



## Nexus between illegal mining and insurgency: Unmasking driver of conflict and environmental grievances in the northwest, Nigeria

By

<sup>1</sup>UNACHUKWU Ugochukwu Vitus., <sup>2</sup>KESHINRO Adedotun Sunday., <sup>3</sup>EMMANUEL Gloria Ekeh  
<sup>4</sup>ALFADARAI Usman Ishaq., and <sup>5</sup>ONIBIYO Ezekiel Rotimi

<sup>1&3</sup>Institute of Governance and Development Studies, Nasarawa State University Keffi  
<sup>2, 4, &5</sup>Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps Headquarters

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### Abstract

*This study explores the complex dynamics driving insecurity in Northwestern Nigeria, shifting analytical focus from surface-level criminal manifestations banditry and kidnapping to the deeper structural issues that fundamentally sustain insurgent violence in the region. By interrogating the political economy of mineral extraction, this study posits that illegal mining operations, constitute the primary driver of conflict architecture in the Northwest. The study leverages Agency Capture Theory to examine how regulatory institutions have been systematically compromised by foreign companies, government officials, and local politicians who facilitate unregulated mining activities with impunity. Employing a qualitative research design with reliant on extant literature. Findings emanating from the study reveal that banditry and kidnapping, primarily carried out by small-scale petty criminals operating outside core insurgency zones, serve as strategic distraction from the larger, more lucrative enterprise of illegal mining. Findings submit that while foreign nationals and high-net-worth individuals implicated in this illicit economy remain remarkably unaffected by the smokescreen of insecurity often conducting operations through proxies and protected by captured regulatory institutions, the communities whose farmlands are targeted for displacement to access mineral deposits are left completely uncared for by government, abandoned to navigate the devastating consequences of environmental destruction, livelihood loss, and violence alone. The study recommends the establishment of a depoliticized mining oversight mechanism including a special mining crimes tribunal with prosecutorial independence and a Joint Mineral Supply Chain Task Force to track and disrupt smuggling corridors, alongside mandatory beneficial ownership transparency and a whistleblower protection program targeting insider information on political and regulatory figures implicated in illegal mining protection. Finally, the study recommends the immediate deployment of a Mining-Affected Communities Restoration and Reparations Program including remediation across mineral-rich zones, a Community Restitution Fund financed through mining levies and asset forfeiture proceeds to compensate displaced communities and restore livelihoods, and mandatory inclusion of women in restitution governance structures to address documented gender-based violence and exclusion.*

**Keywords:** Agency Capture Theory, Environmental Grievances, Illegal Mining, Insurgency

### Introduction

This question directly interrogates the central thesis of the abstract that illegal mining operations, rather than banditry itself, constitute the fundamental conflict driver. It compels investigation into the causal mechanisms linking mineral extraction to insurgent capacity, including how rare earth materials (gold, lithium, diamond) are exchanged for weapons and ammunition, how regulatory agencies have been systematically compromised through agency capture, and how high-profile kidnapping operations strategically distract public and governmental attention from the more lucrative illicit mining economy. The mineral-for-weapons economy

\* Corresponding author: UNACHUKWU Ugochukwu Vitus  
Department of Security and Strategic Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria.

is facilitated by captured regulatory institutions; as government officials from ministry, cadastral offices, local politicians and traditional structure are involved. The mineral-for-weapons economy is also largely protected by a smokescreen of banditry and kidnapping, which function as the primary driver of insurgency persistence in Northwest Nigeria. The question recognizes that understanding the mineral-weapon nexus is essential to disrupting the self-perpetuating cycles of violence that kinetic security interventions alone cannot resolve

The abandonment of mining-affected communities by government; abandoned mining pits, toxic water contamination, loss of arable land, community displacement, and the social grievances are symptoms that insurgent groups exploit for recruitment and local support. This lived experiences of state abandonment and elite impunity translate into community tolerance for, or participation in, insurgent networks, and how addressing these structural injustices may prove more effective than purely military approaches.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite over a decade of kinetic military interventions, amnesty negotiations, and community policing initiatives, insurgency and banditry persist relentlessly across Northwest Nigeria, suggesting that policy responses have consistently misdiagnosed the conflict's primary drivers. The prevailing security narrative frames banditry and kidnapping as the core challenge, directing state resources toward reactive measures while leaving the region's most lucrative illicit economy illegal mining largely unexamined and unperturbed. This study is therefore driven by the urgent need to investigate how the political economy of smokescreen violence functions as the primary driver of insurgency persistence in mineral-rich zones of Northwest Nigeria. Preliminary evidence suggests that high-profile kidnapping operations strategically distract public attention and government scrutiny from the mineral-for-weapons economy, wherein rare earth materials including gold, lithium, and diamond are systematically exchanged for arms and ammunition. However, the specific mechanisms through which regulatory institutions have been captured by powerful actors foreign companies, government officials, and local politicians to facilitate this illicit economy with impunity remain critically under-theorized and empirically underexplored. Without understanding how this smokescreen operates and who benefits from it, security interventions will continue chasing symptoms while the structural engine of violence remains intact.

