



## October 2020 in review

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## Program Director's Corner

Both around the world and on the continent, the last couple of weeks have been very challenging for civil society.

The 2020 elections have generated an avalanche of litigation bordering on voter suppression in states across the US. For months, President Donald Trump has denounced mail-in ballots as fraudulent and his party and campaign have fought to secure tighter restrictions on its use. His challenger Joe Biden and the Democrats believe they are more likely to win if it is easier to vote. In a blow to democrats, a now very conservative leaning US supreme court on Tuesday the 27th, sided with Republicans to prevent Wisconsin from counting mail-in ballots that are received after election day.

In Belarus, anti-Lukashenko protesters marched through Minsk for the 10th straight weekend despite threats from police to fire live ammunition. Days

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Lukashenko raised hopes for change by meeting jailed opposition figures.

In Turkey, politicians, lawyers, and activists have been targeted in new wave of mass arrests. The raids are the latest in what has become a routine practice by law enforcement authorities with a significant adverse impact on the exercise of human rights, deepening the climate of fear and repression across the country.

In Guinea, 82 year old President Alpha Condé wins third term in office amid widespread protests that were violently suppressed by security forces. The president insists a constitutional referendum in March allowed him to run despite a two-term limit, but opponents say he is breaking the law by holding on to power. His opponent, Mr. Diallo told Agence-France Press that 'We are still going to refer the matter to the constitutional court, without having too many expectations'. According to Guinean media reports, at least 30 people have died since the election held on Saturday, October 24th.

In Nigeria, we saw the youth led #ENDSARS protests which had been running for about two weeks come to a brutal halt when security operatives fired live ammunition into the crowd of protesters at the Lekki toll gate plaza, the epicentre of the protests in Lagos; Nigeria's commercial capital.

Personally, I had imagined that the Vice President of Nigeria; Prof. Yemi Osibanjo, who happens to be the former attorney general of Lagos state and someone more in tune with the youth, would have flown into Lagos with a team from the executive arm of government, to meet the protesters at the toll gate plaza and have a discussion on the path forward, much like a village townhall. The optics and fallout would definitely have been a lot different. But alas this was not to be the case.

Without doubt, civil society spaces both on the continent and around the world are continuously being squeezed on all sides. The onus therefore is on civil society actors, to in turn, continue to be proactive in studying and getting ahead of the tactics used by increasingly anti-democratic and authoritarian regimes to trample the basic human rights of freedom of expression, association, and the right to freely choose one's leaders through the ballot box.

I and all of us at AROCSA, look forward to working with you to ensure the rule of law, good governance, and democratic principles prevail in Africa, and indeed the world.

In solidarity,

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*Shaninomi Eribo*

*Programs Director*

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## AROCSA News

### The AROCSA PhD Fellowship Program



The Association for Research On Civil Society In Africa (AROCSA) with the support of Ford Foundation, has established the PhD Fellowship Program in Africa.

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fieldwork, data collection, data processing, and the printing of their final dissertations. Visit our website to learn more and apply for the PhD Research Grants

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## African Civil Society Practitioner Skills Gap Survey 2020



The Association for Research on Civil Society in Africa (AROCOSA) is developing a program to help build functional capacities within indigenous civil society organizations across Africa and requires your input to make informed decisions on what particular skill sets to focus on.

This survey will only take about 3 minutes to complete and your participation will be kept confidential. Thank you for your time.

[Take The Survey](#)

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## US Elections and Voter Suppression



*Photo by Element5 Digital from Pexels*

Voter suppression in the United States of America is not new. It has existed [historically](#) as far back as the late 1800s in the form of [poll taxes](#) and [literacy tests](#).

