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'Getting Involved on Campus': Student Identities, Student Politics, and Perceptions of the Student Representative Council (SRC)

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KEYWORDS Student Representative Council (SRC). Gender Differences. Racial Identity. Year of Study. Residential Background. Post-apartheid Student Perceptions

ABSTRACT Since 1976 when school students in Soweto took to the streets in active defiance of the apartheid state, students as a political constituency have always been admired, noted and feared for the political positions they have taken and campaigns launched. South African student organisations in the 1980s and 1990s aligned themselves with mass democratic movements and engaged with and shaped their agendas. Commentators suggest however, that the nature and character of student organisations have changed in post-apartheid South Africa, and consequently, also students' interest in 'getting involved'. With regard to SRCs, while many authors argue that SRCs are no longer a 'revolutionary force' and have become either retrogressive or disempowered, others suggest that more effort needs to be made to understand the content of 'new' SRCs in post-apartheid South Africa and their appeal to diverse student populations. This paper seeks to establish the *attitudes* of University of Johannesburg (UJ) students towards voting for, and supporting, the Students Representative Council (SRC), and, for involving themselves in student politics at UJ. In making sense of students' perceptions, the paper probes differences and similarities in terms of four key factors: gender, race, year of study, and residential background.

INTRODUCTION

Studies show that young people join student groupings and participate in political and civic activities for a myriad of reasons. These could include the need to engage in struggles for liberation, protest action to end discrimination, or to safeguard interests and advance particular strategic agendas. Most societies, whether developed or developing, reveal student organisations and alliances through which students mobilise support and articulate demands (Patwary 2011). One of the current catalysts leading to sporadic moments of student protest is when university bureaucracies make decisions which affect students, without properly consulting or involving them in the decision-making processes. Failure to involve students in major decision-making, or refusal to consult with them, often rallies them into active bodies (Mitra 2003). Ozymy (2011) maintains that active involvement in university politics in the current era of economic instability is sometimes instigated by fears that study loans would be withdrawn. Hundscheid's (2010) study refers to students who became active participants in SRC politics because they saw the need to demand the expansion of access to learning.

South African universities have been shaken regularly over the past decade by organised groups of students reacting to escalating study fees and a lack of accessible and affordable accommodation. The often inflexible stances of university administrations in seriously considering student demands tend to nurture vibrant and challenging activist responses in return. Student politics, however, take many forms and could entail not just strong protest, but fairly mainstream and well-ordered engagements with management. Gill and DeFronzo (2009) emphasise that whilst students might hold particular interest in SRC politics, they might not want to be actively involved and thus may choose less visible ways of aligning themselves to the general cause of the student body.

The researchers are concerned in the current study, to empirically assess general student perceptions of SRC politics, and whether or not they *should* get involved, and to analyse whether gender, race, year of study and residential background make a difference in shaping these atti-

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tudes. The paper makes the contention that there might be some currency in the Rational Choice Theory's postulations to explain the levels of engagement in student politics by undergraduate students of the University of Johannesburg.

Literature Review

Students' Political Involvement

In defining politics, the paper makes use of Burawoy's (1985: 254) definition which steers us to view student politics as, '…struggles within a specific arena aimed at specific sets of relations'. Badat (1999: 21) posits that Burawoy's formulation also helps us,'…recognise that since student struggles occur within a particular institutional setting, it means that they will be "regulated" and, necessarily, also structured, conditioned and shaped by the distinct institutional arrangements and organisational matrices of the setting'.

Student politics is often shaped by efforts at emulating national leaders or mainstream political parties, for example, participation might be triggered by admiration for leaders such as Jacob Zuma or Julius Malema or their respective parties. Alternatively, students might simply feel the need to participate in SRC activities because of their own personal or political interests to socially connect or link up with larger political agendas deemed to be compelling (Zeilig 2009). In what is arguably one of the first substantive studies probing the formation of student organisations since 1914, Worms (1966) suggests that student organisations exist because they create a sense of belonging, and allow a spirit of collectivism to thrive. Since the 1960s, South African student organisations have exhibited an impetus for collectivist, unifying strategies, and intellectual debate. Badat (1999: 2) refers to the South African Students Organisation (SASO) which was formed in 1968 and popularly associated with the person of Steve Biko. Apart from SASO, the South African National Students' Congress (SANSCO) and the Azania Students Organisation (AZASO) were formidable forces between 1979 and 1986 and could be distinguished by their ability to politically mobilise, organise and rally students during the era of the anti-apartheid struggle. From 1992 moving into the post-apartheid era, the South African Students Congress (SASCO) has taken the lead in championing the interests of South African students.

