

Improving Citizen Threat Preparedness & Recovery

 www.hsaj.org/articles/14078

October 2017

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Within the homeland security context, this paper examines obstacles to effective mass participation, ways to enhance citizen accountability and vigilance in the face of threat, and value controversies embedded in this thrust. The goal is to expand and refine existing techniques so as to improve citizen preparation and recovery regarding ominous human security dangers. Although the quest to improve mass public involvement in its protection from internal and external threat is not new, there is considerable room for improvement.

The principal obstacles to citizen threat preparedness and recovery are paralyzing citizen fears, citizen protection measurement difficulties, and citizen safety misperceptions. The ways to enhance citizen accountability and vigilance in the face of threat include wider adoption of a two-pronged top-down/bottom-up approach that directly involves both government and society; more integrated coordination is needed among relevant private and public players in the citizen protection game, improving incentives for cooperation and resolving public-private differences; and expanded citizens' accountability, preparedness, and vigilance needed to increase (1) their post-disruption resiliency, (2) their government input quality, and (3) their personal safety measures. The value controversies embedded in this thrust include finding ways to restore mutual state-society trust, to minimize tradeoffs between human security and state security, to raise the priority of public safety concerns, and to promote stabilizing civil society norms. While these recommendations may seem familiar, new ways of pursuing these objectives (suggested in the paper) can improve both their effectiveness and legitimacy.

In reflecting on the relative importance of citizen protection, a dual danger exists of either overreacting or underreacting to homeland security threats. The greatest challenge remains prioritizing properly what is most important to state and society. The path to secure citizen protection entails considerable subtlety and sensitivity about diverse threats and responses, depending on security vulnerabilities, threat tolerance, compromise possibilities, risk propensities, physical and psychological resiliency, and value aspirations. To improve threat responses, security officials need more creative, innovative, outside-the-box thinking. Delusions, misperceptions, miscommunications, inconsistent actions, and confounding paralysis about homeland security could be tolerable if the world's citizens were universally experiencing robust safety, but such is not the case.

There is no viable alternative to beginning now to take concrete steps to improve citizen threat preparedness and recovery. Despite extensive efforts in this direction since 9/11, we can certainly do better. The individual security impact of anarchic violence on unhealthy lifestyles, personal damage vulnerability, civil society norm erosion, and lawlessness could, if left

unchecked, so remove any sense of order that government would ultimately be utterly unable to function. We citizens must get the ball rolling to advance our security by undertaking better monitoring of genuine dangers and vigilance about state threat responses, faster means to return to normal after shocks, and more effective independent state-coordinated initiatives to maximize our own safety. The author may be reached at mandel@lclark.edu .

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