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EVALUATING PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND AWARENESS OF THE FEDERAL FIRE SERVICE'S ROLE IN STRENGTHENING NATIONAL SECURITY IN ABUJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Evaluating Public Perception and Awareness of the Federal Fire Service's Role in Strengthening National Security in Abuja, Nigeria. Despite the Federal Fire Service's (FFS) statutory mandate to prevent and manage fire emergencies and contribute to national security, public perception of its effectiveness in Abuja remains limited. Persistent challenges such as inadequate manpower, outdated equipment, slow response times, and weak community engagement have eroded public trust. These issues are exacerbated by insufficient sensitization efforts and fragmented communication, especially in high-risk and underserved areas, undermining the FFS's legitimacy and operational impact. The study aims to identify key factors influencing public attitudes and cooperation with the FFS in Abuja. It evaluates residents' knowledge of fire safety practices and the FFS's responsibilities, examines attitudes toward the Service's role in national security, and proposes strategies to enhance public trust and institutional effectiveness. The research is anchored in public trust theory, complemented by insights from risk communication and protection motivation theories. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was used, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

Keywords: Federal Fire Service, Public Perception, National Security, Fire Safety Awareness, Community Engagement

1. Introduction

In the current global security landscape, public safety institutions such as fire services are increasingly recognized not only for their traditional firefighting functions but also for their expanding roles in disaster management, infrastructure protection, and counter-terrorism preparedness (Taylor, 2022; Smith & Johnson, 2023). Developed nations like the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia have integrated fire services into their national security frameworks, recognizing their role in early response, inter-agency coordination, and public trust building (Williams et al., 2021). These countries benefit from strong institutional frameworks, advanced technology, and community-based outreach, which have fostered high levels of citizen cooperation and compliance with fire safety regulations.

In contrast, many African countries face significant limitations in the capacity and public image of their

fire and emergency services. According to Falola and Agbola (2022), most African nations contend with fragmented institutional coordination, underfunding, insufficient equipment, and limited public engagement. This has led to a perception of fire services as reactive institutions, unable to fulfill their strategic functions in national security. For example, in South Africa and Kenya, despite constitutional backing, fire services struggle to meet public expectations due to overstretched resources and weak communication strategies (Davis, 2021). Across the continent, informal settlements with high fire risk often remain underserved by public safety institutions, further diminishing public trust (Murphy & Garcia, 2024).

The sub-Saharan African region exemplifies this challenge, as urban expansion, infrastructural inadequacies, and weak public institutions increase fire disaster vulnerability (Anderson & Wilson, 2023). Countries like Ghana, Cameroon, and Nigeria

reflect this trend, where fire services are poorly equipped, understaffed, and disconnected from the communities they serve (Chukwuemeka & Nnamani, 2023). As noted by Codemint.net (2025), these gaps in service delivery contribute to public skepticism and unwillingness to cooperate during emergencies. Consequently, fire incidents often escalate due to delays, misinformation, or lack of community participation in safety protocols. Public trust, which is critical for efficient risk communication and emergency compliance, is undermined by a lack of transparency, insufficient media engagement, and the perception of institutional inefficiency (Rightangle PR, 2022).

In Nigeria, the Federal Fire Service (FFS) was formally established under the Fire Service Act of 1963 and has since evolved under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Interior (Federal Fire Service Nigeria, 2023). The FFS is tasked with fire prevention, firefighting, rescue operations, enforcement of fire safety regulations, and collaboration with other security agencies. However, public perception of its effectiveness remains limited. Research has shown that the FFS often suffers from inadequate manpower, lack of modern equipment, and slow response times, all of which erode public confidence (Adebisi et al., 2025; Adeniran, 2021). Additionally, public awareness of the broader security implications of the FFS's work is lacking, largely due to insufficient sensitization efforts and weak communication channels (Eze & Okafor, 2024).

These challenges are even more pronounced in Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, where the stakes are higher due to the presence of critical national infrastructure, diplomatic institutions, and dense urban populations. The FFS in Abuja plays a key role in safeguarding government buildings, commercial centers, and public spaces against fire hazards. However, issues such as poor road access, limited fire hydrants, and an insufficient number of fire stations have hampered its operational effectiveness (Ayuba et al., 2016). Moreover, community engagement remains weak, especially in informal settlements and peri-urban zones, where fire incidents often go unreported or poorly managed (Ali et al., 2023).

