

# Forging UAE's Civil Service Model with BRICS countries to accelerate Agenda 2063 in Africa

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## From Egypt to South Africa

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### Abstract<sup>1</sup>

This article examines how elements of the UAE's civil service model, including the reform experiences from BRICS members Egypt and South Africa, can strengthen the implementation of Agenda 2063, particularly Aspiration 3 on good governance and capable institutions. Despite progress in both countries, persistent institutional weaknesses, accountability gaps, and post-COVID fiscal pressures continue to undermine citizen-centred service delivery. Drawing on polycentric governance theory and the "Leave No One Behind" principle, the study analyses civil service reforms undertaken between 2019 and 2024 and synthesises emerging practices that enhance responsive, transparent, and human-capital-driven public institutions. It identifies areas for practical

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cooperation with the UAE and offers recommendations for advancing civil service excellence across African states.

**Keywords:** Polycentric Governance, Civil Service, International Cooperation, BRICS, Egypt, and South Africa

## Introduction

The African Union (AU) Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want envisages advancing socio-economic and political unity throughout the African continent. Aspiration/Moonshot three of the referred agenda precisely aim to promote good governance, rule of law and respect for human rights in Africa. This aspiration aligns with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 16, which is dedicated to enhancing effective institutions and a peaceful society; however, it recorded the lowest progress amongst all Agenda 2063 aspirations, with an overall performance of 42% across the continent, according to the evaluation of the First Ten Year Implementation (FTYIP) of Agenda 2063 (African Union, 2023). The evaluation equally referenced significant institutional deficiencies in civil service delivery across African countries, particularly with issues pertinent to fighting corruption, empowering responsive and agile public institutions, and investing in human capital (AU Commission, 2023).

In this context, Egypt and South Africa, as prominent member states of the AU, have persistently championed continental integration and emphasised the need for governance changes to enhance economic and political solidarity with nations in the Global South. Over the last five years, both nations have made notable advancements in public service delivery. Nonetheless, the repercussions of COVID-19 on African economies, coupled with other budgetary obstacles, hindered their capacities to improve civil service delivery.

The 2024 Mo Ibrahim Index of Africa Governance<sup>2</sup> elevated Egypt's overall governance score to 51.0 out of 100.0, reflecting notable advancements in human development and economic prospects. Conversely, South Africa scored 65.9 out of 100.0 in overall governance (Mo Ibrahim Index, 2024). Notwithstanding variations, both nations face significant challenges, including bureaucratic corruption in several spheres and a deficiency of accountability

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2 Mo Ibrahim Governance Index (2024): Egypt Profile. Available on <https://iiag.online/locations/eg.html>.

that aggravates service delivery inadequacies. Egypt and South Africa are currently members of the BRICS, along with the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which has been involved in several continental programs to disseminate its transformational civil service model. The UAE has launched various initiatives, including the Government Exchange Program<sup>3</sup> to enhance economic and political connections with African nations.

This article highlights the current reforms implemented by Egypt and South Africa to promote citizen-centric policies and improve public service delivery. It aims to adhere to the *Leave no one behind* principle, in conjunction with the UAE model. The study seeks to interrogate the extent to which the UAE civil service model could be leveraged to promote citizen-centric civil reforms in Egypt and South Africa. Thus, the article explores the key drivers of civil service reforms in BRICS countries, including the UAE, Egypt, and South Africa, through the lens of polycentric governance theory. Furthermore, it synthesises recent initiatives and action-oriented policies to leverage an inclusive civil service, especially in the three countries following the COVID-19 crisis. Finally, it explores opportunities for mutual collaboration and offers recommendations for civil service excellence amongst the selected countries.

The study is structured into three sections. The first presents polycentric governance, a conceptual framework and an analytical framework based on the “Leave No One Behind” principle of Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. The article also highlights the methods and methodology. The third examines the civil service reforms in the UAE, Egypt, and South Africa from 2019 to 2024 and discusses the major empirical findings. The final section concludes and makes recommendations for forging the UAE’s public service model in Africa.

## Polycentric Governance: Conceptual Framework, Grounds, and Application

Polycentric governance (PG) is a system in which multiple governing bodies interact to create and enforce policies within a multi-level framework. It is increasingly used to understand global challenges like climate change, resource management, and social equity. PG involves multiple independent

3 <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/digital-uae/digital-transformation/cooperation-and-collaboration/the-uae-s-regional-and-international-cooperation-in-digital-transformation/the-government-experience-exchange-programme>.

decision-making centres working together to achieve specific goals (McGinnis, 2021), especially when a single-layered governance structure falls apart to meet citizens' needs. Elinor Ostrom introduces PG as structures where multiple governing bodies operate simultaneously, allowing for coordinated and flexible responses to governance issues. PG offers several benefits for environmental policy changes (Ostrom, 2010), including:

1. Flexibility and Innovation: Different governance units can experiment with various approaches to find effective solutions tailored to specific contexts.
2. Local Knowledge and Participation: Local stakeholders can contribute their knowledge and engage in decision-making, leading to more relevant and actionable policies.

He also outlined the necessary conditions for effective polycentric governance. These include clear boundaries and rights for resource users, ways to settle disagreements, and chances to learn and change.

Carlisle and Gruby (2017) proposed a theoretical model for polycentric governance, which offers a systematic framework for understanding interactions among authorities and stakeholders in resource governance. They argue that polycentric systems offer advantages like flexibility, adaptability, and the ability for stakeholders to experiment with tailored governance solutions.

Other researchers characterise PG as "multiple and semi-autonomous decision-making centres operating within a fragmented governance system" (Ekim, 2022; Carlisle, 2017). This framework asserts that decision-making involves multiple participants who face difficulties with coordination, institutional structures, infrastructural connections, and self-organised groups (Gatignon, A.L.C., 2020). The authors elaborated on the initial conceptualisation of PG, which is reinforced in the Figure below. Consequently, a polycentric governance framework encompasses two characteristics: multiple, overlapping decision-making centres possessing a degree of autonomy and an inclination to act in consideration of others through mechanisms of cooperation, competition, conflict, and conflict resolution (Gatignon, 2020: 6–7).

