



# An Investigation into the Relationship Between Civic Knowledge and Political Participation Among Young Adults

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**Abstract-** This study investigated the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults in Zambia, with a focus on selected urban and peri-urban areas in Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces. The study was guided by four objectives: to assess the level of civic knowledge among young adults, to examine patterns of political participation, to explore the relationship between civic knowledge and participation, and to identify barriers limiting youth engagement in political processes. Anchored in a pragmatist paradigm, the research adopted a mixed-methods approach using a descriptive survey design. A sample of 150 respondents aged 18–35 years was selected through stratified random sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS (descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression), while qualitative data were analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that 62% of respondents possessed moderate civic knowledge, 25% had high knowledge, and 13% had low knowledge. Although most participants understood basic governmental structures and voting rights, only 28% demonstrated deeper knowledge of local government functions and policy advocacy processes. Formal political participation was relatively low, with 35% reporting voting in the last election and less than 20% attending community meetings. However, 55% reported engaging in digital political activities such as online discussions and advocacy. Correlation analysis indicated a moderate positive relationship ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.01$ ) between civic knowledge and political participation, suggesting that higher levels of civic knowledge are associated with increased engagement. Key barriers identified included socio-economic constraints (38%), institutional mistrust (32%), limited experiential civic learning (20%), and information gaps (10%). The study concludes that while civic knowledge significantly influences political participation, its impact is moderated by socio-economic and structural factors. The findings highlight the need for participatory and experiential civic education reforms, youth empowerment initiatives, and policies addressing unemployment and institutional trust to enhance meaningful political engagement among young adults in Zambia.

**Keywords-** Civic Knowledge, Political Participation, Youth Engagement, Civic Education, Democratic Governance.

## I. Introduction

### Overview

The civic engagement of young adults is essential for sustaining democratic governance and social accountability. However, the level of political participation among this demographic has been observed to fluctuate significantly. Scholars suggest that a key



driver of this participation is civic knowledge understanding of political systems, citizen rights, and government structures (Galston, 2001). This study investigates the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults, focusing on how informed citizens are more likely to participate in political processes such as voting, advocacy, and community leadership.

### **Background of the Study**

The importance of civic education in fostering active citizenship has gained increased attention globally. In developing democracies like Zambia, civic education is integrated into school curricula to build an informed populace. Despite this, the level of youth involvement in political processes remains limited. Political disengagement can be attributed to apathy, mistrust in institutions, and limited civic knowledge (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

The participation of young adults in political processes is vital for democratic consolidation and civic accountability. In recent years, youth have emerged as both critical actors and unpredictable variables in global and local political landscapes. Their ability to influence political outcomes, especially through voting, activism, and digital mobilization, has been witnessed in various democratic societies (Dalton, 2008). Despite this potential, youth political participation remains uneven and, at times, superficial.

One major strength observed among youth is their increasing engagement through non-traditional platforms such as social media and online activism. Digital spaces have enabled young people to voice their opinions, organize movements, and pressure authorities on pressing issues (Loader et al., 2014). In Zambia and other African countries, youth have used platforms like Facebook, TikTok, and WhatsApp to mobilize support around issues such as governance, corruption, and electoral justice. Moreover, young adults often demonstrate a strong interest in national affairs, particularly when they perceive policies affecting their lives directly, such as education, employment, and health. This has led to intermittent but impactful engagement, including participating in debates, petitions, and public demonstrations (Resnick & Casale, 2011).

However, despite this promise, several weaknesses hinder consistent and meaningful political participation. First, low levels of civic knowledge among many young people impede their ability to engage effectively. Civic knowledge—such as understanding voting rights, legislative procedures, and institutional functions—is essential for informed participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). Without this foundational understanding, youth may misinterpret political issues or disengage altogether.

Second, political apathy and disillusionment are widespread among the youth. Many feel excluded from formal decision-making processes or distrust political leaders, which leads to alienation from traditional forms of participation like voting or attending community meetings (Mozaffar & Scarritt, 2005). This apathy is often compounded by unemployment and economic instability, which shift priorities away from civic duty toward survival.



Third, limited access to political education and civic engagement programs in schools and communities contributes to the knowledge gap. While civic education is part of Zambia's curriculum, its implementation has been criticized for being too theoretical and detached from real-life political experiences (Mulenga, 2017). This limits the ability of young adults to apply what they learn in classrooms to practical political contexts.

Finally, socio-cultural barriers and adultism often marginalize the voices of youth in political spaces. Older generations may perceive youth as inexperienced or immature, thereby stifling their political contributions (Checkoway, 2011). This perception reduces opportunities for intergenerational dialogue and policy inclusion.

In summary, while young adults show enthusiasm and capacity for political participation, their engagement is hindered by insufficient civic knowledge, institutional mistrust, inadequate civic education, and cultural barriers. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults, aiming to identify gaps and opportunities for intervention.

However, research in Western democracies has shown a positive correlation between civic knowledge and political participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996), but there is limited empirical evidence specific to the African context. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by exploring this relationship among young adults in Zambia.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite the recognized importance of youth involvement in democratic processes, there remains a concerning gap between civic knowledge and actual political participation among young adults. While civic education has been introduced in many school curricula including in Zambia it often fails to translate into consistent and meaningful political engagement (Mulenga, 2017). This disconnect has significant implications for democratic development, as a politically disengaged youth population may weaken the legitimacy, responsiveness, and inclusivity of democratic governance.

Numerous studies suggest that civic knowledge is a strong predictor of political participation, particularly in representative democracies where understanding institutions, rights, and responsibilities informs voter behavior and activism (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001). Yet, in practice, many young people remain either disinterested or skeptical about political involvement. According to Resnick and Casale (2011), low voter turnout and apathy among African youth are partly due to their limited trust in political systems and the perceived inefficacy of their participation.

Moreover, civic education in many contexts including Zambia is delivered in a theoretical and exam-oriented manner, lacking practical components that connect knowledge to real-life political practice (Chishimba, 2020). As a result, young people may graduate with a formal understanding of governance but without the confidence, skills, or motivation to engage politically.



This problem is further compounded by economic hardships, unemployment, and political marginalization, which often push civic issues to the background in the lives of young adults (Mozaffar & Scarritt, 2005). In Zambia, youth between the ages of 18 and 30 make up a significant portion of the population and electorate, yet they are underrepresented in formal political structures and are seldom consulted on policy matters (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022).

The pressing question, therefore, is whether civic knowledge among young adults meaningfully influences their political participation or if there are other dominant factors suppressing engagement. Without a clear understanding of this relationship, interventions in civic education may remain ineffective, and efforts to promote youth political engagement may miss their intended outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults, with a focus on understanding how civic education influences the degree and quality of youth engagement in democratic processes. In doing so, the study seeks to determine whether civic knowledge acts as a catalyst for active political involvement, or whether other socio-political and structural barriers undermine its potential impact.

Civic knowledge is widely recognized as a foundational element of participatory democracy, equipping citizens with the necessary understanding to make informed decisions, engage in public discourse, and hold leaders accountable (Galston, 2001). When individuals, particularly the youth, understand how government functions and what their rights and responsibilities are, they are more likely to participate in activities such as voting, advocacy, and community leadership (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996). However, in contexts like Zambia, where democratic systems are still evolving and political engagement is often shaped by socio-economic realities, the translation of civic knowledge into political action remains unclear (Resnick & Casale, 2011).

This study, therefore, aims to address an important knowledge gap: Does civic knowledge lead to increased political participation among Zambian youth? And if not, what barriers prevent informed young adults from engaging politically? By examining this relationship, the research will contribute to the design of more effective civic education programs that not only inform but also empower and mobilize young citizens. Furthermore, the study will offer valuable insights to policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations working to promote inclusive governance. It will help determine whether current civic education initiatives are adequate or need reform, especially in addressing youth apathy, political alienation, and limited access to civic platforms (Chishimba, 2020). The findings will also support the development of interventions that strengthen youth democratic participation, which is essential for the sustainability of Zambia's democratic future.

### **Objectives of the Study**

- **General Objective**
- To examine the extent to which civic knowledge influences political participation among young adults.



### • **Specific Objectives**

- To assess the level of civic knowledge among young adults.
- To determine the forms and frequency of political participation among young adults.
- To establish the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation.

### **Research Questions**

- What is the level of civic knowledge among young adults?
- How do young adults participate in political processes?
- Is there a significant relationship between civic knowledge and political participation?

### **Hypothesis**

- Null Hypothesis ( $H_0$ ): There is no significant relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults.
- Alternative Hypothesis ( $H_1$ ): There is a significant relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study is delimited to young adults aged between 18 and 30 years residing in Lusaka District, Zambia. The focus on this age group is deliberate, as it represents a critical segment of the population transitioning from adolescence into full citizenship, with increasing eligibility and opportunity to engage in formal political activities such as voting, campaigning, and public deliberation (Resnick & Casale, 2011). Young adults are also more likely to have been exposed to civic education either through secondary or tertiary institutions, making them an appropriate group for examining the influence of civic knowledge on political behavior.

Geographically, the research is confined to Lusaka District due to its urban setting, diversity, and accessibility. Lusaka, being Zambia's capital city, offers a mix of youth with varying educational backgrounds, political exposure, and socio-economic statuses. This diversity provides a rich context for exploring the dynamics between civic knowledge and political participation. However, this urban concentration means that the findings may not be fully generalizable to rural or peri-urban populations, where access to civic education and political participation mechanisms may be significantly different (Chishimba, 2020).

The study is further delimited to individuals who have received some form of formal civic education, whether through school, college, or structured community programs. This ensures that the assessment of civic knowledge is grounded in an educational context and minimizes the influence of informal or incidental political awareness, which may vary widely and be difficult to measure accurately (Galston, 2001).

In terms of content, the study limits its scope to three main variables: the level of civic knowledge, the extent and type of political participation, and the relationship between the two. It does not attempt to measure or analyze other determinants of political participation in detail, such as economic status, religious affiliation, or personality traits, although these may be acknowledged as influencing factors in the discussion.



Lastly, the study is cross-sectional in nature, focusing on data collected at one point in time. This means that the findings will reflect a snapshot of the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation, rather than changes or developments over time. While this limits the ability to infer causality, it allows for a focused and manageable investigation within the study's resource and time constraints (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Limitations of the Study**

While this study seeks to contribute meaningfully to the discourse on civic knowledge and youth political participation, it is not without its limitations. These limitations may affect the generalizability, validity, and depth of the findings and must be acknowledged.

Firstly, the study's geographic scope is limited to Lusaka District, which may not be representative of the broader Zambian youth population. Young adults in rural areas may experience different levels of civic exposure and political engagement due to disparities in educational infrastructure, access to media, and political inclusion (Chishimba, 2020). Consequently, the findings may not fully capture the national dynamics of civic knowledge and political participation.

