

# Maybe Domestic and International Tough Love is what Africa Needs

The longevity of some of Africa's odious regimes has been due to state-sponsored violence and intimidation, ethnic and tribal politics, and the complicity of international actors who are eager to bankroll regimes that give them unfettered access to Africa's mineral and energy bounties. A vigilant citizenry that doles out tough love and does not hesitate to punish errant regimes, either through voting patterns or withholding cooperation with the culpable regimes, could be what Africa needs. Tough love, in this case, means assertive behaviour that might be to the chagrin of leaderships whose actions are at variance with the wellbeing of those they govern. Indeed, this assertiveness is love in the sense that it is well-intentioned censure or punishment, meant to encourage wayward leaders to mend their ways. Internationally, some of Africa's donors and partners could also do well by censuring indefensible misbehaviour on the continent. The West sometimes feels that it has a moral obligation to help a hopeless and hapless Africa. During a programme on [Foreign Policy Virtual Dialogue: China and the Global Fight for Democracy](#) on 3 February 2021 co-hosted by [Foreign Policy](#) and the [International Republican Institute](#), Jonathan Tepperman, the editor-at-large of Foreign Policy and the author of [The Fix: How Countries Use Crises to Solve the World's Worst Problems](#), asked me what the United States, and the West in general, could do to help Africa right now. My immediate response was that Africa should not be characterised as a [charity case](#) because the continent has, on many occasions, demonstrated a great deal of agency. In any case, arguably benign interventions from the West have at times gone awry and

compounded rather than ameliorated Africa's travails. However, without denying the culpability of non-African influence on the continent's enduring troubles, a significant portion of the blame lies with African leaderships, and the handling of the coronavirus pandemic illustrates a chilling example of this.

The [coronavirus pandemic](#) has exposed how ill-prepared some countries are in dealing with emergencies. While published figures show that Africa has not suffered to the same extent as the more affluent regions in Europe and America, the continent can scarcely afford to sit on its laurels in self-congratulation. Individual responses to the pandemic have varied from [denial](#) and dangerous nonchalance (from countries such as Tanzania), [lethargy](#) (in the case of Zambia) to severe and [prolonged](#) but ultimately flawed measures in South Africa. The haphazard and unsuccessful response to the coronavirus pandemic is symptomatic of general governance failure besetting Africa. Tough love and punitive measures, both at a domestic and international level, could just be what African governments need. In the case of South Africa, for example, the ruling [African National Congress](#) (ANC), which has been in power since the end of apartheid 27 years ago, has an arrogant swagger about its hold on power, with some of its members [boasting](#) that the party would rule until the second coming of Jesus. Thankfully, the party has had sobering defeats in key areas such as in the 2016 municipal elections when it lost the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan Municipality, Tshwane, where the seat of government is based, and in Johannesburg, which is the economic heartbeat of the country. Indeed, the ANC's cockiness is not a result of the party's efficiency; it has more to do with a citizenry that feels a profound sense of gratitude to a party that was instrumental in ending apartheid. The ANC is also comfortable because it competes with [perennially weak opposition](#) parties that have failed to capture appeal at a national level. This notwithstanding, electoral setbacks demonstrate that the party might be on the verge of losing its

lustre.

The markets hailed the end of Jacob Zuma's reign as President in 2018 with much optimism, convinced that Cyril Ramaphosa would put paid to the rank corruption that was said to be the hallmark of the Zuma administration. The May 2019 national elections saw the ANC losing 19 seats in the national assembly and garnering votes [below the 60% mark](#) of the total votes cast for the first time after 1994. This was a salutary lesson for a movement that has struggled to transition from being a liberation movement to a governing party. The latest fiasco in the ANC's litany of governance challenges has been the procurement of the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine from India to inoculate South Africans from the coronavirus. Amid a media blitz and some relief, Ramaphosa, his deputy David Mabuza, and other high-ranking members of government went to OR Tambo International Airport to receive the first consignment of the vaccine. All this quickly changed to incredulity when reports surfaced that Oxford-AstraZeneca had a disappointing chance of success against the 501Y.V2 variant of Covid-19 that "[accounts for 90% of new Covid cases in South Africa.](#)" The cash-strapped South African government paid R120 million for 1.5 million doses of the vaccine, an expenditure that it seeks to mitigate by [either selling or swapping](#) the stash. The procured vaccine was more suited to combatting the original strain of the coronavirus. Such miscalculations on the part of African governments should incur the censure, even punishment, of ordinary African citizens and international players who, for their own interests, occasionally humour ineffectual governments.

Another administration that deserves tough love is Edgar Lungu's in Zambia. The Ministry of Health enlisted Honey Bee Pharmacy Limited, a private company, to provide medical equipment, including condoms, to the Ministry of Health. It was swiftly established that Honey Bee had [provided](#) defective material, worth \$17 million – in the form of expired or

counterfeit medicines and leaking and defective condoms and gloves – [putting untold numbers of Zambians at great risk](#). In a move of fleeting relief and encouragement, President Edgar Lungu [fired](#) Chitalu Chilufya, the Minister of Health. Stunningly, the National Assembly, significantly dominated by the ruling Patriotic Front (PF), [appointed](#) Chilufya to the Parliamentary Budget Committee two weeks after he was sacked from the health portfolio. It is noteworthy that in 2020, Chilufya [was arraigned](#) before the courts on charges of corruption. He was ultimately and controversially [acquitted](#). His appointment to the Budget Committee betrayed, once again, the heartless and nonchalant methods of Zambia's current government.

The examples of South Africa and Zambia seem to be the norm rather than the exception on the African continent. There are many factors, both domestic and foreign, that support ineffectual governments in Africa. During the Cold War era, some repugnant regimes enjoyed the support of foreign players depending on where their loyalties lie, not because of the quality of their leadership. This was starkly clear when the United States supported Zaire's (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) Mobutu Sese Seko, chiefly because he was more inclined to the West rather than the Soviet Union. The same was the case with the UNITA rebel outfit in Angola, led by Jonas Savimbi. The rise of China and the arguable decline of American values and allure in the developing world could see a continuation of the "Cold War era" manner of international cooperation. Rather than being humoured, African governments might do with tough love, especially from international players of consequence such as China, France, the United States and the United Kingdom. Because of colonial guilt, some Western players are sometimes loath to criticise bad governance in former colonies. A better scenario would be that the African beneficiaries of the non-African largesse meet certain standards of governance, which are generally accepted by institutions such as the United Nations. Africa should

disabuse itself of the notion that there will ever be an unqualified partner for the continent. Any relationship is premised on some conditions, either expressly stated or obliquely implied. Even in the domestic affairs of African countries, the ruling elite should never take for granted the understanding and support of the citizens they govern. This could be the tough love that the continent needs to overcome time-honoured lethargy at state-level.

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