Chapter 5

Students’ Political Engagement and Behaviour

Keeping in mind students’ understandings of democracy, which chiefly involve conceptions of participatory decision-making in a liberal-democratic polity and their high demand for democracy, as well as the findings of the previous chapter that highlighted students’ perception of the supply of democracy in their own countries, this chapter looks at the way students actively participate in the political realm as observers, potential actors, and actual actors. Are students interested in and regularly discussing politics? How do they access information about politics? Do they know about political incumbents and institutions in their country (and on their campus)? In what way do students participate in politics? Do students participate in elections? Are there other forms of civic participation in which students engage, like attending political meetings, contacting officials, or protesting on or off campus? This chapter considers responses from the survey to these and related questions.

First, however, it is incumbent to ask whether students actually consider it appropriate for themselves to participate in politics. As part of the survey, students were asked to consider the statement, ‘University students should concentrate on their studies and not become involved in politics’. Less than 10% of respondents agree with it outright. Rather almost two-thirds disagree or strongly disagree with the proposition that students should stay out of politics (N valid=1 130). The corresponding question whether students should therefore ‘Examine and criticize government on behalf of the less privileged in the country’ finds accordingly overwhelming support (75% ‘strongly agree’/‘agree’ vs. 7% ‘disagree’/‘strongly disagree’; rest: ‘undecided’) (N valid=1 129). When looking at the responses by university it shows that support for the involvement of students in politics is strongest among students at UDSM and least strong (but still supported by over two-thirds) at UCT.

5.1 Students’ cognitive engagement with politics

In order for students to be able to successfully participate in politics on and off campus, they need to be cognitively engaged and aware of public affairs and politics around them. Awareness of politics has presumably many dimensions. In the survey, cognitive awareness is measured in terms of engaging with politics on a regular basis as an interest and discussion topic, making frequent use of news media and knowing key political incumbents and institutions.
5.1.1 Interest in politics and media use

There is considerable student interest in politics across all campuses. At UCT, 75% of respondents say that they are ‘somewhat/very interested’ in politics and government. At UON and UDSM this respective share is 70% and 69% (compare Table 29).

Table 29 Interest in public affairs (politics and government)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Nairobi</th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Dar es Salaam</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not interested at all</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not very interested</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat/very interested</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: ‘How interested are you in public affairs (especially in politics and government)?’
N=1 200 Missing=2

While the student figures are well above the African average (64%) of expressed interest in politics, they are not particularly high within the context of Tanzanian and Kenyan mass public data. Thus, UON students follow their comparatively high national average of 72%. In contrast, the students at UDSM seem actually less interested in politics than the average Tanzanian or their comparative age cohort without higher education. In 2008, 83% of Tanzanians expressed great interest in politics, giving it the highest level of interest of all surveyed African countries (Gyimah-Boadi & Armah Attoh 2009). Lastly, considering that interest in politics in South Africa at 55% is below the African average, and that only half of the South African age cohort express interest in public affairs and politics, the level of political interest among UCT students is extraordinarily high at 75% (see Figure 27).

Figure 27 Student interest in politics in comparative perspective

Question: ‘How interested are you in public affairs (especially in politics and government)?’
N valid Public KNY=1 104; SA=2 400; TZN=1 208. Cohort KNY=1 57; SA=3 12; TZN=1 62.
Source Mass Public Data: Gyimah-Boadi and Armah Attoh (2009) and Afrobarometer Round 4 data.
% ‘Somewhat / very interested’
When students are asked how often they actually discuss politics with friends and family, their frequency of discussion seems to actually outperform their interest in public affairs. About a third of the students on each campus say they discuss political matters ‘frequently’; just under two-thirds say they do so at least ‘occasionally’. The figures of those saying they avoid the topic altogether are negligible at all three universities (compare Table 30).

