

Abstention as a manifestation of political participation crisis in Algeria

Guira Salim

University of Djelfa, (Algeria), salimmagu811@gmail.com

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Abstract:

Algerian political system tried to achieve democracy in many historical stations, but that process encountered many obstacles, which made a rift between the political regime and the citizen.

If we consider that the process of political participation emerges mainly in joining parties and associations through the right to establish them, and participating in the general suffrage ... etc., this participation has become a crisis as a result of the authority's intervention in many cases as a brake to the various political forces in making public policy, as well as the intervention of the authority In electoral processes, either through fraud or by imposing an electoral system that favors one category over another.

Keywords: Political participation; abstention, election; citizenship; universal suffrage; Algerian political system.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Political systems have differed according to the foundations on which the process of choosing a certain system and imposing another. As long as the obsession with setting up a political system that fits with the environment in which there is an appeals to thinkers, politicians, and rulers, there are systems government granting power by inheritance, others by violence, and others through means that are consistent with modern standards of attribution of power, represented in democratic systems that rely on election as the democratic mechanism for transfer of power.

Current forms of electoral system developed as a result of an intellectual effort, and a reflection of many political practices. Since the citizens are who make the selection process between candidates, this is made the electoral system emerge as a mechanism that all groups and currents accept to assign authority.

Elections are a necessary process to achieve the democratization of societies. Especially with the participation of the individual in choosing his representative, but sometimes forget the fact that the democratic system goes beyond just periodically casting the vote of the voter only to include the right to participate in political process and the right to rule without discrimination, democracy means much more than just periodic elections.

Problematic: To what extent do the elections entrench the principles of political participation? How does electoral abstention contribute to creating a crisis of political participation? Then what are the effects of this crisis on the future of democratic transition?

This study aims to clarify the criteria for establishing effective political participation, and how citizens can participate in it, as well as diagnosing the crisis of political participation in Algeria through abstention.

2. First axis: definition of concepts:

2.1. Abstention: Abstention is a term in election procedure for when a participant in a vote either does not go to vote on Election Day or in parliamentary procedure.¹

It is a political behavior that reflects the citizens' rejection of the ruling political elites that dominant the political process. It is also an insolvency of the existing political system, as this phenomenon represents obstacles to the democratic political process, which reflects the lack of confidence in the political path followed by the political elite.

¹- Suffrage universel encyclopédie, <https://www.universalis.fr/encyclopedie/abstentionnisme>

Reasons for electoral abstention:¹

- Lack of trust between voters and authority
- The administration's lack of integrity in the electoral process
- The voter's lack of confidence in the feasibility of voting on the grounds that the results are predetermined
- Corruption
- The misuse of public office by candidates for private gain
- Marginalization of elites

2.2. Political participation: defined as: "political activities whereby members of a society participate in public policy making, it means the individual's participation in the various processes of the political system.

Political participation means: the citizen's right to participate in the political decision-making process, it means also the right of that citizen to observe these decisions with evaluation and control after they are issued by the ruler.

Some thinkers distinguish between participation, interest and interaction, means non-negativity, so that the citizen feels that the state, public affairs and political decisions are influenced by his existence, whether it affected the political decision-making process or not.

The process of political participation completes through direct political activities; such as individual holds a political position or becomes a member of a party. Or participate in elections, or he is satisfied with just voting. Political participation can also be achieved through indirect activities, such as individual is restricted to understand public issues. Political participation is foundation of democracy, and the practical expression of freedom values, justice and equality. Moreover, it is considered an indication of the development or backwardness of society.

Generally, political participation is defined according to the deference of viewpoints, but the closest to our topic is that "political participation is the individual's keenness to have a positive role in political life, through the exercise of the right to vote or participate on elected bodies, which is a right recognized by constitutions, as well as international covenants, since democracy is an idea based on the premise that political power is the property of the sovereign people, it requires a form of organization whose primary goal is to involve citizens in decision-making. Political participation in this sense

¹- Catherine E. DE VRIES and Hector SOLAZ, "The Electoral Consequences of Corruption", **Annual Review of Political Science**, Vol 20, 391-408 (Volume publication date May 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-052715-111917>, 02 May 2021.

is the inclusion of citizen in a collective political action.¹

Citizen is the essence of political participation, whether by expressing his opinion on the election as part of the sovereign group, or by adopting public affairs as a representative of this group. The political participation is what gives a distinct shape and a special character to its owner, so while he becomes a voter, or an elected member, in both forms he is an actor in the election, such as any political behavior that requires political participation in certain environment.

