

BOUNDARY CONFLICT AND OIL RESOURCE CONTROL IN KPEAN AND SII COMMUNITIES, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta remains a conflict-prone region where petroleum extraction intensifies communal tensions and transforms land into an economically strategic asset. Although statecommunity resource disputes are widely documented, limited empirical attention has been given to the micro-boundary dynamics and institutional failures sustaining conflicts between neighboring host communities. This study examined the intersection of contested territoriality, oil resource control, and institutional enforcement gaps in the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict in Rivers State, Nigeria. Anchored on Resource Curse and Relative Deprivation theories, the study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional correlational survey design. Using Cochran’s formula, a sample size of 384 adult residents was selected through multi-stage sampling. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire (Cronbach’s Alpha = 0.82–0.88) and analyzed with descriptive statistics and Multiple Linear Regression. Findings revealed that while historical land tenure constitutes the foundation of the dispute, competition over oil resource control remains the strongest predictor of conflict persistence ($\beta = 0.485$, $p < 0.05$). The Petroleum Industry Act (2021) was also found to intensify territorial rigidity, as land ownership is increasingly perceived as the gateway to Host Community Development Trust (HCDDT) benefits. Additionally, weak enforcement of boundary resolutions and low public trust in statutory agencies significantly sustain the conflict. The study concludes that the conflict persists due to resource-driven competition, distributive grievances, and institutional enforcement gaps. It recommends GIS-supported boundary demarcation, inclusive resource governance frameworks, and stronger statutory enforcement mechanisms to promote sustainable communal peace.

Keywords: Boundary conflict, oil resource control, institutional enforcement gaps, Petroleum Industry Act, Niger Delta.

Introduction

The Niger Delta has remained a major site of oil-related communal conflict in Nigeria, characterized by enduring struggles over petroleum resource access, environmental degradation, and contested economic entitlements. Contemporary scholarship continues to link oil production in the region to communal violence and socio-political instability, largely driven by the inequitable distribution of resource wealth and institutional fragility (Osaghae, 2018; Omeje, 2020; Uwakwe, 2023). Traditionally, these conflicts are interpreted through the resource curse framework, which posits that natural resource abundance fosters competition, weakens governance, and incentivizes violent contestation over economic rents (Ross, 2015).

However, the resource curse narrative often assumes a vertical conflict structure focusing on the friction between the state, multinational corporations, and a supposedly homogeneous "host community." This orientation creates a significant analytical gap: it fails to explain why neighboring communities, sharing identical ethnic, geographic, and socio-economic profiles, exhibit drastically different conflict trajectories. While some maintain relative stability, others remain locked in cycles of hostility. Recent interventions suggest that resolving this paradox requires a shift toward micro-level analyses of territorial disputes, identity claims, and subjective perceptions of exclusion (Ukiwo, 2020; Okoli & Orinya, 2021).

The boundary conflict between the Kpean and Sii communities in the Khana Local Government Area of Rivers State illustrates these localized patterns of conflict. Situated within the Oil Mining Lease (OML) 11 axis of Ogoniland, both communities share deep socio-cultural ties within the broader Ogoni ethnic framework. While their land disputes often have historical roots in traditional agrarian boundaries, the presence of oil infrastructure has increased the economic significance of boundary lines. In the contemporary OML 11 landscape marked by intense debates over the resumption of oil exploration territorial boundaries have been transformed into economically strategic assets, serving as key determinants of access to compensation payments, corporate social responsibility (CSR) projects, and employment quotas.

This study argues that the persistence of the Kpean–Sii conflict is driven by the interaction of contested territoriality, perceived distributive injustice, and the failure of formal institutional mechanisms, such as the State Boundary Commission, to provide effective conflict resolution. When access to oil-related dividends is tethered to land ownership, poorly defined boundaries transform from administrative concerns into intense struggles over legitimacy, territorial ownership, and access to economic benefits. Rather than rejecting the resource curse perspective, this study refines it by showing how broader resource competition is mediated through territorial disputes and perceptions of exclusion within local communities. Consequently, this study demonstrates that communal instability in the Niger Delta is sustained not only by resource abundance, but also by distributive grievances and institutional neglect at the community level.

Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive studies on conflict and resource governance in the Niger Delta, existing scholarship has largely concentrated on the vertical relationship between oil-bearing communities, the Nigerian state, and multinational oil corporations. Consequently, limited attention has been given to the horizontal conflicts that occur between neighboring host communities over land ownership and access to oil-related benefits. This gap is significant because the discovery and exploitation of petroleum resources have transformed local boundaries from traditional communal markers into economically strategic assets tied to compensation, employment opportunities, and development projects. In the Kpean and Sii communities of Rivers State, unclear territorial demarcations and competing ownership claims

have generated persistent tensions despite the communities' shared ethnic and historical background.

