

EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL YOUTH'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL
ELECTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY.

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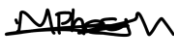
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DECLARATION

I Mphegi Musatondwa, declare that the thesis “Exploring the Perception of Rural Youth’s Participation in Political Election: A Case Study of Thulamela Municipality” hereby submitted for the Master’s DEGREE QUALIFICATION IN POLITICAL SCIENCES, at the University of Venda is my independent work, and I have not previously submitted similar work for qualification at another institution of higher education.

SIGNATURE: 

DATE: 21 February 2025

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this study to myself for demonstrating resilience and determination in the face of countless challenges. Despite the odds, I have pushed through and emerged stronger, and for that, I celebrate this achievement. Here's to the journey ahead and to the many more studies waiting to be explored.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANC	–	African National Congress
AU	–	African Union
BERA	–	British Educational Research Association
ECZ	–	Electoral Commission of Zambia
EFF	–	Economic Freedom Fighters
FODEP	–	Foundation for Democratic Process
IDEA	–	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IEC	–	Independent Electoral Commission
LM	–	Local Municipality
NGO	–	Non-Governmental Organisation
SABC	–	South African Broadcasting Corporation
SA	–	South Africa
SDG	–	Sustainable Development Goal
Stats SA	–	Statistics South Africa
UN	–	United Nations
UNDP	–	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	–	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
UNIP	–	United National Independence Party
VAP	–	Voter Apathy Percentage
RCT	–	Rational Choice Theory

ABSTRACT

Since the end of apartheid in 1994, South Africa held elections every five years to promote democratic engagement and allow citizens to choose their representatives. Despite this democratic foundation, the political landscape revealed a concerning trend: South African youth increasingly became disinterested in participating in political processes, particularly elections. This study investigated the phenomenon of voter apathy among South African youth, focusing specifically on factors that influenced this disengagement among rural youth. Through a phenomenological approach, research analyzed the 2021 local government elections, revealing significant apathy among young voters, which undermined the principles of participatory democracy. Utilizing qualitative research methods, the study incorporated both primary and secondary data collection techniques, including interviews and document analysis. Purposive sampling was used to select 18 youth's from the Thulamela municipality, allowing for a focused examination of their attitudes and behaviours related to electoral participation.

Thematic analysis was employed to explore the findings from recorded interviews, providing insights into the experiences and perceptions of rural youth regarding elections. Ultimately, this study aimed to contribute to the understanding of youth voter apathy in rural areas and proposed actionable recommendations to enhance electoral engagement. The findings reveal a complex interplay of socio-economic factors and personal beliefs that shape the political attitudes of rural youth. By focusing on the lived experiences of these young individuals, the research highlights the distinctive challenges they face in the political arena, offering valuable insights into the broader implications of youth participation in democratic processes. This approach not only enriches the understanding of the phenomenon but also emphasizes the importance of incorporating the perspectives of marginalized groups in electoral discourse

Keywords: Youths, Elections, Voter apathy, participation, electoral democracy

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Before 1994, South Africa's politics was defined racially, where black people were denied civil liberties and constitutional rights (Teorell, 2012). The country was characterised by an Apartheid system that lasted 46 years, from 1948 to 1994 (Mattes, 2012). After apartheid ended in 1994, a constitution was implemented to introduce a democratic regime. This brought an increase in freedoms and rights, as well as expanded opportunities for political participation in 1996. This new constitution aimed to increase public deliberation in the government's consultative process. This revised constitution became law in 1996. The new school program was implemented in 1998 as a means of promoting democracy and teaching children about constitutional values (Mattes, 2012)

The end of Apartheid in the early 1990s marked a significant turning point in South Africa's political history. In 1994, the country held its first democratic elections, in which all citizens could participate regardless of race. The African National Congress (ANC) won the election, and its leader, Nelson Mandela, became the country's first black President. This marked the beginning of a new era of democracy in South Africa.

South Africa has held elections every five years, with the most recent elections in 2019 and 2024. The country's political landscape has changed significantly since the first democratic elections in 1994. The ANC was the dominant political party during the apartheid era and, in the early years of democracy, faced growing criticism for corruption and a lack of progress in addressing the country's social and economic challenges. This has led to new political parties and a more diverse political landscape in South Africa. Despite the challenges faced by South Africa, the country's democratic system has remained robust, with regular elections, a free press, and a vibrant civil society, characterised by the decline of youth participation in electoral affairs.

1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The profiling of elections in South Africa (SA) shows that youth are increasingly becoming less interested in participating in electoral affairs in the country, be it local government or national

elections. The country has continued to experience voter apathy among the youth since the beginning of the century. Youth apathy in a democracy is a matter of grave concern because the strength of any electoral democracy depends on the participation of the people. In the 2021 local government elections and 2024 National elections, South Africa received the lowest voter turnout since 1994, and the trends show that youths, who constitute a large part of South Africa's population, did not participate effectively. There is a considerable gap in the literature regarding youth voter apathy in South Africa in that it gives a blanket focus that does not demarcate urban and rural youth perception of electoral affairs of the country. For instance, Bekker et al. (2022) place too much emphasis on urban youth. This study will address this gap by conducting an in-depth examination of the perceptions of rural youth of elections in general. The main question, therefore, is: Are the rural youth motivated to exercise their democratic right to vote in the country's local government and national elections? What motivates them or demotivates them to vote? The study solicits the youth's perceptions on the conduct of elections in South Africa.

1.2. AIM OF STUDY

This study aims to explore the perception of rural youth's participation in political elections.

1.3. STUDY OBJECTIVES

1. To establish perceptions of rural youth participation on political elections in South Africa.
2. To examine factors contributing to the diminishing interest of rural youth in the country's electoral affairs.
3. To identify the trends in youth voter apathy.
4. To proffer some possible recommendations to increase youth interest in elections.

1.4. STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How do rural youth perceive participation in political elections in South Africa?

2. What factors contribute to rural youth's diminishing interest in the electoral affairs?
3. What are the trends of youth voter apathy?
4. What measures can be instituted to increase rural youth participation in elections in South Africa?

1.5 RESEARCH PARADIGM

Research paradigm refers to the theoretical ground or philosophical ground of the research. Research paradigms can also be referred to as how researchers view the world (Khrismak, 2020). This worldview, perspective, or school of thought influences how data is interpreted. The paradigm of this study is a constructivist approach because employed qualitative research methods such as case studies and interviews to provide or obtain different perspectives regarding the issue of youth's perceptions of participation in political elections.

1.6. RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design encompasses the comprehensive approach to collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and discussing data that address specific research questions (Thakur, 2021). The importance of research design lies in its ability to ensure that the research problem is addressed logically and clearly through the evidence gathered.

This study utilized a phenomenological research design, which focuses on understanding experiences from the individual's perspective (Lester, 1999). A phenomenological approach was chosen to gain insights into the perceptions of rural youth regarding their participation in political elections in South Africa. Creswell (2007) defines phenomenology as a study that describes the significance of the lived experiences of multiple individuals concerning a particular concept or phenomenon. This approach is particularly suitable for this study, as it seeks to explore the perceptions of rural youth regarding their involvement in political elections, necessitating that participants articulate their experiences.

1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach to address the research problem. Qualitative research can be used to understand how an individual subjectively perceives and gives meaning to their social reality. Qualitative research data requires in-depth interviews and diary accounts. This study used qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. This study analysed qualitative data using thematic analysis (Simply Psychology, 2021).

The study adopted a qualitative research design to explore the rural youth's perceptions of voting. Case studies are a methodology of inquiry in which the researcher investigates in-depth a program, occasion, movement, or process (Creswell, 2009). Case studies gather data about specific organisations, institutions, and events. A case study design was adopted for this study. The study uses a case study of Thulamela Municipality to investigate a contemporary phenomenon, which is perceptions of rural youth in political elections. In-depth interviews were conducted with youths aged 18 -35.

1.8. POPULATION

Population refers to the set or group of all the units on which the research findings are applied (Shukla, 2020). In other words, a population is a set of all the units with variable characteristics under study and for which research findings can be generalised. A research population is generally an extensive collection of individuals or objects that is the main focus of a scientific inquiry. .

The Vhembe District has a population of 1,402,779 people, up from 1,294,722 in 2011. According to the Community Survey 2016, most people resided in Thulamela (497,237). Thulamela LM is the most populated municipality in the district, while Musina LM is the least populous municipality. Global Insight notes that the district population grew by 0.9% in 2019 compared to 0.6 in 2006.

The population of this study is youth from Thulamela Municipality. According to the Local Government Structures Act 117 of 1998, Thulamela Local Municipality is a category B municipality. Vhembe District Municipality comprises four local municipalities, including Thulamela Local Municipality. The municipality is located at the easternmost point in the district. The municipality borders Mutale Municipality to the northeast, Makhado Municipality to the southwest on the east, and the Kruger National Park to the west. 47,7% of people live in Thulamela Local municipality in the entire Vhembe district. In this municipality, tribal areas are home to more than 85% of the residents (Stats SA, 2022)

1.9. SAMPLING

Sampling is the process of selecting a sample from the population. The process of sampling makes the research process to be easy and to be less expensive (Shukla, 2020). Sampling is also defined as a procedure to select a sample from an individual or a large population group for a certain kind of research purpose. Sampling is essential as it is too expensive and time-consuming to survey a whole population in a research study.

Because the Thulamela Municipality population is large, this study didn't not focus on the whole Thulamela Municipality population. Instead, it focuses on the youth because this study seeks to explore their perception of participation in political elections. The sample of this study comprised of youths from 18 years to 35 years. Sixteen (16) youths (8 females and 8 males) were interviewed. In this study, the researcher adopted convenience sampling which is a non-probability method whereby participants are selected based on availability. Convenience sampling refers to selecting members of a sample based on their convenient accessibility. In this technique, only available members were selected from those easily accessible to the researcher in this sampling. A non-probability sample is one in which each member of a population has yet to learn how likely he or she is to be chosen (Bhardwaj & Pooja, 2019).

1.10. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Data collection methods refer to the methods the researcher uses to collect data from suitable sources to help resolve or solve the study's research problem. Data collection methods are categorised into two, namely, primary and secondary data collection methods. A primary data collection method is a method used to collect data that has not been collected by anyone. Primary data can be categorized into quantitative and qualitative data. A secondary data collection method is a method that a researcher uses to collect data that has been collected before by other researchers. The researcher uses secondary data to answer new emerging questions not presented in the original study. As a result, the researcher comes up with data analysis that can solve the problem of the current study.

This study used both primary and secondary collection methods to collect data. Interviews and documentary review /analysis were used to collect data in this study. This helped ensure valid and reliable data through triangulation. In-depth interviews were conducted with youths to obtain insights into their perception of voting. In-depth interviews allow for capturing rich, descriptive data about how people think and behave and unfolding complex processes. Data was also collected using secondary document analysis methods. Such data was obtained from journals and books.

1.11. IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The author conducted in-depth interviews to gather insights from the youths of Thulamela Municipality regarding their perception of voting. The decision to use in-depth interviews is based on their efficiency in saving time and resources while providing valuable insights into the perspectives, values, and experiences of this demographic. These interviews are expected to yield more nuanced and detailed information compared to other data collection methods. The interview protocol comprised of a carefully crafted set of 15 open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses about the youth's views on participating in political elections.

1.12. DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) documents. To develop empirical knowledge and elicit meaning, document analysis requires examination and interpretation of data, as with other methods of qualitative research (Harding & Whitehead, 2013). Many documents were consulted to collect data. In this method, a researcher uses not just any document, but only those documents relevant to the study. Document analysis has the advantage of data availability because many documents are in the public domain. Such documents are obtainable from the Internet without payment, making document analysis a good option for qualitative research. In this study the researcher perused several documents and journals using Google Scholar and Science Direct to obtain the relevant data.

1.13. DATA SATURATION

Guest et al. (2006) define data saturation as a point at which the new data no longer brings new aspects or something that differs from the data already collected. As a result, new data becomes redundant as it repeats similar views or trends. In interviews, data saturation can be reached when a researcher hears the same comment repeatedly from the participants. At this point, the researcher stops collecting further data (Saunders et al., 2018). One of the data collection methods in this study was in-depth interviews with 8 young females and 8 young males from Thulamela municipality in Limpopo Province. During the interviews, the researcher interviewed more than 14 youths and their information was repeated, so the researcher stopped collecting data without reaching 16, and from there, the data analysis process was started.

1.14. ANALYSIS OF DATA

Analysis data involved organising, representing, describing, evaluating, and interpreting it using statistical practices (Debamita, 2017). In this study, thematic analysis was used to analyse data. In thematic analysis, patterns (themes) in the data were identified, analysed, and reported. It minimally organised and described the data set in rich detail. Thematic analysis was a qualitative

exploration system that could be extensively used across a range of epistemologies and exploratory questions. It served as a system for relating, assaying, organising, describing, and reporting themes within a data set (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This study adopted this technique of analysis because it was practical and helped in summarising data to come up with an explicit finding, as mentioned (King, 2004).

1. 2MEASURES OF QUALITY CONTROL

1.2.1. REFLEXIVITY AND POSITIONALITY

Research reflexivity involves consciously examining how subjectivity and context influence research processes continuously, collaboratively, and multifacetedly. Research subjectivity is valued and embraced through reflexivity. The term reflexivity in research has many different definitions depending on the methods that the research is based on. According to Dowling (2006), reflexivity in qualitative research is the analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research. A continuous self-critique and self-appraisal where the researcher explains how his or her own experience has or has not influenced the stages of the research process. Gentles et al., (2014), defines reflexivity as a generalised practice in which researchers strive to make their influence on the research explicit -to themselves and their audience.

This study was conducted by a female youth who resides in the locality in which the research was conducted, and reflexivity and positionality were acknowledged. Because things that affected other youths also affected the researcher as a youth, her personal experience the researcher was conscious of how her experiences could possibly influence findings from the study. As the researcher conducted this study, she tried to bracket her experiences and ensured that the information obtained from the study participants was not influenced by her own personal experiences.

1.2.2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY.

This study makes a significant contribution to the discourse on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 16), especially regarding the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies, peace, justice, and strong institutions. By focusing on the perceptions of rural youth about voting and national elections, the research sheds light on an often underrepresented demographic group, particularly in the South African context.

Addressing SDG 16: The study's focus on rural youth aligns well with SDG 16 by highlighting the importance of including diverse voices in the political process. Rural youth, who make up a substantial portion of South Africa's population, play a crucial role in ensuring the legitimacy and inclusiveness of democratic practices. By investigating their perceptions of voting and elections, the study addresses issues related to justice, peace, and strong institutions, reinforcing the idea that all societal groups, including marginalized ones, should be part of shaping governance.

Amplifying Rural Voices: This research brings much-needed attention to the rural perspective in South Africa's political landscape. Rural youth often have different concerns and experiences compared to their urban counterparts. The present study provides a platform for them to express their understanding of political matters. This amplification of rural voices helps to bridge the gap between urban-centred narratives and the realities of those living in rural areas.

Expanding the Literature: Urban-focused literature often overlooks the specific dynamics of rural youth in elections. The study contributes to filling this gap, offering a more nuanced and inclusive view of electoral processes. It challenges the assumption that urban experiences represent the broader national narrative and opens up new pathways for research into rural political engagement.

Future Implications: By investigating the future of the country's democracy through the lens of youth, the present study has implications for future policies and electoral strategies. Understanding rural youth's perceptions can inform political campaigns and help create more inclusive and effective governance structures.

1.2.3. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY (SCOPE OF THE STUDY)

The study focuses on youth perceptions of political participation, specifically within Thulamela Municipality, which is located in Limpopo province, South Africa. This municipality, situated within the Vhembe District Municipality, has experienced significant changes to its boundaries, particularly after the 2016 elections, when parts of Thulamela were incorporated into the newly formed Collins Chabane Local Municipality.

The demographic composition of Thulamela reveals that it is home to a large portion of the Vhembe District's population, with 618,462 inhabitants. Of these, 54.9% are female and 45.1% are male (Statistics South Africa, 2011). The municipality is characterized by small towns, communal land tenure, and village systems, which places it in the "category B" classification of local municipalities (Uhunamure et al., 2017).

This context provides important insight into the social and political landscape that may influence the youth's views on participating in elections. The challenges faced by this demographic, such as access to information, education, and political engagement opportunities, may shape how young people perceive their role in democratic processes. Understanding these perceptions could help guide policy and initiatives aimed at increasing youth participation in political elections, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas like Thulamela.

1.2.4. ETHICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE STUDY

A researcher aims to conduct a study morally and follow all the ethics without compromising them. Research ethics are ethics that a researcher should adhere to while conducting research. Researchers should adhere to all the principles of research ethics without compromising any of them. Principles of research ethics include honesty, privacy and confidentiality, safety, and objectivity.

The main objective of every study is to carry out a study in a moral way. Rana & Dilshad, 2021) posits that researchers must precisely examine ethical considerations during the planning stage for

human subjects or animals with implicit reasoning, feeling, or witnessing physical or emotional suffering. Substantially, ethical considerations in exploratory studies are divided into four types: protection from detriment, voluntary and informed participation, the right to sequestration, and honesty with professional associates.

Because this study involved human subjects who were youths from Thulamela Municipality, there were ethical principles that the researcher adhered to. Firstly, the researcher applied for ethical clearance from the University of Venda ethics committee to conduct the study. The researcher distributed consent forms to participants and informed them that participation was voluntary. The researcher provided a form that included all the information relating to the purpose of the study, and all participants were required to sign the consent form as advised by Strydom (2011).

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured to in this study by making sure that pseudonyms rather than the real names of the participants were used. Privacy of the interview environment was carefully managed during the interview session. The permission to record the interview was also included on the consent form, and the recordings were saved on a device that was only accessible to the researcher and her supervisors. The researcher's documents and all the soft copies were stored in an encrypted folder on a secured computer.

During the data collection process, the researcher clearly communicated the aims and objectives of the study to all participants. Every individual involved in this research was treated with respect, regardless of their sex, religion, political beliefs, or lifestyle. The researcher ensured that all participants were treated equally, with careful consideration given to every point they made throughout the investigation. This commitment to respect and equality aligns with the standards set forth by BERA (2004, 2018).

1.2.5. INFORMED CONSENT

The study ensured that all participants provided their consent willingly, with an understanding of the purpose and advantages of the research. This consent was documented in writing to affirm their informed agreement (Burns & Grove, 2009). The researcher protected informants against physical, psychological, moral, and reputational harm. In addition, she sought permission from the

participants after honestly explaining the purpose of the interview. Informed consent entailed ensuring that participants received information about the research and could understand it.

1.2.6. CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Maintaining confidentiality involves safeguarding information, ensuring that authorised individuals can securely access it, and protecting it from unauthorised access. This concept is crucial in healthcare, law, and research as it involves managing data to maintain trust and comply with requirements (Gellman, 2019). To safeguard confidentiality, it is essential to implement security measures and protocols to prevent any unauthorized access or disclosure of information (Solove, 2021).

Anonymity is essential for protecting individuals' identities and ensuring their privacy. According to Nissenbaum (2020), maintaining anonymity when gathering information for research purposes prevents the linking of participants' personal information to the data, thereby reducing the risk of harm or reprisal and encouraging honest feedback. This is especially crucial in studies involving marginalized communities (Buchanan, 2022). In this study, participants were assured of their privacy, including a commitment to keeping their responses anonymously.

1.2.7. VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, ensuring that each individual had the freedom to make their own choices. According to Lavrakas (2008), voluntary participation refers to the fundamental principle that individuals possess the inherent right to decide whether to engage in research or surveys, free from any form of coercion or undue influence. This meant that participants were fully informed of their rights and understood that they were under no obligation to participate if they did not wish to. Throughout the study, every participant had the option to withdraw or discontinue their involvement at any stage, without feeling pressured to continue.

Importantly, participants were not required to provide any reasons for their decision to leave, allowing for a respectful and comfortable research environment.

1.2.8. PLAGIARISM.

Copying someone's work without giving credit is known as plagiarism. It includes using text, ideas, images, or information from any source without acknowledging the creator. Plagiarism can happen intentionally, such as claiming someone's work as your own, or unintentionally due to a lack of understanding of how to cite sources (Smith, 2021). Plagiarism occurs when someone uses another individual's ideas, content, or intellectual property without attribution and presents it as their creation. According to Pecorari (2013), plagiarism is considered a violation of norms as it undermines the integrity of professional pursuits. In this study, the researcher ensured that plagiarism was avoided by using complete referencing and submitting the study through Turnitin.

1.2.9. CHAPTER OUTLINE

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the Study

This chapter presents the study's problem statement, research aim, questions, and objectives. It also presents a study justification, a description of the study area, a conceptual framework, and a research methodology.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework and literature review

This chapter presents a preliminary and comprehensive literature review of the study on what scholars say about youth's perception of voting and the theoretical frameworks of this study, explaining how the theory is linked to the study.

Chapter 3: Youth and Politics

This chapter provides the historical context of youth participation in politics in the South African context during the apartheid era, post-apartheid, and in the 21st century.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter outlines the research methodology and research design adopted in the study. It also discusses the research ethics the researcher adhered to when conducting the study.

Chapter 5: Presentation of the findings and data analysis

This chapter presents data obtained through interviews and document analysis, provides an interpretation of the study findings and a discussion of the study findings.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter concludes this study by outlining the main findings of the study and providing recommendations for future studies.

1.2.9. CONCLUSION

This chapter introduces the subject of this study. The aim of the study, objectives, research questions and significance of the study were also discussed in this chapter. This chapter outlined the problem statement of this study, and it discussed the research methodology used to resolve the research problem as a strategy to resolve the issue or problem statement of the study deductively.

1.3 PRELIMINARY LITERATURE REVIEW

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE STUDY.

1.3.2. INTRODUCTION

To gain an in-depth comprehension of the rural youth's perceptions of elections, this chapter provides a preliminary review of relevant literature relevant to the study. To explore rural youth's perceptions of elections in South Africa key thematic aspects covered by literature include global

perspectives on the concept of democracy and elections, the global, African, regional and sub-regional experiences of youth and elections, drivers and barriers to young people's participation in elections, and other dimensions of voter apathy.

1.3.3. GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ELECTION AND DEMOCRACY

The concept of democracy originated in ancient Athens through the contributions of its esteemed citizens. The term democracy means ‘the rule of the people’. Demo is Greek (people) and KRATOS (for strength or power). Hence, democracy empowers the people to rule. Diseko (2018) states that democracy is a form of government and governance in which people assume power over the state, either directly or indirectly. The people participate in the governance system through their representatives or directly. Russet (2001) defines democracy as a system of governance with a voting franchise for a substantial fraction of citizens. Emmanuel Kant, emphasises the stabilising factor of democracy, which includes the fact that democrats, by definition, cannot go to war with each other. This means that they maintain global stability by maintaining peace. He outlines that democratic states and societies are peaceful and less likely to go to war than non-democratic societies. In numerous democratic nations, political institutions such as parties and parliaments are underdeveloped, and the bureaucracy frequently lacks policy expertise, independence, neutrality, and authority needed to manage the economy effectively. Poor economic performance and increasing inequality worsen issues related to abuse of power, election manipulation, and violation of democratic norms (Diamond, 2015). According to Skochylyas (2022), democracy is not clearly defined, as it is considered adaptable and can change based on the context in which it is applied.

Zakaria (1997) asserts that in the world we live in, democracy is the most common system that many countries are using, and as a result, democracy is flourishing. However, the problem is that constitutional liberalism, which works hand in hand with democracy, is not flourishing, which results in illiberal democracy. Illiberal democracies are regimes elected by popular majorities but strive to undermine constitutional safeguards, the rule of law and civil liberties (Eggel, 2018). Zakaria (1997) states that illiberal democracies are “democratically elected, often those that were reelected or reaffirmed by referendum, but routinely ignored constitutional limits on power and denied basic freedoms to their citizens”. Laruelle (2022) defined illiberalism as an emerging

concept in political science and political philosophy that remains to be tested by different disciplines and approaches. Scholars use the term democracy to describe the phenomena they study, while politicians use it to describe specific movements, ideologies, and policies either negatively or positively.

Scholars of democratisation have long wrestled with the relationship between elections and democracy. In his triumphal account of the third wave of democracy, Huntington (1991:9) proclaims that “Elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the *sine qua non*” because the cornerstone of democracy is the peoples’ representation and rule, democratisation involves elections. Thus, elections have been the only means to connect people’s representation and democracy. However, elections as a system and mechanism are not a monolith; they have taken various forms to ensure proper representation. Chitlaoarporn (2015) asserts that "Democracy is the Election," suggesting that elections are essential to prevent a political regime from becoming a dictatorship, giving significance to all political systems. Chanchai (2015) affirmed that there is a connection between democracy and elections, He stated that elections are a fundamental part of the political process in a democracy and that every political system employs elections as a symbol of democracy. He also noted that the election process itself can be corrupted and that a democracy based solely on elections may be fraudulent.