2.4. Crisis of political participation: The term indicates the low rates of participation in political process due to the ruling authority putting obstacles to participants; Political participation becomes a crisis of political development when new groups demand their participation in governance. At the same time, it involves a crisis of legitimacy and constitutes a threat to the position of the ruling group, especially if to not respond the demands of the groups. Undoubtedly, whatever leads to a material change in society, such as industrialization, technology, or a review of agricultural systems..., leads to the rise of social groups demanding their participation in governance.

Political participation becomes a crisis in two cases:

- a. The emergence of groups proclaiming to participate in governance
- b. The ruling authority failure to respond to the demands of social groups.

The crisis of political participation is caused by the inability of political system to meet the needs related to political participation for a large part of the society. This crisis is not attributed to a specific reason, rather, there are many factors that overlap to form crisis, and in fact it is part of a linked cycle of many crises. Many countries, especially in the Arab countries, such as the crisis of legitimacy, the crisis of identity, the crisis of distribution, the crisis of intervention, and the crisis of integration..., The emergence of one of these crises does not mean that it is a specific crisis that exists, rather its mere existence means that this system has many crises, in another meaning that each crisis leads to a crisis that are consecutive or simultaneous with each other.

There are many reasons that can lead to the emergence of the participation crisis, including:

The absence of neutral media, Rather, we find that many media, especially in Arab society, are monopolized by the authority, that what is presented to society is a reflection of wishes of authority, which is often affected by the type of media message to be taught to society, it is often a one-way message and not the result of interaction between the different parties, therefore the media remains unable to achieving political participation as part of comprehensive development, through:

¹- CAPITANT Rene, **Démocratie et participation politique dans les institutions françaises de 1875 à nos jours**, Paris : Bordas (Collection Etudes Politiques), 1972, p 31.

poor political upbringing, Delayed democratic experiences, Fragility of institutions, Monopoly of small group to manage development.

2.3. Political development: It has multiple definitions, as Robert Berghinham defined it according to:

a. Legal significance: It is concerned with preparation of constitution, in the sense of how to lay democracy.

b. Economic meaning: It means achieving economic growth in line with the people's economic aspirations.

c. Administrative significance: The necessity of administration committed to respecting the principles of administrative and legal legitimacy while achieving the conditions of effectiveness, efficiency and rationality.

d. Political connotation: achieving assimilation in a societal system and participation in political life.

e. Cultural connotation: Development is an update that comes as a result of a specific political culture.

There are those who define political development according the following indicators:

1. Achieving equality among all citizens.
2. Public participation in democratic decision-making by providing legitimate frameworks.
3. Achieving the principle of separation of powers.
4. Achieving political unity and integration among the parts of society through efficient political upbringing systems and existence of a minimum agreement on political values, with political loyalty to central authority.

Gabriel Almond believes that political development represents the reponce of political system for change in societal and international environment, in particular the system's response to the challenges of nation- building. He has put a comprehensive list that included different and focused definitions of political development, which contained: Political development includes political modernization, political mobilization, democracy, stability and development.

Political development is: "political processes aimed at mobilizing the masses and increase their awareness to raise the level of their participation in political life, to strengthen democratic institutions and to achieve stability and integration."

The conflict of ideas between political scientists, jurists, sociologists and others....

has led to the problem of relationship between political development and political modernization, was believed that the two concepts are identical, and that political development is a manifestation of political modernization. Until "Samuel Huntington" urged (in 1965): the need to distinguish between political development and political modernization.

2.4. Political modernization: The goal of political modernization is to develop the capabilities of institutions to increase their effectiveness in order to be able to perform their duties.

According that, two features of political modernization can be identified:

- a. Strengthening authority while weakening the influence of traditional tribal.
- b. Increase the popular participation in political process within coordination of relationship between citizens and political system.

