

Civil Society as a Structural Pillar of National Development and Social Transformation in Algeria

المجتمع المدني كركيزة هيكلية للتنمية الوطنية والتحول الاجتماعي في الجزائر

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Abstract:

This research explores the trajectory of the "Partner Society" within the context of the 2020 Constitutional reforms, which have repositioned civil society as a central actor in the national development project. By analyzing the shift from informal volunteering practices to the formalization of agency. The study identifies a new model of participatory governance, the analysis focuses on the efficacy of these new actors in addressing territorial disparities, particularly in the "Shadow Zones", and the role of digital transformation in bridging the gap between youth aspirations and state-led development goals. The study concludes that the enshrinement of civic agency in the constitutional framework represents a strategic move toward social accountability and sustainable growth, provided that challenges of digital inclusion and institutional adaptation.

Keywords: National Development; Participatory Democracy; Social Transformation; 2020 Constitution; Civil Society.

Résumé

Cette recherche explore la trajectoire de la «Société partenaire» dans le contexte des réformes constitutionnelles de 2020, lesquelles ont repositionné la société civile comme un acteur central du projet de développement national. En analysant le passage des pratiques de bénévolat informel à la formalisation de l'action citoyenne, l'étude

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identifie un nouveau modèle de gouvernance participative. L'analyse se concentre sur l'efficacité de ces nouveaux acteurs à remédier aux disparités territoriales, notamment dans les « zones d'ombre », ainsi que sur le rôle de la transformation numérique pour combler le fossé entre les aspirations de la jeunesse et les objectifs de développement étatiques. L'étude conclut que la consécration de l'engagement civique dans le cadre constitutionnel représente une avancée stratégique vers la responsabilité sociale et la croissance durable, à condition que les défis de l'inclusion numérique et de l'adaptation institutionnelle soient relevés.

Mots-clés : Développement national ; Démocratie participative ; Transformation sociale ; Constitution de 2020 ; Société civile.

ملخص:

يستكشف هذا البحث مسار "المجتمع الشريك" في سياق الإصلاحات الدستورية لعام 2020، التي أعادت تموضع المجتمع المدني كفاعل محوري في مشروع التنمية الوطنية. ومن خلال تحليل التحول من ممارسات التطوع غير الرسمية إلى إضفاء الطابع الرسمي على الفاعلية، تحدد الدراسة نموذجًا جديدًا للحوكمة التشاركية، ويركز التحليل على فعالية هذه الجهات الفاعلة الجديدة في معالجة التفاوتات الإقليمية، لا سيما في "مناطق الظل"، ودور التحول الرقمي في سد الفجوة بين تطلعات الشباب وأهداف التنمية التي تقودها الدولة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن تكريس الفاعلية المدنية في الإطار الدستوري يمثل خطوة استراتيجية نحو المساءلة الاجتماعية والنمو المستدام، شريطة مواجهة تحديات الإدماج الرقمي والتكيف المؤسسي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التنمية الوطنية؛ الديمقراطية التشاركية؛ التحول الاجتماعي؛ دستور 2020؛ المجتمع المدني.

Introduction

The dynamics of state-society relations in the Global South are increasingly characterized by the search for participatory models that can reconcile institutional stability with social aspirations. In Algeria, this search has culminated in a significant shift toward the "Partner Society" concept, where the role of non-state actors is no longer peripheral or purely philanthropic but integral to the planning, execution, and evaluation of public policies. This transition occurs against a backdrop of deep social transformations that have impacted the country's values, social structures, and modes of participation.

Preamble

The Algerian society has witnessed extensive shifts affecting values, social relationships, and patterns of organization and participation. These

transformations have generated new developmental challenges while simultaneously opening broad horizons for reconsidering the roles of social actors within the national development project. In the heart of these changes, civil society emerges as a key player, moving beyond its traditional role focused on voluntary work toward a more effective role as a partner in planning and implementing development policies. This shift from "Civil Society" to "Partner Society" constitutes a fundamental entry point for rebuilding the relationship between the state and society on new foundations based on participation, transparency, and accountability.

Significance of the Study

This research is significant because it examines the emergence of a new developmental agency in a country that has historically balanced a strong central state with deeply rooted traditions of communal solidarity. The 2020 Constitutional reform serves as a pivotal historical marker, providing the legal and institutional infrastructure necessary to transform civil society from a "service-delivery" entity to a "strategic partner" in governance. Understanding this shift is crucial for policymakers and researchers focusing on sustainable development, local governance, and social cohesion in the North African context. The study highlights how institutional reforms can bridge the gap between state administration and citizen needs, particularly in marginalized regions.

