The Reduction of Criminal Justice Policy in Indonesia: Justice versus Virality

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history
Received: January 26, 2025
Revised: July 31, 2025
Accepted: July 31, 2025

Keywords
Criminal Justice;
Justice;
Reduction;
Virality;

ABSTRACT

The phenomenon of virality on social media has had a significant impact on the criminal justice system in Indonesia. Digital public pressure can influence the speed and direction of law enforcement, even shifting fundamental principles such as the principles of legality, equality before the law, and due process of law. This study aims to analyze how virality influences criminal justice policy, identify forms of reduction and erosion of criminal law policy, and formulate a balanced approach between legal justice and digital public pressure. This study uses a normative juridical method with three approaches: a legislative approach, a conceptual approach, and a comparative approach. The results show, *first*, that virality has shifted the orientation of law enforcement in Indonesia, with viral cases such as those involving Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy being processed more quickly due to public pressure, rather than legal urgency. *Second*, this condition indicates a severe reduction in the principles of legality, equality, and due process, exacerbated by ad hoc legislation and reactive executive intervention. *Third*, while digital publics can promote accountability, Indonesia needs institutional strategies to balance these pressures without compromising legal integrity. Recommendations include reforming legal education based on digital literacy, establishing digital response units within law enforcement agencies, and strengthening media regulations to prevent trial by media. Indonesia needs to restructure its criminal justice policy so that it remains based on constitutional values and the principles of the rule of law, rather than being driven by popularity in the digital space.

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1. Introduction

The Indonesian criminal justice system, long governed by codified legal norms and institutional hierarchy, is undergoing a fundamental epistemological disruption.[1] In the digital era, social media platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) have introduced a new mechanism for public

[1] Randikha Prabu Raharja Sasmita, Sigid Suseno, and Patris Yusrian Jaya, 'The Concept of Reasons for Eliminating Corporate Crime in Criminal Law in Indonesia', *Heliyon*, 9.11 (2023), e21602 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e21602

surveillance and influence that surpasses traditional legal oversight.[2] The phenomenon of *"no viral, no justice" now* shapes law enforcement in Indonesia.[3] This research's main argument is that algorithmic and participatory virality on social media is a central force influencing how law is practiced and enforced. Social media significantly influences public perception and has a direct impact on legal policy and processes.[4] High-profile cases such as those involving Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy, demonstrate that digital attention can expedite legal processes, promote transparency, and pressure law enforcement to act, while similar non-viral cases are often neglected.[5] This reveals unequal access to justice. The situation raises a dilemma how can procedural justice be ensured under the massive, real-time pressure of social media and has Indonesian law enforcement shifted from being driven by due process to being driven by public outcry.

Empirical data corroborate these shifts. The Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia, in its 2024 annual report, documented a 17% increase in public complaints concerning unequal law enforcement in viral versus non-viral cases. The National Commission on Human Rights also reported an uptick in investigations initiated only after public outcry reached significant digital momentum, particularly in cases of police misconduct, sexual violence, and land disputes. Furthermore, the 2023–2025 National Medium-Term Development Plan has acknowledged the risk of unequal access to justice caused by non-integrated digital legal services. While Indonesia has made strides in legal technology through initiatives such as ETLE (Electronic Traffic Law Enforcement), SPPT-TI (Integrated Case Handling System Based on Information Technology), and E-Court, these systems are primarily administrative and lack protections against the manipulation of legal outcomes through social media virality.

This research is driven by concerns over the declining independence of law under digital pressure and the need to clarify the evolving relationship between law, the public, and technology. Specifically, the research investigates how social media virality influences the process and policy of criminal law enforcement in Indonesia and how the state responds within the framework of positive law and institutional practice. Theoretically, this study draws on Michel Foucault's

[2] Jennifer K Dunnigan and others, 'Social Media in Ophthalmology: A Comprehensive Literature Review', *Survey of Ophthalmology*, 70.4 (2025), 817–24 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.survophthal.2025.02.003

[3] Zuman Malaka, 'Tinjauan Sosiologi Hukum Tentang Penegakan Hukum Di Indonesia', *Taruna Law: Journal of Law and Syariah*, 3.01 SE-Articles (2025), 70–77 https://doi.org/10.54298/tarunalaw.v3i01.292

[4] Han Wang and Mengliang Dai, 'Moralization of Law, Heavy-Penaltyism, and Retributive Justice: A Corpus-Assisted Study of Legal Consciousness on Chinese Social Media', *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, 79 (2024), 100700 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijlcj.2024.100700

[5] Melinda Dina Gussela and others, 'Fenomena "No Viral No Justice" Perspektif Teori Penegakkan Hukum', *Ranah Research : Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 7.2 (2024), 792–800 https://doi.org/10.38035/rrj.v7i2.1326

panopticism theory, exploring how public digital surveillance creates compliance without coercion.[6] In the algorithmic era, this concept expands to algorithmic governance, where technological mediation, rather than state institutions alone, drives supervision and decision-making. Concepts such as digital docility and algorithmic populism now play a prominent role in Indonesia's contemporary legal landscape.[7]

Previous research has recognized the role of media in promoting legal accountability; however, it has been limited to traditional forms, such as watchdog journalism, and has not comprehensively explored the role of algorithm-driven virality in influencing law enforcement. For instance, Isnawan (2024) examines digital surveillance in online prostitution cases, but has not analyzed how public participation on social media shapes legal direction and responses.[8] Similarly, Abid and Faisal (2024) compare legal digitization policies in Indonesia and Thailand, emphasizing the technological gap, but fail to discuss the normative implications of algorithmic virality for the principle of due process of law.[9] Patria Setyawan (2023) examine digital law enforcement through CCTV systems and e-Tilang (e-ticketing), using a panopticist approach that is still limited to physical infrastructure, without considering the transformation of the concept in the context of social media.[10] Likewise, Hasanah (2022) highlights the role of media in exposing corruption cases; however, her focus remains on conventional media and has not addressed how algorithms contribute to viral content. In a related vein, Santoso and Pranoto (2021) discuss transparency in the e-court system, but they do not examine how public sentiment on social media influences institutional justice.[11] In light of the gaps identified in previous studies, this research aims to move beyond literature that focuses solely on traditional or digital mechanisms by clarifying the comparative influence of virality. Specifically, this study focuses not only on viral cases but also includes non-viral cases as a comparison. Thus, a comparison between the two groups can empirically demonstrate that virality

[6] Ben Golder, *Re-Reading Foucault: On Law, Power and Rights*, *Re-Reading Foucault: On Law, Power and Rights*, A GlassHouse Book (Routledge, 2012) https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094563

[7] Nicholas Gane, 'The Governmentalities of Neoliberalism: Panopticism, Post-Panopticism and Beyond', *The Sociological Review*, 60.4 (2012), 611–34 https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.2012.02126.x

[8] Fuadi Isnawan, 'Criminal Law Enforcement to Combat Social Media-Based Prostitution', *KRTHA BHAYANGKARA*, 18.2 SE-Articles (2025), 354–80 https://doi.org/10.31599/krtha.v18i2.1868

[9] Abid Fatur Rahman Ritonga and Faisal Faisal, 'Pengaruh Digitalisasi Proses Hukum Acara Pidana: Studi Komparatif Hukum Indonesia Dan Thailand (Criminal Procedure Code)', *Law Jurnal*, 5.1 (2024), 83–94 https://doi.org/10.46576/lj.v5i1.5772

[10] Vincentius Patria Setyawan, 'ANALYSIS OF THE USE OF CCTV IN PUNISHING TRAFFIC VIOLATORS', *Jurnal Humaniora Dan Sosial Sains*, 1.1 SE-Articles (2024), 45–50 https://doi.org/https://humaniorasains.id/jhss/article/view/8

[11] Muhammad Ali Alladuniah, 'The Influence of Public Opinion on the Application of the Presumption of Innocence to the Criminal Justice System', *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS*, 2025 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.47191/ijmra/v8-i06-06

does contribute to expedited case resolution. Through this approach, the study aims to demonstrate that while all cases should ideally be processed quickly and fairly, cases that garner public attention online tend to be prioritized by authorities, whereas similar, non-viral cases often experience significant delays.[12]