The first noted that the decision-making centres in a polycentric governance system are not limited to formal governmental bodies; legislative

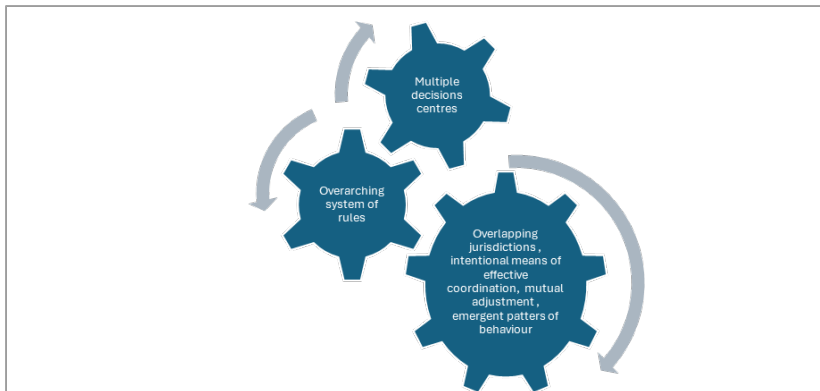
officials, administrative agencies, and other public bodies can also be significant candidates for decision-making centre status. The second attribute highlights that decision-making centres, even if they are formally independent of one another, base their decisions partly on the actions, inactions, or experiences of other members of the system. Taking one another into account, decision-making centres, and other supporting actors in governance.

Thiel (2023) also referred to the normatively defensible polycentric governance that offers three criteria. First, it is crucial for actors to express their concerns about the inadequacy of polycentric governance arrangements in providing collective goods for citizens, a concept known as voice. Second, members of any organisation should push to change the polycentric governance arrangement to serve citizens, which is called the criterion of exit. Third, members of a collective body who are aiming for better services should have the capacity to reformulate institutional settings that adequately meet their needs. This is the criterion for self-organisation. Together, these three criteria cater to orderly contestation (McGinnis 2019; McGinnis et al. 2020).

**Table 1.** Theoretical Model of a Functional Polycentric Governance System for the Commons

Attribute	Enabling Condition	Advantage: Enhanced Adaptive Capacity	Advantage: Good Institutional Fit	Advantage: Risk Mitigation/Redundancy
Multiple, overlapping decision-making centers with some degree of autonomy		X	X	X
	Decision-making centers employ diverse institutions	X	X	X
	Decision-making centers exist at different levels and across political jurisdictions		X	X
	The jurisdiction or scope of authority of decision-making centers is coterminous with the boundaries of the problem being addressed		X	
Choosing to act in ways that take account of others through processes of cooperation, competition, conflict, and conflict resolution		X	X	
	Generally applicable rules and norms structure actions and behaviors within the system	X		
	Decision-making centers participate in cross-scale linkages or other mechanisms for deliberation and learning	X	X	
	Mechanisms for accountability exist within the governance system	X		
	A variety of formal and informal mechanisms for conflict resolution exist within the system	X		

Acton, Gruby, and Nakachic highlighted the importance of aligning polycentric governance systems with social dynamics, particularly in large-scale contexts. They argued that effective governance must be socially fit, meaning it should reflect the values and needs of stakeholders, rather than relying solely on structural design. They identified challenges in large-scale governance, including managing diverse stakeholder interests, ensuring effective communication, and addressing power dynamics. They stressed the necessity of assessing social contexts in governance strategy design and promoting stakeholder engagement to enhance ownership and commitment (Acton.L, Gruby.R, Nakachic, 2021).



**Figure 1:** Definition of Polycentric Governance (Source: Author based on provided literature)

Indeed, key principles of PG can be identified from the screened literature including the existence of multiple centers of decision-making, vertical and horizontal coherence, interconnectedness and inter-dependence of organizations, collaboration and effective communication, decentralization of power between the decision-making centers, adaptability, robustness and resilience: A polycentric approach can better withstand shocks and changes, as multiple governing layers can provide alternative solutions and support.

Leaving no one behind, is also a relevant and imperative principle associated with the polycentric social fit and citizen-centric civil service. LNOB addresses inequity both vertically, amongst individuals and households, and horizontally, through group-based discrimination. This principle focuses on reaching those furthest behind across the SDGs, including ending extreme

poverty (SDG #1), reducing inequalities (SDG #10), ending group-based discrimination, promoting the rule of law and advancing good governance practice (SDG #16). LNOB, with social equity at its core, includes not only reducing disparities across income and wealth but also increasing access to basic services such as education, health, clean water and social protection programs (UNDP, 2018)<sup>4</sup>.



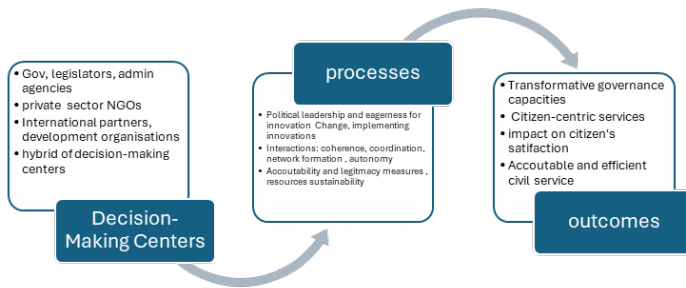
**Figure 2:** Challenges for LNOB in Africa (source: SDGCA, 2022)

## Methodology: Analytical framework and methods of data collection

The article adopts an exploratory method to examine the key drivers of change in the civil service and the anticipated outcomes in the UAE, Egypt, and South Africa using a polycentric governance theory. It provides an analytical framework for polycentric governance based on a citizen-oriented approach. We offer an analytical framework. It suggests an analytical framework inspired

4 [https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion\\_Paper\\_LNOB\\_EN\\_lres.pdf](https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/Discussion_Paper_LNOB_EN_lres.pdf).

by Holscher et al. (2019) and adapted by the author as shown in the Figure below, on governance capacities and other scholars.