Research Objective

The primary objective of this report is to analyze the evolution of civil society's role within the Algerian national development project. It seeks to explore the mechanisms of participatory democracy established by the recent constitutional amendments, evaluate the efficacy of newly created institutional bodies like the National Observatory for Civil Society (ONSC), and examine how social transformations—such as digitalization and changing youth values—are shaping the future of civic engagement in local and national contexts. Furthermore, the study aims to highlight successful models of local development and propose mechanisms for enhancing the role of local actors in sustainable development.

Problematic

Despite the historical presence of social solidarity in Algeria, the integration of civil society into the formal state-led development apparatus has faced challenges related to administrative inertia and the transition from traditional to modern organizational forms. The core problematic of this study is: To what extent has the institutionalization of civil society within the 2020 Constitutional framework succeeded in creating an effective "Partner Society" capable of driving national development and fostering social accountability, especially in marginalized territories?

Research Questions

1. How have the 2020 Constitutional reforms redefined the legal status and operational capacity of civil society in Algeria?
2. What are the sociological dimensions of the transformation from traditional volunteering (Touiza) to modern, NGO-led developmental agency?
3. In what ways does the National Observatory for Civil Society (ONSC) facilitate a dialogue between the state and the populace to achieve development goals?
4. How effective are the mechanisms of participatory governance in addressing the socio-economic challenges of the "Shadow Zones"?
5. What role does digital transformation play in enhancing the transparency and inclusivity of civil society's new roles?

Research Hypotheses

1. The constitutionalization of civil society through the ONSC and the Supreme Authority for Transparency has created a more resilient framework for social accountability and anti-corruption efforts.
2. The shift toward a "Partner Society" improves the effectiveness of local development projects by leveraging the proximity of associations to citizens in marginalized regions.
3. Digital inclusion and e-governance act as critical prerequisites for the success of participatory democracy, as they enable broader youth participation in the national development discourse.

Research Methodology

The study employs a multi-methodological approach to ensure a nuanced understanding of the subject. A **descriptive-analytical method** is utilized to examine the legal texts and constitutional provisions governing civil society. The **historical method** traces the evolution of social solidarity from traditional practices to the present day. A **comparative analysis** is applied to distinguish between traditional and modern volunteering models. Additionally, a **systemic approach** is used to analyze the "corruption control tripod" and the interactive dynamics between the ONSC, the Supreme Authority for Transparency, and the executive branch. The **case study method** is integrated to analyze specific local development programs like CAPDEL.

Structure of the Study

The report is organized into several core sections. The first section explores the theoretical foundations and sociological transformations of Algerian society. The second section focuses on the constitutional paradigm shift post-2020 and the role of the ONSC. The third section analyzes the transition from traditional solidarity to institutionalized partnership. The fourth section examines participatory governance in the context of territorial development and "Shadow Zones". The fifth section delves into social accountability and anti-corruption mechanisms. Finally, the sixth section discusses the digital frontiers of civic engagement and youth leadership, followed by a conclusion and recommendations.

1- Civic Effectiveness Social Transformations and the Theoretical Foundations of

The concept of civil society in the Algerian context is inseparable from the broader sociological shifts that have redefined the relationship between the individual, the community, and the state. Social change is understood here as a dynamic and continuous process influenced by the interplay between social structures, such as laws and institutions, and human agency, representing individual and collective actions.

1-1- Sociological Dimensions of Change

Contemporary Algerian society is characterized by a complex interaction between local cultural heritage and global influences (Lamria, 2025, 1944-1948). While family and local values remain the foundation of social relations, there is a documented decline in adherence to traditional forms of strict family solidarity and hierarchical respect, particularly among the youth (Benarous, 2025, 1574-1588). This rise in individualism and material ambition, however, has not led to a decrease in civic interest but rather to a reconfiguration of how participation is expressed.

