

PUBLIC TRUST IN POLICE: THE ROLES OF TRANSPARENCY, SERVICE RESPONSIVENESS, AND ACCOUNTABILITY AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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Abstract: Public trust in the police often declines due to issues of transparency, accountability, and service responsiveness. This study aims to analyze the influence of these three factors on university students' trust in the Indonesian National Police. The research employed a quantitative approach with a correlational design. The research population was 29,129 students at several universities in Central Kalimantan, with sampling using purposive sampling techniques, resulting in 379 respondents. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using multiple linear regression to examine the relationships and effects among the variables. The findings indicate that transparency, accountability, and service responsiveness each have a positive and significant effect on public trust, while their combined influence provides a stronger contribution in explaining variations in students' trust levels. These results underscore the importance of enhancing police governance quality as a foundation for building and strengthening public trust in the institution.

Keywords: Public Trust, Police, Transparency, Service Responsiveness, Accountability

1. Introduction

Across the globe, instances of unjust policing practices have significantly eroded public trust and cast doubt on the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions. Public confidence in these institutions is largely shaped by perceptions of their performance, accountability, and integrity (Bradford & Jackson, 2024; Schaap, 2021). Procedural Justice Theory posits that organizational legitimacy is determined not only by the outcomes of decisions but also by how fairly, transparently, and responsively the processes are perceived by service users (Tyler, 1990). Procedural justice enhances police legitimacy by mediating institutional trust and fostering a moral obligation to obey the law, making it a critical foundation of effective public sector management.

While the academic literature has extensively examined the dynamics of public trust in the police within Western contexts (Bradford & Jackson, 2024; Schaap, 2021), empirical evidence from emerging democracies such as Indonesia particularly among younger populations with heightened critical awareness remains limited and warrants further investigation. In Indonesia, public trust in the police has shown fluctuating trends and remains highly sensitive to negative incidents. This pattern reflects a global phenomenon, where trust in law enforcement is dynamic and shaped by social, political, and critical events involving police misconduct (Hough, 2020; Bradford et al., 2022). Significant shifts in public trust often follow incidents of police violence or institutional failure in crisis management, as observed in the United States and several Western European countries (Hough, 2020).

A similar trend is evident in Indonesia. Data from the Indonesian Survey Institute (LSI) and Indikator Politik Indonesia show that public trust in the Indonesian National Police (Polri) peaked in 2020 (82%) due to its crucial role in managing the COVID-19 pandemic and distributing social assistance (LSI, 2025). Trust remained relatively

stable in 2021 (80%) but began to decline amid corruption scandals and the viral #PercumaLaporPolisi, digital campaign. In early 2022, trust levels were still at 78% but plummeted to 54–60% following the high-profile murder of Brigadier J by Inspector General Ferdy Sambo and the Kanjuruhan Stadium tragedy, which claimed hundreds of lives. Although a modest recovery was recorded in 2023–2024 (63–70%), early 2025 surveys again reported a decline to below 50%, underscoring the fragility of public confidence and its sensitivity to police behavior (LSI, 2025).

This trust crisis deepened following a tragic incident in August 2025, when a ride hailing driver, Affan Kurniawan, was killed after being run over by a Mobile Brigade (Brimob) armored vehicle during a student protest dispersal in Jakarta. The incident triggered widespread demonstrations across several cities, including Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan, where students representing a critically aware intellectual group demanded greater transparency, accountability, and structural reform within the police force. In response, the Chief of Police established the National Police Transformation and Reform Task Force and pledged stronger internal accountability and transparency measures. However, public reaction, particularly among younger generations, suggested that such reform promises were insufficient to restore eroded trust.

This situation reflects a broader organizational failure in managing stakeholder perceptions. Transparency, responsiveness, and accountability are widely recognized as the three core dimensions of effective public sector governance (Hwang, 2023; de Fine Licht, 2022). Transparency enables stakeholders to understand the rationale behind managerial decisions (Lausch, 2023; de Fine Licht, 2022). Responsiveness reflects the speed and appropriateness of service delivery (Friedman, 2022), while accountability underscores the existence of clear mechanisms for responsibility and oversight.

