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Natural Resources and National Security: A Critical Discourse Analysis on Nigeria's Extractive Frontiers

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Abstract
This study employs a critical discourse analysis to examine how the 2025 Report of the National Early Warning Centre of Nigeria frames the nexus between natural resource governance and national security. Three discourses are identified: (1) a securitized discourse, which depicts mining sites as "zones of terror"; (2) a criminal economy discourse, describing mining sites as hubs of organized crime; and (3) a displacement discourse, linking illicit mining to unemployment and ecological collapse. The securitized discourse was found to dominate, reflecting a policy orientation toward militarized control. However, across all three discourses, little attention is given to community-led solutions, reinforcing state-centric security responses and neglecting the deeper structural drivers of insecurity in Nigeria's extractive frontiers.

Keywords: Mining, natural resources, solid minerals, resource governance, and insecurity

Introduction

The popular 'resource curse' (also known as the paradox of plenty) thesis posits that natural wealth often hinders rather than helps development in many countries rich in natural resources (Collier & Hoeffler, 2005; Badeeb *et al*., 2017). While this thesis provides some explanatory power, it risks flattening the complex interplay of historical legacies, elite agency and global economic structures all of which influence development outcomes. This paper extends the critiques of the deterministic interpretation of the resource curse by arguing that natural resources do not inherently produce conflict or underdevelopment.

Rather, it is the political economy surrounding resource governance that determines whether resources become a curse or a catalyst for development.

In many African states such as Nigeria, political elites often leverage identity cleavages; ethnicity and religion to obscure the underlying contestation over access to and control of economic and natural resources (Alumona & Azom, 2018; Etefa, 2019). This identity politics is thus used to mobilize support and suppress dissent, which in the long run transforms political competition into existential struggles. As such, political office in this context is treated less as a platform for public service and more as a gateway to personal enrichment. This dynamic elevates the stakes of electoral contests, often resulting in violence, electoral violence, and erosion of democratic norms (Onah & Nwali, 2018). The result is a political economy characterized by outsized government overhead relative to service delivery, where public funds are heavily absorbed by extensive personal security for elites and generous allowances for political officeholders (Stober, 2018; African Liberty, 2019). Ogunsola (2023) contends that recurrent spending on governance, particularly within the national assembly is inversely correlated with economic growth. This further highlights the structural inefficiency of public spending in Nigeria where infrastructure remains underdeveloped, public services are weak, and economic diversification is stunted.

Rather than an inevitable curse, access to resource wealth becomes a selective blessing enjoyed by ruling coalitions and their networks, while the majority remains excluded from its benefits. In Nigeria, oil rents have frequently been diverted into elite consumption and patronage; this pattern reflects broader dynamics identified across many resource-rich African states, where natural resource governance mechanisms have created rentier elites at the expense of broader development (Ijere, 2015; Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2015). This exclusion often fuels deep-seated grievances, particularly among unemployed and underemployed youths, many of whom are lured into crime or political violence as coping strategies (African Security Sector Network, 2023). In this way, mismanaged resource rents generate both material deprivation and symbolic injustice, creating fertile grounds for violence, wherein control of extractive sites has become a locus of contestation. This contestation is increasingly driven by armed groups seeking to capture mining sites as alternative revenue streams (Collier, 2003; Dreher & Kreibaum, 2016; Ajide & Alimi, 2021). In response to these developments, official reports and policy documents often reflect evolving state perspectives on the intersection of natural resource governance and national security.

The *Blood and Treasure* report, published by Nigeria's National Early Warning Centre in 2025, offers an opportunity to examine how these perspectives are articulated in the context of Nigeria's extractive sector. This study explores how the report discursively frames the relationship between natural resource extraction and national security. The "*Blood and Treasure"* report, as it is titled, thus serves as a strategic entry point for analyzing how the

Nigerian state narrates and legitimizes its approach to natural resource governance.

