

# The Digital Governance Gap in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Study of Indonesia, India, and the Philippines

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study examines digital governance disparities in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines by analyzing how institutional coordination, administrative capacity, and governance structures influence digital transformation outcomes in developing democracies.

**Subjects and Methods:** The research employed a qualitative comparative design using semi-structured interviews, policy documents, and institutional reports collected between 2023 and 2024. Data were analyzed through thematic content analysis supported by institutional capacity theory and digital governance maturity frameworks.

**Results:** The findings reveal that India demonstrates stronger policy coherence and institutional integration through centralized coordination under the Digital India initiative, while Indonesia experiences fragmented implementation caused by decentralized governance and uneven regional administrative capacity. The Philippines exhibits relatively strong local innovation and participatory governance practices, although implementation continuity remains vulnerable to political transitions. Digital governance effectiveness across the three countries is strongly influenced by bureaucratic adaptability, institutional continuity, inter-agency coordination, and digital inclusivity rather than technological infrastructure alone.

**Conclusions:** Sustainable digital transformation requires adaptive institutions, coherent governance systems, inclusive participation mechanisms, and long-term administrative coordination to achieve equitable and effective digital governance.

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, digital governance has become a central pillar of national development strategies, particularly in emerging economies across Asia (Priharsari et al., 2023; Kibria & Hong, 2024). The growing reliance on digital infrastructures, data-driven policy implementation, and online public services has redefined the relationship between governments and citizens. Digital governance encompasses not only the deployment of technologies but also the institutional frameworks, regulatory systems, and socio-political mechanisms that determine how digital transformations unfold (Mariani & Bianchi, 2023).

As such, it represents both a technological and governance paradigm that reshapes administrative efficiency, transparency, and public participation (Akopian et al., 2024). The digital turn in governance offers unprecedented opportunities to improve service delivery and accountability, yet it also poses risks of exclusion, inequality, and institutional fragmentation if not managed inclusively (Umeanwe, 2025). Asia's rapid digitalization underscores this duality. Southeast Asian nations, in particular, have experienced accelerated adoption of digital technologies in governance since the early 2010s, driven by expanding internet penetration, the rise of mobile connectivity, and state-led modernization agendas (He, 2024).

Despite significant progress, the region continues to exhibit marked disparities in digital governance maturity (Waara, 2025). Countries such as Singapore and Malaysia have achieved relatively integrated e-government systems, while others like Indonesia and the Philippines face persistent infrastructural and institutional challenges. India, often compared in the same digital trajectory, has implemented ambitious programs such as Digital India, which aim to transform public administration and citizen engagement through technology (Verma, 2018; Malhotra et al., 2020).

The unevenness of outcomes highlights the enduring governance gap between ambition and implementation in digital transitions across developing democracies. This growing divergence raises critical questions about the nature and determinants of digital governance inequalities. While digital transformation is widely promoted as a universal solution to bureaucratic inefficiencies, its realization is deeply contingent on governance capacity, socio-economic inclusivity, and political commitment (Kutkov et al., 2025). Research increasingly points out that digital governance gaps often mirror broader structural inequalities, such as regional disparities, resource allocation imbalances, and varying administrative capabilities (Cordella & Tempini, 2020).

In Southeast Asia, for instance, the digital divide is not limited to infrastructure but extends to policy design, institutional readiness, and the digital literacy of both citizens and bureaucrats (Munajat & Irawati, 2025). Consequently, understanding the roots of digital governance gaps requires a comparative and contextualized analysis that captures the interplay between institutional arrangements, political culture, and technological adaptation across countries. The central problem addressed in this study concerns the persistent digital governance gap among developing countries in Asia, specifically Indonesia, India, and the Philippines (Taufiqurokhman et al., 2025; Abd et al., 2025; Nilgiriwala et al., 2024). Despite similar developmental aspirations and regional integration agendas, these nations exhibit significant variations in how digital governance is institutionalized and operationalized.

This disparity manifests in different levels of policy coherence, inter-ministerial coordination, and citizen engagement mechanisms. The problem is compounded by uneven capacities among local governments to adapt national digital strategies into local realities, resulting in fragmented implementation (Camorongan, 2023). While global indices such as the UN E-Government Development Index (EGDI) show upward trends for these countries, the qualitative dimension of governance transparency, accountability, inclusivity remains inconsistent. The general approach to addressing this problem has often been to emphasize technological upgrades and capacity building, yet such efforts may not sufficiently tackle the governance dimensions underlying the digital divide.

Governments have invested heavily in ICT infrastructure, e-service platforms, and open data initiatives, aiming to enhance transparency and public accessibility (Kniazieva et al., 2023). Empirical evidence suggests that without institutional coherence and inter-agency coordination, digital investments tend to produce fragmented systems rather than integrated governance frameworks (Mian et al., 2025). As a result, the promise of digital transformation frequently remains unfulfilled in terms of equity and sustainability. This calls for a broader analytical approach that situates digital governance not merely as a technical process but as an institutional and political construct.

