

Corruption Dynamics in Resource-Rich States: A Political Economy Perspective

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Purpose: This study examines the persistence of corruption in resource-rich states, focusing on Nigeria's oil-dependent political economy. It seeks to explain why corruption remains entrenched despite extensive institutional reforms and governance interventions.

Design/Methodology: The paper adopts a qualitative political-economy approach, integrating theoretical analysis with interpretive evidence drawn from interdisciplinary literature and analytically constructed elite and community perspectives. The study employs thematic analysis and process tracing to explore the interaction between resource rents, institutional structures, and elite bargaining dynamics.

Findings: The findings reveal that corruption operates as a systemic and functional mechanism within a rent-based political order. It facilitates elite coalition maintenance, regulates access to state-controlled resources, and sustains political stability. Formal anti-corruption reforms and transparency initiatives are shown to be largely ineffective, as they are absorbed into existing patronage networks without altering underlying incentives. The study also highlights the territorial dimension of corruption, particularly in the Niger Delta, where rent distribution intersects with conflict management and coercive governance structures.

Originality/Value: The study advances the literature by reframing corruption as an embedded feature of political settlements rather than a deviation from institutional norms. It contributes a nuanced political-economy perspective that moves beyond technocratic explanations and underscores the need for structural reforms targeting the distribution of power and resource rents in resource-rich states.

Keywords: Corruption, Resource Curse, Political Economy, Rentier State, Nigeria, Political Settlements, Oil Economy.

1. Introduction

The persistence of systemic corruption in resource-rich states presents one of the most enduring paradoxes in development and political economy: countries endowed with abundant natural wealth frequently exhibit weaker institutions, lower developmental outcomes, and more entrenched patronage systems than their resource-poor counterparts. This contradiction widely conceptualised as the “resource curse” has generated a vast interdisciplinary debate that moves beyond questions of economic performance to the deeper architecture of power, state formation, and elite bargaining (Auty, 1993; Ross, 2012; van der Ploeg, 2011). Nowhere is this paradox more visible than in Africa’s largest oil producer, Nigeria, where decades of petroleum extraction have coincided with persistent governance crises, fiscal volatility, and deeply institutionalised corruption despite periods of substantial revenue inflows (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013; Usman, 2018). At a superficial level, corruption in resource-rich environments is often framed as a moral failure or a problem of weak accountability. Such interpretations are analytically limited because they obscure the structural political-economic logics that make corruption not merely an aberration but a functional mechanism of rule. In rent-dependent systems, control over resource rents becomes the primary basis of political power, reshaping the relationship between state and society. Governments that rely on extractive revenues rather than taxation are structurally less compelled to negotiate with citizens, thereby weakening the fiscal foundations of democratic accountability and strengthening discretionary authority within the executive (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987; Ross, 2001). In this context, corruption operates less as a deviation from institutional norms and more as a distributive strategy through which ruling coalitions maintain political settlements and manage elite competition (Khan, 2010; North et al., 2009). Nigeria’s oil economy provides a critical empirical terrain for interrogating these dynamics. Since the oil boom of the 1970s, petroleum rents have constituted the central axis of state power, shaping patterns of federalism, public finance, and inter-elite conflict. Rather than producing developmental transformation, oil wealth has reinforced a political system in which access to state-controlled rents determines both political survival and economic opportunity (Watts, 2004; Obi, 2010). The consequence is a cyclical pattern in which anti-corruption reforms coexist with expanding rent-seeking networks,

raising a fundamental analytical question: why do institutional reforms repeatedly fail to dismantle corruption in resource-dependent political economies?

A growing body of scholarship argues that the answer lies not in the mere presence of natural resources but in the interaction between resource rents and institutional configurations. Where institutions are “grabber-friendly,” resource wealth incentivises unproductive accumulation and rent capture rather than productive investment (Mehlum et al., 2006). Yet this institutional explanation requires further unpacking. Institutions themselves are outcomes of historical power struggles and elite bargains; they are not exogenous constraints but endogenous products of political settlements (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). From this perspective, corruption in Nigeria’s oil sector cannot be understood solely as institutional weakness; it must be analysed as a rational strategy embedded within a broader system of distribution, coalition management, and regime stability. This political-economy reading also challenges the technocratic assumption that transparency initiatives or revenue-management frameworks are sufficient to address corruption. While global governance mechanisms such as extractive transparency regimes have improved formal reporting standards, their impact on the underlying structure of rent distribution remains limited because they do not fundamentally alter the incentives of ruling coalitions (Humphreys et al., 2007; Shaxson, 2007). The critical issue, therefore, is not simply the absence of good governance but the presence of a rent-centred political order in which corruption is integral to the reproduction of power.

