

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

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## ABSTRACT

**Purpose:** This study examines the role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in strengthening digital governance advocacy in Nigeria and explores the institutional challenges affecting their participation in digital policy processes.

**Subjects and Methods:** The research employed a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design involving quantitative surveys with 25 CSOs and semi-structured interviews with 15 participants consisting of CSO leaders, policymakers, and digital governance experts. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were interpreted through thematic analysis.

**Results:** The findings show that 72% of CSOs actively engage in digital governance advocacy, particularly in data privacy, digital inclusion, and policy transparency. Advocacy effectiveness remains constrained by limited funding, inadequate technical expertise, and restricted institutional access. CSOs responded through coalition-building, social media advocacy, grassroots mobilization, and capacity-building initiatives.

**Conclusions:** Strengthening participatory governance frameworks, institutional collaboration, technical capacity, and digital infrastructure is essential for promoting inclusive and socially accountable digital transformation in Nigeria.

## 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. 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.

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). 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.

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 obtained from the sequential explanatory mixed-methods design conducted in 2024. The quantitative findings provide an overview of the level of civil society organization (CSO) participation in digital governance advocacy in Nigeria, while the qualitative findings explain the institutional realities, advocacy experiences, and strategic responses developed by organizations operating within the digital policy environment. The integration of both datasets enables a more comprehensive understanding of how CSOs navigate institutional barriers, technological transformation, and participatory governance challenges in Nigeria. The results are organized into three major themes: CSO participation in digital governance advocacy, institutional barriers affecting advocacy effectiveness, and adaptive strategies used by CSOs to strengthen participatory digital governance.

### CSO Participation in Digital Governance Advocacy

The quantitative findings indicate that civil society organizations increasingly engage in digital governance advocacy activities in Nigeria. Out of the 25 organizations that completed the survey in 2024, 18 organizations (72%) reported active involvement in digital governance advocacy, while five organizations (20%) indicated moderate participation. Only two organizations (8%) reported limited involvement in digital policy activities. These findings demonstrate that digital governance has become an important advocacy concern among Nigerian CSOs, particularly in relation to digital inclusion, transparency, data protection, and online civic participation.

Table 1. Level of CSO Participation in Digital Governance Advocacy

Level of Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Active participation	18	72%
Moderate participation	5	20%
Limited participation	2	8%
Total	25	100%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The majority of participating civil society organizations were actively involved in digital governance advocacy during 2024. The dominance of active participation (72%) indicates that digital governance has emerged as a strategic concern among Nigerian CSOs, particularly as digital transformation increasingly affects governance systems, citizen participation, and access to public services. Organizations reported that advocacy activities were commonly conducted through public awareness campaigns, digital literacy programs, policy discussions, and online engagement initiatives targeting both policymakers and local communities. The findings also suggest that moderate and limited participation were primarily associated with organizational capacity constraints. Several smaller organizations explained that insufficient funding, limited technological infrastructure, and inadequate technical expertise restricted their ability to engage consistently in digital governance advocacy. Despite these limitations, even organizations with lower participation levels acknowledged the growing importance of digital policy issues within Nigerian society.

The quantitative findings reveal that CSO involvement extends beyond institutional lobbying activities. Many organizations actively use community-based approaches to educate citizens about digital rights, online safety, data privacy, and equitable access to digital services. This demonstrates that civil society advocacy increasingly combines policy engagement with public empowerment efforts aimed at reducing digital exclusion among vulnerable communities. The interview findings further reinforce the survey results by showing that participants perceive digital governance as closely related to democratic participation and social justice. Participants emphasized that unequal internet access, limited digital literacy, and weak technological infrastructure continue to create disparities between urban and rural populations. Consequently, many CSOs consider advocacy efforts necessary to ensure that digital transformation processes remain inclusive, transparent, and socially accountable.