Yet, this year's presidential elections – due to take place on November 3rd – have revealed increasing worries among citizens and politicians alike, [especially among democrats](#). Without doubt, the US 2020 elections is certain to be a historic one. The outcome of the 2016 presidential elections shocked liberals across the world, and perhaps even a few conservatives. And now, several Russian interference investigations, one failed impeachment, and a pandemic later, the stakes could not be higher. As Democratic presidential

In recent years, voter suppression has been more likely to take the form of [voter purging](#), stringent [identification requirements](#), and the spread of [disinformation](#) about voting procedures, among others. But a [BBC article](#) about the long queues being endured by early voters across the United States, has suggested that many people believe these lines to be a sign of voter suppression. This is despite America being the third largest country in the world by landmass and population. A number of the queuing Americans were optimistic, however, believing the queues to be evidence of a motivated voting populace which will result in higher voter turnouts.

The pandemic and the resulting changes to voting procedures are partly to blame for the lengthy waiting times voters are facing this year, according to this [New York Times](#) piece. Nevertheless, black voters across America statistically wait 45% longer on average to cast their vote in comparison with white voters. Fears that a free and fair election will be hard fought are exacerbated in light of recent history. In 2013 – during the tenure of President Barack Obama – the [supreme court struck down section 5 preclearance from the 1965 voting rights act](#), a part of the act which required states who had a history of racist voting practices to seek permission from federal authorities before making any changes to their electoral regulations. This section, which was included in the act to ensure that no discriminatory rules affecting minorities were passed in these states, is no longer an available safety net.

There are [sceptics](#), of course, who believe that what people consider evidence of voter suppression is simply evidence of a poorly organised and understaffed system. In the face of what must feel like overwhelming, multipronged attacks on their base, democrats seem to have only one [option](#): counter each attempt at voter suppression with a sustained campaign of fact and motivation.

## Other Headlines

[Coronavirus: Student returning to the UK has unproven £50 COVID vaccine](#)

[Google sued by US government over search dominance](#)

[France shuts Paris mosque in crackdown after teacher's beheading](#)

[Global coronavirus report: Italian police use teargas to disperse lockdown protests](#)

[Coronavirus: Antibodies fall rapidly after COVID infection, dashing hopes of herd immunity - study](#)

[Supreme Court rejects Democratic attempt to extend Wisconsin mail-in voting deadline](#)

[Iranians awaiting US election results with bated breath](#)

[‘Made-in-Gaza’ device fights coronavirus spread](#)

## [Nigeria Youth Find Their Voice, But Future Looks Uncertain...](#)

On Wednesday 7th October 2016, what had begun as a viral campaign on social media eventually translated to Nigerian youth in Lagos - Nigeria's commercial capital, embarking on an initial 3 day street protest calling on the Federal Government to scrap the federal 'Special Anti-Robbery Squad' (SARS), a controversial unit of the Nigerian Police Force.

The campaign tagged #ENDSARS, was in direct response to a video shared earlier on October 3rd by a frantic citizen on social media, depicting men, allegedly of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) operating within Delta state in Southern Nigeria, gunning down a young Nigerian, taking his car, and making off with it. On Thursday October 8th, youth in Abuja - the nation's administrative capital, similarly took to the streets in solidarity with their peers in Lagos to protest police brutality and call for the scrapping of the SARS unit. Popular Nigerian entertainers such as [Falz](#), [Tiwa Savage](#), and [Runtown](#) also joined the protest same day.



*Image Credit: Premium Times*

With increasing activity across social media, the protest soon took an international dimension with solidarity protests led by Nigerians taking place in the UK, the US and Canada. The protests also soon evolved beyond just ending SARS to include other deep rooted social grievances such as bad governance, corruption and poor national infrastructure.

However, the street protests in Nigeria which lasted about fourteen days was eventually brought to a brutal halt when security forces fired live ammunition at protesters at about 6.45pm at the Lekki toll gate plaza in Lagos which had become the epicentre of the protest movement. Earlier that day, a 4pm curfew had been announced by the Lagos State Governor, but the protesters had stayed on in defiance of it.

According to [Amnesty International](#), about 12 people were killed in the incident

Lagos state government initially denied that there were any casualties, but now admits that there were two. The Nigerian Army remains reluctant to admit there were any; first denying that they were at the Lekki toll plaza in the first place, but now admitting that indeed they were.

