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Inquest into Existing Structures that Strengthens Democracy in South African Universities

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ABSTRACT Student participation in universities continues to be hampered by several factors. Thus, this article examines the existing structures that serve to strengthen democracy in South African universities. Underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm, the study employed a qualitative approach and a case study design. Data were collected from six lecturers and 75 students across three universities. The research findings revealed that although there are several structures that promote democracy in universities, student representative councils, which are overarching structures, are characterised by numerous shortcomings, which include the abuse of power among many others. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that existing structures in higher education institutions pursue democratic objectives as a matter of course, and seek to promote students' cognitive engagement with politics as well as their curiosity regarding political debate, since such awareness can improve the latter's knowledge of basic facts about the political system.