

# Reinventing a Democratic Republic of Congo Free from Political Corruption

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines the enduring nature of systemic political corruption in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), exploring its historical origins, institutional weaknesses, and socio-economic consequences. Despite post-2000 anti-corruption initiatives—such as the 2005 Anti-Corruption Law and the establishment of the Agence de Prévention et de Lutte contre la Corruption (APLC)—these efforts have struggled against political interference, judicial politicization, and entrenched elite resistance. Colonial legacies of exploitation, kleptocratic governance, and dependence on extractive industries have deepened corruption, redirecting resource wealth away from critical public services and perpetuating widespread poverty (62% of the population lives below the poverty line). Utilizing a narrative literature review alongside theoretical frameworks like Principal-Agent and Institutional Theories, the research contrasts the DRC's challenges with successful anti-corruption reforms in Rwanda, Botswana, and Georgia. Key findings emphasize the critical need for political will, institutional independence, and active civil society participation. Recommendations include the creation of an independent anti-corruption court, adoption of blockchain-based transparency mechanisms, enforcement of international accountability for extractive industries, and economic diversification through sovereign wealth funds. The study advocates for transformative governance reforms to shift from predatory practices to public service-oriented systems, providing a strategic framework for equitable development in resource-rich, post-conflict settings.

**Keywords:** Corruption, Democratic Republic of Congo, Africa, Anti-corruption reforms, Resource governance.

## INTRODUCTION

Political corruption, broadly understood as the misuse of public authority for personal or group benefit (Transparency International, 2025), manifests through practices such as bribery, embezzlement, nepotism, and electoral fraud. In the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), this form of corruption is not merely a collection of isolated misconduct but a deeply embedded feature of governance, shaped by weak institutions, historical legacies of exploitation, and entrenched socio-economic inequalities (Trefon, 2016). This systemic corruption undermines democratic processes, distorts economic development, and perpetuates cycles of poverty and inequality, trapping the nation in a paradox of resource wealth coexisting with widespread deprivation.

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This study investigates the persistence of political corruption in the DRC and explores strategies to transform its governance systems to prioritize accountability, transparency, and democratic legitimacy. While corruption is a global issue, its impact in the DRC is uniquely severe. Despite the country's vast natural resources—such as cobalt and copper—the DRC remains one of the poorest nations globally, with over 62% of its population living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2023). Decades of conflict, colonial exploitation, and kleptocratic leadership have normalized corruption as a mechanism for political survival and elite enrichment (Autesserre, 2010). The research focuses on the post-2000 period, marked by international interventions, constitutional reforms, and anti-corruption initiatives that have failed to produce meaningful progress.

A central question is why anti-corruption efforts in the DRC have repeatedly failed to dismantle entrenched graft despite sustained domestic and international engagement. For instance, the Agence de Prévention et de Lutte contre la Corruption (APLC), established in 2020 and modeled after successful agencies in Rwanda and Botswana, has achieved minimal prosecutions or recovery of stolen assets. This mirrors the ineffectiveness of earlier bodies like the Commission de l'Éthique et de la Lutte contre la Corruption (CELC) (US Department of State, 2023; Kodi, 2007). Critics argue that anti-corruption campaigns often serve as symbolic gestures to placate international donors rather than addressing root causes (International Crisis Group, 2006). These failures are compounded by a judiciary plagued by political interference, underfunding, and corruption, which renders even robust legal frameworks like the 2005 Anti-Corruption Law ineffective (Freedom House, 2010; Bertelsmann Foundation, 2010).

The structural barriers to reform are evident in decades of poor governance, inequitable resource distribution, and authoritarian rule, which have institutionalized corruption as a tool for maintaining power (Shekhawat, 2009). In the DRC, a fragmented political landscape enables competing elites to prioritize personal gain over public service, as exemplified by President Kabila's replacement of state enterprise heads with political allies (Matti, 2010). International actors, including multinational corporations, exacerbate the problem by exploiting weak regulatory frameworks to extract resources, as seen in the militarization of mining in eastern DRC (Global Witness, 2009). For example, an estimated \$80 million in diamonds is smuggled annually, depriving the state of critical revenue (International Crisis Group, 2006).

