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Constitutional Entrenchment of Political Participation and Its Role in Strengthening Democratic Security in Algeria in Light of the 2020 Constitutional Amendment

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Abstract:

Algeria seeks to consolidate the foundations of democracy by establishing a set of principles as its basis and starting point, chief among them the principle of political participation, which is enshrined in the 2020 Algerian Constitution. The Constitution commits to protecting this principle and removing all obstacles that hinder its realization, aiming to strengthen democratic security. Consequently, this research paper aims to examine the contribution of genuine political participation to achieving democratic security in Algeria.

Keywords: Democracy – Political participation – Democratic security.

Consolidation constitutionnelle de la participation politique et son rôle dans le renforcement de la sécurité démocratique en Algérie à la lumière de la révision constitutionnelle de 2020

Résumé :

L'Algérie cherche à consolider les fondements de la démocratie en établissant un ensemble de principes qui lui servent de base et de point de départ, au premier rang desquels figure le principe de participation politique, inscrit dans la Constitution algérienne de 2020. La Constitution s'engage à protéger ce principe et à supprimer tous les obstacles qui entravent sa réalisation, dans le but de renforcer la sécurité démocratique. Par conséquent, cet article de recherche vise à examiner la contribution d'une véritable participation politique à la réalisation de la sécurité démocratique en Algérie.

Mots clés : Démocratie – Participation politique – Sécurité démocratique.



Introduction:

The pursuit of democratic security is considered one of the most significant topics of interest to nations, owing to its profound impact on solidifying state institutions and bolstering their development. Political participation is also regarded as one of the central pillars for political progress and political development in states, whether they are established democracies or in the process of democratization, especially amidst what is termed the democratic transition. This phenomenon swept across many countries at the end of the eighties and during the first half of the nineties, resulting in a wave of transitions from non-democratic regimes to more democratic systems characterized by pluralism and political participation.

Like other countries, Algeria today aspires to modernize its political life and strengthen the foundations of democracy, establishing a suite of principles as the basis and backbone of this process. Chief among these is the principle of political participation, which the institutions of the republic are committed to safeguarding by eliminating all barriers to its realization, as articulated in the second paragraph of Article 35 of the 2020 Algerian Constitution, with the objective of achieving and enhancing democratic security.

Based on the above, this research paper seeks to examine the role of political participation in achieving democratic security in Algeria, through the following main question: How has the principle of genuine political participation contributed to achieving democratic security in Algeria?

To address this question, a two-part approach has been adopted: the first section is devoted to exploring the concepts of political participation and democratic security, while the second section is dedicated to examining the concrete realization of citizens' participation in political life and its impact on democratic security.

1. The Concept of Political Participation and Democratic Security

The modern state distinguishes itself from the traditional state by the extent of citizens' actual participation in political life. Political participation is considered one of the most vital indicators of the soundness of any political system seeking to achieve democratic security.

1.1. The Concept of Political Participation

Political participation is defined as the activity engaged in by citizens to positively influence the process of making public policy. Some define it as the sum of conscious and voluntary activities through which citizens select rulers and directly or indirectly shape public policies. Others consider political participation to be the purposeful process encompassing all forms of citizens' involvement in directing the work of central or local governance bodies or directly undertaking society's required functions, whether consultative, decision-making, executive, or supervisory in nature (Sheikh Ali, 2010, p. 27).

Political participation involves legitimate activities undertaken by citizens aiming to directly or indirectly influence the selection of decision-makers or the actions they take. In other words, political participation seeks to alter the outputs of political systems in accordance with the demands



of those who choose to participate (Zayed Al-Tabeeb, 2007, pp. 86-87).

Citizens can participate in political life through many mechanisms and tools, the most important of which is elections, which are the most significant form of political participation. The existence of competitive, organized, free, and fair elections for public office is what most distinctly separates democratic from non-democratic regimes. Alongside elections, voting represents the second most important means of participating in and influencing political life (Philip, 1998, p. 337).

