

Bridging the Trust Gap: A Review of Public Perception Studies on Police Integrity

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ABSTRACT

Public perception of police integrity has emerged as a critical concern for governments and law enforcement agencies, particularly in the context of increasing public scrutiny, high-profile incidents of misconduct, and declining trust in policing institutions worldwide. Integrity, encompassing fairness, transparency, and accountability, forms the foundation of police legitimacy. Yet, perceptions of integrity remain uneven across societies, shaped by cultural, institutional, and experiential factors. This study addresses the need for a systematic understanding of how police integrity is perceived, the factors influencing these perceptions, and the consequences for public trust and legitimacy. The aim of this study is to analyse the research landscape on public perceptions of police integrity through a data-driven review using **Scopus AI analytics**. The methodology involved systematic mapping of published literature, drawing on outputs such as summary and expanded synthesis, concept maps, topic expert identification, and the detection of emerging themes. This approach enabled a comprehensive overview of scholarly patterns, comparative perspectives, and thematic developments in the field. Findings reveal that perceptions of police integrity are consistently influenced by procedural justice, officer characteristics, accountability mechanisms, and media representations. Comparative studies highlight cross-national variations, with integrity understood and evaluated differently across cultural and political contexts. Consequential studies show that negative perceptions significantly undermine trust, legitimacy, and willingness to cooperate with law enforcement, while accountability and procedural fairness enhance confidence. Emerging themes indicate growing scholarly attention to media narratives, technological accountability tools such as body-worn cameras, and the role of transparency in digital societies. The implications of this review are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it reinforces the centrality of procedural justice frameworks while emphasizing the need for cross-cultural refinement. Practically, it underscores the importance of investing in accountability reforms, cultural competence training, and media engagement strategies to bridge the trust gap. Collectively, the study contributes to an integrated understanding of public perceptions of police integrity and provides a roadmap for strengthening legitimacy in law enforcement.

Keywords— Police Integrity, Public Perception, Procedural Justice, Police Legitimacy and Accountability in Policing

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the police and the public is widely recognized as one of the cornerstones of democratic governance. Across societies, police legitimacy is rooted not only in their legal authority but also in the public's

perceptions of their integrity, fairness, and accountability (Tyler, 2005). As agents tasked with upholding law and order, the police rely heavily on community trust to effectively discharge their duties. Public perception of police integrity, therefore, has become a critical subject of scholarly inquiry, intersecting themes of procedural justice, transparency, community relations, and accountability (Tankebe, 2008; Melkamu & Teshome, 2023).

While the broader literature emphasizes institutional trust and social legitimacy, research on police integrity has increasingly highlighted how citizens' judgments are shaped by both direct experiences and mediated understandings of police conduct. Studies across contexts such as Ghana, Ethiopia, Russia, and Fiji reveal that public trust is influenced by perceptions of procedural fairness, police effectiveness, transparency, and accountability structures (Tankebe, 2008; Zernova, 2012; Chand et al., 2022). At the same time, comparative cross-national analyses demonstrate that societal characteristics, including rule of law adherence and corruption levels, further shape the way integrity is perceived (Ruddell & Trott, 2023). Despite these contributions, the literature remains fragmented, with considerable variation across geographic contexts, methodological approaches, and conceptual definitions of integrity.

The problem is further compounded by inconsistent findings regarding the role of personal and vicarious experiences. Negative encounters and accounts of misconduct often erode trust, yet in some contexts, perceptions of fairness and crime control mitigate these effects (De Angelis & Wolf, 2016; Adorjan et al., 2017). Moreover, demographic factors such as race, socio-economic inequality, and structural deprivation exacerbate disparities in perceptions (Burgason, 2017). This body of work underscores the complexity of studying police integrity, but it also reveals gaps in terms of synthesis and conceptual clarity. Specifically, the field lacks comprehensive reviews that systematically consolidate findings across contexts, trace emerging themes, and identify patterns through data-driven mapping.

Against this backdrop, this paper positions itself to bridge the knowledge gap by conducting a **data-driven review of public perception studies on police integrity using Scopus AI analytics**. By leveraging advanced systematic tools, this study aims to analyse the research area comprehensively, generate a concept map of the knowledge structure, identify leading scholars and topic experts, and highlight emerging themes shaping the field. Through this approach, the paper not only synthesizes past contributions but also provides a roadmap for future research.

