Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, and Meyer's (2008) study of human-rights treaty ratification: formal commitment can serve as a legitimacy signal that is structurally decoupled from substantive implementation. Subsequent work has widened the concept well beyond human rights.

Bromley and Powell (2012) show that organisations can adopt a widely diffused standard without the accompanying change in practice the standard requires.

Taheriruh and Moshtari (2024), studying policy-led public procurement, describe symbolic compliance sustained by specific organisational barriers rather than by intent to deceive.

Silva and Rossoni (2024), as reviewed in recent public-sector institutional scholarship, similarly characterise ceremonial compliance as formal adherence that masks underlying non-conformity, while a 2025 study of Ghana's integrated financial management information system finds a comparable decoupling between formal budgeting structures and practical implementation in a West African public service (Adjei, Yeboah, & Asare, 2025).

The logic extends downward as readily as it extends across policy domains: a state government that reports a nationally mandated wage Act as “implemented” without the parallel training, budgeting, and managerial reform needed to realise its goals is decoupling in location from the national wage-fixing system to the sub-national civil service rather than in kind.

2.3 Nigeria's Minimum Wage Regime and the Federalism Problem

Nigerian wage law has moved through four stages: the Wage Board and Industrial Council Act of 1973, the National Minimum Wage Act of 1981, and the amendments of 2000, 2004, 2011, 2019, and 2024. In each iteration the same structural limitation recurs a federal revenue-sharing arrangement across thirty-six states and hundreds of local governments that leaves many states unable to fund a nationally negotiated increase without additional federal transfers (Fapohunda, Atiku, & Lawal, 2013). The 2024 Act illustrates the pattern clearly: negotiated nationally between the Federal Government and the Nigeria Labour Congress and Trade Union Congress at ₦70,000, it produced a patchwork of state responses ranging from Lagos's ₦85,000 to states that had, by mid-2025, still not reached full implementations for all categories of worker (Legit.ng, 2026; Nairametrics, 2026). A nationally agreed wage floor becomes, at the point of application, a matter for each governor's own negotiation over timing, scope, and the categories of worker covered.

This is exactly what diffusion and decoupling theory would predict: the wage-fixing norm travels easily as legislative language and political discourse, while its administrative substance depends on sub-national capacity and will that the norm itself does not create. Oyo State fits the pattern. It reached a negotiated consequential adjustment in December 2024, with financial effect from January 2025 and a resulting wage structure of ₦80,000 (Oyo State Government, 2025) formally ahead of many peer states, yet respondents' accounts of the 2011 and 2019 Acts analysed below suggest that formal adoption and full substantive compliance have not previously been the same thing in this civil service, and there is little reason to expect the 2024 cycle to differ.

2.4 Equity Theory and the Micro-Foundations of the Wage Performance Link

At the level of the individual worker, Adams's (1965) equity theory offers the clearest explanation for why the gap matters. Workers assess pay not in isolation but against a reference standard, and either underpayment or a mismatch between promised and delivered pay produces demotivation, withdrawal of discretionary effort, and reduced commitment (Adams, 1965; Armstrong, 2006). This mechanism plausibly explains why, in several cases below, engagement scores were lower rather than higher where a wage Act was reported as fully implemented: workers may register the shortfall between an announced policy and its lived substance as an equity violation in its own right, felt more acutely in attitudinal and behavioural measures than in the more mechanical indicators of policy administration.

2.5 Street-Level Bureaucracy: Where Decoupling Becomes Visible

Michael Lipsky's (1980) theory of street-level bureaucracy explains where, organisationally, such a gap opens. Public service employees are typically given considerable discretion to translating vague or under-resourced policy into action on the ground, because the instructions handed down to them are rarely detailed enough to be executed mechanically. Street-level bureaucrats do not implement policy in bad faith; they fill in the details the policy leaves unresolved, in ways shaped by local resource constraints. Applied to minimum wage implementation, Lipsky's framework anticipates the pattern in Section 5: a payroll adjustment or training session may satisfy a ministry's compliance reporting, while the discretionary, relational dimension of service delivery trust between managers and frontline staff goes unaddressed or is even eroded as administrative attention shifts toward compliance documentation.

