



Intelligence Gathering as a Strategic Tool for Effective Security Policy in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria faces complex security challenges, including insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping, which threaten national stability and public safety. The effectiveness of security policy is heavily dependent on the strategic use of intelligence gathering to anticipate, prevent, and respond to these threats. This study employs a qualitative research methodology, relying on secondary data from academic publications, official reports, and policy documents to examine how intelligence informs national security policy in Nigeria. The study adopts the system theory as its theoretical framework. Findings indicate that intelligence gathering plays a critical role in shaping proactive and reactive security measures, informing operational decisions, resource allocation, inter-agency coordination, and crisis management. Examples from counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram and regional intelligence-sharing initiatives highlight the strategic value of intelligence. However, the study also identifies persistent challenges, including inter-agency rivalry, limited technological capacity, human resource constraints, political interference, and inadequate funding, which reduce the effectiveness of intelligence in supporting security policy. The study concludes that intelligence is indispensable for national security but requires robust administrative structures, enhanced coordination, adequate resources, and stakeholder cooperation to maximise its impact. Recommendations emphasise government, agencies, communities, and international partners' roles in strengthening intelligence-led security policy.

Keywords: Administration, Banditry, Coordination, Intelligence, National Security, Policy, Nigeria



1.1 Introduction

Intelligence gathering has become an indispensable element of modern national security policy across the globe. At the international level, intelligence agencies operate to identify, assess, and mitigate a wide range of threats, including terrorism, espionage, cybercrime, and transnational organised crime. Such information flows are central to effective security policymaking because they provide timely and accurate insights that enable governments to anticipate risks and respond proactively (Lowenthal, 2019; Warner, 2014; Gill & Phythian, 2018). Intelligence is not merely reactive; rather, it forms the backbone of crisis prevention, strategic planning, and international cooperation. For example, the United States Intelligence Community produces coordinated National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) that inform executive decisions on national and global threats, demonstrating how intelligence directly influences policy at the highest levels of government (National Intelligence Estimate, 2025). Similarly, Western intelligence services such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the United Kingdom's MI5/MI6 have historically shaped security strategies during major geopolitical events, including the Cold War, where intelligence reports like the Doolittle Report provided assessments that influenced U.S. foreign and defence policies (Doolittle Report, 1954).

In Africa, the role of intelligence gathering assumes particular importance given the region's evolving security landscape. Many states face internal and cross-border threats such as insurgency, organised crime, and political instability, requiring agile intelligence systems to detect and respond to these challenges effectively. African intelligence services have been recognised as crucial instruments for identifying emerging threats and supporting collective security efforts. For instance, the African Union and its specialised bodies, such as the Committee of Intelligence and Security Services of Africa (CISSA), seek to enhance cooperation and information sharing among member states to address terrorism and transnational crime, emphasising that integrated intelligence can improve early warning capabilities and policy responses across the continent (ISS Africa, 2023; Cline, 2016). However, many African intelligence services still face constraints linked to limited funding, technological gaps, and inconsistent interagency collaboration, all of which constrain their ability to provide timely and strategic intelligence for national security policy (ISS Africa, 2023).

In the Nigerian context, intelligence gathering is central to national security due to the persistent and multifaceted threats confronting the country, including insurgency in the northeast, banditry, and kidnapping. Nigeria's intelligence community comprises several key agencies, such



as the Department of State Services (DSS), the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), which are responsible for collecting, analysing, and disseminating information that informs strategic decisions such as security deployment, diplomatic actions, and preventive interventions against destabilising activities (Adetula, 2020). For instance, intelligence has played a critical role in monitoring Boko Haram and other militant organisations, thereby contributing to the disruption of planned attacks and the protection of national security interests (Adetula, 2020).

At the national level, intelligence also facilitates early warning systems that trigger preemptive action against imminent threats. In this regard, community-based intelligence initiatives, such as training programmes that encourage grassroots involvement in reporting suspicious activities, serve as valuable supplements to formal intelligence structures. By extending intelligence gathering beyond formal institutions, these initiatives strengthen local participation in security management and improve situational awareness, thereby supporting the security agencies responsible for implementing national policies (Bodunde & Balogun, 2018). Furthermore, government advocacy for citizen cooperation in sharing information underscores the importance of public participation in enhancing national security outcomes.

