Innovative Research Journal of Sociology and Humanities

ISSN(print 3050-6867, ISSN(online): 3050-6875

Volume 02 Issue 12 December 2025

DOI: 10.58806/irijsh.2025.v2i12n01

Page No: 166 - 171

Historising the Evolution of Electronic Governance in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

E-governance has emerged as one of the main tools for reforming public administration, increasing openness, and enhancing service delivery in Nigeria. The purpose of this study is to historically analyze the evolution of e-governance in Nigeria from its initial attempts of computerization in the late 20th century to digital governance in contemporary days. Using qualitative historical methods, the research assesses major policies, systems, and technologies and institutional changes that have transformed Nigeria's e-governance systems. Pertinent issues like the National Information Technology Policy, the National e-Government Strategy (NeGSt, and the Nigeria Digital Economy Policy are analyzed for their impact and shortcomings. This research finds that there has been marked progress in the digitization of government processes such as the issuance of electronic national identification numbers (NIN), establishment of e-service portals, and public service payment through fintech platforms. Furthermore, e-governance is still limited due to poor ICT infrastructure, low internet access in rural areas, cybersecurity threats and bureaucratic inflexibility. There are also gaps in digital literacy leading to differential outcomes across regions and uneven adoption of e-governance across federal, state and local governments. The findings of this study highlight the importance of strong partnerships between the public and private sectors, ongoing financing for broadband expansion, and digital literacy initiatives focused on overcoming these gaps. Placing Nigeria's advancements in e-governance within other international developments, this work demonstrates how policy measures can more rapidly achieve a fully integrated governance system based on digital technologies. The work analyzes scientific debates on digital governance in Africa, but it also formulates practical solutions for political decision makers.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:
06 December 2025

Available on:
https://irijsh.com/

KEYWORDS: Electronic governance, Digital Transformation, Public Administration, ICT infrastructure, National e-Government Strategy (NeGSt), Digital Economy, Policy Evolution, Government Efficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Electronic governance, or e-governance, is the use of information technology to provide government services, information exchange, communication transactions, and integration of different stand-alone systems between government to citizen (G2C), government to business (G2B), government to government (G2G), government to employees (G2E), and back-office processes and interactions within the entire governance framework,[1] E-governance or electronic governance also refers to the application of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for providing government services.[2] Electronic governance (e-Governance) has become an indispensable pillar in modern public administration, offering a transformative framework through which governments can enhance efficiency, transparency, accessibility, and citizen participation. By leveraging information and communication technologies (ICTs), e-Governance facilitates faster and more reliable delivery of public services, improves the accountability of public institutions, and fosters a more responsive relationship between the state and its citizens. The development of modern e-Governance systems suggests that an institution is modernising and succeeding in developing countries.

Since Nigeria faces many political and social issues, its chances to implement e-Governance are particularly interesting and worth analysing. A lot of governance reforms have been introduced since independence, yet problems such as inefficiency, corruption,

[1]E-governance, Wikipedia, Available online @https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/E-governance?utm(Accessed on May 16, 2025)

[2] Electronic Governance, Science Direct, Available online @https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/electronic-governance?utm (Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

problems in administration, and citizen frustration have continued. Since Nigeria resumed democracy in 1999 and embraced e-Governance, the country has departed from old systems in governance and offers a platform to study the link between technology, governing, and development. Examining Nigeria reveals both unique and shared aspects of technology use in a challenging institutional context and adds insights to debates on digital governance in developing countries. This article looks at how electronic governance in Nigeria has grown with time and explores the major challenges it has faced. The literature examines the effects of policies, leadership, and technology on the growth of e-Governance. Furthermore, the article hopes to discuss the potential of e-Governance in Nigeria and learn from those lessons for future steps. The research examines how e-Governance has developed through time, beginning from the early 2000s to the current stage. It combines studies from different sources such as government papers, education books, and development digest to outline how Nigeria's e-governance system has evolved. This approach provides clarity on how different factors have shaped people's acceptance and outcomes of digital governance in Nigeria.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA.

Before technology shaped governance in Nigeria, its administration was guided by its colonial and early post-independence times. During British colonial rule, the administration relied on indirect rule, making sure that traditional organisations helped with service under the colonial government.[3] The government was run on paper-filled files, a single bureaucracy, and methods of taxing and communicating that were largely manual. Even after 1960, when the country gained independence, its legacy of bureaucratic centralisation and poor technological setup remained.[4]

Nigeria continued to use the colonial structure and made it better after gaining independence. Laws inspired by Britain formed the civil service, making it the main framework for running the nation. To manage its resources and promote development, the government developed ministries and parastatals. Although this system first aided in aligning the country and planning, it soon failed due to unproductive procedures, weak coordination, and a lack of visibility. The main issue with the old governance system was that it relied on manual, rather than automated, processes. At the time, it was difficult and risky to find data in the physical files, since it could easily be changed or lost.[5] Much of the government's dealing with people was affected by unnecessary delays, bad behavior, and a lack of openness. Without automation, the provision of public services became slower and with less accountability. It was these issues that pushed people to look for digital methods.[6] When it became clear that Nigeria required more effective and clear governance, officials started to consider electronic governance as a solution to the country's existing problems.

