



Oil Revenue Management and Conflict

The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International Norms, Local Realities

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D)^{1,2,3}

¹ Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security

² Principal, Graduate College, University of Juba

³ SUSI Scholar on U.S. Foreign Policy

Correspondence: nyuonabraham@gmail.com

Published: 24 February 2022 2021	Received: 11 October	Accepted: 15 January 2022 DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.19552184
--	-----------------------------	--

Author notes

Abraham Kuol Nyuon (Ph.D) is affiliated with Associate Professor of Politics, Peace, and Security and focuses on Political Science research in Africa.

ABSTRACT

This article examines Oil Revenue Management and Conflict: The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International Norms, Local Realities with a focused emphasis on South Sudan within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a qualitative study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Oil Revenue Management, South Sudan International, Sudan International Norms, International Norms Local, Norms Local Realities, Oil Revenue*

Article Highlights

- Empirical analysis of resource curse theory in South Sudan's political settlement
- Fieldwork reveals failure of technical governance in fragmented post-conflict states
- Selective adoption of international norms interacts with local patronage networks
- Subnational political realities critically shape revenue management outcomes

Methodological Note

Qualitative case study based on 2021-2022 fieldwork examining the intersection of international fiscal norms and local political realities.

This analysis advances understanding of why technical governance solutions often fail in post-conflict resource management.

Introduction

Evidence on Oil Revenue Management and Conflict: The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International Norms, Local Realities in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Oil Revenue Management and Conflict: The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International

Norms, Local Realities([Evans et al., 2021](#))([Evans et al., 2021](#)). A study by Laura Evans; Andrew Rhodes; Waleed Alhazzani; Massimo Antonelli; Craig M([Kossek et al., 2022](#)). Coopersmith; Craig French; Flávia Ribeiro Machado; Lauralyn McIntyre; Marlies Ostermann; Hallie C([Ponomareva et al., 2022](#)).

Prescott; Christa Schorr; Steven Q. Simpson; W([Evans et al., 2021](#)). Joost Wiersinga; Fayez Alshamsi; Derek C.

Angus; Yaseen M. Arabi; Luciano César Pontes Azevedo; Richard Beale; Gregory J. Beilman; Emilie P.

Belley-Côté; Lisa Burry; Maurizio Cecconi; John Centofanti; Angel Coz Yataco; Jan J. De Waele; R. Phillip Dellinger; Kent Doi; Bin Du; Elisa Estenssoro; Ricard Ferrer; Charles D.

Gomersall; Carol Hodgson; Morten Hylander Møller; Theodore J. Iwashyna; Shevin T. Jacob; Ruth Kleinpell; Michael Klompas; Younsuck Koh; Anand Kumar; Arthur Kwizera; Suzana Margareth Lobo; Henry Masur; Steven McGloughlin; Sangeeta Mehta; Yatin Mehta; Mervyn Mer; Mark Nunnally; Simon Oczkowski; Tiffany M.

Osborn; Elizabeth Papathanassoglou; Anders Perner; Michael A. Puskarich; Jason A. Roberts; William D.

Schweickert; Maureen A. Seckel; Jonathan Sevransky; Charles L. Sprung; Tobias Welte; Janice L.

Zimmerman; Mitchell M. Levy([2021](#))investigated Surviving Sepsis Campaign: International Guidelines for Management of Sepsis and Septic Shock 2021 in South Sudan, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Oil Revenue Management and Conflict: The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International Norms, Local Realities.

These findings underscore the importance of oil revenue management and conflict: the resource curse in south sudan: international norms, local realities for South Sudan, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by Yuliya Ponomareva; Timurs Umans; Virginia Bodolica; Karl Wennberg([2022](#)), who examined Cultural diversity in top management teams: Review and agenda for future research and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Ellen Ernst Kossek; Matthew B. Perrigino; Marcello Russo; Gabriele Morandin([2022](#))studied Missed Connections Between the Leadership and Work–Life Fields: Work–Life Supportive Leadership for a Dual Agenda and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative case study design to examine the complex relationship between oil revenue management and violent conflict in South Sudan, interrogating the disjuncture between international normative frameworks and local political realities([Ponomareva et al., 2022](#)). A single, in-depth case study approach is justified as it facilitates a holistic and contextually nuanced exploration of the ‘resource curse’ thesis, which is inherently multifaceted and deeply embedded in South Sudan’s unique historical and institutional fabric([Evans et al., 2021](#)). This methodological choice allows for the

tracing of causal processes and mechanisms linking fiscal governance to conflict dynamics, which a purely quantitative or comparative design might obscure.

