

Article

Reducing Administrative Burden Through Simplification and Document Management in Local Governments: Evidence from a District-Level Public Organization

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Abstract

This study examines whether administrative simplification is associated with stronger document-management practices in a district-level local government organization, and why this matters for societal outcomes such as transparency and more equitable access to public services. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional, non-experimental design, we surveyed officials and administrative staff with validated Likert-type instruments (62 items for administrative simplification; 17 items for document management) and tested associations using Spearman's rho. Results show a positive, modest relationship between simplification and document management ($\rho \approx 0.37$; $p < 0.001$). Stage-level analyses indicate consistently positive correlations, with stronger associations in later, institutionalization-oriented stages (implementation, monitoring/evaluation, continuous improvement, and sustainability). The study contributes to debates on administrative burden and digital-era governance by linking staged simplification efforts to the organizational backbone of records flows. Practically, findings suggest that resource-constrained municipalities can improve governance quality by treating document management not as a back-office function but as an enabling infrastructure for user-centered services, accountability, and compliance with digital-government guidance. Limitations include the single-organization design and reliance on staff perceptions; future research should test citizen-level outcomes and service-equity effects.

Keywords: administrative burden; administrative simplification; records management; document management systems; digital government; local government; transparency; public value; global south



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1. Introduction

Local governments in Peru operate at the frontline of state–citizen interactions, where every day administrative procedures shape people’s access to services, information, and rights. In this setting, “paper-heavy” routines and fragmented records are not just internal inefficiencies: they translate into delays, repeated requests for the same documents, unclear case status, and, ultimately, citizen frustration and distrust. Such patterns suggest that administrative performance and information-handling practices are directly connected to transparency, perceived fairness, and the quality of public service delivery. Against this background, Peru has promoted administrative modernization through a set of guidelines and digital-government initiatives. The Presidency of the Council of Ministers has long encouraged entities to identify and remove unnecessary steps, reduce procedural costs, and standardize processes through simplification tools [1–5]. In parallel, the national agenda for digital transformation has reinforced the need to strengthen the institutional infrastructure that enables traceability and interoperability of public records—moving beyond isolated “filing” practices toward more systematic document governance [6–8]. This direction is reflected in the approval and dissemination of a formal Model for Document Management within the framework of administrative simplification reforms [9,10], as well as the consolidation of digital-government regulations and platforms that promote standardized document flows and secure handling of administrative information [11]. However, policy ambition does not automatically produce implementation capacity—especially in resource-constrained municipal environments. Document management requires not only technology but also routines, controls, and accountability mechanisms that ensure integrity, accessibility, and timely circulation of records. In this sense, document management has been described as tightly linked to internal control and governance of information, functioning as a practical backbone for institutional reliability [12–14]. The key question, therefore, is not whether simplification and document management are desirable in principle, but whether and how they actually connect in municipal practice where staff face workload pressures, limited digital infrastructure, and compliance demands. This study addresses that practical and societal problem by examining the association between administrative simplification processes and document-management practices within a district-level municipality. By focusing on the operational interface where procedures are executed and records are produced, circulated, and archived, the research speaks to broader debates on state capacity and public-service quality: small improvements in process design and document flow can reduce administrative friction, strengthen transparency, and contribute—incrementally—to citizen-oriented governance and social well-being in local government contexts [1–5]. Administrative burdens are rarely evenly distributed: complex procedures and weak records tend to weigh more heavily on citizens with fewer resources, lower digital skills, or limited institutional literacy, reinforcing inequalities in access to rights and services. Moreover, digital reforms can generate paradoxical inclusion—reducing burden for some while increasing it for others—when process design ignores user heterogeneity and street-level constraints [11].

However, policy ambition does not automatically translate into implementation capacity in resource-constrained municipalities. The practical gap concerns how procedures are executed and how records are generated, tracked, and safeguarded in day-to-day operations, which affects traceability, accountability, and service responsiveness. Although the literature on administrative burden and digital government have grown substantially, empirical evidence that jointly examines administrative simplification and document-management performance at the municipal frontline remains limited, and existing studies rarely disaggregate simplification into stages to examine where the strongest linkages occur [5–7,9,10,15].

Accordingly, the general objective of this research is to determine the relationship between administrative simplification and document management among officials and administrative staff in the District Municipality of Perené in 2024. To unpack this relationship, we assess the association between document management and each stage of administrative simplification: preparation, diagnosis, redesign, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, continuous improvement, and sustainability [3–5].

Based on this objective, we pose the following research questions (RQs) and directional hypotheses (Hs):

RQ1. *To what extent is perceived administrative simplification associated with perceived document management in a district-level municipality?*

H1. *Administrative simplification is positively associated with document management.*

RQ2. *Is document management more strongly associated with later institutionalization-oriented stages of simplification than with earlier analytical stages?*

H2a–H2g. *Document management is positively associated with each stage of the simplification cycle: (H2a) preparatory stage; (H2b) diagnosis; (H2c) redesign; (H2d) implementation; (H2e) monitoring and evaluation; (H2f) continuous improvement; and (H2g) sustainability.*

Figure 1 summarizes the conceptual model guiding the study. Administrative simplification (overall and by stage) is expected to be positively associated with document-management performance. We further expect stronger associations for later, institutionalization-oriented stages (implementation; monitoring and evaluation; continuous improvement; sustainability) than for earlier analytic stages (preparation; diagnosis; redesign), because later stages embed controls, routines, and lifecycle governance into day-to-day documentary practices.