The most important aspects of political modernization is what is related to the necessary shifts in the public's attitudes with the aim of increasing political participation and awareness, this participation begins in the informal institutions of civil society and political parties ..., This participation must be preceded by effectiveness of political institutions .

Political modernization emerges as a desire for political participation among wider sectors of citizens within society to reach modernity, whether the appearance of modernity is represented in the democratic transition, or change to the multi-party system.

A. Degrees of political participation:

There are degrees agreed for political participation:

- Participation in public politics.
- Holding the political offices.
- Active membership in political organizations.
- Interest in political matters.
- Seeking to occupy a political or administrative position.
- Participate in political discussions.
- Vote.

Political participation, according to "Christopher Arterton" in the book Political

Participation, "is not limited to vote or participate in elections, but included all actions, activities and endeavours that fall within the scope of political process in the broadest sense, aimed at influencing a class of influential people or power, for example: relation with responsible, participation in financing electoral campaigns, discussing public issues, attending political meetings, convincing others to support a candidate, accepting the framework of political party activities, obtaining membership in political organizations and voting.

The concept of political participation, according to the previous definitions, includes all the political processes through which the masses transfer their demands to the ruling elite by influencing their behavior from political parties.

The importance of political participation is evidenced by the fact that it is the primary mechanism establishing the institutional structure and political modernization, from the backwardness of political institutions and their inability to meet the demands and aspirations of new groups and their failure to keep up with political and social changes, from there, loses its legitimacy.

"Huntington" believes that "there is a relationship between political participation and political institutions"¹, he believes that the stability of political systems or not is determined by the nature of the relationship between the two variables, Political participation is the result of social and economic processes associated with modernization, and the impact of modernization on political stability is reflected through the interaction between the social and economic mobilization, and between social frustration and the imposition of the political movement, and between political participation and political establishment. The people's contribution to political participation is evident through individuals or groups within a democratic system. As individuals, they can contribute to political life as voters or politically active elements, as for groups, through collective action as members of society organizations or trade unions.

B. Political participation and Political development:

Development is defined as uniting efforts of all citizens with government to improve the economic, social, political and cultural conditions of the masses, linking them to the conditions of their society, and enabling them to contribute the progress and advancement.

Thus, there is a close relationship and mutual influence between participation and development, as development provides greater opportunities for expanding areas of participation, and creates an incentive for participation, at a time when participation allows the masses to put pressure on the decision-maker to take policies in favour of development issues.

¹ - Samuel P HUNTINGTON, "Political Development and Political Decay", **world politics**, vol 17, N°3, Cambridge university, , Apr 1965, P 386.

There is no doubt that governments, especially in developing countries, have major national responsibilities, and they have many burdens and obligations towards society, in order to expand programs for comprehensive development, to support the government.¹

C. Actors in political participation:

Participation in political process has two forms: first form, the appointment of rulers who represent the rest of society in managing their affairs in the various representative institutions, This appointment is made by the majority of society members, by choosing them through the votes they cast in each election, in their overall form and as a homogeneous bloc that issues its decision in the form of a institution that has sovereignty and a source for all authority, this institution is the first actor in political participation through elections. The second form, the ambition to assume electoral functions, within bodies that form with others the circles of the governance mechanism. Like a homogeneous organization constitute the voters and elect.²

3. Second axis: crisis of political participation in Algeria

3.1. The crisis of political participation in Algeria, the one-party era:

The crisis of political participation in Algeria is evident by the inability of political institutions to absorb political and social forces. One-party rule was accompanied by the exclusion of individual and collective freedoms, the desire of the ruling elites not to involve other forces with a political orientation, and to exercise exclusivity against them and their complete monopoly of representation within a policy framework emerged mobilization lacks participation, therefore the Liberation Front party's vision was limited to participation in the sense of political mobilization, which takes the form of support mobilization and support for some decisions without real participation in making them, as a result of the party's weakness, and its inability to accept the demands of different groups of society.³

Algeria, before the transition to multi-party politics in 1989, did not possess any traditions that adopt real political participation. The prevailing concept is mobilization not participation, and the political arena was completely closed to the front dominated by multiple military elements and technocrats, despite the Algeria's development witnessed in the establishment of associations, it remained lacking that institutional maturity that

¹ - Ibid, P 390.