To address the gaps in previous research, this study combines legal analysis, digital media studies, and political power theory to support the central argument that algorithmic and participatory virality on social media profoundly shapes legal processes, law enforcement responses, and the direction of criminal policy in Indonesia. The research's primary focus is to explain how online scrutiny influences institutional behavior and challenges adherence to the principle of due process of law. Empirical contributions are made through an analysis of 25 viral criminal cases (2020–2025), examining institutional responses, adherence to the principle of justice, and their impact on the integrity of the criminal justice system. This situation illustrates symptoms of a decline in criminal justice policy, specifically the erosion of procedural norms and the independence of legal institutions, resulting from increasing public pressure driven by digital virality. This is despite Article 5 of the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code regulates investigative authority, requiring law enforcement officials to exercise their powers impartially and ensure equal treatment regardless of social status or public attention. There is now a clear shift in the legal system: justice is moving from rule-based fairness to performance-based measures shaped by digital public opinion. Lawmaking and enforcement lose effectiveness when trapped in empty procedural formalism. In this climate, the law is "born prematurely," cut off from the deeper values of justice it should reflect. As a result, the law risks losing its sense of justice and destabilizing the legal order. Studies show that laws made in formal settings but lacking moral substance become empty norms and lose social legitimacy.[13]

This research shows that virality speeds up case handling. However, it can also lead to inconsistent legal standards. Digital public pressure prompts officials to act more populistically. They tend to simplify procedures and prioritize quick reactions over justice principles. This creates a paradox: The public calls for transparency, but it can undermine the presumption of innocence and judicial independence, as well as accountability. The main objective of this study is clear. First, it aims to identify how social media virality influences criminal law policy and processes in Indonesia. Second, it examines whether *due process* is maintained in viral cases. Third, it proposes policy recommendations based on algorithms and legal ethics to address digital pressure. This research aims to make both theoretical and practical contributions. It seeks to help build a criminal justice system that can

[12] Sidik Sunaryo, 'Formal Genus of the Value of Justice in Indonesia', *Legality : Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum*, 29.2 (2021), 223–36 https://doi.org/10.22219/ljih.v29i2.16609
[13] Sunaryo.

handle external pressure.[14] It also aims to strengthen ethical law enforcement in the digital age. While preserving fairness and integrity, the Indonesian legal system must adapt to meet the changing needs of society. However, it should not give in to the changing and emotional tides of virality.[15]

2. Research Method

This study employs a normative legal method, utilizing legislative, conceptual, and comparative approaches, and is analyzed through a descriptive-analytical framework.[16] The purpose is to examine the dynamics of law enforcement in criminal cases that attract massive attention in the digital public sphere.[17] This study employs a legislative approach by analyzing KUHAP, the ITE Law, and Police Circular No. SE/6/X/2023, alongside a conceptual framework based on theories such as Foucault's *panopticism*, digital docility, algorithmic governance, and penal populism, to explore the shift from procedural law to enforcement influenced by public pressure. A comparative approach examines (1) the differences between viral and non-viral case handling in Indonesia (e.g., Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy), and (2) how countries like the Netherlands and Denmark uphold procedural integrity despite digital virality. The Netherlands exemplifies strong adherence to the rule of law, while Denmark emphasizes restorative justice and evidence-based policy. Data sources include 25 viral criminal cases (2020–2025), legal documents (e.g., court rulings, investigation files), 150 news articles, and social media metadata collected via Twitter API and CrowdTangle. Methods include legal document analysis, media content analysis, literature review, and digital scraping, analyzed through legal hermeneutics, media discourse, and comparative frameworks.[18] This methodology reveals patterns of procedural simplification, inconsistent enforcement, and growing legal populism, while offering a framework for reforming algorithm-based legal responses, law enforcement ethics, and public legal literacy.[19]

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[14] Abdul Wahid, Rohadi Rohadi, and Andi Kusyandi, '"No Viral No Justice" Phenomenon in Indonesian Law Enforcement: Acceleration or Threat to Justice ?', *Reformasi Hukum*, 29.1 (2025), 36–51 https://doi.org/10.46257/jrh.v29i1.1183

[15] Ismail Koto, 'Cyber Crime According to the ITE Law', *International Journal Reglement & Society (IJRS*, August, 2021, 103–10 https://doi.org/10.55357/ijrs.v2i2.124

[16] Christopher Boniface, Lachlan Urquhart, and Melissa Terras, 'Towards a Right to Repair for the Internet of Things: A Review of Legal and Policy Aspects', *Computer Law & Security Review*, 52 (2024), 105934 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2024.105934

[17] Herri Swantoro, 'Grounds and Mechanisms for Judicial Review of Civil Cases in Indonesia: A Starting Point for Legal Clarity and Efficiency', *Lex Publica*, 10.1 (2023), 191–214 https://doi.org/10.58829/lp.10.1.2023.191-214

[18] Madaliev Yarmuhammat Xudayberganovich, Agil Ahmadov, and Karomi Karomi, 'The Governments' Role in Preserving National Identity on Globalization', *Journal of Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues (JSDERI)*, 3.2 (2025), 191–220 https://doi.org/10.53955/jsderi.v3i2.76

[19] Dinda Agustin Wulandari, Abdul Kadir Jaelani, and Hilaire Tegnan, 'Income Tax Regulations for Child Content Creators of TikTok Platform: Inefficacy of Indonesian Legal Frameworks', *Journal of*

3. Results and Discussion

The Impact of Virality on Criminal Justice Policy

Virality in the realm of criminal law signifies more than just the rapid spread of information; it marks a profound shift in how justice is pursued and enforced. Public pressure, once external to legal procedure, is increasingly becoming a decisive factor in shaping law enforcement responses.[20] This evolution signals a troubling erosion of the rule of law (rechtsstaat), which ideally upholds legality, impartiality, and due process as the core pillars of justice.[21] As viral outrage escalates into mass-driven demands for punishment, the legal system risks drifting toward penal populism, where emotional public sentiment overrides rational, principled legal action.[22]

Legal cases that go viral have two ambiguous sides.[23] On the one hand, they open new channels of social control, increasing transparency and accountability in law enforcement.[24] The public can disseminate documentation of criminal acts or injustices, which then becomes crucial evidence in investigations.[25] In some cases, social media even serves as an alternative deliberative forum, replacing stagnant formal legal forums.[26] However, on the other hand, virality presents a systemic disruption to legal integrity.[27] Massive public pressure can trigger the phenomenon of trial by the press, a form of informal media litigation that can undermine the presumption of innocence and the neutrality of the legal process.[28] Decisions by law enforcement officers are no longer based solely on objective facts

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Sustainable Development and Regulatory Issues (JSDERI), 2.2 (2024), 169–91 https://doi.org/10.53955/jsderi.v2i2.35

[20] E F Primadhany and others, *Politik Hukum Di Indonesia* (Sada Kurnia Pustaka, 2024).

[21] A J S Runturambi, M Aswindo, and E Meiyani, 'No Viral No Justice: A Criminological Review of Social Media-Based Law Enforcement from the Perspective of Progressive Law', *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan*, 12.1 (2024), 177–95 https://doi.org/10.29303/ius.v12i1.1361

[22] He Shuang, 'The Impact of Online Opinion on Justice: Two Cases in Comparative Law Perspective', *Advances in Social Science and Culture*, 6.5 (2024), p47 https://doi.org/10.22158/assc.v6n5p47

[23] Gussela and others.

[24] I Wayan Kandia I Gede Sujana, 'Indikator Lemahnya Penegakan Hukum Di Indonesia', *IJOLARES: Indonesian Journal of Law Research*, 2.2 SE-Articles (2024), 56–62 https://doi.org/10.60153/ijolares.v2i2.67

[25] Wahid, Rohadi, and Kusyandi.

