

ISRG Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (ISRGJAHSS)



ISRG PUBLISHERS

Abbreviated Key Title: ISRG J Arts Humanit Soc Sci

ISSN: 2583-7672 (Online)

Journal homepage: <https://isrgpublishers.com/isrgjahss>

Volume – III Issue -III (May-June) 2025

Frequency: Bimonthly



Analyzing the Contribution of Natural Resource Governance on Political Instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo

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| **Received:** 04.06.2025 | **Accepted:** 09.06.2025 | **Published:** 17.06.2025

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Abstract

Political instability is a critical and persistent issue in the Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly in North and South Kivu. To address this concern the study was purposed to analyze the contribution of natural resource governance on political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. The study achieved the following specific objectives: First, we examined the role of transparency on political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. Second, we assessed the role of accountability on political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. Lastly, we explored possible strategies for mitigating political instability caused by natural resource governance in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. Two theories underpinned the study. Resource Curse Theory and Institutional Resource Governance Framework. A case study design of North Kivu and a qualitative approach was adopted. An in-depth interviews and document reviews were conducted among 14 participants; 3 security experts, 4 government officials, 4 civil society organisations and 3 NGO representatives. Thematic and content analysis was applied. The study findings revealed a picture of a governance system where secrecy breeds instability. Opaque revenue management allows elites and militias to siphon off wealth, leaving communities impoverished and resentful. Restricted information access prevents accountability, while exclusionary decision-making alienates locals, pushing them toward unrest or militia support. The resulting distrust in institutions perpetuates a cycle of conflict, as communities lose faith in governance and turn to alternative power structures. Addressing transparency through public contract disclosure, community consultations, and accessible information could disrupt this cycle, though entrenched interests pose challenges. More so, the findings reveal that accountability failures i.e. ineffective oversight, pervasive corruption, disempowered communities, and weak legal frameworks drive political instability in North Kivu. Strengthening accountability through independent audits, anti-corruption measures, and community empowerment could mitigate instability, but systemic barriers, including entrenched corruption, pose significant challenges. Lastly, the study proposed strategies; transparency, accountability, community engagement, institutional capacity, and regional cooperation as a holistic approach to mitigating instability. Transparency and

accountability address governance failures, aligning with the Institutional Resource Governance Framework's emphasis on robust systems. Community engagement and capacity-building empower locals and strengthen institutions, countering the Resource Curse Theory's prediction of conflict in resource-rich regions. Regional cooperation tackles external factors, a dimension often overlooked in governance-focused theories. However, implementation faces challenges: corruption, political resistance, and ongoing conflict demand coordinated efforts from local, national, and international actors. These strategies, if realized, could transform North Kivu's resource wealth into a driver of peace and development. Going forward, future research could benefit by integrating quantitative data to measure the economic and social outcomes of governance reforms to complement the qualitative insights here, offering a fuller picture of their impact. These directions would build on this study's foundation, advancing knowledge and practice in resource governance and conflict resolution.

Keywords: Political instability, Resource governance, Transparency, Accountability, Community Engagement, Resource Curse, DRC, Regional cooperation

1. Introduction

At the global level, several studies have explored the ways in which natural resources have been linked to conflict and political instability with such authors as Bannon and Collier (2003) and Ross (2004). Throughout the 1990s, many armed groups have relied on revenues from natural resources such as oil, timber, or gems to substitute for dwindling Cold War sponsorship (Le Billon, 2004). Resources not only financed but, in some cases, motivated conflicts and shaped strategies of power based on the commercialization of armed conflict and the territorialisation of sovereignty around valuable resource areas and trading networks (Renner, 2002). As such, armed conflict in the post-Cold War period is increasingly characterised by a specific political ecology closely linked to the geography and political economy of natural resources (Watts, 2017).

Natural resource conflicts are a significant driver of political instability in Asia, often escalating into violent confrontations. These conflicts stem from competition over resources like oil, gas, water, minerals, and land, which can ignite disputes between states, within nations, and even between communities. Natural resource conflicts are a significant driver of political instability in Asia, often escalating into violent confrontations. These conflicts stem from competition over resources like oil, gas, water, minerals, and land, which can ignite disputes between states, within nations, and even between communities (Bayramov, 2018).

While intra-state conflicts dominate the scene, inter-state conflicts over resources, such as oil, water, and marine resources, are also a factor; for example, the dispute over the South China Sea, driven by competing claims to oil and gas reserves and fishing rights, has raised tensions between China and neighbouring countries (Cao et al., 2024). The Mekong River, shared by several Southeast Asian countries, faces increasing pressure due to dam construction and water usage, leading to potential conflicts. Religious tensions, particularly between Sunni and Shia Muslims, are intertwined with competition for oil and water resources in Southwest Asia (Murshed & Rahman, 2024).

In Africa, the "resource curse hypothesis" contends that large supplies of natural resources may be responsible for low performance, corruption, and conflict (Nsaikila, 2015). This is prevalent in countries such as Angola, Sierra Leone and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Generally, conflict for natural resources is real, as noted by Collier (2000). Nevertheless, relatively little is known about how natural resource governance

leads to political instability with respect to the conflict system in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo (Henri, 2019).

There is conflict and political instability owing to exploitation of natural resources, with Angola, Sierra Leone, and the Democratic Republic of Congo as notable examples (Ogoti, 2019). The African Union's Peace and Security Council has recognised natural resources to have played a stupendous role in instigating conflicts within the continent (African Union, 2006). The AU has also noted that good management of natural resources is central to management of conflicts and sustainable development (Muchunguzi, 2023). However, as noted in these studies, there is still a lack of rigorous analysis of the manner in which natural resource governance influences political instability in different contexts in Africa, including North Kivu Province, eastern Congo (Dale, 2018).

The Democratic Republic of Congo, most especially the Eastern Congo, has long been battling with political instability and conflicts with natural resources as a major cause (Denisova et al., 2023). The country's numerous natural resources, such as coltan, copper, diamonds and gold, which have triggered local and regional conflicts (Goldblatt, 2023). The conflicts involve multiple actors, such as rebel militias, government forces, and foreign companies, especially within the centres of the Eastern Congo (Goldblatt, 2024). Despite efforts to address the conflict, including the 2003 Pretoria Agreement and the 2008 Goma Agreement, political instability persists (Todd, 2024). There was a gap in understanding how natural resource governance contributes to this ongoing instability, particularly in terms of how different actors interact and influence each other in the context of natural resource exploitation.

North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, has an intricate conflict background which involves local, national, and regional players and natural resource exploitation (Armande, 2023). Natural resources have been tapped by different players such as rebels, government troops and the international actors (Narice, 2023). This exploitation has led to distortions of people's rights and freedom, displacement and poverty (Berge, 2024). There are some studies that focus on North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo's conflict and the involvement of natural resources, but literature reviews on impacts of natural resource governance that triggers political instability in this specific study are lacking (Sylvia, 2023). This demands the exploration of actors' interactions, effects of natural resource utilisation on people, and the governance systems that characterise the interactions.

