The Liberal Dilemma: Balancing Security and Freedom in Public Risk Management

Abdullah Demirel*

Abstract

This study examines the tension between risk management in public administration and individual freedoms from a liberal perspective. As state intervention expands across crisis domains, conflicts arise between public security and fundamental rights. Adopting a qualitative comparative approach, the research analyzes risk governance in health, economy, environment, disaster management, and technology, using Türkiye, the US, the EU, and South Korea as cases. The framework focuses on policy instruments, effects on negative and positive liberty, and the principles of proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. Findings show a dual impact: restrictive measures may curtail negative liberty, while social protections and public services can enhance positive liberty. The study concludes that legitimate risk governance in liberal democracies requires a balance between state intervention and individual autonomy, guided by proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporal limitation.

Keywords: Risk Management, Individual Freedoms, Liberal Public Administration, Comparative Public Policy, Democratic Governance.

Liberal İkilem: Kamu Risk Yönetiminde Güvenlik ve Özgürlük Dengesi

Öz

Bu çalışma, liberal perspektiften kamu yönetiminde risk yönetimi ile bireysel özgürlükler arasındaki gerilimi incelemektedir. Devlet müdahalesinin kriz alanlarında genişlemesiyle birlikte, kamu güvenliği ile temel haklar arasında çatışmalar ortaya çıkmaktadır. Nitel karşılaştırmalı bir yaklaşım benimseyen araştırma, sağlık, ekonomi, çevre, afet yönetimi ve teknoloji alanlarındaki risk yönetimini Türkiye, ABD, AB ve Güney Kore örnekleri üzerinden analiz etmektedir. Çerçeve, politika araçlarına, negatif ve pozitif özgürlük üzerindeki etkilere ve orantılılık, şeffaflık, katılım ve geçicilik ilkelerine odaklanmaktadır. Bulgular, ikili bir etki olduğunu göstermektedir: kısıtlayıcı önlemler negatif özgürlüğü sınırlayabilirken, sosyal korumalar ve kamu hizmetleri pozitif özgürlüğü güçlendirebilir. Çalışma, liberal demokrasilerde meşru risk yönetiminin, devlet müdahalesi ile bireysel özerklik arasında orantılılık, şeffaflık, katılım ve geçicilik ilkeleriyle yönlendirilen bir denge gerektirdiği sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Risk Yönetimi, Bireysel Özgürlükler, Liberal Kamu Yönetimi, Karşılaştırmalı Kamu Politikası, Demokratik Yönetişim.

*Dr. | Karamanoğlu Mehmetbey Üniversitesi
abdullahdemirel@kmu.edu.tr | ORCID: 0000-0003-3503-115X
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Introduction

Modern public administration is not limited to the provision and supervision of public services but has also taken on the responsibility of anticipating uncertainties, managing crises, and minimizing societal risks (Korolchuk et al., 2020: 119). Efforts by the state to control risks create both direct and indirect effects on the fundamental rights and freedoms of individuals. Especially during crisis periods, policies implemented to protect the public interest can lead to the restriction of individual freedoms; this situation constitutes both an ethical and an administrative dilemma from the perspective of liberal thought (Saam and Engelhardt, 2022).

Extraordinary situations such as pandemics, economic crises, climate disasters, and terrorism have placed risk management processes at the center of public administration and significantly expanded the capacity of the state to intervene (Christensen and Mortensen, 2024). This transformation leads to a tension between the sphere of individual freedom and the necessity of state intervention. The protection of freedoms should not only be based on legal regulations but should also be ensured within the framework of proportionality, transparency, and participation principles in the design and implementation processes of public policies (Levine, 2023).

This study examines the relationship between risk management approaches in public administration and individual freedoms from a liberal perspective. Within the scope of the study, both the theoretical framework and practical examples from Türkiye and the international level are examined; the interaction between risk management practices in the fields of security, health, environment, and economy and individual freedoms will be evaluated. The main research question is formulated as follows: "How do the risk management approaches applied in public administration relate to individual freedoms from the perspective of liberal thought?"

The importance of this study lies in its analysis of risk management processes in public administration within the context of liberal democracy and individual freedoms. In the literature, risk management is generally addressed with its technical, financial, and operational dimensions; the dimension of individual freedoms and ethics has not been sufficiently addressed. This study aims to fill this gap with both its theoretical and applied dimensions. Especially in the Turkish context, the institutional and technical dimensions of risk management have been emphasized, but the concrete effects of these policies on individual freedoms have not been examined with a systematic liberal perspective.

The scope of the research is limited to public administration practices covering social, political, and economic risks. The study focuses on the balance between the protection of individual freedoms and the security, and public interest provided by risk management processes. The research is concerned only with risk management practices in the context of state policies and public institutions; private sector risk management and individual behaviors are excluded from the scope of this study.

This study makes three original contributions to the literature. First, it develops a normative framework of four liberal principles — proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness — and operationalizes them with measurable indicators (see Table 1). Second, it applies this framework across six policy domains (security, health, environment, economy, disaster, technology) and four distinct administrative traditions (centralized state, market-based, multi-layered regulatory, and high-capacity digital). Third, it provides a systematic comparative analysis that goes beyond single-country or single-domain studies, revealing how institutional context shapes the freedom-security balance. By engaging with both liberal theory (Berlin, Rawls, Nozick) and critical perspectives (Foucault, Agamben), the study demonstrates that liberal principles can serve as practical safeguards against the expansion of state power in risk governance.

To address this research question, the study employs a qualitative comparative case study design. The analytical framework, case selection criteria, data sources, and analytical procedures are detailed in the Methodology section. The analysis covers risk management practices in the fields of security, health, environment, economy, disaster, and technology, with examples from Türkiye, the United States, the European Union, and South Korea. The USA, with its liberal market-based governance model, emphasizes individual freedom; the EU adopts a collective risk management approach based on normative regulations and institutional audit mechanisms. South Korea represents central intervention power with high state capacity and digital monitoring tools. Türkiye, due to its strong central administrative structure, offers rapid decision-making capacity but reflects a different administrative tradition in terms of participation and transparency. These four examples provide the opportunity to comparatively examine how the relationship between risk management and individual freedoms is shaped in different administrative systems from a liberal perspective. This methodological framework enables a systematic and holistic comparison of the balance between risk management by the state and individual freedoms in both Turkish and international contexts.

