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Why Have Youth from Different Neighborhoods of Durban, South Africa Developed Different Opinions Regarding the Role and Importance of Voting in the Current State of South African Democracy?

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Why Have Youth from Different Neighborhoods of Durban, South Africa Developed Different Opinions Regarding the Role and Importance of Voting in the Current State of South African Democracy?

Abstract
The field of political science has become increasingly interested in the electoral participatory habits of young people in recent decades, and in post-apartheid South Africa more specifically in light of the recent and ongoing #feesmustfall movement within the nation's tertiary institutions. Since 1994, South Africa has made a great deal of progress towards dismantling the apartheid system; however, vast inequalities remain and many, mostly black African communities have not yet reaped the rewards of a democratic South Africa. Using qualitative data gathered from three focus groups, this paper examines why youth from black African township communities of Durban, South Africa view electoral participation more negatively and with greater skepticism than youth living in historically white communities. Two independent variables gleaned from the literature are used to explain these different perspectives: the quality of one's civic education and persisting racial socioeconomic inequality.

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Introduction

The year 2017 marks twenty-three years since Nelson Mandela became South Africa's

first democratically elected president and the end of institutionalized apartheid. In subsequent

decades, the Republic of South Africa has undergone drastic social and political transformation

as the remnants of the apartheid-era system have been dismantled in favor of policies and a

government that better reflects the diversity of the nation's citizenry and seeks to improve the

lives of those who were once subjected to the horrors of segregation that were in place between

1948 and 1994. Although inroads have been made, vast socio-economic inequalities remain.

Many of those who suffered during apartheid – namely black and coloured (mixed-race) South

Africans – continue to face seemingly insurmountable poverty and unequal access to government

services, such as primary, secondary, and post-secondary education. Predominately black

townships created under the apartheid regime and newly incorporated informal settlements

continue to be the poorest areas of the nation, while traditionally white neighborhoods remain the

wealthiest.

Perhaps no place in South Africa serves as a better or more drastic example of the

disparity between socio-economic classes and racial groups than its third largest city of Durban,

located within the eThekwini municipality on the country's east coast in Kwa Zulu-Natal

Province. Just as during apartheid, neighborhoods in Durban such as Morningside and Glenwood

continue to be predominately wealthy and white. Large, colonial style homes bordered by high,

concrete walls and wire fences line the streets while private primary and secondary schools and the Howard College campus of the University of Kwa Zulu-Natal dot the skyline. Those living in Glenwood have access to a wide variety of coffee shops, restaurants, large shopping centers, and even an art gallery. It is common to see people walking their dogs in the neighborhood park on cool and crisp evenings, or catching an Uber for a night out on the town during the unforgivingly intemperate summer.

Just a mile away, and within view of Glenwood, is the Cato Crest community of Cato Manor Township. Here, small, one-room shacks made of plywood and sheet metal serve as shelter for hundreds of families. Illegal electricity hookups and unsafe, open-flame stoves cause frequent and deadly fires. Improper sanitation and unclean sources of drinking water create hazardous health conditions. Small tuck shops made out of old shipping containers from the Durban harbor sit on nearly every street corner – selling mobile phone airtime, soft drinks, and an assortment of cheap groceries. Minibus taxis – often filled to maximum capacity – make their way around Cato, honking their horns for those seeking transit into the city center. The differences between the two communities are vast and plain to see. They are located in the same country, the same city, even, but appear to be a world apart.

Another way that these communities are different from each other can found in how residents participate in their democracy. Using Tarrow's (2010) most-similar systems design, which seeks to control for 'common systemic characteristics' in order to explain how 'intersystemic differences' affect dependent variables, this paper seeks to answer why Born Frees – young people born after the end of apartheid – from these two starkly different parts of Durban have developed drastically different opinions on the role and importance of voting in the current state of South African democracy. Fundamentally, controlling for how these different

neighborhoods in Durban are the same will, as Tarrow suggests, 'direct attention to the ways in which they differ.' The residents of Cato Manor and Glenwood live in the same municipality, are citizens of the same country, are beholden to the same laws, vote in the same elections, and sing the same national anthem. In focus groups, however, I found that young people from different neighborhoods in Durban hold different opinions regarding the importance of voting. This paper will examine how two independent variables – quality of civic education and socioeconomic inequality – may cause youth of predominately black townships to view the importance of voting quite differently than youth living in predominately white, upper-class urban neighborhoods. First, an examination of the literature regarding civic education and inequality will place this study in a broader context of research that has been conducted on youth participatory democracy in South Africa and elsewhere. A discussion of findings from focus groups conducted with youth from different neighborhoods of Durban will test whether the quality of one's civic education or socioeconomic class is effecting youth perceptions of voting in South Africa.

