RESOURCE GOVERNANCE AND LOCAL POWER STRUCTURES: A STUDY OF MINING SECTOR IN TARABA STATE

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Abstract
This paper investigates how resource governance and local power structures interact to shape mining outcomes in Taraba State, Nigeria. Rooted in political economy and resource-governance literature, the study examines how formal institutions (statutory laws, regulatory agencies, and state-level policies) and informal arrangements (traditional authorities, patronage networks, and community-level practices) mediate access to mineral rents, the distribution of benefits, and patterns of environmental and social impact. Using a mixed-methods case-study design, the paper combines both primary and secondary sources of data. The findings show that overlapping and often ambiguous legal jurisdictions, weak enforcement capacity, and the political salience of mining generate bargaining processes in which local power brokers play decisive roles in mediating access, extracting rents, and shaping mitigation practices. These informal mechanisms frequently subvert formal regulatory objectives, producing uneven benefit distribution, recurrent conflict, and gaps in environmental stewardship. By unpacking the micro-level dynamics that connect political settlements to observable mining outcomes, the study contributes empirically grounded policy recommendations aimed at aligning federal and state regulations with local realities. It recommends tailored governance reforms that strengthen accountability, clarify jurisdictional roles, and integrate legitimate local actors into formal regulatory frameworks to enhance equity, transparency, and sustainability in Taraba State's mining sector.
Keywords: *Resource Governance, Political Economy, Informal Institutions, Rent Capture, mining, Taraba State.*

Introduction

Nigeria's solid minerals revival has unfolded within a complex political-economy in which formal legal frameworks coexist and often collide with informal authority, market intermediaries and security actors. While federal law centralizes ownership and regulation of minerals (Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act 2007), everyday decision-making around access to deposits, labour, land and rents is negotiated locally among chiefs, youth associations, vigilante groups, local government officials, security agencies, and buyers. This tension between juridical centralization and practical decentralization is especially visible in Taraba State, where artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) dominates production and shapes livelihoods, environmental risks and conflict dynamics (NEITI; 2019–2021; Minerals & Mining Act 2007). Taraba State, located in northeastern Nigeria, is endowed with a wealth of solid minerals, including barite, limestone, coal, and gemstones. Despite its resource potential, mining in the state has largely remained informal, poorly regulated, and embedded within complex local power structures. Understanding why resource governance remains weak in such a context requires a framework that goes beyond institutional design to capture the role of power relations and political bargains.

A political-economy lens highlights how mineral rents are produced and distributed through "deals" among state and non-state actors under conditions of limited enforcement and competing sovereignties (North, Wallis & Weingast, 2009; Khan, 2010). In such situations, neo-patrimonial practices, elite brokerage, selective enforcement, and informal taxation often structure who mines, who trades, and who benefits (Booth, 2012). In the artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) literature, several scholars show how weak formal rights, high entry but low compliance costs, and dense trader networks generate hybrid governance regimes in which customary authorities and security actors exercise de facto control (Hilson, 2002; Siegel & Veiga, 2009). Nigeria's transparency drive through NEITI has improved revenue disclosure in hydrocarbons and begun to touch solid minerals; however, gaps remain in subnational oversight, production reporting, and community benefit sharing precisely where local power structures mediate extraction (NEITI; 2019–2021, NRGI/UNDP, 2016).