Student politics between the 1960s and the 1980s exhibited a form of active citizenship as students conducted boycotts and helped communities in their various campaigns to rally against the apartheid regime. Students' active participation and interest in politics during the apartheid era buttress the republican ideals of active citizenship. Kartal (2002) posits that the republican ideals of active citizenship stress the promotion of a common good through political participation, which is the only way to be free. For republicans, to participate in collective decision-making is the fundamental political duty of citizens. The aforementioned concept of active citizenship is almost akin to the Aristotelian ideal of citizenship which contends that human beings are supposed to be active, moral and politically engaged (Kartal 2002: 2). Active citizenship among the students took several forms over the years (Cele 2008). In the 1970s, this centred on expressing dissatisfaction, for example, with celebrations such as graduation ceremonies (as these glorified the achievements of apartheid universities), with urban forced removals, the formation of ethnically segregated residential areas, or with bans on mass-based organisations and activists (Cele 2008). Badat (1999) observes that some students also joined underground military wings of banned organisations and became involved in bombings, shootouts with the police and guerrilla warfare.

Student politics has changed in post-apartheid South Africa: there is growing acceptance and tolerance of multiparty participation and the co-existence of diverse interests and needs in democratic spaces (Naidoo and Uys 2013).On campus, students may 'shop around' to find parties that attract their interest and to which they feel some sense of connection. The importance of group goals and belonging have been referred to in early studies for example, in Shoben et al.'s study (cited in Foster and Long 1970: 202), it is suggested that students join organisations or become part of SRC politics after scrutinising available organisations, and making comparisons between them. Students may want to get involved due to passionate beliefs nurtured in progressive university environments. Others may be moved by personal and basic needs that they seek to address. Personal needs could be, as Ozymy (2011: 104) states, about low-income

students who expect SRCs to represent them so they can get funding to complete their academic studies. However, Ozymy (2011) maintains that it could be an incorrect assumption that students get politically involved because of their personal needs such as income insufficiency. Some students might also be involved in politics due to personal interests about the need for a good and meaningful political organisation for students. Many students come from politicised environments like 'political' families or civic-aware townships, and some middle-class students might immerse themselves in student politics because they are driven by progressive ideas and a human rights consciousness.

Students could become involved in SRC politics through development programmes that are supported by educators who see the need for students to organise themselves. Valenzuela (1999), however, states that many students do not see educators as caring or supportive of their need to spend time in activities beyond formal studies. Thorne (2010: 222) suggests that few educators would argue that "our role is to support students [whatever their extra interests] even though those interests lead them to become activists". Hundscheid (2010: 226) suggests that "[a]ctivism has at times served as a channel for mischievous or rebellious student impulses, but in this century it has more often been used as a vehicle for attaining desired student ends on campus or in the larger society". South African campuses, particularly historically Black universities, championed the cause of change in the past, notwithstanding the forces that sought to curtail such activity and inhibit the building of strong student organisations (Cele 2008).

In his study, Maseko (1994) argues that during the process of its evolution the SRC attempted to build a hegemonic front, and at the same time can serve as an instrument of domination. This is not always the case, however, as many authors show SRCs to be consistently victimised and devoid of real and substantive power. Mama and Barnes (2007: 51) maintain that in the current South African context, 'service delivery' to the entire student body is emphasised and can be illuminated by the risks many SRC candidates take, often in volatile times, to challenge university managements and other academic forums. Apart from the need for service delivery, there are other reasons why students holding various identities become active participants in SRC politics.

Maruoka (2008) conducted a study after the 9/11 attack in the United States and focused on how Muslim women at universities mobilised after they were forced to remove their *hijabs*(cloth covering their faces). They saw this act as alienating and humiliating and directed in a discriminatory manner towards students from the Muslim religion, particularly women. More women joined student politics to voice their opinions and to state how they should be treated, irrespective of religion. Maruoka's (2008: 119) study states that "[t]his swift rise of violence … has reasserted continuing racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism against ethnic minority women". In South Africa, given a long history of discrimination, gender and race differentials need constant investigation. So too, do differences with regard to year of study and students' places of origin (places of residence).

