The Role of E-Government in Reinforcing Public Service Principles

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Received:10/10/2025 ; Accepted: 25/09/2026; Published: 07/10/2026

Abstract:
Digital transformation has become an imperative for rationalizing public service delivery, elevating service quality, and insulating public service institutions from disruptions generated by sudden crises. This article analyzes how the digitalization of public administration can operationalize the classical principles governing public services—equality, continuity, and adaptability through procedural standardization, expanded accessibility, and the reduction of discretionary human intermediation that often enables favoritism, clientelism, and bribery. It further argues that the pursuit of quality necessarily requires diagnosing implementation constraints. In Algeria, the digital turn remains hindered by infrastructural fragilities, territorial and social digital divides, limited technological capacity and training, fragmented legal–institutional framing, and persistent cybersecurity risks. The study concludes that effective e-administration requires coherent regulation, robust ICT infrastructure, organizational reengineering, and sustained human-capital development.
Keywords: digitalization – e-administration – public-service – equality– Algeria

1. *Introduction*

Digitalization of public administration has become an indispensable policy choice for improving public service delivery within a framework that minimizes procedural complexity and administrative delay. Consequently, many governments have shifted toward electronic public services as a pathway to enhance institutional performance and to promote a governance environment increasingly associated with transparency, accountability, and participatory interaction between administrations and users.

The primary rationale of e-administration lies in facilitating access to public services from two complementary angles. From the administration's perspective, digital systems promise cost rationalization, process optimization, and stronger monitoring capacities. From the users' perspective, they offer faster, simpler, and more predictable services that reduce time, effort, and transaction costs. In this sense, the persistence of traditional bureaucratic practices—often characterized by paperwork, discretionary treatment, and slow procedures—has become a structural obstacle to the modernization of administrative action and to the improvement of public service performance.

The importance of this topic stems from the fact that digitalization is not merely a technical upgrade; it is a governance reform that can reshape the operationalization of core public service principles, notably equality, continuity, and adaptability. By standardizing procedures, reducing

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direct discretionary interaction, and expanding access beyond constraints of time and place, digital tools may contribute to limiting discrimination and curbing informal practices such as favoritism, brokerage, and corruption. Yet, the effectiveness of digitalization remains contingent upon multiple institutional, legal, infrastructural, and human factors that may either enable or constrain its impact.

Against this background, the article addresses the following research problem: To what extent can the digitalization of public administration be considered a fundamental mechanism for ensuring the proper functioning of public services and fulfilling their normative requirements? What are the key conditions for activating this mechanism, and what obstacles hinder its implementation?

This study pursues three main objectives. First, it seeks to clarify the conceptual foundations of administrative digitalization and its relationship to public service governance. Second, it aims to assess the extent to which digitalization contributes to the effective realization of public service principles—particularly equality, continuity, and adaptability. Third, it examines the main prerequisites and constraints of this transition, with a specific focus on the Algerian context, in order to identify the conditions under which digital reform can translate into measurable improvements in service quality.

Structurally, the article is organized into two main parts. The first part examines the effects of digitalizing public administration on the operationalization of public service principles. The second part discusses the requirements of this transition by highlighting mechanisms of implementation and the principal obstacles—technical, organizational, legal, and human—that may impede the achievement of a high-quality digital public service.

2. *The Impact of Administrative Digitalization on the Principles Governing Public Service Operation*

Digital transformation has become an urgent necessity, primarily intended to rationalize public service delivery and enhance its quality. It also helps shield the public service system from crises arising from exceptional, sudden, and unforeseeable circumstances, given that this mode of service provision does not rely exclusively on personnel and physical infrastructures, but rather depends to a significant extent on contemporary technologies. Accordingly, this section examines the concept of e-administration and its role in safeguarding the foundational principles underpinning the operation of public services.