Political instability is a critical and persistent issue in the Kivu region of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), particularly in North and South Kivu. This instability stems from a complex interplay of factors, including a history of conflict, ethnic tensions, resource exploitation, and the presence of armed groups like M23 (Chatlin, 2020). The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) government is actively working to address the critical issue of political instability, particularly in the Kivu region, through various measures. These include strengthening state presence and credibility by improving governance and accountability, addressing corruption, and promoting transparency in resource management; pursuing structural reforms aimed at restoring stability and peace, attracting investment, and creating jobs; and collaborating with international partners like the United Nations and other international organizations to support peacebuilding efforts, provide humanitarian assistance, and address the security challenges in the region. The government is also actively seeking dialogue and peacebuilding efforts, both internally and with regional partners, to address the root causes of conflict and achieve a lasting peace (Majambu et al., 2021; Armande, 2023).

Despite the efforts, the North Kivu Province in Eastern Congo is plagued by persistent political instability, conflict, and human suffering, despite its abundance of natural resources. The province's rich natural resources, including coltan, copper, diamonds, and gold, have become a curse rather than a blessing, fueling violence and instability (Nest, 2011). This paradox has led to devastating consequences for the local population.

In early 2025, fighting between Congolese security forces and militant groups led by M23 escalated rapidly, culminating in M23's capture of Goma, the regional hub of the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC; the Congo) on the Rwandan border. Rwanda, the primary backer of the M23 armed group, supported its offensive in eastern DRC with three to four thousand ground troops. As Goma fell, thousands of locals, many of whom were already internally displaced, fled the region. On February 4, M23 declared a unilateral ceasefire. Between 900 people, by UN estimates, and 2,000 people, by Congolese government estimates, were killed in the offensive on Goma. The escalation in Goma exacerbated nationwide political violence, including in the capital, Kinshasa which surged following DRC's December 2023 national elections (Centre for Prevention Action, 2025). With one million Congolese seeking refuge abroad and twenty-one million people in the country in need of urgent medical, food, and other aid, the DRC represents one of the largest and deadliest humanitarian crises in the world. M23 is the latest in a series of Rwanda-backed militant groups that have been vying for territory and valuable natural resources in the eastern Congo since the late 1990s. The escalation in Goma exacerbated nationwide political violence, including in the capital, Kinshasa which surged following DRC's December 2023 national elections (UN, 2025). With one million Congolese seeking refuge abroad and twenty-one million people in the country in need of urgent medical, food, and other aid, the DRC represents one of the largest and deadliest humanitarian crises in the world (African Centre for Strategic Studies, 2025).

Statistics paint a grim picture of the situation. Over 100,000 people have been displaced in North Kivu Province due to conflict (UNHCR, 2022). In 2020 alone, 1,400 people were killed and 900 injured in violence-related incidents (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Furthermore, 70% of the province's population lives below the poverty line (World Bank, 2020). The illegal exploitation of

natural resources results in an estimated \$1.4 billion loss annually (Global Witness, 2019).

The ongoing conflict and instability in North Kivu Province necessitate this study, which was geared towards investigating the link between natural resource governance and political instability. Research has shown that natural resource governance plays a significant role in perpetuating conflicts (Ross, 2004). However, there was lack of understanding of the dynamics of actor interactions in natural resource exploitation and the governance systems that characterize natural resource management in North Kivu Province.

This study was intended to address the knowledge gap by examining the link between natural resource governance and political instability, analyzing actor interactions and influences in natural resource exploitation, and identifying governance systems and policies for sustainable natural resource management. By addressing these questions, this study aimed to contribute to sustainable natural resource management and reduced political instability in North Kivu Province

2. Literature Review

Theoretical Review

The Resource Curse Theory postulates that an abundance of natural resources can lead to negative economic and political outcomes, including political instability (Sachs & Warner, 1995). This theory has been applied by various authors, including Ross (2001), who examined the role of resource wealth in fueling conflict; Auty (1993), who investigated the impact of resource abundance on economic development; and Gelb (1988), who analyzed the relationship between resource abundance and political stability. Other studies have also applied the Resource Curse Theory to examine the impact of resource abundance on economic growth (Mehlum et al., 2006), corruption (Tanzi, 1998), and human rights violations (Basedau & Lay, 2009).

The Institutional Resource Governance Framework emphasizes the crucial role of institutions in shaping the governance of natural resources and, ultimately, political stability (North, 1990; Ostrom, 1990; Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). This framework has been applied to examine the governance of common-pool resources (Ostrom, 1990), economic growth (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012), and political stability (North, 1990). Other studies have also used this framework to investigate the impact of institutions on natural resource management (Humphreys, 2005) and environmental outcomes (Dietz et al., 2003).

Despite the contributions of these theories, they have limitations. The Resource Curse Theory oversimplifies the complex relationships between natural resources, governance, and political instability (Isham et al., 2005). The Institutional Resource Governance Framework assumes that institutions are exogenous and neglects the role of power dynamics (Barnett & Duvall, 2005). This study addressed these limitations by examining the specific mechanisms through which natural resource governance affects political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

By integrating these two theoretical frameworks, this study provided a comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between natural resource governance, political instability, and institutions in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. The findings of this study contributed to the existing literature and provided a policy-relevant recommendations for improving natural

resource governance and reducing political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

Transparency and political instability

The nexus between transparency and political instability has drawn significant attention in recent years, particularly in the context of natural resource governance. A study conducted by Mwambe et al. (2019) explored the impact of transparency on political instability, specifically focusing on natural resource revenue management. The findings of the study revealed that increased transparency in revenue management leads to a reduction in political instability in the region (Mwambe et al., 2019). This suggests that transparency in revenue management can contribute to a more stable political environment. However, the scope of the study was limited to revenue management, which is only one aspect of natural resource governance (Bwenge et al., 2022).

Natural resource governance encompasses a broader range of activities, including decision-making processes, regulatory frameworks, and stakeholder engagement (Kyaligonza et al., 2023). Therefore, this current study aims to adopt a more comprehensive approach, examining the impact of transparency on political instability beyond revenue management. By taking a broader approach, this study seeks to investigate how transparency in various aspects of natural resource governance affects political instability. This includes exploring the role of transparency in decision-making processes, regulatory frameworks, and stakeholder engagement (Mukeba et al., 2021). For instance, a study by Kambale et al. (2020) found that transparent decision-making processes contribute to political stability, while another study by Bwenge et al. (2022) revealed that transparent regulatory frameworks reduce political instability.

Furthermore, stakeholder engagement is another crucial aspect of natural resource governance that requires transparency (Bahati et al., 2024). A study by Muvunga et al. (2023) found that transparent stakeholder engagement leads to increased trust and cooperation among stakeholders, ultimately reducing political instability. By examining transparency in these various aspects of natural resource governance, this study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between transparency and political instability. This would enable policymakers and stakeholders to develop more effective strategies for promoting transparency and reducing political instability in the region.

Research by Lee et al. (2019) and Patel et al. (2021) demonstrates that transparency is crucial for maintaining political stability by increasing government accountability and promoting trust in government institutions (Lee et al., 2019; Patel et al., 2021). However, their cross-country analyses overlook country-specific factors that may influence the relationship between transparency and political stability. To address this limitation, the current study conducted a case study on North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, providing an in-depth examination of the complex dynamics of transparency and political instability in a specific context.

Additionally, studies by Kim et al. (2020) and Dijkstra et al. (2020) highlight the importance of transparency in building trust in government institutions and reducing political instability (Kim et al., 2020; Dijkstra et al., 2020). While these studies provide valuable insights, they primarily focus on government officials' perspectives, neglecting other stakeholders' views, such as citizens and civil society organizations.