According to Dahl et al., (2019), the last decades have witnessed a growth in the share of young European Union (EU) citizens who express alienation and distrust toward social and political institutions at the national and European levels. However, Henn et al., (2005), argue that political disengagement is thought to affect all citizens, but young people are believed to be particularly disillusioned about the significant institutions of representative democracy, leaving them either apathetic or alienated.

1.3.4. EUROPE AND AMERICAN EXPERIENCES ON YOUTH PARTICIPATION

There is a widespread consensus that young people in Europe and the democratic world are underrepresented in institutional politics due to low youth participation rates (Wattenberg, 2002; Norris, 2002; Pattie et al., 2004; Pickard, 2019). Institutional politics are less important to young

people than they were decades ago and to other age groups. In all political arenas (national, subnational, and European), young people are significantly absent from elections of all kinds than other population segments, illustrating the severity of the problem (Bristow, 2004; Dermody and Hanmer, 2004).

Other scholars have written about the political behaviour of the youth in Britain (Bristow, 2004). Bristow (2004) states that young people's involvement in politics is a matter of political passion and a significant issue because, according to the British Youth Council, many young people seem interested in something other than meaningful political and constitutional issues. Bristow (2004) asserts that addressing youth apathy requires recognising its existence, understanding why it is a problem, and refusing to let quick-fix solutions take over (Bristow, 2004). According to Dermody and Hanmer (2004), young people's growing disaffection from politics results from various reasons, including distrust, disenchantment, cynicism, and a perceived lack of political efficacy, party identification, civic engagement, and civic responsibility. Young people and politicians need to build trust.

McDonald and Hanmer (2019) note that the United States has one of the most intricate sets of voting regulations among Western democracies (e.g., Powell, 1986). A significant aspect of this system is that the responsibility for voter registration has typically rested with the individual rather than the government. Furthermore, decentralisation is a crucial feature, as each state oversees elections while still adhering to certain standards. As a result, residents of each state encounter a unique set of regulations and processes. Osborne (2016) points out several institutional factors that contribute to political apathy in the United States of America. These factors include historical voting restrictions such as poll taxes, education tests, and gender restrictions. Jackman (2016) points out that voting restrictions still exist today in the United States as residency requirements, which mandate that citizens must be state residents for a certain period before being eligible to register to vote.

Since 1972, the participation rate of young Americans in elections declined significantly (Levine & Lopez, 2002). Chaire (2021) posits that youth voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections has consistently been lowest among those aged 18 to 29. Attempts have been made to explain the decline by pointing out that many young Americans have devoted their energy to volunteer work, which they deem more effective than government in solving public problems, and that more and

more young people view themselves as politically independent. Despite the possibility of overlap in interests and concerns, young people differ in their concerns about the same issues based on their perceptions of being out of the "political loop." (Hinds, 2004)

1.3.4. THE AFRICAN EXPERIENCE OF YOUTH AND ELECTIONS

According to Van and Anyidoho (2019), the concept of youth is often defined by chronological age, with some variation depending on the organisation. For example, the United Nations typically considers individuals aged 15 to 24 as youth, while the African Union's African Youth Charter extends the definition to individuals aged 15 to 35 (Abbink, 2005). In Africa, youth generally refers to people between the ages of 15 and 35 (African Youth Charter, 2006). This demographic comprises over a billion of the world's population, with nearly 80 per cent residing in developing continents, especially in Africa (Ebata et al., 2005; AU et al., 2017). As a result, Africa is experiencing what demographers term a "youth bulge," with over 60 percent of its population falling into the youth category (Ebata et al., 2005). Dube (2023) notes that Africa is home to the largest population of young people worldwide, with 200 million individuals aged 15 to 24. Additionally, the continent has the fastest-growing youth population globally, with 60% of its inhabitants under 25.

1.3.4. ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY IN AFRICA

Teshome (2008) notes that the term 'democracy' has not permeated popular discourse in Africa, particularly in regions where indigenous languages do not possess a direct semantic equivalent. As a result, the term is adopted without modification in much of Africa. Africa has undergone two waves of democratisation. The initial wave occurred as the colonial system collapsed, leading to new independent African countries emerging in the 1960s and 1970s. This first wave of nationalist democracy established one-party-dominated states in most of the latest African nations (Teshome, 2008). (ibid). The third wave of democratisation in Africa, part of what Samuel Huntington refers to as "The Third Wave of Democratization" globally, took place in the 1990s (Quinn, 2003); Okechuku (cited in IDEA, 2016) observed that the democratic movement unfolded in three

distinct phases. The initial struggle focused on liberation from colonialism, followed by a phase centered on economic freedom. The third movement emerged from the perceived failures of the first two and aimed to fulfil the aspirations of Africa's people. He highlighted that the essence of the democratic movement is not universally agreed upon, noting that democratisation is often used to consolidate power for private and group interests (IDEA, 2016).

Electoral democracy has become a prominent feature in many democratic processes and has been embraced by newly independent countries as a way to legitimately and genuinely recruit leaders in the post-independence period of many decolonised countries. Following the attainment of independence by African countries, there was a period, as documented by Cowan (1992), characterised by a citizen-led struggle against one-party political systems. Cowan refers to this period as the "second liberation," explaining that the objective was to liberate citizens from undemocratic rule imposed by newly elected African leaders favouring oppressive and autocratic systems. This was accomplished through the elimination of multi-partyism, which served as a check and balance on ruling elites in favour of a one-party governance system that lacked these essential features.

The evolution of electoral democracy in Zambia dates back to 1968 when the country conducted its first multiparty elections. The 1968 General Elections included the first presidential vote. Kenneth Kaunda, leader of the United National Independence Party (UNIP), defeated Zambian African National Congress (a renamed NRANC) leader Harry Nkumbula with 82% of the vote. The ten reserved seats in the National Assembly were abolished, and the number of elected seats increased to 105, with an additional five members appointed by the President. UNIP won 81 of the elected seats (ECZ, 1991). After conducting the first general elections in 1968, Kaunda won the election unopposed in 1973 as President of the country, with 89% of the voters supporting his candidacy. One hundred twenty-five members were elected, the President appointed 10, and the Speaker was elected from outside the chamber. Up to three UNIP candidates could contest each seat despite UNIP being the only legal party. The same system was used in 1978, 1983, and 1988, and Kaunda was re-elected each time (FODEP, 2009). General elections were held in October 1991 to restore multiparty democracy.

Matlosa (cited in (IDEA, 2016) notes that while elections have become common in the continent, they alone do not guarantee democracy. Matlosa questions the suitability of existing liberal

democratic models in the continent, suggesting a need to explore alternative models that are more appropriate for the region Ajibewa noted the growing number of electoral democracies in the region and the positive aspects of recent elections but highlighted the challenges and the observation that simply having many elections does not necessarily strengthen democracy (cited in IDEA, 2016).

Elections have been instrumental in fostering democratic governance and enabling the peaceful transfer of power in several countries. In Nigeria, Benin, and Cape Verde, the opposition secured victory in the presidential and parliamentary elections, and the ruling party peacefully transitioned power. Furthermore, elections have reinstated stability in countries undergoing challenging transitions, such as the Central African Republic, Cote d'Ivoire, and Egypt.

1.3.5. NATURE OF AFRICAN YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL AFFAIRS

Historically, youth have been a critical demographic for African electoral mobilisation (Resnick and Casale, 2011). Resnick and Casale (2011) argue that as the region grapples with a growing 'youth bulge' burdened by unemployment and underemployment, securing the support of this demographic is increasingly vital. Despite their numerical significance and the historical relevance of generational identities within the region, there is limited understanding of the political involvement of Africa's youth. In contrast, Van and Anyidoho (2019) argue that African youth are a powerful political force, as illustrated by the Arab Spring and other political resistance movements led by young people in countries such as Burkina Faso, Senegal, Nigeria, Togo, and South Africa. Young people have historically played a significant role in African societies and have been at the forefront of independence and anti-apartheid movements in the 20th century Van and Anyidoho, (2019).

The role of youth in African politics today reflects a historical trend of their involvement at the behest of formal political authorities. Simultaneously, young people are disengaged from formal politics despite their fervent desire for independence (Van and Anyidoho, 2019). Despite significant political and social changes on the continent, patriarchal and gerontocracy structures

continue to marginalise young people within political institutions. Lacking social and political capital, youth often find themselves on the fringes of power, even as they serve as 'voting machines' and support political parties (Honwana, 2012; Bob-Milliar, 2014). Honwana (2012) argues that what may appear to be apathy and depoliticisation represents a conscious move away from traditional arenas of party politics towards other forms of engagement with society and the global world. The idea of youth engaging in unruly politics (Richards, 1995) is consistent with a theme in youth literature on generational tensions that suggests that young people are inclined to resist or disrupt the status quo (Honwana, 2012). Resnick and Casale (2011) proposed that African youth, particularly those residing in urban areas, exhibit behaviour comparable to their counterparts in other regions. They are less inclined to participate in voting compared to older individuals. They are more prone to demonstrating, have no strong party affiliation or preference for opposition parties rather than aligning with incumbent ones.

1.3.6. FACTORS THAT CAUSE VOTER APATHY

According to Okafor et al. (2002), voter apathy is a situation when eligible voters are unwilling and deliberately avoid participating in elections. He defines voter apathy as a subset of political apathy and is considered one of the primary challenges to democracy, particularly in developing nations. Dupuy and Prakash (2022) assert that voter apathy is a concerning and a destabilising trend in democratisation efforts, especially in the developing countries of Africa and Latin America. Voter apathy refers to the lack of interest in participating in elections among certain groups of voters. When voting is non-compulsory, one of the consequences of voter apathy can be low voter turnout on Election Day (Adeyemi et al., 2020). Voter apathy can be characterised as a lack of interest and motivation to participate in the democratic process of casting a vote to choose a candidate or political party that represents the voter's ideals, aspirations, values, and vision (SABC News, 2024).

African perspective, population size, and stability are pivotal in voter turnout. In countries with lower populations, the impact of each vote is lesser, and therefore, more people turn out to bounce in an election. Also, people who live in the same area for longer periods generally have better knowledge of original issues and campaigners and are more concerned about the political opinions that affect their daily lives. Therefore, they will be more likely to bounce in an election. As posited

by Baek (2009), frequent movement from one place to another, on the other hand, can cause people to ask to engage in the political process. There is a common understanding that people are more informed and engaged in political processes in developed countries. At the same time, profitable adversity in Africa negatively affects political participation because profitable difficulties can affect voter apathy and can lead people to withdraw from politics and concentrate on meeting their introductory requirements.

People affected by poverty need access to an introductory education that would enable them to understand how their vote is anticipated to influence the direction of government programs. Voter turnout is also related to crusade expenditures. Further, plutocrats spend on campaigning increases mindfulness of an election, which can affect the feeling of communal duty 'among citizens. More significant coffers can also enable a more comprehensive distribution of political information, which helps citizens gain the information required about campaigners and political party platforms. On the other hand, there is an additional concern about the plutocrats' role in politics (International IDEA, 2015).

The electoral system used during elections can affect voter turnout. As verified by Translucency International Zambia (2007), voter turnout is advanced in choices that use systems of commensurable representation than in those that use plurality/ maturity systems. Zambia uses a single-member maturity system for the presidential choices and a plurality system for the administrative and original government choices according to the 2016 amended constitution. This study intends to establish whether this system has affected voter turnout. Mandatory voting is also supposed to be a catalyst for increasing voter turnout. Naturally, when choosers are somewhat obliged to bounce, turnout rises dramatically.

Voter apathy in Africa is attributed to enrolment conditions. Hamwiinga (2002) supports this point, confirming that the actuality of individual enrolment conditions the voter must fulfill thereby creating a fresh burden for choosers because enrolment requires time and energy. In some settings, enrolment may also number direct fiscal costs similar to trips to enrolment centers. These burdens can affect enrolment rates and, accordingly, voter turnout. Automatic enrolment (i.e., using civil registries to produce voter lists) or election day enrolment are effective ways of removing enrolment-related walls. In addition, advancing arrangements are associated with voter turnout. FODEP (2009) notes that designing colorful advancing arrangements can impact voter turnout.

These include single or multiple voting days, choices on rest or working days, the vacuity of voting technologies, the proximity of polling stations, and indispensable voting procedures similar to advance voting, postal voting, or deputy voting.

A study by Branson (2003) argues that age and education also significantly impact voter turnout. According to Branson (2003), age is one of the most critical factors that affect voter turnout. Youth voter apathy is a primary source of concern in numerous countries. The World Value Survey exploration findings conducted between 2010 and 2014 showed significantly low voter turnout among people aged 25 or under compared to those aged 26 or over. The exploration covered 59 countries representing all the regions of the world. Masarurwa's (2018) study supports this as it posits that the youth face economic marginalisation, high unemployment, and poverty. They lack skills in business, vocational and technical areas, civic education, elections, and government engagement. Restrictive political structures and a lack of interest, information, and funds hinder their participation in elections and governance. The low literacy rates among young Nigerians continue to restrict their involvement in electoral democracy (Akinboade, 2013). In addition, Chauke (2020) outlined that access to crucial information for making informed decisions should be available to both literate and illiterate youth. While the right to vote for a candidate of their choice is essential for young people, many have yet to understand its significance. The lack of civic education, especially in rural areas, is often cited as a reason for their political apathy.

The position of interest in politics can be a factor that drives turnout at elections. Societies that encourage citizen interest in the political process through the preface of citizenship education in seminaries and a transparent terrain that allows political discussion and debate, among other effects, can boost voter participation (Simfukwe et al., 1997). Meanwhile, voter turnout can be affected by communal duty. A perception of communal duty is one of the most pivotal factors affecting stations' choices. In numerous societies, people perceive it to be their duty to contribute to political decision-making. Also, lack of confidence in the election operation bodies in holding free, fair, and believable choices contributes to voter apathy in Africa Zambia, being a case in point. It must be noted back that some choosers could become apathetic to issues of election owing to their belief that their society cannot hold a free, fair, and violence-free election or dissatisfaction with how once-election controversies were inadequately managed.

According to Lührmann (2013), youth participation allows young individuals to showcase their skills and contribute towards a democratic society while exercising their rights. Checkoway and Aldana (2013) define youth participation as an opportunity for youth self-development, knowledge, and skills transfer. Furthermore, Arnot and Swartz (2013) note that youth participation assists young people in transitioning into adulthood and taking on societal development issues at an early age. Youth are seen to share less in political participation either through political parties or social institutions rallying. Over the decades, the expression of policy involving youth in decision-making has increased extensively (UNDP, 2003).

Meanwhile, according to Mengistu (2016), the factual physical participation of the youth is different for Africans, similar to youth organisations, congress, and councils being extremely limited. Nevertheless, many attempts have been tried to have the West African Indigenous blocs in which the Mano River Union Youth Parliament can be generally mentioned as a classical illustration of engagement. UNDP (2012) noted that, from an international perspective, the African Youth Parliament is another case for the structural move in Africa; youth involvement in the political landscape is not well-established. Despite their strong desire to participate in economic, political, and social affairs, young people face unfriendly engagement conditions, as Resnick & Casale (2011) and Mengistu (2017) noted. There is a need for greater emphasis on including youth in African politics, as they are often viewed as power-seeking individuals. It is rare to find a president or prime minister in Africa who is under 60, which poses a challenge for the youth who may feel marginalized from political participation. African youth are less engaged in the electoral process and tend to be less confrontational, perhaps reflecting their underrepresentation in African politics (UNECA, 2010).

1.3.7. DRIVERS AND BARRIERS TO YOUTH PARTICIPATION

Enaifoghe and Dlamini (2021) posit that many developing countries lack youth participation in politics. They add that this primarily results from the government's failure to create adequate platforms that encourage meaningful engagement of citizens in political processes, especially the youth, who are the future leaders of our society. Those failures became barriers to the participation of youth in political affairs.

The participation model is based on resources, interest, and recruitment (Verba et al., 1995) and is seen as motivation, ability, and triggers. For instance, the behavior model of persuasive design (Fogg, 2009) stipulates that the reasons cannot (lack of resources), do not want to (lack of psychological engagement), or were not asked to participate (lack of recruitment networks) generally centre on a set of variables clustered around socio-economic, psychological, and socialization reasons. According to Hilderman and Anderson (2017), if young people are under social pressure, they feel obligated to participate, and they think something is at stake if they feel an obligation to participate. If they have already participated in the past, then the barriers to participation are eliminated, and then they will participate.

There is usually a link between socioeconomic factors and lack of involvement in political activities since higher-income earners are more likely to participate in electoral politics and protests (Schlozman et al., 2005; Smets and Van, 2013). Education is an additional socio-economic reason for greater involvement, although higher education levels generally do not lead to higher levels of traditional participation. Other factors include marital status, (Denver, 2008), mobility (Smets and Van, 2013), race, ethnicity, gender, citizenship status, religious minorities, etc. When it comes to resources, the ability to understand politics is one of the essential indications of whether an individual has appropriate practical (time, money, access), learned (skills, competencies, experience), and felt resources (confidence and sense of efficacy) to engage in political action.

Honwana (2012) argues that the transition into adulthood is delayed in contemporary African societies because of "endemic poverty and chronic unemployment resulting from failed neoliberal economic policies, bad governance, and political crises such that youthhood has now become a period of waithood for many young people. These social and economic realities inform and may even catalyse young people's political participation (Ahwoi, 2008; Masquelier, 2013). Thus, young people's participation in politics must be situated within the context of political systems, economic conditions, cultural repertoires, social dynamics of religion and ethnicity, and other dimensions of young people's everyday lives.

Social relations of gender significantly influence the nature of youth politics. Within patriarchal societies, young women's active participation in formal politics is hindered by the socialisation of males and females into gendered roles and male dominance of resources and public spaces (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011). Historically, these sociocultural factors have combined with a state

institution indelibly marked by patriarchy and militarism to skew women's public engagement towards the apolitical (Mama & Okazawa, 2008; Tsikata, 1989). Despite these barriers and as democratic space has opened up, women have increasingly participated in politics as candidates, voters, and civil society activists (Stead et al., 2007). However, variations in levels of participation across African countries are observed, which can be attributed to gendered differences in resources, political attitudes, and interests (Coffe & Bolzendahl, 2011).

Youth participate less in institutional politics now than other age groups and cohorts of young people decades ago. This is also caused by the outdated definitions behind the measurements of political participation because the definition of political is only sometimes shared among academics and other population groups. As youth have a greater propensity to engage in non-institutional forms of political participation, broadening the definition transforms the problem of youth participation from where they participate. While elections remain the primary means of influencing the political process, there is a vast repertoire of other popular actions (demonstrations, petitions, engaged consumerism).

1.4. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING OF THE STUDY: RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

This section discusses the theoretical setting of the study and pays attention to the rational choice theory. This theory is deemed ideal for this study, considering that voting is an individual's choice. The wisdom of the rational choice theory aligns with the study's aims. Rational choice theory was established as a behavioral revolution in American political science between 1950 and 1960 (Anthony, 1957). Under the theoretical framework, the study will outline the argument and view of other scholars in this theory and explain how rational choice theory applies to this study.

1.4.1. RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

The rational choice theory provides a useful lens for understanding how individuals make decisions. It assumes that people make choices based on their goals and preferences. Individual-level rationality is generally defined as having complete and transitive preferences. Amandae (2023) defines rational choice theory as a theory that is used to model human decision-making, especially in the context of microeconomics, where it helps economists better understand the

behavior of a society in terms of individual actions. The theory suggests that the way in which choices are made is consistent because they are made according to personal preference. Rational choice theory is increasingly applied to other areas as well, including evolutionary theory, political science, and warfare.

This theory advocates that the electorate decides which way to vote based on the candidates' or parties' performance and promises (Ball & Peters, 2005). It focuses more on the individual than socialisation and the collective social group's behaviors (Heywood: 2002). Drawing a comparison to a marketplace, this model holds that in the political market, the voter will cast their vote for the party that is most likely to serve the ends of the voter, and emphasises the importance of issues, interests, and concerns in elections (Ball & Peters, 2005)

The rational choice theory is used to model human decision-making. Some proponents of the rational choice theory include Gary Becker (1976), James Coleman (1992), Jon Elster (1993), and Mancur Olson (2003). Becker (1976) argued that the rational choice theory model is a unified framework for understanding all human behavior. The rational choice theory can be used to explain why people behave the way they do. It gives an insight into the motivating factors or psychology behind human decision-making. Self-interests are the central factor in describing human behavior.

According to Vik (2013), the rational choice theory, as articulated by Lohman (1996), pertains to the actions of instrumentally rational and self-interested individuals. Moreover, Vik (2013) extended this viewpoint by emphasising that individuals justify their decision to vote or not based on their perceived utility. Rational choice theory encompasses three key distinctions: rational choice, rationality, and rationale. According to Vik (2013), these distinctions are significant because voting for a political candidate does not necessarily require intellectual explanation but should offer some utility for the voter. Quoting Kahneman (2011), asserts that "Rationality is logical coherence reasonable or not," implying that rational behaviour entails consistency, regardless of whether the choice arises from instinct or reasoned thought. Vik (2013) defines rationality as "making choices that are consistent with one's preferences, given the constraints one faces." In this context, constraints refer to the threshold at which the decision-maker is willing to act, ensuring that the benefits of the choice outweigh the associated costs. As referred to in Kahneman (2011), rationale is determined endogenously, meaning that ethical, moral, or other justifications are made by each individual and not necessarily revealed to the voting population.

1.4.2. THE APPLICATION OF RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY IN THIS STUDY

The rational choice theory is justified for this study because when we explore the youth perspective on voting, it is all about individual choice that occurs because of individual preferences or choices. As actors in society and everywhere, individuals behave and act as rational beings who are self-calculating, self-interested, and self-maximizing; these individual social actions are the ultimate source of more significant social outcomes (Abell, 2000). Voting is thus considered a rational act, where individual electors are believed to, based on personal self-interest, decide for themselves which party they prefer (Heywood, 2002). Voting is also seen as a retrospective comment on the party in power and how its performance has influenced citizens' choices. Osmo, & Borri, (2024) define a rational act as a choice that involves disregarding our emotions or treating them as adversaries. They argue that all rational choices are inherently good and define a rational act as the ability to apply knowledge to achieve goals.

The issue of voting is a personal decision; hence, your vote is your secret. The underlying assumption of rational choice theory is that human beings are rational creatures, which means they rely on reason and logic to make decisions (Drew, 2022). In the context of the youth, the assumption is that they are mature people who are getting into adulthood age, and they are knowledgeable about voting; as a result, they can make a personal choice, which, in this case, is a rational choice. Rational Choice Theory aims to elucidate social occurrences by illustrating how they result from the intentional pursuit of self-interest by social actors and, remarkably, individual persons (Lovett, 2006).

The rational choice is well-suited for this study as it effectively explains party politics. It posits that competition among political parties can be seen as rational based on the assumptions of the rational choice model. According to the theory, every political party engages in strategic activities to further their interests while also addressing democratic and governance objectives, and this encompasses everything from the nomination of candidates to campaign tactics and strategies, as well as the conduct of elections and voter behavior (Ogu, 2013). These activities seem to be

intentionally influenced by political parties, employing both physical and psychological methods to prioritize the achievement of their interests over other considerations.

Downs (2018) posits that voters evaluate candidates and their electoral platforms and vote for the party based on its promises of delivery. Advocates of this model contend that voters realign their allegiance to political parties during each election, considering economic conditions and the parties' stances on them (Antunes, 2010). The theory suggests that voters choose parties and candidates whose policies align closely with their own. Therefore, when deciding whom to vote for, voters consider their interests and interests related to their family, class, group, and so on (Dowding, 2018).

1.4.3. ELECTORAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

The theory posits that the market's functioning, can also explain the political system. It draws parallels between consumers and voters and between enterprises and political parties. The theory contends that akin to enterprises seeking to maximise profits and consumers striving to maximise utility, political parties seek to maximise electoral gains. At the same time, voters aim to optimise the impact of their votes (Antunes, 2010).

As noted by Austen-Smith and Banks (1999) the rational choice or revealed preference under certainty encompasses three fundamental principles, namely, reflexivity, completeness, and transitivity. Reflexivity ensures indifference between identical items while completeness ensures that all items are considered in a person's preference function. Transitivity ensures consistency for prediction. The concept of revealed preference suggests that behaviour under certain conditions can be used to predict behaviour under different conditions (Dowding, 2017).

According to McGann (2016), the rational choice theory significantly contributes to voters' understanding of collective decision-making. It establishes a theoretical link between voter

preferences and political outcomes, challenging conventional notions of democratic processes. For example, it prompts a reevaluation of the concept of majority rule as the guiding principle.

The rational choice theory posits that everyone has a rational side capable of making consistent choices (Vik, 2013). This concept lies at the heart of most economic models and has found application in political science. According to Green and Shapiro (1994), the theory has faced criticism since its inception for its assumptions and methodological failings in the areas in which it has been applied. The theory assumes that actors are rational to the extent that they make choices to maximise their utility.

