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AI INTEGRATION INTO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN AFRICA: NAVIGATING COMPLEXITIES, INCLUSION, AND INSTITUTIONAL GAPS

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ABSTRACT

This study will discuss the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in the public administration of Africa by using three main strategic documents: E-Government Survey 2024, Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024, and the Continental AI Strategy 2024. The results indicate that although AI has become viewed as a revolutionary resource to enhance service delivery, efficiency in governance, and administrative responsibility, there is no concerted effort in adoption, and it is mainly policy-based rather than practice-based. The young African population is often described as a strategic resource in terms of AI-enabled innovation in the public sector, but a structural lack of STEM education, digital infrastructure, AI-related skills, and innovation ecosystems has limited the youth's preparedness a great deal. AI implementation has several ethical/regulatory gaps; this is primarily due to algorithmic bias, lack of data protection, and lack of accountability. These gaps pose formidable hurdles to promoting responsible AI use. The study, based on the frameworks of the Street-Level Bureaucracy and Technology Acceptance Model, reveals through a qualitative study of the documents that African systems of governance have many discrepancies between strategic plans and practical implementation capability. The study concludes that Africa is at a crossroads that needs climatic efforts at the continental level, human capital investment, strong regulatory implementation, and youth-focused innovation systems to make sure that AI usage is universal, moral, and development-driven. The expansion and validation of these findings by mixed-method and country-level empirical research should be included in future research.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Public Administration, Digital Governance, Africa, Youth Readiness, Ethical AI Algorithmic Bias, Policy Implementation, Governance Reform, Technology Adoption

1. INTRODUCTION

Along with the use of the expansive range of digital technologies, the practice of public administration is also experiencing a significant and changing focus on how government programs and the policies of government are being implemented (Milakovich, 2021). One focus for public administrators in Africa is the growth of these technologies and their application to the challenges and opportunities presented in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Nhede et al., 2022). One aspect of this trend is the increasing interest in the use of artificial intelligence (AI) to improve the delivery of public

services, to provide greater levels of accountability, and to provide improved overall governance that benefits citizens throughout Africa and the various nations of the continent (Ogu et al., 2024). Originally, the concept of public administration was mainly defined with the emphasis on bureaucratic functions; now, the definition of public administration has evolved into a more comprehensive definition of public value creation, inclusive governance, and multi-sector collaboration by public administrators, private sector partners, and civil society partners (Peters et al., 2022; Rainey, 2021). This research study incorporates a depiction of public administration through a more expansive lens. The research will focus on the interconnected relationship between the roles of state, private sector, and civil society actors in producing, managing, and delivering goods and services to the public. Most of the African government entities have started to implement new, digitally driven technologies to improve the management and delivery of public services (Shibambu & Ngoepe, 2024). The goal is to modernize how government entities interact with their constituents while simultaneously increasing access, efficiency, and effectiveness of the services that they provide. This use of AI, which has been increasingly adopted as a transformational tool for enhancing public sector decision support, assists frontline staff who deliver governmental services to citizens and addresses some of the most difficult developmental challenges that many countries in Africa have faced for many years (Agba et al., 2023). Recent empirical studies on AI adoption further show that successful integration depends not only on technological availability but also on users' willingness, perceived usefulness, ethical confidence, and institutional preparedness, particularly in professional and service-oriented environments (Abu-Farha et al., 2026; Masa'deh et al., 2025).This study aims to address the current use of artificial intelligence in Africa and to determine how users are getting accustomed to using this technology, as well as how it will most likely influence public administration in Africa in the future.

In Africa, which is going digital, AI is becoming a tool that could bring transparency, efficiency, and citizen-centric governance. The theme of the 2025 ASPA Annual Conference, Not Robots Yet: Keeping Public Servants in Public Service, highlights the human-technology interface as the focus of this research. In that regard, the study examines how AI can be incorporated into the work of the African state administration and how the younger generation of the continent is prepared to lead innovation and change. The potential of AI is quite exciting, but African governments continue to persist with structural problems, including poor access to digital infrastructure. Policy frameworks around AI are fragmented in many African countries, which prevents the development of coherent plans. Rules that govern data are either absent or imprecise, which leads to a higher risk of algorithmic bias and a lack of data privacy. The recurring theme throughout the global conversations about AI policy and ethics is that Africa has been excluded from these discussions due to the unique circumstances that African countries face, and therefore, African countries need to develop their own AI policy frameworks that take into account the different socio-political situations they are in. Africa will require coordinated continental strategies for the integration of AI into the public administration, at the very least, to mitigate the factors preventing proper implementation of AI and to address the concerns of ethical usage of AI. This systematic assessment of the current state of AI in Africa, as well as defining the barriers to integration and reforming the governance of AI, is of critical importance.

The purpose of this research is to develop a thorough and well-rounded understanding of how AI is being used to govern Africa, including practical uses, ethical implications, as well as how youth are engaged. The research will provide evidence to support ongoing debates about AI's integration into Africa and will influence policy-making at both the academic level and in areas related to digital government and the administration of public resources. This study aims to determine how much of Africa's public sector was already implementing AI as of today, as well as how AI will fit into Africa's public sector goals for open and accountable government and effective delivery of public services. This will be accomplished by meeting three specific goals: (i) Evaluating the overall quantity and quality of AI being used in government by reviewing official strategic documents (the E-Government Survey 2024, Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024, and the Continental AI Strategy 2024); (ii) Assessing the state of readiness for AI by Africa's growing youth population through evaluating aspects such as digital literacy, the education system, innovation ecosystems, and socio-economic barriers; and (iii) Identifying any ethical, social, and regulatory issues caused by bringing AI into the governments of Africa. The project will identify both the opportunities and barriers associated with implementing AI into public sector functions, and will therefore be a starting point for future research projects and additional government policies.