Table 30 Frequency of discussing politics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Nairobi</th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Dar es Salaam</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>61%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: ‘When you get together with fellow students, friends or family, do you discuss political matters?’
N=1,200 Missing=3

In contrast, the respective national averages are somewhat lower. Thus, while at UON those who say they discuss politics ‘occasionally’/‘frequently’ make up 96%, the Kenya-wide figure is only 79%. Similarly at UDSM, 95% of students discuss politics regularly while as in Kenya 79% of the Tanzanian public in general does so. The UCT figure of 95% is extraordinarily high for South Africa. Only two-thirds of the South African public discuss politics regularly with friends and family (see Figure 28).

Figure 28 Frequency of students discussing politics in comparative perspective

The Student Governance Surveys therefore find that the proportion of students who discuss politics frequently is high on all three campuses – almost 30% above the African average and well above the national averages as well. Considering this in relation to students’ expressed interest in politics, it appears that student life may offer advantages to
the politically interested: The topic of politics is more often discussed than perhaps all students would like!

A related question to that of students’ interest in and discussion of politics is where students get their news from. Figure 29 and Figure 31 (below) show that radio and TV are the news sources most frequently used by most students. Four-fifths of the students say that they use these sources either daily or several times a week to inform themselves about the latest news. In addition, newspaper use and internet use are also highly prevalent. Two-thirds of students say they read newspapers and/or internet news sites daily or almost daily (see Figure 30 and Figure 32 below).

Comparing the Student Governance Surveys with Afrobarometer data shows that students have great advantages of access to certain news sources over the public in general and their age peers who are not at university. Except for radio, which is most widely accessible and used daily or several times a week, access to and use of other news media is skewed in favour of students (Figure 29).

Thus, UON students are twice as likely as their age cohort at large to use newspapers daily or several times a week; UDSM students are three times as likely. Only in South Africa is access to newspapers evenly distributed (at just over 50% for all samples) (see Figure 30).

The East African students are also far more likely to use TV as a source of news than their fellow citizens. UCT students, in contrast, don’t seem to use TV as often as their fellow citizens or the students in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (compare Figure 31).

Thus, while there is already a significant disparity in use of TV and newspapers between students and the public at large in Kenya and Tanzania (but not so in South Africa), the strongest impact of the university environment on access to news comes with the internet.
While the vast majority of students on all three campuses say they use the internet daily or several times a week (between 85% and 88%), use of the internet is minimal among the population in general (between 1% and 10%). As Figure 32 illustrates, the internet is also not a typical ‘youth’ medium; rather it is a medium to which students have special access through the universities. Ismail and Graham (2009) show that even when measured at a lesser, monthly frequency mass publics still do not have access to the internet to the extent that students do (i.e. use of internet by mass publics at least once a month: Kenya 15%; Tanzania 3%; South Africa 19%).
It appears therefore that in terms of news media and thus access to information about public affairs and politics, the Universities of Dar es Salaam and Nairobi put students at a distinct advantage compared to the Tanzanian and Kenyan publics in general and compared to the students’ age peers who are not at university. In this respect, these universities provide a privileged place for the politically interested citizen. In Cape Town, by contrast, the situation is far less marked. Even though students are more interested in public affairs than South Africans in general and discuss politics more frequently, their use of radio and TV (but not newspapers) is less frequent than the general public or their age cohort. The internet has seemingly already eclipsed radio and TV as news media at UCT.

5.1.2 Knowledge about politics

Having seen the high levels of students’ engagement with politics and use of news media, the question now is whether this interest in public affairs and wealth of information also translates into basic knowledge about politics. Can students correctly identify political incumbents on campus and in national government? Do they know the basics about the institutions that govern the university and the nation?

Table 31 Political knowledge: correctly naming incumbents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dean of Students/ Executive Director of Student Affairs</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President of Student Union SRC</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vice-Chancellor</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister of Finance</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Member of Parliament</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President of the Country</td>
<td>98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: ‘Can you tell me the name of…’ % = correct answer; N=1 200 Missing Dean=50; Missing President SU=69; Missing VC=18; Missing Minister=50; Missing MP=52; Missing President=30.
With regard to political incumbents at national level, the survey asked students to identify the name of the president, their member of parliament, and the minister of finance. At university level, the question was asked about the name of the president of the student union or SRC, the vice-chancellor of the university, and the dean of students.