The contribution of this study is threefold. First, it integrates diverse strands of literature into a coherent synthesis, clarifying conceptual and methodological debates. Second, it introduces a data-driven lens by employing Scopus AI analytics, offering a novel approach to mapping the intellectual landscape of police integrity research. Third, it highlights implications for both scholarship and policy by identifying gaps where reform and practice can be better informed. Ultimately, this review contributes to the broader goal of bridging the trust gap between law enforcement institutions and the communities they serve.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 describes the methodology and analytical procedures employed in conducting the Scopus AI-driven review. Section 3 presents the systematic results, including trends, concept mapping, and identification of key contributors. Section 4 synthesizes emerging themes and highlights implications for theory and practice. Section 5 discusses limitations and future research directions. Finally, Section 6 concludes with reflections on the importance of addressing public perceptions of police integrity as a pathway to strengthening legitimacy in policing.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a systematic-driven review design utilizing **Scopus AI analytics** to systematically map the research landscape on public perceptions of police integrity. The analysis was conducted on **11 September 2025**, marking the date of the Scopus AI, and followed a structured workflow to ensure transparency and replicability. Scopus was chosen as the primary database given its broad coverage of multidisciplinary peer-reviewed literature and its integration with advanced artificial intelligence features for systematic analysis (Burnham, 2006; Falagas et al., 2008).

The **search strategy** was developed to capture the breadth of relevant literature, combining terms for perception, policing, and integrity. The final search string was:

("public perception" OR "community opinion" OR "social attitude" OR "public opinion") AND ("police" OR "law enforcement" OR "officer" OR "constabulary") AND ("integrity" OR "ethics" OR "honesty" OR "transparency") AND ("study" OR "research" OR "analysis" OR "survey").

This query was executed within the Scopus database to retrieve peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, and book chapters. Only English-language publications were included to maintain consistency in data extraction and interpretation, consistent with prior systematic reviews in criminology and policing research (Donthu et al., 2021; Moral-Muñoz et al., 2020).

Scopus AI analytics generated multiple outputs that informed the structure of the review. First, the **Summary** provided an overview of the publication trends, including temporal distribution, document types, and most cited sources. This enabled identification of peaks in research attention and geographical patterns of scholarly production. Second, the **Expanded Summary** offered a deeper synthesis of the intellectual structure of the field by highlighting frequently co-occurring terms, citation patterns, and clusters of related studies. This allowed the study to pinpoint how research on police integrity intersects with broader debates on procedural justice, legitimacy, and governance.

Third, a **Concept Map** was generated to visually illustrate the interrelationships among key terms and thematic clusters. Concept mapping, as supported by Scopus AI, is widely used in systematic studies to identify knowledge structures and emerging research streams (Cobo et al., 2011). The concept map in this study revealed the centrality of "trust," "procedural fairness," and "accountability" in shaping the discourse on police integrity, while also indicating peripheral but growing themes such as "digital transparency" and "community policing."

Fourth, Scopus AI identified **Topic Experts** based on citation counts, publication volume, and influence in co-authorship networks. Recognizing influential scholars is a critical component of mapping intellectual landscapes, as it highlights both established authorities and potential collaborators within the field (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017). This study systematically noted the top contributing authors, institutions, and regions actively shaping discourse on public perception of police integrity.

Finally, the **Emerging Themes** analysis was applied to highlight nascent but growing areas of scholarly inquiry. Scopus AI detects trends by analysing keyword bursts and citation trajectories, thereby identifying future directions in research (Donthu et al., 2021). The emerging themes observed in this study included the role of **social media in shaping public opinion on police integrity**, **comparative cross-national perspectives**, and **integration of artificial intelligence and predictive policing ethics**. These themes demonstrate the evolving complexity of public trust in law enforcement in a digitalized and globalized environment.

Overall, by integrating Scopus AI's analytical functions—summary, expanded summary, concept mapping, topic expert identification, and emerging theme detection—this study systematically fulfils its aim of **analysing the research landscape of public perception studies on police integrity**. Beyond descriptive systematics, the methodology provides an in-depth conceptual framework that not only consolidates existing knowledge but also charts directions for future scholarship.

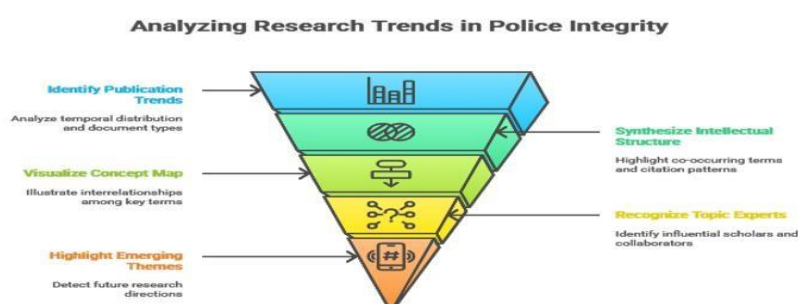


Figure 1: Analysis research trends in Police Integrity

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this Scopus AI–assisted systematic review provide a comprehensive overview of the research landscape on public perceptions of police integrity. Drawing on outputs from the **Summary and Expanded Summary, Concept Map, Topic Expert identification, and Emerging Themes**, the results highlight both the established knowledge base and evolving directions within this area of inquiry.