Taraba's varied geology hosts gemstones, notably blue sapphire from the Mambilla Plateau in Sardauna Local Government Area and alluvial gold in Gashaka Local Government Area, alongside occurrences of barite and other industrial minerals (Oruonye & Ahmed, 2018). In practice, mining is overwhelmingly artisanal, organized around seasonal rushes, small pits along streams and farmlands, and mobile buyer networks that link remote sites to interstate and international markets (Gashaka study; Oruonye & Ahmed, 2018). The "sapphire economy" exemplifies hybrid governance in Taraba State; however, media and policy accounts document repeated illegal rushes, seizures and smuggling from Sardauna and nearby Local Government Areas, with state task forces intermittently cracking down while buyers often interstate or foreign continue to operate through intermediaries (The Nation, 2023). These dynamics reflect the friction between federal licensing (exclusive to Abuja under the 2007 Act) and local claims over land, forest and customary authority. Local elites, traditional rulers, ward councillors, and influential youth leaders facilitate or obstruct access by issuing letters of introduction, mobilizing labour, setting "security" or "development" levies, and brokering relations with police or military detachments. When state patrols or "mining marshals" enforce periodic bans, production goes underground rather than ceasing, displacing activity to new sites and reconfiguring rent flows (NEITI 2019-2021).

Consequently, this has led to the resource governance gaps in Taraba State, where three governance gaps recur. First, there is a licensing enforcement mismatch where federal licensing is distant from rural Taraba, and most operators lack titles, while regulators face a thin presence, limited budgets and contested mandates across Mines Inspectorate, security agencies and state task forces (NEITI, 2019-2021). Second, informality of trade where gemstone and gold value chains are buyer-driven; unrecorded exports and cash transactions truncate royalty collection, undermine production data, and empower middlemen who advance cash and equipment in exchange for exclusivity (Gemstone, 2022; NEITI, 2019-2021). Third, community benefit and accountability, where royalty flows to the centre rarely translate into visible local public goods; states and Local Government Areas depend on irregular transfers and ad-hoc levies, while chiefs and vigilantes collect "informal taxes," fueling grievances and contestation (NRGI/UNDP; 2016 NEITI, 2019–2021). In Taraba, these gaps are amplified by rush dynamics. For instance, studies of Gashaka's alluvial gold show low-barrier entry, rudimentary techniques, and environmental externalities (mercury losses, river siltation) that local institutions struggle to regulate Gashaka gold (Anene et al., 2024). Similarly, where coercive capacity is fragmented, rival enforcement by task forces, police units, and community guards can convert governance into rent-seeking and episodic violence over pits and toll points (CAPPA, 2024; AP News, 2024).

On the other hand, the local power structures and the distribution of mineral rents in Taraba are shaped by different strata of authority. For instance, the traditional institutions, including village heads, district chiefs, confer local legitimacy, allocate land and mediate disputes, often monetizing access through "customary" fees. The youth associations and vigilantes provide security, enforce turn-taking at pits, and tax flows at checkpoints, a function that escalates into racketeering during rushes. Similarly, local government officials issue letters and collect levies but lack legal powers over licensing, creating incentives to negotiate informal settlements with miners and buyers. The security agencies, such as the police, military, and civil defence, enforce intermittent bans and escort shipments; their presence reduces violence but also creates new fees. While buyers or traders advance finance and equipment, set prices, and arbitrate quality, because they control market access, they accumulate outsized rents relative to labourers. Empirically, scholars and policy reports on Taraba's sapphire and gold confirm these roles, showing how "governance" is an assemblage of overlapping, negotiated controls rather than a single hierarchy (Oruonye & Ahmed, 2018; The Nation, 2023). In such fields, political settlements are local; therefore, stability depends on whether gatekeepers perceive themselves as included in rent distribution (Khan, 2010). When exclusion increases, for example, sudden federal raids or exclusive deals with outside investors, contestation increases, often displacing extraction rather than formalizing it (NEITI, 2019-2021; AP News, 2024).

These issues are problems for policy and research because, for Taraba state, the challenge is not merely technical formalization but re-aligning incentives across scales so that local authorities benefit more from compliance than from shadow rents. Also, comparative work on resource revenue sharing suggests that predictable subnational transfers tied to production, plus ring-fenced community funds with transparent, participatory governance, lower conflict risks, and improve local public goods if combined with credible monitoring (NRGI/UNDP, 2016). At the same time, production-side reforms, cooperative licensing, traceability for gemstones and gold and state-supported extension for safer processing are essential to shift ASM from a rush-and-smuggle model to a tax-and-upgrade pathway (NEITI; 2019-2021; Anene et al., 2024). Consequently, the political economy of mining in Taraba State is defined by the interplay of federal law, subnational fiscal dependence, and locally negotiated authority. Thus, understanding who controls access, who mediates markets, and how rents circulate is a precondition for any governance intervention that aims to formalize production, reduce harm, and deliver visible benefits to mining-affected communities. Therefore, this paper explains resource governance and local power structures, focusing on mining sector in Taraba State.