The debate surrounding solutions centers on whether institutional reforms alone can resolve the DRC's governance crisis or if a broader reimagining of its political economy is required. Advocates of institutionalist approaches highlight initiatives like the 2002 Mining Code reforms and World Bank-backed procurement policies as potential pathways (Freedom House, 2010). However, critics emphasize that elite resistance and lack of incentives undermine such efforts, as seen in the 2002 Forestry Code, which failed to curb illegal logging due to collusion between politicians and foreign firms (U4, 2010; International Crisis Group, 2006). Similarly, civil society groups advocating for transparency face harassment, underscoring the systemic hostility to accountability (Freedom House, 2010). Addressing these challenges requires not only strengthening institutions but also confronting the power dynamics and economic structures that sustain corruption.

## **Problem Description**

The DRC faces a systemic corruption crisis rooted in colonial exploitation, kleptocratic governance, and institutional fragility. Despite anti-corruption initiatives post-2000 efforts have failed due to political interference, judicial politicization, and elite resistance. Corruption diverts natural resource wealth from public coffers, perpetuating poverty, inequality, and conflict. Institutional weaknesses, including a compromised judiciary and underfunded anti-corruption bodies, enable graft to persist. International actors and multinational corporations further exacerbate the issue by exploiting weak regulatory frameworks. This entrenched corruption undermines governance, distorts economic development, and erodes public trust, highlighting the urgent need for systemic reform.

## **Research Objectives**

This study examines systemic drivers of political corruption in the DRC, analyzing historical legacies, institutional failures, and socio-political dynamics. It evaluates past anti-corruption efforts' shortcomings and proposes context-specific reforms, drawing on comparative case studies to enhance accountability, rebuild public trust, and promote sustainable governance.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives were identified:

1. Map the historical and structural roots of corruption in the DRC, including colonial exploitation, post-conflict patronage systems, and elite capture of state resources.
2. Assess the impact of corruption on governance, economic development, and public trust in DRC.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of domestic and international anti-corruption measures implemented since 2000.
4. Compare the DRC's governance challenges with successful anti-corruption reforms in other countries.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

This study employs a narrative literature review approach to investigate systemic corruption and governance challenges in the DRC. Unlike systematic reviews, which emphasize structured, replicable methodologies to address narrowly defined questions, narrative reviews prioritize interpretive synthesis of diverse sources to construct a context-rich, coherent analysis (Greenhalgh et al., 2016). This method aligns with the study's objective to critically examine historical, institutional, and socio-political dynamics that sustain corruption while integrating interdisciplinary insights to propose governance reforms. Narrative reviews are particularly effective for complex, multifaceted topics like corruption, where the goal is to contextualize fragmented evidence, highlight contradictions in existing scholarship, and provide explanatory depth (Baumeister & Leary, 1997). By prioritizing thematic synthesis over statistical aggregation, the study weaves together academic literature, policy reports, and grey literature into a nuanced narrative that addresses the research questions.

The narrative review draws on a purposive sample of secondary sources selected for their relevance to the DRC's corruption dynamics, governance structures, and anti-corruption efforts. These include academic literature—peer-reviewed articles and books on corruption, political economy, and post-colonial governance in the DRC and Africa; policy reports from NGOs, international organizations, and think tanks; legal frameworks such as the DRC's anti-corruption laws and constitutional reforms; and historical accounts analyzing colonial and

post-independence legacies to contextualize systemic corruption. While systematic reviews rigidly define inclusion/exclusion criteria, the narrative approach prioritizes conceptual relevance over methodological uniformity. For instance, critiques of the Agence de Prévention et de Lutte contre la Corruption (APLC) (US Department of State, 2023) are juxtaposed with historical analyses of colonial resource extraction (Trefon, 2016) to illustrate how corruption is embedded in the DRC's political economy.

The data analysis follows a thematic synthesis approach inspired by Jesson et al. (2011), involving three stages: first, descriptive coding to extract key concepts from sources; second, thematic organization to group codes into overarching themes aligned with the research questions, including historical legacies, institutional failures, socio-economic impacts, and reform challenges; and third, narrative construction to synthesize themes into a critical narrative that explains how corruption persists and how reforms might address root causes. This process ensures a holistic understanding of the interplay between structural factors and governance outcomes, enabling the study to propose actionable pathways for systemic change. By integrating diverse perspectives and contextualizing evidence, the methodology provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing corruption in the DRC and its implications for sustainable development.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Corruption in the DRC is perpetuated by intersecting structural, institutional, and economic factors. Three theoretical frameworks—Principal-Agent Theory, Institutional Theory, and Rent-Seeking Theory—provide critical insights into these dynamics.

