

Perceived Policy Overload, Policy Fatigue, and Institutional Trust in Indonesian Public Governance: An Exploratory Multivariate Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Growing policy accumulation and administrative demands raise questions about how individuals perceive regulatory complexity and whether these experiences are associated with institutional trust. Existing research has examined organizational overload and administrative burden separately, while the relationship among perceived policy overload, policy fatigue, and institutional trust remains insufficiently understood. This study examines these relationships using an exploratory relational quantitative design and an online survey of 400 Indonesian civil servants and members of the public. Descriptive statistics, K-means clustering, Pearson and Spearman correlations, partial correlations, and canonical correlation analysis were used to identify perceptual profiles and multivariate associations. The retained three-cluster solution distinguished low-, midrange-, and high-score profiles across all three constructs. Policy overload, policy fatigue, and institutional trust were also very strongly and positively correlated, and the first canonical function showed a strong multivariate association between policy perceptions and trust indicators. These findings indicate that high perceived burden can coexist with high institutional trust, complicating a simple burden-to-distrust expectation. However, the substantial overlap among the measures warrants caution regarding construct distinctness. The study contributes by linking policy accumulation, administrative burden, and institutional trust while underscoring the need for further longitudinal and measurement-focused research.

Keywords

Administrative burden; institutional trust; policy fatigue; policy overload; public governance; regulatory complexity

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INTRODUCTION

Institutional trust is a central resource of democratic governance because public institutions depend not only on formal authority but also on citizens' willingness to accept decisions, comply with rules, use public services, and regard governmental action as legitimate. Political-trust research shows that trust is shaped by both broader evaluations of political institutions and citizens' experiences of governmental performance, while remaining sensitive to institutional context and changing expectations of government (Citrin and Stoker 2018). At the level of public service delivery, experiences with service providers can spill over into evaluations of the public institutions responsible for those services, although the magnitude of this spillover varies with the institutional mode of provision (Berg and Johansson 2020). Institutional trust is also associated with assessments of government quality and performance, civic engagement, social capital, and individual characteristics (Mahmud 2021). Policy-feedback research further demonstrates that policy design and delivery can reshape political efficacy, participation, political trust, and responsibility attribution by structuring how people encounter and experience government (Bussi, Dupuy, and Van Ingelgom 2022). Institutional trust is therefore not independent of policy experience: the organization, implementation, and navigability of policy regimes can become part of how individuals evaluate public institutions.

This issue becomes increasingly consequential as contemporary governments operate through expanding and interconnected policy portfolios. Research on policy growth documents a long-term tendency for governments to add rules, policy instruments, and policy objectives more readily than they remove them. Comparative evidence indicates that expanding rule stocks can create implementation difficulties when governments lack sufficient capacities for coordination, learning, and adaptation (Adam, Knill, and Fernández-i-Marín 2017). Policy accumulation similarly occurs when additional instruments and objectives are layered onto existing arrangements, increasing the density and interdependence of policy mixes (Adam, Steinebach, and Knill 2018). As accumulated portfolios become more complex, political fragmentation can alter the advantages and limits of incremental policymaking because new choices must be made within increasingly crowded policy environments

(Adam et al. 2022). Crises may intensify this pattern through regulatory ratcheting, whereby governments introduce additional rules during periods of urgency without subsequently removing them to a comparable extent (Knill and Steinebach 2022).

The consequences of policy growth are particularly visible in public organizations. Cross-national research shows that policy portfolios can expand faster than implementation capacities, generating bureaucratic overburdening and diminishing governments' ability to translate policy commitments into performance (Fernández-i-Marín et al. 2024a, 2024b). Under these conditions, implementing organizations may engage in policy triage by prioritizing some obligations while postponing or deprioritizing others (Knill, Steinebach, and Zink 2024). Recent evidence further strengthens this argument. Kaplaner, Knill, and Steinebach (2025) provide causal evidence that administrative overload can produce policy triage, while comparative research across implementation agencies shows that organizations respond selectively when accumulated policy demands exceed available implementation resources (Zink, Knill, and Steinebach 2025). Macro-level studies similarly indicate that the consequences of rule growth depend substantially on the administrative capacity available to implement expanding policy commitments (Limberg et al. 2021). Together, this literature establishes policy accumulation and organizational overload as significant governance problems. What it explains less fully is how cumulative policy environments are perceived by the individuals who must understand, administer, comply with, or navigate them.

Administrative-burden scholarship provides the strongest micro-level foundation for addressing this problem. Administrative burden is conventionally understood as the learning, compliance, and psychological costs that people experience in their interactions with the state (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015). Research over the past decade demonstrates that these costs are neither trivial nor evenly distributed. Experiences of administrative burden vary with social position, cognitive resources, administrative capital, literacy, social support, health, and the characteristics of particular administrative encounters (Nisar 2018; Christensen et al. 2020; Masood and Nisar 2021; Chudnovsky and Peeters 2021; Döring and Madsen 2022; Bell et al. 2023). The material organization of administrative

environments can also intensify or mitigate burdens (Nisar and Masood 2024), while digital self-service may reduce some transaction costs but simultaneously transfer interpretive and case-processing responsibilities from professional administrators to citizens (Madsen, Lindgren, and Melin 2022).

Importantly, recent scholarship has begun to move beyond burdens associated with isolated programs or individual transactions. Martin, Delaney, and Doyle (2024) draw attention to the cumulative nature of everyday administrative burdens and their unequal distribution, while Pandey (2023) argues for greater analytical attention to subjective individual experience in research on red tape, administrative burden, and sludge. These developments are particularly relevant to the present study because they suggest that people may evaluate not only discrete administrative tasks but also the cumulative demands generated by repeated encounters with policies and administrative requirements. Similar concerns apply to public officials. Administrative tasks can themselves constitute sources of stress for street-level personnel, demonstrating that the experience of administrative demands is not confined to citizens or policy beneficiaries (Tiggelaar, Groeneveld, and George 2024).

