Burlacu, S., Madubueze, M. H. C. (2026). From Governance Quality to Professional Public Service Delivery: An Integrated Institutional Analysis of Romania and Nigeria, 2010-2024. *Administratie si Management Public*, 47, 163-183. https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2026.47-09

From Governance Quality to Professional Public Service Delivery: An Integrated Institutional Analysis of Romania and Nigeria, 2010-2024

Sorin BURLACU[1], Madumelu H.C. MADUBUEZE[2]

***Abstract*:** The capacity of governments to translate governance principles into effective administrative action remains one of the defining challenges of contemporary public administration, particularly as digital transformation, fiscal pressures, and rising citizen expectations increase the complexity of public service delivery. While governance quality is widely regarded as a key determinant of administrative performance, existing research has generally examined governance indicators, institutional capacity, and digital government as separate analytical dimensions, leaving the mechanisms through which they jointly shape professional public service delivery insufficiently understood, particularly in comparisons between European Union member states and Sub-Saharan African countries. This study addresses this gap by proposing an integrated analytical framework in which governance quality constitutes the institutional foundation of administrative performance, institutional capacity functions as the operational mechanism translating governance principles into administrative action, and digital government acts as an enabling factor strengthening institutional effectiveness. The framework is applied through a comparative longitudinal analysis of Romania and Nigeria over the period 2010-2024, selected as a Most Different Systems Design capturing contrasting institutional, political and socio-economic trajectories evaluated through internationally comparable indicators. The empirical analysis relies on secondary data from the Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank), the United Nations E-Government Development Index and its constituent sub-indices, the Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International), World Bank Open Data, and official national policy and digital transformation strategies. The results show that Romania consistently outperformed Nigeria across all six WGI dimensions throughout the period, with the gap dominated by Political Stability, while the narrowest gap was recorded in Government Effectiveness — on which Romania's own average performance remained weak — indicating that the divergence between the two countries is driven primarily by differences in political and security context rather than by administrative capacity alone. The findings are primarily relevant for comparative public administration scholars and for policymakers designing

[1] Associate Professor PhD, Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Faculty of Administration and Public Management, Bucharest, Romania, e-mail: sburlacu@amp.ase.ro, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0189-2472

[2] Lecturer PhD, Department of Public Administration, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Anambra State, Nigeria, e-mail: mh.madubueze@coou.edu.ng, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5993-1406

evidence-informed governance and digital transformation reforms in emerging administrative systems such as Romania and Nigeria.

Keywords: governance quality; institutional capacity; digital government; public service delivery.

JEL: H83, O38, P51.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2026.47-09

Introduction

The capacity of governments to transform governance principles into effective administrative action has become one of the defining challenges of contemporary public administration. Rapid technological change, increasing societal expectations, fiscal pressures and the growing complexity of public problems require public institutions not only to formulate sound policies but also to implement them effectively, particularly under conditions of crisis and turbulence that test administrative resilience (Ansell et al., 2021). Governments are increasingly evaluated on their ability to implement policies efficiently, coordinate institutional actors and deliver public services that generate tangible public value. In this context, governance quality has emerged as a central concept because it captures the institutional conditions that enable governments to formulate sound policies, ensure accountability, uphold the rule of law and provide effective public services (Rhodes, 1996; Kaufmann et al., 2011; Fukuyama, 2013), and improving it has accordingly become a strategic objective of reforms promoted by the OECD, the United Nations and the World Bank, all of which emphasise that sustainable development depends on the effectiveness of public institutions responsible for policy implementation (OECD, 2023; United Nations, 2024).

Although governance quality is widely recognised as a key determinant of government performance, increasing evidence suggests that governance principles alone do not guarantee effective administrative outcomes: countries may achieve comparable scores on governance indicators while displaying substantial differences in policy implementation and service delivery. This indicates that governance quality should be understood not only as a normative framework but also as the capacity of public organisations to transform principles into concrete action, prompting increased research attention to institutional capacity - the ability to mobilise resources, coordinate actors, implement policies and adapt to changing conditions (Evans, 1995; Grindle, 1996; Andrews et al., 2017; Peters, 2018). Institutional capacity thus functions as the operational mechanism through which governance quality is translated into administrative performance; rather than independent concepts, the two constitute complementary dimensions of public administration, jointly determining governments' ability to deliver professional, responsive and sustainable public services - a relationship that becomes particularly visible when

comparing systems operating under different institutional, political and socio-economic conditions.

The accelerating digital transformation of the public sector has further expanded this debate. Digital government is no longer understood merely as the adoption of information and communication technologies, but as playing a strategic role in institutional coordination, policy implementation, transparency and citizen-centred service delivery (Mergel et al., 2019; OECD, 2020; United Nations, 2024) - an enabling mechanism that reinforces institutional capacity rather than an independent reform objective. However, its effectiveness depends on the institutional context in which it is implemented, including leadership capacity, organisational culture and administrative resources; similar digital initiatives may therefore produce significantly different outcomes across countries with different levels of governance quality and institutional capacity.

Despite this substantial literature, important gaps remain. Existing studies have generally examined governance indicators (Kaufmann et al., 2011), institutional capacity (Evans, 1995; Andrews et al., 2017) and digital government (Mergel et al., 2019; OECD, 2020) separately, and more recent contributions, while highlighting the growing importance of digital transformation and governance reform, have continued to address these dimensions in isolation (Androniceanu, 2023; Zambrano-Yépez et al., 2023). Relatively limited attention has been devoted to explaining how governance quality, institutional capacity and digital government interact to influence professional public service delivery, and comparative research has predominantly focused on OECD countries or regionally similar administrative traditions, leaving systematic comparisons between European Union member states and Sub-Saharan African countries scarce. An analytical framework capable of integrating these three dimensions into a coherent explanatory perspective, applicable across diverse administrative contexts, is therefore needed.

