

S P E E C H

The Invisible Ballot

Why Election Technology Stands or Falls on Infrastructure

Nigeria eGovernment Summit 2026

Theme: Mainstreaming Technologies in Nigeria Election Management

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PROTOCOL

Your Excellency, the Executive Governor of Lagos State, Mr. Babajide Olusola Sanwo Olu; Your Excellencies, visiting Governors; the Chairman of the Independent National Electoral Commission; the Directors General and Honourable Commissioners here present; the Chairman of the Nigeria eGovernment Summit, Engr. Lanre Ajayi; distinguished leaders of our industry associations; development partners; members of the press; ladies and gentlemen.

I greet you on behalf of the Lagos State Infrastructure Maintenance and Regulatory Agency, LASIMRA, the one stop shop for the orderly regulation of utility infrastructure in Lagos State.

OPENING

Distinguished guests, technology does not win elections. Trust does.

And trust, in a digital democracy, does not travel on slogans. It travels on fibre. It travels on power. It travels on a right of way that was planned before the campaign posters went up. It travels on infrastructure that does not fail at 4 p.m. on election day when the last result sheet is being transmitted from a polling unit in Ikorodu, Badagry, Epe or Agege.

That is why this theme, Mainstreaming Technologies in Nigeria Election Management, is not, first, a software conversation. It is an infrastructure conversation. And that is the conversation Lagos State, through LASIMRA, came here to have.

THE LESSON OF A DECADE

Over the last ten years, Nigeria has done something few young democracies have done at this scale. We have put biometrics at the heart of the register. We have put accreditation devices in the hands of ad hoc staff. We have opened a public window onto polling unit results. The Electoral Act gave those tools legal life. INEC gave them operational life.

But every one of those tools is a promise that must be kept in real time. A BVAS that cannot talk to a server is a paperweight. An IReV portal that the public cannot reach is a rumour factory. A situation room without redundant connectivity is a single point of national anxiety.

The invitation to this Summit put it plainly: interoperability, infrastructure availability, cybersecurity, policy alignment and public trust remain the unfinished business. LASIMRA lives inside that unfinished business. We do not print ballot papers. We do not write election software. We make sure the ground beneath those systems is not chaos.

WHAT LASIMRA ACTUALLY DOES

Established in 2004, LASIMRA regulates the deployment and maintenance of utility infrastructure in public space: fibre and ducts, masts and towers, power and gas lines. We issue right of way. We enforce standards. We stop the reckless excavation that cuts cables and closes roads. We keep a living map of what is under our streets and above our skyline.

In a megacity of this density, that mandate is not clerical. It is strategic. If operators dig the same road four times in four years, three things happen. The road dies. The fibre dies. And public trust in technology dies with them, because the citizen does not distinguish between a failed device and a failed trench.

So our work is simple to say and hard to do: make infrastructure deployment orderly, investable, shareable and safe, so that digital government, including digital elections, can actually work.

THE DIG ONCE DOCTRINE

That is the meaning of Lagos State's Dig Once policy, the Unified Fibre Duct Infrastructure.

Dig Once is not a slogan we borrowed for a brochure. It is a governing principle. When a road is opened for construction, for rehabilitation, or for a new corridor, we lay the duct once. Multiple operators then light that duct instead of returning, year after year, with jackhammers and generators. One trench. Many networks. One public asset. Many private services.

The ducts themselves last a generation. The fibre inside them can be upgraded without tearing the city open again. That is how a serious city treats digital infrastructure: not as a series of emergencies, but as a planned utility, as fundamental as water and power.

Ladies and gentlemen, if Nigeria is to mainstream technology in election management, Dig Once must become a national reflex, not a Lagos exception. Project BRIDGE and the federal fibre ambition will not be delivered by enthusiasm. They will be delivered by states that stop treating roads as disposable packaging for cables.

PRIVATE CAPITAL ON THE DIGITAL HIGHWAY

Policy without capital is a press statement. That is why I am proud to report what private investors are doing on this platform.

Through LASIMRA, Lagos State has facilitated private investment for the deployment of about 30,000 kilometres of 28 way fibre duct infrastructure along strategic corridors across the State, building on the thousands of kilometres already in the ground. We have also secured in the order of 22 million dollars in foreign direct investment commitments for quality fibre installations.

Hear what that number means. A 28 way duct is not a single operator's private pipe. It is a highway with many lanes. It is designed for sharing. It is designed so that MTN, Airtel, the internet service providers, the State's own networks, and yes, the networks that will carry electoral traffic in 2027, can ride the same protected corridor instead of fighting one another in the same trench.

