

Ethical Challenges of E-Governance: Insights from Bangladesh

Rajib Chandra Das^{id}

Public Administration, CCN University of Science & Technology, Kotbari, Cumilla 3503, Bangladesh
Email: rajibrajcou@gmail.com

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*Corresponding author:

Rajib Chandra Das

Email: rajibrajcou@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Backgrounds: Globally, e-government has grown in importance as a tool for contemporary administration. Bangladesh started this journey with high hopes to make government services better and easier for people. But along with the good changes, many ethical problems have come up.

Objectives: This paper talks about moral problems in detail and suggests ways to fix them. The first part of the paper talks about what e-government is and why ethics are important in this area. After that, it talks about how e-government has grown in Bangladesh. And what problems have arisen. Finally, it provides suggestions on how to resolve these moral issues.

Methodology: This study examines the ethical challenges of e-governance in Bangladesh using a descriptive qualitative approach. Data was collected through documentation studies and literature reviews, analyzing official documents, reports, academic publications, and government websites. Source triangulation was employed to ensure data validity and reliability.

Findings: Findings reveal that despite significant progress, including the National Web Portal, over 8,000 Union Digital Centers, and mobile services—seven ethical challenges persist: digital divide, weak privacy protections, transparency gaps, digital corruption, cybersecurity threats, low digital literacy, and exclusion of marginalized groups.

Conclusions: The foremost conclusion is that e-government will create more problems than it can resolve if good moral values and stringent regulations do not back it. The paper recommends that authorities prioritize equal access, robust data protection laws, improved employee training, and transparent accountability mechanisms. Only then can e-government contribute to national development in a just and equitable manner.

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1. INTRODUCTION

E-government is broadly defined as the use of digital technology to deliver government services to citizens. Development of new technologies allows electronic services to be applied in e-government (Riad et al., 2010). Recently, many countries have switched their services to online access as a means of making them quicker, more economical, and easier to access (West, 2006). Bangladesh joined this movement in the early 2000s. Its government actually wanted to cut down on corruption, increase the quality of the services, and bring about transparency in public administration (Haque, 2020; Rezaul Islam et al., 2020). The slogan “Digital Bangladesh” became popular and many projects were started to make government offices digital (Hossain, 2019). At the same time, increased concern over the protection of privacy (Huque & Ferdous, 2024), going digital is not just about how to handle technology. It also brings about some important ethical questions (Rashid, 2020).

Ethics refer to what is right and fair (Wieland, 2001). In the case of e-government, this would be to ensure that digital services performed do not inflict any harm on people or cause them any unfair treatment (Sharma et al., 2014). This includes protecting people's private information, ensuring that everyone can access these services, and preventing misuse of technology (Chowdhury & Islam, 2022). In general, developing countries have been lagging behind in e-government use as compared to developed countries (West, 2006). Bangladesh faces special challenges here. The country has a large population with different levels of education and income (Yasmin et al., 2025). Very few people have access to computers or the internet (BTRC, 2023). There is also a problem of corruption, weak laws, and a lack of training for government workers (Khan & Roy, 2022; Ministry of Public Administration, 2023). All this creates obstacles in effectively implementing e-government in a proper manner (Siddiquee & Faroqi, 2021).

This paper draws on the major ethical challenges of implementing e-government in Bangladesh. It looks at problems such as the digital divide, privacy issues, lack of transparency, corruption online, cybersecurity risks, low levels of digital literacy, and exclusion of poor and marginalized sections of people (Ahmed & Rahman, 2021). By addressing the gap in previous research, this paper provides a clear understanding and also identifies some practical solutions which can be adopted by the government and other stakeholders in overcoming these challenges (World Bank, 2021; UN, 2022). Understanding these ethical issues is of utter importance. If e-government is not done right, it will increase inequality, violate rights of people, and lower public trust (James, 2007). However, it can help to build up a more modern, efficient, and equitable society (Zafarullah & Huque, 2021; Access to Information (A2I) Programme, 2024).

