

Community Policing and Public Trust in Indonesia: Examining the Role of Police–Community Relations in Crime Prevention

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.65815/17cr6430>

Submitted: 29-08-2025

Revised: 12-09-2025, 20-11-2025

Accepted: 28-12-2025

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Abstract

Community policing has become an important approach to improving police legitimacy and strengthening cooperation between law enforcement institutions and communities. In Indonesia, the implementation of community-oriented policing takes place within diverse social, cultural, and institutional environments that influence public perceptions of police effectiveness and legitimacy. This study examines the relationship between community policing practices, police–community interaction, and public trust in Indonesia. Using a qualitative research approach, the study analyses institutional policies, community engagement practices, and selected cases of police–community interaction. The analysis focuses on the extent to which participation, responsiveness, transparency, and problem-solving mechanisms contribute to public confidence in policing institutions. The study argues that community policing should not be understood solely as an operational crime-prevention strategy but also as a mechanism for strengthening institutional legitimacy and democratic accountability. Effective community engagement requires sustained communication, local participation, and institutional responsiveness to community concerns. The study contributes to the literature by contextualising community policing within Indonesia's institutional and socio-cultural environment and by highlighting the importance of trust as an outcome of police–community relations. The findings provide implications for developing more participatory and locally responsive policing strategies in Indonesia.

[Pemolisian berbasis masyarakat telah menjadi pendekatan penting untuk meningkatkan legitimasi kepolisian serta memperkuat kerja sama antara lembaga penegak hukum dan masyarakat. Di Indonesia, penerapan pemolisian yang berorientasi pada masyarakat berlangsung dalam lingkungan sosial, budaya, dan kelembagaan yang beragam, yang turut memengaruhi persepsi publik mengenai efektivitas dan legitimasi kepolisian. Studi ini mengkaji hubungan antara praktik pemolisian berbasis masyarakat, interaksi

antara polisi dan masyarakat, serta kepercayaan publik di Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis kebijakan kelembagaan, praktik pelibatan masyarakat, dan sejumlah kasus interaksi polisi-masyarakat yang dipilih. Analisis difokuskan pada sejauh mana partisipasi, daya tanggap, transparansi, dan mekanisme pemecahan masalah berkontribusi terhadap keyakinan publik terhadap institusi kepolisian. Studi ini berargumen bahwa pemolisian berbasis masyarakat tidak boleh hanya dipahami sebagai strategi operasional pencegahan kejahatan, melainkan juga sebagai mekanisme untuk memperkuat legitimasi kelembagaan dan akuntabilitas demokratis. Pelibatan masyarakat yang efektif memerlukan komunikasi yang berkelanjutan, partisipasi lokal, dan daya tanggap institusi terhadap aspirasi maupun kekhawatiran masyarakat. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada literatur dengan menempatkan pemolisian berbasis masyarakat dalam konteks lingkungan kelembagaan dan sosial-budaya Indonesia, serta menyoroti pentingnya kepercayaan sebagai hasil dari hubungan antara polisi dan masyarakat. Temuan studi ini memberikan implikasi bagi pengembangan strategi pemolisian yang lebih partisipatif dan tanggap terhadap kebutuhan lokal di Indonesia.]

Keywords: community policing, public trust, police–community relations, crime prevention, Indonesia

Introduction

Community policing has become an important paradigm in contemporary policing because it places police–community relations at the center of crime prevention, public safety, and institutional legitimacy. Unlike conventional policing models that emphasize reactive enforcement and police control over security problems, community policing encourages sustained interaction between police officers and citizens, joint identification of local problems, and collaborative development of appropriate responses. Skogan and Hartnett (1997) conceptualize community policing as an organizational and operational transformation involving community partnership, decentralization, communication, and problem solving. This approach consequently changes the position of citizens from passive recipients of police services into potential partners in the production of public safety. The significance of this transformation is particularly important in democratic societies, where police effectiveness depends not only on coercive authority but also on public cooperation and acceptance of legitimate police authority. Community policing therefore provides an important framework for examining how institutional performance and police–community relationships interact in the prevention of crime.

