

## Between Normative Ambition and Practical Reality: The Limits of New Public Governance in Algeria

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### **Abstract**

*The modernization of public management represents a central challenge for contemporary states, particularly in contexts where governance systems remain heavily centralized. In Algeria, the reform agenda has increasingly invoked the principles of digitalization, decentralization, and participatory democracy as pathways toward transparency, legitimacy, and responsiveness. Drawing on academic literature, policy documents, and comparative insights, this study employs a qualitative, analytical, and critical methodology to assess the trajectory of these reforms. The findings reveal a paradoxical dynamic: while digitalization has improved service accessibility and visibility since the acceleration of reforms in 2020, its impact remains uneven due to structural inertia, the digital divide, and weak regulatory frameworks. Similarly, decentralization, although constitutionally recognized and supported by initiatives such as the CapDeL project, continues to be constrained by strong central oversight, limiting local autonomy. Participatory democracy, though formally endorsed, remains largely symbolic, with citizen involvement in decision-making processes still marginal. Taken together, the analysis underscores that Algeria's governance reforms embody a case of symbolic convergence without substantive transformation. Rather than producing an integrated model of New Public Governance, reforms have yielded fragmented and partial outcomes, highlighting the need for stronger institutional mechanisms and genuine political commitment. These findings contribute to broader debates on governance transitions in developing contexts, particularly regarding the adaptation of reform models originally designed in and for developed countries.*

*Keywords:* Public management reform; digitalization; decentralization; participatory democracy.

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### **1. Introduction**

Since the 1980s, public administrations worldwide have undergone profound transformations. The rise of New Public Management (NPM) emphasized efficiency and performance, drawing on private-sector practices. In the 2000s, attention shifted toward network governance and participatory democracy,

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reshaping relations between governments and citizens. More recently, the 2010–2020 decade witnessed the emergence of digital government, where technological innovations, online platforms, and social networks redefine the very foundations of public management.

Algeria has not remained isolated from these dynamics. After independence in 1962, the country adopted a highly centralized and bureaucratic administrative model, largely inspired by the French tradition, which prevailed throughout the 1960s–1980s. In the 1990s, economic reforms and globalization pressures led to attempts at administrative modernization, yet progress was constrained by institutional resistance and the security crisis of that period. Since the 2010s, the Algerian state has initiated efforts toward digitalization of public services (such as one-stop shops and online platforms), and the 2020 constitutional reform has opened the door to more decentralized and participatory governance, even if centralization still dominates.

At the local level, territorial collectivities—communes and wilayas—established in 1967, constitute the administrative tier closest to citizens. However, their real autonomy has long been restricted. Recent reforms, particularly after 2020, seek to strengthen their role in governance, while emerging initiatives of citizen consultation and civil society engagement demonstrate a growing aspiration for participatory practices. These local dynamics, though still fragile, highlight the potential of a network-based public management rooted in collaboration, citizen engagement, and social innovation.

Against this backdrop, the central research question emerges: To what extent do Algeria’s public management reforms through digitalization, decentralization, and citizen participation enable a transition from a historically centralized model toward a more efficient, inclusive, and citizen-oriented public management system?

Three hypotheses guide this study:

H1: Digitalization improves transparency and accessibility of public services but remains hindered by digital divides and bureaucratic resistance.

H2: Decentralization enhances the adaptation of public policies to local realities but is constrained by the persistent weight of central control.

H3: Participatory democracy fosters citizen trust and policy effectiveness, provided it is supported by robust institutional mechanisms.

The importance of this study is twofold. From a scientific perspective, it enriches the literature on public sector transformation by examining Algeria, a context

rarely addressed in international research, while shedding light on the tension between centralized governance and emerging demands for openness and participation. From a practical perspective, it offers policymakers valuable insights into the levers and obstacles of modernization, with implications for enhancing administrative performance, improving the quality of public services, and rebuilding citizen trust. In a period of profound social and economic change, these issues are not only academic but also strategic for the future of governance in Algeria.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The evolution of public management and governance has been marked by successive paradigms that often coexist rather than replace one another. Denhardt and Denhardt (2000, 2003) question the predominance of the New Public Management (NPM), which conceives public managers as entrepreneurs operating within a lean and market-oriented state. In contrast, they introduce the New Public Service (NPS), grounded in democratic citizenship, community values, and organizational humanism. From this perspective, the role of public officials is not to steer society but to assist citizens in defining and achieving shared goals. Efficiency and productivity remain relevant, yet they are placed within a broader democratic and participatory framework.

