UNDERSTANDING YOUNG SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS' PARTICIPATION IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology.

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DECLARATION

I, Lauren Louise Tracey-Temba declare that this research report is my own unaided work. It is being submitted as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sociology by Coursework and Research Report at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Signed: _____

15 February 2018, Johannesburg

DEDICATION

To my mother Kathleen Tracey, the strongest woman I know.

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Introduction

Introduction

'Local government is the sphere of government closest to the people' (Understanding Local Government, n.d.). It plays an instrumental role in ensuring that residents are part of policy planning and developmental efforts (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 1998). Developmental Local Government (n.d.) is required to be sensitive to community views, and responsive to local problems. In the last few years however, local government has been at the root of demonstrations and protests, many of which are often attributed to poor service delivery such as housing, water, electricity and sanitation (South African History Online, 2014). But while these factors may be the immediate spark of protest action, Cronje (2014) indicates that there are often other deeper reasons behind these continued demonstrations. These include, corroborating trends such as low voter turnout at elections and declining confidence in traditional democratic institutions as well as the current ruling party (Cronje, 2014). This research study aims to unpack young students' knowledge and understanding of local government and local governance in the Johannesburg metro. Do young South Africans understand the role of local government and the impact their decisions have on the quality of their lives? To what extent, if any, do young people's understanding and knowledge of local government and local governance impact their participation, or lack thereof, at the local level?

Globally, marginalized groups, and more particularly youth, are increasingly engaging in protests and social movements against socio-economic inequality, racism, corporate greed and corruption. In 2011, the Arab rebellion, commonly known as the Arab Spring, saw millions of young people across the Middle East, North Africa and United States, rise up against dictatorships and United States (US) led support for the Mubarak dictatorship (Nieftagodien, 2015). Beginning with the Arab Spring, young people across the world have continued to engage in movements against issues of corruption, seen in the United States Occupy movement (Davies, 2011); poor public education and the need for transformation in the education system seen in Chile, London and South Africa (Taylor, 2011; Taylor, 2015), and demonstrations against issues of diversity and race seen in Columbia and Los Angeles (Jessen, 2015; Rancano, 2015).

In South Africa, as with many other countries globally, young people, and more particularly young students, are increasingly turning to protests and demonstrations as a means to have their voices heard and the challenges they face addressed. This was most notably demonstrated in 2015 and 2016, with

the rise of social movements such as “Fees Must Fall” and “Rhodes Must Fall”, which saw students across the country in institutions of higher learning protesting around issues of transformation, inequality, free or low-cost education and student financial assistance (Lancaster, 2016; Jordaan, 2016). In 2016, protests over the safety of students and the insourcing of security guards were seen at the Vaal University of Technology and at Fort Hare University, around issues of student debt, meals, housing and travel allowance (Jordaan, 2016). According to Municipal IQ (n.d.), a local government data and intelligence organisation, there were also a number of violent protests reported around councillor and mayoral appointments in the lead up to the 2016 local government elections.

Undoubtedly, young students’ continued engagement in protests around politics and public issues, along with their low levels of participation in formal democratic processes such as elections, calls for an assessment on whether students are knowledgeable and understand the role of local government, as well as local governance. This research study provides an analysis of young South African students’ knowledge and understanding of local government and local governance. A key focus will be placed on examining the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of young students between the age of 18 and 24 years, at four educational institutions of higher learning in the Johannesburg metro.

Background

The local level is where the concerns of the people intersect almost directly with that of governance and the state (Gaventa and Valderrama, 1999). Moreover, Gaventa and Valderrama (1999:4) argue that politics at the local level allows citizens a direct opportunity to influence and exercise control in governance, which is often only done through formal democratic processes such as voting. In addition, scholars such as Hajnal and Lewis (2003) and Alexander and Kane-Berman (2014) highlight the key role local government plays in providing basic services such as sanitation and water, municipal health services and public transport, as well as infrastructural development such as roads, parks and libraries. Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) outlines the developmental roles of local government as the local sphere of government that needs to:

- provide democratic and accountable government of local communities;
- ensure the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner;
- promote social and economic development;
- promote a safe and healthy environment; and
- encourage the involvement of communities and community organisation in the matters of local government.

In South Africa, however, local government is often identified as the level of government that performs the worst when compared to both national and provincial government (Kivilu et al., 2005). Managa (2012) highlights how the performance of local government at the local level suggests that service delivery backlogs, the delivery of poor public service, political appointments, corruption, lack of capacity and accountability, are just some of the factors that contribute to this. In the last five years, South Africa has also experienced a notable increase not only in the number of peaceful protests which increased from 10,832 in 2011/12 to 11,151 in 2015/16 but also in the number of protests that turn violent, which increased from 1,226 to 3,542 in the same period (Jordaan, 2016). In 2016 for example, a little over 20 schools were burnt in Vuwani, Limpopo, following protests by residents against the inclusion of Vuwani in the new Malamulele municipality, as well as against poor service delivery (Whittles, 2016).

According to the White Paper on Local Government (1998), municipalities require citizens to actively participate at four levels:

- As voters - to ensure maximum democratic accountability of the elected political leadership for the policies they are empowered to promote.
- As citizens who express, via different stakeholder associations, their views before, during and after the policy development process in order to ensure that policies reflect community preferences as far as possible.
- As consumers and end-users, who expect value-for-money, affordable services and courteous and responsive service.
- As organised partners involved in the mobilisation of resources for development via for profit businesses, non-governmental organisations, and community-based institutions (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 1998:33).

Gaventa and Valderrama (1999) argue however, that in as much as citizens have expectations for local government solving everything, the role of citizen participation and political representation at the local or grassroots level also plays an instrumental part in improving the efficiency of public services, the accountability of local government and in deepening democracy. It is with this in mind that understanding the participation of young people in democracy plays an important role, particularly in ensuring that the challenges they face are effectively addressed.

Young South Africans have demonstrated their desire to be engaged and included in democracy through their social activism. There is, however, little translation of this in their participation in formal democratic institutions and processes at the local government level. Young people under the

age of 35 years account for at least 66 percent of South Africa's total population (Southafrica.unfpa.org, n.d.). In addition, these young people also make up a majority of the eligible voting age population (Tracey, 2016a; Ackroyd, 2016). However, faced with a wide range of challenges, such as unemployment, poor standards of education at primary and high school level, criminality, corruption, substance abuse, teenage pregnancies and the spread of diseases such as HIV/AIDS, many of which often directly impact young people, some young people, frustrated and angry, have shifted away from taking part in formal democratic processes such as elections and are instead finding alternative platforms and ways to ensure their grievances are addressed. An example of which can be seen in their participation in protests and ongoing social movements such as "Fees Must Fall" (Tracey, 2016a; CSVR, 2016).

Research Aims and Objectives

This research study aims to analyse young South African students' knowledge and understanding of local government and local governance. This will be done by examining the perceptions, attitudes and experiences of young students between the age of 18 and 24 years, at four institutions of higher learning in the Johannesburg metro: the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Johannesburg (UJ), the Central Johannesburg (CJ) college, Parktown campus and South West Gauteng (SWG) college, Roodepoort Campus. The following research questions guided the research:

- How do young people understand participation in local government?
- How do young people understand their role in local governance?
- What influences young peoples' interest or participation in local government and local governance?

Chapter Outline

Chapter two presents a review of existing scholarly literature on democracy, youth political participation, leadership, contentious politics and social movements. In addition, this chapter also incorporates earlier quantitative research studies conducted around young people's political and civic participation at the local level. Critical to this section is the status of young people's participation in local democracy, as well as a review of the changing characteristics of participation at the local level, to what is described by many scholars as 'new' social movements. This chapter aims to establish a common understanding and framework for the purpose of this study.

Chapter three provides an outline of the methodology used in this study. It elaborates on how the data was collected and analysed among 56 young student participants in four educational Institutions of

Higher Learning across the Johannesburg metro. It highlights the tools used to collect the data, and gives some insight into the research questions explored and the ethical considerations that were taken into account before speaking to the young participants. This chapter also aims to pave the way for the three empirical chapters that ensue.

Chapter four is the first of three empirical chapters that present the research findings. In this chapter, young students' expectations of local government are assessed. It highlights how declining levels of satisfaction with their local environment, particularly around issues of crime and feelings of safety and perceptions around the responsiveness and accountability of local governments, play a role in these students' participation at the local level. This chapter highlights the limited knowledge students have with regards to the roles and responsibilities of local government, as well as their rising expectations at the local level. It illustrates how critical students are becoming of local government, and shows how issues of class between TVET college and university students are further reinforcing the disconnect that exists amongst students and local government, particularly around the different modes of communication used at the local level.

Chapter five demonstrates the important role that leadership plays at the local level. It begins with a brief overview of the different spheres of government, and the make-up of local government. It illustrates young students' perceptions of local representatives, such as councilors and ward councilors, and highlights how issues of visibility, poor service delivery, feelings of alienation, issues of corruption and students' eroding trust in local leaders play a role in whether these young participants get involved in local governance. This chapter also highlights students' lack of knowledge about democratic governance, with protests often identified as the only effective form of political activism.

Chapter six begins by examining young students' perceptions of, and participation on, traditional political platforms such as elections, in a bid to understand their political and civic engagement at the local level. It highlights the impact that patronage party politics is having on students' participation in elections, and illustrates that while young students acknowledge the importance of local elections, they do not always see them as effective in bringing about change at the local level. In this chapter, students' perceptions of the power of the community and community politics are illustrated. It highlights how public consultations such as community meetings, are not always identified as platforms that accommodate the youth. It evaluates young students' perceptions of, and involvement in, alternative platforms such as volunteering in their communities, and taking part in social movements and protests. It illustrates how the marginalization of students at the local level, lack of awareness and knowledge of community platforms that youth can engage on, disillusionment with both local and national politics and with party politics, and lack of empowerment, have resulted in

social movements and protests being identified as the best way to bring about change at the local level.

Chapter seven concludes the research study by giving a brief summary of the key findings. It highlights how young students' engagement at the local level is often affected by their local environment, their perception of local leaders, their limited knowledge of the political system and democratic governance, as well as issues of patronage, transparency and accountability.

Conclusion

It is clear that local government plays a vital role in South Africa, particularly with regards to its proximity to citizens and its role in addressing some of the most basic challenges the country faces, such as inequality and the heritage left behind after apartheid. In addition, the narrative of social movements and protest action in recent years indicates that young people and young students globally, and in South Africa, are dominating such movements. In South Africa, students' continued engagement in these social movements demonstrates their desire to be engaged and included in political and public issues in the country. However, there is a clear disconnect between their participation in social movements at the local level, and their participation in formal democratic processes such as elections. In addition, young South Africans are also demonstrating their anger and frustration at the lack of response from local government in addressing their grievances, through their engagement in protests that turn violent, as seen in Vuwani, Limpopo.

The participation of young people in local democracy is of utmost importance, particularly in finding ways of addressing the critical social justice challenges they face, such as youth unemployment. Young people have the ability to enhance the voice of those directly affected by public policies at the local level, however, according to Gaventa (2004:21), these processes often result in the voices of those directly affected by public policies being excluded from the process of making them, in this case the youth. It is therefore important to assess their knowledge and understanding of local government, and their participation in local governance.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

In this chapter an overview of the academic literature, as well as existing qualitative and quantitative research around issues of democracy, citizenship, political participation, participatory democracy, local leadership, contentious politics and social movements will be explored. A particular focus will be placed on the South African context and young people in this regard.

Democracy and Citizenship

'The Government of the people, by the people, and for the people' these famous words by the then U.S President Abraham Lincoln in his speech the Gettysburg Address (1863) are often quoted as the definition of democracy (Haar, 2016). According to Southall (2010:9), 'democracy' literally speaking means 'rule by the people'. While for Diamond, Linz and Lipset (1995), in order for a democratic system to be seen as effective it is required to ensure that there is:

- meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and organised groups (especially political parties) for all effective positions of government power through regular, free and fair elections that exclude the use of force;
- a highly inclusive level of political participation in the election of leaders and policies, such that no major (adult) social group is prevented from exercising the rights of citizenship;
- a level of civil and political liberties – freedom of thought and expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly and demonstration, freedom to form and join organisations, freedom from terror and unjustified imprisonment – secured through political equality under a rule of law, sufficient to ensure that citizens (acting individually and through various associations) can develop and advocate their views and interests and contest policies and offices vigorously.

Research conducted by Enwere (2013:60) on *The Challenges of Democracy and Neo Liberalism and its Implications to the Politco-Economic Development of Developing Countries*, argues that the theory of democracy isn't necessarily centered around the role that people play, but more around the role that leaders play in democracy. Similarly, Schumpeter (2003:269) identifies modern democracy as an 'institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote'. While according to Houston,

Humphries & Liebenberg in Southall (2010:2), democracy also requires 'accountability of the state's administrative organs to the elected representatives'. A good democracy can therefore be defined as, a regime that is completely responsive and listens to the needs of its citizens (Enwere, 2013:60). In their attempt to define democracy, Hegre et al. (2012) outline the determinants of democracy. They argue that democracy requires that a range of factors be put in place before a country can be identified as being democratically stable (Hegre et al., 2012). These include, but are not limited to: economic development and income levels, high levels of education, a dominant middle class or, on the other hand, an organized working class, religion and ethnic fractionalization, historical experiences and institutions, as well as political factors (Hegre et al., 2012). According to Hegre et al. (2012) the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) also allows for the spread of democratization through ideas and information which, they argue, is as an important tool in ensuring a stable democracy.