Several major contributions to the understanding of AI's integration into African public administration are made by this research. The first area the study covers is the continent of Africa. It has an overview of strategic documents from throughout Africa at the global level, as well as regionally and nationally. The analysis of how these different points of view converge, diverge, or are absent allows the identification of sections where AI adoption is likely to occur and

sections where policy gaps exist affecting AI adoption. This study highlights how youth on the continent (Africa) are often overlooked and provides examples of how they could drive innovation within Artificial Intelligence. This research has advanced the debate regarding AI ethical issues by providing a framework for examining ethical issues associated with AI in light of Africa's contemporary social and political context: AI is best to be guided by culturally based systems of a rights-based framework. Finally, this research contributes to a more integrated view of the relationship between the three fields involved in understanding and managing AI within the African context: Administrative Theory, Technology, and Governance. Examining Artificial Intelligence (AI) through a multidisciplinary lens will help policymakers, researchers, and professionals understand how AI could improve the delivery of public services while also promoting equity and inclusivity, while maintaining accountability. These four contributions allow for enhanced and enriched academic discourse and provide specifically targeted practical recommendations for governments wishing to employ AI to support the transformation towards sustainable governance throughout Africa.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF AI, GOVERNANCE, AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

Artificial intelligence (AI), governance, and public administration are central concepts in this study. AI refers to the simulation of human intelligence in machines designed to perform tasks such as learning, reasoning, and problem-solving (Marwala, 2024). Governance encompasses the systems and processes through which decisions are made, and authority is exercised in the management of a country's affairs (Pierre & Peters, 2021). Public administration is the practical implementation of policies and delivery of public services, traditionally focused on efficiency, effectiveness, and equity (Rosenbloom et al., 2022). In the African context, these concepts intersect amid a unique socio-political and developmental landscape, requiring a contextualized understanding of how emerging technologies can be integrated to strengthen institutional capacities and service delivery (Bibi, 2024).

Historical legacies, weak institutions, and complex governance dynamics shape public administration in Africa. Colonial administrative structures laid the foundation for centralized bureaucracies, often disconnected from citizen needs. Contemporary reforms have attempted to modernize public services through decentralization and digital governance, yet challenges persist (Milakovich, 2021). Corruption, lack of accountability, and inefficient public management systems continue to undermine governance. AI has been posited as a potential solution, but its integration into public institutions remains limited and uneven across the continent (Agba et al., 2023; Thapa et al., 2024). The collective body of literature referenced in this foundational area provides insight into AI's potential as a transformational technology; this potential must be understood through the lens of Africa's unique institutional context, historical limitations, and developmental priorities so that we can develop an analytical framework for how to integrate AI into African public-sector delivery systems in an ethical manner (Onyango, 2025).

2.2. AI ADOPTION, PRODUCTIVITY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN AFRICAN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The development of AI has evolved significantly from rule-based algorithms to machine learning and deep learning systems. In developed countries, AI has transformed sectors such as healthcare, finance, and security (Almansour et al., 2024). In Africa, however, its adoption is still in its infancy. Infrastructure limitations, weak data ecosystems, and a lack of human capital hinder progress (Abiodun, 2025). As highlighted by a prior study, Africa must develop its own pathways to AI adoption that consider local realities and needs (Seleke & Teis, 2025). Ethical risks - such as algorithmic bias, surveillance misuse, and social exclusion - further complicate the narrative around AI in governance (Guidance, 2021). AI holds considerable promise for enhancing productivity in public administration by automating routine functions, improving data-driven decision-making, and enabling real-time service delivery (Poudel, 2024). This viewpoint is supported by recent research on digitalization and AI-supported organisational performance, which suggests that digital technologies can boost work efficiency, planning, and decision-making if they are backed by reliable infrastructure, strategies for implementation and user acceptance (Masa'deh et al., 2025). Nonetheless, Africa's experience with AI and productivity is hindered by inadequate digital infrastructure and limited digital literacy. The impact of AI on productivity in Africa must therefore be analyzed through the dual lens of opportunity and structural constraint (Frimpong, 2025). AI decision support tools, automated complaint handling Systems, and predictive Resource allocation models are

powerful tools that would help alleviate many administrative bottlenecks, but very little use of these tools has been made due to institutional inertia and lack of technology capabilities.

Effective public administration requires accountability mechanisms that ensure transparency, responsiveness, and trust. AI technologies such as predictive analytics, automated reporting, and digital auditing can enhance governance outcomes. However, the same technologies may also facilitate state surveillance and reinforce existing inequalities if deployed without oversight (Southerland, 2023). The literature underscores the need for AI regulatory frameworks that reflect Africa's socio-political contexts and institutional capacities. In Africa, there are international guidelines about how to implement Artificial Intelligence (AI) effectively and ethically within the public sector, but because governance structures throughout the continent are inconsistent (their adoption varies), it has resulted in weak readiness for the use of AI in the public sector. Using AI as an enabler can revolutionize Africa's public administration by enabling data-driven governance, enhancing service delivery, and reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies (Ajayi et al., 2024; Poudel, 2024). Empirical studies across Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, and Senegal demonstrate the transformative impact of AI in surveillance, healthcare, financial management, and digital inclusion (SANGWA & Mutabazi, 2025). However, these gains are uneven and often not replicated at scale due to fragmented policies, inadequate infrastructure, and resistance to change. Successful AI integration requires strong political will, investment in human capital, and inclusive governance models (Socol & Iuga, 2024). A combination of structural barriers, limited regulatory capacity, and entrenched institutional inertia has led to continued challenges for Africa to scale the use of AI to improve public administration in a meaningful way (Eze et al., 2024). Understanding and assessing AI readiness and aligning policies throughout Africa is complicated by the ongoing tension between the dual narratives provided by the literature that state how AI can reshape governance and accountability (Sangwa et al., 2025).

