

# The Civility



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Josephine Omajari

## Dear Readers,

Welcome to the tenth edition of *The Civility* Newsletter by the Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN). This edition highlights recent activities and engagements aimed at strengthening democratic culture, civic participation, and the rule of law in Northern Nigeria.

This volume features a two-day paralegal training program, designed to build the capacity of youth activist to support access to justice, promote human rights awareness, and provide basic legal assistance at the grassroots level.

We also present key outcomes from the Jigawa Town Hall Meeting on Promoting Democracy and Strengthening Political Participation, which brought together citizens, youth leaders, civil society actors, and stakeholders to discuss inclusive governance, electoral participation, and accountability in public leadership.

In addition, this edition covers the Kaduna Roundtable Discussion on Civil Society Support for Democracy in a Politically Charged Nigeria, where participants examined the shrinking civic space, rising political tensions, and the critical role of civil society organizations in safeguarding democratic values and peaceful engagement.

Finally, the newsletter documents a joint statement by Nigerian civil society organizations on the recent United States military operation in Northwest Nigeria, reflecting concerns on its implications for national sovereignty, civilian protection, security governance, and adherence to international human rights and humanitarian standards.

We remain committed to promoting dialogue, civic responsibility, and democratic resilience across Nigeria.

**Disclaimer:** The views expressed in this newsletter are those of OCCEN and do not necessarily reflect the views of its partners or supporters.

Happy Reading!

Josephine Eche Omajari

**The Editor for 'The Civility' Newsletter**

# OCCEN Trains Youth Leaders on Paralegal Services

5<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> November 2025

OCCEN organized 2-Day Paralegal training prepares some selected youth democracy drivers to promote access to justice and support lawyers by performing substantive legal work under supervision. The training equips youth paralegals with legal knowledge, practical skills, ethical awareness, and professional competence. As demand for cost-effective legal services grows, paralegal training has become an essential component of defending human rights and access to justice for marginalized and vulnerable segments of the society.



## Objectives of Paralegal Training

The primary objectives of paralegal training was to:

- Develop foundational knowledge of law and legal procedures
- Build practical skills for legal support work



- Promote human rights works
- Enhance delivery of justice for marginalized and vulnerable segments of the society
- Improve access to justice through skilled legal assistance

The paralegal training covers the following areas:

### Legal Knowledge

- Introduction to law and legal systems
- Civil and criminal law
- Family law
- Constitutional or administrative law
- And other conventions on human rights

### Practical Skills

- Legal research and writing
- Drafting legal documents
- Case management and file organization
- Court procedures and documentation
- Client interviewing and communication

### Ethics and Professional Responsibility

- Confidentiality
- Conflict of interest
- Scope of paralegal practice
- Professional conduct standards

Paralegals play a vital role in improving the work of youth activists and reduce their vulnerability to state abuses, supporting legal services of the marginalized people to access justice.

### Conclusion

Paralegal training is a critical pathway for developing competent legal support professionals. Well-structured programs that balance theory, practical skills, and ethics contribute significantly to the effectiveness of the legal system and access to justice.



# Jigawa Citizen's Town Hall Meeting

25<sup>th</sup> November 2025



## Purpose of the Meeting

The Jigawa Citizen's town hall meeting was organized to provide a platform for community members to engage in open dialogue on democratic governance, civic participation, and local or national issues affecting the Jigawa state. The meeting aimed to encourage transparency, accountability, and public involvement in decision-making processes. The meeting was held in Dutse capital of Jigawa state, at Man Power Development Institute, on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2025.

## Key Topics Discussed

The following major issues were addressed during the meeting:

- Civic participation and voter engagement.
- Accountability and transparency in government.
- Community development and public services
- Youth and marginalized group inclusion in democratic processes.
- Public concerns regarding policy implementation and leadership.
- 

## Summary of Discussions

Participants actively shared their views, concerns, and recommendations. Many emphasized the importance of fair representation, access to accurate information, and regular communication between elected officials and citizens. Questions were raised regarding policy effectiveness, service delivery, and mechanisms for citizen feedback. Officials and panelists responded by clarifying policies, outlining ongoing initiatives, and acknowledging areas needing improvement.

## Public Feedback and Concerns

Key concerns raised by citizens included:

- Limited opportunities for citizen participation beyond elections
- Need for improved transparency in decision-making
- Desire for stronger youth engagement and civic education
- Calls for equitable access to public resources and services.

