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TITLE OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLE ⊚

Civil Society and the Dynamics of Democratic Participation in Algeria:
A Theoretical and Analytical Inquiry into Structures, Roles, and Transformational Challenges

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Abstract

Civil society has long been recognized as an essential component in the architecture of modern democratic states. It functions as a mediating sphere between citizens and political authority, enabling participation, articulation of interests, oversight of governance, and the diffusion of democratic norms. In consolidated democracies, civil society organizations—associations, unions, professional bodies, advocacy groups, and community networks—exercise effective pressure and maintain continuous engagement across all phases of decision-making. Their credibility, functional independence, and rootedness within society enable them to channel public aspirations, defend political participation, and contribute to a culture of democratic accountability. In contrast, the Algerian and broader Arab contexts reveal a paradox. Civil society is numerically present and institutionally visible, yet its qualitative effectiveness remains constrained. Historical legacies of state centralization, limited pluralism, regulatory restrictions, and the politicization of associative life have curtailed the capacity of civil actors to play transformative roles. As a result, civil society's contribution to political participation—mobilization, advocacy, monitoring, and policy influence—remains limited despite an expanding associative landscape. This theoretical study examines the structural factors shaping civil society in Algeria, its relationship with political authority, the constraints affecting its autonomy, and its ability to function as a driver of democratic participation. The paper argues that enhancing political participation through civil society requires deep reforms: strengthening independence, expanding civic freedoms, improving organizational capacity, and fostering stronger citizen–association linkages. Only under such conditions can civil society act as a meaningful partner in democratic transition and a reliable defender of participatory governance.

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Introduction:

"We are not like God to always know what is right with complete clarity." This statement can be applied to the role of the state and its various institutions in the modern Western context. The modern state has replaced the religious state and now oversees all aspects of human life—a role previously ascribed to God in the religious state. Since the state is human-made, errors and shortcomings are inevitable. Therefore, the state alone cannot manage everything, and other institutions must assist in public affairs without challenging the state's authority in approval, enforcement, and coercion. This gives rise to the idea of civil society in its various forms, acting as an intermediary between authority and society, conveying concerns from reality to decision-makers to ensure policies are realistic and socially accepted.

"Civil society is nothing other than an organized agreement aimed at pursuing collective goals because instrumental reason helps individuals recognize their interests and guides them on the best ways to organize them." Thus, a connected relationship arises between civil society as a non-political civil force and the state as political authority, responsible for governance and legitimate use of force. The legitimacy of both civil society and political authority depends on political participation and the creation of institutions with democratic dimensions.

Political participation is the shared goal of the state and civil society, within the limits of each entity's powers. As noted by Azmi Bishara, civil society represents "any critical work without political cost, functioning in politics while staying away from it." Civil society partners with authority but without political rewards such as candidacy or access to decision-making centers. Its "reward" is the implementation of public policies by the state that respond to societal aspirations. This study analyzes the relationship between civil society and political authority, aiming to strengthen effective political participation and assess civil society's central role in democratic transition. This role faces challenges in new democracies, which require pluralistic environments that accept diversity and difference for civil society to flourish.

The independence of civil society is measured by its origin, funding, and activities. Civil society dependent on internal or external power centers cannot perform effectively. According to Habermas, "Civil society operates with relative independence from the state, attempting to exercise all forms of oversight as if public opinion supervises state actions. It must be independent from authority and represent public opinion," while also remaining independent of external forces. Weak civil society reduces participation and undermines democracy, sustainable development, and good governance based on equality and popular involvement. Political participation is a major challenge for building democracy, affecting both emerging and established democracies due to the state's functional tendency to control individuals' lives, free time, and values, leading to a general decline in political participation.

In Algeria, as in other Third World countries, political participation is low despite pluralism in the political class, competitive elections since the late 20th century, an elected parliament, local councils, numerous political parties, and a large number of civil associations. After the 2019 protests, political authorities provided guarantees to ensure transparency and enhance the role of civil forces. Civil society gained official recognition through the National Observatory of Civil Society. Yet political participation remains low. John Rawls notes, "The conception of democratic thought over recent centuries shows that there is currently no agreement on how fundamental constitutional democratic institutions should be organized, considering the fair conditions of cooperation among free and equal citizens." Civil society is meant to translate these democratic functions into real-world outcomes. Globally, declining political participation is a challenge not limited to Algeria, highlighting the role of civil society as a societal force in democratic work.

Research Problem:

To what extent does civil society effectively contribute to enhancing political participation in Algeria?

Sub-questions:

- What is the relationship between civil society and conscious political participation?

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- How does political participation contribute to democratic transition?

- What factors affect the level and nature of political participation?

Study Hypotheses:

- There is a relationship between civil society awareness and political participation; higher civil society awareness increases political participation.

- Political participation is essential for democracy; successful democratic transition requires effective political participation.

- Political participation is influenced by interacting internal and external factors.