2.6 Positioning the Present Study

Global governance and international political economy scholarship has focused chiefly on the state as the unit of compliance whether a convention has been ratified, a wage floor set, or an aggregate indicator trending upward. Nigerian public administration scholarship, meanwhile, has tracked the fiscal and political difficulties of wage implementation without consistently connecting that domestic narrative to the diffusion-and-decoupling framework developed for treaty compliance. This article bridges the two literatures, treating decoupling as a general feature of multi-level governance that is as observable within a state ministry as within a ministry of foreign affairs deliberating a ratification decision.

3. Theoretical Framework

The framework combines two levels of theory. At the macro level, policy diffusion and decoupling theory (Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2006; Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, & Meyer, 2008) suggests that a diffused labour standard adopted through domestic law need not produce uniform substantive practice, because formal compliance can be pursued for its legitimating value independent of administrative capacity or political will. At the individual level, Adams's (1965) equity theory predicts that a felt gap between announced and delivered wage policy will not depress every operational measure uniformly but will register most strongly in reduced engagement and commitment. Together these levels generate a specific, testable expectation that departs from a simple across-the-board improvement hypothesis: indicators satisfied by mere legal compliance (staff training, productivity reform) should associate positively with implementation, while indicators requiring more than compliance (employee engagement, discretionary responsiveness) should associate negatively or not at all. Section 5 evaluates the findings against this uneven-association expectation rather than a one-directional hypothesis.

4. Methodology

Data comes from a cross-sectional survey of Oyo State's public service, administered to civil servants in the Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development and the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Resources. Respondents were selected by stratified sampling, yielding a usable sample of 395, consistent with standard sample-size procedures for a 95 percent confidence level and 5 percent margin of error (Cochran, 1977; Krejcie & Morgan, 1970).

Five-point Likert items measured implementation status of the 2011 and 2019 National Minimum Wage Acts (implemented per provisions; implemented but not per provisions; not implemented); service-delivery quality (competence, responsiveness, working-hour compliance, resource use, supervision, motivation, citizen satisfaction); service culture (reduced corrupt practices, discipline, courtesy, reliability); and employee engagement (participation in decision-making, commitment to public service goals, willingness to work beyond formal hours, job satisfaction). The survey instrument predates the 2024 Act; its findings therefore speak directly to the 2011 and 2019 wage cycles, with the 2024–2025 cycle addressed as an emerging case in Sections 6 and 7 rather than as measured data. Because the outcome variables are ordinal, associations were tested with Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient rather than ordinary least squares regression.

Most respondents were male (73.4 percent) and held tertiary qualifications (60.5 percent, versus 30.4 percent secondary and 9.1 percent primary). The sample concentrated in Grade Levels 08–12 (72.4 percent) and in long service (71.6 percent with 15–25 years; 25.6 percent with 5–15 years; 2.8 percent with 25–35 years). This profile matters for interpretation on two counts. Respondents' tenure meant both the 2011 and 2019 Acts had directly affected their working lives, and their education supported reliable self-report on a structured policy instrument. Their concentration in middle grade bands captures the layer of the service close enough to administrative decisions to observe them, yet not so senior that participation itself was constrained by hierarchy. The gender skew is consistent with known patterns of grade and departmental segregation in the Nigerian civil service; it is noted as a boundary condition on generalisability rather than analysed directly.

Two limitations belong here rather than in the discussion. First, the cross-sectional, correlational design supports no causal inference between implementation and outcomes, only association at one point in time. Second, the study covers two ministries in one state, and its results should be read as indicative of dynamics likely elsewhere in Nigeria's federal civil service rather than as representative of it.

