

Armed Banditry, Artisanal Mining, and the Changing Security Landscape of North-Central Nigeria

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Abstract

The study aims to examine the relationship between artisanal mining and insecurity in North-Central Nigeria, with particular attention to the roles of state and non-state actors in shaping conflict dynamics within mining communities. It aims to assess the influence of governance mechanisms on sustainable solid mineral development within Nigeria's economic diversification agenda. A mixed-methods design was adopted, combining survey data from 400 respondents, including community leaders, artisanal miners, security personnel, civil society actors, and local government officials, with qualitative interviews providing contextual depth. Grounded in Resource Curse and Political Ecology perspectives, the study finds that unregulated mining of gold, tin, and columbite significantly escalates armed banditry and territorial conflicts. Regression results show a strong positive relationship between informal mining and insecurity ($\beta = 0.67, p < .01$) and a moderate effect of state and non-state actors on violence escalation ($\beta = 0.52, p < .05$). The study concludes that insecurity reflects governance deficits and rent-seeking dynamics, underscoring the need for stronger regulation and inclusive local governance mechanisms for sustainable conflict mitigation.

Keywords:

Solid Minerals; Insecurity; Political Economy; Resource Governance;
North-Central Nigeria; Violence.

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Introduction

The relationship between natural resource endowment and insecurity has remained a major concern in both development and conflict studies. While natural resources are often expected to stimulate economic growth and improve livelihoods, evidence from many resource-rich regions suggests that they can also generate competition, social tensions, and violent conflicts. Scholars have observed that valuable natural resources frequently become objects of contestation among state actors, local communities, private interests, and criminal networks seeking to control access to resource rents (Auty 2001; Le Billon 2012). In many developing societies, resource wealth has therefore become associated not only with economic opportunities but also with instability, governance challenges, and recurring violence.

This pattern is particularly evident in North-Central Nigeria, a region endowed with substantial deposits of tin, columbite, gold, limestone, and other solid minerals. Despite the economic potential of these resources, many mining communities continue to experience varying forms of insecurity, including communal clashes, armed attacks, illegal mining activities, and violent competition over resource control. The persistence of these challenges reflects broader concerns raised by the Resource Curse literature, which argues that resource abundance does not automatically translate into development, especially in contexts characterized by weak institutions and ineffective governance structures (Auty 2001; Ross 2015).

The drivers of insecurity in North-Central Nigeria are complex and interconnected. Competition over land and access to valuable resources has intensified tensions among different groups, while weak regulatory institutions and limited state capacity have created opportunities for criminal actors to exploit resource-rich environments (Okoli and Lenshie 2018; International Crisis Group 2020). The proliferation of small arms, the expansion of informal mining activities, and the increasing involvement of armed groups have further complicated the security landscape. As a result, violence in many communities is no longer driven solely by traditional disputes but is increasingly linked to broader economic and political interests surrounding resource extraction.

Solid minerals occupy a strategic position within the political economy of North-Central Nigeria. The growing demand for mineral resources has attracted a diverse range of actors seeking economic benefits from extraction activities. However, where regulatory oversight is weak and governance mechanisms are ineffective, competition for access and control can become a source of conflict rather than development (Le Billon 2012; Ross 2015). In many cases, mineral-rich areas have become sites of contestation involving local communities, private operators, armed groups, and state institutions, creating conditions that sustain cycles of insecurity. Understanding the relationship between solid mineral resources, insecurity, and escalating violence in North-Central Nigeria is therefore essential. Such understanding provides valuable insights into the way in which resource governance,

state capacity, and the activities of non-state actors shape patterns of conflict within mining communities. It also contributes to ongoing debates on how resource wealth can be effectively managed to promote stability, sustainable development, and human security in resource-rich regions.

Problem Statement

North-Central Nigeria possesses significant deposits of solid minerals, including tin, columbite, gold, and limestone, which have the potential to contribute substantially to local economic development, employment generation, and national revenue. However, despite this resource endowment, many communities in the region continue to experience persistent insecurity and violent conflicts linked to resource access and control. Evidence from resource-conflict literature suggests that rather than guaranteeing development, natural resource abundance in weak institutional environments often intensifies competition and social tensions, thereby increasing the risk of violence ([Ross 2015](#); [Le Billon 2012](#)).

Over time, mining communities across parts of North-Central Nigeria have experienced recurring incidents of communal violence, armed attacks, illegal mining activities, and displacement of populations. These patterns are consistent with broader findings that link resource extraction zones to heightened insecurity, particularly where governance structures are weak and informal economic actors dominate extraction processes ([Okoli and Lenshie 2018](#); [International Crisis Group 2020](#)). In such environments, mineral-rich areas become sites of overlapping economic and criminal interests, reinforcing cycles of instability.

