

SECURITY BY DESIGN OR DISPLAY? COMMUNITY AND PROFESSIONAL VIEWS ON INTERVENTION VISIBILITY

CODEE LUDBEY, PERNILLE H. CHRISTENSEN AND GABRIELA QUINTANA VIGIOLA

University Of Technology Sydney, Australia

ABSTRACT

Corporate real estate owners seek to protect assets without undermining the qualities that sustain footfall, dwell and tenant value. We examine visibility of security interventions and how it shapes perception between users of public places and practitioners. Drawing on a focused slice of a larger mixed-methods project (concept mapping, community survey, and semi-structured interviews), the paper compares design-integrated, Invisible security measures with Stealthy and Overt interventions. The Community group consistently rated Invisible measures highest and Overt controls lowest; security practitioners rated all interventions highly; built-environment professionals aligned with Invisible/Stealthy but discounted Overt visibility. We synthesise these findings into a practical Visibility–Acceptance Calibration: start with design-integrated baselines; add service-oriented cues where context warrants; reserve Overt controls for time-bound, clearly communicated needs. The heuristic links visibility choices to asset outcomes by aligning reassurance with place experience, offering owners and operators an approach for procurement and operations that protects legitimacy and performance.

Keywords: protective security, CPTED, placemaking, corporate real estate, public places, visibility

INTRODUCTION

Corporate real estate (CRE) owners and operators increasingly confront a dilemma, that is, how to provide credible protection to their assets without eroding the very qualities that make their places welcoming, legible, and commercially viable. This challenge is particularly acute because the contemporary urban public realm increasingly comprises spaces that are privately owned yet publicly accessible. Shopping centres, corporate plazas, mixed-use developments, and transit-oriented precincts represent a significant portion of where urban populations gather, socialise, and conduct daily activities, yet these spaces operate under private ownership and management (Nemeth and Hollander 2010; Leclercq and Pojani 2023). Unlike traditional public spaces managed by municipal authorities primarily for civic purposes, these privately owned public spaces must simultaneously serve commercial objectives, generating footfall, supporting tenant performance, and protecting asset values, while fulfilling quasi-public functions as community gathering places (Carmona 2015; Carmona et al. 2011). This dual mandate creates unique tensions around security provision. Owners face commercial pressure to create welcoming, accessible environments that encourage lingering and return visits, while also bearing responsibility for protecting people and property from various risks (Chambers and Andrews 2019). The security choices made by private owners of public-facing spaces therefore have implications that extend well beyond individual asset performance to broader patterns of urban social life and community wellbeing.

Within this context, the form of visibility in security, overt guards, cameras, and hard barriers versus invisible, design-integrated measures, has well-documented, mixed effects on how people feel and behave in public places (Daly 2023). Studies show that CCTV, uniformed presence, and vehicle barriers can reassure some users, have negligible impact for others, or even heighten anxiety by signalling ambient threat (Kim, Button, and Lee 2018; Qin, Van de Weghe, and Huang 2025). Over-protection can sterilise space and suppress participation in public life (Whitzman 2011). At the same time, design-led interventions, such as lighting, sightlines, activation, and maintenance, are repeatedly associated with positive perceptions of safety when thoughtfully calibrated to context (Davey and Wootton 2016).

These perception dynamics matter because security does not operate in a vacuum, it shapes whether people enter, dwell, and return. Evidence indicates that perceived risk (irrespective of crime rates) drives avoidance behaviours, while opportunities for connection and social ties are essential for safer, more vibrant places (Navarrete-Hernandez, Vetro, and Concha 2021; Ranaweera 2024). Overly intrusive or threat-centric measures

can push public areas toward “non-places,” undermining the social processes that give environment meaning and identity (Relph 1976; Daly 2023). For CRE and privately owned public spaces, these user responses have obvious implications for footfall, dwell, and tenant outcomes.

This proceedings paper takes a deliberately narrow lens within a larger mixed-methods study, comprising concept mapping, expert interviews, and community surveys, and should be read as a small component of a broader research activity. The mixed-methods study indicates that professional practice is not monolithic, as concept mapping identified two professional orientations regarding public place security protection. Those were a threat-intervention approach emphasising deterrence, detection, and response, and a place-quality approach prioritising environmental design, social cohesion, and community vitality.

While there is broad consensus around the urban design and passive security approaches, divergences sharpen as interventions become more overt and control oriented. Against this backdrop, the present paper examines a single axis of divergence. That is, the visibility of security and its relationship to perceived safety in public places. We focus on the misalignment between end-users’ preference for invisible, unobtrusive protection and practitioners’ reliance, in parts of the field, on visible control for assurance, optics, and compliance (McIlhatton et al. 2019; Smith and Brooks 2013).

