



ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL FIRE SERVICE IN NATIONAL SECURITY IN FCT ABUJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study analyzes public perception and knowledge of the Federal Fire Service's (FFS) role in national security within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. The objectives are to identify factors influencing public trust and confidence in the FFS and to assess prevailing perceptions of its effectiveness in fire safety and emergency response. Despite the FFS's critical mandate to protect lives and infrastructure, challenges such as inadequate manpower, limited resources, infrastructural deficits, and low public awareness undermine its operational effectiveness and public trust. The study draws on Public Trust Theory, Risk Communication Theory, and Protection Motivation Theory to understand the dynamics shaping public attitudes and behaviors toward fire safety. The target population includes residents of the six Area Councils of the FCT, Abuja, alongside relevant government officials, with a sample size of approximately 400 respondents. Employing a descriptive cross-sectional survey design, the study combines quantitative data from structured questionnaires and qualitative insights from focus group discussions and key informant interviews. Data analysis utilizes descriptive and inferential statistics and thematic content analysis. Findings reveal mixed public perceptions shaped by infrastructural inadequacies and variable communication strategies. Trust and cooperation improve in areas with proactive community engagement and education. The study concludes that enhancing transparent communication, operational capacity, and inclusive policies is vital to strengthening the FFS's role in national security. Recommendations include intensifying public awareness campaigns, upgrading equipment and infrastructure, expanding firefighter training, and fostering inter-agency collaboration to build public trust and resilience against fire-related emergencies in Abuja.

Keywords: Federal Fire Service (FFS), National Security, Public Perception, Fire Safety Awareness, and Emergency Response.

1. Introduction

The Federal Fire Service (FFS) in Nigeria is a crucial public safety institution responsible for fire prevention, protection, and response across the country. Established as part of Nigeria's broader emergency management framework, the FFS significantly safeguards lives, property, and critical infrastructure. This essay provides an overview of the FFS, highlighting its historical development, organizational structure, functions, challenges, and the importance of public perception, knowledge, and attitudes toward its operations, especially in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja.

The origins of the Federal Fire Service can be traced back to the colonial era when fire services were

established in major urban centers to protect European settlements and government properties. However, a more formalized and nationalized approach to fire safety emerged post-independence. The FFS was formally established under the Fire Service Act of 1963, which laid the foundation for a nationwide fire safety infrastructure (Onifade, 2018). The Act outlined the responsibilities of the FFS, including fire prevention, firefighting, and rescue operations, as well as the enforcement of fire safety regulations.

Over the years, the FFS has evolved, expanding its mandate to include modern firefighting techniques, disaster response, and community engagement. The Service has undergone several reforms to improve its effectiveness and efficiency, including the

establishment of training institutions and the introduction of modern firefighting equipment (Fagbemi & Ogbeifun, 2020).

The FFS operates under the Federal Ministry of Interior, with a hierarchical structure that includes the Controller General at the top, followed by various departments and regional commands. The Service is organized into several units, including operations, administration, logistics, and training. Each unit plays a specific role in ensuring the smooth functioning of the FFS, from strategic planning and policy formulation to the day-to-day management of fire stations and response teams (Adeleke, 2019).

The FFS is responsible for enforcing fire safety regulations, conducting inspections of public and private buildings, and ensuring compliance with fire safety standards. This includes issuing fire safety certificates and advising on the installation of fire protection systems (Eke & Eze, 2017). The core function of the FFS is to respond to fire incidents, perform rescue operations, and manage hazardous materials.

Fire safety and national security, while often considered separate areas of public safety, are deeply interconnected. The relationship between these two domains becomes particularly critical in urban centers like Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. This essay explores how fire safety, particularly as managed by the Federal Fire Service (FFS), contributes to national security, focusing on the implications for public safety, infrastructure protection, and overall societal stability.

National security traditionally encompasses the protection of a nation from external threats and the maintenance of internal order. However, the concept has evolved to include a broader range of threats, including natural and human-made disasters such as fires. The Federal Fire Service in Nigeria plays a vital role in mitigating these threats, thereby contributing to national security. According to Adeleke (2019), the effective management of fire risks is essential for protecting critical infrastructure, public safety, and economic stability, all of which are foundational to national security.

Fires can have devastating effects on critical infrastructure, including government buildings, power plants, communication networks, and transportation hubs. The destruction of these facilities can disrupt governmental functions, hinder communication and transportation, and impair emergency response capabilities. For example, the loss of a telecommunications hub could cripple communication within security agencies during a crisis, exacerbating the situation. The FFS's role in preventing and responding to fires thus helps safeguard these vital assets (Chukwuemeka & Onuoha, 2021).

The occurrence of significant fire incidents can undermine national security in multiple ways. Economically, fires can result in substantial financial losses, not only in terms of destroyed assets but also through the disruption of business activities and essential services. Such disruptions can lead to economic instability, as seen in cases where industrial fires have led to shortages and increased prices for goods (Ogundipe, 2018).

