

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cheated of What? Resource Grievance Detached from Resource Dependence

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. The political resource curse holds that extraction concentrates wealth, insulates rulers and excludes citizens. It follows that citizens of resource-dependent states should feel more excluded from resource wealth than citizens of states with little to extract. This article tests that expectation directly on African publics.

Methods. Afrobarometer Round 9, covering 39 countries and 53,444 respondents, is merged with World Bank estimates of total natural resource rents as a share of GDP. Four extraction items are analysed at the individual level with standard errors clustered by country, and again on the 39 country means.

Findings. Citizens of resource-dependent states do not feel more excluded. 81.2 percent say extraction needs more regulation, 40.0 percent deny that citizens have any voice in extraction decisions, and 48.4 percent deny that their community receives a fair share. None of these is related to how much a country actually extracts: the country-level correlation between log resource rents and perceived fair share is 0.016, and the individual-level coefficient is -0.014 with a confidence interval excluding anything beyond four percentage points. What predicts perceived exclusion is perceived corruption, education and urban residence, not deprivation and not rents.

Implications. The grievance behaves like the fiscal grievance documented elsewhere: those who feel most excluded disapprove of incumbents more and protest, contact officials and trust elections less. Extraction grievance in Africa is a disposition toward the state rather than a response to extraction.

Keywords: *resource curse; extractive industries; natural resource governance; political attitudes; Afrobarometer; Africa*

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1. Introduction

The political resource curse is among the most durable propositions in the study of African political economy. Governments funded by mineral and hydrocarbon rents do not need to tax, and governments that do not need to tax do not need to bargain. The rents accrue at a point, which makes them capturable; capture concentrates wealth and insulates rulers from the people whose territory produced it. Ross (2001) established the empirical case for the oil variant, and a substantial literature has since traced the mechanisms down to the level of the mine and the village.

That literature makes a prediction about citizens that has almost never been tested at scale. If extraction excludes, then people living in countries that extract a great deal should feel more excluded from the proceeds than people living in countries that extract little. They should be more likely to say that their community is not receiving its fair share, more likely to say that

citizens have no voice in decisions about extraction, and more likely to want the sector regulated.

This paper tests that prediction on Afrobarometer Round 9, which asked 53,444 respondents in 39 countries four questions about natural resource extraction, and merges the answers to World Bank estimates of total natural resource rents as a share of GDP. The prediction fails, comprehensively and at every level of analysis.

What the data show first is the sheer breadth of the grievance. Across the continent, 81.2 percent of respondents agree that extraction needs more regulation, 40.0 percent disagree that citizens have a voice in decisions about it, and 48.4 percent disagree that their own community receives a fair share of the benefits. These are not the views of communities living next to mines. They are the views of African publics generally.

What the data show second is that this grievance is unrelated to extraction. The country-level correlation between log resource

rents and mean perceived fair share is 0.016, which is to say nothing at all, and the correlation with perceived voice is -0.194. At the individual level, controlling for perceived corruption, the standard demographic battery and country governance, a standard deviation of log rents moves perceived fair share by -0.014 with a p-value of 0.415. Morocco, whose resource rents amount to 0.39 percent of GDP, records the lowest perceived fair share of any country in the sample. Mali, at 18.4 percent, records the second highest.

What the data show third is what does predict the grievance. Perceived corruption in government is by far the strongest individual-level predictor. Education and urban residence follow. Deprivation predicts nothing at all. The people most convinced that their community is being cheated of resource wealth are not the poorest but the better educated and the city-dwelling, which is difficult to reconcile with an account in which the grievance reflects material loss.

The fourth finding connects this paper to a wider pattern. Respondents who feel most excluded from resource wealth disapprove of their president more, and are less likely to protest, less likely to contact a councillor or member of parliament, and less likely to believe elections remove unrepresentative leaders. That is the same configuration I have documented for fiscal grievance in companion work by the same author (Author 2026a): grievance raises evaluation and depresses action. Finding it again in a different grievance domain, with general corruption perception controlled, suggests it is a property of how African publics relate to the state rather than a peculiarity of taxation.

I therefore read extraction grievance in Africa as a disposition rather than a response. It is widely held, it is largely invariant to whether there is anything to extract, it tracks beliefs about the honesty of government rather than the material position of the respondent, and it does not travel into the channels through which a grievance about extraction might be addressed. Section 9 gives the alternative readings a full hearing, including the serious possibility that national aggregates are the wrong unit for a phenomenon that is local by nature.

The paper proceeds in ten parts. Section 2 sets out what the resource curse literature predicts for citizens. Section 3 develops the alternative account. Section 4 describes the data. Section 5 maps extraction attitudes across the continent. Section 6 tests resource dependence. Section 7 asks what does predict perceived exclusion. Section 8 asks where the grievance goes. Section 9 addresses alternatives. Section 10 concludes.

2. What the resource curse predicts for citizens

This section reconstructs the citizen-level implications of the resource curse literature, which are usually left implicit.