Despite these efforts and the acknowledged importance of intelligence gathering in strengthening national security policy in Nigeria, the system continues to face significant operational and structural challenges. The problem of this study is that despite the strategic importance of intelligence gathering in strengthening national security policy in Nigeria, the country continues to face persistent security challenges such as insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and other violent crimes, indicating that the intelligence system is not sufficiently effective in preventing or responding to threats. This ineffectiveness is largely attributed to poor coordination and weak information sharing among intelligence agencies, inter-agency rivalry, limited technological capacity, inadequate funding, and political interference, all of which undermine the efficiency of intelligence operations. In addition, community-based intelligence initiatives have not yielded optimal results due to low public trust and weak institutional support, leading to delays and underutilisation of critical local information. Consequently, there exists a gap between the intended role of intelligence gathering in shaping effective security policy and its actual performance in Nigeria's security architecture.



1.2 Conceptual Clarifications

Intelligence

Intelligence is widely conceptualized as a structured process involving the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information relevant to national security decision-making (Gill & Phythian, 2020). This definition is useful because it captures intelligence as a systematic cycle rather than a single act, emphasizing the transformation of raw data into usable knowledge for policy purposes. However, its limitation lies in its strong institutional bias, as it largely assumes intelligence is produced within formal state structures, thereby underrepresenting informal, community-based, or hybrid intelligence networks that have become increasingly relevant in contemporary security environments (Gill & Phythian, 2023).

Similarly, Lowenthal (2019) defines intelligence as a process, a product, and an organisation, involving the direction, collection, processing, analysis, and dissemination of information to policymakers. This definition is particularly comprehensive because it introduces a tri-dimensional understanding of intelligence, making it one of the most widely accepted conceptualizations in modern intelligence studies. Nevertheless, it can be critiqued for being overly descriptive rather than analytical, as it explains what intelligence does but provides limited insight into how power relations, political interference, and institutional weaknesses shape intelligence outcomes in practice, especially in developing states such as Nigeria (Warner, 2021).

On the other hand, Warner (2021) conceptualises intelligence as a structured analytical activity that supports decision-making under conditions of uncertainty. This definition is valuable because it highlights intelligence as a tool for reducing uncertainty in governance and security planning, which is central to modern risk-based security systems. However, it tends to privilege the analytical function of intelligence while downplaying the operational and coercive dimensions, particularly intelligence-led policing and covert operations that are central to counterterrorism and national defence strategies (Johnson, 2023).

Johnson (2023) expands the concept by linking intelligence to military operations and strategic defence decision-making, particularly in relation to warfare and Military Operations Other Than War (MOOTW). This perspective is important because it situates intelligence within real-time security operations and tactical execution, not just policy advice. However, its limitation is its strong militarised orientation, which risks narrowing intelligence to battlefield applications while neglecting its civilian, diplomatic, and governance-related functions in democratic security



systems. Ferris (2021), on the other hand, challenges the idea of intelligence as a form of power and instead views it as an enabling mechanism that guides the effective use of power. This argument is analytically strong because it shifts focus from ownership of intelligence to its functional role in decision optimisation and strategic advantage. However, it underestimates the political reality that intelligence institutions often exercise significant autonomous influence over policy direction, agenda-setting, and even regime stability, particularly in fragile states.

Freedman (2020) links intelligence indirectly to power by defining power as the capacity to produce advantageous outcomes. From this perspective, intelligence becomes a force multiplier that enhances state capability. While this conceptualisation is useful in strategic studies, it can be critiqued for being too broad, as it does not clearly distinguish intelligence from other instruments of state power such as diplomacy, military force, or economic leverage, thereby reducing conceptual precision. Omand (2021) provides a more operationally grounded definition by emphasising intelligence as a structured cycle involving collection, analysis, and feedback mechanisms designed to support national security decision-making. This is particularly valuable because it highlights intelligence as a dynamic and iterative process, rather than a linear one. However, it largely assumes rational decision-making and efficient institutional coordination, which may not reflect realities in many developing countries where bureaucratic rivalry, corruption, and weak institutional capacity disrupt intelligence cycles.

