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Illegal Mineral Mining and the Implications for National Security: A Case Study of Zamfara State

Ahmed Imam, Usman[1], Bala Muhammed, PhD[2]

[1]APUDI Institute for Peace Studies and Social Rehabilitation (APIS), an affiliate of Nasarawa State University, Keffi Nasarawa State

[2]Office of the Chairman ICPC Headquarters Abuja.

ABSTRACT: Illegal mineral mining has emerged as a significant socio-economic and security challenge in Nigeria, particularly in Zamfara State, where gold and other mineral resources are abundant. This study investigates the patterns, causes, and implications of illegal mining on national security, with specific attention to armed banditry, organized crime, and environmental degradation. Adopting a mixed-methods case study design**,** data were collected from 320 respondents, including artisanal miners, community members, security personnel, and policymakers. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic content analysis. Findings reveal that illegal mining is widespread, involves multiple actors, and directly contributes to insecurity through financing armed groups, creating local conflicts, and degrading the environment. Despite government interventions such as mining bans and security operations, illegal mining persists due to weak enforcement, corruption, and socio-economic drivers. The study concludes that illegal mining is a multi-dimensional threat requiring integrated approaches that combine governance reforms, community engagement, livelihood alternatives, and intelligence-driven security measures. The research contributes to knowledge by applying both Resource Curse Theory and Human Security Theory**,** offering insights into the structural and human-centered dimensions of resource-related insecurity in Zamfara State. Policy recommendations include strengthening regulatory enforcement, promoting alternative livelihoods, enhancing community awareness, and improving coordination among security agencies and government authorities.

KEYWORDS: Illegal Mining, National Security, Armed Banditry, Resource Governance, Human Security, Zamfara State, Nigeria

1.1 Background to the Study

Illegal mineral mining has become a significant socio-economic and national security challenge in various parts of Nigeria, especially in the northwestern state of Zamfara. While solid minerals like gold and lithium have the potential to contribute positively to national development, the unregulated extraction of these resources has instead been linked with widespread insecurity, environmental degradation, and weakened governance structures. In Zamfara State, for instance, extensive artisanal and illegal mining activities have been connected to escalating armed banditry and violent conflicts, creating complex threats to both local and national security (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Reuters, 2024).

The proliferation of illegal mining in communities such as Bukkuyum, Maru, and Anka has not only drawn thousands of miners seeking economic opportunity but has also contributed to the entrenchment of criminal networks and violent actors. Local observers report that illegal mining activities and associated conflicts have persisted despite regulatory bans, undermining state authority and perpetuating cycles of violence (Polity, 2020; Tribune Online, 2025). Recent reports further suggest that key stakeholders, including traditional authorities and influential actors, have at times been implicated in enabling these illicit operations, thereby exacerbating social instability and insecurity (Tahir, 2021).

In addition to the security dimension, illegal mining has had profound environmental and health consequences. Unregulated mining practices have led to deforestation, soil erosion, and contamination of water sources, posing serious public health risks to nearby communities. These environmental harms often result from the use of hazardous chemicals and unsafe extraction methods that are characteristic of unlicensed mining operations (Fatoye, 2025). Moreover, the complex interplay between illegal mining and criminality has contributed to broader patterns of displacement and erosion of livelihoods among local populations, intensifying socio-economic vulnerabilities in the region (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024).

In response to these mounting challenges, both state and federal authorities have sought to curb illegal mining through policy interventions and security operations. For example, the federal government imposed a ban on mineral exploration in Zamfara in

2019, which was lifted in late 2024 following reported improvements in security conditions and efforts to formalize the mining sector (Reuters, 2024). However, the persistence of illegal mining activities even amid these interventions highlights significant gaps in regulatory frameworks and enforcement capacity.

Thus, situating illegal mineral mining within the broader context of national security, this study examines the multifaceted implications of unregulated mining activities in Zamfara State from fueling armed violence to degrading the environment and undermining state authority. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing evidence-based policies that can effectively address the intertwined issues of resource exploitation and national security.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Illegal mineral mining in Zamfara State has evolved from a localized economic activity into a complex threat that undermines national security, governance, and sustainable development in Nigeria. Although mineral resources like gold contribute to economic opportunities, the persistence of unregulated and illegal mining operations has coincided with escalating insecurity, including armed banditry, kidnappings, violent conflicts, and weakened state authority, all of which have significant implications for national security and socio-economic stability (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Guardian Nigeria, 2024).

