



**Participation as a Mechanism for Activating Development in Algeria:
A Study of Civil Society**

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Abstract:

This study examines the role of civil society in promoting development in Algeria by evaluating the effectiveness of the legal mechanisms available to it. It also explores the extent to which civil society engages in the implementation of public policies aimed at fostering development. The findings reveal that civil society's contribution to advancing Algeria's development remains constrained by numerous obstacles and challenges. Foremost among these are the lack of sufficient legal safeguards and an increasing societal distrust in civil society as a reliable partner. Overcoming these issues is crucial for enhancing both the traditional and modern roles of civil society organizations in Algeria.

Keywords: Governance; Participation; Civil Society; Development; Algeria.

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1. Introduction

Development policy has long posed a significant challenge for Third World countries since their independence. In response to persistent developmental shortcomings, many of these nations began adopting a new governance approach in the early 1990s. This approach emphasized reducing the state's role in managing public affairs and promoting the participation of other actors, such as civil society. Civil society has been regarded as crucial due to its effective role as an intermediary between citizens and the government, thereby enhancing public policy-making processes and contributing to the activation of development.

Algeria is no exception. In the late 1980s, the country transitioned from one-party rule to political pluralism, accompanied by a policy of openness at all levels. This shift included empowering civil society institutions and increasing their participation in shaping development policies through various legal frameworks that defined and regulated their roles within the governance approach.

1.1 Study Problem:

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

To what extent does Algerian civil society contribute to promoting development?

The following sub-questions fall under this problem:

- What legal tools and mechanisms are available to civil society institutions to enhance their participatory role in fostering development in Algeria?
- What key aspects define civil society's role during the stages of development policy formulation?
- What are the primary challenges and obstacles limiting civil society's participation within Algeria's governance framework?

1.2 Study Hypothesis:

This study proceeds from the following main hypotheses:

- The extent of civil society's participation in promoting development in Algeria is contingent upon specific conditions and influencing factors.

The following sub-hypotheses fall under this main hypothesis:



- Civil society in Algeria utilizes constitutionally guaranteed legal tools and mechanisms to fulfill its participatory roles.
- Within Algeria's governance framework, the articulation of societal demands represents a central aspect of civil society's interventions.
- Overcoming the obstacles and challenges that impede civil society's participation is closely linked to the extent to which both authorities and citizens cultivate a culture of engagement.

Chapter One: Etymological Approach to the Study

This chapter explores the theoretical underpinnings of governance, civil society, and development, providing a conceptual framework that informs the analysis of their interrelations.

1. Governance

The concept of governance initially emerged within the economic sphere, focusing on principles that economists believed could facilitate the achievement of corporate objectives. Among these key principles was the importance of providing transparency to shareholders regarding how companies are managed by their boards of directors (Mohieddin Shaaban, 2014, p. 39).

In the early 1990s, interest in governance intensified as its principles began to be applied as a mechanism for managing both state and societal affairs. This approach was viewed as a potential means of helping governments address developmental challenges, particularly in Third World countries, much as it had helped American corporations navigate their own crises (Abdul Qadir Mahmood, D.S., p. 306). Since then, governance has been widely recognized as a critical approach to promoting comprehensive sustainable development.

1.1. Governance Definition

In 1992, the World Bank defined governance as the manner in which authority is exercised in managing a country's economic and social resources to foster development (Rahawi Aisha, 2017, p. 180). Similarly, the United Nations Human Settlements Program views governance as the framework that ensures the participation of various actors—formal, private, official, and informal—in the planning and management of public affairs. This participation is guided by legal frameworks, effective mechanisms, and tools to achieve citizens' aspirations (Yasmine Khudari, 2016, p. 54).

These definitions highlight the pivotal role that informal actors, such as the private sector and civil society organizations, play in governance, positioning them as essential partners in the development process. Mark Peiffer describes governance as a pluralistic mode, emphasizing the



necessity for governmental partnerships with stakeholders from the outset of public policy-making. His definition underscores that meaningful engagement is indispensable for authentic governance (Walid Suleiman, 2022, p. 522).

1.2 Procedural Definition

This research defines governance as an integrated system of laws, legislation, mechanisms, and roles involving governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations including civil society organizations, and citizens. The fundamental objective is to achieve comprehensive sustainable development.

