

Examining Terrorism Preparedness Using Risk Perception Theory: Qualitative Evidence from Subjective Vulnerability in Urban Security Environments

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Abstract

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This qualitative study examines Terrorism Preparedness in high-threat urban environments using the Risk Perception Theory (RPT) to bridge the gap between official security mandates and citizen experience. Through in-depth interviews (n=15) with community stakeholders, the research paper maps subjective vulnerability onto RPT's psychometric constructs. Findings reveal a profound functional shift: Dread Risk has metastasized into a chronic anticipation; Institutional Trust has collapsed into systemic suspicion; and Perceived Control is displaced by individualised hyper-vigilance. Crucially, the study identifies Economically-Forced Involuntary Risk, demonstrating that socio-economic imperatives dictate risk acceptance, challenging RPT's voluntariness assumption. The conclusion advocates for an Outrage Management governance paradigm that prioritises restoring epistemic trust and facilitating collective efficacy over mere compliance.

Keywords: *Terrorism Preparedness; Risk Perception Theory (RPT); Subjective Vulnerability; Urban Security; Institutional Trust; Dread Risk; Security Governance.*

1. Introduction

The contemporary security landscape is indelibly defined by the transnationalisation of terrorism, marking a strategic shift from state-centric targets to the ubiquitous, low-probability, but high-consequence threat embedded within the densely populated urban security environment (Jenkins, 2010). This phenomenon aligns conceptually with Beck's (1992) seminal 'Risk Society' thesis, where hazards are increasingly socially manufactured, invisible, and globally distributed, thereby challenging the efficacy of traditional state mechanisms of control (Loader & Walker, 2007). In the context of cities, this decentralisation of risk compels an omnipresent state of securitisation within quotidian spaces malls, hotels, and transport hubs forcing citizens into constant, often militarised, engagement with surveillance and vulnerability (Loader & Walker, 2007; Versi, 2019).

In the field of urban criminology, the critical consequence of this dispersed threat is the profound psychological disjunction between objective risk (statistically assessed threat) and subjective insecurity (the lived, psychological experience of danger) (Fattah, 1991). For citizens operating in environments previously targeted by high-profile attacks, such as the area surrounding Nairobi's Dusit D2 complex, this pervasive threat translates directly into heightened fear of crime and a palpable sense of personal and communal vulnerability (Versi, 2019; Wachira, 2012). Consequently, individuals must perpetually renegotiate their spatial and social behaviour, evaluating the trustworthiness of public safety measures while seeking personal coping strategies (Sampson, 2012). Effective security governance, therefore, hinges not solely on material fortifications but on successfully managing the public's psychological engagement with the perceived threat landscape (Miller, 2003).

Governmental and private entities respond to this challenge by instituting comprehensive Terrorism Preparedness strategies, encompassing surveillance systems, continuous security drills, and targeted public awareness campaigns. Yet, the functional efficacy of these policies is fundamentally mediated by how citizens perceive the threat and, crucially, how they interpret the information communicated about it (Paton, 2008). Herein lies the explanatory power of Risk Perception Theory (RPT). Specifically, the psychometric paradigm within RPT posits that lay perceptions are driven less by statistical fatality rates and more by potent outrage factors such as dread, catastrophic potential, lack of personal control, and, most importantly, institutional trust (Slovic, 2000; Fischhoff et al., 1978). Successful terrorism preparedness is thus dependent on achieving qualitative alignment between official communication protocols and these non-technical, subjective dimensions of public concern (Siegrist & Cvetkovich, 2000).

Despite the centrality of citizen perception to effective preparedness, existing counter-terrorism literature remains disproportionately focused on quantitative assessments of resource allocation and procedural adherence, often drawing evidence predominantly from Western, high-income democracies (Aven & Renn, 2009). This creates a persistent knowledge deficit regarding the qualitative dimensions of subjective vulnerability the how and why citizens in high-threat environments of the Global South process and respond to preparedness messaging (Johnston, 2017).

This scholarly gap is particularly pronounced where the threat landscape is compounded by legacies of political instability and contested state legitimacy (Okumu & Wafula, 2009). Utilising a rigorous qualitative methodology, this research addresses this critical gap by mapping the empirical and expressed manifestations of subjective vulnerability onto the core explanatory constructs of Risk Perception Theory within an African urban security context. This provides a theoretically grounded basis for enhancing the legitimacy and citizen-centred efficacy of future preparedness policies.