However, findings from developing countries remain inconsistent. Weak internal accountability systems and low organizational responsiveness often emerge as key barriers to building trust grounded in procedural justice (Wu & Han, 2022; Nursukma & Rosnawati, 2024; Meijer & Grimmelikhuisen, 2020). These conditions reinforce the argument that public trust is a fragile indicator, heavily dependent on governance quality and service consistency. Negative perceptions of Polri are particularly strong among university students, who frequently view the police as procedurally unfair, slow in responding to complaints, and ineffective in enforcing accountability (Finkeldey et al., 2024; Greenwood et al., 2022). Students are considered a strategic stakeholder group due to their high critical awareness, active engagement in public discourse, and significant influence on broader societal opinion.

Therefore, despite the extensive literature emphasizing the importance of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability in public sector management, empirical research specifically examining the simultaneous effects of these three variables on student trust in the Indonesian police remains scarce. This study aims to fill this gap by analyzing both the individual and collective impacts of procedural transparency, service responsiveness, and institutional accountability on student trust. Using a quantitative approach grounded in Procedural Justice Theory, this research seeks to contribute to the theoretical discourse on public management and provide practical recommendations for strengthening police community relations in emerging democratic contexts.

2. Literature Review

The Role of Public Trust in the Police

Public trust in the police is a fundamental pillar of institutional legitimacy and the effectiveness of law enforcement. Mayer et al. (1995) define trust as an individual's

willingness to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will act in accordance with one's interests, without the need for direct oversight. In the policing context, public trust reflects citizens' assessments of officers' competence, integrity, and benevolence in carrying out their duties. This definition is further reinforced by Mappisabbi (2024), who emphasizes the importance of accountability and reliability in building citizens' trust in governmental institutions.

A substantial body of research confirms that public trust functions as a form of social capital, driving civic participation, enhancing voluntary compliance with the law, and strengthening moral acceptance of police authority (Tyler, 1990; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Trust is shaped by perceptions of procedural justice, transparency, service responsiveness, and internal accountability (Bradford & Jackson, 2024). When trust is high, citizens are more likely to report crimes, engage in community safety initiatives, and support institutional reform (Yesberg et al., 2023). Conversely, discriminatory practices or unresponsive services can erode legitimacy and fuel social resistance (Schaap & Saarikkomäki, 2022). Strengthening public trust is therefore essential for fostering a healthy relationship between the police and society particularly in developing democratic contexts.

Minority Trust in the Police

Public trust in law enforcement is not homogeneous across social groups. Historical experiences, structural positions, and collective identities lead to significant variations in trust levels between majority and minority communities. Studies consistently show that trust among minority groups, whether defined by ethnicity, religion, or socioeconomic status tends to be lower than among majority populations. This disparity is closely linked to experiences of discrimination and perceptions of injustice in law enforcement practices.

The National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM, 2022) has consistently ranked the police as the institution with the highest number of human rights violation complaints in Indonesia. According to Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler, 1990), perceptions that legal processes are unfair directly undermine institutional legitimacy. Additionally, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that the social distance between police officers often perceived as representatives of dominant groups and minority communities can weaken social bonds and further erode trust.

Discriminatory policing practices, such as disproportionate stop-and-search targeting certain groups, reinforce skepticism toward law enforcement (Mukherjee & Mathew, 2024). Negative media portrayals also contribute to public distrust, although research indicates that direct interactions between citizens and police officers exert a stronger influence on trust formation (Mukherjee & Mathew, 2024; Desiatova, 2023). The accumulation of negative experiences has led some individuals to avoid contact with the police and resolve conflicts independently conditions that heighten the risk of vigilante justice (Asif, 2023).

Reducing Public Distrust in the Police

In studies on public trust in law enforcement, transparency is frequently identified as a critical precondition for establishing institutional legitimacy and promoting accountability. Hood (2006) defines transparency as the openness of access to relevant information that enables public oversight. Grimmelikhuijsen (2012) expands this definition to include the clarity of information regarding policies, processes, and outcomes, while Mason (1986) emphasizes the importance of accurate, timely, and actionable information for evaluating performance.

