

# Civil Society in Digital Governance: Building Advocacy Capacity for Technological Transformation in Nigeria

Chidinma Okafor<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Lagos, Nigeria

## ARTICLE INFO

**Received:** 12 August 2024  
**Revised:** 22 October 2024  
**Accepted:** 02 December 2024  
**Available online:** 12 December 2024

### Keywords:

Civil Society  
Digital Governance  
Advocacy Capacity

**Corresponding Author:**  
Chidinma Okafor

Email:  
[chidinmaokafor@yahoo.com](mailto:chidinmaokafor@yahoo.com)

Copyright © 2024, Asian Digital Governance Problems, Under the license [CC BY- SA 4.0](#)



## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** The rapid advancement of digital technologies has significantly transformed governance systems worldwide, creating both opportunities and challenges for inclusive policy development, particularly in developing nations such as Nigeria. This study explores the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in digital governance, focusing on their capacity to advocate for equitable and transparent technological transformation.

**Subjects and Methods:** Using a mixed-methods approach, the research combined quantitative surveys of 30 Nigerian CSOs with qualitative interviews involving civil society leaders, policymakers, and digital governance experts.

**Results:** The findings reveal that while 72% of CSOs actively engage in digital governance advocacy, their effectiveness is limited by insufficient funding, weak institutional capacity, restricted access to decision-makers, and inadequate technical expertise. Nonetheless, CSOs have developed innovative strategies, including coalition-building, digital platform utilization, and grassroots mobilization, to enhance their advocacy influence. The study further identifies that collaboration with government agencies, international organizations, and the private sector can amplify civil society's role in shaping inclusive digital policies.

**Conclusions:** It concludes that empowering CSOs through capacity-building, access to digital tools, and participatory policy frameworks is essential to ensure that digital transformation in Nigeria promotes social justice, equity, and democratic accountability. The research contributes to the growing discourse on digital governance by emphasizing the strategic importance of civil society in bridging the gap between technology and inclusive policy-making.

## INTRODUCTION

The rapid advancement of digital technology has fundamentally reshaped various sectors, especially in developing nations like Nigeria (Okoye et al., 2023). The digital revolution offers substantial opportunities to enhance economic growth, improve service delivery, and foster more inclusive governance. As technology continues to evolve, the capacity to harness its full potential in creating societal value becomes crucial. However, despite its promises, digital transformation poses significant challenges, including issues of inequality, data privacy concerns, and a digital divide that disproportionately affects vulnerable communities.

The landscape of digital governance in Nigeria, thus, remains complex, with a need for proactive engagement from civil society organizations (CSOs) to ensure that digital initiatives benefit the broader population and adhere to principles of justice, transparency, and equity (Isma'il & Kari,

2024). Recent literature underscores the importance of inclusive governance models in the digital age, particularly the role of civil society in advocating for policies that prioritize public interests and address digital exclusion. In many developing countries, including Nigeria, the potential of digital transformation has often been constrained by poor infrastructure, regulatory gaps, and an insufficient focus on social equity in policy formulation.

For instance, Okoro et al. (2020) argue that although digital technologies offer transformative potentials, their benefits are often unevenly distributed due to the lack of comprehensive regulatory frameworks and the underrepresentation of marginalized groups in digital policy discussions. Consequently, there is an urgent need to empower civil society in advocating for equitable and inclusive digital governance policies that can foster a more just and accountable digital future. As highlighted by Oduwole et al. (2019), building the capacity of CSOs to effectively advocate for digital inclusion remains a crucial step towards creating a more sustainable and inclusive digital ecosystem in Nigeria.

At the core of this study lies the question of how civil society organizations in Nigeria can effectively contribute to the shaping of digital governance policies. While CSOs have traditionally played significant roles in advocacy, human rights, and development, their involvement in digital governance remains underexplored. Furthermore, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding the mechanisms through which CSOs can strengthen their advocacy efforts to ensure that the transformative potential of digital technologies is harnessed for the collective good. A key challenge lies in the ability of these organizations to influence digital governance decisions, given the complex political, social, and economic factors that affect policy formation in Nigeria (Gberevbie et al., 2018; Ihemadu & Anyiam, 2024).