The following day after the shootings on October 21st, the protest movement was effectively hijacked by street urchins and hoodlums in Lagos state who unleashed wanton destruction and looting of both public and private property, including the burning of government buildings and mass transit buses across the state. In the days that followed, this trend began to spill into other states across the nation especially with the discovery of warehouses were food items which were supposed to have been distributed as part of [the Coalition Against COVID \(CACOVID\)'s philanthropic response](#) to the pandemic. Efforts are still being made to bring the situation under full control across the country.

Nigerians both on the continent and in the diaspora were and are generally glad that after many decades of the suppression of youth voices, the current generation have been able to find theirs and do what previous generations couldn't do by putting together one of the most organised and relatively successful protest movements the nation has seen. The decentralized nature of the protest where there was no formally constituted leadership was also remarkable and made it a bit difficult for government to apply age old tactics of compromising the leadership in order to bring the movement to an end.

However, posterity will judge whether this lack of constituted leadership was indeed a plus or minus for the movement as at some point during the protest when the government wanted to engage in dialogue with the protesters, there was no constituted representation to engage with.

So whilst it is great that Nigerian youth did finally find their voice, whether the momentum they found can be channelled into further organizing and mobilizing at the grassroots level in order to achieve increased political participation and ensure that the right crop of leaders are eventually elected into office remains to be seen.

### **In other news**

[Trump Blocks Nigeria's Okonjo-Iweala from WTO trade role](#)

[COVID-19 Deaths across Africa nears 42,000](#)

[Sychellois election observers note voter intimidation and list issues](#)

[South Africa: President Cyril Ramaphosa Self-Quarantines for COVID-19](#)

[ADB announces new Women in Ethics and Compliance in Africa initiative](#)

[African Legal Support Facility Appoints Two New Management Board Members](#)  
[Rwanda Genocide suspect Joseph Mugenzi arrested in Netherlands](#)  
[Thousands in Somaliland protest against French cartoons](#)  
[Ethiopian Premier, Deputy Premier Express Condolences Over the Passing of Iconic Prof. Mesfin Wolde-Mariam](#)  
[Nigeria at 60: No Cause for Celebration, Say Catholic Bishops](#)  
[Ethiopia-Germany Sign 4.3 Bln Birr Grant to Respond Covid - 19 Emergencies](#)  
[Statement By Executive Director of UN Women, On the Occasion of the High-Level Meeting On the 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference On Women](#)  
[Ethiopia: Green Recovery Post-Covid-19 - Policy Measures for Healthy and Restored Forests](#)  
[WHO Director-General's Opening Remarks At the Member State Briefing On Covid-19](#)  
[World Vision Ethiopia Donates 2.52 Million Birr Worth of Medical Supplies](#)

## In Civil Society Research

AROCSA founding member; Dr. Tade Akin Aina, is set to undertake the behemoth task of Uptake Director for the soon to be established African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC).

The research consortium - whose focus will be the analysis of African cities - is to be established by a partnership of urban development experts who have been awarded a contract of £32 million by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) as part of UK Aid. ACRC will spend the next 6 years tackling diverse and complex issues in some of the fastest growing urban areas across the continent. It is led by Professor Diana Mitlin of The University of Manchester.

ACRC will initially focus on 13 African cities across 12 countries: Accra (Ghana), Addis Ababa (Ethiopia), Bukavu (DRC), Dar es Salaam (Tanzania), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Harare (Zimbabwe), Kampala (Uganda), Khartoum (Sudan), Lagos (Nigeria), Lilongwe (Malawi), Maiduguri (Nigeria), Mogadishu (Somalia), and Nairobi (Kenya).

Learn more about the consortium [here](#).