Administrative burden also has an important psychological dimension. Experimental and observational studies show that demanding state interactions can generate stress, confusion, frustration, anger, autonomy loss, and reduced psychological well-being (Hattke, Hensel, and Kalucza 2020; Bækgaard et al. 2021; Bell, Christensen, and Hansen 2022; Döring and Madsen 2022). Individuals therefore do not encounter administrative requirements simply as neutral procedural obligations; they interpret and respond emotionally to the demands those requirements create. Yet the broader political consequences of these experiences remain incompletely understood. Halling and Bækgaard's (2024) systematic review shows that although administrative-burden research has expanded rapidly, evidence connecting experienced burdens to institutional trust, political efficacy, and civic engagement remains comparatively limited.

The relationship between burdensome policy experiences and institutional trust is especially important because the available evidence is mixed rather than uniformly negative. In the United States, Bell,

Wright, and Oh (2024) find that losing access to public benefits can generate negative policy feedback, including lower trust in government, with especially pronounced consequences among racially minoritized applicants. By contrast, a preregistered recall experiment among Danish unemployment-insurance recipients finds little evidence that recalling burdensome administrative experiences reduces general institutional trust, although limited effects emerge for participation within the relevant policy subsystem (Mikkelsen, Madsen, and Bækgaard 2025). These contrasting findings make it difficult to sustain a simple burden-to-distrust model. A more defensible proposition is that the relationship between administrative demands and institutional trust is contingent on context, the character of the administrative experience, and how that experience is interpreted.

The present study develops this problem by connecting macro-level research on policy accumulation and bureaucratic overload with micro-level scholarship on administrative burden and policy feedback. It distinguishes three analytically related constructs. Policy overload (PO) refers here to a perceived condition in which the volume, frequency of change, overlap, inconsistency, or complexity of policies exceeds an individual's perceived capacity to understand, monitor, implement, or navigate them. This concept differs from bureaucratic overload, which concerns the organizational mismatch between expanding policy responsibilities and implementation capacity (Fernández-i-Marín et al. 2024a; Knill, Steinebach, and Zink 2024; Kaplaner, Knill, and Steinebach 2025). Policy overload is therefore treated as an individual-level perceptual construct rather than as a synonym for organizational overburdening.

Policy fatigue (PF) refers to psychological weariness, frustration, or depletion associated with sustained or repeated exposure to demanding policy requirements. The term requires particular caution because policy fatigue is not an established standardized construct within administrative-burden scholarship. In this study it is conceptualized as an integrative construct grounded in existing evidence on psychological costs, stress, negative emotions, autonomy loss, and reduced well-being arising from administrative demands (Hattke, Hensel, and Kalucza 2020; Bækgaard et al. 2021; Bell, Christensen, and Hansen 2022; Döring and Madsen 2022). Institutional trust (IT), in turn, refers to respondents' evaluative confidence

in public institutions. The hypothesized ordering among overload, fatigue, and trust is therefore treated as a theoretically informed relational framework rather than an empirically established causal sequence.

Indonesia provides a substantively relevant context in which to examine these relationships. Political decentralization expanded the regulatory authority of provincial and district governments and contributed to substantial growth in local rulemaking. Weaknesses in regulatory governance subsequently generated concern over problematic local regulations and prompted central-government efforts to address them (Yuwono, Wiryawan, and Shimada 2025). Such a multilevel regulatory setting potentially increases the frequency with which citizens and public officials encounter multiple or overlapping policy requirements. Nevertheless, decentralization and regulatory proliferation should not themselves be treated as evidence that individuals experience overload or fatigue. Whether respondents perceive cumulative policy demands as excessive, experience psychological strain in relation to those demands, and associate them with institutional trust remains an empirical question.

Three related gaps follow. First, policy-growth research has primarily examined policy stocks, implementation capacity, bureaucratic overload, and organizational performance, whereas administrative-burden scholarship has predominantly focused on costs arising from specific programs or citizen–state encounters (Campbell, Pandey, and Arnesen 2023; Halling and Bækgaard 2024; Fernández-i-Marín et al. 2024a, 2024b). Although recent work has begun to examine cumulative and everyday burdens (Martin, Delaney, and Doyle 2024), comparatively little is known about individual perceptions of the broader cumulative policy environment. Second, while substantial evidence demonstrates the psychological costs of administrative demands, the relationship between such experiences and institutional trust remains empirically unsettled (Bell, Wright, and Oh 2024; Mikkelsen, Madsen, and Bækgaard 2025). Third, the relevant literatures have tended to occupy different analytical locations: administrative-burden research emphasizes citizens and citizen–state encounters, whereas policy-growth and overload research concentrates primarily on public organizations and implementation capacity (Campbell,

Pandey, and Arnesen 2023; Fernández-i-Marín et al. 2024a; Zink, Knill, and Steinebach 2025). Research on administrative-task stress among public officials underscores the importance of examining implementers as well as citizens (Tiggelaar, Groeneveld, and George 2024), but little is known about whether these groups display similar or different configurations of perceived policy overload, fatigue, and institutional trust within the same governance environment.

Accordingly, the study addresses three research questions: (1) What distinct perceptual profiles emerge from respondents' assessments of policy overload, policy fatigue, and institutional trust? (2) How are policy overload, policy fatigue, and institutional trust associated at the bivariate and conditional levels? and (3) What shared multivariate structure links policy overload and policy fatigue with institutional trust? Survey data from citizens and public officials are examined using descriptive statistics, K-means clustering, correlation and partial-correlation analysis, and canonical correlation analysis. These techniques are used for exploratory relational mapping rather than causal estimation. Because the design does not establish temporal precedence or causal identification, the study does not claim that policy overload or policy fatigue causes institutional trust to increase or decline.