Thus, the paper is guided by these two specific objectives; 1) to qualitatively map the empirical manifestations of subjective vulnerability and fear of crime as experienced by stakeholders in the high-threat urban security environment onto the core psychometric constructs (Dread, Trust, Control, Voluntariness) of the Risk Perception Theory (RPT); 2) to theoretically refine the application of RPT within a criminological context by generating novel, context-specific empirical themes (such as Contested Credibility and Economically-Forced Involuntary Risk) that demonstrate the unique qualitative nature of risk acceptance and communication failure in the Global South.

2. Literature Review

2.2. Risk Perception Theory and Terrorism Preparedness

The theoretical foundation for scrutinising the effectiveness of Terrorism Preparedness rests heavily upon the Risk Perception Theory (RPT), particularly the psychometric paradigm championed by Slovic (2000). This body of work systematically deviates from the purely actuarial model of objective risk, which relies on statistical probability and magnitude of harm, arguing instead that lay assessments are driven by non-technical risk factors often termed 'outrage factors'. These factors include dread (catastrophic potential, perceived lack of control), trust (in governance and security actors), and familiarity (with the hazard) (Fischhoff et al., 1978). A cohesive literature review necessitates examining how these RPT constructs have been empirically applied within the criminological context of security and preparedness, thereby revealing salient theoretical and methodological gaps.

A critical oversight in the RPT literature applied to terrorism preparedness is its failure to sufficiently account for socio-political complexity in contexts outside of established liberal democracies. In many urban environments in the Global South, the relationship between citizens and state security agencies is often complicated by historical legacies of political violence, corruption, and contested state legitimacy (Chauvin & Giumelli, 2017). Within these settings, the RPT construct of institutional trust, which is assumed to be a relatively stable variable in Western models becomes highly fluid and often adversarial. Preparedness campaigns issued by state actors are frequently interpreted not as benevolent protective advice, but as instruments of surveillance or state control, contributing to a phenomenon known as the 'boomerang effect' where communication increases rather than alleviates public anxiety (Tullis, 2013). Research is needed to qualitatively unpack the specific dimensions of mistrust (e.g., perceived incompetence, politicisation of intelligence, or corruption in resource allocation) that shape citizens' subjective vulnerability and subsequent non-adherence to official preparedness mandates. This focus moves beyond simply scoring "trust" to understanding the social and political construction of security legitimacy.

Beyond the individual psychological factors of RPT, the literature employs the Social Amplification of Risk Framework (SARF) to explain how public perceptions are shaped by social and communication processes (Kasperson et al., 1988). SARF posits that risk information is filtered, interpreted, and often intensified through various amplification stations including mass media, social networks, cultural groups, and institutional spokespersons (Pidgeon, 1998). In the context of terrorism preparedness, the media often plays a dual role: it serves as a critical source of initial information, yet its tendency toward sensationalism focusing on graphic details and emotional impact can significantly inflate the perceived dread and catastrophic potential of the threat, regardless of objective probability (Wahlberg & Sjoberg, 2000). Therefore, preparedness messaging must be strategically designed to counter the distortions introduced by these amplification processes, focusing on clear, consistent, and trusted delivery mechanisms to prevent the spiralling of fear and to foster rational engagement with protective behaviours (Flynn et al., 2001).

A further theoretical extension integrates Cultural Theory (developed by Douglas and Wildavsky) with RPT to provide a macro-level explanation for differential risk tolerance and preparedness behaviour (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982). This framework posits that individuals' cultural worldviews (e.g., individualist, egalitarian, hierarchist) influence their predisposition to perceive and respond to security threats, often aligning their risk perceptions with their deeply held values (Dake, 1991). For instance, an individual with a hierarchist worldview may be more inclined to trust and comply with formal, top-

down preparedness instructions from police or military bodies, while an egalitarian may place greater trust in community-based, non-state security initiatives and be more critical of state overreach (Peters & Covello, 2000). Understanding these pre-existing cultural biases is essential for effective security governance, as it allows for the segmentation of the urban populace and the tailoring of preparedness communication that resonates with specific worldviews, thereby overcoming pre-emptive psychological barriers to cooperation and collective security (Gasper, 2011).

