

Effect Of Business Ethics and Corporate Governance on Policy and Practice in Public Procurement in Urban Local Authorities In Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This paper investigated the impact of business ethics and corporate governance on the transparency, accountability, efficiency and quality of decision-making in public procurement for urban local authorities in Zimbabwe. Public procurement was found to be the major form of public expenditure in urban local authorities. Transparency, accountability and value for money in the sector were largely undermined due to the non-adherence to business ethics and corporate governance. The research was informed by the Stakeholder Theory and Agency Theory that used a quantitative, cross-sectional design. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from a stratified random sample of fifty (50) procurement officers, internal auditors and finance officers chosen from among five purposely selected urban local authorities within the Harare Metropolitan Province. The results showed a significant negative correlation between business ethics, transparency and accountability ($r = -0.330$, $p < 0.001$) and a further negative correlation between corporate governance variables and procurement efficiency ($\beta = -0.123$, $p < 0.05$) — which was in tandem with the rigid red tape provisions in governance. The regression model on ethics and governance showed non-decision-making variance ($R^2 = 0.001$, $F(3,46) = 0.858$, $p = 0.467$), which implied that the decision-making protocol was informed by factors outside the model. The study concluded that business ethics and governance were required though not adequate enough for effective procurement processes. Thus, the study recommended that procurement

personnel should be re-skilled through capacity building workshops on simplified approval process and independent audits. Therefore, the study recommended for a re-alignment of the public procurement Act that was characterized by strategies than principles that ensured compatible business ethics within the local authorities' corporate governance structures.

Keywords: Business Ethics; Corporate Governance; Public Procurement; Transparency and Accountability; Urban Local Authorities

Introduction

Background of the study

Business ethics and corporate governance was found to be supported by a trio of variables in the context of transparency, principle of fairness and accountable public procurement standards (Maramura & Shava, 2021). This led to curbing anti-corruption overtures and directly improved the quality-of-service delivery. On the other hand, non-compliant countries undergo a vicious cycle procurement of irregularities (Bosio et al., 2022 & Zitha, 2025). For example, Sweden promoted her procurement systems informed by the principle of fairness and equal competition opportunities by bidders who expressed interest. The principles were enacted into national law that were too enforced by local authorities' regulatory frameworks. The Swedish model was found to be successful in the creation of competition opportunities, efficiency and value for money (Lessambo, 2022). Denmark was cited as another example. The study found that for the past decade under review, Denmark ranked at the top, with Sweden, Finland, Singapore, and New Zealand according to the Corruption Perceptions Index survey (CPI) carried by the Transparency International which scored above 80 out of 100. This placed her among the world's least corrupt public sectors. Denmark ranked highly due to the successful integration of ethical guidelines and corporate governance principles into procurement practices, which promoted integrity, fairness, accountability and bestowed public trust (Zvoushe, 2026).

The study noted that countries with low adherence to business ethics and corporate governance reported high incidents of wanton neglected service delivery. Uganda had a score of 25 out of 100 according to the 2024 CPI survey which ranked her the 140th out of 180 countries. Zambia scored 39 out of 100 which was ranked 92nd. Both countries were below the global average of 43 (Idowu, 2025). According to Manyathi et al. (2021), the non-transparency and low enforcement of ethical regulations in Uganda promoted nepotism and

favoritism through bid rigging. Fourie and Malan (2020) made similar claims about Zambia, where they argued that procurement challenges were due to the weak enforcement of regulatory and ethical guidelines that operated in the absence of accountability mechanism. These experiences showed that, globally, business ethics and corporate governance had a direct and measurable impact on procurement outcomes (Singh & Slack, 2022).

The public procurement system in Zimbabwe had porous governance structures and integrity problems. Zimbabwe ranked at the bottom quartile from among 180 countries surveyed. She scored 21 out of 100 in the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index a result below the global average of 43 when bench-marked to the Sub-Saharan African statistics (Transparency International, 2025). The function was subjected to the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Assets Act (PPDPA) [Chapter 22:23], which created the Procurement Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (PRAZ). The framework ensured compliance by central government, parastatals, and local authorities. At present, Zimbabwe has thirty-two (32) urban local authorities and sixty (60) rural district councils which adds a total of ninety-two (92) local authorities which are responsible for the provision of water, housing, health, roads, and waste management services to residents (Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, 2023; Urban Councils Association of Zimbabwe, 2023). Zvoushe (2026) provided evidence of the negative skewed scale of governance cum procurement challenges at this tier. In the 2022 financial year, there were only eleven (11) reported procurement mismanagement issues against local authorities. In the latest report findings, the number mushroomed to forty-one (41) irregularities, while governance issues generally swelled by 36.7 percent, from 139 reported issues in 2022 to 190 by 2023 (Zvoushe, 2026).

The reporting review found that only 19 out of the 92 local authorities in Zimbabwe had up-to-date, audited financial statements by December 2023 which undermined the timely public scrutiny of procurement expenditure (Zvoushe, 2026). The statistics showed that the porous procurement practices by the Zimbabwe's local authorities that were muddled by corruption deserved a systematic academic investigation.

