

A Bibliometric Analysis and Mapping of The Global Research Landscape on Public Distrust Toward The Police: Implications for The Indonesian National Police

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the global research landscape regarding public distrust toward the police and its implications for strengthening the legitimacy of the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia. This study uses a bibliometric method with a quantitative-descriptive approach to analyze the global landscape of research on public distrust toward the police and its implications for strengthening the legitimacy of the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia. Data obtained from Crossref, Scopus, and Google Scholar for the 2020–2025 period using the keywords "police," "legitimacy," "trust," "distrust," and "public perception." The analysis was carried out through network analysis, co-occurrence mapping, and density visualization using VOSviewer. The results of the study show that global research is still focused on the issues of police legitimacy, public perception, and law enforcement, while public distrust has not been studied as an independent variable. Research representation in developing countries, including Indonesia, is still minimal, indicating a contextual gap and the dominance of developed countries' perspectives. Implicitly, this study emphasizes the need to reposition public distrust as an independent conceptual construct and encourage police reform based on procedural fairness by design, transparency through accountability analytics, and strengthening citizen engagement to build public trust and strengthen the institutional legitimacy of the police.

1. Introduction

The police as a law enforcement institution has a fundamental role in ensuring security, order, and social justice, where its success is not only measured by the repressive ability to crack down on law violations, but especially by the extent to which the public trusts its authority and integrity, because public trust is the foundation of legitimacy that determines the sustainability of the moral authority of this institution; Without legitimacy, every law enforcement action risks being perceived as an abuse of power, so that the existence of the police that is trusted by the public becomes not just an administrative need of the state, but a moral prerequisite for a just and civilized social order.

In the modern context, public trust in the police is a key indicator of institutional legitimacy built through the daily interactions between the authorities and the public, where the principles of procedural justice, transparency, and accountability play a central role in shaping public perception; As emphasized by O'Brien and Tyler (2019), the legitimacy of the police arises when the public considers that the police act fairly and respect the rights of citizens, not solely comply with formal rules, because the police who fail to maintain public trust risk losing their moral authority even though legally they remain in power, making public trust a social resource that determines the effectiveness of the police institution.

However, in many countries including Indonesia, public trust in the police faces serious challenges, as shown by the Global Trustworthiness Index (2024) which places the Indonesian police as the second least trusted profession, due to moral crises, abuse of authority (Nurhadi et al., 2023), and media spotlight on ethical violations of the police (Hamadi, 2024), which has gradually eroded the image of the police as the protector of society; In this situation, legal legitimacy alone is no longer adequate, but must be accompanied by social legitimacy based on empathy, procedural justice, and openness, because increasing public distrust makes the police-society relationship filled with skepticism that weakens the moral authority of the police institution.

Various studies have attempted to explain the relationship between legitimacy and public trust in the police, as shown by Wood et al. (2020) who found that procedural justice-based training can reduce the use of violence and public complaints while increasing public trust, while Debbaut & De Kimpe (2023) emphasize the importance of self-legitimacy—i.e. the officer's belief in morality and the legitimacy of their own role—in strengthen external legitimacy in the eyes of the public; These two findings confirm that legitimacy is not just the result of structural policies, but the fruit of the internalization of the values of justice and ethical responsibility in law enforcement officials.

Meanwhile, Morgan & Higginson (2023) revealed that the perception of young people towards policing is strongly influenced by the experience of direct interaction with the authorities, where experiences of injustice tend to form negative perceptions that persist even though institutional reforms have been carried out, while Mancini et al. (2025) highlight that socio-demographic factors such as age, ethnic background, and civic attitudes also affect the level of trust in the police; These findings confirm that public trust in policing is multidimensional, shaped by the complex interactions between psychological, social, and structural aspects in the dynamics of public relations and law enforcement institutions.

Although the global literature shows progress in understanding the relationship between legitimacy and public trust in policing, there are still important gaps, especially since most research focuses more on the variables of trust and legitimacy, while distrust is often seen simply as a consequence of declining legitimacy, rather than as a stand-alone social phenomenon; in the Indonesian context, this is relevant considering that public distrust of the police often arises along with the continuation of the formal legitimacy of the institution (Cahya, 2021), creating a paradox that has not been studied empirically, so a new conceptual approach is needed that places public distrust as an independent variable in police studies.