### Principal-Agent Theory: Breach of Trust

Principal-Agent Theory (PAT) frames corruption as a violation of trust in asymmetric relationships, where agents (e.g., officials) exploit weak oversight to prioritize self-interest over principals' (e.g., citizens) welfare (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). In the DRC, agents manipulate procurement processes and embezzle funds due to systemic weaknesses. For instance, the APLC remains ineffective due to political interference and underfunding (US Department of State, 2023; Heilbrunn & Commissions, 2004). Similarly, opaque mining contracts between officials and foreign firms divert national resources (Global Witness, 2009). However, PAT's emphasis on individual rationality overlooks systemic drivers, such as colonial legacies normalizing corruption as a governance tool (Trefon, 2016). Moreover, its assumption that principals can enforce accountability ignores the DRC's power imbalances.

### Institutional Theory: Systemic Dysfunction

Institutional Theory attributes corruption to weak formal institutions and entrenched informal norms. The DRC's institutional fragility stems from colonial exploitation and Mobutu Sese Seko's kleptocracy (1965–1997), which deliberately weakened governance structures (Autesserre, 2010). Post-2005 reforms, like anti-corruption laws, failed as elites co-opted institutions; judicial independence remains compromised by executive influence (Freedom House, 2010). Informal clientelism further sustains graft, as seen in mining sector collusion between officials and foreign entities (International Crisis Group, 2006). While Institutional Theory highlights systemic decay, it risks oversimplifying the interplay between formal laws and informal patronage in hybrid post-conflict systems (Rothstein & Varraich, 2017).

### **Rent-Seeking Theory: Economic Exploitation**

Rent-Seeking Theory views corruption as profit-driven exploitation of public office. In resource-rich DRC, officials extract rents via bribes for licenses or tax evasion, distorting markets and deterring investment (Krueger, 1974). Fragmented governance exacerbates decentralized rent-seeking, contrasting Shleifer and Vishny's (1993) argument that centralized systems are "efficient." International actors, such as multinational firms, compound this by colluding with elites—evident in the \$80 million annual diamond smuggling trade (International Crisis Group, 2006). However, the theory's economic focus neglects non-monetary drivers, like cultural patronage obligations (Johnston, 2005).

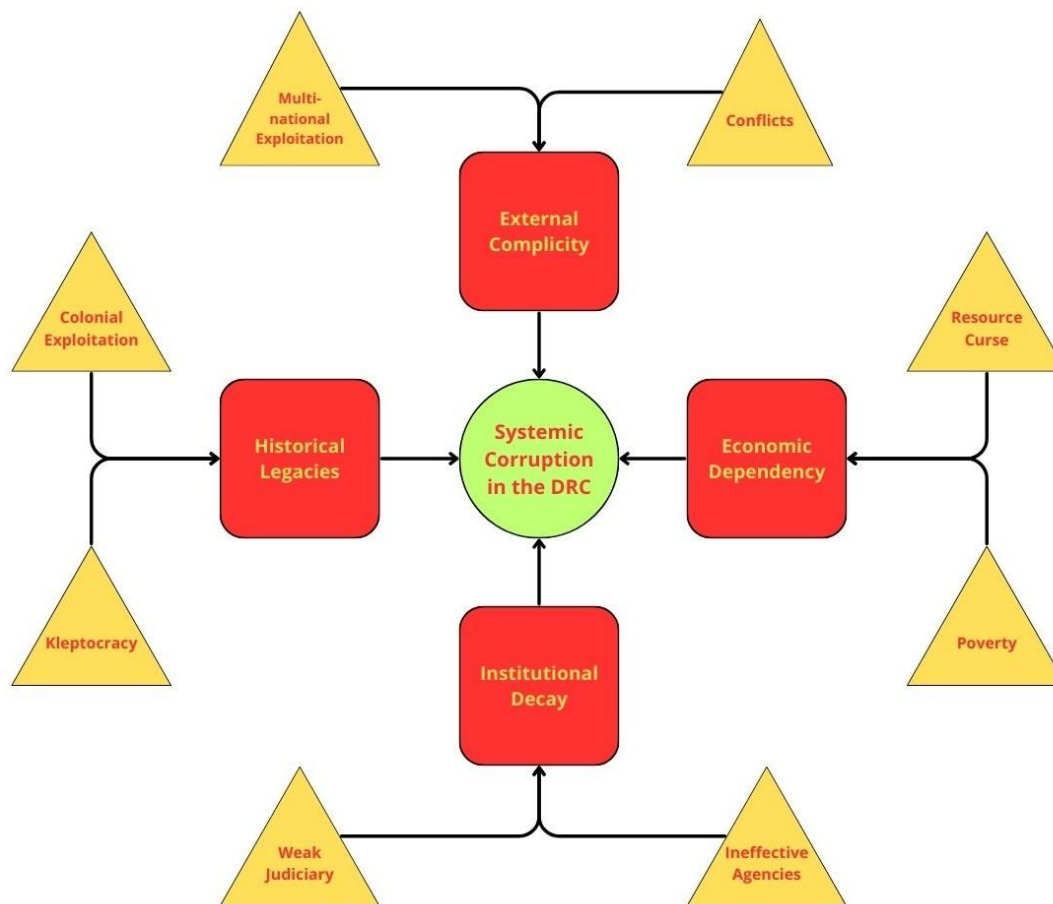
## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Corruption in DRC**