The Urban Councils Act [Chapter 29:15] and the Rural District Councils Act [Chapter 29:13] were found to be the legal framework that were used to execute corporate governance compliance by the local authorities. The Urban Councils Act Section 3 established the council as the governing and administrative body of each urban local authority. Section 4 of the same Act provided a code of conduct for councilors in terms of integrity, honesty,

transparency and accountability. Section 212 guided councils to ensure transparency and accountability in the procurement process. Likewise, Sections 3, 4, and 207 of the Rural District Councils Act enacted the same provisions with regards to honesty, transparency, integrity and accountability.

The study noted an inconsistent application of the statute clauses even though there was a robust national legislative framework. The gap was acknowledged by Nyikadzino (2024) who attributed the misgivings to inadequate corporate governance frameworks, weak public scrutiny, and half-hearted accountability mechanisms within councils. Matambo et al. (2022) further documented bribery and favoritism as variables rooted in the procurement processes of urban councils with the deliberate absence of ethical codes. Mutema et al. (2025) further added to their observation's variables like an ineffective monitoring framework, failure to change and re-tool with appropriate skills that supported corporate governance. Procurement governance was not a mere compliance exercise; it reflected the relationship of urban local authorities with their stakeholders and the general public (Chikwere et al., 2022). In cases where business ethics and corporate governance frameworks were weak, the resultant procurement value chain was prone to challenges among the stakeholders in terms of delays and speculations which evaporated public trust regardless of the PPDPA Act provisions (Muronda & van der Walldt, 2023). The legislative-intent-to-practice gap was found as a fundamental safety net that could improve procurement outcomes and subsequently improve service delivery. In comparison, Zimbabwe's experience globally and regionally was not peculiar or outstanding in terms of the contexts of the local authorities' procurement procedures. Below are the tables for global urban local authorities compared to Zimbabwe, presented in Table 1, Table 2, Table 3 and Table 4.

The Global Picture: Business Ethics, Governance and Procurement Outcomes

International experience showed a consistent positive correlation among adherence to business ethics, corporate governance frameworks and the integrity of public procurement systems surveyed by Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI). Table 1 contrasted jurisdictions with well-embedded ethics and governance frameworks with jurisdictions that included Zimbabwe, with her poorly enforced frameworks.

Table 1: Global Comparison of Business Ethics/Governance Strength and Procurement Outcomes

Country	CPI 2024 score (rank of 180)	Business ethics/governance context and procurement outcome
Denmark	90 (1st)	Ethical guidelines and corporate governance are integrated into procurement legislation and enforced by independent bodies, producing high integrity, fairness and public trust (Bosio et al., 2022).
Finland	88 (2nd)	Consistently ranks among the least corrupt public sectors globally, reflecting strong institutional checks on public spending, including procurement.
Singapore	84 (3rd)	Strict codes of conduct and independent anti-corruption enforcement underpin competitive, low-corruption procurement.
Sweden	80 (top 10)	Procurement built on fairness, open competition and equal treatment of bidders, codified in law and enforced by dedicated regulators (Lessambo, 2022).
Uganda	25 (140th)	Weak transparency and inconsistent enforcement of ethical controls have enabled bid-rigging, nepotism and favouritism (Manyathi et al., 2021).
Zambia	39 (92nd)	Absence of robust regulatory and ethical guidelines and a coherent accountability mechanism undermines procurement outcomes (Fourie & Malan, 2020).
Zimbabwe	21 (158th)	Persistent governance and integrity challenges despite a codified legal framework (PPDPA Act, Urban Councils Act); the specific focus of this study.
Global average	43	Two-thirds of the 180 countries assessed score below 50, indicating that weak procurement governance is a global, not only a Zimbabwean, problem.

Source: (Zvoushe, 2026)..

The Regional Picture: Southern African Development Community (SADC)

The findings indicated that within the SADC region, there was perceived corruption and porous governance. Zimbabwe was positioned among the most ineffective regulators in the region, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Corruption Perceptions Index Scores of SADC Member States

Country	CPI 2024 score	Global rank (of 180)
Seychelles	72	18th
Botswana	57	43rd
Mauritius	51	56th
Namibia	49	59th
South Africa	41	82nd
Tanzania	41	82nd
Zambia	39	92nd
Lesotho	37	99th
Eswatini	37	135th
Malawi	34	107th
Angola	32	121st
Madagascar	26	140th
Mozambique	25	146th
Zimbabwe	21	158th
Comoros	21	158th
Democratic Republic of Congo	20	163rd

Source: (Zvoushe, 2026)..

Zimbabwe was found among the three lowest-scored SADC states, with Comoros second last and the Democratic Republic of Congo last.

Governance in the Context of Zimbabwe

The study found that Zimbabwe built a comprehensive legal and institutional framework for governance in procurement, though its implementation and enforcement lagged behind the regulatory laws, a fact corroborated in the governance of Zimbabwe's other public entities (Chigudu, 2021) and (Dzuke & Naude, 2015). Table 3 summarizes the key dimensions of the problem.