Second, geographically, research on trust and distrust of the police is still dominated by the context of developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, while the representation of developing countries—especially Indonesia—is still very limited in the global research map for the 2020–2025 period, even though Indonesia's socio-political complexity with its history of police reform, strong influence of digital media, and hierarchical bureaucratic culture presents a unique context for the study of trust public, so that this gap is not only empirical but also conceptual because it narrows the global understanding of the dynamics of trust formation and distrust in the police systems of developing countries.

Third, there are methodological gaps in previous research dominated by survey and experimental approaches, while bibliometric studies that are able to comprehensively map the structure of scientific knowledge are still rarely used, even though this analysis allows researchers to trace the evolution patterns of themes, scientific collaborations, and the direction of global research development; Therefore, this study seeks to answer the fundamental question of how the global knowledge map of public distrust toward the police is formed and what its implications are for strengthening the legitimacy of the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia, so that it is expected to enrich academic discourse as well as strengthen the empirical basis for institutional reform based on public trust.

Based on these gaps, this study is focused on analyzing the global research landscape on public distrust of the police using data-driven bibliometric approaches from Scopus, Crossref, and Google Scholar for the period 2020–2025, with the hypothesis that global research on policing is still centered on issues of legitimacy and public perception while public distrust has not yet become an independent focus; Through this analysis, the research is expected to be able to identify patterns, trends, and Indonesia's position in the international knowledge network, as well as make an empirical contribution to the development of evidence-based policies that strengthen public trust in the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia.

2. Research Method

This study uses a bibliometric method with a quantitative-descriptive approach to map trends, conceptual connections, and directions of global research development regarding public distrust of the police, by referring to the bibliometric analysis guidelines of Donthu et al. (2021) which emphasizes the importance of scientific indicators in understanding the structure and dynamics of knowledge; data was collected through a Publish or Perish tool that extracted metadata from Crossref, Scopus, and Google Scholar databases in the 2020–2025 range using the keywords

"police," "legitimacy," "trust," "distrust," and "public perception" to gain a comprehensive picture of the global scientific landscape.

The analysis stages in this study include a data cleaning process to remove duplication and inconsistencies, followed by network analysis, co-occurrence mapping, and density visualization using VOSviewer (Donthu et al., 2021), which in an integrated manner allows the identification of thematic clusters, inter-researcher connectivity, and the evolution of terms in the global literature; Through this combination of methods, the research seeks to fill the methodological gap while providing a scientific basis for evidence-based policy formulation to strengthen the legitimacy and public trust in the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia.