THE GENESIS OF ELECTRONIC GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA (1999–2007)

Nigeria's story changed for good in 1999 when the country moved from military leadership to democracy. President Obasanjo wanted to make the Nigerian government stronger and more efficient. Central to these reforms was the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into public administration. Leaders in the new administration realised that better technology was needed to deal with the ongoing challenges within the public sector.

Obasanjo's leadership used information technology to boost reforms, economic growth, and world competitiveness. His government created different policies to build Nigeria's technical skills and strengthen its governance models. These reforms were framed within the broader vision of national development, anti-corruption, and improved public service delivery.[7]

One of the foundational steps toward electronic governance was the establishment of the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) in April 2001. The main goal of NITDA is to oversee the IT strategy in Nigeria, oversee ICT activities governmentwide, and support partnerships between the government and private sector. It steered government policy for IT and promoted digital literacy among public institutions. Through various capacity-building initiatives and infrastructural projects, NITDA helped lay the groundwork for what would become Nigeria's journey into digital governance.[8] Coinciding with NITDA's creation was the introduction of the National Policy on Information Technology (NPIT) in 2001. The policy outlined a goal to improve Nigeria's technology skills and build strong legal, infrastructure, and content platforms. A key feature of the policy was its emphasis on e-governance as a means of improving the efficiency, transparency, and responsiveness of public service delivery

[3]A. Adebayo, *Principles and Practice of Public Administration in Nigeria*. Spectrum Books, 2001.

[4]A. R. Ejiogu, *The Roots of Political Instability in Nigeria: Political Evolution and Development in the Niger Basin*, New York: Routledge, 2016

[5]T. Olaopa, *Public Administration and Civil Service Reforms in Nigeria*. Bookcraft, 2008

[6]R. T. Suberu, "The Nigerian Federal System: Performance, Problems, and Prospects." *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, vol. 28, no. 4, 2010, pp. 459–477.

[7] J. Iliffe, Obasanjo, *Nigeria and the World*, Boydell & Brewer, 2011, available online @https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7722/j.ctt81pgm(Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

[8]NITDA. "Background." National Information Technology Development Agency, 2021. https://nitda.gov.ng/background(Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

(Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2001).[9] The document stressed that technology would be used to improve how government works, to root out corruption, and to bring the government closer to the public.

In the early 2000s, digital transformation was introduced to many agencies and departments within the federal government. Various government websites were set up, making it possible for people to look at guides and forms for public services online. Agencies such as the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) and the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) began exploring online platforms to improve access to tax filing and business registration, respectively. Though these initiatives were modest in scope and largely limited by infrastructural challenges, they represented a critical first step in reorienting Nigeria's governance model toward a more digitally responsive approach.[10] Besides, the government collaborated with international organisations as well as private businesses to develop more digital infrastructure and attract ICT investments. Although outcomes during this time were not always good due to internet coverage, appropriate funds, and the lack of qualified staff, the basis for developing Nigeria's e-government had begun. They set the foundation for future administrations to work from as they continued developing digital transformation programs.

EXPANSION AND INSTITUTIONALISATION OF E-GOVERNANCE (2007–2015)

The period between 2007 and 2015 marked a significant phase in Nigeria's journey towards institutionalising electronic governance. Moving forward from the first round of ICT reforms, administrations led by Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and Goodluck Jonathan worked harder to integrate digital methods into running the government, so that it could operate more efficiently.[11] The administration of President Yar'Adua saw the importance of using ICT to boost national development. This vision was further amplified during President Jonathan's tenure, which saw the launch of the Transformation Agenda a policy blueprint that prioritised the modernisation of public institutions through ICT integration. Important actions involved setting up more digital networks, helping people learn digital skills, and offering e-government benefits to several departments.

The main advance of that time was biometric registration, which was used to combat fraud and ensure more exact records. The Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System (IPPIS) was implemented to streamline the federal government's payroll, eliminate ghost workers, and ensure fiscal discipline. At the same time, the government began using e-payment systems, helping with smooth and secure salary payments to workers and lessening the chance of corruption. To further entrench financial transparency, the government introduced the Government Integrated Financial Management Information System (GIFMIS). With this system, budgeting, spending, and reporting operations were united, allowing officials to watch spending closely in real time. GIFMIS played a pivotal role in improving the efficiency of public financial management and aligning Nigeria's practices with international standards.