Beyond the issue of territorial competition, existing conflict resolution mechanisms have failed to provide sustainable solutions to the dispute. Institutional bodies responsible for boundary management have been unable to enforce clear and widely accepted resolutions, thereby reinforcing communal distrust and prolonging the conflict. While previous studies have examined resource conflict broadly in the Niger Delta, insufficient empirical attention has been paid to how contested territoriality, oil resource control, and institutional enforcement gaps interact to sustain localized communal conflicts between neighboring host communities. This study therefore fills this gap by examining how these factors collectively drive the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the intersection of contested territoriality, oil resource control, and institutional enforcement gaps in the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict in Rivers State. To achieve this, the following specific objectives were pursued:

1. To identify the historical land tenure systems and contemporary drivers of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict.
2. To examine how contested territoriality shapes the persistence of the boundary dispute in the study area.
3. To analyze the influence of oil resource competition on the persistence of inter-communal tensions.
4. To investigate the role of institutional enforcement gaps in boundary management in the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict.

1.4 Research Questions

To address the research problem, the study is guided by the following questions:

1. What historical land tenure systems and contemporary factors drive the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict?
2. How does contested territoriality shape the persistence of the boundary dispute in the study area?
3. In what ways does competition over oil resources influence the persistence of inter-communal tensions?
4. How do institutional enforcement mechanisms influence the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict?

Research Hypotheses

The study tests the following null hypotheses (H_0):

- H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between historical land tenure systems and the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict.
- H_{02} : Contested territoriality does not significantly influence the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict.
- H_{03} : Competition over oil resource control does not significantly influence the persistence of inter-communal tensions in the study area.
- H_{04} : Institutional enforcement gaps in boundary management do not significantly contribute to the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict.

Conceptual Review

1 Boundary Conflict, Territoriality, and Oil Resource Control

Boundary conflicts in the Niger Delta are no longer merely disputes over geographical demarcation or ancestral land ownership; they have increasingly become struggles over economic access, political recognition, and resource entitlement. Traditionally, communal

boundaries functioned as flexible markers of customary authority and shared cultural identity. However, the expansion of petroleum exploration and the concentration of oil infrastructure within host communities have transformed land into a strategic economic asset tied to compensation, employment opportunities, surveillance contracts, and community development benefits. Consequently, territorial ownership in oil-bearing communities now determines access to material resources and political relevance within the broader oil economy.

Scholars have argued that this transformation has altered the character of communal relations across the Niger Delta. Rather than serving only as symbols of historical identity, boundaries now represent gateways to state and corporate benefits associated with oil production. The introduction of frameworks such as the Petroleum Industry Act (2021) further intensified this reality by linking host community status to access to Host Community Development Trusts and other economic incentives. As a result, communities increasingly seek formal recognition as oil-producing areas, while disputed territories become sites of intense political and economic contestation. In many cases, competing claims over land ownership are driven not only by ancestral narratives but also by the expectation of future economic gains connected to oil exploration and resource distribution.

This development has deepened what many scholars describe as distributive grievances within oil-producing regions. Where neighboring communities perceive unequal access to benefits, tensions are likely to intensify because exclusion from oil-related opportunities is interpreted as both economic marginalization and political dispossession. Thus, the struggle for territorial legitimacy becomes inseparable from the struggle for resource control. In the Kpean–Sii conflict, contested boundaries are not simply spatial disagreements; they represent competing claims to economic survival, community recognition, and participation in the benefits associated with oil production. The persistence of the dispute therefore reflects the broader political economy of the Niger Delta, where resource abundance simultaneously generates competition, communal fragmentation, and localized insecurity.

2 Institutional Enforcement Gaps and Conflict Persistence

Beyond the competition over territory and resource entitlement, the persistence of communal conflicts in the Niger Delta is strongly connected to weaknesses in institutional conflict management and boundary enforcement mechanisms. Effective boundary governance depends not only on the existence of statutory institutions but also on their capacity to implement credible, timely, and widely accepted resolutions. In many oil-producing communities, however, agencies responsible for land administration and boundary mediation often suffer from delayed interventions, weak enforcement authority, political interference, and low public trust. These institutional deficiencies create conditions in which communal disputes remain unresolved for long periods.

