Participatory Democracy between Theoretical Foundations and Practical Implementation: An Analytical Approach to the Algerian Experience

Dr. SAADAOUI kamelia ,

University of Boumerdès- Mhamed Bouguera, (Algeria)
k.saadaoui@univ-boumerdes.dz

Submission date: 04/03/2026 Acceptance date: 02/06/2026 Publication date: 10/06/2026

Abstract:

Participatory democracy connects citizens with regional administration by directly engaging them in local decision-making.

Consultation and dialogue, such as budget discussions and advisory councils, demonstrate the distinct characteristics of participatory democracy at the local level.

These approaches build trust between the state and citizens, supporting transparency, accountability, and better public administration to aid regional development.

Algeria also seeks to implement mechanisms of participatory democracy, particularly through the CapDel and Adil programs.

However, ongoing challenges, including weak political culture, limited financial resources, and constrained technical and administrative capacities, continue to impede progress. Addressing these obstacles requires targeted institutional and legislative reforms to further participatory democracy.

***key words**: : Participatory Democracy; Local Governance; Citizen Participation; Local Development;CapDel;Adil;Algeria.*

***JEL classification:** D72; H70; H72; O21;*

ملخص:

تعد الديمقراطية التشاركية من الممارسات السياسية الحديثة والتي تهدف أو تسعى الى توسيع دائرة المشاركة الشعبية في عملية اتخاذ القرار خاصة على المستوى المحلي حيث تكون الإدارة المحلية قريبة من المواطنين.

الديمقراطية التشاركية لاتقتصر فقط على الانتخابات، بل تمتد الى المشاورات والحوار مثل المشاورات التي تتم حول الميزانية إضافة الى المجالس الاستشارية.

إن تكريس مثل هذا النوع من الديمقراطيات على المستوى المحلي يعزز من الثقة بين الدولة والمواطنين، ويرسخ الشفافية والمساءلة مما يؤدي إلى تحقيق فعالية التسيير المحلي و التنمية المحلية.

الجزائر كغيرها من الدول تسعى إلى تكريس أليات الديمقراطية التشاركية خاصة من خلال برنامجي كاب دال وأديل.

غير أن تطبيق الديمقراطية التشاركية يواجهه عدة تحديات منها ضعف الثقافة السياسية، غياب أو محدودية الموارد المالية والقدرات الإدارية والتقنية، مما يستدعي إصلاحات مؤسساتية وتشريعية محددة الأهداف لتعزيز الديمقراطية التشاركية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: *الديمقراطية التشاركية؛ الحكومة المحلية؛ مشاركة المواطنين؛ التنمية المحلية؛ كابدال؛ أديل؛ الجزائر.*

تصنيف جال: *O21. ،H72 ،H70 ،D72*

Introduction:

Participatory democracy fundamentally seeks to transform the relationship between the state and citizens, proposing a more active citizen role as integral to modern governance.

Participatory democracy involves citizens in decision-making, addressing criticisms of limited public involvement in liberal and representative democracies.

It responds to arguments that traditional democracies inadequately include citizens and their needs.

Previously, citizen participation was limited to voting or parliamentary representation. Participatory democracy offers direct involvement in decisions affecting citizens' lives.

In Algeria, recent initiatives exemplify the country’s strategy to advance participatory democracy at the local level, underscoring the importance of direct citizen involvement in improving local governance and public affairs.

These developments have led to several programs and initiatives aimed at strengthening local actors’ capacities and promoting dialogue between local

authorities and civil society. Programs such as CapDel and A-Deal aim to foster increased citizen participation in local development processes.

Based on this, the article's main argument is that developing participatory democracy in Algeria depends on establishing effective mechanisms for local citizen engagement. To demonstrate this, the article examines the theoretical foundations and practical manifestations of participatory democracy, with particular attention to leading local initiatives in Algeria.

This research investigates which participatory democracy mechanisms have been implemented in Algeria. It assesses how effectively these mechanisms have improved decision-making and service delivery, in line with the central argument that meaningful participation enhances local governance.

I. THEORICAL FRAMEWORK OF PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Participatory democracy emerged as a new concept in contemporary democratic thought, seeking to extend citizens' participation in public affairs beyond electoral involvement. Understanding its theoretical framework clarifies its principles and mechanisms for involving citizens in decision-making.

1. Participatory Democracy (origin and definition):

Before addressing Participatory Democracy, it is essential to shed light on the concept of Democracy. What does it mean?

