

Information Disorder, Education and National Security: A Sociological and Statistical Analysis of Fake News and Social Cohesion in Nigeria

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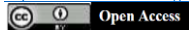
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ABSTRACT

Information disorder has become an important social and security concern as digital platforms increasingly shape how citizens obtain, interpret and circulate information. This paper examines the relationship between information disorder, education, social cohesion and national security in Nigeria, drawing on sociological perspectives and statistical evidence. The paper develops from a presentation of the same title delivered in January 2024 and is subsequently expanded with more recent empirical evidence. Information disorder is conceptualised as encompassing misinformation, disinformation and malinformation, while education is understood not only as formal schooling but also as media and information literacy, critical reasoning and digital competence. The study adopts a quantitative secondary-data design, using descriptive statistics and identifying appropriate bivariate and multivariate techniques for compatible microdata. Evidence is drawn from published studies, national education statistics, digital-news surveys and African social-cohesion data. Findings indicate that digital platforms have become significant channels of information consumption, while information-literacy capacity remains important to users' vulnerability to fake-news sharing. The paper argues that education can constitute an important preventive capability for strengthening information resilience, social cohesion and national security. It recommends institutionalising media and information literacy, improving statistical monitoring of information disorder, strengthening social cohesion and integrating information resilience into preventive national-security policy.

Introduction

The rapid expansion of digital communication has fundamentally changed how people obtain, interpret and share information. Social-media platforms, online news sites and video-sharing networks have increased the speed and scale of information circulation while creating greater opportunities for misinformation, disinformation and other forms of information disorder. Globally, 54% of surveyed audiences reported using social or video networks for news in 2026, while 62% expressed concern about misinformation, indicating the growing significance of information integrity in contemporary societies (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism [RISJ], 2026).

The implications extend beyond the accuracy of individual news items. Information is interpreted through social identities, political orientations, institutional relationships and existing beliefs. False or manipulated information can therefore reinforce existing perceptions, deepen distrust and contribute to polarisation, particularly where social and institutional trust is already weak (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Buchanan, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2018). Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) consequently distinguish between misinformation, disinformation and malinformation according to their content, intent and relationship to harm.

The experience of European countries illustrates the increasing recognition of information disorder as a governance and societal-resilience challenge. In the United Kingdom, concerns about misinformation and the changing news environment have strengthened attention to media literacy and information integrity, while Germany has developed institutional and regulatory responses to harmful

online content. Across the European Union, measures have also been introduced to reduce systemic risks associated with very large online platforms, particularly during electoral processes (European Commission, 2024; RISJ, 2024). These experiences demonstrate that technological regulation alone cannot address information disorder and that citizens' capacity to critically evaluate information remains important to societal resilience.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the challenge assumes additional significance because digital information environments intersect with considerable ethnic, religious, political and linguistic diversity. Countries such as Kenya, Ghana, South Africa and Nigeria have experienced growing concerns over misinformation, political communication and the rapid circulation of unverified information through digital platforms (Apuke & Omar, 2020; RISJ, 2024). Across 39 African countries, 89% of respondents expressed tolerance toward people of different ethnicities and 85% toward people of different religions, while only 57% trusted fellow citizens somewhat or a lot (Afrobarometer, 2024). More recent evidence from 38 African countries similarly shows that trust declines across social boundaries, with 49% trusting people of a different ethnicity and 48% trusting people of a different religion (Afrobarometer, 2026).

This distinction between tolerance and trust is important for understanding information disorder. A society may tolerate social differences while still experiencing relatively weak interpersonal or institutional trust. In such circumstances, misleading information can acquire influence when it confirms existing perceptions of threat, exclusion or injustice. Information disorder therefore becomes a social phenomenon whose consequences depend partly on the strength of interpersonal trust, institutional legitimacy and social cohesion.

Within this broader African context, Nigeria presents a particularly important case. The country's expanding digital environment has made online platforms significant channels for news and public communication. The 2024 *Digital News Report* reported that 91% of surveyed Nigerian online news users accessed news online each week, while Facebook and YouTube were used for news by 75% and 70%, respectively (RISJ, 2024). These figures relate to an online-user sample rather than the entire Nigerian population and should therefore be interpreted within that limitation.

