



E-Democracy and Citizen Participation in Liberia: Confronting the Challenges of Inclusivity and Engagement

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ABSTRACT

E-democracy involves the idea that digital tools such as the Internet can enhance citizen participation in decision-making. However, Liberia, a post-conflict state, still faces challenges with e-democracy. This article explores the factors obstructing the realisation of e-democracy and its goal of fostering meaningful citizen engagement in Liberia. This study used a qualitative approach, collecting secondary data from peer-reviewed articles, official reports, newspapers, and other sources, and interactively analysed in the NVivo 12 Plus software. The analysis is based on Marianne Kneuer's theory of e-democracy, which comprises three indicators: free and equal access, e-participation, and e-government. The findings indicate that the implementation of e-democracy in Liberia encounters several obstacles: (i) limited free and unequal digital access due to weak legal protections for internet freedom, online intimidation, high internet costs, and low digital literacy; (ii) absence of e-participation as citizens struggle to access timely and reliable government information. Traditional media, especially radio, continues to be the primary source compared to digital platforms; (iii) lack of e-government services owing to ineffective online government platforms and unreliable digital services, which force citizens to rely on traditional methods to access public services.

Key word: Digital Democracy; Citizen Participation; Digital Gap; Inclusive Governance; Liberia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

E-democracy has gained popularity in recent years as governments and civil society have recognised the dissonance between modern technology and the seemingly archaic traditional methods of civic engagement (Sundberg, 2019). E-democracy is based on the idea that the implementation of technology, particularly the internet, would allow more people the opportunity to innovatively and inclusively engage in democratic processes (Bindu et al., 2019). Scholars such as Berg & Hofmann, (2021); Fischli & Muldoon, (2024); Lubis et al., (2024) have defined e-democracy as the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) to enhance, complement, or transform traditional democratic practices, enabling political communication, participation, and decision-making processes through digital media. The main concept of e-democracy is that traditional barriers to citizenship in contemporary liberal democratic polities – problems of scale, scarcity of time, decline of community, and lack of opportunities for policy deliberation can be overcome by new forms of online communication (Alathur et al., 2020).

In the Liberian context, the digitalisation of citizens' participation has gained significant attention as it aims to enhance efficiency in service delivery, transparency, and inclusive decision-making. For instance, the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act of 2010 grants inclusive citizen participation and the right to access public records and information without justification (Svård, 2018). Further, the e-government strategy roadmap 2014 – 2018, and the e-Liberia portal, aim to contribute to Liberia's democracy, as well as its transformation into a competitive and innovative knowledge society (Mensah et al., 2020). Yet, Liberia's democratic practices remain weak with limited citizen participation. Liberia is a partly free democratic state, 64/100 (Freedom House 2024), and a deficient democracy in terms of quality (Democracy Matrix, 2021). Specifically, while other indicators of democracy in Liberia, such as the rule of law and civil rights, are slightly improving, citizen participation remains low (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Liberia's Democratic Performance per Indicator

Source : *International IDEA*, (2024) ¹.

Studies on e-democracy have significantly grown in recent years, yet several gaps remain. To establish this research gap, an extensive search was made on Scopus using the following keywords: "e-democracy" OR "digital democracy" OR "electronic democracy" OR "e-participation" OR "e-government" AND "citizen participation" OR "civic engagement" OR "public participation". A total of 1,260 articles

¹ This figure presents Liberia's performance across key democratic indicators, showing modest progress in the rule of law and civil rights, but persistently low levels of citizen participation.

from 2000 – 2024 were downloaded in RIS and analysed through VOSviewer using the network visualisation feature, as shown in Figure 2.