From a societal perspective, fires can cause mass casualties and significant injuries, leading to loss of life, displacement of populations, and psychological trauma. The social disorder following a major fire incident can weaken the government's control and reduce public trust in its ability to provide safety and security. In this context, the FFS's capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to fire emergencies becomes crucial in maintaining public confidence and order (Dada & Ojo, 2020).

Moreover, the threat of arson or fire-related terrorism adds another layer to the connection between fire safety and national security. Deliberate acts of fire-setting can be used to intimidate or destabilize communities, target specific groups, or cause widespread panic. The ability of the FFS to prevent, detect, and respond to such acts is a critical component of national security strategies (Akinyemi, 2020).

Public perception of the importance of fire safety and the role of the FFS is a key factor in the overall effectiveness of fire prevention and response strategies. As Nwosu and Okonkwo (2018) highlight, public awareness and education about fire safety can significantly reduce the incidence and impact of fires.

An informed public is more likely to engage in safe practices, report fire hazards, and cooperate with authorities during emergencies. Trust in public institutions, including the fire service, is a cornerstone of societal stability. In the context of Abuja, where issues such as rapid urbanization and infrastructural development are prevalent, the role of the FFS extends beyond fire suppression to include public safety education and disaster preparedness. A study by Dada and Ojo (2020) highlighted that public awareness and positive perceptions of the FFS's role can lead to more proactive community engagement in fire prevention and response activities. This engagement is crucial for building a resilient community that can better withstand and recover from fire-related incidents.

Despite the Federal Fire Service's critical mandate to protect lives, property, and infrastructure in Abuja, there are persistent shortcomings in public perception, trust, and knowledge of the Service's role in national security. The FFS faces substantial operational challenges—including limited manpower, inadequate equipment, insufficient fire stations, and infrastructural deficits—that hinder prompt and effective fire prevention and emergency response. Rapid urbanization and expanding fire risks further strain the Service, while fragmented inter-agency collaboration undermines coordinated disaster management.

Public awareness and confidence in the FFS remain low, especially in underserved and vulnerable communities, exacerbated by inconsistent public engagement and lack of targeted fire safety education. This lack of trust impedes proactive community cooperation, weakening the effectiveness of fire risk reduction strategies. Moreover, recurring fire incidents, regulatory inefficiencies, and an absence of a comprehensive national fire safety policy contribute to skepticism about the FFS's reliability and its integration into Nigeria's broader security framework. As fire disasters continue to threaten critical infrastructure and societal stability, there is an urgent need to examine and address the barriers to public understanding, trust, and cooperation with the FFS. Bridging these gaps is essential to strengthen community resilience and enhance the FFS's effectiveness in safeguarding national security within the Federal Capital Territory.

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. To explain the current level of stakeholders' cooperation with the Nigeria Federal Fire Service in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. To accomplish this feat, the following specific objectives are set for investigation:

- i. To identify the factors that influence the level of trust and confidence that residents of FCT Abuja have in the Federal Fire Service as a key player in national security?
- ii. To assess the prevailing public perceptions of the Federal Fire Service in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Clarification

The study will involve several key concepts fundamental to understanding the study's focus and objectives. Here, we review and provide explanations for these key concepts, with appropriate citations and references. These key concepts form the theoretical and conceptual foundation for exploring the relationship between the Federal Fire Service and national security in Abuja, Nigeria. They highlight the importance of understanding public perception, knowledge dissemination, and community engagement in enhancing the effectiveness of the FFS and ensuring public safety.

Federal Fire Service (FFS)

The Federal Fire Service represents a critical component within a nation's emergency management infrastructure, operating as a centralized firefighting and emergency response agency at the federal level. This paper presents a comprehensive conceptualization of Federal Fire Services, examining their organizational structure, operational mandate, strategic functions, and the evolving challenges they face in contemporary emergency management landscapes. As nations confront increasingly complex emergency scenarios, from urban conflagrations to wildland-urban interface fires and hazardous materials incidents, the role of Federal Fire Services has expanded significantly (Smith & Johnson, 2023).

The Federal Fire Service typically operates as a specialized agency within a nation's emergency management or public safety administrative structure. According to Black (2022), these organizations are characterized by hierarchical command structures that facilitate rapid deployment and coordinated response to emergencies across different jurisdictional boundaries. The organizational architecture generally encompasses headquarters operations, regional commands, and specialized units dedicated to specific emergency response functions.

In most jurisdictions, Federal Fire Services maintain complex intergovernmental relationships with state, provincial, and municipal firefighting agencies. These relationships are formalized through mutual aid agreements, cooperative protocols, and integrated command systems that enable seamless coordination during large-scale emergencies (Williams et al., 2021). The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA, 2024) establishes that these intergovernmental frameworks are essential for ensuring consistent operational standards and response protocols across different levels of government.

