Tracing the factors of the emergence of digital democracy in the Palestinian Territories

Traçando os fatores do surgimento da democracia digital nos Territórios Palestinos

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Resumo

Este artigo procura demonstrar o conceito de democracia digital e a sua capacidade para formar atitudes e tendências na opinião pública, lidando com as oportunidades disponíveis para a democracia digital ativar a democracia participativa nos territórios Palestinos, demonstrando também a realidade dos desafios da democracia digital na região. O presente estudo utiliza tanto descrição analítica como abordagens teóricas. O estudo conclui que os cidadãos Palestinos perderam confiança nos seus representantes nomeados, devido à falta de mecanismos práticos que estimulem os processos de participação. Devido a isto, os meios de comunicação social e as ferramentas tecnológicas de comunicação na Palestina transformaram-se, entre os cidadãos, num espaço para a troca de ideias e informação, assim como um espaço para diálogo e debate, e para levantar questões de vasto interesse popular, longe das estruturas formais e tradicionais.

Palavras-chave: Democracia Digital; Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação; Territórios Palestinos; Democracia Participativa

Abstract

This paper seeks to demonstrate the concept of digital democracy and its ability to form attitudes and trends in public opinion and it also deals with the opportunities available for digital democracy to activate participatory democracy in the Palestinian territories and it also sheds light on the reality and challenges of digital democracy there. The study uses both the analytical descriptive and the historical approaches. The study concludes that Palestinian citizens lost their confidence in their appointed representatives due to the lack of practical mechanisms that stimulate the processes of participation. Because of that, the media and communication technology tools in Palestine have transformed among the citizens into a space for the exchange of ideas and information, as well as a space for dialogue and debate, and for raising issues of wide popular interest, far from the formal and traditional frameworks.

Keywords: Digital Democracy; Information and Communication Technologies; Palestinian Territories; Participatory Democracy

> The majority of individuals can gain self-confidence and better develop their abilities only through active participation in decisions important to society. Therefore, people generally have a twofold political interest — concern for the end results and concern for the participatory process.
>
> Peter Bachrach
> (Routledge, 2010, p. 46)

1. Introduction

There are many forms of democracy, including representative democracy when the people choose their representatives, and semi-direct (or participatory) democracy when the people delegate their powers to an elected body while keeping right to exercise some powers.[1] Among the advantages of participatory democracy is the participation of a larger sector of the people in the important and major issues of the country, and reducing the tyranny of representative democracy.

Participatory democracy emerged, not to completely abolish representative democracy, but to overcome its limitations and inability to interact and respond to new social data, which is represented by the emergence of increasingly broad social movements and expressions.

In the Palestinian experience, participatory democracy has become a mere slogan for political discourse that is raised with every election and ends with its end (election) as the elected people often abandon their role of being close to the citizen's problems, and re-produce the centralization of the administration or the state.

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1. For more details, refer to IDEA, Direct democracy database:
   https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/direct-democracy

However, with the advent of digital technology and its widespread use, politics has moved to virtual spaces, so that it becomes possible to talk about virtual partisan and political forces, capable of providing many data that promote democracy, such as dialogue, expression of opinion, and conducting important surveys and statistics. Citizens' interest in Palestine has shifted to what is known as a digital democracy created by information and communication technology and diverse digital societies, which include social networks, websites, forums and blogs. The paper argues that there is a correlation between frustration with the means provided by the authority, which was supposed to reinforce the principle of participatory democracy, and the increasing participation in digital democracy as an alternative. This correlation shows the desire of the Palestinian citizen to participate in decision-making and that the reluctance to practice politics on the ground is a result of his conviction that participation in a corrupt political climate is not feasible due to multiple factors, including external and internal ones.

Research problem: From the above, the problem can be posed through the following two questions:

- What are the reality and challenges of digital democracy in the Palestinian territories in the absence of a legal system that controls its principles and borders?
- What are the ways to ensure that the emerging digital democracy activates the principles of participatory democracy in this country?

To answer these questions, the analytical descriptive approach will be used; this approach is designed to suit the purposes of the study by studying digital democracy and its ability to form attitudes and trends in public opinion. Besides analytical descriptive approach, the historical approach is used to contribute to understanding and studying the beginning of participatory democracy in the Palestinian territories whether in legislation or in ground represented local councils. This paper will use Palestine as a case study where the study variables namely; participatory democracy, digital democracy and the relationship between them, will be studied through that case, and a conceptual framework will be presented for each variable of the study.

2. Participatory democracy

Participatory democracy is a form of joint management of local public affairs based on strengthening the participation of the population in political decision-making, it refers to an "alternative" political model that aims to increase the involvement and participation of citizens in public debate and political decision-making, that is, when individuals are called to carry out major consultations concerning local projects or public decisions that concern them directly, in order to involve them in decision-making with collective shouldering of responsibilities as a consequence (Held, 1987, pp. 43-47). Participatory democracy aims to democratize representative democ-

racy, some of its shortcomings have been evident, and to strengthen the role of the citizen, whose role should not remain limited only to the right to vote or run for office and access to locally and nationally produced councils, but extends to include the right in news, giving consultation, tracking and evaluation, meaning that the rights of the citizen are transformed from seasonal rights that begin with each election and end with its end into permanent, continuous and direct rights that are practiced on a daily basis and closely (Saglie and Vabo, 2009, pp. 382–401). In this sense, it is distinguished from representative democracy that is practiced through the mediation of the elected, who may abandon the role of approaching the citizen and involving him in decision-making, and abandoning him as soon as the electoral process ends. If the nature of participatory democracy is its continuity, then representative democracy is circumstantial and limited to a specific time period (Prins, Cuijpers, Lindseth, and Rosina, 2017,p. 375).

Also, the characteristic of representative democracy does not necessarily mean the existence of a real democracy, because fair and free elections are not only the guarantor of democracy, but they can sometimes prepare for it and be a justification for limiting the dynamism of the citizen and his actual participation, thus turning into a situational dictatorship, especially with the transformation of an considerable group of politicians to professionals in politics with what this means of accumulating electoral periods and accumulating all forms of political fraud and cutting off any political contact with citizens (Hussain and Howard, 2021, p. 163).

These processes require elected councils in local groups to promote a culture of listening and interaction, sharing responsibility and knowledge with the citizen, openness to community actors, including civil society organizations and the private sector, and the participation of everyone who can be included from the city's inhabitants from neighborhood associations and clubs, these are processes that establish the values of abandonment of authoritarianism over the central monopolization of the decision-making process.

