The interconnection of literacy in history, law, and politics with public trust in the government

Dyah Estyani Cahya[1*] , Muhammad Afrillyan Dwi Syahputra[2], Olin Monalvia[1]

[1]Civic Education, Faculty of Teacher and Education, Jambi University, Jl. Lintas Jambi - Ma. Bulian KM. 15, Mendalo Darat, Jambi Luar Kota, Muaro Jambi, Jambi 36657, Indonesia

[2]History Education, Faculty of Teacher and Education, Riau University, Jl. HR. Soebrantas, KM 12.5, Simpang Baru, Tampan, Pekanbaru, Riau 28293, Indonesia

*e-mail: dyahestyanicahya@unja.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Public trust in the government does not emerge suddenly; rather, it is shaped by the public's understanding of social and state dynamics. Historical, legal, and political literacy are important elements that influence citizens' assessment of government policies and performance. Individuals with low literacy levels tend to respond passively to social and political issues, often accepting government actions without critically evaluating them. This study aimed to analyze the relationship between historical, legal, and political literacy and the level of public trust in the government. A quantitative approach was employed using a survey method, with sample selection carried out through quota sampling to ensure respondent representation across specific categories. The collected data were analyzed using Kendall's Tau-b correlation test to measure the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. The results of the analysis indicate that there is no significant correlation between historical, legal, or political literacy and public trust in the government (Sig. > 0.05). The low correlation coefficient suggests that these three forms of literacy do not directly influence public trust. These findings indicate that literacy plays a greater role in shaping individuals' critical awareness and reflective ability to evaluate government performance, rather than simply increasing passive trust.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of Indonesia's democratic system, the administration of the government cannot be separated from the roles of various state institutions. Although the executive branch is the primary actor in implementing public policies, the principles of good governance, namely accountability, transparency, and the rule of law, also require the involvement of the legislative and judicial branches of government. Article 20A of the 1945 Constitution grants the House of Representatives (DPR) the authority to perform legislative, budgetary, and oversight functions. Article 24C establishes the Constitutional Court as the guardian of the Constitution's dignity and integrity. In addition, Article 24A assigns the Supreme Court the authority to oversee the application of the law. Therefore, public trust in the government is shaped by society's perception of the overall performance of state institutions operating within a unified constitutional framework.

Ideally, the relationship between the state and its citizens is based on mutual trust. The state is expected to demonstrate governance that is transparent, accountable, and oriented toward public interest, thereby fostering trust and strengthening governmental legitimacy. However, in reality, such conditions do not always occur. The Indonesian government frequently faces crises of public trust, as reflected in increasing criticism, dissatisfaction, and various forms of social protest.

In Indonesia, this phenomenon is evident from the declining public trust index in government institutions. Lembaga Survey Indonesia (LSI) (2023) revealed that most respondents were dissatisfied with the transparency and accountability of government bodies. Respondents cited unclear public policy information, allegations of government data manipulation, and the influence of social media (which frequently spreads unverified information) as the main reasons for the decline in trust. Meanwhile, data from Edelman (2024) reveal that only 47% of Indonesians reported trusting the government, down from 56% the previous year. This situation illustrates a profound crisis of institutional legitimacy, which undermines not only governmental effectiveness but also the foundations of democratic stability.

This phenomenon was further reinforced by the emergence of a wave of protests over the past year. Since August 2024, the Indonesian public's attention has focused on a wave of protests stemming from frustration with the government and institutional dynamics of the country. The initial wave emerged through an online movement using the hashtag #EmergencyWarning as a symbol of concern regarding efforts to amend the regional head election law (RUU Pilkada), which was viewed as a step backward in the democratic process (Fahmi, 2024). Entering 2025, the protests expanded in scale, carried out by thousands of students and civil society who opposed the high allowances received by the DPR (Tutik, 2025). Not long after, another major protest occurred in August and September 2025 when public pressure intensified in response to the violent actions of security authorities in the incident that resulted in the death of online motorcycle taxi driver, Affan Kurniawan (Kontras, 2025).