Operational Mandate

The Federal Fire Service (FFS) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja holds a critical operational mandate that extends beyond traditional firefighting to encompass fire prevention, enforcement of safety regulations, disaster preparedness, and active participation in national security. The Service is responsible for safeguarding lives, property, and economic assets through rapid emergency response, public education, and regulatory enforcement, including the inspection and certification of fire safety compliance in public and private establishments (FFederal Fire Service Regulations, 2019).

A key aspect of the FFS's mandate involves community engagement and capacity building. The Service promotes the establishment of volunteer firefighter teams across communities to extend fire safety awareness and provide immediate response in emergencies. These volunteers are trained to assist in fire prevention education and initial firefighting efforts, thereby enhancing the overall resilience of communities in Abuja and beyond (Adeniran, 2021).

This community-based approach is essential given the challenges posed by rapid urbanization, population growth, and infrastructural deficits that can hinder timely official response.

Despite these efforts, public perception of the FFS's effectiveness is mixed. Challenges such as inadequate manpower, limited fire stations, poor road infrastructure, and insufficient equipment have historically constrained the Service's capacity to respond promptly and effectively to fire incidents (Adeniran, 2021; Omunagbe & Kaseem, 2023). These limitations affect public confidence and highlight the need for sustained investment in human resources, technology, and infrastructure to improve service delivery.

The FFS's role in national security is increasingly recognized by policymakers, as fire disasters can destabilize critical infrastructure and economic activities, thereby posing security risks. Collaboration with other security agencies, such as the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), enhances coordinated emergency response and security during fire incidents (Federal Ministry of Interior, 2023). Additionally, the National Fire Academy in collaboration with the Nigeria Defence Academy offers postgraduate training to develop specialized expertise in fire safety and security disciplines, further professionalizing the Service (Federal Fire Service Nigeria, n.d.).

Research on fire disaster risk reduction in Nigerian cities underscores the fragmented institutional arrangements and uneven distribution of fire service resources, which impede effective fire risk management (Falola & Agbola, 2022). In Abuja, similar structural challenges exist, necessitating reforms that prioritize equitable resource allocation, improved training, and stronger community partnerships to build a fire-safe environment.

The operational mandate of the Federal Fire Service in FCT Abuja integrates fire prevention, emergency response, public education, and national security functions. Strengthening public knowledge and perception of the FFS's role through transparency, community engagement, and demonstrable improvements in service delivery is vital. Continued

reforms and investments will enable the Service to meet the growing demands of urban safety and contribute effectively to Nigeria's national security framework.

Strategic Functions

Beyond their tactical emergency response roles, Federal Fire Services fulfill several strategic functions within national emergency management systems. These include the development of national firefighting standards, conducting research on fire behavior and suppression technologies, and providing specialized training to firefighting personnel across different governmental levels (Anderson & Wilson, 2023).

The strategic dimension of Federal Fire Services also encompasses emergency preparedness planning, which involves hazard identification, vulnerability assessment, and the formulation of risk mitigation strategies for critical infrastructure and populated areas (Edwards, 2020). According to Chen et al. (2022), these strategic functions position Federal Fire Services as knowledge centers that disseminate best practices and innovations throughout the broader firefighting community.

Contemporary Challenges

Federal Fire Services face numerous challenges in the contemporary operational environment. Climate change has dramatically altered fire regimes in many regions, resulting in more frequent and severe wildland fires that strain response capabilities (Murphy & Garcia, 2024). Additionally, the expansion of wildland-urban interface areas has created complex firefighting scenarios that require specialized tactics and resources (Brown, 2021).

Technological advancements present both opportunities and challenges for Federal Fire Services. While new technologies such as drone-based reconnaissance and automated firefighting systems enhance operational capabilities, they also require significant investments in equipment acquisition and personnel training (Washington & Lee, 2023). Furthermore, cybersecurity concerns have emerged as digital systems become increasingly integrated into emergency response operations (Taylor, 2022).

The Federal Fire Service embodies a complex organizational entity that fulfills critical emergency response functions within national public safety frameworks. As conceptualized in this analysis, these agencies operate at the intersection of tactical response, strategic planning, and intergovernmental coordination. Their evolution reflects broader societal changes, technological developments, and emerging threats that continuously reshape the emergency management landscape.

Understanding the multidimensional nature of Federal Fire Services provides valuable insights for policymakers, emergency management professionals, and researchers seeking to enhance public safety systems. Future research directions should explore how these organizations adapt to emerging challenges while maintaining operational readiness across diverse emergency scenarios.

Contemporary Challenges of National Security

Public perception and knowledge of the Federal Fire Service's (FFS) role in national security in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria, must be understood within the broader context of Nigeria's evolving security architecture and the challenges faced by emergency and security agencies. The FFS, constitutionally mandated to provide fire prevention, firefighting, rescue, and disaster management services, is a critical component of Nigeria's national security framework, yet public awareness of its contributions remains limited and often overshadowed by more visible security threats such as terrorism, banditry, and insurgency (Federal Fire Service Nigeria, n.d.; NCTC, 2019).