The article makes three contributions. Conceptually, it connects policy accumulation, administrative burden, and policy-feedback research by moving from system- and organization-level policy growth to individuals' perceptions of cumulative policy demands. Analytically, it distinguishes perceived policy overload from policy fatigue while examining the extent to which these constructs covary with institutional trust, without presuming that they are causally ordered or empirically independent. Empirically, it examines citizens and public officials within the same decentralized governance context, allowing comparison of perceptual configurations across actors occupying different institutional positions. The study's novelty therefore lies not in proposing a settled overload–fatigue–trust chain, but in subjecting this relational architecture to exploratory empirical scrutiny while recognizing heterogeneity, possible construct overlap, and the limits of cross-sectional inference.

METHODS

Research Design

This study used an exploratory, relational quantitative design to examine how policy overload (PO), policy fatigue (PF), and institutional trust (IT) are patterned and associated in a single cross-sectional survey. The design addressed research questions concerned with heterogeneous perceptual profiles and bivariate, conditional, and multivariate associations rather than causal estimation. Accordingly, temporal ordering and causal effects are not inferred.

Sampling, Participants, and Data Collection

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered to Indonesian civil servants and members of the general public. The study records describe stratified random sampling across national, provincial, and local administrative levels, but the available documentation does not specify the sampling frame or within-stratum randomization procedure; population representativeness therefore cannot be independently assessed. The final sample comprised 400 respondents: 59.25% men and 40.75% women; 64.75% civil servants (ASN) and 35.25% general public. The reported administrative-level distribution was 49% local, 34% provincial, and 17% national. Respondents were aged 25–48 years ($M = 32.81$, $SD = 5.73$). Eligibility required Indonesian citizenship, age ≥ 18 years, and engagement with public policy as an implementer or member of the public. The reported response rate was 32.8%. No prospective power analysis was documented, so no statistical-power claim is inferred from sample-size rules of thumb. Incomplete responses constituted less than 2% of the data and were removed by listwise deletion. Little's MCAR test (Little 1988) was reported as nonsignificant ($p > .05$).

Instrument Development and Measurement

The questionnaire underwent expert review by three governance scholars and two senior civil servants, followed by pilot testing with 35 respondents excluded from the final sample. Expert agreement yielded Aiken's V

values of 0.83–0.91 (Aiken 1985), and pilot feedback led to minor wording revisions to three items.

All focal items used five-point Likert categories from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). PO assessed perceived excess, overlap, inconsistency, and interpretive difficulty in policy requirements. PF assessed psychological exhaustion, reduced motivation, and cognitive or emotional strain associated with repeated policy demands. IT assessed perceived institutional competence, fairness or benevolence, and integrity. Because the available records do not support a defensible attribution of these items to previously validated PO, PF, or IT scales, no such scale-source claim is made. Composite scores were calculated as means of retained items.

Data Quality, Reliability, and Common-Method Assessment

Extreme values were screened using a z-score threshold of ± 3 ; none were reported. Scale-level skewness and kurtosis were within ± 1.5 , and Shapiro–Wilk tests were reported as nonsignificant ($p > .05$). These diagnostics were treated as univariate checks rather than evidence of multivariate normality.

Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach’s alpha (α), interpreted alongside other reliability evidence rather than as a mechanical cutoff (McNeish 2018):

$$\alpha = [k / (k - 1)] [1 - (\sum \sigma_i^2 / \sigma_t^2)]$$

where k is the number of items, σ_i^2 is item variance, and σ_t^2 is total-score variance. Composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) were also examined as convergent-validity indicators (Fornell and Larcker 1981); they were not treated as sufficient evidence of discriminant validity.

Common-method variance was assessed using Harman’s single-factor diagnostic and a marker variable. The first factor accounted for 28.6% of variance, and perceived weather satisfaction correlated weakly with the focal measures ($|r| < .08$). These are treated as diagnostics, not proof that common-method bias was absent (Podsakoff et al. 2003; Lindell and Whitney 2001).

Data Analysis

Analyses were conducted in Python 3.10 in Google Colab using pandas, NumPy, scikit-learn, SciPy, and pingouin. Standardized PO, PF, and IT composites were entered into K-means clustering (Jain 2010), which minimized within-cluster sum of squares:

$$J = \sum_{j=1}^k \sum_{x_i \in C_j} \|x_i - \mu_j\|^2$$

Cluster selection was evaluated using the elbow pattern, silhouette coefficient (Rousseeuw 1987), and Davies–Bouldin Index (Davies and Bouldin 1979):

$$s(i) = [b(i) - a(i)] / \max\{a(i), b(i)\}$$

$$DB = (1/k) \sum_i \max_{j \neq i} [(S_i + S_j) / M_{ij}]$$

Pearson correlations estimated linear associations, with Spearman's ρ providing a rank-based comparison (Schober, Boer, and Schwarte 2018). Partial correlations controlled for age, gender, occupation, education level, and reported policy exposure. Canonical correlation analysis (CCA) examined the shared multivariate association between the policy set (PO, PF) and trust indicators (IT1–IT3) (Uurtio et al. 2017). CCA finds linear combinations $U = a^T X$ and $V = b^T Y$ that maximize $\text{corr}(U, V)$. These analyses identify association and do not establish mediation or causal pathways.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, and electronic informed consent was obtained before data collection. No identifying information was collected, and data were stored and reported in aggregate form. No institutional ethics-approval number or approving body was supplied in the available study records; accordingly, none is asserted here.

RESULTS

This section reports findings from 400 valid survey responses. Results are organized by the analytical sequence of the research questions: respondent and measurement characteristics, cluster analysis, correlation analysis, and

canonical correlation analysis (CCA). Interpretation is limited to patterns supported by the supplied results.

Respondent Profile and Measurement Characteristics

Table 1 summarizes the respondent characteristics. Men constituted 59.25% of the sample and women 40.75%. Civil servants (ASN) accounted for 64.75% of respondents, while 35.25% were members of the general public. The reported distribution by government level was 49.0% local, 34.0% provincial, and 17.0% national. Respondents were between 25 and 48 years old, with a mean age of 32.81 years (SD = 5.73). These figures describe a sample weighted toward civil servants and male respondents. Because the supplied results do not provide population benchmarks, no claim is made here that the sample is demographically representative of Indonesian citizens or public officials.