Table 31 shows that virtually all students know the name of the president of their country. That is, however, where the similarities end. By far the most knowledgeable about political incumbents – both on and off campus are the students of the University of Nairobi. Vast majorities of UON students can correctly identify the minister of finance by name (96%), their member of parliament (87%), as well as the vice-chancellor of their university (83%) and the president of the student union (82%). Still over half know the name of the dean of students at UON.

At the University of Dar es Salaam, there is still a large majority who can correctly identify their MP (70%) and the minister of finance of Tanzania (60%), as well as at university level the vice-chancellor of UDSM (80%) and student president of the USRC (62%). However, only just over a quarter of the students know the name of their dean of students.

From the three groups, the students of the University of Cape Town emerge as the least knowledgeable about political incumbents and campus officials. The vast majority (95%) can correctly name the president of the Republic of South Africa and just over half know the name of the minister of finance (55%). The name of their vice-chancellor is known by 69% of the students, but only 30% know the UCT SRC president by name and a tiny minority (7%) can identify the executive director of student affairs correctly.

Taking the question about the minister of finance as an example in the national comparative perspective shows that the UON and UDSM students are much more knowledgeable about this specific political incumbent than their compatriots. Compared to only 12% of Tanzanians, 60% of UDSM students correctly name the minister of finance; in Kenya, where on average 44% of Afrobarometer respondents get the minister’s name right, it is 96% of the UON students. In South Africa, in contrast, 76% of South Africans identified the longstanding and popular minister of finance correctly in the 2008 Afrobarometer survey, that is, significantly more than the UCT students. However, while the survey was conducted at UCT a new cabinet was under formation and thus some students named (correctly) the still incumbent former minister while others named the new minister as incumbent; moreover, many answered ‘know but can’t remember’. 55% of UCT students correctly named the former minister or his successor, which, albeit 20% below the national figure of 76%, can be taken under the circumstances as a fair score (Figure 33).

The second dimension of cognitive political awareness measured in the Student Governance Surveys is knowledge about key political institutions. At a general level, the surveys show that students are more knowledgeable about incumbents than institutions and that knowledge about the political institutions at national level is far more prevalent.

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18 In the UDSM case, the name of the last USRC president was accepted (along with the current transitional president of the student union) since he had been rusticated by university management only months before the survey and was considered by many students still as the rightful USRC president.
among students from all the three campuses than knowledge about university governing bodies. As may be expected, virtually all students can name the majority party that governs in their country correctly. The number of years the president can constitutionally hold office is known by 63% of students at UCT, 72% at UDSM and 84% at UON. The role of the courts in determining the constitutionality of a law is known to half of the students at UCT, but to less than a third of UDSM and UON students.

Table 32 Political knowledge: correctly naming institutions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Nairobi</th>
<th>Cape Town</th>
<th>Dar es Salaam</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University Governing Body</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main membership of the Senate</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of Student Representative Body</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential term limitation</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of courts</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority party</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>92%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: ‘Do you happen to know...’ % = correct answer
N=1 200 Missing UGB=33; Missing Senate=47; Missing SR=46; Missing MP=35; Missing Pres=49; Missing Courts=55.

With respect to university level institutions, knowledge about governing institutions is scarce. Only between a sixth and a fifth of students know that one of the functions of their student representative body is to appoint representatives to the university’s top decision-making bodies, i.e. the Council and Senate. Except at UDSM, where marginally more students are informed about university institutions, Table 32 shows that less than 10% of students at UCT and UON know the basics about the composition of the Senate or which body holds the vice-chancellor accountable.
This section has shown that the university offers in various ways a privileged space for cognitive engagement with politics. It offers a space for more frequent discussion of public affairs and more frequent access to the use of news media (i.e. media of all kinds at UON and UDSM, and especially to the internet at UCT). This has a highly positive influence on the level of knowledge about politics among students at UDSM and UON, but to a lesser extent on students at UCT.¹⁹

### 5.2 Students’ political participation

Democratic processes require the active participation of citizens above participation in elections to be sustained. The classic Kantian distinction between active and passive citizens implies that only those citizens who in one way or another actively participate in decision-making are indeed different from the subjects of a non-democratic polity (Weinrib 2008). Participation presumably also has a positive feedback into cognitive awareness of politics as citizens learn about politics while doing it.