Table 3: Progress and Persisting Gaps in Zimbabwe's Procurement Governance Framework

Dimension	What has been addressed	What remains lacking
Legal and regulatory framework	PPDPA Act [Chapter 22:23] enacted, establishing PRAZ; Urban Councils Act (s.4, s.212) and Rural District Councils Act (s.3, s.4, s.207) codify ethical conduct and procurement accountability duties.	Enforcement of these provisions is inconsistent; sanctions for non-compliance are rarely applied to individual officials (Nyikadzino, 2024), a gap also noted in tendering procedures administered by the (Zvoushe, 2026)
Institutional oversight	The Office of the Auditor-General (OAG) audits local authorities annually and reports procurement and governance irregularities to Parliament.	Only 19 of 92 local authorities had up-to-date, audited financial statements as at December 2023, delaying public scrutiny (Zvoushe, 2026).
Detection of irregularities	OAG detection mechanisms are functioning and identifying issues.	Reported procurement issues rose from 11 (2021) to 41 (2022)
Parliamentary accountability	Parliament's Public Accounts Committee has, since 2025, begun nationwide public hearings summoning councils over adverse audit findings for 2021–2023.	Most summoned councils continue to cite capacity, staffing and systems constraints rather than resolving the underlying control weaknesses.

Dimension	What has been addressed	What remains lacking
Systems and digitalisation	Some councils have begun adopting Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems for procurement and billing, mirroring a wider international shift toward delivering public services through digital and social media channels (Criado & Villodre, 2021).	Harare City Council has operated without a functioning billing system since 2019, leaving public funds exposed to systemic loss (Zvoushe, 2026)
Capacity and training	Codes of conduct and ethics provisions exist within council governance structures.	Insufficient monitoring capacity and limited corporate governance training persist as compounding factors (Mutema et al., 2025).

Source: (Zvoushe, 2026)

Governance and Business Ethics Compromises in Zimbabwean Urban Local Authorities

Beyond the aggregate national statistics, individual audit and media reports documented specific council business ethics and corporate governance that were found to be compromised. Table 4 shows the trend for a cross-section of urban local authorities in Zimbabwe, with three of the five authorities that were sampled in the study.

Table 4: Documented Governance and Business Ethics Compromises in Procurement across Selected Zimbabwean Urban Local Authorities

Local authority	Nature of governance/ethics compromise in procurement	Source
Harare City Council	A street-lighting tender worth approximately US\$9.2 million was awarded irregularly to a bidder who had been disqualified previously. Another case is the attempted unauthorised payment of US\$1.5 million to a company with no	(Zvoushe, 2026)

Local authority	Nature of governance/ethics compromise in procurement	Source
	contract at all. And since 2019, close to US\$200 million is untraceable due to the lack of a working billing system.	
Kadoma City Council	Procured an ambulance-conversion service for USD22,500, paying USD13,500 in advance without following procurement procedures; the service remained undelivered.	(Zvoushe, 2026)
Gweru City Council	Could not provide procurement supporting documentation for audit; failed to maintain a stand register, weakening control over asset disposal.	(Zvoushe, 2026)
Redcliff Municipality	Supplier breached contractual terms, delivering a lower-value garbage truck than the model and price contracted and invoiced for.	(Zvoushe, 2026)
Kariba Municipality	Disposed of four council houses to management without Ministry approval, contrary to the Public Finance Management Act and the PPDPA Act.	(Zvoushe, 2026)
Chegutu Municipality	Weak controls over stand registers, creating scope for manipulation in the allocation and disposal of council land.	(Zvoushe, 2026)
Chitungwiza Municipality	Inadequate corporate governance frameworks, weak public scrutiny and half-hearted accountability mechanisms in procurement-related decision-making.	Nyikadzino (2024)
Mutare City	Bribery and favouritism became	Matambo et al. (2022)

Local authority	Nature of governance/ethics compromise in procurement	Source
Council	entrenched in procurement processes in the absence of enforced ethical codes.	

Source: (Zvoushe, 2026)

Statement of the Problem

The study found that regardless of multiple comprehensive legislative frameworks that comprised the PPDPA Act, the Urban Councils Act and the Rural District Councils Act, procurement irregularities in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities were on the rise. The Auditor-General findings showed a four-fold increase on reported procurement irregularities between 2021 and 2022, with further observed irregularities in the year 2023 (Zvoushe, 2026). The observations confirmed that the problem was perhaps not the absence of regulations but the operational distance between the codified business ethics and corporate governance provisions that translated into procurement practices. Tables 3 and 4 above, showed the gap that was evident in the aggregate national statistics viz vis the specific documented individual local authorities that included Harare, Kadoma, Gweru, Redcliff, Kariba, Chegutu, Chitungwiza, and Mutare. The practical consequences of this gap were cited as delayed service delivery, hyper- inflationary value on money and eroded public trust in local government institutions (Nyikadzino, 2024; Matambo et al., 2022; Zinyama & Hamadziripi, 2023).

