

Public Perceptions of Police Legitimacy in Indonesia: Determinants of Trust, Cooperation, and Compliance

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Abstract

Police legitimacy influences how citizens perceive law enforcement authority and whether they are willing to cooperate with police institutions and comply with legal rules. In Indonesia, public perceptions of police legitimacy are shaped by experiences of police encounters, perceptions of fairness, institutional effectiveness, and broader social expectations. This study examines the factors associated with perceptions of police legitimacy and their implications for public cooperation. The study adopts a conceptual and qualitative analytical framework informed by procedural justice and legitimacy theory. It examines the relationship between perceived fairness, police effectiveness, institutional trust, and citizens' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement. The analysis suggests that legitimacy cannot be reduced to perceptions of crime-control effectiveness. Fair treatment, respectful communication, transparency, and consistency in decision-making are equally important dimensions of police legitimacy. The Indonesian context demonstrates the importance of understanding legitimacy within diverse social environments in which citizens may have different expectations of police authority. The study contributes to policing research by connecting procedural justice theory with Indonesian institutional and social conditions. It argues that strengthening legitimacy requires police organisations to combine effective law enforcement with fair, transparent, and respectful treatment of citizens.

[Legitimasi kepolisian memengaruhi cara warga memandang wewenang penegakan hukum serta kesediaan mereka untuk bekerja sama dengan institusi kepolisian dan mematuhi aturan hukum. Di Indonesia, persepsi publik mengenai legitimasi kepolisian dibentuk oleh pengalaman berinteraksi dengan polisi, persepsi tentang keadilan, efektivitas institusional, dan harapan sosial yang lebih luas. Studi ini mengkaji faktor-faktor yang berkaitan dengan persepsi legitimasi kepolisian serta implikasinya terhadap kerja sama publik. Penelitian ini menggunakan kerangka analisis konseptual dan kualitatif yang didasarkan pada teori keadilan prosedural dan teori legitimasi. Studi ini

menelaah hubungan antara persepsi keadilan, efektivitas kepolisian, kepercayaan terhadap institusi, dan kesediaan warga untuk bekerja sama dengan penegak hukum. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa legitimasi tidak dapat disederhanakan hanya sebagai persepsi mengenai efektivitas pengendalian kejahatan. Perlakuan yang adil, komunikasi yang penuh rasa hormat, transparansi, dan konsistensi dalam pengambilan keputusan merupakan dimensi legitimasi kepolisian yang sama pentingnya. Konteks Indonesia memperlihatkan pentingnya memahami legitimasi dalam lingkungan sosial yang beragam, di mana warga mungkin memiliki harapan yang berbeda terhadap wewenang kepolisian. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada penelitian kepolisian dengan mengaitkan teori keadilan prosedural dengan kondisi institusional dan sosial di Indonesia. Studi ini berargumen bahwa penguatan legitimasi menuntut organisasi kepolisian untuk memadukan penegakan hukum yang efektif dengan perlakuan yang adil, transparan, dan penuh rasa hormat terhadap warga.]

Keywords: police legitimacy, public trust, procedural justice, police cooperation, Indonesia

Introduction

Police legitimacy constitutes one of the central foundations of democratic law enforcement because police institutions exercise coercive authority on behalf of the state while simultaneously depending upon public acceptance of that authority. Unlike purely instrumental conceptions of policing, which evaluate police primarily according to crime-control outcomes, legitimacy concerns whether citizens regard police authority as appropriate, lawful, fair, and deserving of compliance. Tyler's seminal work conceptualizes legitimacy as a significant explanation of why individuals voluntarily accept legal authority even when immediate personal interests may point in another direction (Tyler 2006). From this perspective, citizens do not assess police solely according to whether officers catch offenders or reduce crime. They also evaluate how authority is exercised, whether decisions appear neutral, whether officers treat people with dignity, and whether citizens believe that police institutions are acting within appropriate moral and legal boundaries. These considerations make legitimacy particularly important in democratic societies where police effectiveness cannot be separated entirely from public consent and institutional trust.

The relationship between legitimacy, trust, cooperation, and compliance has received substantial attention in policing research. Procedural justice theory proposes that citizens are more likely to regard legal authorities as legitimate when they experience decision-making processes as fair, receive respectful treatment, believe that authorities are neutral, and perceive that officials recognize their interests and concerns (Tyler 2006). Sunshine and Tyler's empirical research further connected legitimacy with public compliance, cooperation, and support for police

authority, suggesting that legitimacy provides a mechanism through which citizens may support policing beyond calculations concerning the likelihood of punishment (Sunshine and Tyler 2003). This distinction is consequential because coercive compliance based exclusively on deterrence may require continuous surveillance and enforcement, whereas normative acceptance can produce cooperation even in circumstances where direct enforcement is absent. Legitimacy therefore represents an institutional resource that can reduce the social distance between police organizations and the communities they serve.

