



Youth Identity and Political Engagement in Urban Gambia: A Qualitative Exploration

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Abstract

Youth identity in urban Gambia is shaped by a complex interplay of cultural heritage, education, and economic opportunities, influencing their political engagement. The study employed semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of young people aged 18 to 35 who are active participants or potential influencers in community politics. Data analysis involved thematic coding for identifying recurring patterns and themes. Youth identity is significantly shaped by their cultural heritage, particularly the influence of traditional leaders and religious figures on youth perceptions of political efficacy. Additionally, a majority (80%) expressed strong interest in participating in local governance, with education being identified as a key factor facilitating this engagement. The findings reveal that while young people in urban Gambia are politically aware and engaged, their identity shapes their approach to politics, making cultural context crucial for understanding political participation patterns. Policy-makers should incorporate strategies that acknowledge the importance of cultural heritage in youth education programmes aimed at fostering civic engagement. Additionally, initiatives that recognise local leadership as a source of legitimacy can enhance young people's trust and participation in governance structures.

Keywords: *Africanization, Cultural Identity, Ethnography, Political Participation, Urbanism, Youth Activism, Qualitative Analysis*

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