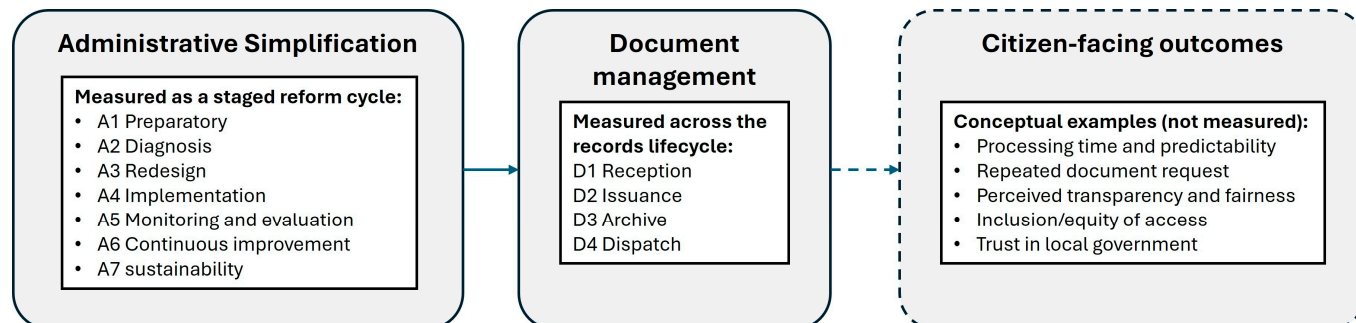


Figure 1. Conceptual model guiding the study.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a critical synthesis of the literature and the regulatory context on administrative simplification and document management. Section 3 describes the methodology (design, participants, instruments, reliability/validity, ethics, and analytical strategy). Section 4 reports the results with clean tables. Section 5 discusses the findings, alternative explanations, and implications for governance and citizen-facing service delivery. Section 6 concludes and outlines limitations and directions for future research, including emerging digital technologies.

2. Materials

2.1. Antecedents

Internationally, public administration scholarship has increasingly treated administrative simplification and document management as two sides of the same governance problem: states cannot reduce administrative burden, speed up services, or sustain transparency without reliable information flows and controllable records. Work on document

management in public organizations emphasizes its role as an enabling infrastructure for accountability, auditability, and institutional performance, not merely an archival function [12–14]. Related contributions in public-sector and European governance contexts highlight that improvements in document governance depend on aligning procedures, roles, and controls with the actual lifecycle of records—creation, registration, processing, access, preservation—and on treating document systems as part of broader organizational management rather than isolated IT deployments [6,13,15]. Likewise, studies that connect simplification reforms with administrative management argue that streamlining should be understood as an iterative cycle—diagnosis, redesign, implementation, evaluation, and continuous improvement—whose effectiveness is mediated by the organization’s capacity to standardize and secure documentary evidence of decisions and transactions [5,7]. In other words, “simplification” without documentary traceability risks becoming cosmetic, while document systems without procedural redesign tend to digitalize inefficiency rather than remove it.

In Peru, these international concerns are mirrored—often with greater urgency—by the combination of modernization mandates and municipal capacity constraints. The *Guía de Simplificación Administrativa* (Administrative Simplification Guide) promoted by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers established a structured approach for reducing unnecessary steps and improving procedures in government entities, explicitly positioning simplification as an operational method rather than a one-off reform [3]. Administrative simplification can be framed as a staged reform cycle that progresses from problem identification and process redesign to implementation and institutionalization, where monitoring and continuous improvement help prevent the re-emergence of administrative burdens over time [4,5,16]. In parallel, Peru has institutionalized document governance through the approval of a Model for Document Management and subsequent guidance tied to the digital-government agenda [9,10], alongside official digital platforms and regulations that frame document flows, interoperability, and compliance as core elements of state modernization [11]. Applied work on digital government consistently shows that reform outcomes depend on implementation capacity, institutional routines, and governance arrangements, which are often weaker in resource-constrained local governments [6,8,10]. A recurrent theme across these national sources is that municipalities face a double bind: they are expected to deliver more user-oriented, transparent services while continuing to rely on paper-based or weakly standardized documentary routines—an issue dramatized by ongoing public concerns about access to information and responsiveness [1,2] and by critiques of the state’s continued dependence on paper [6–8]. From a societal perspective, administrative simplification and document governance matter because they shape citizens’ effective access to rights and services, particularly for groups more exposed to administrative burden and informational asymmetries. This literature motivates the present study’s focus on whether, in a district-level municipality, administrative simplification processes are empirically associated with the quality of document-management practices.

2.2. Administrative Simplification as Administrative Burden/Red Tape Reduction

Building on classic “red tape” theory [16] and the administrative burden framework [7], we conceptualize administrative simplification as a staged reform cycle aimed at reducing citizens’ learning, psychological, and compliance costs in routine interactions with the government. For the purposes of measurement in the local-government context, we operationalize simplification through seven sequential dimensions that capture the end-to-end intervention logic from preparation and diagnosis to redesign, implementation, evaluation, continuous improvement, and sustainment [4,5,7]:

1. Preparatory stage: planning the simplification process, defining responsibilities, and organizing actors and resources to initiate the intervention [4,5].
2. Diagnosis: identifying and analyzing the current state of the procedure, including constraints and capacities (e.g., resources, legal framework, and infrastructure) [4,5].
3. Redesign: developing a formal improvement proposal based on the diagnosis, structuring procedural changes and consolidating them for internal approval [4,5].
4. Implementation: putting the defined changes into operation, including the operational adjustments required to execute the new design [4,5].
5. Monitoring and evaluation: verifying and monitoring how the redesigned procedure performs, incorporating qualitative and quantitative evaluation criteria and indicators [4,5].
6. Continuous improvement: institutionalizing improvement as an ongoing practice through periodic review and corrective adjustments [4,5].
7. Sustainability: consolidating changes over time so that simplification is not episodic but stable and maintainable [4,5].

Defined this way, the construct captures an organization's capability to manage simplification end-to-end, aligned with national modernization guidance for public administration [3–5].

2.3. Document Management as Governance Infrastructure

Document management is conceptualized as the organized set of principles, processes, and controls through which a public institution creates, handles, preserves, and makes available its administrative documents across their lifecycle. In this article, we use “document management” as the umbrella term, consistent with the Peruvian Document Management Model, while recognizing that the concept overlaps with records-management functions emphasized in international information-governance research [13,14]. In the Peruvian public-sector context, this concept is explicitly connected to the transition from dispersed paper-based routines toward standardized, interoperable, and secure documentary practices aligned with digital-government reforms [9]. Under this framing, document management is not reduced to “filing” or storage; it is treated as a governance function that supports traceability, institutional memory, and the reliability of administrative acts [9].