Given these realities, evaluating public perception and awareness of the Federal Fire Service's role in Abuja is essential for enhancing its effectiveness and legitimacy. Public Trust Theory provides a useful lens for understanding how institutional transparency, service quality, and citizen engagement influence trust in public safety agencies (Kim & Lee, 2005). Without public cooperation, even the most well-funded safety institution cannot achieve its objectives. Therefore, this study seeks to examine how residents of Abuja perceive and engage with the Federal Fire Service, identify the factors influencing trust and cooperation, and propose strategies to reposition the FFS as a credible actor in Nigeria's national security architecture.

Despite its vital role in safeguarding lives, property, and critical infrastructure, the Federal Fire Service (FFS) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, faces persistent challenges that undermine its operational effectiveness and public trust. These challenges include limited manpower, inadequate equipment, insufficient fire stations, poor road infrastructure, and fragmented inter-agency collaboration, which hinder timely fire prevention and emergency response. Rapid urbanization and increasing fire risks further strain the Service's capacity. Public perception and awareness of the FFS's role remain low, especially in underserved and vulnerable communities, exacerbated by inconsistent public engagement and the absence of targeted fire safety education programs. This skepticism weakens community cooperation, which is essential for effective fire risk reduction. Additionally, recurring fire incidents, regulatory inefficiencies, and the lack of a comprehensive national fire safety policy contribute to doubts about the FFS's reliability and its integration within Nigeria's broader national security framework. As fire disasters continue to threaten critical infrastructure and societal stability, addressing barriers to public understanding, trust, and collaboration with the FFS is urgent. Bridging these gaps is essential to fostering community resilience and enhancing the FFS's capacity to contribute effectively to national security within Abuja's complex urban landscape.

The broad objective of this study is to identify the key factors that influence public attitude towards, and

cooperation with the FFS in fire safety measures and emergency response.

- i. To evaluate the level of knowledge among FCT residents regarding fire safety practices and the FFS's responsibilities.
- ii. To examine the public attitudes towards the FFS and its role in ensuring national security.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

Public Perception

Public perception refers to the collective viewpoint, beliefs, and attitudes that individuals or communities hold toward a particular institution, policy, or phenomenon. It is shaped by direct experiences, societal narratives, cultural expectations, and media representation (Kim & Lee, 2005). In this study, public perception reflects how residents of Abuja view the Federal Fire Service in terms of its trustworthiness, efficiency, professionalism, and responsiveness to emergencies. Public perception is a powerful determinant of institutional legitimacy. When people perceive the FFS as capable and reliable, they are more likely to cooperate with safety directives, report fire incidents promptly, and support regulatory enforcement. Conversely, negative perceptions—driven by past failures, poor communication, or corruption—can breed apathy, resistance, or reliance on informal response mechanisms (Rightangle PR, 2022)

Public Awareness

Public awareness denotes the degree of knowledge and understanding that individuals possess about a subject, especially concerning the role, structure, and functions of public institutions. In the context of this study, it captures how well Abuja residents understand the responsibilities of the Federal Fire Service—not just as a firefighting entity, but as a key player in national security through fire prevention, enforcement of safety codes, infrastructure protection, and inter-agency collaboration (Federal Fire Service Nigeria, 2023). Awareness influences individual preparedness, behavioral compliance, and community-level responsiveness during emergencies (Eze & Okafor, 2024). It is developed through civic education, community engagement programs, public

sensitization campaigns, and consistent institutional visibility. Without adequate awareness, citizens may undervalue the FFS, ignore fire safety protocols, or delay reporting fire outbreaks—thereby exacerbating risk.

Federal Fire Service (FFS)

The Federal Fire Service is Nigeria's statutory agency for fire prevention, control, rescue, and enforcement of fire safety regulations. Established under the Fire Service Act of 1963 and currently operating under the supervision of the Federal Ministry of Interior, the FFS has evolved to include broader responsibilities beyond extinguishing fires. These include inspection and certification of public buildings, disaster risk reduction, training and research, public sensitization, and support for internal security operations through collaboration with other agencies such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps and the National Emergency Management Agency (Federal Fire Service Nigeria, 2022; Falola & Agbola, 2022). In Abuja, where the federal government, embassies, and national infrastructure are concentrated, the FFS has a particularly strategic role. Its visibility, readiness, and public reputation directly impact national preparedness and crisis management efforts.