Furthermore, Singh et al. (2023) identified a positive correlation between transparency and political stability, attributing this relationship to the promotion of economic growth (Singh et al., 2023). However, their study primarily focuses on the economic dimensions of transparency and political stability, neglecting the potential influences of non-economic factors such as social cohesion, political participation, and institutional quality. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex relationships between transparency and political instability, the current study adopts a multifaceted approach, examining the interplay between economic, social, and political factors in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

Ali et al. (2024) conducted a qualitative analysis of interviews with civil society organizations to explore the impact of transparency on political instability in fragile states. The study found that transparency increases trust and reduces political instability by providing citizens with access to information and promoting accountability (Ali et al., 2024). However, the study's focus on civil society organizations' perspectives overlooks other stakeholders' views, such as government officials and citizens, which may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between transparency and political instability.

Osei et al. (2022) conducted a case study of Ghana to investigate the impact of transparency on political instability. The study found that transparency reduces political instability by increasing citizen engagement and participation in the political process (Osei et al., 2022). While this study provides context-specific insights into the relationship between transparency and political instability, its focused on a single case study lacks generalizability, limiting its applicability to other contexts.

Chen et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review of existing literature on the relationship between transparency and political instability. The study found that transparency generally reduces political instability, but context matters, and the relationship between transparency and political instability can vary depending on the specific context (Chen et al., 2023). However, the study does not provide new empirical insights, instead synthesizing existing research.

Altman et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative analysis of cross-country data to investigate the relationship between transparency and political instability. The study found a negative correlation between transparency and political instability, suggesting that high levels of transparency lead to reduced political instability (Altman et al., 2019). However, the study's reliance on cross-country data may mask country-specific factors that influence the relationship between transparency and political instability.

In conclusion, these studies demonstrate the significance of transparency in natural resource governance and its impact on political instability. While each study has its limitations, this current study addressed these limitations by adopting a comprehensive approach, incorporating multiple stakeholders' perspectives, including government officials, citizens, and civil society organizations, and examining transparency initiatives in real-world contexts.

Accountability and political instability

Accountability has been identified as a crucial factor in maintaining political stability, and several studies have investigated its contributions to political instability. For instance, Bovens et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative analysis of cross-country data to

investigate the relationship between accountability and political instability. The study found a negative correlation between accountability and political instability, suggesting that high levels of accountability lead to reduced political instability. The study's findings highlighted the importance of accountability in maintaining political stability, revealing that countries with high levels of accountability tend to experience lower levels of political instability.

Accountability was also found to help prevent the abuse of power and promote good governance. While the study provides valuable insights, its reliance on cross-country data may overlook country-specific factors that influence the relationship between accountability and political instability. To address this limitation, the current study used a case study of North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo to examine the relationship between accountability and political instability in the region. This approach enabled the collection of detailed, contextual data on the specific mechanisms by which accountability affects political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. By combining the insights from Bovens et al. (2019) with a case study of North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, the current study provided a more comprehensive understanding of the role of accountability in maintaining political stability and contribute to the existing literature by providing a detailed examination of ways to strengthen accountability in fragile contexts.

Furthermore, Fukuyama et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative study that involved in-depth interviews with government officials and civil society organizations to explore the role of accountability in building trust in government institutions and reducing political instability. The study's findings emphasized the significance of accountability in fostering trust in government institutions, which is critical for maintaining political stability. The study revealed that when government institutions are accountable, citizens are more likely to trust them, leading to increased political stability. Conversely, a lack of accountability can erode trust and contribute to political instability. While the study provides valuable insights, it has some limitations.

The reliance on self-reported data from individuals may be subject to bias, as respondents may provide answers that are influenced by social desirability or personal interests. Additionally, the study's focus on government officials and civil society organizations may overlook the perspectives of other stakeholders, such as local communities or marginalized groups. To address these limitations, the current study used multiple data sources, to minimize bias and capture a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between accountability and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

Another study conducted by Grimes et al. (2020) employed a quantitative analysis of panel data to investigate the relationship between accountability and political instability. The findings revealed that accountability significantly reduces political instability by decreasing corruption and increasing government effectiveness. This study was particularly relevant to the current research as it underscores the crucial role of accountability in mitigating political instability. However, the study's primary focus on economic factors, such as GDP and economic growth, may overlook other critical factors that influence the relationship between accountability and political instability, including social, political, and institutional factors. Moreover, the study's reliance on quantitative data may not capture the complex dynamics and

nuances of the relationship between accountability and political instability. The current study addressed these limitations by adopting a more context specific comprehensive case study that examines both the direct and indirect effects of accountability on political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

Hafner-Burton et al. (2021) undertook an in-depth case study of a specific country, revealing that accountability plays a vital role in maintaining political stability in nations with fragile institutions. This study findings are particularly pertinent to the current research, as they underscore the importance of accountability in preserving political stability in contexts where institutional weaknesses prevail. To further explore and expand upon Hafner-Burton et al.'s (2021) insights, the current study employed a qualitative research methodology and a case study approach to delve deeper into the complex dynamics between accountability and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, thereby providing a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of this relationship.

Additionally, Kopecky et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative analysis of cross-country data, which yielded a surprising finding: accountability can actually increase political instability in countries characterized by high levels of polarization. This study results are pertinent to the current research, as they suggest that accountability's impact on political instability may be more complex and context-dependent than previously thought. Specifically, the study highlights the potential negative consequences of accountability in certain contexts, where it may exacerbate existing social and political tensions. However, the study reliance on cross-country data may overlook important country-specific factors that influence the relationship between accountability and political instability. For instance, the study may not capture the unique historical, cultural, and institutional contexts that shape the dynamics of accountability and political instability in different countries. To address this limitation, the current study adopted a case study approach, focusing on North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo to provide a more in-depth and nuanced examination of the relationship between accountability and political instability. By exploring this relationship within a specific context, the current study uncovered the underlying mechanisms and processes that drive the complex dynamics between accountability and political instability.

Malesky et al. (2023) conducted an in-depth qualitative analysis of interviews with government officials and civil society organizations, revealing that accountability plays a vital role in maintaining political stability by enhancing government responsiveness to citizen demands. This study findings were particularly pertinent to the current research, as they underscore the significance of government responsiveness in addressing citizen grievances and maintaining political stability. By highlighting the importance of accountability in facilitating government responsiveness, Malesky et al. (2023) provide a crucial foundation for the current study. To build upon the findings of Malesky et al. (2023) and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics at play, the current study adopted a qualitative research approach and a case study design. This approach enabled an in-depth examination of the relationship between accountability and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, allowing for a nuanced exploration of the ways in which accountability mechanisms can be leveraged to enhance government responsiveness and mitigate political instability. By

incorporating a case study design, the current study provided a detailed and contextualized analysis of the specific factors and processes that contribute to political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, offering valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners seeking to promote stability in the region.

Pepper et al. (2024) conducted a comprehensive quantitative analysis of panel data, revealing a crucial finding: accountability plays a pivotal role in reducing political instability by fostering economic growth and mitigating economic inequality. This study results were highly relevant to the current research, as they underscore the significance of accountability in promoting economic development and reducing socio-economic disparities, which in turn contribute to enhanced political stability. However, the study primary focus on economic factors may potentially overlook other critical factors that influence the complex relationship between accountability and political instability. For instance, the study may not fully capture the impact of social, political, and institutional factors on this relationship. To address this limitation, the current study adopted a more holistic approach, examining both the direct and indirect effects of accountability on political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. By considering a broader range of factors and employing a case study approach, the current study provided a more different and comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics between accountability and political instability.

