

Blood Minerals, Fractured Narratives, and the Political Economy of Nigeria's Northern Violence: *Beyond the Religious Genocide Thesis*

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Abstract

The recurring violence in Nigeria's northern and Middle Belt states has been persistently framed by international actors as a religious conflict, specifically, as a campaign of genocidal persecution targeting the Christian minority by Islamic extremists. This framing has gained renewed traction following the Trump administration's October 2025 redesignation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act, and the subsequent Christmas Day drone strikes on Sokoto State. This paper undertakes a systematic interrogation of that dominant narrative through a political economy and resource conflict lens, drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship, conflict event databases, legislative texts, mineral geology surveys, and primary policy records. Using the theoretical framework of resource conflict and elite capture, the paper argues that the violence is primarily driven by intersecting forces of illegal mineral extraction (lithium, tin, columbite, and tantalite), climate-induced land scarcity, governance collapse, and the deliberate political instrumentalisation of insecurity by elite actors who extract economic rents from sustained conflict. Data from the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project, the Nigerian Mining Cadastre Office, the Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (NEITI), the United States Securities and Exchange Commission, and multiple peer-reviewed academic sources directly contradict the religious genocide thesis. The paper argues that the CPC designation and the Sokoto airstrikes represent a strategic misdiagnosis with dangerous consequences for regional stability, and concludes with a policy framework grounded in structural rather than theological intervention logic.

Keywords: political economy of conflict; mineral resource extraction; Nigeria; farmer-herder conflict; religious persecution narrative; CPC designation; lithium mining; governance failure; elite capture; Middle Belt crisis

INTRODUCTION

On 24 December 2023, the villages of Bokkos and BarkinLadi in Plateau State, Nigeria, experienced mass atrocity violence. More than 200 civilians were killed, residential structures were razed, and survivors were forcibly displaced into internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The Nigerian media and the international press characterised the events as a “farmer–herder clash” with religious undercurrents, continuing a well-worn narrative that locates the drivers of northern Nigerian violence in the theology of its perpetrators rather than in the political economy of the land on which they act (Higazi, 2016; Lenshie et al., 2021). That framing intensified considerably through 2025, culminating in the Trump administration’s October 2025 designation of Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA) of 1998, and in Christmas Day 2025 drone strikes on Sokoto State, conducted by the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) at the direction of President Trump (AFRICOM, 2025; Obadare, 2025).

The religious genocide thesis, as articulated by American evangelical lobbying organisations, Republican legislators, and the Open Doors International persecution index, holds that Nigerian Christians are systematically targeted for extermination by Fulani jihadists and Islamic State affiliates, and that the Nigerian state is either complicit in or incapable of preventing this. The thesis has achieved sufficient traction to shape U.S. foreign policy, contribute to Nigeria’s placement on a U.S. travel ban list, and trigger kinetic military action on Nigerian sovereign territory (ABC News, 2025; Trump, 2025).

This paper contests that thesis, not to deny the real suffering of victims of northern violence or to trivialise religious dimensions of communal conflict, but to advance a more

analytically adequate account of the structural forces driving it. A forensic examination of the spatial correlation between active mining licence zones and massacre sites, the documented operations of illegal mineral extraction syndicates, the architecture of Nigeria's unaudited security vote system, the legislative geography of the Dodd-Frank Act's conflict minerals provisions, and the ACLED conflict event database collectively support a political economy explanation that the dominant religious narrative obscures. The practical stakes of the analytical error are high: a misdiagnosis of the conflict's aetiology produces prescriptions, sanctions, designations, airstrikes, that address none of its structural causes, while potentially deepening the conditions that sustain it.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 establishes the theoretical framework. Section 3 reviews the extant literature. Section 4 outlines the methodology. Section 5 presents the spatial and economic evidence linking mineral extraction to violence. Section 6 interrogates the legislative architecture that enables the international laundering of conflict minerals. Section 7 analyses the political economy of the security vote and elite capture. Section 8 critically examines the CPC designation and the Sokoto strikes. Section 9 offers a policy framework for structural response. Section 10 concludes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is grounded in the political economy of resource conflict and the theory of elite capture, as developed by Le Billon (2001), Collier and Hoeffler (2004), and extended to the African context by Reno (2011) and Lenshie et al. (2021). The resource conflict paradigm holds that violent conflict in resource-rich regions cannot be adequately explained by ethnic, religious, or historical grievance narratives alone. Rather, conflict emerges and is sustained where it serves

as a mechanism for acquiring or maintaining control over high-value extractable resources — particularly in contexts where formal institutional constraints on rent-seeking are weak or captured by elite actors (Le Billon, 2001; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

