

Youth, Democracy, and Civic Engagement: Examining Political Participation among Senior High School Students in Cape Coast, Ghana

Ernest Ampomah Arkoh^{1,2,3*}, Boadu Kankam⁴, Gabriel Kwasi Aboagye⁴, Gloria Osei⁵,
Ebenezer Darkwah Arkoh^{6,7}

¹School of Business Administration, European Institute of Management & Technology (EIMT), Cham, Switzerland

²Elite College of Business & Healthcare, Markham, Canada

³Department of Geography & Regional Planning, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

⁴Department of Business & Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Humanities & Social Sciences Education, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, Ghana

⁵Cambrian College, Sudbury, Canada

⁶Goaso Municipal Hospital, Ghana College of Nurses and Midwives, Accra, Ghana

⁷Critical Care Nursing Membership Programme, Kumasi Training Centre, Ghana College of Nurses and Midwives, Accra, Ghana

Email: *ernestampomaharkoh90@gmail.com, Kankam.boadu@ucc.edu.gh, kankam21265@gmail.com, gabriel.aboagye@ucc.edu.gh, gmadam02@gmail.com, earkoh010@gmail.com

How to cite this paper: Arkoh, E. A., Kankam, B., Aboagye, G. K., Osei, G., & Arkoh, E. D. (2026). Youth, Democracy, and Civic Engagement: Examining Political Participation among Senior High School Students in Cape Coast, Ghana. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 14, 154-199. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2026.147012>

Received: May 29, 2026

Accepted: July 14, 2026

Published: July 17, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by author(s) and Scientific Research Publishing Inc. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution International License (CC BY 4.0). <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



Open Access

Abstract

This study examined youth, democracy, and civic engagement by exploring political participation among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey design and employed a stratified sampling technique to select 400 respondents from selected senior high schools within the metropolis. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, as well as inferential statistics through an independent samples *t*-test. The findings revealed that students predominantly understood political participation in terms of voting, political campaigning, and adherence to laws and civic responsibilities. Respondents further identified several benefits of political participation, including the promotion of democratic governance and democratic values, increased awareness of civic rights and responsibilities, opportunities for expressing societal needs and preferences, and enhanced understanding of electoral and parliamentary processes. The study additionally established that no statistically significant gender differences existed in students' understanding of political participation. The study concludes that political participation remains essential for strengthening democratic culture and civic consciousness among Ghanaian youth. The study therefore recommends intensified civic education, democratic sensitization,

and curriculum-based interventions aimed at promoting active political participation and civic engagement among students.

Keywords

Political Participation, Civic Engagement, Democracy, Youth Participation, Democratic Governance, Senior High School Students

1. Introduction (Background to the Study)

Democracy thrives on the active involvement of citizens in governance and public decision-making processes. Political participation, therefore, constitutes a fundamental pillar of democratic consolidation, civic accountability, and inclusive governance. Across both emerging and established democracies, citizen engagement in political processes such as voting, public deliberation, advocacy, civic activism, and policy discourse is widely recognized as essential for strengthening democratic institutions and promoting social cohesion. Young people, particularly students, occupy a strategic position within this democratic framework because they represent future political actors, opinion leaders, and custodians of democratic continuity.

Political participation has been conceptualized in diverse ways within democratic discourse. Verba, Scholzman, & Brady (1995) viewed political participation as activities undertaken by private citizens to influence governmental actions and public policy. Similarly, Uhlaner (2001) conceptualized political participation as engagement in political activities and public involvement in decision-making processes. Political engagement extends beyond voting behaviour to include civic advocacy, political discussions, demonstrations, campaigning, community mobilization, and participation in civil society organizations (Lamprianou & Demetriou, 2013). Contemporary democratic scholarship further recognizes that political participation among young people is increasingly shaped by civic education, socialization processes, institutional trust, and access to political information.

Globally, concerns have emerged regarding declining youth participation in formal political processes, particularly among students and young adults. Studies in Europe and North America have documented decreasing electoral participation and growing political apathy among younger populations (Lamprianou & Demetriou, 2013). However, scholars argue that this trend does not necessarily indicate disengagement from democracy; rather, youth participation is increasingly taking alternative and informal forms such as digital activism, issue-based advocacy, and community engagement. Nevertheless, insufficient political literacy and weak civic education continue to undermine meaningful democratic participation among students in many societies (Civic Mission of Schools, 2003; Keeter, Zukin, Andolina, & Jenkins, 2002).

Within the African context, political participation remains central to democratic development, particularly in emerging democracies. Although several Afri-

can countries, including Ghana, have experienced relatively high voter turnout and increasing democratic stability, youth participation in governance processes continues to face structural and educational challenges. Existing literature suggests that factors such as inadequate civic education, socioeconomic inequalities, poor political orientation, and limited opportunities for engagement negatively affect the extent to which young people participate effectively in democratic governance (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2005). Empirical studies further indicate that younger citizens are less likely to engage in formal political processes compared to older populations, raising concerns about the future sustainability of democratic systems on the continent (Bratton, 1999).

In Ghana, democratic governance under the Fourth Republic has significantly expanded opportunities for civic and political participation. Ghanaian youth have historically played influential roles in political mobilization, electoral processes, democratic activism, and public discourse (Ninson, 2006). The youth have served as political campaigners, polling agents, community mobilizers, and advocates for democratic accountability (Asante, 2004). Despite these contributions, concerns remain regarding the quality of political understanding and civic preparedness among young people, particularly students in senior high schools.

Senior high school students constitute an important demographic for democratic socialization because the school environment serves as a primary institution for citizenship education, value formation, and civic orientation. Through formal curricula and social interactions, students acquire knowledge, attitudes, and competencies necessary for responsible citizenship and political engagement. However, evidence suggests that many students possess limited understanding of the broader dimensions of political participation beyond electoral activities. Inadequate exposure to civic education, limited political awareness campaigns, and insufficient practical engagement opportunities may constrain students' ability to participate meaningfully in democratic governance (Ahwoi, 2006; Asiamah, 2006).

Furthermore, the increasing complexity of democratic governance in contemporary societies requires young people to develop critical political consciousness, participatory skills, and democratic values at an early stage. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2012) emphasizes that politically informed youth are better positioned to promote peacebuilding, social inclusion, conflict management, and democratic accountability. Consequently, strengthening political participation among students is not only a democratic imperative but also a developmental necessity.

Despite the growing scholarly interest in youth political participation in Ghana, limited empirical attention has been devoted to understanding how senior high school students conceptualize political participation and perceive its democratic relevance. Existing studies have largely focused on adult populations, electoral politics, or university students, thereby creating a contextual and empirical gap regarding political participation among students at the pre-tertiary level. This study therefore seeks to examine democratic participation and civic engagement

among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana, with particular emphasis on their understanding, practices, and perceived benefits of political participation.

1.1. Operational Definition of Political Participation

Political participation refers to the various activities through which individuals engage in political and civic processes aimed at influencing public decision-making, governance, and democratic outcomes. Within the context of this study, political participation encompasses both conventional and non-conventional forms of engagement, including voting in elections, participating in political campaigns, joining political or civic organizations, contacting public officials, attending political meetings, engaging in political discussions and debates, participating in demonstrations, advocacy initiatives, community development activities, and other democratic processes designed to influence governance and public policy.

To this study, political participation is operationalized as the level of knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, willingness, and involvement of senior high school students in activities that promote democratic citizenship and civic engagement. It is measured through students' understanding of political participation, perceived benefits of political involvement, willingness to engage in political and civic activities, and their perceived challenges and barriers to participation. These dimensions are assessed using structured questionnaire items measured on a Likert scale.

A higher score indicates a greater level of political awareness, civic responsibility, democratic orientation, and readiness to participate in political and civic processes, whereas a lower score reflects limited political understanding, weak civic engagement, and reduced participation in democratic activities. In this study, political participation extends beyond electoral activities to include broader forms of civic engagement that contribute to democratic development, social accountability, and active citizenship among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

1.2. Research Gaps and Justification for the Study

Political participation is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic governance because it enhances accountability, representation, civic responsibility, inclusiveness, and democratic legitimacy. Democratic societies therefore place considerable emphasis on civic education and political socialization to equip young people with the competencies required for active citizenship. Within this process, senior high school students occupy a strategic position because adolescence represents a critical stage in the development of political attitudes, civic values, democratic orientations, and participation behaviours that often extend into adulthood. Despite Ghana's democratic advancement under the Fourth Republic and the longstanding involvement of young people in national political processes, concerns remain regarding the extent to which students possess the knowledge, motivation, and capacity necessary for meaningful political engagement.

Although the existing body of literature has generated important insights into youth political participation, several significant gaps remain evident. From a *literature gap* perspective, contemporary studies have largely concentrated on broader themes such as youth activism, electoral behaviour, digital participation, women's political inclusion, governance reforms, employment, and democratic representation. For example, Kumove & Dyrstad (2025) examined the influence of demographic youth bulges on voting and protest behaviour across Africa, while Baizhumakzy et al. (2025) investigated the role of democratic values and civic responsibility in shaping youth participation in Kazakhstan. Similarly, Ablateye (2024), Nyianle (2025), Brantuo et al. (2026), Vellinga (2025), and Frimpomaa-Afrane (2025) focused on youth representation, social media engagement, gender participation, employment conditions, and grassroots governance. However, the literature remains largely silent on how senior high school students specifically understand political participation, perceive its democratic significance, and navigate participation challenges within educational environments.

A clear *knowledge gap* also exists. While existing scholarship provides substantial evidence on determinants and outcomes of political participation among adults and general youth populations, there is limited knowledge regarding the political perceptions, democratic awareness, and participation experiences of students at the pre-tertiary level. Consequently, little empirical understanding exists concerning how senior high school students conceptualize political participation beyond conventional electoral activities and how they interpret their roles within democratic governance systems.

The study additionally addresses an important *theoretical gap*. Dominant political participation frameworks, including the Civic Voluntarism Model, Rational Choice perspectives, Mobilization Theory, and Democratic Socialization Theory, generally emphasize civic resources, education, political efficacy, and institutional engagement as predictors of participation. However, these theoretical explanations have rarely been examined within the context of Ghanaian senior high school students. Existing theories provide limited understanding of how institutional, psychological, social, and educational factors interact to shape political participation among adolescents in emerging African democracies. This study therefore extends theoretical discussions by examining the applicability of these frameworks within a pre-tertiary educational context.

A notable *methodological gap* is equally apparent. Many recent studies have adopted qualitative approaches, policy analyses, macro-level demographic investigations, or national-level surveys focusing on broad youth populations. While these approaches provide valuable insights, they often overlook school-based populations and fail to capture students' perceptions within structured educational settings. The present study addresses this limitation through a systematic quantitative examination of students' understanding, perceived benefits, and challenges associated with political participation.

The study also responds to a significant *population gap*. Existing research has predominantly focused on university students, unemployed youth, women, polit-

ical activists, and broader youth cohorts. Comparatively little attention has been devoted to senior high school students despite their importance as future voters, leaders, and democratic actors. As a result, the political attitudes and participation experiences of this critical demographic remain insufficiently understood within both Ghanaian and African scholarship.

From a *geographical gap* perspective, most studies have been conducted at national, regional, or international levels, with limited focus on specific educational contexts such as the Cape Coast Metropolis. Given Cape Coast's historical significance as a centre of education and civic development in Ghana, understanding political participation among students within this setting provides important contextual insights that may not be captured by broader national studies.

An important *empirical gap* also remains unresolved. Although studies have identified factors such as education, employment, social media use, civic values, and social capital as predictors of political participation, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the specific barriers confronting senior high school students. Issues such as political intimidation, fear of rejection, exclusion, exploitation, violence, misinformation, inadequate civic exposure, and weak participatory opportunities remain insufficiently documented despite their potential influence on democratic engagement. The absence of empirical evidence in this area limits understanding of the factors constraining youth participation at the formative stages of democratic socialization.

Finally, a substantial *practical gap* exists concerning the effectiveness of civic education and youth empowerment initiatives. Although citizenship education has been incorporated into Ghana's educational curriculum, persistent concerns regarding political apathy, weak civic consciousness, democratic disengagement, and youth manipulation by political actors raise questions about whether current interventions adequately prepare students for active citizenship. Evidence-based assessments of students' political understanding and participation experiences are therefore necessary to inform curriculum reforms, civic education programmes, and youth engagement strategies.

