
RE-IMAGING DIGITAL DEMOCRACY AND POLITICAL ACCOUNTABILITY THROUGH THE LENS OF THE HUMANITIES IN A TECHNOLOGICAL AGE IN KOGI STATE

***Daniel Arome, Sherifat Mabe Danjuma & Akagwu Samuel Ugbedeajo**

Registry Department, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa.

Article Received: 16 October 2025

*Corresponding Author: Daniel Arome

Article Revised: 05 November 2025

Registry Department, Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa.

Published on: 25 November 2025

DOI: <https://doi-doi.org/101555/ijrpa.7633>

ABSTRACT

Introduction of digital technology in governance processes has transformed the way politics are being participated in and held in the world. The paper discusses the way digital democracy, governance, and political accountability intersect with the critical approach to the humanities in Kogi State, Nigeria. It explores ways in which other fields like ethics, political philosophy, history and cultural studies can shape the creation of inclusive and responsible digital governance models. The article uses empirical observations and secondary data to determine how democracy in Kogi State is being empowered and complicated by digital technologies. Although Kogi State has adopted a number of digital innovations such as the Governance Delivery Unit (GDU), the adoption of digital billing systems and membership in the Open Government Partnership (OGP), most of these measures have been aimed at the efficiency of the administration and not creating a meaningful democratic engagement. The research identifies that the lack of the humanities-inspired approach has constrained the transformative power of digital governance, one of the factors that have resulted in the enduring problems of elite capture, institutional darkness, and citizen disengagement. Using a combination of Nigerian and transnational literature, the work highlights the necessity of ethically based, historically situated and culturally responsive digital platforms that enhance transparency, civil engagement and confidence in the institutions. The paper ends with a list of recommendations, that is, the creation of state-level laws on digital accountability, the financing of digital literacy, the localisation of e-governance systems, and the establishment of interdisciplinary bodies of oversight. Finally, the paper will also urge the world to change

its paradigm of technocratic governance to a more people-focused digital democracy that is based on justice, inclusion, and ethical accountability.

KEYWORDS: Digital democracy, governance, political accountability, humanities, technology

INTRODUCTION

Digital technology has transformed the organizational form of governance around the world and created a new paradigm of political participation, democratic accountability and the involvement of the people in the public sector. In a general definition, digital democracy talks about the realization of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to expand the democratic workflow, transparency, and civic involvement (Nyabola, 2018). In Nigeria, especially subnational entities such as Kogi State, researchers admit the use of digital governance as a transformative tool that may help in filling the gap between the governed and governing parties, especially in a scenario where there has been increased political exclusion, institutional opacity, and high levels of inefficiency (Ibikunle & Sarumi, 2012).

Nevertheless, just the incorporation of digital platforms does not necessarily carry effective accountability or participatory governance. The further grounds of political legitimacy, civic responsibility and moral authority are asked and explained in the contexts of the humanities like ethics, history, political philosophy, and sociology. These subjects offer the much-needed capability of assessing not only the effectiveness of the governance, but also its fairness in the age of the digital world (Mohammed, 2025). Therefore, the deliberation of the humanities to the design and assessment of digital democracy offers a more ethically sensitive and communally considerate scope, at least in the weakened democratic conditions like Kogi State.

The case of Kogi State in the North-Central part of Nigeria is a complicated mix of the woes of governance, i.e. infrastructure negligence, election fraud, bureaucratic obscurantism, and elite embezzlement and increasing online penetration. Although a platform such as a social media or electronic voting portal is gradually taking root in the political life, their implementation in Kogi State has tended to be unstructured, elitist, or rigged (Etido, Dan-Ralph & Babatunde, 2025). The young age of the state population, their lack of digital literacy, and historical marginalization also make the effectiveness of digital efforts in terms of true democratic accountability harder.

Scholars around the world have underlined that to reach their potential to transform governance, digital technologies should also be supported by democratic culture, critically conscious civic awareness, and ethical-political education (Tunde, 2016). A re-conceptualization of the digital turn in governance, thus, is urgently required, not only in the areas of instrumentation, and infrastructure, but also in that which has been described as the critical interpretive abilities of the humanities. This way, we shall be better able to interpret and judge the normative presuppositions, culture contradictions, as well as the power and control that reside within realm of emerging digital governance in Kogi State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing adoption of digital technologies in governance across Kogi State, there is still a gap between these technologies and the real advancement of democratic accountability. Transparency and citizen engagement Digital platforms tend to perform poorly because of the cosmetic way they are applied, because they are manipulated by elites, or because they are ethically or historically ungrounded. Lack of the humanities informed approach has constrained the success of these technologies in combating systemic governance issues like exclusion, corruption, and poor civic participation, thus the need to rethink digital democracy in the context of humanities critical approach.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to explore how digital democracy can be reimaged to improve governance and political accountability through the lens of the humanities in Kogi State. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Examine the current state of digital democracy and governance practices in Kogi State.
2. Analyze how the humanities can inform and enhance democratic accountability in digital governance.