Political participation is not limited to voting in elections; it also includes various politically oriented acts and activities such as influencing those in power, attending political meetings, joining organizations and political parties, and contributing to campaign financing (Dalbaz & Sha'nan, 2023, pp. 683-684).

There are three categories representing three positions toward political participation:

The indifferent, who are not concerned at all with the idea of participation; The neutral, whose engagement with political participation is very limited; The participants, who are positive or active in political and public affairs.

The second group comprises the majority of citizens, while the third group represents the smallest proportion (Dalbaz & Sha'nan, 2023, p. 88).

Political participation is considered a human right affirmed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Article 21 states: "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. The will of the people shall be the

basis of the authority of government." (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, December 10, 1948)

In this context, the 2020 Algerian Constitution affirms the guarantee of genuine participation for all in political life, pledges to remove all obstacles impeding it, and particularly urges youth participation. The goal behind this is to modernize political life and establish the foundations of democracy and democratic security.

1.2. Democratic Security

Democratic security is a kind of security that emphasizes the need to respect the elements and principles of democracy, notably decision-making, transparency and accountability, and the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens within the state. Democratic security is also defined as the state's ability to achieve human security through the consolidation of democratic governance rules. It entails adopting transparency and accountability in all governmental actions at both central and local levels, and respecting the rule of law and human rights by providing adequate guarantees for public freedoms. Furthermore, it means empowering all segments and groups in society with the right to equitable representation, thereby expanding avenues for popular participation. This fosters internal satisfaction, consensus, and cohesion within society as a whole (Sayad, 2024, pp. 250-251).

Political modernization requires increased and continuous participation in political action and public affairs from all segments of society. Broad political participation helps strengthen the channels and mechanisms of people's involvement in governance, as seen in democratic countries. Thus, mass participation distinguishes modern forms of



governance from non-democratic regimes (Samuel, 1993, p. 48).

Democratic security also refers to the set of measures, procedures, policies, and institutions that ensure the protection of democratic practices and institutions, the establishment of democratic norms and principles, strengthening the public's faith in their outcomes, confronting challenges, ensuring their development and entrenchment—especially in emerging democracies—and transforming democratic values into deeply rooted principles.

Democratic security entails investing the outcomes of the democratic process in state-building through: Political stability, guaranteeing peaceful power transitions, voter confidence in the ruler. Using performance as the measure by which the ruler, government, and political forces persuade the voter.

Accordingly, democracy, by this logic, is considered the primary guarantor of state security, stability, and the advancement of governmental and political performance through the political security produced by effective democracy (Hossam Ali, 2023, p. 206).

Democratic security is based on five fundamental dimensions by which the levels of democratic security can be measured globally (Sayad, 2024, pp. 151-153):

Horizontal accountability:

This refers to internal controls exercised by institutional mechanisms such as oversight by elected councils, judicial scrutiny, and independent horizontal oversight bodies like

anti-corruption and financial oversight agencies (e.g., the Court of Auditors).

Vertical accountability:

This refers to external accountability exercised by the public through elections, civil society activities, and various forms of media and communication.

Rule of law:

This is a principle of governance in which all individuals and entities are accountable under laws that are publicly promulgated, equally enforced, and independently adjudicated.

The principle of equal representation for all social groups:

This means equitable representation in political bodies regardless of status, fostering social cohesion and a sense of security, belonging, and loyalty to the state.

Transparency:

This means complete clarity in decision-making, public policy planning, making these available for oversight by central and local bodies, subjecting administrative and political practices to ongoing scrutiny and accountability. It also includes providing necessary information to citizens via digitalization and professional media.

2. Consolidation of Citizens' Genuine Participation in Political Life and Its Impact on Achieving Democratic Security

The 2020 Algerian Constitution institutionalized the principle of political participation and established several



formal channels and bridges through which citizens can effectively engage in political life and manage public affairs. The most prominent of these official channels include referendums, elections, political parties, local collectivities, civil society, and encouragement of youth participation in political life.

