《非洲大地上的民主梦》

Africa ’ s democratic dreams flourish

The large lady is hoisted on to the small white horse, which is decked out in the colours of the New Patriotic party. She sits triumphant, draped head to toe in the party’s red, white and blue regalia, while onlookers snap her picture. Thousands have streamed to the Ghanaian opposition party’s pre-election rally. Though they are NPP to a man, woman and baby (if the colours of swaddling are anything to go by), everyone asked expresses a desire for free and fair elections. It seems more important to them than the result itself. ??????????????????????(NPP)?????
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“Democracy has really helped Ghana,” says Nana Anim Obiri, a chief from the eastern town of Adukrom, even as he voices concern that this week’s general election — the first round of which is today — may be rigged. “Democracy is a competition, so you have to do something to get re-elected. If it weren’t for democracy, Ghana would not have travelled this far.” “???????????”??????????Adukrom?????????????(Nana Anim Obiri)?????????
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The chief’s sentiments may strike one as touching — naive, even. Perhaps Ghana would have done better under a dictatorship (in truth, it tried that without much success). In any case, the majority of Africans do not like dictators. In a continent of strongmen — and in an era when caudillo-style politicians from Russia to China and from Japan to the US hold sway — belief in democracy in Africa is alive and well. ??
??“??”??????????????“???”????????——??????????????????——??
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That may sound like an outrageous statement about a continent notorious for its presidents for life, blatant vote-rigging and (at least until fairly recently) coup-prone armies. It may seem a particularly absurd claim in what has been, in many ways, a rotten year for African democracy. Long-serving leaders in Rwanda and Burundi ?????????
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changed the constitution to allow themselves to stay on; elections were marred by violence in Uganda and stolen in Gabon. Even that was better than the Democratic Republic of Congo, where scheduled elections never took place at all. ??(Afrobarometer)????????36?????5
.3???????67%???????“????”???????11%??????????????????

Yet surveys of African opinion suggest that, despite all the backsliding, democracy remains a potent ideal. Perhaps that is because the version that actually exists is so horribly flawed. In a poll of more than 53,000 people in 36 countries, 67 per cent said democracy was “always preferable” to the alternative, according to Afrobarometer. Just 11 per cent saw presidential dictatorship or one-party rule as a viable option. “???????????”????????(Ghana Centre for Democratic Development)???????????-???(Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi)??“??????????????”

“Democracy has not exhausted its honeymoon in Africa,” says Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, executive director for the Ghana Centre for Democratic Development. “It is still a strong aspiration of many Africans.”
??(Roberto Foa)??????(Yascha
Mounk)????????????????????????????“???????”(World Values Survey)??????????????????“???‘??’”????199
5???16????1???1?10??????????????????????72
%???????????1980??????????????30%?

Compare that sentiment with attitudes in the west, where genuine democracy — with all its imperfections — has existed for decades. In the US, according to a recent paper by Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk, faith in democracy

is in steady decline. They cite findings in the World Values Survey, which asked Americans whether they approved of the idea of “having the army ‘take over’”. In 1995, one in 16 agreed. Since then, that number has risen steadily to one in six. Younger Americans are much less wedded to the idea of democracy than their grandparents. When respondents were asked to put a value on democracy on a scale of one to 10, 72 per cent of those born before the second world war assigned the maximum value. Among those born since the 1980s, about 30 per cent did.
??——????????????(Yahya Jammeh)?????????——????????????????????

America has gone from idealism to cynicism in a few generations. Many Africans are still idealists. That is why last week’s election in tiny Gambia — in which Yahya Jammeh, an appalling dictator, was defeated in a democratic process — has been treated with wild enthusiasm around the continent. “That has been the most wonderful ??????????????????????????????????(Goodluck Jonathan)??-???(Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf)?

surprise in 2016,” says Christopher Fomunyoh of the Washington-based National Democratic Institute, referring to Mr Jammeh’s acceptance of the result.
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The Gambian outcome is unusual but it is not unique. Last year, Goodluck Jonathan surprised the continent by relinquishing the Nigerian presidency after electoral defeat. Following elections next year in Liberia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf will step down as president after serving two terms that have drawn a line under the country’s terrible civil war. In South Africa, the once unassailable African National Congress is being beaten at the ballot box in local elections — a trend that will either force it to change or, eventually, push it out of government.
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One must not take a rose-tinted view. Africans yearn for democracy mostly because they do not have it. But, unlike in much of the world, the flame is still flickering. ??/??