

GOVERNING ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE MINING IN AFRICA: THE GHANAIAN EXPERIENCE.

Abstract

This paper explains longitudinal and spatial variation in Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) governance in Ghana. While Ghana's ASM sector has, since 2006, witnessed varying clampdown measures, amid periods of tolerance, clampdown measures target only southern miners. This paper draws upon triangulated field interviews to argue that incumbents' political survival imperatives shape longitudinal and spatial variation in ASM governance in Ghana through two mechanisms: the prevailing competitive political settlement pattern and incumbents' domestic resource mobilization considerations.

Ghana's competitive political settlement generates regime survival constraints that drive longitudinal variation in ASM governance. Within this settlement, the mineral rents accruing from ASM and the relative significance of ASM votes – shaped by temporal variation in anti-ASM public discourse – have significant bearings on political survival, explaining the tolerance of and varying clampdown measures against ASM over time. However, incumbents' domestic resource mobilization (DRM) considerations undergird spatial variation in military raids' implementation. LSM companies are disproportionately located in the south and face existential threats from marauding southern hard-rock ASM operatives explaining why clampdown measures target southern, rather than northern, ASM operatives.

The paper's argument suggests that while the business-as-capital and association theories can illuminate spatial variation in ASM governance, they cannot explain incumbents' initial decision to clamp down on miners. Instead, the paper's argument confirms the political settlements and political marketplace theses on how the distribution of power across power configurations and social groups can generate regime survival imperatives and shape development outcomes. It also contributes to the informal economy literature, highlighting how politicians' tolerance or otherwise of informal actors has links with the latter's relative political relevance.

Key words: Africa, Ghana, governing, ASM, LSM, political, settlements, marketplace.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much of the developing world grapples with the problem of the ‘resource curse.’ This concept - resource curse - suggests that resource endowment slows economic growth (Wheeler, 1984; Auty, 1995; Sachs and Warner, 1995; Fearon and Laitin, 2003), fuels authoritarianism (Ross, 2001a; Jensen and Wantchekon, 2004) and causes civil wars (Doyle and Sambanis, 2000; Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). Among other things, the complex roles of and relations between host states, multinational firms that invest in resource exploitation, and global commodity price volatility illuminate the curse (Rosser, 2006). This literature followed the neoliberal development paradigm that encouraged mineral-rich economies to liberalize their economies to attract Multinational mining firms with the requisite capital to finance mining and the technical and management capacity to sustain mining investment (UNECA, 2011).

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many resource-endowed sub-Saharan African countries, including Ghana, Tanzania, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), adopted neoliberal mining codes as part of the World Bank’s structural adjustment programs (SAPs) (Banchirigah, 2006). Yet, many mineral-rich countries experienced either negative or insignificant GDP growths in the 1990s (Weber-Fahr, 2002, UNECA, 2011). Campbell (2003) attributed this outcome to how mining codes made it possible for foreign mining companies to repatriate profits, pay relatively small royalties and relish duty-free equipment import. However, as host states became fixated with foreign direct investments (FDIs) from large-scale mining (LSM), they neglected artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) (Banchirigah, 2008; Bush, 2009; Hilson, 2011), and, thus, pushed the sector underground. ASM informality in the global south has increased as a result.

By 1996, the United Nations’ report *Recent Developments in Small-Scale Mining* estimated that ASM, a labour-intensive mineral exploitation and processing activity, employed six million people (United Nations, 1996), which figure surged to 13 million by 1999 (Jennings, 1999). Presently, the World Bank’s estimates of ASM workforce stands at 100 million (World Bank, 2013). At the country level, varying figures exist. The ASM population in Papua New Guinea shot from 60,000 in the 1990s to 100,000 by 2003 (Crispin, 2003). In Tanzania, it increased from 100,000 in the early 1990s (United Nations, 1996) to 550,000 by 2003 (D’Souza and Cliffe, 2003) and 1.5 million by 2011 (UNECA, 2011). Hilson and McQuilken (2014) estimate that about 90 per cent of ASM operatives work without licenses with ravaging environmental effects (Hilson and Pardie, 2006).

Ghana’s ASM landscape epitomizes this growing informality as the country’s ASM workforce, which was 30,000 in 1995 (World Bank, 1995), increased to 200,000 by 2003 (Hilson and Potter, 2003) and 1.1 million by 2011 (UNECA 2011). Over the last two decades, varying governing elites in Ghana attempted to curtail informal mining, locally known as *galamsey*, through military raids. In 2006, the New Patriotic Party (NPP) Government, under President Kufour, launched Operation Flush-out, a joint military/police raid targeting unlicensed hard-rock artisanal miners and lasting about six months. Similarly, in 2013, President Mahama of the National Democratic Congress (NDC) inaugurated a month’s military raid – the so-called Operation Halt – to halt unlicensed hard-rock and alluvial ASM. Still, between 2017 and 2020, President Akufo-Addo of the NPP launched Operation Vanguard, which, unlike its predecessors, targeted both licensed and unlicensed alluvial and hard-rock miners.

However, each effort at raiding ASM entrenched informal mining. While some scholars attempt to explain why incumbents initiate military raids, others examine why such attacks fail and get terminated (Teschner, 2013; Hilson et al., 2014; Tschakert, 2016; Abdulai, 2017; Hilson and Maconachie, 2020). Hilson et al. (2014) interpret the 2013 raid as the Government’s and donors’ failure to support ASM appropriately. However, Tschakert’s (2016) suggests that the incumbent used this raid to punish illegal Chinese miners in Ghana while covering up the elites’ entrenched

stakes in ASM, which stakes have created law enforcement corruption, preventing the state from effectively taming informal mining (Teschner, 2013; Tschakert, 2016).

Unlike the preceding debates, Abdulai (2017) explores why raids fail, highlighting incumbents' fear of losing ASM votes as a causal variable. However, the 2017 raid remained intact despite the 'relevance' of ASM votes during the 2020 elections. Instead, a recent study juxtaposes the 2013 raid (Operation Halt) with the 2017 raid (Operation Vanguard). It argues that Mahama terminated the 2013 raid because he appreciated ASM's employment prospects (Hilson and Maconachie, 2020). The 2017 raid, however, represents an LSM bias that made it possible for LSM projects to expand (ibid).

Nonetheless, going by the LSM-bias thesis, one is puzzled about why some incumbents tolerate ASM operatives to the LSM companies' repulsion. For instance, the Mills' NDC administration (2008-2012) allowed ASM though it came under considerable pressure from LSM companies to raid ASM operatives. Similarly, in 2016, the Mahama NDC Government failed to evict ASM operatives that had invaded AngloGold Ashanti's (AGA) concession in Obuasi. The initiation and termination of military raids and ASM's tolerance over time by different incumbents remain a puzzle to unravel. Moreover, it is not clear why all successive military invasions focus on southern ASM operatives, despite active ASM in the north. It is this complex variation in ASM governance that this study attempts to explain.

The paper argues that incumbents' political survival imperatives shape longitudinal and spatial variation in ASM governance in Ghana through two mechanisms: the prevailing competitive political settlement pattern and incumbents' domestic resource mobilization (DRM) considerations. Ghana's competitive political settlement generates regime survival constraints that fundamentally drive longitudinal variation in ASM governance forms. Within this competitive settlement, the mineral rents accruing from ASM and ASM votes' relative significance – shaped by temporal variation in anti-ASM public discourse – have significant bearings on political survival, explaining the varying clampdown measures and tolerance of ASM over time.

Thus, Ghanaian incumbents tolerate the sector when ASM votes and rents matter. Under this condition, a military raid is politically inappropriate as there are no imminent threats to losing median votes while the rent from ASM is crucial to incumbent's political budget. Nonetheless, when incumbents find ASM votes moderately essential and ASM-induced rents considerable, incumbents would opt for a moderate but partisan clampdown measure. Doing so makes incumbents accrue more rents from the sector relative to the opposition; appeal to median voters while not falling out with the ASM voter. Finally, incumbents implement a partisan but intense raid when they consider ASM votes irrelevant while valuing ASM rents. This approach appeals to median voters and secures incumbent's access to rents from ASM.

While the votes and rents in ASM create political dynamics that help us appreciate the longitudinal variation in ASM raids, incumbents' DRM considerations undergird spatial variation in military raids' implementation. All successive clampdown measures target southern Ghana because the south's DRM potential from LSM companies is way more remarkable than the north's. The majority of Ghana's LSM companies, which also tend to be the largest tax-paying enterprises, are concentrated in southern Ghana. Thus, military raids target the south, where hard-rock illegal miners often invade LSM concessions.

This paper carefully selected Ghana to maximize variation in the outcome variable. The case appeals to the within-case comparative research strategy (Levy, 2008). It asks why similar incumbents, such as the NDC's Mills and Mahama, govern the ASM sector differently and why

military raids spare some ASM regions. This case selection strategy avoids the selection bias problem when cases do not exhibit any variation in outcomes (Gerring and Cojocaru, 2016). I supported this design with six-month qualitative field interviews involving relevant government ministries and agencies, research institutions, CSOs, gold dealers, local government units, farmers, community-based CSOs and ASM operatives in Obuasi, Ghana's ASM hotspot.

I supplemented the triangulated interview data with observations of policy discourses, participation in ASM conferences, published mining reports, relevant journal articles and books, and online ASM reports. This data collection process mitigated the implicit and explicit biases in interviewee responses and helped trace the key causal factors and mechanisms mediating the observed outcome variable. This paper is structured as follows: Part two discusses the analytical literature to provide a framework for the empirical analysis and contextualize the study's argument in the relevant literature. Part three highlights the variation in ASM governance in Ghana and offers a backdrop for analytical discussion in part four. Part five concludes by highlighting the critical contributions to theory and literature while suggesting areas for future research.

