

Navigating the Spectrum of Police Behavior: Transformational Leadership and Legitimacy in Fostering Internal Regulatory Compliance

Amira Ariffin^{1*}, Azeem Fazwan Ahmad Farouk², Illisriyani Ismail³

Centre for Policy Research (CPR), Universiti Sains Malaysia, 11800 Gelugor, Penang, Malaysia

***Corresponding Author**

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600905>

Received: 18 June 2026; Accepted: 24 June 2026; Published: 08 July 2026

ABSTRACT

Studies on police behavior are often caught up in the "extreme polar syndrome," focusing too much on either serious crimes (such as corruption) or extreme volunteerism that violates policies, such as Prosocial Rule Breaking (PSRB). This tendency has led the mainstream literature to overlook the most critical aspect of organizational governance: mandatory compliance with daily disciplinary rules. Thus, this narrative review aims to map the spectrum of police behaviors and highlight the empirical gap regarding compliance behavior among law enforcement officers. The article search was conducted across major databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, using a specific search string method to ensure comprehensive literature retrieval. The results of the synthesis classify policing behavior into two main spectrums. First, the Non-Compliance Spectrum, which includes four lenses: (1) Integrity Violations and Criminal Deviance, (2) Sociocultural Non-Compliance, (3) Bureaucratic Manipulation, and (4) Prosocial Deviance / Prosocial Rule Breaking. Second, the Compliance Spectrum, which consists of three lenses: (5) Instrumental Compliance, (6) Normative Compliance, Legitimacy and Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB), and (7) Value-Driven Performance Compliance. This study concludes that, to sustainably maintain work discipline within the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP) force in line with the provisions of the internal regulation, namely the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993 [P.U. (A) 395], enforcement institutions must shift from a purely punitive approach toward an approach rooted in Legitimacy Theory. Hence, Transformational Leadership is proposed as the ideal mechanism to inculcate moral values, build procedural fairness, and stimulate voluntary compliance among police officers.

Keywords: Police Behavior, Regulatory Compliance, Transformational Leadership, Legitimacy, Narrative Review

INTRODUCTION

Police duties are a very complex and challenging profession. Essentially, police organizations operate within the framework of a rigid, centralized, and semi-military bureaucratic hierarchical structure (Filstad et al., 2020; Modise, 2023; Nasir et al., 2025; Pozzobon & Scott, 2024; Wang et al., 2020). At the same time, the execution of their duties is highly bound and influenced by strong local cultural norms and dynamics, such as the practice of deep-rooted traditional hierarchies (AlSabah, 2025; Shi, 2024). This work environment, which is often hampered by strict bureaucratic procedures as well as sociocultural pressures, puts police officers in a difficult position, thus influencing their decision on whether to comply with or violate work rules (Charbonneau et al., 2023; Rahmah et al., 2021; Wolff, 2025).

To understand this phenomenon of policing behavior, past studies have used a variety of different theoretical lenses and terminology. The literature illustrates a broad spectrum of concepts used to describe the Non-Compliance Spectrum. It starts from a moral and criminal lens, such as integrity violations and criminal deviance

(Borian et al., 2024; Huberts et al., 2007). This influence extends to sociocultural non-compliance, such as favoritism, wasta, and guanxi practices (AlSabah, 2025; Shi, 2024), and to bureaucratic manipulation involving rule bending and workarounds (Charbonneau et al., 2023; Wolff, 2025). Also not left out is a study that examines non-compliance through the lens of prosocial deviance, namely Prosocial Rule Breaking (PSRB), where members are willing to violate official policies for the sake of continuity of service to customers (Nasir et al., 2024; Wolff, 2025). In Malaysia, this challenge is a reality; for instance, case studies by Yunus and Burhan (2023) against RMP officers showed that integrity violations and daily discipline problems are still a threat to the organization.

While many previous studies have examined police officers' behavior through these lenses, a critical literature gap remains. The majority of past research has been caught up in the "extreme polar syndrome," where they tend to see police compliance or non-compliance at two opposite ends, either focusing too much on serious crime (such as corruption and extortion) or focusing too much on extreme voluntary actions that violate policies such as PSRB (Modula et al., 2024; Nasir et al., 2025). This tendency has led the literature to marginalize and overlook one of the most basic and critical elements of compliance in policing operations: the mandatory observance of daily disciplinary rules (Satriya et al., 2025; Sija, 2023). In a security context such as the RMP, the continuity of good governance begins from the most literal level of compliance with basic disciplinary instruments, in particular the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993 [P.U. (A) 395]. This is particularly important because, as evidenced by Sija (2023), strict policies and regulations alone are insufficient without strong internal commitment from each member.

As such, this narrative review article aims to map the diversity of concepts of compliance behavior in the current literature by organizing them into two main spectrums, namely the Non-Compliance Spectrum and the Compliance Spectrum (comprising a total of seven continuous lenses). This mapping highlights gaps in the daily discipline compliance study, thereby prompting a shift in how discipline and performance of enforcement institutions in Malaysia, particularly the RMP force, are assessed (Satriya et al., 2025). Taking into account the constraints of a punitive, punishment-based approach, this study argues, using the axis of Legitimacy Theory, that disciplinary compliance (such as P.U. (A) 395) should be voluntary (Tyler, 2006, 2025). To achieve this, transformational leadership is proposed as the most effective holistic intervention to build procedural fairness and foster moral values, while sustainably reinforcing organizational culture and stimulating work discipline within the force (Abique, 2024; Ali & Ahamat, 2025; Satriya et al., 2025).

