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Research Article

Intelligence-Led Early Warning Systems And National Security: A Strategic Framework for Preventing Emerging Security Threats in Nigeria and West Africa

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Abstract. The contemporary security environment in Nigeria and West Africa is increasingly characterized by complex, interconnected, and rapidly evolving threats, including terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, violent extremism, transnational organised crime, cybercrime, communal conflicts, separatist violence, trafficking, illicit arms proliferation, resource-based conflicts, political instability, and climate-related insecurity. These threats frequently develop through identifiable patterns before escalating into full-scale security crises. However, the effectiveness of national and regional security institutions is often constrained by fragmented intelligence systems, inadequate information sharing, weak analytical capacity, poor coordination among security agencies, limited

technological infrastructure, insufficient community participation, and the persistent gap between early warning and early action. This study examines the role of intelligence-led early warning systems in strengthening national security and preventing emerging security threats in Nigeria and West Africa. It develops a strategic framework that integrates intelligence collection, data fusion, predictive analysis, community-based information, technological surveillance, inter-agency coordination, regional intelligence sharing, risk assessment, decision-making, and preventive response. The study adopts a qualitative documentary research design, relying on secondary sources including academic literature, official reports, policy documents, institutional publications, and regional security frameworks. The analysis is anchored principally in Intelligence-Led Policing Theory, Human Security Theory, and Systems Theory. The paper argues that early warning becomes strategically valuable only when intelligence is transformed into timely, credible, actionable information and connected to clearly defined response mechanisms. Existing regional arrangements such as the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) and the African Union Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) provide important foundations, but their effectiveness depends on stronger national-regional linkages, interoperable information systems, analytical capacity, trusted community networks, and political willingness to act on warnings. The study proposes an Intelligence-Led Early Warning and Preventive Security Framework (ILEW-PSF) for Nigeria and West Africa. It recommends the establishment of integrated national intelligence fusion mechanisms, real-time risk dashboards, predictive analytics capacity, community intelligence networks, stronger border intelligence, improved intelligence-sharing protocols, early-action triggers, professional training, legal safeguards, and closer cooperation among Nigeria, ECOWAS, the African Union, and other relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: Intelligence, Early Warning, National Security, Predictive Analytics, Terrorism, Banditry, ECOWAS, Nigeria, West Africa, Conflict Prevention.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

National security in the twenty-first century has moved beyond conventional military defence to encompass a broad range of political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and human-security challenges. Contemporary threats are increasingly networked, transnational, asymmetric, and difficult to predict. Terrorist organisations, armed criminal networks, kidnappers, traffickers, cybercriminals and violent extremist groups can exploit porous borders, weak governance structures, digital communication platforms, economic deprivation and local grievances to expand their activities.

Nigeria occupies a strategically important position within West Africa because of its population, economic significance, geographical size, military capacity and political influence. Consequently, insecurity within Nigeria can generate consequences beyond its territorial boundaries. Conversely, instability in neighbouring countries can affect Nigeria through refugee flows, arms trafficking, transnational criminal networks, extremist movements and cross-border displacement.

The nature of contemporary insecurity makes reactive security approaches increasingly inadequate. Conventional responses often become activated after attacks have already occurred. Such approaches may involve military operations, police investigations, arrests, emergency interventions and humanitarian responses. Although these measures remain important, national security institutions

increasingly require mechanisms capable of identifying threats before they mature into violent crises.

Early warning systems provide one avenue for addressing this challenge. An effective early warning system continuously collects, validates, analyses and interprets information relating to indicators of emerging risks. In the security environment, intelligence-led early warning extends this process by combining intelligence collection and analysis with predictive assessment and operational decision-making.

The African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was developed to anticipate and prevent conflicts and provide timely information concerning evolving violent conflicts. Its architecture includes a Situation Room and observation and monitoring centres connected to regional economic communities.

Similarly, ECOWAS established the ECOWAS Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) under its regional conflict-prevention architecture. ECOWARN is operated by the ECOWAS Early Warning Directorate and functions as a regional peace and security observation mechanism.

Recent developments demonstrate the importance of strengthening these systems. In June 2026, ECOWAS and the African Union commenced technical engagement aimed at strengthening cooperation between ECOWARN and CEWS, including information sharing, joint conflict analysis and governance monitoring.

However, the existence of early warning institutions does not automatically guarantee early action. The central strategic problem is therefore not simply whether threats can be detected, but whether warning information can be transformed into timely, legitimate and effective preventive action.

Objectives of the Study

The objective is to examine how intelligence-led early warning systems can strengthen national security and prevent emerging security threats in Nigeria and West Africa.

1. Examine the conceptual relationship between intelligence, early warning and national security;
2. Identify emerging security threats that require intelligence-led early warning mechanisms in Nigeria and West Africa;
3. Assess existing national and regional early warning mechanisms;
4. Examine institutional, technological and operational challenges affecting early warning and early action;
5. Analyse the role of intelligence fusion, predictive analytics and community intelligence in threat prevention;
6. Develop a strategic intelligence-led early warning framework for Nigeria and West Africa; and
7. Propose policy measures for strengthening preventive security capabilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarification

Intelligence

Intelligence refers to information that has been systematically collected, evaluated, processed, analysed and interpreted to support decision-making. Intelligence is therefore different from raw information. The strategic value of intelligence derives from its capacity to reduce uncertainty and provide decision-makers with an informed assessment of potential threats.

In national security, intelligence can include human intelligence (HUMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT), imagery intelligence (IMINT), open-source intelligence (OSINT), financial intelligence, cyber intelligence, geospatial intelligence (GEOINT) and community-based intelligence.

Early Warning

Early warning is a systematic process of identifying, monitoring and communicating indicators of emerging risks before they become major crises.

A security early warning system normally contains four core stages:

- Data Collection → Analysis → Warning → Response

A sophisticated system may be represented as:

- Threat Indicators → Intelligence Collection → Validation → Analysis → Risk Assessment → Warning → Decision → Preventive Action → Feedback

The effectiveness of the system therefore depends on the entire chain rather than on information collection alone.