² - Carole Jean Uhlaner, "Political Participation, Rational Actors, and Rationality: A New Approach", **Political Psychology**, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Sep., 1986), pp. 556, Published By: International Society of Political Psychology, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791256>, Feb 23, 2021.

³ - Zine Labidine GHEBOULI, "Algeria's Political Crisis: An Ongoing Vicious Cycle", <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/algerias-political-crisis-ongoing-vicious-cycle>, Feb 05, 2021, Viewed on Apr 07, 2021.

makes democracy a supreme value that governs the life of society, and the new system did not begin to transform until late, it sought through the 1989 Constitution to create associations, which was amended by Law (No. 90-31 of 1990), stipulates the application for accreditation of the association within three months from the date of establishment request, while allowing the authority to make reservations about its programs if they conflict with applicable laws.

The mobilization of participation continued for a long time, specifically from 1962 until 1989, but with the continuation of that pattern of political participation, how did the political system deal with the attempts of rising groups to achieve their demands?

This is an issue related to the economic situation in Algeria, because it is known that in abundance there is not possible to talk about a crisis of participation, or it was not severe or threatening the political system. In case of Algeria, the participation crisis did not appear seriously as long as oil revenues led to abundance, but presented itself as a crisis, the political system suffered from it with the decline in oil revenues and the deterioration of the economic situation.

3.2. Political participation after the democratic transition in Algeria, multi-party era:

The political system is concerned with political participation through the establishment of constitutional and legal formulas affecting political participation and human rights, such as recognition of party and political pluralism: Article (40) of the 1989 Constitution: “The right to establish political associations is recognized”. This political openness towards pluralism was supported by the promulgation of Law No 11/89 July 1989 relating to political associations, that defined the principles and conditions necessary its establishment, the rules for their work, funding and stopping them.

The 1989 constitution has devoted a chapter to rights and freedoms, it stipulates that “freedoms and rights are guaranteed” (Article 35). “Freedom of artistic and scientific creativity” (Article 36). “Freedom of : expression, association and assembly” (Article 39). “The right to become a representative” (Article 47). “The right to have a job” (Article 48).

The constitution recognized media freedom (Article 39), then supported it with the Media Law promulgated on April 23, 1990, and subsequent laws.

The recognition of the establishment of non-political association, Article (32), the promulgation of the law of December 4, 1990 related to associations, led to the emergence of many associations that comprised different groups and multiple goals.

3.3. The appearance of political participation crisis in Algeria:

- The absence of congruence between ideological principles, programs, and legal

texts with political practices that accompanied the spread of administrative and political corruption.

- Ineffective seasonal formal participation by political parties, who appear during the electoral process only with the aim of performing certain roles or obtaining electoral revenues. Political participation took the form of mobilization with the aim of creating support without expressing real participation stemming from an interest in what is happening in the political society.

- Preserving existing situation, whether in informal institutions such as parties and associations, the absence of power rotation in their internal life or in official institutions, and the survival of some persons and policies.

- The reluctance of the young talent to join political parties, as it is noticed that the elderly dominate the leadership positions, thus the absence of innovation and vitality to move political participation.

- Weak participation in other aspects of social activity and in the non-political areas, as such participation affects attitudes towards political system and political process.

- Poor social mobility and reluctance of intellectuals.

- Elections boycotts.

4. Third axis: crisis of political participation through the electoral process

4.1. Electoral body:

There is no doubt that the composition of the elective body as a means of political participation in terms of its breadth and narrowness was an arena for political struggles between active forces and prevailing ideologies in society, as it is the expression of national sovereignty, and therefore it is the one that produces the general will, because all organs are created from it¹, meaning that give rise to all representative bodies, whether directly or indirectly, as well as the executive institution by electing the president of the republic, or other executive bodies. Accordingly, its formation is of utmost importance in terms of conferring the status of a voter, that is, who has the right to vote, both direct and indirect, as well as the conditions for its use.

a. Adoption of universal suffrage:

