

**Exploring the Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Young
Women's Participation in Provincial and National Elections: A
Case of the City of Johannesburg, Gauteng**

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother, Nomonde Bujela, and my mother, Simthembele Bujela.

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The following people have largely contributed to assisting me complete this research project and I would like to offer my deepest appreciation.

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DECLARATION

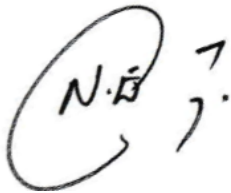
I, Fezeka Nontlantla Bujela, declare that this paper titled: *Exploring the Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Young Women's Participation in Provincial and National Elections: A Case of the City of Johannesburg, Gauteng* is work I have done on my own and all the authors I have cited have been fully acknowledged in the reference list. This dissertation has been submitted at the University of Mpumalanga as a requirement for the completion of Master of Development Studies and it has not been submitted for any examination in any other institution of higher learning.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fezeka N Bujela', written in a cursive style.

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ABSTRACT

Voter apathy remains a significant global crisis. This is because this phenomenon is highlighted in the literature as undermining democratic processes, weakening political legitimacy, and hampering effective governance. South Africa has also not been spared from voter apathy and its prevailing consequences. The literature highlights that, in South Africa, it has been evident through the decreasing voter turnout throughout the years. The 2024 elections saw the lowest voter turnout since the inaugural democratic elections in 1994, especially among women. Despite the fact that South Africa has more women than men, this demographic is performing relatively lower than their male counterparts and especially poorly in the age group 18–35 years. Accordingly, many young women are not participating in electoral processes. Therefore, this research project intended to explore the socio-economic factors that influence young women's participation in provincial and national elections. The study used the City of Johannesburg, Gauteng province, as a study area. This study employed an exploratory research design and qualitative research approach to unpack the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants. The study applied two sampling methods, namely, purposive and convenience sampling. Data were collected using interviews, with 24 participants interviewed. The participants who participated and those who did not participate in the 2024 elections were interviewed. This study found that unemployment among young women, together with other socio-economic issues, including systemic poverty, significantly influences their participation in elections. Unemployment has caused young women to change their voting behaviour. In cases when they do vote, they tend to change the party for which they vote. It is recommended that job creation is implemented, as this will increase trust in government to solve socio-economic issues and policies about gender equality should address the issues around the safety of women and children.

Keywords: Socio-economic, young women, electoral processes, participation, voter apathy

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CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

This study explored the socio-economic factors that influenced young women's participation in South Africa's provincial and national elections (also referred to in the study as general elections). Globally, the literature highlights that voter apathy has increased because the youth has expressed discontentment with governments' performance in addressing socio-economic issues (Acuña-Duarte, 2017). Apathy is understood to be where citizens who are eligible to vote decided on not exercising that right due to various reasons such as scepticism about politics and rising socio-economic concerns (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016). Globally, scholars have bemoaned what they characterise as young apathy in elections (Acuña-Duarte, 2017; Dahl, et al., 2020). This is because young people have shown a declining interest in participating in voting even though they might be politically aware of how voting contributes to addressing many socio-economic concerns (Acuña-Duarte, 2017). The literature highlights that youth participation in politics in European Union democracies is higher than in African democracies where there is higher political instability and where economic and social issues are constantly on the rise (Kitanova, 2020). This is because the reasons why young people show apathy in Europe are different to those of Africa (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016). In Europe, the youth are more concerned about the prominence of climate issues and increased global climate protests (Dressler, 2024). In Africa, however, there are issues such as high unemployment and poverty influence their decision to not participate in voting (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016). In the United States of America (USA), when Barack Obama ran for the presidency, he appealed to young people to participate in the elections. However, the youth did not respond to his call in overwhelming numbers, and the youth turnout was low as it fell from 45% to 44% (Wattenberg, 2015). Moreover, the highest recorded youth turnout rate was in 1972, with a significant 55.4% of young people who participated in voting (Statista Research Department, 2024). During the 20th presidential election of South Korea in 2022, voter turnout increased for the age group over 50 but declined for all the younger age groups (Statista, 2022).

Youth voter apathy is a global crisis, which is higher in Africa since the youth in Africa has experienced underemployment (Resnick & Casale, 2015). South Africa has also not been immune

to the issue of voter apathy, especially among young people (Abbink, 2021). For example, in May 2014, many young South Africans who were born in the post-1994 dispensation (the Born Frees) did not participate in the electoral processes in large numbers (Tshishonga, 2017). The expectation was that this youth would follow formal democratic practices such as voting to keep the culture of voting alive and participate in a democratic election (Tshishonga, 2017). However, the anticipated all-time high voter turnout with the new voters entering the space did not reach its goal, which was to have the majority of the 'born frees' (born after 1994) participate in voting (Mbete, 2024). Many young people aged 18-35 years did not exercise their right to vote (Nyarhi, 2024). After 25 years of democracy in 2019, the born frees had seen that the benefits of democracy were not reaching them fully as high unemployment (especially among young people) and poverty has continued (Liwewe, 2024). The youth is generally viewed as the future of the country, their participation in elections potentially bringing about social change while affirming the authenticity of democratic processes (Abbink, 2021). However, the lack of participation of the youth in elections does not only show apathy in politics, but also the distrust that the youth have in the competency of political leaders to solve the concerns of the youth (Patel & Graham, 2019).

Recently, in the 2024 general elections that took place in South Africa, youth participation was highly anticipated as many prevailing socio-economic issues such as unemployment are prevalent among them (Liwewe, 2024). Hence, many attempts were made to lure them to improve from the 2019 elections to change the status quo and thus their plight (Nyarhi, 2024). According to Duma (2023), the disinterest of the youth towards participating in elections should not be attributed to unawareness of politics, but rather socio-economic factors that the government has failed to deliver to the people. Furthermore, Thorne (2024) highlighted that the electoral committee of South Africa revealed that during the elections held in 2024, 13.4 million eligible citizens were not registered to vote and six million of that number were young people. This was recorded as the lowest number of young people unregistered since 1994. Although the youth to some degree participated, the women who were the marginalised and unequal had lower participation rates (UN WOMEN, 2022). For example, despite there being significantly more female voters compared to male voters, fewer than 23% of young women were registered to vote (IEC, 2024). This is particularly low given that young people make up a large portion of the population, and young women outnumber young men since women generally represent about 51% of the population (Statistics South Africa, 2021).

Consequently, the literature highlights that young women are still lagging in participation in the elections, particularly in voting (Duma, 2023). Therefore, it is from this background that the study explored the socio-economic factors that influence young women's participation in elections (Ofusori, 2021). Notably, there is a deficiency in literature as there are many studies that explore youth (both male and female) apathy in elections (Biney & Amoateng, 2019; Tshishonga, 2017). However, young women represent a significant portion of the electorate. There is relatively little literature that has explored the participation of young women in elections (Duma, 2023). Understanding their participation helps ensure that their voices and concerns are included in political discourse (Tshishonga, 2017). Exploring these gaps can enhance our comprehension of the dynamics of young women's electoral participation and offer a more holistic and effective electoral processes. As indicated in the literature, women's participation in political affairs is not only necessary but a human right that ensures sustainable development, different voices, and bias-free growth among others things (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). Drawing from the history of women being part of the electoral processes, it is worth noting that although female leadership has grown, young women are not participating in extending the voting culture (Akrofi, 2020). Many young women are not participating in electoral processes according to their large demographic in South Africa (Ofusori, 2021).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Globally, youth participation in the election remains substantially low and voter apathy among young people continues to increase (Duma, 2023; Kitanova, 2020; Sloam 2016; Cammaerts et al., 2014). Accordingly, the UNDP (2017) further highlighted that young people from 18 to 35 years participate in elections at lower rates and are dubious of being part of the membership of political parties. Similarly, Zvaita and Tshuma (2024) found that in 36 African countries, youth have the record low level of political and civic engagement in comparison to other age brackets. This is an issue because it limits their capability to directly implement policies that directly affect their future and perpetuates a pattern of disengagement and disempowerment in societal decision-making processes (Duma, 2023). South Africa has not been immune to the issue of voter apathy, especially among young people between the ages of 18-35, which is perceived to be worse among young women (Duma, 2023). For example, in 2024, women represented approximately 55.2% (30.9 million) of the South African population. Those eligible to register to vote between 18-35 years

numbered 10 201 807, yet the quantity of women who casted their vote in the 2024 elections was less than 50% (IEC, 2024). According to the IEC (2024), more women (15.2 million) registered to vote in the 2024 elections, but less than 10 million women participated in the election. This is considered low due to the high proportion of young people in the population, with young women outnumbering young men, as women constitute approximately 51% of the country's population on average (IEC, 2024). South African young women frequently find themselves as observers rather than active participants in the elections (Duma, 2023). Therefore, the low participation and voter turnout remain a challenge as they undermine the values and principles of democratic governance, which relies on the equal participation of all South Africans (Mervis et al., 2013). Furthermore, this weakens the lawfulness of the electoral process and the government itself (Akrofi, 2020). South Africa is still undergoing rebuilding and striving to create better standards of living for people and is characterised by high socio-economic issues that can ultimately influence the participation of young people in elections (State of the Nation Address, 2024). Therefore, it is from this background that the research aims to explore the socio-economic factors that influence young women's participation in elections.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The aim of this study is to explore the socio-economic factors that influence young women's participation in elections. The objectives are as follows:

- 1.3.1 To describe the economic conditions that influenced young women's participation in the 2024 elections.
- 1.3.2 To explore the implications of social factors on young women's participation in the 2024 elections.
- 1.3.3 To explore strategies and initiatives and their effectiveness in mobilising young women to participate in the election.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question formulated for this study is: How do socio-economic factors affect young women's participation in elections? The research sub-questions of this study are as follows:

- 1.4.1 What are the economic conditions that influenced young women's participation in the 2024 elections?
- 1.4.2 How did the social factor/s impact the participation of young women in the 2024 elections?
- 1.4.3 Which strategies and initiatives were effective in mobilising young women to participate in the election?

1.5 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS/TERMS

1.5.1 Youth

Youth is often identified differently worldwide. For example, in accordance with the United Nations (2013), youth have the definition that is persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years old. This is the general world classification of the youth. However, in South Africa, according to the National Youth Commission Act (1996), a young person is one whose age ranges from the ages of 14 and 35 (South African Government, 1996). As stated in the National Youth Policy, this age group encompasses diverse categories of young people, who encounter different socio-political and historical experiences (Lujabe, 2018). A 35-year-old has lived long enough to experience heightened political issues, and a 14-year-old is living in the achievements and fruits of the struggle. However, for this study, the youth is defined and described as young people with an age range from 18–35 years old because a person who is 14 cannot vote, and a 16-year-old can register to vote but will only be in the voter's roll until they turn 18 (The South African Constitution, 1996). The youth in this research project are 18–35 as this is the age range that was eligible to vote and is still categorised as the youth.

1.5.2 Political Participation

Participation takes various forms. According to Persson (2015), it is defined as a process of direct involvement of individuals in a project, programme or activity. Political participation is alternatively also defined as the voluntary act of individuals participating in decision-making,

policy formulation and voting (Picard, 2019). A person can register to vote and not follow through by casting their vote on the ballot. For this study, political participation is defined as an approach that fosters the process of how young women voted in the 2024 elections.

1.5.3 Electoral Process

This is a set of rules that guide the voting system and dictates how elections will be run, and the process of how the turnout will be handled (Hayward, 2019). According to the Helen Suzman Foundation (2019), the electoral process can be categorized into three main aspects: *the ballot structure*, which determines how citizens cast their votes and select candidates; *the district structure*, which dictates how seats are distributed across districts; and *the electoral formula*, which converts votes into allocated seats. For this study, the electoral process is defined with respect to women's participation, encompassing all the stages and mechanisms that facilitate and ensure the involvement of women in voting, from registration to participating in voting, and engaging in electoral activities. This consists of assuring that women are aware of and have access to the voter registration process. Boycotting the elections is also part of the electoral process.

1.5.4 Voter Turnout

Green and Gerber (2019) define voter turnout as the measurement of the quantity of people who voted relative to the quantity of people eligible to vote. Other scholars define voter turnout according to the aggregate turnout rate that involves looking at voter turnout across different types of elections (Geys, 2006). In this study, voter turnout will be defined within a demographic-specific turnout that is the number of young women who were eligible to vote during the 2024 elections, participated in voting. The 2024 elections are the main focus as the lowest youth turnout was recorded since the end of the apartheid regime (IEC, 2024).

1.5.5 Elections

An election is defined as a formal process where a person votes for a particular individual representing a political party for a public office (Gibbin & Webb, 2024). Van Reybrouck (2018) defines elections as formal processes through which individuals choose representatives or decide on policies, usually within a democratic system. Participants cast votes to select candidates for various positions, such as legislative, executive, or judicial roles, or to make decisions on specific issues. The outcome is then determined by majority rule or other voting systems (Cheeseman &

Klaas, 2024). For this research project, elections, in the context of young women's participation, are opportunities for this demographic to influence political and social change. Their engagement is crucial for ensuring diverse perspectives and addressing issues that affect their communities (Bridger, 2021). Active involvement can help shape policies on gender equality, education, and employment. Promoting young women's participation in elections not only enhances representation but also empowers them to fight for their rights and goals, contributing to a more inclusive and equitable democratic process (Nche, 2019).

1.6 PRELIMINARY RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research project adopted an exploratory research design because there is limited information and studies conducted that relate to young women's participation in the 2024 general elections, especially in the city of Johannesburg, Gauteng province. Therefore, adopting this design was deemed suitable to bring new insights in this area. This aligns with the argument of Creswell (2021) that the exploratory research design allows the study to attain an enhanced comprehension of an extant problem. In line with this design, an interpretivist approach was adopted. Accordingly, this paradigm holds that there exist multiple realities and that human behaviour cannot be quantified into a single reality based on probability (Creswell, 2021). This paradigm assisted the researcher in comprehending the meaning that humans assign to their actions, perceptions, and experiences. Methodologically, a qualitative research approach was employed in this project to explore and understand young women's voter apathy through non-numeric data. In nature, this method provides a rich experience and perception of the participants with regards to the phenomenon under study (Bengtsson, 2016). For sampling purposes, the study chose two methods, namely, purposive and convenience sampling. The former was used to recruit the 12 participants that participated in elections, while the latter recruited 12 participants that did not participate in elections. This sample size was determined by data saturation (see Chapter 3). Furthermore, the study adopted face-to-face in-depth interviews as a data collection method. The collected data was analysed using thematic analysis, which was employed to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data as outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017).

1.7 SUMMARY OF ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

To assure that this project is ethical, this project adhered to both university and municipal ethical procedures to make sure that participants are not endangered in any way. The university procedures included obtaining ethical clearance to make certain that the participants would be protected in the study (see Addendum G). A gatekeeper's letter that sought permission for the researcher to collect data was obtained from the City of Johannesburg municipality (see Addendum D). During the collection of the data, the researcher ensured and maintained all 7 ethical principles as outlined by Thomas Bless such as voluntary participation, non-maleficence, respect for participants, causing no harm, and ensuring confidentiality and privacy, among others (see Chapter 3). The participants were requested to inscribe a consent form that outlined the ethical principles and ensured that they were aware that at any given time they could stop the interview (see Addendum E). A translated consent form was available to the participants who preferred to be interviewed in their language (see Addendum F).

1.8 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is significant because:

- There has been a lengthy pattern of decreasing participation of young people globally and in South Africa. However, there is not much literature on the demographic of young women ranging from the ages of 18-35 years. The participation of the young people in elections has been researched by scholars such as Tshishonga (2017) and Tshifhumulo et al. (2023). However, the participation of the gender that largely populates South Africa has not been thoroughly researched.
- The theoretical framework of the study provided a base for understanding and interpreting the study's findings. By grounding the study in an established theory, it ensures that the research is aligned with existing knowledge and contributes to the broader academic discourse.
- The methodology of the study brings about information about the perceptions and experiences of the participants with electoral processes, from both the participants who voted and the ones who did not vote.
- There is not much literature that has been explored on the participation of young women in elections (Duma, 2023). It is significant to give an outlook of why young women are

not participating because their involvement in enforcing the democratic process of voting is important.

- This study serves as a point of reference for young women's participation in a form that will aid many institutions and policy and decision makers such that they might formulate better strategies that will enhance young women's participation in elections.

1.9 OUTLINE OF THE RESEARCH

Chapter 1: Orientation of the study

This chapter begins the project and provides the background to the study. It further covers the statement of the problem, aim and objectives, and the significance of the study with a brief overview of the research design and methodology.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 of this study focuses on reviewing the available literature to establish what has been studied on young women's participation in elections. Furthermore, it discusses the theoretical framework, namely, the rational choice theory (RCT), which is adopted as a theoretical lens for interpreting the emerging research findings.

Chapter 3: Research Design and Methodology

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology employed in this study. It covers the research design, approach, and paradigm, along with the methodology, which includes sampling methods and procedures, data collection techniques, and analysis methods. Additionally, the chapter discusses data quality measures and ethical considerations. Chapter 4: Data analysis, presentation, and interpretation of findings

The chapter will present the data collected and provide a thorough analysis (making sense of the data) and interpretations of the verbatim responses of the participants.

Chapter 5: Discussion of findings, conclusion and recommendations

This chapter has a summary of the findings, and a conclusion is presented. The researcher will further provide a synopsis of the key findings and the recommendations.

