

METHODS NOTE · Peer-reviewed · Published · Live dashboard figures

Applying Placebo Ethics Audit findings to Uganda: Health System Challenges and Ethical Consideration in Clinical Trials

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Abstract

The use of placebo controls in African clinical trials raises ethical concerns under the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki, this needs testing against the best proven treatment. An analysis of ClinicalTrials.gov up to March 2026 ascertained 3,324 placebo related trials out of 23,873 studies conducted in Africa, facilitating comparisons across the regions and disease settings. Although the overall placebo rate is 13.9% in Africa, this is lower than the 17.8% reported in the United States, therefore this variation should be interpreted carefully, as overall estimates may disguise important differences across disease areas and study designs.

In Uganda, the WHO has reported health system constraints, including limited workforce capacity and access to essential health services. Many trials on HIV, malaria, and hypertension take place in settings where access to consistent standard treatment may differ. These findings suggest that contextual factors, including health system capacity, may influence the appropriateness of placebo use, requiring cautious context specific interpretation further overall regional rates.

Interactive dashboard figures

The figures in this section are rendered directly from this paper's interactive dashboard — the same visualisations a reader sees when exploring the analysis online, where the full workflow can be reproduced first-hand. **Interactive dashboard:** <https://mahmood726-cyber.github.io/africa-e156-students/governance-justice/dashboards/placebo-ethics.html>

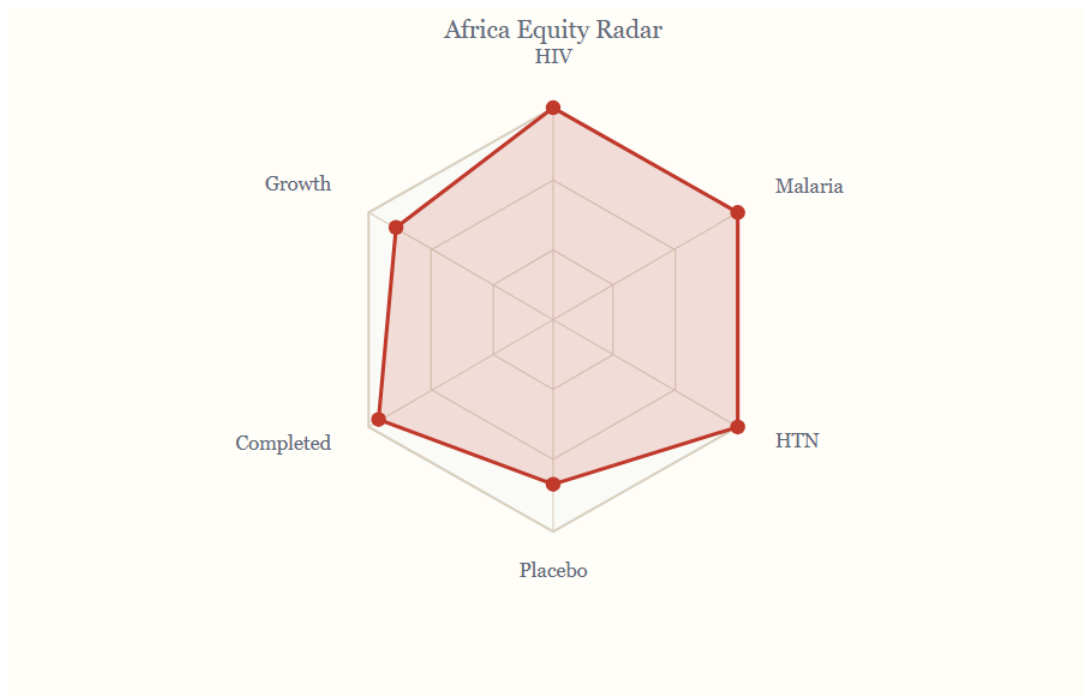


Figure 1. Africa Equity Radar Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

