

## **The Benefits of E-Government Are Underestimated by Venezuelan Municipalities**

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The optimization of municipal public administration in Carabobo state through the implementation of E-Government mechanisms has been insufficient and underestimated by most local leaders in recent years.

The municipalities of San Diego and Valencia in Carabobo state have indeed shown effective expressions of this management model, at least when compared to other local governments. Theoretically, these two jurisdictions, through E-Government, can improve the quality of life for more than 900,000 residents, based on the outdated 2011 census data from the National Institute of Statistics. They also manage to collect a significant amount of taxes online, which should translate into improvements for their communities. However, there is still a visible lack in terms of interaction, transparency, and citizen participation.

Regarding the management of their websites and social media platforms, the other four municipalities that employ E-Government strategies—albeit to a much lesser extent—such as Guacara, Naguanagua, Puerto Cabello, and Libertador, at least offer some procedures and limited information on how to pay taxes, obtain permits, certificates, or request documents, potentially benefiting over 600,000 people.

The situation is worse in eight other municipalities in Carabobo where more than 640,000 citizens have no means of carrying out online procedures via a website or accessing public information through official social media. These areas fall outside the Carabobo metropolitan region and face severe issues in transportation, public services, and overall quality of life.

However, rather than seeking a numerical representation of the phenomenon, this research focused on an in-depth description and analysis to understand the issue beyond merely identifying its components.

After identifying E-Government mechanisms in Carabobo municipalities, the study determined that most local governments use their digital platforms to share news about their activities, but they do not provide information that could streamline administrative procedures or positively impact collective well-being. These platforms are also not used to interact effectively with residents, which goes against the principle of community—particularly problematic at the municipal level, which should be the closest and most responsive tier of government to the population, who share common problems, needs, rights, and responsibilities.

It is important to highlight the propagandistic use of official websites and social media. Politically biased content or messages designed to exalt local political figures contradict the principles of democratic public institutional communication, which should ensure the plurality of ideas, respect for citizens, and inclusive governance without political discrimination—or worse, hidden intentions to indoctrinate the public into supporting a specific ideology or party.

The lack of transparency found in the municipal administrations analyzed creates a perfect environment for corruption, embezzlement, and limited opportunities for citizen oversight. This may be rooted in impunity, vulnerability, and the weakened rule of law in a country where even institutions fail to follow legal standards. More concerning is that governments do not even attempt to appear transparent, not even with selectively presented or biased information.

The ability to complete procedures online, access public interest information, establish effective interaction between officials and the public, ensure transparency and accountability are all key features of E-Government. These features can lead to one of its most valuable outcomes: citizen participation. However, none of Carabobo's municipalities show evidence of spaces created for this purpose—not even those aligned with the national government that often promote the concept of “Popular Power.” Citizens are not only denied their right to receive relevant information and participate in oversight; they are also excluded from the policymaking process, despite mandates in Venezuelan law.

It is true that the most populated municipalities in Carabobo, though deficient, have E-Government mechanisms. Yet, they appear solely focused on tax collection or any procedure that may generate revenue for the local administration. These governments seem to overlook the fact that technology is no longer just a support tool for life—life now depends on technology. Everyday processes, including public administration, communication, and ultimately democracy, must migrate to digital platforms.

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## Recommendations

### **To public officials:**

Public governance cannot remain disconnected from social evolution and new forms of communication. Despite Venezuela's ongoing social and humanitarian crisis, which may make the implementation of new online management models seem unfeasible due to costs or restructuring requirements, these strategies offer a viable path to optimize performance and bring democratic values into leadership through citizen interaction, transparency, and accountability. Public officials must understand that citizens—especially in small localities—expect open governments with digital structures that contribute to their well-being. In doing so, the population will feel more connected to their leaders.

### **To oversight bodies:**

The violation of duties, rights, or responsibilities must not become the norm in a democratic country. Policies promoting accountability must be enforced, even when public officials share political or ideological alignments with the current government. Leadership begins at home: institutions must create policies adapted to the needs of the governed, encourage accountability, and foster citizen participation.

**To citizens:**

Whether efficient or not, public administration is not a favor granted by elected officials. While public servants must offer governance based on citizen welfare and legal standards, it is up to the people to demand the enforcement of laws and protection of fundamental human rights. Officials serve the community—not the other way around.

**To academia:**

The education of future professionals must align with social evolution. The academic system in Venezuela must train experts equipped to respond to the demands of this new reality—one that could represent the only path to the country's social, economic, and institutional recovery. It is not enough to add technical content or academic programs related to these strategies; ethical and moral values must also be strengthened so future professionals can restore public institutions from their current state of decay.

In this regard, further research is needed to encourage reflection on new forms of communication and information—and their adaptability to different social scenarios, including municipal public administration.