Bangladesh began to think over e-government in the late 1990s when the internet was in its infancy and few people were using it. This made the government realize that technology might do a good job in solving many problems in public administration. In 2002, the National ICT Policy was promulgated with some targets for the introduction of information and communication technology in government offices. In 2009, the government declared the vision of "Digital Bangladesh" with a goal to make Bangladesh a middle-income country by 2021 using digital technologies. Many projects were launched based on this vision. These included online birth registration, e-Government Procurement (e-GP), e-TIN, e-Tathyakosh, land records, e-Agriculture, e-passport systems, and mobile banking services. The government also built computer training centers throughout the country and tried to expand internet use nationwide (Ahmad, 2021).

The A2I Programme played a big role in this process. The A2I helped government offices become digital and trained staff to use new systems. Union Digital Centers were opened in villages to provide services such as printing out documents, paying bills, and applying for certificates. These centers took technology closer to the rural population. One of the strategic outputs of the digital agenda is the Access to Information (a2i) programme, which aims to improve the quality and ease of access of decentralised administrative services to the citizens of Bangladesh (A2I 2009). Accordingly, the country succeeded in implementing many of the goals and policies. Thus, several services became available on the internet. People could apply for a passport, file their income tax returns, and register businesses without having to go to government offices. It bridges the digital divide, citizens' participation, access to critical services, access to critical information, critical government offices, social safety net programme and rural connectivity (Aziz, 2020). Time was thus saved, and corruption was reduced. International organizations acknowledged the efforts that Bangladesh had exerted. Thus, the country gained better positions in global e-government indexes. Yet, this path was not easy. One big problem was the weakness of many government organizations to adopt new systems. It was difficult for older employees to learn about new technology. Internet connections were often weak, especially in rural areas. There were also issues of security and privacy of data. Some people became worried that their personal information may be stolen or misused (Chowdhury et al., 2025). Despite these problems, the government did not give up. New projects were started to improve infrastructure, train more people, and make better online services. But with increasing e-government, ethical challenges also grew in importance. The issues are privacy, confidentiality, computer crime (cybercrime), computer decisions, technological dependence, reliability, integrity, (cyber) security, intellectual property, anonymity, legitimacy, internet addiction, computer technology for persons with disability. These are issues that urgently need attention if technology is to serve everyone fairly (Liywalii, 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Ethical and Governance Theories

According to Ansell and Torfing (2016), ethical and governance theories are separate but related frameworks that influence behavior, organizational practices, and decision-making in a variety of fields. In a variety of settings, such as public administration, corporate management, and rising data governance, these theories are essential for guaranteeing responsibility, openness, and moral behavior (Saida & Said, 2024). Governance theories broadly explain novel governing tactics that have arisen across several disciplines over the last two decades, including law, legislation, planning, economics, public administration, and international relations (Ansell & Torfing, 2016; Jessop, 2016). While no single theory can encapsulate this broad body of literature, they all address social challenges of coordination and the nature of various types of rule (Ansell & Torfing, 2016; Kaushal, 2022). For example, corporate governance theories compare concepts such as agency theory, stakeholder theory, and cognitive theory, each of which provides a unique perspective on how firms should be directed and governed (Saida & Said, 2024).

Ethical theories give a normative foundation for defining what is morally right and wrong, as well as advice for making ethical decisions in governance (Rodger & Blackshaw, 2017). Western ethical theories include utilitarianism, deontology (Kantianism), and virtue ethics (Morrell, 2006; Dion, 2012; MBE, 2024; Drašček et al., 2020). The development of intellectual and moral qualities like integrity, reflexivity, obligation, and accountability is the focus of virtue ethics theory (MBE, 2024; Ochang et al., 2023; Drašček et al., 2020; Culham et al., 2024). According to virtue ethics, people with high moral character promote ethical government (Ochang et al., 2023). This viewpoint is especially pertinent to leadership studies, where the influence of self-control, moral identity, and ethical leadership on ethical behavior is investigated (Al Halbusi et al., 2023).

In order to solve complex issues, ethical theories must be incorporated into government. In the context of brain data governance, for example, ethical theories provide normative guidance, assist in aligning decisions with societal values, offer tools for balancing conflicting interests, encourage accountability and transparency, inform risk assessment, provide frameworks for decision-making, promote continuous improvement, and cultivate stakeholder trust (Ochang et al., 2023).