Aspect of Transformation	Traditional Paradigm	Modern Paradigm
Primary Driver	Communal Solidarity (Touiza)	Institutional Partnership & NGO Action
Social Structure	Hierarchical / Tribal / Familial	Network-based / Digital / Professional
Development Role	Immediate Relief / Crisis Response	Strategic Planning / Policy Evaluation
Engagement Tool	Face-to-Face / Local Custom	Digital Platforms / E-Governance
Scope of Action	Neighborhood / Village	National / Global / Thematic

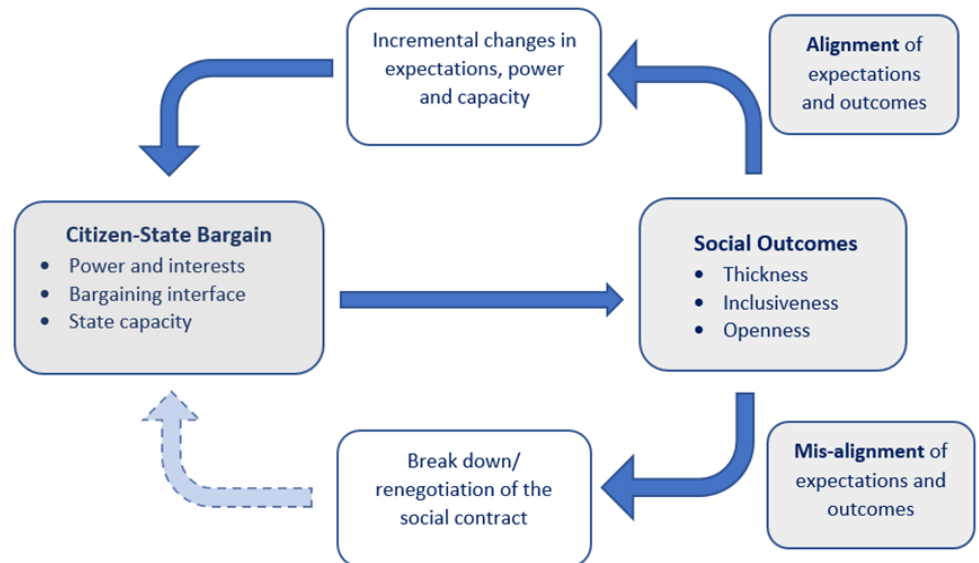
The decline of traditional family decisions regarding education and career reflects a shift toward personal agency. This sociological shift is essential for the "Partner Society" model, as it requires individuals who view themselves as "rights-bearing citizens" rather than mere "beneficiaries" of state programs (Nedjar, 2025, 175-185). The transition to a modern state requires the integration of these individualistic aspirations into a collective development framework.

1-2- The Social Contract and New Agency

The Algerian state-society relationship is increasingly framed as a "social contract," defined as a dynamic agreement on mutual roles and responsibilities (SPL, 2021, 1-79). The move from a paternalistic model—where the state provides basic needs in exchange for legitimacy—toward a participatory model is driven by the recognition that institutional protocols alone may fail to provide responsible governance on a country-wide scale. This "new agency" manifests in the

willingness of citizens to organize despite traditional constraints, aiming to directly improve service delivery or hold officials to account (Vloeberghs&Bergh, 2021, 1-33). The effectiveness of this agency is mediated by the "parity of participation," which identifies barriers within the social order that can undermine equal involvement.

Figure 1: Social Contracts Conceptual Framework



Source: (SPL, 2021, 1-79)

1-3- Theoretical Frameworks of Participation

Participatory theory critiques the liberal view of democracy as merely a competition for political power, advocating instead for active citizen involvement in decision-making to foster collective responsibility. In the Algerian context, this has evolved from project-based applications to influencing national policies (Nedjar, 2025, 175-185). The theoretical shift involves:

1. **From Beneficiaries to Rights-Holders:** Redefining the role of the citizen as an essential partner in managing local affairs (Rebbouh, 2024, 383-392).
2. **From Implementation to Decision-Making:** Engaging civil society in shaping the priorities of local development rather than just executing pre-defined projects (Rebbouh, 2024, 383-392)
3. **Horizontal Accountability:** Moving away from a purely top-down administrative model toward a cooperative and flexible relationship between the state and non-state actors (Boukaouma, 2025, 58-68).

2- *The 2020 Constitutional Reform: Legalizing the Partner Society*

The 2020 Constitutional amendment represents a landmark in the legal evolution of Algeria, specifically regarding the enshrinement of the rule of law and the promotion of participatory democracy. By integrating civil society into the constitutional fabric, the state has signaled its commitment to a transparent and inclusive political system.