5. Findings

The correlational results, summarised thematically below, depart in an important way from a simple positive-relationship hypothesis: the direction of association between formal wage-Act implementation and organisational outcomes depends on which outcome, and which implementation category, is examined. Table 1 reports a representative, not exhaustive, sample of the significant correlations obtained.

Wage Act / Implementation Status	Outcome Indicator	r	p	Domain
2011 Act: implemented per provisions	Commitment to quality assurance	0.130	< .01	Service quality (+)
2011 Act: implemented per provisions	Regular citizen interaction	-0.116	< .05	Service quality (–)

Wage Act / Implementation Status	Outcome Indicator	r	p	Domain
2011 Act: implemented per provisions	Compliance with working-hour rules	-0.305	< .001	Service culture (-)
2011 Act: implemented per provisions	Involvement in decision-making	-0.226	< .001	Engagement (-)
2011 Act: implemented, not per provisions	Training and retraining	0.118	< .05	Administrative (+)
2011 Act: implemented, not per provisions	Favourable work environment	-0.155	< .01	Service culture (-)
2019 Act: implemented per provisions	Productivity-oriented reform	0.340	< .001	Administrative (+)
2019 Act: implemented per provisions	Favourable work environment	-0.366	< .001	Service culture (-)
2019 Act: implemented per provisions	Commitment to public service goals	-0.186	< .001	Engagement (-)
2019 Act: not implemented	Commitment to public service goals	-0.426	< .001	Engagement (-)
2019 Act: not implemented	Willingness to work extra hours	-0.401	< .001	Engagement (-)

Table 1. Selected significant Spearman correlations between minimum wage implementation status and public service outcomes ($n = 395$). (+) denotes a positive association consistent with the study's original hypothesis; (-) denotes a negative association running counter to it.

5.1 Operational and Administrative Indicators

Full implementation of the 2011 Act as per its provisions was positively associated with staff commitment to quality assurance ($r = 0.130$, $p < .01$) but negatively associated with regular staff–citizen interaction ($r = -0.116$, $p < .05$). Partial implementation of the same Act was positively associated with staff training and retraining ($r = 0.118$, $p < .05$) and timely handling of staff complaints ($r = 0.166$, $p < .01$) but negatively associated with productivity-oriented reform ($r = -0.124$, $p < .05$) and a favourable work environment ($r = -0.155$, $p < .01$).

The 2019 Act produced a similar mixed pattern. Full implementation was positively associated with productivity-oriented reform ($r = 0.340$, $p < .001$) and staff training ($r = 0.142$, $p < .001$) but negatively associated with the employee reward system ($r = 0.123$, $p < .05$) reading in the opposite direction, regular staff–citizen interaction ($r = -0.132$, $p < .01$), and a favourable work environment ($r = -0.366$, $p < .001$).

5.2 Service Culture and Compliance Behaviour

Contrary to the study's initial expectations, full implementation of the 2011 Act correlated negatively and significantly with working-hour compliance ($r = -0.305$, $p < .001$). Partial implementation, by contrast, correlated positively with staff readiness to serve ($r = 0.137$, $p < .01$), promptness in responding to public requests ($r = 0.191$, $p < .001$), and service competence ($r = 0.159$, $p < .01$). Where the 2011 Act was not implemented at all, working-hour compliance again fell ($r = -0.148$, $p < .01$) even as reduced resource waste rose ($r = 0.217$, $p < .001$) a combination better explained by a reallocation of managerial attention under administrative disruption than by any single-direction account of non-implementation.