1.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter delved into the background of the study, the problem statement and the methodology. To carry out this study, a qualitative approach was adopted for data collection and analysis to explore and analyse the data collected from participants. Moreover, the study applied two non-probability sampling methods, whereas purposive and convenience sampling were the ones used. This study seeks to understand why young women are making the choice to show apathy towards elections and what the contributing socio-economic factors are that contribute to their participation in elections. The subsequent chapter will unpack the literature review and the theoretical framework that underpins the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter established the fundamental base for this research outlining the introduction, background and motivation behind the study. It continued to discuss the objectives and the research questions that guide the study. Therefore, this chapter discusses the theoretical framework and reviews the available literature that explores key themes related to the socio-economic factors that contribute to young women's participation in general elections. This chapter starts by discussing the theoretical framework, namely the RCT, which serves as a relevant framework for this study. Thereafter, this chapter examines the studies on women's participation in elections beginning with the history related to their participation and other themes such as pre and post-1994, looking at various socio-economic factors such as unemployment, and unfulfilled promises by politicians among other factors. It further discusses media representation and access to information and institutional barriers and support systems. Lastly, a chapter summary will be presented, which covers the main argument raised throughout the chapter

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section examines the theoretical framework that is used as a theory for interpretation of the findings, namely the RCT. This section further discusses why the chosen theory is the blueprint of this study and how it guides the study.

2.2.1 Rational Choice Theory (RCT)

The theory that underpins this research project is RCT, also known as the optimal choice theory (Ganti, 2024). This theory was first propounded by Adam Smith, who argued in his seminal work titled *The Wealth of Nations* that decision-makers are rational thinkers and that economic behaviour is motivated by self-interest (Hodgson, 2012). It has its origins in classical economics, specifically the literature of Adam Smith and Jeremy Bentham (Young, 2016). During the 18th century, Smith presented the idea of 'the invisible hand' that explained how individuals who exercised self-interest unwittingly contributed to the greater good of society (Narveson, 2018). Bentham further made the concept formal by creating the utility theory that explained that people

always seek to increase pleasure and decrease pain (Schofield, 2015). The utilitarian foundation created the base for modern economic theory (Narveson, 2018). In the mid-20th century, the RCT was formalised as a distinct theoretical framework through the work of John von Neuman and Oskar Morgenstern in the theory of games and economic behaviour written in 1944 (Colman, 2016). Their evolving work in game theory gave the mathematical foundation for comprehending strategic interactions among individuals, a critical development in the RCT (Kyriakidis, 2018). RCT gained traction with the increase of neoclassical economics which emphasised the rationality of individuals (Hodgson, 2012). Between the 1950s and 1960s, Gary Becker applied RCT beyond economics, applying it to the analysis of social behaviour, criminology, and family dynamics (Kebede, 2014).

This theory has also been used thoroughly in multiple disciplines such as economics, sociology and psychology to delineate human resolutions and actions (Tshifhumulo et al, 2023). Accordingly, this theory postulates that people make decisions by weighing their options and choosing the one that increases their utility or satisfaction (Young, 2016). Furthermore, it is assumed that a rational thinker is an individual who is aware of their choices and will make an optimal decision. However, this is not always the case as Hodgson (2012) argued that human behaviour is not linear, and it is the environment that people live in that dictates the choices they make. Thus, this theory suggests that individuals select options that maximise self-interest while bearing in mind the benefit of that option (Cornish & Clarke, 2017). Accordingly, the RCT is about how humans will assess the choices available to them and then choose the one that will best lead them to prosperity (Young, 2016). According to this theory, individuals or people's actions are based on self-interest and are self-concentrated, therefore they will weigh the cost and benefit of their most viable option based on certain consistency (Opp, 2019). Furthermore, it explains how people reason with the choices they make, as they will try to consistently make their lives better and optimise their advantage (Cornish & Clarke, 2017). This supports the notion that the choices that people make are well-thought and not random as they want to maximise the ability to make the choice that is going to best benefit them (Hustedde, 2014).

The components of the RCT include:

- *Rationality*, where individuals are assumed to act rationally as they have clear preferences and choose the option that maximises their satisfaction (Young, 2016).
- *Self-interest*, where individuals make their choices based on their personal benefit and how their actions will make them gain more (Opp, 2019).
- *Optimisation*, where people weigh all their options and after careful consideration select the one that offers the highest return (Cornish & Clarke, 2017).
- *Full information*: the theory assumes that individuals have access to all relevant information about their choices and outcomes (Young, 2016).
- *Stable preferences*, where it is assumed that preferences are constant and under the same conditions in future, an individual will choose the same choices (Cornish & Clarke, 2017).

Sociologists and political scientists have adopted RCT as a theory to analyse voting behaviour, collective action and institutional design (Hustedde, 2014). In political science, the theory has been used to comprehend the reason behind why people may choose not to vote when the personal cost outweighs the perceived benefit of the outcome (Roskin, 2024). Economists have applied RCT to interpret market behaviour, consumer choice, and the allocation of resources (Kyriakidis, 2018). Behavioural economists have questioned some of the core components of RCT by noting that people do not act rationally all the time, emphasising the impact of psychological and emotional factors in decision-making (Young, 2016). Regardless of its disadvantages, RCT is still an influential theory for assessing human actions across a wide range of disciplines, and it offers a precise understanding of how people rationalise in complex environments (Opp, 2019).

In relation to this study, this theory proposes that young women may find it beneficial to vote due to their potential influence on policy formulation. However, they might hesitate if they believe the time required to vote outweighs the impact of their vote, especially if they feel their vote does not significantly contribute to change. They can be led to believe that policies that may benefit their interest will be adopted regardless of their participation or that the political system ignores their issues, thus decreasing their incentive to vote. Moreover, young women may focus their attention on immediate personal benefits such as furthering their education or career opportunities that they weigh as having a more direct personal impact on their lives. By expressing voter apathy, young women may think they are saving time for more distinct and tangible rewards. This aligns with the

theory that underpins this research project as it suggests that individuals will abstain from actions that they view as having low personal utility (Ganti, 2024). Therefore, in this manner, voter apathy appears to be beneficial to young women as it allows them to assign resources and time to activities they believe as more urgently valuable. This especially holds if they perceive the electoral system as inadequate and ineffective in changing their standards of living. Therefore, this study seeks to understand why the choice to not participate is believed to be the best-suited option after weighing all the other options.

2.3 CONCEPTUALISATION OF LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses and conceptualises the literature review related to the participation and non-participation of women in the elections. There are different themes that will be discussed in this section, such as the history of women's participation in elections, a global outlook of women's participation, and socio-economic factors that influence their participation, among others.

2.3.1 History of Women's Participation in Elections

Elections have been an integral part of democracy globally and are perceived in the literature as a culture that ensures that the voices and interests of all people of all demographics are heard and that everyone can choose their own leader (Adams, 2014). This tradition has been an important mechanism for strengthening citizen participation in political affairs, mainly in democratic countries such as Ghana, Zambia and South Africa. Accordingly, the history of democratic voting has its roots in the USA in 1776, when voting laws dramatically changed (Holland, 2017). Although voting was already in motion, women were only allowed to exercise this right in 1920 (Kennedy, 2021). It is only after there was a women's revolution that women were considered worthy to be heard in politics (Adams, 2014). The right to vote has been a core element of feminism with many women standing tall for political rights and to have a voice in governance and political affairs that affect their lives (Arat, 2015). Women's suffrage revolutions started in the early 19th century where activists influenced their inclusion in the political process (Holland, 2017). The Equal Franchise Act of 1928 changed voting in the United Kingdom as young women over the age of 21 now had the same voting rights as men (Takayanagi, 2018). The last country in Europe to allow women to vote was Liechtenstein. After the first referendum in 1971 that was rejected, it took another decade. In 1984, women were finally allowed to vote (Gesley, 2021).

New Zealand was the first independent country to grant women suffrage in 1893 (Pickles, 2019). The victory was a result of Kate Sheppard, who led campaigns that were central to women's views being important in creating equal communities (Britannica, 2023). In the USA, the fight for suffrage began with the Seneca falls convention in 1848 where women such as Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony advocated for women's right to vote (Holland, 2017). After decades of activism, the 19th Amendment was approved in 1920, allowing American women the right to vote (Bolt, 2014). However, it is substantial to note that many women of colour, particularly African American women in the Southern states, were effectively disenfranchised until the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s (American Experience, 2020). In Europe, Finland became the first country to grant women full political rights in 1906, including both the right to vote and to run for office (Lovenduski & Hills, 2018). In France, women gained suffrage relatively late, in 1944, following the end of World War II, which had a significant impact on accelerating women's rights in many countries (Harper, 2024). Globally, countries have given women suffrage at different times because of extreme activism (Arat, 2015). In Asia, Japan only allowed women to vote in 1946 after World War 2, while in India, voting rights were given after its independence in 1947 (Lovenduski & Hills, 2018). Many African countries received their independence in the mid-20th century and the rights to vote were given after this period. Ghana, for example, gave women suffrage in 1954 (United Nations, 2023). Furthermore, in the Middle East, women's suffrage came much later as they only got to vote for the first time in the municipal elections in 2015 (BBC, 2015). The number of women who were registered to vote was 130,000 and their male counterpart was 1.35 million (BBC, 2015).

Today, women's participation in elections has significantly increased worldwide, with women constituting a growing percentage of the electorate (Bridger, 2021). However, despite legal emancipation, challenges continue, and women are still represented in minority in political leadership roles in many countries, and societal barriers such as gender discrimination, lack of education, and limited access to resources continue to affect their participation (Duma, 2023). Throughout the whole of Africa, only one country is at the forefront in the quantity of women's representation in parliament (Burnet, 2019). Rwanda has over 60% of women who occupy parliamentary seats, showcasing a positive trend as in 2003 it was just 48% (Dyvik, 2024). Although this is contrary in the USA, more young women can be motivated to vote if they have role models (CAWP, 2019). Women still constitute less than 30% of Congress, although their influence is gradually increasing (Schaeffer, 2023). Overall, while women's legal right to vote is

well established in most parts of the world, efforts are ongoing to ensure equal participation in practice, particularly in areas of political leadership and decision-making (United Nations, 2018).

Globally, women's participation in elections has been an important gauge of gender equality and democracy. It is worth noting that while women's participation has significantly increased with suffrage, challenges remain in many parts of the world. Sweden is usually used as the prime example of a country with gender equality in political participation (Dyvik, 2024). In 2021, women made up 46.1% of parliament based on a foundation of strong legal frameworks promoting equality (Dyvik, 2024). Sweden's political culture promotes gender equality as it enforces parties to implement quotas and encourage women to participate in elections. This results in a higher voter turnout. The latest recorded was 84.21%, and they have more young people participate in voting (Sweden History, 2024). Additionally, social policies such as parental leave and affordable childcare facilitate women's electoral participation, underscoring the interplay between social welfare and political engagement (Sweden History, 2024). In the USA, women's participation in elections has seen notable fluctuations (Center For American Women And Politics (CAWP), 2023). Women who participated in voting during the 2020 elections accounted for 63% of the electorate (O'Neill, 2024). Factors influencing participation include education levels, economic independence, and grassroots movements advocating for women's rights (Casero-Ripollés, 2023). In Russia, women's political representation has been incongruous, with women holding about 16.7% of seats in the State Duma as of 2023 (Statista Research Department, 2024). Despite a constitutional provision for gender equality, cultural norms and a lack of targeted policies have hindered progress, the political landscape is characterised by limited space for political expression, making it difficult for women to engage fully (Rocha, 2015).

Societal attitudes and traditional gender roles still pose significant barriers in Ghana. Women's participation in voting is influenced by economic empowerment initiatives and advocacy from civil society organisations, which work to raise awareness and encourage female electoral participation (Tagoe & Abakah, 2015). Tagoe & Abakah further suggest that women in Ghana should be taught about the electoral system so that they can easily participate in voting. The voting power of women in Pakistan is still inferior to that of men (Cheema et al., 2019). The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) approximates that there was an 11 million difference in votes between men and women in the 2013 general elections and the gap has since widened. In Pakistan, fewer women are registering to vote despite their rising educational levels (Duma, 2023). It was

found by Lekalake and Gyimah-Boadi (2016) that although there are fewer women who participate in voting and protests in contrast to men, young women's participation still falls behind their male counterparts. A major factor is political disillusionment, as many young women believe the political system fails to represent their interests or that their vote will not result in significant change. These systemic barriers often make it harder for young women to participate in voting, in contrast to men, who may encounter fewer challenges in accessing the political process.

2.3.2 Women's Participation in the Elections in Africa

One should applaud the widespread support of women's empowerment and gender equality in Africa; however, it is still a problem for young women to partake in electoral systems compared to men (Duma, 2023). Voting is a system whereby gender is not a factor that dictates involvement. However, in a country where there are more women than men, it is concerning how there is an alarming numeral quantity of women who are not participating in keeping the democratic culture alive. Mwatha et al. (2013) alluded to the fact that young women are scarce in key leadership positions, although they constitute the larger population of political parties. During the 2010 elections in Ghana, fewer women participated in the district elections (Tagoe & Abakah, 2015). Although women are often at the forefront and represent a significant portion of membership in political structures, their leadership skills are not adequately reflected in leadership positions (Tagoe & Abakah, 2015). Ushe (2019) found that the 30% female representation that was advocated by the Beijing Platform for Action, which was advised for Nigeria, has not materialised. Women in Nigeria are disadvantaged because of their age and gender and the result of this is underrepresentation in political participation (Nche, 2019). However, women were put in one group, hence there was no specific data on the participation of young women. Mattes and Richmond (2015) found that young people demonstrate significantly less engagement in local politics and are less likely to make contact with elected representatives.

Although they participate equally in other election-related activities such as attending rallies, working for political parties, and following campaign events, young individuals exhibit notably lower participation rates when it comes to voting in national elections (Mattes & Richmond, 2015). Women's involvement in politics and voting in Africa has changed much in the last few decades, although there are still some hurdles. Women were, in general, not fully involved in politics in Africa because of the colonial heritage, the culture that is still largely male-oriented and the

restrictions that come with insufficient education and resources (Nielsen, 2020). However, development has been evident since the mid-twentieth century in many African countries in the aspect of women being active in politics and elections, mostly after liberation struggles and after new constitutions are formed (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). It is also known that there are countries in Africa which are among the highest globally in regards to the percentage of women in power. In Rwanda, women constitute over 60% of the country's parliament – the highest in any country in the world. This has been made possible by the introduction of gender injunctions and policies in favour of women and the advancement of women through political structures (Warner, 2016). In many African nations, such as Senegal, Namibia and Ethiopia, such gender quotas have been embraced and have enhanced gender equity in politics (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016). These initiatives are also critical towards ensuring more women are involved in critical policy issues such as education, healthcare, and violence against women, etc.

However, there is still extensive work to be done in empowering African women. Nonetheless, there are more and more African women forming, through informal movements, civil societies or feminist groups, for a stronger voice and to fight against structures of inequality (Cornwall, 2016). Their rising impact is altering the polity by advocating for inclusiveness, equality and justice all over the region (Hanmer & Klugman, 2016). Several determinants, ranging from social, political to individual, target women in elections. Women are willing to cast their votes when they perceive policies impacting on gender, sex, health, reproduction, education or any other policy in a sensitive manner to women (Cornwall, 2016). More education and more political information make women more politically active as they learn the relationship between governance, policies, and their lives (Akrofi, 2020). The social movements, feminism, and all the efforts to widen women's representation on top of the embraced political activism, have also enlarged women's political activity (Nche, 2019). Despite those circumstances, however, women have encountered various barriers to voting. Among women, political apathy can be a strong predictor, with some women thinking that political institutions are not responsive enough to women's interests or that women are not likely to affect the changes through a vote.

2.3.3 Women's Participation in the Elections in South Africa

2.3.3.1 Young Women's Participation in Elections in South Africa Before 1994

Apart from being backwards because of oppression, the restrictions on young women regarding their participation in elections in South Africa before 1994 can be blamed on the apartheid policies that allowed no voting by the majority Black people, African women included (Clark & Worger, 2016). The apartheid regime was oppressive to blacks in centralising white supremacy in governance and all suffrage was limited to whites only (Lipton, 2014). Even white women had championed the war against being out of the voting system after a radical movement against the white government. The oppression of women by men was caused by societal expectations of the political system that silenced women's political engagement (Deegan, 2014). However, more politically suffocating was racism, economic construction and legal discrimination against black women (Deegan, 2014). For the younger women, their political articulations were particularly silenced as they were doubly disadvantaged by the system, racially and as women (Clark & Worger, 2016). Events such as the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings in Pretoria led by women such as Lilian Ngoyi and Helen Joseph were a step forward in the quest for equality (Sisulu, 2019). Even if feminine votes were not allowed, many young women came in numbers against the undesired government such as the pass legislation for blacks, especially women (Sisulu, 2019). Even though they were shut out of the electoral process, young women engaged in political struggles through underground movements and such organisations as the ANC Women's League.

2.4 OVERVIEW OF GENERAL ELECTIONS POST 1994

In South Africa, the year 1994 was the year of transformation and the rebirth of a new constitution that gave everyone equal rights regardless of their demographic (Clark & Worger, 2016). The voter turnout of South Africa was very high as people had hope that apartheid could be a thing of the past (Schulz-Herzenberg, 2019). The next election of 1999 was the year of acclimation as people got used to the new laws and policies that were going to change their lives for the better (South African History, 2014). During this period, many people were still hopeful that under the new administration and policies, many things would change from the laws of apartheid. The elections of 2004 saw an increase in the decrease of cultural constraints that limited women's participation in elections as more women were elected to parliament (Newman & Lannoy, 2014). Furthermore, the election of 2010 saw a large increase in protests as living costs increased and violence against

women was on the rise (Biswas et al., 2014). The 2019 South African National and Provincial elections witnessed a low turnout among young voters, with only 15.4% casting their votes (IEC, 2019), and less than 20% of young women exercised their voting rights during this period. The municipal elections of 2021 in South Africa further underscored the pattern of low and decreasing voter turnout among young and first-time voters (Bekker & Runciman, 2022). Despite nearly 1.8 million eligible 18 to 19-year-olds for the 2021 local election, a staggering 90% of them did not register (Bekker & Runciman, 2022). Furthermore, less than 20% of individuals aged 20 to 35 took steps to register, a striking contrast to the over 90% registration rate among those over 40 (Bekker & Runciman, 2022). In February 2019, it was announced that the elections would be held on the 8th of May 2019 (South African Government, 2019). This was a highly anticipated election as the youth born after the apartheid regime would be voting for the first time (Patel & Graham, 2019). This would mean that the voter's roll would increase. The opposite was witnessed, and this election had the lowest voter turnout since 1994. Women's voter turnout was even lower than the men's. As there were more women, it was expected that the percentage would be lower, however, more women did not participate in the 2019 election. Ryabchuk (2016) and Okafor et al. (2022) suggested that not voting is not only a sign of voter apathy but a protest regarding the inability of electoral politics to alter the status quo.

