

DHR-PA—Democracy and human rights in public administration in Africa

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Abstract

While public administration research has traditionally paid profound attention to democratic values in government-citizen relations, public institutions are still wrestling with entrenching human rights norms today. This article's Democracy and Human Rights in Public Administration (DHR-PA) perspective offers a view that a human rights-anchored reforms agenda may assist with setting the much-needed tone for realizing democratic norms in African administrative contexts where society is still dealing with extreme forms of human rights abuses. It operationalizes institutional nuances and qualities of democratic and human rights values using Afrobarometer's Round 9 dataset for Namibia, Kenya, and Nigeria. Results show that human rights proclivities of African public administration remain subtle and nebulous despite more targeted DHR-PA reforms and the creation of institutions like human rights commissions and administrative justice agencies. Overall, for democracy to work, African public administration must acquire and entrench human rights norms and values in its engagements with citizens.

KEYWORDS

abuses, African political systems, African public administration, Afrobarometer, democracy, DHR-PA reforms, human rights, human rights norms, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, public administration, sub-Saharan Africa

Related Articles

Kahn-Nisser, Sara. 2018. "Constructive Criticism: Shaming, Incentives, and Human Rights Reforms."

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Even though most of the world's population today still lives under some form of human rights abuse or injustice (see *Freedom in the World 2021* survey), how public administration sits within this situation remains peripheral in mainstream public administration research (Roberts et al., 2023). While some notable strides have been made in the social equity pillar of public administration to address some gaps in this endeavor, especially with regard to race and gender (Alvez & Timney, 2008; Frederickson, 2010; Johnson & Svava, 2015; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023; Sabharwal et al., 2014; Stivers et al., 2023; Svava & Brunet, 2005), bolder emphasis on human rights tends to get lost in the plurality of epistemological and Western-oriented reform approaches. This is even more so on matters arising regarding democracy and human rights in the West that may be least beneficial in understanding related issues in developing countries (Roberts et al., 2023). This article aims to illuminate this debate in African political contexts where, for some time now, human rights issues have remained pertinent to the governance and public sector reforms (PSRs) agendas. In so doing, it develops a Democracy and Human Rights Perspective (DHR-PA) as a conceptual framework, which it then empirically applies to examine public administration's values-premises using the latest Afrobarometer (Round 9) survey findings.

A focus on democratic values and human rights foundations of African public administration is fundamental in packaging the public sector and constitutional reforms in Africa today (Kibet & Fombad, 2017; Wanyande & Okumu-Ojiambo, 2023). Governments are now more intentional in developing and revising their Sustainable Development policy blueprints or National Development Plans (NDPs), which present viable opportunities for realizing democratic administration in the region (Ayisi et al., 2022; Onyango, 2022). That is to say, the underlying governance challenges and democratic deficits notwithstanding, through NDPs, African countries are now more committed to realizing a transformed and more citizen-oriented public administration to ensure improved living standards as stipulated in the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and the African Union's Agenda 2063 (Onyango, 2023a). This article shows how a DHR-PA presents the much-needed *tone* to raise the consciousness for a robust reform agenda and research tradition on human rights foundations (values-premise) to better position African public administration toward achieving these objectives.

From a DHR-PA standpoint, democratization challenges in Africa may draw primarily on a botched relationship between democratic principles and administrative norms in public administration. The result of this is that public institutions are ill equipped to promote democratic values like social equity, responsiveness, and accountability in public affairs (Heller, 2001; Onyango, 2023b; Tsheola, 2014). Or, more specifically, as Akwasi Aidoo (1993) noted decades ago and further reflected in other case studies recently (Tsheola, 2014, in South Africa; Ayisi et al., 2022, in Ghana), could African countries be democratizing without human rights? And could the lack of a clear agenda for making state administrative systems more

DHR-sensitive have something to do with this? Or is it possible that public administration has failed to effectively couple democratic public values with contemporary challenges as African governments seek practical solutions that may sometimes fall outside the democratization agenda (Onyango & Hyden, 2021)?

Such queries make a DHR-PA agenda even more fundamental in studying African public administration. First, a DHR-PA may assist in revitalizing public reforms meant to leverage democratic administrative norms. This is especially critical now when democracy is globally on trial, and public administration is confronted with growing public distrust (Bauer et al., 2021; Peters & Pierre, 2022; Witesman, 2021). Second, a human rights-sensitive perspective not only assists in assessing the democratic bill of health of administrative systems but also integrates related components into a holistic lens for a more straightforward practical understanding and potential action. DHR-PA's integrative framework should help with consolidating the analytical *silos* or oft-fragmented approaches to understanding and rethinking democratic public values and systems in Africa (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2014; Ekeh, 2004; Hyden, 2023; Kirk & Allen, 2022). Third, a DHR-PA agenda would be critical, especially in contexts where administrative systems are aligned with state-building politics (Onyango, 2023a). Or where human rights have historically been problematic, and public administration still wrestles with structural injustices of its past, like administrative racism in the United States or South Africa (Alexander & Stivers, 2010; Noble & Wright, 2012; Starke et al., 2018), and colonial autocratic norms in developing countries. In other words, a DHR-PA research agenda considerably dissects the democratic administration values premise of the government and the existing interfaces between what these values hold for the citizens, as well as the empirical realities of public administration.

This article's DHR-PA perspective builds on the public sector reforms approaches literature to explore citizens' perceptions and attitudes toward democratic administration and human rights values or foundations of public administration in Kenya, Namibia, and Nigeria. In so doing, the study is guided by the question: How is African public administration performing in entrenching or realizing democracy and human rights values? In answering this question, the present DHR-PA perspective relies on Afrobarometer datasets to put democracy and human rights issues into context. It examines citizens' attitudes about principles and norms in how individuals or citizens interpret, internalize, or influence them in public administration. These values and norms covered those public administration activities related to fair treatment of persons, the rule of law, gender equality, and access to information, among others.

Citizens' responses relatively differed in Nigeria, Namibia, and Kenya, with an overall improvement concerning different DHR areas. For example, on whether people are treated unequally under the law, 36.3% of Kenyans stated often, 25.8% said always, and 25.3% said rarely. In Namibia, 29.0% stated rarely, 28.5% said often, and 21.4% said always. In Nigeria, 42.9% said always, which is relatively higher than in Namibia and Kenya; 40% said often, and 11.3% said rarely. However, whereas more Nigerians than Kenyans and Namibians feel that people are relatively treated unequally under the law, more Nigerians (89.8%) than Namibians (80.5%) can access budget information from their local government councilors. Most Kenyans (95.1%) said they can access such information. These countries were selected based on their regional distribution and representation (Nigeria for West Africa, Kenya for East Africa, and Namibia for Southern Africa) and the availability or access to Afrobarometer's Round 9 findings at the time of writing this article. Even so, results from other countries are now available at <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>.