The application of procedural justice theory to Indonesia, however, cannot simply reproduce assumptions developed in Western democratic contexts without considering local institutional and cultural conditions. Indonesia possesses a highly centralized police organization operating across a geographically extensive and socially diverse society. Historical experiences of authoritarian governance, the post-Reformasi transformation of state institutions, varying levels of institutional capacity, and substantial differences between urban and rural communities may affect how citizens interpret police authority. Davies, Meliala, and Buttle's ethnographic research is particularly important in this regard because it found that Indonesian citizens' narratives about police were strongly concerned with procedural justice and respectful treatment rather than being reducible to instrumental assessments of police effectiveness (Davies, Meliala, and Buttle 2016). Their findings challenged the assumption that police reform in Indonesia should focus primarily on improving crime-control capacity. Instead, the research suggested that respect and social recognition could be important components of police legitimacy within Indonesian communities.

More recent research, however, complicates this interpretation. Adhikara and Putranto examined police legitimacy in Indonesia using survey data from 1,301 citizens who had experienced police-initiated encounters at the West Java Regional Police in 2024. Their findings indicated that instrumental dimensions of police effectiveness were more important than procedural justice in predicting legitimacy within their sample, while public satisfaction did not function as a mediator between legitimacy and its antecedents (Adhikara and Putranto 2025). This finding differs from the earlier ethnographic conclusion and illustrates why Indonesian police legitimacy should not be treated as a universal or context-independent phenomenon. The apparent divergence may partly reflect differences in methodology, population, institutional setting, and measurement. It may also indicate that citizens evaluate police through multiple normative and instrumental criteria simultaneously. The disagreement between these findings creates an important analytical opportunity: rather than asking whether procedural justice or effectiveness is universally more important, research should examine how different dimensions interact in shaping public perceptions of legitimate police authority.

Public trust constitutes another important dimension of police legitimacy. Trust concerns citizens' expectations that police institutions will exercise authority competently, honestly, predictably, and in accordance with accepted standards.

Legitimacy and trust are related but conceptually distinct. A citizen may trust police competence while disagreeing with the legitimacy of particular police practices, or may regard police authority as legitimate while expressing concerns about institutional performance. Treating trust as synonymous with legitimacy can therefore obscure the mechanisms through which citizens evaluate law enforcement. Nevertheless, institutional trust can strengthen the practical consequences of legitimacy because citizens who expect police to act fairly and competently may be more willing to provide information, report victimization, serve as witnesses, comply with lawful instructions, and participate in community-based crime prevention. Police legitimacy should consequently be understood as part of a broader institutional relationship in which citizens continuously assess police behavior and determine whether engagement with police is worthwhile.

Cooperation is particularly significant because modern policing depends heavily upon information and voluntary participation from the public. Police officers cannot observe every offence, identify every offender, or obtain every relevant piece of evidence through coercive authority alone. Citizens provide information, report crimes, identify suspects, testify in court, participate in neighborhood initiatives, and assist investigations. When citizens perceive police institutions as unfair or untrustworthy, the expected costs of cooperation may increase. Individuals may fear retaliation, believe that information will not be handled appropriately, or conclude that police will not respond effectively. Conversely, when citizens perceive police as legitimate, cooperation may become a form of civic participation rather than simply an obligation imposed by authority. Legitimacy therefore has implications beyond individual attitudes because it can affect the informational and social resources available to police organizations.

Compliance with law similarly involves more than the avoidance of sanctions. Individuals may obey legal rules because they fear punishment, because compliance is materially advantageous, or because they regard the legal order as legitimate. The distinction is important for democratic governance because enforcement resources are inherently limited. A system in which citizens comply only when police are physically present would require extensive surveillance and coercive capacity. Normative compliance, by contrast, can operate without continuous direct intervention. Tyler's research argues that perceptions of procedural fairness can influence citizens' willingness to accept legal decisions and comply with the law because fair treatment strengthens the perceived legitimacy of legal authorities (Tyler 2006). The implication for policing is that fair treatment may have consequences extending beyond individual encounters. Repeated experiences of respectful and neutral authority can contribute to broader perceptions that legal institutions deserve voluntary compliance.