Romania and Nigeria provide an analytically valuable basis for such a comparison because they combine substantial institutional differences with a shared commitment to improving governance quality, strengthening institutional capacity and modernising public service delivery. Romania has pursued extensive administrative reforms within the framework of European Union integration, while Nigeria has implemented successive reform programmes within a markedly different political, economic and institutional environment; both, however, are evaluated through internationally comparable governance and digital government indicators, allowing the analysis to move beyond descriptive national case studies towards a systematic examination of how governance quality is translated into administrative performance - not by ranking the two systems, but by treating them as distinct trajectories toward the same objective. Recent studies reinforce this rationale: strengthening institutional leadership, accountability and policy implementation remains essential for improving governance outcomes in Nigeria (Anazodo et al., 2025; Madubueze et al., 2026), while digital transformation and institutional modernisation are increasingly emphasised as drivers of administrative performance in Romania (Burlacu et al., 2022a; Burlacu et al., 2022b; Bucur Cosconel et al., 2025).

Building upon these considerations, the study addresses three research questions, examined comparatively across Romania and Nigeria between 2010 and 2024: (RQ1) How does governance quality influence professional public service delivery? (RQ2) What is the role of institutional capacity in mediating the relationship between governance quality and public service delivery? (RQ3) How does digital government strengthen governance outcomes and professional public service delivery?
In answering these questions, this study makes three complementary contributions. First, it develops an integrated analytical framework connecting governance quality, institutional capacity and digital government within a single explanatory perspective, explaining how these dimensions interact rather than examining them independently. Second, it contributes empirically through a comparative longitudinal analysis of Romania and Nigeria over 2010-2024, an under-examined comparison in the existing literature. Third, it contributes methodologically by combining internationally recognised governance indicators with systematic analysis of official policy documents, a mixed secondary-data approach enabling a more contextual interpretation than analyses relying exclusively on composite indices or single-country case studies. Collectively, these contributions aim to advance comparative public administration research and inform evidence-based governance reforms in emerging administrative systems.

1. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

1.1. Governance Quality

Governance quality has become a central concept in contemporary public administration because it captures governments' capacity to formulate and implement effective policies, manage public resources responsibly and provide services that respond to citizens' needs. Unlike traditional approaches that equated administration mainly with formal structures and hierarchical authority, contemporary governance research emphasises institutional effectiveness, accountability, regulatory quality and the ability of public institutions to generate public value (Rhodes, 1996; Bevir, 2012; Fukuyama, 2013; Kaufmann et al., 2011; Peters, 2018).
The literature approaches governance quality from two complementary perspectives. The first understands governance as institutional performance — the extent to which governments are effective, accountable, predictable and capable of controlling corruption — building on the broader tradition of governance-without-government theory (Peters & Pierre, 1998; Pierre & Peters, 2000) and operationalised through the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) framework across dimensions such as Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law and Control of Corruption (Kaufmann et al., 2011). The second perspective emphasises state capacity and implementation, arguing that governance quality depends not only on formal rules or institutional design but also on the administrative ability to transform policy objectives into concrete outcomes (Fukuyama, 2013; Pollitt & Bouckaert,

2017). This distinction matters for comparative public administration because countries may formally adopt similar governance principles — transparency, accountability, digitalisation, performance management — while achieving markedly different administrative results unless these reforms are supported by effective institutions and implementation capacity (Peters, 2018; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017).

The Worldwide Governance Indicators developed by Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi (2011) remain among the most widely used tools for cross-country and longitudinal governance analysis, providing a common analytical basis for comparing Romania and Nigeria, two administrative systems with markedly different historical, institutional and socio-economic trajectories. Composite indicators nonetheless have limitations: they identify differences in governance performance without fully explaining the institutional mechanisms through which governance quality affects public service delivery. A higher Government Effectiveness score, for instance, indicates stronger administrative performance but does not show how reforms are implemented or how citizens experience public services — a limitation especially relevant in emerging administrative systems, where formal reforms and actual implementation may diverge considerably.

Consequently, this study does not treat governance quality as an isolated explanatory variable but examines it in relation to institutional capacity and digital government, arguing that these dimensions together explain how governance principles are translated into professional public service delivery. Governance quality defines the institutional conditions under which public organisations operate; institutional capacity, examined next, determines whether these conditions can be transformed into effective administrative action.

1.2. Institutional Capacity as the Operational Mechanism of Governance Quality

Institutional capacity is widely recognised as one of the principal determinants of administrative performance because it reflects the ability of public institutions to formulate, coordinate and implement public policies effectively. While governance quality defines the institutional environment within which public organisations operate, institutional capacity determines whether governance principles can be transformed into effective administrative action (Evans, 1995; Grindle, 1996); the two should therefore be viewed not as competing concepts but as complementary dimensions of administrative performance.

The concept has evolved considerably over the last three decades, from an early focus on organisational resources, financial capabilities and qualified personnel towards a broader, multidimensional construct that includes administrative competence, policy coordination, leadership, organisational learning and adaptability (Peters, 2018; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017; Wu et al., 2015). This evolution reflects the increasing complexity of public governance, where successful policy implementation depends on interactions among institutions rather than on the

performance of individual organisations, and where governments adopting similar governance principles or reform strategies may nonetheless achieve substantially different levels of administrative performance because implementation capacity varies across institutional contexts (Grindle, 1996; Peters, 2018).

Effective institutions are better equipped to coordinate public organisations, allocate resources efficiently, promote professional standards and respond to changing societal needs; conversely, limited institutional capacity often results in fragmented implementation, weak inter-organisational coordination and inconsistent service delivery, even when governance reforms are formally adopted (OECD, 2023). This relationship is particularly visible in emerging administrative systems, where governments frequently pursue ambitious reform agendas under conditions of limited organisational resources, uneven administrative development and, in the most constrained cases, outright institutional fragility (Brinkerhoff, 2010). Comparative studies show that countries adopting similar reform models may follow markedly different implementation trajectories because institutional maturity, administrative professionalism and organisational learning differ significantly across national contexts (Evans, 1995; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017), providing an appropriate framework for comparing Romania and Nigeria, two countries that have implemented substantial public administration reforms within distinct institutional and socio-economic environments.