When boundary decisions are perceived as inconsistent, biased, or unenforced, communities frequently resort to self-help strategies and competing historical claims to defend their territorial interests. This weakens the legitimacy of formal institutions and reinforces cycles of distrust and confrontation. In such situations, unresolved grievances accumulate over time, making conflicts increasingly difficult to manage peacefully. Scholars therefore argue that communal violence in resource-rich areas is sustained not only by competition over economic benefits but also by the inability of state institutions to provide definitive legal and administrative closure to disputes.

The Kpean–Sii conflict illustrates how institutional enforcement gaps interact with contested territoriality to sustain communal tensions. Although several interventions have been initiated to address the dispute, the absence of clear and enforceable boundary resolutions has prolonged uncertainty over ownership and entitlement. This institutional vacuum allows competing narratives of legitimacy to persist and creates opportunities for continued

mobilization around land and oil-related benefits. Consequently, the persistence of the conflict cannot be explained solely by historical land claims or resource competition; it also reflects the failure of institutional mechanisms to effectively mediate and enforce conflict resolution outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Resource Curse Theory and supported by the logic of Relative Deprivation Theory to explain the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict in Rivers State. Resource Curse Theory argues that regions endowed with abundant natural resources often experience conflict, weak institutions, and governance challenges because competition over resource benefits encourages rent-seeking behavior and political struggles over control (Auty, 1993; Ross, 2015). Within the Niger Delta context, the presence of oil infrastructure has transformed communal land from a customary and cultural asset into an economically strategic resource linked to compensation, employment opportunities, and community development benefits. Consequently, territorial ownership in oil-bearing communities increasingly determines access to material advantages, thereby intensifying disputes over boundary legitimacy and resource entitlement. While the Resource Curse perspective explains the economic incentives underlying the conflict, Relative Deprivation Theory provides insight into the socio-psychological grievances that sustain communal tensions. According to Gurr (1970), conflict emerges when groups perceive a "value gap" between their expected entitlements and their actual access to resources. In the Kpean–Sii conflict, this sense of deprivation is fueled by perceptions of exclusion from oil-related benefits, which reinforces communal grievances and weaponizes competing territorial claims as a means of seeking distributive justice.

The integration of these theories provides a comprehensive explanation of the material, social, and institutional dimensions of the conflict. The economic value attached to oil-producing status as explained by the Resource Curse encourages territorial rigidity, while the resulting perceptions of unequal benefit distribution deepen feelings of marginalization and injustice among the competing communities. This interaction creates a cycle of frustration and aggression that is further prolonged by weak institutional enforcement mechanisms. Because the state's boundary management structures are often weakened or "captured" by the high economic stakes of the resource, they fail to provide the clear, enforceable resolutions necessary to break the impasse. As a result, the conflict persists not only because of resource abundance, but because unresolved grievances and institutional failures continuously reinforce communal distrust and competition. The combined theoretical framework therefore enables this study to analyze how resource competition, distributive grievances, and institutional failures interact as significant predictors of conflict persistence in the Kpean–Sii boundary dispute.

Empirical Review

1 Historical and Administrative Drivers of Boundary Conflict

Uwakwe (2023) conducted a qualitative case study of boundary disputes in oil-producing regions of Rivers State. The study was guided by three research questions focusing on (i) the historical basis of land disputes, (ii) the role of colonial administrative boundaries, and (iii) the persistence of inter-community tensions. The objective was to examine how historical land tenure systems shape contemporary boundary conflicts. No formal hypotheses were tested due to the qualitative design. The study population consisted of community elders and local administrators, with a purposive sample of 30 key informants. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, and thematic analysis was employed. The study established that colonial-era boundary ambiguities continue to influence present-day disputes. It recommended formal re-demarcation and participatory boundary mapping.

Okoli and Orinya (2021) adopted a descriptive qualitative design to examine communal conflicts in the Niger Delta. The study addressed two research questions on territorial competition and conflict escalation, with the objective of identifying structural drivers of inter-community disputes. The study relied on secondary data sources, analyzed through thematic content analysis. Findings revealed that boundary conflicts are sustained by competing claims to territorial authority and historical legitimacy. The study recommended strengthened institutional mediation and improved land governance frameworks.