Table 1. Respondent Demographics

Category	Sub-category	Frequency / Value
Gender	Male	59.25%
	Female	40.75%
Occupation	Civil Servants (ASN)	64.75%
	General Public	35.25%
Government level	Local	49.0%
	Provincial	34.0%
	National	17.0%
Age	Mean	32.81
	SD	5.73
	Range	25–48

Source: Authors’ data (2025)

The three focal constructs were centered close to the midpoint of the five-point response scale (Table 2). Policy Overload (PO) had the highest mean ($M = 3.003$, $SD = 0.929$), while Policy Fatigue (PF) and Institutional Trust (IT) had identical reported means of 2.928, with standard deviations of 0.928 and 0.934, respectively. All three constructs spanned the full

observed range from 1.0 to 5.0. Skewness ranged from -0.150 to -0.101 and kurtosis from -0.300 to -0.208 . The distributions were therefore close to symmetric in the supplied data and showed substantial dispersion across the response scale. This variability provides an empirical basis for examining whether respondents form distinct multivariate profiles rather than concentrating around a single response pattern.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Constructs

Construct	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Policy Overload	3.003	0.929	1.0	5.0	-0.150	-0.208
Policy Fatigue	2.928	0.928	1.0	5.0	-0.140	-0.300
Institutional Trust	2.928	0.934	1.0	5.0	-0.101	-0.284

Source: Authors’ data (2025).

The measurement statistics in Table 3 were high. Cronbach’s alpha ranged from 0.925 to 0.958, composite reliability from 0.953 to 0.973, and AVE from 0.872 to 0.923. These coefficients support strong reported internal consistency and convergent validity of the composites. They do not, by themselves, establish discriminant validity among PO, PF, and IT.

Table 3. Reliability and Convergent Validity

Construct	Cronbach’s α	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Policy Overload	0.925	0.953	0.872
Policy Fatigue	0.942	0.963	0.897
Institutional Trust	0.958	0.973	0.923

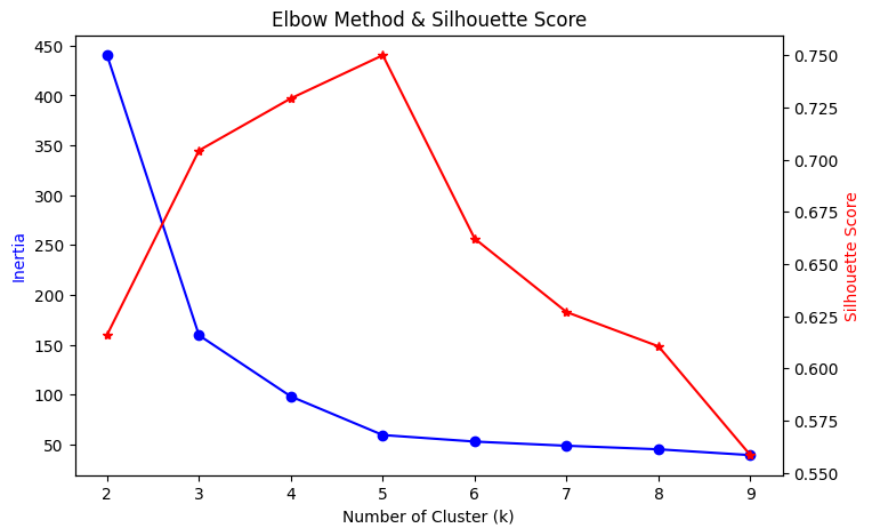
Source: Authors’ data (2025).

RQ1: What Distinct Perceptual Profiles Emerge?

K-means clustering was used to identify patterns across standardized PO, PF, and IT scores. The analysis retained a three-cluster solution for profiling. Figure 1 shows that, for $k = 3$, the reported silhouette coefficient

was 0.704 and the Davies–Bouldin Index 0.407. The inertia curve drops sharply from $k = 2$ to $k = 3$, but the silhouette curve continues upward and reaches its plotted maximum at $k = 5$. Thus, $k = 3$ provides a reasonably separated retained solution, but the diagnostics do not establish it as uniquely optimal.

Figure 1. Elbow Method and Silhouette Plot



Source: Authors’ data (2025).

Table 4 shows an ordered pattern across the retained groups. Cluster 1 ($n = 119$) recorded low scores ($PO = 1.95$, $PF = 1.86$, $IT = 1.83$); Cluster 0 ($n = 177$) recorded midrange scores ($PO = 3.08$, $PF = 2.98$, $IT = 2.99$); and Cluster 2 ($n = 104$) recorded high scores ($PO = 4.08$, $PF = 4.05$, $IT = 4.08$). Figure 3 shows the same pattern: the clusters differ mainly in overall level rather than in profiles where one construct moves opposite to the others.

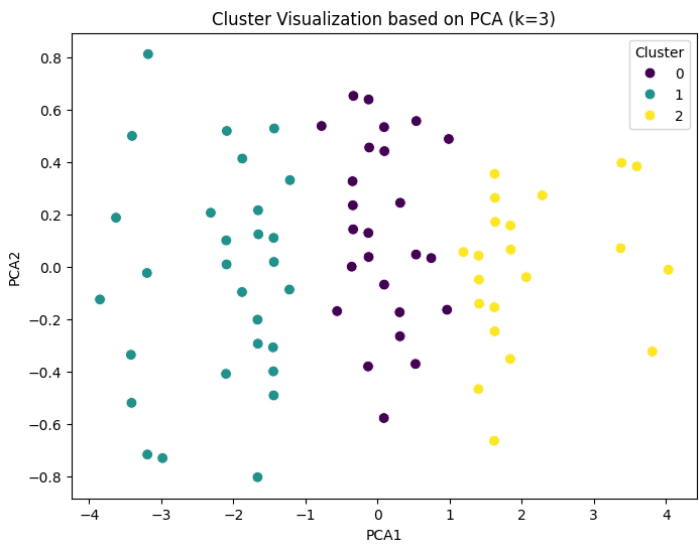
Table 4. Cluster Profiles

Cluster	PO Mean	PF Mean	IT Mean	Sample Size
0	3.08	2.98	2.99	177
1	1.95	1.86	1.83	119
2	4.08	4.05	4.08	104

Source: Authors’ data (2025).