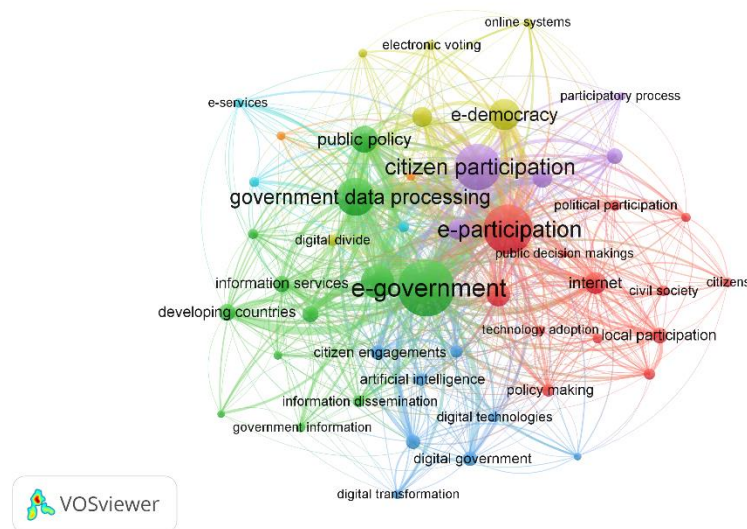


Figure 2. Network Analysis Visualisation²

Citizen participation (in the purple cluster) is central in Figure 2, and is more often discussed alongside other related terms like political participation, public decision-making, and civil society. On the other hand, “e-democracy” in the yellow cluster is more studied with terms like information and communication, online systems and electronic voting. This means that while e-democracy and citizen participation are widely discussed topics, they are often treated as distinct research areas. In other words, while researchers talk about e-democracy as a technical concept, their direct linkage to festering substantive citizen participation, especially in the unique socio-political context of a developing and post-conflict nation like Liberia, remains critically underexplored. In simple terms, there is a conceptual gap between the two, and research is needed to examine how e-democracy directly influences or enhances citizen participation, especially in terms of inclusivity, digital access, or civic impact.

In the Liberian context, there are different perspectives on the development of democracy. For instance, Sumaworo (2024) emphasised that a functional democracy relies heavily on improving living conditions, providing essential infrastructure, and ensuring institutions operate as per the law. But Liberia’s democracy lacks these fundamentals, making citizens less motivated to engage. Similarly, Adedayo (2020) pointed out that systemic barriers like human rights violations, corruption, poor governance, and weak economic plans have eroded public trust and participation in Liberia. Further, Krawczyk (2021) suggested that while Liberia’s dense civil society is active, it often discourages citizens from directly engaging in democratic processes like contacting officials, the media, or protesting. Mvukiyehe & Samii (2017) added that targeted civic education can address this gap by boosting electoral participation and increasing citizen involvement. While these studies are significant, scientific discussions on the emergence of e-democracy in Liberia and the challenges of citizen participation are nonexistent. This leads to the question: why has Liberia's e-democratic system struggled to achieve inclusive and meaningful citizen participation? The novelty of this study lies in its focus on identifying the barriers to citizen participation, i.e. inclusivity and meaningful engagement, in the context of e-

² This figure illustrates the thematic relationships among key concepts in the literature on citizen participation and e-democracy, highlighting dominant research clusters and identifying underexplored areas relevant to this study.

democracy, a topic difficult to find. Interestingly, this arrives at a time when citizens are now demanding inclusive participation from governments, which will provide meaningful insights. Hence, the study aims to advance academic knowledge on citizen participation and e-democracy, and policy development, particularly in developing countries.

The goal of this study is to explore the challenges hindering the realisation of e-democracy and its role in fostering substantive citizen engagement in Liberia. To achieve this, the study adopts Kneuer's (2016) e-democracy framework, which conceptualises how digital media can enhance democratic engagement. This framework was chosen for its detailed focus on the legal, structural and participatory dimensions essential to functioning e-democracies, particularly in emerging contexts. It highlights the need for systems that safeguard internet freedom, promote e-participation, and support efficient digital public services (Kneuer, 2016). These indicators directly align with the research question by allowing a structured investigation into why Liberia's e-democratic system struggles to foster substantive citizen participation. These indicators serve as analytical tools to assess the conditions under which citizens engage with digital platforms, the quality of that engagement, and the capacity of state institutions to support it. This study not only identifies barriers to citizen involvement but also provides policy recommendations on how digital tools can be more effectively used to enhance participation, accountability, and transparency in Liberia and other developing democracies, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

2. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Creswell, (2014) explained that this approach focuses on examining conditions in their natural context. This approach is also used to explore a specific event or phenomenon by gathering diverse information, which is then processed to answer questions such as "why" and "how" (Creswell, 2014). This method is relevant to this study to explore and answer the research question regarding the quality of citizen engagement in Liberia's e-democratic system. Due to time constraints, limited resources, and difficulty in getting informants, the study heavily relied on secondary data sources. A total of 80 newspaper articles from credible Liberian and international news agencies and at least 25 peer-reviewed articles, along with relevant government reports and international publications, were systematically reviewed, guided by their relevance to the research themes. These data were considered sufficient as thematic saturation was reached, meaning no new themes, codes, or insights emerged during later stages of data analysis (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). The use of multiple, triangulated secondary sources also strengthens the validity of the results (McLeod, 2023).