Elite capture, as applied here, refers to the process by which politically connected actors use state instruments, licensing systems, military deployment, emergency fiscal allocations, to extract rents from manufactured or sustained insecurity. Page (2018) and Egbo et al. (2012) document this mechanism in specific relation to Nigeria’s security vote system, demonstrating how the political class benefits financially from the continuation rather than the resolution of conflict. The rentier state dimension, identified by Beblawi (1987) and applied to Nigeria by Omeje (2006), provides the macro-structural context: a state whose primary income derives from resource rents rather than citizen taxation lacks both the fiscal incentive and the institutional accountability architecture to resolve conflicts that generate additional rents.

The paper further draws on the environmental security and climate-conflict nexus literature (Homer-Dixon, 1994; McGuirk & Nunn, 2025) to account for the ecological stressors that have intensified farmer–herder competition for land, and on the global commodity chain literature (Gereffi&Korzeniewicz, 1994) to trace how extraction rents are captured at each node of the lithium supply chain from the mining site in Plateau State to the technology company in Silicon Valley.

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Farmer–Herder Conflict: Dominant Explanatory Frameworks

The literature on farmer–herder conflict in West Africa has converged on a multi-causal model that rejects mono-causal religious or ethnic explanations. Higazi (2016) documented the evolution of the Middle Belt crisis from localised land disputes into organised armed violence, identifying the collapse of customary land management institutions, particularly the pre-colonial burti pasture corridor system, as a critical enabling condition. Lenshie et al. (2021) conducted a systematic analysis of conflict incidents in Benue, Plateau, and Nasarawa States, concluding that the primary structural drivers are resource scarcity, climate change-induced pastoral migration, and governance failure, with religious identity functioning as a secondary mobilisation frame rather than a primary cause.

McGuirk and Nunn (2025) provide the most rigorous recent econometric evidence, demonstrating through instrumental variable analysis that climate-induced drought significantly increases herder–farmer conflict by displacing pastoral communities southward into agricultural zones. Their findings, corroborated by a 2025 VoxDev policy digest, show that the intensity of conflict peaks in the period immediately before the planting season, when competition for land and water reaches its annual maximum, a temporal pattern inconsistent with ideologically driven violence but entirely consistent with resource competition. Omitola (2024) further situates the conflict in a political economy of land scarcity, noting that “mass agricultural expansion projects intensified competition for limited pasture and land by decreasing the viable lot of land for pastoralism and settled existence,” and that “the effect of gold mining, corporate mining and other mining activities restrict access to land use.”

The ACCORD (2025) study of southern Kaduna, covering four local government areas with a combined population of 927,428 residents over the period 2015–2024, found that while religion constitutes what it terms a “potent aspect” of the conflict, it primarily operates by “frustrating an unbiased and effective implementation of government policies” rather than as an initiating cause. Crucially, the study documents that “many reports and commentaries suggest the involvement of some political elites from the north who fuel the clashes for political and business interests.”

3.2 Mineral Extraction and Conflict

A growing body of literature directly links illegal mineral extraction to the escalation of violence in Nigeria’s Middle Belt. Euronews (2024) documented the expansion of unlicensed lithium mining operations across Nasarawa, Plateau, and Kaduna States, noting that “much of this wealth, lithium included, is siphoned off through unlicensed mines, fuelling an illegal trade that costs the nation billions of dollars and drives insecurity, according to a parliamentary probe.” The Africa Defense Forum (2025) provided detailed reporting on the role of Chinese-national-led mining syndicates, drawing on court records, EFCC arrest documentation, and community testimony to establish a pattern of organised illegal extraction followed by community displacement. *Frontiers in Geochemistry* (2025) published a comprehensive review of Nigeria’s lithium geology, mapping significant deposits across thirteen states and noting the approximately 20 percent annual growth in global lithium demand driven by electric vehicle manufacturing, providing the demand-side context for the extraction pressure.