Two limitations nonetheless remain in the existing literature: institutional capacity is frequently analysed independently from governance quality, and relatively little attention has been devoted to how it interacts with digital government development to influence professional public service delivery in emerging administrative systems. Addressing these gaps, this study conceptualises institutional capacity as the operational mechanism through which governance quality is translated into administrative performance and, subsequently, into professional public service delivery — the theoretical foundation for the following section, which examines digital government's role in strengthening institutional effectiveness.

1.3. Digital Government as an Enabler of Institutional Capacity

Digital government has become one of the most significant drivers of public administration reform, transforming how governments design policies, manage administrative processes and deliver public services (Lips, 2019; OECD, 2020; United Nations, 2024). Rather than simply introducing information and communication technologies into existing bureaucratic processes, digital government promotes organisational change, inter-institutional collaboration, data-driven decision-making and the redesign of public services around citizens' needs and is therefore increasingly viewed as a governance reform rather than merely a technological innovation (OECD, 2020).

Recent literature argues that digital government is not an independent determinant of administrative performance: its effectiveness depends on the institutional capacity of public organisations to adopt, integrate and sustain digital innovations, since

investments in digital infrastructure alone rarely improve public administration unless accompanied by capable institutions, professional civil servants, appropriate regulatory frameworks and effective leadership (Mergel et al., 2019; United Nations, 2024). Digital technologies therefore reinforce institutional capacity rather than replacing it, facilitating accessibility, transparency and responsiveness through simplified procedures and expanded online services, while enhancing organisational learning through administrative data and integrated information systems (OECD, 2023; United Nations, 2024).

This relevance is especially pronounced in emerging administrative systems. Countries such as Romania and Nigeria have adopted ambitious digital transformation strategies, yet their outcomes have varied considerably because digital transformation has progressed under different institutional, economic and organisational conditions, evidence consistent with comparative findings that digital oversight capacity and implementation maturity diverge sharply between developed and developing administrative contexts (Freire et al., 2025). These differences suggest that digital government is most effective when embedded within broader governance reforms supported by adequate institutional capacity.

Although the literature increasingly recognises the importance of digital transformation, two gaps remain: many studies analyse digital government primarily from a technological perspective, with limited attention to its interaction with governance quality and institutional capacity, and comparative evidence explaining its contribution to professional public service delivery across emerging administrative systems remains scarce. Addressing these gaps, this study conceptualises digital government as an enabling mechanism that strengthens institutional capacity and supports the translation of governance principles into improved public service delivery.

1.4. Professional Public Service Delivery and an Integrated Analytical Framework

The ultimate objective of public administration is not governance itself, institutional reform or digital transformation, but the delivery of public services that effectively respond to citizens' needs. Contemporary literature increasingly evaluates governance reforms according

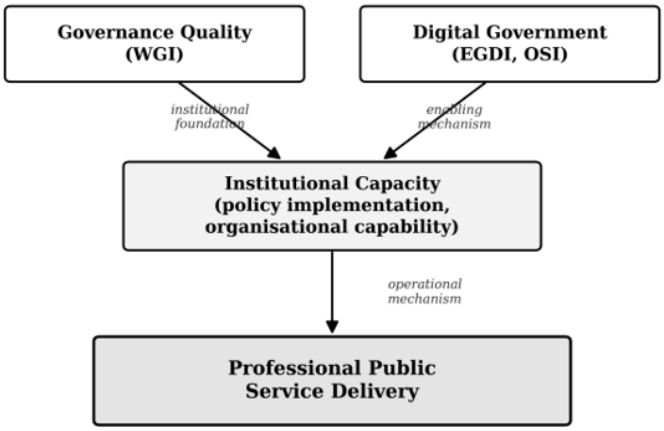
to their capacity to improve service quality, accessibility, efficiency, transparency and public trust, reflecting a broader shift from viewing citizens as passive recipients of public services towards active participants in public governance (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015; Bovaird & Löffler, 2003; Osborne, 2010; Christensen & Lægreid, 2022).

Professional public service delivery depends on the interaction of multiple institutional factors rather than on any single reform: governance establishes the institutional environment; institutional capacity provides the organisational resources and competencies necessary for implementation; digital government enhances responsiveness, transparency and accessibility (Denhardt & Denhardt,

2015; OECD, 2023). Improvements in service delivery should therefore be understood as the cumulative outcome of these complementary dimensions, a perspective particularly relevant for emerging administrative systems, where similar governance principles and digital strategies often produce substantially different outcomes because of differences in institutional capacity and administrative professionalism (World Bank, 2024; United Nations, 2024).

Building on this review, the study adopts an integrated analytical framework in which governance quality represents the institutional foundation of administrative performance, institutional capacity functions as the operational mechanism through which governance principles are implemented, and digital government acts as an enabling factor strengthening institutional effectiveness. Professional public service delivery represents the observable outcome of the interaction between these three dimensions (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Integrated analytical framework of the study



Source: Developed by the authors based on Rhodes (1996), Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), Mergel et al. (2019), OECD (2020), and Osborne et al. (2022).

Governance quality is operationalised using the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI); digital government is assessed through the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and its Online Service Index (OSI) component; institutional context is interpreted through official reform strategies and policy documents; and professional public service delivery is treated as the observable outcome of their interaction rather than as an independently measurable construct. This framework is particularly suited to comparative public administration because it enables the systematic examination of administrative systems operating under different institutional, socio-economic and governance conditions, allowing the analysis of Romania and Nigeria to move beyond descriptive comparisons of governance scores towards a contextual explanation of how governance quality is translated into administrative performance.