The definitions and approaches around democracy highlighted above provide a useful context and condensation of the important dimensions that encapsulate democracy. In many African countries for example, democracy has become a universal paradigm that defines not only political, but also economic development (Enwere, 2013:59). Over the last century however, democracy has seemingly taken a knock. The progress made in the late 20th century seen in countries such as Germany, India and South Africa, where autocratic regimes and decolonization gave way to new democracies, has stalled in the 21st century (The Economist, 2018). Political developments on the African continent, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, and more recently in North Africa, have challenged theories of democracy as well as the determinants of democracy (Hegre et al., 2012). In South Africa for example, scholars (Shumba, 2015; Southall, 2013) have identified how liberation movements such as the African National Congress (ANC), with its deepening domination, have shown signs of authoritarianism and anti-developmental tendencies such as patronage party politics, intolerance and deligitimization of opposition and abuse of incumbency. These factors, among others, have resulted in the luster of democracy being tainted since its introduction in 1994, because it hasn't necessarily resulted in the incorporation of all social groups into the democratic system (Adetula, 2011:15). In addition, scholars illustrate how the current government and ruling party is now more than ever being viewed as a political party that is becoming progressively more self-serving (Blair, 2016; Booysen, 2013; IOL, 2017).

One of the biggest challenges to democracy however, has come from the voters (The Economist, 2018). Southall (2010:5) highlights how huge freedoms associated with competitive electoralism, such as freedom of expressions - identified through free and fair elections, has resulted in electoral systems staying around because they provide a form of democratic legitimacy. However, Southall (2010:5) states, what these electoral systems neglect is that even in regimes such as Zimbabwe, where

blatant abuse of power runs deep, these forms of democratic legitimacy are still recognized as effective, provoking debate about the appropriateness of inherited electoral systems as well as questioning the 'fairness' of representation of all segments of the population they bring. In South Africa, while the ruling political party, the ANC, holds genuine majority support, this dominance has resulted in the political party being seen as arrogant and holding little tolerance for minorities, and rarely accepting of accountability to those who elected them (Southall, 2010:6). As a result of competitive electoralism, many democratic governments have gotten themselves into large structural deficits, often borrowing for short term gains in order to please their electorate, which in turn resulted in them neglecting the long-term impact (The Economist, 2018). In South Africa, for example, political parties continue to place a heavy emphasis on the issue of service delivery in their manifestos and promises to deliver services. According to Friedman (1999:220), 'citizens are believed to use democracy as a source of material benefit rather than of self-expression'. While this is true for many citizens, particularly in the run up to local government elections, and illustrated in many service delivery protests, this also challenges the quality of democracy in the 21st century, which is often impacted by other factors as well, such as issues of corruption and poor leadership. In 2010, then Deputy Minister of Provincial and Local Government, Yunus Carrim, brought this to light perfectly when he said in a statement:

> Most of the protests are about service delivery issues. But they are also about a range of other municipal issues including maladministration, nepotism, fraud and corruption and the failure of councillors and administrators to listen to residents. But it is the range of some sections of the protestors and the extent of violence and destruction that they wreak that is striking. It reflects a far more fundamental alienation of the people from our democracy. It suggests an accurate sense of marginalization and exclusion, … the nature and scope of the protests we are witnessing are not part of a healthy growing democracy (Reddy, 2016:3).

A fundamental dimension of democracy is participatory democracy which, by virtue of its own right, encapsulates the importance of citizen participation in local democracy, and in the management of cities (Benit-Gbaffou, 2008). An essential part of participatory democracy is to ensure that all members of society participate in decision-making processes that impact their lives. Decisions on public safety, infrastructure and service delivery, among others, all occur at a local level, and affect citizens directly (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003). Where citizens are not participating at the local level, opportunities to participate in democracy and become active citizens are lost. Policies are implemented and inputs are made, without the necessary contribution and buy-in from the affected community (Hajnal and Lewis, 2003).

Young people and political participation

Globally, young people are often identified as being politically apathetic and possessing low levels of political interest, knowledge and understanding (Jowell and Park, 1998). In Liberia, research conducted by Trust Africa and Humanity United (2011) on youth participation in local government, found that young people were not always aware of how they could participate in local government, with some young people quite cynical of how their participation in local government could impact decision-making at the local level. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom in 2002, young people did not often distinguish the roles of local government from that of national government. For example, when participants in the study 'highlighted concerns about local issues such as crime reduction, vandalism and the need for streets to be kept clean, local government was not always seen as related to these issues' (Molly, White and Hosfield, 2002:6).

In South Africa, research conducted by Tracey (2016a) on young peoples' political participation illustrated how feelings of alienation and being sidelined from political life are often factors that affect young students' political participation. For Fakir, Bhengu and Larsen (2010), these factors play a role in them withdrawing from, and taking part in, traditional forms of political activity, such as voting. While Booysen (2015) highlights that young people are also often skeptical about political representatives who they see as non-responsive, lazy and only concerned about enriching themselves.

In analyzing young people's knowledge and understanding about local government and local governance, an assessment of the nature of various forms of political participation cannot be neglected. Nyalunga (2006) and Potgieter and Lutz (2014) highlight how voting is still identified as a key factor in measuring the democratic participation of citizens in a democracy. Much of the literature on voter participation however, is often focused on the nature of low voter turnout in national elections, with fewer studies being conducted on understanding the reasons behind the even lower voter turnout at local/municipal level. Research conducted by Kivilu et al. (2005) and Hajnal and Lewis (2003) shows that during national elections, voter turnout rates comparatively higher than that of local/municipal elections. In addition, research conducted by Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd (2008) and Barnes and Virgint (2010) highlights how low voter turnout among young people is not unique to South Africa. Their research also demonstrate how continuously declining levels of youth voter turnout at national level is often cited in the discourse on voter participation in elections (Dermody and Hanmer-Lloyd, 2008; Barnes and Virgint, 2010). According to Hajnal and Lewis (2003), high levels of nonparticipation at the local level significantly disadvantages different segments of the population, especially when considering the critical role citizens can play at the local level, particularly in policy making. This highlights the importance of involving youth in participatory

democracy at the local level, as it has the ability to give young people a voice, impart knowledge, as well as encourage youth involvement in political life.

While participating in traditional forms of democracy such as an election is still seen as the cornerstone of a representative democracy, Evans and Prilleltensky (2007) highlight how community youth development programmes and activities also play an instrumental role, particularly due to the fact that the well-being of youth is often dependent on their relationships and the community they reside in. They go on to define well-being as 'a positive state of affairs in which the personal, relational, and collective needs and aspirations of individuals and communities are fulfilled' (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2007:681). In the case of youth however, this involves more than just the absence of risk, but also includes a sense of support, a sense of control, of collaboration and democratic participation in decision making processes (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2007). Evans and Prilleltensky (2007:684) go on to argue that youth cannot change their level of well-being in instances where their environment remains the same or without change. In the same vein however, strategies that focus on environmental change alone end up being limited. This highlights the need to combine strategies for well-being with personal and collective change (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2007:684). For example, by promoting the collective well-being of youth through community youth development, their personal well-being or sense of empowerment will be enhanced, as well as their relational well-being to solve conflict, development of social skills and a sense of mutuality with their community, as opposed to competition (Evans and Prilleltensky, 2007).

In South Africa, there are a number of structures, policies and plans aimed at spearheading youth development. According to Mtwesi (2014:39) however, these policies often serve as mere political symbols of what can be achieved, and not necessarily what must be achieved. For example, the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA), Act Number 54 of 2008 - 'mandates the NYDA to develop an Integrated Youth Development Strategy for South Africa and initiate, design, co-ordinate, evaluate and monitor all programmes aimed at integrating the youth into the economy and society in general. The Act further instructs the Agency to promote a uniform approach by all organs of state, the private sector and non-governmental organisations, to matters relating to, or involving youth development' (Draft National Youth Policy 2014-2019:10). Yet, according to the Draft National Youth Policy 2014-2019, the NYDA, which is meant to be the main driver of youth development, no longer has the capacity to do so. In 2014, a mere 44 percent of the NYDA offices functioned at capacity (Draft National Youth Policy 2014-2019:17). This has led to calls for all levels of government to spearhead youth development at their respective levels, along with private businesses (Draft National Youth Policy 2014-2019:49). This could also indicate that community youth development initiatives on the ground may not be happening at the level they should be, potentially making the gains in this regard very modest.

The role of leadership at the local level

Local leadership plays an integral part in ensuring that citizens understand the role of local government, are not sidelined from political issues that could affect them, and are well informed about issues that occur at the local level. According to van Donk (2007), where there is effective leadership, crosscutting issues have a much better chance of being addressed.

Local elected representatives (councillors) are supposed to play a key role in making sure that the citizens in the wards they represent are a part of the design and implementation of developmental plans at the local level (Paradza, Mokwena and Richards, 2010). Not only do local representatives act as the voice of the people, by expressing the needs of the community, but also to ensure that the developmental plans that are implemented address the needs and concerns of the citizens (Paradza, Mokwena and Richards, 2010). According to the Code of Conduct for councillors, 'councillors must be accountable to local communities, as well as provide services in an effective and sustainable manner' (City of Joburg, 2007). To what extent this is done however, is not clear. Yeboah-Assiamah, Asamoah and Osei-Kojo (2014) have identified that councilors and municipalities often shift administrative responsibilities, fail to provide effective service, and lack in their engagement and interaction with citizens. While for Bhagwan (2014), government officials tasked with responding to citizens' demands disengage from the citizens, often shifting the blame, which in turn increases the frustration felt by many citizens, and further contributes to feelings of disillusionment towards local government.

In South Africa, a lack of expertise and leadership in many municipalities has resulted in severe backlogs in the delivery of services and the under-spending and maladministration of government resources (Managa, 2012). In addition, the issue of corruption remains one of the biggest challenges South Africa faces at both the national and local level of government (Newham, 2013). In 2015, as many as 200 municipal officials were arrested for issues of fraud and corruption (Mngxitama-Diko, 2016). Research studies conducted on the determinants of trust (Adetula, 2011; Richey, 2009; Chingwete, 2016) highlights how citizens often present low levels of trust and confidence in institutions of governance where corruption has been found. According to Tracey (2015), in South Africa, the lack of accountability by officials and the political elite, along with perceptions of high levels of corruption, have meant that many young people are becoming increasingly aware of the impact that issues of fraud and corruption is having on the country and on their future. This suggests that an assessment of the role that local leadership plays is an important one, particularly with regards to young peoples' participation in local governance or local government.

Contentious Politics and Social Movements

In their research, Nyalunga (2006) and Potgieter and Lutz (2014) demonstrate that there is a wide range of unconventional forms of participation that enable individuals to influence decision making and interaction, particularly at the local level. These activities they highlight, include: engagement in public demonstrations, social movements and protests, politically motivated violence and vandalism, supporting strikes and boycotts, as well as lobbying bodies such as parliamentary committees (Nyalunga, 2006; Potgieter and Lutz, 2014). As a result, a look into the literature on contentious politics is necessary, particularly in trying to understand young students' engagement in non-traditional forms of political participation, as seen in social movements such as "Fees Must Fall" and "Rhodes Must Fall".

McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007:2) define contentious politics as: 'a causally coherent domain with distinctive properties. It is causally coherent in the sense that similar cause-effect relationships apply throughout the domain. It is distinctive in the sense that some features of contentious politics appear nowhere else in social life'. A look at the literature on contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2007; Ballard, Habib and Valodia, 2006) highlights the fact that it finds expression in three main approaches: political process, rational choice and 'resource mobilization' and constructivism. Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006) outline how collectively, these approaches have provided links between 'old' movements aimed at revolutionary change, particularly around issues of freedom, liberation and independence and 'new' forms of social movements that are often seen as more radical and not necessarily challenging the structure of the state. In an attempt to understand the rise in contentious politics in America in the early 1960s, scholars of the political process approach to movements, such as McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007:7) looked at collective behaviour and the manner in which it was used to influence and get actors to respond to the struggles of the masses. In the mid-1960s however, contentious politics moved into the realm of economics and collective action, building on human and material resources and developed along distinctions of race, class, gender, ethnicity and religion (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2007; Ballard, Habib and Valodia, 2006). During the same period, rationalist orientated approaches to collective action highlighted how grievances on their own cannot explain collective action, that individual interests and motivations also played a role in whether people would take action or not (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2007:10). According to McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007:10) however, this approach fails to acknowledge instances where people take part in collective action such as marches, strikes and riots, for interests other than their own, and as a result of historical and institutional contexts. For political process theorists such as McAdam however, state actors also play a role in instances where mobilization occurs, as Giugni (2009:361) highlights in reference to McAdam (1996), political opportunity forms when four factors are evident:

- the relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system;
- the stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity;
- the presence or absence of elite allies; and
- the state's capacity and propensity for repression.

In their analysis of political opportunity, Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006) illustrate how protest cycles, formed as a result of political process, are often expanded by heightened mobilization, rapid innovations and popular acceptance of the claims made by participants. However, in instances where disillusionment, frustration and boredom set in on the part of the participants, they argue, these protests decline, and in some cases even disappear. Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006) go on to suggest that political opportunity approaches went a long way in explaining the opportunities that exists for collective action, and the different forms it can take. They argue however, that these approaches were limited in their explanation of how 'new' movements came about.

An understanding on how 'new' movements came about was brought through the constructivist approach on contentious politics and the rise of new identity movements. For McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007), scholars of new social movements such as Touraine (1981), and Melucci (1989) and Snow et al. (1986), highlight how social movements involved a new cultural code; one that took into account identity and cultural framing as important factors for mobilization to occur. Identities and framings such as women's rights and gay and lesbian movements were all used as symbols of solidarity and collective identity, and helped to better understand how collective action came about Ballard, Habib and Valodia (2006).

In a bid to bridge and synthesize these three approaches on contentious politics, McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007:18) demonstrate how the broad use of the term contentious politics fails to take into account the different mechanisms and processes that drive distinctive forms of contentious politics, such as:

- brokerage - where different groups are brought together around a common campaign;
- identity shift - which involves people who previously identified themselves as distinct, temporarily unifying under the banners of workers and victims;
- boundary formation - which employs the "us" versus "them" approach between two political actors;

- co-optation as identified by Piven and Cloward's Poor People's Movements study (1977) which demonstrates how previously excluded political actors are incorporated into positions of power;
- diffusion - where contention is spread from one site to another and finally, the repression or facilitation of contentious politics by different authorities.