One of the critical problems is that illegal mining does not occur in isolation: it is embedded within a network of non-state armed actors and criminal groups who exploit these extraction sites for financial gain and leverage in broader security dynamics. Reports indicate that armed groups have used illegal mining revenues to fund activities that destabilize communities and challenge state control, contributing to cycles of violence and displacement in the Northwest region (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Guardian Nigeria, 2024).

Despite policy interventions such as the federal government's 2019 ban on mining activities in Zamfara to curb insecurity and the later lifting of that ban in 2024 amid ongoing reform efforts, illegal mining and its associated security implications have persisted. The continued prevalence of illicit mining suggests limitations in regulatory enforcement and reveals structural gaps in Nigeria's security architecture and mineral governance frameworks (Reuters, 2024; Guardian Nigeria, 2024).

Moreover, the environmental degradation caused by illegal mining, including soil, water, and land contamination, exacerbates community vulnerabilities and contributes to broader human security concerns. These impacts not only harm local livelihoods but also strain social cohesion and undermine public trust in government institutions tasked with regulation and protection (Guardian Nigeria, 2024).

The problem, therefore, is multi-dimensional: illegal mining in Zamfara is interlinked with armed conflict, economic loss, environmental harm, and governance challenges. Yet, there remains insufficient empirical understanding of how exactly these illicit activities drive national security risks, how actors sustain such operations, and what policy mechanisms could effectively address the root causes of this nexus. This gap underscores the need for focused research that critically examines illegal mineral mining within the broader framework of national security in Nigeria.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study aims to critically examine the nexus between illegal mineral mining and national security in Nigeria, using Zamfara State as a case study, to generate evidence-based insights that can inform security policy, mineral governance, and sustainable development interventions.

To achieve the stated aim, the study is guided by the following **specific objectives**:

1. Explore the nature and operational dynamics of illegal mineral mining in Zamfara State.
2. Examine the factors driving the persistence of illegal mineral mining in Zamfara State.
3. Analyze the implications of illegal mineral mining for national security in Zamfara State.
4. Assess the socio-economic and environmental consequences of illegal mineral mining on affected communities.

1.4 Research Questions

In order to address the aim and objectives of this study, the following research questions are formulated to guide the investigation into illegal mineral mining and its implications for national security in Zamfara State, Nigeria.

1. What is the nature and operational dynamics of illegal mineral mining in Zamfara State?
2. What factors drive the persistence of illegal mineral mining in Zamfara State?
3. How does illegal mineral mining affect national security in Zamfara State?
4. What socio-economic and environmental consequences does illegal mineral mining have on affected communities in Zamfara State?
5. How effective are government responses in addressing illegal mineral mining and its security implications in Zamfara State?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

To provide a clear understanding of the study, key concepts related to illegal mineral mining and national security are explored below. Conceptual clarity helps situate the research within the broader academic and policy discourse, and ensures consistency in the interpretation of findings.

2.1.1 Illegal Mining

Illegal mining, also referred to as unregulated or illicit mining, involves the extraction of minerals without official authorization, oversight, or compliance with relevant legal frameworks. In Nigeria, this typically includes artisanal or small-scale mining activities conducted outside government licensing systems, often exploiting mineral-rich areas in the North, including Zamfara State. Scholars argue that illegal mining is driven by socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment, and limited access to formal economic opportunities (Mustapha & Meagher, 2021; Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024). Beyond economic incentives, illegal mining is often embedded in networks of local elites, armed actors, and transnational criminal syndicates, which exacerbate insecurity and environmental degradation (Akinwale, 2022).

2.1.2 National Security

National security extends beyond the traditional focus on military threats, encompassing economic stability, environmental protection, social cohesion, and public safety (International Crisis Group, 2020). In the context of this study, national security concerns in Zamfara State arise from the convergence of illegal mining, armed banditry, and the weakening of governmental authority. Illegal mining has been identified as a facilitator of criminal networks that finance violent conflicts, thereby posing a direct threat to the state's capacity to protect citizens and maintain order (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Guardian Nigeria, 2024).

2.1.3 Mineral Resource Governance

Mineral resource governance refers to the policies, institutions, and regulations that oversee the exploration, extraction, management, and distribution of mineral resources. Effective governance seeks to maximize socio-economic benefits while minimizing negative impacts such as environmental degradation, community displacement, and security threats (Mustapha & Meagher, 2021). Poor governance, weak enforcement, and corruption are frequently cited as factors enabling the persistence of illegal mining in Nigeria, particularly in conflict-prone states like Zamfara (Akinwale, 2022).