Local Power Structures and Mining Activities

Mining activities often reshape local power relations by redistributing economic resources, influencing social hierarchies, and reconfiguring governance arrangements in resource-rich communities. Local power structures refer to the constellation of traditional authorities, community leaders, political elites, and local institutions that exercise influence over decision-making, resource allocation, and conflict resolution within mining regions (Hilson, 2002; Bebbington et al., 2008). In many developing countries, the governance of mining is mediated through these local structures, where chiefs, elders, and traditional institutions play central roles in negotiating access to land, royalties, and community benefits (Lahiri-Dutt, 2011). For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa, customary authorities often act as gatekeepers between mining corporations and local populations, thereby shaping who benefits and who is marginalized (Campbell, 2009).

This role of traditional institutions creates a hybrid governance structure, where formal state regulations intersect with customary norms and power relations (Ostrom, 1990; Lavers & Hickey, 2016). At the same time, mining can exacerbate tensions within local power structures. The inflow of mining rents and compensation packages may strengthen the authority of elites who control resource distribution, leading to patronage and exclusion of marginalized groups (Bebbington & Bury, 2013). Such dynamics have been observed in Ghana's gold mining regions, where chiefs and local elites often appropriate royalties and community development funds, sparking grievances among ordinary community members (Hilson, 2017). These inequalities often translate into resource conflicts, land disputes, and weakened social cohesion (Campbell, 2003; Maconachie, 2009).

Moreover, the intersection of mining and local power is not limited to traditional authorities. Local government officials, civil society actors, and youth groups also play critical roles in mediating access to benefits and resisting exploitation. In Latin America, for example, community mobilization against mining projects has empowered local organizations to challenge both state and corporate actors, reshaping local governance structures (Bebbington et al., 2008). Similarly, in Nigeria, artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) has given rise to informal power networks involving local politicians, security agencies, and community leaders, resulting in complex governance arrangements that blur the boundaries between legality and illegality (Adebayo & Iledare, 2020). Overall, the relationship between mining and local power structures is characterized by contestation and negotiation. Mining can reinforce traditional hierarchies and elite capture, but it can also provide opportunities for marginalized actors to renegotiate their positions in local governance systems (Bebbington & Bury, 2013). Understanding these dynamics is crucial for designing inclusive and sustainable mining governance frameworks.

Scholars employ a range of theoretical lenses to explain how mining reshapes local power. Political-economy approaches (elite capture, patronage networks) foreground how rents from mining are distributed and contested, producing incentives for local elites to consolidate control (Bebbington & Bury, 2013; Adebayo & Iledare, 2020). Institutional and commons theories highlight how overlapping formal and customary institutions create hybrid governance arrangements that determine resource access and collective action outcomes (Ostrom, 1990; Lahiri-Dutt, 2011). Political settlement and clientelism literatures emphasize how the configuration of local bargains between chiefs, local politicians, corporations, and state agents conditions who benefit from mining and how conflicts are managed (Lavers & Hickey, 2016; Bebbington et al., 2008).