5.3 Employee Engagement: The Clearest Case of Decoupling

The engagement findings are the most theoretically significant, and the most consistently at odds with the assumption that full implementation should improve workplace attitudes. Full implementation of the 2011 Act correlated negatively with perceived involvement in decision-making ($r = -0.226$, $p < .001$), commitment to public service goals ($r = -0.136$, $p < .01$), and willingness to work beyond official hours ($r = -0.148$, $p < .01$). The 2019 Act showed negative associations under both full implementation ($r = -0.186$, $p < .001$) and partial implementation ($r = -0.187$, $p < .001$) with satisfaction in serving the public well ($r = -0.204$, $p < .001$), willingness to work extra hours ($r = -0.167$, $p < .01$), and commitment to public service goals ($r = -0.167$, $p < .01$). These negative associations were strongest where the 2019 Act was reported as not implemented at all: involvement in decision-making ($r = -0.289$, $p < .001$), commitment to public service goals ($r = -0.426$, $p < .001$), and willingness to work extra hours ($r = -0.401$, $p < .001$).

Taken alone, the non-implementation findings could support a simple wage-motivation story: lower engagement where the Act was least implemented. Read alongside the negative associations under full implementation, the more defensible interpretation is that the relationship is non-linear engagement is depressed both where the promised wage status is clearly unmet and where it is formally achieved but perceived by respondents as substantively incomplete.

6. Discussion: Formal Compliance and Substantive Decoupling in a Sub-National Civil Service

A simple compliance model predicts monotonic improvement as a wage Act is implemented more widely; the pattern in Section 5 is neither monotonic nor noise. It is the pattern decoupling theory anticipates once applied below the level of the state. Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, and Meyer (2008) show that

symbolic ratification of human-rights instruments can secure international legitimacy while ground-level practice lags or deteriorates; more recent work extends the same logic to procurement reform, public financial management, and accrual accounting, where formal adoption of a globally circulating standard substitutes, for a period, for the organisational work the standard requires (Adjei, Yeboah, & Asare, 2025; Taheriruh & Moshtari, 2024). The Oyo State data show the same pattern one level down within a federal system: a nationally declared, internationally inflected wage standard is reported as “implemented,” and some of the measures of engagement and culture the policy is meant to produce move accordingly, while others stay flat or worsen. This is consistent with ILO’s own cross-national compliance research, which finds that legal coverage and formal wage-fixing machinery poorly predict whether workers lived experience changes to match (Rani, Belser, Oelz, & Ranjbar, 2013). The present study’s contribution is a plausible mechanism for where the gap opens: a ministry reporting a wage Act as implemented “per its provisions” likely channels attention and budget toward the wage adjustment itself, leaving less for the supervision, trust, and stability that would let employees experience the policy as a substantive improvement. This is close to what Adams (1965) would call perceived inequity a clear formal commitment paired with no corresponding rise, or even a fall, in day-to-day investment in the workforce and it plausibly explains the study’s strongest finding: a decline in stated commitment to public service goals.

Lipsky’s (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory supplies the organisational mechanism. Frontline workers are left to fill the gap between an announced policy and the resources actually made available for it, so gains concentrate on indicators a ministry can document for auditors and political leadership, and losses concentrate on relational or discretionary indicators that require sustained managerial attention a fiscally strained ministry is least able to sustain alongside a wage increase. The resulting pattern is a structured trade-off rather than random noise, of exactly the kind decoupling theory predicts when an internationally inflected standard enters an implementing bureaucracy without matching investment in implementation capacity.

None of this implies bad faith, data manipulation, or that Nigeria’s minimum wage policy is inherently unsound; nor does the correlational design license an implementation-causes-disengagement claim. What the data support is more modest, and for global governance scholarship more useful, statement: the transmission of an internationally inflected labour standard to the individual worker is not a pipeline. Where it bends are empirically visible not only in the high-level compliance statistics international organisations typically track, but in the ordinary data of a civil service survey and, on the evidence reviewed in Section 2.3, in the pattern of state-by-state variation now unfolding under the 2024 Act as well.