Methodology:

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach through description and analysis of civil society's role in political participation in Algeria and its effect on democratic transition. The historical method is also used, examining periods of Algerian contemporary history, particularly after political openness and pluralism, to identify key changes in civil society's role in promoting political participation through structural and functional transformations.

Study Divisions:

To answer the research questions, the study is divided into two main sections:

- **Section One:** Defining civil society and political participation, including conceptual analysis, issues, levels, characteristics, and determinants of the phenomenon.

- **Section Two:** Civil society's function in promoting democracy through political participation in Algeria, assessing its effectiveness, obstacles to its performance, and their impact on political participation and democratic transition.

Section One: Nature of Civil Society and Political Participation

"Public opinion forms when we move from individual concerns to confronting general problems and engage each other through dialogue and discussion." Civil society is a voluntary gathering of individuals to form a group that discusses and contributes to public affairs in the presence of a strong centralized political authority. This societal force mirrors direct and indirect political participation. "Democratic political authority should be considered as a result of partnership among free and equal individuals, justifying the philosophical contract in practicing authority." Governance is a form of political participation between political authority (state apparatus) and civil society (social force).

Subsection One: What is Civil Society?

Former British Prime Minister Gordon Brown noted: "People who wanted change joined the Labour Party as a means to achieve it. Now they want to be the means of change themselves." This reflects new forces separate from politics but working to guide, pressure, or replace it if it fails. Modern state philosophy of social contract divides political work and clarifies functional competencies: political authority has limits and functions; society has limits and functions. Civil society exists between the two: organized and legal, yet lacking decision-making authority.

Branch One: Definition of Civil Society

Civil society generally comprises social, economic, religious, and cultural institutions working in their respective fields to meet local needs, operating with relative independence from political institutions. It has representative purposes, such as defending economic interests, advancing professions, expressing members' interests, and cultural objectives (e.g., literary unions, cultural associations, social clubs).

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Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci defines civil society as a set of superstructures like unions, parties, schools, associations, media, literature, and the church (Jnahani, 1999, p. 30). His socialist background includes political parties as part of civil society due to their pressure and change functions. Other thinkers exclude political parties from civil society because of their pursuit of power. Contemporary German thinker Jürgen Habermas defines civil society as a network of social organizations discussing solutions to public interest problems (Habermas, 1999, p. 48). This aligns with current definitions, limiting civil society to social, cultural, religious, and economic organizations, excluding political parties. Azmi Bishara notes modern civil society's "aversion to the state," while political parties dominate the state and impose ideology.

Researcher Habib Jnahani notes: "Civil society is an imported concept in Arab-Islamic heritage, emerging in Arab political discourse only recently, characterized by features distinct from its original context. Arab-Islamic society adopted it in the second half of the 19th century, when reformists traveled to Europe and observed these practices" (Jnahani, 1999, p. 33). This imported concept, introduced post-independence, brought Western models into Arab-Islamic societies, sometimes distorting local political thought. Bertrand Badie observes that cultural elites benefit from imported models regardless of ideological background. Saad Eddin Ibrahim defines civil society as "the domain in which citizens freely establish organizations independent of authority to express opinions, achieve interests, or serve common causes," excluding political parties.

Mohammed Abed Al-Jabri emphasizes that civil society is first and foremost "urban society," with voluntary institutions organized by citizens, contrasting with "natural" institutions of tribal or rural society where membership is compulsory (Oroub, p. 163). Civil society is thus an urban phenomenon reflecting a lifestyle distinct from rural or tribal life.

Academic studies generally define civil society as "a group of voluntary organizations filling the public space between family and state, aiming to serve members' interests, provide citizen services, or conduct humanitarian activities, adhering to values of respect, consent, tolerance, participation, and peaceful management of diversity" (Shukr, p. 36).

Since the term "civil society" is Western and linked to liberal democracy, some criticize its transfer to Arab contexts without adaptation. Abdullah Hammoudi notes this transfer neglects state specificity, institutional structure, legitimacy, and self-perception of organizations, and ignores the mediating role of civil society between family and state, requiring bypass of familial and tribal relational structures (Hammoudi, 1998, p. 227). Bertrand Badie observes that non-Western societies struggle between adaptation and innovation. Some scholars propose alternatives within Islamic conceptual frameworks, such as "institutions of the Ummah" distinct from state institutions (Ismail, 1989, p. 180). These approaches often lack theoretical foundation. Durkheim rejects conflating different societies with state forms due to cultural differences.

Some scholars define civil society operationally as "political, economic, social, and cultural institutions operating in their fields with relative independence from the state for multiple purposes..."

Political Purposes, Trade Union Goals, Cultural and Social Objectives:

Political purposes include participation in decision-making at the national level, such as political parties. Trade union goals include defending the economic interests of union members, raising the professional level, and expressing members' interests. Cultural purposes are seen in writers' and intellectuals' unions and cultural associations, aiming to raise awareness according to the orientations of each association's members. Social purposes involve contributing to social work to achieve development. Thus, the prominent elements of civil society institutions are political parties, labor unions, professional federations, cultural and social associations, though reservations exist regarding political parties even within Western thought itself. "A political party is defined as a free organization of individuals whose goal is participation in public affairs, including through nominating candidates for free and democratic elections." The goal of a political party is to reach power, not merely to participate through initiative, proposal, cooperation, pressure, or advocacy.