The data were analysed using the interactive model of qualitative data analysis by (Miles et al. (2014) following four phases: (i) data collection – we gathered data by conducting content analysis and review of literature; (ii) data reduction – we reduced, summarized, and classified the items based on the research's themes; (iii) data display – we then used the NVivo 12 plus software crosstab analysis feature to deductively code the data based on the pre-defined themes derived from Kneuer's framework: (a) Free and Equal Access, (b) E-Participation, and (c) E-Government, and present the findings using figures. The percentages in the figure were generated automatically by NVivo 12 plus, which calculates the proportion of references coded under each theme relative to the total coded references, representing the percentage distribution of coded references and showing how much each category contributes to the overall analysis. (iv) Conclusion and verification – finally, we verified the research by making valid conclusions on the data findings. However, a key limitation of our findings is that the secondary sources may not fully capture the lived experiences and perceptions of citizens, which limits the depth of insight into personal engagement with Liberia's e-democracy.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Marianne Kneuer's E-Democracy Framework

To answer the research questions proposed in this study, the e-democracy framework proposed by Marianne Kneuer in 2016 will be used to guide the analysis. Kneuer (2016) explained that e-democracy is the practice of using digital tools such as the Internet to help people participate more in politics and decision-making, either by sharing their views or holding leaders accountable. This form of participation makes democracy stronger by improving access to information while ensuring internet freedom. Further, this approach not only makes governments more transparent and efficient but also builds trust and strengthens the connection between citizens and their leaders. The framework consists of three indicators, namely, (1) Free and Equal Access, (2) E-participation, and (3) E-government services. The framework is shown in Figure 3.

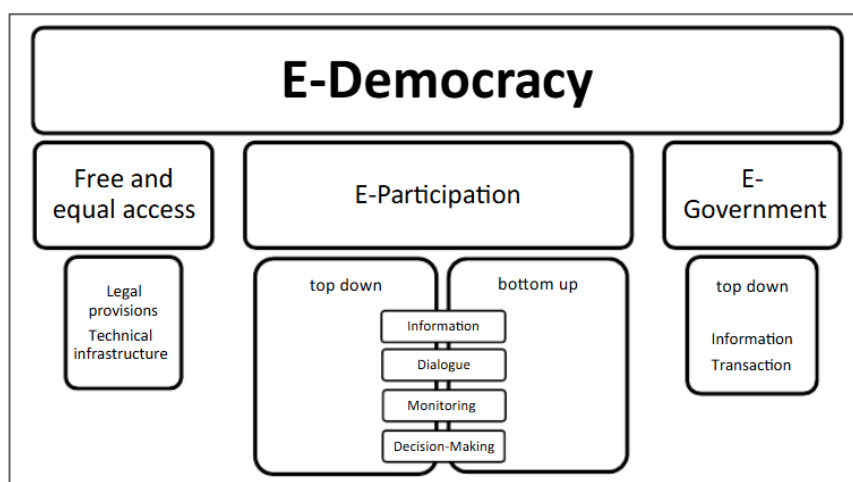


Figure 3. Kneuer's E-Democracy Framework

Source : *Source: Kneuer, (2016)*³.

The first indicator, Free and Equal Access relates to the basic conditions for ICT use in democracies and draws upon two central prerequisites for the existence and durability of e-democracy: (i) the technical infrastructure (access to digital media) – the right and ability to use digital tools such as smartphones, computers, and reliable Internet services; and (ii) Legal provisions on Internet freedom – the ability of people to use the internet without undue restrictions or censorship from authorities or third parties. The second indicator, E-Participation, is about how citizens use digital tools to engage with the government and participate in decision-making. This includes: (i) e-information – when people use digital media just to learn about what is happening in the government. (ii) e-consultation – when people share their opinions or provide feedback to the government through online forums. (iii) e-monitoring – when citizens observe and track the actions of government officials and institutions to hold them accountable. (iv) e-decision-making – when citizens take part in actual decision-making processes, such as signing e-petitions or participating in online campaigns.

The third indicator, E-government, involves the government using technology to improve public services and administrative functions. This includes (i) public service delivery – making services faster and easier to access online. (ii) efficiency – improving government operations so that public resources are used better and costs are lowered. (iii) policy outcomes – to ensure that these digital services lead to better policy outcomes and that citizens are more satisfied with their government.

³ This figure outlines the theoretical framework guiding the study, illustrating three core indicators through which digital tools can enhance democratic engagement, transparency, and accountability

Free and Equal Access: Is Access to The E-Democratic Space in Liberia Truly Free and Equal?

Kneuer (2016) identified free and equal access as the foundation of e-democracy, emphasising citizens' rights and abilities to use digital tools and a stable Internet without intimidation or restrictions from authorities. Such access ensures fair opportunities for all to participate in democratic processes. Guo & Zhang (2024) highlighted its importance in fostering the free exchange of ideas, enhancing access to information, strengthening political engagement, improving government transparency, promoting equal participation, and safeguarding basic human rights. In this section, the focus is on identifying the challenges of free and equal digital access to e-democracy in Liberia. This phenomenon is shown in Figure 4.