Political Apathy

Some students do not see the need to be active in SRC or student politics and therefore it is said that they are rather apathetic. Apathy, can be simply described as the behaviour which reveals a lack of interest in an issue, due to prioritising personal or individualistic concerns. Altbach (1979: 609) notes that American students became politically apathetic in the 1970s, leading him to probe the circumstances under which they would begin to show an interest. African American students became inactive after the decline of the Student Nonviolent Co-ordinating Committee (SNNC) and the Black power movements of the 1960s (Altbach 1979). In reference to this study, questions that were posed about apathy included the following: What creates interest in SRC politics? Why are some students more apathetic than others in challenging unfair realities? If some students display apathy, what could be the main and secondary reasons behind such a disposition? Could apathy be a response to perceptions that the SRC does not serve students' interests? Negative perceptions of student leadership might discourage students from participating in activities or elections. Some students may not define themselves as being in need of an SRC, but see themselves as independent persons who always stand up

for themselves. Such students could be either middle or working- class.

Gaidzanwa's (1993) study highlights that place of residence is often a decisive factor: he showed that disadvantaged students originating from the farms and rural areas, often felt that they could risk losing their grants and job opportunities if they participated in politics on their campuses. At the same time, many White students from urban areas refrained from political activities, for similar reasons. Arising out of this is an acknowledgement that politics represents not only a 'dangerous' game in a national context, but can be deemed problematic on campus when it is viewed as 'risky' practice. Another form of apathy is illustrated by Gill and DeFronzo's (2009: 205) study which shows that students are interested in student politics, but will not necessarily take part in every political action advocated by the SRC. The authors state that they cannot fully account for why student movements exist at times when there is no rapid social change, and why some students engage in activist practices while others do not.

Apathetic attitudes can also be gender differentiated. Mama and Barnes (2007: 50) found that women students do indeed get involved, but they would find satisfaction in office responsibilities and are not driven by the need to be instrumental in key delivery issues. They also noted some of the reasons why some women are apathetic towards SRC politics which include the perception that politics is largely a male preoccupation. Once again, these are just perceptions. Lake (2010) also shows that political apathy is strategically promoted by various groupings in universities. Apathy is sometimes apparent when university cultures discourage active political involvement and attempt to control levels of student governance and free expression. Novak (2008: 52) claims: "[m]any kinds of political activities, such as students promoting non-university events or organising on behalf of campaigns, such as student strikes and debates were prohibited on campus". He further noted that some students, who planned to join the military, deferred military service to enable an undergraduate education. This group was less likely to get active on campus.

Even though some South African universities do not encourage students to partake in campus politics, what seems certain is that student politics serves as a training ground for national politics. Most students are well aware of democratic processes, and of candidates who stand for elections and make campaign promises.

METHODOLOGY

Quantitative Approach

This study adopted a quantitative design which Muij (2004: 41) aptly describes as being fundamentally about "explaining phenomena by collecting numerical data that are analysed using mathematically based methods, in particular statistics." A structured questionnaire was the instrument used to collect and build numerical data on student attitudes differentiated in terms of gender, race, year of study and residential background.

The unit of analysis was the entire student population of the University of Johannesburg, Auckland Park Kingsway Campus, comprising over forty thousand students. A randomly selected sample of 310 students was selected, encompassing the groups of interest (Gravetter and Forzano 2009: 128)

Questionnaire Construction and Data Collection

The questionnaire had an introduction highlighting the nature of the study and the reasons for the study. It consisted of closed-ended questions and it was divided into two sections. Section 1 consisted of biographical questions, while Section 2 consisted of the main questions that related to the research topic. The questionnaire used statements and respondents chose their answers from a given scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The questionnaire was in a hard copy format and participants were interviewed face-to-face in a comfortable and private space on campus where there was no noise or any form of distraction. The participants engaged with the interviewer in a forthright manner, possibly due to the facts that the topic was of interest and they were treated respectfully during the interview process. The interviews were conducted over a four-week period in August 2012, and the data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

Characteristics of the Sample

A total of 310 students made up the sample. When compared in terms of gender, 52.9% (n=164) were female and 47.1% (n=146) male. In racial terms, two *convenient* groups were constructed: the first being a Black African group, as representative of the majority population in South Africa. The second group entailed the combination of the so-called minorities in South Africa: Whites, Coloureds, and Indians. The concept of 'minority' is a contested one and we draw on it with great discomfort here. In recent years the minority groups have been argued to be withdrawing from public politics or showing little interest in voting on election-day. At the University of Johannesburg, they are anecdotally deemed to be the least inclined towards actively taking up student issues. In class terms, additionally, they represent a more privileged set of groups. In numerical terms, the grouping was expedient because Coloureds and Indians were few in number, and thus could be re-coded with the White group. Therefore the 'White/Coloured/Indian' group had a large sample of 54.5% (n=169), Black Africans had a sample of 44.8 (n=139). Only 2 students did not want to specify their 'race' probably due to ideological reasons, and they appear as missing values with 0.6% (n=2).