Accordingly, the paper addresses the following question for CRE contexts: How does the visibility of security interventions create perception gaps between users and practitioners, and what practical calibration follows from this gap? To respond to it, we draw on the visibility-relevant slices of an online survey from the larger mixed-methods design: (i) community ratings of intervention types (used here to contrast Invisible measures, Covert measures, and Overt controls), and (ii) expert ratings of intervention types.

The paper’s contribution is pragmatic and bounded. The discussion indicates how a single, high-leverage misalignment, visibility, can be calibrated without sacrificing protection, offering CRE teams a proportionate visibility heuristic that begins with design-integrated baselines and introduces visible control only where context and risk justify it. This aligns with the mixed and context-dependent evidence on visible measures and preserves the social and symbolic processes through which spaces become valued places.

BACKGROUND AND FRAMING

Security in corporate real estate sits at the intersection of two enduring approaches. The visible control of risk (e.g., signalling and oversight through guards, cameras, barriers, or screening) and design-integrated protection embedded in the fabric of place (e.g., lighting quality, clear sightlines, spatial legibility, and integrated protection). Each approach has merit and, critically, each carries perceptual consequences. Overt systems can reassure some users and organisations through clear signals of guardianship and procedural readiness; equally, they can prime others to read the environment as risky or exclusionary (Miethe and Venger, 2022; Qin et al., 2025). Design-integrated approaches, by contrast, often register as good urbanism, such as supporting comfort, wayfinding, and everyday use, yet their protective intent may be less legible to decision-makers tasked with demonstrating due diligence. For CRE owners of publicly accessible assets, the calibration of visibility therefore matters not only for risk management but also for place quality, brand legitimacy, and commercial performance.

Placemaking and criminology scholarship highlights why this calibration is non-trivial. Perceived safety is co-produced through spatial cues, social presence, and routine activity patterns (Clarke 1995; Willcocks, Ekblom, and Thorpe 2019). People dwell where environments read as coherent, cared-for, and human-scaled (Bennetts et al. 2017). Over-protection can erode those cues, tipping spaces toward a transactional “non-place” feel (Daly 2023); insufficient signalling, on the other hand, may fail to deter criminal or terrorist acts, or to satisfy governance expectations (John et al. 2023). In practice, the design brief must reconcile the tensions between how to achieve proportionate visibility, and enough legibility to support assurance and deter opportunism, without saturating the public realm with symbols of threat and threat protection.

Security practice adds a complementary, operations-led framing of this approach, considering the aspects of deterrence, detection, delay, and response, and national guidelines on counter-terrorism protection (Coaffee 2009; Smith and Brooks 2013). These forces often pull projects toward visible artefacts because they are auditable, measurable, and communicable to boards, regulators, and insurers (Chambers and Andrews 2019). Yet what reads as prudent from a compliance perspective does not always translate to positive user perceptions on the ground. This is especially salient for privately owned public spaces and mixed-use precincts, where the

same cues that satisfy assurance can influence the very metrics that underpin asset value (Basu et al. 2022; Qin, Van de Weghe, and Huang 2025).

To support these views, we note that concept mapping between two professional groups, those being, security practitioners and built environment practitioners, in the broader study surfaced two professional orientations in how “security” is framed. The first, a threat-intervention orientation (privileging deterrence, detection, and response) and second, a place-quality orientation (privileging environmental design, social cohesion, and routine activity). Threat-intervention logics tend to value explicit signalling and control to deter would be attackers, and place-quality views gravitating toward Invisible cues that read as good urbanism to encourage mixed-use. We reference this divergence to support the framing of this paper, as it helps explain why visibility of control is a contested attribute.

Building from this perspective, the literature further discusses how the visibility of counter-terrorism protective security (CTPS) measures can shape public experience of urban places (Frasco and Christensen 2025). Building on work by Coaffee, O’Hare, and Hawkesworth (2009), interventions can be categorised as Overt, Stealthy, or Invisible (Figure 1) depending not only on their physical form but on how they are interpreted by users of space. As Frasco and Christensen (2025) note, “*Built environment practitioners have a responsibility to balance social, environmental, and economic factors in the pursuit of effective placemaking. Implicit in the concept of placemaking is the democratic principle that public spaces should be designed for the community*”. From this perspective, visibility is not simply a visual property but an experiential one. Even if an intervention is disguised, if it impedes access or signals exclusion to particular groups, it will be read as overt.