Nigeria's digital transformation is occurring alongside a large and complex education system. The Federal Ministry of Education's 2024/2025 statistics report 39,881,798 learners and 1,187,031 teachers, although only 124,146 of 222,888 listed schools reported data, representing a reporting rate of 55.7% (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2026). The statistics therefore demonstrate both the scale of the education system and the need for continued improvement in education-data coverage.

Education provides an important institutional platform for strengthening citizens' capacity to navigate the information environment, although formal educational attainment alone does not necessarily guarantee resilience against misinformation. Increasingly, attention has shifted toward media and information literacy, digital competence and critical-thinking skills. UNESCO (2021, 2024) identifies these competencies as important for enabling citizens to evaluate information sources, recognise misleading content and participate responsibly in digital environments.

Evidence from Nigeria further strengthens this argument. Mi and Apuke (2024), using structural equation modelling based on an online survey of Nigerian social-media users, found that instant news sharing, self-promotion, self-expression and altruism were associated with fake-news sharing, while social-media knowledge moderated these relationships. The study specifically found that users with greater social-media knowledge showed weaker relationships between these factors and fake-news sharing (Mi & Apuke, 2024).

The relationship between information disorder and national security consequently operates through broader social processes. Where misleading information contributes to distrust, polarisation or hostility, it can weaken social cohesion and institutional legitimacy. Conversely, stronger information literacy, social trust and community networks can improve citizens' capacity to question, verify and correct misleading narratives. This perspective is consistent with Social Capital Theory, which emphasises trust and networks as foundations of collective action, and with the human-security approach, which places social stability and human wellbeing within the broader understanding of security (Putnam, 2000; UNDP, 1994).

The concern, therefore, is not that every instance of misinformation constitutes a national-security threat. Rather, the concern lies in the interaction between information disorder and existing social

vulnerabilities. In Nigeria, where rapid digital communication intersects with social diversity, educational inequalities and questions of public trust, understanding this interaction is important for preventive security policy. The study consequently examines information disorder, education and social cohesion from a sociological and statistical perspective, with particular attention to the capacity of education and information literacy to strengthen societal resilience and contribute to national security.

The study builds on a presentation of the same title delivered in **January 2024** and expands the original analysis with more recent statistical evidence and empirical literature. Its central proposition is that education should be understood not only as a mechanism of human-capital development but also as a potential **preventive national-security capability**, particularly when it equips citizens with the knowledge and critical capacity required to navigate an increasingly complex information environment.

2.0 Statement of the Problem

The central problem addressed by this study is the interaction between information disorder and social cohesion within an increasingly digital Nigerian society. The expansion of social-media communication has increased citizens' access to information while simultaneously creating opportunities for false, manipulated and misleading content to circulate rapidly (RISJ, 2024; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The problem is not simply that citizens encounter false information. Information becomes socially consequential when it interacts with political, ethnic, religious and institutional identities. Misleading narratives can reinforce perceptions of threat, intensify distrust and contribute to social polarisation when they resonate with existing grievances or group identities (Bakir & McStay, 2018; Buchanan, 2020).

A second dimension concerns education. Formal schooling provides knowledge and cognitive development, but it does not automatically equip citizens with the specific competencies required to evaluate digital information. Media and information literacy, source verification, critical reasoning and digital competence are increasingly necessary components of information resilience (UNESCO, 2021, 2024). A third problem concerns national-security policy. Conventional security approaches tend to prioritise terrorism, violent extremism, organised crime and physical threats. Yet contemporary security environments also involve information contests, public trust, social narratives and institutional legitimacy. The challenge is therefore to determine how information resilience and education can contribute to preventive national security without treating legitimate political expression or disagreement as security threats.

3.0 Objectives of the Study

The general objective is to examine the relationship between information disorder, education, social cohesion and national security in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to:

- i. examine the nature and dimensions of information disorder in contemporary Nigerian society;
- ii. assess the relationship between education, media literacy and vulnerability to misleading information;
- iii. examine the relationship between information disorder and social cohesion;
- iv. analyse available statistical evidence concerning Nigeria's digital, educational and social-cohesion environments; and
- v. propose policy measures for strengthening education-based information resilience as a component of preventive national security.