The NEITI Solid Minerals Audit Report (2024) documented the magnitude of revenue losses from illegal mining, while the Climate Home News investigation (2025) of the Kangimi

processing plant in Kaduna State revealed the gap between public commitments on community benefit-sharing and actual implementation, finding that a facility projected to create 1,500 direct jobs had employed seventeen people as of March 2025.

3.3 The Religious Persecution Narrative: Evidence and Counter-Evidence

The religious persecution thesis draws primary empirical support from the Open Doors International World Watch List, the Intersociety NGO reports, and the figures cited by U.S. legislators including Representative Riley Moore and Senator Ted Cruz. These sources claim that over 7,000 Christians were killed in Nigeria in the first seven months of 2025, that more than 50,000 Christians have been killed since 2009, and that Nigeria is the “most dangerous country in the world for Christians” (ADF International, 2025; International Christian Concern, 2025).

These figures have been substantively contested. ACLED data, the most methodologically rigorous independent conflict event database, found that of more than 20,400 civilian deaths in Nigeria between January 2020 and September 2025, 317 were from attacks specifically targeting Christians and 417 from attacks specifically targeting Muslims (CNN, 2025). The Council on Foreign Relations analysis (Obadare, 2025) noted that the violence in Sokoto State is “mainly driven by criminal bandit groups,” with some IS-affiliated elements, but not specifically anti-Christian in character. Truthout (2025) reported that residents of Jabo, a community bombed in the Christmas Day 2025 strikes, described it as “a peaceful community” with “no known history of ISIS, Lakurawa, or any other terrorist groups,” and noted that the majority of victims of Boko Haram violence since 2009 have been Muslim, not Christian, according to ACLED and CFR records. The 2021 Biden State Department review, under

Secretary Antony Blinken, removed Nigeria from the CPC list precisely because the available evidence did not support the criteria of “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom” (ABC News, 2025).

METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a qualitative analytical methodology combining critical discourse analysis, document analysis, and political economy mapping. The research draws on five categories of primary and secondary source data.

First, spatial conflict data from ACLED covering the period January 2020 to September 2025, which provides disaggregated event-level records of conflict incidents in Nigeria, including actor classifications, location coordinates, and casualty figures. Second, mineral licensing data from the Nigerian Mining Cadastre Office (MCO) and the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development, including the 2024 revocation of 924 dormant licences and the distribution of active prospecting licences. Third, legislative and regulatory texts including Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (2010), the final SEC Conflict Minerals Rule (2012), and the Nigerian Minerals and Mining Act (2007). Fourth, peer-reviewed academic literature sourced from Scopus and Web of Science indexed journals covering the period 2016–2025, with a focus on farmer–herder conflict studies, resource conflict theory, and governance of extractive industries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Fifth, policy and investigative reports from NEITI, EFCC, AFRICOM, the Council on Foreign Relations, and investigative journalism outlets, including CNN, AP, and Euronews.

The critical discourse analysis approach examines how the religious persecution narrative is constructed, by whom, in what institutional contexts, and in whose interests, following the methodology established by Fairclough (2001) and applied to African conflict narratives by Obi (2010). The political economy mapping traces the extraction value chain from the mining site through the intermediary syndicate layer, the customs misclassification node, the refining stage, and the final corporate purchaser, identifying rent capture at each node.

The study acknowledges limitations: the opaque nature of illegal mining operations means that direct primary data collection is inherently constrained, and event attribution in conflict zones is subject to significant uncertainty. The paper is therefore analytical and interpretive in character, drawing on the convergence of multiple independent data streams rather than on a single evidentiary base.

THE SPATIAL ECONOMICS OF VIOLENCE: MINERALS, MASSACRES, AND THE CADASTRE MAP

Geological Context

Nigeria's solid minerals endowment is substantial and strategically significant. The Nigerian Geological Survey Agency (NGSA), in collaboration with the Ministry of Mines and Steel Development, has mapped lithium deposits in thirteen states, with confirmed spodumene concentrations in Plateau, Nasarawa, Kaduna, Kwara, Ekiti, and Kogi States (Frontiers in Geochemistry, 2025). Lithium demand is growing at approximately 20 percent annually driven by global electric vehicle adoption, and China controls over 70 percent of global refining capacity, creating strong structural incentives for offshore raw material acquisition (Frontiers in Geochemistry, 2025; Euronews, 2024). The Middle Belt states that constitute Nigeria's primary

lithium belt are geographically identical with the epicentre of the country's worst sustained violence.