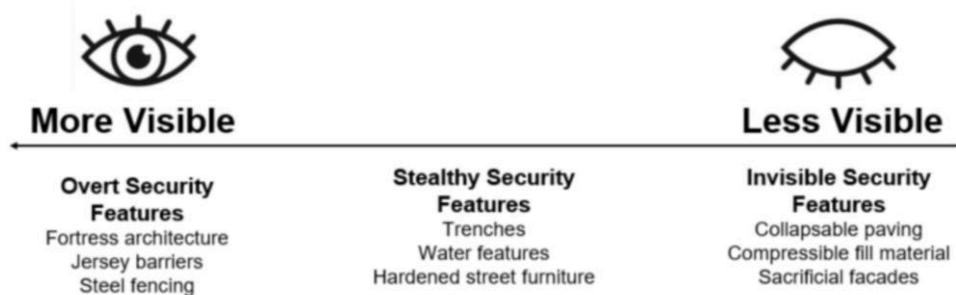


Figure 1. A spectrum of visible security, from Frasco and Christensen (2025) adopted from Coaffee, O’Hare, and Hawkesworth (2009).

While visibility has been theorised in CTPS research, particularly through distinctions between overt, stealthy, and invisible interventions (Coaffee et al., 2009), the concept is often treated descriptively rather than analysed as a systematic variable shaping acceptance. Most existing studies emphasise either crime prevention effectiveness or symbolic politics, without explicitly comparing how different professional groups and communities evaluate interventions across this visibility spectrum. This paper addresses that gap by focusing directly on visibility as a contested but under-examined dimension of protective security in public places.

METHODOLOGY

As noted, the broader study began with concept mapping involving security and built-environment practitioners. Participants generated and organised statements about security interventions in public places, which provided both a conceptual map of the domain and a catalogue of items to be tested further (Kane and Trochim 2008). For this paper, we note only that convergence was strongest around design-integrated, embedded measures, while divergence increased as interventions became more overt. The concept-mapping outputs served as the item pool for the survey.

This paper focuses on the survey, which was the second stage of the broader study, following Fowler (2014). The survey was administered to both community members (n=53) and expert participants (n=10 security, n=10 built environment). Using the interventions (n=73) generated by the concept mapping, respondents rated the perceived safety of interventions on a seven-point scale (from “most unsafe” to “most safe”). For analysis related to visibility, the items were grouped into three bins along a visibility continuum: Invisible (e.g., lighting quality, clear sightlines, community activity), Stealthy (e.g., custodianship, emergency management, subtle operational signals), and Overt controls (e.g., weapon screening, patrols, conspicuous barriers). Items that were considered more context-dependent were provisionally grouped into the ‘Stealthy’ category, consistent with

how the visibility spectrum has been considered in prior studies. The intention was not to assign fixed rankings but to illustrate relative patterns in perceived safety across the categories.

Importantly, while the study organises interventions along a visibility continuum for analytical purposes, it is recognised that 'visibility' encompasses multiple dimensions: physical prominence (how obvious the intervention is), symbolic meaning (what the intervention signals about risk and control), and operational posture (how interventions are delivered and managed). For the purpose of this paper, we have simplified these dimensions for exploratory purposes.

Taken together, this approach provided a triangulated basis for examining the visibility gap. Concept mapping established the domain and generated items, the survey indicated differences in visibility preferences between community and expert groups. This design allows us to illustrate, at a group level, where end-user and practitioner perspectives align, where they diverge, and how visibility calibration can be understood in the CRE context.

Exploratory Analytical Strategy: Group Level Aggregation

The exploratory nature of this research necessitates methodological choices that prioritise theoretical development over statistical power. The expert samples consist of individuals with extensive professional experience and thus are considered sufficient for initial pattern detection and theory generation, while the larger community sample provides comparative context. Subsequently this stage of the study is positioned as theory-generating rather than population-estimating.

Importantly, while the survey produced individual-level Likert data, the primary unit of theoretical interest in this study was the professional group rather than the individual respondent. The research centres on whether distinct groups, such as security practitioners, built environment professionals, and community participants differ systematically in their evaluation of security interventions in public places. Accordingly, we conducted the analysis on aggregated group means rather than treating professional membership as a covariate in an individual-level mixed-effects model.

This aggregation serves several purposes. First, it enhances signal detection by reducing within-group variability to measurement error rather than treating it as substantive variance. In this way, the analysis foregrounds the construct of professional consensus rather than diluting it within individual-level heterogeneity. Second, aggregation is theoretically appropriate, as the research is focussed on understanding the influence of shared training, institutional approaches, and disciplinary norms in the shaping of professional orientations to security.