Despite this cognitive limitation in rooting and contextualizing the concept within the Arab-Islamic environment, factors and conditions have combined for the emergence of civil society—not as a concept but as a sociological fact. Researcher Mohammed Al-Ghilani noted that "civil society is not a completed reality whose existence can be automatically verified without clear premises; it is a hypothesis full of paradoxes and an observatory of a history rich in conflicting ideas and experiences. Its importance lies not in proving its existence but in using it as an

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analytical tool to interpret the overall social transformations and realities within the societal fabric" (Belkziz, 2001, p. 13). In other words, civil society concerns practical field practice, not just ready-made concepts accepted without implementation, monitoring, and tracking their impact on general political performance.

Section Two: Pillars of Civil Society:

Civil society consists of organizations and associations of a civil nature, meaning they are not officially represented within political authority structures. Rather, they function as social links that organize various societal groups in a civic manner capable of expressing concerns. These links may be modern, such as unions, associations, and NGOs, or traditional, like religious brotherhoods and familial or tribal links. "Civil society institutions are based on both modern and non-modern elements," yet despite their differences, they share a position midway between society and political authority. They mediate in various fields, including associations, unions, parties, clubs, and cooperatives, such as business federations, labor and professional unions, farmers' federations, and charitable associations. The concept of civil society involves three pillars (Qandeel, 1999, p. 99):

1. **Free Voluntary Action:** Civil society emerges and manifests through voluntary participation, both in establishment and activity. It is a free action, not based on coercion, contrasting with traditional associations where membership is automatic and not by individual choice.

2. **Collective (Institutional) Organization:** Civil society is organized, creating a system of institutions and federations that operate methodically according to logical standards and mutually agreed rules (Jabr, 2023). Although it is not an official authority, it is a legal and organized entity with recognized legal structure and hierarchical organization, operating under the law, with institutional character and legal responsibilities, as well as moral and financial accountability.

3. **Moral and Behavioral Pillar:** This includes acceptance of differences and diversity among individuals and recognition of others' rights to have civil organizations that protect and defend their material and moral interests. "Individuals permanently join groups through emotion, may oppose other groups, practice reflection and insight, and express their feelings while recognizing others' feelings." Civil society develops and reinforces this behavior, allowing individuals to group according to their identity orientations while respecting and committing to other orientations in managing conflicts within and between civil society institutions and the state, through proper means and values of respect, tolerance, cooperation, and peaceful conflict.

Thus, civil society is a legal, organized, hierarchical manifestation, though informal in that it does not hold decision-making power. It mediates between society and political authority, participates in public affairs, organizes society, and promotes cooperation. It is voluntary, organized, institutional, and based on respect for diversity. Its primary goal is to strengthen dialogue, accept diversity, and live in a pluralistic society united by response to the common good.

Second Requirement: What is Political Participation?

"Peoples who cannot resist internally fall under the charge of high treason, nor can they resist externally, as they bear the burden of foreign domination." Here, resistance refers to freedom of political expression, freedom of assembly, joining political entities, and peaceful opposition. These values are established under a democratic system that guarantees citizens' public and private freedoms, encouraging political participation. Individuals are more likely to express political opinions when they feel free to accept or reject policies. Political participation can be positive or negative and depends on the existence of freedom for expression. The second requirement of the first section focuses on political participation as a concept and as a mechanism to embody democracy.

Branch One: Definition of Political Participation:

Understanding political participation requires first clarifying participation in general, as a foundation for political participation (Al-Faris, 2001, p. 10). Participation means shared living from a political sociology perspective, involving life within a space that accepts diversity. This acceptance motivates individuals to participate politically to create authority overseeing public affairs and maintaining diversity. Nader Kazem calls this the "principle of deterring authority by authority": individual authority can counter political authority, even if corrupt or oppressive.

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Participation limits authoritarianism by enforcing shared living values. In Arabic, "to participate" (شارك) means to have a share; participation connects the individual to the collective.

Political participation is any voluntary citizen action aimed at influencing public policy, managing public affairs, or selecting leaders. The general concept is "the participation of large numbers of individuals and groups in political life," defined by Samuel Huntington and John Nelson as: "activities undertaken by ordinary citizens to influence government decision-making, whether individually or collectively, organized or spontaneous, continuous or intermittent, peaceful or violent, legal or illegal, effective or ineffective" (Al-Faris, 2001, p. 11). Any citizen initiative to effect change by non-formal means in formal structures constitutes political participation, which can be active or passive, peaceful or violent, depending on authority, politics, and freedom.