**Figure 3:** Analytical framework of Polycentric Governance for Civil Service. Source: Author's Compilation

The study contributes to the African literature on public service delivery through an interpretive case study approach. The study employs a combination of qualitative methods, which includes a review of government documents, reports, and regulations on civil service changes in the nations from 2020 to 2024. Semi-structured interviews with national institutions in both nations will enrich this policy-oriented paper's conclusions and proposals.

Guided by the proposed analytical framework, the paper leverages on primary and secondary data to answer the key guiding question and its associated sub-questions. The proposed research methods for this study are listed as follows:

- 1. Secondary sources:** this includes thematic analysis of the current literature on the civil service model of the three selected countries, including the recent initiatives taken by the UAE, Egypt, and South Africa to boost public reforms. This includes scanning official reports, articles, national visions, political statements, and high-level engagements at the UAE and AU levels, including the World Government Summit (2024).
- 2. Primary sources:** the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 experts in the case study countries, particularly Egypt and South Africa. Three officials from Egyptian institutions, two key academic staff members, three officials from the Government of South Africa, and two representatives from think tanks and civil society. Also, two officials from AU institutions were included.

- 3. Participatory observation:** This method is insightful for synthesising interactions amongst a hybrid of decision-making centres during high-level engagements at the African Union level and at the UAE, including the World Government Summit (2024).

The following matrix succinctly explains the application of the research methods:

**Table 1:** Research questions and applied methods

Question	Source	Method	Who
What are the key drivers of civil service reforms/vision in the UAE, Egypt and South Africa?	Academic articles, Official reports, national visions i.e National Development Plan, UAE Vision 2031, Egypt 2030, NDP 2030 of South Africa  Academic articles, books	Content analysis of official documents  Thematic analysis (codes and generated themes) from the Interviews  Participatory observations	National officials  Development partners
How have the existing institutional and coordination mechanisms – which includes Government entities, legislative branch and administration agencies collaborate to implement civil service reforms?	Interviews  Official statements  Publications on AU organs and continental reports (institutional reform and integration report 2023)  Academic chapters, papers and articles on the APRM and AU  Field experience	Thematic analysis (codes and generated themes) from the Interviews and survey  Content analysis of official documents  Participant observation	Key experts  National officials
To what extent has the UAE model can be leveraged to benefit other BRICs countries? what could be the enabling conditions to foster collaboration with Egypt and South Africa?	Interviews  Official continental reports  Civil society publications	thematic analysis (codes and generated themes) from the Interviews  Discourse / content analysis  Survey findings  Participant observation	Member states representatives, APRM National structures, youth, CSOs and academia

## BRICS countries' Experiences in Civil Service

### *United Arab Emirates*

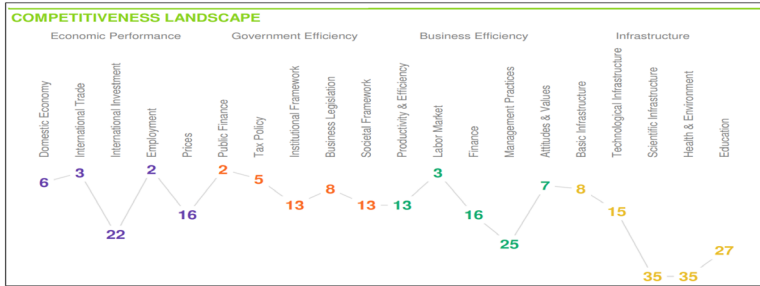
Building on an extensive review of literature and official documents, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has taken positive strides to modernise its civil service and delivery model. The UAE was ranked seventh (7<sup>th</sup>) globally in the IDM World Competitiveness Ranking 2024, issued by the World Competitiveness Centre of the International Institute for Management Development (IMD).<sup>5</sup> For the eighth consecutive year, the UAE ranked first in the Middle East and North Africa region and fourth in government efficiency.<sup>6</sup>

The United Arab Emirates is a constitutional federation that consists of seven emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, and Fujairah. The seven emirates practice autonomous, decentralised planning models. According to the Constitution, the federation shall guarantee all UAE citizens equal rights and opportunities, safety and security, and social justice (UAE Gov, 2023).

The public administration reforms (PARs) in the UAE, and particularly Dubai, the most influential emirate alongside Abu Dhabi, date to the 1990s during a global transition towards globalisation and market-oriented policies worldwide. Diversification of the economy represents a critical element of Dubai's economic survival strategy by expanding non-oil sectors, including business, construction, international trade, finance, and tourism (Koji: 3). Further, global partnerships as well as state leadership are classified amongst key drivers of PARs in the UAE (Sharker, & Al-Athmay, 2019).

5 IMD is an international survey aims to assess the capacity and readiness of an economy to adopt and explore digital technologies as a key driver for economic transformation in business, government, and wider society. <https://u.ae/en/about-the-uae/uae-competitiveness/imd-world-competitiveness-yearbook/the-uae-performance>.

6 UAE Ranking. Available at [https://imd.widen.net/content/zfxullm2dk/pdf/AE1page\\_WCY\\_2024.pdf](https://imd.widen.net/content/zfxullm2dk/pdf/AE1page_WCY_2024.pdf).



Updated on 21 Nov 2024

**Figure 5:** Competitiveness Ranking of UAE. Source: IMD, 2024.

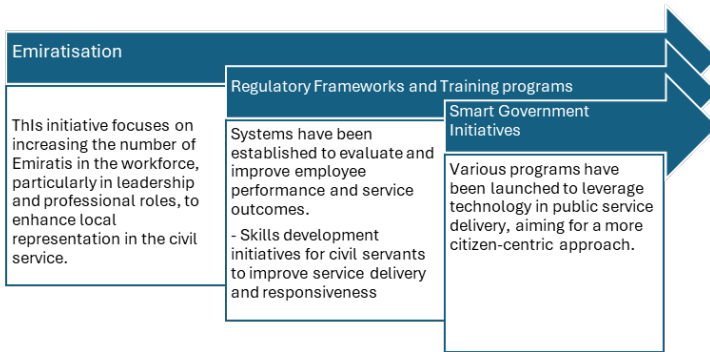
### Political Vision for Civil Service Excellence is reinforced.