1.4.4. CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed the preliminary literature related to the present study and the theoretical framework underpinning this study. The next chapter, which includes a comprehensive literature review to provide further clarity to the aims and research objectives of the present study.

CHAPTER 2: COMPREHENSIVE LITERATURE REVIEW

2. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided the context of the research problem relating to perceptions on youth participation in political affairs. This chapter provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature and the theoretical setting of the study, which is the youth bulge theory. A thematic approach will be utilised, and the critical points that the literature review will cover are the historical background of democracy, the function of elections, elections in the modern-day, types of democracy, the connection between democracy and election, and development, youth factors in electoral politics, participatory and representative democracy, La Derrick and James ladder on youth involvement and development, political participation, political participation in the global sphere, and the youth political participation in Africa and Youth bulge theory.

2.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF DEMOCRACY

According to Moniruzzaman (2019), Western industrial countries were the first to experience the emergence of democracy over 200 years ago. This early start allowed these democracies ample time to develop, mature, and consolidate by the time the non-Western countries were introduced to the system after the end of colonialism. As a result, the democracies of Western Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan are often seen as ideal models of electoral democracies. Dobos (2013) stresses the significant role of elections in democratic political systems. According to prominent democratic theories, a system cannot be deemed democratic without elections (or some form of direct democracy, such as a referendum) conducted under universal suffrage.

Democracy is the most cherished and rightful political system in the contemporary world. Huntington's (1991) in his influential research has shown that over the past 200 years, countries worldwide have generally displayed a political tendency to move towards democratic forms of government. The global trend towards democratic governance generally gained traction after decolonisation and following the end of the Cold War. While acknowledging occasional setbacks, it is evident that there is a notable increase in the number of countries embracing democratic forms of government in the present day compared to any other historical period. Huntington argued that the democratisation process occurred in several waves; according to his analysis, the third and last waves created the most significant impact. Arguably, the trend toward democracy after 1990, following the end of the Soviet Socialist system, the Gulf War in 1991, and the "Arab Spring" in 2010, set the most significant wave, which some experts have termed the fourth wave.

2.2. FUNCTION OF ELECTIONS

In mature and consolidated democracies, especially in highly industrialist countries, elections serve twin functions: representation of the people and continuity of democracy. However, in new or young democracies in industrialist or underdeveloped countries, the role of elections is different. Here, elections are used merely as legitimizing tools for the ruling regime to preserve and continue its power, often suppressing the true meaning of "representation." An analysis of the relationship between elections and democracy in Asian, African, and Latin American countries reveals that the ruling regimes tend to hold periodic elections to maintain a "legitimacy cloak" of democracy. This distinction clarifies the meaning and relationship between elections and democracy in "Western" and non-Western countries.

UNDP (2024) posits that in a democracy, elections serve three essential functions. Firstly, they provide the means for people to choose their representatives in a legislature, a congress, or a single executive office such as the presidency. Secondly, elections serve as a method of selecting governments; indeed, in many parts of the world, elections are primarily a contest between competing political parties to see who will control the government. Finally, elections confer legitimacy on the political system. Since the end of the Cold War and the emergence of democratic governance worldwide, elections have become essential in establishing a legitimate government.

The primary role of election is to provide a mechanism by which the great mass of system members can choose their leaders, thus giving majority approval to the exercise of leadership. Secondly, elections may indicate public choice among government policies, although this function is less frequently performed than once, which was thought to be the case. Furthermore, the belief held by prospective candidates in the potential for voters to reject them in the next election on account of their policies might prompt them to anticipate public opinion. This allows the indirect influence of elections on policy formation. A third central function of elections is the legitimization of a regime. An election serves as a device of public endorsement or, occasionally, of repudiation of the system of government (Jack, 2014).

Webb & David (2024) posit that elections provide political education for citizens and ensure the responsiveness of democratic governments to the people's will. They also legitimize the acts of those who wield power, a function that is performed to some extent even by noncompetitive elections. Elections play a significant role in underpinning the stability and legitimacy of the political community. Like national holidays commemorating everyday experiences, elections link citizens to each other, confirming the polity's viability. Elections are essential for bringing people together and ensuring everyone's voice is heard, and they also show that each person matters and deserves respect as a human being (Nwanna, 2014). Whatever other needs voters may have, participation in an election serves to reinforce their self-esteem and self-respect. Voting allows people to have their say and, through expressing partisanship, satisfy their need to feel a sense of belonging. The long battle for the right to vote and the demand for equality in electoral participation can manifest a profound human craving for personal fulfillment.

Elections play a crucial role in promoting accountability and transparency. Gregory (2024) emphasises that transparency fosters trust in the democratic process, regular elections hold leaders accountable, as elected officials must answer to the electorate for their actions and decisions. Transparent elections ensure a peaceful and fair transition of power.

2.3. LEGITIMISATION

Wojtasik (2013) argues that elections serve as a means to translate public preferences into the legitimization of power and provide the opportunity to actively engage citizens in electing

authorities and directing their activity in this field. They also help map the significance of individual topics in the public consciousness and translate them into current policy.

Election works as the only legitimising factor, and over the past several decades, it has become a popular means for authoritarian political leaders or dominant political parties in young or transitional democracies to consolidate their power base. Hence, elections have lost their representative value and have increasingly been turned into a democratic means to legitimise and institutionalise undemocratic regimes. This has been the most apparent trend in Bangladesh's electoral politics over the past decade. Both national and local level elections are engineered in such ways through manipulating electoral laws, the election commission, and the legal system that effectively developed an intended mechanism of preventive representation. As of 2024, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) emphasises the pivotal role of credible elections in conferring political legitimacy, which is crucial for building robust states and providing governments with the mandate necessary to address a wide array of sustainable development challenges.

Over time, as the democratisation trend gained momentum, the election mechanism developed further. Notwithstanding multiple variations and complexities, it appears that countries' transition toward and continued maintenance of democracy invariably led to elections being implemented as a means of legitimacy (Moniruzzaman M.2019).

2.4. ELECTION IN A MODERN DAY

Elections have become the institutional key to modernising democracy's essence: the rule of the people by the people through representative government. Every modern definition of representative democracy includes contested elections as the fundamental legitimate procedure for translating rule by the people into workable executive and legislative power. The 21st century has seen an increasing number of young people becoming politically active, engaged, and influential. Despite this, they are not fully participating in a formal political system such as elections, which is vital to shaping a better democracy (Mijiana: 2020).

According to UNDP (2024), most states worldwide conduct elections today, although the interpretation and standard of these elections vary significantly. While the UNDP supports the idea

of countries being "differently democratic," respecting and understanding diverse political systems, cultures, and traditions as equally valid means of selecting governments, it firmly upholds the principle that free and fair elections are essential for any state to be recognised as genuinely democratic. Gu -Xiangyun (2024) outlined that elections still stand as the indisputable bedrock of modern democratic systems, enabling citizens to assert control over their governments and decisively shape the course of their nations.

2.5. TYPES OF DEMOCRACY: PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

Democracy involves the exercise of power and the resolution of conflict. It relies on political institutions and processes guided by the principles of popular control over public decisions and decision-makers, as well as equality of respect and voice among citizens in exerting that control (IDEA, 2005). Lubinga (2014) states that there are two forms of democracy: direct and representative democracy. The first form which is direct democracy, is a form in which people themselves, rather than the elected representatives determine the laws and policies by which they are to be governed. Representative democracy is a system whereby the elected representative enacts legislation on behalf of the people. Catt (1999) identifies three forms of democracy in which the people together make decisions that the government enacts as their agent (participatory democracy, direct democracy, and representative or liberal democracy).

2.5.1. PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY

According to Dacombe and Parvin (2021), participatory democracy is advocated for its capacity to facilitate a higher level of popular control over the actions of public officials and representatives compared to more constrained conceptions of democracy. Furthermore, they assert that participation provides an additional layer of scrutiny over the actions of public officials by increasing the potential avenues for participation so that dissenting voices can be heard, public figures held to account for their actions, and any significant policy failure is more likely to be brought into the open (Dacombe, & Parvin, 2021).

Pateman (2012 , 7-19) underscores that participatory democracy derives from the idea that power should be equally shared amongst all citizens so that everyone has an equal say in collective affairs. He outlines that democracy is achieving a society's most equal power distribution. In a participatory democracy, the people rule by collectively discussing debatable issues and providing solutions as agreed upon by the group participatory democracy advocates for more citizen participation and more excellent political representation than traditional representatives. According to Breakfast (2015), participatory democracy emphasizes the direct involvement of citizens at the core of democratic theory. This perspective suggests that democratic systems organized in this manner can lead to more legitimate and effective governance. Participatory democracy can be exercised through decision-making processes in neighborhood assemblies and referendums. In South Africa, participatory democracy is exercised through local government structures, such as voting for local councilors.

Two key attributes of participatory democracy are equality and self-determination. Port (2011) states that participatory democracy promotes equal power distribution in collective decision-making. It underscores the fact that all citizens have equal societal status and that no one is superior. Port (2011) contends that participatory democracy empowers individuals to be masters of their own lives, enabling them to be self-determining and autonomous. People desire to live according to their preferences without the imposition of others' ideas of what's best for them. Baker (1997) posits that participatory democracy fosters community and nurtures positive social relationships. His analysis underscores that participatory democracy fosters a stronger sense of community and belonging. This allows people to feel accepted, heard, and included in society.

2.5.2. REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

In John Mill's cautious definition, representative government is an institutional framework in which the entire populace exercises the essential authority, or a substantial segment thereof, through the election of deputies at regular intervals (Mill, 2016). According to Alkan (2021), this authoritative power must have a designated position within the constitutional structure

Mill describes representative democracy as a system in which the whole people or some numerous portions of them exercise the ultimate controlling power through deputies periodically elected by themselves (Pickles, 1970). Furthermore, Hay (2006) asserts that representative democracy empowers citizens to govern themselves in larger communities by enabling leaders to mobilize public opinion, forge consensus, and implement policies.

According to Schumpeter (1976), the theories of democracy prior to the twentieth century were considered "unrealistic" and "outdated" and are inadequate in explaining the complexities of bureaucratic and mass societies in the twentieth century. In his new theory of democracy Schumpeter (1976) redefined the concept: the democratic method is the institutional arrangement for making political decisions in which individuals gain the power to decide through a competitive struggle for the people's vote. Schumpeter's definition can be viewed as a typical example of representative democracy as an institutional tool (Alkan, 2021).

Representative democracy can be described as a model that “takes the form of party-based parliamentary rule and functions primarily through elected representatives.” (Dalton et al., 2001). Representative democracy is a form of government in which the people elect officials to create laws, policies, and other government matters on their behalf. Representative democracy is the opposite of direct democracy, in which the people vote on every law or policy considered at every level of government. The basic idea of representation democracy is to neutralise or minimise political participation in larger countries. It is typically employed in countries like South Africa, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom. Universal participation and majority rules are characteristic of representative democracy. Universal participation in representative democracy means all eligible voters can cast their respective votes, Eligible people who are fit concerning mental capacity and have reached a certain age.

In South Africa, one is regarded as a responsible person. Once a person is 18 years old they are legible to vote. The majority rule is whereby candidates who attain the majority of votes cast automatically are recognized as the victors by the whole population. They are the ones who lead the country. Other characteristics of representative democracy are political equality and powers to elect Government. Political equality is where voters must cast only one vote per candidate during elections, with no exceptions. People elect one candidate or party that he/she feels will represent them well. According to Plokte (1997), the elected representatives may also have the power to

select other government leaders, such as a prime minister or president, on behalf of their electors. In South Africa, people vote for a party, not for a president or the parliamentarians. The party then decides which person is going to be a president and also which people are going to be parliamentarians.

2.5.3. CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

A constitutional democracy is a form of government in which citizens elect representatives or vote on laws authorized and limited by a constitution. This type of system is also known as a "liberal democracy." Typically, the constitution is a written document, although, in the UK, it consists of a collection of documents that together establish constitutional rules (Chatterjee, 2012).

In a constitutional democracy, there are three levels of democracy. The first level is the establishment and amendment of the constitution by the people, known as direct democracy. The second level involves the election of representatives and possibly the president. In a direct democracy, this level is achieved by the people forming the legislature. The third level is the democratic voting process conducted by the members of the legislature. In a direct democracy, the second and third forms are combined (Chatterjee, 2012).

Kenny & Amadio (2024), in their writing, adopted Aristotle's definition of constitutional democracy as a rule by many for the interest of the people and the government that the constitution is supreme. This is a system where the Authority is limited by legal and institutional means so that the rights of individuals and minorities are respected. In constitutional democracy, how the people are to be ruled and governed is clearly stated in the Constitution. This system is used in countries like South Africa, the United States, and Japan. Separations of powers and basic rights are the most important part of constitutional democracy.

Basic rights are one of the fundamental values of democracy. In a democracy, basic rights are a primary goal of the government. This means that the government should ensure that every Human being enjoys these rights, including the rights to life, liberty, and social rights like health care and education. These fundamental rights are endorsed by the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 and are entitled to everyone. Equality before the law is another critical attribute of constitutional democracy. Dworkin (2013) describes equality before the law in a

constitutional democracy as the idea that no one is above the law, and the law applies to all people, governors, and the governed. This law should not be used to discriminate based on unfair criteria such as gender, race, or political belief.

2.6. CONNECTION BETWEEN DEMOCRACY, ELECTION AND DEVELOPMENT

2.6.1. DEMOCRACY AND ELECTION

Scholars of democratisation have long wrestled with the relationship between elections and democracy. In his influential analysis of the third wave of democracy, Huntington (1991, 579-616) contends that "Elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the sine qua non". As the cornerstone of democracy is the people's representation and rule, democratisation involves elections. Thus, elections have been the only means to connect people's representation and democracy. However, elections as a system and mechanism are not a monolith; they have taken various forms to ensure proper representation.

Edgell & Mechkova (2015) posit that in mature and consolidated democracies, particularly in highly industrialized countries, elections serve a dual purpose: the representation of the electorate and the perpetuation of democratic continuity. However, this is not the case with new or young democracies in industrialist or underdeveloped countries, where elections are used merely as legitimising tools for the ruling regime to preserve and continue its power. Therefore, the true meaning of "representation" often remains suppressed. An analysis of the relationship between elections and democracy in Asian, African, and Latin American countries reveals that the ruling regimes tend to hold periodic elections to maintain a "legitimacy cloak" of democracy. Hence, the meaning and relationship between elections and democracy in "Western" and non-Western countries are different (Moniruzzaman, 2019)

Jack (1970) posits that elections are universally recognized as a cornerstone of political institutions, wielding immense influence over societal governance. The majority of adults in nations across the globe actively participate in shaping the direction of their countries through voting. Elections are considered a popular prerequisite for democracy in scientific and political

activity. Given the claim that democracy is ruled by the people for the people, many scholars and politicians associate democracy with holding free and fair elections.

Elections serve as a symbol of democracy; free and fair elections symbolise democratic principles. They signify that citizens have the right to choose their leaders. When elections are compromised (e.g., through fraud or manipulation), the democratic foundation weakens. The democratic form of government is an institutional setup that enables popular participation through the electoral process. According to political scientist the democratic ideal is founded on two principles: political participation and political contestation. Political participation necessitates that all eligible individuals can vote in free, fair, and competitive elections. This illustrates the link between democracy and elections (Dahl, 2005).

2.6.2. DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

Doric (2019) establishes a noteworthy correlation between higher GDP per capita levels, a conventional measure of economic development, and democracy scores in transition economies. Peev and Mueller (2012) posit that countries characterized by low levels of corruption, strong property rights, independent judiciaries, and enhanced transparency and political accountability tend to experience rapid economic growth. Democracy has the potential to boost economic growth by fostering political stability and mitigating transaction costs, commitment constraints, and information asymmetries within political organizations (Ruiz et al., 2016).

Prokopijević (2000) argues that simply observing the developed countries of the West leads to the conclusion that democracy is a valid economic system. He also suggests that while democracy may not be sufficient for a prosperous market economy, it is desirable for establishing a prosperous economic order (Prokopijević, 2000). According to Doric (2019), the relationship between democracy and economic growth is not automatic. There are two central schools of thought regarding the interrelationship between democracy and economic development. The first school of thought, the conflict school, argues that there is no strong relationship between democracy and development. They believe that because democratic states are not mature enough, their operations are ineffective, undermining economic growth and development. Scholars from this school claim

that non-democratic regimes are more economically viable. Lee Kuan Yew's hypothesis emphasizes the possibility of interest groups proliferating and lobbying for their interests, thus slowing down decision-making and causing stalemates in the political sphere to the detriment of society as a whole (Knutsen, 2010).

Doric (2019) outlines the "skeptical school," which emphasizes that there is no straightforward relationship between democracy and economic growth. It argues that economic growth depends on the effectiveness of economic policy measures. This school considers the relationship between democracy and economic development complex and challenging to measure. In a society, democracy cannot develop without improving the standard of living. According to Doric (2019), democratic tendencies are positively correlated with increased actual social product per capita, longer life expectancy, and a reduction in the gender gap in primary education.

Linking democracy and development: The African evidence from the preceding sections shows that apparent that the evolution of democracy in Africa has coincided roughly with the continent's growth and development. When the measures of democracy deteriorated on the aggregate in the 1980s, so did growth and the various economic and development outcomes. Furthermore, as the measures improved in the late 1980s or early 1990s, so did these outcomes. A closer examination reveals further that improvements, especially in growth and per capita GDP where the data is much more complete, occurred with a slight lag. For instance, most of the improvements in the democracy indicators often began roughly in the late 1980s or very early 1990s, consistent with the post-Cold War period. Meanwhile, growth resurgence, for instance, began in the mid-1990s. Such evidence, however, is only qualitative and too gross (Fosu, 2020)

Through elections, democracy provides a mechanism to hold the power of the elite or special interest groups in check, ensures the separation of state powers into discrete branches of government, and protects human rights and the rule of law. In turn, democracies engender confidence in the pursuit of long-term investments. In this line of reasoning, democracy is often conflated with good governance as a force multiplier on all development aspects: African countries with more vital institutions and better governance indicators, particularly regarding government effectiveness and regulatory quality, generally fare better. However, such substantive democracies require significant time and resources to mature (Cilliers2021).

2.7. YOUTH FACTORS IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

After 30 years of a democratic system in South Africa, from 1994-2024, there has been a steady decline in voter participation from the youth. Electoral politics is a privilege for everyone eligible to participate in electoral politics, including youth. So many factors influence youth to participate in electoral politics or not participate in the electoral process. In South Africa, young people born after 1994 and known as Born Frees are not that concerned with the struggle of the past or even aware that many young people died fighting for the freedom that everyone is enjoying today. These young people are more focused on the better life that the mass media portrays. In addition, democracy education in South Africa does not appear to target a youthful constituency (Peters, 2004).

2.7.1. Unemployment.

The South African youth face the challenge of high unemployment, which impacts their overall quality of life. This situation highlights the government's failure to implement effective strategies to tackle youth unemployment, leading to a diminishing interest among young people in engaging in electoral democracy through voting. Many young people express their desire to vote yet struggle to find jobs despite having qualifications and no personal connections. In contrast, individuals with political ties continue to find opportunities in the job market, escalating one of the socio-economic issues that fuel youth disengagement in South Africa. The worsening job opportunities for young people over the years have played a significant role in their growing disinterest in participating in the electoral process (Chauke, 2022). According to a report published by The Economist's Pocket World in Figures, South Africa has the highest youth unemployment rate of any other country ". According to (Stats SA, 2024), youth aged 15-34 remained vulnerable in the labour market. The fourth quarter of 2023 results show that the total number of unemployed youth had increased by 87000 to 4,7 million while there was a decrease of 97 000 in the number of employed youth to 5.9 Million.

2.7. 2. Lack of education

Lack of knowledge about democratic practices hinders youth participation in elections as they do not understand the complexities of democratic practices. Rural youth, living in absolute poverty and with little education, struggle to comprehend the principles of electoral democracies specifically that this is their way of holding government to account. After the election, civic education is no longer important, and no one cares about them. Young people are less likely to vote because of a lack of civic education (Akinboade, 2013). To make an informed choice of political leadership, a young person must be well-educated. Various studies have shown that young people believe that education enables them to make informed decisions and avoid being fooled by politicians (Chauke, 2020).

Education in South Africa cannot assist students or graduates in the battle of life, and the education system is of questionable quality, resulting in an unacceptably high unemployment rate among young graduates. The inability of the job market to integrate with the education system inhibits the economy's capacity to absorb these youth. After completing their studies, students should be offered curriculums that enable them to enter the workforce immediately (Seanego & Mogoboya, 2019). Youth have lost hope in the country's education system and government in general, hence the decline in voter turnout at the polling stations during elections. Through different studies, researchers have discovered that South African citizens are disappointed with the education system. This is one of the contributing factors to the decline of votes.

2.7.3. Poverty

The younger generation faces the challenges of poverty. As a result, they choose not to engage in electoral democracy. Consequently, the political parties in power must focus on improving the living conditions, especially in the townships, so that young Africans can fully experience life (Chauke, 2022).

2.7.4 .Corruption

According to Mijia (2020) corruption is one reason that contributes to the youth's disinterest in electoral politics. Young people show disinterest and apathy toward political engagement due to inadequate support and encouragement from relevant authorities, the prevalence of corruption within the administration, a lack of noticeable progress in their communities, authoritarian traits exhibited by local leaders, and the infringement of both democratic and human rights by government officials and security forces

2.8 PARTICIPATORY AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY

Goldsmith (2024) defined democracy, as a form of governance, comes in various shades, with representative and participatory democracy standing as prominent models. While distinct in their approaches, these two forms of democracy share fundamental similarities that underscore their commitment to citizen involvement and decision-making.

Participatory democracy and representative democracy are two distinct models of governance, either with its own merits and challenges. These two distinct models bring the justifications for involving youth in electoral politics within these frameworks. According to Resende (2007), in participatory democracy, citizens are no longer just recipients but rather active participants in the formation of public policies. In light of this, the various societal issues, the unique requirements of minority groups, and the inadequate representation of many others underscore the need to integrate the perspectives of social actors into political decision-making. Participatory democracy emphasises active citizen engagement in decision-making processes. It encourages direct involvement, consultation, and collaboration. Elected representatives are entrusted with the responsibility of making informed decisions. They engage in debates, gather information, and deliberate on behalf of their constituents.

In essence, all forms of democracy involve some level of participation. Every democratic system is established through an initial agreement, such as a socially accepted contract or constitution, and continuous input from the public through regular elections. Therefore, to describe democracy as consensual is to say that it is also participatory. However, in modern times, participatory democracy goes beyond initial agreement and occasional elections. Civic engagement is the active and meaningful involvement of citizens in the processes of governance. This involvement often

takes place through mechanisms such as initiatives and referenda, allowing citizens to directly participate in decision-making. The concept emphasizes the citizen's pivotal role as a proactive agent in creating laws and underscores their significance as essential participants in the governing process (Encyclopedia.com:2024).

In contrast to representative democracy, where the citizen plays a passive role as a client of the government, a watchdog holding the government accountable but otherwise being ignored, and a periodic voter responsible for choosing those in power, philosophers of participatory democracy, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1762) and Robert Michels (1911), have interpreted this "limited" view of democracy as being contrary to its fundamental essence. In the context of representation within a democracy, Michels (1911) argues that the democratic principle is compromised. In a representative democracy, he suggests that liberty vanishes when the ballot is cast into the box.

Gambo (2019) explores the various advantages of involving youth in political issues within the context of participatory democracy. Firstly, he underscores the profound impact of "Ownership and Belonging," as active participation in shaping policies and laws cultivates in young individuals a palpable sense of ownership and a deep-rooted feeling of belonging. Furthermore, he emphasizes the unifying and inclusive nature of youth involvement, fostering a sense of unity and inclusivity within the political sphere. The concept of "Empowerment" takes center stage, as Gambo highlights how youth engagement bestows young individuals a powerful voice and agency, ensuring that their perspectives are not only considered but also integral in shaping political discourse. Additionally, involving youth in political processes has a profound effect on the creation of "Informed Citizens," as it inspires them to become informed about legal processes, governance, and societal issues. Lastly, the aspect of "Social Cohesion" is illuminated, showcasing how youth participation serves as a bridge that spans across generations, promoting understanding, empathy, and cooperation, ultimately fostering a more cohesive society.

Resende (2007) asserts that within a representative system, the authority to make decisions is bestowed through democratic elections, providing the elected leader with the independence to govern as they deem appropriate over their term. In this capacity, the leader functions as the embodiment of the collective will of numerous voters, wielding the responsibility of representing their multifaceted interests. It balances efficiency and broad participation. Youth involvement in electoral politics has several benefits as a representative democracy model. The first benefit is

legitimacy because representative democracy gains legitimacy by reflecting the diversity of its population, including youth. The second one is policy relevance; Youth perspectives enrich policy discussions, ensuring that laws address contemporary challenges. Furthermore, the third benefit is about future orientation, as youth are stakeholders in the future; their involvement ensures that policies consider long-term consequences.