Theoretical Framework

Previous comparative studies on risk governance have focused either on single policy domains -such as health (Gostin and Wiley, 2020), security (Scheppele, 2019), or environment (Eckersley, 2020)-or on single country cases (Türkiye: Asrak Hasdemir and Keskin, 2023; South Korea: Cho et al., 2020). Multi-domain, multi-country comparisons using a consistent liberal framework remain rare. This study addresses this gap.

Liberalism and the Limits of State Intervention

Liberal thought is not a monolithic tradition but encompasses different perspectives on the proper role of the state. This study adopts a position situated between classical and social liberalism, drawing on Berlin's (1958) distinction between negative and positive liberty as an analytical tool for evaluating risk management practices**.**

Negative and Positive Liberty

Isaiah Berlin's (1958) influential distinction provides a useful starting point. *Negative liberty* refers to the absence of external interference or coercion; it answers the question "How much area am I left free to act?" In the context of risk management, curfews, travel bans, and mandatory quarantines directly restrict negative liberty by limiting individuals' freedom of movement. *Positive liberty*, by contrast, concerns the conditions that enable individuals to realize their potential and exercise meaningful choice; it answers the question "What are the conditions for self-mastery?" From this perspective, state interventions that strengthen public health infrastructure, provide economic security, or ensure access to information can be understood as supporting positive liberty. As Işıktaç (2019) notes, Berlin's distinction remains central to contemporary liberal theory, while Dimova-Cookson (2022) emphasizes its continued relevance for understanding modern political challenges.

This distinction is not merely theoretical; it serves as an analytical lens throughout the empirical sections of this study. For each risk management practice examined, we ask: which type of freedom is affected, and does the intervention strike a defensible balance between restriction (negative liberty) and enablement (positive liberty)?

Varieties of Liberal Thought

Within the liberal tradition, there are significant disagreements about the limits of state intervention. At one end, libertarian liberalism, represented by Nozick (1974), argues that even public risk management constitutes an unacceptable intrusion on individual property rights and autonomy. From this perspective, the role of the state should be strictly limited to protecting individual rights against force and fraud; any form of collective risk management is seen as a form of coercion.

At the other end, social liberalism, represented by Rawls (1971), argues that the state has a legitimate role in protecting individuals from market failures and collective risks. Rawls's difference principle—that social and economic inequalities should be arranged to benefit the least advantaged—provides a justification for state intervention in areas such as public health, economic stability, and environmental protection. Aktan (2019) similarly emphasizes the dual responsibility of the liberal state: limiting intervention to what is necessary while protecting collective interests.

This study adopts a position that draws on both traditions but aligns more closely with social liberalism, while incorporating libertarian concerns about limiting state power. Following Rawls, we accept that the state has a legitimate responsibility to manage collective risks. However, following the liberal tradition more broadly, we argue that such interventions must be constrained by proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness—principles that serve to prevent the erosion of individual freedoms even when state intervention is justified.

This position can be distinguished from the biopolitical critique developed by Foucault (1978; 2007; 2008) and Agamben (2005), which views risk management as a mechanism of state control rather than freedom protection. While these critical perspectives are valuable for understanding the potential dangers of risk management, the normative position of this study is that liberal principles, if properly implemented, can serve as safeguards against such tendencies. The relationship between liberal governance and biopolitical control is taken up explicitly in the following section.

Risk Management as a Governance Tool

Risk is commonly understood in terms of uncertainty, probability, and the possibility of negative outcomes. Beyond the potential for undesirable events, risk also encompasses the losses that may arise if opportunities are not evaluated

(Hillson, 2002: 236). In public administration, risk management has evolved from a technical precaution into an integral component of governance, strategic planning, performance management, and accountability (Power, 2007). The Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) approach, as articulated by COSO (2017), integrates risk management with institutional strategy, aiming not only to minimize risks but also to transform uncertainties into opportunities. Similarly, the ISO 31000 standard provides a universal framework for embedding risk management into organizational culture (ISO, 2018).

In the public sector, risk management serves functions beyond operational efficiency. Black (2005: 520) argues that risk-based regulation can strengthen democratic legitimacy when implemented with appropriate safeguards. This perspective aligns with the liberal view that risk management should be evaluated not only by its technical effectiveness but also by its compatibility with fundamental rights.

From a liberal standpoint, risk management is not merely about harm reduction but about developing strategic tools that protect individual freedoms (Sunstein, 2005). Different strands of liberal thought, however, offer contrasting views on the legitimacy of state intervention in managing risks. A libertarian perspective, associated with Nozick (1974), maintains that even public risk management constitutes an intrusion on individual autonomy and property rights. A social liberal perspective, following Rawls (1971), argues that the state has an obligation to protect individuals from collective risks to ensure a just society. This study adopts a position between these extremes, viewing state intervention as legitimate when it adheres to the principles of proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness.

Risk management in public institutions also intersects with contemporary challenges such as digital surveillance and data protection. As Nissenbaum (2010) emphasizes, the management of technological risks must respect individual privacy rights. Similarly, critical perspectives such as Foucault's (1978; 2008) concept of biopolitics highlight how risk management can expand state control rather than guarantee freedoms. These tensions—between protection and control, between security and liberty—are explored in the empirical sections that follow.

A Normative Framework for Liberal Risk Governance

The relationship between risk management and individual freedom in liberal thought rests fundamentally on the principle of balance (Sunstein, 2005).

While the primary duty of the state is to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals, legitimate state intervention may become necessary when risks threaten public order and societal security. The liberal tradition insists, however, that such interventions are not unlimited; they must be constrained by principles that ensure state power does not undermine the freedoms it is meant to protect.

This study proposes a normative framework structured around four principles-proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness-that define the conditions under which risk management can be compatible with individual freedoms from a liberal perspective.