4.0 Research Questions

- i. What forms of information disorder are most relevant to Nigeria's contemporary information environment?
- ii. How does education, particularly media and information literacy, influence vulnerability to misleading information?
- iii. What relationship exists between information disorder and social cohesion?
- iv. What do available statistics reveal about Nigeria's digital, educational and social-cohesion environments?
- v. How can information resilience be integrated into preventive national-security policy?

5.0 Conceptual Clarification

5.1 Information Disorder

Information disorder refers to the wider ecosystem involving misinformation, disinformation and malinformation (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). The concept is preferable to the undifferentiated expression "fake news" because it recognises differences in intent, content and potential social consequences. Misinformation involves false information shared without necessarily intending harm; disinformation involves deliberately deceptive or manipulated information; while malinformation involves genuine information used in a harmful or misleading context (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017).

5.2 Education and Information Resilience

Education in this study encompasses formal schooling as well as media and information literacy, digital literacy and critical-thinking capacities. UNESCO (2021, 2024) identifies media and information literacy as important for helping citizens evaluate information, identify misleading content and engage responsibly with digital environments. Evidence from Nigeria supports this relationship. Mi and Apuke (2024) found that social-media knowledge moderated factors associated with fake-news sharing among Nigerian social-media users, providing empirical support for treating information knowledge as a relevant component of information resilience. Education should therefore be conceptualised not simply in terms of years spent in school but also in terms of the competencies developed to evaluate sources, verify claims and make informed decisions before sharing information.

5.3 Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the capacity of individuals and groups to coexist, trust one another, participate in collective life and perceive institutions as legitimate and fair (Afrobarometer, 2024, 2026; World Bank, 2026). Putnam (2000) associates social capital with networks, trust and norms of reciprocity that facilitate collective action. In the context of information disorder, these forms of social capital can influence whether individuals accept, question or reject information about other groups and institutions.

5.4 National Security

National security is understood broadly as the protection of citizens, institutions and the state from threats that undermine safety, stability, social order and national resilience. This interpretation is consistent with the human-security approach, which expands security beyond territorial defence to include threats affecting people's lives and wellbeing (UNDP, 1994).

6.0 Theoretical Framework

6.1 Social Constructionism

Berger and Luckmann's (1966) Social Constructionism provides the first theoretical foundation. Social reality is produced and reproduced through interaction, communication and shared meanings. Information therefore matters not only because it conveys facts but because it contributes to how individuals interpret social reality. Information disorder can consequently construct misleading perceptions of social groups, institutions and events when false or manipulated narratives are repeatedly circulated and socially validated.

6.2 Social Capital Theory

Putnam's (2000) Social Capital Theory provides the second theoretical foundation. Trust, networks and norms of reciprocity facilitate cooperation. Where trust is weak, misleading information may encounter fewer social barriers to circulation because citizens may lack reliable interpersonal or institutional mechanisms for verification. The theory also suggests that strong social networks can provide a protective function when they facilitate discussion, correction and collective verification.

6.3 Human Security Theory

The human-security perspective developed by UNDP (1994) broadens the analysis beyond conventional military threats. From this perspective, social instability, institutional weakness and threats to human wellbeing can become security concerns. Information disorder is therefore relevant where it contributes to fear, polarisation, mistrust or weakened social resilience.

7.0 Conceptual Model

The paper proposes three interconnected pathways:

Education → Information Evaluation Capacity → Reduced Vulnerability to Information Disorder

Information Disorder → Distrust/Polarisation → Reduced Social Cohesion → Increased Security Vulnerability

Education + Media Literacy + Social Trust → Information Resilience → Social Cohesion → National Stability

The model does not assume that education automatically prevents misinformation or that misinformation automatically causes insecurity. Rather, it proposes that education and information literacy can influence the capacity of individuals and communities to evaluate information, while social trust and institutional legitimacy can shape how information is received and acted upon.

8.0 Methodology

8.1 Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative secondary-data research design. It draws on published statistical evidence and empirical studies concerning information consumption, education, social trust, social cohesion and misinformation. The design is appropriate because the study seeks to examine relationships across multiple dimensions of the Nigerian information and social environment without generating a new primary survey.