Normatively, the study anchors the variable in the approval of the Model for Document Management and related provisions that define how entities should structure documentary processes, especially as they move toward electronic document exchange and integrated record flows [9]. The construct is also linked to the broader institutional architecture of digital government, where document management becomes a practical condition for interoperability and for meeting standardized requirements for handling and certifying administrative information within public entities [10]. The study illustrates this logic by emphasizing that document governance becomes operationally relevant only when embedded in routine workflows and supported by clear responsibilities, controls, and interoperable systems [6,10].

Operationally, the study specifies document management through four key dimensions that capture the most relevant stages of documentary handling in municipal administration:

1. Reception: the intake and registration of incoming documents (paper or electronic), including initial verification and logging, to ensure traceability from the first point of contact and smooth routing across units [9].
2. Issuance: the production and formal release of official documents, ensuring timeliness, standardization, and legal validity [9].

3. Archiving: the classification, storage, and preservation of records (physical or electronic) to secure institutional memory, retrieval, and compliance with retention rules [9].
4. Dispatch: the distribution and delivery of documents to internal recipients or external users, supporting responsiveness and citizen-facing service delivery [9].

Taken together, these dimensions reflect a concept of document management as an end-to-end system that sustains administrative action: it enables institutions to evidence decisions, support internal control, and meet transparency expectations, especially within the state's ongoing digital transformation agenda [9,10,17,18]

2.4. Why Simplification Should Relate to Document Management

Under these definitions, simplification should relate to document management because redesigning procedures clarifies document flows, reduces redundant steps, standardizes responsibilities, and makes the document lifecycle more controllable—conditions that typically enable more consistent issuance, archiving, and dispatch. In short, simplification targets the process architecture, while document management targets the information/record architecture that those processes depend on [4,5,9]. Prior research on electronic document management systems in intergovernmental settings shows that sustained use depends on user acceptance dynamics (e.g., perceived usefulness and organizational support), which can shape day-to-day records flows in public organizations [19].

Local governments are often where citizens most directly experience the “friction” of the state: forms, requirements, waiting times, and unclear procedural responsibilities translate into compliance, learning, and psychological costs that shape perceived service quality and trust. This line of work is captured by the administrative burden framework, which explains how procedural complexity can systematically disadvantage users and depress policy take-up, even when formal rights exist [5,7]. In resource-constrained municipal settings, simplification initiatives and clearer document flows are therefore not only managerial improvements but also governance interventions that can enhance transparency and perceived responsiveness—two mechanisms repeatedly linked to trust in government [1,20]. Evidence from administrative burden research suggests that opaque procedures and repeated documentation requests can increase learning and compliance costs for citizens and undermine perceived fairness, especially in citizen-facing local services [7,18].

3. Methodology

3.1. Type, Level, and Design

This study used a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational design. Data were collected once from officials and administrative staff in a district-level local government organization to test whether perceived administrative simplification is associated with perceived document-management performance. The design is non-experimental because no variables were manipulated and no intervention was implemented. The study is applied in orientation and aims to generate practice-relevant evidence for local government management. Analytically, it adopts a correlational approach to estimate the strength and direction of association between administrative simplification and document-management practices in the observed setting. Operationally, the study uses a descriptive–correlational approach with a cross-sectional design (measurement at a single point in time) and a quantitative orientation. Data are collected through a survey using Likert-type questionnaires. Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The administrative simplification scale showed excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.959$; 62 items), while the document management scale also demonstrated strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.902$; 17 items). For association

testing, the study specifies Spearman's rho, which is appropriate for ordinal Likert-type measures and does not require distributional normality assumptions.

The population is defined as the set of individuals who share the characteristics relevant to the research within the District Municipality of Perené. The study reports a total population of 233 staff members. To delimit the study population, the document specifies explicit criteria. Inclusion criteria: (i) personnel from administrative and managerial areas (e.g., Mayor's Office, Municipal Management and other units indicated in this study, including their secretariats/assistants); (ii) officials and administrative staff who are hired or appointed; (iii) staff in good health; (iv) staff with a positive willingness to complete the questionnaire. Exclusion criteria: (i) personnel with operational/plant functions without supervisory roles, staff under their responsibility, or decision-making authority; (ii) personnel on leave for health or other reasons; (iii) personnel unavailable during the data-collection window; (iv) personnel whose work routes require them to go directly to the field for supervision tasks.

The target population comprised $N = 233$ officials and administrative staff from the District Municipality of Perené in 2024. We collected data from $n = 100$ respondents. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Prior to participation, respondents received study information describing the purpose, procedures, confidentiality safeguards, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences; written informed consent was obtained from all participants. No sensitive personal data were collected, and no names or direct identifiers were recorded. Data were entered and stored in de-identified form in password-protected files accessible only to the research team. Because participation depended on access and availability in a resource-constrained municipal setting, the study relied on a non-probability (voluntary/convenience) sample rather than a full census. Because the sample was non-probabilistic, classical margins of error and confidence intervals for population estimation are not strictly applicable. Accordingly, results should be interpreted as evidence of association within the surveyed staff rather than as precise population parameters for all municipal employees. Nevertheless, the achieved sample size provides adequate statistical power to detect small-to-moderate rank correlations in the observed setting.

3.2. Data-Collection Techniques and Instruments

Data were collected via a structured questionnaire administered to officials and administrative staff. The instrument measured the two core constructs—administrative simplification and document management—using five-point Likert-type response options. The instrument applies a five-point Likert scale to capture the degree to which respondents perceive practices as present in their organization: 1 = Never, 2 = Almost never, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Almost always, and 5 = Always [21]. The study frames the questionnaire as an appropriate tool for gathering comparable responses across officials and administrative staff and for enabling subsequent association testing between constructs. In terms of content grounding, the administrative simplification questionnaire was aligned with the national methodology and guidance promoted by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, which structures simplification as a staged process for public entities [3]. In addition, item content was reviewed to ensure conceptual consistency with administrative burden and red tape perspectives used in contemporary public administration research [16]. The instrument for document management is anchored in the Peruvian Model for Document Management and the digital-government framework, as formalized in official regulations and guidance [9,10]. This alignment supports content validity by ensuring that items reflect formally defined practices and dimensions within the Peruvian public administration context (Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1. Instrument operationalization matrix—Variable 1 Administrative simplification.