Akinola (2024) situates intelligence within the Nigerian context, defining it as an institutional mechanism involving DSS, NIA, and DIA in managing internal and external threats. This definition is important because it localises intelligence within Nigeria's security architecture. However, it is limited by its structural focus, as it pays less attention to the informal, community-based intelligence systems and the political economy factors that significantly shape intelligence effectiveness in Nigeria.

Intelligence Gathering

Intelligence gathering is widely understood as the systematic process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting information to inform decisions and guide policy, particularly in governance, national security, and strategic planning. Lowenthal (2019) defines it as the acquisition of information from multiple sources, both overt and covert, with the aim of producing actionable insights that reduce uncertainty and anticipate potential threats. At first glance, this definition emphasises the strategic utility of intelligence, but it prompts a critical question: whose



interests does this intelligence primarily serve? Is it merely a tool of state security, or does it extend to broader policy-making that impacts citizens' welfare?

Clarke (2007) adds that intelligence gathering is a continuous and proactive process, highlighting the identification of relevant data, assessment of credibility, and synthesis of diverse information streams. While this view stresses methodological rigour, it raises concerns about bias and selective attention in the collection process. If analysts prioritise certain sources or types of information over others, intelligence may reflect subjective interpretations rather than objective reality, potentially misleading policy decisions.

Johnson (2013) further defines intelligence gathering as a disciplined activity aimed at monitoring environments, detecting patterns, and predicting outcomes to support strategic and operational decisions. He emphasises verification, ethical considerations, and analytical rigour, suggesting that intelligence is only as reliable as the systems and practices used to produce it. However, in practice, especially in developing countries, verification is often challenged by limited access to data, political pressures, or institutional weaknesses, prompting questions about the practical accuracy of intelligence outputs.

Grabo (2015) views intelligence gathering as both an art and a science, combining human judgment with technical tools to convert raw information into meaningful knowledge. This perspective introduces an interpretive dimension, implying that intelligence is not merely factual but constructed through analysis and understanding. Similarly, Adeoye (2018) highlights the importance of intelligence gathering in guiding state policies in Nigeria, especially in the face of security threats, economic instability, and social unrest. Yet, the Nigerian context also illustrates the pitfalls of intelligence: failure to act on available information, politicisation of intelligence, and weak coordination between agencies often undermine the effectiveness of gathered intelligence.

Within the context of this paper, intelligence gathering is more than a passive accumulation of facts; it is a dynamic, context-dependent process that carries both immense potential and significant risk. Its value lies not only in the collection of data but in the accuracy, interpretation, and application of that information in shaping effective, timely, and ethical policy decisions. In this sense, intelligence gathering represents a critical, albeit complex, pillar of modern governance.

Security Policy

Policy, in its broadest sense, can be understood as a deliberate course of action or inaction adopted by a government or governing authority to address specific societal issues or achieve predetermined objectives. Dye (1979, p.1) defines policy as “what government chooses to do or



not to do,” highlighting that both action and deliberate inaction reflect governmental priorities. Policies regulate behaviour, organise bureaucracies, distribute resources, and establish frameworks for decision-making. Egonmwan (1984) adds that policy is future-oriented, representing optimal strategies for achieving government programs as reflected in laws, regulations, or official statements. Anderson (1975) describes policy as a series of goal-directed actions by government actors aimed at solving societal problems, while Shankansky (2019) emphasises that policy encompasses all governmental activities affecting society, not just high-profile decisions. Leichter (2015, p.12) further notes that policy reflects official statements and articulated plans that guide government priorities and actions. Collectively, these definitions show that policy is purposive, strategic, and inherently connected to governance structures and societal needs.

Building on this understanding, **security policy** represents a specialised subset of policy aimed specifically at protecting a nation, its citizens, and critical infrastructure from threats. It can be defined as a deliberate framework of principles, strategies, and actions adopted by a government to prevent, manage, or respond to internal and external security threats, including terrorism, insurgency, organised crime, cybercrime, and other forms of violence (Anderson, 2015; Egonmwan, 1984). Security policy is both proactive and reactive, guiding the allocation of resources, the functioning of security agencies, and the coordination of preventive and operational measures. Dye’s (1979) conceptualisation of policy as deliberate action or inaction applies directly here, as security policy decisions may involve pre-emptive interventions or calculated restraint depending on the situation.

