



Local Governance and Participatory Democracy in Light of the 2020 Algerian Constitutional Amendment



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Abstract

Participatory democracy is a new way of getting people and groups in civil society to be involved in making decisions and taking part in public life. Most countries want to promote participatory democracy because it helps people feel like they belong to the nation and builds solidarity among people.

In this light, Algeria has taken steps to put participatory democracy into practice through its 2016 and 2020 Constitutions, which recognize it as a good way to help society grow.

Keywords

Participatory Democracy;
Civil Society;
Constitutional Reform;
Citizen Engagement in
Decision-Making;
Local Governance.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الديمقراطية التشاركية؛
المجتمع المدني؛
التعديل الدستوري؛
مشاركة المواطن في صنع
القرار؛
إدارة محلية.

الإدارة المحلية والديمقراطية التشاركية على ضوء التعديل الدستوري الجزائري لسنة 2020 ملخص

إن الديمقراطية التشاركية تعد نمطا وشكلا جديدا من أشكال اشراك الفرد وإطراف المجتمع المدني في صنع القرار والمشاركة في الشأن العام، حيث تسعى غالبية الدول إلى تحقيق التكافل بين أفراد المجتمع الواحد وتنمية روح الانتماء للوطن عن طريق تكريس الديمقراطية التشاركية على مستوى الإدارات المحلية. والجزائر من خلال دستور 2016 و 2020 عملت على تفعيل العملي للديمقراطية التشاركية باعتبارها أفضل وسيلة لتحقيق التنمية داخل المجتمع.

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I- Introduction:

The idea of participatory democracy is one of the most important issues in politics, society, culture, and the economy right now because it benefits the people who vote, especially civil society and citizens in general. The goal of participatory democracy was not to get rid of or replace representative democracy, but to make it better by fixing its problems. Civil society, in all its diversity and with growing awareness, knows that its role goes beyond just voting for representatives; it also includes taking part in decision-making processes (Fettal & Chawki, 2021, p. 02).

After the Soviet Union fell apart and liberal capitalist ideas became popular, the idea of democracy became more popular in developing countries. These beliefs support democracy and the idea that people should be in charge of their own lives. Citizen participation in the decision-making processes of public authorities has a positive effect on many areas of development, especially those that have to do with the social side of human life (Kheshaimiya & Sadawi, 2021, p. 02).

The government of Algeria has made participatory democracy a part of its institutions by getting citizens involved in the successful implementation of development plans, especially in areas that are often left out, through civil society. This is shown by the activation of the 2016 and 2020 constitutions' provisions.

The problem of this study can be formulated in the following main question:

- What is meant by participatory democracy,
- What are its significance and objectives,
- What are the foundational elements upon which it is built?

To answer this question, the study is divided into two sections:

- The Concept of Participatory Democracy, this section addresses the concept of participatory democracy,
- Will explore its various dimensions.

II- The Concept of Participatory Democracy:

The idea of participatory democracy came about as a new thing because of a number of changes and transformations that happened around the world in the modern era. Its main goal is to deal with the realities of democracy in developing countries and to encourage progress in different areas of strategy and development within the community.

"Participatory approach" is one of the newest ideas in modern political thought. It wants to make coherent systems that make it easier to put in place a vertical distribution of powers, which would give local governments clear control over their own affairs without having to follow orders from central authorities. This distribution is a kind of power-sharing that aims to create traditions that allow social actors—citizens, civil society, and the private sector—to take part in decision-making and help shape public policies at the local level. When these stakeholders talk to each other, they can come up with shared ideas and visions, which protects local communities from failing to develop (Zarga, 2017, p. 19).

This section is split into two parts so that we can fully talk about this topic:

- Origins
- Participatory Democracy (Definition, Characteristics, Objectives)

II.1. Origins:

After the problems with representative democracy, participatory democracy came about. It came about as a complementary framework that tried to fix its flaws and shortcomings by dealing with problems at the community level and making sure that everyone could take part in the development of local government.