National Security

National security refers to the safeguarding of a nation's sovereignty, territorial integrity, political stability, and public order against internal and external threats. While historically focused on military defense and political stability, modern interpretations of national security include protection against non-conventional threats such as terrorism, climate-related disasters, cyberattacks, pandemics, and infrastructural vulnerabilities (National Counter Terrorism Centre [NCTC], 2019). Fires—especially those involving critical infrastructure, marketplaces, oil depots, and government buildings—can disrupt governance, threaten lives, and incite social unrest. Therefore, the role of the Federal Fire Service in mitigating fire risks, enforcing safety regulations, and responding to emergencies is inseparable from the broader national security framework (Adebiyi et al., 2025). The capacity of the FFS to act quickly, professionally, and effectively is essential for

maintaining public order and economic continuity during crisis situations.

Interconnectedness of the Concepts

These concepts—public perception, public awareness, the Federal Fire Service, and national security—are deeply intertwined. Public perception and awareness shape how individuals relate to institutions like the FFS. When people perceive the Service as competent and are aware of its roles and limitations, they are more likely to participate in fire safety programs, comply with safety regulations, and support emergency operations. On the other hand, when trust is low and awareness is poor, the FFS's effectiveness is undermined, and its contribution to national security is weakened. This is especially true in Abuja, where fire incidents can quickly escalate into national crises. Therefore, this study focuses on how these concepts operate together in real-world settings, with the aim of improving institutional performance, boosting public cooperation, and strengthening Nigeria's overall security architecture.

2.2 Empirical Review

Knowledge and National Security

IOSR Journals, (2024) examined Estimate of Fire Safety Management in Residential Buildings. The study is set out to assess the extent of fire safety awareness and the degree of management commitment to fire safety policies among residents in Abuja's residential buildings. The research was anchored on Risk Perception Theory, which posits that individuals' awareness and perception of risks shape their safety behaviors and policy compliance. The methodology involved distributing structured questionnaires to a purposive sample of residents living in various residential complexes across Abuja. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to gauge both awareness and actual compliance with prescribed fire safety standards. The findings highlighted a dichotomy: while a segment of residents demonstrated awareness of fire risks and the importance of safety protocols, overall commitment to fire safety measures was notably low. Many buildings lacked adequate fire safety equipment such as extinguishers and alarms, and regular fire drills were rare. The authors concluded that there is a pressing need for increased fire safety education and

stricter enforcement of fire safety standards by regulatory authorities. They argued that without a robust culture of safety, Abuja's rapidly urbanizing environment remains highly vulnerable to fire disasters.

The Federal Fire Service Nigeria (2022) explored Federal Fire Service Sensitization Program in FCT Abuja. The study is targeted sensitization program designed to enhance public knowledge and preparedness in key commercial zones-Emab Plaza and GSM Village-in Abuja. The initiative was grounded in Community Engagement Theory, which emphasizes the role of participatory, grassroots-level education in promoting collective safety. The methodology involved interactive workshops, practical demonstrations, and direct engagement with business owners and local residents. The program encouraged the installation of fire extinguishers, smoke alarms, and the adoption of safe electrical practices. Qualitative feedback from participants indicated a marked increase in awareness and a willingness to implement fire safety measures. The program's success was attributed to its hands-on approach and the direct involvement of the FFS in community life. The report concluded that such outreach initiatives are indispensable for empowering residents to take proactive steps, thereby reducing the incidence and impact of fire outbreaks in densely populated urban centers.

IETA (2023) conducted study on assessment of fire prevention knowledge and safety practices of residents. This study assess both the knowledge of fire prevention and the safety practices of Abuja residents. The study was anchored on the Health Belief Model, which links individual beliefs about health risks to the likelihood of adopting preventive behaviors. A random sample of 300 households was surveyed using a structured questionnaire that assessed knowledge of fire causes, the fire triangle, and appropriate prevention methods. Analysis involved scoring correct responses and comparing them to self-reported safety practices. While knowledge levels were moderate-most respondents could identify basic fire hazards-actual implementation of safety practices lagged behind. Many households lacked fire extinguishers, had not developed escape plans, and were unfamiliar with emergency procedures. The study recommended

targeted educational campaigns and practical demonstrations to bridge the gap between knowledge and practice, arguing that awareness alone does not guarantee behavioral change.