Participatory democracy constitutes the institutional framework through which citizenship practice, cooperation and consultations are achieved between various institutions and public interests on the one hand, and associations, non-governmental organizations, individuals and groups on the other hand. This is to improve the living conditions of people, defend their freedoms, and enable them to enjoy basic rights and development that meets the conditions for progress and prosperity, within the framework of a modern state dominated by rights and law, in which participation, pluralism and good governance are secured, and the foundations of social solidarity are laid in which everyone enjoys security, freedom, dignity, equality, equal opportunities, social justice and the foundations for a decent living, within the scope of the correlation between the rights and duties of citizenship.

The participatory democracy approach is employed and incorporated in the formulation of local public policy, with the aim of supporting the selection of rational alternatives to the administrative decisions taken by the councils of local groups at the

local level to run the affairs of the city and move the wheel of development in line with the demands of the population (Hosein, 2014, pp. 642–646). The practice of participatory democracy depends on the existence of institutions that allow the participation of members of society in making decisions that concern them. It also depends on an intellectual position and a willingness to tolerate and respect others, and is based on a general willingness to accept differences of opinion and differences. (Ibid).

We consider that participatory democracy is a higher element than representative democracy, because participatory democracy is based on a sound democratic principle, which is betting on the citizens and giving them the actual, self-participatory value side by side with the state, because the state alone does not make progress without the citizen, and the citizen without the state does not create a civilization. This means that citizens' participation in making decisions that concern them is the essence of democracy. The system of participatory democracy depends on the intensity of popular participation, which makes it suitable for revolutionary situations that are characterized by public mobilization, high political awareness, and a pervasive feeling of the need for a person to exercise the right to participate in determining the course of society.

2.1 The emergence of participatory democracy

Landemore and Howarth believe that the transformations in the decision-making process are only part of the deep and rapid comprehensive transformations known to the global community led by advanced societies (Landemore, 2015, pp.166–191). The need for change and the emergence of new social variables and demands made reformulating the economic and political system one of the major priorities in the countries of the world, and accordingly questioning the role of institutions and the status and responsibility of the state in this equation. The birth of participatory democracy, then, was not isolated from the new philosophy in the management of public action and the tendency to give the "local dimension" an essential place in this measure (Howarth, Bryant, Corner, Fankhauser, Gouldson, Whitmarsh and Willis, 2020, pp. 1107–1115). If, since World War II, public policies have been based on the idea of the necessary intervention of the state, the economic crisis and its social repercussions have imposed a transition from a central government in which the state controls to a rule based on the plurality and difference of actors and considering the "local dimension" as a strategic station in restructuring action and public policy.

However, this saying does not mean the complete absence of the state, but rather suggests a desirable model that can be called the contractual state, as it is a state not based on exclusion and coercion, but on negotiation and listening (Springborg, 1987,pp. 395-433). According to this perspective, it is the one who is keen on the synthetic solution between different points of view and interests, the state, which was the main financier of services, its role is now limited to helping to ensure meeting and communication, helping to resolve disputes and putting partners at the same table, removing legal and financial barriers and overseeing negotiations more than taking decisions or imposing its point of view.

Thus, the state sought to relinquish some of its competencies in favor of local actors: from local groups, civil society and the private sector and their participation in making public goals and decision-making in various aspects of social life and forming a pattern of local action characterized by participatory democracy.

In addition to this, participatory democracy contributed, as we mentioned earlier, to the revision of the concept of politics because of its strong connection with the revision of the concept of public policies and the management of public affairs, and its repercussions on economic management and on the concept of development itself, reluctance on the political field and the low rate of political participation so that democracy is nothing but a necessary ritual for the rulers and turns into a mechanism that operates for itself in without need of citizens and serves the interest of a very isolated and limited group at the expense of other social groups with what this brings of social exclusion and weak involvement in local and national development, as there is no local development without the actual participation of the citizen in decision-making, the real entrance to building a mature democracy (Nabatchi, Gastil, Leighninger, and Weiksner, 2012, pp. 56, 140).

Participatory democracy, then, is nothing but a direct product of the inability of public policies to achieve social justice, rid social disparities, address negative social influences, a desire to shift desires and hopes towards local areas, and a restructuring of public action and the involvement of various actors in sharing the bill of the crisis resulting from the applied neoliberal policies (Qvortrup, 2013, p. 72).

Despite the advantages that participatory democracy has, it has not been without flaws and thus criticism. Some researchers have addressed the problem of participatory democracy in a number of points that can be summarized as follows: that it is inclusive democracy that increases the risk of forming an authoritarian majority (Baker, Lynch, Cantillon, and Walsh, 2004, pp. 152-169). Also, participatory democracy may lead to destabilization through excessive mobilization, as participation and excessive demands can destabilize the political system. In participatory democracy, the quality of political decisions is neglected resulting long-term strategic problems that are difficult to contain, and through participatory democracy, citizens try to maximize individual personal interest and are motivated only to cooperate for the common good under special circumstances, and one of the most prominent defects of participatory democracy it is an overestimation of citizen skills. Citizens who are supposed to make reasonable decisions may not be able to act if their opinion does not match the opinion of the majority. Added to all this is the problem of dividing the audience into active and inactive audiences: usually only active citizens participate. How can citizens who are inherently passive, but still eligible to vote, participate in the decision-making process? As the self-interested, rational member has little incentive to participate because he lacks the skills and knowledge to be effective, making it cost effective to rely on officials' expertise."

Through the above, it can be said that participatory democracy overlaps with other concepts, most notably decentralization, good governance and civil society,

the relationship of participatory democracy with good governance is obvious, and the concepts of each party overlap with the other making it difficult to disengage between them, and with a simple definition of good governance as "not excluding anyone from human activity in the development process" as it is carried out by elected political leaders, and administrative cadres committed to developing the resources of society, advancing citizens by improving the quality of their lives and their well-being, with their consent and through their participation and support(Fung and Wright, 2003, p. 91)". What can be said about the relationship that links the two concepts is an integrative relationship, as it is not possible to imagine democracy without rational governance and it is not possible to imagine good governance without being in a democratic sphere, good governance is based on consensus within society and decision-making, that is, on the inclusion of the citizen as a primary actor, which will allow the consolidation of the principle of participatory democracy, starting with setting priorities, passing through the provision of information and setting policies and concluding with its implementation, also, achieving the rule of law, ie the consolidation of democracy, will only be achieved by achieving development in all its aspects, dependent on good governance based on the participation of citizens (Vitale, 2006, p. 745). So, the establishment of rational governance is an inevitable result of the consolidation and embodiment of participatory democracy (Wolfe, 1985, p.378).