Against this backdrop, the present study is justified because it addresses these interconnected literature, knowledge, theoretical, methodological, population, geographical, empirical, and practical gaps by examining youth, democracy, and civic engagement through the lens of political participation among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. By generating context-specific evidence on students' understanding of political participation, perceptions of democratic benefits, and participation challenges, the study contributes to the advancement of scholarship, informs democratic education policy, and provides practical insights for strengthening active citizenship and democratic consolidation in Ghana and other emerging democracies.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to investigate youth, democracy, and civic engagement, examining political participation among senior high school students in

Cape Coast, Ghana. Specifically, the study sought to:

- 1) Investigate the ways in which SHS students in the Cape Coast Metropolis understand political participation.
- 2) Explore the views of SHS students on the benefits of political participation in the Cape Coast Metropolis.
- 3) Examine gender differences in senior high school students' understanding of political participation.

1.4. Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the direction of the research:

- 1) In what ways do SHS students in the Cape Coast Metropolis understand political participation?
- 2) What are the views of SHS students in the Cape Coast Metropolis on the benefits of political participation?

Hypothesis

The corresponding hypothesis has been formulated to help evaluate how gender differences determine political participation.

H₀: There is no statistically significant gender difference in senior high school students' understanding of political participation.

1.5. Significance of This Research

This study contributes to the growing discourse on youth civic engagement by enhancing understanding of political participation among senior high school students in Ghana. The findings will inform policymakers, curriculum developers, educators, and stakeholders in social studies education on students' levels of political awareness and engagement. The study also provides empirical evidence for strengthening citizenship education and democratic learning within the school curriculum. Furthermore, it offers practical insights for advocacy, policy formulation, and educational interventions aimed at promoting active civic responsibility, democratic values, and meaningful political participation among Ghanaian youth.

1.6. Authors' Novelty

This study offers a novel contribution to the political participation literature by shifting analytical attention from the widely studied domains of electoral behaviour, digital activism, university student engagement, and adult political participation to senior high school students within a developing democratic context. While previous studies have predominantly examined youth participation from broader demographic, socioeconomic, and governance perspectives, the present study specifically investigates how senior high school students understand political participation, perceive its democratic value, and experience barriers to engagement within a formal educational environment.

The originality of this study further lies in its integrated examination of youth, democracy, and civic engagement through the interconnected dimensions of political understanding, perceived democratic benefits, and participation challenges. By focusing on students in the Cape Coast Metropolis—a historically significant educational and civic centre in Ghana—the study provides context-specific evidence that has been largely absent from both Ghanaian and African political participation scholarship. The study therefore introduces a fresh empirical perspective on democratic socialization among adolescents and extends contemporary discussions on citizenship formation in emerging democracies.

1.7. Contribution to Academic Debate

This study contributes significantly to ongoing academic debates concerning the determinants of political participation, the effectiveness of civic education, and the role of democratic socialization in fostering active citizenship. Classical political participation theories, including the Civic Voluntarism Model (Verba et al., 1995), Rational Choice Theory, Mobilization Theory, and Democratic Socialization Theory, generally assume that education, civic resources, political efficacy, and institutional exposure increase political participation. However, the findings of this study suggest that educational exposure alone may not necessarily translate into broad and meaningful democratic engagement among young people.

The study advances contemporary debates by demonstrating that students often possess electorally centred understandings of political participation despite receiving civic education. Furthermore, the findings reveal that psychological, institutional, and social barriers—including fear, exclusion, intimidation, and limited participatory opportunities—continue to constrain democratic engagement. These findings challenge conventional assumptions that civic knowledge automatically produces active citizenship and instead support emerging arguments that contextual experiences and participation environments play a critical role in shaping democratic behaviour.

Additionally, the study contributes to debates on youth political participation within African democracies by highlighting the need to move beyond traditional electoral measures of participation toward broader conceptions of civic engagement, democratic inclusion, and participatory citizenship. In doing so, it enriches scholarly discussions regarding the relationship between democratic education and practical democratic participation among young people.

1.8. Contribution to Knowledge

The study makes substantial empirical, theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions to knowledge.

Empirically, the study fills an important gap by providing evidence on political participation among senior high school students in Ghana, a population that has received limited scholarly attention despite its strategic importance for demo-

cratic development. The study generates new insights into students' understanding of political participation, perceived democratic benefits, and participation constraints within the Cape Coast Metropolis.

Theoretically, the findings extend existing political participation and democratic socialization literature by demonstrating that youth political engagement is influenced not only by educational exposure but also by institutional, psychological, and contextual factors. The study therefore broadens existing explanations of political participation by integrating democratic knowledge, civic perceptions, and participation barriers within a single analytical framework.

Methodologically, the study contributes by examining political participation at the pre-tertiary educational level using a systematic quantitative approach, thereby expanding the methodological scope of youth political participation research, which has often focused on university students, adult populations, or national survey data.

Practically, the study provides evidence-based insights capable of informing educational policy, civic education curriculum development, youth empowerment programmes, democratic governance initiatives, and citizenship education interventions. The findings offer valuable guidance for policymakers, educators, curriculum developers, civic organizations, and democratic institutions seeking to strengthen civic consciousness, democratic culture, and youth participation in governance.

Ultimately, the study contributes to broader efforts aimed at promoting democratic consolidation, active citizenship, political inclusion, and sustainable democratic development in Ghana and other emerging democracies by highlighting the critical role of senior high school students as future democratic actors and agents of civic transformation.

2. Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical perspectives advanced by Seyd & Whiteley (2002) on political participation. Their multidimensional framework provides a comprehensive explanation of the factors influencing citizens' involvement in political and civic activities. The framework integrates the civic voluntarism model, rational choice model, social psychological model, mobilization model, and general incentives model to explain variations in political participation among individuals.

According to Seyd & Whiteley (2002), the civic voluntarism model posits that individuals' participation in politics is largely influenced by access to resources such as time, money, civic skills, education, occupation, income, and social status. The model suggests that citizens who possess adequate socioeconomic and educational resources are more likely to engage actively in political processes because such resources enhance political awareness, competence, and confidence. In the context of this study, education serves as a critical mechanism through which senior high school students acquire civic knowledge, democratic values, and partici-

patory competencies necessary for meaningful political engagement.

The rational choice model further explains political participation as a deliberate and calculated decision-making process in which individuals assess the potential benefits and costs associated with participation. From this perspective, students are likely to engage in political activities when they perceive such involvement as beneficial to their personal development, democratic rights, social influence, or societal progress. Closely related to this is the social psychological model, which emphasizes the role of attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and behavioural orientations in shaping political engagement. Students' understanding of democracy, civic responsibility, and governance therefore significantly influences their willingness to participate in political processes.

Additionally, the mobilization model argues that political participation is often stimulated by environmental influences, social networks, institutions, and political opportunities. Schools, peer groups, families, political organizations, and civic institutions play critical roles in exposing students to political information, democratic values, and participatory experiences. Consequently, students' political engagement may be strengthened through civic education programmes, awareness campaigns, and institutional support systems that encourage democratic involvement.

The general incentives model complements these perspectives by asserting that participation is motivated by expected rewards, benefits, or incentives. Such incentives may be material, social, psychological, or civic in nature. In this regard, students may participate in political activities because they perceive benefits such as enhanced civic awareness, leadership development, representation of societal interests, democratic inclusion, and opportunities to influence governance outcomes.

Drawing from these theoretical assumptions and contemporary literature on political participation, this study conceptualizes political participation as a process influenced by education, civic knowledge, political understanding, and democratic practice. The framework assumes that adequate civic education equips students with the knowledge and understanding required for effective participation in democratic processes. Increased political awareness subsequently enhances students' engagement in activities such as voting, campaigning, advocacy, community participation, and civic responsibility. Ultimately, active participation is expected to generate democratic benefits including the promotion of good governance, civic consciousness, social inclusion, and democratic accountability.

The conceptual framework further recognizes that students' political participation may be moderated by demographic and contextual factors such as age, gender, social status, access to resources, and individual choice. These variables may shape the extent to which students acquire political knowledge, develop participatory attitudes, and engage in democratic practices.

The framework adopts a linear relationship among the key variables, beginning with education and political awareness, progressing to civic knowledge and under-

standing, leading to political participation, and culminating in democratic benefits. This directional relationship suggests that effective civic education and political orientation are essential prerequisites for meaningful youth participation in democratic governance. Although the present study focuses specifically on senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana, the framework provides broader applicability for understanding political participation among youth in other educational and sociopolitical contexts.

2.1. Conceptualization of Students' Understanding of Political Participation

As indicated in **Figure 1**, Political participation is a multidimensional democratic concept encompassing a wide range of civic and political activities through which citizens influence governance and public decision-making processes. Such activities include voting, participation in electoral campaigns, political advocacy, engagement in demonstrations, contacting public officials, and involvement in community-based decision-making structures. Within democratic societies, education plays a critical role in equipping citizens, particularly students, with the knowledge, values, and competencies required for meaningful participation in political processes.

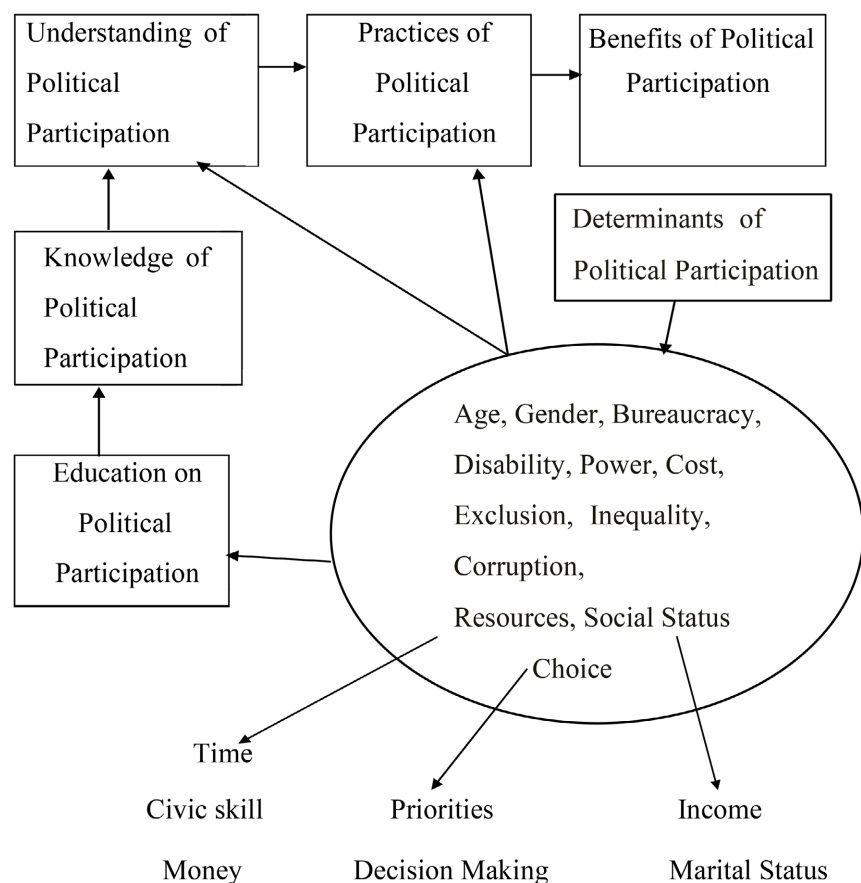


Figure 1. Proposed framework on students' understanding of political participation.

Figure 1 indicates that this study conceptualizes students' understanding of political participation to the extent to which senior high school students possess civic knowledge, democratic awareness, participatory skills, and the ability to engage responsibly in political and civic activities. The conceptualization is anchored in the theoretical assumptions of Seyd & Whiteley's (2002) models of political participation, particularly the civic voluntarism model, rational choice model, social psychological model, mobilization model, and general incentives model.