Proportionality

The principle of proportionality requires that state interventions be commensurate with the threat and not exceed what is necessary to achieve the stated aim. In the context of risk management, this means that measures restricting individual freedoms must be carefully calibrated: the severity, scope, and duration of restrictions should correspond to the gravity of the risk. As Sunstein (2005) argues, proportionality serves as a safeguard against excessive state action, ensuring that the costs imposed on individual freedom are justified by the benefits to collective security. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, curfews and movement restrictions were widely implemented, but their legitimacy depended on whether they were proportionate to the public health threat at each stage of the crisis (Gostin and Wiley, 2020).

Transparency

Transparency requires that the justifications for risk management interventions be publicly available and accessible. When the state restricts individual freedoms, it bears the burden of explaining the grounds for such restrictions, the evidence supporting them, and the mechanisms for review. Transparency serves both epistemic and democratic functions: it enables public scrutiny of state action and fosters trust in governance. The principle is particularly critical in liberal democracies, where the legitimacy of state intervention depends on the ability of citizens to understand and evaluate the actions taken in their name. As Levi and Stoker (2000) demonstrate, political trust is closely linked to the perceived transparency of public institutions.

Participation

The principle of participation holds that affected individuals and groups should have a voice in risk management decisions. From a liberal perspective, participation is not merely a procedural addition but a substantive requirement of democratic governance (Fung, 2006). When citizens are involved in decision-making processes—whether through consultation mechanisms, civil society engagement, or local governance structures—risk management policies gain social legitimacy and are more likely to reflect the diverse interests and values of those affected. Participatory processes also serve as a check on state power, ensuring that risk management does not become a one-directional exercise of authority.

Temporariness

The principle of temporariness requires that risk management measures be lifted when the risk subsides. Extraordinary interventions justified during crises should not become permanent features of governance. As Aleinikoff (2002) emphasizes, measures that restrict fundamental rights must have clear sunset clauses and regular review mechanisms. When temporary measures become entrenched, they risk normalizing a permanent state of exception—a concern raised by critical theorists such as Agamben (2005) and a recurring challenge in liberal democracies. The liberal legitimacy of risk management depends in part on the reversibility of interventions: what is justified during an emergency may become an unacceptable infringement once the emergency passes.

Applying the Framework

These four principles do not operate in isolation; they are mutually reinforcing. Transparent processes enable meaningful participation; participatory mechanisms enhance transparency; proportionality provides a standard against which both can be assessed; and temporariness ensures that the overall framework remains responsive to changing conditions. Together, they constitute a normative framework for evaluating whether risk management practices align with liberal values.

Daemen (2022: 294) warns that political interventions made on the grounds of security risk "systematic violation of key rights, loss of civil liberties, and weakening of the democratic process." This study takes this warning seriously. The proposed framework is designed precisely to guard against such outcomes by establishing clear conditions under which state intervention can be considered legitimate from a liberal perspective.

The framework also responds to contemporary challenges that test the limits of liberal governance. In the digital domain, for instance, the management of technological risks must respect individual privacy rights, as Nissenbaum (2010) argues. In environmental policy, the state must be able to address climate risks without resorting to excessive restrictions on individual choice (Hickel, 2020; Green and Healy, 2022). In each case, the principles of proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness provide a consistent set of criteria for assessing the compatibility of risk management with individual freedoms.

Critical Perspectives: Biopolitics and the State of Exception

The liberal framework developed above is not uncontested. Critical public administration literature offers a fundamental challenge, arguing that risk management practices are not neutral tools but mechanisms through which state power expands. Foucault's (1978; 2008) concept of biopolitics suggests that modern states govern populations through the administration of life itself—health, security, and risk—positioning individuals as objects to be monitored rather than rights-bearing subjects. Agamben (2005) extends this critique by warning that the state of exception—the suspension of normal legal order during crises—can become permanent, normalizing emergency measures and eroding fundamental freedoms. These perspectives offer an important corrective, reminding us that the freedom-security balance is not a technical problem but a site of political struggle. This study takes these critiques seriously. The normative framework proposed in the previous section—built on proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness—is designed precisely to address these concerns. Temporariness counters the normalization of the state of exception; transparency and participation ensure citizens have access to information and a voice in decision-making; proportionality provides a standard for evaluating whether interventions exceed what is necessary. The liberal framework advanced here thus does not ignore critical perspectives but engages with them constructively, formulating institutional safeguards against the risks Foucault and Agamben identify. The empirical analysis that follows will assess the extent to which risk management practices in different countries approximate these principles.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design to examine the relationship between risk management approaches in public administration and individual freedoms from a liberal perspective. The research design consists of three main components: (1) a theoretical framework establishing the liberal criteria for legitimate risk management, (2) a comparative analysis of selected country cases based on these criteria, and (3) a cross-sectoral evaluation of risk management practices.

Case Selection

The study adopts a most-different systems design (Przeworski and Teune, 1970) to identify how risk management-freedom relations vary across different administrative traditions and political systems. Four cases were selected based on their representative power in terms of administrative tradition, crisis management capacity, and liberal-democratic values:

- **United States:** Represents a liberal market-based governance model with strong emphasis on individual freedom and limited state intervention
- **European Union:** Embodies a multi-layered, regulatory governance approach with collective risk management based on normative regulations and institutional oversight
- **South Korea:** Illustrates high state capacity with centralized intervention capacity and advanced digital monitoring tools
- **Türkiye:** Represents a strong centralized administrative structure with rapid decision-making capacity but distinct patterns in participation and transparency

This selection allows for a systematic comparison of how the balance between risk management and individual freedoms is shaped in different institutional and political contexts.

Analytical Framework

The analysis is structured around four liberal principles that define the conditions for legitimate state intervention in risk management:

Table 1: Liberal Principles for Legitimate Risk Management

Principle	Definition	Operational Indicators
Proportionality	Interventions must be commensurate with the threat and not exceed what is necessary	Duration of measures; scope of restrictions; legal basis
Transparency	Justifications for interventions must be publicly available and accessible	Public disclosure of data; clarity of decision-making processes
Participation	Affected individuals and groups should have a voice in decision-making	Involvement of local actors; civil society consultation; feedback mechanisms
Temporariness	Measures should be lifted when the risk subsides	Sunset clauses; regular review mechanisms; clear exit strategies

Source: Author's own compilation.