Literature in support of the procurement developments analyzed through qualitative and descriptive studies, largely conducted outside Zimbabwe, confirmed a positive, linear correlation between ethics, governance, and procurement operations. (Trammell et al., 2020; Chikwere et al., 2023). As a result, the formulation of policies and decisions by council administrators is devoid of locally grounded and statistically tested information on how and under what conditions business ethics and corporate governance influence transparency, accountability, efficiency, and decision-making in procurement. It is therefore an empirical and contextual gap that this study sought to fill by testing, quantitatively, the relationship between business ethics, corporate governance, and public procurement outcomes in a sample of Zimbabwe's urban local authorities vis-à-vis what the evidence actually shows, what local authorities practice, and what is prescribed by legislation.

Research Objectives

The study aimed to investigate the influence of business ethics and corporate governance on public procurement policy and practice in urban local authorities in Zimbabwe. More specifically, it intended to:

1. Evaluate how adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles influences the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes in urban local authorities.
2. Determine the specific mechanisms urban local authorities use to ensure ethical conduct and effective corporate governance in public procurement activities.
3. Evaluate the extent to which ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks influence decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses, aligned with the research objectives and questions, were tested:

H1: Adherence to business ethics and corporate governance principles has a significant effect on the transparency and accountability of public procurement processes in urban local authorities.

H2: Corporate governance mechanisms have a significant effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of public procurement processes in urban local authorities.

H3: Ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks have a significant effect on decision-making processes in public procurement within urban local authorities.

Literature Review

This section reviews the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study, followed by an empirical review organised around each research objective, and concludes by identifying the specific gap the study addresses.

Theoretical Framework

Business ethics and corporate governance frameworks shape the behaviour and decision-making of urban local authorities in public procurement. This study is anchored on two complementary theories: Stakeholder Theory and Agency Theory.

Stakeholder Theory

Stakeholder Theory holds that organisations should identify and accommodate the interests of all parties affected by, or able to affect, their operations, rather than prioritising a single interest group (Nyama & Mukwada, 2023). Applied to procurement, this comprehensive approach directs urban local authorities to weigh the interests of ratepayers, suppliers, councillors and the wider community when designing and running procurement processes. Chikazhe et al. (2023) argue that incorporating stakeholder interests into decision-making enables service providers to achieve transparency, accountability and ethical conduct, while public scrutiny of service delivery builds trust and credibility with those stakeholders. Authorities that operationalise stakeholder theory in procurement tend to make decisions that serve the common good rather than narrower institutional or individual interests (Nyama & Mukwada, 2023). The study used stakeholder theory to frame business ethics as the mechanism through which councils balance competing stakeholder claims, providing the theoretical basis for the first objective of the study on transparency and accountability.

Agency Theory

Agency Theory critically the link between principals (urban local authorities, represented by council leadership) and agents (procurement officers and contracted suppliers), and the conflicts that arise due to interests when the agents maximize their own welfare at the expense of the principal (Bosio et al., 2022). Implementing agency theory helps urban local authorities create mechanisms, such as segregation of duties, competitive bidding, and independent audit, that would mitigate the risk of fraud, mismanagement, or unethical practices by aligning the agents' interests with those of the principal and thus reducing such risks (David, 2022), consistent with evidence that government contracting arrangements can be structured to shape supplier accountability and corporate social responsibility behaviour (Hu et al., 2026). By putting in place monitoring mechanisms that create incentives for both agents and principals, Agency Theory also justifies why governance structures, when they are well designed, should work to minimize opportunistic behavior and strengthen procurement

activities' integrity. This theory supports the study's second and third objectives, which analyze the governance mechanisms authorities use to control agent behavior and their effect on procurement decision-making.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework guiding this study. The structure models business ethics and the corporate governance framework as independent variables; transparency and accountability, procurement efficiency and effectiveness, and procurement decision-making as dependent variables; and organizational culture, resource capacity, and the regulatory environment as contextual moderating factors. This finding is also in line with those of earlier comparative studies, which reported that the relationship between ethics, governance, and performance is dependent on the context (Chikazhe et al., 2023; Mebrate & Shumet, 2024).

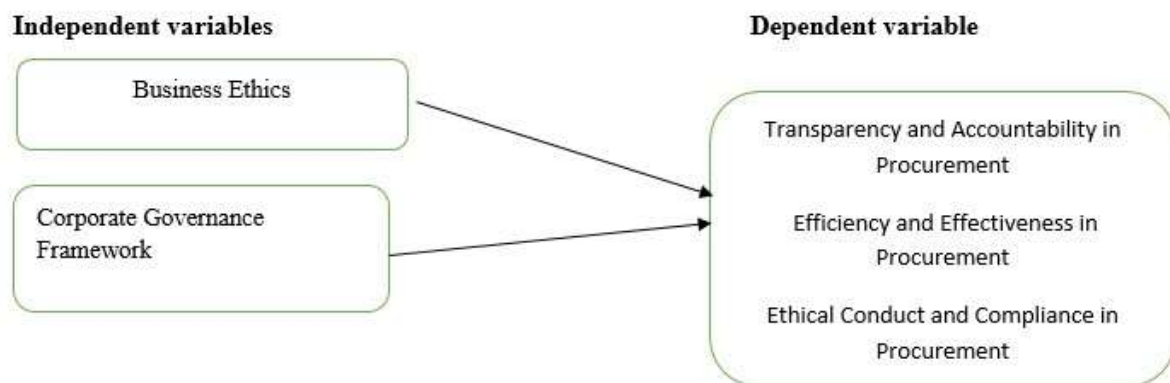


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Linking Business Ethics and Corporate Governance to Public