Mohamed Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai, conceived a transformative political vision to galvanise the city’s transformation to be a global icon for business and tourism in the Middle East. He adopted the 2015 Dubai Strategic Plan.<sup>7</sup> Which aimed ‘to establish a universal understanding of Dubai’s vision among the various government entities and to ensure a common framework for the operations of these entities’ [Government of Dubai, 2007: 9]. The Plan was developed based on five key sectors with core strategic targets: (1) economic development; (2) social development; (3) infrastructure, land, and environment; (4) security, justice, and safety; and (5) government excellence (Government of Dubai 2007: 9- P.16).

Reforms of the civil service were introduced as part of the economic modernisation package. To localise the public civil service and enhance administration procedures, key initiatives are adopted by the federal Government of UAE as explained in the figure below.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.arabruleoflaw.org/compendium/Files/UAE/94.pdf>.

**Table 2:** Key Initiatives adopted by the UAE to promote efficient Civil Service model



**Source:** Author’s compilation

E-government constitutes a fundamental administrative transformation. The ‘e-Government’ concept, initiated in 2001, facilitated the establishment and promotion of websites for various governmental entities, resulting in the computerisation of all administrative operations and services. This program markedly enhanced the online service rate in Dubai City, achieving 90%. Recently, the Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority (TDRA) established the UAE Digital Government Online Service Index (DGOSI)<sup>8</sup> to assess the quality of digital services offered by federal government agencies. It also seeks to evaluate the advancement of digital engagement and open data inside these bodies.

The transfer of knowledge and investment in human resources have consistently been essential for the UAE’s competence in public service delivery. The Mohammed Bin Rashid Program for Leadership Development<sup>9</sup> aims to enhance the capabilities of future leaders and government officials in the UAE. The establishment of the Mohammed Bin Rashes School of Government aims to enhance research on public policies in the UAE and the Arab world, in conjunction with the Department of Government Enablement<sup>10</sup> in Abu Dhabi, which seeks to facilitate the registration of government employees as

8 <https://dgo.gov.ae/en/publications/uae-digital-government-online-services-index>.

9 <https://www.mbrclad.ae/en/>.

10 <https://www.dge.gov.ae/en/what-we-do/programs>.

learners and to maintain precise records of their course completions, awards, and certifications.

The leaders and administrations of the UAE, both federal and municipal, have incorporated the notion of leaving no one behind into the UAE 2031 vision, which aligns with the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The vision is directed by four fundamental pillars; 1) Forward Society for prosperity; 2) Forward Economy – reflecting the UAE’s belief in the importance of human capital as the main driver of the next 10-year development plan ; 3) Forward Diplomacy to strengthen the UAE’s influence and soft power; 4) Forward Ecosystem to enhance the government performance and the UAE’s technological methods including the development of digital infrastructure.

To achieve this vision, the Government set key indicators as follows:

1. one of the top 10 countries globally in the Human Development Index<sup>11</sup>
2. one of the top 10 countries globally in the quality of healthcare
3. position the Emirati cities among the best 10 cities globally in terms of quality of life

Recently, the government launched a unified portal for digital services called “Sharik.ae”, which means in Arabic “participate” to receive queries and reflections from citizens and residents in the UAE concerning life in the UAE. Under this portal, there is a specific section pertinent to the UAE’s 2031 vision for justice, safety and law.<sup>12</sup>

Beyond the internal reforms, the UAE established different channels with the African Union to promote the exchange of knowledge and capacity building with African countries. The Government Experience Exchange Office was established in 2018 to endorse a knowledge-sharing platform and transfer the United Arab Emirates’ experience and best practices in the field of government development and modernisation to other countries. Five African countries—Angola, Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, and South Africa—took part in an exchange program set up by the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). The goal was to promote the Government Excellence and Government Accelerators program, which gives cross-sectoral government teams a way to deal with problems and reach big goals quickly (Prime Minister’s office, 2021).

11 <https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/human-development-index#/indicies/HDI>.

12 <https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/justice-safety-and-the-law/justice-safety-and-we-the-uae-2031-vision>.

On a bilateral note and as revealed in the Figure below, the UAE supported the Government of Egypt to promote the “Government Excellence” initiative to boost the capacities of civil servants within the new Administrative Reform Plan. They also offered training programs on digital transformation, human resources, and the code of ethics in civil service.



**Figure 6:** UAE Support Program for Egypt’s Administrative Reforms. Source: UAE Prime Minister’s Office, 2020

## South Africa

South Africa, as a post-apartheid country, has been going through many transitions to enhance the civil service model and citizens satisfaction. As one of the most unequal countries worldwide, the government of South Africa has sought a myriad of drivers to boost a professional civil service model despite wicked problems like corruption and low efficiency of civil service. The National Development Plan (NDP) imagines the creation of a “capable and developmental state” for South Africa, guided by the East Asian states as ideal models to be emulated. (Ukwandu.C.D, 2019).

Many experts and reports acknowledged the South African Constitution as one of the most solid and comprehensive across the continent, aiming to promote constitutional democracy in the state. It establishes the principles governing public administration, including the need for a professional, impartial, and accountable civil service. The “Bill of Rights” in Chapter 9 of

the Constitution and the institutions that upheld it gave civil servants a lot of freedom. The Public Protector, the South African Human Rights Commission, the Commission for Gender Equity, the Auditor-General, and the Electoral Commission [1] are just a few of the institutions that have this freedom. These institutions are separate from the government and only have to follow the constitution and the law (APRM Review, 2022).

## A Professional and Efficient Civil Service for a Developmental State

Political vision and eagerness for excellence as key drivers for civil service. According to the interviewees' reflections, the eagerness to establish a professional civil service in south Africa is grounded on a myriad of key drivers including the following:

1. To address the post-apartheid context of discrimination against Black South Africans and historical inequality, transformation policies focused on affirmative action and deployment equity.
2. The African National Congress (ANC), which has been the ruling party since 1994, aims to improve the government's responsiveness and efficiency in providing essential services, particularly to marginalised communities, while addressing service delivery.
3. In South Africa's government service, corruption and lack of accountability have been prevalent for decades. The goal was to increase anti-corruption efforts to restore public trust in government, including audits, ethics policies, and open procurement procedures.
4. Public sector professionalisation and capacity building aimed to enhance public servant competency, professionalism, and productivity. It focuses on capacity building and professional growth. Therefore, the government approved the long-awaited the National Framework Towards Professionalisation of the Public Sector<sup>13</sup> in October 2022, which seeks to replace the Public Service Act (1994) and the Public Service Regulations that set out the structure, functions, and management of the civil service. These laws aim to promote fairness, equity, and efficiency in the public sector.