2.1. Referendums and Elections

A referendum is defined as the process whereby the people are consulted to express their opinion on a specific matter, whether legislative, constitutional, or political. The issue is presented to voters to gauge their perspectives, effectively granting the people—as the source of authority—the power to respond with ‘yes’ or ‘no.’ Thus, the referendum is a highly significant means through which citizens can participate in political life (Al-Burj, 2020, p. 1480).

This is affirmed in Article 08 of the 2020 Algerian Constitution: “Constituent power belongs to the people... The people also exercise this sovereignty through referenda and via their elected representatives” (see Article 08 of the 2020 Constitution).

The President of the Republic may also submit a constitutional amendment to a referendum, as stipulated in Article 219 of the Constitution, while Article 222 of the same Constitution grants three-quarters of the combined Parliament the right to propose constitutional amendments to the President (see Articles 219–222 of the 2020 Constitution).

Elections are another key instrument of political participation, referring to the right of citizens to elect those

they deem fit for representative positions – a political right enshrined in most constitutions, including Algeria's 2020 Constitution. Article 56 states that every citizen who meets the legal requirements has the right to vote and to stand for election in presidential, legislative, and local elections (see Article 56 of the 2020 Constitution; Qarwaz & Salawi, 2022, p. 145).

2.2. Political Parties

A political party, in the modern sense, is characterized by four key features:

- Continuity of organization,
- Wide-reaching organization,
- The party's desire for power, participation in it, or influence over it,
- The pursuit of popular support (Al-Khazraji Mohamed, 2004, pp. 209–213).

According to Article 03 of Organic Law 12-04 on political parties, a political party is defined as a group of citizens sharing the same ideas and uniting to implement a common political project through democratic and peaceful means to exercise authority and responsibility in leading public affairs.

A political party is established for an unlimited duration, enjoys legal personality and management autonomy, and organizes its structures according to democratic principles (Organic Law No. 12-04, 2012).

This is enshrined by Article 57 of the 2020 Algerian Constitution, which stipulates that the right to establish political parties is recognized and guaranteed. Parties may not be founded on religious, linguistic, ethnic, gender-based, occupational, or regional grounds. This right may not be



invoked to undermine fundamental freedoms, core national identity values, national unity, territorial integrity, the independence of the country, people's sovereignty, or the democratic and republican nature of the State. Political parties are also prohibited from engaging in party propaganda based on these factors. The Constitution also grants, in Article 58, several rights intended to make party life more democratic (see Articles 57-58 of the 2020 Constitution).

The Constitution further promotes women's participation in political life by increasing their representation in elected bodies (see Article 58 of the 2020 Constitution). Organic Law 12-04 requires the mandatory inclusion of women in candidate lists for legislative, provincial, and municipal elections according to seat quotas, and mandates that replacements for women in these bodies must also be women, helping them retain their seats (Salam, 2014, pp. 261-262).

The law also mandates female representation at every stage of party formation, encouraging women's involvement in politics, decision-making within parties, and fostering diversity and inclusivity in political discourse. It also bolsters women's presence in deliberative, executive, and leadership bodies of political parties (Ben Salem & Dali, 2024, pp. 591-593).

2.3. Local Collectivities and Participation in Local Public Affairs

Algeria adopted administrative decentralization, which involves the existence of elected local administrations aimed at promoting local development. This is reflected in the

sweeping reforms affecting provinces and municipalities via legal amendments largely intended to expand financial autonomy, independent legal standing, and implement participatory local democracy. These measures empower local citizens to manage their affairs by strengthening relationships between local administrations and other actors, ensuring transparency and accountability, and modernizing public administration (Si Hamdi & Qariga, 2023, p. 720).

The 2020 Constitution emphasizes the state's encouragement of participatory democracy at the local level and establishes decentralized, non-centralized relations between the state and local authorities. Elected local councils are positioned as spaces for citizen participation in managing public affairs (see Articles 16, 17, 18 of the 2020 Constitution).

According to Article 11 of the Communal Law No. 11-10 (June 22, 2011), the municipality is the institutional framework for local democracy and proximity management. The municipal people's assembly is charged with informing citizens about their affairs, consulting them regarding planning and socio-economic and cultural development priorities, and may present its annual report to the public (Law No. 11-10 on Municipalities, 2011).