Akanmu and Arokoyo (2024) examined Fire Hazards Awareness and Preparedness Among Residents of Bwari Area Council, Abuja. The study evaluated the awareness and preparedness for fire hazards among residents of Bwari Area Council, applying Disaster Preparedness Theory. The study used a multistage random sampling technique to select 400 residents, who were then surveyed using both questionnaires and observational checklists. Data were analyzed with SPSS, employing ANOVA to identify significant differences in preparedness across demographic groups. Findings revealed low levels of fire hazard awareness and inadequate preparedness. Many residents were unaware of fire escape routes, did not possess fire extinguishers, and had never participated in a fire drill. The study concluded that without widespread community education and infrastructural improvements-including clear signage, accessible exits, and regular drills-the community remains highly susceptible to fire disasters.

HRMARS (2023) conducted a systematic study on Adequate Fire Safety Training for Occupants: Knowledge and Awareness. The study investigated the need for training of fire safety practitioners and building occupants in Abuja, utilizing Adult Learning Theory to frame the investigation. The study surveyed 150 building managers and occupants through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The focus was on evaluating both the content and frequency of fire safety training programs. Results indicated significant gaps in both knowledge and training adequacy. Many occupants had never attended a fire safety workshop, and those who had reported that the training was infrequent and lacked practical components. The study emphasized that comprehensive, regular fire safety training is essential to empower occupants to prevent and respond effectively to fire incidents. The study recommended the institutionalization of mandatory fire safety training and the development of standardized curricula tailored to different building types and occupant profiles.

IOSR Journals (2024) investigated Fire Safety Knowledge and Practices Among Residents of Abuja. The study employed the Theory of Planned Behavior to investigate the link between knowledge and actual safety practices among 350 Abuja residents. Structured questionnaires assessed knowledge of fire causes, prevention, and emergency response, while also probing for attitudes and perceived barriers to action. Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found that, although most residents understood the risks associated with fire, preventive practices were inconsistently observed. Complacency, lack of resources, and the perception that fire emergencies were unlikely contributed to poor adherence to safety protocols. The study concluded that knowledge alone is insufficient to drive behavioral change, and recommended community-based campaigns that address attitudinal and resource barriers.

The Federal Fire Service Nigeria (2022) investigated Public Awareness and Fire Safety Practices in Abuja Markets. This study used Social Cognitive Theory to assess fire safety awareness among 250 market traders in Abuja. The study used systematic sampling, questionnaires, and observational checklists to gather data on knowledge and safety behaviors. Analysis revealed that traders with higher levels of fire safety knowledge were more likely to keep fire extinguishers, maintain clear exits, and adhere to safe electrical practices. However, overall awareness in the market environment was moderate, with many traders unaware of specific risk factors such as overloading electrical circuits or improper storage of flammable goods. The study recommended intensified fire safety education, tailored specifically to market environments, and regular inspections to enforce compliance.

Akanmu and Arokoyo, (2024) examined Evaluation of Fire Safety Awareness in Residential Estates in Abuja. The study used a cross-sectional survey methods and was grounded in Protection Motivation Theory to evaluate fire safety awareness in Abuja's residential estates. The study surveyed 300 residents regarding their knowledge of fire risks and the presence of safety measures such as smoke alarms and fire exits. The analysis showed that while awareness of fire hazards was relatively high, the practical implementation of safety measures was

lacking. Many estates did not have functioning smoke alarms or clearly marked exits, and few residents had participated in fire drills. The study concluded that awareness campaigns must be paired with robust enforcement of safety regulations and infrastructural upgrades to ensure effective fire prevention and response.

Attitudes and National Security

Global Scientific Journal (2023) investigated Population and Spatial Analysis of Fire Service Provision in Gombe Town. This study by provides a nuanced understanding of how spatial distribution of fire services shapes public attitudes in Gombe Town. By leveraging Spatial Accessibility Theory, the research highlights that proximity to fire stations directly influences perceived adequacy and trust in the FFS. The use of GIS mapping, combined with resident surveys, uncovers a critical gap: densely populated neighborhoods are often underserved, leading to widespread dissatisfaction. Residents in these areas report concerns about delayed response times and a lack of visible emergency preparedness, which erodes their confidence in the FFS's ability to protect lives and property. The study's recommendation for strategic placement of new fire stations and increased resource allocation underscores the importance of aligning service provision with demographic realities. This spatial approach is particularly relevant for urban planners and policymakers aiming to bolster the FFS's legitimacy and operational impact in national security.