Three limitations in the existing literature justify this approach: governance quality, institutional capacity and digital government are predominantly examined as separate analytical constructs; comparative evidence on their interaction within emerging administrative systems remains limited; and few studies combine internationally comparable governance indicators with institutional evidence capable of explaining differences in professional public service delivery. Addressing these limitations, the following section presents the research methodology developed to examine these relationships empirically in Romania and Nigeria.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Research Design

This study adopts a comparative longitudinal research design to examine the relationships among governance quality, institutional capacity, digital government and professional public service delivery in Romania and Nigeria. The comparative approach was selected because it enables the systematic analysis of how similar governance objectives are translated into administrative outcomes under different institutional, political and socio-economic conditions; rather than ranking the two countries, the study applies the integrated analytical framework introduced in Section 1.4 (Figure 1) to identify the institutional mechanisms through which governance quality contributes to effective public service delivery.

The study covers the period 2010-2024, selected because it captures the consolidation of Romania's post-accession administrative modernisation alongside successive public administration reform programmes in Nigeria, spans the accelerated digital transformation promoted internationally after the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, and provides sufficient longitudinal observations to identify trends rather than isolated annual fluctuations.

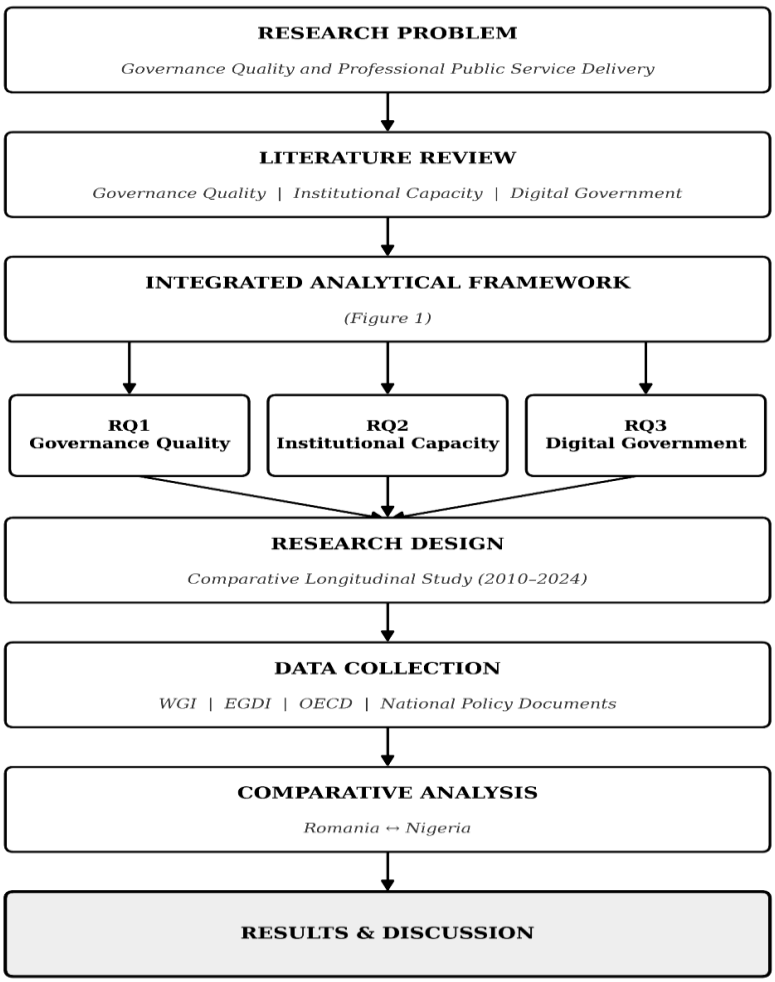
The comparative design follows the logic of a Most Different Systems Design (MDSD): Romania and Nigeria differ considerably in administrative traditions, governance structures, levels of economic development and institutional context, yet both have pursued governance reforms, institutional modernisation and digital transformation while being assessed through internationally comparable indicators. This combination of structural difference and comparable measurement creates favourable conditions for examining how institutional context shapes the relationship between governance quality and public service delivery.

The empirical analysis relies exclusively on secondary data from internationally recognised organisations and official governmental sources: governance quality is assessed using the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), digital government performance through the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and its constituent dimensions, complemented by systematic analysis of national strategic documents, public administration reform strategies and OECD policy reports. This mixed approach allows methodological triangulation and a richer interpretation of administrative performance than reliance on composite indicators alone. Quantitative indicators identify long-term patterns and differences in

governance and digital development, while policy documents provide contextual evidence on institutional reforms and implementation processes; rather than testing causal relationships through econometric modelling, the study adopts an explanatory comparative perspective on how these dimensions interact to shape professional public service delivery.

The research design is aligned with the three research questions formulated in the Introduction (Table 2), and its overall architecture — from research problem to comparative analysis and interpretation — is summarised in Figure 2, with construct operationalisation detailed in Table 1.

Figure 2. Research Design and Analytical Architecture



Source: Developed by the authors.

Figure 2 traces this architecture step by step: the research problem is grounded in the literature review on governance quality, institutional capacity and digital government, which feeds into the integrated analytical framework presented in Figure 1; the framework is disaggregated into the three research questions (RQ1-RQ3), which converge into a single comparative longitudinal research design; this design structures the collection of WGI, EGDI, OECD and national policy data, which are then analysed comparatively between Romania and Nigeria and interpreted in the Results and Discussion section. Table 1 operationalises each construct underlying this architecture, specifying its indicators, data source, coverage period and analytical role.

Table 1. Operationalisation of Research Constructs

Construct	Operational Definition	Indicator(s)	Data Source	Years	Role in Analysis
Governance Quality	Institutional effectiveness and quality of governance	WGI (6 dimensions)	World Bank	2010-2024	Independent construct
Institutional Capacity	Administrative ability to formulate and implement policies	Policy documents + WGI interpretation	OECD / Governments	2010-2024	Mediating construct
Digital Government	Maturity of digital public administration	EGDI, OSI, TII, HCI	United Nations	2010-2024	Enabling construct
Professional Public Service Delivery	Capacity to provide effective, citizen-oriented public services	Policy outcomes interpreted through governance and digital indicators	OECD / National reports	2010-2024	Dependent construct

Source: Developed by the authors based on Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), Peters (2018), Mergel et al. (2019), OECD (2020), and the relevant literature.