Whilst 'social movements' are often underscored as forms of contentious politics, Giugni (2009) along with McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007) highlight how 'social movements' often engage in contentious politics. This, it is argued, is generally based on the fact that both acts mobilize people around interlinking repertoires, political opportunity structures and regimes (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2007:18-19). McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2007:19) go on to state however, that social movements involved 'sustained challenges to power holders in the name of a population living under the jurisdiction of those power holders, by means of concerted public displays of that population's worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment'. It includes 'an array of sustained campaigns of claim making, public performances such as marches, petitions, public meetings and public displays of unity and commitment in the form of clothing (wearing the same colours or badges) and chanting slogans, amongst others' (McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly, 2007:19). What is clear from the research on contentious politics is that, in order to understand the distinctive makeup of social movements, an understanding of the shift from conditions to mechanisms, but also an investigation of the driving factors, as well as the material structures is necessary.

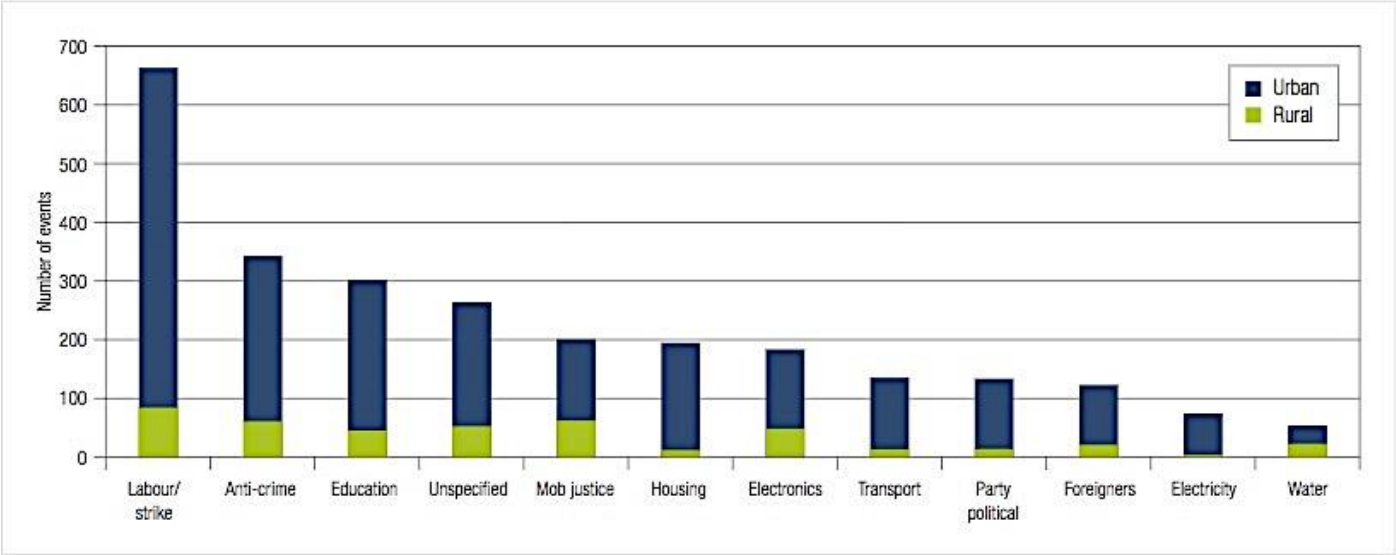
In the context of South Africa, social movements have been used as a form of resistance by the poor for decades (Ballard, 2005; Friedman, 2012). According to Friedman (2012:87-88), Trade Unions such as the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), the largest trade union in the country and longtime ally of the ANC, led some of the first forms of collective action in the country, around issues of redistribution. Friedman (2012:86) goes on to argue however, that limitations on the trade unions' ability to reach the growing number of poor people outside the formal economy, have raised questions regarding the role social movements that operate outside of the formal economy can play in, bringing about campaigns for redistribution, once led by unions.

In South Africa, the use of unconventional forms of participation, such as demonstrations, protests and social movements have become a major tool for citizens to get their voices heard, and the challenges they face addressed. According to Managa (2012), this is because government structures are blamed for the lack of service delivery in both rural and urban communities in South Africa. In 2009 and 2010 for example, South Africa experienced a significant increase in the number of service delivery protests that took place, mainly in poor urban areas and informal settlements (South African History Online, 2014). According to Akinboade, Putuma Mokwena and Kinfack (2013), Da Camara

(n.d) and Allen and Heese (2011), these service delivery protests are often linked to issues such as a lack of confidence in municipal governance, lack of access to information, poor socio-economic conditions, factional politics and corruption, and maladministration at the local level. For Cilliers and Aucoin (2016:12), the last few years has seen the use of violence as a means to communicate citizens' frustrations with issues of poor service delivery, and in an attempt to force government to respond. They argue that, in many cases, protests do not start off violently, but are in fact followed by 'protracted efforts at engaging with government, using legitimate and non-violent methods (e.g. requests for meetings, petitions, writing letters, peaceful marches, etc.)' (Cilliers and Aucoin, 2016:12).

Data collected by the Institute for Security Studies Public Violence Monitor, an interactive online portal that has been monitoring protests and public violence since 2013, illustrates how protests between January 2013 and April 2016 have been motivated around key frustrations such as inadequate labour strikes, anti-crime, education and local government service delivery, such as housing, transport, water and electricity (Figure 1) (Cilliers and Aucoin, 2016:13).

Figure 1: Public violence main grievance type by rural/urban divide: January 2013-April 2016



Research also often identifies young South Africans as the ones 'involved in, if not instigators of, protest activity' (Potgieter and Lutz, 2014; Lefko-Everette, 2012:25). While for Cilliers and Aucoin (2016:12), young males in both rural and urban areas who have poor education and live in lower socioeconomic conditions and areas, are frequently identified as the main perpetrators active in violent demonstrations and using violent means to get their frustrations across. This suggests that an understanding of young peoples' participation in protests and social movements at the local level is critical. Particularly, when considering their low levels of participation in formal democratic

processes such as elections at the local level. Understanding this will also assist us in assessing students' knowledge of local governance.

Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of existing academic literature and debates on issues of democracy, young peoples' political participation and the role that leadership and contentious politics play at the local government level in South Africa. It encompasses a wide range of debates in which scholars and researchers alike highlight how progress made in democracy over the last century is showing signs of deceleration, particularly in many African countries where political developments are seemingly challenging the theories of democracy, as well as its determinants. It highlights how factors such as the inclusivity of all social groups, civil and political liberties such as freedom of expression, as well as accountable governments and elected representatives, amongst others, all make for a good democracy.

In this chapter, liberation movements such as the ANC, with its one-party dominance are identified as showing signs of political party patronage and abuse of incumbency, all of which are tainting democracy since its introduction in 1994. It goes on to highlight how some of the challenges to democracy can be seen through electoral systems and electoral competition, where promises are made by political parties to the electorate, but are not always delivered. This suggests that factors such as political party patronage and unfulfilled promises by political parties may serve as increasing frustrations at the local level, where issues of inadequate service delivery and low levels of participation in traditionally formal democratic processes continue.

This section also demonstrates the importance of youth involvement in participatory democracy. It suggests that issues of political apathy on the part of the youth, political alienation, feelings of well-being, community youth development and a lack of trust in the political elite could be identified as potential barriers to young peoples' political participation at the local level. The debates in this chapter suggests that youth may be more interested in getting involved in social movements, demonstrations and protest activities at the local level as opposed to voting in an election. It illustrates how contentious politics and social movements are being identified as potentially more effective platforms in ensuring that the challenges faced by young people are addressed. This raises important questions about young peoples' knowledge and understanding of political systems and issues of local governance. It also suggests that young people may not be aware of available traditional platforms at the local government level, that are there for them to engage on. Last but not least, this chapter reflects on the important role that leadership plays at the local level. It highlights how inadequate leadership and a lack of expertise at the local level could be part of the reason behind poor service

delivery at the local level, suggesting once again that issues of political party patronage may play a role in citizens' perceptions of leadership at the local level.

The next chapter outlines the methodology used to conduct this research study.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed during the process of conducting this study. As indicated earlier, the aim of this research study is to understand young South African students' understanding of local government. In order to achieve this, this research study has made use of a qualitative research approach (Creswell, 2014) to analyse and gain insight on young South African students' knowledge and understanding of local government and local governance in the Johannesburg metro. This chapter's purpose is to outline the manner in which the research data was collected and analysed, the population sampled as well as the ethical considerations.

Data collection

This qualitative research study involved 56 young students in two universities and two TVET colleges in the Johannesburg metropolitan. It included 35 semi-structured in-depth, one-on-one interviews with students at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), the University of Johannesburg (UJ), the Central Johannesburg (CJ) college - Parktown campus and South West Gauteng (SWG) college - Roodepoort Campus (Table 1).

Table 1: Number of one-on-one interviews per educational institution

Institution	**University of the Witwatersrand**			**University of Johannesburg**	**Central Johannesburg College**	**South West Gauteng College**	**Total**
Race Group	Black	Indian	Coloured	Black	Black	Black	
Male	3	1	2	4	4	1	15
Female	4	0	1	7	3	5	20
Total	**7**	**1**	**3**	**11**	**7**	**6**	**35**

In addition, three focus group discussions were held at both the CJ and SWG Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) colleges, and one at the main campus of Wits University, among 21 young students between the age of 18 and 24 years (Table 2).

Table 2: Number of focus group discussions per educational institution

Institution	**University of the Witwatersrand**			**Central Johannesburg College**	**South West Gauteng College**	**Total**
Race Group	Black	White	Coloured	Black	Black	
Male	0	1	1	6	2	10
Female	1	1	4	0	5	11
Total	**1**	**2**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**21**

The selected educational institutions are all centrally located in the Johannesburg metro, and attract a wide range of young people from various backgrounds, municipalities, race groups and cultures. As a result, a wide cross section of the youth in the given age bracket in both TVET colleges and universities could be reached. Young people at universities and further education and training colleges are identified as the aspirations of society. They have the ability to provide a social, economic and political benefit to the country through their knowledge and skills acquired in institutions of higher learning. In the last few years, young people in institutions of higher learning have also played an instrumental role in movements such as "Fees Must Fall" and "Rhodes Must Fall", demonstrating their desire to get involved in the development of the country, as well as in the socio-economic challenges that often affect them directly. One would also expect these young people to have some knowledge and understanding of local government and local governance at this level, and this is what this research study aims to unpack.

Democratic participation among young people encompasses a broad range of debates on issues that either involve, affect or impact youth and their participation, or lack thereof, in democracy. In analysing young students' knowledge and understanding of local government, I was mindful of the fact that their political participation at the local level could encompass many other factors that could influence or hinder their participation. Given the nature of the study, I therefore made use of in-depth one-on-one interviews and focus group discussions in order to gain a more in-depth understanding on the complexities inherent in a topic of this nature.

In both TVET colleges and universities, the relevant research heads were approached for permission to conduct the study on each of the selected campuses. An information sheet outlining the nature of the research study, along with the questions to be asked during the focus groups and in-depth one-on-one interviews were also given to each educational institution contacted. After numerous phone calls and follow up emails to the relevant research heads, permission to conduct the research study on the campus grounds of each institution was only received from Wits University. As a result, for the University of Johannesburg and both TVET colleges, the focus of the study shifted from approaching students on the campus grounds, to approaching them as they exited each of the selected educational

institutions. This process gave the researcher an opportunity to make sure that the participant was a student at the relevant educational institution, as students would produce their student cards as they swiped out of each educational institution. Interviews were held over a period of four months from August to November 2015. This was in the midst of the student led movement "Fees Must Fall" and at the onset of election campaigning for many political parties, in the lead up to the 2016 local government elections.

At each selected educational institution, participants were approached and asked if they would be interested in taking part in a research study aimed at understanding young students' attitudes, feelings and knowledge towards local government and local governance. Participants were given an option to take part in either an in-depth one-on-one interview or a focus group discussion with other students. It was also explained to each participant that their involvement in the research study was voluntary, and they were free to opt out of the study before, during and after their initial participation. Participants were asked to verify their age, and where possible, through student cards and/or other forms of identification, so as to ensure that individuals younger than 18 were not included.

At the beginning of each in-depth, one-on-one interview and focus group session, the background and purpose of the research was explained to potential participants, and the researcher introduced. I also informed each participant about how the information will be used, and handed them a letter of informed consent as well as an information sheet, outlining the nature of the study. The letter of informed consent, as well as the information sheet was also explained verbally to the participants before they were requested to sign.

Students were asked a series of questions about their participation at the local level, perceptions of their local leaders, their engagement in local governance and social movements, and awareness of local programmes aimed at youth. Questions were open-ended, giving students an opportunity to openly engage with the topic.

In analysing the interviews and focus groups, a thematic analysis was used. Interview transcripts were reviewed and common categories were identified. Word tables were developed and the data was organised under common thematic areas. In addition, quotes were pulled out of the interview transcripts in each section in order to emphasize the points made under each thematic area. The data was also divided by institution, for example university student or TVET College student.

The focus group discussions and in-depth one-on-one interviews were conducted in English. I was aware that conducting the focus group discussions and in-depth one-on-one interviews in English only could create some bias. English is the main medium of instruction used at all of the selected

educational institutions, and one would expect that these young people are able to understand and communicate in English. Each focus group session was digitally recorded. The interviews were also transcribed verbatim and the quotations used in the findings were marginally refined and reduced.

Sampling

Convenience sampling has been used to select two universities and two TVET colleges in the Johannesburg metro, from the list of public TVET colleges provided on the Services Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) website (Services Sector Education and Training Authority, n.d.) and from a list of South African universities provided on the South African Info website (South African Info, n.d.). Respondents included male and female South African citizens that were registered and attended either of the selected educational institutions.