Summary and Expanded Summary

The **Summary analysis** of Scopus AI outputs reveals that research on public perceptions of police integrity has consistently emphasized the interplay between service quality, procedural fairness, and institutional accountability. A central finding is that citizens' overall impressions of police services strongly shape subsequent evaluations of courtesy, equal treatment, and honesty (Chang, 2022). This phenomenon, often described as a “halo effect,” demonstrates how broader perceptions of institutional performance can extend to judgments of officer integrity. Such results underscore the importance of first-order interactions—how the public perceives daily service delivery—as a gateway to building trust in law enforcement agencies.

The **Expanded Summary** highlights the role of accountability as a recurring theme in shaping public attitudes. Empirical studies consistently find that perceived accountability is a robust predictor of satisfaction with local police, even after controlling for socio-demographic and contextual variables (De Angelis & Wolf, 2016). This suggests that public trust is not solely grounded in enforcement capacity or crime control effectiveness, but also in perceptions of internal controls, transparency, and the willingness of agencies to discipline misconduct. In fact, the literature indicates that the absence of visible accountability mechanisms erodes legitimacy and increases skepticism toward law enforcement institutions (Tankebe, 2008; Melkamu & Teshome, 2023).

From a methodological perspective, many studies adopt the **theory of police integrity**, which is structured around four key dimensions: familiarity with and enforcement of formal rules, the presence of effective internal control mechanisms, the willingness to challenge the code of silence, and the influence of broader societal norms (Ivkovic, 2015). These dimensions have been operationalized through structured questionnaires, often asking respondents to evaluate the seriousness of misconduct scenarios, appropriate disciplinary responses, and the likelihood of reporting unethical behavior (Ivkovic et al., 2025; Prprović et al., 2022). Such approaches provide a structured lens to capture the public's moral and ethical evaluations of policing practices.

Despite these contributions, the Expanded Summary also underscores several **challenges and gaps** in the literature. First, public perception is prone to cognitive biases, meaning that responses may be shaped by heuristic judgments rather than objective encounters (Chang, 2022). Second, there is an uneven distribution of research across geographic regions. For example, studies in small island developing states such as Fiji reveal distinctive challenges, including perceptions of corruption and strained community relations, yet remain underrepresented in the global literature (Chand et al., 2022). Third, research highlights that factors such as race, ethnicity, neighborhood context, and even linguistic accents significantly influence perceptions of integrity, raising the need for more nuanced, context-sensitive studies (Lai & Zhao, 2010; He et al., 2023).

The implications of these findings are profound for both scholarship and policy. From a scholarly perspective, the consistency of results across regions demonstrates that public perceptions of police integrity are anchored in universal dimensions—fairness, accountability, transparency—while still being mediated by local social and cultural contexts. From a policy perspective, strengthening internal accountability mechanisms, enhancing transparency in reporting practices, and building trust through fair and respectful daily interactions are crucial strategies for bridging the trust gap. Furthermore, addressing regional blind spots and incorporating new methodological innovations—such as experimental designs examining accent, cultural identity, or digital interactions—will be vital in refining our understanding of integrity in policing.