The time series analysis of these Round 9 findings is further undertaken by comparing them with Rounds 5 to 8 surveys. The proceeding discussions are structured as follows: the next section reviews African public administration literature in line with democratic reforms and a human rights agenda in public administration research. This section also identifies critical democracy and human rights aspects of public administration, emerging principles and



institutional dispensations aimed at improving the role of public administration in achieving democracy and human rights in the region and nationally. This is followed by the conceptualization of this study's DHR-PA perspective. Sections after that deal with the data and methods, results, discussion, and conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW: AFRICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND ITS DEMOCRATIC VALUES-PREMISE

There have been tremendous global, regional, and national policy efforts and research agendas to refocus public administration toward paying more “attention [to] the role of citizens in the work of government to help address the pervasive citizenship and democratic deficits” (Nabatchi, 2010, p. 376). The ever-expanding body of whistleblowing research in public administration (e.g., Domfeh & Bawole, 2011; Nwoke, 2019; Onyango, 2021) and social equity (Frederickson, 2010; Johnson & Svava, 2015) or gender equality (Bekana, 2019; Hossain & Jamil, 2022; Onyango & Akinyi, 2023) can be cases in point in this regard. Essentially, the citizen-centeredness of public administration underscores the values-premise, which measures DHR-PA constructs like administrative justice, responsiveness, representation, accountability, fairness, citizen participation, equity, and equality (cf. the *Quality of Government* research and datasets).

Specific efforts by regional governments in Africa, like the African Charter on the Values and Principles of Public Service and Administration, require the member states to realize public administration that respects human rights. Chapter II (Article 4.1.) states that “The Public Service and Administration and its agents shall respect all users' human rights, dignity and integrity.” This charter further gives the agents or administrators the hitherto limited right to belong to other associations like trade unions, engage in collective bargaining, or take industrial action to promote and protect their labor rights. These regional policy frameworks, including the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, are being operationalized nationally through public service diversity policies, citizen charters, and institutions like independent parliamentary commissions to realize DHR-PA structures and norms.

However, while demanding these rights, civil servants and citizens must still give due regard to national laws and regulations. But, as whistleblowing studies in African public administration show (Arszułowicz & Gasparski, 2017; Onyango, 2021), national laws take on realities of their own political contexts and, in most cases, have been applied in a relatively autocratic fashion. The result has constrained the realization of DHR-PA aspects like creating a more representative bureaucracy and accountable local governments in most African countries (Onyango, 2019; Plagerson, 2023; Sidha et al., 2023). Another thing is that the pursuit of DHR-PA in Africa revolves around the good governance agenda (a Western world-value-laden form of democratization and order of public authority) to realize people-centered governing norms. But, while a good governance approach has presented normative deficits to the human rights agenda (Hyden, 2023; Mutua, 2023), the attention to human proclivities of administrative systems gives some hope in realizing DHR-PA conditions. This is evident in recent practical institutional steps toward realizing DHR-PA systems, which have been conspicuous in constitutional and public sector reforms (Kibet & Fombad, 2017).

The aim of these reforms has been to realize democratic administration and develop human rights-sensitive public service in most African countries. Whereas PSRs only deal with civil service or bureaucratic changes, DHR-related reforms go beyond this toward transforming the entire human rights ecosystem. They should produce the cross-cutting transformation of state-society relations or the entirety of the state and its apparatuses of power like the legislature, judiciary, police, and political party system. In the human rights scholarship concerning

African countries, much has been written concerning the role of police in exercising human rights abuses than, say, the civil service. Even so, a democratic administration can hardly co-exist with an autocratically run police service, a thoroughly corrupt judiciary, and a state-captured legislature, as are common in most African settings (see Akinlabi, 2022; Hope, 2023; Onyango, 2020). This way, DHR-PA presents an integrative way of combining the complex mix of PSR approaches and related state reforms akin to human rights and democracy in Africa and similar political contexts. Borrowing Rosenbloom's (1983) analysis of separation of power and public administration reforms, PSRs and related approaches cut across political, legalistic, and managerial values, structures, and views concerning the position and role of an *individual* in public administration.

In addition, DHR-PA nuances in the civil service, judiciary, and police are increasingly being entrenched through recent open government/innovation, digital governance, participatory or collaborative governance, etc. These reform trends have established their own pathways in various disciplines, remaining highly fragmented in Africa, with only convergence found in the good governance agenda. Toward these efforts, leading continental research organizations like Afrobarometer and the African Development Bank (AfB) have generated insightful data to inform the DHR-PA dimensions, especially since the 2000s. Like in the European Union, pursuing DHR-PA structures in Africa has also taken on regional measures, as stipulated in Agenda 2063s *Aspiration 3*, and country-specific PSRs (Ohemeng & Akonnor, 2022; Onyango & Hyden, 2021).

Understanding DHR-PA in Africa typically audits the relationship between the political regime's characteristics and public administration's institutional development, a common tradition in studying African public administration (e.g., Hyden, 2021). While the Eurocentric and American public administration research seems to have moved away from this politically laden analysis into more tangible nuances of citizen-civil service relations (e.g., Goodnow, [1900] 2017), African public administration research is still profoundly grounded in the *politics-administration dichotomy*. Political and administrative boundaries are heavily blurred and enmeshed. Indeed, the African state's level of development and state-building experimentations means that public administration remains the main political arena where citizens and political elite negotiate government representation of different ethnic groups (not political parties).

This way, social equality is collectively constructed rather than individually defined, as an individual becomes an aggregate representative of a group. This is the central argument in the political approach to public administration (Johnson & Svava, 2015; Rosenbloom, 1983). With an individual representing a community in the civil service, their kin (and tribe members) would consider public administration more representative because service delivery is often timely within a social network—knowing a person in the bureaucracy can prove to be helpful in accessing public service (Bierschenk & Olivier de Sardan, 2014; Onyango, 2017). Therefore, as can also be demonstrated by the diversity policies of *advanced societies* (defined as states with highly diverse social identities and citizenship) like the United States, representation in the civil service, as a political value, is somehow based on parochialized social connotations regarding rights, fairness, and equality.

It is no wonder that African public administration is a highly contested political arena where each community seeks a share, making it the center of the regime's power for entrenching its interests and rewarding supporters. It is without a doubt that this political development analysis (political-clientelism) has richly informed and soundly challenged the Eurocentric and American public administration theories that, despite their mischaracterization of African contexts, continue to inform the study of public administration in Africa, as elsewhere. More importantly, a political development analysis clearly defines the political regime characteristics of public administration and its DHR inclinations. In his paper *Characteristics of Democratic Administration*, Theodore Reller (1944) distinguished between autocratic and democratic administration. He links democratic administration to democracy and defines the

latter “as the process of extending controls to people and groups in accord with their ability to effectively (in terms of social and individual development) employ them” (Reller, 1944, p. 1036). This analysis makes democratic administration more inclined toward promoting human rights than the control-focused autocratic administration associated with non-democratic or hybrid political regimes. Building broadly on previous dimensions developed by the likes of Mary Parker Follet ([1923] 2006), Theodore identifies ten characteristics of democratic administration, which can be summarized into the following: human development (welfare system), administrative responsibility, efficiency, accountability and transparency, accessibility of records or access to information, meritocracy and professionalism, delegated decision making, public participation and co-operation with citizens, fixed responsibilities, or specialization (cf. Frederickson, 1997; Ostrom, [1973] 2008; Waldo, 1952).