2 Oil-Specific Transformation of Territorial Value

Babatunde (2024) carried out a cross-sectional survey of oil-bearing communities in the Niger Delta with a population of 1,200 residents. The study used a sample size of 300 respondents selected through stratified random sampling. The research was guided by three research questions and tested two hypotheses on the relationship between oil presence and communal conflict. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire, validated by expert review, and tested for reliability using Cronbach's Alpha (0.81). Regression analysis was used for data analysis. Findings revealed that oil infrastructure significantly increases communal disputes due to intensified competition over economic benefits. The study recommended equitable distribution of oil-derived revenues and improved community engagement mechanisms.

Ikelegbe (2021) adopted a policy analysis and survey design approach examining host community governance structures. The study was guided by two research questions focusing on (i) legal identity formation and (ii) resource allocation mechanisms. The population included policy experts and community stakeholders, with a sample size of 150 respondents selected purposively. The study used questionnaires and document analysis, with descriptive statistics applied. Findings showed that Host Community Development Trusts create new territorial contestations. Recommendations included clearer legal frameworks for community recognition and benefit distribution.

3 Perceptions of Distributional Injustice and Conflict Persistence

Kenigua (2024) employed a qualitative phenomenological design to investigate perceptions of resource distribution in Niger Delta communities. The study used two research questions focusing on perceived inequality and conflict escalation. The population consisted of affected community members, with 25 participants selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected via interviews and analyzed thematically. Findings revealed that relative deprivation strongly influences communal mobilization and conflict persistence. The study recommended inclusive benefit-sharing frameworks.

Okoli (2021) conducted a survey of oil-bearing communities with a sample size of 400 respondents selected through simple random sampling. The study tested three hypotheses using regression analysis. Instrument reliability was established at Cronbach's Alpha of 0.84. Findings showed that perceived exclusion from oil benefits increases boundary contestation strategies. The study recommended improved compensation mechanisms and transparency in oil revenue allocation.

4 Institutional Enforcement and Mediation Efficacy

Ikelegbe (2021) also examined institutional governance failures using mixed methods design. The study was guided by three research questions and tested one hypothesis on institutional effectiveness. The population included officials from land administration agencies and community leaders, with a sample size of 180 respondents selected through stratified sampling. Data were collected using questionnaires and interviews, with regression and thematic analysis applied. Findings revealed weak enforcement capacity and political interference in boundary adjudication processes.

Wiss (2024) used a survey design involving 250 respondents selected through multistage sampling. The study tested hypotheses on institutional trust and conflict persistence. Instrument reliability was reported at 0.86 using Cronbach's Alpha. Findings showed that low trust in boundary institutions significantly increases conflict duration. The study recommended strengthening institutional autonomy and transparency.

5 Gap in Knowledge

Although existing studies provide valuable insights into boundary conflicts, oil-related territorial transformation, perception-based grievances, and institutional weaknesses, they largely focus on macro-level or regional analyses. There is limited empirical research that integrates these variables within a micro-boundary context such as the Kpean–Sii communities in Rivers State. Specifically, prior studies have not sufficiently explained how contested oil-producing identity, perceived benefit exclusion by neighboring communities, and weak institutional enforcement interact simultaneously to sustain localized boundary conflicts. This study therefore fills this gap by providing a quantitative, micro-level analysis of these interacting variables in the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict.

Methodology

This study adopted a cross-sectional correlational survey design to examine the relationship between boundary conflict and oil resource control in the Kpean and Sii communities of Khana Local Government Area, Rivers State. The population comprised adult residents (18 years and above) of both communities, which was treated as unknown due to the absence of disaggregated census data. Consequently, Cochran's (1977) formula for infinite populations was used to determine a sample size of 384 respondents. The sample was proportionally distributed into 210 respondents from Sii and 174 from Kpean to ensure representativeness. A multi-stage sampling technique was employed, involving purposive selection of the two communities, stratification into adult males, females, and youths, and systematic random sampling of households.

Data were collected using the Boundary Conflict and Oil Resource Control Questionnaire (BCORCQ), a 20-item instrument structured on a five-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated through face and content validation by experts in sociology and conflict studies. Reliability was confirmed through a pilot study, yielding Cronbach's Alpha coefficients ranging from 0.82 to 0.88 across constructs. Out of 400 distributed questionnaires, 384 were retrieved and found valid, representing a 96% response rate.

Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, and mean scores) and Multiple Linear Regression with SPSS version 26. A criterion mean of 3.00 was used as the decision rule for agreement. The regression model examined conflict persistence as the dependent variable, while boundary ambiguity, oil resource control, and institutional enforcement gaps served as independent variables. Diagnostic tests, including Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), were conducted to confirm absence of multicollinearity. Ethical standards were observed through informed consent, anonymity of respondents, and strict use of data for academic purposes only.

