Caught in the Crossfire : Natural Resources, Energy Transition, and Conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo

Authors : Koami West Togbetse

Abstract : The global shift towards clean and sustainable energy sources, known as the energy transition, is compelling numerous countries to transition from polluting energy systems to cleaner alternatives, commonly referred to as green energies. In this context, cobalt holds significant importance as a crucial mineral in facilitating this energy transition due to its pivotal role in electric batteries. Considering the Democratic Republic of Congo's reputation for political instability and its position as the largest producer of cobalt, possessing over 50% of the world's reserves, we have assessed the potential conflicts that may arise as a result of the rapid increase in cobalt demand. The results show that cobalt does not appear to be a determinant contributing to all past conflicts over the study period in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Gold, on the other hand, stands out as one of the coveted metals for rebel groups engaged in rampant exploitation, increasing the likelihood of conflicts occurring. However, a more in-depth analysis reveals a shift in the relationship between cobalt production and conflict events around 2006. Prior to 2006, increased cobalt production was significantly associated with a reduction in conflict events. However, after 2006, this relationship became positive, indicating that higher cobalt production is now linked to a slight increase in conflict events. This suggests a change in the dynamics affecting conflicts related to cobalt production before and after 2006. According to our predictive model, cobalt has the potential to emerge increasingly as a contributing factor, just like gold.

Keywords : conflicts, natural resources, energy transition, geopolitics
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