Political participation, in a given time and place, depends on the meaning, value, and vitality of politics within the society, and the role assigned to citizens by different social groups. Limiting participation to an elite, whose modernity and rationality are questionable, renders even the best principles and theoretical models practically irrelevant. The key determinant is whether politics is public and inherent to citizenship (science of public affairs) or elite-centered (objectives and desires of a few), the latter prevalent in many Arab countries, shaped by tribal, ideological, and material factors (Al-Jabri, *The Arab Political Mind*, p. 80). The effectiveness of political participation cannot be assessed without considering governance structures and decision-making processes, and the extent of democratic values in society.

Sidney Verba, Truman Nye, and Jae-on Kim define political participation as lawful activities performed by citizens to influence leader selection or actions, including government decisions (Al-Baz, 2006, p. 358). Participation presupposes a political system, even if flawed; claims that "the people are the authority" risk populism and chaos, potentially producing more oppressive rulers.

Daoud Al-Baz defines it as giving citizens equal opportunities to shape governance, contribute to determining their state's destiny, and actively engage in politics through voluntary practice, voting, candidacy, or discussion in intermediary organizations (Amer, 2001, p. 15). This ensures parliamentary representation and oversight without abolishing governance structures.

Thus, political participation includes voluntary activities and some official actions, making it both a right and duty of citizens and political professionals alike. According to Rashida (2023):

- Political participation is the voluntary role of citizens individually or collectively (party, organizations) in political life.

- Its goal is direct or indirect influence on decision-makers for public interest or specific group interests.

- Various institutions must exist for citizens to perform their role and achieve their participation goals.

Political participation means access to central authority and involvement in decision-making via lawful mechanisms, not through chaotic populism advocating absolute popular authority.

Branch Two: Forms and Levels of Participation:

Political participation generally refers to voluntary activities through which citizens contribute to public life. Levels vary by country, period, conditions, and citizens' willingness, affected by the nature of authority and its interaction with society. Real participation occurs where authority does not dominate completely, unlike authoritarian systems limiting participation (Foucault: "Nothing is weaker than a political system indifferent to truth, nothing more dangerous than one claiming to define it").

1. Levels of Participation:

1. **Highest Level:** Active political actors meeting three of six criteria: political membership, donations, attending meetings, participating in campaigns, contacting representatives, or discussing politics widely (Al-Sufi, 2023).

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2. **Second Level:** Politically interested individuals who vote, follow politics, and aim for their party representatives to attain office.

3. **Third Level:** Marginal participants indifferent to politics, participating pragmatically during crises or threats (Al-Sufi, 2023).

4. **Fourth Level:** Extreme participants acting outside legal frameworks, sometimes violently, opposing society or the political system, seeking to impose identity or ideology by force.

2. Stages of Participation:

1. Political interest: monitoring public issues, discussing politics with family or colleagues, increasing during crises or campaigns.

2. Political knowledge: awareness of local or national political figures.

3. Political voting: participating in campaigns, supporting candidates financially or through voting.

4. Political demands: contacting officials, filing complaints, joining parties or volunteer associations.

Participation exists in all political systems, more evident in democracies offering freedom, human rights, and competitive elections (Al-Baz, 2006). Greater engagement in decision-making increases legitimacy, though excessive participation can complicate decisions and reduce efficiency and legitimacy (Al-Sufi, 2023).

Minority activists can regularly communicate with representatives, often via interest groups or political organizations (Al-Wardi, 2023). Participation levels and forms are closely linked to governance systems and their responsiveness.

4. Determinants of Political Participation:

Participation is influenced by political stimuli, social variables, and institutional channels:

1. **Political stimuli:** Exposure to media, campaigns, meetings, or discussions may increase participation, but does not guarantee it, depending on class, residence, education, and personal inclination.

2. **Social variables:** Education, income, occupation, gender, age, etc., affect participation. Higher income and education generally increase engagement; women are less likely than men, though socioeconomic progress narrows the gap. Age increases participation until the 40s-50s, then declines after 60. Cultural, religious, and educational context, along with governance structure, determine participation levels (Rashida B., 2023).

4. Characteristics of Political Participation:

1. Voluntary and intentional behavior: citizens contribute due to social responsibility.

2. Acquired behavior: learned through life and societal interactions, not innate.

3. Practical positive behavior: implemented in real life, achieving community objectives.

4. Holistic process: social, political, multifaceted, involving all stages from understanding to implementation and evaluation.

5. Pluralistic action: participation spans multiple domains—economic, political, social—simultaneously.

6. Mass participation: local, regional, national, or international scope (e.g., municipal, regional, national elections; participation in international institutions like the African Union or Arab League).

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7. Right and duty: participation is both a citizen's right and obligation, contributing to political discussion, voting, candidacy, and fulfilling social responsibilities to achieve societal development.

8- Participation as a Goal and a Means: Political participation is both a means and a goal at the same time. It is a goal because a healthy democratic life requires the masses to engage in social responsibility, which implies changing citizens' behaviors and cultures toward a sense of social responsibility. It is also a means for enabling the masses to play a pivotal role in advancing society toward progress and prosperity and contributing to driving the development process.