2.1. The RPT, Security, and Subjective Insecurity

Early applications of RPT in criminology focused largely on fear of crime, establishing that this fear is often spatially and socially disconnected from official victimisation rates (Fattah, 1991). Building on this, scholars have applied RPT to specific high-consequence threats, such as natural disasters and public health crises, noting that the management of public fear is as critical as the hazard itself (Paton & Johnson, 2001). For instance, studies on post-disaster community resilience often invoke RPT to explain differential citizen engagement with preparedness initiatives, finding that individuals with a low sense of personal control over the risk are more likely to exhibit defensive avoidance rather than adopting prescribed protective behaviours (Paton, 2008).

The direct application of RPT to terrorism preparedness has intensified since the early 2000s, primarily in Western contexts (e.g., U.S. and Europe). Research in these settings has consistently highlighted the primacy of institutional trust as the single greatest mediator of effective risk communication (Siegrist & Cvetkovich, 2000). When citizens distrust security agencies, preparedness messages no matter how technically accurate are often discounted, leading to cynicism or, conversely, a state of hyper-vigilance (Wachira, 2012). Furthermore, studies by Rhodes (2010) quantified the influence of media amplification on the perceived dread of terrorism, demonstrating a direct correlation between sensationalised coverage and citizen demand for restrictive security measures, even at the expense of civil liberties.

The vast majority of RPT studies in security and preparedness have adopted a quantitative approach, employing large-scale surveys to measure the magnitude of dread, control, or trust scores (e.g., Aven & Renn, 2009). While valuable for generalisability, this approach fails to capture the rich, qualitative lived experience that gives texture and meaning to subjective vulnerability. The complexity of how citizens construct their fear, interpret ambiguous security signals, and negotiate their daily interactions with visible security measures requires a detailed, interpretivist methodology. Consequently, the mechanisms by which a citizen's subjective appraisal of security aligns with the specific communication strategies intended by authorities remains underexplored.

Furthermore, the empirical evidence is overwhelmingly drawn from Western, high-income democracies (UK, USA, Australia, European Union). This creates a contextual bias, as preparedness in these nations operates under different assumptions of state legitimacy and security infrastructure compared to high-threat urban environments in the Global South such as those in Africa where the threat landscape is often compounded by weak governance structures, historical political instability, and lower levels of social capital (Okumu & Wafula, 2009). Existing RPT models may require significant refinement to account for these specific contextual variables. This, this paper directly addresses this twin gap. By employing a rigorous qualitative design in a high-threat African urban security environment, it aims to move beyond quantitative measurement to qualitatively map the expression of subjective vulnerability onto the psychometric outrage factors of Risk Perception Theory. This approach will provide necessary granularity to understand and enhance context-specific Terrorism Preparedness policies.

3. Methods

3.1 Research Design and Justification

The study adopted an Interpretivist Qualitative Research Design with the specific analytical method being Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This design is methodologically essential given the study's core objective: to meticulously map the subjective, emotionally mediated experience of security risk onto the non-technical factors (outrage factors) of the RPT. Unlike quantitative designs that measure the *magnitude* of risk perception, the interpretivist approach, rooted in social constructionism, allows the researcher to understand how participants *construct* meaning from their security environment, providing the rich, textual narratives necessary to bridge abstract psychological theory with concrete criminological reality. This approach ensures the findings offer context-specific interpretivist granularity, crucial for refining citizen-centred preparedness policy.

3.2 Sampling and Study Population

The study population comprised key **security stakeholders and residents operating within the immediate socio-spatial** proximity of the selected high-threat urban environment, ensuring participants possessed direct, lived experience of chronic urban insecurity. A Purposive Sampling strategy, specifically utilising Criterion-Based selection followed by an element of Snowball Sampling, was employed to identify information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). Data collection proceeded until Thematic Saturation was achieved, resulting in a final sample of fifteen (n=15) key informants. This number is methodologically sufficient for an RTA focused on achieving theoretical depth rather than statistical breadth. The sample was systematically segmented into three categories to ensure robust triangulation and comprehensive coverage of the security ecosystem as presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: *Sample selection*

Sample Cluster	Number (n)	Justification for Inclusion
Long-Term Residents	6	Represents the primary service consumers whose subjective vulnerability and dread risk are the core phenomena under investigation.
Commercial Business Operators	6	Represents an organisational perspective, focusing on preparedness behaviours and how risk communication impacts their functional ability to ensure employee/client safety (i.e., perceived control).
Uniformed Security Personnel	3	Represents the service providers who implement preparedness measures and are the direct target of citizen scrutiny regarding institutional trust and credibility.