In order to identify governance as rational, Jamie P. Horsley and Anuradha Joshi put a set of pillars on which it is based, which can be considered as the conditions or components of participatory democracy (Horsley, 200, Joshi, 2010, Souza. 2001, 32). These pillars are participation and transparency, accountability and legitimacy, efficiency and responsiveness:

- *Participation*: which means providing the means to participate and contribute to the decision-making processes.

- *Transparency*: by allowing citizens to access administrative documents by dispensing the principle of confidentiality.

- *Accountability*: It is through subjecting decision makers to oversight by citizens, and this is related to the amount of information allowed to be viewed and by all legal means.

- *Legitimacy*: the administrative bodies to acquire the consent of citizens to work in accordance with the provisions of the law.

- *Efficiency*: meaning the ability of licensed agencies to transfer resources into programs and projects that meet the needs of citizens.

- *Responsiveness*: it is the administrative bodies' listening to the citizens' demands and seeking to achieve them by all available means.

2.2 The case of Palestine

The Palestinians have never had a space truly free from outside interference for the exercise of democracy. Since the Ottoman Empire and the British Mandate to the

State of Israel, imperial and colonial regimes imposed repressive measures to curb Palestinian politics and democratic expression. Despite these circumstances, the Palestinians have always been trying to regain control of political activity. The first major time that Palestinians practiced democracy was when Fatah assumed the leadership of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1969. Israel considered the reform of the PLO and its alignment under Arafat's leadership as a serious threat, and sought to marginalize and weaken it. For example, in 1976 the Israeli authorities imposed municipal elections in the West Bank with the aim of creating independent administrative regions that would negotiate directly with the occupying authorities. The Israeli occupation administration hoped to install local leaders in order to weaken the authority of the PLO, then still in exile, and take its place as the representative of the Palestinian people. The weekly magazine Al-Hadaf1 issued by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine indicated that the Israeli regime gave the Palestinians artificial independence within the framework of the Israeli state. However, the elections resulted in the opposite of what Israel had hoped for, as pro-PLO representatives were elected, which enhanced the organization's legitimacy in the eyes of the people in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Journal of Palestine Studies, 1976, p. 226).

Palestinian political democracy reached its climax in the 1980s and early 1990s, during the first intifada. Law professor George Bisharat described it as: The most democratic of the Palestinian people's movements, inflaming popular sentiment and activism, temporarily transferred the capacity for political initiative from the hands of diaspora leaders and political reformers to the hands of a young, decentralized leadership in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (Bisharat, 2013).

The mobilization efforts during that period were led by a unified leadership of civil institutions and others that sought to obstruct the Israeli regime, as many unions, student organizations, cooperative societies, and popular committees established a revolutionary consensus on the formation of a "popular authority." Linda Tabar explains that "the authority of the Palestinian people focused on creating new structures that could provide an alternative to capitalist economic exploitation and patriarchal domination." Palestinian women made intense efforts during the first intifada (1987-1993) and made their way to participate in the political and mobilization spaces that were previously dominated by men (Tabar, 2013, pp. 18-19). However, the promising signs in that period promising the practice of revolutionary democracy quickly faded with the start of the Oslo Accords in 1993, because the suppression of the intifada and the start of negotiations between the PLO and Israel was the beginning of the elimination of the political Palestinian struggle.

Oslo witnessed the establishment of the Palestinian Authority to be an interim government and the nucleus of the State of Palestine. Given the weak ability of the PA to generate funds, it relied heavily on donor aid that flooded the West Bank and Gaza Strip under the umbrella of institution building and democracy promotion. However, aid's real goal of consolidating neoliberal policies and strengthening the power of the PA's security services revealed a well-established agenda among donors,

and expressed the process of "democratization," according to Laila Farsakh, who believes that this process resulted from the deliberate marginalization of "political parties, parliamentary institutions, trade unions and people's committees in favor of strengthening non-governmental organizations, and because of the adoption of "a neoliberal agenda that makes the market the basis for change" (Farsakh, 2012, p. 13).

The Ministry of Local Government of the Palestinian Authority adopted a specific series of internal regulations and bylaws that were prepared in accordance with the law under the Ministry's supervision. It is worth noting that most of these regulations relate to matters that the law grants to local councils to establish them and not to the minister, which is inconsistent with the decentralized concept of local government that the ministry seeks to find (Elstub and Escobar, 2019, p. 369).

At the same time, the Ministry did not complete the development of special regulations and policies related to the work of local bodies, such as the system for employees of local authorities, human resources management, financial systems and procurement. Therefore, there are no clear policies regarding any decisions that can be taken in the ministry's office in the governorate, or any decisions that should be transferred to the center. In this situation, taking decisions is random, and large and small issues are dealt with in the same way. As a result, the organized legal system in general is not fixed or clear. Likewise, the laws that existed before the establishment of the PA related to the responsibilities and powers of the governor in (taken from the Egyptian or Jordanian system). Previous laws and Israeli military orders regarding certain issues such as urban planning still exist, and besides the lack of elections, the law creates more unclarity.

The legalization of participatory democracy: The amended Palestinian law consecrates the state's encouragement for participatory democracy at the level of local groups, and broadens consultation by establishing new consultative institutions with the executive authority, such as Civil Service Affairs (Article No. 87), and the Supreme Judicial Council (Article No. 100). (Ismail, 2005, p. 92)

(Article No. 2) of the Basic Law states that the people are the source of powers, and they exercise them through the legislative, executive and judicial authorities on the basis of the principle of separation of powers in the manner set forth in this Basic Law. (Article No. 85).[2] Also stipulates that the country shall be organized by law into local administrative units ... Each unit shall have a council that is directly elected, as stipulated in the law (4).[3] (Ismail, ibid).

This participatory perception, which allows the expansion of the fields of consultation and participation with the aim of strengthening participatory democracy in all management institutions and at all levels for the sake of rational local public governance and strong citizen participation, as it would guarantee the effectiveness of

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2. "Amended Basic Law on the Judicial and Legislative System in Palestine," Al-Moqtafi, last modify April 13th, 2021, http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=14138

3. The Judiciary and Legislation System in Palestine - Al-Muqtafi - Prepared by the Institute of Law at Birzeit University. http://muqtafi.birzeit.edu/pg/getleg.asp?id=14138

public activity, strengthen social peace and cohesion, improve the living framework of citizens, and upgrade the quality of services.