2.3. YOUTH READINESS, ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS, AND ADMINISTRATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF AI

Africa's youth population, comprising over 60% of the total population, is a crucial demographic asset in the AI revolution (Cilliers, 2025). Youth are typically early adopters of digital technologies and central to innovation ecosystems. Nevertheless, systemic barriers such as poor education systems, limited STEM participation, and unemployment hinder youth participation in AI development (Musundire, 2025). Research suggests that targeted policies supporting youth-led AI innovation, entrepreneurship, and education can transform Africa's governance and development trajectory (Idowu, 2025). Several scholars argue that empowering youth through innovation hubs, digital literacy initiatives, and AI-focused academic pathways is essential for creating a sustainable public-sector AI workforce. Research on AI-supported education also indicates that smart learning systems can assist in identifying students with specific learning stresses, suggesting that AI can promote more inclusive educational opportunities and contribute to the foundation of future public-sector workforces with AI literacy (Qusef et al., 2025). AI adoption in public service raises significant ethical questions about fairness, privacy, transparency, and human rights. Many AI systems are trained on biased data, leading to discriminatory outcomes. Without ethical guardrails, the application of AI in governance could exacerbate marginalization and social inequality (Mergen et al., 2025). The African Union's Continental AI Strategy (2024) emphasizes ethical AI deployment through human rights-based approaches and inclusive governance principles (AJUZIEOGU, 2025). Still, enforcement and contextual relevance remain major challenges. The absence of harmonized data protection frameworks, coupled with weak accountability systems, creates vulnerabilities that undermine citizen trust in AI-enabled governance.

AI-induced automation has triggered fears of job loss across both public and private sectors. While AI can enhance productivity, it also threatens jobs in routine administration, data entry, and basic decision-making roles (Victor-Mgbachi, 2024). In Africa, where formal employment is already limited, the adoption of AI must be balanced with policies that promote job creation, reskilling, and the protection of vulnerable workers (Olowu, 2025). Public servants' perceptions of AI - whether optimistic or sceptical - will influence adoption trajectories and policy design. Most studies show that Africa's demographic characteristics, ethical constraints, and employment-market conditions contribute to AI adoption. While there is hope that the youth will be ready for AI development, they may not have the skills or experience to make use of AI yet. There are many ethical frameworks for AI development and use that exist, but few countries have laws that enforce the ethical frameworks. In addition, perceptions that AI will create job loss still influence the level of government acceptance of AI. In order to evaluate an inclusive AI governance framework, it is important to understand the socio-economic and institutional dynamics that affect AI governance.

2.4. Research GAP

Although there has been an increase in research on the relationship between AI, governance, and digital transformation in Africa, there are still many unanswered questions. Most of the studies currently available are focused on sector applications of AI, like banking, hospital management, and security. There is very little research available on how AI ties into administrative structures, workflows within Africa, and the culture of public sector organisations, and so forth. Another area that is currently lacking in the existing literature is the relationship between youth and public administration and AI development. While youth have been recognised in many ways to play a central role in Africa's digital future, no studies have documented specific examples of youth leading the way to create innovative AI technologies or provide solutions to governance issues. Without understanding the full scope of youth capabilities, characteristics of their innovation ecosystem, and the impact of their policy environment on their ability to use AI, the concept of AI readiness in Africa cannot be fully realised.

Also, there is a significant amount of literature describing the ethical and regulatory concerns regarding AI, but only a few studies that describe how African governments are implementing ethical and regulatory frameworks. Although many reports outline principles for ethical AI, little research has been conducted about the ability of government institutions to execute and implement such frameworks effectively, and consequently, the difference between an ideal policy and the actual implementation of that policy is not well defined, research on the national, regional and continental AI Governance documents are lacking in comparative analysis of the various governance documents in existence. While some important examples of government AI-related strategic documents exist (for example, the E-Government Survey 2024, Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024, and Continental AI Strategy 2024), the majority of the scholars researching these topics have not attempted to synthesise the dissimilarities, similarities, or areas where implementation is lacking across these strategic documents. To fill this gap, this research synthesises high-level strategic documents, evaluates the level of preparedness of young individuals for engaging with AI, and analyses the legal and ethical implications of AI as these implications relate to the responsibility of government in a continental context of public administration. Therefore, this research provides the first complete, comprehensive, and Africa-centric view on the increasing importance of AI in public administration, an area in which comprehensive research is lacking to date.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. STUDY AREA AND CONTEXTUAL SCOPE

This study focuses on Africa as a geographical and socio-political context undergoing rapid digital transformation amidst persistent development challenges. The research does not target a specific locality or institution but adopts a continent-wide lens, with specific reference to Ghana as a national case study and selected African Union-level policy frameworks. The rationale for this approach lies in Africa's shared challenges - such as infrastructure deficits, regulatory gaps, and digital exclusion - and its common opportunities, particularly a burgeoning youth population and continental policy initiatives like the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy (2024). The countries referenced in this study, including Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, and Senegal, serve as indicative cases representing varying levels of AI readiness and public administration reform within Africa.