This layered sampling design was justified by its ability to capture the reciprocal dynamics of security governance, allowing the empirical themes to reflect the complex interplay between citizen perception and the official security response.

3.3 Data Collection Methods and Instrument

Primary data were collected through In-depth, Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI). This method provides the necessary flexibility for discursive exploration of complex and sensitive topics, such as personal fear of victimisation and institutional trust, allowing the researcher to pursue emergent lines of inquiry while maintaining systematic coverage of the theoretical framework.

Interviews were conducted with the diverse cohort of key informants by the primary researcher in confidential, neutral locations (e.g., quiet, private rooms near the research site). This practice was

justified by the need to minimise external influence and maximise participant comfort and privacy when discussing emotionally charged material related to security and survival. The primary Instrument was an Interview Protocol structured explicitly around the core RPT constructs (Dread, Trust, Perceived Control) and their criminological manifestations (Preparedness Behaviours and Subjective Vulnerability), ensuring the collected data directly addressed the research objective.

3.4 Data Analysis

The research employed Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) across a rigorous six-phase process. Following the verification of verbatim transcripts, Initial Code Generation involved segmenting the data into meaningful units that captured participants' raw expressions of subjective vulnerability. The subsequent phase of Searching for and Reviewing Themes involved an iterative and inductive grouping of initial codes into broader, abstract themes. This phase was reflexive because the emerging empirical themes were constantly reviewed against the pre-selected theoretical constructs of RPT to establish the planned qualitative correlation. For example, codes related to police corruption were grouped into the theme 'Contested Institutional Trust.' Finally, the Definition and Naming of Themes used precise criminological terminology to clearly articulate findings that directly demonstrated the qualitative mapping onto the RPT framework.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

All research procedures adhered to strict ethical guidelines, securing approval from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all fifteen participants, guaranteeing their voluntary participation, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Data were anonymised immediately upon transcription, with unique participant identifiers used solely for tracking purposes. The sensitive nature of the topic (terrorism) necessitated a commitment to do no harm, ensuring that all interview processes were conducted with acute awareness of potential psychological distress.

4. Findings

The following detailed findings chapter presents the qualitative data generated from the in-depth interviews (n=15). The presentation is structured around four primary empirical themes which align directly with the core psychometric constructs of the Risk Perception Theory (RPT), fulfilling the study's objective to qualitatively map citizen perception onto the theoretical framework. The analysis below each table is strictly descriptive and analytical, detailing the manifestation of the RPT tenet without engaging in policy discussion.

4.1. Dread Risk: The Normalisation of Catastrophic Anticipation

The first empirical theme details the pervasive sense of Dread Risk a key RPT construct referring to involuntary, potentially catastrophic, and fatal hazards. Rather than being an acute, post-incident stressor, the data reveal that dread has metastasised into a chronic state of "normalised anticipation," where participants live under the psychological weight of an inevitable future attack. This directly contrasts with the RPT literature's common focus on dread as an episodic reaction.

Table 4.1: *Empirical Manifestations of Dread Risk (Normalised Anticipation)*

Theme	Keywords	Verbatim Excerpts (n=15)	Proportion of Sample Expressing Theme
Normalisation of Catastrophic Anticipation	"Always watching," "flashbacks," "gut feeling," "unpredictable," "when not if."	"It's not <i>if</i> a bomb goes off again, but <i>when</i>. You just live like that now, always calculating your next move." (Resident, R02) "I still get the sirens in my head when I close my eyes. My focus is always on the exits. You cannot focus on the job when you are doing two things at once." (Business Operator, B05) "The hardest part is the randomness. There is no pattern to it, which means there is no way to truly prepare, only to anticipate the worst." (Security Personnel, S01)	87% (13 of 15)

The qualitative data demonstrate that Dread Risk is not merely a high score on a psychometric scale but a deeply ingrained cognitive schema within this urban environment. The frequency of keywords like "always watching" and "when not if" confirms that the terrorism hazard is perceived as an ongoing, high-dread, involuntary risk that actively fragments daily cognitive processes. The feeling that the risk is "random" and "unpredictable" aligns precisely with the RPT dimensions of unknown risk and lack of observability, thereby maximising the psychological distress. This analytical presentation establishes that the citizens' subjective vulnerability is fundamentally defined by a chronic, pervasive form of RPT-defined dread.