This argument resonates with the Algerian case. Benahmed (2023) shows that attempts to modernize public administration through NPM reforms remain deeply contested. Despite initiatives to strengthen efficiency and accountability, bureaucratic rigidity, inefficiency, and corruption continue to undermine citizens' trust. The study stresses the limits of transferring private-sector practices into the public sphere and calls for corrective strategies such as comprehensive human resource management, fostering organizational culture, and improving financial oversight.

Beyond Algeria, comparative research in the Global South highlights the socio-technical aspects of governance reform. Ayodele et al. (2023), in their study of South African municipalities, argue that digital participation cannot be reduced to technological deployment. Instead, it requires empowered local officials, context-sensitive tools, peer learning, and systemic approaches that reflect institutional realities. Their conclusions echo the findings of Aristovnik, Murko, and Ravšelj (2022), who emphasize that governance models evolve incrementally through layering. In Slovenia, for instance, central administration retains Neo-Weberian characteristics, while local governments combine managerial approaches, digital practices, and principles of Good Governance.

The role of collaboration has also been widely examined. Ansell and Gash (2008) propose a contingency model of collaborative governance, based on a meta-analysis of 137 cases, which identifies trust, time, and interdependence as decisive conditions for success. Their framework highlights how small, incremental achievements foster long-term cooperation between public agencies and external stakeholders. In the digital domain, Schneider et al. (2020, 2021) advance the concept of Modular Politics, in which governance systems are built from interoperable and adaptable components. This model allows not only the replication of traditional governance mechanisms but also the experimentation with new forms of digital participation and decision-making.

In Algeria, digital reforms illustrate both potential and limitations. Bouguetaia and Mezouri (2023) report progress in areas such as digital infrastructure, literacy, and online service delivery. However, they also note persistent weaknesses, including the digital divide and insufficient data protection, which continue to hinder citizen trust. They argue that Algeria is on a trajectory toward more citizen-oriented governance, provided reforms are sustained and structural inequalities addressed.

Overall, the literature shows that governance reforms follow a hybrid path, shaped by the interplay of historical legacies, institutional dynamics, and emerging democratic and digital imperatives

Despite these contributions, important gaps persist. First, although paradigms such as New Public Management, New Public Service, collaborative governance, and digital-era governance have been well-established, little research has examined how these approaches interact within the specific institutional environment of Algeria. Second, existing studies tend to focus on either digitalization, decentralization, or citizen participation in isolation, without considering their interconnections as part of a broader transformation of governance. Finally, Algeria remains insufficiently explored in comparative public administration scholarship, despite offering a valuable context for understanding how states with entrenched bureaucratic traditions navigate the transition toward more participatory and citizen-centered governance. This study aims to address these gaps by analyzing Algeria's evolving governance trajectory through the combined perspectives of digitalization, decentralization, and participatory democracy.

### 3. Research methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, analytical, and critical approach, relying on the triangulation of multiple sources to assess public governance reforms in Algeria through the lenses of digitalization, decentralization, and participatory democracy.

#### 3.1 Data collection

The research draws on three main categories of sources:

**Academic literature:** peer-reviewed articles and books retrieved from international databases (Scopus, Web of Science, Cairn, Google Scholar) to capture both theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence on New Public Governance (NPG) and e-government initiatives.

**Institutional reports:** national and international publications, including those by the United Nations, the World Bank, the CAPDEL project, and Algeria's Ministry of Digitalization and Statistics.

**International indicators:** in particular, the E-Government Development Index (EGDI, 2022), which provides a comparative benchmark situating Algeria within global trends.

#### 3.2 Analytical approach

The analysis followed a thematic and interpretive logic, structured around the three core dimensions of NPG:

**Digitalization:** assessment of digital policies, their pace of implementation, and their capacity to reduce inequalities in access to public services.

**Decentralization:** evaluation of the legal and institutional framework, with particular attention to the extent of actual autonomy granted to local governments.

**Participatory democracy:** exploration of citizen participation mechanisms and their implications for institutional trust, legitimacy, and accountability.