Democracy began in ancient Greece, where citizens voted on decisions in public meetings. Early models of participation emerged from this practice.

Participatory Democracy is a system in which citizens are directly involved in decisions that impact their lives, rather than relying exclusively on elected officials (Guide, 2025).

However, participation excluded groups like women, enslaved people, foreigners, and young non-military citizens, limiting involvement.

Later, Rousseau stated that true authority must respect people's freedom, leading to theories for broader participation.

In the 19th century, John Stuart Mill stressed citizen participation, education, and individual freedom.

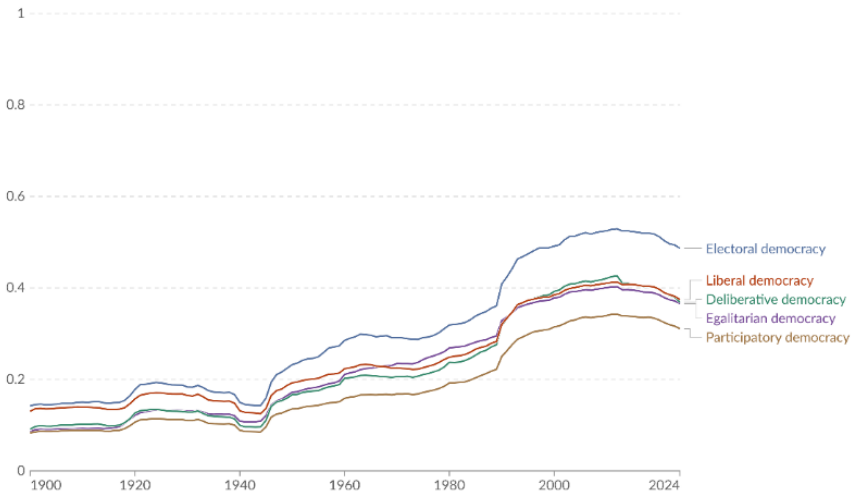
In the 20th century, practical applications of Participatory Democracy started to be seen in several domains; one example is participatory budgeting in Porto Alegre, Brazil(Guide, 2025), it was constitutionalized in 1988, followed by

the European countries like Britain which named it "Deliberative Democracy", then Germany and France under the name of "Proximity Democracy" in 2002(KASSE, 2020, p. 549)**.** Then it extended to Asia and the Arab world.

1-1: Model of New Democracies :

In the modern era, many models of democracy appeared, such as electoral democracy, Liberal democracy, Deliberative democracy, Egalitarian democracy and Participatory democracy, which represent the highest level of the citizens' participation in managing their affairs

Figure 01: The score of the type of new democracies



Source: Participatory Democracy Index, 2024. March 17, 2. This evolution can be visualised in the graph above, which illustrates the types of democracy worldwide from 1900 to 2024.

The graph identifies five types of democracy: electoral, liberal, deliberative, egalitarian, and participatory democracy.

The graph shows electoral democracy receiving the highest score, while participatory democracy receives the lowest.

Higher scores indicate greater citizen involvement in elections.

The lower participatory democracy scores reflect reduced citizen participation in policymaking, often due to constraints such as restrictive governance, security concerns, or limited opportunities to participate.

1.2.Definition of participatory democracy:

Participatory democracy uses state-set procedures to involve the public in decisions. This mostly happens locally, where government offices are near citizens.

Still, this democracy is not just local. It also happens at the national and regional levels (Petitjean, 2016, p. 06).

Participatory democracy can be expressed through several mechanisms, such as(Wokuri, 2018):

- Consultation.
- A constitutional right, such as the right to petition.
- Other ways include work by groups active in certain fields, neighbourhood committees, and groups formed for specific policy goals.

II. Participatory democracy in Algeria

1. The Legal framework:

The first signs of participatory democracy in Algeria began to appear in Municipal Law No. 11-10 of 2011, which recognised in the Article 11 and 14 that the municipalities are regional communities and places for the exercise of democracy (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Official Journal, 2011) with an emphasis on mandatory consultation and the advisory role of associations and local government, (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Official Journal, 2011, p. 8). It also encouraged the neighbourhood as a mechanism for gathering citizens' needs, despite its limited role in consultation, with no real participation in decision-making.

The Constitution of 2016, for the first time, mentions the concept of Participatory Democracy in Chapter 02, Article 15. (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, Official Journal,(Algerian Constitution 2016), 2016, p. 08)

The Constitution of November 2020 also enshrines this principle in articles 10 (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria P. D., Official Journal,(Algerian Constitution), 2020, p. 08) and 16 (People's Democratic Republic of Algeria P. D., Official Journal,(Algerian Constitution), 2020, p. 09), which promote the role of civil society in public affairs.