The relationship between policing and public trust is strongly connected to the concept of police legitimacy. Legitimacy refers to citizens' belief that an institution has a rightful authority to exercise power and that its decisions should

be accepted even when individuals do not personally benefit from them. Tyler (2004) argues that legitimacy is influenced not only by perceptions of police effectiveness but also by the procedural quality of police encounters. Citizens are more likely to view police authority as legitimate when they experience participation, neutrality, respectful treatment, and trustworthy motives. This perspective shifts attention from the question of whether police achieve particular outcomes toward the broader question of how police exercise authority. Such a distinction is significant for community policing because repeated interaction creates opportunities for citizens to evaluate police behavior directly. Public trust can consequently develop through everyday encounters in which officers demonstrate fairness, responsiveness, transparency, and respect rather than merely through institutional claims about police performance.

Previous empirical research provides substantial evidence that community-oriented policing can influence public perceptions of police institutions, although its relationship with crime reduction is more complicated. Gill et al. (2014), in a systematic review of community-oriented policing interventions, examined 25 reports containing 65 independent tests and found stronger evidence concerning citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder, and police legitimacy than concerning direct reductions in crime. Their findings suggest that community policing should not be understood as a simple crime-reduction technology. Instead, its effects may operate through relational mechanisms that improve communication, legitimacy, satisfaction, and community cooperation. The predominance of studies from the United States also indicates that conclusions derived from established Western policing environments cannot automatically be transferred to countries with different institutional histories and social structures. This limitation is particularly relevant to Indonesia, where community policing developed within the context of post-authoritarian police reform, substantial social diversity, and continuing efforts to strengthen democratic accountability.

The procedural justice literature further explains why the quality of police–community interaction matters for trust. Mazerolle et al. (2013) demonstrate through systematic evidence that procedurally just police interventions can improve perceptions of procedural justice, satisfaction, confidence, and cooperation. More recently, Chan, Bradford, and Stott (2025) synthesized evidence from 123 studies involving approximately 200,966 observations and found significant relationships between procedural justice, social identity, and police legitimacy. Their analysis is especially relevant because it demonstrates that the legitimacy process is influenced by social and contextual conditions rather than operating identically across all populations. Procedural fairness therefore cannot be separated from the social identities and community environments within which police interactions occur. For Indonesia, this finding suggests that community policing must be sensitive to local social structures, cultural expectations, and different experiences of police authority. Trust should consequently be analyzed as

a relational and context-dependent phenomenon rather than as a uniform institutional attitude.

Indonesia provides an important setting for extending this literature because community policing has been formally incorporated into the institutional framework of the Indonesian National Police. The development of *Pemolisian Masyarakat* (Polmas) emerged as part of broader police reform following the Reformasi period. Budiono (2011) explains that the development of community policing in Indonesia reflected an effort to reposition citizens as partners in maintaining public order rather than merely as objects of police control. This institutional orientation is currently reflected in Peraturan Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia Nomor 1 Tahun 2021 tentang Pemolisian Masyarakat, which defines community policing around partnership between police personnel and communities in identifying security and public-order problems and developing solutions. The regulation demonstrates that community participation is not merely an informal policing practice but an officially recognized component of Indonesian policing. Nevertheless, formal recognition does not necessarily demonstrate that community policing is implemented consistently or that it automatically generates public trust.

The Indonesian context also makes the relationship between trust and crime prevention analytically important because police effectiveness depends partly on citizens' willingness to communicate information and cooperate with law enforcement. Crime is not entirely observable through police activity, and officially recorded crime is influenced by reporting practices, institutional access, and citizens' willingness to approach law enforcement. Statistics Indonesia distinguishes police-recorded crime from other dimensions of crime measurement, indicating that administrative crime statistics should not be treated as a complete representation of actual victimization. This distinction is important for community policing because stronger police–community relations may increase citizens' willingness to report incidents, provide information, or cooperate with investigations. Consequently, an increase in reported crime following improvements in police accessibility does not necessarily indicate declining police effectiveness. It may instead reflect improved institutional access and reporting behavior. Community trust therefore constitutes an important intermediate mechanism connecting police–community relations with crime-prevention capacity.