The Mining Licence–Violence Correlation

The Nigerian Mining Cadastre Office issues Exclusive Prospecting Licences (EPLs) that confer the right to explore for minerals within specified geographic boundaries. An overlay of active MCO licence zones with georeferenced ACLED conflict event data reveals a concentration of high-lethality incidents in communities situated within or adjacent to EPL areas in Riyom, Mangu, Bokkos, BarkinLadi, and Wase local government areas of Plateau State, all documented lithium and tin bearing zones (Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative [NEITI], 2024).

The mechanism connecting these spatial patterns has been documented by Nigerian law enforcement. In May 2024, joint military and police operations in Nasarawa State resulted in the arrest of Chinese nationals and the confiscation of truckloads of stolen unrefined lithium (Africa Defense Forum, 2025; VOA Learning English, 2024). A parallel operation in Oyo State arrested 32 individuals, including two Chinese nationals, at a produce market that community leaders identified as having been converted into a lithium transit point (Africa Defense Forum, 2025). The EFCC established in its investigation that these operations were not isolated artisanal activity but “highly organized, well-funded corporate extraction teams” embedded within a logistics chain running from mining sites to Lagos’ Apapa Port and onward to Chinese refineries (VOA Learning English, 2024).

The sequence of events at Bokkos and BarkinLadi after the December 2023 massacre is analytically decisive. As documented by investigative sources synthesised in this paper’s primary

dossier, the post-massacre period was characterised not by cattle grazing, as would be expected if the violence were primarily about pastoral resource access, but by the arrival of heavy excavation equipment and contractors. This observation is consistent with what Le Billon (2001) terms “war as a continuation of economic accumulation by other means” and with Reno’s (2011) analysis of warlord economies in which violence functions as land clearance for resource extraction.

The Chinese Syndicate Dimension

The involvement of Chinese mining interests in Nigeria’s illegal extraction economy requires careful disaggregation. Nigerian Minister of Solid Minerals Dele Alake, addressing the 2025 Chinese Mining Conference in Tianjin, disclosed that Chinese companies, including Canmax Technology, Jiuling Lithium, Avatar New Energy Nigeria, and Asba, had invested over US\$1.3 billion in Nigerian lithium processing since September 2023 (Global Voices, 2025). Separately, Chinese Ambassador to Nigeria Yu Dunhai stated that plans were underway to establish electric vehicle manufacturing facilities in Nigeria, and that Chinese companies were “already heavily involved in the Nigerian mining sector, from exploration to processing” (Global Voices, 2025).

Legal investment of this scale coexists with documented illegal activity by Chinese nationals in the same sector. The distinction between licensed joint-venture operations and syndicate-based illegal extraction is porous, however, because both rely on the same raw material flows, the same transportation infrastructure, and the same export routes. Climate Home News (2025) found that the Kangimi joint venture in Kaduna State, formally constituted as a

partnership between the Kaduna State Government and Ming Xin Mineral Separation Nigeria Ltd, had failed to deliver on promised community development commitments, with the village head reporting that school renovation, health facility construction, and road improvements had not materialised a year after the plant’s inauguration.

THE LEGISLATIVE ARCHITECTURE OF IMPUNITY: SECTION 1502 OF THE DODD-FRANK ACT

The international dimension of Nigeria’s mineral extraction economy is structured, in part, by a significant legislative gap in American law. Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (2010) amended the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 by requiring U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) issuers that manufacture products in which conflict minerals are necessary to functionality to disclose whether those minerals originated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo or an adjoining country, and if so, to submit a Conflict Minerals Report detailing their due diligence processes (SEC, 2012; Global Witness, 2017).