1.3 Governance Standards

Governance standards vary among international organizations, but this study highlights the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) standards as the most diverse and comprehensive. According to Samia Baburi (2019, p. 28), these standards include:

- Participation: Granting all sectors of society the right to participate in decision-making, either directly or through intermediary institutions such as civil society.
- Transparency: Ensuring that necessary information is made available to stakeholders, including citizens, to facilitate informed decision-making.
- Justice and Equality: Providing equal opportunities for all segments of society, with a particular focus on the poor, to achieve social equity.
- Accountability: Holding both official and non-official actors accountable to the public and relevant authorities.
- Strengthening the Rule of Law: Upholding the rule of law to protect the rights and responsibilities of all individuals.
- Efficiency and Effectiveness: Optimizing the use of human, financial, material, and natural resources to achieve established goals.
- Consensus Building: Encouraging consensus among diverse stakeholders to achieve common objectives.
- Responsiveness: Formulating policies that address the needs of all stakeholders, including citizens.
- Strategic Vision: Developing long-term plans that consider both internal and external factors, anticipate risks, and advance policies accordingly.

2. Participation

While the concept of participation in a broad sense was articulated in United Nations declarations and resolutions as early as the 1960s, its practical application gained significant



momentum in the early 1990s. This period marked the rise of new governance approaches that advocated for reducing state dominance in policymaking and promoting increased citizen participation, either directly or through intermediary institutions such as civil society (Balwad Abdel Aziz, 2012, p. 161).

2.1 Definition of Participation

Abdul Wahab Yasser argues that participation is the cornerstone of good governance and is vital for strengthening democracy. He emphasizes the importance of creating an enabling environment to ensure genuine participation from all stakeholders, including civil society organizations (Yasser Abdel Wahab, 2018, p. 204). Another perspective defines participation as the mechanisms through which community members engage in decision-making via institutional channels, ensuring the democratic expression of their opinions (Shaher Muhammad Obaid, 2022, p. 16).

Drawing from these perspectives, this research proposes the following procedural definition: Participation is the mechanism by which individuals contribute to development decision-making, either by expressing their opinions directly or through civil society institutions.

2.2 Requirements for Participation

Effective participation mechanisms require the fulfillment of several key prerequisites, as outlined by Salima bin Al-Hussein (2015, p. 189):

- Real Democracy: Ensuring peaceful transitions of power and strict adherence to the rule of law.
- Culture of Participation: Fostering cooperation and integration within society.
- Clear Development Visions: Establishing well-defined development goals among participating entities, including informal actors.
- Consensus Environment: Creating a conducive environment for mutual agreement among stakeholders.
- Mature Civil Society: Supporting an independent and capable civil society.
- Experienced Human Capital: Ensuring the availability of skilled individuals to lead development initiatives.

3. The Nature of Civil Society

3.1 The Emergence of the Idea of Civil Society



The concept of civil society has been a subject of controversy and debate throughout the history of political thought, with various interpretations offered by different thinkers and philosophers based on their perspectives and intellectual frameworks. Aristotle is often credited as the first philosopher to explore the notion of civil society, laying its foundational ideas by categorizing the state into three groups: the very rich, the very poor, and the middle class, each with a distinct role in society (Mohamed Majdan, 2020, p. 56). However, the concept significantly crystallized during the 17th and 18th centuries in Europe, shaped by intellectual revolutions that transformed social, political, and economic life.

These transformations provided fertile ground for the concept of civil society to attract the attention of Western philosophers, particularly those associated with social contract theories. Thomas Hobbes defined civil society as one where rights are protected by established rules and limitations, fostering mutual respect (Khairallah Al-Jouri, 2018, p. 35). Jean-Jacques Rousseau viewed civil society in relation to the state, emphasizing freedom and the absence of constraints that might inhibit its development and role (Ihsan Al-Naib, 2016, p. 104). In the 20th century, Antonio Gramsci approached civil society from an ideological perspective, viewing it as a network of organizations such as political parties, schools, and churches that influence ideas, cultures, and ideologies within the state. He regarded civil society as both a safeguard and a potential catalyst for systemic change (Salma Kunda, 2019, p. 222).

Following World War II and throughout the Cold War, the concept of civil society experienced a period of stagnation. However, it reemerged with new connotations during global events such as the collapse of the communist bloc, the rise of Western liberalism, and the wave of globalization. These global changes were echoed in Third World countries, where populations expressed discontent with existing regimes and called for democratic reforms instead of socialist models. This period also witnessed the rise of governance as a new approach to enhancing development, with civil society emerging as a vital component.

3.2 Definition of Civil Society

Israa Alaa Al-Din Nouri defines civil society as a collection of organizations, bodies, and voluntary associations whose members share common goals and collaborate across various social, cultural, economic, and religious domains. She emphasizes their role in monitoring and limiting state authority (Aladdin Nouri, 2010, p. 375). Amani Kandil similarly describes civil society as consisting of informal social organizations that strive to maximize individual participation in decision-making processes that directly affect them (Shlighem Ghania, 2016, p. 163).