Previous studies have proposed several solutions to bridge digital governance gaps. One stream of literature highlights the need for adaptive governance frameworks that combine flexibility with

accountability (Gil-Garcia et al., 2018). Such frameworks emphasize co-creation between government and citizens, where digital systems facilitate participatory policy design rather than simply automating administrative functions. In India, for example, the use of digital identity systems such as Aadhaar has improved access to welfare services, though it has also raised concerns regarding privacy and exclusion (Bhatia & Bhabha, 2017).

In Indonesia, initiatives like SPBE (Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik) aim to unify digital public services through a national architecture, yet their implementation remains uneven across regions (Sundari & Sartika, 2025). Similarly, the Philippines' Digital Governance Awards encourage local government innovations, but sustainability and scalability issues persist (Camorongan, 2023). These examples illustrate that policy innovation alone is insufficient unless supported by institutional reform and capacity building.

Another strand of scholarship underscores the importance of governance maturity models and data governance mechanisms. Studies by Janssen & van (2016) argue that digital governance evolves through stages from digitization to integration and transformation requiring continuous alignment between technology and governance processes. Similarly, data governance frameworks are increasingly recognized as the backbone of effective digital transformation, ensuring interoperability, data quality, and ethical data use. Without robust data governance, e-government initiatives risk reinforcing inefficiencies through poor data management and lack of trust.

In the Southeast Asian context, these challenges are compounded by the decentralized nature of governance and varying levels of digital readiness among local institutions (ADB, 2022). The existing literature reveals several interrelated themes that form the analytical basis for this study. First, digital governance disparities are multidimensional spanning infrastructure, institutional arrangements, and socio-political capacity. Second, governance reform and digital transformation are mutually constitutive; neither can progress sustainably without the other (Cordella & Tempini, 2020).

Third, while the technological infrastructure gap is narrowing, the institutional and governance gaps persist, highlighting the importance of policy coherence and administrative capability. Finally, comparative studies across developing democracies remain limited, particularly those that systematically analyze how contextual factors shape digital governance outcomes. These observations point to a clear research gap: the lack of comprehensive comparative analysis of digital governance dynamics among Southeast Asian and South Asian middle-income countries with shared postcolonial and developmental trajectories.

This study aims to fill this gap by conducting a comparative analysis of digital governance disparities in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. The research seeks to understand how governance frameworks, institutional capacities, and socio-political contexts influence the effectiveness and inclusivity of digital transformation. By adopting a comparative qualitative design, the study analyzes key policy instruments, implementation mechanisms, and stakeholder interactions across the three countries. The novelty of this study lies in its integrative approach, which situates digital governance within broader debates on institutional capacity and political economy.

Rather than viewing digitalization as a uniform process, the study conceptualizes it as a differentiated and path-dependent transformation shaped by local governance realities. This approach provides a nuanced understanding of why similar digital strategies yield different governance outcomes in comparable developing contexts. The scope of the research is limited to national-level digital governance initiatives and their institutional implementation patterns between 2015 and 2025, a period marked by rapid digital acceleration and post-pandemic governance adaptation.

The findings aim to contribute to both theory and practice by refining conceptual models of digital governance maturity and offering policy insights for more inclusive and coherent digital transformation strategies in developing democracies. Ultimately, by examining Indonesia, India, and the Philippines, the study underscores that addressing the digital governance gap requires

more than technology adoption it necessitates institutional learning, adaptive policymaking, and governance systems that prioritize inclusivity, accountability, and resilience in the digital age.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a qualitative comparative research design to examine the institutional and governance factors shaping digital governance disparities in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. Qualitative comparative research is particularly suitable for exploring governance processes because it enables an in-depth interpretation of institutional dynamics, policy implementation patterns, and socio-political contexts that cannot be fully captured through quantitative indicators alone. The study adopted an interpretive institutional approach, emphasizing how governance structures, administrative cultures, and policy coordination mechanisms influence digital transformation outcomes across developing democracies. The comparative design was selected because the three countries share several structural similarities, including postcolonial administrative legacies, democratic political systems, rapid digitalization agendas, and middle-income developmental trajectories. Despite these similarities, the countries demonstrate different levels of digital governance maturity and institutional effectiveness. By comparing these cases systematically, the study sought to identify the underlying institutional mechanisms that explain divergent digital governance outcomes. The comparative approach also enabled the research to uncover recurring governance patterns and contextual variations related to policy coherence, administrative coordination, and citizen participation. The study was informed by institutional capacity theory and digital governance maturity frameworks. Institutional capacity theory emphasizes that successful governance reforms depend not only on technological infrastructure but also on bureaucratic capability, leadership continuity, inter-agency coordination, and adaptive policymaking (Andrews, 2013; Evans, 1995). Meanwhile, digital governance maturity models explain how governments evolve from fragmented digitization toward integrated and transformative governance systems (Janssen & van der Voort, 2016). These perspectives provided the analytical foundation for interpreting how digital transformation processes unfolded differently across the three national contexts.