As Table 1 shows, Governance Quality and Digital Government are each measured through an established composite index (the WGI and the EGDI with its OSI, TII and HCI sub-indices, respectively), whereas Institutional Capacity and Professional Public Service Delivery are operationalised through a combination of policy documents and secondary interpretive sources, reflecting the absence of a single standardised metric for these two constructs. This distinction is consistent with the mediating and dependent roles assigned to them in the analytical framework. Table 2 aligns each research question with its corresponding construct, variables, data sources and analytical technique, showing how the operationalisation in Table 1 is mobilised to answer RQ1-RQ3.

Table 2. Alignment between Research Questions, Variables and Methods

Research Question	Analytical Construct	Variables	Data Sources	Analytical Technique	Expected Evidence
RQ1 How does governance quality influence professional public service delivery?	Governance Quality	WGI indicators	World Bank	Comparative longitudinal analysis	Governance trajectories
RQ2 What is the role of institutional capacity?	Institutional Capacity	Governance indicators + policy reforms	OECD + National strategies	Comparative institutional analysis	Institutional mechanisms
RQ3 How does digital government strengthen governance outcomes?	Digital Government	EGDI, OSI, HCI, TII	United Nations	Integrated comparative analysis	Digital transformation effects

Source: Developed by the authors.

Table 2 confirms that all three research questions can be addressed through internationally comparable, publicly available data and a consistent comparative-longitudinal technique, which ensures methodological coherence across the governance, institutional capacity and digital government dimensions examined in the remainder of the analysis.

2.2. Data Sources

The empirical analysis draws exclusively on publicly available secondary data. Governance quality indicators come from the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) database, covering six dimensions — Government Effectiveness, Regulatory Quality, Rule of Law, Voice and Accountability, Political Stability and Absence of Violence, and Control of Corruption — widely used in comparative public administration research for their international comparability over time.
Digital government performance is assessed through the United Nations E-Government Survey, comprising the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), the Online Service Index (OSI), the Human Capital Index and the Telecommunication Infrastructure Index. Institutional integrity is additionally assessed using the Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI, Transparency International), and contextual socio-economic information — GDP per capita, internet users, demographic indicators — is drawn from World Bank Open Data. These quantitative sources are complemented by official public administration reform documents, national development strategies and digital transformation strategies issued by Romanian and Nigerian authorities.

2.3. Analytical Framework and Variables

The analytical framework is organised around four complementary constructs, detailed in Table 1: Governance Quality, the independent construct, operationalised through the six WGI dimensions; Digital Government Capacity, operationalised through EGDI, OSI, the Human Capital Index and the Telecommunication

Infrastructure Index; Institutional Context, examined qualitatively through policy documents and reform strategies rather than quantified; and Professional Public Service Delivery, the principal outcome, interpreted as the observable result of the interaction among the other three constructs rather than measured through a single indicator — an approach consistent with comparative governance research explaining complex administrative outcomes through multiple complementary dimensions.

2.4. Data Analysis

The empirical analysis proceeds in four stages: descriptive statistics present the evolution of governance indicators for Romania and Nigeria over 2010-2024; a comparative longitudinal analysis identifies convergence and divergence patterns across the six WGI dimensions; digital government indicators are analysed to assess their contribution to administrative modernisation and service delivery; and governance trends are finally interpreted against the institutional reforms identified in official policy documents, a triangulation that strengthens the interpretation of quantitative findings. Rather than establishing causal relationships through econometric modelling, the study aims to identify consistent governance patterns and explain how differences in governance quality and institutional reform are associated with professional public service delivery.

2.5. Research Limitations

Three limitations should be acknowledged. First, reliance on secondary data means the study does not directly capture citizens' perceptions or public servants' experiences. Second, internationally comparable governance indicators are largely perception-based composite measures that may not fully reflect all dimensions of administrative performance. Third, focusing on two national administrative systems means findings should be interpreted as context-specific rather than universally generalisable. Nonetheless, combining internationally recognised governance databases with official policy documents ensures methodological transparency, comparability and reproducibility.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Evolution of Governance Quality

3.1.1. Overall Governance Trends

The comparative analysis of the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) reveals distinct governance trajectories in Romania and Nigeria during the period 2010-2024. Across the six governance dimensions, Romania consistently recorded higher governance estimates than Nigeria, indicating a stronger institutional environment throughout the observation period. Nevertheless, governance quality evolved differently across individual dimensions, suggesting that institutional reforms reflect

the interaction between political, administrative and socio-economic factors rather than progressing uniformly.

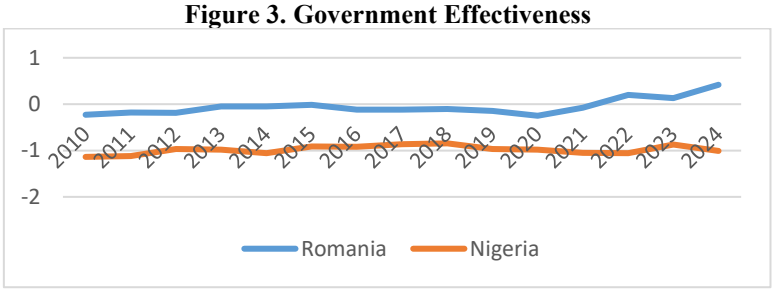
Table 3. Comparative Descriptive Statistics of Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) for Romania and Nigeria (2010-2024)

Governance Dimension	Romania Mean	Nigeria Mean	Difference (RO−NG)	RO 2010	RO 2024	NG 2010	NG 2024	RO Change	NG Change
Political Stability	0.320	−1.954	**2.274**	0.193	0.159	−2.025	−2.003	−0.034	0.022
Rule of Law	0.329	−0.972	1.301	0.104	0.371	−1.116	−1.007	0.267	0.109
Regulatory Quality	0.379	−0.821	1.200	0.422	0.383	−0.911	−0.633	−0.039	0.278
Voice and Accountability	0.453	−0.664	1.117	0.444	0.387	−0.887	−0.727	−0.056	0.161
Control of Corruption	−0.118	−1.154	1.037	−0.293	0.026	−1.131	−1.115	0.319	0.017
Government Effectiveness	−0.051	−0.983	**0.931**	−0.226	0.418	−1.138	−1.007	0.644	0.131

Source: Authors' calculations based on the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), World Bank (2025 revision).

