

# The Civility



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Josephine Omajari

## Dear Readers,

Welcome to the ninth edition of *The Civility* Newsletter, published by the Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN). The Civility is generously supported by the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and highlights key outcomes of OCCEN's project, "Strengthening Youth Civic Activism in Northern Nigeria."

The newsletter features initiatives implemented across Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Jigawa, and Zamfara States, including a three-day capacity-building program in Kano for 40 youth activists drawn from the project states. The training focused on democracy and political parties, youth networking, human rights and the rule of law, civic engagement, and the Open Government Partnership (OGP).

This edition also documents the establishment of the Pro Bono Lawyers Network in Northern Nigeria under the *Shield for Justice* initiative, with support from Amnesty International, aimed at strengthening access to justice and human rights protection.

In addition, this volume features a joint statement commemorating the International Day of Political Prisoners (IDPP), highlighting concerns over arbitrary detention, restrictions on civic space, and the criminalization of peaceful expression, while reaffirming a strong commitment to the protection of fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. The edition also captured a story of OCCEN participation in 3-Day Nigerian Political Parties capacity building training on policy development, organized by International Republican Institute (IRI) one of the NED core institutions. And lastly an opinion article, written by OCCEN Executive Director Mr. Abdulrazaq Alkali

Disclaimer: The views expressed herein are those of OCCEN and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Endowment for Democracy or its staff.

Happy Reading!

Josephine Eche Omajari

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

# OCCEN joint 3-Day Political Parties Capacity Building Training on Policy Development organized by International Republican Institutes (IRI) Nigerian office

The Political Parties Training on Policy Development was organized to strengthen the capacity of political party members to formulate, analyze, and communicate effective public policies. The training aimed to promote issue-based politics, enhance democratic governance, and improve the quality of policy proposals presented by political parties.

- Policy identification and problem analysis
- Stakeholder engagement and consultation
- Use of data and research in policy formulation
- Policy drafting, implementation, and monitoring
- Communication and advocacy of party policies

### Training Methodology

The training employed participatory and learner-



### Objectives of the Training

The key objectives of the training were to:

- Build participants' understanding of the policy development process
- Enhance skills in evidence-based policy formulation
- Promote inclusive, participatory, and responsive policy design
- Strengthen political parties' capacity to develop clear and implementable policy platforms
- Encourage cross-party dialogue on national development priorities

### Participants

The training was attended by representatives from various registered political parties and some selected civil society organizations, including:

- Party leadership and executive members
- Policy and research officers
- Youth and women representatives
- Civil society leaders

### Key Topics Covered

The training covered the following thematic areas:

- Introduction to public policy and governance

centered approaches, including:

- Interactive presentations
- Group discussions and plenary sessions
- Case studies and practical exercises
- Policy drafting simulations
- Award certificate of participation

These methods encouraged active participation and experience sharing among participants.

### Key Outcomes

The training achieved the following outcomes:

- Improved understanding of policy development processes among participants
- Enhanced capacity of political parties to develop coherent and evidence-based policies
- Increased appreciation of inclusive and consultative policy-making
- Strengthened collaboration and dialogue among political parties

Participants demonstrated improved skills in identifying policy gaps and proposing practical solutions aligned with national priorities.

# 2-Day Capacity Building Workshop for Pro Bono Lawyers in Northern Nigeria, 30<sup>th</sup> – 31<sup>st</sup> October 2025

OCCEN facilitated 2-Day Capacity Building Workshop for Pro bono Lawyers in northern Nigeria, organized by Shield for Justice with support from Amnesty International. The pro bono services workshop equipped the participants on the structures, processes, outcomes, and challenges associated with delivering free professional legal services to

- Strengthen institutional capacity within beneficiary organizations

### Scope of Pro Bono Services

The Pro bono services covered:

- Legal advice and representation
- Legal awareness and rights education



underserved individuals and communities. The initiative was designed to improve access to justice through free legal services to vulnerable and marginalized population in northern Nigeria.

### Objectives of Pro Bono Workshop

The Pro bono services seeks to:

- Expand access to legal and professional services for marginalized populations
- Connect qualified professionals with individuals and organizations in need
- Promote a culture of volunteerism and ethical responsibility

- Drafting and review of legal documents
- Policy support and institutional capacity building
- Alternative dispute resolution and mediation (where applicable)

### Outcomes and Impact

The efforts resulted in:

- Increased access to legal assistance for vulnerable individuals and groups
- Successful resolution of disputes and improved legal compliance
- Enhanced legal awareness among beneficiaries



- Strengthened trust between communities and professional service providers
- Positive professional development experiences for pro bono volunteers.