2.*1 The Digital-Transition Mechanism of Public Service Institutions*

E-administration constitutes a strategic instrument for augmenting the performance and efficiency of conventional administration (Kadouri, 2010, p. 157). It is frequently characterized as an administration without fixed place, time, persons, or paper—one that is no longer governed by the classical bureaucratic model (Zarzar, 2013, p. 30). This contemporary mode of administrative governance emerged with the diffusion of the Internet and the rapid migration of numerous private-sector activities toward digital service delivery (Aliyan, 2012, p. 31), a shift that has rendered the public sector's entry into this domain not merely desirable but structurally inevitable (Al-Hilu, 2007, p. 31).

2.1.1 Defining E-Administration

E-administration has been variously conceptualized as an administrative system premised on the use of computers, Internet networks, and extranets to support and enhance access to

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information and services, and to deliver them to citizens and institutions with transparency and high efficiency. It has also been described as an integrated electronic system that relies on information and communication technologies (ICTs) to convert manual administrative work into operations executed through advanced digital techniques. Furthermore, it has been defined as the transformation of all conventional administrative tasks and services into electronic processes performed with high speed and extreme precision through e-administration technologies—often referred to as "paperless administration"—wherein Internet technologies and business networks are mobilized to execute core managerial functions such as e-planning, e-organization, e-leadership, and e-control. Another definition frames e-administration as the deployment of ICTs to develop and improve the management of public affairs, operationalized through the delivery of official governmental services—whether between governmental entities or between such entities and their users—via an information-based mode grounded in Internet infrastructures and supported by security guarantees that protect both the beneficiary and the service-providing authority.

On this basis, e-administration may be understood as a modern managerial paradigm mandated by the technological revolution that has shaped its conceptual architecture. It has been adopted by institutions across different sectors and mandates to facilitate a transition from traditional administrative management to digital governance through the strategic use of modern technologies—both to manage the citizen–institution interface and to reinforce inter-institutional coordination and integration.

2.1.2 Principles of E-Administration

E-administration is grounded in a set of core principles, most notably:

- **Quality of citizen-facing services**, achieved by fostering an institutional environment anchored in technological skills and competencies capable of producing evidence-based outcomes and proposing context-appropriate solutions to administrative problems.
- **Results-oriented management**, aimed at maximizing efficiency and effectiveness in service provision through the execution of programs and projects, translating policy ideas into measurable outputs and generating tangible gains—particularly by reducing citizens' burdens in time, cost, and effort.
- **Usability and universal accessibility**, through reliance on technological tools and reduced dependence on human and structural intermediaries; modern communication instruments—constituting the backbone of e-administration—enable equal access to services with maximal procedural simplicity.
- **Cost containment**, by prioritizing investment in technological instruments and leveraging competitive dynamics among service providers to deliver services at lower prices.
- **Continuous adaptation**, as a condition for keeping pace with accelerated digital changes in pursuit of higher-quality service delivery.

2.1.3 Objectives of Transitioning to Digital Administrative Management

When transitioning to digital modalities of service delivery, the administration seeks to achieve several objectives, most importantly:

- **Adopting modern digital management practices** in order to dismantle bureaucratic inertia and secure rapid, high-quality services.

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- **Enhancing administrative transparency**, by widening access to information for relevant stakeholders through technological channels.
- **Rationalizing public expenditure**, and optimizing the use of public funds in service provision through modern technological tools for both management and service delivery.

2.2 The Role of the Digital Transition in Operationalizing Public Service Principles

Public service institutions rely, in the provision of services to the public, on a set of normative principles. Among the most prominent are the so-called *Rolland principles* (*les principes/lois de Rolland*), which traditionally encompass the principle of continuity of public service, the principle of adaptability (mutability) of public service, and the principle of equality of users before public services (Chapus, 1995, p. 537). For public service delivery to attain the level required by the public interest, it must be structured and exercised in compliance with these principles.

2.2.1 *The Effect of Digital Transition on the Principle of Equality of Users Before Public Service*

This principle constitutes a direct extension of the broader principle of equality before the law, pursuant to which individuals are to be treated equally with respect to rights and obligations, as well as in relation to public burdens (Al-Shara, 2017, p. 37). Accordingly, equality before public services implies that all persons should have access to public services without exception, impediment, or arbitrariness, and that services must be delivered under equivalent conditions and circumstances, free from discriminatory treatment.