To test for systematic differences in visibility ratings between the three stakeholder groups, a two-way ANOVA was conducted on aggregated group means (Security, Built Environment, Community) across the three visibility categories (Invisible, Stealthy, Overt). The choice of ANOVA reflects the study's theoretical emphasis on group consensus as the unit of analysis, allowing direct comparison of mean group evaluations across conditions (Field, 2013). While mixed-effects modelling would treat professional membership as a random effect around individual variation, the focus here is explicitly about between-group differences in collective evaluations. ANOVA thus provides an appropriate inferential framework to identify whether stakeholder groups diverge systematically in their assessments of different types of interventions.

This methodological choice does, however, carry limitations. Aggregation necessarily reduces statistical power and masks within-group diversity, including intersectional differences by gender, experience, or cultural background that are known to influence perceptions of safety. Such demographic elements are considered in the broader study. Overall, the aggregation approach reflects a deliberate alignment between theory and method for this focus area, with professional consensus and divergence, rather than individual variance being the focus. The aggregated approach means that the following results should be interpreted as group-level constructs of group consensus rather than individual attitudes.

RESULTS: THE VISIBILITY GAP

The survey results suggest systematic divergence in visibility preferences across the three stakeholder groups (Figure 1). Within the sample, community ratings indicate a clear descending gradient. Invisible measures averaged 5.62, Stealthy measures 5.32, and Overt measures 4.93, representing a 0.69-point decline across the visibility spectrum, a 10% reduction across the scale from most Invisible to most Overt interventions.

Security practitioners displayed remarkable consistency across all visibility categories. Their ratings varied minimally. Invisible (Mean (M) = 5.99), Stealthy (M = 6.05), and Overt (M = 5.94), with only a 0.11-point span across the entire visibility continuum. This tight clustering around 6.0 points indicates strong professional consensus that all intervention types enhance perceived safety, regardless of visibility.

Built Environment professionals occupied a middle position with selective alignment patterns. They closely matched Security practitioners for Invisible (M = 5.77) and Stealthy (M = 5.77) measures but dropped for Overt measures (M = 5.37), creating a 0.40-point gap between Stealthy and Overt categories. This pattern suggests designers recognise the value of Invisible and process-oriented measures while sharing community concerns about Overt visibility's impact on place quality.

Between-group contrasts reveal widening divergence with visibility. The Security-Community gap expands systematically across categories: 0.37 points for Invisible measures, 0.73 points for Stealthy measures, and 1.01 points for Overt measures. This progressive widening illustrates the core tension, the more visible security interventions become, the greater the disconnect between professional confidence and public acceptance.