Article 12 of the same law requires municipal councils to encourage local initiatives aiming to involve citizens in problem-solving and improving living conditions, while Article 14 allows anyone to view municipal council deliberations and decisions and obtain copies at their own expense (Law No. 11-10 on Municipalities, 2011).

Citizen participation is not limited to elected assemblies but also extends to combating corruption. Article 15 of Law 06-01 stipulates that civil society participation in preventing



and combating corruption should be encouraged, including through transparency in decision-making and increased citizen involvement in public management (Law No. 06-01, 2006).

Algeria embraced the participatory approach through various laws and legislations to draw local collectivities closer to citizens and other stakeholders like the private sector and civil society, making them true partners in local governance and development. However, on the practical level, significant challenges to implementing participatory democracy have emerged, necessitating transitional mechanisms capable of applying these principles. This led the President to emphasize the need for reform in local governance and preparations for amendments to municipal and provincial laws to enable these structures to keep pace with Algeria's evolving socio-economic environment (Si Hamdi & Qariga, 2023, p. 721).

2.4. Civil Society

Involving civil society in public affairs reflects the principle of participatory democracy and is a hallmark of the rule of law. In this spirit, the 2020 Algerian Constitution enshrined the role of civil society, with Article 16 specifying that the state encourages participatory democracy, notably through civil society (see Article 16 of the 2020 Constitution).

This article appears in the chapter outlining the general principles governing the people, declaring constituent power and national sovereignty, underscoring the drafters' commitment to civil society's role in partnership with the state in managing Algerian public affairs (Ouchan, 2022, p. 773).

Article 213 of the same Constitution established the National Observatory for Civil Society as an advisory body with the President. The Observatory provides opinions and recommendations regarding civil society concerns, promotes national values, enhances democratic practices and citizenship, contributes to achieving national development goals, with its composition and functions set by the President (Article 213 of the 2020 Constitution).

Constitutionalizing civil society organizations and elevating their status demonstrates a strong political will to realize democratic security within the system of governance. The presence of a vibrant civil society is a healthy indicator of public awareness of the importance of citizen participation alongside official entities in managing public affairs (Qalil, 2022, p. 291).

2.5. Encouraging Youth Participation in Political Life

The 2020 Constitution explicitly encouraged youth participation in politics, as stated in Article 73: "The State shall provide the institutional and material means necessary to develop young people's capacities and stimulate their creative energies. The State encourages youth to participate in political life" (see Article 73 of the 2020 Constitution).

The Electoral System Law compounds this in Articles 1 and 87, guaranteeing the participation of citizens and civil society, especially youth and women, in political life and ensuring their freedom of choice. Article 87, section four, also mentioned possible state support to young candidates on independent lists for legislative and local elections to motivate their genuine participation without obstacles (Yadr, 2024, p. 73).



From all the above, it is clear that the 2020 Algerian Constitution has institutionalized the principle of political participation, providing citizens the avenues to engage in political life and public governance via constitutional mechanisms such as referendums, elections, political parties, local collective governance, and psychological and financial encouragements for youth participation—thus, cultivating the foundations of democratic security within the Algerian state.

Conclusion

The consolidation of democratic security has become an imperative that commands significant attention from the state. Many efforts have been made toward this, most notably the 2020 constitutional amendment, which sought to entrench the principle of citizens' political participation. As a result of this study, the 2020 Algerian Constitution stands as a fundamental pillar for the actualization of genuine political participation, as it incorporates a set of constitutional mechanisms that encourage and facilitate citizen involvement in, or influence over, political actions at both the central and local levels, whether directly or indirectly.

This has contributed to achieving core goals of democratic security, most importantly political stability, the assurance of peaceful transitions of power, and a reduction in all forms and types of corruption. However, in practice, despite the existence of multiple mechanisms for participation, actual levels of citizen engagement remain limited. This necessitates employing all formal and informal means to

promote awareness of the importance of participation in political life and the management of public affairs, whether directly or indirectly.

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