The Resource Curse and Development in Africa

A growing body of literature emphasizes the role of political institutions and elite behavior in shaping the developmental trajectory of resource-rich states. In many African countries, colonial legacies remain very evident and continue to shape postcolonial governance, maintaining cycles of exclusion and dependence. (Mamdani, 1996; Rodney, 1982). Wallerstein (1974) and Arrighi (1994) situate African resource economies within the broader capitalist world-system, emphasizing the structural constraints imposed by global markets and the asymmetrical power relations that define North-South interactions. Within this frame, political elites undermine inclusive development by monopolizing resource rents for personal gain (Robinson *et al.*, 2012). The spatial distribution of natural resources further heightens the likelihood of violent conflict particularly when control over resource-rich territories becomes a strategic objective for both state and non-state actors (Le Billon, 2001). Ross (2003) contends that the weakening of taxation systems and the entrenchment of patronage politics are mechanisms through which resource wealth can erode democratic accountability. As a result, ethnic, religious and regional identities and their associated divides are employed by political elites to consolidate power and control over natural resources. Such identity politics often results in exclusionary governance and inter-group conflict (Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010).

Many young people are caught in these exclusions, and the loss of arable land for farming exacerbates the problem. Arable lands lost from unchecked extraction activities, oil spills, deforestation, and mining pollution directly undermine local livelihoods, intensify poverty and erode state legitimacy, all of which create fertile ground for terrorist recruitment (Ajide & Alimi, 2021; UN Security Council, 2022). Consequently, unemployed and underemployed youths in such communities become easy targets for recruitment into crime (Richards, 2005; Honwana, 2012; Uvin, 1998; Sommers, 2011; Abbink, 2005). For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), many disenfranchised youths are often being used by both state and non-state actors in ongoing conflicts to serve as foot soldiers in elite-driven struggles over natural resource control (Stearns, 2011; Autesserre, 2010). Elbadawi and Soto (2015) however, argue that while resource rents are positively linked to insecurity particularly in the form of armed civil conflicts, this link is not a predetermined outcome. Rather, it is significantly influenced by the quality of a country's economic and political institutions. Lower-quality institutions fail to mitigate the potential negative effects of resource rents, thus allowing them to become a major instigator of insecurity. In light of this, two competing perspectives debate whether resource wealth primarily incites violence through greed and opportunity or through grievances stemming from inequality and exclusion (Costello, 2017; Ghatak & Karakaya, 2021). Within this debate are some scholars who argue that resource wealth is a potential recipe for conflict, where proceeds are commonly used to finance terrorism, and on the other hand are those who emphasize institutional weaknesses as the critical factor (Tahir & Khan, 2024; Riaz *et al*., 2024).

In recent years, Zamfara State in northwestern Nigeria has emerged as a hotspot in the convergence of illicit mining, banditry, and terrorism, as many security officials assert that the surge in rural banditry in the area is due to violent criminal factions competing for control over these mineral resources. These criminal groups often operate with the aid of some local chieftains, political figures, and foreign actors to escalate local violence to create conditions favorable for continued exploitation of mineral resources (Kleffmann *et al.*, 2024; Ojewale, 2025). According to Nigeria's Presidential Artisanal Gold Mining Development Initiative (PAGMI), between 2012 and 2018, about 97 tons of gold valued at over $3 billion were smuggled out of Nigeria, much of it believed to originate from Zamfara and other mineral-rich regions. This dynamic illustrates how illegal mineral resource extraction in Nigeria has metastasized from a source of raw material exploitation for core economies to also becoming a significant funding stream for non-state armed groups. In many West and Central Africa countries, terrorist financing is increasingly linked to direct involvement in illegal mining rather than exclusive dependence on external sponsors or diaspora funding (UN Security Council, 2022). These groups typically thrive where state capacity is weak and legal frameworks for resource management are inadequate or easily circumvented (African Union, 2024). Groups like Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province have evolved from occasional resource raiding to seeking control over mining sites (UN Security Council, 2022). Proceeds from such ventures are then laundered through informal financial systems, making detection and disruption difficult (UN Security Council, 2022).