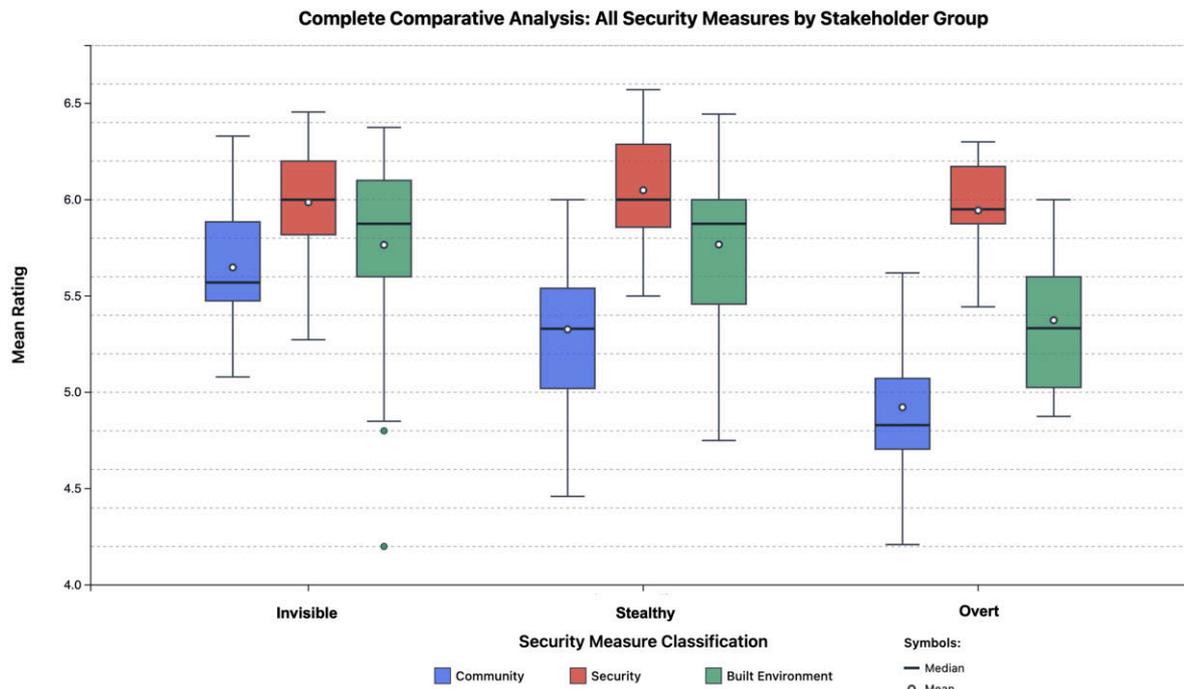


Figure 2. Perceived Safety Ratings by Security Measure Visibility and Stakeholder Group

Dispersion patterns reinforce these group differences. Community responses show increasing variability with visibility (Standard Deviation (SD): 1.14, 1.25, 1.48), suggesting more diverse individual reactions to conspicuous controls. Security practitioners maintain consistent, tighter distributions (SD: 0.88, 0.84, 1.05), reflecting professional consensus. Built Environment professionals exhibit the most heterogeneity for Overt measures (SD = 1.55), a significant variation when compared to their response on Invisible measures (SD = 0.97). These findings are consistent with internal professional disagreement about visibility's relationship to place quality.

Taken together, these descriptive patterns are consistent with security visibility amplifying professional-public divergence. While all groups cluster relatively closely around Invisible measures (0.37-point maximum gap), this consensus erodes as interventions become more conspicuous. For Overt measures, Security practitioners maintain high confidence (M = 5.94) while Community acceptance drops to 4.93 points, the lowest rating across all categories and groups. Built Environment professionals bridge these perspectives, maintaining professional alignment for Invisible measures while joining community scepticism of Overt controls.

Inferential Statistics: Two-Way ANOVA

To test whether the observed differences in visibility ratings were statistically significant, a two-way ANOVA was conducted on the aggregated dataset, in which each data point represented the mean evaluation of a

professional group for a given intervention type. This resulted in nine observations in total (three identity groups \times three visibility categories). While the degrees of freedom are necessarily limited in an aggregated nine-cell design, this aligns with the study's intention to identify whether group-level consensus patterns are sufficiently strong to produce divergence even under conservative statistical conditions.

The results indicate a strong main effect of identity group, $F(2,4) = 13.29$, $p = .017$, with an effect size of $\eta^2 = 0.68$ (Table 1). This indicates that, even at the aggregated level, identity group explains the majority of variance in safety ratings. Security practitioners consistently rated interventions more positively than both community respondents and built environment professionals. Marginal means across all categories showed Security at 5.99, Built Environment at 5.64, and Community at 5.29, translating to non-trivial group-level differences of 0.35–0.70 points on the seven-point scale (Figure 3).

The effect of intervention type was weaker but in the expected direction. The main effect was not statistically significant at conventional thresholds, $F(2,4) = 4.14$, $p = .106$, with $\eta^2 = 0.21$, but the pattern of means echoed the descriptive analysis. That is, Invisible interventions attracted the highest ratings overall ($M = 5.79$), Stealthy measures were slightly lower ($M = 5.71$), and Overt measures were lowest ($M = 5.42$). The magnitude of these differences, Invisible versus Overt (0.37 points) and Stealthy versus Overt (0.30 points), indicates trends that failed to reach significance because of limited power.

Interaction effects could not be robustly tested in the reduced model, but the descriptive patterns illustrate how group responses varied across the visibility continuum. Security practitioners remained stable across all categories (range = 0.11), Built Environment professionals diverged at the Overt category (range = 0.39), and Community respondents showed the steepest decline from Invisible to Overt interventions (range = 0.69).