2. Concrete examples of participatory democracy in Algeria:

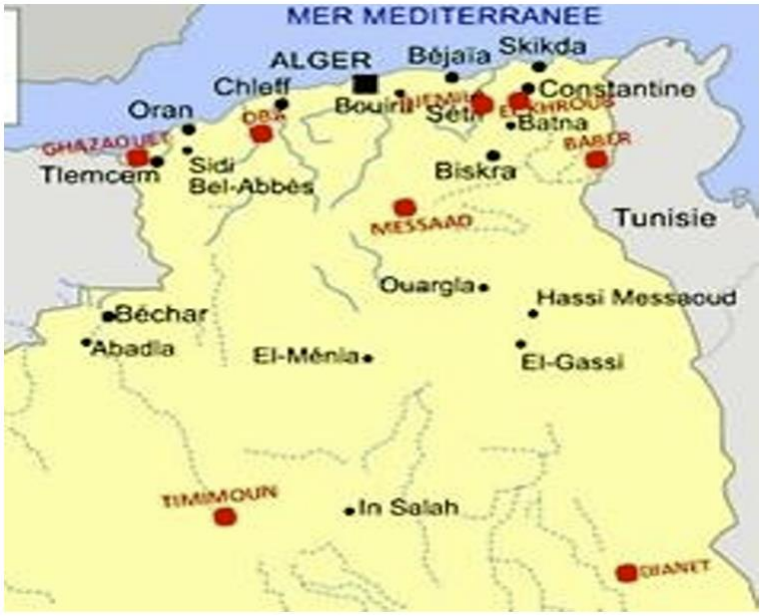
2.1. CAPDEL programme:

The CapDel* program is designed to strengthen the skills of local development actors in Algeria/ Municipalities models. (PNUD, p. 01)

As part of ongoing reforms, CapDel helps local officials, civil society members, and citizens work together. For example, it facilitates meetings to identify local priorities and supports collaborative planning sessions for municipal projects.

The CapDel programme began in January 2017. It aims to support local development and is part of a wide-ranging set of reforms in Algeria. It involves eight pilot towns from the country's most diverse regions: Djemila (Setif), Babar (Khenchela), Djanet (Illizi), El Kharoub (Constantine), Ouled Ben Abdelkader (Chlef), Timmoun (Adrar), Ghazaouet (Tlemcen), and Messad (Djelfa). (PNUD, Capacity-building programme for local development actors/Model Municipalities: CAPDEL, s.d.)

Figure N Municipalities where CapDel was implemented



Source: Draft Final Report: Final Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Algeria:" Programme For Strengthing the capacities of Local Development Actors/ Model Municipalities(CapDel): Participatory Democracy and Local Development, June 23rd,2023, p. 11.

CapDel applies a model of participatory governance through activities such as

* CapDel:Capacite des Acteurs de Devellopement Local (Capacity Building Programme For Local Developemet Actors.

organising public forums and creating partnerships across municipal, daira, and wilaya levels. These efforts provide citizens and local groups with opportunities to propose and review plans that directly impact local projects and development.

To achieve its goals, CapDel trains local actors in strategic planning, invites citizens to participate in workshops, and runs action programs in which community members and officials jointly set development priorities. The total program budget is $11,702,000. The European Union gives $8,532,000. Management costs are 7%. The government gives $297,000, with 3% management costs. The UNDP provides $200,000. (PNUD, Local Development and Participatory Democracy, p. 02)

The objectives of the program:

Promote and develop citizen representation and participation in the management of affairs, and strengthen dialogue among authorities, Civil Society, and citizens for greater social cohesion within the framework of participatory democracy. Improve citizens' access to Quality Public Services, and reduce the administrative burden by introducing ICT and promoting inter-municipal cooperation to enhance territorial complementarity. (PNUD, Capacity-building programme for local development actors/Model Municipalities: CAPDEL, s.d.).

Diversity in the economy and making the most of the potential of territories to create sustainable employment and wealth opportunities, introducing risk and disaster management into local development planning to ensure its sustainability, and building resilient territories. (PNUD, Capacity-building programme for local development actors/Model Municipalities: CAPDEL, s.d.).