As presented in Table 3, the magnitude of the Romania–Nigeria gap varies considerably by dimension: the largest and most persistent gap is in Political Stability (2.274), nearly double the next largest difference, while the smallest is in Government Effectiveness (0.931) — on which Romania's own average score is itself negative (−0.051). Section 3.1.4 discusses this pattern in detail.

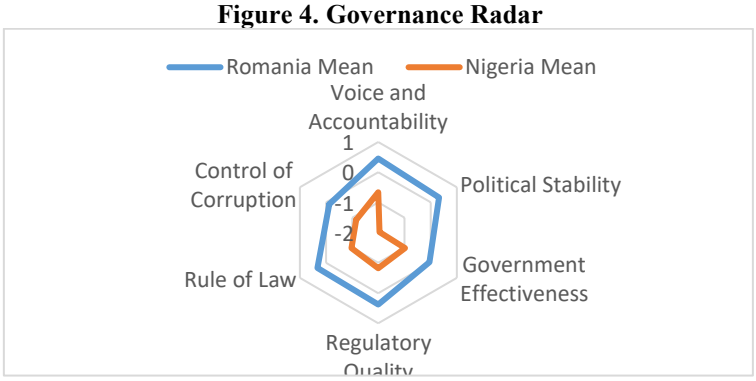
Figure 3. Government Effectiveness



Source: Authors' visualisation based on the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), World Bank (2025)

The temporal evolution illustrated in Figure 3 confirms that governance quality is not a static institutional characteristic: Romania generally maintained a positive trajectory, while Nigeria exhibited a more volatile pattern across several dimensions, supporting its analysis as a dynamic institutional process.

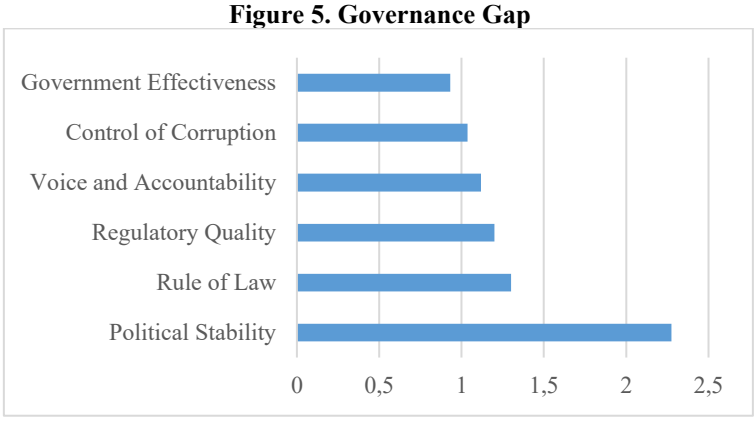
Figure 4. Governance Radar



Source: Authors' visualisation based on the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), World Bank (2025).

The comparative governance profile in Figure 4 confirms that differences are not equally distributed across dimensions, with Political Stability showing by far the widest gap and Government Effectiveness and Control of Corruption the narrowest — consistent with the pattern identified in Table 3.

Figure 5. Governance Gap



Source: Authors' calculations and visualisation based on the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), World Bank (2025).

Finally, the Governance Gap analysis (Figure 5) shows that the distance between the two countries remained evident throughout the period, though its magnitude varied by dimension. Rather than a simple ranking of administrative systems, these differences illustrate how institutional context shapes governments' capacity to translate governance principles into professional public service delivery.

3.1.2. Governance Quality in Romania

Romania's governance trajectory during 2010-2024 reflects gradual institutional consolidation, though progress varies across dimensions rather than following a uniform upward trend. Voice and Accountability is Romania's strongest dimension on average (0.453) but declined slightly over the period (0.444 to 0.387), suggesting a plateau in democratic-participation gains; Regulatory Quality (0.379 average) followed a similarly modest decline (−0.039), while Political Stability (0.320 average) remained broadly stable at a comparatively low level for an EU member state. By contrast, three dimensions tied more directly to administrative and rule-based governance improved: Rule of Law rose from 0.104 to 0.371 (+0.267) and Control of Corruption from −0.293 to 0.026 (+0.319), crossing into positive territory. The most pronounced change is in Government Effectiveness, which rose from −0.226 to 0.418 (+0.644) — the largest improvement among all six dimensions — even though its period average (−0.051) remains the second-lowest, reflecting a weak starting position rather than continued underperformance.

Romania's profile thus suggests two parallel patterns: a mature but plateauing performance on democratic-participation dimensions, and a still-improving, historically weaker performance on core administrative-effectiveness dimensions — indicating that continued institutional adaptation in effectiveness and corruption control remains relevant even for an EU member state.

3.1.3. Governance Quality in Nigeria

Nigeria presents a more heterogeneous trajectory, characterised by generally low governance estimates but consistent, if modest, improvement across all six dimensions — distinct from Romania, where three dimensions declined slightly.

The largest gains are in Regulatory Quality (−0.911 to −0.633, +0.278) and Voice and Accountability (+0.161), while Government Effectiveness (+0.131) and Rule of Law (+0.109) improved more moderately, reflecting persistent constraints in policy implementation and administrative coordination. Political Stability and Control of Corruption remain Nigeria's weakest dimensions in both level (−1.954 and −1.154 on average) and trend, improving only marginally (+0.022 and +0.017). This near-stagnation on precisely the two lowest-scoring dimensions indicates that security conditions and corruption control represent Nigeria's most persistent structural constraints, more so than administrative or regulatory capacity, which show clearer improvement. Rather than uniformly weak or uniformly improving, Nigeria's governance performance is therefore differentiated across dimensions, supporting the need for context-sensitive, dimension-specific reform approaches.