Compounding this gap is the profound environmental devastation wrought by unregulated mining activities abandoned mining pits, toxic water contamination, destruction of arable land, and forced community displacement which generates deep local grievances that insurgent networks exploit for recruitment and community support. Yet despite the visibility of environmental degradation across mineral-rich zones, no

systematic inquiry has examined the extent to which environmental grievance serves as insurgent recruitment narratives in Northwest Nigeria. Communities whose farmlands are targeted for displacement to access mineral deposits receive no compensation, resettlement support, or environmental remediation from government, leaving them to navigate livelihood loss and violence entirely alone. This lived experience of state abandonment and elite impunity transforms affected populations from potential security partners into recruitment pools for insurgent networks promising protection or redress. The failure to investigate how environmental grievances translate into insurgent sympathy represents a critical blind spot in both counter-insurgency strategy and conflict scholarship, leaving communities abandoned and violence perpetuated.

This study holds profound significance across theoretical, empirical, policy, strategic, and societal dimensions, offering understanding of the nexus between illegal mining and insurgency in Northwest Nigeria. Study extends the application of Agency Capture Theory into conflict studies by demonstrating how regulatory institutions are systematically compromised by powerful actors of foreign companies, government officials, and local politicians to facilitate illegal mining with impunity, while introducing novel concepts of smokescreen violence which is the strategic deployment of kidnapping and banditry to distract from lucrative illicit economies. The study showcases environmental grievance as recruitment narrative on how state abandonment of mining-affected communities translates into insurgent sympathy. For policy makers, the study provides an accurate diagnosis essential for effective intervention, demonstrating that without disrupting the mineral-weapon nexus and reclaiming captured regulatory institutions, kinetic security operations will remain futile regardless of scale. Academically, the study contributes to security studies, political economy, and environmental sociology by offering a replicable model for investigating resource-conflict dynamics and generating testable hypotheses for future research across fragile and conflict-affected states.

### **Research Questions**

This study provides answer to the following questions

- i. How does the political economy of smokescreen violence function as the primary driver of insurgency persistence in mineral-rich zones of northwest, Nigeria
- ii. To what extent does environmental grievance serve as insurgent recruitment narratives in mineral-rich zones of northwest, Nigeria.

## Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study interrogates the nexus between illegal mining and insurgency by unmasking driver of conflict and environmental grievances in the northwest, Nigeria. While specific objective

- i. Examine political economy of smokescreen violence influence on insurgency persistence in mineral-rich zones of northwest, Nigeria.
- ii. Investigate influence of environmental grievance serves as insurgent recruitment narratives in mineral-rich zones of northwest, Nigeria

## Literature Review

### Political Economy of Smokescreen Violence

The concept of political economy of smokescreen violence emerges from critical interrogation of how high-profile criminal activities function strategically to obscure more lucrative illicit economies that fundamentally drive conflict dynamics. In the Nigerian context, this conceptualization challenges conventional security narratives that frame banditry and kidnapping as primary threats, arguing instead that these visible manifestations serve as distractions from structurally entrenched illegal mining operations. According to Baiyewu (2025), the Global Rights report on Violent Earth: Mineral Governance and Endemic revealed that political actors actively provide protection and cover for sponsors of illicit mining across host communities, with weak enforcement of mining regulations and inadequate oversight enabling resource exploitation at the expense of local communities (Baiyewu, 2025). This institutional complicity creates what Peterside (2025) describes as a parallel economy with armed enforcement, cross-border linkages, and political insulation, wherein illegal mining, kidnapping for ransom, and stolen livestock do not operate in isolation but feed each other and thrive where state presence is weak. The smokescreen functions precisely because ransom payments capture public attention and media headlines while the mineral-for-weapons economy facilitated by captured regulatory institutions operates with astonishing impunity beneath the surface of visible violence.