The Act defines “covered countries” as the DRC, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia (Source Intelligence, 2023). Nigeria shares no border with the DRC. Nigeria is therefore legally outside the scope of Section 1502 disclosure requirements. This means that U.S.-listed technology companies, including producers of electric vehicles, smartphones, and data centre hardware, can purchase lithium refined from Nigerian ore by Chinese intermediaries, certify the product as “DRC conflict free” on their SEC Form SD filing, and face no legal obligation whatsoever to investigate whether the raw material originated in a community cleared by armed militia action (SEC, 2012; Global Witness, 2017; IEA, 2026).

The SEC noted in its final 2012 rule that companies not required to file a Conflict Minerals Report need only submit Form SD indicating that their minerals did not originate in covered countries or from scrap or recycled sources (SEC, 2012). Once Nigerian lithium reaches a Chinese refinery and its geographic origin is chemically erased in the refining process, it is not merely difficult but legally impossible for a downstream American purchaser to be held accountable for its provenance. The Extended Minerals Reporting Template (EMRT 2.0), released in 2025 by the Responsible Minerals Initiative, has expanded voluntary reporting to include lithium and cobalt, but voluntary frameworks cannot substitute for mandatory legal obligation (Source Intelligence, 2023).

It merits emphasis that the 2025 EU Conflict Minerals Regulation, which came into force in 2021, covers all conflict-affected and high-risk areas globally rather than the DRC alone, representing a significantly more robust legal standard (Source Intelligence, 2023). The geographic restriction in Dodd-Frank is therefore not a technical necessity but a political choice, one whose consequences fall disproportionately on communities in non-DRC mineral states such as Nigeria. Reforming Section 1502 to extend its geographic scope to all conflict-affected and high-risk areas consistent with the OECD Due Diligence Guidance definition is an actionable legislative remedy that U.S. lawmakers have not pursued.

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF SUSTAINED INSECURITY: SECURITY VOTES, ELITE CAPTURE, AND THE INCENTIVE STRUCTURE OF VIOLENCE

The political economy of Nigeria's northern violence cannot be understood without analysing the financial architecture that the Nigerian state has constructed around insecurity. Central to this architecture is the institution of the security vote: a discretionary public fund

allocated to the President, state governors, and local government chairmen for urgent security needs, disbursed outside conventional budgeting processes, and exempt from both legislative appropriation oversight and Auditor-General scrutiny (Page, 2018; Egbo et al., 2012).

Empirical research on security vote expenditure establishes its scale and opacity. Annual security vote disbursements to subnational executives exceed ₦375 billion, with monthly allocations per state reaching as high as ₦1–2 billion in states with active conflict (IJNRD, 2025). Page (2018), in a landmark investigation published by the Africa Research Institute, documented how the ambiguity surrounding the concept of “national security” has been instrumentalised to institutionalise unaccountable governance across military and civilian administrations alike, tracing the practice from the Babangida era through the fourth republic. Egbo et al. (2012) described the security vote as a mechanism through which “corruption is legitimised in government,” noting that monthly allocations can reach ₦100 million per governor with no receipts, no audit, and no outcome metrics required.

The consequence for conflict resolution incentives is structural and severe. A state governor who presides over sustained insecurity can access significantly larger emergency fiscal allocations than a governor whose state is at peace. This creates what the political economy literature terms a “conflict trap” (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004) at the subnational level, where the political class profits from the continuation of violence and faces no financial incentive to invest in its resolution. When the military task force deployed in Plateau State (Operation Safe Haven) generates revenue by charging convoys of extracted minerals a passage fee, as documented by investigative sources, the security apparatus itself becomes a node in the extraction value chain rather than a neutral enforcement mechanism.

The ACCORD (2025) study’s finding that political elites deliberately fuel farmer–herder clashes “to destabilise communities considered hostile or against the northern political agenda” adds a further instrumental dimension: beyond fiscal extraction, violence in the Middle Belt serves to depress voter registration in communities that are politically organised against incumbent elite interests. The *Frontiers in Political Science* study (2025) documented that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) was unable to register new voters in several northern local government areas due to insecurity, and could not deliver voter cards to over three million internally displaced persons in troubled northern zones during electoral periods.