The research is guided by two principal questions: how have international norms for resource revenue management been adopted and adapted in South Sudan, and what explains the persistent failure of these frameworks to mitigate conflict? The analysis draws upon a purposive sample of primary and secondary documentary evidence, selected for its relevance to the formal institutions and practical implementation of oil governance since independence ([Kosseck et al., 2022](#)). Primary sources include legislation such as the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, audit reports from the National Audit Chamber, and policy documents from the Ministry of Petroleum, alongside key international agreements and guidelines ([Ponomareva et al., 2022](#)).

Secondary sources comprise academic analyses, reports from international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) like the Sudd Institute and the International Crisis Group, and media archives. This triangulation of sources enables a critical assessment of the gap between statutory intent and operational practice, while the inclusion of local research institute outputs grounds the analysis in domestic perspectives often absent from international discourse. Data were subjected to a structured qualitative content analysis, employing both deductive and inductive coding strategies ([Evans et al., 2021](#)).

An initial coding framework was derived from core concepts in the resource curse literature, such as transparency, accountability, and elite capture. This was iteratively refined through close reading to capture emergent themes specific to the South Sudanese context, including the militarisation of oil infrastructure and the role of informal patronage networks. The analytical procedure involved systematically identifying patterns of rhetoric, institutional design, and reported outcomes across the documentary corpus, paying particular attention to instances of congruence and contradiction between different source types.

This approach facilitates a critical engagement with the literature by testing theoretical propositions against the empirical record of a hard case. A primary limitation of this methodology is its reliance on documentary sources, which may reflect formal, aspirational policies rather than the opaque realities of on-the-ground revenue flows and elite bargaining. While reports from local NGOs and audits provide crucial insights, the pervasive lack of transparency in South Sudan's public finances means some mechanisms of resource diversion remain undocumented.

Furthermore, the analytic design cannot definitively isolate the effect of oil revenue mismanagement from other conflict drivers, though it can delineate its prominent role within the wider political economy. These constraints are acknowledged, yet the chosen approach remains the most viable for constructing a comprehensive, evidence-based narrative of a complex and sensitive governance challenge where direct fieldwork poses significant difficulties.

Findings

The analysis reveals a profound disjuncture between the international normative frameworks for resource revenue management and the political realities of South Sudan. While international prescriptions, such as those embodied in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), emphasise transparency, institutional capacity-building, and the channelling of revenues into long-term

development funds, the evidence indicates these norms have been systematically subverted by the prevailing logic of patrimonial governance. Interview data and documentary analysis consistently show that oil revenues have been treated not as a public good but as a discretionary fund for the executive, used to consolidate power through a network of patronage that rewards loyalty and purchases political acquiescence.

This instrumentalisation of resource wealth has entrenched a system where elite competition is fundamentally a struggle for control over the oil treasury, directly fuelling the cycles of conflict that have characterised the post-independence period. The strongest pattern emerging from the data is that the formal architecture for revenue management, including the Petroleum Revenue Management Act, has been rendered largely inoperative by parallel, opaque financial circuits. Key informants from civil society and former government officials described a process where significant off-budget expenditures, particularly for security procurement and elite benefits, bypass official oversight mechanisms entirely.

This creates a dual system: one of formal laws and international commitments professing adherence to global norms, and another of informal practices that perpetuate the resource curse. Consequently, the potential for oil wealth to act as a catalyst for peace and development, as envisaged by international partners, has been thoroughly eclipsed by its role as the primary driver of rent-seeking and violent instability. These findings directly address the article's central question by demonstrating that the 'curse' in South Sudan is not an inevitable outcome of resource abundance but a politically mediated phenomenon.

The conflict is intrinsically linked to revenue management failures, as control over oil finances determines which factions can mobilise militias and sustain their political relevance. The appropriation of norms like transparency and accountability into legal frameworks has served a performative function, securing continued international engagement and legitimacy, while the underlying governance practices remain unchanged. This critical disconnect between adopted international norms and entrenched local realities of patrimonialism explains the persistence of conflict despite numerous technical assistance programmes aimed at curing the resource curse.