Concept Map of Public Perception of Police Integrity

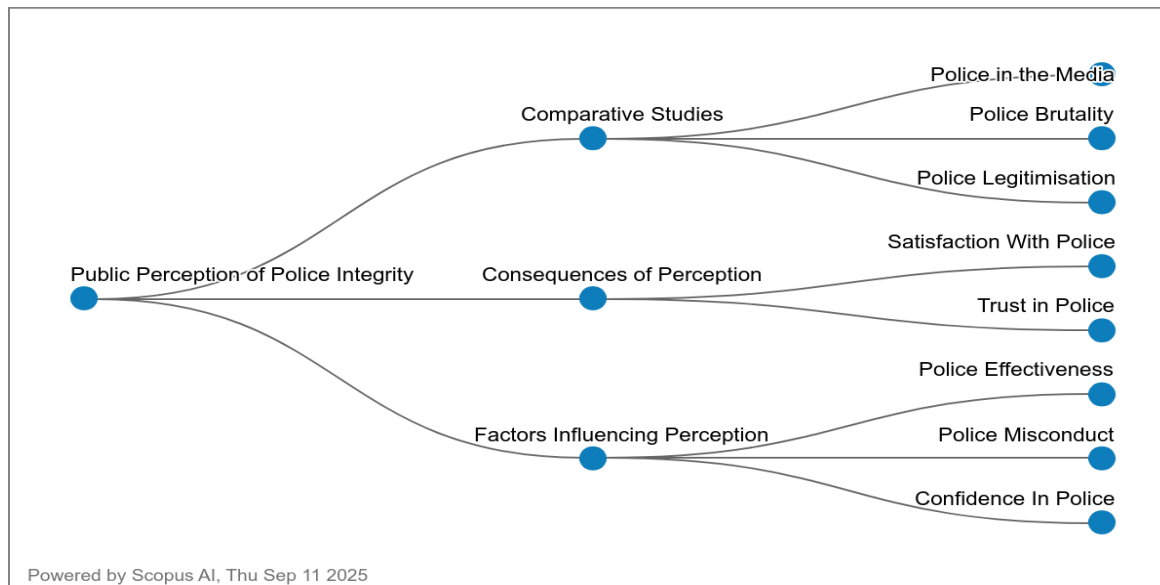


Figure 2: Concept Map of Public Perception of Police Integrity

The concept map generated through Scopus AI (trial date: 11 September 2025) provides a structured visualization of the thematic connections within the field of public perception of police integrity. At the center of the map lies the core construct—public perception of police integrity—which branches into three major dimensions: **comparative studies**, **consequences of perception**, and **factors influencing perception**. These dimensions capture both the theoretical depth and practical relevance of the research landscape, highlighting how perceptions of police integrity are formed, the conditions that influence them, and the broader implications for institutional legitimacy.

A review of Public Perception of Police Integrity

Public perception of police integrity has been consistently identified as a fundamental determinant of trust in law enforcement institutions and broader government legitimacy. In conflict-stricken or divided societies, perceptions of integrity are especially salient, as citizens' trust in public institutions often hinges on their view of the police as either protectors of public order or agents of corruption (Singh, 2022). When the public perceives that police officers act with honesty, impartiality, and accountability, institutional trust tends to increase, thereby reinforcing the legitimacy of the state. Conversely, perceptions of widespread corruption or misconduct within the police force can severely erode trust, destabilize governance, and even escalate public unrest.

A critical insight from comparative studies is that public perceptions often diverge significantly from internal police evaluations. For instance, research in Croatia revealed that citizens, particularly students, rated police integrity more negatively compared to police officers themselves (Prprović et al., 2022). This discrepancy reflects a perception gap between those inside law enforcement institutions and the public they serve. Such differences highlight the importance of bridging perspectives through transparency initiatives, community engagement, and accountability measures to align institutional practices with public expectations.

Factors influencing public perception are frequently tied to citizens' direct or indirect interactions with law enforcement. Procedural justice—defined as fair treatment, impartial decision-making, and respect for rights—emerges as a consistent predictor of positive evaluations of police integrity (Wells, 2007). Citizens who experience respectful and procedurally fair interactions are more likely to perceive the police as trustworthy and legitimate, whereas encounters marked by unfairness or abuse diminish perceptions of integrity. These findings underscore the critical role of everyday encounters in shaping long-term public confidence in law enforcement.

Cross-national comparisons further reveal cultural and contextual variations in how police integrity is perceived. A study comparing Chinese and American college students found that Chinese students viewed the police less

positively than their American counterparts, with perceptions strongly influenced by media portrayals and personal victimization experiences (Wu, 2010). Such findings illustrate that perceptions of integrity are not merely products of institutional performance but also shaped by societal narratives, political contexts, and cultural expectations. This underscores the importance of situating analyses of public perception within specific national and cultural frameworks.

Finally, the impact of public perception on institutional trust and legitimacy cannot be overstated. Concerns over misconduct, brutality, and corruption remain significant obstacles to building trust in the police across diverse societies, including small island states such as Fiji, where these issues have been shown to weaken community confidence (Chand et al., 2022). Public perception of police integrity thus serves as both a barometer of law enforcement legitimacy and a predictor of citizen cooperation. Strengthening police integrity through reforms in accountability, transparency, and community relations is therefore crucial for bridging the trust gap between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve.

