Civic Political Engagement of Sub-Saharan African Naturalized Immigrants

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Civic Political Engagement of Sub-Saharan African Naturalized Immigrants

Abstract
Civic political engagement is an intentional and empathic leadership behavior, especially toward engaging minorities and populations that are usually not seen and heard. Research has shown that civic political engagement helps foster better communities, people, organizations, all levels of government, and private and non-profit entities. Engaging sub-Saharan Africans as a disadvantaged population requires that they are met where they are, and because this does not happen often, they have continued to be ignored and understudied compared to other immigrant groups. This qualitative study has been an effort to see and hear sub-Saharan African stories and experiences. The study used a descriptive phenomenology approach. There were 24 participants in four focus groups to examine how sub-Saharan Africans naturalized immigrants engage in civic political processes. The study used Hanna Pitkin's political representation theory as a lens to approach the research. In the findings, the following themes and subthemes emerged based on three research questions. The first question investigated participation, and activities and behaviors modeled emerged as the theme. Subthemes were: voting, campaign and mobilization, advocacy/activism, and volunteering. The second question examined the influence of lived experiences, and the theme was perception and attitude. The subthemes were: opportunity, resilience, representation, and fear of politics. Finally, the third question investigated motives with the theme of ubuntu ("I am because you are"). The subthemes were: collective community responsibility, and dignity and identity.

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Civic Political Engagement of Sub-Saharan African Naturalized Immigrants

By

Chol-Awan A. Majok

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Kim VanDerLinden, Ph.D.

Committee Member
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Dedication

I want to thank almighty God; without his infinite love, I would have never had a chance to dream and to pursue all that I am today. To the smartest, most patient, motivator, and caring, my dissertation chair, Dr. Kim VanDerLinden, whom I owe my scholarly voice and leadership journey to her able guidance. And to my committee member Dr. Robert DiFlorio whose daily strategies of three hours helped me finished. To Dr. C. Michael Robinson, who recruited and mentored me all the way to the finish line. To Dr. Grant Reeher, who was my executive mentor and a good friend. To Dr. Steven Blatt, whose steady friendship and love is pure. To my big brother, Eliezer Hernández, whose encouragement never seized, and to my Cohort 5, we have been through a lot in the program. And to those who prayed for me in my village of Gol and along the rough and smooth journeys. Thank you.

To my hero, my father, Majok Aguto Chol, may his soul rest in peace, who cared for me when I had no mother, and faithfully believed that I would someday be somebody. To my oldest brother Aguto Majok Aguto, who without him, I would have never made it out from the desperate days of “Lost Boys” and refugee camps. And to the entire family of Ngong Lok, who has inspired me to set the bar high. To the most faithful, loving, forgiving, and to whom I am the father and a hero, my children; Akuch, Gop, Majok, Akau, and Yar. To Abiei Akau Gai, the woman of my dream, my chick, my number one cheerleader, whom I owe much of my essential being to, and that without her, I would be
words and not actions. May God always give her the mercy and the courage she needs for her kind heart.
Biographical Sketch

Chol Majok is current the Director of Supported Employment Program, Alliance for Economic Inclusion, Onondaga County, and the purpose is to help reduce poverty in the unemployed and underemployment. Chol is also a city of Syracuse councilor representing the Third District Council.

Chol attended Syracuse University from 2004 to 2008 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and a minor in Psychology. Chol attended Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy at the University at Albany and graduated with a Master of Arts in Political Science with a concentration of Public Law in 2015. Chol took leadership training through Leadership Greater Syracuse and graduated in 2016.

Chol started his doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership at St. John Fisher College in May of 2017. Chol’s dissertation research was Civic Political Engagement with Naturalized sub-Saharan African immigrants. The dissertation was completed under the supervision of Dr. Kim VanDerLinden. Chol completed the program and graduated with the Ed.D. in May of 2020. You can reach Chol-Awan A. Majok at cmajok1@gmail.com.
Abstract

Civic political engagement is an intentional and empathic leadership behavior, especially toward engaging minorities and populations that are usually not seen and heard. Research has shown that civic political engagement helps foster better communities, people, organizations, all levels of government, and private and non-profit entities. Engaging sub-Saharan Africans as a disadvantaged population requires that they are met where they are, and because this does not happen often, they have continued to be ignored and understudied compared to other immigrant groups. This qualitative study has been an effort to see and hear sub-Saharan African stories and experiences. The study used a descriptive phenomenology approach. There were 24 participants in four focus groups to examine how sub-Saharan Africans naturalized immigrants engage in civic political processes. The study used Hanna Pitkin’s political representation theory as a lens to approach the research.

In the findings, the following themes and subthemes emerged based on three research questions. The first question investigated participation, and activities and behaviors modeled emerged as the theme. Subthemes were: voting, campaign and mobilization, advocacy/activism, and volunteering. The second question examined the influence of lived experiences, and the theme was perception and attitude. The subthemes were: opportunity, resilience, representation, and fear of politics. Finally, the third question investigated motives with the theme of ubuntu (“I am because you are”). The subthemes were: collective community responsibility, and dignity and identity.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Africa is one of the poorest places in the world today due to economic disadvantages and rising and recurring political conflicts (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012). There are many reasons for African migration to the Western Hemisphere (North America, Europe, and Australia). According to Kamya (1997), two factors stand out: kinship where members bring other family members over and changes in the social, political, and economic conditions. Black immigrant populations in the Western Hemisphere are from Africa, South America, and Central America (Anderson, 2015). Many of the Blacks in the western world are descendants of the slavery era. Blacks are people of African descent who were brought to the United States through the slave trade and later arrived through voluntary migrations (Anderson, 2015).

In the United States between 2010 and 2017, the number of sub-Saharan African immigrants superseded both Asian Pacific and Latino immigrants (Connor, 2018). Sub-Saharan African immigrants are the fastest-growing population among Black immigrants in the United States, Canada, and in Europe (Anderson, 2015; Anderson, 2017; Capps et al., 2012; Mondain & Lardoux, 2012). In the United States, sub-Saharan Africans make up 39% of the population of the foreign Blacks, with Caribbean Blacks leading at 49% (Anderson & Lopez, 2018).

Sub-Saharan African countries are all African countries, including islands, except Sudan, Tunisia, Western Sahara, Algeria, Egypt, Libya, and Morocco (Connor, 2018). These seven African countries are culturally Middle Eastern (Arab) countries. In other
words, North African countries are physically located in Africa, but they associate more politically, socially, and economically with the Arab world than they do with Black Africans. Furthermore, these countries do not consider themselves to be ethnically constituted by Black Africans (Connor, 2018).

Overall, Black immigrants with their children make up 18% or almost one-fifth of the Black population in the United States (Anderson & Lopez, 2018) with sub-Saharan African immigrants representing 4.8% of the Black immigrant community in 2015 (Anderson, 2017). As of the year 2017, 1.5 million sub-Saharan Africans live in the United States (Connor, 2018). Many of the Blacks in the Western world are descendants of the slavery era.

Slave trade started in 1519 to 1867, and by then, over 10 million Africans had already crossed over to North America and Europe (Capps et al., 2012). Historically, immigration of Black Africans started during the transatlantic slave trade as early as the 16th century and their migration was involuntary; however, migration to the West today remains relatively voluntary for Africans (Anderson, 2017; Capps et al., 2012; Mollenkopt & Hochschild, 2009).

In comparing Americans and Europeans, Americans have a long history of racial discrimination and have put more effort forth to combat it, which has allowed the incorporation of various groups, with candidates making immigrants more visible and influential here than in Europe (Mollenkopt & Hochschild, 2009). Immigrants who are legal residents vote in Europe, unlike America. However, America is still more proactive in immigrant incorporation measures (Mollenkopt & Hochschild, 2009).
Contemporary Black immigration to the United States soared in the 1960s under President Lyndon Johnson is partly due to the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 or the Hart-Celler Act of 1965, which sought skilled Black persons to move to the United States and encouraged family migration (Anderson, 2015; Center for Immigration Studies [CIS], 1995; Capps et al., 2012). According to Capps et al. (2012), in the United States, immigration law did two things: it removed national origin quotas, which had immigrants coming only from Northern Europe, and made it legal for immigrants to be brought by family members or through a family unification process.

Later, the Refugee Act of 1980 expanded the immigration rationale to include conflict and war zone relief. As such, sub-Saharan African immigrants from Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Eritrea were incorporated into the Act, thereby gaining resettlement status to the United States as refugees (Anderson, 2017).

Furthermore, the United States Immigration Act of 1990 or the Immigrant Diversity Visa Program was initiated specifically for the stimulation of immigration from underrepresented countries in Europe; however, the program also benefitted sub-Saharan Africans (Anderson, 2015, 2017). Many of the immigrants from sub-Saharan African countries such as Oromo, South Sudan, the Congo, and Somalia were forced out of their native counties due to war and were seeking permanent residency in the US (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019).

From 2000 to 2013, African populations in the United States grew by 137% compared to other Black immigrant groups (Anderson, 2017). As immigrants, Black Africans, in general, adapt and integrate well into their hosting countries. They are most
likely to be men, younger, and enter as refugees seeking asylum than other immigrant groups (Capps et al., 2012). Africans and other immigrant communities are a growing political force that political candidates and civic, political institutions will have to battle with, and candidates who ignore them will find it hard to win both federal, state, and local elections (Erwing & Cantor, 2014).

**Civic Political Engagement**

Lai and Hynie (2010) and Putnam (2000) define civic engagement as people connecting with their communities socially and politically. Civic engagement encompasses people’s participatory relationships with fellow citizens and various institutions. Civic political engagement (CPE) behaviors include visiting with neighbors, talking with local and national officials, participation with political institutions, involvement in political campaigns and political discourse, which include signing petitions, speaking out, joining associations, building social networks, attending community meetings, and voting (Lai & Hynie, 2010; Putnam, 2000).

CPE can have an essential role in the betterment of individuals and groups by building social and political ties (Lai & Hynie, 2010; Choudhary & Gupta, 2017; Putnam, 1995). According to the National Conference of Citizens (NCoC), communities with robust civil societies are more likely to aspire to better government due, in part, that these involved citizens demand, encourage, and serve as partners with governmental entities to address public issues (NCoC, 2010).

Nevertheless, civic engagement in America has declined both socially and politically and is especially noted in the communities settled by immigrants. Deterioration in CPE activities includes decreased volunteerism, charitable donations,
collective actions, and social networks and affects voter turnout, political representation, political candidates and immigrant mobilization (Galston, 2007; Hays & Kogl, 2007; Lai & Hynie, 2010; Putnam, 2000; White & Mistry, 2016).

**Political representation.** Immigrants and minorities continue to receive low-policy representation and face discrimination, which has continued to raise serious political questions and concerns toward the government (Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014; Morad, 2014). Pitkin (1967) defines political representation as acting in the interest of the represented actively and responsively. Political representation theories consider a bilateral and dynamic relationship between the representative (political candidate) and those the candidate represents as one of the most important relationships. Minority policy representation can influence the allocation of services, especially in social welfare, police, fire, parks, and employment (Sass & Mehay, 2003). When immigrants are engaged in the policy-making process, an encouraging narrative of an inclusive democratic process exists (Wang, 2013).

**Mobilization efforts.** Political candidates can have a significant role in mobilizing naturalized citizens and immigrants. These candidates can influence election outcomes due to the power of these elected offices and these candidates’ relationships with community members. These candidates can choose to exclude immigrant populations or can choose to include immigrant groups by actively engaging with the immigrant community and encouraging voter registration (Wang, 2013).

Whereas political candidates with immigrant backgrounds (Africa, Asia, and Latin America) tend to be mostly unsuccessful in their bids for political offices, political candidates with immigrant backgrounds do inspire immigrant voter turnout (Morad,
Minorities represented by minorities are important for their concerns because they have different experiences; it matters that Blacks represent Blacks or other minorities represent other minorities, especially for policy representation (Preuhs & Hero, 2011). Although immigrants are elected to political offices, the gap between the population with such candidates is severely incompatible (Wust, 2014).

**Voter turnout.** Voter turnout is one indicator of civic political engagement well-being. Krogstad and Lopez (2017) define voter turnout as the number of adult citizens who cast a ballot in various elections. They note that immigrants are less politically active in comparison to other American ethnic groups due, in part, to low trust in political officials. These lower levels of participation in the political process may present a myriad of challenges as these immigrant groups may not be fully recognized by their new government (Klofstad & Bishin, 2014).

In the 2016 election in the United States, the number of Blacks who cast ballots was lower than the 2012 election compared to any other race, and for Hispanics, the turnout was not that different (Census Bureau Report, 2017). Compared to general elections, the results of primary elections in local areas are historically lower as voter turnout is disproportionately lower compared to the national level (Gerber, Huber, Bigger, & Hendry, 2017; Smets & Ham, 2013).

In addition to immigrant groups in the United States, voter turnouts and disparities for disadvantaged ethnic populations are low, especially among Blacks and Latinos as compared to Whites (Census Bureau, 2017; Krosgead & Lopez, 2017). According to the United States new Census Bureau data (2017), the voter turnout for non-Hispanic Whites in 2016 was up to 65.3%, and voter turnout for non-Hispanic
Blacks was 59.6%. For Blacks, these numbers were seven points lower in comparison to 2012. In 2012, Blacks voted more for the first time (66.6%) than Whites (64.1%). According to Krogstad and Lopez (2017), the seven-point decline in Black voter turnout is the largest on record among any racial group since the White vote in 1992, which plummeted from 70.2% to 60.7%.

In contrast, Latinos, as a marginalized group, were similarly consistent for both 2012 and 2016 general elections turnouts, 48% and 46.6%, respectively (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). Conversely, the rate of naturalized immigrant citizens (born in another country and became United States citizens) was up slightly, but the voter turnout was 36% in 2012 and 54.3% in 2016 (Krogstad & Lopez, 2017). The minority population tends to be ignored by political parties and candidates, which influences turnout, isolation due to no outreach or communication, and overall political underrepresentation (Banducci, Donovan, & Karp, 2004; Sobolweska et al., 2013).

**Problem Statement**

There is a gap in the literature about sub-Saharan African immigrants’ political engagement, especially in the United States. As many African immigrant issues remain understudied (Uwakweh, Rotich, & Okpala, 2014), little is known in the scholarship world about immigrants’ political participation and whether they change civic political engagement in contemporary democracies (Just & Anderson, 2012). Scholars have demonstrated little interest in treating African immigrants as separate identities from mainstream Black-African Americans (Clark, 2008). Research has continued to classify Africans as African Americans, reflecting overall lack of diversity in Black politics,
ignoring Africans’ natural, cultural, political behaviors and ideological differences with other Blacks or African Americans (Alex-Assensoh, 2009).

Furthermore, research has focused on Asian, Latino, Jewish, and Russian immigrants’ civic engagement in the political arena but has primarily ignored that of African immigrants (Kamya, 1997; Wambu & Nkabinde, 2016). In the United States and Canada, African immigrants historically have been given limited attention and therefore are considered a marginalized population group (Gele & Harslof, 2012; Kamya, 1997; Mondain & Lardoux, 2012).

Currently, sub-Saharan African immigrants are a small part of immigrant communities in the United States, consisting of 4.8% of the total immigrant population (Anderson, 2017). However, sub-Saharan African immigrant numbers are consistently growing (Anderson, 2017). African immigrants are not all refugees but many of them do come from war-torn countries as refugees (Mondain & Lardoux, 2012). Currently, the omission of this group has led to total exclusion from some civic arenas (Ebert & Okamoto, 2013; Junn, 1999).

Moreover, sub-Saharan Africans are the most educated population in both Europe and United States (Anderson & Connor, 2018; Mondain & Larnoux, 2012; Uwakweh et al., 2014), and even compared to the United States native-born (Anderson & Connor, 2018). In comparison to all other immigrant population groups, sub-Saharan Africans are most likely to become naturalized American citizens, are more educated, are most likely to work in professional occupations, are the most likely of all immigrant groups to be proficient in the English language, and are most likely to vote (Anderson & Connor, 2018; Capps et al., 2012; Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019; Erwing & Cantor, 2014).
Theoretical Rationale

This section presents political representation theory as the theoretical paradigm that undergirds this research study. Pitkin (1967) defines political representation as acting in the interest of the represented actively and responsively. Political representation is driven by debates around established rules that govern participants' process of inclusions and chances of creating more aspiring and accommodating measures for groups seeking visibility (Rehfeld, 2006). An essential element in representative democracy posits that all who are bounded by a policy should have inputs in its crafting processes (Pande, 2003).

Political representation theories exhibit a bilateral and dynamic relationship between the representative (political candidate), and those the candidate represents as one of the most important relationships (Pitkin, 1967). In political representation, although relationships between the representative and represented may be portrayed, there are still limits cast upon representation by institutions and practices in normative settings (Schweber, 2016). Thus, representation means that the results of political decisions are determined by designated individuals or representatives, and these individuals can mediate activities between the represented and the decisions at hand (Brennan & Hamlin, 1999).

Pitkin (1967) posits four tenets of political representation theory: formal or authoritative, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive. First, formal or authoritative political representation theory refers to rules and processes utilized to designate representatives (Barnes & Burchard, 2012). These are rules of recognition that
constituents use to evaluate whether a person in power is indeed a political representative or not (Rehfeld, 2006).

Second, descriptive representation means resemblance in racial, gender, ethnicity between the elected official and the constituents they represent. That is, constituents voting on ethnic lines are influenced by cultural relation through selection of representatives that represent the group-based interest (Bloemraad, 2013; Sobolewska, 2013; Verkuyten, 2017). In descriptive representation, constituents want representatives who see the same thing as they do (Verkyten, 2017). One of the distinctions between minority and nonminority representatives is that minority-elected officials are propelled by the power of their shared and lived experiences that only minority candidates can relate to (Preuhs & Hero, 2011).

The third element of political representation theory is symbolic representation, meaning having an elected official with convictions, beliefs, emotions, and attitude that coincide with the represented or constituency’s positions (Biba, 2015; Pitkin, 1967). Furthermore, symbolic representation means the feeling of being equally represented (Barnes & Burchard, 2012). Finally, substantive representation means representative acting on the best policy interest of the constituents (Barnes & Burchard, 2012). Substantive means that a group is driven by their interests, especially in policy (Rosenthal, Zubida, & Nachmias, 2017).

In the preference of minorities, they will mostly choose a representative who reflects their ethnic backgrounds, and such candidates can increase voter turnout. Further, when voters see people who look like them in offices, it inspires them also to want to run for political positions (Shah, 2014). Also, at a more salient angle, the presence of a
representative with a minority background does signal that the process and the system be inclusive of minority needs (Dancygier et al., 2015).

However, there continues to be less attention given to the experiences, attitudes, emotions, and feelings of minority constituents, and this is reflected in the lack of affinity between the elected officials and constituents of minority backgrounds (Bird, 2012). Immigrants and minorities continue to get low-policy representation and discrimination, which has continued to raise serious political questions and concerns toward the government (Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014; Morad, 2014).

Minority policy representation can influence allocation of services, especially in social welfare, police, fire, parks, and employment (Sass & Mehay, 2003). For example, when immigrants are engaged in the policy-making process, an encouraging narrative of an inclusive democratic process exists (Wang, 2013). That is, the rise in political representation for underrepresented minorities increases the chances of a more substantial impact on policy framing (Pande, 2003).

**Statement of Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to understand the civic political engagement of sub-Saharan African immigrants. Immigrants, regardless of legal status, tend to engage politically at lower rates than native-born citizens in host countries (DeSipio, 2011; Goldsmith & Holzner, 2015). The purpose of this study is to better understand naturalized sub-Saharan African Americans’ lived experiences of civic political engagement, as well as their preferences and motivations for participation in civic political engagement activities.

**Research Questions**
This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do naturalize sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political activities?

2. In what ways do the lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans influence their civic political engagement?

3. If engaged, what is the nature of sub-Saharan Africans naturalized citizens’ motivation for engagement?

**Potential Significance of the Study**

Current immigration policies are creating a more diverse populous that can affect political, social, and economic change in the United States. Naturalized sub-Saharan African Americans can become an emerging voting bloc to influence the social and political status quo through the power of casting ballots in local, state, and federal elections (Ewing & Cantor, 2014). Therefore, it is paramount that policymakers, community leaders, politicians, and local candidates integrate sub-Saharan African Americans into the U.S. political system to help influence policymaking to enhance the lives of this currently underrepresented group.

Sub-Saharan African Americans contribute to the development of communities and systems, as citizens as well as taxpayers. As such, sub-Saharan African Americans are voters, aspiring political candidates, and community leaders. However, research is needed to better understand how naturalized sub-Saharan African Americans can be included in the current U.S. political arena.
Definitions of Terms

This section will define terms in the literature. African Americans are a group of Black people whose ancestors were brought to the Americas unwillingly through the transatlantic slave trade. Their identity has been defined and shaped by others, for example, being termed at various points in history Africans, colored, Negros, Afro-Americans, and African Americans (Clark, 2008; Butterfield, 2004). Furthermore, African Americans have been a presence in the Americas for a long time. Yet, there is a historical and chronic rejection of referring to African Americans as Other. The same treatment applies to the African diaspora, which tends to check the homogeneity of Blacks as one identity (Clark, 2008).

Black immigrants are those born outside of the United States and its territory and whose race is Black or mixed-raced (Anderson, 2015). Engaging is used to capture the resiliency and the tenacious spirit of immigrants to balance transnational borders (Uwakweh et al., 2014). First Generation refers to those immigrants who come to the United States as refugees and immigrants. Moreover, the foreign-born population includes naturalized citizens, legal nonimmigrants, or those who have to live in a country with visas and without authorization. In this dissertation, “foreign-born” and “immigrant” will be used interchangeably (Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019).