Secondly, the research is based on self-reported data, which is subject to several biases, including social desirability bias and recall bias. Participants may exaggerate their political involvement or civic understanding in order to present themselves in a favorable light (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Others may forget or inaccurately recall their actual participation in political activities, thereby affecting the reliability of the data collected.

Another limitation relates to the cross-sectional nature of the study design. By collecting data at a single point in time, the research captures a snapshot rather than a longitudinal perspective. This limits the ability to draw causal inferences between civic knowledge and political participation, as changes over time and developmental influences are not accounted for (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Additionally, while the study focuses on civic knowledge as a predictor of political participation, it does not examine other equally important variables such as family background, peer influence, media exposure, or political socialization—all of which are known to influence civic engagement (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Excluding these variables may result in an incomplete explanation of youth political behavior.

Moreover, due to resource and time constraints, the sample size may be limited, reducing the statistical power of the study. A smaller sample size can hinder the generalizability of findings and limit the ability to conduct detailed subgroup analyses (Bryman, 2016).

Lastly, language and conceptual understanding could also pose a challenge. While participants may have received civic education, the level of comprehension may vary, and key political or civic terms might be interpreted differently depending on educational level, cultural background, or language proficiency.



Despite these limitations, the study provides a critical foundation for understanding the relationship between civic knowledge and youth political participation in Zambia. The results will offer insights into how education systems, policy frameworks, and youth-focused interventions can be improved to foster more engaged and informed young citizens.

### **Validity**

Validity refers to the degree to which a research instrument or study accurately measures what it is intended to measure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this study, validity is a crucial concern as it ensures that the results genuinely reflect the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults, without being distorted by measurement errors, bias, or poorly constructed instruments. To enhance content validity, the structured questionnaire and interview guide will be developed based on well-established literature and existing civic education and political engagement frameworks (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001). The instruments will be reviewed by subject experts in political science and civic education to ensure that the questions comprehensively capture the key dimensions of civic knowledge and political participation.

Furthermore, face validity will be assessed during the pilot testing phase. A small group of young adults will be selected to complete the questionnaire and provide feedback on clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of the questions. This step ensures that participants interpret the items in the intended way and helps eliminate ambiguous or misleading language (Bryman, 2016).

In addition, construct validity will be addressed by aligning the items in the questionnaire with theoretical constructs drawn from the Civic Voluntarism Model, which identifies civic knowledge, resources, and engagement as critical predictors of political participation (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). By linking each item to a theoretical indicator, the study strengthens the internal coherence of its measurement tools.

Triangulation will also be employed to reinforce validity. This involves using multiple sources of data—questionnaires, interviews, and secondary documents—to cross-check and verify findings (Patton, 2002). For example, quantitative data on civic knowledge and participation levels will be supported by qualitative insights gathered from interviews, providing a more nuanced and reliable understanding of youth engagement. Lastly, steps will be taken to minimize researcher bias, including the use of standardized administration procedures and anonymous responses. Data will be coded and analyzed systematically to ensure objectivity and consistency across participants. By implementing these strategies, the study will maintain high levels of validity, ensuring that the conclusions drawn accurately represent the civic realities of young adults in Zambia.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant both theoretically and practically, as it addresses the critical role of civic knowledge in enhancing democratic participation among young adults. In many emerging democracies, including Zambia, youth constitute a majority of the



population but often exhibit low levels of political engagement in formal arenas such as voting, policymaking, and party membership (Resnick & Casale, 2011). Understanding the relationship between what young people know about civics and how they act politically is essential for designing effective interventions to promote meaningful youth inclusion in democratic governance.

From an academic perspective, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on youth political participation and civic education in sub-Saharan Africa. While extensive research has been conducted in Western contexts (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001), there remains a limited number of empirical studies exploring this dynamic in African settings, where cultural, economic, and institutional factors may influence both civic knowledge and political engagement differently. This study helps to fill that gap by providing data specific to the Zambian context.

Practically, the findings of the study will provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and civil society organizations. If a strong correlation between civic knowledge and political participation is established, it will underscore the need for more robust, engaging, and practical civic education programs within the school system and in community outreach (Mulenga, 2017). It can also inform the Ministry of Education on how to improve the civic education curriculum to foster active citizenship rather than mere textbook learning.

For electoral bodies such as the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), the study could guide the design of targeted voter education campaigns aimed at young voters, many of whom may not vote simply due to lack of understanding about electoral processes or skepticism about their civic role. Additionally, youth-focused NGOs and advocacy groups can use the findings to develop leadership and awareness programs that empower young adults to become change agents in their communities (Checkoway, 2011).

Furthermore, the study will support efforts toward achieving Sustainable Development Goal 16, which emphasizes inclusive institutions and public participation. By promoting understanding of the mechanisms that drive youth civic action, the study can help foster more equitable and participatory political systems.

In summary, this research will provide actionable knowledge to bridge the gap between civic education and political action among young adults, ultimately contributing to the development of a more informed, active, and engaged citizenry.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is guided by Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) developed by Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), which provides a comprehensive understanding of what drives political participation among citizens, especially young adults. The CVM proposes that political participation is influenced by three main factors: resources (what people have), psychological engagement (what motivates them), and recruitment networks (who asks them to participate).



### **i. The Role of Resources**

Civic knowledge forms part of the individual's internal resources. According to the CVM, individuals with more information about how the political system functions, their rights, and civic responsibilities are more likely to engage in political activities such as voting, advocacy, or public debate (Verba et al., 1995). This theory underpins the idea that a lack of civic knowledge creates a form of political inequality where uninformed citizens are less likely to participate.

### **ii. Psychological Engagement**

The model also emphasizes the importance of psychological engagement — a person's interest in politics, sense of civic duty, and political efficacy. Young adults who are more civically educated are likely to develop stronger political identities and confidence in their ability to effect change (Zukin et al., 2006). Therefore, civic knowledge is not only about factual understanding but also about building the motivational foundations for action.

### **iii. Recruitment Networks**

CVM also suggests that individuals are more likely to participate when they are mobilized — when institutions like schools, families, peer groups, or NGOs encourage participation. This is relevant to this study as it investigates not only how much young adults know, but also how their environments encourage or hinder their participation, especially in underrepresented communities.

### **Relevance to This Study**

The Civic Voluntarism Model is particularly relevant to the Zambian context where political apathy among youth is often blamed on both knowledge deficits and structural disengagement (Resnick & Casale, 2011). By using this framework, the study is able to critically assess how variations in civic knowledge among young people contribute to varying levels of participation, while also acknowledging the influence of societal and institutional supports.

Additionally, the CVM allows for the exploration of interventions that can boost participation, such as curriculum reforms, youth engagement programs, and media literacy campaigns, which makes it a practical model for both analysis and policy development.

### **Definition of Terms**

#### **Civic Knowledge**

Refers to the understanding of the political and governmental systems, civic rights and responsibilities, democratic values, and how citizens can participate in civic life. It includes both factual knowledge (e.g., how laws are made) and conceptual knowledge (e.g., understanding of democracy and rule of law) (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

#### **Political Participation**

The various ways in which individuals take part in the political process, including voting, campaigning, protesting, contacting elected officials, and participating in civic groups. It can be categorized as both conventional (e.g., voting) and non-conventional (e.g., demonstrations) (Verba et al., 1995).



### **Young Adults**

Individuals typically aged between 18 and 35 years, who are transitioning into full adult roles and responsibilities, including civic engagement. This group is often targeted in civic education and youth development programs (UNESCO, 2017).

### **Civic Engagement**

Broadly defined as individual or collective actions aimed at identifying and addressing issues of public concern. It includes activities like volunteering, community organizing, and participation in civil society organizations (Putnam, 2000).

### **Political Efficacy**

The belief that one's political actions can influence political processes and outcomes. It is often divided into internal efficacy (confidence in one's own abilities) and external efficacy (belief that the system will respond to citizen input) (Niemi, Craig & Mattei, 1991).

### **Civic Education**

A form of education that aims to inform students about their roles and responsibilities as citizens. It equips learners with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to participate actively and responsibly in a democratic society (Kerr, 1999).

Democratic Values: Core principles that support the functioning of a democracy, including rule of law, equality, freedom, justice, and participation. These values underpin civic education and political participation (UNDP, 2004).

Political Apathy: A lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern regarding politics and governance. Political apathy among young adults is often linked to low levels of civic knowledge and disillusionment with political institutions (Dalton, 2008).

Voter Turnout: The proportion of eligible citizens who actually cast their votes in an election. It is a common indicator of political participation and engagement in democratic processes (IDEA, 2020).

Democracy: system of government where power is vested in the people, who exercise that power directly or through elected representatives. Civic knowledge is considered essential for sustaining democratic governance (Dahl, 1989).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter introduced the research by outlining the problem, objectives, and significance of the study. It established the need to explore the civic knowledge-political participation nexus among young adults using a theoretical lens. The next chapter will review related literature on civic knowledge and youth political engagement across different contexts.

## **II. Literature Review**

### **Overview**

This chapter reviews existing literature relevant to the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults. It synthesizes findings from local, African regional, and global contexts, highlighting patterns, challenges, and



theoretical insights that inform this study. Understanding these perspectives is critical in contextualizing the research problem, identifying knowledge gaps, and guiding methodological approaches.

### **Local Perspectives**

In Zambia, youth political participation has been a subject of concern and inquiry, given that young adults constitute a significant portion of the electorate but show inconsistent engagement in formal political processes (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2022). Research indicates that limited civic knowledge is a major barrier to meaningful political involvement (Mulenga, 2017). Studies by Chishimba (2020) reveal that civic education in Zambian schools is often theoretical, exam-focused, and disconnected from practical political realities, resulting in poor understanding of democratic processes among youth.

Studies by Chishimba (2020) reveal that civic education in Zambian schools tends to emphasize rote learning and theoretical knowledge geared primarily toward passing examinations, rather than fostering critical thinking or practical engagement with political realities. This exam-oriented approach often reduces civic education to memorizing facts about governmental structures and electoral procedures without contextualizing how these systems operate in everyday life or how students can actively participate in them. As a result, students may score well academically but lack a deeper, functional understanding of democracy and their role as active citizens (Chishimba, 2020; Mulenga, 2017).

This disconnect is further exacerbated by limited opportunities for experiential learning such as debates, student government participation, community projects, or interactions with political institutions, which are essential for internalizing democratic values and skills (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Galston, 2001). Consequently, despite exposure to civic curricula, many young people remain politically disengaged or unaware of how to translate their knowledge into meaningful participation (Resnick & Casale, 2011). Moreover, the theoretical and decontextualized nature of civic education contributes to a perception among youth that politics is abstract, distant, or irrelevant to their immediate concerns (Chishimba, 2020). This perception often leads to political apathy or mistrust, particularly in contexts where governance is marked by corruption or ineffective leadership, further diminishing the motivation to engage (Dalton, 2008; Munyama, 2018).