[26] Fred E Stephens and J C Upshaw Downs, 'Chapter 8 - Ethics in Law Enforcement: Defining the Thin Blue Line', ed. by J C Upshaw Downs and Anjali B T - Ethics in Forensic Science Ranadive Swienton (San Diego: Academic Press, 2012), pp. 215–54 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-385019-5.00008-7

[27] Hamdi Gugule and Romi Mesra, 'Analisis Sosiologis Terhadap Video Viral Tiktok Tentang Penegakan Hukum Di Indonesia', *Ideas: Jurnal Pendidikan, Sosial, Dan Budaya*, 8.3 (2022), 1071 https://doi.org/10.32884/ideas.v8i3.956

[28] Malaka.

and procedures, but are driven by public expectations formed through opinion, framing, and viral narratives.[29]

The characteristics of virality indicate that widely disseminated legal content often incorporates strong emotional elements, creative visualizations, and narrative strategies that evoke sympathy.[30] Therefore, legal narratives are tested not only by the strength of their arguments but also by their ability to resonate affectively.[31] It presents a serious challenge to the principle of equality before the law, as only cases with high narrative appeal tend to receive serious attention and treatment.[32] Cases that are substantively equally serious but fail to penetrate the "market of public attention" are left behind and denied the justice they deserve.[33]

This imbalance in legal attention underscores how emotional engagement and narrative virality increasingly dictate which cases are prioritized, creating a distorted standard of justice. In this context, the rise of the "No Viral No Justice" phenomenon highlights how public visibility has become a prerequisite for legal responsiveness, revealing a deeper institutional crisis in upholding consistent and impartial law enforcement. The "No Viral No Justice" phenomenon, now a public slogan, reflects a crisis of public trust in the integrity and responsiveness of law enforcement agencies, particularly the police.[34] Many criminal cases in Indonesia only gain attention after going viral, whether through personal narratives, visual uploads, or pressure from online communities.[35] Some prominent cases include those of Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy. In these cases, law enforcement was carried out reactively, after the incident had gone viral, rather than being

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[29] Khairullah Al Mujtaba, 'Analisis Hukum Dampak Putusan Kasus Pidana Pembunuhan Berencana Terhadap Proses Peradilan Di Indonesia Saat Ini Dan Ke Depan (Studi Kasus Dengan Terdakwa Ferdy Sambo)', 2023 https://doi.org/https://repository.unissula.ac.id/32137/

[30] Ryan Faisal, Hj Kurniati, and Hj RAS, 'Application of the Police Code of Ethics in the Ferdy Sambo Case', *Formosa Journal of Social Sciences (FJSS)*, 2 (2023), 667–74 https://doi.org/10.55927/fjss.v2i4.7453

[31] Ruochen Zhang and An Chen, 'Public Risk Perception in Extreme Weather Events: Topic Distribution, Spatiotemporal Analysis, and Sentiment Comparison on Social Media', *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 2025, 105692 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijdrr.2025.105692

[32] Zehui Bu, Jicai Liu, and Jiaqi Liu, 'The Double-Edged Effect of Social Media in the Collaborative Governance of PPP Projects from a Value Perception Perspective', *Sustainable Cities and Society*, 128 (2025), 106468 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scs.2025.106468

[33] Peter Waara, 'Contested Futures: Media, Social Cohesion, and the Kaunisvaara Mine in Swedish Public Discourse 2006-2024', *The Extractive Industries and Society*, 24 (2025), 101721 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2025.101721

[34] Rizka Amallia and others, 'Analisis Perkara Tindak Pidana Penganiayaan Yang Dilakukan Oleh Mario Dandy', *JURNAL PENELITIAN SERAMBI HUKUM*, 2023. https://doi.org/10.59582/sh.v16i02.724

[35] Nesha Sarah, Riskiqa Sekarsari, and Jufryanto Puluhulawa, 'Legal Review of Ferdy Sambo Decision From the Perspective of Justice of the Offender', *Estudiante Law Journal*, 1.1 (2024), 228–38. https://doi.org/10.33756/eslaj.v1i1.23642

conducted proactively under proper legal procedures.[36] It represents an institutional defiance of the principle of legality, where the law only operates after viral pressure.[37] It shift can be understood through the theoretical lens of algorithmic *panopticism* , a contemporary reconstruction of Michel Foucault's concept of the *panopticism* .[38]

Table 1. Comparative Analysis of the Impact of Virality on the Ferdy Sambo[39] and Mario Dandy[40] Cases

Aspect	Ferdy Sambo Case (2022)	The Mario Dandy Case (2023)
The Initial Viral Moment	It went viral due to public suspicion of the police's fabricated narrative regarding the shootout and alleged obstruction of justice.	Viral because of the video of brutal violence and the luxurious lifestyle of the children of state officials
Triggers of Public Pressure	Inconsistencies in police statements, loss of CCTV, and involvement of high-ranking police officials	The spread of the video of the assault, the perpetrator's relationship with tax officials, and allegations of illicit wealth
Media and Public Reactions	The hashtags #TangkapFerdySambo and #JusticeForBrigadierJ are trending nationally and internationally.	Widespread response on social media to the violence and privilege issues of officials' children, #JusticeForDavid
Impact on Investigation	The National Police Chief dismissed Sambo and dozens of members, the investigation changed drastically after public pressure and Bharada E's confession.	The process is running quickly with the implementation of scientific crime investigation by the Regional Police, there is no impression of a cover-up.
Impact on the Courts	The death sentence by the South Jakarta District Court, then changed to life imprisonment by the Supreme Court, invited public interpretation as a compromise against pressure.	Mario was sentenced to 12 years in prison and ordered to pay restitution of Rp 25 billion; AGH was sentenced to 3.5 years in prison under the juvenile justice system.
Impact on Police Policy	Proposals for reform of the Police Law and improvements to the Propam Division, calls for increased internal oversight	It does not directly change policy, but strengthens the image of the police in taking action without discrimination.
Changes in Institutional Attitudes	Internal reform of the National Police, mass dismissal, and PTDH Ferdy Sambo were only carried out after public pressure.	Rafael Alun was removed, the National Commission on Child Protection called for a revision of the Child Protection Law, and

[36] Shinta Khoerunisa and Nur Rochaeti, 'Criminological Perspectives on Crime Persecution Case Study Mario Dandy', *International Journal of Social Science and Human Research*, 2023. https://doi.org/10.47191/ijsshr/v6-i5-74

[37] Marsha Diva Ananda Putri Silalahi and others, 'Analisis Hak Asasi Manusia Dalam Penanganan Kasus Mario Dandy', *JERUMI: Journal of Education Religion Humanities and Multidiciplinary*, 2024. https://doi.org/10.57235/jerumi.v2i1.1999

[38] Gane.

[39] Novi Prastiti, Budi Dwi Satoto, and Moch Rizal Efendi, 'Identifying Dominant Actors of Ferdy Sambo's Case Network on Social Media X/Twitter Using Social Network Analysis for Public Relations Strategy', *Journal of Information Technology and Cyber Security*, 2024. https://doi.org/10.30996/jitcs.10852

[40] Amallia and others.

		criticism emerged of the child protection law.
Legal Analysis	There are indications of judicial populism and the influence of public opinion on decisions, reflecting the instability of judicial independence.	The decision was deemed normative and in accordance with the Criminal Code, the judge was not influenced by extreme pressure from the masses.
Virality Influence Level	Very high, determines the direction of the investigation, ethical processing, and verdict; without virality, there is a high probability that the case will be closed.	High, changing public perception of official integrity and expediting legal action, but not significantly influencing judges
Implications for the Legal System	Shows that public pressure can replace the work of legal institutions, an indication that *rule by opinion* replaces *the rule of law.*	Virality supports transparency but does not shift the foundations of justice; it rather demonstrates institutional accountability.

Sources: The data was processed by the author from various sources.

Table 1. shows that, in a comparative study of the Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy cases, both demonstrate a substantial correlation between virality on social media and the response of the criminal justice system in Indonesia. Essentially, these two cases illustrate how public pressure, facilitated by digital exposure, can significantly influence the direction and intensity of law enforcement, while also revealing the problematic nature of the rule of law, which is vulnerable to compromise by the rule of opinion. The main similarity between the two cases lies in the massive scale of virality and its driving force behind the expedited legal process. In the Ferdy Sambo case, virality emerged in response to a manipulative narrative from the police authorities, who were deemed non-transparent. The digital wave prompted the reopening of legal facts and encouraged the emergence of key actors, such as Bharada E, who became a justice collaborator. In the Mario Dandy case, virality began with the dissemination of footage of the brutal assault, accompanied by public outrage over the lavish lifestyle of the official's child. In both cases, intense public attention served as a catalyst, forcing law enforcement agencies, the police, the prosecutor's office, and the courts to act decisively and responsively.