Anderson (2015) explains that security policy-making is a structured process by which governments translate strategic objectives into actionable programs designed to achieve national safety and stability. This process involves threat identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. Threat identification entails recognising security challenges that demand government attention, while agenda setting prioritises which threats require immediate focus. Policy formulation involves analysing options and potential responses, and decision-making selects the most suitable course of action. Implementation occurs through security programs, regulations, or operational measures, and evaluation assesses effectiveness, enabling continuous improvement (Egonmwan, 1984; Anderson, 2015).

Security policy is influenced by political, social, economic, and institutional factors. Political ideologies, public opinion, interest group pressures, and government priorities determine which security policies are adopted and how they are executed. Economic capacity and available



resources shape the operational effectiveness of agencies, while institutional coordination ensures that intelligence, law enforcement, and military operations function cohesively (Levi-Faur, 2010). Social factors, including citizen participation and societal norms, also play a role, particularly in policies that rely on community engagement for early warning systems or intelligence gathering. The effectiveness of security policy, therefore, is shaped by the dynamic interplay of these contextual variables.

In practice, security policy encompasses preventive measures, such as intelligence gathering, law enforcement patrols, border security, public awareness campaigns, and institutional capacity building. Reactive measures include crisis response, conflict management, and post-event interventions to restore stability (Fagbemi, Issa & Fagbemi, 2024). For example, in Nigeria, effective security policy relies heavily on intelligence collection and analysis to anticipate threats from Boko Haram, banditry, and other insurgent or criminal activities, enabling the government to implement timely and targeted interventions (Adetula, 2020). Likewise, security policies incorporate both national and international dimensions, as cooperation with regional organisations like the African Union (AU) and global partners ensures coordinated responses to cross-border and transnational threats.

In essence, security policy is a purposive, strategic, and structured framework that guides government action in protecting national interests. It builds on general policy principles while focusing specifically on safeguarding citizens and critical infrastructure. Security policy-making is an iterative and continuous process that integrates planning, implementation, and evaluation to ensure that governmental decisions effectively address both immediate and emerging threats. By aligning intelligence, resources, and operational strategies with broader governance objectives, security policy serves as a central pillar for national stability, societal welfare, and sustainable development.

Intelligence Gathering in Historical Perspective

Intelligence gathering has historically been a critical instrument in informing the policies and strategic decisions of states. In simple terms, intelligence gathering refers to the systematic process of collecting, analysing, and interpreting information relevant to national security, political decision-making, or organisational objectives. It serves as the foundation upon which governments develop strategies, make informed decisions, and anticipate threats or opportunities. Dye (1979) contends that governmental action or inaction constitutes policy, which underscores the importance of intelligence in both deciding what a government chooses to do and what it



deliberately refrains from doing. Intelligence, therefore, is integral to the policy-making process, as it provides policymakers with evidence-based insights that guide problem identification, agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation.

The historical evolution of intelligence demonstrates its enduring relevance to governance and policy. In ancient civilisations such as Rome and Greece, espionage was informal, relying primarily on human sources to acquire information about potential adversaries (Woodward, 2014). These early practices highlight the strategic function of intelligence in anticipating threats and shaping political or military actions. By the 19th century, states such as Prussia had formalised intelligence structures, emphasising systematic collection and analysis of information to inform strategic decision-making (Richelson, 1997). The introduction of technologies like the telegraph further accelerated the speed and accuracy of intelligence operations, allowing governments to respond more efficiently to emerging challenges (Oosthuizen, 2022).

The 20th century, particularly during the two World Wars, witnessed significant advancements in intelligence capabilities. Agencies such as the CIA and MI6 emerged, institutionalising human intelligence (HUMINT), signals intelligence (SIGINT), and imagery intelligence (IMINT) to inform both tactical and strategic policies (Kerbaj, 2022). HUMINT relied on human sources and espionage activities to provide a nuanced understanding of adversary intentions and morale, essential for military planning (Moffett et al., 2022). SIGINT involved intercepting communications and electronic signals to reveal operational plans, while IMINT used satellite and aerial imagery to assess battlefield landscapes and inform resource allocation (Gallatin, 2024; Wysocki & Niewińska, 2022). Collectively, these intelligence types illustrate how structured information gathering underpins decision-making processes and policy outcomes.