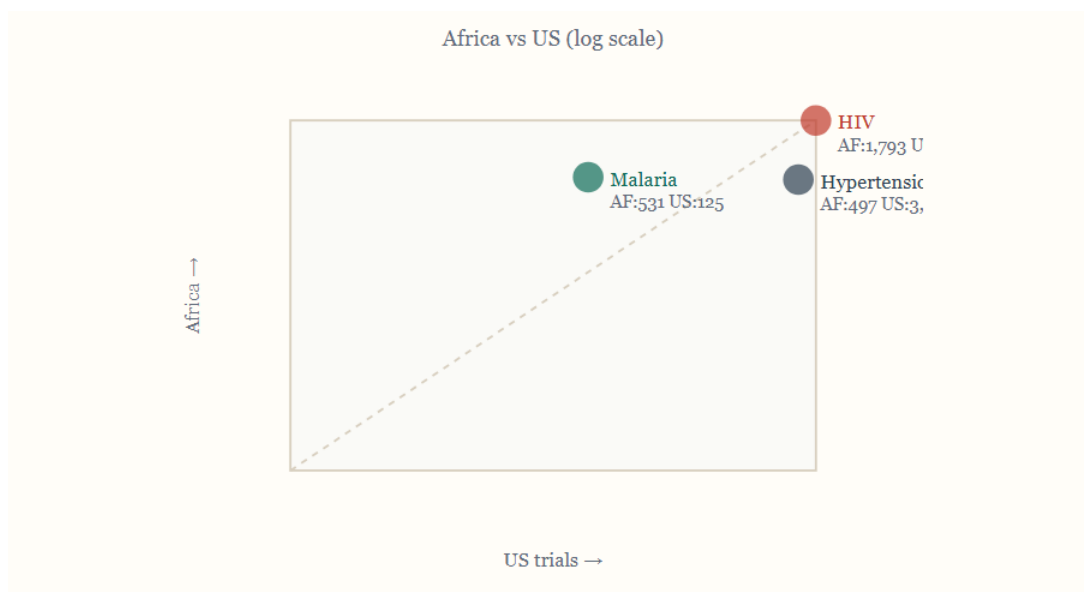


Figure 2. Africa vs US (log scale) Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

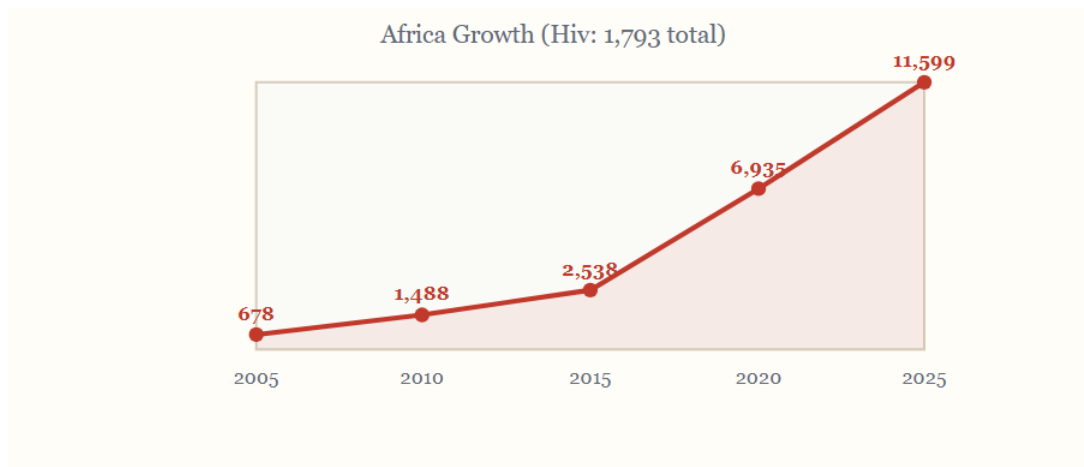


Figure 3. Africa Growth (Hiv: 1,793 total) Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