The Indonesian context presents particular challenges because public perceptions of police are shaped by the country's broader institutional history. The post-1998 Reformasi period produced substantial institutional changes, including the separation of the Indonesian National Police from the armed forces and the

development of a more explicitly civilian policing model. Law No. 2 of 2002 established the legal foundation of the Indonesian National Police and defined policing functions in terms of maintaining public security and order, enforcing the law, and providing protection, guidance, and services to society (Republic of Indonesia 2002). These functions imply that police legitimacy cannot be measured solely through crime statistics because the police institution is simultaneously expected to provide public services and maintain social order. Citizens therefore encounter police in diverse contexts, including criminal investigations, traffic enforcement, public-order situations, administrative services, victim assistance, and community engagement.

The institutional transformation of Indonesian policing also means that public perceptions may reflect both contemporary encounters and historical expectations concerning state authority. Police legitimacy is partly relational: citizens evaluate police against their understanding of what legitimate authority should look like. In societies with histories of hierarchical governance, citizens may accept certain forms of unequal authority while simultaneously expecting officers to demonstrate respect and restraint. Adhikara and Putranto's 2025 study explicitly considers the relevance of centralized authority, high power-distance culture, and historical police-state relationships when analyzing legitimacy in Indonesia (Adhikara and Putranto 2025). This perspective challenges the assumption that procedural justice operates identically across societies. It does not imply that fairness or respect become irrelevant in hierarchical contexts; rather, it suggests that citizens may combine expectations of effective authority with expectations concerning appropriate treatment.

The concept of procedural justice is consequently useful but should be applied analytically rather than mechanically. Four dimensions are particularly relevant to police-citizen interactions: participation or voice, neutrality, respectful treatment, and trustworthy motives. Voice refers to whether citizens have an opportunity to explain their circumstances or express concerns. Neutrality concerns whether police decisions appear consistent and based on relevant information rather than personal preference or status. Respect concerns the dignity with which citizens are treated during encounters. Trustworthy motives concern whether citizens believe that officers are acting for legitimate public purposes rather than personal gain or arbitrary exercise of authority. These dimensions can influence whether citizens interpret police intervention as legitimate even when the immediate outcome is unfavorable. Procedural justice is therefore concerned not with guaranteeing that every citizen receives the outcome they desire, but with ensuring that authority is exercised through processes that citizens can understand as fair.

Fairness, however, should not be separated from effectiveness. A police organization that treats citizens respectfully but consistently fails to respond to serious crime may struggle to maintain legitimacy. Conversely, an institution that solves crimes effectively but treats citizens arbitrarily may generate instrumental

dependence without strong normative acceptance. The recent Indonesian evidence is particularly valuable because it suggests that effectiveness and procedural justice should not necessarily be conceptualized as competing variables. The contrasting findings of ethnographic and survey research may instead indicate that citizens evaluate legitimacy through different combinations of these dimensions depending on the circumstances of interaction. A victim seeking assistance may emphasize police responsiveness, whereas a person stopped or investigated by police may place greater emphasis on neutrality and respectful treatment. Legitimacy research should therefore distinguish between different forms of police encounters and different expectations held by citizens.

This study addresses this issue by examining police legitimacy as a multidimensional relationship between perceived procedural fairness, institutional effectiveness, public trust, cooperation, and compliance. The analysis does not assume that one factor universally determines legitimacy. Instead, it considers how these dimensions can reinforce or weaken one another within the Indonesian institutional environment. The study is particularly concerned with the mechanisms connecting citizens' perceptions of police conduct to their willingness to engage with police institutions. Cooperation is treated as a behavioral consequence of legitimacy, while compliance is understood as a broader expression of acceptance of lawful authority. Trust functions as an important relational mechanism because citizens must believe that police institutions are capable of using their authority responsibly before cooperation can become sustainable.

The research is guided by three related questions. First, how do Indonesian citizens' perceptions of procedural fairness and police effectiveness contribute to perceptions of police legitimacy? Second, how does institutional trust connect legitimacy with citizens' willingness to cooperate with police? Third, under what conditions can police legitimacy support voluntary compliance with legal authority? These questions allow the analysis to move beyond a simple discussion of whether citizens trust the police. They instead direct attention toward the institutional processes through which trust and legitimacy are formed, maintained, challenged, and potentially restored. The questions are also appropriate for a qualitative conceptual study because they allow existing empirical findings, legal frameworks, and theoretical literature to be integrated into a contextual interpretation of Indonesian policing.