Policy making, in relation to intelligence gathering, is therefore a systematic and iterative process in which information is translated into actionable strategies. It begins with problem identification, where intelligence helps detect threats, vulnerabilities, or societal needs. Agenda setting follows, guided by the significance of the intelligence collected, which determines which issues demand priority attention. Policy formulation involves analysing alternatives, weighing potential consequences, and designing programs or regulations based on intelligence insights. Decision-making selects the optimal course of action, which is then implemented and continuously monitored. Finally, policy evaluation reassesses outcomes, feeding back into future intelligence collection and policy adjustments (Anderson, 2015; Dye, 1979). Intelligence ensures that each step is informed, reducing uncertainty and increasing the likelihood of effective outcomes.



In the Nigerian context, intelligence gathering plays a particularly significant role in policy making due to complex security, political, and socio-economic challenges. Nigeria's intelligence apparatus, which includes the Department of State Services (DSS), the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), and military intelligence units, provides critical information that informs national security policies, counter-terrorism strategies, and law enforcement operations (Omotola, 2020). Effective intelligence gathering has been vital in addressing insurgencies such as Boko Haram in the North-East, where timely information has shaped military deployments, emergency responses, and community protection programs. However, challenges such as corruption, bureaucratic inefficiencies, poor inter-agency coordination, and outdated technological infrastructure have sometimes hindered the effective translation of intelligence into actionable policy (Adebayo, 2018). These challenges often result in policy failures or delayed responses, highlighting the critical need to strengthen intelligence capacity to support informed and timely policy-making processes.

Thus, intelligence gathering is both a historical and contemporary pillar of effective policy making. From ancient espionage to modern satellite surveillance, intelligence provides the empirical foundation necessary for governments to anticipate risks, allocate resources, and implement policies that respond to societal needs. In Nigeria, while intelligence has contributed to successes in national security and strategic planning, persistent institutional and operational challenges indicate the need for reforms to optimise intelligence-informed policy making. By integrating robust intelligence mechanisms into governance, Nigeria can enhance its ability to make proactive, evidence-based policies that address the multifaceted challenges of security, development, and national cohesion.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the systems theory as its theoretical framework. Systems Theory was developed by Ludwig von Bertalanffy in the 1950s as a General Systems Theory aimed at explaining how different components of a system interact to form an integrated whole. The theory was later expanded in political science by David Easton (1965), who applied it to political systems analysis through the input–output model of governance. In organizational studies, Katz and Kahn (1978) further developed it by explaining organizations as open systems that interact continuously with their environment. More recent contributions by Donella Meadows (2008) strengthened the



theory through systems thinking, emphasizing feedback loops, interdependence, and dynamic interactions within complex systems.

The basic assumption of Systems Theory is that any system is composed of interrelated and interdependent parts, meaning that a change in one component affects the entire system. It assumes that systems are holistic in nature and must be understood as a whole rather than in isolation. The theory also assumes that all systems operate through an input–process–output structure, where inputs are processed into outputs that influence the environment. Another key assumption is the existence of feedback mechanisms, which allow systems to adjust and improve their performance based on outcomes. In addition, the theory assumes that systems are open and are continuously influenced by their external environment, including political, economic, and social factors. Finally, it assumes that systems are goal-oriented and are structured to achieve specific objectives through coordination and interaction among components.

Despite its usefulness, Systems Theory has been criticized on several grounds. One major criticism is that it is overly abstract and theoretical, making it difficult to apply directly to empirical research without simplification. The theory has also been criticized for overemphasizing order, stability, and coordination, while neglecting conflict, corruption, and institutional inefficiencies that are common in real-life political and administrative systems. Furthermore, it does not adequately address issues of power relations and political influence, which are crucial in understanding how public institutions function, especially in developing countries. Critics also argue that some of its concepts, such as feedback loops and system equilibrium, are difficult to measure empirically. In addition, the theory assumes rational behaviour among actors within the system, which may not always reflect the realities of human and institutional behaviour in practice.