Table 1. Summary of Inferential Statistics

<i>Effect Tested</i>	<i>F-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>	<i>η^2 (Effect Size)</i>
<i>Identity Group (main effect)</i>	$F(2,4) = 13.29$	0.017	0.68 (large)
<i>Intervention Type (main effect)</i>	$F(2,4) = 4.14$	0.106	0.21 (moderate)
<i>Group \times Intervention Type (interaction)</i>	Not robustly tested (reduced model)		

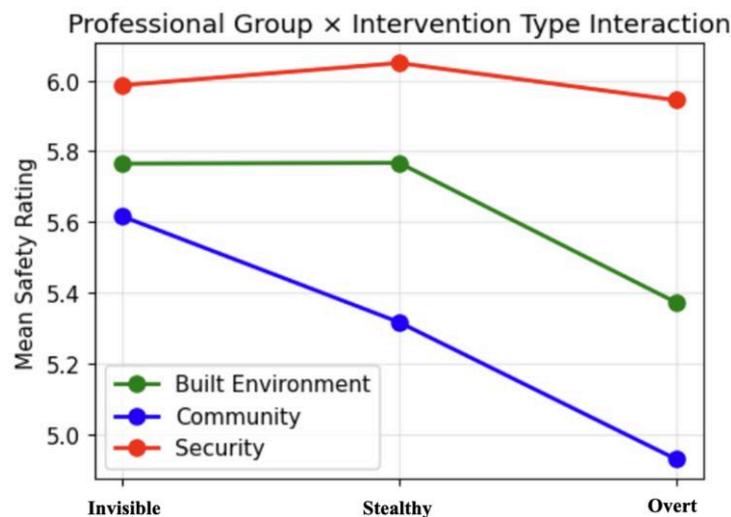


Figure 3. Group by Intervention Type - Marginal Means

Taken together, the group-level ANOVA supports two core claims. First, group identity is the dominant source of systematic variation, accounting for nearly 70% of the variance in ratings. Second, while the statistical evidence for intervention type is weaker due to sample size constraints, the descriptive patterns align with theoretical expectations. That is, Overt measures consistently attract lower ratings, particularly from

community respondents. The analysis therefore supports the argument that visibility is not only a design characteristic but also a social variable that widens divergence between professional and public perspectives when interventions become more conspicuous.

Subsequently, this analysis reveals three distinct orientations in this sample toward security visibility. Community respondents respond to Invisible, design-integrated approaches with contextual tolerance for visible controls; Security practitioners view all interventions as enhancing safety, reflecting professional emphasis on deterrence and operational readiness; Built Environment professionals support integrated and governance measures while recognising Overt visibility's potential costs to place experience and user acceptance.

Where they meet: Convergent patterns and theoretical implications.

Both end-users and practitioners converge around passive/urban-design measures, such as lighting that supports facial recognition and wayfinding, unobstructed sightlines, active edges, upkeep and activation, as first-order interventions that improve perceived safety without heavy signalling of threat. Acceptance remains relatively high through this part of the continuum. Divergence widens as interventions become more Overt. Visible surveillance, screening, and hard perimeter treatments are where community ambivalence increases and professional rationales tend to emphasise assurance or compliance. The middle ground is occupied by low-intensity, Stealthy interventions, for example, approachable custodians, signage, or subtly integrated access delineation, which can be read as service rather than enforcement. In practice, agreement is strongest around “design-led first, controls if needed,” while disagreement grows with the density and intrusiveness of visible signals.

Read together, the evidence suggests a simple calibration band for visibility along one curve. Starting with Invisible baselines, then introduce modest, context-aware cues (e.g., service-oriented staff, subtly legible boundaries) to lift reassurance without eroding place quality, and then recognise an inflection zone where extra visibility brings diminishing returns and spaces feel managed or disconcerting rather than welcoming. User acceptance here hinges on clear purpose, temporary need (e.g., events), and coherent design. On the other hand, care is needed to avoid where high visibility signals threat, reduces acceptance, and stacked Overt cues compound the effect unless there is an obvious, time-bound justification and strong framing. For CRE, the practical takeaway is straightforward. Prioritise design-integrated measures, add visible control sparingly and situationally, and resist stacking unless the rationale is self-evident. While exact thresholds vary by context, the shape is consistent. Reassurance rises with proportionate, legible visibility and falls once visibility dominates the user's read of place, making visibility calibration a tractable lever for aligning protection with user acceptance.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CRE ASSET PERFORMANCE

Considering this framing, the asset-level implication is that design-integrated (“Invisible”) measures are potentially a reliable way to lift perceived safety without collateral costs to place experience, Overt controls appear to carry the greatest acceptance risk for the public, and process/operations (“Stealthy”) cues are the hinge that can either reinforce reassurance (when delivered as service) or slide toward enforcement (when signalling surveillance or control).

