

LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN ALGERIA: REALITY AND PROSPECTS SEKFALI RIM

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Abstract:

Governance is considered one of the most essential prerequisites for local development, as it aims to enhance the performance of local communities by providing an approach that enables effective participation in the management of public affairs. Algeria is among the countries striving to achieve this goal, despite the challenges it faces.

This research explores the current state of local governance in Algeria, the obstacles it encounters, and the potential solutions and future prospects for implementing effective local governance. The study particularly emphasizes the role of governance in advancing local development and keeping pace with ongoing transformations, especially the shift toward digitalization and the adoption of electronic local governance, which contributes to greater transparency and improved developmental performance.

Keywords: Local communities, governance, developmental performance, financial resources, human resources, electronic governance.

INTRODUCTION:

The current economic, social, and political reality in our country calls for a transition toward economic development with a focus on local development to improve citizens' living conditions. This can only be achieved through the adoption of mechanisms and approaches that activate the capacities of localⁱ administration within a participatory approach, wherein local citizens take part in decision-making—an approach that aligns with the principles of governance.

Governance, in this context, refers to the system adopted by modern states—whether developing or developed—to regulate and direct their resources in a way that achieves both economic and social development. It also represents a mode of exercising authority in managing state resources in accordance with functional responsibilitiesⁱⁱ.

The World Bank defines governance as the manner in which the economic and social resources of a society are managed for the purpose of development. Hence, governance is considered a method of managing the state and societies at all levels and across all sectors, by promoting the interests of citizens through the establishment of democracy, equality, and the participation of individuals in decision-makingⁱⁱⁱ.

Through this research paper, we aim to examine the extent to which local governance in Algeria can succeed, and whether it is capable of addressing developmental imbalances at the local level. Accordingly, we will explore the reality and indicators of governance implementation as well as the challenges and stakes it faces.

This will be done through the following central research question: To what extent is local governance effective in promoting local development in Algeria?

To address this question, we divided the study into two main sections:

• The first section explores the current state of local governance in Algeria, including indicators of its implementation and the obstacles it encounters.



• The second section is devoted to the future prospects of local governance by focusing on the foundational principles necessary for its activation and the importance of transitioning toward electronic governance for local communities.

Section One: The Reality of Governance in Algeria

The success of governance depends on the presence and cooperation of its three main actors: the state^{iv}, the private sector, and civil society. Governance promotes integration and harmony among these three components, as the state alone cannot establish effective governance. Rather, it must act as a partner to the private sector—recognized as the arena for economic initiatives—and to civil society, which serves as a channel for participation and communication.

This collaborative model is essential for achieving sustainable local development aimed at improving citizens' living standards and engaging them in the management of public affairs. This vision is aligned with the state's aspirations, as evidenced by certain indicators that reflect a genuine intention to realize this model (First). However, numerous obstacles still hinder its implementation (Second).

First: Governance Indicators in Algeria

Local governance indicators in Algeria have emerged through political discourse as well as through local government legislation.

1. Indicators of Local Governance within Political Discourse:

In its political discourse aimed at adopting the principles of local governance, Algeria has taken several steps to develop the management of local communities, including:

a. Reconsideration of the Administrative Division:

The first step was the establishment of delegated provinces or administrative districts under Executive Decree No. 15-141, which regulates the organization and functioning of administrative districts^v. This was in execution of Presidential Decree No. 15-140 establishing administrative districts within certain provinces and defining specific rules related to them^{vi}.

As a result, ten delegated provinces were distributed across eight provinces, each supervised by a delegated governor operating under the authority of the provincial governor. These delegated governors are tasked with implementing applicable laws, regulations, and decisions issued by the Provincial People's Assembly within their respective districts.

This restructuring led to the enactment of Law No. 19-12 dated December 11, 2019^{vii}, concerning the regional organization of the country. Article 3 of this law states that the new regional structure consists of **58 provinces** and **1,541 municipalities**. This included the creation of **10 new provinces** in the South and **44 administrative districts in the High Plateaus region**. The expansion of the administrative division did not stop there; seven districts were also upgraded to delegated provinces^{viii}.