To allow for a broad sample of information among the specified age group, there were between six and eleven in-depth one-on-one interviews conducted at each of the four selected educational institutions. Focus groups comprised of between two to ten participants per focus group. There were 24 questions developed, based on the literature review. Questions were aimed at understanding young students' attitudes towards local government, their perceptions of local representatives and the role they play, as well as their political and civic participation at the local level.

Ethics

All participants in the study were over the age of 18 and are not identified by name in this research study. All willing participants were required to sign a consent form, before taking part in the focus group discussion or in-depth, one-on-one interview, and were given an information sheet explaining the nature and purpose of the research, as well as the risks and, or, benefits of participating, if any.

Conclusion

This study is mindful of the fact that the research findings could only speak to a portion of the youth, particularly those individuals who are enrolled in institutions of higher learning. It should also be noted that as a qualitative research project, this research study is in no way exhaustive but rather seeks to contribute context, depth and richness with regards to young people's understanding and knowledge of local government and local governance. It will also allow for a deeper insight into the complexities that young people face at the local level. The next chapter is the first of three empirical chapters presenting the findings of the research study.

Chapter 4

Students' expectations of local government

Introduction

Twenty-four years into democracy and young students are questioning whether South Africa's democracy has really improved the challenges many of them continue to face at the local level. By its very nature, local government (also known as municipal government) is meant to be the product of the community. According to the 2016 South African Customer Satisfaction Index (SAcsi) however, 'municipalities are falling dismally short of the expectations of their citizens' (Sacsi.consulta.co.za, 2016). The SAcsi Index highlights that citizens' satisfaction in Johannesburg had dropped to its lowest in three years, from 60.2 out of one hundred in 2015 to 54.7 in 2016 (Sacsi.consulta.co.za, 2016). The findings of this study confirm declining levels of satisfaction amongst young students in the Johannesburg Metropolitan.

Each interview and focus group discussion began by asking students to describe their local environment, and what their actual daily living experiences are like in their local community. The descriptions given by these young respondents of their local environment and community at the start of our discussions, paints the picture for the responses that followed throughout the rest of the interviews and focus groups. It also illustrates how young peoples' experiences in, and attitudes of their local communities have an impact on how they view local government, and participate in local governance.

According to Section 153(a) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) key to the developmental duties of municipalities is that they must 'give priority to the basic needs of the community, and to promote the social and economic development of the community.' The Constitution (Gov.za, 2017) also goes on to state that 'everyone has the right to have access to adequate housing…healthcare services, food, water and social security [and] to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well-being'.

During our discussions, it was interesting to note the differences in the way students at university, most of whom lived at home, described their local communities, as compared to their cohorts in TVET colleges. University students frequently described how safe they feel in their local communities. They often made reference to the urban areas they live in, where the garbage is collected regularly and the environment kept clean. These students were also generally quite

complacent about the communities they lived in, and often made reference to local infrastructure, such as existing parks and libraries during their discussion. For students in TVET colleges however, the picture painted was a little more somber. These students would mention how poor the communities are that they lived in. They described how the garbage was rarely collected, electricity and water not always available, and highlighted their concerns with the continued crime they observed. For these young people, the 'good' developments in their communities, such as parks and libraries, were frequently brushed off as 'too few' and 'vandalized'. Instead, their discussions and frustrations were often focused more on how unsafe they feel, and how susceptible to crime they were in their communities.

During our discussions, both TVET college and university students highlighted their concerns around drug abuse, particularly amongst young people in the community. For some students, perceptions around crime in their communities and feelings of safety were often associated with drugs and drug abuse. As one female TVET college student said, *'... there's a problem of 'Nyaope people', you will have to be home before 18h00, for fear of the Nyaope smoking people because they will rape you, they will take everything!*'.

Concerns around safety and crime in South Africa are not unique to young students, according to the 2015/16 Victims of Crime Survey (Statistics South Africa, 2016), a survey conducted across the nine provinces of South Africa in all private households and workers hostels. Despite declining levels of crime over the last five years, particularly in areas such as house robberies and theft of personal property, many South Africans still feel that violent and property related crimes are increasing (Statistics South Africa, 2016:3-6). In addition, approximately 33% of the households surveyed mentioned that they did not feel safe walking alone in parks or open areas, nor did they allow their children to play freely in their neighbourhoods (23%) (Statistics South Africa, 2016:2). The survey also goes on to highlight how, a little over 80 percent of the respondents in Gauteng held the perception that 'drugs are the reason behind the high prevalence of violent and property crime' (Statistics South Africa, 2016:20). During our discussions, it was clear early on that the feelings students had around issues of crime, safety and the cleanliness of their local community had impacted on how effective and visible they felt local government is in their communities.

Perceived levels of responsiveness and accountability at the local level

Following the advent of democracy, citizens, particularly those in rural and poor urban areas, anticipated an improved quality of life and better service delivery (Sithole and Mathonsi, 2015). According to the SAcsi 2016 results, some of the key drivers of citizen satisfaction stem from issues around clean and tidy municipal areas, good quality roads, parks and public areas, and reliable

services such as the availability of clean drinking water (Sacsi.consulta.co.za, 2016). However, twenty four years into democracy, local government is facing increased challenges to meet the rising expectations of its citizens (Sithole and Mathonsi, 2015).

Students' concerns around the visibility of local government and how unresponsive it is to the community's needs were commonplace during our discussions. They commonly held the perception that local government is 'not connecting with the people' and 'not responding to the needs of the community'. As this 20 year old, female, CJ College student explains.

> *Do I even see the local government? Do they even exist? No. They don't have contact with the people they are supposed to look after. They don't have contact with the environment around them. You say you are our local government but you know nothing about what you are governing.*

While for this university student, local government's poor visibility demonstrates its lack of interest in assisting citizens.

> *I think that the local government doesn't really respond very well. There have been cases where my parents have phoned about water. The water vault being too high, ridiculously high. Also, burst pipes and the lights going off. They haven't been that helpful in that case. And I have never seen the local government come over to try and address any issues like that*. (19 year old, female, Wits University student)

Good governance at the local level requires local government to be responsive to the needs of the community it represents, as well as to report, explain and be answerable for decisions it has made on behalf of the community (Goodgovernance.org.au, n.d.). In instances where there is a lack of responsiveness and accountability, students perceive local government to be absent from participatory spaces.

In South Africa, the glaring and widening inequalities, as well as failed promises by the state in meeting the most basic needs of the citizens, has meant that for these young students their patience for local government is running out. Persistent inequalities have a tendency to fuel discontent and feelings of an inadequate or failing state capacity. During our discussions, students would generally identify local government as a mere service delivery institution, responsible for providing basic services to communities such as water, electricity and sanitation.

I mean, I would say it [local government] provides basic services to the community. They [local government] are closer to the community so they know what the needs of the community are. [So basic services are] … lighting, water and electricity and maintaining a clean environment. (24 year old, male, Wits University)

They [local government] are supposed to provide us with services…like water, electricity and shelter. (22 year old, female, CJ College)

For these young students, local government's core competency is the delivery of basic services. During their discussions it was clear that they often failed to recognize that local government has more than just service delivery at its core. That it also has an obligation to enhance public participation in decision-making at the local level, as well as to promote not only the social but also the economic development of the community (Local Government, n.d.:19).

Is our local government doing enough? No, they are not doing enough. I think now they have just focused on eco-parks a lot. I see no need to have an eco-park when we've got an abandoned school? Children sit in open windows in winter! So, I think, rather focus on that than parks. … I think they are failing because every time they are picketing for votes, they give us so many things [promises] that they want to do. But once you empower them, they don't do any of those things. We didn't have parks until recently. So, I think it's one of their picketing games. They should act more than speaking. We need to see them in action. We need to see them do what they are in power to do. (23 year old, female, SWG College)

The dissatisfaction with the effectiveness and efficiency of local government is clearly illustrated in this 23 year old, female SWG College student's explanation. It also highlights the enormous expectation students, particularly those in TVET colleges have of local government. Students would also commonly illustrate how critical they were of the motives and drivers behind local government's actions, particularly in instances where they were visible or responsive. An example of this was evident in the way in which students would frequently mention how local government is only visible and responsive at the time of an election and during election campaigning, when they need to attract votes. Outside of this students felt that local government is doing very little, a point that will be discussed in more detail later on.

Perceived levels of knowledge, understanding and modes of communication at the local level

Jolobe (2014) indicates that protest action at the local level is often triggered by confusion, or a lack of knowledge and understanding, with regards to what constitutes a national level responsibility such

as housing, jobs and land, and what constitutes a local level responsibility. During our discussions, students would commonly mention national level responsibilities such as jobs, building schools and clinics, and providing bursaries, as the responsibility of local government. In instances where these needs were not met, local government was seen to be unresponsive and not doing enough to adhere to the demands of the community.

For an institution that has citizen participation at its core, it is crucial to make sure that citizens, and more particularly youth, have the requisite information and knowledge about local government and its roles and responsibilities. This will enable them to feel more empowered to hold elected representatives to account, ensure that their voices are heard and that they are better equipped to get involved in the planning of local government (Gaventa, 2004). As one 21 year old female UJ student said in response to a discussion around why youth do not participate at the local level, '*it's because they [youth] are not informed, they don't know where to go. They just don't know anything about community engagement.'*

In 2002, government launched the Batho Pele initiative, aimed at improving 'access to public services through increased transparency, accountability and citizen involvement in public service planning and operations' (World Bank, 2011:x). One of the key policy actions of this initiative is increased access to information and services that empower citizens. It also states that information on services should not only be provided at the point of delivery, but also that arrangements must be made for users who are far away from the point of delivery (World Bank, 2011:x). Access to information allows citizens to assess the progress made by local government in meeting the community's needs, and ultimately empowers them to hold them to account. Without adequate information, citizens have little knowledge and understanding of the progress made in certain areas, or the challenges faced in achieving them at the local level.

During our discussions, it was evident that issues of communication and the dissemination of information at the local level play an important role in hindering students' participation in local governance. As students spoke, the disconnect between local government and young students was apparent throughout their discussions around access to information at the local level. In a study conducted by Liberman, Martin and McMurry (2017:11-12) amongst 1000 South African local councillors in 21 municipalities between November 2016 and August 2017, it was found that 'local councillors do not universally or consistently access digital communications such as Facebook, Twitter and the web'. During our discussions, students commonly mentioned how disconnected and socially excluded they felt at the local level, particularly on platforms that are meant to inform them and provide them with the knowledge they need to participate at the local level. The alienation felt by these young students at the local level was also frequently perceived as a fault of local leaderships (a

point that will be discussed in more detail later on), and their failure to stimulate youth involvement in local government or in local governance. As a result, they mention that they have lost interest and would rather not participate at the local level. They highlight how existing platforms such as community meetings are mainly catered for adults, and not necessarily welcoming to the youth. This point was mentioned throughout the study and suggests that these platforms could be reinforcing the alienation and frustration felt by young people in politics.

Students commonly agreed that if local representatives want to reach and engage with the youth, they need to utilize digital communication platforms where young people frequent, such as Facebook.

> *In my community they don't really target the youth. So, if there were more platforms … to target us? Because, as I said, they usually target the senior members in the community and not the kids really. And they are still stuck with the old way of doing things. Where you need to be formal and you need to write letters and send them directly. And if you speak to them in a certain way then they don't talk to you. Youth are more technological. They like sitting on their computer and reading things there!* (23 year old, male, Wits University)

> *I think they should do something better. They should open a Facebook account where they could update us annually or every time when they have information or whenever there is a meeting.* (24 year old, male, CJ College)

> *Come to us. They should come to us, find us! … Facebook, where ever we are. We are everywhere and they should find us!* (19 year old, female, SWG College)

Students commonly agreed that local government needs to develop innovative ways like engaging them on social media platforms such as Facebook, and also went on to mention the need to create different programmes that will entice youth to get involved at the local level, such as hosting workshops and seminars for unemployed youth and developing more programmes on arts and culture.

The discussions held around access to information at the local level highlighted the class differences and inequalities that still exist between TVET college and university students, and how they access information about local government. For example, among university students it was common place to access information about local government via online platforms and through various Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as cellphones. As one 21 year old, male, UJ student said... *'as a youth, the first place is online. I go online to check [what's happening in local government and in my community].'*

In contrast, however, TVET college students would commonly mention community meetings and radio and television as their first point of reference when looking for information on local government. For these students their discussions illustrated how socially excluded they felt at the local level, and from platforms that would allow them to gain access to information about their community. They also highlighted how ineffective these platforms are, and often held the perception that they are not always informed and at times not always given the correct information at community meetings or on radio. As these two TVET college students explain.

I: *How do you access information about local government? …*

R: *… In our community we usually have meetings. The community meetings where … they share information with community members …*

I: *How effective do you think this source of information is?*

R: *They aren't very effective because sometimes you find that there is no electricity and you were not told, or there is no water and it's really affecting the community.* (21 year old, male, CJ College student)

I: *Have you and how do you access information about local government?*

R: *We don't get to access; we just listen to the news or the radio if they let us know anything. But as far as that we don't' know anything.*

I: *Do you find this way of finding out information effective? Does it help?*

R: *Not at all because sometimes they just tell us that there is going to be a water cut, but they don't specify which area? So you find that you are waiting for the water to go, but then it won't, then tomorrow [when] you are unprepared, it goes, so we are not well informed!* (23 years old, female, SWG College)

While students would commonly illustrate their awareness of different platforms to access information on, or from local government, their discussions indicate that they do not always identify with these modes of communication. What was also clear as our discussions continued is that young students, particularly those in TVET colleges, perceive local government and local representatives as self-serving, interested only in how they can benefit, and not in serving the community. This gives them little to feel hopeful about, and only fuels their skepticism with regards to local government's motives and drivers. An example of this was identified in the way in which students would commonly highlight how information on local government is often only available at the time of an election, when it benefits local government.