## Outcomes and Resolutions

The meeting concluded with several agreed-upon outcomes:

- Commitment to hold regular town hall meetings
- Plans to improve communication channels between citizens and leaders
- Encouragement of civic education initiatives
- Documentation of public concerns for follow-up action

## Conclusion

The town hall meeting was constructive and participatory, reflecting strong citizens' interest in democratic governance. Continued dialogue and follow-up actions were recommended to strengthen trust, accountability, and citizen engagement. The event was attended by full representations from civic society, youth and women organizations, political parties, security agencies and government officials.



# Kaduna Roundtable Discussion on Civil Society Support for Democracy



OCCEN in collaboration with its Democracy drivers' network in Kaduna organized one-day roundtable discussion on supporting democracy in Kaduna and Nigeria at large. The event was convened to examine the causes, consequences, and possible remedies for political polarization, voter apathy and mistrust about the system of governance. Participants represented diverse ideological, professional, and social backgrounds, including academia, civil society, media, and public policy. The objective was to foster constructive dialogue and identify practical strategies to reduce polarization and strengthen democratic engagement.

## Key issues Discussed

Participants identified several interrelated drivers of democracy decline and polarization:

- Media fragmentation and social media algorithms, which reinforce echo chambers and amplify extreme viewpoints on religion and ethnicity
- Declining trust in institutions, including government,

media, and electoral systems

- Growing voter apathy



- Identity-based politics, where political affiliation is increasingly tied to social, cultural, or moral identity.
- Economic inequality and regional disparities, contributing to feelings of exclusion and resentment.
- Elite rhetoric, which can intensify divisions when political leaders frame opponents as threats rather than competitors.

### Consequences of the democracy decline

The discussion highlighted significant social and political impacts:

- Reduced capacity for compromise and bipartisan cooperation.
- Increased political hostility, including dehumanization of opposing groups.
- Erosion of democratic norms, such as respect for election outcomes and rule of law.
- Strained community relationships and weakened social cohesion.

### Role of Media and Technology

Participants emphasized the dual role of digital platforms:

- While enabling broader participation and mobilization, they also facilitate misinformation and rapid spread of fake news and polarizing content.
- Concerns were raised about the lack of transparency in algorithmic content curation.
- Suggestions included stronger media literacy initiatives and platform accountability.

### Areas of Agreement and Disagreement

Areas of agreement included recognition that Nigeria's democracy is in decline and a growing challenge that no single factor is responsible. There was broad consensus on the importance of dialogue, institutional trust, and civic education.

#### Areas of disagreement emerged around:

- The appropriate level of regulation for media and technology platforms.
- Whether polarization is primarily driven by grassroots social change or elite political strategy.
- The balance between free expression and the need to limit harmful or misleading political content.

### Proposed Solutions and Recommendations

Participants proposed several approaches:

- Promoting issue based democratic governance and citizens centered policies
- Promoting structured dialogue across ideological lines at community and national levels.
- Strengthening civic education, with emphasis on critical thinking and democratic values.
- Encouraging responsible political leadership, including norms against inflammatory rhetoric.

- Supporting independent journalism and fact-based reporting.
- Designing institutional reforms that incentivize cooperation rather than zero-sum competition.

### Conclusion

The roundtable underscored that political polarization is a complex and deeply rooted issue with serious implications for democratic governance and social stability. While perspectives differed on causes and remedies, participants agreed that sustained dialogue, institutional reform, and civic engagement are essential to addressing polarization. Continued collaboration among stakeholders was identified as a critical next step.





Press Statement

Nigerian Joint Civil Society Action

# WHERE IS NIGERIA'S PRESIDENT?

December 29, 2025

**W**e, the undersigned civil society organizations and leaders, express grave concern and deep alarm over the recent U.S. air strike carried out on Christmas Day on Nigerian territory and the troubling silence, absence, and abdication of responsibility by Nigeria's political and military leadership in its aftermath. This event raises fundamental questions about sovereignty, constitutional governance, civilian protection, and the integrity of Nigeria's social contract.