Immigrants are people who have been given legal residency by their host countries. Migrants are people who have been issued temporary residency but intend to return to their country of birth. Refugees are people who cross national boundaries seeking safety avenues due to fear prosecution (Kamya, 2001). Representative is defined as a person who looks out for the best policy interests of people they represent (Barnes &
Burchard, 2012). *Represented* is defined as the polity on whose behalf an elected person acts (Pitkin, 1967).

*Sub-Saharan Africa* is defined as all the countries in Africa except Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Sudan, and Libya. *Undocumented or illegal aliens* are people who enter another country without proper documentation, and the appropriate terminology for this group is undocumented immigrants (Kamya, 1997). *Transnationalism* is the movement of people or immigrants across borders, connecting places of origin and reception (Bourne, 1916; Waldinger, 2013).

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the history of U.S. immigration policies, which served as a catalyst for sub-Saharan African immigration to the United States and the need for inclusion and assimilation of sub-Saharan African Americans into the civic political system. Civic political engagement is a mechanism to facilitate full integration of this population into citizenship through political representation, policy work, political campaigning, and voting in local, state, and federal elections.

Whereas research continues to focus on the civic political engagement of Black, Latino, and Asian immigrant Americans, the literature has mostly ignored sub-Saharan African American civic political engagement. There is limited research available concerning sub-Saharan African American participation in civic political engagement in the United States. As such, this research study seeks to create awareness for sub-Saharan African Americans’ civic engagement practices, lived experiences, and motivation toward civic political engagement.
In the United States, scholars have neglected the differences in civic engagement participation among the native and the foreign-born as well as those who are not naturalized U.S. citizens but who are indeed civic-minded. The number of sub-Saharan Africans migrating to the US is increasing annually. Once immigrants are in the United States, they become residents, they may choose to go through the process to become naturalized, and at that point, should be fully incorporated into the political process. Along with the fact that sub-Saharan Africans status as the most educated, proficient in the English language, professionally skilled, taxpaying, among other qualities, these naturalized Americans should be included in the U.S. political system as potential representatives, policymakers, political candidates, and community leaders. This research endeavors to create awareness, to educate, and to add significance to the body of research regarding sub-Saharan African American civic political engagement.

Chapter 2 will explore the literature on sub-Saharan civic engagement. Chapter 3 will discuss this study’s design and methodology, Chapter 4 presents the study findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the research and its implications.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

To Pitkin (1967), the concept of political representation dates back to ancient Greek, Roman, and French civilizations. However, the contemporary definition of political representation came about around the 13th and 14th centuries and was found in English Church Council and parliamentarian use. Pitkin (1967) defines political representation as the process of making citizens’ voices, thoughts, and ideas part of public policymaking and development. To Pitkin, the concept of representation aligns with the modern definition of popular representation after the American and French Revolutions: “taxation without representation, rights of Man” eventually linking the concept to self-government, which means every person’s right to have a say in their government and institutions (Pitkin, 1967, p. 3)

Understanding political representation. Political representation as a theory has four dimensions which include formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive representations. Formalistic political representation refers to authority and accountability (Pitkin, 1967). Formalistic representation is the relationship between the voters and the elected representative. Formalistic representation has two dimensions: authoritative, which is how an elected official obtained their position, and accountability, which is how an elected representative fulfills their constituents’ wishes and demands. Symbolic representation describes the political representative’s value to those citizens whom the individual political representative represents. Descriptive representation is how the
representative or the elected official resembles their constituents physically. Lastly, substantive representation refers to the actions or activities that the representative ensues on behalf of their constituents (Pitkin, 1967).

For this study, these four political representation dimensions impact immigrant and minority populations’ overall conceptions of and behavioral understanding toward political representation, voter turnout, policy representation, choice of candidates, mobilization efforts, and integration processes in the areas of political and social networks.

**Immigrants’ incorporation process.** Before becoming residents and citizens, most sub-Saharan Africans who are permanent and documented residents in the United States come through pathways of Diversity Visa Program (one in five Africans), as refugees, and through their family and relatives’ sponsorship (Anderson, 2015; Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019). Obtaining citizenship is the most influential factor in an immigrant’s integration and network-building processes (Wong, 2000).

Many theories of immigrant incorporation and engagement rest in three approaches; exposure, resilience, and transferability. Research supports that these three approaches are how immigrants mobilize themselves as a group in the political system of their hosting country (White et al., 2008; Voicu & Comsa, 2014). Exposure approach posits that political engagement of immigrants will increase as they become familiar and have more contact with their host country’s political system (White et al., 2008). Furthermore, immigrants’ political integration and social engagements in hosting countries are possible through building networks, which is influenced by length of residency and exposure in hosting countries (Wong, 2000).
The resilience approach posits that immigrants are unlikely going to amend learned political and social behaviors from their native countries in their host countries (Voicu & Comsa, 2014). Transferability approach is a relationship between past political experience in a native country and in a host country, which is the ability to take previous experience, making it work in the new state (Black, 1987).

All these approaches support that immigrants’ past political experience increases the propensity for political engagement in hosting countries, especially voter turnout (Wass et al., 2015). The three prospects in immigrants’ integration processes are summarized as follows: a) exposure, or how well they adapt, b) resistance, or rigidity in old ways and making no room for new experiences in hosting countries, and c) transferability, or bringing old experiences into new places (White et al., 2008).

**Immigrants and political representation.** In the lens of descriptive representation, immigrants are alarmingly underrepresented at local and national levels around the world (Bloemraad & Schonwalder, 2013; Dancygier et al., 2015; Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014; Morad, 2014). Descriptive representation, or the presence of minority-elected representatives, ease minority feelings of marginalization (Dancygier et al., 2015). For minorities, political representation can also be attained through executive appointments in local government, and this where immigrants have higher political representation potential than in local or national elections (Morad, 2014). Therefore, immigrants do get some representation (Bloemradd & Schonwalder, 2013). Also, descriptive representation is the election of representatives who share a similar racial and ethnic background with their constituents, and which assumes that they would be better and stronger advocates for minority issues (Preuhs & Hero, 2011).
Generally, the literature on minority descriptive representation makes three arguments: First, if presented with the choice, minorities will always prefer ethnic candidates, mostly possible with the size of ethnic minorities in an area. Second, institutional and structural factors (e.g., voter suppression, intimidation, and disenfranchisement) in the legislature races influence the odds of winning. Third, having minority candidates run for political and public offices, although in most cases, minority candidates do not make it past the party designation to be on election ballots (Shah, 2014).

**Immigrant pathway and hurdles to engagement.** Immigrant political involvement is dictated by length of residency and exposure in host countries, which is how long immigrants have been in their new countries and how the level of their political partnerships dictates their political engagement (White et al., 2008; Wong, 2000). Overall, a citizen must meet residential requirements to become a United States citizen and then show they are sufficiently competent in a working knowledge of U.S. history and government, especially for naturalization (Wong, 2000).

In most European countries, immigrants who have been residents for 3 to 5 years can vote and run in local municipal elections (Dancygier et al., 2015). Across the United States, an immigrant considering a run for the United States House of Representatives must be a citizen for 7 years, at least 25 years old, and a legal resident of the state and the district they want to represent, and for the United States Senate, an immigrant must be a citizen for 9 years, a minimum of 30 years old, and a resident of the state (Constitution of the United States; Gao & Bell, 2015).
Influence of socioeconomic factors. Immigrants’ political underrepresentation is also influenced by individual socioeconomic status or resources (e.g., income, education, and employment status), contextual-based (e.g., party system, electoral rules and many more, also known as “opportunity structures”), and finally and significantly, discrimination (Dancygier et al., 2015).

In addition, Dancygier et al. (2015) posit that being poor and with low educational achievement reduces the propensity for political engagement, qualities which fall under the negative effects of personal characteristics and political opportunity structures. Lack of engagement predisposes one to political underrepresentation, triggering an inclination for some immigrants to feeling ethnically excluded, which perpetuates into civic disengagement (Jensen, 2008) as well as feelings of prejudice and discrimination in other areas, like workforce industries (Opoku-Dapaah, 2017).

Political candidates with immigrant backgrounds. Historically, whenever immigrant candidates emerge, the sense of threat and discomfort among the native-born ensues, thereby complicating descriptive representation for immigrants (Verkuyten, 2017). Presence of immigrant candidates project threats and fear to native-born citizens by triggering negative feelings; however, when immigrants are not involved in party politics, the perceived threat is lessened from native-born citizens toward immigrants, but in turn, the result is underrepresentation for minority and immigrant populations, especially within the established political system (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017; Verkuyten, 2017), and discrimination (Dancygier et al., 2015). Immigrant candidates tend to lean toward pragmatism more than ideological politics (Fanning, Howard, & O’Boyle, 2010).
Black immigrant candidates. Immigrants, especially sub-Saharan Africans, are motivated to campaign as political candidates as common people trying to solve local issues (Fanning et al., 2010). However, when immigrants consider political candidacy, resources, immigrant identity, race, language ability, acculturalization, and other factors hinder their political persistence (Reny & Shah, 2018). To Martin (2015), candidates’ ethnicity can give hints informally to voters. Blacks do run for a political office, and their decisions are influenced by prior candidates who looked like them, fulfilling the powerful descriptive dimension influence (Shah, 2014).

Blacks minorities generally are more likely to give approval for their representative when he or she is a Black or minority person than not (Banducci et al., 2004; Gay, 2007). Minta and Sinclair-Chapman (2013) believe that a greater interest in minority candidates will help representatives pay more attention to minority issues. Whereas most minorities tend to support minority candidates, however, Blacks and Latinos candidates continue to lose consistently; in comparison to Latino minorities, Blacks lose more political races (Hajnal, 2009; Wust, 2014).

Immigrants are usually outnumbered in their political electoral power, even in urban areas where high concentrations of this population are found (Sobolewska, Fieldhouse, & Cutts, 2013). Immigrants, as a faction of a minority community, tend to do better in politics if engaged in local community issues (Fanning et al., 2010).

Immigrant candidates and district demographics. To Bilodeau (2009), residential segregation can help some immigrants to be politically engaged as it plunges them into their own ethnic spaces, which speeds up their path to integration into the host societies. Districts with a high population density of immigrants engage more in
mobilization, supporting a party, supporting political candidates, and influencing electoral outcomes, which give them more influential voices and preferences from the representatives (Bilodeau, 2009). If not engaged, minority and immigrant voter electoral power is further dissolved, which also pushes them toward the disadvantaged category (Griffin & Newman, 2012).

In the case of Black immigrant candidates, scholars have and continue to ignore differences in participation between native-born and foreign-born and non-citizens who are civic-minded, and this neglect has led to total exclusion from civic arenas (Ebert & Okamoto, 2013; Junn, 1999). Sub-Saharan Africans and Caribbeans are classified as Blacks (Clarks, 2008). However, there is a distinction between Black Americans and Black Africans, and most African immigrants identify themselves as Black in the United States, not as African Americans (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012; Clark, 2008).

In electoral races, Blacks do poorly in mayoral, Senate, and gubernatorial races. The only races in which they do well is for the House of Representatives, and overall, minority candidates tend to do better in liberal democratic populations (Hajnal, 2009; Wust, 2013). Also, findings show that minorities usually have better representation in districts populated by Blacks and Latinos (Griffin & Newman, 2007; Hajnal, 2009). Moreover, districts occupied by Latinos and minorities do not usually mean that the district will consistently be represented by Latinos, namely because Whites mobilize their conservative supporters (Griffin & Newman, 2007). Like Blacks, Latino candidates usually end up losing political races (Sobolewska et al., 2013).

**Barriers and lack of interest for political candidacy.** Black and minority underrepresentation partly rests on whether minority candidates come forth as contenders
seeking political office. On the other hand, Black candidates’ decision to enter into the race and onto the ballots is influenced by whether the seat was ever held by a Black candidate and the number of potential Black registered voters (Shah, 2014).

Shah’s (2014) findings conclude that underrepresentation of minorities, particularly Blacks, also rests on restrictions and barriers to getting on a ballot due to the low presence of minority populations within a specific area and electoral system. However, on a more promising side, candidates with immigrant backgrounds who are female often succeed in winning their specific elections (Wust, 2013). Furthermore, more female than male candidates from minority backgrounds have better turnouts (Morad, 2014).

**Voter turnouts and its influences.** Voter turnout and propensity to vote are both influenced by age, education, mobilization (all parties), media exposure, previous voting behavior, political interest, and knowledge (Smets & Ham, 2013). Immigrants from Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin America have lower voting rates compared to their counterparts, and overall, immigrants are two to three times less likely than the rest of the population to participate in elections, which continues to feed the minority underrepresentation narrative (Morad, 2014). On the other hand, immigrants in Western Europe have higher voter turnout than those in Europe and North America (Morad, 2014).

Immigrant voter turnout is influenced largely by the level of exposure to a hosting country's political system and methods (White et al., 2008). On the other hand, African immigrants are encouraged to integrate into hosting nations but are not included in the participation processes by their new hosting communities (Ejorh, 2012). In addition,
immigrants from repressive regimes in their countries of origin are reluctant to participate in political activities like protests and the signing of petitions (Bilodeau, 2008).

Moreover, research has shown that citizens with stronger voting powers have much stronger policy representation, and those with less voting power see less policy representation and overall political representation (Griffin & Newman, 2012; Hajnal & Trounstine, 2009; Morad, 2014). The agendas of minority, especially Black and Latino, members of Congress, are influenced by ethnic and in-group issues. As such, it is important to Blacks that Blacks are represented by Blacks because a representative ethnicity affects their decision-making processes (Preuhs & Hero, 2011).

As voter turnout is a part of the problem resulting in lower political representation (Morad, 2014), municipal structures and electoral systems, especially in large districts, make it difficult for immigrants or minorities to get elected due to the financial burden of running and a lack of name recognition, both of which mostly favor incumbents (Siemiatycki, 2011). Minority political efficacy and turnout is better at a district level than in a wide structural system (Banducci et al., 2004). The Census Bureau (2017), Krogstad and Lopez (2017), and a meta-analysis by Smets and Ham (2013) conclude that disadvantaged groups, particularly Blacks, tend to have lower voter turnouts on average.

**Immigrant determinants of voter turnouts.** Those who had voted in primary elections were nearly three times more likely to engage in other activities than those who did not vote (Werfel, 2017). Moreover, Wong (2000), in her study of Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants, found that exposure to media outlets had had a positive effect on acquiring societal relations; however, Cuban immigrants did not have some positive
outcomes. Also, DeSipio (2011) shows that immigrants are most likely to engage passively, like watching the news, which makes active political engagement less frequent.

In a study of Asian American immigrants, Xu (2005) identified several factors that influence Asian voter turnout in relation to other minorities: socioeconomic status, immigration status and length of residency, level of education, and institutional barriers, especially registration laws. Also, age is a reliable indicator of political engagement among all immigrants. Those who moved to host countries early (age of 13) are more likely to engage in politics than those who came later (White et al., 2008). Also, second-generation immigrants tend to become politically engaged more than their naturalized parents (Fanning et al., 2010; Wust, 2013). Finally, resource-based factors lead to better electoral participation and representation (Dancygier et al., 2015; Xu, 2005).

**Influence of candidates on voter turnouts.** Candidates do help voter turnouts. To Gerber et al. (2017), primary electoral participation in the US is consistently lower than the outcomes of the general election overall. However, candidates with a minority background help voter turnout in the district the candidate represents (Banducci et al., 2004). Specifically, for immigrants, naturalized immigrants tend to have lower electoral participation, especially voting (DeSiPio, 2011).

Immigrant candidates’ names on the ballot increase voter turnout among constituents with immigrant backgrounds (Wang, 2013). Minorities, especially in the United States and New Zealand, are more likely to remember the names of their representative and contact them when they look like them (Banducci et al., 2004). Also, trust and confidence in government and efficacy, or how influential citizens feel toward government policy outcomes, do increase voter turnout (Smets & Ham, 2013).
Additionally, electoral or voter registration laws influence voter turnout (Shino & Smith, 2018; Siemiatycki, 2011). In contrast, Gerber et al. (2016) have shown that voters in primary elections tend to perceive the designation process challenging to maneuver, projecting individual-level high costs and low benefits (e.g., political interest and civic duty) compared to the amount of effort they put in. Therefore, voters usually put off their decision to choose to voters they perceive as more politically knowledgeable and party invested than they (Gerber et al., 2016). To immigrants, politically knowledgeable individuals are political parties, as well as those who are fluent in English (Sobolewska et al., 2013).

Xu (2005) and Dancygier et al. (2015) concur that being educated boosts the likelihood of immigrant civic and political propensity to vote. Sub-Saharan Africans are the most educated compared to North Americans, Europeans, and their fellow immigrants (African Immigrants," 1999; Feliz, 2015; Uwakweh et al., 2014). In the United States, 41.7% of African-born adults over 25-years old have bachelor’s degrees compared to 28.1% of host country natives and 26.8% of other immigrants (Uwakweh et al., 2014).

African immigrants, unlike African Americans, because of their residential neighborhoods, are inclined to have better access to resources around K-12 education, better neighborhood services, and live in neighborhoods resembling Whites than African Americans (Alex-Assessoh, 2009). Moreover, unlike African Americans, African immigrants tend to live in residential neighborhoods where almost one-third of the residents have college degrees, which increases the propensity to live in non-Hispanic Whites areas. In comparison, African Americans normally live in residential
neighborhoods where less than one in five residents have completed college and have degrees (Alex-Assensoh, 2009).

Policy representation. In a study of the power of voting on policy representation by the members of Congress, Griffin and Newman (2012) found that compared to Whites, Blacks are four times less likely to get policy representation, and Latinos are three times less likely to get policy representation, even when controlling for other variables like co-partisans (which increase the White ratio significantly). Still, voting power could not mitigate representational disparities for disadvantaged populations (Griffins & Newman, 2012). However, policy representation matters to minorities, which makes them want a representative to look more like them (Banducci et al., 2004). On the contrary, in terms of political engagement and efficacy, Banducci et al. (2004) are critical of descriptive representation because it still does not produce substantive representation.

Compared to those of minorities, White policy preferences and candidates triumph consistently (Hajnal, 2009). On the other hand, Griffin and Flavin’s (2011) study concluded that African American and Latino voters placed limited emphasis on their members of Congress and remained less engaged in deliberation and policy process than do White voters. For immigrant populations, a lack of progressive actions on immigration policy is related to the low civic and political engagement of immigrants (Erwing & Cantor, 2014). Multiple factors influence policy success; minorities, like any other group, are rarely in complete consensus on their collective policy preferences (Hajnal, 2009). Also, both Blacks and Latinos tend to be less concerned than Whites about policy representation (Griffin & Flavin, 2011). For immigrants, many across the globe can collectively relate to the effect of immigration policies on families, especially deportation.
and which affects all, regardless of citizenship lines, among Latinos, Asians, and Africans (Erwing & Cantor, 2014).

**Influence of policy practice on services requests.** With a long history of discrimination, Levine and Gershenson (2014) argue that the African American relationship with local governments is pessimistic and can be demonstrated through persistent requests for services at local levels and sometime in the form of collective actions. In understanding how policy perception instigates a desire for services requests, Hajnal and Trounstine (2014) show that disadvantaged groups are less likely to approve of governmental municipal services delivery. Minority groups, in general, have, for the most part, negative attitudes toward government service delivery (Levine & Gershenson, 2014). To Hajnal and Trounstine (2014), the overall relationships between Blacks and Latinos and the government improve when trust and efficacy improved.

Hajnal and Trounstine (2014) show that race matters in local government. Overall, Blacks and Latinos are significantly less likely inclined than Whites to be satisfied with city services, and Blacks, in particular, feel worse off in receiving local government services compared to white and Latinos. According to Levine and Gershenson (2014), the relationship between the government and a disadvantaged population is influenced by government service delivery. Hajnal and Trounstine’s (2014) research suggests that disproportionalities between groups are not driven by trust or effectiveness only, but by policies and service delivery at local municipal levels.

**Policy preferences.** Griffin and Newman (2007) demonstrated that disadvantaged minorities continue to experience less substantive representation of their opinions among policymakers compared to those of White and other affluent populations. Griffin and
Newman's (2007) findings also have shown that members of the House of Representatives tend to vote toward the preferences of their White constituency, rather than those of their minority constituencies.

As a method of incentive, members of Congress seeking reelection are more likely to focus on constituents who vote for them (e.g., swing voters and interest groups) as well as channeling resources to their campaigns (Griffin & Newman, 2012). Generally, policy representation changes nothing for Blacks and other low-income earners (Griffin & Newman, 2012). On the other hand, a city with an at-large district with minority and Blacks representatives’ policy representation is more responsive to minority needs (Sass & Mehay, 2003).

Constituent policy preferences influence legislators’ voting behavior; however, districts predominantly inhabited by Black and Latino voters are associated with low voter turnout (Gay, 2007). Because of policy underrepresentation, racial minorities, poor, African Americans, Latino, or low-income populations place low priority on policy representation (Griffin & Flavin, 2011). In a substantive political representation perspective, voter turnouts for Black voters can help promote the Black agenda (Banducci et al., 2004).