Systems Theory is highly relevant to this study because it provides a holistic framework for understanding intelligence gathering as an interconnected system within Nigeria's national security architecture. Intelligence agencies such as the Department of State Services (DSS), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), and National Intelligence Agency (NIA) operate as interdependent units that collect, process, and disseminate information for security decision-making. The theory explains that the effectiveness of national security policy depends not only on the existence of these agencies but also on how well they coordinate, share information, and respond to feedback. In the Nigerian context, weaknesses such as inter-agency rivalry, poor communication, inadequate funding, and weak technological capacity represent system dysfunctions that reduce the effectiveness of intelligence operations. Moreover, the external



environment, including political interference and socio-economic constraints, also affects how the intelligence system functions. Therefore, Systems Theory is appropriate for this study because it explains how intelligence inputs are transformed into security policy outputs and how breakdowns within the system contribute to persistent insecurity challenges such as insurgency, banditry, and kidnapping in Nigeria.

1.4 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine intelligence gathering as a strategic tool for effective security policy in Nigeria. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it focuses on understanding meanings, interpretations, and institutional processes rather than numerical measurement. It allows for an in-depth analysis of how intelligence activities are structured, coordinated, and applied within Nigeria's security architecture. The study relies entirely on secondary sources of data, including textbooks, peer-reviewed journal articles, government publications, policy documents, intelligence reports, and credible online academic materials. Key institutions such as the Department of State Services (DSS), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), National Intelligence Agency (NIA), as well as international organisations like the United Nations and the African Union, provide relevant documentary evidence for the study. The collected secondary data were analysed using qualitative content analysis, which involved systematically reviewing and interpreting existing literature to identify recurring themes, patterns, and relationships relevant to intelligence gathering and national security policy. This included examining issues such as inter-agency coordination, intelligence sharing, security challenges, and policy effectiveness in Nigeria.

Intelligence Gathering as a Strategic Tool for Effective Security Policy in Nigeria

Intelligence gathering has become an indispensable aspect of modern security policy, particularly in nations facing complex and persistent threats. At its core, intelligence gathering refers to the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of information relevant to national security, enabling timely and effective policy decisions. Experts contend that intelligence allows governments to anticipate threats, understand the intentions and capabilities of violent actors, and shape responses that protect citizens and uphold stability (Obasi, 2022). In Nigeria, such strategic use of intelligence has been crucial given the intricate security challenges the country faces, spanning insurgency, kidnapping, banditry, and inter-communal violence. Intelligence informs not



only tactical responses but also broader policy frameworks that allocate resources and coordinate multi-agency efforts to safeguard lives and property. Effective intelligence, therefore, ensures that national security policy is proactive rather than reactive, providing a foundation for sustainable peace and public safety (Ibekwe, 2025).

In Nigeria, the nature and intensity of security threats underscore the importance of robust intelligence mechanisms. The Boko Haram insurgency, which emerged in the early 2000s and intensified by 2009, remains one of the country's most enduring security crises, with tens of thousands of deaths and millions displaced, particularly in the northeastern region (National Counterterrorism Centre, 2025). Intelligence has been central to counterinsurgency operations. For example, Nigerian and partner forces targeted ISIS-linked militant camps in the Bauni forest of Sokoto State with precision strikes based on detailed reconnaissance and threat assessments. In December 2025, coordinated operations using intelligence on foreign fighters and local affiliates aimed to disrupt planned large-scale attacks, demonstrating how accurate intelligence enables security policy to translate into decisive action (Reuters, 2025). These operations highlight how intelligence guides both strategic planning and immediate tactical decisions, ensuring that national security policy is informed by concrete data on threats.

Another notable application of intelligence in Nigeria's security policy is regional coordination. To combat Boko Haram and affiliated groups across the Lake Chad Basin, Nigeria agreed to host the headquarters of the Regional Intelligence Fusion Unit (RIFU) of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in Abuja under a memorandum of understanding. This initiative institutionalised intelligence sharing among frontline states, including Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and previously Niger, to synchronise operations against insurgents that traverse porous borders. Intelligence sharing through the MNJTF enhances situational awareness, enables coordinated military planning, and ensures that policy responses reflect both national and regional realities (Daily Post Nigeria, 2016). The existence of RIFU underscores how intelligence is not limited to national borders but also informs policy decisions in a wider West African security framework.