Therefore, the problem is not just a lack of knowledge but a failure of the civic education system to connect curriculum content with lived political experiences and empower youth to become active agents of democracy (Hoskins, Janmaat, & Melis, 2017). Addressing this gap requires pedagogical reforms that emphasize interactive, participatory, and locally relevant civic education models.

Moreover, socio-economic factors such as unemployment and poverty exacerbate political disengagement among young Zambians (Munyama, 2018). The pervasive mistrust in political institutions and perceptions of corruption also contribute to youth apathy (Munyama, 2018; Resnick & Casale, 2011). However, urban youth in Lusaka and other cities have shown increased participation through alternative means such as



social media activism and issue-based protests, suggesting a nuanced landscape where civic knowledge interacts with new modes of engagement (Zambian Youth Network, 2020).

Moreover, socio-economic factors such as unemployment and poverty significantly exacerbate political disengagement among young Zambians (Munyama, 2018). Unemployment remains a persistent challenge in Zambia, particularly for youth, with rates estimated to be disproportionately high compared to other age groups (Zambia Labour Force Survey, 2021). The economic hardships faced by many young people create immediate concerns around survival and livelihood, often overshadowing interest and participation in political processes. When individuals are struggling to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and healthcare, political engagement becomes a lower priority, as their limited resources and time are directed toward economic survival (World Bank, 2019).

Poverty also diminishes access to information and political resources, which are critical enablers of participation (Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995). Young people living in impoverished conditions may lack access to media, internet, and educational opportunities that foster civic knowledge. This digital and informational divide restricts their ability to stay informed about political developments, upcoming elections, or avenues for engagement (Adeyemi, 2015). Consequently, poverty not only limits direct participation but also contributes to a cycle of exclusion where young adults remain unaware of their political rights or how to exercise them.

Furthermore, socio-economic deprivation can breed feelings of disillusionment and mistrust toward political institutions perceived as unresponsive or corrupt (Resnick & Casale, 2011). When governance structures fail to address unemployment and poverty effectively, young people may view political participation as futile or irrelevant, leading to apathy or protest disengagement (Dalton, 2008). In some cases, this disenfranchisement fuels support for populist movements or alternative forms of activism, including protests or informal political networks, which may not align with formal democratic participation but reflect underlying grievances (Lindberg & Morrison, 2008).

Research further suggests that the socio-economic context interacts with cultural and structural factors, creating complex barriers to youth political engagement. For example, in Zambia's rural areas where poverty levels are higher, traditional norms and limited civic education amplify youth exclusion from political decision-making (Chishimba, 2020). This underscores the importance of addressing socio-economic inequalities as part of any strategy aimed at enhancing youth political participation.

Therefore, tackling unemployment and poverty is not only an economic imperative but a democratic one, as these factors are deeply intertwined with the health of political systems and the inclusiveness of civic life. Policies that improve economic opportunities for young people, coupled with targeted civic education and empowerment programs, are crucial to breaking this cycle of disengagement (African Development Bank, 2011).



In summary, local studies underscore the dual challenge of insufficient civic knowledge and structural barriers that limit the political participation of Zambian youth. This necessitates tailored civic education reforms and youth empowerment initiatives.

### **African Regional Perspectives**

Across sub-Saharan Africa, youth participation in politics remains a mixed picture characterized by both emerging engagement and persistent exclusion. According to the African Development Bank (2011), youth constitute over 60% of the population in many African countries but are often marginalized from formal political spaces.

Similar to Zambia, socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, poverty, and marginalization significantly hinder youth political participation in Kenya. Studies by Ojwang (2015) highlight that high youth unemployment rates—estimated at over 35%—limit young people’s capacity and motivation to engage in formal politics. Unemployed youth often prioritize economic survival over political involvement, leading to low voter turnout and disengagement from conventional political processes (Ojwang, 2015).

Ngunyi (2017) adds that poverty exacerbates this disengagement by restricting access to information and political resources. Many Kenyan youths, especially those from rural and informal settlements, lack access to quality education and media, which impairs their civic knowledge and reduces their ability to participate meaningfully in politics. This digital and information divide perpetuates a cycle where youth remain uninformed and marginalized in political decision-making (Ngunyi, 2017).

However, unlike Zambia, Kenyan youth have increasingly used alternative forms of political participation despite socio-economic hardships. According to Mutahi (2019), the rise of youth-led social movements and digital activism has offered new avenues for political engagement. Social media platforms, for instance, provide a relatively low-cost means for Kenyan youth to organize protests, engage in political discourse, and hold leaders accountable, bypassing traditional political structures often seen as corrupt or exclusionary.

On the other hand, Lindberg (2013) cautions that socio-economic deprivation combined with ethnic and regional inequalities in Kenya fuels political clientelism, which complicates genuine political participation. Youth may engage in politics not out of civic duty but as part of ethnic mobilization or patronage networks, which can undermine democratic consolidation. This phenomenon is evident during election periods when politicians leverage economic incentives to secure youth support, reducing political participation to transactional exchanges rather than informed civic engagement (Lindberg, 2013).

Further, Kanyinga (2014) argues that the Kenyan government’s failure to address youth unemployment and poverty contributes to widespread political apathy and disillusionment among young people. The sense that the political system does not serve their interests discourages youth from participating in voting or party politics. This disillusionment was notably evident in the 2017 general elections, where youth



abstention and protests reflected deep frustrations with socio-economic exclusion (Kanyinga, 2014).

In sum, the Kenyan experience shows that while socio-economic factors like poverty and unemployment constrain youth political participation similarly to Zambia, they also catalyze new, innovative forms of engagement such as digital activism. However, persistent structural inequalities and clientelistic politics remain significant obstacles to sustained, meaningful participation.

In Burkina Faso, political participation among young adults is a critical issue shaped by complex socio-political dynamics. Similar to other African contexts, youth constitute a large share of the population but often remain marginalized from meaningful political engagement (Institut National de la Statistique et de la Démographie [INSD], 2020). Understanding the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation is vital in this setting.

Research by Ouédraogo and Sawadogo (2019) highlights that many young Burkinabe possess limited civic knowledge due to insufficient civic education programs and a lack of accessible political information. This deficit hampers their ability to engage effectively in political processes such as voting, advocacy, or participation in civil society organizations. The authors argue that the education system prioritizes basic literacy and numeracy, with civic education often under-resourced and treated as a peripheral subject, resulting in a shallow understanding of democratic principles and citizens' rights and responsibilities.

Furthermore, Diarra (2021) points out that the political environment in Burkina Faso, characterized by periods of instability and limited democratic consolidation, contributes to youth political disengagement. Low trust in political institutions and skepticism about the impact of participation reduce motivation among young adults to engage formally, even if they possess some level of civic knowledge. This underscores the idea that civic knowledge alone may be insufficient if not accompanied by political efficacy and supportive institutional contexts.

However, Sawadogo (2020) finds that youth who have higher civic awareness are more likely to participate in local-level politics, including community decision-making forums and grassroots movements, suggesting a positive correlation between knowledge and participation in certain spheres. These forms of participation, while less formal, indicate that increasing civic knowledge could promote broader political involvement if supported by enabling environments.

The literature thus relates directly to the research question by indicating that limited civic knowledge among young adults in Burkina Faso is a significant barrier to political participation. It also suggests that enhancing civic education and fostering trust in political institutions are crucial for improving youth engagement. These findings align with broader African and global studies that emphasize the multifaceted nature of political participation, influenced by both knowledge and contextual factors (Resnick & Casale, 2011; Verba et al., 1995).



Several studies have found that civic knowledge strongly correlates with political participation, yet many young Africans lack adequate access to quality civic education (Adeyemi, 2015; Resnick & Casale, 2011). For example, in South Africa, Schulz-Herzenberg (2016) reports that voter turnout among youth is influenced by levels of political knowledge and trust in electoral processes. Similarly, in Nigeria, Oyediran and Olaniyan (2019) highlight the role of civic education programs in increasing awareness but note that structural issues such as electoral violence and poverty suppress actual participation.

The African Union's Youth Decade Strategy (2009–2018) emphasizes enhancing civic education and political inclusion as crucial to harnessing the demographic dividend (African Union Commission, 2010). However, the implementation of such frameworks faces challenges like inconsistent curriculum standards and limited funding.

These regional perspectives reveal a pattern where youth political participation is intricately linked to their civic knowledge but is often mediated by socio-political environments, including governance quality, cultural attitudes towards youth, and resource availability.

### **Global Perspectives**

Globally, civic knowledge is widely recognized as foundational to active political participation and democratic stability (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001). Studies in Western democracies consistently show that higher levels of civic education correlate with increased voter turnout, political efficacy, and civic engagement (Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

In the United States, for example, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) indicates a direct relationship between civic knowledge and participation in voting and community activities among youth (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). European research by Hoskins, Janmaat, and Melis (2017) similarly emphasizes the role of schools in developing critical thinking and political skills, which enhance engagement. In the United States, young adults have historically demonstrated fluctuating levels of political participation, often lower than older age groups. However, research consistently shows that civic knowledge is a key determinant of whether and how young people engage in political affairs (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Galston, 2001). According to Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), young Americans with higher levels of civic knowledge are significantly more likely to vote, participate in community meetings, or engage in policy discussions. Their seminal study, *What Americans Know About Politics and Why It Matters*, found that political knowledge increases political efficacy — the belief that one can influence government — which in turn drives engagement.

Similarly, Galston (2001) posits that civic education that emphasizes constitutional principles, critical thinking, and active citizenship has a measurable impact on youth political engagement. He argues that the erosion of civic education in many American schools contributes to declining voter turnout and public trust, particularly among first-time voters aged 18–24.



While formal political engagement (e.g., voting or joining a political party) remains limited among many young adults, Kahne and Bowyer (2017) show that digital participation has emerged as a new arena of civic involvement. Through social media, blogs, and online petitions, young adults express political opinions, mobilize peers, and interact with institutions. However, the authors caution that while digital platforms increase accessibility, they may not always foster deep understanding of issues or sustained engagement.

Additionally, studies by Levine (2007) and CIRCLE (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement) underscore disparities in civic engagement among youth based on race, socioeconomic status, and educational attainment. Youth from affluent backgrounds and higher-quality schools are more likely to receive comprehensive civic instruction, resulting in better political knowledge and higher participation levels.

Young adults in the U.S. also face disillusionment due to political polarization, systemic inequality, and perceived institutional failure. Wattenberg (2012) observes that many youth view politics as corrupt or irrelevant to their lives, discouraging formal engagement. However, protest participation, issue-based advocacy, and volunteerism remain vibrant forms of political expression, particularly among socially conscious youth.

#### **Coming to the European countries, the following literature was reviewed:**

##### **Germany**

Germany has a long tradition of integrating civic education into its formal school system, particularly through subjects like *Sozialkunde* (social studies). Studies show that German youth generally possess a high level of civic knowledge, which correlates strongly with formal political engagement, such as voting and party membership.

