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**The participation of civil society in promoting the principle of accountability**  
**Conceptual Study**

مشاركة المجتمع المدني في تعزيز مبدأ المساءلة  
دراسة مفاهيمية

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**Abstract:**

The global transformations resulting from the spread of modern concepts in political and administrative literature, such as democracy, human rights, and civil society, generally indicate a reduction in the traditional role of the state and a redistribution of roles to new institutions, especially civil society, which is considered a primary means of popular participation and influence on political decision-making. The importance of studying civil society lies in understanding the relationship between the state and society, as this relationship contributes to strengthening the democratic character of state institutions through the consolidation of social accountability and the dissemination of civic culture, thus enhancing positive interaction between the government and society.

**Keywords:** Civil society, accountability, participatory democracy

ملخص: إن التحولات العالمية التي نتجت عن انتشار مفاهيم حديثة في الأدبيات السياسية والإدارية، مثل الديمقراطية وحقوق الإنسان والمجتمع المدني. تشير في مجملها إلى تقليص دور الدولة التقليدي وإعادة توزيع الأدوار على مؤسسات جديدة، خاصة المجتمع المدني، الذي يعد وسيلة رئيسية للمشاركة الشعبية والتأثير في القرار السياسي. كما تكمن أهمية دراسة المجتمع المدني لفهم العلاقة بين الدولة والمجتمع، حيث تسهم هذه العلاقة في تعزيز الطابع الديمقراطي لمؤسسات الدولة من خلال تكريس المساءلة المجتمعية ونشر الثقافة المدنية، مما يعزز التفاعل الإيجابي بين الحكومة والمجتمع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المجتمع المدني، المساءلة، الديمقراطية التشاركية.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of contemporary concepts and terms in political and administrative literature has led to global transformations across various domains such as economics, politics, and culture. Among these concepts, democracy, human rights, civil society, local governance, and good governance have become focal points of interest and debate in research and political practices. These terms signify a reduction in the traditional role of the state and a redistribution of its roles to new institutions and actors, particularly civil society.

Undoubtedly, the field of political rights encompasses the foundations of society and the pillars of the state, as well as the extent of societal participation, the distribution and separation of powers, and the delineation of the state's boundaries in its interactions with citizens. The issues of democracy and human rights are clearly and inextricably linked to the existence of an effective civil society, which is considered one of the most important means of popular participation and influence on political decision-making. These institutions represent the channels through which competition takes place, making their existence the backbone of the process of political decision-making and implementation. A study of civil society is one of the most prominent approaches to understanding the relationship between the state and society, a relationship that has significant implications for strengthening the democratic character of state institutions, especially in light of the growing interest in reassessing the roles of both the state and civil society. Through the consolidation of social accountability, the promotion of

democratic values, and the dissemination of civic culture, this relationship enhances positive interaction between the government and civil society.

This study is divided into

### **Research Problem:**

**What are the constraints that enable civil society to achieve accountability?**

**This main research question branches into several sub-questions:**

- **What are the concepts of civil society and accountability?**
- **What are the constraints on civil society's contribution to the consolidation of accountability?**

**Research Objectives:** The objectives of this research can be summarized as follows:

- 1-To define civil society.
- 2- To define accountability.
- 3- To identify the key characteristics and features of civil society and accountability.
- 4- To propose ways to empower civil society to achieve accountability.

### **Methodology:**

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, one of the most common and widely used methodologies in political science. Also known as the sequential comparative method, this approach aims to understand all the facts and aspects related to the studied phenomenon by relying on previous exploratory studies. This helps us to acquire accurate and detailed knowledge

about the different components of the phenomenon. This approach also allows us to predict the future of the phenomenon, as social phenomena are characterized by constant change over time and space.

Study Divisions:

The Concept of Civil Society

The Concept of Accountability

Constraints on Civil Society's Contribution to Consolidating Accountability

### **:Axis One: The Concept of Civil Society**

The concept of civil society has become prevalent in both local and global discourses due to its increasing effectiveness and expanding roles. To comprehend this concept, it must be defined and its elements examined. Civil society has undergone a long historical development, with contributions from thinkers, philosophers, and politicians, sparking widespread debate throughout the ages until reaching its current definition.