9- Participation Unifies the Collective Thought of the Masses: Participation helps in shaping a unified mindset toward feeling a shared purpose and destiny and the willingness to exert efforts to support it (Mahmoud, 2023). Participation leads to the unification of efforts and also to the feeling of shared destiny through collaborative and cooperative work, especially when it has an impact on decision-making.

From this, it can be said that both the concepts of civil society and political participation are of Western origin and were introduced to Arab countries or all countries outside the Western cultural sphere, especially during the colonial period and the emergence of liberation movements, which largely adopted Western-style struggles. After independence, these concepts were retained and integrated into the political life of the nation-state, becoming the primary tools for practicing political activity, expressing opinions, and interacting with various levels of political authority. Civil society constitutes a level within the structure of political systems, and political participation at its various levels reflects a healthy state of the political system.

Chapter Two: The Role of Civil Society in the Process of Political Participation in Algeria

"Many writings in recent times on the requirements and means of transitioning from a non-democratic system of governance to a democratic system have found fertile ground in the Arab world for evaluation." Since the end of the twentieth century, the region has been a focal point of protests and political change, known as the "third wave" of political change, according to thinkers and theorists. This movement continued until recent years, marked by what became known as the Arab Spring.

If we return to the forms of political participation, they include several types: peaceful and violent, those based on electoral participation, and attempts to achieve change starting from decision-making centers. These can be described as peaceful participation, where "some groups pursue peaceful protest" by strengthening civil work and attempting to impose change starting from society itself through organization and raising political awareness. This can create a complementary relationship between civil society and political participation. This chapter will include two main sections addressing the interrelated relationship between civil society and political participation through their integration in terms of function and context in the Algerian reality.

Section One: The Function of Civil Society in Promoting Democracy through Political Participation

Since the February 22, 2019, movement, Algeria has witnessed pivotal transformations that support the role of civil society and its organizations and open the way for political participation, as they are living forces not affiliated with any political current. Civil society contributed to accompanying the social movement, ensuring its peacefulness, and maintaining its demands for change and reform without affecting national constants. The movement and its momentum presented a real challenge to the Algerian state, which could have led to conflicts or crises related to identity and reference frameworks, especially in a tense world governed by conflicts.

Here, civil society played a clear role in maintaining the peacefulness of the movement, moderating its demands, and bridging the gap between popular demands and the political authority's vision for resolving tensions. Civil society served as a mediator between the people and the authority, as "no state is capable of monitoring the thoughts of all its citizens at all times and everywhere," especially when societal demands seek radical and deep changes in the political system and its mechanisms.

Political authority found itself obliged to seek mechanisms for democratic transformation within legal and constitutional frameworks. Among these frameworks: adapting the legal and legislative framework governing political life and the ongoing transition toward democracy in Algeria, seen as a step forward toward expanding political participation and establishing new political rules, institutions that strengthen the democratic path such as

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parties, pressure groups, and interest groups acting as intermediaries between citizens and the state (Allah, 1998, p. 61). This led to the beginning of institutionalizing participation in the Algerian political field through diversifying the nature of political actors, especially non-official ones represented by civil society manifestations.

Subsection One: Institutionalizing Political Participation

The process of building effective institutions in political processes relies on the ability of decision-makers to manage public affairs by integrating official and non-official actors in communication with society. This ensures that public policies are effective in securing social loyalty and transitioning from conflict-based protest relationships to interactions based on societal channels and alternatives where individuals voluntarily engage, serving as communication channels within the political system. This aligns with the political systems theory of David Easton, Gabriel Almond, and Card Deutsch regarding inputs, outputs, and communication processes. Non-official actors serve as channels for transmitting and responding to messages.

"Societies and states capable of competition today and resisting severe challenges are those that balance official government policy and civil society-based politics." This approach protects political authority against infiltrations, as citizens are indirectly represented within state bodies through semi-official channels, legitimizing the authority's work and simultaneously encouraging individuals to engage positively in political participation through:

- Elevating political democracy to the institutional level and consolidating it within a promising democratic political structure, despite ambiguities or contradictions in some practices.

- Framing political conflict among political forces regarding decision-making authority and public policy through institutionalized political frameworks and mechanisms.

- Gradual development and deepening of civic culture, endorsing coalition governments, power-sharing, political and intellectual pluralism, and equality principles embodied in the rule of law.

- A growing tendency to define limits of state action, allowing civil society institutions some degree of freedom from direct state intervention.

- An increasing inclination to make the political process a forum for peaceful discussion and consensus-building as a basis for competition among political actors (Karim, 2006, p. 40).

This approach compensates for the mistrust fostered by political parties in Algeria since the 1989 Constitution that endorsed openness and pluralism. However, the security crisis undermined democratic processes, weakened the effectiveness of pluralism, and eroded the image of young political parties, some affiliated with violent eliminationist currents, others subordinated to political authority, contributing to the social movements' resurgence in Algeria since 2011.

"The emergence of Arab civil society is a natural outcome of current political developments and the shrinking role of Arab political parties, making space for new political actors..." The Algerian and Arab political arenas needed new forces and actors to frame political work.