Getting to the bottom of this question is important as South Africa continues to transform both socially and politically. As liberation heroes of the apartheid era pass into memory, it is vitally important to understand how Born Frees imagine their place within the nation's democracy, for they will soon be tasked with leading South Africa into the future. The ways in which they participate are interesting in that their participatory methods are likely to drive future policy initiatives and sway important national political decisions. On the broader scale, answering the question of why people who come from different places with different socioeconomic backgrounds and experiences engage in divergent methods of participation is key to understanding how political perceptions are created and maintained over time.

The Importance of (Civic) Education

In an article examining the role that education plays in American and British youth civic

engagement, Sloam (2014) concludes the following:

> 'Although an individual's educational attainment is strongly associated with
> socioeconomic status (a key factor in determining civic and political engagement in its
> own right), education appears to have an independent stronger relationship with
> participation' (p. 667).

Sloam's analysis shows that among youth, one's level of education is a key factor in determining

whether an individual will engage in any form of participatory democracy, and, if they do, which

forms of participation they are most likely to embrace. Likewise, in a multi-level analysis of

twenty-five democratic nations, Marien et al. (2010) found education to be the 'single most

important determinant of political participation.' Individuals who were more educated –

specifically those who had attained post-secondary training at a tertiary institution – were more

likely to participate frequently in political action than those who were less educated. 'Through

their education,' Marien et al. write, 'citizens acquire civic skills, are more likely to end up with

a higher income and are more likely to be targeted by the mobilization efforts of civil society

organizations' (p. 192). Thus, education has quickly become one of the most studied and

discussed variables in relation to political participation. In general, highly educated individuals

appear more likely to participate than less educated citizens.

Sloam (2014) writes that an integral aspect of secondary education is the 'delivery of

civic education across society' (p. 678). Civic education, here, refers to the knowledge that

students develop during their schooling about systems of government, political choices, and

participatory engagement. Given that highly educated individuals are more likely to participate

in politics, it appears logical that a similar pattern would emerge for individuals who have been

exposed to a better quality of civic education as well. A great deal of discourse has unfolded

within the discipline regarding the best methods of delivering civic education to young people. Many different outcomes regarding lifelong participation must be considered when discussing the most effective means by which to educate students about their civic lives. Should, for example, the outcome of a civic education curriculum be that students are more likely to vote? Should students be taught to read about politics and research their political choices? In the event of government inaction, should students be taught that peaceful protests or violent riots are an appropriate form of participation? How might each of these habits be ingrained in the minds of young people? The questions are seemingly endless and point to a number of different approaches to civic education that could lead to a wide array of outcomes in relation to young peoples' participatory habits.

Within a democratic context – the focus of this paper – Torney-Purta et al. (2001) conclude: '…it is clear that equipping young people with knowledge of basic democratic principles and with skills in interpreting political communication is important in enhancing their expectation that they will vote' (p. 185). In their analysis of twenty-five democratic nations, Torney-Purta et al. clearly expect a quality civic education to increase an individual's chances of voting. How might this be accomplished? The researchers write: 'A focus on didactic instruction, issues-centered-classroom discussion, students' participation in school councils or other organizations, education about the media, or community-based projects may enhance one outcome without influencing others' (p. 186). Importantly, Torney-Purta et al. show that effective civic education curriculums require experiences both in and out of the classroom. Experiential civics, in which students are given opportunities to participate in a wide array of platforms that mock real-life methods of democratic citizenship are shown to increase the likelihood of young people to engage in traditional methods of participation – most importantly,

voting. In relation to their multi-national study, Torney-Purta et al. conclude that 'a classroom climate in which the student is free to discuss opinions and different points of view is associated with both higher knowledge scores and with intent to vote in the majority of countries' (p. 184). Classroom experiences where students can engage in constructive discourse about topics that are normally reserved for older generations appear vital to fanning the flames of participatory and electoral interest.

