

SECURING NIGERIA'S FUTURE THROUGH MINING SOLID MINERALS RESOURCES: PROSPERITY, SOVEREIGNTY AGAINST ASYMMETRIC AND HYBRID THREATS

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's over-reliance on crude oil has exposed the national economy and security architecture to asymmetric and hybrid threats, including resource-linked insurgency, illegal mining, environmental sabotage, and transnational criminal networks. With over 44 commercially viable solid minerals spread across all 36 states and the FCT, Nigeria possesses a strategic resource base capable of driving economic diversification, fiscal sovereignty, and national security resilience. This paper argues that securing Nigeria's future requires repositioning solid minerals development as a core pillar of national security strategy. Through an integrated approach that combines legal reform, intelligence-led regulation, community-based security, and strategic communications, solid minerals can be leveraged to reduce vulnerability to external coercion, disrupt illicit financial flows, and enhance jointness and interoperability among security agencies. The paper adopts a qualitative, policy-analytical methodology, drawing on existing literature, government data, and security threat assessments. Findings indicate that ungoverned mining spaces serve as incubators for banditry, terrorism, and foreign interference. The paper concludes with recommendations for establishing a Minerals Security Command, strengthening inter-agency fusion, formalizing artisanal mining, and deploying strategic communications to counter disinformation around mining operations.

Keywords: Solid minerals, asymmetric threats, hybrid threats, economic sovereignty, resource security, jointness, Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Nigeria's security and economic trajectory since 1960 has been dominated by petroleum. While oil has generated revenue, it has also created structural vulnerabilities: price volatility, regional concentration of conflict, environmental degradation, and dependence on foreign technology and markets. Asymmetric actors and hybrid threat networks have exploited these gaps, using illegal oil bunkering, pipeline sabotage, and ungoverned spaces to fund operations.

Solid minerals offer an alternative pathway. The Nigerian Geological Survey Agency estimates mineral deposits worth over \$700 billion, including gold, lithium, tin, columbite, barite, limestone, and rare earth elements critical to global energy transition. Yet, over 80% of mining activity remains artisanal and informal, occurring outside regulatory oversight. These ungoverned spaces mirror the conditions that enabled Boko Haram and banditry in the Northeast and Northwest.

1.2 Statement of Problem

Three interlocking problems undermine Nigeria's ability to secure prosperity through solid minerals:

1. Security vacuum: Illegal mining sites are used as bases for kidnapping, arms trafficking, and terrorist financing.
2. Governance deficit: Weak licensing, poor revenue tracking, and inter-agency rivalry reduce state capacity to assert sovereignty over mineral resources.
3. Hybrid threat exposure: Disinformation, foreign economic coercion, and transnational criminal networks target Nigeria's mineral sector to gain leverage.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim is to examine how solid minerals development can advance Nigeria's prosperity and sovereignty while countering asymmetric and hybrid threats.

Objectives:

1. Analyze the security implications of Nigeria's solid minerals sector
2. Evaluate existing legal and institutional frameworks for gaps
3. Propose an integrated security architecture for jointness and efficiency
4. Recommend policy measures for prosperity and sovereignty protection

1.4 Scope

This paper focuses on strategic solid minerals in Nigeria, with emphasis on security, governance, and policy. It does not cover detailed geological surveys or mining engineering processes.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW / THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Resource Security and National Sovereignty

The "resource curse" literature argues that abundant natural resources can undermine institutions and fuel conflict if governance is weak. Ross 2012 and Collier 2007 link mineral wealth to civil conflict when state presence is low. For Nigeria, the Niger Delta experience validates this. However, "resource blessing" is possible through strong institutions, as demonstrated by Botswana's diamond model.

2.2 Asymmetric and Hybrid Threats in Extractive Spaces

Asymmetric threats refer to non-state actors using unconventional means against a stronger state. Hybrid threats blend conventional, irregular, cyber, and information warfare. In Nigeria's mining sector, hybrid threats manifest as armed groups controlling gold mines in Zamfara and Niger State, foreign actors providing equipment to illegal miners in exchange for minerals, and disinformation campaigns framing mining operations as "land grabbing" to incite community resistance.

