

# Perceived Benefits of Civic Virtue Integration in Urban Zambia: A Phenomenological Study in Kanyama and Mandevu Constituencies

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.91100073>

Received: 18 November 2025; Accepted: 24 November 2025; Published: 29 November 2025

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the perceived benefits and social impacts of integrating civic virtues in Zambian society, with a focus on Kanyama and Mandevu constituencies in Lusaka. Guided by an integrated theoretical framework combining Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Communitarianism, the research investigates how civic virtues are acquired, reinforced, and practised within urban communities. Using a qualitative study approach and a phenomenological case study design, a sample size of 25 was arrived at using purposive and homogeneous sampling in order to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences in benefiting from civic virtues. Data were collected through focus group discussions with teachers and interviews with Neighbourhood Watch members. Thematic analysis helped to arrive at the study findings. The findings reveal that civic virtues, such as transparency, accountability, respect for human rights, and patriotism, are cultivated through observational learning, role modelling, and community engagement. Participants emphasized that civic virtue integration promotes social cohesion, good governance, economic development, and a culture of inclusivity. Neighbourhood Watch programs emerged as key mechanisms for reinforcing civic behaviour by fostering trust. For policymakers and educators, the study highlights the need to invest in community-based civic education initiatives that leverage local leadership and participatory structures. Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of civic virtue programs and examine how digital platforms might complement traditional modes of civic learning.

**Keywords:** social fragmentation, social cohesion, trust, civic virtue-integration, social learning theory and Communitarianism

## INTRODUCTION

Civic virtues, a distinct category of human virtues, are the settled dispositions that reflect the qualities essential to being an engaged and responsible member of a political community. Drawing on classical philosophy, particularly the teachings of Aristotle, civic virtues are understood as enduring characteristics that embody excellence specific to the realm of citizenship and public life. These virtues encompass traits such as honesty, fairness, respect for others, and a commitment to the common good, which are crucial for fostering a healthy, functioning democracy (Lovett, 2014).

In an era marked by increasing polarisation and social fragmentation, the cultivation of civic virtues becomes more vital than ever, as they serve not only to enhance individual character but also to promote social cohesion and trust among community members. Furthermore, civic virtues are essential for empowering citizens to actively engage in civic activities such as voting, community service, and public discourse and to uphold democratic values and principles. By developing a deeper understanding of civic virtues, citizens can better appreciate their role in shaping both individual behaviour and the broader fabric of society, ultimately contributing to the flourishing of democratic governance and civic life. "Civic virtues" is also a normative and

multi-dimensional concept. It typically includes citizenship behaviours, civic responsibility, public-mindedness, tolerance, and community engagement.

Globally, it has been recognised that civic virtues are vital to the well-being of society, given the polarisation that plagues our societies today. Moreover, the (Darnell and Kristján Kristjánsson, 2020) lack of civic virtues at a global level has led to a decline in social trust. Government trust and institutional trust in America stood at 19% in 2015 (American Journal of Democracy, 2024). Furthermore, civic engagement globally, as one of the civic virtues, has led to lower electoral turnout and increased distrust in government (OECD Report, 2023). Kimpell (2015) conducted a study on republican civic virtue, enlightened self-interest and Tocqueville. Tocqueville's claim in *Democracy in America* about the link between associations and a vibrant public sphere is interpreted especially by neo-republicans in political theory as aligned with their argument that civic virtue can and ought to be fostered in today's democracies.

Studies by Kahne and Westheimer (2017) highlight the critical role of civic education in fostering civic virtues among the youth. Their research emphasises that educational institutions are pivotal sites for instilling values of civic responsibility and participation. They advocate for educational curricula that foster critical thinking, dialogue, and community engagement as essential components of civic virtue development. The value of responsibility in the textbooks embraces not only the meanings of self-obligation and accountability, but responsibility is also defined as an individual's sense of self-discipline in their behaviour that enables them to avoid conflict and strive for harmonious social order. The other important values are "Respect", "Helpful", "Hard-working" and "Caring". This study provided an example of how a multi-ethnic nation state like Malaysia promotes these moral values through its educational curriculum, for political legitimacy and forging national unity, a component that was explored in the current study using a qualitative method.

Civic virtues are also a concern in Africa as the AU Agenda 2063 emphasises the virtues of civic engagement, good governance and human rights in the achievement of the goals of the continent (The Africa We Want, 2015). Recognizing the value of civic virtues, the AU promotes good governance, democracy and human rights as these are essential for civic virtues to thrive. Adediran & Ogunleye (2024) contended that inappropriate civic values among Nigerians have deeply eroded the fabric of Nigerian society, and the only remedy is to inculcate fundamental patriotic values in the younger ones, who are the future leaders, through the learning of Civic Education. It is pertinent to note that a successful process of solving the present challenges of our society through the inculcation of civic virtues in our youths requires effective civic education in our schools.