Conceptual Clarification

Digital democracy

A modern paradigm for political engagement and governance, digital democracy, also known as e-democracy or cyber-democracy, makes use of digital technologies to strengthen democratic processes. Different definitions of digital democracy have been provided by academics and organizations, but they all agree on the basic idea that information and communication technologies (ICTs) may be used to improve accountability in governance, promote transparency, and increase civic involvement. In the definition by United Nations

Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA, 2022), digital democracy refers to the application of digital means to allow participatory governance, an open dialogue between the citizens and the state, and better services to the population. This idea underscores the ability of digital platforms to form a participatory and friendly political culture in which individuals will play an influential role in the decision-making process. It is also representative of the international movement towards the e-governance paradigms that emphasize openness, speed, and accessibility.

Emejulu and McGregor (2016) approach the concept from a humanities-oriented perspective, stating that digital democracy is “a socio-political practice that must be critically interrogated to ensure it reflects justice, inclusivity, and ethical engagement in digital public life.” Their view cautions against uncritical techno-optimism, calling for a human-centered model of digital democracy that accounts for power relations, access disparities, and cultural context. Similarly, “the integration of digital platforms such as social media, mobile apps, and e-portals into the structures of political engagement, aimed at enhancing responsiveness, inclusiveness, and the transparency of government actions” is how Fagbadebo (2020) define digital democracy. Their focus lies in the practical application of technology to foster active citizenship and combat bureaucratic opacity, especially in countries facing governance challenges like Nigeria.

Governance

The processes, institutions, structures, and customs that govern a society's use of power, decision-making, and authority are collectively referred to as governance. It includes the ways in which governments communicate with the public, distribute funds, create policies, and guarantee accountability and the rule of law (UNDP, 2022). Although the term is often used in connection with government activities, governance extends beyond the state to include civil society organizations, private sector actors, and international institutions that influence public affairs. Omeiza and Aluko (2022), focusing on the Nigerian context, describe governance as “the totality of processes through which public institutions manage public affairs, ensure citizens' participation, and deliver services in a transparent and accountable manner.” Their point of view emphasizes how important strong governance is to solving development issues and fostering public trust in a nation characterized by socioeconomic disparity, institutional instability, and corruption. Furthermore, from a humanities standpoint, governance is not just a technical or managerial activity but a

normative enterprise concerned with justice, legitimacy, and moral responsibility. As highlighted by Kehinde, Imhonopi and Evbuoma (2016), effective governance requires not only structural efficiency but also ethical leadership, inclusive values, and historical consciousness that reflect the lived realities of the governed.

Political accountability

According to Bovens (2021), political accountability is a relationship in which an authority is obliged to explain and justify its conduct to a forum, which can pose questions, pass judgment, and possibly impose sanctions. The interactive character of accountability is encapsulated in this concept, which involves both duty-bearers (those in authority) and right-holders (people and institutions with monitoring roles). It also implies that accountability is not complete without consequences either in the form of commendation, correction, or sanction. According to Agbaje and Adejumobi (2022), political accountability is the process, which enables electors and appointees to be held to account by the mechanisms of institutional and civic engagement. They emphasize on the fact that accountability is imperative in a democratic society such as Nigeria which is largely a society where the public officials are usually covered by patronization network, poor institutions, and low political willingness to transparency.

Electronic technologies have further introduced an extra dimension to political accountability and thus people are more likely to monitor and assess and even respond to the actions of the political leaders. Digital platforms, including social media and e-governance tools, present alternative arenas of civic oversight, and place political actors under the immediate scrutiny of real-time data, as Omodia and Osaretin (2023) propose. They however, warn that without proper management within an ethical and inclusive framework, digital accountability may be compromised through misinformation, censorship, and digital exclusion. In humanities perspective, political responsibility is both a moral/intellectual duty to justice, representation and the common good and not merely an official duty. Onyewuchi (2021) indicates that accountable governance requires moral leadership that is founded on such principles as integrity, service, compassion, and loyalty to the social compact. Such values are particularly important in such parts of the country as Kogi State where public distrust in the administration is undermined by alienation and the lack of institutions as well as the failure of governance.