Similarly, Sloam (2010) writes that experiential learning is integral to delivering civic education that will lead to 'democracy as a way of life' for young people. He argues that students must be exposed to three different levels of civic education: first, 'individual experiences' where students can pursue issues that are important to them; experiences that engage students with, and place them in a 'broader social-community context' where democracy can be viewed as a 'social system;' and experiences where students learn about 'state and formal politics' and the importance of government and governing (p. 327). Furthermore, Sloam argues that these three levels of civic education should not be confined to the classroom:

> While teachers are the main gatekeepers for experiential learning, educational establishments play a crucial cognitive and social role in the development of political understandings. Whether or not we regard schools and universities as ''mini-polities,'' they are at the very least sites of political and civic action, and arenas in which individuals develop their own personal political biographies (p. 329).

Through hands-on civic opportunities such as classroom debates, school elections, volunteering in the community, working with a non-governmental organization, or writing to an elected representative, students are able to develop an understanding and appreciation of civic engagement and to develop a propensity for lifelong democratic habits – including to vote. Quite simply, experiential civic education at the basic, secondary, and tertiary levels should be seen as a playground for participation where students can experiment with different types of engagement and become comfortable with participation during their most formative years.

Indeed, active and engaged citizens are more likely to develop participatory habits through experiential learning situations than they are by reading a civics textbook provided by the national government. In sum, Sloam (2008) writes that 'by adopting a less top-down and more interactive approach to political science education, we can not only encourage and enhance deep learning, but also play a part in promoting the democratic engagement of young people' (p. 520). Quality civic education programs thus rely on a combination of reworking traditional, classroom-based civic curriculums and the ideas of imaginative educators and policymakers who understand the importance of giving students opportunities to participate both in and out of the classroom beginning at an early age. Although Yohalem and Martin (2007) agree, they emphasize the importance of positive reinforcement from educators in relation to student participatory opportunities:

> In order for young people to make community involvement a priority, space needs to be created and social recognition provided. Adolescents may be highly motivated but without clear pathways for involvement, they will not necessarily become engaged. Sustained engagement requires supportive environments that provide structure, opportunities to participate in decision-making, and clear roles for young people (p. 809).

Yohalem and Martin's call for 'sustained engagement' in civic education curriculums is important to this discussion as well. In order to develop habits such as voting, it is vital for schools and educators to provide students with many opportunities to experiment with participation and a wide array of avenues through which to do so. Additionally, giving students a chance to make decisions that affect their own lives appears to be an integral component of experiential civic education that helps to further develop engaged citizens.

Given Sloam's research that shows the correlation between education and political participation, it appears equally likely that the quality of one's civic education is a key determinant regarding whether students will develop habits during their schooling that will

translate into real and lifelong democratic engagement as they grow older. Thus, in democratic systems, the quality of one's civic education should be considered an important variable in determining how individuals – especially young people – perceive the importance of voting as well as what other methods of participation they might use.

Racial Inequality in South Africa

A second independent variable should also be considered when discussing youth electoral participation in the South African context: racialized socioeconomic inequality. As discussed in the introduction, inequality bleaches into many different aspects of life for young people living in post-apartheid South Africa. Van Der Westhuizen (2012) writes bluntly: 'Viewed broadly, South Africa may be the most consistently unequal country in the world' (p. 33). Indeed, the World Bank estimates South Africa's Gini coefficient – a widely used measure of income inequality between the rich and poor that ranges from zero (totally equal) to one (totally unequal) – to be approximately 0.63. This number is, as one might imagine, alarmingly high for an industrialized democracy. Statistics South Africa, the official data-gathering department of the South African government, admitted in a 2014 report that 'inequality is a key challenge in South Africa' (p. 36). Although inequality is clearly an enormous problem as the nation moves forward, the ways in which inequality exists within the population are even more alarming and point to the lingering effects of the apartheid era.