Zembere (2018) conducted a study on democratic citizenship education in Zimbabwe's higher education system and its implications for teaching and learning. The study aimed to examine the impact of democratic citizenship education on higher education in Zimbabwe between 1980 and 2015. Critical inquiry was employed as the primary research design, drawing on social constructivism and transformation as frameworks that informed this research. The research used deconstruction as a method, and this enabled the research to claim openness in thinking about university education in Zimbabwe to unforeseeable in becoming being other than it is today, so that university education can contend with issues of inequality, corruption, as well as electoral and ethnic violence in whatever singularity.

In the Zambian context, civic virtue encompasses various aspects that promote the well-being and development of society. According to Kafukulu (2018), civic virtues in Zambia include respect for authority, community solidarity, and participation in volunteer work. Additionally, Simutanyi (2015) highlights the importance of social cohesion, tolerance, and respect for diversity as essential components of civic virtue in Zambia's multicultural society. These civic virtues are shaped by Zambia's cultural, historical, and socio-economic context, and they encompass a range of settled dispositions that reflect the moral excellences necessary for contributing positively to societal well-being and governance. Several studies illustrate the vital role that educational institutions play in cultivating civic virtues.

Vincent (2018) examined the influence of values education and the interplay of religion in shaping civic virtues, particularly through the lens of the teaching of 'fundamental British values.' The study pointed out that the

integration of religious elements within secular educational frameworks can create both opportunities and challenges for inclusivity and broad civic engagement. Furthermore, research by Tan (2018) emphasised that diverse moral values conveyed through educational curricula could serve as a foundation for fostering responsible citizenship in multi-ethnic societies. However, inquiries into their efficacy and applicability within local contexts remain underexplored.

Reijers (2023) conducted a study on technology and civic virtue. The study highlights that a major technological trend is the increasing focus on the person: technical systems personalise, customise, and tailor to the person in both beneficial and troubling ways. This trend has moved beyond the realm of commerce and has become a matter of public governance, where systems for citizen risk scoring, predictive policing, and social credit scores proliferate. What these systems have in common is that they may target the person and her ethical and political dispositions, her virtues.

Mainde, Mpolomoka & Mwansa's (2022) study examined localising Civic Education's integrative approaches on the development of moral and civic competencies among secondary school learners. A descriptive research design was used targeting 96 respondents who were selected to participate in collecting primary data, which was analyzed thematically. The study used 'Social Learning Theory' expounded by Albert Bandura, which stresses the importance of observation and imitation of behavioural samples, which meet the moral standards of society. Through this theory, it is hoped that learners will observe and imitate positive community behaviours, which will be integrated with Civic Education's integrative approaches in developing moral and civic competencies in the community.

This study aimed to investigate how civic virtues are perceived to benefit Zambian society by examining community insights in Kanyama and Mandevu, institutional perspectives, and cultural interpretations that inform their integration into social and governance structures.