These measures aim to achieve a higher level of development in these regions, stimulate economic projects, create economic dynamics, and bring administrative services closer to citizens. Ultimately, this supports administrative decentralization, promotes balanced territorial occupation, meets the economic and social development needs of citizens, positions southern provinces as drivers of national development, and fosters economic movement.

Political discourse has also emphasized strengthening investment opportunities and enhancing governance by ensuring regional balance and encouraging local investment.

b. Reconsideration of the Role of the State and its Institutions:

Recent global political, economic, and social developments have prompted countries—including Algeria—to reevaluate their methods of managing economic and social affairs. In response to various globalization-related challenges, Algeria has begun implementing structural reforms by adopting



more flexible mechanisms and transitioning toward local governance. This transition involves the participation of all relevant actors to activate the principle of partnership and realize effective local governance.

2. Local Governance Indicators within the Local Authorities Law:

Local governance indicators are reflected through the establishment of appropriate mechanisms enabling local citizens, whether as individuals or groups, to participate in decision-making and the management of public affairs^{ix}.

A. Local Governance Indicators in the Municipal Code:

Law No. 11-10 on municipalities^x includes a set of indicators aimed at promoting governance, starting with empowering citizens to participate in the electoral process and select their representatives, thereby reinforcing participatory democracy^{xi}.

Furthermore, the municipality is considered the institutional framework for practicing democracy at the local level and for proximity-based governance. The Municipal People's Assembly (Assemblée Populaire Communale) is required to take all necessary measures to inform citizens about their local affairs and consult them regarding development and planning options and priorities in the economic, social, and cultural domains^{xii}.

Through these provisions, the legislator has introduced a degree of transparency in the work of local councils to ensure that citizens are aware of their local matters.

Every person has the right to access the minutes of the Municipal People's Assembly^{xiii} deliberations as well as municipal decisions. This transparency is reinforced by the issuance of Executive Decree No. 16-19, which specifies the procedures for accessing the minutes of municipal deliberations and decisions^{xiv}. This decree obliges the Municipal People's Assembly to take all necessary measures to facilitate citizen access to information about public affairs management, including the mandatory use and development of appropriate digital platforms to ensure the dissemination and communication of municipal decisions^{xv}.

Key provisions include:

- Posting the proposed meeting agenda at the entrance of the deliberation hall and in areas designated for public information^{xvi}.
- Ensuring that sessions of the Municipal People's Assembly are public and open to all citizens of the municipality***ii.
- Institutionalizing the role of elected and appointed members at the municipal level^{xviii}.
- \bullet Holding the municipality accountable for the errors committed by the mayor, elected officials, and municipal employees in the exercise of their duties^{xix}.

B. Governance Indicators in the Law on Wilayas (Provinces):

The legislator, through the Law on Wilayas^{xx}, sought to promote local governance and uphold the principle of transparency, which is reflected through the following measures:

- The sessions of the Provincial People's Assembly are held publicly^{xxi}.
- It is mandatory to post the session agenda at the entrance of the deliberation hall and in designated public notice areas, especially electronic ones, as well as at the headquarters of the wilaya and its affiliated municipalities. This must be done immediately after the members of the Provincial People's Assembly are summoned**xii*.
- The Wali (Governor) is required to present a report on the implementation of decisions made during previous sessions at the opening of each ordinary session^{xxiii}.



- Members of the wilaya are held accountable for their actions and decisions xxiv.
- The wilaya is empowered to establish provincial public services to meet the collective needs of its citizens, in accordance with the resolutions of the Provincial People's Assembly^{xxv}.