It is also important to recognize that not all resource-rich states exhibit this pattern. While the phenomenon is widespread across many developing countries, it is not synonymous with all peripheral economies, as some countries have managed their resources more judiciously and avoided the negative outcomes associated with the resource curse. For example, Botswana despite operating a peripheral economy has been particularly successful in managing its diamond reserves, thereby translating resource wealth into sustained economic growth (Gandu, 2011). Similarly, several countries in the MENA region such as Oman, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have leveraged their oil reserves to achieve relatively stable economic growth (Drine, 2012). The success of these countries is largely attributed to the quality of their institutions and good governance. In contrast, Nigeria in spite of its geopolitical influence in Africa, continues to struggle with resource governance and insecurity. As Watts (2010) documents, oil wealth in the Niger Delta has fueled both state repression and militant resistance. Likewise, in Sudan, De Waal (2007) and Flint and De Waal (2008) claim that oil revenues were being channeled to fund militias and suppress dissent in Darfur. These dynamics are not confined to Africa, as similar patterns have been observed in many resource-rich states in Latin America and Southeast Asia, suggesting a broader global phenomenon.

Against this backdrop, the liberal peacebuilding model, championed by the United Nations since the 1990s, emphasizes institutional reconstruction and democratization as key strategies for conflict resolution. However, it has drawn criticism for often neglecting local contexts and indigenous mechanisms of peace (Natorski, 2011). Mac Ginty (2011) critiques the liberal peacebuilding model for imposing Western templates, which often fail to align with local realities. As a remedy, Tanabe (2019) advocates for a hybrid approach in which Western liberal actors and local stakeholders co-create contextually responsive and transformative peace initiatives. This perspective aligns with findings from the World Bank (2011), UNDP (2015), and Boege *et al*. (2009), which stress the importance of inclusive governance, local ownership, and socio-economic justice in post-conflict recovery. In the context of Nigeria, the DRC and many other African countries, these critiques are particularly salient, as peacebuilding efforts have often failed to address the underlying political economy of natural resource control.

Despite numerous studies linking natural resource wealth to conflict, there is limited research applying critical discourse analysis (CDA) specifically to how government reports in Nigeria construct and validate narratives around natural resource extraction and national security. This gap is particularly significant given that Nigeria is one of the largest oil producers in Africa, yet it suffers some of the highest rates of oil theft and pipeline vandalism globally. Through illegal bunkering, an estimated 470,000 barrels are lost daily, resulting in a monthly financial loss of approximately $700 million (Awodezi & Mohammed, 2023). This situation highlights the significant disconnect between the country's natural resource wealth and its state capacity.

Theoretical Framework: Resource Curse and World-Systems Theory

The 'resource curse' as coined by Auty (1993), has been a dominant framework for explaining the paradox in which countries rich in natural resources often experience poor developmental outcomes. Building on this perspective, scholars within the world-systems tradition emphasize that the global political economy plays a central role in perpetuating these outcomes. Within world-systems theory, Bunker and Ciccantell's (2005, 2007) concept of *raw materialism* sheds insight into how core economies systematically exploit peripheral regions for raw materials, often with devastating environmental, economic, and social consequences (Kara, 2023). Moore (2015) and Foster (2000) link capitalist expansion to ecological crises, arguing that the commodification of nature and labor is central to the functioning of the global capitalist system. As such, this study adopts world-systems theory, drawing specifically on Bunker and Ciccantell's (2005, 2007) concept of *raw materialism*, to analyze how mining zones in Nigeria are transformed into sources of insecurity. World-systems theory situates Nigeria as part of the global capitalist system, where core economies demand strategic minerals (gold, lithium, tourmaline, tin) and peripheral regions provide them under conditions of ecological strain.

World-systems theorists and political ecologists offer a structural critique of the resource curse by examining how global power asymmetries shape the extraction, circulation, and consumption of natural resources. Scholars such as Bunker and Ciccantell (2005, 2007), Moore (2015), Foster (2000), and Dauvergne (2001) argue that extractive peripheries are systematically produced and maintained to serve the accumulation needs of core economies. The raw materialism framework, in particular, emphasizes how labor exploitation and governance fragmentation in countries like Nigeria are not aberrations but essential features of a global system organized around the unequal exchange of nature. These perspectives push the resource curse debate beyond national explanations and toward a transnational political economy of extraction. Raw materialism thus offers a structural and historical approach to understanding how the extraction, processing, and consumption of raw materials shape the long-term evolution of the capitalist world-economy. At its core, raw materialism situates resource extraction within the broader dynamics of global capitalism. This paper draws on the conceptual lens of *raw materialism,* as developed by Bunker and Ciccantell (2005, 2007), to examine the political economy of natural resource governance in Nigeria as constructed in the *Blood and Treasure* Report.