Nigeria's National Security Strategy (NSS) explicitly recognizes the need for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to crisis response and resilience, involving multiple agencies at federal and state levels, including the FFS, Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC), and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) (NCTC, 2019). The FFS's role in protecting critical infrastructure, responding to fire emergencies, and supporting disaster management directly complements the efforts of other security agencies in preserving lives and property, which are foundational to national stability.

However, systemic challenges such as inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, limited personnel training, and coordination difficulties hamper the FFS's operational effectiveness and, by extension, public confidence (Academia.edu, 2021).

Academic analyses emphasize that the FFS's integration into Nigeria's broader security architecture is essential for addressing the multifaceted nature of national security threats. For instance, the Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has expanded its mandate to include protection of critical infrastructure and counter-terrorism support, highlighting the need for synergy among agencies (Ali, Umar, & Danga, 2023). The FFS similarly must enhance its capacity not only through improved equipment and training—such as postgraduate safety and security programs offered in partnership with the Nigeria Defence Academy (Federal Fire Service Nigeria, 2022)—but also through public engagement to raise awareness of fire risks and prevention strategies.

Public attitudes towards the FFS are influenced by frequent fire incidents in Abuja and other urban centers, where infrastructural deficits such as blocked access roads and insufficient fire hydrants delay emergency responses (Academia.edu, 2021). These operational challenges contribute to skepticism about the FFS's ability to fulfill its mandate effectively. However, community engagement initiatives, including fire safety education and drills, have shown promise in improving public knowledge and fostering cooperation, which are critical for enhancing national security resilience (Ali et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive national fire safety policy in Nigeria exacerbates these issues by limiting standardized fire prevention measures and enforcement mechanisms (Academia.edu, 2019). Scholars argue that establishing such a policy is imperative for integrating fire safety into national security planning, ensuring adequate resource allocation, and formalizing inter-agency collaboration (Academia.edu, 2019). This policy framework would also support the FFS's expanded role under proposed legislative reforms aimed at modernizing fire and rescue services nationwide.

Public's perception and knowledge of the Federal Fire Service's role in national security in Abuja are intertwined with broader national security challenges and institutional capacities. Enhancing the FFS's operational effectiveness through increased funding, training, infrastructure development, and legislative support is critical. Equally important is improving public awareness and engagement to build trust and cooperation, thereby strengthening Nigeria's overall national security architecture. Academic literature underscores that a multi-agency, policy-driven approach that includes the FFS as a key stakeholder is essential to addressing Nigeria's complex security environment and safeguarding its citizens and critical infrastructure.

2.2 Empirical Literature

Trust and National Security

Cobin (2013) carried out a study on The Enterprise of Fire Safety Services in Lagos, Nigeria. The study sought to assess the effectiveness of fire safety regulation and the resultant public trust in fire services within Lagos State, Nigeria, with implications applicable to other urban centers such as Abuja. The study aimed to explore the institutional and regulatory challenges that affect fire safety delivery and public confidence. The study utilized Institutional Theory and Regulatory Failure Theory to analyze the roles of government agencies and private sector actors in fire safety.

Institutional Theory helped explain how organizational structures and governance affect service delivery, while Regulatory Failure Theory highlighted lapses in enforcement that undermine public trust. The research was based on secondary data analysis, including fire incident records, regulatory frameworks, and enforcement reports from 1972 to 2010. The study also reviewed policy documents and media reports to contextualize findings. The study revealed significant regulatory inefficiencies and government failure in enforcing fire safety standards, which led to widespread non-compliance and diminished public trust. The lack of effective monitoring and sanctions allowed fire hazards to proliferate, increasing the frequency and severity of fire incidents. The study also noted the emergence of private fire safety firms as complementary actors, filling gaps left by public services.

Ayuba et al., (2016) investigated Fire Vulnerability Assessment of the Federal Capital City, Abuja, Nigeria. The study aimed to spatially analyze fire vulnerability across districts in Abuja and assess how this vulnerability influences residents' confidence in fire services. The study sought to identify geographic disparities in fire service coverage and their implications for public trust. The study was grounded in Risk Perception Theory, which links individuals' perception of vulnerability to hazards with their trust in protective services. The theory posits that higher perceived risk in underserved areas may erode trust in emergency responders. The researchers employed Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map the locations of fire stations relative to population density and fire incident data across Abuja's districts. The population included all districts within the Federal Capital City, with a focus on spatial accessibility. Data collection involved GPS mapping and analysis of fire incident reports over a five-year period. Data analysis used spatial statistics to identify coverage gaps and vulnerability hotspots. Findings: The study found that fire stations were unevenly distributed, with affluent districts such as Wuse and Maitama having better coverage, while peripheral and lower-income areas were underserved. This spatial inequality correlated with higher fire vulnerability and lower trust in the FFS among residents in underserved districts. Residents in these areas reported feelings of neglect and skepticism about the FFS's ability to protect their communities.