Students may have high levels of political interest, enthusiastically follow the news and discuss politics and in the process gain knowledge about politics and form the kinds of opinions about democracy and how it works in their country; however, how does this cognitive engagement with politics translate into political action? Does the fact that students are ‘seated closer to the political stage’ cognitively, correlate with a more likely active participation and leadership in politics?

This section investigates therefore whether students engage in formal democratic procedures such as voting when they have the opportunity to, involve themselves in various other aspects of active citizenship including membership and leadership of organisations of civil society, participate in meetings and contact officials as well as other forms of informal political participation (such as marching in demonstrations).

#### 5.2.1 Students’ participation in elections and identifying with parties

The survey shows that two-thirds of the surveyed students say they voted in the last general election; half of them also voted in the last student election on their campus. Self-reported student turnout to national elections was highest in Kenya, where 79% say they participated in the disputed 2007 election (and one student was ‘too young to vote’). Regarding the presidential and parliamentary elections in Tanzania at the end of 2005, 62% of the UDSM students say they have participated (and 19 students said they were still too young then). At UCT; 62% of the students also report to have participated in the last election (which was for most surveyed students the April 2009 election); 39 students say they were ‘too young to vote’. In all cases, the number of students who say they ‘could not find a polling station’ or were ‘prevented from voting’ is negligible (Figure 34). At the same time, only 31% of students say they feel close to any particular political party (N valid=1 162).
Turning to the last student elections on campus, here UCT students top the list with 67% indicating that they participated in the 2008/2009 SRC election (even though only 30% correctly name the SRC president who emerged from that election). At UON, 59% of students voted in the 2008/2009 SONU election (and 82% know the Union president), while at UDSM only 25% of the students say they participated in the DARUSO presidential election held in late 2008 (but 62% know the name of the DARUSO president who was elected then) (N valid=1 194).

On the one hand there are clearly anomalies in the data regarding voting behaviour and knowing incumbents. (For instance, how come so many UCT students participate in student elections but then fail to be interested in their outcome?) On the other hand, the relative lesser interest in student elections also correlates with the lack of identification with the student representative structures on all campuses. Less than 20% of students say they feel close to their student representative body (whereby identification is highest with DARUSO at UDSM at 38%, followed by identification with SONU at UON by 15% of students, and least with the UCT SRC at only 6% of students).

5.2.2 Civic participation: meetings, protests

In accordance with the design of the Afrobarometer, the Student Governance Surveys measure a range of ways in which students can participate in politics on and off campus. They include: participating in political meetings; attending demonstrations; personally contacting officials; writing to a newspaper; getting involved in an organisation; or even running for and taking up a formal student leadership position at university.
As illustrated in Table 33, there are considerable sections of the student population from each of the three universities that actively participate in politics on and off campus. The majority of respondents from UON and UDSM indicate that they had participated in the last twelve months in political meetings both on and off campus. Over a quarter of respondents at UON and half of UDSM students also attended a national protest once or more often during the last year. In contrast, student participation in political meetings is considerably lower among UCT students (involving only about a third of the student population) and only around a fifth of students from UCT (21%) participated in a student protest and even less (17%) in an off-campus demonstration. However, if one adds the campus-based activism to activism off-campus, UCT students are still considerably more involved in politics than the national average indicates.

Figure 35 illustrates the finding that students participate much more (UDSM, UON) or to the same degree (UCT) as their fellow citizens in protests and demonstrations that are held
off-campus. In particular, whereas only 20% of Tanzanians report that they attended a demonstration or protest in 2008, the figures for students at the University of Dar es Salaam is almost double that (36% for students participating in national protests). Moreover, half of UDSM students report to have been part of a campus-based protest (not displayed). Similarly, while the Afrobarometer reports that 13% of Kenyans participated in demonstrations in 2008, more than double that percentage is true for the Nairobi students (28% for national protests; in addition to 29% for student protests). Lastly, as mentioned already, UCT students are about on par with the national average of 19% for demonstration attendance (17% for national protests; 24% for student protests). The variations between the East African universities is replicated in the variations between these two countries and can therefore be understood in terms of the national political contexts; the South African (UCT) figures, however, follow the trend of earlier findings regarding student engagement at UCT.