Nigeria's intelligence agencies play distinct but complementary roles in shaping security policy. The Department of State Services (DSS) is principally responsible for domestic intelligence and counter-terrorism efforts, including surveillance, counter-espionage, and the protection of critical infrastructure. Through persistent intelligence operations, the DSS has been able to issue early warnings and prevent attacks. In August 2024, for example, the DSS uncovered plans by



subversive actors to hijack nationwide protests, prompting engagement with community leaders and preventing possible widespread disorder (Guardian, 2024). Such pre-emptive action reflects how intelligence feeds into policy decisions that go beyond military operations, informing civil protection strategies and maintaining public order.

The Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the National Intelligence Agency (NIA) further strengthen the intelligence base for national security policy. The DIA provides military intelligence that informs operational planning against insurgent and bandit groups, ensuring that the Nigerian Armed Forces have the information needed for mission design. The NIA focuses on foreign intelligence and counterintelligence, monitoring global developments and transnational threats that could impact Nigeria. Intelligence outputs from these agencies guide policy decisions on border security, diplomatic engagements, and international collaborations. For instance, discussions on enhancing border fencing and cooperation with neighbouring states to curb armed infiltration have been shaped in part by intelligence insights on cross-border movements of militants and weapons (Obasi, 2022).

Intelligence gathering has also been central to operational responses to non-insurgent threats, such as kidnapping and banditry, which have surged in many parts of the country. In late 2025, gunmen abducted more than 300 schoolchildren and 12 teachers from St. Mary's Catholic School in Niger State, part of a broader pattern of mass kidnappings that prompted the federal government to declare a nationwide emergency and reinforce security forces. These incidents require rapid intelligence collection from community sources, signal interception, and field reconnaissance to locate victims, map criminal networks, and guide rescuers. This illustrates how intelligence informs crisis policy beyond conventional insurgency contexts, enabling the government to respond to multiple forms of insecurity with targeted interventions (AP News, 2025).

Beyond immediate tactical and operational responses, intelligence gathering provides insights into the financial and logistical networks that sustain violent groups. Investigative reports have highlighted complex financing networks involving numerous accounts across Nigeria that funnel funds to Boko Haram operatives. This information enables policymakers to develop strategies that disrupt the operational capacity of extremist groups, not just their immediate actions (Guardian, 2025). The ability to trace financial flows and logistics is critical to shaping comprehensive security policies that address the root causes of violent activity rather than only its symptoms.



The integration of intelligence into Nigeria's security policy demonstrates its strategic value across multiple dimensions. Intelligence does not merely support isolated operations; it informs systemic policy decisions that shape how resources are allocated, how task forces are structured, and how community engagement programs are designed to encourage grassroots reporting of threat indicators. By embedding intelligence into the core of policy design and implementation, Nigeria ensures that security measures are proactive, evidence-based, and anticipatory. Analysts argue that ongoing reforms, including efforts to enhance inter-agency cooperation and information sharing, have the potential to improve the timeliness and impact of intelligence on policy, reflecting a growing recognition of intelligence as a central pillar of effective national security strategy (Ibekwe, 2025).

Obstacles to Effective Intelligence Gathering and Policy Implementation in Nigeria

Despite the strategic importance of intelligence gathering in shaping Nigeria's security policy, the country faces significant challenges and failures that undermine the effectiveness of its national security apparatus. These challenges are both structural and operational, affecting the ability of intelligence agencies to collect, analyse, and act on timely information. One of the most pressing issues is inter-agency rivalry and poor coordination. Nigeria's intelligence community comprises multiple agencies, including the Department of State Services (DSS), Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), and National Intelligence Agency (NIA). While each has a specific mandate, overlaps in responsibilities and competition for resources often result in fragmented operations and delayed responses to threats. According to Ojo (2023), the lack of coordinated intelligence sharing has historically limited Nigeria's capacity to prevent high-profile attacks, reducing the effectiveness of security policy.