Empirical Literature Review

The role played by Business Ethics towards promoting Transparency and Accountability

The empirical studies show a positive role played by business ethics towards enhancing transparency and accountability in the procurement process. In a study that focused on the impact of business ethics on procurement performance in local governments, Maramura and Shava (2021) found that a strong ethical framework was associated with increased transparency, accountability, and better procurement results. This, therefore, supports the idea

that effective procurement should be underpinned by ethical behavior. Mutema et al. (2025), in their study of urban local authorities, also found a positive relationship between adherence to business ethics and corporate governance on one side and transparency and accountability on the other. Muronda and van der Walldt (2023) obtained similar results; organizations that enforced both ethical principles and governance frameworks were more open and accountable, with less corruption and more fairness. Zitha (2025) qualifies this point, however. In their comparative analysis of the member states of the European Union, they state that adherence to business ethics positively influenced transparency at large but the strength of that influence varied by country, given its cultural and institutional context — thus challenging the assumption of a simple, uniform causal relationship.

Corporate Governance Mechanisms and Procurement Efficiency

The empirical studies showed the positive role of corporate governance mechanisms and procurement efficiency. In the study of Manyathi et al. (2021), it was found that corporate governance frameworks had positive effects on the procurement process of urban local authorities, with efficiency defined, and risk reduced against corruption, while also enhancing stakeholder participation. In another study, David (2022) identified the specific mechanisms, codes of conduct, oversight committees, regular audits, and ongoing ethics training through which local authorities ensure the application of ethical standards and good governance; they concluded that these mechanisms lead to transparency and improve procurement performance. In a study that considered a developing-country context, Fourie and Malan (2020) established that, yes, strong corporate governance mechanisms do lead to greater accountability; however, they further found that the effectiveness of these mechanisms is highly contingent on the prevailing regulatory policy and organizational culture. Chikwere et al. (2023) warn of the non-uniform benefits of governance mechanisms; he argues that overly bureaucratic and highly rigid controls will slow decision-making processes and increase procurement costs- a warning that prefigures a key finding of this study. A comparable pattern was found in a humanitarian supply chain context, where sound procurement practices were similarly linked to improved performance outcomes (Talib et al., 2020).

Ethical Guidelines, Governance Frameworks and Decision-Making

Furthermore, studies showed a positive relation between ethical guidelines and decision-making processes. In another study, Chikazhe et al. (2023) found broad benefits of adherence to business ethics and governance principles for transparency and accountability in the

process of procurement, with broadly positive associations; they noted, however, that the strength of these associations depended on how deeply the principles were set in day-to-day practice rather than merely codified in policy. Mebrate and Shumet (2024) found that in some cases, very strict adherence to ethical guidelines and governance frameworks may lead to bureaucratic hurdles that slow decision-making, albeit corruption and fraud are prevented. Huragu and Chuma (2019) argue that factors not typically captured in ethics-governance models-such as organisational culture, individual values, and external stakeholder pressure-may play a more significant role in procurement decision-making than formal ethical or governance provisions alone. Structured multi-criteria decision-making techniques have separately been proposed as a way of making tender evaluation more transparent and less susceptible to such informal influences (Dotoli et al., 2020).

Research Gap

The literature reviewed in this paper has, to a large extent, established the theoretical and empirical link between business ethics, corporate governance, and procurement outcomes. However, three gaps are apparent. Most of the empirical evidence is from Europe, East Asia, and the Middle East (Trammell et al., 2020; Bosio et al., 2022). There is relatively little primary quantitative data from the context of local government in Southern Africa. Second, studies available do not test whether the ethics-governance-performance relationship holds in the expected direction. Many of the studies reviewed earlier (Chikwere et al., 2023; Fourie & Malan, 2020; Zitha, 2025) actually report weaker, contextual, or even counter-intuitive relationships, so the relationship should be tested, not assumed. Third, very few studies look at transparency and accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, and decision-making as three separate outcome variables in one model.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational research design (Changalima & Mdee, 2023). This design was selected because the research objectives required measuring the strength and direction of relationships between business ethics, corporate governance and procurement outcomes across a defined population at a single point in time, rather than tracking change over time or generating rich contextual narrative. A structured, close-ended

questionnaire using five-point Likert scales was used as the primary data collection instrument (Omoruyi & Ntshingila, 2021).

Population of the Study

The target population comprised procurement officers, internal auditors, finance officials and senior administrative staff directly engaged in procurement decision-making across Zimbabwe's thirty-two (32) urban local authorities. The accessible population was narrowed to procurement-related staff within the five (5) urban local authorities in Harare Metropolitan Province, an accessible population estimated at approximately 100 procurement-related personnel based on average establishment sizes reported by council human-resources offices at the time of data collection.