Materials and Methods

This study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) to examine the *Blood and Treasure* report published in 2025 by Nigeria's National Early Warning Centre (NEWC) a division of the Office for Strategic Preparedness and Resilience (OSPRE). Established in 2022 under the Nigerian government's conflict prevention framework, OSPRE serves as the institutional hub for anticipatory governance and national security foresight. The NEWC is tasked with generating early warning signals on emerging threats and coordinating multi-agency responses across Nigeria's security and policy architecture. The *Blood and Treasure* report represents one of the first comprehensive state-led efforts to document the nexus between illegal mining and insecurity. The report is a state-authored policy document, intended to guide national policy and specific modes of governance. As such, it offers a valuable site for examining how the Nigerian state discursively constructs "resource governance," assigns responsibility and frames both solutions and subjects.

Guided by the methodological principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA), this study analyzes the report not only for its content but also for its form, framing, and rhetorical strategy. Specifically, it interrogates how the language of the report reflects underlying ideologies of state authority, security, and development. Drawing from the political economy of discourse and critical policy analysis traditions (Fairclough, 2013; Fischer, 2003), this approach foregrounds the power relations and institutional interests embedded in official narratives. Particular attention is given to how the report narrates the effects of extractive activity in five key dimensions: social, political, ecological, criminal/transnational and governance. By approaching this national policy document as a site of meaning-making, the method allows for a nuanced interpretation of how Nigerian state institutions conceptualize and respond to resource governance.

Tracing the Resource Governance through Time and Space in Nigeria

Across time and geographic space, resource management has often been marred by illegal mining, armed violence, and the involvement of political actors. These dynamics mirror but also complicate the classical "resource curse" narrative by revealing that resource governance is not merely a technical or economic challenge, but a political and contested process shaped by actors who exploit disorder to maintain control. This makes the resource curse not simply a "curse," but a configuration of power.

From colonial mining towns to oil-rich Delta communities and today's artisanal gold sites in the North, Nigeria's extractive frontiers have long been shaped by exclusionary political economies. The Nigerian state has historically functioned as a gatekeeper to wealth, privileging access for a narrow political class while disempowering the majority (Akinola, 2018). This elite-centric distribution of extractive benefits underpins the enduring logic of the resource curse in the Nigerian context. Under British colonial rule, minerals such as tin, gold, and coal formed the backbone of Nigeria's early extractive economy. Mining towns like Jos and Enugu were established around mineral wealth, where communal land tenure was overridden, ecological systems disrupted, and local labor conscripted under harsh conditions (Azgaku & Osuala, 2015). These colonial mining frontiers prioritized imperial interests over domestic development, establishing a pattern of extraction without transformation that would persist long after independence.

The discovery of oil in Oloibiri in 1956 and the Biafran War shifted the Nigerian state's economic orientation toward petroleum (Klieman, 2012; James *et al.*, 2022). The post-independence state centralized control of oil revenues, sidelining the solid minerals sector. Infrastructure and regulatory attention were redirected toward the Niger Delta, entrenching a rentier logic that rewarded elite loyalty and discouraged diversification. As federal revenues ballooned, so did the centralization of power and the entrenchment of patronage politics, which further deepened regional inequalities and bred resentment among neglected zones. These shifts laid the foundation for a bifurcated resource economy: one centered on globally strategic oil production, and another largely unregulated based on informal solid mineral extraction.

With Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999, the liberalization of political space coincided with deepening poverty in rural regions, particularly in the North (Aderonmu, 2010). The decline of state-led mining initiatives and limited employment options led to a surge in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM), especially in gold-rich areas like Zamfara, Niger, and Kaduna. While

ASM offered an economic lifeline to disenfranchised youth and communities, it also attracted criminal networks and exposed these regions to new forms of insecurity. Armed banditry, herder-farmer clashes, and communal disputes over land use increasingly overlapped with mineral-rich territories, creating fragile zones of extraction where neither traditional nor formal authorities could effectively mediate conflict (Ogbonnaya, 2020).