However, it is not uncommon for a series of protest actions to be accompanied by various problems that arise in the digital sphere, such as disinformation and hoaxes, as well as problems on the ground, including repressive actions by the authorities and behaviors that may involve legal violations. This situation is partly caused by the fact that not all people involved in the demonstrations possess adequate literacy skills. Limited historical literacy leads to misunderstandings of context, while low legal literacy results in insufficient comprehension of rights, obligations, and the legal process itself. Low political literacy contributes to the spread of disinformation, misinterpretation of policies, and apathy.

Based on the phenomena that occurred above, from the perspective of public trust theory, this indicates that the effectiveness and credibility of government institutions are not only evaluated based on the results of policy products but also through transparent interactions between the government and its public (Suriadi, 2025). This aligns with the research findings of Kwak (2012) and Evans (2013), who emphasized the importance of government transparency in gaining public trust. In a democratic country such as Indonesia, a loss of trust in institutions, including the government, parliament, and law enforcement agencies, represents a deeply concerning sign of declining legitimacy and weakening stability within the political system.

Key factors underlying the crisis of public trust are low levels of public understanding and the government's slow response. As public trust declines, social rejection of policies, increased legal disobedience, and growing skepticism toward the democratic process emerge (Suriadi 2025). Meanwhile, Winahyu (2017) indicates that historical literacy is successful in fostering social awareness. Thus, the researcher sees the urgency of integrated literacy between history, law, and politics as a basis for developing critical citizen awareness, encouraging rational rather than merely emotional participation, and supporting the creation of healthy government-society relations. This is the basic reason researchers have conducted studies on public trust in the government, focusing on its relationship with historical, legal, and political literacy.

2.   METHOD

This study uses a quantitative approach with a correlational design, which aims to understand the direction and strength of the relationship between variables. The subjects of this research are Indonesian citizens who have access to public information, both through digital and conventional media. The research sample consisted of 150 respondents selected using quota sampling. This number was deemed adequate for a nonparametric correlation analysis (Sugiyono, 2018). Data were collected through an online questionnaire compiled based on theoretical indicators and have fulfilled the elements of validity and reliability with the help of SPSS. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and nonparametric inferential methods. Before conducting the correlation test, the data were tested for normality using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. which shows that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, the relationship between the variables was analyzed using Kendall's Tau-b correlation test.

3.   RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Definition of Literacy

The English word "literacy" is derived from the Latin "littera," meaning letters. It encompasses an understanding of various writing systems and their associated conventions (Baynham, 1995). Furthermore, literacy is defined as a person's ability to use language to communicate, encompassing reading, speaking, listening, and writing, using various approaches according to their communication goals (Handayani, 2020). Meanwhile, another opinion states that understanding literacy is not only limited to writing and reading activities, but also encompasses how individuals interact within the community. In a more detailed explanation, the UNESCO declaration reveals that information literacy also relates to the ability to recognize, determine, search, evaluate, and produce information in an effective and organized manner, as well as the ability to use and convey information to solve various problems (Widarti, 2016). Based on these perspectives, it can be concluded that literacy is not merely a matter of reading and writing but rather the integration of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and critical thinking skills that enable individuals to respond to different contexts.

3.2. Historical Literacy

Historical literacy is a concept with many definitions. It is considered an essential tool for developing historical thinking skills (Mikkonen, 2016). Furthermore, historical literacy is understood as the ability to work analytically and produce valid interpretations of historical sources (Rantala, 2018). Historical literacy also refers to the benefits individuals can gain from studying history (Maposa & Wasserman, 2009).

Maposa and Wasserman organized the various ideas that have emerged regarding historical literacy into a conceptual framework encompassing five key dimensions. The concept of historical literacy can be analyzed from various dimensions, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Historical Literacy Indicators

Dimensions	Sub-Dimensions
Knowledge	- Events - Narratives
Conceptions of Understading	- Time - Cause and effect and concequences - Motivation - Importance - Moral judgment - Change and continuity - Empathy
Source Work	- Source search - Corroboration - Contextualization - Analysis - Evaluation - Explanation
Historical Awareness	
Historical Language	

Source: Maposa & Wasserman (2009)

It can be concluded that historical literacy plays a crucial role in shaping society's understanding. A group that understands its own history and environment can be categorized as a civil society. This indicates the importance of historical literacy in developing critical thinking and problem-solving abilities.