METHODOLOGY

Literature Search Strategy

To enhance methodological rigor and address the replicability limitations often associated with narrative reviews, the literature search strategy was systematically designed using a combination of advanced search techniques. A comprehensive search was conducted across three primary academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science (WoS), and Google Scholar, covering publications between the years 2006 and 2026. The identification of relevant literature was executed using specific keywords tailored to the research objectives, emphasizing police behavior, compliance behavior and law enforcement context. The search strings were formulated using Boolean operators (AND, OR) and phrase searching to accurately capture the targeted concepts across different databases (Shaffril et al., 2021). This work also practiced the manual search technique, which is handpicking, snowballing, and backward tracking techniques. The formulated search strings are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Formulated Search Strings

Databases	Search String
Scopus https://www.scopus.com/home.uri	TITLE-ABS-KEY ("police behavior" OR "police behaviour*") AND ("compliance behavior" OR "compliance behaviour" OR "compliance") AND ("law enforcement")
Web of Science https://www.webofscience.com/	TS=(police behavior OR police behaviour) AND TS=(compliance behavior OR compliance behaviour OR compliance) AND TS=(law enforcement)

Databases	Search String
Google Scholar https://scholar.google.com/	("police behavior" OR "police behaviour*") AND ("compliance behavior" OR "compliance behaviour" OR "compliance") AND ("law enforcement")

The study selection process was guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram principles to enhance the transparency of this narrative review (Moher et al., 2009). The process commenced with the Identification phase, which yielded an initial pool of records across the selected databases. Following the removal of duplicate records, the Screening phase was conducted by meticulously examining the titles and abstracts of the remaining articles. Subsequently, in the Eligibility phase, the full texts of potentially relevant articles were assessed against predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the relevance and quality of the literature synthesized in this narrative review, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria were established prior to the screening process (Shaffril et al., 2021). The establishment of these boundaries is crucial to maintaining scientific rigor and minimizing selection bias. The complete set of parameters used to screen the literature is summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Publication Timeline	Published between year 2006 and 2026.	Published before the year 2006.
Language	English and Malay.	Languages other than English and Malay.
Publication Type	Peer-reviewed empirical journal articles, theoretical/conceptual papers, and authoritative official organizational reports.	Non-academic blogs, magazines, student theses, and non-peer-reviewed sources.
Study Population	Law enforcement personnel, specifically police officers, and other public sector workers with similar law enforcement duties.	Other public sectors (lecturer/teacher, students, doctor/nurse) and the private sector

Quality Appraisal

Unlike systematic reviews, narrative reviews often face criticism for the absence of formal quality assessment tools. To address this methodological limitation and ensure the rigor of the synthesized literature, this study adapted the Scale for the Assessment of Narrative Review Articles (SANRA) framework (Baethge et al., 2019). The selected materials comprising empirical articles, theoretical papers, authoritative reports, and relevant scholarly books were evaluated against SANRA's core criteria. These encompass the clarity of the study's aims, the transparency of the literature search, the adequacy of referencing, and the robustness of scientific reasoning. Only literature that demonstrated strong theoretical or empirical rigor and direct relevance to law enforcement compliance behavior was retained for the final narrative synthesis.

There are significant advantages to using a narrative review approach for this study. In contrast to other types of reviews, such as systematic literature reviews (SLR), which are typically more linear and tied to rigorous quantitative data extraction, narrative reviews offer much greater leeway (Hodgkinson & Ford, 2015). It allows for a more independent exploration of theoretical frameworks (such as Legitimacy Theory and Social Learning Theory) as well as exploring historical and cultural backgrounds that are important components of understanding the dynamics behind police behavior. More critically, this approach allows for the synthesis of literature from various disciplines to detect marginalized issues in the academic literature, in particular the phenomenon of "extreme polar syndrome" which leads to a neglect of focus on the observance of the daily discipline required under the provisions of P.U. (A) 395. Therefore, this methodology is suited for bridging the current literature gap and providing a solid theoretical basis for future empirical investigations. The selection process for articles is shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Flow diagram of the study selection process.