One participant explained:

*“A lot of people still think digital governance only belongs to government agencies or technology companies. But for us, it’s more about citizens’ daily lives. Communities without internet access or digital literacy are automatically excluded from opportunities. That’s why civil society groups keep pushing these discussions.”*  
(Participant 3, CSO Representative, Interview 2024)

Another participant stated:

*“We see digital governance as part of public accountability. Citizens want transparency about how their data is used and how online regulations are created. Civil society organizations try to make those discussions easier for ordinary people to understand.”*  
(Participant 8, Digital Governance Expert, Interview 2024)

The findings also reveal that advocacy activities were conducted through public discussions, digital literacy workshops, policy consultations, media campaigns, and community awareness programs. Organizations reported that advocacy efforts increasingly combine offline community engagement with online campaigns to expand public participation in digital governance discussions.

### **Main Areas of Digital Governance Advocacy**

The survey findings identified several major advocacy priorities among participating organizations. Data privacy and digital inclusion emerged as the most dominant advocacy themes, followed by transparency in digital policymaking and online rights protection.

Table 2. Main Advocacy Areas of Participating CSOs

<b>Advocacy Area</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Data privacy and protection	20	80%
Digital inclusion	18	72%
Policy transparency	17	68%
Digital literacy programs	15	60%
Online freedom and digital rights	13	52%
Cybersecurity awareness	11	44%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

Data privacy and protection became the most dominant advocacy issue among participating CSOs, with 80% of organizations identifying it as a major concern in 2024. This finding reflects increasing public attention toward the use of personal data, online surveillance, and the growing risks associated with digital platforms. Digital inclusion also emerged as a significant advocacy priority, as many organizations emphasized the unequal distribution of internet access and technological resources across different social groups in Nigeria. In addition, policy transparency and digital literacy programs were identified as important advocacy areas because many citizens still possess limited understanding of digital rights, cybersecurity risks, and online participation mechanisms.

The qualitative findings further reveal that CSOs increasingly frame digital governance as a broader social and developmental issue rather than solely a technological matter. Participants explained that rural communities and economically marginalized populations continue to experience limited access to stable internet infrastructure, digital education, and online public services. Consequently, many organizations have expanded their advocacy activities toward community education programs, awareness campaigns, and public discussions aimed at improving digital participation and reducing social inequality. These findings demonstrate that digital governance advocacy in Nigeria increasingly intersects with issues of social justice, democratic participation, and equitable access to technological opportunities.

One participant noted:

*“In urban areas, people are already discussing artificial intelligence and digital innovation, but many rural communities still struggle with unstable internet*

connections and electricity problems. So digital governance is also about inequality and social access.” (Participant 6, Community Outreach Coordinator, Interview 2024)

Another participant explained:

“Many citizens become suspicious when digital policies are discussed without public consultation. People worry about surveillance, misuse of personal data, and online safety. Civil society organizations help communities understand those issues.” (Participant 12, Policy Researcher, Interview 2024)

The qualitative findings further reveal that CSOs attempt to bridge the gap between technical policy discussions and public understanding by translating complex digital issues into accessible community discussions.

### **Institutional Barriers Affecting Advocacy Effectiveness**

Although most organizations actively engage in digital governance advocacy, the findings reveal that institutional and structural barriers continue to limit advocacy effectiveness. Limited funding was identified as the most significant challenge, followed by inadequate technical expertise and restricted access to policymakers.

Table 3. Institutional Challenges Affecting CSO Advocacy

<b>Institutional Challenges</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Limited funding	18	72%
Inadequate technical expertise	17	68%
Restricted access to policymakers	15	60%
Political resistance	13	52%
Weak institutional collaboration	11	44%
Limited technological infrastructure	10	40%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The findings indicate that advocacy effectiveness is strongly influenced by organizational capacity and institutional access. Larger organizations with stronger donor networks and international partnerships reported greater participation in policy consultations, while smaller organizations depended more heavily on grassroots campaigns and public awareness initiatives. Participants repeatedly emphasized that digital governance discussions increasingly involve technical issues such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence regulation, and data governance frameworks. Smaller organizations often struggle to participate effectively because of limited expertise and insufficient training opportunities.