The study makes three contributions to the policing literature. First, it contextualizes procedural justice theory within Indonesia rather than treating theoretical propositions developed primarily in Western settings as universally applicable. Second, it brings together procedural and instrumental dimensions of legitimacy by considering fairness and effectiveness as potentially complementary determinants of public attitudes. Third, it connects legitimacy to concrete behavioral consequences, particularly cooperation and compliance. This approach is important because legitimacy has limited practical significance if it is examined solely as an attitude without considering how that attitude affects interactions

between citizens and police. The article consequently treats legitimacy as both a normative judgment and an institutional resource that can influence the capacity of police organizations to obtain voluntary cooperation from the public.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

A. Police Legitimacy and Normative Acceptance

Police legitimacy can be understood as the public perception that police possess an appropriate right to exercise authority and that their decisions deserve recognition even when citizens do not personally benefit from particular outcomes. This definition distinguishes legitimacy from popularity and satisfaction. A citizen may be dissatisfied with a traffic ticket while nevertheless accepting the authority of the officer who issued it. Conversely, a citizen may report satisfaction with police because an officer solved a personal problem while simultaneously holding broader doubts about the institution's integrity. Legitimacy therefore involves a normative judgment concerning the appropriateness of authority. Tyler's legitimacy framework emphasizes that individuals are more likely to accept legal authorities when they perceive those authorities as procedurally fair and morally appropriate (Tyler 2006). In policing, this means that citizens evaluate not only what police do but also whether police possess the kind of authority that should be obeyed and supported.

The normative dimension of legitimacy has significant consequences for democratic policing. Coercive institutions can compel immediate compliance through legal sanctions, but coercion alone does not necessarily generate durable acceptance. A police officer may compel an individual to stop, submit to an investigation, or follow an order because the officer possesses immediate legal and physical power. Yet the individual's longer-term relationship with police depends partly on whether the intervention is interpreted as lawful and justified. Legitimacy therefore concerns the sustainability of authority beyond individual encounters. When citizens recognize police authority as legitimate, they may comply even when they disagree with a specific decision because they accept the institution's general right to make and enforce lawful decisions. This normative acceptance reduces the need to rely exclusively on surveillance and coercion as mechanisms of social order.

B. Procedural Justice as a Source of Legitimacy

Procedural justice theory provides one of the most influential explanations for how legitimacy develops. Its central proposition is that citizens care about the fairness of decision-making processes independently of whether those processes produce outcomes favorable to them. Voice gives citizens an opportunity to communicate their perspective, neutrality signals that decisions are based on consistent standards, respectful treatment communicates recognition of individual dignity, and trustworthy motives suggest that authorities are acting for legitimate rather than self-interested purposes (Tyler 2006). These dimensions can shape

citizens' evaluations of police even when the immediate result of an encounter is unfavorable. Procedural justice consequently provides a mechanism through which coercive authority can become socially acceptable. The police may still impose sanctions, conduct investigations, or restrict individual behavior, but the manner in which these powers are exercised influences whether citizens interpret them as legitimate exercises of public authority.

Evidence from Indonesia provides important support for examining procedural justice while also highlighting the need for contextual adaptation. Davies, Meliala, and Buttle's ethnographic study found that Indonesian citizens' assessments of police were strongly influenced by how officers interacted with them and by the social meaning of respect. Their findings suggested that procedural justice could have substantial relevance within Indonesia because citizens associated respectful treatment with social legitimacy (Davies, Meliala, and Buttle 2016). Importantly, their research did not simply transplant a Western theory into Indonesia; it identified culturally specific mechanisms through which respect and social relationships influence perceptions of authority. This indicates that procedural justice should be examined through local meanings rather than assumed to have identical manifestations everywhere. Respect, neutrality, and voice may be universal analytical categories while their social interpretation can vary across institutional and cultural environments.

C. Police Effectiveness and Instrumental Legitimacy

Although procedural justice is central to legitimacy theory, police effectiveness remains an important dimension of public evaluation. Citizens reasonably expect police to prevent and investigate crime, respond to emergencies, protect victims, and maintain public order. An institution perceived as incapable of performing these functions may struggle to maintain public confidence regardless of how respectfully individual officers behave. Instrumental evaluations concern whether police produce outcomes that citizens consider valuable. Such evaluations can influence legitimacy because citizens may regard competent performance as evidence that police authority serves a legitimate public purpose. The recent Indonesian study by Adhikara and Putranto provides particularly important evidence because it found that instrumental effectiveness was more significant than procedural justice in predicting legitimacy within a sample of 1,301 citizens involved in police encounters in West Java (Adhikara and Putranto 2025).

The apparent tension between procedural and instrumental explanations should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence that one dimension makes the other irrelevant. Police legitimacy may instead emerge from the interaction between competence and fairness. Citizens may expect police to produce results while also expecting officers to exercise authority appropriately. The importance assigned to each dimension may depend upon the type of encounter, the citizen's prior experience, the seriousness of the problem, and the institutional context. A victim of serious crime may place immediate importance on police responsiveness, while

a person subjected to an investigation may focus on neutrality and respectful treatment. The analytical implication is that legitimacy should be conceptualized as multidimensional rather than reduced to a single predictor. Indonesian police reform should therefore avoid choosing between effectiveness and procedural fairness as mutually exclusive policy objectives.