There were parts of participatory democracy in the past, but it didn't become well-known in the United States until the 1960s. The United States' focus on participatory democracy was mostly because of efforts to fight poverty and marginalization, especially in Western Europe. More and more people called for participatory democracy, which led to the European Union conference on the topic. Also, the term became very popular in business and industry when big American companies started letting their employees and managers help with the planning, running, and decision-making

of their operations, as well as with the monitoring and evaluation of implementation. This practice brought out the spirit of conversation, discussion, and working together for a purpose (Chrit, 2008, p. 25).

The idea grew more widely as participatory democracy was used in the United States, and then it spread to Latin American countries in the 1970s, especially Argentina and Brazil. These countries became well-known for their advanced forms of participatory democracy, especially in the city of Porto Alegre, which is still a well-known example. The idea spread to Europe in the 1980s, especially to England, where it became known as "deliberative democracy." It also appeared in Berlin, Germany, where it was called "local democracy," and in France in 2002, where it was called "neighborhood democracy." After these events, participatory democracy became more popular around the world.

The term changed even more when international organizations, institutes, and conferences that supported participatory democracy as a new way of doing things started using it. The European Union's creation of the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy is an example of this evolution.

The European Union conference on participatory democracy that took place in Brussels on March 8–9, 2004, made it clear that European democracy was in crisis and that everyone involved was to blame. As a way to solve this problem and improve the European Union, participatory democracy was suggested as a way to bring representative democracy back to life and promote development with other partners (Ayad, 2024, p. 61).

Since then, participatory democracy has been a major focus of reform efforts and has been a big part of political discourse. For instance, during the French presidential elections in 2007, candidate Ségolène Royal put participatory democracy forward as both a goal and a way to change the political institutions of the Fifth Republic. Barack Obama also talked about participatory democracy during his campaign for president of the United States. As a result, we can say that participatory democracy has come about in different times and places, but it is mostly used in politics, especially at the local level. Different countries use different words, but "participatory democracy" is still the best and most widely used term (Chrit, 2008, p. 26).

II.2. Participatory Democracy (Definition, Characteristics, Objectives):

Participatory democracy is a new term that has become the main way for people to voice their opinions and demands. It is a new way for people to get involved, as opposed to the old way where the administration made all the decisions and public activity was focused on centralized decision-making.

II.2.1. Definition of Participatory Democracy:

Participatory democracy means that citizens are involved in government and decision-making not just as workers, but also as users or beneficiaries of public services. This is an important part of administration to make sure that decisions accurately reflect and meet the needs of the people (Ghazlan, 2010, pp. 123-124).

Local participatory democracy is not only a goal for the present, but it is also a very important way to make decisions. The more people in a neighborhood can voice their opinions and suggest ways to improve it, the more the community can work together to reach its goals. Also, the political system works better when it takes into account what its members want.

Several scholars and thinkers have come up with definitions to help make the meanings and effects of the participatory approach clearer, both in theory and in practice. These include:

- Participatory democracy is a way of doing politics that tries to get more people involved in public discourse and making political decisions. Its goal is to give citizens more rights than just voting, running for office, and going to local and national councils. These rights include the right to choose, consult, and take part in making, monitoring, and evaluating public policies.
- The idea of participatory or direct democracy is a different way of doing things than representative democracy. It aims to give citizens more power in making political and economic decisions and to give them more rights when it comes to organizing the government.
- The participatory approach to governance means that people and stakeholders can say what they need, set goals, and make commitments and responsibilities when it comes to managing local public affairs. It is also thought of as a way to give people more power to take care of their own interests and keep an eye on their elected officials at all times.

- Participatory democracy is a form of collective management of local public affairs, founded on enhancing the involvement of residents in political decision-making or when individuals are called upon to engage in major consultations concerning local projects or public decisions that directly affect them. This process is accompanied by collective responsibility for the resulting outcomes and reinforces the citizen's role in exercising their autonomous competence within the local community (Cherif, 2016).
- Participatory democracy represents a new model or form of democracy characterized by the direct participation of citizens in discussing public affairs and making political decisions that concern them. It involves expanding the exercise of power to citizens by involving them in public dialogue, debate, and the political decision-making that follows (Chrit, 2008, p. 30).

Accordingly, these definitions converge on the following key elements:

- The adoption of a bottom-up concept of democracy, emphasizing the participation of local non-state actors such as individuals and civil society organizations.
- The characteristic of direct interaction and active engagement between citizens and elected bodies, as well as between citizens and their concerns (Dabbih, 2013).