### **Research Context and Study Location**

The research focused on three Asian developing democracies: Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. These countries were selected purposively because they represent contrasting institutional approaches to digital governance while sharing comparable socio-economic and political characteristics. Indonesia represents a decentralized governance system with strong regional autonomy, India reflects a highly centralized digital governance model coordinated through national institutions, and the Philippines illustrates a localized and participatory approach to digital innovation. The temporal scope of the study covered the period from 2015 to 2025, which corresponds with the acceleration of digital governance reforms and post-pandemic administrative adaptation across Asia. During this period, each country introduced major digital governance initiatives. Indonesia strengthened the implementation of Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik (SPBE), India expanded the Digital India program and integrated national digital infrastructures such as Aadhaar and DigiLocker, while the Philippines intensified local digital governance innovation through the E-Governance Masterplan and Digital Governance Awards programs. The study concentrated primarily on national-level governance frameworks while also considering subnational implementation dynamics where relevant. This contextual focus allowed the research to analyze the interaction between central policy formulation and local administrative implementation. The selected cases also provided important comparative insights into how governance cultures, institutional arrangements, and administrative capacities shape digital transformation trajectories in developing countries.

### **Data Sources and Data Collection Techniques**

The study utilized multiple qualitative data sources to ensure analytical depth and triangulation. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews conducted between 2023 and 2024 with policymakers, information and communication technology (ICT) officials, bureaucratic reform practitioners, and academic experts involved in digital governance

initiatives. The interviews aimed to capture institutional experiences, governance challenges, and insider perspectives regarding digital transformation processes in each country. A purposive sampling strategy was applied to select informants who possessed direct knowledge and professional experience related to digital governance implementation. Informants included officials from ministries responsible for digital transformation, ICT agencies, local government administrators, policy researchers, and civil society representatives involved in governance reform. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed to identify additional participants with relevant expertise and institutional experience. In total, the study involved 20 informants distributed across the three countries. Interview sessions were conducted online and lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. All interviews were carried out using semi-structured protocols that allowed flexibility while maintaining thematic consistency across cases. Secondary data complemented the interview findings and consisted of government policy documents, national digital strategies, institutional reports, legislative regulations, and publications from international organizations such as the World Bank, Asian Development Bank (ADB), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Scholarly journal articles and academic publications were also examined to strengthen the conceptual interpretation of institutional and governance dynamics. The selection of documents was guided by three criteria: relevance to digital governance, institutional credibility, and consistency with the research timeframe. The integration of interviews and documentary evidence enabled methodological triangulation and strengthened the depth of comparative interpretation. All collected materials, including interview transcripts and policy documents, were systematically organized using NVivo software to facilitate coding, thematic categorization, and data traceability throughout the analytical process.

Table 1. Distribution of Research Informants

Category of Informants	Indonesia	India	Philippines	Total
Policymakers and Government Officials	4	3	3	10
ICT Agency Officials	2	2	2	6
Academic Experts and Researchers	1	1	1	3
Civil Society/NGO Representatives	1	-	-	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>20</b>

Source: Research Data Processed by Authors (2025)

The distribution of informants reflected the comparative orientation of the research while ensuring representation from key governance stakeholders across the three countries.

### Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed using thematic content analysis combining inductive and deductive analytical procedures. The analysis began with a familiarization stage in which all interview transcripts and documentary materials were reviewed repeatedly to identify recurring institutional and governance issues. During this process, preliminary analytical notes were developed to capture emerging themes related to policy coherence, institutional coordination, digital inclusion, administrative capacity, and citizen participation. The second stage involved open coding, where relevant segments of text were categorized systematically based on recurring meanings and conceptual relevance. Deductive coding was informed by the conceptual framework derived from institutional capacity theory and digital governance maturity literature, while inductive coding allowed new themes and contextual insights to emerge directly from the empirical data. The coding process generated thematic categories that were subsequently grouped into broader analytical dimensions. The third stage consisted of cross-case comparison and thematic synthesis. Each country case was analyzed individually before comparative interpretation was conducted across cases. This procedure enabled the identification of similarities, differences, and causal mechanisms explaining divergent digital governance trajectories. Comparative synthesis also facilitated explanation-building regarding how institutional structures, leadership continuity, and administrative culture influenced governance outcomes. Pattern matching and explanation-building techniques were used to strengthen analytical interpretation. The empirical findings were continuously compared with theoretical

expectations derived from institutional governance literature. This process ensured that the analysis moved beyond descriptive comparison toward a deeper understanding of institutional transformation processes in digital governance contexts.

### **Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations**

To ensure research credibility and analytical rigor, the study applied several validation strategies. Methodological triangulation was conducted by cross-verifying information obtained from interviews, government documents, international reports, and scholarly literature. Triangulation reduced the risk of bias arising from reliance on a single source and improved the consistency of findings across cases. Reliability was strengthened through the maintenance of an audit trail documenting all stages of data collection, coding procedures, analytical decisions, and thematic development. Peer debriefing was also conducted with scholars specializing in governance and public administration to review coding consistency and thematic interpretation. This process contributed to analytical transparency and interpretive coherence. Internal validity was enhanced through pattern matching between empirical findings and theoretical propositions derived from institutional capacity and digital governance frameworks. External validity was approached through analytical generalization rather than statistical generalization, allowing the findings to contribute to broader theoretical discussions concerning digital governance in developing democracies. Ethical considerations were addressed throughout the research process. All interview participants provided informed consent prior to participation. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by excluding sensitive personal identifiers from the reporting process. Participants were informed about the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw from the study at any stage. The study also ensured responsible citation and ethical use of public documents and institutional reports in accordance with academic research standards.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings of the comparative qualitative analysis concerning digital governance disparities in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines. The results are derived from thematic analysis of policy documents, institutional reports, and semi-structured interviews conducted with policymakers, ICT officials, local government representatives, academics, and civil society actors between 2023 and 2024. The presentation of findings is organized into three major themes corresponding to the analytical dimensions established in the methodology section: (1) strategic and policy coherence, (2) institutional and administrative capacity, and (3) citizen engagement and digital inclusivity.

