

# Managing cybersafe futures: Safeguarding Nigeria's growth in an era of digital acceleration in the 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution

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## Abstract

Cybersecurity and data protection are no longer technical afterthoughts; they are now core pillars of national resilience, economic confidence, and institutional credibility. Technical safeguards such as encryption, identity controls, and network security must work in lockstep with strong legal and regulatory frameworks that protect data rights and enforce accountability. Although the Nigerian government has established various policies and laws, continual updates to the laws governing cybersecurity are required to address emerging threats. However, as cyber threats continue to evolve, so too must our strategies for safeguarding information integrity and user privacy. This study is anchored on the sociotechnical systems (STS) theory and Economic theories propounded by Eric Trist and Fred Emery at the Tavistock Institute in the 1950s to demonstrate that work should be designed to balance technical efficiency with human needs, promoting autonomy and adaptability for better performance and well-being. This paper examines how Nigeria can move decisively from digital expansion to digital assurance. This paper also discusses the current cybersecurity and regulatory landscape in Nigeria, identifies key challenges, and proposes comprehensive strategies for managing a cybersafe future for Nigeria one that protects innovation, safeguards citizens, and sustains long-term economic growth. It is a literature review-based paper.

## 1. Introduction

In this digital age, Nigeria is standing at a decisive digital moment where the proliferation of technology has transformed how individuals, businesses, and governments operate. Nigeria, as one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa, is witnessing unprecedented digital adoption across various sectors. However, this growth is accompanied by inherent risks, particularly with regard to cybersecurity. According to the Nigerian Communications Commission (2021), the number of internet users in Nigeria has exceeded 150 million, yet a significant proportion remains vulnerable to cyber threats. Meanwhile in 2024, the ICT sector accounted for approximately 16 per cent of national GDP, consolidating its position as one of the strongest drivers of economic growth, productivity, and innovation. With well over 140 million Nigerians actively connected, making our cyberspace the backbone of governance, finance, healthcare, education, and everyday commerce. This scale of connectivity is unprecedented, and irreversible.

Digital infrastructure growth is promoting inclusion, efficiency, and economic growth, though, growing these systems without adequate security is creating systemic vulnerability. There is a growing challenge of cybercrime, misuse of data, institutional vulnerability and the erosion of trust and confidence by people on digital platforms hence compromising the stability of countries and organizations. Accordingly, the idea of cybersecurity and data protection has developed as a marginal technical issue into a core element of national resilience, economic trust and institutional authority. The technological adoption and ICT integration literature also suggests that the lack of proper protection weakens the gains of digital innovation in the educational and socio-economic system (Nnoli & Muogbo, 2025). Good digital governance, thus, requires technological security measures, including encryption, identity control, and network security, to be combined with legal and regulatory systems of enforceability. This type of alignment guarantees the security of the data rights, accountability, and sustainable digital transformation (Okafor et al., 2023; Enemuo et al., 2024; Anakpua et al., 2025).

This paper examines how Nigeria can move decisively from digital expansion to digital assurance. Assessing the strength of our current policy, institutional architecture, technical foundations of cyber resilience and interrogate the role of trust and public-private collaboration, as well as confronting the emerging risks shaping the future of cyberspace. Drawing on recent national reforms, regulatory initiatives, and global best practice, it outlined practical, actionable pathways to securing a truly CyberSafe Future for Nigeria, one that protects innovation, safeguards citizens, and sustains long-term economic growth.

## Theoretical framework

This paper is anchored on the sociotechnical systems (STS) theory and Economic theories. The sociotechnical systems theory was propounded by Eric Trist and Fred Emery at the Tavistock institute in the 1950s to demonstrate that work should be designed to balance technical efficiency with human needs, promoting autonomy and adaptability for better performance and well-being. The core principles embedded in this theory are inter-dependence, joint optimization, open systems, work design and emergent change (Trist & Emery, 1951).

The theory encourages work environments where technology support, human capabilities and human factors enhance technological effectiveness and adaptability. The STS theory explains the interplay between people, processes and technology leading to a cyber safe ecosystem and the end users of the technological tools in the Nigerian digital infrastructure space. The STS theory tends to explain the management of cyber space in relation with existing organizational culture, user behavior, vulnerability and cybersecurity awareness.