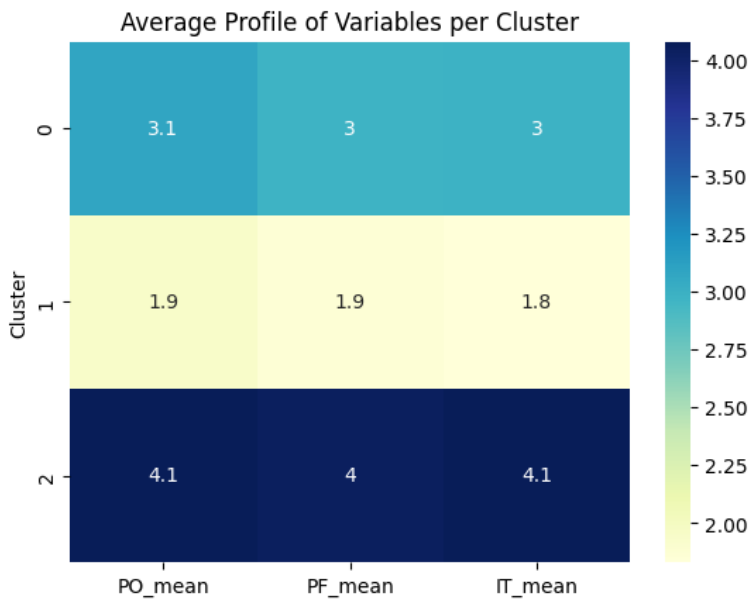
Figure 2 provides a two-dimensional PCA visualization of the retained solution. Cluster 1 appears on the lower side of the first principal component, Cluster 0 in the central region, and Cluster 2 toward the higher side, consistent with Table 4. The plot is descriptive rather than an additional clustering test. Because the figure does not state whether all 400 cases are displayed or whether points were reduced or subsampled, no inference is drawn from the number of visible points.

Figure 2. PCA-Based Cluster Visualization (k = 3)



Source: Authors’ data (2025).

Figure 3. Average Variable Profiles per Cluster



Source: Authors’ data (2025).

Table 5 shows similar occupational composition across the retained clusters. ASN respondents constituted 66.1% of Cluster 0, 65.5% of Cluster 1, and 61.5% of Cluster 2, compared with 64.75% in the full sample. Both ASN and general-public respondents appear in every cluster. Because no formal tests of cluster membership by occupation, gender, age, or government level are reported, these figures support descriptive comparison only, not a claim that demographics have no association with cluster membership.

Table 5. Demographic Composition per Cluster

Cluster	ASN	General Public
0	117	60
1	78	41
2	64	40

Source: Authors’ data (2025).

RQ1 is therefore answered by the retained low-, midrange-, and high-score profiles across PO, PF, and IT. The notable empirical feature is their same-direction movement: the high-PO/high-PF group also reports high IT, whereas the low-PO/low-PF group reports low IT. These configurations do not identify the mechanisms that produce them.

RQ2: How Are Policy Overload, Policy Fatigue, and Institutional Trust Associated?

The bivariate results show very strong positive associations. In Table 6, PO correlated at $r = 0.944$ with PF and $r = 0.950$ with IT, while PF correlated at $r = 0.959$ with IT. Because Table 6 does not report p-values or confidence intervals, these results are described by their observed direction and magnitude.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Construct	PO	PF	IT
PO	1	0.944	0.950
PF	0.944	1	0.959
IT	0.950	0.959	1

Source: Authors’ data (2025).

Spearman correlations show the same pattern (Table 7): $\rho = 0.931$ for PO–PF, 0.936 for PO–IT, and 0.955 for PF–IT. The similarity between Pearson and Spearman estimates indicates that the strong positive ordering is not specific to the Pearson metric.

Table 7. Spearman Correlation Matrix

Construct	PO	PF	IT
PO	1	0.931	0.936
PF	0.931	1	0.955
IT	0.936	0.955	1

Source: Authors’ data (2025).

The correlations are consistent with the cluster profiles, but their magnitude also raises a measurement issue. Using the AVE values in Table 3, $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ is approximately 0.934 for PO, 0.947 for PF, and 0.961 for IT. PO’s correlations with PF (0.944) and IT (0.950) exceed $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ for PO, and the PF–IT correlation (0.959) exceeds $\sqrt{\text{AVE}}$ for PF. The reported evidence therefore does not fully satisfy the Fornell–Larcker comparison for PO and PF. This does not prove construct identity, but discriminant validity is not demonstrated by the reported statistics.

Partial correlations were reported as controlling for age, gender, occupation, education, and policy exposure, but the coefficients, confidence intervals, and p-values are not presented. Their adjusted magnitude therefore cannot be assessed here. The available results also do not establish mediation, which would require a separate indirect-effect analysis. RQ2 is thus supported most directly by Tables 6 and 7.

RQ3: What Shared Multivariate Structure Links Policy Overload and Policy Fatigue with Institutional Trust?

CCA examined the association between the policy set (PO, PF) and the trust set (IT1–IT3). Table 8 reports $\rho = 0.979$ for the first canonical function and $\rho = 0.082$ for the second. Their squared values are approximately 0.958 and 0.007, respectively, indicating a very strong first canonical association and little additional association in the second. These squared values refer to the canonical variates, not to variance explained in each original variable.

Table 8. Canonical Correlations

Function	ρ
1	0.979
2	0.082

Source: Authors’ data (2025).