Corruption in the DRC is deeply rooted in historical, institutional, and economic factors. Colonial exploitation under Belgian rule (1885–1960) institutionalized extractive governance, prioritizing resource plunder over development, particularly in rubber, ivory, and minerals (Trefon, 2016). This legacy entrenched a culture where power equated to personal enrichment. Post-independence, Mobutu SeseSeko's kleptocratic regime (1965–1997) exacerbated systemic graft by deliberately weakening state institutions, siphoning an estimated \$4–15 billion from public coffers, and fostering patronage networks (Autesserre, 2010). These practices normalized corruption as a tool of political survival.

The DRC's institutions remain fragile and politicized. Anti-corruption agencies like the APLC lack autonomy, resources, and political independence, rendering them ineffective (US Department of State, 2023). The judiciary, plagued by underfunding and executive interference, rarely prosecutes elites (Freedom House, 2010). A fragmented political landscape further entrenches corruption, as leaders prioritize personal gain over public service. For instance, President Kabila's replacement of state enterprise heads with political allies exemplifies how governance structures reward loyalty over competence (Matti, 2010).

The DRC's wealth in minerals like cobalt and copper has fueled corruption rather than development. Weak regulatory frameworks enable elites and multinational corporations to collude, evading taxes and smuggling resources. An estimated \$80 million in diamonds is illicitly exported annually, depriving the state of revenue (International Crisis Group, 2006). Global Witness (2009) highlights how mining sector corruption funds armed groups and sustains conflict in eastern DRC. Economic policies prioritizing extraction over equitable growth have left 62% of the population in poverty (World Bank, 2023). International actors, including donor agencies and corporations, inadvertently perpetuate corruption by prioritizing short-term stability over systemic reform and exploiting weak oversight (Global Witness, 2009). Prolonged conflict in eastern DRC has entrenched graft, as armed groups and politicians profit from illegal mining and trafficking, creating a "war economy" resistant to accountability (Autesserre, 2010). The root causes of corruption in DRC are provided in Figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Root causes of corruption in DRC**

Corruption in the DRC's extractive industries, particularly cobalt and oil, has diverted wealth from public coffers to private elites and foreign entities. Anderson (2023) notes that multinational firms exploit weak regulatory frameworks, colluding with local officials to secure mining contracts at below-market rates. This deprives the state of critical revenue, perpetuating underdevelopment. Titeca and Edmond (2019) highlight opaque oil deals that siphon revenues with little accountability. Mazibuko (2023) estimates that corruption reduces the DRC's annual GDP growth by 1–2%, as resources are misallocated and investor confidence erodes.

Governance is eroded by corruption, undermining the rule of law and institutional integrity. Patronage networks dominate the political system, treating public offices as tools for personal enrichment rather than service delivery (Rahmé& Walsh, 2022). Anti-corruption bodies like the APLC are underfunded and politically compromised, while the judiciary's susceptibility to bribery fosters impunity (Titeca& Edmond, 2019). Corruption in the healthcare system exacerbates public welfare crises. Mostert et al. (2015) document how embezzlement and bribery limit access to essential services, particularly for vulnerable populations. Funds meant for medical supplies and infrastructure are often diverted, worsening health disparities and mortality rates.