Intelligence-Led Early Warning

Intelligence-led early warning refers to the systematic use of intelligence capabilities, analytical tools, technological systems and human knowledge to detect, assess and communicate emerging threats before they escalate.

It goes beyond conventional early warning by emphasising:

- intelligence fusion;
- threat assessment
- predictive analysis;
- pattern recognition;
- risk modelling;
- scenario development;
- continuous monitoring;
- strategic forecasting; and
- Linkage between warning and operational response.

National Security

National security encompasses the protection of the state, population, territory, institutions, economy, critical infrastructure and national interests against internal and external threats.

Contemporary national security therefore includes military security, public safety, cybersecurity, food security, energy security, economic security, environmental security and human security.

Intelligence and National Security

The literature on intelligence studies generally conceptualises intelligence as a process through which uncertainty is reduced for policymakers and security decision-makers. Intelligence enables governments to understand threats, estimate adversary capabilities, identify vulnerabilities and develop response options.

Traditional intelligence systems were frequently oriented towards military threats and state adversaries. Contemporary security environments require broader intelligence architectures because threats increasingly emerge from non-state actors, criminal networks, extremist organisations and digitally connected communities.

For Nigeria, this requires the integration of intelligence from military, police, border, and financial, cyber, and immigration, correctional and local sources.

Early Warning and Conflict Prevention

Early warning has long been recognised as a key component of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. The United Nations has emphasised that reliable information collection and analysis can facilitate timely warning concerning potential crises.

The African Union's CEWS demonstrates an institutional commitment to translating monitoring and analysis into preventive decision-making. CEWS monitors simmering, potential, actual and post-conflict situations and provides information intended to facilitate timely and informed decisions.

The fundamental lesson from this literature is that early warning must not remain an analytical exercise. Warning becomes strategically meaningful when institutions possess the authority, resources and political will to act.

Early Warning in West Africa

West Africa has developed several regional mechanisms for conflict prevention and security monitoring. ECOWARN represents a major regional instrument for monitoring peace and security risks. ECOWAS has also developed tools for joint analysis and response planning.

ECOWAS's early warning architecture considers several dimensions of human security, including environment and natural disasters, crime and criminality, health and pandemics, security, governance and human rights.

This broad approach is important because contemporary security threats are interconnected. For example, climate pressures may contribute to displacement and competition over resources, which may interact with criminality, communal conflict and political instability.

Emerging Security Threats in Nigeria and West Africa

Emerging threats include:

- Terrorism and Violent Extremism

Terrorist organisations remain significant threats because of their capacity to exploit ungoverned or poorly governed spaces, recruit vulnerable populations and establish cross-border networks.

- Armed Banditry and Kidnapping

Banditry and kidnapping have evolved beyond isolated criminal incidents into complex security problems involving financial networks, weapons, local informants and territorial control.

- **Transnational Organised Crime**

Drug trafficking, human trafficking, arms trafficking, migrant smuggling, illegal resource exploitation and financial crimes can undermine state institutions and generate resources for violent groups. UNODC describes organised crime as both a cause and consequence of weak governance in West Africa.

- **Cybercrime and Hybrid Threats**

Digital technologies provide opportunities for criminal networks and extremist groups to conduct financial fraud, propaganda, recruitment, disinformation and cyberattacks.

- **Communal and Resource-Based Conflicts**

Competition over land, water, grazing routes, forests and mineral resources can become security risks when combined with weak governance, political manipulation and arms proliferation.

- **Climate-Related Security Risks**

Climate change can act as a conflict multiplier by increasing displacement, livelihood insecurity and competition over resources. Recent African policy discussions have stressed the need to integrate climate, peace and security considerations into early warning and preventive action.

Early Warning and Conflict Prevention in Nigeria

Arul Ogun (2023) examined the role of early warning systems in conflict prevention in Nigeria, with particular attention to the failure to recognise or act upon warning signs preceding violent conflicts. The study adopted a mixed approach involving historical analysis and interviews with 600 key informants drawn from Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. The findings indicated that Nigeria frequently experiences identifiable warning signals before conflicts escalate, but such indicators are often disregarded, inadequately communicated or insufficiently incorporated into preventive decision-making. The study consequently demonstrated that the major challenge is not necessarily the complete absence of warning information but the failure to transform available warning information into preventive action.

The relevance of this finding to the present study is significant. It suggests that intelligence-led early warning in Nigeria should not be evaluated solely according to the quantity of information collected. Rather, attention should be directed towards the complete warning-to-action chain, including intelligence collection, validation, analysis, dissemination, decision-making and response.

ECOWARN and Regional Conflict Prevention

Adegboyega et al. (2023) assessed the ECOWAS Early Warning and Response Network (ECOWARN) and its relationship with conflict management in West Africa. The study employed a qualitative design based on documentary and archival materials. Its findings indicated that ECOWAS has established institutional

mechanisms capable of identifying emerging political and security risks; however, a weak relationship persists between early warning information and actual conflict-resolution measures. The study argued that ECOWARN should move beyond the analysis of crisis indicators towards more effective mediation, preventive diplomacy and engagement with political authorities.

This empirical evidence supports the argument that early warning should be understood as a process rather than merely an institutional information centre. Warning has limited strategic value when decision-makers fail to receive, trust or act upon the information generated by early warning institutions.

Similarly, research examining ECOWARN's role in addressing transborder criminality has highlighted the importance of regional information networks in dealing with security threats that cross national boundaries. The transnational character of organised crime, trafficking and cross-border violence means that national warning mechanisms alone cannot provide sufficient situational awareness. Regional intelligence sharing is therefore essential to identifying patterns that may not be visible from within one country.

African Union Early Warning and Early Action

Mascara (2021) examined the relationship between early warning and early action within the African Union's Continental Early Warning System (CEWS). The study found that the gap between warning and action remains a significant challenge in the African Peace and Security Architecture. The research demonstrates that producing credible early warning information is only one part of preventive security; institutional structures must also facilitate the movement of warning information into political and operational decisions.