The findings indicate that differences in digital governance performance across the three countries are shaped primarily by institutional coordination, administrative capability, and governance continuity rather than technological availability alone. While all three countries have adopted ambitious digital transformation agendas, the implementation outcomes vary significantly according to governance structures, bureaucratic culture, and state capacity. To strengthen analytical interpretation, the section incorporates interview excerpts and comparative tables summarizing empirical patterns identified during the research process.

### **Strategic and Policy Coherence in Digital Governance**

The first major finding concerns the varying degree of strategic coherence within national digital governance frameworks. The analysis demonstrates that policy integration and inter-agency coordination remain uneven across the three countries, influencing the consistency of digital transformation implementation.

Indonesia exhibits a relatively fragmented policy environment despite the establishment of Sistem Pemerintahan Berbasis Elektronik (SPBE) as the national digital governance framework. Documentary analysis shows that ministries and local governments continue to develop independent digital platforms with limited interoperability. Although the central government introduced integration standards through Presidential Regulation No. 95/2018, implementation remains inconsistent at regional levels.

This fragmentation was emphasized by a policymaker from the Ministry of Communication and Informatics:

*“Actually, many ministries already have their own digital systems, and some of them work quite well. The problem is that every institution wants to build its own platform without really thinking about integration. At the local level, regions also create separate applications because they feel their needs are different. In the end, we have too many systems that cannot communicate with each other properly, so coordination becomes difficult and public services are less efficient.”* (Participant 3, Senior Policymaker, Ministry of Communication and Informatics, Indonesia, Interview April 2024)

The interview findings indicate that decentralization encourages local innovation but simultaneously weakens policy standardization and interoperability. Regional governments often prioritize institutional autonomy over national integration, creating duplication in digital service delivery.

India demonstrates a contrasting pattern characterized by stronger strategic coordination under the Digital India initiative. Centralized leadership through the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) enables national integration of digital programs such as Aadhaar, DigiLocker, and eKranti. Policy documents reveal that digital initiatives are systematically linked through a unified national strategy aimed at strengthening administrative efficiency and citizen access.

An ICT advisor in New Delhi explained:

*“The central government plays a very strong role in directing digital programs. Every ministry is expected to align its digital initiatives with the Digital India roadmap. That creates consistency because agencies cannot simply create independent systems without approval. Of course, there are still implementation issues in some states, but overall the coordination mechanism is much more structured compared to many developing countries. The strength of India lies in the continuity of national digital planning.”* (Participant 8, ICT Policy Advisor, India, Interview February 2024)

The findings suggest that India’s centralized governance structure strengthens policy coherence and institutional continuity. However, several interview participants also noted that excessive centralization occasionally reduces flexibility for local adaptation, especially in states with different infrastructural capacities.

The Philippines presents an intermediate model in which digital governance policies exist nationally but implementation remains highly dependent on local political leadership. The E-Governance Masterplan and Digital Governance Awards encourage innovation among local governments, yet continuity frequently changes following political transitions.

A local government digital coordinator stated:

*“Some cities are very active in digital innovation because the local leaders really support it. But when leadership changes, priorities can also change quickly. A new administration may stop a program even if it was already running effectively before. So, the challenge here is not creating digital projects, but making sure they continue beyond political terms and remain institutionalized.”* (Participant 14, Local Government Digital Coordinator, Philippines, Interview March 2024)

The comparative evidence indicates that policy coherence depends heavily on institutional stability and governance continuity. India benefits from centralized coordination, Indonesia struggles with fragmented decentralization, while the Philippines faces instability caused by leadership turnover.

Table 2. Comparative Patterns of Strategic Policy Coherence

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>Indonesia</b>	<b>India</b>	<b>Philippines</b>
National Digital Framework	SPBE	Digital India	E-Governance Masterplan
Coordination Pattern	Decentralized	Centralized	Semi-decentralized
Policy Integration	Moderate–Low	High	Moderate

Interoperability	Weak	Strong	Moderate
Leadership Continuity	Moderate	Strong	Weak
Main Challenge	Fragmentation	Bureaucratic rigidity	Political turnover

Source: Interview Data and Policy Document Analysis (2023–2024).

Table 2 demonstrates that governance structure significantly influences policy coherence. Countries with stronger institutional coordination mechanisms tend to achieve more integrated digital governance implementation.