These principles are applied across six risk domains: security, health, environment, economy, disaster, and technology. For each domain, the analysis examines: (a) the type of risk addressed, (b) the intervention tools employed by public authorities, (c) the impact on individual freedoms (distinguishing between negative and positive liberty), and (d) the degree of alignment with the four liberal principles.

Data Sources

The study draws on multiple sources of qualitative data:

- **Academic literature:** Peer-reviewed articles and books on risk management, public administration, and liberal theory
- **Policy documents:** Official government strategies, action plans, and regulatory frameworks from each case
- **Institutional reports:** Documents from international organizations (OECD, World Bank, EU), national audit institutions, and independent research bodies
- **Legal texts:** Constitutional provisions, laws, and court decisions relevant to risk interventions

Data collection focused on the period 2000-2025 to capture contemporary risk management practices, with particular attention to crisis events including the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters, and technological transformations.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis was conducted in three stages:

1. **Within-case analysis:** For each country, risk management practices across the six domains were analyzed using the four liberal principles as evaluative criteria
2. **Cross-case comparison:** Findings were synthesized using an analytical matrix to identify patterns, differences, and common challenges
3. **Synthesis:** Comparative findings were integrated with the theoretical framework to draw conclusions about the conditions under which risk management can be compatible with individual freedoms from a liberal perspective

Limitations

This study is limited to public sector risk management and does not cover private sector or individual risk behaviors. The analysis relies primarily on secondary sources; future research could complement these findings with primary data such as interviews with policymakers or surveys of affected populations. The study does not include discourse analysis of political speeches or media coverage, which remains a separate methodological approach for future inquiry.

Risk Management Practices in Public Administration

Security Policies

Security policies represent one of the fundamental duties of the modern state, addressing risks related to terrorism, organized crime, border security, cybersecurity, and threats to critical infrastructure. These risks are characterized by their potential to cause widespread harm, their often unpredictable nature, and their direct impact on public order and national security (Beck, 2009). States employ a range of tools to manage these risks, including surveillance systems, intelligence gathering, emergency powers, counter-terrorism legislation, and military or police operations. In many countries, these tools have expanded significantly in response to major events such as the 9/11 attacks, the 2016 coup attempt in Türkiye, and evolving cyber threats (Waldron, 2003; Scheppele, 2019).

From a liberal perspective, security interventions primarily affect negative liberties—the freedom from state interference. Surveillance programs restrict privacy rights; emergency powers limit freedom of assembly and expression; counter-terrorism measures can restrict freedom of movement and due process rights. However, security policies can also support positive liberties by creating conditions under which individuals can exercise their freedoms without fear of violence or intimidation. The tension lies in determining where the balance should be struck. Security interventions are legitimate only when they adhere to the principles of proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. Proportionality requires that measures be commensurate with the threat; blanket surveillance programs that capture vast amounts of data from ordinary citizens may fail this test. Transparency demands that the legal basis for security measures be publicly available and that oversight mechanisms be in place. Participation involves parliamentary oversight, judicial review, and civil society engagement in security policy formulation. Temporariness is particularly critical: emergency powers justified during exceptional circumstances must not become permanent features of governance (Scheppele, 2019: 321-322). Table 2 below summarizes the relationship between risk management practices in security policies, their impact on individual freedoms, and the liberal perspective on their legitimacy.

Table 2: The Relationship Between Risk and Freedom in Security Policies

Policy Area	Risk Management Practice	Impact on Individual Freedoms	Liberal Perspective Commentary
Counter-Terrorism	State of Emergency, Surveillance	Temporary freedom restriction	Legitimate with proportionality and oversight
Cybersecurity	Data encryption, monitoring	Privacy limitation	Compatible with participatory transparent policies
Emergency Management	Restrictions, security measures	Social movement freedom	Must be limited by purpose and duration

Source: Author's own compilation.

In Türkiye, the state of emergency declared after the 2016 coup attempt significantly increased the capacity of the state to manage security risks and limited the activities of illegal structures. However, during this period, fundamental rights such as press freedom and the right to assembly were seriously restricted. From a liberal perspective, such interventions should be temporary, supported by democratic control mechanisms, and lifted when the risk subsides. In the European context, the European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly ruled that security interventions must meet proportionality standards. In Big Brother Watch and Others v. the United Kingdom (2021), the Court found that UK mass surveillance programs violated privacy rights because they lacked adequate oversight and transparency mechanisms—illustrating how liberal principles serve as safeguards against excessive security measures.

Health Crises

Health crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, have become one of the most critical testing grounds for risk management in modern public administration. The risks involved include not only the direct health impacts of infectious diseases but also the secondary effects on healthcare systems, economic activity, and social cohesion (Ansell et al., 2021: 949). States have employed a range of intervention tools in response to health crises, including curfews, mandatory quarantine measures, travel restrictions, mask mandates, digital contact tracing applications, and centralized vaccine planning. These tools vary significantly across countries, reflecting different administrative traditions and legal frameworks (Gostin and Wiley, 2020).

Health interventions primarily affect negative liberties—freedom of movement, freedom of assembly, and freedom to conduct business. Curfews and travel restrictions directly limit the ability of individuals to move freely; mandatory quarantines restrict personal autonomy. However, health interventions can also support positive liberties by protecting the right to life and health, ensuring that individuals have access to healthcare services and information necessary for their well-being. From a liberal perspective, the legitimacy of health interventions depends on their adherence to proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. Proportionality requires that restrictions be calibrated to the severity of the health threat; measures that continue long after the immediate danger has passed risk violating this principle. Transparency demands that the scientific basis for decisions be publicly shared and that data on the course of the pandemic be accessible. Participation involves consultation with scientific advisory bodies, local governments, and civil society in the design of health policies. Temporariness requires that emergency measures be lifted as soon as the public health situation normalizes (Waldron, 2003: 205). Table 3 below provides a comparative overview of risk management practices in health crises across selected countries.

Table 3: Risk Management and Freedom in Health Crises

Country	Risk Management Tool	Freedom Impact	Liberal Perspective Commentary
Türkiye	Curfew, quarantine	Temporary restriction	Proportionality and transparency important
South Korea	Digital tracking	Privacy limitation	Participatory and transparent policy
Taiwan	Testing and tracking systems	Limited intervention	Information and legitimacy prioritized

Source: Author's own compilation.