Gnanguênon (2021), in an analysis of African continental and regional early warning systems, similarly identified persistent difficulties in translating early warning recommendations into early response. The study highlighted three major obstacles: weak interaction between early warning personnel and political decision-makers, inadequate resources for responding to transregional conflicts, and the political dimensions of conflict response. The study further emphasised the importance of relationships between technical warning institutions and political stakeholders in determining whether warnings result in preventive action.

The findings from these studies demonstrate that the early warning problem in Africa is multidimensional. It includes technological, institutional, political, financial and operational dimensions. Consequently, an effective intelligence-led system must establish mechanisms through which warning thresholds automatically trigger appropriate institutional consideration and response.

Contemporary Development of ECOWAS Early Warning Capacity

Recent developments within ECOWAS provide further empirical evidence of the continuing effort to improve the region's early warning capabilities. In February 2026, ECOWAS conducted a technical retreat for ECOWARN field monitors to strengthen data collection and support preventive measures. The exercise focused on

improving the regional early warning information base and reaffirmed early warning as a central component of the regional peace and security architecture.

In May 2026, ECOWAS also supported capacity building for the operationalisation of the National Centre for the Coordination of Response Mechanism (NCCRM) Data Hub in Ghana. The initiative focused on data harmonisation, reporting alignment, dashboard utilisation and coordination between national early warning systems and ECOWARN. This development is particularly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates an emerging shift towards integrated, data-driven national-regional early warning architecture.

The implication is that West African early warning systems are progressively moving from traditional reporting structures towards interconnected data platforms. However, technological integration alone cannot guarantee effective prevention. It must be accompanied by analytical capacity, institutional coordination, trusted information flows and clearly defined response mechanisms.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies on early warning and preventive security demonstrate that the existence of warning mechanisms does not necessarily result in effective conflict prevention. The central empirical concern is the extent to which information concerning emerging threats is collected, analysed, communicated to decision-makers and translated into timely preventive action.

Empirical Evidence on the Early Warning–Early Action Gap

The empirical literature consistently identifies a recurring gap between identifying threats and responding to them. This gap can be conceptualised as:

Threat Signal → Intelligence Collection → Analysis → Warning → Decision → Action

Failure at any stage can undermine the entire system.

For example, a community may report unusual movements of armed individuals, but if the information is not verified, analysed and transmitted to the appropriate security authority, the warning may not produce preventive action. Similarly, intelligence agencies may produce accurate threat assessments, but political or institutional delays can prevent the deployment of appropriate preventive measures.

The empirical literature therefore demonstrates that early warning effectiveness depends on institutional connectivity. Information must move horizontally between relevant agencies and vertically from local communities to national decision-makers and from national institutions to regional mechanisms.

Empirical Evidence on Technology and Data-Driven Early Warning

Contemporary early warning systems increasingly employ data platforms, geospatial technologies, dashboards, predictive analytics and automated information processing. These tools can improve the speed with which large volumes of information are processed and can facilitate identification of geographical and temporal patterns.

However, technology creates new risks. Inaccurate or incomplete data can produce inaccurate assessments. Automated systems may also generate false positives, while politically manipulated information, misinformation and disinformation can distort threat assessments. Consequently, technological systems should complement rather than replace professional intelligence analysis and human judgement.

The emerging direction of ECOWAS's data-harmonisation and dashboard initiatives illustrates the increasing importance of interoperable data systems in regional early warning.

Literature Gap

Although existing studies have made important contributions to understanding early warning, several significant gaps remain.

First, much of the existing literature examines early warning primarily from the perspective of conflict prevention, with relatively limited attention to the integration of intelligence functions into a comprehensive national security early warning architecture. Existing studies frequently discuss conflict indicators, governance, human security and preventive diplomacy but provide less detailed consideration of how HUMINT, OSINT, SIGINT, financial intelligence, geospatial intelligence, cyber intelligence and community intelligence can be systematically fused to identify emerging threats.

Second, there is a national-regional integration gap. Existing research has examined ECOWARN and the AU CEWS as regional mechanisms, while other studies have examined conflict early warning within Nigeria. However, insufficient attention has been given to the operational relationship between Nigeria's national intelligence and security institutions and regional warning mechanisms. This is particularly important because terrorism, banditry, trafficking, arms proliferation, cybercrime and organised criminal networks frequently cross national boundaries.

Third, there is a warning-to-action gap. The empirical literature repeatedly demonstrates that warnings may be generated without corresponding preventive action. Masara (2021), Gnanguênon (2021) and Adegoboye et al. (2023) all point towards weaknesses in the transition from warning information to practical response. However, there remains a need for a strategic framework that specifies how intelligence indicators should be linked to predetermined early-action triggers, responsible institutions, decision-making authorities and response options.

Fourth, there is a technology-human intelligence gap. Existing discussions increasingly recognise the importance of digital platforms and data-driven systems, but insufficient attention has been given to integrating advanced technological capabilities with community-based intelligence. In Nigeria, local communities frequently possess important information concerning changes in local security conditions. The challenge is to integrate such knowledge into formal intelligence systems while ensuring confidentiality, legality, reliability and protection of informants.

Fifth, there is a predictive analytics gap. Existing early warning systems largely emphasise monitoring and reporting, while the potential contribution of predictive

analytics, geospatial intelligence, artificial intelligence, network analysis and risk modelling remains underdeveloped within the Nigerian national-security context. The present study therefore extends the literature by considering how predictive capabilities can complement traditional intelligence analysis.

Sixth, there is a multi-threat integration gap. Much of the literature examines individual threats such as terrorism, communal conflict, political instability or transnational crime. Contemporary insecurity, however, is interconnected. Banditry can intersect with illegal mining, arms trafficking, kidnapping, local grievances and displacement, while climate stress can intensify competition over land and water. A comprehensive early warning framework therefore needs to identify interactions among multiple threat categories rather than treating each threat in isolation.

Seventh, there is a governance and accountability gap. Intelligence-led early warning involves the collection and processing of potentially sensitive information. Existing discussions often emphasise effectiveness while giving less attention to privacy, legality, data protection, human rights, accountability and proportionality. A sustainable national early warning architecture must therefore combine operational effectiveness with appropriate legal and institutional safeguards.