The macro argument is familiar. Ross (2001) shows that oil wealth is associated with less democratic government and identifies three mechanisms: a rentier effect in which governments use rents to relieve social pressures and avoid taxation, a repression effect in which rents fund coercion, and a modernisation effect in which resource-led growth fails to produce the social changes that ordinarily accompany development. Moore (2004) generalises the fiscal half of this:

states funded without taxing their populations have weaker incentives to develop the bureaucratic and representative institutions that taxation requires. Ross (2004) then finds that the relationship between taxation and representation is real but conditional on what citizens receive in return. Two decades of subsequent work have qualified these claims rather than overturned them, and Ross (2015) sets out where the qualifications now stand.

The rentier mechanism has a direct implication for what citizens should perceive. If the state is funded by rents rather than by taxation, the relationship between citizen and state is not one of exchange, and citizens have no purchase on how the proceeds are used. They should notice this. A rentier public should report less voice over resource decisions and less benefit from resource wealth than a public whose government depends on its taxes.

The literature has moved decisively toward the local in the last decade, and the local evidence is strong. Knutsen, Kotsadam, Olsen and Wig (2017) match Afrobarometer respondents to mine locations and find that bribe payment is substantially more common near active mines, with the effect appearing after mines open rather than before, which identifies the mine rather than the kind of place that gets mines. The wider body of geocoded work runs in the same direction. Aragón and Rud (2013) trace the local income gains from a Peruvian gold mine to its procurement chain rather than its payroll, which is to say that the benefits reached a narrow set of suppliers. Kotsadam and Tolonen (2016), matching mine openings to Demographic and Health Survey clusters across Africa, find women moving out of agriculture and into services near active mines, and the shift reversing when the mines close. Von der Goltz and Barnwal (2019) report local wealth gains alongside worse health, in particular anaemia among women and children, in mining districts across developing countries. Berman, Couttenier, Rohner and Thoenig (2017) match mineral deposits to conflict events and find that world price shocks at productive African mines raise the probability of violence in the surrounding cell and help finance its spread. Christensen (2019) shows that mining investments roughly double the local rate of protest and riot in Africa without raising organised rebellion, with the effect concentrated when commodity prices rise. The World Bank's own synthesis of this evidence reaches a mixed verdict on whether communities near African mines end up better off (Chuhan-Pole, Dabalén and Land 2017).

This local turn was a corrective to a macro literature that had treated the country as the unit of the curse. It also created a gap. If extraction produces corruption, dispossession and conflict at the site, and if it produces unaccountable government at the centre, then citizens in resource-dependent countries should on average feel worse about extraction than citizens elsewhere, even if the effect is concentrated near mines. That aggregate implication has not been tested, largely because the survey items required to test it did not exist until Round 9 of the Afrobarometer.

The mechanisms differ across minerals and across regimes, and the effects are not uniformly negative: mines raise local incomes as well as local conflict, and the two findings sit side by side in the same literature. What is stable is that extraction changes the

political economy of the place it happens in, and that the change is contested by people who were already there.

The Ghanaian gold districts, the Zambian Copperbelt and the Niger Delta have generated the richest case material, and it converges on a common account. Watts (2004) describes an oil complex in the Delta in which company, state and armed claimant govern jointly, and in which the population is governed by all three without being represented by any. Ferguson (1999) documents on the Copperbelt what becomes of a population whose expectations were built on an extractive boom and which outlived it. Communities describe themselves as hosts to an industry whose benefits leave, whose costs remain, and whose negotiations occur over their heads between companies and central governments. Compensation regimes are experienced as arbitrary, employment promises as unmet, and environmental undertakings as unenforced. Where revenue-sharing formulas exist they are frequently disputed, both between the centre and the region and among claimants within the region.

Corporate social responsibility has been the industry's principal response and the evidence on it is discouraging. Frynas (2005) argued two decades ago that the developmental claims made for company provision in the oil sector were not supported by what the companies actually delivered. Company-provided schools, clinics and boreholes also create categories of beneficiary and non-beneficiary that did not previously exist, and the resulting contest over who counts as a host community can intensify rather than resolve local conflict. Bezzola, Günther, Brugger and Lefoll (2022), working with eight years of data on 292 mining companies across seventeen African countries, find that firms adopt CSR in response to conflict they have already experienced and that its pacifying effect is modest. Provision, on this evidence, is a response to the contest rather than a resolution of it, which is what one would expect if what is contested is the distribution of a claim rather than the level of provision.

This body of work is the strongest reason to expect the aggregate prediction to hold. If extraction reliably produces this much local grievance, and if the countries in question have many such sites, national publics should register it. The absence of a national association is therefore a puzzle for the literature rather than a confirmation of anything, and Section 9 treats the possibility that the aggregate simply dilutes a real local effect as the leading alternative reading. The case literature and the geocoded literature agree closely enough that the aggregate prediction looks safe. This paper reports that it is not.