- Provide incentives and recognition for pro bono contributors
- Enhance beneficiary awareness and referral mechanisms
- Allocate dedicated resources for coordination and monitoring

### Challenges Encountered

Key challenges included:

- Resource constraints affecting coordination and follow-up
- Geographic and logistical barriers
- Managing expectations of beneficiaries and volunteers

### Conclusion

The pro bono services has proven to be an effective approach to bridging service gaps and advancing social justice. With improved coordination, sustained partnerships, and adequate resources, pro bono initiatives can continue to deliver meaningful and lasting impact.

### Lessons Learned

- Early screening and clear case definitions improve efficiency
- Continuous engagement with volunteers enhances retention
- Strong partnerships are essential for sustainability
- Monitoring and feedback mechanisms improve service quality

### Recommendations

To strengthen future facilitation of pro bono services:

- Expand the network of participating lawyers
- Introduce digital case management and tracking systems



## Joint Statement on the International Day of Political Prisoners

On this International Day of Political Prisoners, we stand together to affirm a simple truth: no one should be imprisoned for exercising their fundamental rights or for peacefully expressing their beliefs. Yet around the world, there are an estimated **one million political prisoners**, who are unjustly detained for political reasons. These individuals—journalists, human rights defenders, democratic opposition leaders, religious leaders, artists, and ordinary citizens—represent the conscience of their societies. Their imprisonment is an assault not only on their freedom, but on the shared principles of human dignity and justice.

The International Day of Political Prisoners originated in the Soviet Union in 1974, when political prisoners collectively held a one-day hunger strike. Soviet prisoners of conscience repeated this protest every October 30, supported by demonstrations of solidarity in major cities. In response to Vladimir Putin's ongoing and deepening repression, Russian political prisoners rekindled the tradition in 2021. In the years since, it has become an international day of solidarity with political prisoners worldwide.

Political imprisonment corrodes the rule of law, silences dissent, undermines press freedom, and weakens the foundations of democracy. Authoritarian governments use it to suppress opposition, instill fear, and consolidate control. Each unjust detention sends a chilling message to others who seek to speak truth to power.

We, as organizations who advocate on behalf of those unjustly detained around the world, call on **democratic governments to continue to make the release of political prisoners a global priority**—to raise these cases consistently in bilateral and multilateral forums, to request information and specific actions be taken on the prisoners' behalf, to support accountability mechanisms, and to continue to provide support to organizations that advocate on behalf of those unjustly detained and provide legal and humanitarian assistance to them and their families. Solidarity with the unjustly detained must be sustained, coordinated, and visible.

We also stand in solidarity with the families, lawyers, and civil-society organizations who continue to

advocate for freedom in the face of repression. Their courage reminds us that the defense of liberty is a collective responsibility.

On this day, and every day, we reaffirm our shared commitment to the universal right to freedom of thought, expression, association, and belief. The world's political prisoners must not be forgotten—and their freedom must remain a global cause.

Signed:

1. Freedom House
2. Free Russia Foundation
3. McCain Institute
4. National Endowment for Democracy
5. Abdorrahman Boroumand Center for Human Rights in Iran
6. Al-Tahreer Association for Development (TAD)
7. Amnesty International
8. Center for Civil Liberties
9. Committee to Protect Journalists
10. Freedom Now
11. George W. Bush Institute
12. Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign
13. Human Rights Center Viasna
14. Human Rights Defense Center Memorial
15. Human Rights First
16. Human Rights Foundation
17. Human Rights Watch
18. International Republican Institute
19. James W. Foley Legacy Foundation
20. Lantos Foundation for Human Rights & Justice
21. Oma Organization for Human Rights and Democracy Promotion
22. Organization for Community Civic Engagement (OCCEN)
23. OVD-Info
24. Political and Governance Development Academy
25. The 30 October Foundation
26. The Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights
27. Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP)
28. Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation
29. World Liberty Congress

# 3-Day Youth Training on Democracy and Civic Engagement 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> October 2025

## 1. Introduction and Background

Youth civic engagement is widely recognized as a cornerstone of democratic resilience and sustainable development. Despite comprising a large portion of national populations in Nigeria, young people often participate at lower rates than older adults in formal political mechanisms such as voting and political party membership. Barriers include limited civic knowledge, exclusion from leadership structures, socio-economic marginalization, and a lack of viable platforms for meaningful engagement.

## Why Youth Training on Democracy and Civic Engagement

- **Democratic Health:** Youth bring fresh ideas and perspectives that can help reinvigorate democratic institutions and ensure political systems represent all segments of society.
  - **Social Stability:** Providing structured training reduces the likelihood that youth disengagement will manifest in violence or disenchantment with governance.
- Individual Development:** Participation builds leadership skills, confidence, agency, civic identity, and critical thinking.