However, striking differences can be found in the level of intervention and vulnerability of each institution to the pressure of virality. In the Ferdy Sambo case, public pressure not only influenced the investigation but also visibly affected judicial considerations. The South Jakarta District Court's death sentence against Sambo was later overturned by the Supreme Court and commuted to life imprisonment. This change invites multiple interpretations, as it represents either a correction of the judicial system or a compromise in response to moral pressure, demonstrating the fluctuation between substantive justice and perceived justice. In the Mario Dandy case, despite intense public pressure, the judge appeared to uphold normative criminal law principles by sentencing him to 12 years in prison and ordering him to pay restitution of Rp 25 billion. In this case, the court

appeared to be more autonomous and consistent in considering objective legal elements.[41]

The extent to which virality influences legal decisions also reflects disparities in institutional characteristics.[42] The police, as the institution at the forefront of initial handling, are more easily influenced by digital pressure, as evidenced by the dismissal of structural officials and the shifting narrative of cases quickly after a viral issue.[43] Meanwhile, despite their independence, as guaranteed by Article 24 of the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 48 of 2009 concerning Judicial Power, the courts continue to exhibit symptoms of judicial populism, namely the tendency to consider public opinion in issuing decisions, as indicated in the initial verdict against Ferdy Sambo. It indicates that judicial independence is not an absolute entity, but can be influenced by social expectations that are widely formed in the digital space.

Thus, this comparative analysis reveals that while virality serves as a fact-revealer and a driver of transparency, it also carries consequences, including a potential reduction in the principle of due process of law. In situations where virality is the sole driver of justice, the legal system risks only functioning when public scrutiny is present and becoming impotent when silent cases occur. Therefore, in both the Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy cases, virality becomes a kind of pseudo-legal mechanism that, while effective in stimulating a response, remains dangerous if not accompanied by strengthening institutional independence and the rule of law based on the principles of legality, objectivity, and professionalism.

This research finds that the "No Viral, No Justice" phenomenon is not merely an expression of public dissatisfaction, but rather a tangible indication of a systemic crisis in law enforcement practices in Indonesia.[44] When access to justice is determined more by the extent to which a case attracts public attention through social media than by the work of legal institutions themselves, what occurs is not law enforcement, but rather a delegitimization of the law. In viral cases such as those of Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy, the legal process demonstrates unusual speed and transparency. In contrast, in many other similar or even more serious cases, handling tends to be slow or neglected. These findings suggest that virality not only amplifies attention but has become a primary trigger for forcing state

[41] Muammar Muammar, 'Penanganan Tindak Pidana Viral: Reduksi Terhadap Asas Legalitas Ke Asas Viralitas', *PATTIMURA Legal Journal*, 2.1 (2023), 19–29 https://doi.org/10.47268/pela.v2i1.8362
[42] Bu, Liu, and Liu.
[43] M. Ilham Tanzilulloh and Khoirun Nisa Aprilian Agmar, 'Virality, Justice and the Principle of "Blocking the Means to Evil"', *De Jure: Jurnal Hukum Dan Syar'iah*, 16.2 (2024), 317–35 https://doi.org/10.18860/J-FSH.V16I2.28847
[44] Zul Khaidir Kadir, 'Fragmented Justice : How the Wedding Cake Model Is Influenced by the ' No Viral , No Justice ' Phenomenon', *International Journal of Law Analytics (IJLA)*, 2.4 (2024), 315–30 https://doi.org/10.59890/ijla.v2i4.2674

institutions to act, even replacing formal mechanisms that should operate independently.[45]

This phenomenon reflects a shift in institutional pressures.[46] Law enforcement agencies, which should operate independently and based on legal principles, now react to public expectations driven by the logic of social media algorithms.[47] The digital public is now monitoring institutions that previously acted as watchdogs for society. This dynamic creates reputational pressure that is not always constructive, as law enforcement ultimately aims to appease public opinion rather than ensure substantive justice.[48] As a result, justice becomes a kind of social commodity. It depends on the level of public support and the accompanying digital virality. In this case, the principle of equality before the law becomes increasingly weakened, as anyone without access or the ability to "go viral" their case risks delays, neglect, or even injustice.

In practice, law enforcement officials demonstrate a high level of responsiveness to pressure from cases that go viral on social media, while official reports or conventional legal complaints tend to be responded to slowly or even ignored. For example, in the Ferdy Sambo case concerning the death of Brigadier J, which went viral on various digital platforms, the investigation was conducted quickly, press conferences were held regularly, and internal police structures were immediately activated. However, according to the Indonesian National Police's 2024 Criminal Case Handling Performance Report, cases involving drugs or murder that don't get much attention often take 90 to 120 days to resolve. Strong public pressure on internet platforms also sped up the case of Inspector General Teddy Minahasa, which was seized in day 14 at October 2022. This reveals a new law enforcement priority: viral cases move faster than others.[49] It indicates operational and ethical dysfunction within legal institutions, where concerns about public opinion supplant professionalism and internal accountability. At this point, justice is produced not based on established legal procedures, but on social

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[45] Binsar M. Gultom, *Pandangan Kritis Seorang Hakim Dalam Penegakan Hukum Di Indonesia 3*, Pandangan Kritis Seorang Hakim Dalam Penegakan Hukum Di Indonesia (Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2017).

[46] Muhammad Mutawalli, 'Kewenangan Badan Pemeriksa Keuangan Dalam Melakukan Pemeriksaan Dana Desa Yang Bersumber Dari APBN', *LITIGASI*, 23.1 (2022), 61–82 https://doi.org/10.23969/litigasi.v23i1.5030

[47] Hasiholan Sihaloho and Sudarto Sudarto, 'Analysis of Community Control over Law Enforcement in the No Viral No Justice Trend in Realizing Justice', *LITERATUS*, 7.1 (2025), 164–68 https://doi.org/10.37010/lit.v7i1.1993

[48] Ben Wagner and others, 'Mapping Interpretations of the Law in Online Content Moderation in Germany', *Computer Law & Security Review*, 55 (2024), 106054 https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.clsr.2024.106054

[49] Crameraldo Anugerah Putra Openg and others, 'Proses Penegakan Hukum Terhadap Kasus Penganiayaan Mario Dandy Kepada David Ozora', *Collegium Studiosum Journal*, 2023. https://doi.org/10.56301/csj.v6i2.1121

expectations driven by the speed and reach of digital information. Legal mechanisms become a kind of performative stage, activated only when the spotlight is bright enough.

In terms of policymaking, public pressure through social media in the Mario Dandy case has even prompted discourse on revising the Child Protection and Child Protection Law (SPPA) to increase sanctions for juvenile offenders.[50] This move demonstrates a tendency for legislation to be based less on legal evaluation and more on political responses to pressure from public opinion.[51] It ignores the principle of lex ferenda, an evidence-based policy, and opens up the possibility of reactive legislation that is counterproductive to the protection of children's constitutional rights.[52] The relationship between the media and law enforcement institutions is no longer linear, but rather complex and multidirectional. The media no longer acts merely as a watchdog but has become an actor of change with the ability to direct the legal process. However, this also opens the possibility of media instrumentalization by political elites for purposes of power struggles. In the Sambo case, certain institutions and political factions utilized public narratives to reshape the power structure within the Indonesian National Police (Polri). In the Mario Dandy case, the media was used to create the impression that the state is responsive to social justice, even though this contradicts the principle of corrective justice that should be upheld in juvenile law.