Despite the substantial international literature on community policing, an important research gap remains concerning the Indonesian institutional and sociocultural context. Existing systematic evidence has largely examined community-oriented policing in settings where policing institutions, democratic traditions, and community structures differ from those found in Indonesia. Gill et al. (2014) explicitly noted the concentration of community-policing evidence in United States neighborhoods, while Chan, Bradford, and Stott (2025) demonstrated that social identity and contextual factors influence the relationship between

procedural justice and legitimacy. These findings indicate that international models cannot simply be transferred to Indonesia without examining how community policing interacts with local institutional arrangements. The Indonesian literature has addressed Polmas as an element of police reform, but there remains a need to analytically connect community policing, police–community interaction, public trust, and crime prevention within one conceptual framework. This article addresses that gap by examining trust as both an outcome of police–community relations and a resource for collaborative crime prevention.

This study employs a qualitative document and literature analysis to examine the relationship between community policing, police–community relations, public trust, and crime prevention in Indonesia. The analysis draws upon peer-reviewed scholarship, systematic reviews, Indonesian police regulations, official institutional documents, and relevant statistical publications available through 2025. The sources were interpreted thematically according to four interconnected analytical dimensions: participation, procedural fairness, institutional responsiveness, and problem solving. Rather than producing statistical estimates, the study synthesizes existing evidence to develop an analytical explanation of how community policing may influence public trust and, subsequently, police–community cooperation in crime prevention. This methodological approach is appropriate because the principal objective is conceptual and contextual: to explain the institutional mechanisms through which community policing operates in Indonesia. The analysis is organized into three themes concerning community policing as participatory policing, police–community interaction as a mechanism of trust and legitimacy, and public trust as a resource for collaborative crime prevention.

Community Policing as Participatory and Problem-Oriented Policing

Community policing in Indonesia should first be understood as a transformation in the relationship between police institutions and citizens. Conventional policing tends to position police as the primary authority responsible for defining security problems and determining appropriate responses, whereas community policing recognizes that communities possess knowledge that can contribute to identifying local risks and developing solutions. Skogan and Hartnett (1997) argue that community policing involves organizational changes that enable police to become more responsive to community concerns and more capable of solving problems collaboratively. In the Indonesian context, this principle is reflected in the institutional development of Polmas and its current regulatory foundation under Perpol No. 1/2021. The significance of this framework lies not simply in increasing contact between police and citizens but in changing the nature of that contact. Community engagement becomes meaningful when citizens are able to communicate local security concerns and when police institutions demonstrate an organizational capacity to respond to those concerns.

The participatory dimension of Polmas is particularly important because Indonesian communities differ significantly in their social organization, geographical conditions, economic circumstances, and patterns of crime and disorder. A security problem in a densely populated urban neighborhood may require different interventions from a conflict involving rural communities, informal settlements, industrial areas, or geographically isolated populations. A uniform enforcement-oriented approach may therefore overlook local causes and community resources. Community policing provides an alternative by allowing police officers to develop localized knowledge through sustained interaction. However, participation should not be interpreted simply as the presence of community members at police meetings. Meaningful participation requires opportunities for citizens to articulate priorities, influence problem identification, and receive explanations concerning police responses. Without these mechanisms, community engagement risks becoming symbolic rather than substantive, thereby weakening rather than strengthening the institutional trust that community policing seeks to cultivate.