THE CPC DESIGNATION AND THE CHRISTMAS DAY STRIKES: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

The Trump administration’s October 2025 CPC redesignation of Nigeria under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, and the subsequent Christmas Day airstrikes on Sokoto State, represent the most consequential international policy intervention in Nigeria’s conflict since the post-independence period. They demand rigorous empirical scrutiny.

The CPC designation was predicated on the claim that Nigeria has engaged in “systematic, ongoing, and egregious violations of religious freedom” (ABC News, 2025). The evidentiary basis for this claim, as presented by the International Christian Concern (2025), ADF International (2025), and Representative Riley Moore’s office, rests primarily on figures from the Open Doors World Watch List and the Intersociety NGO, which estimate that 7,000 Christians were killed in the first seven months of 2025 at an average of 35 per day, and that between 50,000 and 100,000 Christians have been killed since 2009. Senator Ted Cruz cited these figures without source attribution in Congressional testimony.

The ACLED dataset, which uses standardised event-level data collection protocols and has been widely validated in the academic conflict studies literature, presents markedly different figures. Of 20,400-plus civilian deaths in Nigeria between January 2020 and September 2025, ACLED recorded 317 in attacks specifically targeting Christians and 417 in attacks specifically targeting Muslims (CNN, 2025). Truthout (2025) further noted that, per both ACLED and CFR records, the majority of the approximately 53,000 civilians killed by Boko Haram since 2009 were Muslim, not Christian, and that Boko Haram’s primary theatre of operation, northeastern Nigeria, is geographically remote from where the Christmas Day strikes occurred.

AFRICOM’s December 25, 2025, statement confirmed strikes in Sokoto State’s Tangaza area, targeting what Nigerian Information Minister Mohammed Idris described as “two major ISIS enclaves” in the Bauni forest (CNN, 2025; NPR, 2025). AFRICOM stated that “multiple ISIS terrorists were killed,” but provided no casualty count and did not identify the targets by name. The community of Jabo, located in Tambuwal Local Government Area, approximately 58 kilometres south of Sokoto city, was hit by at least one missile. Its parliamentary representative told CNN that the community had “no known history of ISIS, Lakurawa, or any other terrorist groups,” and that a projectile landed metres from the community’s only hospital. Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Tuggar explicitly stated that the strikes “have nothing to do with a particular religion” (NBC News, 2025).

Dakar-based African security analyst OluwoleOjewale characterised the Sokoto region as dominated by “criminal bandits who have been tormenting rural villages,” with some ISWAP presence, but not a specifically anti-Christian operation (CNN, 2025). Council on Foreign Relations analyst Ebenezer Obadare (2025) described Trump’s framing as a “binary”

characterisation that “does not resonate with the reality on the ground.” Religious scholar Anthea Butler of the University of Pennsylvania told Democracy Now! (November 2025) that the persecution-of-Christians narrative “fits a saviour narrative of American ethos right now,” serving domestic evangelical political mobilisation rather than Nigerian empirical reality.

The Biden administration’s 2021 removal of Nigeria from the CPC list, upheld by then-Secretary of State Blinken, had concluded that the evidence did not meet the statutory threshold of systematic and egregious violations. The Trump redesignation in 2025 was not preceded by new empirical evidence meeting that threshold; it was preceded by sustained evangelical lobbying, Congressional hearings, and Cruz’s proposed sanctions legislation (ABC News, 2025). The policy process is therefore better understood through the lens of domestic American politics than through the lens of Nigerian conflict evidence.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS: TOWARDS A STRUCTURAL RESPONSE FRAMEWORK

The foregoing analysis generates a set of policy recommendations that are structurally grounded rather than theologically derived. These are offered to leadership audiences in Nigeria, the African Union, and the international community.

First, the Nigerian Federal Government must operationalise the value-addition mandate announced by President Tinubu in early 2024, which conditions the issuance of mining licences on demonstrated in-country processing capacity. As of mid-2025, six lithium processing plants are operational or near completion, representing investments of over US\$1.3 billion by Chinese companies alone (Global Voices, 2025; Discovery Alert, 2025). However, operationalising the mandate requires enforcement capacity that the Ministry of Solid Minerals Development does not currently possess: its 2025 exploration budget was ranked twelfth in Africa at approximately

US\$2.5 million, compared to Côte d'Ivoire's US\$147 million (Veriva Africa, 2025). The institutional disproportion between Nigeria's mineral endowment and its governance capacity for that endowment is itself a structural driver of the extraction gap that illegal syndicates exploit.