The total sample of first years was large at 45.2% (n=140), second years being second at 31.9% (n=99), lastly third years and above at 22.9% (n=71). With regard to students from different residential backgrounds, the largest proportion came from the suburbs - 61.3% (n=190), the second were students from townships at 31.0% (n=96), the last were students from the rural village/farms or agricultural holdings at 7.7% (n=24).

Ethical Considerations

Permission to conduct the study and interview students was obtained from the relevant University of Johannesburg authorities. Students were invited to be part of the sample and assured that their identities would be kept anonymous. Their participation was voluntary, without any form of incentive offered at the end.

Research Hypotheses

In line with the research concerns and selective literature reviewed, the following hypotheses were proposed:

Hypotheses 1: There is a significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students towards SRC politics (*Independent variable*: sex; *Dependent variable*: attitudes towards SRC politics).

Hypotheses 2: There is a significant difference in the attitudes of students of different racial identities towards SRC politics (*Independent variable*: race; *Dependent variable*: attitudes towards SRC politics).

Hypotheses 3: There is a significant difference in the attitudes towards SRC politics of first, second and third-year undergraduate students (*Independent variable*: level of study; *Dependent variable*: attitudes towards SRC politics).

Hypotheses 4: There is a significant difference in the attitudes towards SRC politics of students from suburbs, townships and rural areas (*Independent variable*: place of residence; *Dependent variable*: attitudes towards SRC politics).

RESULTS

All Students Should Have Voted in the Previous SRC Elections

Table 1 shows responses to the statement "All students *should have* voted in the previous SRC elections." The largest response was from the 51.3% of students (n=159) who agreed, displaying a positive attitude towards the need to vote. The next response was the neutral group with 30.6% (n=95), then lastly were those who disagreed at 18.1% (n=52).

Table 1: All students should have voted in the previous SRC elections

		Frequency	*Per cent*
Valid	Disagree	56	18.1
	Neutral/Undecided	95	30.6
	Agree	**159**	**51.3**
	Total	310	100.0

All Students Should Vote in the Next SRC Elections

Table 2 shows responses to the statement "All students *should* vote in the next SRC elections". A large number of students agreed (56.8%), reflecting a positive attitude towards

the need to vote in the next election. The second largest group was the neutral one (27.4%) with the disagreeable group representing a minority (15.8%).

Table 2: All students should vote in the next SRC elections

		Frequency	*Per cent*
Valid	Disagree	49	15.8
	Neutral/Undecided	85	27.4
	Agree	**176**	**56.8**
	Total	310	100.0

All Students Should Get Involved in SRC Politics

Table 3 shows responses to the statement "All students *should* get involved in SRC politics". The largest response is from those who were neutral (39.4%). This sizeable group indicated that students are largely "undecided", suggesting apathy and resistance to the idea of getting involved in SRC politics. The second group represents those who agreed (36.1%), with the smallest group being disagreeable (24.5%).

Table 3: All students should get involved in SRC politics

		Frequency	*Per cent*
Valid	Disagree	76	24.5
	Neutral/Undecided	**122**	**39.4**
	Agree	112	36.1
	Total	310	100.0

The Current SRC Works to Address the Needs of Students

Table 4 shows that close to half the sample (48.4%) were undecided, suggesting little faith in the current SRC. The second largest group is those who held positive views of the SRC (36.1%), and lastly, are those who appeared to be emphatic about the SRC not serving the interests of students (15.5%).

Table 4: The current SRC works to address the needs of students

		Frequency	*Per cent*
Valid	Disagree	48	15.5
	Neutral/Undecided	**150**	**48.4**
	Agree	112	36.1
	Total	310	100.0

All Students Should Know Who the Current SRC Members Are

Table 5 shows that whilst many students are negative towards the current SRC, there is stronger agreement that students *should know* who the current SRC members are. A majority of students (61.9%) agreed. The second largest group is those who were undecided (21.9%). Lastly, a low number disagreed (16.1%).