13 <https://www.thensg.gov.za/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/NATIONAL-FRAMEWORK-BOOKLET.pdf>.

5. improving governance and aligning civil service objectives with South Africa's National Development Plan and the 2030 Vision for Sustainable Development. The district-development model highlights the need for better coordination among central government, provincial authorities, and municipalities.
6. Modernisation and digital transformation are crucial, as South Africa was an early adopter of access to information legislation and has introduced digital services to enhance efficiency, especially considering challenges from COVID-19. The civil service wage bill, which accounts for nearly 30% of the national budget, is deemed unsustainable, making reforms necessary for better resource allocation and cost-effective service delivery.
7. The promotion of public participation and social accountability aligns with South Africa's commitments to international frameworks such as the African Union Charter on Civil Service and the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 16, which emphasizes strong institutions and good governance. The Government of South Africa and the private sector view an efficient civil service as a mechanism for enhancing democracy and expanding democratic space.
8. The African presence and influence across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and dedication to the African Union governance processes, including APRM<sup>14</sup> and Open Government Partnership (OGP), to enhance citizen participation and engagement in public administration reforms.
9. Last, necessity for fostering labour relations and collective bargaining. The government of South Africa acknowledges labour as a tool to improve industrial relations, productivity, and collective bargaining outcomes. One of the interviewees stated, "Here we try the reform process, trying to balance employee welfare with public service efficiency. We bring our own perspective and also align reforms with global best practices in governance and public administration."

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14 <https://thepresidency.gov.za/president-attend-african-peer-review-mechanism-20th-anniversary>.

## A hybrid of institutions and decision-making centres with less conflict provisions

Chapter Seven (7) of the South African Constitution highlighted that the local sphere of the government consists of municipalities, which must be established for the whole of the territory of the Republic. The executive and legislative authority of a municipality is vested in its Municipal Council. A municipality has the right to govern, on its own initiative, the local government affairs of its community, subject to national and provincial legislation, as provided for in the Constitution. The national or provincial government may not compromise or impede a municipality's ability or right to exercise its powers or perform its functions.<sup>15</sup>

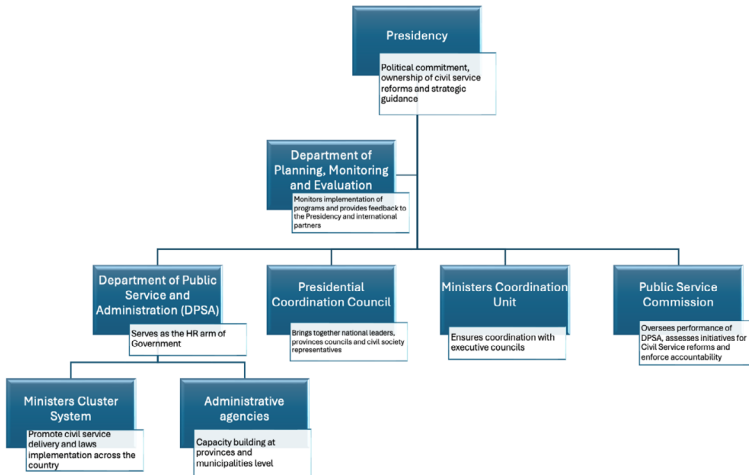
Alongside the constitution, the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Batho Pele White Paper, No. 1459 of 1997) introduced a very clear policy framework and implementation strategy for the transformation of Public Service Delivery. The central component of the strategy is the eight Batho Pele "Citizen First" Principles, which concentrate on the consultative nature of civil service and openness and transparency.<sup>16</sup> The eight principles call for consultations with citizens for a better quality of civil service, accessibility of all citizens to the services to which they are entitled, openness and transparency of information, value for money, and redress.

The South African civil servants' total number is estimated at approximately 1.2 million persons, while the total population of the country is 60 million citizens. To improve coordination and collaboration at the civil service level, there are two levels of institutional coherence:

- 1. Executive branch level:** As contained in the Figure below, the Presidency and the executive ensure proper follow-up between the presidency and different executive and legislative bodies involved in civil service delivery. The following chart illustrates different mechanisms established to coordinate and facilitate efficient communication at different levels of government.

15 <https://www.justice.gov.za/constitution/SACConstitution-web-eng-07.pdf>.

16 Civil Service Commission.



**Figure 7:** Institutional and Coordination Mechanisms for Civil Service in South Africa. Source: Author's compilation<sup>17</sup>

One of the innovative dialogues which is designated to promote leaving no one behind is the Forum of South Africa's Directors General (FSA), which aims to liaise cooperate between directors at national levels across the Government, listen carefully to their demands and try to address institutional and capacity-building gaps and performance management across the national bodies.

2. **Society and private sector level:** according to one of the interviewees, the Government of South Africa, given the historical inequalities dilemma, heavily concentrated on citizen engagement throughout the civil society role in promoting the rule of law and democratic provisions. The private sector, alongside trade unions and other associations, has been working closely with the Government through the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC) to boost economic recovery and address developmental issues. Government, labour, business and community organisations, through this platform, established a social dialogue and annual summit to promote economic growth and exchange views on the national priorities through a wide citizenry approach.

17 Guided by the inputs of interviewees from South Africa

## Collaboration with the UAE and civil service efficiency

Interviewees concurred that engagement with the UAE had increased significantly over the previous five years. Within the framework of the BRICs, South Africa has enhanced its economic and political relations with the UAE, particularly in key sectors such as infrastructure and digital transformation. Political leadership established a bilateral pact and a joint committee to improve bilateral relations. As a result of these initiatives, the UAE has emerged as a main economic partner within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), with commerce between the two states increasing by 45%.