For decades, this democratization of public administration to promote human rights fundamentals (DHR-PA) has broadly taken on the multifaceted generation of PSR approaches. These approaches have often bordered on different public value streams. According to Rosenbloom (1983), these reform approaches can be said to reside in various vital aspects and expectations of *what* public administration should do and *how* it should carry out its activities (also see Frederickson, 1997). As already mentioned, these approaches take on a mixed basket of *managerial* or market-related values (New Public Management), underscoring the 3E's—efficiency, effectiveness, and economy; the *political values*, which include the pursuit of representative bureaucracy, accountability, and *legal values* underpinned by due process, individual rights, fairness, or equity (Rosenbloom, 1983, 2017).

While expanding on this, later works and developments have considered H. George Frederickson's longstanding advocacy to include social *equity* as another pillar of 3Es (e.g., Norman-Major, 2022). According to the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA), social equity as a value of public administration includes “(1) procedural fairness, (2) distributional equity, (3) process equity and (4) outcome disparities” (Norman-Major, 2022, p. 342). Realizing social equity in African public administration is evident in the recent proliferation of national policies on gender, persons with disabilities, and youth, among others. Norman-Major (2011, 2022) expands the 3Es to include *engagement*, which we can also consider as having policy *engagement* elements, citizen participation, and collaborative public service to ensure relevance, cultural competence, and accountability; *empathy*, which looks into political neutrality; collective support for welfare systems; and ethics, loyalty to public interest, democratic participation, and access to information. Adequate case studies have demonstrated how African governments are dealing with efforts to entrench these Es to create a vibrant and democratic public service delivery (Ayisi et al., 2022; Onyango, 2023c; Tapscott, 2017).

Overall, the DHR-PA perspective presents an integrative view of these values, which determines what public administration should do (government activities) and how it should do these things (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; Frederickson et al., 2018; Rosenbloom, 2017). The DHR-PA perspective's integrative framework categorizes these values within three dimensions: legal, managerial, and political, as explained further below.

DHR-PA PERSPECTIVE: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION VALUES

The legal values of DHR-PA in Africa

DHR-PA characteristics are more conspicuous in the legal values of public administration (or administrative law), which is the embodiment of public administration in the constitutional principles of a country (Rosenbloom, 2022). Administrative law should create an environment where social equity or the rule of law can thrive, and citizens can sue the government (Endicott,



2021; Frederickson, 2010). Therefore, variations in national laws and regulations are hinged on a country's political development or regime, hence the varying DHR-PA performance. At the same time, besides the legal studies (e.g., Adeola & Mutua, 2022), much of our understanding of the state of human rights in Africa has also been informed by international humanitarian Law and humanitarian studies.

These studies, however, pay scant attention to building public administration's capacity (Onyango, 2022). The clandestine or reactive nature of humanitarian operations and the contextual complexities of emergencies have rarely allowed local knowledge transfer. And they rarely give the public administration time to learn and develop the needed capacities to handle future human rights crises. Most importantly, humanitarian operations always occur in context with the limited application of the law or public administration, or in contexts with no state presence (limited statehood) and functional administrative structures. These limited statehood conditions can rarely entrench democratic conditions to realize human rights generally.

For some time now, PSRs in most African countries have introduced domestic DHR institutions like independent constitutional commissions and oversight institutions to improve DHR aspects that the mainstream public administration has had problems realizing since the 1960s. Human rights and national gender commissions have been created across Africa to deal with DHR concerns, specifically. They include the Office of the Ombudsman Namibia, the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC), the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in Nigeria, and the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR). While these commissions are supposed to improve human rights environments, how the mainstream public administration (the civil service) works within this landscape still needs to be understood and effectively operationalized. Government structures still need to realize microscopic DHR aspects and remain standard practice, compliance procedures, or governance symbols in public administration.

In the legal approach, institutions like the Ombudsman should guarantee this to realize the judicialization of public administration processes, administrative justice, and respect for civil rights. For decades, the pursuit of DHR-PA has witnessed the establishment of Ombudsman institutions across Africa to address historical injustices, promote the Bill of Rights, and redress administrative ills (Ayeni, 2018; Reif, 2004). The Ombudsman establishes the adversarial organizational structure in public administration for oversight. In the legal approach, an individual's right is paramount, as fundamentally captured in the mandates of Namibia's Office of the Ombudsman, the Kenyan Commission for Administrative Justice (CAJ) and the Public Complaints Commission (PCC) in Nigeria.

Like the Nigerian and Namibian Ombuds, the Kenyan Ombudsman was specifically created in 2011 and “empowered to, among other things, investigate complaints of delay, abuse of power, unfair treatment, manifest injustice or discourtesy. Secondly, the Commission is mandated to oversee and enforce the implementation of the Access to Information Act, 2016” (CAJ website). The CAJ replaced the Kenya National Human Rights and Equality Commission (KNHREC) and the Public Complaints Standing Committee. Similarly, the Nigerian PCC has created alternative dispute resolution (ADR). “Alternative dispute resolution and mediation have been the mode of operation in the Commission since its inception; it has allowed the Commission to resolve cases without expenses incurred by anyone” (PCC website). Recently, especially since the 2000s, public administration-oriented or executive Ombudsman models have mushroomed across Africa (Ayeni, 2018). Still, the legal values of public administration need to be studied more in mainstream public administration and conceptualized besides being functionally problematic in African public service, as this study's findings will show shortly.



The political values for DHR-PA in Africa

Caldwell (1944) considered public administration “truly a branch of politics, and the administrative theories of great public administrators cannot be understood without reference to their political objectives, their emotional promptings, and the measure of their values” (cited in Kingsley & Caldwell, 1945, p. 87). This way, the political approach presents the most familiar DHR aspect of public administration. Despite being less nuanced in DHR, it is critical and intricately linked to the object of the legal approach or administrative law. However, as reported in African public service literature (Kpessa-Whyte, 2022), the political approach also problematically co-exists with the managerial approach (Rosenbloom, 2017).

Political values of public administration include public accountability, responsiveness, and representation (Rosenbloom, 1983). These values become more explicit in Norman-Major's (2022) additional values of ethics, mainly democratic participation and engagement values, such as transparency, cultural competence, and inclusion. Social equity is also essentially political contestations that are actualized through more representative, accountable, and responsive structures like a decentralized participatory governance arrangement (Onyango, 2020; Onyango & Hyden, 2021). The political approach mainly promotes a pluralistic society and democratic governing systems. In Frank Goodnow's (1900, p. 98) words centuries ago, the political approach believes that “the people, the ultimate sovereign in a popular government, must, however, have control over the officers who execute their will, as well as those who express it.” Similarly, Rosenbloom (1983, p. 222) notes that the “basic concept behind pluralism within public administration is that since the administrative branch is a policy-making centre of government, it must be structured to enable faction to counteract faction by providing political representation to a comprehensive variety of the organized political, economic, and social interests that are found in the society at large.”

In this light, decentralization reforms—especially devolution—have become fashionable for organizing accountability, responsiveness, and representation of public administration. Decentralization should bring government systems and decision-making processes closer to the people. In Africa, decentralization has been used to break down the once-centralized public administration systems, which is pivotal in enhancing political values (Chigwata & Ziswa, 2018). In theory, decentered decision-making structures like local legislative assemblies and administrative systems have created more people-centered mechanisms of governing society. Public accountability institutions, mainly anti-corruption agencies (ACAs), are widespread in African countries and beyond (see, e.g., de Sousa, 2009).