Within policing, transparency plays a strategic role in enhancing perceptions of fairness, preventing suspicion, and strengthening institutional legitimacy (Vora et al., 2024). Research indicates that openness increases public perceptions of justice and trust (Schmidhuber et al., 2021). Grimmelikhuijsen et al. (2021) further demonstrate that transparent processes exert a stronger influence on trust formation than decision outcomes alone. Public involvement in oversight also enhances institutional legitimacy. This suggests that transparency is not merely an administrative principle but a strategic instrument for strengthening police-community relations especially in emerging democracies.

Beyond transparency, responsiveness is another crucial dimension in building the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions. Responsiveness refers to the speed, readiness, and willingness of police officers to address public needs and complaints effectively. Parasuraman et al. (1988) define responsiveness as the willingness to help and provide prompt service. Numerous studies show that higher levels of responsiveness are positively correlated with public satisfaction and police legitimacy (Van Craen & Skogan, 2015). Rapid responses to citizen requests including providing explanations when requests cannot be met contribute to a positive institutional image (Choi, 2017). Van Craen and Skogan (2015) even conclude that responsiveness is a stronger predictor of public trust than other dimensions such as performance or distributive justice. Conversely, low responsiveness often fuels public dissatisfaction and weakens trust in the police particularly in developing countries where institutional capacity remains limited.

Alongside transparency and responsiveness, accountability constitutes a core pillar of governance aimed at fostering public trust. Accountability refers to the obligation of public actors to explain, report, and justify their actions to authorized bodies and to the broader public (Bovens, 2007; Bovens, Schillemans, & Goodin, 2014; Brandsma & Schillemans, 2013). In the context of public service, accountability encompasses performance reporting, evaluation, complaint mechanisms, and the imposition of sanctions for misconduct. Public perceptions of police accountability significantly influence levels of trust.

Research shows that robust internal accountability mechanisms including sanctions for misconduct enhance public trust in the police (Vora et al., 2024). Transparency in reporting and ethical auditing also strengthens institutional legitimacy (Kumar et al., 2023), while the combination of accountability and public participation reduces social resistance (Jessie et al., 2024). The literature demonstrates that transparency, responsiveness, and accountability are mutually reinforcing pillars in building public trust in law enforcement institutions (Sunshine & Tyler, 2003; Cucciniello & Grimmelikhuijsen, 2017; Meijer, 2013). Citizens are more likely to comply with the law when the police are perceived as fair, responsible, and open in fulfilling their institutional roles. Transparency, coupled with the protection of human rights, has been shown to strengthen public trust and even mitigate legitimacy crises following major incidents (Vora et al., 2024; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Conversely, the absence of effective accountability mechanisms often leads to declining trust, particularly after instances of ethical misconduct or abuse of power.

However, several studies report inconsistent findings. Shi (2023), for example, reveals that formal accountability without consistent implementation fails to enhance public trust. These mixed results highlight an important research gap: the need for analyses that simultaneously examine the effects of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability on public trust, particularly in the context of police institutions in developing democracies.

Grounded in Procedural Justice Theory (Tyler & Jackson, 2014) which underscores the importance of fair processes in building institutional legitimacy and the principles of good governance, which emphasize openness, adaptiveness, and accountability in public administration, this study assumes that these three variables play a strategic role in strengthening public trust in the police. University students are considered representative of a critically engaged generation capable of rationally evaluating public institutions' performance and objectively assessing their legitimacy (Zaborova, 2000). Conceptually, transparency reflects the extent to which the police provide public access to information and decision-making processes; responsiveness captures the ability of officers to address public needs and complaints quickly and appropriately; and accountability represents the degree to which police actions can be publicly justified. These three dimensions are hypothesized to contribute positively both individually and collectively to the formation of public trust in the police. Accordingly, this study seeks to contribute to the theoretical discourse in public management literature while providing practical recommendations for strengthening police community relations through improved institutional governance.