As aforementioned, this study's main focus is the city of Durban within and the eThekwini municipality. According to Statistics South Africa, as of 2011, 73.8% of the municipality's population was black African, 16.7% was Indian/Asian, 6.6% was white, and 2.5% was coloured (mixed race). Clearly, an overwhelming majority of those living in Durban are black Africans, with the other three racial categories making up significantly smaller portions

of the population. As a testament to the shear magnitude of racialized socioeconomic inequality in South Africa, apart from size of population, black Africans in the municipality statistically outdo other racial demographics only in categories such as 'infected by HIV/AIDS' and 'living in informal dwellings.' Generally speaking, at the national level, racialized inequality can be found in many different statistical measures. Using data from the 2011 census, the Pew Research Center (2013) reports the following:

> [in 2011, the] average annual household income for [black Africans] was 60,613 rand (roughly $8,700 at the then-current exchange rate), about a sixth the average annual income among white households and a quarter that of Asian households. Mix race (or "coloured" in South African parlance) households had an average income about twice that of blacks.

Similarly, regarding individual median monthly earnings, a government issued report, titled 'Monthly Earnings of South Africans,' released in 2010 by Statistics South Africa concluded that, 'Black Africans earned 22.0% of what the white population earned, 36.1% of what Indians/ Asians earned, and 81.7% of what the coloured population earned' (p. viii). The 2014 Statistics South Africa report cited earlier found that less than one percent of white South Africans were in poverty in 2011 (p. 27). The same government report found that in the same year (2011), 54.0% of black Africans were living in poverty (p. 36). Analyzing data collected between 2006 and 2011, Statistics South Africa (2014) reports:

> While the poverty gap for black Africans had decreased to 23.6% by 2011, it was still more than twice as large as for any other [racial demographic] group. The severity of poverty was similarly more than twice as large for black Africans than for other groups at each point in time (p. 28).

Inequality, and the poverty it has created, in South Africa is especially significant among the nation's youth. The same report concluded that in 2011, 'it is very clear that the highest levels of poverty were among the younger sections of the population,' and that 55.7% of South African youth – under the age of seventeen – were living below the poverty line (p. 29). Among older

Born Frees – those aged eighteen to twenty-four – 50.7% were living in poverty during the same year (p. 36). An overwhelming majority of these youth living in poverty were, and continue to be black Africans living in townships and informal settlements like Cato Manor in Durban. Between 1948 and1994, the racist Afrikaaner apartheid regime envisioned a society in which whites ruled the South African government and economy, while Indians, coloured, and black South Africans lived in deepening levels of abject poverty, respectively. Data shows that despite rising wages and national policies geared towards providing non-whites with increased economic opportunities, a majority of black South Africans continue to live in deep poverty twenty-three years after Nelson Mandela became president.

Van Der Westhuizen (2012) writes that racialized socioeconomic inequality in South Africa may create the 'potential for political destabilization' as 'inequality [increases] within ethnic groups, especially among black South Africans' (p. 34). Clearly, socioeconomic inequality and poverty have created different life experiences and contextual situations for white and black South Africans. Life in Cato Manor Township is much different than life in Glenwood or Morningside. Generally speaking, level of household and individual income, access to quality public services, and the types of interactions one has with government differ greatly for black and white South Africans. Education – an important variable related to electoral participation mentioned earlier – is a prime example of situational inequality. According to data from the 2011 census, just 3.4% of Durban's population had completed a degree at an accredited tertiary institution; 21.4% had completed secondary school, while the remaining percentage of the population had completed less than secondary schooling. Given the importance of schooling in the development of one's interest in political participation, it is clear that socioeconomic inequality – in many different aspects of South African life – has an effect on one's perception of

electoral participation and civic engagement among youth. Again, Sloam (2014) provides the theoretical foundation for the importance of socioeconomic inequality in terms of its influence on participation when he writes that 'low levels of…social mobility vastly reduce the prospects of youth engagement' (p. 681).

Comparative Studies of Youth Voting Perceptions in South Africa

According to the literature, it seems plausible to hypothesize that a quality civic education and low exposure to the adverse effects of economic inequality will increase a young person's chances of believing that voting is important in South Africa. Before examining qualitative data collected in Durban, it is important to briefly examine the findings of other research on the subject of youth participatory democracy in South Africa. Booysen (2015), for example, conducted a sweeping national focus group study of the subject at the height of the Fees Must Fall movement – a student led movement calling for a decrease in tertiary school fees. In sum, she found that Born Frees engage in a wide array of participatory methods: 'Their activities range from volunteer community work (clean-ups and road-fixing, for example), to protest action to get jobs allocated to members of the local community' (p. 2). Her research incorporated perspectives from Born Frees belonging to various racial demographic groups from across the country. Little can be gleaned specifically regarding differences in racial participatory habits related to voting from her report – sponsored by Freedom House – however, her analysis of a focus group conducted in a predominately black township of Durban, Umlazi, is quite interesting. On how participants in this focus group viewed voting, she writes:

> Registration and voting is thus a transactional activity for them: they vote and in exchange they hope to get considered for a job. They are not always optimistic that this will be forthcoming, but at least they know that they have not disqualified themselves by not registering and voting' (p. 27).