2. ANALYTICAL LITERATURE.

2.1. Political Settlements and Political Marketplace Thesis.

Di John and Putzel (2009: 4) define political settlement as the "balance or distribution of power between contending social groups and social classes, on which any state is based." Power distribution, in turn, reflects "... the relative holding power of different groups and organizations contesting the distribution of resources" (Khan, 2010: 1). Such contestation influences development outcomes in ways that may confound the predictions of institutional scholars. While institutional scholars regard institutions as primary cause of cross-national variation in growth and development (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006; Rodrik, 2008), the same set of institutions across different political settlements may produce varying results because of the power asymmetry across contending social groups (Di John and Putzel, 2009)

Thus, 'intra-elite contention and bargaining', 'elites/non-elites contention' and 'state-society bargaining' become relevant in understanding variations in the holding powers of different social groups that shape outcomes (Di John and Putzel, 2009: 4). In this light, Kelsall's (2018) distinction between the *political settlement's social foundation* and *power configuration* becomes more illuminating. The *social foundation* refers to the scope of 'powerful groups' within the settlement, while the *power configuration* comprises the head of government that wields political power (ibid).

Powerful groups within the *settlement's social foundation* may vary, including businesses, party members, ethnic networks, and trade unions. These powerful groups have distinct disruptive capacities which can upset the settlement's power configuration. Yet, such collective action may more or less produce desired outcomes depending on the nature of power configuration. The power configuration of the settlement may either be dominant, in which case one governing coalition dominates the political landscape over time, or competitive wherein, at least, political power frequently alternates between contending governing coalitions. Granted that social actors in *competitive settlements* can play "one authority against another" it becomes difficult for leaders to commit to long-term policies (ibid).

Since there is no clear dominance of one party over the other in competitive political settlements, incumbents' preoccupation revolves around votes maximization in the political marketplace for political survival. Therefore, fluidity, rather than continuity, in economic policymaking is the

inevitable outcome of this settlement since incumbents' regime survival proclivities also compromise their policy commitments. As Anthony Downs (1957) argues, policy formulation in democracy becomes a vote buying mechanism. As rational agents, political parties would pursue policies to serve particular interest groups to enhance their chances of winning the next election.

Consequently, the pursuit of "preconceived policies... to serve [preconceived] interest groups" is not the priority of parties (Ibid: 137) given the amorphous nature of the political relevance of different social groups to governing coalitions. Thus, campaign promises of parties, which are preconceived policies in a sense, may differ markedly from actual policy formulation or implementation depending on their electoral implications. Such policies may have distributional effects in ways that reward supporters, punish opponents and attract median votes. While policymaking can be a vote maximizing strategy and thus a subtle patronage schema, political parties also have to engage in direct distribution of resources in ways that maximize votes.

Here, much depends on the political budget, defined as "the funds available to the ruler for discretionary spending on ensuring the loyalty of members..." (De Walle, 2018: 2). It follows that the source and amount of rent that accrue to the political budget shape the likelihood of regime survival. Hence, "management of the political budget is the single most important political business management skill for a political entrepreneur..." (ibid). The implication is that "the role of personal agency and political skill [cannot be] considered as an extraneous factor..." but rather as actual politics (Ibid). De Walle's conception of the political budget sits with Robert Bates' (2014) earlier work, which argued that incumbents use price distortions to extract economic surplus from farmers to buy-off urban dwellers, including bourgeoisies petit bourgeoisie capable of regime destabilization (ibid).

The inferential logic is that rulers need to maximize their chances of political survival through votes and rents. Where competition is keen, incumbents' economic policies would be fluid rather than consistent, responding to their political survival imperatives. This theoretical discussion provides the framework for this paper.

2.2. Responding to informality and ASM

The informal economy concept emerged in the Third World following Keith Hart's contention that informality represents burgeoning entrepreneurialism in contexts where official economic rules and regulations are incompatible with the norms of workers. Several scholars have corroborated Hart's argument (De Soto, 2001; Tostensen, 2001; Meagher, 2003; 2014; Hansen and Vaa, 2004; Lindell, 2010a). Kate Meagher (2003; 2014) sees the neoliberal economic reforms as responsible for the expanding informal economy, while De Soto (2001) attributes rising informality to the disconnect between formal economic laws and informal actors' norms.

To Castells and Portes (1989), informality arises when an economic activity straddles both licit and illicit spheres. For instance, whereas the "processes of production and distribution" in informal economies are illicit, their "final product" is licit (ibid) and subsidize formal economies (Joshi and Moore, 2004; Guha-Khasnobis and Kanbur (ed), 2006; UNDP, 2008; Deevi, 2012). The informal economy's peculiar nature leaves states with the option of either raiding informal actors or tolerating them. Since the preoccupation of informal enterprises is to avoid any contact with the state (Cross, 1998; Lomnitz, 1988; Birbeck, 1978), it follows that states with limited capacity to "penetrate and co-ordinate civil society" (See Becker, 1968; Mann, 1984: 191) also tend to tolerate the informal economy.

Hence, informality proliferates because of weak regulatory capacity. However, such a technical explanation of growing informality overlooks the role of politics. Not only is regulatory enforcement fiscally costly, but it can also be politically costly. As Stigler (1971: 3) argues, while regulatory enforcement aims at protecting the public or a section of the public, “‘politics’... is a constantly and unpredictably shifting mixture of forces of the most diverse nature”, (ibid). Accordingly, incumbents’ political needs matter more in understanding the enforcement or otherwise of informal sector regulations. Therefore, the informal economy’s relative political significance shapes politicians’ decision to tolerate or raid informal actors (Weitz-Shapiro, 2014; Amengual, 2016; Holland, 2016). Thus, while the poor’s “primary political assets” are their votes (Holland, 2016: 235), politicians can, sometimes, ignore these assets.

Like the broader informal economy, ASM’s economic and livelihood relevance have received wider attention in the policy and academic world (Maponga and Ngorima, 2003; Okoh and Hilson, 2011; Hilson and Garforth, 2013; Dondeyne and Nndunguru, 2014; Hilson and McQuilken, 2014; Hilson, 2017; Werthmann, 2017; Barreto et al., 2018). The African Union’s African Mining Vision, in particular, rallies African country’s behind an urgent need to integrate the sector into their respective development agendas (AU, 2009). Nevertheless, the growing informality in ASM is worrying, not least because of the environmental ramifications. Some scholars regard this as a manifestation of poor bureaucratic and technical support for ASM and a policy preference of LSM as against ASM (Jennings, 1999; Hilson and Potter, 2003; 2005; Banchirigah, 2006; Siegel and Veiga, 2009; Bryceson and Geenen, 2016; Hilson and Maconachie, 2020). Others point to the entrenched interests of powerful coalitions in ASM (Teschner, 2013; Tschakert, 2016; Abdulai; 207).

Hilson and Potter (2003: 250 – 251), for instance, contend that “insufficient institutional support, complications with the existing licensing scheme, and uncooperative large-scale mining companies” explain rising informality in ASM. On the contrary, Teschner (2013) and Tschakert (2016) similarly point to law enforcement corruption, shaped by the deep-seated interests of society’s powerful groups in ASM, as an explanation for the rising informality. Such analysis suggests that incumbents profit from ASM informality and have a stake in perpetuating it (Tschakert, 2016). Concerning Ghana’s case, Tschakert argues that incumbents introduce military raids against ASM to obscure their (incumbents’) contribution to ASM informality while using foreign elements, illegal Chinese miners in particular, as scapegoats.

This analysis of the military raid’s motivation runs contrary to Hilson et al’s (2014) debate that the attack was expressive of the years of lack of support for distressed miners. While these debates provide competing explanations as to why raids are launched against ASM operatives, Abdulai (2017) provides insights into why these raids do not last. He points to how incumbents in competitive political settlements are also vulnerable to informal miners whose votes are crucial to political sustenance. To him, ahead of elections, incumbents terminate any efforts at raiding illegal miners for political reasons. Yet, the current incumbent did not end its raid despite the danger of losing ASM votes in the 2020 elections. At present, why incumbents initiate and terminate military invasions remains blurred. Moreover, the above studies pay no attention to how raids focus on southern ASM while sparing northern ASM. This study, therefore, builds on this literature by filling this lacuna.

3. VARIATION IN ASM GOVERNANCE IN GHANA.

As suggested above, while Ghana's ASM sector has witnessed distinct state-sponsored clampdowns under some incumbents, other incumbents tolerate ASM. The latest of the clampdown measures is the NPP Government's Operation Vanguard, a joint military-police taskforce inaugurated in June 2017 to raid all forms (alluvial and hard-rock) and types (licensed and unlicensed) of ASM. The Government established an inter-ministerial Committee Against Illegal Mining (IMCIM) to coordinate Operation Vanguard's work. The President, Nana Akufo-Addo, contended that "if our river bodies are drying up, our landscape is being desecrated, we here, leaders of our society, leaders of our nation, political leaders, religious leaders have a responsibility to say no."¹

At the superficial level, the idea of public interest – constitutionally defined as any action that benefits or intends to benefit the people of Ghana² – might have influenced the ban on all forms of ASM. Although the Government lifted the ban on licensed ASM operatives in December 2018, Operation Vanguard is, nonetheless, in force to clamp down on illegal miners (Oxford Business Group, n.d.). This clampdown exercise is the third consecutive time that an incumbent has raided ASM operatives. Preceding Operation Vanguard was Operation Halt initiated by the Mahama-led NDC Government in 2013 and coordinated by the national security sub-committee on lands and natural resources. Operation Halt was, however, limited in scope targeting only unlicensed ASM operatives – particularly Chinese gold seekers that had inundated Ghana's ASM landscape – and spanning barely a month.