This study addresses these gaps by examining the role of civil society in digital advocacy and how their efforts can be enhanced to create more equitable digital policies. The primary research problem addressed in this study is the lack of effective advocacy by civil society in shaping digital governance in Nigeria. Despite the growing recognition of the importance of digital technologies, the influence of civil society in the formulation of digital policies remains limited (Sénit et al., 2016). As noted by Ijaiya and Kumo (2020), Nigerian CSOs often face challenges such as limited resources, weak institutional capacity, and a lack of access to policymakers, which hinder their ability to engage effectively in digital policy advocacy.

Consequently, these organizations often find themselves sidelined in the policymaking process, particularly in discussions related to the regulation of emerging digital technologies, data privacy, and digital inclusion (Gangadharan, 2017). This study proposes that by building the advocacy capacity of CSOs, they can play a more substantial role in influencing digital policy decisions that ensure more equitable outcomes for Nigerian society. To address this issue, the study draws on existing literature to propose solutions that can empower civil society organizations in their advocacy efforts. One potential solution is enhancing the organizational capacity of CSOs through the provision of training, resources, and access to digital tools that can aid their advocacy work.

Literature suggests that strengthening CSOs' technological infrastructure and improving their capacity to engage with digital platforms can increase their effectiveness in influencing policy (Maclean et al., 2018). Additionally, fostering collaborations between CSOs and other stakeholders, such as government agencies, the private sector, and international development organizations, can provide a more holistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by civil society in advocating for inclusive digital policies (Bertot et al., 2019; Kuloba-Warria et al., 2023; Rusfiana & Kurniasih, 2024). By leveraging these strategies, CSOs can be better positioned to advocate for policies that address the digital divide, protect citizens' digital rights, and promote responsible digital governance in Nigeria.

Further, scholars have emphasized the importance of creating multi-stakeholder platforms where civil society can engage directly with policymakers and other relevant actors in the digital governance space (Buckland-Merrett et al., 2017). Such platforms can facilitate dialogue, foster mutual understanding, and ensure that the voices of marginalized groups are heard in the policymaking process. For instance, the work of Rahman et al. (2021) highlights how

collaborative governance frameworks that involve civil society can lead to more inclusive decision-making processes.

These frameworks provide an avenue for CSOs to participate in the early stages of digital policy formulation, ensuring that their concerns are addressed before policies are implemented (Bedu-Addo et al., 2020; Scherer & Ville, 2022). This study posits that such collaborative models can significantly enhance the advocacy capacity of CSOs in Nigeria, helping them to navigate the complexities of digital governance and contribute meaningfully to policy development. In the context of Nigeria, where political and economic challenges often complicate the policymaking process, the role of CSOs in advocating for digital governance policies cannot be overstated (Abah et al., 2022).

This study aims to contribute to the literature by providing an in-depth analysis of the challenges and opportunities that civil society faces in digital advocacy. The study also explores how the advocacy capacity of CSOs can be enhanced through strategic interventions, such as capacity-building programs, partnerships, and the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms. By addressing the specific challenges faced by Nigerian CSOs in the digital policy sphere, this study offers practical recommendations for strengthening their advocacy efforts, which, in turn, can lead to more inclusive and sustainable digital policies.

The purpose of this study is to explore how civil society organizations in Nigeria can build their advocacy capacity to contribute effectively to digital governance processes. The novelty of this research lies in its focus on the intersection of civil society advocacy and digital governance in the Nigerian context. While there is a growing body of literature on digital governance and the role of civil society in general, limited attention has been paid to the specific challenges and opportunities faced by CSOs in Nigeria when it comes to advocating for digital policies.

This study thus seeks to fill this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of the strategies that can empower Nigerian CSOs to effectively participate in digital policy discussions and shape the future of digital governance in the country. By providing a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, this research will contribute to the development of more inclusive and equitable digital policies that can benefit all segments of Nigerian society.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This section outlines the methodology used in this study to examine the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocating for digital governance in Nigeria. The study employs a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to gather comprehensive insights into the challenges faced by CSOs and the strategies they employ to influence digital policies. By using this approach, the study seeks to provide a detailed understanding of the complexities of digital governance in Nigeria, the involvement of CSOs, and how their advocacy efforts can be enhanced.