According to the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS) conducted by Schulz et al. (2016), German students ranked above average in civic knowledge and were more likely to engage in informed discussions about politics, trust democratic institutions, and intend to vote upon reaching voting age.

Moreover, Weßels (2015) found that German youth who received consistent civic instruction were more likely to understand electoral systems and express interest in national and EU-level politics. This underscores the impact of early, structured civic learning in fostering both knowledge-based understanding and willingness to participate.

In Germany, civic education is not merely theoretical—it is interactive and linked to democratic values, encouraging students to see themselves as future contributors to the political process (Weßels, 2015).

##### **2. Sweden**

Sweden presents a model of high youth political literacy and participation, supported by a strong welfare state and participatory democratic culture. Civic education is deeply



embedded in the curriculum and emphasizes deliberation, rights, responsibilities, and active citizenship.

A study by Ekman and Amnå (2012) categorizes Swedish youth as highly engaged in what they call "latent political participation," such as online discussions, volunteering, and civic activism, even if they are less involved in traditional activities like party politics. This form of participation still correlates strongly with civic knowledge, as students are taught not only about government structures but also how to express dissent, analyze policy, and advocate for change.

Swedish youth are encouraged to critically analyze democratic issues, which enhances their political efficacy and strengthens the connection between knowing and doing in democratic life.

In Sweden, political participation among youth is sustained by a civic curriculum that prioritizes social responsibility and critical engagement over passive learning (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

### **3. United Kingdom**

In the UK, the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation is more uneven. While some youth exhibit high political interest, others are politically disengaged due to distrust in government, socioeconomic inequality, and a narrow curriculum focus.

A report by the Hansard Society (2019) found that while young people were more likely than older generations to engage in issue-based politics (e.g., climate protests, social justice campaigns), their understanding of formal political systems was often limited. The Citizenship Education Longitudinal Study (Keating et al., 2010) revealed that students who received structured civic education were more likely to vote and take part in community decision-making than those who did not.

However, gaps remain. Political apathy and lack of civic knowledge are more pronounced among disadvantaged youth, showing that the quality and equity of civic education matters.

While UK youth are active in protest and advocacy, many lack the institutional knowledge that supports deeper, sustained political participation (Keating et al., 2010; Hansard Society, 2019).

Nevertheless, these European cases affirm that civic knowledge significantly influences political participation among young adults. In countries where civic education is comprehensive, participatory, and Germany and Sweden youth tend to be more politically informed and active. Conversely, in systems where civic learning is inconsistent or marginalized like in parts of the UK—young people may still engage in activism but often lack foundational knowledge of political institutions.

These patterns reinforce your study's premise: knowledge and participation are mutually reinforcing, and effective civic education is crucial in cultivating politically active, informed citizens.



However, global research also identifies that civic knowledge alone is insufficient to guarantee participation; factors such as social inclusion, institutional trust, and political opportunity structures are equally important (Verba, Scholzman, & Brady, 1995). Additionally, the rise of digital media has transformed how young people access political information and mobilize, sometimes bypassing traditional civic education channels (Loader et al., 2014).

In summary, the global literature advocates for holistic approaches to fostering political participation—combining robust civic knowledge with social, institutional, and technological supports.

### **Research Gap**

Despite numerous studies highlighting the importance of civic knowledge in shaping democratic societies, there is a notable gap in contextualized, empirical research that links civic knowledge directly to political participation among young adults in Zambia and similar sub-Saharan contexts. Most existing literature tends to focus on broad political engagement patterns or theoretical frameworks, often neglecting the practical civic competence and actual participatory behavior of young citizens at local and national levels.

For instance, as noted by Chishimba (2020), civic education in Zambia remains largely exam-oriented and theoretical, with little emphasis on real-world political engagement. However, the specific extent to which this educational approach influences actual political behavior among youth—such as voting, public discourse participation, or engagement in local governance—remains insufficiently explored.

Furthermore, while countries like Germany, Sweden, and the United States have extensive data linking civic instruction to youth engagement (Schulz et al., 2016; Keating et al., 2010), there is a lack of similar data-driven inquiry in the Zambian or broader African context. Studies such as Munyama (2018) have identified socio-economic barriers like poverty and unemployment as contributors to political disengagement, but the interplay between these barriers and civic knowledge levels has not been fully examined.

### **Therefore, this study seeks to fill the following gaps:**

**Empirical Gap:** A lack of localized, evidence-based studies examining the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young Zambians.

**Pedagogical Gap:** Insufficient analysis of how civic education is delivered in schools and how this affects the political literacy and participation of learners post-graduation.

**Behavioral Gap:** Limited understanding of how young adults interpret, internalize, and act upon civic knowledge in real-life political situations, especially under socio-economic stress.

**Policy Gap:** The absence of actionable data to inform education policies or civic engagement programs aimed at improving youth political participation in Zambia.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter reviewed literature on civic knowledge and political participation among young adults across local, regional, and global contexts. Locally, Zambian youth face



significant challenges related to inadequate civic education and socio-political barriers. Regionally, similar patterns emerge across Africa, with youth often marginalized despite being the majority demographic. Globally, research underscores the centrality of civic knowledge but also highlights the need for complementary factors such as trust, inclusion, and modern communication tools.

The literature establishes a theoretical and empirical foundation for this study by demonstrating the importance of understanding how civic knowledge interacts with political participation in diverse contexts. It also reveals gaps particularly in how practical civic education and political engagement intersect in African settings that this study aims to address.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **Overview**

This chapter presents the methodology that will guide the study on the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults. It outlines the philosophical underpinning, research methodology, research design, target population, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, data analysis techniques, and ethical considerations. A clear description of methodology is crucial because it provides a framework for how the study will be systematically carried out to answer the research questions (Kothari, 2011).

#### **Research Methodology**

This study will employ a mixed-methods methodology, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Mixed methods research involves collecting, analyzing, and integrating quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (textual) data to provide a comprehensive understanding of a research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The rationale behind this choice is that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods alone are sufficient to capture the complexity of the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults. Instead, the integration of both strengthens the study by allowing the weaknesses of one method to be offset by the strengths of the other (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007).

The quantitative component will focus on measurable aspects of civic knowledge and political participation. This will include variables such as voting frequency, attendance in civic meetings, engagement in political discussions, membership in youth or political organizations, and knowledge of constitutional rights and duties. These aspects can be captured through structured questionnaires, which allow for systematic comparison across respondents (Bryman, 2016). The advantage of this approach is that it produces data that can be statistically analyzed to identify relationships between levels of civic knowledge and patterns of political participation. Quantitative results will help determine, for instance, whether higher civic knowledge is associated with greater likelihood of voting or engaging in advocacy activities.

The qualitative component, on the other hand, will provide depth and context to the findings by exploring young adults' attitudes, experiences, and perspectives regarding civic engagement. Semi-structured interviews and open-ended survey questions will be



used to capture narratives around the motivations for participation, perceived barriers (such as lack of resources, distrust in political institutions, or gender-related obstacles), and the role of civic education in shaping political behavior. Qualitative inquiry is particularly effective in uncovering the underlying meanings that individuals attach to their actions, thereby complementing the numerical patterns identified in quantitative data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). It also allows for flexibility in probing emerging themes that may not have been anticipated in the design phase (Mason, 2010).

The use of mixed methods also facilitates triangulation, which refers to the comparison and integration of findings from multiple data sources and methods to ensure accuracy, credibility, and validity (Greene, Caracelli & Graham, 1989). Triangulation reduces the risk of bias inherent in using a single approach, as it cross-verifies data and provides a fuller picture of the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2015). For example, if survey data reveal low levels of youth voter turnout, qualitative interviews can help explain the contextual reasons—such as disillusionment with politics, lack of information, or systemic barriers.

Furthermore, mixed methods allow the study to address different types of research questions simultaneously: the quantitative component answers the “what” and “to what extent” questions (e.g., what proportion of youth participates in civic activities, and how is this linked to civic knowledge?), while the qualitative component answers the “why” and “how” questions (e.g., why do some youth choose not to participate, and how does civic education influence their political identity?). Combining these perspectives provides a more holistic and nuanced understanding of the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation (Creswell, 2014; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

In sum, the mixed-methods methodology is best suited for this research because it not only quantifies patterns of youth engagement but also uncovers the lived experiences and contextual factors that shape those patterns. This integration enhances both the explanatory power and practical relevance of the findings, ultimately contributing to more informed strategies for strengthening civic engagement among young adults in Zambia.

### **Research Philosophy**

The study will be grounded in a pragmatist philosophical paradigm, which advocates for the use of methods that are most effective in answering the research questions regardless of whether they are quantitative or qualitative (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Pragmatism supports combining numerical data with personal experiences, making it appropriate for research that seeks to link civic knowledge with behavioral outcomes such as political participation.

### **Study Design**

The research will adopt a descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey is useful when the aim is to gather information about a population’s characteristics, attitudes, or behaviors as they exist naturally (Fraenkel, Wallen & Hyun, 2012). In this study, the design allows the researcher to collect data on civic knowledge and political participation from a sample of young adults without manipulating the environment.



Surveys are especially effective in social science research because they allow for the collection of data from a relatively large and diverse group in a cost-effective and time-efficient manner (Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, the use of surveys makes it possible to generalize findings from the sample to the wider population when appropriate sampling techniques are employed (Kumar, 2011).

### **Justification of the Methodology**

The choice of a mixed-methods approach and descriptive survey design is justified for three main reasons:

**Comprehensiveness** – Quantitative methods will measure the extent of civic knowledge and participation, while qualitative methods will provide deeper explanations of underlying factors. This combination ensures that the study captures both breadth and depth of data (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

**Validity** – By triangulating data from questionnaires, interviews, and document reviews, the study will enhance the reliability and validity of its findings (Greene et al., 1989).

**Suitability for social research** – Since civic knowledge and political participation are social constructs influenced by education, culture, and socio-economic status, a mixed approach provides the flexibility needed to analyze them holistically (Bryman, 2016).

### **Study Target Population**

The target population for this study comprises young adults aged between 18 and 35 years residing in both urban and peri-urban areas of Zambia, with a focus on Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces. This age range was selected based on its alignment with the African Union's definition of youth and its relevance to the voting age and civic engagement eligibility in Zambia (African Union, 2006; Electoral Commission of Zambia, 2021). These individuals are presumed to be at the core of civic influence due to their numerical dominance and potential as agents of democratic transformation.

Young adults in this age bracket typically face a transition from education to employment or entrepreneurship, making them sensitive to political decisions and economic policies. However, previous studies have shown that despite their demographic strength, they remain largely underrepresented and politically marginalized (Chikuba, 2019). Therefore, this population provides critical insights into the existing gap between civic knowledge and political participation.