The women might be registered but people of all ages have decreased participation in voting. Beregovskiy (2019, pp. 5–9) argued that the USA has experienced the lowest voter turnout out of all democracies. More and more people are showing less interest in voting processes. This is happening rapidly in democratic countries that have been freed in the last thirty years. Indeed, voter apathy is a crisis globally (Tshifhumulo et al., 2023). It is a global crisis because voting is a system that is inclusive and democratic, people can choose who they prefer their leader to be. As such, if fewer people are voting, states become less democratic. Many believe that if they do not vote they lose the ability to complain about their issues to the government (Sherif, 2022). First world countries have allowed for women to participate in elections prior to developing countries, however, voter apathy is prevalent worldwide (Adams, 2014). The African continent has also experienced low voter participation, which has had a notable impact. Scholars such as Madubuegwu et al. (2020) highlighted those emerging democracies in Africa face challenges such as low voter turnout and apathy among voters.

2.4.1 Young Women's Participation in Elections: Post 1994

Young Women's Participation in Elections 1994–1999

The years 1994-1999 signified a remarkable defining moment for the participation of young women in elections in South Africa (Aeby, 2018). The elections of 1994 represented the eradication of apartheid and the start of democracy in which women of all races voted in the first democratic elections (Aeby, 2018). This period represented a time when the political environment was undergoing intense change, including replacing the constitution with a new one that protected the rights of women (South African Government, 2015). Many young women were eager to be involved in voting and influencing the country's future, especially those belonging to the minority races, who had never voted before (Vincent, 1999). All women were excited to participate in voting as it was opening a door to new rights that included them. It was also a period where young women were beginning to engage more actively in elections primarily for important causes such as education, healthcare, and employment, all of which formed the cornerstones of the post-apartheid political order (South African Government, 2015). Several young women were also spurred by the presence of influential women in politics such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Cheryl Carolus, who encouraged the engagement of women in governance (Daniels, 2017). Despite the enthusiasm, there were still sociocultural and economic challenges such as poverty, lack of education, and political factors that hindered the full participation of young women (Vincent, 1999). However, many had a lot of faith that the new ability to vote could assist with improving the socio-economic issues that were a result of apartheid.

Young Women's Electoral Participation in South Africa, 1999–2004

Between the years of 1999-2004, young women's election participation in South Africa started to level, with deeper democratic practices being entrenched within the society (South African History, 2016). Deconstructing the meaning of this statement, during this period many young women who were born towards the end of apartheid were coming of age and began voting (Bridger, 2021). Young women's focus shifted towards fighting against social and economic inequalities such as education, health care, and work opportunities. Gender issues became more visible in politics and legislation, for example in the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act of 2000. This act used policy tools targeting gender inequalities and assisted in putting young women on the political platform (South African Government, 2009). Still, young women's voting

behaviour in this period was shaped by the remnants of apartheid imbalances (Newman & Lannoy, 2014). Young women from low-income rural areas often face significant barriers in accessing political information and understanding how to exercise their rights. As is often the case in a society where there is significant Gender Based Violence and radical cultural demarcation, such young women's political participation was less visible (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2016). Contrary to this situation was the gradual uptake of the gender quotas by political parties such as ANC, which brought in an increased number of women into parliament. This inspired many young women to become more politically engaged and to see politics as a space where they could advocate for their rights (South African History, 2016).

Young Women's Participation in Elections, 2009–2014

From 2009 to 2014, young women's elections in South Africa underwent a transformation as voters embraced social media and technological advances (Biswas et al. 2014). This new form of activism has enabled them to coordinate and disseminate information on a wider platform, which addressed issues such as gender violence, unemployment, and education among others (Biswas et al. 2014). Trends such as #EndRapeCulture and student protests against the high tuition fees in institutions of higher learning such as the #FeeMustFall movement, engaged young women in political activism. This opened up new avenues of participation apart from just voting (Mlaba, 2015). The 2014 elections saw a number of women voting motivated by the levels of discontent that had been reached with respect to post-apartheid South African transformation and inequality (Johnston, 2015). Many young women focused on issues of economics, further education and job prospects in politics, especially in big cities (Tracey-Temba, 2014). At the same time, after the young voters turned away from the ruling political parties, there was a general disenchantment with these established parties, as they believed that the parties failed to address the crucial factors affecting their lives (Mattes & Richmond, 2015). Youth apathy was very high despite the expectation that born frees would vote (Tshishonga, 2017). Many young women chose apathy as they felt the government was failing to champion their issues. As a result, the lowest voter turnout was recorded since democracy (Masungwini, 2020).

Young Women's Participation in Elections in 2019–2024

Youth participation in elections further declined in 2024 as more young people eligible to vote chose not to (O'Regan, 2024). However, continuous low turnout rates among young people, including young women, were evident mainly because of a widespread feeling of disenchantment and feelings of consumptive politics (Nyarhi, 2024). While some of the young women occupied this space, for others they still have the old patriarchal image with male leaders who are not capable of solving the problems that the youth face (Nyarhi, 2024). Still, the young women have remained active in elections and politics in general especially by demanding accountability from politicians using social networks (Khumalo, 2024). The literature suggests that young women do not vote for a number of reasons. Some of these factors include socio-economic barriers, cultural norms, political disillusionment, and lack of access to information (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2022). These challenges are adapted in this narrative and many more are also less emphasised to look into equitable solutions for the greater population of young women in terms of the focus on elections and whether they can be active voters. Although South Africa has had equality in top the 5 political parties, none of the political parties in 2024 elections had a female presidential candidate (Bebington, 2024). This could have increased voter turnout amongst young women in South Africa.

Overall, election trends have changed since the first election, with voter turnout initially being the highest and then decreasing to the lowest in the most recent election. The first election was full of hopeful voters who wanted to be free from apartheid and elect a president that will be just to all. Many young women were participating in this election with excitement that the future will be brighter as they could access more than Bantu education. In the second election after 1994, Gender issues were recognised as unfair under the law and steps to rectify this injustice were taken. In societies where gender-based violence (GBV) was accepted, these incidences decreased. Young women born towards the end of apartheid started voting. During the third election, youth voter turnout started to decrease as protests arose from the high cost of tertiary fees and the promises of the end of the apartheid regime still did not materialise. In the election of 2019, youth voter turnout further decreased. Now opposition parties increase while the ruling party loses support. Socio-economic issues are increasing, and the standards of living are decreasing as youth unemployment and poverty increase. In the last election of 2024, young women showed extreme apathy towards the elections, recording the lowest turnout since 1994. The economy has deteriorated since the

COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, some businesses have not recovered, and this caused unemployment to increase.

2.5 FACTORS INFLUENCING YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTIONS

2.5.1 Socio-Economic Factors

Socio-economic status plays a significant role in shaping youth participation in elections as it determines whether a young person will participate or not (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017). For example, Ahmad (2015) suggested that youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds are more probable to participate in electoral processes as opposed to those from lower-income households. This is because factors such as education level, employment status, and household income all influence young people's ability and motivation to participate in elections (Eggers et al., 2022). Youth participation in elections is crucial for the health and vibrancy of democratic societies. However, understanding the factors that influence young people's engagement in electoral processes is essential for policymakers and electoral stakeholders (Driskell, 2017). Understanding the determinants of youth participation in elections is crucial for promoting inclusive and representative democracies. Policymakers and electoral stakeholders must address these determinants through targeted interventions, educational initiatives, and structural reforms to foster greater youth engagement in electoral processes. Oyedemi and Malatji (2016) stated that voter apathy among the born frees is caused by socio-economic issues such as unemployment, inequality and poverty. A study conducted in the third quarter of 2018 produced results that showed that the government's delivery in providing solutions to socio-economic rights does influence the participation of the youth in national elections (Patel & Graham, 2019)

2.5.2 Unemployment

Employment is a crucial building block for the attainment of a better standard of living (Grün et al., 2010). Contradictory to other scholars, such as Ibrahim et al. (2015) and Awofeso and Irabor (2021), in the USA, Burden and Wichowsky (2014) found that the higher the unemployment rate is, the more people participate in elections. Citizens tend to be more inspired to rule out the president they blame for their low standards of living. However, this does not hold everywhere. In Nigeria, for example, a low voter turnout during the 2019 general elections was caused by the high

rate of youth unemployment (Ibrahim et al., 2015). This is contradictory to what happens in the west, as the youth in Nigeria chose not to vote as they were unemployed. Awofeso and Irabor (2021) allude to the fact that lack of employment opportunities were the key driving factor that made young people display voter apathy. In the fourth quarter of 2018, 33.4% of young women from the employable ages of 15 were not employed in South Africa (StatsSA, 2020). This is the same group of women who were expected to participate in the 2019 elections but were affected by unemployment due to the government's failure to expand the labour market and create job opportunities (Mamokhere et al., 2024). Currently, the unemployment rate in South Africa is 33.5% in the second quarter of the year (Trading Economics, 2024). Amongst the youth, between the ages of 15-24 years, the unemployment rate is 59.7%, and among the age group of 25-34 years, it is 40.7% (Cowling, 2024).

Unemployment among the youth in South Africa is very extreme and this largely contributes to voter apathy. High unemployment is commonly associated with discontent towards the government, leading individuals to seek increased political activism with the expectation of political solutions to their economic woes (Mamokhere et al., 2024). Particularly for the unemployed, and especially the youth, elections provide an avenue through which they can participate in decision making that influences policies on job creation, social welfare, and economic reforms that enhance their future (Ogunbela & John, 2019). Furthermore, unemployment can also encourage voting as people look for those who will deal with employment issues, growth inclusivity, and economic rehabilitation (Awofeso & Irabor, 2022). Political parties endorsing and implementing strategies aimed at ending or promoting solutions to unemployment can win the votes of the disillusioned economically active population who have given up on voting as a tool for change (Cowling, 2024). In contrast, unemployment, is subject to voter apathy due to lack of political responsiveness especially when voters believe that no candidate or party would be able to address their predicament (Mokgonyana, 2023). This brings forth the concern of the governments and political actors outlining mechanisms to tackle unemployment in concrete terms. Failure to do so can enhance political alienation and disillusion. Thus, to increase voter participation and minimise voter jadedness, unemployment collectively must be tackled (Mamokhere et al., 2024). Adding to the problem, young women struggle even more to be absorbed into the labour market. StatsSA (2024) recorded that young women show higher vulnerability in the job seeking arena in contrast to young men. In 2024, the immersion rate of young men was

31,9%, surpassing young women, whose rate stood at 24,2%. The unemployment rate among young women was estimated at 49,4% (StatsSA, 2024).

It is often an assumption that it is the youth who are not involved in political structures that remain unemployed. However, that is not the case, as even young people leagues have unemployed masses. Individuals in South Africa are grappling with high unemployment, and they have resorted to not participating in elections because they feel as if their leaders do not care about their issues (Mokgonyana, 2023). According to StatsSA (2024), unemployment is to be blamed for many people not being able to find jobs, implying that the labour market is not welcoming. Consequently, many people distance themselves from electoral processes because they believe voting will not change their lives (Mamokhere, et al., 2024). Therefore, there is a huge decline in the number of individuals who can vote because voting might not be important when they are still encountering economic struggles. The research project conducted by the South African Institute of Race Relations (2023) argued that, in a democratic state that is still trying to alleviate the triple threat challenges, individuals will not vote if the majority of them share the same thinking of “everything will remain same” or “why should I even vote?”. The party that has been in the majority since the dethroning of the apartheid regime, the African National Congress (ANC), has lost many voters due to failing to give people jobs, houses and basic services to millions of misfortunate individuals (AP News, 2024). Employment access enables women to be financially independent, more confident, and better skilled, significantly influencing their political participation (Ogunbela & John, 2019).

2.5.3 Poverty

A socio-economic factor such as poverty is not a new phenomenon in developing countries and past injustices have been blamed for the mass poverty in South Africa. A common argument is that 20-plus years of democracy cannot erase 300 years of injustice. Poverty can significantly contribute to voter apathy among young women, reflecting a complex interplay of economic, social, and psychological factors. In 2019, 25% of the population lived in extreme poverty that it lead them to survive below the poverty line, where people would be required to survive on R992 per month (Worldbank, 2020). In the fourth quarter of 2023, over 18 million South Africans were living in extreme poverty, surviving with just \$1.90 (R33,63) a day (Cowling, 2024). Kasara and Suryanarayan (2015) found that many people who live above the poverty line vote more than poor

people. This is because wealthier individuals are more affected by issues such as taxation, which gives them a great incentive to vote. Poor people have no incentive to vote if their situation has been deteriorating election to election while politicians fail to represent them (Patrick, 2017). Although South Africa has struggled to improve equality among the rich and the poor, the efforts of government cannot be belittled. The government has from time-to-time increased social grants for the poor and elderly (South African Government, 2024). The Social Relief of Distress (SRD) grant, which was expected to increase in April 2024 to R370, has over 19 million South Africans who depend on it to make ends meet (SAnews, 2024). The government has made attempts at decreasing the difference between the rich and the poor. But, despite that, many people still live below the poverty line.

For young women living in poverty, priorities might centre around securing basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare (Schafer et al., 2022). When daily survival is a pressing concern, engaging in political processes such as voting can appear less urgent (Seanego & Mogoboya, 2019). The immediate challenges overshadow the perceived impact of voting, leading to disengagement from the political system (Patrick, 2017). Many young women in impoverished conditions lack access to reliable information about candidates, policies, and voting procedures (Enaifoghe & Dlamini, 2022). Without adequate information, they might feel disconnected from the political system or sceptical about its relevance to their lives. Hamidu and Ali (2018) found that limited access to education also compounds this issue, as educational attainment is closely linked to political awareness and participation. The socio-economic barriers that poverty imposes can also contribute to feelings of disenfranchisement as young women experiencing economic hardship might believe that the political system is not designed to address their needs or represent their interests (Brown-Iannuzzi et al., 2017). This sense of alienation can lead to a belief that their vote will not contribute towards change, reinforcing apathy. When the political system seems unresponsive or indifferent to their struggles, the motivation to participate in elections diminishes (Mamokhere et al., 2024). Poverty often correlates with increased stress and mental health challenges, which can further reduce political engagement. The emotional and psychological toll of economic hardship can lead to feelings of hopelessness and powerlessness, which may extend to a lack of faith in the efficacy of voting (Schafer et al., 2022).

2.5.4 Religion

Religion is one of the most important social factors in an individual's life as it shapes one's social principles (Ives & Kidwell, 2019). Many religious practices influence the way people behave in society and how they view their roles (Gerber et al., 2016). Religious leaders have understood for many years a country is governed by laws and policies. They have allowed many politicians to campaign in their churches and many church members have also campaigned and gained support from church members (Gerber et al., 2016). It is noteworthy that it is not all religious churches that promote political participation. Some religious structures prohibit members from engaging in political activism in elections. Many religious leaders have moral guides on how individuals should participate in political spheres (Early, 2012). In certain places of worship, political association is viewed as a moral compromise, with the justification that one should not vote as they already have a leader, which is their chosen deity (Ives & Kidwell, 2019). In this context, many people may be conflicted when asked to participate in electoral processes. Contrary to this, in other churches, electoral processes such as educating people about voting, campaigning and the use of church buildings as voting stations are practised. Religious leaders act as a connecting bridge to influence church members to vote as a means to achieve change. In countries with large Muslim, Hindu and Christian populations, political engagement may be viewed as a way of influencing laws that protect religious institutions and preserve religious practices (Early, 2012). Therefore, religion can be an influencing and limiting factor when it comes to participation in elections depending on how it is viewed in different churches.

2.5.5 Unfulfilled Promises by Political Parties

During election season, political parties lure people with ambitious manifestos filled with promises that are aimed at the betterment of living standards (Osborne, 2014). Political campaign manifestos have also created distress, as politicians make unattainable or false goals just so they can gain more voters during each election campaign (Managa, 2012). When doing this, politicians generate fallacious expectations that in the next election, people will receive the pledges they have (Osborne, 2014). The majority of election manifestos and campaigns of political parties have the same sequence of repeating themes since 1994: strengthening municipalities that are underachieving to reduce poor service delivery, fast-tracking basic need services, improving infrastructure, combating corruption and expanding the labour market (Reddy, 2016). Once these promises are

not delivered, communities begin to be in distress and turn to protestation (Twala, 2014). A study conducted in Benue State in Nigeria found that voter apathy is caused by citizens believing that the result of the elections is determined beforehand, therefore their votes do not matter (Agaigbe, 2015). Moreover, the candidates are imposed on the people without a majority appeal. In South Africa, every election has shown that more and more young people are not participating in elections (Bartlett, 2019). Unfulfilled promises by political parties have been one of the causes of this (Masinga, 2021). Masuku and Jili (2019:2), cited in Fransman and von Fintel (2024), argued that many scholars have provided a large body of literature on the issues that perpetuate a lack of service delivery in South Africa over the years.

The South African government has struggled to provide better quality of services to the people despite significant public spending (Human Sciences Research Council, 2024). These trends have led to the South African youth not believing that political parties are capable of bringing change. Understanding that these are basic needs that parties are failing to give to the people, protests and violence ensure Ndasana et al. (2022). Due to the incapacity of government to service the people, democracy has been replaced with many dissatisfied non-voters who are not willing to participate in electoral policies (Mamokhere et al., 2024). Chapter 13 of the National Development Plan (NDP) speaks to strengthening municipalities so that they are capacitated to give people services that better their lives (South African Government, 2011). With the current track record of service delivery, it seems as though the status quo will not change in the remaining 6 years of the NDP. If people repetitively encounter poor access to basic services such as water, electricity, healthcare and education, this ultimately decreases their confidence in political leaders' capacity to tend to their needs and obtain a better standard of living (Mamokhere et al., 2024). Unfulfilled promises by political parties contribute to voter apathy. When they are infuriated by continuous service delivery shortcomings, numerous voters become disheartened and dissociated from the electoral process. This then leads to them doubting the effectiveness of participating in elections (Ndasana et al., 2022).