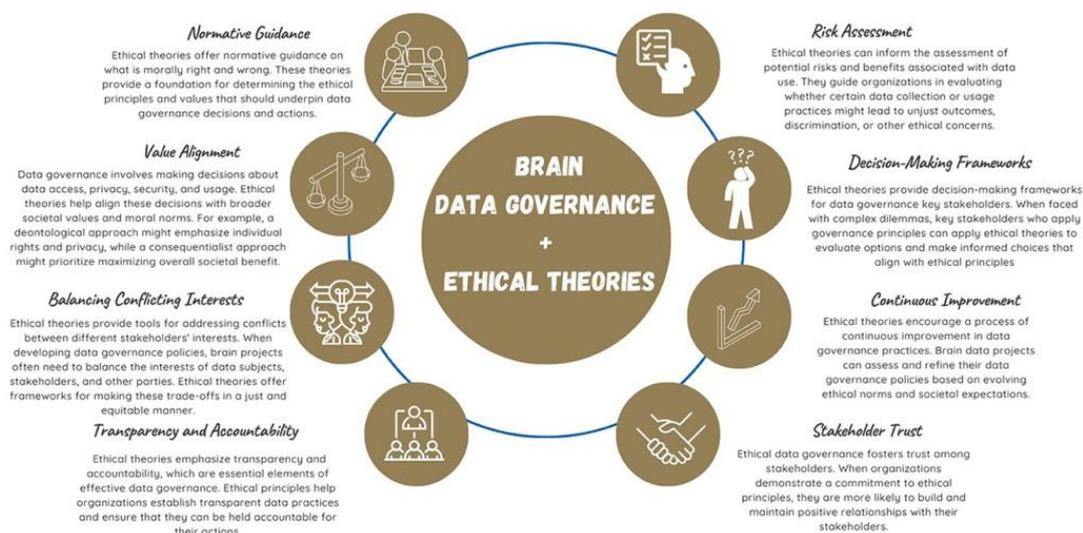


Figure 1. Brain Data Governance and Ethical Theories

Source: Ochang et al. (2023)

The figure 1 above depicts how ethical theories serve as a foundational framework for effective brain data governance by providing normative guidance, assisting with value alignment, balancing competing interests, promoting accountability and transparency, supporting risk assessment, providing decision-making frameworks, promoting continuous improvement, and promoting stakeholder trust. Another figure from Ochang et al. (2023) depicts specific ethical considerations in brain data governance, including privacy, safety, confidentiality, consent,

prejudice and exclusion, accuracy, ownership, legal basis, trust, rights in the brain, proportionality, and data retention and destruction.

2.2. E-Government

E-Government means the delivery of government services with the help of information technology. E-government generally refers to the utilization of ICTs, and other web-based communication technologies to improve and develop efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery in the public sector. It involves putting online all functions of government so that they are easily accessible to all its citizens. E-government can be categorized into various types, based on who is involved. For instance, some of the categories include G2C (Government-to-Citizen), G2B (Government-to-Business), G2G (Government-to-Government), and G2E (Government-to-Employee) services (Blake, 2000). According to Kumar & Best (2006), e-government can be defined widely as the use of ICTs in the public sector to improve its functions and delivery of services. Services became quicker, corruption was reduced, and satisfaction among citizens increased. However, e-government is not about building websites or applications. Rather, it requires a comprehensive change in how governments work: employee training, updating the laws, and infrastructure strong enough to support digital services. Without these elements, an e-government project can surely fail or create more problems.

2.3. Service Delivery

Service delivery is the process through which a service is designed and organized to meet people expectations. E-Government can serve a variety of different ends such as better delivery of government services to people, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management (Sharma et al., 2014). Service delivery quality is a multifaceted concept (Steenhuisen, 2009). Efficiency and effectiveness that are the measures for good public service delivery; legitimacy, legality, and transparency are also crucial (Gestel et al., 2008; Sharma et al., 2014; WRR, 2004).