3. Results and Discussion

Mapping the Global Research Landscape

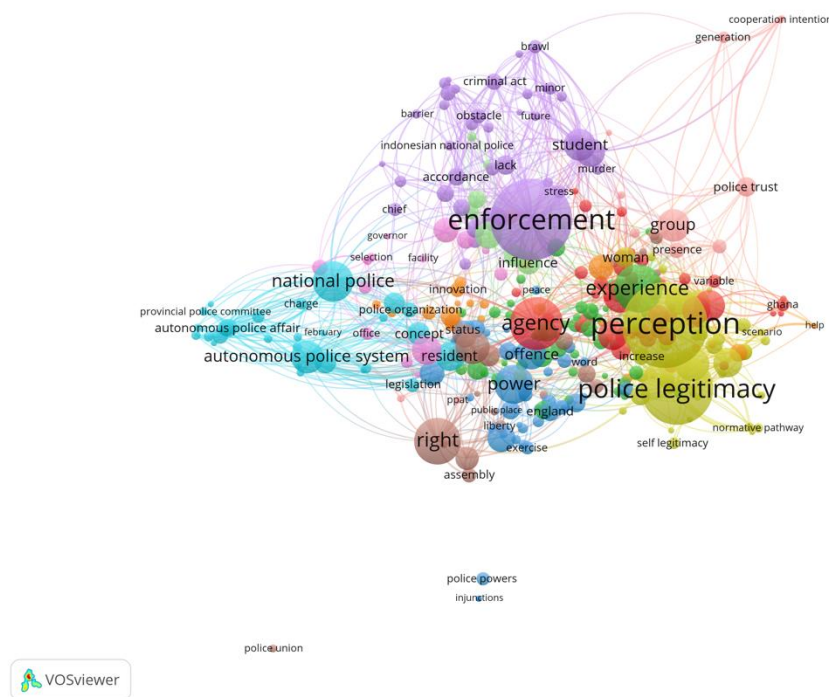


Figure 1. Network Visualization with VOSviewer

The visualization of this research network illustrates the structure of conceptual relationships between various terms relevant to the themes of police, law enforcement, and public legitimacy, where from a total of 346 identified items, 11 clusters were formed with 7305 links and a total strength of 37256 which showed a high level of interconnectedness between topics; Each node represents a keyword with a size that reflects the frequency with which it appears in the literature, while the connecting lines (edges) indicate associations or co-occurrences between concepts in the same document, so the larger the node, the more central the term's role in the global research knowledge map.

Of the 11 clusters formed, six of them emerged as the core of the research network, namely the yellow cluster with the term "perception" (179 links, total link strength 1761, 138 appearances) which highlighted the importance of public perception to the legitimacy of the police; purple clusters themed "enforcement"

(199 links, 1819 TLS, 130 occurrences) depicting a focus on law enforcement; and red clusters centered on "agency" (174 links, 1047 TLS) that emphasize the role of agencies and authorities; Meanwhile, the green cluster with the word "experience," blue with "National Police," and brown with "right" highlight social experience, institutional aspects, and issues of rights and public freedoms.

Thematically, this research map shows two main pillars of the study, namely the institutional and structural dimensions that include enforcement, agency, and national police issues, as well as the socio-psychological dimension that focuses on perception, experience, and police legitimacy; The close relationship between perception and police legitimacy confirms that public trust in the police is strongly influenced by citizens' social experiences and interactions, while the relationship between enforcement, agency, and right reflects the tension between authority and civil liberties, so that police research is not only normative-institutional, but also rooted in public perception and participation in building the social legitimacy of police institutions.