While the Economic theory help us to understand the economic impact of cybercrime and the incentives of investing in developing strategies to secure emerging technologies. This theory encourages the promotion of cybersecurity innovation and entrepreneurship to develop local solutions for local cybersecurity challenges.

## 2. Method

The document review method was chosen as the primary research tool in this study because it would allow conducting a thorough and systematic examination of the changing digital and cybersecurity landscape in Nigeria. The document review technique was believed to be suitable since it provides the opportunity to synthesize the available knowledge based on credible secondary sources such as academic journal articles, policy documents, government reports, regulatory frameworks, and publications issued by international organizations interested in digital governance and cybersecurity. In this manner, the research assessed current trends in the digital cyber safe ecosystem, with special focus on the impact of technological growth on security practices, institutional readiness, and the general trust of the citizens towards the digital systems.

The research approach also facilitated a thorough discussion of channels by which Nigeria can commit to making a transformation between the fast-tracked digital growth and the sustainable digital confidence. The analysis of relevant documents was performed to evaluate how far cybersecurity and data protection principles are incorporated into national digital initiatives. Moreover, the paper analyzed the current state of cybersecurity and regulatory environment to define whether legal tools, enforcement strategies, and institutional frameworks in place are sufficient to protect digital resources and information.

The most critical analysis of reported gaps, new threats, and systemic vulnerabilities reported in previous research and policy reviews identified key challenges that impact the achievement of a cyber-safe future. Lastly, the document review technique facilitated the formulation of a set of holistic measures towards the management of a secure digital future in Nigeria. These initiatives were informed by the best practice, on-ground realities, and evidence-based suggestions in the literature reviewed which makes the offered solutions practical and consistent with national development goals.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. Managing cybersafe futures

Cybersecurity and data protection are no longer technical afterthoughts; they are now core pillars of national resilience, economic confidence, and institutional credibility. Cybersafe futures entails a digital eco system or environment where both individuals, private, public, corporate and none corporate organizations are guaranteed of digital safety while utilizing the cyberspace without threats, actual cyber-attacks or breaches of any kind. Michelle Moore of University of San Diego opined that global cost of cybercrime is projected to rise from 9.22 trillion in 2024 to 13.82 trillion in 2028 reflecting the yearly huge damage and financial impact on the cyberspace users. Managing the cyberspace future will require the interplay of different approaches that is all inclusive in the areas of ethical considerations, awareness campaigns, cooperation and constant evolving local means to solve local challenges.

#### 3.2. Current Cybersecurity and Regulatory Landscape in Nigeria

Despite a growing awareness of cybersecurity issues, Nigeria faces substantial challenges in creating a secure cyberspace. The National Cybersecurity Policy (2019) outlines strategic goals for strengthening Nigeria's cybersecurity posture; however, its implementation has remained inconsistent across sectors due to capacity, coordination, and enforcement gaps (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2019). Cybercriminal activities, such as phishing, ransomware attacks, and data breaches, are reportedly on the rise (Adebayo et al., 2020). The conflicting regulatory frameworks and insufficient funding for cybersecurity initiatives further exacerbate this risk on the rise (Adebayo et al., 2020). The conflicting regulatory frameworks and insufficient funding for cybersecurity initiatives further exacerbate this risk.

Nigeria has made significant progress in cybersecurity governance, establishing key legal and institutional frameworks, though gaps in enforcement and coordination remain. The country now operates under the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act of 2015, which was amended in 2024 to include new incident reporting and identity verification provisions. Complementing this is the National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy (2023) and the Nigeria Data Protection Act (2023), which builds upon the earlier 2019 National Data Protection Regulation (NDPR). Oversight and implementation are managed primarily by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) and the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC). NITDA's Cybersecurity Department emphasizes that Nigeria has "*established key instruments including the Cybercrime Act (2015/2024), the National Cybersecurity Policy and Strategy, and sector-specific regulations such as the National PKI Regulation and the Nigerian Data Protection Act*" (TechAfrica News, 2025). In addition, sector regulators are progressively aligning policies to reinforce cybersecurity standards and promote compliance, highlighting the country's incremental yet deliberate approach toward a more secure digital ecosystem. For example, the Central Bank of Nigeria has published risk-based cybersecurity frameworks for banks and payment service providers (DPA, 2025), and the Nigerian Communications Commission cooperates on infrastructure security.