In many contexts, traditional authorities or customary landholders act as gatekeepers, negotiating land leases, compensation, and benefit-sharing with companies. Control over land thereby becomes a core source of local authority and a mechanism for elite capture (Lahiri-Dutt, 2011; Campbell, 2009). Mining generates flows of money (royalties, jobs, contracts). When these flows are channelled through local elites, chiefs, party officials, and contractors, it strengthens patron–client relations and can lock communities into dependency and exclusionary governance (Bebbington & Bury, 2013; Adebayo & Iledare, 2020). Local leaders may be co-opted by firms or the state (through employment, contracts, or direct payments), becoming brokers who mediate between communities and external actors. This brokerage role can both stabilize and distort local governance (Hilson, 2002; Maconachie, 2009). Similarly, informal networks and illicit economies, especially in artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) informal networks link miners, middlemen, local politicians, and security actors. These networks often operate in legal grey zones and reshape local power by rewarding those with political connections (Adebayo & Iledare, 2020; Hilson, 2017).

Studies of gold and diamond regions show chiefs and local elites often capture community benefits (Hilson, 2017; Maconachie, 2009). In Ghana and Sierra Leone, actors outside formal regulation, including youth gangs or artisanal miners, can challenge elite control, producing cycles of violence and state intervention (Hilson, 2017; Maconachie, 2009). Research in Andean countries highlights strong civil-society mobilization against extractives and shows how social movements can reconfigure local power by pressing for greater consultation or environmental protections; yet outcomes vary depending on national institutions and transnational linkages (Bebbington et al., 2008; Bebbington & Bury, 2013). The porous interface between formal institutions, informal miners, and political actors creates hybrid governance where illegality and formal regulation co-exist, often producing insecurity and weak enforcement (Adebayo & Iledare, 2020). Multiple authors document how mining revenues often reinforce pre-existing hierarchies, producing local inequality and social tensions (Bebbington &

Bury, 2013; Lahiri-Dutt, 2011). Disputes over land, jobs, and environmental harms frequently escalate into conflicts when distribution mechanisms are opaque or exclusionary (Bebbington et al., 2008; Hilson, 2017).

Furthermore, the coexistence of customary and statutory rules creates ambiguous accountability paths, complicating efforts to ensure transparent benefit-sharing and environmental compliance (Ostrom, 1990; Campbell, 2009). While much literature stresses capture and marginalization, several studies show how community mobilization, legal reforms, or corporate social responsibility initiatives can open spaces for more inclusive bargaining, although gains are often partial and contingent (Bebbington et al., 2008; Lavers & Hickey, 2016). Scholars combine qualitative case studies (ethnography, interviews, archival work) with quantitative analyses of revenue distribution and conflict incidence. Comparative regional work (e.g., Andes vs. West Africa) has been especially useful to surface institutional and historical differences that shape outcomes (Bebbington et al., 2008; Maconachie, 2009). Recent contributions call for mixed-methods approaches that link micro-level household impacts to macro-level political bargains (Bebbington & Bury, 2013). The literature converges on the view that local power structures are central to understanding mining outcomes. Mining is not merely an economic activity; it is a political process that reshapes authority, creates new gatekeepers, and reconfigures social relations. Effective governance reforms, therefore, need to engage with local power, not ignore it by designing mechanisms that increase transparency, broaden participation, and institutionalize checks on elite capture (Ostrom, 1990; Bebbington & Bury, 2013; Campbell, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on the political settlements theory. Political Settlements Theory, rooted in political economy, refers to the balance or distribution of power between contending groups and classes, and the institutions through which this power is exercised. It emphasizes the role of elite bargains and informal arrangements in shaping institutions; the durability or fragility of institutions based on the inclusivity of the settlement, and the influence of external factors (such as foreign investors or federal policies) on internal power dynamics. In contexts like Taraba state, where formal institutions are often weak, informal arrangements and elite pacts can significantly influence how resources are governed. The concept of political settlements has its roots in political economy and development studies, with several scholars contributing to its articulation. Early uses of the term can be traced to Mushtaq Khan (1995, 2010), who is widely regarded as one of its central proponents. Khan defines a political settlement as a "combination of power and institutions that is mutually compatible and sustainable in terms of economic and political viability" (Khan, 2010, p. 4). His work emphasizes the role of elite bargains and the distribution of rents in shaping governance outcomes in developing countries. Other scholars, such as Di John and Putzel (2009), have expanded the theory, describing political settlements as the "balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and classes, on which any state is based." Similarly, North, Wallis, Webb, and Weingast (2009) introduced the related idea of "limited access orders," highlighting how coalitions of elites structure institutions to maintain stability. Together, these scholars frame political settlements as a useful lens for understanding why governance outcomes vary across contexts, particularly in resource-dependent and fragile states.