Elected councils in general and local councils in particular, are considered the natural framework for citizens' participation in managing public affairs.

Perhaps this is clearly demonstrated by increasing the number of local councils whose members are elected to contribute to strengthening participatory democracy, which would allow citizens to participate in making decisions at the municipal level and following up on their implementation. It is also an appropriate framework for citizens to intervene in determining development priorities at the local level.

In order to advance the reality of the Palestinian community that suffered during the previous eras, before the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1993, the Ministry of Local Government of the Palestinian Authority developed a new vision for the Palestinian local system, and in light of this vision, the Palestinian local system is formed of two levels (Ismail, ibid):

- The first level: It is located at the top of the structural pyramid of this level. The central authority is represented by the Ministry of Local Government with its headquarters in Ramallah and another in Gaza. The ministry has branch offices.
  (Directorates or offices in the governorates) that exercise their competencies within the boundaries of the governorate, and they are directly accountable to the ministry (center).
- The second level: It is the decentralized (local) level, which is represented by local councils and bodies.

As the number of municipalities until 1994 was (30) municipalities along with (109) village councils in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. After the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority and the establishment of the Ministry of Local Government, the number of local government units increased to (120) municipalities, (251) village councils, and (127) Project committees or development committees. In addition, there are (49) joint service councils and (17) regional project planning committees for Joint development in various parts of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.[4]

In the third reading, the Legislative Council approved the Palestinian Local Authorities Bill, and it was referred to the President of the Palestinian Authority for approval. It was issued on 12/10/1997, bearing the number (1) of 1997 (Al-Moqtafi, ibid).

The head of the local authority is elected from within the elected members. As for the powers of the councils, it is defined by the law in a list that includes no less than 27 items and includes planning cities, streets and buildings, building licenses, water, electricity and others. The council has the right, with the approval of the minister, to lay down regulations to enable it to carry out any functions or to exercise any of the

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4. Project committees are committees consisting of three to five members in localities with a population of less than a thousand people.

powers mentioned in the law. The law includes a new clause with regard to the joint service councils, as, with the approval of the neighboring local bodies, the minister may establish joint service councils for a converging group of local bodies. They the law included forty articles related to all the councils' powers and their relationship with the central authority. Council activities are subject to monitoring by the Ministry of Local Government and its organizational role.

In addition to the Palestinian Local Authorities Law No. (1) of 1997, the legal framework regulating local government in Palestine includes Law No. (5) of 1996 related to the election of councils of Palestinian local bodies, which means organizing the electoral representation of chairpersons and members of local councils (Hilal, 1998, p. 18).

This law represents an important event in the field of local government, and its guarantee that local government is at this level is democratic, by organizing the process of electing heads and members of Palestinian local bodies, a process that was long disrupted during the occupation period, especially after the 1976 elections. For a period of nine years, it remained mere ink on paper, since it was not implemented on the ground until December 2004, when partial elections were held for a number of local bodies, affecting twenty-six local authorities in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

The application of participatory democracy allows for the participation in imposing oversight on development programs decided by local councils, especially with regard to projects of priority and importance to citizens and everything that has implications and impacts on the people's lives, especially the environmental impacts. In this regard, Article (3) of the Environmental Law within the framework of Sustainable Development Project stipulates a set of principles on which environmental protection is based, including Information and Participation Principles , whereby every person has the right to be aware of the state of the environment and the right to participate in practical measures (Ismail, ibid). That precedes the decision-making about the establishment of projects that may cause harm to the environment.

The reality of participatory democracy in Palestine: The official discourse in Palestine focuses on the necessity of community engagement in order to build socialist democracy and contribute to building policies, strengthening its path and striving to achieve its goals. The same discourse calls for officials to participate with the broad community through fulfilling their pledges. It also requires that the local councils relationship with the youth be solid, based on trust and open dialogue without tutelage, to broaden the base of participatory democracy, achieve consensus around the higher interests of the country, and to avoid conflict and rift between generations.

The years of division after the legislative elections that took place in 2006, and preparation to end this division through the holding of new elections during 2021, have led to the existence of programs to strengthen participatory democracy, by involving the largest possible number of citizens in the preparatory elections that precede the general elections. Therefore, work is being done to find appropriate formulas to embody citizen participation in the conduct of local affairs, and to expedite the

development of appropriate mechanisms that allow responding to the aspirations of citizens, that is with existence of several legal articles in Palestinian legislations calling for the establishment of participatory democracy, the elimination of bureaucracy and bribery in all its forms, and the improvement of public service.

The Palestinian Authority, in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations Development Program, works to boost the capacity of local authorities and civil society to promote local development. An agreement has been signed to finance the "democracy promotion" program funded by the European Union. Since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the European Union has supported democracy in Palestine. During the period between 1994 and 1998, approximately 231 million euros were allocated to projects related to the promotion of democracy and human rights in Palestine, accounting for 52% of all European aid to the Palestinian Authority. During the period 2002-2003, the European Union spent nearly 7 million Euros to reform and modernize the Palestinian judicial system, and to establish the Palestinian Judicial Training Institute. It held several human rights courses for the security services, in addition to about 16 million euros to build a police training center in Jericho (Abu, 2016). The European Union imposed the element of conditionality by declaring that any violation of human rights and principles of democracy gives the the EU the full right to suspend European aid to the PA in a step to push the PA to implement reforms in financial institutions and transparency (Al-Ezz 2016).

However, despite this European support for the democratic process in the Palestinian territories, the concept of democracy and participatory democracy is still empty of its content, ink on paper and glamorous slogans in light of the absence of transparency, rampant manifestations of corruption, the tyranny of central management, and the difficulty of obtaining information in a timely manner. Field data confirm that citizen participation in the conduct of his municipality's affairs, as stipulated by law, is not applied due to the lack of mechanisms and means to implement these laws.

We find that the aforementioned legislations and laws confirm that the real participation of citizens in the conduct of local affairs takes place through development initiatives, implementation of projects and their follow-up, but the absence of mobilization in the local scope makes these initiatives non-existent at the level of elected councils, and their activation is undertaken by governors appointed by the central government instead of elected and citizens.

Palestinian society also witnesses the citizens' reluctance to fulfill their role in social and development participation, and the educated class, in turn, turned away from giving their opinions and ideas to the bodies that were to be elected in various development activities and initiatives due to the loss of confidence in their representatives and the absence of communication between the two parties. That confirms the decline of the culture of community participation over the years, despite what was known about this community previously, its initiatives to prepare and clean the perimeter, and to implement urban projects for the public benefit.