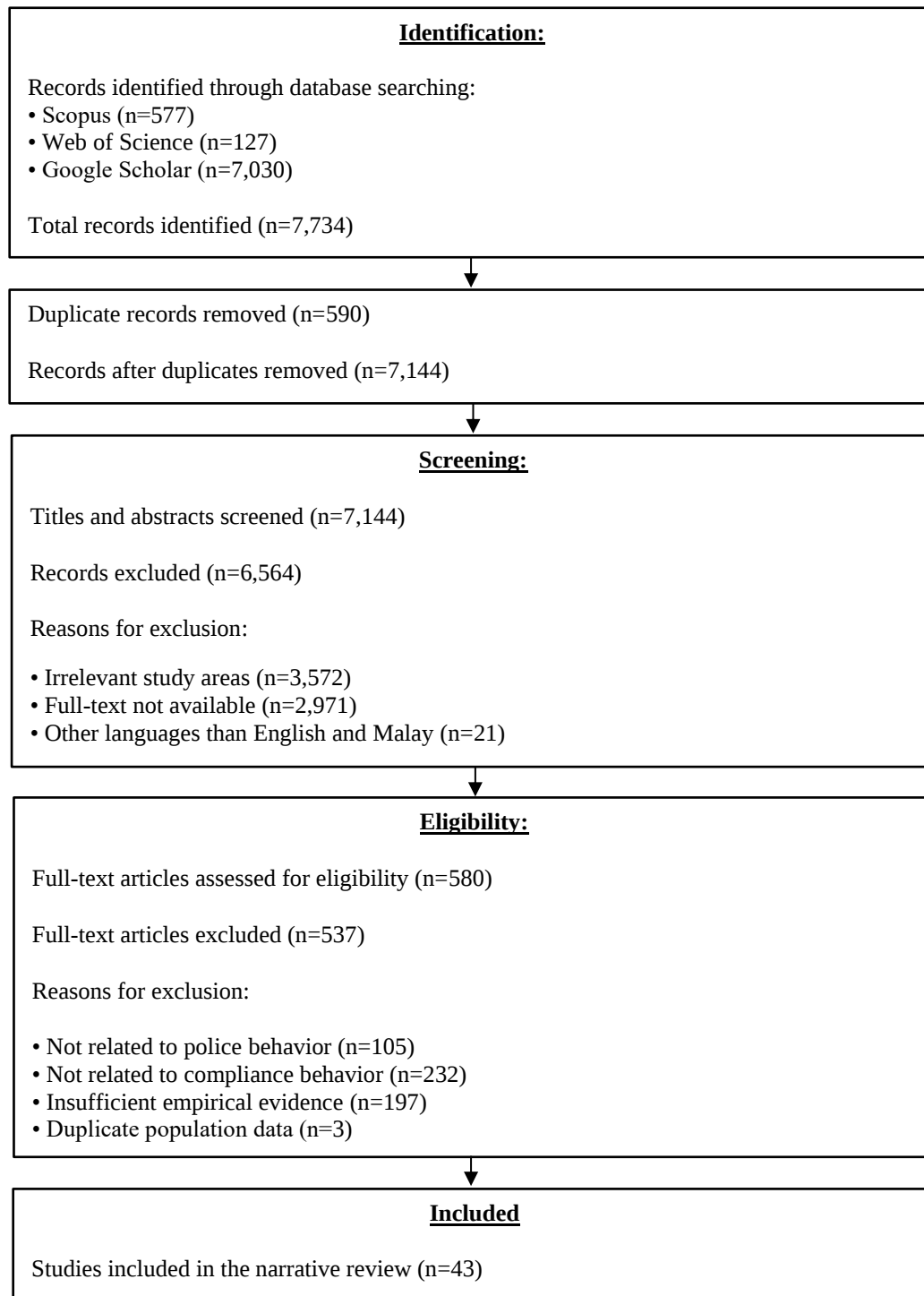


Figure 1 illustrates the methodological framework used for the literature search and selection process in this narrative review, adapted from the PRISMA guidelines (Moher et al., 2009; Shaffril et al., 2021). The initial search across Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar (spanning from year 2006 to 2026) yielded 7,734 records. After removing duplicates and screening the titles and abstracts, 580 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Ultimately, a final total of 43 studies met the inclusion criteria and were included in the narrative synthesis.

RESULTS

The results from the literature review synthesis reveal that the behavioral patterns of law enforcement personnel in the field can be mapped into two main contradictory continuums, namely the Non-Compliance Spectrum and the Compliance Spectrum.

Non-Compliance Spectrum

Analysis from past research has formed four main lenses of non-compliance (Lens 1 to Lens 4) as follows:

Lens 1: Integrity Violations and Criminal Deviance

In the context of law enforcement, non-compliance is often interpreted through the lens of extreme crime, leading to a direct violation of integrity. Past studies have defined corruption as the abuse of public office for personal gain (Huberts et al., 2007). Non-compliance under this lens encompasses a broad spectrum of deviant acts, such as accepting bribes, abuse of power, manipulation of information, extortion, as well as unwarranted violence against civilians (Huberts et al., 2007; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025). Interestingly, the criminological literature also classifies these perpetrators of non-compliance into two main categories: "grass-eaters", i.e., subordinate officials who passively accept small bribes, and "meat-eaters", i.e., superior officials who proactively look for opportunities to acquire large-scale bribes (Quah, 2014).

In developing countries and particularly in Asia, these symptoms of extreme non-compliance are often considered an endemic disease that shackles policing institutions (Isaeva et al., 2026; Quah, 2014). Weaknesses in internal controls, resource constraints, low salary compensation, and high workloads are often rationalized by law enforcement personnel to justify their involvement in misconduct practices (Brahim et al., 2021; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025). Over time, this situation leads to the phenomenon of "normalization of corruption", where the organizational culture begins to consider non-compliance as a habit or a way to "survive" in a challenging work environment (Ashforth & Anand, 2003; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025).

For example, a study of the policing system in Pakistan found that the tense organizational environment and the influence of political interference have encouraged police personnel to engage in rampant acts of corruption (Latupono & Wibowo, 2025; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025). In Malaysia, this crisis of trust has also permeated the enforcement sector following a string of misconduct scandals involving the police and various other agencies (Borian et al., 2024; Brahim et al., 2021). As a result, non-compliance at this level of moral crime is very harmful because it not only paralyzes the effectiveness of enforcement operations but also directly erodes public trust and destroys the legitimacy of police institutions in the eyes of the public (Borian et al., 2024; Mphidi & Pheiffer, 2025).

Lens 2: Sociocultural non-compliance

Apart from individual factors, previous studies have proved that the practice of non-compliance in law enforcement organizations is strongly driven by local sociocultural influences that penetrate the rigid bureaucratic system. Universally, the symptoms of nepotism and cronyism act as a substitute for the elements of competence and professionalism, by placing priority on family relationships and personal interests over merit. This practice indirectly demotivates members, undermines the promotion process, and ultimately erodes public trust in public institutions (Gjinovci & Gjinovci, 2026).

In Arab countries and the Middle East, the manifestation of this culture is particularly evident through the practice of privatization, which is the use of the influence of family or clan networks to obtain special treatment (AlSabah, 2025). In the context of policing, this practice directly threatens institutional goals and operational integrity because decisions that should be based on merit and law have been undermined by favoritism to maintain the loyalty of the tribe. Interestingly, empirical studies by AlSabah (2025) on police station chiefs in Kuwait found that leaders who practice the Transactional Leadership style tend not to see private ownership as a serious problem, thus showing how this culture of favoritism is allowed to flourish in the policing landscape.

A similar sociocultural phenomenon also occurs in the East Asian region, known as *guanxi* (favoritism). Compared to a normal network of contacts, Shi (2024) defines *guanxi* within the Chinese police bureaucracy as a long-term interpersonal relationship that is strongly bound by the elements of *ganqing* (affective/emotional bond) and *renqing* (instrumental bond or indebted ethics). More critically, the reliance on *guanxi* requires police officers to take care of each other's *mianzi* (reputational features) of individuals in positions. As a result, this

cultural dynamic has given rise to the phenomenon of "*renqing* cases", where police officers are willing to violate integrity by giving lighter sentences to offenders who have a strong *guanxi* relationship with superiors.

Such sociocultural dilemmas proved that law enforcement personnel are often trapped in a difficult position, either to comply with the official laws of the country or to be forced to submit to the demands of local societal norms. The continuation of practices such as *wasta* (nepotism) and *guanxi* not only creates non-compliance with the law through inconsistent enforcement outcomes, but it also instills injustice in the police management system and slowly cripples the professionalism agenda of the enforcement forces (Shi, 2024).

Lens 3: Bureaucratic Manipulation

Not all forms of disobedience are motivated by malicious intent or self-interest. Through the lens of bureaucratic manipulation, police officers are often seen to break or bend rules as a pragmatic response to the weaknesses, ambiguities, and constraints of the bureaucratic structure itself (Charbonneau et al., 2023). This argument is strongly supported by Dobel (1990), who asserts that the use of discretion by civil servants is an unavoidable phenomenon, as laws and instructions from superiors are often too general, contradictory, and underdetermined when faced with the realities and dynamics on the ground. On the other hand, the literature defines rule bending as the act of taking advantage of the loopholes or ambiguities of a rule for various interpretations, while workarounds refer to informal actions that are consciously and carefully planned to correct the weaknesses of the rules to achieve the objectives of the service (Charbonneau et al., 2023).