The plunder of natural resources, facilitated by corruption, has severe environmental and social consequences. Anderson (2023) notes that illegal mining practices, often involving armed groups, degrade ecosystems and displace communities. Titeca and Edmond (2019) add that oil extraction in environmentally sensitive areas is marred by corruption, with little regard for sustainability. These activities fuel conflict as armed groups compete for control of lucrative resources, perpetuating cycles of violence and instability. The effects of corruption in DRC are summarized in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Effect of corruption on DRC**

Sector	Effects of Corruption	Sources
Economy	Reduced GDP growth, misallocation of resources, deterred foreign investment	Mazibuko (2023); Anderson (2023)
Governance	Weakened institutions, lack of accountability, culture of impunity	Rahmé and Walsh (2022); Titeca and Edmond (2019)
Public Health	Limited access to healthcare, shortages of medical supplies, increased mortality rates	Mostert et al. (2015)
Environment	Deforestation, pollution, displacement of communities, resource-driven conflict	Anderson (2023); Titeca and Edmond (2019)

Since 2000, the DRC has implemented domestic and international anti-corruption measures, yet systemic challenges persist. The 2005 Anti-Corruption Law criminalized bribery and illicit enrichment but lacked enforcement mechanisms, resulting in low prosecution rates (UNCA, 2022). The APLC, established in 2020, has struggled to prosecute high-profile cases due to political interference, underfunding, and lack of autonomy, mirroring the failures of its predecessor, the Commission de l'Éthique et de la Lutte contre la Corruption (CELC) (Lee-Jones, 2020). Decentralization reforms aimed to reduce centralized power but faltered due to weak local governance and entrenched patronage networks. For example, the 2002 Mining Code, intended to regulate resource extraction, was undermined by collusion between politicians and multinational corporations, enabling opaque contracts and revenue leakage (Staines& Villafuerte, 2022). The judiciary's lack of independence exacerbates these issues, as courts remain susceptible to executive interference (Bossuyt et al., 2022).

International actors have provided support through legal, financial, and institutional partnerships. The DRC's ratification of the UN Convention Against Corruption (UNCAC) in 2007 aligned it with global norms, but implementation gaps persist due to weak domestic institutions (Staines& Villafuerte, 2022). The EU's rule-of-law programs (2010–2021) focused on judicial reform but stalled post-2019 amid political instability (Bossuyt et al., 2022). Participation in the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) improved mining revenue transparency but faces limitations due to elite collusion and opaque contracts (Staines& Villafuerte, 2022). Extraterritorial mechanisms like the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act (FCPA) have penalized multinational corporations for bribing Congolese officials, yet systemic graft within domestic institutions remains (Sehgal, 2024).

The DRC's anti-corruption measures often target symptoms—such as prosecuting low-level officials—while neglecting root causes like elite power networks and economic inequality (Lee-Jones, 2020; Sehgal, 2024). Civil society and media face harassment, stifling oversight, while the absence of access-to-information laws obstructs transparency (UN Office on Drugs and Crime,

2024). Poverty and informal economies normalize “survival corruption,” where citizens bribe officials for basic services, perpetuating a cycle of impunity (Lee-Jones, 2020). Table 2 below summarizes key domestic and international anti-corruption measures, their effectiveness, and challenges.

**Table 2: DRC’s measures for addressing corruption**

Measure	Type	Effectiveness	Challenges
2005 Anti-Corruption Law	Domestic	Limited; outdated enforcement	Weak judiciary, lack of specialized courts
APLC (2020)	Domestic	Minimal prosecutions; mirrors past failures	Political interference, underfunding
UNCAC Ratification	International	Aligns with global norms but lacks implementation	Weak institutions, elite resistance
EU Rule-of-Law Programs	International	Mixed; progress reversed post-2019	Political instability, attacks on judiciary
EITI Compliance	International	Improved mining transparency but limited	Elite collusion, opaque contracts

### Comparing the Experience

DRC faces a corruption crisis deeply entrenched in its colonial legacy, institutional fragility, and resource-driven conflicts. However, this challenge is not insurmountable, as evidenced by the transformative reforms achieved by Rwanda, Botswana, and Georgia. By analyzing these nations’ strategies, the DRC can identify actionable pathways to dismantle systemic graft and redirect governance toward accountability and equity.