The continent-wide focus of this report is warranted due to the fact that there are multiple influences on AI Governance and the Reforming of Public Administration in Africa; thus, the same influences apply to AI Governance and Public Administration Reform within Africa. The influence of both National Priorities and Supranational Frameworks, such as Agenda 2063, the DTS (Digital Transformation Strategy for Africa), and the Continental AI Strategy, on AI Governance and the Reforming of Public Administration in Africa, significantly affects how African Governments implement Digital Governance; thus, each of these documents informs how Digital Governance across the Continent will take shape. Through this influence, each of these documents facilitates the Modernization of Government Institutions through Regulatory Harmonization across the Continent and, as such, requires an in-depth analytical approach to achieve the greatest benefit for all the people of Africa. The methodology used to conduct this Study uses a regional Bloc approach to how AI is used and implemented in the Public Sector (Public Administration) across Africa. Therefore, this methodology provides an Overall View of the Systemic Environment and Context in which AI is being utilized and adopted within the African Public Administration.

Table 1

Table 1Overview of Countries Referenced in the Study

Country	Relevance to AI & Governance	Notable AI/ICT Initiatives
Ghana	National AI-supportive digital economy reforms	Digital Economy Policy & Strategy (2024)
Rwanda	Early adopter of AI in healthcare logistics	Zipline AI-enabled drone deliveries
Kenya	AI-enabled surveillance & digital service systems	Huduma Centres, digital identity systems
Senegal	Emerging digital governance ecosystem	National Digital Strategy

Table 1 shows a structured overview of the four countries in Africa (Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, and Senegal) used as case studies in this research study with respect to the role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within these countries and their various phases of AI development and use within Digital Governance related to Public Service Reform. Each country is at a unique development phase in terms of AI and has demonstrated varying degrees of ability to integrate Digital Technologies into Administration. Therefore, Table 1 gives the reader a comparison of how the AI-driven transformation looks in one administrative landscape in Africa to the next.

3.2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MODEL DEVELOPMENT

The conceptual model developed in this study integrates two relevant theoretical frameworks – the Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) – both of which have been used to explore the adoption and impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies within Africa's public administration. SLB theory, as articulated by Lipsky (1980) (Uzun & Tanriverdi, 2025), foregrounds the discretionary role of frontline public servants who are often tasked with implementing government policies in complex, resource-constrained environments. In the model, SLB provides a critical lens for examining how AI technologies may support, alter, or challenge these frontline roles, especially in contexts where human judgment and contextual interpretation remain essential for service delivery. The discretionary power of public servants and their operational realities are thus central to understanding the organizational dimension of AI adoption.

Complementing this perspective, TAM (Davis, 1989) introduces the behavioural and perceptual dimensions of technology acceptance, focusing on two key constructs: Perceived Usefulness (PU) and Perceived Ease of Use (PEOU) (POZI, 2023). These constructs help explain the attitudes and beliefs of both public officials and citizens regarding AI technologies in public service contexts. The model further recognizes that AI adoption and its public service outcomes are not linear but are influenced by broader contextual moderators - namely, ethical, social, and regulatory considerations. These include concerns such as algorithmic bias, digital inequality, public trust, and the adequacy of legal frameworks governing AI. The combined framework offers a multidimensional and context-sensitive understanding of how AI can shape the effectiveness, inclusivity, and legitimacy of public service delivery in Africa.

Figure 1

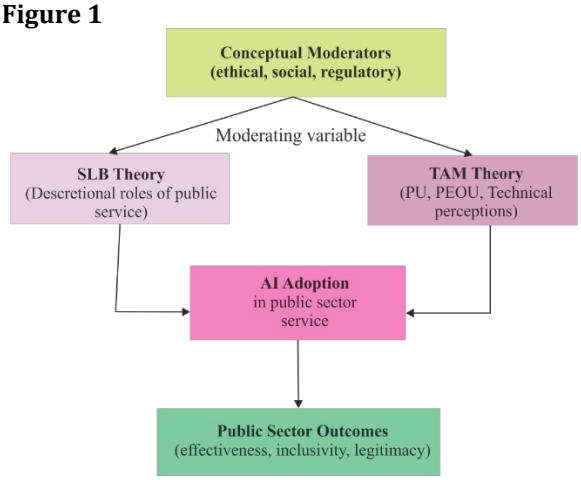

Figure 1 Conceptual Model of AI Adoption in Public Administration

Figure 1 indicates that Frontline discretion (SLB), technological perceptions (TAM), and contextual moderators (social, ethical, and regulatory) shape the results of adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI). SLB defines how our judgment and autonomy impact AI adoption; TAM defines the factors that contribute to our acceptance of new technologies, including AI; and the contextual moderators define the constraints that we face when trying to adopt new technologies. All of these factors interact with each other to determine several public sector outcomes, including inclusivity, efficiency, and legitimacy.

3.3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLING STRATEGY

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to identify and analyse three key strategic documents that offer global, regional, and national perspectives on the adoption of artificial intelligence in governance. These documents include the E-Government Survey 2024 published by the United Nations, the Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024 issued by the Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation of Ghana, and the Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy 2024 developed by the African Union Commission. The selection was guided by the documents' relevance, credibility, and the breadth of AI-related themes they cover, including digital governance, ethical considerations, policy frameworks, and youth inclusion.

Rather than engaging in fieldwork or survey-based data collection, the study adopted a qualitative document analysis approach. This method enabled a systematic examination of the content, structure, and policy orientations embedded in the selected texts. The analytical focus was on identifying recurring themes, strategic priorities, and policy directives that shape AI adoption within Africa's public sector. This approach was deemed suitable for capturing high-level institutional perspectives and understanding the implications of AI-driven initiatives in governance across different scales in Africa.