Methods

This study employs a qualitative conceptual and analytical research design to examine the determinants and consequences of police legitimacy in Indonesia. The approach is appropriate because the objective is not to estimate a population-level causal effect but to synthesize theoretical propositions, institutional developments, and existing empirical findings concerning the relationship between police legitimacy, trust, cooperation, and compliance. The analysis draws upon peer-reviewed scholarship, established theoretical literature, Indonesian legal instruments, institutional publications, and documented empirical studies concerning police-citizen relations. Particular attention is given to literature directly examining Indonesia because legitimacy theory may operate differently across institutional and cultural environments. The study also incorporates international scholarship where it provides foundational concepts or comparative analytical frameworks. This combination permits the article to distinguish between propositions supported by Indonesian evidence and broader theoretical assumptions that require contextual qualification.

The literature was analyzed thematically around five interconnected concepts: procedural justice, police effectiveness, institutional trust, public cooperation, and legal compliance. Procedural justice was examined through the dimensions of voice, neutrality, respect, and trustworthy motives. Police effectiveness was examined in relation to crime control, responsiveness, service delivery, and institutional competence. Trust was treated as an expectation that police will exercise authority competently, fairly, honestly, and predictably. Cooperation was conceptualized through citizens' willingness to report crime, provide information, assist investigations, communicate with officers, and participate in community-oriented policing. Compliance was examined as citizens' willingness to obey lawful police instructions and broader legal rules, including forms of compliance motivated by normative acceptance rather than fear of punishment. These conceptual distinctions prevent the terms from being treated as interchangeable and allow their relationships to be examined more systematically.

The analysis also adopts a contextual comparative logic by examining apparent differences among Indonesian studies. Rather than treating divergent findings as methodological contradictions that must be resolved by selecting one result, the study considers whether differences in research design, population, location, type of police encounter, and measurement can explain variations in findings. Davies, Meliala, and Buttle's ethnographic study, for example, examined citizen narratives over an extended period and emphasized the social meaning of

respect, whereas Adhikara and Putranto used survey data from 1,301 citizen-initiated police encounters in West Java and tested relationships statistically (Davies, Meliala, and Buttle 2016; Adhikara and Putranto 2025). These methodological differences matter because they may capture different dimensions of legitimacy. The study therefore uses methodological pluralism rather than assuming that one form of evidence provides a complete account of Indonesian public perceptions.

The study does not claim to generate new survey or interview data. Its contribution lies in analytical synthesis and theoretical contextualization. This limitation is important because public perceptions of police legitimacy can vary across provinces, socioeconomic groups, age categories, types of police contact, and levels of exposure to crime. Existing empirical findings should consequently not be generalized mechanically to the entire Indonesian population. Instead, the study uses the available evidence to develop a theoretically informed explanation of how legitimacy may be constructed within Indonesia. Future empirical research can test the propositions developed here through representative national surveys, longitudinal studies, experiments, administrative data, and qualitative research across different Indonesian regions.

The methodological framework also recognizes that legitimacy is partly relational and dynamic. Citizens do not form perceptions of police exclusively through isolated encounters. They may draw upon personal experiences, family narratives, media reports, community discussions, perceptions of corruption, experiences of victimization, and observations of police conduct in public-order situations. Institutional trust can therefore change over time as citizens receive new information or encounter different forms of police behavior. A conceptual analysis of legitimacy must consequently examine both micro-level encounters and broader institutional narratives. This study addresses this relationship by treating police legitimacy as an outcome of repeated interaction between citizens and police institutions rather than as a static characteristic possessed by the police organization itself.

Analysis and Discussion

A. Procedural Justice as a Foundation of Police Legitimacy and Public Trust

The findings indicate that perceptions of procedural justice constitute an important foundation of police legitimacy in Indonesia. Citizens are more likely to perceive the police as legitimate when they believe that police officers exercise authority fairly, treat citizens with dignity and respect, provide opportunities for individuals to express their views, and make decisions in a neutral and consistent manner. This finding is broadly consistent with the process-based model of policing, which argues that citizens' evaluations of legal authorities are shaped not only by the outcomes of police interventions but also by the fairness of the procedures through which authority is exercised (Tyler 2003; Tyler 2004).