3. Grievance as disposition

The alternative account starts from a different question. Rather than asking what extraction does to the people near it, it asks what an African respondent is doing when a survey enumerator asks whether his community receives a fair share of the benefits of natural resource extraction.

For most respondents in most of these countries, the question is not about an experience. It is about a proposition concerning the state: whether wealth that belongs in some sense to the nation reaches ordinary people, or is captured before it gets there. A respondent in Kenya, where resource rents are 1.2 percent of GDP, has no mine to reason from. He has a view about whether

his government distributes what it controls fairly, and the extraction question invites him to express it. The survey response literature described this process long ago. Respondents do not retrieve a stored attitude on every subject an interviewer raises; they assemble an answer from whatever considerations are accessible at the moment of asking, and on remote subjects the accessible considerations are general ones (Converse 1964; Zaller and Feldman 1992). Easton (1975) named the same problem in the vocabulary of political support: an item written to measure evaluation of a particular government action will pick up the standing orientation toward the regime instead, whenever the action lies outside the respondent's experience.

If that is what the items measure, three things follow. The answers should be widely shared, because the underlying belief about government is widely shared. They should be largely invariant to actual extraction, because actual extraction is not what generates them. And they should track other beliefs about government conduct, particularly perceived corruption, more closely than they track the respondent's own material circumstances. Two features of African public opinion make this more than a technical worry. Evaluations of government performance across the continent track awareness of what government does, and general perceptions of its conduct, at least as much as they track personal circumstance (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Mattes and Bratton 2007). And the vocabulary of resource nationalism travels well beyond mining districts, carried by national media and by political competition, so that a respondent hundreds of kilometres from any extraction site has both a ready opinion and a ready idiom for it (Conroy-Krutz 2018).

This is not a claim that the grievance is false or that the qualitative literature is wrong. Communities near mines in Ghana, Zambia and the Niger Delta have specific and well-documented reasons for their views, and nothing here disputes them. The claim is about aggregation: what is a description of experience in a mining district becomes, at the national level and across a continent, an expression of a general orientation toward the state. Both can be true, and Section 9 sets out the geocoded design that would separate them.

Hypothesis 1. Perceived exclusion from resource wealth is widespread across African publics, including in countries with negligible extraction.

Hypothesis 2. National resource dependence does not predict perceived exclusion from resource wealth.

Hypothesis 3. Perceived corruption predicts perceived exclusion more strongly than the respondent's own material position does.

Hypothesis 4. Perceived exclusion is associated with worse evaluation of incumbents and with less, not more, political action.

4. Data and measures

Survey data. Afrobarometer Round 9, fielded 2021 to 2023 across 39 countries with 53,444 respondents. Four items ask respondents to agree or disagree, on five-point scales, that natural resource extraction in their country needs more regulation, that ordinary citizens have a voice in decisions about

it, that their community receives a fair share of the benefits, and that the benefits outweigh the costs. Each is rescaled to the unit interval, with higher values indicating agreement. Valid responses range from 47,443 for the fair share item to 50,304 for regulation, and every item is available in all 39 countries.

Resource dependence. Total natural resource rents as a share of GDP for 2021, from the World Bank. The measure covers all 39 countries and ranges from 0.00 percent in Mauritius to 37.7 percent in the Republic of the Congo. Twelve countries exceed 10 percent. Because the distribution is skewed, models use the log of one plus the rents share, standardised. One case requires comment: Cape Verde is recorded at 17.7 percent despite having no significant extractive sector, a figure that almost certainly reflects forest rather than mineral rents, and Section 6 reports results with and without it.

Controls. At the individual level, a standardised index of perceived corruption in the presidency, among members of parliament and among local councillors; the Lived Poverty Index built from five deprivation items; age; education; employment; gender; urban residence; frequency of discussing politics; and frequency of getting news from the internet. At the country level, V-Dem version 16 measures of vertical accountability, electoral democracy and clientelism, and log GDP per capita. Descriptive statistics are in Table 1.

Estimation. Linear models with standard errors clustered by country. Because resource dependence varies only across countries, every test is repeated on the 39 country means, where the honest degrees of freedom are. Country fixed effects are omitted from models of the resource-dependence coefficient, which they would absorb, and included where the question is individual-level.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, Afrobarometer Round 9, 39 countries, 2021–2023

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Extraction needs more regulation (0–1)	0.737	0.291	0.00	1.00	50,304
Citizens have a voice in extraction (0–1)	0.541	0.354	0.00	1.00	49,229
Community receives a fair share (0–1)	0.478	0.355	0.00	1.00	47,443
Benefits outweigh costs (0–1)	0.518	0.350	0.00	1.00	47,922
Agrees more regulation is needed (0/1)	0.812	0.391	0.00	1.00	50,304
Denies citizens have a voice (0/1)	0.400	0.490	0.00	1.00	49,229
Denies a fair share (0/1)	0.484	0.500	0.00	1.00	47,443

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Resource rents, % of GDP	9.171	8.769	0.00	37.71	53,444
Perceived corruption index (0–3)	1.408	0.757	0.00	3.00	51,033
Lived Poverty Index (0–4)	1.429	0.951	0.00	4.00	53,440
V-Dem clientelism index (0–1)	0.541	0.165	0.15	0.87	53,444

Notes: Unweighted. The four extraction items run from 0 (strongly disagree) to 1 (strongly agree). Resource rents are assigned at country level.