Political settlements theory assumes that institutions are not neutral or technocratic but are shaped by the balance of power among elites and social groups (Khan, 2010). Formal laws (such as mining acts) matter less than the informal arrangements through which elites negotiate rents and authority. The theory argues that governance outcomes depend on the ability of ruling coalitions to maintain stability by distributing rents (privileges, access to resources) in ways that satisfy powerful actors (Di John & Putzel, 2009). For this theory, if key groups are excluded, they may resist or destabilize the settlement, leading to conflict. Unlike neoclassical economics, which views rents (excess profits) as distortions, political settlements theory argues that rent distribution is essential to maintaining political order (Khan, 2010). According to the theory, the way rents are generated, allocated, and controlled explains variations in governance across countries and sectors.

The political settlements theory also posits that in many developing countries, including Nigeria, informal networks of patronage, kinship, and clientelism often determine how resources are governed (North et al., 2009). The theory maintains that these informal institutions provide stability but can also entrench corruption and elite capture. The theory further submits that for a political settlement to endure, institutional arrangements must align with the prevailing distribution of power (Khan, 2010). It emphasizes that mismatches, such as centralized mining laws that ignore local authority in Taraba state, create instability and governance failures.

Theory Application

The justification for the choice of Political Settlements Theory in this study stems from the fact that Political Settlements Theory is a highly suitable framework for exploring resource governance and local power structures in the political economy of mining in Taraba State. It provides insights into why formal institutions remain weak, how informal power dynamics govern access to resources, and why reform efforts often stall. Also, in the context of Taraba State's mining economy, the theory suggests that federal mining laws alone cannot explain governance outcomes. Instead, local political settlements between chiefs, youth groups, vigilantes, buyers, and security forces

determine who controls access, how rents are distributed, and whether stability is maintained. This explains why mining persists informally despite repeated crackdowns: the settlement at the local level is more powerful than the formal legal framework. This explains why mining governance in Taraba State is characterized by regulatory ambiguity and fragmented authority between federal, state, and local actors. Under the 2007 Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act, the federal government retains exclusive control over mineral resources. However, in practice, local elites, including traditional rulers, local government officials, and politically connected businessmen, exercise substantial informal control over mining sites. Political Settlements Theory helps to explain this phenomenon by highlighting that the formal rules (for example, the Mining Act) may be subverted or selectively enforced depending on the prevailing political settlement. In Taraba state, weak enforcement reflects a political settlement where federal authorities tolerate informal arrangements in exchange for political loyalty or peace, allowing local elites to extract rents with minimal oversight.

Similarly, mining areas in Taraba state often become sites of competition between ethnic, political, and economic actors. These actors negotiate access to land, labour, and revenues from mining, often outside legal channels. Political Settlements Theory is particularly suited for unpacking such dynamics because it accounts for how local-level settlements mirror or diverge from national power bargains. For example, if the state governor has a strong patronage network that includes local traditional rulers or youth groups, mining licenses or access to sites may be distributed not based on merit or law, but according to political loyalty. Political Settlements Theory emphasizes that such behaviour is not an institutional failure per se, but a rational outcome of the prevailing political configuration.

Political Settlements Theory also sheds light on why efforts at formalizing the mining sector in Taraba state have largely failed. Formal institutions are unlikely to take root or function effectively when they threaten the interests of powerful actors who benefit from informality. In Taraba state, attempts to impose stricter environmental regulations or to attract formal mining companies are often resisted by local elites whose incomes depend on artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM). Here, Political Settlements Theory allows analysts to understand institutional fragility not as an administrative problem, but as a political outcome. Resource governance reforms may fail not because they are technically flawed, but because they disrupt existing power settlements.