According to the definitions given above, the participatory approach arises from the cumulative civilizational developments brought about by a number of technical and practical experiences within a larger historical context characterized by the openness of conflict between society and authority. It is impossible to separate the intellectual and philosophical theorization of the participatory phenomenon from the classical frameworks that define and structure the literary formulation of the relationship between civil society institutions as social components and political institutions on the one hand, which reveal their presence and influence within the local community (Zarga, 2017, p. 44).

II.2.2. Characteristics of Participatory Democracy:

Participatory democracy is distinguished by a set of key characteristics, among which the following are most significant:

- By encouraging a sense of community among all people, participatory democracy helps to maintain the current system. This group identification emphasizes how crucial it is to work within the parameters of participatory engagement in order to guarantee the realization of common interests.
- Participatory democracy serves as a platform that promotes the combining of efforts and fosters a spirit of cooperative cooperation within society, in contrast to representative democracy, which may involve competition and polarization through traditional voting processes.
- In a participatory democracy, legitimacy is established by inclusive engagement, in which no party experiences marginalization or exclusion. Rather, each participant acknowledges and affirms their part in the way society is constructed collectively.
- For any system or project to be successful, it must be effective. Participatory democracy is a way to reach set goals and is an important part of building a strong democratic system (Hejjaz, 2020, p. 20).
- Participatory democracy embraces a grassroots model, striving to enable citizens to directly participate in decision-making processes and influence outcomes.
- It is characterized by dynamic and direct interaction between citizens and public officials.
- Participatory democracy is viewed as a complement to, rather than a substitute for, representative democracy (Driss, 2017, p. 61).

II.2.3. Objectives of Participatory Democracy:

The main goal of participatory democracy is to get citizens directly involved in making decisions, suggesting ideas, and shaping public policies, especially at the local level, in order to promote development that meets the needs of the community.

To facilitate citizen participation in local governance, the following key objectives can be identified:

- Improving Local Administration: This is based on the idea that "the best administration is the closest administration." Its goal is to make decisions more effective and stop disagreements over proposed solutions.
- Rationalizing Policies and Administrative Work: Participatory democracy makes local policies and administrative practices more rational and well-informed by changing how things are done in the past. This is because citizens are involved in and keep an eye on the steps of programs as they happen.
- Facilitating Implementation of Decisions and Project Selection: Since citizens are involved in these processes, it becomes easier to implement decisions and select local development projects.
- Rebuilding Trust Between Citizens and Officials: Participatory democracy aims to bring citizens and officials back together by opening up lines of communication and direct dialogue. It also aims to get citizens involved in local government.
- Empowering Community Members: Participatory democracy assists individuals in achieving their goals and enhances their capacity to address community problems and reach consensual solutions.
- Promoting the Concept of Citizenship: It fosters a sense of responsibility toward the nation and enables individuals to participate actively in political life.

Accordingly, participatory democracy constitutes the framework through which citizens express their will, submit proposals, and oversee and monitor local development programs and projects (Brabah, 2011, p. 105).

III- Aspects of Participatory Democracy:

Freedom, equality, and justice are the principles and pillars of participatory democracy. These have always been important demands of citizens throughout history. The idea of democracy has changed a lot over time. Direct democracy, which was the first form of government, was a way for people to express their will. But as societies grew and became more diverse, it became necessary to create new ways to represent participatory democracy.

III.1. Principles of Participatory Democracy:

III.1.1. Human Rights and the Rule of Law:

In recent years, the idea of human rights has gotten a lot of support and confirmation, making it an important part of international discussions. Human rights talk is more widely accepted now than it was in the past. It is now a common way to talk to people at home and around the world, and it is also an important part of the literature on development and progress (Kahal, 2017, p. 163).

Even though this is a clear victory for the promotion and use of human rights, some critical and strict groups are still not sure how deep the social cohesion behind this agreement is.

The World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in the middle of 1993 also put to rest any doubts about how human rights law should be thought of. Still, getting global justice for human rights is still a hard goal to reach.