The civic voluntarism model posits that political participation is largely influenced by individuals' access to resources such as education, civic skills, income, occupation, time, and social status (Verba & Nie, 1972; Seyd & Whiteley, 2002). In this regard, **Figure 1** clearly shows that education is considered a fundamental mechanism for developing students' political consciousness and participatory competencies. Adequate civic education enables students to understand democratic processes, appreciate their civic responsibilities, and develop the confidence necessary to engage in political activities. Conversely, inadequate educational exposure may limit political understanding and reduce participation levels among students (Easterly & Levine, 1997).

The study (see **Figure 1**) further conceptualizes political understanding as a process shaped through socialization by institutions such as schools, families, the media, government agencies, and community organizations. Through these socialization agents, students acquire information, attitudes, and orientations regarding democratic governance and citizenship responsibilities. The social psychological model emphasizes that individuals' attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural orientations significantly influence their willingness to participate in public affairs. Thus, students who are adequately informed and politically oriented are more likely to develop positive democratic attitudes and engage actively in civic life.

Political participation within this study as shown in **Figure 1** includes both conventional and unconventional forms of engagement. Conventional participation refers to legitimate democratic activities such as voting, participating in campaigns, engaging in public debates, contributing to community development initiatives, and involvement in decision-making processes. Unconventional participation, on the other hand, may include protests, demonstrations, boycotts, and other forms of political activism. The study assumes that effective civic education enables students to distinguish between these forms of participation and engage responsibly within democratic boundaries.

The rational choice model also informs this conceptualization (refer to **Figure 1**) by suggesting that individuals engage in political participation after evaluating the potential benefits and costs associated with such involvement. Students are therefore likely to participate in political activities when they perceive benefits such as leadership development, civic empowerment, social inclusion, democratic representation, and opportunities to influence societal decisions. Continued engagement in political participation is expected to generate broader democratic

outcomes, including the promotion of good governance, accountability, transparency, peacebuilding, social cohesion, and increased civic responsibility.

Figure 1 additionally recognizes that students' political understanding and participation are influenced by several demographic, socioeconomic, and contextual factors. These include age, gender, social status, access to civic resources, disability, ethnicity, inequality, corruption, bureaucracy, and political exclusion. Existing literature suggests that younger individuals often demonstrate lower levels of political participation compared to older adults due to limited political experience and inadequate civic exposure (Bratton, 1999; Kuenzi & Lambright, 2007). Similarly, gender disparities continue to shape political participation, although recent studies indicate that the gap between male and female participation is gradually narrowing (Conway, 2001; Lamprianou & Demetriou, 2013).

Resource availability also remains a significant determinant of political engagement (refer to **Figure 1**). Students with access to civic skills, financial resources, information, and supportive social networks are more likely to participate actively in democratic processes. Civic competencies such as communication skills, debating abilities, leadership skills, and critical thinking further enhance students' capacity for political engagement. Conversely, structural barriers such as poverty, corruption, discrimination, bureaucratic constraints, and social exclusion may undermine students' ability to participate effectively in political activities.

Furthermore, **Figure 1** acknowledges that disability and unequal power relations may affect students' opportunities for civic engagement. Students from marginalized or less privileged backgrounds may encounter challenges in accessing political information, participating in decision-making processes, or benefiting from democratic opportunities. Similarly, institutional inequalities and corrupt practices may discourage students from engaging in political participation due to perceptions of unfairness, exclusion, or lack of transparency.

Overall, this conceptualization assumes a linear relationship between civic education, political knowledge, democratic understanding, political participation, and democratic benefits. It is expected that increased civic education and political awareness among students will enhance their understanding of democratic participation, strengthen their engagement in political activities, and ultimately contribute to democratic consolidation and responsible citizenship. Although the present study focuses specifically on senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana, the conceptual framework provides broader relevance for understanding youth political participation in other educational and sociopolitical contexts.

2.2. Empirical Review

Conceptual Perspectives of Political Participation

Political participation has consistently been identified as a fundamental dimension of civic engagement and democratic governance. Scholars widely acknowledge that democratic systems depend on citizens' active involvement in political and public affairs to ensure accountability, representation, and legitimacy within gov-

ernance structures. According to Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995), democracy cannot function effectively without citizens' freedom and willingness to participate in the governing process. Consequently, political participation has attracted substantial scholarly attention within political science, civic education, and democratic studies.

Traditionally, political participation has been conceptualized primarily in terms of electoral engagement, particularly voting behaviour. Early empirical studies largely focused on activities such as voting in elections, participation in political campaigns, involvement in political discussions, and staying informed about electoral issues (Obradović & Masten, 2007). Voting has long been regarded as the cornerstone of representative democracy because it constitutes the most visible and institutionalized form of citizen participation within democratic systems (Haste & Hogan, 2006). Through voting, citizens exercise political choice, influence leadership selection, and contribute to public decision-making processes.

However, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that political participation extends beyond conventional electoral activities. Researchers have argued that less formal and noninstitutionalized forms of participation should also be considered, particularly when examining youth engagement in democratic processes (Metzger & Smetana, 2009). This broader perspective includes participation in civic organizations, community activism, online political engagement, advocacy campaigns, protests, demonstrations, and volunteerism. Such forms of engagement are particularly important for adolescents and young people who may not yet possess the legal right to vote but nevertheless engage actively in civic and political life.

Empirical evidence further suggests that traditional forms of civic engagement have gradually declined among younger populations, while alternative and informal forms of participation have become increasingly prominent (Amnå, 2012). Young citizens often prefer issue-based activism, digital engagement, and community-oriented participation over conventional partisan politics. This shift reflects broader transformations in democratic participation, where civic expression increasingly occurs through social networks, online platforms, advocacy movements, and community initiatives rather than solely through electoral mechanisms.

Haste & Hogan (2006) emphasized that although voting remains central to democratic practice, it is often an infrequent and low-intensity activity for many citizens, especially within established democracies. Consequently, greater scholarly attention has been directed toward other forms of political expression through which individuals and groups attempt to influence governance, public policy, and social change. These include collective action, demonstrations, petitions, boycotts, and social movements. Democratic citizenship therefore involves not only adherence to laws and civic obligations but also the capacity to challenge unjust policies, advocate for reforms, and participate critically in public affairs.

In examining youth civic engagement, researchers have frequently focused on

political intentions, expectations, and attitudes rather than actual political behaviours. This approach is largely informed by the limited opportunities available to adolescents to participate formally in politics before reaching voting age (Hooghe & Wilkenfeld, 2008). Studies have therefore explored adolescents' intentions to vote, willingness to engage in political discussions, and expectations regarding future civic participation as indicators of democratic orientation and future engagement.

Empirical studies investigating the relationship between political intentions and actual political behaviour have produced important findings. Granberg & Holmberg (1990), for instance, found a strong correspondence between intentions to vote and subsequent voting behaviour. Similarly, longitudinal research demonstrates that political attitudes, ideological orientations, and participatory behaviours developed during adolescence often remain relatively stable throughout adulthood (Jennings & Stoker, 2004). These findings underscore the importance of civic education and early democratic socialization in shaping long-term patterns of political participation.

Broader conceptualizations of civic engagement have also incorporated volunteerism, community service, and participation in youth organizations as important dimensions of political and civic life (Flanagan, 2004; Sherrod, Flanagan, & Youniss, 2002). Such activities are viewed as mechanisms through which young people develop social responsibility, collective identity, and commitment to community well-being. Participation in volunteer and community activities may therefore contribute to the development of democratic values and participatory competencies among youth.

Nevertheless, some scholars caution against conflating volunteerism with political participation. Walker (2002) argued that many young people perceive volunteer activities as alternatives to formal politics rather than pathways into broader political engagement. Similarly, Obradović & Masten (2007) found that volunteerism and electoral participation represent distinct forms of civic engagement that may not necessarily predict one another. These findings suggest that while civic and political participation are interconnected, they should also be examined as separate but complementary dimensions of democratic engagement.

Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that political participation is a dynamic and evolving concept encompassing both conventional and unconventional forms of engagement. Contemporary understandings increasingly recognize the diverse ways through which young people express civic identity, engage with democratic processes, and contribute to social change. The literature further highlights the importance of education, political socialization, and civic opportunities in shaping students' understanding and practice of political participation.

2.3. Democratic and Civic Benefits of Political Participation

Political participation has long been recognized as a central component of demo-

cratic governance and civic engagement. Empirical scholarship consistently demonstrates that active citizen involvement in political processes contributes not only to democratic legitimacy but also to improved governance outcomes, social cohesion, and civic development. The literature on political participation emphasizes both individual and collective benefits, highlighting its significance for democratic consolidation and societal transformation.

One major strand of empirical literature focuses on the transformative capacity of political participation. Nelson & Wright (1995) argued that participatory processes function as instruments for social change by empowering citizens to influence governance and public policy decisions. Similarly, Beierle (1999) maintained that citizen involvement contributes to more effective and efficient policy outcomes because public participation introduces diverse perspectives, local knowledge, and collective problem-solving approaches into decision-making processes. Through participation, citizens become active stakeholders rather than passive recipients of governance.

Empirical studies further suggest that political participation enhances public understanding of governance and policy issues. Blackburn & Bruce (1995) emphasized the educational value of participation, arguing that engagement in political processes increases citizens' awareness of social, political, and environmental challenges. Participatory engagement enables citizens to acquire technical and social understanding necessary for evaluating policies and contributing meaningfully to democratic deliberations. In support of this position, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA, 1996) observed that collaborative relationships between communities and institutions foster broader understanding of complex societal problems and facilitate collective responses to such challenges.

Research also indicates that political participation benefits policymakers and public administrators. Thomas (1995) argued that continuous interaction between citizens and government officials enables administrators to better understand community preferences, concerns, and policy expectations. This interaction reduces resistance to policy implementation and promotes smoother governance processes because citizens are more likely to cooperate with policies they helped formulate or influence. Howard, Lipsky, & Marshall (1994) similarly demonstrated that institutionalized citizen participation emerged historically as a response to demands for greater accountability and inclusion in urban governance. Consequently, participatory governance has become increasingly important in strengthening trust between governments and citizens.

Another significant benefit identified in the literature is the promotion of democratic legitimacy and social inclusion. Applegate (1998) noted that participatory structures such as citizen advisory boards create opportunities for direct interaction between citizens and policymakers, thereby enhancing transparency and democratic responsiveness. Valadez (2001) further argued that participation empowers marginalized groups by enabling them to gain legitimacy and recognition as political actors within society. Through participatory engagement, individuals

and communities develop greater confidence in democratic institutions and processes.

Empirical evidence additionally suggests that political participation contributes to conflict resolution and consensus-building within societies. Weeks (2000) documented how deliberative democratic initiatives facilitated collective decision-making and enabled communities to resolve contentious policy issues through dialogue and compromise. Reich (1990) similarly contended that balanced citizen input promotes negotiation, cooperation, and mutual understanding, thereby helping societies address previously unresolved problems. Participatory processes therefore serve as mechanisms for strengthening social cohesion and democratic stability.

The literature also highlights the economic and administrative benefits associated with political participation. Randolph & Bauer (1999) observed that participatory governance often reduces the likelihood of costly litigation because citizens who are actively involved in decision-making processes are more likely to accept policy outcomes. O'Leary, Durant, Fiorino, & Weiland (1999) acknowledged that participatory initiatives may involve financial and administrative costs; however, they argued that such costs are often lower than the long-term consequences of policy resistance, public distrust, and legal disputes resulting from exclusionary governance practices.

At the individual level, political participation has been associated with civic development, democratic competence, and personal empowerment. Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995) identified the development of individual capacities as one of the primary benefits of participation. Drawing on Mill's democratic philosophy, they argued that participation enhances citizens' competence, independence, responsibility, and capacity for critical thinking. Participation therefore contributes to the development of informed, confident, and socially responsible citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to democratic governance.

Putnam (2000) further emphasized that participation in civic and political activities promotes social trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and collective responsibility. Individuals who engage actively in political processes are more likely to develop stronger commitments to democratic values and community welfare. Similarly, Uslaner (2002) argued that political participation becomes increasingly important as individuals develop stronger social attachments through family, work, and community life. Such attachments encourage greater concern for public issues and increase participation in civic and political activities.