However, a recent analysis notes that many provisions of the 2024 Cybercrime Act are still unimplemented, and only in 2024 were critical infrastructure networks formally designated under law (D20104 Cybercrime, 2025) Enforcement gaps mean breaches often go unreported –for instance the controversy around alleged data leaks at the National Identity Management Commission (D20104 Cybercrime, 2025) weakening trust. This underscores an urgent need to strengthen Nigeria's cyber ecosystem. As NDPC's Commissioner recently warned, policies alone are not enough; we need investment in "*policies, human capital development, infrastructure, [and] Public-Private Partnership (PPP)*" backed by political will to build a resilient digital future (Nigeria Data Protection Commission, 2024). Practically, this means closing policy gaps and accelerating implementation.

For example, Nigeria's 2023 Data Protection Act broadens legal bases for processing personal data (adding "*legitimate interest*" alongside consent and others), expands definitions of sensitive data (to include biometric/genetic), and creates a mandatory registration regime for data controllers of "*major importance*" (DPA, 2025). The NDPC is now issuing guidance to operationalize this law: in February 2024 it set criteria for "*major importance*" (e.g. processing large volumes of data or operating in key sectors), and in mid-2024 it released draft directives clarifying obligations like

appointing Data Protection Officers and performing privacy impact assessments (DPA, 2025). Meanwhile, the Cybercrimes Act was amended early in 2024 to add a 72-hour breach reporting requirement and to strengthen provisions on identity verification and international cooperation (DPA, 2025). These are steps forward, but constant review is needed: our laws must keep pace with evolving threats. In particular, Nigeria should ratify and implement international cyber conventions (Budapest Convention, the Malabo Convention on cybercrime, etc.) to align with global best practice and enhance cross-border collaboration.

### 3.3. Building Technical Resilience and Capacity

True cyber resilience blends legal frameworks with technical and organizational measures. We need to embed security at every level of system design and policy. Nigeria has begun to institutionalize this: for example, a National Cybersecurity Coordination Centre (under the NSA's office) now oversees sectoral Computer Security Incident Response Teams (CSIRTs) in agencies like NITDA, the NCC, and the Defense Space Administration (D20104 Cybercrime, 2025). The NDPC has emphasized that cyber security and privacy are "*inextricably linked*" technical controls (encryption, firewalls, authentication) must be paired with data protection controls (Nigeria Data Protection Commission, 2024). This means adopting standards and guidelines rigorously. For instance, critical infrastructure (power) grids, telecoms, banking networks) should implement multi-layered defenses and incident response plans based on ISO/IEC 27001, the NIST Cybersecurity Framework, or Nigeria's own standards. Our regulators should require regular security audits and penetration testing for important systems, and enforce the 72-hour breach notification rule and other legal mandates.

A resilience-minded cybersecurity strategy requires proactively anticipating and mitigating potential attacks. The financial sector offers a particularly instructive case: recent reports indicate that banks in Nigeria are confronting emerging threats such as AI-powered malware distributed via messaging apps, near-field-communication (NFC) payment exploits, and even blockchain-based command-and-control infrastructures (Kaspersky Security Bulletin, 2025; Nigerian Communication Week Report, 2025). Organized crime groups are increasingly combining physical heists with sophisticated cyberattacks, exemplified by large-scale supply chain attacks in 2025, which targeted financial networks by exploiting vulnerabilities in third-party providers (Nigerian Communication Week Report, 2025). This trend highlights the critical importance of third-party risk management in organizational cybersecurity planning.

On the defensive side, many institutions are adopting AI-driven tools for real-time threat detection and automated response (Nigeria's Cybersecurity Outlook, 2025). Encouraging such innovation is essential: partnerships with global technology firms, exemplified by NITDA's recent workshop with Google, facilitate knowledge transfer in AI-powered security and big data analytics. At the same time, supporting indigenous cybersecurity startups is vital, as local developers possess contextual knowledge of Nigeria-specific threats, enabling tailored solutions that align with national cybersecurity priorities (Nigeria's Cybersecurity Outlook, 2025). Together, these measures reinforce a forward-looking approach to digital resilience and national cyber defense.