Drawing from these definitions, civil society can be broadly understood as a collection of non-governmental organizations to which individuals voluntarily affiliate, aiming to address social, economic, political, or cultural challenges within their respective domains.

3.3 Characteristics of Civil Society

Civil society is characterized by several key attributes (Azgil, 2012, p. 119):

- Independence: Civil society institutions aim to operate autonomously, free from subordination to other institutions, groups, or individuals.
- Freedom: The effectiveness of civil society depends on members' freedom to engage and participate, within the bounds of the law.
- Complexity: Civil society is diverse, consisting of multiple organizational bodies and subunits that are geographically distributed to address a wide range of issues.
- Cohesion: Civil society organizations demonstrate internal consensus among their members, which helps to minimize potential conflicts.

3.4 Civil Society Institutions

- Associations: Associations play a significant role in civil society, enabling individuals to direct their efforts toward shared interests across various fields (Mohamed Majdan, 2021, p. 17).
- Unions: Although primarily focused on defending professional interests, unions also contribute significantly to civil society's influence in many countries.
- Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs): NGOs are pivotal in civil society, as they rely on voluntary efforts to address social needs across sectors such as health and humanitarian aid (Osman Allam, 2013, p. 187).

4. The Nature of Development

4.1 The Concept of Development

The concept of development gained clarity after World War II, coinciding with waves of liberation and independence among many countries facing development challenges. Initially, development was viewed predominantly through an economic lens, with progress measured by economic growth (Amal Touhami, 2017, p. 301). However, experiences in developing countries revealed the limitations of this narrow approach, as persistent weaknesses remained despite achieving acceptable economic indicators, as defined by the United Nations (Ibrahim Al-Issawi, 2001, p. 14).

Criticism of this economic-centric view prompted a shift in focus among development practitioners in Third World countries toward addressing issues such as equity, poverty reduction,



and unemployment. This broadened the scope of development to include social dimensions (Abdel Salam Nuer, 2020, p. 145). By the early 1990s, there was increasing recognition that development, to be effective, must encompass the human dimension, prioritizing human well-being as both the means and end of development (Ibrahim Al-Issawi, 2001, p. 21). Additionally, environmental considerations gained prominence, emphasizing the need to preserve ecological balance and safeguard future resource rights (Reem Bin Zayed, 2019, p. 578).

4.2 Definition of Development

Development has been defined from various perspectives, each offering a unique lens through which to understand the concept. The United Nations defines development as a deliberate process, guided by specific policies, aimed at achieving social and economic transformations within society and its environment, whether at the local, regional, or national levels. These processes require coordinated efforts from both governmental and civil society entities, utilizing available resources to address the challenges anticipated from such transformations (Mohamed Abdo, 2010, p. 159). Ali Khalifa Al-Kuwari further characterizes development as a civilizational process aimed at inducing profound societal changes across all domains (Kamal Zamouri, 2018, p. 176).

4.2.1 Procedural Definition:

Development is understood as an integrated process involving the collective efforts of governments, citizens, and intermediary organizations to initiate change across various facets of life, including economic, social, political, cultural, human, and environmental dimensions.

4.3 Barriers to development:

Development, particularly in developing countries, faces numerous obstacles at multiple levels, including the following (Fakroun Al-Saeed, 2005, pp. 135-141):

4.3.1 From economic standpoint:

- High unemployment rates.
- Weak industrial and agricultural infrastructure, coupled with the failure to keep pace with development.
- Inability to create new and alternative sources of wealth.
- Insufficient capital directed toward investment.
- Inability to maintain stable inflation rates.

4.3.2 From a social standpoint:



- High population growth rates, coupled with poor distribution and exploitation of resources.
- Inadequate healthcare services in certain communities.
- Exploitation of child labor and the exclusion of women from the workforce.
- Lack of a cooperative culture within societies and the widespread dependence on the state.
- Prevalence of irrational consumption patterns of available resources.

4.3.3 Politically

- Political instability and the frequent occurrence of military coups, particularly in African countries.
- Lack of democratic participation and peaceful transitions of power.
- Weak political awareness, hindering actual change.
- The influence of customs and traditions on political systems.
- Absence of a culture of political participation.

4.3.4 Administratively:

- Reliance on traditional methods in administrative management.
- Lack of realism in goal setting.
- Widespread corruption, including bribery and nepotism.
- Centralized management practices.
- Inefficient utilization of human competencies.