The political economy dimensions of this smokescreen violence are further illuminated by evidence from Zamfara State, where the commencement of gold mining in commercial volume marked the simultaneous escalation of high-velocity crime. Adisa (2026) documents that before large-scale gold mining, cattle rustling constituted the primary security challenge, manageable by security forces, but the advent of gold mining transformed the landscape into kidnapping for ransom, banditry, and organized criminal gangs. This transformation reflects what Peterside (2025) identifies as the protection economy fees demanded for access to mining pits, safe passage, and operational cover which turns fear into steady income for armed groups while rendering communities unable to move or trade freely. Crucially, the smokescreen operates through

the strategic involvement of what the Miners Association of Nigeria terms “political bandits politicians and associates” who divert resources, capture allocations, shield illegal mining, or quietly profit from disorder while commissioning press statements about security (Ayankale & Liman, 2025). The TRT Afrika (2025) investigation further reveals that gold has become an increasingly important revenue stream for armed bandit groups since 2023, with intelligence sources confirming that even licensed mining companies are forced to pay armed groups to gain access to sites, and that armed gangs actively support illegal mining operations by violently displacing communities that sit on mineral-rich land. This complex web of elite complicity, institutional capture, and strategic violence distraction constitutes the political economy of smokescreen violence that this study interrogates as the primary driver of insurgency persistence in Northwest Nigeria's mineral-rich zones (Adisa, 2026; Baiyewu, 2025).

### **Environmental Grievance as Insurgency Recruitment**

Environmental grievance as a conceptual framework for understanding insurgency recruitment emerges from scholarship examining how ecological degradation, resource depletion, and state abandonment of affected communities create conditions that armed groups exploit for mobilization and support. The Niger Delta experience provides foundational insights, with studies demonstrating that environmental degradation resulting from oil exploration led to massive devastation of farmlands and rivers, destroying agricultural and fishing livelihoods that formed the economic backbone of local communities (Isokon, 2024). This study found that environmental degradation relates to the resurgence of militant groups, with the devastation resulting in lost livelihoods that made recruitment into militant formations both preferred and unavoidable for displaced youth. The theoretical mechanism operates through relative deprivation, wherein communities experiencing environmental destruction witness the contrast between their suffering and the impunity of those profiting from resource extraction, generating grievances that insurgent narratives can channel toward violence. As Isokon (2024) concludes that addressing environmental pollution, poverty, unemployment, insufficient infrastructure, resource deprivation proves more effective than kinetic military measures in lessening the desire to be recruited into militant groups.

In Northwest Nigeria, environmental grievance as recruitment narrative operates through the specific mechanisms of unregulated mining-induced degradation. Adisa (2026) documents that mining activities have generated underdevelopment, crimes, inequality, and conflict, with communities being displaced while environmental damage deforestation, water pollution, and lead poisoning inflicts public health crises on populations already marginalized from state attention. The 2010 lead poisoning crisis in Zamfara, which claimed hundreds of lives (mostly children), exemplifies how unsafe artisanal mining practices create enduring grievances that shape community perceptions of state abandonment (Shehu, 2025). Analysing

environmental stress and violent conflict in northern Nigeria, demonstrates that climate-induced displacement and livelihood insecurity provide fertile ground for extremist groups to exploit local grievances for recruitment expansion (Minko, 2025). The study reveals that in the Lake Chad Basin, youth constitute 60% of the population, and many have turned to criminality as traditional livelihoods collapse due to environmental degradation, with insurgent groups like Boko Haram exploiting the lack of livelihoods to recruit fighters while providing socio-economic support that communities cannot access through legitimate channels.

This dynamic translates directly to Northwest Nigeria's mining-affected zones, where abandoned mining pits, toxic water contamination, and destruction of arable land generate profound grievances that insurgent networks exploit. As the TRT Afrika (2025) investigation documents, communities that protest mining activities face deadly raids to take over the area, with residents fleeing repeated attacks while miners respond with violence to access mineral wealth. The differential impact wherein foreign nationals and high-net-worth individuals remain unaffected while local communities bear the full weight of environmental devastation represents the ultimate expression of what the Amnesty Policy study (2025) identifies as marginalization that significantly relates to the resurgence of militant groups, creating a grievance reservoir that insurgent recruiters systematically tap for sympathy, support, and active participation (Isokon, 2024; TRT Afrika, 2025; Shehu, 2025).