In view of the political stalemate due to the political division between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, participatory democracy becomes necessary, the aim of which is to consecrate citizen participation with an active presence of all social groups in consultation and dialogue on issues of local affairs. All political parties are obliged to democratize from within and open up to society. It is required that the parties establish a culture of dialogue in the public sphere and promote it, as they were created for the same purpose. In order for this to be achieved, the mechanisms of participation in their work should be upgraded, so that their work is permanent, not circumstantial.

The success of this advanced form of participatory democracy depends on the existence of a strong, active, informed and enthusiastic civil society and the presence of citizens aware of the meaning of democracy, with the middle class and the educated class in general who already withdrew from political action.

The authorities should also hold local elections that renew the legitimacy of local councils, and then open channels of communication, dialogue, and rapprochement with youth and other age groups that use information technology as a means to express different opinions without restrictions, and lay the foundations for practicing "digital democracy" within local groups, after the state of non-response increased among the various segments of society, and an almost comprehensive state of mistrust and complacency has arisen for appointed officials who have been overtaken by the ever-growing digital community movement.

3. Digital Democracy

3.1 Concept and Challenges

Since the early 1960s, new information and communications technologies (ICTs) have been presaged by futurists as holding enormous potential in current practices in political communication, and the reflections of this have led to the creation of a rapidly expanding multidisciplinary discourse and to an ever-evolving body of literature that addresses a range of issues and implications for information technology and communications of the political process in both theory and practice (Aichholzer 2020, p. 47).

The terms often used to refer to this topic are "electronic democracy" and "digital democracy". The use of concepts such as "remote democracy", "virtual democracy" or "electronic democracy" was largely confined to the early stages. Various attempts have been made to structure the historical development of this discourse and the different views on it.

Thus despite the long history of these concepts, ideas, and intentions behind them, no common and agreed-upon terms have yet been developed, and there are no generally agreed upon definitions. Among the many somewhat different concepts we can distinguish definitions with a normative tendency, as well as definitions that are more impartial. We can link each of these definitions as well to one of the basic models of democracy described above.

In what follows, we will briefly attempt to approach some of them in order to narrow the basic concepts and define the conceptual framework for our analysis of digital tools and systems.

A set of contributions that focus on theoretical and practical issues related to the relationship between new media and democracy provide an essential and reliable starting point. Some introduce "digital democracy" as a key concept and provide a definition of its normative components:

Digital democracy means the use of computer information and communication technology (ICT) in all types of media (eg the Internet, interactive broadcasting, and smartphone) for the purposes of promoting political democracy or citizen participation in the various manifestations of democratic practice (Richardson and Emerson, 2018).

This concept was then reformulated in more independent and impartial terms: "We define digital democracy as a set of attempts to practice democracy without limiting time, place, conditions and other physical factors, using ICT as an aid rather than a substitute for traditional "analog" political practices (Netchaeva, 2002, p.405).

In a recent contribution, a more succinct definition was given than the previous one: "Digital democracy can be defined as the pursuit and practice of democracy in any way using digital media in political communication via the Internet and also by an offline medium (Ibid). Here a distinction must be made between 'internet' and" Offline" because of course political activities do not only happen on the Internet but also in other media.

Hacker and Van Dijk tend to side the term "digital democracy" as a stronger concept than all other related concepts for various reasons. However, this does not mean that digital democracy will replace the use of traditional means of communication and face-to-face communication. Experimentally, different combinations of virtual and traditional media are currently the most popular (Dijk and Van, 2003, p. 319).

Although they reject the term "e-democracy" as being too general (since some of the older mediums of broadcasting or telephony were also electronic), other modern concepts reinforce the concept of "e-democracy" which is a term synonymous with "digital democracy" (Ibid). For example: "E-democracy refers to the use of ICT in political dialogues and decision-making processes as complementing or contradicting traditional means of communication such as face-to-face interaction or one-way media."

Experts Coleman and Norris also emphasized the preference for "e-democracy" as a key concept. After presenting a set of definitions of e-democracy, they pointed out basic commonalities and opted for a broad normative understanding of the concept, i.e.: "The common denominator between them is the assumption that e-democracy has to do with the use of ICT to enhance democratic structures and processes. "E-democracy is top-down and bottom-up concerning the institutional processes of hierarchies and looser network arrangements (Coleman, and Norris, 2005)." In light of the different definitions and terminology presented in the political literature we

will use the terms "e-democracy" and "digital democracy" interchangeably as key concepts in our analysis of digital tools and systems to promote participatory and direct democracy.

The Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Member States on e-Democracy is a milestone among the political frameworks related to e-Democracy, as its core consists of twelve recommendations including the following two main recommendations:

1. Consider taking advantage of the opportunities offered by e-democracy to strengthen democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes.

2. Considering and implementing e-democracy as support and consolidation of democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes through information and communication technology and linking it to citizen engagement...

And here we mention two basic principles: When introducing or taking steps to improve e-democracy, stakeholders must consider the following principles of e-democracy:

- E-Democracy as a support and consolidation of democracy, democratic institutions and democratic processes through information and communication technology is above all related to democracy and its main objective is the electronic support of democracy.

- E-Democracy is one of many strategies to support democracy, democratic institutions, democratic processes and the dissemination of democratic values. It is an additional, complementary and interrelated process with the traditional processes of democracy; each process has its advantages. Among the guiding principles, the Council of Europe document refers to "different sectors of e-democracy" (including more explanations in its paragraphs): "e-democracy includes in particular e-parliament, e-legislation, e-justice, e-mediation, e-environment e-election, e-referendum, e-initiative, e-voting, e-consultation, e-petitions, e-campaigns, and e-survey; Benefit from e-participation, e-deliberations and e-forums (The Council of Europe. Council of Europe Publishing, The Committee of Ministers, 2009).

Based on these approaches, we can summarize our use of the two main concepts of e-democracy and e-participation as follows: We understand e-democracy as the practice of democracy under the support of digital media in political communication and political participation. E-participation includes all forms of political participation and utilization of digital media, including formal institutional mechanisms and informal civic engagement.

3.2 *Challenges of the application of digital democracy*

The application of the principles of digital democracy faces many challenges in developing countries in particular, as some political systems in these countries do not believe in rights of communication, freedom of expression, pluralism in the field of media and active public participation in communication messages and the multiple directions of the communication process (Cropf, 2017, p. 16).