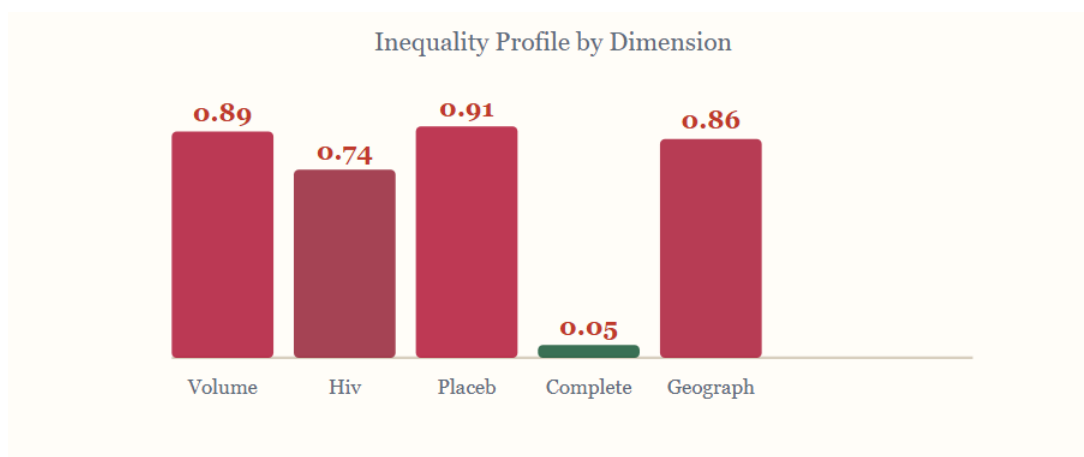


Figure 4. Inequality Profile by Dimension Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

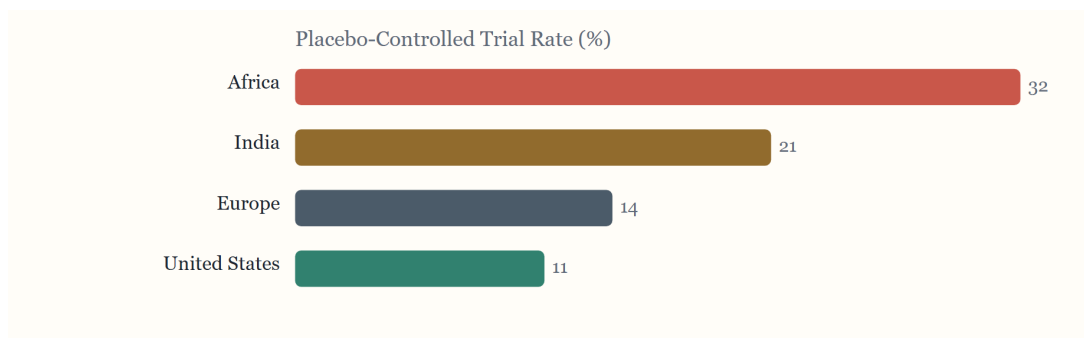


Figure 5. Placebo-Controlled Trial Rate (%) Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