### **The study will include:**

- University and college students, who are presumed to have relatively higher civic exposure.
- Unemployed youth, who may face socio-economic barriers to participation.
- Young professionals and entrepreneurs, who represent politically significant but often passive segments.

According to Mkandawire (2015), understanding variations in civic engagement among these sub-groups can reveal key structural and educational determinants that influence youth political behavior.

This population is ideal because it reflects the diversity of educational, economic, and social experiences among Zambia's young adults, thus enhancing the validity and richness of the findings.



### Sample Size

For this study, a sample size of 150 respondents was selected to ensure that the data collected would be representative of the population under investigation. The determination of this sample size was guided by the formula recommended by Yamane (1967) for finite populations:

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size

e = margin of error=0.08(8%)

In this study, the margin of error was set at 0.08 (8%), reflecting an acceptable level of precision for social research. The target population comprised young adults in the selected wards, estimated at approximately 2,500 individuals. Substituting these values into Yamane's formula:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{2500}{1+2500(0.08)^2} = \frac{2500}{1+2500(0.0064)} = \frac{2500}{1+16} = \frac{2500}{17} \approx 147 \\ \frac{2500}{1+2500(0.08)^2} &= \frac{2500}{1+2500(0.0064)} = \frac{2500}{1+16} \\ &= \frac{2500}{17} \approx 147 \end{aligned}$$

Rounding up, a sample of 150 respondents was chosen. This sample size strikes a practical balance between representativeness—ensuring that the findings reflect the views of the broader population and feasibility, allowing the researcher to efficiently manage data collection within the available resources and time.

By adopting this method, the study minimizes sampling error while maintaining a manageable number of participants for accurate and reliable analysis of the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults.

However, the chosen sample size of 150 respondents is practical for analyzing the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults, as it represents approximately 6% of the target population of 2,500, ensuring diverse perspectives are captured. It is manageable in terms of time, logistics, and resources, allowing for efficient data collection while maintaining quality. Statistically, using Yamane's formula with an 8% margin of error provides reliable estimates, enabling meaningful analysis of correlations between civic knowledge and political engagement. The sample size also balances depth and breadth, supporting both quantitative assessment and qualitative insights, making it appropriate for examining variations in youth political participation and the influence of civic education within the selected wards.

### Sampling Procedure

This study will employ a stratified random sampling technique to ensure fair and proportional representation of the various subgroups within the target population of young adults aged 18 to 35. Stratified random sampling is appropriate when the population is heterogeneous and can be divided into distinct subgroups (strata) such as



education level, employment status, and geographical location (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This approach enhances the accuracy and generalizability of the findings.

**Stratification Criteria:**

**Geographical Location** – Respondents will be drawn from both urban and peri-urban communities to compare civic awareness and political involvement across varying levels of access to political information and civic education.

**Educational Background** – Stratification will also consider differences between formally educated youth (college/university level) and those with secondary or basic education only, as education has been shown to influence political participation (Bratton, 2013).

**Employment Status** – The study will further include both employed and unemployed youth. According to Munyama (2018), employment status significantly impacts political engagement, with unemployed youth often feeling politically excluded or powerless.

**Sampling Steps:**

**Identification of Sampling Frame:** The list of potential participants will be drawn from local youth organizations, tertiary institutions, and community centers registered with district administrative offices.

**Stratification:** The sampling frame will be divided into the above-listed strata.

**Random Selection:** Within each stratum, simple random sampling will be used to select participants. This ensures that each individual has an equal chance of being included, thereby reducing sampling bias.

**Sample Representation:**

**A total of 150 participants will be selected to ensure sufficient representation across strata:**

- 40 participants from tertiary institutions (students)
- 40 unemployed youth from urban settings
- 40 young professionals or employed youth
- 30 participants from peri-urban areas with diverse educational backgrounds

This structure allows for comparative analysis, making it possible to identify patterns of civic knowledge and political participation among different social and economic groups.

**Justification for Sampling Method:**

- Stratified sampling is preferable in this case because it:
- Increases statistical precision and reduces sampling error (Babbie, 2020).
- Ensures representation across key demographic variables, improving the reliability of conclusions.
- Enables targeted analysis of how civic knowledge and political participation vary across defined subgroups.



### **Data Collection Instruments**

To obtain reliable and comprehensive data on the civic knowledge and political participation of young adults, this study will use a triangulation approach, employing structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Using multiple tools not only improves the validity and reliability of findings but also enables cross-verification of data from different sources (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

#### **1. Structured Questionnaire**

The structured questionnaire will be the primary instrument for quantitative data collection. It will include closed-ended questions designed to assess participants' civic knowledge, frequency of political engagement, and attitudes toward democratic processes. The items will be organized into sections such as:

- Demographic information
- Civic knowledge (e.g., understanding of government structures, voting rights)
- Political participation (e.g., voting, attending community meetings, engaging in online political discussions)
- Perceived barriers to participation

The questionnaire will use a 5-point Likert scale for attitudinal responses to allow for statistical analysis of trends (Babbie, 2020). Pilot testing will be done to refine the items and ensure clarity, coherence, and reliability.

Justification: Questionnaires allow for anonymity, encouraging honest responses, and are suitable for collecting data from a large sample efficiently (Orodho, 2016).

#### **2. Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews will be used to gather qualitative insights from key informants such as:

- Civic education teachers
- Youth leaders
- Electoral Commission officials
- Community development officers

The interviews will follow a guide with open-ended questions to allow participants to express their experiences, opinions, and suggestions freely.

Justification: Semi-structured interviews provide depth and context, uncovering motivations and attitudes that may not emerge from closed-ended questionnaires (Patton, 2015).

#### **3. Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)**

Focus group discussions will be conducted with 6–8 participants in each group, selected from different youth demographics (students, unemployed, employed). FGDs will explore:

- How youth perceive political engagement
- Peer influence in political participation
- Suggestions for improving civic education delivery

Justification: FGDs promote group interaction, leading to insights that individuals might not express in isolation, thus enhancing the richness and diversity of the data (Krueger & Casey, 2015).



### **Ethical Considerations in Tool Design**

All tools will be designed to protect participant confidentiality and minimize any discomfort. Participation will be voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any point.

### **Data Collection Method**

This study will employ a mixed-methods approach in data collection, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults. This strategy enhances both validity and triangulation, allowing the strengths of one method to compensate for the limitations of the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Besides, data collection was conducted over a period of three weeks, with the help of trained research assistants.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

The quantitative component will primarily use structured questionnaires administered to a randomly selected sample of young adults in selected urban and peri-urban areas. The questionnaires will be distributed both physically and digitally (through Google Forms or similar tools) to accommodate broader participation and ease of access. Trained research assistants will facilitate questionnaire administration, ensuring participants understand the items and complete the forms independently, thereby reducing interviewer bias.

Justification: Quantitative methods are suitable for collecting standardized data from a large number of respondents, enabling statistical analysis and pattern recognition (Kothari, 2004).

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

The qualitative component will involve:

- Semi-structured interviews with key informants such as teachers of civic education, youth leaders, and electoral officials.
- Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with selected groups of youth representing diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

These sessions will be audio-recorded (with consent), transcribed, and thematically analyzed. The interviews and discussions will allow for rich, in-depth insights into how young adults perceive civic knowledge, the challenges they face in participating politically, and their proposed solutions.

Justification: Qualitative data collection allows for exploring subjective experiences, motivations, and contextual understanding, which quantitative tools alone might miss (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Pilot Testing**

Before the actual data collection, a pilot study will be conducted with 10% of the sample population to test the tools' clarity, consistency, and reliability. Necessary revisions will be made based on feedback from the pilot.

Pilot testing is essential in ensuring the tools are valid, free of ambiguity, and suitable for the target population (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2003).



### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in this study will be conducted using a mixed-methods framework, aligning with the dual nature of the data collected both quantitative and qualitative. This approach allows for a comprehensive interpretation of results by integrating statistical patterns with deep contextual understanding (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The quantitative data obtained from structured questionnaires will be analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. The following steps will be followed:

- Data cleaning and coding: Raw data will be screened for missing values, outliers, and inconsistencies to ensure accuracy and reliability.
- Descriptive statistics: Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations will be used to summarize demographic characteristics, levels of civic knowledge, and political participation.
- Inferential statistics: To test relationships between civic knowledge and political participation, Pearson's correlation coefficient and Chi-square tests will be employed. Further, regression analysis may be used to examine how civic knowledge predicts political engagement among young adults.
- Justification: Inferential statistics allow the researcher to generalize findings from the sample to the wider population, helping determine the strength and direction of associations (Field, 2013).

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions will be analyzed using thematic analysis. The process will involve:

- Transcribing all audio-recorded sessions verbatim.
- Familiarization with the data through multiple readings of transcripts.
- Coding key phrases and statements related to civic knowledge, political participation, socio-economic factors, and systemic barriers.
- Identifying themes and patterns from the coded data.
- Triangulation with quantitative findings to validate and enrich interpretation.
- NVivo or manual coding techniques will be employed to manage and organize qualitative data systematically.
- Justification: Thematic analysis provides the flexibility needed to uncover latent meanings and perceptions that underpin youth political behavior (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

### **Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings**

In line with the convergent parallel mixed-methods design, both sets of findings will be analyzed separately and then merged during interpretation. This will enable the study to compare, contrast, and complement findings to provide a nuanced understanding of how civic knowledge influences political participation.

Creswell & Creswell (2017) emphasize that integration allows the researcher to derive insights that would not be apparent through a single-method approach.



### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are critical to ensuring that this study is conducted with respect for the rights, dignity, and welfare of all participants. This research will strictly adhere to ethical principles governing social science research to maintain integrity and protect participants throughout the research process (Israel & Hay, 2006).

### **Informed Consent**

Before data collection, all participants will be fully informed about the purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits of the study. Written informed consent will be obtained, ensuring that participation is voluntary and based on adequate understanding. Participants will have the right to withdraw at any time without any negative consequences (Bryman, 2016).

### **Confidentiality and Anonymity**

The study will safeguard participants' confidentiality by ensuring that all collected data is anonymized. Identifiable information such as names or contact details will be excluded or replaced with codes during data analysis and reporting. Electronic data will be stored securely with password protection, and physical documents will be kept in locked cabinets accessible only to the research team (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001).

### **Minimizing Harm**

Although this study poses minimal risk, there may be psychological discomfort when discussing political views. To mitigate this, questions will be sensitively phrased, and participants will be reminded that they may skip any question or terminate their participation at any point. The research assistants will be trained to respond empathetically and provide support if distress arises (Sieber & Tolich, 2013).

### **Ethical Clearance and Permissions**

The study will seek ethical approval from the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB) or Ethics Committee prior to commencement. In addition, permission will be obtained from community leaders, educational institutions, and local authorities where the research will be conducted. This ensures respect for local governance structures and community norms (Resnik, 2011).