#### 3.3 Critical perspective and triangulation

A critical lens guided the interpretation of findings, highlighting discrepancies between political discourse and concrete outcomes. Triangulating academic sources, institutional reports, and international indices allowed the study to:

Identify points of convergence and divergence across sources,  
Measure the gap between reform ambitions and their actual implementation,  
and situate Algeria's trajectory within the broader context of governance  
transitions in developing countries.

#### 4. Research results and discussions

##### 4.1 The algerian trajectory of public management reform

The digital transformation of Algeria's public sector has accelerated in recent years, with reforms aimed at improving service delivery, transparency, and citizen trust. Initial initiatives in e-government introduced online portals, digital payment systems, and administrative services accessible through electronic platforms. While these measures have simplified certain procedures, they have also revealed persistent challenges such as the digital divide, institutional inertia, and insufficient data protection mechanisms (Bouguetaia & Mezouri, 2023). These dynamics confirm the argument of Ayodele et al. (2023), who stress that digital transformation in the Global South is not purely technological but requires institutional adaptation, socio-technical capacity, and citizen engagement.

A particularly significant development is the launch of Algeria's National Artificial Intelligence Strategy in 2024, which represents a decisive step toward embedding advanced digital tools in public governance. Organized around six pillars—research and innovation, higher education and skills, support for start-ups, digital infrastructure, regulatory frameworks, and priority sectors such as health, agriculture, water management, and cybersecurity (Ouadah, 2024). The strategy aims to position AI as both a driver of modernization and an enabler of sustainable development. From a governance perspective, this reflects a move toward a platform model of government (Janssen & Estevez, 2013), where data systems and digital infrastructures form the backbone of inter-ministerial coordination.

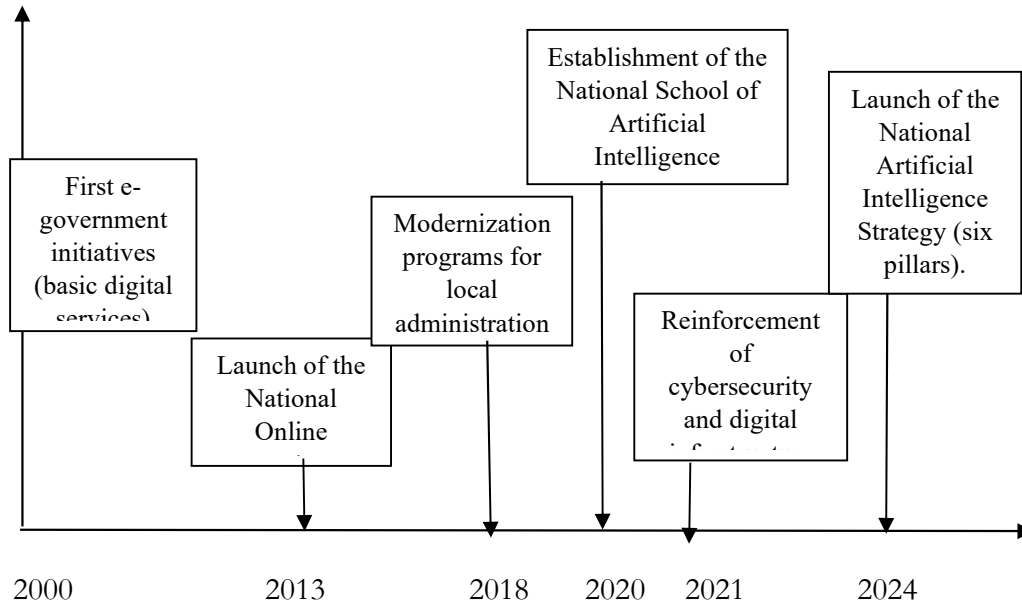
The integration of regulatory and ethical dimensions also acknowledges the risks of algorithmic decision-making in public administration, notably regarding transparency, accountability, and discrimination (Floridi et al., 2018). The establishment of the National School of Artificial Intelligence (ENSIA) in 2020, presented as a pioneering institution in Africa, further illustrates how higher education is mobilized to build long-term institutional capacity. At the same time, the success of this ambitious strategy remains contingent on inter-sectoral coordination, adequate resources, and effective monitoring mechanisms.

Algeria's AI strategy also carries a regional dimension, positioning the country as a potential leader in African digital diplomacy. References to neighboring states, such as Tunisia, are not direct comparisons but highlight Algeria's aspiration to influence continental debates on digital governance (OCDE, 2023). Yet these ambitions must be balanced against unresolved domestic constraints, including fragmented data governance, limited digital literacy within public institutions, and the absence of a comprehensive AI legal framework.