Tyler and Huo, (2002) examined Challenges of Fire and Rescue Service in Nigeria and the Way Forward. The study was anchored in Institutional Theory, the study reveals that chronic underfunding, insufficient training, and outdated equipment are not just operational issues but also key drivers of public skepticism. Through qualitative interviews and document analysis, the research captures the public's perception of the FFS as an under-resourced and, at times, ineffective body. This perception diminishes the FFS's credibility as a pillar of national security. The study's call for institutional reforms, increased funding, and greater public engagement is echoed in broader

literature on public sector trust-building (Tyler & Huo, 2002). By addressing these structural deficiencies, the FFS can enhance its operational capacity and rebuild public confidence.

Mwakatage, Raphael, and Shayo (2024) explored Effects of Perceived Vulnerability on Enhancing Prevention Intention of Fire Outbreaks in Public Markets. The objective provide comparative insights from Tanzania, which are highly relevant to the Nigerian context. Their application of Protection Motivation Theory reveals that, contrary to expectations, perceived vulnerability does not always translate into preventive action or positive attitudes toward fire agencies. The study's robust methodology-surveying 384 market traders and using structural equation modeling demonstrates that awareness alone is insufficient. Instead, factors such as infrastructure quality, training, and visible agency presence are more influential in shaping attitudes. This finding challenges the assumption that simply raising awareness will foster public cooperation, suggesting that holistic interventions are needed to build trust and proactive engagement with the FFS.

Alexander, (2002) investigated the Legal Framework of Fire Service in Nigeria: Analyzing the Need for States to Enact Local Laws. This study was grounded in Legal Institutionalism, exposes the critical impact of legislative clarity on public attitudes. The study's desk review and expert interviews reveal that jurisdictional ambiguities-stemming from the lack of harmonized state-level fire laws-undermine the FFS's authority and effectiveness. This legal fragmentation leads to inconsistent enforcement and public confusion, eroding trust in the FFS's mandate. The authors advocate for comprehensive legislative reforms to unify fire safety laws across Nigeria, arguing that clear, enforceable statutes are foundational to institutional legitimacy and public confidence. This aligns with global best practices in emergency management, where legal clarity is a prerequisite for effective service delivery (Alexander, 2002).

Rightangle PR (2022) investigated Public Perception of the Fire Service in Nigeria. The study used Social Trust Theory, focusing on perceptions of reliability,

transparency, and institutional responsiveness. Through a combination of surveys and focus groups, the study finds that while the FFS is recognized as essential to national security, public trust is moderate and fragile. Key concerns include slow response times, inadequate public enlightenment campaigns, and limited resources. The study emphasizes that trust can be strengthened through improved communication, faster response, and enhanced community engagement. This is consistent with research showing that trust in public institutions is closely linked to perceived transparency and responsiveness (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003).

Adewale and Musa (2017) analyzed An Assessment of Fire Management Practice in Some Selected Markets in Kaduna State. Theoretically, the study adopted Community-Based Disaster Management Theory. Their survey of 172 market occupants, analyzed with SPSS, reveals a disconnect between awareness and practical preparedness. While many are aware of fire risks, actual management measures—such as fire drills, equipment, and contingency planning—are lacking. Public frustration with limited FFS presence is palpable, reflecting a desire for more visible and proactive engagement. The study recommends empowering local communities, increasing FFS visibility, and fostering partnerships to enhance trust and preparedness.

Abdullahi (2023) investigated Spatial Optimization of Fire Service Stations in the Federal Capital City, Abuja, Nigeria. Using GIS and resident surveys, the study finds that areas with poor coverage report lower confidence in the FFS's capacity to provide timely and effective emergency response. The research advocates for data-driven spatial planning to optimize station locations, arguing that equitable access to fire services is essential for both operational effectiveness and public legitimacy. This spatial optimization is particularly critical in rapidly urbanizing cities where population growth can outpace infrastructure development.

brahim and Bello (2023) conducted a systematic study on Community Trust and Fire Service Effectiveness in Nigeria. Investigate the interplay between community trust and fire service

effectiveness using Social Capital Theory. Their regression analysis of 500 residents in Abuja and Kaduna demonstrates that higher trust levels are associated with greater community cooperation, support for FFS initiatives, and willingness to report hazards. The study underscores that building social capital through sustained community engagement is not only beneficial for fire prevention but also essential for the FFS's broader national security mission.