2.4. Ethics in E-Government

Ethics in e-government concerns the moral principles that should guide the usages of technologies in public administration. Equity, privacy, transparency, and accountability make up some of the key ethical principles in e-government. First is equity, meaning everyone should have equal access to digital services irrespective of income, education, or location. Second is privacy, meaning people's personal information should be safe and not shared without permission. Third is transparency, which means the government should be open about how it uses technology and makes decisions. Fourth is accountability, meaning officials must be responsible in cases where they misuse technology or fail to protect the interests of the citizens. Other important values are security, fairness, and respect for human rights. Security means protection from hackers and other threats. If a system is designed in an unethical way, it can harm individuals and communities. E-government implementations must consider security and privacy issues to ensure protection of individual rights (Fang, 2002).

3. METHOD

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of ethical challenges of e-governance. Data collection methods included documentation studies and literature reviews, with secondary data obtained from a variety of sources such as official documents, reports, research articles and academic publications, as well as books and articles. Under the analysis of government documents, relevant websites, there is make overview of e-government implementation and ethical challenges. The patterns were then classified. Source triangulation ensured data validity by cross-document and cross-perspective verification of information, enhancing reliability.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Overview of E-Government Implementation in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has made significant efforts in implementing e-government over the last two decades. The journey started from basic computerization of government offices to sophisticated online services and digital platforms. The government developed an array of platforms for service delivery. The National Web Portal, (www.bangladesh.gov.bd), acts as the single-window gateway for government information and services. The citizens can get information on various ministries, departments, and their services through this portal. Each ministry and department maintains their websites where specific information and services are available. Union Digital Centers have played an important role in reaching services to rural people. Union parishads, the lowest tier of local government, house these centers Press Information Department, (2024). Entrepreneurs operate these centers and charge a small price for the services. People can get passport photos, print out documents, pay utility bills, apply for certificates, and get different government forms from these centers. More than 8,000 UDCs were operating across the country by 2024 (Palak, 2024). A summary of services available through various e-government platforms in Bangladesh is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Services Available Through E-Government Platforms in Bangladesh

| Category | Examples of Services Utilizes | Access |
|---|---|--|
| Citizen Services | Birth/Death Registration, National ID, Passport | Online portals, UDCs, Mobile apps |
| Business Services | Business Registration, Tax Filing, Trade License | Online portals |
| Government Services | Land Records, Court Information, Pension | Online portals, UDCs |
| Payment Services | Utility Bills, Government Fees, Taxes | Mobile banking, Online banking |
| Digital Municipality Service System | It utilizes NID API to verify authenticity of citizen seeking service from Municipality. | BCC |
| Ek-Sheba Sarkar | It utilizes NID API and Birth & Death Registration System API to verify authenticity of citizen seeking service. | A2I |
| Digital Service Book System | It utilizes NID API and e-Primary system to verify teacher info. | Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) |
| e-Nothi Application | It utilizes NID API to verify authenticity of citizen seeking service. | A2I |
| LISF (Land Information and Service framework) | It utilizes NID API to verify authenticity of citizen seeking service. | A2I, Ministry of Land |
| eRecruitment System | It also Utilizes Blockchain platform to store critical info of admit card. It utilizes NID API to verify authenticity of registered applicants. | BCC |
| Data Analytics Platform | It provides Big Data Analytics platform for govt. organizations. | BCC |

Source: UNPSA, (2019)

The government also introduced mobile government (m-government) services. These services use mobile phones to deliver information and allow transactions. For example, people can

check their exam results; pay bills, and receive government notifications through SMS or mobile apps. This approach is particularly useful in Bangladesh where mobile phone penetration is high but computer ownership is low. Another important development was the introduction of digital payment systems. The government partnered with mobile financial service providers to enable cashless transactions. Services like bKash, Nagad, and Rocket became popular for paying bills, transferring money, and conducting business. The government also started accepting payments online for various services, reducing the need for physical visits to government offices.