6.1 A Note on Ministry Context

Although this study does not disaggregate by ministry, the magnitude of decoupling plausibly varies with a ministry’s exposure to citizen-facing service delivery, its capacity to generate revenue, and the political salience of its outputs. A ministry funded entirely through statutory allocation likely faces a sharper version of the fiscal trade-off described above than one with internally generated income sufficient to fund both wage compliance and the managerial investment engagement requirements. Testing whether the strength or direction of the pattern in Table 1 varies with a ministry’s fiscal autonomy is a natural next step, and one a purely national or state-level compliance indicator could not reveal.

7. Implications for Global Labour Governance Scholarship and Policy

For governance scholars, the central implication is methodological. Compliance research on international labour and human-rights standards concentrates on the state level ratification, legislation, aggregate trend and is not built to detect decoupling inside the implementing bureaucracy, where a policy reported as fully compliant can still depress the engagement and service quality the standard exists to protect. Studies of labour-standard diffusion into the Global South would benefit from pairing national compliance data with sub-national survey instruments of the kind used here, particularly as Nigeria’s 36 states continue to diverge under the 2024 Act.

For policymakers in federal systems, reporting a wage Act as “implemented” should not be read as evidence of improved service delivery. Resourcing decisions that document training activity or revised reward schedules without investing in a stable, trusted work environment risk reproducing the disengagement this study identifies. A policy that does not pair wage compliance with investment in supervisory capacity, job security, and consistent enforcement is likely to satisfy formal requirements while missing its substantive objectives.

The finding also speaks to current debate over how international organisations monitor labour standards in federal and decentralised states. Ratification and legislative-adoption measures of the kind recorded in ILO NORMLEX cannot capture the sub-national variation of this study documents: two ministries in the same state, executing the same national legislation, can show materially different links between implementation and outcome depending on how implementation is resourced locally. A monitoring architecture that pairs national reporting with periodic, standardised frontline surveys not as a replacement for national compliance reporting, but as a complement to it would let both international bodies and domestic oversight institutions see labour standards breaking down inside the bureaucracy, not only when they are ignored at the national level.

The equity-theoretic dimension of the findings (Adams, 1965) suggests a low-cost intervention: pairing any future wage adjustment, including the ongoing 2024–2025 rollout, with clear, proactively communicated information about its scope, timing, and rationale. Because perceived inequity, not merely low absolute pay, appears to drive disengagement, transparent but partial implementation may in practice produce less discretionary withdrawal than an implementation reported as complete but experienced as incomplete.

A further, more distant line of inquiry would compare Oyo's experience with other Nigerian states and other Global-South federations of similarly uneven fiscal capacity, to test whether the decoupling pattern documented here generalises. Early evidence from the 2024 wage cycles the spread from Zamfara's continued shortfall to Imo's ₦104,000 suggest fiscal asymmetry across states is, if anything, widening rather than narrowing, which would extend rather than resolve the pattern this article documents (Nairametrics, 2026).

8. Conclusion

This article asked whether a nationally initiated, internationally inflected minimum wage standard produces the service delivery and engagement gains it promises at the level of an individual sub-national civil service. The Oyo State evidence gives neither a simple yes nor a simple no, but a pattern consistent with policy diffusion and decoupling theory: some administrative indicators move in the expected direction under formal implementation, while employee engagement arguably what matters most to citizens who rely on public services stays flat or worsens.

This is not evidence that minimum wage policy fails. It is evidence of where, in a federal system, an internationally circulating labour standard is likely to decouple from practice not at the point of national legislation, but at the point where compliance must be resourced, supervised, and made credible to the workers it is meant to benefit. Policy diffusion theory (Simmons, Dobbin, & Garrett, 2006), decoupling theory (Hafner-Burton, Tsutsui, & Meyer, 2008), street-level bureaucracy theory (Lipsky, 1980), and equity theory (Adams, 1965) together specify not just that a policy practice gap exists, but where in the organisational chain it opens and why workers experience it as they do. As Nigeria's wage floor rises again under the 2024 Act and its state-level consequential adjustments, research on the sub-national life of global labour standards should track that point of decoupling as closely as it tracks the moment of legislative enactment.

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