

TECHNOLOGY-ENABLED CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

In Lagos State, the 2018 launch of the Lagos Criminal Information System (LCIS) and the 2021 ACJL amendment authorizing remote proceedings and electronic confession recording represent the most comprehensive integration of digital tools into Nigerian criminal procedure to date. This paper evaluates the impact of these reforms on case processing efficiency, institutional accountability, and access to justice. Drawing on Heeks's (2006) e-government theory and implementation theories associated with Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) and Lipsky (1980), the paper analyses LCIS performance data, confession recording compliance, and remote proceedings utilization. Findings show that digitalization coincided with a 54% rise in case processing volumes between 2019 and 2024, though the study cannot isolate LCIS effects from other concurrent reforms. Infrastructure deficits, uneven digital literacy, and the risk of digital exclusion for defendants without device access remain critical barriers. The paper argues that digital tools are necessary but not sufficient for criminal justice reform: gains are real but uneven, and responsible deployment requires infrastructure investment, governance frameworks, and universal access provisions that current arrangements do not yet provide.

Keywords: Technology-Enabled, Criminal Justice Reform, Institutional Accountability.

Introduction

The relationship between technology and justice reform is one of the most actively debated questions in contemporary criminal procedure policy. Digital tools offer the prospect of faster, more transparent, and more accountable criminal justice systems. They also introduce new risks of exclusion, error, and concentration of institutional power in ways that are difficult to scrutinize or challenge (Yusuf & Okpara, 2025). How this relationship plays out depends on the specific technologies deployed, the institutional context in which they operate, and the governance frameworks that regulate their use.

Lagos State has been at the forefront of digital criminal justice reform in Nigeria. The Administration of Criminal Justice Law (ACJL), enacted in 2007 and amended in 2011 and

2021, progressively incorporated digital tools as a mechanism for advancing efficiency and accountability. The 2011 amendment introduced electronic recording of confessions. The 2018 launch of the Lagos Criminal Information System (LCIS) created a case tracking infrastructure spanning police, prosecution, courts, and correctional services. The 2021 amendment extended digital tools to remote proceedings, electronic filing, and a Crime Data Register. Together, these innovations constitute the most comprehensive digital criminal justice reform programme in Nigeria (Olugasa, 2020; Yusuf & Okpara, 2025).

This paper evaluates that programme. Its central question is: what has digital reform achieved in Lagos criminal justice, and where do the critical barriers to full integration lie? The paper draws on Heeks's (2006) e-government theory and implementation theory to analyze LCIS performance, confession recording compliance, remote proceedings, and the structural barriers that limit technology's impact. It situates Lagos within the broader Nigerian context of digital justice reform and identifies governance requirements for responsible deployment. The analysis has significance beyond Lagos. As the template for the federal Administration of Criminal Justice Act (ACJA) 2015, adopted by over 30 Nigerian states, Lagos's digital reforms set a precedent for the country (Ojoye, 2019). Understanding what LCIS has achieved, where it has fallen short, and what governance it requires is directly relevant to criminal justice modernization across Nigeria.

E-government theory examines how information and communication technologies transform the delivery of public services and the relationship between state institutions and citizens. Heeks (2006) identifies three levels of e-government transformation: back-office efficiency gains that improve internal processing without changing citizen-facing interactions; front-office service improvements that change how citizens access services; and transformational change that restructures institutional relationships and power distributions. Applied to criminal justice, back-office gains include digital case tracking and electronic filing. Front-office improvements include remote proceedings and online access to case information. Transformational change would involve restructuring accountability relationships between agencies in ways that reduce abuse and improve outcomes for defendants and victims.

Heeks (2006) also identifies the most common failure mode of e-government projects in developing contexts: the design-reality gap, in which technology is designed for conditions that do not exist in the implementation environment. Systems designed for reliable electricity, universal device access, high digital literacy, and standardized data practices fail when one or more of these conditions is absent. The Lagos LCIS deployment reflects this tension, delivering significant gains where ideal conditions exist while falling short in lower-resource divisions. Olugasa (2020) evaluates the use of technology to make the ACJA effective across Nigerian jurisdictions and identifies three enabling conditions for successful adoption: sustained political commitment; adequate infrastructure investment including power, connectivity, and devices; and structured training that builds digital literacy incrementally. Where these

conditions are present, adoption produces measurable efficiency gains. Where they are absent, technology projects stall or produce data systems maintained in form but not used in practice. Yusuf and Okpara (2025), writing in the *Journal of Law and Technology in Africa*, provide a recent assessment of technology challenges in Nigerian criminal justice. They document four structural barriers: unreliable power supply; connectivity gaps preventing real-time data exchange; insufficient hardware for case volumes; and resistance among senior personnel who perceive digital oversight as a threat to their discretionary authority. Each barrier is present in Lagos to varying degrees.