Taken together, digitalization in Algeria illustrates both progress and fragility. On one hand, reforms in e-government and AI create opportunities for more efficient, transparent, and citizen-oriented governance. On the other, structural inequalities and institutional inertia continue to limit inclusiveness and accountability. This hybrid trajectory resonates with Aristovnik, Murko, and Ravšelj's (2022) notion of layering, in which new digital paradigms coexist with traditional bureaucratic logics rather than replacing them. In this sense, Algeria's experience demonstrates that digitalization is not only a technological project but a deeper institutional and democratic challenge, requiring alignment between infrastructure, regulation, and citizen-centered values.

To capture the gradual nature of Algeria's digital transition, it is helpful to present the main milestones that have marked its evolution. Beginning with early e-government projects in the 2000s and culminating in the adoption of the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy in 2024, this trajectory illustrates a steady expansion of scope—from basic digitization of records to the integration of advanced technologies like AI into the core of governance. The figure below traces this chronology, emphasizing the institutional and technological developments that have driven Algeria's digital transformation.

Algeria's path toward digital governance has been marked by progressive reforms. The early 2000s introduced initial e-government projects aimed at digitizing basic services. In 2013, the launch of the National Online Services Portal expanded citizens' direct access to administrative procedures. By 2018, digital modernization programs extended to local governments, fostering efficiency at the municipal level. The establishment of the National School of Artificial Intelligence (ENSIA) in 2020 positioned Algeria as a regional leader in AI education. In 2021, reforms focused on strengthening cybersecurity and digital infrastructure. The 2024 National Artificial Intelligence Strategy consolidated these efforts under six strategic pillars: research, education, entrepreneurship, infrastructure, regulation, and priority sectors, signaling a decisive move toward AI-driven governance. These milestones reflect Algeria's gradual shift from digitizing services to embedding digital governance as a strategic priority.



**Figure 1. Evolution of Digitalization and Digital Governance Policies in Algeria (2000–2024)**

*Source: the author's contribution based on (Government of Algeria, (2020–2024))*

Although the chronological overview highlights the key institutional milestones in Algeria's digital journey, assessing their real impact requires turning to measurable indicators. Beyond domestic reforms and strategies, international benchmarks such as the United Nations E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and E-Participation Index (EPART) offer an external perspective on the country's progress and global standing. These metrics allow for a more comprehensive evaluation, capturing not only infrastructure and human capital development but also the degree to which digitalization has improved service accessibility and fostered citizen participation.



**Figure 2. Algeria's Performance in the un E-Government Development Index (EGDI) and E-Participation Index (EPART), 2024**

*Source (United Nations, 2024)*

The 2024 United Nations e-government report places Algeria at 116th position worldwide in the E-Government Development Index (EGDI), with a score of 0.5956 (United Nations, 2024). This outcome indicates notable progress in telecommunications infrastructure and human capital development, yet persistent shortcomings in the provision and quality of online public services. In stark contrast, Algeria's ranking in the E-Participation Index (EPART) declined sharply to 187th, underscoring the limited presence of interactive platforms, consultation mechanisms, and citizen-oriented digital tools. This divergence reveals a paradox within Algeria's digital transformation: despite advancements in infrastructure and capacity, the foundations of digital participatory democracy remain fragile and underdeveloped. As highlighted in the UN report, addressing this gap requires not only technological investments but also comprehensive institutional reforms that integrate transparency, accountability, and citizen engagement into governance. The subsequent section of this study will examine this dimension of participatory democracy in greater detail.

According to the 2024 United Nations report, Algeria's efforts in digital transformation remain partial without deeper involvement from its citizens. While significant progress has been made in infrastructure, a clear gap persists in terms of e-participation, suggesting that technological development alone cannot guarantee inclusive governance. To address this imbalance, participatory democracy is increasingly recognized as a vital counterpart to digitalization,

ensuring that innovations contribute not only to administrative efficiency but also to legitimacy and social inclusion.