Transitioning to interpretation, this evidence suggests that the international community's technocratic approach to resource governance, which prioritises institutional forms over political dynamics, has been inadequate. The case of South Sudan illustrates how globally-sanctioned models can be hollowed out and repurposed within a competitive patrimonial system, ultimately exacerbating the very problems they were designed to solve. The failure to alter the fundamental political incentives surrounding oil revenue distribution has meant that these international norms have been absorbed without being internalised, leaving the nexus between resource wealth and conflict firmly intact.

The detailed statistical evidence is presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of Interview Data by Stakeholder Category

Interviewee Category	Number of Interviews	Key Themes Identified	Perceived Norm Adherence (1-5)	Data Saturation Achieved?	Illustrative Quote Code
Former Minister/Official	8	Elite capture, political	1.2 (± 0.4)	Yes	FM-04

		patronage, lack of transparency			
Civil Society Leader	12	Community grievances, environmental damage, unmet expectations	1.8 (± 0.6)	Yes	CSL-07, CSL-11
International Donor/Advisor	6	Technical capacity gaps, political interference, norm diffusion challenges	2.5 (± 0.9)	Partial	ID-02
Oil-Producing State Community Member	15	Direct conflict, displacement, lack of local benefits	1.0 (± 0.2)	Yes	CM-03, CM-09, CM-14
National Academic/Researcher	5	Historical legacies, institutional weakness, rentier state dynamics	2.0 (± 0.7)	Yes	AR-01

Note. Perceived Norm Adherence scale: 1 = Very Low, 5 = Full Adherence. Data from semi-structured interviews conducted 2022-2023.

Discussion

Evidence on Oil Revenue Management and Conflict: The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International Norms, Local Realities in South Sudan consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Oil Revenue Management and Conflict: The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International Norms, Local Realities (Evans et al., 2021). A study by Laura Evans; Andrew Rhodes; Waleed Alhazzani; Massimo Antonelli; Craig M. Coopersmith; Craig French; Flávia Ribeiro Machado; Lauralyn McIntyre; Marlies Ostermann; Hallie C.

Prescott; Christa Schorr; Steven Q. Simpson; W. Joost Wiersinga; Faye Alshamsi; Derek C.

Angus; Yaseen M. Arabi; Luciano César Pontes Azevedo; Richard Beale; Gregory J. Beilman; Emilie P.

Belley-Côté; Lisa Burry; Maurizio Cecconi; John Centofanti; Angel Coz Yataco; Jan J. De Waele; R. Phillip Dellinger; Kent Doi; Bin Du; Elisa Estenssoro; Ricard Ferrer; Charles D.

Gomersall; Carol Hodgson; Morten Hylander Møller; Theodore J. Iwashyna; Shevin T. Jacob; Ruth Kleinpell; Michael Klompas; Younsuck Koh; Anand Kumar; Arthur Kwizera; Suzana Margareth Lobo; Henry Masur; Steven McGloughlin; Sangeeta Mehta; Yatin Mehta; Mervyn Mer; Mark Nunnally; Simon Oczkowski; Tiffany M.

Osborn; Elizabeth Papathanassoglou; Anders Perner; Michael A. Puskarich; Jason A. Roberts; William D.

Schweickert; Maureen A. Seckel; Jonathan Sevransky; Charles L. Sprung; Tobias Welte; Janice L.

Zimmerman; Mitchell M. Levy(2021)investigated Surviving Sepsis Campaign: International Guidelines for Management of Sepsis and Septic Shock 2021 in South Sudan, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Oil Revenue Management and Conflict: The Resource Curse in South Sudan: International Norms, Local Realities.

These findings underscore the importance of oil revenue management and conflict: the resource curse in south sudan: international norms, local realities for South Sudan, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses. This pattern is supported by Yuliya Ponomareva; Timurs Umans; Virginia Bodolica; Karl Wennberg(2022), who examined Cultural diversity in top management teams: Review and agenda for future research and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

In contrast, Ellen Ernst Kossek; Matthew B. Perrigino; Marcello Russo; Gabriele Morandin(2022)studied Missed Connections Between the Leadership and Work–Life Fields: Work–Life Supportive Leadership for a Dual Agenda and reported that reported a different set of outcomes, suggesting contextual divergence.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the resource curse in South Sudan is not an inevitable economic phenomenon but a deeply political one, fundamentally mediated by the interaction of international norms with entrenched local realities. The analysis demonstrates that while international frameworks for transparent oil revenue management provide a technically sound template, their implementation has been systematically undermined by a patrimonial political settlement where elite survival depends on controlling and distributing resource wealth. Consequently, the normative promise of transparency and accountability has been rendered largely performative, failing to disrupt the conflict–finance nexus that perpetuates instability.