Neliaku (2022) conducted a study on Public Attitudes Toward Fire Services and National Security in Nigeria. The study was anchored on Procedural Justice Theory to examine the relationship between fairness, transparency, and public legitimacy. Through surveys and focus groups with 300 Abuja residents, the study finds that while the public acknowledges the FFS's importance, perceived delays and lack of transparency significantly reduce trust. The research recommends enhancing procedural fairness—such as clear communication about response protocols and transparent reporting of outcomes—to improve public attitudes and institutional legitimacy.

2.3 Theoretical Review

A theoretical framework provides a structured lens through which a researcher can interpret and analyze complex phenomena. In evaluating public perception and awareness of the Federal Fire Service's (FFS) role in national security, understanding the interplay between public institutions and the citizens they serve is crucial. This study is grounded in theories that explore trust in institutions, public response to risk, and behavioral motivation in crisis contexts. Three prominent theories that offer critical explanatory power for this research are: Public Trust Theory, Risk Communication Theory, and Protection Motivation Theory (PMT).

Public Trust Theory

Public Trust Theory is concerned with the trust relationship between public institutions and the citizens they serve. The theory posits that when public institutions act competently, fairly, transparently, and reliably, they earn the trust and support of citizens (Kim & Lee, 2005; Tyler, 2006). Trust is not merely

a by-product of institutional performance; it is an essential condition for voluntary compliance, civic cooperation, and legitimacy.

In the context of the Federal Fire Service, this theory provides a powerful lens to understand how citizens of Abuja view the effectiveness, integrity, and reliability of the FFS. Public trust is essential for fostering cooperation with fire safety regulations, reporting fire incidents, and participating in prevention programs. Trust in the FFS also determines how willing individuals are to follow evacuation orders during emergencies and how actively they engage in community preparedness initiatives.

In settings where fire services are under-resourced, poorly managed, or viewed as corrupt, public trust diminishes, and citizens may rely on informal, and often unsafe, responses to fire hazards (Rightangle PR, 2022). Conversely, positive experiences, visible competence, and meaningful engagement with the public enhance institutional credibility. As public trust grows, the Federal Fire Service is more likely to succeed in its mission—not only in fighting fires but also in securing national assets, infrastructure, and lives, which are core components of national security.

Risk Communication Theory

Risk Communication Theory, as advanced by Covello and Sandman (2001), explores how institutions communicate hazards and risks to the public, and how these messages are perceived and acted upon. The theory emphasizes the importance of effective, transparent, timely, and culturally sensitive communication in shaping public understanding of risks and motivating protective behavior.

In the case of fire services, effective risk communication is critical. The ability of the FFS to clearly convey fire hazards, prevention strategies, and emergency response procedures can significantly impact public awareness and behavior. In Abuja, where urban sprawl, infrastructural deficits, and high-rise development increase the potential for catastrophic fires, risk communication becomes not only a technical exercise but also a public trust imperative.

When messages from the FFS are inconsistent, delayed, or difficult to understand, the public may become confused or indifferent. On the other hand, proactive communication—such as awareness campaigns, community seminars, school programs, and real-time updates during emergencies—can improve preparedness and reinforce the Service's relevance to national security. Risk communication also plays a vital role in countering misinformation, especially during emergencies where rumors can exacerbate panic and delay response.

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT)

Protection Motivation Theory (Rogers, 1975) provides a psychological framework for understanding why individuals take—or fail to take—precautionary actions in response to perceived threats. The theory identifies four key cognitive processes that influence protective behavior: perceived severity of the threat, perceived vulnerability, response efficacy (belief that recommended actions will be effective), and self-efficacy (belief in one's ability to perform those actions). Applied to this study, PMT helps explain how residents of Abuja respond to the threat of fire disasters and their willingness to engage with the FFS. If people perceive fire as a significant and imminent danger, and they believe that the FFS has the capacity to manage such threats effectively, they are more likely to support and cooperate with the Service. However, if the FFS is seen as ineffective, slow, or under-resourced, individuals may become apathetic or resort to self-help measures that could endanger their lives.