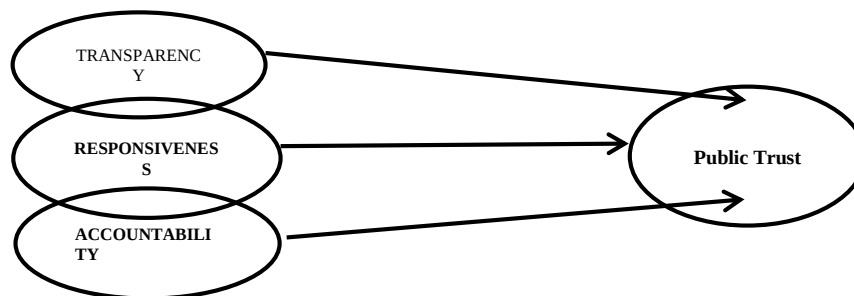


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The hypotheses of this study are formulated as follows:

- H1: Transparency has a positive effect on public trust in the police.
- H2: Service responsiveness has a positive effect on public trust in the police.
- H3: Accountability has a positive effect on public trust in the police.
- H4: Transparency, service responsiveness, and accountability simultaneously have a positive effect on public trust in the police

3. Method

This study employs a quantitative approach with a correlational survey design to examine the relationships between transparency, service responsiveness, and accountability, and their effects on public trust in the police. The research population comprised all active university students from several higher education institutions in Palangka Raya City, Central Kalimantan Province, totaling 7,983 individuals. A sample of 367 respondents was determined based on the Krejcie and Morgan sample size table. A purposive sampling technique was applied, with the inclusion criteria being active students with a critical capacity to evaluate police performance and institutional legitimacy. The sampling process also ensured representation across various faculties to maintain data relevance and representativeness in line with the research objectives. Data were collected using a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire, with indicators developed from relevant theoretical frameworks: public trust was adapted from Mayer and Schoorman (1995), procedural transparency from Mason (2014), responsiveness from Parasuraman et al. (1988), and accountability from Bovens (2007).

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS version 26. Since the prerequisite tests indicated that the data were not normally distributed and the relationships among variables were non-linear, Spearman's Rho correlation test was employed to measure the direction and strength of the relationships between variables at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. This technique is appropriate for ordinal-scale data and non-parametric distributions. All participants provided informed consent voluntarily, and their data were kept anonymous to ensure confidentiality and adherence to ethical research principles.

4. Results and Discussion

The results of the descriptive analysis of 367 respondents reveal several key characteristics. In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were female (71.93%), while male respondents accounted for 28.07%. Regarding age distribution, the < 20 years age group constituted the majority with 63.76%, followed by the 20–22 years age group with 35.15%. In terms of faculty affiliation, most respondents were from the Faculty of Education (53.41%), followed by the Faculty of Law (35.42%). Concerning the level of study, nearly all respondents were undergraduate students (99.46%). Additionally, 48.50% of respondents reported having previous interactions with the police, while 51.50% had no prior interaction.

These findings indicate that the majority of respondents are young undergraduate students with diverse educational backgrounds and varying levels of interaction experience with the police. This diversity is significant because variations in demographic characteristics may influence perceptions and evaluations of police transparency, responsiveness, and accountability.

To examine the relationships between the independent variables transparency, service responsiveness, and accountability and the dependent variable public trust in the police, a Spearman's Rho correlation test was conducted. The results of the correlation analysis are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Spearman's Rho Correlation Test

Variables	Correlation coefficient (ρ)	Sig. (p)	Interpretation
Transparency	0,683	0,000	Signifikan ($p < 0,05$)
Responsiveness	0,630	0,000	Signifikan ($p < 0,05$)
Accountability	0,598	0,000	Signifikan ($p < 0,05$)

Based on the results of the analysis, all three independent variables demonstrated a positive and significant relationship with public trust in the police ($p < 0.05$). Transparency exhibited the strongest correlation ($\rho = 0.683$), followed by responsiveness ($\rho = 0.630$) and accountability ($\rho = 0.598$). These findings indicate that the higher the levels of transparency, responsiveness, and accountability demonstrated by the police, the greater the level of public trust.