Table 2

Table 2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Document Selection

Criterion Type	Inclusion	Exclusion
Geographic	Africa-focused, the African Union, or the African member states	Non-African jurisdictions
Content	AI governance, digital policy, public administration	Purely technical AI papers without governance relevance
Temporal	2020–2024 strategic documents	Outdated policy documents before 2010
Credibility	Governmental or intergovernmental publications	Unverified online sources

Table 2 provides a visual overview of how a document was selected for qualitative analysis based on the same standards outlined above in terms of inclusion/exclusion criteria. In addition to confirming their relevance, credibility, and methodological robustness by systematically filter by geographic, topical, temporal, and credibility benchmarks. The use of these structured parameters was necessary, as there are many publications related to the study of digital governance and artificial intelligence (AI) within Africa.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

The documentary analysis was applied to data collection, and it presupposes the systemic review, assessment, and interpretation of the texts of public policies. The chosen documents were obtained in direct form from official repositories of the United Nations, the Government of Ghana, or the African Union Commission. The initial phase of the information collection process was the process of identifying and retrieving the information on the subject of AI governance, digital transformation, public administration, and continental strategies with the help of specific keywords like AI governance, digital transformation, public administration, and continental strategies. This made the inclusion of only documents that fit within the thematic span of the study. An authenticity check phase was adopted after this, whereby all the documents were evaluated against authorship, year of publication, institutional source, and version status to ensure reliability and to remove the unofficial or obsolete policy documents.

After the authentication, the documents were subjected to a process of structuring and thematic segmentation. All the documents were categorized into major analytical themes such as policy aims, initiatives related to AI, ethical frameworks, provisions of youth readiness, and governance reforms to facilitate systematic coding. This procedure

enabled the research to not only have explicit (manifest) policy directives but also implicit (latent) indicators of what the institution was prioritizing and the governing orientations. Such a narrow focus of the analysis on a documentary basis is explained by the fact that this research aims at evaluating strategic alignment, policy direction, and institutional preparedness to adopt AI in Africa in the context of the public administration. In contrast to surveys or interviews, which focus on perceptions or performance, documentary analysis gives first-hand experience on high-level levels of governance, which is why it is the most suitable approach to use in this study.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUES

The study applied thematic content analysis to analyse the selected documents. The analytical process was guided by the method proposed by Braun and Clarke (Braun & Clarke, 2023), which involves familiarization with data, generation of initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report.

Key themes identified through the document analysis included the adoption of artificial intelligence in public administration, highlighting its potential to enhance service delivery, decision-making, and administrative efficiency. Another major theme was youth readiness and digital capacity, which emphasized the importance of equipping young people with the skills and infrastructure necessary to participate meaningfully in AI-driven economies. The analysis also revealed critical ethical, regulatory, and social implications, such as concerns about data privacy, algorithmic bias, accountability, and the digital divide.

Additionally, the documents outlined various policy prescriptions aimed at guiding AI integration, but they also exposed significant implementation gaps. These gaps point to challenges in translating strategic intentions into actionable programs, particularly in resource-constrained or institutionally fragmented environments. Collectively, these themes offer a nuanced understanding of the current landscape and the strategic priorities that must be addressed to ensure responsible and inclusive AI adoption in Africa's public sector.

Additionally, content analysis techniques were employed to systematically classify manifest and latent content within the documents. Thematic patterns were cross-referenced across the three documents to compare consistency, gaps, and contradictions. This comparative approach enabled the identification of both common policy aspirations and context-specific implementation challenges.

3.6. RELIABILITY, VALIDITY, AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Some strategies were put in place to guarantee validity and reliability during the research process in order to achieve methodological robustness. The purposive sampling method was also employed to maintain reliability, as only the documents that were directly related to AI governance and swearing of office were used. The thematic coding was done cautiously and twice cross-checked to reduce the possibility of interpretation bias and increase consistency. Moreover, the code-recode process was used, which provides the researcher with the opportunity to re-analyze the coded data after a specified period, ensuring the consistency of the new themes and categories, which strengthens the validity of the analysis.

Measures of validity were also taken into consideration in the study. The triangulation between global, regional, and national documents increased the quality of the analytical work, as it was possible to converge and compare the insights provided at various levels of governance. The conceptual consistency with the existing theoretical models, that is, the Street-Level Bureaucracy (SLB) theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), helped even further to situate the analysis in actually existing scholarly mainstreams. Additionally, the application of various thematic prisms, including youth preparedness, moral aspects, and governance ramifications, contributed to maintaining construct validity through the possibility of understanding the adoption of AI in African public administration in a multidimensional manner. Ethical concerns were completely addressed during the study. All documents analysed were not confidential, and there were no human subjects in the study; there was no issue of informed consent or confidentiality. Document management was based on the principles of academic honesty, and policy analysis and interpretations were based on objective and subjected to objective policy analysis and normative judgments. These steps taken together maintain the transparency, replicability, and ethical integrity of the research, making the findings credible and methodologically sound.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1. CURRENT STATE OF AI ADOPTION IN AFRICA'S PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

This study aims to critically examine the adoption of artificial intelligence (AI) in Africa's public administration ecosystem and how it enhances service delivery, governance, and accountability, while also exploring the AI readiness of the continent's youthful population in driving public service. The specific objectives are to: i) examine the current state of AI adoption in public administration in Africa using document analysis, ii) assess the AI readiness of Africa's youthful population to drive public service delivery, and iii) explore the ethical, social, and regulatory implications of AI-powered innovations in Africa's public service delivery. By addressing these objectives, the study seeks to provide insights into the opportunities and challenges of AI integration in Africa's governance landscape.

The content analysis of the E-Government Survey 2024, the Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024, and the Continental AI Strategy 2024 reveals that AI adoption in Africa's public administration remains fragmented and nascent. The E-Government Survey adopts a global comparative lens, illustrating Africa's embryonic digital governance status, with AI integration occurring only in isolated pockets. Using indices such as the EGDI, OSI, and HCI, the report shows that Africa's countries, except for outliers like Mauritius and South Africa, lag significantly behind global averages in digital governance. These findings are consistent with scholarly observations that infrastructural and governance limitations continue to hinder meaningful AI integration.