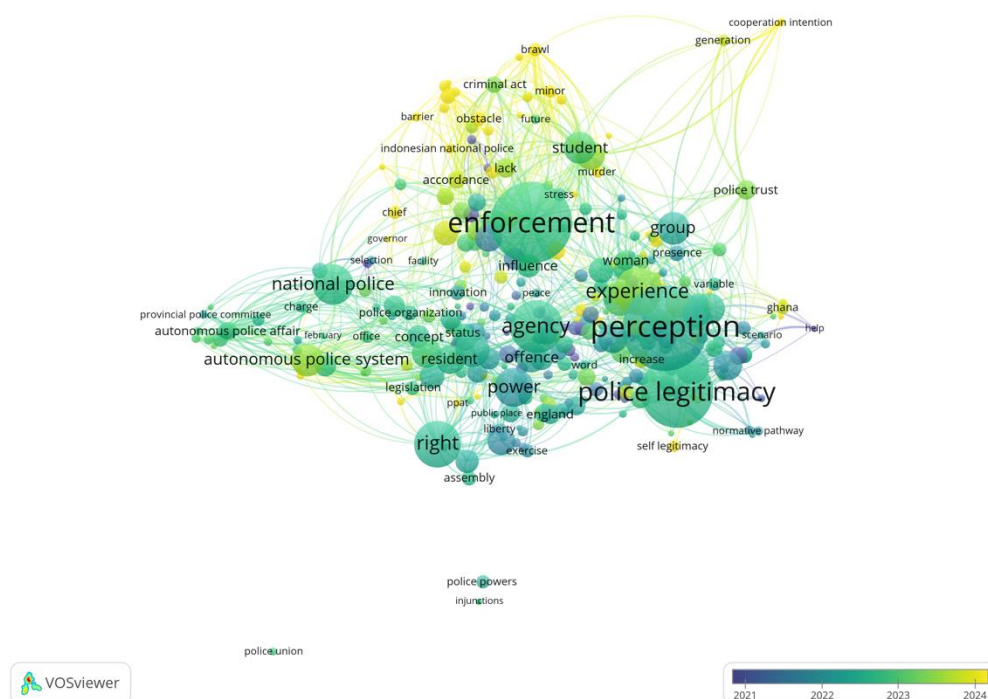


Figure 2. Overlay Visualization with VOSviewer

This overlay visualization shows the temporal dynamics of research on police legitimacy and public perception in the 2021–2024 range, where the colors on each node indicate the dominant emergence period of the term: blue represents an earlier topic (2021–2022), green marks a transition phase (2022–2023), and yellow indicates new themes that develop in 2023–2024; Overall, this map indicates that research on police legitimacy, perception, and enforcement has developed in line with the shift towards social issues that are more contextual and adaptive to the dynamics of public trust in recent years.

In the early period marked in blue, the research focused on institutional and structural aspects such as the national police, autonomous police system, legislation, and agencies that reflected attention to national policies, organizations, and police

systems as a conceptual foundation; Entering the intermediate phase (green, 2022–2023), the direction of the study shifts to the social dimension and community experience with the increase in terms such as experience, resident, and right; Meanwhile, in the current phase (yellow, 2023–2024), the research topic highlights psychological and relational aspects such as student, cooperation intention, police trust, and generation, indicating a new focus on the interaction of the younger generation and social trust in the authorities.

Overall, this overlay visualization shows a shift in the research paradigm from a normative-structural approach to a participatory and perceptual approach, where the focus previously on institutional reform and policing policies has now shifted to the way people assess, perceive, and respond to the actions of law enforcement officials; The dominance of yellow in the recent period indicates increased attention to the issues of trust-building, legitimacy, and citizen engagement, which as a whole reflects the direction of research towards a more humanistic and public experience-based perspective, placing the relationship between police and society at the core of contemporary academic discourse.