The situation is further exacerbated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, coupled with weak regulatory enforcement and illegal mining practices. Research shows that the availability of illicit arms and weak state capacity significantly increase the likelihood of violent conflict in resource-rich regions ([UNODC 2021](#); [Williams 2018](#)). Consequently, both local and external actors exploit governance gaps to gain economic and political advantage within mining communities.

Non-state actors, including armed groups and criminal networks, play a significant role in these dynamics by engaging in illegal extraction, taxation, and territorial control. At the same time, state responses are often constrained by institutional weaknesses, inconsistent enforcement, and governance challenges that limit effective regulation of resource extraction activities ([Aning and Abdallah 2013](#); [Okoli and Okpaleke 2014](#)).

Despite growing scholarly attention to resource-related conflicts in Nigeria, there remains limited empirical evidence that specifically quantifies the relationship between solid mineral exploitation and insecurity in North-Central Nigeria, as well as the combined roles of state and non-state actors in shaping these outcomes. This gap necessitates a focused empirical investigation to explain how resource governance structures influence patterns of violence in mining communities.

Research Objective

The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between solid mineral resource exploitation and insecurity in North-Central Nigeria, with particular emphasis on the roles of state and non-state actors in shaping patterns of violence and conflict within mining communities.

Literature Review

The Concept of Armed Banditry

Armed banditry refers to the organized use or threat of violence by non-state armed groups to achieve economic, territorial, or political objectives through criminal activities such as robbery, kidnapping, extortion, cattle rustling, illegal taxation, and territorial domination. Unlike conventional criminality, armed banditry is characterized by its sustained nature, strategic organization, and systematic deployment of violence, often within contexts of weak state presence, fragile institutions, and contested authority. It thus occupies a conceptual space between organized crime and low-intensity armed conflict, blurring the boundaries between criminal enterprise and insurgent activity.

In security and conflict studies, armed banditry is increasingly understood as a manifestation of complex political economy dynamics rather than merely a breakdown of law and order. Empirical scholarship demonstrates that armed banditry thrives in environments where state capacity is limited, governance is predatory, and economic opportunities are structurally constrained ([Okoli and Lenshie 2018](#)). In such contexts, violence becomes both a survival strategy and an economic instrument, enabling armed groups to extract rents, control trade routes, and dominate resource-rich territories. Consequently, armed banditry often evolves into a self-sustaining criminal economy, sustained by illicit markets, arms trafficking networks, and local patronage systems.

The emergence and consolidation of armed banditry are closely linked to structural factors such as poverty, youth unemployment, environmental stress, resource competition, and historical grievances. In many fragile regions, particularly across the Sahel and parts of West Africa, shrinking livelihoods due to climate change, agricultural decline, and land scarcity have intensified competition over resources, pushing marginalized populations toward violent survival strategies ([International Crisis Group 2020](#); [UNODC 2021](#)). These dynamics are further exacerbated by the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, porous borders, and weak regional security coordination, which collectively lower the threshold for organized violence.

In the Nigerian context, armed banditry has transformed from sporadic cattle rustling and highway robbery into a highly coordinated system of mass kidnapping, village raids, and territorial occupation, particularly across the North-West and increasingly the North-Central regions. Scholars argue that this transformation reflects deeper

failures of governance, including ineffective policing, elite complicity, corruption, and the erosion of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms ([Okoli and Okpaleke 2014](#)). Armed groups now exercise quasi-sovereign authority in many rural spaces, imposing illegal taxation, regulating local economies, and determining patterns of movement and settlement. This development signals a profound reconfiguration of state-society relations, where non-state actors increasingly substitute or contest formal authority.

More critically, armed banditry increasingly intersects with artisanal mining, illegal resource extraction, and transnational criminal networks, thereby deepening its complexity and lethality. Resource-rich zones provide both financing and strategic cover for armed groups, while illicit mining sites become arenas of violent contestation, labour exploitation, and elite capture. This convergence of criminal violence and resource predation not only intensifies local insecurity but also embeds armed banditry within broader networks of organized crime, making conventional military or policing responses insufficient. As [Le Billon \(2012\)](#) argues, such conflict-resource entanglements transform violence into a profitable enterprise, reinforcing cycles of insecurity and underdevelopment.

Overall, armed banditry represents a multidimensional security threat that transcends conventional crime control paradigms. It reflects the intersection of economic deprivation, governance breakdown, and political exclusion, sustained through violent rent-seeking and territorial control. Effective responses, therefore, require an integrated strategy combining security enforcement, institutional reform, community engagement, and sustainable livelihood interventions. Without addressing these structural foundations, armed banditry is likely to persist, mutate, and further destabilize fragile regions.

The Concept of the Changing Security Landscape

The concept of the changing security landscape refers to the dynamic transformation in the nature, actors, drivers, and spatial patterns of security threats within a given political and social context. Traditionally, security was conceptualized primarily in statist and militaristic terms, with emphasis on territorial defence, interstate warfare, and the protection of national sovereignty. However, contemporary security discourse has shifted significantly toward a broader and more complex understanding that incorporates non-traditional threats such as terrorism, armed banditry, organized crime, resource conflicts, environmental insecurity, cyber threats, and transnational criminal networks ([Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998](#); [Kaldor 2012](#)). This shift reflects fundamental changes in the global political economy, patterns of conflict, and the evolving character of violence.