Through the foregoing, we will delve into a range of definitions that have addressed the concept of civil society. One definition suggests that civil society is "the extensive network of organizations that modern societies have developed over their long history, which parallels the work of the state" [1]. It has also been defined as "the totality of non-hereditary and non-governmental organizations established to serve the common interests or principles of their members, as it is the society in which relations between its individuals are organized on the basis of democracy." Larry Diamond defines civil society as "a space for organized social life based on the principles of self-governance and

independence from the state apparatus, subject to a legal system or set of laws and shared obligations" [2].

Raymond Hinnebusch defines civil society as a fundamental expression in stable pluralistic transitions. Civil society, manifested in a network of voluntarily formed associations that appear independent of the state and primary groups, while working to contain social divisions and form a buffer zone between the state and society, also works to link it to the state and its authority [3].

Mohammed Abed Al-Jabiri defined civil society as a society in which relations between individuals are organized on the basis of democracy [4].

The World Bank defines it as: a large group of non-governmental organizations and non-profit organizations that have a presence in public life and bear the burden of expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on moral, cultural, political, scientific, religious, or charitable considerations

#### **- Requirements for the Emergence of Civil Society Institutions:**

Administrative and organizational independence: This is the complete independence from state administrative bodies in managing internal affairs in accordance with internal laws and regulations. This independence is strengthened through:

- Activating communication channels between levels of civil society institutions.
- Strengthening the foundations of solidarity and mutual support as a

priority for components of civil society organizations.

- Establishing the rules of internal practice, ensuring continuity

**Financial independence:** The financial resources possessed by the institutions that make up civil society constitute one of the most important requirements for them to play their political and social roles and manage their relationship with the state in a way that guarantees their independence in confronting it. Whether the resources are self-generated or from external parties, they form a barrier to state control over the institution. If the sources of funding that direct its activities and objectives come from the state, it will lose the meaning of its existence.

**Complexity:** This refers to the multiplicity of units within civil society institutions, meaning the multiplicity of its organizational bodies. The greater the strength and diversity of the subunits, the greater the opportunities for adaptation. This reflects a degree of functional specialization, a condition for its continuity, and the existence of internal levels and its geographical spread on the widest possible scale within the society through which it operates. The more civil society institutions are able to ensure the loyalty of their members, the more likely they are to maintain their existence

**Homogeneity:** This refers to the absence of internal conflicts within civil society organizations that hinder their operations. When divisions among factions and leaders within these organizations are rooted in ideological differences related to the organization's mission, and when conflicts are resolved peacefully, this indicates the

maturity of these institutions. Conversely, when divisions stem from personal reasons and are resolved violently, it suggests the underdevelopment of these institutions. Furthermore, homogeneity implies a high degree of consensus and satisfaction among the members of civil society organizations. The more cohesive an organization is, the higher its performance [5].

## **Axis Two: The Concept of Accountability**

**1-Defining Accountability:** The concept of accountability in public administration is a subject of considerable debate, with numerous scholars, researchers, and international organizations offering diverse perspectives. The following provides an overview of these viewpoints: Some scholars define accountability as the right, ability, and empowerment to question, review, and evaluate the performance of officials against predetermined standards, based on accurate data and information. The ultimate goal is to make informed decisions and enhance efficiency and effectiveness

Others view accountability as the existence of clear and publicly stated mechanisms and frameworks that grant the right to question and hold officials accountable, ensuring that they act responsibly and recognizing that everyone is subject to the law. This is seen as the complement to transparency[6].

The United Nations Development Programme offers a more explicit definition, stating that accountability is the requirement for officials to provide explanations to stakeholders regarding how they exercise their powers and fulfill their duties, to address criticisms, meet demands, and accept (some) responsibility for failures, inadequacies, or deception

In the context of civil society, accountability is defined as the commitment of civil society organizations to account for the nature of their duties and to improve their efficiency and effectiveness.

The World Bank defines accountability as : a multifaceted principle that forms the foundation of good governance across all government activities. Public accountability requires every individual acting on behalf of the state, whether elected or not, to disclose and justify their actions to the public (often referred to as transparency and responsibility) and to be subject to judicial, administrative, or electoral sanctions if their actions are found to be contrary to the public interest [7]. The World Bank distinguishes between two types of accountability:

**External Accountability:** This refers to the ability of citizens to hold public officials accountable, whether through voting, advocacy campaigns, or direct oversight of public institutions.