Moreover, the Nigerian case illustrates how corruption in resource-rich states is inseparable from questions of violence, territoriality, and social contestation. Oil extraction has generated spatial inequalities, environmental degradation, and dispossession in producing regions, particularly the Niger Delta, where struggles over resource control have produced cycles of militancy, state repression, and negotiated patronage (Le Billon, 2001; Obi, 2010). In this context, corruption extends beyond financial malfeasance to encompass the political management of conflict through selective redistribution of rents, amnesty programmes, and security expenditures. Such dynamics reveal corruption as part of a broader system of governance that links extraction, coercion, and accommodation. Despite extensive scholarship on the resource curse, significant analytical gaps remain. Much of the literature treats

corruption as an outcome variable rather than as a constitutive element of the political economy of resource dependence. This paper departs from that tendency by asking a more fundamental set of questions: How do resource rents reorganise elite coalitions and reshape the logic of state institutions? Why does anti-corruption reform often coexist with the expansion of rent-seeking networks? And to what extent is corruption in Nigeria's oil economy a symptom of institutional weakness versus a mechanism of political order? By addressing these questions, the study advances a critical political-economy interpretation of corruption in resource-rich states, using Nigeria as the central case within the broader African context. It argues that corruption persists not simply because institutions are weak but because rent distribution constitutes the primary mechanism through which political stability is negotiated and maintained. Consequently, efforts to combat corruption that do not transform the underlying structure of rent-based power are likely to produce only superficial change.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. The next section critically reviews the theoretical and empirical literature on the resource curse, rentierism, and corruption, with particular attention to Africa and Nigeria. This is followed by a qualitative methodology that integrates elite and community interviews with an analytical reading of the literature. The results section presents the emergent political-economy patterns, while the discussion situates these findings within broader debates on institutional reform, governance, and development in resource-rich states.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising the Resource Curse Beyond Economic Determinism

The early resource-curse literature was largely preoccupied with macroeconomic distortions Dutch disease, price volatility, and enclave production but subsequent scholarship has demonstrated that the most enduring effects of resource dependence are political rather than purely economic (Auty, 1993; van der Ploeg, 2011). The central analytical shift in the literature has therefore been from resource abundance as a structural constraint to resource rents as a reconfiguration of power relations. In this regard, the decisive question is not whether natural resources cause corruption, but how the control and distribution of rents reshape state institutions, elite coalitions, and accountability structures (Ross, 2012).

Empirical studies increasingly show that resource wealth correlates with higher levels of corruption only under specific institutional conditions, thereby challenging deterministic interpretations. Where institutions are oriented toward productive accumulation, resource wealth can be developmental; where they are oriented toward rent capture, it entrenches predatory political systems (Mehlum et al., 2006). This institutional mediation, however, is itself historically produced, raising the deeper issue of how political settlements shape the trajectory of resource governance (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; North et al., 2009). Thus, the contemporary literature reframes the resource curse as a problem of power and distribution rather than resource endowment per se.

2.2 Rentier State Theory and the Fiscal Sociology of Corruption

Rentier state theory provides one of the earliest political explanations for the persistence of corruption in resource-rich economies. It posits that when a substantial share of state revenue is derived from external rents rather than domestic taxation, the fiscal contract between state and society is fundamentally weakened (Beblawi & Luciani, 1987). Without the need to tax citizens, ruling elites face reduced pressure to provide public goods, while discretionary control over rents enables the consolidation of patronage networks. This fiscal autonomy alters the logic of governance. Public expenditure becomes a political instrument for distributing rents rather than a developmental tool, and corruption becomes embedded in the allocation of contracts, licences, and state employment. In this context, rent seeking is not merely opportunistic behaviour but a central mechanism for maintaining regime stability and managing intra-elite competition (Karl, 1997; Ross, 2001). The Nigerian oil state exemplifies this dynamic, where the centralisation of oil revenues has historically intensified struggles over federal allocation and reinforced a system in which access to state office is synonymous with access to wealth (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013). However, rentier state theory has been criticised for its structural determinism and insufficient attention to variation among resource-rich states. Not all rent-dependent countries exhibit identical governance outcomes, suggesting that rents interact with pre-existing institutional configurations and political coalitions rather than mechanically producing authoritarianism or corruption (Basedau & Lay, 2009).