I: *Have you ever received any information about local government?*

R: *What kind of information?*

I: *Maybe get a pamphlet or something that tells you about the local…*

R: *Yes, I have seen that kind of information. … The more concrete information I received was on the pamphlets [they] were talking about the Johannesburg city. … It was actually during the election time, where you can go and check for the registration. … Also if you've got any concern you can go and check at the local offices.*

I: *So in regards to this are you saying you are only picking up this information around election time?*

R: *Yes. It's not like it's available at all times at our disposal. It is only available to us when they feel that it is supposed to be available to us. It is supposed to be for their good.* (21 year old, male, UJ)

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how students' experiences and attitudes about their local environment and the persistent inequalities they face has an impact on how effective they believe local government is within their community. It outlines how issues of crime, safety, poor service delivery, local government's lack of responsiveness and poor visibility leaves students, particularly those in TVET colleges, with the perception that local government is not doing enough, and that it is absent from participatory spaces. It illustrates that in instances where local government is seen as responsive and visible, students are quite critical of the motives and drivers behind it and in turn become quite cynical of the benefits of other platforms they could use to raise their voice, such as elections.

It highlights the limited knowledge young students have of local government and its roles and responsibilities, and illustrates how this has led to rising expectations of local government, not only to deliver local level responsibilities such as water, electricity, garbage removal and sanitation, but also to provide national level responsibility such as providing jobs and building schools. Students also often identified local government as a mere service delivery institution, and rarely if ever mentioned its role as the level of government closest to the people and responsible for enhancing public participation in decision making at the local level. This lack of knowledge means that these students may not be empowered enough to hold their elected representatives to account, and instead fail from participating altogether, as they do not see much hope.

It shows how class differences amongst university and TVET college students has meant that young people access information differently, which in turn has implications on how students participate at the local level and how vulnerable they are to populist movements. It illustrates how platforms and

modes of communication aimed at assisting citizens become more involved in local governance, are not necessarily targeted at the youth or involving them in any way. Students commonly indicated that, while community meetings are open to everyone in the community, they should not be seen as effective platforms that engage the youth, and as platforms that equip the youth with the knowledge and understanding necessary to participate effectively at the local level. What their responses do indicate is that more attention needs to be paid to developing and engaging youth on innovative platforms that they use to generate public talk and dialogue. As one 20 year old female, CJ College student simply put it: *when you open a business, you must first look at your target market … Then find out what's fun to do with the youth and then get [them] involved.*

Chapter 5

Students' understanding of leadership at the local level

Introduction

In South Africa, local government is one of three spheres of government; the other two are provincial and national government (Structures | Local Government Action, n.d.). Within local government there are two types of municipalities, Metropolitan municipalities which exist in the six largest cities in South Africa such as the City of Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria among others, and non-Metropolitan municipalities which include Districts and Local municipalities such as Gert Sibande and Frances Baard, both of which are District Municipalities (Structures | Local Government Action, n.d.). In each municipality there is a council made up of elected members who approve policies and by-laws, and are responsible for passing the budget for its municipality each year (Understanding Local Government, n.d.). The council is also responsible for all the development plans and service delivery in their municipal area (Understanding Local Government, n.d.).

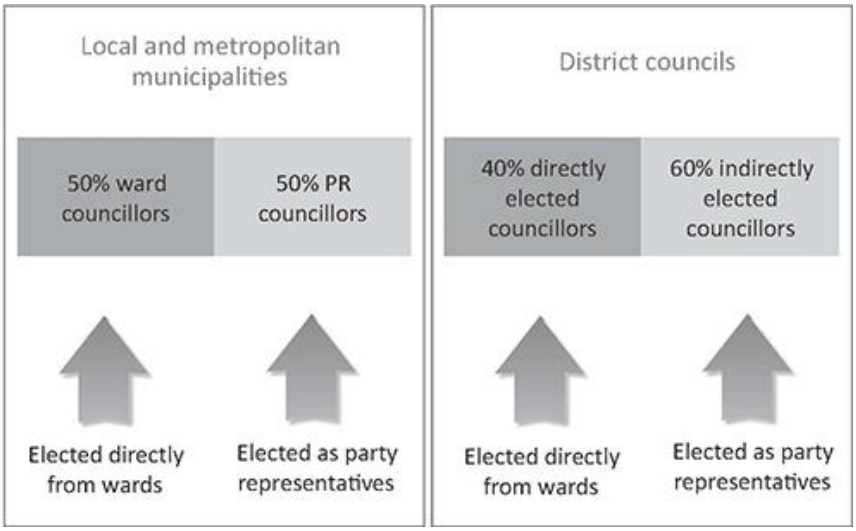
Understanding how the electoral system operates at the local level is important as it provides insight into how leaders operate at the local level as well as the interests that drive them. Electoral systems do not only serve to help shape public policy outcomes but also the behaviour and incentive structures of political actors (Menocal, n.d:3). It also provides insight into who politicians feel most accountable to and depend on to further their careers based on the election formula that is used to elect them into office (Menocal, n.d:3).

One of the most basic factors about the electoral system is that it translates the votes in an election into the seats won by political parties and candidates (Menocal, n.d:3). The electoral system must therefore include the type of election formula (plurality/majority, proportional, mixed, or other); the ballot structure (i.e. whether the voter votes for a candidate or a party and whether the voter makes a single choice or expresses a series of preferences) and the district magnitude (the number of representatives to the legislature that a particular district elects) (Menocal, n.d:3).

According to the South African Constitution, elections must use the Proportional Representation (PR) system (Gov.za, 2017). This system allows political parties to get a certain number of seats in parliament based on the percentage of votes they receive in an election. At the local level, South Africa uses a mixture of constituency-based elections and the PR system (Elections in South Africa, n.d). This means that the country is divided into wards and the citizens in each ward select an

individual as well as a political party to represent them in the local council (Elections in South Africa, n.d). In metropolitan and local councils for example, this means that half of the council seats are made up of 50 percent ward councillors who are elected by, and directly accountable to the community, and 50 percent political party representatives who are elected based on the percentage share of the votes they received in the election (Figure 2) (Elections | Local Government Action, n.d.).

Figure 2: Breakdown of elected representatives to council at the local level



At the local level, councillors and ward committees are the community's link to the council responsible for various planning and policy-making processes, as well as specific programmes or projects that are implemented at the local level (SALGA and GTZ South Africa, 2006:49). In addition, as part of their mandate, a ward councillor may establish ward committees, as a tool for communities to participate in local government (Elections | Local Government Action, n.d.) and to foster relationships between various stakeholders at the ward level, such as traditional councillors and community development workers (Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs, 2017). Ward committees are meant to be set up as soon as possible after an election, so that any interest groups and individuals in the ward can be identified and elected to be a part of the ward committee (Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs, 2017). Each ward has one committee and each committee is made up of between 10 to 15 candidates from that particular ward (Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs, 2017). Each ward committee is chaired by the ward councilor (Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs, 2017).

Ward committees play an important role in ensuring that community members are involved at the local level and are kept informed about decisions made by the council that affect their lives (Local Government, n.d.:97). The function of a ward committee includes, but is not limited to:

- Getting better participation from the community to inform council decisions.
- Make sure that there is more effective communication between the council and the community.
- Assist the ward councilor with consultation and report-back to the community.
- Advise the ward councilor on issues and development in the community.
- Representing the community on the compilation and implementation of the Integrated Development Plan. (Local Government, n.d.:96; Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs, 2017)

Students' knowledge and perceptions of local leadership

The role that leadership plays at the local level cannot be overstated. Good leadership at the local level requires leaders to be involved, inclusive and credible, and are leaders that listen to the community and address problems proactively. According to Ozor and Nwankwo (2009:64), local government provides leaders with an important platform for community development and local governance where they have the ability to encourage, influence and motivate community members to participate in, and improve their local environment. During our discussions, students were often quite firm in what they felt good leadership entailed at the local level. They frequently identified good leaders as individuals that '*come down to the level of the people or community*', people who '*put the community's needs first*' and are '*visible in the community'*. In the discussions that follow I will highlight the extent to which young students' knowledge and understanding around local government structures, as well as their ideas of what good leadership entails, accounts for their attitudes and perceptions of local leaders.

During our discussions, young students, particularly those in TVET colleges, demonstrated their awareness of local structures such as ward councillors and street committees, and even highlighted the role of local community members. However, these individuals were not the central matter of concern with regards to local performance. Instead, students frequently highlighted the role that national leadership ought to play in addressing local level service delivery. This not only demonstrates the enormous expectation students, particularly those in TVET Colleges, have of the state, but it also illustrated the lack of awareness and knowledge students commonly have of the mixed- member proportional representation that happens during a local election, which allows voters two votes, one to elect a ward councilor, and a second one to elect a political party representative, commonly known as PR Councillors. As this student demonstrates.

I: *Who is in charge of your community?*

R: *The party that is in charge is the ANC, African National Congress. And his name is Elliot, the councilor.*

I: *Do you think Elliot is playing his role in the community?*

R: *Elliot is a person who wants to stay … when we are about to have votes, that's when he's like (makes running gesture with hands to signal busy/working). Because currently they are putting in the pavements because they want votes and all that. They are only functioning when there are votes coming up.*

I: *Outside of that?*

R: *Nothing is happening.* (21 year old, male, CJ College)

Contrary to their expectations of the state and limited knowledge regarding PR and ward councillors, students in both university and TVET colleges also commonly placed significant responsibility on the community, and the idea that everyone should play a role in making sure the community is improved. Their discussions once again illustrated their need for inclusion at the local level, through their requests for street committees that will engage the youth directly on what they feel is lacking in their communities, a point which will be explored in more detail later.

I: *Who do you think is responsible for what happens in your community and for providing services to the community?*

R1: *The current government, or the current leadership in parliament are the ones responsible for everything that is lacking and everything that is there in our communities. …*

R2: *It should be the government. But sometimes as individuals we should think and not break things and always point it to the government. … As individuals, it starts with us.*

R3: *I think people who should deliver good services around its premiers and government. … government must do something. Get people to investigate our premiers, whatever. The ward councilors must do something.*

R4: *I think the person who should provide service for the community and all that…I think as the whole community, as individuals in the community, the government, the local businesses, everyone in the community should put a hand on helping the communities grow. …*

R5: *The person who I think is responsible for certain developments in our community should start where we elect a street committee who will interview us in terms of what*

is lacking in our community so that he can go out there and represent us in the local government.

R6: *As R5 has said…they have done that before. All these periods before elections they don't do anything. But three days, four days there they come and ask; what do you need, what do you not need? What is wrong, what is right? After the elections, they forget us.*

R7: *Personally I think our current leadership is failing us. …*

As the discussions progressed however, students commonly demonstrated the impact issues of visibility are having on their perceptions of leadership, and the driving factors behind when and why leaders engage them, frequently mentioning that this only happens at the time of an election. Research conducted by Booysen (2009:128-129) on service delivery protests at the local level highlights that approximately 80 percent of South Africa's metropolitan and urban population agrees that municipal and ward committee members are invisible at the local level. This illustrates that young students are not unique in their concerns around poor leadership and the visibility of leaders at the local level. It also however, highlights the important impact that local leaders have on civil protests and strike action being used as alternative forms of civic participation at the local level. Most of the students during my discussions frequently held the perception that formal democratic processes such as voting do not necessarily benefit them, but instead only benefit local leaders who they perceive are doing very little at the local level.

R2: *Yeah, they [local leaders] only come after elections…they will not come before elections.*

R3: *We only see him during election time.*

R5: *Three weeks before the elections, on the 28th of July.*

R1: *They will say they will build houses.*

I: *So outside of elections you never see them?*

All respond at once: *Ah. We don't know them. They stay in Sandton. They don't come this side.* (CJ College focus group)

Well, in 2014 they were busy putting up posters, but that was [an] election year. But last year [2015], no, [they were not visible]. Now they are visible again because [it's] the election year again and now they need us more because now they're local government [elections]. And that's why they are more visible. (21 year old, male, University of Johannesburg)

According to Lekalake (2016:9), 56 percent of young South Africans between the age of 18 and 35 years have never had any contact with any political or community leader. From the discussions I had with students in universities and TVET colleges across Johannesburg, it is clear that this statistic is not far from the reality on the ground. Students frequently mentioned that local leaders were often not visible in their communities. They commonly mentioned that they do not know who their local councilor is and what he/she does in the community. In addition, students in TVET colleges were often quite critical of where their local councillors live, illustrating the need for local leaders to be seen in the community, or to be seen as someone that lives in the community. This may indicate that these young students believe that proximity brings with it accountability. It could also indicate that these students are critical of mixed class wards and ward councillors who are identified as individuals that live in wealthier areas and do not necessarily understand the plight of the community they represent. These perceptions could lead to tension amongst these students making them more susceptible to populist movements and violence.

I: *Have you had any experiences with local government? With your local councilor?*

R1: *No. I don't know, he lives in Sandton, I live in Cullinan.*

R2: *Currently I don't know the ward councilor of Johannesburg.*

R3: *I don't know him. They said that he lives in Midrand, but then he is the councilor for Hillbrow, so it doesn't make sense to me.*

R4: *Currently we don't have one because the previous one was shot last year. We still have to select one.*

R5: *I don't know.* (CJ College, Focus group)

Throughout our discussions it was clear that students commonly knew very little of how a Metropolitan municipality such as Johannesburg operates. For example, in our focus group discussion at CJ College, one student made reference to not knowing the ward councilor of Johannesburg, a municipality that hosts as many as 270 city councillors, 135 of which are ward councillors elected to serve each of the 135 wards (Raba and Dlamini, 2016). While another student at Wits University highlighted the need for the Mayor of Johannesburg to be at the forefront of the struggle and movement and in instances where this wasn't happening, he was perceived as not being active at the local level. In addition, students commonly illustrated that for them politics at the local level were about struggle and protests, failing to recognize what governing actually means.