Empirical studies also demonstrate that political participation strengthens democratic representation and responsiveness. Verba et al. (1995) and Bartels (2002) noted that individuals who participate actively in politics are more likely to have their voices heard by policymakers and political leaders. Through participation, citizens communicate their needs, preferences, and policy expectations to government institutions. This process enhances accountability and ensures that governance structures remain responsive to public interests.

Furthermore, political participation facilitates the protection and advancement of collective interests within democratic societies. Drawing on Madison's democratic principles, scholars argue that participation allows citizens and groups to articulate diverse opinions, negotiate competing interests, and influence public policy outcomes. Through democratic engagement, citizens can express their developmental aspirations, advocate for reforms, and contribute to decisions affecting their communities and societies.

Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that political participation generates substantial democratic, social, educational, and developmental benefits. Participation strengthens governance, enhances policy effectiveness, promotes civic competence, fosters democratic accountability, and empowers citizens to contribute meaningfully to societal development. These findings underscore the importance of promoting political participation, particularly among young people and students, as a means of strengthening democratic culture and civic responsibility within contemporary societies.

2.4. Gender Dimensions of Political Participation

Gender remains one of the most extensively examined variables in the literature on political participation and civic engagement. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that political participation is influenced by gendered social structures, access to resources, educational opportunities, and institutional arrangements that shape the extent and nature of men's and women's engagement in political processes. Consequently, scholars have devoted considerable attention to understanding the relationship between gender and political participation within both developed and developing democracies.

A dominant perspective within the literature emphasizes the role of education as a significant determinant of political participation for both men and women. Goetz (2003) argued that formal education is strongly associated with political engagement because it equips individuals with civic knowledge, political awareness, communication skills, and confidence necessary for participation in democratic processes. Similarly, Burns, Schlozman, & Verba (2001), drawing on extensive empirical research in the United States, identified education as one of the strongest predictors of political participation among both women and men. Education therefore serves as a critical mechanism for enhancing political efficacy, democratic orientation, and civic competence.

Despite improvements in women's educational attainment globally, empirical evidence suggests that increased education does not automatically translate into proportional participation in formal politics. Goetz (2003) observed that although the United States records relatively high levels of female participation in higher education and professional employment, women's representation in formal political institutions has remained comparatively low. This indicates that structural and institutional barriers continue to limit women's participation in political leadership and decision-making processes, even within advanced democracies.

Interestingly, empirical studies from some developing countries present contrasting findings. Goetz (2003) reported that countries such as Rwanda, Uganda, and Mozambique, despite relatively low female literacy levels and economic challenges, have achieved comparatively higher levels of women's representation in parliament. These findings suggest that political participation is influenced not only by education and socioeconomic development but also by political reforms, institutional frameworks, gender quotas, and broader sociopolitical dynamics.

The literature further emphasizes that women's political participation carries both individual and collective significance. According to Goetz (2003), women's engagement in politics enables them to influence public policies and advocate for issues affecting women and marginalized groups. Political participation therefore becomes a mechanism for challenging gender-based inequalities, promoting social justice, and advancing inclusive governance. Through civic and political engagement, women are better positioned to contribute to democratic decision-making processes and ensure that governance structures respond to diverse societal needs.

However, numerous empirical studies identify persistent barriers that constrain women's political participation globally. Research by Matland and Taylor (as cited in (Goetz, 2003)) highlighted several structural obstacles, including women's domestic responsibilities, limited political socialization, weaker social capital, lower access to economic resources, underrepresentation in influential occupations, and marginalization within male-dominated political institutions. Electoral systems, cultural norms, and patriarchal structures further contribute to women's underrepresentation in political leadership and formal governance processes.

Another important debate within the empirical literature concerns the measurement of women's political participation. Traditional approaches often measure participation solely by women's representation in elected offices such as parliament and local government (Goetz, 2003). However, scholars argue that such measures provide only a limited understanding of women's actual political engagement. Molyneux (1994) demonstrated that high levels of women's representation in formal political structures do not necessarily indicate meaningful political empowerment, particularly in contexts where independent civic participation is restricted.

Consequently, more inclusive approaches have emerged that conceptualize women's political participation beyond formal political office. Goetz (2003) suggested that participation in women's organizations, civic associations, advocacy groups, and social movements may provide a more comprehensive indicator of women's engagement in political life. Ramirez, Soysal, & Shanahan (1997) further demonstrated that the presence and strength of women's organizations within a country often reflect broader levels of women's civic activism, democratic involvement, and political consciousness.

Empirical studies also reveal that women often possess important participatory resources that can enhance political engagement. Goetz (2003) found that women frequently demonstrate strong involvement in religious associations, community

organizations, and school-based civic activities. Participation in such social networks may strengthen civic skills, leadership capacities, and democratic orientation. However, these participatory advantages are often overshadowed by men's greater access to educational, economic, and occupational opportunities, which continue to provide men with broader pathways into formal political participation.

Furthermore, some studies indicate that experiences of discrimination and marginalization may themselves become catalysts for political activism among women. Gender-based inequalities can motivate women to organize collectively, advocate for reforms, and participate in civic struggles aimed at achieving equality and representation. Nevertheless, the persistence of discriminatory cultural and institutional practices continues to hinder women's full participation in democratic governance.

Overall, the empirical literature demonstrates that gender significantly shapes patterns of political participation through its interaction with education, socialization, institutional structures, and access to participatory resources. While progress has been made in narrowing gender gaps in political engagement, substantial inequalities remain within formal political institutions and decision-making processes. The literature therefore underscores the need for inclusive civic education, institutional reforms, and empowerment initiatives aimed at promoting equitable political participation among both men and women.

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach using a descriptive cross-sectional survey design to examine senior high school students' knowledge and understanding of political participation in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The descriptive design was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to describe existing conditions and characteristics within a population without manipulating variables (Grimes & Shulz, 2002). According to Polit & Hungler (1995), descriptive studies are useful for observing and documenting phenomena as they naturally occur, while Babbie (1990) emphasized their suitability for generating generalizations from large populations. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design facilitates the collection of data at a single point in time, allowing for efficient assessment of prevalence and associated characteristics (Levin, 2006). The target population comprised 15,998 students from ten public senior high schools within the Cape Coast Metropolis.

3.1. Population

Table 1 presents the population distribution of senior high school students within the Cape Coast Metropolis. The total student population comprised 15,998 students drawn from ten public senior high schools, including SHS 1, SHS 2, and SHS 3 students. The distribution reflects variations in student enrolment across the schools and educational levels, thereby providing a comprehensive represen-

tation of the target population for the study. The population structure further informed the stratified sampling procedures employed to ensure proportional representation of respondents across schools, gender, and academic levels.

Table 1. Population distribution of students in the Cape Coast metropolis.

Name of School	SHS 1		SHS2		SHS 3		Total
	M	F	M	F	M	F	
Wesley Girls' High School	0	532	0	425	0	413	1370
University Practice SHS	237	263	189	239	173	147	1248
Oguuaa Snr. High Technical	216	212	150	177	179	152	1086
St. Augustine's College	655	0	497	0	522	0	1674
Academy of Christ the K.	238	299	201	218	135	144	1235
Adisadel College	614	0	569	0	551	0	1734
Ghana National College	391	651	370	509	282	430	2633
Holy Child SHS	0	453	0	379	0	370	1202
Efutu Secondary/Tech	302	304	250	255	201	201	1513
Mfantshipim SHS	915	0	729	0	659	0	2303
Total of all SHS students	3568	2714	2955	2202	2702	1857	15,998

Source: Metropolitan Education Office, Administrative Records (Unpublished Institutional Records), 2015, Ghana Education Service.

Table 2. Population distribution of students by programme.

Name of School Programmes		SHS 1		SHS 2		SHS 3		Total
		M	F	M	F	M	F	
Wesley Girls	Science	0	226	0	191	0	202	619
	General Arts	0	158	0	124	0	105	387
	Business	0	92	0	61	0	54	207
	Home Econs	0	35	0	32	0	36	103
	Visual Arts	0	21	0	17	0	16	54
Mfantshipim	Science	514	0	437	0	403	0	1354
	General Arts	270	0	140	0	152	0	562
	Technical	79	0	84	0	71	0	234
	Visual Arts	52	0	68	0	33	0	153
UPSHS	Science	59	22	36	18	31	11	177
	General Arts	58	108	67	106	55	55	449
	Business	70	56	52	39	52	36	305
	Home Econs	2	65	1	64	2	34	168
	Visual Arts	48	12	33	12	33	11	149
St. Augustine's	Science	326	0	206	0	242	0	774
	General Arts	159	0	138	0	115	0	412
	Business	143	0	121	0	139	0	403
	Visual Arts	27	0	32	0	26	0	85

Continued

Oguaa Sec. Tec.	Science	10	4	5	5	14	3	41
	General Arts	74	97	52	66	68	66	423
	Business	41	27	20	18	34	19	159
	Home Econ.	0	67	0	86	1	58	212
	Visual Arts	47	7	35	2	27	4	122
	Technical	44	10	38	0	35	2	129
Efutu Sec. Tech.	Science	27	8	19	15	5	5	79
	General Arts	113	156	76	82	78	73	578
	Business	71	47	52	40	61	27	298
	Technical	48	19	49	9	30	3	158
	Visual Arts	42	9	50	17	25	9	152
	Home Econs	1	65	4	92	2	84	248
Holy Child SHS	Science	0	189	0	167	0	171	527
	General Arts	0	142	0	122	0	102	366
	Business	0	62	0	44	0	51	157
	Home Econ.	0	34	0	33	0	33	100
	Visual Arts	0	26	0	13	0	13	52
Adisadel Col.	Science	255	0	249	0	218	0	722
	General Arts	189	0	187	0	192	0	568
	Business	106	0	86	0	91	0	283
	Visual Arts	64	0	47	0	50	0	161
Ghana Nat. Col.	Science	95	83	73	61	55	25	392
	General Arts	158	284	148	246	124	229	1,189
	Business	105	139	103	86	69	51	553
	Home Econ.	0	116	0	98	0	69	283
	Visual Arts	33	29	46	18	34	56	216
Academy SHS	Science	40	18	36	14	21	10	139
	General Arts	102	105	78	80	51	43	459
	Business	44	39	47	14	31	31	206
	Home Econs	6	120	5	78	1	51	261
	Visual Arts	46	17	35	32	31	9	170
Total		6282		5157		4559		15,998

Source: Metropolitan Education Office, Administrative Records (Unpublished Institutional Records), 2015, Ghana Education Service.

Table 2 presents the distribution of students across academic programmes, gender, and educational levels within the selected senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The total student population comprised 15,998 students distributed across SHS 1, SHS 2, and SHS 3 levels. The programmes offered included Science, General Arts, Business, Technical, Home Economics, and Visual Arts.

The distribution indicates that General Arts and Science recorded the highest student enrolments across most schools, suggesting strong preference for gram-

mar-based academic programmes. Conversely, Technical, Home Economics, and Visual Arts programmes generally recorded relatively lower enrolments, reflecting limited participation in technical and vocational education pathways. **Table 2** further reveals variations in gender representation across schools and programmes, particularly between single-sex and mixed-sex institutions. Male-dominated schools such as Mfantsipim School, Adisadel College, and St. Augustine's College recorded higher male enrolments, while female enrolments were dominant in schools such as Wesley Girls' High School and Holy Child School. The population distribution therefore provided an appropriate basis for the stratified sampling procedure employed in the study.

3.2. Sample and Sampling Procedures

All ten (10) public senior high schools within the Cape Coast Metropolis were included in the study through a census approach. The decision to involve all eligible schools was intended to ensure comprehensive coverage of the target population and enhance the representativeness of the findings across the metropolis.

The participating schools reflected the diversity of the senior high school system in Ghana and comprised different institutional categories, including mixed-sex and single-sex schools, missionary-founded and government-established schools, as well as day, boarding, and mixed day-boarding institutions. The inclusion of schools with varied administrative structures, student compositions, and residential arrangements provided a broad and balanced perspective on students' understanding, perceptions, and experiences of political participation.

By incorporating all public senior high schools in the metropolis, the study minimized selection bias and strengthened the external validity of the findings, thereby allowing for more reliable generalizations regarding political participation among senior high school students within the Cape Coast Metropolis.