The digital transition of public service institutions is expected to enhance the practical realization of this principle by reducing differential treatment among users and by curbing the dysfunctions often associated with traditional administration, such as brokerage, favoritism, clientelism, and bribery. In addition, electronic public service delivery tends to standardize procedural pathways and requirements, thereby placing all users on an equal footing in terms of compliance with procedures and access to outcomes. This is largely because the user–administration interaction is mediated through digital interfaces rather than direct human discretion, which may otherwise generate informal constraints that undermine the effective application of equality.

2.2.2 The Effect of Digital Transition on the Principle of Continuity of Public Service

Since public services are designed to satisfy collective needs in pursuit of the public interest, their operation must be regular and uninterrupted. Without continuity—particularly in essential services (e.g., policing, gendarmerie, justice, transportation, postal services, and telecommunications)—the continuity of the state itself is compromised; and without such continuity, the state's existence is fundamentally jeopardized. Public service, in this sense, constitutes a core institutional component linked to the state's stability, capacity, and endurance, which necessitates the preservation of its operational regularity (Lachaume, Boiteau, & Pauliate, 2000, p. 276).

This principle is arguably among those most directly affected by electronic service systems. Digitalization can transform continuity from mere regular provision into a form of functional permanence, given that e-services are not structurally constrained by time or place and can remain accessible regardless of the circumstances confronting the public service institution.

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Moreover, electronic public service systems substantially strengthen institutional resilience in the face of unexpected crises that may disrupt or even fully paralyze service provision through conventional channels.

2.2.3 The Effect of Digital Transition on the Principle of Adaptability and Suitability

This principle requires public services to respond to evolving collective needs and to the shifting content of the public interest (Espalugas, 1998). Economic, social, and political conditions are continuously changing, and thus the nature, scope, and modalities of public services must remain dynamic, adapting to such transformations.

Because public service institutions are inherently oriented toward satisfying collective needs, public authorities must keep pace with developments in the technical means and operational methods through which services are delivered. The contemporary technological revolution imposes, therefore, an imperative of institutional adaptability: public services must align with these digital transformations and recalibrate their delivery instruments accordingly, so as to meet citizens' rising expectations for timely, reliable, and high-quality services.

3. Requirements for the Digital Transition of the Public Service Institution

Adherence by the public service institution to the principles that govern its operation constitutes a necessary condition for fulfilling the purposes for which it was established. Accordingly, adopting digitalization-based management modalities as part of the modernization of public service institutions can, on the one hand, materially enhance the quality of public service delivery, and, on the other hand, contribute to insulating the public service system against unforeseen future crises.

3.1 The Necessity of Digitalizing the Public Service Institution to Attain Public Service Quality

The reform of the public service institution is contingent upon multiple factors, foremost among which is the imperative to improve the relationship between the institution and its users by enhancing the quality of services provided. The effectiveness of public service delivery is commonly assessed through the degree of user satisfaction with the service level offered. In this regard, there is little doubt that the reality of public service delivery in Algeria has been marked by a genuine crisis in service quality—one that no longer responds adequately to contemporary demands despite repeated reform attempts (Lachaume et al., 2000, p. 276).

The pursuit of public service quality necessarily presupposes an accurate diagnosis of the impediments that obstruct reform. While reform initiatives are primarily designed to eliminate the dysfunctions afflicting public service institutions, they simultaneously confront structural constraints that prevent attainment of the required standards—standards imposed by recent transformations and by Algeria's increasing openness. The inability of public service institutions to keep pace with the current technological revolution has resulted from several interrelated factors, including infrastructural deficiencies, limited material and human capacity to master the technological dimension, insufficient institutional framing, and other constraints. Recent developments have significantly expanded the demand for public services and intensified societal insistence on service quality. Consequently, the transition away from classical bureaucratic administration is no longer an optional policy choice but rather a structural necessity imposed upon public service institutions. Indeed, attaining an acceptable threshold of effectiveness—commensurate with the modern transformations experienced by

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Algeria—requires that public service institutions open themselves to contemporary technologies.