Inevitably, as the ongoing pattern of inadequate service delivery continues, voter turnout decreases, focusing attention on the crucial necessity for government accountability and effective governance to gain citizens' trust and boost communal participation. In addition, Wade (2017) expressed that low voter turnout in South Africa is a result of the decrease in voters from 1994-2024. This may have been caused by many factors such as poor education, insufficient service delivery,

unemployment, corruption, and crime. Wade (2017) stated that the electoral process can be hard for some individuals, specifically with the exercise of registering and showing up at the voting stations (Wade, 2017; Seanego et al., 2019). Furthermore, Chapman (2019) added that individuals often do not take part in electoral processes due to the thought that the electoral system does not address their needs. Lack of government efficiency in delivering services is one of the reasons people have chosen to abstain from voting (Mamokhere et al., 2024).

2.5.6 Cultural Constraints

Another important constraint is the prevalence of patriarchal cultural norms that marginalise women from participating in public life, such as in Northern Nigeria and Pakistan (Awan, 2016). When combined with religious beliefs, such as Christianity or Islam, these norms can deter women from undergoing fingerprinting or facial recognition registration due to concerns about unveiling, as seen in Uganda in 2006 (Ahikire & Madanda, 2008). Additionally, cultural expectations may prevent women from queuing alongside men for registration. Women may also not view themselves as potential voters and may prioritise domestic responsibilities instead (Cheema et al., 2019). Some women may lack the confidence or political awareness to register. In cultures where girls' education is undervalued, women may have lower levels of education compared to men (Qureshi & Ahmad, 2022). Many women may be illiterate or unfamiliar with the political process, thus unaware of their electoral rights or how to fulfil candidacy requirements (Howell, 2014). Some women may fail to recognise the significance of voting and elections in their lives, particularly in contexts with low female representation in leadership roles, which can dampen enthusiasm for voter registration (Ogunbela & John, 2019). Young women still experience challenges in electoral processes regardless of their education status as they have a very minor political existence (Biney & Amoateng, 2019). These challenges mirror one another, although the experience differs from country to country. While young people are active in socio-political movements and are seen as change agents, conventional politics is an old-man sport. Many leaders are over the age of 35, and the youth continues to be underrepresented (UNDP, 2017).

Generally, young women are confronted with twice as much discrimination during electoral processes based on their gender and age (UNDP, 2020). The 2017 UNDP report provides a general picture of what young women are facing worldwide. The purpose of this study was therefore to explore the challenges that young women face in South Africa, particularly in the city of

Johannesburg. Enaifoghe et al. (2021) explored the challenges that women across Africa are facing. These issues included: the difficulty in obtaining credit; illiteracy, especially for rural women; GBV, especially in South Africa; a lack of role models among women as there are few female role models; a lack of resources, making women more vulnerable and lacking the funds to fight elections. In many extremely patriarchal societies, women are also not allowed to participate in politics (Hussain et al., 2021). Although discriminating laws and informal systems exist to belittle women's participation, Nielsen (2020) argued that these are the same laws that influence revolutionary movements. Hussain and Behan (2021) and Soyiyo (2021) argued that patriarchy serves to do nothing but limit women's political participation. Men tend to put women in certain brackets that reduce their responsibilities, such as making women "busy" by emphasising statements such as "it is a woman's responsibility to do all household chores" (Soyiyo, 2021). In Pakistan, traditional values and social limitations put on women and their manoeuvrability by patriarchal standards are normally identified as the source of women's low voting participation in comparison to men (Cheema et al., 2019).

2.5.7 Media Representation and Access to Information

Media representation and access to information play crucial roles in shaping young women's engagement in electoral processes (Dimitrova et al., 2014). The portrayal of women in politics and the availability of political information significantly impact how young women perceive their role in the political sphere and their likelihood of participating in elections (Kahne et al., 2015). The media's portrayal of women in politics can affect public perceptions and the aspirations of young women. Historically, media representation of women in politics has often been limited and stereotypical. Female politicians are frequently depicted through gendered lenses that focus on their appearance, personal lives, or emotional responses rather than their policies and professional qualifications (Jenkins, 2016). Such portrayals can perpetuate stereotypes and undermine the seriousness of women's political contributions, potentially discouraging young women from seeing politics as a viable field for themselves. Positive and diverse media representation, however, can have the opposite effect (Moeller et al., 2018). When young women see female politicians depicted as strong, competent leaders who are making significant contributions to society, it can inspire them and foster a sense of possibility (Jenkins, 2016). The coverage of women such as Jacinda Ardern or Kamala Harris highlights their achievements and leadership qualities, which can

encourage young women to engage in politics themselves. The visibility of women in various political roles helps to break down barriers and dispel the notion that politics is a male-dominated arena, thereby increasing young women's motivation to participate (Kahne et al., 2015).

Moreover, media portrayal can influence the public's perception of the importance of gender diversity in politics (Moeller et al., 2018). This increased awareness can galvanise young women to get involved, as they recognise the direct impact of political decisions on issues they care about (Dimitrova et al., 2014). Access to accurate and comprehensive political information is another critical factor influencing young women's electoral engagement (Bode, 2017). The availability of information about candidates, policies, and voting processes can significantly affect voter participation (Kahne et al., 2016). In many cases, young women may face limitations to accessing this information, such as through a deficiency of digital literacy, limited resources, or inadequate outreach from political parties (Bode, 2017). In the digital age, online platforms have become vital for disseminating political information. Social media, websites, and apps offer opportunities for young women to learn about candidates and their platforms, find out about voting procedures, and engage in political discussions (Moeller et al., 2018). However, the effectiveness of these platforms depends on their accessibility and the quality of the information provided. Schools, community organisations, and non-profits can play a role in teaching young women about the electoral process, the significance of their vote, and how to critically evaluate political information (Jenkins, 2016). By enhancing political education and information access, these initiatives help to empower young women to take conscious decisions and participate more actively in elections (Bode, 2017).

2.5.8 Institutional Barriers and Support Systems

Institutional barriers and support systems have a pivotal function in molding young women's participation in provincial and national elections. The structure of electoral systems, the policies in place, and the level of institutional support can either facilitate or hinder young women's ability to engage in the political process. The design of electoral systems can significantly influence young women's political participation (Baker, 2018). Systems that include gender quotas or reserved seats for women can enhance female representation and encourage more women, including young women, to get involved in politics (Barbara & Baker, 2016). Countries with legislated gender quotas have seen higher rates of female representation in parliament, which can create role models and encourage young women to pursue political careers (Manthwa & Ntsoane, 2018). First-past-

the-post systems and majoritarian electoral systems often favour established parties and incumbents, making it more challenging for newcomers, including young women, to compete effectively (Stockemer & Sundström, 2021). Additionally, the lack of financial support for female candidates can be a significant barrier, as young women may face challenges in raising funds for campaigns. Supportive policies and institutional frameworks are crucial for promoting young women's participation in elections (Barbara & Baker, 2016). Policies that provide funding for women's political campaigns or offer training and mentorship programmes have the potential of overcoming some of the barriers that young women face. Moreover, political parties and institutions have the ability to significantly support young women's participation (Baker, 2018). Parties that prioritise diversity and inclusion in their candidate selection processes can develop possibilities for young women to run for office (Manthwa & Ntsoane, 2018).

Measures such as providing online voter registration, ensuring polling stations are accessible to people with disabilities, and offering flexible voting options can help increase voter turnout among young women. Globally, the design of electoral systems and the presence of gender quotas have diverse impacts on young women's political participation (Bird, 2014). In countries with legislated gender quotas, such as Sweden, female representation in politics is notably higher. It's gender quota system, which obligates that women constitute at least 30% of parliamentary seats, has led to the highest proportion of female parliamentarians in the world (Stockemer & Sundström, 2021). This system not only provides young women with role models but also creates a more supportive environment for their political participation. In contrast, countries without gender quotas or with less supportive electoral systems often see lower levels of female representation (Bol, 2016). In many democracies, such as the USA and India, the lack of institutionalised quotas and the competitive nature of electoral systems can pose significant challenges for young women (Atinc et al., 2022). Here, the absence of quotas and high campaign costs create barriers that make it hard for young women to compete on an equal footing with established male candidates (Bird, 2014). Supportive policies and institutional frameworks vary widely across the world. In Nordic countries, such as Denmark and Norway, extensive policies that support work-life balance, such as generous parental leave and affordable childcare, facilitate greater female political participation (McColgan, 2015). Conversely, in many developing countries, institutional support for young women's political participation is often limited.

2.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

The UNDP (2017) highlighted that youth are pivotal in shaping the 2030 Agenda for SDGs by setting priorities related to employment, education, and governance. Young women, who represent about 20% of the global population and are included in the broader youth category, are vital as change agents (UNDP, 2017). In South Africa, women, who make up roughly 51% of the population and include a significant proportion of youth (35.7%), should be actively involved in politics to enhance national well-being and democracy (Republic of South Africa, 2019). Fresh perspectives from young women can aid transitioning nations in overcoming authoritarian practices (UNDP, 2013). Their role in voting has increased, particularly in youth-dense societies. Historically, young women in South Africa have been influential, participating in significant events such as the Women's March on August 9, 1956, and the Soweto Youth Uprising on June 16, 1976 (Bridger, 2021). young women's participation in elections is essential for addressing issues that disproportionately affect their lives and shaping policies that respond to their unique experiences (Bhalotra et al., 2018). By actively engaging in the electoral process, young women can advocate for matters such as reproductive rights, healthcare access, education, and workplace equality, and making sure that their voices are represented in decision-making processes (Gilardi, 2015). Young women often face distinct social and economic challenges, and their political involvement helps push for policies that address these concerns (United Nations, 2021) For example, voting can influence legislation that provides better maternity leave, fair wages, and protections against GBV. When young women participate, they also help broaden the range of perspectives in governance, leading to more inclusive policy outcomes that reflect the needs of diverse communities (Gilardi, 2015). Furthermore, young women's engagement in elections encourages greater gender representation in leadership roles, which can inspire future generations (Bhalotra et al., 2018). Political participation empowers young women to pursue leadership positions themselves, from local government to national office, contributing to a shift toward gender parity in political spaces (Mervis et al., 2013). Their active involvement helps dismantle patriarchal structures that have historically excluded women from power, fostering an environment where women's issues are prioritised (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). In addition, young women voters create momentum for systemic change by supporting candidates and policies that promote gender equality and social justice (Cornwall, 2016). This participation strengthens their political influence and ensures that the specific challenges they face are addressed through informed policymaking (Rama & Morna,

2020). Young women's participation in elections is important for a balanced and representative democracy and their involvement ensures that diverse perspectives and issues important to younger generations are addressed (Mlambo & Kapingura, 2019). It helps in shaping policies that address the essentials and interests of all segments of society, promoting gender equality and social justice. Young women often champion progressive causes and bring fresh ideas to the political arena, driving innovation and reform (Mervis et al., 2013). By voting and engaging in political processes, they can challenge existing disparities and advocate for changes that improve their communities and the broader society. Indeed, their active participation is essential for a vibrant and inclusive democracy (United Nations, 2021).

2.7 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter commenced by discussing the theoretical framework, namely the RCT. It then explored the body of literature that scholars found contributes to young women's participation in provincial and national elections. The chapter further discussed the hindrances to women's participation in elections, cultural barriers, inferiority complexes, religious barriers, and a lack of support from men. The literature gave insight into how many young women are experiencing the same barriers to participating in politics worldwide. Furthermore, this chapter explored common socio-economic factors that young people blame for their voter apathy. The subsequent chapter encompasses the research design and methodology used to carry out the study.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored the available literature related to women and young women's participation in the elections. It also discussed the theoretical framework, namely the RCT that is used as a lens to interpret the findings of the study. Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the research design and methodology used in the research project. This chapter begins with a discussion of the research design that was used as a guide for the study. Following this, it explains the research approach and paradigm that were implemented in the study. It further discusses and explains the target population and sampling procedure that was used to recruit the participants. Thereafter, it describes data collection and instruments. The chapter then explains the thematic analysis, which was adopted to make sense of the data from the participants. Ethical considerations and procedures that guided the study will also be delineated. It concludes with a summary of the key points discussed throughout the chapter.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed an exploratory research design, which aids in acquiring more insight into the research problems that is being studied (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Exploratory research is used to better comprehend existing problems and assess them in a new light (Orina et al., 2015). This design was chosen because it enabled the researcher to explore complex and poorly understood phenomena without preconceived assumptions, as per the argument by Mbaka and Isiramen (2021). Furthermore, this research design allowed the researcher to expedite new knowledge about the topic (Swedberg, 2020). This research design allowed the study to attain an enhanced comprehension of an extant problem (Creswell, 2021). The context of this study is to enhance the understanding of why young women are participating at declining rates. There exists a gap in the literature pertaining to the participation of young women (particularly between the ages of 18-35 years old) in both the provincial and national elections in South Africa. Therefore, this approach enabled the researcher to attain the perceptions and lived experiences of young women and what inhibits or promotes their participation in elections. This design enabled the participants in this study (20) to be interviewed to gather different perspectives and discover new patterns. This design

allowed the researcher to uncover and define relevant themes that assisted with the analysis. It also disclosed the factors that have an impact on young women's participation in elections such as religion, social media, unemployment, and a lack of interest in current political affairs - factors which may have not been previously studied.

3.3 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The study applied an interpretivist paradigm, which holds that multiple realities exist and that human behaviour cannot be quantified into a single reality based on probability (Creswell, 2021). This means that interpretivists believe that reality is shaped by the diverse perspectives of individuals and is socially constructed (Chowdhury, 2014). This paradigm is a research approach in sociology that concentrates on comprehending the nonobjective connotations and encounters of people within their social context (Adom et al., 2016). Additionally, this paradigm depends on observations and interrogation of social phenomena to produce a rich and deep comprehension of the problem being explored (Adom et al., 2016). Furthermore, this paradigm holds that people's experiences can only be understood through the shared realities of people (Potrac et al. 2014). People have different experiences with the same problems, therefore understanding these experiences falls within the interpretivist paradigm that does not believe in reality being linear (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Therefore, it is from this background that this paradigm was adopted. In this study, this paradigm enhanced the researcher's understanding of the meanings that humans assign to their actions within a specific context. Moreover, interpretivism was chosen because it allowed researchers to delve deeply into the personal and social meanings that young women attach to their voting behaviour. This paradigm was particularly effective for exploring intricate social phenomena and capturing the detailed viewpoints of individuals, which were crucial for understanding the reasons behind young women's participation or lack of participation in elections. By using interpretivism, the researcher established the underlying reasoning behind young women's voting behaviours, offering a richer and more comprehensive view of their electoral participation. This research used this paradigm in the research project by attaining the experiences and views of the participants through thorough probing. Unlike positivism, which believes in a singular reality and seeks biased findings, interpretivism values subjective lived experiences of humans and the connotations individuals link with these experiences (Chowdhury, 2014). The researcher further used interpretivism to explore the complications of people's behaviour and

cultural circumstances (Pulla & Carter, 2018). With this paradigm, methods like an interview were used to collect qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)

3.4 RESEARCH APPROACH

The research approach that was used in this study is the qualitative research method. It involved exploring and understanding social phenomena through non-numeric data such as words, images, and observations (Dodgson, 2017; Creswell & Poth, 2016; Mik-Meyer, 2020). Furthermore, this research approach aimed to explore the meaning behind human behaviours, beliefs, and experiences, often employing methods such as interviews, observations, and content analysis (Creswell, 2021; Tenny et al., 2017). It is particularly useful when exploring subjective experiences, social interactions, and cultural contexts that quantitative methods might overlook (Mik-Meyer, 2020). Adopting a qualitative approach provided depth and nuance to research, allowing for a richer understanding of complex phenomena (Creswell, 2021). The method was adopted because the researcher was interested in exploring the day-to-day livelihood of young women and those perceptions that cannot be quantified. The researcher used the qualitative approach to enable the potential respondents an opportunity to communicate their lived experiences and understand the implications of the research problem. Thus, through this method, the participants were granted the chance to share their perspectives through in-depth interviews (see map in Figure 3.1) which facilitated open and meaningful dialogue. Furthermore, this approach allowed them to articulate their experiences and viewpoints in detail, providing a nuanced understanding of their lived realities. By creating a space for candid discussions, the interviews captured the complexities of the research problem, highlighting personal and contextual factors. This method not only enriched the data but also ensured that participants' voices were central to the research findings. The qualitative research approach was best suited for this study because it was able to facilitate the foundation for obtaining rich and deep insights from the participants (Dodgson, 2017). Unlike statistical data from quantitative methods, the qualitative approach allowed the researcher to further probe participants for more information when needed. Through probing, as new factors arose, the qualitative approach enabled the researcher to explore new and emerging factors. This approach contributed to the researchers gaining the views of young women and the socio-economic factors that influence their participation in elections.

3.5 STUDY AREA AND TARGET POPULATION

Gauteng is one of nine provinces located in the north eastern part of South Africa. It is the smallest province by land. However, as the population of the country grew to 63 million, Gauteng is the most populous province with nearly 16 million residents (StatsSA, 2024). This province is known as an economic hub as it has one of the biggest economies in South Africa. The following map illustrates the position of Gauteng province in South Africa and that of the City of Johannesburg in Gauteng.