Improving basic cyber hygiene remains a critical priority for Nigeria. Recent studies highlight that many organizations under-invest in cybersecurity, lack adequately trained personnel, and have weak incident reporting mechanisms. Reflecting these systemic gaps, the World Bank's Global Cyber Security Capacity Centre ranked Nigeria poorly in 2023, indicating significant deficiencies in workforce development and institutional preparedness (D20104 Cybercrime, 2025). Addressing these challenges requires sustained capacity-building initiatives, including dedicated funding for higher education programs in cybersecurity and related fields, as well as professional certification pathways for IT personnel.

Programs led by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA), such as the "*3 Million Tech Talents*" initiative, exemplify strategic efforts to develop local expertise. Collaborations with global technology firms, including Cisco and SecDojo (France), provide free cybersecurity training to equip Nigerians with essential skills (NITDA, 2022). In late 2025, NITDA opened applications for Cisco-led cybersecurity courses, emphasizing that Nigeria's large youthful population represents a potential talent pool capable of filling global cyber workforce gaps if properly trained (NITDA, 2020). To build a robust cybersecurity ecosystem, such programs must be

expanded, universities encouraged to integrate cybersecurity curricula, and diaspora expertise leveraged. By investing in human capital and promoting widespread awareness of cyber hygiene, Nigeria can strengthen its digital resilience, reduce vulnerabilities, and ensure that its growing digital economy is safeguarded against evolving cyber threats.

Moreover, incident response capacity must improve. Coordination between agencies and between government and private sector is crucial. Establishing and adequately resourcing a national CERT (Computer Emergency Response Team) under NITDA or a lead agency would help centralize threat intelligence. Information-sharing platforms (public-private threat intel centres) should be promoted so that banks, telcos, and utilities can promptly warn each other of attack patterns. Currently, organizations often hesitate to report breaches (D20104 Cybercrime, 2025); this culture needs to change. Policymakers should consider incentives or legal safeguards that encourage transparent reporting (for example, limited liability for good-faith reporting).

### **3.4. Digital Trust, Data Protection and Collaboration**

Digital trust is fundamental to a secure and thriving cyberspace, as it ensures that citizens feel confident their personal data is protected and that online services operate predictably. Nigeria has made meaningful progress in this regard through legal and institutional measures. The Nigeria Data Protection Authority (NDPA) and the Nigeria Data Protection Commission (NDPC) have enshrined individual data rights, enabling data subjects to request access to or correction of their information, while requiring organizations to appoint Data Protection Officers (NDPC, 2025). Under the leadership of Dr. Vincent Olatunji, the NDPC has actively raised public awareness and issued guidance on critical topics, including consent, children's data, and accountability. The commission emphasizes that privacy rights and cybersecurity are interdependent, noting that robust data protection frameworks "*empower individuals*" and must complement technical security measures (NDPC, 2025).

A key initiative to strengthen digital trust is NITDA's National Digital Trustmark, launched in October 2025 in collaboration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), GIZ, and NACCIMA. This voluntary "*security seal*" certifies online businesses that meet NITDA's vetting standards, appearing on websites and letterheads to signal legitimacy and reduce online fraud, identity theft, and scams (The Nation Newspaper, 2022). By fostering public-private collaboration, the Trustmark enhances consumer confidence. Additional measures, including digital identity frameworks integrating NIMC IDs and public key infrastructure (PKI regulation), are recommended to secure e-government and e-commerce transactions, further consolidating Nigeria's digital trust ecosystem.

Effective cybersecurity in Nigeria depends not only on national measures but also on collaboration with global and regional partners. Engaging with international stakeholders on cyber norms and leveraging continental frameworks, such as the African Union's Convention on Cybersecurity, strengthens Nigeria's ability to prevent and respond to cyber threats. Regional cooperation with ECOWAS and African tech hubs facilitates intelligence sharing on cross-border crimes, coordination of cyber incident responses, and the promotion of best practices. Conferences, working groups, and joint exercises cultivate a culture of collaboration. For instance, the recent NITDA-Google Cybersecurity Workshop in Abuja brought together policymakers, industry experts, and regulators to review Nigeria's frameworks, identify gaps, and explore capacity-building opportunities. The National Cybersecurity Coordination Center emphasized that such partnerships are essential for fostering innovation and building technical competence (TechAfrica News, 2025).

