

**“Do We Stay or Do We Leave?” The Role of Trust and Engagement  
in Students’ Decision Whether to Remain in South Africa**

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**ABSTRACT** This paper focuses on University of Johannesburg (UJ) students’ views on remaining in or leaving South Africa. These views are based on the degree of trust students perceive the government (broadly defined) to be worthy of, and the degree of engagement in the affairs of the country that students are prepared to expend in the context of perceived threats to South African citizens. A survey of 1214 undergraduate students on all four UJ campuses was conducted in 2011. Care was taken that the sample reflected the overall picture of the research population. The data is analysed in terms of a typology that considers the extent to which people either respond to real or perceived threats based on trust or distrust in the government’s ability and willingness to protect their interests as citizens. On this basis, they could furthermore either engage the threatening reality or disengage from it altogether. The paper analyses the extent to which patterns can be identified among different groups of UJ undergraduate students with regard to the four possible responses that emerge from the developed typology: Trusting engagement, trusting disengagement, distrusting engagement and distrusting disengagement.