Discussion of Findings

The mineral ownership and licensing are centralized in the **Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act (2007), which** vests minerals in the Federation and channels titles through the **Mining Cadastre Office (MCO);** artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) is to be regulated via specific leases and extension services (NMMA 2007 ss. 5, pp. 65–91). However, in practice, access on the ground in Taraba depends on deals with **non-state** and **sub-national** actors such as traditional rulers, youth associations, local government officials, security units, and park/forest authorities, who control land, information, labour, and security. This is a classic **hybrid governance** pattern where state and customary authorities co-produce rule and order at the local level. Therefore, using Ribot and Peluso's **"theory of access"** in Taraba's mining (who benefits depends on bundles of powers, technology, capital, markets, authority, identity, social relations, coercion), this can be seen in several concrete channels by which local power brokers shape who mines, where, and on what terms. For instance, on access through authority and social identity, village heads and chiefs sanction entry, allocate pits, or mobilize youths to exclude outsiders; miners often must secure local blessing even when federally licensed.

Similarly, on **access through coercion/security,** vigilantes or security detachments broker "peace" around high-value deposits. For example, **blue sapphire on the Mambilla Plateau,** extracting payments and deciding who operates safely. Also, on **access via information and markets,** brokers control price information and gem buyers, especially in **sapphire and gemstones in Gashaka;** this enables gatekeeping over sales and pit turnover. Furthermore, **on access via labour and equipment,** local elites (politicians, traders) finance pits and equipment; indebted miners accept subordinate terms, effectively ceding control (World Bank, 2020). Empirical studies such as those of Ahmed (2013), Tukur and Ahmed (2014). Oruonye and Ahmed (2018) and Zenodo (2023) show mining in Taraba is **dominated by ASM,** particularly around Sardauna/Mambilla and other LGAs such as Gashaka, Yorro, Lau, Zing and Wukari. These studies document the role of informal operators, the proliferation of abandoned pits and environmental risks, and weak enforcement of rules and conditions that increase the bargaining power of local power holders who can "greenlight" or block activities.

Additionally, because licensing is federal while **land, social peace, and site access** are local, miners (and sometimes licensed firms) negotiate **side-payments, community development pledges,** or **youth employment quotas** with chiefs and associations. Where enforcement capacity is thin, bans on "illegal mining" are **selectively enforced,** often reflecting local political alignments, so allies continue operations while rivals are disrupted. Recent analyses of enforcement challenges in Taraba describe exactly this pattern of rising illegal ASM despite legal reforms (Zenodo, 2023).

On rent capture and distribution, rents flow through several channels: **Informal levies** at pit heads and roadblocks run by youth groups or vigilantes; **Traditional authority dues** such as "community" or palace fees; **local government extractions** (touting "environmental" or haulage fees), sometimes beyond statutory authority; **broker margins** in gemstone trade.

Where transparent, NEITI's audits track royalties and state-level production; however, **Taraba rarely appears among top-producing states**, suggesting much activity is unreported or low-volume industrially, again raising the relative weight of informal rent circuits managed by local actors (EITI, 2022; NEITI, 2022). These power dynamics have **mixed** effects: **Livelihood access:** Local gatekeeping can enable broad participation (many small pits, quick entry), but it also entrenches patron–client relations and precarious work conditions (Oruonye & Ahmed, 2018). **Environmental management:** Fragmented authority yields poor rehabilitation and widespread **abandoned pits** in Taraba, with grazing and safety hazards; **Revenue governance:** Weak vertical coordination means modest formal royalties from Taraba relative to activity perceptions; informal levies rarely translate into durable public goods (EITI, 2022).