Looking forward, consumer trust and data governance are inseparable from cybersecurity. As Nigeria enacts new legislation covering e-transactions, IoT safety, and digital services policies must embed privacy-by-design and security-by-design principles. Penal sanctions should deter both cybercriminals and negligent actors. The NDPA mandates breach notifications to the NDPC within 72 hours, aligned with Cybercrimes Act provisions, and empowers the commission to fine violators (DPA, 2025). Effective enforcement enhances public confidence in online engagement. Complementary digital literacy campaigns, including translations into local languages, help citizens and SMEs adopt safe practices. Notably, the NDPC recently launched an Igbo-language version of the Data Protection Act to expand awareness. Such outreach, particularly for small businesses and public agencies, is vital for embedding a cyber-safe culture across Nigeria.

### 3.5. Emerging Threats and Opportunities

Achieving a cybersafe future for Nigeria necessitates a multifaceted approach. By prioritizing education, strengthening legal frameworks, investing in technology, and fostering collaboration, Nigeria can significantly mitigate cybersecurity risks. The journey toward a secure digital landscape is challenging but essential for national development and the protection of its citizens' digital rights.

As Nigeria digitizes further, new threats will emerge but so will new opportunities. On the threat side, advances in technology amplify risks. Cybercriminals are already using artificial intelligence and automation: for example, banks have reported AI-scaled malware that can evade detectors and propagate rapidly via messaging apps (Nigerian Communication Week Report, 2025). Deepfake and social engineering tools are improving, threatening financial fraud and political disinformation. IoT devices and 5G networks will expand the attack surface. Even quantum computing (potentially on the horizon) could break current encryption standards. We must prepare by investing in quantum-resistant cryptography and by pushing vendors to secure their IoT/5G products from the start.

The Nigerian fintech boom is an opportunity if secured properly. Our dynamic FinTech and mobile money ecosystem drives innovation, but also makes cybersecurity mission-critical. Regulators like the CBN and SEC must work closely with NITDA to ensure fintech players comply with best practices (e.g. strong authentication, encrypted data storage, fraud monitoring). There is also an immense opportunity in Nigeria's talent pool. Our young workforce can fill the global cyber skills gap (NITDA, 2020). We should support cybersecurity research and startups (through grants, incubators, hackathons) so that home grown solutions can emerge. International collaboration (e.g. exchange programs, joint cyber exercises) can accelerate learning. Block chain and distributed ledger technologies, if harnessed, can improve transparency in government services, supply chains and identity systems, but they must be carefully regulated to prevent misuse. Even as cybercrime evolves, technology like AI/ML can help us build smarter defense systems and automate routine security tasks. In every sector, we should view cybersecurity not as a burden, but as an enabler of growth. Strong cyber defenses will protect investments and attract foreign tech companies and investors. Nigeria aims to be Africa's leading digital economy; to achieve this, policymakers and private firms must prioritize cyber resilience.

## 4. Conclusion

Conclusively, managing a CyberSafe Future for Nigeria in this 4<sup>th</sup> industrial revolution is achievable, but it requires decisive action today which is the future we spoke about yesterday. We must implement and enforce the laws on our books, from the Cybercrimes Act to the new Data Protection Act. We must invest in people by expanding cybersecurity education, certifications, and training partnerships with industry leaders (NITDA, 2020). We must foster collaboration between government and the private sector building on successes like the Digital Trustmark and our coordination centers (The Nation Newspaper, 2022; TechAfrica News, 2025). And we must embrace cyber resilience as a guiding principle, continuously updating our technical defenses, incident response plans, and regulatory frameworks so that they can adapt to threats (D20104 Cybercrime, 2025; Nigeria's Cybersecurity Outlook, 2025). The path ahead is challenging: Cybercriminals are growing in number and sophistication, and new technologies cut both ways. Yet Nigeria has many strengths a dynamic digital economy, a youthful population, and committed institutions. By combining legal innovation, technical expertise, and a spirit of public-private partnership, we can secure our cyberspace. We must ensure that Nigeria's future is one where every child, entrepreneur, and citizen can confidently engage online where data is protected, transactions are secure, and digital trust is the norm. The time to act is now. Together, we will make CyberSafe Futures for Nigeria and help our nation thrive in the digital age.

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