Table 2. E-Government Implementation Framework in Bangladesh

| Indicator | Topics |
|------------------------|--|
| Policy Level | Digital Bangladesh Vision National ICT Policy E-Government Strategy |
| Infrastructure Level | Internet Connectivity (Broadband & Mobile) Data Centers & Cloud Infrastructure |
| Service Delivery Level | National Web Portal System Online Government Portals Union Digital Centers (9,500) Mobile Applications & SMS Services |
| Citizen Level | Access to Government Services Digital Literacy & Skills Awareness & Participation |

Source: Adapted from A2I, (2025)

The e-government implementation framework in Table 2 covers policy, infrastructure, service delivery, and citizen engagement. Despite these achievements, implementation has been uneven across different sectors and regions. Urban areas have better infrastructure and more people with digital skills. Rural areas face challenges like poor internet connectivity, a lack of electricity, and low literacy rates. Some government departments have been more successful in going digital compared to others. The good progress in this respect has been for the departments dealing with revenue, passports, and education. However, the departments which deal with complex services such as land administration and judiciary have been relatively slow in digitization. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated e-government adoption in Bangladesh. During the lockdowns, when physical offices were closed, many services had no alternative but to go online. This compelled government employees and citizens to be more comfortable with digital tools. Virtual meetings became common, and many processes that required visits to offices were successfully completed online.

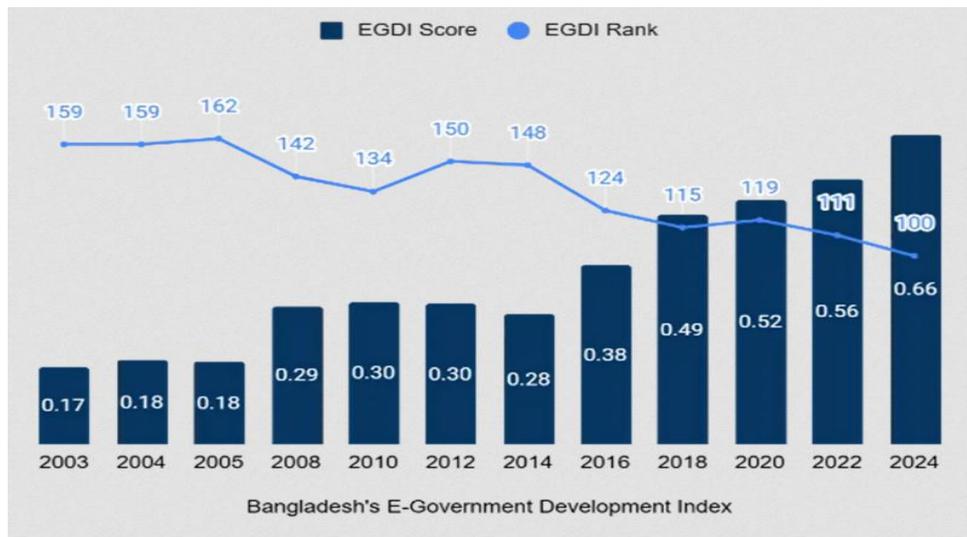


Figure 2. E-Government Development Index (EGDI) Ranking of Bangladesh

Source: Light Castle Partners, (2025)

As shown in figure 2, Bangladesh has gradually improved its e-government ranking. The country moved from 100th position globally in 2003 to 110th position in 2024. This shows that efforts are paying off, though there is still a long way to go compared to developed countries. Bangladesh's position on the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) improved dramatically, demonstrating real development in digital governance, infrastructure, and human capacity.

4.2. Ethical Challenges of E-Government in Bangladesh

4.2.1. Digital Divide and Access Inequality

In developing countries, the digital divide occurs where there is a lack of infrastructure (for example, power supply) or access to modern technology such as internet, computers and mobile phones (James, 2007). One of the most serious ethical issues concerning e-government is the digital divide. The term describes the gap between individuals who have digital access and their counterparts who do not. In the country of Bangladesh, this gap is gigantic and involves millions of people. Many factors are responsible for the digital divide. Economic inequality is a major reason. Poor people cannot afford computers, smartphones, or internet connections. So, even when services are provided online, they can never avail themselves of such services. However, many villages have slowed or unreliable internet. Some remote areas have no internet access altogether. In other words, residents of these places cannot benefit from e-government services even if they want to. Education is yet another barrier. A large number of people, particularly the older sections of citizens and those with little formal education, simply do not know how to use a computer or a smartphone. Getting access to websites or using applications is intimidating for them.