While a considerable proportion of students indicate their participation in collective political activities such as political meetings and demonstrations, the share of the student body that engages in more individual political action is significantly smaller (for data see Table 33 above). Only at the University of Nairobi is the proportion of students who have in the past year written to a newspaper or contacted an official over 20%. At UDSM, under half the number of students who participated in collective political activities ever contacted a senior university or government official to raise a complaint; and even fewer have ever written a letter to an on-campus or off-campus newspaper. The share of individually activist students at UCT is even lower, with less than 10% indicating that they have engaged in any such political activity in the past year. Low levels of contacting formal political leaders and officials have also been observed in the Afrobarometer surveys (with only a 13% African average for contacting government officials) (Gyimah-Boadi & Armah Attoh 2009).

5.2.3 Active organisational memberships and leadership

By means of active membership or leadership of a voluntary organisation either on or off campus, students can participate politically in civil society and thereby claim a place in the public realm as active citizens. Table 34 shows that student participation in associational life is highest in campus-based student organisations. Almost two-thirds of the respondents from all three universities indicate that they are active members or leaders of a non-political student organisation (be it secular or religious). Student involvement in associational life beyond campus is also high – overall 53% of students are members of off-campus groups. Between a third (UCT) and two-thirds (UDSM) of students indicate that they are actively involved in an off-campus secular or religious association.

In comparative perspective it emerges clearly that active membership in voluntary associations is much higher among students than the mass publics. This is especially true for on-campus organisational membership; but even in off-campus secular organisations students are more likely to be active members than both their age cohort without higher education and mass publics. Looking only at student membership in off-campus secular institutions, it can be seen that UDSM students (53%) lead in comparison and that the student figure is considerably higher than the national figure reported by the Afrobarometer.
Equally much higher than the national figure of 16% for South Africa at large (or 11% for the age cohort) is the UCT figure of active off-campus membership of students in non-religious organisations (43%). In Kenya, where the national average is at a high of 43%, active involvement of UON students still beats that with 48% for student membership in off-campus associations (in addition to 63% in on-campus organisations). Student life clearly offers opportunities for organisational involvement both on and off campus which non-students do not have (Figure 36).

Looking at the active involvement of students in religious off-campus groups, a more varied picture emerges (see Figure 37). Students at UDSM are the most actively involved, whereby over 70% indicate active membership or even leadership of an off-campus religious group. This mirrors their high levels of religiosity as well as the high level of involvement in religious groups reported for Tanzanians in general (71% nation-wide).

The South African figures of 39% active involvement pares with the 36% of students at UCT who indicate active membership in off-campus religious groups (while religiosity at UCT is also lower than on the other campuses with 73%) (compare Figure 37).

Lastly, at UON only 53% of the students surveyed report that they are active members of off-campus religious groups while religiosity is indicated at a high 94%. UON students are thus less involved as members in religious organisations than Kenyans overall, of which 66% indicate active membership.

The student surveys therefore show that students tend to be much more actively involved in organisational life in general, including active membership in secular off-campus groups in addition to high levels of campus-based organisational activity. Table 34 (above) also shows that some students take their interest in politics even a step further and become active members of a political party. The relative proportions are higher in East Africa with 11% of UON students and 12% of UDSM students indicating active political party involvement, than at UCT where only 2% of students report party membership.

### Table 34 Civic participation of students: associational memberships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>University</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nairobi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political party</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student union</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-political student association (secular or religious)</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious group (off campus)</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voluntary association or club (non-religious) (off-campus)</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question: ‘Are you personally involved in any of the following? In what capacity?’ % = active member/official leader. N valid political party=1132; student union=1130; non-political student association=1164; religious group (off-campus)=1151; voluntary association or club (non-religious) (off-campus)=1141.
Figure 36 Student membership in comparative perspective

- Active membership in campus organisations: Student surveys
- Active membership of off-campus secular organisations: Student surveys
- Active membership of voluntary and community organisations: Mass public age cohort

Question: ‘Are you personally involved in any of the following? In what capacity?’