2-1- *Key Constitutional Provisions and Institutional Impact*

The new constitution includes several articles that reflect the state's concern for civil society and its role in public life. Articles 9 and 10 affirm that the people choose institutions that ensure transparency in the management of public affairs and that the state ensures the activation of civil society's role (Daim&Derrar, 2024, 1058-1068).

- **Article 34:** This article is pivotal as it commits the state to removing obstacles that hinder individual development and full participation in social, economic, and cultural life, providing a legal basis for social inclusion programs (Tahraoui&Rekache, 2025, 963-974).
- **Article 53:** Guarantees the right to form associations, with a strategic direction toward removing pre-authorization requirements to further empower civic groups (ICNL, 2025).
- **Article 213:** Designates the National Observatory for Civil Society as an advisory body to the President of the Republic, institutionalizing the consultation process (Merahi&Djaborebbi, 2025, 1-12).

Aspect of Transformation	Traditional Paradigm	Modern Paradigm
Primary Driver	Communal Solidarity (Touiza)	Institutional Partnership & NGO Action
Social Structure	Hierarchical / Tribal / Familial	Network-based / Digital / Professional

Development Role	Immediate Relief / Crisis Response	Strategic Planning / Policy Evaluation
Engagement Tool	Face-to-Face / Local Custom	Digital Platforms / E-Governance

Rationalizing Political and Civil Acts -2-2

The constitutional reform serves as a tool for achieving stability by rationalizing civil and political acts. It aims to preserve political legitimacy by aligning the constitution with the social and economic realities of the populace. This alignment is essential for shielding society from upheavals and ensuring that the momentum of development remains peaceful and structured. By providing a strong legal and political framework, the reform enables the establishment of a "just state" where societal progress is driven by law rather than individual discretion (Tahraoui&Rekache, 2025, 963-974).

2- The National Observatory for Civil Society (ONSC):

A New Institutional Catalyst

The creation of the ONSC, outlined under Presidential Decree 21-139, is the most visible manifestation of the "Partner Society" strategy. As an advisory body, the ONSC serves as a platform for dialogue and consultation between civil society and public authorities.

2-3- Objectives and Operational Framework

The ONSC is not merely a consultative forum but is tasked with strengthening national values and democratic practices. Its primary objectives include:²

- Promoting Collective Action:** Encouraging the formation of associations and collective engagement in public life.
- Facilitating Dialogue:** Serving as a bridge between the President of the Republic and various civil society segments to exchange ideas on growth and reform.
- National Development:** Participating with other institutions to achieve national development goals and correcting development policies through participation and transparency.

2-4- Composition and Inclusive Representation

The composition of the ONSC is designed to embody diversity and inclusivity. It consists of 50 members, divided equally between men and women (25 each). Furthermore, the President selects four individuals from the national community abroad, ensuring that the Algerian diaspora contributes to the national development discourse. This structure ensures that the Observatory can dialogue and consult on matters related to civic promotion from a wide range of perspectives (Daim&Derrar, 2024, 1058-1068).

2-5- Accountability and Reporting Mechanisms

The ONSC is required to maintain a high level of transparency in its operations. Its activities are documented through:

- **Annual Reports:** A literary and financial report submitted to the President of the Republic.
- **Periodic Reports:** Regular updates on the work program and outcomes of its activities.
- **Foresight and Analysis:** Providing opinions and recommendations on economic, social, and environmental fields to guide sustainable development policies.

3- Participatory Local Governance:

From Volunteering to Institutional Partnership

The transition from informal social solidarity to structured participatory governance is a core theme of the Algerian national development project. This involves moving from traditional collective practices to a modern model of institutional partnership.

3-1- Evolution of Solidarity: Touiza and the Rise of NGOs

Traditional practices like **Touiza** (community cooperation), **Alaouna** (agricultural assistance), and **Fazaa** (emergency response) have long been embedded in Algerian society. These practices provided a sense of belonging and reinforced social bonds. However, globalization and modernization have necessitated a reevaluation of these methods.

Modern volunteering is now primarily driven by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and youth associations, which provide a framework for large-scale and professionalized projects. The introduction of Corporate Social

Responsibility (CSR) programs has further institutionalized these efforts, linking social development with economic sustainability (Benarous, 2025, 1574-1588).