Procedural justice is particularly important because police legitimacy is not synonymous with police effectiveness. An institution may be perceived as effective in controlling crime while simultaneously being regarded as procedurally unfair. Tyler (2004) argues that citizens' willingness to support and cooperate with the police is influenced substantially by judgments concerning the manner in which police authority is exercised, independently of assessments of police effectiveness. Thus, public trust should not be understood exclusively as a function of crime-control performance. The quality of interactions between police officers and citizens can itself constitute an important source of institutional legitimacy.

This distinction has important implications for the Indonesian context. In a policing environment characterized by a historically centralized institutional structure and relatively hierarchical relationships between state authorities and citizens, the exercise of discretionary authority becomes particularly significant for perceptions of legitimacy. Recent scholarship examining Indonesia similarly argues that conventional Western models of police legitimacy require contextualization because Indonesian policing operates within distinctive institutional and sociocultural conditions (see "Revisiting Police Legitimacy" 2025). Rather than assuming that procedural justice operates identically across societies, the Indonesian case suggests the importance of examining how citizens interpret fairness, respect, neutrality, and voice within existing relationships between the police and the community.

The findings also support a distinction between trust in the police and legitimacy of the police. Trust generally concerns whether citizens believe that police institutions or officers are reliable, competent, honest, and capable of performing their responsibilities. Legitimacy, by contrast, concerns whether citizens regard police authority as rightful and appropriate. Tankebe (2013) emphasizes that these concepts should not simply be treated as interchangeable. His multidimensional approach conceptualizes legitimacy through dimensions including procedural fairness, distributive fairness, lawfulness, and effectiveness. This distinction is analytically important because high levels of institutional confidence do not necessarily imply that citizens regard police authority as normatively justified.

Accordingly, the relationship between procedural justice, trust, and legitimacy can be conceptualized as mutually reinforcing rather than purely linear. Fair treatment can increase institutional trust, while accumulated experiences of trustworthy police behavior can strengthen perceptions that police authority is legitimate. Conversely, perceptions of unfairness, disrespect, corruption, or arbitrary decision-making may undermine both trust and legitimacy, even when the police achieve favorable instrumental outcomes. This interpretation is consistent with the broader literature demonstrating that citizens' assessments of procedural fairness are closely associated with legitimacy judgments (Tyler 2006).

The implication is that police reform should therefore be evaluated not only through measurable outputs such as crime reduction, arrest rates, or response times,

but also through citizens' experiences of police encounters. Legitimacy is partly produced through everyday interactions. Consequently, respectful communication, impartial treatment, transparency in decision-making, and meaningful opportunities for citizens to be heard represent institutional practices through which police legitimacy can be continuously constructed.

B. Police Legitimacy, Trust, and Citizens' Willingness to Cooperate

The second important finding concerns the relationship between perceived police legitimacy and citizens' willingness to cooperate with law enforcement. The theoretical expectation is that citizens who regard the police as legitimate are more likely to voluntarily assist police activities, report crimes, provide information, and engage with law-enforcement institutions. This relationship is central to process-based theories of policing because legitimacy transforms compliance and cooperation from responses driven primarily by coercion into forms of voluntary support (Tyler 2004; Tyler and Fagan 2008).

Empirical research provides substantial support for this relationship. Tyler and Fagan (2008), for example, found that legitimacy was associated with citizens' willingness to cooperate with the police and that experiences of procedural justice contributed to legitimacy regardless of whether the immediate outcome of a police encounter was favorable. A subsequent meta-analysis covering 56 studies and 88 samples likewise found relationships between procedural justice, legitimacy, and cooperation, providing broader support for the theoretical chain linking fair treatment to legitimacy and cooperation (Mazerolle et al. 2013). ScienceDirect+1

In the Indonesian context, cooperation should be understood as an important indicator of the practical consequences of police legitimacy. Police institutions depend on information supplied by citizens, witnesses willing to participate in investigations, victims willing to report offenses, and community members willing to communicate with police officers. Where citizens distrust police institutions, the costs of cooperation may be perceived as higher than its expected benefits. Citizens may become reluctant to report crime, provide information, or participate in police-community programs. Consequently, the effectiveness of policing is partly dependent upon the relational quality between police institutions and the communities they serve.

Importantly, however, cooperation should not be interpreted as an automatic consequence of trust. Citizens may trust particular police officers while simultaneously expressing reservations about the police institution as a whole. Similarly, citizens may cooperate because they perceive an instrumental benefit or because they fear sanctions. Tyler's process-based perspective distinguishes such externally motivated behavior from cooperation that emerges because citizens recognize the authority of the institution as legitimate (Tyler 2006). Legitimacy is therefore analytically valuable because it captures the normative dimension of police-citizen relations.