Chapter Two: The Participation Status of Civil Society and its Contribution to Enhancing Development in Algeria: Manifestations and Obstacles

1. The Status of Civil Society in Algeria since the Establishment of Pluralism

1.1 1989 Constitution

The introduction of the 1989 Constitution marked a significant step towards establishing a robust civil society in Algeria, capable of public participation and influencing developmental policies. Many stakeholders recognized the Constitution as pivotal in this regard. The Algerian legislature explicitly acknowledged citizens' rights and freedoms, particularly in Article 39, which affirmed Algerians' entitlement to defend their fundamental rights and individual and social freedoms, either individually or through associations addressing relevant issues. This provision sought to redefine the relationship between society and the government (Muhammadrasm, 2013, p. 217).

Article 39 further strengthened civil society by guaranteeing freedoms of expression, association, and assembly, while Article 40 allowed citizens to form political associations,



provided they upheld fundamental freedoms, national unity, and territorial integrity (Mohamed Majdan, 2020, pp. 83-85).

The Associations Law No. 90-31, issued on December 4, 1990, defined associations as legal agreements through which individuals and legal entities unite for specific purposes, pooling their knowledge and resources to engage in professional and social activities, particularly in the scientific, religious, educational, and cultural domains (Mohamed Majdan, 2020, p. 59).

The Algerian legislature sought to differentiate associations from other entities by specifying their establishment procedures, funding sources, and the nature of their activities. Furthermore, the law empowered civil society institutions to contribute to public policy-making by conveying citizens' concerns to official bodies and monitoring the implementation of policies to prevent potential violations.

However, Algeria soon entered a turbulent period of prolonged violence, exacerbated by electoral changes that hindered civil society's efforts over the next decade.

1.2 1996 Constitution

The 1996 Constitution upheld the right to establish associations, as outlined in Article 41, and extended this guarantee to the formation of political parties under Article 42. However, the formation of political parties on religious or linguistic bases was prohibited, and the number of political parties was limited to no more than 25, reflecting the political climate at the time (Constitution 1996, Articles 41, 42).

In conclusion, the Algerian legislature aimed to foster a diverse and integrated civil society capable of supporting comprehensive development by easing the establishment of associations and organizations and expanding their roles in public policy. This initiative led to the formation of numerous associations across various sectors.

While the state sought to facilitate civil society activities that contribute to development, Algerian civil society still required additional mechanisms and support to operate effectively.

1.3 2016 Constitutional Amendment

The 2016 Constitutional Amendment reaffirmed the rights and roles granted to civil society in previous constitutions since the introduction of pluralism. Article 39 emphasized the right of individuals or associations to defend basic human rights, while Article 48 reiterated guarantees for individual and collective freedoms (2016 Constitution, Articles 39, 48).



Article 49 emphasized the right to peaceful demonstration, a critical tool for civil society's constructive engagement, ensuring that demonstrations remain aligned with their intended purposes and do not deviate from their goals (2016 Constitution, Article 49).

Furthermore, Article 50 safeguarded freedom of the press across written and audiovisual media, essential for civil society to articulate citizens' concerns, propose solutions, and present diverse perspectives (2016 Constitution, Article 50).

Article 51 highlighted citizens' right to access information, documents, and statistics, promoting civil society's participation in decision-making processes that affect citizens (2016 Constitution, Article 51).

1.4 2020 Constitutional Amendment

The 2020 constitutional amendment, Algeria's most recent to date, demonstrated an increased focus on civil society by encouraging the establishment of additional organizations to enhance political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions. It preserved all previously granted rights and means for civil society while strengthening its presence through various mechanisms. This amendment aligned with domestic socio-economic and political conditions, as well as international calls for the adoption of participatory principles.

Article 10 mandated the inclusion of civil society in the management of public affairs, highlighting its crucial role in achieving comprehensive development. Article 53 reaffirmed the right to establish associations, allowing them to begin activities immediately upon declaration. Associations could only be dissolved by judicial decision, thus safeguarding their independence and freedom of operation (2020 Constitution, Articles 10, 53).

The Algerian government also established the **Civil Society National Observatory** under Article 213 of the November 1, 2020 Constitution, situated within the Presidential Office. This body is dedicated to promoting national values, democratic practices, and citizenship. Collaborating with other institutions, the Observatory provides opinions and recommendations concerning civil society, ensuring its independence and enhancing its effectiveness within Algeria's development and governance frameworks (2020 Constitution, Article 213).

Additionally, President Abdelmadjid Tebboune underscored the importance of civil society in his directives to officials, emphasizing the need to receive, support, and encourage associations.