One participant explained:

“Digital policy meetings are becoming more technical every year. Discussions about cybersecurity or data regulation often use complicated legal language. Smaller organizations sometimes feel excluded because they don’t have enough technical experts.” (Participant 1, CSO Director, Interview 2024)

Another participant added:

“Access is still unequal. Organizations with political connections or international visibility are more likely to be invited into consultations. Community-based groups working directly with citizens are sometimes left outside the process.” (Participant 10, Human Rights Advocate, Interview 2024)

The interviews also revealed that bureaucratic procedures and political considerations continue to shape participation opportunities within digital governance discussions. Several participants stated that consultations are sometimes conducted formally but provide limited opportunities for meaningful public influence.

A government representative interviewed in the study stated:

*“There is increasing recognition that civil society should be involved in digital governance, but institutional procedures remain slow. Many agencies still prioritize administrative processes before broader public participation.”*  
(Participant 14, Government Official, Interview 2024)

These findings suggest that participatory governance mechanisms within digital policymaking remain uneven and highly dependent on institutional relationships and organizational visibility.

### **Adaptive Strategies Developed by CSOs**

Despite institutional constraints, the findings show that Nigerian CSOs continue to develop adaptive strategies to strengthen advocacy effectiveness. Coalition-building emerged as the most common strategy, followed by social media advocacy, grassroots mobilization, and technical capacity-building programs.

Table 4. Advocacy Strategies Used by CSOs

<b>Advocacy Strategies</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Coalition-building	16	64%
Social media advocacy	14	56%
Grassroots mobilization	13	52%
Capacity-building initiatives	12	48%
Public awareness campaigns	11	44%
Partnerships with universities and NGOs	9	36%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The qualitative findings reveal that coalition-building enables organizations to combine expertise, strengthen advocacy networks, and improve institutional visibility. Participants explained that collaborative advocacy becomes especially important when organizations operate under financial and technical limitations.

One participant explained:

*“No organization can handle digital governance issues alone because the challenges are too broad. Some organizations focus on legal advocacy, others focus on community education, and some are stronger in media campaigns. Coalitions help combine those strengths.”* (Participant 5, Coalition Coordinator, Interview 2024)

The findings also demonstrate that social media increasingly functions as an important advocacy tool for bypassing institutional barriers and reaching wider audiences. Organizations reported using online platforms to simplify policy discussions and encourage public participation.

A participant stated:

*“Social media helps us speak directly to communities without waiting for formal government meetings. Sometimes online discussions create enough public pressure that policymakers are forced to respond publicly.”* (Participant 9, Digital Rights Activist, Interview 2024)

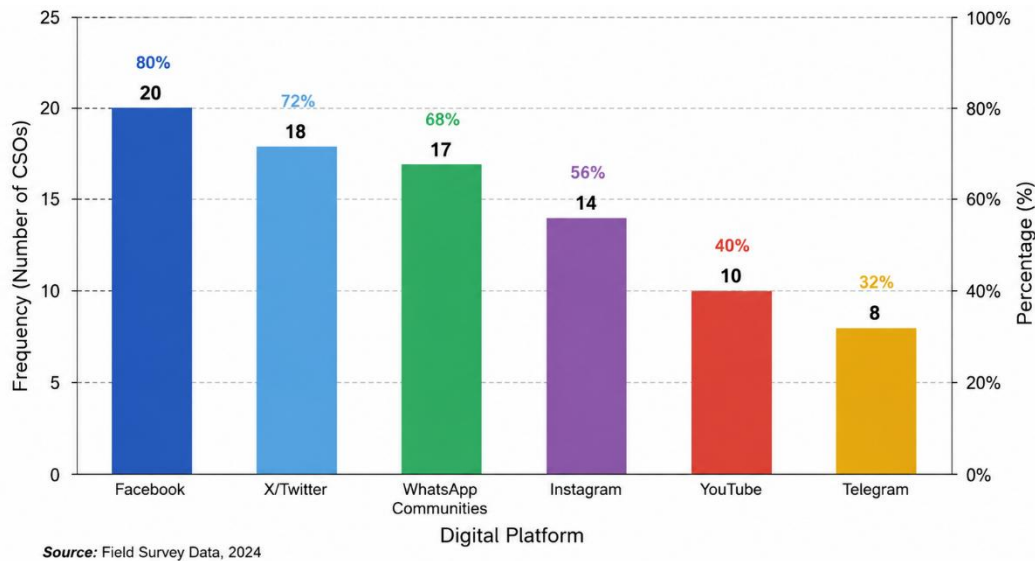
Capacity-building initiatives also emerged as an important strategy for improving organizational preparedness in digital governance advocacy. Participants explained that rapid technological change requires continuous learning and technical adaptation.