This distinction is particularly relevant in Indonesia because police-community relations may be shaped simultaneously by formal authority, social expectations, personal experiences, and perceptions of institutional performance. The literature on police legitimacy increasingly recognizes that legitimacy is multidimensional and cannot be reduced to procedural fairness alone. Tankebe (2013), for example, identifies procedural and distributive fairness, lawfulness, and effectiveness as relevant dimensions of legitimacy. This suggests that citizens' willingness to cooperate may depend on whether police authority is perceived as not only fair but also lawful, effective, and appropriately exercised.

The findings therefore suggest that improving cooperation requires more than increasing police visibility or enforcement capacity. Institutional strategies need to strengthen the normative basis of police authority. Police-community engagement, accessible complaint mechanisms, transparent investigations of alleged misconduct, and consistent treatment of citizens can contribute to an environment in which cooperation becomes more voluntary and sustainable. This argument is consistent with the broader observation that effective policing depends substantially upon public support and cooperation rather than coercive capacity alone (Tyler 2004).

At the same time, the Indonesian case cautions against treating cooperation as an unqualified measure of legitimacy. High cooperation rates may also reflect social conformity, perceived necessity, or fear of authority. Future empirical research should therefore distinguish between voluntary cooperation based on perceived legitimacy and instrumental cooperation motivated by deterrence or coercion. Such a distinction would provide a more precise assessment of whether improvements in police-community relations represent genuine legitimacy gains.

C. From Legitimacy to Legal Compliance: Implications for Police Reform in Indonesia

The third major implication concerns the relationship between police legitimacy and citizens' willingness to comply with the law. Process-based theories propose that legitimate authorities are more capable of securing voluntary compliance because citizens perceive their decisions and rules as entitled to respect. Legitimacy therefore provides an important normative foundation for legal compliance that complements conventional deterrence-based approaches (Tyler 2006).

The significance of this relationship extends beyond individual encounters with police officers. When citizens perceive the police as legitimate, they may be more willing to accept police decisions even when those decisions produce unfavorable outcomes. This is because legitimacy is associated with the belief that the institution has a rightful claim to exercise authority. Tyler (2003) argues that legal authorities are more likely to obtain public deference and cooperation when citizens perceive the processes through which authority is exercised as fair. Thus, compliance cannot be fully explained by the probability or severity of punishment.

This argument is particularly relevant for Indonesia because police legitimacy represents an institutional resource rather than merely an attitudinal outcome. Public confidence can facilitate law enforcement by reducing reliance on coercive mechanisms and increasing voluntary adherence to legal rules. Conversely, legitimacy deficits may create a gap between formal legal authority and citizens' willingness to accept that authority. Recent Indonesian scholarship has similarly examined the relationship between public trust, procedural justice, institutional legitimacy, and compliance, emphasizing that procedural fairness and institutional accountability are relevant to citizens' normative acceptance of law-enforcement authority. Garuda

However, the relationship between legitimacy and compliance should not be interpreted as deterministic. Citizens' compliance with law is also influenced by factors such as personal morality, perceived deterrence, social norms, socioeconomic circumstances, and the perceived fairness of specific laws. Consequently, police legitimacy should be understood as one component of a broader institutional and social environment supporting lawful behavior. This perspective prevents an overly simplified interpretation in which increasing public trust alone is assumed to automatically produce higher levels of compliance.

The Indonesian findings nevertheless highlight an important direction for police reform: institutional legitimacy should be treated as an outcome of how police authority is exercised, rather than simply as a communication or public-relations objective. Efforts to improve public perceptions cannot be sustained solely through campaigns emphasizing police achievements. If citizens' direct experiences with police contradict institutional messaging, trust may remain fragile. Legitimacy requires consistency between formal institutional commitments and everyday police practices.

This is especially important given that public trust in the Indonesian National Police has shown fluctuations over time. For example, a 2026 survey reported by the Indonesian National Police cited public trust at 79.2 percent, while another survey reported later in 2026 cited 82.4 percent. These figures demonstrate that trust is measurable and potentially changeable, but they should not automatically be interpreted as equivalent to legitimacy, voluntary cooperation, or legal compliance. Instituto Nacional de Policia+1 The distinction reinforces the need for future research to measure these constructs separately rather than treating them as a single indicator of police performance.

Overall, the findings support a conceptual sequence in which procedural justice contributes to perceptions of legitimacy and trust, legitimacy facilitates voluntary cooperation, and legitimacy can also support normative compliance with law. Nevertheless, this sequence should be interpreted as a theoretically informed relationship rather than a simple deterministic causal chain. The existing meta-analytic literature supports associations among these variables but also notes heterogeneity across studies and limitations in establishing causal direction (Mazerolle et al. 2013). ScienceDirect For Indonesia, longitudinal and comparative

research would therefore be valuable in determining whether changes in police practices produce sustained changes in legitimacy, cooperation, and compliance.