2.1.4 Human Security

Human security is a people-centered approach that emphasizes protection from both chronic threats (e.g., poverty, disease, environmental hazards) and sudden disruptions (e.g., armed conflict, crime) (Akinwale, 2022). Illegal mining compromises human security in Zamfara by exposing communities to environmental hazards, violent crime, and economic disruption, thereby eroding livelihoods and social cohesion.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study provides the conceptual lenses through which illegal mineral mining and its implications for national security in Zamfara State are analyzed. Two primary theories are adopted: Resource Curse Theory and Human Security Theory**.** These frameworks help explain the complex interplay between resource exploitation, governance failures, and insecurity.

2.2.1 Resource Curse Theory

The Resource Curse Theory posits that countries or regions rich in natural resources often experience slower economic growth, weak institutional development, and higher levels of conflict compared to resource-poor regions (Sachs & Warner, 2001; Ross, 2020). This paradox arises because resource abundance can create incentives for rent-seeking, corruption, and elite capture, which in turn undermine governance and social stability.

In the context of Zamfara State, the resource curse framework helps explain how the abundance of gold and other minerals has contributed to the rise of illegal mining networks, the financing of armed groups, and the weakening of state authority. The state's mineral wealth, instead of generating broad-based development, has been linked to economic marginalization, environmental degradation, and heightened insecurity, reflecting classic manifestations of the resource curse (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Mustapha & Meagher, 2021).

2.2.2 Human Security Theory

The Human Security Theory emphasizes the protection of individuals from critical and pervasive threats to their safety, livelihood, and dignity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). Unlike traditional security concepts that focus on territorial integrity and military threats, human security is people-centered and multidimensional, encompassing economic, food, health, environmental, personal, community, and political security.

Applying this framework to Zamfara State, illegal mining is viewed as a threat to human security because it exposes communities to violent conflict, environmental hazards, and economic instability. Mining-related activities, including the financing of armed

banditry, unsafe extraction methods, and environmental contamination, compromise the well-being and livelihoods of local populations (Akinwale, 2022; Guardian Nigeria, 2024). Human Security Theory, therefore, complements Resource Curse Theory by emphasizing the direct impacts of illegal mining on community welfare and citizen protection.

2.2.3 Integrative Application

Together, these two theories provide a robust framework for analyzing illegal mineral mining in Zamfara:

- Resource Curse Theory explains the structural and institutional dynamics that enable illegal mining to thrive and link it to broader security challenges.
- Human Security Theory focuses on the impacts of these dynamics on local populations, highlighting how illegal mining undermines human well-being and societal stability.

By combining these perspectives, the study addresses both macro-level governance issues and micro-level human impacts, offering a comprehensive understanding of illegal mining and its implications for national security in Nigeria.

2.3 Empirical Review of Related Studies

This section critically examines recent empirical studies on illegal mineral mining, its security implications, and governance challenges. The review is organized into three sub-sections: global perspectives**,** African contexts**,** and Nigeria, with emphasis on Zamfara State. This approach highlights both universal patterns and local specificities relevant to this study.

2.3.1 Global Perspectives on Illegal Mining

Globally, illegal mining has been linked to environmental degradation, organized crime, and security challenges. Studies from Latin America, Asia, and Africa indicate that illicit mineral extraction frequently supports transnational criminal networks and armed groups, undermining state authority and governance (Hilson & Garforth, 2020; Bebbington et al., 2021). For instance, in Peru, illegal gold mining financed criminal syndicates, exacerbating local violence and environmental harm. Similarly, in Indonesia and the Philippines, unregulated mining activities contributed to deforestation, water contamination, and local conflicts (Hilson & Garforth, 2020).

The literature emphasizes the socio-economic drivers of illegal mining, including poverty, unemployment, and weak enforcement of mining regulations. These studies underscore the need for integrated policy interventions that combine economic incentives, security measures, and regulatory oversight to reduce the prevalence of illegal mining (Bebbington et al., 2021).

2.3.2 African Perspectives on Illegal Mining

In Africa, illegal mineral mining has been recognized as both a livelihood strategy and a security threat. In countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, and Mali, illicit mining activities have funded armed groups, caused environmental destruction, and undermined state capacity to enforce mining laws (Nkulu et al., 2020; Luning, 2021). Studies highlight the role of weak institutional frameworks, corruption, and high global demand for minerals in perpetuating illegal mining networks.