In terms of substantive representation, differences in policy representation are associated with group values as African Americans are more concerned with district allocations of funding and policies (Griffin & Flavin, 2011). However, minority representatives in policy conversations are critical, as Minta and Sinclair-Chapman (2013) have shown that diversity in the legislature makes legislators more responsive to minority interests, both in the Senate and the House of Representatives.
**Policies and propensity of immigrants’ engagement.** Embarking on the naturalization processes, voting, and talking to legislators add to immigrants’ sense of civic responsibility. These behaviors help shape outcomes that affect these immigrants and their children (Munoz, 2012). Politically, immigrants who are involved in their communities create fair and active spaces that reduce prejudice, strengthen social bonds and relationships, challenge unjust social narratives, and encourage group affinity (Taurini, Paloma, Garcia-Ramirez, Marzana, & Marta, 2017). In a larger image of political participation and engagement, success rests on who wins and who loses, as this dictates influence and power (Verkuyten, 2017).

According to Erwing and Cantor (2014), in 2010, 5.5 million new American families had at least one parent who was an unauthorized immigrant. In 2013 alone, close to half a million families of new Americans were deported, and many families separated. Groups and entities with voting power experienced better policy representation and better outcomes in the U.S. political system (Griffin & Newman, 2012).

However, even with its dark past of slavery, discrimination, and more, the United States still holds better incorporation processes and measures compared to most European countries, as evidenced in the American political/electoral system, public attitudes, and social structures (Mollenkopt & Hochschild, 2009).

**Influence of neighborhood actions on immigrant engagement.** For Hays (2015), the lack of political engagement among minority communities in the United States is a primary concern because it shapes their attitudes toward the government (Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014; Hays, 2015; Levine & Gershenson, 2014). Hays (2015) study concluded that political interaction with political leaders can change neighborhood
attitudes. When citizens positively interact with political leaders in their neighborhoods, they are six times more likely to get together to solve their local community problems. Also, education or knowledge, and homeownership or length of residency among residents is highly associated with neighborhood collective action (Hays, 2015).

Native-born threats on immigrant civic engagement. Ebert and Okamoto (2013) have shown that native-born behaviors against immigrants create solidarity among immigrants 100% of the time. Also, institutional political threats by the state give rise to fear in immigrants, resulting in heightened boundaries and mistrust of the government. However, when native-born citizens reach out to immigrants through events, larger civic participation from immigrants was apparent (Ebert & Okamoto, 2013).

People become politically active because of deeper values, such as being treated fairly by others and living in an environment that produces a sense of pride or a sense of civic duty (Gerber et al., 2016). Mathews (2014) believes that “pride is a source of identity” (p. 69), and a sense of pride drives political incentives. However, many naturalized citizens in the African community are worried about institutional and citizen threats, especially losing resources they have gained in hosting communities if they speak out (Ejorh, 2011).

Ebert and Okamoto (2013) have shown that political threats by the state are three times more likely to reduce civic engagement among immigrants. Policies of dehumanization, which are aggression, hostility, spitting in people’s faces, and calling names (e.g., Trojan horse, rabid dogs) affect minority groups, as such actions make them feel less than human and provoke and even encourage a reciprocal need to retaliate (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017).
**Government and neighborhood trust and mistrust on engagement.** Many disadvantaged groups, especially immigrants, the experience of disengagement is shaped by mistrust of the government, especially for immigrants from oppressive backgrounds, which, in turn, affects political engagement in hosting countries. To be sure, various methods should be employed to promote these minorities’ political engagement (Mayan, Turner, Ortiz, & Moffatt, 2013). In contrast, DeSapio (2011) has shown that civic political engagement is limited across the United States and that immigrants are part of the problem. Also, immigrants are limited by resources affecting their ability to regularly engage in political endeavors (DeSapio, 2011).

To Levine and Gershenson (2014), urban cities with better political integration of immigrants show through service delivery and for that, immigrants engage in high numbers. In comparison, Ebert and Okamoto (2013), Hays (2015) and Levine and Gershenson (2014), all concurred that receptiveness from native-born communities toward immigrants improves chances of civic political engagement. The absence of receptive attitudes from the native-born and the presence of political legislative threats affect first-generation immigrants when seeking city services (Ebert & Okamoto, 2013; Levine & Gershenson, 2014). Threats by their hosting country increase first-generation immigrants’ low expectations of their host countries, and by extension, greatly affect their attitudes toward political institutions and engagement (Maxwell, 2010).

Actions to speak to political leaders are influenced by the length of residency in the neighborhood and the optimism around one’s neighborhoods (Hays, 2015). In comparison, Werfel (2017) and Hays (2015) concurred about the influence of prior civic engagement experiences shaping future behaviors. People who are committed to their
neighborhoods are more likely to speak out on issues than those who are not (Hays, 2015; Werfel, 2017).

For neighborhoods populated by immigrants and refugees, there is a propensity of disengagement (Levine & Gershenson, 2014). In contrast, the literature shows that neighborhoods where members of disadvantaged groups are mixed with Whites tend not to be as well engaged (Levine & Gershenson, 2014).

**Political and social mobilization efforts.** To Africans, political mobilization is a means to achieving proper political representation (Ejorh, 2011). Political mobilization occurs when citizens are rallied to take part in politics by candidates, social groups, and political parties (Smets & Ham, 2013). Associational mobilization for Africans can combat social and policy change, which is achieved through fostering collaboration in efforts to create social and community changes, and the path of political inclusion, which are ethnic meetings, self-preserving and protective associations, and generally shared political and social interests (Ejorh, 2011).

Association is a way to mobilize Africans, especially in addressing their community issues in host countries they live in (Ejorh, 2011). Overall, mobilization, in general, as a coping strategy by Africans is transferred to hosting countries all over the world, particularly to build political power and assert better integrational processes (Ejorh, 2011).

Critical to the mobilization efforts across all citizenship statuses is the idea of resilience, exposure, and transferability (Voicu & Comsa, 2014). The literature on the mobilization of immigrants supports that the exposure and resilience perspective, especially in host countries, helps with mobilization efforts and voter turnout (White et
al., 2008; Voicu & Comsa, 2014). Critical to immigrants’ mobilization effort are allies, especially civil society and state institutions, which help promote their messages (Pero & Solomos, 2010).

Griffin and Newman (2012) argue that those who vote tend to be rewarded better for their efforts by political candidates, that is, political mobilization increases voter turnouts when social networks, friends, influences, religious affiliation, and sense of duty are incorporated. Moreover, with the right mobilization and awareness, voters are twice as likely to have better voter turnout for political candidates during primary elections (Gerber et al., 2016). However, Martin (2015) found that political mobilization alone by ethnic candidates did not affect voter turnouts, but having other social networks and group affiliations within ethnic communities helped voter turnouts. Moreover, when areas populated by immigrants and minorities do not get contacts from politicians, it is because they are viewed as less resourceful by political parties and candidates for mobilization efforts (Sobolewska et al., 2013).

Representation and voting power are connected (Griffin & Newman, 2012). Ethnic minorities are not represented well in American democracy (Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014). As such, minority mobilization generally comes in the aftermath of the struggle for group rights politically, economically, and socially. Minority groups, especially Africans, use their organizations to mobilize their members to seek political voice and inclusion (Ejorh, 2011).

Smets and Ham (2013) point out that partisan mobilization can increase voter turnout at a higher rate. Political candidates rarely mobilize naturalized citizens because they are not politically engaged (Barreto, 2005; Wambu & Nkabinde, 2016). Like any
other group of constituencies, immigrants need a reason to turnout apart from the mere obligation or civic duty to vote (Wang, 2013). According to Martin (2015), when ethnic minority candidates campaign for representation in places populated by minority constituencies, they are likely to win. Shah (2014) has also shown that voting power, especially in the number of registered minorities and chances of winning, matters to minority candidates seeking public offices.

To Sobolewska et al. (2013), campaign resources are usually allotted toward affluent electorates by political parties and that increases the likelihood of a party having contact with such voters. Candidates with immigrant backgrounds have a higher chance of being elected if these immigrants are supported by the party and districts (Wust, 2013). In other words, according to Wust (2013), descriptive representation is mostly possible when immigrant candidates’ support is through a political party and is constituency-based.

### Political parties’ mobilization of immigrants and minorities

Positive civic engagement by candidates and parties increase voter turnout at higher rates; however, psychologically, political efficacy, interest, and knowledge are related to higher voter turnouts (Smets & Ham, 2012). Overall, Smets and Ham (2012) have also shown that voters who are civically engaged with political parties, various candidates, political interests and knowledge, have obtained a better education, and political efficacy tend to have a significant voter turnout in national elections.

There is a positive relationship between how long a person has been in a hosting country and the likelihood of an affinity with major political parties (Wong, 2000). Intense mobilization from major political parties helps immigrants with partisan politics
and affiliations in their host countries (Wong, 2000). To immigrants, candidates need to show that they genuinely want their votes (Wang, 2013).

In party nomination processes, left-wing parties or more social democrats are more likely to nominate candidates with immigrant backgrounds (Wust, 2013). Political parties who are more left-wing (Socialist and Democratic parties) or social policy-driven are more likely to support minorities or immigrants than do far-right-wing parties (Pero & Solomos, 2010; Wust, 2013). Therefore, countries and elections with strong support for immigrants by left-wing parties tend to increase political representation (Bloemraad & Schonwalder, 2013). However, these political parties and candidates do not invest enough resources into ethnic minorities’ recruitments and campaigns (Wang & Kim, 2011; Sobolewska et al., 2013). Further, immigrants in the United States are mistreated by right-wing political parties, either through exclusionary policies and institutional processes (Pero & Solomos, 2010).

Considering that there are anti-immigrant entities around the world that do campaign successfully, these anti-immigrant philosophies have polluted various legislatures to act against minorities and immigrants (Dahlstrom & Sundell, 2012). Republican or right-wing parties are associated with “blatant dehumanization,” which carries with it policies of aggressiveness, hostile behaviors, and attitudes toward minorities or marginalized groups, such as immigrants and Muslims (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017).

Central to the immigrant policy success is the voice of major parties’ stands and interests that identify as pro-immigrant forces (Dahlstrom & Sundell, 2012). To Dancygier et al. (2015), immigrants’ municipal configuration or residential patterns help
their political opportunities. That is, immigrants’ chances of being pursued by political parties are high in the areas densely populated by immigrants, but overall, political parties focus on recruiting native-born individuals (Fanning et al., 2010). Immigrants and other minorities’ failures to undertake public offices rest on several variables, for example, demographic, political, and electoral factors within certain areas (Dancygier et al., 2015; Shah, 2014). Important to political representation success are party nominations to a candidacy list and eventually winning, which are closely intertwined (Dancygier et al., 2015).

**Influence of social networks on immigrants and minority engagement.**

Although research has shown that social actions or affiliation with social groups improve the well-being of immigrants (Taurini et al., 2017), Klofstad and Bishin (2014) find that social associations do not translate into campaigns and the political engagement of immigrants on an impactful scale. For African immigrants, association is a way to mobilize in addressing their community issues in hosting countries (Ejorh, 2011; Owusu, 2000). In other words, associational mobilization for Africans is a way to combat social and policy change (Ejorh, 2013).

Important to political engagement and influencing voter turnouts are social networks, especially for ethnic minorities (Martín, 2015). However, among the three levels of political resocialization—exposure, resilience, transferability—exposure perspective help immigrants adapt better. However, immigrants are at a disadvantage in political engagement processes in their host countries compared to the native-born (White et al., 2008).
The general well-being of a person is interrelated to their environment (community), substantiating the concept that a person cannot function alone due to the collective orientation among human beings (Somé, 1998). Therefore, insufficient social networks lead to isolation, which creates other barriers to involvement in political activities, such as lack of participation in protests (Bilodeau, 2008).

Networks of civic engagement help make citizens more competent in decision processes; that is, voluntary organizations can help citizens with the necessary skills to stay connected (Michels & Graaf, 2010). Volunteerism and community participation is a reciprocal process that benefits both the giver and receiver neighborhoods, which come as a sense of personal gratification through helping others (Martinez, Crooks, Kim, & Tanner, 2011; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2016).

Finally, civic engagement in America has been declining since the 1970s (Putnam, 2000; Flanagan & Levine, 2010). Low civic engagement is apparent in voter disparity and turnouts both in primary elections and in general elections (Gerber et al., 2016; Smets & Ham, 2013). Civic political engagement disparities among disadvantaged populations (Blacks, Latinos, and immigrants) have limited these groups’ engagement in policy representation equally, such acquiring the right candidates and support for political offices and requesting city services, and also result in less voting power, mistrust, low efficacy, and exclusion (Ebert & Okamoto, 2013; Gerber et al., 2017; Hajnal & Trounstine, 2014; Hays, 2015; Levine & Gershenson, 2014; Martin, 2015; Smets & Ham, 2013).

To Flanagan and Levine (2010), civic engagement fosters a sense of purpose outside self-centeredness, and this can be exemplified through voting, community and
group work, volunteering, all of which contribute to a sense of value and place in society through shared connectedness, and especially during the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Political engagement helps citizens serve in political processes such as candidates’ designation; candidates are representative of the districts, especially in local electoral districts (Gerber et al., 2016). However, problems lie in voter perceptions of the process and outcome. Research has also shown that prior experiences can predict other civic engagement behaviors.

From a social engagement perspective, all those who voted were more likely to be involved, and especially in nonprofit organizations (Smet & Ham, 2013; Werfel, 2017). For immigrants, developing social ties and social networks help with coping (Kamya, 1997). Mobilization is a coping strategy utilized by Africans and transferred to hosting countries all over the world, particularly to build political power and assert integrational processes (Ejorh, 2011).

According to Bergstresser et al. (2013), social opportunity and solidarity are essential tenets of political engagement. Social opportunity is a form of inclusion, especially for minorities who come from dictatorial government backgrounds (Bergstresser et al., 2013). For sub-Saharan Africans, solidarity empowers through shared African identity and a collective sense against isolation in host countries (Ejorh, 2011). Political engagement creates solidarity among community members through social assurance and assertion of individuals belonging in community associations, while people who are politically engaged can be involved in other community areas like schools and public offices (Bergtresser et al., 2013).

**Chapter Summary**
This chapter presented empirical evidence on the civic political engagement of immigrants and minorities, focusing on political representation. The goal of this literature review was to shed light on the political representation of immigrants, using minority civic political engagement experiences as a lens, and how factors such as voter turnouts, policy, incorporation, and mobilization (political parties and social networks) processes play roles in minority civic political engagement processes. Chapter 3 presents a detailed description of the research methodology utilized to answer the research questions. Chapter 4 presents the research findings, and Chapter 5 discusses the research and its implications.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Civic political engagement helps community members develop closeness with each other as it fosters a sense of belonging in one’s community. The level of engagement, however, is low for immigrant communities in the United States (Lai & Hynie, 2010). Sub-Saharan Africans are a small portion of immigrant communities in the United States, making up a tiny percentage of the total immigrant population at 4.4%, although their numbers are growing (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). In the United States, African immigrants have been given limited attention, and they are perceived as a disadvantaged group (Kamya, 1997). Africans are also an incredibly marginalized population that is difficult to access through surveys (Gele & Harslof, 2012). According to Wambu and Nkabinde (2016), research has focused mainly on Asians and Latino immigrants’ civic and political engagement and have primarily ignored Africans. Immigrants, regardless of their legal status, tend to engage politically at lower rates than native-born citizens in host countries (DeSipio, 2011; Goldsmith & Holzner, 2015).

There is little to no research on African immigrants’ political engagement in the United States (Wambu & Nkabinde, 2016). Voter turnout as one indicator of civic and political engagement is low among immigrants as they are less politically active. Voter turnout is a form of political engagement, and low levels present challenges, as groups who do not participate may not be recognized by their government (Klofstad & Bishin, 2014). Political candidates rarely mobilize naturalized citizens because they are not
politically engaged (Barreto, 2005; Wambu & Nkabinde, 2016). Also, lack of civic and political engagement does affect campaign engagement, policy framing, requests for city services, and availability of political candidates in the group. This chapter describes the problem statement and research questions, overall research design, research context, research participants, instruments used in data collection, procedures for data analysis, and finally, a summary of the methodology.

The research questions that guided this study looked at ways naturalized sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political activities, and the ways the lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans influence their civic political engagement. Whether engaged or not, what is the nature of naturalized sub-Saharan African citizens’ motivation or lack of engagement?

1. In what ways do naturalized sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political activities?

2. In what ways do the lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans influence their civic political engagement?

3. If engaged, what is the nature of sub-Saharan Africans naturalized citizens’ motivation for engagement?

Qualitative research is useful when there is a need to understand unfamiliar occurrences, such as the nature of immigrants’ civic engagement (Jensen, 2008). For Africans who are hard to access, a qualitative method is the best option (Gele & Haslof, 2012). Qualitative methodology is also helpful with particular reference to the influence of cultural identity on civic engagement (Jessor, Colby, & Shweder, 1996).
A descriptive phenomenological approach is useful when seeking to understand the nature of phenomena experienced by a group or person (Shahraki-Vahed, Firouzkhouhi, Abdollahimohammed, & Ghalgaie, 2017). The method employed for this study was descriptive phenomenology, first developed by Husserl (1970). Philosophical phenomenological research emerged in the 20th century as a result of positivist postulating that knowledge can be measured objectively and independent of human experience (Reiners, 2012).

The study used Husserl’s (1970) descriptive philosophical phenomenology, not the descriptive psychological phenomenology Giorgi (2007) or other psychologies. Although Husserl’s philosophical descriptive phenomenological method is transferable to psychology, the transcendental attitude is not, which is the adaption of consciousness free of people’s opinions (Giorgi, 2007). Descriptive phenomenology in social sciences is used as a method of exploring and describing the lived experiences of people and is a philosophical method different from natural sciences, which describes through measuring the experience of conscious objects (Christensen, Welch, & Barr, 2017).

In descriptive phenomenology, bracketing is important, which is abstaining from the use of personal knowledge (Husserl, 1970). Essential to Husserlian phenomenology is the belief that disposes of all prior knowledge and focuses on the experiences of the phenomenon in the picture (Lopez & Willis, 2004). Also, it is worth acknowledging that complete bracketing is impossible (Bevan, 2014). However, bracketing requires that a person be aware of their own natural attitudes and lifeworld (Merleau-Ponte, 1962).

Descriptive phenomenology is “pure” descriptions of people’s experiences; it explores, analyzes, and describes while maintaining the natural and plain meaning of the
experience (Matua & Van Der Wal, 2015). Descriptive phenomenology describes people’s conscious experiences while setting aside biases and opinions in the process, or bracketing (Reiners, 2012). Descriptive phenomenology methods use the concept of the natural attitude, which is the way individuals are involved in the lifeworld, and the lifeworld is described as individual consciousness of their world, especially in their experiences of things (Bevan, 2014).

Research Context

The study looked at sub-Saharan Africans living in the city of Syracuse, New York. Syracuse has a good number of sub-Saharan Africans. Several demographics are essential and must be considered: age, gender, language, level of education, citizenship status, and length of residency. Syracuse is home to various ethnic community centers and religious facilities that serve ethnic communities: RISE, Interfaith Works, Northside Learning Center, Catholic Charities, Episcopal churches, mosques, and many more.

Syracuse is known for welcoming refugees and immigrants. Syracuse is a sanctuary city. Sanctuary cities are cities that do not allow police officers to randomly stop people primarily to question their immigration status (Kopan, 2018). Sanctuary policies are policies that prohibit local municipalities from collaborating with federal immigration law enforcement agencies (Baker, 2017). Sanctuary policies counteract behaviors of federal law enforcement agents who are "overzealous" toward immigrants who have committed minor offenses (Kopan, 2018). Syracuse's overall local election voter turnout has a considerable challenge. In 2017, the engagement in voter turnout for the mayoral race for the midterm election was 35% citywide (Breidenbach, 2017). The turnout for the presidential election in 2016 was 72% in Onondaga County (Buckshot,
2018). In 2009 and 2013, the voter turnout was 32% and 24%, respectively (Magnarelli, 2017). These sub-Saharan Africans are part of the low participation in the local elections.

**Research Participants**

Between 2000 and 2014, there were 40,815 foreign-born people in the metropolitan city of Syracuse (New American Economy, 2017). Among this population are sub-Saharan Africans. In the city of Syracuse alone, there are over 10,000 refugees, the majority of whom are resettled to the north side of the city (Baker, 2016). These refugees are primarily from eastern sub-Saharan African countries (South Sudan, Somalia, the Republic of the Congo, and Oromo/Ethiopia).

Women, mainly from Somali, speak better when men are not present (Allen & Slotterback, 2017); however, in this study, the participants were comprised of both males and females in the same focus groups. Participants were asked about their civic political engagement (Gele & Harlof, 2012). There was a need for a larger sample of 24 individuals for the focus groups to achieve adequate, diverse sampling (Gele & Harlof, 2012).

The estimated local populations of the population represented range as follows: South Sudanese, 700-1,000; Oromo (Ethiopia), 200-400; Somali, 1,500-2,000; and Congolese, 1,000-1,500. Because of the reduction in the number of new arrivals due to current policies implemented by President Donald Trump, the number of refugees is declining per year (Breidenbach, 2017). These countries are very diverse with tribes and ethnic groups. Four Congolese ethnic groups that were later determined based on availability, Ethiopia is strictly the Oromo ethnic group, and Somali has both the Bantu
and non-Bantu. All these ethnic groups have their own dialects, except the Somalians who speak Somali.

Purposeful sampling was conducted to identify and select participants for this study. Luo and Creswell (2016) define purposive sampling as a process of choosing participants for a qualitative study who are best able to inform the central phenomenon of study. Purposeful sampling identified participants using the researcher’s network, which also included community centers, and immigrants’ organizations such as government employees, civic and social associations, and not-for-profit organizations who are all sub-Saharan Africans oriented.