Participatory democracy is a process of collective decision-making that combines elements from direct and representative democracy. Citizens have the power to decide on policy, and politicians assume the role of policy implementation. The electorate can monitor politicians' performance by comparing citizens' proposals with implemented policies (IDEA, 2005). Participatory democracy plays a vital role in youth participation; through participatory democracy, young people get empowered and can learn critical life skills and develop civic and human rights knowledge, which are imperative to their own and their community's development. With this model, volunteerism can be a relevant, purposeful motor for democracy and sustainable communities today, creating a vibrant, purposeful society tomorrow. According to Barron (2020), the concept of volunteerism should be emancipatory for all stakeholders involved, encompassing both volunteers and communities. This viewpoint is supported by the Ladder of Volunteer Participation.

2.9. LA DERICK AND JAMES LADDER, YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS AND DEVELOPMENT.

Le Dereck and James Ladder Participation, which Roger Hart established in the early 1960s, talks about youth involvement in the country's political affairs. James Ladder explained that organisations run by older adults or adult people prevent young people from participating in decision-making. Ladder participation provides a clear picture of why youth are less interested in politics. James Ladder's participation theory advocates for youth participation in the political processes of their country, especially the electoral process. The ladder of participation consists of 7 Levels of participation that determine the youth's participation level in the political process.

Manipulation is the first step, which outlines adults' manipulation at the cost of young people. The first element is to promote adultism rather than youth development. The second element of James ladder participation is decoration; this is where the elders organise the project of the youth without the involvement of the youth themselves. In South Africa, older people sit down together and talk about decisions that will impact the youth without their participation. Step 3 of James Ladder's participation is when the adults give the youth a chance to outline their views regarding the matter that involves them. However, in reality, the adults do not consider young people's voices and the young people have raised this element known as tokenism.

Step 4 is known as the assigned but informed; it is where young people are informed of the project or things happening or taking place in the community, such as voting. In this setting, young individuals are made aware of the significance of engaging in the electoral process. This is step five, which is known as consulted and informed. This is where the youth are now involved in the project that is taking place. Young people can raise their voices and ideas and come up with suggestions on implementing ideas that can help them. Then, adults make the final decision, while the youth come up with suggestions. This is one of the steps that can be used to increase young people's participation in politics by ensuring that youth are involved and are allowed to come up with their ideas for implementing the things that affect them as youth. Step number six is known as adult-initiated; this is the space where adults do not dominate like in the first stage, where everything was about them. Here, both adults and young people share the decision-making process. This element increases or promotes participation because when decisions are made, youth will be part of those decisions, meaning whatever decision will be implemented has the input of young people. Hence young people are part of the decision-making process. The last part, step 7, is called Young People Initiated and Directed. Here, young people develop programs that promote their development, and they do it with the help of adult/older people supporting them. This is the stage that can promote young people or youth participation positively. This is because it will give them a chance or a platform to address the challenges they are going through or are facing. Engaging in the electoral process and other political matters can inspire them to become more active citizens, as it contributes to the overall decision-making framework. Additionally, they will have a role in the development initiatives being implemented, which can enhance their growth as young individuals.

2.10. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Developing the youth for participatory decision-making aims to promote equal opportunity and treatment of youth in an environment that supports continued development and learning. The youth's participation in democratic processes, community, and civic decision-making, and responsiveness to their needs, aspirations, and challenges recognise the importance of youth development initiatives, their peculiar needs, transparency, accountability, and accessibility (RSA, 2009).

Engaging youth in decision-making is a vital and ethical component of any democratic society. It empowers young people, contributes positively to their quality of life, supports their emotional and social well-being, and fosters a sense of belonging. By focusing on youth development, individuals feel that they are part of something significant, can express valued opinions on important matters, and collaborate with both peers and adults within the community. Encouraging youth participation is crucial for nurturing active citizenship, as it aligns young people's social rights with their responsibilities. Greater involvement in decision-making typically leads to increased support from adults and organizations.

Political participation can be classified as conventional and unconventional. Conventional participation is associated with more structured and lawful participation. This type of participation tends to occur within particular norms and traditions of a country, namely electoral actions. Unconventional participation has often been referred to as a less traditional or even a non-institutional form of participation. This type of participation is more aggressive and assertive behavior that may even break the law. Conventional political participation focuses on actions, or one's involvement in voting in elections, campaigning, lobbying, running for election, attending meetings, contacting politicians/ government officials, public hearings, recalls. Unconventional participation focuses on actions or one's involvement outside of the electoral process and "aims to influence politics through non-institutionalized means. This type of participation includes political demonstrations, protests, boycotting, civil disobedience, public debates, and even strike action (Martin: 2022). Political participation as a concept involves citizens' use of both conventional and

unconventional actions. Many forms of conventional and unconventional political participation are employed, but the reasons why these forms of behavior are used often differ.

2.10.1. YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN THE GLOBAL SPHERE

Youth political participation is becoming a hot issue globally, and it is considered an alternative way of development. This way, world governments are paying attention. For instance, “the AU has over the years adopted normative frameworks to entrench the protection and promotion of young people’s rights, including their right to participate in governance, democratic processes, and decision-making structures at all levels. Young people lack interest in conventional political participation while still they are actively participating in informal ones (Mijiana, 2020).

A global force of youth activism is becoming increasingly evident. Over the past decade, many 'youth revolts' have occurred worldwide. The Tunisian Revolution triggered several other movements, including the Arab Spring, the Indigodomos movement in Southern Europe, the protests against the Iraq War, and the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. The youth mobilization movement has harboured fundamental changes in Africa, where young people have dominated the population, economies have underperformed, and governments have not responded to their concerns. In many African countries, youth-led protests led to the toppling of governments. (Honwana et al., 2021).

2.10.2. YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN AFRICA

The youth in Africa are all persons aged between 15-35 years; youth politics in Africa today shows some continuity with a history of co-optation of youth in the service of formal political authorities (be it chieftaincy, the state or political parties) but also evidences a disengagement of the youth from formal politics that contrasts with their enthusiasm at independence. There are two extremes in the discourse of youth politics: full, vocal, and sometimes aggressive participation or, on the other hand, complete disengagement. However, many young people will likely be between these extremes (Farthing, 2010). Undoubtedly, African youth are a political force. Nothing evidences

this fact more in contemporary times than the Arab Spring and other movements of political contestation, resistance, or revolt led by young people in Burkina Faso, Senegal, Niger, Togo, and South Africa, among other countries.

Youth politics in Africa today shows some continuity with a history of co-optation of youth in the service of formal political authorities (be it chieftaincy, the state, or political parties) but also evidences a disengagement of the youth from formal politics that contrasts with their enthusiasm at independence (Gyampoo, 2019). While the continent has undergone significant political and social change, patriarchy and gerontocracy still permeate political institutions in ways that disadvantage young people. Relatively lacking in social and political capital, the youth find themselves on the periphery of power even while hiring themselves out as ‘voting machines’ and party apparatchiks. From the preceding, African young people’s participation in politics ranges from roles as agents and instruments for the development of more democracy to activities such as purveyors of political conflict and violence. Literature shows that they are often marginalised in formal political processes and structures. Young people’s political exclusion is due to their lack of interest in politics. However, young people’s activism in alternative spaces of political engagement shows that they may be disillusioned with formal political systems they perceive as flawed, corrupt, repressive, or exclusionary (Gyambo, 2019)

Youth in Africa participate in political affairs through unconventional participation, and as a result, youth activism is sweeping Africa. Young activists and youth-led movements are on the front lines of change through protests, forming associations, and new spaces for expression. During the 2010s, African youth movements were primarily concerned with politics. Young activists were outspoken against government misdeeds. Notable examples of such movements include Y’en a Marre in Senegal, Balai Citoyen in Burkina Faso, and Filimbi in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

2.11. YOUTH BULGE THEORY

2.11.1. Introduction

This study borrows insights from the youth bulge theory, which refers to the demographic phenomenon where a significant proportion of a population consists of young people (typically aged 15 to 35). Under the youth bulge theory, we will delve into the background of youth bulge theory, the application of the theory to the study, the implications of the bulge theory in youth participation, and the conclusion.

2.11.2. Background

The youth bulge theory is derived from strategic demography and seeks to explain how demographic factors influence global and regional security. According to Macrothink Institute (2014), the youth bulge is predominant in developing countries, especially those that have experienced a reduction in infant mortality but continue to exhibit high fertility rates. Pruitt (2020) posits that the “youth bulge” is a demographic phenomenon characterised by a higher percentage of young people within a country's population. This can have significant social, economic, and political implications for the nation. Thobejane (2017) argues that the youth population explosion caused by the youth bulge results from the high natality rate and low mortality rate stemming from advancements in medical and health sciences. In contrast, Gidley & Inayatullah (2002) argue that the youth bulge is not merely a demographic trend, but an integral component of an alternative future perspective, one that revolves around the viewpoint of young people.

2.11.3. LINK TO THE STUDY (APPLICATION TO THE STUDY)

The youth bulge can lead to a demographic dividend. This occurs when a large proportion of the population is of working age, contributing to economic growth and development. For instance, according to Sohail (2016), when South Korea and China made the youth bulge into a demographic

dividend they flourished by creating regulatory environments where small businesses could flourish the power of the landed elite was significantly diminished, allowing social mobility and foreign investment could lead initially to jobs and later to technology transfer and the development of state-supported “national” multinational corporations. The youth bulge means a substantial labour force (Sohail, 2016). However, this potential workforce needs adequate education, skills, and employment opportunities to contribute positively to the economy. The youth bulge allows youth-led activism, advocacy, and political engagement. Young people can drive social change and influence policy decisions. The youth bulge provides a platform for feminist movements and gender equality advocacy. The youth bulge has led to civil unrest as young people have not found jobs and thus have been a destabilizing influence, either joining radical groups or becoming part of the permanently unemployed or partly employed (Weber, 2019).

Nordås & Davenport (2013, 926-940) posit that when youth participation is influenced and declined by the youth factors in participation, such as employment, lack of education, and poverty, it breeds dissatisfaction and grievance. As a result of this dissatisfaction and grievances, conflict, and violence (protests), activist movements emerge among young people. Despite the large number of youth, the participation of young people in electoral politics remains low. As the number of youth increases, so do their challenges. When the government fails to address its challenges, it results in the perception of exclusion, which results in young people seeking another way of expressing their dissatisfaction, including civil disobedience and protest. Africa experiences a live bulge, a demographic phenomenon in which a significant proportion of the population falls within the 18- to 34-year-old age group. The youth bulge theory outlines the challenges and opportunities of youth bulge in a country. Actively improving youth participation in decision-making can motivate them to participate in electoral office, which can help build democracy (Kaiku, 2017)

According to Pruitt (2020), a "youth bulge" refers to a demographic trend marked by a large proportion of young people within a country's population. This phenomenon carries significant implications for the nation's social, economic, and political landscape. The increasing youth population is leading to disengagement among young individuals in political matters as they grapple with challenges like unemployment. Furthermore, as Kaiku (2017) highlights, nations with a substantial increase in their young population often illustrated as a "youth bulge" in population

pyramids, are at a higher risk of experiencing conflict, violence, and political disengagement among young people.

2.11.4. YOUTH PARTICIPATION IMPLICATIONS OF THE YOUTH BULGE THEORY

Inayatullah (2016) argues that the impact of the youth bulge depends on whether the older generation in power resists change, leading to a demographic bomb, or mobilises youth resources to create a demographic dividend. Inayatullah (2016) argues that a demographic dividend can fuel global economic growth, as young people in one region can drive innovation that stimulates progress in another area. He concluded that a youth bulge can be perceived as either a positive catalyst for opportunity or a negative catalyst for conflict. Ural's (2006) study identified the relevant factors believed to interact with youth bulge to increase the risk of political violence. He concluded that youth bulge may also increase the risk of terrorism and spontaneous violent events like riots, demonstrations, or apathy.

2.11.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter reviewed literature and theoretical frameworks related to democracy, elections, and youth political participation, emphasizing the challenges that hinder youth engagement, such as unemployment, poverty, and corruption. A key focus was the Youth Bulge Theory, which explains the dual potential of a youthful population to drive growth or contribute to instability if youth feel excluded from political processes. The South African context was examined, highlighting the structural barriers faced by rural youth, including lack of voter education, limited political representation, and economic difficulties, which lead to political apathy and disengagement. The chapter established a strong theoretical foundation for the study, identifying crucial factors influencing rural youth perceptions of electoral participation. The next chapter will further explore youth political engagement in South Africa, offering insights into historical and contemporary interactions with the political landscape.

CHAPTER 3 SOUTH AFRICA YOUTH AND POLITICS

3.1. INTRODUCTION.

This chapter delves into the intersection of South African (SA) youth and politics. Since 1994, South Africa's political landscape has undergone significant transformations, marked by six democratic elections, including the pivotal 1994 elections. This chapter provides a lens to these changes, mainly through youth involvement. It covers the background of politics, youth participation, youth and politics during colonial times, youth and politics during the post-apartheid era, 21st-century youth and election development, youth and activism in the 21st century, challenges of youth participation in SA, and a conclusion.

3.1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF POLITICS

The term "politics" is derived from the Greek word "politika," which originated from Aristotle's book on governing and governments, reflecting his concept of "affairs of the city." Bueno (2013) highlights the evolving nature of politics and provides a standard definition of the ability to persuade and influence the sovereign electorate to wield political power and authority in the governance of the state. According to Heywood (2013), politics encompasses the activities associated with the governance of a country or area, including the making, preservation, and amendment of general rules. Politics is a grand theatre where individuals engage in collective decision-making processes that significantly influence their lives (Britannica, 2024). Osieja (2021) also defines politics as public administration, which involves the management of a country's resources.

3.1.2. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

According to Galstyan (2019), participation has evolved in response to social science and civic process developments. The primary understanding of participation is rooted in democracy and governance. Forbrig (2005) posits that, in political theory, participation is narrowly limited to people voting in elections. Graham (2020) emphasizes that electoral participation (i.e., voting) has

been the primary form of political participation in South Africa. However, various participatory acts exist beyond the ballot box. "Political participation is loosely defined as the actions of citizens that affect politics" (Van, 2016). According to Martin (2022), the definitions of political participation encompass more than a specific act. Citizens engage in these activities voluntarily, intending to instigate specific changes or influence certain processes.

Youth participation serves as a means for young people to enlighten policymakers, making them more informed about the realities of young people, according to Galstyan (2019). This, in turn, can rejuvenate the political system and lead to better policies and services. As was supported by Farthing (2012), participation is considered a tool for the individual development of a young person as a citizen. Graham (2020) emphasises that electoral participation (i.e., voting) has been the primary form of political participation in South Africa. However, various participatory acts exist beyond the ballot box. "Political participation is loosely defined as the actions of citizens that affect politics" (Van, 2016). According to Martin (2022), the definitions of political participation encompass more than a specific act. Citizens engage in these activities voluntarily to instigate specific changes or influence certain processes.

3.1.3. YOUTH POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Martin (2022) argues that political participation has evolved to encompass traditional electoral methods and non-electoral forms of participation. The various types of political participation can be categorised as conventional and unconventional. Stockemer (2014) noted this distinction as the most common and is also mentioned by multiple scholars when discussing the subject of political participation. In his study, Kaim (2021) suggests that political participation is often considered conventional or unconventional. He adds that this differentiation is based on dualistic thinking.

Conventional participation is seen as more important than unconventional options in a voting-focused system. In a representative democracy, the focus on traditional involvement has resulted in overlooking unconventional forms of participation as political acts. The two types are often viewed as opposites (Martin, 2022). According to Akram et al. (2014), conventional energy sources

are often considered a narrow category, while unconventional energy sources comprise a broader category that includes all elements labeled as non-conventional.

Conventional political participation encompasses voting, campaigning, lobbying, running for office, attending meetings, contacting government officials, participating in public hearings, and engaging in recalls or referendums. Stockemer (2014) conceives unconventional participation as involving actions outside the electoral process and aims to influence politics through non-institutionalized means.

According to Graham (2020), conventional political participation in South Africa mainly revolves around electoral activities, such as voting. Despite being a fundamental democratic right and a way for citizens to engage and bolster the democratic process actively, this mode of participation is showing a steady decline. The decreasing electoral support indicates that South Africans are becoming less enthusiastic about participating in elections. It also reflects their dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Moosa (2021) supports this point by noting that citizens not only have increasingly negative perceptions of political participation, but also feel frustrated and lack faith in their leaders, as they believe these representatives are not responsive to their needs. Weitz-Shapiro and winters (2008) argue that political participation plays a crucial role in enhancing citizens' knowledge and competence regarding specific issues and in providing a better understanding of the political process and their rights as citizens. They emphasise that participation contributes significantly to developing informed and empowered citizens.

According to Sabu (2020) research suggests that young people's apparent apathy reflects their frustration with the functioning of the political system. They perceive a lack of responsiveness to their needs in a context of more security but fewer opportunities. While young people show disinterest in conventional political participation, they actively engage in informal forms of civic involvement. Khambule (2021) argues that the situation of young people in South Africa is deeply troubling as it threatens social stability and the country's long-term economic development. This is particularly concerning because the youth are the most productive sector of the economy in such circumstances. Young people who have limited opportunities to acquire the skills needed to enter the job market become emotionally and physically vulnerable. They are also more likely to engage in risky behavior and crime. According to Cunha and Heckman (2009), families living in socio-economic conditions of deprivation characterized by poverty and inequality experience significant

effects on their psychological well-being and human development, which affects human capability development.

3.1.4. YOUTH AND POLITICS DURING COLONIAL TIMES (APARTHEID TIMES)

According to the Apartheid Museum (2023), in 1961, South Africa achieved independence from the United Kingdom. Many South African activists sacrificed their lives for the cause during a long and intense struggle for freedom. In the fight for independence, Nelson Mandela led the African National Congress, which worked tirelessly to achieve it. The National Party introduced a system of racial segregation after it was elected to office in 1948. This was an apartheid government. DF Malan's National Party won power in 1948 on the apartheid election ticket under his leadership. South African blacks were deliberately deprived of their freedom during apartheid. Apartheid was not a wholly new initiative. Africans had been increasingly deprived of their rights since the discovery of minerals in the late 19th century, and segregationist policies had been implemented. Black people, however, suffered from more systematic and determined oppression under apartheid.

Young Black people, primarily students and professionals, became politically active in the 1940s. Most of these young people were college students. After becoming involved in student associations, several broadened their perspectives beyond campus politics. South African youth were primarily motivated by discourses associated with national and global struggles against fascism. South African youth were also heightened in their sense of African nationalism as a result of Italy's attack on Ethiopia in World War II. They also joined the radical, action-oriented African Teachers Union and participated in political activities. Consequently, a generation of political activists emerged that was vibrant and radicalized.

During the apartheid period, in the early years of colonial rule, youth at that time played an essential role in politics as they were involved in different activism that was against segregation and oppression (SAHO;2021). During apartheid time, young people of South Africa played a significant role in ending the oppression in schools and the apartheid government. They were involved in protests and underground meetings to conquer the apartheid government.

Young people formed the ANC Youth League aimed to end to apartheid in South Africa. All this is evidence that young people were fully committed and participated in the country's political affairs by then. Thompsell (2021) posits that establishing SASCO in 1970 was another example of youth political engagement. SASCO led to the well-known 1976 uprising that brought political awareness in schools for the youth and increased youth interest in politics. The rise of Black Consciousness out of the inactivity of the 1960s, a new resistance movement began to take hold. Black Consciousness, led by the charismatic leader Steve Biko, argued that blacks should develop pride in being black and lead the struggle against apartheid. In schools, African youth were angry at their poor education, and the ideas of Black consciousness began to appeal to them. Their futures were also dominated by unemployment and hardship when they graduated.

The turning point came in 1976 when the government forced African students to learn half of their subjects in Afrikaans. This decision sparked the Soweto uprising of 1976. As the uprisings spread from Soweto to the rest of the country, the government clamped down on opposition leaders. Thousands of young people fled into exile. The Soweto uprising was a landmark event leading the government down the road to greater repression and limited reform. (Apartheid Museum: 2023). The rise of the youth in the mid-80s rendered South Africa ungovernable, resulting in the release of political prisoners and the commencement of a negotiated settlement in the early 90s. The youth's participation in the political sphere was significantly evident in the past rise of the youth in the mid-80s, which made South Africa ungovernable, leading to the release of political prisoners and the beginning of a negotiated settlement in the early 90s.

As South Africa's history has unfolded, youth have often risen to lead the resistance to apartheid or to shape the forms that resistance took. As a result of the youth agency, organisations developed a core group of leaders among young people who would play crucial leadership roles in the future. Examples here include individuals such as Oliver Tambo, Nelson Mandela, and other leaders of the ANC Youth League who would take up leadership positions in the ANC later. A similar development took place during the Black Consciousness Movement, which gave rise to leaders who would later play an essential role in organisations active in the 1980s. As a result, the youth agency has been influential in several ways, including by developing a core of leaders that have sustained the liberation struggle (HSRC: 2018).

Apartheid South Africa did not provide institutional channels for political participation; this played a significant role in shaping the youth's political options regarding shaping political events and outcomes (Gordon et al., 2019). The country's youth were highly politicised during the years of resistance from the mid-1970s and became a major thorn in the side of the apartheid regime (Gordon et al., 2019). This experience shaped the context for youth participation and how they would relate to institutions post-apartheid. The local political environment determines the degree of youth participation. This, however, is insufficient to encourage widespread young involvement. Competitive politics, which would increase voter turnout among the youth, need also be taken into account. Most political engagements were limited to protest marches on the streets and in schools. Vilakazi and Nene (2021) note that in the 1980s youth in South Africa played a significant role in making the country ungovernable. This ultimately led to the release of political prisoners and the start of a negotiated settlement in the early 90s. The youth's involvement in politics during apartheid was notably unconventional.

3.1.5. YOUTH AND POLITICS DURING POST-APARTHEID

Casting that first vote in the 1994 founding elections in South Africa was a proud moment for many, signaling the beginning of freedom, dignity, and hope. According to Masinga (2021), the overwhelming endorsement for the ANC to take control in a new and democratic country was evident in the images of long queues as people cast their first vote. On May 10, 1994, Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president of South Africa. Almost immediately, the government addressed the issue of a democratic constitution, and in 1996, the most progressive constitution in the world was signed into law.

Everyone, especially young people, was granted the right to education and other benefits under the Republic of South Africa's Constitution in the post-apartheid era (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, South African Government, 2020). Anyone was able to pursue their education at any institution. The only drawback was that, after finishing their education, most young people, in particular, remained impoverished due to unemployment (Montle, 2020). One of the major

obstacles confronting the new democratic government was how to reduce the extremes of poverty and inequality in South Africa. The government introduced the Reconstruction and Development Program and began providing jobs, housing, water, education, and electricity to people experiencing poverty. This involved tackling poverty among the urban and rural poor. Millions of people have been given access to key services such as electricity, water, and sanitation. Moreover, over 2 3 million subsidies have been approved for new houses.

The next election after the first democratic election in South Africa was held on 7 June 1999; youth participation was significant during this time. Most of the people who were young by then were the people who experienced the struggle against the apartheid government; when the election came, it was their pride to participate in the electoral process as a way of exercising their right to vote. President Mbeki stabilised the domestic economy and re-integrated South Africa into the global economy in a masterly fashion. Black economic empowerment has gone some way to redress a racially imbalanced economy, and the government has continued major spending programs on social services.

3.1.6. 21ST CENTURY YOUTH AND ELECTION DEVELOPMENT

Youth participation in contemporary South Africa has changed drastically from the first election in the 21st century, which took place in 2004, until 2024. Youth participation has been declining because of various factors that lead youth to voter apathy. The 21st century is the period that started in 2000 and continues until now. Young people who are 25 years and older into the democratic process in South Africa live in the aftermath of oppression and struggle to liberate black people from the white minority. The youth of today who are eligible to vote are the ones who were born in the aftermath of the long struggle against the apartheid government; this subset of youth is referred to as “born frees” because their birth came in 1994 or after. Unlike those who came before them, this generation is considered to have more opportunities and human rights that are better preserved.

The succession of Mandela by Thabo Mbeki took place during an “economic boom,” but the latter’s economic policies were widely criticized as too slow. The Black community, who had

endured decades of marginalisation, was especially dismayed by the slow progress in bridging the wealth gap. Unemployment, crime, and corruption were prevalent. Mbeki was criticised for the poor management of the AIDS crisis that led to the death of hundreds of South Africans daily. His woes began when he undermined the democratic processes using state institutions. He adopted an authoritarian and paranoid leadership style, which created agitations within the ANC (Le Roux, 2013), and this affected the youth participation in political affairs negatively, for they felt that the change was taking too long or delayed after they voted.