Dimensions	Indicators	Measurement Scale
A1 = Preparatory	Team Training and awareness Procedures Work plan	5-point Likert scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Almost never; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Almost always; 5 = Always.
A2 = Diagnosis	Characterization of the PA Diagnosis Capability mapping	
A3 = Redesign	Analysis Redesign Regulatory framework Proposals	
A4 = Implementation	Training New regulatory framework Environments Dissemination	
A5 = Monitoring and evaluation	Monitoring and evaluation plan Tools Resources	
A6 = Continuous Improvement	Planning Implementation Verification of Achievements	
A7 = Sustainability	Documentation Dissemination Regulation	

Table 2. Operationalization matrix for Variable 2 (Document management).

Dimensions	Indicators	Measurement Scale
D1 = Reception	Electronic documents Physical documents Review and verification of documents	5-point Likert scale: 1 = Never; 2 = Almost never; 3 = Sometimes; 4 = Almost always; 5 = Always.
D2 = Issuance	Opening hours Digitally signed electronic documents Applicable formats Timeliness	
D3 = Archive	Document organization Document description Document selection Document preservation Archival services Archival standards	
D4 = Dispatch	Destination Control Exceptions	

Responses were cleaned and coded for analysis. Descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) were used to summarize levels of each variable and dimension, and

results are reported in tables. For hypothesis testing, the study applies Spearman's rho to evaluate the association between administrative simplification and document management, as well as between document management and each simplification dimension. This choice is consistent with the ordinal nature of Likert-type measurement and with the study's relational level of analysis [21]. The inferential strategy relies on a conventional significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, using the p -value to decide whether the observed associations are statistically significant. The study reports that statistical processing is carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 27), which is used to produce the descriptive summaries and the Spearman correlation outputs supporting the conclusions. The operationalization matrices for both constructs, including dimensions and indicators, are provided in Appendix A (Tables A1 and A2).

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Results

4.1.1. Variable 1: Administrative Simplification

This section reports the descriptive distributions for the two study variables based on the effective analytical sample ($n = 100$). Administrative simplification is predominantly reported at moderate levels (Table 3), suggesting that staff perceive ongoing—yet not fully consolidated—efforts to streamline procedures.

Table 3. Administrative simplification (Overall Level).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	62–144	0	0
Moderate	145–227	78	78
High	228–310	22	22
Total		100	100

Table 3 provides the overall distribution of administrative simplification. The dimension-level results are then reported sequentially to identify where the simplification cycle is comparatively stronger or weaker (Tables 4–10). Specifically, the preparatory stage shows a moderate–high pattern consistent with formal initiation and planning routines (Table 4). Diagnosis concentrates more strongly in moderate–low levels, suggesting that process-mapping, bottleneck identification, and evidence-based diagnosis are not yet fully institutionalized (Table 5). Redesign also remains mostly moderate, reflecting incremental rather than transformative reengineering of procedures (Table 6). Implementation shows a clearer positive shift, indicating that “doing the change” (standardizing steps, clarifying responsibilities, and executing the redesigned process) is more visible in day-to-day operations (Table 7). By contrast, monitoring and evaluation shows the weakest distribution, with most respondents clustered in the low-to-moderate range (Table 8), suggesting that controls and evaluation mechanisms lag behind earlier procedural changes. Continuous improvement is moderate with room to mature, pointing to limited feedback loops and learning routines (Table 9). Sustainability is also moderate, suggesting that improvements are not always stabilized through documentation, monitoring, and routine updating over time (Table 10). Taken together, Tables 4–10 suggest an uneven profile across the simplification cycle: diagnostic work and monitoring/evaluation appear weaker, whereas redesign, implementation, and sustainability show comparatively stronger distributions. This pattern indicates that procedural change may be advancing faster than the analytical and control routines required to institutionalize it.

Table 4. Administrative simplification—Preparatory (Dimension 1).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	17–39	7	7
Moderate	40–62	85	85
High	63–85	8	8
Total		100	100

Table 5. Administrative simplification—Diagnosis (Dimension 2).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	7–16	44	44
Moderate	17–26	56	56
High	27–35	0	0
Total		100	100

Table 6. Administrative simplification—Redesign (Dimension 3).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	7–16	11	11
Moderate	17–26	45	45
High	27–35	44	44
Total		100	100

Table 7. Administrative simplification—Implementation (Dimension 4).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	7–16	0	0
Moderate	17–26	62	62
High	27–35	38	38
Total		100	100

Table 8. Administrative simplification—Monitoring and evaluation (Dimension 5).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	5–11	59	59
Moderate	12–18	30	30
High	19–25	11	11
Total		100	100

Table 9. Administrative simplification—Continuous improvement (Dimension 6).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	9–21	4	4
Moderate	22–33	78	78
High	34–45	18	18
Total		100	100

Table 10. Administrative simplification—Sustainability (Dimension 7).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	10–23	0	0
Moderate	24–36	60	60
High	37–50	40	40
Total		100	100

4.1.2. Variable 2: Document Management

For document management, the overall level is mainly moderate, with a sizeable low segment and a smaller high-performance group (Table 11). The dimension-level results indicate uneven performance across the documentary lifecycle (Tables 12–15). Reception is predominantly low (Table 12), suggesting gaps in intake channels and initial validation routines. Issuance shows a comparatively stronger profile, consistent with the operational priority given to outgoing documentation and formal responses (Table 13). Archive tends to concentrate at moderate–low levels, indicating weaker routines for retention, preservation, traceability, and standardized archival practices (Table 14). Dispatch management also shows a moderate profile, with persistent gaps in internal documentary order, tracking, and systematic filing practices (Table 15). Overall, the descriptive results suggest that document management strength is more visible in “front office” outputs than in the back-office functions that secure continuity, accountability, and institutional memory.

Table 11. Document management (Overall Level).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	17–39	38	38
Moderate	40–62	54	54
High	63–85	8	8
Total		100	100

Table 12. Document management—Reception (Dimension 1).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	4–9	63	63
Moderate	10–14	29	29
High	15–20	8	8
Total		100	100

Table 13. Document management—Issuance (Dimension 2).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	4–9	18	18
Moderate	10–14	42	42
High	15–20	40	40
Total		100	100

Table 14. Document management—Archive (Dimension 3).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	5–11	41	41
Moderate	12–18	44	44
High	19–25	15	15
Total		100	100

Table 15. Document management—Dispatch (Dimension 4).