Border Intelligence and Regional Security

Nigeria's extensive land borders and its position within the West African regional security environment make border intelligence a central component of intelligence-led early warning. Cross-border movements of terrorists, criminals, traffickers, arms and illicit financial networks can transform localised insecurity into regional security problems.

An effective border early warning architecture should integrate information from immigration authorities, customs institutions, police, military formations, intelligence agencies, local communities and neighbouring countries. Border intelligence should not be limited to identifying individuals crossing borders. It should also examine patterns of movement, trafficking routes, financial transactions, weapons flows, unusual population movements and changes in criminal network behaviour.

Regional cooperation is particularly important because a threat may be detected in one country before it becomes visible in another. The ECOWARN architecture provides an important platform for regional information exchange, while emerging efforts to strengthen national data hubs and their integration with ECOWARN indicate the increasing importance of national-regional interoperability

The Early Warning–Early Action Gap in Nigeria and West Africa

The central finding emerging from the literature is that the principal weakness of many early warning systems is not necessarily the absence of information. Rather, the problem lies in converting information into action.

The process can be represented as follows:

- Threat Indicators → Intelligence Collection → Validation → Intelligence Fusion → Risk Analysis → Warning → Decision → Preventive Action → Monitoring → Feedback

A breakdown at any point can produce an early-warning failure.

For Nigeria, the problem may occur when community information is not transmitted to formal security structures, when agencies fail to share intelligence, when analytical products are not communicated effectively to decision-makers, or when decision-makers fail to act on credible warnings.

At the regional level, the problem may arise when ECOWARN or CEWS identifies emerging risks but lacks the political authority, resources or institutional coordination required to generate timely intervention. Previous research has specifically identified weak links between early warning and practical conflict response within African regional security systems.

The strategic implication is that Nigeria and West Africa require an early-action architecture, rather than an early-warning architecture alone.

Intelligence Fusion and Multi-Agency Coordination

Intelligence fusion should constitute the operational centre of the proposed framework. The fragmented nature of contemporary security threats makes it difficult for a single institution to obtain a complete picture of an emerging threat.

For example, a developing banditry threat may generate different indicators across multiple institutions. Police records may identify an increase in kidnapping incidents; military patrols may observe unusual armed movements; border agencies may record unusual cross-border activity; financial intelligence may identify suspicious transactions; local communities may report the movement of unfamiliar individuals; and open-source intelligence may reveal changes in extremist or criminal communications.

Individually, these indicators may appear unrelated. When fused and analysed together, however, they can reveal a developing threat pattern.

The proposed framework therefore recommends a structured national intelligence fusion mechanism capable of integrating relevant intelligence streams while maintaining appropriate institutional responsibilities, legal safeguards and information-security standards.

Predictive Analytics and Artificial Intelligence in Early Warning

Predictive analytics can strengthen intelligence-led early warning by identifying patterns and relationships within large volumes of information. Applications may include crime hotspot prediction, geospatial risk mapping, network analysis, anomaly detection, border-risk assessment and scenario forecasting.

However, predictive analytics should not be regarded as a substitute for intelligence professionals. Predictive systems are dependent on the quality of their data and analytical models. Poor data, algorithmic bias, misinformation or deliberate manipulation can generate erroneous threat assessments.

Accordingly, the proposed ILEW-PSF adopts a human-in-the-loop approach in which artificial intelligence and predictive tools support, rather than replace, professional intelligence judgement. This approach is particularly important in national security because preventive decisions may affect fundamental rights, public confidence and community relations.

Community Intelligence and Participatory Early Warning

The empirical literature suggests that effective early warning should not be exclusively state-centred. Communities are frequently the first to observe changes in local security conditions.

A community-based intelligence component should therefore be established through secure reporting mechanisms, local liaison structures, civil society organisations, traditional institutions and trusted community representatives. Such mechanisms could provide information concerning:

- unusual movements;
- recruitment activities;
- emerging communal tensions;
- threats against individuals or communities
- suspicious weapons movements;
- extremist mobilisation;
- trafficking activities;
- displacement patterns; and
- Changes in local conflict dynamics.

However, community intelligence must be subjected to verification and professional analysis. Unverified rumours or politically motivated allegations should not automatically be treated as intelligence. The system should therefore apply source evaluation, corroboration and analytical validation.

Proposed Intelligence-Led Early Warning and Preventive Security Framework (ILEW-PSF)

The findings of the study support the development of the following framework:

- INPUTS
- Humann Intelligence (HUMINT)
- Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT)
- Signaux/Cyber Intelligence
- Ge spatial Intelligence (GEOINT)
- Financial Intelligence
- Communiât Intelligence
- Border Intelligence
- Police and Military Intelligence
- Regional Intelligence

INTELLIGENCE FUSION

Collection → Verification → Integration → Cross-Validation

ANALYTICAL PROCESS

Pattern Recognition → Threat Assessment → Predictive Analytics → Scenario Development → Risk Modelling

EARLY WARNING

Low Risk → Moderate Risk → High Risk → Critical Risk

DECISION-MAKING

National Security Institutions → State/Local Authorities → ECOWAS → African Union

EARLY ACTION

Preventive Diplomacy → Intelligence-Led Deployment → Border Measures → Community Protection → Law Enforcement → Humanitarian Preparedness → Conflict Mediation

FEEDBACK

Assessment → Lessons Learned → Intelligence Updating → Model Improvement

The framework establishes a continuous cycle rather than a linear process. Information collected after preventive action should be returned to the intelligence system to improve subsequent threat assessment.

Discussion of Empirical Findings

The empirical evidence reviewed in this study supports five major conclusions.

First, early warning information exists but is not always transformed into action. Evidence from Nigeria and African regional institutions indicates that warning mechanisms can identify risk indicators while institutional or political barriers prevent timely response.

Second, institutional fragmentation reduces early-warning effectiveness. Security threats are increasingly interconnected, but intelligence may remain separated among police, military, intelligence, and border, financial and civilian institutions. Effective intelligence fusion is therefore essential.