Second, Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Act requires legislative amendment to extend its geographic scope beyond the DRC to encompass all conflict-affected and high-risk areas as defined by the OECD Due Diligence Guidance. The EU Conflict Minerals Regulation provides a working model. Until this amendment is achieved, U.S.-listed technology companies should be urged, including through shareholder activism and Securities Exchange Act disclosure reform, to conduct supply chain due diligence on lithium and other critical minerals regardless of country of origin.

Third, Nigeria's security vote system requires immediate legislative reform. The Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) has long called for the legislative appropriation of security votes and their subjection to Auditor-General oversight. Empirical research (IJNRD, 2025; Page, 2018; Egbo et al., 2012) demonstrates that the current opacity of the system incentivises the perpetuation of insecurity by its primary beneficiaries. Without addressing this incentive structure, any security intervention, domestic or international, operates within an institutional environment that is structurally biased against conflict resolution.

Fourth, the farmer–herder conflict requires dedicated land administration reform, including the formal revival and demarcation of pastoral transit corridors consistent with the ECOWAS Transhumance Protocol of 1998. The Transboundary Migration and Herder-Farmer Conflicts study (IJRIAS, 2025) recommends improved immigration surveillance, multilateral ECOWAS coordination mechanisms, and enhanced cross-border monitoring infrastructure as the

appropriate policy tools for a conflict whose drivers are fundamentally ecological, demographic, and economic.

Fifth, the international community's engagement with Nigeria's conflict must be recalibrated away from domestically motivated religious persecution frames and toward structural security sector reform, mineral governance capacity building, and climate adaptation support. The Sokoto airstrikes, however tactically targeted, do not address the cadastral corruption, the Chinese syndicate operations, the security vote incentive structure, or the Dodd-Frank loophole that together constitute the operational architecture of the violence. They provide domestic political dividends in the United States while leaving all of the structural conditions of the conflict intact.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued that the dominant international narrative framing Nigeria's northern violence as a religious genocide of Christians is analytically inadequate, empirically contested, and strategically counterproductive. Drawing on political economy theory, ACLED conflict event data, mineral geology surveys, legislative analysis, and peer-reviewed scholarship, the paper has demonstrated that the structural drivers of the violence are the illegal extraction of critical minerals (principally lithium, tin, columbite, and tantalite), climate-induced competition for land and water, governance failure and the deliberate instrumentalisation of insecurity by politically connected rent-seekers operating through the unaudited security vote system, and the legislative geography of the Dodd-Frank Act that permits the international laundering of conflict-origin minerals.

The CPC designation and the Christmas Day 2025 Sokoto strikes represent a policy intervention that is simultaneously inadequate as a response to the real structural drivers of the violence and dangerous as a frame for future engagement, insofar as it legitimises military action against a sovereign state on the basis of a contested and politically mediated interpretation of multi-causal conflict data. Nigeria's Foreign Minister's characterisation of the strikes as "a new phase of an old conflict" that "have nothing to do with a particular religion" reflects a more accurate and actionable understanding of what is driving the violence than the theological framework that motivated them.

The practical implications are significant. Every year that the structural causes go unaddressed, the food basket of Nigeria continues to be emptied by the displacement of its farming communities, communities continue to be cleared to enable extraction that is legally laundered in overseas refineries, and governors continue to withdraw untraceable billions from security vote allocations while declaring the deaths of their constituents on television. Colonialism did not end with independence. It updated its mechanisms. The royal charter has been replaced by the mining licence. The trading company has been replaced by the Chinese syndicate and the Silicon Valley technology corporation. And the district officer has been replaced by the security vote. Naming this architecture accurately is the precondition for dismantling it.

Future research should focus on three areas: longitudinal spatial analysis of the correlation between mining licence issuance and conflict event escalation in the Middle Belt; comparative institutional analysis of security vote governance in Nigeria against other Sub-

Saharan African rentier states; and a legislative advocacy study of the pathway to extending the geographic scope of the Dodd-Frank Act’s conflict minerals provisions.

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