One interviewee explained:

*“Technology changes quickly, so organizations have to keep learning. Training programs help staff understand cybersecurity, digital regulation, and new policy developments. Without technical learning, advocacy becomes weak.”* (Participant 11, Program Manager, Interview 2024)

The integrated findings demonstrate that Nigerian CSOs continue to play an increasingly important role in digital governance advocacy despite persistent institutional limitations. The combination of quantitative and qualitative findings highlights both the growing relevance of civil

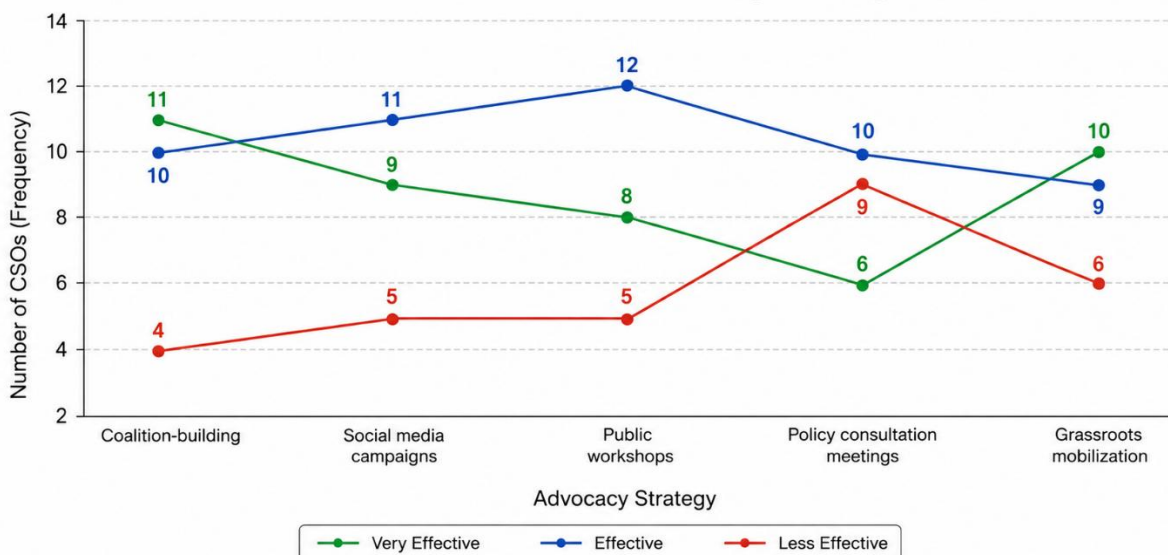
society participation and the structural barriers that continue to shape digital governance processes in Nigeria during 2024.



**Figure 1.** Digital Platforms Used by CSOs for Advocacy Activities

The figure generally demonstrates that digital platforms play a significant role in supporting advocacy activities conducted by civil society organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria during 2024. The findings indicate that social media and online communication platforms have become important tools for disseminating information, engaging communities, increasing public awareness, and strengthening participation in digital governance discussions. Platforms with broader accessibility and higher public engagement were used more frequently, showing that CSOs increasingly rely on digital communication strategies to expand advocacy reach and improve interaction with citizens. Overall, the figure reflects the growing integration of digital technology into civil society advocacy efforts, particularly in promoting public participation, policy awareness, and community mobilization within Nigeria’s digital governance landscape.