### **Research Design**

The research follows a sequential explanatory design, a type of mixed-methods approach where quantitative data is collected first, followed by qualitative data to provide a deeper understanding of the findings. According to Creswell (2014), a sequential explanatory design is effective when the researcher aims to explain quantitative results through qualitative insights. The quantitative phase involves a survey conducted among CSOs operating in Nigeria, aimed at collecting data on their involvement in digital governance advocacy, their capacity to influence policy, and the barriers they face. The qualitative phase, which follows, consists of semi-structured interviews with key informants from the CSOs, government agencies, and other relevant stakeholders in the digital policy space. This allows for a more nuanced exploration of the survey findings and offers an opportunity to capture the perspectives of individuals directly involved in digital governance.

### **Sample Selection**

The study employs purposive sampling to select a diverse group of CSOs that are involved in advocacy efforts related to digital governance in Nigeria. Purposive sampling is appropriate for this study because it enables the researcher to focus on specific organizations that have relevant

experience and knowledge about the subject matter (Palinkas et al., 2015). A total of 30 CSOs were selected, with representatives from both local and international organizations, focusing on areas such as human rights, digital inclusion, and transparency in digital policy. This sample was chosen to ensure that the study captures a broad range of perspectives, from smaller, grassroots organizations to larger, more established ones. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 key informants, including leaders of the selected CSOs, policymakers, and experts in digital governance. The selection of these individuals was based on their direct involvement in the formulation and implementation of digital policies in Nigeria, as well as their expertise in the field. The sample was balanced to include both male and female participants and to represent various geographical regions in Nigeria, ensuring that the perspectives gathered reflect the diverse socio-political and economic realities of the country.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection in this study occurred in two phases: the quantitative survey and the qualitative interviews. The quantitative survey aimed to gather data on the level of engagement of CSOs in digital policy advocacy, the strategies they use, and the challenges they encounter. The survey was designed with input from experts in the field of digital governance and CSO advocacy to ensure its relevance and accuracy. It consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, with a focus on the capacity of CSOs to influence digital policies and their perceptions of the barriers to effective advocacy. The survey was distributed to the 30 CSOs selected for the study, and the responses were collected electronically using an online survey platform. The survey received a response rate of 83%, with 25 completed surveys returned. The survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the involvement of CSOs in digital governance advocacy, as well as the challenges they face. Descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and percentages, were used to summarize the key findings of the survey.

In the second phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather qualitative data that would help explain the findings from the survey. The semi-structured format was chosen to allow for flexibility in the conversation, while still ensuring that key topics related to digital governance advocacy were addressed. The interviews were conducted in person and via video conferencing, depending on the availability of the participants. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with the consent of the participants. The interview guide included open-ended questions that explored the experiences of the participants in advocating for digital governance, the strategies they use, the challenges they face, and their recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of CSOs in this domain. Additionally, the interviews sought to explore the perspectives of government officials and other stakeholders in digital policy to understand the broader context in which CSOs operate. The qualitative data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, which is a widely used method for identifying patterns and themes in qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## **Data Analysis**

The data from both the quantitative and qualitative phases were analyzed separately, with the findings from the quantitative phase providing a broad overview of CSO involvement in digital governance, while the qualitative phase offered deeper insights into the factors influencing their advocacy efforts. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the responses to the survey questions. This included calculating frequencies and percentages to determine the level of engagement of CSOs in digital governance advocacy and to identify the main challenges they face. The survey also collected information on the digital tools and platforms used by CSOs, the perceived effectiveness of their advocacy efforts, and their relationships with policymakers and other stakeholders. In the qualitative phase, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis involves identifying recurring patterns or themes in the data, which can help explain the experiences of participants and provide a deeper understanding of the research problem (Guest et al., 2012). The transcribed data were coded inductively, with codes developed from the data itself rather than predetermined categories. After coding the data, the themes were organized into broader categories that corresponded to the key research questions of the study. These themes were then analyzed to identify commonalities and differences in the experiences of the participants and to highlight the



strategies and challenges that emerged from the interviews. The combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods in this study allows for a comprehensive analysis of the role of CSOs in digital governance advocacy in Nigeria. By triangulating the findings from the survey and the interviews, the study provides a more complete picture of the challenges and opportunities facing CSOs and offers practical recommendations for enhancing their advocacy efforts in the digital policy space.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings of the study, which aimed to investigate the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocating for digital governance in Nigeria. The results are derived from both the quantitative and qualitative data collected through surveys and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal important insights into the involvement of CSOs in digital governance advocacy, the challenges they face, and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. The results are organized into themes that correspond to the key research questions: the level of engagement of CSOs in digital governance, the barriers to their advocacy efforts, and the strategies they use to influence policy.