The UAE has emerged as a principal importing partner for South Africa within the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), accounting for 38% of imports from the region. South Africa is the UAE's second-largest trade partner in Africa, accounting for 8% of non-oil trade (UAE MOFA, 2024).<sup>18</sup>

The strategic alignment between both countries positively contributes to their collaboration through BRICS, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Group of 77, and UN platforms. The interviewees highlighted several areas of collaboration that they found encouraging.

1. Institutional capacity and professionalism in merit-based recruitment appraisals
2. Enforcing rules and laws, combating corruption, and maintaining institutional integrity with the district-development model are all important aspects.
3. Promoting citizen-centred feedback systems in the civil service
4. Cybersecurity, digitisation exchange
5. Benchmarking the National School of Government with the Dubai School of Government for agile training programs.

## Egypt

Egypt has a substantial civil service framework, comprising 25% of the total public sector. The evolution of Egypt's public governance reform encompasses multiple phases aimed at establishing a more effective and accountable administrative structure. Significant political turbulence characterised the period following the 2011 Revolution and its subsequent repercussions (El

18 [https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3\\_isn=27749](https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=27749)

Baradei, 2021). Despite numerous initiatives aimed at decentralisation, most governmental efforts to modernise the civil service remain predominantly centralised and concentrated (Boex, 2011; Barsoum, 2018).

Similarly, the civil service reform in Egypt encountered numerous challenges, notably the disproportionately large bureaucracy, which comprised 6.37 million employees in 2014 (Al-Araby, 2014), presenting a significant strain on the state budget. Moreover, the entrenched corruption permeating the executive branch has developed into an institutional phenomenon within a multifaceted state structure. It has been challenging for public governance reforms to progress over the years due to persistent corruption, low public trust in civil service delivery, a lack of transparency, and the prevalence of nepotism (Ali, 2015). In 2015, Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index ranked Egypt 88th among 168 nations, with a score of 36 out of 100 reflecting perceived corruption levels.

## Bold Political Leadership for Institutional Transformation

The Government of Egypt has adopted a bold vision for administrative reform since 2014. The overall coordinator of this portfolio from 2014 to 2019 was the Ministry of Planning, Economic Development, and Administrative Reform (MPED). Dr Ashraf Al-Araby, former Minister of MPED, oversaw the adoption of the 2016 Civil Service Law, which aims to make merit-based hiring official in the public sector. To do this, the law's recruitment processes, performance reviews, protections for youth and gender equality, digital transformation, and promotion standards need to be changed to ensure meritocracy.<sup>19</sup>

According to one of the interviewees and a lead expert in public administrative reforms, political leadership has been a strategic driver for administrative reform. In 2018, President Sisi emphasised the importance of human capacity building as part of the government's top sectors and national vision, which encompasses health, the economy, and human capital. Egypt's 2030 Vision for Sustainable Development.<sup>20</sup> Also incorporated the Administrative Reform Plan (ARP). The interviewee further stated that political commitment resulted in the allocation of specific financial resources and budget lines for the implementation of administrative reforms.

19 [https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3\\_isn=27749](https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=27749)

20 [https://mped.gov.eg/Files/Egypt\\_Vision\\_2030\\_EnglishDigitalUse.pdf](https://mped.gov.eg/Files/Egypt_Vision_2030_EnglishDigitalUse.pdf).

Additionally, the president and the prime minister's cabinet restructured the established institutional and coordination systems to provide strategic guidance and oversee the implementation and monitoring of the ARP. The purpose of that is to ensure that all parties are involved in this "institutional administrative transformation.» The interviewee also stated that «reform is not the responsibility of one organ or a person; it is a collective responsibility across different entities.»

Other experts from the government noted that another driver for administrative reforms is the low trust of citizens in government services, along with the downgrade of Egypt's assessment in most international reports regarding working labour conditions and civil service limitations, including corruption practices.

## Formulation of Coordination and Institutional Mechanisms for Administrative Reforms

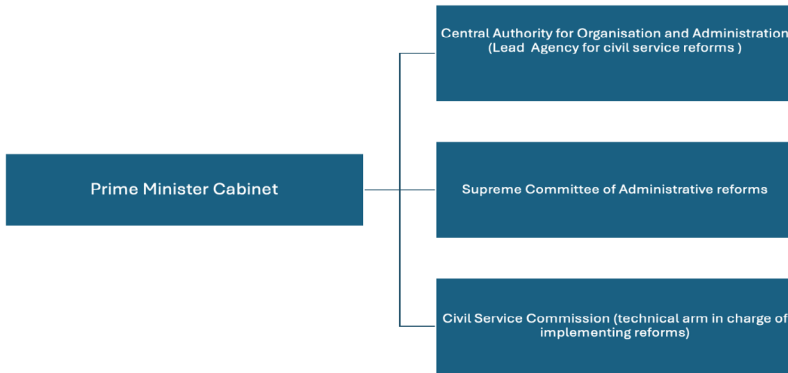
As far as the multiple centres of decision-making are concerned, it can be argued that, since 2019, critical structural adjustments have been applied to ensure adequate oversight of the administrative reform process. The 2019 Presidential Decree for assigning members of the Government Cabinet noted that the Prime Minister is appointed as the delegated Minister in charge of Administrative Reform, along with his duty as the Prime Minister.

Accordingly, the Prime Minister established the Supreme Committee for Administrative Reforms as a way to make sure that reforms are "institutionalised" and that administrative reforms are carried out across all levels of the government and ministerial entities. The Supreme Committee convenes twice a year, bringing together all relevant ministers involved in administrative reform, such as the Minister of Local Development, as well as representatives from technical experts and nongovernmental organisations.

The Central Agency for Organisation and Administration (CAOA) in Egypt, established in 1964, is responsible for reforming public services and focusing on the integrity and effectiveness of public service delivery monitoring, alongside other tasks such as recruitment, capacity building, training, and promotion. The referred decree assigned CAO A the role of rapporteur for the Supreme Committee for Administrative Reform, with its institutional mechanism presented in the figure below. The decree also established the Civil Service Commission as a technical arm, addressing issues related to

civil servants, promotions, and incentives. The CAO has prioritised the establishment of an observatory for public services to develop a framework for measuring the performance and quality of citizen-centred public service (2024: 25).