**Perceived Effectiveness of Advocacy Strategies (2024)**



**Figure 2.** Perceived Effectiveness of Advocacy Strategies

Coalition-building was perceived as the most effective advocacy strategy because it enables organizations to combine institutional networks, technical expertise, and financial resources.

Public workshops and grassroots mobilization were also considered effective in increasing community awareness regarding digital rights and policy participation.

Digital exclusion remains one of the major concerns identified by participating civil society organizations in this study. The survey findings reveal that unequal access to digital infrastructure and technological resources continues to affect several vulnerable social groups across Nigeria. Participants explained that disparities in internet connectivity, digital literacy, and access to affordable technological devices contribute significantly to unequal participation in digital governance and online public services. As digital transformation increasingly influences education, communication, employment, and public administration, communities with limited digital access face a higher risk of social and economic marginalization.

Table 5. Types of Communities Most Affected by Digital Exclusion

Community Group	Frequency	Percentage
Rural communities	21	84%
Low-income households	19	76%
Women in remote areas	15	60%
Youth without digital access	14	56%
Elderly populations	11	44%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The findings demonstrate that digital exclusion disproportionately affects rural and economically marginalized communities. Rural communities were identified as the most affected group, with 84% of respondents emphasizing that inadequate internet infrastructure, unstable electricity supply, and limited technological facilities continue to restrict digital participation in many regions. Low-income households were also significantly affected because many families experience difficulties accessing smartphones, computers, and stable internet services required for digital communication and online activities. In addition, women in remote areas, digitally disconnected youth, and elderly populations continue to face barriers related to limited digital literacy and restricted access to technological resources.

The qualitative interviews further revealed that these inequalities not only limit access to information but also reduce opportunities for education, employment, online public services, and civic participation. Participants explained that communities experiencing digital exclusion are often less involved in digital governance discussions because of weak technological access and limited awareness of digital rights. Consequently, many CSOs consider digital inclusion programs, public education initiatives, and infrastructure advocacy as essential strategies for reducing social inequality and ensuring more equitable participation in Nigeria’s digital transformation process.

Table 6. Forms of Government–CSO Interaction in Digital Governance

Type of Interaction	Frequency	Percentage
Formal policy consultations	16	64%
Public hearings	13	52%
Collaborative workshops	12	48%
Informal communication channels	10	40%
Joint policy drafting	6	24%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The findings presented in Table 6 indicate that interactions between civil society organizations and government institutions in digital governance primarily occur through formal policy consultations and public hearings. Formal consultations were identified by 64% of respondents, suggesting that government agencies increasingly recognize the importance of involving CSOs in discussions related to digital policy and governance. Public hearings and collaborative workshops also emerged as relatively common forms of interaction, reflecting growing efforts to encourage stakeholder participation within the policymaking process. These interactions generally focused

on issues related to digital inclusion, online regulation, cybersecurity awareness, and public access to digital services.

Despite these developments, the findings also reveal that meaningful participation remains relatively limited. Only 24% of organizations reported involvement in joint policy drafting processes, indicating that most CSOs still occupy consultative rather than decision-making roles within digital governance discussions. Interview participants explained that although consultation opportunities have increased, many engagements remain procedural and provide limited influence over final policy outcomes. Several participants further emphasized that institutional barriers, bureaucratic procedures, and unequal access to policymakers continue to restrict broader civil society participation. These findings suggest that participatory governance frameworks in Nigeria remain uneven and require stronger institutional collaboration to ensure more inclusive and transparent digital policymaking processes.

Table 7. Sources of Advocacy Funding Among CSOs

Funding Source	Frequency	Percentage
International donor organizations	18	72%
NGO partnerships	15	60%
Private sector support	9	36%
Membership contributions	8	32%
Government grants	5	20%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

The findings reveal that most advocacy activities remain highly dependent on international donor support and partnerships with non-governmental organizations. Limited access to government grants reflects continuing institutional distance between civil society organizations and state institutions.