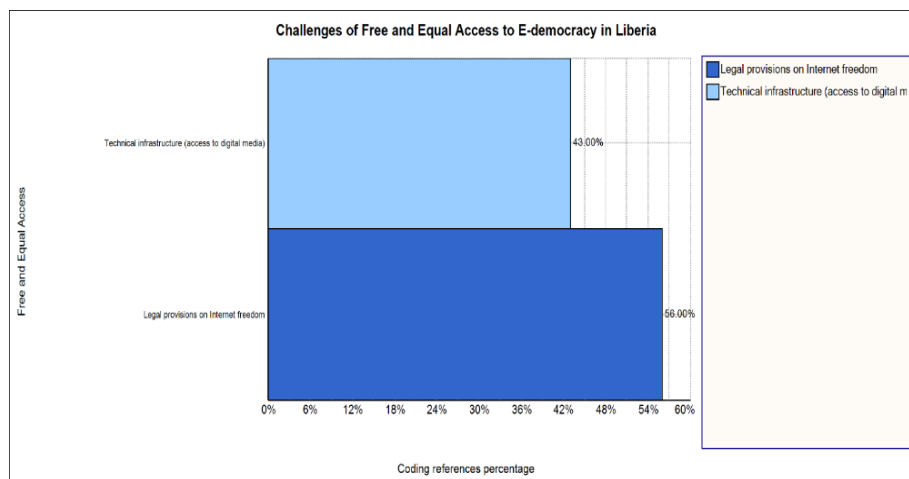


Figure 4. Challenges of Free and Equal Access to E-Democracy in Liberia

Source : *processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus* ⁴.

Based on Figure 4, limited internet freedom (56%) is a huge challenge, suggesting that more of the issues stem from limitations in the legal or regulatory practices that ensure citizens' freedom to use the internet without intimidation or restrictions. Chapter 3, Article 15 of the Liberian constitution provides the foundational principle and guarantee of individual and collective rights to exercise freedom of speech in a form and manner consistent with international best practices. Liberia also adopted the Freedom of Information Act (FOI) in 2010, granting the right to request and receive government information to everyone without the applicant having to give any reason or justification or to have a "legal interest" in the information. Liberia is also a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which enshrines the right to freedom of expression and speech. There is also the Declaration of Table Mountain of 2019, which aims to advance a free press and freedom of expression in Liberia. This means that Liberia should have a vibrant citizenry empowered to demand accountability and efficiently participate in the democratic process.

However, in recent years, Liberia has witnessed numerous instances of online intimidation and internet shutdowns, particularly targeting media practitioners and citizens. Social media, especially Facebook, serves as the primary platform for online expression in Liberia. Persistent internet shutdowns have heightened tensions between citizens and the government over online freedom of expression. For example, during the 2019 nationwide protest, where predominantly young people and opposition political parties rallied under the slogan "*Save the State*" to protest poor governance and

⁴ This figure presents results on the structural and systemic barriers affecting citizens' ability to access and participate in Liberia's e-democracy on equal terms.

demand accountability for a missing US\$80 million, the government shut down all social media access, restricting online expression. Additionally, independent radio stations and online TV hosts were shut down (Mengonfia, 2020), violating the Liberian Constitution and the Freedom of Information Act of 2010. Top political figures have also perpetuated threats and intimidation against citizens and media practitioners. In 2022, a journalist was assaulted and unlawfully sentenced to a month in prison for “disorderly conduct” in an incident involving a legislator (FrontPage Africa, 2022). Further, reports from the Media Foundation for West Africa (2022) revealed instances of journalists and citizens being physically attacked, assaulted, intimidated, and sometimes killed for online criticism, often involving state security personnel or unknown gangs. These findings are similar to previous studies by Kuehn & Salter (2020); Miller & Vaccari (2020); Santos (2021), highlighting intimidation and undue restrictions to internet access as significant barriers to e-democracy. This reflects Liberia’s fragile post-conflict democracy, where weak institutions and limited civic protections make online expression a target of control rather than a tool for engagement. In this environment, digital dissent is often treated as a threat to authority.