Post-genocide Rwanda exemplifies how political will and institutional reforms can combat corruption. In the aftermath of the 1994 genocide, Rwanda’s leadership recognized corruption as a direct threat to national unity and stability. This recognition led to the establishment of the Rwanda Governance Board (RGB) and the Office of the Ombudsman, both granted operational independence and prosecutorial authority to pursue high-profile cases (Lee-Jones, 2020). Unlike the DRC’s APLC, which remains constrained by political interference, Rwanda’s anti-corruption bodies operate with direct presidential support. Between 2015 and 2020, 12 ministers were dismissed for graft, demonstrating a zero-tolerance approach to elite impunity (Sarjito, 2023). Furthermore, Rwanda’s digitization of land registries and tax systems replaced cash-based transactions with transparent digital platforms, significantly reducing bureaucratic discretion. This stands in stark contrast to the DRC, where informal deals and cash bribes dominate sectors such as mining and public services. Rwanda’s success underscores the critical role of unwavering political commitment, a stark contrast to the DRC’s entrenched elite resistance to meaningful reform.

Botswana’s management of its diamond wealth offers another instructive model for resource-rich nations. By channeling diamond revenues into the Pula Fund—a transparent sovereign wealth fund managed by the Bank of Botswana—the country ensured that natural resources benefited the public (Ceschel et al., 2022). Botswana’s adherence to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) mandated public disclosure of mining contracts, a practice notably absent in the DRC, where opaque deals between officials and foreign firms perpetuate revenue leakage. Conversely, civil society in Botswana actively audits government spending, a

role stifled in the DRC through repression and harassment of activists (Staines& Villafuerte, 2022). For instance, Botswana's partnerships with grassroots organizations to monitor infrastructure projects have fostered public trust, unlike the DRC's mining sector, where armed groups and politicians collude to siphon resources worth \$80 million annually (International Crisis Group, 2006). Botswana's approach highlights the necessity of transparency and civil society engagement to break cycles of resource predation.

Georgia's 2003 Rose Revolution illustrates the transformative potential of judicial reform. In response to systemic bribery, Georgia's government dismissed 85% of corrupt judges and instituted merit-based appointments, solidifying judicial independence as a cornerstone of governance (Heimann&Pieth, 2017). These reforms drastically reduced bureaucratic red tape, cutting business registration time from 33 days to one, a stark contrast to the DRC, where entrepreneurs face labyrinthine processes riddled with bribes (Ceschel et al., 2022). In contrast, the DRC's judiciary remains a tool of patronage, with judges often beholden to political elites (Freedom House, 2010). Georgia's success stemmed from treating judicial reform as a moral imperative rather than a technical adjustment, a lesson the DRC has yet to internalize.

The divergent experiences of Rwanda, Botswana, and Georgia collectively underscore three critical lessons for the DRC. First, political will is indispensable: Rwanda's leaders treated corruption as an existential threat, whereas the DRC's elites continue to prioritize personal gain over national survival. Second, institutional independence is crucial; Botswana's apolitical management of diamond wealth contrasts sharply with the DRC's politicized APLC, which lacks the autonomy to hold powerful figures accountable. Third, citizen empowerment is non-negotiable. Georgia and Botswana leveraged civil society and technology to foster transparency, while the DRC suppresses dissent and criminalizes activists who expose graft. By integrating these lessons, the DRC can begin to dismantle its entrenched corruption networks and rebuild a governance system grounded in accountability and equity.

## CONCLUSION

### General Discussion

The DRC remains ensnared in a corruption crisis that is both a relic of historical exploitation and a consequence of contemporary governance failures. Rooted in colonial-era resource plunder and perpetuated by post-independence kleptocracy, corruption in the DRC has evolved into a systemic tool for elite survival. Institutions like the APLC and the judiciary, designed to combat graft, are themselves compromised by political interference and underfunding, rendering legal frameworks like the 2005 Anti-Corruption Law symbolic rather than substantive. The DRC's reliance on extractive industries has exacerbated this crisis, funneling mineral wealth into private pockets while 62% of the population lives in poverty (World Bank, 2023). International interventions, though well-intentioned, have struggled to address the root causes—elite resistance, institutional capture, and a lack of political will.