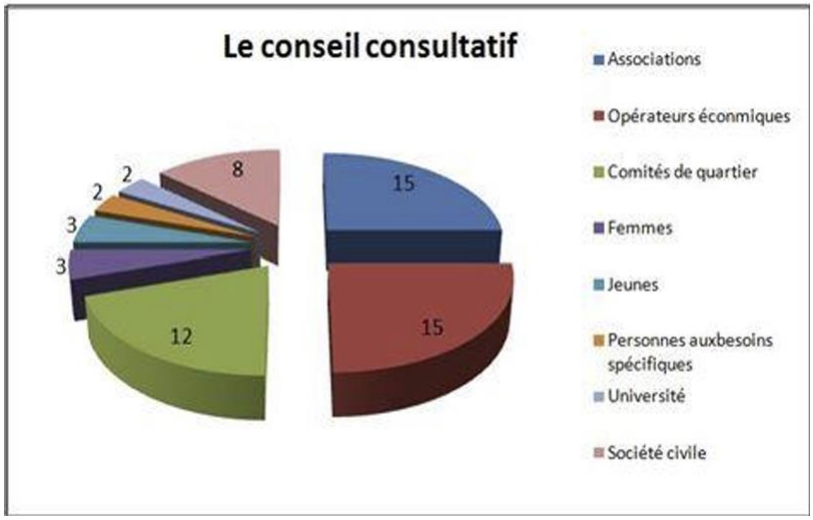
The most important results of the projects:

Promoting participatory democracy through introducing new tools for citizen participation, such as **local consultative forums**, through the elaboration of citizen chart and the creation of Municipal consultative Councils, which are permanent bodies for dialogue, consultation and citizen participation, gathering representatives from different actors of civil society (associations, professional Organizations, neighbourhood committees, youth, women, economic actors and persons with specific needs (PNUD Algerie, s.d.).

The Municipal Consultative Councils were implemented in seven wilayas during 2018 and 2019: Djanet, Djemila, Messaad, El Khroub, Ghazaouet, Timimoun, and Ouled Ben Abdelkader. (PNUD Algerie, s.d.),For

example, in EL Kharoub, this council is composed of 60 elected officials. (SIDI SALAH & BOURAHLI, 2021, p. 81) , distributed as follows :

Figure: N02 Level of representation of different actor categories in the Municipal Consultative Council of El Kharoub.



Source: Zéhour SIDI SALAH& Radja Maya BOURAHLI, CAPDEL, an execution tool for participatory governance: "from consultation to sharing power". El Khroub municipality study case, **Revue de la ville et de l'environnement**, Vol. 02/N° 01 (juin 2021),p. 83.

The figure above shows the different categories of actors involved in the municipal council of El Kharoub. Both associations and economic actors each represent 15members, while neighbourhood committees make up 12 members. Civil society participation is at 8 members, with youth and women each accounting for 3members. The University and individuals with specific needs have the smallest representation, with just 2 members.

This distribution reflects an attempt to achieve a diverse representation of local actors; however, it also highlights disparities in representation across categories, which require promoting participation from some categories, especially youth, women, and university members, to ensure greater inclusivity in the consultation and decision-making process.

Participatory budgeting is integrated into the elaboration of the municipality's plan for the development of the new generation. In the municipality's consultative meetings with citizens, the development priorities of neighbourhoods were identified, with citizens proposing projects such as improving public lighting and road maintenance, and creating green spaces. This kind of consultation helps define local financing priorities and enhance transparency and confidence between citizens and their municipality. (UNEP, Final Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Algeria:" Programme For Strengthing the capacities of Local

Development Actors/ Model Municipalities(CapDel): Participatory Democracy and Local Development, 2023)

The mechanism for dialogue between the municipality and civil society, as shown in the report, is a tool of participation in decision-making. The project supported local associations by training them in the elaboration of development projects, involving them in local planning, and organising workshops on civil participation. The report shows that strengthening civil society capacities helps to enhance local political participation and support sustainable local development. All these tools contribute to improving citizens' participation in local development debates. (UNEP, Final Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Algeria:" Programme For Strengthing the capacities of Local Development Actors/ Model Municipalities(CapDel): Participatory Democracy and Local Development, 2023)

To enhance the capacities of elected local actors, training courses were organised for elected officials and local staff. The training is based on local planning, participatory management, transparency, and governance. (UNEP, Final Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Algeria:" Programme For Strengthing the capacities of Local Development Actors/ Model Municipalities(CapDel): Participatory Democracy and Local Development, 2023)