The current state of digital democracy and governance practices in Kogi State

In today's political administration, digital democracy and governance are becoming more and more important, especially for states looking to modernize public participation and service provision. The development of these practices has been disproportionate in Nigeria, where subnational actors such as Kogi state have made slow but significant strides to incorporate digital instruments in governance. Although it has been reported that there have been major improvements, systemic constraints have impeded their full democratic capabilities.

Over the past years, Kogi State has been embracing a number of digital projects to promote transparency, efficiency in the delivery of its services and engagement of its citizens. One of such examples is the Governance Delivery Unit (GDU), introduced in 2024, which is a central data-driven coordination organ that oversees the implementation of government policies, performance across ministries, and causes responsiveness in the delivery of public services (Kogi State Government, 2024). The GDU indicates a tendency in subnational governance to results-focused management and digital tracking tools, which are advised to achieve effective e-governance in the developing setting by UNDP (2022). Additionally, the Kogi State Internal Revenue Service made a conscious effort to automate fiscal governance in 2025 by launching a digital billing system. This system was created to increase compliance, decrease leaks, and get rid of inefficiencies in tax collection that were based on paper (Kogi State IRS, 2025). These developments demonstrate the state's willingness to transition from traditional bureaucracy to a more technology-driven administrative model.

Digital democracy in Kogi State, however, remains in its infancy. Although platforms such as social media and electronic communication tools are widely used by politicians and government agencies, there is limited institutionalization of digital platforms specifically designed to foster two-way communication between the government and citizens. Kogi State formally joined the Open Government Partnership (OGP) project in 2021 with the goal of using digital tools to create a controlled environment for citizen participation and participatory governance. However, as recently as 2023, civil society publications emphasized the OGP Steering Committee's lack of participation and demanded that the state's action plan fully activate the digital accountability mechanisms (VON, 2023).

In Kogi State, there has been minimal public indication of active digital platforms for participatory budgeting, online public consultations, or e-petitions, despite budgeted allocations of ₦165 million for OGP implementation in 2024 (KogiReports, 2024). This

underscores a broader pattern in Nigerian states where digital democracy is often reduced to mere information dissemination rather than authentic citizen participation or co-governance (Agunbiade & Adebayo, 2021).

Humanities Disciplines and Their Role in Enhancing Democratic Accountability in Digital Governance

The relationship between technology innovation and democratic accountability has garnered significant attention from academics, decision-makers, and civic actors in the rapidly changing field of digital governance. There is increasing agreement that humanities fields like ethics, political philosophy, and history are essential in creating ethical, inclusive, and accountable digital governance frameworks, even though the majority of the discussion has concentrated on infrastructure, data management, and system design (Floridi, 2020; Eubanks, 2018). These disciplines provide interpretive and normative tools that help societies question not just how digital technologies are used in governance, but why, for whom, and with what consequences.

It is becoming more widely acknowledged that integrating humanities studies into digital governance is essential to fostering democratic accountability in a society that is rapidly changing technologically. Specifically, ethics offers a normative basis for assessing the use of digital technology in public administration. As digital tools become embedded in decision-making, ethical scrutiny ensures that core values such as justice, fairness, privacy, and human dignity are upheld. According to Floridi (2019), information ethics must govern digital networks in order to prevent violations of individual rights. Okon (2022) cautions that in Nigerian, digital governance runs the risk of escalating current inequities and power disparities in the absence of ethical oversight, especially in areas like Kogi State where public confidence in the government has historically been weak.

Political philosophy offers a deeper interrogation of the legitimacy and distribution of power in digital governance frameworks. Political philosophy contributes to preventing digital tools from becoming tools of elite control or technocratic exclusion by referencing ideas like representation, justice, and public discourse. Habermas (1996) emphasizes the need for deliberative democracy, where citizens actively participate in shaping policies, not just through elections but through open, reasoned dialogue. Fuchs (2021) extends this argument by highlighting the dangers of platform capitalism, where digital systems may prioritize profit and surveillance over democratic inclusion. According to researchers like Agbaje and

Adejumobi (2022), the absence of an inclusive political philosophy in digital governance in Nigeria erodes governmental legitimacy and alienates citizens.

The discipline of history brings critical insights into how past governance structures have shaped current political and civic relations. In postcolonial cultures like Nigeria, where the effects of marginalization, corruption, and authoritarianism still influence institutional behavior and public expectations, it puts the difficulties of establishing digital governance in perspective. Nwakanma (2023) stresses that understanding these historical patterns is essential to designing digital systems that do not repeat the exclusions of the past. In Kogi State, where certain communities have experienced political neglect and disenfranchisement, a historically informed approach to digital governance can help rebuild trust and foster more inclusive participation.