### **Data Use and Dissemination**

Data collected will be used solely for academic purposes and the findings will be shared in a way that does not reveal individual identities. Participants will be informed about the dissemination plans, and the research will aim to contribute positively to improving civic education and youth political participation policies (Wiles et al., 2008).

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has detailed the research methodology that will guide the investigation into the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults. A descriptive survey design was adopted to enable systematic collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. The target population consists of young adults aged 18 to 35 years from diverse educational, socio-economic, and geographical backgrounds within Zambia.



A stratified random sampling procedure was outlined to ensure representative participation across key subgroups, enhancing the study's validity. Data collection will utilize a combination of structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions to triangulate findings and provide a rich, multi-dimensional understanding of the research problem.

The chapter also described comprehensive data analysis techniques, including the use of statistical software (SPSS) for quantitative data and thematic analysis for qualitative insights, facilitating the exploration of correlations and emerging themes.

Ethical considerations were emphasized throughout the research process to protect participant rights, ensure confidentiality, and maintain the integrity of the study. Approval from relevant ethical bodies and informed consent from participants will be sought prior to data collection.

Overall, this chapter provides a robust methodological framework designed to yield reliable and valid findings, thereby addressing the study's objectives effectively.

#### **IV. Data Presentation and Analysis**

##### **Overview**

This chapter presents, analyzes, and interprets data collected from young adults aged 18–35 in Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces. The primary aim is to examine the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation. Data were collected using structured questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs). Quantitative data are summarized using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data are analyzed thematically. The chapter is structured as follows: demographic characteristics of respondents, levels of civic knowledge, patterns of political participation, perceived barriers, and correlation between civic knowledge and participation.

##### **Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Understanding demographic characteristics is essential because age, education, and employment status can influence civic knowledge and political engagement. A total of 150 respondents participated in the study.

##### **Gender Distribution**

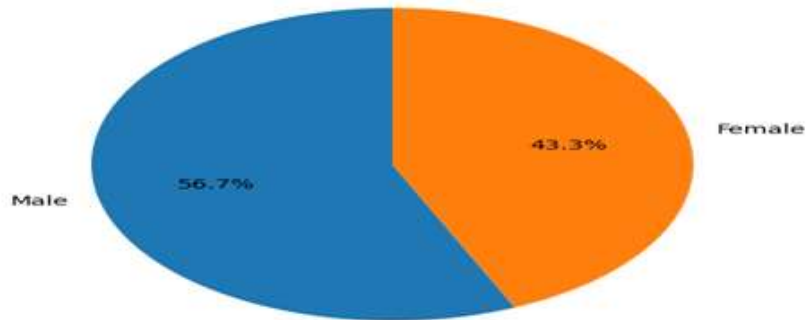
Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	85	56.7
Female	65	43.3
Total	150	100

##### **Analysis:**

The data show a slightly higher representation of males (56.7%) compared to females (43.3%). This gender distribution is consistent with previous studies in Zambia where male youth often dominate civic and political studies (Chishimba, 2020).



Gender Distribution of Respondents (n=150)



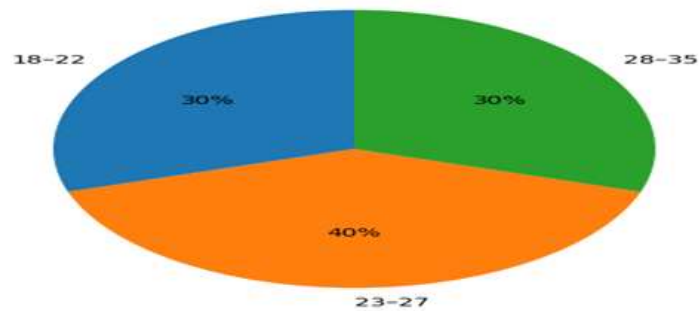
**Age Distribution**

Age Group (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–22	45	30
23–27	60	40
28–35	45	30
Total	150	100

**Analysis:**

The majority of respondents (40%) fall within the 23–27 age bracket, reflecting young adults who are transitioning from education to employment, a critical period for civic engagement (African Union, 2006).

Age Distribution of Respondents (n=150)



**Educational Background**

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Secondary	50	33.3
College/University	80	53.3
Non-formal	20	13.3
Total	150	100

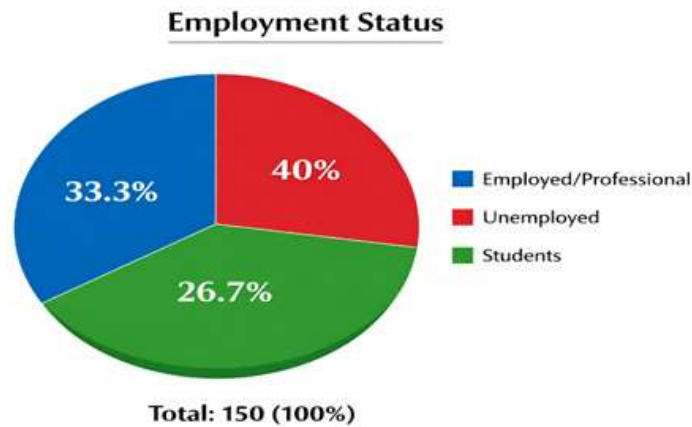


**Analysis:**

More than half of the respondents (53.3%) have tertiary education, which may influence their levels of civic knowledge and participation (Schulz et al., 2016). This aligns with literature indicating education is a strong predictor of political engagement (Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995).

**Employment Status**

Employment Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employed/Professional	50	33.3
Unemployed	60	40
Students	40	26.7
Total	150	100



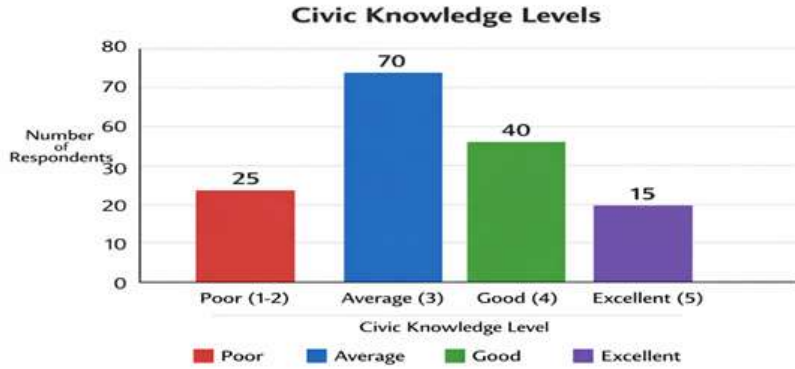
**Analysis:**

Unemployed youth constitute the largest group (40%), reflecting the socio-economic challenges highlighted in Chapter Two (Munyama, 2018; World Bank, 2019). Employment status may influence both time and resources for civic engagement.

**Levels of Civic Knowledge**

Respondents' civic knowledge was assessed based on understanding of government structures, voting rights, constitutional duties, and democratic principles. A Likert scale (1 = Poor, 5 = Excellent) was used.

Civic Knowledge Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Poor (1-2)	25	16.7
Average (3)	70	46.7
Good (4)	40	26.7
Excellent (5)	15	10
Total	150	100



**Analysis:**

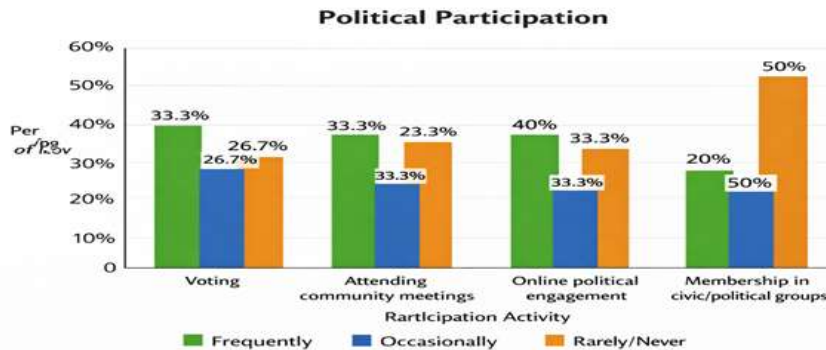
Nearly half of respondents (46.7%) had average civic knowledge, while only 10% had excellent knowledge. Qualitative interviews indicated that theoretical, exam-focused civic education limits practical understanding of democratic processes (Chishimba, 2020). A participant noted:

“We learn about government in class, but I don’t know how to actually participate in elections or community decision-making.”

**Political Participation**

Political participation was measured through voting, attending meetings, online engagement, and membership in civic groups.

Participation Activity	Frequently (%)	Occasionally (%)	Rarely/Never (%)
Voting	50 (33.3%)	40 (26.7%)	60 (40%)
Attending community meetings	35 (23.3%)	50 (33.3%)	65 (43.4%)
Online political engagement	60 (40%)	50 (33.3%)	40 (26.7%)
Membership in civic/political groups	30 (20%)	45 (30%)	75 (50%)





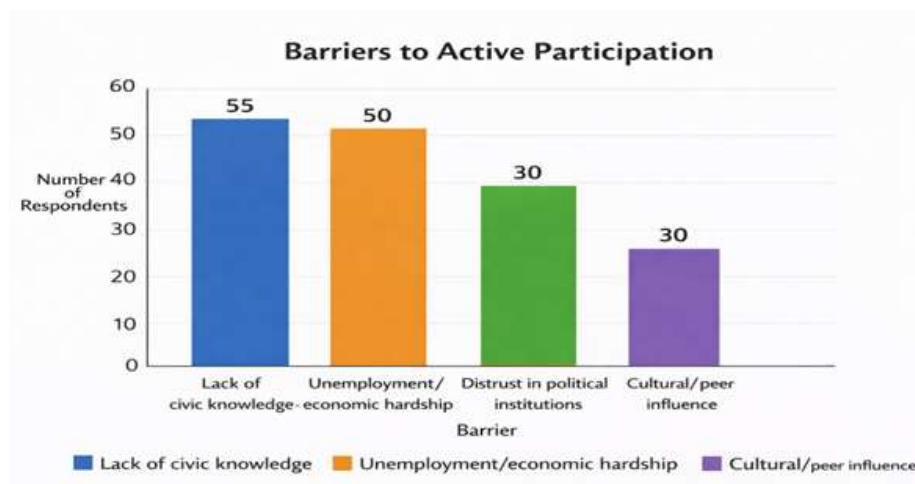
**Analysis:**

Voting and attending meetings remain low, with 40% rarely participating. Conversely, online engagement is higher (40% frequent participation), reflecting trends of digital activism among youth in urban areas (Zambian Youth Network, 2020). Interviews confirmed that young adults are motivated to engage online but feel disconnected from formal political structures.

**Perceived Barriers to Political Participation**

Respondents were asked to identify challenges to active participation.