Her analysis indicates that participants in the focus group viewed voting as more of a means to

gain employment – by promising support for a specific candidate or party – than as a vital and learned civic duty.

Additionally, Booysen found that participants who were both registered to vote and who said they had voted did so for the following reasons: hoping for change, to honor the sacrifices made by those who fought against apartheid, a sense of duty as a citizen, to have a voice, to reward a political party for providing a public good, because they supported or were against a certain political party, and – as suggested by the aforementioned quote – to attain employment. Other participants who were registered to vote supplied reasons for why they chose not to vote: lack of interest in politics, did not feel as though they were being listened to, disappointed with the delivery of public goods, anger at a certain political party, or that they felt as though voting would not, in fact, get them a job. Variation in the responses Booysen received is fascinating, and – given the discussion above about civic education and inequality – might be explained by a number of factors and variables.

Interestingly, Roberts and Letsoalo (2008) found that a 'sizable majority of young people' in South Africa 'consider it a duty to vote,' and that a similar number of Born Frees felt as though voting in national elections made a difference (p. 12). 'Therefore, without even considering non-electoral forms of participation,' they write, 'young South Africans emerge as interested, aware and engaged in political matters to the same extent as their elders. These results pose a convincing challenge to the stereotypical representations depicting youth as "disengaged" or "lost"' (p. 12). Thus, Roberts and Letsoalo conclude that most young South Africans consider voting to be a civic duty, which indicates that civic education – regardless of being learned at school, home, or in the broader community – has been effective at persuading Born Frees to participate. However, given Booysen's findings and the literature that suggests that both civic

education and inequality play a large role in determining how one perceives political and/or electoral participation, further qualitative analysis and data will prove helpful in uncovering why youth from different neighborhoods of Durban view electoral participation so differently.

Methodology

Qualitative research and data presented in this paper are derived from three focus groups conducted from October 2015 to November 2015 by the author. Two focus groups were conducted – one each – in the predominately black townships of Cato Manor and Inanda within the eThekwini municipality. All Born Frees in these two focus groups – six in total – were black Africans. A third focus group was conducted with youth who live in predominately white neighborhoods of the city. All Born Frees in the third focus group – two in total – were white. Participants were asked a series of semi-structured questions ranging in topic from their own civic education experiences in secondary school to their opinions regarding the current state of South African democracy and the recent Fees Must Fall Movement that was sweeping the nation at the time. All focus group participants were between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five. Participants were all either members of youth civil society organizations or had participated in such organizations' programming. Members of the Cato Manor Township focus group were all associated with a small community based organization that provides supplemental math and science programming in the township's schools. The Inanda Township focus group was composed of students involved with a democratic development organization in Durban that seeks to provide low-income youth with opportunities to learn about government and leadership. The focus group of youth from predominately white neighborhoods included students involved in a highly selective council of high school students who are interested in leadership, community organizing, and public service.

Findings and Discussion

Cato Manor and Inanda Township Youth

The two focus groups conducted among black African township youth proved interesting in relation to earlier discussions related to the literature on both civic education and racialized socioeconomic inequality in South Africa. When the Cato Manor Township group was asked what they learned in their secondary school civic education classes about democracy and participation, one participant said: 'In my school the only thing we were learned…was the story – the Mandela story.' Participants in both of these focus groups expressed that they felt that they had received an inadequate civic education and that, during secondary school, they had not been exposed to any platform of experiential civics engagement. A participant in the Inanda Township group expressed that what she had learned in school about participation was quite different than what she found when she graduated: 'I think we are taught something else at school and when you see what's really happening in the world that's different from what we're taught in school.' All of the Cato Manor group and all but one of the Inanda focus group participants were currently or had at one time been enrolled in an institution of higher learning. Being enrolled in university and involved with community projects and organizations appeared to provide these youth with a different perspective and set of skills than that which they had developed in high school. A participant from the Cato Manor group said:

> I think [being involved with a community based organization] exposes us to some
> heightened realities. When…we were in high school, we didn't see it but right now,
> because we are much older and we are in the university and you start understanding the
> things…really, we have a problem and something needs to be done.

