

DEMCAP REPORT 2025:



Key Insights at a Glance

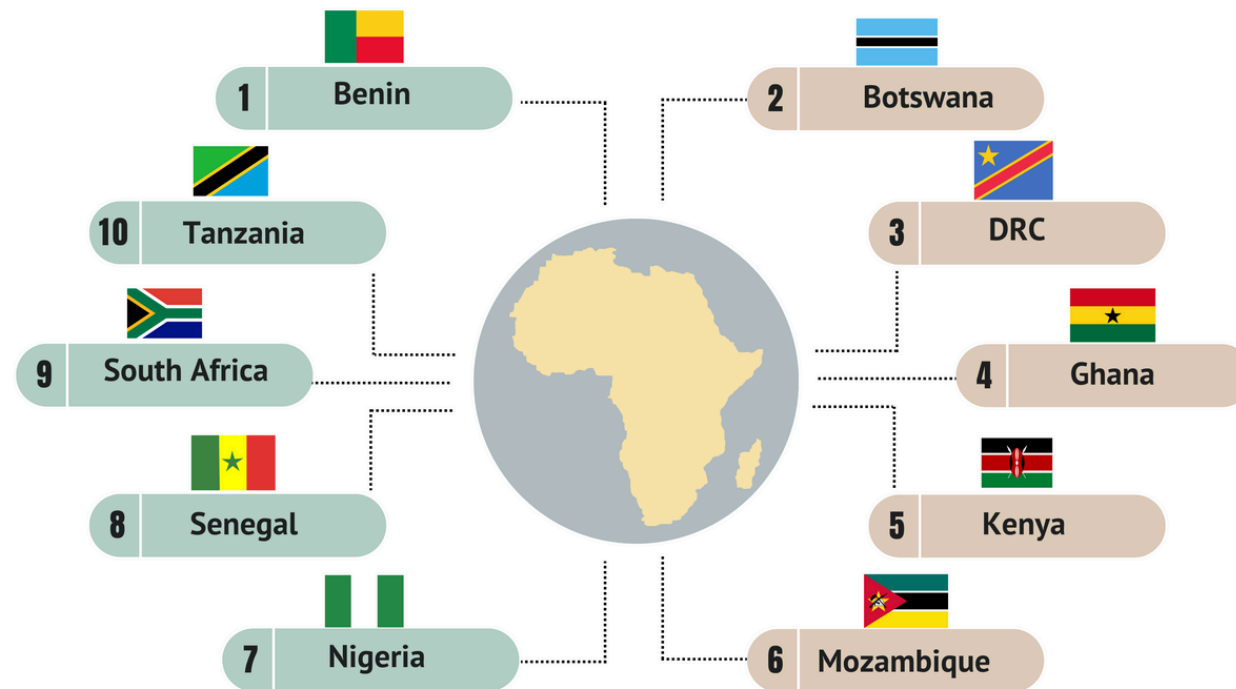


Introduction

Democracy in Africa is under increasing pressure—not only from military coups and overt authoritarianism, but also from more subtle and systemic forms of institutional manipulation. While headline-grabbing crises such as electoral violence or unconstitutional power grabs often dominate public debate, a quieter and more corrosive threat has taken root across many countries on the continent: **democracy capture**.

This report, along with the Democracy Capture (DemCap) project, introduces a new and comprehensive effort to map and measure the extent of democracy capture in Africa. Drawing on original data collected from 370 state institutions and agencies in ten African countries, it presents a cross-national comparison of how democratic processes are being undermined from within, often in ways that are difficult to detect or confront.

In DemCap Round 1, we do this for ten countries – Benin, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, and Tanzania.



The analysis in the report makes it possible to compare levels of state capture across a wide range of individual agencies and institutions that can be categorized under six key dimensions of democracy: vertical accountability institutions, horizontal accountability institutions, policy-making institutions, enforcement agencies, implementing regulatory agencies and independent regulatory agencies.