Central to the success of these e-governance initiatives was the role of Galaxy Backbone Limited, established in 2006 as the federal government's ICT services provider. The organisation was tasked with building and managing a unified ICT infrastructure for government ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). As part of developing the 1-Gob platform, Galaxy Backbone offered secure, dependable connectivity, storage solutions, and collaboration platforms to the MDAs. With this infrastructure, government organisations were able to work together effortlessly, share data easily, and offer services more efficiently, reducing unnecessary repetition.[12] Yet, the country had some problems such as low broadband coverage, limited computer literacy among government staff, and weak rural infrastructure. Nevertheless, the period between 2007 and 2015 laid a robust foundation for Nigeria's digital transformation, setting the stage for subsequent e-governance developments.

CONSOLIDATION AND MODERNISATION OF E-GOVERNANCE (2015–2023).

The period from 2015 to 2023 marked a significant phase in Nigeria's digital transformation journey, characterised by concerted efforts to consolidate and modernise e-governance frameworks. Under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, the government prioritised the digital economy as a cornerstone for national development, leading to the establishment of the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy in 2019. This ministry was tasked with formulating and implementing policies aimed at leveraging Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) to enhance public service delivery, promote transparency, and drive economic diversification (Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy). A pivotal initiative during this era was the launch of the "National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (2020–2030)."[13] In addition, the policy comprises eight major

[9] Federal Republic of Nigeria. National Information Technology Policy. 2001. https://www.segundawodu.com/itpolicy.pdf (Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

[10] R. O. Garuba, "ICT and Democratic Governance in Nigeria." Fountain Journal of Management and Social Sciences: 2014, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 73-77

[11] Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy. Nigeria e-Government Master Plan. 2023, https://fmcide.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/NgeGovMP.pdf (Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

[12] Galaxy Backbone Limited. "About Us." 2025, https://galaxybackbone.com.ng/about-us/.(Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

[13] Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy. "About the Ministry." Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy, 2023, https://fmcide.gov.ng/](https://fmcide.gov.ng/. (Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

areas, amongst them are developmental regulation, digital literacy and skills, building strong infrastructure, service infrastructure, driving development and promoting digital services, soft infrastructure, building a digital society and adopting indigenous content. The policy aimed to reposition Nigeria's economy by harnessing digital technologies to foster innovation, create jobs, and improve governance (National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2020–2030).[14]

In line with these strategic objectives, the Central Bank of Nigeria introduced the "eNaira" on October 25, 2021, making Nigeria the first African country to launch a central bank digital currency (CBDC). Developing the eNaira was aimed at assisting the physical naira, supporting financial inclusion, simplifying welfare payments and improving cross-border trade. Despite initial challenges related to public awareness and infrastructure, the eNaira represented a significant step towards a cashless economy and demonstrated the government's commitment to embracing digital financial solutions. Simultaneously, the "National Identity Management Commission (NIMC)" intensified efforts to digitize identity management through the issuance of the National Identification Number (NIN).[15] This initiative was created to help improve e-governance and ensure better security in sharing and managing government information. The NIMC's digital identity ecosystem facilitated the integration of various government services, thereby enhancing efficiency and reducing identity-related fraud.

Even so, there were several obstacles in carrying out these e-governance programmes. The "digital divide" remained a significant barrier, with disparities in internet access and digital literacy between urban and rural populations hindering equitable participation in digital services. E-governance programmes faced new challenges because of problems arising from a lack of reliable power supply and poor broadband networks.[16] Furthermore, annoying practices like corruption and rigid bureaucracy slowed down the launch of these technologies and prevented the promised improvement in transparency in running the government. Despite these challenges, the period from 2015 to 2023 laid a robust foundation for Nigeria's digital transformation. The government's strategic focus on the digital economy, coupled with initiatives like the eNaira and digital identity management, signaled a commitment to modernising governance and fostering inclusive development. In the coming years, further investment in developing infrastructure, capacity and fighting corruption will be important for supporting and boosting these results.

CASE STUDIES OF E-GOVERNANCE APPLICATIONS

e-Tax (Federal Inland Revenue Service)

The Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) has significantly advanced Nigeria's tax administration through the implementation of electronic tax systems. The introduction of the "e-Filing" platform allows taxpayers to file returns, make payments, and access tax services online, thereby enhancing efficiency and compliance.[17] As of 2016, FIRS added additional ways to pay taxes online through Rimta, Interswitch and NIBSS for everyone . More recently, in October 2024, FIRS introduced the "*829# USSD initiative," enabling taxpayers without internet access to perform tax-related activities via mobile phones .