In conclusion, since adopting governance approaches in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Algeria has consistently prioritized civil society, ensuring its growth and influence through constitutional provisions.

2. Algerian Civil Society Institutions' Role in Enhancing Development

Like civil society institutions in other countries, Algeria's civil society is characterized by its diversity and pluralism, with roles varying across regions based on composition and areas of activity. This study examines the participation of key civil society institutions in Algeria, particularly since the adoption of pluralism. Through embracing governance as an approach, the state sought to reduce its direct involvement and elevate civil society as a crucial partner in Algeria's development process.

2.1 National and Local Societies

Since the early 1990s, the number of national and local societies in Algeria has significantly increased, reaching 1,027 national societies and 9,076 local societies by 2012. The state has continuously supported civil society, particularly by facilitating the formation of associations. As of 2019, there were 1,553 national associations and 92,989 local associations (Lokman Maghraoui, 2021, p. 269).

National associations play a key role in shaping public policies, focusing on national-level issues. Local associations, primarily civic in nature, operate at the city, neighborhood, and village levels, addressing social concerns such as education and providing aid to vulnerable groups, including children, the sick, the poor, and housebound women (Shawish Brothers Hamida, 2015).

2.2 Trade Unions

In Algeria, the General Union of Algerian Workers remains the dominant trade union organization. While historically influential, it has been criticized for prioritizing political demands over the protection of workers' rights. In comparison to Tunisia, Algerian trade unions have demonstrated limited effectiveness in shaping public policy content.

2.3 Zawiyas

Sufi-oriented zawiyas, such as the Qadiriyya Zawiya in Algeria, play a significant role in participating in and implementing public policies. Their close relationship with authorities positions them as key religious institutions that are often consulted in the policy-making process, particularly during the tenure of former President Abdelaziz Bouteflika.



2.4 Student Organizations

Following the political liberalization of the early 1990s, several student organizations emerged in Algeria. However, these groups have experienced a decline in influence, shifting their focus from national issues like development to internal conflicts and biases, often prioritizing personal interests over broader public concerns (Shawish Brothers Hamida, 2015, p. 119).

3. Obstacles and Challenges of Civil Society in Algeria

Numerous obstacles hinder the role of civil society organizations in Algeria, limiting their ability to effectively engage in the development process:

3.1 Independence Issues

Algerian civil society faces significant challenges regarding its independence, particularly in terms of financial and intellectual autonomy. Rooted in a single-party environment, civil society organizations continue to align with government directives, despite the introduction of pluralism. They rely heavily on state support, which undermines their role as mediators between citizens and the government. This dependence has weakened their ability to effectively convey and address citizens' concerns.

3.2 Legal Barriers

Although the government has made efforts to facilitate civil society participation since the advent of pluralism, legal barriers remain. These include stringent conditions for authorizing peaceful demonstrations and protests. Furthermore, limited access to financial resources restricts civil society's ability to effectively engage in development initiatives.

3.3 Lack of Dialogue Culture

The relationship between Algerian civil society and the authorities is characterized by a lack of dialogue. Civil society organizations are often disregarded by the authorities, who fear that their involvement in decision-making processes may pose a threat to regime stability, reflecting historical European precedents.



3.4 Democracy Deficit

Algerian civil society suffers from a deficit of internal democracy, as evidenced by leadership structures that discourage open discussion and compromise, leading to instability. Additionally, a lack of openness to diverse perspectives reflects broader challenges found in many Third World countries, where citizens remain hesitant to engage with civil society as a means of addressing their grievances.

4. Conclusion

This study examines the critical issue of civil society's participation in Algeria's development processes within the framework of the governance approach. It underscores the legal mechanisms designed to increase civil society's involvement in public policy-making and development. Since the adoption of political pluralism, Algeria has made continuous efforts to elevate the role of civil society, gradually reducing the state's centrality to include a broader range of stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of public policies. However, challenges persist, particularly regarding the depth and effectiveness of civil society's participation, which remains hampered by ongoing dependencies and cultural barriers.

The Law of Associations, enacted on December 4, 1990, laid the groundwork for the emergence of civil society in Algeria, responding to both national and international calls for reducing state control over public affairs and opening space for other actors. Although Algeria has seen significant growth in the number of civil society organizations, positioning it as a leader among Arab countries in this regard, the effectiveness of these organizations remains limited. While civil society has been successful in voicing citizens' concerns, its role in shaping policy, proposing alternatives, and engaging in evaluation processes has been notably constrained. This limitation is largely attributed to its continued dependence on state patronage, as well as the public's reluctance to rely on civil society as a tool for driving developmental progress.



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