Public Perception of Police Integrity – Comparative Studies

Comparative studies consistently highlight that public perception of police integrity is not uniform across contexts but instead reflects diverse cultural, institutional, and experiential factors. One key finding is the divergence between how citizens and police officers view integrity within the same system. A study in Croatia demonstrated that students expressed significantly less positive views of police integrity compared to police officers, with students associating policing with lower standards of honesty and fairness (Prprović et al., 2022). This perception gap reveals the importance of recognizing how insider and outsider perspectives diverge, suggesting that officers may overestimate the integrity of their institution while the public remains more critical. Such discrepancies undermine mutual understanding and point to the necessity of increasing transparency and accountability to align institutional self-perceptions with public expectations.

Cross-national comparisons further underscore the heterogeneous nature of police integrity. Ivković and Haberfeld (2015) found that tolerance for misconduct varied across ten countries, reflecting differences in political culture, legal frameworks, and organizational norms. For example, practices deemed acceptable in one jurisdiction, such as minor gratuities, may be considered clear violations in another. This heterogeneity highlights the challenge of establishing universal benchmarks for integrity and illustrates how societal norms shape perceptions of what constitutes ethical policing. Comparative research thus provides important insights into the contextual nature of integrity, cautioning against overly generalized assumptions in global debates on police legitimacy.

Another significant insight relates to the role of public opinion in shaping evaluations of police service. Chang (2022) reported that in the United States, citizens' overall perceptions of police services generated a "halo effect," positively influencing evaluations of courtesy, equal treatment, and honesty. This indicates that general satisfaction with institutional performance reinforces perceptions of integrity, suggesting that improving everyday service delivery can indirectly enhance trust and legitimacy. Importantly, this finding emphasizes that integrity is not merely assessed through high-profile incidents of misconduct but also through routine interactions and the broader climate of service provision.

Studies in East Asia provide further nuance to comparative research by demonstrating how structural and social factors influence perceptions of integrity. Lai et al. (2024) found that in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, adherence to procedural justice, effectiveness in crime control, and residential stability significantly increased citizen confidence in the police. These findings suggest that in societies with strong communal bonds and relatively homogeneous populations, integrity is closely tied to procedural fairness and effectiveness in delivering public safety. The regional perspective underscores how cultural expectations and institutional stability shape confidence, making procedural justice a consistent but contextually mediated driver of legitimacy.

Finally, accountability emerges as a central determinant of public attitudes across comparative contexts. A study in a Western city showed that satisfaction with police accountability was a strong predictor of satisfaction with local police, even after controlling for demographic and contextual factors (De Angelis & Wolf, 2016). This reinforces the broader argument that integrity is not only about adherence to rules but also about demonstrating

transparency and responsiveness when misconduct occurs. Comparative evidence, therefore, converges on the conclusion that while cultural, institutional, and social contexts shape specific perceptions, accountability and procedural fairness remain universally critical to sustaining legitimacy. Collectively, these findings emphasize that comparative studies provide valuable insights into the global diversity of perceptions while highlighting common principles that underpin trust in policing.

Public Perception of Police Integrity – Consequences of Perception

Public perception of police integrity carries significant consequences for trust in law enforcement and the broader legitimacy of government institutions. Negative perceptions, particularly in divided or conflict-ridden societies, can undermine institutional stability by eroding citizens' belief in the fairness and honesty of law enforcement (Singh, 2022). When citizens perceive the police as corrupt or lacking integrity, the ripple effect extends beyond law enforcement agencies, diminishing trust in the state as a whole. This erosion of legitimacy is particularly damaging in fragile contexts, where maintaining public confidence in governance systems is vital for peacebuilding and social order.

One of the strongest predictors of how the public evaluates police integrity is procedural justice. Studies consistently demonstrate that perceptions of fairness in police interactions significantly influence citizens' evaluations of police performance (Wells, 2007). When citizens believe they are treated respectfully and impartially, they are more likely to perceive the police as legitimate, regardless of the outcome of the encounter. Conversely, perceptions of unfair treatment contribute to distrust and scepticism toward law enforcement institutions. This highlights that the consequences of public perceptions are not only attitudinal but also behavioural, as trust in procedural justice directly affects cooperation with the police and compliance with the law.

Public perceptions of police integrity are also shaped by a complex interplay of personal experiences, media representations, and demographic variables. Research on Russian policing demonstrates that negative personal experiences with misconduct or abuse foster widespread distrust, which often generalizes to perceptions of the police institution as a whole (Zernova, 2012). Similarly, studies show that effective communication and transparency can mitigate negative perceptions, particularly in local communities where visibility of police actions is high (Bain et al., 2014). Moreover, individual cognitive traits, such as need for cognition and numeracy, also influence how citizens interpret information about police performance, suggesting that the consequences of perception are partly filtered through psychological predispositions (Pham & Cheng, 2020).