## Core Components of the Youth Training

Training typically starts with foundational knowledge of democratic systems, civic rights and responsibilities, electoral processes, the role of public institutions, rule of law and how policies are made.

Youth trainings focused on building practical skills





such as:

- Group debate and Public speaking
- Campaign planning
- Advocacy skills
- Media and digital communication

These skills increase young people's confidence and prepare them to engage in public debate and organize citizen initiatives.

Training programs also integrate **hands-on activities** — such as community action projects, simulations (group work and exercise), and strategies for voter education campaigns — are more effective because they allow participants to apply what they learn in real contexts.

The training ensures that programs are:

- **Youth-led or youth-inclusive** in design and delivery
- **Responsive to local social and political realities**
- Accessible to marginalized groups (e.g., rural youth, women, ethnic minorities)

### Approaches and Methodologies

OCCEN employed the use of mixed media engagement. Youth engage better when learning blends **face-to-face workshops** with **digital components** like online discussions or campaigns. A mixed approach increases reach, accommodates

different learning styles, and uses platforms where youth are already active (e.g., social media).

OCCEN introduced the participants to its Democracy Drivers Network (DDN) for Peer-to-peer educational learning, networking, and solidarity. With aim of building trust and relevance among participants, while intergenerational components (mentorship from older civic leaders) can bridge gaps and help institutionalize youth voices within political spaces. OCCEN programs used a **rights-based approach** that treats young people as agents of change rather than passive recipients, ensuring transparency, accountability, and respect for youth voices in all activities.

### Measuring Training Impact

To assess effectiveness of the training program OCCEN employed the used of robust **monitoring and evaluation** frameworks that measure the knowledge of the participants before and after the training looking at long-term outcomes, such as:

- Participant confidence in political engagement
- Participation in formal and informal political activities post-training
- Leadership roles taken in community organizations or civic structures
- Policy changes or initiatives influenced by trained youth

# Overcoming the Reckless Fragility of Nigeria's Democracy through the lens of Youth

Nigeria's democracy, restored in 1999 after long years of military rule, remains a remarkable achievement. Yet more than two decades later, it is still fragile—often recklessly so. Elections are held regularly, institutions exist on paper, and civic participation is vibrant, but the substance of democratic governance is persistently undermined by elite impunity, weak institutions, identity politics, and widespread socio-economic insecurity. The challenge before Nigeria is no longer how to return to democracy, but how to rescue it from erosion by those who benefit from its appearance while hollowing out its core.

At the heart of this fragility lies a contradiction: democratic procedures coexist with undemocratic political behavior. Elections are too often treated as zero-sum battles rather than mechanisms for collective choice. Vote-buying, intimidation, and the manipulation of state institutions have normalized the idea that power is captured, not earned. When political actors repeatedly undermine electoral integrity without consequences, citizens begin to disengage, seeing democracy as a ritual that changes faces but not realities.

Institutions that should act as democratic guardrails—electoral bodies, courts, legislatures, and anti-corruption agencies—struggle to assert independence. While individuals within these institutions sometimes act courageously, systemic pressures remain overwhelming. Executive overreach, selective law enforcement, and political interference weaken public trust. A democracy cannot survive where institutions answer more to powerful individuals than to the constitution and the people.



By Abdulrazaq Alkali

Ethnic and religious mobilization further compounds this weakness. Nigeria's diversity should be a democratic strength, but it is often weaponized for short-term political gain. When leaders frame political competition as an existential struggle between identities, they deepen polarization and delegitimize opposition. Governance becomes secondary to “winning,” and national cohesion suffers. Over time, citizens are encouraged to defend “their own” leaders regardless of performance, accountability, or respect for democratic norms.

Socio-economic realities also place democracy under strain. Pervasive poverty, unemployment, and insecurity create fertile ground for manipulation. When daily survival is the priority, abstract democratic principles lose urgency. Vote-



buying thrives where citizens feel abandoned by the state, and apathy grows when democratic participation seems disconnected from improved living conditions. Democracy without development risks becoming an empty promise.

Yet Nigeria's democracy is not beyond repair. Its resilience lies in its people: a vocal civil society, an increasingly assertive media, a politically conscious youth population, and a diaspora that remains deeply invested in the country's future. The #EndSARS movement, despite its tragic suppression, revealed both the depth of public frustration and the capacity for civic mobilization. These forces demonstrate that Nigerians have not given up on democracy—they are demanding a

as voting every four years. Education—formal and informal—should emphasize rights, responsibilities, and the power of sustained engagement. A politically literate populace is harder to deceive and easier to mobilize for accountability.

Finally, governance must deliver. Democracy is ultimately judged not by speeches or constitutions, but by outcomes. Reducing poverty, improving security, and expanding economic opportunity are not separate from democratic consolidation—they are central to it. When citizens see tangible benefits, democracy gains legitimacy and defenders.