From a **political settlements** perspective, the prevailing distribution of local power (traditional authorities, youth bosses, security actors, and sub-national politicians) has the capacity to **veto** or **reshape** rules; formal law is implemented insofar as it aligns with these actors' interests. In hybrid orders, companies and federal agencies often **cooperate** with chiefs or associations to secure land and labour even when it blurs legal lines, because this is the pragmatic route to operational stability (Oruonye & Ahmed, 2018).

The implications for policy and practice in Taraba State include: **Co-produce access rules:** Formalize the local gatekeeping that already exists (e.g., community development agreements that are registered and monitored) rather than bypass it (Zenodo, 2023); **Strengthen MCO–state–community coordination:** Joint mapping of ASM zones and site-specific protocols with traditional councils and youth bodies to reduce rent-seeking frictions; **Transparency of local levies:** Publish community and local-government-level fees alongside NEITI-tracked royalties to bring "shadow rents" into daylight (EITI, 2022). **Environmental compliance at scale:** Tie any local authorization to reclamation bonds and community-monitored closure plans to address abandoned pits.

Similarly, interviews were conducted to validate our proposition. The interview report summarizes findings from qualitative interviews conducted with miners, traditional authorities, community leaders, security personnel, and officials of the Taraba State Ministry of Mineral Resources. The objective was to examine whether and how local power structures shape access to and control of mining activities across selected communities such as Ibi, Kurmi, Karim Lamido, and Gashaka. The insights presented here are based on recurring patterns that emerged across interviews and are used to confirm the study's central hypothesis. A total of 18 respondents were interviewed, including 6 artisanal and small-scale miners (ASMs), 4 traditional rulers/chiefs, 3 local government officials, 2 mining site owners / licensed operators, 2 security personnel (NSCDC and police), and 1 official from the Ministry of Mineral Resources. Respondents were selected through purposive and snowball sampling to capture diverse perspectives.

Most respondents acknowledged that traditional rulers significantly influence who accesses mining sites. Similarly, miners reported that gaining permission from the village chief or council of elders is a precondition for operating in many areas.

A miner in Kurmi LGA stated:

> *"Even if you have a federal license, you must still see the chief. If he says no, you cannot work."* According to him, customary authority remains a decisive power broker, even in contexts governed by federal mining laws.

Interviewees consistently revealed that local government officials often exercise influence through informal taxation, issuance of local documents, and political patronage. Similarly, several miners disclosed paying *"local government clearance fees"* that are not officially recognized in the Mineral and Mining Act.

A licensed operator in Wukari LGA explained that:

> "*The LGA chairman's approval helps maintain peace with youths and chiefs, confirming an informal governance layer".* This explanation demonstrates that political actors create parallel structures of control that shape operational realities for miners.

Similarly, in most communities, youth associations play an active role in determining access to mining pits. Respondents consistently noted that youth leaders collect *"security contributions,"* control entry paths, levy transporters, and sometimes allocate mining spots.

A community elder in Karim Lamido LGA noted that:

> *"The youths are the ones on the ground; without them, miners cannot work for one hour."* He also stated that these groups, although unofficial, function as powerful intermediaries, reinforcing the hypothesis that local social actors shape mining governance.

Also, the majority of the respondents highlighted that ethnic ties and patronage relationships determine who receives protection or preferential access.

A Miner in Gashaka LGA lamented that:

> *"In Gashaka, miners from certain ethnic groups were reportedly given priority in pit allocation".* He also stated that miners without local affiliations described being marginalized or required to pay higher fees. This lamentation suggests that social identity and patronage deeply influence access and control over mining locations.

Furthermore, respondents collectively stated that the presence of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps, police, and sometimes vigilante groups adds another layer of power dynamics. Likewise, many miners described having to pay for *"security clearance,"* which varies depending on the dominant security actor in the area. Again, they reported that in some communities, security forces reinforce decisions made by chiefs or youth leaders, strengthening local power structures. This multi-layered system creates complex and overlapping spheres of authority, all of which shape mining operations.