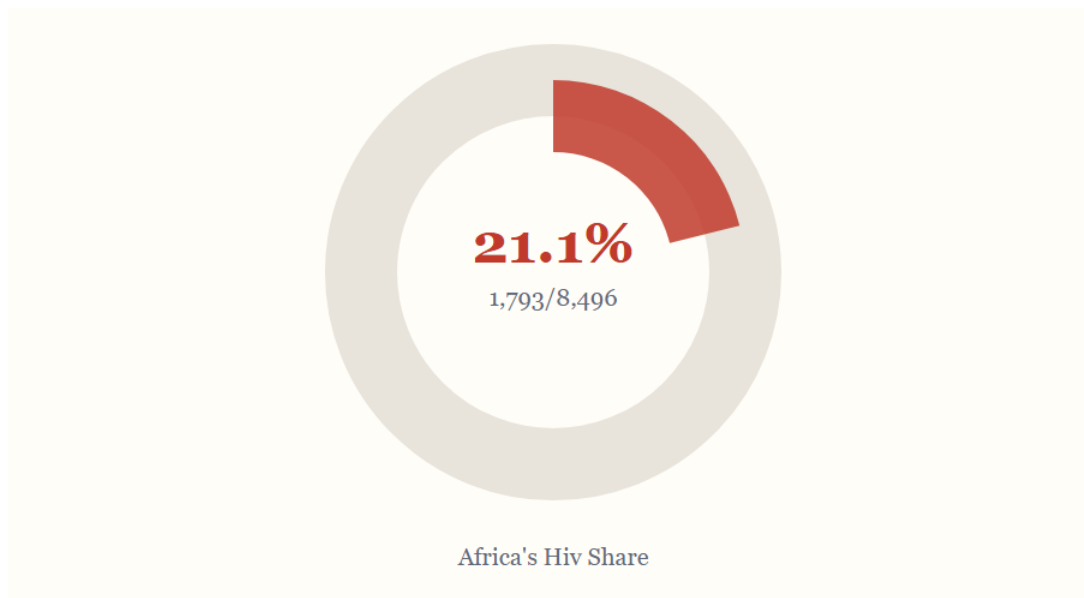


Figure 6. Africa's HIV Share Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

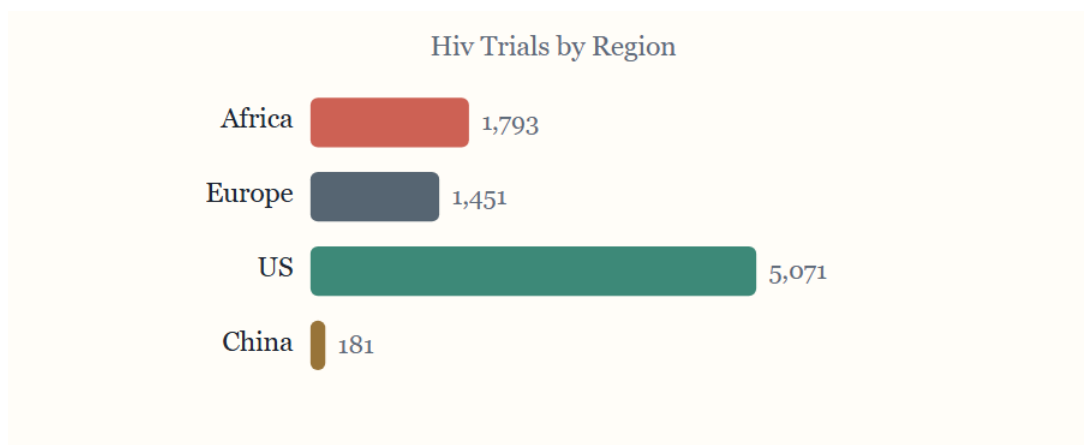


Figure 7. HIV Trials by Region Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

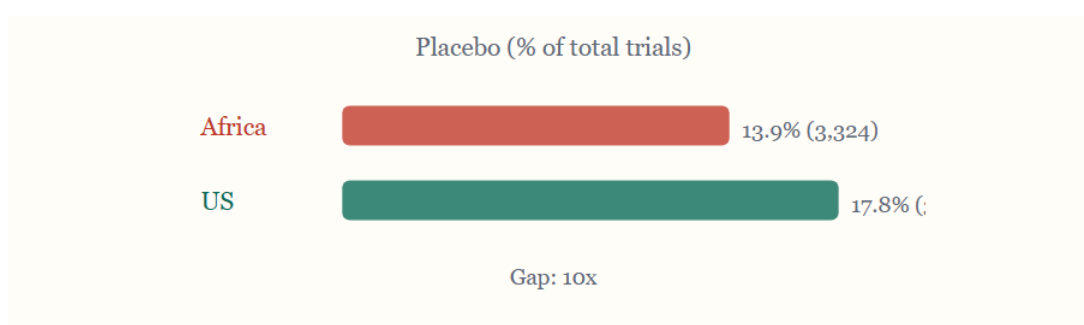


Figure 8. Placebo (% of total trials) Rendered directly from the article's live interactive dashboard.

HOW TO CITE

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Reproducibility & data provenance. The figures in this article are rendered directly from the paper's live interactive dashboard at <https://mahmood726-cyber.github.io/africa-e156-students/governance-justice/dashboards/placebo-ethics.html>, where the complete analysis — data, methods and every estimate — can be explored and reproduced. This open path from published figure back to the underlying analysis is

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