Table 5: All students should know who the current SRC members are

		Frequency	*Per cent*
Valid	Disagree	50	16.1
	Neutral/Undecided	68	21.9
	Agree	**192**	**61.9**
	Total	310	100.0

Hypotheses Tests

Hypothesis 1

This hypothesis examines differences in the attitudes of male and female students towards SRC politics. The independent variables of sex are two categories which resulted in a t-test being performed.

In Tables 6 and 7 the researchers have the following statistical hypotheses addressed.

Ho (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant difference between male and female students in regard to attitudes towards SRC politics.

Ha (Alternative hypothesis): There is a significant difference between male and female students in regard to attitudes towards SRC politics.

Table 6 shows that male and female responses were similar on all questions. Men tended to be slightly more assertive about suggesting that students should align themselves to student politics, and women were slightly more supportive of the current SRC. However, these variations were not statistically significant. Contrary to gendered expectations that might suggest that male and female students differ in terms of their attitudes towards SRC politics, we see no difference of a striking nature. Such results are at odds with some other findings that women might participate in SRC politics merely for office sake, and not just to deliver for the student body, and

Table 6: Group statistics

Student attitudes viewed in terms of gender		*N*	*Mean*	*Std. deviation*	*Std. error mean*
All students should have voted in the previous SRC elections	Male	146	2.3425	.78291	.06479
	Female	164	2.3232	.75075	.05862
All students should vote in the next SRC elections	Male	146	2.4247	.75963	.06287
	Female	164	2.3963	.73991	.05778
All students should get involved in SRC politics	Male	146	2.1164	.76573	.06337
	Female	164	2.1159	.77854	.06079
The current SRC works to address the needs of students	Male	146	2.1301	.72648	.06012
	Female	164	2.2744	.64898	.05068
All students should know who the current SRC members are	Male	146	2.4932	.76336	.06318
	Female	164	2.4268	.75177	.05870

Table 7: Independent samples test

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		*t-test for Equality of Means*					*95% Confidence Interval of the Difference*	
		F	*Sig.*	*t*	*df*	*Sig. (2-tailed)*	*Mean difference*	*Std. error difference*	*Lower*	*Upper*
All students should have voted in the SRC elections	Equal variances assumed	**.777**	**.379**	.221	308	.825	.01930	.08717	.15222	.19081
	Equal variances not assumed			.221	300.45	7.825	.01930	.08738	.15266	.19125
All students should vote in the next SRC elections	Equal variances assumed	**.163**	**.686**	.332	308	.740	.02832	.08525	.13944	.19607
	Equal variances not assumed			.332	301.835	.740	.02832	.08538	.13971	.19634
All students should get involved in SRC politics	Equal variances assumed	**.128**	**.721**	.007	308	.995	.00058	.08790	.17238	.17355
	Equal variances not assumed			007 .	304.943	.995	.00058	.08782	.17222	.17339
The current SRC works to address the needs of Students.	Equal variances assumed	**.373**	**.542**	-1.847	308	.066	.14425	.07812	.29797	.00946
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.835	292.765	.068	.14425	.07863	.29901	.01050
All students should know who the current SRC members are	Equal variances assumed	**.013**	**.911**	.770	308	.442	.06632	.08616	.10322	.23586
	Equal variances not assumed			.769	302.729	.442	.06632	.08624	.10338	.23603

in doing so, they find some form of recognition. It has also been argued in the literature that women might be more apathetic – this was not the case in the present study.

Hypothesis 2

Here, the differences in attitudes towards SRC politics among students from different race groups were explored. The independent variable of race was recoded into two categories which resulted in a t-test being performed.

In Table 8 the following statistical hypotheses are addressed.

H*o* (Null hypothesis): There is no significant difference in attitude towards SRC politics among students from different race groups (Black African *and* White/Coloured/Indian).

H*a* (Alternative hypothesis): There is a significant difference in attitude towards SRC politics among students from different race groups (Black African *and* White/Coloured/Indian).