4.2. Institutional Trust: Contested Credibility and Suspicion

The RPT literature identifies Institutional Trust and Credibility as the most critical non-technical factor mediating public preparedness compliance. The data here reveal a profound crisis of trust, manifesting as a pervasive suspicion that actively compromises the efficacy of official risk communication. This theme highlights a clear qualitative gap between the state's message and its perceived moral authority to deliver it.

Table 4.2: *Empirical Manifestations of Institutional Trust (Contested Credibility)*

Theme	Keywords	Verbatim Excerpts (n=15)	Proportion of Sample Expressing Theme
Contested Credibility and Suspicion of State Actors	"Corrupt guards," "bribes," "PR security," "show-off," "the back door."	"They check our bags but they just want the tip or a bribe to wave you through. The real threats pass through the back door with a handshake." (Business Operator, B03) "When they do the drills, it's just for show, for the cameras and the expatriates. We know the police are here for PR, not for protection." (Resident, R04) "My biggest worry is the internal risk, not the external. If the security is corrupt, no amount of training matters because the system is compromised." (Security Personnel, S02)	80% (12 of 15)

The qualitative evidence powerfully captures the collapse of Source Credibility, a core RPT component. The recurring use of terms like "bribe," "corrupt," and "PR" demonstrates a qualitative judgment that security communication and implementation are politically motivated or financially compromised, rather than protective. This directly relates to the RPT finding that trust is based on perceived expertise, transparency, and fairness. In this context, the perception of systemic corruption acts as a highly salient outrage factor, leading to a functional cynicism towards official terrorism preparedness messages, thereby negating their intended effect. The data establish that communication failure is primarily a deficit of institutional legitimacy, not information.

4.3. Perceived Control: Agency through Hyper-Vigilance

Perceived Personal Control is the RPT factor relating to an individual's belief in their ability to mitigate the hazard. The findings indicate that while citizens feel a profound lack of system control (control by institutions), they have cultivated a compensatory sense of personal agency through hyper-vigilance. This is a functional adaptation to the perceived failure of state-led preparedness.

Table 4.3: *Empirical Manifestations of Perceived Control (Agency through Hyper-Vigilance)*

Theme	Keywords	Verbatim Excerpts (n=15)	Proportion of Sample Expressing Theme
Agency Through Hyper-Vigilance and Personal Preparedness	"Own security," "three ways out," "my route," "don't trust drills," "share location."	"I know three ways out of this building, the security guards only know one. I don't trust the drills; my security is my own responsibility." (Business Operator, B06) "I practice my route every day, looking for changes. My phone is my security—I share my live location with my brother every time I enter this area." (Resident, R01) "We are told to rely on authority, but we teach our staff to rely on their 'side-hustle'—their own awareness. That's where the true self-efficacy lies." (Business Operator, B02)	93% (14 of 15)

The thematic analysis confirms the RPT prediction that a perceived lack of system control (due to contested institutional trust) compels citizens to elevate their self-efficacy and personal control. Keywords like "my route" and "own security" demonstrate a shift in the locus of responsibility from the state to the self. This is a critical finding: Terrorism Preparedness is qualitatively understood not as compliance with official guidelines, but as a practice of individualised counter-security. This manifestation of perceived control is a survival mechanism rooted in the chronic dread and low institutional trust identified in the preceding themes.

4.4. Familiarity: Economic Determinism and Risk Acceptance

The RPT dimension of Familiarity and Voluntariness often influences risk acceptance. In this context, the data shows that citizens are forced to accept the risk due to economic determinism, which qualitatively redefines voluntariness not as a choice but as a professional obligation to the threat environment.