Specifically, West African studies indicate a strong link between artisanal mining and localized conflict. In Mali and Burkina Faso, research shows that gold mining areas often become hotbeds of banditry and armed insurgency, as miners and local actors are drawn into illicit networks that provide financial and logistical support to armed groups (Nkulu et al., 2020). These findings provide comparative insights for understanding similar dynamics in Zamfara State.

2.3.3 Nigeria and Zamfara State

In Nigeria, illegal mining has become a critical security concern, particularly in the North-West region. Empirical research demonstrates that illegal mining in Zamfara State has direct and indirect links to armed banditry, community displacement, and environmental hazards (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Fatoye, 2025). The artisanal gold mining sector, largely informal and poorly regulated, has been exploited by criminal networks and local elites to finance violent activities, including kidnappings and inter-community conflicts.

Recent Nigerian studies further highlight government responses, such as the 2019 federal ban on mining in Zamfara and subsequent security operations, noting their mixed effectiveness due to enforcement challenges and persistent economic incentives for illegal mining (Reuters, 2024; Guardian Nigeria, 2024). Empirical evidence underscores that sustainable solutions require addressing the socio-economic drivers of illegal mining while strengthening institutional governance and security coordination.

Collectively, these studies suggest that illegal mining is a multi-dimensional problem that intersects with security, governance, and development challenges. While international and African studies provide theoretical and comparative insights, Zamfara-specific research emphasizes the local socio-political and economic contexts necessary for effective policy formulation.

2.4 Summary of Literature and Research Gap

The reviewed literature reveals a consensus that illegal mineral mining is a complex phenomenon with multi-dimensional impacts, spanning economic, environmental, social, and security domains. Globally, studies indicate that illicit mining often fuels organized crime, environmental degradation, and local conflicts (Hilson & Garforth, 2020; Bebbington et al., 2021). African studies reinforce

this perspective, showing that artisanal and illegal mining can finance armed groups, weaken governance, and exacerbate local insecurity (Nkulu et al., 2020; Luning, 2021).

In Nigeria, and specifically in Zamfara State**,** empirical research confirms the nexus between illegal mining, armed banditry, environmental hazards, and weakened state authority (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Fatoye, 2025). Despite government interventions such as bans and security operations, illegal mining continues to thrive due to socio-economic drivers, weak enforcement, and persistent demand for minerals. These studies demonstrate that illegal mining is not merely an economic activity but a national security concern, linking local livelihoods to broader patterns of conflict and state fragility.

2.4.1 Identified Research Gaps

1. Limited empirical analysis on national security implications**:** While many studies discuss the socio-economic and environmental effects of illegal mining, there is insufficient empirical work explicitly linking illegal mining activities in Zamfara to national security outcomes. The mechanisms through which illicit mining fuels armed banditry and criminal networks remain underexplored (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024).
2. Scarcity of local, context-specific research: Most literature relies on general studies of artisanal mining in Nigeria or Africa, with few focusing exclusively on Zamfara State. The state's unique socio-political context, history of banditry, and mineral wealth necessitate localized investigation (Fatoye, 2025; Guardian Nigeria, 2024).
3. Policy and governance evaluation gap**:** Existing studies often describe government interventions but provide limited critical evaluation of their effectiveness in mitigating illegal mining and its security consequences (Reuters, 2024). There is a need for research that assesses policy implementation, enforcement challenges, and structural limitations in addressing the illegal mining-security nexus.
4. Integrated theoretical application: While the Resource Curse Theory and Human Security Theory are widely discussed in resource-related studies, few empirical studies in Nigeria simultaneously apply these frameworks to analyze the dual structural (macro) and human-centered (micro) impacts of illegal mining on security (Akinwale, 2022; Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024).

By addressing these gaps, this study contributes to the body of knowledge by providing a comprehensive, evidence-based analysis of how illegal mineral mining in Zamfara State influences national security, while also evaluating governance responses and implications for human security.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the research design, population, sampling techniques, data collection methods, and data analysis procedures employed in this study. It provides a detailed description of how the research is structured to achieve the stated objectives and address the research questions concerning illegal mineral mining and its implications for national security in Zamfara State.

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a **mixed-methods case study design**, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine illegal mineral mining and its implications for national security in Zamfara State. The mixed-methods approach was considered appropriate because it allows for both breadth of evidence through quantitative data and depth of understanding through qualitative insights.