Further statistical tests showed that we have an F-value of 0.011 and p-value (sig.) = 0.917 which is >0.05 therefore we do not reject the null hypothesis. There are thus no significant differences amongst the racial groups on this issue. Therefore we can interpret the results of the t-test where T= 1.513 and p-value (sig. on 2-tailed) = 0.131 also >0.05. The second statement has an F-value of 5.001 and p-value (sig.) of 0.026<0.05. Here, we reject the null hypothesis. Race is significant in considering the attitudes that all students *should vote* in the next SRC election and consequently take an active part in student politics on campus.

The third statement has an F-value of 1.211 and p-value (sig.) of 0.272>0.05. Here we reject the null hypothesis and note that race is not significant in considering the viewpoint that all students *should get involved* in SRC politics. The fourth statement has an F-value of 12.980 and p-value (sig.) = 0.000<0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected implying that race is significant in considering the attitudes that *the current SRC works* to address the needs of students. The fifth statement has an F-value of 9.282 and p-value of 0.003<0.05. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected again, reinforcing the view that race is significant in considering the attitudes that *all students should know* who the current SRC members are.

Overall, race appears to be a significant determinant of attitudes towards SRC politics and students' involvement as active agents. These results affirm Gaidzanwa's (1993) study that found that some students, particularly Black African students, from the farms and rural areas were fearful of losing their grants and job opportunities, which then inhibited their participation in political activities on their campuses. In general, though, many of those reticent were White/Coloured/Indian students from urban areas who refrained from such activities and who exhibited a lack of confidence with regard to the benefits of 'getting involved'.

Hypothesis 3

This hypothesis stated that there is a significant difference in attitude towards SRC politics among students in different years of study. Differences in responses of first, second and third year students are presented in Table 9.

The hypotheses outlined specifically are:

Ho: There is no significant difference towards SRC politics between students from different years of study.

Ha: There is a significant difference towards SRC politics between students from different years of study.

Table 8: Group statistics

Student Attitudes Viewed In Terms of Race		*N*	*Mean*	*Std. deviation*	*Std. error mean*
All students should have voted in the previous SRC elections	Black African	139	2.4101	.75960	.06443
	White/Coloured/Indian	169	2.2781	.76349	.05873
All students should vote in the next SRC elections	Black African	139	2.5324	.69472	.05893
	White/Coloured/Indian	169	2.3195	.77439	.05957
All students should get involved in SRC politics	Black African	139	2.2230	.76180	.06461
	White/Coloured/Indian	169	2.0355	.77069	.05928
The current SRC works to address the needs of students	Black African	139	2.2230	.76180	.06461
	White/Coloured/Indian	169	2.1953	.62942	.04842
All students should know who the current SRC members are	Black African	139	2.5899	.70003	.05938
	White/Coloured/Indian	169	2.3550	.78943	.06073

Table 9: Descriptives

Factor 1: All students should have voted in the previous SRC elections.

	N	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*Std. Error*	*95% confidence interval for mean*		*Minimum*	*Maximum*
					Lower bound	*Upper bound*		
1st	140	2.2786	.57690	.04876	2.1822	2.3750	1.00	3.00
2nd	99	2.3485	.60695	.06100	2.2274	2.4695	1.00	3.00
3rd and above	71	2.4014	.61452	.07293	2.2560	2.5469	1.00	3.00
Total	310	2.3290	.59546	.03382	2.2625	2.3956	1.00	3.00

The Anova test in Table 10 shows the significant value for factor 1 with the statement "All students should have voted in the previous SRC politics" as 0.341>0.05, therefore the researchers do not reject the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in attitude towards SRC politics among students of different levels of study.

Years of study (that is, whether students are new on campus or experienced students) do not seem to impact significantly on their interest in student (SRC) politics. The results seem to negate Novak's study. Novak (2008) argued that "[m]any kinds of political activities, such as students promoting non-university events or organising on behalf of campaigns, such as student strikes and debates were prohibited on campus". In the light of this, most of the protesting students were juniors rather than seniors in the institution. By juniors, Novak was referring to those in their first year of study, while the seniors are those from second years of study and above. These differentiations do not shape political involvement in the UJ context.

Hypothesis 4

Here it was vital to know differences in attitudes towards SRC politics among students from different residential backgrounds. Given that the independent variables of residential background were more than two categories, a one-way Anova was performed.

Table 11 illustrates the descriptives of factor 1 which addresses the statement "All students should have voted in the previous SRC elec-

Table 10: ANOVA

Factor 1: All students should have voted in the previous SRC elections.