At the core of the changing security landscape is the transformation of conflict from conventional state-based warfare to fragmented, localized, and network-driven forms of violence. Modern security threats increasingly emerge from non-

state armed actors who operate across porous borders, exploit weak governance structures, and embed themselves within local economies and social systems. These actors frequently combine criminal, political, and economic motives, producing hybrid forms of insecurity that defy traditional military responses (Duffield 2001; Williams 2018). Consequently, contemporary security challenges are no longer confined to battlefields but permeate everyday social spaces, including farms, markets, highways, mining sites, and rural communities.

This evolving security environment is also shaped by the political economy of violence, in which economic predation, resource exploitation, and rent-seeking behaviours sustain armed mobilization. In resource-rich but institutionally weak contexts, competition over valuable commodities such as minerals, land, and livestock intensifies insecurity, as armed groups seek to control production sites, trade routes, and taxation systems (Le Billon 2012; Ross 2015). These dynamics produce localized war economies that normalize violence, erode state authority, and entrench cycles of instability. As a result, security threats become deeply embedded in everyday economic activities, making them structurally resilient and difficult to dismantle.

Environmental stress, demographic pressure, and livelihood insecurity further contribute to the changing security landscape, particularly in fragile regions. Climate variability, land degradation, and shrinking economic opportunities exacerbate competition over natural resources, intensifying communal tensions and facilitating recruitment into violent networks (Homer-Dixon 2010; Ide et al. 2021). In such settings, insecurity becomes both a cause and consequence of underdevelopment, reinforcing vulnerability and weakening institutional responses. This interlocking relationship between environmental change, economic precarity, and violent conflict underscores the multidimensional nature of contemporary security challenges.

In Nigeria, the changing security landscape is reflected in the proliferation of armed banditry, mass kidnapping, violent extremism, communal conflicts, farmer-herder clashes, and criminal insurgencies across multiple regions. These threats signify a fundamental departure from conventional security paradigms, revealing deep-seated governance failures, institutional fragility, and declining state monopoly over the legitimate use of force (International Crisis Group 2020). The expansion of violent non-state actors into rural and peri-urban spaces has transformed patterns of everyday life, economic activity, and population mobility, thereby redefining both the geography and sociology of insecurity.

More critically, Nigeria's evolving security landscape illustrates the growing convergence between criminal violence and resource governance failures. The entrenchment of armed groups within artisanal mining zones, forest corridors, and agrarian communities has blurred distinctions between economic survival strategies and organized violence. This convergence has reconfigured local power

relations, weakened traditional authority structures, and fostered alternative systems of governance based on coercion and illicit taxation. In this sense, the changing security landscape is not merely a security problem but a profound governance crisis that challenges the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state.

Overall, the concept of the changing security landscape captures the transformation of insecurity from episodic and centralized threats into persistent, decentralized, and socially embedded forms of violence. It reflects a shift toward complex security environments in which criminality, political grievance, economic predation, and institutional fragility intersect. Addressing such evolving threats, therefore, requires integrated policy responses that combine security sector reform, inclusive governance, economic restructuring, and community-based resilience mechanisms. Without such holistic interventions, contemporary insecurity is likely to deepen, fragment further, and generate enduring instability.

Governance, Corruption, and Multi-Scalar Resource Competition in Extractive Economies

Recent scholarship on extractive governance increasingly emphasizes that institutional inefficiency in resource-rich settings cannot be fully understood without accounting for the interaction between corruption, elite competition, and transnational economic networks. Corruption, in this context, operates as a critical mechanism through which administrative inefficiency is produced and sustained. As Mauro (1995) demonstrates, corruption reduces bureaucratic effectiveness by distorting allocation processes, weakening regulatory enforcement, and undermining public sector performance, particularly in resource-dependent economies. Similarly, Rose-Ackerman (1999) argues that corruption is not merely a moral or legal deviation but a structural governance problem that reshapes decision-making processes and weakens institutional accountability.

Beyond administrative inefficiency, extractive economies are often characterized by intense internal elite struggles over resource capture. In line with Bayart's (1993) "politics of the belly," access to mineral rents becomes a central driver of political competition, where state and non-state elites strategically position themselves to control extraction, licensing, and revenue flows. Reno (1995) further conceptualizes this dynamic through the notion of "shadow states," where formal governance structures are systematically penetrated by informal networks of power, patronage, and resource extraction. In such contexts, governance becomes fragmented as competing elites instrumentalize state institutions for private accumulation.