8.2 Sources of Data

The study draws on evidence from:

- i. Afrobarometer surveys on social cohesion, trust and tolerance;
- ii. Federal Ministry of Education education statistics;
- iii. National Bureau of Statistics reports;
- iv. Reuters Institute *Digital News Report*;
- v. DataReportal digital-environment statistics;
- vi. UNESCO media and information-literacy materials;
- vii. UNDP human-security and violent-extremism research;
- viii. World Bank research on social cohesion and resilience; and
- ix. peer-reviewed empirical studies on misinformation and social-media behaviour.

8.3 Statistical Approach

Descriptive statistics are used to summarise reported indicators of digital access, information consumption, education and social cohesion. Where compatible individual-level microdata are available, the study proposes bivariate correlation and multivariate regression. A basic model is specified as:

$$SC_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IE_i + \beta_2 EDU_i + \beta_3 TRUST_i + \beta_4 SES_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Where:

SC = social-cohesion indicator;

IE = information exposure;

EDU = education/information-literacy indicator;

TRUST = interpersonal or institutional trust;

SES = socioeconomic status; and

ε = error term.

A moderation model may further test whether education changes the relationship between information exposure and social cohesion:

$$SC_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 IE_i + \beta_2 EDU_i + \beta_3 (IE \times EDU)_i + \varepsilon_i$$

Inferential results are not reported unless the relevant microdata have actually been analysed. Published aggregate statistics from incompatible datasets are therefore not combined to manufacture correlations or causal relationships.

9.0 Statistical Findings

9.1 Global Information Environment

The global information environment provides the broader context for the Nigerian case.

Table 1: Selected Global Information-Environment Indicators

Indicator	Statistic	Source
People using social/video networks for news globally	54%	RISJ (2026)
Concern about misinformation globally	62%	RISJ (2026)
Overall trust in news globally	37%	RISJ (2026)
Countries covered by the 2024 Digital News Report	47	RISJ (2024)
Respondents in the 2024 Digital News Report	More than 95,000	RISJ (2024)

The statistics indicate the growing importance of social and video platforms within contemporary news consumption and the continuing concern surrounding misinformation (RISJ, 2024, 2026).

9.2 Nigeria's Digital Information Environment

Nigeria illustrates this transformation.

Table 2: Selected Nigerian Digital-News Indicators

Indicator	Statistic	Source
Weekly online news access among surveyed users	91%	RISJ (2024)
Facebook use for news	75%	RISJ (2024)
YouTube use for news	70%	RISJ (2024)
Instagram use for news	58%	RISJ (2024)
Telegram use for news	53%	RISJ (2024)
TikTok use for news	46%	RISJ (2024)

The figures demonstrate the importance of social platforms as channels through which Nigerian online news users encounter information. However, the Reuters Institute sample represents online news users rather than the entire Nigerian population and should therefore not be interpreted as a nationally representative estimate (RISJ, 2024).

9.3 Education and Information Capacity

Nigeria's education system provides a significant institutional platform for building information resilience.

Table 3: Selected Nigerian Education Indicators, 2024/2025

Indicator	Reported figure
Total schools listed	222,888
Schools reporting	124,146
Reporting rate	55.7%
Learners	39,881,798
Teachers	1,187,031
Classrooms	726,847
Learner-teacher ratio	33.6
Learner-classroom ratio	60.1

Source: Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria (2026).

The figures demonstrate the considerable scale of Nigeria's education system but also reveal a limitation in administrative-data coverage. The reporting rate of 55.7% means that the statistics should not automatically be interpreted as complete national coverage.

The relationship between education and misinformation is further supported by empirical research. Mi and Apuke (2024) employed structural equation modelling to examine fake-news sharing among Nigerian social-media users and found that social-media knowledge significantly moderated relationships between several motivations and fake-news-sharing behaviour. This suggests that information literacy may be more directly relevant to information resilience than formal educational attainment considered in isolation.

9.4 Social Cohesion, Trust and Tolerance

Social cohesion represents the social environment within which information is interpreted.