The fact is, frontliners were often faced with extreme operational demands and limited resources (Charbonneau et al., 2023). A study by Zarghamifard & Danaeefard (2020) confirmed that role ambiguity, task complexity, and extreme workload in the public sector often force members and managers to bend standard rules simply to ensure that organizational goals can be achieved in an urgent environment. In the police institution, time and energy constraints make it impossible to arrest or punish every offender found. This situation encourages them to exercise autonomy and discretion by creating informal rules of thumb. For example, police officers may choose to merely give verbal warnings to ordinary citizens rather than issuing strict maximum fines, because they feel that the execution of such punishments is disproportionate, unreasonable, and causes unfair harm to the community (Charbonneau et al., 2023).

The process of manipulating or circumventing this regulation is not carried out carelessly. Charbonneau et al. (2023) reveal that police officers often use a cognitive approach called "progressive deepening", which is a thought process in which they first imagine a chain of effects and consequences if a rigid rule is literally enforced against the public. If such enforcement is expected to have a greater negative impact, complicate the work process, or burden the court system, members will continue to implement shortcuts. For example, at the structural level, there are enforcement groups that deliberately create or adopt municipal bylaws so that they can bypass the formal reporting system of the superiors, which is considered too long, thus streamlining the administration of their work. Non-compliance at this level clearly proves that operational continuity, common sense, and problem-solving goals have been raised over the practice of blind compliance with bureaucratic procedures.

Lens 4: Prosocial Deviance / Prosocial Rule Breaking

At the polar opposite of moral crime (Lens 1), there is a form of disobedience driven by a purely altruistic intention to provide the best service to the public. While his original intention to serve was pure, this prosocial deviance or prosocial rule breaking could have different implications when he began to ignore the department's official policies and procedures.

Prosocial Rule Breaking (PSRB) is defined as the actions of an employee who intentionally violates an organization's official policies, regulations, or prohibitions with the primary intention of promoting the welfare of stakeholders or customers (Wolff, 2025). Through cross-national empirical studies, Weißmüller et al. (2022) revealed that Public Service Motivation can encourage bureaucrats to break the rules deliberately to assist clients. In fact, a recent study by Wolff (2025) proved that civil servants sometimes choose to implement PSRB rather than rigid rule-following simply to help the people or clients who are deemed deserving, especially when bureaucratic procedures are seen as too slow and burdensome for the target group.

In policing scenarios on the ground, this lens occurs when police officers deliberately violate official reporting protocols or circumvent disciplinary detention procedures solely based on human values, compassion, or to ensure the continuity of service delivery to victims. Even though these contingencies are driven by good intentions and a two-pronged goal to help the community, the PSRB's practice is still classified as administrative deviation as it turns its back on the chain of command and deliberately violates the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

The existence of Lens 4 indirectly confirms the reality of the "extreme polar syndrome" within the policing literature. Historically, researchers have been heavily captivated by the two opposite extremes of this spectrum: focusing either on destructive integrity violations and criminal deviance at one end (Lens 1), or on the altruistic but policy-violating prosocial deviance (prosocial rule breaking) at the other (Lens 4). This polarized tendency explains why studies on the most fundamental form of compliance required for organizational survival, mandatory adherence to everyday disciplinary rules, seem to have largely "disappeared" from the radar of mainstream literature. Table 3 shows the spectrum of non-compliance in law enforcement organizations with the lens and definition of each term.

Table 3. Spectrum of Non-Compliance in Law Enforcement Organizations (Lens 1 to Lens 4)

Lens	Terms	Definition	References
Lens 1: Integrity Violations and Criminal Deviance	Integrity Violations	Abuse of public office and power directly for personal gain (such as extortion and moral crimes).	Huberts et al. (2007); Brahim et al. (2021); Borian et al. (2024)
	Grass-eaters	Subordinate officers who only passively accept small bribes when opportunities exist in the field.	Quah (2014)
	Meat-eaters	Top officials or syndicated groups who proactively look for opportunities to gain large-scale bribes.	Quah (2014)
	Normalization of Corruption	An organizational culture that justifies non-compliance considers it a habit to "survive" in the workplace.	Ashforth & Anand (2003); Mphidi & Pheiffer (2025)
Lens 2: Sociocultural Non-Compliance	Nepotism and Cronyism (Universal Concept)	Replace the elements of competence and professionalism with a preference for family or personal relationships over merit.	Gjinovci & Gjinovci (2026)
	<i>Wasta</i> (Middle Eastern Manifestations)	The equation of nepotism in Arab countries: the use of the influence of family or tribes to get special treatment.	AlSabah (2025)
	<i>Guanxi</i> (East Asian Manifestations)	The equation of nepotism in China: interpersonal relationships that demand the care of facial water (<i>mianzi</i>) and indebted ethics (<i>renqing</i>).	Shi (2024)
Lens 3: Bureaucratic Manipulation	Discretion	Civil servants make flexible decisions in the field because laws are sometimes too general or contradictory.	Dobel (1990)
	Rule Bending	The act of taking advantage of the loopholes or ambiguities of a rule to make various interpretations to facilitate the continuity of the task.	Charbonneau et al. (2023); Bozeman (2022)
	Workarounds	Informal actions that are consciously and carefully planned to overcome or correct the weaknesses of a regulation to achieve service objectives more quickly.	Charbonneau et al. (2023); Bozeman (2022)

Lens	Terms	Definition	References
	Progressive Deepening	Members' thoughts or cognitive processes that first imagine the adverse consequences if rigid rules are enforced against the public.	Charbonneau et al. (2023)
	Task Overload and Ambiguity	Non-compliance occurs as a pragmatic response to extreme workloads and urgent operational targets.	Zarghamifard & Danaeefard (2020)
Lens 4: Prosocial Deviance / Prosocial Rule Breaking	Violation of Prosocial Rules (PSRB)	Actions of employees who intentionally violate official policies, regulations, or prohibitions with the sole intention and objective of promoting welfare and helping customers/society.	Wolff (2025); Weißmüller et al. (2022)