Over the past decade, extractive violence in Nigeria has become more organized and militarized. As documented in the *Blood and Treasure* Report (2025), armed groups and non-state actors now operate de facto mining regimes in areas such as Zamfara, Shiroro, and Kwande. These zones have transformed into conflict economies, where mineral wealth sustains criminal enterprises, insurgent groups, and local warlords.

Analysis

The *Blood and Treasure* report, published by Nigeria's National Early Warning Centre in 2025 report provides a reportage on the mining of solid minerals such as gold, lithium, tin, barite, gemstones, columbite-tantalite (coltan), sapphires, limestone, granite, coal, and rare earth minerals across mining sites in Zamfara (Dangulbi, Guru, Biya, Sabuwar Kasuwa, Gobirawa, Maru, Tsafe, Gummi, Gusau, Anka and Bukkuyum), Kaduna (Birnin Gwari), Niger (Shiroro and Rafi; Karaga, Babana), Benue (Kwande) and Taraba (Gembu and the Mayo-Sina valley). The report also notes that Iwajowa (Bodija) in Oyo State serves as a hub for illegal storage and trade in explosives by miners, and has been linked to enabling terrorist attacks.

Criminal Economy Discourse: Illicit Mining as an Organized Crime

According to the National Early Warning Centre (2025), "mining sites have emerged as epicentres of transborder illicit economies and havens for criminal networks" (pg. 1). The report frames illegal mining as "organized crime involving the security [forces] and some influential people in the area" (pg. 11). Over the years, it depicts extraction as a "joint venture" between miners and terrorists, linking resource economies with violence, organized crime, and political decay (p. 13). This framing highlights the contested governance of resource spaces, where artisanal miners, armed groups, and local elites form shifting alliances beyond state oversight. In this discourse, illegal mining is not simply a criminal enterprise but a parallel mode of governance, illustrated by claims that militants have "expanded their footprint and hoisted the flag of Boko Haram over the area" (p. 11). Illegal mining is thus cast not merely as an administrative or security problem but as a moral and national crisis. The "curse" is socially constructed as an inherent feature of informal mining, obscuring the formal sector's own exploitative dynamics.

The report constructs a binary between "the state" as protector and non-state actors as predators (e.g., bandits, terrorist groups). Armed groups are portrayed as autonomous actors "controlling mining zones," a depiction that downplays federal and subnational complicity. While some mention of elite collusion appears, it is usually deflected onto "foreign-linked cartels" or regional actors, suggesting a strategic avoidance of naming systemic failures in governance.

The report maps extractive violence to "zones of terror" such as Zamfara and Shiroro, presenting them as exceptional rather than structurally produced outcomes. As Table 1 illustrates, the geopolitical fluidity of extractive violence: bandits displaced from Anka, Bukkuyum, and Maradun (Zamfara) relocate to Birnin Gwari, replicating violent governance regimes across state lines. "Gangs dislodged by military operations in neighbouring Zamfara State also took refuge in the same LGAs, thus fostering a convergence of terrorists and bandits in the forests of Kaduna" (pg. 10). These shifting zones of contestation are frequently located in ecologically sensitive areas, such as grazing corridors, forest reserves, and river basins; amplifying both human insecurity and environmental degradation. The convergence of mobile violence, extractive pressures and ecological fragility underscores the urgency of rethinking Nigeria's political and spatial approach to resource governance.

Table 1*:* The Geography of Mining and Conflict

Region	Mineral Resource(s)	Conflict Actor(s)	Key Features
Zamfara (NW)	Gold, laterite	Armed bandits, Fulani militias	Epicenter of extractive conflict, declared terrorist zone by FG
Shiroro, Niger State (NC)	Gold	Boko Haram, ISWAP factions	Mining sites used as abduction zones
Benue (NC)	Gold, lithium	Local militias, foreign-linked cartels	Illegal mining intertwined with boundary disputes and land grabs
Oyo (SW)	Gold, tourmaline	Corporate actors, criminal networks	Urban explosion (Ibadan) tied to black-market explosives for mining
Birnin Gwari, Kaduna (NW)	Tin, sapphire	Bandits, terrorist collaborators	Cross-border refuge zone for militants from Zamfara
Plateau State (NC)	Tin, uranium	Historical site of resource conflict	Sites now reoccupied by ASM and affected by radioactive contamination

Source: Created by author using the Office for Strategic Preparedness & Resilience report, 2025

Displacement Discourse

In Maradun Local Government Area, Chinese gold miners had bought up farmland from villagers and were engaged in illegal mining with the tacit *approval of the Emir and government officials. Apparently, state and federal officials and even some traditional rulers who benefitted by buying the gold cheaply from the villagers had encouraged the activities of the Chinese miners who had effectively displaced the locals* (Pg.14).