By guaranteeing that digital governance platforms are sensitive to the local sociocultural environment, cultural studies support democratic accountability. In pluralistic societies such as Nigeria, there should be pluralism in governance instruments that include linguistic, religious, and ethnic diversity. Emejulu and McGregor (2020) argue in favor of culturally rooted digital democracy and give warnings against imposing universal methods that do not care about regional variations. Onuigbo and Akinyemi (2023) emphasize that unless the cultural subtleties are considered, digital platforms can either distance citizens or do not respond to their needs. Cultural sensitivity is especially relevant in the Kogi State since the state is multi-ethnic and characterized by different degrees of digital literacy. Localization of digital platforms through language translation, inclusive design, and community-based engagement enhances both usability and democratic responsiveness.

The interdisciplinary perspective within the humanities provides a practical structure on how to improve democratic accountability in digital governance. Applied ethics makes sure digital systems are morally acceptable; political philosophy challenges their rightness, history puts them back into perspective, and cultural studies make sure they are relevant on the local level. In combination, these fields would create the kind of people-based governance that is beyond automation or efficiency. As new forms of governance in entities such as Kogi are still being developed, and the digital process of inclusion is not uniform, it is important to settle digital reforms in the humanities so that evolution of technology can be made to be compatible with a democratic approach that is characterized by transparency, equity and people involvement.

CONCLUSION

The advent of internet-based democracy has given rise to additional opportunities and issues in the development of governance in developing lands like Kogi State. Although there have been marked improvements in the digitization of the administration of the state as can be seen in the adoption of the use of digital billing, creation of the Governance Delivery Unit and the arrangement between the state and the Open Government Partnership (OGP); until recently these were made without a lot of bend towards democratic inclusiveness. There are growing uses of digital tools to manage the handling of information and services and so their potential in democratic terms has been yet fully utilised, especially in the dimensions of transparency, participatory governance, and civic empowerment.

The integration of humanities practices into digital governance holds great potential for strengthening democratic accountability. Ethics, political philosophy, history, and cultural studies thus show the moral foundations needed to ensure that citizens are safeguarded against being spied upon, discriminated against or marginalized; that the processes of power should be called to question, that legitimacy and representation in digital decision-making is questioned; that governance reforms since the past should not be continued and that digital platforms be geared towards sociocultural sensitivities of the various communities within Kogi State.

What is evident across all analyses is that digital governance cannot be divorced from human values, institutional context, or historical experience. Without ethical scrutiny, historical awareness, and cultural sensitivity, digital democracy risks becoming an elitist and technocratic exercise that alienates citizens rather than engages them. To promote a really democratic digital governance system in Kogi State, there is need to apply people-oriented, inter-disciplinary approach that is normative with participatory ethics and inclusive political culture.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the review above, the following recommendations are proffered.

1. Develop a Humanities-Informed Digital Governance Policy Framework

The Kogi State government ought to institutionalize the participation of the scholars and practitioners in the ethics, history, political philosophy and culture studies in its digital policy making and analysis. This would make sure that the technology application is inclined by values of equity, justice, transparency, and inclusion.

2. Revitalize the OGP and Institutionalize Participatory Digital Platforms

The existing Open Government Partnership structures must be fully operationalized with functional digital platforms that allow for citizen feedback, online consultations, participatory budgeting, and performance tracking. Civil society should be empowered to play a watchdog role in this process.

3. Invest in Digital Literacy and Inclusive Civic Education

Kogi State should also apply holistic digital literacy initiatives to reach the rural areas, women, young people, and marginalized groups in an attempt to provide a solution to the digital divide. The success of digital democracy is only guaranteed through acquisition of the skill and confidence in executing part in online checking of Democracy.

4. Enact State-Level Digital Accountability Laws

Beyond aligning with national e-governance frameworks, Kogi should adopt its own legislation on data privacy, algorithmic transparency, and citizens' digital rights. These laws should mandate institutional accountability for misuse of digital systems and provide redress mechanisms for affected citizens.

5. Promote Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration in Civic Tech Development

Government-academia-local-innovator-civil society co-creation should be promoted to create real solutions to governance problems via digital spaces, e.g. e-procurement monitoring solutions, budget transparency dashboards, online grievance redress systems. This type of cooperation generates innovation and democratic possession.

6. Localize and Culturally Adapt Digital Platforms

All e-governance tools should reflect the linguistic, cultural, and social realities of Kogi's diverse population. This includes translating platforms into local languages, integrating indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms, and ensuring accessibility for people with disabilities and low literacy levels.

7. Institutionalize Ethical Oversight Bodies

A state level Digital Ethics Council or an Independent Digital Accountability Commission will be like a watchdog against the implementation of technology in governance. These institutors ought to check the ethical risks, inclusive design, and accountability of institutions over the failure of digital governance.

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