Metric	Traditional Volunteering (Touiza)	Modern Institutional Partnership
Organization	Informal / Local Custom	Formal NGOs / Legal Framework
Scale	Neighborhood / Village	National / International
Sustainability	Occasional / Event-based	Long-term / Structured Projects
Tools	Physical Labor / Direct Aid	Digital Platforms / Professional CSR

Source: (Benarous, 2025, 1574-1588)

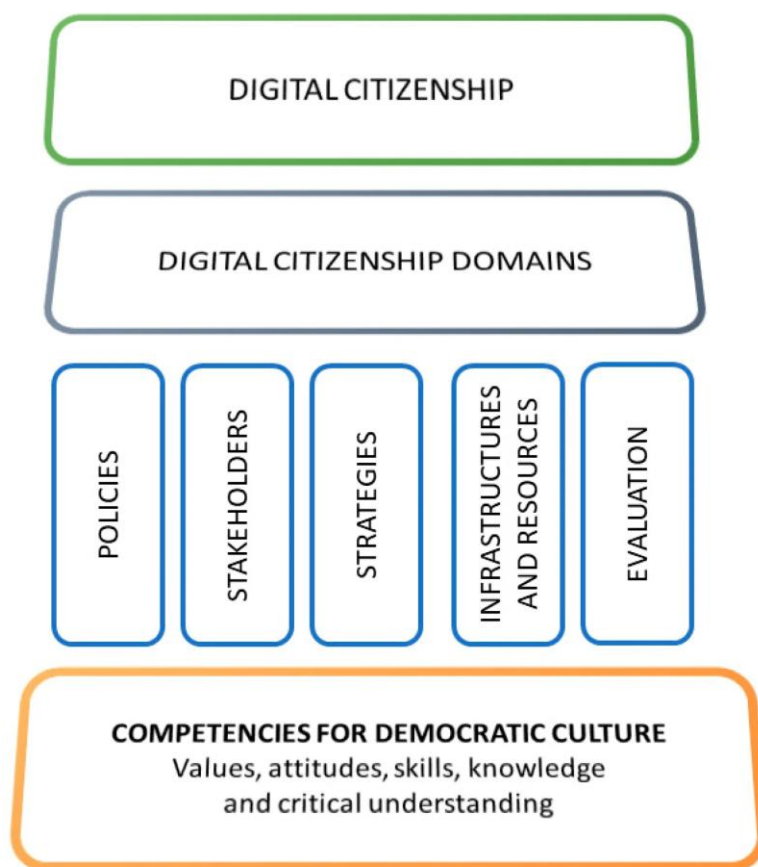
3-2- The Municipality as a Space for Citizenship

The municipality is the regional base for decentralization and a primary space for exercising citizenship. Adopting local participatory democracy allows citizens to participate in managing affairs that affect their daily lives, such as:¹

- **Local Services:** Management of waste, roads, lighting, and landscaping.
- **Social Solidarity:** Managing school grants and Ramadan solidarity operations.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluating local policies through a two-sided communication mechanism between authorities and citizens.

Whenever the level of information provided by local authorities is high, the interaction with citizens increases, creating a cooperative environment where mistakes can be corrected and new policies drawn up for subsequent years.

Figure 2. Model of Digital Citizenship



Source: (Tokovska et al., 2023, 141)

4- The Resilience of "Shadow Zones" and Inclusive Development Models

A key challenge for the Algerian national development project has been addressing territorial disparities and the marginalization of regions in the interior, commonly referred to as "Shadow Zones".

4-1- Targeted Social Programs and Challenges

Starting in the 1980s, several social programs were introduced to integrate these marginalized regions (Frische, 2025, 49-84). However, the success of these programs often depends on the level of citizen engagement. The **CAPDEL Program** is a significant example of an initiative designed to strengthen the capacities of local authorities and civil society as actors in local development (Nedjar, 2025, 175-185).

4-2- Barriers to Implementation in Marginalized Regions

Case studies of local development projects, such as those led by the **El Ghaith Association**, identify several obstacles to effective participation in these zones:⁹

1. **Administrative Resistance:** Public officials sometimes delay necessary permissions for participatory actions.
2. **Lack of Trust:** Mistrust among local officials can hinder interactive and participatory activities.
3. **Financial Constraints:** Substantial portions of local budgets are consumed by maintenance, leaving little for community-identified needs.
4. **Political Interference:** Elected officials may perceive their mandates as a license to make unilateral decisions, overshadowing community needs.