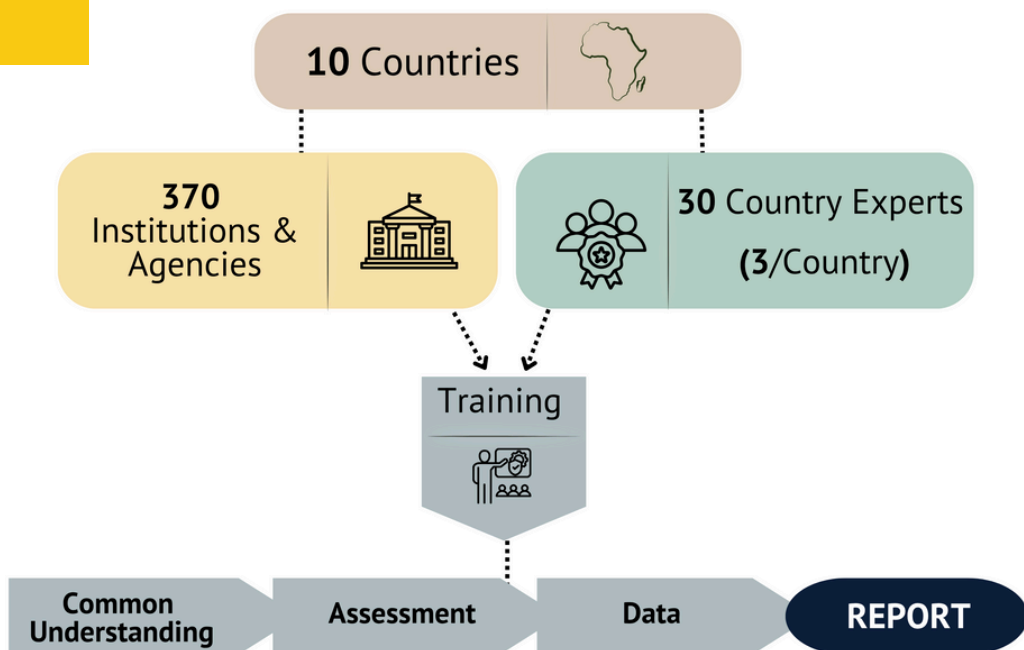


The Approach

The data collected by DemCap covers 370 institutions and agencies grouped into six main dimensions of democracy capture across 10 countries. To do this, the DemCap core team worked with 30 individual country experts (3 per country), who each received the same rigorous training. Assessors were trained together in groups of five countries at a time to ensure that they developed a common understanding of democracy capture and measured the extent of democracy capture using a standardized assessment process.

At the same time, the country-assessors played an important role in refining the research instrument, identifying the most relevant institutions and agencies in each country, and providing both narrative reports and numerical scores for their countries, enabling us to develop a richer understanding of the various faces of democracy captured across Africa.





The DemCap Sample

The first round of DemCap research covered ten cases, which were selected to ensure that the project was representative of countries from different parts of the continent.

The sample is also representative of the continent's four main sub-regions: West Africa, East Africa, Southern Africa, and Central Africa. Partly as a result, it also reflects different colonial pasts and contemporary linguistic variations, including Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone.

Language Categories

Countries



Francophone

Benin, DRC, Senegal



Anglophone

Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania, Botswana



Lusophone

Mozambique



Sub-Region

Countries



West Africa

Benin, Ghana, Nigeria,
Senegal



East Africa

Kenya, Tanzania



Southern Africa

Botswana, Mozambique,
South Africa



Central Africa

Democratic Republic
of Congo (DRC)