On a national level, Ghana's strategy offers a focused perspective, acknowledging similar constraints but laying out a roadmap for leveraging AI to improve public sector efficiency. The document details interventions such as regulatory sandboxes, data governance structures, and local capacity building aimed at enhancing AI integration in governance. This aligns with arguments that stress the importance of building indigenous capacities for sustainable AI implementation. At the continental level, the African Union's strategy identifies over 2,400 innovation actors but highlights the limited engagement of these entities with public administration systems. The absence of a unified, scalable framework underscores the need for coordination and institutional investment.

These findings support the first objective of this study in two ways: first, they illustrate how the inclusion of AI into government policy agendas is growing across Africa; however, there still appears to be little coordination or consistency in its application throughout African public administration systems. This evidence suggests that there may be some level of strategic intent; however, it also highlights the disconnect between the strategic intent and the operational capability to implement AI-enabled services. In addition, this analysis shows that a strong foundation of building capacity, making infrastructure investments, and developing harmonized governance structures must be created before African governments will be able to grow their capacity to provide AI-supported public services across the continent.

4.2. AI READINESS OF AFRICA'S YOUTH FOR PUBLIC SECTOR INNOVATION

The documents converge on recognizing Africa's youth as a strategic demographic for driving AI-led public sector reforms, but they also highlight systemic barriers limiting this potential. The E-Government Survey 2024 notes that although Africa's youth are digitally inclined, they face significant deficits in AI-specific education and skills development, especially in rural areas (United Nations, 2024, p. 167). This insight aligns with prior studies that emphasize the urgency of investing in STEM education and digital capacity to ensure inclusive participation in the Fourth Industrial Revolution. The Ghana strategy presents a more targeted approach by proposing curriculum reforms, youth-centric digital programs, and the creation of tech entrepreneurship ecosystems aimed at fostering youth leadership in AI (GDEP, 2024, p. 29). These initiatives reflect broader arguments by Begazo, Blimpo, and Dutz (2023), who advocate for building innovation ecosystems to unlock youth potential. At the continental level, the AU strategy recommends interventions such as TVET programs and youth innovation hubs. However, these proposals, while well-intentioned, are limited in actionable specificity, prompting critiques like those from Mutambara (2025), who warns that such strategies risk superficiality if not accompanied by structural reforms to tackle deep-rooted digital inequality and resource limitations.

The analysis found that youth in Africa's AI readiness exists on two levels, primarily as a function of skills development but more broadly across many areas where Africa's youth require better access to supportive infrastructure, including access to technology, digital connectivity, mentorship opportunities, and institutional support. Despite the frequent use of the rhetorical framing of youth as the primary agents of driving the digital transformation,

only a small number of examples of youth-driven AI innovations exist within the current research and literature in relation to the public sector, indicating a large disparity between what policy aspirationally states and the reality of the implementation.

The analysis of the second objective demonstrated that while Africa's youth could drive AI public sector reform, systemic inequality between youth in Africa in terms of technology access and opportunities to develop skills related to technology, and the growth and development of artificial intelligence (AI), is a hindrance to Africa's youth's ability to lead and drive change. Therefore, Africa's demographic dividend of youth being the majority of the population has the potential to offer a significant opportunity to transform the continent's public sector and support youth participation in the governance of AI in Africa, but significant reforms are required to address the systemic barriers to AI governance from an equity perspective to empower youth as stakeholders in the governance of AI.

4.3. ETHICAL, SOCIAL, AND REGULATORY IMPLICATIONS OF AI IN PUBLIC SERVICE

All three documents identify critical ethical, social, and regulatory concerns associated with AI-powered governance, though they differ in depth and specificity. The E-Government Survey 2024 offers a diagnostic overview, pointing to risks such as algorithmic bias, data misuse, and surveillance in environments with weak regulatory frameworks. In the digital public administration context, these threats are linked with cybersecurity and explainability, as poorly regulated AI systems may expose public institutions to automated cyberattacks, lack of transparency and trust in decision-making processes (Alzu'bi et al., 2024). It notes that only 31% of Africa's countries have developed AI strategies, revealing significant gaps in ethical governance (United Nations, 2024, p. 167). However, the document falls short of providing Africa-specific recommendations, a limitation critiqued by Gaffley, Adams, and Shyllon (2022), who call for deeper engagement with the socio-political and human rights dimensions of AI in Africa's contexts.

Ghana's strategy is more explicit in its ethical stance, proposing algorithmic transparency mechanisms, people-centered approaches, and regulatory collaboration involving multiple stakeholders (GDEP, 2024, pp. 22–23). This aligns with the positions of Krasodomski et al. (2024) and Gaffley et al. (2022), who advocate for the development of context-specific ethical frameworks that are grounded in local values and global accountability standards. The most comprehensive analysis is found in the Continental AI Strategy 2024, which calls for multi-layered governance systems, independent oversight bodies, and the cultural contextualization of AI ethics. It emphasizes the potential of AI to deepen social inequalities if not governed inclusively and warns against the marginalization of indigenous knowledge systems (Continental AI Strategy, 2024, pp. 32–35). This aligns with the perspectives of Mutambara (2025) and the World Economic Forum (2022), who stress that responsible AI governance must be intentional, inclusive, and equity-focused. The results indicate that although ethics have been incorporated into various types of policy documents, policing and monitoring policies are not sufficiently enacted in practice. Thus, there is a disparity between the creation of ethical standards and their implementation through a system of legal instruments, institutions, and mechanisms for holding individuals accountable. This highlights the need for public officers to be trained not just in the use of AI but also the laws of electronic administration, electronic accountability, and the legal considerations of AI-supported public service delivery (Al-Billeh et al., 2025).