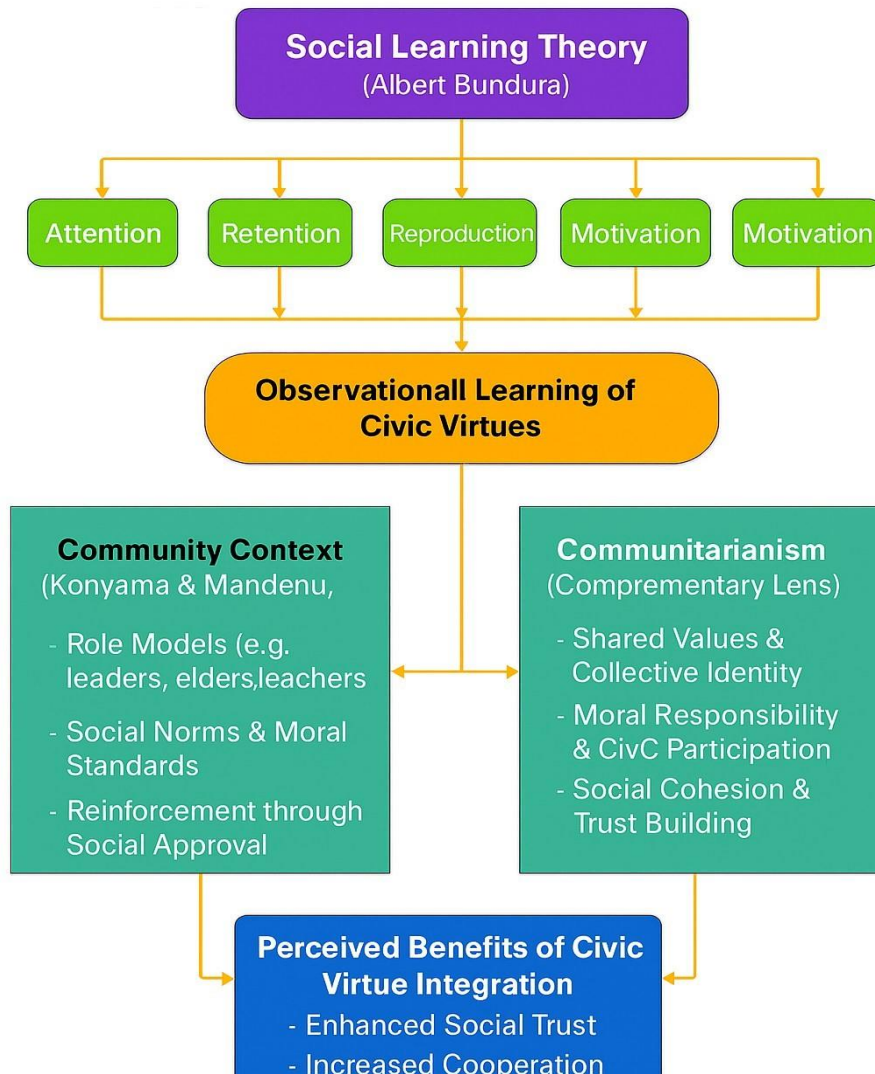
### **Theoretical Framework of the Study**

This study is grounded in Social Learning Theory, as articulated by Albert Bandura, which posits that individuals acquire behaviours through observation, imitation, and modelling within social contexts. Civic virtues, such as responsibility, tolerance, and cooperation, are not innate traits but are cultivated through exposure to role models and reinforcement of socially approved conduct. In the Zambian communities of Kanyama and Mandevu, civic behaviour is shaped by communal interactions, making Social Learning Theory a fitting lens for understanding how civic virtues are transmitted and internalized. The Banduran theory emphasizes four key processes: attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation. These processes are evident in how community members observe civic-minded individuals (e.g., local leaders, teachers, religious figures), retain and reproduce their behaviours, and are motivated by social approval or communal harmony. The theory also accounts for the role of environmental factors, such as poverty, education, and social cohesion, which influence the likelihood of civic virtue adoption.

To deepen the analysis, the study also draws on Communitarianism, a philosophical framework that underscores the role of shared values, collective identity, and mutual responsibility in shaping civic norms. Communitarianism complements Social Learning Theory by emphasizing that civic virtues are not only learned but also sustained through active participation in community life. In contexts like Kanyama and Mandevu, where social bonds and collective identity are strong, civic virtues thrive when individuals see themselves as part of a moral community.

The integrated framework illuminates how civic virtues are both socially learned and communally reinforced. It provides a robust foundation for interpreting the lived experiences of participants and understanding the perceived benefits of civic virtue integration, such as increased trust, cooperation, and social cohesion.

**FIGURE 1: Integrated Theoretical Framework for Civic Virtue Acquisition and Reinforcement in Kanyama and Mandevu Constituencies in Luska, Zambia**



Source: Integrated by researchers from the Social Learning Theory (Albert Bandura, 1977) and the Communitarianism Theory (Amitai Etzioni, 2003) in the context of Kanyama and Mandevu communities.

## METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative approach. This approach was suitable for this type of study as it allowed the researcher to communicate with the study participants (Kasonde, 2013). The study used a Phenomenological case design, which is a method of inquiry that entails an in-depth exploration of the civic virtues using the lived experiences of participants in a real-world context.

Purposive sampling was used, and the sample size was between 25, subject to reaching sample saturation from the Kanyama and Mandevu communities of Lusaka District. In this study, the participants were chosen with the intention to enrich data on the lived experiences of participants on how to facilitate an enabling environment to have a complete understanding of the current state of civic virtues in Zambian Societies. The researcher also used homogeneous sampling in order to gain a deeper understanding of their lived experiences in civic virtues. Primary data was collected through the use of focus group discussions and oral interviews using an interview guide. These tools made it easier for the researchers to gather primary data. Data was coded and analysed thematically. This enabled the researchers to draw well-informed conclusions from the findings, supported by a deep understanding of the meanings and significance of the collected data. Themes that emerged from this study were used to conclude each finding.