In social theory, this situation can be understood as a new form of *panopticism* , where the logic of surveillance shifts from formal structures to massive and continuous digital public surveillance.[53] Authorities no longer police the public, but instead feel they are being watched by it. The pressure to act arises not from legal awareness, but from concern about damaging the institution's image. It suggests that the power to discipline has shifted direction, from institutions to the public, from the state to algorithms, from procedures to perceptions.[54] Unfortunately, this power is not always distributed fairly. Those with access to social media, influencer networks, and a grasp of digital literacy can mobilize public sympathy. At the same time, marginalized or vulnerable groups are often unheard of, even though they experience the same or even greater injustices. In

[50] Yasmin Arinda Lubis and others, 'Revitalising the Juvenile Criminal Justice System in Indonesia: A Comparative Study with International Law and Evaluation of Practice', *Journal of Ius Comparatum Law Studies*, 1.1 SE-Articles (2025), 48–62 https://doi.org/10.35586/jicls.v1i1.10829

[51] Vira Yanti, 'Policy Analysis of Juvenile Criminal Law: Between Protection and Enforcement', *JHK : Jurnal Hukum Dan Keadilan*, 1.6 SE-Articles (2024), 24–31 https://doi.org/10.61942/jhk.v1i6.243

[52] Ramadhani Dwi pangestu and Mega Dewi Ambarwati, 'Implementasi UU SPPA Dalam Menangani Anak Yang Sedang Berhadapan Dengan Hukum', *JURNAL ILMIAH PENELITIAN MAHASISWA*, 2.6 SE- (2024), 416–24 https://doi.org/10.61722/jipm.v2i6.576

[53] Gane.

[54] Golder.

this case, justice becomes selective, and the legal system loses its primary role as a guardian of certainty, fairness, and equality.[55]

These findings strongly suggest that the Indonesian legal system is not yet equipped to handle the rapid changes of digital society, which demand prompt responses. When justice is achieved solely through viral pressure, the law ceases to be a tool for conflict resolution, but rather an instrument of momentary legitimacy easily swayed by the tide of public opinion. Even more worrying, if this situation persists, the public will increasingly lose trust in formal legal channels, opting instead to use digital pressure as their primary means of defending their rights. In the long term, this could foster a culture of "trial by social media," which threatens the presumption of innocence and the rule of law itself.[56]

Therefore, this phenomenon should not be considered a typical dynamic of the digital age, but rather an indicator of systemic damage that requires immediate structural reform. Without comprehensive improvements to institutional integrity, internal oversight mechanisms, and public legal literacy, the slogan "No Viral, No Justice" will continue to be a bitter reflection that the law in Indonesia only works when the cameras are on and the masses are speaking out. Justice, which should be present in silence and the firmness of procedures, has instead become a spectacle waiting to go viral.

The Reduction and Erosion of Criminal Justice Policy

The phenomenon of viral criminal cases refers to a situation where the truth or legal facts are no longer determined by legally valid evidence according to established legal provisions but rather by the ability of information to be widely shared and accepted on social media. In this context, virality becomes a measure of the legitimacy of legal information, with implications for law enforcement methods and the authorities' responses to criminal cases. At its peak, there is a shift from the validity of evidence to shareability. Traditionally, criminal law evidence in Indonesia refers to the provisions of Article 184 of the Indonesian Criminal Procedure Code, which stipulates that valid evidence must meet certain criteria and consist of specific types of evidence, such as witness testimony, expert testimony, documents, indications, and the defendant's statement, all supported by physical evidence. However, in practice, a significant shift can be observed, where the validity of legal facts is often determined by how quickly and widely information can spread. This phenomenon indicates not only institutional dysfunction but also a reduction in criminal justice policy.[57]

[55] Tanzilulloh and Agmar.
[56] Wahid, Rohadi, and Kusyandi.
[57] Kadir, 'Fragmented Justice : How the Wedding Cake Model Is Influenced by the ' No Viral , No Justice ' Phenomenon'.

The reduction of criminal justice policies indicates a shift in the function of law from a normative system based on the principle of the rule of law to an instrument responsive to public pressure, especially in the context of the virality of criminal cases on social media. This phenomenon is primarily observed in the form of, *first*, the simplification of unstructured legal procedures. Efforts to expedite legal processes without a clear normative framework result in the neglect of the principle of due process of law. When legal facts are validated based on virality, the investigation process becomes disrupted. Investigators may feel the need to act quickly to avoid public criticism rather than following proper legal procedures. This also has implications for the disregard of the presumption of innocence. Viral content that prioritizes sensationalism often overlooks the principle of the presumption of innocence, which holds that a person is considered innocent until proven guilty in a court of law.[58] Social media can spread narratives as if the defendant is already guilty, thereby tainting the legal process with public opinion formed before a legitimate legal verdict is reached. The objectivity of law enforcement is also compromised when social media fosters polarization and intense pressure from certain societal groups.[59] Law enforcement is faced with a dilemma between maintaining independence and responding to massive public demands. This creates a risk of compromising the quality and fairness of law enforcement.[60] From the perspective of legal sociology, this phenomenon illustrates that law does not operate in isolation but is profoundly influenced by evolving social and cultural forces, including information technology and social media. Law enforcement is not only a matter of written norms but also how those norms are accepted and implemented within a dynamic social context.[61]

Second, the rise of populism in law enforcement. The phenomenon of viral criminal cases on social media is a form of populist mobilization in the digital space that functions as a pressure group against relevant institutions or agencies. This phenomenon reflects the public's distrust of formal legal institutions. The public feels that law enforcement is often unresponsive to certain cases unless they receive widespread attention through social media. From the perspective of legal positivism, H.L.A. Hart introduced the concepts of primary rules and secondary rules. Primary rules are the rules that govern societal behavior, while secondary

[58] Tanya Mayal, 'Presumption of Innocence and Dilution of Facts by Media Trials', *International Journal of Legal Science and Innovation*, 3.3 (2021), 475–82 https://doi.org/https://doij.org/10.10000/IJLSI.11754

[59] Soo Ling Lim and Peter J. Bentley, 'Opinion Amplification Causes Extreme Polarization in Social Networks', *Scientific Reports*, 12.1 (2022), 18131 https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-22856-z

[60] Ronald P. Dempsey, Elizabeth E. Eskander, and Veljko Dubljević, 'Ethical Decision-Making in Law Enforcement: A Scoping Review', *Psych*, 5.2 (2023), 576–601 https://doi.org/10.3390/psych5020037

[61] Arsyad Aldyan and Abhishek Negi, 'The Model of Law Enforcement Based on Pancasila Justice', *Journal of Human Rights, Culture and Legal System*, 2.3 (2022), 178–90 https://doi.org/10.53955/jhcls.v2i3.51

rules are the rules that govern how primary rules are created, amended, and enforced. Hart emphasizes that an effective legal system must have both types of rules to ensure order and justice in society.[62] However, the phenomenon of the virality of criminal cases on social media shows that although primary rules and secondary rules have been established, their implementation does not always run effectively. As a result, the community seeks alternative ways to demand justice, one of which is by utilizing virality on social media as a form of social pressure on law enforcement.[63] his indicates a weakness in the existing positive legal system, where rules made by the competent authorities are not always applied consistently and fairly.[64]

Third, executive intervention and ad hoc legislation. In response to viral cases, there is a tendency to create instant policies or unilaterally reinterpret legal norms without undergoing a comprehensive legislative process or thorough testing. This executive intervention often manifests in the form of direct instructions from government leaders, political statements beyond their authority, or even interference in ongoing legal processes, either explicitly or through symbolic pressure.[65] Although in a presidential system like Indonesia, the executive and judicial powers are constitutionally separated, in practice, these boundaries often become blurred when certain cases provoke massive public reactions. Law enforcement then finds itself trapped in a dilemma between maintaining institutional independence or following political directives that arise to alleviate social pressure.[66] Besides executive invention, the pattern of ad hoc legislation also contributes to this problem. This type of legislation refers to the creation or revision of laws that is done hastily, not based on systemic evaluation, and solely aimed at responding to viral cases or temporary interests. For example, proposals to amend specific articles in the Criminal Code or the issuance of ministerial regulations driven by viral individual events without going through academic manuscripts, public testing, or regulatory impact analysis should be prerequisites for regulation formation. [67] This growing pattern of executive intervention and ad

[62] João Costa-Neto and Henrique Porto de Castro, 'Was Hart an Inclusive Positivist?', *Ratio Juris*, 37.2 (2024), 130–47 https://doi.org/10.1111/raju.12402

[63] Wahid, Rohadi, and Kusyandi.