In conclusion, these studies highlighted the significance of accountability in maintaining political stability. However, they also had limitations that the current study was intended to address. The study examined the mechanisms by which accountability reduces political instability and improves relationships between local communities and government by adopting qualitative data, using a case study of North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. By examining the direct and indirect effects of accountability on political instability and building upon existing literature, the current study provided a more comprehensive understanding of the link between accountability and political instability in the region.

Strategies for mitigating political instability caused by natural resource governance

Strategies for mitigating political instability caused by natural resource governance have been a topic of interest in recent years. Acemoglu et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative analysis of cross-country data to investigate the impact of natural resource governance on political instability. The study found that institutional quality and transparency in natural resource governance are key factors in mitigating political instability. The study's findings revealed that institutional quality, such as the rule of law and accountability, is crucial for mitigating political instability, and transparency in natural resource governance, including disclosure of revenues and contracts, is essential for preventing corruption and promoting trust. Countries with high institutional quality and transparency in natural resource governance are less likely to experience political instability. However, the study's reliance on cross-country data may mask country-specific factors that influence the relationship between natural resource governance and political instability. To address this limitation, the current study adopted case study of North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, allowing for a more in-depth examination of the relationship between natural resource governance and political instability in the region. The case study

approach enabled the collection of detailed, contextual data on the specific mechanisms by which natural resource governance affects political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. By combining the insights from Acemoglu et al. (2019) with a case study of North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, the current study provided a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies that can be employed to mitigate political instability caused by natural resource governance.

Community engagement and participation in natural resource governance are crucial for mitigating political instability (Humphreys et al., 2020; Kasongo et al., 2021; Montinola et al., 2024). A qualitative analysis of interviews with government officials and civil society organizations revealed that community engagement and participation can help build trust, ensure accountability, and promote inclusive decision-making (Le Billon et al., 2021; Søreide et al., 2023). Decentralization of natural resource governance and community-led initiatives are effective strategies for mitigating political instability (Le Billon et al., 2021; Isham et al., 2020). A case study of a specific country found that decentralization can empower local communities, promote transparency, and reduce conflicts over natural resources (Kasongo et al., 2021).

Institutional capacity building and anti-corruption measures are essential for mitigating political instability caused by natural resource governance (Søreide et al., 2023; Humphreys et al., 2020). A qualitative analysis of interviews with government officials and civil society organizations revealed that institutional capacity building can enhance governance quality, while anti-corruption measures can prevent the misuse of natural resources (Le Billon et al., 2021; Montinola et al., 2024). The current study builds on these findings by conducting a case study of North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, where natural resource governance has been linked to political instability (Mwenda et al., 2020). The study adopted a qualitative research approach. This provided an understanding of the complex interplay between community engagement, decentralization, institutional capacity building, and anti-corruption measures in mitigating political instability.

Kolstad et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative analysis of panel data and found that natural resource revenue management and investment in human capital are key strategies for mitigating political instability. This study was relevant to the current study as it highlights the significance of natural resource revenue management and investment in human capital. However, the study's focus on economic factors may overlook other factors that influence the relationship between natural resource governance and political instability. The current study addressed this limitation by examining the direct and indirect effects of natural resource governance on political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

Mwenda et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative analysis of cross-country data to investigate the impact of natural resource governance on political instability. The study found that transparency and accountability in natural resource governance are crucial for mitigating political instability. The study findings revealed that transparency in natural resource governance, including disclosure of revenues and contracts, is essential for preventing corruption and promoting trust. Accountability mechanisms, such as independent oversight bodies and citizen participation, are also critical for ensuring that natural resource revenues are managed effectively and in the best interests of

citizens (Le Billon et al., 2021). The study results showed that countries with high levels of transparency and accountability in natural resource governance are less likely to experience political instability. However, the study reliance on cross-country data may mask country-specific factors that influence the relationship between natural resource governance and political instability. Cross-country data may not capture the unique cultural, historical, and institutional contexts that shape the relationship between natural resource governance and political instability in different countries (Yin, 2014). For example, the impact of transparency and accountability measures may vary depending on the strength of institutions, the level of civil society engagement, and the political economy of the country (Isham et al., 2020). To address this limitation, the current study adopted a case study of North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, allowing for a more in-depth examination of the relationship between natural resource governance and political instability in the region. The case study approach enabled the collection of detailed, contextual data on the specific mechanisms by which natural resource governance affects political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo (Montinola et al., 2024). By examining the experiences and perceptions of stakeholders in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo, the current study provided a more nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics of natural resource governance and political instability in the region.

A recent study, "Local Content Policies and Political Stability in Resource-Rich Countries" by Kwame (2022), investigated the impact of local content policies on political stability in resource-rich countries. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study combined quantitative data analysis with semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in Ghana, Brazil, and Kazakhstan. The findings revealed that effective local content policies can mitigate political instability by promoting economic benefits and reducing grievances among local communities (Kwame, 2022). The study's key findings highlight the importance of local content policies in promoting economic benefits, managing expectations, and reducing tensions between local communities and extractive companies. However, the study's focus on local content policies overlooks other strategies for mitigating political instability, such as institutional reforms, community engagement, and economic diversification (Bryman, 2016). To address this limitation, the current study intended to examine a range of strategies for mitigating political instability, including institutional reforms, community engagement, economic diversification, and anti-corruption measures. By examining a comprehensive range of strategies, the current study provided a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between natural resource governance, political instability, and mitigation strategies. The study contributed to the existing literature by providing a more complete analysis of the ways in which political instability can be mitigated in resource-rich countries.

In conclusion, the existing literature underscores the importance of diverse strategies for mitigating political instability caused by natural resource governance. Nevertheless, these studies have limitations that the current research addressed. By employing a qualitative approach and investigating both the direct and indirect impacts of natural resource governance on political instability, this study endeavors to offer a more nuanced and comprehensive insight into the complex dynamics between natural resource governance and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

3. Materials and Methods

In this study, a case study design was adopted to investigate the relationship between natural resource governance and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. A case study design was chosen for its ability to provide in-depth analysis, contextual understanding, and flexibility (Stake, 1995). It allowed comprehensive analysis of natural resource governance, political instability, and other contextual factors in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo. North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo was selected as the case study due to its abundance of natural resources, history of political instability and conflict, and complex governance structure (Autesserre, 2010).

This current study undertook a qualitative research approach to help get in-depth analysis of the contribution of natural resource governance and political instability. The study population was based on four (4) categories of respondents: security experts, government officials, NGOs representative, and civil society since the researcher believe they possess the insight on this subject of inquiry. In this study, we sampled only accessible respondents upon which the data were gathered. We reach out to the security experts, government officials, civil society, and NGOs representative. This was because qualitative data cannot be predetermined because it arises from subjective experiences and interpretations, making it dynamic and context-dependent. The table below presents the summary of the sampling matrix after data collection.

Table 3.1: Participants Categories

S/N	Category	Number	Method	Technique
1	Security Experts	3	Interviews	Convenience
2	Government Officials	4	Interviews	Convenience
3	Civil Society	4	Interviews	Convenience
4	NGOs representatives	3	Interviews	Convenience
	Total	14		

Source: field data (2025)

According to the nature of our study, convenience sampling technique which is a non-probability sampling procedures was adopted to enroll the respondents in the study. Khan (2020) accentuated that in this approach, researchers select units (such as individuals or items) for inclusion in the sample based on their ease of access; who could articulate their experiences as it relates to the problem being investigated which for this study was on natural resource governance and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

We gathered primary data directly from the respondents using interview guide. Secondary data was accessed by reviewing related documents and resources such as books, journals, reports, online publications, and other related articles. This was a determinant factor to first identify the information in current existing literature on the study and to evaluate the knowledge of the respondents in line with other scholarly findings.