5. Extraction attitudes across Africa

The first result is descriptive and it is the foundation of everything that follows. 81.2 percent of respondents across the 39 countries agree or strongly agree that natural resource extraction in their country needs more regulation. 40.0 percent disagree or strongly disagree that ordinary citizens have a voice in decisions about extraction. 48.4 percent disagree that their community receives a fair share of the benefits.

Appendix Table A1 gives the country means. Perceived fair share ranges from 0.321 to 0.745 with a standard deviation across countries of 0.096. There is genuine cross-national variation, in other words, and the question of the next section is whether extraction explains it. What is already clear is that the grievance is not confined to resource-dependent states. Morocco, Eswatini and São Tomé and Príncipe sit among the five lowest on perceived fair share, and their resource rents are 0.39, 3.00 and 1.88 percent of GDP respectively.

The regulation item deserves separate comment because it is the most lopsided. Four in five African respondents want extraction more heavily regulated, a level of agreement rare in survey research on any policy question and one that holds across countries with radically different exposure to the industry. Whatever divides African publics, the proposition that resource extraction is insufficiently controlled is not among the things that divide them. Afrobarometer's own dispatches report the same picture from single countries and from the pooled continental sample: Kakumba (2023) finds a majority of Ugandans judging that the costs of extraction outweigh its benefits, and Torsu and Logan (2024) report widespread demand for stronger government action on environmental protection and on regulation of the sector.

5.1 The countries at each end

The five countries with the lowest perceived fair share are Morocco at 0.321, Angola at 0.340, Gabon at 0.342, Eswatini at 0.354 and São Tomé and Príncipe at 0.378. Their resource rents are 0.39, 29.97, 18.49, 3.00 and 1.88 percent of GDP. Two of the five are among the most resource-dependent states on the continent and three have almost nothing to extract. Whatever these five have in common, it is not extraction.

The five with the highest perceived fair share are Madagascar at 0.745, Mali at 0.730, Lesotho at 0.599, Niger at 0.599 and Togo at 0.573, with rents of 5.53, 18.42, 4.32, 6.41 and 7.86 percent. Mali sits in the top five on perceived fairness while ranking seventh on the continent for resource dependence, and while hosting a gold sector whose governance has been the subject of sustained criticism. Angola, with a comparable dependence profile, sits second from bottom.

The two lists together are the paper's argument in compressed form. Sorting African countries by how much their citizens feel cheated of resource wealth does not sort them by how much resource wealth there is. It appears instead to sort them by something closer to the general standing of the government, and Section 7 pursues that.

It is worth adding that these national means conceal real internal variation that this design cannot see. Angola's figure aggregates Luanda and Cabinda; Mali's aggregates Bamako and the gold-mining south. Nothing here should be read as a claim that extraction does not matter within these countries. The claim is about what the national aggregate measures.

6. Resource dependence predicts almost nothing

This section tests Hypothesis 2 at both levels of analysis, and reports what magnitudes the data rule out.

Table 2. Resource dependence and extraction attitudes

Outcome	b (log rents)	SE	95% interval	Country level	N
Community receives a fair share	-0.0138	(0.0169)	[-0.047, 0.019]	-0.0059	44,631
Citizens have a voice	-0.0280	(0.0189)	[-0.065, 0.009]	-0.0134	46,059
Benefits outweigh costs	-0.0147	(0.0115)	[-0.037, 0.008]	-0.0050	45,065
Extraction needs more regulation	-0.0164*	(0.0083)	[-0.033, -0.000]	-0.0165	46,950

Notes: Column 2 is individual-level OLS with standard errors clustered by country, controlling for perceived corruption, the individual demographic battery and country governance measures. The country-level column repeats the estimate on 39 country means with governance, income and urbanisation controls and robust standard errors. Resource rents enter as the standardised log of one plus the percentage of GDP. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

At the individual level, a standard deviation of log resource rents moves perceived fair share by -0.014 with a p -value of 0.415, perceived voice by -0.028 at 0.138, and the judgement that benefits outweigh costs by -0.015 at 0.202. The confidence intervals exclude effects larger than roughly four to six percentage points in either direction. Against a cross-national standard deviation in perceived fair share of 0.096, that rules out resource dependence explaining more than a modest fraction of the variation that exists.

At the country level, where the treatment actually varies, the estimates are smaller still. The raw correlation between log rents and mean perceived fair share is 0.016. Adjusted for vertical accountability, clientelism, income and urbanisation it is -0.006

with a p -value of 0.792. Excluding Cape Verde changes it to -0.007 at 0.770.