2.3 Theoretical Lens: Security Sector Reform + Economic Statecraft

This paper adopts a hybrid framework: Security Sector Reform for inter-agency jointness, and Economic Statecraft to position minerals as tools of sovereignty. SSR ensures police, military, NSCDC, and intelligence agencies operate with shared situational awareness. Economic Statecraft uses minerals to reduce external dependence and negotiate from strength.

2.4 Domestic Scholarship on Conflict, Governance and Security Architecture

Nigerian scholarship provides strong grounding for linking resource development to security outcomes. Akinade 2009 demonstrates that ungoverned economic spaces and competition over natural resources are primary drivers of communal violence. The work establishes a 3-stage response model: early warning, rapid intervention, and post-conflict reconciliation. This framework is directly applicable to mining host communities where disputes over land and royalties escalate into asymmetric attacks.

Akinade 2007 and 2008 further show that poor security operations and absence of security culture enable crime and xenophobia to thrive in resource-rich areas. Akinade 2007 documents how weak inter-agency coordination creates gaps exploited by non-state actors. Akinade 2008 argues that sustainable development in Nigeria is impossible without resolving the coercion-violence cycle that emerges when citizens feel excluded from resource benefits.

2.5 Strategic Security, Statecraft and Communication

More recent works connect security to diplomacy and governance. Akinade 2018 argues that Nigeria's security challenges are "governance failures projected as security problems." This supports the paper's call to treat solid minerals policy as a governance and sovereignty issue, not just an economic one.

Akinade 2008 highlights disinformation and poor strategic communication as force multipliers for hybrid threats. This directly informs Section 5.4 on countering narratives around mining operations.

Akinade 2019 and Akinade 2017 propose that strategic security requires aligning domestic resource policy with foreign policy objectives and deploying tested crime prevention models to protect national interest. This underpins the recommendation to designate strategic minerals as national security assets.

Akinade 2017 classifies mines, haulage routes, and processing plants as critical infrastructure requiring asset-specific threat assessment and joint protection.

Akinade 2017 establishes the complementary role of public and private security actors, which is essential for securing dispersed mining sites where state presence is limited.

Akinade 2018 provides operational models for engaging host communities as security partners, reducing reliance on coercive force and building trust.

Akinade 2019 links environmental degradation from unregulated extractive activity to broader threats to food security and public health, reinforcing the need to treat mining pollution as a security threat.

2.6 Synthesis

Across Akinade 2007–2019, a consistent thread emerges: Nigeria’s security and development challenges are structural, requiring integrated responses that combine law, operations, community engagement, and strategic communication. This paper applies that integrated model to solid minerals.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a qualitative policy analysis. Data sources include:

1. Federal Ministry of Solid Minerals Development reports, 2023–2025
2. Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative NEITI reports
3. Security threat assessments from Institute of Security Nigeria
4. Peer-reviewed journals on resource conflict and hybrid warfare
5. Field observations and stakeholder interviews with mining host communities

Analytical approach: Thematic analysis of security risks, governance gaps, and policy options. The 3-stage conflict response model from Akinade 2009 and crime prevention models from Akinade 2017 guide the assessment of community-level threats.

4. FINDINGS: SECURITY RISKS IN NIGERIA’S SOLID MINERALS SECTOR

4.1 Ungoverned Mining Spaces as Threat Multipliers

Field data shows over 6,000 illegal mining sites across Nigeria. In Zamfara, bandit groups tax miners and use proceeds to buy weapons. In Niger State, artisanal gold mining funds armed groups linked to broader insurgency. These spaces lack state presence, creating “security vacuums” that attract transnational actors. Consistent with Akinade 2009, absence of early warning and rapid intervention allows localized disputes to escalate into regional insecurity.

4.2 Revenue Leakage and Fiscal Vulnerability

NEITI 2023 reports that Nigeria loses an estimated \$9 billion annually to illegal mining and smuggling. This leakage reduces fiscal sovereignty and increases dependence on oil and external borrowing. Hybrid actors exploit this by offering “protection” to miners, creating parallel governance structures. This reflects the governance failure identified in Akinade 2018.

4.3 Environmental Sabotage and Community Conflict

Unregulated mining causes deforestation, water poisoning, and land disputes. These grievances are weaponized through disinformation to frame the state and legitimate companies as enemies. This is classic hybrid warfare: combining environmental damage with information operations. Akinade 2008 and 2019 link such exclusion, coercion, and environmental degradation to xenophobia, communal violence, and threats to agrosecurity.