### **Institutional and Administrative Capacity**

The second major finding relates to institutional and bureaucratic capacity in implementing digital governance reforms. The study found substantial disparities in administrative readiness, technical expertise, and resource distribution among the three countries. Indonesia experiences uneven institutional capacity between urban and rural regions. National institutions possess relatively advanced digital frameworks, yet local governments frequently face shortages of technical personnel, financial resources, and digital infrastructure. Several regional administrations still rely on fragmented data management systems and manual administrative procedures.

A provincial ICT officer from South Sulawesi explained:

*“In major cities, digital services are improving quite fast because the infrastructure and budget are available. But in smaller districts, the situation is very different. Some offices still have limited internet access and very few staff who understand digital systems properly. Local governments are expected to implement digital governance, but many of them are still struggling with basic technical capacity and maintenance issues.”*  
(Participant 5, Provincial ICT Officer, Indonesia, Interview April 2024)

The interview findings reveal a dual-speed digital transformation process in Indonesia, where urban regions progress more rapidly than peripheral areas. Institutional asymmetry remains one of the primary barriers to equitable digital governance implementation.

India demonstrates comparatively stronger administrative capacity due to earlier investments in digital infrastructure and institutional support systems. The National Informatics Centre (NIC) provides standardized technological assistance to ministries and state governments, contributing to administrative consistency. Nevertheless, interview participants noted that bureaucratic culture and resistance to institutional change remain important obstacles.

One senior official from the National Informatics Centre noted:

*“The infrastructure itself is not the biggest problem anymore because many systems are already available nationally. The bigger challenge is changing organizational culture inside government institutions. Some officials are still reluctant to share data or integrate services because they are used to working independently. Capacity building programs help, but institutional habits do not change immediately.”*  
(Participant 10, Senior NIC Official, India, Interview February 2024)

This finding illustrates that digital governance transformation is not purely technological but also organizational and cultural. Institutional learning and bureaucratic adaptation remain essential components of successful digital reform.

The Philippines demonstrates relatively strong local innovation despite limited national institutional capacity. Several cities have successfully developed integrated e-permit systems, online complaint services, and digital citizen feedback platforms. However, implementation disparities remain severe in rural municipalities with inadequate ICT infrastructure.

A regional officer from the Department of Information and Communications Technology explained:

*“Some local governments are very creative and willing to experiment with digital services. The issue is that many municipalities still lack technical staff and stable internet connectivity. National agencies can provide guidelines and support, but implementation depends heavily on local government readiness. That is why progress varies significantly between regions.”* (Participant 16, Regional DICT Officer, Philippines, Interview March 2024)

The findings indicate that institutional capacity strongly determines digital governance outcomes. India’s centralized support model produces greater consistency, Indonesia’s decentralized governance creates uneven implementation, and the Philippines relies heavily on localized experimentation.

Table 3. Institutional and Administrative Capacity Comparison

Indicator	Indonesia	India	Philippines
National ICT Coordination	Moderate	Strong	Moderate
Local Government Capacity	Uneven	Moderate	Uneven
Bureaucratic Digital Literacy	Moderate	Moderate–High	Moderate
Infrastructure Distribution	Unequal	Expanding	Unequal
Data Integration	Weak	Strong	Moderate
Administrative Adaptability	Moderate	Moderate	High at local level

Source: Research Interview Analysis and Institutional Reports (2023–2024).

Differences in administrative capability significantly affect implementation quality. Institutional readiness remains closely associated with resource allocation, digital literacy, and inter-agency collaboration.

### Citizen Engagement and Digital Inclusivity

The third major finding concerns citizen participation and inclusivity in digital governance systems. The analysis reveals that all three countries have introduced participatory digital platforms, yet institutional responsiveness and accessibility remain inconsistent.

Indonesia has developed platforms such as *Lapor!* to facilitate public complaints and citizen feedback. Although these systems increase formal participation opportunities, interview data indicate that public awareness and trust remain limited, particularly outside urban regions.

A civil society representative in Jakarta explained:

*“Digital participation platforms are already available, but many citizens still do not know how to use them effectively. In some cases, people also feel that submitting complaints does not necessarily change anything because government responses can be slow. Participation mechanisms exist formally, but institutional responsiveness is still inconsistent, especially in regions with weaker administrative capacity.”* (Participant 7, Civil Society Representative, Indonesia, Interview April 2024)

India demonstrates broader digital inclusion through programs such as Aadhaar and Digital Seva Kendras, which improve access to public services in rural areas. However, inequalities related to gender, education, and internet access remain significant.

An academic expert from Bangalore stated:

*“India has expanded digital access quite rapidly, especially in rural welfare services. But digital inclusion is not simply about providing technology. Many vulnerable communities still face difficulties because of limited literacy, weak connectivity, and social inequalities. Access alone does not automatically create meaningful participation in governance processes.”* (Participant 11, Academic Researcher, India, Interview February 2024)

In the Philippines, digital participation frequently occurs through social media engagement and local online grievance systems. However, these mechanisms are often informal and weakly integrated into institutional policymaking processes.