Hilson and Maconachie (2020) have analysed these two operations, arguing that the NPP Government's Operation Vanguard was a mechanism to extract rents from the gold mining industry. This raid, they continue, protected LSM companies' interests whose taxes constitute 'easy money' for the Government. This LSM-bias, they argue, explains the military sweeps of ASM operatives in much of sub-Saharan Africa. Their argument hinges on the business-as-capital and association models, which posit that multinational firms' leverage their structural and organisational powers to influence governments' policies (Haggard et al., 1997). From this perspective, one imagines a rentier state that is quick to hide behind environmental protection to generate rents from the mining sector through a clampdown exercise.

Nevertheless, unlike Operation Vanguard's relatively longer lifespan, Hilson and Maconachie (2020) contend that Operation Halt got terminated partly because of allegations of human rights abuses and partly due to the Government's realisation of the substantial employment prospects in ASM. However, given Ghana's competitive political settlement, it is inadequate to overlook the political underpinnings that might have motivated Operation Vanguard's launch and the termination of Operation Halt. A third raid preceded these two military operations, code-named Operation Flush-out, under President Kufour in 2006. Like his successors, Kufour deployed a joint military-police taskforce to flush-out illegal miners in the country in 2006 for about six months. This raid mainly targeted unlicensed hard-rock miners.

Despite their common purpose of raiding ASM operatives, the successive military invasions varied in scope and life span, as discussed above. It is also worth mentioning that all three clampdown measures focused on southern Ghana, despite active illegal mining in northern Ghana. Moreover, while these clampdown measures paint a picture of strained relations between incumbents in Ghana and ASM operatives, some Ghanaian incumbents do tolerate ASM. Between 2008 and 2012,

¹ Kwawukume V. (2017). I will put my Presidency on the line to stop galamsey – President. Retrieved November 15, 2018 from <https://www.graphic.com.gh/news/general-news/i-will-put-my-presidency-on-line-to-stop-galamsey-president.html>

² See Article 295 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana

late President Mills of the NDC endured illegal miners across the country, resisting any corporate mining pressure to raid ASM. The Ghana Chamber of Mines' (GCM's) 2012 report³ highlighted how ASM's invasion of LSM concessions increase the operational cost of companies which threaten "the good standing and image of the regulated mining industry" (GCM, 2012: 14). Nonetheless, President Mills' did not yield to this 'capitalist coercion'.

Similarly, when about 5000 unlicensed miners in Obuasi invaded AGA's sensitive shafts in 2016, President Mahama failed to evict the miners. This LSM/ASM tension was, perhaps, the acutest in Ghana's mining history. The Ashanti King's intervention, on whose customary land AGA operates, could not persuade Mahama to evict the informal miners forcibly. Mills' and Mahama's tolerance of ASM at different times questions the empirical relevance of the LSM-bias thesis. The longitudinal and spatial variations in how incumbents raid and tolerate the ASM sector, summarized in the tables below, are intriguing and form the basis for analytical work in the final section.

Table 1. Longitudinal variation in ASM governance in Ghana

Period	Governance Type	Governance Indicator	Incumbent
2006-2008	Anti-ASM	Intense clampdown	NPP (President Kufour)
2009-2012	Pro-ASM	Complete tolerance	NDC (Late President Mills)
2013	Anti-ASM	Moderate/Mild clampdown	NDC (President Mahama)
2015-2016	Pro-ASM	Complete tolerance	NDC (President Mahama)
2017-date	Anti-ASM	Intense clampdown	NPP (President Akufo-Addo)

Source: Author's own

Table 2. Spatial Variation in ASM Governance in Ghana from 2006 – 2020.

Territories	Region	Governance Type	Governance Indicator
Southern Territories	Ashanti	Anti-ASM	Intense and mild Clampdowns over time
	Brong-Ahafo		
	Western		
	Eastern		
Northern Territories	Upper East	Pro-ASM	Complete Tolerance.
	Upper West		
	Northern		

Source: Author's own

³ These reports usually describe events in the mining industry in the previous year. So, for example, a 2012 report would cover events in 2011.

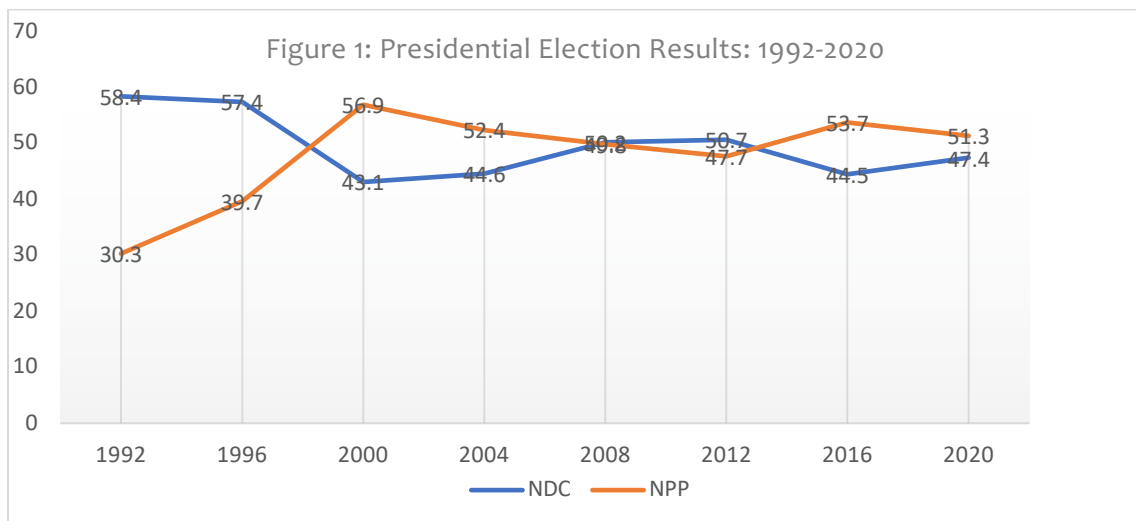
4. POLITICAL SURVIVAL AND ASM GOVERNANCE IN GHANA

How do we explain the complex variation in ASM governance discussed in the preceding section? This section argues that incumbents' political survival imperatives over time travel through two fundamental mechanisms to account for the longitudinal and spatial variation in ASM governance. First, the paper suggests that Ghana's competitive political settlement, wherein political power frequently alternates across governing coalitions, generates regime survival imperatives that culminate in varying ASM governance forms over time. In this competitive settlement, the mineral rents accruing from ASM and the relative significance of ASM votes – shaped by temporal variation in anti-ASM public discourse – have significant bearings on political survival and shape the varying ways incumbents respond to ASM over time.

Second, I argue that incumbents' domestic resource mobilization considerations explain why ASM raids target southern ASM operatives but leave their northern counterparts unscathed. As we show below, unlike northern Ghana, southern Ghana hosts the majority and more important LSM companies, which companies also tend to suffer invasions from ASM operatives. Consequently, incumbents limit clampdown measures to the south as a mechanism to protect and promote the property rights of southern mining companies. This way, incumbents also preserve the LSM sector, which is the largest tax-paying sector in Ghana. Nevertheless, DRM considerations alone are not sufficient to motivate incumbents' initial decision to raid ASM. Instead, much depends on whether or not the political dynamics favour a clampdown measure, explaining why some incumbents did tolerate ASM invasions of LSM concessions. In the following sections, we provide field evidence to support these arguments

4.1. Political settlement and temporal variation in ASM governance

This section examines how Ghana's competitive political settlement, shown in the figure below, mediates longitudinal variation in ASM governance. It shows that the changing political dynamics shaped the country's competitive political settlement pattern, explains why fluidity in ASM governance, reflective in the raids and tolerance of miners over time by different incumbents. We shall show how variation in the ASM governance approaches of Presidents Mills, Mahama (NDC) and Akufo-Addo (NPP) has much to do with changing political dynamics over time.



Source: Author's

4.1.1. Mills' Tolerance of ASM.

Why did Mills tolerate ASM operatives despite evidence of informal miners encroaching the concessions of mining companies? I argue that informal miners so politically mattered to President Mills that a military raid was simply inconceivable. With a generally low public narrative on ASM-induced diseconomies, miners' votes remained important to Mills which, together with ASM-generated rent, increased the miners' political relevance to Mills. Put differently, the quest for ASM votes and rents became important to Mills' Government. It influenced the Government's tolerance of ASM even against incessant calls by industry-players (LSM companies) for the Government to raid the informal miners.