The Egyptian Parliament also receives regular updates on the progress towards APR to ensure accountability and integrity of the reform process.



**Figure 8:** Institutional Mechanisms for Administrative Reform in Egypt  
Source: Authors Compilation

### Impact of Administrative Reforms on Egypt’s Service Delivery

Successful Initiatives echoed the positive outcomes of Administrative Reforms on Egypt’s civil service delivery. The interviewees commended the outcomes of Administrative Reforms as they contribute to some of the following successful practices and initiatives:

#### *The establishment of a merit-based recruitment Centre*

CAOA initiated the establishment of a completely digitalised capability assessment and competition centre. As the government agency responsible for coordinating the APR implementation, the CAO established a single portal for all government job openings. According to rules, all government agencies shall adhere to an asymmetric and unified recruitment system and procedures

which enhance the integrity of the civil service and ensure equal access to job opportunities, as one of the interviewees alluded.<sup>21</sup>

### *Preparedness of Civil Servants for Transition to the New Administrative Capital*

The government, through CAO, launched a comprehensive training program to prepare public employees for the transition to the New Administrative Capital (NAC). As per the inputs from the former President of CAO, Saleh El-Sheikh, "CAO adopted a scientific methodology for the movement plan. A certain module was developed and circulated to all employees, which has been equally approved by the supreme committee. Oriented guidelines were introduced to civil servants to prepare them physically and physiologically for such a massive transition". CAO has trained 50,000 employees who have moved to the NAC.

To oversee the overall movement process, a special committee was established under the leadership of the Prime Minister, with the participation of all relevant ministries and authorities. The committee used to meet every two weeks and make important decisions about the movement plan based on six transformations. These transformations include assessing and preserving old buildings, using digital infrastructure for the movement, managing human resources, setting the rules for moving employees, and offering incentives to employees, such as housing and transportation allowances, along with other subsidised services for education, transportation, etc. These efforts aimed to create a more efficient and sustainable urban environment. Furthermore, the committee emphasised the importance of public feedback, ensuring that the voices of citizens were heard and considered in the ongoing development of the movement plan.

The Ministry of Transportation also established a second technical committee to monitor the movement plan. Recently, the Ministry of Transportation launched a survey to assess the quality of services provided by the NAC and its efficiency in supporting the well-being of civil servants.

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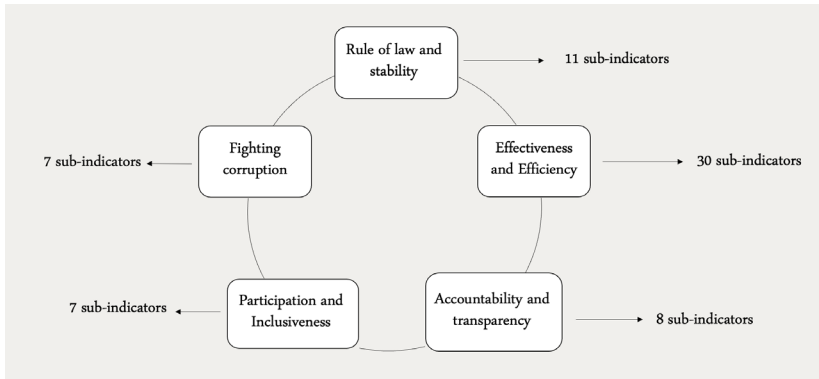
21 <https://chandlergovernmentindex.com/country-stories/egypt-new-capital-new-culture-of-governance/>.

## *Strengthening Training Capacities and Egypt's National Indicator to assess good governance*

The National Institute of Governance and Sustainable Development exemplifies administrative transformation in Egypt. The NGSD is a governmental profit agency characterised by autonomy with the objective of enhancing Egypt's performance in governance indicators at global, regional, and local levels. The Institute serves as a monitoring entity for Egypt's performance in these indicators, providing policymakers with clear recommendations to improve Egypt's progress (Ezzat, 2023).

The Prime Minister designates an executive director to oversee the NGSD. The Minister of Planning and International Cooperation serves as the head of the Board of Trustees for the Institute in their professional capacity. The NGSD serves as the training division of the ministry, offering a variety of capacity-building programs and training focused on good governance and related topics.

The NGSD has created a national governance indicator to improve Egypt's position in international governance rankings and to enhance the quality of governance reporting at the national level. The government aims to conduct comprehensive evaluations that reflect the achievements of the Egyptian state across various governance dimensions and identify areas requiring improvement. While the figure below reveals national indicators, the Egyptian government does not regard this indicator as a replacement for international governance indicators. This tool serves as a self-diagnostic instrument that monitors the state of governance in Egypt, evaluates the efforts made for its implementation, and identifies potential areas for improvement. This also provides the government with a method to assess the effectiveness of its development programs' implementation (NIGSD, 2023)



**Figure 9:** Thematic areas and Indicators of Egypt's National Governance Indicator. Source: NIGSD, 2024.

### *Building the Eco-System for Anti-Corruption reforms in Egypt*

Corruption represents a persistent and deeply entrenched issue in Egypt. The intricate national framework of civil service, coupled with the expectations placed on the central government to deliver services, facilitated the spread of corruption among various entities and authorities throughout Egypt's 27 governorates. The Anti-Corruption Authority (ACA) and the Anti-Corruption Academy have initiated a significant transformation in the efforts to combat corruption in Egypt.

The adoption of the Anti-Corruption Strategy<sup>22</sup> Represents a significant milestone for the civil service reform agenda in Egypt. The strategy seeks to enhance the skills of government employees, strengthen integrity and transparency, and create a unified administrative framework that meets the needs of investors. Additionally, it aims to create a strong legislative and judicial framework to address corruption. It involves continuous amendments to laws that enhance anti-corruption efforts, along with judicial procedures and digital litigation. It includes capacity building for the judiciary members and personnel.

The Anti-Corruption Authority implemented the strategy by establishing a dedicated unit within each ministry and government entity to investigate corruption issues and report on violations. The units adhere to a standardised

22 <https://aca.gov.eg/Media/News/2022/12/14/2022-638066209175469059-546.pdf>.

reporting system for the ACA, recognised as an effective mechanism for monitoring the strategy's progress.