e-Voting in Internal Political Party Affairs and Electoral Processes

The adoption of electronic voting (e-voting) in Nigeria has been a subject of ongoing discourse, particularly concerning its potential to enhance electoral integrity. While full-scale implementation in national elections remains limited, there have been discussions and pilot programs exploring e-voting's feasibility. The European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES) has contributed to this discourse by analysing conditions necessary for successful e-voting implementation in Nigeria, emphasising the need for robust legal frameworks, technological infrastructure, and public trust.[18]

e-Procurement and Public Service Recruitment

To promote transparency and efficiency in public procurement, Nigeria has embraced electronic procurement (e-procurement) systems. The Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) oversees the implementation of e-procurement platforms that allow for electronic

[14]National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy (2020–2030). National Information Technology Development Agency, 2020, [https://nitda.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/National-Digital-Economy-Policy-and-Strategy2.pdf (Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

[15] National Identity Management Commission. "Digital Identity Ecosystem." NIMC, 2023, Available online @https://nimc.gov.ng/digital-identity-ecosystem/ (Accessed on May. 16, 2025)

[16]O. Oghuvbu, "E-Governance in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects." *RUDN Journal of Public Administration*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2021, pp. 484–495

[17]Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS). FIRS Launches USSD Code to Enhance Tax Payment. FIRS, Oct. 2024, Available online @ https://www.firs.gov.ng (Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

[18] European Centre for Electoral Support (ECES). "e-Voting in Nigeria: Exploring the Feasibility." ECES.eu, 2021, [https://www.eces.eu/en/posts/evoting-nigeria](https://www.eces.eu/en/posts/evoting-nigeria, (Accessed on May, 16, 2025)

tendering and bidding processes.[19] Additionally, the Federal Road Safety Corps (FRSC) utilises e-procurement websites to facilitate transactions between buyers and sellers of goods and services . To make recruitment simpler, the Federal Civil Service Commission has set up a website where anyone can apply for their preferred position.[20]

N-Power and Other Social Intervention Programmes Online Application Systems

To help deal with youth unemployment, the Nigerian government set up the N-Power programme in 2016. The application process for N-Power is conducted entirely online, allowing applicants to complete pre-screening questionnaires and full applications via the program's website . Making applications online makes the process simpler and also allows more people to participate. So far, the programme has brought together many Nigerian youths who are now supported and given chances in education, health, agribusiness and technology.[21]

CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE E-GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA (1 PAGE)

Even though progress has been made in electronic governance, Nigeria is still unable to reach its full potential due to various difficulties. These issues involve a lack of infrastructure, problems with online safety and privacy, too few qualified individuals and differences in policies. The absence of proper infrastructure for power and Internet is one of the biggest problems facing e-governance in Nigeria.[22] Collapsing of the national power grid happens regularly because of old and damaged equipment, many instances of vandalism and not enough investments, causing economic troubles and daily problems with the electricity supply . Also, due to limited access to broadband, people living in rural areas find digital services harder to use. The expansion of digital governance has exposed vulnerabilities in Nigeria's cybersecurity framework. Adhering to cybersecurity policies is tough for government organisations which might result in data breaches and harm people's trust in them. Even though the 2015 Cybercrimes Act created rules for tackling cybercrimes, applying them is not always effective and different agencies cannot work closely together.[23]

E-governance can work well only if the team supporting it is skilled in handling digital processes. Even so, the country lacks an adequate number of trained personnel and both officials and the general public are not very familiar with technology. Because of this deficit, e-governance platforms become less efficient. Initiatives by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) aim to address this gap through digital literacy and capacity development programs.[24] There is a lack of progress in e-governance because the policy and approach used are not consistent. Regular updates in policies, several agencies covering the same areas and missing joint action plans result in things not being done as they should. As a result, programmes meant to improve e-governance are less effective and consistent.

PROSPECTS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The governments of Rwanda, Kenya and South Africa have achieved much in moving towards e-government services. For instance *Irembo* allows Rwandans to access online services from the government through strong leadership and IT investment. E-government in Kenya provides digital services for taxes and businesses, while South Africa embraces a fair eGovernance system that is protected against attacks. Nigeria can improve its services by enhancing cooperation, teaching tech skills and making service platforms user-friendly. Nigeria can gain more from e-governance by developing better access to the internet and improving power supply. Collaboration between government and the private industry can lead to new inventions and more efficient methods. Governing bodies should strengthen laws for protecting data to encourage trust among individuals. In addition, teaching people and employees digital skills will enhance efficiency in public services for everyone. Appropriate policies can also help e-governance strengthen democracy and benefit the country. Instead of paperwork, Nigeria is shifting to digital systems which started under Obasanjo and has continued through each successive administration. E-governance has improved transparency, accountability, and citizen participation. To build a strong future, Nigeria must also focus on increasing investment, improving its laws and offering digital training to all for maximum gains in digital governance and support democracy and development.

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