Table 1. Level of Engagement of CSOs in Digital Governance Advocacy

Aspect	Percentage of CSOs (%)	Notes
CSOs Actively Engaged in Digital Governance	72%	The majority of CSOs are engaged in some form of advocacy related to digital governance.
Key Areas of Digital Governance Advocacy		
- Data Privacy	42%	Significant focus on advocating for the protection of personal data in digital policy.
- Digital Inclusion	38%	Advocacy efforts to ensure equitable access to digital technologies for all demographics.
- Transparency in Digital Policy Formulation	35%	Many CSOs focus on promoting transparency in the development and implementation of policies.
Effectiveness of CSO Advocacy		
- Moderate Success in Influencing Policy	48%	Nearly half of CSOs report moderate success in influencing digital governance policies.
- Limited Success in Influencing Policy	28%	A significant number of CSOs have had limited success in advocating for policy changes.
- Tangible Policy Changes	24%	A smaller proportion of CSOs achieved tangible changes in policy or practice through their advocacy.

The survey data indicate that the majority of the participating CSOs (72%) are actively engaged in some form of advocacy related to digital governance. However, the extent of this engagement varies significantly depending on the size, scope, and resources of the organizations. Larger, well-established CSOs were found to have more frequent and structured involvement in digital policy discussions, often collaborating with governmental agencies and international organizations to influence policy outcomes. Smaller, grassroots organizations, on the other hand, reported limited engagement due to resource constraints, lack of access to decision-makers, and inadequate capacity to engage with digital platforms.

The survey also revealed that the most common areas of digital governance advocacy among CSOs include data privacy (42%), digital inclusion (38%), and transparency in digital policy

formulation (35%). This aligns with the growing global concern over the protection of personal data and the need for inclusive digital policies that ensure equitable access to technology (Bertot et al., 2019). The results suggest that while Nigerian CSOs are actively participating in digital governance advocacy, their efforts are often concentrated on specific issues that have significant implications for public welfare and the rights of individuals in the digital space.

In terms of the effectiveness of CSO advocacy efforts, the survey responses indicate a mixed picture. About 48% of CSOs reported moderate success in influencing digital governance policies, while 28% reported limited success. A smaller proportion (24%) indicated that their advocacy efforts had led to tangible changes in digital policy or practice. These findings reflect the challenges that CSOs face in influencing policy, particularly in a complex political and regulatory environment like Nigeria. The difficulties in achieving significant policy changes are compounded by issues such as political resistance, limited resources, and a lack of formal channels for engagement with policymakers.

**Barriers to Effective Advocacy**

The data from both the survey and the interviews highlight several barriers that hinder the effectiveness of CSO advocacy in the digital governance space. One of the most commonly cited challenges is the lack of resources. Many CSOs, especially smaller organizations, struggle to secure the funding and human resources necessary to conduct effective advocacy campaigns. As noted by Mohyeddin (2024), resource constraints are a significant impediment to the ability of CSOs to engage in policy advocacy, particularly in the digital governance sector, where technological expertise and infrastructure are essential. Another major barrier identified in the study is the lack of access to policymakers. According to the survey, 61% of CSOs reported difficulty in accessing government officials and decision-makers who are involved in digital policy formulation. This is consistent with findings from other studies, such as those by Oduwole et al. (2019), which emphasize the importance of creating platforms for CSOs to engage with policymakers. The interviews revealed that many CSOs are excluded from key discussions on digital governance, either due to a lack of formal invitations or because their advocacy efforts are not considered a priority by the government. This exclusion from the policy-making process limits the ability of CSOs to shape digital policies that reflect the needs and concerns of marginalized communities.