In regards to Objective 3, the research findings confirm that ethical, social, and regulatory issues create some of the largest obstacles to AI deployment within the public sector in Africa. The absence of effective data-protection policies, uncertainty regarding algorithmic transparency, a lack of mechanisms for auditing AI, and the absence of adequate institutional safeguards place citizens at risk and could result in distrust, increased inequality, and a decrease in the integrity of services.

4.4. THEMATIC OVERLAPS, CONTRADICTIONS & OBSERVED GAPS

The matrix compiled in Table 3 highlights how each theme overlaps, contradicts, or crosses between the three major policy documents. It is evident through this matrix that there are parallel priorities between these documents, such as Digital Governance, Youth Empowerment, and Responsible (Ethical) use of Artificial Intelligence. However, it also identifies the many discrepancies in how each of these priorities is implemented, as well as the lack of institutional capacity for implementation and the need for greater regulatory harmonization.

Table 3

Table 3 A Matrix Summary of the Thematic Overlaps, Gaps, and Contradictions in the Adoption of AI in Public Administration in Africa

Themes/Patterns	E-Governance Survey 2024	Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024	Continental AI Strategy 2024	Cross-Referenced Trends & Gaps
AI Adoption in Public Administration	Diagnostic focus on digital governance maturity; AI adoption in public services remains largely nascent and undocumented, with few country outliers (Mauritius, South Africa).	AI adoption in public service is aspirational but underdeveloped, with plans for data governance, AI policy frameworks, and sandbox environments.	AI adoption is fragmented and minimal in public administration, though recognized as a priority sector.	Consensus that AI adoption in public services is weak, fragmented, and exploratory; the lack of systematic documentation of public sector use cases is a major gap across all documents.
AI Readiness of Africa's Youthful Population	Highlights youth as tech-savvy, but AI-specific skills, STEM education, and readiness are low; rural-urban disparities are noted.	Strong emphasis on youth as strategic assets, with recommendations for digital skills integration into education and promotion of AI entrepreneurship ecosystems.	Youth are seen as key drivers, but skills gaps, innovation ecosystem gaps, and inequalities persist; proposes AI in TVET and support for startups.	Alignment on the potential of youth, but readiness remains untapped due to education, skills, and inclusion gaps; lack of youth-led public sector AI case studies across all documents.
Ethical, Social, and Regulatory Implications of AI in Public Service	Brief acknowledgment of ethical risks (bias, exclusion, weak governance); recommends regulatory sandboxes, but lacks Africa's socio-political contextualization.	Strong focus on ethical, transparent, accountable AI governance; recommends algorithm transparency frameworks, cross-sector collaboration, and inclusive policies.	Extensive detailing of ethical, social, and cultural implications; recommends multi-tiered governance, oversight bodies, and culturally sensitive ethics frameworks.	Overlap in recognizing risks of bias, exclusion, and governance gaps, but Continental AI Strategy provides the most comprehensive approach; E-Governance Survey is weaker and more general, lacking context-specific ethical analysis for Africa.
Policy & Regulatory Recommendations	Suggests regulatory sandboxes; lacks concrete Africa-centric models; only 31% of Africa's countries have AI strategies.	Advocates for national data governance frameworks, sandbox environments, cross-sector collaboration, and algorithmic transparency, with Ghana CARES as a flagship example.	Proposes continental governance frameworks, independent oversight bodies, transparency registers, and AI impact assessments.	All documents stress the need for robust, agile, and inclusive AI regulation, but practical enforcement mechanisms, case evaluations, and implementation models are largely absent, indicating a critical cross-cutting gap.

A thorough synthesis of these three documents indicates that they all contain similar diagnoses, they point to low AI maturity, weak data governance, underdeveloped youth ecosystems, and ethical vulnerabilities, yet differ in terms of the depth of analyses for each document and their proposed solutions. The Continental AI Strategy provides the most in-depth and context-specific level of analysis, while the E-Government Survey provides a more general/global view of the issues.

1) Across all three documents, the biggest cross-cutting gaps are:
2) absence of concrete youth-led AI use cases,
3) poor regulatory enforcement capacity,
4) fragmented AI governance ecosystems, and
5) limited institutional mechanisms to scale AI from pilot projects to national systems.

The findings provide evidence to support the three objectives as indicated; integration of AI requires considerable reform, capacity building, youth empowerment, and governance. These results highlight and explain how AI will be applied to public sector operations in Africa.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1. INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

The findings of this study highlight the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) in Africa's public administration, while also underscoring the significant challenges that may hinder its widespread adoption. The analysis of the E-Governance Survey 2024, Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024, and the Continental AI Strategy 2024 reveals a consensus on the nascent state of AI integration in Africa's public sector. Despite the continent's youthful demographic dividend and increasing digital innovation, AI adoption remains fragmented and largely aspirational, with limited documented use cases in public service delivery (United Nations, 2024; Continental AI Strategy, 2024). This aligns with Begazo, Blimpo, and Dutz (2023), who argue that infrastructural deficits and governance gaps continue to impede Africa's digital leapfrogging potential. The study's emphasis on the underdeveloped state of AI in public administration corroborates Evans' (2019) observations about the persistent digital divide in Sub-Saharan Africa. Overall, the results show that although policy ambition is strong, practical implementation is still weak, revealing a clear mismatch between strategic commitments and administrative capacity.