Contextually, the 'problem' that this participant was discussing is the effect that inequality and poverty have on young, namely black Africans in Cato Manor Township. Participants in both of

these focus groups expressed that they felt discouraged by the poverty they had witnessed and experienced while growing up in Cato Manor and Inanda townships. One participant in the Cato Manor Township group relayed that '[he and his fellow participants] are still experienc[ing] the effect of apartheid.' Another participant from the same focus group agreed: 'And…you must say: "okay, we're experiencing, eh, this democracy but for us apartheid, it's, like a chain reaction."' Participants in both focus groups agreed with such sentiment in that they felt as though the transition to democracy has not relieved black communities of the same racialized inequality that existed in the pre-1994 era. Simply said, it was apparent from participants in these focus groups that civic education in townships schools has not utilized experiential platforms through which participation is learned and practiced, and that inequality that has been perpetuated since the apartheid era continues to be at the forefront of these Born Frees' minds.

How have these variables affected township youth perceptions on voting and participation? As expected, all of the Cato Manor and Inanda township focus group participants expressed frustration with traditional methods of democratic participation, specifically voting. One participant in the Cato Manor group seemed to speak for the group when he said: 'Sometimes I do vote and sometimes I don't vote.' When asked why, he responded that, 'Here in South Africa, we can say it is important, but it is not *that* important because, actually here in South Africa there is nothing much you can change by voting.' A participant in the Inanda focus group shared that when she first registered to vote, she was hopeful that her voice would be heard: 'Back then I was so excited to vote because I wanted to make a change' After having had the chance to vote in multiple elections, she reflected: 'I don't see change happening. I just tell myself that I'm never gonna [vote] again, I'll never.' Another youth in the Inanda focus group said that voting has accomplished very little in her community:

> You know what they do? [Policial parties] say…we're gonna build…[government] houses for you. And then they start building before…the voting time comes. And once…people's done voting, they will never come back. They will never come back and finish that work that they started.

This participant's observations point to an interesting variable that was not considered in the discussion of the literature: mistrust of political parties and government institutions. While it is clear that these Born Frees' education and economic conditions have played a large role in the development of their perceptions regarding the importance of voting, many participants in the township focus groups expressed a deep disappointment with their government and believed that most politicians and political parties are inherently corrupt. In sum, a participant in the Cato Manor focus group lamented: 'In South Africa actually I think…you must demand everything. Because through vote and debate there is nothing much you can change…'

Demanding change appeared to be a key participatory tool used by youth in both Cato Manor and Inanda townships. Every participant shared that they had - in many cases, recently – participated in protests and collective political demonstrations. A participant from the Cato Manor focus group said: 'I always participate in any kind of protest: peaceful, not peaceful, whatever…' Many participants in the Cato Manor focus group had taken part in protests at various campuses of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal as part of the Fees Must Fall movement. Weeks before the Cato Manor focus group, for example, student protesters had torched an academic building and car at the Westville campus of UKZN. When asked why they participate in protests, one participant in the Cato Manor group observed bluntly: 'Because from that at least we get results…' During the Inanda Township focus group, a student said that she had recently dropped out of university because she could no longer afford to pay school fees. When asked if she had ever participated in a protest or collective demonstration, she responded:

> **Participant:** I did march at school, yeah, last year. I did that a lot. I would go to school only to march, I…knew that I didn't have money for transport but I would…make up excuses because I wanted to be part of the march. Yeah, it just means so much. You know…I fell in the group of students who didn't have money…to register. So the fee increment was really affecting us.
>
> **Interviewer:** Yeah, and you felt as though your voice was heard when you marched? It did something?
>
> **Participant:** It did something.

These views appear to be in line with the findings of other studies. Marien et al. (2010) write: 'Non-institutionalized forms of politics…clearly lead to a more inclusive political society: women and young people tend to use these forms to get their voices heard in the political arena' (p. 205). Indeed, participants in both the Cato Manor and Inanda focus groups believed that protesting was an effective means by which to make their voices heard. Participants in these two focus groups in the predominately black townships of Cato Manor and Inanda show that – to some level – quality of civic education and inequality have played a role in their rather negative perceptions of the effectiveness of voting. Some participants shared that they have voted, but most said that they felt as though it was an ineffective method by which to engage with their government and elected officials and said that they would not vote again.