High-profile events and scandals exacerbate the consequences of perception, often triggering widespread distrust and fear of the police. For example, the murder of Sarah Everard in the United Kingdom, which involved a serving police officer, had a profound impact on public perceptions of police integrity, particularly among women, leading to heightened fear and reduced confidence in law enforcement (Herbert et al., 2025). Such cases demonstrate how singular events can catalyse broader crises of legitimacy, reinforcing public doubts about accountability and systemic integrity. The consequences are not limited to individual perceptions but extend to collective attitudes, shaping social movements, protests, and demands for institutional reform.

Finally, public perceptions of police integrity often create “halo effects,” where overall satisfaction with police service influences subsequent evaluations of courtesy, fairness, and honesty (Chang, 2022). This finding underscores the compounding nature of perceptions: once trust is established, citizens are more likely to evaluate police actions positively; however, once trust is broken, negative appraisals can dominate future interactions. The consequences of perception, therefore, extend beyond episodic evaluations and can solidify into long-term patterns of trust or distrust. This body of evidence highlights the importance of investing in integrity, transparency, and procedural justice to ensure that public perceptions contribute positively to the legitimacy of policing institutions.

Public Perception of Police Integrity – Factors Influencing Perception

Research on police integrity demonstrates that public perceptions are shaped by a constellation of demographic, experiential, and contextual factors. Demographics such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status, as well as

direct contact with the police, consistently influence levels of trust. Wentz and Schlimgen (2012) found that citizens' personal encounters with the police, as well as their perceptions of how officers treat other community members, significantly affect their views of police integrity. This indicates that evaluations are not formed in isolation but reflect both individual experiences and broader community narratives about policing.

Another important determinant is **police professionalism and public safety**, which directly contribute to public satisfaction and confidence. In a study conducted in India, general satisfaction with police services, perceptions of professionalism, and feelings of safety were significant predictors of citizens' confidence in police-community relationships (Nalla & Madan, 2012). These findings suggest that integrity is strongly associated with how well the police fulfil their expected roles, demonstrating that effective service provision enhances both public confidence and perceptions of ethical conduct. Thus, institutional performance is intertwined with perceptions of integrity.

Cognitive and psychological dispositions also play a role in shaping perceptions. Pham and Cheng (2020) found that individuals with higher levels of need for cognition and numeracy tend to hold more favourable attitudes toward the police. This highlights that thinking styles and information-processing abilities influence how citizens interpret police behaviour and institutional integrity. At the same time, perceptions of **procedural justice** remain among the strongest predictors of trust: Wells (2007) demonstrated that fair treatment during encounters significantly improves evaluations of police officers, regardless of whether outcomes were favourable. Collectively, these findings underscore that both cognitive dispositions and procedural fairness shape perceptions of integrity.

Broader social and cultural factors, including media portrayals, corruption, and abuse of power, further influence public perceptions. Wu (2010) showed that media representations significantly shape evaluations of police performance among Chinese and American students, while Semukhina and Reynolds (2014) reported that experiences with bribery and abuse of power in Russia had strong negative correlations with trust in the police. These results illustrate how perceptions of integrity are not only influenced by individual experiences but also by systemic issues and societal narratives about corruption. In societies with high perceived corruption, police integrity becomes closely linked to broader institutional legitimacy.

Finally, studies of juveniles and social contextual framing emphasize the dynamic nature of perception formation. Geistman and Smith (2007) found that factors such as acceptance of drug use, personal victimization, race, and parental presence significantly shaped juveniles' attitudes toward the police. Similarly, Braga et al. (2014) demonstrated that contextual factors, such as the general climate of police-community relations, significantly influence how citizens appraise police behaviour. These findings reveal that public perception of integrity is mediated by life stage, social identity, and neighbourhood dynamics, highlighting the need for context-sensitive policing strategies. Together, the evidence suggests that demographic, experiential, psychological, and contextual factors interact in complex ways to shape public judgments of police integrity.

Emerging Themes

A **consistent theme** within the literature is the centrality of public perceptions of police legitimacy and procedural justice. Research across jurisdictions demonstrates that citizens' evaluations of fairness, respect, and impartiality during police encounters strongly influence perceptions of legitimacy (Tyler, 2005; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). Procedural justice serves as a foundation for public cooperation, with citizens more likely to comply with the law and support police activities when they perceive officers as fair and transparent (Tankebe, 2008). This theme underscores that procedural fairness is not only an ethical imperative but also an instrumental mechanism for strengthening public trust and cooperation.