We always see the posters everywhere. However, [for] example the mayor of our town, as a leader, he should be in the forefront. On the streets, he should be part of the struggle … part of the movement to improve the society. As a leader, he must lead from the front. But he is not really evident. … (24 year old, male, Wits University)

Their responses also indicate that not only do young students not understand the role that local councillors should play, but they also illustrated a very limited knowledge of how they come to be elected as local leaders, and the role that they as students and citizens of the country play in electing their respective ward councillors. In a local election, metropolitan municipalities such as Johannesburg require voters to cast two separate votes on two separate ballot papers. The first vote is considered the proportional representation vote, a vote for the political party contesting the metro council, while the second vote is a vote for a ward candidate, an individual or independent candidate contesting the ward (they can also be a representative of a political party) (Etu.org.za, n.d.). According to the Constitution of South Africa, elected leaders are only required to live in the municipal area and be citizens that can vote in that area (Gov.za, 2017). They are not obligated to live in the ward in which they are elected (Gov.za, 2017). As a result, local councilors may not always be visible in specific wards and to the community. However, it is clear from the discussions, that young students, particularly those in TVET colleges, do not necessarily agree with this and that it may be increasing tension amongst this group of students. As this TVET college student explains, the only way young people can influence decision making at the local level is through mobilizing the people in their community, the ones who reside there and understand the challenges faced by the community. Once again, highlighting the need for locally based representatives.

R: *If I wanted to change something in my community?*

I: *Individually, how would you go about doing it? Or would you just leave it?*

R: *No, I think I would go to people [in my community]. Because people in my community solve my community's problems. …*

I: *Why would you do that? Do you think it's better than going to your local…?*

R: *I think it's better asking people who know something! … they can take you from here Houghton, Joburg, [to] come [and] apply to the government of Vosloorus …. And you know nothing about Vosloorus? So, I want people who know something about Vosloorus who can help you! …* (20 year old, female, CJ College)

To further demonstrate the actual disconnect between local government and young students, it is important to consider the actual level of service delivery taking place in the Johannesburg metro. Over the last five years, the Province of Gauteng which hosts the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality, City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality and Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality

as well as two District Municipalities, Sedibeng and West Rand, reportedly had the largest percentage increases in the provision of basic services to consumers (Statistics South Africa, 2015). According to the 2015 Non-Financial census of Municipalities (NFCM) released by Statistics South Africa (Stats SA), at the local level, Johannesburg had the highest increase in the number of consumers receiving free basic electricity, from 130 000 in 2011 to 427 688 in 2015 (Statistics South Africa, 2015).

In 2016, South Africa registered 3.6 million indigent/poor households who are unable to pay for certain basic services such as access to water, electricity, and sanitation and refuse removal. Of this figure, 1.7 million exist in Gauteng (Lehohla, 2017). The City of Johannesburg accounted for 109 713 of the 1.7 million indigent households (Lehohla, 2017). According to the 2016 NFCM, the number of consumers receiving services from municipalities across South Africa has continued to show a steady increase in the provision of basic services between 2015 and 2016 (Statistics South Africa, 2017). In Johannesburg for example, marginal increases were reflected in the provisions of water, sewerage and sanitation and solid waste management (Table 3) (Lehohla, 2017). These statistics do not only demonstrate that the Johannesburg metropolitan municipality is in fact fairing relatively well in delivering basic services to its consumers, but also highlights the lack of knowledge students possess about democratic governance and accountability at the local level.

Table 3: Number of consumer's receiving basic services in 2015/16

City of Johannesburg 2015/16				
	2015	**2016**	**Difference**	**Reason**
Water	978 406	982 427	4 021	Water services were expanded to areas around Soweto, Orange Farm, Turffontein and Alexandra.
Sewerage and sanitation	759 268	778 293	19 025	Sanitation services were extended to Kraaifontein and Cosmo City areas.
Solid waste management	1015 257	1016 919	1 661	Bins were provided to the following areas Kraaifontein, Cosmo City, Alexandra.

Students' eroding trust in local leaders

In 2016, young South Africans between the age of 18 and 29 made up 11.8 million (35 percent) of the eligible voting age population (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2016). Yet, in the 2016 local government election, a mere 6.3 million (53 percent) youth between the age of 18 and 29 registered to vote (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2016). In South Africa, voter registration levels amongst youth between the age of 18

and 29 remains the lowest of all age groups. It must be noted however, that low voter registration amongst young people, particularly during local elections, is not uniquely a South Africa problem. Their low levels of participation in local elections however, raise important questions about the role that ward councillors play, not only in representing the local community and in bringing about public service transformation at the local level, but also with regards to young students' attitudes towards local government and their political participation at the local level.

Students' would commonly mention how neglected and uninspired they felt by the very councillors and political party representatives that are meant to encourage their participation and representation in their communities. They frequently said they want councillors to listen to them, '*hear the voice of the people*' and '*meet our demands as a community'*. They want to be engaged at the local level and want councillors to inspire them and ask them as young people what they want to see happen in their communities.

> *My local leadership, doesn't [include] me, it doesn't inspire me to get involved. I see what's happening in the community, but I'm not inspired to go ahead and participate.* (24 year old, male, CJ College)

> *I'll use myself as an example. They [local leaders] are not inspiring us because right now I don't know, I don't have a clue. It's bad, but there is no one saying here is information so that I can crave more information.* (22 year old, female, University of Johannesburg)

During their discussions, respondents would emphasise the need for local leaders to involve the community at all times. As this young student put it, if local leaders engaged young people, they may be more interested in participating at the local level.

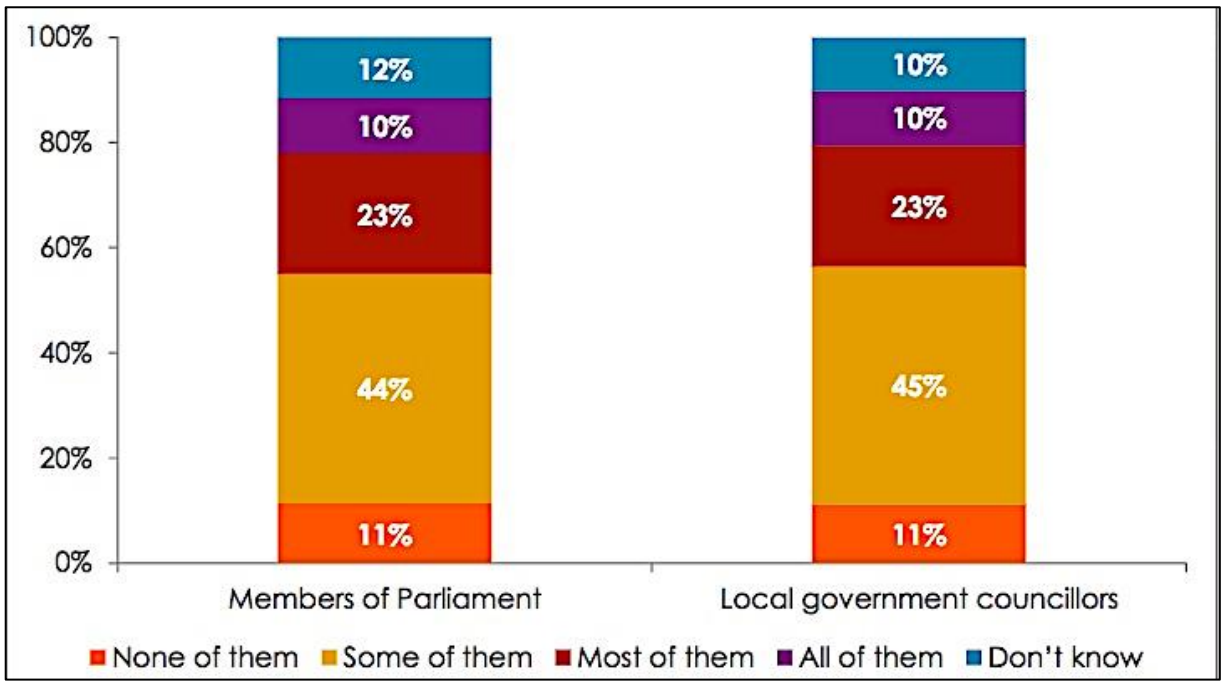
> *I mean we forever hear that we are the future generation so it's really important to talk to us. Look at me, I don't care. But if they did talk to me, I would pay some interest* ... (20 year old, female, University of Johannesburg)

According to research conducted by Chingwete (2016:1), among 2 400 adult South Africans in August and September 2015. Approximately 73 percent of the adults interviewed believe that 'most' or 'all' local government councillors are corrupt (Chingwete, 2016:9). In addition, in 2016, South Africa saw approximately 200 municipal officials arrested for issues of fraud and corruption (Mngxitama-Diko, 2016). What was clear during my discussions with students is that the costs associated with fraud and corruption at the local level often run well beyond the fiscus.

The issue of corruption in local government and among local leaders was brought up throughout the discussions. Students commonly perceived local leaders as corrupt individuals, who live in affluent urban areas, drive fancy cars and who got to where they are through corrupt means and not on merit. As one 23 year old, male university student said: *'right now the leader they chose [where I stay], I don't even like the guy. I know he's corrupt. He was campaigning, but I know his merchandise and everything that he owns, and that's not through his own work, it's through local government money.'* They illustrate how getting involved at the local level often requires you to know someone in a position of power or identify with someone prominent, outside of that there is no hope of upward social mobility. As one male student said, '*[local politics] is way too corrupt! Everything is corrupt! It's about who you know up the ladder, so for a small guy like me, I can't make it'.*

Research conducted by Afrobarometer (Aiko, Akinocho and Lekorwe, 2016:2) on the job performance of Members of Parliament (MPs) and local councillors found that, across 36 African countries surveyed, less than half of the 54 000 citizens interviewed said that they trust their MPs (48%) and local councillors (46%). In addition, respondents were also asked a question on how many MPs and local councillors they thought were involved in corruption? To which a large majority of respondents answered that at least 'some' of their MPs (44%) and local councillors (45%) are corrupt, while a third mentioned that 'most' or 'all' of their MPs and local councillors are corrupt (Figure 3) (Aiko, Akinocho and Lekorwe, 2016:9). It is therefore important to note that the perceptions of corruption and low levels of trust in local councillors held by the young students in this study are generally not much different from the more general perceptions of local representatives held by older South Africans and citizens in other African countries.

Figure 3: Perceived extent of corruption among MPs and local government councillors in 36 African countries (2014/15)



According to research conducted in the local municipality of Buffalo City in the Eastern Cape, factionalism and factional support in local structures and by local party members in poorer communities is often used to gain resources and material interests at the local level (Mukwedeya, 2015:117). In the study, Mukwedeya (2015:127) explains how.

> Previously unemployed individuals who successfully secure political office such as being a local councilor or various party leadership positions have had their material fortunes improved radically. With access to salaried jobs, tenders and the capability to distribute jobs, they have made very visible improvements in their quality of life. This display of wealth develops the conception that access to the state is guaranteed through the party and its leaders. The perceived powers to distribute jobs in municipality drive some community members to support a party and specific individuals within the party in exchange for jobs.

During our discussions, young students commonly demonstrated their dissatisfaction with local leaders throughout our discussions. They often perceived local councillors as self-interested individuals, only there to empower themselves, drive around in flashy cars and live in affluent urban areas such as Sandton. These perceptions are evident in the case of Elliot, the ANC councillor highlighted at the beginning of the chapter and others. For these students, this perceived nexus of

power, wealth and status among local leaders only served to increase feelings of distrust and perceptions of corruption at the local level. Their responses illustrated the detrimental impact low levels of trust and issues of corruption are having on the political future of South Africa, with young students mentioning how these cases only make them pull further away from participating at the local level.

> *Because of the corruption, I don't think any young or youth would want to go there [get involved in local government] or anything, because they don't set a good example for the youth. … even though they want to but [as a result of] the things that are happening now, not at all.* (23 year old, female SWG College)

> *… Where is the encouragement [for youth to take part in local government]? There is nothing [and it's] because of the corruption…do you want to be a part of that? …* (24 year old, male, Wits University)

Conclusion

This chapter began with an overview of local structures, particularly as it pertains to leadership at the local level. It demonstrates the very important role that local leaders play, not only in getting the community to better participate at the local level, but also in enticing the youth to get involved and engage at the local level. The responses illustrate that while students have an awareness of local structures, they are often not knowledgeable about what constitutes a local level responsibility nor, of the roles, responsibilities and make up of local councils. This was notably seen in their lack of knowledge on ward councillors and political party representatives, and the difference between the two at the local level, with students frequently only referring to the latter. What this chapter also indicates is that there is a clear lack of knowledge among these students, and how they understand democratic governance. They commonly illustrate how leaders are not seen as part of the struggle and only as self-serving individuals. Their discussions highlight how politics and political action is more about protests and mobilizing the community and locally based people, who understand the challenges in the community and less about governance. A common theme that comes through once again in this chapter is how isolated and excluded these students feel at the local level, and how local leaders need to engage them more. This again highlights the need for leaders to become more innovative in the way in which they engage young people at the local level. Increased engagement at the local level amongst these young students and local ward councillors could also stop the perceptions that politics are about protests.

The negative perception students associated with local councillors in this chapter often overlapped with their low levels of participation in formal democratic processes such as voting. Councillors were frequently identified as only visible at the time of an election - so why vote when that is all they are seemingly interested in? This also resulted in young students' perception that local leaders could not be trusted and that they were corrupt and self-absorbed. These sentiments were particularly true for those students in TVET colleges, who held little admiration and respect for their local leaders, and perceived them to be uninspiring. It highlights how perceptions of ward councillors as far removed individuals, who live in affluent areas and not within the community they are responsible for, could be perpetuating these students' vulnerabilities to engage in populist movement. What this chapter also clearly illustrates is the actual disconnect that exists amongst young students and local government, particularly in a metropolitan municipality such as Johannesburg, where service delivery is among the best in the country.