4-3- The "Partner Society" as a Solution

To overcome these barriers, a transition to a "Partner Society" model is essential. This involves:

- **Negotiated Models:** Moving from a hierarchical model where authorities simply present a project, to a negotiated model where citizens co-decide on priorities (Nedjar, 2025, 175).
- **Information as Empowerment:** Ensuring that access to information is treated as a prerequisite for consultation and shared decision-making (Nedjar, 2025, 175-185).
- **Capacity Building:** Training both local authorities and civil society in the tools of good local governance (UN, 2021).

5- Social Accountability and Anti-Corruption Mechanisms

The move toward a "Partner Society" is intrinsically linked to the principles of transparency and accountability. In Algeria, this has been operationalized through the establishment of the Supreme Authority for Transparency, Prevention, and Combating Corruption.

5-1- The Constitutional Role of the Supreme Authority

The 2020 Constitution transformed the previous anti-corruption body into an independent institution. This aligns the Algerian framework with international

standards, such as the UN Convention against Corruption. The Authority's role is not just punitive but preventive, focusing on:⁸

- **Capacity Building:** Strengthening the skills of civil society in the field of anti-corruption.
- **Transparency Dissemination:** Promoting a culture of transparency through media and administrative training.
- **Citizen Feedback:** Establishing tools for interaction and communication to confront administrative corruption.

5-2- The Corruption Control Tripod

A systems approach to enhancing ethics involves a "corruption control tripod":

1. **Public Officials with Integrity:** Individuals with strong personal ethics.
2. **Strong Institutions:** Administrative rules and independent monitoring systems.
3. **External Audit and Social Capital:** Independent external audits and the engagement of civil society act as disciplinary mechanisms. Adopting a reductionist approach would be futile; instead, these three pillars must reinforce each other to combat corruption in all its forms (Farazmand, 2002, 127-143).

5-3- Social Accountability Proxies

Civil society, the media, and the business sector act as "proxies of public interest". These proxies advocate for the public interest by (Wafa, 2016, 301–316):

- **Watchdog Functions:** Exposing failures and exerting participatory control.
- **Budget Analysis:** Analyzing public spending to identify gaps and prioritize needs.
- **Creating Space for Debate:** Providing platforms for citizen voice to be heard.

6- Digital Transformation, Youth, and the Future of Participation

Digitalization is a "global megatrend" that is reshaping state-society relations by altering how the social contract is negotiated and delivered.

6-1- E-Government and Social Inclusion

E-government brings administration closer to citizens, facilitating transparency and increasing efficiency. In Algeria, the transition to electronic services is seen as a way to mitigate obstacles like administrative delay and corruption (Moringiello&Reynolds, 2013). However, challenges like limited digital literacy and

infrastructural gaps persist, particularly among marginalized populations (Djatkiko et al., 2025).

Digital Metric	Potential Benefit	Challenge / Barrier
E-Administration	Increased transparency and speed	Infrastructural gaps in remote areas
Civic Tech	Enhanced citizen engagement and voice	Limited digital literacy in some groups
AI & Blockchain	Improved security and fraud prevention	Institutional barriers to adoption

Sources: (Djatkiko et al., 2025) (Tokovska et al., 2023, 141) (Zisengwe, 2024, 26)