Third, national and regional early warning systems need stronger operational linkages. ECOWARN and CEWS provide important regional mechanisms, but their effectiveness depends on the quality and timeliness of information received from national systems and the ability of regional bodies to support preventive action.

Fourth, community participation is an important but underutilised component of early warning. Communities can provide information about local changes that may not be immediately visible through national intelligence systems. Their participation must, however, be supported by trust, confidentiality and appropriate verification mechanisms.

Fifth, technology must be integrated with human judgement. Data platforms, predictive analytics and artificial intelligence can strengthen analytical capacity, but they cannot independently resolve the political, institutional and human dimensions of early action.

The findings therefore support the argument that Nigeria and West Africa require a shift from a predominantly warning-oriented model towards an intelligence-led preventive security model in which warning information is systematically connected to decision-making and early action.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the empirical evidence and identified literature gaps, the study recommends the following:

1. Establishment of an integrated national intelligence fusion mechanism: Nigeria should strengthen mechanisms for integrating relevant intelligence from police,

military, intelligence, immigration, customs, financial, cyber and community sources.

2. Development of national real-time security dashboards: Secure analytical dashboards should enable authorised decision-makers to monitor emerging threats, geographical hotspots and changing risk levels.
3. Creation of clearly defined early-action triggers: Specific warning indicators should be connected to predetermine preventive actions and responsible institutions.
4. Strengthening of ECOWAS–Nigeria intelligence linkages: National early warning structures should be more effectively connected to ECOWARN and relevant African Union mechanisms.
5. Development of community intelligence networks: Trusted community-based reporting mechanisms should be developed, particularly in high-risk and border communities.
6. Investment in predictive analytical capacity: Security institutions should develop professional capabilities in geospatial intelligence, data analysis, network analysis, scenario forecasting and responsible artificial intelligence.
7. Strengthening border intelligence: Nigeria and neighbouring states should improve intelligence sharing concerning terrorism, trafficking, arms proliferation, kidnapping and transnational organised crime.
8. Professional training: Intelligence analysts and early-warning personnel should receive continuous training in strategic forecasting, data analysis, risk assessment and intelligence fusion.
9. Legal and human-rights safeguards: Intelligence-led early warning should operate within Nigerian law and applicable human-rights and data-protection standards.
10. Institutionalisation of early-warning performance evaluation: Security institutions should regularly assess whether warnings were accurate, whether decision-makers received them on time and whether appropriate action followed.
11. Strengthening political commitment to early action: Decision-makers should develop institutional procedures that reduce the possibility of credible intelligence warnings being ignored because of bureaucratic, political or institutional delays.
12. Development of a national-regional preventive security protocol: Nigeria, ECOWAS and relevant AU institutions should develop interoperable procedures for responding to threats that cross national borders...

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Intelligence-Led Policing Theory

The study is principally anchored in Intelligence-Led Policing (ILP) theory. ILP emphasises the systematic collection and analysis of intelligence to identify criminal threats, prioritise risks and guide the allocation of security resources.

The theory is relevant because early warning requires security agencies to shift from reactive responses to proactive threat identification.

In the Nigerian context, ILP can support:

- Herat prioritization;

- criminal network analysis;
- predictive risk assessment;
- intelligence-led deployment;
- identification of high-risk locations
- identification of emerging criminal patterns; and
- Strategic resource allocation.

Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory broadens security beyond state survival to include protection from threats affecting individuals and communities.

The approach is particularly relevant to Nigeria and West Africa because insecurity involves not only territorial threats but also kidnapping, displacement, food insecurity, poverty, health crises, environmental stress and violent crime.

An intelligence-led early warning system should therefore monitor both state security indicators and human-security indicators.

Systems Theory

Systems Theory views national security as an interconnected system in which different institutions and variables interact.

The theory explains why security intelligence cannot be effectively managed through isolated institutional structures. Police intelligence, military intelligence, immigration information, financial intelligence, community reports, cyber intelligence and regional data are interconnected components of a wider security system.

The theoretical implication is that strengthening one agency while leaving information-sharing mechanisms weak may produce limited security benefits.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative documentary research design to examine the contribution of intelligence-led early warning systems to national security and the prevention of emerging security threats in Nigeria and West Africa. The choice of a qualitative documentary approach was considered appropriate because the study is primarily concerned with understanding institutional processes, intelligence structures, early warning mechanisms, security challenges, policy frameworks, and the relationship between warning information and preventive action.

Rather than relying on primary survey data, the study systematically examined existing academic and institutional knowledge to identify patterns, challenges, opportunities and strategic gaps in intelligence-led early warning systems. The approach also enables the study to compare national mechanisms in Nigeria with regional arrangements established by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and the African Union (AU).

The research was guided by three complementary theoretical perspectives: Intelligence-Led Policing Theory, Human Security Theory, and Systems Theory.

These theories provide a conceptual basis for understanding how intelligence collection, risk assessment, human security concerns, institutional coordination and preventive action can be integrated into a comprehensive early warning architecture.

Sources of Data

The study relied exclusively on secondary sources of data. Data were obtained from credible and relevant documentary materials, including:

1. peer-reviewed journal articles;
2. Academic books and scholarly publications;
3. Doctoral and master's theses where relevant;
4. Reports of the Federal Government of Nigeria;
5. Publications of Nigerian security and intelligence institutions;
6. ECOWAS policy documents and early warning reports;
7. African Union peace and security documents;
8. United Nations reports and publications;
9. Reports of international organisations working on conflict prevention and security;
10. Policy frameworks and national security strategies;
11. Official statistical and institutional publications;
12. Reports relating to terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, organised crime and violent extremism;
13. Credible research institute and think-tank publications; and
14. Relevant open-source intelligence and publicly available digital information.

Particular attention was given to materials addressing intelligence analysis, early warning, early action, conflict prevention, predictive analytics, national security, transnational organised crime and regional security cooperation.

Documentary Data Collection Procedure

Data collection involved a systematic review of relevant documentary materials. The researcher first identified major concepts associated with the study, including intelligence-led security, early warning, early action, national security, predictive analytics, intelligence fusion, community intelligence, conflict prevention, ECOWARN, CEWS and regional intelligence cooperation.