Subsequently, technical infrastructure, access to digital media (43%), is another challenge, as shown in Figure 4. Liberia’s digital landscape is underdeveloped, with only 30.1% internet penetration (Kemp, 2024), reflecting a significant digital divide that hinders e-democracy. About 87.1% of the population has access to mobile devices, 52.3% to smartphones and 39.71% to basic phones (World Bank, 2024). However, the gap between accessibility and affordability remains stark. High Internet costs are a major barrier; the government’s price floor policy in 2021 doubled the price of 1GB of data from \$1 to \$2, further burdening citizens (Dodoo, 2022). Additionally, the Liberia Telecommunications Authority (LTA) worsens these challenges by frequently increasing taxes on GSM companies like Orange Liberia and Lonestar Cell MTN, leading to higher Internet prices and reduced services (The Liberian Investigator, 2024). Further, smartphones are prohibitively expensive in Liberia, with the cheapest devices consuming over 40% of the average monthly income (Broadband Commission, 2024). Moreover, gender inequality worsens the divide, as men are 49% more likely than women to access the Internet, placing Liberia 95th out of 100 countries for the gender gap in internet usage (A4AI, 2020). These findings align with the work of Amin et al., (2023) and Suherlan, (2023) demonstrating that the digital divide undermines citizens’ ability to participate in e-democracy. These challenges are amplified in Liberia’s struggling economy, where high poverty levels, weak infrastructure, and limited market competition make digital access a luxury for many. The gender gap further reflects deep-rooted social inequalities that restrict full democratic participation.

E – Participation: Is Digital Engagement in Liberia’s Democracy Meaningful and Inclusive?

The second indicator identified in the e-democracy framework by Kneuer (2016) is e-participation. This is about the various ways citizens utilise digital tools to engage with the government and participate in decision-making. This section aims to identify the specific challenges citizens face during e-participation and how they use different digital tools to enhance their participation in e-democracy in Liberia. The illustration is shown in Figure 5.

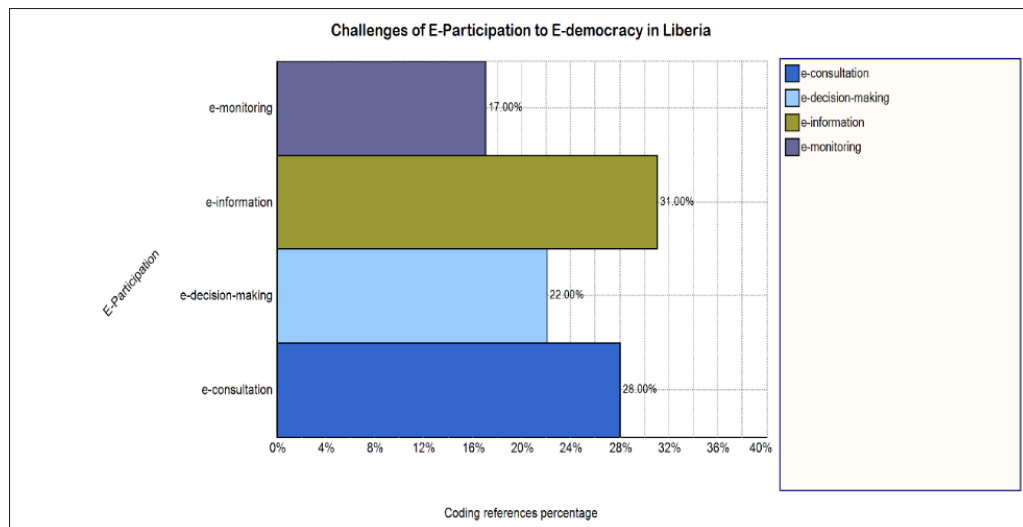


Figure 5. Challenges of E-participation to E-Democracy in Liberia

Source : Processed by the authors in NVIVO 12 plus⁵.

From Figure 5, e-information has the most significant challenges at 31%, reflecting that many Liberians struggle to use digital platforms to learn about government activities. In this study, we found that citizens have limited access to reliable and timely government information through online channels (see Figure 6).