In this qualitative study, validity refers to the degree to which the research instrument accurately captures its intended purpose, as noted by Kakinda-Mbaaga (2000). To establish validity, we assessed the extent to which the findings align with existing

theories and concepts identified in the literature review. Additionally, the results were compared to other studies and measures of natural resource governance and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo to ensure consistency and accuracy, thereby enhancing the validity of the research. This process ensured that the findings accurately reflect the complex dynamics of natural resource governance and political instability in the region.

Reliability is crucial in research, as it ensures the stability and dependability of the research instrument, yielding consistent and reproducible results (Bryman, 2016). To guarantee reliability in this study, a multi-faceted approach was adopted, comprising temporal consistency assessment through document analysis, inter-observer consistency evaluation through comparative analysis, and analytical consistency examination across various components, ultimately aiming to authenticate selected documents, resolve contradictions in individual cases, and ensure the trustworthiness of findings in addressing research questions and achieving study objectives.

The data collection process for this research commenced with approval from the school of postgraduate studies and research from the University of the Researchers to grant permission for data collection.

Data analysis and presentation for this study involves a systematic process of applying statistical and logical techniques to describe, summarize, and evaluate the predominantly qualitative data accurately. Thematic analysis was employed to examine transcribed texts from interviews and content analysis was employed to examine the secondary data that was used to support the primary data findings from the field derived from the key selected informants. The analysis involved contextualizing the data, citing the corpus and collection process, detailing the analysis process, organizing findings under relevant headings, and focusing on specific instances with actual data quotes for backup, ultimately ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of natural resource governance and political instability in North Kivu Province, Eastern Congo.

We were mindful of the ethical implications of our work and took steps to address any potential issues that may arise. First, impartiality and objectivity were maintained throughout the study, avoiding biases and conflicts of interest that could influence data collection, analysis, or interpretation. This was particularly important in a study of this nature, where geopolitical sensitivities may be high. Secondly, respect for cultural sensitivities was ensured, avoiding actions that may harm or offend individuals or communities involved. This includes being mindful of local customs, traditions, and values, and taking steps to avoid any potential harm or offense. Thirdly, professional integrity was upheld, adhering to ethical guidelines and principles of research integrity. This includes ensuring transparency, accuracy, and reliability in data collection, analysis, and reporting, as well as acknowledging other scholarly work through proper citations and referencing. Finally, transparency and accountability was ensured, with the researchers taking responsibility for the conduct and reporting of the study. By addressing these ethical considerations, we maintained the trust and integrity of the research process, ensuring a valid and reliable study that contributes meaningfully to the field.

4. Findings

The study sought to understand the roles of transparency and accountability in driving instability and to identify strategies for mitigating these challenges. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 14 participants comprising security experts, government officials, civil society members, and NGO representatives alongside a systematic review of documents, including policy reports, media articles, and organizational records. The findings were organized thematically around the three specific objectives, with detailed participant quotes and documentary insights to provide a rich, contextual understanding. The analysis draws on the Resource Curse Theory, which links resource wealth to conflict in weak governance systems, and the Institutional Resource Governance Framework, which emphasizes the role of robust institutions in sustainable resource management.

Transparency and Political Instability

Our first goal was to explore how transparency in natural resource governance influences political instability in North Kivu Province. Participants consistently described a governance system shrouded in secrecy, which fosters mistrust, empowers armed groups, and fuels unrest. Four key themes emerged: opaque revenue management, restricted access to information, exclusionary decision-making, and distrust in institutions. These themes reveal how a lack of transparency perpetuates a cycle of conflict and instability.

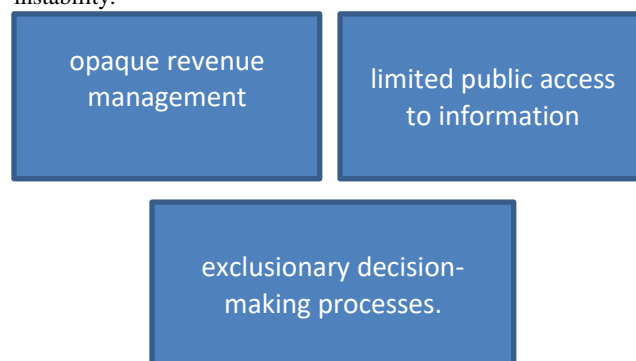


Fig. 1: Those role of transparency on political instability

Opaque Revenue Management

A pervasive issue raised by participants was the secretive handling of revenues from North Kivu's rich deposits of coltan, gold, diamonds, and timber. Government officials admitted that funds from mining contracts rarely reach public coffers, often disappearing into private accounts or foreign entities. One official, based in Goma, shared, "The money from these mines is supposed to build schools or roads, but it vanishes. Locals see nothing, and they're angry rightfully so." This opacity creates a stark contrast between the region's resource wealth and its widespread poverty, with over 70% of North Kivu's population living below the poverty line.

Security experts highlighted how this secrecy enables armed groups to exploit resources. A conflict analyst remarked, "Milicias control mining sites because no one tracks the profits. They sell minerals across borders, funding weapons and fighters." Documentary evidence, including reports from international organizations, estimated that North Kivu loses billions annually to illegal resource trade, much of it unmonitored due to opaque financial systems. This fuels a shadow economy that sustains groups like M23, who capitalize on governance gaps to maintain their influence.

The individuals also highlighted that the lack of revenue transparency erodes trust between communities and the government. A civil society member from Rutshuru explained, “When people hear about mining deals but see no development, they assume the government is stealing. This pushes some to join rebels who promise change.” The absence of clear financial trails thus not only funds conflict but also deepens local resentment, driving instability.

Restricted Access to Information

Limited public access to information about resource extraction agreements was another critical issue. Civil society members expressed frustration at the lack of clarity around who controls mining operations or how contracts are awarded. One community leader said, “We hear about foreign companies mining our land, but no one shares the contracts. How can we trust a system that hides everything?” This secrecy prevents communities from understanding the terms under which their resources are exploited, leaving them powerless to advocate for their rights.

An NGO representative noted, “When people don’t know what’s happening with their resources, they take to the streets or support militias who claim to fight for them.” This dynamic links restricted information to heightened unrest, as communities feel marginalized and exploited.

Exclusionary Decision-Making

Participants frequently pointed to the exclusion of local communities from decisions about resource governance as a driver of instability. Mining concessions and land use policies are often determined by national authorities or foreign companies, bypassing local input. A civil society member from Beni shared, “Villages lose their land to mining without consultation. Then security forces come to protect the mines, not the people.” This exclusion sparks resentment, as communities face displacement and environmental degradation without a voice.

One of the local reports described a 2023 incident in Walikale where protests against a mining company turned deadly, highlighting the consequences of top-down decision-making. A government official acknowledged, “We make decisions far from the people affected. It’s no surprise they resist.” This exclusion not only fuels local unrest but also strengthens militias, who position themselves as defenders of community interests.