Before Mills' election in 2008, his party's (NDC's) campaign on natural resource governance emphasized the links between a deregulated mining sector and the increasing vulnerability in mining communities. The party argued that "deregulated mining has sacrificed our mining communities; they face conflict, dislocation, environmental degradation, unemployment. The sector must be reorganized to benefit communities and develop Ghana" (NDC Manifesto, 2008: 2). This campaign associated the plight of mining communities in general and ASM operatives, particularly with the previous Government's (NPP's) capitalist orientation that had led to military raids in mining communities.⁴

However, having won the 2008 elections, Mills did little, if anything at all, to better the lots of informal miners (Abdulai 2017; Hilson and Maconachie, 2020). Yet, unlike his predecessor and successors, Mills failed to clampdown on ASM operatives despite the GCM's continual lobby for a raid of ASM. Instead, Mills directed all mining companies that had previously violated mining communities' rights through direct physical attacks or limited landowners' compensation to compensate victims.⁵ This presidential directive and the general tolerance of ASM operatives reflected both the relevance of informal miners' votes and the campaign finance prospects in ASM.

On the one hand, between 2009 and 2012, ASM remained a critical electoral constituency that the Mills administration could not ignore. Although the GCM led vigorous advocacy against ASM, this hardly spurred the kind of anti-ASM public discourse via media outlets required to elicit the Government's response. The media's indifference towards illegal mining was partly because alluvial ASM mechanization was burgeoning with relatively unnoticeable diseconomies.⁶ By implication, the ASM sector, which directly employed between 500,000 and a million people at the time, remained a crucial electoral constituency.⁷ Since President Mills won the 2008 elections with approximately less than 50,000 votes, he could not risk almost a million miners' votes through military raids.

Beyond the importance of ASM votes, ASM's campaign finance prospects contributed to shaping Mills' tolerance of ASM. Between 2009 and 2012, the global gold price increased exponentially due to the 2008/2009 financial crises, which surged the demand for gold.

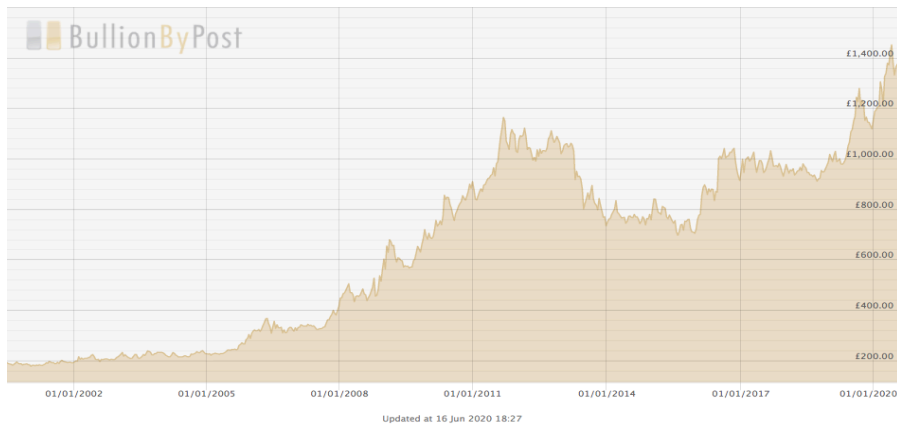
⁴ Interviews with the Centre for Social Impact Studies (CESIS) and the Ghana National Association of Small-Scale Miners (GNASSM) in July 2019.

⁵ Interview with CESIS

⁶ Within this period, only a few Chinese illegal miners and other foreigners did participate in Ghana's small-scale mining landscape so that the devastating impact of alluvial mining was relatively unnoticeable. Interview with Dr Tony Aubynn in May 2019

⁷ Ibid

Figure 2: over time change in global gold price



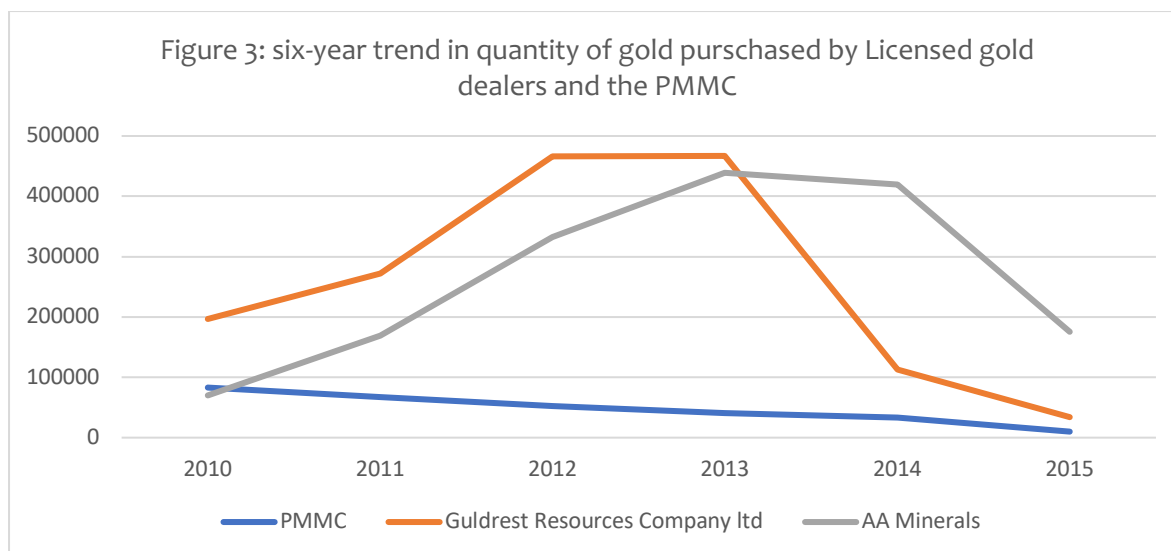
Source: BullionByPost, 2020.

By 2009, the gold price saw a steep rise until it reached a tipping point in September 2011, selling at £1,148.84 an ounce. The price then plateaued throughout 2012 before taking a nose-dive in 2013. These price dynamics had an impact on the domestic political economy crescendos. The period 2009 and 2012 was Africa's golden era. While much of the world was reeling under the global financial crisis's enervating effects, the African Union, through its African Mining Vision, purported to aid African countries in taking advantage of this golden era and increasing revenues from the gold sector. In Ghana's case, President Mills introduced a National Fiscal Stabilization Levy in 2009, which imposed a five per cent levy on the gross profits of mining companies mining (Abdulai, 2017). In 2010, the party introduced a fixed royalty rate of five per cent in place of the sliding three to six per cent scale of royalty.

The sliding royalty rate meant that mining companies could consistently pay just three per cent without violating any law, short-changing the state in the process. Therefore, the introduction of the fixed five per cent royalty rate was necessary to accrue more revenues to the state.⁸ In addition to these changes came more 'draconian' fiscal measures such as the upward review of the corporate tax from 25 per cent to 35 per cent and installing a new windfall tax of 10 per cent (ibid). Nevertheless, mining companies contested Mills' fiscal regime, effectively stalling the 10 per cent windfall tax implementation, which would have raked in more revenues to the state. Failure to impose this tax on companies also dashed the Mills Government's expectations of significant revenue mobilization from the LSM sector.

However, as the ASM sector also responded positively to the growing market price, the Government had the option of generating rents from this sector. Mills facilitated the formation of the Ghana National Association of Small-scale Miners (GNASSM) and housed it in the Diamond House close to the parastatal Precious Minerals and Marketing Company (PMMC) to facilitate mineral trade between these two bodies. The creation and location of the GNASSM was a strategy to revive the PMMC's access to gold as competition from both licensed and unlicensed gold dealers had almost knocked the PMMC out of the gold market.

⁸ Interview with the Ghana Chamber of Mines and CESIS in May and July 2019



Source: Author's based on data from the Minerals Commission.

Figure three shows that the PMMC's access to gold fell beyond 2011 despite the establishment and location of the GNASSM in the diamond house. However, that the PMMC's access to ASM gold had begun to take a nose-dive from 2010 sheds light on why the Government organized the GNASSM. Given the potential to accrue rent from the ASM sector, it becomes clear why Mills encouraged informal mining to the abhorrence of the GCM and mining companies who suffered invasion from hard-rock ASM operatives in particular. Throughout Mills administration, artisanal miners in Obuasi recounted how their trade faced no state-sponsored clampdown, emphasizing Mills as a friend to illegal miners. They contrasted Mills' tolerance of the ASM sector with his successors (Mahama and Akufo-Addo) and predecessor's (Kufour's) raid of the sector. Thus, both the market for ASM votes and ASM-induced rents explain why Mills tolerated ASM operatives against the GCM's and LSM companies' wishes.

4.1.2. Mahama's Moderate and Partisan Clampdown on ASM in 2013

Unlike his predecessor, who tolerated ASM, Mahama briefly raided ASM during the so-called Operation Halt. I characterise Mahama's raid as moderate precisely because of its relatively short lifespan compared to preceding and succeeding ones. I argue that a rather limited anti-ASM public discourse, together with high ASM-induced rents, motivated Mahama's decision to introduce a moderate but partisan clampdown measure. Put differently, the day's politics explains why Mahama launched Operation Halt and terminated it shortly after. This argument contradicts Hilson and Maconachie's (2020) debate that the Government's appreciation of ASM's importance explains the operation's termination. Indeed, a careful analysis of the events preceding the raid and its ending shows that politics matters.

When Mahama took office in January 2013, the GCM's continual advocacy against ASM was beginning to gather momentum in the media even as ASM-induced environmental degradation became more noticeable. This changed the dynamics for Mahama and would drive his Government's raid of ASM. The GCM that criticised Mills for failing to clamp down on ASM applauded Mahama's Operation Halt for stemming the tide of illegal mining (GCM, 2014). Given that gold price had tumbled to £800 per ounce by June 2013 from £1140 per ounce in 2011, Mahama's decision to clampdown on ASM appeared astonishing. The price differential of about £340 per ounce meant that gold mining companies contributed more to revenue generation in 2011 than they were in 2013.