Compliance Spectrum

In contrast to the non-compliance syndrome, the compliance spectrum represents the superior goal of every law enforcement organization. However, the results of a literature review found that compliance is also not a flat concept. It moves in a continuum starting from coerced obedience to moral consciousness-driven obedience. This spectrum can be divided into three main lenses (Lens 5 to Lens 7) as follows:

Lens 5: Instrumental Compliance

This lens refers to the basic adherence of police personnel to the formal guidelines and standard operating procedures (SOPs) set by the organization. In the local context, the main measuring stick for this lens is compliance with P.U. (A) 395. Apart from the act, it is also strongly supported by other RMP internal control instruments, such as the RMP Standard Compliance Manual and the RMP Integrity Plan, which focus on the prevention of misconduct and ethical compliance (Brahim et al., 2021). Studies revealed that compliance at this level often starts with "instrumental compliance" or threat-based compliance derived from the Deterrence Theory (Mbago et al., 2016). Under this approach, police officers are compliant solely to avoid disciplinary punishment or warnings from supervisors. While this literal compliance is a very important first line of defense for the RMP, the existence of strict policies and procedures alone is inadequate if it is not supported by a strong internal commitment from each member (Sija, 2023).

Lens 6: Normative Compliance, Legitimacy and OCB

To overcome the weaknesses of the penalty-based compliance above, this lens brings a paradigm shift towards voluntary compliance. Through this lens, scholars rely heavily on the Theory of Legitimacy. This theory argues that individuals will obey the laws and orders of the ruler not out of fear of punishment, but because they believe that the authority is legitimate and provides consistent procedural justice, thereby fostering normative compliance (Hertogh, 2023; Tyler, 2006, 2025; Wang et al., 2020). When this normative compliance is successfully built through trusted leadership, it acts as a catalyst for "normative commitment", wherein police officers feel a sense of moral obligation internally to voluntarily achieve the organization's goals (Donkor, 2022; Nor & Ishak, 2023). Furthermore, to sustainably achieve this normative commitment within the police force, scholars emphasize the critical concept of internal procedural justice (Tyler et al., 2015). When police executives and supervisors treat their officers with fairness, dignity, and respect, it builds internal legitimacy that directly promotes the officers' voluntary compliance with departmental rules and policies (Tyler, 2025; Tyler et al., 2015). When this sense of legitimacy and fairness is established, it directly stimulates healthy Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) (Hapsari et al., 2021). The latest empirical evidence clearly proves that police officers in Malaysia who are driven by trusted leadership will willingly display OCB, i.e., voluntarily perform more than essential duties to support the goals of public service without violating any official policy (Nasir et al., 2024, 2025).

Lens 7: Value-Driven Performance Compliance

At the pinnacle of the Compliance Spectrum is the lens of value-driven performance, where disciplinary compliance translates directly into the effectiveness of service delivery. Integrity at this level transcends the mere ability to resist corruption; rather, it is manifested through the conscious dedication of police officers to proactively integrate ethics with operational efficiency to provide the best and most effective policing services to the community (Brahim et al., 2021; Sija, 2023). Empirical studies by Satriya et al. (2025) on police personnel demonstrate that strong adherence to work discipline exerts a highly significant positive influence on boosting organizational performance, a process that is also strongly driven by employees' achievement motivation (Anggraini & Johannes, 2024). This is further corroborated by Amrulloh and Nurcholis (2025), who assert that performance improvement within police agencies is highly contingent upon the implementation of strict discipline and the cultivation of a conducive work environment. Through this ultimate lens, members proactively and simultaneously integrate discipline, ethics, and operational efficiency to successfully achieve the team's service targets. Table 4 below shows the spectrum of compliance in law enforcement organizations with the lens and definition of each term.

Table 4. Spectrum of Compliance in Law Enforcement Organizations (Lens 5 to Lens 7)

Lens	Terms	Definition	References
Lens 5: Instrumental Compliance	Instrumental Compliance / Rule-Based Compliance	Adherence to formal discipline instruments, such as P.U. (A) 395, Standard Compliance Manual, and the Integrity Plan is literally driven solely out of fear of disciplinary punishment or threats from supervisors (Deterrence Theory).	Sija (2023); Brahim et al. (2021), Mbago et al. (2016)
Lens 6: Normative Compliance, Legitimacy and OCB	Legitimacy Theory / Procedural Justice / Normative Compliance	Compliance that exists voluntarily when a member believes the authority and the instructions issued are valid, fair, and consistent.	Tyler (2006, 2025), Hertogh (2023), Wang et al. (2020)
	Normative Commitment	Members feel that adherence to the goals of work and the organization's policies is a form of "moral obligation" from within themselves.	Donkor (2022); Nor & Ishak (2023)
	Internal Procedural Justice / Internal Legitimacy	The fair and respectful treatment of police officers by their own supervisors and executives, which promotes officers' voluntary compliance with departmental rules and policies.	Tyler et al. (2015)
	Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB)	The attitude of members who willingly carry out their commitments goes beyond the essential duties of the department, without violating any official guidelines.	Hapsari et al. (2021); Nasir et al. (2024, 2025)
Lens 7: Value-Driven Performance Compliance	Discipline Drives Performance	Full compliance with work discipline acts as the main catalyst that translates directly into a surge in operational performance.	Satriya et al. (2025)
	Functional Integrity	Integrity not only rejects corruption but proactively integrates ethics with operational efficiency to provide the best policing services to the community.	Brahim et al. (2021), Sija (2023); Anggraini & Johannes (2024)
	Leadership and Conducive Environment	Organizational performance improvement is highly dependent on the implementation of strict discipline and a conducive work environment cultivated by leaders.	Amrulloh & Nurcholis (2025)

DISCUSSION

Literary Gap: The Periphery of "Compliance with Disciplinary Rules"

Past studies have highlighted the behavior of law enforcement personnel through a variety of lenses, but there remains a significant empirical gap in the current literature. The majority of evaluations regarding police behavior are often measured at levels that are either too extreme or too liberal. This phenomenon is described in this review as the "extreme polar syndrome." At one end of the spectrum, the concept of integrity violation is usually directed at destructive integrity violations and criminal deviance (Lens 1), such as corruption, extortion, and abuse of power (Borian et al., 2024; Brahim et al., 2021; Huberts et al., 2007). At the opposite pole, the focus shifts to prosocial deviance (Lens 4), which highlights extreme altruistic actions that go beyond essential duties, leading to the practice of Prosocial Rule Breaking (PSRB) to meet the needs of society (Hapsari et al., 2021; Nasir et al., 2024; Wolff, 2025). Meanwhile, other evaluations center on bureaucratic manipulation (Lens 3), which is more geared towards the use of technical tactics and workarounds to bypass the service bureaucracy on the ground (Charbonneau et al., 2023). Furthermore, non-compliance is also frequently attributed to entrenched sociocultural influences (Lens 2), where traditional practices like 'wasta' and 'guanxi' override professional merit and foster systemic favoritism (AlSabah, 2025; Shi, 2024).