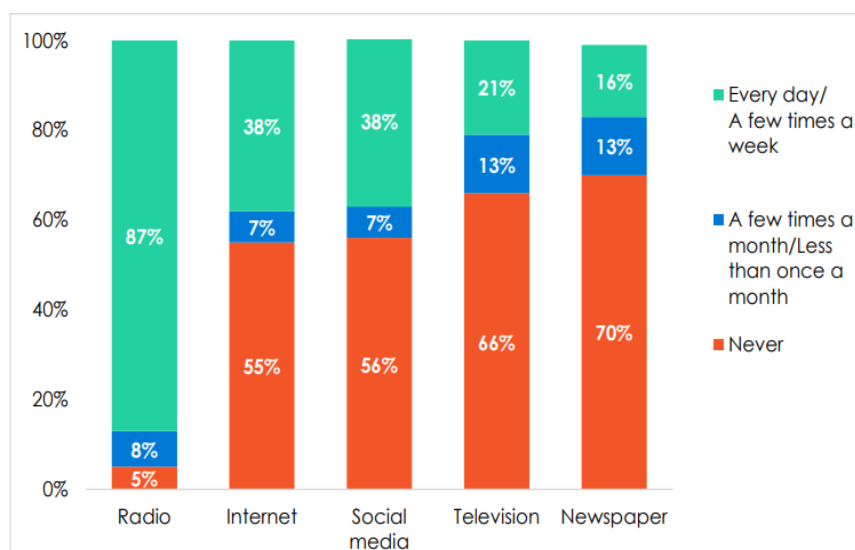


Figure 6. Sources of Government Information in Liberia

Source : *Afrobarometer*, (2021) ⁶.

As shown in Figure 6, radio is the dominant source of information for Liberians, with 87% using it daily or weekly, compared to 38% for the Internet and social media. This dominance is largely due to Liberia's post-conflict infrastructure challenges, high poverty rates, and the widespread accessibility of radio, which aligns with the country's strong oral communication culture and limited literacy levels.

⁵ This figure presents results on the specific barriers limiting citizens' ability to engage with government and participate in decision-making through digital tools in Liberia's e-democracy system

⁶ This figure presents data on where citizens primarily access government information, revealing limited reliance on online sources for timely and reliable updates

Conversely, 55% of citizens never use the Internet for information, highlighting a significant reliance on traditional media over digital platforms. However, there is a growing interest in digital media use, particularly among younger, urban and semi-urban populations, reflecting an emerging shift toward online engagement. Nonetheless, Segun (2024) argued that the heavy reliance of traditional media (e.g. radio) as a source of government information over digital media (e.g. internet) is a major barrier to the realisation of e-democracy, because citizens are less likely to have direct access to government updates, policies, or services. In the Liberian context, citizens often received filtered or second-hand information instead of engaging directly with authentic, timely government communications. As a result, they remain under-informed and unable to participate meaningfully in democratic processes, particularly amid the persistent intimidation of media institutions.

Further, e-consultation (28%) poses significant challenges to e-democracy in Liberia. We found that citizens struggle to provide feedback or opinions to the government through digital platforms due to limited Internet access and overreliance on traditional media like radio for information (see Figure 6). We also found that while some government institutions (e.g. ministries and agencies) are now using social media platforms, especially Facebook, to share information with the public. However, these institutions do not consider public opinions and feedback. This is consistent with the work of Ye et al., (2023) that these challenges discourage meaningful dialogue between the government and the people, hindering opportunities for collaborative problem-solving and policy-making, which are vital for inclusive e-democracy. In Liberia's top-down political culture, citizen input is often undervalued, and public institutions lack formal mechanisms to process feedback. This weakens digital dialogue and reinforces long-standing gaps between citizens and decision-makers.

Additionally, e-decision-making (22%) is another challenge. It was found that citizens face difficulties participating in governance decisions, such as signing e-petitions or engaging in online campaigns in Liberia. Shin et al., (2024) attributed these challenges to limited digital infrastructure, poor digital skills, and inadequate platforms for citizens' inclusion in decision-making. Wang et al., (2024) explained that these issues exclude citizens from having a tangible impact on governance, particularly marginalised groups, further weakening inclusive and participatory democracy. Lastly, e-monitoring (17%) is another significant challenge. In Liberia, citizens face limited access to reliable digital platforms to track government actions or provide feedback on programs and policies. We found that citizens face several obstacles, such as the lack of effective platforms for government transparency, limited trust in government accountability efforts, and technical barriers that prevent consistent monitoring (Afrobarometer, 2023). Lourenço (2023) highlighted that this inability to monitor government actions compromises citizens' ability to hold officials accountable, a crucial component of e-democracy. These challenges reflect Liberia's weak institutional responsiveness and limited civic space, where citizens, especially marginalised groups, have few opportunities to shape or scrutinise governance. This undermines democratic accountability and widens the gap between the government and its people.

E-Government Services: Are Digital Public Platforms in Liberia Efficient, Reliable, and Citizen-Centred?

E-government services are the final stage of the E-Democracy framework. Kneuer, (2016) highlighted that this indicator offers online tools to citizens as a government service with a focus on public service delivery, efficiency, and policy outcomes. This indicator views the role of the citizen as a consumer or client, which aims to reduce costs and make administrative transactions efficient, increasing transparency and reducing corruption for a participatory democracy. This section of the study focuses on identifying the challenges of e-government to e-democracy in Liberia. The results can be seen in Figure 7.