A list of curated opportunities from around the world for civil society scholars and practitioners in Africa

- [Ilumina Research grants for the 2021 Agricultural Greater Good Initiative](#)
- [The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies and the German Historical Institute in Rome Joint Fellowship for African Studies](#)
- [China Africa Project \(CAP\) and Diinsider Call for contributions: African health and agricultural development](#)
- [DAAD Call for Scholarship Applications 2021 at the Regional Institute for Population Studies \(University of Ghana\)](#)
- [DAAD Call for Scholarship Applications 2021 at the University of Witwatersrand, African Centre for Migration and Displacement \(ACMS\)](#)
- [Creating Hope in Conflict: a Humanitarian Grand Challenge program](#)
- [EXPO 2020 Dubai COVID-19 Call For Proposals](#)
- [Impact!Africa Summit](#)
- [Annual Africa Conference on Social Entrepreneurship](#)
- [The Conservation, Food & Health Foundation Grant](#)
- [Noel Buxton Trust's Africa Grants](#)

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## Meet...Ms. Ayo Obe



Ms Ayo Obe (née Ogunsola) is a lawyer and human rights activist that was born in Carshalton, United Kingdom on the 24th May 1955. She recieved her education in Britain and Nigeria, receiving her Bachelor and Master of Law from the University of Wales before being called to bar and completing her National Youth Service in Nigeria. She is a partner in Ogunsola Shonibare, a law firm based in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Ms. Ayo Obe is considered one of the leading heroes of the historic struggle borne out of the events of June 12th 1993, wherein the presidential elections where cancelled by military head of state Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida. The presumed winner of the democratic election, late Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, was eventually detained for declaring himself president. Ms.

Nigerian history. She provided free legal services to those arrested under the regime of Ibrahim Babangida and subsequently the infamous dictatorship of General Sani Abacha.

Asides from a prolific legal career, Ms. Obe has also made her mark in the third sector in Africa and around the world. She has been a member of the boards of the Centre for Law Enforcement Education (CLEEN), Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA), the Z.O. Dibiaezue Memorial Libraries, and the community-based Ajegunle Community Project in Lagos. She acted as a representative for Nigerian Human Rights NGOs on the country's Police Service Commission from 2001 to 2006.

Ms. Obe has headed the Elections Program of the National Democratic Institute's Nigerian office. She was President of Nigeria's oldest indigenous human rights organisation, the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO), from 1995 to 2003. Her service as president of the organisation spanned the military rule of General Sani Abacha through to Nigeria's return to democracy with the fourth republic in May 1999. She then chaired the Transition Monitoring Group, a coalition of independent NGOs focused on election monitoring, from 1999 to 2001. She chaired the Steering Committee of the World Movement for Democracy and was on the African Democracy Forum's steering committee from 2004 to 2008.

Ms. Obe is a prolific writer who has written columns for Nigerian publications Sunday Punch, Next, and The Guardian. She has also delivered several lectures and papers with a focus on human rights and democracy, including the 2nd Annual lecture of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association, papers on Shari'a Law in Nigeria at the John F. Kennedy School of Government of Harvard University, and at Yale University. She contributed a chapter on Nigeria's quest for freedom of information legislation in her capacity as a member of the Transparency Task Force of Columbia University's Initiative for Policy Dialogue, in their publication *The Right to Know*.

Ms. Obe is a chair of the Board of Trustees of the Goree Institute in Senegal. She is a member of the Board of Brussels-based International Crisis Group. She has also been a panelist at the Oslo Forum, the Beijing Forum, and the Women's Forum.

We are always looking for new and exciting content about civil society in Africa. If you would like to contribute to *Solidarité*, please pitch us your ideas.

## Send Your Pitch

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### About the Newsletter

*Solidarité* is AROCSA's regular newsletter designed to keep readers up to date with AROCSA's programs, and events, as well as developments and opportunities mainly from within, but also from outside Africa's civil society spaces.

Appreciating the recognition at the onset of the founding of AROCSA that there have been and continue to be multiple, stand-alone efforts to encourage research and knowledge-sharing on the 'third sector' in Africa, *Solidarité* seeks to be a resource for pooling together information in order to provide a more holistic view of the sector, as well as insight into what different civil society actors across practice and academia are doing to improve the quality of life across the continent.

So on the occasion of our inaugural issue, we thank you for reading and as always, we appreciate your support.



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### About AROCSA

The Association for Research on Civil Society in Africa is a platform set up to promote and advance a community of excellence in research and practice on civil society in the service of African development.

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