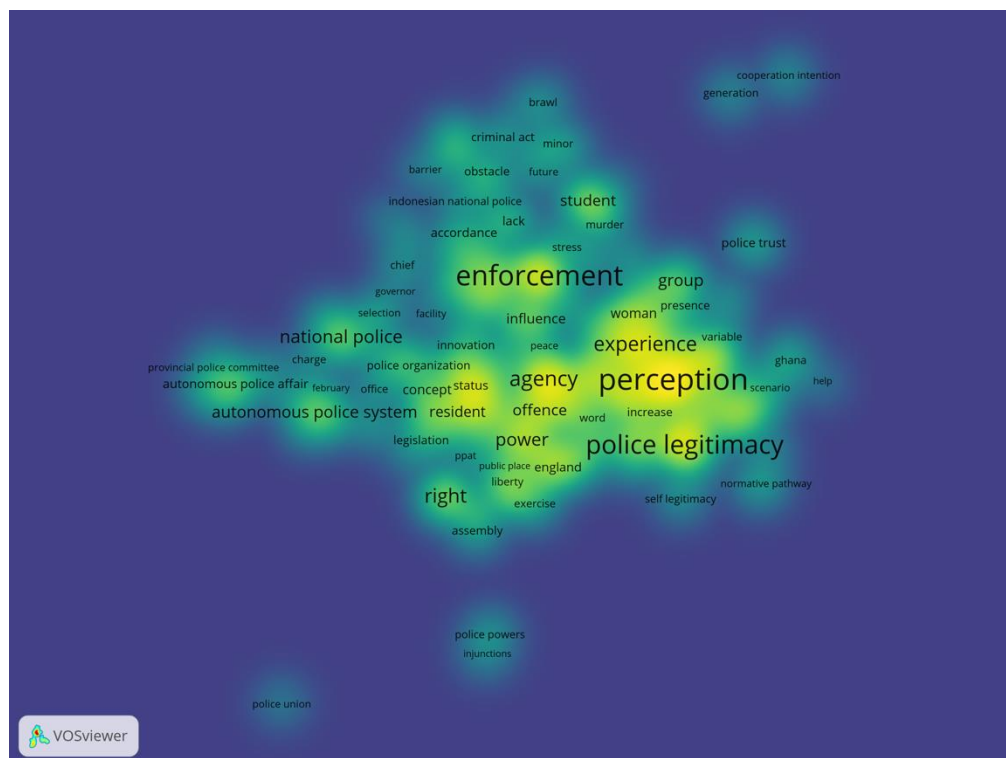


Figure 3. Density Visualization with VOSviewer

This density visualization describes the level of density or intensity of relationships between concepts in the research network, where the colors on the map indicate the frequency and strength of association of a term with other terms in the literature analyzed; Bright yellow areas denote high density representing keywords with strong emergence and interconnectedness to many concepts, while green to dark blue indicate moderate to low density or relatively infrequently used terms, so visually, the central part of the map reflects the main themes of research that the global academic community focuses on in policing studies.

It can be seen that the highest density centers are bright yellow concentrated

around the keywords perception, police legitimacy, and enforcement, which indicate that these three are the core of the research network and the most dominant topics that are often studied simultaneously in the context of public trust in law enforcement officials; Meanwhile, the terms agency and experience appear in yellowish green areas that indicate their role as a bridge between institutional and social aspects, while the National Police, Autonomous Police System, and Right are in the dim green areas, reflecting a more specific research focus and a relatively lower intensity of connectivity than the main theme in the network's center.

Conceptually, this density visualization shows that research in the field of policing is currently concentrated on psychological and sociological dimensions, especially related to how public perception shapes police legitimacy, where the high density around the terms perception and police legitimacy affirms the central position of the issue of public trust in law enforcement officials in academic discourse; Meanwhile, dimmer-colored areas such as the Police Union and the Autonomous Police Affair show research space that is still rarely explored, so this map not only visualizes the dominant theme, but also reveals opportunities for the development of new studies related to the institutional and policy dimensions of the police.

Research Gap Identification

The results of the bibliometric analysis show that during the period 2020–2025 global research on policing is still focused on three main concepts, namely police legitimacy, public perception, and law enforcement, which consistently form the core of the network with the highest level of network density and density visualization, indicating the dominance of approaches that focus on legitimacy and public perception rather than public distrust issues; Thus, public distrust of the police has not been widely studied as an independent variable, but is still positioned as a logical consequence of declining legitimacy in the context of the relationship between police institutions and the community.

From a geographical perspective, overlay visualization shows the dominance of research rooted in the context of developed countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom, while developing countries—especially Indonesia—still have very limited representation in the global research map, indicating a contextual gap in the form of limited empirical and theoretical contributions from developing countries to academic discourse on public relations and policing; In fact, in the Indonesian context, the issue of public trust in the police institution is a crucial strategic issue, especially after various image crises and institutional reforms that have not yet fully resulted in fundamental changes.

From a methodological perspective, global research in this period is still dominated by survey-based and experimental quantitative approaches, while bibliometric mapping studies that trace the evolution of concepts and scientific collaboration are still relatively rare, so this research occupies a strategic position in filling this gap through bibliometric analysis that maps conceptual developments, geographical distributions, and future research directions. with the aim of not only strengthening the academic legitimacy of the field of police studies, but also providing a scientific basis for efforts to rebuild public trust in the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia in a sustainable and evidence-based manner.

Discussion

Global bibliometric analysis shows that research on public distrust of the police is still centered on the issues of police legitimacy and procedural justice (Debbaut & De Kimpe, 2023; Meško & Hacin, 2025; Wood et al., 2020; Sahin, 2024; Li et al., 2024; Pass et al., 2025), with terms such as perception, legitimacy, and enforcement dominating conceptual networks while distrust only emerges as a small branch; This indicates that the issue of distrust has not received proportionate attention, as seen in Indonesia, where the formal legitimacy of the police remains but public emotional distrust is increasing due to the moral crisis of the authorities.

The overlay visualization shows a shift in global research direction from a focus on normative legitimacy to psychosocial dynamics, with the emergence of new themes such as cooperation intention, trust repair, and youth perception (Hobson et al., 2022; Sheridan-Johnson et al., 2025; Estorcien & Headley, 2025; Rasool & Blomqvist Mickelsson, 2025; Tyler, 2025). This shift reflects the increasing attention to the trust aspect of the younger generation, which in the context of the National Police has become relevant as the digital generation shapes their perceptions through online media and indirect experiences (Webb et al., 2022; Brunet et al., 2023; Morgan & Higginson, 2023; Kypraiou et al., 2024; Bibizadeh et al., 2023). However, global maps still show a weak relationship between information justice and the level of public trust in developing countries (Dobson et al., 2025; Irvita & Asriani, 2025; Mancini et al., 2025).