It is apparent that Nigeria is in a dual crisis of leadership and security, and at the heart of this crisis is the apparent abdication by the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, of his constitutional role as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. By inviting a foreign government to manage what is fundamentally an internal security challenge, the President ceded sovereign authority in a manner that undermines Nigeria's constitutional order. Even more disturbing is that during and after the operation, the President, the Service Chiefs, and the leadership of the National Assembly were either on vacation or completely silent, leaving the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Yusuf Tuggar, to publicly rationalize decisions that strike at the core of national sovereignty and democratic accountability.

This silence reflects a profound breakdown of institutional accountability mechanisms. Section 14(2)(b) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) is unequivocal: *"the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government."* This provision represents a central pillar of Nigeria's social contract. Any security action, especially one involving foreign military forces, must be grounded in

transparency, civilian protection, and democratic oversight. None of these standards were met.

While we acknowledge the importance of international counterterrorism cooperation, there is an urgent need to critically assess Nigeria's National Counterterrorism Strategy (NACTEST), as well as its Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, in light of the recent U.S. operation on Nigerian soil, to determine whether it aligns with these frameworks or exposes significant gaps within them.

We are particularly troubled by the severe deficit of information regarding the nature, scope, legal basis, and rules of engagement governing the collaboration between the Nigerian and U.S. governments. Since the incident, Nigerians have not been informed of the basis for authorizing the strikes, under what legal framework they were conducted, what safeguards were in place to protect civilians, whether the National Assembly exercised any oversight, or what accountability mechanisms exist for harm caused. This opacity fuels mistrust and undermines public confidence in government at a time when trust is already dangerously low.

In addition, at the time of issuing this statement, there has been no confirmation that any actual belligerent targets were hit. Instead, reports that debris from expended munitions fell on farmlands in Jabo, Tambuwal Local Government Area of Sokoto State, and in Offa, Kwara State, near the premises of a hotel, underscore the very real risks to civilian life and property. While the Nigerian Air Force inaugurated a "Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response (CHMR) Board" in July 2025, no publicly articulated civilian

harm mitigation protocols have been presented for this offensive. In contemporary military operations, particularly those involving air strikes, responsible governance demands clear standards for target verification, proportionality assessments, post-strike damage evaluations, and accessible avenues for civilian complaints, investigation, compensation, and redress. The absence of such frameworks in this operation constitutes a serious governance failure.

We caution that the government's inept management of this crisis is capable of aggravating narratives that escalate religious and communal tensions in an already fragile national context. Nigeria's security challenges cannot and must not be framed in ways that deepen

Chiefs, and the National Assembly in the face of these grave developments, is wholly unacceptable.

If the President and his security leadership have concluded that they lack the capacity or will to manage Nigeria's internal security challenges within the bounds of the Constitution and would rather cede such authority to a foreign power, then constitutional responsibility and democratic integrity demand that they resign.

Nigerians deserve accountable leadership and security rooted in sovereignty, the rule of law, and respect for human life.

**Signed:**

21st Century Community Empowerment for Youth and Women Initiative

*“By inviting a foreign government to manage what is fundamentally an internal security challenge, the President ceded sovereign authority in a manner that undermines Nigeria's constitutional order.”*

polarization or stigmatize communities. What is required is a united, inclusive, and rights-respecting approach that prioritizes peace, social cohesion, and long-term stability.

We emphasize the urgent need to address the harms suffered by civilians as a result of the strike action. This includes transparent investigations, public disclosure of findings, prompt assistance to affected communities, and adequate compensation where harm has occurred. Without these steps, the already wide public trust deficit between citizens and the state will continue to deepen.

Finally, the office of the President carries the fundamental expectation that President Bola Tinubu possesses the capacity, judgment, and resolve to serve as Commander-in-Chief of Nigeria's armed forces. The authorization of a foreign military to conduct strikes within Nigerian territory without any public explanation of the necessity or legal basis for such action, coupled with the continued silence of the President, the Service

- Accountability Lab Nigeria
- ACE-Nigeria
- Advocacy Centre for Development
- African Centre for Media and Information Literacy (AFRICMIL)
- African Law Foundation (AFRILAW)
- Alliances for Africa (AFA)
- Alliance on Surviving Covid-19 and Beyond (ASCAB)
- Amnesty International Nigeria
- Baobab for Women's Human Rights
- Bauchi Human Rights Network
- BENDEF
- BOCODEP
- BudgIT
- Bwatiye Community Development Association
- Cedar Seed Foundation
- CEE- HOPE
- Centre for Community Excellence (CENCEX)
- Centre for Social Justice