Chapter 6

Students' political and civic participation at the local level

Introduction

The representation and participation of marginalized groups, such as youth in formal democratic spaces such as elections, youth councils and political parties, is significantly important in ensuring an effective local democracy. In South Africa, young people are still considered marginalized as they continue to battle with limited to no access to various civil, political and social rights and opportunities that are more readily available to adults in society, such as access to employment and adequate representation in various formal democratic spaces such as community meetings and political parties. Nevertheless, this demographic group present a vital resource to local democracy, as it has the potential to play a key role in influencing decision makers and pushing for change at the local level and in their local community, especially when taking into consideration young peoples' sheer strength in numbers. This section looks at young students' political and civic engagement at the local level. It assesses their perceptions of elections and voting, and their awareness, or lack thereof, of existing youth and other civic platforms that enable youth participation in local government and local governance. It considers how students' knowledge and understanding of the political system plays a role in whether they engage at the local level, and also takes into consideration how they participate in local governance.

Academics (Potgieter and Lutz, 2014; Schoeman and Puttergill, 2007) have identified young South Africans as politically apathetic, particularly when taking into consideration their low levels of political participation in formal democratic processes such as elections, as indicated earlier on. Research conducted by Tracey (2016a) to understand the voting behaviour of young South African students between the age of 18 and 24, in both rural and urban areas across all the nine provinces of South Africa however, found that youth are growing increasingly frustrated with the challenges they face, such as high unemployment, continued crime and corruption, poor infrastructure, poor education and inequality. It goes on to state that young people are in fact not apathetic, but disillusioned with the current political landscape, which gives them little to feel hopeful about, and in turn acts as a disincentive for their participation in an election (Tracey, 2016a).

Students' perceptions on elections and voting at the local level

During my discussions with students, their disillusionment with traditional political platforms was clear. Students would commonly acknowledge the importance of formal democratic platforms such as local government elections, but frequently mentioned how doubtful they were about the effectiveness

of local elections. For these students, there is little change taking place in their local communities, so why vote? Their discussions also illustrate the impact that patronage party politics are having on students' participation in elections – with leaders often identified as merely using their votes to benefit their own political interest and growth.

> *They [local government elections] are important, like [one] hundred and ten percent important. But I'm not voting because I don't see any change. So, I don't see how my one vote is going to affect [anything]. I just see it as helping that guy on a ladder to go up and up and up while we are down here sinking and sinking. ...* (22 year old, female, University of Johannesburg*)*

> *It's not because we're ignorant per say, it's because we are trying to see what's happening ... and then we see that there's no change. The government is not doing much to help us so why should we help them back. By voting it means we're helping them to rule again for the next four years. ... We choose not to engage in local elections because of that. ...* (24 year old, male, CJ College)

According to the South African White Paper on Local Government (1998), 'municipalities need to ensure that voters are constantly made aware of the need to vote, and that they are able to vote easily and safely' (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 1998). During the discussions however, while it was clear that the students were aware of the importance of voting, the perceived inadequacy of local leadership and lack of change in their communities meant that they did not necessarily see a 'need to vote' at the local level, or see it as something that could bring about change. The views held by these young students however, are not very different from young students' perceptions of voting at the national level. In the lead up to the South African 2014 national elections, young students across South Africa also highlighted the lack of transformation as one of the main reasons behind why some youth abstain from participating in elections (Tracey, 2016a). This indicates that young students are not only disillusioned with the political future of the country at the local level, but also at a national level, which could have a detrimental impact on the country moving forward.

Students' perceptions of the power of the community and community politics

During our discussions, despite students' refusal to take part and vote in local elections, they were often more bold and celebratory as they mentioned how they participated in new areas of collective action and self-belief, often mentioning how they are getting involved in, and with their communities,

through volunteering initiatives such as cleaning up the streets in the community, helping out at orphanages and church soup kitchens, and in assisting community members.

> *I [volunteered at] the orphanage … we went there with a group of church people. I think we went there twice, it's an orphanage in Brixton. We went there and we were helping them, paint. It was on Nelson Mandela day; it was just a voluntary thing we decided to do…I'm not even part of the church.* (21 year old, male, University of Johannesburg)

> *We clean up. When the municipality does not pitch we clean up by ourselves.* (21 year old, male, SWG College)

They frequently acknowledged the important role that the community plays in improving the local environment. Their discussions however, also illustrated their pessimism and disillusionment with government. As the discussions progressed, students once again illustrate how disempowered they feel in traditional political platforms. Their discussions also signal the onset of a potential democratic deficit, where young people are actively rejecting traditional politics altogether, and instead opting for more collective community action that they perceive as far quicker and effective, as these two students explain.

> *I don't believe in government much. I believe for a community to be what it is, we are responsible. They can bring whatever…they can bring a park, they can bring a pool, but we are responsible for whatever happens in the community. I don't believe in those street committees that they place there to give us…no! If we want it to be clean, we are going to [clean] the streets. If we want kids to be safe in the street, we [need to] tell them after this time don't be here or avoid this…* (20 year old, female, CJ College)

> *I feel like we [community] also have to play a role. … I think if we just get together, speak about [the] things we need, we can make it happen …* (18 year old, female, Wits University)

During our discussions, it was clear that a critical transformation is happening, particularly in the way that these students' self-belief and need for bypassing the state is pushing them to become more action orientated in a bid to empower themselves. They spoke with conviction when they mentioned that the best way to effect change and address the challenges they face in their communities is for young people to step up to the plate, as this group of students explains.

I: *Do you think it's important for youth to be involved in Local Government and local governance?*

R1: *Yes, because that's where they are staying. It's very important.*

R2: *I think the youth have power. The youth of the previous regime had power. The youth of [today] has power, it's just that we're ignorant.*

R3: *That's why we must be involved.*

R4: *In the previous era, the youth are the ones that brought change. If the youth can, if we put the youth in charge and we learn from the old people, we can change this country, I'm telling you.* (CJ College focus group)

While for this young student, it is up to each young person individually to play a leadership role.

> *I believe that change starts with you! If there is loitering around, I'd be the one not to loiter and add to the mass. And also, I don't know, maybe go to the recreational centers and speak to whoever is there. Maybe there will be a local community meeting and then we'd address it and educate each other, like why is it wrong, why we shouldn't do it.* (22 year old, female, University of Johannesburg)

These responses demonstrate that, despite young students' disillusionment with traditional political platforms such as voting at the local level, there is a clear desire to get involved and to be included at the local level and in their communities. It also indicates some acknowledgement that what happens in their community is not only the sole responsibility of local government - that the youth also have a role to play. However, one cannot overlook nor dismiss the fact that while these young students are showing their political activism at the community level, their rejection of government and bypassing of the state, as well as their disillusionment with party politics, only serves as a trap to further disempower them.

Students' participation in public consultations

In South Africa, there are a number of different avenues for the public and councillor to raise issues with the council at the local level. These include petitions, questions sent in writing or asked during meetings, and requests tabling a problem and bringing it to the attention of officials (Local Government, n.d.:100). According to research conducted by Mattes and Richmond (2014:19) on youth political participation between 1994 and 2014, young people between the age of 18 and 25 years are more likely (32 percent) to discuss a problem in their community with other people in the community, rather than discuss the problem with community leaders (17 percent), or complain to local government officials (10 percent). During our discussions it was important to try and understand

how these young students get involved at the local level, if they have concerns and issues within their communities, do they bring it to the attention of their local leaders, and if so, how do they do this?

Students commonly agreed that it was important for young people to be involved in local government, and in local governance. During our discussions however, they often mentioned that the reason why young people do not participate at the local level is because they are unsure and unaware of how to get involved. They commonly mentioned how there are no platforms for youth to engage on, or programmes catered specifically for youth at the local level that they can participate in. They would highlight how local leaders and government are not engaging the youth at the local level, once again illustrating the disconnect that exists among these young students and local leaders/government.

> *No, they [local leaders] don't speak to us [youth]. There aren't even programs for us, for the youth, especially people who want to join the government, like the youth league. I don't think they give us the platform to do so.* (23 year old, female, SWG College)

> *I think so…but if [there are other formal youth platforms] they are not very prominent…we are not very informed about these initiatives. … I haven't seen any initiatives in order to get us, the young people to actually be involved in politics from the government side*. (18 year old, male, University of Johannesburg)

> *I've never seen that in my area. … I've never seen a council calling youth and saying we have something for all of you, maybe meetings [to] uplift you, something, there is never things like that in my community. I've never seen them.* (21 year old, male, CJ College)

Findings from the 2016 Afrobarometer study on youth political engagement in South Africa, highlight that 46 percent of youth between the age of 18 and 25 years 'attended a community meeting at least once in the previous year' (Lekalake, 2016:8). The study goes on to state that attending a community meeting is still identified as the best form of civic participation when compared to 'joining others to raise an issue' (29%) (Lekalake, 2016:8). Interestingly, during my discussions with the students, while they demonstrate their awareness of community meetings, they did not identify these as platforms that youth could engage on. They also often mentioned that these platforms were spaces designed to accommodate older adults, and that their voices were not acknowledged. Their responses illustrate the intolerance and expectations these students have at the local level, where adults are identified as dominating local platforms and leaders are seen as doing very little to get the youth

involved. It highlights their need to dominate and be in control of platforms that have been set up and are meant to encourage engagement at the local level. What it also indicates however, is that these students do not necessarily have the confidence or feel comfortable speaking up in spaces dominated by adults. As such, their discussions highlight that the exclusion young students felt in these meetings was not solely a reflection of local leaders, but also a reflection of older community members, who young students often felt difficult engaging with on that level.

> *I don't think their [local leaders] focus is basically [on] younger people really. They usually want to engage with older [people], the seniors in the community. When it comes to them engaging us [youth], they don't really engage us at all. There's nothing, no platform where we as young people engage [local leaders] or [where] our age group [can engage] with them. It's usually [targeted at] everyone. There is no platform for young people to actually talk to them.* (23 year old, male, Wits University)

Students would commonly mention how they are not taken seriously in community meetings by adults, and felt as though their participation did not matter. Seemingly, these students still hold the perception that the roles between young and old which are still embedded in the South African culture, are still being used as tools to sideline youth on the very platforms that are meant to empower them, and allow them to engage with and question adults. The role between young and old was also evident in how they often shifted any responsibility at the local level away from them and towards the elders in the community, street committees and the councillor. Their discussions illustrate how unempowered these students feel at the local level but, it also shows how this has resulted in students carrying feelings of contempt towards the elders working in their communities. As these responses illustrate.

I: *How do you or any of your family members engage with local government? If you have an issue, how would you go about engaging with local government?*

R: *We do nothing. We wait until they decide it's the right time to do something or bring the electricity back and to bring water.*

I: *So how are they going to know that there is a problem in your area if nobody …*

R: *We've got [a] street committee; the one that they [local government] placed there. If there is no electricity, she stays there, she knows that there is no electricity. So we can't still go there and say there is no electricity, while she can see that there is no electricity! There is no water, when she sees there is no water!* (20 year old, female CJ College)

I: *How would you go about changing anything in your local community?*

R: *I don't feel like I'll change anything because I don't have enough power. … it's in the councillor's hands to change the community.*

I: *But you as an individual, don't you think that you can change anything?*

R: *No.*

I: *And you don't think you can approach the local council to help you?*

R: *Ah, it doesn't help even if you approach the local councillor to help you, they don't do anything, so like…yeah. I'll just chill and not do anything.* (19 year old, female, University of Johannesburg)

I: *But have you ever engaged with local government or with your local ward councillor? Have you had any engagement at all?*

R: *Personally, I haven't. There's people that I know, obviously elderly people, our parents have engaged with [the] local municipality and the ward councillor of the community. …* (24 year old, male, Wits University)

The responses highlighted above suggest that students perceived lack of empowerment and feelings of alienation in public consultations, such as community meetings, could be contributing to their lack luster participation at the local level. What their responses also suggest is that these feelings of alienation are further feeding into the frustrations of these students who are becoming quite uncivil towards local leaders and adults in the community, as a result of their perceived ineffectiveness in resolving the challenges they face. Crucial in these responses is that students are demonstrating their need to dominate spaces, to be in control and part of the struggle to bring about change and show action at the local level. Highlighting once again how susceptible these students are to populist movements and protests at the local level.

Students' participation in demonstrations and protests

In her research, Tracey (2016a) shows that young students see other forms of public participation, such as public protests and demonstrations, as a more viable alternative to ensuring that their voices are heard and the challenges they face addressed. In addition, young students' participation at the local level is more often than not characterized in the media by public and collective violence, seen in the form of protests and social movements such as "Fees Must Fall", and "Rhodes Must Fall" (Mahr, 2016; Lancaster, 2016). The "Fees Must Fall" movement for example, illustrated perfectly how protests can be used as an effective tool to get those in authority – be it the government or university management – to agree to a 'no increase' in tuition fees in 2016, following an initial attempt to increase the costs by 10 percent in the previous year. As one 21 year old male, CJ College student

said during our discussions, '… we are taught that if you want something, you should protest. That's our system, that's what they [government] taught us…so?'.

During our discussions, students commonly illustrated how engaging in protests gives them a sense of power, as it resulted in more immediate action from government and ensures that things get done at the community level. Their distrust of traditional political platforms such as elections was evident during their discussions. Following on from their discussions throughout the study, it was clear that these students' feelings of mistrust towards leaders, government and political parties had resulted in them becoming quite cynical about democracy itself, as this student's response illustrates.