Back then, the opinions of young South African were suppressed by postcolonial electoral patterns. By contrast, today's political environment encourages youth to participate in political dialogue. The 2019 general election was successful but youth participation on traditional voting platforms still needs to be higher. Young people in the 21st century are more engaged on social media platforms. As a result, young people's use of social media has increased direct engagement with political representatives, strengthened political dialogue, and allowed the expression of political opinions, contributing to youth civic participation.

The post-apartheid period witnessed various degrees of decline in youth participation in political activities. After 30 years, there is evidence of 'politically disengaged' youth despite the rich history of political activism. The youth of today are confronted with many challenges, including a high volume of unemployment, poverty, and crime. Unemployment cuts across a broad spectrum of young people, ranging from matriculates to graduates of institutions of higher learning. The country's key challenge lies in making young people conscious of their identity, being aware of their history, and inspiring them to remain patriotic.

Lekalake (2016) argues that youth political engagement has again come into focus during ongoing nationwide protests by university students demanding change in South African higher education institutions. Contemporary South Africa is characterised by a large gap between the rich and the poor and faces socio-economic instability. The young "born frees" also experience similar challenges. According to HRSC IEC, results of the 2019 election have indicate that voter turnout has declined 11 % compared with the 2014 elections (Kitanova: 2020), implying that things now are different from those of apartheid times because there are several ways of participating in politics, such as protesting and signing petitions. Youth are disengaging themselves from formal.

One of the formal forms of participation in political affairs of the country in South Africa, in which youth are disengaging, is participating in the electoral process.

In South Africa, the liberation movement during apartheid fought for the right of the franchise until they got it in 1994. As a result, the right to franchise can be exercised by everyone eligible because the right to franchise is the starting point in democracy (Didi, 2020). South Africa a country with a growing youth population and an increasing lack of formal politics by youth, is putting South Africa's democracy at stake. Because of this disengagement from the formal political affairs of the country, Robert Mattes posed the question of whether South African youth is a ticking time bomb (Mattes, 2015). He argues that South Africa's political culture has a genuine problem, mainly familiar to the youth.

Back then, young South Africans' opinions were suppressed by postcolonial electoral patterns. By contrast, today's political environment encourages youth to participate in political dialogue. Violent protests are frequently broadcast on social media sites through images or videos that show exclusion or acts of hatred towards particular groups. Activism like #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall represent notable violent demonstrations that may have persuaded young people to take voluntary action (Kariuki: 2021). In the 21st century, political parties use online marketing because 21st-century youth spend much of their time on social media platforms. It is where they express their opinions, even regarding the issue of participating in elections. This platform helps different political parties navigate their needs, be aware of them, or be mindful of and respond to them.

3.1.7. YOUTH AND ACTIVISM IN THE 21st CENTURY

Activism is an activity that pressures individuals in positions of authority to improve society and advance the greater good (Brooks, 2023). The involvement of South African young people in activism has resulted in a notable transformation in political engagement and activity. In contrast to previous demonstrations or lobbying, contemporary youth movements have increasingly relied on technology as a fundamental pillar of their operations (Majudi & Shai (2023). Social media has emerged as a potent instrument for amplifying young activists' voices and facilitating information

dissemination, hence facilitating the establishment of global movements (Thomson, 2018). The phenomenon of youth activism has become a significant and influential factor in contemporary South Africa; the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) is one of the influential activist movements in South Africa. Formed in 2013, it was founded by former ANC Youth League leader Julius Malema and former ANC Youth League spokesman Floyd Shivambu.

One factor that causes youth activism in South Africa is the corruption committed by elected leaders. After the second election of democracy in South Africa, former presidents such as Thabo Mbeki, Kgalema Motlante, and Jacob Zuma were in charge, and the current president is Cyril Ramaphosa. Many things happened under their leadership, which resulted in the decline of voter turnout and contemporary youth activism. There was a series of youth unrest after Jacob Zuma took over from Motlante. Among these protests was the demonstration by the youth after Zuma sacked his respected Finance Minister Pravin Gordhan, which further plunged the economy into chaos. South Africa's ailing economy is distressed, hence the university students introduced the slogan #FEESMUSTFAIL.

During this term of President Cyril Ramaphosa, much youth activism took place in South Africa. Youth activism is primarily effective in universities where the student forms their group or movement, such as ANCYL, and other emerging movements, such as EFF which is currently dominated in the universities and the colleges of South Africa. According to Egwu et al. (2021), one of the most significant opposition figures to Ramaphosa's government is Julius Malema, the former president of the ANCYL and the leader of the EFF. The EFF has a strong following among university students, providing a powerful voice for youth activism, as demonstrated in the #WitsAsinaMali (we have no money) protest in March 2021.

Youth activism in South Africa is continuously born out of dissatisfaction with the current government's inequality, wealth distribution, and service delivery. The high rate of youth unemployment and low economic power threaten the current and future political system because, due to youth dissatisfaction, demonstrations and protests are continuously taking place. Youth participation in contemporary South Africa remains a considerable concern to the country's political system. There is a question of whether democracy will impact the country's democracy positively or negatively since the youth are less interested in political affairs. Failure of youth to participate in the electoral process might lead to lack of credibility of South Africa's democracy.

3.1.8. CHALLENGES OF YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

The decline in the youth's political involvement and the lack of inclusion in policymaking threaten the future of democracy in South Africa. Inevitably, increased youth electoral participation has a bearing on voter outcomes and the society that emerges from the constant struggle for improved socio-economic conditions. In addition, Paul (2022) notes that the youth cannot significantly influence policy formation due to the nature of the party-political system and the dismal history of internal democracy inside political parties. This demonstrates why disengaging from the current party-political structure might lead to meaningful youth participation. Some contend that if young people engage in non-formal party channels, they have the potential to influence policy response.

Despite not participating in political processes like civic organisations, young people appear to have their elders' democratic perspectives on politics. According to Kariuki (2021), there are three ways to examine involvement in political processes: traditional voting and campaigning, planned assembly of two or more people to address non-pestering concerns, and, lastly, violence in politics. Youth in South Africa need to be adequately included in activism or politics. Increasing youth participation in politics or activism is essential due to their unassuming disposition. It cannot be overstated how vital youth influence is for any political party to succeed and thrive; it affirms their significance in the political sphere. However, South African youth face difficulties in participating in politics and activism because of several factors. South Africa has yet to have an encouraging experience when it comes to youth involvement in politics and activism due to a variety of factors, such as victimisation, intimidation, societal indifference, and socio-cultural limitations.

3.1.10. CONCLUSION

Public protests were the commonest way of expressing dissent against the apartheid regime. This was exemplified in the youth uprisings in the 1970s. Participating in politics of this kind defies formal institutions of authority and has its own political culture. The youth defiance during the apartheid years would outlive the apartheid system. This culture of participation has endured and

become a feature of democratic South Africa, where the youth continue to express their dissatisfaction with the government by embarking on public protests. These have often taken the form of so-called service-delivery protests. Perhaps in recent years, most protests have involved the use of public violence, the blockading of public roads, and sometimes the burning of schools and public facilities. In turn, the police have of late resorted to firing and killing protesters.

The grievances that spark protests are usually legitimate and apparent. The language of the protests, however, evolves often and rapidly into an expression of disregard for government institutions. The aim of demonstrations increasingly transcends service delivery, as they focus on issues like justice and government inaccessibility. The fact that so many youths are unemployed makes them readily available to participate in such protests. The protests provide an avenue for the youth to express their political ideals. The youth's attitude towards formal government institutions is also expressed in their large-scale rejection of voting as a mechanism for political participation. HSRC (2011) shows that in 2010, young people (18-24) represented the lowest number of voters (51%) but also the highest number of voters who intend to register (75%). It suggests that, despite the intention of youth to vote (by registering as voters), they are concerned that negative perceptions of democracy's integrity and effectiveness might dampen their intentions.

This year marks 30 years of freedom in South Africa. It is also a year when South Africans will again head to the polls for National Government Elections. Many young people feel betrayed, and the best way to make their demands known is through agitations in the form of protests. Although South African youth constitute about half of the electorate, they are not keen to vote or be involved in political activities because they are often marginalised in almost all democratic processes.

CHAPTER 4: Research Methodology, Data Analysis and Presentation of Findings

4. 1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research approach and the overall design for collecting and analysing data on the rural youth's perceptions of voting. Fundamentally, the study aimed to understand the meanings the youth attach to voting or participating in the country's local government and national elections. The chapter presents the description of the study area, demographics (see table 1), data collection process, data analysis, sampling strategies, data presentation and measures adopted to ensure dependability and data trustworthiness. Thematic analysis was employed to derive key themes and patterns from qualitative data. Major findings are presented thematically in table (see table 2) and lastly, a detailed explanation is proffered. The study is based on narrative interviews with the 12 purposively sampled youth.

4. 2 Description of the Study Area: Thulamela Municipality

Thulamela Local Municipality is classified as a Category B municipality located in the Vhembe District in the northern region of Limpopo Province. (Uhunamure et al., 2017). Thulamela Local Municipality, established in 2000 under the Local Government Municipalities Structure Act, No. 117 of 1998, Section 12, serves as a compelling case study in the northeast region of South Africa's Limpopo Province. It is strategically located approximately 70 kilometres east of Makhado and 180 kilometres northeast of Polokwane, the province's capital. This municipality stands out as a gateway to the internationally recognized Kruger National Park, which is the second-largest national park in the world. Notably, the eastern boundary of Thulamela Municipality is demarcated by this iconic park, while the historical settlement of Thulamela itself, recognized for its cultural significance, lies within the park's confines and boasts a rich history dating from the 13th to the 18th centuries.

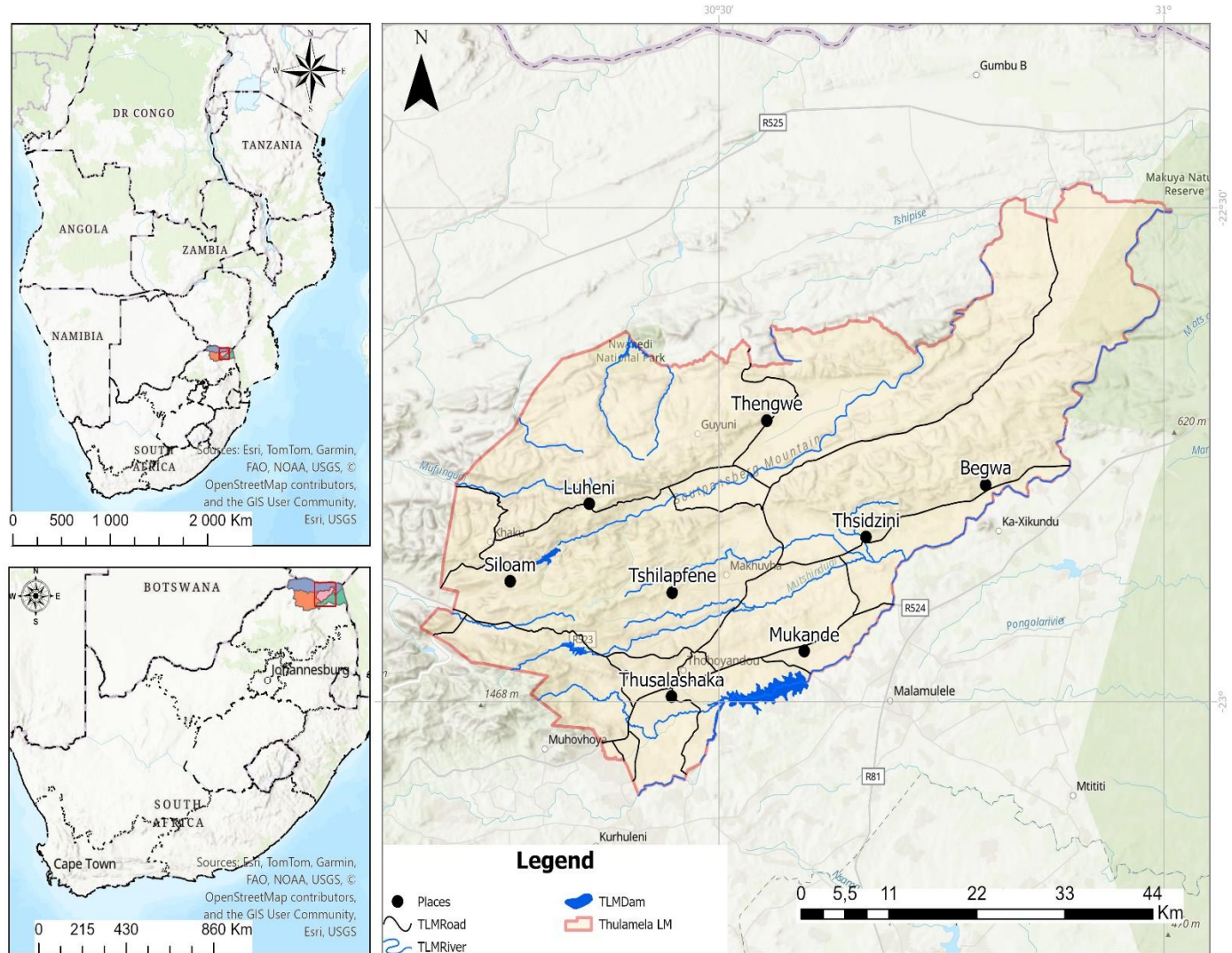
In the aftermath of the 2000 election, a consultation process was initiated by the Greater Thohoyandou/Greater Levubu-Shingwedzi Municipality to select a name that would better reflect the evolving socio-political landscape. Ultimately, the name Thulamela was chosen for its unifying

connotation, derived from the Karanga or Shona language, meaning “the place of giving birth” or “hill without vegetation.” Thulamela is characterized by a culturally diverse population, with the predominant cultures being that of the Tsonga and VhaVenda communities. However, the municipality is marked by significant socio-economic challenges, including rural settlement patterns and acute shortages of essential household infrastructure and services. There is an observable inconsistency in land usage, compounded by the historical concentration of economic resources in the former township areas and their peripheries.

The legacy of apartheid continues to influence local governance, resulting in pervasive extreme poverty across both rural and urban settings. The challenges faced by residents in underprivileged regions are severe, as many are compelled to allocate substantial time to fulfilling basic needs such as water collection and firewood gathering. The health of these communities is likewise impacted by inadequate housing and limited healthcare access. The prevailing patterns of dispersed settlement and inconsistent land use amplify the costs associated with delivering essential infrastructure, placing an additional burden on impoverished households who must travel considerable distances to access markets, employment opportunities, and essential services.

Spanning an area of 2.64 km² (1,020 square miles), Thulamela Municipality is the smallest municipality within the Vhembe district, comprising approximately 10% of the total geographical area. The municipality is organized into 41 wards and encompasses two distinct geographical regions, namely Thohoyandou and adjacent rural areas. According to the South African National Census of 2022, Thulamela Municipality's population stands at 575,929, reflecting an increase from 497,237 in 2016, and indicating an annual growth rate of 2.39% (Stats SA, 2022). The demographic statistics reveal that 99.3% of the population identifies as black Africans, with minority groups comprising 0.5% Indian, 0.1% colored, and 0.1% white. This demographic context is crucial for understanding the socio-economic dynamics and challenges within the municipality.

See map below showing the location of Thulamela Municipality



Map of Thulamela Municipality: [Thulamela Local Municipality - Overview](#)

4.3. Qualitative Methodology

To gain an in-depth understanding of the rural youth's perceptions of voting, a qualitative methodology was relied upon. An appraisal of the methodology offered by Denzin and Washington (2008) shows that the approach offers insight into a phenomenon being investigated through observation and interaction with study participants. Corte (2021) reinforces that

qualitative research is interactive in orientation and allows us to get closer to the phenomenon being studied. The methodological value of using a qualitative approach in this context is that it necessitated capturing the detailed thoughts, feelings, and motivations behind youth's participation in elections. Another psychological value opined by Creswell (2003), is that a qualitative approach provides rich, descriptive insights into participants' cognitive processes, highlighting the reasons underlying their behaviour and attitudes. Mason (2017) supports the utilization of qualitative methodology in the study of social realities like the youth's perception of voting because it is interpretive and helps to find the meaning of how the social world is produced.

To align with the aims and objectives of the research, I implemented a naturalistic approach that facilitated the collection of first-hand data through meaningful interactions with the social contexts surrounding my participants. Following Mtonton's (2015) suggestion, I focused on exploring the lived experiences of rural youth about their political engagement. To this end, I employed qualitative techniques such as in-depth interviews and comprehensive document reviews to uncover the deeper meanings and influencing factors at play in their electoral participation. This approach was critical in addressing my research questions and illuminating the multifaceted nature of youth involvement in the political process. Another strength derived from utilising a qualitative is that the approach allows for exploring and studying a phenomenon from the participant's perspective, which was the prime focus of this study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003).

4.4 Research design

A Research design is a strategy for answering your research question using empirical data (Creswell & Creswell (2003). As Banadri (2023) asserts, research design helps ensure that the methods used match the study objectives so that a researcher can apply the right kind of data analysis relevant to this study. The explorative nature of the study demanded an in-depth understanding of the rural youth's. A descriptive phenomenology design was therefore invoked to explore the rural youth's. According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) phenomenology, developed by Edmund Husserl as an eidetic method, to understand the way things appear to individuals in their experience. In other words, it aims at identifying the essential components of phenomena or experiences which make them unique or distinguishable from others. Creswell (2007) defined phenomenology as a study that describes the significance of the lived experiences of multiple

individuals concerning a particular concept or phenomenon. This approach is particularly suitable for this study, as it seeks to explore the perceptions of rural youth regarding their involvement in political elections, necessitating that participants articulate their experiences. The design necessitated understanding people's experience of a phenomenon in their natural setting (Creswell, 2015). Patton (2002) argues that a phenomenological design describes what people experience regarding a social phenomenon. The phenomenological approach helped to understand the youth's lived experiences regarding elections in their rural spheres.

The design allowed for studying the youth in their natural world and as they experience the phenomena. Babbie (2017) supports that phenomenological design is essential to explore a phenomenon from the insider's perspective, who is a participant. Instead of making assumptions about the phenomena, a phenomenological research design, helped to understand experiences from the individual's perspective, as posited by Lester (1999). A phenomenological approach was chosen to gain insights into the perceptions of rural youth regarding their participation in political elections in South Africa.

Phenomenological research has several methods for collecting data, a phenomenological study is primarily focused on experience, and that is why storytelling, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions and observations constitute ideal methods for collecting data in qualitative research (Connelly, 2010). Augmenting phenomenology was the use of a case study design, consisting of Thulamela Municipality. This study adopted the case study method, which involves an interview (investigation) of a specific situation. According to Creswell, et al (2007), a case study is a valuable research method when investigators aim to provide in-depth insights into specific instances, compare multiple examples, or examine bounded, well-defined cases. Bunkar (2024) added that the case study helps the reader analyse the scenario in order to extract relevant lessons and provides a comprehensive understanding of a confined unit. According to Yin (2014), conducting case study research requires a high level of skill and expertise. While Yin advocates for the importance of case study research in program evaluation, he emphasizes that its effectiveness depends on the specific evaluation context and the researcher's capabilities. Merkus (2023) outlines that the method's strength is that it allows researchers to explore complex phenomena and contexts. It is flexible and replicable since internal validity is achieved correctly. The other methodological value of using phenomenology explained by Vagle (2018), is the element of bracketing or suspending

personal conceptions about the issue being examined. That allows for understanding phenomena from the perspective of the people involved or affected. That helps to guard against researcher bias since there is no priori position. It allows for generating first-hand information by interacting with the relevant participants, in this case, former mineworkers.

4.5 Sampling Strategy

Sampling is the process of selecting a subset of individuals from a larger population for research purposes. This approach simplifies the research process, making it more efficient and cost-effective (Shukla, 2020). It is particularly valuable in research studies where surveying an entire population would be impractical due to financial and time constraints (Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). According to Sarfo, Debrah et al. (2022), sampling involves selecting a representative portion of a larger population to ensure meaningful and generalisable findings.

For this study, the researcher employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method in which participants are selected based on specific criteria, such as their availability and relevance to the research objectives. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental sampling, is a deliberate strategy that enables the selection of individuals, settings, or events that provide valuable insights that may not be obtainable from other sampling methods (Taherdoost, 2016). In this approach, the researcher includes participants based on their perceived significance to the study. Unlike probability sampling, where each population member has a known likelihood of being selected, non-probability sampling does not guarantee an equal chance of selection (Bhardwaj & Pooja, 2019). Makwana et al. (2023) further emphasise that purposive sampling is designed to ensure the inclusion of individuals whose characteristics align with the study's objectives.

Mujere (2016) highlights both the advantages and limitations of purposive sampling. One of its strengths is the flexibility it offers, allowing researchers to employ various techniques such as homogeneous sampling, critical case sampling, and expert sampling. For instance, critical case sampling can be used to determine whether a phenomenon warrants further investigation before adopting expert sampling to explore specific issues in more depth. However, purposive sampling is susceptible to researcher bias due to its subjective nature, which may influence the selection of participants and potentially affect the validity of the findings.

The study population consisted of youth in Thulamela Municipality between the ages 18-35. These were derived from 11 villages (Table 1 shows the demographics of the study populations). I target the youth who reside in rural villages of Thulamela municipality because that aligns with the study's aim to explore the perception of rural youth's participation in political elections. Initially, the study aimed to interview sixteen people but ended up interviewing thirteen because of data saturation. I had to stop data collection because new information was being generated. Of the selected thirteen, eight were males and six were females. Purposive sampling was deemed ideal for the study because it allowed targeting the youth who are the key study population and at their convenient places. The utilisation of convenient sampling as a non-probability sampling technique resonates with Yin (2013) who postulates that a non-probability sampling technique is ideal for focused qualitative studies with a case design to investigate a real-life phenomenon.

I settled for a small sample size because of time and resources. Sandelowski (1995, p.183) states that small samples provide a "deep, case-oriented analysis" of qualitative data. Schumacher (2001,) argues that "the power and logic of purposive sampling are that a few cases studied in depth yield many insights about the topic" Thus, the purposive sampling technique was appropriate for this study because the selected. . As a university student, most of the participants, come from the university. Most of the Interviews were conducted at the University of Venda on different days depending on the availability of the participants. To the participants who were not students at the University of Venda, interviews were held at their respective villages where they reside after making arrangements with them about the date and time for the Informed consent.

Demographic composition of the study participants.

Number of participants	Gender	Village /Residential Area	Age	Marital status	Highest academic qualification	Number of voting

1	Female	Masisi	21	Single	Grade 12 certificate	N/A
2	Male	Vondwe	22	single	Grade 12	1
3	Male	Shayandima	27	single	Post-Graduate	2
4	Female	Vondwe	19	single	Grade 12	N/A
5	Male	Tshilamba	23	single	degree	N/A
6	Female	Dididi	25	single	Post-Graduate	N/A
7	Male	Itsani	23	single	Degree	2
8	Male	Niani	25	single	Degree	1
9	Female	Lwamondo	27	single	Post-graduate	1
10	Male	khubvi	24	single	diploma	N/A
11	Male	phiphidi	30	Married	Certificate	N/A
12	Female	Tshivhilwi	25	single	Grade 12	N/A
13	Female	Ngudza	28	Married	diploma	2

Figure 1.2 Demographic table

4.6. Data Collecting Process

The utilisation of a phenomenology research design created an imperative to collect data using face-to-face in-depth interviews with the youth in Thulamela Municipality. Through in-depth interviews, a conversation between the interviewee and the interviewer was necessitated. That also created space for exploring and understanding a social reality from the perspective of those who experienced the situation (Maxwell, 2012). I therefore engaged the Thulamela youth in their natural settings to allow them to narrate their perceptions of voting and elections in general. In-depth interviews were found to be flexible and gave room for further probing. That necessitated generating rich data on the youth's lived experiences of elections.

Participants were briefed on the purpose of the study and consent was sought. It was made clear that if one wished to stop participating, they were free to do so since participation was voluntary. An interview guide was also shared to allow the participants to familiarize themselves with the process (Annexure Three: Interview guide). Considering that the study site is rural, where Tshivhenda is the dominant language, in-depth interview questions were translated from English to Tshivhenda to allow the participants to converse in their mother language. In the process, I was able to record and capture verbatim data in its original context. In-depth interviews were also complemented by taking field notes detailing key issues.

Constructing clear and concise questions was another consideration to avoid leading questions and confusing the participants. Because the study was phenomenological, I managed to reflect on my prior knowledge and position as a youth to avoid bias. Reflecting on positionality helped to ensure data trustworthiness. As noted by Maxwell (2012) and Babbie (2017), a researcher's preconceived ideas could distort study findings if there is no reflection on positionality. As part of my youth, I entered the field with the spirit of inquiry and not advocacy. My own experience and preconceived ideas about voting did not compromise objectivity as I interacted with the study participants.

The data collection process from the participants took place over two months, from October 2024 to November 2024. This timeframe allowed youth to present their self-reported perceptions and experiences regarding voting, ultimately enriching the findings of my research.