In addition to ACAs, Kenya, Namibia, and Nigeria are among the countries worldwide that have created specialized institutions. These include the auditor general, public asset authorities, witness agency, etc., to promote public accountability and responsiveness in public administration. In some cases, like in Uganda, the Ombudsman also serves as the ACA. Ultimately, these institutions and the legislations are supposed to enhance democratic administration. Unlike the legal approach, the political approach views an individual as an aggregate part of the group, making representing social groups a primary objective of public administration, as seen in representative bureaucracy literature.

Indeed, some African governments have developed workforce diversity policies to promote bureaucratic representation. These should mainstream gender equality, public participation, social integration, etc. For example, Kenya developed a diversity policy for public service in 2016. In Uganda, there is the National Employment Policy for Uganda 2011. This policy recognizes the employment of vulnerable groups and works in tandem with the 2007 Equal Opportunities Act, the 2006 Employment Act, the 2011 Employment Regulations, the 2000 Workers' Compensation Act, etc. Nigeria's Federal Character Commission (FCC) embody similar values, but at the federal level, leaving the mainstream public administration without a specific public service diversity policy.



These efforts and others characterize democratic administration in most African countries (Ayisi et al., 2022; Onyango, 2022). Realizing a democratized public administration should be the state's goal as it strengthens its capacity-related variables, its public administration (administrative state), and political context *vis-à-vis* DHR values. Public administration becomes an object of political development, a state consolidation tool (state-building), and a nation-building mechanism (managing social diversity and enhancing societal well-being). This connection between democratic administration and the state's capacity to strengthen nationhood has been extensively studied in Africa. However, it leaves most African public administrations at a loss because of neoliberal analyses that mischaracterize and leave out the complexity of African public authority and how it patterns political values of representation, public accountability, and responsiveness (Hyden, 2021; Kirk & Allen, 2022).

Managerial values in DHR-PA in Africa

Like New Public Management in Europe, New Zealand, and Australia or reinventing government in the United States, Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) managerialism underscore the realization of Weberian structures in organizing public administration, which has undoubtedly proven elusive in African countries. To professionalize public administration, these structures give an impersonal view of the individual as the employee, the client, or the victim (Rosenbloom, 1983, 2017).

However, in practice, the good governance PSR agenda features great pillarization of political, legal, and managerial approaches. For example, the professionalization of public administration in Nigeria, Kenya, and Namibia since 1999 has been underpinned by managerial values, accountability, responsiveness, access to information and fairness, among others. In most African contexts today, E-government structures or digitalizing public service are part of efforts to achieve 3Es (e.g., Hinson et al., 2022). The objective of Namibian e-government is “to make government administration more transparent, speedy and accountable while addressing the society's needs and expectations through efficient public services and effective interaction between the people, businesses and government” (<https://opm.gov.na/e-governance>).

Also, the public service charters have come in handy in articulating DHR-PA principles in public institutions. Still, in Namibia, the public service charter seeks to provide “a courteous and helpful service which is run to suit the convenience of those entitled to the service; services provided by public servants who can be identified readily, through wearing name badges, by their customers. [It adds it seeks to provide] efficient and economic public services within affordable resources” (<https://www.meft.gov.na/about-meft/public-service-charter/117/>). Similar values are being promoted in service delivery charters in Kenya and Nigeria, underscoring timeliness or efficiency, accountability, accessibility, and responsiveness to operationalize a citizen-oriented public administration.

Nevertheless, these developments are yet to embed DHR-PA elements effectively, and challenges remain akin to African countries' *developing* and *democratizing* challenges (Hyden, 2021; Onyango, 2021). It is commonplace that the destruction that followed SAP reforms across Africa cannot be overstated. Nevertheless, they remain part of good governance imprints, guiding how public administration should work. Even though the 3Es are the critical pillars of public administration, the managerial approach has been the most studied and criticized aspect in most administrative contexts. As mentioned, the SAP reforms, like hollowing out of the state, say, public tendering, have not worked as intended under prevailing conditions of the weak regulatory state in most African contexts (e.g., Kpressa-Whyte, 2022). With market failures and other forms of fragile statehood, responsiveness and transparency have been underscored in response to the fact that public tendering and privatization of service delivery have promoted corruption networks and eroded

public accountability mechanisms, ultimately threatening the realization of 3Es (e.g., Afolabi et al., 2022; Onyango, 2017). The integrative nature of these approaches and how they relate to DHR-PA concerns can be derived from Afrobarometer findings, as presented in the sections below.

DATA AND METHOD

Afrobarometer survey

Afrobarometer datasets, like governance indices globally, evaluate governance categories' performance, including democracy and human rights, exploring how they have evolved since 1999 in almost 40 African countries. Afrobarometer, as a pan-African, nonpartisan survey research network, provides reliable data on these dimensions, showing African experiences and evaluations of democracy, governance, and quality of life. For a more elaborate explanation of surveys and methods used by Afrobarometer, see <https://www.afrobarometer.org/surveys-and-methods/>. Between 1999 and 2021, eight surveys have been completed in up to 39 countries. Afrobarometer conducts face-to-face interviews in the language of the respondent's choice. For Round 9, the Afrobarometer team in Kenya, based at the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), University of Nairobi, interviewed 2400 adult Kenyans from November 12–30, 2021, with a 41.4% response frequency. In Namibia, the Afrobarometer survey is done by Survey Warehouse. They interviewed a nationally representative, random, stratified probability sample of 1200 adult Namibians between October 31 and November 16, 2021. A sample of this size yields country-level results with a margin of error of ± 3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level. In Nigeria, NOIPolls interviewed a nationally representative, random stratified probability sample of 1600 adult Nigerians, between March 5 and 31, 2022.

Altogether, the three countries' sample size is 5200. Each country sample yielded country-level results with a margin of error of ± 2 percentage points in Kenya, Namibia ± 3 , and ± 2.5 in Nigeria, generating a confidence level of 95%. The Online Data Analysis (ODA) tool provided by the Afrobarometer was used to produce time series data analysis for the previous four survey rounds. These data are presented in graphs and charts. These countries were selected based on their regional representation (Nigeria for West Africa, Kenya for East Africa, and Namibia for Southern Africa) and the availability or access to Afrobarometer's Round 9 findings at the time of writing this paper. However, results from other countries are now available at <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>. A time series analysis of the Round 9 data is achieved by comparing them with the previous Afrobarometer's Rounds 5 to 9 surveys.

Selected variables

DHR-PA specifically reside in democracy categories: the function of government, civil liberties, political participation, the electoral process, and pluralism (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). As in classical works on democratic administration discourse (see Ostrom, [1973] 2008; Reller, 1944; Waldo, 1952), DHR-PA investigates citizens' perceptions regarding fundamental public values, mainly administrative responsiveness, equality, accountability, representation, transparency, access to information, etc. A democratic administration analysis makes DHR-PA the object of state politics and how its structures are organized to deliver democratic aspirations. In practice, democratic administration aspirations, like decentralization and equality, have become increasingly central in African state reforms, taking center stage in organizing and auditing how the state works. To analyze these dimensions, data were retrieved on those variables that relate DHR to public administration, as presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1 Variables of analysis.