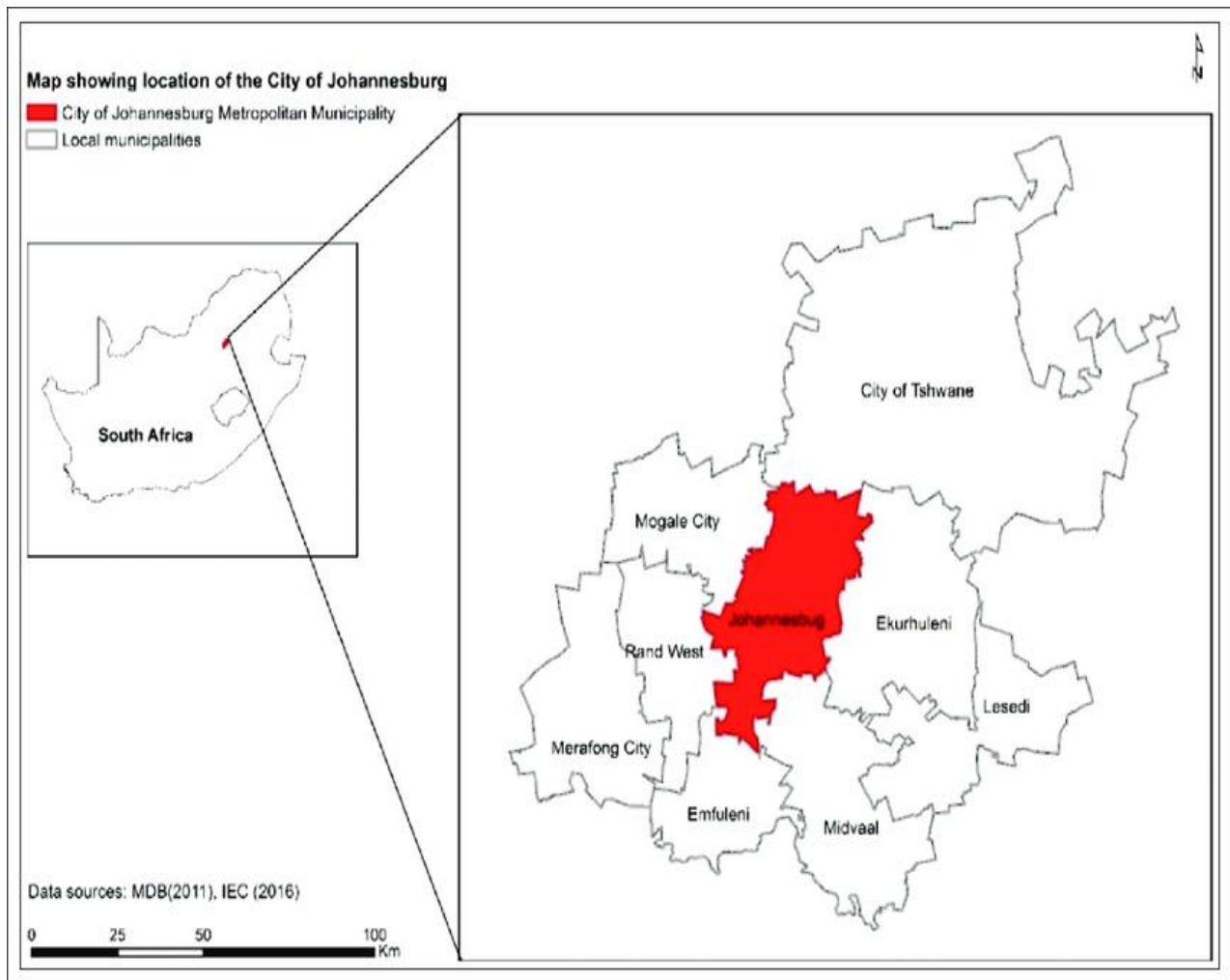


Figure 3.1: Map of South Africa and Gauteng (Source: Research Gate)

According to StatsSA (2023), this province has one of the largest economies and is one of the top 3 provinces contributing to South Africa's GDP. The largest industries in Gauteng are finance, real estate, businesses, and manufacturing (BusinessTech, 2023). The province might contribute

immensely towards the country's GDP, however, it has many unresolved socio-economic issues. The province has high levels of unemployment, poverty, crime and inequality (Gauteng City-Region Observatory (GCRO), 2024). Despite the province's large economy, poverty is still a very big problem (Everatt, 2017). A very big part of the province has informal settlements where poverty is very high. There is also a significant inequality gap between affluent areas and underdeveloped ones (Mushongera, 2017). Unemployment in the province has been a critical issue. The unemployment rate in Gauteng is 47% and youth unemployment is 46% (GCRO, 2024). This is higher than the national average, which is 39% (StatsSA, 2023). The province has failed to provide sufficient job opportunities despite having such a diverse economy. Unemployment increased by 63,000 in 2024, even after there were attempts to alleviate this crisis (Msimanga, 2024). As much as Gauteng is considered an economic hub in South Africa, economic growth has not been all-inclusive, and many poor communities have been left out (Everatt, 2017). The number of people who registered to vote in Gauteng was 6,541,978 and the number of people who cast their vote was 3,966,765 (IEC, 2024). The City of Johannesburg was leading in the number of participants in the 2024 elections. The number of young people who voted was 931,137.

The City of Johannesburg has a population of nearly 4.8 million residents (South African Government, 2023). Inequality is most evident in the City of Johannesburg, where the city is home to many of the country's wealthiest suburbs with gated communities and opulence. However, many residents live in informal settlements where people lack basic services such as clean water and a clean environment (Mushongera, 2017). Characterised by high unemployment, the city of Johannesburg has an unemployment rate of 48% (GCRO, 2024). Youth unemployment in particular is significantly high as many young people are unemployed due to a lack of experience (Stefan et al., 2017). Therefore, many young people end up in temporary jobs or unskilled labour. Crime and safety are one of the socio-economic factors that are pressing in the City of Johannesburg. The city has very high crime rates that include robbery, and violent and gruesome crimes (Skosana, 2019). The history of the triple threat challenges has fuelled social unrest and criminal activity (Stefan et al., 2017). The socio-economic issues facing Gauteng and the City of Johannesburg are very intricate and connected. It is with this background that the target population was young women between the age of 18-35 years who participated and those who did not participate in the 2024 elections situated in Braamfontein, Gauteng province. The age group is distinct because of the young women who were eligible to vote in 2024 and are part of the youth.

Moreover, the study aimed to also understand the factors that contribute to the participation of women who did not vote in elections. The total number of people who voted in the City of Johannesburg was 2,329,841 and the number of young people who voted was 336,173 (IEC, 2024).

3.6 SAMPLING METHOD AND PROCEDURE

This study adopted two non-probability sampling methods, that is purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are selected based on specific characteristics or criteria that align with the research objectives (Campbell et al., 2020). This sampling technique has a specific criterion that allowed the researcher to target participants who share certain characteristics that were relevant to the study, thus allowing for more focused and pertinent data collection (Palinkas, 2015). This sampling method was important in this study because it allowed the researcher to choose the participants that fit the criteria, young women between the ages of 18–35 who participated and the ones who did not participate in the 2024 general elections. Since the study explored young women’s participation, the researcher deliberately selected participants of a specific age (18–35 years). This approach ensures that the sample includes individuals who have direct experience or insight into socio-economic factors contributing to young women’s participation in elections. Purposive sampling was used for the young women who participated in elections. It was used for the selection of a total of 12 young women who participated in the 2024 elections by acquiring a voter’s roll from the IEC. The total number of participants was determined by data saturation. Accordingly, Vasileiou et al. (2018) recommended that to reach data saturation, a minimum of 10 participants can form part of the study. The responses from the participants became repetitive and constant at participant number 10. However, two more participants were interviewed to verify if no new information could be gathered.

In addition, convenience sampling was used to recruit the participants who did not participate in the 2024 general elections. This sampling method was deemed the most prevalent form of non-probability sampling, where researchers gather data from participants who are easily accessible to them (Suen et al., 2014). Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on their ready availability and proximity to the study area (Etikan et al., 2016). This method includes selecting participants who are easily accessible and interested to participate, rather than using other probability sampling approaches (Etikan et al., 2016). While

convenience sampling is often used for its practicality and efficiency, it can introduce biases since the sample may not be represent of the larger population. Sample bias was addressed by using the general age range of the youth, which is 18–35 years old, rather than using a specific one and young women who did not participate in the elections were included in the study to compare and understand broader voting behaviour. Although qualitative research has no direct answer of how many participants can be part of a study, it is recommended that the sample size is big enough to allow for the collection of rich and informative data (Vasileiou et al., 2018). The researcher used this sampling method to recruit a total of 12 young women who did not participate in elections. Data saturation was reached at the 10th participant. However, 2 more interviews were done to check if no new information could be gathered. The total sample size of the study for both young women who participated and did not participate in the 2024 general election was 24.

3.7 DATA COLLECTION

The research project adopted one data collection method, namely in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, in-depth interviews are generally one on one interactions where one person plays the role of an interviewer, and the other is an interviewee, researcher, and participant, respectively (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Furthermore, in-depth, semi-structured interviews are a qualitative data collection method where the interviewer uses predetermined questions (Alshenqeeti, 2014; Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). Despite relying on predetermined sets of questions, the in-depth, semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to further inquire the participants follow-up questions (Barclay, 2018; Adams, 2015). Furthermore, these questions serve as a framework rather than a script (Adams, 2015). This method uses closed-ended questions for unstructured interviews and dichotomous questions (yes/no) for structured interviews (Barclay, 2018). This ensures that all key topics are covered while allowing room for the interviewee to introduce new ideas or perspectives (Alshenqeeti, 2014). In-depth, semi-structured interviews foster a conversational style, where the interviewer can engage with the participant more naturally (Striepe, 2021). This approach often leads to a more in-depth exploration of the participant's experiences, perceptions, and attitudes (George, 2022). This method is particularly useful for exploring complex issues, such as young women's participation in elections, as it allows participants to express their thoughts and feelings in their own words. This can establish nuanced insights that might not emerge from more rigid question formats (George, 2022).

The entire data collection process started from the 1st of September and concluded on the 24th of September 2024 in Braamfontein. The type of interviews that occurred in the study were in-depth, semi-structured interviews. As noted by (Al-Amer et al., 2015), collecting data in an area that is categorised by diversity and many ethnicities can be difficult if the researcher uses one language. Therefore, researchers must balance interview data sets. As such, in the context of the study area being characterised by diversity and different ethnicities, the researcher translated the interview questions into two dominant languages: IsiZulu and English. The interviews were held in the language that the participants preferred. In the context of this study, the majority of the participants preferred English. This allowed for deeper insights as they could express themselves freely without a language barrier. As outlined by Gawlewicz (2016), it is essential to conduct interviews in the participants' preferred language as this increases the comfort of the participants and further enriches the peculiarity of their responses. The semi-structured interviews had open-ended questions that enabled the researcher to ask the participants to delve further into what they are talking about in response to the research objectives set in Chapter 1.

To ensure confidentiality, the interviews took place at the Parktonia Hotel boardroom in Braamfontein. This place was chosen so that the interviews could be conducted in a quiet, private setting. This helped participants feel safe and confident when sharing their experiences and perspectives. This approach helped maintain data integrity while fostering trust between the researcher and participants, ultimately contributing to the credibility and depth of the findings. This aligns with the idea by Gawlewicz (2016), who argued that interviews with the participants must be conducted in a place that fosters privacy and comfort to encourage open and honest responses from participants. Conducting interviews in confidential and familiar environments not only enhances the quality of the data collected but also assures that participants feel respected and valued throughout the research process. Furthermore, Bryman (2015) argued that privacy and trust-building during interviews are essential for capturing rich, authentic narratives, particularly when exploring sensitive or personal topics. The average time of the interviews was 16 minutes, and the interviews were captured on a digital recording device with the consent of the participants. They were then transferred to an external hard drive for the protection of the participant's contribution and to ensure confidentiality (see the section on ethical considerations). It was imperative that data collection was done correctly so that the data from the participants could enrich the research project. It is noteworthy to mention that during the data collection process;

preliminary data analysis was also conducted to assess whether the main research question was being adequately addressed. This approach aligns with the idea proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), who argued that the data analysis process should begin concurrently with data collection to allow for ongoing insights and necessary adjustments throughout the research process. This iterative approach enhances the depth and accuracy of the findings and allows researchers to identify emerging patterns and potential gaps early on. As a result, the study can maintain a clear focus on its objectives while ensuring the reliability and validity of the data collected.

3.8 DATA ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was employed in this research project. Accordingly, it is a method used to identify, analyse, and report patterns or themes within qualitative data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Figure 3.2 illustrates the six phases of thematic analysis:

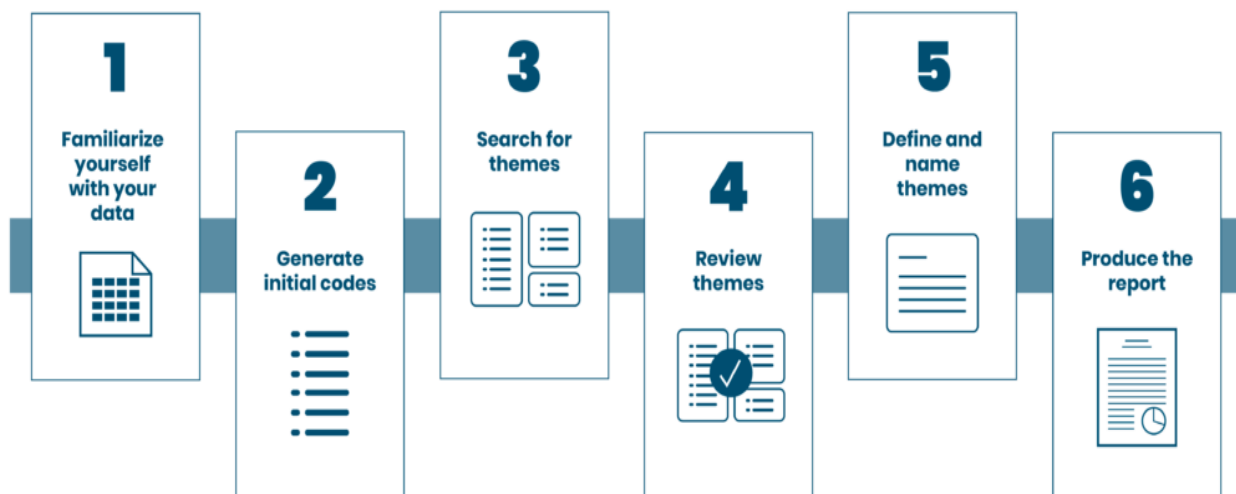


Figure 3.2: Six stages of thematic analysis (Source: Elon University)

This method of analysis involves systematically coding data, identifying recurring patterns or themes, and interpreting their meaning relative to the research question or topic (Neuendorf, 2018). By breaking down data into manageable themes, researchers can highlight the most significant and recurring ideas, making sense of vast amounts of qualitative information (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Thematic analysis was best suited to the research project as it aligned properly with the research objectives and enabled the researcher to gain rich insights from participants (Braun &

Clarke, 2014). The objectives aimed to explore and interpret themes related to experiences and non-experiences of young women in elections (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). In exploring young women's participation in elections, thematic analysis allows for a thorough examination of themes such as motivational factors, barriers to participation, and influences (Neuendorf, 2018). Thematic analysis revealed how different factors such as unemployment or political education influenced young women's voting behaviours (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). Thematic analysis offers flexibility in handling diverse data types and can accommodate various theoretical frameworks (Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Whether dealing with interviews, focus groups, or textual content, this method allows researchers to apply a consistent analytical framework across diverse datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The method allows for a broad exploration of data without being constrained by predefined categories (Braun & Clarke, 2014).

The researcher analysed the data through the 6 stages of thematic analysis (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). However, before the first phase, the researcher transcribed all the recorded information into written text. The researcher did this by creating a transcript in NVIVO software, the 2020 version (NVIVO 14). The recordings were uploaded into the software and then transcribed into text. When the language that was used by the participants was not in NVIVO, then the researcher manually translated and transcribed. Thereafter, the researcher began by familiarising themselves with the data as explained by Braun and Clarke (2014). This was done by continuously reading the transcripts, playing the audio recordings, and making initial notes to identify key themes, patterns, and areas of interest. This iterative process ensured a comprehensive understanding of the data and laid the foundation for subsequent thematic analysis. After this phase, the researcher began coding the data (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2016). In this phase, the researcher created codes through transcribing. These codes represent the content of the data. Each code was labelled as it represented an important aspect of data (Caulfield, 2019). This was done through the generation of themes. This step served the purpose of organising the data into smaller groups to create the pathway for data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher then combined the similar codes into one broader theme. The combined codes share a similar pattern, and irrelevant codes were not used. This was done to create a thematic system that captures the key ideas emerging from the data (Caulfield, 2019). Following this phase, the researcher reviewed the themes, as outlined by Hecker and Kalpokas (2019). This was done by reviewing the themes that directly speak to the study. The researcher then refined and evaluated the themes to

establish how the themes accurately represent the data. This involves checking if themes are supported by the data and revising or merging overlapping themes. Thereafter the researcher defined and named the themes. The researcher then proceeded to finalise the list of themes and formulated a comprehensive name for each theme. Defining the themes helped to articulate the unique focus of each theme and how it contributes to answering the research question (Hecker & Kalpokas, 2019). Lastly, the researcher produced a report (see Chapter 4), as explained by Braun and Clarke (2014).

3.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

To ensure that the study is ethical, it followed the university procedures of obtaining ethical clearance (see Addendum G) and a gatekeeper's letter that sought permission for the researcher to collect data (see Addendum D). This study considered the University of Mpumalanga research policy. During the collection of the data, the study maintained ethical considerations by following the 7 principles as outlined by Bless et al. (2013) such as voluntary participation, respect for participants, causing no harm, and ensuring confidentiality, privacy, and anonymity. These principles were upheld as follows:

- **Voluntary participation**

This was maintained by assuring that no participant was forced to participate. The participants volunteered. Furthermore, each participant was made aware that they could end the interview anytime they felt as if they could not continue participating.

- **Respect for participants**

Respect for participants was ensured by showing the participants that they were inherently valued. The participants were treated with dignity. Doing this honoured the participants' rights, beliefs, and views even when they differed from the researcher.