Centre LSD  
CISLAC  
Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD)  
Center for Transparency Advocacy  
Chidi Anselm Odinkalu  
Citizens Advocacy for Social & Economic Rights (CASER)  
Clean Technology Hub  
CLEEN Foundation  
Community Life Project (CLP)  
Community Outreach for Development and Welfare Advocacy (CODWA)  
Companions for the Development of Jibia Local Government Area  
Connected Advocacy  
Conscience for Human Rights and Conflict Resolution (CHRCR)  
Corporate Accountability and Public Participation Africa (CAPPA)  
Disabled People in Leadership Initiative and Network of Women with Disabilities  
Dorothy Njemanze Foundation (DNF)  
Enough Is Enough  
F. S. A. F. C. I  
FEMBUD  
FENRAD  
Gatefield  
Gender Relevance Initiative Promotion  
Global Rights  
Grassroots Development Centre  
HEDA  
HOMEF  
Human Rights Network Jigawa  
Initiative for Social Development  
Keen and Care Initiative (KCI)  
Kebetkache Women Development & Resource Centre  
Koyenum Immalah Foundation  
Life and Peace Development Organisation  
Media Rights Agenda  
Mowalek Centre for Sustainable Community Development  
Neighbourhood Environment Watch Foundation  
Nextier SPD (Security, Peace and Development)  
Network of University Legal Aid Institutions (NULAI)  
Online Hub NG  
OrderPaper Advocacy Initiative  
Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN)  
Partners West Africa Nigeria (PWAN)  
Partnership for Justice and Network of Nigerian Human Rights Defenders  
Policy Alert  
PRAWA International  
Praxis Center  
Publish What You Pay (PWYP) Nigeria  
Rule of Law and Accountability Advocacy Centre (RULAAC)  
SBM Intelligence  
Sesor Empowerment Initiative to Sesor Empowerment Foundation  
SIPJAD  
Social Action  
Socio-Economic Research and Development Centre  
Sokoto Youth Council  
South Saharan Social Development Organisation  
Stephanie Peacebuilding and Development Foundation (SPADEV)  
Support Initiative for Sustainable Development  
Tap Initiative  
TechHerNG  
The Kukah Centre  
The Resource Centre for Human Rights & Civic Education (CHRICED)  
Urban Alert  
We The People  
West African Drug Policy Network (WADPN)  
Woman in Media Communication Initiative (WIM)  
Women in Mining Nigeria (WIMNG)  
Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA)  
Yiaga Africa  
Yobe Youth Council

# The Politics of Crossing Over: Defection and the Unmaking of Democratic Meaning in Nigeria

In Nigeria, political defection is not merely an event; it is a season, consistent with the ideological habits of our political elites. It arrives with the inevitability of harmattan—dusty, predictable, and disorienting. Today, a governor defects. The next day, a bloc of lawmakers also defects. Thunderous speeches permeate the air while the crowd cheers, not because anything of real significance has been clarified, but because power has been reconfigured. This spectacle occurs so frequently that citizens simply shrug at it with a disturbing indifference, because, for what it's worth, it is now the new normal.

There is no getting around the fact that politics is dynamic, or that loyalties shift as much as political parties evolve. But in Nigeria, defection is very rarely about conscience. More often than not, it is a raw transaction dictated by survival, ambition, or proximity to power. Nowadays, governors defect when they feel politically threatened and therefore need federal patronage or protection to remain at the top of the political food chain. Legislators recalibrate their allegiances only to safeguard political longevity, but not to defend the interests of the constituents they are supposed to serve. It is in these situations that political parties merge, not through any defined philosophical convergence, but through clandestine negotiations in hotel rooms far detached from the citizens who gave them legitimacy. This is not the spectacle we witnessed growing up. At least, there was some morality in the way politics was conducted.

For the ordinary Nigerian voter, the lesson is subtle yet profound: ideology is dispensable, while power is the only enduring constant. At this instance, we need not be reminded that this lesson corrodes the very foundations upon which democracy was built and thus opens the window to a dangerous political phenomenon: apathy.