4.4 Inter-Agency and Public-Private Gaps

Currently, NSCDC, Police, Military, Customs, and Mining Marshals operate without unified command. Intelligence is siloed. Private security operators at mine sites lack coordination with public agencies. This reduces interoperability and allows illegal miners to exploit jurisdictional gaps. Akinade 2007 and 2017 identify this pattern of weak coordination between public policing and private protection as a core driver of crime trends and insecurity.

5. DISCUSSION: AN INTEGRATED SECURITY ARCHITECTURE FOR MINERALS SOVEREIGNTY

5.1 Pillar 1: Minerals Security Command – For Jointness

Establish a joint command under the Office of National Security Adviser, integrating Military, Police, NSCDC, DSS, and Mining Marshals. Mandate: protect strategic mining corridors, secure haulage routes, and coordinate intelligence. Modelled on Operation Safe Haven, but focused on resource corridors. This operationalizes the jointness requirement emphasized in Akinade 2017 for critical infrastructure protection.

5.2 Pillar 2: Formalization and Community-Based Security

Formalize artisanal miners into cooperatives with licenses, training, and security support. Apply the early warning and reconciliation components of Akinade 2009 and community policing strategies from Akinade 2018 to prevent communal conflict. Community-based vigilance groups, vetted and trained, become first line of defense. This reduces recruitment pool for armed groups and builds trust.

5.3 Pillar 3: Intelligence-Led Regulation and Crime Prevention Models

Deploy geospatial monitoring, drones, and satellite surveillance on high-value mineral zones. Integrate data into National Counter Terrorism Centre. Financial intelligence units should track mineral export proceeds to block illicit flows. Apply crime prevention models from Akinade 2017 to identify risk hotspots and implement situational prevention measures at mining sites.

5.4 Pillar 4: Strategic Communications Against Disinformation

Counter narratives that paint mining as exploitation. Use local language radio, town halls, and social media to communicate benefits: jobs, infrastructure, community development funds. Pre-empt foreign disinformation that frames Nigeria as unable to manage its resources. Akinade 2008 provides the framework for communication skills in international relations and countering hybrid threats.

5.5 Pillar 5: Legal and Policy Reform

Amend Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act 2007 to:

1. Classify strategic minerals and associated infrastructure as national security assets, consistent with the critical infrastructure protection framework proposed in Akinade 2017
2. Increase penalties for illegal mining, mineral smuggling, and sabotage of mining infrastructure
3. Mandate inter-agency data sharing and joint threat assessment per asset, as recommended for CIP regimes
4. Establish Mineral Sovereignty Fund for reinvestment in host communities and infrastructure resilience
5. Integrate environmental protection and agrosecurity safeguards per Akinade 2019 to prevent pollution of farmland and water sources

This aligns with the statecraft approach in Akinade 2019, aligning domestic resource policy with national interest.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Nigeria's future security cannot rest on oil alone. Solid minerals provide a pathway to prosperity, fiscal sovereignty, and resilience against asymmetric and hybrid threats. However, prosperity without security is impossible. The state must assert control over mining spaces, build joint operational capacity, and win the information war. As argued in Akinade 2017, protecting resource infrastructure requires moving from reactive policing to proactive, intelligence-led, asset-specific security. The community policing and crime prevention models in Akinade 2017 and 2018 must be deployed to secure dispersed mining communities.

Key Recommendations:

1. Immediate: Activate Minerals Security Command with joint operations in Zamfara, Niger, Osun, and Ebonyi gold belts
2. Short-term: Formalize 500,000 artisanal miners into cooperatives with biometric ID and security clearance by 2027, applying the conflict prevention model in Akinade 2009 and community policing strategies in Akinade 2018
3. Medium-term: Enact Minerals Security Act to designate strategic minerals and harmonize agency mandates between public policing and private protection as outlined in Akinade 2017
4. Long-term: Build domestic processing capacity to capture value chain and reduce export of raw minerals vulnerable to external manipulation, while enforcing environmental protection standards per Akinade 2019

Securing Nigeria's future demands treating solid minerals not just as an economic sector, but as a frontline of national defense.

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