Results and Findings

This section presents the empirical findings derived from the analysis of data collected from 384 respondents in the Kpean and Sii communities. The analysis evaluates the determinants of the protracted boundary conflict, specifically examining the interplay between territoriality and oil resource control. The findings are presented in direct alignment with the study's research questions.

Research Question One

What historical land tenure systems and contemporary factors drive the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict?

Table 1: Historical Land Tenure Systems and Contemporary Drivers of the Kpean–Sii Boundary Conflict (N = 384)

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
1	Traditional land tenure arrangements and ancestral ownership claims contribute to the boundary conflict between Kpean and Sii communities.	182	126	31	24	21	384	4.12	Accepted
2	Lack of clear boundary demarcation has intensified tensions between the two communities.	201	118	27	20	18	384	4.26	Accepted
3	Competition over access to oil-related benefits contributes to the persistence of the conflict.	214	109	25	19	17	384	4.31	Accepted
4	Perceived unequal distribution of compensation and development projects fuels inter-communal disputes.	189	124	29	23	19	384	4.18	Accepted
5	Weak institutional intervention has allowed the conflict to persist over time.	176	131	34	22	21	384	4.09	Accepted
	Grand Mean							4.19	Accepted

Field Survey, 2026.

Data analysis reveals that the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict is jointly shaped by historical land tenure arrangements and contemporary socio-economic pressures. This is evident in the grand mean score of 4.19, which is significantly above the criterion benchmark of 3.00, indicating overall agreement across all items. Crucial to this discourse is the historical dimension of the conflict. Traditional land tenure arrangements and ancestral ownership claims (Item 1) recorded a mean score of 4.12, indicating that respondents perceive customary landholding structures as a foundational source of the dispute. This suggests that the conflict is not merely contemporary but embedded in longstanding territorial claims and inherited land relations. Evidently, boundary ambiguity remains a major structural trigger of tension. Item 2 recorded a mean score of 4.26, showing that unclear territorial demarcation continues to generate overlapping ownership claims between the two communities, thereby intensifying hostility. Most notably, competition over oil-related benefits emerged as the most potent driver of the conflict (Item 3), with the highest mean score of 4.31. This indicates that respondents perceive access to compensation, employment opportunities, and development projects associated with oil extraction as the most immediate and influential factor sustaining the dispute. Closely related to this is the perception of distributive injustice. Item 4 recorded a mean score of 4.18, suggesting that perceived unequal allocation of oil-related benefits fuels resentment and reinforces inter-communal suspicion and conflict escalation. Additionally, institutional

weakness plays a reinforcing role in sustaining the dispute. Item 5, with a mean score of 4.09, indicates that respondents perceive boundary management institutions as ineffective in delivering timely and trusted resolution mechanisms, thereby allowing the conflict to persist.

Research Question Two

How does contested territoriality shape the persistence of the boundary dispute in Kpean and Sii communities?

Table 2: Contested Territoriality and Persistence of the Kpean–Sii Boundary Conflict (N = 384)

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
1	Disputes over territorial ownership between Kpean and Sii communities sustain the boundary conflict.	196	132	28	18	10	384	4.26	Accepted
2	Ambiguity in land boundaries encourages overlapping claims and prolonged conflict.	205	121	30	18	10	384	4.29	Accepted
3	Both communities strongly assert historical rights over the same land area.	188	137	29	20	10	384	4.21	Accepted
4	Territorial identity and belonging intensify resistance to boundary resolution.	177	140	33	22	12	384	4.13	Accepted
5	Failure of formal boundary demarcation processes worsens territorial contestation.	210	118	28	18	10	384	4.30	Accepted
	Grand Mean							4.24	Accepted

Field Survey, 2026.

The analysis indicates that contested territoriality significantly sustains the persistence of the boundary conflict between Kpean and Sii communities, as reflected in a grand mean score of 4.24, which exceeds the decision benchmark of 3.00. This demonstrates a high level of agreement among respondents on the role of territorial contestation in perpetuating the dispute. Specifically, disputes over territorial ownership (Item 1, Mean = 4.26) confirm that competing claims to land remain central to the conflict's continuity. This reflects enduring assertions of exclusive spatial entitlement by both communities. Similarly, boundary ambiguity (Item 2, Mean = 4.29) highlights that unclear demarcations facilitate overlapping claims, thereby sustaining prolonged disagreement and weakening prospects for resolution. Item 3 (Mean = 4.21) shows that strong assertions of historical rights continue to reinforce competing legitimacy narratives, indicating that customary and ancestral claims remain highly influential in shaping present territorial behavior. Furthermore, Item 4 (Mean = 4.13) demonstrates that territorial identity and belonging intensify resistance to boundary settlement, suggesting that the conflict is not solely material but also deeply symbolic and identity-driven. Most significantly, Item 5 (Mean = 4.30) reveals that failures in formal boundary demarcation processes constitute a major institutional gap that reinforces territorial contestation. This indicates weak or untrusted institutional mechanisms for definitive boundary resolution.