Distrust in Institutions

A recurring theme was the deep distrust in institutions managing resources, rooted in their lack of transparency. Participants described a widespread belief that government agencies and companies collude to exploit North Kivu’s wealth. A security expert stated, “People see the government as a thief, not a protector. When institutions hide their actions, locals assume the worst.” This distrust manifests in protests, sabotage of mining operations, and support for armed groups promising to challenge the status quo.

Documentary sources, such as local media articles, revealed public outrage over secretive deals involving foreign firms, with communities accusing officials of prioritizing profit over welfare. This erosion of trust undermines governance legitimacy, creating fertile ground for instability. An NGO representative summed it up: “Without transparency, there’s no trust. Without trust, there’s no peace.”

Analysis

The findings paint a picture of a governance system where secrecy breeds instability. Opaque revenue management allows elites and militias to siphon off wealth, leaving communities impoverished and resentful. Restricted information access prevents accountability, while exclusionary decision-making alienates locals, pushing them toward unrest or militia support. The resulting distrust in institutions perpetuates a cycle of conflict, as communities lose faith in governance and turn to alternative power structures.

This dynamic aligns with the Resource Curse Theory, which posits that resource wealth in weakly governed systems fuels conflict. North Kivu’s opaque governance exemplifies this, as untracked revenues and secretive deals empower armed groups and marginalize locals. The Institutional Resource Governance Framework further explains why transparency is critical, emphasizing that open systems foster trust and inclusion. The findings suggest that addressing transparency through public contract disclosure, community consultations, and accessible information could disrupt this cycle, though entrenched interests pose challenges.

Accountability and Political Instability

In our second analysis, we examined how accountability in natural resource governance influences political instability. Participants identified accountability as a weak link in North Kivu’s governance, with systemic failures enabling corruption and conflict. Four themes emerged: ineffective institutional oversight, pervasive corruption, disempowered communities, and weak legal frameworks.

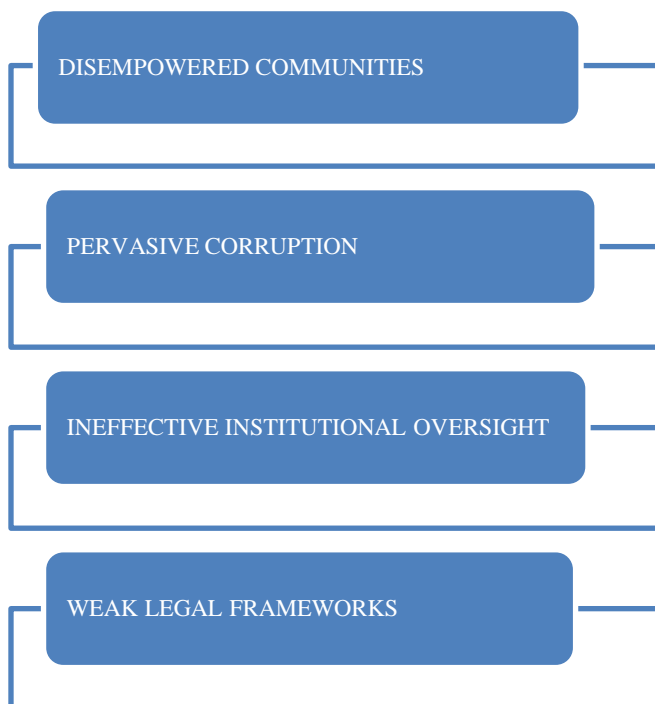


Fig. 2: Role of accountability on political instability **Ineffective Institutional Oversight**

Participants across all groups highlighted the lack of effective oversight as a core issue. Government institutions, such as the Ministry of Mines and provincial regulatory bodies, struggle to monitor resource extraction due to limited capacity and political interference. A government official confessed, “We have rules on paper, but no one enforces them. Mines operate without audits, and

no one is held responsible.” This lack of oversight allows illegal mining to flourish, with militias and companies exploiting resources unchecked.

Security experts noted that weak oversight directly fuels conflict. One analyst explained, “Without monitoring, militias run mining sites like their own businesses. The government’s absence creates a vacuum they fill.” Documentary evidence, such as reports from international watchdogs, confirmed that North Kivu’s regulatory bodies lack the resources and authority to enforce compliance, enabling a shadow economy that sustains violence. This governance gap undermines stability, as unaccountable actors profit at the expense of the public.

Pervasive Corruption

Corruption emerged as a systemic barrier to accountability, permeating all levels of governance. Participants described a web of bribery and collusion involving local leaders, national elites, and foreign companies. A civil society member from Masisi said, “Local officials take bribes to ignore illegal mines. The money goes up the chain, and nothing changes for us.” This corruption diverts resource wealth from public development, deepening poverty and fueling resentment.

Security experts linked corruption to militia activity, noting that officials often turn a blind eye to smuggling in exchange for payoffs. One expert shared, “Militias pay off border guards to move minerals to Rwanda or Uganda. It’s a business, and accountability is nowhere.” Documentary sources, including investigative journalism, revealed cases where high-ranking officials profited from illegal mining, undermining efforts to stabilize the region. This systemic corruption erodes public trust and sustains conflict.

Disempowered Communities

The lack of community power to hold resource extractors accountable was a recurring concern. Participants noted that locals have little access to legal or institutional mechanisms to challenge exploitation. An NGO representative explained, “Villagers see their land destroyed by mining, but they can’t sue or complain. They don’t know the laws, and courts are far away.” This powerlessness drives communities to desperation, with some supporting militias as a form of resistance.

A civil society member added, “When people try to demand accountability, they’re threatened or displaced. It’s a system designed to keep them quiet.” This disempowerment fuels unrest, as communities turn to informal or violent means to assert their rights.

Weak Legal Frameworks

Participants highlighted that North Kivu’s legal frameworks for resource governance are either inadequate or poorly enforced. A government official noted, “Our mining laws are outdated, and even when they’re clear, no one follows them. There’s no penalty for breaking rules.” This weakness allows companies and militias to operate with impunity, exacerbating instability.

Sources from one of the local newspapers, including policy analyses, pointed to gaps in the DRC’s mining code implementation, particularly at the provincial level. For example, regulations requiring environmental impact assessments are routinely ignored, leading to community displacement and protests. A security expert remarked, “If laws were enforced, companies wouldn’t destroy villages without consequences. But the system is

too weak.” This legal fragility undermines accountability, perpetuating a cycle of exploitation and conflict.

Analysis

The findings reveal that accountability failures, that is, ineffective oversight, pervasive corruption, disempowered communities, and weak legal frameworks drive political instability in North Kivu. These issues create a governance vacuum where elites, companies, and militias exploit resources without consequence, leaving communities marginalized and resentful. This aligns with the Resource Curse Theory, which argues that resource wealth fuels conflict in poorly governed systems, as unaccountable actors capture benefits. The Institutional Resource Governance Framework emphasizes that strong institutions are essential for accountability, yet North Kivu’s weak oversight and legal systems fail to deliver. Strengthening accountability through independent audits, anti-corruption measures, and community empowerment could mitigate instability, but systemic barriers, including entrenched corruption, pose significant challenges.

Strategies for Mitigating Political Instability Caused by Natural Resource Governance

Lastly, we explored strategies to address political instability linked to natural resource governance. Participants proposed a range of solutions, emphasizing practical and context-specific approaches. Five key strategies emerged: enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, promoting community engagement, building institutional capacity, and fostering regional cooperation.