The city of Syracuse is a diverse location with many ethnic groups from various countries in Africa. This study focused on adults 18 years and older. The adults were first-generation sub-Saharan African immigrants, who are people born outside of the host country. The selection was carried out through a researcher network and through the use of purposive sampling (Jensen, 2008). Determining the right sample size in a qualitative study was a matter of judgment and experience in information gathering (Denise & Cheryl, 2004).

The sample size depended on the number of available participants in each country: Somalians, Oromo or Ethiopians, Congolese, and South Sudanese. However, an ideal sample size for a descriptive phenomenological study ranges from 5 to 25 participants (Creswell, 1998). Morse (1994) suggests that at least six participants are necessary for a descriptive phenomenological study.

The participants were from various Syracuse networks, including business owners, current and former government employees, association members, and not-for-
profit organizations employees who are sub-Saharan Africans. New American Forum (NAF) members with other immigrants’ community-based organizations (Interfaith Works, Catholic Charities, and Refugee Immigrant Self-empowerment [RISE]) served as gateways for recruiting participants. An email and a flyer containing the desired participants’ age, education, gender, naturalization status, and birth country were sent to prospective participants.

The involvement of the interviewer in the African community provided access and trust. As a result, allowing the interviewer the opportunity to explain the importance of the research to prospective participants and how vital it was to understand the conditions of African immigrants (Opoku-Dapaah, 2017). Generally, half of Africans are naturalized, seven in 10 speak English very well, two-fifths of African immigrants at least have a bachelor’s degree, and one-third have professional jobs (American Immigration Council, 2012).

The criteria for participants included the ability to speak English, have a high school diploma or college-degree level of education. These questions were asked before the focus group started (Martinez et al., 2011), mainly to verify participants’ level of education and their experience with civic and political engagement.

Some participants were heavily involved in the community where they lived (Manguvo, Whitney, & Chareka, 2013), and others were not as involved. The interviewer generated a consent form which was signed by the participants (Jensen, 2008). A community activist—a person involved in the community's leadership in both social and political areas—was consulted to verify the participants’ community involvement (Hays, 2007).
Instruments Used in Data Collection

Focus groups were the main instrument used because group conversation is mostly used in African cultures (Smith, 2002). Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, and Indall (1994) assert that focus groups are considered an essential method because of its emphasis on people’s context. Focus groups focus on individuals who have experienced a definitive situation and can also be used for a group of individuals, treating individuals as one unit in focus (Merton & Kendall, 1946).

Focus groups are used mostly in phenomenological and exploratory research (Aaker, Kumar, Leone, & Day, 2012). Also, focus groups are used to understand group dynamics, and how groups influence individuals to “accept or reject others’ ideas” in group interactions (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2015, p. 10). Questions in the focus groups and interviews were mainly formulated to explore engagement (Gele & Harslof, 2012). Focus group responses were audiorecorded. Finally, the details of the study in all focus groups were made available to participants before data collection (Gele & Harslof, 2012).

Three focus groups were audiorecorded and notes were taken of participants’ activities, observations, and statements (Martinez et al., 2011). Interviewer positionality with the participants was critical for the access and trust process. The researcher is a group member, and this helped establish an authentic working relationship with the participants (Manguvo et al., 2013).

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

The focus group interview questions were semi-structured. All the data gathering was strictly qualitative. Qualitative analysis software was used to record the sessions (Allen & Slotterback, 2017). The use of focus groups is necessary because of the African
population context (Smith, 2002). A focus group approach was used until saturation was reached (Gele & Harlof, 2012).

The recommended focus group session time ranged between 43 and 93 minutes (Manguvo et al., 2013). Once the recording was done, it was listened to, and transcription followed. Husserl’s (1970) bracketing was used to isolate positionality, which is the idea of recording assumptions and biases about a phenomenon before data collection so that a thorough understanding of a participant experienced is achieved (Shahraki-Vahed et al., 2017).

Data analysis. As described by Gele & Harlof (2012), the data was audiorecorded and verified with participants to grant content validity. An audio recording was listened to several times for understanding, rigor, and credibility was established using focus groups. Notes verification from participants was used to establish consensus (Shahraki-Vahed et al., 2017). A journal about the focus groups was maintained, as these analytical memos were phenomenological perceptions of the participants (Saldâna, 2016).

Second, considering that the research here was one of the first in studying sub-Saharan Africans’ civic political engagement, a descriptive phenomenology was employed as well as descriptive coding for analysis. Descriptive coding is basic coding in the process of categorizing or organization at the elementary levels to create a summary (Saldâna, 2016). Recurring themes were put together based on the participants’ perspectives using coding.

Positionality. The researcher is a South Sudanese male from the Dinka Tribe. The researcher plays an active role in the immigrant community, particularly the South Sudanese community, and he happens to be a former refugee as well. While the research
was conducted, the researcher was a political candidate for the city of Syracuse’s Common Council or city legislature.

The researcher explained to the participants the importance of sub-Saharan Africans voices and representation in scholarship. As a result, there was a high hope that the study would create in the future social identity constructs for Africans in the western world and would be used as a means to motivate further civic participation in the communities in which they live.

**Chapter Summary**

The proposed method of study was descriptive phenomenology. The goal was to understand the pure and natural motives of sub-Saharan Africans’ civic and political engagement in their natural context. Sub-Saharan Africans are some of the most underrepresented groups in the United States, and they have unique prospects that limit and isolate them into an understudied group.

Descriptive phenomenology is a type of qualitative research. The study at hand is a qualitative research study which described and explored the lived experiences of sub-Saharan Africans in civic and political engagement. A qualitative method was useful in this setting because there is little to no research on sub-Saharan Africans’ civic and political engagement.

Purposeful sampling was used, as well as recruitment using a researcher network, community centers, and immigrants’ organizations. The participants were all sub-Saharan Africans from Somali, Congo, South Sudan, and Oromo/Ethiopia. Data were collected through focus groups. There were four focus groups of 24 participants in total. Also, audio recording and notetaking were used to document the conversations.
Coding and thematic analysis were done using questions with themes and subthemes. Studies have shown that it is impossible to do complete bracketing, as Husserl has suggested. Sub-Saharan Africans struggle with inequality in policy representation, campaign candidates, political mobilization, and requests for local city services.

Chapter 4 presents the research findings, and Chapter 5 also discusses the implications and conclusions of the research findings.
Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

For the last decade or so in the United States of America, sub-Saharan African immigrant numbers have bypassed those of Latino and Asian-Pacific immigrants (Connor, 2018). Moreover, sub-Saharan Africans have been the fastest-growing population among Black immigrants in the United States, Canada, and Europe (Anderson, 2015; Anderson, 2017; Capps et al., 2012; Mondain & Lardoux, 2012). Furthermore, sub-Saharan Africans make up 39% of foreign Blacks in the United States (Anderson & Lopez, 2018). In the overall immigrant community, sub-Saharan Africans make up a total of 4.8%, or 1.5 million, of the Black immigrant population (Connor, 2018; Pew Research Center, 2018).

Despite superseding population growth, there continues to be a gap in the literature about sub-Saharan African immigrants’ political engagement in the United States, and many African immigrant issues remain unexplored and understudied (Uwakweh et al., 2014). Furthermore, problems of distinguishing this population from other Black groups continue, and scholars continue to give little to no interest to African immigrants (Clark, 2008).

In general, much is unknown about African immigrants and immigrant communities' civic political engagement and their influence in contemporary democracies (Just & Anderson, 2012). Because there is a gap in the literature, in general, due to limited attention on immigrants populations in the scholarly literature historically—and
when they are studied the focus has been on Latinos, Asians, Jewish people, and Russians—African immigrants are ignored and continue to be marginalized (Gele & Harslof, 2012; Kamya, 1997; Mondain & Lardoux, 2012; Wambu & Nkabinde, 2016).

Overall, this research project is an attempt to tell the empirical story of immigrants, particularly Black sub-Saharan African naturalized citizens’ civic political engagement. This chapter is dedicated to the analysis of data gathered through focus groups. Using a qualitative research methodology and, specifically, a descriptive phenomenological approach, this study will explore sub-Saharan African immigrants’ ways of engagement, how their lived experiences affect their civic participation and their motives for participating in civic political engagement processes.

Four focus groups represented four countries of sub-Saharan Africa: Congo, Ethiopia, South Sudan, and Somalia. The research asks three initial questions that were divided into three sections. Section 1 dealt with the first question, which is addressed by the first theme and subtheme. The same model and approach were applied to Section 2’s Question 2, and Section 3, Question 3. The focus was to explore participants’ civic participation, the influence of lived experiences, and motives for civic political engagement.

**Research Questions**

This study was seeking to answer the following research questions:

1. In what ways do naturalized sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political activities?

2. In what ways do the lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans influence their civic political engagement?
3. If engaged, what is the nature of sub-Saharan Africans naturalized citizens’ motivation for engagement?

Data Analysis and Findings

This part will highlight the research context or setting, as well as describe how participants were selected. Also, this section shows the list of participants in the four focus groups. The data analysis and findings will be described, and in particular, the three themes that emerged from the three research questions. A rigorous analysis of the data was done as the researcher listened and repeatedly reread the focus group transcripts.

This research focused on the following four countries to find participants: South Sudan, Ethiopia, Somali, and Congo. There were 24 participants in all four focus groups. There was a need for a larger sample of 24 participants to achieve adequate and diverse sampling (Gele & Harlof, 2012). Tables 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4 show participant demographics per country.

This research focused on participants who were 18 years or older, naturalized American citizens, spoke fluent English, and who had a minimum of a high school diploma. The researcher used purposeful sampling or snowballing.

The researcher was part of the sub-Saharan African community and therefore was able to engage his network of the people to ask for recommendations for additional participants. To abide by St. John Fisher College’s IRB protocol, each participant in each focus group was given a pseudonym names to help ensure privacy. In this dissertation, all names are pseudonyms.
Table 4.1

*South Sudanese Participants/Focus Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age &amp; gender</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1: PB</td>
<td>52 (Male)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2: AL</td>
<td>23 (Female)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3: NA</td>
<td>26 (Female)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4: MD</td>
<td>41 (Male)</td>
<td>Graduate-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5: MM</td>
<td>38 (Male)</td>
<td>Graduate-level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6: EL</td>
<td>32 (Male)</td>
<td>Associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7: ABS</td>
<td>22 (Female)</td>
<td>Associate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2

*Somali Participants/Focus Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age &amp; gender</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1: FD</td>
<td>23 (Female)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2: SK</td>
<td>23 (Female)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3: HA</td>
<td>36 (Male)</td>
<td>Associate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4: FA</td>
<td>22 (Female)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5: AAS</td>
<td>26 (Male)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6: LMS</td>
<td>33 (Male)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7: AMS</td>
<td>25 (Female)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8: AN</td>
<td>28 (Female)</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.3

*Ethiopia-Oromo Participants/Focus Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1: AR</td>
<td>22 (Male)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2: ABE</td>
<td>21 (Female)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3: AAE</td>
<td>29 (Female)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4: HB</td>
<td>33 (Female)</td>
<td>Associate plus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5: DA</td>
<td>19 (Female)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4

*Congolese Participants/Focus Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Age &amp; Gender</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1: SB</td>
<td>32 (Female)</td>
<td>Juris Doctorate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2: AMC</td>
<td>35 (Male)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3: LMC</td>
<td>37 (Male)</td>
<td>Some College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4: UM</td>
<td>35 (Male)</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data analysis.** The data analysis included transcription readings and listening to transcript recordings. Consistent with the protocols of descriptive phenomenology, descriptive coding was employed, or basic coding, in the process of organizing and categorizing at the elementary levels to create a summary (Saldàna, 2016). Recurring themes were put together. The analysis of the focus groups primarily consisted of identifying important themes from the data (Allen & Slotterback, 2017). The data
analysis involved participants’ engagement in the communities, the influence of lived experiences on participation, and motives for participation.

**Findings.** The story of sub-Saharan Africans in the area of civic political engagement has rarely been told. This research below is their story. In doing this research, three major themes emerged. Sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political engagement, that is, they connect socially and politically with the community in which they live, build relationships with neighbors, interact with local, state, and national elected officials, and participate in the community politically and socially (Lai & Hynie, 2010; Putnam, 2000).

**Research Questions and Overview of Results**

Based on the three research questions, themes and subthemes emerged. The first research question examined *participation*, which explained how participants tangibly demonstrated their civic political engagement in their hosting community. In the first question, *activities and behaviors modeled* emerged as the theme. This theme describes the day-to-day involvement of the sub-Saharan Africans in their community and the types of activities in which they partake. The subthemes are voting, campaigning and mobilization, advocacy, and volunteering (Table 4.5).

The second research question examines the influence of lived experiences, which explains how sub-Saharan Africans’ lived experiences before moving to their hosting countries, as well as their experiences in their hosting countries, have affected their life outlooks and internalizations. The theme developed here is *perception and attitude*, showing that their lived experiences have bestowed upon them the gratitude and encouragement to willfully engage in hosting communities, as well as resentments that
isolate. These are recurring historical and familiar societal practices both at home and in the hosting country, then and now, that have both fostered and hurt communal engagements. The subthemes are opportunity, resilience, representation, and fear of politics.

Also, the research questions were further organized into political and social engagements. Most of the activities and findings were either in a space where participants were directly engaged in political activities or social activities around the community. Therefore, each finding will be labeled as political or social. Political engagement includes voting and campaigning and mobilization, while social participation includes advocacy and volunteering.

Finally, the third research question examined motives, which are reasons behind why sub-Saharan Africans do what they do in and to hosting communities. The theme here is ubuntu (I am because you are). This theme shows that community participation and contribution to society is a mandatory way of life and a cultural norm for sub-Saharan Africans. That is, a person thrives when others thrive. The subthemes here are collective community responsibility and dignity and identity.

Table 4.5

*Research Questions, Themes, and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>Activities and behaviors modeled</td>
<td>Voting, Campaigning &amp; Mobilization, Advocacy/activism, and Volunteering &amp; Mentoring</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence of Lived Experiences</td>
<td>Perception and Attitude</td>
<td>Opportunity, Resilience, Representation, and Fear of Politics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: activities and behaviors modeled. This section presents and discusses Research Question 1 (RQ1) and its findings. RQ 1 asked: In what ways do naturalized sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political activities? The theme that emerged from this research question is activities and behaviors modeled. The motive here was to analyze what sub-Saharan Africans have shown in their hosting communities that demonstrate that they are engaged both socially and politically. All the details of the findings are described under the subthemes. Under this theme, there are four subthemes that demonstrate involvement in the community: voting, campaigning and mobilization, advocacy/activism, and volunteering and mentoring.

RQ1 subtheme 1: voting. Most African immigrants vote because voting is personal and valuable. According to sub-Saharan Africans, voting validates the right of a person to exist. Under this subtheme, participation is shown by casting ballots for elected officials politically. Voting is an activity that is very gratifying, “Yes. My first vote was here, yes, right after I became a citizen in 2007. So, that was the first opportunity that I had and I really enjoy it” (Participant PB).

Furthermore, Participant AL highlighted below the depth and the meaning of voting for sub-Saharan Africans:

Because I think my understanding of voting really came in when I saw my parents almost willing to lose their jobs to go vote for South Sudan to be a country. And being like, "Wow. That's what it means?" That's the depth of civic engagement, in parallel to another country, it's do or die. Where in the US sometimes it's seen as a
luxury or seen as a social media thing rather than that of something that's very much like, "If you don't vote, your voice is not there." Where in other countries, it's like, "If you don't vote, you would not be able to exist."

For sub-Saharan Africans, voting is essential. Many of them did not have the privilege to vote for representation in their governments in their native countries. The United States, for most of them, has redeemed them to be able to vote. Adults instill in their children that they must vote. According to Participant FA:

Being raised here, you are taught at a young age that your voice matters and voting is very important. As a young adult, we are the future. That was basically taught to us at a young age. For my family, my grandfather always getting everyone in the family to vote like, "Did you vote today? Go." He would be clocking us. He would be honest to make sure we did that. Yeah. I do vote.

Considering the history of the countries represented in the study (South Sudan, the Republic of the Congo, Somalia, and Ethiopia) that many of the participants came from, voting is personal. For example, “So, I do vote. It is very important to me….” and “Yes, I rarely have interacted with politicians” (Participant MM). Many of the participants are voters. Although, few (two out of 24) did express that they do not vote regularly:

Myself, I vote a lot. I voted a lot. As I mentioned early, I became a citizen in 2007. My first vote was in 2008 when Obama became a President. And I usually vote for primaries, local vote, and I vote also for the general election for the presidential election. So, I never miss voting, except the most recent one. I didn't
vote last time. Because I voted a lot and I don't see any progress in our community. (EM)

Moreover, there is power in voting and it is uplifting for many of the sub-Saharan Africans. Apart from seeing their older relatives and parents’ jubilations (alluded to by Participant AL), they see a larger personal meaning in the power of voting. Although many vote regularly, sub-Saharan Africans shared that they vote more in general elections than in local elections. Here is Participant AM’s perspective:

One thing I would say is like being able to vote and kind of like voice your…. Put your action into voting for someone that you want to represent you and represent your community. Just being able to do that gives me a lot of power because I'm able to decide who I want in the office and who I want me to represent for me, and also for my people, and also for the people that I want, and for the minority people that cannot voice their opinions.

In summary, voting is very important to sub-Saharan Africans; it represents their voice and that it matters as a way to move a community forward, and is gratifying. According to sub-Saharan Africans, voting is a way to put their voices into action and a way to have minority voices be heard. Voting is a model; it is passed down by parents to their children by monitoring and encouraging children, especially fathers, to make sure that their children vote. Most sub-Saharan Africans vote in general elections.

**RQ1 subtheme 2: campaign and mobilization.** This subtheme speaks to the involvement of getting political candidates elected. This is where many of the sub-Saharan Africans help other people get elected by knocking on doors and encouraging fellow immigrants to partake in the political processes. Also, this tenet applies to
overseas politics, as well, referred to in this research as “transcontinental mobilization.”

Here is a perspective from Participant HB that partly summarized this statement:

Some of the stuff that I've done, that I got involved in, it is mostly helping the new Americans register to vote, and also going out and protesting when there is injustice being done here locally in our country, instead of even outside the country, in terms of when I say outside the country, I mean my motherland. I am now connected, in another way, when I say politically. The way that I am connected is when there is injustice going on back home, the community, the New American Community, especially from the Oromo ethnic background, when there is injustice being done in Ethiopia, we gather from all over the North America. We come together in either Washington, DC or New York City, and there is the large number of people in thousands that come out and protest, just so the voice of the people back home are being heard here locally, because the government of the United States is who is funding the government back home.

Furthermore, transnational civic political engagement is an active phenomenon that many of the sub-Saharan African participants take very seriously. Many of the participants alluded that they were born or grew up in refugee camps. The war and instabilities in their countries forced them to flee. Therefore, their native countries and affairs are dear to their hearts. Here, Participant AA describes their civic political engagement in campaign and mobilization for political rights:

We go out there and try to show people back home, try to be a voice for our country sometimes. Because they don't have that voice back home, they don't
have media. They don't have things that bring their voice out to the world. So we
do go out sometimes to try to bring their voice out.

Participation in campaigns and mobilization is a civic duty to some sub-Saharan
Africans who are familiar with the process. Many want to vote, but they do not know
how. Therefore, individuals like HB bridge the gaps by helping to encourage other
immigrants to register if they have not, and also mobilize other new Americans to vote.
One of the points that was clear across all focus groups was that immigrants encourage
each other regardless of their backgrounds to take advantage of the political processes.
For that, this is their way of engaging in “the political process” or being active where
they live.

Many sub-Saharan Africans have not forgotten why they came to the United
States as refugees and immigrants. For that, they stay connected to their home countries
and continue to encourage their fellow compatriots to participate in their home countries.
Many of the sub-Saharan Africans are involved in campaigns; they go to town halls,
donate to political campaigns, and work with political parties’ representatives as they are
in political parties. Moreover, they indicated that they lobby (as stated above by
Participant HB), write letters to their representatives, engage in political debates through
watching debates on televisions. Here is Participant AL’s perspective:

Besides voting, there is lobbying. There is letter writing. There is voting but
voting at all levels. Not just the presidential election. That's one of my pet peeves.
Also, making sure that other people understand their engagement and being able
to be like, "Hey, are you registered?" Yeah, just engaging in the politics that you
live in and being able to question the political process.
Some of them have been able to get involved in the community by participating in campaigns:

I would say an experience that I can kind of remember getting involved with in a political election here is I was able to help an individual walking around the neighborhood kind of signing different petitions for them to kind of run for office within Syracuse. (AA)

Through other new Americans mobilizing other new Americans, this is how new Americans get involved in civic political processes. According to Participant AN, “That's how I started involving in the political and also campaigning with Chol.”

In summary, campaigning and mobilization are done in two ways: helping candidates in hosting countries get into political office and mobilizing fellow native-born sub-Saharan Africans from the same country to fight against the political and social unfairness that sent most of them into refugee camps and eventually to the United States. Mobilization and campaigning also involved encouraging other new Americans to register to vote, rallying for their people back home, attending town hall meetings, writing letters to representatives, lobbying, and helping other new Americans get elected.