Conclusion

This study examined public perceptions of police legitimacy in Indonesia by focusing on the relationships among procedural justice, public trust, police legitimacy, cooperation, and legal compliance. The discussion demonstrates that police legitimacy cannot be understood solely in terms of institutional effectiveness or crime-control capacity. Rather, legitimacy is closely connected to how citizens experience and evaluate the exercise of police authority. Fair treatment, neutrality, respect, opportunities for voice, and perceptions of lawful authority constitute important dimensions through which citizens assess whether police authority is rightful and deserving of public support (Tyler 2003, 2004; Tankebe 2013).

The findings further suggest that public trust and legitimacy have important implications for police-community relations. When citizens perceive police authority as legitimate, cooperation with law enforcement can become more voluntary and less dependent on coercion or instrumental considerations. This is consistent with the process-based model of policing, which emphasizes that citizens' willingness to cooperate with legal authorities is influenced by perceptions of procedural fairness and legitimacy (Tyler and Fagan 2008). In this sense, legitimacy represents an important institutional resource because police effectiveness depends not only on formal enforcement powers but also on citizens' willingness to provide information, report crime, participate in investigations, and engage constructively with police institutions.

The relationship between legitimacy and compliance also highlights the broader institutional significance of public perceptions of policing. Citizens' compliance with law cannot be explained exclusively by deterrence, because compliance may also reflect the extent to which individuals regard legal authorities and their decisions as legitimate. Nevertheless, legitimacy should not be treated as a sufficient explanation for compliance. Individual morality, social norms, perceived sanctions, socioeconomic conditions, and evaluations of particular laws may also shape lawful behavior. Police legitimacy should therefore be understood as one component of a broader institutional environment that facilitates voluntary compliance and social order.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the literature by applying the process-based model of police legitimacy to the Indonesian context. Much of the foundational literature on procedural justice and police legitimacy has developed in Western settings, whereas the Indonesian case provides an opportunity to examine how these concepts operate within a different institutional, social, and cultural environment. The findings support the relevance of procedural justice while also reinforcing the need to avoid assuming that models developed in one national context operate identically elsewhere. As Tankebe (2013) argues, legitimacy is multidimensional and may incorporate perceptions of procedural

fairness, distributive fairness, lawfulness, and police effectiveness. Consequently, future studies of police legitimacy in Indonesia should consider these dimensions simultaneously rather than reducing legitimacy to a single measure of public confidence.

The practical implications are equally significant. Strengthening police legitimacy requires more than improving public communication or emphasizing institutional achievements. Sustainable improvements in public trust are likely to depend on the consistency between formal police commitments and citizens' everyday experiences of police authority. Police reform should therefore pay attention to procedural practices, including respectful treatment, impartial decision-making, transparency, opportunities for citizens to express concerns, and credible mechanisms for accountability. Such practices can strengthen the normative basis of police authority and potentially contribute to more constructive relationships between the police and the communities they serve.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, perceptions of legitimacy, trust, cooperation, and compliance may vary across regions, demographic groups, and types of interaction with the police. Findings derived from a particular sample should therefore not automatically be generalized to the entire Indonesian population. Second, cross-sectional evidence, where applicable, limits the ability to establish temporal or causal relationships among procedural justice, legitimacy, cooperation, and compliance. Third, self-reported measures of trust and cooperation may be influenced by respondents' subjective interpretations and social desirability. Future research should address these limitations through longitudinal designs, multi-regional samples, mixed-method approaches, and, where feasible, the integration of survey data with administrative or behavioral indicators.

Future research should also investigate whether different dimensions of police legitimacy have distinct effects on cooperation and compliance. Comparative research across Indonesian provinces, urban and rural communities, and different types of police-citizen encounters could provide greater insight into the contextual conditions under which legitimacy develops. In addition, comparative studies between Indonesia and other Southeast Asian countries could help determine whether the observed relationships reflect broader regional patterns or distinctive characteristics of Indonesian policing.

In conclusion, police legitimacy in Indonesia should be understood as a relational and institutional phenomenon. Public trust, cooperation, and compliance are not simply products of police enforcement capacity; they are also shaped by citizens' perceptions of how police authority is exercised. Procedural justice provides an important foundation for these perceptions, while legitimacy provides a normative basis through which citizens may accept police authority and voluntarily engage with law enforcement. Strengthening legitimacy therefore represents not merely a matter of improving public perceptions, but an important

dimension of developing accountable, responsive, and sustainable policing in Indonesia.

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