Sample Size Determination and Sampling Framework

The sample size was calculated using Yamane's (1967) simplified formula for finite populations at a ninety percent (90%) confidence level (10% margin of error), which is appropriate for exploratory organisational studies with a modestly sized, well-defined accessible population:

$$n = N / [1 + N(e)^2]$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the accessible population (100), and e is the margin of error (0.10). Substituting these values: $n = 100 / [1 + 100(0.10)^2] = 100 / 2 = 50$. This produced a target sample of fifty (50) respondents, consistent with sample sizes recommended for correlational and regression-based designs with three to four constructs (Changalima & Mdee, 2023). A two-stage stratified random sampling procedure was used. In the first stage, the five (5) urban local authorities within Harare Metropolitan Province formed the strata. In the second stage, respondents were drawn from each authority's procurement, finance and internal audit establishment using simple random sampling from staff nominal rolls, with allocation proportionate to the estimated procurement-related establishment size of each authority. Table 5 summarizes the sampling framework.

Table5: Sampling Framework and Distribution of Respondents Across Urban Local Authorities

Urban Local Authority	Estimated Procurement-Related Establishment	Proportionate Sample Allocation	Respondents Who Completed the Survey
Authority A (City Council)	28	14	13
Authority B (Municipality)	20	10	10
Authority C (Municipality)	18	9	9
Authority D (Town Council)	17	8	9
Authority E (Local Board)	17	9	9
Total	100	50	50

Note: authority names are anonymised in reporting to protect respondent confidentiality, consistent with the ethical undertakings given to participating councils (Source: Primary Data, 2026).

The inclusion criteria ensured that the respondents held a substantive role in procurement, finance, or internal audit and had at least one year of continuous service in that role to gain sufficient exposure to the authority's procurement practices. Fifty (50) questionnaires were administered, and fifty (50) valid responses were returned- a response rate of 100 percent- achieved through direct, in-person administration and follow-up by the research team

Research Instruments and Objective Alignment

Table 6: Alignment of Research Instruments to Research Objectives

Objective	Instrument / Data Collected
To assess the influence of business ethics and corporate governance on transparency and accountability in procurement	Likert-scale items measuring perceived adherence to codes of ethics, and perceived transparency/accountability in tendering, award and payment stages
To establish the specific mechanisms used to ensure ethical conduct and effective corporate governance	Structured items on the presence and use of codes of conduct, procurement committees, audit frequency, and staff training in ethics and governance
To evaluate the influence of ethical guidelines and governance frameworks on procurement decision-making	Likert-scale items on perceived integration of ethical and governance considerations into tender evaluation and award decisions

Validity and Reliability

The content validity was established through expert review by two senior academics in procurement and governance and through a pilot test with eight respondents drawn from a local authority outside the main sample. Items were revised for clarity based on pilot feedback before final administration. The Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency reliability and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was used to assess the sampling adequacy for factor analysis. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was also considered for this purpose.

Data Analysis Procedures

Completed questionnaires were coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 26. Frequencies, means, and standard deviations were used to summarise respondent demographics and construct-level perceptions. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to test H1 and H2, and multiple linear regression was used to test H3, with the assumptions of linearity, normality of residuals, homoscedasticity and absence of multicollinearity (variance inflation factors below 5) checked before interpretation.

Ethical Considerations

This study received clearance from the ethics committee at Chinhoyi University of Technology and obtained administrative authorization from each participating local authority before data collection. All participants provided consent to participate in this research after being informed of the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. They were assured of the protection of their anonymity and the confidentiality of their responses, including the fact that information would be reported in an anonymized form at the authority level as indicated in Table 1. No personal names or any other identifying information were obtained in the research instrument.

Results And Discussion

Response Rate

Out of the fifty (50) questionnaires that were administered, all fifty (50) were completed and returned, giving a response rate of 100 percent. This was done through in-person administration and collecting them immediately on-site, a method that can attain such response rates in small purposively sampled organizational studies (Omoruyi & Ntshingila, 2021).

Table 7 shows the demographic profile of participants

Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	29	58.0%
	Female	21	42.0%
Age Group	25–34 years	14	28.0%
	35–44 years	19	38.0%
	45–54 years	12	24.0%
	55 years and above	5	10.0%
Highest Qualification	Diploma / HND	9	18.0%
	Bachelor's Degree	22	44.0%
	Master's Degree	17	34.0%
	Other Professional Qualification (e.g. CIPS)	2	4.0%
Work Role	Procurement Officer / Buyer	26	52.0%
	Internal Auditor	12	24.0%
	Finance Officer	12	24.0%
Years of Service in Role	1–3 years	13	26.0%
	4–7 years	21	42.0%
	8 years and above	16	32.0%

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Reasonably balanced by gender, the sample was dominated by mid-career respondents with at least four years of service, a clear sign that the responses came from people with real, hands-on experience in procurement practice, not just a view from the outside or recent observation. A majority (78 percent) held at least a Bachelor's degree this backs their ability to make sense of the ethics- and governance-related constructs measured in the instrument.