Should not send the role of Civil Society to support the project of the local Association in participation in local development, as it contributed to the creation of local Networks between civil society and local authorities. Without forgetting the experience of the Messad municipality in Djelfa, including the establishment of mechanisms of citizen consultation through consultative meetings, the involvement of youth in proposing projects, and the involvement of women in local consultations, this experience helps expand the base of social participation in local decision-making. (UNEP, Final Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Algeria:" Programme For Strengthing the capacities of Local Development Actors/ Model Municipalities(CapDel): Participatory Democracy and Local Development, 2023)

This project was completed in 2020 and assessed three years later. The challenges faced by the project, as outlined in the final evaluation report of UNEP, include limited financial resources in municipalities, limited experience among some local actors in participatory democracy, administrative bureaucracy, and the weak sustainability of some mechanisms after the project's conclusion.

2.2. ADIL programme:

The ADIL programme (Support to Integrated Local Development) was officially launched on 29 September 2025 in Algiers by the Ministry of Interior. It is jointly supported and funded by the European Union and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and executed by VNG International, an association of Dutch municipalities (Équipe de presse et information de la Délégation d, 2025).

The Objectives of the programme:

ADIL focuses on supporting sustainable local development through:

Assisting local authorities in developing and executing municipal action plans in an integrated and sustainable manner, Promoting the institutional and technical capacities of local actors, Strengthening transparency and participatory democracy, Encouraging citizens to participate in managing local affairs. (Équipe de presse et information de la Délégation d, 2025)

The Programme Context:

ADIL programme for the enlargement of Algerian reforms in the fields of Decentralisation, Participatory Democracy and Integrated regional development. (Équipe de presse et information de la Délégation d, 2025)

The programme will be implemented in four model wilayas: Biskra, Mostaguenem, Tebessa, and Tiaret. It includes twelve previously selected municipalities. (Équipe de presse et information de la Délégation d, 2025)

The mechanisms of work :

This programme uses a participatory approach involving sectoral ministries, Decentralised state services, local economic actors, and Civil Society Organisations, and focuses on integrating youth and women. (Équipe de presse et information de la Délégation d, 2025)

The ADIL programme lasts three years with a budget of 21.8 million euros: 20 million euros from the European Union and the remainder from the Netherlands. (Équipe de presse et information de la Délégation d, 2025)

The expected results include the realisation of 48 development projects in the model wilayas.

Promoting participatory democracy, enhancing local governance, and achieving concrete impacts on citizens and local authorities. (Équipe de presse et d'information de la Délégation, 2025).

2.3. Steps toward consolidating participatory democracy in Algeria :

One of the first steps was the launch of a territorial assessment of local-level participatory bodies and mechanisms. The result of this assessment and local consensus revealed over 465 participatory bodies in various forms, such as municipal advisory councils, youth councils, citizenship centres, municipal coordination and consultation councils, advisory committees, and councils of notables (MINISTERE DE L'INTERIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITES LOCALE, s.d.).

Additionally, regulatory mechanisms govern procedures related to the right to consult, including access to municipal assemblies' deliberations. This principle of transparency and access to information is considered a fundamental right of citizens, enabling their effective and direct participation in local affairs and policy shaping (MINISTERE DE L'INTERIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITES LOCALE, s.d.).

More than 3546 consultation requests have been recorded in municipal services; 3346 were accepted, and 200 were rejected for non-conformity with the mechanisms set out in Article 8 of the executive decree. n°16-190.(MINISTÈRE DE L'INTÉRIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITÉS LOCALES, s.d.)

A draft decision is currently being adopted that establishes a sectoral committee responsible for implementing participatory budget mechanisms. (MINISTÈRE DE L'INTÉRIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITÉS LOCALES, s.d.)

The **development of a survey in all wilayas and the structures concerned with citizen participation** to define the opportunities and obstacles to citizen participation in managing local public affairs, as the first phase, before the preparation of the framework circular, identifying the modalities of citizen participation at the local level. (MINISTÈRE DE L'INTÉRIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITÉS LOCALES, s.d.)

Participation in enhancing wilaya and municipal codes on participatory democracy and association partnerships;(MINISTERE DE L'INTERIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITES LOCALE, s.d.)

Mechanisms have been proposed to promote youth engagement at the local level through an integrated participatory approach based on the following elements(MINISTERE DE L'INTERIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITES LOCALE, s.d.):

Organising young people within institutional frameworks related to local participatory councils.

Utilising digital tools to inform young people about the activities of local elected assemblies.