Second: The Obstacles Facing Local Governance in Algeria

Local communities in Algeria face numerous challenges that hinder their ability to fulfill their assigned roles and prevent them from achieving effective local governance. These obstacles can be summarized as follows:

- 1. **Legislative Obstacles:** The slow pace of legislation or the hasty enactment of laws without thorough analysis significantly impacts the functioning of local institutions. This often leads to jurisdictional conflicts stemming from the evasion of responsibilities, as well as the proliferation of legal loopholes exploited by both citizens and administrative bodies. Therefore, it is imperative that competent state authorities consult experts and specialists to draft well-considered legislation^{xxvi}.
- 2. **Political Obstacles:** One of the pressing challenges for local institutions is the low voter turnout in local elections, which has led to limited political participation within local councils. This is compounded by the failure of political parties to play their role in presenting developmental programs and encouraging civic engagement. In some cases, parties have even contributed to the electorate's disengagement. Additionally, civil society, which is considered a key pillar of local governance and democracy^{xxvii}, often plays a weak role. The core objective of local administration is to strengthen communication between the administration and the citizen, enabling the latter to exercise their right to participate in public affairs management^{xxviii}.
- 3. Financial Obstacles: One of the most significant problems facing local institutions is financial dependency on the central government, particularly for funding economic interventions that require state support^{xxix}. The performance of local communities is closely tied to the availability of autonomous financial resources that enable them to make independent developmental decisions^{xxx}. Without financial and administrative autonomy within a unified state, the notion of true local autonomy as a model of decentralization becomes unattainable^{xxxi}. Although Articles 152 and 169 of the Provincial and Municipal Code respectively stipulate that local authorities are responsible for managing and mobilizing their own resources, local officials must fully understand the magnitude of the responsibilities entrusted to them. Additional issues include the lack of local investment, the proliferation of informal markets, and problems related to industrial land. According to the World Bank's 2017 Doing Business Report, Algeria ranked 156th out of 190 countries^{xxxii}, a result attributed to weak economic performance and stagnating development.
- 4. **Administrative Corruption:** Administrative corruption remains one of the most critical barriers to effective local governance. This is evident in the large number of corruption cases involving locally elected officials and staff, particularly in relation to public contracts and tenders, the unequal distribution of services, facilities, and land allocated by the state, as well as unlawful recruitment practices that disregard scientific and professional merit. Additionally, bribery is often used to expedite bureaucratic^{xxxiii} procedures, which discourages investment in an environment marked by corruption and the absence of clear, enforceable regulations.

Section Two: Prospects for Local Governance in Algeria

Given the importance of the governance approach in advancing local development, it is essential to explore solutions to the main weaknesses of local development and to examine its future prospects. These prospects are primarily reflected in a focus on financial and human resources (First), and the necessity of adopting electronic governance (Second).

First: Focus on Financial and Human Resources

Financial and human resources are considered the fundamental basis for achieving genuine local governance.



1. Focus on the Financial Resources of Local Communities **xxiv* Addressing the financial resources of local communities requires exploring ways to overcome the quantitative and qualitative shortcomings of these resources. This can only be achieved by initiating reforms in the local tax system itself and by working to optimize the value of resources in all their forms to ensure a balance between budget revenues and expenditures, through:

a. Reform of Local Taxation: This includes:

- Fiscal autonomy, which involves the participation of local communities in matters related to local taxation, including defining tax bases and participating in tax collection.
- Granting local councils the authority to determine the rates of taxes that are returned to them.
- Establishing mechanisms to activate the implementation of Article 4 of Law No. 11-10 on the Municipal Code, by enforcing a long-neglected principle in the management of local affairs: ensuring proportionality between the resources available to municipalities and the responsibilities assigned to them*xxxv.
- **b. Utilization of Management Resources:** These resources include revenues from public assets and independence-related revenues. Municipalities must work to inventory their assets, revise rental pricing, and improve asset management methods. Municipal services must coordinate with the Directorate of State Property, the Land Registry, the Cadastral Survey, and the Municipal Treasurer to update the municipal property index. This will ensure the registration and regular updating of all municipal assets, settlement of the status of utilized properties, and revision of property valuation and management methods^{xxxvi}.

In addition to enforcing Article 175 of Law No. 11-10 on the Municipal Code, which grants municipalities full authority to determine a financial fee when providing services to citizens.

- Enhancing Local Government Revenues: This can be achieved by implementing Articles 155 and 156 of Law No. 11-10, which allow municipalities to benefit from concessions and delegated management of public services through program contracts or service procurement agreements. Moreover, Article 163 of the same law must be activated, which obliges the Municipal People's Council to regularly take the necessary measures to valorize municipal income-generating properties and make them more profitable.