At the external level, resource extraction is increasingly embedded within transnational mineral economies. External actors, including commodity buyers, intermediaries, and cross-border trading networks, play a significant role in shaping extraction incentives and sustaining informal or illicit supply chains. These actors often reinforce local governance weaknesses by providing alternative market

structures that bypass formal regulatory systems. Taken together, these dynamics illustrate that governance failure in extractive sectors is not solely institutional but also relational, emerging from the interaction between corruption-driven inefficiencies, elite competition over resource capture, and external demand structures that sustain informal mineral economies.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on the relationship between natural resources and conflict have consistently demonstrated that the impact of resource endowment on security outcomes is context-dependent. While resource wealth can stimulate economic opportunities, it frequently generates adverse outcomes such as competition, exclusion, and violent conflict in environments characterized by weak governance and limited institutional capacity (Ross 2015; Le Billon 2012). This duality reinforces the argument of the Resource Curse literature, which posits that resource abundance may become a liability rather than an asset in fragile political settings (Sachs and Warner 2001).

1. Resource Wealth and Conflict

Empirical evidence from resource-rich developing regions indicates a strong association between natural resource endowment and the incidence of violent conflict. Ross (2015) argues that resource abundance increases the likelihood of conflict through mechanisms such as rent-seeking, inequality, and weak institutional oversight. Similarly, Le Billon (2012) demonstrates that resource extraction zones often become sites of contestation where multiple actors compete for access and control, thereby increasing the probability of violence.

In the Nigerian context, Okoli and Lenshie (2018) observe that rural areas with valuable natural and extractive resources frequently experience heightened insecurity due to overlapping claims over land and economic opportunities. This aligns with findings from the International Crisis Group (2020), which documents how resource-rich regions in Nigeria's northern corridor have become increasingly associated with armed violence, communal disputes, and illegal economic activities.

2. Role of State Actors

The literature consistently emphasizes that state capacity and governance quality significantly shape resource-conflict outcomes. Aning and Abdallah (2013) argue that weak regulatory systems and inconsistent enforcement mechanisms contribute to the escalation of violence in resource-rich environments. In such contexts, ineffective governance allows illegal extraction networks to thrive, thereby weakening formal institutions and intensifying insecurity.

Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) further highlight that governance failures in Nigeria's security architecture, including delayed interventions and weak policing capacity, have contributed to the persistence of banditry and violent crime in resource-contested regions. These dynamics demonstrate that state actors play a dual role, either mitigating or unintentionally exacerbating insecurity, depending on institutional effectiveness.

3. Role of Non-State Actors

Non-state actors are widely recognized as central participants in resource-related conflict systems. Williams (2018) explains that armed groups and criminal networks often exploit weak governance structures to gain access to economic resources, particularly in peripheral rural areas. These actors frequently engage in illegal extraction, extortion, and territorial control, thereby reinforcing cycles of violence. Similarly, UNODC (2021) documents the growing link between illicit economies and organized armed groups, noting that resource-rich environments provide both financial incentives and operational spaces for non-state armed actors. This aligns with broader conflict theory, which suggests that economic opportunity structures significantly shape patterns of violence in fragile states.

4. Impact on Communities and Human Security

Empirical research consistently shows that resource-related conflicts have severe consequences for human security. Homer-Dixon (2010) argues that environmental and resource scarcity can produce chronic insecurity by undermining livelihoods and increasing vulnerability to violence. In addition, the United Nations Development Programme (1994) emphasizes that insecurity in resource-dependent communities extends beyond physical violence to include displacement, poverty, and loss of access to essential services. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that resource-driven conflict has multidimensional impacts on communities, affecting both material conditions and broader social stability.

5. Gaps in Empirical Literature

Despite extensive research on resource-related conflicts, several gaps persist: Most studies treat resource-conflict dynamics in broad regional terms, often neglecting localized analysis of solid mineral resources in North-Central Nigeria. Few studies simultaneously examine the interplay between state and non-state actors, governance effectiveness, and community security outcomes. Empirical research quantifying the direct link between mineral exploitation and patterns of violence, particularly in a mixed-methods framework combining qualitative and quantitative evidence, remains limited. These gaps justify the current study, which seeks to quantify the impact of solid mineral resources on insecurity, while also exploring the roles of state and non-state actors in shaping the dynamics of violence in North-Central Nigeria.

Theoretical Review

The nexus between resource wealth and conflict has been extensively examined in political economy and conflict studies, providing a robust foundation to understand the dynamics in North-Central Nigeria. Several theories are particularly relevant:

1. Resource Curse Theory

The Resource Curse Theory posits that countries or regions endowed with abundant

natural resources often experience slower economic growth, weak institutions, and higher levels of conflict (Auty 1993; Sachs and Warner 2001). In the context of North-Central Nigeria, the presence of solid minerals such as tin, columbite, and limestone does not automatically translate into local development. Instead, these resources have frequently become flashpoints for communal and politically motivated violence. This theory helps explain why resource-rich communities experience recurring insecurity despite their economic potential, highlighting the role of institutional weakness and competition for resource control.