Variables	Constructs
Public accountability and transparency	The degree of citizen-centeredness in service delivery, government performance, access to information
Representation and responsiveness	Access to elected officials: Elected officials follow constituents' demands, democratic citizen participation
Citizenship and participation	Collective action, citizen mobilization, citizen responsiveness
The rule of law	Compliance with court orders, social equality, reporting corruption (engagement and ethics), individual rights

Source: Author.

RESULTS

Rights and freedoms: Societal perceptions of individual rights

For public administration to acquire DHR principles and characteristics, citizens must aspire to realize these principles in society. These alternatively define individual freedom and rights, which should be realized through public administration. To explore this dimension, findings on the following questions were retrieved.

Let's talk for a moment about the kind of society you would like to have in this country. Which of the following statements is closest to your view? Statement 1: The government should be able to ban any organization that goes against its policies. Statement 2: We should be able to join any organization, whether or not the government approves of it.

Table 2 indicates the frequency of responses to these statements in the 2019/2021 dataset in Kenya, Nigeria, and Uganda.

The Round 9 findings show similar preferences in the ability of the government to exercise control over their associational rights, with most responses favoring the second statement over the first statement. Accordingly, Nigerians (18.5%) agreed with statement 1, with 28.8% agreeing very strongly. Still, 26.1% agreed with statement 2, with 24% agreeing very strongly. In Kenya, 13.4% agreed with statement 1, with 28.8% agreeing very strongly, showing a decline from previous findings; while 18.3% agreed with statement 2, with 36.8% agreeing very strongly. In Namibia, 26.5% agreed with statement 2, with 38.3% agreeing strongly, showing

TABLE 2 Individual rights to join any organization (round 8 survey).

Category	Total (%)	Country		
		Kenya (%)	Namibia (%)	Nigeria (%)
Agree very strongly with 1	30.0	35.2	21.5	28.7
Agree with 1	19.1	13.4	22.4	25.2
Agree with 2	18.6	12.8	25.9	21.9
Agree very strongly with 2	29.4	34.9	28.5	21.9
Agree with neither	1.6	1.8	.7	2.0
Refused	.1	.2	.1	—
Don't know	1.1	1.7	.9	.3

Source: Author's generated analysis via Afrobarometer.org/online data analysis.

an improvement from the previous findings; while 16.4% agreed with statement 1, with 16.9% agreeing strongly. So, while most Namibians prefer less government control of their freedoms to associate with organizations, Kenyans prefer either, as Nigerians seem to prefer government constraints on organizations they should join.

Much of this variation also takes on these countries' historical pathways. For instance, Nigeria has been dealing with the insurgent organization Boko Haram, which may have informed their preference for statement 1. The Kenyan government has a history of banning organizations like civil society actors that criticize its policies. On the contrary, Namibia has had a history of struggles against systems of apartheid and popular movements for individual freedoms of association, which makes statement 2 the most preferable. These findings show the broader political environments of public administration and inform citizens' perceptions and preferences for DHR-PA values and structures in these countries.

Accountability, transparency, and responsiveness

Public administration's responsiveness and transparency evaluate the broader governance environment influencing government-citizen relations. This specifically audits public issues of performance, corruption, and citizens' attitudes concerning their voice in government activities. The following questions were analyzed to explore these dimensions:

Which statements are closest to your view? Choose Statement 1 or Statement 2.
 [Do you agree or agree very strongly?] Statement 1: It is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if we do not influence what it does.
 Statement 2: It is more important for citizens to be able to hold the government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly.

Table 3 summarizes the R8 or 2019/2021 data.

Figure 1 captures the responses to the above statements in the studied countries going back to 2011 and 2013, when the Round 5 survey was carried out, until 2019/2021, when the R8 survey was conducted. Both figures show a growing demand for more accountable governments across Africa for some time now.

The findings in Figure 1 show a growing demand for public accountability, responsiveness, and transparency in Namibia, Nigeria, and Kenya in the last decade. More citizens think they should be able to hold the government accountable, even if that means it makes decisions more slowly. The 2021/2022 data or Round 9 survey captures similar trends: 35.4% of Namibians strongly agreed with statement 2, against 15.5% who agreed strongly with statement 1. In Nigeria, 37.3% strongly agreed with statement 2, against 19% who strongly agreed

TABLE 3 Government performance versus accountability to citizens in Africa.

Category	Total (%)	Kenya (%)	Namibia (%)	Nigeria (%)
Agree very strongly with 1	18.0	13.7	16.1	25.8
Agree with 1	14.9	8.6	18.6	21.6
Agree with 2	21.9	17.7	30.3	21.8
Agree very strongly with 2	43.8	58.3	33.6	29.7
Agree with neither	.6	.5	.2	1.0
Refused	.0	.1	–	–
Don't know	.8	1.1	1.1	.1

Source: Author's generated analysis via Afrobarometer.org/online data analysis.

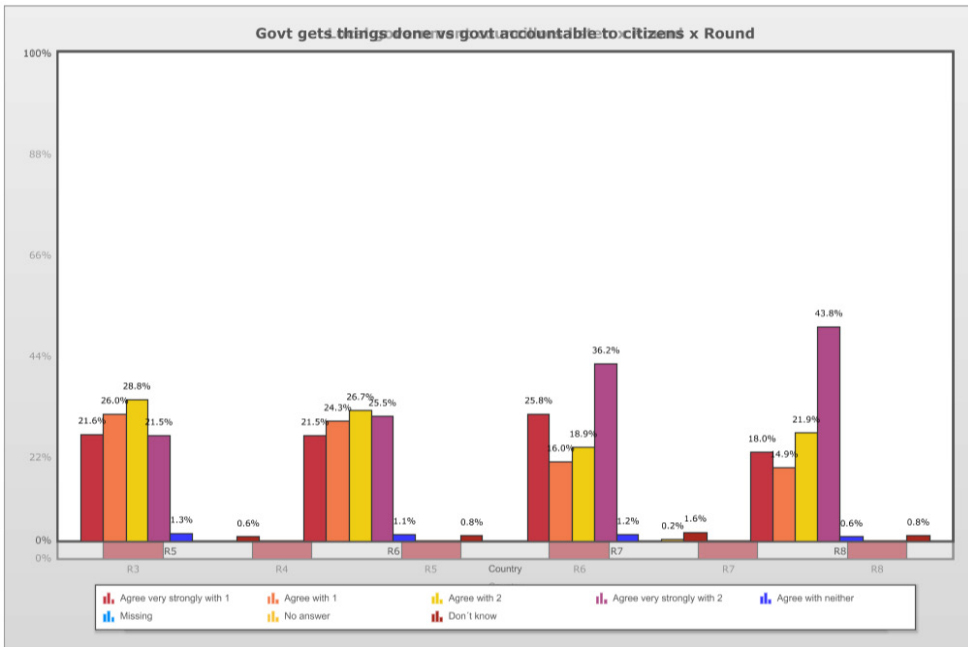


FIGURE 1 The government performance in the last decade. *Source:* Author-generated analysis via Afrobarometer.org/online data analysis.

with statement 1. More than half (52.6%) of Kenyan respondents agreed strongly with statement 2, compared to 14% who strongly agreed with statement 1.