Table 10. CSO Expectations for Strengthening Digital Governance

Expected Improvement	Frequency	Percentage
Increased funding support	20	80%
Technical training programs	18	72%
Greater access to policymakers	17	68%
Improved digital infrastructure	15	60%
Stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration	14	56%

Source: Field Survey Data, 2024

Most organizations emphasized the importance of sustainable funding and technical training to strengthen advocacy effectiveness. Participants also highlighted the need for more inclusive governance frameworks that provide meaningful opportunities for civil society participation in digital policymaking.

## Discussion

### **Civil Society Participation and Structural Challenges in Digital Governance Advocacy**

The findings demonstrate that civil society organizations (CSOs) have become increasingly important actors in Nigeria's digital governance landscape (Inakefe et al., 2024; Asante, 2023). The high level of participation identified in the quantitative findings indicates that digital governance advocacy is no longer treated solely as a technological concern but increasingly as an issue related to democratic participation, social accountability, and equitable access to public resources. The involvement of 72% of participating organizations in active advocacy activities reflects the growing recognition that digital transformation directly affects citizens' rights, access to information, and opportunities for social inclusion (Saner et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2022; Kempin, 2019; Nosratabadi et al., 2023). These findings support Bertot et al. (2019), who argue that digital governance requires participatory mechanisms that incorporate civil society perspectives within policymaking processes.

The findings also reveal that advocacy priorities are strongly connected to broader social inequalities within Nigerian society. Data privacy, digital inclusion, and policy transparency emerged as the dominant advocacy themes because communities continue to face unequal access to internet infrastructure, digital literacy, and technological resources. Rural communities and low-income households were identified as the groups most affected by digital exclusion, indicating that technological advancement in Nigeria remains unevenly distributed. This condition reflects the argument of Gangadharan (2017), who explains that digital governance debates are closely connected to issues of social inequality and exclusion. Digital transformation therefore cannot be separated from broader development challenges related to poverty, infrastructure limitations, and unequal access to education.

The qualitative findings further show that CSOs increasingly position themselves as intermediaries between communities and government institutions. Organizations attempt to translate complex policy discussions related to cybersecurity, online regulation, and data governance into accessible public discussions that ordinary citizens can understand. This finding demonstrates that advocacy activities extend beyond institutional lobbying and include public education, digital literacy campaigns, and grassroots mobilization efforts. Such strategies reflect the participatory governance perspective proposed by Rahman et al. (2021), who emphasize that inclusive digital governance depends on active collaboration between governments, civil society, and communities.

Institutional barriers nevertheless continue to limit advocacy effectiveness. Limited funding, inadequate technical expertise, and restricted access to policymakers emerged as the most significant challenges faced by participating organizations. Smaller organizations particularly experienced difficulties participating in technical policy discussions involving cybersecurity regulation, artificial intelligence, and digital data management because they lacked specialized expertise and stable financial support. These findings align with Maclean et al. (2018), who explain that effective digital advocacy increasingly requires technological capacity, organizational learning, and access to institutional networks.

The findings additionally indicate that participation opportunities within digital governance remain uneven. Although government institutions increasingly involve CSOs through consultations and public hearings, only a limited number of organizations reported direct participation in policy drafting processes. This demonstrates that civil society participation remains largely consultative rather than decision-making in nature. Participants also emphasized that organizations with stronger political networks and international visibility were more likely to gain institutional access compared to smaller community-based groups. Such conditions reinforce structural inequalities within civil society participation itself, where organizational resources and institutional relationships significantly influence policy influence and advocacy visibility.

### ***Adaptive Advocacy Strategies and the Development of Participatory Digital Governance***

The findings demonstrate that Nigerian CSOs continue to develop adaptive strategies to maintain advocacy effectiveness despite institutional limitations. Coalition-building emerged as the most dominant strategy because collaborative advocacy allows organizations to combine expertise, expand networks, and strengthen public visibility. The effectiveness of coalition-building reflects the increasing importance of collective action within contemporary governance systems, particularly in environments where organizations operate under financial and technical constraints. This finding supports Fyall & McGuire (2015), who argue that policy influence among nonprofit organizations becomes stronger when advocacy efforts are conducted through collaborative networks rather than isolated institutional actions.