Participatory democracy holds a central place within governance theories, with different models highlighting how citizen engagement reinforces legitimacy and inclusiveness. Habermas (1996, 2000) argues that democracy must be continuously sustained through active citizen involvement in deliberation, supported by institutions that guarantee transparent and high-quality processes. Arnstein's (1969, 2007) "Ladder of Participation" illustrates the varying degrees of citizen influence, ranging from manipulation to genuine empowerment through citizen control, while reminding policymakers to critically reflect on the authenticity of their participatory initiatives. Complementing these views, Hirst's (1994) notion of associative democracy emphasizes the contribution of voluntary associations in pluralistic governance, provided that robust regulatory frameworks and accountability mechanisms are in place. Collectively, these perspectives underline that participatory democracy is not a single model but rather a continuum of practices and institutions capable of enriching governance and reinforcing democratic legitimacy.

Contemporary governance theories expand and refine these foundational perspectives. Deliberative democracy, advanced by scholars such as Cohen and Gutmann, underscores the centrality of inclusive public reasoning in shaping collective decisions. Network governance highlights the interdependence of public institutions, civil society, and private actors, privileging horizontal coordination over hierarchical control. More recently, digital governance frameworks have stressed the potential of technology to enhance e-participation, transparency, and collaborative decision-making, while at the same time raising concerns about equity, accessibility, and the persistence of digital divides.

Building on these theoretical insights, the role of ICTs has become increasingly central in strengthening participatory democracy. Their contribution is particularly evident when three conditions are met: the provision of reliable information, the active engagement of citizens in policy formulation, and supportive regulatory transformations. Under these circumstances, digital participation enables a partial redistribution of authority to citizens, enhancing both transparency and accountability. However, the depth of civic engagement depends on the participatory space afforded by e-government platforms, which may range from basic voting tools to more advanced deliberative forums. In the Maghreb context, the full realization of direct democracy through digital tools may remain aspirational. Nevertheless, expanding deliberative alternatives within the existing

representative framework appears essential to foster meaningful and effective citizen involvement in public affairs (Esselimani, Sagsan, & Kiralp, 2021).

Beyond theoretical debates, participatory democracy also takes diverse forms in practice, reflecting specific national and cultural contexts. Examples from around the world illustrate this diversity: the United Kingdom has promoted community planning, Germany has experimented with citizen juries, Brazil pioneered participatory budgeting, Romania embraced community organizing, while France has developed neighborhood councils and contracts. Additionally, the Local Agenda 21 framework has been implemented in many countries as a tool for participatory governance and sustainable development (Messaoudene & Messaoudi, 2016).

In Algeria, the notion of participatory democracy as a structured form of inclusive governance began to take shape in the late 1960s. However, it was not until the 1990s that it gained greater visibility at the local level, largely in response to growing political concerns over declining electoral participation. This process often relied on actors traditionally marginalized in decision-making, such as civil society associations, and in some cases drew inspiration from alternative currents, including alter-globalization movements. For its advocates, participatory democracy extends beyond the citizens' right to freely elect their representatives. It also encompasses broader entitlements, such as the right to information, consultation, dialogue, and in certain cases, co-decision-making. This expanded vision has gradually been reflected in contemporary constitutions and legal frameworks, reinforcing its relevance as a foundation for democratic governance (Naili, 2020).

In the framework of Algeria's institutional reforms, the 2016 Constitution introduced participatory democracy at the level of local authorities. Building on this foundation, the Algerian government, in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), launched the CapDeL program (Participatory Democracy and Local Development). With a total budget of ten million euros, CapDeL seeks to strengthen the capacities of local actors and promote inclusive, transparent, and citizen-centered governance. The initiative is being piloted in ten municipalities across the country, selected to reflect Algeria's geographical, cultural, and socio-economic diversity. Through this model approach, CapDeL aims to institutionalize mechanisms of citizen participation particularly for youth and women alongside local authorities in decision-making and communal development planning. Ultimately, the program seeks to generate best practices that can be scaled up nationally, thereby embedding participatory democracy within the broader process of decentralization

and sustainable local development (Ministry of the Interior, Local Authorities and Territorial Planning, 2016).

As with any new initiative, the early stages of participatory democracy in Algeria were not without challenges, particularly in a context where the democratic framework remains unclear and where a culture of citizen engagement in public affairs is still limited. Participation is, in fact, a collective learning process that requires time, experience, and a gradual transformation of mindsets. The launch of the CapDeL program encountered several structural and cultural obstacles. On the one hand, the persistence of certain bureaucratic practices and traditional perceptions among some administrators hindered the emergence of collaborative relations between local actors. On the other hand, the weakness of the associative sector and the lack of training within civil society organizations limited their capacity for mobilization and their effective contribution to local governance processes. Added to this are administrative compartmentalization and the detachment of some elected officials from the daily realities of citizens, which complicated the establishment of a constructive and inclusive dialogue.