Unlike Nigeria and Namibia, which show an increased preference to hold the government accountable, Kenya's case shows a decline from the previous findings, where 58.3% strongly agreed with statement 2 against 13.7% who strongly agreed with statement 1. An explanation for the decline in Kenya's case can be found in the poor government performance if the 2022 election campaigns were conducted and the results are anything to go by. The vote for the current United Democratic Alliance administration and a loss by a relatively more popular opposition was primarily perceived as a protest vote against the previous administration.

Further interrogation of the responsiveness and responsibility of public administration were explored using the following questions:

Which statements are closest to your view? Statement 1: The government is like the people's boss. People should respect the government and do what it directs. Statement 2: The government is like the people's employee. It should respect citizens and do what they request.

Most respondents strongly perceive the government as a servant or employee of the people rather than the boss. Indeed, 65.8% of Kenyans agree very strongly with statement 2, with only 8.8% agreeing very strongly with statement 1. Almost half (47.8%) of Nigerians agree very strongly with statement 2, with only 11.8% agreeing very strongly with statement 1. A similar picture is painted in Namibia, where 51.5% agreed very strongly with statement 2, with only 9% agreeing very strongly with statement 1. So, most Kenyans consider a government to be more accountable and responsible to the citizens than Namibia and Nigeria, respectively.

Compared to the findings of the previous question, most citizens, especially Kenyans, do not understand the links between their ability to hold the government accountable to ensure it remains respectable to the citizens. This may indicate an underlying citizen agency deficit, which can be confirmed by the fact that most reportedly shy from reporting corruption by



public administrators. Despite considering some civil servants as corrupt (Nigeria at 47.7%, Kenya at 51.6%, and Namibia at 54.4%), when asked if they could report corruption, most respondents said no because of the fear of retaliation. On this point, 63.4% of Namibians, 83.3% of Kenyans, and 86.4% of Nigerians agreed that speaking out against corruption bore the risk of retaliation or other negative consequences. This could explain the low public trust scored against different public institutions and authorities.

The same citizen agency deficit also comes out in the unwillingness of citizens to protest or raise an issue of public concern, as seen in the proceeding sections. Also, regarding responsiveness, most respondents in these countries believe that public service systems have yet to enhance the right to access health care, food, clean piped water, and security. These findings' insights show the state of DHR-PA concerning public administration's responsiveness and accountability to the citizenry.

In addition, when asked: How many of the following people do you think are involved in corruption, or haven't you heard enough about them to say: Judges and magistrates?, 19.3% of Namibians said most of them, more than half (53.3%) said some of them, and 12.8% said none. In Kenya, 22% said most of them, 56.4% believed some of them, and 8.3% said none. In Nigeria, 33.2% said most of them, while 45.2% thought some of them and 4% said none. This may mean that the judicialization of public administration, like those pursued through the Executive Ombudsman, says much about responsiveness and public ethics in the courts of law in the selected countries.

However, when asked How likely it is that you could get someone to take action If you went to a local government office or anti-corruption authority to report corrupt behavior like misuse of funds or requests for bribes?, 37.8% of Namibians said not at all likely, the same with 46% in Kenya, and 49.5% in Nigeria. Also, 23.4% of Namibians said they were somewhat likely to report corruption or misuse of funds, 21.7% in Kenya, and 18.9% in Nigeria. This shows deficits concerning the effective application of law in these countries.

Representation, citizen participation, and mobilization

Bureaucratic representation takes on political connotations and social demographics of public administrators. It also relates to citizen participation and mobilization in ensuring citizens' welfare in public administration. To map these dimensions, the following questions' findings were analyzed: How likely is it that you get together with others and make your elected Representatives to the National Council/Member of the County Assembly listen to your concerns about a matter of importance to the community? According to Round 9 data, 33.0% of Namibians said not at all likely, 21.6% said not very reasonable, and 26.9% said somewhat likely. In Nigeria, 26.9% said not at all likely, 28.6% said not very likely, and 31.2% said somewhat likely. In Kenya, 23.8% said not at all likely, 15.1% said not very reasonable, and 29.8% said somewhat likely.

Also, when asked: How much of the time do you think the following try their best to listen to what ordinary people have to say: Members of Local Authority Council?, 45.9% of Nigerians said never, 35.1% said sometimes, and 14.4% said often. In Kenya, 42.0% said never, 36.9% said only sometimes, and 14.2% said often; while 39.3% of Namibians stated that only sometimes, and 32.8% said never. Only 7% said always, showing representation, responsiveness deficits, and relations between local authorities and citizens. Low evaluation of local representatives' commitment to promoting citizens' welfare seems to have barely changed in the last decade if the previous findings are anything to go by, as seen in [Figure 2](#).

In addition, the findings on the following question were retrieved to map public participation or the citizen-centeredness of public administration. Respondents were asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. [If "No"] Would you do

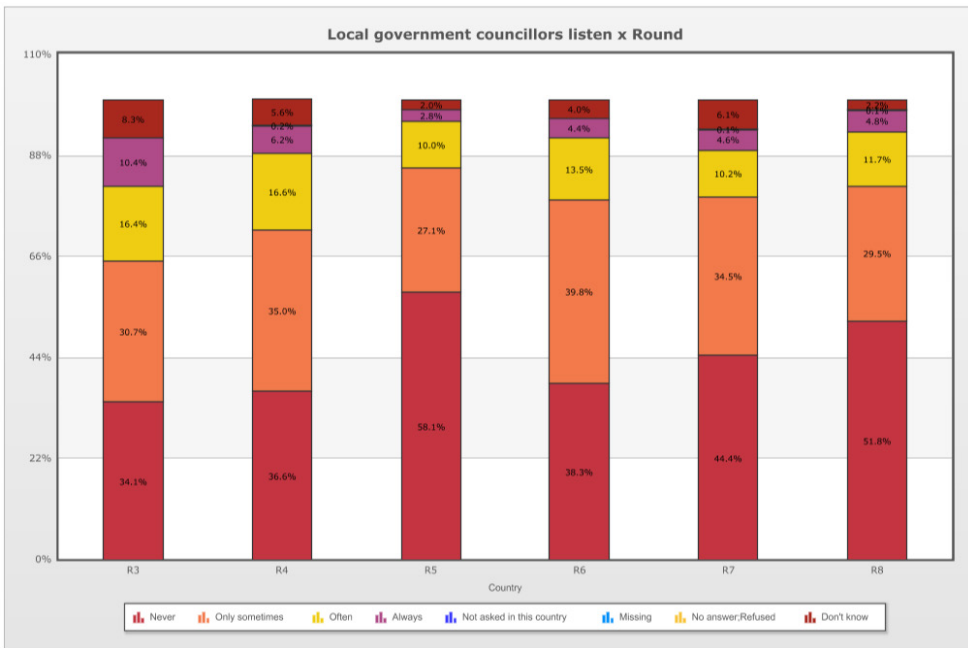


FIGURE 2 Whether local government representatives listen to citizens (time series analysis). *Source:* Author-generated analysis via Afrobarometer.org/online data analysis.

TABLE 4 Whether citizens get together to raise an issue.