	Sum of squares	*Df*	*Mean square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Between groups	.766	2	.383	1.081	.341
Within groups	108.798	307	.354		
Total	109.564	309			

Table 11: Descriptives

Factor 1: All students should have voted in the previous SRC elections.

	N	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*Std. Error*	*95% confidence interval for mean*		*Minimum*	*Maximum*
					Lower bound	*Upper bound*		
1st	140	2.2786	.57690	.04876	2.1822	2.3750	1.00	3.00
				Lower bound	*Upper bound*			
Suburb	190	2.2237	.61986	.04497	2.1350	2.3124	1.00	3.00
Township	96	2.4974	.52377	.05346	2.3913	2.6035	1.00	3.00
Rural village/ Farm/ agricultural holding	24	2.4896	.48611	.09923	2.2843	2.6948	1.50	3.00
Total	310	2.3290	.59546	.03382	2.2625	2.3956	1.00	3.00

tions", showing the responses of students from different residential backgrounds. To reiterate the hypotheses:

Ho: There is no significant difference between residential sites and voting behaviour.

Ha: There is a significant difference between residential sites and voting behaviour.

Table 12 offers the results of the Anova test. The significant value for factor 1 with the statement, "All students should have voted in the previous SRC politics" is = 0.000<0.05, therefore we reject the null hypotheses which states that there is no significant difference in attitude towards SRC politics among students from different residential backgrounds. Students from townships supported student politics to a greater extent than those from the suburbs and rural villages/farms or agricultural holdings. Township students showed a mean score of 2.4974, which is substantial. The second largest means is of students from the rural villages/farms or agricultural holdings with 2.4896. The low mean is of students from the suburbs with a mean score of 2.2237.

This finding shows the significance of different residential locations which affirms Gaidzanwa's (1993) study that students from farms and rural areas might fear the risk of losing their grants and job opportunities if they participated in political activities on their campuses. Many students from suburbs are White/Coloured/Indian students who are unfamiliar with community struggles and the need to participate actively to assert their rights.

DISCUSSION

Participation in SRC Politics as an Act of Active Citizenship

Contrary to perceptions of political apathy in post-1994 South African universities, this study's findings suggest that there is healthy political involvement and interest in politics at the University of Johannesburg, notably among Black African students. With respect to Black African female students' perceptions on SRC politics, the study's findings have debunked to some extent, Mama and Barnes' (2007) assertion that there is a discernible sense of apathy towards SRC politics by female students in South African universities, as compared to their male counterparts. This study presents significant findings which suggest that there is possibly no difference in the levels of SRC political participation, or active citizenship between male and female Black African students. Whereas Aristotle's notion of active citizenship was gendered, as he argued it was only men who were supposed to be politically engaged (Kartal 2002: 2), the kind of active citizenship which the UJ study on participation in SRC politics seems to be showing, is one which is inclusive of both male and female students.

There is currency in active citizenship for those students who are in the forefront of student politics and get elected into their institutions' SRCs. Luescher-Mamashela (2011: 101) capture's this point succinctly in a study they conducted at the University of Nairobi, the University of Cape Town and the University of Dar es Salaam, by arguing, '…formal student representation on campus could serve as a training ground for leadership in civil society as the skills and competencies acquired in the university context could immediately be transferred to organised civil society beyond campus (and vice versa)'. The same situation might be applicable to the UJ SRC leaders who might be using participation in student politics as a dress rehearsal for active political engagement in civil society organisations, or even the leading political parties such as the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF).

However, in as much as there might be a form of active participation in politics by the Black African students, the UJ study showed that when

Table 12: ANOVA

Factor 1: All students should have voted in the previous SRC elections.

	Sum of squares	*df*	*Mean square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Between groups	5.449	2	2.724	8.033	.000
Within groups	104.115	307	.339		
Total	109.564	309			

it came to the minority racial groups – Whites, Coloureds and Indians, political apathy was witnessed with respect to their attitude towards student politics. The political apathy of the minority racial groups at UJ appears to mirror that of the wider South African minority racial groups as is shown by an OSFSA 2006 report on general political participation in South Africa. OSFSA (2006: 8) notes that, "significant shares of the Indian and Coloured electorate abstained from voting in 1999 and 2004, and among these communities, levels of registration were probably lower than among Africans as a group. Indian, Coloured and White abstainers, when surveyed, were more likely to cite political disaffection as a reason for not voting." Thus, the political distance shown by the minority racial groups at UJ might be a reflection of the general political apathy among the minority racial groups in South Africa. However, scholars such as Dell (2011) attribute the low levels of participation in student politics by, notably, White students to the racialised nature of politics in post-apartheid South African universities. Dell (2011: 3) cites Stellenbosch University political analyst Amanda Gouws who told the University World News that post-apartheid student politics in South Africa was still very racialised and had been aggravated to some extent by the integration of historically White campuses. Gouws was further quoted as arguing that campus cultures changed and White students viewed themselves as the losers, hence the withdrawal from participation in activities such as student politics (Gouws 2011 cited in Dell 2011: 3).