The sample size for the study was determined using the sample size determination table developed by **Krejcie & Morgan (1970)**. For a target population of 15,998 students, a minimum sample size of 375 respondents was recommended at a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. However, the study utilized 400 respondents to enhance reliability and generalizability. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure proportional representation of students across the ten public senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. According to **Bryman (2004)**, stratified sampling improves representativeness by incorporating relevant subgroups within a population. The population was stratified by school type, educational level (SHS 1-3), gender, and programme of study. Thereafter, proportional allocation and simple random sampling techniques were used to select respondents, ensuring that every student had an equal chance of participation (**Acquah, 2009**).

3.3. Proportionate Allocation of Sample

To ensure adequate representation of students across all selected public senior high schools within the Cape Coast Metropolis, a proportionate sampling alloca-

tion technique was employed. This approach enabled each school to contribute to the sample in proportion to its student population size, thereby enhancing the representativeness and generalizability of the findings.

The total student population of all public senior high schools included in the study was 15,998. The sample size of 400 respondents was then distributed proportionately across the participating schools using the proportionate allocation formula:

$$[n_i = \frac{N_i}{N} \times n]$$

where:

- (n_i) = Sample allocated to a particular school;
- (N_i) = Population of the school;
- (N) = Total population of all selected schools (15,998);
- (n) = Total sample size (400).

For example, the sample allocation for Wesley Girls' Senior High School was determined by dividing the school's student population (1370) by the total population of all selected schools (15,998) and multiplying the result by the overall sample size (400):

$$[n_i = \frac{1370}{15998} \times 400 = 34 \text{ respondents}]$$

This procedure yielded the number of respondents selected from Wesley Girls' Senior High School. The same proportional allocation method was applied to all participating schools to ensure that larger schools contributed a correspondingly larger number of respondents than smaller schools.

Furthermore, within each selected school, the allocated sample was proportionately distributed across the three grade levels (SHS 1, SHS 2, and SHS 3) based on their respective enrolment figures. This ensured equitable representation of students from all educational levels and minimized sampling bias arising from unequal population distributions across grades.

Table 3. Distribution of students for each school.

Senior High Schools	Sample Size	SHS1	SHS2	SHS 3
Wesley Girls SHS	34	13	11	10
University Practice SHS	31	12	11	8
Oguua Snr. Tech. School	27	11	8	8
St. Augustine's College	42	17	12	13
Academy of Christ the King	31	13	11	7
Adisadel College	43	15	14	14
Ghana National College	66	26	22	18
Holy Child SHS	30	11	10	9
Efutu SHS	38	15	13	10
Mfantshipim School	58	23	18	17
Total	400	156	130	114

Source: Field data in 2015, political participation in public schools, Cape Coast (unpublished raw data). Ghana Education Service (GES), Cape Coast.

Table 3 presents the distribution of respondents across the selected senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. A total of 400 students were sampled from ten public senior high schools, comprising 156 SHS 1 students, 130 SHS 2 students, and 114 SHS 3 students. Ghana National College recorded the highest number of respondents (66), followed by Mfantshipim School with 58 respondents, while Oguua Secondary Technical School recorded the least representation with 27 respondents. The proportional distribution of respondents across schools and educational levels enhanced the representativeness and reliability of the study findings.

Following the proportionate allocation of respondents across schools, grade levels, and academic programmes, a simple random sampling technique was employed to select individual participants. Specifically, the lottery method was used to ensure that every student within the designated grade levels and programmes had an equal and independent probability of being selected for participation in the study.

To operationalize this procedure, identification numbers corresponding to eligible students were written on identical slips of paper and placed in a container. The number of slips prepared reflected the required sample size for each stratum. The slips were thoroughly mixed to eliminate selection bias, after which the required number of respondents was selected through a completely random draw.

The use of the lottery method enhanced the fairness and objectivity of the selection process by providing all eligible students with an equal opportunity to participate. This approach minimized sampling bias and strengthened the representativeness of the sample, thereby improving the reliability and generalizability of the study findings.

Table 4. Distribution of students by schools.

Name of School	No	%
Wesley Girls Senior High School	34	8.5
University Practice Senior High School	31	7.8
Oguua Secondary Technical High School	27	6.8
Saint Augustine's College	42	10.5
Academy of Christ the King SHS	31	7.8
Ghana National College	66	16.5
Holy Child Senior High School	30	7.5
Efutu Secondary Technical High School	38	9.5
Mfantshipim Senior High School	58	14.5
Adisadel College	43	10.8
Total	400	100

Source: Field data in 2016, political participation in public schools, Cape Coast (unpublished raw data). Ghana Education Service (GES), Cape Coast.

Table 4 shows that a total of 400 students participated in the study, with respondents proportionally selected from the various senior high schools within the

Cape Coast Metropolis. Ghana National College recorded the highest representation, while Oguua Secondary Technical School had the least. The proportional distribution enhanced the representativeness, reliability, and generalizability of the study findings.

Table 5 presents the distribution of male and female respondents across the sampled senior high schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The findings indicate that a relatively higher number of respondents were selected from SHS 1, followed by SHS 2 and SHS 3 students respectively. Ghana National College recorded the highest number of sampled respondents among all the selected schools. The results further revealed that male students constituted a larger proportion of the sample compared to their female counterparts. This distribution ensured adequate representation of respondents across gender, school, and educational levels within the study.

Table 5. Distribution of number of males and females from each school in the sample.

Senior High Schools	SHS 1		SHS 2		SHS 3	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Wesley Girls SHS	0	13	0	11	0	10
UPSHS	6	6	5	6	4	4
Oguua Snr. Tech.	6	5	4	4	4	4
St. Augustine's Co.	17	0	12	0	13	0
Academy of Christ	6	7	5	6	3	4
Adisadel College	15	0	14	0	14	0
Ghana National Co.	10	16	9	13	7	11
Holy Child SHS	0	11	0	10	0	9
Efutu SHS	7	8	6	7	5	5
Mfantipim School	23	0	18	0	17	0
Sub Total	90	66	73	57	67	47
Total	156		130		114	

Source: Field data in 2015.

Table 6 presents the demographic characteristics of respondents, including gender, age, educational level, and programme of study among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis. As shown in **Table 6**, 230 (57.5%) of the respondents were males, while 170 (42.5%) were females, indicating a relatively higher male representation among students during the 2015/2016 academic year.

Table 6. Demography of respondents.

Variable	Subscale	No.	%
Gender	Male	230	57.5
	Female	170	42.5
Age	14 - 15 years	85	21.3
	16 - 17 years	236	59.0

Continued

	18 - 19 years	71	17.8
	20 years and above	8	2.0
Form	SHS 1	156	39.0
	SHS 2	130	32.5
	SHS 3	114	28.5
Programme	Science	121	30.0
	Business	64	16.0
	General Arts	135	34.0
	Visual Arts	33	8.0
	Home Economics	34	9.0
	Technical	13	3.0

Source: Field data in 2016.

The findings in **Table 6** also suggest increasing awareness among parents and students regarding the importance of education, as reflected in the growing transition of students to the senior high school level. **Table 6** further indicates that 135 (34.0%) respondents offered General Arts, 121 (30.0%) studied Science, 64 (16.0%) pursued Business, 34 (9.0%) were enrolled in Home Economics, 33 (8.0%) studied Visual Arts, and 13 (3.0%) offered technical programmes. The dominance of General Arts and Science programmes may reflect students' academic preferences and the broader orientation of Ghana's educational system toward grammar-based education. Conversely, the relatively low enrolment in Technical, Visual Arts, and Home Economics programmes may suggest limited student interest and lower patronage of technical and vocational education pathways.

3.4. Data Collection Instrument

Data were collected using a self-developed structured questionnaire comprising closed-ended items measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. The questionnaire was specifically designed to address the study objectives and was informed by established theoretical and empirical literature on political participation.

The development of the instrument was guided by prominent theoretical frameworks of political participation, including the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) developed by Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995), the Rational Choice Model (RCM), the Social Psychological Model (SPM), the Mobilization Model (MM), and the General Incentives Model (GIM) advanced by Seyd & Whiteley (2002). In addition, relevant conceptual and empirical studies on youth political participation, democratic engagement, and civic involvement informed the formulation of questionnaire items.

The questionnaire was organized into four sections. Section A captured respondents' demographic characteristics, while Sections B, C, and D assessed students' understanding of political participation, perceived benefits of political par-

ticipation, and perceptions of gender participation in political processes, respectively.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, a pilot study was conducted prior to the main data collection exercise. Reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha produced an overall coefficient of .811, indicating satisfactory internal consistency. The subscale reliability coefficients were .857 for understanding of political participation, .845 for perceived benefits of political participation, and .823 for gender participation in political processes. These values exceeded the recommended threshold of .70, demonstrating acceptable reliability for research purposes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000).

The validity of the instrument was established through multiple procedures. First, item generation was grounded in well-established theoretical models and extant literature to enhance construct representation. Second, the draft questionnaire was subjected to expert review by specialists in political science, governance, social studies, and related social science disciplines. Their evaluations contributed to the refinement of item wording, elimination of ambiguous statements, and improvement of content coverage. Finally, pilot testing was undertaken to assess the clarity, relevance, and comprehensibility of the instrument. Feedback obtained from the pilot study informed subsequent revisions and modifications. Collectively, these procedures provided evidence of content validity, face validity, and construct validity, thereby enhancing the overall quality and credibility of the measurement instrument.

3.5. Data Analysis and Collection Procedure

The questionnaires were administered and retrieved on-site, resulting in a 100% response rate. Respondents were given approximately thirty minutes to complete the instrument, although additional time was provided where necessary to ensure completeness and accuracy of responses. Missing responses were immediately addressed to maintain the validity and reliability of the instrument. Following data collection, the instrument recorded an overall Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .862. The subscale reliability coefficients were .825 for understanding of political participation, .855 for perceived benefits of political participation, and .839 for gender participation in political processes. These values exceeded the recommended threshold of .70, demonstrating acceptable reliability for research purposes (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000), indicating high internal consistency.

For data analysis, responses were coded and entered the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Data were cleaned, organized, and analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Percentages were used to analyze respondents' demographic characteristics, while means and standard deviations were employed to examine students' understanding and perceived benefits. In addition, an independent samples *t*-test was conducted to determine whether significant gender differences existed in students' understanding of political participation.

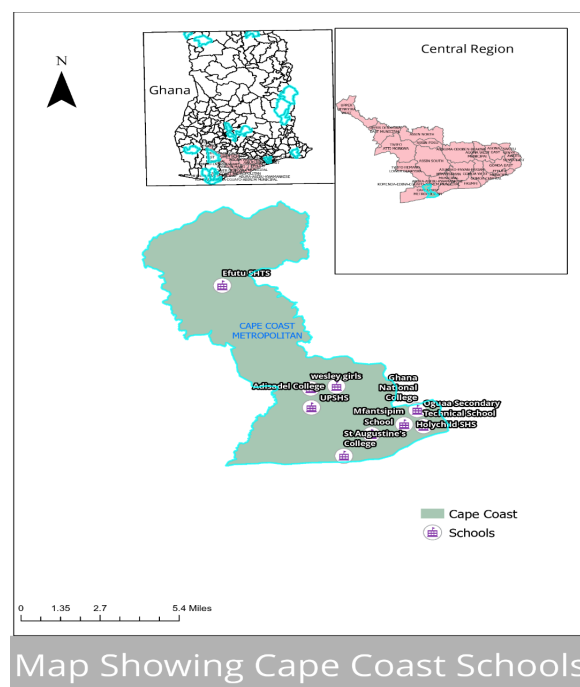
3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study strictly adhered to internationally accepted ethical standards governing academic research involving human participants. Ethical approval was obtained through the postgraduate thesis review procedures of the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, University of Cape Coast, under the supervision of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Consultancy (DRIC), with ethical clearance reference number DASSE/ED/PCT/14/0013. In addition, official authorization was secured from the selected senior high schools prior to the commencement of data collection to ensure institutional cooperation and compliance with established research ethics protocols.