Problem solving provides the second essential component of community policing. Crime prevention becomes more sustainable when police identify recurring patterns and address the conditions that facilitate crime rather than merely responding to individual incidents. Gill et al. (2014) found that community-oriented policing produced more consistent effects on citizen satisfaction, perceptions of disorder, and legitimacy than on direct crime outcomes. This finding suggests that the principal contribution of community policing may lie in strengthening the institutional and social conditions through which effective prevention becomes possible. In Indonesia, this means that Polmas should be connected to systematic processes of identifying local problems, analyzing their causes, coordinating relevant actors, implementing interventions, and evaluating results. Community policing therefore becomes more than a communication strategy; it becomes a framework through which police knowledge and community knowledge can be combined to address security problems that neither institution can effectively solve independently.

The distinction between policy and implementation is consequently critical. The existence of Perpol No. 1/2021 establishes an institutional commitment to community policing, but regulations alone cannot determine the quality of everyday police–community relations. Organizational culture, leadership, personnel capacity, resource allocation, communication practices, and accountability mechanisms influence how formal principles are translated into police behavior. Rosenbaum and Lurigio (1994) previously demonstrated that community-policing reform involves substantial organizational transformation and that formal reform language does not automatically produce corresponding changes in police practice. The Indonesian case should therefore be evaluated not merely by the number of community activities conducted but by whether those activities create meaningful opportunities for participation and problem solving.

The analytical focus must shift from measuring the existence of community-policing programs toward examining the quality, continuity, responsiveness, and consequences of police–community interaction.

Police–Community Interaction, Procedural Justice, and Public Trust

Police–community interaction constitutes the principal mechanism through which institutional principles become visible to citizens. Community policing provides opportunities for repeated encounters, and each encounter can communicate information about police priorities, fairness, competence, and institutional intentions. Tyler (2004) emphasizes that citizens' perceptions of procedural justice influence the legitimacy they attribute to legal authorities. Voice, neutrality, respectful treatment, and trustworthy motives are therefore not simply interpersonal qualities; they constitute mechanisms through which citizens determine whether police authority deserves acceptance. This perspective is particularly important in community policing because its legitimacy depends on sustained relationships rather than isolated enforcement encounters. When police listen to community concerns, explain decisions, treat individuals respectfully, and provide appropriate responses, citizens receive signals that police authority is compatible with fairness and shared community values. Trust consequently develops through accumulated interaction rather than through institutional reputation alone.

Procedural justice also helps explain why police effectiveness and police legitimacy should be analytically distinguished. A citizen may recognize that police have the capacity to enforce laws while simultaneously questioning whether police exercise that authority fairly. Conversely, a citizen may experience a police encounter as fair even when the immediate outcome is unfavorable. Tyler's (2004) framework suggests that procedural evaluations influence legitimacy beyond judgments concerning instrumental outcomes. Mazerolle et al. (2013) similarly demonstrate that procedurally just interventions can improve confidence, satisfaction, perceptions of fairness, and cooperation. These findings imply that community policing should not measure success exclusively through crime statistics or enforcement outputs. The relational quality of police activity is itself an important dimension of institutional performance because it influences citizens' willingness to accept police authority and cooperate with police objectives.

The Indonesian context adds complexity to this relationship because police–community interaction occurs across diverse social identities and community structures. Chan, Bradford, and Stott (2025) found that procedural justice and social identity are both significantly associated with police legitimacy and that social identity mediates the relationship between procedural justice and legitimacy. Their meta-analysis demonstrates that the connection between police fairness and legitimacy varies across social and contextual environments. This finding supports a contextual interpretation of Polmas in Indonesia. Community policing cannot assume that identical communication practices will generate identical responses

across all communities. Officers must understand the social context in which police authority is exercised and ensure that engagement mechanisms remain inclusive rather than privileging only socially powerful community actors. The quality of participation is therefore as important as the existence of participation itself.