3.3. Law Literacy

Law as a system must be viewed from a broader perspective. This legal system includes the legal structure, legal substance, and legal culture (Sudjana, 2019). The legal structure, or what is commonly referred to as legal institutions, is a system that regulates the extent to which laws can be implemented effectively.Meanwhile, legal substance is a crucial element that determines the possibility of implementing the law (Vidyapramatya, 2020). Substance also refers to the results of a person's work within the legal environment, such as decisions issued or new regulations created (Hasaziduhu, 2019). On the other hand, legal culture refers to a society's way of thinking and the social forces that influence how the law is used, circumvented, or even abused. This legal culture is closely related to a society's legal awareness. In this sense, the entire legal system, including its structure, substance, and culture, is interconnected and inseparable.

In its implementation, a mutually supportive relationship must be established between the three. Therefore, the necessary step is to increase legal literacy among the public. Legal literacy can be understood as the process of transferring knowledge and understanding to individuals regarding the legal system, legal standards, legal rules, and legal principles themselves. The primary goal is to increase legal awareness and understanding of citizens' rights and obligations (Indriasari, 2023). In addition, legal literacy is defined as a person's ability to access, understand, and use legal information correctly and responsibly (Sutiyoso, 2021). To measure legal literacy, there are indicators divided into four aspects, including: level of knowledge, level of understanding, attitude, and behavior (Mashun et al., 2023). From the several definitions above, it can be concluded that legal literacy has significant urgency in efforts to build a society that is more legally aware, responsible, and actively participates in realizing legal order.

3.4. Political Literacy

Political literacy is often considered limited to the study of socio-political texts and situations, even though these situations are intended to produce educated individuals. However, political literacy needs to be considered more comprehensively, including knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of one's role

in the political and governmental system (Bahrudin, 2022). Political literacy refers to the application of understanding, skills, and attitudes related to politics, starting from simple things such as political issues that can impact oneself and others in the decision-making process (Crick, 2023). Political literacy can also be understood as knowledge and insight regarding political dynamics and topics related to them. This knowledge and insight can help individuals to play an effective role as part of society (Karim et al., 2015).There are four methods that can be used to assess the political literacy of the community, with the following indicators: realizing the need for political information, determining search strategies, communicating information, and assessing the results of the achievements of the political processes (Heryanto, 2019). Based on several definitions above, it can be concluded that political literacy is knowledge and understanding of political processes and issues that enable individuals to play a role as active citizens in the democratic process.

3.5. Public Trust Theory

Public trust is a fundamental component of the relationship between individuals and public institutions as citizens. Current public trust theory stems from institutional performance theory, which focuses on institutional performance to determine the level of public trust (Schmidthuber, Ingrams, 2020). Public trust is also defined as the public's perception of the performance of the government or public institutions in providing good services and meeting community needs. This level of trust is highly dependent on the transparency, accountability, and integrity of these institutions. If the public perceives that government institutions or public bodies are trustworthy, political participation and support for public policies will be higher (Soetomo, 2020). Another perspective explains that public trust in the government or political system plays a crucial role in increasing political participation. People with high trust in the government tend to be more active in elections, political discussions, and other social activities. Conversely, low public trust can lead to political apathy and a lack of engagement in the democratic process (Wahyudi, 2019).

Based on the definition above, a conclusion can be drawn that public trust refers to the collective belief or general public perception of the government or other public institutions.Public trust encompasses the public's cognitions, beliefs, and emotional responses to government performance and integrity. The concept of public trust encompasses three main dimensions that can be used as measurement indicators: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. The cognitive dimension involves an individual's understanding and beliefs about the object being evaluated, such as their views on government policies and performance. The emotional dimension encompasses an individual's emotional response to the object being evaluated, such as sympathy or disapproval of government policies and performance. The behavioral dimension encompasses an individual's actions, reflected in their reactions to published policies and government performance (Andhika, 2018).