**Internal Accountability:** This means one public institution holding another public institution accountable. Examples include courts enforcing laws and the constitution, parliament voting against the executive branch, or financial auditing institutions reviewing a government's financial transactions [8].

The World Bank points out that competition is a fundamental basis for accountability, as politicians compete for the right to exercise power, whether they are political leaders or service providers. This competition provides citizens with an effective opportunity to hold government officials and institutions accountable for their efforts to serve the public interest.

Some argue that accountability in local governance means ensuring that local decision-makers are accountable to citizens and other relevant stakeholders. This implies that local authorities are subject to what is known as dual accountability, which involves balancing accountability to voters on the one hand and accountability to higher levels of government on the other [9].

## 2. Accountability and Related Concepts

### - Accountability and Oversight:

Although the concept of accountability is widely used in public administration literature, it still lacks a precise definition. Some writings conflate accountability with oversight, even though the two concepts are distinct. There may also be overlap between accountability and the concepts of monitoring and evaluation. Additionally, some people confuse accountability with responsibility and consider them to be synonymous terms, and sometimes there is confusion between accountability and auditing. Oversight, which has been studied by management scholars from various perspectives, is considered one of the fundamental pillars of the administrative process. Fayol defined it as "checking the conformity of actual performance with plans, while adhering to instructions and established principles." Others have defined it as a set of methods and procedures carried out by a specialized external body or internal unit to ensure that performance conforms to what it should be and to verify it within the framework of the planned programs [10]. Many management thinkers conclude that oversight:

- Is linked to the establishment of performance standards.

- Focuses on measuring performance by monitoring the implementation of processes.

- It represents an ongoing activity that includes pre-performance control, concurrent control that accompanies performance, as well as post-performance control that takes place after performance.

- It seeks to strengthen the relationship between different efforts and assess their actual contribution to achieving the goals.

- It focuses on studying the areas and aspects of shortcomings and deviations from the set plans and objectives.

- It emphasizes the importance of taking corrective actions in a timely and cost-effective manner.

#### **- Accountability and responsibility:**

Some believe that accountability means taking responsibility. It means “the obligation of organizations to provide an account of the nature of their exercise of the duties assigned to them with the aim of raising the efficiency and effectiveness of these organizations, as well as the means, mechanisms and practices used by the government to ensure that the activity and outputs of the government apparatus are consistent and consistent with objective goals and standards.”<sup>11</sup>The overlap of the concepts of accountability and responsibility led some researchers to consider that responsibility means “the commitment of an individual to perform specific duties as part of the government apparatus, regardless of his personal desires, and holding him accountable in case he fails to meet this commitment.”<sup>12</sup>

Accountability involves two types of

responsibilities or duties: The first is the responsibility to do the act, and the second is the responsibility to give an account of that act. In other words, the organization and its managers have the responsibility to manage resources based on the trust placed in them by their beneficiaries, as well as the responsibility to explain how these resources are used. Thus, accountability is, in essence, the ability to justify our actions, the ways in which we carry them out, and the costs associated with them.

- **Accountability:** Accounting means counting, estimating, and managing things well. The person who performs these tasks is known as an accountant, and this is the specialized, technical meaning of the accounting profession, and is therefore not the focus of this article. The second meaning of accounting appears in several contexts. Accounting means evaluating performance, often leading to reward and punishment, making accountability a broader concept than accounting. After what has been presented, we must clarify that we do not deny that there is a correlation and overlap between these concepts. Moreover, oversight is considered one of the most important mechanisms that determine public accountability, along with some other elements that we will review later.

#### **3- Elements and means of accountability:**

Based on what has been mentioned, accountability includes several key elements, the most prominent of which are:

**Responsibility:** The specific obligation falls on the worker in the administrative apparatus of the state, as it requires him to perform certain duties and tasks. Upon accepting this obligation, his responsibility is determined, and he becomes accountable

for his actions and decisions, which should stem from a true sense of responsibility. It should be clear that no one is above accountability, there are no exceptions in this context.

**Inquiry:** This mechanism is an essential part of the accountability system, allowing stakeholders and regulators to demand that officials provide explanations and convincing justifications for their actions. These officials must demonstrate that their actions are in line with the public interest and lawful, and that the resulting public expenditures have been handled in accordance with standards of efficiency and conservation of public funds.