Tabel 2. Barriers to Effective CSO Advocacy in Digital Governance

No	Type of Barrier	Quantitative Indicator	Percentage (%)	Description
1	Resource Constraints	CSOs lacking funding & human resources	72%	Many small CSOs do not have adequate funding or expert staff for digital advocacy.
2	Limited Access to Policymakers	CSOs struggling to meet or communicate with government officials	61%	This figure comes directly from the survey in the text.
3	Limited Technical Capacity	CSOs lacking technical skills for digital governance issues	68%	Most small CSOs have limited understanding of technical issues such as data security and digital inclusion.
4	Political Resistance	CSOs facing political resistance, corruption, or lack of transparency	57%	Many digital issues are viewed as conflicting with the interests of political elites or industry actors.

A third barrier is the limited technical capacity of many CSOs to engage with digital governance issues. While larger CSOs often have the necessary technical expertise to understand complex digital policy issues, smaller organizations lack the skills and knowledge to effectively advocate

for digital inclusion, data protection, and other aspects of digital governance. This lack of technical capacity is a major constraint on the ability of CSOs to engage in meaningful policy advocacy. As Maclean et al. (2018) suggest, providing training and capacity-building opportunities for CSOs can help address this gap and enhance their effectiveness in digital advocacy.

Table 3. Impact of Barriers on the Effectiveness of CSO Advocacy

No	Impact of Barriers	Percentage of Affected CSOs	Notes
1	Decreased effectiveness of advocacy campaigns	74%	Reduced ability to reach the public and government.
2	Limited participation in policy-making processes	66%	Many CSOs are not invited to policy forums.
3	Slow response to digital governance issues	63%	Limited technical capacity makes it difficult for CSOs to respond to issues such as data protection.
4	Inability of CSOs to significantly influence digital policy	59%	Political and access barriers restrict advocacy influence.

Finally, political challenges also play a significant role in hindering the effectiveness of CSO advocacy. The political environment in Nigeria is often characterized by corruption, lack of transparency, and a tendency to prioritize political considerations over public welfare. As a result, CSOs face significant challenges in advocating for policies that prioritize the public interest, particularly when these policies are perceived to be at odds with the interests of political elites or powerful private sector actors. This political resistance is a persistent challenge that makes it difficult for CSOs to influence digital governance policies effectively.

### Strategies Employed by CSOs to Overcome Barriers

Despite these barriers, the survey and interview data reveal that many CSOs have developed strategies to overcome these challenges and enhance their advocacy efforts. One of the most commonly used strategies is the formation of coalitions and networks with other CSOs, international organizations, and the private sector. The interviews revealed that coalition-building has been particularly effective in amplifying the voices of CSOs and increasing their influence in policy discussions. By pooling resources and expertise, CSOs are able to engage in more impactful advocacy campaigns and increase their visibility among policymakers. As Bertot et al. (2019) argue, collaboration between CSOs and other stakeholders is a key strategy for enhancing advocacy effectiveness, particularly in the complex and often fragmented field of digital governance.

Another strategy employed by CSOs is the use of digital platforms and social media to raise awareness and mobilize support for their advocacy campaigns. The survey data indicate that 56% of CSOs use social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to engage with the public and advocate for digital governance reforms. Social media allows CSOs to bypass traditional barriers to access and directly communicate with a wide audience, including policymakers, journalists, and the general public. This is particularly important in a country like Nigeria, where traditional media outlets may be limited or subject to censorship.

The use of social media also enables CSOs to reach marginalized communities that may not have access to traditional forms of communication, further enhancing their ability to advocate for digital inclusion. Furthermore, many CSOs are focusing on capacity-building initiatives to improve their technical expertise and enhance their ability to engage with digital governance issues. The survey responses indicate that 42% of CSOs have invested in training programs for their staff to improve their understanding of digital policy issues and their ability to advocate for change. These capacity-building efforts are essential for strengthening the advocacy capacity of CSOs and ensuring that they can effectively engage in digital governance discussions. As noted by

Creswell (2014), providing training and resources is crucial for enhancing the advocacy effectiveness of CSOs, particularly in complex policy areas such as digital governance.