The Utility of the Rational Choice Theory in Explaining UJ Students' Levels of Political Participation

Coleman's postulations on the rational choice theory are useful in understanding UJ students' levels of participation in student politics. The focus in Rational Choice Theory is on actors (Lindenberg 2000). Lindenberg (2000) argues that for Coleman, actors are seen as being purposive, or as having intentionality; that is, actors have ends or goals toward which their actions are aimed. The above might be seen as a rationale that compels a large portion of the UJ students sampled in this study to actively take part and also to take a keen interest in student politics. Students might be motivated to actively engage in student politics by the urge to become active citizens, or it might be because some of these students have the ultimate goal of being involved in politics on a full-time basis after the completion of their studies. But some students face immediate problems such as financial and academic exclusion, and that is why they get involved.

However, it should be borne in mind that although the Rational Choice Theory focuses on actors' purposes or intentions, it also endeavours to factor in possible constraints on action (Heckathorn 2005). Such constraints can emanate from social institutions and they occur throughout one's life and they are manifest, for instance, through universities and their rules, the policies of employing organisations and the laws of society (Heckathorn 2005). The constraints listed serve to restrict choices available to actors and, thereby, the outcomes of the actions. Such kinds of constraints might account for the reasons why some of the students are not actively engaged in politics – for fear of losing bursaries or even failing to get employment after the completion of one's studies, as was shown by Gaidzanwa's (1993) study on University of Zimbabwe students' levels of participation in student politics. Some of the UJ students who are apathetic towards student politics may just be facing such constraints and dilemmas in their bid to be actively involved in student politics. Dibetle (2007) takes an extreme position by arguing that student political engagement in the post-apartheid era has not only waned, but that it has actually 'died'. Dibetle (2007) contends that this is the case because unlike the apartheid era when students felt compelled to enter student politics in order to be a part of the liberation struggle, most students who have entered university, post-1994 are now concerned with their own individual economic freedom which precludes them from actively engaging in student politics, let alone join or participate in student organisations such as the SRCs and organisations such as the SASCO.

CONCLUSION

In general, SRC politics represents a compelling arena for young South African students. Whilst the statistics show that students of all demographic groups display some level of interest in student political participation, it would

seem that race and class (as reflected in different residential sites) are most crucial differentiating forces. For a large sector of Black African students, involvement in SRC politics is an important phase, and a necessary step in entrenching rights and taking up issues affecting them. If these students originate from the townships where a culture of resistance might be strong, they will most likely associate themselves with activist politics and be aware of student agendas. Historically, playing a leadership role at the SRC level has meant that students go on to gain confidence in participating in politics at a national level. Student politics is not viewed as a male domain – both male and female students show similar inclination towards getting involved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

University administrations rarely consider the creation of infrastructure and provision of funding as high priorities to facilitate the involvement of students in campus-level politics. Yet this is crucial to cultivate greater involvement of students in decision-making, taking ownership of their own lives, and in setting agendas for meaningful policy changes. Familiarity with political processes, voting, campaigning, and finding avenues to raise problems to be addressed, will in the long run lay the basis for a strengthened national democracy and active and informed citizenry. Thus, the *first recommendation* of this study is that university managers should seek to encourage and create space for young people to gain experience as political actors. This may mean structuring adequate time for SRC elections, for voter education and for regular meetings between management and SRC representatives. To ensure that 'getting involved' serves most students' interests, and not an elite or select demographic group, the *second recommendation* is that more in-depth studies of students at various universities be pursued to establish how gender, ethnicity, class, residential area and year of study (amongst other factors) play roles in prompting or inhibiting political involvement. Since, as has been witnessed in South Africa, the nature and dynamics of student populations constantly change, it will be vital to monitor shifts in attitudes – longitudinally – and reflect on the driving forces shaping them.

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