Levels	Scale	n	%
Low	4–9	56	56
Moderate	10–14	36	36
High	15–20	8	8
Total		100	100

4.2. Normality Assessment

Normality tests indicate that the study variables do not follow a normal distribution (Table 16). Given (i) the ordinal measurement scale (Likert-type instruments) and (ii) the observed distributional properties, the study applies Spearman's rho for correlational hypothesis testing.

Table 16. Normality Test—Inferential Statistics.

	Kolmogorov–Smirnov ^a			Shapiro–Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Administrative simplification	0.159	100	<0.001	0.926	100	<0.001
Document management	0.135	100	<0.001	0.947	100	0.001

a. Lilliefors significance correction.

Both Kolmogorov–Smirnov (Lilliefors-corrected) and Shapiro–Wilk tests indicate statistically significant departures from normality for the composite scores (Table 16). Given the ordinal nature of Likert-type responses and the non-normal distribution of summed indices, we rely on Spearman's rho for association testing.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing

4.3.1. Testing H1 (Overall Association)

Table 17 reports the association between administrative simplification and document management. The correlation is positive and statistically significant ($\rho = 0.372$, $p < 0.001$; $n = 100$), indicating that higher levels of simplification tend to co-occur with better document-management performance. Using a Fisher z approximation, the 95% confidence interval for this association is approximately [0.189, 0.530], suggesting a modest-to-moderate positive relationship in substantive terms (i.e., higher perceived simplification tends to co-occur with more orderly document-management practices).

Table 17. Correlation between administrative simplification and document management (H1).

			Document Management	Administrative Simplification
Spearman's rho	Document Management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.372 **
		p (two-tailed)		<0.001
	Administrative Simplification	N	100	100
		Correlation coefficient	0.372 **	1.000
		p (two-tailed)	<0.001	
		N	100	100

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

4.3.2. Testing H2a–H2g (Stage-Level Associations)

The stage-level hypotheses examine whether document management is associated with each stage of the simplification cycle. Table 18 shows a positive, small-to-moderate association for the preparatory stage ($\rho = 0.324$, $p = 0.001$; $n = 100$). Table 19 shows a positive but modest association for diagnosis ($\rho = 0.303$, $p = 0.002$; $n = 100$). Table 20 reports a similarly modest association for redesign ($\rho = 0.304$, $p = 0.002$; $n = 100$). Table 21 indicates a clearer moderate association for implementation ($\rho = 0.410$, $p < 0.001$; $n = 100$). Table 22 reports the strongest association for monitoring and evaluation ($\rho = 0.546$, $p < 0.001$; $n = 100$). Table 23 shows a moderate-to-strong association for continuous improvement ($\rho = 0.500$, $p < 0.001$; $n = 100$). Finally, Table 24 indicates a moderate-to-strong association for sustainability ($\rho = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$; $n = 100$). Taken together, the results suggest that later-cycle stages (implementation, evaluation/control, continuous improvement,

and sustainability) are more strongly linked to document-management performance than earlier-cycle stages (diagnosis and redesign). As a robustness check for multiple comparisons across the seven stage-level tests (H2a–H2g), we applied a Bonferroni-adjusted significance threshold ($\alpha = 0.05/7 \approx 0.007$). For transparency, approximate 95% confidence intervals (Fisher z) for the stage-level correlations are as follows: preparatory [0.135, 0.492]; diagnosis [0.112, 0.474]; redesign [0.113, 0.475]; implementation [0.230, 0.566]; monitoring and evaluation [0.390, 0.673]; continuous improvement [0.333, 0.639]; sustainability [0.330, 0.638]. All reported stage-level associations remain statistically significant under this more conservative criterion (Tables 18–24), indicating that the inference is not driven by inflated Type I error due to multiple testing.

Table 18. Spearman correlation between document management and the preparatory stage (H2a).

			Document Management	Preparatory
Spearman's rho	Document Management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.324 **
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)		0.001
		<i>N</i>	100	100
	Preparatory	Correlation coefficient	0.324 **	1.000
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	0.001	
		<i>N</i>	100	100

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 19. Spearman correlation between document management and the diagnostic stage (H2b).

			Document Management	Diagnosis
Spearman's rho	Document Management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.303 **
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)		0.002
		<i>N</i>	100	100
	Diagnosis	Correlation coefficient	0.303 **	1.000
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	0.002	
		<i>N</i>	100	100

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 20. Spearman correlation between document management and the redesign stage (H2c).

			Document Management	Redesign
Spearman's rho	Document Management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.304 **
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)		0.002
		<i>N</i>	100	100
	Redesign	Correlation coefficient	0.304 **	1.000
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	0.002	
		<i>N</i>	100	100

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 21. Spearman correlation between document management and the implementation stage (H2d).

			Document Management	Implementation
Spearman's rho	Document Management	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	0.410 **
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)		<0.001
		<i>N</i>	100	100
	Implementation	Correlation coefficient	0.410 **	1.000
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	<0.001	
		<i>N</i>	100	100

Note: ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed).

Table 22. Spearman correlation between document management and monitoring and evaluation (H2e).

			Document Management	Monitoring and Evaluation
Spearman's rho	Document management	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.546 **
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	.	<0.001
		N	100	100
	Monitoring and evaluation	Correlation coefficient	0.546 **	1.000
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	<0.001	.
		N	100	100

Note: ** *p* < 0.01 (two-tailed).**Table 23.** Spearman correlation between document management and continuous improvement (H2f).

			Document Management	Continuous Improvement
Spearman's rho	Document management	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.500 **
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	.	<0.001
		N	100	100
	Continuous Improvement	Correlation coefficient	0.500 **	1.000
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	<0.001	.
		N	100	100

Note: ** *p* < 0.01 (two-tailed).**Table 24.** Spearman correlation between document management and sustainability (H2g).

			Document Management	Sustainability
Spearman's rho	Document management	Correlation coefficient	1.000	0.498 **
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	.	<0.001
		N	100	100
	Sustainability	Correlation coefficient	0.498 **	1.000
		<i>p</i> (two-tailed)	<0.001	.
		N	100	100

Note: ** *p* < 0.01 (two-tailed).