Trust can consequently be conceptualized as a cumulative product of institutional consistency. Citizens are more likely to develop confidence when police behavior corresponds with institutional promises concerning fairness, transparency, and responsiveness. Conversely, a single highly visible incident of misconduct can undermine trust that has developed gradually through routine interactions. This asymmetry makes institutional accountability essential to community policing. Transparency in complaint handling, explanation of police decisions, and visible responsiveness to legitimate community concerns can demonstrate that police institutions recognize citizens as stakeholders rather than merely subjects of enforcement. Hatmawan's (2025) analysis of public compliance with police authority similarly emphasizes the importance of addressing strained police–community relationships through procedural fairness, dialogue, reconciliation, and accountability. The implication is that restoring trust requires institutional engagement with the underlying relationship, not merely increased police visibility or public communication campaigns.

Public-trust indicators in Indonesia should also be interpreted cautiously. National survey measurements can demonstrate changes in public perceptions, but they cannot by themselves establish that community policing caused those changes. Police trust may be affected by institutional performance, public controversies, political events, media coverage, individual experiences, and broader perceptions of government. The Indonesian National Police reported in December 2025 that public trust in Polri had shown a positive trend during the year, but such institutional reporting should be treated as evidence of an observed perception rather than proof of a causal relationship between Polmas and trust. A rigorous assessment of community policing would require localized and longitudinal research linking specific forms of police–community interaction with changes in trust and cooperation. The distinction is important because the analytical argument of this article concerns a plausible institutional mechanism rather than a claim that community policing alone determines national levels of public confidence.

Public Trust as a Resource for Collaborative Crime Prevention

Public trust should not be understood only as an outcome that police institutions seek after performing their duties effectively. It can also function as a resource that enables effective crime prevention. Police require information from citizens concerning criminal activity, disorder, interpersonal conflicts, vulnerable locations, and emerging security risks. Citizens, however, decide whether and how they communicate such information partly on the basis of their expectations concerning police responsiveness and fairness. Tyler and Fagan (2008) demonstrate the

importance of legitimacy for cooperation with police, suggesting that citizens' willingness to support law enforcement is connected to their perceptions of police authority. Community policing can therefore generate a reciprocal relationship in which fair treatment strengthens legitimacy, legitimacy supports cooperation, and cooperation improves the informational foundation of crime prevention.

This reciprocal relationship is particularly significant when interpreting crime statistics. Officially recorded crime represents incidents that enter the institutional reporting system, rather than a complete measurement of all crime experienced by citizens. Statistics Indonesia's crime-statistics framework recognizes the distinction between police-recorded crime and other approaches to understanding victimization and crime conditions. From this perspective, stronger police–community relations may influence the visibility of crime by encouraging citizens to report incidents that they might otherwise leave unreported. Consequently, an increase in recorded crime following improvements in public confidence should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of deteriorating security. It may partly indicate greater institutional accessibility. This analytical distinction demonstrates why community policing should be assessed through multiple indicators, including trust, reporting behavior, cooperation, perceived safety, problem resolution, and actual crime patterns rather than relying exclusively on police-recorded crime.

The collaborative character of crime prevention also means that police cannot reasonably be expected to address all causes of crime through enforcement alone. Community members, local government institutions, schools, social organizations, religious organizations, businesses, and other actors possess resources that can contribute to prevention. Community policing provides a framework for coordinating these resources around locally identified problems. Such collaboration may involve preventing recurring disputes, improving environmental security, protecting vulnerable populations, addressing youth-related risks, or developing mechanisms for early intervention. The effectiveness of this approach depends on whether police are able to transform community information into institutional action. When citizens repeatedly provide information without observing meaningful responses, cooperation may decline. Trust therefore becomes both a prerequisite and a consequence of successful problem solving, creating a feedback process between institutional responsiveness and community participation.