**Monitoring and evaluation:** Accountability requires clear oversight mechanisms that facilitate monitoring. These mechanisms should be known, accepted, and available to everyone in advance. These mechanisms provide an accurate reading and assessment of the situation, which helps guide the accountability process and makes reward and punishment possible, fair and constructive.

**Reward and punishment:** The request for inquiries should include a system of reward and punishment, so that officials do not have the opportunity to escape the consequences of their actions. Accountability should be used properly, so that it is informed and intended to guide and direct.

### **Axis Three: Constraints on Civil Society's Contribution to Entrenching the Principle of Accountability:**

After our study of the concepts of civil society and accountability, we believe it is necessary to address the controls of civil

society's participation in promoting the principle of accountability in local administration, which we will address in the following axis:

#### **1- Promoting the state of right and law :**

The concept of a state of right and law is manifested through how the state exercises its powers, as it focuses on protecting individuals from authoritarian arbitrariness through the use of legitimate coercion. This concept relies on respecting and guaranteeing individual freedoms, within a framework of collective justice, where state activities are subject to the provisions of the law based on democratic principles. This is done through the application of the principle of separation of powers, which expresses the

rights enshrined in the law and protected by it for individuals and groups. The law provides individuals with legal rights and protections aimed at guaranteeing their rights and protecting them from infringement and injustice. The right to law encompasses a variety of rights, such as the right to life, liberty, property, equality, and justice, as well as other rights related to participation in public life<sup>13</sup>.

It is not possible to talk about the contributions and roles of civil society without legal, constitutional and legislative frameworks that support and strengthen civil society organizations and provide them with the necessary guarantees to operate freely. This requires removing all unjustified restrictions and controls, and getting rid of bureaucratic and administrative obstacles that may face these organizations and their activists. The existence of a fair legal and constitutional framework contributes to enabling civil society to play an important role in cooperation with the state, as both

parties share societal tasks and responsibilities. In essence, the power of the state reflects a function with specific competencies exercised by its institutions according to a set of legal rules, which in turn gives civil society organizations the right to carry out certain activities and practices that contribute to strengthening the local community as a whole, by communicating its views and demands to the political system.

### **-Institutionalizing**

#### **participatory democracy in local administration:**

Democracy is one of the most important concepts and terms that do not know stagnation, as the concept of democracy is one of the concepts with a strong link to the state, in light of the recent developments in

societies at the economic, political and social levels, it has become necessary for all active groups in society to participate in efforts to coordinate and integrate these elements. In order to understand these transformations and achieve development goals. The concept of participatory democracy emerged as a result of the need to address the shortcomings of representative democracy based on electoral processes. Thus, the goal of participatory democracy is not to replace representative democracy, but rather to complement it, as it contributes to improving its performance by promoting cooperation and constructive dialogue between political bodies and social components<sup>14</sup>. It can be said that participatory democracy represents a pattern of managing public affairs, as it focuses on enhancing citizen participation in political decision-making by organizing broad consultations involving individuals about

public projects or decisions, with everyone taking responsibility for the consequences.

### **3- Independence of civil society from authority:**

The principle of independence of civil society is a prerequisite for the legitimacy of its activity, which contributes to building a strong and effective civil society that protects the interests of its members and institutions. Independence also means the right and freedom of organizations to define their goals according to their vision of the needs of the groups they represent. Independence also requires civil society organizations to play an interactive role with the state, through partnership with the government and the private sector in the comprehensive development process, through planning, implementation, and evaluation. Independence also includes the freedom to organize, select staff and manage these organizations without interference from the executive authority or any external authorities<sup>15</sup>.

Ensuring the participation of citizens in the administration of government, through the provision of private and public personal freedom that allows participation in national decision-making, is not limited to participation in voting and election only, but extends to other activities that fall within the context of the political process. The principle of ensuring the financial and judicial independence of civil society from the authority guarantees effective oversight of the public administration's actions and behaviors, and the creation of new patterns of social development.

### **3. CONCLUSION**

Through this study, we tried to put the principle of accountability among the important roles played by civil society through the oversight role, and there is no doubt that a smart and conscious government is the one that governs and manages not with a group of employees and workers, but is able to utilize the capabilities and capabilities of citizens and their participation in its decisions

Creating an environment in which civil society organizations can perform their work in a democratic atmosphere requires the adoption of all modern concepts in the management of public affairs.

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