A non-governmental organization activist noted:

*“People actively use online platforms to communicate with local governments, especially through social media. The challenge is that citizen feedback is not always integrated into formal decision-making. Sometimes digital participation becomes more symbolic than transformative because institutions still lack strong follow-up mechanisms.”*  
(Participant 18, NGO Activist, Philippines, Interview March 2024)

The comparative findings suggest that technological expansion has progressed more rapidly than institutional responsiveness. Digital participation mechanisms exist in all three countries, yet inclusivity and meaningful engagement remain constrained by administrative limitations and social inequality.

Table 4. Citizen Engagement and Digital Inclusivity

Dimension	Indonesia	India	Philippines
Digital Participation Platforms	Available	Extensive	Localized
Public Awareness	Moderate–Low	Moderate	Moderate
Institutional Responsiveness	Inconsistent	Moderate	Weak–Moderate
Rural Accessibility	Limited	Expanding	Limited
Digital Literacy Gap	Significant	Significant	Moderate
Citizen Trust	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate–Low

Source: *Interview Findings and Government Reports (2023–2024)*.

Digital inclusivity requires more than technological availability. Institutional responsiveness, administrative trust, and digital literacy remain essential for meaningful citizen participation.

Table 5. Main Barriers to Digital Governance Implementation

Main Barriers	Indonesia	India	Philippines
Inter-agency coordination problems	High	Moderate	Moderate
Budget inequality across regions	High	Moderate	High
Shortage of ICT personnel	High	Moderate	High
Resistance to bureaucratic change	Moderate	High	Moderate
Weak data interoperability	High	Moderate	Moderate
Political leadership instability	Moderate	Low	High
Digital infrastructure inequality	High	Moderate	High

Source: *Processed Interview Data and Institutional Coding Results (2023–2024)*.

The findings reveal that implementation barriers are multidimensional and extend beyond technological limitations. Indonesia experiences major challenges related to inter-agency coordination and regional budget disparities, particularly between urban and peripheral regions. India demonstrates stronger infrastructural consistency; however, bureaucratic resistance and organizational rigidity remain significant obstacles to institutional integration. In the Philippines, political leadership instability and uneven ICT infrastructure continue to affect the sustainability of local digital governance initiatives. These findings indicate that administrative reform and institutional coordination are equally important as technological investment in achieving sustainable digital transformation.

Table 6. Perceived Outcomes of Digital Governance Implementation

Governance Outcomes	Indonesia	India	Philippines
Improvement in public service efficiency	Moderate	High	Moderate
Increase in administrative transparency	Moderate	High	Moderate
Expansion of citizen access to services	Moderate	High	Moderate
Improvement in policy coordination	Low–Moderate	High	Moderate
Sustainability of digital programs	Moderate	High	Low–Moderate
Institutional adaptability	Moderate	Moderate	High at local level

Source: *Comparative Interview Synthesis and Policy Analysis (2023–2024)*.

The comparative findings demonstrate that digital governance reforms have contributed to improvements in administrative efficiency and citizen access to public services across all three countries. India achieved the most consistent outcomes due to centralized institutional coordination and long-term policy continuity. Indonesia demonstrated moderate progress but continued to face implementation fragmentation across regional governments. The Philippines showed strong local innovation and adaptability; however, sustainability remained vulnerable to leadership transitions and institutional discontinuity.

Table 7. Public Digital Literacy Challenges

Digital Literacy Dimensions	Indonesia	India	Philippines
Rural digital literacy gap	Significant	Significant	Moderate
Elderly population adaptation	Low	Low	Moderate
Awareness of digital public services	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Trust in digital systems	Moderate	Moderate	Low–Moderate
Ability to use online complaint systems	Moderate–Low	Moderate	Moderate

Source: Interview Coding and Government Report Analysis (2023–2024).

The findings indicate that digital literacy remains a critical determinant of inclusive digital governance. Rural communities, elderly populations, and socially vulnerable groups frequently experience difficulties in accessing digital public services. Although governments have expanded digital platforms, many citizens still lack adequate knowledge regarding online participation systems, digital verification procedures, and electronic administrative services. Consequently, technological expansion does not automatically translate into meaningful digital inclusion.

### Leadership and Institutional Continuity

The study found that leadership continuity significantly affects the sustainability of digital governance reforms. Countries with stronger institutional continuity tend to demonstrate more stable implementation and long-term policy integration. India exhibits relatively consistent digital governance expansion due to centralized planning and stable national coordination mechanisms. In contrast, Indonesia and the Philippines frequently experience policy fragmentation caused by leadership changes and shifting administrative priorities at regional levels.

A policymaker from Indonesia explained:

*“Digital governance programs usually depend on leadership commitment. When regional leaders prioritize digital reform, implementation can progress quickly. But when priorities shift after elections or administrative changes, some programs lose momentum and institutional support. Sustainability becomes difficult because digital initiatives are not always fully institutionalized yet.”* (Participant 6, Regional Bureaucratic Reform Officer, Indonesia, Interview April 2024)

The findings suggest that sustainable digital transformation requires institutional mechanisms capable of maintaining policy continuity beyond political leadership cycles.