People think of human rights as a set of moral claims that must be in line with legally recognized rights that are set by law. People should see them as a set of moral arguments and a basis for political demands. Kofi Annan told the Human Rights Committee in Geneva that human rights are indivisible and interdependent, whether they are civil, political, economic, or social. They make up an interconnected system in which each part helps the others and is linked to them through relationships of mutual dependence, influence, and interaction (Kahal, 2017, p. 163).

Human rights are the most important part of the rule of law, which protects the idea of citizenship. This idea is that the citizen is the state itself, which is what the "state complex" means. The democratic circle is the education that comes from democracy. This one circle makes up a system that gives itself an endless goal.

But just recognizing people's rights in the state isn't enough to call a system democratic. The principle of equal rights, which is necessary for democracy, does not just mean that all citizens have the same rights. It means that the law must fully protect these rights for all citizens without exception. A state governed by law is important because it keeps people safe from tyranny, oppression, and violence.

There are two main things that make political modernity different: the rule of law, which limits the state's arbitrary power while allowing it to organize itself and control social life, and the idea of popular sovereignty, which is a more direct way to prepare for the arrival of democracy.

The demand for new forms of democracy entails political pluralism, justice, and equality across all domains (Kahal, 2017, p. 38).

III.1.2. Citizenship:

The trend around the world toward democratic transition and active political participation has made it necessary to make the idea of citizenship more clear and stronger. This idea is directly related to how democracy works. In addition, the context of globalization makes it even more important to protect individual rights and freedoms by making citizenship rights permanent (Siyam, 2007, p. 03).

Citizenship means having and using rights and responsibilities in a specific area of land with clear borders. This area is currently understood to be the modern nation-state based on the rule of law. In a state of citizenship, all citizens have the same rights and responsibilities. Michael Walzer gives a wider meaning to citizenship by connecting it to a person's right to be a part of and belong to a certain community, which is realized through rights and responsibilities.

Citizenship requires people to be aware of their place in society and to feel like they belong to more than just a city or state. They should also feel like they belong to a community that is connected by shared culture and history.

This awareness of belonging has two dimensions:

- First: A person's awareness of being a citizen comes from wanting to break free from the old regime and not wanting to submit or obey.
- Second: Being aware of being part of a certain group, which makes authorities use people and groups as resources and tools; this doesn't go against limiting the scope of power.

Since the 18th century, the idea of citizenship has changed both in terms of numbers and quality. It now includes many different types of citizens without discrimination. As a result, all groups now have the right to take part in making decisions in the state. Citizens are different from non-citizens because they are full members of the political community or state.

In short, citizenship is the right of a person who is a member of a certain political community or group to have rights and responsibilities that make them a free participant in managing the affairs of that community and representing its identity. The law must ensure equal treatment for all, enabling effective participation in decisions that affect their lives.

III.1.3. Political Pluralism:

Democracy is a new option that replaces the old authoritarian regime and has become the natural way for people to organize politically. Political pluralism was at the heart of liberal democracy, and it changed in many ways over time, including in terms of the economy, society, and politics.

Tocqueville says that political pluralism is made stronger by the decentralization of power, the growth of independent groups, and the diversity of cultures and ethnicities.

Political thought since the seventeenth century has been closely linked to the idea of political pluralism. This idea is based on the idea that private interests are legitimate and that the public good is important. People thought of property as a "natural right," and it was almost necessary for political society to exist. Pluralism in both power and society gave rise to a new kind of political economy, which includes market economies, commercial capitalism, and industrial capitalism. This new way of doing business created new social classes and hierarchies, which then led to new kinds of relationships and problems.

Political pluralism is more than just having more than one party; it also depends on these parties' ability to come up with plans and visions for the state and society. It also needs a civil society that is legally recognized and free, and that has enough power to make important political decisions.

Political pluralism is an important part of participatory democracy because it spreads political power across many sources and centers. This keeps power from being concentrated in one group and gives different groups a chance to compete for it. These groups are representative because the people who are governed can choose their leaders freely.

As one of the ideas behind participatory democracy, the pluralist view is based on a few key ideas that can be summed up as follows:

- There exists an approximate equality among groups, each having a viable pathway to political power, with no single group holding a dominant position over others.
- All citizens belong to groups, and many individuals hold membership in multiple groups simultaneously.
- Groups exhibit a high degree of internal responsiveness, with leaders accountable to their members.
- Although groups have competing interests, there is a broader consensus among them regarding the nature of the political system, despite openness and competition.
- The state remains neutral among groups, and governmental mechanisms are sufficiently fragmented to provide multiple access points.