Civil society activity in Algeria initially faced stagnation due to security conditions that hindered political openness, but it has recently revived, reflected in the issues it raises and the contributions it makes through social, economic, and political stances, as well as national seminars since September 1991 and dialogues on political and economic life with the state, culminating in the National Associations Forum between April 10-11, 1997, representing a first step toward consolidating democracy by involving civil society in proposing solutions to national crises. Civil society adapted its activities to public issues (Morsi, 2023).

Civil society organizations stimulate voter turnout and encourage voting for credible and competent candidates. The more voters participate, as witnessed in elections following the 2019 social movement, the more civil society manifestations play a pivotal role in enhancing political participation and advancing young competencies into authority institutions, especially the legislative body, dominated by independent candidates with civil society backgrounds, forming the second-largest parliamentary bloc.

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Civil society with social depth and mass presence increases the chances of electing competent candidates, promoting renewal and oversight of political authority and performance through activating political participation (Waazi, p. 11). This participation is conscious, effective, and avoids populist rhetoric that may turn movements against governance regardless of its nature. "The basic demand of populist movements is the elimination of ruling institutions," which is anti-democratic. Therefore, civil society rationalizes political participation, ensuring it is conscious rather than calling for political disengagement, and exercises its role through:

1- Direct Voting in Elections:

This is considered one of the most important means of political participation in Algeria, directly linked to representative democracy. Its success depends on many factors, mainly society's ability to monitor and hold representatives accountable. This pattern has been established since the adoption of pluralism but became more effective after the 2019 social movement, independent electoral authority, constitutional court transition, electoral term adjustments, and strengthening civil society—all enhancing political participation awareness, especially among youth.

2- Participation through Popular Referendums:

The ruling system sometimes seeks popular approval for laws or measures before implementation. In Algeria, this is used to achieve political, economic, or social goals linked to regime legitimacy. "Senior officials in democratic systems are chosen through competitive elections in which most citizens can participate," but elections alone are insufficient without civil society support for credibility.

3- Participation through Political Parties:

This is a cornerstone of democratic systems and essential in structuring and activating popular political participation (Sharif, 2006, p. 11). Today, party credibility has declined, with citizens preferring independent, young, competent candidates, and civil society provides these talents, enhancing election participation.

Subsection Two: Impacts of Civil Society Performance on Political Participation

Political participation has declined globally, even in long-standing democracies, due to development realities and emerging demands like climate and gender movements. New actors, such as civil society, are required to rejuvenate politics. Civil society organizations represent their members, defend their interests, and actively contribute to development at national and global levels. However, the lack of genuine partnerships between authorities and non-official actors limits civil society's influence.

Two main issues reflect this:

- Weak association infrastructure, particularly budgets. Civil society relies on resources for independence in dealing with official bodies. States often dominate, creating clientelist channels that compromise civil society credibility, as seen before the 2019 movement when distinctions between official and non-official, opposition and pro-government, were blurred.

- Civil society can have a negative impact if subordinated to external entities, affecting neutrality and election integrity, favoring state-backed candidates, leading citizens to abstain, perceiving predetermined outcomes. Post-2019 reforms enhanced independence in elections, strengthening civil society credibility as a participatory, non-partisan actor.

Subsection Three: Context of Civil Society Effectiveness

Civil society is a key element in political participation due to its neutrality and elite composition. Association leaders are often educated and politically aware without partisan involvement. "Civil society can form a general will encompassing rulers and citizens," promoting the common good without partisanship. Civil society frames public life in Algeria and participates in campaigns serving the public interest, strengthening democracy and governance.

Its roles include:

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1.Monitoring and Oversight: Observing government and officials, reporting corruption, enhancing political credibility.

2- **Promoting Transparency:** Demanding transparency in governance, monitoring state institutions, reporting corruption, and facilitating citizen access to information.
3- **Encouraging Citizen Participation:** Educating citizens on political engagement, supporting independent competencies, and raising awareness of rights and responsibilities.
4- **Communication between Citizens and Government:** Conveying citizens' concerns to authorities, addressing problems, proposing practical solutions, and representing specific groups.
5- **Promoting Human Rights:** Protecting and advocating for rights, supporting victims, ensuring legal access, opposing discrimination, and aligning with state policies.
6- **Participating in Decision-Making:** Initiating proposals, applying pressure, and participating in local and national decision-making processes (Al-Baz, 2006), reinforced by the 2020 Constitution recognizing civil society as a management partner.
7- **Promoting Sustainable Development:** Contributing to policies enhancing economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

8- **Citizen Awareness:** Educating the public on political, economic, and social issues, encouraging voter registration and participation.

9- **Election Monitoring:** Ensuring fair elections, educating citizens, minimizing campaign malpractices, and reporting violations (Thesing, 2019; Fattah, 1992).

10- **Policy Formulation Participation:** Offering proposals and engaging in dialogue to improve democratic processes via seminars and expert discussions.
11- **Stimulating Community Participation:**

Civil society contributes to encouraging community participation in decision-making and program implementation, as it functions as a proposing force and an initiative force, where it can push for many reforms it deems appropriate and beneficial to society. It also raises awareness of the importance of participation in local and national issues (Thesing, 2019) through public discussion as well as by submitting demands and proposals to political authorities.