This highly polarized state of the spectrum indicates that the mainstream literature has largely ignored and marginalized one of the most critical forms of basic compliance required for the continuity of daily police operations: the mandatory adherence to everyday disciplinary rules (Satriya et al., 2025). Compliance with these disciplinary rules is not just a moral recommendation, but it is also an element of structured legal obligation that governs the personal and professional behavior of each member. In Malaysia, this mandatory compliance is officially enshrined under the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993 [P.U. (A) 395]. Through this official instrument, members are literally obliged to adhere to strict standards of discipline, including an absolute prohibition involving drug abuse (Rule 7), a prohibition on incurring serious financial debts or bankruptcy (Rule 13), a prohibition on disobedience to orders (Rule 4(2)(i)), as well as a prohibition on abandoning public duties for personal gain (Rule 4(2)(a)) (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam, 1993).

Legitimacy Theory and Transformational Leadership Intervention

Since compliance with disciplinary instruments such as P.U. (A) 395 is critical, traditional management approaches often rely on threat and punishment-based enforcement derived from the Deterrence Theory (Lens 5: Instrumental Compliance). However, the literature reveals that the threat of punishment alone is limited and unsustainable in guaranteeing long-term compliance (Mbago et al., 2016). As an alternative solution, this review argues, based on the axis of Legitimacy Theory pioneered by Tyler (2006, 2025), that the best form of compliance should be voluntary. When police officers believe that their management and supervisors are providing consistent procedural justice, it creates a high sense of legitimacy. Consequently, members feel they have a "moral obligation" to comply with the rules without being coerced (Hertogh, 2023; van Rooij et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2020), thereby shifting their behavior towards Normative Compliance (Lens 6).

In order to translate this sense of legitimacy and procedural fairness into actual operations, transformational leadership is proposed as the most effective intervention mechanism. Through the Idealized Influence dimension, transformational leaders act as ethical role models who are respected and trusted (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Gempesao et al., 2023). Based on the social learning theory framework by Bandura (1971), subordinates continuously observe, learn, and imitate the behaviors, values, and attitudes of their leaders in the work environment. Even more critically in the context of policing, empirical studies have proven that when leaders exhibit strict adherence to rules and integrity, subordinates will psychologically mimic and translate those moral standards into their daily operations (Byun & Lee, 2021; Huberts et al., 2007). In a local context, a recent study by Nor and Ishak (2023) on police officers clearly confirms that the transformational leadership style exerts a much more dominant influence than transactional leadership in forming a highly compliant organizational commitment.

Recent empirical evidence on the police force by Satriya et al. (2025) strongly supports this proposition. They found that transformational leadership does not affect performance in isolation; instead, it works significantly by improving work discipline first. This reinforces the fact that effective leadership builds members' adherence to daily disciplinary rules before it translates into excellent service performance (Lens 7: Value-Driven Performance Compliance). Ultimately, the internal legitimacy and voluntary commitment driven by transformational leaders go beyond merely achieving normative compliance (Lens 6). Instead, they actively propel the organization toward the pinnacle of the continuum, which is Value-Driven Performance Compliance (Lens 7), where police personnel proactively integrate strict ethical discipline with operational efficiency to provide the best service to the community.

However, it must be acknowledged that this transformational style has its own limitations. A study by AlSabah (2025) among police chiefs found that transformational leadership was less effective in eradicating extreme hierarchical negative cultures, such as the practice of *wasta* (favoritism and nepotism). Furthermore, empirical research by Abique (2024) confirmed that there was no significant link between transformational leadership and employee engagement in certain police cultures. These findings demonstrate that the charm of transformational leaders does not automatically succeed in fostering positive work engagement if it is not supported by other environmental satisfaction factors or strict transactional rules.

Overall, despite these limitations, transformational leadership remains a highly ideal and holistic intervention mechanism for the RMP. While it may have boundaries in certain aspects of work engagement, this style has consistently proven successful in building procedural fairness, fostering discipline in line with P.U. (A) 395, and sustainably reinforcing a culture of compliance within the police force (Ali & Ahamat, 2025; Satriya et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the behavior of law enforcement officers, particularly the RMP, should not be measured solely through a narrow lens focused exclusively on extreme misconduct (such as corruption and extortion) or excessive voluntary behavior (such as OCB and PSRB). The "extreme polar syndrome" in this academic discourse needs to be unraveled to allow for a more critical and realistic assessment of organizational governance.

This study emphasizes that the maintenance of internal governance, namely, literal compliance with disciplinary instruments and daily work discipline, such as the Public Officers (Conduct and Discipline) Regulations 1993 [P.U. (A) 395], should be established as the main focus and the first line of defense for the organization. However, sustainable adherence to discipline can no longer rely solely on punitive approaches or rigid threat-based enforcement (Deterrence Theory). Instead, this compliance is more effectively realized when driven by legitimacy mobilized by transformational leaders. When a supervisor acts fairly and serves as a respected role model, it psychologically fosters procedural fairness, which stimulates voluntary compliance among subordinates, thereby preserving the dignity of the RMP force.

As suggested by the limitations of a narrative review, the proposed conceptual framework of police compliance and non-compliance spectrums requires robust empirical validation. Therefore, future research should empirically test this framework within law enforcement agencies using a mixed-methods approach. Specifically, quantitative surveys examining the structural relationships between Transformational Leadership, Legitimacy, and regulatory compliance, complemented by in-depth qualitative interviews or observational data collected from police personnel, are highly recommended to provide comprehensive evidence for this model.