Another consistent theme concerns the **impact of officer characteristics on public perception**. Studies show that demographic factors such as race, gender, and cultural competence shape how communities perceive police legitimacy (Brown & Benedict, 2002; Schuck & Rabe-Hemp, 2005). For example, female officers are often associated with greater community trust, while officers who demonstrate cultural competence are more likely to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in public evaluations. This body of research suggests that increasing diversity

within police forces and prioritizing cultural awareness training are crucial strategies to address community concerns about bias and representation.

The **perception of police misconduct and accountability** also emerges as a consistent theme, reflecting persistent public concern about corruption, brutality, and transparency. High-profile cases of misconduct often trigger widespread distrust, regardless of subsequent accountability measures (Weitzer & Tuch, 2006). At the same time, the use of accountability mechanisms such as body-worn cameras has been linked to improved perceptions of transparency and officer integrity (Ariel et al., 2015). These findings highlight that integrity is not only tested during routine encounters but also in the institutional capacity to respond effectively to misconduct. Thus, accountability frameworks are essential to rebuilding and sustaining legitimacy in the aftermath of scandals.

A further consistent theme involves the **role of media in shaping public perceptions of policing**. Media coverage—whether traditional or digital—has a profound influence on how citizens perceive police integrity (Chermak et al., 2020; Dowler & Zawilski, 2007). Negative portrayals of misconduct amplify distrust, whereas positive stories of effective community engagement can enhance legitimacy. Importantly, social media platforms intensify the visibility and emotional salience of police actions, accelerating the spread of both critical and supportive narratives (Mourtgos et al., 2019). This indicates that public perceptions are mediated not only by direct encounters but also by broader communication environments, making media strategy a key consideration for law enforcement agencies.

Taken together, these consistent themes reveal the multidimensional nature of public perceptions of police integrity. Procedural justice and officer characteristics influence evaluations at the interpersonal level, while accountability measures and media narratives shape broader institutional legitimacy. The consistency of these findings across studies reinforces their centrality to understanding trust in policing. Future research can build on these themes by testing hypotheses such as whether procedural justice training improves legitimacy, whether female representation increases trust, or whether body-worn cameras and media strategies can effectively mitigate the negative consequences of misconduct.

Comparative Analysis with the Prior Study in the Field

In conceptualizing this paper, the previous paper on thematic review with title of “Police Integrity: A Thematic Review of Its Public Perception” in 2024 (Ramli et al., 2024) is used to see the evolution of public perception in this field of study.

The literature search was conducted and retrieved 97 articles from Scopus, 24 from ScienceDirect, and 87 from Wiley, producing a broad pool of publications for screening. A total of 171 articles were excluded because their content was premature, anecdotal, not directly related to police integrity issues, or because the full text was incomplete, inaccessible, or affected by broken links and overlapping or incomplete metadata. After applying these exclusion criteria, the final number of articles retained for review was 37, as shown in Table 1. These 37 articles were then imported into ATLAS.ti 9 as primary documents. Each article was organised according to key bibliographic categories: author, issue number, periodical, publisher, volume, and year of publication. This categorisation enabled a structured analysis of publication trends, including the distribution of articles by year and the progression of research patterns over time. The final dataset in ATLAS.ti 9 therefore consisted of 37 systematically selected documents, forming the core materials for thematic analysis.

The search strings for the stated thematic review paper are as follows:

| Databases | Search Strings | Total from databases |
|-----------|--|----------------------|
| Scopus | TITLE-ABS-KEY ("police integrity") AND PUBYEAR > 2016 AND PUBYEAR < 2022 | 97 articles |

| | | |
|------------------------------|--|--------------|
| | <p>TITLE-ABS-KEY ("police ethics") AND PUBYEAR > 2016 AND PUBYEAR< 022</p> <p>TITLE-ABS-KEY (police AND ethic*) AND PUBYEAR > 2016 AND PUBYEAR < 2022 AND (LIMIT-TO (OA, "all") AND (LIMIT-TO (DOCTYPE , "ar")) AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "SOCI") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "ARTS") OR LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA , "MULT")) AND (LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Police") OR LIMIT-TO (EXACTKEYWORD , "Ethics"))</p> | |
| ScienceDirect | <p>"police integrity" Year: 2017 - 2021</p> <p>"police ethics" Year: 2017 - 2021</p> <p>Polic? Integrity Year: 2017 – 2021</p> <p>Police ethic? Year 2019 – 2021</p> | 24 articles |
| Wiley Online Library | <p>"police integrity" year: [2017 to 2021]</p> <p>"police ethics" year: [2017 – 2021]</p> <p>"police ethic*" year: [2017 – 2021]</p> | 87 articles |
| Total articles from database | | 208 articles |