4.2.2. Privacy and Data Protection Issues

Privacy and security are one of the fundamental rights; however, e-government systems as well as stores collect vast amounts of individual data, making a serious hazard. Bangladesh has weak data prevention legislation, and the Digital Security Act mainly focuses on national security rather than protecting personal information. Furthermore, technical security is not adequate; rigorous rules must control who may use data as well as how it can be utilized.

4.2.3. Transparency and Accountability Gaps

E-government is supposed to make government more transparent. It should be easier for citizens to see what the government is doing and hold officials accountable when services are online. In reality, however, many e-government systems in Bangladesh lack transparency (Chowdhury et al., 2025). One drawback is that decision-making procedures are not clear all the time. When an application is submitted online, often citizens have no idea what happens next. Who considers the application? What criteria will be used? How long will it take? If the application is rejected, for what reason? These questions are often not answered (Aktar & Tasnim, 2021).

4.2.4. Corruption in Digital Platforms

Corruption has been a long-standing problem in Bangladesh's public administration. Most of the people hoped that would lessen various sorts of corruption by eliminating direct contact between officials as well as citizens. But in some cases, it has happened. In addition to that, online services have made it quite complex for officials to demand bribes for simple tasks.

4.2.5. Cybersecurity Threats

With the increase in the number of government services moving online, there is a corresponding rise in the risk of cyberattacks. Bangladesh faces serious problems regarding cybersecurity. The hackers targeting government systems to either steal data, disrupt services, or cause damage come both from within the country and from outside its borders. Most of the security features of government websites and databases in Bangladesh are quite poor (Palak, 2024). They use outdated software, have poor encryption, and lack proper monitoring systems. This makes them easy targets for cyberattacks. Over the last couple of years, a number of government websites have been hacked and defaced (Franceschi-Bicchierai, 2023).

4.2.6. Lack of Digital Literacy

Even where the technology is in place and services are online, many cannot avail themselves of these services because they lack digital literacy. Digital literacy refers to the ability to safely and efficiently use computers, the internet, and digital services. Digital literacy rates are low in Bangladesh, with significant differences by age, sex, and level of education. Many people do not know how to type, or use a mouse, or navigate websites, or operate smartphones. Online forms confuse them, and they are afraid to make mistakes. And this lack of skills is a barrier to benefiting from e-government. They have to depend on intermediaries such as families, friends, or entrepreneurs at Union Digital Centers to assist them (Shadat et al., 2020).

4.2.7. Exclusion of Marginalized Groups:

E-government systems can, however, inadvertently exclude marginalized groups. These include people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, the elderly, and the extreme poor, whose special needs are often not considered when digital services are being designed (Ahsan et al., 2025; Antara, 2024). People with visual impairments cannot use websites that are incompatible with screen readers, while the deaf and hard-of-hearing struggle with video content because of a lack of captions (Antara, 2024).

4.3. Addressing Ethical Challenges: Recommendations

A comprehensive approach by Bangladesh is therefore required to overcome the ethical challenges discussed above. The following recommendations can make e-government more ethical, fair, and inclusive.

Bridging the Digital Divide: The pivotal government should work to close it by expanding internet infrastructure to villages as well as partnering with the private companies at the lowest cost. Furthermore, public access company points such as libraries, community centers, and post offices should provide free internet. Digital literacy programs must be scaled up in schools and adult education, with special focus on women and the elderly as well as marginalized groups.

Strengthening Data Protection: Bangladesh requires robust data prevention legislation that defines how individual data is collected, stored, and accessed, as well as amended. Additionally, government systems must utilize durable security measures and train staff to protect data misuse. An independent data prevention authority should observe compliance and enforce the law.

Improving Transparency and Accountability: E-governance must be transparent, providing citizens clear information on application status and decision-making criteria as well as their fundamental rights. Functional accessible grievance maneuvers, both online and offline should ensure complaints are detected quickly and fairly. In addition to that, regular audits must verify not only technical performance but also that the systems serve citizens ethically and equitably.