Encouraging investment and the establishment of new enterprises through the adoption of public service delegation mechanisms can help generate new financial resources that support local development^{xxxvii}.

Additionally, improving fiscal oversight mechanisms and tax collection tools is essential, including the use of advanced technologies for calculating, assessing, and collecting taxes**xxviii.

2. Focusing on the Human Resources of Local Communities The human element is considered one of the most vital pillars available to local administration, playing a key role in enhancing the performance of local communities. This is achieved by ensuring that employees and elected officials possess the qualifications and skills necessary to perform their duties effectively. In this regard, national training centers were established to support the professional development of local community personnel. The Ministry of Interior and Local Communities currently operates five (05) national centers dedicated to the training and upskilling of local staff, located in the provinces of Béchar, Djelfa, Ouargla, Constantine, and Oran xxxix.

Local community staff are considered human resources who may be employed either on a permanent or temporary basis and are subject to legal regulations. They benefit from training courses designed to improve their functional performance and increase productivity in alignment with their job roles. Initially, training programs were limited to appointed staff across various grades. Over time,



however, these initiatives were extended to include elected officials, particularly at the municipal council level^{xl}. Under Law No. 11-10 on Municipal Administration, elected municipal officials are required to participate in training and upskilling programs related to municipal management^{xli}.

Nevertheless, a lack of competence among the majority of elected officials has been observed, prompting legislators to revise candidacy conditions for local council elections. A new requirement was introduced mandating that at least one-third (1/3) of candidates possess a university-level education. However, it remains difficult for such candidates to secure seats on elected councils due to the absence of a binding requirement, combined with low levels of political awareness among voters, who often base their choices on tribal or familial affiliations rather than educational qualifications^{xlii}.

The Algerian state has continued its efforts to promote the training of municipal officials. It launched the CAPDEL Program (Capacités des Acteurs de Développement Local)—Capacity Building for Local Development Stakeholders—in January 2017, under the supervision of the Ministry of Interior and Local Communities and in partnership with the European Union and UNDP. The program aims to strengthen the role of local communities by building their internal capacities to confront emerging local challenges. It targets all local actors involved in participatory governance and focuses on four core axes that encompass all aspects of participatory local governance*

The training process for municipal elected officials is subject to the discretionary authority of the Ministry of Interior and Local Communities, indicating a centralized approach to traditional training, which tends to emphasize curricula aligned with conventional municipal management practices^{xliv}. This approach falls short of meeting the expectations for developing an elite cadre within local councils. Successful local development requires comprehensive human resource development across economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions^{xlv}.

Second: Adopting an E-Governance System

The adoption of an e-governance system by local communities has become a necessity, driven by global transformations and local needs. Technological advancements and scientific and technical progress have contributed significantly to enhancing administrative work quality, underscoring the importance of e-governance in improving the performance of local authorities. However, its implementation requires a well-structured and effective strategy.

1. The Impact of E-Governance on the Performance of Local Communities

The adoption of e-governance has wide-ranging effects, including:

- a. Improving the Economic Situation:
- Saving money, effort, and time.
- Encouraging investment and e-commerce.
- Monitoring and controlling financial transactions.
- Curbing embezzlement of public funds and combating corruption.
- b. Enhancing the Administrative Situation:
- Eliminating bureaucracy and the complexities of traditional administrations.
- Improving functional performance.
- c. Enhancing the Social Situation:
- Providing services through institutional and communicational development.
- Accelerating social interaction through electronic applications.
- Activating social activities through the use of digital platforms^{xlvi}.

d. Promoting the Principle of E-Participation: E-participation refers to the process of involving citizens through information and communication technologies in decision-making, transforming public administration into a participatory, inclusive, cooperative, and goal-oriented system. It helps reach citizens to identify their needs and, in turn, enables citizens to access public institutions and have their voices heard^{xlvii}.

2. Strategy for Implementing E-Governance in Local Communities

The state is making concerted efforts to establish a comprehensive strategy for the digitization of public services, including local administration, and has made it one of its top priorities. The adoption of modern technologies in local governance has become imperative to build an information society capable of dealing with technological developments. Through elected councils, citizens can contribute to the management of public affairs, reflecting the principle of administrative decentralization—seen as a school for democratic learning. Activating digital systems enables citizens to participate in managing their local units and engaging in political life^{xlviii}.