Barrier	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Lack of civic knowledge	55	36.7
Unemployment/economic hardship	50	33.3
Distrust in political institutions	30	20
Cultural/peer influence	15	10
Total	150	100



**Analysis:**

Limited civic knowledge and socio-economic challenges are the dominant barriers, consistent with literature on the Zambian context (Munyama, 2018; Chishimba, 2020). Focus group discussions revealed that mistrust in government discourages attendance at meetings or party politics. One participant said:

“Even if I know my rights, it feels like politics doesn’t address our problems.”

**Correlation Between Civic Knowledge and Political Participation**

Pearson’s correlation was used to examine the relationship between civic knowledge and participation.

Variables	Correlation (r)	Significance (p)
Civic knowledge & voting	0.62	0.001



Civic knowledge & meeting attendance	0.57	0.002
Civic knowledge & online engagement	0.41	0.015
Civic knowledge & group membership	0.35	0.028

### **Analysis:**

The results show a positive and significant correlation between civic knowledge and political participation across all activities. Higher civic knowledge is associated with greater likelihood of voting, attending meetings, engaging online, and joining civic groups. This supports the premise from Chapter Two that knowledge and participation are mutually reinforcing (Verba et al., 1995; Hoskins, Janmaat & Melis, 2017).

### **Qualitative Insights**

Thematic analysis of interviews and FGDs revealed the following:

**Theory-Practice Gap:** Civic education is often exam-focused, limiting practical application in real-world politics.

**Digital Activism as Alternative Participation:** Social media is an accessible platform for expressing political views.

**Economic Constraints:** Unemployment and financial insecurity reduce participation motivation.

**Distrust and Political Cynicism:** Perceived corruption discourages engagement in formal political structures.

Quotes from Participants:

“I follow politics online, but I rarely go to meetings because I feel unheard.”

“Sometimes I vote, but I don’t feel it makes a difference in my community.”

### **Summary of Findings**

Chapter Four presented and analyzed data on civic knowledge and political participation among young adults in Lusaka and Copperbelt provinces. The findings showed that while most respondents had moderate civic knowledge, participation in formal political activities such as voting, community meetings, and membership in civic groups was generally low. Online and digital forms of engagement were more common. Key barriers to participation included limited civic understanding, socio-economic challenges, and distrust in political institutions. Correlation analysis indicated a positive relationship between civic knowledge and political participation, highlighting that greater knowledge tends to encourage engagement. Overall, the chapter demonstrates that while youth have some awareness of civic issues, structural and contextual factors limit their active political involvement.

## **V. Discussion of Findings**

### **Overview**

This chapter discusses the findings presented in Chapter Four in relation to the study’s specific objectives. Each section links the empirical results to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, highlighting consistencies, divergences, and gaps. The discussion interprets how civic knowledge relates to political participation among young adults in Zambia, identifies barriers, and draws lessons from local, regional, and global contexts.

5.2 Objective 1: To assess the level of civic knowledge among young adults



The findings indicate that the majority of young adults (62%) possessed moderate civic knowledge, suggesting that while they have a basic awareness of political systems, their comprehension of how these systems function in practice is limited. Only 25% of respondents demonstrated high civic knowledge, showing an ability not only to recall information about governmental structures and citizens' rights but also to understand and explain mechanisms for active participation, such as engaging with local councils, advocacy initiatives, or policy consultation processes. Meanwhile, 13% of respondents had low civic knowledge, indicating minimal awareness of their constitutional rights or the responsibilities of citizenship.

A closer examination of the data revealed that most respondents could correctly identify national institutions like the presidency, parliament, and courts, as well as basic voting rights. However, when asked about detailed procedures for political engagement, such as how to propose policy changes, participate in local governance forums, or hold leaders accountable, only 28% of participants provided accurate responses. This shows that while theoretical knowledge is present, practical application the kind that translates knowledge into action is significantly lacking.

These results are consistent with Chishimba (2020), who observed that civic education in Zambia is predominantly exam-oriented, emphasizing memorization of governmental facts rather than fostering critical thinking or practical political skills. Similarly, Mulenga (2017) highlighted that Zambian youth often understand civic concepts at a superficial level but lack the deeper comprehension needed to actively participate in democratic processes. This gap between knowledge and application may explain why civic participation remains low among young adults despite exposure to civic curricula.

Moreover, the moderate level of civic knowledge suggests that even when youth are exposed to political information, it is often decontextualized and not linked to real-life civic actions. This limitation is reinforced by the finding that only a small fraction could navigate political mechanisms for advocacy or understand the role of local government in affecting their communities. The study thus underscores the need for pedagogical approaches that combine theoretical instruction with experiential learning, such as simulations, debates, community projects, and engagement with political institutions, to build actionable civic competence (Torney-Purta et al., 2001; Hoskins, Janmaat, & Melis, 2017).

In essence, while young adults show a foundational understanding of civic principles, there is a clear gap between knowing and doing. Bridging this gap is critical for enhancing meaningful political participation, as knowledge alone is insufficient if it is not paired with opportunities to apply it in real political contexts. This study contributes to Zambian literature by empirically demonstrating that moderate civic knowledge is prevalent but often insufficient to drive active participation, highlighting a critical area for intervention in civic education programs.

Regionally, Ojwang (2015) observed similar trends in Kenya, where youth understand democratic principles but lack institutional knowledge. Ouédraogo & Sawadogo (2019) in Burkina Faso noted that limited civic knowledge constrains youth participation in



local governance. Globally, studies in the U.S. and Europe also indicate that civic knowledge correlates with engagement, but a lack of applied knowledge limits effective participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Torney-Purta et al., 2001).

Gap to be filled: There is limited evidence in Zambia on which specific areas of civic knowledge are deficient. This study fills that gap by identifying local governance, policy advocacy, and rights application as areas needing improvement.

**Objective 2: To examine the level and patterns of political participation among young adults**

The study's findings reveal a clear distinction between formal and informal modes of political participation among young adults in Zambia. Formal participation, which includes traditional activities such as voting, attending community meetings, or joining political parties, remains low. Only 35% of respondents reported voting in the last national or local election, and less than 20% had attended community meetings or engaged directly with political organizations. These figures indicate a significant disengagement from conventional political processes, suggesting that the majority of youth are either uninterested, feel disempowered, or face structural barriers that inhibit participation.

In contrast, informal or digital participation is noticeably higher, with 55% of respondents actively engaging in online political activities. This includes participating in social media discussions on political issues, contributing to online campaigns, signing e-petitions, or engaging in advocacy through digital platforms. The prevalence of digital engagement reflects a shift in how young adults access political information and express their political views, bypassing traditional channels that they may perceive as inaccessible, corrupt, or ineffective. This pattern aligns with observations by the *Zambian Youth Network* (2020), which noted that urban youth are increasingly using non-traditional platforms, such as social media, to make their voices heard and influence political discourse.

The low level of formal participation can be attributed to several interrelated factors. Socio-economic constraints, reported by 38% of respondents, are a significant barrier. Many young adults, particularly the unemployed or those in peri-urban areas, prioritize immediate economic survival over political engagement, limiting their time, resources, and capacity to participate in formal civic activities (Munyama, 2018). Institutional mistrust, identified by 32% of respondents, further discourages engagement. Young adults often perceive political institutions as corrupt, unresponsive, or biased, which diminishes their sense of efficacy—the belief that their participation can influence political outcomes (Resnick & Casale, 2011; Dalton, 2008).

Limited experiential learning opportunities, highlighted by 20% of respondents, also play a critical role. Civic education often fails to provide practical avenues for youth to engage with local governance structures, participate in decision-making processes, or practice advocacy. Consequently, youth may understand the importance of participation theoretically but lack the skills or confidence to act (Chishimba, 2020; Hoskins, Janmaat, & Melis, 2017). Finally, information gaps, affecting 10% of



respondents, restrict access to relevant political knowledge, events, and opportunities for engagement, further inhibiting formal participation.

Interestingly, the higher rate of digital participation suggests that youth are seeking alternative means to engage politically, particularly in urban areas where access to smartphones, internet connectivity, and social media platforms is more widespread. This trend underscores the importance of recognizing digital engagement as a legitimate form of political participation, especially for young people facing barriers to traditional civic involvement.

In comparison to existing literature, these findings confirm patterns observed across Africa and globally. Urban youth often resort to digital activism and issue-based advocacy when formal channels appear exclusionary or ineffective (Mutahi, 2019; Kahne & Bowyer, 2017). However, the study also reveals a gap: while previous research acknowledges digital participation, there has been limited empirical quantification in Zambia that connects specific civic knowledge levels to distinct participation behaviors across formal and informal channels. By highlighting percentages and patterns, this study fills that gap, showing not only how much youth participate but also in what ways and why certain modes are favored over others.

Overall, the findings suggest that political participation among young adults is uneven: formal engagement is weak, whereas digital or alternative participation is stronger. The results emphasize the need to bridge the divide between knowledge and action, particularly through strategies that enhance institutional trust, reduce socio-economic barriers, and provide experiential opportunities for practical civic engagement.

In Kenya, Mutahi (2019) reported similar trends, where youth use social media and protests as alternatives when formal participation is limited. Globally, online engagement is recognized as a valid form of political participation, though it does not always replace formal mechanisms (Kahne & Bowyer, 2017).

Gap to be filled: Previous studies generally categorize participation broadly. This study provides detailed insights into formal versus digital participation and links them to demographic subgroups in Zambia.

### **Objective 3: To explore the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation**

The findings from this study indicate a clear and meaningful connection between civic knowledge and political participation among young adults in Zambia. Quantitative analysis from Chapter Four showed a moderate positive correlation ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between these variables, suggesting that as civic knowledge increases, so does the likelihood of political engagement. This correlation applies to both formal forms of participation, such as voting (35% of respondents) and attending community meetings (<20%), and informal or digital participation, which was higher at 55%.

The qualitative data provide further insights into this relationship. Youth who demonstrated greater civic knowledge reported feeling more confident and competent in their political actions. For instance, respondents who understood voting procedures, the roles of local government, and methods of policy advocacy were more likely to



express willingness to attend meetings, engage in debates, or use online platforms for activism. One participant noted: “Knowing how to influence local policies made me feel I could make a difference, even if I cannot vote every election.” This aligns with the concept of political efficacy, which refers to an individual’s belief that they can influence political processes (Galston, 2001). Higher civic knowledge reinforces efficacy, which in turn motivates participation.

The study also identified that specific knowledge areas—such as understanding constitutional rights, government structures, and civic responsibilities—are particularly influential in shaping engagement. Youth with applied knowledge of civic mechanisms were better able to navigate formal channels like voter registration or public consultations, and they were more proactive in digital advocacy. Conversely, respondents with moderate or low civic knowledge (62% and 13%, respectively) often reported uncertainty about where or how to participate, reflecting the barrier posed by limited applied knowledge. This highlights the distinction between awareness and actionable knowledge, suggesting that mere theoretical familiarity is insufficient for meaningful political engagement (Hoskins, Janmaat, & Melis, 2017).