2. Greed vs. Grievance Theory

The Greed vs. Grievance framework (Collier and Hoeffler 2004) distinguishes between economic and socio-political motivations for conflict. The “greed” perspective emphasizes that actors, including criminal networks and armed groups, may exploit resources to generate personal or organizational wealth, while the “grievance” perspective focuses on inequality, marginalization, and disputes over land or resource rights. In North-Central Nigeria, both dynamics coexist: non-state actors capitalize on mineral wealth for financial gain, while local communities engage in violent contestation due to perceived exclusion from mining benefits.

3. Political Ecology Theory

Political Ecology provides a lens to understand the interaction between natural resources, power relations, and environmental change (Robbins 2012). It emphasizes that resource conflicts are not merely economic but are deeply embedded in social, political, and ecological systems. Applying this to North-Central Nigeria, disputes over mineral-rich land are shaped by historical land tenure systems, ethnic divisions, and governance failures, illustrating that environmental and resource issues are inseparable from broader social and political inequalities.

4. Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory shifts the focus from state-centered security to the protection of individuals and communities from chronic threats, including economic deprivation, violence, and environmental hazards (UNDP 1994). In the context of solid mineral exploitation, human security is often compromised as communities face displacement, violent attacks, and disruption of livelihoods. This theory underlines the importance of policies that integrate resource management with social protection and conflict prevention.

Synthesis and Application to the Study

Combining these theoretical perspectives allows for a comprehensive understanding of the triad of resources, insecurity, and violence in North-Central Nigeria. The Resource Curse Theory explains the structural paradox of resource wealth and underdevelopment; the Greed vs. Grievance framework highlights actor motivations; Political Ecology situates conflicts within broader social and environmental contexts; and Human Security Theory underscores the impact on communities and the need

for inclusive governance strategies. Together, these frameworks provide a strong foundation for analyzing the causes, dynamics, and potential solutions to resource-related conflicts in the study area.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between solid mineral resources, insecurity, and escalating violence in North-Central Nigeria. The mixed-methods approach is particularly suitable for this study because it allows for the triangulation of data, facilitating both statistical analysis of conflict patterns and in-depth insights into the roles of state and non-state actors in resource-related conflicts. The study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, beginning with quantitative data collection and analysis to establish the scope and patterns of resource-related violence. This is followed by qualitative investigations to explain and contextualize the statistical findings, providing deeper insights into local dynamics, governance challenges, and actors' behavior. The research focuses on selected states in North-Central Nigeria, including Plateau, Nasarawa, and Benue, which are notable for their rich solid mineral deposits and recurrent incidents of communal and resource-driven violence. These states provide a representative cross-section of the challenges posed by resource wealth and insecurity in the region. The target population includes community members living in mineral-rich areas, local government officials, security personnel, mining operators, and representatives of civil society organizations. A stratified random sampling technique will be used for the quantitative survey to ensure representation across different demographic groups, while purposive sampling will guide qualitative interviews with key informants who have detailed knowledge of resource conflicts.

The dependent variable, Insecurity, was measured using respondents' perceptions of the prevalence of violent conflict, armed banditry, territorial disputes, illegal armed activities, and threats to community safety associated with mining activities. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5).

Resource Exploitation was operationalised through indicators measuring the intensity of artisanal mining activities, competition over mineral resources, illegal extraction practices, and perceived pressure on local resource governance structures. State Actors were measured through respondents' assessments of government presence, security operations, regulatory enforcement, monitoring of mining activities, and conflict management interventions within mining communities. Non-State Actors were measured using indicators relating to the activities of armed groups, informal mining networks, vigilante organisations, private security actors, and other non-governmental actors involved in resource control and conflict dynamics. Composite indices were generated by aggregating responses to relevant questionnaire items for each construct. These indices were subsequently used in the multiple regression analysis.

Result and Data Analysis

This section presents the findings obtained from the survey administered to respondents across selected mining communities in North-Central Nigeria. A total of 400 questionnaires were successfully completed and analyzed. The respondents comprised community members (200), local government officials and other state actors (100), security personnel (50), and mining operators and other non-state actors (50). The analysis begins with the descriptive statistics showing respondents' perceptions of artisanal mining, resource exploitation, insecurity, and the roles of state and non-state actors, followed by the results of the multiple regression analysis used to examine the relationship between the study variables.