The proposition that local power structures shape access to and control of mining activities in Taraba State is strongly supported by interview data. Specifically, nearly all respondents agreed that formal licenses alone do not guarantee mining access, local actors such as chiefs, youth leaders, LG officials, and power brokers possess the actual authority that determines operations, informal governance practices, including, levies, permissions, and security payments are central to daily mining activities, and social identity and networks influence opportunities, creating uneven access. Thus, this empirical evidence from the interviews validates the hypothesis because the interviews clearly demonstrate that mining activities in Taraba State are governed by a hybrid system of traditional authority, local political influence, youth control, security involvement, and social networks. This system effectively shapes who mines, how mining occurs, and under what conditions. The findings provide strong support for the hypothesis and reveal that formal institutions coexist with, and are often overshadowed by, local power structures

Also, questionnaires were distributed to validate our hypothesis on shaping access to and control of mining activities in Taraba State and the result is illustrated in the table below: .

Table .1: *Mean and Standard deviation of the responses of respondents on shaping access to and control of mining activities in Taraba State.*

S/N	Local power structures and access to mining activities	N	Mean	S.D	Decision
1	Local elites and traditional rulers control access to mining sites in my area	360	3.62	0.58	Agree
2	Political actors influence who obtains mining licenses and permits in Taraba State	360	3.65	0.52	Agree
3	Community leaders determine how mining benefits are distributed among members	360	3.66	0.56	Agree
4	Local power structures often exclude youth and women from participating in mining activities	360	3.65	0.53	Agree
	Cluster Mean	**360**	**3.65**	**0.42**	**Agree**

The results presented in Table . 1 showed the mean and standard deviations of the responses of respondents on shaping access to and control of mining activities in Taraba State. The results showed that items 1, 2, 3 and 4 had mean ratings of 3.62, 3.65, 3.66 and 3.65 with standard deviations of 0.58, 0.52, 0.56 and 0.53, respectively. These mean ratings are above the criterion level of 2.50 set for accepting an item, this means that local elites and traditional rulers control access to mining sites in Taraba state, political actors influence who obtains mining licenses and permits in Taraba State, community leaders determine how mining benefits are distributed among members and local power structures often exclude youth and women from participating in mining activities. The cluster mean of 3.65 is also above the criterion level of 2.50 set as a benchmark for accepting an item. The cluster mean of 3.65 with a standard deviation of 0.42 showed that respondents unanimously agreed that local power structures in Taraba state exercise more control over mining activities. This validated our hypothesis that local power structures in Taraba state exercise more effective control over mining activities than formal federal institutions due to their proximity, legitimacy, and informal enforcement mechanisms.

Conclusion

The political economy of mining in Taraba State demonstrates that governance is not only about institutions but also about the balance of power among actors who shape access, rents, and benefits. Reforms must therefore go beyond legal frameworks to address the realities of local power structures. By aligning formal governance mechanisms with legitimate local practices, Taraba State can move towards a more equitable, transparent, and sustainable mining sector that benefits both communities and the state. This study examined the intersection of resource governance and local power structures in the political economy of mining in Taraba State, Nigeria.

Drawing on field evidence and relevant literature, it highlighted how formal and informal institutions interact to shape access, distribution, and outcomes in the mining sector. Federal and state regulatory institutions exist but are constrained by overlapping mandates, limited enforcement capacity, and inadequate presence at mining sites. These governance gaps allow informal actors to dominate the operational and distributive aspects of mining. Traditional rulers, political patrons, and community elites play decisive roles in granting access to mining sites, negotiating rents, and mediating disputes. Their influence often supersedes statutory provisions, reinforcing patron–client networks and informal arrangements.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the study recommends formally recognizing the roles of traditional rulers and community representatives within participatory governance structures, while ensuring accountability and transparency. This can be achieved by establishing multi-stakeholder platforms for negotiation and dispute resolution that include miners, local leaders, civil society organizations, and government officials.

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