Faced with these challenges, many controversial issues arise related to the application of the concept of media of digital democracy on the ground, such as support for political issues of various orientations.

And with the ability to generate and create information on a large scale, new and accurate methods of controlling it are born. This means that digital democracy is just an illusion, the freedom that is monitored is, in fact, not a freedom. Also, the huge amount of indefinable information cannot be absorbed by its enormity, and therefore it is sifted based on the expertise of specialized engineers so that a group of vital information is broadcasted within a vast amount of superficial information that is difficult to separate what is useful from unuseful, and makes the trackers of knowledge in a state of loss (Ibid).

The electronic democratic process, especially in politically developed countries, is characterized by four dimensions, which can be described as follows (Shanab, 2015, p. 23):

- Electronic voting systems: They allow the voter to vote once for the same electoral round, and are easy to use and access by citizens. And it became possible to participate in the referendum electronically without the need to go to voting centers.

- Political activities via the Internet: encourage the publication of the agendas of the various parties and forces, the development of the political relationship between the people and the state agencies, and the development of the concept of electronic popular gatherings through the creation of electronic groups.

- Electronic transparency: is done through the publication of government documents over the Internet except security and military documents or the harm of publishing them is greater than the harm of concealing them This step helps governments fight corruption and strengthen monitoring mechanisms.

- Democratic participation: where the opinion of the people is surveyed electronically on issues of public concern, and government decisions are published before they are drawn up in order to take citizens' views on it.

The merging of information and communication technology with political action in democratic systems has, in fact, led to the creation of new mechanisms and methods of work for democratic practice and political work, in what we can call ICT Democ-

racy or Digital Democracy, which is a product of integration between the values and essence of democracy, as a political concept and social, information and communication technology, as a mechanism and a means to promote the first. Information and communication technology has played a vital role in supporting democracy around the world, with what it enabled in terms of expression tools and strategies for action in the public political sphere, and in a way that affected the performance of traditional institutions, and in the way that it enabled an open public domain of political ideas and information. But the challenge that remains in developing countries, including the Arab countries, is the digital divide, which is the most dangerous dimension in the electronic democratic process, given that the percentage of citizens who know the use of technology in these countries is still modest leading to the danger of monopoly the information is on the part of a small group of society that has the ability to access government websites, at the expense of the majority of citizens.[5]

The reality of digital democracy in the Palestinian territories: The internet gave new horizons for expression and opinion for pro the authority and those who are against it as well, which led to the emergence of the term virtual opposition, which took a global character in light of the network's ability to achieve communication between activists in various countries, this supports the trends of digital democracy at the level Global. In Palestine, several accounts appeared on social media and blogs, which played a prominent role in raising issues of concern to public opinion related to the daily concerns of citizens, such as unemployment, the high cost of living, high prices, deterioration of roads, poor public utility services, and administrative bureaucracy, to issues with a political dimension such as abuse of authority and corruption in all its forms, whether against the authority in the West Bank or the ruling authority in the Gaza Strip.

The contents of what is published in the communication networks and blogs in their handling of topics vary between seriousness and cynicism, with sarcastic comments and jokes and videos, to sober articles calling for fighting corruption and bureaucracy and improving public service, as well as criticizing the authorities and calling for change and real reforms that contribute to ending the political division and renewing political legitimacy by holding elections regularly.

The membership of Palestinian youth in groups formed through social networks opened the door to political practice in the information space. Political affairs have become a fundamental variable in these networks, and this can be demonstrated by three basic axes (Shat and Pimenidis, 2017, p. 295):

- Mobilizing public opinion: The groups in social networks play an effective role in mobilizing public opinion towards some political issues. These networks in the Palestinian territories have become a field for calling for protests and encouraging strikes, and they have

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5. The first Arab country in using Internet is Saudi Arabia in (30th in the world) while the Palestinian Territories placed in the 98th in 2019.

also opened a new field for electoral advertising and electoral com-
petition, especially in the legislative elections that are being prepared
for in 2021.

- The emergence of virtual citizenship: social networks opened the
  way for the exercise of citizenship issues via the Internet, and it was
  linked to the rights and duties of socio-political origin; In light of the
  tensions experienced by the national state in the Arab neighborhood,
  and the backsliding of political rights in real-world contexts, the vir-
  tual society demands political rights.

- Activating the role of civil society: There are many civil society or-
  ganizations, including civil associations, political parties and trade
  unions that have built rules for them in the virtual society, which
  promote through social networks the ideas and policies they adopt.
  Some organizations have successfully used these networks in attract-
  ing new supporters to their ranks.

Several Palestinian bloggers succeeded in arousing the interest of Internet users,
such as the Palestinian blogger "Nizar Banat" who posted a video on his Facebook
account in which he criticized the Palestinian Authority for dealing with political is-
sues related to security coordination with the Israeli occupation authorities (Alaraby,
2020). In the early morning of June 24th, 2021, security forces belong to the Pales-
tinian Authority broke into Nizar Banat's house in the Hebron Governorate in the
West Bank and arrested him, few hours later the PA announced his death, which is
believed happened because of a brutal treatment with him.

Among the most famous Palestinian bloggers who were pursued by the censor-
ship, judicial follow-up and imprisonment, "Muhammad al-Karoui, Jihad Abdo and
Amer Hamdan", who were arrested in the West Bank by the Palestinian Author-
ity after they participated in the mobilization of a movement known as the "United
Movement against Corruption," which was organized in the summer of 2019, after
publishing documents and files showing the extent of corruption in the Palestinian
Authority institutions, these documents were widely circulated among social media
activists (Ultrapal, 2020). The security forces intervened in dispersing the demon-
stration and arrested a number of its participants.

These arrests of social media activists were based on a law issued in June 2017, by
President Mahmoud Abbas, who signed the Cybercrime Law without prior consul-
tations (Aid, 2018). Instead of enhancing the digital security of citizens, the law has
become a tool for suppressing domestic opposition. This raised ire of civil society
institutions that demanded the amendment of the law, this incident highlighted the
legitimacy crisis in the Palestinian Authority government.

The Gaza Strip witnessed a similar movement entitled "We Want to Live", which
calls for fighting corruption and providing a minimum standard of living in the se-
verely affected area for several internal and external factors, most notably the Israeli

blockade imposed on the population since 2007, but this movement was repressed and some of its participants were arrested at the hands of Palestinian security of the ruling authority in the Gaza Strip (Abu Aisha, 2019).