12- Providing support for youth and women:

Civil society helps encourage political participation for youth and women and works to remove obstacles that might hinder their involvement (Al-Jabri, *The Arab Political Mind*), especially in Arab countries and Third World countries including Algeria, where there may be a certain degree of disengagement from electoral participation among women and youth. However, the presence of active and vibrant community forces in the field can change this stereotype.

Accordingly, it can be said that civil society contributes to enhancing political participation by raising societal awareness and encouraging citizens to actively participate in political life and decision-making, aiming to achieve maximum efficiency and follow a successful strategy within the available frameworks (Weitz, 2008). Civil society is a living social force with a presence within the community, and thus it can bring about the desired change in a smooth and non-confrontational manner, which strengthens participatory and integrated work between formal and informal actors. Conscious political participation can only be achieved in the presence of a strong civil society that enjoys social representation, enabling it to raise concerns and promote peaceful political engagement.

Section Two: Obstacles to Civil Society Performance in the Political Process:
The modern state is the domain or space that requires managing a combination of official institutions that monopolize various forms of legitimate violence, and informal institutions and structures that possess social legitimacy and the capacity to contribute to governance. Here, we encounter two types of authority: legal formal authority and socially legitimate authority. Weber defined authority as the attempt to share power and influence its distribution, whether between the state and groups within the state, and this division should serve the public good, i.e., delineate the scope of political authority as well as the scope for various social actors. The absence of such a

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clear division leads to a series of constraints that slow down political processes, as illustrated in the following sections:

Branch One: The Suffocating Security Crisis in Algeria:

Immediately after the first pluralistic legislative elections, national, democratic, and secular parties failed spectacularly, and the elections led to the rise of the Islamic current through democratic means. Soon, however, this current began producing anti-democratic rhetoric, calling to bypass democracy and establish a theocratic system based on exclusive religious references. While democratic practice requires that access to power occurs through party organization, with the party deriving legitimacy from ideology, the Islamic Salvation Front's ideology opposed party work and, therefore, opposed democratic transition, especially in the absence or weakness of civil society at that time, which was just beginning to form under party pluralism. This led to army intervention, halting the electoral process, and delaying democratic transition due to the lack of societal bodies to guide the public and instill an understanding of power rotation and pluralism in ideas, visions, and orientations.

These rapid, multifaceted events led the country into instability, starting with the October 5, 1988 events and continuing through January 1992, disrupting the democratic process and shaking political pluralism in Algeria. The state had to undertake several reforms that negatively impacted Algerian society, including:

- Ending laws that guaranteed permanent employment for Algerians.

- Worker layoffs, which caused a significant rise in unemployment (Fattah, *Political Crisis in Algeria*, 1992).

- Resorting to specific governance institutions to supervise a transitional phase that continued until 1995 with the arrival of President Liamine Zéroual.

- Halting various reforms, particularly those related to freedom of opinion, assembly, and the formation of civil organizations, with the Supreme Youth Council project frozen since 1995 and only resumed after the 2019 movement.

The security crisis stalled democratic transition and revealed a misunderstanding of democracy and pluralism not only among the ruling authority but also among the parties that emerged under political openness, which themselves became antagonistic to pluralism. The system's immaturity and the novelty of democratic experience explain the difference between established and emerging democracies, where the key distinction is not the type of governance but its quality, encompassing consensus, legitimacy, organization, efficiency, and stability. The structure of the system and societal culture, and its organization into associative forces, are more important than an authoritarian and monopolistic political authority. Awareness within society was lacking during Algeria's democratic transition, highlighting the absence of a conscious civil society that understood the requirements of openness and its preservation.

Branch Two: Associational Independence in Algeria:

"Democracy has a history, like any other human invention. Democratic values and institutions are not carved in stone, and even the meaning of democracy changes over time." Perhaps this equation has not yet been understood by Arab societies or societies outside the Western cultural context, as democracy originated, grew, and evolved in the West, while we received it as an imported product, possibly without a guide explaining it. Consequently, we adopted it as it came, without adjusting it to our historical trajectory or cultural structure. Today, we possess the same formal and informal governing institutions as the West, but only as structures, apparatuses, and legal texts, lacking the practice and culture necessary for effectiveness.

This is reflected in the relationship between the state and civil society. Despite state support for associations through financial assistance, grants, and provision of premises under relevant ministries, and the organization of training courses, such support is often a means of control and co-optation, emptying associations of their content through preferential financial support that keeps them dependent on the state. This leads to politicization of most civil society bodies, transforming them into channels for party projects. Associations often confuse the concept of party work with that of civil work, possibly due to the novelty and immaturity of the experience (Burnsten, 2002), rendering many organizations, clubs, and associations ineffective and lacking real weight.