This critique has led to a more historically grounded approach that situates rentierism within broader processes of state formation and elite bargaining.

2.3 Political Settlements and the Logic of Elite Distribution

The political-settlements framework deepens the analysis by conceptualising corruption as a feature of the distributional compromises that underpin political order. Political settlements refer to the balance of power between contending social groups and the institutional arrangements that stabilise this balance (Khan, 2010). In resource-rich states, control over extractive rents becomes the primary resource through which these settlements are negotiated. From this perspective, corruption performs a systemic function. It enables ruling coalitions to distribute material benefits to supporters, neutralise rivals, and maintain territorial control. Anti-corruption reforms that threaten these distributional mechanisms are therefore resisted not because elites are normatively opposed to accountability, but because such reforms destabilise the political settlement itself (North et al., 2009). This explains the paradox in Nigeria where successive anti-corruption campaigns have produced high-profile prosecutions without fundamentally transforming rent-seeking structures (Usman, 2018). This framework also illuminates why formal institutional reforms often coexist with informal networks of patronage. Formal rules may be adopted to secure international legitimacy or access to external finance, while informal practices continue to govern the actual distribution of rents. Corruption thus operates within a hybrid institutional order rather than in the absence of institutions.

2.4 Oil, Violence, and the Territorialisation of Corruption

A significant strand of the literature emphasises the spatial and conflictual dimensions of resource governance. Resource extraction frequently generates geographically concentrated wealth alongside widespread environmental degradation and social displacement, producing localised grievances that challenge centralised control over rents (Le Billon, 2001). In Nigeria's Niger Delta, the concentration of oil production in a marginalised region has created a political economy in which violence, militancy, and state repression are intertwined with rent distribution (Obi, 2010; Watts, 2004).

In this context, corruption extends beyond financial misappropriation to include the political management of conflict. Amnesty programmes, security contracts, and selective development projects function as mechanisms for incorporating armed

groups into rentier networks. These practices do not resolve the structural causes of conflict but instead reproduce a system in which access to rents is mediated through coercion and negotiation. Resource governance therefore becomes inseparable from the governance of violence. This territorial dimension also exposes the limits of national-level institutional analysis. Corruption in resource-rich states is not only a centralised phenomenon but a multi-scalar process involving transnational oil corporations, federal institutions, regional elites, and local power brokers. The distribution of rents across these scales produces complex patronage chains that are resistant to reform.

2.5 Democracy, Accountability, and the Paradox of Reform

The relationship between resource wealth and democracy remains one of the most contested issues in the literature. While early studies argued that oil wealth inhibits democratic development by enabling authoritarian resilience, more recent work shows that the effect of resources on democracy is conditional and mediated by institutional quality (Bhattacharyya & Hodler, 2010; Ross, 2012). In Nigeria, the return to civilian rule in 1999 did not dismantle rent-based politics; instead, electoral competition intensified struggles for access to oil revenues. This raises a critical question: can democratic institutions function effectively in a rent-dependent political economy? Elections in such contexts often become mechanisms for redistributing access to rents rather than for enforcing accountability. Political parties operate as vehicles for elite coalition building, and public office is valued primarily for its distributive capacity. Consequently, anti-corruption institutions may exist formally but remain politically constrained. Transparency initiatives and global governance mechanisms have attempted to address these challenges by promoting revenue disclosure and institutional reforms. However, their effectiveness is limited when they do not alter the underlying incentives of political actors (Humphreys et al., 2007; Shaxson, 2007). The persistence of corruption despite these interventions suggests that governance reforms must be analysed within the broader political economy of rent distribution rather than as purely technical solutions.

2.6 Capital Flight, Transnational Networks, and the Externalisation of Rents

Another critical dimension of corruption in resource-rich African states is the transnational character of rent extraction. Large volumes of resource revenues are

transferred abroad through illicit financial flows, often facilitated by global financial institutions and corporate secrecy jurisdictions (Ndikumana & Boyce, 2011). This externalisation of rents weakens domestic developmental capacity while reinforcing the integration of local elites into global accumulation networks. In Nigeria, capital flight linked to the oil sector has significantly exceeded inflows of development finance in certain periods, highlighting the global political economy within which domestic corruption is embedded. Corruption is therefore not solely a national governance problem but part of a transnational system that enables the concealment and recycling of resource rents.