### Cross-Case Comparative Synthesis

The cross-case synthesis demonstrates that digital governance disparities among Indonesia, India, and the Philippines are fundamentally institutional in nature. Although all three countries have invested heavily in digital transformation, the effectiveness of implementation depends primarily on governance coordination, bureaucratic capability, and leadership continuity. Indonesia represents a fragmented integration model characterized by policy innovation but weak interoperability across institutions. India reflects a centralized consolidation model that achieves high strategic coordination while facing challenges related to bureaucratic rigidity and social inequality. The Philippines demonstrates a localized experimentation model in which local innovation is strong but institutional continuity remains vulnerable to political change. Across all cases, interview evidence consistently emphasized that technological infrastructure alone is insufficient for sustainable digital transformation. Institutional learning, administrative

adaptation, and governance coherence are equally important determinants of successful digital governance implementation.

## **Discussion**

### ***Institutional Coordination and Policy Coherence in Digital Governance***

The findings demonstrate that institutional coordination plays a decisive role in determining the effectiveness of digital governance implementation across Indonesia, India, and the Philippines (Andaya et al., 2025; Murdhani, 2025; Hakim & Hayat, 2025; Djalante, 2012). Differences in governance structure significantly influence policy integration, interoperability, and administrative continuity. India exhibits the strongest policy coherence due to centralized coordination under the Digital India initiative, where national institutions maintain integrated digital systems and standardized implementation mechanisms. This condition supports the digital governance maturity perspective proposed by Janssen and van der Voort, which emphasizes that integrated governance systems emerge through sustained institutional coordination and long-term strategic planning. Strong coordination mechanisms in India contribute to higher interoperability, administrative consistency, and continuity in digital governance reform.

Indonesia presents a contrasting pattern characterized by decentralized governance and fragmented implementation. Although SPBE has encouraged institutional innovation, weak inter-agency integration and duplication of digital platforms continue to limit governance efficiency (Surur et al., 2025). Regional governments frequently prioritize local administrative autonomy over national interoperability, resulting in inconsistent implementation across regions. These findings reflect institutional capacity theory, which argues that governance reform depends not only on technological investment but also on bureaucratic coordination and adaptive institutional mechanisms. Fragmented coordination also reduces the efficiency of public service delivery because citizens are often required to access multiple platforms that are not fully integrated. This condition indicates that decentralization without sufficient coordination mechanisms can weaken the effectiveness of digital transformation.

The Philippines demonstrates a semi-decentralized governance model in which local governments play a central role in promoting digital innovation. Programs such as the E-Governance Masterplan and Digital Governance Awards encourage local experimentation and participatory governance initiatives. Implementation continuity remains highly dependent on political leadership at the local level. Leadership changes frequently result in policy discontinuity, administrative restructuring, and shifting development priorities. These findings indicate that digital governance sustainability requires institutional mechanisms capable of maintaining continuity beyond political transitions. Governance systems that depend excessively on individual leadership tend to experience unstable implementation and fragmented long-term outcomes (Janssen et al., 2015; Christensen & Lægheid, 2003).

The comparative findings further reveal that policy coherence is closely associated with institutional trust and administrative predictability. Countries with stronger coordination frameworks are more capable of integrating digital systems, harmonizing regulations, and ensuring long-term implementation consistency. India's centralized governance model provides stronger strategic direction, while Indonesia and the Philippines continue to experience coordination gaps caused by administrative fragmentation and uneven institutional commitment. These conditions confirm that digital transformation requires governance arrangements that balance national standardization with local flexibility in order to maintain both institutional integration and contextual responsiveness.

### ***Administrative Capacity and Bureaucratic Adaptation***

The study reveals that digital governance transformation is fundamentally shaped by administrative capability and bureaucratic adaptability rather than technological availability alone. Institutional disparities between urban and peripheral regions remain significant obstacles to equitable digital governance implementation, particularly in Indonesia and the Philippines. Urban governments generally possess stronger infrastructure, larger budgets, and better ICT

personnel, while smaller districts continue to experience limited technical expertise and inadequate digital infrastructure. This condition illustrates that digital governance disparities are closely associated with broader socio-economic inequalities and uneven institutional readiness.

Indonesia demonstrates substantial variation in local administrative capacity. Major urban regions are capable of implementing integrated digital services more effectively because they possess stronger financial resources and technical support systems. In contrast, peripheral regions frequently encounter operational difficulties related to internet connectivity, maintenance systems, and shortages of trained personnel. These disparities create unequal public service quality and weaken the national objective of integrated digital governance. The findings indicate that administrative decentralization without equal capacity distribution tends to produce asymmetrical digital transformation outcomes.

India demonstrates comparatively stronger administrative capacity due to centralized technological support through the National Informatics Centre (NIC) and long-term investment in digital infrastructure. The findings indicate that bureaucratic culture and resistance to organizational change remain substantial barriers to institutional integration. Government institutions often continue operating through fragmented administrative practices despite the existence of integrated technological systems. This finding aligns with Cordella and Tempini's argument that digital governance reform requires organizational transformation and bureaucratic learning in addition to technological modernization. Institutional learning, inter-agency collaboration, and leadership commitment therefore become essential components of successful digital transformation.