## **Empirical Review**

### **Political Economy of Smokescreen Violence and illegal mining**

Okoli (2024) interrogated Yan Sakai vigilantism and community response to armed banditry in Nigeria's North West. This study employed qualitative analysis anchored on the theory of civilian autonomy, drawing from secondary data and existing literature on armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria. The study identifies illicit gold mining as one of the three primary factors enabling contemporary armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria, alongside existence of ungoverned spaces and multidimensional poverty. The study argues that the weakness of the Nigerian state in security provisioning and regulation of vigilante activities explains the emergence of armed groups and the concomitant internecine violence between Hausa and Fulani communities.

Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime & ACLED (2025) examined Conflict and organised crime in Northwest Nigeria: Mapping fatalities and financing mechanisms. This quantitative-qualitative mixed-methods study analysed conflict data across Zamfara and Kaduna States between 2018 and 2023, triangulating ACLED event data with field interviews and key informant accounts to establish patterns of

violence and their relationship to criminal economies. Investigation showed that banditry deaths in Zamfara and Kaduna States reached above 4,758 between 2018 and 2023, surpassing fatalities fueled by violent extremist groups in Nigeria's northeast region during the same period. The study established that since 2022, the artisanal and small-scale gold mining sector has become a key source of terrorist financing, fundamentally shifting the political economy of violence in the region.

Sadiq (2025) analysed how gold-for-arms trade is fuelling terror in Nigeria's north-west. The study engaged field interviews, direct observation, and primary source engagement with bandit leaders Kachalla Mati in Zamfara State, also conducted interviews with artisanal miners, local dealers, and obtained two recorded interview sessions with bandit leaders

Result from the study revealed that bandit leader Kachalla Mati extracts between ₦200-300 million (approximately \$130,000-\$196,000) weekly from gold mining operations in Anka, Zamfara State. The gold is stockpiled, smuggled through the Nigeria-Niger border into the Sahel, and ultimately reaches Dubai, which has become the world's second-largest gold trading hub and a destination for Nigeria's illicit gold. The study documents that bandits forcibly extract gold from miners through ultimatums as hand over the gold or be killed, with one miner reporting surrendering ₦2 million (\$1,300) worth of gold in a single incident.

### **Environmental Grievance as Insurgency Recruitment**

Nigerian Federation of Mining Host Communities & Global Rights Nigeria. (2025) evaluated weak enforcement, governance gaps, and national security implications. This collaborative study employed qualitative research methods including key informant interviews across mining host communities in West Africa and the Sahel. Study elicited testimonial evidence from community members, women's groups, and local leaders regarding the impacts of mining activities on their livelihoods and security. Result from revealed that weak enforcement of mining regulations and inadequate federal oversight enable resource exploitation at the expense of local communities, resulting in environmental degradation, food insecurity, and threats to national security.

Crucially, the report documented allegations of state capture instances where political actors provide protection and cover for sponsors of illicit mining. Women in mining host communities are disproportionately affected, with many reporting incidents of sexual harassment and gender-based violence linked to ongoing mining activities, while being systematically excluded from decision-making processes and economic benefits.

Aina (2025) interrogate Nigeria's enduring "gold wars" in artisanal mining, environmental damage, and armed conflict. This policy analysis synthesizes data from UN Comtrade, academic studies, and field reports to examine the relationship between artisanal mining, environmental degradation, and armed conflict in Northwest Nigeria. The analysis tracks gold smuggling data and its relationship to insecurity. The study reveals that between 2012 and 2018, approximately 97 tonnes of gold worth over \$3 billion was illegally smuggled out of Nigeria. The analysis documents that ASGM activities have established new centers of power beyond the state's control, leading to a destabilizing wave of rural banditry and criminality. The governments of Zamfara and Katsina States have explicitly cautioned that proceeds from illegal gold sales are funding weapons purchases by armed groups, with Zamfara's police chief identifying a strong and glaring nexus between the activities of armed bandits and illicit miners.

University of British Columbia (2025) examined environmental and socioeconomic impacts of mining and community forestry in Ilesa, Osun State, Nigeria. This case study employed site visits, observation, and secondary data analysis to assess the environmental and socioeconomic impacts of artisanal and small-scale gold mining in Ilesa and surrounding communities including Igun, Itagunmodi, Isaobi, Ido Ijesa, and Omo Ijesa. The study synthesized findings from multiple studies on mining impacts in the region. The study documents that artisanal and small-scale gold mining has caused severe environmental degradation including widespread forest loss, soil erosion, water contamination, and heavy metal pollution of waterbodies. Mining activities have displaced farmers, degraded water resources including the culturally significant Osun River, and increased rural vulnerability among forest-dependent households. The influx of migrant miners from northern Nigeria has increased resource competition and potential social tensions. The study notes that when mine wastes are not properly managed, especially acidic water and heavy metals like mercury, lead, and cadmium, they pose significant risks to soil quality and human health.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Agency Capture Theory**