By implication, Mahama's Government got less revenue from LSM than Mills, yet Mahama fell for the GCM's advocacies, unlike Mills. It will be misplaced to contend that the LSM-bias thesis explains Mahama's response to the GCM's advocacy⁹, considering his predecessor's different response. On the contrary, nonetheless, the political dynamics within which Mills and Mahama governed the mining industry differed remarkably, making it easier for Mills than Mahama to resist the GCM's pressure. The narrative of ASM-induced environmental degradation gained more momentum under Mahama than it did under Mills. By 2013, domestic and international media reports on how illegal Chinese miners had flooded Ghana's ASM landscape and contributed to wanton environmental degradation were commonplace.

The Guardian's documentary illuminated the pollution of water bodies, the proliferation of riffles on illegal Chinese mining sites, massive excavations and the use of mercury and other toxic chemicals in gold extraction (Hirsch, 2013).¹⁰ Citi fm, like several other domestic media outlets, reported on pit collapses in ASM sites and complication of ASM by illegal Chinese miners (Kankam-Boadu, 2013).¹¹ The surge in the participation of illegal Chinese miners in Ghana's ASM by 2013 has its roots in ex-President Kufour's decision to sponsor Ghanaians to acquire a more effective alluvial mining method in Guangzhou, China.¹²

Thus, by 2013, the Chinese presence in Ghanaian alluvial mining communities had become conspicuous along with the ASM-induced environmental degradation. In effect, alluvial ASM under Mahama was more pervasive than had occurred under Mills, explaining why the Ghanaian media became more interested in ASM-induced degradation in 2013. Given these differing circumstances, the political stakes/cost of tolerating ASM was higher under Mahama than under Mills, compelling Mahama to respond by raiding illegal miners without regard to the form of ASM (i.e. whether alluvial or hard-rock ASM). Yet, the public discontent on ASM pointed more to alluvial ASM rather than hard-rock ASM. The former (alluvial ASM) disproportionately attracted Chinese miners because of the relative ease with which they could extract gold ore.

Thus, the broad clampdown on illegal alluvial and hard-rock ASM provided a cover for Mahama to also respond to LSM companies who were more worried about marauding hard-rock ASM operatives. Beyond the Government's intent to avert any public backlash because of illegal mining, the prospect of accruing rents from the ASM sector is fundamental in explaining Mahama's decision to raid ASM. Before the raid, the Government queried a financier of the then opposition NPP, Chairman Wontumi, over the legality or otherwise of his mining concessions in the Western Region. Chairman Wontumi, who later became the Ashanti Regional Chairman of the NPP, claims Mahama sought to persuade him to cross the political line to no avail.

This event immediately preceded the Government's clampdown on illegal miners culminating in destroying Wontumi's excavators and confiscating some kilograms of gold.¹³ Besides Wontumi's

⁹ Contrary to this contention, Mahama became very antagonistic towards AGA, in particular, and LSM in general in 2016. We shall examine this in the next part of this paper.

¹⁰ Hirsch, A (2013). The price of gold: Chinese mining in Ghana documentary/Guardian Investigations. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ohrrE1rjzLo> [Accessed: 15 January, 2019]

¹¹ Kankam-Boadu, B. (2013). Galamsey: The untold truth. Available at <https://citifmonline.com/2013/05/galamsey-the-untold-truth/> [Accessed: 28 May 2020]

¹² Ibid

¹³ See Topic: Exclusive Interview with Chairman Wontumi (NPP Ashanti chair). Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77tQ4MNDha4> [Accessed: 7th March 2020]

case, Ashanti Region – the opposition's stronghold – was also the hardest hit¹⁴ relative to the Western Region – a swing region – where ASM is equally pervasive. While then sector Minister attributes this to human error, it could not be a mere coincidence that the raid disproportionately targeted the opposition's stronghold. Even within the Ashanti Region, Operation Halt surprisingly spared illegal miners in Obuasi who identified with the GNASSM. The GNASSM's connection to the NDC explains why Operation Halt spared illegal miners in Obuasi and why it targeted unlicensed miners, sparing their licensed counterparts (i.e., GNASSM). A leading GNASSM member admitted that the sector Minister worked closely with the GNASSM to define Operation Halt's scope, a point that the sector minister confirmed.¹⁵

Accordingly, the GNASSM had successfully negotiated a clampdown measure that exempted GNASSM members, including unlicensed miners that identified with the GNASSM. How Chairman Wontumi and the ASM operatives in the Ashanti Region became key targets of Operation Halt, relative to GNASSM and its members, clarifies the NDC Government's partisan rent-seeking motivation. Nonetheless, the raid lasted barely a month. A former sector Minister contended that the Government did not get the media's support to sustain the fight against illegal mining. Contrasting Operation Halt with Operation Vanguard (which we discuss next), he posited that the media was passively involved in framing the illegal mining narrative under the former.

Unlike the NPP, the media was not actively on our side. I was trying to explain to the mines and energy committee in parliament that the situation is such that I would need the support of this parliamentary committee and the entire people of Ghana to address ASM.¹⁶

Thus, had the media actively mobilized public sentiment against ASM under Mahama's administration – beyond mere reports on illegal mining – the Government would have sustained the raid beyond a month. In the absence of such media activism against ASM, the risk of losing ASM votes relative to median votes in the future was high. Thus, while Operation Halt served a partisan purpose in accruing rents for the incumbent, it remained a politically risky enterprise compelling the Government to terminate the Operation. Therefore, the debate that Mahama terminated Operation Halt because he appreciated ASM's employment prospects overlooks the role of politics in shaping policy outcomes.

4.1.3. *Akufo-Addo's Intense and Partisan Clampdown on ASM*

Ahead of the 2016 elections, the NPP's campaign message gave miners a sense of hope that the party would not clampdown on ASM granted that nod. In July 2016, barely six months to a general election, then-candidate Akufo-Addo during his campaign trail in Obuasi, criticized the NDC's Operation Halt for destroying livelihoods of miners while promising to promote the ASM sector:

I was here in Obuasi to say that galamsey, which I prefer to call small-scale mining, will be regularized to ensure that the youth all find work to do. Shortly afterwards, Mahama also came here to tell you that I was lying and that an Akufo-Addo government will rather sack everyone involved in galamsey.... When he [i.e.

¹⁴ Interview with a former Minister of Lands and Natural Resources in June 2019.

¹⁵ Personal interview with the GNASSM PRO in Kumasi in July 2019.

¹⁶ Personal interviews with a former sector minister in June 2019

Mahama] won the [2012] election, he rather directed soldiers to come and drive out all persons involved in galamsey in Obuasi.¹⁷

Miners fell for this campaign message reflective in the NPP’s impressive performance in ASM constituencies in the 2016 elections, relative to the NDC’s, compared to the 2012 electoral outcomes in the same constituencies.

Table 3: Distribution of ASM Votes in Stronghold and Swing Constituencies¹⁸

NPP’s Stronghold – Ashanti Region				
ASM Constituency	NPP 2012	NPP 2016	NDC 2012	NDC 2016
Obuasi West	31,788	34,660	16,072	11796
Obuasi East	25,108	27,952	15,673	11,400

NDC’s Stronghold – Upper East Region				
ASM Constituency	NPP 2012	NPP 2016	NDC 2012	NDC 2016
Bolgatanga Central.	11027	14487	35142	32242
Talensi.	7120	9104	17110	18798

Swing Region – Western Region				
ASM Constituency	NPP 2012	NPP 2016	NDC 2012	NDC 2016
Tarkwa Nsuaem	38506	42850	32600	23379
Prestea Huni-Valley	30175	33327	40904	34876

Source: Author’s

Nonetheless, following Akufo-Addo’s inauguration in 2017, ASM’s narrative changed, altering the political dynamics. Unlike Mahama’s administration, Akufo-Addo met with an active media campaign against ASM, which I argue made it politically desirable to raid ASM operatives. I show further that the incumbents’ prospects of accumulating rents from ASM, to the opposition’s demerit, further drove the decision to raid ASM.

Median votes and the clampdown measure

In April 2017, the Media Coalition Against Galamsey (MCAG) formed quickly to demand a clampdown on ASM and fleetingly shaped national consensus against illegal mining. This development shifted the balance of power against miners. Anthony Downs (1957) reminds us that political parties do not prioritize “the pursuit of preconceived policies... to serve [preconceived] interest groups” (p. 137). Thus, the disconnect between the NPP’s clampdown measure and its campaign promise to miners rests on how the MCAG swayed public opinion and, therefore, median voters against galamsey.