The Anti-Corruption Academy enhances this initiative by offering diverse training sessions aimed at increasing awareness of corruption practices and counterstrategies among civil servants. The Academy has expanded its training programs to support African nations, such as Sierra Leone, Namibia, and South Africa, as Egypt currently holds the chair of the Africa Association of Authorities 20-2025<sup>23</sup>.

Interviewees assert that the anti-corruption strategy represents a "collective effort" undertaken by the anti-corruption authority, NIGSD, and the ministries of justice and economic planning, in conjunction with oversight institutions. Monitoring and evaluation present significant challenges in assessing the implementation of the overall Administrative Reform Plan across Egyptian governorates and within government bodies.

Interviewees suggested that CAO requires further empowerment to engage effectively with various ministries and local municipalities for the implementation of the ARP. It is recommended that CAO establish a semi-annual, citizen-oriented platform to raise awareness of the ARP, coordinate administrative reform efforts, and enhance monitoring and evaluation at subnational levels. This will facilitate the monitoring of outcomes and enhance public trust in government services.

The OECD's latest review of Egypt's civil service reforms identified several issues. Egypt must establish data governance protocols to ensure that government institutions can collect, utilise, and store public information consistently and logically. The implementation of the new guidelines for monitoring and evaluation is crucial (OECD, 2024) and essential for enhancing coordination between vertical and horizontal data collection and utilisation (Igriglu, Ostry, and Allam, 2020).

## Conclusion

The article has attempted to examine the application of the polycentric governance approach to promote a renewed civil service model in three BRIC countries. Further, it aimed to unlock opportunities for triangular or bilateral benchmarking and learning opportunities between these countries to enhance

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23 <https://aca.gov.eg/News/3132.aspx>.

civil service delivery, citizen satisfaction and trust in their government. In spite of the differences between the three countries, they are clearly unique, and each has tried to create and use its own “modern civil service model” based on its own vision, national incentives, and available funds. The article made the following key findings and recommendations:

1. Egypt remains challenged by the heaviest bureaucracy compared to South Africa and the Emirates, considering the number of civil servants (150,000 in the UAE, 1.2 million in South Africa, and 6.7 million in Egypt). Despite various challenges, the primary data of the study noted a variety of reforms and affirmative actions taken by the governments of South Africa and Egypt to address the professionalisation of the public sector, enforcing the rule of law by fighting corruption, and promoting a code of ethics in the past few years.
2. The UAE and South Africa clearly have a hybrid system of different autonomous entities involved in decision-making and implementation of administrative reforms, while Egypt has a centralised approach to take these reforms into action. However, Egypt’s citizens still need to see and acknowledge the results of transformative reforms. Therefore, we can extend the polycentric analytical framework and assumptions to more detailed research at the national level, which is quite useful.
3. All three countries acknowledge the need for political leadership and technical will to initiate reforms. The paper showed how the role of the ruler of Dubai was influential in reorienting the country’s vision and digital transformation. On the other hand, President Al-Sisi of Egypt and President Ramaphosa of South Africa initiated effective administrative reforms, including fighting corruption and improving quality of services to citizens.
4. There are many lessons from the UAE that Egypt and South Africa can benefit from, including: i) the UAE’s belief in building reliable human capital and respecting the citizens’ expectations; ii) empowering youth and providing exposure to senior officials and young leaders to build a second generation of leaders across the public sector; iii) policy reorientation for digital transformation and ease of access to services; and iv) nurturing the mindset of excellence, the Edge of Government, and creating the national tools to measure efficiency, i.e., the efficiency index.

- Egypt and South Africa are recommended to equally share their best practices, including i) establishing a self-assessment and competence centre for civil servants and promoting meritocracy; ii) application of digital services for a broad scale of citizens; iii) institutionalising Anti-corruption mechanisms and coordination units; and iv) investing in human capital through training programs and impactful initiatives.

Intensifying knowledge-sharing programs, including the exchange of civil servants and setting standards and benchmarking between the three countries' government schools and training institutes, can contribute to the efficiency and flexibility of the African civil service. This can be leveraged under the BRICS platform. The study's findings, such as collaboration, will positively boost an efficient and agile civil service in Africa.

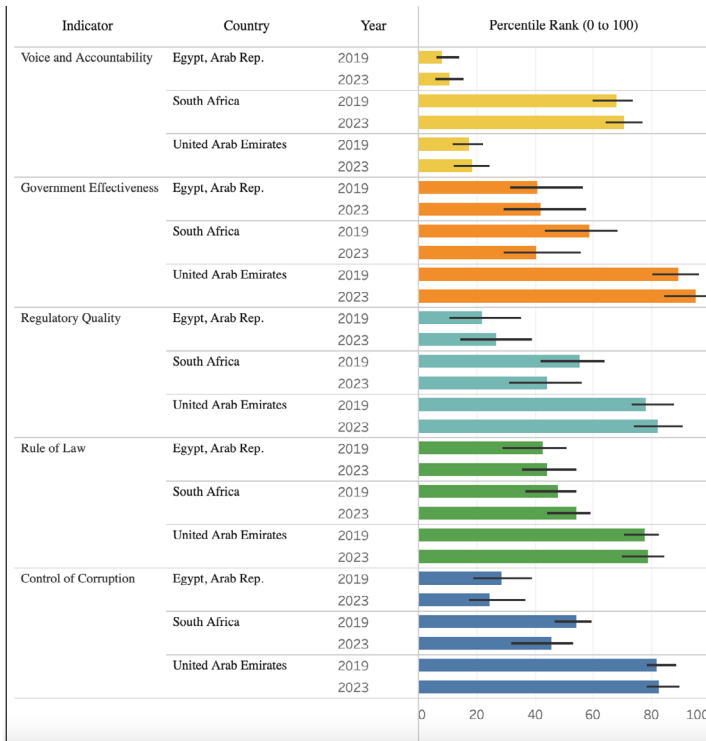


Figure 10: Governance Effectiveness indicators (Source: World Bank, 2024)

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