Agency Capture Theory emerged from the pioneering work of Stigler (1971) and Bernstein (1955), posits that regulatory agencies, over time, tend to identify with the interests of the industries they regulate rather than the public good they are designed to protect. Yackee (2014) refines this conceptualization, defining agency capture as the control of agency policy decision making by a subpopulation of individuals or organizations external to the agency. This definition is beyond simplistic notions of corruption to encompass more subtle forms of institutional co-optation, including the systematic alignment of regulatory outputs with private interests through legal and ostensibly legitimate channels. Owen (2012) extends this analysis by arguing that capture often operates at the level of legislative oversight committees themselves, where "Type

2 corruption" lawful but systematically biased policy making enables regulated entities to fund expensive election campaigns in return for privileged access to regulatory decision-making.

Applying Agency Capture Theory reveals how the political economy of smokescreen violence in Northwest Nigeria is fundamentally enabled by the systematic capture of regulatory institutions mandated to oversee mining activities. The Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative's documentation of over \$9 billion in annual losses to illegal mining [citation: empirical sources from previous response] represents not merely enforcement failure but active institutional subversion wherein regulatory agencies the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development, the Mining Cadastre Office, and state-level mineral resource management bodies have been captured by a coalition of foreign companies, politically connected local entrepreneurs, and government officials who facilitate unregulated extraction with impunity.

As Laffont and Tirole (2000) demonstrate in their agency-theoretic approach to interest-group politics, an interest group has more power when its interest lies in inefficient rather than efficient regulation, measured by the degree of informational asymmetry between the regulated industry and the political principal. In the Nigerian context, this manifests as what the Miners Association of Nigeria terms "political bandits" politicians and associates who divert resources, capture allocations, and shield illegal mining while publicly commissioning statements about security. The smokescreen of high-profile banditry and kidnapping functions precisely as Owen's (2012) analysis predicts: visible criminality captures public attention and media headlines while the more lucrative mineral-for-weapons economy operates beneath the surface, protected by captured institutions that strategically deploy the spectacle of violence to distract from the structural extraction engine.

Furthermore, when regulatory agencies are captured, the costs of unregulated economic activity are systematically externalized onto vulnerable populations while benefits accrue to politically connected elites. Walters' (2019) empirical study of regulatory agenda-setting demonstrates that even in venues where it would be exceedingly easy to give business interests precisely what they want, agencies maintain some capacity for critical distance yet the Nigerian mining sector exhibits precisely the pattern of extreme capture that Walters' analysis warns against: regulatory agencies remain largely unmoved and even handed not toward public interest but toward elite private interests. The environmental consequences documented in mining-affected communities abandoned pits, toxic water contamination from mercury and lead processing, destruction of arable land, and mass displacement represent the material manifestation of captured governance. Yackee (2022) raises the provocative possibility that capture designations may be employed strategically by policy losers to delegitimize agency actions; conversely, in Northwest Nigeria, it is the captured institutions themselves that delegitimize the state in the eyes of affected populations.

The pathway forward, as Carpenter and Moss (2014) argue in their comprehensive treatment of preventing regulatory capture, requires insulating regulatory institutions from the very forms of political and economic pressure that currently render them instruments of elite interests rather than guardians of public welfare. For Northwest Nigeria, this means confronting not only the visible violence of banditry but the invisible architecture of institutional capture that makes such violence both possible and profitable.

## **Methodology**

This study adopted qualitative research design while making use of secondary data generated via journal publications, internet, library, and other documented materials relevant to the study; the study interrogated the nexus between illegal mining and insurgency by unmasking drivers of conflict and environmental grievances in the northwest, Nigeria. This study is conducted by examining literature concerning illegal mining and insurgency, agency capture, illegal mining and environmental grievances in the northwest, Nigeria. The literature was obtained through searches in publicly available material. Literature from non-serial publications, official reports, and conferences has been included particularly if they have been cited by other references.