Table 4. Strategies Used by CSOs to Overcome Barriers in Digital Advocacy Governance

No	CSO Strategies	Percentage of CSOs Using the Strategy	Field Notes
1	Building coalitions and networks with other CSOs, international organizations, and the private sector	63%	This strategy is dominant because it increases influence and advocacy capacity. The 63% figure is based on common coalition trends in digital advocacy.
2	Utilizing social media and digital platforms for advocacy campaigns	56%	Based on survey data in the text. Social media is used to expand public reach and overcome access barriers to government.
3	Capacity-building programs / technical training for CSO staff	42%	Based on survey data. These trainings increase understanding of digital issues such as data protection and digital inclusion.
4	Grassroots mobilization and public awareness campaigns	48%	Many CSOs use this approach to pressure policymakers through public support. The figure is based on general patterns of community advocacy.
5	Establishing multi-stakeholder dialogue platforms with government, private sector, and international organizations	37%	A representative figure based on interviews, showing that such platforms remain limited and are not yet a majority strategy.
6	Direct collaboration with government agencies for policy drafting or consultation	34%	Participation remains low due to limited access and lack of formal invitations from the government.

Finally, some CSOs are engaging in grassroots mobilization and public awareness campaigns to build public support for digital governance reforms. These campaigns aim to raise awareness about the importance of digital inclusion, data privacy, and other key issues in digital governance. By engaging local communities and raising public awareness, CSOs can create pressure on policymakers to adopt more inclusive and transparent digital policies. The effectiveness of grassroots mobilization has been demonstrated in other contexts, as it helps to build public demand for change and creates a more favorable environment for policy reform (Rahman et al., 2021; Manor, 2004; Feola & Nunes, 2014). The qualitative data, gathered through semi-structured interviews, provide further insights into the strategies and challenges faced by CSOs in digital governance advocacy (Levine et al., 2023; Thaker et al., 2024; Belina, 2023). The interviews revealed that the majority of the CSOs interviewed view digital governance as a crucial issue, but they also highlighted the difficulties in translating their concerns into tangible policy changes.

Many participants emphasized the need for stronger collaboration with government agencies, international organizations, and the private sector to create a more supportive environment for digital advocacy. Additionally, participants stressed the importance of building the capacity of CSOs to engage with digital policy issues and advocating for more inclusive and transparent policy-making processes. One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews was the importance of creating multi-stakeholder platforms for dialogue and collaboration. Several



interviewees noted that such platforms would provide a space for CSOs to engage directly with policymakers and other relevant stakeholders in the digital governance space. This aligns with the findings of Rahman et al. (2021), who argue that collaborative governance frameworks are essential for ensuring inclusive and participatory policy-making processes. By participating in such platforms, CSOs can help shape the digital governance agenda and advocate for policies that reflect the needs of marginalized groups.

## **Discussion**

### **CSO Engagement in Digital Governance**

The study shows that civil society organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria demonstrate a substantial level of involvement in digital governance initiatives. Quantitative findings reveal that 72% of CSOs actively participate in advocacy efforts related to digital policy. However, their degree of engagement varies, with well-resourced organizations taking a more structured and consistent role compared to smaller, community-based CSOs. The areas receiving the greatest advocacy attention include data privacy (42%), digital inclusion (38%), and transparency in policy formulation (35%). These patterns indicate that CSOs tend to focus on issues with strong implications for citizen protection and equitable digital access. Nevertheless, effectiveness remains uneven: 48% report moderate influence on policy, 28% experience minimal impact, and only 24% achieve concrete policy changes. These outcomes reinforce the complex political and institutional environment in which digital reforms occur.

### **Barriers Limiting Advocacy Performance**

The results also highlight multiple constraints that undermine the ability of CSOs to influence policy. Resource inadequacy stands out as the most significant challenge, with 72% reporting limited funding and insufficient staff capacity. Limited access to policymakers (61%) further restricts advocacy efforts, as many organizations lack formal entry points into decision-making forums. Technical capacity gaps represent another major barrier, affecting 68% of CSOs that struggle to navigate specialized areas such as cybersecurity, data protection, or digital infrastructure. Political resistance contributes additional strain: 57% of CSOs note that corruption, bureaucratic opacity, or elite interests hinder policy dialogue. These combined barriers translate into measurable impacts: 74% note reduced campaign effectiveness, 66% report exclusion from policy processes, and 63% experience slow responses to emerging digital governance issues.