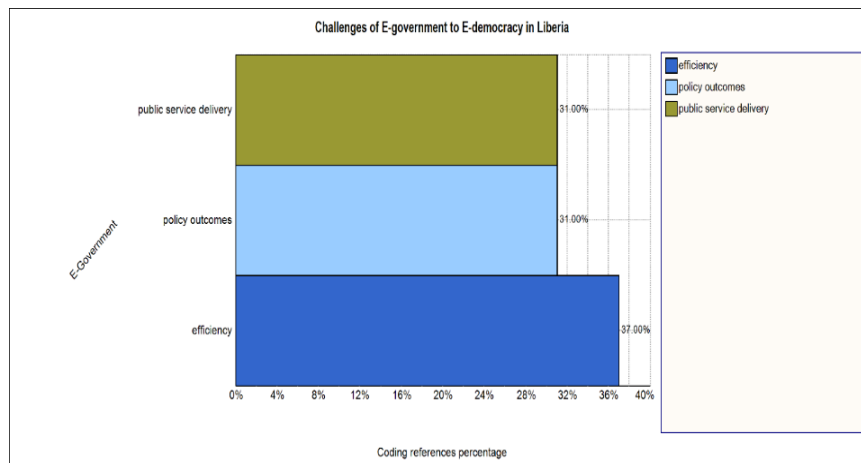


Figure 7. Challenges of E-government to E-Democracy in Liberia

Source : *Processed by the authors in NVivo 12 plus*⁷.

From Figure 7, public service delivery (31%) is a significant challenge to e-democracy in Liberia. Kneuer (2016) described this as the process by which governments use digital tools to provide services, such as certificates, business registrations, online tax payments, and bill settlements. Liberia has attempted to address this issue by developing official websites like the Liberia Revenue Authority (see <https://revenue.lra.gov.lr/>), the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (see <https://www.mfdp.gov.lr/>), and the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare (see <https://moh.gov.lr/>). These platforms include e-procurement systems aimed at reducing corruption and enhancing transparency. Additionally, the e-Liberia portal (see <https://eliberia.gov.lr/>) was launched recently to serve as a one-stop shop for accessing services such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, and passports.

However, we found that most services on these websites remain inaccessible digitally or are nonexistent, forcing citizens to visit offices physically. These inefficiencies lead to long travel distances, extra costs, and often bribery. As a result, citizens waste time and lose trust in public services. Internet access and digital literacy pose further challenges. Connectivity is weak nationwide and almost nonexistent in rural areas, excluding rural citizens, while urban populations benefit more. The existing literature, such as Loretto & Ukeje, (2020) and Umbach & Tkalec, (2022) highlighted that without equitable digital service delivery, public trust erodes, undermining e-democracy goals. This means that Liberia's limited public service delivery via digital platforms reduces citizen engagement and accountability. It has created disparities that weaken democratic participation.

Efficiency (37%), as shown in Figure 7, is the biggest challenge. Kneuer (2016) described efficiency as improving government resource use to reduce waste, save costs, and make services faster and more transparent. However, we found significant inefficiencies in Liberia's public service delivery, largely due to traditional bureaucratic processes. Obtaining services like passports, birth certificates, police clearance, or driver's licenses often takes weeks or months, requiring multiple trips to government offices due to poor systems. Bribes are frequently demanded to expedite the process. Jia et al. (2024) suggested that a fully digitalised system could address these challenges as envisioned under e-government. For example, online platforms for processing passports, renewing licenses, and paying taxes could save time, reduce costs, and minimise corruption, ensuring greater efficiency (Luna et al.,

⁷ This figure presents results on the key limitations of digital public service delivery in Liberia, highlighting issues of inefficiency, unreliability, and limited transparency in e-government platforms.

2024). However, many such systems are either unavailable or poorly implemented in Liberia. Citizens attempting to access ministry websites often encounter frequent crashes due to poor internet infrastructure or find services nonexistent, leading to frustration. Studies by Li & Shang (2023), Nguyen et al. (2024), and Ramadhan & Pribadi (2024) confirmed that efficient e-government systems increase trust in democratic institutions by reducing corruption and red tape. Thus, Liberia's failure to achieve efficiency undermines its democratic credibility, as citizens perceive digital tools as ineffective and revert to traditional, non-transparent methods.