% = active member/official leader.
Student Data: N valid voluntary association or club (non-religious) (off-campus) = 1,141
Afrobarometer: N valid (non-religious) voluntary association or community group: Public KNY = 1,101; SA = 2,400; TZN = 1,208. Cohort KNY = 157; SA = 312; TZN = 162.

Figure 37 Student membership in religious groups in comparative perspective

- Students’ religiosity
- Religious group off-campus membership: Student surveys
- Religious group mass public age cohort
- Religious group mass public all

Question: ‘Are you personally involved in any of the following? In what capacity?’

% = active member/official leader.
Student Data: N valid = 1,141; Source Afrobarometer Data: Gyimah-Boadi & Armah Attoh (2009).
Among the advantages that students have in civic life over their age cohort and the mass publics in their country is not only that they are more frequently active members in (especially secular) organisations off-campus over and above a range of campus-based organisations; students are also more likely to be leaders of these organisations. Figure 38 shows that between 13% and 29% of students are official leaders of a voluntary, religious or secular association on or off campus. The biggest part of the gap between students and non-students is, as with active membership observed above, the additional opportunity students have by being able to take leadership positions on campus. In other words, the campus-based (non-political) student organisations represent a major potential training ground for the future leadership of civil society in these countries.20

Associational life on campus and leadership in campus-based organisations is often considered an important training ground for the new leadership of civil society. This section has shown that there is potential for it to play such a role. The following section therefore looks at the extent to which various forms of student leadership and activism on campus correlate with off-campus political involvement.

5.3 Students as active citizens?

This chapter has shown that being a student at any of the three universities offers clear advantages to the politically interested. Overall, students have better access to a diversity...
of information about politics, in that politics is much more frequently discussed on campus than among citizens in general and students have more access to and use of a diversity of news media, of which frequent access to the internet as a source of news is almost exclusively a student privilege in Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania.

In addition to the enhanced opportunity for cognitive engagement and media, the university also offers opportunities to pursue political and non-political collective activity for honing civic and leadership skills. Thus, students participate at least as likely in national elections, voluntary associations in the community, political meetings and national demonstrations as citizens in general (or even significantly more likely in the cases of UON and UDSM students). In addition, students have a whole palette of campus-based political activities and political and non-political organisations in which to participate and hone their civic and leadership skills, which are not open to the public in general. Thus, looking only at membership of voluntary associations off-campus, UON students are equally as likely, UDSM students double and UCT students three times more likely to be active members than their age peers without higher education. Moreover, students are far more likely to be among the official leadership of these associations than non-students. Over and above that, a majority of students on all campuses are also active members of campus-based voluntary organisations in which many take leadership positions. The Student Governance Surveys therefore provide ample evidence of both cognitive and positional politically relevant advantages offered to students by the university.

This section takes the consideration of students’ active citizenship, which is implicit in the analysis of students’ cognitive awareness of and participation in politics, a step further and investigates the extent to which student leadership and student activism may serve as a training ground for active citizenship in their country.

5.3.1 Student leadership, activism and active citizenship

In chapter 1, the development of active citizens has been noted as one of the purposes of higher education in democracies. Active citizens participate in public affairs by various means. While a level of cognitive engagement is necessary, active citizenship further involves voting in elections and other forms of citizenship participation. The Student Governance Surveys conceptualised different participatory orientations of students in terms of (1) formal involvement in student leadership; (2) student activism, that is, political involvement outside of formal channels (e.g. protesting); and (3) non-involvement/passive orientation.