Density visualization shows high density in the area of perception and police legitimacy, while institutional nodes such as the national police and autonomous systems are in the bluish-green zone which shows low linkage (O'Brien & Tyler, 2019; Maskály et al., 2021). This pattern indicates that global research still focuses more on the psychological aspects of citizens rather than the structural dimensions of institutions. In the Indonesian context, this gap is evident because the structural reform of the National Police has not been balanced with a public perception-based approach. Therefore, this bibliometric study emphasizes the importance of integrating institutional research with social psychology to explain how institutional accountability can reduce the level of distrust.

Methodologically, the study for the period 2020–2025 is still dominated by the use of cross-sectional surveys and structural equation modeling to analyze the relationships between variables in a correlation manner (Lee et al., 2025). Nonetheless, longitudinal and experimental approaches are beginning to develop through procedural justice training trials in various jurisdictions, which provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of changing public trust in the police (Morgan & Higginson, 2023). Within this framework, bibliometric mapping such as this study has important academic value because it is able to close methodological gaps by mapping the evolution of key themes, actors and institutions, as well as the direction of global collaboration in the study of public distrust of the police.

The bibliometric analysis in this study reveals three main themes about public distrust of the police, namely distrust formation rooted in negative experiences, media representation, and institutional bias (Ryu, 2023; Martynova, 2020); trust repair that focuses on post-crisis recovery efforts through transparency and public communication (Jangda & Arif, 2023; Kim, 2020); and contextual heterogeneity that

highlights differences in belief levels based on age, ethnicity, and social status (Neupert & Zhu, 2020; Davis et al., 2021), show that distrust is not simply a lack of legitimacy, but a complex social, emotional, and structural phenomenon.

For the National Police of the Republic of Indonesia, these findings confirm the importance of applying the principle of procedural fairness by design, namely the integration of procedural fairness values in every stage of police work—from decision-making in the field to public communication (Brunet et al., 2023). Studies by Morgan & Higginson (2023) and Mancini et al. (2025) show that citizens' perceptions of process fairness have a greater influence on trust than the final outcome of law enforcement. Therefore, strengthening distrust management needs to be a strategic part of the National Police's communication policy and institutional reform to build sustainable public trust.

The bibliometric findings also open up a new direction for policy research, namely the application of accountability analytics-based technology to strengthen the accountability and transparency of police institutions (Irvita & Asriani, 2025). However, as reminded by Dobson et al. (2025), transparency without the support of a strong internal reporting culture can actually trigger public cynicism. Therefore, the application of this kind of technology needs to be accompanied by ethical governance and public participation mechanisms that ensure credibility, so that digital innovation really becomes an instrument of strengthening trust, not a new source of distrust in institutions.

This research makes two main contributions which include: (1) theoretically, this research expands the understanding of public distrust as a stand-alone conceptual construct in the study of police legitimacy, not simply the opposite of public trust; and (2) practically, this research offers a strategic map for the National Police to map Indonesia's position in the global knowledge network and identify opportunities for collaboration with international institutions. By utilizing the results of bibliometric mapping, this research plays an important role in supporting evidence-based policy formulation towards sustainable recovery and strengthening of public trust.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study confirm that global research on policing is still centered on the issues of police legitimacy, public perception, and law enforcement, while public distrust has not been treated as an independent variable that stands alone; through a bibliometric approach, this study reveals the dominance of the context of developed countries, as well as the lack of empirical contributions from developing countries, including Indonesia, as well as offering novelty by positioning distrust as an independent conceptual construct that has its own social, psychological, and institutional dimensions, so that the results open a new direction for police reform through the application of procedural fairness by design, strengthening transparency based on accountability analytics, and a participatory approach that places public trust at the core of the institutional legitimacy of the police.

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