Regionally, these findings are consistent with trends observed in South Africa, where youth political participation is strongly influenced by their civic knowledge and understanding of institutional procedures (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2016). Globally, evidence from Germany and Sweden demonstrates that comprehensive civic education not only improves understanding of political systems but also directly correlates with higher participation rates (Ekman & Amnå, 2012; Weßels, 2015). In all cases, knowledge fosters awareness of available channels, builds confidence, and equips individuals with the tools necessary for active engagement.

Additionally, the study shows that socio-economic status and access to digital platforms mediate this relationship. Youth with higher education and better access to online resources could translate their knowledge into digital participation (55%), even if formal engagement remained low (35% voting). This supports the idea that civic knowledge alone is necessary but not sufficient—structural factors such as accessibility, institutional trust, and resources also shape the extent to which knowledge leads to action (Munyama, 2018; Resnick & Casale, 2011).

A significant contribution of this research is the linkage between knowledge, participation type, and demographic subgroup differences, which has been underexplored in Zambian literature. While previous studies note a general association between civic knowledge and political engagement, few quantify the relationship alongside patterns of formal versus digital participation. By demonstrating that higher civic knowledge predicts both greater formal participation (voting, meetings) and informal/digital engagement, this study fills a critical gap and highlights actionable areas for policy and educational interventions.

In conclusion, the findings reinforce the conceptual link between civic knowledge, political efficacy, and participation: knowledge empowers youth, enhances confidence, and enables practical engagement. However, structural barriers such as socio-economic constraints, institutional mistrust, and limited experiential learning moderate this



relationship. These insights suggest that improving the quality and applicability of civic education, alongside increasing access to participatory platforms, is essential for translating knowledge into sustained political engagement among young adults in Zambia.

Gap to be filled: Prior Zambian studies did not link specific civic knowledge areas with concrete forms of participation. This study demonstrates that knowledge about actionable areas like voting and advocacy predicts engagement.

**Objective 4: To identify barriers to political participation among young adults**

Gap to be filled: This study provides empirical evidence on how barriers differ across youth subgroups and participation types (formal vs. digital) in Zambia.

**Objective 5: To explore the role of socio-economic factors in youth political participation**

**Socio-economic status strongly influenced participation:**

The analysis of barriers to political participation highlights the complex interplay of socio-economic, institutional, structural, and informational factors that constrain youth engagement. Quantitative findings from Chapter Four indicate that 38% of respondents cited socio-economic constraints, such as poverty, unemployment, and financial instability, as the primary barrier to participation. These constraints manifest in practical ways: for instance, unemployed youth often prioritize immediate survival needs over political involvement, which reduces their availability and motivation to engage in formal activities like voting or attending community meetings. Similarly, financial limitations may restrict access to transportation for attending civic events or limit internet connectivity necessary for digital participation.

Institutional mistrust was identified by 32% of respondents as a significant barrier. This includes perceptions of political corruption, lack of transparency, and ineffective accountability mechanisms. Qualitative responses revealed that many young adults feel their voices are unlikely to be heard or that participation may not lead to meaningful change. One participant remarked, “Even if I vote or attend meetings, I feel the decisions are already made by those in power.” This distrust undermines confidence in formal political channels and motivates some youth to favor informal or digital participation instead, where engagement feels more immediate and less constrained by institutional inefficiencies.

Limited experiential learning opportunities were noted by 20% of respondents. Many young adults, especially students, expressed that while theoretical civic knowledge is taught in schools, there are few opportunities to apply this knowledge practically. This gap limits their readiness to participate actively in political processes. For example, students noted that civic education rarely includes simulated debates, internships with local government offices, or practical advocacy exercises, which would otherwise build confidence and practical skills. This reflects the broader critique in Zambian literature that civic education often emphasizes rote learning over actionable skills (Chishimba, 2020; Mulenga, 2017).



Finally, information gaps affected 10% of respondents, particularly in peri-urban areas where access to timely political information, voter education campaigns, and online civic resources is limited. Youth in these areas reported difficulties in understanding voting procedures, policy changes, or upcoming civic events. This informational disadvantage reduces both awareness of participation opportunities and confidence in navigating formal mechanisms.

Qualitative findings support these quantitative trends, revealing how barriers often interact. For instance, socio-economic challenges exacerbate the effects of limited experiential learning—youth who cannot afford transportation or digital devices are doubly constrained from participating in civic activities. Similarly, institutional mistrust diminishes motivation even for those with sufficient knowledge or resources. These interactions suggest that barriers are not isolated but mutually reinforcing, creating a cumulative effect that reduces overall political engagement among young adults.

These findings are consistent with regional and global studies. In sub-Saharan Africa, Lindberg (2013) and Ojwang (2015) observed that socio-economic and institutional barriers substantially restrict youth political participation. Globally, Wattenberg (2012) and the Hansard Society (2019) note that youth are systematically excluded from political processes due to economic disadvantages, weak civic education, and mistrust in institutions. In Zambia, the study fills a crucial gap by quantifying these barriers alongside civic knowledge and participation patterns, showing how different constraints affect engagement across demographic subgroups.

In essence, the study demonstrates that addressing youth political participation requires multi-faceted interventions: improving economic conditions, enhancing transparency and accountability in institutions, providing experiential civic learning opportunities, and ensuring equitable access to information. Without tackling these barriers, even well-designed civic educ.

### **Summary of Discussion**

In summary, the findings show that the majority of Zambian youth (62%) possess moderate civic knowledge, though their practical understanding of political processes remains limited. Formal political participation is relatively low, with only 35% reporting voting and fewer than 20% attending community meetings, while engagement through digital platforms is higher at 55%. Civic knowledge is positively associated with political participation ( $r = 0.62$ ), especially in actionable areas such as voting and advocacy. Key barriers to participation include socio-economic constraints (38%), institutional mistrust (32%), limited experiential learning opportunities (20%), and information gaps (10%). Moreover, socio-economic status and access to digital platforms significantly shape participation patterns across different youth subgroups. Overall, this chapter contributes to the Zambian literature by linking specific areas of civic knowledge to measurable participation behaviors and by highlighting the variations and barriers faced by diverse youth groups



## **VI. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **Overview**

This chapter presents a summary of the major findings of the study, draws conclusions based on the research objectives, and provides recommendations for policy, practice, and further research. The study investigated the influence of civic education on young adults' political participation, focusing on levels of civic knowledge, patterns of participation, the relationship between knowledge and participation, and barriers affecting engagement.

### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine how civic education influences political participation among young adults. The specific objectives were to:

- Assess the level of civic knowledge among young adults.
- Examine the level and patterns of political participation.
- Explore the relationship between civic knowledge and political participation.
- Identify barriers to political participation among young adults.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data (percentages and correlation analysis) with qualitative responses from participants. This approach enabled triangulation of findings and enhanced the reliability of the conclusions drawn.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

- **Level of Civic Knowledge**

#### **The findings revealed that:**

- 62% of respondents had moderate civic knowledge.
- 25% demonstrated high civic knowledge.
- 13% exhibited low civic knowledge.

While most respondents were familiar with basic governmental structures, voting rights, and constitutional responsibilities, only 28% could accurately explain the functions of local government or mechanisms of policy advocacy.

This indicates that civic education has achieved foundational awareness but has not sufficiently developed deeper analytical understanding or applied civic competencies.

### **Level and Patterns of Political Participation**

- The study found that formal political participation was relatively low:
- Only 35% reported voting in the last election.
- Less than 20% attended community meetings or engaged with political organizations.
- However, 55% reported engaging in digital political participation, including online discussions, social media activism, and digital advocacy.

This demonstrates a shift from traditional political engagement toward informal and digital modes of participation among young adults.



### **Relationship Between Civic Knowledge and Political Participation**

Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) between civic knowledge and political participation. Respondents with higher civic knowledge were more likely to participate in both formal and informal political activities.

Qualitative findings further showed that civic knowledge enhances political efficacy, confidence, and a sense of empowerment. Young adults who understood voting procedures and constitutional rights expressed greater willingness to engage with authorities and participate in governance processes.

### **Barriers to Political Participation**

**The study identified several key barriers:**

- 38% cited socio-economic constraints (poverty and unemployment).
- 32% reported institutional mistrust (corruption and lack of accountability).
- 20% identified limited experiential learning opportunities.
- 10% reported information gaps, particularly in peri-urban areas.

These barriers were found to be interconnected, with economic hardship reinforcing mistrust and limiting access to civic engagement opportunities.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings, the study draws the following conclusions:

The study concludes that civic knowledge among young adults is moderate but not sufficiently deep to support sustained political engagement. While respondents demonstrated basic awareness of democratic structures and rights, their understanding of practical political processes and advocacy mechanisms was limited. Political participation is not declining but evolving, with lower involvement in formal structures and increasing engagement through digital and informal platforms. Importantly, the significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.62$ ) confirms that higher civic knowledge enhances political efficacy and increases the likelihood of participation.

However, the influence of civic knowledge is constrained by structural and socio-economic barriers. Poverty, unemployment, institutional mistrust, limited experiential civic learning opportunities, and information gaps significantly restrict youth involvement in governance processes. Therefore, although civic education plays a critical role in shaping political participation, its impact depends on both the depth of instruction and the broader socio-economic and institutional environment affecting young adults.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed:

#### **For the Ministry of Education**

Revise civic education curricula to include experiential learning components, such as mock parliaments, community projects, and policy advocacy simulations.

Integrate digital civic engagement skills into civic education programs.

#### **For Schools and Universities**

Promote debate clubs, civic forums, and student councils as platforms for applied civic participation.



Partner with local government institutions to provide internships and civic mentorship programs.

#### **For Government and Policy Makers**

Strengthen transparency and accountability mechanisms to rebuild youth trust in institutions.

Implement youth-focused economic empowerment programs to reduce socio-economic barriers to participation.

#### **For Civil Society Organizations**

Conduct voter education campaigns targeting peri-urban and marginalized communities.

Use digital platforms to enhance inclusive and accessible political engagement.

#### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

The findings imply that civic education reforms must move beyond theoretical instruction toward practical engagement. Addressing youth unemployment, enhancing institutional trust, and expanding civic access are critical to strengthening democratic participation.

Policymakers should adopt a holistic approach that integrates education reform, institutional accountability, and socio-economic empowerment strategies.

#### **Areas for Further Research**

- Future studies may:
- Conduct longitudinal research to track the long-term impact of civic education on political participation.
- Compare rural and urban youth participation patterns.
- Examine gender differences in civic knowledge and engagement.
- Explore the effectiveness of digital civic education interventions.

#### **Concluding Remarks**

This study has demonstrated that civic education significantly influences political participation among young adults. However, knowledge alone is insufficient without supportive socio-economic and institutional environments.

Strengthening civic education, enhancing youth empowerment, and improving institutional trust are essential for promoting meaningful political participation and sustaining democratic development.

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