Category	Total (%)	Country		
		Kenya (%)	Namibia (%)	Nigeria (%)
No, would never do this	16.8	14.5	10.6	24.9
No, would do it if I had the chance	27.8	24.4	46.1	18.9
Yes, once or twice	15.6	16.2	13.0	16.8
Yes, several times	20.8	23.7	17.0	19.4
Yes, often	18.4	21.0	12.8	18.8
Refused	.1	.1	–	.1
Don't know	.5	.1	.5	1.0

Source: Generated using the Afrobarometer online data analysis tool.

this if you had the chance to get together with others to raise an issue? In Nigeria, 25.2% said they would never do this, the same percentage said they would do it if they had the chance, and 25.2% said several times. In Kenya, 15.3% said they would never do this, 48.6% said they would do it if they had the chance, and 15.6% said several times. In Namibia, 16.8% said they would never do this, 42.9% would do it if they had the chance, and 20.6% said they would do this several times. The Nigerian case presents interesting insights concerning citizen participation and mobilization in public affairs.

Table 4 compares these findings to 2019/2021 data in Namibia, Kenya, and Nigeria. The response rates or preferences on each question remain somewhat the same, showing low citizen mobilization and proactive participation on issues that affect them. This means these countries' public administration mostly lacks adequate feedback mechanisms for ensuring DHR-PA repertoires like effective, efficient, and representative allocation functions.

Furthermore, a relevant question in this regard is: How likely is it that you could get someone to take action if you went to a local leader or a local government office to request assistance for a development project in your community, like an improved water supply or community clean-up activity? According to Round 9 findings, 49.4% of Namibians stated they would do it if they had the chance, and 35.1% said they would never do it. In Kenya, approximately 39% said they would not be at all likely, <28.5% said somewhat likely, and 8.5% said very likely. In Nigeria, 44.9% said not at all likely, <20.3% somewhat likely, and 3.6% said very likely. These findings represent low scores on the performance of public service delivery systems and citizen agencies in asserting their rights over service delivery access in countries under focus.

It was then asked: Here is a list of actions that people sometimes take as citizens. For each of these, please tell me whether you, personally, have done any of these things during the past year. [If “No”:] Would you do this if you had the chance: Participated in a demonstration or a protest march? This question can be used to interrogate whether or not citizens can exert pressure or demand effective public service delivery. The following findings were made: 64.3% of Nigerians said no, they would never do this; more than 25.3% said no, they would do it if they had the chance; and 4.1% said yes, several times. In Kenya, 66% said no, they would never do this; more than 28% said no, they would do it if they had the chance; and 1.6% said they had participated in demonstrations or protests several times. In Namibia, 35.1% said no, they would never do this; <49.4% said no, they would do it if they had the chance; and 4.4% said they had participated several times in protests as a mode of citizen participation.

Access to information

The following question was considered for analysis under access to information as an aspect of DHR-PA: *For each of the following statements, please tell me whether you disagree or agree. Information held by public authorities is only for use by government officials; it should not have to be shared with the public.* Unexpectedly, 32.5% of Namibians agreed with this statement, and 25.2% strongly disagreed. In Nigeria, 26.7% strongly disagreed with the statement, and 38.3% disagreed. Also, a lower percentage of Namibians, 23.3% of Nigerians, agreed with the statement. In Kenya, 40.8% strongly disagreed with this statement, 25.9% disagreed, and 18.2% agreed. However, compared to 2019/2021 data, relatively fewer Namibians agreed with this statement, as fewer Kenyans disagreed strongly. A similar trend was also witnessed in Nigeria, as shown in [Table 5](#).

Still, as findings on additional questions in this line of investigation would show, the leeway to access information differs with the nature of the information needed. This may mean

TABLE 5 Government information for official use only.

Category	Total (%)	Country		
		Kenya (%)	Namibia (%)	Nigeria (%)
Strongly disagree	26.8	31.6	23.1	22.2
Disagree	31.5	31.4	34.0	29.6
Neither agree nor disagree	7.6	4.5	7.9	11.9
Agree	20.5	21.0	20.6	19.5
Strongly agree	8.2	8.0	7.1	9.5
Refused	.1	.1	.1	–
[Undefined]	5.4	3.3	7.3	7.2

Source: Generated using the Afrobarometer online data analysis tool.

that public administration in these countries is still operating with much secrecy, especially regarding financial and budget information on service delivery contracts. This was further investigated by analyzing data from the following question: How likely can you get the following information from the government or other public institutions, or haven't you heard enough to say? If you contacted your local government office to request to see a contract for a government-funded project or purchase?

More than half of Kenyans (59.2%) said they are not at all likely to access this information. In Namibia, 46.7% stated they are not at all likely to access that information, while 50.3% of Nigerians said they are unlikely to access such information. On access to the local government development plan and budget, Kenyans (55.4%), Namibians (46.7%), and Nigerians (46.9%) said they are not at all likely to access such information.

These findings contradict those that pried public access to information on budgets and expenditures at the local government. Respondents were asked:

I would like to ask you what information should be shared with the public and which should not. For each of the following, please tell me whether ordinary citizens and news media should have the right to obtain this information from the government or whether the government should be allowed to keep the information away from the public: budgets and expenditures for the local government councilors?

The findings here are that 80.5% of Namibians, 95.1% of Kenyans, and 89.8% of Nigerians stated yes, agreeing to the availability of such information to the public. This paints a different picture of how the local governments work. However, whether public access to this information improves accountability and responsiveness of the public may be another thing if previous findings are anything to go by.

The rule of law and fairness of public administration

When asked: How often, if ever, are people treated unfairly by the government based on their economic status, that is, how rich or poor they are?, less than half of Kenyans (35.7%) said they sometimes experience unfair treatment in government institutions because of their economic conditions, with Namibians at 46.5% and Nigerians at 27%. This may mean more awareness of the economic status and how it positions citizens' relations with the government in Namibia than in Kenya and Nigeria. It may also mean most Kenyans and Nigerians experience other more critical challenges than economic status when accessing public service. Indeed, 29.3% of Kenyans and 20% of Namibians said they often experience unfairness from the government, with Nigerians at 27.1%.

However, 23.3% of Kenyans said they always experience unfair treatment, Namibians 17.5%, and Nigerians at 40.3%. This way, Nigerian public administration always discriminates against citizens based on their economic status more than Namibian and Kenyan public administrations. These findings generally show administrative law deficits or distributive injustice, which can promote policy exclusion. This becomes clear when respondents were asked: In your opinion, how often are people treated unequally under the law in this country? 36.3% of Kenyans stated often, 25.8% said always, and 25.3% said rarely. In Namibia, 29.0% stated rarely, 28.5% said often, and 21.4% said always. In Nigeria, 42.9% always, which is relatively higher than in Namibia and Kenya; 40% said often, and 11.3% said rarely. Overall, we can see in both questions that more Nigerians than Kenyans and Namibians feel that people are relatively treated unequally under the law.

The Kenyan case also shows optimism regarding expanding gender rights for women. This came out when respondents were asked: How well or badly would you say the current



government is handling the following matters, or haven't you heard enough to say: Promoting equal rights and opportunities for women? In the case of Kenya, 39.3% said fairly well, more than half (53.9%) in Kenya stated the same, and in Nigeria, 21.5%. Still, 21.5% of Namibians said the government handled women's rights fairly well and very well. Kenyans (25.3%) think the government has done fairly badly, while 30.8% of Nigerians stated that the government had done fairly badly, with 38.8% thinking it has done very badly. In short, the rule of law is still experiencing serious challenges in Namibia and Nigeria, more than in Kenya, despite some improvements in gender rights in the latter.