I: *Do you think voting perhaps is a way to get things sorted out in the local community?*

R: *I think it's fixed in some way. It's just maneuvered. I'm not saying it happens all the time. But it's not a hundred percent, you don't know for sure if they will consider what people are saying. I think it's only when people … protest and [are] all violent. I'm not saying it's right, that's the only way we get the government's attention. I'm not saying it's ok, I'm not saying I condone it, but hey, it works.*

I: *How else do you think young people can engage with Local Government? So outside of protests, how else can they engage with local government?*

R: *I don't think there is another way, … I really don't think there is another way because government only understands violence and that's why it's happening. So I don't think there is another way except that.* (20 year old, female, Wits University)

There were many accounts like this among the students. Whilst they acknowledged other ways of engaging local government, such as going directly to the municipality and speaking to the ward councillor or petitioning, they often felt that trying to engage with local government through those avenues was not as successful as protesting. Their discussions suggest that students have little trust in existing platforms at the local level, and highlight students' need for more transparency and accountability at the local level. Interestingly, students made little mention of the role that political parties play at the local level, once again suggesting that students aren't particularly knowledgeable about the councillors in their communities, and their role at the local level.

I: *How else do you think young people can engage with Local Government, outside of protests? Do you think there is a way they can get their message across? Or do you think that protests are the best way?*

R: *I think yes [protests are the best way]. We usually write a petition. But the problem with petitions is that they don't get to the right hands … so it leads to protesting either way.*

I: *So you feel like if they [young people] use any other method, it's not going to work?*

R: *It's not going to work because we've been using the protesting for a while now. Even our parents were using it. It's kind of in our blood now.*

I: *And you feel that that's working?*

R: *No, not really. It's damaging South Africa actually. It is damaging.* (21 year old, male, CJ College)

In 2015/16, it was the poor and working-class (predominantly black youth) that took part in and drove movements and protests such as "Rhodes Must Fall" and "Fees Must Fall" (Chetty and Knaus, 2016). This suggested that these movements were a class struggle, with both race and class lying at the heart of it all. During our discussions, while students commonly identified protests and demonstrations as the best way to get local government to act, their responses quickly highlighted the class differences that exist amongst university and TVET college students. For TVET college respondents, the "Fees Must Fall" movement illustrated perfectly how racial divides and issues of class still haunt South Africa's democracy. Their responses also illustrated the shortfalls that still exist in democratic South Africa, particularly in bridging the divide, not only between the rich and poor, but also between the poor and middle class. Shortfalls that can be seen in the sub-standard education most black South Africans still receive; the unemployment crisis that disproportionately affects youth; poor and uneven performance of public services at the local level; continued corruption at the local and national level which breeds cynicism amongst the electorate particularly the youth, and last but not least, it is in the divided society that still remains in South Africa amongst the rich and poor, the privileged and the impoverished.

During our discussions, TVET college students were very critical of the students that took part in the "Fees Must Fall" movement. They argued that these were students that could afford tertiary education, and therefore should not have been protesting for free education. Their responses highlight how modern forms of class prejudice - in this case poor black students who rely on state resources are often invisible to the perpetrators - in this case middle working-class students who are in university and considered 'privileged'.

… I feel that it's unfair that there are children that have worked hard, that have got distinctions, that are sitting at home because they don't have varsity entrance. But, we have got one of the rich classes that are there protesting, their parents can afford it! … Varsity

> *can't be free for all students. It's not going to work. The economy won't handle it. It won't work!* (23 year old, female, SWG College)

It was clear from the discussions, that while the "Fees Must Fall" movement was a hard won and welcome achievement that managed to illustrate young students' agency, it was also a reminder to some that democracy still has a long way to go in ensuring equality and social cohesion. Research conducted by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR), analysing the "Fees Must Fall" movement, illustrated similar findings among 48 students interviewed at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), Soshanguve campus, which has been characterised by as many as 28 student protests over access to basic services, financial and academic exclusion, amongst others, since 2004 (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2017:49-50). TUT respondents highlighted how protests on their campus over the years did not garner the same support as the "Fees Must Fall" movement did in historically white universities such as Wits, the University of Cape Town, Pretoria and Stellenbosch (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2017:49-50). As one non-protesting student respondent said: 'TUT Soshanguve kids are never listened to because of their perceived lower class' (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2017:49-50). During our discussions, the inequality between university and TVET college students was stark in the responses of TVET college students. For these students, it was logic that universities charge higher fees because they provide a higher quality of education. This suggests that the status quo of the apartheid era still prevails in the thinking of these TVET college students, where universities and social services catering almost exclusively to the white minority, are seen as more expensive than those catered exclusively to the black majority, because the quality provided is of a higher standard (Chetty and Knaus, 2016).

> *I disagree with that [free education]. Because I still believe good things are expensive. I'm not promoting it, but quality things are expensive. So, in order for us to get quality education, you must at least pay. Because, you can see the abuse of something, when it's free. We abuse free things. So, imagine if they had to say university is free. It will be just like our local clinics; can you see how they are? That will be university. We should know that we need to study there, and move forward. Imagine if it had to be like that.* (20 year old, female, CJ College)

Conclusion

This chapter illustrates how the marginalization of students at the local level and in areas that are meant to enhance their participation in local governance, plays an important role in their lack luster response to participating in traditional political platforms. It highlights how issues of political

patronage, where leaders are seen as self-interested and only concerned with their own political growth, serve to only push these students further away from taking part in traditional democratic processes such as voting. Their discussions highlight how the disillusionment felt by these students is not only a concern at the local level, but at national level as well, suggesting that democratic governance in the country could be entering dangerous territory, as these young students pull further away from participating in formal democratic processes. In this chapter, students' rejection and lack of trust in government and local leaders was clear, particularly in preference to participate in unconventional platforms such as volunteering and social movements and protests, as these spaces allowed for immediate action and created spectacle. This illustrated the potential democratic deficit amongst these students, where traditional platforms such as voting are viewed as less attractive, and community orientated action seen as more effective.

The lack of awareness and knowledge of community youth platforms that youth could engage on at the local level was clear amongst these students'. They mentioned that there are no platforms catered towards the youth at the local level. In addition, while they did mention and acknowledged community meetings, they did not identify these as platforms that youth could feel comfortable engaging on. Instead, community meetings were identified as an 'adult only' platform, highlighting their concerns of being sidelined on traditional local government platforms. What their discussions also show however, is the intolerance these young students possess of platforms where they are not in control and where they do not dominant, suggesting that these students are more individualistic and less open to being part of the broader political struggle.

This chapter shows how student's perceived lack of empowerment and feelings of alienation at the local level has meant that for them, social movements are being identified as the best way to get government to address the challenges that young people face. It illustrates how these platforms give students a sense of power at the local level and bring with it change and action in their communities. However, while students commonly agreed that social movements and protests were an effective form of political participation, the discussions in this chapter highlighted the impact that class differences and inequality are having on these students, particularly in their discussions around the "Fees Must Fall" movement. This could suggest that these factors may be contributing to the lack of unity amongst students, where movements such as "Fees Must Fall" and the continued battle for free tertiary education is concerned.

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This study was primarily concerned with trying to understand young students' participation in local government and local governance. The narratives reflected above have gone some way in illustrating the consistencies that exist with regards to earlier research as evident in the literature review. It demonstrates how young peoples' knowledge and understanding of local government and local governance is dependent to some extent on their understanding of democracy, on their perceptions of local leadership, on the availability and dissemination of information at the local level and on their feelings of well-being and knowledge of existing community youth development programmes. It highlights how, in cases where these factors are lacking, young people are instead ensuring that their challenges are addressed through their participation in social movements and other unconventional platforms, such as volunteering and helping out in the community.

The South African National Development Plan describes youth as a challenge that needs to be addressed, a 'hazard' that poses 'the single greatest risk to social stability' (National Planning Commission of South Africa, 2012:85). In South Africa, as well as globally, youth are continually viewed as politically apathetic, particularly when taking into consideration their low levels of political participation in formal democratic processes, such as the elections. While in the media, young students' participation at the local level is often characterised by public and collective violence, seen in the form of protests and social movements such as "Fees Must Fall", and "Rhodes Must Fall" (Mahr, 2016; Lancaster, 2016). The findings of this study suggest however, that while young students are trying to reclaim their role as agents of change, the obstacles they face in trying to participate effectively at the local level are hindering this process.

At the local level, there are a number of ways that local government ensures that citizens of South Africa are engaged on key issues and have access to information. This is done publicly through community meetings and government manuals in terms of Section 14 of the Promotion of Access to Information Act (2000) (Eservices.joburg.org.za, n.d.), as well as through other modes of communication such as TV and radio, amongst others. The findings in this study illustrate the important role that access to information as well as the effective dissemination of information at the local level, plays in ensuring that young students are more knowledgeable about the political system, as well as the roles and responsibilities of local government. During the discussions, students' limited awareness of traditional platforms that they could use to engage local government on was evident. In addition, these students did not necessarily identify these platforms as effective or transparent, in ensuring that leaders and government are held accountable. Their discussions highlight how

disempowered and alienated these students feel at the local level, particularly in their identification of community meetings as platforms that are 'adult only' spaces, and often inaccessible and unwelcoming to youth. Their responses suggest that the attitude of adults towards youth could be one of the barriers to their participation at the local level. This may also highlight the need for adults to become more accommodative and receptive of youth on platforms that they are meant to use to actively participate at the local level. Students would also mention how TV or radio are ineffective and inaccurate in the information it gives communities around issues of service delivery, and were clear about the need for local government to engage them in new and innovative ways. Their discussions suggest that in a rapidly changing world, public institutions need to become more innovative and be able to adapt to new technology, for example social media, in order to reach this evolving group of students. This could result in improved confidence on the part of students to engage at the local level, and in improved governance at the local level where issues of transparency, accountability and representation are critical for their participation in traditional democratic platforms.

The students' limited knowledge and understanding of the political system and democratic governance, particularly at the local level, was a common thread throughout this study. During their discussions around protests and social movements, these students were convinced that taking part in protests was the most effective form of political activism at the local level. Their discussions highlight how, for these students, participating in protests brings with it a sense of empowerment and immediate action that in turn, has a direct impact on their lives, as opposed to taking part in other traditional democratic platforms such as elections and community meetings at the local level, which they identified as less direct and perceived to yield little result. Throughout the research, students' frustrations and disillusionment with the political system was clear, as they outlined how ineffective traditional democratic processes such as elections are and how such platforms only serve to benefit the political elite. A review of the literature on young South Africans' participation in elections and voting at the national level indicates that students who took part in this study are not the only young people who identify voting in an election as ineffective and 'pointless' (Tracey, 2016a; (Human Sciences Research Council, 2014). This suggests that students are not only disillusioned with the political system at local level, but also at the national level, which could have detrimental consequences on the political future of the country. For example, if young students are showing signs of discouragement in both national and local level politics, turnout in elections could fall even further among this young demographic group who make up the bulk of the South African population. This in turn could raise worrying concerns regarding the legitimacy of the elected government.

The findings in this study also suggest that students are becoming increasingly aware of issues of political party patronage and clientelism at the local level. During their discussions students frequently identified local leaders as self-serving, corrupt and only active at the time of an election,

when it benefits them. Scholars writing on patronage and political clientism such as Southall and Anthony Butler, illustrate how patronage party politics not only brings into question the political leaders and brokers who mobilize voters in exchange for resources, but that it also results in the alienation of voters (Southall, 2017; Sunday Times Live, 2014). The widespread loss suffered by the ANC in the 2016 local government elections highlighted the impact that increased self-enrichment and corruption can have on voter confidence, and in instances where political parties are seen to be engaging in patronage party politics (Tracey, 2016b). This study suggests that students' eroding trust in local government and local leaders, along with their disillusionment with party politics and their need to bypass the state/anti-government sentiments, could be a sign of a different kind of politics and not necessarily the complete rejection of democratic politics. This different kind of politics can be seen in the rise of populist movements which young students are now vulnerable to, such as "Fees Must Fall". It can also be seen in their rejection of the state and in placing greater emphasis on the power of the community to get things done at the local level, often viewing this as far more effective than getting involved with local government.

This study highlights the need for an evaluation of existing youth programmes in order to assess the effectiveness of these programmes in engaging youth at the local level. Young students acknowledged the contributory role they could play at the local level in ensuring development. However, the findings of this study suggest that youth development platforms at the local level may not be reaping the benefits of these young students, this was particularly clear in their lack of awareness of youth platforms at the local level as well as through their interest to engage in protests action.

This study also highlights that youth are not a homogenous group, and as such should not be treated as one. It highlights how changing forms of democratic participation, seen in social movements such as "Fees Must Fall" and other protests at the local level, have brought to the fore issues of classism and continued socioeconomic differences amongst these students, particularly with regards to how different students, those in TVET colleges and those in universities, access information on local government and around issues of poor service delivery, which impacts on the different perceptions these students have of local government and its effectiveness at the local level.

The need to effectively involve youth at the local level and in a community's decision-making process is very important, and also well established in the literature. Not only does it allow for more efficient service delivery as communities feel more involved, but it also garners a sense of responsibility and consciousness of the environment and what they can do to change it. What is often neglected however, is that in order for young people to participate effectively in local government and local governance, they require at the very least knowledge and an understanding of local government structures. This research highlights that young students still require 'broad-based knowledge and

awareness of the roles and functions of local bodies, the opportunities and processes of community engagement, and the rights and responsibilities of participatory citizenship' (Gaventa, 2004:21).

The youth of South Africa are a powerful resource. Local government needs to acknowledge the role they can play in local development and decision making at the local level. By effectively engaging and involving young students and youth in local government and local governance, local government could go a long way to changing the perception of youth as a risk to social stability and mere beneficiaries of local government programmes and services, and more towards agents of change. The findings in this study indicate that students' lack of knowledge and understanding of the political system and democratic governance, their eroding trust in government and local leadership, along with their perceptions of local government as absent from participatory spaces serve to only increase these students' vulnerability to populist movements and protest action at the local level. It highlights the role that supportive adults can play in enabling youth involvement at the local level and suggests that in the absences of these supportive and inclusive environments that are meant to create spaces for better communication and service delivery, young people will find solace in other forms of political activism such as protests. According to Branson (1998), 'democracies are sustained by citizens who have the requisite knowledge, skills and disposition', it is therefore crucial that local government ensures that this not only happens at the national level but equally so at the local level.

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