3.7. Informed Consent

Prior to the commencement of data collection, formal institutional approval was obtained through an introductory letter issued by the Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education, College of Education Studies, University of Cape Coast, and presented to the selected senior high schools to secure administrative authorization and institutional support. The objectives, procedures, and significance of the study were clearly explained to all participants before the administration of the questionnaires. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to their involvement. Participants were further assured of anonymity, confidentiality, and the exclusive use of the data for academic and research purposes. Throughout the study, strict adherence was maintained to ethical principles relating to privacy, informed participation, data protection, and responsible information management.

Map of the Study Area



4. Data Analysis & Interpretation of Results

A five-point Likert scale questionnaire was administered to senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Response options were coded as follows: Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Undecided = 3, Agree = 4, and Strongly Agree = 5. To facilitate the interpretation of mean scores, the scale range was divided into equal intervals using the formula:

Based on this computation, mean scores were interpreted as follows:

Mean Range	Interpretation
1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree
1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
2.61 - 3.40	Undecided/Neutral
3.41 - 4.20	Agree
4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree

This classification ensured a clearer distinction between negative, neutral, and positive perceptions, thereby enhancing the accuracy and interpretability of the findings.

In addition, standard deviation values were used to assess the degree of variability in respondents' views. Standard deviation values below 1.00 indicated relatively high consensus and homogeneity of responses, whereas values equal to or greater than 1.00 suggested greater dispersion and heterogeneity in respondents' opinions. The combined use of mean scores and standard deviations provided a comprehensive understanding of both the central tendency and variability of respondents' perceptions regarding political participation.

4.1. Students' Understanding of Political Participation

The first research question examined the ways in which senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis understand political participation. The purpose of this research question was to explore students' perceptions and comprehension of the activities, processes, and practices associated with political participation within a democratic context. The responses of the students are presented in **Table 7**.

Table 7. Students understanding of political participation.

Statements	Mean	SD
I understand political participation to mean registering as a voter and casting votes during elections	3.74	1.091
I understand political participation to mean being a member of a social organization, school club, neighborhood association, NGO's and charity clubs	2.80	1.188
I understand political participation means taking part in social activities, skills acquisition, service training and national service	3.06	1.262
I understand political participation to mean taking part in communal labour in the school or in the community	2.82	1.214

Continued

I understand political participation to mean participating in cultural Organisations, cultural music and dance, sports clubs etc. in the school or community	2.61	1.082
I understand political participation to mean holding political office, contesting for a public office and being a public office holder	3.40	1.325
I understand political participation to mean looking for information or reading politics in newspapers, magazines, and reference materials	3.13	1.263
I understand political participation to mean trying to persuade someone to vote a certain way	2.84	1.219
I understand political participation to mean contributing money to help a political group or the candidate who contests on the ticket of a party	3.10	1.234
I understand political participation to mean attending meetings to gain information, discussing developmental issues, or giving support to others	3.48	1.282
I understand political participation to mean campaigning for a candidate who contests for position during an election	3.68	1.299
I understand political participation to mean payment of taxes, SRC and Club dues as well as various school dues	3.14	1.215
I understand political participation to mean abiding by laws as well as obeying the rule of law	3.68	1.299
I understand political participation to mean disobeying laws and taking the consequences to demonstrate that laws or polices in the society, public or schools are unjust	2.38	.867
I understand political participation to mean the boycotting of certain products, blocking of traffic, painting slogans on posters, going for strikes to make known the demands of citizens	2.65	1.051
I understand political participation to mean taking part in demonstrations, or rioting about unfavourable school policies, unfavourable decisions or national policies, rules, increment in fees etc. made by school authorities or the government	2.91	1.199
Total of Means/Std. Dev.	49.42	19.09
Means of Means/Std. Dev.	3.09	1.193

Source: Field data in 2016.

4.2. Analysis and Interpretation of Results Abstract

Table 7 presents respondents' understanding of political participation. The overall mean score of **3.09** (SD = **1.193**) indicates that students generally exhibited a **moderate or neutral understanding** of political participation. This suggests that although respondents possessed some knowledge of political engagement, their understanding was neither comprehensive nor strongly developed across the various dimensions of political participation.

The highest mean score was recorded for the statement "*I understand political participation to mean registering as a voter and casting votes during elections*" (M = **3.74**, SD = **1.091**), indicating agreement among respondents. Similarly, students agreed that political participation involves *campaigning for candidates during elections* (M = **3.68**, SD = **1.299**) and *abiding by laws and the rule of law* (M = **3.68**, SD = **1.299**). Respondents also agreed that *attending meetings to obtain information, discuss developmental issues, or support others* constitutes political participation (M = **3.48**, SD = **1.282**).

Several items recorded mean scores within the neutral category. These included

holding or contesting political office ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 1.325$), *reading political information through newspapers and magazines* ($M = 3.13$, $SD = 1.263$), *paying taxes and school dues* ($M = 3.14$, $SD = 1.215$), *contributing money to support political candidates or parties* ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 1.234$), and *participating in social activities and national service programmes* ($M = 3.06$, $SD = 1.262$). These findings suggest uncertainty among students regarding the broader civic dimensions of political participation.

Respondents disagreed that political participation involves *disobeying laws to protest perceived injustices* ($M = 2.38$, $SD = 0.867$). Likewise, they disagreed that activities such as *boycotts, strikes, blocking traffic, and displaying protest slogans* constitute political participation ($M = 2.65$, $SD = 1.051$). Students also expressed neutral perceptions regarding *participation in demonstrations and riots* ($M = 2.91$, $SD = 1.199$).

The standard deviation values, most of which exceeded 1.00, indicate considerable variability in respondents' views, suggesting differences in students' understanding of political participation across the sampled schools.

4.3. Results and Discussion of the Mean and Standard Deviation of Students' Understanding of Political Participation

The findings reveal that senior high school students predominantly associate political participation with conventional democratic activities, particularly voting, election campaigns, and adherence to legal norms. This suggests that students perceive political participation primarily through the lens of electoral engagement rather than as a broader process encompassing civic activism, community involvement, and policy influence.

The strong association between political participation and voting is consistent with the Civic Voluntarism Model proposed by Verba, Scholzman, & Brady (1995), which identifies electoral participation as one of the most visible and accessible forms of political engagement. The findings also support studies by Kumove & Dyrstad (2025), who found that electoral participation remains the dominant expression of political involvement among young people across African democracies.

The neutral responses regarding civic associations, social organizations, community service, and information-seeking behaviours suggest that students possess only a partial understanding of the broader democratic responsibilities associated with citizenship. This finding aligns with Niemi & Junn (1998), who argued that young people often develop a narrow conception of politics when civic education emphasizes electoral processes while paying limited attention to participatory citizenship and civic engagement.

Furthermore, respondents' rejection of civil disobedience, strikes, boycotts, and protest actions as forms of political participation may reflect the influence of formal educational environments that prioritize law-abiding behaviour and institutional participation. While this orientation supports democratic stability, it may also indicate limited awareness of non-conventional yet legitimate democratic

mechanisms through which citizens can express grievances and influence public policy. Similar observations have been reported by Baizhumakzy et al. (2025), who found that democratic participation among young people is strongly shaped by prevailing political culture and civic norms.

The relatively high standard deviation values across most items suggest the existence of divergent interpretations of political participation among students. These differences may be attributable to variations in civic education exposure, socioeconomic background, access to political information, school culture, and personal political experiences.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that although students possess a basic understanding of political participation, their perceptions remain largely confined to electoral and institutional activities. This underscores the need for civic and citizenship education programmes to broaden students' appreciation of political participation by incorporating community engagement, advocacy, public deliberation, civic activism, and other democratic practices essential for active citizenship and democratic consolidation in Ghana.

4.4. Students' Perceptions of the Benefits of Political Participation Abstract

The second research question examined senior high school students' perceptions of the benefits of political participation in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The purpose of this research question was to explore students' views regarding the democratic, civic, and societal benefits associated with active involvement in political participation.

Table 8. Students' perceptions of the benefits of political participation.

Statements	Mean	SD
Political participation improves economic, cultural and social development by way of improving the freedom of citizens	3.99	1.088
Students learn electoral and parliamentary processes, public administration as well as promotion of young women's participation	4.01	1.109
Political participation helps young people to engage in peacebuilding by using new skills to organize societies to bring about social change and effective policies	4.09	1.075
Political participation helps individuals to act with integrity, share thoughts with others, care for others in promoting sound values and guiding the next generation	3.85	1.246
Women participation is increased in decisions that affect them both at home and community	3.31	1.341
Public participation is assumed to be cost-effective because it reduces the probability of disputes arising among citizens and those in leadership positions	3.19	1.347
Promotion of good democratic governance system and democratic values	4.19	1.007
Political participation is educational, and those who take part become in many ways better human beings, more independent, useful, competent, respect for other and their willingness to take responsibilities	3.68	1.263
The voices of those who participate are most likely to be heard through equal sharing of their interest and heeded by decision makers	3.81	1.225

Continued

Political participation helps people within a nation to share information and ideas about their wants, preferences and needs of their community to authorities and management of a country, society, locality or a province	4.04	1.146
Political participation improves living conditions, better health services, lower crime rates and increase voting rates among others	3.32	1.329
Political participation puts pressure on government officials to give a listening ear and pay attention to the needs and plight of the residents by giving in to their ideas	3.74	1.243
Political participation puts pressure on government officials to give a listening ear and pay attention to the needs and plight of the residents by giving in to their ideas	3.74	1.243
Political participation helps in transparent decision making which enhance and develop democracy	3.83	1.184
Political participation helps individuals to know their rights and responsibilities as Ghanaians	4.16	1.077
Total Means/Std. Dev	53.21	15.47
Mean of Means/Std. Dev.	3.80	1.11

Source: Field data in 2016.

4.5. Students' Perceptions of the Benefits of Political Participation Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Table 8 presents respondents' perceptions regarding the benefits associated with political participation. The overall mean score of 3.80 (SD = 1.11) indicates that students generally agreed that political participation yields significant benefits for individuals, communities, and society. This finding suggests a relatively positive perception of the value of political engagement among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

Among the statements examined, the highest mean score was recorded for "*Promotion of good democratic governance system and democratic values*" (M = 4.19, SD = 1.007), indicating strong agreement among respondents. Similarly, students agreed that political participation helps individuals *know their rights and responsibilities as Ghanaians* (M = 4.16, SD = 1.077) and *engage in peacebuilding through the acquisition of skills that facilitate social change and effective policy-making* (M = 4.09, SD = 1.075). Respondents also agreed that political participation enables people to *share information, preferences, and community needs with public authorities* (M = 4.04, SD = 1.146) and assists students in *learning electoral processes, parliamentary procedures, and public administration* (M = 4.01, SD = 1.109).

Furthermore, respondents agreed that political participation contributes to *economic, cultural, and social development* through the promotion of citizens' freedoms (M = 3.99, SD = 1.088). Political participation was also perceived as promoting *transparency in decision-making* (M = 3.83, SD = 1.184), ensuring that citizens' voices are heard by decision-makers (M = 3.81, SD = 1.225), and placing pressure on public officials to respond to citizens' concerns (M = 3.74, SD = 1.243).

However, several items recorded mean scores within the neutral category. Re-

spondents were uncertain regarding whether political participation increases *women's involvement in decisions affecting their lives* ($M = 3.31$, $SD = 1.341$), improves *living conditions, health services, crime reduction, and voting rates* ($M = 3.32$, $SD = 1.329$), or reduces disputes between citizens and leaders through cost-effective public participation mechanisms ($M = 3.19$, $SD = 1.347$).

The standard deviation values, most of which exceeded 1.00, indicate moderate variability in responses, suggesting some differences in perceptions among students regarding the specific benefits associated with political participation.

4.6. Students' Perceived Benefits of Political Participation: Descriptive Analysis of Mean Scores and Variability

The findings demonstrate that senior high school students generally recognize political participation as a vital mechanism for promoting democratic governance, civic responsibility, accountability, and societal development. The high overall mean score suggests that students perceive political engagement as beneficial not only to individuals but also to broader democratic and developmental processes.

The strong agreement that political participation promotes democratic governance and democratic values is consistent with democratic participation theories, which posit that citizen involvement enhances government responsiveness, legitimacy, and accountability. This finding aligns with the work of Verba, Schlozman, & Brady (1995), who argued that political participation serves as a fundamental mechanism through which citizens influence public decisions and strengthen democratic institutions.