[64] Nur Insani and Suud Sarim Karimullah, 'Justice for Nature: Integrating Environmental Concerns into Legal Systems for Adequate Environmental Protection', *Jurnal Hukum Dan Peradilan*, 12.1 (2023), 129 https://doi.org/10.25216/jhp.12.1.2023.129-158

[65] Xiaolong Ma and Weifeng Su, 'Local Government Intervention in Tourism-Driven Rural Gentrification: Types and Interpretative Framework', *Tourism Management*, 100 (2024), 104828 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2023.104828

[66] Arthur Josias Simon Runturambi, Munarni Aswindo, and Eliza Meiyani, 'No Viral No Justice: A Criminological Review of Social Media-Based Law Enforcement from the Perspective of Progressive Law', *Jurnal IUS Kajian Hukum Dan Keadilan*, 12.1 (2024), 177–95 https://doi.org/10.29303/ius.v12i1.1361

[67] Zul Khaidir Kadir, 'Fear and Control: Rethinking Criminal Policy through the Lens of Moral Panic', *International Journal of Law Analytics*, 3.2 (2025), 201–18 https://doi.org/10.59890/ijla.v3i2.13

hoc legislation, driven by viral pressures, does not stand in isolation it is deeply intertwined with broader structural consequences for Indonesia's criminal justice system. The normalization of reactive policymaking and politicized legal actions has contributed to a gradual but profound erosion of foundational legal principles.

The reduction of criminal justice policies has profound implications for the national criminal procedure law, particularly concerning the fundamental principles in a rule of law system, such as, *first,* the erosion of the rule of law principle, especially the principle of equality before the law and the principle of legality *(nullum crimen sine lege)*. In this context, the principle of equality before the law is distorted into equality before social media algorithms, so the acceleration of case handling is more determined by the level of virality than the juridical weight of the case.[68] Moreover, the principle of legality, which should be the foundation of law enforcement, is beginning to erode due to the need to "meet public expectations." This creates a situation where "there is no crime without going viral first" becomes a new norm in law enforcement practices. This condition reinforces the impression that crimes or legal violations will not be seriously addressed unless they have become widely discussed on social media. In other words, "there is no crime without going viral" has become an unwritten norm that de facto shapes the operational standards of law enforcement. This is undoubtedly dangerous, as it changes the character of the law from an objective normative system into a responsive mechanism controlled by public pressure.[69] Furthermore, this practice has the potential to violate Article 8 of the Criminal Procedure Code, which explicitly states that everyone is entitled to equal treatment before the law and in judicial proceedings. In cases that go viral on social media, the treatment of suspects often involves massive public exposure, the formation of pre-trial guilty opinions, and expedited or politicized legal actions. Meanwhile, other non-viral cases often experience delays, neglect, or even termination of investigations. Such discriminatory patterns erode the principles of non-discrimination and the protection of human rights in the judicial process. This does not guarantee or provide legal certainty and justice in the legal process, as the law is often influenced by intense public pressure.[70]

Second, is the crisis of trust in the legal system. Public trust in the legal system is crucial for maintaining social order, upholding the rule of law, ensuring legal certainty, and fostering a sense of justice. However, with the shift in criminal justice policy norms regarding the handling of criminal cases that go viral on

[68] Sofia Nina, 'A Review on the Impact of Social Media on Modern Legal Systems', *International Journal of Law and Societal Studies*, 1.1 (2024), 1–10 https://doi.org/10.61424/ijlss
[69] Arthur Josias Simon Runturambi, Aswindo, and Meiyani.
[70] Dona Budi Kharisma, 'No Viral No Justice: Is It a Principle of Social Justice? (Study of Viral Cases on Social Media in Indonesia)', *Safer Communities*, 24.2 (2025), 103–15 https://doi.org/10.1108/SC-07-2024-0037

social media, legal certainty is disrupted because there is no guarantee that the law will be applied consistently in all circumstances. That inconsistency breeds public distrust in the criminal justice system. When the law is only effective if it receives media attention, society feels that the law cannot be relied upon without virality, which indicates a weakness in the legal system that is not optimally responsive. [71] This makes social media an "informal prerequisite" in law enforcement, which contradicts the principles of due process and procedural justice. This crisis is exacerbated by the lack of internal accountability and the institution's failure to restrain itself from populist interventions.[72] This situation indicates a shift in the locus of legal legitimacy from state institutions to the digital public sphere. The law is no longer deemed legitimate because an authorized authority issues it but rather because it receives "social validation" from the public. This poses a serious challenge to the principle of the rule of law, which demands that legal norms be applied without discrimination and not be swayed by fluctuations in public opinion. This contradicts the Responsive Law of Nonet and Selznick, which encourages us to consider that law must be able to accommodate the voices of society without sacrificing fundamental principles of justice.[73]

In addition to the implications of both aspects, the phenomenon of viral criminal cases on social media also has the consequence of inconsistency in law enforcement, leading to selective enforcement practices. This selectivity indicates that social media algorithms heavily influence the legal treatment of perpetrators, victims, and cases.[74] In many situations, the legal process is immediately addressed once the case receives widespread attention through social media, while similar cases reported through formal channels but not going viral experience stagnation. This phenomenon illustrates how legal logic is being replaced by algorithmic logic, where the urgency of handling a case is determined by its viral spread and, thus, the number of people aware of it without considering the objective level of the legal violation. Law enforcement officials often use virality as an initial justification for action, creating an unwritten norm of *"no viral, no justice."*.[75]

Conversely, countries like Denmark and the Netherlands demonstrate how legal systems can be responsive without losing their integrity. In Denmark, the

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[71] Eman Tadros, Tessa Mullin, and Sarah Presley, 'The #stigma of #conviction: A Twitter Thematic Analysis', *Current Psychology*, 2025 https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-025-08042-0
[72] Berk Esen, 'Judicial Transformation in a Competitive Authoritarian Regime: Evidence from the Turkish Case', *Law & Policy*, 47.1 (2025) https://doi.org/10.1111/lapo.12250
[73] Laurent Pech, 'The Rule of Law as a Well-Established and Well-Defined Principle of EU Law', *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, 14.2–3 (2022), 107–38 https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-022-00176-8
[74] Justin R Ellis, 'More than a Trivial Pursuit: Public Order Policing Narratives and the "Social Media Test"', *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal*, 17.2 (2021), 185–207 https://doi.org/10.1177/1741659020918634
[75] Kharisma.

principle of the rule of law is upheld through an independent and participatory legal system. Responses to community aspirations are structured through mechanisms such as public consultations, evidence-based policy evaluations, and the active role of ombudsman institutions.[76] Meanwhile, the Netherlands developed a strong tradition of legal responsiveness through social dialogue and evidence-based policymaking. The Netherlands judicial system is not subject to populist pressure or digital virality; rather, it upholds justice based on applicable law and rational consideration.[77] Both Denmark and the Netherlands reflect a responsive form of legal system, as stated by Nonet and Selznick. Public trust in the public in both countries is built not by virality or popularity, but by transparency, accountability, and consistent legal treatment. Here is a comparison of law enforcement in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Indonesia.

Table 2 Comparison of Law Enforcement in Denmark, the Netherlands, and Indonesia

Aspect	Indonesia	Netherlands	Denmark
Legal Responsiveness Model	Tends to be pseudo-responsive: laws react to social media virality without a normative basis.	Responsive: open to the aspirations of the community through public consultation and public participation.	Responsive: the law responds to social values while still upholding due process and substantive justice.
The Influence of Social Media Virality	High virality determines the priority of case management.	Low enforcement remains based on evidence, not the popularity of the case.	Very low - social media does not directly influence the legal process.
Due Process Protection and Presumption of Innocence	Often overlooked in viral cases	Strictly guarded by the judiciary and the media	Consistently enforced and protected by legal and ethical frameworks
Public Trust in Legal Institutions	Low- a crisis of trust drives people to seek justice through social media.	High – transparency, accountability, and professionalism of legal institutions	Very high – ranked 1st in the world in the rule of law index and trust in the police.
Justice Project Score (Rule of Law Index 2023)	0.53 (ranked 68th in the world)	0.84 (ranked 7th in the world)	0.90 (ranked 1st in the world)

Sources: The data was processed by the author from various sources.