The report repeatedly highlights the role of foreign actors, particularly Chinese firms, in collaboration with "politically exposed persons", embedding Nigeria's extractive periphery deeper into global circuits of capital and violence (pg. 9). This dynamic reflects Bunker and Ciccantell's (2005, 2007) *raw materialism*, where extractive zones are sites of global accumulation and local disarticulation. By documenting how illicit extraction intertwines with migration, ecological degradation, and regional insecurity, the report resituates the resource curse within political economy not simply as a macroeconomic dysfunction but as a lived experience of disempowerment, risk, and survival.

"The illicit enterprise has drawn in local and foreign migrants and led criminal syndicates to resort to deadly violence in protecting their access to minerals in the locality" (pg. 11). Interestingly, the report also notes that "what has been established in respect of the relations between armed groups and mining sites in Nigeria is correlation rather than causation" (pg. 13). Here violence is not depicted as inherent to resources but instrumentalized around resource sites.

Over the past two decades, changes in land ownership, encroachment onto grazing routes and ecological factors have dramatically altered the social and security environment in Zamfara and transformed the state into the epicentre of a criminal insurgency in the North-West. The convergence of three factors served as a catalyst for the crisis. The continuing southward surge of the Sahara which has rendered much of the land agriculturally unproductive, in addition to land hunger triggered by the growing human population and the emergence of mining as an alternative to both farming and grazing (pg. 6).

This framing positions youth involvement as an "existential necessity of survival" casting them simultaneously as victims and contributors to disorder. Such duality appears to serve the state's rhetorical need to justify militarized interventions, while avoiding direct accountability for structural neglect. "In Plateau State, the boom in artisanal mining in Barkin Ladi, Riyom, Bassa and Jos South local government areas, has lured largely under-aged children away from formal education and agricultural activities. This has led to both a spike in primary and secondary school dropout rates as well as a decline in agricultural productivity" (pg. 15). Here illegal mining is linked with forced migration, child labor, and public health crises, including recurring lead poisoning in Zamfara and Niger (p. 16). This is mostly tied to artisanal mining, which is portrayed as both a survival strategy and a trap for youth, leading to "abandonment of formal education," food insecurity, and long-term disempowerment.

Securitized Discourse

The dominant ideology in the report is "state developmentalism" with security overtones. "Non-state armed groups are drawn to ungoverned spaces where they can sink their roots with minimal resistance from an often demoralized population and outside the scrutiny of the central government" (pg. 13). Solutions are framed through more effective regulation, inter-agency coordination, and centralized monitoring, measures that reinforce technocratic state authority rather than considering more inclusive or community-led approaches. This logic echoes what Shore and Wright (1997) describe as "governance through discourse", where the state's power to define the problem also becomes its justification for controlling the solution. The construction of "governance" in this way is not neutral; it aligns with a developmentalist ideology that presumes that the state, despite its flaws, is the legitimate and natural steward of national resources.

As Table 2 shows, the report constructs resource extraction primarily through the lens of securitization, positioning artisanal mining as a threat that must be contained. This framing obscures the longer political and economic histories that enabled extractive precarity in the first place. Ideologically, the report reinforces state developmentalism and technocratic authority while marginalizing alternative or community-led interpretations of stability. These discursive choices appear to reproduce power hierarchies that protect elite and foreign interests while displacing local agency.