Political pluralism is the main idea behind participatory democracy. It starts with citizenship, focuses on human rights, and shows how these three things can work together in real life (Hamida, 2020, p. 135).

III.2. Conditions and Mechanisms of Participatory Democracy:

This section will be divided into two subsections:

III.2.1. Conditions for Participatory Democracy:

To make participatory democracy work in a certain system or society, a number of important conditions must be met. These conditions make it possible to reach the goals of participatory democracy, which are listed below:

- The presence of a structured, organized, and independent civil society, whose institutions are strong because they are independent, allows them to create an environment that encourages cooperation and participation through their roles in the local and societal thicker context.
- Independent and diverse media that provide citizens with access to public affairs, allowing them to form informed opinions on relevant issues.
- The ability to communicate with each other all the time and in a way that makes it easy for people to take part and share their thoughts, as well as other written forms of communication like making sure that people can see what the city council is doing and deciding.
- The creation of a legal framework that requires citizens to take part in discussions and decisions. This means that elected bodies must listen to what citizens have to say and consider their suggestions. If they can't include them, they must explain why to make sure that people can still participate in a meaningful way. It's also important to diversify the ways that people can keep an eye on decisions and projects that are being carried out by local elected councils as part of local governance.
- Furthermore, it is mandatory that local government decisions be subject to prior public dialogue and debate.

Based on this, it can be said that these conditions are the foundation for starting a successful participatory approach, where participation comes from the ground up as a way to apply the idea of people making decisions, especially when it comes to citizens being involved in local government (Chrit, 2008, p. 29).

III.2.2. Mechanisms of Participatory Democracy:

The primary mechanisms through which participatory democracy is actualized can be summarized as follows:

- Neighborhood Councils: Each neighborhood usually has a council made up of its residents that meets to talk about problems that affect them directly, like sanitation, water distribution, transportation, health, and education. These councils meet to talk about things, think about them, suggest new ideas, plan programs, and make decisions with the relevant authorities.

- Youth Councils: In developed countries, youth councils are very important for encouraging creativity and serving as places for reflection, talent discovery, and the development of expertise across different councils and levels of government.
- Sectoral Workshops: These workshops are mostly for people who use public services and are usually from a higher class of society. People come together to talk about, think about, and give their thoughts and suggestions on scientific and practical issues.
- Scientific Seminars: Also known as consensus seminars, started in Denmark and have since spread to other countries. It involves a group of people talking and discussing the seminar topic directly with experts after doing a lot of research and preparation. At the end of the seminar, the committee sends out a report that lists their decisions or suggestions about the topic.
- Public Debate: This mechanism involves having public discussions about local, regional, or national issues and gathering people's opinions on certain topics or programs. It makes it easier for them to help shape public policy.
- Internet Networks: Most countries use them a lot, and many political institutions and national and local public administrations have websites and social media pages. These platforms show off their programs and activities and also give people a place to give their thoughts and suggestions (Chrit, 2008, p. 31).

IV- Conclusion:

Democracy is a constitutional mechanism set up by the legislator to get citizens and civil society groups involved in running their local government. This helps citizens and the local bodies that represent them work together and get along better when it comes to managing their communal interests (Kettal & Chawki, 2019, p. 09).

Participatory democracy is very important for local development and giving people more chances to get involved, either directly or through civil society representatives. But putting it into practice is still a long way from reaching its goals.

Therefore, to effectively activate participatory democracy, the following recommendations are proposed:

- Reconsideration of municipal and regional local government laws to create genuine opportunities for citizen participation.
- Promotion of a culture of participatory democracy among citizens and civil society organizations.
- Improving national participatory democracy by putting into action the advisory bodies called for in the most recent constitutional amendments and passing laws to do so.
- Strengthening the competencies and capacities of elected local councils and adopting good governance principles in management and administration as a strategic approach to support participatory democracy.
- Enhancing the role of civil society organizations and mechanisms for popular oversight by actively involving citizens in the development process.

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