A national map is being developed for associations active in youth work. Partnership agreements and capacity-building sessions are also being established between associations and local authorities for managing local projects.

III. The Challenges of participatory democracy in Algeria:

The implementation of participatory democracy in Algeria faces many obstacles, such as:

- The limit of financial resources.
- The resistance to change.
- Lack of awareness about the importance of participatory democracy in effectively managing local affairs and achieving sustainable development.
- The lack of participative culture in managing public affairs.

Conclusion:

Participatory democracy in Algeria has gradually become a vital approach for improving citizen engagement in local governance and public decision-making. In this context, initiatives such as the Capital Program and the Ideal Program have played a key role in promoting participatory practices by fostering dialogue and collaborative development among local authorities, civil society, and citizens.

These initiatives have helped establish new mechanisms for consultation and cooperation at the local level.

However, more efforts are needed to strengthen these initiatives, reinforce the institutional framework for participation, and ensure the long-term sustainability of participatory governance in Algeria.

Bibliographie

(s.d.).

SIDI SALAH, Z., & BOURAHLI, R. (2021, 06). CAPDEL, AN EXECUTION TOOL FOR PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE : "FROM CONSULTATION TO SHARING POWER". EL KHROUB MUNICIPALITY STUDY CASE. *Revue de la ville et l'environnement, 02*(01), pp. 75-87.

Équipe de presse et information de la Délégation d, É. (2025, 10 02). *Lancement du programme ADIL en soutien au développement local et à la démocratie participative*

en Algérie. Consulté le 02 21, 2026, sur Delegation of the European Union to Algeria: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/node/456933_en?s=82

Guide, Y. C. (Réalisateur). (2025). *What Is The Origin Of Participatory Democracy? - Your Civil Rights Guide* [Film]. Consulté le 09 28, 2025, sur https://www.bing.com/videos/riverview/relatedvideo?q=participatory+democracy++pdf+&mid=E9CDCABA3D160EF2A4A7E9CDCABA3D160EF2A4A7&FORM=VIRE

KASSE, A. (2020, 06 15). Civil Society and its role in acheiving Participatory Democracy in Arab and Islamic countries. *Dirassat & Abhath*, pp. 546-553.

MINISTERE DE L'INTERIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITES LOCALE, M. (s.d.). *Promotion de la démocratie participative :*. Consulté le 02 16, 2026, sur MINISTERE DE L'INTERIEUR, DES COLLECTIVITES LOCALES ET DES TRANSPORTS: https://interieur.gov.dz/promotion-de-la-democratie-participative/

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, P. D. (2011, 07 03). Official Journal. *(37)*.

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, P. D. (2016, 03 07). Official Journal,(Algerian Constitution 2016). *(14)*, 8.

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, P. D. (2020, 12 30). Official Journal,(Algerian Constitution). *(82)*.

Petitjean, O. (2016). *SEANCE 1. CONCEPTS ET HISTOIRE DE LA DEMOCRATIE* . Consulté le 02 16, 2026, sur citego: https://base.citego.org/docs/mooc_dp_seance_1.pdf

PNUD Algerie, P. (s.d.). *CapDeL organised the first Forum of the Municipal Consultative Councils of its pilot municipalities.* Consulté le 02 28, 2026, sur PNUD Algerie: https://www.undp.org/fr/algeria/communiques/le-capdel-organise-le-premier-forum-des-conseils-consultatifs-communaux-de-ses-communes-pilotes

PNUD, P. (s.d.). *Capacity-building programme for local development actors/Model Municipalities: CAPDEL*. Consulté le 02 28, 2026, sur PNUD: https://www.undp.org/fr/algeria/projets/programme-de-renforcement-des-capacites-des-acteurs-de-developpement-local/communes-modeles-capdel

PNUD, P. (s.d.). Local Development and Participatory Democracy. Récupéré sur https://short-url.org/1q7ob

UNEP, U. (2023). *Final Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Algeria:" Programme For Strengthing the capacities of Local Development Actors/ Model Municipalities(CapDel): Participatory Democracy and Local Development.*

UNEP, U. (2023). *Final Evaluation of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project in Algeria:" Programme For Strengthing the capacities of Local Development Actors/ Model Municipalities(CapDel): Participatory Democracy and Local Development.*

Wokuri, P. (2018, 09 16). *Démocratie participative.* Consulté le 02 16, 2026, sur Publicdictionnaire: https://publictionnaire.huma-num.fr/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/democratie-participative.pdf