DISCUSSION

DHR-PA interrogates the linkages between democratic output and public administration's embeddedness in public values. A DHR-PA analysis of the above findings paints a somewhat intricate picture. By giving a closer look into the microscopic characteristics of democratic government, we see how the large-scale political transformations (state reforms) toward democracy (how the state works) may take time to be realized in public administration, where long-term democratic norms are or should be realized.

Therefore, a DHR-PA perspective explains why global indices like the Freedom Index 2022 report show that countries like Nigeria, Kenya, and Namibia still lag behind European and North American states in entrenching democratic conditions. Still, a noticeable public consciousness is emerging, albeit problematically, in the public administration of the studied countries. For example, we can see a shift in how the African public thinks about gender rights and other DHR-PA rights, like access to information. Put differently, an analysis of democratic and human rights inclinations of public administration shows how some African countries perform relatively better in expanding democratic political conditions than those in the same political development category in other parts of the world (see Economist Intelligence Unit, 2021). The Freedom Index's ten categories for DHR include the rule of law, size of government, security and safety movement, religion, association, assembly, civil society, expression and information, identity and relationships, legal system and property rights, access to sound money, freedom to trade internationally, and regulation. These categories, like the common five democracy categories, underpin governance philosophies of organizing and managing society in the manner of a neoliberal state. DHR-PA is central if a state is to acquire these categories, as discussed above.

However, to promote the institutional characteristics of these categories, public administration in African countries should understand the contextual connotations of human rights and freedom, their evaluation indices, and practices. Recent findings in countries like Somalia and Sudan can be cases in point. In the Freedom Index report, Sudan and Somalia are among the lowest in 2021's freedom report. In a 0–10, where 10 indicates more freedom and 0 no freedom, Namibia scores 7.56. In contrast, Kenya and Nigeria score 6.73 and 6.2, respectively, showing that Nigeria is the least free country of the studied countries. Kenya is less free than Namibia, a scenario that reflects the Afrobarometer findings reported earlier.

There are also strong indications that context-specific citizenship interpretations and complex social relations outside good governance or neoliberalism frames of human rights hinder developing DHR-PA conditions. For example, whereas most Sudanese disapprove of non-democratic government, according to recent Afrobarometer data, a good number of Sudanese (20.8% agreeing strongly and 25.2% just agreeing) indicated that it is more important to have a government that can get things done, even if they do not influence what it does. This response was only slightly lower than 28.9%, who stated that it is more important for citizens to hold the government accountable, even if it makes decisions more slowly. A similar variation was established when Sudanese were asked if they approved or disapproved of a military government,

with 25.4% approving (13.2% strongly approving) against 24.4% disapproving (30.3% strongly disapproving). More importantly, most Sudanese felt completely free (44.8%) and somewhat free (31.4%) against not at all free (8.8%).

So, if we rely entirely on Freedom Index data and indicators to understand DHR-PA conditions in these countries, there should be a significant variation between those approving (with a significantly higher percentage) and disapproving of an undemocratic form of government. Sudanese have also always felt safe and secure (57.6%). These findings contradict Freedom Index evaluations that categorize Sudan as performing poorly in promoting the rule of law, freedom, and security, among others. Similar contradictions can be reported in Somalia, which lacks a functional neoliberal state. However, as Risse (2017) shows, an absence of neoliberal state fundamentals does not mean an absence of the rule of law or individual freedoms in Somalia. Instead, the informal public authority or state effectively ensures security and safety. This means DHR lenses, as framed by neoliberalism, need to be revised to understand contextual human rights complexities and how they should be promoted by public administration in African countries.

This notwithstanding, we cannot be quick to cast away neoliberal human rights indices. They are still relevant in measuring how the African state is performing in ensuring DHR-PA conditions. As shown above, the Round 9 Afrobarometer and previous findings in Kenya, Namibia, and Nigeria paint a hopeful picture of improving structural changes and citizen spaces or their rights in public administration. These findings further point to the primary role of public administration in improving the conditions of democracy, such as elections administration and fairness, public accountability, the rule of law, corruption and representation, service delivery, and gender rights.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The democratic administration unpacks the values-premise of public administration and remains pertinent in realizing human rights concerns in contemporary public administration and governance research. This article's DHR-PA perspective shows how these values are experienced or perceived by citizens in Nigeria, Kenya, and Namibia. While recent case studies provide richer insights into the progress in making governments work better, the issue of human rights and the role of public administration needs to be explicitly addressed in the theoretical development of public administration research and practice, especially in African political contexts. This should focus on improving and strengthening policies and structures that entrench democratic administration, like public participation mechanisms, administrative justice, and public engagement processes. Human rights remain the preservation of donor organizations focused more on reforms that would tame political actors and security agencies rather than public administration, which should benefit from the trickle-down effects of democratic political transformation. Therefore, while this top-down approach is crucial, it rarely entrenches DHR values at the bottom, where citizens need them most and where they are more likely to cause citizen-centered democratic transformation by expanding invented spaces of citizen participation and government-citizen relations.

The result is that human rights have been addressed chiefly legally and far detached from the socio-institutional development of public administration or norms needed to realize democratic principles. This delineation of human rights from the heart of public administration operations has made the realization of DHR-PA elusive. Despite human rights issues being the main object of public administration and governance, how these issues have been framed or targeted (if at all they are) in public administration does little to explicitly operationalize them, especially in African contexts where public administration is still dealing with *democratizing* and *developing* problems such as extreme poverty, inequalities,



and autocratic norms. Even though appropriate policies like decentralization have been implemented to address these deficits, a lot is needed to transform the public administration's DHR affinities.

Case studies on local governance and urban politics in Africa have extensively informed the essence of citizen participation in public accountability, social equity, fairness, and representation (see Bisong, 2022; Onyango, 2020). However, these conventional or structural efforts may also need to tap into emerging DHR opportunities in the ongoing technological transformation through social media and other digital technologies (see Bothale & Dick-Sagoe, 2023; Ondiek & Onyango, 2023).

This would complement DHR-PA consciousness already taking root despite relative variations across African countries. This variation resides in the changing state politics (political environments) due to constitutional reforms and public sector reforms that are shifting more from regime consolidation politics (Ndulo, 2019) toward promoting popular participation, which is a prerequisite for DHR-PA (Onyango, 2023b). This being the case, the conceptual and empirical realities of DHR-PA have become central to evaluating African public administration. Despite the underlying neoliberal connotations, public values of representation, equality, transparency, responsiveness, fairness, and justice are at the core of this transformation. This article's discussions further indicate that DHR-PA deficits may also be linked to issues that Waldo (1952) identified in the formative years of American public administration as *administrative facts* and which are characteristic of a developing public administration like those in Africa. Overall, DHR-PA conditions emphasize and display a mix-basket of public values, whether political, legal, or market-embedded values, as typical in public sector reforms.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There is no conflict of interest in this paper.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data available online at: <https://www.afrobarometer.org/online-data-analysis/>.

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