In essence, the digital transition aims to improve and rationalize public service quality through the modernization of public service institutions, bringing administration closer to citizens and enhancing performance through technological instruments. Such instruments broaden the base of beneficiaries due to their availability and ease of access—unconstrained by time and place—and due to the speed with which services can be requested and obtained.

3.2 Mechanisms of the Digital Transition in Public Service Institutions and Their Constraints

Following Algeria's internal and external liberalization in the early 1990s, a noticeable lag emerged in the Algerian administration's assimilation of modern technologies—technologies that many countries had already adopted along the path toward building e-government. This delay produced a digital gap between Algeria and its external environment. Early governmental attempts to integrate technological tools remained modest; yet the difficulties faced by public service institutions in Algeria reveal a tangible fragility in governance, particularly in times of crisis. This context has underscored the strategic importance of adopting e-administration as a mode of public service delivery capable of safeguarding continuity regardless of circumstances.

3.2.1 Algeria's Experience in Digitalizing the Public Service Institution

The e-Algeria 2008–2013[1] program constituted the first ambitious initiative to adopt an e-administration model. It was launched by the Ministry of Post and Information and Communication Technologies and was preceded by consultations with public institutions and administrations, public and private economic operators, universities, research centers, and professional associations active in the ICT field, with a view to proposing and debating reform ideas.

The e-Algeria project articulated a set of objectives intended to be achieved by 2013, most notably: modernizing administration through the integration of ICTs to bring the administration closer to citizens; creating enabling conditions for the development of the ICT industry by establishing high-speed, high-quality infrastructure; adopting a program that prioritizes higher education and vocational training in the technological domain; and developing the legislative and regulatory framework necessary for e-government.

Following the initiation of studies and the gradual adoption of the project's orientations, efforts to modernize public service delivery expanded through the incorporation of modern

[1] The principal objectives of this strategy may be summarized as follows:

- accelerating the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) within public administration;
- accelerating the use of ICTs within public-sector institutions;
- developing incentive mechanisms and procedures capable of enabling citizens to benefit from ICT equipment and networks;
- fostering the development of a knowledge-based economy;
- strengthening research in the fields of technological development and innovation;
- upgrading the legal framework (legislative and regulatory).

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technologies—particularly within the sectors of interior affairs and local authorities[2], justice[3], post and telecommunications[4], social security[5], and other sectors that have sought to institutionalize and develop this modality of public service provision[6].

3.2.2 Obstacles to the Effective Materialization of the Digital Transition

Several categories of constraints continue to impede the operationalization of digital transition within public service institutions:

- Legal constraints: notably, the absence of a clear, coherent, and harmonized legal framework governing digital administrative action and electronic public service delivery.
- Technical and financial constraints: reflected in substantial technological delays resulting from weak infrastructure, especially regarding network quality; the persistence of a digital divide across national territories and among citizens due to uneven territorial coverage and unequal access to internet services (partly due to high costs); as well as elevated equipment costs and difficulties related to maintaining and troubleshooting e-administration software systems.
- Human constraints: manifested in a quasi-resistance to modern technologies and an institutional inability to abandon entrenched bureaucratic routines. This is partly

[2] The Ministry of Interior and Local Communities has been among the earliest sectors to adopt this mode of public service delivery, particularly in the field of civil status administration. This has been achieved through the digitalization of the civil status register, relying on an advanced database that contains all civil-status information related to citizens and is designed for secure storage and retrieval, thereby facilitating access to comprehensive data. The sector has also modernized identity documents—most notably the biometric national identity card and biometric passport—as well as implementing electronic registration for the pilgrimage (Hajj), among other public service domains.