The researchers also cross-checked and validated the responses using member checking criteria. To ensure dependability, the collected data was compared and cross-checked to ensure consistency and reduce the impact of individual biases. To ensure confirmability, the study detailed each step of the data analysis to ensure that the findings accurately portrayed the participants’ responses. To ensure transferability of the findings, the study used a critical case sampling technique to come up with a decisive sample. To ensure the authenticity of the study, the researcher purposively selected appropriate participants who formed the study sample.

## RESULTS

The following layouts present thematic findings from FGDs and interviews among the participants from both the Kanyama and Mandevu constituencies.

Table 3.1: Perceived Benefits of Integrating Civic Virtues in Zambian Society (FGD with Teachers)

Theme	Description	Verbatim Quote
<b>Social Cohesion &amp; Unity</b>	Civic virtues foster unity and collective identity	“It promotes social cohesion and unity.”
<b>Good Governance &amp; Anti-Corruption</b>	Encourages ethical leadership and reduces corrupt practices	“It promotes good governance and reduces corruption.”
<b>Peace &amp; Stability</b>	Enhances societal harmony and reduces conflict	“It promotes peace and stability in our society.”
<b>Economic Development</b>	Supports national development and economic progress	“We believe that integrating civic virtues promote economic growth and development.”
<b>Human Rights &amp; Dignity</b>	Reinforces respect for individual rights and dignity	“It also promoted respect for human rights and dignity.”
<b>Environmental &amp; Community Responsibility</b>	Cultivates care for the environment and civic duty	“It promoted responsibility towards the community and the environment.”
<b>Patriotism &amp; National Pride</b>	Strengthens national identity and pride	“We believe that integrating civic virtues promote patriotism and national pride.”
<b>Community Participation</b>	Encourages active involvement in societal affairs	“It promoted community participation and engagement.”
<b>Transparency &amp; Accountability</b>	Promotes openness in governance	“It promoted transparency and accountability in governance.”
<b>Social Justice &amp; Equality</b>	Advances fairness and equal treatment	“It also promoted social justice and equality.”
<b>Belonging &amp; Identity</b>	Builds a shared sense of citizenship	“It promoted a sense of belonging and identity among citizens.”
<b>Respect, Tolerance &amp; Inclusivity</b>	Fosters mutual respect and inclusive values	“It promoted a culture of respect, tolerance and inclusivity.”

Table 3.2: Positive Impacts of Civic Virtues on Individuals and Communities

Impact Area	Description	Verbatim Quote
<b>Community Bonding</b>	Strengthens interpersonal relationships and unity	“Civic virtues promoted a sense of community and social cohesion.”
<b>Civic Engagement</b>	Inspires volunteerism and service	“They have inspired us to participate in community service projects and volunteer work.”
<b>Responsibility &amp; Duty</b>	Encourages civic responsibility	“Civic virtues promoted a sense of responsibility and duty towards the community.”
<b>Role Modeling</b>	Motivates individuals to lead by example	“They inspired us to become role models and champions of civic virtues.”

<b>Human Rights &amp; Dignity</b>	Reinforces ethical treatment of others	“Civic virtues promoted respect for human rights and dignity.”
<b>Transparency &amp; Accountability</b>	Enhances integrity in public service	“They promoted transparency and accountability in governance.”
<b>Patriotism &amp; National Pride</b>	Cultivates national loyalty	“Civic virtues promoted a sense of patriotism and national pride.”
<b>Civic Participation</b>	Encourages involvement in development initiatives	“They inspired us to participate in civic activities and community development projects.”
<b>Social Justice &amp; Equality</b>	Promotes fairness and equity	“Civic virtues promoted social justice and equality.”
<b>Belonging &amp; Identity</b>	Builds inclusive community identity	“They promoted a sense of belonging and identity among community members.”
<b>Citizenship Development</b>	Inspires personal growth and civic responsibility	“Civic virtues inspired us to become better citizens.”
<b>Respect, Tolerance &amp; Inclusivity</b>	Encourages inclusive and respectful behaviour	“They promote a culture of respect, tolerance and inclusivity.”