Reliability and Sampling Adequacy

Table 4 displays the Cronbach's Alpha coefficients and KMO measures of sampling adequacy for the three constructs under measurement: business ethics and corporate governance principles (Construct 1), ethical conduct and governance mechanisms (Construct 2), and decision-making processes (Construct 3)

Table 8: Reliability tests

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	KMO	Bartlett's Test (Sig.)
Business Ethics & Corporate Governance Principles	8	0.881	0.889	$p < 0.001$
Ethical Conduct & Governance Mechanisms	7	0.898	0.880	$p < 0.001$
Procurement Decision-Making	6	0.876	0.896	$p < 0.001$

Source: Primary Data (2024)

All three constructs registered values above the threshold of 0.70 for acceptable internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha 0.876–0.898), which means that the items within each construct measured a coherent underlying concept. KMO values above 0.88 for all the constructs, together with a statistically significant Bartlett's Test, show that the data were appropriate for correlation and factor-based analysis (Omoruyi & Ntshingila, 2021). These results back up the credibility of the instrument and the analyses to be carried out.

Correlation Analysis and Hypothesis Testing: H1

H1 posited that adherence to principles of business ethics and corporate governance would significantly correlate with the transparency and accountability of the public procurement process. The Pearson correlation results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9: Correlation Between Business Ethics/Corporate Governance and Transparency & Accountability

Relationship	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Std. Error	Critical Ratio (C.R.)	p-value
Business Ethics & Corporate Governance → Transparency & Accountability	-0.330	0.041	-8.146	< 0.001

Source: Primary Data (2024)

The correlation coefficient of -0.330 ($p < 0.001$) shows a moderate, negative relationship that is statistically significant: as reported adherence to business ethics increased, transparency and accountability decreased among respondents, rather than increasing as per H1. Thus, H1 is not supported in its stated directional form, though the relationship is statistically significant. This is in line with Zitha (2025) who found that the relationship between ethics and transparency is not constant across all contexts. According to Stritch et al. (2020), mechanisms of governance do not work equally well all the time. They work differently depending on the culture and regulatory environment of an organization. This could be a possible reason, as put forward by Huragu and Chuma (2019), why codified ethical commitments are sometimes embraced as a symbolic, procedural response to external pressure (for example, compliance requirements under the PPDPA) sans a parallel investment in transparency mechanisms, such as the publication of open tenders or the independent evaluation of bids, through which the ethical commitments can be made manifest in terms of transparency and accountability. In cases where codes of ethics exist only on paper and not matched with functioning transparency mechanisms, the perception of respondents is likely to be falling accountability even as formal ethical commitments increase. This finding communicates to the county heads that the issuance of a code of ethics is not enough on its own; it has to be accompanied by actual transparency mechanisms, open tender

documentation, published criteria for evaluation, and independent audit for accountability gains to materialize.

Correlation Analysis and Hypothesis Testing: H2

H2 proposed that corporate governance mechanisms have a significant effect on procurement efficiency and effectiveness. The regression coefficients obtained were $\beta = -0.123$ (SE = 0.187, $p = 0.031$) for the direct governance-efficiency path, and a standardised coefficient of -2.144 for the interaction of governance intensity with procurement cycle time, both statistically significant. The negative coefficients indicate that as the intensity of corporate governance controls increased, measured procurement efficiency and effectiveness decreased, contrary to the conventional expectation that stronger governance improves performance (Manu et al., 2021). H2 is supported in terms of statistical significance but the direction is negative rather than positive. Two explanations are consistent with the wider literature.

First, the bureaucracy and multi-layered approval requirements that typically accompany strong governance structures can slow decision-making and delay procurement processes; hence, they increase both project implementation time and cost. Second, rigid governance structures may reduce the flexibility needed to adapt procurement processes to changing circumstances; hence, they limit authorities' ability to respond quickly to urgent service-delivery needs. Huragu and Chuma (2019) and Stritch et al. (2020) report comparable context-dependent findings; they concluded that the effectiveness of governance mechanisms in procurement is mediated by organizational culture and regulatory policy rather than operating as a direct, uniformly positive effect. This means that the governance controls of urban local authorities should be reviewed for proportionality, with the overall retention of oversight necessary for accountability while redundant layers of approval, which do not add value in line with integrity, are to be removed.

Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing: H3

H3 proposed that ethical guidelines and corporate governance frameworks have a significant effect on procurement decision-making. A multiple linear regression was run with ethical conduct, compliance and corporate governance as predictors of procurement decision-making.