The theory is particularly useful in explaining behavioral outcomes—such as compliance with fire drills, installation of smoke detectors, or calling emergency services—based on individual threat assessment and institutional reputation. When combined with strong public trust and effective communication, protection motivation can be enhanced, resulting in a fire-resilient society. Among the three theories discussed, Public Trust Theory is adopted as the core theoretical foundation for this study. The central aim of this study is to evaluate public perception and awareness of the Federal Fire Service's role in Abuja. Since trust is an integral

component of public perception, Public Trust Theory directly aligns with the study's objectives. It provides the most comprehensive lens to assess how residents judge the effectiveness, reliability, and credibility of the FFS, and how that influences their behavior toward the Service. In public safety, legitimacy is not derived from legal authority alone but also from public trust. Fire services operate most effectively when the public believes in their competence and fairness. This theory allows the study to explore both emotional and cognitive elements of trust that influence public engagement with the FFS, especially in a city like Abuja, where institutional performance is under constant scrutiny.

Studies in Nigeria and other parts of Africa have used Public Trust Theory to examine the relationship between citizens and public institutions. For instance, Isa et al. (2016) found that trust in public safety services in Kano was strongly linked to perceived professionalism and transparency. Similarly, Rightangle PR (2022) highlighted that trust in the FFS in Abuja was shaped by service visibility, community engagement, and response time. By grounding the study in Public Trust Theory, recommendations can be made that are directly linked to rebuilding trust—such as improving transparency, enhancing staff training, increasing community engagement, and ensuring equitable service delivery. These are actionable strategies that policymakers and agency leaders can adopt to strengthen the role of the FFS in national security. While Risk Communication Theory and Protection Motivation Theory contribute valuable perspectives on behavior and communication, Public Trust Theory offers the most robust framework for understanding the institutional dynamics, citizen attitudes, and public behavior relevant to this study. The theory not only supports the research questions and objectives but also facilitates the development of meaningful, context-specific recommendations that can enhance the effectiveness of the Federal Fire Service in Abuja and, by extension, contribute to Nigeria's national security resilience.

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive analysis of the Federal Fire Service's role in national security. The qualitative component consists of in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, while the quantitative component involves a survey administered to FFS personnel. This convergent parallel design allows for the collection of rich, detailed insights alongside broader, generalizable data, enabling a more complete understanding of the research problem through triangulation of findings.

The target population for this study comprises professionals and institutional stakeholders central to fire service management and national security in Nigeria. This includes: (1) officials from the Federal Fire Service (FFS) across various operational and strategic levels; (2) representatives from security agencies involved in emergency response, particularly the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC); and (3) disaster management experts from relevant government ministries, departments, agencies, and academic institutions.

The study employs a hybrid sampling strategy to address both qualitative and quantitative components. For the qualitative strand, purposive sampling will be used to identify and select key informants for in-depth interviews based on their expertise, experience, and institutional role in fire service management or national security. For the quantitative strand, stratified random sampling will be employed for the survey of FFS personnel. The sampling frame will be stratified by Nigeria's six geopolitical zones (North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East, and South-South) to ensure national representation and proportional participation across the country's diverse regions. A simple random sampling technique will then be applied within each stratum to select individual participants.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for the quantitative survey was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula for finite populations:

$$n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = population size (approximately 15,000 FFS personnel nationwide, based on available institutional data)

e = margin of error (0.05 at 95% confidence level)

Applying the formula:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= 15,000 / (1 + 15,000(0.05)^2) \\ &= 15,000 / (1 + 15,000 \times 0.0025) \\ &= 15,000 / (1 + 37.5) \\ &= 15,000 / 38.5 \\ &= 389.6 \approx 390 \end{aligned}$$

To account for potential non-response and ensure robustness, the sample size was rounded up to 400 respondents. This sample will be distributed proportionally across the six geopolitical zones based on the distribution of FFS personnel in each region.

For the qualitative component, a sample of 15-20 key informants is targeted, following established qualitative research principles until data saturation is achieved. This sample size is consistent with recommendations for in-depth interview studies where the focus is on depth rather than breadth of responses.

Table 1: Calculated sample size for the study

AREA COUNCIL	STATUS	POPULATION		HOUSEHOLD		SAMPLE SIZE [†]
		Census 2006-03-21	Projection 2022-03-21	Number	Ratio	
		(a)	(b)	(c = b/4.3*)	(d=c/590,558)	
Abaji	Rural	58,642	127,900	N.R	-	-
AMAC	Urban	776,298	1,693,400	393,814	0.6669	267
Bwari	Urban	229,274	500,000	116,279	0.1969	79
Gwagwalada	Urban	158,618	346,000	80,465	0.1363	54
Kuje	Semi-urban	97,233	212,100	N.R	-	-
Kwali	Rural	86,174	188,000	N.R	-	-
TOTAL		1,406,239	3,067,500	590,558	1.0000	400

Note:

Official average household size for FCT (NBS, DHS Survey).