**RQ1 subtheme 3: advocacy/activism.** This subtheme talks about sub-Saharan African aspects of social engagement and not political participation. Sub-Saharan Africans are advocates/activists of various issues, such as helping other Africans by introducing them to institutions in the United States, talking to elected officials about social issues that affect Africans, and filling the voids that are necessary for the survival of other Africans in hosting countries. This section includes rallying and social justice causes rather than politically motivated causes. Participant SB states:
I think that goes back to how we hold on to identity. You're more motivated to help other Africans because those are your people. That's your experience. That ends up being what you contribute and how you participate in the community. Any kind of tragedy that happens within your community, you're very quick and ready to participate in that way, or speak out, or if something unfair has happened to them, whether it's police-related or something that happens. All of a sudden, you're more likely to speak out, right, because this is a country where you have the freedom of speech. This is a country where you can say, "Hey, something's going on, and it's wrong," and I can participate. I have participated in rallies and gone to things in which I'm ready to speak up because I feel like that's my people.

To sub-Saharan African participants here, it is important that what we do change the community. Here is Participant EM’s take on the extent of advocacy on behalf of fellow Africans and the new American community:

That's one of the reasons why I decided to take the test for Syracuse City Police, and hopefully, I could help some of these young guys understand, hey, don't fall into that pattern where Americans think, hey, stay away from the police. If you are a cop, you are a snitch. I want to change that mindset. Let them understand, "Hey, okay, you call them a snitch when someone tell the truth. But as soon as you are in trouble you dial 911, hey, I need some help. So, how come you are going back and forth and being a hypocrite?" Also, I hope I can help some of them understand, hey, if I can make it through, you can make it through as well. I went to OCC for a year and a half for architecture, and I loved dealing with buildings. Currently, I am a construction worker and I do not feel like, for me,
being a construction worker...it is good for my pocket, but it is not good for my community.

Therefore, advocacy for sub-Saharan Africans is a part of a person’s professionalism. Participants here believe that the jobs they do should be part of and connected a larger cause then just themselves. Activism and social advocacy are an essential part of everyday community engagement for sub-Saharan Africans. Here is a Participant AMC’s view:

I am a community organizer. I have been for a long time since I have been here. I used to be a guy who was always in charge of welcoming the newcomers, and I did that for a very long time. In term of my experience, how I struggled as a young man trying to fit in the American culture, it put a burden on my understanding that when someone is new, it is our job to prepare the newcomer to fit in, to learn, to make resources available for them to succeed and feel like they're at home, to feel like there are people who actually walk in the path that they are just entering. To me, that is something that I do passionately year in and year out, and that is my contribution I have done for a very long time.

Moreover, advocacy for sub-Saharan Africans includes immigration issues. This year, it has become increasingly common in social settings to be more involved because of the fear in the political climate. Participant AB states:

I think it was the stuff with immigration, I feel like. Because coming as a refugee here, it made me worry about other people, like about other people's... How do I say this? Other people wanting to come to this country. Yeah, other immigrants wanting to come to this country. They're coming for basically kind of the same
reasons why my parents brought us here, and it's stopping them from coming here, because of their religion, or like saying that, "Oh, they're stealing our jobs or doing this." That made me think like, "Okay if he's president, he's going to be able to pass laws and stuff that affect immigration." It just made me feel that's not okay.

Advocacy is for a cause that is important to the participants and the larger society. Advocacy is focused around subsidies for childcare, eldercare, and better services in general. Sub-Saharan Africans engage by being on board for social organizations that fit and advocate for their needs. For example, Participant ANS explains the extent of their participation in advocacy.

Let me just focus on the Childcare Solutions where I sit on the board. The director, a group of us who are childcare providers, the staff, we went to Albany in January 2019 to advocate for childcare providers, the children in the Syracuse community and also the parents because childcare is very expensive and it's very demanding and very expensive. We talked to the legislators for them to raise the rate and also to add the billion dollars that they were approving in the year 2019 and 20 so they can add more funding to the social services so that parents can get childcare.

Furthermore, advocacy, for sub-Saharan Africans, involves participation in a broader context, including helping other new Americans in other ethnic communities to access basic rights and necessities. For sub-Saharan Africans, helping other new Americans within the same community remind them of themselves. For example, Participant LMS says:
I had the opportunity, I guess, in the community to be a case manager for a large population of the diverse refugee people. I had the opportunity to resettle I guess Somali and Nepalese. It helped me to connect the refugee population with the people living in Syracuse for example, helping them to connect them with social services and obviously, the need within the city is huge. I've done that job for 10 years and I moved on into the health field where I'm trying to advocate for a diverse population of people, the refugees that sometimes the community is not well educated about it and they don't understand. That gap needs to be basically filled. Another way that I am trying to give back also to the community is obviously I graduate from Syracuse University and to see helped me. Actually, right now I'll be joining the human rights commission in January, and I'm hoping to advocate more. I also serve in the board at the Masjid as a social secretary, so that helps me basically to reach out to people that are in need and obviously keep it very confidential, but also the need is there and a lot of these jobs actually intersect, and hopefully trying to make things better.

In summary, the key is helping other Africans because they are part of one’s larger identity. Advocacy means defending fellow Africans, including speaking out against injustice, both unseen (death) and seen (police brutality). Fight for social justice because the environment is conducive to freedom of speech. Advocacy or activism is enlisted in jobs, such as law enforcement, to bring African voices to the community, and to change the negative narrative Africans have of police. Advocacy means being a community organizer, preparing the newcomers for the United States, talking to
legislators about social causes such as childcare, filling the gaps where it is needed, and leading through experiences of being the first in the United States.

**RQ1 subtheme 4: volunteering and mentoring.** This question dealt with the work that involves the donation of time and resources socially in a community. Volunteering, to sub-Saharan Africans, should be connected to life purpose and everything a person does day-to-day. Sub-Saharan Africans engage in their communities by volunteering through tutoring languages, math, board and neighborhood cleanups and so on. According to the participants, all that fits under this subtheme includes mostly giving time to not-for-profit organizations, individuals, and modeling the way for other fellow new Americans, seniors, and neighborhoods. These include giving time to youth activities (sports/soccer), making sure that young people do not commit crimes, interpretation and translation work, board work, churches, homelessness, sharing life experiences with other community members, tutoring, filling out paperwork for new Americans, and generally helping others when in need.

Living in the United States has many advantages, which many sub-Saharan Africans see as a chance to willingly give back to the community that gave them so much. Giving personal time to other people and organizations is part of what sub-Saharan Africans do, and they do it in many contexts and spaces. Participants state:

> Also, school-wise, we have taught Swahili and French. Yes. Math. It depends. In some science, we have been good even though we learn here, but we become very good, more than some Americans, Clean Up 'Cuse. And we motivate them because we come with nothing, with no English at all (LMC)

We help in food pantries and churches (AMC).
I have done volunteer work like clothing drive. Through our church, we have done clothing drives where we give brand new clothes to children on the East Side because that is where the church is, so we reach out to that community in particular (SB).

Although an automatic reaction for anybody would be to associate with and go to familiar spaces, sub-Saharan Africans, tend to go beyond their communities to volunteer and tell their stories to those who are less fortunate and aware. They participate with organizations potentially to ease their integration. Participant SB says, for example:

It is not African. It is the community of the people that live around the church, so they could be of any ethnicity. I have done toy drives. I am a teacher, and so we do a lot of toy drives during the holiday season. We have participated with the upstate medical university, and they did a fundraiser where they did a clothing and toy drive for my classroom. I do not have any African kids in my class. I have gone and spoken at events, I've helped people with legal paperwork for free, I've helped people open businesses, and these are not Africans at all, based upon just my own experience and what I have had, and how difficult it is to get things started and get things going.

Sub-Saharan Africans also volunteer to serve underserved populations by lending their technical expertise to their communities. As careers, prestige, and building wealth do drive people, sub-Saharan Africans are looking for something deeper, connecting, and sentimental:

So, what I have specifically really done, which I think is... When I graduated from Upstate, I immediately got a job. And I got a very good job at St. Joseph's
Hospital, okay? I was supposed to be a surgical PA, but then I realized that, hey, I just got out of school. Do I really want to go into those narrow paths? I had a conversation with myself, so I decided to go to Malone, New York. It's about four hours, three and a half hours. So, four hours. I professionally really declined the offer from St. Joseph's Hospital. So, decided to get a job in Malone, New York, which is three and a half hours away. And this was specifically an underserved community. So, I think that is part of the giving back to the community. That is giving back to the institutions. That is another aspect of civic engagement (MM).

In the process of accustoming themselves to the United States institutional cultures, sub-Saharan Africans understand the power of giving. They try to be reflective and mindful of those who are in need and how they can be helpful by volunteering their time:

As my colleague, speaker MM spoke, it is a very good example. And he is right. As giving back to the community is one of our calling actually in practice. . . for new Americans, it’s drive them to the doctors, and see the people, take them to St. Joseph's and get their X-rays or ultrasound, pre-screening exams. And so, to me I think this is a good window for us as new Americans to be able to look back and give to those who doesn't know how to get stuff. What I provided was actually sometimes I do paperwork for green card applications, some other assistance with the government programs. I did that for a year. I thought it was a blessing to do that and I really admire people that do that (EM).

Community requires everyone to give their time individually, and that sub-Saharan Africans eventually build a group relation by which people continue to give to each other consistency overtime:
as a member of South Sudanese community, I can say something. That we have a very collective effort, our community. We do things individually, but we do things as a community in general. And each member of South Sudanese community has something to contribute to the city of Syracuse, to the state of New York, and even to the whole United States of America. That we are doing things individually, but at the end of the day, it come as a work of the community itself. (PB)

Volunteering in giveaways, which create a sense of belonging overall is important to sub-Saharan Africans. Additionally, sub-Saharan Africans make an effort to communicate with neighbors around neighborhood issues. Helping with the community where they need help such as giving transportations and taking people to important events such as poll areas to vote and so on and cleaning up neighborhoods:

There is this guy that used to take broken bikes and stuff, and he would fix them up, and every year he would bring all these bikes, and they would have them in the gym. I used to always volunteer to set up the bikes up, and they would just invite any of the kids in the community to come and get a free bike. Just because kids, like he said, it's like Syracuse is really dangerous. (AR)

Some of the participants talked about getting involved in more organized and structured organizations that serve neighborhoods. Some of the organizational work that sub-Saharan Africans are involved include being board members:

For my neighborhood, we clean. We have a community neighborhood committee. We get together, and depending on who, we clean our neighbors. That keeps the
neighbor safer and cleaner, because you know if the person that is not familiar comes around. Everybody knows everybody basically. (AA)

Professional work and life purpose are intertwined in the sub-Saharan African community. Participant SK states, “I was working as elderly people 6 years. I helped with people who have a depression to teach the elderly independence and mental issues and giving them a life and train them independently.” “Being a teacher/advocate, I do work with a very diverse group of kids. I guess that is my way of giving back to the community,” stated Participant FA.

In summary, sub-Saharan Africans give time and resources through volunteering. They volunteer in sports activities for kids, help other new Americans and natives through languages and tutoring, and give their time as board members. They volunteer at neighborhood capacities by helping with neighborhood cleanups, bike giveaways, clothing drives, joining neighborhood committees, and helping senior citizens attain independence and self-empowerment. Furthermore, for sub-Saharan Africans, one’s professional work should be related to a person’s life purpose.

**Theme 2: perception and attitude.** Research Question 2 (RQ2) was: In what ways do the lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans influence their civic political engagement? The theme was *perception and attitude*, referring to how participants’ overall lives in native and hosting countries have impacted their overall inclination to engage with the larger society in the hosting nation. It examined how outlooks, thoughts, and actions experienced dictate their propensity to engage in social and political institutions.
This theme also takes into account how appreciative sub-Saharan Africans are toward the life they have lived in native lands and the United States. Also, it had looked at how resentments and apathy are playing a role currently and how perceptual reality had affected faith and disbelief in civic political engagement. There are four subthemes for this theme: opportunity, resilience, representation, and fear of politics. The subthemes are discussed below.

**RQ2 subtheme 1: opportunity.** This subtheme looks at civic political engagement as an opportunity to be better. Many sub-Saharan African participants here came to the United States to look for better lives. Better lives include living socially, politically, and economically with access to opportunities. According to one of the participants, in our community:

You have more leverage, open room, and wave. There's more fish in the ocean compared. . .In America, if you don't have one open door, you could look in for the next one. In Africa, we didn't have that opportunity where to find that open door at all, so here, regardless of whether you find that opportunity this year or not, you could keep on pushing. Keep on pushing so you could climb up on that status. It's not a definite thing that you always could have a high school diploma, like our sisters. They have climb up to become a lawyer (referred to one participant SB). The newcomers, they've climb up to make good name for themselves. That's the American dream, that's the opportunity. (AMC)

Opportunities to engage in one’s community adds to personal power. Living in the United States is a different life:
Here which is totally absolutely different, you have freedom to vote, you have freedom of speech, you have opportunities to be in political power whether you were born here or not. Back home in the refugee camp, from my own experience, you didn’t really know nothing about the political power of this state or this country of the refugee camp. (AA)

Other positive experiences include the absence of “the power of voice, no one is above the law, and the rule of law,” according to Participant HA.

Sub-Saharan Africans’ lived experience has a lot to do with helping them in the United States. According to Participant AMC, “It has motivated me to do well, to go through school and kind of graduate through college and just help my fellow people…."

The lived experiences in the refugee camps were traumatic, poor, despairing, and feeling there was no way out. Our previous lives taught us never to take life for granted. This has taught us “to work hard with school, jobs, and to the community that I live” (AMS).

Life in the United States is better for most of the participants in this study:

The system in the United States here, also it’s fair. It does not matter where you come from and race. Maybe you may experience a little bit of discrimination, but you can reach your goal. I used to see my mom struggling a lot . . . When I came here, that makes me a strong woman. I never give up my dreams. (SK)

Moreover, all the participants’ countries are tribally based, with hurdles to opportunities, while in the United States, sub-Saharan Africans here, through hard work, even in the face of discrimination, “have power and voice in this country” (HA).

Furthermore, according to Participant EM, lived experiences in refugee camps “Give you
an understanding where you cannot take life for granted, so, if you can make it in Sudan, you definitely can make it in the United States.”

In summary, sub-Saharan Africans see community engagement as an opportunity to expand one’s life horizons, and a chance to move ahead in life, something their countries of birth and refugee camps did not offer. It is a chance to elevate their status and achieve the American Dream. Engagement is a chance to see how fairness plays itself out in the society, and way to feel you belong regard of your race and country of origin. Civic political engagement is an opportunity to appreciate life and not take it for granted.

**RQ2 subtheme 2: resilience.** This subtheme dealt with social and political hardship incurred by sub-Saharan Africans and what they make of those circumstances. Study participants felt that, in the United States, people pick parts of you that nature bestowed upon you and that cannot be changed, as one cannot change how one was created. According to the participants in this study, discrimination is visible and alive in the United States. Although many of the sub-Saharan Africans continue to function and live their lives in the United States, they are not an exception to the American societal malaises of discriminatory acts, especially in their communities. However, because of the resilience that they have developed in the camps and their previous lives, they continued to overcome.

Part of not getting engaged in the political process, especially running for public office is because people would be willing to point out the obvious things that you cannot change, like the color of your skin. Also, the body politic is White-male dominated, and catering to that is tiring, especially as a Black woman. For example, “I don’t have time to
deal with colorism,” stated Participant ABS. Additionally, participants almost unanimously echoed that being Black is a stigma that never leaves in civic political areas; it continues to overshadow one’s abilities and talent, especially in the political world. To Participant ABS, “people attack based on my immigrant background, Black African, and every other part that I have no control over.” According to Participant MD, in the United States, “it does not matter how much you know, you always a Black man.”

Furthermore, there are more barriers that continue to hinder sub-Saharan Africans from full civic political engagement. For example:

My reason for not is . . . Like my yes is very strong because as everyone has said I am a true believer in representation, and I think my lived experience as being just raised as a refugee. Living here but being so young that I can pass for just someone who's born here and all of that. Yes. But no because I am an African Black woman and I think that that politics gets . . . There is a totem pole in terms of politics, in terms of how people are ready to treat you. And I just feel like as a Black woman I do not have the stamina for, I have the stamina, but I don't have the regard to deal with pompous White men. And I don't have the time to cater to a fragile male ego. I don't have time to deal with fragile Whiteness. I don't have time to deal with colorism. I don't have time to deal with all of the things that God has put me into from the day I was born. You know what I mean. I'm a dark-skinned Black woman who's African, who came to this country as an immigrant, so people are going to try to attack every part of that. I do have the stamina and the linguistic ability to fight it, but no. It is not worth it. (ABS)
In the process of fighting for individual and group progress, political engagement continues to be a struggle because of discrimination. However:

I would say they're not necessarily a barrier, but they're a key point to someone who, like, I am an intelligent, well-spoken woman, but if someone already sees that as a threat, they are going to try to attack the things that I cannot defend outside of God. Like, I cannot tell you, "I'm sorry for being Black." I can't tell you, "I'm sorry for being African." I cannot tell you I'm sorry for being…things that were out of my control. When I was 4 years old and I came to this country, I didn't know that being Black and being woman, being all these other intersectional aspects of me were going to bother a part of the negative side of America I would say. So, I think that would be the biggest point for me to not be in office, so I will just, that's why I believe in just getting my degrees, going about my business, and just staying out of the limelight because I have it. I just don't have the stamina to deal with it. (AL)

Although they remained optimistic in their pursuit of better lives in the United States, they feel discriminated against. For example, against their accent:

I'm still sometimes struggling finding words, and some people from the get-go, when you have an accent, just having trouble to understand what you are saying. The judgment is like, "He's stupid. Oh, I'm wasting my time with him.” (LM)

Therefore, with such perception and attitude from the community toward new Americans, engagement becomes very challenging:

You are an African booty scratcher and this and that, and they're making fun of you. It is tough, but I think a part of us understands that oh, these people just don't
get it. They don't know, because we have a different experience. We learned to respect people in other cultures because we have a different experience, and they do not. I think a part of us kind of knows that, there is kind of an ignorance to people that we recognize, like, okay, they do not understand, as opposed to internalizing it and then making it feel like we're the ones that are at fault. (SB)

Resilience is the safeguard for most Africans as they feel pushed away in American society. While they are called names, their lived experience has made it much more bearable to cope with the challenges that they encounter every day in the streets of America. Sub-Saharan Africans, although constantly feeling annihilated and pushed away, their knowledge, maturity, and confidence continue to help them rise above:

We have felt unwanted. We have been discriminated against. We have been misused or abused by other people, whatever it may be, but I do not think we take that and internalize it and feel like I don't belong here because this person tells me I do not belong. I think we recognize that that person is the ignorant one. (SB)

Collective struggles that former refugees and their parents went through have made them better Americans. Today, there is a collective sentiment that those struggles back home have made them better Americans. Refugee life does prepare new Americans to deal with and cope with hardship in the United States. For example, “I never had to second-guess what I need to do to get out of trouble. Somehow, I already knew that I could find a way to get out of hardship in any form” (HA).

In summary, for sub-Saharan Africans, resilience here is the ability to endure discrimination and injustice and yet continue to see life as full of potential and livable. Sub-Saharan Africans struggle with having accents in the United States, being made fun
of, being call names, exclusion, discrimination against their place of origin, race, and color, and so on. However, the lives they have lived in their countries of birth, refugee camps, and the United States have prepared them for whatever is in their ways.

**RQ2 subtheme 3: representation.** This theme dealt with a desire to be well represented, which is a need to have candidates who phenotypically resemble sub-Saharan Africans and can relate to them. Participants feel that if they were given the opportunity, they would run for political office. However, with troubling lived experiences, coupled with political parties' lack of inclusion, many sub-Saharan Africans do not become political candidates so they can represent their own values and people.

In fighting for individual and group representation, political engagement continues to be a struggle, which influences and affects a pool of candidates. Therefore, the perception and attitude that sub-Saharan Africans have of not being accepted fully in the United States continue to grow even stronger and, therefore, add to the many barriers that already exist. As there are many reasons to be pessimistic in areas of representation (social and political), sub-Saharan Africans continue to wait and wish for a chance to run for political offices and other leadership positions so they can represent their own people:

If I was given a chance to run for office, I would do it. I have been trying for few years now in my party, but my party is very, very, very White-oriented. And I play a lot of big roles in my party, political party. I have been working with them. I give money to the political party. I don't see myself getting in office, even though I ran for office. What I have seen is a kind of neglecting population. That they don't even at look at this group of people coming to the party will change anything in here or how they look at things. You cannot fit in. These people think
you're just a criminal or something like that. All these little things. Like, probably don't have no money. You are inner city, poor people. (MD)

According to sub-Saharan Africans, Africans deserve to be treated like everyone else in the community. “The same way that they engage with the Italians, the same way that they engage with the Irish. They are down at the pubs. They have to consider us” (LM). Africans have restaurants with their ethnic cuisines. Africans want the politicians to come to their “grounds” and be visited in places like Taste of Africa. “They should be coming to the Taste of Africa. They should be coming to events that people are doing” (SB).

Just like the way Italians and Irish were targeted for attention, “You need to target Africans, and even a wider range of the immigrant community differently…” (LM). To sub-Saharan Africans, ethnic restaurants are associated with their cultures. Culture is associated with people’s values according to sub-Saharan Africans, therefore, “You're going to the pub because that's associated with Irish culture, so that means you put a little effort into knowing what Irish culture is. You need to also do the same thing to understand our different cultures and understand who we are and not just put us all under the same umbrella because not all Africans are the same” (SB).