The philosophy of CapDeL is based on the idea that participatory democracy cannot be reduced to the mere act of voting, but must instead enable citizens to be actively involved in the design, implementation, and evaluation of local policies. It is therefore an innovative and commendable initiative that opens up promising prospects for more transparent and inclusive governance. However, its success will depend on the ability of institutional and associative actors to overcome resistance to change, to establish a genuine culture of consultation, and to prevent any instrumentalization of the program for purposes other than those originally intended (Zéhour & Bourahli, 2021).

While digitalization and participatory democracy are often presented as core elements of public management reform, their effectiveness ultimately depends on a solid foundation of decentralization. Without transferring decision-making authority and resources to local levels, digital tools risk being reduced to technical upgrades, and participatory mechanisms may remain symbolic rather than transformative. Decentralization thus provides the structural conditions that allow technology and citizen engagement to converge into more legitimate, inclusive, and sustainable governance.

Decentralization is one of the most significant reforms of the past generation, both in terms of the number of countries affected and its far-reaching implications for the nature and quality of governance (Faguet, 2014). It has become an almost universal component of public sector reform in developing countries, although its

outcomes have not always lived up to the considerable and diverse expectations associated with it (Smoke, 2015). When attempting an evaluation of developing countries e-governments, more issues emerge, public administration is characterized by inefficiency, limited capacity, poorly trained personnel, a no trust in information and communication technologies added to the immature security of systems and vulnerability of information to intrusions as well as corruption, and the generally unstable political state. One could say that e-government was introduced to, in general, help solving administrative problems, nevertheless, because e-government and its related concepts were developed in and for developed countries, it should not be assumed that it will be appropriate for developing countries (Gideon, Perjons, & Rusu, Digital Transformation-driven Decentralisation of Public Governance, 2024). More broadly, the rise of decentralization reflects a wider redefinition of the state's role in the economy. Governments intervene not only to provide pure and quasi-public goods, but also to correct market failures, mitigate negative externalities, and manage economic cycles. They further play a critical role in securing income support for vulnerable households while aligning income distribution with broader societal expectations (Afonso, Jalles, & Venâncio, 2024). Within this global context, Algeria's trajectory illustrates both the promises and the constraints of decentralization as a pathway to responsive governance and inclusive development.

Within this broader context, administrative decentralization has long been promoted as a pathway toward more responsive and context-sensitive governance (Arroyave, Lopez, & Santos, 2025). In Algeria, decentralization has constituted a constitutional foundation since independence. In its action plan, the government has elevated the principle of decentralization as a strategic requirement for improving territorial and administrative governance, aiming to strengthen both the performance and the efficiency of public action. This transition from a managerial state to one acting as facilitator, regulator, and controller requires granting local administrations broader prerogatives and effective means of action.

Such a transformation necessitates a comprehensive approach that redefines the role of local authorities as genuine extensions of the state in implementing national objectives. Due to their proximity and direct interaction with citizens, economic operators, and local stakeholders, local governments are particularly well positioned—and increasingly expected—to ensure the success of public policies. Nevertheless, despite this proximity, territorial collectivities in Algeria continue to face structural and institutional constraints that hinder their ability to deliver on public objectives, particularly in terms of improving living conditions and promoting local development. These obstacles are largely the result of persisting centralized administrative procedures and decision-making mechanisms,

which undermine the quality of public services and slow down local economic dynamics. Compared to neighboring Tunisia and Morocco, where decentralization reforms have advanced further in strengthening local autonomy, Algeria's trajectory remains characterized by strong central oversight despite constitutional recognition of decentralization.

According to Smoke (2001), the decentralization of governance typically encompasses three main dimensions: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. While often presented as sequential steps, some scholars interpret them as distinct forms of decentralization. Although their precise meaning varies across disciplines and linguistic contexts, together they provide a conceptual framework for analyzing how authority, responsibility, and resources are redistributed from central to subnational governments (Gideon, Perjons, & Rusu, 2024). In this framework, deconcentration refers to the internal redistribution of functions within central government agencies; delegation involves transferring specific responsibilities to semi-autonomous entities that remain accountable to the center; and devolution represents the strongest form, granting elected local governments legal authority, decision-making power, and resources. Closely tied to fiscal decentralization, devolution highlights the critical role of local governments in delivering public services, though in many developing contexts central governments retain control over revenues and redistribute them through intergovernmental fiscal transfers (Tristan, 2021).