Comparative analysis with Rwanda, Botswana, and Georgia underscores critical lessons. Rwanda's post-genocide reforms demonstrate that political will and institutional autonomy are prerequisites for accountability. Botswana's transparent management of diamond revenues through the Pula Fund and civil society audits reveals how resource wealth can fuel development rather than predation. Georgia's judicial overhaul, which dismissed corrupt judges and slashed bureaucratic red tape, highlights the transformative potential of

meritocracy and technological innovation. These cases contrast starkly with the DRC's realities, where patronage networks, repression of dissent, and opaque resource deals remain entrenched.

### Recommendations

To dismantle systemic corruption, the DRC must adopt a multi-pronged strategy informed by global successes and tailored to its unique context. Institutional reforms are paramount, beginning with the establishment of an independent anti-corruption court with jurisdiction over high-profile cases, modeled after Rwanda's High Court Chamber for Anti-Corruption. Judges should undergo vetting by international bodies like the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2004) to ensure impartiality. Decentralization efforts must be accompanied by safeguards, such as Rwanda's *Imihigo* performance contracts, which tie local officials' promotions to anti-corruption metrics. This would shift governance from patronage to accountability while addressing the fragmentation that enables elite capture.

Technological transparency is another cornerstone of reform. Blockchain technology, as seen in Sierra Leone's mining sector, could be implemented to track mineral exports and tax revenues, ensuring real-time visibility of transactions. Digitizing land registries and procurement processes would reduce bureaucratic discretion and petty bribery, streamlining public services and deterring illicit enrichment. Such innovations would align the DRC with global best practices, fostering trust in state institutions.

International accountability must also be strengthened. Renegotiating Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) compliance to mandate real-time revenue disclosure, coupled with penalties for firms evading scrutiny, would curb opaque deals. The European Union and the United States could condition cobalt imports on certifications of ethical sourcing, mirroring conflict-free mineral regulations. These measures would pressure multinational corporations to adhere to transparency standards, reducing their complicity in resource looting.

Civil society empowerment is equally vital. Legal protections for whistleblowers and journalists, inspired by Botswana's robust framework, would safeguard activists who expose graft. The United Nations could fund a Congolese Social Accountability Fund to train civil society actors in budget tracking and governance monitoring, enabling grassroots oversight of public spending. By amplifying civic engagement, the DRC can counteract the repression of dissent that stifles accountability.

Economic diversification is essential to breaking the cycle of resource dependency. Redirecting mining revenues into agriculture and manufacturing via a sovereign wealth fund, akin to Botswana's Pula Fund, would reduce reliance on volatile extractive markets and create jobs. This would address the poverty that fuels public tolerance of corruption while fostering long-term economic resilience.

Finally, a judicial overhaul is non-negotiable. Purging the judiciary of political loyalists and introducing merit-based appointments, as Georgia did post-2003, would restore faith in the rule of law. Strengthening legal frameworks to prosecute illicit enrichment and recover stolen assets would send a clear message that impunity cannot persist.

## **A Path Forward**

The DRC's corruption is not inevitable but a product of choices—choices to prioritize elite interests over public welfare. While the challenges are immense, Rwanda, Botswana, and Georgia prove that systemic change is achievable with political courage, institutional integrity, and grassroots mobilization. International actors must move beyond symbolic gestures to enforce accountability, while Congolese leaders must confront colonial legacies and reorient governance toward equity. By embracing transparency, technology, and citizen agency, the DRC can transform its paradox of plenty into a future where resources uplift, rather than impoverish, its people. The road is arduous, but the alternative—a nation perpetually shackled by predation—is untenable.

## **LIST OF SYMBOLS**

**APLC:** Agence de Prévention et de Lutte contre la Corruption (Agency for the Prevention and Fight against Corruption)

**CELC:** Commission de l'Éthique et de la Lutte contre la Corruption (Commission for Ethics and the Fight against Corruption)

**DRC:** Democratic Republic of Congo

**EITI:** Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

**EU:** European Union

**FCPA:** Foreign Corrupt Practices Act

**GDP:** Gross Domestic Product

**NGOs:** Non-Governmental Organizations

**PAT:** Principal-Agent Theory

**RGB:** Rwanda Governance Board

**UNCAC:** United Nations Convention Against Corruption

**UNODC:** United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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