¹⁷ See Starrfmonline.com. (2016). NPP will regularize ‘Galamsey’ – Akufo-Addo. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/NPP-will-regularize-galamsey-Akufo-Addo-455652> [Accessed, 27 March 2021]

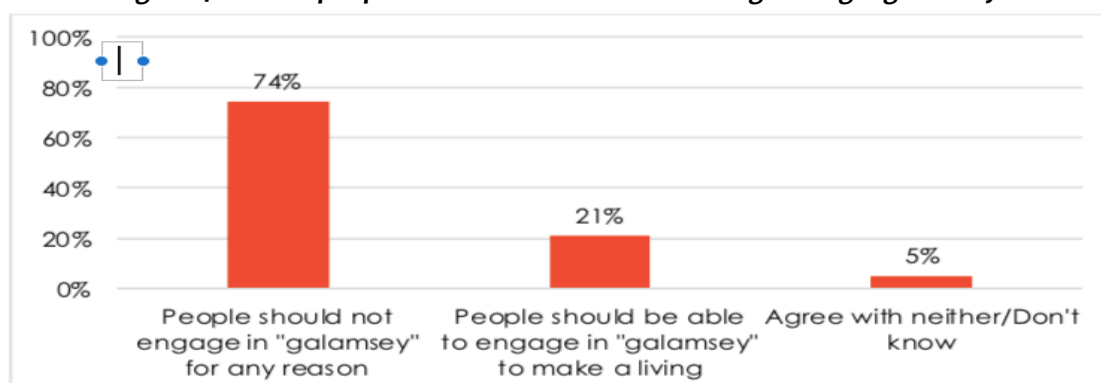
¹⁸ See Appendix A for a detailed table comparing the performance of the NPP and NDC in all ASM constituencies in 2012 and 2016.

Led by a renowned and influential media practitioner, Kenneth Ashigbey, the MCAG aimed to advocate the eradication of ASM (Constitution of MCAG, n.d. cited in Frimpong, 2019). This objective seemed overambitious given the depth of illegal mining in Ghana and the power coalitions, including chiefs and politicians, that profit from this trade (Teschner, 2012; Tschakert, 2016). Nonetheless, the MCAG's membership base and finance source provided it with some veneer of independence against power coalitions. First, it drew membership from varying social groups, including media institutions and religious associations (Frimpong, 2019). Citi FM, the leading voice of the MCAG, launched the 'Stop Galamsey Now' campaign in April 2017, which, among other things, demanded the placement of a moratorium on ASM for six months (Adogla-Bessa, 2017). The station leveraged its wavelength to galvanize citizens' voices against the ASM 'menace'.

Second, the MCAG thrived on donor funding and support from private and parastatal businesses. STAR-Ghana, a pool of independent donor organizations including EU, USAID, UK aid, funded the MCAG (Frimpong, 2019). The Chamber of Mines pledged its support to sustain the MCAG's advocacy (ibid). At the same time, Ghana Oil Ltd (Goil) offered GHC 10, 000 (or the equivalent of US\$ 2,500) worth of fuel coupons to facilitate the MCAG's movement across mining sites (GNA, 2017). Against the backdrop of social group pressure, the President's commitment to put his presidency on the line to fight a sector becomes clear. Some argue that this presidential commitment marked "the first time government and [agreed] to place the needs of the nation first and conserve the environment for posterity" (Frimpong, 2019: 38).

Nonetheless, such an interpretation of the President's action is misleading. Instead, the desire to protect his political interest, shaped by the MCAG's activism, drove the President's resolve to raid ASM. A failure to do so would have pitted the median voter (the larger voting public) against his Government. It was safer to sacrifice one million ASM votes to secure the relatively more significant median votes. A November 2017 Afrobarometer survey underpinned how the MCAG advocacy had made an impression on public imagination against galamsey as shown below.¹⁹

Figure 4: Should people be allowed to eke out a living through 'galamsey'?



As shown in figure four, the overwhelming rejection of ASM indicates the media's power to shape anti-ASM public discourse of powerful social groups (urban dwellers in particular). It suggests how any incumbent would have raided ASM, just as Akufo-Addo did. This political dynamic explains the

¹⁹ See Armah-Attah, D. (2017). Ghanaians disapprove of illegal mining, endorse alternative livelihood support by government. Afrobarometer Dispatch No. 175. Available at https://afrobarometer.org/sites/default/files/publications/Dispatches/ab_r7_dispatchno175_ghanaians_support_drive_a_gainst_galamsey.pdf [Accessed: 10th January 2018]

raid's sustenance despite the incumbent's quest for votes ahead of the 2020 election. By Abdulai's (2017) logic on ASM votes' importance, would have expected Akufo-Addo to entirely terminate Operation Vanguard because of over one million miners' votes. Nonetheless, the MCAG's activism did swing median voters against ASM, making it politically risky for the incumbent to tolerate or promote ASM in line with its campaign message.

Mineral rents and the raid

The prospects of partisan extraction of ASM rents provided a further political impetus for the raid. Pro-incumbent ASM operatives would hide behind the clampdown cover to exploit minerals while perceived pro-opposition miners, such as the GNASSM, became the target of the invasion. In February 2017, about five months before the raid, the sector ministry engaged with the GNASSM and other stakeholders to devise sustainable measures to address ASM's illegalities. This stakeholder engagement produced the Multi-Sectoral Mining Integrated Project (MMIP), which churned out two strategies to address illegal mining. The first strategy sought to regularize the sector by leveraging multiple stakeholders' expertise, including central and local government agencies, GNASSM (i.e. licensed miners), chiefs, illegal miners, and the police.

The second strategy, which was to be the last resort, envisioned a crackdown on ASM. Shortly after the stakeholders' meeting, the Government placed a temporary ban on ASM in March 2017 to access the ASM-induced havoc.²⁰ Without the military's deployment, about 97 per cent of illegal ASM operatives stopped operating and moved their equipment from the mining sites.²¹ Nonetheless, the Government later set up IMCIM, an ad-hoc body, in June 2017 to take over the fight against ASM. The Chair of the IMCIM, professor Frimpong Boateng who also served as Minister of Environment, turned the MMIP's strategy upside down, prioritising the second strategy for two reasons. First, the IMCIM deeply suspected GNASSM as a pro-opposition mining association. This suspicion surged as a splinter group of the GNASSM, the Ashanti Chapter of Small-Scale miners, threatened demonstrations against the initial ban on ASM. A leading GNASSM member argued that:

They saw all of us as members of the opposition NDC party with no good intention for the Government. When we went for a meeting with them, we could read from their faces that they didn't want to have us in the meeting.²²

Second, Professor Frimpong Boateng had a stake in ASM through his son's ASM business.²³ Accordingly, raiding ASM would serve Frimpong-Boateng's parochial familiar interest and the incumbent's interest at large to the opposition's neglect. Expectedly, many GNASSM members – who had licenses from the Minerals Commission – fell victim to Operation Vanguard, losing their investments as a result.²⁴ Under Frimpong Boateng's watch, more than 500 excavators ceased by the IMCIM disappeared. It turned out that the incumbent had distributed the excavators to its members to mine surreptitiously. A leaked audio recording showed how Frimpong Boateng highlighted the NPP's need for campaign finance while interacting with Ekow Ewusi – the Central Regional NPP organiser – in a local dialect on exploiting some concessions to raise funds for the party.²⁵

²⁰ Interview with GNASSM and MLNR in July 2019.

²¹ Ibid

²² Interview with GNASSM in July 2019

²³ Interview with a former employee of the Minerals Commission in April 2020.

²⁴ Interview of several licensed miners during a two-day mining conference organized by the Third World Network in May 2019. a

²⁵ Alleged conversation between Frimpong-Boateng & Ekow Ewusi on plans to finance NPP through Galamsey. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URsRBLRWvns> [Accessed: 12th February 2020]

Moreover, a visit to one of the mining communities in Obuasi revealed that Wontumi had moved his excavators to mine in a nearby forest with Operation Vanguard's protection. Again, the chief of this community leveraged his political connection with the NPP to facilitate illegal mining.²⁶ Besides these field evidence, a 2018 scandal disclosed that Mr Charles Bissue, the IMCIM's secretary, facilitated illegal mining despite the ban. The Criminal Investigations Department (CID) did clear Bissue of any wrongdoing. However, the Office of the Special Prosecutor, which is, presumably, an independent body, took over the issue for further investigations, claiming that the CID, a political body, had no jurisdiction over a corruption case requiring independent investigation (Zadok, 2019).

While the Government announced that it had relieved Bissue of his position pending investigations, Bissue remained at the IMCIM and was the key contact who elected to grant me an interview.²⁷ These developments highlight how the contest for ASM-induced rents did motivate the raid in 2017. They also explain why the Government decided to include licensed ASM operatives in the ban while banning all ASM forms (alluvial and hard-rock) despite alluvial mining being entirely responsible for ASM-induced water pollution.

4.2. Domestic resource mobilization and spatial variation in ASM Governance

While the above explains longitudinal variation in ASM governance, this section clarifies why only southern miners tend to be targets of ASM raids. I argue that the domestic resource mobilization (DRM) imperatives of incumbents matter. Compared to northern Ghana, southern Ghana, I contend, is a more economically viable region, hosting the country's leading foreign exchange earning sectors such as the LSM sector. Thus, as hard-rock ASM operatives in southern Ghana threaten the LSM industry, incumbents pay particular attention to the south when raiding ASM operatives.

While this argument seems to underscore the LSM-bias thesis, I argue further that in a competitive political settlement, DRM considerations from LSM would only matter in deciding how to implement a raid rather than when to launch it. In what follows, I show how LSM interests mediate spatial variation in ASM governance while contrasting this with a discussion on why LSM interests do not matter in motivating incumbents' initial clampdown decisions.