Table 3.3 shows a Social Context for Civic Virtue Integration (Neighbourhood Watch Interviews)

Contextual Element	Description	Verbatim Quote
<b>Community Engagement</b>	Events foster neighborly bonds and collective action	“We’ve had block parties, potluck dinners... that help us get to know each other.”
<b>Trust Building</b>	Builds trust between residents and law enforcement	“Neighbourhood Watch has been instrumental in building trust... with the police department.”
<b>Social Cohesion</b>	Promotes mutual support and cooperation	“When you know your neighbors, you’re more likely to look out for each other.”
<b>Resource Needs</b>	Integration efforts require institutional support	“There’s need for more resources and support to effectively integrate civic virtues.”
<b>Opportunities &amp; Challenges</b>	Mixed landscape of enabling and constraining factors	“The social context is characterized by a mix of challenges and opportunities.”

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a robust alignment between the perceived benefits and impacts of civic virtue integration and the theoretical constructs embedded in the integrated framework. Drawing on Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and the communitarian lens, the results illustrate how civic virtues are both acquired and reinforced within the socio-cultural context of Kanyama and Mandevu constituencies.

### Civic Virtue Acquisition through Observational Learning

Participants’ emphasis on role modelling, particularly by teachers, elders, and community leaders, reflects the Attention component of Bandura’s theory. These figures serve as visible exemplars of civic behaviour, capturing the attention of community members and setting normative standards. The repeated references to values such as transparency, accountability, and respect for human rights suggest that these virtues are not only observed but internalized, corresponding to the ‘Retention’ phase. This internalization is evident in participants’ articulation of civic virtues as foundational to peace, stability, and national development. This view is supported by Kimpell (2015).

The Reproduction of civic behaviour is demonstrated through participants’ engagement in community service, volunteerism, and civic activities. These behaviours indicate that civic virtues are not merely conceptual ideals but are actively practised as alluded to by Kahne and Westheimer (2017) when he supports the fostering of civic virtues among the youth. The Motivation to sustain these behaviours appears to be driven by both intrinsic values

and extrinsic reinforcement, such as social approval, community recognition, and the tangible benefits of civic engagement, like improved governance and social cohesion.

### **Reinforcement through Communitarian Values**

The communitarian dimension of the framework is strongly reflected in the findings. Participants consistently referenced shared values, collective identity, and moral responsibility as central to civic virtue integration. Statements such as “It promoted a sense of belonging and identity among citizens” and “It promoted a culture of respect, tolerance and inclusivity” underscore the role of communal norms in shaping civic behaviour. These values foster a sense of moral obligation and mutual accountability, which are essential for sustaining civic engagement.

Neighbourhood Watch programs emerged as a practical mechanism for reinforcing civic virtues within the community. Participants described these programs as instrumental in building trust between residents and law enforcement, facilitating community events, and fostering interpersonal relationships. These activities contribute to social cohesion and trust *building*, which are key contextual elements in the framework. This is supported by scholars like Kafukulu (2018) and Sumutanyi (2015). Moreover, the call for increased resources and institutional support highlights the structural challenges that may hinder the full realization of civic virtue integration similar to what Adediran & Ogunleye (2024) opined in the Nigerian context. In addition, as Chanda (2024) noted, civic education initiatives in Zambia must be context-sensitive and community-driven to effectively promote national development.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study demonstrates that the integration of civic virtues in Zambian society, particularly in urban constituencies like Kanyama and Mandevu, is a socially embedded process shaped by observation, communal reinforcement, and contextual engagement. The findings affirm that civic virtues promote social cohesion, good governance, and national development, while also fostering individual responsibility and collective identity.

By aligning empirical insights with Bandura’s Social Learning Theory and Communitarianism, the study offers a robust framework for understanding how civic virtues are acquired and sustained. It underscores the importance of role models, community structures like Neighbourhood Watch, and shared moral standards in reinforcing civic behaviour.

### **Theoretical and Practical Implications**

The integration of Social Learning Theory and Communitarianism provides a nuanced understanding of how civic virtues are cultivated in urban Zambian communities. The findings suggest that civic virtue acquisition is not a linear process but a dynamic interplay between individual observation, communal reinforcement, and contextual facilitation. This has important implications for policy and practice. Educational institutions, community organizations, and local governance structures must collaborate to create environments that model, reinforce, and sustain civic virtues.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of localized interventions, such as Neighbourhood Watch programs, that leverage existing social networks and communal values. These initiatives can serve as platforms for civic education, participatory governance, and community development, thereby enhancing the overall civic capacity of the population.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

For policymakers and educators, the study highlights the need to invest in community-based civic education initiatives that leverage local leadership and participatory structures. Future research should explore the longitudinal impacts of civic virtue programs and examine how digital platforms might complement traditional modes of civic learning.

**Funding:** The study received no funding from external sources.

**Declaration of Interest:** None of the authors declared any conflict of interest.

**Acknowledgement:** The Authors acknowledge the help rendered to them by the participants in the study.

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