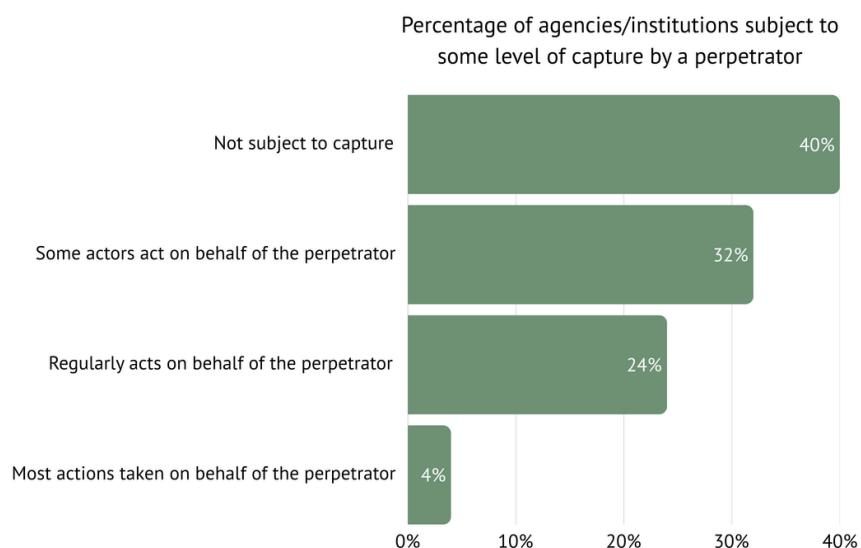
Key Findings

The conclusions of this report have significant implications not only for the fragility of African States to autocratization, but also for how we should view democracy and democratic resilience moving forward. We find that:

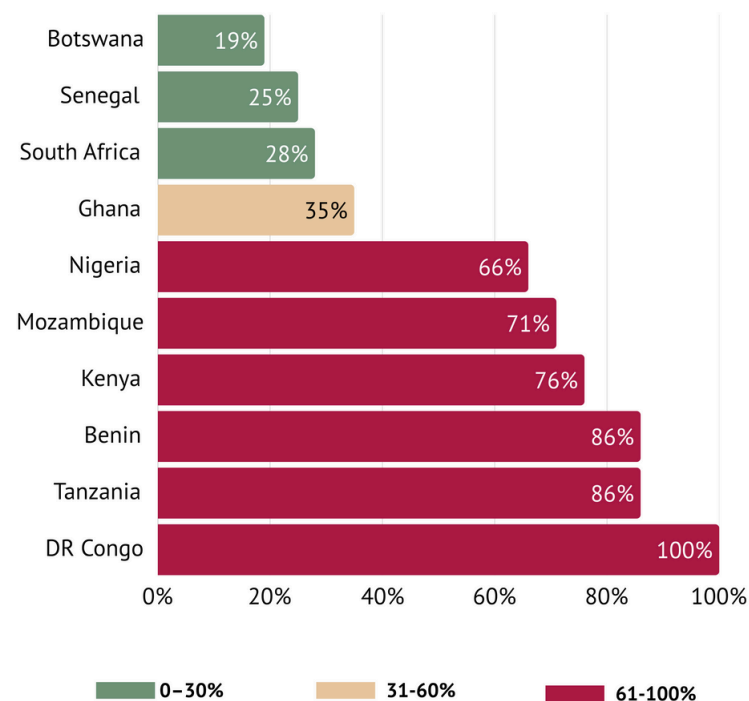


- Overall, across all countries examined, there is **a worrying level of democracy capture**. A considerable number of agencies/institutions (60%) analyzed currently reflect at least some level of capture by a perpetrator.

Current Level of Democracy Capture



- The level of democracy capture varies depending on the country. The percentage of agencies/institutions in each country reflecting at least some level of capture by a perpetrator is as follows:



- The extent of democracy capture at the **level of institutions and agencies** is concerning overall; only 40% are rated as being “not subject to capture” of any kind.
- Lesser-known institutions**, such as independent regulatory agencies and implementing agencies, are more likely to be captured than their higher-profile counterparts categorized under horizontal and vertical accountability.