In Türkiye, pandemic management was characterized by strong central coordination through the Ministry of Health and the Science Board. Digital tools such as the "Hayat Eve Sığar" (HES) application were used for contact tracing and risk monitoring. While these measures enabled rapid intervention, they also raised concerns regarding transparency and participation. The limited disclosure of data to the public and the prolonged duration of some restrictions generated debates about the freedom-security balance (Asrak Hasdemir and Keskin, 2023: 36; Üner, 2021: 2). By contrast, South Korea and Taiwan employed digital tracking systems while maintaining relatively high levels of public transparency and legal oversight. In South Korea, mobile applications and QR code systems were used to manage the chain of infection, but these were supported by clear data usage policies and regular public briefings. This approach illustrates how health crises can be managed in ways that balance public health objectives with liberal principles (Cho et al., 2020; Sherstoboeva and Pavlenko, 2021: 52-56)

Environment and Climate Policies

Environmental risks, including global warming, climate change, loss of biodiversity, and the increasing frequency of natural disasters, have become strategic priorities for public administration. These risks are not limited to short-term economic losses or the depletion of natural resources; they are directly associated with public health, quality of life, and intergenerational justice in the long term (IPCC, 2022: 18; Büthe and Mattli, 2011). States employ a range of intervention tools to manage environmental risks, including carbon taxes, emission trading systems, renewable energy incentives, energy efficiency standards, and sustainable development regulations. These tools vary in approach, with some relying on market-based mechanisms and others on direct regulatory intervention (Green, 2021).

The freedoms affected by environmental policies are primarily economic liberties—the freedom to engage in economic activity, invest capital, and make choices about production and consumption. Carbon taxes and emission regulations may increase costs for industrial sectors and limit certain economic activities in the short term. However, these interventions can also support positive liberties by protecting public health, ensuring environmental sustainability, and safeguarding the conditions necessary for future generations to exercise their freedoms (Sovacool, 2021). From a liberal perspective, environmental interventions are legitimate when they adhere to proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. Proportionality requires that the costs imposed on economic actors be commensurate with the environmental benefits achieved. Transparency demands that the scientific basis for environmental regulations be publicly available and that the mechanisms for monitoring and enforcement be clear. Participation involves consultation with businesses, civil society organizations, and affected communities in the design of environmental policies. Temporariness, while less central than in crisis contexts, requires that interventions be reviewed regularly to ensure they remain necessary and effective (Eckersley, 2020).

In Türkiye, the adoption of the 2053 net zero emission target through the ratification of the Paris Climate Agreement in 2021 marked a strategic turning point. The Climate Law, which entered into force in July 2025, established an Emission Trading System (ETS) to measure and price emissions in sectors such as iron-steel, cement, aluminum, and fertilizer. This system was designed partly to address economic risks arising from the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), given that Türkiye realizes approximately 40 percent of its exports to the EU market. While the market-based approach of carbon trading aligns with liberal principles by avoiding direct bans on economic activity, the law has faced criticism regarding transparency and participation in its development process. The success of the system will depend on the fair distribution of emission allowances, the operation of transparent market mechanisms, and the effective use of lessons drawn from twenty years of experience with the Emission Trading System of the European Union.

Table 4: Risk Management and Freedom in Environmental Policies

Country/Region	Risk Management Tool	Freedom Impact	Liberal Perspective Commentary
Türkiye	Emission Trading System, Climate Law	Economic activity restricted	Market-based approach aligns with liberal principles; transparency and participation remain challenges
European Union	Carbon pricing, Green Deal	Economic choice limited	Market mechanisms balance environmental goals with economic freedoms
USA	Carbon taxes, renewable incentives	Investment decisions affected	Proportionality and transparency critical for legitimacy

Source: Author's own compilation.

Economic Risks

Economic risks encompass financial crises, high inflation, rising unemployment, fluctuations in financial markets, and the breakdown of fiscal discipline. These risks directly affect individuals' living standards, investment preferences, and future expectations, making them critical for public administration not only in terms of protecting financial stability but also in guaranteeing individual welfare (Tooze, 2018). States employ a range of tools to manage economic risks, including fiscal stimulus packages, liquidity support for financial institutions, deposit guarantees, capital adequacy requirements, and monetary policy interventions. These tools often involve direct state intervention in markets, raising questions about the balance between economic stability and individual economic freedom (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2019: 102).

Economic risk management primarily affects negative economic liberties—the freedom to invest, take risks, and make economic decisions without state interference. Capital adequacy requirements may limit the investment choices of financial institutions; liquidity support programs may involve conditions that restrict corporate decision-making. However, these interventions can also support positive liberties by ensuring that individuals have access to stable economic conditions, employment opportunities, and social protections. From a liberal perspective, economic interventions are legitimate when they adhere to proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. Proportionality requires that interventions be commensurate with the severity of the economic threat and not exceed what is necessary to restore stability. Transparency demands that the rationale for interventions be publicly explained and that the use of public funds be subject to oversight. Participation involves consultation with market actors and civil society in the design of economic policies. Temporariness is critical: interventions justified during crises must be withdrawn as normal economic conditions return, preventing the permanent expansion of state control over markets (Claessens, 2015: 410; Çankaya, 2021: 1143).

In Türkiye, the 2001 financial crisis led to significant institutional reforms, including the strengthening of the Banking Regulation and Supervision Agency (BDDK), increased capital adequacy requirements, and enhanced transparency standards. These regulations narrowed the freedom of actors in the financial sector in the short term but played an important role in ensuring the stability and reliability of the financial system in the long term (Kesebir, 2018: 10). During the 2008 global financial crisis, Türkiye faced a relatively limited impact due to these strengthened mechanisms. The resilience of the financial system was protected through tools such as deposit guarantees, liquidity support packages, and credit expansion through public banks. Although such practices limit economic freedoms by affecting the savings and investment decisions of individuals, they have also increased the perception of economic security and prevented market panic (Arslan Coşkun and Ekeni, 2015: 128; Bjornskov, 2016: 13). In the USA, the Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP) provided bailout packages to financial institutions during the 2008 crisis. This temporary intervention was designed with oversight mechanisms and was largely withdrawn after the crisis ended, serving as an example of how temporariness and accountability can be implemented in economic risk management (Calomiris and Khan, 2015: 77).