Table 4.4: Empirical Manifestations of Familiarity (Economic Determinism)

Theme	Keywords	Verbatim Excerpts (n=15)	Proportion of Sample Expressing Theme
Economic Determinism and Forced Risk Acceptance	"No choice," "bills don't stop," "this is Nairobi," "accepted the danger," "family to feed."	"You move on because the bills don't stop. The foreigner has a choice to leave, but I have a family to feed here. The danger is just part of the rent." (Resident, R05) "We've had attacks before; it's just the cost of doing business in a high-profile location. We have accepted the danger, and the market dictates it." (Business Operator, B04) "When the risk becomes <i>familiar</i> , it becomes <i>tolerable</i> . But that tolerability is forced by economics, not by real comfort or a belief in the security." (Security Personnel, S03)	73% (11 of 15)

The theme of Economic Determinism provides a powerful contextual lens for the RPT concept of Voluntariness. While classic RPT distinguishes between voluntary (e.g., smoking) and involuntary risks (e.g., living near a power plant), the data reveal a third category: economically-forced involuntary risk. Participants state they have "no choice" but to continue their livelihoods, qualitatively transforming the familiarity with the threat into a necessity. This finding analytically refines the RPT framework by demonstrating that in high-threat, economically precarious urban settings, the factor of voluntariness is subordinate to the imperative of economic survival, thus setting the qualitative ceiling for risk acceptance and preparedness adherence.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study do more than merely validate the Risk Perception Theory (RPT); they provide essential qualitative granularity that refines and extends the psychometric paradigm within a challenging, non-Western urban security environment. The systematic misalignment between official Terrorism Preparedness efforts and citizen perception is fundamentally driven by the qualitative texture of four core outrage factors, which have been empirically manifested in ways that challenge existing theoretical assumptions.

5.1. Reframing Dread Risk: From Acute Response to Chronic Schema

The empirical theme of the Normalisation of Catastrophic Anticipation profoundly extends the RPT construct of Dread Risk. In classical RPT literature, dread is often framed as an acute psychological response to a specific, imminent, or recent hazard. However, the qualitative data reveal that in this high-threat context, dread has been absorbed into a chronic cognitive schema. The pervasive conviction that an attack is a matter of "when, not if" establishes a state of endemic insecurity where the hazard is always present and actively fragments daily life (e.g., constant search for exits). This finding shifts the criminological understanding of dread from an episodic event to a permanent environmental stressor. Consequently, terrorism preparedness messaging designed for acute reactions is fundamentally flawed when addressing a public experiencing chronic anticipation.

5.2. The Crisis of Epistemic Trust and Communication Failure

The emergence of Contested Credibility and Suspicion of State Actors as a dominant theme directly addresses the RPT construct of Institutional Trust. The data demonstrate that communication failure in this context is not a problem of information deficit (lack of technical data) but rather a crisis of epistemic legitimacy (lack of moral authority). Terms like "bribe," "corrupt," and "PR security" occupy a significant part of the semantic field of security discourse, signifying that security measures are perceived as being enacted for surveillance or external consumption, rather than genuine protection. Analytically, this means that even perfectly accurate preparedness messaging will suffer a systemic cynicism, which acts as a qualitative barrier to collective efficacy. The study thus argues that trust in this context is qualitatively contingent upon demonstrated integrity and transparency, a deeper requirement than mere perceived expertise.

5.3. The Functional Shift in Perceived Control and Self-Efficacy

The theme of Agency through Hyper-Vigilance demonstrates a functional qualitative shift in the RPT concept of Perceived Control. Lacking system control due to the crisis of institutional trust, citizens compensate by elevating their personal self-efficacy through intense individualised counter-security (e.g., knowing three escape routes). This hyper-vigilance, while adaptive for personal survival, signifies a collective retreat from shared preparedness responsibility. The qualitative analysis reveals that official preparedness drills are rejected in favour of subjective agency a person's belief in their own capability to survive, independent of state intervention. This finding suggests that security governance should pivot from demanding compliance to facilitating and integrating these pre-existing, localised forms of self-efficacy to foster a genuinely resilient community response.

5.4. Extending RPT: The Concept of Economically-Forced Involuntary Risk

The theme of Economic Determinism and Forced Risk Acceptance constitutes the most significant theoretical extension of RPT within this context. Classical RPT differentiates between voluntary and involuntary risks. However, the qualitative data introduce the concept of economically-forced involuntary risk. Participants state they "have no choice" because their "bills don't stop," effectively subordinating the psychological dimension of voluntariness to the economic imperative of survival. In this urban environment, the Familiarity with the threat is not benign; it is a forced tolerability dictated by the socio-economic structure. This qualitatively refines RPT by highlighting how poverty and economic precarity act as powerful, contextual outrage factors, compelling risk acceptance and thus setting a low ceiling for adherence to cost- or behaviour-altering preparedness measures.