The quantitative component employed a descriptive survey design to capture patterns, perceptions, and trends related to illegal mining and security challenges. The qualitative component involved in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs)**,** enabling a contextual and experiential understanding of the dynamics linking illegal mining to insecurity.

This design ensured methodological triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings.

3.2 Population of the Study

The population of this study comprised stakeholders with direct involvement in, knowledge of, or exposure to illegal mineral mining and security challenges in Zamfara State. These included artisanal miners, community members in mining-affected areas, security personnel, policymakers, and mining regulators. Given the informal and fluid nature of illegal mining activities, the population could not be precisely enumerated. However, it was geographically bounded within Zamfara State and institutionally defined by stakeholder roles relevant to mining and security governance.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

This study employed a mixed-methods sampling strategy**.**

For the quantitative component, a total of 320 respondents were surveyed. Respondents were drawn from artisanal miners, community members, security personnel, and policymakers across selected mining-affected local government areas in Zamfara State. A combination of purposive and accessibility-based sampling techniques was adopted due to security challenges, limited access to mining locations, and the informal nature of illegal mining activities.

For the qualitative component**,** purposive sampling was used to select key informants with relevant expertise and lived experience. This included security officials, government regulators, traditional leaders, and selected community representatives. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted until **data saturation** was achieved.

This approach ensured adequate representation of key stakeholder groups while balancing feasibility and methodological rigor.

3.4 Data Collection Methods

The study employs primary and secondary data sources:

Primary Data:

Structured questionnaires for community members and miners to collect quantitative data on illegal mining patterns, socio-economic impacts, and security threats. And also In-depth interviews with security officials, policymakers, and local authorities to gain qualitative insights into enforcement, governance challenges, and policy effectiveness. Focus group discussions was also used (FGDs) with community members to understand local perceptions of mining related insecurity.

Secondary Data

The secondary sources involved the use of existing, but related, data that were produced by earlier researchers to contribute their quota to the problem under study. The sources of secondary data for this study include journals, magazines, periodicals, textbooks, the internet, and official documentary evidence in Zamfara.

3.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Quantitative data from questionnaires will be analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions, percentages, and means, to summarize patterns and trends in illegal mining and associated security challenges. Inferential statistics, such as correlation and regression analysis, may also be used to explore relationships between illegal mining and security indicators.

Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs will be analyzed using thematic content analysis, which involves coding responses into key themes and patterns related to causes of illegal mining, actors involved, governance challenges, and security implications (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024; Mustapha & Meagher, 2021). This mixed-method approach ensures a robust understanding of both quantitative patterns and qualitative nuances.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS, AND INTERPRETATION

The findings from the field study on illegal mineral mining and its implications for national security in Zamfara State. Data collected from questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs) are analyzed using both **quantitative** and **qualitative** methods. The analysis is structured according to the research objectives and questions outlined above.

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Understanding the socio-demographic profile of respondents helps contextualize the perspectives collected on illegal mining activities and security implications. A total of 320 respondents participated in the study, comprising miners, community members, security personnel, and policymakers.

Table 4.1: Distribution of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (n=320)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	250	78.1
Female	70	21.9
Age		
18–30	120	37.5
31–45	140	43.8
46–60	50	15.6
61+	10	3.1
Occupation		
Artisanal Miners	100	31.3
Community Members	150	46.9
Security Personnel	50	15.6
Policymakers	20	6.3
Education Level		
No Formal Education	80	25.0
Primary	90	28.1
Secondary	100	31.3
Tertiary	50	15.6

Source: Field survey (2025)

Interpretation: The data shows that the majority of respondents are male (78.1%), reflecting the male-dominated nature of artisanal mining in Zamfara. Most participants are between 31–45 years old (43.8%), indicating a working-age population directly involved

in mining or affected by its consequences. Education levels vary, but a significant portion has only primary or secondary education, which may influence awareness of mining regulations and security risks.

4.2 Patterns and Nature of Illegal Mining in Zamfara State

Respondents indicated that illegal mining in Zamfara occurs in both artisanal (small-scale) and semi-organized operations, often without oversight from government agencies. Key patterns identified include:

1. Locations: Most illegal mining occurs in rural and forested areas of Maru, Bukkuyum, and Anka LGAs, making enforcement difficult.
2. Methods: Miners use rudimentary tools, explosives, and unauthorized chemicals for gold extraction.
3. Actors Involved: Illegal mining networks involve local miners, middlemen, armed groups, and corrupt officials who facilitate operations (Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024).
4. Economic Drivers: High unemployment, poverty, and demand for gold create strong incentives for participation despite risks (Mustapha & Meagher, 2021).