Students' recognition of political participation as a means of understanding rights and responsibilities further reflects the role of civic engagement in fostering active citizenship. This finding supports the assertions of civic education scholars who contend that democratic participation enhances political efficacy, civic competence, and citizenship development. It also corroborates the findings of Baizhu-makzy et al. (2025), who identified civic responsibility and democratic values as significant predictors of youth political participation.

The perception that political participation contributes to peacebuilding, policy influence, and social transformation suggests that students appreciate the broader societal functions of democratic engagement. These findings resonate with contemporary scholarship emphasizing the role of youth participation in promoting social cohesion, democratic resilience, and sustainable development.

However, respondents' uncertainty regarding the impact of political participation on women's empowerment, improved living standards, and conflict reduction may reflect limited exposure to the practical outcomes of political engagement within their communities. This finding suggests that while students understand the normative and democratic benefits of participation, they may be less aware of its direct socioeconomic and gender-related implications. Similar observations have been reported in studies examining youth political engagement in emerging democracies, where awareness of democratic principles often exceeds understanding of governance outcomes and policy impacts.

The relatively high variability in responses further indicates that perceptions of political participation benefits differ among students. Such variations may be attributable to differences in civic education experiences, socioeconomic backgrounds, political awareness, access to information, and exposure to democratic processes.

Overall, the findings suggest that students hold favourable perceptions regarding the benefits of political participation. Nevertheless, there remains a need to strengthen civic education programmes to deepen students' understanding of how political participation contributes to social inclusion, gender equality, public service delivery, and broader development outcomes. Such efforts are essential for nurturing informed, engaged, and democratically responsible citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to Ghana's democratic consolidation and national development.

4.7. Gender Differences in Senior High School Students' Understanding of Political Participation

The hypothesis examined whether significant differences existed in the understanding of political participation between male and female senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The purpose of the hypothesis was to determine whether students' gender significantly influenced their understanding of political participation. The null hypothesis (H_0) stated that there is no statistically significant difference in the understanding of political participation between male and female students. To test this hypothesis, an independent samples t -test was conducted. In this analysis, gender served as the independent variable, while students' understanding of political participation constituted the dependent variable.

Table 9. T-test results on gender differences in senior high school students' understanding of political participation.

Gender	Mean	SD	t	df	p
Male	3.10	.473	.575	398	.566
Female	3.07	.529			

Source: Field data in 2016.

The statistical procedure was employed to determine whether differences in mean scores between male and female students were statistically significant. The independent sample t -test was used to identify the difference between the dependent variable and independent variable at a significance level of 0.05. **Table 9** presents the results of the differences obtained. To determine whether male and female students differed significantly in their understanding of political participation, an independent-samples t -test was conducted using the composite score derived from the 16 questionnaire items measuring understanding of political participation. The items were analyzed in their original form and were not reverse coded.

4.8. Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Results from **Table 9** shows that the independent samples *t*-test revealed no statistically significant difference in the understanding of political participation between male students ($M = 3.10$, $SD = .473$) and female students ($M = 3.07$, $SD = .529$), $t(398) = .575$, $p > .05$. The findings indicate that both male and female students possessed relatively similar levels of understanding regarding political participation. The results presented in **Table 9** indicate that male students ($M = 3.10$, $SD = .473$) reported a slightly higher level of understanding of political participation than female students ($M = 3.07$, $SD = .529$). However, the difference between the two groups was minimal. The minimal difference in mean scores suggests that gender did not significantly influence students' perceptions and understanding of political participation within the study context. The independent samples test revealed that the observed difference was not statistically significant, $t(398) = .575$, $p = .566$. Since the probability value exceeded the conventional significance threshold of .05, the null hypothesis of no gender difference was retained. This finding suggests that male and female students possess comparable levels of understanding of political participation. Consequently, the null hypothesis, which stated that no statistically significant difference exists between male and female students' understanding of political participation, was accepted.

The mean difference between the two groups was only .03 points on a five-point scale, indicating a negligible practical difference. Based on the magnitude of the *t*-value and mean difference, the corresponding effect size is extremely small (Cohen's $d \approx .06$), which falls well below Cohen's (1988) criterion for a small effect ($d = .20$). This indicates that gender explains very little variation in students' understanding of political participation.

Furthermore, the 95% confidence interval for the mean difference would be expected to include zero, providing additional evidence that the observed difference may be attributable to sampling variability rather than a meaningful gender effect.

The results from **Table 9** further imply that civic awareness and political understanding among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis are relatively balanced across gender categories.

4.9. Results and Discussion of the Independent Samples t-Test on Gender Differences in Political Participation

The findings demonstrate that gender does not significantly influence students' understanding of political participation among senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis. Both male and female students exhibited similar levels of political understanding, suggesting that exposure to civic education, democratic values, and political information may be relatively uniform across genders within the school environment.

The findings contrast with earlier studies by Lamprianou & Demetriou (2013), Vecchione & Caprara (2009), and Stolle & Hooghe (2009), which identified gender as a significant factor influencing political participation. Historically, males

were perceived to participate more actively in politics than females. However, the current findings suggest a narrowing of gender disparities in political awareness and participation among younger populations. The results therefore reflect increasing gender equality, improved access to education, and enhanced civic sensitization efforts aimed at promoting democratic participation among both male and female students.

These findings challenge traditional assumptions that males are generally more politically knowledgeable or engaged than females. Instead, the results suggest that contemporary educational settings may be narrowing historical gender disparities in political awareness and civic knowledge. The finding is consistent with recent studies emphasizing the increasing democratization of political information and civic learning opportunities among young people irrespective of gender.

The absence of statistically significant gender differences may also reflect the influence of Ghana's educational curriculum, which provides similar civic education experiences to both male and female students. Consequently, political knowledge acquisition appears to be driven more by shared educational experiences than by gender-specific factors.

Overall, the results indicate that interventions aimed at improving students' understanding of political participation should target all students rather than focusing on one gender group, as both male and female students exhibit comparable levels of political understanding.

5. Findings

The study found that senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis possess a moderate understanding of political participation, with an overall mean score of 3.09 (SD = 1.193). The findings revealed that students predominantly associate political participation with conventional democratic activities such as voter registration, voting during elections, campaigning for candidates, attending political meetings, and obeying laws and regulations. These activities recorded the highest mean scores, indicating a relatively strong understanding of electoral and institutional forms of participation.

The study further found that students demonstrated limited understanding of broader civic and participatory dimensions of political participation. Activities such as membership in social organizations, participation in community development initiatives, communal labour, cultural associations, civic advocacy, and information-seeking behaviours regarding politics were largely perceived with uncertainty. Additionally, respondents generally disagreed that civil disobedience, boycotts, strikes, and other forms of protest constitute political participation. The findings therefore suggest that students' conceptualization of political participation remains largely confined to electoral processes and formal democratic institutions rather than encompassing the wider spectrum of civic engagement.

Students generally perceived political participation as beneficial, as evidenced

by the overall mean score of 3.80. Political participation was strongly associated with democratic governance, democratic values, civic responsibility, and citizenship development. Respondents believed that political participation enhances peacebuilding, policy influence, transparency, and communication between citizens and public authorities.

Students demonstrated uncertainty regarding the role of political participation in promoting women's empowerment, improving living conditions, reducing crime, and minimizing disputes between citizens and government. Variations in responses suggest differing levels of political awareness and civic understanding among students.

Based on the independent-samples *t*-test analysis, the study found that there was **no statistically significant difference** between male and female senior high school students regarding their understanding of political participation ($t(398) = .575, p = .566$). Male students recorded a mean score of 3.10 (SD = .473), while female students obtained a mean score of 3.07 (SD = .529), indicating only a marginal difference in political understanding.

The findings further revealed that both male and female students demonstrated a **moderate level of understanding** of political participation, suggesting that political knowledge and awareness are relatively similar across gender groups within the Cape Coast Metropolis. The negligible effect size (Cohen's $d \approx .06$) indicates that gender contributes very little to explaining variations in students' understanding of political participation.

Additionally, the results suggest that civic and political learning opportunities available within the school system may be equally accessible to both male and female students, thereby reducing traditional gender disparities in political awareness and civic knowledge.

6. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that senior high school students possess a basic but incomplete understanding of political participation. While students demonstrate awareness of traditional and electoral forms of political engagement, their understanding of participatory citizenship, civic responsibility, advocacy, community involvement, and non-electoral democratic activities remains limited. The dominance of voting and election-related activities in students' perceptions suggests that political participation is largely viewed through a conventional democratic lens.

The study further concludes that existing civic and citizenship education programmes may not be sufficiently exposing students to the multidimensional nature of political participation. Consequently, students may graduate from secondary school with restricted knowledge of the diverse avenues through which citizens can contribute to governance, public accountability, policy influence, and democratic development. This narrow understanding has implications for the development of active citizenship and long-term democratic consolidation in

Ghana.

The study concludes that senior high school students in the Cape Coast Metropolis generally recognize the democratic, civic, and governance-related benefits of political participation. However, their understanding is stronger regarding democratic and citizenship outcomes than socioeconomic, developmental, and gender-related benefits. This suggests that while students appreciate the normative value of participation, they may have limited awareness of its broader developmental implications.

The study concludes that senior high school students' understanding of political participation remains largely conventional and electorally oriented, indicating limited exposure to broader dimensions of democratic engagement and participatory citizenship. The study further concludes that students generally appreciate the democratic, civic, and governance-related benefits associated with political participation, although their understanding of its wider developmental and transformative outcomes remains limited. Finally, the findings suggest that gender disparities in political understanding among senior high school students are gradually narrowing, as both male and female students demonstrated relatively comparable levels of civic awareness, democratic orientation, and understanding of political participation.

7. Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the study recommends the following:

The Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service should review and strengthen civic and citizenship education curricula to incorporate broader dimensions of political participation, including advocacy, community engagement, public deliberation, civic activism, volunteerism, and democratic accountability.

Schools should create opportunities for students to engage in practical democratic experiences through student leadership programmes, school governance structures, debate clubs, mock elections, civic projects, and community service activities. Such experiences will enable students to appreciate political participation beyond electoral activities.

Educational institutions, civil society organizations, and electoral bodies should collaborate to organize seminars, workshops, and public education campaigns aimed at increasing students' awareness of the various forms and benefits of political participation within democratic societies.

Schools should encourage students to participate actively in community development initiatives, environmental campaigns, volunteer programmes, and local governance activities to foster a stronger sense of civic responsibility and democratic engagement.

Students should be provided with greater access to credible political and civic information through school libraries, digital platforms, newspapers, educational media programmes, and civic education resources. This will help broaden their understanding of political processes and democratic participation.

School administrators should promote democratic practices within the school environment by encouraging student representation, participatory decision-making, respect for diverse opinions, and inclusive governance structures. Such practices can strengthen democratic socialization and prepare students for active citizenship.

Policymakers and stakeholders should develop targeted youth engagement initiatives that expose students to the broader functions of democracy and governance, thereby nurturing politically informed, civically responsible, and democratically active citizens capable of contributing meaningfully to Ghana's democratic development.

Civic education programmes should emphasize the developmental, social, and economic benefits of political participation alongside democratic principles. Schools should integrate practical civic engagement activities that demonstrate how participation contributes to community development and public accountability. Educational stakeholders should strengthen awareness of the relationship between political participation, gender equality, and inclusive governance.

Youth-focused democratic education initiatives should highlight the role of participation in improving public services, social welfare, and community well-being. Policymakers and civil society organizations should create platforms that enable students to observe and experience the practical outcomes of democratic participation in their communities.

The Ministry of Education and the Ghana Education Service should continue strengthening civic and citizenship education programmes across senior high schools to improve students' understanding of political participation irrespective of gender. Schools should provide equal opportunities for both male and female students to participate in student leadership, mock elections, debates, civic clubs, youth parliaments, and governance-related activities that foster practical democratic engagement.