Codemint.net, (2025) studied the impact of Staff Training Policy in the Federal Fire Service Abuja. This study evaluated the impact of staff training policies on operational efficiency and public trust in the Federal Fire Service in Abuja. This study was to determine how continuous professional development influences service quality and community perceptions. The study was framed within Total Quality Management (TQM) principles, emphasizing continuous improvement and employee development as drivers of organizational excellence and customer satisfaction. The population consisted of FFS personnel in Abuja. A sample of 100 employees, including frontline firefighters and management staff, was selected using stratified random sampling. Data collection methods included structured questionnaires assessing training frequency,

content, and perceived effectiveness, as well as semi-structured interviews with senior officers. Performance data on response times and incident outcomes were also reviewed. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics and thematic analysis for qualitative data. The study found a positive correlation between regular training and improved emergency response effectiveness. Personnel who received updated training demonstrated higher competence, confidence, and professionalism, which translated into better service delivery. These improvements were linked to increased public trust as evidenced by community feedback and reduced complaints. However, the study noted gaps in training coverage and the need for more specialized courses to address emerging fire risks.

Rightangle (2022) carried out a systematic study on Public Perception of the Fire Service in Nigeria. This qualitative study explored cultural and social factors shaping public trust in fire services across Nigerian communities, with a focus on Abuja. The objective was to identify barriers and facilitators of trust from the residents' perspectives. Social Trust Theory guided the analysis, focusing on how interpersonal and institutional trust develop through social interactions, transparency, and perceived fairness. The study employed purposive sampling to select 50 residents from diverse Abuja neighborhoods. Data collection involved in-depth interviews exploring experiences with the FFS, perceptions of its effectiveness, and cultural attitudes toward government institutions. Data were analyzed using thematic content analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns. The study revealed that historical neglect, lack of consistent community engagement, and perceived corruption contributed to mistrust in the FFS. Residents expressed skepticism about the service's commitment and capacity, especially in informal settlements. Conversely, transparency during emergencies, visible professionalism, and proactive communication improved trust. The study also highlighted the role of community leaders in mediating trust and facilitating cooperation.

Public perceptions and National Security

Adebisi et al., (2025) carried out a study on Public Perception of Fire Service Effectiveness in Nigeria: The Case of Abuja. This study assessed residents'

perceptions of the Federal Fire Service's (FFS) effectiveness in Abuja and its impact on public trust. Using the Service Quality (SERVQUAL) model, the research focused on reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy as key trust determinants. A cross-sectional survey of 400 residents, selected through stratified random sampling, was conducted. Data analysis revealed that timely responses, firefighter professionalism, and availability of modern equipment positively influenced trust, while delays and inadequate public education reduced confidence. Residents in well-served districts exhibited higher trust levels. The study concluded that improving operational efficiency and expanding community sensitization are essential to boosting trust and strengthening the FFS's national security role (Adebiyi et al., 2025).

Agbo and Musa, (2022) assess the Role of Firefighter Training in Enhancing Public Trust: Evidence from Nigeria. This research examined how firefighter training programs affect public perceptions of the FFS's competence and trustworthiness. Grounded in Human Capital Theory, it posited that investment in personnel skills leads to better service delivery and increased confidence. Using mixed methods, the study surveyed 150 firefighters undergoing training and interviewed 100 community members in Abuja. Findings indicated that enhanced training improved operational performance, recognized and valued by communities, which led to higher trust ratings. Firefighters also reported increased confidence post-training. The authors recommended scaling training programs and integrating community feedback to sustain public trust (Agbo & Musa, 2022).

Moreover, the study highlighted that social media platforms amplify both positive and negative narratives, often shaping real-time public opinion and expectations. The rapid spread of misinformation or unverified reports can exacerbate public anxiety and erode trust, especially in crisis situations (Adebiyi et al., 2025). Therefore, the study recommended that the FFS and other security agencies engage proactively with traditional and social media, providing timely, accurate information and transparency to build and sustain public trust. Strategic media engagement, including regular press briefings, community outreach via media, and collaboration with journalists, is

essential to counter misinformation and foster informed public discourse on national security (Eze & Okafor, 2024). This approach aligns with global best practices where transparent communication enhances institutional legitimacy and public cooperation.

Isa et al., (2016) examined Socioeconomic Factors Influencing Public Trust in Fire Services in Urban Nigeria. Socioeconomic variables significantly influence public trust in fire services within Nigerian urban centers. The study is grounded in social capital theory, which links social networks, education, and economic status to institutional trust, a quantitative survey of 500 residents across Abuja districts was conducted (Isa et al., 2016). Regression analysis demonstrated that higher education and income levels positively correlate with greater trust in the Federal Fire Service. Educated and economically advantaged residents tend to have better access to information, higher fire safety awareness, and more positive perceptions of institutional competence. Conversely, residents from lower socioeconomic backgrounds exhibited greater skepticism and limited awareness, often perceiving fire services as inaccessible or ineffective.