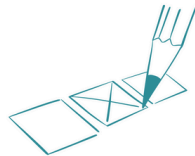
- In most of the democracies examined (Benin, DR Congo, Senegal, and Nigeria), the **chief executive (president)** is the key perpetrator of democracy capture.
- **Businesspeople** and **influential individuals** outside the formal political system play an important role in democracy capture and are almost as likely to be perpetrators as political parties. This highlights the range of actors involved in democracy capture and the need to better understand the relationship amongst them.
- Perpetrators use three key methods for democracy capture:



Financial inducements/
Bribes



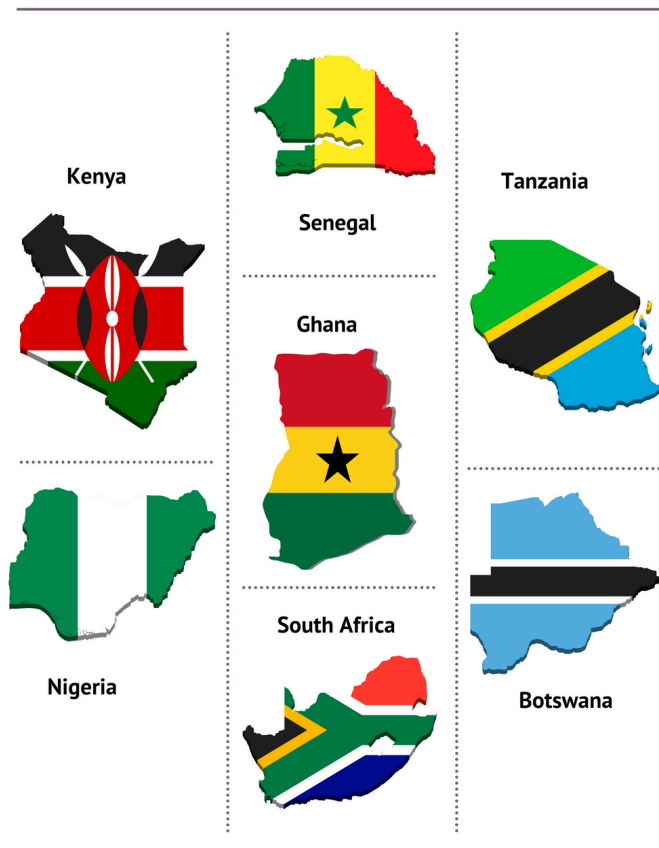
Political pressure/
Threat of withdrawal of
support



Threats of removal
from office

- The actions of perpetrators have **negative consequences for a wide range of activities**, including procurement processes, public prosecutions, legislative scrutiny, the enactment of reforms and the provision of public services – as well as undermining accountability and the resilience of the wider democratic system.
- Perpetrators of democracy capture have two ultimate goals:
 - a) increasing partisan control; and
 - b) achieving material gain.
- The following countries are assessed as being the most vulnerable to an increase in **democracy capture in the future**:





Conclusion

The evidence in this report highlights the **urgent need** for further investigation into the consequences of democracy capture—immediate, medium, and long term.

While the intention of many perpetrators may not be to destroy democracy outright, their actions often bend institutions to serve narrow interests, in ways that may appear benign in the short term but ultimately undermine the vitality and resilience of democratic systems. In some cases, perpetrators may even believe that their interventions are not harmful. Yet the cumulative effect of these actions—particularly when they involve the manipulation of enforcement agencies or regulatory bodies—can be deeply corrosive. The patterns revealed by this report suggest that capture is often not designed to replace democracy but to reshape it into a system that serves elite agendas, while maintaining a democratic façade.

DemCap offers more than a new dataset—it **provides a new lens**. By revealing where democracy is being hollowed out, even in countries often held up as models, it calls into question some of the assumptions that underpin current policy and programming. Above all, it delivers a stark warning: **no country should be considered immune**. Democracy capture is not the exception—it is the risk that lurks beneath the surface of all political systems. Recognizing that reality is the first step toward designing the tools needed to resist it.





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