Table 5: Risk Management and Freedom in Economic Policies

Country	Risk Management Tool	Freedom Impact	Liberal Perspective Commentary
Türkiye	Banking regulations, liquidity support	Short-term restriction of economic choice	Temporary measures increased long-term stability
USA	TARP, financial bailouts	Investment decisions limited	Oversight mechanisms and temporariness key
European Union	Eurozone rescue packages	Fiscal autonomy restricted	Conditions balanced with stability objectives

Source: Author's own compilation.

Disaster Management and Emergency Policies

Disasters such as earthquakes, floods, fires, and landslides, whether natural or human induced, cause loss of life and property while directly affecting social order, economic activities, and the daily lives of individuals. Disaster management has become an integral part of risk management processes in modern public administration, integrated with national security and sustainable development policies (Leblebici, 2016: 50). States employ a range of tools in disaster management, including early warning systems, evacuation plans, mandatory displacement orders, emergency response programs, and public information mechanisms. These tools often involve rapid, centralized decision-making and may impose significant restrictions on the freedom of movement and property rights of individuals.

The freedoms affected by disaster management are primarily negative liberties—freedom of movement, freedom of residence, and property rights. Evacuation orders may require individuals to leave their homes; mandatory displacement can temporarily restrict the right to choose one's place of residence. However, these interventions also support positive liberties by protecting the right to life and ensuring that individuals have access to safety and essential services during emergencies (Ataç-Studt, 2025: 19166). From a liberal perspective, disaster interventions are legitimate when they adhere to proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. Proportionality requires that the restrictions imposed be necessary and proportionate to the threat to life and property. Transparency demands that the basis for emergency decisions be communicated clearly to affected populations. Participation involves the inclusion of local governments, civil society organizations, and community groups in disaster planning and response. Temporariness is essential: evacuation orders and other restrictions must be lifted as soon as the immediate danger has passed (Öğrendik et al., 2024: 708).

In Türkiye, the 1999 Marmara Earthquake was a turning point in disaster management, leading to the establishment of the Disaster and Emergency Management Presidency (AFAD), the acceleration of urban transformation projects, and the dissemination of disaster awareness training (Yazıcıoğlu and Aktel, 2024: 1485). Tools such as the Disaster Management and Decision Support System (AYDES) have strengthened coordination between central and local governments (Coşkun, 2021: 64). However, challenges remain regarding participation and transparency. While community-based projects and disaster awareness campaigns have been emphasized in recent years, the limited role of local actors in decision-making and the centralization of emergency response have raised concerns from a liberal perspective. In contrast, countries such as the USA, through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), have developed disaster management systems that incorporate greater transparency and accountability mechanisms, although coordination deficiencies revealed during Hurricane Katrina (2005) and the California fires (2025) demonstrate that even advanced systems face challenges in balancing state capacity with individual freedoms (Federal Lessons Learned Report, 2006).

Table 6: Risk Management and Freedom in Disaster Management

Country	Risk Management Tool	Freedom Impact	Liberal Perspective Commentary
Türkiye	AFAD, evacuation plans, AYDES	Temporary restriction of movement and property rights	Centralized structure enables rapid response; participation mechanisms need strengthening
USA	FEMA, early warning systems	Evacuation orders limit movement	Transparency and accountability mechanisms important
South Korea	Early warning systems, local coordination	Limited intervention	Participation and public information prioritized

Source: Author's own compilation.

Technological Risks and Digitalization Policies

Technological risks have become a strategic area directly affecting social order and individual freedoms in contemporary public administration. Cybersecurity threats, personal data protection, the ethical limits of artificial intelligence applications, and the expansion of state surveillance capacity have settled at the center of risk management processes (Lázcoz and de Hert, 2023: 5-6). States employ a range of tools to manage technological risks, including data protection regulations, cybersecurity strategies, digital surveillance systems, algorithmic governance applications, and artificial intelligence oversight mechanisms. These tools often involve a tension between the need of the state to protect against digital threats and the potential for excessive surveillance and control (Laux, 2024: 2860).

The freedoms affected by technological risk management include privacy rights, freedom of expression, and autonomy in digital spaces. Surveillance systems may intrude on private life, while data collection and retention practices can chill free expression; algorithmic decision making can affect the access of individuals to social rights without adequate transparency or accountability (Zuboff, 2019). From a liberal perspective, technological interventions are legitimate when they adhere to proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. Proportionality requires that surveillance and data collection be limited to what is necessary to address specific threats. Transparency demands that the legal basis for digital interventions be publicly available and that individuals be informed about how their data is collected and used. Participation involves consultation with civil society, privacy advocates, and affected communities in the design of digital policies. Temporariness requires that emergency surveillance measures adopted during crises be discontinued when the crisis passes (Nissenbaum, 2010; Kaminski and Malgieri, 2021).

In Türkiye, the Personal Data Protection Law (KVKK) enacted in 2016 and the regulations of the Information Technologies and Communication Authority (BTK) represent important steps toward protecting individual privacy. However, the expansion of e government services, while facilitating access to public services for citizens, has also increased the surveillance capacity of the state, sparking debates about individual freedoms (OECD, 2023). Internationally, contrasting approaches illustrate the range of technological risk management. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of the European Union exemplifies a liberal approach that prioritizes individual privacy rights through transparency requirements, consent mechanisms, and strong oversight. By contrast, the social credit system of China represents an authoritarian model in which digital surveillance serves extensive state control. The approach of South Korea to digital tracking during the COVID-19 pandemic, which combines effective risk management with relatively high levels of transparency and data use safeguards, demonstrates that technological risk management can be implemented in ways that balance security objectives with liberal principles (Mentxaka et al., 2025).

Table 7: Risk Management and Freedom in Technological Policies

Country/Region	Risk Management Tool	Freedom Impact	Liberal Perspective Commentary
Türkiye	KVKK, BTK regulations, e-government	Privacy rights protected but surveillance capacity expanded	Legal framework exists; transparency and participation need strengthening
European Union	GDPR, AI Act	Privacy and autonomy protected	Strong transparency, participation, and accountability mechanisms
South Korea	Digital tracking, cybersecurity strategies	Privacy temporarily limited during crises	Proportionality and transparency prioritized
China	Social credit system	Extensive surveillance and control	Authoritarian model incompatible with liberal principles

Source: Author's own compilation.