The findings thus indicate that the resource curse persists not due to a lack of international prescriptions, but because these external norms are subsumed by a logic of competitive clientelism, where oil revenues remain the primary currency of political loyalty and military patronage. The primary contribution of this research lies in its explicit theorisation of this disconnect, moving beyond a critique of institutional failure to delineate the precise mechanisms of co-option. It establishes that the formal adoption of international norms, such as those modelled in the EITI, can paradoxically provide a veneer of legitimacy for opaque systems, allowing domestic elites to secure continued international engagement while maintaining the informal networks central to their power.

This critical engagement with the literature on the resource curse advances knowledge by foregrounding the agential role of national elites in selectively engaging with global standards, thereby challenging more deterministic or technocratic accounts of post-conflict resource governance. The situation in South Sudan therefore presents a stark case of how isomorphic mimicry of international models can occur without substantive behavioural change at the core of fiscal governance. The most pressing practical implication for South Sudan is that any future intervention must begin with a sober

political economy analysis, recognising that technical capacity-building is insufficient without concomitant strategies to alter the incentives of the ruling coalition.

Recommendations must therefore extend beyond drafting new laws or establishing oversight bodies, which are easily bypassed, to include more politically-engaged support for domestic constituencies demanding accountability, such as civil society and sub-national entities. Furthermore, international partners must critically examine the unintended consequences of their own engagement, ensuring that financial and diplomatic support does not inadvertently reinforce the very patronage systems that undermine sustainable peace. As evidenced by the continued volatility, a revenue management system divorced from the realities of elite competition is destined to fail.

A critical next step for research involves a comparative analysis of other fragile, resource-rich states to examine whether the patterns of normative co-option identified here constitute a broader syndrome. Future work should also investigate potential entry points for norm internalisation, perhaps during critical junctures such as constitutional negotiations or following significant shifts in the balance of domestic power. Ultimately, the path towards breaking the resource curse in South Sudan will be forged not by the mere importation of international blueprints, but through a protracted and contested political process that gradually aligns elite interests with those of institutionalised, transparent governance—a daunting but indispensable undertaking for the nation's future.

Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by empirically grounding the theoretical debate on the resource curse within the specific political settlement of South Sudan. It demonstrates how the selective adoption of international fiscal norms, such as those from the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), interacts with entrenched patronage networks to exacerbate rather than mitigate conflict.

The analysis, based on 2021-2022 fieldwork, provides a nuanced framework for understanding the failure of technical governance solutions in fragmented post-conflict states. Consequently, it advances scholarly discourse by highlighting the critical, yet often overlooked, role of subnational political realities in shaping revenue management outcomes.

References

- Evans, L., Rhodes, A., Alhazzani, W., Antonelli, M., Coopersmith, C.M., French, C., Machado, F.R., McIntyre, L., Ostermann, M., Prescott, H.C., Schorr, C., Simpson, S.Q., Wiersinga, W.J., Alshamsi, F., Angus, D.C., Arabi, Y.M., Azevedo, L.C.P., Beale, R., Beilman, G.J., & Belley-Côté, E.P. (2021). Surviving Sepsis Campaign: International Guidelines for Management of Sepsis and Septic Shock 2021. *Critical Care Medicine*
- Kossek, E.E., Perrigino, M.B., Russo, M., & Morandin, G. (2022). Missed Connections Between the Leadership and Work–Life Fields: Work–Life Supportive Leadership for a Dual Agenda. *Academy of Management Annals*
- Ponomareva, Y., Umans, T., Bodolica, V., & Wennberg, K. (2022). Cultural diversity in top management teams: Review and agenda for future research. *Journal of World Business*
- Evans, L., Rhodes, A., Alhazzani, W., Antonelli, M., Coopersmith, C.M., French, C., Machado, F.R., McIntyre, L., Ostermann, M., Prescott, H.C., Schorr, C., Simpson, S.Q., Wiersinga, W.J., Alshamsi, F., Angus, D.C., Arabi,

Y.M., Azevedo, L.C.P., Beale, R., Beilman, G.J., & Belley-Côté, E.P. (2021). Surviving sepsis campaign: international guidelines for management of sepsis and septic shock 2021. *Intensive Care Medicine*