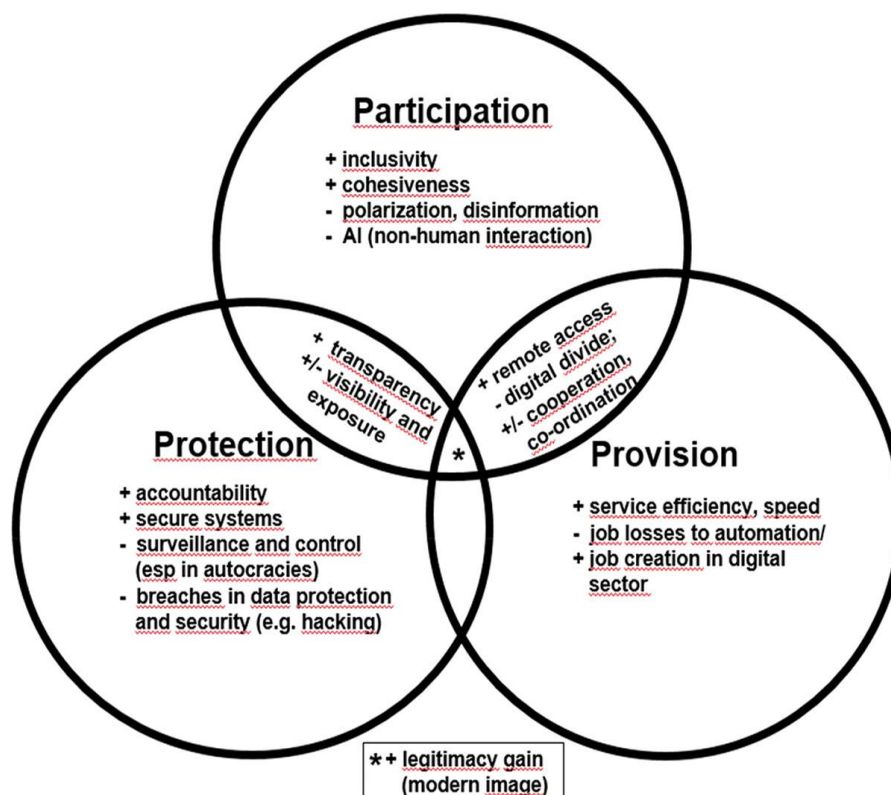
6-2- Youth Leadership and Digital Activism

Algerian youth are increasingly using digital tools to participate in modern social organization. While traditional values are evolving, youth remain committed to "active citizenship" through digital platforms and NGOs. The universal adoption of digital technologies could significantly reduce frictional unemployment and boost economic growth (Komati et al., 2024). Educational institutions play a critical role here by integrating digital tools into the curriculum to prepare youth for the modern workforce (Fouchane&Zidan, 2024, 463-480).

6-3- Digital Protection and Rights

As part of the new social contract, the state has a duty to protect society's digital rights, including data privacy and cybersecurity. This involves providing the necessary digital infrastructure while ensuring that societal groups can participate in how these technologies are deployed. Digitalization altered the form of established public services, creating new possibilities for exchanging "digital goods" within the social contract (Zintl&Houdret, 2025, 946-969).

Figure 3. Opportunities and risks by digitalization for social contracts' deliverables



Source: (Zintl & Houdret, 2025, 946–969)

Conclusion

The evolution of civil society in Algeria from a traditional volunteering role to a "Partner Society" marks a transformative shift in the national development project. The 2020 Constitutional reform has provided the necessary institutional architecture—through the ONSC and the Supreme Authority for Transparency—to integrate civic voice into the core of governance. The transition is supported by a sociological rebirth where youth agency and digital transformation are bridging the gap between local needs and national policies. While challenges such as administrative resistance and territorial disparities in "Shadow Zones" remain, the framework for participatory democracy offers a clear path toward a more inclusive, transparent, and resilient state. The "Partner Society" is not merely a legal concept but a structural pillar for sustainable development and social cohesion in the modern era.

Recommendations

1. **Strengthening ONSC-Local Links:** Establish formal mechanisms for the National

Observatory for Civil Society to collaborate with municipal councils, ensuring that national-level consultations are reflected in local development priorities.

2. **Expanding Digital Inclusion:** Launch nationwide digital literacy programs focused on marginalized regions to ensure that the transition to e-government does not leave vulnerable populations behind.
3. **Institutionalizing Participatory Budgeting:** Pilot participatory budgeting initiatives across more municipalities to give citizens a direct say in how local resources are allocated.
4. **Incentivizing Youth-Led NGOs:** Develop specialized legal and financial support frameworks for youth-led associations focusing on innovation, environment, and digital activism.
5. **Enhancing Transparency Training:** The Supreme Authority for Transparency should expand its training programs for civil society actors, empowering them with the tools needed for effective budget tracking and oversight.
6. **Sustaining "Shadow Zones" Development:** Continue prioritizing regions in the interior through multi-stakeholder partnerships that leverage the proximity and knowledge of local associations.
7. **Fostering a Culture of Dialogue:** Encourage permanent discussion platforms between administrative officials and community leaders to build the trust necessary for successful participatory governance.
8. **Digital Rights Framework:** Draft and implement comprehensive digital rights legislation that protects citizen data while facilitating the growth of civic tech and digital participation.

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