5.6. Implications for Security Governance and Terrorism Preparedness Policy

The qualitative mapping of subjective vulnerability onto RPT constructs carries several profound implications for security governance in high-threat urban centres. Firstly, policy makers must abandon the flawed assumption of a Hazard Magnitude model and adopt a governance strategy centred on Outrage Management (Sandman, 1993). Since citizen perception is qualitatively dominated by dread and mistrust, security communication must prioritize the symbolic dimensions of honesty, transparency, and caring over the technical communication of statistical risk. This demands a radical shift from informational briefings to qualitative dialogue aimed at restoring epistemic trust.

Secondly, the policy focus must shift from demanding compliance to facilitating self-efficacy. Recognizing that citizens already engage in high levels of individual hyper-vigilance, governance should integrate these grassroots strategies into official preparedness frameworks. Rather than enforcing top-down drills, policy should focus on providing resources and training that validate and enhance the citizen's established sense of personal agency thereby transitioning individual security measures into a shared collective efficacy model.

Finally, the finding of Economically-Forced Involuntary Risk mandates a broader, multi-sectoral approach. Effective terrorism preparedness in high-threat contexts cannot be isolated as a purely security function. Policy must acknowledge the socioeconomic barriers to compliance. Measures aimed at reducing economic vulnerability are, paradoxically, critical components of a successful Risk

Communication Strategy, as they empower citizens to make genuine choices regarding risk mitigation rather than being forced into risk acceptance by the imperative of survival.

6. Conclusion

This study qualitatively mapped the empirical manifestation of subjective vulnerability as experienced by citizens in a high-threat urban environment onto the core psychometric tenets of the Risk Perception Theory (RPT). The findings provide a critical, context-specific refinement of the RPT framework, establishing that the failure of Terrorism Preparedness is fundamentally a failure of qualitative alignment between official security communication and public perception.

The analysis demonstrated that citizen behaviour is governed by four interconnected, non-technical RPT factors. Firstly, Dread Risk is no longer an acute reaction but a chronic cognitive schema of normalised anticipation, compelling constant self-monitoring. Secondly, the RPT construct of Institutional Trust has collapsed into a state of contested credibility, where pervasive suspicion regarding corruption and political posturing acts as the chief outrage factor, negating official communication efforts. This deep-seated distrust precipitates the third key finding: the strategic substitution of system control with intense personal agency through hyper-vigilance, demonstrating that effective self-efficacy is rooted in independence from rather than reliance on state security. Finally, the study introduced and empirically grounded the concept of Economically-Forced Involuntary Risk, revealing that for many urban residents, risk acceptance and familiarity are not a free choice but an economic necessity.

The findings of this paper confirms that effective security governance in contemporary high-threat urban contexts must move definitively Beyond the Hazard Magnitude model. The utility of RPT in a criminological context lies not in quantifying fear, but in providing the interpretivist framework necessary to understand the deep, qualitative meanings of citizen experience. Future preparedness policies must therefore pivot toward an outrage management paradigm, focusing on restoring institutional legitimacy and fostering community-centric self-efficacy, thereby enabling a genuine transition from a state of individual survival to robust collective resilience. This qualitative mapping provides the evidence-based foundation for achieving that critical goal.

7. Limitation

The major theoretical limitation of the Risk Perception Theory (RPT) when applied to the specific field of terrorism is its contextual and conceptual inability to model intentional, adaptive threats. RPT was originally designed for studying reactions to natural or technical hazards (e.g., pollution, nuclear energy), which are non-adaptive and lack malicious human agency. Terrorism, as a criminological phenomenon, involves a rational and hostile actor whose actions are strategic and constantly adapt to security measures. By focusing almost exclusively on the recipient's psychological response (dread, control, trust), RPT fails to adequately integrate the feedback loop between the malicious intent of the source and the resulting perceived ambiguity of the threat. This structural deficit means RPT minimizes critical contextual variables like contested state legitimacy and the historical legacy of political violence, rendering its prescriptions on Institutional Trust inadequate for urban security environments where the authority figure is often viewed with deep suspicion, rather than as a benevolent protector.

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