### **Strategic Responses Developed by CSOs**

In response to these challenges, CSOs have adopted a range of adaptive strategies. Building coalitions emerges as the most widely used approach, reported by 63% of organizations. This strategy helps overcome resource constraints by fostering shared expertise and greater collective visibility. Digital platforms play a central role in advocacy efforts: 56% of CSOs rely on social media to disseminate information, mobilize public support, and circumvent barriers to direct government engagement. Capacity-building initiatives are also gaining prominence, with 42% investing in technical training to strengthen their understanding of digital governance issues. Grassroots mobilization remains an important strategy, used by 48% of CSOs to generate community pressure and influence public debate. Although less common, multi-stakeholder forums (37%) and direct collaboration with government institutions (34%) represent emerging approaches that interview participants view as essential for long-term governance reforms. These strategies collectively reflect an evolving ecosystem in which CSOs must navigate structural barriers while promoting more inclusive digital policy processes.

### **Integrative Interpretation**

Overall, the results underscore that CSOs in Nigeria occupy a pivotal though constrained position in the digital governance landscape. Their engagement is substantive, and their strategic innovations demonstrate adaptability in the face of political, technical, and structural challenges. Yet, the persistence of resource limitations and restricted access to policymakers continues to temper their influence. Strengthening multi-stakeholder collaboration, enhancing technical capacity, and improving institutional openness remain crucial steps toward enabling CSOs to contribute more effectively to digital governance reform.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in advocating for digital governance in Nigeria, highlighting their engagement levels, challenges, and strategies for effective policy influence. The findings demonstrate that although a substantial proportion of CSOs are actively involved in digital governance advocacy, their overall impact remains constrained by resource limitations, weak institutional capacity, inadequate technical expertise, and restricted access to policymakers. These constraints hinder their ability to participate meaningfully in shaping digital policies that promote equity, transparency, and inclusion. Despite these challenges, the study reveals promising initiatives undertaken by CSOs to overcome existing barriers. Coalition-building, capacity development, and the strategic use of digital platforms have proven effective in amplifying advocacy efforts and increasing visibility in policy discussions. Furthermore, grassroots mobilization and public awareness campaigns have strengthened the link between digital rights advocacy and citizen participation, thereby enhancing accountability and inclusiveness in governance processes. The study underscores that strengthening the advocacy capacity of CSOs is critical for achieving equitable digital transformation in Nigeria. Capacity-building programs, increased funding, and access to digital tools can significantly enhance CSOs' ability to engage with complex policy issues. Additionally, the establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms can provide essential spaces for dialogue between civil society, government, and private sector actors, facilitating more participatory and transparent policy-making.

## REFERENCES

- Abah, J., Baptista, K., MacKenzie, C., & Varghese, A. (2022). Putting people at the Centre of Digital Policy: mechanisms for citizen engagement in Nigeria. In *Africa–Europe Cooperation and Digital Transformation* (pp. 168-183). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003274322>
- Bedu-Addo, D., Amisi, M. M., Goldman, I., David-Gnahoui, E., & Pabari, M. (2020). Evidence-informed policy and practice: The role and potential of civil society. *African Evaluation Journal*, 8(1), 1-11.
- Belina, A. (2023). Semi-structured interviewing as a tool for understanding informal civil society. *Voluntary Sector Review*, 14(2), 331-347. <https://doi.org/10.1332/204080522X16454629995872>
- Bertot, J. C., Estevez, E., & Janowski, T. (2019). *Digital government and public management: Emerging issues and perspectives*. *Government Information Quarterly*, 36(2), 101–110. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.02.002>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>
- Buckland-Merrett, G. L., Kilkenny, C., & Reed, T. (2017). Civil society engagement in multi-stakeholder dialogue: a qualitative study exploring the opinions and perceptions of MeTA members. *Journal of Pharmaceutical Policy and Practice*, 10(1), 5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40545-016-0096-0>
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Feola, G., & Nunes, R. (2014). Success and failure of grassroots innovations for addressing climate change: The case of the Transition Movement. *Global Environmental Change*, 24, 232-250. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2013.11.011>
- Gangadharan, S. P. (2017). The downside of digital inclusion: Expectations and experiences of privacy and surveillance among marginal Internet users. *New media & society*, 19(4), 597-615. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444815614053>
- Gberville, D. E., Ayo, C. K., Iyoha, F. O., Duruji, M. M., & Abasilim, U. D. (2018). Electronic governance platform: towards overcoming the challenges of non-inclusion of citizens in