This disparity highlights the need for targeted educational campaigns and inclusive fire safety policies that address the knowledge gaps and vulnerabilities of marginalized communities (Isa et al., 2016). Fire prevention programs tailored to informal settlements and low-income areas can improve awareness, compliance with safety regulations, and ultimately, trust. The study underscores that socioeconomic inequalities shape not only risk exposure but also perceptions of institutional legitimacy. Bridging these gaps through community-based interventions and equitable resource distribution is critical for building widespread public trust in fire services and enhancing national security resilience.

Falola and Agbola, (2022) studied operational challenges and public confidence in Nigeria's Fire Services

This mixed-methods study applied service quality theory to identify operational challenges faced by the Federal Fire Service in Abuja and their impact on public confidence). Surveys of 250 residents and interviews with 30 FFS personnel revealed

that inadequate equipment, delayed emergency responses, and poor communication significantly undermine public confidence. Despite these challenges, professionalism and successful fire interventions were positively associated with increased trust, indicating that operational effectiveness remains a key determinant of public perception. The study emphasized that resource investment, improved logistics, and enhanced communication strategies are necessary to restore and sustain public confidence. The findings align with broader literature emphasizing that tangible service quality improvements directly influence institutional legitimacy (Tyler, 2006). The study recommended prioritizing procurement of modern firefighting equipment, upgrading infrastructure, and training personnel in communication and community engagement to enhance transparency and responsiveness.

Addressing these operational challenges is essential not only for improving fire safety outcomes but also for reinforcing the FFS's role as a trusted national security institution. Federal Fire Service Nigeria, (2022 Fire Safety Awareness and Its Effect on Public Trust in Abuja Using the Health Belief Model, this cross-sectional survey assessed the relationship between fire safety awareness and public trust in the Federal Fire Service among 350 Abuja residents (Federal Fire Service Nigeria, 2022). The model posits that individuals' knowledge and perceived susceptibility to hazards influence their attitudes and behaviors. The study finding reveals that increased fire safety knowledge was significantly associated with higher trust in the FFS and greater compliance with fire safety regulations. Residents who participated in sensitization programs demonstrated improved understanding of fire risks and prevention measures, which fostered confidence in the service's capabilities.

2.3 Theoretical Review

In examining the perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes towards the Federal Fire Service (FFS) and its role in national security within Abuja, it is crucial to draw upon a combination of theories from sociology, psychology, and public administration. The following theories provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the dynamics of public perceptions, the impact of information dissemination,

and the role of public services in national security. Public Trust Theory examines the relationship between public institutions and the trust of the

Public Trust Theory

Trust in public institutions, such as the FFS, is crucial for the effective implementation of safety measures and emergency responses (Kim & Lee, 2005). This theory will help analyze how trust in the FFS influences public cooperation and adherence to fire safety protocols. Public Trust Theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing public perception and knowledge of the Federal Fire Service (FFS) in relation to national security in Nigeria. At its core, the theory posits that government institutions derive their legitimacy from the trust vested in them by citizens, who expect these institutions to act in ways that protect the collective interest (Bouckaert & Van de Walle, 2003). When agencies fulfill their mandates effectively, they reinforce public confidence, which in turn enhances compliance, cooperation, and societal stability. Conversely, a deficit of trust undermines institutional credibility, weakens public cooperation, and may foster indifference or resistance toward official policies (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

In the context of FCT Abuja, trust in the Federal Fire Service is integral to national security. The FFS is not only tasked with responding to fire incidents but also contributes to safeguarding critical infrastructure, preventing disasters, and protecting lives and property. Citizens' perception of its competence, responsiveness, and transparency influences how they cooperate with fire safety protocols, report hazards, or engage in preventive practices. If the public perceives the FFS as effective, reliable, and accountable, trust is likely to increase, which directly supports national security by strengthening community resilience (Grimmelikhuisen & Meijer, 2014). However, when inefficiency, corruption, or inadequate service delivery dominates public perception, trust declines, thereby impeding the agency's ability to mobilize citizens in mitigating security risks.

A strength of Public Trust Theory lies in its explanatory power for linking institutional performance to public cooperation. It provides a lens for evaluating how perceptions of fairness, transparency, and competence shape trust and, by

extension, societal stability (Blind, 2007). This makes it particularly relevant for assessing the FFS, as its role in national security is contingent on public willingness to engage with and rely on its services. Another strength is its interdisciplinary application, bridging public administration, sociology, and security studies to illuminate how citizen–institution relationships evolve.