Social media advocacy also emerged as an important strategy for expanding public participation and bypassing institutional barriers. The findings show that platforms such as Facebook, X/Twitter, and WhatsApp Communities are widely used to disseminate information, organize campaigns, and engage citizens in digital governance discussions (Chagas et al., 2022). Digital platforms therefore function not only as communication tools but also as spaces for civic mobilization and participatory engagement. This reflects the perspective of Schmitz et al. (2020), who explain that digital

technologies increasingly shape how civil society organizations organize advocacy activities and influence public discourse.

The growing reliance on digital communication additionally reflects changing patterns of political participation within developing democracies (Vaccari & Valeriani, 2018; Ohme, 2019; Bennett et al., 2018; Deseriis, 2021; Ruess et al., 2023). Participants explained that online campaigns frequently generate public attention capable of pressuring policymakers to respond to social concerns regarding surveillance, digital rights, and online safety. Public discussions related to digital governance increasingly occur within online spaces rather than through traditional institutional forums. This finding supports Sénit et al. (2016), who argue that communication technologies can expand opportunities for democratic participation by amplifying civil society voices within governance processes.

Capacity-building initiatives also emerged as a central strategy for strengthening advocacy effectiveness. Organizations emphasized the importance of continuous technical learning because digital governance discussions evolve rapidly alongside technological developments. Training programs related to cybersecurity, digital literacy, and policy analysis were considered essential for enabling organizations to participate more effectively in technical policy discussions (Elrayah & Jamil, 2023; Choudhary & Bansal, 2022; Mukherjee et al., 2023). This finding indicates that advocacy effectiveness depends not only on public visibility but also on the ability of organizations to adapt to changing technological and regulatory environments.

The findings further demonstrate that grassroots mobilization remains essential within digital governance advocacy. Community education programs, public awareness campaigns, and local workshops were widely used to connect digital policy issues with everyday social concerns such as education access, online employment, financial inclusion, and public service accessibility. Participants explained that many citizens initially perceive digital governance as a distant and highly technical issue (Simonofski et al., 2021; Esposito et al., 2024; Patergiannaki & Pollalis, 2024). CSOs therefore play a critical role in linking digital transformation with practical community experiences and social realities. This demonstrates that successful advocacy requires both institutional engagement and public empowerment strategies.

The study also highlights the continuing need for stronger institutional collaboration between government agencies and civil society organizations. Participants consistently identified increased funding opportunities, technical training, and greater inclusion within policymaking processes as important priorities for strengthening digital governance advocacy in Nigeria. Participatory governance frameworks remain constrained when civil society organizations are limited to symbolic consultation roles without meaningful influence over policy outcomes. Inclusive digital transformation therefore requires institutional reforms that improve transparency, expand stakeholder participation, and reduce structural barriers limiting civil society engagement within digital governance processes.

## **CONCLUSION**

Civil society organizations (CSOs) play an increasingly significant role in shaping digital governance advocacy in Nigeria through activities related to data privacy, digital inclusion, policy transparency, and public awareness. The findings reveal that digital governance is increasingly understood not only as a technological issue but also as a matter of democratic participation, social accountability, and equitable access to digital opportunities. Despite the growing involvement of CSOs, advocacy effectiveness remains constrained by limited funding, inadequate technical expertise, restricted access to policymakers, and unequal institutional participation. The study also shows that digital exclusion continues to disproportionately affect rural communities, low-income households, women in remote areas, and populations with limited technological access. In response to these challenges, CSOs have adopted adaptive strategies such as coalition-building, social media advocacy, grassroots mobilization, and technical capacity-building initiatives to strengthen public engagement and policy influence. The study highlights the importance of strengthening participatory governance frameworks, expanding institutional collaboration, improving digital infrastructure, and increasing technical support to ensure that digital transformation processes in Nigeria remain inclusive, transparent, and socially responsive.

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