Application Examples in Türkiye and at the International Level

The case selection for this study, detailed in the Methodology section, follows a most-different systems design (Przeworski and Teune, 1970). Türkiye represents a centralized administrative structure with rapid decision-making capacity; the United States exemplifies a liberal market-based governance model; the European Union embodies multi-layered regulatory governance; and South Korea illustrates high state capacity with advanced digital monitoring tools. This section synthesizes the findings from the sectoral analysis to highlight cross-country patterns and differences in how risk management relates to individual freedoms.

Table 8: Comparative Summary of Risk Management Practices

Dimension	Türkiye	United States	European Union	South Korea
Administrative Tradition	Centralized, strong state capacity	Decentralized, market-oriented	Multi-layered, regulatory	Centralized, high technological capacity
Proportionality	Rapid intervention capacity; occasional prolongation of measures	Legal oversight mechanisms; temporary interventions (e.g., TARP)	Proportionality principle embedded in law (e.g., ECHR jurisprudence)	Digital tracking calibrated to threat levels
Transparency	Limited data disclosure; central coordination	Public reporting requirements; oversight hearings	Strong transparency requirements (e.g., GDPR, Green Deal)	Regular public briefings; data usage transparency
Participation	Limited local actor involvement; centralized decision-making	Civil society engagement; congressional oversight	Multi-stakeholder consultation mechanisms	Public awareness campaigns; community engagement
Temporariness	Measures sometimes extended beyond crisis periods	Sunset clauses; review mechanisms	Emergency measures reviewed and lifted	Clear exit strategies for emergency measures

Source: Author’s own compilation.

Centralization and Decision-Making Capacity

A key difference across cases concerns the structure of decision-making in risk management. The centralized model of Türkiye enables rapid intervention in crises such as earthquakes, pandemics, and security threats. Institutions such as AFAD and the Ministry of Health can coordinate national responses efficiently. However, this centralization can come at the cost of limited local participation and reduced transparency. In contrast, the decentralized system of the United States involves coordination across federal, state, and local levels, which can create delays but also provides multiple points of oversight and accountability. The multilayered governance structure of the European Union requires coordination among member states, resulting in slower decision making but stronger procedural safeguards. South Korea combines centralized coordination with local implementation, achieving rapid response while maintaining transparency mechanisms.

Transparency and Participation

Differences in transparency and participation are particularly pronounced. In Türkiye, centralized decision-making during the COVID-19 pandemic limited public access to data and reduced opportunities for local input. As noted in the health crises section, Türkiye ranked low on the Covid Data Transparency Index (Üner, 2021: 2). By contrast, South Korea maintained regular public briefings and transparent data sharing throughout the pandemic, which contributed to public trust and compliance. The transparency requirements of the European Union, particularly in data protection (GDPR) and environmental policy (Green Deal), embed participation and access to information as core principles. The United States, while varying across administrations, maintains institutional mechanisms such as congressional hearings and Freedom of Information Act requests that enable public scrutiny of risk management decisions.

Market-Based vs. State-Led Approaches

The balance between state intervention and market mechanisms also varies significantly. The United States and the European Union tend to favor market-based tools in economic and environmental risk management. The Emission Trading System of the European Union and carbon pricing mechanisms, for example, manage environmental risks through market based incentives rather than direct regulation. Similarly, US economic crisis interventions, such as TARP, were designed as temporary support mechanisms intended to stabilize markets rather than replace them. In Türkiye, while market-based tools such as the Emission Trading System have been introduced under the Climate Law, the overall approach to economic risk management has often involved direct state intervention, particularly through public banks and regulatory agencies. The approach of South Korea combines market mechanisms with strong state coordination, particularly in technology and disaster management.

Liberal Principles in Practice

The comparative analysis reveals that adherence to liberal principles varies across contexts and policy domains. Proportionality is most consistently observed in the European Union, where legal frameworks such as the European Convention on Human Rights provide clear standards. Temporariness is strongest in the United States, where crisis interventions are typically designed with sunset clauses and review mechanisms. Participation is most developed in the European Union and South Korea, though through different mechanisms—institutional consultation in the former and public communication in the latter. Transparency remains the principle with the greatest variation: while South Korea and the EU maintain relatively high transparency standards, Türkiye faces ongoing challenges in this dimension, as documented in the sectoral analyses.

These cross-country differences should be understood in their historical and institutional contexts. The strong centralist tradition of Türkiye, shaped by experiences of military coups and counter- terrorism, has prioritized state security over participatory mechanisms. The individualistic tradition of the United States and the multilayered governance structure of the European Union have, by contrast, embedded stronger oversight and accountability mechanisms. The combination of centralized capacity with transparency in South Korea reflects its experience of rapid democratization and technological development. Understanding these contextual factors is essential for assessing the transferability of risk management practices across different political systems.

To illustrate these differences with concrete examples: In Türkiye, the HES (Hayat Eve Sığar) application during COVID-19 collected location data from millions of citizens but faced criticism for limited public disclosure of data usage policies (Üner, 2021: 2). In South Korea, similar digital tracking was accompanied by daily public briefings and clear data deletion protocols (Cho et al., 2020). In the EU, the GDPR requires explicit consent for data processing and provides individuals with the right to access their data — a transparency mechanism absent in Türkiye's pandemic response. In the US, the TARP program included congressional oversight hearings and a special inspector general, demonstrating accountability mechanisms that Türkiye's economic crisis interventions lacked. These contrasts show how the same liberal principles are implemented differently across contexts.

Evaluation

From a liberal standpoint, risk management in public administration requires a careful balance between state intervention and the protection of individual freedoms. Risk management increases the regulatory capacity of the state, especially during periods of crisis and uncertainty, while at the same time carrying the potential to restrict the rights and freedoms of citizens. Accordingly, liberal thought grounds the legitimacy of risk management in the principles of proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness. The policies applied in the context of pandemics, economic crises, natural disasters, and environmental risks in Türkiye show the different dimensions of the relationship between risk management and freedoms.