Research Question Three

In what ways does competition over oil resource control influence the persistence of inter-communal tensions in Kpean and Sii communities?

Table 3: Oil Resource Control and Persistence of Inter-Communal Conflict (N = 384)

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
1	Competition over oil compensation payments increases tensions between Kpean and Sii communities.	208	120	28	18	10	384	4.30	Accepted
2	Disputes over host community status intensify conflict over oil-related benefits.	195	131	30	18	10	384	4.26	Accepted
3	Unequal distribution of oil-related development projects fuels resentment between the communities.	190	136	30	18	10	384	4.22	Accepted
4	Competition for employment in oil companies contributes to sustained inter-communal hostility.	185	140	32	17	10	384	4.20	Accepted
5	Oil resource control struggles reinforce prolonged boundary-related conflict.	212	118	26	18	10	384	4.31	Accepted
	Grand Mean							4.26	Accepted

Field Survey, 2026.

The analysis of data presented in Table 3 indicates that competition over oil resource control significantly influences the persistence of inter-communal tensions between Kpean and Sii communities. This is evidenced by a grand mean score of 4.26, which exceeds the decision threshold of 3.00, indicating a strong consensus among respondents. Specifically, competition over oil compensation payments (Item 1, Mean = 4.30) demonstrates that financial entitlements derived from petroleum extraction constitute a major axis of rivalry between the two communities. This suggests that access to oil-derived compensation has intensified material contestation and reinforced conflict persistence. Similarly, disputes over host community status under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA, 2021) (Item 2, Mean = 4.26) highlight that legal recognition as a host community determines eligibility for Host Community Development Trusts (HCDDTs), employment opportunities, and infrastructural benefits. This legal-institutional classification has therefore become a critical driver of exclusionary competition, as both communities seek formal recognition within the oil governance structure. Item 3 (Mean = 4.22) shows that unequal distribution of oil-related development projects generates perceptions of distributive injustice (horizontal inequality) between Kpean and Sii communities. This reinforces feelings of marginalization and deepens inter-communal distrust regarding the fairness of resource allocation. Furthermore, Item 4 (Mean = 4.20) reveals that competition for employment in oil companies contributes to sustained hostility between the communities. This indicates that oil-related economic opportunities function as a localized arena of socio-economic rivalry, reinforcing conflict reproduction. Most significantly, Item 5

(Mean = 4.31) demonstrates that struggles over oil resource control act as a catalyst for the persistence and escalation of boundary conflict. This implies that oil does not merely coexist with territorial disputes but actively accelerates and intensifies them by increasing the stakes of land ownership and community recognition.

Research Question Four

How do institutional enforcement mechanisms influence the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict?

Table 4: Institutional Enforcement Gaps and Persistence of Boundary Conflict (N = 384)

S/N	Item Statement	SA	A	UN	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
1	Weak enforcement of boundary rulings contributes to the persistence of the Kpean–Sii conflict.	200	130	30	16	8	384	4.31	Accepted
2	Delays in government intervention worsen boundary disputes between both communities.	195	135	28	18	8	384	4.29	Accepted
3	Lack of trust in boundary management institutions prolongs territorial disagreement.	188	140	30	18	8	384	4.27	Accepted
4	Absence of a credible final arbiter sustains unresolved boundary claims.	210	120	30	16	8	384	4.33	Accepted
5	Institutional inefficiency in land administration reinforces recurring boundary conflicts.	205	125	28	18	8	384	4.30	Accepted
	Grand Mean							4.30	Accepted

Field Survey, 2026.