- **Causing no harm**

This was ensured in the study by reducing the potential risk or harm to the participants through choosing a suitable environment. The participants were also not subjected to any experiments that could harm them.

- **Ensuring confidentiality**

The data obtained from the participants were not shared with other parties, and the participants were made aware that their identities would not be revealed in the study.

- **Privacy and anonymity**

The interviews that were used promoted anonymity to protect the participants. As a requirement of the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPI Act), everyone has the right to have their information protected from illegal collection and distribution of their personal information (POPIA, 2019).

3.10 DATA QUALITY CONTROL MEASURES

There are different methods that can be adopted to ensure the quality of the data. For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that trustworthiness can be achieved by a criterion of credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability (Anney, 2014). Therefore, beyond the four criteria identified by Lincoln and Guba, the study also used a pilot study, prolonged engagement, and language to ensure the appropriateness and quality of the data.

Credibility refers to how much trust can be put in the truthfulness of the research findings (Cope, 2014). The researcher ensured credibility by presenting the participants' original perspectives and lived experiences and the verbatim interpretation of their responses. The researcher also used an established research methodology to collect data. Triangulation was used to ensure credibility. This was done through the diversification of the sources that ensured credibility as multiple different women were interviewed, and different perspectives helped confirm the data and reduce bias. The study reached data saturation, and saturation increased the credibility and rigour of qualitative research, demonstrating a systematic approach to data collection and analysis.

Dependability can be defined as the stability of the responses from the participants over time. This is how consistent the findings are if the research is replicated (Kyngäs et al., 2020). The researcher ensured dependability by using precise methods for data collection and analysis to produce a dependable study.

Confirmability is the confidence that can be put in the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). This was ensured by establishing that the data in the study is not made up by the researcher and other scholars can confirm the study. Furthermore, it was assured that data was repeatedly checked throughout data collection and analysis to make sure that the findings can be repeated by other scholars. Thematic analysis allowed the researcher to develop codes that provided a clear

theme during data analysis. A data audit reviewed the data collection and analysis methods, assessing the possibility of bias or distortion.

Transferability is the process of abstraction that involves passing on information from a specific source to another that has not been clearly studied (Drisko, 2024). It was used as a data quality control measure to make sure that the data could be used on other similar research studies. The findings of the study cannot be generalised. The researcher confirmed transferability by comparing the findings to establish consistency or inconsistency of the findings with existing literature.

A pilot study is a feasibility study that is performed to test different parts of the project. This is done to prevent the researcher from conducting the research without sufficient knowledge of the proposed methodology (Lowe, 2019). Lewis et al. (2021) outlined that the minimum number of participants a pilot study can have is 10% of the sample size. A total of five people were in this study's pilot study. The pilot study was conducted to help the researcher identify any issues in the data collection process, allowing adjustments before actually collecting data for the study. The questions in the interview guide were reviewed thoroughly to reduce ambiguities and limit confusion for the participants. The questions were straightforward, and this promoted accurate and reliable data. By doing this, the researcher increased the dependability of the study. Open-ended questions were employed to gather spontaneous and impartial responses, along with digital recordings, thorough transcript analysis, and detailed note-taking.

Language was used as a data quality control measure as the interview guide was translated into two languages so that the participants could choose which language they preferred to be interviewed in. Translation made the participants comfortable expressing themselves freely. Accurate translation was used in the study, and even after translation the questions remained relevant to the study.

Prolonged engagement is a method that allows a researcher to observe and engage with participants to obtain in-depth data from them (Dado et al., 2023). This was also used to ensure credibility in the study as the researcher spent more time in the field actively participating and interacting with the participants. This was achieved through interviews as the researcher further probed the participants for more information.

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter began by discussing the research design that was adopted in the study. The chapter then further described the research methodology, including the research paradigm that was employed, namely interpretivism. This paradigm guided the rest of the methodology. Thereafter, the study discussed the study area and target population. This section gave a justification for why the area was chosen. Furthermore, data collection instruments as well as strategies used were discussed to ensure that ethical standards and data quality control measures were upheld. The following chapter will present the data analysis and interpretation of findings.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the research design and methodology of the study. It further discussed the data control measures and ethical considerations that were used to carry out the study. Therefore, this chapter focuses on data analysis, presentation and interpretation of the findings that were collected through in-depth interviews. The chapter thus begins with a discussion of the demographic profile of the participants, and thereafter the data analysis and interpretation of the narrative findings from the participants. This will be done by discussing different themes that emanated from the thematic analysis. Some of these themes include unemployment, political education, lack of interest in politics, challenges of voting systems, lack of government efficacy, and religion. At the end, the chapter presents a summary of the key points that were raised in the findings of the study.

4.2 DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE PARTICIPANTS

The study specifically looked at young women between the ages of 18-35 years (as already discussed in the previous chapter). The participants were young black women who both participated and did not participate in elections. The views, perceptions and experiences of the participants regarding their non-participation in the election were critical because they provided valuable insights into the underlying factors influencing voter behaviour, including socio-economic conditions, political trust, and perceived efficacy. Understanding these different perspectives helps identify barriers to (non)participation and opportunities to enhance democratic engagement and inclusivity in electoral processes.

4.3 DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This section contains the analysis of the data from the participants and a detailed interpretation of the findings. It will present the participants' verbatim responses and interpretations. Furthermore, drawing from the interviews, the generated themes are interpreted in this section.

4.3.1 Unemployment and Voting Behaviour

Globally and generally, unemployment remains one of the critical socio-economic issues that continue to affect many people, including South Africans, contributing to widespread inequality, poverty and other social issues (Tcherneva, 2017). Subsequently, the study established contradictory views regarding the issue of unemployment and participation in the elections. For example, the participants' views indicate that unemployment influences the participants' voting behaviour positively and negatively, such that some decide to vote to change their status quo, while other participants opted to refrain or abstain from participating in the elections altogether. This is what some of the participants had to say about this issue:

Participant 3 stated:

“I did not participate in voting this year because I have been unemployed since I voted in 2019. No new jobs have been created and I have applied nonstop, therefore voting doesn't change anything.”

A similar response was noted from Participant 7, who explained:

“Socio-economic factor such as unemployment contributed to why I did not vote in the elections.”

These responses explain the nonparticipation of the participants due to the same socio-economic condition, specifically high unemployment and the inability of the government to respond to the crisis of unemployment. Contrary to this, Participant 9 indicated that increasing unemployment is the reason they opted to participate in the elections. They expressed hope that by altering their voting behaviour, specifically by voting for a different political party, they could help bring about a change in their circumstances and address the issue of unemployment. Participant 9 articulated their perspective as follows:

“Youth unemployment was a driving factor that pushed me to vote in the 2024 elections, I thought it was time we gave another party a chance to rule and actually give us the change we need.”

These views indicate that some of the participants believe that voting or participating in the election does not lead to any meaningful change. However, others still believe that political intervention, particularly voting, is critical in addressing socio-economic issues, including

unemployment. Unemployment has contributed to the change in voting behaviour of participants. This has led to some participants not voting at all, and some to change the parties they vote for. The responses of the participants support the available literature that many young people are not participating in electoral systems because the unemployment rate is increasing (Oyedemi & Mahlatji, 2016). Recent statistics indicate that unemployment is heavily affecting the standards of living of young women. As it stands, 49,4% of young women are unemployed in 2024 (StatsSA, 2024). Unemployment is higher in young women than it is with young men, and young women are less probable to find jobs (StatsSA, 2023). This is the reality of unemployment among young women; therefore, it is likely why they are not participating in elections. The responses confirm Katzenellenbogen's (2024) study that young people face high unemployment and political disillusionment and that has led to a lower voter turnout. Therefore, it is concluded that unemployment highly influences young women's voting behaviour in elections, negatively or positively. It influences them to not participate in elections in many cases but also encourages them to vote as a form of fighting back and trying to increase employment. It can also be deduced from the responses that voter apathy is a form of participating in elections because young women who do not participate see this as an opportunity to force the government to perform better so that they can vote in the next elections.

4.3.2 Political Education and Access to Information

The study established that there is not enough political education among the youth. This largely contributes to their participation in elections as they delineated that the lack of political education has resulted in them not participating in elections. They did not know who to vote for and why they should vote for them. This is what some of the participants had to say about this:

Participant 1 said:

"I don't think there's enough political education, political education should be everywhere on social media. Start podcast, just the other day I was watching a podcast in the US like politics is on the face of people in other countries. So that people know what is going on in the South African government."

A similar response was noted from other participants that highlight voter apathy as attributed to inadequate political education. For example, Participant 7 stated:

“I think that political education has an impact, [we] young women don’t have enough political education, personally I don’t even know the people in power except for the President”

The responses of the participants show that the participants in the study are not well educated in politics. It is easier to show voter apathy when you do not know what happens in the political arena. It is evident that the young women who participated in the study do not believe that they have the relevant access to information about politics. For example, Participant 1 was steadfast in arguing that political education should not just be in the form of long lectures but should also take the form of podcasts and more technological approaches. This is noted by the Observer Research Foundation, which has indicated that a lack of political education in young women makes them disregardful of their basic and political rights (ORF, 2022). Due to insufficient political education, the gap in voter turnout for young women increases. Political education has the potential to maximise young women’s participation (United Nations, 2021). Accessing information about politics should not only be offered by political parties. It should not feel as if inclusion is based signing a membership form. The government can really offer more to political education to young people. Moreover, they need to make the youth part of the change so that they see the difference (Wattenberg, 2015). Therefore, what can be deduced from this is that political education and access to information contribute to the level of participation of young women in elections. It is an essential tool that can largely increase young women’s voter turnout. The more young women are educated about the importance of their role in electoral processes, the more they will participate. This is a positive relationship that is dependent on the other variable for the increase of the other. As such, political education is a key factor in empowering young women.

4.3.3 Religion Versus Political Behaviour

Globally, religion has always been used as a tool for mobilisation as many people gather in one place to worship (Stark, 2015). This is also the same in South Africa (Shore, 2016). Despite that, during the election, politicians have often used places of worship to mobilise people to vote or participate in political gatherings. The study established that religion has an impact on the participation and nonparticipation of young women in electoral processes. Some of the participants

indicated that their religion does play a role in whether they participate or not, despite the efforts of mobilisation. For example, Participant 5 stated:

“I am a Jehovah’s Witness; I do not participate in voting and all election processes. It goes against my religion.”

Another interviewee, Participant 8, agreed to this and mentioned:

“I have never voted in my life; this is because of my religion. I have been taught that politics cause divisions and by not voting I play my part by keeping the nation united.”

Also, Participant 10 said:

“I am politically neutral, although I respect the government’s authority, I do not vote. My religion guides me, and I believe that I have upheld my religion through not voting.”

The verbatim responses of the participants establish that their religion has prohibited them from participating in voting. Usually, religion is not a factor that can prevent one from participating in elections (Gerber et al. 2016). Many religious communities allow political leaders to campaign in their churches and encourage the members to vote (Gerber et al., 2016). However, the responses of the participants indicate that they did not participate in elections because of their religion, which forbade them from participating in politics. The responses of the participants confirm the literature by Richardson (2015) and Knox (2018), that the participants in Jehovah’s Witness do not vote, participate in juries, or serve in the military. There have been cases against the church but the church strongly upholds their beliefs, and they continue to make members not participate in electoral processes (Richardson, 2015). While everyone has the right to choose, the government cannot force anyone to participate in elections, and this lowers the voter turnout of young women in elections. This rule creates a sense of isolation from the general rules of the public as they do not vote. However, they live under a governed state, which makes laws that affect their standards of living. There is also a loss of voice in society as they do not have access to express their opinions and desires through the democratic process. Nonetheless, this is a choice that the young women have made to not participate in electoral processes regardless of the socio-economic factors. Therefore, it can be deduced from the verbatim responses of the participants that religion has the power to shape people’s behaviour (in this case political behaviour), lived experiences, perceptions and understanding of social and economic issues. It can be deduced from the responses of the

participants that religion is very powerful and can conduce to the participation of young women in elections. For example, the South African Council of Churches (SACC) led by Desmond Tutu contributed towards the end of apartheid by spreading anti-apartheid news and helping encourage negotiations (SACC, 2015).

4.3.4 Lack of Interest and Passive Participation in Politics

The study found that a lack of interest immensely contributes to low voter turnout among young women. Some of the participants did not participate due to this factor. For example, Participant 11 expressed:

“I think young women don’t vote because they are ignorant, we are focused on other things, and we don’t take time to participate”

Also, Participant 16 stated:

“I did not participate in voting because I was not interested, I knew that it was election season, but I didn’t care because my vote does not contribute to any change”

A similar response was noted from another participant illustrating the continuous lack of interest in the electoral processes from the participants despite knowing about the election season. For example, Participant 18 said:

“I have never voted, even though I am almost an elder and this is because I feel as if it is obvious which party will win therefore it is not worth all the energy”.

A common view amongst interviewees was that they do not participate because they simply choose not to. This theme surfaced because there was a sense of apathy from the participants (Nwokolo, 2022). This has been recurring over the years as many young people believe that their vote does not contribute to any change, therefore, and they choose to ultimately not participate (SABC, 2023). It is quite common that when it is election season, young people just do not vote. For example, recent trends prove that many of them are not interested, show a lot of apathy, and are pulling away from practicing their democratic right (Nwokolo, 2022). Despite this, the responses from the participants can be interpreted as deliberate voter apathy. Therefore, it can be argued that voter apathy in this case is not neglecting democratic processes, but that it is an important form of passive participation in the elections - as a form of protesting. This is because the participants indicated that “they deliberately chose not to participate.” This aligns with the idea by Dunphy and

Hodgan (2020) that voter apathy can also be interpreted as a form of boycott, which is a form of passive participation. Furthermore, the idea of voter apathy indicates that people do not wake up and decide that their vote does not contribute to change, but is rooted in the repetitive nature of the government failing to deliver services (Bélanger, 2017). Hence, according to Young (2016), human beings are considered to be rational thinkers who choose the best decisions for themselves. Also, Chang (2024) stated that young people (Gen Z) are not voting because they are discouraged, and they firmly believe that the government is not in touch with their issues. In conclusion, it can be asserted that the participants in this study can be classified into two groups: (i) those who abstained from participation due to a lack of interest and the belief that voting holds no tangible value, and (ii) those who abstained from voting as a form of protest against the elections, stemming from a lack of trust in political parties and leaders. The youth has shown a lack of interest in elections because of the lack of the current unresolved socio-economic issues.

4.3.5 Family and Peer Influence

The type of families that people come from contributes to their participation in elections (Siegel-Stechler, 2021). Family plays a very important role in moulding the participation of young women in elections, contributing towards their attitude about political engagement and social activities (Siegel-Stechler, 2021). The study established that family and peer influence are a key factor that plays a role in the participants' voting behaviour. The response of the participants suggests that if their family members are not active in politics, or vice versa, that contributes to the outcome of their active or passive participation. Also, the power of the youth mobilising and influencing itself towards a particular cause cannot be underestimated. Some of the interviewees stated that their peers influenced their participation. This is what some of the participants were captured saying. Participant 2 noted that:

“My family regularly participates in voting; I am also obligated to vote because they remind me all the time that it is important.”

A similar response was acknowledged from another participant, for example, Participant 17 stated:

“I only registered to vote because my friends registered, then I ultimately voted because of that.”

The responses show that the families and friends of the participants contributed to their participation in voting. Alternatively, Participant 5 mentioned that because of their family values,

which are not inclined toward politics, they did not participate in the elections. This highlights the role of socio-cultural factors in shaping individuals' political behaviour and decision-making processes. For example, Participant 5 said:

“I did not participate because of my family values, such as culture and lifestyle, which did not allow me to do so”

The responses from the participants reveal that close associations, including the orientation of friends and family, including their beliefs and values, largely contribute to whether they participate in elections or not. Family remains an important aspect of one's life and most people consider how they are perceived by their family members (Lahtinen et al., 2019). Therefore, when one's family values voting, they are most likely to carry that culture to other generations. The sense of belonging and following family values is shown to be a critical aspect of their voting behaviour (Graham et al., 2020). Families represent the first level of socialisation agents, where political participation can be taught at a very young age (Gidengil et al., 2016). The participants show that if the family is politically active, this instils a sense of civic responsibility, while the reverse is the case as well. Therefore, young women are more likely to follow the values of their families, and if the latter is being followed then young women will also follow the non-participatory nature of the family (Gidengil et al., 2016). Families who express apathy have the potential to discourage young women from voting. The literature by Graham et al.(2020) emphasised the notion that family influence from an early age contributes to how a young person will view participating in elections. Also, political socialisation from a young age makes young people more politically aware, and they find it easier to be responsible (Jennings & Niemi, 2015). Therefore, it can be argued that family influence is the foundation for how young women in this study view participation in elections.

Peer influence might be regarded as a small factor that contributes to the participation of young women in elections, but in fact the impact of peer influence is significant. The participants alluded to their participation being influenced by their peers. As social beings, young women often look to their friends, family, and broader social networks for guidance on political beliefs and behaviours (Braha & De Aguiar, 2017). This dynamic can significantly impact their engagement in the electoral process. When peers are politically active, young women are more likely to follow suit (Harmon et al., 2019). Participation in discussions about candidates, issues, and the importance of voting can create a sense of urgency and motivation (Zainurin et al., 2024). Seeing friends advocate

for specific candidates or issues can motivate others to participate and make informed choices (Zainurin et al., 2024). Moreover, peer influence can help young women navigate the complexities of political participation. Friends who are knowledgeable about the electoral process can offer support and guidance, demystifying aspects such as voter registration and the voting process itself (Braha & De Aguiar, 2017). Conversely, the absence of peer support can hinder participation. If a young woman is surrounded by peers indifferent to voting, she may feel less inclined to engage. Ultimately, the findings of the study show that peer influence plays a crucial role in shaping young women's political engagement, fostering a culture of participation and collective action that can lead to increased voter turnout and active citizenship.