[3] The Ministry of Justice has likewise initiated several projects aimed at modernizing the justice service by strengthening the technological dimension of public service delivery. To this end, it established an entity within the Ministry specifically tasked with sectoral modernization. This has included the development of the Ministry's information system, the adoption of electronic authentication for documents, and the use of videoconferencing technologies during judicial procedures. In addition, an electronic certification mechanism has been introduced, enabling users to obtain judicial documents bearing electronic signatures via the Internet, alongside other contemporary techniques intended to improve the efficiency and accessibility of justice-related services.

[4] The postal sector has benefited substantially from the modernization of public services, particularly through facilitating and digitizing financial transactions associated with postal accounts, and by introducing electronic withdrawal cards that allow users to conduct a wide range of financial operations remotely.

[5] In the domain of social security, the *Chifa* (electronic health insurance) card has been introduced, enabling insured persons to access electronic public services connected to the card through digital platforms.

[6] The National Observatory of Public Service is composed of five high-level figures selected for their expertise from among senior officials who have held top positions within state institutions, in addition to representatives from several ministries, including Finance; Industry and Mines; Energy; Commerce; Housing, Urban Planning and the City; Transport; National Education; Labour, Employment and Social Security; as well as the Ministries of Health and of Post and ICT. It also includes representatives from the General Directorate of the Civil Service and Administrative Reform, the National Economic and Social Council, and a representative of the National Office of Statistics, in addition to the presidents of two provincial (wilaya) people's assemblies and two municipal councils, representatives of nationally oriented associations, and a representative of the media. The Observatory may also draw on any person on the basis of their competence. Its members are appointed for a renewable three-year term by decision of the Minister of Interior, upon the proposal of the institutions and bodies to which they belong.

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attributable to digital illiteracy—particularly among older administrative cadres—combined with the limited availability of training programs and reskilling initiatives designed to adapt personnel to modern technological tools. Additionally, concerns related to information security persist, especially fears of system breaches and the resulting risks of losing privacy, confidentiality, data integrity, and exposure to forgery, manipulation, or sabotage (Fartas, 2016, p. 320).

3.2.3 Measures Undertaken to Improve Public Service Delivery Through Digital Transition

The 2020 constitutional amendment represented a significant step toward improving public service delivery by constitutionally entrenching the principles governing the operation of public service institutions. Article 27 of the Constitution stipulates that public service institutions shall guarantee equal access to services for all users without discrimination, and that they operate according to the principles of continuity, continuous adaptability, nationwide territorial coverage, and the ضمان حد أدنى من الخدمة (guaranteeing a minimum level of service).

This constitutional framework, which reinforced the imperative of upgrading public service quality, must be accompanied by an enabling legislative climate that supports the effective adoption of e-administration as a contemporary mechanism for public service delivery. This entails establishing the legal foundations for using modern technologies in the management of public service institutions, while simultaneously ensuring safeguards for their use and protecting both users and the administration from threats arising from breaches of information security.

In the same reform trajectory, the establishment of the National Observatory of the Public Service Institution constitutes an executive initiative intended to help steer public service institutions in Algeria out of the service-delivery crisis they face. The Observatory is an advisory body chaired by the Minister of Interior and Local Communities. It is tasked with promoting and developing the public service institution and the administration more broadly, through consultation with ministerial departments and other relevant institutions, by evaluating implementation of the national policy, and by proposing rules and measures aimed at improving the organization and functioning of public service institutions in a manner aligned with economic, social, and technological developments and with users' needs.

Within the modernization process, the Observatory studies and proposes measures that can contribute to enabling administrations, institutions, and public bodies to implement their modernization programs. It also proposes incentives to develop and generalize e-administration, and supports the establishment of effective communication systems to ensure that citizens are informed about public services, to improve access to information, to collect users' opinions and proposals, and to respond to complaints.

The Observatory's work is structured around periodic reports submitted to the Prime Minister and an annual report submitted to the President of the Republic. These reports include proposals and measures debated by members and focused on identifying operational shortcomings and proposing solutions to enhance the performance of public administrations.