The right to vote can be considered one of the basic features, as stated in the revolutionary discourse on citizenship since 1789 through the French revolution, to the point that election became a criterion for it. But a deep analysis of this leads to a different

¹- MARTIN Pierre, **Les systèmes électoraux et les modes de scrutin**. 3eme édition, Paris : Montchrestien, 2006, P 58.

result, citizenship decided by the constitution is broader than the right to vote. So, citizenship, being the link between democratic institutions and election, is an identity that cannot be distinguished between citizens by giving the right to vote for some citizens and rejecting it for others, this discrimination in the electoral body is a fragmentation of the society; therefore, citizenship is the mechanism to erase these social differences.

Citizenship appeared as a right to participate directly or indirectly for practice power, as well as a criterion for practice the right to vote,¹ citizenship is saved in the acquisition of nationality, which is the first criterion for universal suffrage in the constitution. Then the electoral laws come to establish that in a way clarify the conditions for enjoying this right. This right depends to a large extent on the extent of flexibility or rigidity of the nationality law with regard to its acquisition, whether in the original form or by naturalization, whatever, the issue does not pose a major problem in Algerian law, as much as it's raised in countries receive a lot of immigrants, who issue their participation in economic and social life is related to the issue of participation in political life, at least in its local elections. Nationality is important in the election law for countries that are members of regional groupings such as the European Union.

B. Universal suffrage in constitution :

Universal suffrage derives its rules from the constitution, and recognized it without discrimination based on financial grounds, or social affiliation, as was the case in Europe and America previously.

The Algerian constitutions since 1963 have approved this principle, making it a constitutional principle based on the equality of all citizens, without referring to any other condition except the citizenship, as it precedes the existence of the right to vote.

In Algeria, vote did not change as a result of political or ideological conflicts, as happened in other liberal democracies, who lived struggles to achieve universal suffrage, where was the right to vote, major arena for these struggles by expanding it to all members of the people or narrowing it to one group without another, as happened in France, Britain and the United States of America, there were many prevailing criteria for the enjoyment of this right, so the amount of tax paid by the individual was the norm, or the ownership was real estate was the standard, in addition to other restrictions surrounding the right to vote according to the prevailing power relations, that is, according to whether the bourgeoisie dominant or the aristocracy.

Algerian constitutions in this regard started from where other international constitutions ended, meaning that they reaped the extraction of the political struggles that preceded and were the reason for the recognition of universal suffrage in most contemporary constitutions.

¹- BRAHIMI Mohamed, *Le pouvoir en Algérie et ses formes d'expression institutionnelle*, Alger : O P U, 1995, p 126.

This recognition of universal suffrage in Algerian constitutions can be traced back to the influence of the legislator with the French constitutions in their drafting, so that the French constitutions provided for universal suffrage in both the 1948 Constitution and the 1958 Constitution, this is on the one hand. And on the other hand this can be traced back to the political and social approach that Algeria has adopted since independence, which was a socialist, making the election a means of social mobilization and integration, so It was necessary to liberate this right from restrictions. In the 1989 constitution, the result is the same, but the reasons are different, because election has become one of the characteristics of the systems that adopt liberal way, and therefore it was necessary to expand the right to vote in line with the liberal trend was adopted under constitution and subsequent laws.

In practice, the multiparty elections in Algeria witnessed many political phenomena, on the grounds that the elections are one of the main mechanisms in the process of political reform and democratic transformation, and an indicator for defining the relationship between authority and society, which legitimizes political institutions and imposes negotiation of power pacifically, renewal the elite.

When delving into the election results, many questions arise:

- Why is there an abstention from electoral participation and party rallies?
- Did the elections change the political composition, and replace the ruling elite, and give the new generation the opportunity to assume political positions and participate in decision-making?

4.2. Election is a mechanism for political representation:

Electoral systems are mechanisms to increase the capacity of representation. It contributes to the access of various political forces to the elected councils.

Representation takes at least three forms:

- **Geographical representation:** It means that each region has members to represent it in Parliament
- **Effective representation:** It is related to the presence of different forces, and political parties in the elected councils
- **Descriptive representation:** Parliament must reflect the opinions and directions of different segments of citizens. A descriptive parliament represents: men and women, young and old, rich and poor, it reflects different religious affiliations, linguistic pluralism, and ethnic groups.