While community acceptance is important for commercial outcomes, security design must also meet regulatory requirements, insurance standards, and actual threat mitigation needs (Booth, Boshier, and Chmutina 2023). The calibration approach could balance community preferences with these legitimate security imperatives, recognising that some contexts may require accepting lower community acceptance in exchange for necessary protection. Nevertheless, aligning public acceptance and commercial outcomes (entry, dwell, repeat visitation) requires security considerations in design and operations to start with Invisible measures as the primary locus of security intervention. Good lighting, clear sight lines, CPTED, passive surveillance via active edges, natural access control, elements to direct movement, well-designed and well-maintained spaces, mixed-use/activation, planting that avoids hiding, oversight from neighbours, multiple paths/exit points, green infrastructure, “design for the feeling of safety,” and similar are consistently read as care and competence rather than control and map directly to traditional and second-generation CPTED thinking (Cozens and Love 2015; Cozens, Love, and Davern 2019; Willcocks, Ekblom, and Thorpe 2019). Importantly, as shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**, if security is not legible in an integrated approach, it is expected that community tolerability of a place

will also be poor, as they could feel unsafe. Therefore, some investment in security visibility is important, but needs to be interwoven with a broader set of baseline ‘Invisible’ approaches.

Subsequently, the use of Stealthy measures can be used to fine-tune reassurance, delivered with a service posture. This includes onsite security/custodians, response procedures, emergency management, communication between operator and police, coordination between neighbours, layered security, risk-based approach, detect/delay/increase-effort, public address systems, collect views of users, prosperity/social support/community development, socioeconomic/demographic awareness, security control rooms, and post-incident recovery. These sit mid-range for the community but higher for security and designers, they reassure when expressed as help and readiness. Avoid Stealthy approaches that drift toward bureaucratic or punitive tone e.g., rules & behaviour signage, enforce with fines, white-level inspections, or that feel surveillance-forward in style, which the community reads more coolly.

Finally, reserve Overt controls for context-justified, time-bounded situations (events, alert states), because the acceptance cost is highest here. When interventions such as visible patrols, significant physical security interventions, video analytics, infrared weapon detection, weapons screening, and anti-vehicle measures are warranted, pair them with good governance, clear communication, and custodianship. State the risk posture and duration, explain the purpose in plain language, and staff the space for help first, and enforce second. Such an approach is likely to reduce the “signal of threat,” keeping the experience anchored in service, and helps protect footfall and dwell.