4.3.6 Lack of Government Efficacy

Service delivery blockages remain one of the most critical socio-economic factors that even create protests in many communities (Mclouhlin, 2015; Kanyane, 2014). Subsequently, this study found that a lack of government efficacy influences how young women participate in elections. This was established based on participants' feedback that government performance in service delivery significantly influences their level of participation. This is what the participants had to say:

Participant 4 stated:

“One of the socio-economic factors that contributed to me not voting was service delivery. Local government is failing us and we are so tired”

An identical response was recorded for example, Participant 10 said:

“I have been voting but the same thing happens, we still lack services, and the government has not been doing anything to assist therefore I choose to not vote.”

Also, Participant 11 indicated that:

“I come from a small village, we have been fetching water from a communal tap for years. There's no need to continue voting”.

The participants reveal that service delivery is an imperative issue that many young women acknowledge as a continuous problem in South Africa. The participants agree that the lack of government efficiency is a push factor in choosing not to vote. It can be further deduced from the responses that the participants who have been voting in previous elections see no progress, leading

to apathy. The lack of service delivery has made the participants question the capability of government to grant basic services. All spheres of government have allocated budgets that are meant to cater for people's needs (Nyarhi, 2024). It becomes alarming when budgets are depleted but no services have been delivered to the people (Kanyane, 2014). Additionally, the youth have indicated that their concerns are often overlooked, as leaders focus on other matters (Nyarhi, 2024). Young women do not see service delivery in their neighbourhoods, and they do not want to vote. Service delivery, as a promise that is made through manifestos, should be delivered to the recipients. From the responses in this study, service delivery has proven to contribute to the level of how young women participate in elections.

4.3.7 Representation and Female Leader Role Models

There have been many female leaders in the past who have been activists and helped in achieving democracy, for example Charlotte Maxeke, Winnie Mandela and Ruth First (South African History, 2016). Despite that, and despite them and other women having paved the way for other female activists to be at the forefront of politics, current representation and female leader role models are limited (Gilardi, 2015). The representation of women remains important as this shows that politics is not a male sport. Therefore, this study established that representation and female role models influence young women's participation. This was established as participants spoke about it and this is what the participants captured:

Participant 4 noted:

"Women are less considered when it comes to positions, I think what influences them is that there are no female role models, and they always say that women are not capable of leading but not considering that leading doesn't have a gender."

Another participant's response seconded this. For example, Participant 17 commented:

"I am very politically aware and as much as cabinet has reached 50% male and female. Women are not in strategic positions, when last did we have a woman as a secretary general except for in the women's leagues. It is very disappointing therefore I kept my vote."

Participants agreed that there is a lack of female role models to inspire young women to run for leadership positions in elections. As argued by Gilardi (2015), young women need to see themselves in other female leaders as this promotes political awareness and makes them want to

participate in electoral processes. Female leaders have come a long journey and have played an imperative role in politics (South African History, 2016). While this may be the case, young women in this study still feel as though there are no role models, and politics seems to be a male-dominated sport. Commenting on the role model effect, Lawrence (2021) argued that many women participate in voting as they resonate with the candidate. The literature suggests that young women can participate more in elections if they have more role models (Lawrence, 2021). This is important because more of them will make sure to cast a vote rather than choose apathy. Therefore, it can be highlighted that young women in the study share views that make note of the women in leadership positions. However, this does not suffice because they do not occupy decision-making positions. This discourages them from voting because this translates into the idea that women are not capable of leading outside being deputised and being treasurers.

4.3.8 Challenges of Voting Systems

The electoral process has upgraded from the former process that lacked the use of technology. Now the electoral process has made voting easier using technological advancements. However, the electoral process is still not perfect, although its advancements are noteworthy. The research project found that there still exist barriers to voting that have contributed to the participants not voting. The participants responded to this as follows:

Participant 1 said:

“No, I didn’t vote because I registered to vote at home, but I was in Joburg during voting season, and I didn’t know how to change that”

A similar response by a participant was noted, for example, Participant 11 indicated:

“I got to the voting station and the long queues were so discouraging and I still had other things to do that day. I then decided not to vote.”

Participant 19 stated:

“I thought we had the option of voting online; unlike other areas we didn’t have people transporting us to our voting stations. I couldn’t walk to my station as it was quite far”.

Drawing from the responses of the participants, there is discontentment with the electoral process. As much as it has evolved from the process of 1994, it remains old-fashioned. Ultimately, this is

one of the crucial factors that reduce voter turnout as one can be registered and ready to vote but be discouraged by the long queues and logistics during the day of voting. Squabbles and fights break out as people stand for hours waiting to vote. They fight about line cutting and complain about hunger (Seleka et al., 2024). Even after voting stations had closed, there were still people waiting to vote (Pettigrew 2021). The conditions in some voting stations were terrible as some people only got to vote after 9 hours of waiting, and volunteers were limited to 20 house visits per volunteer (Seleka et al., 2024). The barriers to voting did not increase the voter turnout from the previous elections. Many South Africans, including the study participants, ended up not casting their votes because of the lack of many voting stations that would reduce long queues in big areas, and the lack of ballot papers (Davis, 2024). Pettigrew (2021) asserts that the barriers to voting such as the long queues can be treated as the result of the lowered voter turnout. There is more that can be done to improve the state of the barriers to voting because if people can wait for long hours just to vote, that means that they are serious about their participation. Moreover, if the barriers continue, more people will think twice before casting their vote.

4.3.9 The Use of Social Media as a Mobilisation Tool and Awareness Programmes

Social media has been a powerful tool used to communicate messages that reach most of the population (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015). This has been used as a strategy to communicate even to the youth as this generation is known for being online constantly (Dunu & Uzochukwu, 2015). The lack of awareness programmes was identified by the study participants as having an impact on the level of participation in elections. The participants have alluded that political parties do not host programmes that include the general public, and this influences their participation. Subsequently, this study established that social media has not been used adequately as a mobilisation tool. The participants have expressed that social media has largely contributed to the participation of young women in elections. This is what some of the participants had to say about this:

Participant 7 stated that:

“We are young people who are always online, I saw ads about voting, they used to put voting on TV shows back in the day. Now social media is the way we communicate. I think that because now that people are on social media, I think more social media. Visiting schools,

educate young people at a young age and teach them so that by the time they are eligible to vote they can be aware”

Contradicting this point, Participant 8 said:

“Social media has been used adequately during elections; it is just that you will not find a common young woman on these political sites”.

The responses represent contradicting views, where a participants argued that social media is not being used adequately as a tool to mobilise young women to vote. The other, however, suggests that social media was the reason why they participated in voting. The following responses from the participants concern how awareness programmes affected how participants voted, for example:

Participant 11 stated:

“Teaching the young ones, going as far as visiting schools to teach the young eligible voters that political parties exist, and this is what they do. Listing the achievements and hosting discussion that affect the youth.”

A different view was noted from other participants. For example, Participant 18 indicated:

“I grew to know more about politics through attending political events, therefore I could say that the strategies that mobilised me was the party programmes such as the door to door and marches.”

The participants expressed views that share the common notion that use of social media in capturing the youth is underutilised. The digital age has changed the political space. Social media has become a powerful tool that young people use daily to do even the most basic things. The participants provide strategies on how young women can be mobilised to participate in elections. The government has made strides in ensuring that they are online and communicating with youth. This has been done through the presidential pages online to help people access accurate information (South African Government, 2024). Nonetheless, these pages are not active and they do not facilitate news that the youth would be interested in. The youth that is always on social media platforms should be targeted on all these platforms. Social media has the power to educate and influence young women. The digital age does not require primitive ways to lure young people. Kahne et al. (2016) found that digital media is increasingly central to civic and political life and is, in many respects, stating the obvious. In South Africa, digital media is not being used optimally

to increase voters. This factor is one of the best strategies that can be used to encourage young women to vote at an early stage. It does have to be at the start of election campaigning. Social media is evolving and if the government does not capitalise, the traditional way of mobilising young women will not work in the future as it has proven to fail as voter turnout is decreasing. Social media also amplifies peer influence, serving as a platform for political dialogue and activism. The participants expressed their views as they elaborated on the party awareness programmes. There are contradicting views as some believe that they could be mobilised more if there were more party programmes, not just before elections. Some of the participants were influenced by the party programmes, including the door-to-door visits and marches. They believed that this was enough to influence them to participate in voting. Young women often share information, campaign messages, and personal experiences related to elections through these channels. This digital engagement not only raises awareness about electoral issues but also creates a sense of community among those who advocate for similar values.

4.3.10 Gender-Based Violence

Generally, GBV has been prevalent in South Africa (Buqa, 2022). It is continuously on the rise and has become a critical socio-economic issue that contributes to gender inequality (Meyiwa et al., 2017). Therefore, the research project found that GBV immensely contributes to the participation and non-participation of young women in electoral processes. This was established as the participants mentioned the following:

Participant 4 stated:

“More and more women feel unsafe in our country, what is there to vote for when I might be dead in a few days. The government does not care how many women die at the hands of men.”

The comment shows that the participants decided to express their discontentment with how the government deals with the issue of GBV, particularly violence against women, by not voting. Participant 9 used the opportunity of voting to change the plight of young women GBV in South Africa:

“There is too much GBV, this made me vote because something needs to be done about it.”

Also, Participant 18 said:

“I chose to use my vote to contribute to solving the crisis that we have as a country which is GBV. After the #MeToo movement I realised that women’s safety is very important”.

The participants share a common fear of this disease that has compromised the safety of women and children. The distasteful reality is that GBV is a crucial socio-economic factor that is prevalent in South Africa (Meyiwa et al., 2017). GBV is a pressing issue that needs urgent solutions, and young women often march as a cry for help and a form of advocating for their rights. It is from this that the participants highlighted GBV as an influencing factor that contributed to their voting behaviour in the 2024 elections. GBV has persisted in South Africa, leading some young women to abstain from voting, believing the government neglects the issue and women's rights. Other women use GBV as a reason to cast a vote as they believe that the more they participate, the more they contribute to societal change. There have been many programmes in Africa that have fought against gender imbalances and GBV (Bouilly et al., 2016). South Africa still lags even though women have led #AmINext and #MeToo. GBV is still an incurable disease, therefore voter apathy is also prevalent among young women. During the 2024 State of the Nation Address, the government stood in support of no violence against women as R21 billion was allocated to helping and empowering GBV survivors and tightening bail for GBV cases (Republic of South Africa, 2024). Mkancu (2024) argued that political parties should not use GBV as a campaigning strategy. Furthermore, voters should be voting for parties that focus on the solution to GBV. Therefore, it can be said that the efforts of the government do not go unnoticed. However, GBV is still a human rights violation that is perpetuated. More young women will continue to show apathy as a form of protesting the elections because the situation is worsening. Everyone should have an equal chance to participate in elections, and perpetual GBV decreases that chance for young women as the situation worsens.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The aim of this chapter was to produce a presentation of the findings from the interviews and then analyse and interpret the findings. For this study, thematic analysis was used to code the data and develop themes from the participants’ responses. Moreover, the themes allowed the researcher to analyse and delve into the socio-economic factors that influence young women’s participation in elections. The views of the participants gave different perspectives, where some of the participants

were influenced by socio-economic factors to vote and others did not vote because of socio-economic factors. This gave the study a broader view of how different participants interpret the different socio-economic factors and how their voting behaviour changes to choose the most viable choice concerning voting. The subsequent chapter will provide a summary of the key findings, recommendations, and conclusions based on the key findings.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The preceding chapter provided the data analysis, presentation and interpretation of the findings of the study. The verbatim responses of the participants were presented as sourced from the interviews. The chapter further discussed the themes that were created from the interviews. This chapter provides a discussion of the findings, conclusion, and recommendations. It commences with the discussion of research findings centred on three key themes, namely, from unemployment and voting behaviour, lack of government efficacy, GBV, service delivery speaks louder than words, and gender inequality: violence against women and female leader representation. Then it reflects on the three (3) study objectives that were set in Chapter 1. Thereafter, the chapter presents the recommendations and study limitations. Finally, the conclusion is discussed, outlining the key arguments raised throughout the study.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

While there are factors that have been studied that cause youth apathy towards elections, this research project addressed the socio-economic factors that influence young women's participation in elections. This study particularly examined how young women respond to economic conditions such as high unemployment rates. The focus on young women is crucial as this group experiences distinct challenges in the labour market, which may have significant implications for their political attitudes and behaviours during elections. This section explores the findings of this study, and contextualises them within the scope of the RCT. This theory explains decision-making by people based on the idea that individuals choose choices that maximise their personal benefit over social whole. Therefore, according to the RCT, the young women who participated in the study weigh their options and choose the best possible choice which, in the context of the study, is to vote or not to vote.

5.2.1 From Unemployment to the Ballot Box

The study reveals that unemployment among young women significantly influences their participation in elections, aligning closely with principles of classical the RCT. This theory posits that individuals or people make decisions by weighing cost and benefits to maximise personal advantage. Therefore, in the context of voting and participation in the elections, young women, faced with persistent unemployment and unfulfilled promises for job creation (Grootes, 2024), assess the perceived effectiveness of participating in elections against abstaining or changing their political allegiance. Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the government's inability to fulfil its promise of labour market expansion, influencing their decision-making process during the 2024 elections. For some, the opportunity cost of voting outweighed the potential benefits, leading to voter apathy. Others shifted their support to alternative parties, reflecting a recalibration of their political expectations based on socio-economic realities. Therefore, the correlation between high unemployment rates and evolving voting behaviour highlights how economic conditions act as a lens through which young women evaluate political options. Furthermore, this shift in behaviour is consistent with trends showing declining youth participation in South African elections compared to previous cycles (Nyarhi, 2024). Unemployment becomes a “long-term illness” disproportionately affecting the youth (Grootes, 2024). The associated economic frustration undermines trust in established political systems, thereby increasing voter apathy and reshaping electoral dynamics. Therefore, within the lens of the RCT, this demonstrates how structural inequalities, particularly unemployment, redefine the perceived utility of electoral participation for young women in South Africa. As a result, voter apathy is perceived to have more benefits than the elections, hence young women chose to refrain from direct participation in the elections. According to the RCT, voter apathy is their best decision, which has more benefits than voting. Unemployment has that much power to influence young women to reject continuing the culture of democracy. Many young people align themselves with parties that promise economic recovery or better job opportunities. At this stage, it is observed that young women who did not vote due to unemployment might exhibit apathy, whereas those who considered unemployment as a factor in their voting decision tended to change the party they supported. Their utility maximisation can be viewed as a strategic decision to choose candidates or parties that provide clear, credible promises for economic improvements.

5.2.2 Service Delivery Speaks Louder than Words

This study also found that the lack of service delivery contributed to the low voter turnout in the 2024 elections. Most of the participants agree that the lack of government efficiency is a problem that needs solutions. Therefore, in the context of a lack of service provision, young women do not see service delivery in their neighbourhoods, and they do not want to vote. For this study, service delivery is analysed in two different contexts that emanate from the responses of the participants. It is examined as the (i) quality of services from government's provision and (ii) the accessibility of delivered services. Generally, service delivery in South Africa has been one of the reasons for protests (De Juan & Wegner, 2019; Yende, 2022). It indicates clearly in the literature that if local government fails, South Africa fails (Reddy, 2016). This is a phenomenon that is not foreign to South Africa. Post 1994, one of the resolutions was that development should take place where poverty is non-existent (Reddy, 2016). Furthermore, Kadt and Lieberman (2020) wrote that there are many theories of democratic governance that posit that people should vote for the leaders who provide services or vote for the opposition when service delivery is poor. If people believe that voting will not improve service delivery, the perceived cost of participating in electoral processes outweighs the potential benefit (Young, 2016). Voters are responsive to service delivery. If there is no service delivery, fewer people are likely to vote (Kadt & Lieberman, 2020). Accordingly, rational choices theory posits that the young women in the study made the decision based on the calculation of cost versus benefit, voting and not voting. Therefore, in the context of the study, the continuous lack of services created the idea that voter apathy is a more rational choice. Service delivery is an imperative that many young women acknowledge as a continuous issue in South Africa (Public Servants Association, 2015). Hence, it can be argued within the context of the study that the continuous lack of service delivery can be understood as a phenomenon that has been used as a rational choice that leads to a reduced voter turnout. Others used it as an opportunity to change their voting pattern as they sought an alternative party to bring about their desired outcome.

5.2.3 Complexities of the 2024 General Election Processes

Looking at service delivery through the lenses of electoral processes, this refers to the communication of voting rights, procedures, and candidate information. If electoral commissions or local governments do not provide clear, accessible, and timely information, young women from lower socio-economic backgrounds may be less informed about how to vote or why it is important.

This lack of access could be due to poor digital literacy, limited physical access to information, for example poor community outreach or economic barriers that prevent attendance at informational meetings or events (Maphunye, 2019). Moreover, young women did not participate in elections due to the many outdated voting systems such as the long process of changing where you initially registered to vote when you might have relocated, and the long queues. Thus, the government must provide updated systems that fast-track voting instead of making the process feel like an extra chore. Some of the participants expressed that party awareness programmes have contributed to their participation in elections. These complexities have decreased the voter turnout and have the potential to lower it even further. It becomes a more rational choice not to vote because voting becomes more complex and time-consuming. The RCT suggests that the young women in the study will choose self-interest over anything, therefore if the electoral process is not favourable, they will choose not to vote.