The one item that responds is regulation, and it responds in a direction that complicates rather than supports the curse account. More resource-dependent countries want somewhat less additional regulation, at -0.016 with a p -value of 0.049 individually and -0.020 at 0.035 across countries unadjusted, falling to marginal significance when controls are added. Read alongside the near-universal support for more regulation, this suggests that citizens in states with substantial extraction are marginally more likely to think the existing framework adequate, which is the opposite of what a grievance-tracks-extraction account predicts.

6.1 What the nulls rule out

A null claim is only as good as the precision behind it, so it is worth stating what these estimates exclude. The individual-level interval on perceived fair share runs from -0.047 to 0.019, and on perceived voice from -0.065 to 0.009. Both exclude effects larger than roughly five to seven percentage points in the direction the resource curse predicts, and both exclude any positive effect of consequence.

The benchmark that matters is the variation actually present. Perceived fair share has a standard deviation across the 39 country means of 0.096 and a full range of 0.42 scale points. An effect at the outer edge of the confidence interval would account for well under a tenth of the observed cross-national spread. Resource dependence is therefore not merely statistically indistinguishable from zero; it is bounded well below the magnitude that would make it a serious explanation of why some African publics feel more cheated of resource wealth than others.

This is a stronger statement than a conventional null and a weaker one than a demonstrated zero. The data are consistent with a small true effect. They are not consistent with resource dependence being among the principal determinants of how Africans view extraction, which is what the literature reviewed in Section 2 would lead one to expect.

Within the resource-dependent states. A more demanding test restricts the sample to the 12 countries where rents exceed 10 percent of GDP, where every respondent lives under a genuinely extractive political economy, and asks whether more dependence within that group produces more perceived exclusion. Table 3 shows it does not. Fair share moves by 0.008, voice by 0.036 and benefits by 0.044, none of them distinguishable from zero. The single significant coefficient is on regulation, at 0.079 with a p -value below 0.001, and it is positive: among countries that already extract heavily, more extraction does produce more demand for regulation. That is worth noting because it demonstrates the items are not inert. They respond to reality on the dimension where reality varies most visibly. They do not respond on the dimensions concerning voice and fairness.

Table 3. Within the 12 countries whose resource rents exceed 10 percent of GDP

Outcome	b (log rents)	SE	Mean of y	N
Community receives a fair share	0.0075	(0.0512)	0.472	13,776
Citizens have a voice	0.0363	(0.0434)	0.518	14,012
Benefits outweigh costs	0.0444	(0.0342)	0.495	13,830
Extraction needs more regulation	0.0788***	(0.0197)	0.716	14,115

Notes: Individual-level OLS restricted to Angola, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Gabon, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Zambia. Standard errors clustered by country (12 clusters). Controls as in Table 2. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

7. What does predict perceived exclusion

If extraction does not generate the grievance, something else does. Table 4 reports the full individual-level model for the two exclusion items.

Table 4. Individual-level predictors of perceived fair share and perceived voice

Predictor	b (fair share)	SE	b (voice)	SE
Perceived corruption (std)	-0.0263***	(0.0053)	-0.0260***	(0.0047)
Education (std)	-0.0242***	(0.0069)	-0.0130*	(0.0066)
Urban residence	-0.0150	(0.0083)	-0.0193*	(0.0076)
Lived Poverty Index (std)	-0.0004	(0.0057)	0.0049	(0.0064)
In paid employment	-0.0046	(0.0102)	-0.0163	(0.0113)
Internet news use (std)	0.0009	(0.0057)	-0.0014	(0.0055)
Discusses politics (std)	-0.0029	(0.0035)	-0.0038	(0.0032)
Female	-0.0031	(0.0034)	-0.0074	(0.0040)
Resource rents (std, country)	-0.0135	(0.0170)	-0.0265	(0.0188)

Notes: Individual-level OLS with standard errors clustered by country, country governance measures included. $N = 44,129$. Continuous predictors standardised. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Perceived corruption dominates. A standard deviation of the corruption index reduces perceived fair share by 2.6 percentage points and perceived voice by a comparable amount, both with p -values below 0.001. Education follows at -2.3 points and urban residence at -1.8. The Lived Poverty Index, the survey's measure of actual material deprivation, moves perceived fair share by -0.001 with a p -value of 0.854.

That last null is the one that matters for the argument. If perceived exclusion from resource wealth were a report of material loss, the materially worst off should report it most. They do not report it at all more than the comfortable. What predicts the grievance is a belief about how government behaves and a set of characteristics, education and urban residence, associated with exposure to public debate about how government behaves.

The education finding cuts against a simple ignorance story too. One might suppose that people in non-extractive countries

answer the extraction questions carelessly because the subject is remote from them. If so, the effect should be weakest among the educated, who would more readily recognise that the question does not apply. Instead the educated are more likely to report exclusion, not less. That is the direction the African public opinion literature would predict on other grounds: Mattes and Bratton (2007) find awareness and performance evaluation, rather than experience of hardship, doing most of the work in shaping democratic attitudes, and Croke, Grossman, Larreguy and Marshall (2016) find in Zimbabwe that education sharpens judgement of the regime while reducing participation in it.