Nonetheless, the theory has notable weaknesses. Critics argue that trust is a multidimensional concept influenced by broader cultural, economic, and political contexts that Public Trust Theory does not fully capture (Hardin, 2002). In Nigeria, where governance challenges such as corruption and institutional inefficiency are prevalent, public trust may not depend solely on institutional performance but also on systemic perceptions of government. Additionally, the theory is often critiqued for its normative assumptions, presuming that institutions inherently act in the public interest, which may not reflect realities in fragile democracies (Levi & Stoker, 2000).

In sum, Public Trust Theory provides a strong foundation for understanding how residents of FCT Abuja perceive and evaluate the Federal Fire Service’s role in national security. While the theory emphasizes the link between trust and institutional performance, its limitations highlight the need to account for Nigeria’s broader socio-political realities. Integrating this theory into the study allows for a nuanced exploration of how trust dynamics influence public attitudes and engagement with the FFS in ensuring national security.

Risk Communication Theory

Risk Communication Theory explores how information about risks, such as fire hazards, is communicated to the public and how this affects their understanding and behavior (Covello & Sandman, 2001). This theory is crucial for assessing the effectiveness of the FFS’s communication strategies and how well they inform the public about fire safety and prevention measures.

Risk Communication Theory examines how information about risks is communicated to people and how it shapes their understanding, perceptions, and behavior. Originally applied in fields like public health and disaster management, it focuses on how

effectively messages about hazards—such as fire risks—are conveyed to influence appropriate protective actions (Covello & Sandman, 2001). The theory highlights that successful risk communication depends on clear messaging, trust-building, cultural sensitivity, and addressing audience concerns.

In the context of irregular migration and security challenges in Katsina State, Risk Communication Theory is highly relevant. It can help analyze how authorities and stakeholders communicate the risks associated with irregular migration—such as increased crime, social tension, and strained resources—to local communities, migrants, and policy actors. Effective risk communication can reduce misinformation, fear, and stigma, encouraging informed responses rather than panic or hostility.

Additionally, the theory underscores the importance of two-way communication that incorporates feedback and local knowledge, enabling tailored messaging that resonates with diverse audiences. In migration contexts, this involves providing migrants with accurate information about safe routes, legal options, and available support, while advising host communities about integration and security measures.

By applying Risk Communication Theory, policymakers and security agencies in Katsina can design communication strategies that enhance social cohesion, mitigate conflict, and support collaborative management of migration-related risks. This approach optimizes public understanding and promotes behaviors that help maintain peace and security amidst complex migration dynamics.

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT)

Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), originally proposed by Rogers (1975), offers a robust framework for examining how individuals perceive threats and adopt protective behaviors. The theory asserts that protective motivation arises from two parallel cognitive processes: threat appraisal and coping appraisal. Threat appraisal involves evaluating the severity of a risk and one’s vulnerability to it, while coping appraisal assesses the perceived efficacy of the protective response and one’s self-efficacy in carrying

it out (Maddux & Rogers, 1983). Together, these processes determine whether individuals adopt or reject recommended protective measures.

In applying PMT to the Federal Fire Service (FFS) in FCT Abuja, the theory helps explain how residents perceive fire risks and the agency's role in mitigating them. For instance, if citizens perceive fire outbreaks as severe and view themselves as vulnerable, they are more likely to adopt preventive behaviors such as installing fire extinguishers or complying with safety regulations. However, these protective actions depend heavily on coping appraisal—whether people believe that the FFS is competent, well-equipped, and responsive, and whether they themselves feel capable of acting on safety instructions. Thus, public perception of the FFS's effectiveness directly influences motivation to engage in behaviors that support national security and disaster resilience.

A major strength of PMT lies in its predictive power regarding behavior in high-risk contexts. By highlighting the cognitive mechanisms that drive protective action, the theory offers clear pathways for designing public education campaigns and policy interventions (Prentice-Dunn & Rogers, 1986). In the Abuja context, PMT underscores the importance of communicating both the seriousness of fire risks and the effectiveness of FFS measures to encourage compliance. It also aligns with security studies, as effective protection behaviors contribute to broader national security objectives by reducing vulnerability to both natural and man-made hazards.

Nevertheless, PMT has its weaknesses. Critics note that it tends to overemphasize rational cognitive processing, underestimating the influence of cultural, emotional, and social factors in shaping protective behaviors (Floyd et al., 2000). In Nigeria, where religious beliefs, community norms, and socio-economic constraints strongly shape responses to security threats, PMT's purely cognitive focus may not fully capture local realities. Additionally, the theory assumes that once individuals perceive high threat and strong coping capacity, they will act accordingly, yet structural barriers such as poverty or inadequate government infrastructure may hinder action even when motivation is present. Protection Motivation Theory offers a useful framework for analyzing how

Abuja residents perceive the role of the Federal Fire Service in national security. By emphasizing the interaction between threat appraisal and coping appraisal, it provides insights into how trust in institutional effectiveness translates into protective action. However, its limitations highlight the need to integrate cultural and contextual variables when applying PMT to the Nigerian security environment.