Table 4: Selected African Social-Cohesion Indicators

Indicator	Statistic	Source
Tolerant toward people of different ethnicity	89%	Afrobarometer (2024)
Tolerant toward different religions	85%	Afrobarometer (2024)
Tolerant toward different political affiliations	82%	Afrobarometer (2024)
Tolerant toward different nationalities	80%	Afrobarometer (2024)
Trust relatives "a lot"	58%	Afrobarometer (2024)
Trust fellow citizens somewhat/a lot	57%	Afrobarometer (2024)
Believe people are often/always treated unequally under law	61%	Afrobarometer (2024)

The evidence demonstrates that tolerance and trust are not synonymous. African societies may exhibit considerable tolerance toward social differences while simultaneously experiencing lower levels of interpersonal or institutional trust (Afrobarometer, 2024). More recent Round 10 evidence reinforces this interpretation. Across 38 African countries, 81% trusted relatives somewhat or a lot, compared with 58% for neighbours, 49% for people of a different ethnicity and 48% for people of a different religion (Afrobarometer, 2026).

10.0 Sociological Analysis of the Findings

The statistical evidence supports four principal observations. First, information exposure has expanded. The Nigerian digital-news figures demonstrate substantial reliance on online and social platforms among surveyed online users. The significance lies not only in the volume of information but also in the changing structure of information distribution, in which professional journalism, personal commentary, political messaging and user-generated content coexist within the same digital environment.

Second, education must be understood as information capacity. Conventional educational attainment should not automatically be treated as a sufficient measure of information resilience. The capacity to evaluate sources, identify manipulation, verify claims and resist impulsive sharing is particularly important. The Nigerian SEM evidence provided by Mi and Apuke (2024) supports the relevance of social-media knowledge in moderating behaviours associated with false-news sharing.

Third, social cohesion provides a protective social environment. Trust and social networks can function as mechanisms through which individuals discuss and verify information. Conversely, weak trust can make individuals more dependent on identity-based networks or information sources perceived as sympathetic to their group. Afrobarometer's evidence concerning high tolerance alongside weaker trust demonstrates that social cohesion should be treated as multidimensional (Afrobarometer, 2024, 2026).

Fourth, information disorder has national-security relevance. Information disorder becomes a security concern when it contributes to distrust, polarisation, hostility or weakened institutional legitimacy. This does not mean that every false statement constitutes a national-security threat. Rather, the security significance emerges from the interaction between information, social structures, political competition and institutional resilience.

11.0 Discussion

The findings support the central proposition that information disorder should be examined sociologically. False information does not become influential simply because it exists. Its influence depends partly on the social environment into which it is introduced. A misleading narrative concerning an ethnic or religious group may have different consequences in a society characterised by strong intergroup trust than in one characterised by suspicion and institutional distrust. Social structures can therefore mediate the consequences of information.

Education similarly operates through capability rather than formal qualification alone. An individual may possess substantial academic knowledge while lacking the ability to verify a viral video or distinguish an authentic source from an impersonated account. Conversely, individuals with less formal education may possess strong practical media-literacy skills. Policy should therefore avoid treating educational attainment automatically as a proxy for misinformation resilience. The Nigerian evidence reinforces this position. Mi and Apuke (2024) found that social-media knowledge moderated relationships between motivational factors and fake-news sharing among Nigerian social-media users.

The findings also reinforce the importance of social cohesion. Afrobarometer evidence demonstrates that Africans frequently express tolerance across ethnic, religious and political differences while reporting considerably lower levels of trust across social boundaries (Afrobarometer, 2024, 2026). This indicates that preventive information-security policy should not focus exclusively on correcting false content. It should also strengthen the social conditions that allow citizens to question, verify and discuss contested information without immediately converting disagreement into hostility.

The implication for Nigeria is that information resilience should become part of a broader preventive-security architecture. Security institutions, educational institutions, civil-society organisations, media organisations and communities have complementary roles. This approach is

consistent with the broader human-security and whole-of-society orientation reflected in contemporary peacebuilding and countering-violent-extremism literature (UNDP, 2023).

12.0 Implications for National Security

The analysis produces five major national-security implications. First, information disorder can undermine social cohesion when false or manipulated narratives intensify existing group tensions.