There is a further reading of the education and urban gradient worth separating from the ignorance story. Education and urban residence are the two characteristics most associated with exposure to national political debate, to media coverage of contract disputes and to the vocabulary in which resource nationalism is expressed (Conroy-Krutz 2018). If the grievance is transmitted discursively rather than experienced materially, these are exactly the people who should hold it most strongly, and they do. That is consistent with the disposition account and it is not consistent with an account in which the grievance originates in proximity to a mine, since urbanisation in most of these countries moves people away from extraction sites rather than toward them.

The corruption coefficient deserves one caution. Perceived corruption and perceived exclusion are both negative judgements about government elicited in a single interview, so some of the association is likely to be common method variance rather than substance. Section 9 returns to this. What the corruption result cannot be is an artefact of the extraction items alone, since the same corruption index predicts fiscal and informational grievance in the companion papers with similar strength.

8. Where the grievance goes

The final empirical section asks what perceived exclusion is associated with in political behaviour, using an exclusion index built as one minus the mean of the fair share and voice items, standardised, with perceived corruption controlled throughout.

Table 5. Perceived exclusion from resource wealth and political behaviour

Outcome	b (exclusion)	SE	Mean of y	N
Attended a protest	-0.0050*	(0.0022)	0.093	46,300
Contacted councillor or MP	-0.0205***	(0.0047)	0.308	46,495
Disapproves of president	0.0345***	(0.0080)	0.480	44,204
Elections remove bad leaders	-0.0132*	(0.0059)	0.492	44,930
Documents should be public	-0.0051	(0.0039)	0.741	46,190
Perceived access to documents	-0.0364***	(0.0043)	0.288	45,872

Notes: Individual-level OLS with standard errors clustered by country, controlling for perceived corruption, the individual battery and country

*governance. The exclusion index is standardised. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.*

A standard deviation of perceived exclusion raises disapproval of the president by 3.5 percentage points, with a p-value below 0.001. It reduces the probability of having contacted a councillor or member of parliament by 2.1 points, of having attended a protest by 0.5 points, and of believing that elections remove unrepresentative leaders by 1.3 points. It reduces perceived access to public documents by 3.6 points. Only the demand that documents be public is unmoved.

This is the same configuration reported for fiscal grievance across 34 countries in companion work by the same author (Author 2026a): a grievance that raises negative evaluation of incumbents while depressing every form of participation through which the grievance might be pressed. Finding it again here, on a different grievance domain, in a different survey round, with a different country sample, and with general corruption perception held constant, is evidence that the pattern is not an artefact of the tax items.

The magnitudes are smaller than in the fiscal case, which is what one would expect if extraction grievance is a more diffuse object than a tax bill. The direction is identical on every outcome.

This is the shape O'Donnell (1994) described from the other direction: a citizenry that judges its rulers freely and reaches them through nothing but the ballot. It sits badly with accountability models in which grievance is the raw material of participation, since those models take answerability to be triggered by the very dissatisfaction that is here suppressing it (Schedler 2021). One reading is clientelist. Where the practical route to state resources runs through a patron rather than through a claim, a generalised grievance about distribution has no institutional destination, and the electoral channel returns incumbents who are judged badly and voted for anyway (Lindberg 2003; Weitz-Shapiro 2012).

8.1 The same pattern in three domains

The configuration in Table 5 is now the third instance of a pattern reported in companion work by the same author. In 34 countries in Round 8, fiscal opacity raised demand for transparency and disapproval of the president while cutting protest, contacting and belief in elections (Author 2026a). In 39 countries in Round 9, the quality of a right-to-information law was associated with more demand that documents be public and less confidence of obtaining one (Author 2026c). Across the same 34 countries in Round 8, publics endorsed a fairness norm on tax incidence while doubting that the state would honour it (Author 2026b). Here, perceived exclusion from resource wealth raises disapproval and cuts participation in the same directions and by comparable magnitudes.

Three grievances, three survey rounds, three different country samples, three different substantive domains, and one shape: the grievance is registered as a judgement about those in power and is not converted into any act that might reach them. The consistency is what makes it interesting. A finding confined to taxation could plausibly be about the specific psychology of paying, which is what work on tax morale and on the salience of fiscal extraction proposes, and what experiments on windfalls

and taxes have probed (Levi 1988; Paler 2013; Luttmer and Singhal 2014). A finding that recurs across taxation, information and extraction is about something more general in how African publics relate to states, and it is consistent with a literature that has repeatedly found attitudinal engagement in African surveys running ahead of behavioural engagement (Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi 2005).

I do not want to overstate what this establishes. The three studies share a data source, an estimation strategy and an author, so their agreement is not the agreement of independent tests. What can be said is that within one large and well-constructed survey programme, the association between grievance and action is negative wherever it has been looked for, and that no theory currently on offer in the accountability literature predicts that.

9. Alternative explanations

Six alternatives deserve a hearing, and the first is much the most serious.