Participation in political process is one of the basic characteristics of good governance. It is not possible to imagine political openness and real democratic

development without effective institutions through which citizens participate in choosing their representatives, in the decision-making process over their implementation. There are many forms of political participation that are limited to participation in electoral process.

4.3. Political phenomena effecting elections:

A. Split from political parties:

During preparing the electoral lists, political parties faced a series of protests, resignations, and rebellions, Party members entering the elections in the form of independent lists, while others preferred other parties with better positions and ranks in new lists.

This mobile membership and the phenomenon of split can be explained by the weak party commitment and failure of the parties to penetrate into society, with absence of democracy within political parties.

B. Money gets involved in electoral process:

In Algerian parliamentary elections, money had a negative impact on the electoral process, whether in terms of bribing the leaders of political parties by some businessmen to obtain the first ranks in the party lists. Or to buy votes during the voting process, the question is: Why do "businessmen" think about running as deputy, there is no doubt that the main goal is to obtain parliamentary immunity and to use it as a profit investment.

C. Weak election campaigns:

Despite the provision of means and capabilities, the electoral campaigns were characterized by coldness and lack of public response to it, as political parties were unable to move public opinion and mobilize it to the electoral process, which led to the cancellation of many gatherings. This reluctance is due to the absence of a reasonable and real political program that the parties market. Almost all parties, including coalition parties and small parties, have adopted the programs of the President of the Republic and have given up their party programs.

4.4. Electoral behavior:

Election is a periodic monitoring process, so the voters have the ability to give his vote or prevent it from the candidates according to their performance and competence in achieving their interests. Thus, the candidate who wishes to be re-elected again usually looks at the monitoring role of voting, and the ability of the voter to keep or dismiss him, through voter turnout or abstention, the voter's position on the electoral process becomes clear, in terms of his awareness of its importance and his intention to participate or not in it.

Electoral abstention is also a political position that carries political messages and connotations. This phenomenon is increasing among young people, inhabitants of the big cities, women and educated people. This can be explained in the loss of confidence in elections as a way to express the popular will. However, it is a process aimed at preserving the existing system of government, in addition to the poor fulfilment of parliament, as it did not express public opinion and did not exercise oversight and accountability and parliamentary opposition and the phenomenon of absenteeism prevailed in the sessions, the failure of the political party system to perform its functions as a result of internal crises and conflicts.

5. CONCLUSION:

Finally, through the above, despite the diversity of laws regulating the electoral process in Algeria, their weakness in practice is clear, because the Algerian citizen is always reluctant to participate in it, as there are many obstacles that prevent his participation in the political process in general and elections in particular, which can be identified in:

1. The mismatch between political practices and legal rules, when extrapolating the 1989 constitution, the 1996 constitution and the subsequent constitutional amendments, especially the constitutional articles concerned with political participation, we find that there is an adoption of the process of popular participation through its recognition of equality between citizens in political opportunities, National sovereignty belongs to the people, exercised through Parliament. However, the reality is different from that, as the dominance of the executive authority over decision-making has led to the weakness of the legislative institution

2. Weakness of political organizations (political parties and civil associations...), this weakness is evident in their internal crises, such as (partisan split, bad programs...etc). Accordingly, the ability of institutions in advanced democracies depends on the participation of the citizen in their decisions, who seeks to achieve his demands through the selection of serious and efficient elites. In Algeria, the one-party period until 1989 was characterized by a narrow political participation, which resulted in the exclusion and marginalization of competent elites, these political practices extended beyond pluralism

Theoretically, political reforms in Algeria since the 1989 constitution and the subsequent constitutional amendments are positive and good. These reforms included many ideas of democracy achieving, such as multi-party system, and the amendment of electoral systems..., while the realization of these values, in fact, requires an authority striving to achieve development.

However, this political openness in Algeria faced a lot of obstacles, such as the coincidence of these reforms with security instability, which led to the split within the authority, the loss of the relationship between authority and political actors, and the collapse of communication channels between authority and citizens.

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