Table 9 shows high loadings on Function 1 for PO (0.982), PF (0.989), IT1 (0.865), IT2 (0.987), and IT3 (0.998). Figure 4 displays the corresponding positive relationship between the first policy and trust canonical variates. These loadings show broad representation of the first

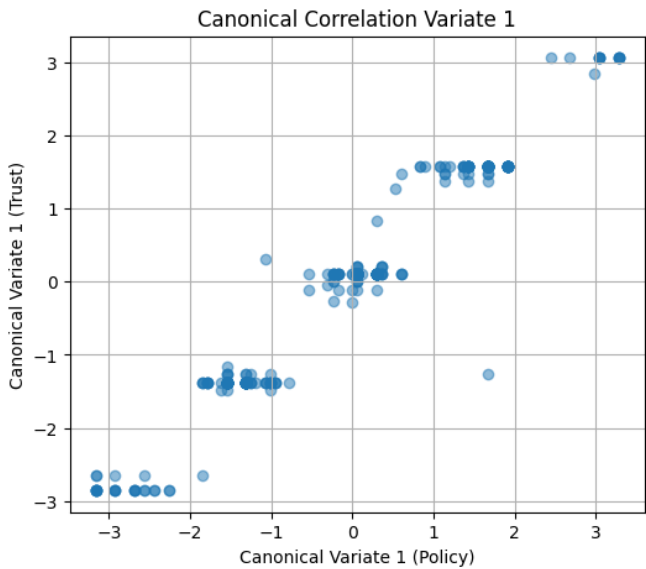
function across both sets, but do not establish discriminant validity given the very high zero-order correlations.

Table 9. Canonical Loadings – Function 1

X (Policy)	Loading	Y (Trust)	Loading
PO	0.982	IT1	0.865
PF	0.989	IT2	0.987
		IT3	0.998

Source: Authors’ data (2025).

Figure 4. Canonical Structure Plot



Source: Authors’ data (2025).

The reported bootstrap analysis using 5,000 resamples produced a 95% confidence interval of 0.961–0.987 for the first canonical correlation, close to the observed 0.979. Mardia’s multivariate skewness and kurtosis were reported as within acceptable thresholds, although exact values are not supplied. VIFs were also reported below 3.0, but the calculation specification is unavailable; given the very high pairwise correlations,

this statement is not used to infer absence of multicollinearity or construct overlap.

Two qualifications apply. First, no Wilks' lambda or equivalent inferential test for the canonical functions is reported, so Function 1 is described by its observed magnitude, loadings, and bootstrap interval rather than a formal significance test. Second, neither CCA nor the preceding correlations establish causal direction, mediation, or temporal ordering.

Overall Pattern of Results

Across the three research questions, PO, PF, and IT show strong same-direction covariation. The retained clusters form low-, midrange-, and high-score profiles (Table 4; Figure 3), all pairwise correlations exceed 0.93 (Tables 6 and 7), and CCA yields one dominant observed canonical relationship (Tables 8 and 9; Figure 4). These findings support strong covariation and retained perceptual segmentation, while the measurement evidence does not fully establish discriminant validity. They do not establish mediation, causal sequencing, or a uniquely optimal cluster solution.

DISCUSSION

The findings reveal a consistent but more complex pattern than a simple burden-to-distrust model would predict. Across the retained cluster solution, bivariate correlations, and canonical correlation analysis, policy overload (PO), policy fatigue (PF), and institutional trust (IT) move strongly in the same direction. Respondents with high PO and PF also tend to report high IT, whereas respondents with low PO and PF tend to report low IT. At the same time, the very high correlations among the three measures raise an important measurement question: the available evidence does not fully establish their discriminant validity. The findings therefore support strong covariation among the reported constructs but do not establish a causal sequence from overload to fatigue to trust, nor do they demonstrate that the three constructs are empirically independent.

This distinction is important because administrative-burden scholarship does not support a universal expectation that demanding

administrative experiences necessarily produce institutional distrust. Administrative burden is conventionally conceptualized through learning, compliance, and psychological costs arising in citizen–state interactions (Moynihan, Herd, and Harvey 2015), and subsequent research has shown that these burdens vary substantially across individuals and institutional settings (Halling and Bækgaard 2024). Recent scholarship has also emphasized the subjective character of administrative experience and the cumulative effects of repeated encounters with administrative demands (Pandey 2023; Martin, Delaney, and Doyle 2024). The present findings are consistent with this broader move away from treating administrative burden as a uniform experience, while also indicating that the relationship between perceived burden and institutional trust requires more cautious theorization than a simple negative linear model permits.

Heterogeneous Perceptual Configurations

The retained three-cluster solution distinguishes low-, midrange-, and high-score profiles across PO, PF, and IT. These profiles should be interpreted descriptively rather than as evidence of three stable psychological types. The clustering diagnostics support reasonable separation for the retained solution, but the silhouette pattern does not establish $k = 3$ as uniquely optimal. The empirical contribution of the cluster analysis therefore lies in identifying an ordered pattern of responses rather than proving the existence of definitive latent groups.

The low-score profile combines low PO, low PF, and low IT. The evidence does not justify labeling these respondents as disengaged, indifferent, administratively inexperienced, or weakly exposed to policy, because those mechanisms were not measured directly. What can be concluded is narrower: respondents who reported relatively little overload and fatigue did not necessarily report greater institutional trust. This pattern alone complicates any assumption that lower burden automatically corresponds to higher trust.

The high-score profile is even more consequential for interpretation. Respondents in this group reported high PO, high PF, and high IT simultaneously. This configuration is inconsistent with a straightforward expectation that greater perceived burden should mechanically correspond

to lower trust. However, the data do not establish why high burden and high trust coexist. The original interpretation that such respondents view complexity as professionalism, institutional competence, or procedural seriousness cannot be sustained because professional identity, institutional embeddedness, procedural literacy, and interpretations of regulatory complexity were not directly measured.

The occupational composition provides further reason for caution. Civil servants accounted for 61.5% of the high-score cluster, compared with 64.75% of the total sample. The high-score group therefore cannot be characterized empirically as disproportionately composed of institutionally embedded public officials. Both civil servants and members of the general public appear in all three profiles. The cluster evidence consequently supports heterogeneity in perceptual configurations but does not identify occupational status as the mechanism generating them.