## **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of this study reveal that the political economy of smokescreen violence functions as the primary driver of insurgency persistence in Northwest Nigeria through a sophisticated mineral-for-weapons economy protected by captured regulatory institutions and strategically maintained peripheral violence. This finding aligns with and extends the empirical documentation by Sadiq (2025), who established that bandit leader Kachalla Mati extracts between ₦200-300 million weekly from gold mining operations in Anka, Zamfara State, with proceeds smuggled through the Nigeria-Niger border ultimately reaching Dubai's gold trading hubs. Okoli's (2024) identification of "illicit gold mining" as one of three primary factors enabling contemporary armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria further validates this finding, particularly his argument that the weakness of the Nigerian state in security provisioning and regulation of economic activities explains both the emergence of armed groups and the concomitant violence between communities. The involvement of what the Miners Association of Nigeria terms "political bandits" politicians and associates who divert resources, capture allocations, and shield illegal mining while publicly commissioning statements about security (Ayankale & Liman, 2025).

The findings of this study demonstrate that environmental grievance serves as a potent insurgent recruitment narrative in Northwest Nigeria's mineral-rich zones through the systematic creation of ecological devastation, community displacement, and state abandonment that armed groups exploit for mobilization and community

support. This finding empirically aligns with the Global Rights and Mining Host Communities Study (2025), which documented that weak enforcement of mining regulations and inadequate federal oversight enable resource exploitation at the expense of local communities, resulting in environmental degradation, food insecurity, and documented "allegations of state capture instances where political actors provide protection and cover for sponsors of illicit mining." The study's documentation that women in mining host communities are disproportionately affected, with many reporting sexual harassment and gender-based violence linked to ongoing mining activities while being systematically excluded from decision-making processes, reveals the gendered dimensions of environmental grievance that insurgent narratives can exploit. Communities experiencing such catastrophic health impacts, with no government remediation or accountability, become what Aina (2025) identifies as "new centers of power beyond the state's control," wherein armed groups offer employment, protection, and belonging to youth whose agricultural livelihoods have been destroyed by mining-induced environmental degradation. The University of British Columbia's (2025) case study of Ilesa mining communities further substantiates this finding, documenting that artisanal and small-scale gold mining has caused severe environmental degradation including widespread forest loss, soil erosion, water contamination, and heavy metal pollution of waterbodies, with mining activities displacing farmers, degrading water resources, and increasing rural vulnerability among forest-dependent households.

## **Conclusion**

The findings of this study lead to the compelling conclusion that the persistence of insurgency in Northwest Nigeria cannot be understood, nor effectively addressed, without confronting the political economy of smokescreen violence that systematically diverts attention from the region's most lucrative illicit economy: illegal mining. The evidence demonstrates that banditry and kidnapping the visible manifestations of insecurity that dominate media headlines and government security briefings function strategically as peripheral violence protecting a mineral-for-weapons economy of vastly greater magnitude. The conclusion is inescapable: until the mineral-weapon nexus is disrupted and captured regulatory institutions are reclaimed from the private interests that currently control them, kinetic security interventions will remain perpetually reactive, chasing bandits while the structural engine of violence continues operating unchecked beneath the smokescreen of peripheral crime.

Secondly, study concludes that environmental grievance, systematically generated by unregulated mining activities and compounded by state abandonment, has become a primary recruitment narrative for insurgent networks in Northwest Nigeria, transforming ecologically devastated communities into fertile ground for armed group expansion. When communities witness the complete absence of government remediation, compensation, or accountability while the foreign and local elites who profit from extraction remain entirely

unaffected by the insecurity they help finance the resulting grievance becomes what insurgent recruiters systematically exploit for sympathy, support, and active participation.

## Recommendations

Based on the above this study therefore recommends

- i. That the Federal Government, in collaboration with the Nigerian Communications Commission and the newly established Northwest Development Commission, must constitute a Special Mining Crimes Tribunal with prosecutorial independence, staffed by magistrates and investigators drawn from outside the mineral-rich states to insulate proceedings from local political capture. This tribunal should be empowered to investigate and prosecute not only artisanal miners but the foreign companies, government officials, and local politicians whose protection enables the mineral-for-weapons economy to flourish.
- ii. That the Northwest Governors Forum, Federal Ministry of Environment, in partnership with the Northwest Development Commission and international development partners must conduct a Comprehensive Environmental Damage Assessment and Remediation Initiative across all mineral-rich zones of Northwest Nigeria, prioritizing communities with documented lead poisoning fatalities, active water source contamination, and large-scale agricultural land destruction. This initiative must include the safe closure and rehabilitation of abandoned mining pits, the provision of alternative clean water sources for contaminated communities, and the medical screening and treatment of populations exposed to heavy metal toxicity.

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