The 2011 ACJL amendment requiring electronic recording of confessions addressed a specific failure mode of the pre-reform system. Under the old Criminal Procedure Act, manual confession recording triggered trial-within-trial procedures lasting months or years when defense counsel challenged voluntariness (Aidonojie et al., 2024). The electronic recording requirement was intended to create an objective record that either confirmed or refuted claims of coercion. The CLEEN Foundation study cited in Aidonojie et al. (2024) found national compliance at 43.4%. The PWAN (2019) court observation survey found that confession procedure non-compliance remained a significant source of delay in Lagos courts despite nearly fifteen years in the statute.

Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) demonstrate that translating policy into practice is inherently complex, involving multiple actors with different incentives, capacities, and interpretations of legislative intent. A well-designed digital infrastructure operating where institutional conditions are misaligned will underperform relative to its objectives. Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory adds that policy outcomes are ultimately determined by the discretionary behaviour of front-line officials. Technology changes the conditions under which discretion is exercised but does not eliminate the human agency that determines whether digital systems are used as designed or circumvented.

Methodology

This study is a policy evaluation using secondary data. It evaluates the impact and limitations of digital criminal justice reform in Lagos through analysis of case processing statistics, compliance data, legislative texts, and the technology adoption literature. Quantitative data were drawn from Lagos State Ministry of Justice reports (2025), compliance survey data from PWAN (2019) and Aidonojie et al. (2024), and prison population data from Ibrahim (2019), Guardian Nigeria (2020), Premium Times (2021), and Salau (2025). Qualitative analysis draws on Olugasa (2020), Yusuf and Okpara (2025), RoLAC Programme (2023), Heeks (2006), Pressman and Wildavsky (1973), and Lipsky (1980). A principal limitation is the absence of disaggregated LCIS performance data. The Lagos State Ministry of Justice has not published data on LCIS usage rates, data quality audits, remote proceedings volumes, or Crime Data Register completeness. Aggregate case processing statistics serve as proxies for digital reform impact but cannot isolate the contribution of specific tools from other concurrent reform factors

including increased judicial staffing and prosecutorial capacity building. This limitation is identified where relevant throughout the analysis.

Findings

The Lagos Criminal Information System (LCIS), launched in 2018, is a case tracking infrastructure linking police, the Directorate of Public Prosecutions, courts, and correctional services in a shared information environment. It enables real-time tracking of case status, automated alerts for remand review deadlines and trial dates, and aggregate reporting on case volumes and disposal rates. It is the first system in Nigerian criminal justice history to create a shared information environment spanning all four principal justice sector agencies (Olugasa, 2020). Table 1 presents case processing data for the period spanning the LCIS launch.

Table 1: Lagos State Case Processing Volumes and Disposal Rates, 2019-2024

Year	Cases Filed	Cases Disposed	Disposal Rate (%)	Source
2019	12,400	7,068	57%	MoJ Lagos (2025)
2020	8,200	5,412	66%	MoJ Lagos (2025)
2021	13,100	8,515	65%	MoJ Lagos (2025)
2022	15,800	10,296	65%	MoJ Lagos (2025)
2023	17,600	11,704	67%	MoJ Lagos (2025)
2024	19,100	12,896	68%	Salau (2025)

Note. Case filing figures for 2020 reflect disruption from COVID-19 court closures. Data sourced from Lagos State Ministry of Justice (2025) and Salau (2025).

Table 1 shows that case processing volumes grew by approximately 54% between 2019 and 2024, from 12,400 filings to 19,100. Disposal rates improved from 57% to 68% over the same period. These trends coincided with the introduction and expansion of LCIS, remote proceedings, and related digital tools, though as noted in the methodology, other concurrent reforms including increased judicial staffing and prosecutorial investment also contributed to these outcomes. The 2020 drop in filings reflects COVID-19 disruption. Notwithstanding the positive trend, the absolute volume of undisposed cases grew in every year because new filings consistently outpaced disposals. The backlog problem has slowed but has not been resolved.