Overall, the pattern suggests that later-cycle stages (evaluation/control, continuous improvement, sustainability) are more strongly related to document management than earlier diagnostic/redesign stages—a pattern that is examined in the Discussion section in terms of implementation capacity and institutionalization mechanisms.

5. Discussion

This study examined whether administrative simplification is associated with document-management performance in a district-level public organization. The overall correlation ($\rho = 0.372$; $p < 0.001$) is statistically robust but substantively modest, which is plausible in real-world administrative settings where multiple constraints (capacity, legacy routines, staffing, and technology) jointly shape outcomes. The descriptive profiles reinforce this interpretation: document management tends to be stronger in outward-facing issuance routines than in archival and internal-office practices. Administrative simplification shows an uneven profile across stages: diagnostic work and monitoring/evaluation are reported as weaker, whereas redesign, implementation, and sustainability show comparatively stronger distributions. Even modest associations can matter societally when they affect how quickly and predictably citizens obtain information and services from local government. The results identify statistically significant associations between staff perceptions of administrative simplification and document-management practices in one district-level

municipality. Given the cross-sectional, self-report design and the non-probability sample, the findings do not establish causality, do not directly measure citizen-level outcomes, and should be interpreted as analytically informative rather than statistically generalizable to the broader population of Peruvian organizations. Where transparency, equity /inclusion, or citizen burden are discussed, these are framed as plausible mechanisms and implications consistent with prior literature—not as observed effects in the present data. From a public-administration perspective, the findings align with the administrative-burden and “red tape” literature: simplification efforts can reduce friction in citizen–state interactions, but benefits depend on how reforms are operationalized and institutionalized. Prior work highlights that burden reduction is not automatic under digitalization; poorly designed processes can shift learning and compliance costs onto citizens or frontline staff rather than remove them [5–7]. Accordingly, simplification that prioritizes implementation, controls, and continuous improvement may generate more immediate gains in documentary order and traceability than upstream stages that require analytical capacity and process-engineering skills. These findings also align with classic arguments that ICT can shift discretion and control from frontline officials to system-level routines, reconfiguring how rules are enacted and audited in public administration [22]. This interpretation is consistent with empirical work showing that reductions in administrative burden are mediated by implementation choices and organizational capacity, rather than being an automatic consequence of digitalization or procedural simplification [5,7,11]. It also aligns with evidence from digital-government research indicating that public value creation depends on institutionalization mechanisms—such as governance arrangements, champions, and routinization—more than on one-off redesign efforts [6,8,10,23]. Finally, empirical studies in records and information governance highlight that sustained documentary performance relies on standardized controls, auditability, and user acceptance of electronic document management systems [13,14,19].

Alternative explanations should be considered. First, common-method variance and a generally “pro-reform” response tendency could inflate associations when both constructs are measured via the same self-report instrument. Second, omitted organizational factors—such as leadership attention, managerial capacity, or digital maturity—may jointly drive both simplification and document-management performance, producing a positive association even if neither is causally prior. Third, reverse ordering is plausible: improvements in document management (e.g., clearer traceability and standardized record flows) may enable subsequent simplification by making bottlenecks visible and controllable.

The stage-level pattern observed here is theoretically meaningful. Diagnosis and redesign show smaller associations with document management than later stages, suggesting that “knowing what to change” and “redesigning on paper” are not, by themselves, enough to improve documentary performance. Stronger links emerge when reforms are executed (implementation) and then monitored, verified, and stabilized (monitoring and evaluation; continuous improvement; sustainability). In this study, the strongest correlations are observed for monitoring and evaluation, continuous improvement, and sustainability, suggesting that institutionalization and control routines may be particularly relevant for improving record-related performance in municipal practice. This echoes arguments in information governance and records-management research: accountability and transparency require controls embedded across the information lifecycle, not merely formal procedural statements. When documentary routines are reinforced through auditability, standardized controls, and systematic retention practices, organizations are better positioned to prevent information loss, ensure evidence integrity, and support citizen-facing service quality. Practically, the results suggest that local governments seeking service improvements may benefit from treating document management as a core administrative capability rather than

a purely technical back-office function. Strengthening archival and internal-office practices may be particularly high-leverage because these functions secure institutional memory, enable traceability, and reduce rework—effects that can translate into more reliable service and fewer citizen burdens. At the same time, reform agendas should treat digital inclusion as a distributional issue: digital tools can reduce burden for digitally confident users while deepening exclusion for others if document flows and service channels are redesigned without attention to user heterogeneity and street-level constraints [11,17,18]. Overall, the study contributes empirically to debates on how administrative capacity and information governance intersect in frontline public administration. Rather than treating simplification as an abstract modernization ideal, the results indicate which reform stages are more closely connected to documentary performance—information that is directly actionable for local governments operating under resource constraints and limited implementation capacity, where reform success typically depends on sustained institutionalization rather than one-off procedural redesign [6,10,23].

While the evidence is drawn from a single district-level public organization, the observed pattern is analytically informative and consistent with the broader literature on administrative burden and digital government. However, it should not be interpreted as statistically generalizable evidence for the Peruvian organizational landscape as a whole; cross-sector and multi-organization studies are needed to test whether the relationships observed here hold across different institutional settings.

6. Conclusions

Overall, the study concludes that administrative simplification is positively and significantly related to document management in the District Municipality of Perené. Using Spearman's rho with an effective analytical sample of $n = 100$, the general hypothesis test shows a positive, statistically significant association between the two variables ($\rho = 0.372$; $p < 0.001$). This result supports the study's central argument that simplification—understood as a structured process of intervention in administrative procedures—tends to co-occur with higher reported levels of document handling, organization, and circulation within the municipality [3–5,9]. At the stage level, document management is significantly associated with each dimension of the administrative simplification cycle. The correlations are positive and statistically significant for the preparatory stage ($\rho = 0.324$; $p = 0.001$), diagnosis ($\rho = 0.303$; $p = 0.002$), and redesign ($\rho = 0.304$; $p = 0.002$), indicating that planning and analytical steps of simplification are linked—albeit modestly—to documentary performance [4,5]. Stronger relationships emerge for implementation ($\rho = 0.410$; $p < 0.001$) and especially for the stages most closely connected to control and institutionalization: Monitoring and evaluation ($\rho = 0.546$; $p < 0.001$), continuous improvement ($\rho = 0.500$; $p < 0.001$), and sustainability ($\rho = 0.498$; $p < 0.001$). This pattern suggests that stronger document-management performance is more closely linked to stages focused on implementation, monitoring, consolidation, and sustained practice than to upstream planning and analytical work. This interpretation is consistent with research on digital government transformation and public value creation, which emphasizes institutionalization mechanisms (e.g., governance arrangements, champions, and routines) rather than one-off redesign efforts [9,10,23]. Descriptive results further indicate that administrative simplification is mainly perceived at a moderate level (78%), while document management shows a substantial “low” segment (38%) and limited “high” performance (8%). This supports the view that document management remains a practical bottleneck for municipal modernization. This reinforces the relevance of national frameworks such as the Administrative Simplification Guide and the Document Management Model as capacity-building instruments for resource-constrained local governments [3,9,10]. Substantively, the study contributes to debates on administra-