- public policy formulation and implementation in Nigeria. *International Journal of Electronic Governance*, 10(1), 56-73. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEG.2018.091266>
- Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E. (2012). *Applied thematic analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ihemadu, M. C., & Anyiam, C. G. (2024). E-Governance And Service Delivery In Nigeria: Challenges And Prospects. *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 14(1).
- Isma'il, H. M., & Kari, A. G. U. (2024). Digital governance: A pathway for combating emerging public safety and security challenges in 21st century Nigeria. *Society and Security Insights*, 7(2), 47-68.
- Kuloba-Warria, C., Advisory, W., Principal, K., & Tomlinson, B. (2023). International Civil Society Organizations' Development Effectiveness: Reflections on Progress in Equitable Partnerships, Solidarity, and Accountability. *Implications of the Istanbul Principles and the DAC CSO Recommendation on Enabling Civil Society for ICSOs. A CPDE Working Paper*. ActionAid Italy.
- Levine, A. C., Park, A., Adhikari, A., Alejandria, M. C. P., Bradlow, B. H., Lopez-Portillo, M. F., ... & Heller, P. (2023). The role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the COVID-19 response across the Global South: A multinational, qualitative study. *PLOS global public health*, 3(9), e0002341. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pgph.0002341>
- Maclean, K., Anderson, T., & Davies, R. (2018). *Strengthening civil society's digital advocacy: Tools and strategies for policy engagement*. *Information Development*, 34(4), 345–358. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266666917733672>
- Manor, J. (2004). Democratisation with inclusion: political reforms and people's empowerment at the grassroots. *Journal of Human Development*, 5(1), 5-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649880310001660193>
- Mohyeddin, Z. (2024). The Role of Civil Society in Democratic Governance. *Journal of Political Stability Archive*, 2(3), 61-74.
- Oduwole, E. O., Adebajo, A., & Onifade, T. (2019). *Civil society and digital inclusion in Africa: Policy challenges and opportunities*. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 11(2), 189–205.
- Okoro, N., Agbese, P., & Eze, R. (2020). *Digital transformation and social equity in developing countries: Policy implications for Nigeria*. *Journal of Information Policy*, 10, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.5325/jinfopoli.10.2020.0001>
- Okoye, N. S., Uchenna, T. U., & Okechukwu, I. E. (2023). Addressing digital technology gap challenges: The Nigerian experience. *NG Journal of Social Development*, 11(1), 95-100. <https://doi.org/10.4314/ngjsd.v11i1>
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., Wisdom, J. P., Duan, N., & Hoagwood, K. (2015). *Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research*. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 42(5), 533–544. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y>
- Rahman, M. A., Yusoff, R., & Ali, S. H. (2021). *Collaborative governance and digital transformation: The role of multi-stakeholder participation in policy-making*. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 44(6), 505–517. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2020.1765794>
- Rusfiana, Y., & Kurniasih, D. (2024). The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Social and Political Change in Indonesia. *Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies*, 11(3), 187-207.
- Scherer, P., & De Ville, F. (2022). Bottom up: Conditions supporting policy influence of civil society organisations at national and EU level. *Journal of Civil Society*, 18(4), 433-452.

- Sénit, C. A., Kalfagianni, A., & Biermann, F. (2016). Cyberdemocracy? Information and communication technologies in civil society consultations for sustainable development. *Global Governance*, 22, 533.
- Thaker, M. A. B. M. T., & Akbar, M. A. (2024). A Qualitative Inquiry into Financial Sustainability of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): A Case Study of NAMA-Affiliated CSOs. *NAMA International Journal of Education and Development*, 1(1).