Based on the data above, the comparison with countries like the Netherlands and Denmark confirms that legal responsiveness does not have to undermine legal autonomy. In fact, in models like theirs, openness to public aspirations is placed within a legitimate and procedural institutional framework, ensuring that justice

[76] Dorian Schaap, 'Police Trust-Building Strategies. A Socio-Institutional, Comparative Approach', *Policing and Society*, 31.3 (2021), 304–20 https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2020.1726345
[77] Mike D Schneider and others, 'Revisiting the Base in Evidence-Based Policy', *Political Studies*, 2025 https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217251320728

remains the ultimate goal, not merely a reaction to the popularity of a case. Thus, Indonesia needs to adjust the direction of its legal response to avoid being trapped in digital populism, which undermines the principles of the rule of law and erodes public trust in the judicial system. This comparative insight not only highlights best practices from more mature legal systems but also provides a critical lens through which Indonesia can evaluate the deeper consequences of its current approach. By reflecting on these international models, a clearer picture emerges of how far Indonesia's legal system has drifted from its foundational principles under the weight of digital populism.[78]

In conclusion, the phenomenon of viral criminal cases illustrates a troubling reduction and erosion of Indonesia's criminal justice policy, where legal processes are increasingly dictated by digital populism rather than by constitutional principles and due process.[79] The shift from evidence-based enforcement to reactionary, virality-driven action not only undermines the rule of law but also jeopardizes equality, legal certainty, and institutional independence. Contrasted with countries like Denmark and the Netherlands, where legal responsiveness is pursued through structured, accountable, and rights-based mechanisms, Indonesia's current trajectory reflects an urgent need for reform. To restore the integrity of criminal justice, Indonesia must reaffirm its commitment to the foundational principles of legality, non-discrimination, and judicial independence, ensuring that the law operates not as a response to social media pressure but as a consistent and fair system grounded in justice and the rule of law.

Balancing Justice and Virality in Criminal Justice Policy

The rise of viral criminal cases in Indonesia has added a new layer of complexity to the pursuit of justice, challenging the balance between legal integrity and public responsiveness. In an era where social media amplifies public outrage and emotional narratives, the criminal justice system is increasingly pressured to act swiftly—often prioritizing visibility over substance. This dynamic raises a critical question: how can the legal system remain fair, objective, and principled while also being responsive to legitimate public concerns? The challenge lies in finding a balanced approach that upholds the rule of law without ignoring the societal demand for meaningful justice.[80]

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[78] Zea Szebeni and others, 'Banana Populism: Exploring the Emotionally Engaging, Authentic, and Memeable Rhetoric of Populist Visual Communication', *Social Media + Society*, 11.1 (2025) https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051251313847

[79] Sven Engesser and others, 'Populism and Social Media: How Politicians Spread a Fragmented Ideology', *Information, Communication & Society*, 20.8 (2017), 1109–26 https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2016.1207697

[80] Julia Magdalena Wuysang and others, 'Viral Justice: Law Enforcement in the Social Media Era', *Nurani: Jurnal Kajian Syari'ah Dan Masyarakat*, 24.1 (2024), 1–16 https://doi.org/10.19109/nurani.v24i1.22274

In Indonesia, judicial decisions often spark public debate due to perceptions that they fail to uphold the principles of justice expected by society and justice seekers. This phenomenon is evident in various legal cases. The judicial process is still widely viewed as falling short of delivering true justice, making justice seem like a "luxury" that remains inaccessible to the general public. One of the persistent issues is the tension between procedural justice and substantive justice. Procedural justice emphasizes adherence to standardized and legitimate legal procedures, whereas substantive justice focuses on achieving morally and ethically fair outcomes. Law enforcement in Indonesia today tends to be heavily focused on procedural justice, prioritizing uniformity and the strict application of formal legal rules without rules, without necessarily addressing the root causes of legal disputes. As a result, the system often fails to deliver justice in a meaningful sense.[81]

This shortfall has led to widespread public dissatisfaction, as many justice seekers perceive the judiciary as lacking objectivity, integrity, and professionalism. Frequently, legal decisions are perceived as controversial and inconsistent with both legal principles and the public's sense of justice and fairness. In many cases, judicial rulings appear poorly reasoned and lack depth, relying instead on rigid syllogisms to interpret legal facts. Such decisions, which are not based on comprehensive legal reasoning (*onvoeldoendegemotiveerd*), ultimately undermine the authority and credibility of the legal system itself.[82]

The gap between procedural outcomes and public expectations of substantive justice is especially evident in high-profile cases. For example, a defendant may be acquitted due to insufficient evidence despite public conviction of their moral guilt. Conversely, when law enforcement prioritizes substantive justice over proper procedures, the rule of law may be compromised and human rights violated. This illustrates that justice must not be measured solely by its outcomes but also by the fairness and integrity of the legal process through which decisions are made.[83]

A key question arises: why does the application of positivist logic in criminal law enforcement often hinder the realization of substantive justice? In practice, law enforcers tend to adopt a rigid, positivist approach, treating the text of legal statutes as the ultimate and unquestionable authority. This mindset relies heavily

[81] Brent E. Turvey and Aurelio Coronado, 'Victimity: Entering the Criminal Justice System', in *Forensic Victimology* (Elsevier, 2023), pp. 33–76 https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-821768-9.00002-1
[82] Dodi Ria Atmaja and Lidya Marika, 'The Influence of Procedural Justice on Work Engagement And Turnover Intention', *Majalah Ilmiah Bijak*, 21.1 (2024), 125–44 https://doi.org/10.31334/bijak.v21i1.3679
[83] Lidia E. Nuño and Weston J. Morrow, 'Assessing the Process-Based Model of Regulation within a Jail Setting: Arrestees' Perceptions of Procedural Justice, Trust and Obligation to Obey', *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 43.5 (2020), 676–91 https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2020.1722727

on formal legality, as enshrined in Article 1 paragraph (1) of the Indonesian Criminal Code, which prioritizes legal certainty above all else. As a result, what is achieved is formal, procedural justice justice in appearance rather than justice that reflects deeper moral or ethical values. This form of justice often lacks the spirit of compassion, conscience, and divine guidance that many believe should underlie the legal system.[84]

Balancing substantive and procedural justice in the digital era has become increasingly complex due to the widespread exposure of legal cases, the influence of public opinion, and the pervasive role of social media. When public sentiment becomes overly dominant, law enforcement officers risk making decisions or taking legal actions not based on the principles of justice, but rather to appease social pressure. This situation poses a serious threat to legal objectivity and judicial independence. Therefore, law enforcement institutions must strengthen the moral resilience, professionalism, and integrity of their officers to ensure they remain firm against external influences.[85]

The rapid expansion of internet usage has fueled the dominance of "viral" news in everyday life. Viral content refers to information that spreads rapidly across various digital platforms. Because of its wide reach and intense public attention, viral news often shapes public opinion and behavior. This phenomenon has significantly impacted both the legal sector and society at large. In many instances, the public treats viral exposure as a standard for whether justice will be served. The digital transformation, which allows instant dissemination of information, has given rise to a new phenomenon in legal case resolution: *"No Viral, No Justice,"* where virality becomes an unwritten condition for legal action to occur.[86] Operationally, virality can be measured through quantitative indicators such as the number of views, opinions, and distribution on social media within a short period of time, as well as qualitative indicators such as the intensity of public opinion and the rapid reaction of law enforcement agencies to trending issues. Thus, virality not only reflects the dynamics of digital communication but also serves as a crucial variable that can intervene substantively and procedurally in the legal process.

Law enforcement is frequently affected by the phenomenon of going viral on social media. The public can appear to "judge" a case without waiting for the legal procedure to conclude by viewing viral content. This can lead to the development of social pressure that influences court decisions. The virality of a case on social media frequently disrupts a fair and objective legal process. The phenomenon of

[84] Muammar.
[85] Claudia Landwehr, 'Procedural Justice and Democratic Institutional Design in Health-Care Priority-Setting', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 12.4 (2013), 296–317 https://doi.org/10.1057/cpt.2012.28
[86] Kharisma.

"no viral, no justice" is becoming more prevalent in society. To garner the attention of law enforcement, the public requires a case to become widely known. Nevertheless, this has the potential to infringe upon the presumption of innocence and judicial independence.[87] This shift undermines the principle enshrined in Article 27 Paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution, which guarantees equal legal treatment for all citizens, regardless of whether their cases receive widespread public attention.