Relevant documents were then selected according to their relevance to the research objectives. Priority was given to authoritative institutional documents, peer-reviewed academic publications and studies that provided empirical evidence concerning early warning and security prevention in Nigeria and West Africa.

The documents were subsequently organised according to major analytical themes. These included:

- intelligence collection and processing;
- intelligence fusion and information sharing;
- threat identification and risk assessment;
- predictive analytics and technological surveillance;
- community-based intelligence;
- inter-agency coordination

- national-regional intelligence cooperation
- early warning and early action;
- institutional constraints;
- political and decision-making factors; and
- Preventive security responses.

This procedure allowed the researcher to identify similarities, differences, recurring patterns and gaps within the existing literature and policy environment.

Data Analysis Technique

The study employed qualitative thematic content analysis to analyse the documentary materials. Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic means of identifying and interpreting recurring themes and relationships within textual and institutional sources.

The analytical process involved four major stages:

Stage One: Data Identification and Selection.

Relevant literature, reports, policy documents and institutional materials were identified and screened according to their relevance, credibility and contribution to the research objectives.

Stage Two: Classification and Coding.

The selected materials were classified under major thematic categories such as intelligence collection, information sharing, predictive analysis, community intelligence, early warning, early action, institutional coordination and regional security cooperation.

Stage Three: Comparative Analysis.

The study compared national-level early warning mechanisms in Nigeria with regional mechanisms, particularly ECOWARN and the AU's CEWS. The comparison focused on institutional capacity, information flow, analytical mechanisms, coordination structures and the ability to translate warning into preventive action.

Stage Four: Interpretation and Synthesis.

The findings were synthesised to determine the major factors responsible for the effectiveness or weakness of intelligence-led early warning systems. The results were then used to develop the proposed Intelligence-Led Early Warning and Preventive Security Framework (ILEW-PSF).

The analytical process can be represented as:

Data Collection → Source Evaluation → Thematic Coding → Comparative Analysis → Interpretation → Identification of Gaps → Strategic Framework Development

Analytical Framework

The study conceptualises intelligence-led early warning as a continuous security cycle rather than a one-time intelligence activity. The analytical framework consists of interconnected stages:

- Threat Environment → Intelligence Collection → Data Validation → Intelligence Fusion → Analysis → Risk Assessment → Early Warning → Decision-Making → Preventive Action → Monitoring and Feedback

The first stage involves identifying emerging threats and vulnerabilities. Intelligence is subsequently collected from multiple sources, including human, open-source, geospatial, financial, cyber, signals and community-based sources. The information is then validated and fused to establish a more comprehensive threat picture.

Analytical processes are applied to identify patterns, trends, relationships and possible escalation scenarios. Risk assessment then determines the probability, potential impact and urgency of identified threats. Where a defined risk threshold is reached, an early warning is communicated to relevant decision-makers.

The process does not terminate at the dissemination of warning information. The critical stage is the transformation of warning into preventive action. This may involve policing, intelligence operations, mediation, border security, community engagement, humanitarian intervention, diplomatic action or other appropriate responses. Feedback from these interventions is subsequently incorporated into the intelligence cycle.

Ethical Considerations

Although the study is based on documentary research and does not involve direct human participants, ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. The researcher relied on publicly available and legitimately accessible information and avoided the use of classified intelligence, confidential operational information or personally identifiable security information.

Academic integrity was maintained through appropriate acknowledgement of the intellectual contributions of previous researchers and institutions. Information was interpreted objectively and presented in a manner that avoids compromising national security, individual privacy or ongoing security operations.

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Intelligence-Led Early Warning as a Strategic Instrument of National Security

The findings of this study demonstrate that intelligence-led early warning should be understood as a strategic instrument for preventing insecurity rather than merely as a mechanism for collecting and transmitting information. The contemporary security environment in Nigeria and West Africa is characterised by threats that frequently develop gradually through identifiable indicators before reaching crisis levels. Terrorist mobilisation, bandit recruitment, kidnapping networks, communal tensions, trafficking activities, illegal arms movements, cybercrime, resource competition and political violence may all generate observable signals that can be detected through systematic intelligence collection and analysis.

The central implication is that national security institutions need to move from predominantly reactive security operations towards preventive and intelligence-driven security management. Reactive responses remain necessary when violence has already occurred, but their effectiveness is often constrained by the human, economic

and institutional costs associated with responding after threats have escalated. Intelligence-led early warning provides an opportunity to identify vulnerabilities, assess the probability and potential impact of threats, and initiate preventive interventions before violence becomes widespread.

The analysis further indicates that intelligence has limited value when it remains fragmented within individual institutions. Nigeria possesses multiple institutions involved in intelligence collection, law enforcement, border management, military operations, financial monitoring, cybersecurity and internal security. However, where information remains institutionally compartmentalised, the overall security system may fail to recognise connections between apparently separate incidents.

For example, an increase in kidnapping incidents, unusual movement of armed groups, suspicious financial transactions, arms trafficking, local recruitment and community displacement may initially appear to be unrelated events. An integrated intelligence system could potentially identify these indicators as components of a developing criminal or extremist network. Intelligence fusion is therefore essential for converting isolated pieces of information into a comprehensive threat assessment.

From Early Warning to Early Action: The Central Security Challenge

One of the strongest findings emerging from the literature is the persistent gap between early warning and early action. The Nigerian and wider African experience suggests that security institutions may sometimes possess information concerning developing risks without translating that information into timely preventive measures.

This creates what may be described as the warning-action paradox: the existence of information does not necessarily produce prevention. An early warning becomes strategically meaningful only when it reaches an institution with the authority, capacity and willingness to act.

Intelligence Fusion and Inter-Agency Coordination

The analysis shows that intelligence fragmentation remains one of the major barriers to effective early warning. Contemporary security threats rarely conform to the responsibilities of one institution. Terrorism may involve financial transactions, illegal migration, arms trafficking, cyber communication, local recruitment and cross-border movement simultaneously. Similarly, kidnapping and banditry may involve criminal financing, weapons procurement, community-level intelligence networks and movement across state or national borders.