Educational authorities should organize regular seminars, workshops, and civic engagement programmes that expose students to the broader dimensions of political participation, including advocacy, public deliberation, community service, and policy engagement. School administrators should ensure equitable representation of male and female students in student leadership positions and decision-making bodies to reinforce democratic values and participatory citizenship. Schools should improve access to newspapers, civic education materials, digital resources, and current affairs programmes to deepen students' political knowledge and awareness of democratic processes. Teachers should adopt participatory teaching approaches that allow students to experience democratic processes through simulations, community projects, public discussions, and service-learning activities.

8. Areas for Further Research

Future studies should investigate other factors that may influence students' un-

derstanding of political participation, such as school type, socioeconomic background, parental political involvement, media exposure, religious affiliation, and geographical location, since gender appears to have limited explanatory power in this regard.

9. Policy Implications

The study demonstrates that while senior high school students appreciate the democratic and civic value of political participation, there is a need for policies that broaden their understanding of its socioeconomic, developmental, and gender-related outcomes. Consequently, educational and governance policies should prioritize comprehensive civic education, experiential democratic learning, inclusive participation, and youth empowerment as essential pathways for strengthening democratic citizenship and fostering long-term democratic sustainability in Ghana.

The study demonstrates that while senior high school students possess a foundational understanding of political participation, their knowledge remains largely confined to electoral activities and formal political institutions. This underscores the need for educational and governance policies that broaden civic learning, promote experiential democratic engagement, and cultivate a more expansive understanding of citizenship. By doing so, Ghana can nurture a generation of young citizens who are not only voters but also active participants in governance, community development, public accountability, and democratic transformation.

Since no significant gender differences were observed, policymakers should design civic education and youth political engagement programmes that target students collectively rather than developing separate interventions based solely on gender. The focus should instead be on improving the overall quality of civic learning and democratic socialization among young people in Ghana.

Authors' Contribution/Originality Statements

Ernest Ampomah Arkoh, Kankam Boadu, Gabriel Aboagye, Gloria Osei, and Ebenezer Darkwah Arkoh collectively contributed to the conception and design of the study, data collection, analysis and interpretation of findings, drafting of the manuscript, and critical revision of the article for important intellectual content. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication and agreed to be fully accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

References

- Ablateye, B. N. O. (2024). *Women and Youth Rising in Ghana's Democracy*. African Centre for Parliamentary Affairs (ACEPA).
- Acquah, H. D. (2009). *Research Methodology in Education*. Yamens Press.

- Ahwoi, K. (2006). *Youth and Political Participation in Ghana*. Ghana Universities Press.
- Amnâ, E. (2012). How Is Civic Engagement Developed over Time? Emerging Answers from a Multidisciplinary Field. *Journal of Adolescence*, 35, 611-627.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2012.04.011>
- Applegate, J. S. (1998). Beyond the Usual Suspects: The Use of Citizens' Advisory Boards in Environmental Decision Making. *Indiana Law Journal*, 73, 903-957.
https://www.repository.law.indiana.edu/ilj/vol73/iss3/4/?utm_source=chatgpt.com
- Asante, R. (2004). The Youth and Politics in Ghana: Reflections on the 2004 General Elections. In K. Boafo-Arthur (Ed.), *Voting for Democracy in Ghana: The 2004 Elections in Perspective*. Freedom Publications Ltd.
https://scholar.google.com.hk/citations?view_op=list_works&hl=th&hl=th&user=cR3nH8EAAAAJ
- Asiamah, I. (2006). The Youth and Organisation of Effective Political Parties. In *Report on the Ghana/Netherlands Inter-Party Youth Conference Organised by the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA)* (pp. 23-30). Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA).
- Babbie, E. (1990). *Survey Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Wadsworth.
- Baizhumakzy, Z., Tangkish, N., Mazhinbekov, S., Sarsenbekov, Z., & Korganova, S. (2025). Fostering Democratic Engagement: Factors Shaping Youth Political Participation in Kazakhstan. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 7, Article ID: 1561187.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2025.1561187>
- Bartels, L. M. (2002). Economic Inequality and Political Representation. *American Political Science Review*, 89, 1-15.
- Beierle, T. C. (1999). Using Social Goals to Evaluate Public Participation in Environmental Decisions. *Review of Policy Research*, 16, 75-103.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1999.tb00879.x>
- Blackburn, J., & Bruce, W. (1995). *Mediation and Public Participation*. Island Press.
- Brantuo, M., Nunfam, V. F., Asitik, J. A., & Afrifa-Yamoah, E. (2026). Bridging the Gender Gap in Ghanaian Local Governance: Key Enablers and Pathways. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 33, 99-119.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxaf035>
- Bratton, M. (1999). Political Participation in a New Democracy: Institutional Considerations from Zambia. *Comparative Political Studies*, 32, 549-588.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414099032005002>
- Bratton, M., Mattes, R., & Gyimah-Boadi, E. (2005). *Public Opinion, Democracy, and Market Reform in Africa*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511617324>
- Bryman, A. (2004). *Social Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Burns, N., Schlozman, K. L., & Verba, S. (2001). *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation*. Harvard University Press.
- Civic Mission of Schools (2003). *The Civic Mission of Schools*. Carnegie Corporation.
- Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed.). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Conway, M. M. (2001). *Women and Political Participation*. CQ Press.
- Easterly, W., & Levine, R. (1997). Africa's Growth Tragedy: Policies and Ethnic Divisions. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112, 1203-1250.
<https://doi.org/10.1162/003355300555466>

- EPA (1996). *Stakeholder Involvement and Public Participation at the United States of America*. Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation (1801).
<https://www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-09/documents/stakeholder-involvement-public-participation-at-epa.pdf>
- Flanagan, C. A. (2004). Volunteerism, Leadership, Political Socialization, and Civic Engagement. In R. M. Lerner, & L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 721-745). Wiley.
- Fraenkel, J. R., & Wallen, N. E. (2000). *How to Design and Evaluate Research in Education* (4th ed.). McGraw-Hill.
- Frimpomaa-Afrane, A. (2025). *From Grassroots to Governance: Reimagining Youth Development in Ghana through OKOBI and Its Implications for Administrative Capacity Building*. Master's Thesis, School of Transnational Governance, European University Institute.
- Goetz, A. M. (2003). *Women's Political Effectiveness: A Conceptual Framework*. UNRISD.
- Granberg, D., & Holmberg, S. (1990). The Intention-Behavior Relationship among U.S. and Swedish Voters. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 53, 44-54.
- Grimes, D. A., & Schulz, K. F. (2002). Descriptive Studies: What They Can and Cannot Do. *The Lancet*, 359, 145-149. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736\(02\)07373-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(02)07373-7)
- Haste, H., & Hogan, A. (2006). Beyond Conventional Civic Participation, Beyond the Moral-Political Divide: Young People and Contemporary Debates about Citizenship. *Journal of Moral Education*, 35, 473-493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240601012238>
- Hooghe, M., & Wilkenfeld, B. (2008). The Stability of Political Attitudes and Behaviors among Adolescents and Early Adulthood: A Comparison of Survey Data on Adolescents and Young Adults in Eight Countries. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 37, 155-167.
- Howard, C., Lipsky, M., & Marshall, D. R. (1994). Citizen Participation in Urban Politics: Rise and Routinization. In G. E. Peterson (Ed.), *Big-City Politics, Governance, and Fiscal Constraints* (pp. 153-200). The Urban Institute Press.
- Jennings, M. K., & Stoker, L. (2004). Social Trust and Civic Engagement across Time and Generations. *Acta Politica*, 39, 342-379. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.ap.5500077>
- Keeter, S., Zukin, C., Andolina, M., & Jenkins, K. (2002). *The Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*. CIRCLE.
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30, 607-610.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308>
- Kuenzi, M., & Lambright, G. M. S. (2007). Voter Turnout in Africa's Multiparty Regimes. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40, 665-690. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414006288969>
- Kumove, M., & Dyrstad, K. (2025). Do Youth Bulges Affect Voting and Protesting? An Age-Period-Cohort Analysis. *Political Studies*, Advance Online Publication.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217251394166>
- Lamprianou, I. (2013). Contemporary Political Participation Research: A Critical Assessment. In K. Demetriou (Ed.), *Democracy in Transition* (pp. 21-42). Springer.
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-30068-4_2
- Levin, K. A. (2006). Study Design III: Cross-Sectional Studies. *Evidence-Based Dentistry*, 7, 24-25. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.ebd.6400375>
- Metzger, A., & Smetana, J. G. (2009). Adolescent Civic and Political Engagement: Associations between Domain-Specific Judgments and Behavior. *Child Development*, 80, 433-441. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2009.01270.x>

- Molyneux, M. (1994). Women's Rights and Political Participation in Latin America. *Oxford Development Studies*, 22, 221-241.
- Nelson, N., & Wright, S. (1995). *Power and Participatory Development*. Intermediate Technology Publications.
- Niemi, R. G., & Junn, J. (1998). *Civics Education: What Makes Students Learn?* Yale University Press.
- Ninson, A. K. (2006). *Political Parties and Political Participation in Ghana*. Konrad Adenauer.
https://www.kas.de/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=8bcb143c-acc8-ddb7-0477-2eddc52b3e47&groupId=252038
- Nyianle, J. B. M. (2025). Social Media and Political Participation among Youth in Sekondi-Takoradi, Ghana. *Journal of African Studies and Development*, 17, 76-83.
<https://doi.org/10.5897/jasd2025.0725>
- O'Leary, R., Durant, R., Fiorino, D., & Weiland, P. (1999). *Managing for the Environment*. Jossey-Bass.
- Obradović, J., & Masten, A. S. (2007). Developmental Antecedents of Young Adult Civic Engagement. *Applied Developmental Science*, 11, 2-19.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10888690709336720>
- Polit, D. F., & Hungler, B. P. (1995). *Nursing Research: Principles and Methods* (5th ed.). Lippincott.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Ramirez, F. O., Soysal, Y., & Shanahan, S. (1997). The Changing Logic of Political Citizenship: Cross-National Acquisition of Women's Suffrage Rights, 1890 to 1990. *American Sociological Review*, 62, 735-745. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2657357>
- Randolph, J., & Bauer, M. (1999). Improving Environmental Decision-Making through Collaborative Methods. *Review of Policy Research*, 16, 168-191.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-1338.1999.tb00882.x>
- Reich, R. B. (1990). *Public Management in a Democratic Society*. Prentice Hall.
- Seyd, P., & Whiteley, P. (2002). *High-Intensity Participation: The Dynamics of Party Activism in Britain*. University of Michigan Press. <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.14704>
- Sherrod, L. R., Flanagan, C., & Youniss, J. (2002). Dimensions of Citizenship and Opportunities for Youth Development: The What, Why, When, Where, and Who of Citizenship Development. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6, 264-272.
https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532480xads0604_14
- Stolle, D., & Hooghe, M. (2009). Shifting Inequalities: Patterns of Exclusion and Inclusion in Emerging Forms of Political Participation. *European Societies*, 13, 119-142.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2010.523476>
- Thomas, J. C. (1995). *Public Participation in Public Decisions*. Jossey-Bass.
- Uhlener, C. J. (2001). Participation: Political. In N. J. Smelser, & P. B. Baltes (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences* (pp. 11078-11082). Elsevier.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/b0-08-043076-7/01187-6>
- UNDP (2012). *Youth Political Participation and Decision Making*. UNDP.
- Uslaner, E. M. (2002). *The Moral Foundations of Trust*. Cambridge University Press.
- Valadez, J. M. (2001). *Deliberative Democracy, Political Legitimacy, and Self-Determination in Multicultural Societies*. Westview Press.

- Vecchione, M., & Caprara, G. V. (2009). Personality Determinants of Political Participation. *Political Psychology*, 30, 901-917.
- Vellinga, A. (2025). *Youth Political Participation and Employment: A Case Study of Ghana*. Master's Thesis, Universiteit Leiden
- Verba, S., & Nie, N. H. (1972). *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality*. Harper & Row.
- Verba, S., Scholzman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Harvard University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1pnc1k7>
- Walker, T. (2002). Service as a Pathway to Political Participation: What Research Tells Us. *Applied Developmental Science*, 6, 183-188.
- Weeks, E. C. (2000). The Practice of Deliberative Democracy: Results from Four Large-Scale Trials. *Public Administration Review*, 60, 360-372. <https://doi.org/10.1111/0033-3352.00098>