Wealthy Urban Community Youth

The focus group conducted with youth from predominately white and wealthy neighborhoods of Durban yielded a contrasting view of how Born Frees perceive voting and political participation. Both participants in this focus group grew up in wealthy families and continue to reside in the rather opulent neighborhood of Glenwood. Unlike their township peers, participants in this focus group expressed that they felt their civic education and experiences in secondary school had provided them with an enthusiastic appreciation for active citizenship and electoral behavior. They described a richly diverse array of topics covered in their schools' curriculum and suggested that their citizenship education began at home at an early age:

…we did learn about the way that our…government works: like the ministers, the parliament, like, sort of governmental systems and then we didn't…learn too much about the history of apartheid and…the transformation to democracy but it was a known thing about what democracy is…from a young age. I think they taught people the fundamentals of a democracy [in primary school].

Participants in this focus group shared that their civic knowledge transcended textbook material and classroom lectures. One participant shared that he remembered having 'discussions about democracy and what democracy is' starting early on in his primary education. He specifically remembered a teacher he had in grades five and six who would take time at the end of each school day to allow her students to discuss important political topics:

I had a very good teacher in grade five and six and basically what she did was she let us have discussions in class when she would do our timing so that we had extra time at the end of the day and we'd have discussions about different things…

Importantly, another participant recalled: '…what we'd have is the grade sevens would run a campaign. So they'd have their own political parties, and then we as a school would get to vote who we'd want as our rulers of the school.' She admits that this experience was her first with electoral participation and that it was transformative. Both of these students were quite involved in their communities and participated in a wide variety of extracurricular organizations including a youth council, a symphony orchestra, and various other volunteer-based groups. The youth council itself appeared to be an integral component to their civic education. Each year, the council of many different Durban schools holds elections for its leadership team – the most important of which is the 'mayor.' The council holds many different student-organized community service projects throughout the year in conjunction with the municipal government and local community leaders.

Although none of the participants in this focus group were old enough to register to vote at the time, they nonetheless shared that they believe it is important to vote and that they felt as

though they would vote when they came of age. Their keenness to voting appeared to be rooted in a sense of duty and citizenship that likely originated in their civic education. One participant said: 'We know that we need to vote and we know we have to know about the party in power and that we can hold them accountable for their actions.' Such sentiment indicates multiple levels of engagement regarding how youth in the focus group perceive the importance of voting: one must not only vote, but make an informed decision when they vote and continue to hold politicians accountable over time – effectively what Yohalem and Martin (2007) define as 'sustained engagement.' Another participant added an additional perspective regarding the importance of voting:

> I think that it's very important to vote…because if you're not voting you're sort of undermining democracy and you're kind of, I wouldn't say betraying it, but you're not doing what you should be doing to create a democratic society.

His opinion here falls more in line with what is largely considered to be voting as an act of citizenship – in that youth vote because they feel as though it is their duty as an active and engaged member of South African society.

Neither participant in the wealthy urban community focus group had actively sought out ways to engage with their government through any form of protest. One participant, however, shared that in an interesting turn of events he had months earlier found himself inadvertently involved in a march on city hall in central Durban in support of some sort of service delivery union. As he was preparing for an event for the youth council in city hall, he got locked out of the building and had no choice but to walk with the marchers as they surrounded the hall. When asked how he felt about the situation and protesting in general, he responded: '…well it made me feel very…empowered and it gave me a sense of, I wouldn't say it gave me a sense of anything, but I was very happy to see so many people…expressing their views in a way such as marching.'

It seems unlikely that this participant will be engaging in protests the same way as his peers in Cato Manor and Inanda have; however, his – albeit brief – experience with protest politics gave him a sense of collective belonging that he otherwise would not have experienced. Protesting aside, another participant in the focus group shared that she views involvement with non-governmental organizations as a key method of participation that can lead to social change: '…if more organizations like this arise and come, and are established no matter what their aim or objective is…it really gives people opportunities to make a difference.'

