



IRIAD – THE ELECTORAL HUB COMMEMORATES THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY 2021

The Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD) and The Electoral Hub commemorates the International Day of Democracy 2021 by celebrating the spread and consolidation of democracy in countries around the globe. Our efforts to advance democratic governance in Nigeria include the following:

- Research and documentation to promote transparency, accessibility and accountability in the democratic process.
- Advocacy to promote the inclusion and representation of marginalised groups such as women, youth, persons with disabilities, and internally displaced persons (IDPs).
- Political education of young people to enhance their civic awareness and promote youth political participation.
- Sensitisation of secondary school students on the Open NASS initiative to promote youth engagement in the legislative process.
- Sensitisation of IDPs on gender rights, including the causes and consequences of gender-based violence.

The International Day of Democracy was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007, with the aim of encouraging governments to strengthen and consolidate democracy.¹ The Day is celebrated on 15 September each year. The theme of International Day of Democracy 2021 is “Strengthening Democratic Resilience in the Face of Future Crises”. This theme was spurred by the advent of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) which has been ravaging the world since 2019.

The COVID-19 pandemic has raised the question of how to balance public health and safety with democratic norms and principles. This was most evident in the restrictions on freedom of movement as a result of lockdown orders, as well as other human rights abuses that occurred during enforcement of these orders. For example, the BBC reports that while enforcing the lockdown, security agents in Nigeria killed eighteen people, more than the total number of people who had died from the virus at that time.²

More starkly, COVID-19 led to the postponement of national and subnational elections in at least 79 countries and territories across the globe.³ In the Nigerian context, although the

¹ <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/strong-parliaments/international-days/international-day-democracy>

² <https://bbc.com/news/world-africa-52317196>

³ <https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections>

Edo and Ondo State governorship elections were conducted on schedule, the by-elections in six senatorial districts and nine state constituencies were postponed due to the pandemic. Given that elections are an integral feature of modern democracy, the postponement of elections poses a huge threat to democracy, especially in countries that have just recently transitioned from authoritarian regimes.

In light of this, it is imperative that stakeholders take action to ensure democratic resilience in the face of crises. The United Nations has noted that “democracy is as much a process as a goal, and only with the full participation of and support by the international community, national governing bodies, civil society and individuals, can the ideal of democracy be made into a reality to be enjoyed by everyone, everywhere”.⁴ This shows that a multifaceted approach involving different stakeholders is required to strengthen democratic resilience.

We urge governments around the world to make sustained efforts to promote democracy in their respective countries, parliaments to formulate laws that protect democracy, civil society organisations to advocate for democratic rights and freedoms, the media to educate and sensitise the public on democratic issues, electoral support agencies to support the consolidation of democracy in different countries, and the general public to demand conformity with democratic norms and principles.

As we commemorate the International Day of Democracy today, we are confident that stakeholders around the world will take the required action to ensure that democratic principles such as the rule of law, respect for human rights, participation, representation, inclusion, transparency, and accountability are safeguarded even in the context of COVID-19.

Signed

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⁴ <https://www.un.org/en/observances/democracy-day>