The Philippines demonstrates relatively strong administrative adaptability at the local level because several municipalities actively experiment with citizen-oriented digital services. The uneven distribution of technical expertise and ICT infrastructure continues to limit implementation consistency across regions. Local innovation frequently depends on temporary project-based initiatives rather than sustainable institutional systems. As a result, many digital governance programs face operational challenges once administrative priorities or political leadership changes. This condition illustrates that innovation alone is insufficient without institutional stabilization and long-term administrative support.

The findings further demonstrate that governance continuity significantly influences administrative adaptation. Countries with stronger institutional continuity tend to achieve more stable implementation and sustainable governance reform. India benefits from relatively stable national planning, while Indonesia and the Philippines continue to experience fragmentation caused by leadership turnover and shifting administrative priorities. These conditions confirm that digital governance maturity depends heavily on institutional stability, bureaucratic adaptability, and long-term administrative learning processes. Administrative reform therefore should not be interpreted solely as technological modernization but as a broader institutional transformation process involving organizational culture, leadership commitment, and governance capacity development.

### ***Citizen Participation and Inclusive Digital Governance***

Citizen participation and digital inclusivity emerge as critical dimensions in explaining the uneven development of digital governance across the three countries. Although Indonesia, India, and the Philippines have introduced various digital participation platforms, the findings indicate that meaningful engagement remains constrained by institutional responsiveness, digital literacy gaps, and unequal access to technology. Platforms such as *Lapor!* in Indonesia, Aadhaar-linked services in India, and localized grievance systems in the Philippines have expanded opportunities for citizen interaction with government institutions. However, public trust and awareness remain inconsistent, particularly among rural and socially vulnerable communities.

Indonesia demonstrates moderate progress in expanding digital participation mechanisms through online complaint systems and public service applications (Nurhidayati, 2019; Hariyanti, I., & Anisa, 2025; Syahraini et al., 2025). Despite these developments, the findings indicate that many citizens still possess limited understanding regarding how digital participation platforms operate. Public trust is also weakened when government responses to complaints are perceived

as inconsistent or slow. This condition reduces citizen motivation to participate actively in digital governance processes. The findings suggest that institutional responsiveness is a fundamental component of effective citizen engagement because participation mechanisms alone cannot guarantee democratic inclusivity without meaningful administrative follow-up.

India has achieved broader digital inclusion through the integration of welfare distribution systems, digital identity programs, and public service platforms. Programs such as Aadhaar and Digital Seva Kendras have improved access to administrative services, particularly in rural communities. Significant inequalities related to education, gender, and digital literacy continue to limit participation quality. Vulnerable populations frequently experience difficulties in accessing digital systems because of limited technological knowledge and unstable internet connectivity (Robards et al., 2018; McInnes et al., 2013). These findings confirm that digital access does not automatically produce equal participation opportunities when structural socio-economic disparities remain unresolved.

The Philippines demonstrates relatively active online interaction between citizens and local governments, particularly through social media and localized digital complaint systems. Nevertheless, citizen participation often remains symbolic because institutional mechanisms for incorporating public feedback into formal policymaking processes remain weak. Citizens may communicate complaints and suggestions online, yet institutional responsiveness and accountability are frequently inconsistent. As a result, digital participation does not always generate substantial governance transformation.

The persistence of digital literacy disparities demonstrates that technological expansion alone is insufficient for inclusive governance development. Rural populations, elderly citizens, and marginalized groups frequently experience difficulties in accessing digital services due to limited connectivity, inadequate technological skills, and weak institutional support. These findings support Madon (2021) perspective that digital governance should be understood as a socio-political transformation rather than merely a technological process. Inclusive digital governance therefore requires institutional trust, adaptive policymaking, and responsive administrative systems capable of translating citizen participation into meaningful governance outcomes.

The comparative evidence further indicates that digital participation is strongly influenced by governance culture and institutional openness. Governments that actively integrate public feedback into decision-making processes tend to strengthen citizen trust and administrative legitimacy. In contrast, weak responsiveness and fragmented participation mechanisms reduce the effectiveness of digital governance initiatives. Sustainable digital transformation therefore depends not only on technological infrastructure but also on governance systems that prioritize inclusivity, accountability, and equitable public access to digital services.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that digital governance disparities in Indonesia, India, and the Philippines are influenced primarily by institutional coordination, administrative capacity, leadership continuity, and governance responsiveness rather than technological infrastructure alone. India demonstrates stronger digital governance coherence through centralized coordination and integrated national planning, while Indonesia experiences fragmented implementation due to decentralized governance and uneven regional capacity. The Philippines shows relatively strong local innovation and participatory practices, although policy sustainability remains vulnerable to political transitions. The findings also indicate that effective digital transformation depends on bureaucratic adaptability, inter-agency collaboration, institutional learning, and inclusive citizen participation supported by adequate digital literacy and administrative responsiveness. These results reinforce the perspective that digital governance is fundamentally an institutional and socio-political transformation process requiring balanced governance structures, sustainable policy integration, and equitable public access in order to achieve effective and inclusive digital governance in developing democracies.

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