tive burden and digital-era governance by showing that the institutionalization stages of simplification are most strongly associated with record-related performance.

Limitations should be noted. First, the study is cross-sectional and perception-based, so the observed relationships cannot be interpreted causally. Second, measuring both constructs using the same self-report instrument at the same time may introduce common-method variance, which can inflate correlation estimates. Third, the evidence comes from a single organization and a non-probability (voluntary/convenience) sample, limiting statistical generalizability beyond the surveyed staff. Fourth, the study is limited to a single public-sector organization and does not include private-sector entities or cross-industry comparisons. As a result, the findings cannot be directly extrapolated to other organizational settings or used to infer systematic differences between public and private sectors in Peru. While prior studies indicate that document management and administrative simplification challenges differ across sectors and industries, examining such variation empirically was beyond the scope of the present design and represents a relevant avenue for future comparative research. Future research should test whether these internal gains translate into citizen-level outcomes, such as shorter processing times, fewer repeated documentation requests, and improved perceived transparency. Finally, the analysis does not explicitly address the role of emerging digital technologies such as artificial intelligence or cloud-based document-management services. These technologies are increasingly shaping how public organizations automate classification, retrieval, and traceability of records, and may alter the relationship between administrative simplification and documentary performance. Future research could examine how AI-enabled document processing and cloud infrastructures interact with simplification initiatives, particularly in resource-constrained local governments.

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Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in this manuscript:

BCS	Better Citizen Service
CI	Continuous Improvement
df	Degrees of freedom
IBM	International Business Machines (brand in “IBM SPSS Statistics”)
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IOP	Institutional Operational Plan
IT	Information Technology
LPAG	Ley del Procedimiento Administrativo General (General Administrative Procedure Law, Peru)
MOF	Manual of Organization and Functions
RENIEC	National Registry of Identification and Civil Status (Peru)
ROF	Organization and Functions Regulation
SERVQUAL	Service Quality model (SERVQUAL)
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics)
TUO	Texto Único Ordenado (consolidated legal text, Peru)
TUPA	Texto Único de Procedimientos Administrativos (Single Text of Administrative Procedures, Peru)
ρ	Spearman’s rho
α	Cronbach’s alpha

Appendix A

Table A1. Instrument development matrix—Variable 1 Administrative Simplification.

Dimensions	Indicators	Items
A1 = Preparatory	Identification and formation of the team	1. A competent Administrative Simplification Process Management Committee has been appointed. 2. A competent Continuous Improvement (CI) team has been appointed to develop administrative simplification.
	Team training and awareness	3. Municipal officials and staff have been trained and sensitized through workshops to develop the administrative simplification process.
	Procedures identified and prioritized	4. The administrative procedures contained in the TUPA on the administrative simplification process have been identified and prioritized appropriately.
	Identifying related actors	5. The internal and external factors involved in the administrative simplification procedures have been properly identified. 6. The entity has an effective management system in place to develop the administrative procedures to be simplified.
	Work plan	7. The entity has a process-based approach to developing administrative procedures to be simplified. 8. The work plan contains clearly identified objectives and actions. 9. There is a monitoring plan with dates, process progress, and indicators. 10. The evaluation plan includes tools, analysis, information monitoring, and strategies for compliance with the simplification process. 11. The work plan includes the activities to be carried out, those responsible, estimated times, and the resources needed to develop the administrative simplification process.

Table A1. Cont.

Dimensions	Indicators	Items
A2 = Diagnosis	Characterization of the Administrative Process	12. The administrative procedure for starting and ending the activities carried out by staff has been diagnosed, identifying the user public and the documents they use, receive, and generate. 13. The staff who manage the administrative procedure understand the reasons why they carry out the activities in one way or another. 14. Discussions are held with the public regarding their perception of the administrative procedure. 15. Mechanisms are in place for analyzing and making decisions to eliminate or change the activities necessary to optimize the administrative procedure. 16. Administrative simplification allows for compliance with the optimal service time frame established by the TUPA. 17. The administrative procedure is illustrated graphically, showing the flow of activities.
	Legal diagnosis	18. There are regulations that must be modified because they hinder the administrative procedure, such as (laws and decrees), regional or municipal ordinances, TUPA, Organization and Functions Regulations (ROF)
	Diagnosis of equipment and infrastructure	19. The IT equipment in the areas involved in administrative simplification includes state-of-the-art hardware, software, programming languages, and interfaces. 20. There are offices or physical spaces suitable for administrative tasks (spacious, well-ventilated, well-lit, comfortable for workers and the general public). 21. Chairs and other furniture are in good condition. 22. The office walls, cables, and electrical installations are in good condition. 23. There is a monitoring plan in place to meet the needs of workers and citizens who visit the entity.
	Mapping of human resource capacities	24. There is a comprehensive training plan in place to identify staff skills and abilities in relation to the simplification process. 25. Psychological tests of skills, abilities, and stress management are administered to measure the employee's ability to adapt to the environment. 26. Written assessments are administered on administrative procedures covered by Laws 27444 and 29060. 27. Training is provided on administrative procedures covered by Laws 27444 and 29060.
	Analysis of the Administrative Procedure	28. An analysis of the administrative procedure has been proposed based on the information provided with the aim of eliminating unnecessary activities.
	Administrative Procedure Redesign	29. Workshops have been proposed with the participation of the personnel involved in the administrative procedure, in order to gather input and validate proposals for a simplified procedure.
A3 = Redesign	Modification of the Regulatory Framework and Management Tool	30. Based on the redesign proposal, regulatory proposals have been developed to modify the current legal framework and management tools.
	Proposal for Infrastructure and Equipment Upgrades	31. A hardware design has been proposed after the new simplified administrative procedure was validated with the approval of a regulation governing it.