More specifically, future studies should explore the role modeling mechanism in depth to confirm the validity of Social Learning Theory in transforming a culture of non-compliance into sustainable normative compliance. In addition, empirical studies can assess the potential for integrating transformational and transactional leadership styles to form a hybrid leadership intervention model that is more resilient to local cultural challenges. This comprehensive understanding will not only enrich the human resource management literature but will also assist policymakers in designing more strategic and high-impact leadership training modules for the RMP.

REFERENCES

1. Abique, J. R. (2024). Components of Transformational Leadership vis-à-vis Employee Engagement among Police Officers in Angeles City. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*, VIII(IIS), 1969–2006. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.803143S>
2. Ali, M. H. F. M., & Ahamat, A. (2025). Transformational and Innovative Leadership in the Royal Malaysia Police (RMP): A Path Toward Modern Policing. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)*, 9(9), 4410–4421. <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.9090000361>
3. AlSabah, N. (2025). Leadership Styles and Perceptions in Policing: Evidence from Kuwait's Police Stations. *Asian Journal of Criminology*, 20(3), 241–259. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-025-09459-z>
4. Amrulloh, M. A. G., & Nurcholis, L. (2025). Improving Performance through Transformational Leadership and Learning Culture with Work Environment as a Mediating Variable. *Jurnal Riset Bisnis Indonesia*, 22(2), 337–354.
5. Anggraini, R., & Johannes, S. (2024). How Transformational Leadership and Competency Supporting Employee Performance: Role of Achievement Motivation as Mediation. *Asean International Journal of Business*, 3(1), 50–61. <https://doi.org/10.54099/aijb.v3i1.830>
6. Ashforth, B. E., & Anand, V. (2003). The Normalization of Corruption In Organizations. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 25, 1–52. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085\(03\)25001-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085(03)25001-2)
7. Baethge, C., Goldbeck-Wood, S., & Mertens, S. (2019). SANRA—a scale for the quality assessment of narrative review articles. *Research Integrity and Peer Review*, 4(1), 5. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41073-019-0064-8>
8. Bandura, A. (1971). *Social Learning Theory*. General Learning Press.
9. Bass, B. M., & Riggio, R. E. (2006). *Transformational Leadership (Second Edition)*. Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
10. Borian, I. H., Huam, H. T., & Yasin, I. M. (2024). The Relationship between Full-Range Leadership Styles and Police Integrity. *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 14(9), 2009–2022. <https://doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i9/23021>
11. Bozeman, B. (2022). Rules Compliance Behavior: A Heuristic Model. *Perspectives on Public Management and Governance*, 5(1), 36–49. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppmgov/gvab028>
12. Brahim, M., Hussin, M. M., Ismail, M., & Mohamad, M. (2021). Kesedaran Pegawai dan Anggota Polis Diraja Malaysia Tentang Integriti dalam Penyampaian Perkhidmatan. *Malaysian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (MJSSH)*, 6(9), 166–184. <https://doi.org/10.47405/mjssh.v6i9.1024>
13. Byun, G., & Lee, S. (2021). Social learning in empowering leadership: A moderated mediation analysis. *Sustainability (Switzerland)*, 13(18). <https://doi.org/10.3390/su131810137>
14. Charbonneau, É., Boisvert, Y., & Bégin, L. (2023). Rule Breaking, Bending, and Workarounds: Police Officers and Chiefs' Coercion-Discretion of Enforcing State Executive Orders. *Public Performance & Management Review*, 46(3), 536–562. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15309576.2022.2162940>
15. Dobel, J. P. (1990). Integrity in the Public Service. *Public Administration Review*, 50(3), 354–366.
16. Donkor, F. (2022). Do Transformational Leaders Affect Employee Performance and Normative Commitment Through General Self-Efficacy? Analysis in Ghanaian Public Sector Organizations. *Public Organization Review*, 22(3), 707–723. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11115-021-00531-7>
17. Filstad, C., Karp, T., & Glomseth, R. (2020). How Police Leaders Learn to Lead. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 14(3), 601–615. <https://doi.org/10.1093/policing/pay043>
18. Gempesao, M. C., Nabe, N. C., Chavez, C. B., & Magbojos, R. R. (2023). Transformational Leadership of Police Commissioned Officers and Service Engagement of Non-Commissioned Personnel: The Mediating Role of Personal Ethics. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 10(7). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejes.v10i7.4882>
19. Gjinovci, A., & Gjinovci, D. (2026). Favoritism Practices, Nepotism, and Corruption in Public Administration: Impacts on Employment, Meritocracy, Efficiency, and Institutional Trust. An Institutional and Governance Perspective in Transitional Public Sectors. *European Journal of Management, Economics and Business*, 3(2), 202–218. [https://doi.org/10.59324/ejmeb.2026.3\(2\).15](https://doi.org/10.59324/ejmeb.2026.3(2).15)