Nigeria's democracy is fragile, but it is not doomed. What makes it reckless is not its imperfections, but the

*“Democracy cannot thrive if citizens understand it only as voting every four years. Education—formal and informal—should emphasize rights, responsibilities, and the power of sustained engagement.”*

better version of it.

Overcoming democratic fragility requires deliberate, sustained action. First, institutional independence must move from rhetoric to reality. Electoral reforms should prioritize transparency, accountability, and swift justice for electoral offenses. Courts must be insulated from political pressure, and anti-corruption efforts must be consistent rather than selective. When rules are enforced fairly, democratic behavior becomes rational rather than naïve.

Second, political parties must be reformed from within. Internal democracy, ideological clarity, and credible candidate selection are essential. Parties that function merely as vehicles for elite ambition weaken democracy by offering voters no real choices. Strengthening parties strengthens representation.

Third, civic education must be taken seriously. Democracy cannot thrive if citizens understand it only

repeated tolerance of behavior that weakens it. Choosing a different path requires political will, civic courage, and a collective refusal to normalize democratic decay. The task is urgent, but the possibility remains: a democracy that is not merely endured, but trusted, defended, and made to work.

### **Young People Must Decide Its Fate**

Nigeria's democracy is not failing because it is young. It is failing because it is being treated recklessly.

After more than two decades of civilian rule, the real danger is no longer military takeover, but democratic decay—slow, normalized, and increasingly familiar. Elections are held, but trust is thin. Institutions exist, but confidence is weak. Citizens participate, but power rarely listens.

For young Nigerians, this fragility is not theoretical. It is personal.



You vote, yet nothing improves. You protest peacefully, yet you are ignored or intimidated. You speak out, yet you are told to be patient in a country that shows little urgency for your future. Over time, frustration hardens into apathy. And when young people stop believing their voices matter, democracy begins to suffocate.

### **When Democracy Feels Like a Burden, Not a Promise**

Democracy is meant to empower citizens. In Nigeria, it often feels like a test of endurance. Campaigns are loud; governance is quiet. Accountability is promised, then postponed. Courts are overwhelmed, elections disputed, and consequences delayed until they no longer matter.

For millions of young Nigerians navigating unemployment, rising costs, and insecurity, civic engagement competes with survival. When finding food, transport, or shelter consumes daily life, participation starts to feel optional—if not pointless.

That feeling is dangerous.

Democracy rarely collapses in one dramatic moment. It weakens when citizens quietly disengage.

### **Nigeria's Youth Are Not the Problem — They Are the Pressure Point**

Despite the narrative, Nigerian youth are not apathetic. They are informed, connected, and politically conscious. They organize online and offline. They monitor elections. They mobilize voters. They protest injustice. They demand dignity.

What they often receive in return is suspicion.

Peaceful protest is treated as a threat. Youth activism is dismissed as noise. Engagement is encouraged during elections, then criminalized afterward. The message is clear: participate, but do not disrupt comfort. A democracy that feeds on youth energy while rejecting youth demands is living on borrowed time.

### **Survival Politics and the Erosion of Trust**

Democracy cannot survive where large numbers of citizens feel economically invisible. When survival

becomes the only priority, citizenship suffers. Hunger weakens accountability. Desperation invites manipulation.

This is why reckless politics thrives. Ethnic fear replaces ideas. Religious suspicion replaces policy. Loyalty replaces competence. While citizens argue among themselves, the real beneficiaries avoid scrutiny.

When politics becomes identity warfare, democracy loses its substance and keeps only its symbols.

### **The Choice before Young Nigerians**

Nigeria's democratic future will not be decided by speeches or slogans. It will be decided by whether young Nigerians withdraw—or insist.

Withdrawal is tempting. It feels logical in a system that disappoints repeatedly. But history is clear: when citizens retreat, power consolidates. Silence never weakens abuse; it protects it.

Insistence is harder. It requires persistence in the face of delay. It demands refusing to normalize failure. It means voting even when outcomes feel predetermined, organizing locally even when results are slow, and defending the right to protest even when it is inconvenient.

Democracy is not maintained by hope alone. It is maintained by pressure.

### **Fragile, Not Finished**

Nigeria's democracy is fragile because it is still contested. Because it still matters. Because it has not yet delivered what it promised.

Fragility does not mean hopelessness. It means responsibility.

Young Nigerians are not the leaders of tomorrow; they are the citizens of today. The question is not whether democracy will survive on its own—it will not. The question is whether those most affected by its failure will continue to demand its repair.

Democracy dies when people decide it is no longer worth defending.

Nigeria's youth must decide whether that happens.



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