Table A1. Cont.

Dimensions	Indicators	Items
A4 = Implementation	Capacity building	32. An online software design has been proposed after the new simplified administrative procedure was validated with the approval of a regulation governing it. 33. A flowchart for the redistribution of physical space aimed at optimizing the process has been proposed. 34. A flowchart suitable for customer service has been proposed. 35. A flowchart has been proposed that is suitable for a good working environment. 36. Workshops on regulatory aspects identified in the diagnostic stage have been proposed to ensure that those administering the simplification process acquire greater and/or new knowledge and skills as needed.
	Training and awareness	37. The continuous improvement team has conducted workshops, training, and awareness-raising on the proposed new redesigned administrative procedure.
	New regulatory framework Regulatory	38. The proposal for the regulatory changes necessary for its implementation was executed in order to ensure the sustainability of the reform processes for management instruments (ROF—MOF), the manual, and the standard that regulates procedures.
	Adaptation of Environments and ICT	39. The environments were reorganized in line with the logic of the new redesigned administrative procedure in order to have an impact on workers and the public. 40. A flowchart was implemented that illustrates the administrative procedures in a block diagram, emphasizing the new requirements, costs, and other aspects. 41. With regard to ICT, hardware and specialized software were purchased as indicated in the redesign stage.
	Mass dissemination of the reform undertaken	42. The reform was disseminated through easy-to-understand information brochures for internal and external users. 43. The reform was disseminated among the personnel involved with the aim of acquiring the necessary skills for better management of the redesigned administrative procedure. 44. The reform was disseminated through press conferences to the user public (unions, neighborhood groups, etc.). 45. The reform was disseminated through radio programs.
	Follow-up plan	46. The achievements and weaknesses of the simplification process were verified and identified in order to take corrective measures and ensure feedback to optimize results.
A5 = Monitoring and Evaluation	Evaluation Plan	47. The monitoring plan was designed and implemented, detailing the activities to be carried out (schedule and deadlines for review, tools, indicators, and those responsible for planning). 48. Dissemination mechanisms were established for members of senior management, managers and/or directors, and those responsible for the process. 49. Tools such as surveys and user interviews were established to collect periodic data on indicators of the simplification process management. 50. An ex-post evaluation of results or end of the simplification process was established to analyze compliance with the objectives of the work plan and optimize process management.

Table A1. Cont.

Dimensions	Indicators	Items
A6 = Continuous Improvement	Implementation of continuous improvement	51. A continuous improvement approach has been implemented with the aim of achieving higher levels of efficiency and effectiveness, geared towards promoting competitiveness and/or user well-being.
	Better Citizen Service Approach	52. Continuous improvement objectives have been included in the Institutional Operational Plan (IOP), based on the needs and expectations of users under the Better Citizen Service (BCS) approach.
	Simplification process (internal)	53. Deficiencies have been analyzed in order to take corrective action and enable the entity to learn from its mistakes and respond to the needs and expectations of users.
	Simplification process (outward) SERVQUAL model (quality and satisfaction level)	54. The degree of quality and satisfaction from the user's point of view has been identified, as well as the weighting assigned by the user according to the SERVQUAL model. 55. Techniques such as surveys and questionnaires (via email and the web) have been used to measure quality attributes and satisfaction levels among users. 56. Personal interviews have been conducted with users to measure quality attributes and satisfaction levels. 57. Focus groups have been used with users to measure quality attributes and satisfaction levels. 58. Suggestion boxes have been implemented for users to measure quality attributes and satisfaction levels.
A7 = Sustainability	Sustainability tools	59. Sustainability tools have been implemented, such as documenting the simplification process. 60. Sustainability tools have been implemented, such as regulating the administrative procedure. 61. Sustainability tools have been implemented, such as access to certifications. 62. Sustainability tools have been implemented, such as letters of commitment.

Table A2. Instrument development matrix—Variable 2 Document Management.

Dimensions	Indicators	Items
D1 = Reception	Electronic documents	1. Electronic documents are received through document management systems or applications.
	Physical documents	2. Physical documents are received and digitized using image capture equipment and appropriate computer procedures.
	Review and verification of internal documents	3. Documents received within the entity (internal communication) are reviewed and verified in accordance with the TUO of the LPAG, TUPA, and the entity's internal policies. 4. Documents received outside the entity (external communications) are those exchanged with other public administration entities and are reviewed and verified in accordance with the TUO of the LPAG, TUPA, and the entity's internal policies.
D2 = Issuance	Opening hours	5. The opening hours for receiving documents in paper or electronic format are in accordance with its policies.
	Digitally signed electronic documents	6. Electronic documents are issued in a reliable and timely manner to progressively reduce the activities of capturing images of paper documents.
	Applicable formats	7. Applicable formats have been established for the types of documents managed by the municipality in accordance with the document typology specified in the archiving process.

Table A2. Cont.

Dimensions	Indicators	Items
D3 = Archive	Timeliness	8. Documents have been issued in a timely manner, in accordance with the established deadlines, using the means and tools assigned for this purpose.
	Document organization	9. Documents are properly organized for archiving.
	Document description	10. Documents are adequately described to ensure their review and safekeeping.
	Document selection	11. Documents are classified using a system that allows for quick management.
	Document preservation	12. The archive guarantees the preservation of documents.
	Archival services	13. Archival services are effective.
D4 = Dispatch	Archival standards	14. There are guidelines for appraising documents in accordance with archival standards, determining the permanent or temporary value of documents.
	Destination	15. Activities have been established to ensure that paper and electronic documents reach their destination.
	Control	16. Adequate control of documents dispatched manually or automatically has been implemented, allowing for verification of their receipt.
	Exceptions	17. Exceptions are considered a hindrance to the normal dispatch of documents by the persons responsible for the activity.

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