20. Hapsari, D., Riyanto, S., & Endri, E. (2021). The Role of Transformational Leadership in Building Organizational Citizenship: The Civil Servants of Indonesia. *Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 8(2), 0595–0604. <https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2021.vol8.no2.0595>
21. Hertogh, M. (2023). Relational legal consciousness in the punitive welfare state: How Dutch welfare officials shape clients' perceptions of law. Cambridge University Press, 293–316. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12663>
22. Hodgkinson, G. P., & Ford, J. K. (2015). What makes excellent literature reviews excellent? A clarification of some common mistakes and misconceptions. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 36(S1), S1–S5. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1983>
23. Huberts, L. W. J. C., Kaptein, M., & Lasthuizen, K. (2007). A study of the impact of three leadership styles on integrity violations committed by police officers. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, 30(4), 587–607. <https://doi.org/10.1108/13639510710833884>
24. Isaeva, E., Seki, M., & Kakinaka, M. (2026). Leader and Peer Influence: Unraveling the Impact of Ethical and Unethical Behaviors on Civil Servants' Motivation in the Kyrgyz Republic. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 49(3), 203–220. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2025.2464831>
25. Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam. (1993). Peraturan-Peraturan Pegawai Awam (Kelakuan dan Tatatertib) 1993 [P.U. (A) 395]. Kerajaan Malaysia. <https://docs.jpa.gov.my/docs/pu/pua395.pdf>
26. Latupono, A. Z., & Wibowo, M. (2025). The Role of organizational culture in moderating the effect of transformational leadership On job satisfaction of police members. *The Journal of Academic Science*, 2(5), 1350–1361. <https://doi.org/10.59613/78E2FA25>
27. Mbago, M., Ntayi, J. M., & Muhwezi, M. (2016). Compliance to Acts, Rules and Regulations: Evidence From Sub-Saharan Africa. *Journal of Public Procurement*, 16, 374–405. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JOPP-16-03-2016-B006>
28. Modise, J. M. (2023). Efficient and Effective Leadership in Law Enforcement, Characteristics and Behaviors of Effective Police Leaders that Assists Upholding A High Standard of Professionalism and Integrity. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 8(9), 2096–2112. www.ijisrt.com
29. Modula, M. J., Mathapo-Thobakgale, E. M., Nyoni, C. N., & Jansen, R. (2024). Strategies for Coping with Occupational Trauma: A Scoping Review of the Police Officer Context. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(7), 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21070921>
30. Moher, D., Liberati, A., Tetzlaff, J., & Altman, D. G. (2009). Preferred reporting items for systematic reviews and meta-analyses: The PRISMA statement. *British Medical Journal*, 339, 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.b2535>
31. Mphidi, A. J., & Pheiffer, D. C. (2025). Corruption and moral degradation within the Tshwane Metropolitan Police Department. *African Security Review*, 34(2), 225–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2025.2457646>
32. Nasir, N. S. M., Zain, M. H. M., Shahzada, M. R., Khalifa, G. S. A., & Mokhtar, M. Y. (2025). The Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior in Law Enforcement: An Islamic Leadership Perspective. *GJAT*, (Special Issue), 230–255. <http://jurnal.usas.edu.my/gjat/index.php/journal>
33. Nasir, N. S. M., Zain, M. H. M., Shahzada, M. R., & Ning, Z. (2024). The Relationship Between Transformational Leadership and Organizational Citizenship Behavior Among Law Enforcement Officers in Malaysia. *Journal of Business Innovation*, 9(1), 163–176.
34. Nor, N. M., & Ishak, S. (2023). Gaya Kepimpinan Transformasi dan Transaksi Terhadap Komitmen Organisasi Konteks Berkepatuhan Tinggi. *E-Bangi Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2023.2001.13>
35. Pozzobon, T., & Scott, S. (2024). Bridging the divide: Exploring inequities between sworn and civilian leaders in a Canadian police service. *International Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 24(1). <https://doi.org/10.29173/ijll47>
36. Quah, J. S. T. (2014). Curbing police corruption in Singapore: lessons for other Asian countries. *Asian Education and Development Studies*, 3(3), 186–222. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AEDS-07-2014-0029>
37. Rahmah, L., Himam, F., Riyono, B., & Nurcahyo, A. (2021). The Implementation of The Work Ethics Dynamics at The Police Corps (Exploration Study on Unethical Behavior). *Jurnal Ilmiah Peuradeun*, 9(1), 123–144. <https://doi.org/10.26811/peuradeun.v9i1.517>

38. Satriya, I. B., Suswati, E., Mulyono, S., & Haritsar, Y. (2025). The Influence of Transformational Leadership and Work Motivation on Police Personnel Performance Mediated by Work Discipline. *Jurnal Administrare: Jurnal Pemikiran Ilmiah Dan Pendidikan Administrasi Perkantoran*, 12(2), 118–127.
39. Shaffril, H. A. M., Samsuddin, S. F., & Abu Samah, A. (2021). The ABC of systematic literature review: the basic methodological guidance for beginners. *Quality and Quantity*, 55(4), 1319–1346. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-020-01059-6>
40. Shi, H. (2024). The Impacts of Guanxi: Drug Policing Under Police Professionalisation in China. *Sociological Research Online*, 29(3), 579–595. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13607804231177501>
41. Sija, A. (2023). The Effect of Integrity Compliance on Task Performance in the Royal Malaysia Police. *European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*, 6(2). <https://doi.org/10.46827/ejhrms.v6i2.1461>
42. Tyler, T. R. (2006). Psychological perspectives on legitimacy and legitimation. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 57, 375–400. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190038>
43. Tyler, T. R. (2025). Legitimacy-based policing. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 24(2), 165–187. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9133.12695>
44. Tyler, T. R., Goff, P. A., & MacCoun, R. J. (2015). The Impact of Psychological Science on Policing in the United States. *Psychological Science in the Public Interest*, 16(3), 75–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1529100615617791>
45. van Rooij, B., Fine, A., Shalvi, S., Feldman, Y., Scheper, E., Yunmei, W., Leib, M., Cheng, Q., & Wanhong, Z. (2024). The obligation to obey the law: exploring National Differences. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 82(2), 415–432. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-024-10148-8>
46. Wang, S.-Y. K., Sun, I. Y., Wu, Y., Van Craen, M., & Kuen-Lung Hsu, K. (2020). Does trust in supervisors translate to compliance and cooperation? A test of internal procedural justice among Taiwanese police officers. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, 53(3), 433–453. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0004865820917996>
47. Weißmüller, K. S., De Waele, L., & van Witteloostuijn, A. (2022). Public Service Motivation and Prosocial Rule-Breaking: An International Vignettes Study in Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands. *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 42(2), 258–286. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0734371X20973441>
48. Wolff, J. N. (2025). Is It Going Above and Beyond or Breaking the Rules? How Clients' Identities, Perceived Deservingness, and Outcomes Affect Citizens' Judgments of Bureaucrats' Rule Decisions. *Public Administration*, 1–28. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padm.13052>
49. Yunus, Z. Z., & Burhan, N. A. S. (2023). Faktor Pelanggaran Integriti Organisasi: Kajian Kes Terhadap Anggota Polis Diraja Malaysia (PDRM) di Kontinjen Selangor. *E-Bangi Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 20(2). <https://doi.org/10.17576/ebangi.2023.2002.25>
50. Zarghamifard, M., & Danaeefard, H. (2020). What drives leader integrity? *International Journal of Business Governance and Ethics*, 14(1), 1–33. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJBGE.2020.104685>