The results further reveal that transparency exerts the strongest influence on public trust. This finding supports Organizational Transparency Theory, which emphasizes that openness regarding institutional processes, policies, and performance outcomes forms a fundamental basis for building social trust (Grimmelikhuijsen et al., 2021). When the public has access to relevant, verifiable, and accountable information, confidence in the institution's integrity increases. Jessie et al. (2024) and Jopang et al. (2024) also found

that consistent transparency practices such as policy disclosure, public reporting, and participatory communication significantly contribute to enhancing trust. However, the effectiveness of transparency depends on social context, information quality, and the motives behind disclosure (de Fine Licht, 2022; Taufiqi & Ariani, 2022). In the policing context, transparency should go beyond simply publishing documents, it must be accompanied by effective risk communication strategies and public engagement to avoid negative perceptions that may undermine police community relations (Liu & Chan, 2023).

Responsiveness also showed a significant relationship with public trust ($p = 0.630$; $p < 0.05$). This finding aligns with Procedural Justice Theory, which posits that public trust depends not only on policy outcomes but also on how institutions respond to citizens' needs, complaints, and participation (Tyler & Jackson, 2014). Quick and appropriate responses from the police have been shown to enhance public trust (Jessie et al., 2024), particularly in the context of community policing. However, the effect of responsiveness tends to be weaker than that of transparency. This may be due to the high public expectations for service delivery, which are often not fully met, resulting in a smaller overall impact on trust. Therefore, responsiveness should encompass not only the speed of response but also the quality of interaction marked by empathy, problem-solving capacity, and continuity which fosters positive perceptions of institutional integrity and commitment (Taufiqi et al., 2022).

Furthermore, accountability also demonstrated a positive and significant relationship with public trust ($p = 0.598$; $p < 0.05$). This finding supports Institutional Legitimacy Theory, which emphasizes that institutions' willingness to openly justify their actions and policies is a fundamental basis for social legitimacy (Sunshine & Tyler, 2021). Accountability mechanisms such as internal investigations, sanctions for misconduct, and the public release of investigative findings significantly enhance public trust, particularly among minority groups (Kochel & Skogan, 2021). Public officials' accountability has also been shown to increase public confidence in government institutions (Abidin et al., 2023), as citizens are more likely to trust institutions when every action can be transparently justified (Taufiqi et al., 2022). However, symbolic or inconsistent accountability practices fail to meaningfully enhance trust (Bovens, 2014), underscoring the importance of sincere and sustained implementation.

Taken together, transparency, responsiveness, and accountability collectively account for 46.7% of the variance in public trust in the police. This finding underscores that public trust is a multidimensional construct that cannot be built through a single aspect of governance alone. From a theoretical perspective, this study expands the concept of institutional trust by demonstrating that these three variables are complementary in shaping legitimacy and public confidence, particularly in developing democracies. From a practical standpoint, the findings offer strategic recommendations for policymakers and police leadership: strengthening transparency through open data and performance reporting; enhancing responsiveness through prompt service delivery and effective public communication; and deepening accountability through robust oversight and public participation in performance evaluation.

This study, however, has several limitations. First, the cross-sectional design only captures conditions at the time of data collection and cannot represent the temporal dynamics of public trust. Future research should employ a longitudinal design to observe changes over time. Second, the study population was limited to university students, so the findings cannot be fully generalized to the broader population. Third, the use of Spearman's Rho correlation was necessitated by the data's failure to meet normality and linearity assumptions; while appropriate for monotonic relationships, the

results cannot be generalized as linear relationships. Fourth, the study focused on three primary variables, and future research should consider additional factors such as procedural justice, citizen experience, and institutional integrity for a more comprehensive analysis.

5. Conclusion

This study found that transparency, service responsiveness, and accountability each have a positive and significant effect on public trust in the police, with transparency exerting the strongest influence. Together, these three variables explain 46.7% of the variance in public trust, highlighting that trust is a multidimensional construct shaped not only by institutional performance but also by open communication, timely responses, and credible accountability mechanisms. The findings support Procedural Justice Theory and Institutional Legitimacy Theory, emphasizing that consistent transparency, responsive services, and accountable practices are essential for building legitimacy and strengthening police community relations in developing democracies. Practically, the study recommends that police agencies improve data openness, service quality, and oversight mechanisms to foster public confidence. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and include broader populations and additional variables for a more comprehensive understanding of trust dynamics.

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