The frequency of the questionnaire administered is listed above

Respondent Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Community Members	200	50.0
Local Government Officials/State Actors	100	25.0
Security Personnel	50	12.5
Mining Operators/Non-State Actors	50	12.5
Total	400	100.0

Source: Researchers Survey, 2025

Frequency Distribution of Responses (400 respondents)

Question	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1. Resources increase violent clashes	20	30	40	150	160
Q2. Disputes over mining land cause insecurity	15	25	30	160	170
Q3. Illegal/unregulated mining escalates tension	10	20	40	170	160
Q4. Resource exploitation marginalizes communities	25	30	50	140	155
Q5. Conflicts have led to displacement/ loss of livelihoods	20	25	35	160	160
Q6. Government regulates mining effectively	50	80	100	120	50
Q7. Security agencies intervene promptly	45	75	90	120	70
Q8. Local leaders mediate disputes effectively	30	50	90	150	80
Q9. Non-state actors escalate conflicts	15	20	25	150	190
Q10. Collaboration could reduce violence	10	15	25	160	190

Source: Researchers survey, 2025

Notes/Interpretation:

- Questions Q1–Q5 reflect community perceptions of violence and resource impact, so higher agreement is expected among community members.
- Questions Q6–Q8 reflect perceived effectiveness of state and local actors, so there is more variation and neutrality.
- Questions Q9–Q10 reflect perceptions of non-state actors’ role, showing strong agreement that they escalate conflict, and optimism about collaboration reducing violence.

Regression Results

Model:

$$Insecurity = \beta_0 + \beta_1_{Resource\ Exploitation} + \beta_2_{state\ actors} + \beta_3_{non-state\ actors} + \varepsilon$$

Predictor	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value
Constant	-0.534	0.610	-0.875	0.382
Resource_Exploitation	0.325	0.016	19.886	0.000
State_Actors	-0.163	0.024	-6.745	0.000
Non_State_Actors	0.473	0.052	9.090	0.000

Model Summary:

- **R² = 0.677**, indicating that approximately 68% of the variation in insecurity is explained by resource exploitation and the roles of state and non-state actors.
- **F-statistic = 276.5, p < 0.001**, showing that the model is statistically significant.

Interpretation of Results

The regression analysis reveals a statistically significant positive relationship between resource exploitation and insecurity ($\beta = 0.325, p < .001$). This finding suggests that increasing levels of artisanal mining and resource extraction are associated with higher levels of insecurity within mining communities. The result supports the argument that competition over valuable mineral resources creates conditions that encourage violent conflict and criminal activities.

The analysis further indicates that non-state actors significantly contribute to insecurity ($\beta = 0.473, p < .001$). The relatively larger coefficient suggests that the activities of armed groups, informal mining networks, and other non-state actors constitute a major driver of insecurity in mineral-rich areas.

Conversely, the role of state actors is negative and statistically significant ($\beta = -0.163, p < .001$), indicating that effective government intervention, security presence, and regulatory oversight help reduce insecurity. This finding highlights the importance of state capacity in managing resource-related conflicts.

The model explains approximately 67.7% of the variation in insecurity ($R^2 = 0.677$), while the F-statistic (276.5, $p < .001$) confirms the overall statistical significance of the model. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that resource exploitation, state actors, and non-state actors are important predictors of insecurity in mining communities across North-Central Nigeria.

Discussion of the Findings

Theme 1: Impact of Solid Mineral Resources on the Escalation of Violence and Insecurity

The study examined how the proliferation and exploitation of solid mineral resources shape the dynamics of violence and insecurity in North-Central Nigeria. The regression results reveal that resource exploitation exerts a strong and statistically significant positive influence on insecurity ($\beta = 0.325$, $p < 0.001$). This finding quantitatively confirms that the intensity of mineral extraction is directly associated with the escalation of violent conflicts across the region. From the survey, approximately 78 percent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that areas rich in mineral resources, such as tin, limestone, and lead, have experienced heightened insecurity. Community and non-state respondents, in particular, reported higher perceptions of conflict compared to state officials. This reflects widespread awareness of the linkage between resource endowment and contestation.

The empirical finding resonates with the Resource Curse Theory, which argues that natural resource abundance, in the absence of strong governance, often becomes a catalyst for conflict and underdevelopment (Auty 2001; Collier and Hoeffler 2004). In North-Central Nigeria, solid minerals have become sites of violent competition among local elites, artisanal miners, and armed groups, reflecting what is termed the “petro-violence paradox,” which is an adaptation of the same logic in mineral economies.

Qualitative data further illuminate these quantitative patterns. A community elder from Plateau State remarked that:

“Wherever there is tin or limestone, you always hear gunshots or fights over who has rights to the land.”

Similarly, a mining operator in Nasarawa State stated:

“Illegal miners move in, and soon tensions flare between them and the local youth; the government does not intervene quickly.”

These narratives highlight a central dynamic, which is this: the absence of effective governance mechanisms allows resource access disputes to evolve into full-scale communal violence. The weak institutional regulation of artisanal mining licenses and overlapping land ownership rights further complicate this problem, turning local economies of extraction into economies of violence. Empirical evidence from event records supports this interpretation. The 2018 Jos North clashes over limestone mining sites resulted in dozens of deaths and the displacement of more than 3,000 residents. Similarly, in Benue and Nasarawa, violent outbreaks near mineral belts such as Awe and Logo have mirrored this pattern. These incidents confirm the quantitative findings that resource exploitation is a structural driver of insecurity rather than merely an economic opportunity.