“At first, when they see you speaking, they already tied you as Africans, so you also feel like, ‘Okay, since I'm African, so you mean that I should not partake with the local policy or with local laws that happen here?’” (UM). Sub-Saharan Africans think that politicians engage with other communities, just not Africans. Politicians only engage with “well-known Africans, politicians do not come to the ground level, they do not go to African businesses and they do not engage with the community” (UM).
In the United States, there is a huge lack of politicians who originate from Africa. “They never identify us in the first place” (AMC). “More than the lack of representation, I think also the politicians that I've seen didn't really engage with the African community at all” (SB). Furthermore, politicians tend to lump sub-Saharan Africans with Blacks, but Africans see Blacks as different, “Do not put us in all Black” (LM). According to sub-Saharan Africans, politicians who engage with people they serve have a high chance that they can deliver better services to the community and people:

You would know where you could go to find somebody to translate . . . But because the district attorney is not engaged in the community in which he is elected to serve, okay, it makes you feel as if you're disregarding these people as if they're not part of your community. (SB).

Because me personally, when I first came in, we did not have any African representing anybody in terms of seat in the Senate or seat in the common council or anything like that. We did not have any Africans. I have been here about 15 years already. We did not have anybody representing us, so our voice was not there. In the beginning, it did push me away because you had a stigma feeling like maybe you will not be accepted there among these people. At first, we felt like that is something we are not going to cross path. . .Because you have to understand, for most of us, just because we're citizen, you still feel like you are not really accepted completely. (UM)

Many of the sub-Saharan Africans who distance themselves from political engagement do so because there has not been a clear and inviting path of building comforting levels of engagement processes. Therefore, sub-Saharan Africans continue to
stay away from enlisting as candidates because they see the civic political engagement as something still foreign and unreachable.

In summary, sub-Saharan Africans feel that elected officials and representative do not represent them and their values, and this tends to push some of them away from civic political engagement. Representation means seeing representatives who look like sub-Saharan Africans in offices and to be treated and visited by the representatives like other ethnic communities such as Irish, Italian, and general White Americans. They know that their Blackness and being Africans are not intersecting with the Americanism of sexism, racism, egoism, and colorism. Representatives are very White, especially in political parties, and this gives little to no chance for sub-Saharan Africans. Paths to political representation continue to be limited and unclear, according to sub-Saharan Africans.

RQ2 subtheme 4: fear of politics. This subtheme dealt with the distancing of sub-Saharan Africans from civic political engagement due to the consequences, direct or indirect, of prior civic political engagement. This is what participants observed in themselves or among family members. For some sub-Saharan Africans, politics are not for them based on their lived experiences.

Part of lack of engagement, especially with local sub-Saharan African communities, is that they are eroded by colonialism, violence and cultural wars, conflicts, tribalism “and everything else we left back home, it is following us” (AMC & UM). These problems continue to hold Africans back even in the Land of Opportunity. For example:

In our home country, especially in Africa, if you get education here in the United States and you go back there and you try to help development, they see you as a
threat, as a challenge, as a risk or something like that, [rather] than using you as an opportunity to help. America collects everyone, brings everyone, and then they say, "You can run for office. We need your idea." In our home country, they see you as a threat once you get your education from outside go back to your home country (HA).

The fear of political violence from past lived experience is something that Sub-Saharan Africans have not forgotten, even in the United States of America where they currently live; they still feel and remember what it was like in the past. For that, the political violence experienced in their home countries and that they continue to suffer through news, especially those who grew up in Africa and had the courage to go back home to do work for their government, is discouraging and disheartening:

Back home where you never had the right to say a word in front or in public where you would be always in a constant fear of, "Are you going to be the next out of the door? Are you going to be the next that's going to get killed or shot?"

It's a huge significant difference. (FD)

Moreover, growing up in Africa, most of the participants have never talked to a politician. Therefore, trying to engage with politicians even now is hard and difficult. For that, talking to politicians is:

It is not still clicking in my head what I need to tell them or what I want them to do for the community or something like that because it's not a Somali thing in a way. Even my parents do not even talk about the idea of talking to a political official bringing up an issue that’s happening in the community or something like that. (HA)
Again, the upbringing and the deep fear from their prior civic political life left many of the sub-Saharan African participants permanently skeptical of politics and the like.

According to Participant LM:

I definitely will exercise the right to vote and obviously organize the community, but personally I don't see me never a politician. A big round of applause to whoever is going to do it. I obviously support them. Right now, we have a wonderful guy from the Sudanese community that definitely I'm excited to follow him, and I'll definitely back him up. It just goes to again like our upbringing. The way the tribal system has been used; if you understand our history, a tribe in itself is not a bad thing. Even in our religion, it teaches us God created tribes in countries so you may know about each other. It's like a family tree, but people are using it to advance and not even after you look at the politicians basically. It's like you have to give something of yourself basically, sell some part of yourself to be in a certain situation.

Moreover, “...after the election depending on what happens after that, there could be violence and there could be a lot of trouble in the country afterward. Politics tend to get dangerous” (DA). For those who are not interested in politics, they expressed that politics was very uninviting and dangerous. “I would say it pushes me away, just because it gets really intense” (DA). Part of lack of involvement has to do with a lack of freedom experienced at home; they feel that if they say something, they can be misquoted and that is how violence starts and perpetuates around the world. “...I know when I was back home, politics was really dangerous. Because the war happened because of politicians,
sometimes because of my experience, I feel like it’s something I will always stay away from it” (AR).

The experiences back home have definitively shaped the perceptions and attitudes of these sub-Saharan Africans toward politics. However, the politics they experienced in their native land was not the only factor that pushed them away from civic political engagement arenas in hosting countries. Many of the participants here were very vocal about distancing themselves from politics because of the many things that they have experienced here in the United States. Some of the sub-Saharan Africans who are in elected offices are treated badly. For example, Participant ABE explained:

My third reason is, because the way people are treating Ilhan Omar, I feel like if that was me in that situation, I wouldn't be able to handle it the way she does. Like just being a Muslim woman, being a refugee, being African, being Black. All these things are so against her that it makes me think I would never want to be that. It is like her being so different from everyone else that's in office, people looked at her differently. They didn't care what she had to say, just because of where she came from, and because of her scarf. At first, it definitely encouraged me, because it's like even though we're not from the same country, we have so many similarities. I can see myself in her. So at first, it was like if she can do it, why can't the rest of us just do it too. But then, after all this like, the way other people started viewing her and people started looking at her, I think that just turned me off from ever running for office.

Other factors that add to the fear of politics and putting names forward to run for political office for immigrants and sub-Saharan Africans are:
The only thing that I actually wanted to add is they kind of just brought up a very good point since they spoke after me. One other fear, one other turnoff that is keeping people from running for the office, or preventing people, especially from different background, from different diverse community is the hateful words and the hateful speech that our current president have been using. The fact that it's showing it, it looks like there's more White supremacy than Black, and the fact that the president himself is being out there or going publicly saying all these hateful words, and using all these hateful words towards the whole entire country, and especially towards the new American communities and the Black people of color. Not only Black, but Hispanics, and Blacks, and Latinos, and Asians, and Middle Eastern or everybody, you name it (HB).

Being a politician is seen as unique by sub-Saharan Africans. To be a politician:

…you have to be aggressive and you have to be cold-hearted because that’s how politics is. It takes a lot. Everybody is like saying, “Do this for me or do this for me.” No one wants to say no and yes. It's also important as well. You don't have all that power to do all the things that you want to do because also there's different rules, there's certain commands that you have to follow through, there's different things that as a politician you have to go through in order for make that change happen. It's just not like one-click easy, like I can make this happen. You have to go through these different people in order for one thing to make it happen. (AMS)

According to sub-Saharan Africans, the people that they voted for have not been able to represent them; they only represent half of the community, which in most cases excludes them. They have expressed that they need candidates that they can relate to as
sub-Saharan Africans and immigrants. They feel they have been forgotten; however, they are still part of the community, no one speaks for them, and therefore, some do vote because of the people who run:

I feel like now I can relate to you. You can speak for us [referring to the researcher who was recently elected and is a sub-Saharan African], for those of us who have been forgotten, such as the Sudanese community. We are still a part of this community. We are citizens as well. And we don't have people that speak for us. I feel like when the White people are in office; they forget about us. They tend to forget. So, that's why I always was not the type to vote because I feel like we didn't have enough representation. Everyone who was running did not stand for what I stood for, I guess, you could say. (NA)

In sum, seeing a candidate from the participant’s background would encourage them to vote. The reason being is that the participant sees themselves through the candidates. Furthermore, according to sub-Saharan Africans, the candidate’s relatability descriptively gives assertion and confidence in representation. According to one of the participants, the candidate “will have experiences that are similar to mine, which will make them want to put in some rules that will affect as South Sudanese and other Africans….” (NA)

Another factor that has affected the attitude and hope of many sub-Saharan Africans is the apathy toward politics. There is a perception, according to Participant EM, that “politics tend to work for people who are higher up or the ‘rich folks’…if you don’t believe in me, why should I believe in you?” For sub-Saharan Africans to vote consistently, they want to see more people who can relate and look like them in the
offices. If not, the representatives, “They do not represent me. They are mostly White older men, or it would be some Black men that are in it. I do not really see any Black woman given any position, any strong position or any Sudanese Black woman going into office” (ABS).

For all of these reasons, some of the participants who were pessimistic felt that their votes do not matter. Also, local community way of life or culture has made it difficult for young people to be part of the civic processes in the local ethnic communities, as it was almost unanimous that they believed “your voice does not matter because the younger you are, the belief that you are not knowledgeable enough to understand what’s going on in the community. And that hurt me the most because you go there, you raise your hand, the person who is speaking looking around like you are not even there” (EM).

Participants strongly believe that politicians do not represent them. Politicians do not represent what matters to them the most. For example, according to the following participants:

A lot of people don't represent what we have. They don't represent our values. They don't represent what we have in our mind, our houses. They say one thing in front of me, when tomorrow they say something different. That's always a problem with these politics. But I do vote. That's one of my rights in America to go and vote. (MD)

The reason why I never used to believe in politics and stuff like that because I believe that politicians tell you whatever you want to hear. When they go to the office, it's a whole different story because from what I see, a lot of guys, a lot of
people that improve or getting things from the politician are people in the higher
levels. (EM)

In summary, politics is a dangerous space for many of the sub-Saharan
participants; it is a matter of life and death. Lived experiences in home countries have
demonstrated that they should not speak their minds in public. They still carry the burden
of their early life experiences to the United States, which also affects how they engage
politically in hosting countries. Most of the sub-Saharan Africans vote, but not all of
them will run for political offices because of their lived experience of fearing politics.
Moreover, to sub-Saharan Africans, politics in the United States is also “uninviting.”

**Theme 3: ubuntu (I am because we are).** Research Question 3 (RQ3) was: If
engaged, what is the nature of sub-Saharan African naturalized citizens’ motivation for
engagement? The theme here is *ubuntu* (I am because we are). This theme examined sub-
Saharan Africans’ intentions or reasons for involvement in civic political engagement.
Ubuntu is an African philosophy that originated in South Africa. Ubuntu is more of an
altruistic approach to humanity and community affairs. In this philosophy, an individual
exists because other people exist; it is within this relationship that an individual thrives
and becomes everything. Therefore, for sub-Saharan Africans, “I am because you are”
(LM), or ubuntu.

Therefore, every effort should be made in the reflection of the larger collective
community. For this, sub-Saharan Africans are motivated to take part in civic politics
because they are ubuntu and they want to see this philosophy alive wherever they go.
This research theme has two subthemes: collective community responsibility and dignity
and identity. All this stems or comes from individuals knowing that they exist because others exist.

**RQ3 subtheme 1: collective community responsibility.** For sub-Saharan Africans, they give back because somebody was once kind to them and they want to return the favor. It takes a community to move the people in the community forward. It is the responsibility of every community member to help other community members within the community. For that, sub-Saharan Africans engage because they see good leaders generally trying to make a change in the community by doing work. “Politicians are just leaders in our community” (AR). Therefore, engaging in the community is “making the community better” (AR):

There are native home values tied to giving, and they are driven by that sentiment, that feeling to give back to America. Because I have to give back to this country. You have to give back. In some way, big or small, we have to do something for this country. (LM)

This is our home. We are part of it. We have to contribute. We have to protect it. We have to get involved. We live in a city that is very diverse with multi-cultures, so we have to be part of what is move in this country and this city so we should not be left behind. (AMC)

Sub-Saharan Africans make it their business to be civic politically engage because “It's the fire. It's the love. We have it in our hearts, so to keep that going” and they got this drive and eagerness to be community-minded “from home. From Africa” (AMC). Furthermore, AMC continues:
We came with it. You are born with it. That is our culture. So, to keep the fire going, you've got to keep putting the woods in. Us doing what we do, that's like keeping the fire burning. We can't just be cold. That's not who we are. We are not cold people. We are people in love. We are people who initiate contact with people. We have to keep the fire going. We cannot isolate ourselves. We are now able to communicate, so why isolated ourselves?

Ubuntu is a way of life in Africa; it is the essential philosophy of Africans. “Yeah. So, this is what have guided our ancestors, still guiding us, even though we are now changing” (LM). However, as things and life have evolved, “Of course, this has changed” (SB):

It's still there. This foundation has not changed, just the wall has been painted so many times, some color that don't match, but you change again. But our foundation is African. We are Bantu. We as Bantu, we have one culture, one similarity, one origin. That's what keep us, so regardless of how we have change or evolve as time goes on, or conflict that has arisen, that's just normal, sometimes we disagree, but the key thing is we are still African. We are still African. We are the old generation that have just always lived together. (AMC)

That kind of attitude, the way in which we carry ourselves, if we go to a place even where we might not have been originally wanted, they can't help but embrace you when you're there. Have you ever gone to a place where you're like, "Okay, seems like people are a little uneasy," nobody's talking to you, but because we're such lively people, Africans are warm and we have smiling on our faces. When you first come to the country, you don't know the language, all you do is
smile and nod at people, so you get used to being friendly and smiling to the point where you will warm up the room even if it was cold. (SB)

Overall, Africans are very communal and help the people around the community where they live. It resonates with them as Africans because they were taught in their villages to take care of each other. All participants affirmatively portrayed this point. The idea of ubuntu, which is intrinsic throughout sub-Saharan African communities, which is the idea that a person can only live a meaningful and engaging life through other people. According to sub-Saharan African participants, ubuntu is love. “Now, we are fighting each other there, there are wars, but at the origin, we always have been together (AMC, SB, & LM).

Furthermore, the sense of collective community responsibility is something that is taught to sub-Saharan Africans and Africans, generally at a young age in different forms. The same amount of respect and honor given to immediate relatives and community elders would be the same as one would give to a distant uncle and community member. Respecting your older family members define how you look at your other community members. Serving one’s community is a demonstration of a sense of respect for people in the community. For example:

I was introduced to being polite. I was already prepared to come to this country and do better, because of the experience that I had over there. We looked up to all the elders as our parents. We would have the same respect that we have for our mother and father. We'll have the same respect for our elders in the community, and we'll call them fathers and mothers, we'll call them uncles and aunties, even though they were not immediate blood. It kind of makes me feel sad sometimes,
because knowing that I was able to call my community members, or like people next door to me, my uncle and my auntie. The reason to why our parents taught us to do that is a symbol of respect. But now, when you do that here, people look at you like, "I am not your uncle. I am not your aunt. Why are you calling me this name?" It's a very difficult situation. It makes me feel very disrespectful, referring to someone older than me by their first name because that's not what I was taught growing up as a young girl. (HB)

Part of what gets people engaged and involved is seeing your neighbors doing things around the neighborhood. For example, “But if I get some people who are really motivated to do those stuff, I do not mind getting engaged to help out” (AR). For that, they are scared for their lives to get engaged because the neighborhoods they live in are dangerous. “I be scared just to walk to the corner store by myself” (ABE). For sub-Saharan Africans who do get involved in their neighborhoods, safety, maintenance, and a chance to get together with their neighbors is the main motive to get involved. “That keeps the neighborhood safer and cleaner, because you know if the person that’s not familiar comes around, everybody, and everybody knows everybody basically” (AAE). Therefore, because they see everyone doing things, it makes them want to do more things.

Part of the reason sub-Saharan Africans continue to engage in their neighborhood is their neighbors' instantiating friendly and welcoming attitudes and atmosphere:

When we first moved there, they introduced themselves to us and they brought us some little goodies; they put papers every Monday in our door. I smile, I say hi,
and I never make myself feel different from others, because I am raised in a large different people. (AAE).

Moreover, some of the reasons for getting involved, for sub-Saharan Africans, are seeing people who share similar backgrounds and experiences. “I get involved mostly on the Northside, where there are the most population of the new American community. I get involved to help out” (HB). Many of the sub-Saharan Africans get into community connections like sports, senior care, childcare, and so on to help acquainted themselves with the larger community besides their own national and ethnic groups. For example, “Within a sport, it brings people together” (AAS).

Because the motive is to help the community, “that we are doing things individually, but at the end of the day, it's come as a work of the community itself” (PB). Many of the sub-Saharan Africans feel that even their professional jobs reflect and should be embodied in and as part of moving a community forward, not merely individual. “I went to a community centers where they have all these refugees coming from different countries. And I thought to myself, ‘You know what? This is very humbling’ because I was not looking for money. What I was looking for were ways to give back…” (EM).

Getting involved has to be tangible and have measurable outcomes. Furthermore, sub-Saharan Africans are involved in things like elderly care in the community:

I have a faith to help elder people. They are really here, in America, they are lonely, and some of them are depressed. …I want to help them because we see only physical illness but we can't see the mental illness and brain illness. …so that's why I put myself. ... To stop the stigma of mental issues in people so that they can go hospital and get some medicine for that. (SK)
For that, sub-Saharan Africans are working to help immigrants in general adjust to their new lives in the United States. “…so for me I feel like somehow I have this obligation that I need to give back to my own community and then help them get out of problems…I feel like I’m a citizen and I have a responsibility over what happens in my community and neighborhood” (HA).

Additionally, according to sub-Saharan Africans, building a collective community responsibility requires individuals to do their parts. Individual action and services contribute to the larger good. For that, many of the participants take the responsibility of one’s community very seriously because they feel there is so much that can be lost and at stake, and they used their lived experiences from their native lands as a point of reference. For example:

…the first thing we form a Sudanese community association of Central New York in 2001. They said, "United we stand, divided we fall. So, we tend not to remain divided. We tend to remain united. So, we came as a one unit and we work as a community. So, we form that organization to keep us united and to achieve many other thing, but the real one to the interests of ourselves and our children. (PB)

In summary, it takes a village to move the villagers forward. People have given so much to sub-Saharan Africans, and they want to replicate the favor through engagement in their hosting communities. Therefore, they give back because they see themselves as part of the broader community; it is the way of “love.” Giving to the community is an intrinsic part of being an African; to see themselves through other villagers or in the way of ubuntu. To sub-Saharan Africans, communalism as an individual obligation never dies, no matter the circumstances and environment. A community/village is a place were
children, and everyone, learn respect and politeness through aunties and uncles. To sub-Saharan Africans, an absence of collective community responsibility produces fears of engagement, lack of safety in neighborhoods, and shabbiness of the communities. Finally, civic political engagement helps sub-Saharan Africans with humility, brings people together, and smiles.

**RQ3 subtheme 2: dignity and identity.** This subtheme looks at dignity and identity as the implicit reason why sub-Saharan Africans are engaged in the community in their hosting countries. To sub-Saharan Africans, dignity and identity are the synchrony and dynamism, and common denominator by which people strive to be part of the larger community. They see caring for the community, fighting for the community collective interest, representation, and many more as reflection and a defining entity for their dignity and identity. For that, it is the main driving force by which villagers in the community, within a person, and in group contributes, and even in spaces they are neglected and pushed away from.

To belong to space bestows upon an individual a sense of dignity and identity. That is, respect for one’s environment is accompanied by dedication and commitment through service. In this manner, a community member can create relatable associational relationships socially and politically. Therefore, a person’s dignity and identity are intrinsic and ingrained, and this is what propels them to identify with the community they live in and serve. For that, sub-Saharan Africans want to live in communities that acknowledge their dignity and identity, and in return, replicate the same through community engagements.
For example, “…I have been really thinking about getting involved with law lately. Just because I see everything that happens nowadays, and some people don’t have someone watching out for them” (DA). This concern has been part of the reason why some sub-Saharan Africans want to run for public offices. Additionally, to help reduce racism and other factors that bring fears to seeking public office:

is getting involved in the community. Working in the community. Working with different people, different background. That's kind of helping me get that fear out of my system, but as we see every day in the news, whatever, it's still there. (AAS)

…we got to make the change here. That is why I keep telling some of these older guys, stop worrying about what's going on in Sudan. You live in the United States. You've been here for 15-20 years. You are not going back to Sudan. So, if you want to make change, you got to make a change where you are at right now, where your children are. (EM)

To sub-Saharan Africans, the United States is their home, and change has to happen here. They feel that many of them will not be going back anytime soon, and therefore, making the United States home is just as beneficial and dignifying as if they were in Africa. Additionally, “just seeing how different it is, and how much better it is being here, and being exposed to the things that we have, the opportunities that we have” (DA).

Volunteering for social justice organizations is a way to find self-worth and to contribute to the power of the community members. “Just doing that for the people kind of like feels good and also empowering for the people so that I can help them all as well”
Many sub-Saharan Africans are not interested in political offices. Many of them are advocates and voices of the community and are on a consistent basis are encouraged to run by their fellow Africans, but they never do.