Another critical challenge is limited information sharing and inadequate technological capacity. Many intelligence agencies operate with outdated technology and insufficient data management systems, restricting their ability to process and analyse large volumes of information efficiently (Ibekwe, 2025). Intelligence on Boko Haram and other extremist groups is sometimes available but poorly utilised due to gaps in analysis and dissemination. Furthermore, as modern threats increasingly involve digital communication, online recruitment, and cyber operations, Nigeria's intelligence agencies have struggled to integrate open-source intelligence (OSINT) and cyber intelligence into policy planning, limiting the responsiveness of security strategies (Eze, 2024).



Human resource constraints also hinder effective intelligence gathering. Skilled personnel trained in intelligence analysis, field operations, and cybersecurity are limited, and attrition due to poor remuneration and working conditions exacerbates the problem. As noted by Adebayo (2022), sustaining human intelligence networks in rural and conflict-prone areas such as Borno, Zamfara, and Kaduna is difficult because local communities often fear reprisals from insurgents or armed bandits. This lack of grassroots cooperation reduces access to critical information, which is essential for proactive policy formulation.

Corruption and political interference further weaken intelligence operations. In some instances, intelligence reports are ignored or suppressed due to political considerations, reducing the reliability of actionable information. Oloruntooba (2023) highlights that this has led to delayed responses to security threats, undermining national policies designed to protect citizens. Failures in acting on intelligence not only endanger lives but also erode public confidence in security agencies, making communities less willing to provide information in the future.

Nigeria's vast and porous borders present a continuous challenge for intelligence-led security policy. Militant groups, smugglers, and criminal networks exploit gaps in surveillance and cross-border intelligence sharing. While regional initiatives like the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) exist, inconsistencies in intelligence integration among member states reduce the effectiveness of collective security policies (Ibekwe, 2025).

Finally, resource constraints and inadequate funding limit both the operational and analytical capacities of intelligence agencies. Intelligence gathering requires investments in technology, training, and infrastructure, yet budgetary allocations are often insufficient. As noted by Eze and Okeke (2024), this underfunding leaves agencies under-equipped to monitor threats comprehensively or deploy rapid-response mechanisms, resulting in recurring attacks and kidnappings despite available intelligence.

1.5 Conclusion

Intelligence gathering remains a critical component of Nigeria's national security policy, underpinning the government's ability to anticipate, prevent, and respond to diverse security threats. Its strategic importance is evident in counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram, coordinated regional efforts with neighbouring states, and interventions in cases of mass kidnappings and banditry. Intelligence provides actionable insights into the movements, capacities, and networks of violent actors, shaping both tactical and policy-level decisions.



However, persistent challenges such as inter-agency rivalry, inadequate technological infrastructure, human resource limitations, political interference, and resource constraints have hindered the full effectiveness of intelligence in supporting security policy. These limitations have sometimes resulted in delayed actions, operational gaps, and continued insecurity, demonstrating that while intelligence is indispensable, its potential is only as strong as the structures and systems supporting it. Overall, intelligence gathering remains central to the formulation and execution of security policies in Nigeria, highlighting its role as both a tool for proactive intervention and a critical determinant of national stability.

1.6 Recommendations

To strengthen the effectiveness of intelligence gathering in supporting Nigeria's security policy, several key recommendations are proposed.

- i. The federal government should establish a central coordination framework to ensure that the DSS, DIA, NIA, and other agencies share information efficiently and reduce duplication.
- ii. Intelligence agencies should invest in training their personnel and adopting modern technology, including surveillance systems, data analysis tools, and secure communication networks, to strengthen both human and cyber intelligence capabilities.
- iii. The Ministry of Finance should provide adequate funding to support personnel, equipment, and operational needs of intelligence agencies.
- iv. Regional and international partners should enhance cross-border intelligence sharing and joint initiatives to prevent insurgents and criminal networks from exploiting porous borders.
- v. Community leaders should encourage citizens to report suspicious activities and foster trust between local communities and security agencies.
- vi. Policymakers and legislators should implement oversight and accountability mechanisms to reduce corruption and political interference, ensuring that intelligence consistently informs objective and effective decision-making.



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