3. Methodology

This study employed a descriptive cross-sectional survey to assess perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes of residents in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, at a single point in time. This design was chosen for its ability to identify patterns and correlations without altering the environment (Creswell, 2014). Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used: structured questionnaires gathered numerical data, while focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) provided qualitative insights.

Study Area

The study was conducted in Abuja, Nigeria's capital and the seat of the Federal Government. Geographically, the FCT lies between latitudes 8°45'N–9°20'N and longitudes 6°45'E–7°39'E, spanning about 7,315 km². It borders Niger, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Kogi States, and consists of six Area Councils: Abaji, Abuja Municipal, Bwari, Gwagwalada, Kuje, and Kwali. Abuja's political significance and concentration of critical infrastructure justify its selection, as the Federal Fire Service (FFS) plays a central role in protecting lives, property, and national assets within the territory.

Data Collection Methods

A mixed-methods approach was adopted.

- a. Structured Questionnaires:** Distributed to a representative sample of residents, business owners, and government employees, capturing demographics, knowledge of the FFS, perceptions of effectiveness, and attitudes toward its security role. Both closed and open-ended questions were included.
- b. Qualitative Methods:** Semi-structured FGDs and

KIIs were conducted with experts, community leaders, and stakeholders, guided by thematic protocols and recorded for verbatim analysis. Secondary data were drawn from policy documents and reports to contextualize findings (Booth et al., 2016).

Sampling Techniques

A combination of probability and non-probability methods was applied.

- a. Stratified Random Sampling:** Used for the quantitative survey, stratifying the population by Area Council to ensure proportional representation.
- b. Purposive Sampling:** Applied to KIIs and FGDs, targeting participants with expertise in fire safety, security, or governance.

Population and Sample

The study population comprised residents across all six Area Councils. A sample of 400 respondents was selected for the survey, based on a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. For qualitative data, 15–20 key informants were engaged until saturation was reached.

Data Analysis Techniques

- a. Quantitative:** Data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, standard deviations) and inferential tests (chi-square, t-tests, regression) via SPSS or STATA to explore relationships between knowledge and perceptions of the FFS.
- b. Qualitative:** Data from KIIs and FGDs underwent thematic analysis, coding transcripts to identify patterns and narratives. NVivo software supported organization and analysis.

4. Results and Discussion

Service (FFS) in the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, are shaped by both institutional performance and broader governance challenges. Respondents generally recognized the FFS as an essential agency in fire prevention, disaster management, and protection of critical infrastructure, thereby linking its operations to national security. However, perceptions of effectiveness were mixed. While some residents

acknowledged improvements in fire response, training, and awareness campaigns, a larger proportion identified persistent challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, poor response times, limited manpower, and insufficient public engagement.

The study also revealed that public trust in the FFS is significantly influenced by awareness levels. Communities with greater exposure to fire safety campaigns or direct contact with fire officers expressed higher confidence in the agency. Conversely, low awareness and negative past experiences reduced trust, reinforcing skepticism about the FFS's capacity to fulfill its mandate. The findings suggest that while the FFS is recognized as central to safeguarding lives and property, gaps in service delivery, communication, and institutional coordination undermine its credibility. Addressing these challenges through improved resources, training, and transparency is critical for strengthening public confidence and advancing national security.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The methodology underscores the importance of assessing public perception and knowledge in strengthening the role of the FFS in Abuja's security landscape. Although constitutionally mandated to prevent and respond to fire hazards, challenges such as weak infrastructure, low awareness, and limited coordination hinder effectiveness and trust. By applying Public Trust Theory and related frameworks, this study highlights how improved service delivery, transparency, and community engagement can enhance public cooperation. Ultimately, investments in training, communication, and inter-agency collaboration are essential to reposition the FFS as a trusted actor in Nigeria's national security framework.

Based on the findings and insights from the study, it is recommended that:

- i. The Federal Fire Service (FFS) intensifies its public engagement and awareness campaigns across all Area Councils in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Proactive strategies such as community fire safety education, regular sensitization programs, public drills, and collaborations with community leaders can enhance citizens' knowledge and

perception of the FFS's role in national security. These efforts should particularly target underserved and vulnerable communities where public skepticism and fire risks are highest. Additionally, leveraging both traditional and social media platforms to disseminate timely, transparent, and accurate information about the FFS's activities and successes can improve visibility, shape positive narratives, and reinforce public trust.

ii. FFS should prioritize operational reforms through capacity building, modern equipment acquisition, and improved response logistics. This includes scaling up

specialized training for personnel, increasing the number of fire stations in strategic locations, and strengthening coordination with other emergency and security agencies. Legislative and policy reforms are also necessary to institutionalize a national fire safety framework that ensures equitable resource distribution and clearly defines the role of the FFS within Nigeria's security architecture. These combined measures will not only enhance the Service's effectiveness but also secure its legitimacy as a trusted national security institution.

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