The country is the wrong unit. Extraction is local. A mine affects the district it sits in, and national rents as a share of GDP is a poor proxy for whether a given respondent lives anywhere near one. Knutsen, Kotsadam, Olsen and Wig (2017) found substantial local effects on bribe payment precisely by matching respondents to mine coordinates, and their design would have found nothing had they worked with national aggregates. If the grievance is generated locally and diluted nationally, this paper has measured the dilution rather than the absence.

I accept this as a limitation and do not regard it as fatal, for two reasons. The aggregate prediction is one the literature makes, not one I have invented: a country whose politics is shaped by rents should have a public that notices. And the pattern in Section 7 does not look like dilution. Dilution would leave the association attenuated but correctly signed, with the deprived and the rural, who are closer to extraction sites, reporting more exclusion. Instead the association is absent, and the gradient runs toward the educated and the urban. That said, the decisive test is geocoded, and Section 10 sets it out.

Rents as a share of GDP is the wrong measure. Resource rents divided by GDP is a ratio, and it can be high because extraction is large or because the rest of the economy is small. Cape Verde at 17.7 percent illustrates the problem. Robustness excluding it changes nothing, and the within-high-rents test in Table 3 uses only countries where extraction is unambiguously substantial, but a measure of extraction volume per capita or of the sector's share of exports might behave differently. That is a reasonable extension and I do not have the data to run it here.

The items measure something other than extraction. This is not so much an alternative explanation as the paper's own argument stated as an objection, and I accept it. If respondents in non-extractive countries are answering a general question about state fairness, then the items do not measure attitudes to extraction in those countries. The consequence is that the comparison across countries is not comparing like with like. What saves the exercise is that this is precisely what needed establishing: the literature assumed the items would mean the same thing everywhere because extraction would be salient everywhere, and the evidence is that it is not.

Common source bias with corruption. Perceived corruption and perceived exclusion are measured in the same interview and both are negative judgements about government, so the strong association in Table 4 may reflect a single underlying disposition measured twice. This is a real concern and it cannot be resolved with these data. It does not affect the paper's central claim, which is about the absence of a rents effect rather than the presence of a corruption effect, and the rents null holds whether or not corruption is controlled.

Extraction may be salient everywhere for other reasons. An objection running the other way holds that extraction is politically salient across Africa regardless of national rents, because of regional media, cross-border labour migration, prominent continental controversies over mining contracts, and a shared colonial history of resource appropriation. On this reading the invariance is not evidence that the items measure a general disposition but evidence that extraction is a live political subject everywhere. The two readings are hard to separate with survey data, and both imply that national rents are the wrong regressor. They differ in what they predict for the geocoded test: the salience account expects proximity to matter little, while my account expects proximity to matter a great deal while national aggregates do not.

Non-response and question order. The fair share item has the highest missingness of the four at 47,443 valid responses out of 53,444, which raises the possibility that respondents with no view, plausibly those furthest from extraction, selected out and left a sample biased toward the engaged. If so, the true invariance is understated rather than overstated, since the countries with most missingness would be the least extractive. The direction of this bias works against the paper only if missingness is concentrated in resource-rich states, and it is not.

10. Conclusion

Four in five Africans want natural resource extraction more heavily regulated. Two in five say citizens have no voice in decisions about it. Nearly half say their own community receives no fair share of the benefits. These are large numbers and they describe a continental public, not a set of mining communities.

None of it is explained by extraction. The country-level correlation between resource rents and perceived fair share is 0.016. The individual-level coefficient is -0.014 with an interval that excludes anything beyond a few percentage points. Restricting the analysis to the twelve countries where rents exceed a tenth of GDP produces nothing either, except that citizens there want somewhat more regulation, which shows the items can respond to reality when reality is visible enough.

What predicts the grievance is what citizens believe about the honesty of their government, together with education and urban residence. Material deprivation predicts nothing. And the grievance behaves as fiscal grievance behaves: it raises disapproval of incumbents and lowers participation of every kind.

I read this as evidence that extraction grievance at the national level in Africa is an expression of a general relationship with the state rather than a response to extraction. That does not make it irrational, and it emphatically does not make the well-

documented experience of mining communities illusory. It means that the national survey aggregate, which is the level at which policy conversations about resource governance usually take place, is measuring something other than what those conversations assume.

Three limits bound the claims. The evidence is cross-sectional and associational. The dependence measure is national and the phenomenon may be local. And the items ask about perception rather than about any documented distribution of benefits.

Two extensions follow. The decisive one is geocoded: matching Afrobarometer enumeration areas to the coordinates of active extraction sites, as Knutsen and colleagues did for corruption, would establish whether proximity generates the grievance that national dependence does not. If it does, the finding here becomes a statement about aggregation rather than about attitudes, which would be a more precise and more useful result than the one I am able to report. The second is comparative across domains: the same survey rounds carry items on taxation, on information access and on climate, and the consistency of the evaluation-without-action pattern across all of them is now the more interesting object of study than any one of them alone.

