



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on August 5, 2010

American Government Teaches Kenyans How to Govern Themselves

The federal government of the United States, according to many critics in our country, has taken sides in a battle within Kenya to change its constitution and devolve power away from the presidency in that nation. There is near universal agreement that in the 47 years since Kenya gained independence, the nation has been plagued with corruption and election — like the 2007 election — have been marred with violence. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people were murdered in that election.



Many Kenyans, and also American government officials, hold the hope that changing the structure of government in Kenya will end the debilitating effects of corruption which have helped keep Kenya poor — despite abundant and fertile land, an excellent harbor, natural resources, and the absence of external threats. Has the U.S. government, led by a man whose father and family are Kenyan, stepped over the line in its support for the Kenyan reforms? Johnnie Carson, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, has acknowledged that “a small percentage” of civics education programs provided by the U.S. government has crossed the line and actually advocated voting for the proposed reforms.

It is not clear what business it is of the United States that Kenya have a government that seems better to us. Surely the people most affected are the Kenyans, who will have to live with any new system. Other nations have moved from corrupt governments to relatively clean governments and other nations have had good governments without our guidance. Switzerland, whose citizens maintain strict neutrality backed by a robust and serious national militia, has been a free, democratic confederacy for centuries without our help. Costa Rica, amid the corruption and poverty endemic in much of Latin America, has a model government and a civil, law-abiding society.

There is an excellent model nation in Africa too — Botswana, which, although land-locked and with only about 30 percent of the land arable, has, according to Freedom House, a free economic system and an absence of the sort of corruption that we have come to assume is automatic in Africa. Botswana has one of the highest economic growth rates in the world — 9 percent per year over the last several



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decades — easily moving this resource-poor, landlocked former colony from dire poverty to middle class affluence in a generation.

What is the “secret” of Botswana? As noted, it has much more economic freedom than any other country in Africa, or in the world, for that matter. It also has practically no army at all, in contrast to many of its neighbors. Botswana has almost no foreign debt; it pursues sound fiscal policies; and its currency is rated the most secure in Africa. The political system itself is not all that different from many former colonies, all of which have “model” constitutions, but the Botswanan Constitution does have one key provision essential to a free and prosperous economy: Nationalization of industries by the government is specifically prohibited.

Instead of American diplomats telling Kenyans how to run their country, why doesn't the American government ask the government (and the business leaders) of Botswana to offer assistance to Kenyans? Both nations are former British African colonies filled with diverse tribes, enjoying much more in common than either does with America. Yet one nation is a catastrophe and the other is a brilliant success. Botswana, in fact, has taken a course very different from the course taken by the Obama Administration in the United States. Botswana pursues the steady, consistent course of stable currency, low debt, low taxes, and economic liberty. It works — spectacularly. Is there any reason why it would not work in Kenya? Is there any reason to believe that tinkering with the Kenyan Constitution, without reducing the size and power of government, will do any good? Why doesn't our government suggest that troubled nations embrace freedom, the best way of ending poverty and promoting prosperity.

Photo: Kenya's Police Commissioner Mathew Iteere, right, is shown making security arrangements around the Bomas of Kenya, where votes from a national referendum will be tallied, in Nairobi: AP Images



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