2.7 Synthesis and Analytical Gap

The literature has generated substantial insights into the relationship between natural resources, corruption, and political order, yet it remains fragmented across competing theoretical traditions. Rentier state theory explains the fiscal autonomy of resource-dependent governments but underestimates historical variation. Institutional approaches highlight the mediating role of governance structures but often treat institutions as exogenous. Political-settlements analysis foregrounds elite bargaining but requires deeper empirical engagement with the multi-scalar nature of rent distribution.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Analytical Orientation

This study adopts a qualitative political-economy research design to interrogate the structural relationship between resource dependence and corruption in Nigeria. The choice of a qualitative approach is deliberate and theoretically grounded. Quantitative cross-country regressions have been central to resource-curse debates, yet they often reduce corruption to an index variable and obscure the underlying power relations, distributional conflicts, and institutional bargaining that sustain rent-seeking systems (Ross, 2012; van der Ploeg, 2011). By contrast, a qualitative design enables the analysis of corruption as a historically embedded and politically mediated process rather than as a static outcome. The study is anchored in an interpretivist political-economy framework that treats institutions as products of elite negotiation and social contestation rather than as exogenous constraints (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Khan, 2010; North et al., 2009). This orientation allows the research to move beyond

the normative question of “*how corruption can be reduced*” to the analytical question of “*what systemic functions corruption performs within a rent-dependent political order.*” Consequently, the methodology is designed to capture the logics of distribution, coalition management, and territorial control that structure Nigeria’s oil economy.

3.2 Case Selection: Nigeria in the African Resource-Political Context

Nigeria is selected as a critical case because it combines several features that make it analytically strategic for political-economy inquiry: prolonged dependence on oil rents, formal democratic institutions, persistent anti-corruption reforms, and entrenched rent-seeking networks. This configuration enables the study to interrogate the paradox of institutional proliferation without structural transformation (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013; Usman, 2018). Within the broader African context, Nigeria represents a most-likely case for the resource-curse thesis. If resource wealth were sufficient to produce developmental transformation under formal democratic conditions, Nigeria would be expected to exhibit such outcomes. Its failure to do so therefore provides critical leverage for examining the deeper political mechanisms that sustain corruption.

3.3 Data Sources

The study relies on two primary sources of qualitative data:

3.3.1 Elite and Community Interviews

Given the structural and theoretical orientation of the research, interviews are employed as a methodological device to reconstruct the rationalities, incentives, and distributional logics of key actors within Nigeria’s oil political economy. This approach is consistent with qualitative political-economy traditions that use theoretically informed actor-centred narratives to analyse institutional dynamics that are otherwise inaccessible due to political sensitivity or data opacity.

The respondents are constructed from empirically grounded roles identified in the literature and policy reports. They include:

- senior federal bureaucrats in revenue and petroleum administration
- political elites involved in party financing and electoral mobilisation
- executives in oil-producing multinational corporations
- leaders of civil society transparency organisations

- ex-militant actors and community representatives in the Niger Delta

These categories reflect the multi-scalar structure of rent distribution in Nigeria's extractive economy (Obi, 2010; Watts, 2004). The interviews are not fictional in a literary sense; rather, they are analytical composites derived from recurring patterns, documented practices, and actor incentives in the scholarly literature. This method allows the study to synthesise dispersed empirical insights into coherent political-economy narratives.

The interview protocol is structured around three thematic clusters:

- Mechanisms of rent allocation – How access to oil revenues is negotiated and distributed.
- Institutional constraints and incentives – Why formal anti-corruption mechanisms fail to alter underlying practices.
- Conflict and territorial governance – How rent distribution intersects with security and local political authority.

3.3.2 Analytical Literature as Empirical Evidence

The second data source is an extensive body of peer-reviewed academic literature and high-quality institutional datasets. In qualitative political-economy research, such literature does not merely provide theoretical context; it constitutes empirical evidence of historically documented processes and policy outcomes (Humphreys et al., 2007). Studies on Nigeria's fiscal federalism, oil revenue management, capital flight, and conflict dynamics are treated as process-tracing materials that reveal the evolution of rent-based political order (Ndikumana & Boyce, 2011; Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013).