Table 2: Compliance with Electronic Confession Recording Requirements

Metric	Finding	Implication	Source
National compliance rate	43.4%	Majority of confessions non-compliant nationally	Aidonojie et al. (2024)
Non-compliance with suspects' rights	~38% non-compliant	Coercion risk unmitigated in non-compliant cases	Aidonojie et al. (2024)

Metric	Finding	Implication	Source
Trial-within-trial disputes	Reduced where recording used	Technology effective where deployed	Aidonojie et al. (2024)
Primary barrier to compliance	Equipment deficit and attitudinal resistance	Training and equipment investment required	Olugasa (2020)

Note. National figures from CLEEN Foundation (2024) cited in Aidonojie et al. (2024). Lagos-specific disaggregated data not available.

Table 2 shows that despite fifteen years in the statute, compliance with the confession recording requirement remains below 50% nationally. Where recording has been used, trial-within-trial disputes have declined, validating the provision's design logic. The problem is uneven deployment, not the technology itself. The PWAN (2019) court observation survey confirmed that confession-based delays persist in Lagos courts at the state level.

Remote Proceedings and the COVID-19 Acceleration

The 2021 ACJL amendment formally authorized remote proceedings, electronic filing, and digital evidence presentation. Lagos courts had already begun using video-link technology during the COVID-19 period beginning in 2020, and the 2021 amendment legitimized and extended these practices. The RoLAC Programme (2023) identified remote proceedings as a significant contributor to disposal rate improvement in 2020 despite physical court closures: proceedings that would previously have been adjourned due to defendant transport failures were conducted remotely, maintaining case momentum.

Post-pandemic, remote proceedings continue selectively, primarily for custody hearings and mention dates not requiring witness examination. Full remote trials have not been systematically adopted. Connectivity gaps, inadequate devices in correctional facilities, and the absence of protocols for remote evidence examination constrain the scope of remote proceedings to lower-complexity hearing types (Yusuf and Okpara, 2025). These are structural limitations requiring targeted infrastructure investment. The 2021 amendment established a Crime Data Register as a centralized repository for criminal case data spanning all justice sector agencies. The Register has the potential for transformational change in Heeks's (2006) terms: by creating a permanent accessible record of every case from arrest through final disposition, it could enable oversight bodies, civil society, and researchers to monitor system performance and identify patterns of abuse or delay. In practice, no publicly accessible crime data portal has been launched and published statistics remain aggregated at a level that prevents case-level analysis. The Register currently functions as a statutory requirement and partially implemented data system rather than an operational public accountability mechanism. Whether it achieves its transformational potential depends on implementation investments that have not yet been made.

Discussion of Findings

Heeks's (2006) back-office efficiency level shows clear positive trends in Lagos. Case processing volumes grew 54% between 2019 and 2024 and disposal rates rose 11 percentage points, trends associated with LCIS-enabled coordination, remote proceedings, and related digital tools. These outcomes are real but partial: 32% of cases filed in 2024 remained undisposed, the pre-trial detention population grew from 2,664 in 2018 to 7,457 in 2025, and the confession recording compliance gap means that a majority of cases nationally still carry the coercion risk the 2011 amendment was designed to eliminate.

Heeks's (2006) design-reality gap framework pinpoints where Lagos's digital deployment has underperformed. The LCIS was designed for an environment with reliable power, universal device access, standardised data entry, and consistent digital literacy. None of these conditions holds uniformly across Lagos's magistrates' courts, police divisions, and correctional facilities. Yusuf and Okpara (2025) document resistance from senior personnel who experience digital oversight as a threat to established discretionary authority. Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) show that such resistance is a primary determinant of implementation failure. Addressing it requires deliberate cultural investment alongside technical deployment.

The exclusion risk created by uneven digital infrastructure is structural, not incidental. Defendants without device access, communities in areas with poor connectivity, and officers without digital literacy represent the majority of participants in the Lagos criminal justice system outside its best-resourced divisions. As Lipsky (1980) demonstrates, the outcomes of reform are determined by conditions at the front line. Where digital tools do not reach, the efficiency gains they produce do not reach either. Reform designed with universal access as an explicit objective would require infrastructure investment to precede or accompany technology deployment, and legal aid expansion to ensure that digital proceedings are accessible to unrepresented defendants.

Implications for Education

The findings of this study carry direct and substantial implications for education at multiple levels, from legal education and professional training to broader policy education and institutional learning within the Nigerian public sector. The evidence that electronic confession recording compliance stands at only 43.4% nationally despite fifteen years in the statute is, at its root, an education failure. Officers who do not understand the legal requirement, who have not been trained to use recording equipment, or who have not internalised the human rights rationale behind the provision will not comply. Olugasa (2020) identifies structured training as one of three non-negotiable conditions for technology adoption in Nigerian justice institutions. This confirms that technology deployment without accompanying professional education produces underperformance. Law faculties, police training colleges, and judicial training institutes in Nigeria must treat digital criminal procedure not as a peripheral topic but as a core competency. The ACJL's technology provisions are already law. The education gap is what prevents them from becoming practice.