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This dependency and exploitation, due to the lack of financial independence, undermines civil society's effectiveness in Algeria, as organizations are either financially incapacitated or exploited by authorities and affiliated parties due to reliance on government funding, or what is known as political money. Although the 2020 constitution aimed to combat and limit this, it still governs the state-civil society relationship, making societal bodies mere clientelist channels and unable to propose national projects. The level of political organization in society reflects the relationship between its political institutions and the social forces that form it. If this relationship is clientelist, the reality is discouraging for political work and participation.

Branch Three: Marginalization of Civil Society:

Decision-makers in Algeria strongly promote, in official rhetoric, the structuring and organization of society and the establishment of vibrant social forces capable of guiding it toward organized political work. Associations are among the most prominent forms of public freedoms in the modern era, serving as schools of democracy through internal organization and free elections. Participation in associations and hierarchical progression trains individuals for collective work, power rotation, participatory management, and advocacy. However, marginalizing civil society and treating it as subordinate to the authority turns associations away from democratic management practices, leaving them subject to leadership influenced by authority, encouraged toward authoritarian practices. Marginalization by the state thus attempts to co-opt civil society by undermining democracy internally and externally.

Civil society institutions are essential social regulators and foundational for democratic construction, yet government institutions often exclude them from key discussions and decisions on public policy (Menissi, 2004), leaving them powerless and ineffective. Despite post-2019 reforms, civil society remains slow to regain full effectiveness due to entrenched practices and public perceptions, which remain obstacles.

Branch Four: Apathy in Algerian Civil Society:

Mario Torenti stated, "We have populism because we do not have a people," reflecting the link between populist discourse and the absence of a conscious society organized in civil entities capable of monitoring and holding authorities accountable. The lack of societal organization fosters the rise of unrealistic, emotion-driven discourse aimed at appealing to hearts rather than minds. Algerians' political apathy and withdrawal allowed opportunistic forces to dominate the political and social scene, facilitating the emergence of fictitious associations, irrelevant organizations, and micro-parties without grassroots support. This has led to political desertification, where democracy exists in rhetoric but not practice, particularly before 2019. Political parties in Algeria lack popular bases, and civil society suffers from non-independence and lack of social depth, leading to isolation due to:

- Inability to recruit volunteers, limiting the workforce essential for collective action.

- Distrust of state institutions, widening the gap between society and the state.

- Absence of media role in highlighting civil society activities (Metrouk, 2002, p. 83).

- Alienation from local needs, as associations adopt issues disconnected from Algerian society.

- Lack of self-financing, resulting in dependence on state support (Weitz, 2008).

- Lack of transparency and democracy in management, leading to splits or inactivity.

- Unclear programs and goals, reflecting organizational immaturity.

- Decision-making concentration, dominated by leadership, a common feature of Algerian civil society (Fattah, *Political Crisis in Algeria*, 1992, p. 80).

Thus, civil society in Algeria is young, particularly as a force of effectiveness post-pluralism. Security issues during democratic transition weakened its legitimacy, creating fragile, dependent entities. Its role as a driver of conscious political participation remained marginal until the 2019 movement, when authorities sought to revive it through

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laws enhancing connectivity and encouraging engagement. Progress is slow due to established practices and societal perceptions, which remain key obstacles.

Conclusion:

The primary role of civil society lies in consolidating democracy through fostering genuine, conscious political participation, based on its awareness of internal and external changes and its capacity to influence the public. The hypothesis linking civil society awareness and political participation is validated, demonstrating civil society's influence in shaping political processes. However, civil society alone is insufficient for successful democratic transition and the consolidation of democratic values, as multiple other variables affect achieving optimal democracy, especially in Third World countries and Algeria. The study confirms, even partially, the central idea that civil society impacts political participation, which in turn affects the quality of democracy and governance under civil society oversight. Post-2019 reforms encourage synchronization between efficiency and performance, promoting civil society's role as a socially and politically influential force.

Methodology

This study adopts a theoretical–analytical methodology, relying on:

1. Conceptual analysis: Examination of foundational concepts including civil society, political participation, democratic transition, autonomy, and governance, using established political theory and comparative democratization literature.
2. Historical–contextual approach: Analysis of the evolution of civil society in Algeria since independence, focusing on legal frameworks, political reforms, and socio-political transformations that shaped the associative sphere.
3. Comparative perspective: Reference to selected Arab and international experiences to contextualize the Algerian case within broader democratization patterns.
4. Documentary review: Consultation of legal texts, official documents, academic research, and reports from international organizations addressing civil society, participation, and governance.

No human subjects or empirical field data were used, as this research is exclusively theoretical.

Ethical Considerations

The research is entirely based on publicly available academic sources and official documents. No interviews, surveys, or human participants were involved. The authors ensured:

- Academic integrity and avoidance of plagiarism.
- Transparency in interpretation of theoretical sources.
- Respect for differing scholarly viewpoints regarding Algerian political development.
- Fair representation of civil society actors without political bias.

Because the study does not involve sensitive or personal data, no additional ethical approval was required.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the writing or publication of this study.

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