This situation comes in view of the fact that the concept of security has expanded to include technological threats resulting from the communications revolution, about which a defensive position must be taken. Thus, some governments see the flow of information across unrestricted borders as a potential threat to their national security, especially if this information flow coincides with the state of economic stagnation and backwardness, with the absence of real democracy and the increase in rates of political repression.

Hence, the real benefit from the abundance of information and the communication revolution, can only be provided with essential conditions, the most important of which are absolutely freedom of expression and actual democracy. Thus, governments in developing countries will use the pretext of security as a reason to suppress freedom of expression through various means of communication, is a flimsy excuse, as the concept of security in this form has become a very narrow concept. Because it was specially formulated for the security of institutions and governments and the interests of those in charge of them only, without giving importance to individuals' freedom to obtain real information.

The ruling authorities in Palestine, whether in the West Bank or in the Gaza Strip, established controls and issued laws to control and regulate electronic media in the country. However, these measures have become feared by some activists in this field, due to the official rhetoric hinting at restrictions on freedom of expression in electronic spaces. While some observers consider that the matter is nothing more than a step towards adapting the legal system to organize and upgrade electronic media to avoid information chaos and the spread of rumors and put an end to ethical slips and professional abuses, as some parties exploit these media to send messages that spread fear and suspicion among the Palestinian people and threaten their cohesion.

4. Digital Democracy for the Development of Participatory Democracy

Digital democracy does not, in fact, mean the invention of a new type of democracy, but rather an exercise of democracy known for its mechanisms and tools, that is, traditional democracy must exist in the first place before digital democracy emerges. And after the expansion of its practice, every citizen becomes involved in political life and social and contributes to decision-making related to his daily life (Hacker and Dijk, 2000, p. 6). Digital democracy becomes a form of participatory democracy, but with using digital technology and electronic media.

The participatory democracy needs information technology: In the pre-internet era, a major idea dominated the course of human behavior, as most individuals were reluctant to speak about politics, public affairs and human rights issues, whether in public places, in the family, or with co-workers. However, in the wake of the tremendous development of the Internet and the boom in information and communication

technology, including social networks and news and interactive websites, vast spaces and free spaces were provided to individuals and groups for discussion in all matters of life, especially political issues, and minorities were given an opportunity to freely express their political and intellectual views away from the pressures of society and the ruling political system.

The penetration of information and communication technology into the field of political action has led to the birth of new mechanisms and methods of work to express opinion and practice democracy, and to stimulate political participation in all its forms (peaceful demonstrations, electoral campaigns, etc.), in what we can describe as the ICT Democracy or digital democracy.

If participatory democracy expresses an approach to public policy-making and solving problems that encourages citizens to actively participate in discussing topics directly related to their daily affairs, and opens the path towards listening to the voice of citizens and civil society through entering into dialogue, while making an effort to receive different views, then here it appears the need to techniques (for participatory democracy) that enable consultation and dialogue without the need for a decision-making authority.

These techniques are represented by the mechanisms of practicing digital democracy, and the various technological means related to it that allow to fill the large gap between the ruler and the ruled and reformulate the relationship between them. The citizen, by virtue of this relationship, does not remain an isolated individual, but rather an element that has a language to express and communicate by. However, the matter requires strengthening the conditions for communication, which are seriousness in dialogue and debate, honesty and commitment, and the existence of a sincere intention on the part of the governing body to reach the reality of the problems and concerns raised through this participation and consultation.

The combination of communication and information technology and political action has produced new tools and methods of work in practicing the participatory democratic process in many countries, and has allowed for the dissemination of the appropriate climate to stimulate and strengthen political participation, such as political marketing and electronic electoral campaigns, electronic election via the Internet, and participation in the making of public policies, gaining supporters for specific cases.

The high rate of access to the Internet in developed countries and in a number of developing countries is the reason for the emergence of many political, economic and social initiatives that rely on social networks and modern means of communication in order to perpetuate the principles of participation (Anderson, and Rainie, 2020). It is now available for anyone to provide an opinion on issues of public interest. We find ourselves in front of a universal human phenomenon, which is the result of a deep interaction between the tools of the citizen's exercise of his political and democratic rights as stipulated in international conventions on the one hand, and the achievements of the information and communication technology revolution on the other

hand that requires its generalization to all countries that truly seek democracy and citizen participation in achieving security stability and development.

4.1 Prospects for digital democracy in the Palestinian territories

The digital political phenomenon is still shaping day after day, as the digital achievements in this era do not stop at a specific limit, but rather digital democracy is imposing itself on the social and political reality of societies that have opened up to media and communication technologies, which is imperative for all actors in the Palestinian Territories. The various political, social and human rights groups need to deal with it and ensure that it is invested in the service of the public interest.

The Palestinian government has placed the digital transformation project at the top of its priorities, within the plan, in order to provide the necessary conditions to help the industry and use of information and communication technologies flourish, whether at the level of the financial and business sector and financing mechanisms within the framework of the partnership between the public and private sectors, or what is related on the legal level, in order to facilitate and ease administrative procedures (Jamal, 2007,p. 204). The use of media and communication technology tools has also enabled citizens to address sensitive topics and issues through electronic discussion forums aimed at expanding the circle of dialogue and expressing opinion on government policies. Palestinian youth found on the Internet an outlet to express their opinions, ideas, and intellectual, social and political proposals, and the Internet became a space for them to practice digital democracy with greater freedom of expression, in addition to being available all the time for everyone.

In this context, Li and Prasad say "Indeed, Palestinians have articulated their subjectivities through myriad digitalized channels, including relaying their personal experiences and narratives as well as their political claims through videos, postings, and photos. Compared with the temporal and erasable nature of graffiti in the West Bank, the content in social media enjoys some degree of permanence and expandability. Indeed, the digitized content can be archived in the networked space and can be circulated and built upon through the networked community in an iterative manner (Li and Prasad, 2018, p. 499)".

Perhaps the most prominent thing in this phenomenon is the ability of these young people to reduce the dominance of traditional media over the making and production of news and information, and to break the state's monopoly on media and its control over the margins of freedom of expression within society. This is because the youth group is one of the social groups most open to other cultures, the most aspirational and ambitious, the keenest towards the values of renewal and change, and the most rebellious against the social and political standards and options that surround them.

However, since 2015, cybercrime has increased in Palestine, both in the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and in the West Bank. These crimes include identity theft, defamation, extortion, and especially the extortion of women. The Palestin-

ian Cybercrime Unit has initiated investigations into digital crimes committed by or against Palestinian citizens from countries such as Nigeria and Morocco. Palestinian ministries and officials have been targeted themselves by phishing and piracy campaigns. According to the Palestinian Police, this rise in digital crime is attributed to two main factors: The first is the increase in internet connectivity and the use of social media, and the second is the lack of laws that allow law enforcement officials to prosecute crimes committed through networks in the Internet (Aid, ibid).