Consequently, intelligence-led early warning requires a multi-agency intelligence fusion architecture capable of combining information from different institutions.

Such an architecture should facilitate structured information sharing among relevant military, police, intelligence, border, immigration, financial, cybersecurity and other security institutions. It should also establish common data standards, information classification procedures, analytical protocols and mechanisms for assessing the reliability of intelligence.

The purpose of intelligence fusion is not simply to increase the volume of information available to security agencies. Rather, it is to improve the quality of analysis by enabling analysts to identify relationships and patterns that may remain invisible when information is assessed independently.

This finding strongly supports Systems Theory. From a systems perspective, national security institutions constitute interconnected components of a larger security system. Weakness in communication between components can reduce the effectiveness of the entire system. Consequently, intelligence sharing should be regarded as a structural requirement for national security rather than an optional administrative practice.

Predictive Analytics and Emerging Technologies

The findings also indicate that technological development presents significant opportunities for improving early warning. Artificial intelligence, machine learning, geospatial technologies, big-data analytics, satellite imagery, digital mapping and automated risk dashboards can support the identification of emerging patterns.

Predictive analytics can assist security institutions in identifying relationships between variables such as the frequency and geographical distribution of violent incidents, population displacement, suspicious financial activities, arms movements, environmental pressures and social tensions.

However, predictive technologies should not be treated as substitutes for human intelligence or professional judgement. Algorithms are dependent on the quality, completeness and representativeness of the data used to train and operate them. Poor-quality data may generate inaccurate predictions, while biased datasets may reproduce existing institutional biases.

For this reason, the most appropriate model for Nigeria is a human-machine intelligence architecture in which technological systems support, rather than replace, trained intelligence analysts and decision-makers.

Community Intelligence and Local Knowledge

The analysis further demonstrates that community participation is indispensable to effective early warning. State security institutions may possess sophisticated technologies, but local communities frequently have immediate knowledge of changes in their security environment.

Community members may notice unusual movements of strangers, changes in criminal behaviour, suspicious recruitment activities, escalating disputes, arms circulation, threats against individuals, and movement of displaced persons or emerging disputes over land and natural resources before these developments become visible through formal security channels.

Consequently, community intelligence should be institutionalised as a legitimate component of national early warning architecture.

However, community intelligence must be carefully managed. Unverified rumours, misinformation, ethnic or political biases and deliberate false reporting can create new security problems. The system should therefore include mechanisms for verification, corroboration and source protection.

A credible community intelligence mechanism should provide secure channels through which citizens, traditional institutions, religious leaders, civil society organisations, local authorities and community-based organisations can communicate relevant information to appropriate authorities.

The significance of this approach is consistent with Human Security Theory, which places individuals and communities at the centre of security analysis. Security should not be assessed exclusively from the perspective of territorial defence or state institutions; it should also consider threats to the safety, livelihoods and dignity of populations.

Intelligence-Led Early Warning and Terrorism/Violent Extremism

Terrorism and violent extremism represent areas where intelligence-led early warning can provide particularly important preventive benefits. Terrorist organisations often depend upon recruitment, financing, logistics, propaganda, mobility and local support structures. These activities may generate warning indicators before an attack takes place.

An integrated early warning system could monitor combinations of indicators rather than individual incidents. For example, the simultaneous emergence of extremist propaganda, recruitment activity, unusual financial transactions, and movement of suspected operatives and acquisition of weapons could generate a higher risk assessment than any individual indicator considered separately.

Nevertheless, preventive intelligence operations must remain subject to legal safeguards and respect for fundamental rights. Overbroad surveillance, indiscriminate profiling or the targeting of communities based on ethnicity, religion or political identity can undermine public trust and ultimately reduce the quality of intelligence.

Therefore, intelligence-led prevention should be risk-based rather than identity-based. The focus should be on observable behaviours, credible indicators and verified intelligence rather than assumptions about particular communities.

Early Warning and Armed Banditry and Kidnapping

The increasing sophistication of banditry and kidnapping in parts of Nigeria demonstrates the importance of developing locally responsive early warning mechanisms. These forms of insecurity may be associated with illegal arms, criminal financing, rural insecurity, displacement, weak state presence and difficult terrain.

An effective early warning architecture could identify patterns involving repeated attacks, movement of armed groups, ransom-related financial activity, emerging criminal alliances, changes in local violence patterns and population displacement.

The analysis suggests that early warning should also be geographically sensitive. A national system may identify broad trends, but state and local-level security structures require more detailed information regarding particular communities, routes, forests, border areas and vulnerable populations.

Consequently, the proposed framework should operate through national, regional, state and local intelligence layers. Information should move vertically between levels while relevant intelligence is shared horizontally among agencies.

Transnational Organised Crime and Border Intelligence

West Africa's porous borders create a particular challenge for national early warning systems. Criminal networks involved in trafficking, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, human trafficking and migrant smuggling can move across jurisdictions, making national responses insufficient.

The analysis demonstrates that regional intelligence cooperation is therefore fundamental. A threat detected in one country may constitute an early warning signal for another country. Cross-border movements, trafficking routes, suspicious financial transactions and criminal networks may only become visible when information from multiple countries is combined.

Nigeria should therefore strengthen intelligence cooperation with neighbouring states and regional institutions through appropriate information-sharing arrangements. Regional mechanisms such as ECOWAS early warning structures can provide an important platform for identifying transnational patterns.

The strategic objective should be to develop a national-regional intelligence continuum in which information flows from local communities to national institutions and, where appropriate, to regional mechanisms.

Climate Change, Resource Competition and Security Early Warning

The analysis indicates that early warning should not be restricted to conventional security indicators. Environmental pressures can interact with economic deprivation, migration, resource competition, communal tensions and criminality.

In Nigeria and West Africa, changes in rainfall patterns, drought, desertification, flooding, agricultural losses and competition over land and water may contribute to population displacement and livelihood insecurity. These conditions do not automatically produce violent conflict, but where institutions are weak, they may intensify existing grievances.

This demonstrates the importance of integrating environmental and socioeconomic indicators into national security early warning systems.