This caution is consistent with the broader administrative-burden literature. Individual experiences of burden are shaped by cognitive resources, administrative capital, social position, health, and the design of administrative encounters rather than by a single universal mechanism (Christensen et al. 2020; Chudnovsky and Peeters 2021; Masood and Nisar 2021; Bell et al. 2023). Research also increasingly emphasizes that accumulated administrative demands may be experienced differently across individuals and contexts (Martin, Delaney, and Doyle 2024). The present study extends this concern to respondents' broader perceptions of policy environments, but the mechanisms generating the identified profiles remain questions for subsequent research.

Administrative Burden and Institutional Trust: A Conditional Relationship

The coexistence of high perceived burden and high institutional trust should be understood against mixed evidence concerning administrative burden and political feedback. Policy-feedback research demonstrates that policies and their modes of delivery can shape citizens' political attitudes and their relationship with government (Bussi, Dupuy, and Van Ingelgom 2022). Direct evidence concerning administrative burden and trust, however, does not point in one direction.

Bell, Wright, and Oh (2024) show that losing access to public benefits in the United States can produce negative policy feedback, including lower trust in government. In contrast, Mikkelsen, Madsen, and Bækgaard (2025) find little evidence in a preregistered Danish experiment that recalling burdensome administrative encounters systematically reduces general institutional trust. These studies support the interpretation that administrative burden may influence trust under some conditions without constituting a general burden-to-distrust law.

The present results are compatible with that more conditional account. They show that high perceived overload and fatigue can coexist with high institutional trust within the same respondent profile. They do not demonstrate that burden increases trust, that trust causes respondents to tolerate burden, or that institutional confidence buffers psychological strain. Any of these mechanisms would require additional evidence. The safer implication is that burden and trust should be treated as related but analytically separable dimensions whose association may depend on characteristics of policy design, institutional experience, prior expectations, and the broader governance context.

Service-experience research provides a useful parallel. Berg and Johansson (2020) demonstrate that experiences with public services can spill over into trust in responsible institutions, but the magnitude of that relationship varies according to institutional arrangements. Mahmud (2021) similarly shows that institutional trust is associated with broader assessments of governmental quality and performance as well as individual and civic characteristics. Trust is therefore unlikely to be determined by administrative burden alone. The strong positive association observed in the present study may reflect the fact that respondents form institutional evaluations from multiple simultaneous experiences and judgments, only some of which are captured by PO and PF.

Strong Associations and the Problem of Construct Distinctness

The most striking quantitative result is the magnitude of the associations among PO, PF, and IT. Pearson correlations range from 0.944 to 0.959,

and the corresponding Spearman coefficients range from 0.931 to 0.955. The first canonical correlation is similarly high at $\rho = 0.979$. These results establish strong empirical co-movement. They should not, however, be interpreted automatically as evidence of an overarching cognitive schema.

The measurement statistics warrant particular caution. Although all three constructs demonstrate high internal consistency, composite reliability, and AVE, the very high cross-construct correlations create problems for discriminant validity. Using the reported AVE values, the square root of AVE is approximately 0.934 for PO, 0.947 for PF, and 0.961 for IT. The PO–PF correlation of 0.944 and PO–IT correlation of 0.950 both exceed the square root of AVE for PO, while the PF–IT correlation of 0.959 exceeds the corresponding value for PF. Under the Fornell–Larcker comparison, the evidence therefore does not fully establish separation among the constructs (Fornell and Larcker 1981).

This does not demonstrate that PO, PF, and IT are the same construct. Conceptually, they refer to different domains: perceived characteristics of the policy environment, psychological responses to policy demands, and evaluations of institutions. Empirically, however, the current measures overlap substantially. The high canonical loadings cannot resolve that issue because CCA is designed to identify shared multivariate association rather than discriminant validity (Uurtio et al. 2017). Consequently, the dominant canonical function should be interpreted as evidence that the measured policy and trust variables covary strongly, not as proof of a single latent evaluative architecture.

Common-method variance is another relevant consideration because all focal measures were collected in the same self-report questionnaire. The Harman single-factor diagnostic and marker-variable results reported in the Methods provide some reassurance, but such procedures cannot establish that common-method bias is absent (Podsakoff et al. 2003; Lindell and Whitney 2001). The magnitude of the observed correlations therefore warrants replication using alternative measurement strategies and, ideally, data collected from different sources or at different times.

Contributions to Administrative-Burden and Policy-Growth Research

Despite these qualifications, the findings make a useful conceptual contribution by connecting research that has generally operated at different analytical levels. Policy-growth scholarship demonstrates that expanding policy portfolios can outpace organizational implementation capacity and generate bureaucratic overload and policy triage (Fernández-i-Marín et al. 2024a, 2024b; Knill, Steinebach, and Zink 2024). More recent evidence shows that overload can cause selective implementation and organizational policy triage under conditions of accumulated demands (Kaplaner, Knill, and Steinebach 2025; Zink, Knill, and Steinebach 2025).

Administrative-burden scholarship, by contrast, has primarily examined costs experienced by individuals interacting with the state (Campbell, Pandey, and Arnesen 2023; Halling and Bækgaard 2024). Recent work has increasingly recognized subjective and cumulative administrative experience (Pandey 2023; Martin, Delaney, and Doyle 2024), while research on street-level administration demonstrates that administrative tasks can also generate stress for public officials themselves (Tiggelaar, Groeneveld, and George 2024).

The present study brings these strands together by examining perceived policy overload as an individual-level response to a cumulative policy environment rather than treating organizational bureaucratic overload and individual administrative burden as interchangeable. Its contribution is therefore not to establish a new causal theory of policy fatigue and trust, but to identify a set of empirical relationships that warrant further investigation across levels of governance.