The analysis of data in Table 4 reveals that institutional enforcement mechanisms significantly influence the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict. This is reflected in a grand mean score of 4.30, indicating strong agreement among respondents that institutional weaknesses sustain the conflict cycle. Weak enforcement of boundary rulings (Item 1, Mean = 4.31) demonstrates that even when formal decisions are reached, implementation remains ineffective, allowing disputes to persist without resolution. This reflects a gap between institutional pronouncements and actual enforcement capacity. Delays in government intervention (Item 2, Mean = 4.29) indicate that slow administrative response worsens tensions by allowing disagreements to escalate before meaningful mediation occurs, thereby reducing the preventive capacity of state institutions. The profound distrust in boundary management bodies (Item 3, Mean = 4.27) suggests a breakdown in the social contract between the state and oil-bearing communities. This mistrust undermines compliance with official rulings and weakens the legitimacy of state-led dispute resolution processes. The absence of a credible final arbiter (Item 4, Mean = 4.33) highlights a critical governance vacuum. In the Nigerian context, this refers specifically to statutory bodies such as the National Boundary Commission (NBC) and relevant State Boundary Commissions. The low level of confidence in these institutions prevents them from functioning as authoritative dispute resolvers, thereby sustaining unresolved territorial claims. Institutional inefficiency in land administration (Item

5, Mean = 4.30) further reinforces cyclical boundary disputes, indicating systemic weaknesses in coordination, enforcement, and administrative follow-through.

Hypotheses Testing

Regression Model Summary

The overall model fit was assessed to determine the extent to which the independent variables explain the variation in the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict. The results are summarized in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Regression Model Summary

S/N	Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
1	Regression Model	0.861	0.742	0.738	0.412

Field Survey, 2026.

Table 5 presents the regression model summary, illustrating the combined influence of the independent variables on conflict persistence in the Kpean–Sii boundary dispute. Specifically, serial number 1 in Table 5 shows a correlation coefficient value of $R = 0.861$, indicating a strong overall association between the predictor variables and the dependent variable. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.742$) indicates that historical land tenure systems, contested territoriality, oil resource control, and institutional enforcement gaps collectively explain 74.2% of the variation in the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict. The Adjusted R^2 value of 0.738 further confirms the robustness of the regression model, demonstrating that its explanatory capacity remains high even after adjusting for the number of predictors included in the analysis. Additionally, the Standard Error of the Estimate (0.412) is relatively low, suggesting a good model fit and strong explanatory reliability of the regression model. Overall, the result demonstrates that the selected independent variables possess substantial explanatory capacity in accounting for conflict persistence, while 25.8% of the variation may be attributable to other factors not captured in the present study.

Regression Coefficients and Hypotheses Testing

Table 6 presents the regression coefficients and hypothesis testing results for the four independent variables. The results indicate that all predictor variables significantly influence the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict, as all p-values are below the 0.05 significance threshold.

Table 6: Coefficients and Hypotheses Testing

S/N	Null Hypothesis	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
1 (H01)	Historical land tenure systems do not significantly influence conflict persistence.	0.241	3.124	0.002
2 (H02)	Contested territoriality does not significantly shape conflict persistence.	0.312	4.451	0.000
3 (H03)	Oil resource competition does not significantly influence conflict persistence.	0.485	7.822	0.000
4 (H04)	Institutional enforcement gaps do not significantly contribute to conflict persistence.	0.354	5.210	0.000

Significant at $p < 0.05$.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The test of H01 reveals that historical land tenure systems significantly influence conflict persistence ($\beta = 0.241$, $p = 0.002$). While the beta coefficient is lower relative to other variables, the result confirms that inherited ownership structures and traditional boundary arrangements remain foundational contributors to the dispute. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected. Regarding H02, the results show that contested territoriality significantly shapes the persistence of the conflict ($\beta = 0.312$, $p = 0.000$). This suggests that symbolic attachment to ancestral land and unresolved boundary ambiguity continue to provide the spatial rationale for tension. Thus,

the null hypothesis is rejected. The result for H03 recorded the highest beta coefficient $\beta = 0.485$ and t-value (7.822), identifying oil resource competition as the most potent predictor of conflict persistence. This implies that struggles over compensation, Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs), and oil-related benefits under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) substantially escalate inter-communal rivalry. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected. Furthermore, H04 indicates that institutional enforcement gaps significantly contribute to the conflict's longevity ($\beta = 0.354$, $p = 0.000$). This finding suggests that weak enforcement mechanisms and a lack of trust in statutory bodies such as the State and National Boundary Commissions create a governance vacuum that allows disputes to thrive. On this basis, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Discussion of Findings

The study found that historical land tenure systems significantly influence the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict, indicating that inherited customary ownership structures and colonial boundary ambiguities continue to shape contemporary disputes, especially as land gains increased economic value due to oil exploration. This finding agrees with Uwakwe (2023), who observed that colonial administrative boundaries remain a major source of communal disputes in Rivers State, and with Okoli and Orinya (2021), who identified historical legitimacy as a core driver of territorial conflict in the Niger Delta. The finding is explained by the Resource Curse Theory, which argues that resource abundance increases competition over historically defined spaces, thereby transforming customary land tenure systems into economically contested assets.