3.1.4. Comparative Analysis

Governance quality differs between Romania and Nigeria not only in magnitude but in its pattern of evolution: Romania outperformed Nigeria on all six dimensions throughout 2010-2024, yet the two countries' trends did not move in parallel. Nigeria

recorded positive change on all six dimensions, while three of Romania's dimensions (Voice and Accountability, Political Stability, Regulatory Quality) declined slightly, narrowing the gap on precisely these dimensions even as Romania's average level remained higher throughout. Political Stability represents by far the largest and most persistent difference between the two countries, followed at some distance by Rule of Law and Regulatory Quality. Government Effectiveness, by contrast, records the smallest gap — a finding that qualifies rather than confirms a straightforward institutional-capacity explanation: Romania's own average score on this dimension is negative, indicating that administrative effectiveness remains a comparative weakness even within an EU governance context, and that the two countries converge most closely on precisely the dimension most directly associated with institutional capacity. This suggests that improvements in political stability and rule-based governance, rather than administrative capacity alone, account for the largest part of the observed divergence. The comparative evidence therefore supports the argument that governance quality is a necessary but not sufficient condition for professional public service delivery. Institutional capacity appears to mediate the relationship between governance principles and administrative outcomes, but political and security context — captured primarily by Political Stability — appears to condition the overall governance gap more strongly than administrative capacity alone.

3.1.5. Key Findings

The WGI analysis yields three principal findings. First, Romania maintained consistently higher governance quality across all six dimensions throughout 2010-2024, though the two countries' trajectories diverged: Nigeria improved modestly on all six, while three of Romania's dimensions declined slightly. Second, the governance gap is dominated by Political Stability and narrowest in Government Effectiveness, on which Romania's own average performance remains weak. Third, this pattern indicates that the Romania–Nigeria divergence is driven primarily by differences in political and security context rather than by institutional capacity alone — findings that provide the empirical foundation for interpreting institutional capacity and digital government as complementary, rather than singularly decisive, determinants of professional public service delivery in the two countries.

4. Conclusions

This study set out to explain professional public service delivery through an integrated reading of governance quality, institutional capacity and digital government, applied comparatively to Romania and Nigeria between 2010 and 2024. Its scientific value lies less in confirming that an EU member state outperforms a Sub-Saharan African country on governance - an unsurprising finding on its own - and more in showing where and why the two trajectories actually diverge, and where they do not.

The central and most original finding is that the Romania-Nigeria governance gap is not evenly distributed across institutional dimensions, nor is it primarily a story of

administrative capacity. Political Stability accounts for by far the largest share of the divergence, pointing to security and political-context factors rather than bureaucratic performance as the dominant explanatory mechanism. Government Effectiveness, by contrast, is the dimension on which the two countries converge most closely - a convergence driven as much by Romania's own comparatively weak performance on this dimension and on Control of Corruption as by Nigeria's progress. This qualifies a common assumption in comparative public administration research, whereby governance gaps between developed and developing systems are treated as roughly uniform proxies for institutional capacity: capacity-related dimensions can in fact be the least differentiating factor between an EU member state and a developing country, while political-security context can be the most differentiating one - a distinction of genuine theoretical weight, since it separates the political conditions under which institutions operate from the administrative competence of the institutions themselves, two mechanisms frequently conflated in composite governance scores.

A second contribution is methodological: the Most Different Systems Design applied here, comparing an EU and a Sub-Saharan African administrative system through a common indicator framework over a fifteen-year period, remains uncommon in a literature that has predominantly examined governance convergence within regionally or institutionally similar country clusters. Identifying a differentiated, internally consistent pattern rather than a blanket ranking across a starker institutional divide strengthens the case for governance indicators as diagnostic rather than purely evaluative tools.

For policy, the findings suggest that governance reform agendas in Nigeria may gain more from addressing political stability and security conditions than from administrative capacity-building alone, since the latter dimension already shows the narrowest gap with an EU comparator. For Romania, the persistence of a negative average score on Government Effectiveness and Control of Corruption despite over a decade and a half of EU membership indicates that administrative modernisation and anti-corruption reforms warrant continued, rather than diminishing, policy attention.

These conclusions should be read alongside the study's limitations regarding reliance on secondary, perception-based indicators and its two-country scope. Extending the analysis to an empirical assessment of digital government maturity (EGDI, OSI) - treated here as a conceptual rather than empirically tested dimension - and incorporating primary data on citizens' and civil servants' experiences represent the most promising directions for future research building on this framework.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

This research received no external funding.

References

Anazodo, R. O., Madubueze, M. H. C., Egberi, E. A., Okoye, A. T., & Chidebelu, V. C. (2025). Public administration, policy development and preponderances of professional service delivery: Rethinking the strategies for Nigeria. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Growth Evaluation, 6*(4), 154-163. https://doi.org/10.54660/IJMRGE.2025.6.4.154-163

Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & Woolcock, M. (2017). *Building state capability: Evidence, analysis, action*. Oxford University Press. ISBN 978–0–19–960641–2

Androniceanu, A. (2021). Transparency in public administration as a challenge for a good democratic governance. *Administratie si Management Public, 36*, 149-164. https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2021.36-09

Androniceanu, A. (2023). The new trends of digital transformation and artificial intelligence in public administration. *Administratie si Management Public, 40*, 147-155. https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2023.40-09

Ansell, C., Sørensen, E., & Torfing, J. (2021). The COVID-19 pandemic as a game changer for public administration and leadership? The need for robust governance responses to turbulent problems. *Public Management Review, 23*(7), 949-960. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2020.1820272