As Saha (2000: 13) points out, ‘what might be considered legitimate active citizenship in one context, may be considered civil disobedience or even criminal disobedience in another.’ This point is not only relevant to keep in mind with respect to the different national contexts in which the surveys were conducted, it also applies to the different levels or spheres where students participate in politics. On the one hand, the distinction between conventional and unconventional political behaviour on campus is somewhat implicit in the distinction between the ‘formal student leadership’ (made up of elected or appointed official student representatives), and the group of ‘student activists’ who are defined here
as students who have attended one or more demonstrations or protest marches in the past year. On the other hand, whether marching and demonstrating is considered legitimate intra- or extramural citizenship behaviour depends on the local context. Along with investigating these different dimensions of active citizenship, this section also tests the proposition of a student leadership pathway to active citizenship. Is political behaviour at campus level replicated off-campus?

5.3.2 Active citizenship by university

The group of students considered as ‘active citizens’ refers to those respondents who always prefer democracy and have either participated in a protest on or off campus in the previous 12 months or are current/previous student representatives (SL). If the former group of protesting democrats represents the more unconventionally activist, democratic students, the latter then represents active citizens that prefer formal channels of participation. There is, of course, a considerable overlap between the two types of active citizens whereby 40% of SL can also be considered democratic, protesting active citizens. Overall two-thirds of SL (65%) are active citizens by this definition.

Figure 39 Active citizens: protesting or formally involved democrats

![Bar chart showing active citizens at UDSM, UON, and UCT](chart)

N valid: UON=378; UCT=387; UDSM=373.

Figure 39 shows that the active citizens at the Universities of Cape Town, Dar es Salaam and Nairobi make up only a fraction of the student body: 35% at UDSM, 27% at UON and 22% at UCT. On each campus there is still a smaller group of students who participate in student demonstrations and national demonstrations but who are not always democratically inclined. Furthermore, both at UCT and UON, the majority of students are not participating in protests or demonstrations, whether on or off campus.

5.3.3 Active citizenship in national comparative perspective

In national comparative perspective, the students turn out to be much more likely activist citizens within their respective contexts than their respective age cohort not in higher education and their fellow citizens in general. While students do not necessarily prefer democracy more than the mass publics, the big difference is that those who do so are
much more likely to protest or take leadership positions in organisations of civil society and/or student organisations. Thus, among the mass publics, less than a quarter of respondents (in SA even less than a sixth) can be called activist democratic citizens in that they prefer democracy to any other form of government and have either attended a protest in the last twelve months or hold an official leadership position in a secular or religious group (or both). Figure 40 illustrates the differences between students and the mass publics.

Figure 40 Active citizenship in comparative perspective

While the differences between students and non-students are interesting and noteworthy, the difference between the general public and the youth cohorts without higher education in each country are at least equally interesting, showing that it is not youthfulness in general, but tendencies associated with being in higher education, that are likely to account for the more activist disposition of students.

5.3.4 Student political leadership as a training ground?

Participation and leadership in formal settings such as student government on campus and voluntary associations on or off campus are among the typical indicators of active citizenship (Saha 2000: 12). When it comes to leadership in associational life, there are correlations of varying strength between participation in formal student leadership and leadership of voluntary organisations both on and off campus.

Table 35 indicates the extent to which students in formal positions of student government also take leadership in civil society. Strong to moderate correlations exist among formal student leadership and leadership of non-political student organisations at UON and UDSM, and moderate to weak correlations between formal student leadership and leadership in off-campus secular voluntary organisations at UDSM, UON and UCT. When looking at the concrete data it can be seen that at the University of Nairobi, 43% of all formal student leaders are also official leaders of a non-political student organisation (as against 18% of other students; N valid=389); at UCT 26% of formal student leaders also
CHAPTER 5 STUDENTS’ POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT AND BEHAVIOUR

lead a non-political student organisation (as against as against 8% of students not in formal leadership; N valid=395); and at UDSM there are 28% of formal student leaders as against 8% of students not in student government who lead a non-political student organisation (N valid=380). Albeit with less frequency, a similar tendency can also be observed with regard to student leadership in off-campus non-religious organisations (e.g. at UON, 25% of formal student leaders are also leaders of off-campus organisations, as against 9% of other students; N valid=383).