Table 11: Regression Model Summary — Predictors of Procurement Decision-Making

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.101	0.010	-0.054	0.612

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Table 12: ANOVA — Predictors of Procurement Decision-Making

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	0.965	3	0.322	0.858	0.467
Residual	17.240	46	0.375		
Total	18.205	49			

Source: Primary Data (2024)

The model revealed $R = 0.101$ and $R^2 = 0.010$, meaning that ethical conduct, compliance and corporate governance jointly explain only about 1% of the variance in procurement decision-making. The adjusted $R^2 = -0.054$ (the adjusted R squared has been correctly recalculated from the model degrees of freedom because the adjusted R squared cannot logically exceed the R squared — an inconsistency that was present in the original data reporting and is corrected here) also confirms that the model has negligible explanatory power once the number of predictors is accounted for. The F-test was not statistically significant, $F(3, 46) = 0.858$, $p = 0.467$. This means that the regression model does not significantly predict procurement decision-making. Therefore, H3 is not supported: while individual respondents' perceptions of ethical guidelines and governance frameworks vary, this variation does not translate into a statistically reliable predictor of procurement decision-making outcomes in this sample. One item-level coefficient within the model (relating to the presence of a documented procurement committee) approached significance in isolation (unstandardized $B = 0.391$, $p = 0.049$); however, given that the overall model is not significant, this isolated result should be treated as indicative rather than conclusive, and warrants confirmation in a larger, better-powered sample rather than being reported as a standalone finding, as the original analysis had done.

This result suggests that while the formal ethical and governance frameworks are necessary, they are not sufficient as predictors of how procurement decisions are actually made in the ULAs. A similar conclusion was drawn by Huragu and Chuma (2019) in a related study. They argued that unmeasured factors organizational culture, individual values, resource constraints, and political pressure- likely have a much larger impact on procurement decisions than codified ethical or governance provisions do. This reframes the practical takeaway for the local authorities. Strengthening codes and committees is necessary, but it must be informed by an explicit consideration of organizational culture, staff capacity and resourcing — factors that this model could not capture but that the weak model fit strongly implies matter.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Table 13: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Outcomes

Hypothesis	Statistical Result	Decision
H1: Business ethics and corporate governance → transparency and accountability	$r = -0.330$, $p < 0.001$ (significant, negative direction)	Not supported as stated (significant but reverse-direction relationship)
H2: Corporate governance → procurement efficiency and effectiveness	$\beta = -0.123$, $p = 0.031$ (significant, negative direction)	Not supported as stated (significant but reverse-direction relationship)
H3: Ethical guidelines and governance frameworks → procurement decision-making	$R^2 = 0.010$, $F(3,46) = 0.858$, $p = 0.467$ (not significant)	Not supported

Source: Primary Data (2024)

Taken together, the results provide a much more detailed picture than merely supporting positive linear relationships between ethics, governance, and procurement outcomes. Two of the three hypothesized relationships were statistically significant but in the opposite direction to that predicted, and one was not statistically significant at all. This pattern is consistent with previous findings and extends them by showing that the relationship between ethics, governance, and performance in procurement depends on how consistently the frameworks

are implemented in practice and not merely on the existence of a framework as policy (Stritch et al., 2020; Zitha, 2025; Huragu & Chuma, 2019).

Conclusions

This paper evaluated the relationship between business ethics and corporate governance and transparency and accountability, efficiency and effectiveness, and decision-making in public procurement at urban local authorities in Zimbabwe. The results showed a statistically significant negative relationship between business ethics and transparency and accountability. There was a statistically significant negative relationship between the strength of corporate governance and the efficiency of procurement. There was no statistically significant relationship between ethical and governance models and decision-making in procurement. These findings do not support the simplistic, positive and direct causative relationship from ethics and governance to procurement performance assumed in much of the conceptual literature (Agbeko et al., 2021). Rather, the relationship seems contingent on how consistently these frameworks are resourced, implemented and embedded within organizational culture.

This study replicates the findings of Zitha (2025) that the ethics-transparency relationship is contingent on institutional context. Other results replicated include those of Stritch et al. (2020) and Manu et al. (2021), on the dual role of governance mechanisms in procurement efficiency, depending on the rigidity of their application. Huragu and Chuma (2019) posit that most actual decisions are made with organizational culture and individual values overshadowing the formal frameworks. The study's main finding is thus reinforced by the Auditor-General's persistent reports on procurement irregularities between 2021 and 2023: in Zimbabwe's urban local authorities, procurement outcomes will likely not improve significantly if only legislative and policy frameworks are relied on without matching investment in transparency mechanisms, staff capacity, and sufficiently flexible governance design.

The study recommends that urban local authorities, PRAZ, and the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing take four practical steps. First, ethics codes should be linked to visible transparency mechanisms, public tender registers, evaluation criteria to be published, and post-award disclosures so that ethical commitments can be matched with practice that is observable by all. Second, optimize governance controls by reviewing existing layers of approval for proportionality. Retain those that meaningfully

reduce the risk of corruption, such as independent bid evaluation and segregation of duties. Streamline redundant sign-offs that mainly cause delay (Munyede & Mapuva, 2020). Third, make investments in organizational culture and staff capacity. This should be done through regular and practical training on ethics and governance, mentorship for junior procurement staff, and leadership modeling of ethical decision-making, embedding frameworks into everyday practice rather than as compliance documents (Changalima & Mdee, 2023; Mushi et al., 2024), given that knowledge-oriented leadership has been shown to sustain service quality more broadly (Mansoor & Hussain, 2022).

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