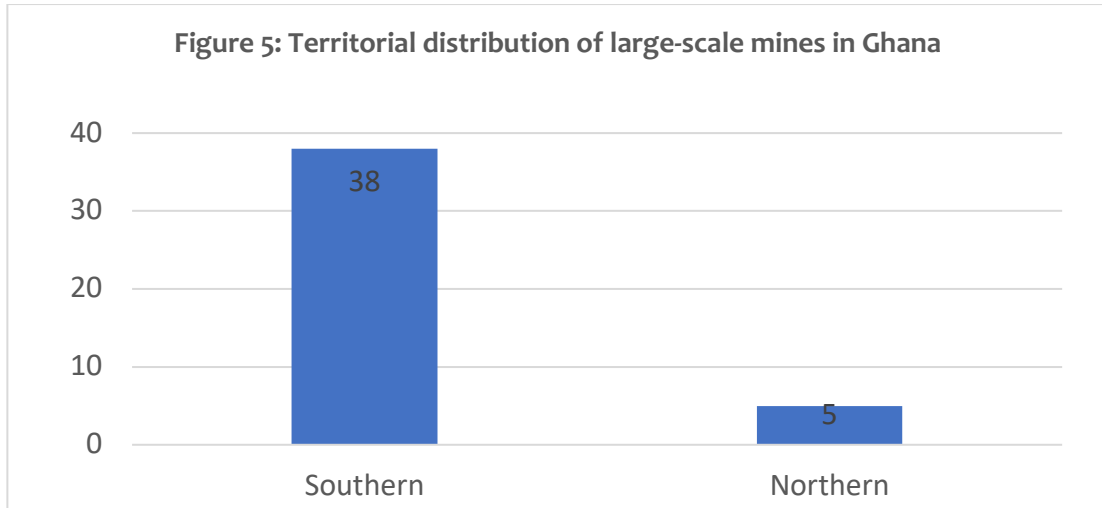
4.2.1. LSM interests and spatial variation in ASM governance.

All the successive ASM raids observed in Ghana since 2006 targeted southern ASM operatives while leaving northern miners unscathed. This cross-sectional variation in implementing an attack has much to do with each of the incumbents' concern to protect LSM mining interests in southern Ghana. Unlike northern Ghana, the overwhelming majority of Ghana's LSM companies operate in the south. Here, LSM/ASM competition over mineralized lands often translates into clashes between company security and ASM operatives (Hilson, 2002; Aubynn, 2009). Accordingly, these dynamics of strained LSM/ASM relations are acutely pronounced in southern Ghana.

As figure five shows, out of the approximately 43 active large-scale mines in Ghana, only five exist in northern Ghana (i.e. four in Upper East and one in Upper West), with the remaining 38 located in the south as follows: 15 mines in Ashanti Region; 14 in Western Region; seven in Eastern Region, and two in Brong-Ahafo Region.

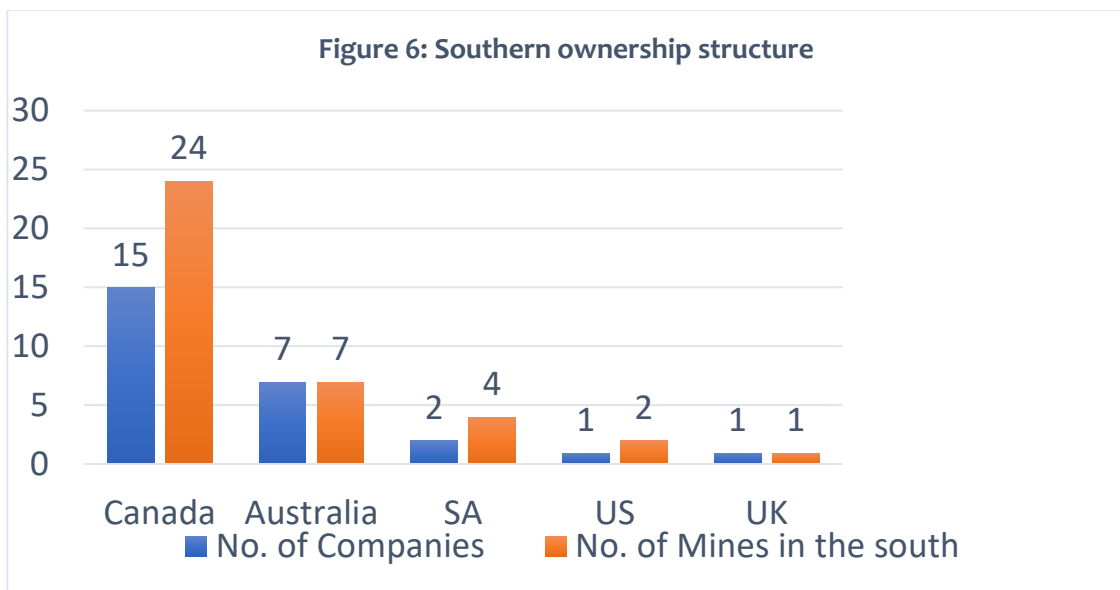
²⁶ Field interviews in July 2019

²⁷ Several attempts to arrange an interview with Bissue proved futile.



Source: Author's

Regarding the five mines' ownership structure in northern Ghana, three Australian companies own four mines while one Chinese company owns the other. The ownership structure in the south is more diverse, as shown in figure six.



SA = South Africa, US = United States, UK = United Kingdom

Source: Author's

The lopsided distribution of LSM mines and ownership structure across the country highlight the relevance of southern transnational mining interests to Ghanaian governing coalitions compared to their northern counterparts. Indeed, three of the south's mining companies – Newmont GoldCorp, Goldfields Ghana Ltd and AngloGold Ashanti – account for more than 50 per cent of total gold production in the LSM sector.²⁸ Existing data from the Ghana Chamber of Mines provide corroborative evidence. Out of 10 companies operating a total of 12 mines in southern Ghana,

²⁸ Interview with Ghana's Minerals Commission in June 2019.

Newmont GoldCorp, Goldfields Ghana Ltd and AngloGold Ashanti accounted for 63 per cent of total gold production in 2015 and 62.6 per cent in 2016. On the revenue side, the sum total of these companies' contribution stood at 62.5 per cent in 2015 and 63 per cent in 2016.²⁹ The southern regions in which these companies operate are also the hotspots of ASM in Ghana. For instance, Tarkwa and Obuasi, which respectively hosts Goldfields and AGA, are notorious for ASM. Accordingly, LSM voices are more pronounced in the south relative to the north, compelling incumbents to focus on the south when raiding ASM operatives. Given the relevance of LSM interests in southern Ghana, Operation Vanguard also targeted only southern ASM operatives who threaten LSM interests.

Mining companies, acting mainly through their respective embassies and high commissions, boosted the MCAC's pressure on the Government to raid ASM. For instance, the Canadian, Australian and British Governments provides finances for the reclamation of galamsey lands.³⁰ he Australian High Commissioner Andrews Barnes argued that galamsey is "bad for the economy because it... makes the legitimate investments of mining companies much more difficult to work here and undermine[s] legitimate miners."³¹ Similarly, the US embassy bemoaned the environmental degradation in Atewa Forest Reserve (GNA, 2017) which is close to the Colorado-based Newmont Goldcorp Akyem project in the Eastern Region. Newmont's investment of US\$ 3.2 billion constitutes 15 per cent of the company's global production (Hilson and Maconachie, 2020).

As ASM invasions comprise a fundamental problem for Newmont Goldcorp, the company regards government-sponsored clampdown measures as cost-effective ways of warding off marauding ASM operatives.³² These corporate pressures meant that the Government had to extend the clampdown to include hard-rock ASM operatives. Only by doing so could it secure the property rights of mining companies against hard-rock ASM invasions. Consequently, the Government made key hard-rock mining communities the regional headquarters of Operation Vanguard in southern Ghana. Obuasi, the host community of AGA, was the Ashanti Regional headquarters of Operation Vanguard. Similarly, Tarkwa, the host community of Goldfields Ghana Ltd, became the Western Regional headquarters of Operation Vanguard.

These development agreements granted 15-year protection to the companies against any future fiscal changes. As empirical research links property rights protection with the level investment democracies attract (Li et al., 2018), Kufour's Operation Flush-out was a necessary policy intervention to guarantee these mining giants' property rights. Thus, while the successive raids of ASM operatives considered southern mining companies' interest, Ghana's fluid political dynamics compel other incumbents to ignore these corporate interests and thus tolerate ASM.

²⁹ See Appendix B for how I arrived at these percentages.

³⁰ Agyeman, K. (2017). Gov't begins moves to reclaim galamsey lands in Kyebi. Available at <https://citifmonline.com/2017/11/govt-begins-moves-to-reclaim-galamsey-lands-in-kyebi/> [Accessed: 17 December 2017]

³¹ Myjoyonline.com. (2017). Australian govt backs Ghana's anti-galamsey fight, pledges support. Available at <https://www.modernghana.com/news/768909/australian-govt-backs-ghanas-anti-galamsey-fight.html> [Accessed: 20th October, 2017]. Beyond owning mines in Ghana, Australian companies such as Barmenco Mining Ltd and BCM provide mine support services. Barmenco Mining Ltd provides underground mining and development services to Ghana's largest LSM company Newmont GoldCorp Ltd.

³² Personal interviews with an official of NewmontGold Corp in July, 2019. The Ghana Chamber of Mines confirmed the frequent ASM invasion of mining companies' concessions.

4.2.2. *When DRM from LSM Doesn't Matter*

Despite their organizational wherewithal and structural powers, LSM companies sometimes fail to get governments to raid ASM. When incumbents cannot dispense with ASM votes, no amount of corporate mining pressure would suffice to warrant a clampdown on ASM operatives. As incumbents' performance shapes the rational voter's voting decision (Downs, 1957), the rationale incumbent would evade any pressure to clampdown on ASM if ASM votes can make a difference. Ahead of the 2016 general elections, the Mahama-led NDC Government confronted a dilemma of whether or not to evict about 5000 ASM operatives that had invaded AGA's Adansi Shaft.