That is mainstreaming. Not another pilot. Not another donated gadget that dies when the grant ends. A backbone that private capital is willing to fund because the rules are clear, the right of way is bankable, and the regulator will not move the goalposts after the money is in the ground.

FROM THE DUCT TO THE POLLING UNIT

Now connect this, directly, to tomorrow's ballot.

Election technology fails at the last mile. It fails where power is uncertain. It fails where there is no redundant path out of a ward. It fails where a fibre cut at 2 p.m. has no alternative route. It fails where INEC offices, RACs, collation centres and polling units sit on islands of connectivity while the rest of the city is an ocean.

Thirty thousand kilometres of shared duct changes that arithmetic. It shortens the distance between a polling unit and a resilient backhaul. It gives operators a cheaper, faster, safer way to reach communities that were previously not commercial. It gives the State a map. We are advancing GIS mapping of fibre routes and the Automated Telecom Infrastructure Registration System, TIRS, so that when a cable is threatened, we know what is there, who owns it, and how to protect it.

Cybersecurity, which this Summit rightly places at the centre of the conversation, does not begin in a security operations centre. It begins with physical infrastructure that is identified, registered, monitored and defended. You cannot secure what you have not mapped. You cannot trust a result that travelled on a network nobody can account for.

HOMES, HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS: THE REAL ELECTORAL COLLEGE

There is a temptation, in rooms like this, to talk about elections as if they begin on election morning. They do not.

A voter who has never had reliable internet in her home will not suddenly become a confident digital citizen because a device appeared at her polling unit. A health centre that cannot transmit data will not inspire faith in a results portal. A school that is offline cannot raise the generation we keep asking to trust the process.

That is why the goal for Lagos is unambiguous: internet connectivity to every home, every hospital, every health centre and every school.

This is not a luxury target. It is electoral infrastructure in slow motion. Civic education will move online. Party campaigns already have. Fact checking must. Voting information that includes persons with disability must. Observer reports must. If those flows only work in Victoria Island and die in Ibeju Lekki or Iba, we have not mainstreamed technology. We have decorated it.

The same ducts that will carry a child's lesson on Thursday will carry a polling unit's result on Saturday. That is the point. Build once. Serve many public purposes.

WHAT LAGOS ASKS OF THE FEDERATION

Let me be direct, because the 2027 general elections will not wait for perfect conditions.

First: treat right of way as national election infrastructure, not as a local revenue argument. Harmonise it. Price it so that operators can go where votes live, not only where ARPU lives.

Second: adopt Dig Once in every state that will host a collation centre. If we keep digging the same roads in the same season as voter registration and elections, we will keep cutting the same cables and then blaming the technology.

Third: protect the physical layer. Vandalism of fibre and towers is an attack on the ballot by other means. LASIMRA will continue to enforce, to remove dangerous and illegal installations, and to work with NCC, the operators and security agencies. We ask the same seriousness nationwide.

Fourth: design electoral technology for the network we actually have, with offline capability, store and forward, and redundancy, while we build the network we need. Devices must be honest when the sky is closed. Infrastructure must make the sky unnecessary.

CLOSE

Your Excellencies, distinguished guests: Lagos did not become the economic engine of this country by waiting to be invited into the future. We laid roads. We laid law. We are now laying the digital highway on which the next chapter of Nigerian democracy must travel.

INEC can design the best process in Africa. Innovators can write the most elegant code. Civil society can watch every upload. None of it will matter if the pipe is dark.

So when we speak of mainstreaming technologies in Nigeria's election management, let us mean this: not gadgets on a high table, but fibre under the street; not a portal that works in a hotel ballroom, but a network that works in a primary school that doubles as a polling unit; not a policy that is announced, but a duct that is shared.

The 2027 election will be decided by millions of ordinary Nigerians. The credibility of that decision will be decided, quietly, by whether the country built the invisible ballot, the infrastructure that carries the visible one.

LASIMRA is building that infrastructure in Lagos, with private investors as partners, with Dig Once as doctrine, and with a simple public promise: connectivity that reaches the home, the hospital, the health centre and the school, so that when the nation asks technology to keep its word, the ground is ready to keep it too.

I thank you.

Prince Elegushi Oyekanmi

General Manager / Chief Executive Officer

Lagos State Infrastructure Maintenance and Regulatory Agency (LASIMRA)