Moreover, the spread of hoaxes and defamation via social media poses serious challenges from the standpoint of criminal law. These actions frequently violate provisions in the Indonesian Penal Code (KUHP), including Article 310 paragraph (1), which prohibits defamation that damages a person's reputation. Similarly, Article 14, paragraph (1) of the 2008 Electronic Information and Transactions Law (UU ITE) addresses the spread of false information online that could harm others. Additionally, Article 335 paragraph (1) of the Criminal Code may apply to cases that involve causing public unrest, which is increasingly common in viral social media incidents.[88]

In high-profile cases such as Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy, law enforcement's swift response was largely triggered by massive public outrage and the viral spread of information across social media platforms. While these rapid actions were praised as breakthroughs in accountability, they also revealed a troubling pattern: justice appears to move faster when amplified by virality. This creates a disparity for victims in similarly serious cases that fail to gain public traction, fostering a perception that the legal system is driven more by visibility than by impartiality. Consequently, public trust erodes, as justice is increasingly seen not as the outcome of a fair and consistent legal process, but as something earned through online attention and social pressure. This shift distorts the core purpose of the justice system, replacing objectivity with performative accountability, and exposes law enforcement to external influence. When virality becomes the main trigger for action, the foundational principles of due process and equality before the law are significantly undermined. [89]

Viral pressure resulting from social media and public opinion poses a growing threat to the independence of judges, prosecutors, and investigators. These officials now face scrutiny not only within formal legal frameworks but also from emotionally charged public discourse. This reality underscores the need for capacity building through judicial education that reflects contemporary challenges. Law enforcement officers must develop the skills to handle public

[87] Landwehr.
[88] Saptosih Ismiati, 'No Viral No Justice in the Law Enforcement System: The Study of Domestic Violence', *EVOLUTIONARY STUDIES IN IMAGINATIVE CULTURE*, 2024, 1547–53 https://doi.org/10.70082/esiculture.vi.1567
[89] Arthur Josias Simon Runturambi, Aswindo, and Meiyani.

pressure responsibly, which includes the ability to distinguish between morally valid public concerns and misleading collective demands.[90] In navigating this complex landscape, it becomes increasingly important to balance responsiveness to public sentiment with the preservation of legal integrity. While public pressure especially in viral cases can spotlight genuine injustices, it must be carefully managed to prevent emotional narratives from overriding legal standards. This is where progressive legal frameworks and regulatory safeguards play a vital role.

Progressive legal thought prioritizes substantive justice, equality, and the protection of human rights. While public sentiment can serve as an essential indicator of societal concerns, it must not become the sole basis for legal decisions.[91] To reduce the spread of misinformation that could compromise the legal process, the government must establish stricter regulations on the circulation of information through social media. Regulatory frameworks should incorporate precise verification mechanisms to ensure that only accurate and verified information shapes public opinion and influences legal proceedings. Implementing such standards is a foundational step in ensuring that the public receives legal information based on objective truth rather than emotional or sensational narratives. These regulations would also provide law enforcement with a more stable legal footing, shielding them from undue influence caused by viral trends that often distort legal priorities. Without proper regulation, social media could disrupt the integrity of the legal system by pressuring law enforcement to prioritize cases based on popularity rather than legal urgency or substance. This distortion can result in selective justice, undermining both fairness and consistency. To address this, law enforcement institutions must also strengthen internal capacity, particularly in professional ethics and impartiality. Officers need to carry out their duties based on legal norms, not external social pressure.[92]

Denmark and the Netherlands present compelling examples of how justice and virality can coexist without undermining legal integrity. Both countries illustrate that a legal system can be attuned to public concerns while still upholding procedural fairness and institutional autonomy. In Denmark, public participation is channeled through structured avenues such as public consultations, ombudsman mechanisms, and evidence-based policy reviews, ensuring that

[90] Kiki Tanlim, Surya Nita, and Ahmad Ibrahim Badry Badry, 'Dynamics of Progressive Law Implementation in Indonesia: Prospects and Challenges of Law in the Era of Industrial Society 4.0', *Pena Justisia: Media Komunikasi Dan Kajian Hukum*, 23.1 (2024), 745 https://doi.org/10.31941/pj.v23i1.4203

[91] Brezillya Anggraini and Renita Tresna, 'Perspective of Law Enforcement Officials with the Emergence of the "No Viral, No Justice" Phenomenon', *Jurnal Hukum Dan HAM Wara Sains*, 3.03 (2024), 345–50 https://doi.org/10.58812/jhhws.v3i03.1444

[92] Sihaloho and Sudarto.

responsiveness does not come at the expense of legal principles.[93] The Netherlands, on the other hand, maintains consistency in law enforcement through a strong tradition of judicial independence and rational legal reasoning, effectively insulating legal decisions from populist or viral influences. In contrast to Indonesia, where the momentum of a case is often shaped by its popularity online, Denmark and the Netherlands embed public sentiment within a clear legal framework, absorbing societal concerns without being overpowered by them. These models demonstrate that responsiveness and the rule of law are not inherently at odds but can be harmonized through thoughtful institutions, public confidence, and a deep commitment to substantive justice.[94]

To address the tension between procedural and substantive justice resulting from the dominance of virality in the digital ecosystem, legal reform is needed based on Berlant's theory of viral justice, which views justice as an affective response mediated by technology and public opinion. First, the state needs to establish rapid response units within law enforcement agencies to manage digital exposure using principles of algorithmic governance, with standardized fact-checking protocols to prevent public opinion from distorting legal legitimacy. Second, legal profession reform training should include education on digital *panopticism* (Foucault), namely how the existence of social media creates constant surveillance pressure that impacts the independence of law enforcement. Third, courts should require judges to formulate decisions with a balanced moral, legal, and social considerations to counteract the reduction of law to digital provisions based on viral opinions. Fourth, revisions to digital media regulations are needed to prevent trial by media and ensure that public legitimacy of the law is shaped by trust in fair legal processes, not by emotional pressures shaped by algorithms. Finally, collaboration between the state, digital platforms, and civil society is needed to strengthen digital legal literacy, so that the public understands the boundaries between the right to information and the dangers of viral manipulation that threaten the principles of justice and legal fairness.[95]

4. Conclusion

This research finds that the rise of digital virality has significantly disrupted the integrity of Indonesia's criminal justice policy. *First*, virality has evolved from a tool of public participation into a powerful force that shapes legal outcomes. High-

[93] Mads Madsen, 'Exceptionalism for Most, Excess for Others: The Legal Foundation of a Bifurcated Criminal Justice System in Denmark', *European Journal of Criminology*, 21.3 (2024), 392–410 https://doi.org/10.1177/14773708231208333

[94] E.R. (Rutger) Leukfeldt and R.A. (Robert) Roks, 'Cybercrimes on the Streets of the Netherlands? An Exploration of the Intersection of Cybercrimes and Street Crimes', *Deviant Behavior*, 42.11 (2021), 1458–69 https://doi.org/10.1080/01639625.2020.1755587

[95] Wawan Andriawan, 'Pancasila Perspective on the Development of Legal Philosophy: Relation of Justice and Progressive Law', *Volksgeist: Jurnal Ilmu Hukum Dan Konstitusi*, 5.1 (2022), 1–11 https://doi.org/10.24090/volksgeist.v5i1.6361

profile cases such as Ferdy Sambo and Mario Dandy demonstrate how viral pressure can override established legal procedures. Law enforcement agencies, particularly the police, respond rapidly to online outrage, while courts exhibit tendencies of judicial populism. As a result, viral cases receive disproportionate attention, compromising the principle of equality before the law. *Second*, the research reveals that viral-driven legal responses have contributed to ad hoc lawmaking, bypassing normative legislative processes. This shift threatens foundational legal principles, including legal certainty, due process, and the presumption of innocence. Law is increasingly used not as an objective normative framework, but as a reactive tool to manage digital dissatisfaction and political pressure, marking a significant reduction in the substance and stability of criminal justice policy. *Third*, rather than rejecting virality outright, Indonesia must construct institutional mechanisms to mediate its influence without compromising legal integrity. This includes reforming legal education to incorporate digital legal literacy, training future practitioners to understand how algorithms and social media shape legal narratives. A dedicated digital response unit within law enforcement is also recommended to monitor viral trends, prevent misinformation, and respond proportionately. Additionally, stronger media regulation is needed to prevent prejudicial reporting and protect due process. The future of Indonesia's criminal justice system depends on its ability to remain responsive without surrendering its legal autonomy.

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