3.2.4 Essential Conditions for the Digital Transition of Public Service Institutions

Where there is a genuine political and administrative will to implement digital transition as a modern modality of public service delivery, several requirements are indispensable:

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- Establishing a facilitating legal framework that enables digital transition within a stable and predictable normative environment.
- Investing in material and infrastructural capacity, particularly by improving internet network quality—which constitutes the critical backbone of digital transition—providing modern hardware and software, and investing in robust databases protected against breaches that threaten information security and that may directly affect national security as well as individual security.
- Investing in human capacity by changing institutional mindsets through broader internet connectivity, encouraging use, raising awareness of its benefits and its positive impact on public service quality and accessibility, and—most critically—developing the technological competencies of administrative personnel, who represent the cornerstone of the transition to e-administration, by strengthening their digital skills, expertise, and professional readiness.

4. *CONCLUSION*

The digitalization of public service institutions constitutes a strategic lever for upgrading public service delivery and enhancing administrative credibility in the eyes of citizens. Beyond its technical dimension, e-administration represents a contemporary paradigm of public governance that seeks to reconfigure the relationship between the administration and its users by simplifying procedures, reducing transaction costs, and strengthening transparency and traceability. In this sense, the shift toward digital public services is not merely a modernization of tools; rather, it is a structural reform capable—when properly implemented—of improving performance, limiting bureaucratic inertia, and reinforcing citizens' trust through more predictable, standardized, and accessible service delivery.

At the normative level, the digital transition can contribute to the effective operationalization of the foundational principles governing public services. By limiting discretionary interaction and ensuring procedural uniformity, digital interfaces may reduce discriminatory treatment and curb informal practices that often undermine the principle of equality. Likewise, the availability of services beyond the constraints of time and place strengthens continuity, particularly during exceptional circumstances in which conventional service channels may be disrupted. Moreover, the adaptability of public services becomes more feasible when administrations possess digital infrastructures that allow them to recalibrate procedures, update service workflows, and respond more rapidly to evolving social needs and policy priorities. Hence, digitalization has the potential to translate the classical principles of public service from abstract legal requirements into tangible administrative practices experienced by users in their daily interactions with public institutions.

Nevertheless, the Algerian experience illustrates that the transition from policy ambition to effective implementation remains complex and uneven. While Algeria has launched several initiatives intended to institutionalize digital governance—most notably through ambitious national programs and sectoral modernization efforts—the outcomes on the ground have often been modest. This gap between strategic intent and practical realization reflects a set of intertwined constraints: the absence of a sufficiently coherent and harmonized legal framework, infrastructural and financial limitations that weaken connectivity and technological readiness, and significant human challenges related to digital skills, organizational culture, and resistance

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to abandoning entrenched bureaucratic routines. In addition, persistent concerns about cybersecurity, data integrity, and confidentiality generate reluctance among both administrators and users, thereby reducing uptake and weakening the effectiveness of digital platforms.

Accordingly, the consolidation of digital public services in Algeria requires more than isolated technological projects; it requires an integrated reform ecosystem. This ecosystem should include a stable and enabling legal environment that regulates electronic transactions, clarifies institutional responsibilities, and provides safeguards for users' rights and data protection. It also necessitates substantial investment in technological infrastructure—particularly network quality, interoperable platforms, and secure databases—as well as a thorough administrative reengineering process to align workflows, organizational structures, and service standards with the logic of digital governance. Equally crucial is the human dimension: the success of e-administration depends on sustained training, reskilling, and capacity-building programs for public employees, alongside incentives that encourage innovation and accountability within public institutions.

Finally, citizen-centered digitalization cannot be achieved without cultivating a broad societal culture of digital use. This entails awareness-raising initiatives, enhanced digital inclusion policies, and practical measures to reduce the digital divide across regions and social groups. Only through such multidimensional reforms can digitalization evolve from an aspirational discourse into an operational reality that genuinely enhances public service quality, reinforces the principles of equality, continuity, and adaptability, and contributes to the modernization of public administration in a manner consistent with contemporary governance requirements.

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