The implementation of e-governance in local communities aims to deliver better services to citizens and improve public service quality and direct communication. To this end, the Ministry of Interior and Local Communities launched a modernization plan, beginning with the issuance of the first "12S birth certificate" via an electronic service window in the 500 Dwellings Municipality of Batna on March 14, 2011, and culminating in the launch of the "Paperless Electronic Municipality" project across three model municipalities in Algiers (Dar El Beïda, Hussein Dey, and Algiers Centre).

The goal was to eliminate traditional paper documents and replace them with biometric documents. The process was launched in the presence of the Minister of Interior and Local Communities, who stated:

"The future municipality that the Algerian citizen aspires to is one that relies on modern technological means to eliminate paperwork, bureaucracy, excessive travel, favoritism, and to promote greater transparency.xiix"

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis highlights the importance of local governance in advancing local development. It is evident that the Algerian state is actively working to achieve this goal, as reflected in its efforts to promote the widespread implementation of local governance systems. However, several challenges persist that hinder this progress. The weak performance of local communities and their dependency on central authorities contradict the principles of decentralization and autonomy.

To revitalize local development, it is essential to focus on enhancing the financial resources of local communities and to invest in their own-source revenues. Furthermore, empowering competent local elites to manage public affairs and raising the level of citizen participation in the management of public services is vital. Moving toward e-governance can also help reduce bureaucracy and enhance transparency in administrative processes, especially through the implementation of the modernization program based on advanced technological tools.

In light of this, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The local tax system must be reformed, and a dedicated law on local taxation should be enacted.
- Municipalities should make better use of available resources and improve tax collection mechanisms.
- Municipalities must be encouraged to seek new sources of revenue by attracting local investments.
- Citizens should be made aware of the importance of participating in political life and managing public affairs within elected local councils.



- Targeted training programs must be guaranteed for elected officials to enhance their performance.
- Article 176(2) of Ordinance No. 21-01 on the Organic Law on Elections should be revised to mandate that more than one-third of local council candidates hold a university-level education, ensuring their effective representation in elected bodies.
- The infrastructure of e-governance systems must be improved.
- The issue of digital illiteracy must be addressed to ensure that citizens can effectively engage with new technologies.

"A process of developing, organizing, and directing the efforts of community members in a way that ensures the provision of food needs for the population—both quantitatively and qualitatively—for the present and the future. This also includes improving the general standard of living and working conditions for all those employed in the agricultural sector, as well as strengthening self-reliance mechanisms in productive work by making optimal use of the material and human resources available in rural communities."

(Source: Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, Rural Development in the Arab Organization.

(Source: Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, Rural Development in the Arab Organization, Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Khartoum, September 2008, p. 5.)

https://www.worldbank.org/wbi/gouvernance

^{iv} Through the adoption of various economic support programs—the Economic Recovery Support Program (2001–2004), the Growth Support Program (2005–2009), the Five-Year Development Plan (2010–2014), and the National Economy Consolidation Program (2014–2019)—Algeria has demonstrated intentions to strengthen governance mechanisms.

(See: Farhat Abbas & Saoud Wassila, General Overview of the Economic Development Program in Algeria (2001–2014), Journal of Communication and Law, Issue 1, June 2018, p. 72; also see: Cherchari Farouk, Requirements of Good Governance: Factors for Achieving Sustainable Local Development, Doctoral Dissertation, Abderrahmane Mira University, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Béjaïa, 2019, p. 82.)

Aflou in the Wilaya of Laghouat, Barika in the Wilaya of Batna, Ksar Chellala in the Wilaya of Tiaret, Ain Oussera and Messaad in the Wilaya of Djelfa, El Abiodh Sidi Cheikh in the Wilaya of El Bayadh, and Bou Saada in the Wilaya of M'sila have been promoted to delegated provinces

vi Through the implementation of the Economic Recovery Support Program (2001–2004), the Growth Support Program (2005–2009), the Five-Year Development Plan (2010–2014), and the National Economy Consolidation Program (2014–2019), Algeria has pursued a series of strategic economic initiatives.