These correlations suggest that students in formal leadership roles on campus have a tendency to also take leadership in non-political on- and off-campus associations. In this respect, formal student representation on campus could serve as a training ground for leadership in civil society as the skills and competencies acquired in the university context could immediately be transferred to organised civil society beyond campus (and vice versa).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 35 Student leaders taking leadership in civil society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally student leader / Leader of a non-political student organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N valid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formally student leader / Leader in a non-religious association off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader in a non-religious association off campus / Leader in a religious group off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). Control variables: involvement/non-involvement on/off campus in religious/non-religious organisations. Only the strongest correlations are displayed.

Moreover, involvement in formal student leadership on campus is also correlated with participation in student activism and other forms of civic participation. Among students at the University of Nairobi, there are moderate to weak correlations between formal student leadership and involvement in political activism. Weak correlations in this regard can also be found in the UCT and UDSM data.

Table 36 indicates significant moderate to weak correlations between being a student representative and participating in various forms of political activism (attending political meetings, protests, contacting officials, and writing letters to newspapers) on and off campus. Among students of the University of Nairobi, there are moderate to weak correlations between formal student leadership and involvement in political activism. Weak correlations in this regard can also be found in the UCT and UDSM data.

By far the strongest significant correlations in this investigation are found between those who behave as political activists on campus as well as off campus. There appears to be a significant group of students who are not in formal student leadership positions but who participate extensively in political activism on and off campus. In this respect Table 36 shows that at all three universities, there is a fairly strong correlation between those
students who participate in student political activism on campus and those who do so off campus (UCT .781**; UON .614**; UDSM .565**). This correlation also holds (albeit not as strongly) when identifying specific political activities such as attending political meetings or protest marches.

5.3.5 Student politics and political specialisation

A way of understanding these findings is to consider student political leadership as a series of related activities for which politically-inclined students specialise. In this regard, leadership within a formal organisational context can be considered a type of student political specialisation, whereby leaders in student government also tend to act as leaders in other formal organisational contexts such as non-political student organisations and off-campus voluntary associations (compare Table 35).

A second type of specialisation is evident from Table 36. Moderate to strong correlations are evident between the indices of on-campus and off-campus political activism (especially with regard to attending political meetings and participating in protests). This suggests that student participation in informal collective political activity is a second type of student political specialisation. The table indicates clearly that the correlation between student participation in collective campus-level political activism and corresponding off-campus political activities is strong and robust across all three universities.

5.4 Summary and conclusion

This chapter has considered students’ cognitive engagement with politics and political participation in different forms on and off campus. It has shown that students are not necessarily more interested in politics than citizens in general; however, students have a cognitive advantage over the public in general in that politics is discussed more frequently
on campus and students have frequent access to a diversity of news media, of which access to the internet in particular is almost exclusive to students in Kenya, South Africa and Tanzania. Whether the advantages for cognitive engagement provided by the university environment translate into better knowledge about politics cannot be said conclusively. It is clear, however, that all three universities provide a privileged place for cognitive engagement with politics.

The same can also be said with respect to political participation. Especially the University of Dar es Salaam and the University of Nairobi appear to provide havens for political activity with high levels of student involvement in political meetings and demonstrations on campus. Yet even at UCT students are more likely to participate in protests than mass publics when one adds their on and off campus experiences. In comparative perspective it also emerges that students’ active membership of voluntary associations is much higher than that of mass publics. Not only is it higher in off-campus organisations, it is further augmented by participation in various on-campus student organisations. Moreover, leadership of voluntary associations (off-campus) is far more likely among students than non-students. In other words, university and student life present unmatched opportunities for exercising political activity and organisational leadership at a young age. Students therefore are not only seated closer to the political action as observers but also as political actors.

While students in general thus emerge among the most active citizens in their respective countries, the chapter finds that formal student leadership only weakly (or moderately in the UON case) correlates with informal political activity on campus, and weakly (in all three universities) with informal political activity off-campus. Rather, formal student leadership (i.e. student representation in university governance structures) and leadership in other formal organisational contexts, on the one hand; and informal collective political activity on and off campus on the other hand; represent somewhat distinct political specialisations for students on all three campuses. Thus, the university potentially offers a training ground for active citizenship in formally organised civil society as well as in informal and more unconventional forms of political participation.