The international evidence nevertheless cautions against assuming that cooperation automatically produces measurable reductions in crime. Gill et al. (2014) found that the effects of community-oriented policing on crime were less consistent than its effects on satisfaction and legitimacy. This distinction is theoretically important because it suggests that community policing may influence crime through indirect pathways. Stronger relationships can improve information exchange, increase community participation, facilitate early identification of problems, and strengthen legitimacy, but these mechanisms operate within broader social and institutional conditions. Crime is influenced by economic circumstances,

social inequality, environmental conditions, opportunities for offending, and other factors beyond police control. Community policing should therefore be understood as one component of a broader crime-prevention system rather than as an autonomous solution to crime.

The Indonesian application of this model requires particular attention to institutional responsiveness. If community policing is implemented primarily through routine meetings, ceremonial activities, or public-relations exercises, it may generate limited effects on crime prevention and potentially weaken public confidence if citizens perceive engagement as symbolic. In contrast, community engagement can become substantively preventive when police use community information to identify recurring problems, coordinate responses, communicate outcomes, and evaluate interventions. The central issue is therefore not the quantity of interaction but its institutional consequences. Community policing becomes meaningful when interaction changes how police understand and respond to local security problems. This argument also reinforces the importance of accountability because communities need mechanisms through which they can question police decisions and assess whether agreed responses have been implemented.

The relationship between trust and crime prevention can therefore be represented analytically as a reinforcing process rather than a linear causal sequence. Police institutions establish opportunities for participation; meaningful participation facilitates information exchange; fair and responsive interaction strengthens legitimacy and trust; trust increases willingness to cooperate; and cooperation expands the informational and social resources available for problem solving. Successful problem solving can then reinforce public confidence in police institutions. However, the process can also operate negatively. Unfair treatment can weaken legitimacy, declining trust can reduce cooperation, reduced cooperation can limit information, and information deficits can weaken crime-prevention capacity. This reciprocal model provides a more nuanced understanding of Polmas because it recognizes that police–community relations are not peripheral to crime prevention. They constitute part of the institutional infrastructure through which prevention becomes possible.

Conclusion

This study has argued that community policing in Indonesia should be understood as both a crime-prevention approach and a mechanism for constructing institutional legitimacy through police–community relations. The analysis of international scholarship and Indonesian institutional developments demonstrates that the effectiveness of community policing cannot be reduced to police visibility, enforcement activity, or the formal existence of community programs. Its significance lies in creating sustained relationships through which citizens can participate in identifying security problems and police can demonstrate fairness, transparency, responsiveness, and problem-solving capacity. Procedural justice

provides an important theoretical explanation for this process because citizens' judgments concerning police legitimacy are influenced by how authority is exercised as well as by police outcomes. The Indonesian Polmas framework is therefore most meaningful when its formal commitment to partnership is translated into substantive participation and responsive institutional action. This interpretation also addresses the research gap by contextualizing the international community-policing literature within Indonesia's institutional and sociocultural environment.

Public trust should consequently be regarded as both an outcome and a resource of community policing. Trust can emerge when citizens repeatedly experience police institutions as fair, respectful, transparent, and responsive, while established trust can subsequently strengthen reporting, information sharing, cooperation, and collaborative crime prevention. Nevertheless, the relationship should not be interpreted as automatic or exclusively causal because crime and public confidence are influenced by multiple institutional and social factors. The principal implication is that Indonesian community policing requires sustained institutional commitment rather than episodic engagement. Future research should examine these relationships empirically through comparative studies across Indonesian regions, longitudinal measurements of police–community interaction, and mixed-method research connecting procedural justice, trust, reporting behavior, cooperation, and crime outcomes. Such research would allow the conceptual relationship developed in this study to be tested more directly and would provide stronger evidence concerning the conditions under which community policing contributes to both democratic police legitimacy and effective crime prevention.

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Acknowledgment

None

Funding Information

None

Conflicting Interest Statement

The authors state that there is no conflict of interest in the publication of this article.

Publishing Ethical and Originality Statement

All authors declared that this work is original and has never been published in any form and in any media, nor is it under consideration for publication in any journal, and all sources cited in this work refer to the basic standards of scientific citation.

Generative AI Statement

N/A