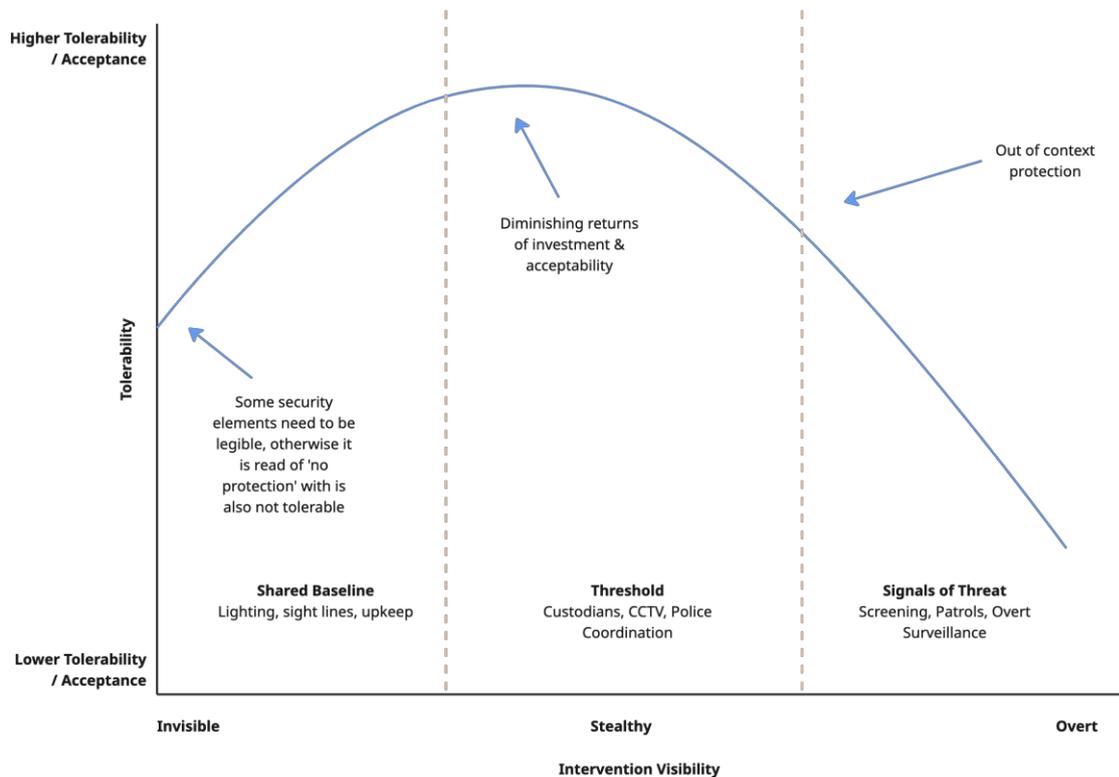


Figure 4. Intervention Tolerability vs Intervention Visibility

Designers and operators should consider these preferences in design briefs and procurement requirements. Specifications that only ask for “controls” are likely to accumulate Overt interventions, precisely where the public’s ratings are weakest. Briefs that name outcomes (perceived safety, acceptance, comfort, legibility) invite an opportunity for design-integrated responses. Further to this approach, the adoption of a disciplined order of operations in the design and delivery process is critical. Deliver the Invisible baseline first to meet a minimum level of protection and then add visible controls sparingly and situationally. When visible layers are added, keep them minimal and purpose-obvious, and avoid stacking multiple Overt cues in the same areas unless the rationale is self-evident. Where stacking is unavoidable (e.g., events), mitigate with communicative design (clear messaging, generous thresholds,) and a service-forward team.

Finally, align incentives so place quality and risk posture are managed together rather than traded off. Tie deliverables to both control effectiveness and user-experience outcomes, ask design teams to evidence how

security elements contribute to legibility and comfort, and brief operators to monitor simple commercial signals (footfall rhythms, dwell proxies, complaint types) alongside security metrics. In effect, the results recast security visibility as a calibration problem, not an intervention decision. Prioritise Invisible design (where all groups are most comfortable), treat Stealthy cues as a service-oriented stabiliser, and deploy Overt measures only when context and time bounds make the rationale clear. This sequencing is the path most consistent with the observed community gradient, the designer middle ground, and the security profession's assurance needs.

LIMITATIONS

This paper presents a focused analysis of a single axis of visibility, within a specific Australia/NSW context. The empirical base is modest and non-probabilistic, so results should not be treated as statistically representative. The modest sample size, particularly for expert groups, constrains generalisability, though the participants represent high-experience practitioners whose role in shaping CRE security practice makes their inclusion analytically meaningful despite small N. Perceived-safety ratings are self-reported and cross-sectional, and as such, they speak to attitudes rather than behaviours (e.g., actual footfall or dwell) and do not support causal inference.

Further, this study focuses on perceived safety rather than actual security outcomes. While user perceptions matter for commercial performance, security interventions must ultimately be evaluated on their effectiveness in preventing and responding to actual threats (Christensen 2021; John et al. 2023). The relationship between visibility, perception, and security effectiveness requires further investigation.

Our three-bin classification (Invisible, Stealthy, Overt) simplifies context and design expression. Several items are sensitive to setting, operator posture, and communicative framing, which may shift how they are read by users. Analytically, treating visibility as unidimensional leaves other relevant dimensions such as authority/response posture, delivery-lifecycle timing, maintenance governance, and demographic segmentation, outside scope. Findings arise from CRE and publicly accessible precincts, and as such, caution is warranted when generalising to dissimilar settings (e.g., closed campuses, high-security areas, or jurisdictions with different threat and policy baselines).

Finally, the interventions used in the survey represent expert-generated items rather than a comprehensive enumeration of possible security measures. Concept mapping participants may have systematically overlooked intervention types, creating selection bias in the items evaluated. Responses are therefore bounded by expert-defined possibilities rather than reflecting broader public awareness of security options.

CONCLUSION

A single misalignment, that being how visible security should be, appears to shape perceived safety in CRE public realms and, by extension, the behaviours that underpin asset performance. Community responses tend to favour design-integrated, "Invisible-by-design" measures that read as good urbanism, while parts of professional practice gravitate toward Overt signals that satisfy assurance and operational needs. Calibrating between these perspectives is a practical task. A place-oriented sequence, including establishing Invisible baselines (lighting, sightlines, activation), followed by adding visible control sparingly and situationally with clear purpose and time-bounds, offers a tractable path to explore when reconciling protection with acceptance. When Overt measures are warranted, pairing them with governance, plain-language communication, and service-oriented custodianship helps sustain legitimacy without tipping spaces into "signal of threat." Framed this way, visibility can be approached not a hardware decision but a calibration problem in practice, with proportionate, legible signalling that supports reassurance up to a point, and restraint beyond it, so that security remains part of place quality rather than its antagonist.

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