Despite these governmental concerns and preventive measures, it is expected that digital democracy in Palestine will contribute to maximizing political and social impacts, as evidenced by the clear shift in patterns of use of the Internet in the country during recent years, in the direction of high rates of use among young people in particular, as a means of freedom of dialogue and expression, discussions through social media pages, and the establishment of virtual gatherings in order to raise social and professional demands, or to call for protests and expressing anger at government decisions. There are many examples of this phenomenon that the social scene in Palestine has known since the beginning of the "Arab Spring" uprisings, including:

- The outbreak of a popular protest movement in September 2012 against the successive waves of rising prices, which prompted thousands of protesters to take to the streets of the main cities in the West Bank, chanting slogans calling for the departure of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, as it quickly turned into violent confrontations in both Hebron and Nablus. The mostly peaceful demonstrations were led by youths angry at the worsening economic situation and widespread unemployment (Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies). Those demonstrations were one of the reasons that led to the resignation of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad several months later.

- In 2017, activists launched an electronic movement against the Palestinian Telecommunications Company because of the monopoly policy produced by the company and the exorbitant fees in exchange for bad services provided by the company that controls the telecommunications sector in the Palestinian territories (Qudsn Net, 2017), as a result of this movement, demonstrations erupted in various cities that led to encounters with the security forces and the arrest of a number of demonstrators, but the movement partially succeeded in obtaining some concessions from the telecommunications company, and the electronic movement is still effective and the Facebook page of the movement as of this writing has more than 260K likes.[6]

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6. The page on Facebook can be found this link: https://www.facebook.com/groups/428446937499489

There are many protest activities that started electronically and then took to the streets in the Palestinian territories, some of which are political, economic or social. This form of protest operation has been termed "digital protest," or "electronic civil disobedience," whose starting point is the means of social communication. Here, the primary role of government agencies is evident in positive interaction with the pulse of the street, and to prevent such protests from occurring by opening digital spaces for dialogue, consultation and participation in a permanent and continuous manner, and to make room for all ideas, visions and perceptions that did not find an opportunity to be expressed and heard by the authorities.

The problem, however, is that the truthful, realistic information revolution is difficult to achieve in non-democratic societies, and the opportunities to allow spread it depend on the flexibility of those governments and the available margin of freedom. This margin may allow the means of information technology and communication to survive and develop social, economic and political competition, or repression may be an alternative under the pretext of preserving public security to face risks that may threaten the ruling institutions and their interests. And since the Palestinian Authority declares that it adopts the democratic approach and calls for strengthening it through laws and legislation issued in this regard, it is necessary to adapt the tools of communication and information technology to positive interaction with community issues, and to make this sector carry a societal vision that stems from the principle of developing service sectors for citizens and changing the administrative mentality of staff of the state and its institutions, and then from the principle of disseminating the concepts of digital citizenship and the technological community on the basis of a strategy aimed at achieving participatory democracy and sustainable development. It is also possible, in the future, to poll members of the people electronically about controversial issues that may concern the citizen, and they are allowed to participate in the accountability process, when they have sufficient information on the performance of the government by publishing and documenting the minutes of the governmental and parliamentary sessions via the Internet and various technological means.

With the development of the digital system and the provision of a highly efficient protection system, citizens will be able to participate in electoral elections via the Internet, which leads to an increase in the rate of participation, the speed of issuance of results, and a relative reduction of fraud, in addition to reducing the mobilization of human resources required to manage the organization processes and oversee polling and counting votes, and reducing the financial costs that are spent on various electoral events in Palestine, especially in light of the talk about renewing the legitimacy of Palestinian institutions (the meaning here is to hold legislative and presidential elections) based on what the Palestinian political parties and movements agreed upon in the Cairo Dialogue at the beginning of 2021.

5. Conclusion

Although the principle of participatory democracy has been established in the Palestinian political system, which is currently being formed, especially at the beginning

of the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1993, and this culminated in holding elections to choose local representatives with significant powers in 2005-2006. However, a number of challenges led to the disruption of participatory democracy In Palestine, several parties bear the responsibility for this obstruction, as local councils have become of limited influence in light of the lack of renewal of their legitimacy and the appointment of their members and consequently their subordination to the central government. This situation prompted the Palestinian citizen to refrain from participating in public affairs due to its futility.

Under these circumstances, modern means of communication have emerged to provide an alternative that enables the public to express an opinion and this opinion can be heard by the concerned authorities, and thus encouraged an considerable sector of the people to engage more effectively in the practicing politics, and it is worth to mention on the extent of the impact of ICT such as social media on the Palestinian arena, not only by providing a space for participation and expression of opinion, but also provided a place where the Palestinians can meet, whereas the political geography imposed by the Israeli occupation prevented the Palestinians, where the residents of the Gaza Strip are separated from the residents of the West Bank, the residents of the West Bank are separated in cantons riven by Israeli settlements and checkpoints[7], and thus ICT has helped to solve a vital problem that was preventing the activation of the public participation, which is central for participatory democracy.

The electronic campaigns have helped the Palestinian street to regain momentum against influential parties, starting with the Israeli occupation, which is facing a documented Palestinian narrative that has received great interaction at the international level, and this was recognized by Israeli officials during the last war on the Gaza Strip in May 2021, the Palestinian activists also succeeded in challenging the ruling authorities in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and creating means of pressure on the authorities to stop or implement certain policies, although some activists paid a heavy price for defying the authorities, either by arrest or by death, as happened with the activist Nizar Banat in the summer of 2021.

One of the most important lessons offered by the Palestinian experience in this context is that the disruption of the traditional democratic path is not a sufficient reason to disrupt political participation, using available tools provided and without waiting for the traditional official bodies that are considered the first to be affected by digital democracy because their policies and practices are essential content for the topics that It is often critically addressed by practitioners of digital democracy. The Palestinian experience also shows that digital democracy has opened the way for everyone to participate and express his/her opinion, even if it is in a vulgar and inappropriate way and without accurate information about the topics at hand. Also, part of the educated elite and those with higher degrees are reluctant to use digital

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7. There are about 400 checkpoints in the West Bank restricting the movements of the Palestinian people.

means of communication to express their opinion, and thus some of the defects, we mentioned previously on participatory democracy, are manifested.

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