4.7. Data Analysis Methods

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I employed interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to investigate the lived experiences of rural youth and their perceptions of participation in political elections. My primary objective was to explore in detail how these individuals make sense of their personal and social worlds, particularly in the context of their political engagement. Utilizing IPA allowed me to delve deep into the participants' accounts, uncovering their individual perceptions and interpretations surrounding the electoral process. By focusing on their narratives, I aimed to understand the factors that influence their involvement or lack thereof in political activities. This methodology proved to

be particularly useful in examining the nuances of rural youth experiences, enabling me to arrive at a richer, more nuanced understanding of their perspectives.

The first step involved transcription of where recorded in-depth interviews into words. Verbatim data was coded by identifying similarities, differences, and key themes from the captured narratives. That allowed me to establish a chronological relationship among the themes. The subsequent stage involved a more theoretical ordering of the themes, where I clustered them together and identified certain ones that emerged as superordinate concepts. In my presentation, I adopted an alternative strategy to discuss the links to literature. Each superordinate theme was addressed comprehensively within a single results and discussion section, facilitating a clearer articulation of how the findings relate to existing research (Stuckey, 2014).

The themes were therefore extrapolated and aligned with the research questions. Practically, thematic analysis demands that the researcher closely examine the collected data to identify common themes such as topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that continuously emerged, as postulated by Maxwell (2012). Interpretive phenomenology analysis helped to understand the meanings individual participants attached to the phenomenon. That ensured understanding of the issue from the participant's perspective (Watts and Clifton, 2006).

4.8. Measures for sustaining validity, trustworthiness and dependability of data

Like every social and scientific enquiry, there is an imperative to ensure that data is valid, trustworthy and dependable. Before interacting with the participants, I piloted my research instruments. The logic was to ensure that the questions effectively capture the intended outcomes. Using participants' verbatim language allowed for an accurate representation of their statements and experiences, enhancing the validity of the findings. Thus, recording voices in their original context ensured generation of primary data and for the phenomenon to speak for itself. I also ensured that the open-ended questions were not double-barreled to avoid confusing the interviewee.

Reliability was achieved through the flexible and replicable nature of the qualitative methods used. The study's design allowed for internal validity by ensuring that the data collection methods, such as in-depth interviews and document analysis, were aligned with the research objectives. The use

of semi-structured and unstructured interviews facilitated a deeper exploration of participants' perceptions and experiences regarding voting and political participation.

Dependability was addressed by conducting interviews with a diverse sample of participants from various villages within the Thulamela Municipality. This approach provided rich and varied insights, contributing to the overall reliability of the data. The research process included thorough documentation of the methodology, challenges faced, and ethical considerations, which further supported the dependability of the findings.

4.8.1 Reflexivity and positionality

According to (Dowling, 2006), reflexivity in qualitative research is the analytic attention to the researcher's role in qualitative research. Research reflexivity involves consciously examining how subjectivity and context influence research processes continuously, collaboratively, and multifacetedly (Olmos-Vega, 2023). A continuous self-critique and self-appraisal where the researcher explains how his or her own experience has or has not influenced the stages of the research process (Gentles et al., 2014), defined as a generalised practice in which researchers strive to make their influence on the research explicit -to themselves and their audience.

In my study on youth experiences, I recognized the importance of reflexivity and positionality, especially as a researcher who is part of the same demographic being studied. Conducting this research from the perspective of a young person allowed for a unique understanding of the themes that emerged, yet I made a conscious effort to delineate my personal experiences from the study itself.

While the issues discussed in the research resonated deeply with me as a youth, I took cautious steps to ensure that my subjective experiences did not contaminate the data collection or analysis processes. This involved setting aside my narratives and focusing solely on the perspectives gathered from relevant sources and the participants I interviewed. As alluded before, that was also necessitated using phenomenology design that allowed bracketing and suspending prior ideas and conceptions of the issue being investigated. By emphasizing this separation, I aimed to ensure that the findings reflected the voices and experiences of the broader youth population, rather than my

viewpoint. The insights shared by the participants were integral to the research and underscored the diverse experiences of youth, thus enriching the overall quality and authenticity of the study.

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter has provided a comprehensive overview of the research methodology utilized to investigate the experiences of youth about voting. Through a combination of in-depth interviews and document analysis, I was able to gather rich qualitative data that illuminated the diverse perspectives of participants. The application of IPA allowed for a nuanced exploration of their lived experiences, while the rigorous analytical process ensured the emergence of meaningful themes. By prioritizing trustworthiness and validity, I aimed to present findings that genuinely reflect the voices of the youth, contributing to a broader understanding of their engagement with the electoral process. Ultimately, this methodological approach has laid a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion of the research findings, enriching the overall contribution of this study to the field. The next chapter presents and analyses the findings using a thematic approach. It also infuses literature and theoretical control to allow some degree of comparative analysis.

CHAPTER 5: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF STUDY FINDINGS

This chapter presents the findings obtained from interviews and document analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing rural youth's political engagement. The findings are organized around the research questions and objectives and highlight the perspectives of rural youth on their participation in political elections in South Africa. From the findings, key themes that emerged include youth perceptions of voting, understanding of the voting process, barriers to political participation, the role of access to information, and the role of community. The study's results have important implications for policymakers, educators, and community leaders seeking to enhance rural youth's participation in democratic processes and for the youth themselves. See Table 2 showing the themes.

Research Questions	Major Theme	Sub-theme
-Can you explain your understanding of the voting process? -What does voting mean to you?	Theme 1: Understanding of the voting process	-Lack of voter education -Lack of Trust in the voting process -Youth and democracy
- What is your perception about voting as a youth? - Do you think it's important for young people to vote? Why?	Theme 2: the perception of voting,	-Trends of voter apathy -Rural youth's perception of voting -Conventional vs. Unconventional Participation -Rural Realities and Structural Marginalization. - Implications for Democratic Representation - Conceptualizing Youth Engagement

- What challenges do you face when trying to vote? - Have you ever encountered any situation discouraging you or others from voting?	THEME 3: barriers to political participation	- Poverty as a barrier to Electoral Participation. -Corruption - Past – experience - The generational gap in political representation.
- How does your family or community influence your decision to vote or not vote? -Have you participated in political activities like rallies or community meetings? If so, what motivated you to participate? - Do cultural or societal norms in your community affect your participation or engagement in electoral affairs?	Theme 4: Community as role players	-Societal norms - party political identities
-In your opinion, what should be done to make the election attractive and favourable to the youth?	Theme 5: Future Participation	-Attitudes to change - Reflection and solution

- In your opinion, what is the role of young people in shaping the future of voting in your community?		
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5.1 THEME 1 *Understanding of the voting process*

The study's primary objective was to examine rural youth's perceptions of participating in political elections. To achieve this, the study first investigated South African rural youths' understanding of the voting process. This was critical in gaining insight into their understanding and the significance of voting and elections.

Findings from the study research reveal that the majority of youth have a broad understanding of elections and the voting processes. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 for example, indicated that elections are a democratic right that individuals should exercise as an individual right to choose the representative. Respondent 1 argued that elections are the only way to remove ineffective leaders. This shows depth in understanding elections as a way of choosing leaders for public office. In support of this, Participant 3 argued that the voting process gave people a chance to elect their preferred leaders into public offices.

P.1 *“is the process in which individuals can choose their leaders using their right to vote.”*

P 3. *“I think the voting process is whereby we raise our voice as South African citizens, and then we elect those who we think have the abilities and the capabilities to run this country. And when we elect them, we hope that they will do better for this country and ensure that everything is in order”.*

Despite the broad understanding of elections displayed by the majority of the study participants, only a few showed a lack of understanding of the voting process and elections. Participants 7 and 9, for example, demonstrated that elections are a process that only pertains to a certain group of people who are in politics and elderly people who understand politics.

Participant 1 strongly showed a lack of understanding of the voting process as she said that the “*voting process is something which is of elderly people.*” Participant No. 8 said, “*Voting process is a process that the government implements as a way of bribing us to forget about the corruption*”.

The findings indicate that most rural youth perceive voting as a democratic right and a means of electing competent leaders. However, a segment of youth lacks an understanding of the process and views elections as a process controlled by politicians. Rational choice theory (RCT) helps explain this divergence: those who perceive a tangible benefit in voting (e.g., influencing governance) participate, while those who believe elections are predetermined and offer no personal gain opt-out. This aligns with Vik (2013), who argues that voters justify their decision to vote or abstain based on perceived utility.

51.1. Lack of voter education

Lack of voter education emerged to be a hindrance to rural youths' participation in elections, Participants 7, 8, and 9 confirmed that they would want to participate in the electoral process. However, the lack of adequate information to guide them was a challenge. Participant 9 stated that: “*No one comes to teach us about the importance of voting because they think rural people are not important.*” The preceding quotation regarding the lack of education aligns with Akinboader's (2013), view that who lack of civic education was a barrier to natural youth participation. The view resonates with Chauke (2020), who argues that young people must be well-educated to make informed political choices.

The research findings showed that rural youth often have limited access to education, which hinders their ability to comprehend complex political concepts. Furthermore, the harsh realities of absolute poverty, such as constant struggles to meet basic needs, can overshadow any interest in political participation. To make matters worse, governments often fail to reach out to rural youth, leaving them feeling disconnected from the political process. This sense of disconnection can lead to feelings of indifference towards electoral democracies. Most of the respondents articulate their

everyday realities of absolute poverty that makes them lose hope and trust in the election and democracy as a whole, for instance:

P1 *“I don’t know much about the voting process because the only time I knew about it was when I saw the posters being posted all over the streets, and that’s all”.*

P3 *“For me, growing up in Thulamela municipality didn’t shape my role, which influenced me to participate in elections; as a result, I grew up not knowing anything about the voting process because we were not exposed to such teachings, the political leaders used to come and lie about the things that they are going to do in my village”*

P7 *It would have been better if we were taught about this in school, maybe during study time or once a week, so that we may know.*

The findings reveal that there is a gap between rural and urban youth which is caused by the lack of education on elections and voter process. The literature proved that, indeed, the education that rural and urban youth receive is not the same, though the information is not even enough for all the South African youth it is worse in the rural areas as it was routine in the literature review. The findings highlight that urban youth participate in elections because they are aware of the functions of elections. As earlier mentioned in Chapter 2, elections give people (youth included) the opportunity to choose leaders or public officers. Contrary to these assertions, one aspect that emerged from the study was lack of knowledge about elections among the rural youths. This brings to light the rural /urban dichotomy where urban youth are informed unlike their rural counterparts hence, their voting is a choice, not a constraint.

5.1.2. Lack of Trust in the voting process

Findings from the study reveal an important revelation about a lack of trust in the political process that shapes elections. The finding reveals that youth are disengaging their participation in political affairs/voting process because they don’t trust the voting process as they think that it has been captured by the ruling party, and they end up not participating in the things which they don’t trust.

The findings reveal that many young people perceive the electoral process as being compromised or 'captured' by the ruling party, leading to a sense of futility in their participation. They feel that their votes do not carry meaningful weight or that the outcomes are predetermined, which erodes their faith in the democratic process as a whole. This disillusionment results in a significant portion of the youth opting out of political activities entirely, as they are reluctant to engage in systems they view as inherently unfair or biased.

P 1. *“I don't see any reason to participate in the voting process because I have realised that whether I vote or not, the ruling party will still win because there is no truth there on voting”*

P 3 *“The IEC System is not a make sure (Ndo to zwivhona) “I have seen it” in 2024 during the National election. I was working there to help people vote, but the IEC system was failing, and people were allowed to vote manually, and somebody could vote twice, and this makes me doubt the process of voting”*

The participant responses highlight two key dimensions of this mistrust. The first is the perception that electoral outcomes are predetermined. As Participant 1 articulated, there is a strong belief that the ruling party will retain power regardless of the actual number of votes it obtains, rendering participation seemingly futile. This perception not only erodes faith in the fairness of elections, but also diminishes the youth's confidence in their ability to influence political outcomes through democratic means. Consequently, many youths withdraw from participating in a system they believe offers no genuine opportunity for change.

The second dimension of mistrust relates to procedural inefficiencies and irregularities. Participant 3's experience during the 2024 national elections illustrates this concern vividly. The failure of the IEC voting system, reliance on manual voting, and the potential for double voting significantly undermine the credibility of the electoral process. Such incidents reinforce the notion that the system is vulnerable to manipulation, further alienating young voters who expect transparency and accountability.

This erosion of trust has profound implications for democracy. When a substantial portion of the youth disengages from electoral politics, it creates a democratic deficit, as their voices and perspectives are excluded from shaping policies and leadership. The lack of youth participation also weakens the legitimacy of elected officials and the democratic process, creating a cycle of mistrust and disengagement.

Furthermore, the findings align with Mijia's (2020) observation that systemic issues such as corruption, lack of motivation from governing bodies, and non-democratic practices contribute to youth apathy. This reinforces the argument that restoring trust requires addressing both the structural and procedural flaws within the electoral process. Measures such as enhancing transparency, ensuring the reliability of voting systems, and fostering accountability among political leaders are essential to rebuild faith in the democratic process.

5.1.3. Youth and democracy

Research findings reveal that rural youth clearly understand democracy and its principles. A significant number of participants associated democracy with their rights. For instance, Participant 2 defined democracy and elaborated on its principles during the interviews.

The responses from Participants 2, 6, and 9 demonstrate that rural youth are aware of democratic principles. However, the findings also indicate that while they understand democracy conceptually, they have limited experience with its practical application. This is evident from the challenges they continue to face, challenges that, according to democratic principles, should not exist. Participant 9 highlighted issues such as the lack of access to water, sanitation, and education, which are fundamental rights in a democratic state but remain unfulfilled in their community.

P 2 *“Voting to me is the process of democracy which gives a people a choice to choose their own preferences leader, and because democracy is the government of people by people, people exercise their right through voting”*

P.7 *“So voting is very important since we are using representative democracy in South Africa. We elect people who we are sure will represent us in a good way to vote. It means you won't have any complaints that the leaders who you selected are not waiting”*

The above responses shows that, indeed, youth are aware of democracy and how it works. This was also supported by Dahl (2005) who notes that elections have become the institutional key to modernising democracy's essence: the rule of the people by the people through representative government. Dahl argues that the democratic ideal is founded on two principles: political participation and political contestation. Political participation necessitates that all eligible individuals can vote in a free, fair, and competitive elections. This illustrates the link between democracy and elections (Dahl, 2005).

Findings from this study reveal that youth constitute a large percentage of the population and hold the future of the country. This is supported by the literature from the study, and it also aligns with one of the theories that has been used in this study which is the youth bulge theory. The study's findings showed that although youth are the majority they are not participating in elections or the voting process. Participant's number outlined that youth are the majority, meaning that they can bring a huge difference. However the, the participants further outline that it is better not to even engage in the process because the government will not the necessary service or the basic needs in his community despite his participation in elections.

P *“Youth, we are many, and we can do a lot if we come together and decide that we want to engage and stop waiting for the old people to decide things on our behalf then we can achieve great things the problem is that sometimes we feel discouraged and being turned off by the system itself”.*

p.2 *“Youth, we are being bored by the way how things are done, most especially by those whom we have selected to present in public office when they came into power, they did not reconsider us, especially us who live in a rural village we are always the one who and left out when it comes to the delivery service”*

The above verbatim response from the participants showed that youth are aware of what is happening and they know that they are the ones who constitute a large part of their population in South Africa. It is not true that youth are hindered from participating participate in political affairs because they are not satisfied by how things are done especially how government conducts its affairs and the fact that they are not being prioritized as the people who constitute a large percentage of the population. Despite their numerical superiority their voices are not being heard or taken into consideration. This view is supported by previous literature wherein it is noted the youth particularly in most in developing countries like South Africa constitute the majority of the constitution.

This can also be supported by the theory which was used in this study which also emphasises people's rational choices influence their preferences because such choices is influenced by whether they will benefit or not. influence Findings from the study indicate that youth are aware of what is happening but they choose to disengage themselves from elections because they realise that participating in the elections will not benefit them since their voices are not even considered. According to the rational choice theory, people or individuals participate in something from which they will benefit, so according to the youth, they do not see any hope in voting. The rational choice theory is used to model human decision-making as a way to find out why people behave. Findings from this study reveal that the reason why youth opt out of elections is because they feel that they are excluded by governance processes and think that the government just wants to use them during the election and then exclude them later, leading to voter apathy.

5.2. THEME 2: THE PERCEPTIONS OF YOUTH IN VOTING

Findings from the study reveal that youth have a different perception of voting. In this study, the perception of rural youth was very important as it was one of the objectives of this study. Participants in the study revealed their perceptions of voting. Most of them said that voting is a good thing and their perception towards it was good, although they also show that irrespective of

their understanding and their positive perceptions about voting, few things hinder them from participating in voting. These include the issue of service delivery in their community. Findings show that this has resulted in a trend of voter apathy among the youth as they are showing a lack of interest in political affairs.

5.2.1. Trends of voter apathy

Based on the findings, it is evident that there is a concerning trend of voter apathy among rural youth. The research highlights that youth display lack of interest in voting due to various factors, leading to apathetic behavior toward the democratic process. Participants in the study expressed their desire to participate in elections with a common theme of disillusionment and dissatisfaction with the political system. The findings reveal a concerning trend of voter apathy among rural youth, characterized by a lack of interest and motivation to participate in the democratic process of voting. This observation is supported by qualitative data from participants and aligns with broader academic and media observations, such as those reported by SABC News (2024) and Dermody and Hanmer (2004)

Many rural youth expressed disillusionment with the political system, citing broken promises and lack of tangible outcomes from previous elections. Participants highlighted that politicians often fail to deliver on their pre-election promises, leading to a sense of betrayal and mistrust.

Example: One participant stated, *“When it comes to participation, ‘Khanne ndipfa tshi tshipengo’ (It sounds crazy to me) to see the very same people participating in an election for many years without receiving the promises that they are being told. After elections, nothing happens.”* This sentiment reflects deep-seated cynicism toward the political process.

Rural youth feel alienated from the political system due to the dominance of older politicians who do not represent their interests or understand their challenges. Participants noted that the absence of young candidates on electoral lists further exacerbates this disconnect.

Example: A participant who identified as a political student shared, *“To me, as a political student, I know that it is important for me to vote, but I don’t have the zeal to do so because even the people who are representing us are much older than us. They cannot relate to our everyday*

challenges as youth. This makes me not take elections seriously since it feels like a game of old people.”

Participants described elections as a repetitive cycle of unfulfilled promises and empty rhetoric. This cynicism is particularly pronounced among rural youth, who feel marginalized and overlooked by political leaders, for instance: The statement *“It’s very rare to find youth on the list of those who want to be voted for, and worse, even when they choose their cabinet after we have voted for them, they only include those ‘madala’ (old age people)”* highlights the frustration with the lack of youth inclusion in political decision-making.

While some participants demonstrated an understanding of the importance of voting, they admitted to choosing not to participate due to dissatisfaction with the system. This suggests that awareness alone is insufficient to motivate youth to vote if they perceive the system as unresponsive to their needs, For instance, one participant stated that their first voting experience was also their last, highlighting the extent of dissatisfaction among rural youth.

The findings highlight a growing trend of voter apathy among rural youth, driven by distrust in political leaders, lack of representation, perceived political inefficacy, and cynicism towards the electoral process. These factors collectively contribute to disengagement from the democratic process, as youth feel their voices are neither heard nor valued. These findings show that the lack of trust in political leaders and institutions discourages youth from engaging in voting, as they perceive it as a futile exercise.

5.2.2. RURAL YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF VOTING

The study findings revealed that, indeed, youth do know about the election and voting process. Findings reveal that from the two types of participation, namely conventional and unconventional youth participation is characterized by unconventional participation, which occurs outside the election process. The literature shows that youth participation is declining in every election. Moosa (2021) supports this view further supports this point by noting that citizens not

only have increasingly negative perceptions of political participation, but also feel frustrated and lack faith in their leaders, as they believe these representatives are not responsive to their needs. Findings from the study reveal that though youth are showing less interest in participation, they are active in unconventional participation. This view is supported by the literature Sabu (2020) who notes that that young people's apparent apathy reflects their frustration with the functioning of the political system. They perceive a lack of responsiveness to their needs in a context of more security but fewer opportunities. While young people show disinterest in conventional political participation, they actively engage in informal forms of civic involvement. This is supported by Martin (2022) who posits that unconventional participation focuses on actions or one's involvement outside of the electoral process and "aims to influence politics through non-institutionalized means. This type of participation includes political demonstrations, protests, boycotting, civil disobedience, public debates, and even strike action (Martin, 2022).

P 5 *"I think it's important for us as a youth to vote but voting for the people who will have common interests with us as youths. I think it's important because it is the only way that youth can get what they want. At least they will be able to choose people who might represent their interests and ideas in the government. Rather than just having a government which is filled by the old people, you know, old people that don't have any sense of the idea of what the youth want or you know, Things like that."*

P 7 *"As a youth, uh, my perspective is that it's very important because. If we vote for people who are productive and energetic, people who will be able to represent us well and who will see that they will do something for us? It will have an impact, but if we run the vote, we want. Get what we want to get as citizens of South Africa, so there is nothing bad about voting. It just has positive impacts on me unless people who we voted for are not providing service for us."*

P 12. *"My perception of voting is that elections are a long route that people take as a way of waiting for a change that is not making sure whether it will ever come since the main idea of voting is to want to see the change of certain things; hopefully, a good and better change which in our community it's hard to notice much change even when people are voting, to me voting is a long route because in south Africa when you need a change, you have to go to the street and cause chaos like strike that's the language that our public officers understand quickly"*

P9 “Yeah, I think it is very important because. OK. Just like that, our history people came before us. They thought so hard. They sweat, and they bloodied so that we can have the opportunity to. Vote and make a difference. Then that also alone, I think it makes. More meaningful, I should note. Secondly, you want to change if you want to see change what will give if option A. Replay. Not delivering. But not give the benefit of the. To option B to see if. They won't be able to deliver so. Also when people vote, it gives a competitive advantage to their parties. , I think that's my opinion about it. And that's what made motivated me to want to move”

The above sentiment shows that the perception of youth towards election is not that bad, but it is affected by what happens after voting which results in frustration when they discover that what they were told was just propaganda resulting in negative perceptions. The researcher noted that the negative perceptions of youth about elections emanated from the disappointment by the public officers who failed to deliver services, pushing the youth to unconventional participation as a way of trying to find something that they can trust and feel included since they were not getting what they want through conventional participation.

The study illuminates a nuanced landscape of rural youth engagement, where awareness of electoral processes coexists with a pivot toward unconventional political participation. This shift, driven by systemic disillusionment, reflects a broader crisis of trust in governance, as articulated by participants and corroborated by contemporary literature.

5.2.3 Conventional vs. Unconventional Participation

While rural youth recognize voting's theoretical importance (P5, P7, P9), their lived experiences reveal deep skepticism about its efficacy. Participant P12's assertion that “voting is a long route” underscores the perceived disjuncture between electoral participation and tangible outcomes. This aligns with Martin's (2022) conceptualization of unconventional participation—protests, strikes, boycotts as a response to institutional unresponsiveness. The data suggests that rural youth are not

apathetic but strategically channeling their agency into non-institutionalized methods, reflecting what Sabu (2020) terms “frustration-driven activism.” Their actions are less a rejection of politics than a critique of its current form, emphasizing demands for accountability and relevance.

P9’s reference to South Africa’s liberation struggle highlights a generational tension: voting is framed as a hard-won right, yet its contemporary utility is questioned. This duality speaks to diminished external political efficacy, the belief that authorities will respond to citizens’ needs. When leaders fail to deliver (as noted by P7 and P12), youth interpret this as systemic betrayal, exacerbating distrust. Moosa’s (2021) observation about declining faith in leaders resonates here, particularly in rural contexts where service delivery gaps are stark. The erosion of efficacy is cyclical; unmet expectations reduce electoral engagement, further marginalizing youth voices in policy agendas.

Lührmann (2013) posits that youth participation is not merely a symbolic act but a crucial mechanism through which young individuals demonstrate their capabilities and actively engage in democratic processes. This perspective aligns with Checkoway and Aldana’s (2013) assertions that youth participation is an opportunity for self-development, facilitating knowledge and skills transfer that equips young people to contribute meaningfully to society. These insights underscore the idea that youth engagement is both a personal and collective investment in democratic sustainability.

Furthermore, Arnot and Swartz (2013) emphasise that participation is instrumental in youth transitioning into adulthood, where they take on roles in societal development at an early stage. This suggests that when young people are excluded from institutional politics, as observed in rural South Africa, they may miss out on formative experiences that foster civic responsibility and leadership. However, the frustration-driven activism described earlier indicates that youth are still exercising agency, albeit through alternative means. This supports the idea that declining electoral participation should not be conflated with apathy but rather understood as a strategic response to systemic failures. All these scholars illustrate that meaningful youth participation, whether institutional or non-institutional, is essential for democracy and social progress. When traditional political structures fail to accommodate young voices, alternative forms of engagement emerge. This reinforces the need for political institutions to adapt and create inclusive spaces that recognise youth not just as future leaders, but as active agents of change in the present.