Moreover, fear of not having predecessors of their own kind is a deterring factor. However, within this study, sub-Saharan Africans had one of their own elected simultaneously when the study was taking place. Because they saw one of their own elected, “…maybe I need to try this, just because you did this thing, and now people have started thinking about…” (HA). They would run for political office so that they have one of their own in the government. According to one of the participants, they would want to run for political office because “we don’t have a Somali woman who’s a politician” (SK).

Living in the United States has made many sub-Saharan Africans more appreciative of their identity as Africans. Often they come from homes that have been destroyed by wars, and as such:

You find whatever it is that you have in common with that person because you're trying to hold on to your own identity, because that often gets lost in America, and that is something that is a giveaway when you immigrate because you're trying to assimilate to your country. The identity of being a refugee, of being an immigrant, so then it does not matter what kind of immigrant you are. (SB)

“Newcomers. We help. First, we have our own people, but then, it goes beyond.” (LM).

Freedom to sub-Saharan Africans means dignity and identity and it must be protected based on their lived experience. Participant AMC states:

When we are here in the United States, we have been here long enough, we know when you have freedom, there's responsibility to that freedom. We have laws that
prohibit what we do as people, so that is the experience that drive us. I tell young people, I say, "Look. I have been in your shoe. You don't want to make a mistake that's going to cost you the freedom that you just got.

Finally, because of the neglect of politicians toward sub-Saharan African communities, there is a strong desire to lobby by Africans for Africans:

I think if we organized and we put our vote into someone, so we're organized as Africans, as a whole community of Sub-Saharan Africans, and push to put our vote towards somebody, and they win, all the politicians are going to see that. This is so because neglecting by the leaders wherever they are does bring back memories that made them refugees and immigrants in foreign lands. Therefore, getting engage to protect dignity and identity, especially freedom, is essential to all. (SB)

For those who are willing to participate in the political processes, they want to do it for dignity and identity purposes. According to Participant NA:

I would do it because somebody has to be Rosa Parks, somebody has to stand up and put up with the abuse, to represent us…so in the future there are African women who are representing us. . . I would do it for those reasons that she would not do it.

Lastly, to maintain dignity and identity in one’s community, and to sustain collective community responsibility, sub-Saharan Africans believe that people should be looking out for each other, working with people of different race and backgrounds and that this would be able to break down the barriers that make us less relatable as people who live in the same community. In that way, we can still uplift each other and respect
each other as individuals in the community. Sub-Saharan Africans want to see people who look like them in leadership roles, especially elected officials. Seeing people who look like them and can relate to their experiences strengthened their dignity and a strong feel of identity in the communities they live in. Dignity and identity are culturally transcendental; they are recognized globally no matter who the person is, a need for respect, care, inclusiveness, acknowledgment, and so on. For sub-Saharan Africans, this is precisely the point. Because dignity and identity are not static and consistently given in nature, they engage in hosting communities to get due respect and acknowledgment they deserve as citizens and as community members.

In summary, ubuntu—I am because you are—is a collective community responsibility for everyone. The problematic hurdles that trouble an entire group feel, such as lack of representation, neglect from elected leaders, and exclusion from community ideas and invitations make the community less of a collective. For that, the comparability that this theme represents becomes less, as the participants inferred. Therefore, sub-Saharan Africans engage in their communities to bring a sense of their own definition of community to their hosting communities, which is a place where a group of people collectively come together to care and share responsibilities. Therefore, dignity and identity share a special bond with collective community responsibility when people have created an environment where they see themselves in each other, the way of ubuntu. Through this, engagement in the community with sub-Saharan Africans become an essence and behavior in dynamism and synchrony, within and among various groups and people in one community.
Summary of Results

This chapter presented the findings for this study. Political representation theory was used to analyze the findings for this study. The theory was used to understand the lived experiences of sub-Saharan Africans naturalized immigrants in civic political engagement in Syracuse, New York. The qualitative research methodology employed descriptive phenomenology. Four focus groups of naturalized sub-Saharan African immigrants were created for data collection, with a total of 24 participants.

The guiding questions for the study were how sub-Saharan Africans naturalized participate in civic political activities, the ways their lived experiences influence their civic political engagement, and finally, what their motive was when engaged in civic political engagement. The findings yielded three categories, three themes, and many descriptions or subthemes. First, the research findings were categorized under participation, the influence of lived experiences, and motives. Second, the themes were activities and behaviors modeling participation, perception and attitude, and finally, ubuntu (I am because you are).

The descriptions or subthemes were: activities and behaviors modeling participation, encompassing voting, campaigning and mobilization, advocacy, and volunteering and mentoring; perception and attitude, encompassing opportunity, discrimination, candidacy and representation, and fear of politics and; ubuntu (I am because you are) encompassing collective community responsibility and dignity and identity. Therefore, out of the three themes, there are 12 descriptions or subthemes that emerged out of the study as findings.
Finally, Chapter 5 will discuss implications as well as the researcher’s recommendations for better practices and future research in the field. Also, the findings will be summarized in the restatement of the significance of the study and why it was done. The research will relate political representation to sub-Saharan African naturalized citizens’ civic political engagement. Lastly, the study had several limitations, which will be acknowledged and discussed, as well.
Introduction

This study was conducted primarily to find out how and why sub-Saharan Africans’ naturalized citizens are politically engaged in hosting countries. The research problem here is that there is a gap in the literature about sub-Saharan African immigrants’ civic political engagement. Therefore, sub-Saharan Africans naturalized immigrants have not been studied sufficiently to yield enough knowledge about their civic political engagement in hosting communities around the world. Further, there is an identity misrepresentation that sub-Saharan Africans struggle with insofar as being referred to as African Americans. This study is one of the first to look into the issues of political and social responsibilities for sub-Saharan African immigrants and their ways of adapting to hosting countries. This research will add value to policy leaders, community leaders, and research leaders’ conversations around the world.

Because sub-Saharan Africans are a growing population in the West, it is essential that their civic political behaviors and motivations in their communities are understood by stakeholders. Sub-Saharan Africans are an emerging and competitive voting bloc, and they are influencing social and political bodies at the municipal, state, and federal levels (Ewing & Cantor, 2014). Therefore, it is crucial that policymakers and political candidates pay attention to this group. Furthermore, sub-Saharan Africans, for the most part, are active members of their hosting communities; they pay taxes and contribute to the development of those communities as well.
There are so many benefits of civic political engagement for citizens and communities. Communities with inclusive and expansive civic political engagement avenues are more likely to have better government, of which citizens are aware, and therefore, demand their rights from their representatives and leaders (NCoC, 2010). That is, citizens who are politically active overall have better life outlooks than those who are not; they are more connected to their communities and able to serve them better because they are aware and feel connected and that they belong. The study has three main research questions:

1. In what ways do naturalized sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political activities?
2. In what ways do the lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans influence their civic political engagement?
3. If engaged, what is the nature of sub-Saharan Africans naturalized citizens’ motivation for engagement?

The task of this chapter is to reconcile the themes and subthemes with the literature on civic political engagement. The chapter discusses the implications of the findings to policymakers, community leaders, and scholarship. Since this is one of the first studies in the field of civic political engagement with sub-Saharan African naturalized citizens, the researcher is hoping to add the voices of sub-Saharan African communities in diaspora into policy and leadership conversations; they are a group with significant stories more stakeholders should pay attention to.

This chapter will make recommendations for further research, policy, and to the community. Furthermore, the chapter will explain the limitations incurred before, during,
and after the study. There were several limitations; however, they did not critically impede the study but merely imposed challenges.

Implications of Findings

The research was guided by three research questions. To answer the research questions, the researcher organized the findings as follows: the first theme and subthemes have answered RQ1. RQ2 is answered by the second theme and subthemes. RQ3 was also answered by the third theme and subthemes. All the findings are reiterated under the implications of findings.

Research Question 1: themes and subthemes. RQ1 examines the participation of sub-Saharan Africans in civic political engagement. The theme here is activities and behaviors modeled by the participants. The findings in this research question have multiple subthemes as follows: voting, campaigning and mobilization, advocacy/activism, and volunteering and mentoring.

Subtheme 1: voting. Voting was the most dominant engagement aspect in this subtheme grouping. Many sub-Saharan Africans are eager and passionate about voting; however, they are rarely engaged as a community by the candidates and politicians. However, DeSiPio (2011) finds something slightly different in that naturalized citizens tend to have lower voter participation. Voter turnout for sub-Saharan African participants was high. For the few of them who were not active voters, several factors were at play, including not having candidates that look like them. However, for the most part, voting for sub-Saharan Africans means a chance to have power and “voice.”

The level of engagement that they have experienced was self-seeking and self-invitation. Many of the sub-Saharan Africans come from countries that rarely had
credible elections. Therefore, many of them never voted in their own countries of birth before migrating to the United States. So, voting to them is exciting, sentimental, a “family affair,” and personal. For the politician who is interested in engaging constituents, sub-Saharan Africans are a voting bloc that is to be highly considered. In the literature, voter turnout for minorities increases when candidates with minority backgrounds are present (Banducci et al., 2004). This point was true in this study. Indeed, it was unanimous among the participants that having a candidate from their ethnic backgrounds was most likely to make them vote in elections, a point that is supported by Martin (2015).

The point made by White et al. (2008) regarding exposure concept was true insofar that the more immigrants stayed in this country, the more they were able to engage in the hosting country political system, and a point also made by Wong (2000) and Dancygier et al. (2015). This point is concurrent with sub-Saharan African immigrants as well. Like other immigrants, sub-Saharan Africans cannot engage politically until they have resided for 5 years in the United States or until they are eligible to apply for citizenship, and they could hardly wait.

Moreover, a point that was also made by White et al. (2008) was that immigrants who moved to Canada earlier than the age of 13 were more likely to vote later in life than those who moved there at later ages, an observation supported by Fanning et al. (2010) and Wust (2013). However, for sub-Saharan Africans, those who came at older ages were more likely to vote than the younger first generation. Among those who came here as toddlers, some of them were easily discouraged and did not have resilience compared to those who came here much older. Generally, voter turnout results for primary elections
are lower than general elections (Gerber et al., 2017; Smets & Ham, 2013). This statistic was supported by this study as sub-Saharan Africans who did not vote in primaries were more likely to vote in general elections than primary.

**Subtheme 2: campaign and mobilization.** Although the study population continues to get involved in the political processes, campaigning and mobilization are mostly to help other new Americans to register to vote, takes them to polling places, and so on. This is both externally and internally connected to transnational campaigning and mobilization. Sub-Saharan Africans rally for their countries’ development and against injustices in their native lands. However, according to Smets and Ham (2013), mobilization takes place when candidates, social groups, and political parties assemble citizens. Wang (2013) alludes that candidates can actively include immigrants by mobilizing and encouraging immigrant communities to register and vote.

Many of the sub-Saharan Africans are not invited to engage in the dialogue or discourse, nor are there any efforts by parties, social groups, and candidates to include their voices. However, according to Fanning et al. (2010), a point agreed to by this research, immigrants have an interest in politics, especially in being candidates, because they want to bring solutions to local issues. Sub-Saharan Africans do all these as a surviving mechanism in hosting countries and to gain power (Ejorh, 2011). The participants had talked about getting involved in campaigns and mobilization so that they are able to have community centers. However, although they were engaged with social groups, this did not automatically translate into political engagement (Klofstad & Bishin, 2014), a point supported by this research. However, much of their internal mobilization and campaigns are *transcontinental* rather than toward hosting countries.
Subtheme 3: advocacy/activism. This subtheme had dealt with the social aspect of advocacy or activism. Sub-Saharan means of acting on social justice for themselves, neighborhoods, families in the United States, and overseas. Advocacy for sub-Saharan Africans is the notion that fighting for Africans is important. This subtheme carries with it a significant load beyond just one occasion or circumstance. One of the critical points here is that sub-Saharan Africans consider advocacy/activism as an intrinsic part of their lives. Advocacy goes as far as one’s profession. Sub-Saharan Africans are doctors, lawyers, police officers, and community activists because they believe fighting for one’s people is bigger than one’s self.

Sub-Saharan Africans advocate for themselves and others because they believe that they should take care of their communities. A point referenced by Taurini et al. (2017) that immigrants’ involvement in communities helps reduce prejudice, creates stronger social relationships and fosters larger communal affinity. Per the participants, it was important that they become part of the larger social network through churches, community organizations, activism, or community organizing outlets. Most importantly, sub-Saharan Africans want to be invited to the table for them to participate. Immigrants’ social ties and networks do help them to cope with their new environments (Kamya, 1997). This study supported Ejorh’s (2011) assertion that Africans are encouraged to participate in social activism but are not explicitly invited to do so by new hosting country communities.

Subtheme 4: volunteerism and mentoring. Volunteering and mentoring involves believing in something larger than oneself and that it requires that you give time to society. Indeed, to reach back to bring others up so that there is no attrition in the
communalism spirits. For sub-Saharan Africans, it means that connecting with the other immigrant communities and new hosting communities. This means sharing experiences that hosting communities do not have, such as languages and cultures, and adapting to new ways of giving personal time.

A point in the literature that has certainly been confirmed by the research is that volunteerism and broad participation is a two-way benefit for the giver and receiver, yielding personal fulfillment (Martinez et al., 2011; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2016). Additionally, another view that has also been observed in the research and supported by the literature is that lack of social networks does put community members into insolation and can create distancing in other areas of engagement, such as protesting, as well (Bilodeau, 2008). Moreover, for sub-Saharan Africans, volunteerism constructs a sense of individual and community value, which can be realized through the common bond with others, a point is affirmed by the research described here and made previously by Flanagan and Levine (2010).

**Research Question 2: themes and subthemes.** RQ2 examines the influence of lived experiences. The theme here is *perception and attitude*. Following this theme are four subthemes: opportunity, resilience, representation, and fear of politics. The lives of sub-Saharan Africans have lived in their native lands, refugee camps, and in the United States have definitely shaped how they think and act. However, there are certain cultural factors that are embedded in them that no matter where they are, and they remain culturally attached to their values. Like the previous research question, the findings for this section are also divided into two categories, political and social lived experiences.
Opportunity and resilience are both under social and political categories, and representation and fear of politics fall under political lived experiences alone.

**Subtheme 1: opportunity.** Many things based on sub-Saharan Africans lived experience continue to influence their engagements and thought processes. Coming to the United States for many participants in this study was not a choice but a chance to escape misery. Coming to the United States and having access to everything that their previous lives never afforded them was an opportunity, such as citizenship duties. These ranged from becoming a citizen of one of the most beautiful countries on earth to having a chance to engage in communities freely without fear of prosecution.

A top priority of immigrants, in order to be politically engaged in the United States, is to become a citizen (Wong, 2000). To the sub-Saharan African study participants, citizenship was an opportunity. It was a chance to vote, something they were not permitted in their home countries, and the right of freedom of speech, to have a voice, equality and fairness, absence of tribalism, and overall, an understanding that life indeed can be sweet. Finally, the lived experience in the United States is indeed an opportunity of a lifetime for sub-Saharan Africans. It carries with it second chances and the promise that one can make it with enough effort. An opportunity to be a citizen also means that one can bring family and relatives to the United States (Anderson, 2015; Echeverria-Estrada & Batalova, 2019). The lived experience here is an opportunity to give back to all they have received.

**Subtheme 2: resilience.** This subtheme speaks of discrimination experienced by sub-Saharan Africans in the process of civic political engagement. This subtheme depicts exclusion, feeling of unwanted and unwelcome, neglected, not belonging in mainstream
society. However, these negative feelings only add to the resiliency that sub-Saharan Africans have been accustomed to all their lives in the violent spaces they come from, refugee camps, and into a country eroded by colorism, racism, and social, political, and economic classes. To sub-Saharan Africans, resilience is an adaptation using prior life experiences as a point of reference to mitigate and make sense of present life.

Immigrants are discriminated against by the native-born citizens and established political systems (Dancygier et al., 2015; Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). However, as a coping mechanism, they use segregation to help become politically active as they migrated to more ethnic-based communities (Bilodeau, 2009) to build coalitions. This study found that more immigrants were clustered in the northern part of the city, and more immigrants were able to volunteer and had more interest to even volunteer there as well. Although they remain foreign in the eyes of the natives even after so many years in the United States, they are optimistic, and they have thick enough thick to maneuver the tough streets and fears of implicit and explicit unwelcoming gestures. They are Africans; “if they can make it in Sudan,” they can make it here, said participant EL.

Resilience is the courage of immigrants to cope with hosting countries' new boundaries (Uwakweh et al., 2014). Xenophobia toward sub-Saharan Africans is real. Many sub-Saharan Africans, although the United States is tough and rough, find strength in their prior lives, which have taught them and made them more mature than the average individual who never had to face such challenges and hardship. A majority of sub-Saharan Africans, once in the United States, know what they want, what they do not want, and where they are going. Prejudice from native-born citizens is destructive psychologically. It is important to know that the policies of dehumanization (aggression,
calling names, etc.) makes minorities feel less human (Kteily & Bruneau, 2017). However, the resiliency and maturity grew from their experiences in their war-torn countries and refugee camps give them enough strength to cope with exclusion gestures encountered in the United States.

Although discriminated against, sub-Saharan Africans still have faith and optimism in government and continue to have a deep respect for the government and the community they live in. Sub-Saharan Africans used their lived experience to advance themselves rather than letting it hold them back. Therefore, they continue to give to the community to make it better even if they often feel unwanted, uninvited, and unwelcomed. Finally, their counterparts, African Americans, are very pessimistic and lack trust in their relationship with local governments, a result of a long history of discrimination in the United States (Levine & Gershenson, 2014).

**Subtheme 3: representation.** Sub-Saharan Africans want good representatives to represent them, as well as want to enlist themselves as candidates when opportunities are conducive and welcoming. The candidates that currently represent them locally, stateside, and federally do not understand their African values, nor do they look like them. A point made by the literature is that when Blacks and minorities run for political office to represent their people, their decisions are influenced by whether candidates who look like them had ever run before (Shah, 2014). Sub-Saharan African women want to see other women of their background and culture speaking and representing them, and when this desire is not realized, it presents a challenge that usually means political exclusion. Although possibilities to change this narrative are there, there are particular problems, especially immutable ones: being a woman, Black, immigrant, refugee, and
other socially-constructed ones: “male ego,” being the minority in the party system, and discrimination.

Representation is not equal; representatives tend to engage with more White populations like the Irish and Italians and neglect Africans. In doing so, representatives bring class into their priorities. Many sub-Saharan Africans here are working poor and feel representatives engage with the Irish and Italians because they have more materially to offer than Africans do. A point referenced in the study is that when immigrants want to participate in political processes, issues of resources, identity, language barriers, and other factors deterred them (Reny & Shah, 2018). That is, there is zero engagement, specifically with the African community by the representatives. There are no clear and constant tangible pathways to engagement with Africans from the candidates and representatives.

The findings in the literature supported a point made by Ejorh (2011): Africans get involved in mobilization to achieve proper political representation. However, there are no pathways that encourage Africans to run for public offices, as not enough representatives from their backgrounds have paved pathways to political interest and courage, and they remain skeptical and pessimistic about the political processes. A point made by Hajnal (2009), Sobolewska et al. (2013), and Wust (2013) is that even if Latino and Black candidates run as candidates for political offices, they mostly lose their races, and that is because they are usually outnumbered by population. Because there are not many Africans who are candidates to represent the interest of Africans, even if they are citizens, they feel that they are still not part of the community. Africans want their own candidates and representatives.
Citizens who engage with political leaders around their neighborhoods are six times more likely to be involved and solve their local and neighborhood issues (Hays, 2015). Also, positive engagement with candidates can increase voter turnout (Smets & Ham, 2012). But, psychological, political effectiveness, interest, and knowledge levels do increase voter turnout. Therefore, the lack of candidates engaging Africans, as expressed by the participants, is a problem that does affect engagement. Policy representation was not mentioned at all, and this is because of a lack of engagement and candidates who would represent them.

According to Minta and Sinclair-Chapman (2013), when the lawmakers are diverse, more interests of the minority is represented, especially at the federal levels. Power has a lot to do with who loses and wins, as well as who gets to participate and engage (Verkuyten, 2017). For those groups who consistently lose in political and policy representation, like Latinos and Blacks, Latinos are three times and Blacks are four less likely to get policy representation compared to their White counterparts (Griffins & Newman, 2013). These findings have also been corroborated in this study, as well, as the participants have zero policy engagement with candidates and representatives.

Like African Americans, sub-Saharan Africans are also very unhappy with government performances in representing them and in service delivery, a point made by Levine and Gershenson (2014). This point was made by Hajnal and Trounstine (2014) and was also confirmed by this research. A point affirmed in this research is that according to Hajnal and Trounstine (2014) and Morad (2014), minorities and immigrants continue to get low policy representation. Finally, “descriptive and symbolic
representation,” as described by Pitkin (1967), indeed is a problem here. Africans want to be represented by a person that looks like them and represents their values.

**Subtheme 4: fear of politics.** Engagement in politics is a resurrecting of prior traumatic experiences for most of the participants here. Politics in their homeland had meant being killed over voicing one’s views; politics was not for everyone and was decidedly not inviting. Politics resembles, for most of the participants, risking freedom, safety, family, and even one’s life. Civic political engagement in the community meant that one had to overcome personal fear of death and cultivate a belief that they are just as worthy as any other citizens and they are free to participate. This is a difficult thing to overcome, even with hosting communities showing signs that are inviting.

To sub-Saharan Africans, politics is a place where people are bullied, a point also referenced by Dancygier et al. (2015). Politics is not safe, just like at home here in the United States. Some Africans in elected office, for example, are bullied and treated badly by Americans. Therefore, fear of politics in the way people are treated during the campaign and once elected is a huge deterrent in having an interest in running for political offices, a point corroborated by Dancygier et al. (2015) and Shah (2014).