Taken together, these perspectives underline that decentralization is not simply an institutional or administrative reform but a structural precondition for building participatory democracy and advancing digital governance. Without a solid base of decentralized authority, initiatives in citizen participation and digital transformation risk remaining symbolic rather than substantive.

## **5. Results: between normative ambition and practical reality in algerian governance reforms**

The findings of this research highlight a significant gap between the normative ambitions of New Public Governance (NPG) in Algeria and its effective implementation. While digitalization, decentralization, and participatory democracy are formally recognized as reform priorities, their concrete application remains partial and constrained by persistent institutional and cultural inertia. This situation illustrates what can be described as a case of symbolic convergence without substantive transformation.

**Digitalization :** Reform initiatives were launched as early as 1999, yet meaningful progress has only been visible since 2020, particularly with the adoption of the National Artificial Intelligence Strategy in 2024. Although these efforts signal political will, their impact remains limited by the digital divide, weak regulatory frameworks, and bureaucratic resistance. As Idoughi (2018) notes, digital models conceived in developed countries are often difficult to transfer to developing contexts, and Algeria exemplifies this difficulty. The results confirm that digitalization has enhanced transparency and accessibility only in a limited way, as administrative practices remain largely resistant to change.

**Decentralization :** Despite constitutional recognition in 2016 and programs such as CAPDEL, decentralization has not translated into a genuine redistribution of authority. Local governments continue to operate under strong central supervision, which restricts their fiscal and administrative autonomy. Compared with neighboring countries such as Morocco and Tunisia, Algeria's trajectory reflects an enduring centralization that undermines local accountability and weakens the legitimacy of local institutions (Faguet, 2014; Smoke, 2015).

**Participatory Democracy :** Citizen participation is largely symbolic. While mechanisms of consultation have been introduced, they have not enabled citizens to influence decision-making in any substantive manner. The CAPDEL project, designed to empower municipalities and encourage inclusive participation, has fallen short of its objectives. Citizens remain marginalized, and trust in institutions is undermined by opaque processes and weak accountability. This finding aligns with Esselmani, Sagsan, & Kiralp (2021), who stress that participatory democracy depends on effective transparency and accountability mechanisms, which remain underdeveloped in the Algerian context.

Taken together, these results suggest that the principles of transparency, legitimacy, and responsiveness, central to the NPG paradigm, are only partially achieved in Algeria. Transparency is constrained by limited access to public information and by bureaucratic inertia; legitimacy is weakened by the absence of genuine decentralization and inclusive participation; and responsiveness remains undermined by institutional rigidities and slow adaptation to citizens' needs.

Ultimately, Algeria's governance reforms appear more rhetorical than transformative. While they converge discursively with international paradigms of digitalization, decentralization, and participation, their practical outcomes remain fragmented, delayed, and insufficiently institutionalized. The Algerian case thus illustrates the paradox of reform: a strong alignment with the vocabulary of New Public Governance, but limited substantive transformation on the ground.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the introduction of participatory democracy mechanisms in Algeria cannot be approached in a naïve manner. It requires both genuine political commitment and the capacity to transcend particularistic interests in favor of a collective vision shaped by citizens. This entails a profound transformation in the philosophy of public action: the state, historically characterized by strong centralization, must gradually evolve into an institution oriented toward citizens while preserving essential national cohesion. Within this perspective, decentralization is not merely an administrative reform but a structural reorganization of the state—one that remains constrained by bureaucratic inertia and the enduring weight of central control. The real challenge lies in striking a delicate balance between safeguarding national unity and granting genuine autonomy to local authorities and citizens.

Most importantly, the study highlights that a genuine synergy between digitalization, decentralization, and participatory democracy paves the way for a governance model anchored in transparency, responsiveness, and legitimacy. Yet, in Algeria, these dynamics remain more symbolic than substantive. The success of the reform agenda ultimately depends on the State's ability to move beyond rhetorical commitments and translate these principles into effective and inclusive institutional mechanisms.

Ultimately, the Algerian case reveals that without concrete institutionalization, reforms risk remaining a symbolic convergence without substantive transformation.

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