The Indonesian setting strengthens this contribution by locating the analysis within a decentralized regulatory system in which multiple governmental levels possess rulemaking authority. Existing evidence documents substantial local regulatory activity and persistent concerns about regulatory governance following decentralization (Yuwono, Wiryawan, and Shimada 2025). The present data cannot determine whether decentralization itself causes the reported perceptions, but they provide evidence that questions of cumulative policy demands and institutional

evaluation are empirically relevant beyond the advanced democracies that dominate much of the policy-growth and administrative-burden literature.

Implications for Governance and Policy Design

The results suggest several cautious implications for governance. First, policy simplification should not be justified on the assumption that reducing burden will automatically increase institutional trust. Administrative burdens have documented consequences for access, well-being, and participation and therefore remain important targets for reform (Bækgaard et al. 2021; Bell et al. 2023; Halling and Bækgaard 2024). The present results simply indicate that trust may not respond to burden in a uniform manner.

Second, the strong association between policy perceptions and institutional evaluations highlights the importance of how individuals experience policy systems as a whole. This is consistent with research showing that burdens can accumulate across everyday administrative encounters (Martin, Delaney, and Doyle 2024) and that public-service experiences can spill over into institutional trust (Berg and Johansson 2020). Governments should therefore pay attention not only to individual procedures but also to consistency, navigability, and cumulative demands across programs and administrative levels.

Third, differentiated administrative experiences deserve greater attention. Citizens vary in cognitive resources, administrative capital, health, and social support, while public officials face their own administrative-task pressures (Christensen et al. 2020; Masood and Nisar 2021; Bell et al. 2023; Tiggelaar, Groeneveld, and George 2024). Policy design that reduces unnecessary complexity while maintaining procedural clarity may therefore be more defensible than a generic prescription for either maximal simplification or increased regulatory rigor.

The findings do not support the stronger claim that “excessive simplification” could reduce trust by making institutions appear less professional. That mechanism was not measured and should remain a hypothesis for future research rather than a policy recommendation derived from the present data.

Methodological Contribution and Limitations

Methodologically, the study demonstrates the value of combining clustering, bivariate correlation, rank correlation, and CCA to explore multiple dimensions of perceptual data. K-means provides an exploratory representation of response profiles, while Pearson and Spearman correlations reveal the magnitude and consistency of pairwise associations. CCA further maps shared multivariate variation between the policy and trust variable sets (Uurtio et al. 2017).

These techniques should nevertheless be interpreted within their limits. The three-cluster solution was retained for substantive profiling but was not shown to be uniquely optimal. The reported partial correlations cannot be evaluated fully because coefficients and confidence intervals are not presented. The CCA does not include reported Wilks' lambda tests for the canonical functions. Most importantly, neither clustering, correlation, partial correlation, nor CCA establishes temporal sequencing or causation.

The measurement issue is also substantive rather than merely technical. The very high correlations raise uncertainty about empirical distinction among PO, PF, and IT. Future studies should refine the item sets, assess discriminant validity explicitly, and consider alternative measures of construct separation. Multi-wave designs could reduce same-source measurement concerns and provide stronger evidence concerning temporal relationships.

Several additional limitations remain. The cross-sectional design prevents assessment of how overload, fatigue, and trust develop over time. Self-reported measures may reflect response styles or common evaluative tendencies. The available sampling documentation does not permit independent assessment of population representativeness. The Indonesian governance context may also limit transferability to institutional settings with different regulatory structures.

Future research should therefore combine longitudinal, experimental, behavioral, administrative, and qualitative evidence. Particular attention should be given to mechanisms that the present study cannot test: procedural justice, service quality, prior trust, administrative literacy, professional identity, institutional experience, perceived legitimacy of specific policies,

and interpretations of regulatory necessity. Testing these mechanisms would help explain why similar levels of administrative burden may correspond to different trust evaluations across individuals and institutional contexts.

Overall, the study points toward a more conditional understanding of the relationship between cumulative policy demands, psychological strain, and institutional trust. Its strongest contribution is not evidence that high burden produces high trust, but evidence that a simple linear burden-to-distrust assumption is insufficient to explain the observed data. At the same time, the substantial overlap among the measures means that this conclusion should be treated as an empirical starting point rather than a definitive theoretical resolution.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an empirically grounded assessment of how individuals perceive policy overload, policy fatigue, and institutional trust within a dense and evolving governance environment. By combining cluster analysis, correlational tests, and canonical correlation analysis, the study demonstrates that administrative burden is not experienced or interpreted uniformly. Instead, it produces distinct attitudinal patterns shaped by policy exposure, institutional embeddedness, and cognitive interpretation. The identification of three stable clusters, particularly the high burden–high trust group, challenges the assumption that administrative burden necessarily weakens institutional trust. These findings suggest that policy complexity and psychological fatigue may coexist with strong trust when individuals interpret regulatory density as a sign of professionalism, institutional competence, or procedural seriousness. The strong intercorrelations among overload, fatigue, and trust, together with the dominance of a single canonical dimension, indicate that individuals form institutional judgments through broad and integrated evaluative schemas rather than through separate assessments of burden and trust.

Methodologically, the study contributes to administrative burden research by integrating segmentation techniques, covariate-controlled correlations, and multivariate modeling. The use of canonical correlation analysis offers a broader view of how policy experiences are linked

to institutional evaluations beyond conventional bivariate analysis. Practically, the findings call for differentiated governance strategies. While unnecessary administrative barriers should be reduced, simplification alone may not be sufficient or universally appropriate. Public institutions should balance accessibility with procedural clarity, fairness, consistency, and institutional rigor. The study also highlights the importance of everyday administrative encounters, frontline service quality, and transparent communication in shaping trust. However, its cross-sectional design limits causal inference, and reliance on self-reported perceptions may introduce bias. Future research should employ longitudinal, experimental, behavioral, and qualitative approaches to examine how burden and trust evolve over time and how mechanisms such as cognitive load, procedural justice, professional identity, and institutional experience shape these relationships across different governance contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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