By Shamsuddeen Suleiman

Political parties, in theory, are designed to be vessels of ideas—platforms for competing visions of governance, development, and justice. In practice, in this country, the ease with which politicians traverse party lines exposes these institutions as mere vehicles to be boarded and abandoned depending on personal circumstances. Political manifestos are drafted but rarely internalized. Platforms are announced but seldom implemented. Defection turns politics into all dance without meaning while sapping the opposition of its democratic purpose. Opposition is not sabotage; this must be understood. It is the shadow that gives shape to power and the institutional memory that reminds rulers of the ephemeral nature of the power they wield.

When opposition figures defect en masse and recklessly, as we are seeing today, opposition becomes ornamental—irrelevant and lacking in popular legitimacy. When all elected representatives gravitate

towards the party in power and suck up to it, even the grandest parliaments transform into theatres of nodding heads, where supposedly honourable members allow executive excesses to go unchecked. In scenarios like this, even accountability becomes an afterthought.

There is also a psychological cost—one that can hardly be legislated. Citizens who witness politicians abandoning parties without explanation may abandon belief itself. Young Nigerians like me, who are already skeptical of civic and political participation, would retreat further into apathy or resentment. Nigerians watch with dismay as voting becomes a ritual without conviction and civic engagement turns into performance without the driving power of hope. Democracy, in this manner and context, is not violently compromised; it is slowly starved of meaning by the foremost beneficiaries of its largesse.

However, if experience is anything worth noting, I would say that change is still within the realm of possibility. Ideologies can evolve. Defection can, in rare instances, be an act of conscience—but only when accompanied by honesty, explanation, and deep, selfless reflection. What we often witness as a trigger for defection, however, is personal convenience dressed up in flowery rhetoric and then passed off as worthy justification. The language of “public interest” often bandied around in moments like this only serves as a fig leaf for personal ambition. It is all about power and the desire to keep it. At the risk of sounding discourteous, I can't help but think that sometimes it is about self-esteem—the urge to belong to what is seen as a bigger political platform or a bigger and more powerful government cult. Or perhaps, it is just a politician's act of trading their morality, armies of supporters, and party's ideology in return for blanket immunity against anticorruption watchdogs or federal witch-hunt. In whatever way we look at it, the thriving culture of political cross-carpeting in this country does not help our democracy. It weakens its core and makes it boring and uninteresting.

Meanwhile, apart from the act of defection itself, the true danger lies in the perception it nurtures and sustains: that nothing in politics is permanent except personal interest and the blind struggle to protect it. When that perception takes root deep into the marrow of the polity, democracy becomes transactional while

citizens lose hope in their own country. Let me underscore the foregoing with a specific instance of a particular precedent:

A friend of mine promised never to exercise his civic and political duties again after the defection of Governor Abba Yusuf of Kano State to the ruling APC. In retrospect, Governor Yusuf was elected under the platform of an underdog party, the NNPP, with the sponsorship of his mentor of more than 40 years, who is also a former governor of the state and Nigeria's former defence minister, Engr. Rabi'u Musa Kwankwaso. The Kwankwasiyya movement under Mr. Kwankwaso, a group that also catapulted Mr Yusuf to power, shares no ideological affinity with the APC, yet he crossed over anyway. That was an ideological inconsistency and betrayal my dear friend could not stomach. “You can't criticise an ideology for 10 years and suddenly identify with it,” my friend would argue. And he's not alone.

Our democracy, as nascent and experimental as it is, still remains a beautiful work in progress. The incredible work that non-governmental organizations across the country, like OCCEN, are doing to advance the course of democracy and good governance is helping to pull the citizenry, especially younger people, into both political and civic participation. The trajectory seems promising. Democracy will work for all, we envisage. But even at this, we are at the risk of losing something of great value: democratic faith—the belief that parties mean something, that opposition matters, that loyalty is not folly, and that conviction in one's own belief is neither a sign of weakness nor of naïveté.

A federal government that makes liquidating opposition and silencing all forms of dissenting political views its most sacred duty cannot, in good conscience, pride itself as being friendly towards democracy and its values. A democracy-friendly government provides a safe space for all political parties to operate and thrive. It does not suffocate alternative views or platforms. Neither does it shrink the political space or blackmail opposition figures into its fold. That is why Nigeria is touted as a multiparty democracy.

Sadly, the current government at the centre is pulling enormous state resources to change that label. And unfortunately, it is winning.



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—PHOTOGRAPHY

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