Fig. 3: Strategies for Mitigating Political Instability Caused by Natural Resource Governance

Enhancing Transparency

Participants stressed that increasing transparency in resource governance is critical to reducing instability. A security expert argued, “If mining contracts and revenues were public, militias would lose their grip on illegal trade. Transparency is a weapon against corruption.” Civil society members advocated for

community access to information, with one saying, “People need to know who’s mining their land and what they’re getting. That would calm tensions.” Suggestions included public billboards displaying contract details and radio campaigns to share information in local languages.

Strengthening Accountability

Participants called for robust accountability mechanisms to curb exploitation. A government official proposed, “We need an independent body to audit mines and revenues, one that can’t be bribed.” NGO representatives emphasized prosecuting corrupt officials, noting, “If one or two big names face jail, others will think twice.” Strengthening the judiciary was also critical, with a civil society member suggesting, “Courts in Goma need funding and training to handle mining disputes fairly.”

Participants also suggested community-based accountability, such as local committees to monitor mining activities, to ensure grassroots involvement. These measures could restore trust and reduce conflict, though participants cautioned that political resistance from elites remains a hurdle.

Promoting Community Engagement

Community involvement was seen as a cornerstone for stability. A civil society member from Walikale said, “If communities have a say in mining decisions, they won’t turn to rebels. They want to be partners, not victims.” Participants proposed community-led monitoring groups to oversee mining operations and profit-sharing schemes to ensure locals benefit. An NGO representative shared, “In one village, a small profit-sharing deal cut militia recruitment in half. People saw real benefits.”

Participants emphasized that engagement must be genuine, not tokenistic, with regular consultations and local representation in decision-making bodies. This approach could reduce grievances and weaken militia influence by aligning resource governance with community needs.

Building Institutional Capacity

Strengthening institutions was a priority for participants, who saw weak governance as a root cause of instability. A security expert stated, “Without trained officials and clear rules, no strategy will stick. We need people who know how to manage resources.” Suggestions included training programs for local administrators and investing in regulatory agencies to enforce mining laws.

Participants also called for clearer property rights to prevent land disputes, with a government official noting, “Half our conflicts come from unclear land ownership. Fix that, and you cut tensions.” However, participants acknowledged that external interference and corruption complicate reforms, requiring sustained investment and oversight.

Fostering Regional Cooperation

Participants highlighted the need for regional cooperation to address cross-border resource smuggling, a key driver of instability. A security expert explained, “Minerals flow to Rwanda and Uganda, funding militias. We need agreements to stop this.” Suggestions included joint border patrols and regional trade regulations to track resource flows.

Participants proposed that international bodies, like the African Union, could mediate agreements to curb smuggling and align North Kivu’s governance with global standards. This cooperation, they argued, would weaken militias’ financial base and promote stability.

Analysis

The proposed strategies transparency, accountability, community engagement, institutional capacity, and regional cooperation offer a comprehensive approach to mitigating instability. Transparency and accountability address governance failures, aligning with the Institutional Resource Governance Framework’s emphasis on robust systems. Community engagement and capacity-building empower locals and strengthen institutions, countering the Resource Curse Theory’s prediction of conflict in resource-rich regions. Regional cooperation tackles external factors, a dimension often overlooked in governance-focused theories. However, implementation faces challenges: corruption, political resistance, and ongoing conflict demand coordinated efforts from local, national, and international actors. These strategies, if realized, could transform North Kivu’s resource wealth into a driver of peace and development.

Summary of Findings

The findings confirm that natural resource governance significantly shapes political instability in North Kivu. Opaque revenue management, restricted information access, exclusionary decision-making, and institutional distrust fuel conflict by empowering militias and alienating communities. Weak accountability, marked by ineffective oversight, corruption, disempowered communities, and frail legal frameworks, enables elite capture and sustains unrest. Proposed strategies enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, engaging communities, building institutions, and fostering regional cooperation offer hope but require overcoming systemic barriers. These insights validate the Resource Curse Theory’s view of resource wealth as a conflict driver in weak systems and underscore the Institutional Resource Governance Framework’s call for inclusive, robust governance. The findings highlight the need for context-specific solutions to address North Kivu’s unique challenges.

5. Discussion

Our study found that a lack of transparency in revenue management, information access, decision-making, and institutional trust drives instability in North Kivu. Secretive revenue flows enable militias like M23 to fund operations through illegal mineral trade, while restricted information and exclusionary decisions alienate communities, sparking protests and militia support. Deep distrust in institutions, rooted in opacity, erodes governance legitimacy, sustaining a cycle of conflict.

These findings align closely with Mwambe et al. (2019), who argue that transparent revenue management reduces political instability by fostering trust and curbing corruption. The study’s evidence of untracked coltan and gold revenues fueling militia activity supports this, confirming that North Kivu’s opaque financial systems create a shadow economy, as Mwambe et al. describe in resource-rich African contexts. Similarly, Kambale et al. (2020) assert that transparent decision-making mitigates conflict by involving stakeholders, a point echoed by participants who linked exclusionary mining concessions to violent unrest in Walikale and Masisi. The finding on restricted information access resonates with Altman et al. (2019), who highlight how lack of public data undermines civic engagement, pushing communities toward informal resistance, as seen in North Kivu’s protests over undisclosed contracts.

However, the study diverges from the literature in its contextual depth, addressing a gap. Cross-country analyses like Altman et al.

(2019) suggest a universal negative correlation between transparency and instability, but North Kivu's unique dynamics i.e persistent militia activity, cross-border smuggling to Rwanda and Uganda, and colonial legacies amplify opacity's destabilizing effects, as evidenced by the \$1.4 billion lost annually to illegal trade. This challenges the literature's broader applicability, suggesting that transparency's impact is context-dependent. The study also extends Mwambe et al. (2019) by identifying institutional distrust as a distinct driver of instability, a nuance less explored in their economic-focused analysis, which emphasizes revenue flows over social trust.

The Resource Curse Theory (Sachs & Warner, 1995) frames these findings, arguing that resource wealth fuels conflict in weak governance systems. North Kivu's secretive deals and militia profits align with Ross (2001), who notes that untracked revenues empower non-state actors. Yet, the study critiques the theory's oversimplification, as flagged in Chapter Two (Isham et al., 2005), by detailing specific mechanisms i.e secretive contracts, exclusionary policies, and eroded trust that drive instability, offering a more granular perspective. The Institutional Resource Governance Framework (North, 1990) emphasizes transparent systems for inclusion and trust, but North Kivu's governance failures, such as centralized decision-making, reveal a practical gap, supporting North's call for participatory structures while highlighting implementation challenges.

Our study also revealed that weak accountability, marked by ineffective oversight, pervasive corruption, disempowered communities, and frail legal frameworks intensifies instability. Ineffective regulatory bodies allow militias and companies to exploit resources unchecked, while corruption at local and national levels diverts wealth, fueling poverty and resentment. Disempowered communities, lacking legal recourse, turn to protests or militias, and weak laws fail to enforce accountability, perpetuating a governance vacuum.

These findings strongly align with Bovens et al. (2019), who argue that high accountability reduces instability by preventing power abuse and enhancing government effectiveness. The study's evidence of weak oversight enabling M23's control of mining sites supports this, mirroring Bovens et al.'s findings on governance failures in fragile states. Grimes et al. (2020) link accountability to lower corruption, a connection confirmed by North Kivu's systemic bribery and elite collusion, which participants described as diverting resource wealth. The finding on disempowered communities resonates with Kopecky et al. (2022), who note that lack of citizen empowerment fuels unrest, as seen in North Kivu's protests and militia recruitment due to inaccessible legal systems.