Second, weak information literacy can increase citizens' vulnerability to misleading information, particularly where digital information is consumed rapidly and shared through trusted personal networks.

Third, institutional distrust can make corrective information less effective because citizens may evaluate information according to the perceived credibility of the messenger rather than the evidence presented.

Fourth, education provides an important preventive mechanism because it can develop critical reasoning, source evaluation and responsible digital participation.

Fifth, national-security institutions require better data on information disorder. Without systematic measurement, policy responses may depend excessively on anecdotal assessments of viral content rather than evidence concerning prevalence, exposure, behavioural responses and social consequences.

13.0 Policy Recommendations

Recommendation One:

The Federal Government of Nigeria should institutionalise media and information literacy as a cross-cutting educational competency rather than treating it solely as a specialised communication subject.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Federal Ministry of Education, NERDC and relevant state education authorities to integrate source verification, digital literacy, critical reasoning, misinformation recognition and responsible information sharing into appropriate curricula.
- ii. Tertiary institutions and teacher-training institutions to strengthen practical media-literacy modules that teach students and educators how to evaluate digital sources and manipulated content.

Recommendation Two:

The Office of the National Security Adviser should recognise information resilience as part of preventive security alongside conventional threat-management capabilities.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Office of the National Security Adviser in collaboration with relevant security institutions to establish evidence-based mechanisms for monitoring information threats while protecting legitimate expression and criticism.
- ii. Security institutions to develop partnerships with educational institutions, civil-society organisations, technology stakeholders and professional media organisations for early identification and responsible mitigation of information threats.

Recommendation Three: Strengthen Social Cohesion and Public Trust

The Federal Government of Nigeria should strengthen social-cohesion mechanisms that increase trust across ethnic, religious, political and community boundaries.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The Federal Government and State Governments to support structured community dialogues, civic education and intergroup engagement that strengthen social trust and reduce susceptibility to divisive narratives.
- ii. Local Governments in collaboration with civil-society organisations to develop community-based information-verification and early-warning mechanisms that enable trusted local actors to challenge harmful misinformation before it escalates into social conflict.

Recommendation Four:

The Federal Government of Nigeria should establish a systematic evidence base for measuring information disorder, media literacy and social cohesion.

Implementation Strategies

- i. The National Bureau of Statistics in collaboration with relevant universities and research institutions to incorporate indicators of digital information exposure, media literacy, trust and information-sharing behaviour into appropriate surveys.
- ii. The Office of the National Security Adviser in collaboration with relevant educational institutions to use longitudinal data to identify relationships between information exposure, education, social trust and social-cohesion outcomes rather than relying exclusively on isolated incidents or anecdotal evidence.

14.0 Conclusion

Information disorder has become an increasingly important dimension of contemporary social and security environments. The global experience demonstrates that the expansion of digital information systems has increased both access to news and exposure to misleading content (RISJ, 2024, 2026). European experiences demonstrate the importance of combining platform governance, electoral safeguards and information literacy, while African evidence highlights the interaction between information, trust, tolerance and social cohesion (European Commission, 2024; Afrobarometer, 2024, 2026).

Nigeria's digital information environment makes the issue particularly relevant. The country's online news users demonstrate substantial engagement with social and digital platforms, while its education system provides a potentially important institutional platform for building information resilience. The scale of the education system, however, is accompanied by limitations in administrative-data coverage (Federal Ministry of Education, Nigeria, 2026). The evidence also indicates that education should not be understood merely in terms of years of schooling. Media and information literacy, critical reasoning and social-media knowledge are important components of the capacity required to evaluate information. The Nigerian empirical study by Mi and Apuke (2024) provides direct evidence that social-media knowledge can moderate factors associated with fake-news sharing.

Ultimately, the security challenge is not simply the existence of false information. It is the possibility that information disorder interacts with weak trust, social fragmentation and institutional vulnerabilities to undermine social cohesion. Building resilience therefore requires more than fact-checking after misinformation has spread. It requires citizens capable of evaluating information, institutions capable of communicating credibly, communities capable of correcting harmful narratives and security institutions capable of recognising information resilience as part of preventive national security. The central conclusion of this paper is that education is not merely a social-development instrument in the information age; it is also a component of national resilience and preventive security.

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