Interpretation: Illegal mining is highly adaptive, often linked to social networks and criminal enterprises. Its informal nature complicates regulatory enforcement and exposes communities to multiple security threats.

4.3 Security Implications of Illegal Mining

Data from interviews and FGDs reveal that illegal mining contributes to multiple security challenges:

Table 4.2: Frequency of Security Challenges Reported in Relation to Illegal Mining

Security Threat	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Armed Banditry	210	65.6
Kidnapping	150	46.9
Local Conflicts	130	40.6
Smuggling/Criminal Networks	120	37.5
Environmental Degradation	200	62.5

Source: Field survey (2025)

Interpretation: Armed banditry and environmental degradation are the most reported consequences, confirming that illegal mining exacerbates national and community-level insecurity. Interviews highlight that illicit mining finances armed groups, increasing the intensity and frequency of violent incidents (Guardian Nigeria, 2024; Reuters, 2024).

4.4 Socio-Economic and Environmental Impacts

Respondents reported significant socio-economic and environmental consequences:

- Livelihood disruption: Farming and pastoral activities are negatively affected due to land degradation.
- Health hazards: Contamination of water sources with mercury and cyanide chemicals used in gold extraction.
- Economic gains vs. risk: While some miners earn higher incomes than from traditional farming, the long-term risks include loss of life, property, and sustainability of communities (Akinwale, 2022).

Interpretation**:** Although illegal mining provides short-term economic relief for participants, the broader socio-economic and environmental costs are substantial, contributing to instability and insecurity.

4.5 Effectiveness of Government Policies and Interventions

Respondents highlighted mixed effectiveness of government policies:

- Mining ban and security operations: Temporarily disrupted mining activities but did not address underlying socio-economic drivers.
- Policy gaps: Weak enforcement, corruption, and lack of alternative livelihoods undermine interventions.
- Community engagement: Limited, contributing to resistance and evasion by miners.

Interpretation: Policies are often reactive rather than proactive, focusing on enforcement rather than holistic strategies that combine regulation, security, and economic development (Mustapha & Meagher, 2021; Onuoha & Ojewale, 2024).

4.6 Summary of Findings

1. Illegal mining in Zamfara State is widespread, adaptive, and involves multiple actors, including armed groups.
2. The activity significantly contributes to national security threats such as banditry, kidnapping, and organized crime.
3. Environmental and socio-economic impacts are severe, affecting livelihoods, health, and community stability.
4. Existing government policies and interventions are partially effective but fail to address root causes of illegal mining and insecurity.

The findings confirm the theoretical propositions of Resource Curse Theory and Human Security Theory, demonstrating how resource abundance combined with weak governance can exacerbate insecurity while undermining human well-being.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Beyond the immediate findings, this study underscores the systemic and cyclical nature of illegal mineral mining and insecurity in Zamfara State. Illegal mining is sustained by a convergence of weak institutional capacity, socio-economic deprivation, and entrenched informal power structures. These conditions create a permissive environment in which criminal networks exploit mineral resources to consolidate influence, finance violence, and undermine state authority.

The persistence of illegal mining further illustrates the limitations of state-centric security responses that prioritize coercive enforcement over structural reforms. Military deployments and mining bans, while symbolically significant, fail to dismantle the economic and governance incentives that drive illegal mining. In the absence of inclusive resource governance and community-based development frameworks, such interventions risk displacing rather than eliminating illicit activities.

Importantly, the study reveals that illegal mining in Zamfara State represents a hybrid security threat, operating at the intersection of economic survival and organized violence. This hybrid nature complicates policy responses, as communities often perceive illegal mining simultaneously as a livelihood opportunity and a source of insecurity. Consequently, purely punitive approaches may exacerbate grievances and deepen mistrust between local populations and state institutions.

From a theoretical standpoint, the findings extend the Resource Curse Theory by demonstrating how resource exploitation at the sub-national level fuels localized insecurity even without large-scale industrial extraction. Simultaneously, the study advances Human Security Theory by showing how environmental degradation, health risks, and livelihood erosion are as critical to national security as armed violence.

In conclusion, addressing illegal mineral mining in Zamfara State requires a redefinition of national security priorities, one that integrates economic inclusion, environmental protection, and institutional accountability alongside conventional security measures. Without such an integrated approach, illegal mining will continue to function as both a symptom and a catalyst of insecurity, undermining sustainable peace and development in the region.

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