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## **The Illusion of Democracy**

**By Loloa Ibrahim**

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Serbia

In the bitter cold of Serbia's October, tens of thousands of defiant, men and women take to the streets in protest. In unison they roar "He is finished." They capture the parliament building in a show of defiance. Outnumbered, police relinquish power to the mob, standing idly by as young men and women storm the building. Before long, millions of uncounted ballots from the rigged elections are thrown down to the people. They shower the jubilant crowd like bursts of confetti. It is the end of Slobodan Milosovic's self-imposed tyrannical reign as president. It is the dawn of democracy.

October, 2002— It is that exhilarating time of year—election time. Two years have passed since the Serbian people's non-violent resistance and the country's induction into the free world. For a country that had fearlessly united with fire and fervor in the face of a tyrant and demanded dignity, and had become a testament to the oppressed of the world—this was a time millions stilled to watch. What they would see this year would shock their very belief in the promise of democracy. Voter turnout in Serbia is so low that the elections are declared invalid.

Meanwhile...

In a related but completely dissimilar story in another part of the world, one country holds a fairy-tale election with astoundingly perfect results. The citizens of this "utopia" would never miss an opportunity to vote for their beloved ruler. With adoration, and for some literally with their blood, millions of voters cast their ballots for the man who evidently provides them with comforts worthy of such a show of appreciation. The man: Saddam Hussein.

Unquestionably, this most beloved of rulers is the first ever to win one hundred percent of a country's vote, making him ruler for another seven years. There are over eleven million eligible voters and every one of them voted for Saddam that day. The sick, the limping, the old, the frail—all came. Saddam's

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people insist the vote was fair and accurate. Saddam Hussein was the only candidate.

Without resorting to speculation, could it be that perhaps his being the only contender played a role in his receiving one hundred percent of the vote? It's a far cry, but it just might be true.

### The Third Wave?

This is a bad time for democracy. It has shown us some of the most absurd and unjust elections. So what has happened to the "Third Wave?" The one political scientists and analysts have boasted about since the fall of communism. The Third Wave of democratization that sweeps through the world replacing oppression and tyranny with truth and justice. If anything, the results of these absurd elections point to a new phenomenon—a wave of "half-done" democracy that is hurriedly being

implemented without the necessary foundations in place.

Increasingly, it seems that the countries that so avidly promote democracy somehow expect it to exist in a vacuum. What results is a highly skeptical and distrustful population, driven to the voting booths out of despondency or, as in the case of Iraq, out of fear. But this is not true democracy; this is not true participation—the Third Wave so far is nothing more than an illusion.

### Zimbabwe

Picture Robert Mugabe in his presidential palace talking defiantly to the American ambassador on the telephone: "No, we do not need American election monitors. Zimbabwe's elections are free and fair. We don't need advice from a country that can't run its own elections." He refers to the Bush and Gore mess of 2000.

After episodes of political violence and intimidation, and after the press and media has been stifled and silenced, Zimbabwe's elections take place. Concern is expressed over the mass arbitrary detentions, disappearances, and cruel and inhuman treatment by Mugabe's men. The lack of transparency and accountability, coupled with the prevention of thousands of opposition supporters from voting, wins Mugabe a comfortable victory. The international community is as always—outraged.

### Elsewhere in Our Troubled World

In Pakistan UN envoys are sent to monitor elections. But at the verge of losing, President Musharraf orders to have the investigations stopped and, not long after, declares himself the winner.

In Bangladesh, the government decides to send out an army to stamp out the increasing crime in the country. Their targets: not criminals, but opposition leaders. The country's crackdown on crime is accused of being nothing more than a form of state terrorism directed at political parties.

As for our friends, the Germans, their Prime minister, Gerhard Schroeder wins an election after one of his ministers artlessly compares George W. Bush to Adolph Hitler. Is it the tactless comparison that is more shocking here, or the extremity of the measures taken by politicians to appeal to their otherwise

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disenchanted populations?

All around the world, voter turnouts are decreasing, as is trust in government—except of course in Iraq, where Saddam and his lovable thugs are able to tactically coerce people to vote by stamping their blood on ballots. But Iraq's kingdom-come aside, recent trends bring about great speculation about the 'Third Wave' and how prepared countries are for democracy.

In that respect it seems as if the West is willing to sacrifice quality for quantity. The more countries convert to democracy, the more its proponents can boast of its promise, and the easier it is to access and do business with these countries. Few will admit that the majority of these 'Third-Wavers'; these newly democratized nations are anything but democratic.

### Closer to Home

It seems as if the world of politics is completely devoid of trust if even the world's most successful democracy, the good old United States, is having its share of troubles.

In the shadow of the United State's chaotic presidential elections of 2000, Russia's Communist party made a sarcastic offer to send election monitors to Palm Beach to help with Florida's troubled mid-term elections. The same joke was voiced by the Albanians and by none other than Zimbabwe's Robert Mugabe. However, what was once a joke has now become a reality. America has accepted the offer.

The first delegation of poll monitors ever assigned to analyze an American election arrives in the United States and among its staff are Russian and Albanian representatives.

Their goal is to evaluate whether or not Florida's mid-term elections meet international democratic standards.

This same team of 'democracy-police' have previously monitored the French elections, and now the United States, after which they will pay Turkey a little disciplinary visit.

Some would say this event is justice for all countries that have been lectured by Washington in the past about their electoral processes.

Others would say maybe we could all learn a thing or two from Mugabe and Saddam's perfectly silenced masses.

### The Reality

No corner of the earth is without a democracy in distress.

Those of us who are lead to believe that the world is rapidly reverting to democracy have been deceived. Most of these new democracies are haunted with previous histories of communism or civil war and marred by poverty and social inequality. Under these conditions, the transition to democracy is quite impossible. Inasmuch as there are institutions promoting democracy all over the world, there are

few that promote the economic and social stability that makes democracy possible.

Why are they telling us that the stage has been set for democracy when all around the world less people are inclined to vote and more people are distrustful of their leaders? This year certainly speaks for itself. Across the globe, elections have proven to be nothing more than theatrical—Saddam's one hundred percent vote; Serbia's no-shows; Mugabe's self-imposed landslide victory.

As for the third wave—maybe, just maybe somewhere beneath the ocean of falsities, the real wave is brewing.

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**Democracy is the art of running the circus from the monkey cage.**

**By Arthur Snell**

**Democracy is the art of running the circus from the monkey cage. by Arthur Snell**

And who ruffled my feathers? My state legislators did when they voted in favor of a bill costing \$3m to produce curriculum materials for our public schools. So what's wrong with that?

All members of the legislature, both republicans and democrats, voted in favor...with the exception of a single republican senator who felt that it was none of their business. He is right. Their job is to finance public education not to produce curriculum materials.

How could this have happened at a time when over 6% of our labor force is unemployed and we are in a severe and prolonged economic down-turn? There are several possibilities:

- The media failed to keep us informed.
- No organization protested (PTA, School Boards, Teachers, parents etc. etc.
- The bill was proposed by a member of a politically potent ethnic minority and, in the present climate of multiculturalism and ethnic diversity of course {"whitey" would grovel and vote for a bill clearly against their best interest as well as the interests of the students

This is just one more example of the failure of what we laughingly call DEMOCRACY. Democracy is like a wheelbarrow, you know. It doesn't work unless you get behind it and apply some effort. Fail to do this and you forfeit your bitching and whining rights.

Retired high school science teacher.

David Blaine's Mega Magic Tricks eBook



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