5.2.4 Violence Against Women and the Underrepresentation of Female Leaders

According to the RCT, people assess the choices they have and choose the one that they think is the best (Roskin, 2024). Aligning with the principles of the RCT, which include self-examination, the choice to not vote was a rational one for the participants in this study. Gender-based violence (GBV) has emerged as a critical socio-economic factor that threatens voter turnout in South Africa, particularly among young women. As the "rape capital of the world" (Govender, 2023), the country faces ongoing challenges in ensuring the safety of women and children. This alarming reality has caused many young women to question the effectiveness of voting. While some are motivated to vote for change, others are discouraged, believing that their votes fail to address the daily issues they face. This normalisation of violence in society not only discourages participation in public life but also underscores the lack of trust in the government's ability to solve these systemic problems. Another important limitation to women's engagement is the underrepresentation of female leaders in strategic positions. Although South Africa has women in leadership roles, few occupy key decision-making positions, perpetuating the perception that women are incapable of leading. Unlike countries such as the USA, where figures such as Kamala Harris inspire female voters, South Africa has yet to field a female presidential candidate (Manjeya, 2024). This lack of representation discourages young women from participating in politics and voting. Female role models in power could empower young women and increase voter turnout. However, political

parties in South Africa often sideline women, relegating them to less influential roles, which hinders their advancement (Kanjere, 2019). Media portrayal further exacerbates the problem, portraying women as less credible leaders.

Overall, the findings of the study reveal that socio-economic factors affect young women's participation in elections. Economic conditions such as unemployment decrease the voter turnout of young women. Financial instability limits political engagement and participation in electoral processes. Additionally, access to resources such as political education and updated voting systems significantly impacts participation in voting. The findings show that young women's participation is dependent on better standards of living, and young women show apathy or change their voting behaviour according to how socio-economic factors affect them. Unlike religion, which was found to be a barrier to voting, the research project further found that cultural constraints in South Africa differ compared to other countries. The traditional idea of a woman is that one must always aspire to never do things that are in the man's territory. While in other countries, culture is a factor that contributes to young women's participation. For example, in Pakistan, women still follow traditional and cultural barriers that limit their participation in elections (Cheema et al., 2019). The study found the contrary among young women in South Africa. None of the young women expressed cultural constraints as a socio-economic factor that influences their participation. Democracy has provided young women with rights that free them from traditional patriarchy, enabling them to become active citizens. Therefore, cultural constraints are not applicable as socio-economic factors that influence the participation of young women. These socio-economic factors create a cycle of political disengagement. This has been evident, with the consistently decreasing voter turnout.

5.3 REFLECTION ON THE STUDY OBJECTIVES

5.3.1 Study Objective 1

The first objective was to describe the economic conditions that influence young women's participation in the 2024 elections. This objective was addressed by examining unemployment rates and voter behaviour among this demographic. Thus, the study highlighted that persistent unemployment, exacerbated by unmet governmental promises of job creation, significantly shaped young women's decisions either to abstain from voting or to change their political support. The economic conditions further contributed to the low voter turnout in the 2024 elections as many

young women showed apathy. The 2024 elections reflected the people's distrust in the political parties' ability to resolve issues and improve standards of living. Unemployment and service delivery were found to be the economic conditions with largest influence on young women's participation. The responses from the interviews revealed that unemployment has largely contributed to young women's participation in the 2024 elections. This shows that unemployment made young women show apathy and not vote at all or it has changed their voting behaviour. Where they did opt to vote, they voted for a different party. Furthermore, through this objective, the study findings show that service delivery influenced how young women participated. This is because young women from low-income areas did not vote since they found it pointless and believed that whether they voted or not, public services would not be delivered.

5.3.2 Study Objective 2

The second objective was to explore the implications of social factors on young women's participation in the 2024 elections. From this objective, it emerged how social factors such as GBV, family, and peer influence etc., impact young women's participation in elections. For example, these social factors show that young women are either empowered to fight for the rights of women who are abused, or they have lost faith in political leaders as GBV remains high in South Africa. Gender-based violence is one of the biggest social factors in South Africa that many young women consider a good reason to show voter apathy. This part of the interview showed that the participants' voting behaviour is influenced by GBV, where some of the participants voted because of the severity of GBV in South Africa. The participants used their vote because they believed that voting would have an influence on changing the current status quo. Family and peer influence also contribute to how young women view electoral processes. Social factors shape the minds of young women towards elections. Many young women do not vote due to the perception that elections and manifestos often fail to result in significant changes. This finding of the study revealed that young women often rely on the views of their families and peers. The participants were influenced to either participate or not participate in elections. From this objective, it was discovered that religion is also a powerful factor that influences how young women participate in elections. This is a factor that contributes to the low voter turnout, and the danger of this is that there remains no remedy as the church does not give the choice of voting. Thus, the women in this situation will never vote regardless of the improvement or decline in socio-economic factors.

5.3.3 Study Objective 3

The third objective was to explore the effectiveness of strategies and initiatives aimed at mobilising young women to participate in the election. This objective was addressed by identifying the effective strategies and initiatives that were effective in mobilising young women to vote. This included assessing whether party programmes and social media were effective in convincing young women to vote. Party programmes were effective in increasing membership. However, being a member does not equate to voting. Social media was effective as young women saw the utility of social media during elections. These strategies were effective during the campaigns. However, social media should not be a tool that is used only during election seasons. It should also be used as a campaign tool even 3 years before the elections. Political parties have held programmes that lobby people to join and grow their parties. The study found that some of the participants were mobilised through strategies and programmes such as door-to-door visits and marches. Social media is very important since we have entered the digital age. Many young people are constantly online. The study found that social media was used as one of the strategies to mobilise young women. It further found that young women do not think that social media is effective, as vast as it may be.

5.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This research project intended to explore the socio-economic factors that influence young women's participation in elections. The study achieved that by finding that the socio-economic factors are mainly unemployment, service delivery, and gender inequality. Through these findings, the study had its limitations:

5.4.1 Methodological

The study used a qualitative research approach that required the researcher to use interviews as a data collection tool. Therefore, for future studies, a mixed method can be used where a quantitative approach can be used to determine the correlation between socio-economic factors and participation rates.

5.4.2 Study Area

This study focused on a specific demographic area, which was the City of Johannesburg. Therefore, conducting research in this part of Gauteng alone may be non-representative of other

areas in the City of Johannesburg Municipality or in other municipalities more generally. More comprehensive data on young women's participation in elections might be obtained from a survey of South Africa's other towns or regions. Initially, we did not plan to include regional or provincial political leaders because we expected difficulties in reaching them for data collection. Therefore, it is important to include all parties when conducting future studies. A single racial category was also a limitation for the study as South Africa has many people of different ethnicities. This study only interviewed black young women.

5.4.3 Theoretical Framework

The RCT was the theoretical framework that was adopted in the study. This theory is a classical theory, which is usually rooted in a single discipline or single perspective, whereas a hybrid theory integrates multiple aspects from different theories. Therefore, for future studies, a hybrid theory may be adopted in the study to render a more thorough understanding drawn from different theories.

5.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study explored the impact of socio-economic factors on the participation of young women in elections. The study found that economic conditions and social factors motivate young women to participate or show apathy towards elections. The project established that voter apathy is a form of participating in elections as it is a result of unattained better standards of living. One of the major findings is that the increasing unemployment rate and lack of service delivery inevitably contribute to how young women vote. The outdated voting systems, lack of political education, and violence against women play a significant role in the participation of young women in electoral processes. The implication of the findings suggests that, as long as the status quo of socio-economic factors does not change, the turnout of young women will further decrease. Therefore, it is from this background that the study makes the following recommendations:

- This study's findings suggest that implementing policies to expand the labour market can create more jobs for young women. Unemployment makes people develop a belief that the government is unable to better their standards of living as some of them survive on self-sustaining methods.

- Religion is one of the study's findings that involuntarily limits political participation. It is recommended that there is an integration of religion and political participation without compromising the principles of the other. This can be done by having a distinction between religious institutions and political functions.
- The findings of the study reveal that there still is an ongoing perpetuation of GBV. It is further recommended that this issue is declared a national crisis, and that it be treated as such until women and children feel safe in South Africa.
- Service delivery is one of the main issues found in low- and middle-class areas where most South Africans reside. It is important for people to see the effectiveness of government, and this is done through delivering services. The government should ensure that basic services such as electricity, water, and a clean environment are delivered to the people.
- Additionally, based on the observations and limitations cited, this study recommends that an investigation of this nature be conducted in other South Africa towns. This is because of the possibility that the challenges faced by young women in the City of Johannesburg may be distinct from those faced by those in other South African regions. The study also suggests that future research collects data from South African men to investigate whether they are encouraging the participation of young women in electoral processes.

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ADDENDA

Addendum A: Interview schedule for key participants

1. What influenced your participation in the 2024 elections as a young woman?
2. Was your participation influenced by socio-economic factors, if not please describe the factors that influenced your participation?
3. which socioeconomic factors influenced your participation?
4. Can you describe your level of interest in participating in elections?
5. What can be a contributing factor that can discourage you from voting?
6. Do you think that how the economy was performing in 2024 affected how you voted?
7. May you please explain on the type of barriers that young women face when it comes to participating in elections, in your own words?
8. Do you think that the level of political education of young women has an impact on their involvement in election processes?
9. Why do you think that young women don't participate in elections, please elaborate?

Addendum B: Translated interview schedule for key participants.

1. Yini ibe nomthelela ekubambeni kwakho iqhaza okhethweni luka-2019 njengowesifazane osemusha?
2. Ingabe ukuhlanganyela kwakho kuthonywe izici zenhlalo-mnotho, uma kungenjalo sicela uchaze izici ezibe nomthelela ekubambeni kwakho iqhaza?
3. yiziphi izici zenhlalakahle yezomnotho ezibe nomthelela ekubambeni kwakho iqhaza
4. Ungakwazi yini ukuchaza izinga lakho lentshisekelo ekubambeni iqhaza okhethweni?
5. Ucabanga ukuthi indlela umnotho obusebenza ngayo ngo-2019 ibe nomthelela endleleni ovote ngayo?
6. Ngicela ukuchaza ngohlobo lwezithiyo abesifazane abasebasha ababhekana nazo uma kuziwa ekubambeni iqhaza okhethweni?
7. Ngabe ucabanga ukuthi izinga lemfundo yezepolitiki yabesifazane abasebasha linomthelela ekuzibandakanyeni kwabo ezinhlelweni zokhetho?
8. Ingabe ucabanga ukuthi abantu abasha abavela ezizindeni ezihlukene zenhlalo-mnotho babamba iqhaza ngendlela ehlukile?
9. Uyakholwa ukuthi abesifazane abasebasha abahlanganyeli okhethweni ngenxa yokuntuleka kwabesifazane ezikhundleni ezibalulekile?

Addendum C: Letter requesting permission

University of Mpumalanga
Private Bag X11283
Mbombela
1200

06 July 2024
The Municipal Manager
PO BOX 1014
Johannesburg
2001

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a student registered for a master's degree in development studies at the University of Mpumalanga. I hereby request permission to conduct research in Braamfontein, situated in the City of Johannesburg municipality. The research is mainly for my academic growth and personal development.

The proposed title of my research is exploring the socio-economic factors that influence young women's participation in elections in Braamfontein, Gauteng province. With this letter, I have attached the data collection instruments that I will use to collect data from the participants of the study.

Should you wish to obtain more information or have questions related to the study, please do not hesitate to contact me or my supervisor. Our contact details are as follows:

Name of Researcher: Fezeka Bujela

Cell phone number: 0760144510

Email: 220098158@ump.ac.za

Supervisor: Dr NE Yende

Email: Nsizwazonke.Yende@ump.ac.za

I hope my request will be to meet your set requirements.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Fezeka Bujela', is written over a light blue rectangular background.

FN Bujela

Addendum D: Gatekeeper's letter



City of Johannesburg
Department of Corporate & Shared Services
Office of the Group Head: Group Human Capital Management

6th Floor, B Block
Metropolitan Centre
158 Civic Boulevard
Rraamfontein

PO Box 1049
Johannesburg
South Africa
2000

Tel +27(0) 11 407 6926
Fax +27(0) 11 339 1878
www.joburg.org.za

20 August 2024
Fezeka Nontlantla Bujela,
Master's in Development Studies
University of Mpumalanga

Ref: Permission to conduct research study

This letter serves to acknowledge receiving the letter requesting permission to conduct research in the City of Johannesburg under the title: **"EXPLORING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS: A CASE IN THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG PROVINCE"**. I am aware that the study entails the collection of information from the City, city officials and participants from communities through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, observation participation and other fora of the city.

The research study is promoted by the City of Johannesburg because it helps both students and practitioners to gain an understanding of the sociology of the City, as it evolves and contributes towards the building of developmental local government.

I, Tersia Johanna Groenewald, as delegated authority of the City of Johannesburg Municipality (the City), hereby give permission to the primary researcher, ezeka Nontlantla Bujela, the following:

To collect and publish information about the City is publicly not available, for the research project titled: **"EXPLORING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE YOUNG WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PROVINCIAL AND NATIONAL ELECTIONS: A CASE IN THE CITY OF JOHANNESBURG, GAUTENG PROVINCE"**.

- This authorisation is based on mutual understanding that the City's name can be revealed in her/his project; and
- The researcher contacts the relevant department for arrangements pertaining to the research; and
- The information provided by the employees or any other means (such as company's archived documents or reports) of the City is purely for academic purposes and cannot be used for any other purpose.

Please note that on completion of the study, a copy of the research report should be submitted to the City of Johannesburg in honour of your commitment.

I urge you to present this letter of permission whenever you come across officials and participants in the research study. I thank you for choosing the City of Johannesburg to conduct the study.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tersia Groenewald".

(On behalf of Tersia Groenewald)
HR Officer: Human Resource Development
Tel: (011) 407- 6064
Email: NtombozukoL@joburg.org.za

Addendum E: Consent form

A Consent Form for Participation in the Study

I agree to participate in a research project conducted by, who is doing his/her Master's Degree in Development Studies at the University of Mpumalanga.

This participation form serves as permission that I am giving to the researcher regarding my full participation in this research.

The participation form also acknowledges the following aspects:

1. I have adequate information about the research topic, and I understand the study.
2. I understand that my participation is based on voluntary participation. Therefore, the role that I will play in the study has been clearly outlined to me and I understand the role.
3. I am fully aware that since my participation is voluntary and there is no force used on me to participate in the study. I can withdraw at any stage of the researcher when I no longer feel comfortable sharing any information.
4. I understand that during the data collection process, the researcher will take written notes and use a tape recorder to record our conversation for the purpose of the study. I give the researcher full permission to take written notes and I am aware that I can choose to not be recorded by the researcher.
5. I am aware that my anonymity, privacy and confidentiality will be respected in this study. Therefore, the researcher will only share information that I have fully agreed upon for the need of the study.

.....

Participant signature

.....

Date

.....

Researcher signature

.....

Date

Addendum F: Translated consent form

Ifomu Lemvume Yokubandakanyela Ocwaningweni

Mina..... vuma ukubamba iqhaza kuphrojekthi yocwaningo olwenziwa ngu, owenza iHonours Degree in Development Studies eNyuvesi yaseMpumalanga. Leli fomu lokubamba iqhaza lisebenza njengemvume engiyinikeza umcwaningi mayelana nokuhlanganyela kwami ngokugcwele kulolu cwaningo.

Ifomu lokubamba iqhaza liphinde livume izici ezilandelayo:

1. Nginolwazi olwanele mayelana nesihloko socwaningo, futhi ngiyaluqonda ucwaningo.
2. Ngियाqonda ukuthi ukubamba kwami iqhaza kusekelwe ekubambeni iqhaza ngokuzithandela. Ngakho-ke, indima engizoyidlala ocwaningweni ibekwe ngokucacile kimina futhi ngiyayiqonda indima.
3. Ngazi kahle ukuthi njengoba ukubamba kwami iqhaza kungokokuzithandela futhi akukho mandla asetshenziswa kimi ukuba ngibambe iqhaza ocwaningweni. Ngingahoxa kunoma yisiphi isigaba socwaningo lapho ngingasazizwa ngikhululekile ukwabelana nganoma yiluphi ulwazi.
4. Ngियाqonda ukuthi ngesikhathi sokuqoqwa kwedatha, umcwaningi uzobhala amanothi futhi asebenzise irekhoda ukuze aqophe ingxoxo yethu ngenhloso yocwaningo. Nginikeza umcwaningi imvume egcwele yokuthatha amanothi abhaliwe futhi ngiyazi ukuthi ngingakhetha ukungarekhodwa umcwaningi.
5. Ngiyazi ukuthi ukungaziwa kwami, ubumfihlo kanye nokugcinwa kuyimfihlo kuzohlolishwa kulolu cwaningo. Ngakho-ke, umcwaningi uzokwabelana kuphela ngolwazi engivumelene ngalo ngokugcwele ngesidingo socwaningo.

X

Participant's signature

Date:

X

Researcher's signature

Date:

Addendum G: Ethical clearance



Ref: UMP/Bujela/08/2024

Date: 16 August 2024

Fezeka N. Bujela (220098158)

School of Development Studies

FACULTY OF ECONOMICS, DEVELOPMENT AND BUSINESS SCIENCES

University of Mpumalanga

RE: APPROVAL FOR ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR THE STUDY:

Exploring The Socio-Economic Factors That Influence Young Women's Participation in Provincial and National Elections: A Case in the City of Johannesburg, Gauteng province

Reference is made to the above heading.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee (Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences) UMP, approved the ethical clearance of the above-mentioned study.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e., Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach, and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/ modification prior to its implementation.

PLEASE NOTE: Research data should be stored securely in the school/division for a period of 5 years.

The Ethical Clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter, Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.



Prof. Ogujiuba Kanayo

Chairperson: FREC,

Faculty of Economics, Development and Business Sciences

University of Mpumalanga

Addenda H: Editor's certificate



03 March 2025

CERTIFICATE

Fezeka Nontlantla Bujela

Dear Fezeka

Thank you for using Impela Editing Services to edit your Master's thesis entitled *"Exploring the Socio-Economic Factors Influencing Young Women's Participation in Provincial and National Elections: A Case of the City of Johannesburg, Gauteng."*

I have proofread for errors of grammar, punctuation, spelling, syntax and typing mistakes. I have formatted your work and checked the references (this means checking the formatting) according to APA 7th edition.

Please note that Impela Editing accepts no responsibility for work changed after issuing this certificate.

Kind regards

Helen Bond (Bachelor of Arts, HDE)

Addenda I: Plagiarism report