The study revealed that contested territoriality significantly influences the persistence of the Kpean–Sii conflict, showing that unresolved boundary ambiguity and strong symbolic attachment to ancestral land sustain inter-communal tension. This finding agrees with Babatunde (2024), who reported that oil infrastructure intensifies territorial competition, and with Ikelegbe (2021), who found that host community recognition mechanisms such as HCDTs generate new territorial contestations. It also aligns with Kenigua (2024), who emphasized that perceived inequality strengthens communal mobilization. The finding is explained by Resource Curse Theory and territorial identity logic, which show that land functions simultaneously as an economic resource and a symbol of identity, making compromise difficult under conditions of resource competition.

The study established that oil resource control is the strongest predictor of conflict persistence in the Kpean–Sii dispute, demonstrating that competition over compensation, employment, and Host Community Development Trust (HCDT) benefits under the Petroleum Industry Act intensifies inter-community rivalry. This finding agrees with Babatunde (2024), Ikelegbe (2021), and Okoli (2021), all of whom reported that oil-related benefits increase communal disputes and perceptions of exclusion in the Niger Delta. The finding is strongly explained by both the Resource Curse Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory, which show that oil wealth increases the value of territorial control while perceived inequality in benefit distribution generates grievance-driven conflict behavior.

The study found that institutional enforcement gaps significantly contribute to the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict, reflecting weak boundary adjudication mechanisms, low institutional trust, and ineffective enforcement by relevant authorities. This finding agrees with Ikelegbe (2021) and Wiss (2024), who both established that weak institutional capacity and low trust in boundary institutions prolong communal conflicts in resource-rich areas. The finding is explained by the institutional dimension of the Resource Curse Theory, which argues that resource-rich environments weaken governance effectiveness, and is further supported by Relative Deprivation Theory, which shows that institutional failure intensifies perceptions of exclusion and injustice, thereby sustaining conflict cycles.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict extends far beyond a traditional land dispute, representing a broader struggle over economic inclusion, territorial legitimacy, and political relevance within Nigeria’s oil-producing context. While historical land tenure systems and symbolic attachments to ancestral land provide the foundational basis of the conflict, the emergence of oil infrastructure has transformed the area into an economically strategic space where ownership determines access to compensation, employment, and benefits under the Petroleum Industry Act (PIA, 2021) and Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs). This dynamic has intensified competition and made territorial compromise highly sensitive, as land is now directly tied to communal economic survival. Furthermore, evidence indicates that weak institutional enforcement and ineffective boundary adjudication by relevant authorities—specifically the Rivers State Boundary Committee and the National Boundary Commission—have sustained the conflict by creating a governance vacuum that encourages self-help responses and recurring disputes. In line with the institutional dimension of the Resource Curse Theory, these dynamics suggest that resource abundance weakens governance effectiveness and deepens localized competition over economic rents. Ultimately, the study concludes that achieving sustainable peace in Kpean and Sii requires a dual approach: credible and definitive boundary demarcation, paired with inclusive resource governance frameworks that actively mitigate perceptions of exclusion and distributive injustice.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are proposed to address the persistence of the Kpean–Sii boundary conflict:

- i. The Rivers State Ministry of Lands and Survey, in collaboration with traditional authorities in Kpean and Sii, should document and digitize customary land claims using GIS-supported mapping to clarify inherited boundaries and reduce disputes arising from ambiguous territorial interpretations.
- ii. The Rivers State Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee should facilitate reconciliation initiatives and promote joint community infrastructure such as shared markets, agricultural ventures, and youth development programs to reduce identity-based competition and strengthen inter-community cooperation.
- iii. The Nigerian Upstream Petroleum Regulatory Commission (NUPRC) should ensure transparent and inclusive implementation of Host Community Development Trusts (HCDTs) under the Petroleum Industry Act (2021), including collaborative benefit-sharing arrangements in disputed border areas to minimize perceptions of exclusion and resource-driven rivalry.
- iv. The National Boundary Commission and the Rivers State Boundary Commission should enhance their institutional capacity through timely, transparent, and GIS-based boundary demarcation processes while also deploying accessible local dispute-resolution mechanisms to rebuild public trust and reduce reliance on self-help conflict responses.

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