For further reference, see:

Farhat Abbas and Saoud Wassila, General Overview of the Economic Development Program in Algeria (2001–2014), Journal of Communication and Law, Issue No. 1, June 2018, p. 72.

Charchari Farouk, Requirements of Good Governance: Factors for Achieving Sustainable Local Development, Doctoral Thesis submitted to Abdelrahman Mira University, Faculty of Law and Political Science, Béjaïa, 2019, p. 82.

ⁱ UNESCO has defined local development as:

ⁱⁱ Rouf Houchat, in his doctoral dissertation titled "Governance of Local Development in Algeria: A Case Study of Boumerdes Province", submitted to the University of Batna 1 during the academic year 2017–2018, page 91.

iii Daniel Kaufmann, "Rethinking Good Governance: Dialogue on Governance and Development in the Middle East and North Africa", available at:

vii Executive Decree No. 15-141, dated May 28, 2015, concerning the organization and functioning of the administrative district, published in Official Gazette No. 29, issued on May 31, 2015.

viii Presidential Decree No. 15-140, dated May 27, 2015, establishing an administrative district within certain provinces and defining the specific rules related to it, published in Official Gazette No. 29, issued on May 31, 2015.

^{ix} Law No. 19-12, dated December 11, 2019, amending and supplementing Law No. 84-09 of February 4, 1984, concerning the regional organization of the country, published in Official Gazette No. 78, issued on December 18, 2019.



- ^x This is in accordance with Article 19 of the 2020 Constitution, issued by Presidential Decree No. 20-442 dated December 30, 2020, which concerns the promulgation of the constitutional amendment approved by the referendum of November 1, 2020, and published in Official Gazette No. 82, dated December 30, 2020.
- xi Law No. 11-10 dated June 22, 2011, related to the Municipal Law, published in Official Gazette No. 37, issued on July 3, 2011.
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- xiv Article 14 of Law No. 11-10 related to the Municipal Law.
- ^{xv} Executive Decree No. 16-190, dated June 30, 2016, specifies the procedures for accessing the minutes of the Municipal People's Assembly deliberations and municipal decisions, published in Official Gazette No. 41, issued on July 12, 2016.
- xvi Articles 2 and 3 of Executive Decree No. 16-190, previously cited.
- xvii Article 22 of Law No. 11-10 related to the Municipal Law.
- xviii Article 26 of Law No. 11-10 related to the Municipal Law.
- xix Articles 138, 139, and 140 of the Municipal Law.
- xx Law No. 12-07 of February 21, 2012, concerning the Law on Wilayas, published in Official Gazette No. 12 dated February 29, 2012.
- xxi Article 26 of the Law on Wilayas.
- xxii Article 18 of the Law on Wilayas.
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- xxiv Articles 138, 139, and 140 of the Law on Wilayas.
- xxv Article 141 of the Law on Wilayas.
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- xxxiv Municipal financial resources include both internal resources (such as tax revenues and management revenues) and external resources (such as loans and subsidies).
- xxxv Article 4 of Law No. 11-10, which constitutes the Municipal Code, stipulates:
- "The municipality must ensure the availability of the financial resources necessary to cover the burdens and responsibilities assigned to it in all areas. Any new task entrusted to the municipality or transferred to it by the State must be accompanied by the simultaneous provision of the financial resources required for the permanent assumption of this task."
- xxxvi Nadhira Doubabi and Boutilab Brahimi, The Problem of Weak Financial Resources in Municipalities: A Case Study of the Municipalities of Guelma Province, Revue [journal name incomplete].
- xxxviii Nadhira Doubabi and Boutilab Brahimi, Previously Cited Reference, p. 154.
- xxxix Ministry of Interior and Local Communities, Algeria, Training Programs for Local Community Personnel. Available at: www.interieur.dz/index.php/ar
- xl Ammar Boudiaf, Public Service in Algerian Legislation (A Study under Ordinance 06-03 and Special Statutory Laws Supported by State Council Jurisprudence), Djissour Publishing and Distribution, Algeria, 2015, p. 113.



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