Table 1: Search strings from Scopus, Scince Direct and Wiley Online Library

The stated study was aimed to synthesized literature on “police integrity” and its public perception from 2017 to 2021 from four databases including Scopus, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library by using Atlas.ti 9 (using Zairul’s thematic review approach for coding and theme development (Zairul, 2020)) and focused on substantive issues in police integrity including misconduct, public perception and trust, emerging corrective measures with the central research question (RQ): “What are the trends of police integrity discussed in the literature and publications from 2017 to 2021?” Thus, it can be said that, the thematic review paper was more topic-bounded based “police integrity”/ “police ethics” keywords and problem centred which has highlighted the police misconduct issue and deterioration of public trust.

Turning the tables, this paper aims to map a broader research landscape on public perceptions of police integrity, using a more inclusive search strategy centered on perception and integrity together from Scopus database, enhanced with Scopus AI analytics for mapping patterns, clusters and themes. The focus is not only on “police integrity” as a keyword, but on how the public evaluates police integrity through constructs such as procedural justice, accountability, media representation, and officer characteristics. For instances, this paper seeks to capture comparative, consequential and emerging themes such as cross-national variation, trust and legitimacy outcomes, body-worn cameras and digital transparency. This paper is more on perception bounded consisting of public perception of police integrity, and it is operationalised through concepts of justice, legitimacy and accountability constructs, yet widens the conceptual field beyond explicit “integrity” and “ethics” labelling.

Therefore, the present study extends and enriches the earlier thematic review by addressing its limitations, widening the analytical lens, and introducing more contemporary research themes. In short, this paper represents a significant betterment of the earlier thematic review, offering deeper insights, broader coverage, and a more current understanding of the research landscape.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this review has synthesized the growing body of scholarship on public perceptions of police integrity, highlighting how perceptions are shaped by procedural justice, officer characteristics, accountability mechanisms, media influence, and broader socio-political contexts. Across comparative, consequential, and factor-based studies, the evidence consistently shows that perceptions of fairness, transparency, and professionalism are central to sustaining trust in law enforcement. At the same time, cross-national studies underscore the heterogeneity of these perceptions, reflecting cultural, institutional, and historical differences in how integrity is defined and evaluated.

From a theoretical perspective, the findings reaffirm the explanatory power of **procedural justice theory** (Tyler, 2005; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003), which posits that fairness and respectful treatment are more influential than outcomes in shaping legitimacy. Comparative studies expand this theoretical framework by demonstrating that integrity perceptions are mediated by contextual variables such as corruption levels, media environments, and cultural norms (Ivković & Haberfeld, 2015; Ruddell & Trott, 2023). The review thus contributes to the theoretical refinement of legitimacy studies by emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural variation and the need to integrate institutional and societal-level factors into models of public trust.

Practically, the findings carry significant implications for policing agencies worldwide. First, investing in **procedural justice training** and **cultural competence programs** can enhance community trust and reduce disparities in public perceptions. Second, strengthening **accountability mechanisms**, including transparent complaint procedures and the deployment of body-worn cameras, can mitigate the negative effects of misconduct scandals (Ariel et al., 2015). Third, engagement with the **media and digital platforms** must be strategically managed to counter misinformation and promote narratives of fairness and integrity. Collectively, these strategies can help bridge the trust gap, improving both the effectiveness and legitimacy of law enforcement institutions.

Despite its contributions, this review faces several limitations. The reliance on published abstracts and secondary data may limit the depth of analysis, as full-text studies could provide more nuanced insights into context-specific dynamics. Furthermore, much of the existing research is concentrated in Western and developed contexts, leaving important gaps in regions such as Africa, Latin America, and small island states where integrity challenges may be pronounced but underexplored. Methodologically, the predominance of survey-based studies risks oversimplifying perceptions that are shaped by complex socio-cultural factors and mediated by cognitive biases.

Future research should therefore address these gaps by expanding comparative analyses to underrepresented regions and incorporating **mixed-methods approaches** that combine surveys with ethnographic and experimental designs. Additionally, new research should explore the influence of **digital media, artificial intelligence, and predictive policing technologies** on public perceptions of integrity, given their increasing role in contemporary law enforcement. Finally, longitudinal studies would be valuable in examining how perceptions evolve in response to reforms, scandals, or societal change, providing a more dynamic understanding of the relationship between integrity, legitimacy, and trust.

In conclusion, public perceptions of police integrity remain central to the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions. By integrating theoretical insights with practical strategies, while acknowledging current limitations, this review provides a foundation for both scholars and practitioners to strengthen integrity and rebuild trust in policing.

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