Table 2: Summary of Discursive Construction and Embedded Ideologies in the "Blood and Treasure" Report

Discursive Strategy	Key Example(s)	Ideological Function / Power Implication
Securitization of extraction	Use of war-like metaphors such as "zones of terror"; framing informal mining as linked to insurgency and terrorism	Recasts extraction as a national threat to justify militarized state response; silences socioeconomic causes and corporate complicity
Erasure of corporate actors	Multinational oil companies and extractive firms are rarely named or implicated	Protects transnational capital and shifts blame to local actors and weak institutions
Passive constructions	"Resources are lost" rather than "looted by elites or companies"	Obscures accountability and reinforces dominant narratives of state fragility without interrogating elite interests

Discussion

The *Blood and Treasure* report constructs a political reading of the resource curse by tracing how armed groups, terrorists, and bandits use extractive resources (especially gold) to fund their operations and extend control over territories: Mining sites become ungoverned zones, used to store abductees, raise funds, and recruit labor. Armed groups evolve from "protectors" of miners into owners of the mines themselves, forming what the report calls "joint ventures" with illegal miners. This reflects the classic *resource curse* narrative, but not through oil rents or Dutch disease. Instead, it is a political curse of fragmented sovereignty, where extractive wealth fosters parallel power structures that rival the state.

The resource curse here is political in its exposure of elite collusion and institutional weakness, where public institutions enable rather than prevent extractive violence. In areas like Zamfara and Benue, the curse plays out as ethnic conflict, grazing disputes, and loss of agricultural land, often exacerbated by climate change and elite land grabs. The Fulani-Hausa conflict is traced to changes in land use driven by both ecological degradation and the spread of mining, illustrating how resources catalyze identity-based conflicts. Traditional farming and herding practices are undermined, leading to deepening food insecurity and social fragmentation. Illegal gold is tied to transnational crime networks, money laundering, and human trafficking: The report draws parallels with Sierra Leone and DRC, constructing Nigeria's case as part of a broader African resource extraction-criminality nexus. These networks turn natural wealth into a vector for global criminality, rather than national development. "The gold rush has been a boon to transnational organized crime cartels" (pg11); situates the resource curse not in national economic mismanagement, but in global political economy and criminal governance.

Across time and space, the report shows that illegal mining spreads opportunistically, adapting to the absence or complicity of state institutions. As the state attempts to regulate one area, extractive actors migrate to others, creating a mobile resource frontier. These dynamic mimics what Bunker and Ciccantell (2005) describe as the "frontier logic" of global capitalism: capital pushes deeper into marginal zones when prior ones are depleted or regulated. The geographic spread of violence tracks strategic mineral interests notably gold, lithium, and rare earths; reflecting shifting global demand. The transition to a green economy in the Global North, for instance, has heightened foreign and domestic interest in Nigeria's lithium deposits, especially in Nasarawa, Oyo, and Benue states, often with little regard for community rights or ecological impact.

This paper underscores that the "resource curse" in Nigeria is not simply a macroeconomic dilemma but an evolving political ecology. Violent actors do not just emerge in response to mineral wealth; they co-produce resource economies in settings where state control is fragmented, and global demand intersects with local exclusion. The result is a violent cohabitation of extraction and governance in which illegal mining serves both as economic survival and political strategy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

While existing literature on natural resources and conflict consistently demonstrate that resource abundance and mismanagement increase the risk of armed conflict these studies largely treat conflict in aggregate terms, focusing on civil wars, insurgencies, and communal violence (Ross, 2004; Paola et al. 2020). What they do not sufficiently address is the way in which resource mismanagement translates directly into terrorism financing and insurgent governance. In Nigeria, this linkage is visible in mining enclaves such as Zamfara and Shiroro, where artisanal gold becomes a source of grievance but also a source of revenue for groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP. By extending the insights of previous studies, this paper shows that resource mismanagement does not just correlate with conflict broadly but operates as a direct enabler of terrorist economies.

This study is limited by its reliance on a single policy document; the *Blood and Treasure* report as its primary data source. While critical discourse analysis enables a deep interrogation of the language, framing, and ideological constructions within the report, the findings may not fully capture the broader spectrum of voices, especially those of local communities or non-state actors not explicitly represented in the text. Moreover, as the analysis centers on official discourse, it reflects state-centric narratives that may obscure or simplify complex ground realities. Future studies could benefit from triangulating such policy texts with interviews, media analyses, or ethnographic fieldwork to enrich the understanding of how resource governance is negotiated and contested in practice.

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