This event led to the death of the company's Corporate Communications Manager, John Owusu (GCM, 2016)³³ and held the potential of stifling the company's search for investors to redevelop the mine. Acting alongside the Chamber of Mines and the Ashanti King, AGA lobbied President Mahama to evict the miners. The Chamber linked ASM invasions with "a sense of insecurity and fear among investors, which will cause a slowdown in investment in the country's mineral sectors."³⁴ Nonetheless, Mahama tolerated the miners, citing the South-African government-sponsored massacre of mineworkers at Marikana, a platinum mine site, to justify his inaction. The Asante King, a publicly known friend of Mahama, bemoaned Mahama's inaction against the invading miners the Government "told me to the face that they can't go and fire gun shots like what is happening in South Africa and so I should let it [AGA] collapse."³⁵

Mahama's reference to Marikana to justify his tolerance of ASM in Obuasi is intriguing. Unlike the illegal miners in Obuasi that had illegally seized control of AGA's shaft, the victims in Marikana were striking Lonmin workers who wanted salary increment. Moreover, Mahama had signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with mining companies that obliged state security to protect company concessions against marauding illegal miners. Thus, while AGA expected the use of force to evict the invading miners, the Government failed to act in this direction despite the opposition coalition sympathizing with AGA. The opposition promised to "ensure that (AGA) mine is reopened and strengthened, so as to bring life back to Obuasi."³⁶

Despite these corporate and political pressures, Mahama tolerated ASM operatives. Since 2016 was an election year, a raid on miners in Obuasi would have sent a wrong signal to the remaining one million ASM operatives in the country. Mahama further pulled out of the MoU that obliged the Government to provide security for mining companies. Thus, the crisis in Obuasi had opened other mining companies up to the threat of ASM invasion across southern Ghana in particular. Not even

³³ The popular narrative by the GCM and the media was that ASM operatives had invaded AGA's properties and killed its manager. However, personal interviews in Obuasi revealed that the invasion played a mediating role. A company vehicle had run over George Owusu when the driver, a foreigner, anticipated an attack from ASM operatives and sped off. It rather took the intervention of the miners to get George Owusu to the hospital.

³⁴ A speech by Sulemanu Koney, CEO of the Ghana Chamber of Mines. See Myjoyonline.com (2016). Illegal mining: Chamber of Mines wants government intervention. Available at <https://www.myjoyonline.com/business/illegal-mining-chamber-of-mines-wants-govt-intervention/> [Accessed: 28th April 2020]

³⁵ Mornah, K. (2019). NDC told me to go to hell when I called for help for Obuasi Mine – Asantehene. Available at <https://bestnewsgh.com/ndc-told-me-to-go-to-hell-when-i-called-for-help-for-obuasi-mine-asantehene/> [Accessed: 25th March 2021].
Also see a youtube video in which the King delivered the speech in a local dialect at Ghanaweb (2019). AngloGold offered Obuasi mine to me at \$1 – Otumfuo. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ClzKt4ad2tM> [Accessed: 25th March 2021]

³⁶ See Starrfmonline.com. (2016).

did AGA's suit against Mahama's Government in the International Centre for Settlement of Investment (ICSID),³⁷ compel him to act otherwise.

Eventually, the Government and AGA sought an out-of-court settlement which, surprisingly, resulted in a compromise by AGA. The company undertook feasibility studies of its concessions and shed off 60% of its mineralized land to the Government for onward allocation to the illegal miners to get them out of the active underground shaft. This state-business tension shows the LSM-bias thesis's limitation in explaining military sweeps of ASM operatives. The above analysis suggests that when ASM votes mattered, the Government's quest for DRM from the mining industry was irrelevant, explaining why Mahama favoured illegal miners over AGA in particular, but also the LSM sector more generally.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper examined why ASM governance varies over time and across space in Africa, using Ghana as a case study. It sought to appreciate ASM's raid and tolerance by incumbents over time while shedding light on why clampdown measures are limited to southern Ghana. The paper found that incumbents' political survival imperatives shape longitudinal and spatial variation in ASM governance through Ghana's competitive political settlement and incumbent's resource mobilization considerations. When incumbents find ASM operatives politically relevant, they tolerate ASM and vice versa. However, clampdown measures focus on southern Ghana because of the disproportionate allocation of LSM interests in the south. Thus, incumbents prioritize raiding southern ASM operatives to secure the property rights of southern mining companies.

The study's finding has significant theoretical and empirical implications. It confirms the theoretical debate that power distribution across power configurations and social groups in a competitive political settlement matters in understanding development outcomes. The paper shows that the quest for political survival in Ghana's competitive political settlement means that sometimes favouring one social group (ASM operatives) matters more than other social groups (LSM companies) and vice versa. This argument, however, contradicts the thesis that incumbents in Ghana terminate clampdown measures ahead of elections because of the fear of losing ASM votes. We have shown in this paper that median votes sometimes cancel out ASM votes, making it politically prudent for incumbents to maintain military raids to please median voters.

While the study found that the business-as-capital and association models shape spatial variation in ASM governance, it did, however, find these theories limited in explaining longitudinal variation in ASM governance. The LSM-bias thesis, rooted in these models, concludes that large-scale mining companies' interests account for military sweeps of ASM operatives in Africa. Yet, this paper has demonstrated that incumbents' political vulnerabilities in a competitive political settlement implies that transnational mining interests are not inviolable. Consequently, mining companies are sometimes at the receiving end of 'undesirable' government policy, especially when incumbents' tolerance of illegal miners subtly encourages illegal miners to invade company concessions.

Empirically, the paper contributes to a wealth of informal economy literature that suggests that politics matters in appreciating how governments relate with their informal workforce. This literature concludes that cross-sectional variation in the tolerance of different groups of informal actors within states has much to do with incumbents' relative perception of the political (electoral) relevance of informal actors. More narrowly, this thesis contributes to the ASM literature by

³⁷ See Business & Human Rights Resource Centre (n.d). Ghana: AngloGold Ashanti petitions World Bank body against mine invasion; NGO director says mining should benefit all. Available at <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/ghana-anglogold-ashanti-petitions-world-bank-body-against-mine-invasion-ngo-director-says-mining-should-benefit-all>. [Accessed: 28th April 2020].

showing how a political economy lens helps appreciate the complex variation in ASM governance. The study's findings are relevant for other cases beyond Ghana, including Tanzania, South Africa, and the DRC. These dominant settlements may generate consistent rather than fluid ASM policies that may be more or less supportive of miners. Future studies could further explore this area of research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A.

A Comparison the performance of the NPP and NDC in all ASM constituencies in 2012 and 2016.

CONSTITUENCY	NPP (2012)	NPP (2016)	NDC (2012)	NDC (2016)
Ashanti region				
Obuasi West	31, 788	34660	16, 072	11796
Obuasi East	25,108	27952	15,673	11400
Asante Akim Central	26097	28801	9316	7423
Brong Ahafo Region				
Asutifi South	12791	13001	15752	14549
Asutifi North	15339	16531	13606	12208
Central Region				
Upper Denkyira East	22,923	25243	15,705	14037
Assin North	11,884	14143	14830	12266
Assin Central	16157	18368	13105	10019
Assin South	21386	24517	17059	14031
Eastern Region				
Akim Oda	20631	21836	9129	6610

Akwatia	20678	21436	19118	15925
Upper East Region				
Bolgatanga Central	11027	14487	35142	32242
Bolgatanga East	3,123	4241	10543	10293
Talensi	7120	9104	17110	18798
Nabdam	4719	6152	7533	9317
Upper West Region				
Wa Central	20822	22107	37382	32664
Wa West	7301	8518	18856	18617
Wa East	11271	12581	13900	12036
Western Region				
Tarkwa Nsuaem	38506	42850	32600	23379
Prestea Huni-Valley	30175	33327	40904	34876
Amenfi West	16184	17309	26777	23407

Source: Ghana's Electoral Commission (2016 figures)

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (2012 figures)

Appendix B.

Mineral (Gold) Production and Revenue (2015 and 2016).

Year	2015		2016	
	Production	Revenue (USD)	Production	Revenue (USD)
Abosso Goldfields Ltd	167,831	194,810,509	147,720	183,390,746
Adamus Resources Ltd	110,401	128,341,506	87,710	107,150,748
AngloGold Ashanti Iduapriem Mine	192,522	223,433,033	214,196	268,261,229
AngloGold Ashanti, Obuasi Mine	52,648	65,698,815	3,072	3,268,846
Asanko Gold Mine	-	-	162,802	195,388,905
Chirano Gold Mine	255,377	301,539,585	211,440	258,313,956
Goldfields Ghana Ltd (Tarkwa Mine)	586,051	680,689,902	568,036	708,864,563
Golden Star Bogoso Prestea Ltd	114,150	133,303,230	89,673	112,970,441
Golden Star Wassa Ltd	108,266	124,569,806	104,380	129,284,717
Newmont Ghana Gold Ltd (Ahafo mine)	331,507	386,930,281	348,861	434,741,967
Newmont Golden Ridge Ltd (Akyem mine)	472,632	548,633,233	470,313	586,878,575
Perseus Mining (Ghana) Ltd	189,527	259,536,265	153,208	165,324,528
Total	2,580,912	3,047,486,165	2,561,411	3,153,839,221
Total for AGA, Newmont and Goldfields	1,635,360	1,905,385,264	1,604,478	2,002,015,180

Source: Author's based on data from GCM, 2016.