Overall, this theme establishes that solid mineral wealth in North-Central Nigeria operates as a “double-edged sword,” a source of local revenue and livelihood, but also a potent driver of violent contestation. The convergence of statistical, qualitative, and event-based evidence points to a systemic link between mineral exploitation and insecurity, driven by weak governance, economic desperation, and the strategic manipulation of resource access by political elites.

Theme 2: Role of State and Non-State Actors in Managing or Exacerbating Resource Conflicts

The second objective investigated the relative roles of state and non-state actors in either mitigating or amplifying resource-induced insecurity. The regression analysis revealed that state actors exhibit a negative relationship with insecurity ($\beta = -0.163$, $p < 0.001$), while non-state actors display a positive and significant relationship ($\beta = 0.473$, $p < 0.001$). Together, these results suggest that the state’s presence and efficiency reduce the likelihood of violence, whereas the activities of non-state actors intensify conflict. Survey data further demonstrate these dynamics. Approximately 42 percent of respondents agreed that state actors, when effective, contribute positively to conflict management, but 40 percent remained neutral or disagreed, indicating inconsistent experiences of government intervention. Conversely, over 85 percent perceived that non-state actors, including local militias, illegal miners, and private security outfits, exacerbate insecurity.

These findings align with the Greed and Grievance Model ([Collier and Hoeffler 2004](#)), which posits that resource-driven conflicts emerge when the potential gains from exploitation surpass the risks of confrontation, particularly in environments with weak institutions. Non-state actors often act as rent-seekers, exploiting mineral revenues for territorial control. Meanwhile, state agencies frequently lack the logistical capacity or political will to regulate such activities effectively.

Qualitative accounts reinforce these patterns. A security officer in Benue disclosed:

“Sometimes we arrive late; by the time we intervene, the conflict has already escalated. Local leaders are not always cooperative.”

A community respondent from Plateau added:

“Politicians sometimes favor one group over another, making the fights worse. People no longer trust that the government is neutral.”

Similarly, a civil society leader observed:

“Non-state actors, including armed groups and illegal miners, often intimidate locals; without their cooperation, peace initiatives fail.”

These testimonies reveal that the crisis of governance, manifested through delayed intervention, selective enforcement, and political bias, creates a vacuum that non-state actors exploit. Thus, while the state theoretically holds the mandate for conflict management, its fragmented capacity allows non-state actors to shape the

security landscape. Event data provide further validation. In Plateau State's 2021 tin-mining conflicts, for example, state intervention temporarily reduced clashes through the deployment of security forces, but the absence of long-term institutional monitoring enabled the violence to resurface months later. This pattern typifies a cyclical governance failure; state responses are reactive rather than preventive. The triangulated evidence underscores that the coexistence of weak state regulation and empowered non-state actors sustains a political economy of insecurity. The non-state networks profit from the disorder, while the state struggles to reassert authority. The regression results thus encapsulate a broader structural challenge: the imbalance of power between formal and informal actors in the mineral sector.

Theme 3: Corruption, Elite Struggles, and External Resource Pressures

Beyond institutional coordination challenges identified in this study, the findings also point to deeper structural dynamics involving corruption, elite competition, and external resource pressures that collectively shape governance outcomes in Nigeria's solid minerals sector. The prevalence of illegal mining activities and weak regulatory enforcement can be interpreted not only as administrative inefficiencies but also as manifestations of corruption-driven distortions within governance structures. In line with Mauro (1995) and Rose-Ackerman (1999), such corruption weakens bureaucratic effectiveness, undermines accountability mechanisms, and creates opportunities for selective enforcement of mining regulations, thereby reducing the capacity of the state to effectively govern the sector.

Furthermore, the pattern of federal-state tensions and contested control over mining revenues reflects broader struggles among political and local elites over resource capture. Consistent with Bayart's (1993) "politics of the belly" and Reno's (1995) concept of shadow states, access to mineral rents appears to be embedded within networks of patronage and elite bargaining, where formal governance institutions are frequently influenced or bypassed by informal power structures. This dynamic helps explain the persistence of fragmented authority and weak policy coordination observed in the sector.

In addition, the findings suggest that Nigeria's artisanal mining economy is increasingly integrated into broader transnational mineral networks, where external actors such as mineral buyers, intermediaries, and cross-border trading systems reinforce informal extraction practices. These external links sustain demand for illegally sourced minerals, thereby weakening domestic regulatory efforts and further complicating governance outcomes. Collectively, these dynamics indicate that governance challenges in the solid minerals sector extend beyond institutional design failures to include corruption-induced inefficiencies, elite-driven resource competition, and transnational economic pressures that shape extraction and distribution processes.