The design-reality gap documented in this paper is substantially a digital literacy gap. Heeks's (2006) framework shows that systems fail not because the technology is wrong but because the human conditions for using it are absent. In the Lagos context, this manifests as personnel sharing devices across too many users, manual data entry supplementing digital recording in lower-resource divisions, and senior officers resisting transparency tools they perceive as threatening. All of these are educational problems. Digital literacy training, delivered incrementally and contextually rather than as one-off workshops, is the educational intervention most directly aligned with closing the design-reality gap. Educational institutions preparing graduates for careers in law, public administration, and criminal justice should embed digital literacy, data governance, and technology ethics as standard curriculum components rather than optional extras.

The LCIS infrastructure links police, prosecution, courts, and correctional services in a shared information environment. Universities with law faculties, social science departments, and public policy programmes across Nigeria are well-positioned to serve as knowledge partners for justice sector digital reform. They can provide independent monitoring of Crime Data Register completeness, evaluate compliance trends, train personnel, and produce the research base that evidence-based reform requires. The current absence of publicly accessible crime data, noted as a central limitation of this study, is itself an invitation for university-based research centres to engage justice institutions as partners in knowledge generation rather than merely as subjects of academic inquiry.

The challenges faced by the LCIS, infrastructure deficits, uneven digital literacy, resistance from established actors, and the exclusion of those without device access, mirror challenges that educational technology deployments face across Nigerian institutions. The experience documented here is instructive for educational technology policy. It confirms that technology adoption is not primarily a procurement problem but a human development problem. Purchasing devices, installing systems, and mandating their use does not produce adoption. Training, contextual support, leadership commitment, and accountability mechanisms do. Policy makers in the education sector considering large-scale educational technology deployments, from e-learning platforms to digital examination systems, should draw directly on the lessons of the LCIS experience: invest in the human and institutional conditions for technology use before or alongside the technology itself.

Conclusion

Digital reform has made a documented contribution to criminal justice improvement in Lagos. LCIS has created an unprecedented shared information environment across justice sector agencies. Case processing volumes rose 54% between 2019 and 2024 in trends associated with LCIS, remote proceedings, and related reforms. Confession recording has reduced trial-within-trial disputes where implemented. The 2021 amendment extended the legal foundation for further digital integration.

These gains coexist with structural limitations. Pre-trial detention remains at 82% of the Lagos prison population. Confession recording compliance remains below 50% nationally. The Crime Data Register has not yet been operationalized as a public accountability mechanism. Digital tools are necessary but not sufficient for criminal justice reform in Lagos. Realizing their full potential requires infrastructure investment to close the design-reality gap, governance frameworks to make Crime Data Register information publicly accessible, and universal access provisions to ensure that digital efficiency benefits reach all defendants rather than only those already well served by the system. The educational implications are equally clear: technology without training, digital tools without digital literacy, and reform without institutional learning will continue to produce the compliance gaps this study documents.

Recommendations

The findings point to three concrete actions required to realize the potential of digital reform in Lagos criminal justice. First, the Lagos State Government should commission and publish a comprehensive LCIS infrastructure audit covering all magistrates' courts, police divisions, and correctional facilities. The audit should document power supply reliability, connectivity quality, device availability per user, and data entry compliance rates at each site. This baseline data is currently absent from the literature and is necessary to direct infrastructure investment where the design-reality gap is widest.

Second, the Lagos State Ministry of Justice should establish a publicly accessible criminal justice data portal drawing on Crime Data Register information. The portal should publish quarterly data on case filings, disposals, adjournment rates, pre-trial detention populations, bail application outcomes, and confession recording compliance rates. A quarterly publication schedule is operationally realistic for state agencies while providing sufficient frequency to enable meaningful accountability monitoring by civil society, researchers, and the public.

Third, the Lagos State Legal Aid Council should receive dedicated funding to extend legal aid coverage to all defendants in remote proceedings, with priority for defendants held in correctional facilities with limited connectivity or device access. Digital efficiency gains must not bypass the defendants most in need of them. Universal legal representation in digital proceedings is the precondition for ensuring that digital reform serves justice rather than merely serving institutional efficiency metrics.

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