Lastly, policy outcomes (31%) are a significant challenge. Kneuer (2016) defined policy outcomes as how well e-government leads to better governance and citizen satisfaction through tangible results. In Liberia, some digital platforms have been introduced, but poor implementation hinders their effectiveness. For instance, the Liberia Revenue Authority launched an online business registration system, but entrepreneurs often have to visit the agency physically to complete applications (Reporter, 2022). We also found that the e-Liberia portal, launched as a one-stop online platform, has most of its services, such as birth certificates, driver's licenses, and scholarship applications, still unavailable digitally. Furthermore, many government websites are outdated or non-functional, forcing citizens to rely on manual, traditional methods that contradict the purpose of digital transformation. Recent studies by Bahamonde & Trasberg (2021) and Benlahcene et al. (2024) confirmed that effective policy outcomes from digital governance can improve trust and promote citizen participation in decision-making. Similarly, Ilieva et al. (2024) emphasized that without user-friendly and reliable e-government platforms, citizens will perceive digital tools as ineffective and revert to inefficient traditional systems. Liberia's failure to deliver impactful policy outcomes undermines participatory e-democracy, as citizens lose trust in digital initiatives and remain disengaged from democratic processes.

Critical Analysis: What Undermines the Foundations of E-Democracy in Liberia?

The results of the three indicators of e-democracy in this study – free and equal access, e-participation, and e-government – are closely interconnected, and the challenges in Liberia are deeply linked. The most significant issue identified is free and equal access. Without free internet and affordable options, citizens cannot fully utilise digital platforms. This limits their ability to engage in online discussions, criticise the government, participate in decision-making, or access government information (e-participation). Free and equal access also influences e-government because when people cannot afford the internet and when infrastructure is weak, they are unable to use digital services effectively. Even when platforms are available, poor service delivery and a lack of trust in the system discourage engagement. This creates a cycle: poor infrastructure and high internet costs restrict access, while ineffective digital platforms diminish trust and reduce participation. Compared to the other two indicators, free and equal access is the foundation. Without it, e-participation and e-government cannot succeed.

Nevertheless, there are encouraging developments that show a gradual shift toward digital democratic engagement. For example, the Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (2010), the Open Government Partnership (OGP) in 2016, the e-Government Strategy Roadmap (2014–2018), and the e-Liberia Portal all provide a legal and institutional foundation for digital transparency, citizen access to public information, and improved service delivery. Furthermore, there is a growing trend of government institutions, including ministries, agencies, lawmakers, local governments, and even political parties, using social media platforms, mainly Facebook, to disseminate information to the public. This new practice has made government and public communication, to a certain extent, a bit more immediate and accessible, especially for digital media users. At the same time, citizens, particularly youth and those in urban areas, are increasingly engaging in political discourse, accessing public information, and

interacting with officials online, signalling a positive trajectory for digital civic participation. Although these practices are not yet widespread, and there are implementation challenges, they suggest growing digital responsiveness and offer important entry points for strengthening e-democracy in Liberia in the near future.

4. CONCLUSION

This study examined the key challenges facing the realisation of e-democracy in Liberia, particularly its capacity to promote inclusive and meaningful citizen participation. Using Kneuer's (2016) framework, the analysis focused on three core indicators: free and equal access, e-participation, and e-government. First, limited access remains the most significant barrier. Weak legal protections for online expressions, intimidation, poor infrastructure, high connectivity costs, and low digital literacy continue to exclude large segments of the population. Second, meaningful e-participation is constrained by the absence of reliable and timely government information and the limited use of interactive digital platforms. Traditional media, especially radio, remains the dominant source of information, reducing opportunities for direct online civic engagement. Third, Liberia's e-government services are still underdeveloped. Most platforms are either unreliable or poorly maintained, pushing citizens toward slow, opaque, and paper-based administrative processes. Collectively, these findings show that while digital democracy is evolving in Liberia, significant legal, structural and systemic barriers continue to limit inclusive participation and the realisation of its full potential.

The findings of this study present actionable insights for policymakers in Liberia. First, to bridge the digital divide, the government should subsidise internet access and expand infrastructure in rural and underserved areas. The promotion of national digital literacy programs is equally essential, especially for youth and first-time users. Second, strengthening legal protections for internet freedom, whistleblowers, and online expression will enhance citizens' trust and willingness to engage digitally. Finally, the development of user-friendly and reliable e-government platforms, integrated across all government institutions and accessible via mobile devices, will ensure that digital services are not only available but effective in promoting transparency, responsiveness, and public accountability.

This study also extends the application of Kneuer's e-democracy framework to the context of a developing, post-conflict democracy, revealing how the interdependence of its three indicators is shaped by political, socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural realities. Our findings confirm that free and equal access is not just a precondition but a structural foundation without which the other indicators cannot work. Furthermore, it shows that when governments and citizens use social media to share information or interact online, it can be an early sign that e-democracy is starting to take shape. However, this study faces limitations. Future research should employ mixed-methods approaches, combining surveys with in-depth interviews to quantitatively measure the level of e-participation or qualitatively explore the perceived barriers and motivations from the citizens' perspective.

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