5.2.4. Rural Realities and Structural Marginalization.

The rural dimension adds layers of complexity. Geographic isolation, limited access to youth-centric policies, and entrenched traditional power structures may amplify feelings of exclusion. Unlike urban youth, who might engage through digital activism, rural participants emphasize street protests a mode necessitated by limited infrastructure and visibility. This aligns with global studies showing rural populations often resort to visible, collective action to counter marginalization (Bayat, 2013). Additionally, the dominance of older leaders (P5's "government filled by old people") reflects a demographic disconnect, where youth see governance as ill-equipped to address issues like unemployment or education.

5.2.5. Implications for Democratic Representation

The trend toward unconventional participation carries dual implications. Positively, it reflects youth resilience and innovation in claiming political space. However, declining electoral engagement risks perpetuating underrepresentation as parties may prioritize demographics with higher voter turnout. This creates a feedback loop: youth issues are sidelined, fueling further disillusionment. Internationally, similar patterns have led to calls for institutional reforms, such as youth quotas or participatory budgeting to bridge representation gaps (Checkoway, 2011).

5.2.6. Conceptualizing Youth Engagement

The findings challenge stereotypes of youth apathy, reframing disengagement as a critical commentary on governance. To rebuild trust, policymakers must address both structural barriers (e.g., rural service delivery) and symbolic inclusion (e.g., youth representation in leadership). Civic education programs could also highlight synergies between conventional and unconventional methods, empowering youth to navigate multiple avenues of influence.

In conclusion, rural youth's political perceptions are shaped by a blend of historical reverence, present-day disillusionment, and adaptive resistance. Their turn to unconventional participation is not an exit from politics but a reimagining of it one that demands responsive governance and inclusive institutions to restore faith in democratic processes. Future research could explore comparative rural-urban dynamics or the impact of digital platforms on rural youth activism, offering deeper insights into evolving political landscapes.

5.3 .THEME 3: BARRIERS TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The research findings highlight various barriers preventing rural youth from participating in the voting process and elections, emphasizing a decline in youth political engagement. The study identifies poverty, corruption, past voting experiences, lack of service delivery, and lack of confidence as key factors discouraging electoral participation among rural youth. These challenges shape youth's perceptions of governance, limit their access to political processes, and diminish their motivation to vote.

5.3.1. Poverty as a Barrier to Electoral Participation.

The study underscores the role of poverty in limiting rural youth's engagement in elections. Participants from Thulamela Municipality reported that economic constraints severely hinder their ability to participate in the voting process. The high unemployment rate among rural youth, compared to their urban counterparts, creates a survivalist mentality where meeting basic needs takes precedence over political engagement. Lack of financial resources restricts their ability to access polling stations, as they cannot afford transportation or time off from informal work opportunities.

Additionally, the economic marginalization of rural youth affects their overall political outlook. The frustration of acquiring qualifications that do not translate into employment opportunities discourages them from engaging in a system they perceive as failing them. A participant's statement, *"It's painful to go to school, and your degree becomes a piece of paper, and you don't get employed,"* reflects the disillusionment many rural youth experience. The perception that

voting does not lead to tangible improvements in their economic conditions further fuels apathy toward elections.

These findings align with Musarurwa's (2018) research which suggests that economic deprivation, coupled with limited access to vocational training and business skills, reduces political participation. When youth do not see direct benefits from political engagement, they are less likely to participate in governance structures. The infrastructural neglect of rural areas, with fewer polling stations and limited civic education, exacerbates these challenges, making voting seem irrelevant to their daily struggles.

P 3. *"It's painful to go to school, and your degree becomes a piece of paper, and you don't get employed. To us rural youth, it's tough, unlike those who are in urban areas, who can just go to a neighboring manufacturer and get a general worker job in the meantime."*

The impact of poverty on youth political participation cannot be underestimated. Economic marginalization fosters a sense of exclusion, reinforcing the belief that political engagement does not yield meaningful change. This disenfranchisement is worsened by systemic barriers such as inadequate transportation infrastructure, high unemployment, and lack of civic education. When youth perceive elections as a process that does not address their socio-economic realities, they are less inclined to participate. Socioeconomic challenges and limited access to political information contribute to youth disengagement. Some youth believe their votes will not lead to meaningful change, thus choosing not to participate. According to the rational choice theory, when the costs of participation (e.g., time, effort, and lack of trust in the system) outweigh perceived benefits, rational actors choose not to engage.

To address this challenge, policymakers must consider targeted interventions that enhance economic opportunities for rural youth. Initiatives such as skills development programs, youth entrepreneurship support, and improved access to employment can create a sense of empowerment, motivating young people to engage in political processes. Additionally, increasing the accessibility of polling stations and implementing civic education campaigns tailored to rural communities can help bridge the gap between youth and electoral participation.

Poverty remains a major deterrent to youth political participation in rural areas. Without addressing the economic hardships faced by young people, efforts to boost voter turnout among rural youth will likely remain ineffective. A holistic approach that integrates economic empowerment with political engagement strategies is crucial for reversing the decline in youth participation in elections.

5.3.2 Corruption

The study revealed that corruption is one of the factors that hinder rural youth from participating in elections. Corruption in rural areas prevents youth participation when youth witness unskilled people getting opportunities that require the skills that some even went to school to acquire such skills, but when they witness it in their community when unskilled people are given the opportunity because of corruption, these cause a barrier to youth participation hence most of the participants in this study indicated that corruption discourages them from participating in elections because the people who are committing such corruption are the very same people who occupy public office.

P 5. *“There are things such as corruption that occur during elections and lobbies, so it did shape how I view political affairs in a sense.”*

P 13: *“My experience growing up in Thulamela was characterized by the hearsay that I used to hear every day as I was growing up that the leaders who are leading us or who are representing us in the public offices here in Thulamela are corrupt and this has shaped my participation in politics, most especially when the mayor who was in charge including the executive committee which was there were excluded from their offices. The reason why they were excluded was because of the corruption in which they were found. The corruption was related to the VBS issue, and for me, this was a real red flag that the very same people who are representing us in the public offices are the worst culprits.”*

Study findings also revealed that political lobbying was another way of corruption that causes a barrier to youth participation. Corruption happens during the period of elections, where instead of

elections being fair and free election results are influenced by those who are in power. As a result corruption makes youth less interested in electoral politics this was supported by (Mijia, 2020). Youth are apathetic to political participation because of lack of support and motivation from concerned bodies, corruption around administration, and an absence of visibility. Lee Kuan Yew's hypothesis emphasizes the possibility of interest groups proliferating and lobbying for their interests, thus slowing down decision-making and causing stalemates in the political sphere to the detriment of society as a whole (Knutsen, 2010).

Findings also revealed some of the consequences of corruption that result in a lack of service delivery when those who are public officers use service delivery funds for personal use. The researcher notes from findings that lack of service delivery serves as a barrier to political participation and chronic underdevelopment in rural areas, such as inadequate healthcare, education, and clean water, creates a cycle of disengagement. The government's failure to address these post-election needs leads youth to question the efficacy of their vote, thereby perpetuating disinterest.

Findings from the study suggest a direct link between corruption and youth political disengagement. When young people perceive political systems as corrupt and self-serving, they lose motivation to participate. Instead of engaging in a system they see as flawed, they opt for non-participation.

Furthermore, the presence of corruption at multiple levels—ranging from election rigging to resource misallocation creates a negative feedback loop. Youth who grow up witnessing corruption may adopt a cynical view of politics, believing that their participation will not lead to meaningful change. This aligns with the testimonies of the study's participants, such as the respondent from Thulamela, who pointed to the VBS scandal as a clear sign of corruption among local leaders. Moreover, the study highlights that political lobbying exacerbates the problem. When election outcomes are manipulated in favor of powerful interest groups, the legitimacy of electoral processes is compromised, discouraging youth participation even further.

In addition to electoral corruption, the study points to the indirect consequences of corruption, particularly in service delivery. Poor governance, characterized by misallocation of resources, leads to persistent underdevelopment. Youth in rural areas, facing inadequate healthcare, education, and infrastructure, become disillusioned with political processes, as they do not see tangible benefits from their engagement. This supports the idea that corruption does not only deter electoral participation but also contributes to long-term political disengagement due to unmet needs and frustrations with governance.

Study findings highlight corruption as a major barrier to youth political participation in rural areas. The perception that political processes are manipulated, coupled with a lack of service delivery, results in political apathy among young people. Addressing this issue requires structural reforms to enhance transparency in governance, reduce electoral corruption, and improve service delivery. Only by restoring trust in political institutions can youth be encouraged to participate actively in elections and governance.

5.3.3. Past Experience

Findings from the study indicate that historical disillusionment plays a critical role. Youth who participated in previous elections but saw no improvement in policies, infrastructure, or services report apathy. Repeated neglect by elected officials reinforces the perception that voting is futile. The researcher notes that rural youths find it hard to take elections seriously when they remember their ugly experience, and they take it personally to the extent that they believe that because they are staying in rural areas, they are not as important as those who are in urban areas. The researcher notes that the effect of experience on the rural youth has led to lack of confidence in elections, this barrier encompasses both self-doubt and systemic distrust. Many rural youth feel inadequately informed about political processes or believe their voices are marginalized in systems dominated by urban elites. This lack of agency diminishes their motivation to engage.

P “My experience of registration. It was not good because as rural youth we did not even know how to follow all these steps to register to vote and to myself it was even better because I could read and write but to my fellow youth it was not easy. It ended up leading to us not voting because I remember even myself, I thought maybe I followed all the procedures and all the steps of

registration but during election day when I went to the station, I was told that my registration process was not complete. So the registration process is not user-friendly”

P 10. *“It’s so surprising that people are still voting because South Africa has already held nine national elections and people have been voting ever since 1994. But after so many years now, people are still suffering with the problems that they were suffering back there 20 years ago. There is no notable change in our community. We are still facing the problem of water and sanitation. This doesn’t make sense why we are voting us to see the change because even though people are voting and there is no change in our community even though all people are still voting but there is no change that we are expecting and no change that we have been promised during election time.”*

Study findings indicate that historical disillusionment plays a crucial role in shaping the attitudes of rural youth towards elections. A key factor contributing to their apathy is the perceived lack of improvement in policies, infrastructure, and services despite their participation in previous elections. This repeated neglect by elected officials reinforces the belief that voting is futile, leading to widespread political disengagement among rural youth.

One of the most significant findings is that rural youth internalize their political marginalization, believing that their voices are less important than those of urban residents. This perception stems from their lived experiences, where promises made during election campaigns fail to materialize into tangible improvements. The psychological impact of this repeated cycle of unfulfilled promises leads to a deep-seated distrust in the electoral process.

Furthermore, the research highlights systemic barriers that contribute to low electoral participation. Many rural youth find the registration process complex and inaccessible, particularly those with limited literacy. The testimony from one respondent underscores this challenge: despite believing they had completed all registration steps, they were later informed on election day that their registration was incomplete. Such experiences create frustration and reinforce the notion that the system is not designed to accommodate them effectively.

Additionally, the findings reveal a strong sense of disenchantment with the lack of development in rural communities. Despite South Africa having held nine national elections since 1994, many rural youth see no substantial improvements in essential services like water and sanitation. This stagnation fuels skepticism about the efficacy of voting, as many young people perceive no correlation between electoral participation and positive change. The frustration was expressed by one participant who questioned why people continue to vote despite persistent socio-economic challenges reflects a broader sentiment of disillusionment.

It is evident that rural youth disengagement from elections is not simply a matter of disinterest but a response to systemic failures. Their apathy is rooted in historical neglect, structural challenges, and a sense of political exclusion. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach, including improved voter education, more accessible registration processes, and concrete policy actions that demonstrate the tangible benefits of electoral participation. Restoring trust in the electoral system demands a concerted effort from policymakers, electoral bodies, and community leaders to ensure that rural youth feel both valued and empowered in the democratic process.

5.3.4. The generational gap in political representation.

Findings from the study reveal the generational gap between young and old people as a barrier to rural youth participation in elections. The generational gap emerge as a barrier that prevents rural youth participation because the generational gap makes elections irrelevant to the youth, leading to apathy. Because they feel that they do not fit in. The research findings revealed that youth are showing negative attitudes in elections because they are struggling with the issue of belonging, and because of this, they feel like they are excluded from the political affairs alluded by the participants that sometimes as youth feel excluded from the political affairs since the public officers never seat them and tried to hear them the always old people giving each other time to express themselves, the participants further alluded that the exclusion is so serious that even in community meetings the views of youth are not considered or do not matter to old people.

P10 *“As a reflection from my childhood as I was growing up under Thulamela municipality, I don’t remember anything that has shaped my political view in my municipality, and this was because as young people even today, we are not included in the political affairs from the local government or*

even in the community, The government officials they don't interact with us a young people they interact with the old people though some of the things they affect us, these people seems not to care of our views .”

P 13 “As young people, we were not included in any political affairs. We were just left out, and we were not allowed to be active in political affairs, though we used to have the interest to learn it, there was no opportunity to do so. We are treated like a passive subject even in the municipality, no program allows public officers to engage with the youth.

P 4 The only time that we see the public officers in our communities is when the elections are approaching when they are giving propaganda speeches, afterwards, they interact with old people from villages like chief councilors and ward councilors”

The generational gap in political representation has profound implications for youth participation in rural communities. The exclusion of young people from political affairs not only diminishes their sense of belonging, but also weakens democratic processes by limiting the diversity of voices in decision-making. The findings suggest various key issues that contribute to this gap, which are structural and institutional barriers, Disillusionment with political processes, Political engagement limited to election Campaigns, and a need for Youth-Centered Political Reforms.

Political structures and community meetings appear to prioritise older individuals, sidelining the youth. This suggests that institutional reforms are necessary to create spaces for youth participation. The lack of youth-inclusive programs in municipalities further exacerbates the gap, as young people do not have to opportunities to engage with political leaders. Findings indicate that young people's disinterest in elections is not due to apathy alone but rather a response to their exclusion from governance processes. When youth feel that their opinions do not matter, they are less likely to engage in political processes. This can result in declining voter turnout among young people, weakening democratic engagement in rural areas.

The perception that political engagement is only relevant during election periods reinforces youth disillusionment. If political leaders only interact with communities when seeking votes, young people may view elections as a tool for maintaining the status quo rather than an opportunity to influence governance. Continuous engagement beyond election cycles is necessary to build trust

between youth and political institutions. Findings from the study revealed that to bridge the generational gap in political representation there is need for policies that actively involve youth in decision-making. This could include the establishment of youth advisory councils, dedicated platforms for youth engagement in municipal governance, and civic education initiatives aimed at empowering young people to participate in politics.

These findings highlight the urgent need for inclusive political structures that encourage youth participation. The generational gap in political representation contributes to the marginalisation of young people, fostering a cycle of disengagement and disillusionment. Addressing this issue requires a shift in governance approaches, ensuring that youth perspectives are integrated into political decision-making processes. Without proactive efforts to bridge this gap, the future of democratic participation in rural areas remains at risk.

5.4 THEME 4: COMMUNITY AS ROLE PLAYERS

Findings from the study reveal that youth who reside in different villages of Thulamela receive different influences depending on their respective village. Findings indicate that the community plays a pivotal role in molding youth perceptions about participation in voting. A community as a big family has its ways of doing things, and young people who are growing up there are expected to follow that and not to derive from the standard that they have found when they were born. The analysis focuses on key themes that emerge from the findings, including societal norms, political identities, and the rural-urban divide in political engagement.

The data suggests that young people in rural villages do not develop their political views in isolation; rather, their perspectives are shaped by the broader community. Since rural communities function as extended families, there are established norms and expectations regarding how individuals should behave, including political participation. The expectation that young people follow traditional ways of doing things, including voting patterns, suggests a form of social conformity where deviation from the norm may not be easily accepted.

This phenomenon aligns with rational choice theory and youth bulge theory. Rational Choice Theory suggests that individuals make decisions by weighing the costs and benefits of their actions to maximize personal advantage. In this context, young people in Thulamela's villages assess their participation in voting based on the potential rewards or consequences within their community. Since rural communities function as extended families with strong social norms, youth may perceive that aligning with traditional voting patterns yields benefits such as social acceptance and community support. Conversely, deviating from established norms might result in social alienation or disapproval, increasing the "cost" of independent political decision-making. Thus, the findings suggest that community influence shapes youth political participation through a cost-benefit analysis based on social acceptance and traditional expectations.

The Youth Bulge Theory argues that societies with a high proportion of young people often experience shifts in political engagement, social stability, and even unrest, depending on economic opportunities and political structures. The findings suggest that young people in Thulamela do not operate in isolation but are embedded in a broader communal structure that dictates their political engagement. In rural areas, where traditional structures dominate, youth may be expected to conform to existing political norms, limiting political dissent or independent activism. However, in villages where attitudes are shifting perhaps due to urban influence, education, or technology youth might challenge traditional expectations, leading to generational shifts in political behavior. This aligns with the Youth Bulge Theory's assertion that large youth populations can either reinforce stability or become a force for political change, depending on external influences such as community norms and economic conditions.

5.4.1 Societal norms

Findings from the revealed that there are no societal norms in the communities which hinder them from participating in elections, although participants posit that due to their upbringing and culture, if they are in a queue, then somebody of old age (pensioner) is behind they can allow him or her

to pass but the participants also mentioned that one can do that if he/she wants to because it, not a must to do so.

P7. “There's no such in my village because the Constitution itself does not allow it, so we can't agree with the traditional and societal norms towards election Yeah, we never faced that challenge”

P 8. No, there is no such thing in my village we can just allow the pensioners to vote first as a way of showing love and respect to them.

P 12. No, I have voted twice in my life, and I have never experienced such in my society.

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The above quotations reveal that that there is no evidence of strict societal norms that explicitly prevent youth from participating in elections. However, cultural practices, such as prioritising elders in voting queues highlight the role of social conditioning in shaping voting behavior. The data also highlights that these practices are voluntary rather than mandatory, indicating that while societal norms exist, individuals still have some level of agency in decision-making. The comparison between rural and urban youth presents a critical insight into how information access affects political participation. The data suggests that urban youth are more likely to receive diverse and timely political information due to better access to media and digital platforms, whereas rural youth face challenges in this regard. This digital divide impacts how political knowledge is formed and shared, reinforcing the notion that rural voters may be more dependent on traditional community narratives when making voting decisions.

A key observation from the data is that rural youth may have less exposure to alternative political viewpoints, making them more susceptible to the dominant political ideologies within their communities. This limited access to information could result in a lower likelihood of questioning established voting patterns or engaging in independent political analysis. The study found that societal norms and community expectations significantly influence youth voting behaviour. In some rural villages, young people align their voting choices with traditional expectations to

maintain social acceptance. The Rational Choice Theory supports this by suggesting that individuals weigh social costs against political choices. This is consistent with the work of Kahneman (2011), who argue that rational behaviour often incorporates non-material incentives, such as social belonging.

5.4.2. Party political identities

Findings from the study show that there is a party political identity that occurs within the community, which influences the voting or perception of voting. The participants indicated that since the ward councillor comes from his village, people ought to support that person by voting for the party that he belongs to so that he can deliver services within the community.

P 9 *“I stay in the same street with the Ward Councilor, and in my village, it is a must for all of us to vote for the party that the chancellor belongs to as a way of showing our loyalty.”*

P 13: *“In my village, there is a dominant ANC, and this was influenced because one of the sons who was born in the very community became a major; as a result, the whole community turned to celebrate him, and then the ruling party became dominant in our village that it was hard to even during the elections to find people wearing other party t-shirt except the ruling party T-shirt (ANC)”*

The above sentiments highlight the strong influence of party political identities in shaping voting behavior within rural communities. The evidence suggests that loyalty to a local political figure, such as a ward councilor or mayor creates a sense of obligation among residents to support the party they belong to. This reinforces a culture where political affiliation is tied to personal and communal relationships rather than policy evaluation or ideological alignment.

From a theoretical perspective, this aligns with the rational choice theory, which suggests that voters act in their self-interest, often prioritising tangible benefits over political ideology. In resource-constrained rural areas, where access to development projects and government services is often limited, community members may perceive voting for a local leader's party as a practical

means of securing benefits. This is evident in the participants' statements, where voting is framed as a collective duty to ensure continued service delivery.

However, this phenomenon has implications for democratic competition and accountability. When political support is based on social ties rather than performance or policy, it can lead to entrenched political dominance. As one participant noted, the ruling party became so dominant that it was difficult to find opposition supporters openly expressing their views. This suggests that alternative political choices may be discouraged, either through social pressure or implicit coercion. In such an environment, elected officials may feel less pressure to be accountable, knowing that their support is secured through communal loyalty rather than governance performance.

Furthermore, this dynamic may contribute to political stagnation and reduced policy innovation. If voters consistently support a single party out of loyalty rather than an assessment of governance effectiveness, there is little incentive for parties to adapt, improve service delivery, or address pressing local issues.

In conclusion, while party political identities in rural communities provide a strategic mechanism for securing localised benefits, they also raise concerns about democratic engagement, political competition and accountability. Addressing these challenges requires efforts to promote political awareness, voter education, and mechanisms that ensure government accountability beyond party loyalty. The analysis of the data underscores the powerful role that communities play in shaping youth voting behavior in Thulamela. Societal norms and party political identities significantly influence how young people perceive and engage in elections, often limiting independent political thought. The rural-urban divide in information access further complicates political participation, making rural youth more reliant on local narratives. Addressing these challenges requires targeted civic education, digital access expansion, and efforts to promote political independence among young voters. The study found that societal norms and community expectations significantly influence youth voting behavior. In some rural villages, young people align their voting choices with traditional expectations to maintain social acceptance. Rational choice theory supports this by suggesting that individuals weigh social costs (such as ostracisation) against political choices. This is consistent with the work of Kahneman (2011), who argues that rational behaviour often incorporates non-material incentives, such as social belonging.

5.5. THEME 5: FUTURE PARTICIPATION

Findings from the study demonstrate that the future exercise of democracy is threatened by the decline of today's conventional youth, which is characterized by the youth bulge. This can make future participation worse than it is now. The findings show that there is need to harness the youth bulge for the sake of future participation. This is because findings from the study suggest that we are likely to experience what we call a “youthquake”, and this aligns with a study by Ural (2006), which identified the relevant factors believed to interact with the youth bulge to increase the risk of political violence. Ural (2006) further concluded that the youth bulge may also increase the risk of terrorism and spontaneous violent events like riots, demonstrations, or apathy. These findings show that it is very important that the government takes into consideration the democratic graphic designs and ensure that youth participate in all processes of the nation, including elections. This has been seen in some countries like China, Russia, Singapore, and South Korea, which are connected to those democratic dividends by trying to make the president invest in their youth, making sure that.

5.5.1 Attitudes to change

The study's findings indicate a potential shift in youth attitudes towards political participation, though conditionally. The findings prove that the state of youth participation can change through the consideration of political belonging. There are only 5 years left to the 2030 agenda for sustainable development, which emphasizes social change. Change-makers, change agents, and innovation champions focus on the youth as champions of hope. However, the current reality contradicts these expectations, as youth engagement in elections remains relatively low. The qualitative data gathered from participants highlights a general sentiment that youth representation in government is crucial to fostering engagement. Participants in the study noted:

P.8 *“Youth participation in not just local government, but also a national government, so I believe that as young people we need young ministers, we need young presidents because it's only them*

that can understand us better and young people will also have a reason to vote, you know we will have some sense of role models in the political landscape that we look at, you could take a look at someone like maybe Julius Nyerere.”

P.12 *“Until the government involves youth in its affairs and allows youth to be one in the cabinet, then I think I might reconsider my voting decision, at least I will be voting for people who can relate with me and whom I trust.”*

Participants (P.8, P.12) emphasize the demand for young leaders who resonate with their experiences. Julius Nyerere’s reference illustrates how youthful leadership can inspire trust and belonging. Symbolic representation alone is insufficient; substantive roles in governance (e.g., ministerial positions) are crucial. When youth see peers in power, they perceive political systems as relevant, increasing electoral participation. This aligns with the 2030 Agenda’s vision of youth as "change-makers," yet current structures often exclude them, creating disillusionment. The 2030 Agenda positions youth as champions of social innovation, yet their electoral disengagement threatens democratic sustainability. This paradox stems from a perceived irrelevance of traditional politics. Youth may prioritize activism (e.g., climate strikes) over voting, viewing institutional processes as ineffective. Bridging this gap requires aligning political agendas with youth priorities (e.g., climate action, digital rights) and fostering trust through transparency.

The study highlights the urgent need for strategic interventions to address declining youth participation in democracy. While there is potential for attitudinal change, political structures must evolve to create an inclusive environment where young people feel represented and empowered. The youth bulge presents an opportunity rather than a crisis if effectively managed, it can drive a more vibrant and participatory democracy. Governments must recognize this demographic as an asset and implement measures that ensure their sustained engagement in democratic processes.