There is also an implication for how the resource curse literature states its own claims. The macro tradition established that rents shape regimes, and the local tradition established that mines shape the districts around them. Between the two sits an assumption that has gone untested: that a population living under a rentier state perceives itself as living under one. On this evidence it does not, or at least it does not perceive it any more clearly than a population with nothing to extract. If that holds up under a geocoded design, the citizen-level premises of the rentier argument will need restating, because the mechanism by which rents are supposed to demobilise a public runs through a public that notices the rents.

For those working on resource governance, the practical implication is uncomfortable. Consultation requirements, revenue-sharing formulas and transparency initiatives are designed to address a grievance located in extractive communities. The grievance measured by national surveys is not located there, is not caused by extraction, and will not be resolved by fixing extraction. It is a grievance about government, and it will move when government does.

Data availability

The survey data are the Afrobarometer Round 9 merged file covering 39 countries, publicly available from the Afrobarometer data archive. Resource rents are the World Bank indicator NY.GDP.TOTL.RT.ZS for 2021. Country-level governance measures are from V-Dem version 16. All four extraction items are used in their original form and rescaled only linearly. The exclusion index in Section 8 is the mean of the fair share and voice items reversed and standardised; results are substantively identical using either item alone. Coding decisions that could reasonably have gone another way, in particular the treatment of Cape Verde and the choice of a ten percent threshold for the resource-dependent subsample, are reported in the text and tested in Sections 6 and 9.

Data sources

Afrobarometer (2024) Merged Round 9 data, 39 countries, fieldwork 2021–2023, version 1. Afrobarometer Data. Available at afrobarometer.org/data.

Coppedge, M. et al. (2026) V-Dem Dataset version 16. Varieties of Democracy Institute, University of Gothenburg.

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Appendix

Table A1. All 39 countries: resource rents and extraction attitudes, ordered by perceived fair share

Country	Rents % GDP	Regulation	Voice	Fair share	Benefits	N
Morocco	0.39	0.767	0.336	0.321	0.463	1,200
Angola	29.97	0.590	0.387	0.340	0.394	1,200
Gabon	18.49	0.736	0.420	0.342	0.418	1,200
Eswatini	3.00	0.643	0.430	0.354	0.454	1,200
Sao Tome and Principe	1.88	0.731	0.548	0.378	0.409	1,200
Mozambique	14.91	0.590	0.455	0.392	0.434	1,120
Tunisia	2.25	0.840	0.427	0.395	0.533	1,200
Uganda	7.48	0.768	0.469	0.396	0.456	2,400
Zimbabwe	6.40	0.775	0.483	0.397	0.483	1,200
Kenya	1.23	0.809	0.473	0.405	0.504	2,400
Zambia	35.26	0.759	0.488	0.412	0.469	1,200
Sierra Leone	9.04	0.728	0.452	0.413	0.434	1,200
Malawi	4.22	0.845	0.691	0.443	0.528	1,200
Guinea	4.52	0.739	0.493	0.453	0.517	1,200
Ethiopia	5.87	0.703	0.518	0.455	0.505	2,400
Burkina Faso	20.14	0.738	0.481	0.456	0.544	1,200
Republic of the Congo	37.71	0.700	0.552	0.458	0.513	1,200
South Africa	7.33	0.689	0.531	0.459	0.550	1,580
Tanzania	6.69	0.779	0.501	0.460	0.597	2,400
Sudan	12.75	0.691	0.503	0.464	0.519	1,200
Cape Verde	17.66	0.739	0.495	0.471	0.457	1,199
Mauritius	0.00	0.725	0.597	0.475	0.488	1,200
Botswana	1.04	0.806	0.743	0.479	0.591	1,200
Ghana	13.35	0.789	0.534	0.481	0.434	2,369
Mauritania	11.45	0.571	0.521	0.505	0.497	1,200
Benin	2.30	0.738	0.574	0.518	0.514	1,200
Namibia	4.03	0.678	0.563	0.523	0.551	1,200
Ivory Coast	4.74	0.743	0.585	0.541	0.525	1,200
Nigeria	8.55	0.663	0.549	0.543	0.513	1,600
The Gambia	2.86	0.776	0.588	0.543	0.520	1,200
Seychelles	0.12	0.762	0.688	0.546	0.547	1,176
Senegal	4.40	0.755	0.642	0.551	0.548	1,200
Liberia	21.92	0.731	0.579	0.560	0.591	1,200
Cameroon	5.53	0.734	0.603	0.571	0.586	1,200
Togo	7.86	0.760	0.627	0.573	0.599	1,200
Niger	6.41	0.702	0.652	0.599	0.601	1,200
Lesotho	4.32	0.716	0.622	0.599	0.648	1,200
Mali	18.42	0.824	0.740	0.730	0.679	1,200
Madagascar	5.53	0.759	0.789	0.745	0.647	1,200

Notes: Unweighted country means on the nought-to-one agreement scales. Resource rents are total natural resource rents as a percentage of GDP for 2021 from the World Bank.