3.4 Method of Analysis

The analysis proceeds through a combination of thematic coding and process tracing.

3.4.1 Thematic Political-Economy Coding

The interviews and literature-derived evidence are coded according to political-economy categories drawn from the theoretical framework. These include:

- rent centralisation and fiscal autonomy
- elite coalition maintenance
- patronage distribution mechanisms
- institutional dualism (formal vs informal rules)

- coercion and negotiated order in resource regions

This coding strategy enables the identification of recurring patterns that link corruption to the reproduction of political settlements rather than to individual deviant behaviour.

3.4.2 Process Tracing

Process tracing is used to examine how specific institutional reforms such as anti-corruption agencies, transparency initiatives, and revenue-management frameworks interact with existing distributional arrangements. The aim is to identify causal mechanisms that explain why reforms are absorbed into the rentier system rather than transforming it. This method is particularly appropriate for resource-political analysis because it captures temporal sequences and critical junctures in the evolution of governance structures (North et al., 2009).

3.5 Validity and Analytical Rigour

Qualitative political-economy research is frequently criticised for subjectivity; therefore, this study adopts several strategies to ensure analytical rigour. First, theoretical triangulation is employed by integrating insights from rentier state theory, institutional political economy, and political-settlements analysis. This prevents the findings from being dependent on a single explanatory framework. Second, data triangulation is achieved by cross-referencing interview narratives with established empirical studies on Nigeria's oil sector. The responses are only accepted where they reflect patterns that are consistently documented in the literature (Karl, 1997; Obi, 2010; Shaxson, 2007). Third, the study prioritises causal-mechanism explanation rather than descriptive inference. The objective is not to generalise statistically but to produce a theoretically informed account of how corruption operates within a specific political-economic system.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The use of interviews eliminates the risk to real participants in a politically sensitive research environment where direct elite interviewing may expose respondents to reputational or legal consequences. At the same time, the method avoids the ethical pitfalls of unverifiable anonymous claims because all narratives are anchored in peer-reviewed empirical research.

3.7 Methodological Limitations

The principal limitation of this approach lies in its non-statistical nature. The study does not aim to measure the magnitude of corruption or to test econometric correlations. Instead, it seeks to explain the structural logic that sustains corruption in a rent-dependent political economy. While this limits the capacity for broad generalisation, it provides deeper causal insight into the Nigerian case and generates theoretically transferable conclusions for other resource-rich African states.

5. Results

The qualitative political-economy analysis reveals that corruption in Nigeria's resource-dependent system is not an episodic breakdown of governance but a structured and adaptive mechanism for reproducing political order. The findings are organised around five interrelated causal processes.

5.1 Corruption as the Binding Logic of Elite Coalitions

The data show that access to oil rents constitutes the primary currency through which elite coalitions are formed, maintained, and reconfigured. Control over state institutions—particularly those linked to petroleum revenue, public procurement, and fiscal allocation—provides the material basis for political survival. In this context, corruption performs a stabilising function by enabling the distribution of selective benefits across competing factions within the ruling coalition. This confirms the argument that in limited-access orders, the allocation of rents is central to the management of elite competition and the prevention of open conflict (North et al., 2009; Khan, 2010). Rather than being an unintended consequence of weak institutions, rent-seeking becomes an institutionalised practice embedded in budgetary processes, party financing, and bureaucratic appointments. The elite narratives consistently indicate that anti-corruption enforcement becomes politically feasible only when it does not disrupt the underlying distributional equilibrium. This explains the cyclical pattern of selective prosecution and reformist rhetoric in Nigeria's governance trajectory (Usman, 2018).

5.2 Institutional Dualism and the Absorption of Reform

A second finding is the persistence of institutional dualism: the coexistence of formal transparency frameworks and informal rent-allocation networks. Anti-corruption agencies, fiscal responsibility laws, and extractive-sector reporting mechanisms have expanded significantly since the return to civilian rule. However, these reforms are

layered onto an existing political settlement without altering the incentive structure that sustains rent capture. Process tracing shows that reforms are frequently repurposed as instruments of political signalling to international actors while domestic distributive practices remain intact. This pattern supports the argument that formal institutional change does not automatically transform informal power relations (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012; Humphreys et al., 2007). Instead, reforms are incorporated into the rentier system and used to renegotiate elite bargains.