Fighting Digital Corruption: Safeguarding e-governance from various kinds of corruption involves minimizing human involvement through automation and maintaining transparency and accuracy, as well as equitable contest in procurement with strict technical checks and ongoing evaluation of major IT projects.

Enhancing Cybersecurity: It requires raising investment in modern tools as well as skilled workers, comprehensive training for government employees, regular cyber practice, and strong international cooperation, as well as updating valid frameworks with well-equipped legislation enforcement to address emerging cyber threats.

Building Digital Literacy: Promoting digital literacy as a fundamental competency requires integrating technology education into college and school, offering community-based functional training for adults with multilingual resources, and utilizing media campaigns across TV, radio, and social media platforms to increase consciousness as well as to assure people could safely and effectively access e-governance services.

Inclusion Guaranteed: Assuring inclusion in e-governance needs designing systems that evaluate all user groups from the start, pursuing international accessibility standards, providing multilingual support as well as assistive options. Furthermore, providing substitute face-to-face services for those unable to use digital platforms, and ensuring no group is excluded from access to public service.

Legal and Policy Reforms: Bangladesh should strengthen its valid and policy framework for government by updating effective laws on data protection, digital accessibility, cybersecurity, and digital rights. While ensuring all initiatives pursue clear ethical principles such as equity, privacy, transparency, accountability, and security, as well as inclusion.

Building Institutional Capacity: Strengthening institutional capability for ethical e-governance requires ministries with functional training and resources, as well as technical support; coordinating efforts through a central agency; leveraging universities for research-based guidance; and engaging society to monitor implementation and prevent citizen rights.

5. CONCLUSION

E-government in Bangladesh has tremendous potential for improving public administration. It can make services quicker, cheaper, and more accessible. It can reduce corruption and enhance transparency. It can also help the country develop and join the race in the global economy. The progress seen so far shows that the vision of Digital Bangladesh is achievable. However, this paper has identified that e-government brings with it serious ethical challenges. The digital divide means millions cannot access online services. Inadequate data protection laws place personal privacy at risk. Lack of transparency and accountability allows corruption to persist in new forms. Cybersecurity threats pose risks to both citizens and government systems, while low digital literacy limits individuals' ability to use digital services effectively. Excluded groups also remain unable to fully benefit from e-government initiatives. These challenges, however, extend beyond technical limitations and cannot be resolved solely through improved software or faster internet. They fundamentally involve considerations of equity, rights, and justice. They involve careful thought about what type of digital society Bangladesh intends to build.

The recommendations provided in this paper give a way ahead. These involve bridging the digital divide, making data protection stronger, ensuring more transparency, fighting corruption, enhancing cybersecurity, building digital literacy, and ensuring inclusion. Legal reforms will be supported by capacity building, citizen participation, and continuous monitoring. Above all, there has to be a commitment to ethical principles in all e-government initiatives. Every project should be judged not just by how efficient it is, but also how fair it is. Ethical e-government is everyone's responsibility. The government should provide leadership, resources, and regulations. Government employees must be trained and held accountable. Citizens must be informed and engaged. Civil society must monitor and advocate. The private sector must design systems with ethics in mind. Academic institutions must research and educate. The media must report and raise awareness.

Bangladesh stands today at an important juncture in its journey toward a digital society. The choices it makes today will define the country's future for decades. If e-government is implemented in an ethical way, it has the potential to help build a society that is more just, prosperous, and modern. But if ethics are overlooked, such technology runs the risk of reinforcing old inequities and fostering new exclusions and injustices. Better than digitizing government should be creating a government that serves all people fairly in the digital era, and this requires deep thinking about ethics at every step. This requires listening to the most vulnerable. This also requires having the courage to address problems even when solutions are difficult or expensive.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that they have no known financial or nonfinancial competing interests in any material discussed in this paper.

Author Contributions

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: conceptualization, methodology, investigation, data curation, formal analysis, writing—original draft, and writing—review & editing.

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Ethical Approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by the authors.

Data Availability

The data supporting this study are from publicly available documents, reports, and academic publications cited in the references.

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