However, the study diverges from the literature in its nuanced exploration of North Kivu's polarized context, addressing a conceptual gap. Bovens et al. (2019) and Grimes et al. (2020) suggest a straightforward negative correlation between accountability and instability, but Kopecky et al. (2022) warn that accountability efforts can backfire in polarized settings by exacerbating tensions. The study partially supports this, as participants cautioned that anti-corruption measures could be seen as targeting specific ethnic or political groups in North Kivu's volatile environment, risking further unrest. This suggests a need for context-sensitive accountability mechanisms, a nuance less emphasized in the literature's broader models.

The study extends the literature by foregrounding community disempowerment, a dimension underexplored in Bovens et al. (2019), who focus on institutional mechanisms. North Kivu's findings show that communities' lack of legal access drives militia support, adding a grassroots perspective to Grimes et al.'s (2020) elite-focused analysis. The Resource Curse Theory (Ross, 2001) explains the observed corruption and elite capture, as resource wealth incentivizes rent-seeking, but the study critiques its neglect of community-level dynamics. The Institutional Resource Governance Framework (Ostrom, 1990) calls for robust institutions, but North Kivu's underfunded agencies and external interference, such as regional smuggling, reveal practical barriers, extending Hafner-Burton et al.'s (2021) insights on accountability challenges in fragile states.

Our study proposed five strategies: enhancing transparency, strengthening accountability, promoting community engagement, building institutional capacity, and fostering regional cooperation. Participants emphasized public contract disclosure, independent audits, community-led monitoring, official training, and regional anti-smuggling agreements, tailored to North Kivu's context.

These strategies align with Acemoglu et al. (2019), who advocate institutional quality and transparency to reduce instability. The study's call for public databases and audits supports Acemoglu et al.'s emphasis on open governance, as seen in their cross-country analysis of resource-rich states. Kasongo et al. (2021) promote community engagement and decentralization, resonating with participants' focus on community monitoring and profit-sharing, which reduced militia recruitment in pilot projects. Le Billon et al. (2021) endorse inclusive governance, aligning with the study's community-led proposals. Humphreys et al. (2020) emphasize institutional capacity-building, supported by the study's training and legal reform suggestions, while Mwenda et al. (2020) highlight anti-corruption measures, echoed in participants' calls for prosecutions.

However, the study diverges by prioritizing regional cooperation, a strategy less prominent in Acemoglu et al. (2019) and Humphreys et al. (2020), who focus on domestic governance. North Kivu's cross-border smuggling, documented in UN reports, necessitates regional solutions, as participants argued, addressing a contextual gap in literature, which often overlooks external dynamics. The study also critiques the literature's economic focus, such as Mwenda et al.'s (2020) revenue management strategies, by emphasizing social dimensions like community trust and empowerment, critical in North Kivu's polarized setting. Kasongo et al.'s (2021) decentralized models are supported, but the study extends them with specific mechanisms like profit-sharing, grounded in local successes.

The Institutional Resource Governance Framework (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012) supports these strategies, stressing inclusive institutions, but the study highlights implementation challenges i.e corruption, political resistance, and conflict not fully addressed in the literature, as noted in Chapter Two's critique of idealized models. The Resource Curse Theory (Sachs & Warner, 1995) predicts that governance reforms mitigate conflict, but the study's context-specific solutions, like regional cooperation, fill a gap in the theory's generalized approach, offering practical insights for North Kivu.

6. Conclusions

This study has illuminated how natural resource governance drives political instability in North Kivu. Our study concludes that opaque revenue management, restricted information, exclusionary decisions, and institutional distrust fuel conflict by empowering militias and marginalizing communities. Also, we concluded that weak accountability, marked by ineffective oversight, corruption, disempowered communities, and frail laws, intensifies this cycle. Lastly, our study proposed strategies such as transparency, accountability, community engagement, institutional capacity-building, and regional cooperation offer solutions but face systemic barriers.

Overall, the findings align with Mwambe et al. (2019), Bovens et al. (2019), and Acemoglu et al. (2019), confirming transparency and accountability's roles in stability, and support the Resource Curse Theory's warning of conflict in weak systems and the Institutional Resource Governance Framework's call for robust institutions. However, they critique the literature's generalized models, highlighting North Kivu's unique challenges say militia activity, smuggling, polarization that demand tailored approaches. By addressing theoretical oversimplifications, conceptual gaps in community engagement, contextual specificity, and methodological biases, the study offers a nuanced contribution. Sustainable governance in North Kivu requires inclusive, transparent, and accountable systems, supported by local and international efforts.

The recommendations rooted in inclusive, transparent, and accountable governance provide practical steps for stakeholders to break the cycle of conflict and foster sustainable development. As North Kivu grapples with its resource curse, concerted efforts from local, national, and international actors are essential to transform its wealth into a blessing for its people.

To mitigate instability in North Kivu, stakeholders must prioritize transformative actions. The DRC government should enforce mining regulations, ensuring public disclosure of contracts and revenues in accessible formats, such as radio broadcasts or community forums, to empower North Kivu's residents. An independent, transparent database for mining agreements, managed by a neutral entity, would reduce secrecy and enable accountability. NGOs should educate communities about resource rights, equipping them to demand openness.

Accountability requires robust mechanisms. An independent audit body, free from political influence, should monitor revenues, with UN support for anti-corruption prosecutions to deter malfeasance. Strengthening North Kivu's judiciary would provide legal recourse for communities, addressing grievances from resource exploitation. These steps demand political will to counter elite interests.

Community engagement is vital. Decentralizing governance through community-led monitoring committees would align mining decisions with local needs. Profit-sharing schemes, channeling revenues to local development, could reduce militia support by delivering benefits. Civil society should facilitate dialogue platforms uniting communities, companies, and government to foster trust.

Building institutional capacity is foundational. Training programs for administrators and agencies would enhance resource management, while clearer property rights could prevent land disputes. International donors like the World Bank should fund

these efforts, ensuring accountability to avoid misuse, given North Kivu's corruption challenges.

Regional cooperation is essential. Engaging Rwanda and Uganda to curb smuggling through joint border patrols and trade regulations would weaken militias' finances. The African Union could mediate agreements, aligning North Kivu with global standards like the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. These efforts aim to transform North Kivu's resource wealth into a catalyst for peace.

7. Areas for Further Research

The study's insights into natural resource governance and political instability in North Kivu open several avenues for deeper exploration. We recommend that future research could track the long-term effects of transparency and accountability reforms in the region, assessing whether they sustain stability over time.

Comparing North Kivu's experience with other resource-rich, conflict-prone areas globally would shed light on strategies that might transfer across contexts, enriching the understanding of localized governance challenges.

Exploring how resource governance impacts women and marginalized groups in North Kivu would address a critical gap, as these perspectives were underexplored in this study.

Additionally, integrating quantitative data to measure the economic and social outcomes of governance reforms could complement the qualitative insights here, offering a fuller picture of their impact. These directions would build on this study's foundation, advancing knowledge and practice in resource governance and conflict resolution.

Data, materials and/or code availability

All datasets upon which this study results were generated are readily available upon realistic request through the corresponding email of the authors.

Funding

There was no funding awarded for this study. All expenses were catered for by the authors.

Declaration of competing interest'

The authors declare no conflict of interest as regards to this study.

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