Bevir, M. (2012). *Governance: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Bovaird, T., & Löffler, E. (2003). Evaluating the quality of public governance: Indicators, models and methodologies. *International Review of Administrative Sciences, 69*(3), 313-328. https://doi.org/10.1177/0020852303693002

Brinkerhoff, D. W. (2010). Developing capacity in fragile states. *Public Administration and Development, 30*(1), 66-78. https://doi.org/10.1002/pad.545

Bucur Cosconel, A. M., Stanescu, S. G., Anica-Popa, L. E., & Diaconeasa, A. A. (2025). Digital transformation of public administration services: Lessons for Romania. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Business Excellence, 19*(1), 3834-3846. https://doi.org/10.2478/picbe-2025-0292

Burlacu, S., Pargaru, I., Iacob (Pargaru), O. C., & Gombos, S. P. (2022). Digital public administration and the perspectives of sustainable development in Romania. *European Journal of Sustainable Development, 11*(4), 230. https://doi.org/10.14207/ejsd.2022.v11n4p230

Burlacu, S., Bran, F., Gombos, C. C., & Mocanu, V. (2022). Digital transformation in public administration: Paradigms, specificities and developments in Romania. *Proceedings of the Administration and Public Management International Conference, 18*, 113-124. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=1257939

Christensen, T., & Lægreid, P. (2022). Taking stock: New Public Management (NPM) and post-NPM reforms—Trends and challenges. In A. Ladner & F. Sager (Eds.), *Handbook on the politics of public administration* (pp. 38-49). Edward Elgar Publishing. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839109447.00010

Denhardt, J. V., & Denhardt, R. B. (2015). *The new public service: Serving, not steering* (4th ed.). Routledge.

Evans, P. (1995). *Embedded autonomy: States and industrial transformation*. Princeton University Press.

Freire, F. de Souza, Costa, G. P. C. L., Martins, V. M., & Saraiva, M. C. C. M. (2025). Automating public governance oversight: Evidence from the Federal District of Brazil. *Administratie si Management Public, 45*, 91-109. https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2025.45-05

Fukuyama, F. (2013). What is governance? *Governance, 26*(3), 347-368. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12035

Grindle, M. S. (1996). *Challenging the state: Crisis and innovation in Latin America and Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

Howlett, M., & Ramesh, M. (2023). Designing for adaptation: Static and dynamic robustness in policy-making. *Public Administration, 101*(1), 23-35. https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.12849

Kaufmann, D., Kraay, A., & Mastruzzi, M. (2011). The worldwide governance indicators: Methodology and analytical issues. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law, 3*(2), 220-246. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1876404511200046

Lips, M. (2019). *Digital government: Managing public sector reform in the digital era*. Routledge.

Madubueze, M. H. C., Okpalaibekwe, U. N., Nweke, A. C., Onyekwelu, R. U., Ananti, M. O., & Nwadiogbu, M. N. (2026). Strategic leadership in times of crisis and adaptive public administration: A developing nation experience of policy response to economic volatility. *Multidisciplinary Reviews, 9*, e2026364. https://doi.org/10.31893/multirev.2026364

Mergel, I., Edelmann, N., & Haug, N. (2019). Defining digital transformation: Results from expert interviews. *Government Information Quarterly, 36*(4), 101385. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.giq.2019.06.002

Moore, M. H. (1995). *Creating public value*. Harvard University Press.

OECD. (2020). *The OECD digital government policy framework: Six dimensions of a digital government* (OECD Public Governance Policy Papers No. 2). OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/f64fed2a-en

OECD. (2023). *Digital government review of Romania: Towards a digitally mature government*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/68361e0d-en

OECD. (2023). *Government at a glance 2023*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/3d5c5d31-en

OECD. (2023). *The principles of public administration*. OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/7f5ec453-en

Osborne, S. P. (Ed.). (2010). *The new public governance? Emerging perspectives on the theory and practice of public governance*. Routledge.

Osborne, S. P., Powell, M., Cui, T., & Strokosch, K. (2022). Value creation in the public service ecosystem: An integrative framework. *Public Administration Review, 82*(4), 634-645. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13474

Peters, B. G., & Pierre, J. (1998). Governance without government? Rethinking public administration. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 8*(2), 223-243. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jpart.a024379

Peters, B. G. (2018). *The politics of bureaucracy: An introduction to comparative public administration* (7th ed.). Routledge.

Peters, B. G. (2023). Public administration in authoritarian regimes. *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration, 45*(1), 7-15. https://doi.org/10.1080/23276665.2023.2169820

Pierre, J., & Peters, B. G. (2000). *Governance, politics and the state*. Macmillan.

Pollitt, C., & Bouckaert, G. (2017). *Public management reform: A comparative analysis—Into the age of austerity* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.

Ramesh, M., & Howlett, M. (2026). Inferential reasoning in policy analysis: Knowledge use under uncertainty and complexity. *Policy & Politics*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1332/03055736Y2026D000000088

Rhodes, R. A. W. (1996). The new governance: Governing without government. *Political Studies, 44*(4), 652-667. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.1996.tb01747.x

Shkarlet, S., Oliychenko, I., Dubyna, M., Ditkovska, M., & Zhovtok, V. (2020). Comparative analysis of best practices in e-Government implementation and use of this experience by developing countries. *Administratie si Management Public, 34*, 118-136. https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2020.34-07

United Nations. (2024). *United Nations E-Government Survey 2024: Accelerating digital transformation for sustainable development*. United Nations. https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/reports/un-e-government-survey-2024

World Bank. (2024). *Worldwide governance indicators: Methodology and data documentation*. World Bank.

Wu, X., Ramesh, M., & Howlett, M. (2015). Policy capacity: A conceptual framework for understanding policy competences and capabilities. *Policy and Society, 34*(3-4), 165-171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polsoc.2015.09.001

Zambrano-Yépez, C., Guillén-Rodríguez, Y., & Henriquez-Coronel, P. (2023). Multivariate analysis of the determinants of e-government. *Administratie si Management Public, 40*, 132-146. https://doi.org/10.24818/amp/2023.40-08