Synthesis of Themes

The two themes converge to depict a complex but coherent reality. Solid mineral resources are at the center of an intertwined system of insecurity, governance weakness, and non-state predation. Quantitative data confirm that resource exploitation and non-state actor activity are statistically significant drivers of violence, while qualitative and event analyses expose how governance gaps allow these forces to thrive.

The findings reveal that the triad of resources, insecurity, and actor dynamics forms a self-reinforcing cycle in North-Central Nigeria:

1. Resource exploitation generates competition and grievance.
2. Weak state oversight fails to mediate these disputes effectively.
3. Non-state actors capitalize on the vacuum to consolidate economic and territorial control.

This interplay transforms mineral wealth into a security liability, suggesting that peace and stability in North-Central Nigeria depend not only on resource control but also on governance reform and the demilitarization of local economies of extraction.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study examined the complex interaction between solid mineral resources, insecurity, and escalating violence in North-Central Nigeria, emphasizing the roles of state and non-state actors. Through a mixed-method approach, integrating survey data, regression analysis, and qualitative insights, the research demonstrated that solid mineral exploitation significantly contributes to the prevalence of insecurity, particularly in mineral-rich communities such as those in Plateau, Nasarawa, and Benue States.

The regression results confirmed that resource exploitation and non-state actors have a strong positive relationship with insecurity, while state actor engagement has a mitigating effect. These findings highlight the persistent structural dilemma where natural resource abundance, instead of fostering prosperity, fuels contestation and violence. Weak governance institutions, unregulated mining, and the proliferation of armed non-state groups collectively sustain a cycle of insecurity.

The qualitative findings reinforced this statistical pattern. Local testimonies described how resource control disputes, poor regulatory oversight, and political interference exacerbate communal divisions. Several respondents underscored the perception that government interventions are inconsistent, reactive, and, at times, biased toward certain interest groups. These perspectives echo the broader “resource curse” thesis, wherein natural resource wealth breeds political instability when not accompanied by effective governance and equitable distribution.

In sum, the study concludes that insecurity in North-Central Nigeria is not merely a by-product of poverty or ethnic rivalry, but a symptom of structural governance failure around resource management. The region’s solid mineral potential continues

to invite violent competition because state institutions lack the capacity, neutrality, and coordination needed to regulate extraction, mediate disputes, and enforce accountability. The findings underscore an urgent need for policy interventions that integrate economic governance, inclusive peacebuilding, and local participation.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen Institutional Frameworks for Mineral Governance

The federal and state governments should review and harmonize mining laws to clarify ownership, licensing, and revenue-sharing structures. This will reduce jurisdictional overlaps between federal agencies and state authorities, which currently fuel conflict. Establishing joint mineral management committees involving community leaders, local governments, and security agencies would promote shared responsibility and transparency.

2. Enhance Security Presence and Intelligence Coordination

Security operations in mineral zones should shift from reactive responses to preventive intelligence gathering. A coordinated security command structure involving the police, military, and civil defense corps is essential to monitoring illegal mining and disarming violent groups. Incorporating local vigilantes into formal community policing structures could improve trust and early-warning capabilities.

3. Promote Community Participation and Resource Benefit Sharing

Communities located within mineral-rich areas should not be treated as passive observers. The government should institutionalize Community Development Agreements (CDAs) that ensure a defined percentage of mining revenues is reinvested locally in infrastructure, education, and health. Such arrangements would address grievances and reduce the appeal of violent mobilization.

4. Regulate and Formalize Artisanal Mining

The Ministry of Mines and Steel Development, in partnership with state governments, should formalize artisanal and small-scale mining through licensing, capacity training, and monitoring. This will reduce illegal operations and promote responsible mining practices while increasing state revenue.

5. Address the Influence of Non-State Actors and Political Interference

A comprehensive deradicalization and disarmament program targeting armed groups engaged in resource-related violence should be implemented. At the same time, political actors who sponsor or shield illegal miners must be held accountable through independent judicial and anti-corruption mechanisms.

6. Integrate Peacebuilding into Resource Management Policy

Resource governance should be situated within a broader peacebuilding framework. The government, in collaboration with civil society and traditional councils, should promote dialogue platforms to mediate inter-communal disputes and build local trust. This can prevent resource competition from escalating into violence.

7. Invest in Alternative Livelihoods and Human Capital Development

To reduce dependency on unregulated mining, state governments should invest in vocational training, agribusiness, and entrepreneurship initiatives for youth in mineral-producing areas. Diversifying local economies would not only mitigate unemployment-induced violence but also strengthen economic resilience.

The study ultimately illustrates that the triad of solid mineral resources, insecurity, and escalating violence is a political economy problem rather than a purely security one. Addressing it requires a governance-centered approach that balances economic development with social inclusion and security reform. Peace in North-Central Nigeria will remain elusive until the extractive sector is embedded within a transparent, participatory, and accountable framework that prioritizes citizens over elite or corporate interests.

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