Participants in this focus group varied in a number of ways from youth encountered in the two predominately black townships. First, they grew up in wealthy neighborhoods of Durban and attended well-funded secondary schools. Both participants expressed that their civic education both in and out of the classroom provided them with a plethora of opportunities to become engaged and participate in various forms of participation. Furthermore, the quality and scope of their educational experiences appears to have made an impact on their perceptions regarding voting, as they both expressed that they thought voting was an important duty of every South African and that, when they came of age, they planned to both register to vote and vote. Participants in this focus group also saw engagement with civil society organizations as important for young people in order to build leadership and create meaningful social change in their communities. In sum, both economic status and quality of civic education appear to have made an influence on this focus group's perceptions of electoral participation as well.

Conclusion

This study's use of the most-similar systems model has shown that civic education and racially-based socioeconomic inequality appear to affect youth perceptions of electoral participation in post-apartheid South Africa. Focus group data reveals that Born Frees who have

grown up in impoverished black African neighborhoods of Durban and who have received inadequate civic education are less likely to believe voting is an important and effective participatory method than youth who live in wealthier and whiter communities where experiential civic learning opportunities are common and encouraged. These findings are in agreement with existing literature regarding civic education and socioeconomic inequality. Sloam's (2008; 2010; 2014) work shows that while higher levels of education correlate positively with political participation, a civic education grounded in experiential participatory opportunities is key to developing positive electoral engagement habits for individuals as they grow older. Torney-Purta et al. (2001) and Yohalem and Martin (2007) agree in that they write that extracurricular participatory opportunities have been shown to lead young people to vote and stay interested in politics and government. Similarly, findings in this study support theories related to the effects of inequality on participation in that people who have suffered from drastic inequality appear less likely to engage in traditional forms of participation such as voting. Similarly, Sloam (2014) found: 'When youth engagement does take place, it often takes the form of volunteering and protest' (p. 674).

However, the findings of this study do not take into account other variables that are likely at play in the many neighborhoods of Durban, South Africa. Mistrust of government, perceived corruption, one-party dominance, involvement with civil society organizations, and non-curricular participatory experiences all seem to be of significance when discussing how Born Frees – and youth in general – create opinions on the importance of voting and develop participatory habits. It is difficult, however, to separate each of these variables in a society largely defined by drastic socioeconomic inequality. Civic education, for example, is itself connected to the issue of inequality in that where one lives in Durban, or South Africa more

broadly, dictates the school one attends and quality of education that one will receive. Thus, twenty-three years after apartheid, the effects of a once-segregated system live on in many different aspects of black South African life. All of this is not to say that all South Africans live or continue to live in segregated communities. For example, many black, Indian, and coloured South Africans live in quite wealthy urban communities, just as some white South Africans have found themselves jobless and homeless. This, of course, complicates analysis of space and inequality in South Africa, as research should indeed account for changes that have unfolded since the end of apartheid.

Furthermore, researchers must be cautious in evaluating different forms of participation. Sloam (2014) suggests that while non-electoral forms of youth participation are important to a thriving democratic system, they do not equate to electoral participation: 'poor [youth] turnout figures result in low prioritization of youth issues by politicians, which – in turn – result in the further alienation of young people from electoral politics…' (p. 679). Sloam's argument becomes ever more poignant as many black African Born Frees turn away from electoral forms of participation at time when South African elections are becoming increasingly competitive. In order for young people of all demographics and socioeconomic backgrounds to embrace electoral participation, a great number of systemic changes much occur. A good place to start would be ensuring that students receive a quality civic education regardless of who they are or where they come from in order to create a society where democracy, engagement, and participation is are viewed as a way of life.

Further Research

This study's observations and data contain many limitations that further research can both clarify and expand upon. Focus groups incorporated into this study, for example, are somewhat

limited in their size and scale. The three focus groups combined contained only twelve

participants. The focus group conducted with wealthy urban community youth contained only

two participants. Although this article has been effective at outlining general trends that will

likely be found in other communities and municipalities in South Africa, a more robust data set

would help in either supporting or rejecting theories regarding civic education and inequality and

their effect on electoral participation. Qualitative data such as is used here and in similar studies

in South Africa provide a rich and more ethnographically dense approach to the study of

electoral participation than do traditional methods of quantitative regression analyses. There is

something to be said for a more humanistic approach to the study of politics and participation in

that it provides researchers with an inherently more personal and realistic view of how societal

problems are affecting political choices and decision-making in an increasingly complex world

by listening to the voices of those on the ground.

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