Assessment of Existing National and Regional Early Warning Mechanisms

The analysis of existing early warning structures indicates that Nigeria and West Africa are not starting from an institutional vacuum. The African Union CEWS and ECOWAS ECOWARN provide important regional foundations for conflict monitoring and preventive security.

However, the effectiveness of these arrangements depends substantially on the strength of national systems and the quality of national-regional linkages.

The central challenge is therefore one of integration rather than institutional proliferation. Creating additional institutions without strengthening coordination may increase bureaucratic complexity without improving security outcomes.

Nigeria would benefit more from strengthening interoperability among existing institutions, establishing common intelligence standards and improving mechanisms for transforming warning into preventive action.

Similarly, regional early warning mechanisms require stronger connections to national and local institutions. Regional analysts may identify a potential threat, but preventive intervention ultimately depends on the capacity and willingness of national authorities to respond.

Institutional and Political Barriers to Early Action

The study identifies several institutional factors that can prevent warnings from becoming action. These include bureaucratic competition, information hoarding, inadequate funding, weak communication structures, limited analytical skills, insufficient technological infrastructure and the absence of clearly defined institutional responsibilities.

Political considerations may also influence whether warnings are acted upon. Security warnings concerning politically sensitive issues may be delayed, ignored or interpreted through political interests. This creates a significant challenge because early warning frequently requires decisions before a threat becomes publicly obvious.

An effective system therefore requires institutional procedures that protect professional intelligence assessment from inappropriate interference while ensuring that elected and authorised decision-makers retain responsibility for policy choices.

The solution is not to remove political authority from national security decision-making, but to strengthen the professional integrity, credibility and accessibility of intelligence assessments available to decision-makers.

Analysis through Intelligence-Led Policing Theory

The findings are strongly consistent with Intelligence-Led Policing Theory, which emphasises the systematic use of intelligence and analysis to identify threats, prioritise risks and guide the allocation of security resources.

Applied to Nigeria and West Africa, intelligence-led policing provides a framework through which security agencies can move from responding equally to every incident towards identifying high-risk individuals, locations, networks and patterns.

The theory supports the development of risk-based security management in which intelligence informs operational priorities. Rather than waiting for attacks to occur, agencies can use intelligence assessments to determine where preventive resources are most urgently required.

The major contribution of the present study is to extend this logic beyond policing into a broader national-security and regional-security framework.

Major Findings of the Study

The analysis generates the following major findings:

1. Early warning information exists but is not always transformed into preventive action. The principal challenge is therefore the warning-action gap rather than the complete absence of information.

2. Intelligence fragmentation weakens national security. Information held separately by different institutions may prevent the identification of interconnected threats.
3. Intelligence fusion is essential. Combining human, technological, financial, geospatial, cyber and community intelligence can produce more comprehensive threat assessments.
4. Community intelligence is strategically important. Local communities can provide information that formal institutions may not obtain through conventional intelligence channels.
5. Predictive analytics can strengthen threat anticipation. However, technological systems must be combined with human expertise, data validation and ethical safeguards.
6. Regional cooperation is indispensable. Terrorism, trafficking, arms smuggling, organised crime and migration-related risks frequently cross national borders.
7. Early warning must include human-security and environmental indicators. Security threats may emerge from interactions between poverty, displacement, climate stress, resource competition and governance weaknesses.
8. Political will and institutional responsiveness are critical. Even technically sophisticated early warning systems cannot prevent insecurity when credible warnings are ignored or delayed.
9. The effectiveness of early warning should be measured by preventive outcomes. The number of reports produced should not be the principal measure of success; attention should be given to whether credible warnings resulted in appropriate preventive action.
10. Nigeria requires stronger national-regional interoperability. National intelligence structures should be better connected with ECOWAS and African Union early warning mechanisms.

Policy Implications

The findings have several implications for national security policy in Nigeria and West Africa.

First, Nigeria should strengthen an integrated national intelligence fusion mechanism capable of bringing together relevant intelligence institutions and security information systems.

Second, government should invest in interoperable digital infrastructure, geospatial technologies, secure communication platforms, data analytics and real-time risk dashboards.

Third, early warning should be linked to predefined response protocols. Each major category of threat should have clear escalation thresholds and designated institutional responsibilities.

Fourth, community-based intelligence should be institutionalised through secure reporting channels, community liaison structures and mechanisms for verifying local information.

Fifth, intelligence personnel and analysts require continuous professional development in predictive analytics, geospatial intelligence, cyber intelligence, data interpretation, scenario planning and strategic forecasting.

Sixth, Nigeria should strengthen intelligence cooperation with neighbouring countries and regional organisations to address transnational threats.

Finally, early warning systems must operate within clear legal and ethical boundaries. Data protection, privacy, human rights and accountability should be incorporated into intelligence collection and analytical processes to preserve public confidence.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria and West Africa face an increasingly complex security environment in which threats are interconnected, adaptive and transnational. Terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, organised crime, cybercrime, trafficking, communal violence, resource competition, political instability and climate-related insecurity can develop gradually before becoming major security crises.

The strategic significance of intelligence-led early warning therefore lies in its ability to identify emerging risks before they escalate. However, intelligence alone does not provide security. The value of intelligence depends on the quality of collection, analysis, and dissemination, decision-making and preventive action.

Existing mechanisms such as ECOWARN and the AU Continental Early Warning System demonstrate that West Africa already possesses important institutional foundations. The continuing cooperation between ECOWAS and the African Union further indicates recognition of the importance of coordinated early warning.

For Nigeria, the strategic challenge is to develop an integrated national architecture capable of connecting intelligence agencies, security institutions, state and local authorities, communities, technology platforms and regional mechanisms. Such an architecture should use intelligence fusion, predictive analytics, geospatial tools, community reporting, border intelligence and strategic forecasting while maintaining appropriate legal and ethical safeguards.

Ultimately, the goal should be to move Nigeria and West Africa from a predominantly reactive security culture to a preventive security culture. The most effective national security system is not necessarily one that responds most forcefully after an attack, but one capable of recognising warning signals early, assessing their significance accurately and taking legitimate preventive action before violence becomes irreversible.

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