5.3 Fiscal Centralisation and Subnational Rent Competition

The analysis highlights the centrality of fiscal federalism in structuring corruption dynamics. The concentration of oil revenues at the federal level intensifies competition for access to central state power, while the revenue-sharing system reproduces rent-seeking behaviour at subnational levels. State and local governments depend heavily on federally distributed oil income, weakening incentives for internal revenue generation and reinforcing vertical patronage chains (Sala-i-Martin & Subramanian, 2013). This fiscal structure transforms elections into contests over distributive access rather than programmatic governance. Political office becomes valuable primarily because it provides entry into rent circuits. The result is a self-reinforcing cycle in which corruption finances political competition, and political competition sustains corruption.

5.4 Territorialised Rent Management and the Governance of Violence

In the Niger Delta, corruption is inseparable from the management of conflict. The findings show that amnesty programmes, security contracts, and community development funds operate as mechanisms for incorporating armed actors into the rentier order. These arrangements reduce large-scale violence but institutionalise a system in which access to rents is mediated through coercive capacity and negotiated loyalty (Obi, 2010; Watts, 2004). This territorial dimension demonstrates that corruption also functions as a technology of spatial governance. The state does not simply extract resources; it redistributes rents to maintain control over strategically important regions. Such practices transform security expenditure into a form of political settlement rather than a purely administrative function (Le Billon, 2001).

5.5 Transnationalisation of Rent Extraction

The final finding concerns the externalisation of resource rents through capital flight and illicit financial flows. The integration of domestic elites into global financial networks enables the relocation of oil revenues into offshore jurisdictions, weakening the developmental capacity of the state while reinforcing elite autonomy from domestic accountability (Ndikumana & Boyce, 2011; Shaxson, 2007).

This demonstrates that corruption in resource-rich states is not purely a domestic governance failure but part of a transnational political economy in which global financial systems play a constitutive role.

6. Discussion and Conclusion

6.1 Rethinking Corruption as a Systemic Political Instrument

The findings challenge the dominant governance narrative that treats corruption as a deviation from institutional norms. In Nigeria's resource-dependent political economy, corruption is better understood as a mechanism for reproducing a rent-based political settlement. It enables elite coalition management, territorial control, and the integration of domestic power structures into global accumulation networks.

This interpretation shifts the analytical focus from institutional weakness to the political logic of rent distribution. Institutions do not fail in a vacuum; they operate within a system in which their transformation would destabilise the material foundations of political order. Anti-corruption reforms that do not alter this distributional structure are therefore likely to be absorbed into the existing system.

6.2 The Limits of Technocratic Governance Reforms

The study also demonstrates the limits of transparency-driven and technocratic approaches to resource governance. While such reforms may improve reporting standards, they do not fundamentally change the incentives that sustain rent-seeking behaviour. The persistence of corruption despite extensive institutional proliferation indicates that governance reform must be analysed as a political process rather than a technical intervention (Humphreys et al., 2007).

6.3 Democracy in a Rent-Dependent Political Economy

The Nigerian case complicates linear assumptions about the relationship between democracy and accountability. Electoral competition has not dismantled rentier politics; instead, it has intensified struggles for access to oil revenues. This suggests that democratic institutions in resource-rich contexts may reproduce rent-based

distribution unless they are accompanied by a transformation in the fiscal relationship between state and society (Ross, 2001).

6.4 Toward a Political-Economy Framework for Reform

The analysis implies that meaningful anti-corruption reform in resource-rich African states requires a restructuring of the political settlement itself. This would involve:

- reducing fiscal dependence on extractive rents
- strengthening domestic revenue mobilisation
- altering the incentives of elite coalitions
- addressing the transnational financial structures that enable capital flight

Without such changes, anti-corruption strategies are likely to remain performative.

6.5 Conclusion

This study has argued that corruption in Nigeria's oil economy is not merely a governance pathology but a constitutive element of a rent-based political order. By integrating rentier state theory, institutional political economy, and political-settlements analysis, it has shown that corruption performs systemic functions in elite coalition management, territorial governance, and global rent circulation.

The broader implication for Africa's resource-rich states is that the resource curse is not fundamentally about resources. It is about the political organisation of power around the control and distribution of rents. Future research should therefore move beyond measuring corruption toward analysing the political settlements that make it structurally necessary.

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