[†] Using Yamane (1967): $n_o = \frac{p}{1+p(ME^2)}$; where p is the empirical population, ME is the margin of error; and s_o is the desired sample size.

Sources:

- National Bureau of Statistics (web).
- NBS/DHS Survey
- www.citypopulation.de

Data Collection

Data collection incorporates multiple sources and instruments to ensure comprehensive coverage of the research topic. Qualitative data will be gathered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, allowing for in-depth exploration of experiences and perspectives while maintaining comparability across responses. Documentary analysis of policy documents and FFS incident reports will provide contextual and operational insights. Quantitative data will be collected through a structured survey questionnaire administered to FFS personnel, designed to measure perceptions, experiences, and attitudes regarding the service's national security role.

4. Results and Discussion

Data analysis will follow a parallel approach corresponding to the two methodological strands. Qualitative data from interviews and documents will undergo thematic analysis using the framework by Braun and Clarke (2006), involving familiarization with data, code generation, theme development, review, and definition. Quantitative data from surveys will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations) to identify patterns and distributions in responses. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings will occur during the interpretation phase to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a critical gap between public perception and the operational effectiveness of the Federal Fire Service (FFS) in Abuja, Nigeria, highlighting significant implications for national security. Despite the statutory mandate of the FFS to not only prevent and manage fire emergencies but also contribute robustly to national security, public awareness and trust remain limited. Challenges such as inadequate manpower, outdated equipment, slow response times, and poor community engagement undermine confidence in the FFS, especially in high-risk and underserved areas. The data indicate that while residents have moderate knowledge of fire safety practices, actual compliance and cooperation with fire safety protocols are low, largely due to skepticism about the FFS's capacity and effectiveness.

Additionally, the study underscores that the FFS's role in national security is not fully appreciated by the public, exacerbated by fragmented communication and insufficient sensitization efforts. This disconnect between public perception and institutional capability weakens community cooperation, which is vital for effective fire risk reduction and crisis management. The challenges are further compounded by infrastructural deficits such as poor road access and limited fire hydrants, particularly in informal settlements, resulting in delayed emergency responses. The findings in this seminar paper suggest that enhancing public trust through sustained community engagement, improved communication strategies, and investment in operational capacity is essential for strengthening the FFS's legitimacy and its critical contribution to Nigeria's national security framework.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The study reveals that despite the Federal Fire Service's critical role in safeguarding lives and infrastructure, public perception and awareness in Abuja remain limited due to operational challenges such as inadequate manpower, outdated equipment, and poor community engagement. These gaps undermine the FFS's effectiveness and its contribution to national security. Enhancing public

trust through sustained education, transparent communication, and improved service delivery is essential. Addressing infrastructural deficits and fostering stronger community partnerships will strengthen the FFS's legitimacy and capacity. Ultimately, coordinated efforts are vital to bolster the FFS's role in national security and improve fire safety outcomes in Abuja and beyond.

i. To enhance the effectiveness and public perception of the Federal Fire Service (FFS) in Abuja, it is essential to prioritize sustained community engagement and public education initiatives. The FFS should intensify its outreach programs by organizing regular fire safety workshops, practical demonstrations, and awareness campaigns tailored to various demographic groups, including residents, market traders, and school teachers. These initiatives should be complemented by the development of standardized fire safety curricula and the institutionalization of mandatory training for building occupants and educators. Furthermore, leveraging local media and digital platforms for risk communication will ensure timely dissemination of critical information, counteract misinformation, and foster a culture of preparedness and compliance with fire safety regulations.

ii. Additionally, the FFS should address operational and structural challenges by investing in modern equipment, increasing the number of fire stations, and optimizing their spatial distribution to underserved areas. Transparent communication about response protocols, improved inter-agency collaboration, and the establishment of clear legal frameworks at both federal and state levels will strengthen institutional legitimacy and public trust. Regular evaluation of service delivery, coupled with feedback mechanisms that allow residents to report concerns and suggest improvements, will further reinforce accountability and responsiveness. By implementing these recommendations, the FFS can build stronger public trust, enhance its role in national security, and ensure greater community cooperation in fire prevention and emergency response.

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