White supremacy, racism, discrimination, bias, neglect, economic background, being a woman, time, and age all contribute at varying degrees to lack of engagement in civic political life, especially running for office. Griffin and Newman (2007) argue that Whites mobilize their conservative supporters to prevent Latinos and Blacks from being representatives. Fear of politics, for sub-Saharan Africans, is real because it has continued to disappoint them throughout their lived experiences. However, optimism about the United States having more open doors for opportunity, for some, is very
encouraging. Many sub-Saharan Africans do resist overcoming their fear of politics, a point also made by Voicu and Comsa (2014).

Moreover, immigrants’ experience is influenced by prior civic political experience, especially oppressive backgrounds that lead to broken trust, which in hosting countries affects how they engage (Mayan et al., 2013). Sub-Saharan Africans’ prior civic political life has left permanent scars against engagement, although some continue to want to participate in various civic political avenues, although it comes with extra carefulness. Additionally, DeSapio (2011) shows that limited resources affect immigrant engagement efforts. Finally, Africans are worried that if they speak out, they may lose all they have acquired in their hosting countries (Ejorh, 2011). These points were all confirmed in this research of sub-Saharan Africans.

**Research Question 3: themes and subthemes.** The theme for RQ3 is *ubuntu* (I am because you are). Subthemes in this section are collective community responsibility and dignity and identity. Behaviors have motives, especially those that are intentional. This section addresses why sub-Saharan Africans engage in civic political engagement within their communities. There are major underlying motives as to why engagement happens at its core. Although sub-Saharan Africans continue to show up for their communities, they battle many humiliating and degrading approaches from native-born community members.

The previous two sections have generally dealt with how sub-Saharan Africans engage in their hosting countries, how they participate, and how lived experiences have shaped how they think and behave. This section deals with why they are engaged, that is, the motives driving their engagement. Through observations of sub-Saharan African
participants in this study, it was demonstrated that they are communal and collective by their nature and their pride and dignity in being human and African matter a lot.

**Subtheme 1: collective community responsibility.** For Africans, it is an intrinsic nature to always put the community first. As many of the participants alluded, every community member must help other community members. Furthermore, they are engaged because somebody was once kind to them. Therefore, they are obligated to give back to the community. These two subthemes are categorized as both social and political.

To sub-Saharan Africans, giving back to the community never fails individuals. The point referenced by Michels and Graaf (2010) that volunteering with organizations in the community help with the necessary skills. This point has been supported by the literature, showing that involvement with political leaders and neighborhoods can change people's attitudes (Hays, 2015). A community must never be left to dry out; it must at all times be replenished and given to so that there is surplus to continue giving to the people living in it. Civic political engagement is a form of appreciation and protection toward the United States. It is a form and a way to show love for the country that has given so much to the people who had nowhere to go.

Engagement in one’s community is a home value that Africans take with them everywhere they go. Werfel (2016) stated that people who were engaged in their community before are more likely to continue to engage in other social organizations like nonprofits. Also, the United States has given so much to sub-Saharan Africans, and they must give back even in the face of adversities and prejudices. Sub-Saharan Africans embrace other people; it is their way of life. However, Bilodeau (2008) shows that
immigrants who come from repressive backgrounds are less likely to engage, especially in political activities.

Life is complete when sub-Saharan Africans can see other people’s lives are livable. This is a sub-Saharan African way, passed down for generations. Civic political engagement is a way to show respect to one’s community, elders, and ancestors. Africans engage because they see their neighbors participating, and it is an African way of life to give to your community. Flanagan and Levine (2010) argue that, indeed, civic political engagement is a way to keep the neighborhood safe, livable, help other immigrants, and to give back.

Furthermore, giving one’s time and participation have benefits to the person doing the giving. It helps to create a sense of gratification for people who give their time (Martinez et al., 2011; Stukas, Snyder, & Clary, 2016). Moreover, civic engagement adds meaning to a person’s life, especially in how they feel connected to others (Flanagan & Levine, 2010). These two points in the literature have been corroborated by this research. Additionally, togetherness or social ties do help immigrants in general in how they accustomed and integrated into their hosting communities (Kamya, 1997). Sub-Saharan African participants help others so that they remain a part of a collective community, and it is their responsibility.

Subtheme 2: dignity and identity. Civic political engagement for sub-Saharan Africans is a matter of pride, finding a niche, believing in one’s community, and underneath all, it is an effort of trying to find the lost identity and creating a long-term sense of belonging that refugee life and living in foreign land put into question. Civic political engagement is fighting to protect the community, a community that is often
neglected, uninvited to be at discussion tables where policies and major decisions are made. Dignity and identity are making sure that those voices are heard, voices with accents and unfamiliarity are heard and represented. It is a matter of group preservation, making sure that they are counted, and creating presence among and with voices of reason and dialogues in their communities.

Bergsresser et al. (2013) talked about social opportunity and solidarity, which is a form of inclusion, and this research project concurs that sub-Saharan Africans are looking for inclusion in their new land. Many sub-Saharan Africans know that their countries of origin, for the most part, are no longer the same; they have changed since they left them behind. They do realize that because they have been away so long in the camps and foreign lands, part of them, such as cultures, customs, languages, manners, and perspectives, may have permanently changed. They are, for the most part, aliens to their own people and remain as foreigners everywhere they go both in their own birth countries and in hosting nations. Therefore, civic political engagement in hosting countries is a method and a mechanism to rekindle and regroup the lost self, dignity, and identity. Finally, sub-Saharan Africans recognized that the United States government is much more accepting and welcoming to their identity and dignity than their homeland governments. Therefore, they are able to much more freely exercise and express who they are, so political engagement is easier.

Moreover, there are several points that the research finds in common with the literature. First, people are politically active because they desire fairness, a sense of pride, and civic duty (Gerber et al., 2016), and pride produces identity (Mathews, 2014). Second, in cities that are inclusive of immigrants politically through the efforts of service
delivery, the immigrant population is usually engaged in high numbers (Ebert & Okamoto, 2013; Hays, 2015; and Levine & Gershenson, 2014). Immigrants want to be part of the hosting nations when given a chance and this is the same sentiment for sub-Saharan Africans. Third, the absence of welcoming behaviors to immigrants, such as threats by the native-born and the government increases disengagement, mistrust, negative attitudes, and seeking of services by immigrants (Ebert & Okamoto, 2013; Levine & Gershenson, 2014; Maxwell, 2008). Rather than enduring humiliation and disrespect, they rather distance themselves and stay at home and watch TV, a point also supported by DeSipio (2011).

Fourth, associations are formed in the African communities to help address issues in hosting countries (Ejorh, 2011; Owusu, 2000). This is a way for sub-Saharan Africans to still have communities, remain active in their hosting communities, and protect their values. Fifth and final, mobilization as a coping approach is transferred over to hosting countries to help establish political power and ease resettlements (Ejorh, 2011). Sub-Saharan Africans want to feel still that they have a place they belong to and call home and want still to be a part of social and political processes when conducive. All these points add up to building and preserving dignity and identity for the sub-Saharan Africans.

Limitations

This section discusses problems encountered during research that have affected in some way the research outcomes. The topics discussed in this section are participants’ selection, the position of the researcher, and the method of data collection. Overall, the researcher had four focus groups, with a total of 24 participants.
**Participant selection.** All participants were mainly from East Africa. The study would have benefited more if the participants had included other sub-Saharan African countries in the west and south. Also, the study ended up being comprised solely of former refugees or people who came to the United States because of war. The study would have been more comprehensive if it had included those who came to the United States on a lottery visa or immigrated voluntarily.

The participants were from an extended network of the researcher, and to a certain extent, they were acquaintances within the sub-Saharan African communities. The researcher is a well-connected individual within the refugee and sub-Saharan African communities. It was also difficult to find participants who met the requirements and who were also not known by the researcher or his network. The research would have benefited if the recruitment avenues were widened than just among the researcher’s acquaintances and network. The research would have benefitted as well if there was a chance to interview those who do not speak English and who are usually not engage beyond their ethnic community’s civic political engagement.

**Position of the researcher.** The researcher is an immigrant, refugee, and a sub-Saharan African from South Sudan and one of the leaders in his community. The researcher’s position was apparent and clear to the participants from the beginning of the process. Considering that the researcher holds a leadership position in the community, this might have been intimidating to the participants. Furthermore, although bracketing was done in the best possible ways, based on the descriptive phenomenology recommendations, it is impossible to know if the research was completely free of bias and prior knowledge considering that the researcher is very familiar with the participants.
Method of data collection. Focus groups were used for the study as a way to collect data. However, considering that sub-Saharan African cultures in the diaspora are no longer completely pure or authentic, circular group conversation may not have been the best. These Africans had been refugees and immigrated to the United States, so much of their cultures are lost in their transcontinental migrations. Therefore, using other methods like interviews and semi-structured interview approach over focus groups may yield different findings. Also, the participants spoke English as a second language for this study. However, it may have helped to use ethnic languages to give participants comfort and purity in the expression of their thoughts and feelings.

Recommendations

This section discusses multiple factors for policy practice, community leaders, and leadership.

Recommendation for policy practice. First, sub-Saharan Africans are not African Americans. For instance, many of the participants in the study were from South Sudan, Congo, Somalia, and Oromo-Ethiopia. Therefore, the participants unanimously agreed that they wanted to be called South Sudanese Americans, Somali Americans, Congolese Americans, and Oromo-Ethiopian Americans. Although some of the participants were not too sure of what African American means, they were later as the discussion got deeper, and were convinced that they would prefer their own country of birth rather than the hybrid term African American.

The term African American is for American Blacks who cannot trace their roots back to any specific country in the continent of Africa. In other words, although they love their continent of Africa, it was borderline offensive to most of the participants to be
called African Americans because they believe they know where they came from in the
continent of Africa and they have their own countries. The literature has concurred with
this statement as Black Africans refer to themselves as Black in the United States and not
African Americans (Capps, McCabe, & Fix, 2012; Clark, 2008). Misrepresentation in the
policy world creates a question of dignity and identify for sub-Saharan Africans. Sub-
Saharan Africans left their own countries to seek safe places that would recognize their
need for dignity and identity. There is a need to update policies that deal with identity
demographics and allow recognition for native Africans. Having a section that explicitly
shows African-born identity is essential for the dignity and identity of Africans in
general. Sub-Saharan Africans are not African Americans; they are Somali Americans,
South Sudanese Americans, Ethiopian Americans, or Congolese Americans.

Immigrants are not the same, they come from different countries and they require
different levels of needs and engagement. Sub-Saharan Africans are highly educated
immigrants and should be looked at as people with wisdom, knowledge, and competency
that can add to the discussion of better diversity in the workforce and communities,
corporate America, not-for-profit, and government sectors.

Community and policy leaders should be very proactive and intentional with how they
engage sub-Saharan Africans, they are very resourceful, and they can contribute
tremendously to the community they live in civic political engagement life. Sub-Saharan
Africans have a very strong work ethic, want to engage, and are educated. For diversity
and representation, African Americans, although they are Black, cannot speak for the
African-born. It is disrespectful to a diverse group with separate identities and
demographics like African-born and African Americans under one umbrella.
**Recommendation for community leaders.** First, it is important that African communities help to have places they can gather to share village stories, cultures, and traditions with their kids. There is a huge need for community centers, a need to explore this option as a means to help parents keep kids off the streets. The first generation is completely disconnected from their immigrant parents and community centers or spaces that can allow them to be together as an ethnic community may this disconnect.

Second, to help strengthen sub-Saharan Africans, who share similarities in their struggles with other American minority groups, efforts should be made to have native-born American minorities mentor them. For example, organizations that deal with voter turnout drives, volunteerism, representation, and so on should link with sub-Saharan Africans and other immigrants’ communities and encourage them simultaneously. Sub-Saharan Africans have a lot of resilience, and it is to the advantage of Black Americans to explore this through intentional invitation, for Africans to share their stories of struggles and have the same be reciprocated between Africans and Black Americans.

Third, sub-Saharan Africans are very communal people, and Black organizations should learn from Africans to help restore what they have lost for centuries and generations. The sense of pride, dignity, and identity that Africans carry with them could be a means to resurrect many of the neighborhoods that are plagued with trash, violence, and shabbiness. Using the African ubuntu principles could make many of the neighborhoods more livable and friendly.

Fourth and finally, it is imperative that the policy world looks at how they refer to the sub-Saharan Africans’ identity and dignity. Lack of proper distinction does send uninviting messages. Sub-Saharan Africans are not African Americans; they are South
Sudanese Americans, Congolese Americans, etc. For mutual advancement, it is important that groups like African Americans reach out to sub-Saharan Africans to rekindle a portion of lost ancestral roots and heritage. This can be done through mutual mentorships.

**Recommendation for leadership.** First, Africans have a philosophy called ubuntu. This philosophy can be used to enhance leadership styles. The United States needs to embrace the new reality, which is a country and place where people come to embrace new meanings and identities, especially for refugees and immigrants of sub-Saharan Africa. There are two main concepts that Bolman and Deal (2017) talk about in regard to bringing changes to organizations and settings. The symbolic frame is about establishing alternative practices to help commemorate the present, past, and future. The leadership world needs to embrace sub-Saharan Africans as a group that is vital to the past, present, and future of the United States. There has not been an acknowledgment of the contribution made to the United States socially and economically by Africans.

Second, Bolman and Deal (2017) also talk about the political frame concept, which is the idea of constructing spaces where conversations are fostered, allowing new meanings to be made. There is a need for political willpower in the conversation about inclusion. Sub-Saharan Africans are a growing population that needs to be given the same platform as Latinos, Asians, and not get clustered under the pseudonym of Blackness.

In summary, the issue of sub-African participation in hosting communities requires that they are acknowledged as a group that is socially, politically, and economically competitive as everyone in the United States. Also, there is a need for leadership through the political will to allow sensible practices of inclusivity. To interpret Bolman and Deal (2017), communities and organizations that do not create inclusiveness
risk disengagement, conflicts between us versus them, losing a sense of belonging, and people becoming isolating. The symbolism and political frame in managing communities can reduce disengagement and isolation. Leaders need to be inclusive by practicing ubuntu, and they need political will.

**Future research.** There are several future research recommendations here. First, there is a need to deeply study sub-Saharan African motives for becoming naturalized citizens of the United States, as well as what roles parents played in young adults becoming citizens. This should be done in focus groups. Second, the research questions studied here should be posted to sub-Saharan Africans who do not speak English in the United States. Third, the same research questions here should be replicated with other sub-Saharan Africans from the west and south who are not refugees but immigrants.

Fourth, research should be conducted to examine the effectiveness of ethnic-based community associations versus native-born agencies serving refugees and immigrants in service delivery sectors. Fifth, it is important to understand the perception of African Americans about native-born Africans, a prejudiced perception of whether they think native Africans have it easy, same, or not. Sixth, a study to understand why more Black African immigrants are more educated than Black Americans would be beneficial.

Seventh, in what way does the dignity and identity question influence civic political participation for minorities in America, especially Blacks and other immigrant groups? Eighth, the idea of using ubuntu in fighting crimes in neighborhoods should be explored and studied because sub-Saharan Africans’ first generations are falling into gangs, and might ubuntu mitigate this dilemma?
All these questions generally are fundamental to the lived experiences and coping mechanism of being Black in America, a land that is constantly looking at Black people as the other and foreigners in the only place they have known. Although Black people have been here longer than most people, they are still referred to as African Americans instead of Black Americans. What do they need to do to be considered full Americans rather than half Americans?

**Conclusion**

This section will summarize the research and findings. Sub-Saharan Africa encompasses are all the countries in Africa except seven countries that are considered Middle Eastern countries in the north. Sub-Saharan Africans are the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the western hemisphere. Civic political engagement continues to be a critical element in how people in communities’ functions, especially in how immigrants integrate into the larger hosting nations’ cultures and ways of life. Many studies, including this one, have clearly affirmed that civic political engagement is a two-sided issue; people need to be invited and engage.

In the political sector, minority groups are ignored by political entities, candidates, leaders, and all this contributes to a lack of political representation (Banducci et al., 2004; Sobolweska et al., 2013). Lack of representation continues to lower the numbers of political turnout for minorities such as Latinos and Blacks compared to Whites (Census Bureau, 2017; Krosgad & Lopez, 2017). Politically, any entity that ignores sub-Saharan Africans will have a hard time winning elections (Erwing & Cantor, 2014).
Studies have shown that civic political engagement continues to decline, especially in the areas settled by immigrants, including voter turnout, representation, mobilization by candidates, etc. All these contribute to a lack of representation in policy and other necessary areas such as police, fire, parks, social welfare, and so on for minorities (Sass & Mehay, 2003). Moreover, as a lack of representation continues for minorities, many African immigrant matters remained understudied, little scholarship is dedicated to understanding immigrant civic political engagement, and lack of attention to these issues persists. While other minorities do get attention, sub-Saharan Africans get little to nothing in their hosting communities.

The theory used in this study was political representation theory. The theory is defined by Pitkin (1967) as officials acting in the interest of the people who elected them actively and responsively. The theory has four tenets: formative or authoritative, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive. The theory stresses that those who are within the parameters of the policy at hand have a right to participate and be involved in the formation and framing processes (Pande, 2003).

Using a qualitative research design, the study was based on the lens of descriptive phenomenology by Edmund Husserl, which is a way to describe “pure” lived experiences of people. The purpose and the significance of this study relative to the theory were to have a good understanding of lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans in how they go about civic political engagement in their hosting communities.

Political representation theory best suited this study as immigrant and refugees lived a multifaceted unstructured and structured ecological lives all over the world, and
how those lived experiences cumulatively shape and morph them into engaging or isolated community members.

Political representation theory is a relevant theoretical framework here due to the underrepresentation that sub-Saharan Africans, minorities, and immigrants experience in general. It is the hope of this research that grassroots community leaders, politicians and candidates, and policymakers do engage sub-Saharan Africans in their communities for better outcomes. Below are the three questions that guided this research:

1. In what ways do naturalized sub-Saharan Africans participate in civic political activities?

2. In what ways do the lived experiences of naturalized sub-Saharan Africans influence their civic political engagement?

3. If engaged, what is the nature of sub-Saharan Africans naturalized citizens’ motivation for engagement?

The research and findings here have many points of agreement around the benefits and concerns of civic political engagement. It is clear that leadership matters in fostering an effective and inclusive mechanism in moving people forward. Civic political engagement continues to be a critical element in developing and harnessing inclusive communities. Research and findings here demonstrate that every human being is capable of engagement; there are multiple factors that constitute engagement, namely culture and languages, invitation and approaches, seeing other people like you in leadership roles, backgrounds, resources, education, and opportunities.

However, leaders continue to be elusive about the reality that looms around neighborhoods and their needs. Minority communities, especially when their perception
and attitude are shaped by discrimination and exclusion like the sub-Saharan Africans, tend to get discouraged, and this disengagement leads to isolation that is rarely restored without intentional and tangible inclusiveness.

First, sub-Saharan Africans continue to show up in civic political arenas where they are not wanted. They vote, they help in campaigns, they advocate for their neighbors and fellow new Americans, and they give their times through volunteering. Engagement is a way for sub-Saharan Africans to build affinity with their new lands; however, the new land continues to ignore and not engage although they continue to persist and find ways to be a part of social and political formatives and developments.

Second, sub-Saharan Africans come from backgrounds that are tremendously challenging socially and politically. However, they manage to live through them and somehow come out better prepared to want to engage consistently. The lived experiences for sub-Saharan Africans do shape how they become. However, in this sense, they are more resilient in the face of discrimination, underrepresentation and continue to have the courage to want to fight their fears, although the world they live in gives no reason not to be afraid. It is important for leaders to actively know where sub-Saharan Africans have been, and their business to engage them. The trauma they have lived in the process of escaping wars and violence in home countries, the uncertainty of the future in refugee camps, and feeling of inadequacy, rejections, and unwanted presence through exclusion by hosting countries is defeating. However, they continue to show resilience, compassion, and hope wherever they are through their smiles.

Third, sub-Saharan Africans continue to see themselves in other people. Therefore, their reasons for engagement are motivated by the desire for collective
success, which is taught early on during their formative years. For sub-Saharan Africans, community builds pride, dignity, identity. For many of them who have lived in foreign lands, they continue to hold on to their core values. They give to the communities that are hosting them because they see themselves through them.

There are so many leadership lessons that sub-Saharan Africans do have and can teach to communities. The power of empathy and altruism, diversity and inclusion, social justice, and ecological respect for one’s community, morals and ethics, and the power of resilience define leadership for sub-Saharan Africans. There is so much that can be learned from sub-Saharan Africans, and much attention is needed to understand how they become so resilient in the face of so many challenges.
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Appendix A

Data Collection Tool

1. Tell me a little bit about your background.
   a. Why did you come to the United States and how long have you been here?
   b. How old were you when you came to United States?
   c. How would you describe your new life in the United States?
   d. Why did you decide to get naturalized?

2. How did your experiences in your birth country prepare you for your life in the new country?

3. What positive experiences have you encountered that are different politically in the United States than in your birth country?

4. What do you do in your neighborhood and community that involve other people outside your own ethnic community?

5. What are some of the reasons you are involved or not involved in your community?

6. What are some of your interaction with politics and politicians around your local ethnic community, local government, and larger community?

7. When presented with the opportunity, would you personally ever run for political office here in the United States? Why or why not?

8. Discuss any recommendations you have for your community leaders?

9. Is there any other information that was not addressed in the above questions you would like to discuss?