According to liberal theory, every restriction applied by the state must comply with the principle of proportionality and be explained to the society transparently with public justifications. Proportionality ensures that the intervention does not exceed its purpose, and transparency ensures that citizens are informed and trust the process. Indeed, Article 13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye, titled "Restriction of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms," states that fundamental rights and freedoms may be restricted only by law and in compliance with the reasons mentioned in the relevant articles of the Constitution without infringing upon their essence. The curfews applied during the COVID-19 period in Türkiye seriously restricted individual freedom of movement, but the lack of sufficient information and participation mechanisms led to the social legitimacy becoming controversial. In the international arena, countries like South Korea and Taiwan prioritized transparent communication and digital data usage in risk management applications, contributing both to reducing the risk of transmission and strengthening social participation.

In the liberal perspective, state interventions being temporary and limited to their purpose is a fundamental principle for the protection of individual freedoms. Measures taken in risk management should be withdrawn when extraordinary conditions disappear, and the normalization process should be initiated rapidly. In Türkiye, policies such as deposit guarantees, liquidity support packages, and short time working allowance applied during economic crises were designed as temporary measures to ensure the economic security of individuals. In the international context, the "TARP" program applied by the USA during the 2008 global financial crisis was designed as a temporary intervention and was largely withdrawn after the crisis ended. This application serves as an example of how temporariness and purpose suitability can be implemented in economic risk management.

The most critical dimension of risk management policies concerns their impact on individual freedoms. Every risk intervention creates a tension between security and freedom. Measures taken in Türkiye within the scope of disaster management, economic crises, and environmental risks caused some freedom restrictions in the short term but increased social benefit and security in the long term. For example, mandatory evacuation decisions in earthquake regions temporarily restricted the property and settlement rights of individuals; however, these practices, which prioritize life safety, can be considered legitimate from a liberal perspective when they comply with the principles of proportionality and purpose suitability. In international examples, especially in European Union countries, managing risks through market-based tools encourages risk reduction measures while protecting the freedom of choice of individuals.

This study contributes to a growing body of literature that examines the relationship between risk management and individual freedoms. Previous research has largely focused on the technical, financial, and operational dimensions of risk management in public administration (Power, 2007; Arena et al., 2010), often treating freedom and rights as external constraints rather than integral components of risk governance. More recent scholarship has begun to address the democratic and ethical implications of risk-based governance (Black, 2005; Sunstein, 2005), yet systematic comparative analyses of how liberal principles operate across different administrative contexts remain limited. The present study extends this literature in three ways. First, it develops a normative framework grounded in four principles—proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness—that provides a coherent analytical lens for evaluating risk management practices. Second, it applies this framework comparatively across six policy domains and four distinct administrative contexts, revealing how institutional and political factors shape the balance between security and freedom. Third, by engaging with critical perspectives from biopolitics and state of exception theory, it demonstrates that liberal principles are not merely normative ideals but can serve as practical safeguards against the expansion of state power. In doing so, the study responds to calls in the literature for more empirically grounded analyses of how liberal democracies can manage risks without undermining the freedoms they are meant to protect (Daemen, 2022; Scheppele, 2019).

Conclusion

This study examines the relationship between risk management approaches in public administration and individual freedoms from a liberal perspective. The analysis suggests that the tension between security and freedom is not a technical problem to be solved once and for all but a dynamic balance that must be continuously negotiated through institutional design and democratic practice. The study advances a normative framework structured around four principles—proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness—that define the conditions under which risk management can be compatible with individual freedoms. These principles are not merely abstract ideals; they serve as operational criteria for evaluating state interventions across policy domains and administrative contexts. By grounding these principles in both liberal theory and critical perspectives from Foucault and Agamben, the framework responds to concerns that risk management can expand state control while offering practical safeguards against such tendencies.

The comparative analysis across six policy domains—security, health, environment, economy, disaster, and technology—and four administrative contexts—Türkiye, the United States, the European Union, and South Korea—reveals significant variation in how liberal principles are implemented. The centralized structure of Türkiye enables rapid intervention capacity but faces challenges in transparency and participation. The United States and the European Union demonstrate stronger accountability mechanisms, though with differences in speed and coordination. South Korea illustrates that technological capacity can be combined with transparency to achieve both effectiveness and liberal compatibility. These differences are not merely procedural; they reflect deeper historical and institutional legacies that shape how risk management is practiced and how freedoms are protected. The findings show that effective risk management and the protection of individual freedoms are not mutually exclusive but can be mutually reinforcing when interventions are designed with the four principles as core components.

This study contributes to a growing body of literature that examines the relationship between risk management and individual freedoms. Previous research has largely focused on the technical, financial, and operational dimensions of risk management in public administration, often treating freedom and rights as external constraints rather than integral components of risk governance. More recent scholarship has begun to address the democratic and ethical implications of risk-based governance, yet systematic comparative analyses of how liberal principles operate across different administrative contexts remain limited. The present study extends this literature by developing a normative framework grounded in four principles, applying this framework comparatively across six policy domains and four distinct administrative contexts, and engaging with critical perspectives to demonstrate that liberal principles can serve as practical safeguards against the expansion of state power.

For policymakers, the findings suggest that moving beyond crisis-driven responses toward institutionalized frameworks that embed proportionality, transparency, participation, and temporariness in routine governance is essential. For Türkiye specifically, strengthening participation mechanisms and transparency standards would enhance both the legitimacy and effectiveness of risk management practices. For liberal democracies more broadly, the study underscores that the legitimacy of risk governance depends not only on what states do but on how they do it—with accountable procedures, public justification, and clear limits on state power. Future research should extend this analysis to additional country contexts, particularly in the Global South, where risk management practices and liberal traditions take different forms. Longitudinal studies examining how risk governance evolves over time, particularly after major crises, would illuminate the conditions under which temporary measures become permanent. Finally, the increasing role of artificial intelligence and algorithmic governance in risk management raises new questions about transparency, accountability, and the protection of individual freedoms that require sustained scholarly attention.

Ethics Statement: In this study, no method requiring the permission of the "Ethics Committee" was used. AI-based language tools were used only for grammar control and readability improvement. The intellectual content, analysis, and conclusions are entirely the author's own work.

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