5.2. COMPARISON WITH PAST STUDIES

A key theme emerging from the analysis is the critical role of Africa's youth in driving AI-powered public service innovation. While the documents acknowledge the youth's tech-savviness, they also identify systemic barriers such as inadequate AI-specific education, STEM skills gaps, and rural-urban disparities (GDEP, 2024). This finding resonates with Mutambara's (2025) caution that without targeted investments in education and skills development, Africa risks excluding marginalized populations from the AI economy. The study's focus on youth readiness aligns with Begazo, Blimpo, and Dutz's (2023) argument that digital literacy and innovation ecosystems are ess ential for unlocking youth potential. However, the absence of concrete case studies on youth-led AI innovations in the public sector represents a significant gap, as noted by Marwala (2022). Although this study adds to and reinforces previous concerns expressed in the literature, it provides a greater insight into the structural disconnection between policy conversations about youth and the actual limited access young innovators have to real-world opportunities in public administration.

5.3. IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The ethical, social, and regulatory implications of AI adoption in Africa are another critical area of discussion. The documents collectively highlight risks such as algorithmic bias, exclusion, and surveillance, but their treatment of these issues varies in depth. The Continental AI Strategy 2024 provides the most comprehensive framework, advocating for multi-tiered governance and culturally sensitive ethical standards. This aligns with Gaffley, Adams, and Shyllon's (2022) call for Africa-centric ethical guidelines to mitigate risks like data privacy violations and erosion of public trust. In contrast, the E-Governance Survey 2024 offers a more generic diagnostic approach, lacking contextual specificity for Africa's settings. This discrepancy underscores the urgency of developing localized ethical frameworks. These findings suggest a need for more stringent regulatory oversight, additional investments in human capital, and expressly defined structures for governing AI (such as "AI governance"). Having proper regulatory enforcement, investment in human capital development, and transparency around the established AI governance structure will prevent the potential that the application of AI would serve to reinforce existing levels of inequality rather than improve service delivery. Such trends would directly erode any degree of trust in public institutions.

5.4. LIMITATIONS OF THE FINDINGS

While this study provides significant insights into the integration of artificial intelligence in Africa's public administration, it is not without limitations. First, the exclusive reliance on document analysis restricts the depth of empirical evidence, especially regarding the lived experiences of stakeholders such as public servants, policymakers, and citizens. Without interviews, surveys, or focus groups, the study cannot capture nuanced perceptions or real-time institutional dynamics. Second, the geographic scope is somewhat constrained. Although the study references Ghana and broader Africa's Union frameworks, it does not systematically analyse country-specific cases across Africa's diverse governance and technological landscapes. As such, regional variations in AI readiness and implementation are

underexplored. Third, the absence of quantitative data limits generalizability. This study focuses on qualitative themes and policy interpretation, which, while rich in context, may not reflect widespread realities on the ground. Future studies should therefore employ mixed methods, cross-country comparisons, and participatory research designs to provide more empirically grounded, context-sensitive, and representative findings.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This analysis underscores the convergence across the E-Governance Survey 2024, the Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024, and the Continental AI Strategy 2024 on key themes: Africa's limited AI adoption in public administration, the underleveraged potential of its youthful population, and the pressing need for ethical, inclusive, and accountable AI governance frameworks. The documents collectively portray Africa as poised at a critical juncture, facing both the promise and perils of AI-driven transformation in public service delivery. Overall, collectively these findings demonstrate that Artificial Intelligence, while capable of improving local governance through improved governance capacity, is still in its infancy and is driven by government policy rather than local practice; i.e., the development of artificial intelligence is constrained by available infrastructure and the institutional environment to which it must operate. While the E-Governance Survey 2024 provides valuable global benchmarks of Africa's nascent digital governance capacity, it falls short in offering localized pathways to accelerate AI integration within Africa's governance structures. Conversely, the Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2024 and the Continental AI Strategy 2024 provide more granular analyses and policy directions tailored to Africa's context, yet both documents still reflect gaps in practical mechanisms for operationalizing these ambitions, particularly concerning youth-led innovation ecosystems and regulatory enforcement capabilities. As there is a significant disconnect between the ambition of policy and actual implementation, it is critical to develop long-term investment strategies to develop the capabilities needed to implement the policies through the restructuring of administrative structures, as well as modernizing regulations. Furthermore, none of the documents adequately addresses how existing structural and institutional vulnerabilities could negatively impact the transformative potential of AI, such as the potential for creating governance failures through the use of biased, exclusionary, and inadequately regulated AI systems. In addition to this, the issues mentioned in the previous sentence and the previous citations are consistent with the concerns highlighted by previous studies and by the World Economic Forum (2022) regarding the risk of introducing further inequality and distrust in public institutions through unregulated use of AI. Future research must include more empirical work across all African countries, exploring the differences in the implementation of AI policies across countries, and looking at the differing stakeholder perspectives between those countries on the subject of AI Governance.

CREDIT AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Michael Kwame Mickson led the conceptual development of the study and designed the research methodology. He conducted the formal analysis and was primarily responsible for drafting the original manuscript. He also contributed significantly to the review and editing of the final document to ensure coherence and scholarly rigor.

Erika Mamley Osae was responsible for the investigation and data curation, including the collection and organization of relevant policy and strategic documents. She played a key role in validating the findings and contributed meaningfully to the review and editing process, ensuring accuracy and clarity throughout the manuscript.

Hilda Appiah undertook the literature review and conducted the detailed document analysis, identifying key themes and synthesizing relevant scholarly insights. She also participated actively in the review and editing stages, providing feedback that enriched the theoretical and contextual depth of the study.

All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this manuscript.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

APPENDIX A. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The following strategic documents were analysed as part of this study:

- United Nations (2024). E-Governance Survey 2024.
- Government of Ghana (2024). Ghana Digital Economy Policy and Strategy.
- Africa's Union Commission (2024). Continental Artificial Intelligence Strategy.

All documents are publicly available through the respective institutions' official websites.

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