5.5.2. Reflection and solution

The study findings underscore the historically active role of youth in South Africa's political landscape. Historically, young people played a significant role in the liberation struggle, joining movements such as the ANC Youth League to fight against apartheid this aligns with SAHO (2021). However, in contemporary times, youth political participation has evolved. Unlike during the struggle against apartheid, young people today do not need to go into exile or join liberation movements to be politically active. Instead, they can access a broader range of participatory methods, including digital platforms, protests, and petitions. Despite these opportunities, the research indicates a decline in formal youth participation in the electoral process, particularly among the Gen Z (Generation Z) or 'born-free' generation.

This decline in electoral participation suggests a growing disconnect between youth and the effectiveness of democracy in their daily lives. The findings align with Kitanova's (2020) study who highlights that contemporary youth participation differs from that of apartheid-era youth, as new forms of engagement exist. While the youth of today still care about politics, their methods of participation have shifted, emphasizing informal means such as online activism. However, rural youth face barriers to accessing online platforms due to poverty and lack of digital infrastructure, which limits their political engagement. This digital divide presents a significant challenge to inclusive political participation.

P 2. *“Vhana vha tea uto funziwa nga u khetha vah tshe vhatuku zwikoloni u swika vhatshi swikelela minwaha ya u voutha nahone vha tea u thoma u vha na nyambedzadzo na vho vharangaho pahnda vhatshi vha tume uri zwine vha khou zwifunziwa ngaha khetho zwifhe practical” (Children should be taught to vote from an early age in school until they reach voting age and should begin to have discussions with their leaders to make sure that what they are being taught about elections is practical.)*

P 5 *“There should be new ways of campaigning that will allow us to interact with those who are campaigning directly, I believe that podcast can help to make election attractive and favorable to us as a youth” (“u fhirisa uri hu vhidziwe tshivhidzo musanda riye upfa vha tshi khou anba zwithu zwine na u hanedza ari kone na u hanedza na u zwivhudzisa ngauri ri vha ro pwanyeledziwa nga vhathu vhahulwane vha henefho muvhunduni)” (instead of calling a congregation to the palace to*

hear them say things that you can't object and ask questions because you are being oppressed by the elders of the village.)

P 9 *"Looking at the 2024 national election, I think that IEC should do TiK Tok challenges that can make the voting process attractive"*

The above sentiment and research findings provide solutions to enhance youth political engagements, which include civic education from an early age, using modernized campaigning methods, leveraging social media for political awareness, bridging the digital divide in rural areas, and creating safe spaces for political dialogue.

The findings provide the solution to civic education from an early age, which is a crucial recommendation for the integration of civic education into the school curriculum from an early age. As one participant stated, "Children should be taught to vote from an early age in school until they reach voting age and should begin to have discussions with their leaders to make sure that what they are being taught about elections is practical." This approach ensures that young people understand the significance of their electoral rights and responsibilities. Schools should facilitate discussions between students and local leaders to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

The research findings also provide a solution for using modernized campaigning methods since the traditional campaign methods may not resonate with the youth of today. Instead of holding conventional community meetings where questioning political leaders may not be encouraged, alternative methods should be explored. One research participant suggested, "There should be new ways of campaigning that will allow us to interact with those who are campaigning directly. I believe that podcasts can help to make elections attractive and favourable to us as a youth." Podcasts and other interactive digital formats provide accessible and engaging platforms for political discourse, allowing youth to engage in critical discussions without hierarchical constraints.

Leveraging social media for political awareness: Social media platforms play a crucial role in shaping youth perceptions and engagement. To make the electoral process more appealing, the Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) should adopt youth-friendly strategies. One participant noted, "Looking at the 2024 national election, I think that IEC should do TikTok challenges that

can make the voting process attractive." Using TikTok and similar platforms to create engaging, informative content can help bridge the gap between formal political processes and youth culture. Such strategies could demystify the voting process, making it more accessible and appealing.

Bridging the digital divide in rural Areas: While urban youth may have easier access to political information through digital platforms, rural youth often face challenges due to poverty and limited internet connectivity. Efforts should be made to provide affordable internet access, digital literacy programs, and localized online platforms tailored to rural communities. Government and private sector partnerships could help expand digital infrastructure, ensuring that all young people, regardless of location, have equal access to political information.

Creating safe spaces for political dialogue: Many young people feel constrained by traditional political structures where elders dominate discussions, making it difficult for youth voices to be heard. Creating safe spaces for youth-led political dialogue can empower young people to express their views without intimidation. These spaces could be in the form of youth parliaments, town hall meetings specifically for young people, and digital forums where open discussions on political matters can take place.

The findings highlight that while youth political engagement has evolved, there remains a significant decline in formal participation, particularly in voting. Addressing this requires a multi-faceted approach, including early civic education, innovative campaigning, social media engagement, digital inclusion for rural youth, and safe spaces for political dialogue. By implementing these solutions, South Africa can foster an inclusive political environment where young people feel empowered to participate in shaping the country's future actively.

CHAPTER 6 PRESENTATION OF MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter serves as a comprehensive summary of the findings derived from the study on the perception of rural youth participation in the Thulamela municipality. It aims to synthesize the

insights gathered during the research process, linking them to the initial aims and objectives outlined at the onset of the study. By exploring the attitudes and experiences of rural youth concerning their participation in community activities, this chapter not only highlights significant trends and themes but also addresses the specific research questions posed. Furthermore, it offers actionable recommendations based on the findings, with the ultimate goal of informing stakeholders and guiding future initiatives. The conclusion will encapsulate the key takeaways from the study, emphasizing the importance of fostering youth engagement in rural development.

6.2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE CHAPTERS

Chapter 1 details the study aims and the problem to be explored. In this chapter, the study aim and objectives were provided, and the literature review and the theoretical framework were presented. The literature acknowledges the importance of youth participation in elections, the lack of interest /disengagement of youth in political affairs as a global problem, The literature outlines two types of youth participation, which are conventional and unconventional participation the literature outlines how these two types of participation posed a threat and benefit to the democracy system as election is the cornerstone. Chapter 3 focuses on South African youth and politics; the chapter provides a broad analysis of SA youth and politics from colonial times to the 21st century. Chapter 4 presents data presentation, findings, and discussion. The chapter adopted a thematic approach to analyse the findings.

6.2. MAIN FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study findings, this section presents recommendations for rural youth voter apathy/for rural youth participation in political elections.

Table 3 Presentation of main findings and recommendations

Summary of Main Findings	Recommendations / Implications for Further Research
Understanding of the Voting Process: Most rural youth understand voting as a democratic right, but some remain uninformed or perceive it as manipulated.	Strengthening voter education in schools and communities is essential, along with utilizing media platforms to increase awareness. Future research should assess the impact of civic education programs in rural areas.
Lack of Voter Education: Limited access to electoral information deepens youth disengagement, especially in rural areas.	Expanding voter education programs and leveraging digital platforms can improve access to information. Research should explore ways to bridge the urban-rural divide in political awareness.
Lack of Trust in the Electoral Process: Many youth perceive elections as rigged or controlled by the ruling party.	Strengthening electoral transparency and accountability can help restore trust. Future studies should examine strategies for rebuilding confidence in democratic institutions.
Voter Apathy Among Youth: Disillusionment with political leaders and broken promises reduce youth motivation to vote.	Encouraging youth representation in politics and holding leaders accountable can combat voter apathy. Research should analyze the impact of youth-led movements on political participation.
Barriers to Political Participation: Poverty, corruption, past voting experiences, and generational gaps hinder youth engagement.	Addressing economic challenges, corruption, and governance issues is crucial to increasing youth political participation. Further research should explore the link between economic empowerment and voter turnout.

Community Influence on Political Participation: Traditional norms and political party loyalty shape youth voting behavior.	Creating inclusive spaces for political discussions and youth engagement can foster independent political decision-making. Research should examine the role of digital activism in rural youth participation.
Future Political Participation Trends: Continued youth disengagement could threaten democracy, but attitudes can change with the right interventions.	Investing in youth-focused democratic initiatives and promoting young leadership can boost participation. Future studies should explore how digital platforms influence youth engagement in elections.

6.2.1. Understanding of the Voting Process

The study revealed that most rural youth in South Africa have a fundamental understanding of the voting process, recognizing elections as a democratic right and a means of selecting competent leaders. However, a significant minority remains uninformed, perceiving voting as an activity reserved for politicians or older citizens. Some youth also view the electoral process with suspicion, believing that elections are manipulated and outcomes predetermined. These mixed perceptions suggest a gap in civic education and political engagement among rural youth. Without a strong understanding of the importance of voting and the mechanisms of democratic governance, youth participation in elections will remain low.

6.2.1.1. Recommendation:

To address this knowledge gap, voter education must be integrated into the school curriculum from an early age. Schools should incorporate lessons on democracy, governance, and the electoral process to ensure that young people develop an informed perspective on voting before they reach voting age. Additionally, community-based civic education programs should be introduced to reach out-of-school youth. Political leaders and civil society organizations should collaborate to

launch awareness campaigns through accessible platforms such as radio, social media, and community meetings to engage rural youth effectively.

6.2.2. Lack of Voter Education

The study identified inadequate voter education as a major barrier to youth electoral participation. Many rural youth lack access to reliable information about elections, leading to misconceptions and political disengagement. This issue is further exacerbated by socio-economic challenges such as poverty and limited access to quality education which prevent young people from fully engaging in political affairs. Moreover, the urban-rural divide means that youth in cities have better access to political information than their rural counterparts, deepening inequalities in political participation.

6.2.2.1. Recommendation:

To bridge this knowledge gap, electoral commissions, and civic organizations should intensify voter education programs targeting rural youth. Schools, community centers, and religious institutions should be used as platforms for conducting voter education workshops. In addition, digital platforms such as podcasts, social media campaigns, and interactive websites should be leveraged to disseminate information about the electoral process. It is also crucial for political parties to engage directly with rural youth through outreach initiatives, ensuring that they have the necessary information to make informed voting decisions.

6.2.3. Lack of Trust in the Voting Process

One of the study's most striking findings was the widespread lack of trust in the electoral system among rural youth. Many young people believe that elections are not free and fair, with political manipulation and electoral fraud undermining the legitimacy of the process. Some youth expressed the belief that their votes do not count as they assume the ruling party will always win regardless of their participation. Others cited procedural inefficiencies, such as malfunctioning voting

systems, as further evidence that elections are unreliable. This erosion of trust in the democratic process discourages youth from voting, reinforcing political apathy.

6.2.3.1 Recommendation:

To restore trust in the electoral system, election oversight bodies must ensure transparency in election procedures. This includes strengthening electoral laws, improving vote-counting systems, and addressing allegations of fraud through independent monitoring. The Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) should also implement voter education campaigns that emphasize the integrity of the voting system and encourage youth participation. Political parties should commit to greater transparency in their campaigns, and civil society organizations should engage in voter mobilization initiatives to promote confidence in the electoral process among the youth.

6.2.4. Perceptions of Rural Youth in Voting and Voter Apathy

The study found that rural youth generally have a positive perception of voting, recognizing its importance in democratic governance. However, despite this awareness, many young people remain reluctant to participate in elections due to deep-seated disillusionment with the political system. Rural youth feel that political leaders fail to deliver on their promises, leading to growing voter apathy. Many believe that voting does not bring about real change, as elected leaders rarely address their concerns once in office. Additionally, the exclusion of young candidates from political office reinforces the perception that politics is an arena dominated by older generations, further discouraging youth participation.

6.2.4.1. Recommendation

To combat voter apathy, political parties must prioritize youth representation in leadership positions. Policies that encourage the inclusion of young candidates in electoral processes should be implemented, such as youth quotas in party structures. Furthermore, political leaders must be held accountable for their promises, with mechanisms such as town hall meetings, community feedback sessions, and social media platforms providing opportunities for youth to engage with

elected officials. Strengthening youth participation in governance through leadership training programs and political mentorship initiatives can also help build trust and motivation for youth to engage in elections.

6.2.5. Barriers to Political Participation

Several barriers to political participation were identified in the study, including poverty, corruption, past experiences of ineffective governance, and the generational gap in political representation. Poverty was highlighted as a major challenge, as many rural youth struggle with basic survival and are unable to prioritize political engagement. Corruption in governance further discourages youth from voting as they believe that political leaders prioritize personal gain over public service. Past experiences of electoral disappointment also contribute to voter apathy, as youth feel that voting does not lead to meaningful change. The generational gap in political representation alienates young people, as they feel excluded from decision-making processes dominated by older politicians.

6.2.5.1. Recommendation

To address these barriers, the government should implement policies that provide economic opportunities for young people, such as youth employment programs and entrepreneurship support. Strengthening anti-corruption measures and ensuring accountability among political leaders is also crucial in restoring youth confidence in governance. Civic education programs should be expanded to equip youth with knowledge on how to engage in politics beyond elections, including advocacy and policy-making. Political structures should also be reformed to ensure greater youth representation in governance.

6.2.6. Community's Role in Political Participation

The study found that rural communities play a significant role in shaping youth voting behavior. Many youths follow established community voting patterns, supporting the political party favored by local leaders rather than making independent political decisions. This sense of loyalty can limit political diversity and discourage critical engagement with election processes. Additionally,

community structures often exclude youth from political discussions, reinforcing a sense of political alienation.

6.2.6.1 Recommendation

To encourage independent political engagement among youth, communities should create inclusive spaces where young people can discuss political issues and make informed voting decisions. Community leaders should be encouraged to facilitate open discussions on political diversity rather than enforcing party loyalty. Youth advisory councils should be established within communities to ensure that young voices are included in decision-making processes. Additionally, digital platforms can be used to create online communities where youth can engage in political debates and discussions outside of traditional structures.

6.2.7. Future Participation and Solutions

The study reveals that the continued decline in youth participation could threaten the future of democracy in South Africa. If young people continue to disengage from elections, governance structures will remain dominated by older generations, leading to further disillusionment. However, the study also highlights that youth attitudes toward political participation can change if structural barriers are addressed. Many youth expressed interest in voting if they felt that their voices were valued and their concerns addressed.

6.2.7.1. Recommendation

To enhance future participation, the government should invest in youth-focused democratic initiatives that ensure young people are actively involved in decision-making. Introducing young leaders in political structures can inspire greater youth engagement. Social media and digital platforms should be used to make political participation more accessible and appealing to younger generations. Additionally, integrating civic education into school curricula and providing platforms for youth activism can help instill a culture of political engagement from an early age.

6.3. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could explore comparative rural-urban dynamics to understand how political participation varies between these contexts. Additionally, investigating the impact of digital platforms on rural youth activism could provide deeper insights into evolving political landscapes. Researchers could also examine the effectiveness of modernized campaigning methods, such as podcasts and interactive digital formats, in engaging youth in the electoral process. Furthermore, studies could focus on the role of civic education programs in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical engagement in politics. Lastly, exploring the relationship between youth representation in government and youth political engagement could yield valuable insights into fostering a more inclusive democratic process.

6.4. CRITICAL EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

The study's strengths lies in its comprehensive analysis of the factors influencing rural youth's political engagement and its challenge to stereotypes of youth apathy. The study provides a thorough and insightful analysis of rural youth's political perceptions in South Africa specifically under Thulamela Municipality, effectively situating its aim within relevant theoretical frameworks and broader social contexts, the study also highlights critical challenges facing rural youth in political participation, ranging from lack of voter education and political exclusion to deep-seated mistrust in the electoral system. However, these challenges can be addressed through targeted interventions such as improving civic education, increasing youth representation in politics, and leveraging digital platforms for political engagement. By implementing these recommendations, South Africa can foster an inclusive democracy where young people feel empowered to participate in shaping the country's future. While there are areas for further exploration, the study's contributions to understanding youth political engagement are valuable for both academic scholarship and practical policy applications in enhancing democratic participation.

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ANNEXURE A

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Title of the Research Study: Exploring the perception of rural youth’s participation
In political election: A case study of Thulamela Municipality

Principal Investigator/s/ researcher : Mphegi Musatondwa

Co-Investigator/s/supervisor/s : Prof P Dzimiri
Prof R Tshifhumulo

Outline of the Procedures: *(Responsibilities of the participant, consultation/interview/survey details, venue details, inclusion/exclusion criteria, explanation of tools and measurement outcomes, any follow-ups, any placebo or no treatment, how much time required of participant, what is expected of participants, randomization/ group allocation).*

The study will collect data through interviews and document analysis. Participants of the youths of Thulamela Municipality who are eligible to participate in political elections of the country are to be considered.

Risks or Discomforts to the Participant: *(Description of foreseeable risks or discomforts to for participants if applicable e.g. Transient muscle pain, VBAI, post-needle soreness, other adverse reactions, etc.).*

There is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort to participants. The confidentiality of respondents is highly guaranteed.

Benefits: *(To the participant and to the researcher/s e.g. Publications).*

The knowledge emanating from the findings of this research will also benefit the respondents.

Reason/s why the Participant May Be Withdrawn from the Study: *(Non-compliance, illness, adverse reactions, etc. Need to state that there will be no adverse consequences for the participant should they choose to withdraw).*

If participants no longer feel the need to participate and also if the researcher deviates from the consent form, participants may withdraw and there will be no adverse consequences for the participant should they choose to withdraw.

Remuneration: *(Will the participant receive any monetary or other types of remuneration?).*

No remuneration will be given to the participants.

Costs of the Study: *(Will the participant be expected to cover any costs towards the study?).* No participant will be expected to cover any costs towards the study.

Confidentiality: *(Description of the extent to which confidentiality will be maintained and how will this be maintained).*

Participants' right to privacy will be ensured. Only codes will be used instead of participants' identities.

Research-related Injury: *(What will happen should there be a research-related injury or adverse reaction? Will there be any compensation?).*

There is no foreseeable research-related injury in this research

ANNEXURE B

CONSENT FORM

Title of the Research Study: Exploring the perception of rural youth's participation

In political election: A case study of Thulamela Municipality

Statement of Agreement to Participate in the Research Study:

- I hereby confirm that I have been informed by the researcher, *Mphegi Musatondwa*, about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of this study - Research Ethics Clearance Number: __,
- I have also received, read and understood the above-written information (*Participant Letter of Information*) regarding the study.
- I am aware that the study results, including personal details regarding my sex, age, date of birth, initials, and diagnosis, will be anonymously processed into a study report.
- In view of the requirements of research, I agree that the data collected during this study can be processed in a computerized system by the researcher.
- I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study.
- I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and (of my own free will) declare myself prepared to participate in the study.
- I understand that significant new findings developed during the course of this research which may relate to my participation will be made available to me.

Full Name of Participant

Date

Time

Signature

I, ... , ... , ... , ...

I Mphegi Musatondwa) herewith confirm that the above participant has been fully

Informed about the nature, conduct and risks of the above study.

Full Name of Researcher

Mphegi Musatondwa

12 April 2024



.....

Date.....

Signature.....

Full Name of Witness (If applicable)

.....

Date

Signature.....

Full Name of Legal Guardian (If applicable)

.....

Date.....

Signature.....

ANNEXURE C

Interview Guide

Exploring the perception of rural youth's participation in Political election: A case study of Thulamela Municipality.

I am Mphegi Musatondwa, a Master's student in Political Sciences at the University of Venda. I am conducting an in-depth study to explore the perception of rural youth's participation in Political elections: A case study of Thulamela Municipality. I would like to interview you to better understand your perspective on youth perceptions in electoral affairs. I hope your responses will provide insight into this study. Please note that participation in this interview remains voluntary and confidential. If you feel uncomfortable continuing with the interview, feel free to withdraw, and there will be no consequences. The interview will take approximately 15 to 20 minutes of your time.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview with me, and you agreed to have our conversation recorded. Before we start the interview, please read the informed consent form and sign it for me as evidence that you have agreed to participate without coercion.

Questions for In-depth Interviews with Youths.

Demographic Information

1. Gender

Female		Male		Other	
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2. Age (years)

18-25		26-30		31-35	
-------	--	-------	--	-------	--

3. Marital Status

Single		Married		Widowed		Divorced		Separated	
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4. Highest Academic Qualifications

Ordinary level		Advanced level		Certificate		Diploma		Degree		Postgraduate degree	
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5. Residential Area

1. Can you explain your understanding of the voting process?
2. What does voting mean to you?
3. Can you explain your experience growing up in Thulamela Municipality and how it shaped your participation in political affairs?
4. Can you share any past voting experiences and how that has impacted your views on elections here do you get information about voting?
5. Do you have enough information to make an informed choice when voting?

6. Have you ever participated in elections before? If not, what were the reasons?

7. Have you participated in political activities like rallies or community meetings? If so, what motivated you to participate?

8. What is your perception about voting as a youth?

9. Do you think it's important for young people to vote? Why

10. Have you ever encountered any situation discouraging you or others from voting?

11. How does your family or community influence your decision to vote or not vote?

12. Do cultural or societal norms in your community affect your participation or engagement in electoral affairs?

13. In your opinion, what should be done to make the election attractive and favourable to the youth?

Lastly,

14. In your opinion, what is the role of young people in shaping the future of voting in your community? Is there something that you think has not been said or discussed in as far as youth participation in elections is concerned?

Thank you very much for the wonderful insights and your willingness to participate in this interview.

ANNEXURE D

Ethics approval letter

ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

NAME OF RESEARCHER/INVESTIGATOR:
Ms M Mpegi

STUDENT NO:
18008004

PROJECT TITLE: **Exploring the perception of rural youth's participation in political election: A case study of Thulamela Municipality.**

ETHICAL CLEARANCE NO: **FHSSE/24/DS/01/2410**

SUPERVISORS/ CO-RESEARCHERS/ CO-INVESTIGATORS

NAME	INSTITUTION & DEPARTMENT	ROLE
Prof P Dzimiri	UNIVEN, Development Studies	Supervisor
Prof R Tshifhumulo	UNIVEN, Development Studies	Co-Supervisor
Ms M Mpegi	UNIVEN, Development Studies	Investigator-Students

Type: **Masters Research**
Risk: **Minimal risk to humans, animals or environment (Category 2)**
Approval Period: **October 2024 – October 2025**

The Research Ethics Social Sciences Committee (RESSC) hereby approves your project as indicated above.

General Conditions
While this ethics approval is subject to all declarations, undertakings and agreements incorporated and signed in the application form, please note the following:

- The project leader (principal investigator) must report in the prescribed format to the REC:
 - Annually (or as otherwise requested) on the progress of the project, and upon completion of the project.
 - Within 48hrs in case of any adverse event (or any matter that interrupts sound ethical principles) during the course of the project.
- Annually a number of projects may be randomly selected for an external audit.
- The approval applies strictly to the protocol as stipulated in the application form. Would any changes to the protocol be deemed necessary during the course of the project, the project leader must apply for approval of these changes at the REC. Would there be deviation from the project protocol without the necessary approval of such changes, the ethics approval is immediately and automatically forfeited.
- The date of approval indicates the first date that the project may be started. Would the project have to continue after the expiry date; a new application must be made to the REC and new approval received before or on the expiry date.
- In the interest of ethical responsibility, the REC retains the right to:
 - Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project,
 - To ask further questions; Seek additional information; Require further modification or monitor the conduct of your research or the informed consent process.
 - withdraw or postpone approval if:
 - Any unethical principles or practices of the project are revealed or suspected.
 - It becomes apparent that any relevant information was withheld from the REC or that information has been false or misrepresented.
 - The required annual report and reporting of adverse events was not done timely and accurately.
 - New institutional rules, national legislation or international conventions A.R necessary

ISSUED BY:
UNIVERSITY OF VENDA, RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE
Date Considered: October 2024

Name of the RESSC Chairperson of the Committee: **Prof M. Mwale-Manjoro**

Signature: 


PRIVATE BAG 3556, THOHAYANDOU, 9800, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.
TELEPHONE 031 521 8044 FAX 031 521 8045
"A quality driven, practically sustainable, rural-based Comprehensive University"

UNIVERSITY OF VENDA
OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
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ANNEXURE E

Language Editing Certificate

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND EDUCATION

24 FEBRUARY 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

RE: EDITING OF THE MASTERS DISSERTATION TITLED “EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL YOUTH’S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ELECTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY”

CANDIDATE NAME: MPHEGI MUSATONDWA

STUDENT NUMBER: 18008004: UNIVERSITY OF VENDA

This letter serves to confirm that I edited the **MUSATONDWA MPHEGI’S** Masters Dissertation titled **“EXPLORING PERCEPTIONS OF RURAL YOUTH’S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL ELECTIONS: A CASE STUDY OF THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY”**

My work entailed identifying and correcting grammatical, typographical, formatting, and related editorial errors in the document.

I have recommended numerous corrections related to formatting, grammatical, typographical, sentence construction and syntactic errors in the document. The responsibility to ensure that **ALL** the recommended changes are correctly made is that of the author of the document.

Should there be any queries regarding the editorial aspects of the document please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



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