3.6. The Interconnection between Historical, Law, and Political Literacy and Public Trust in the Government

This section presents the results of statistical tests on the relationship between various forms of civic literacy and the level of public trust in government. The tests were conducted partially to determine the extent to which each literacy variable—historical literacy, legal literacy, and political literacy—contributes to the formation of public trust in government. The test results are presented in the following table and interpreted based on the correlation coefficient, significance (Sig.), and direction of the relationship.

Table 2. The Interconnection between Historical Literacy (X^1) and Public Trust in the Government (Y)

Correlations			Historical Literacy	Trust in Government
Kendall's tau_b	Historical Literacy	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	-,017
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,761
		N	150	150
	Trust in Government	Correlation Coefficient	-,017	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,761	.
		N	150	150

Based on the findings of the Kendall's Tau correlation test (Table 2), a correlation coefficient value of -0.017 was obtained with a significance (Sig.) of 0.761, which is greater than 0.05. This finding indicates that there is no significant correlation between the Historical Literacy variable and the Public Trust in Government variable. The negative but very weak correlation value indicates that the direction of the relationship tends to be opposite, but its strength is not significant. Therefore, it can be concluded that changes in the Historical Literacy variable do not have a meaningful relationship with changes in the Public Trust in Government variable.

Table 3. The Interconnection between Law Literacy (X^2) and Public Trust in the Government (Y)

Correlations			Legal Literacy	Trust in Government
Kendall's tau_b	Legal Literacy	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,071
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,211
		N	150	150
	Trust in Government	Correlation Coefficient	,071	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,211	.
		N	150	150

Based on the findings of the Kendall's Tau correlation test (Table 3), a correlation coefficient value of 0.071 was obtained with a significance level (Sig.) of 0.211, which is greater than 0.05. This finding indicates that there is no significant correlation between the Legal Literacy variable and the Public Trust in Government variable. Although the correlation value indicates a positive trend, the correlation strength is very weak. Therefore, it can be concluded that changes in the Legal Literacy variable are not significantly related to changes in the Public Trust in Government variable.

Table 4. The Interconnection between Political Literacy (X³) and Public Trust in the Government (Y)

Correlations			Political Literacy	Trust in Government
Kendall's tau_b	Political Literacy	Correlation Coefficient	1,000	,076
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	,186
		N	150	150
	Trust in Government	Correlation Coefficient	,076	1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,186	.
		N	150	150

Based on the findings of the Kendall's Tau correlation test (Table 4), a correlation coefficient value of 0.076 was obtained with a significance (Sig.) of 0.186, which is greater than 0.05. These results indicate that there is no significant correlation between the Political Literacy variable and the Public Trust in Government variable. Although the correlation value indicates a positive direction, the strength of the relationship is very weak. Thus, it can be concluded that changes in the Political Literacy variable are not significantly related to changes in the Public Trust in Government variable.

The three literacy variables of history, law, and politics did not indicate a significant relationship with public trust in government. This finding indicates that high literacy levels do not necessarily correlate directly with trust in government. Descriptively, respondents with high literacy actually indicated a tendency to be skeptical of government performance. This suggests that increasing citizen literacy has the potential to foster critical thinking, rather than simply passive trust.

Thus, historical, legal, and political literacy play a role in shaping citizens' critical awareness, rather than directly increasing trust in the government. This phenomenon aligns with Habermas's theory of critical citizenship (Moris, 2010), which emphasizes that a highly informed society will assess the legitimacy of the state reflectively, rather than automatically accepting government authority.

This finding can also be explained through the concept of political efficacy (Niemi & Craig, 1990), which emphasizes that individuals with high political and legal literacy tend to be more sensitive to social inequality and are more courageous in criticizing government actions that are considered inconsistent with democratic and legal values. Therefore, the absence of a significant positive relationship does not mean that literacy plays no role, but rather indicates that literacy functions more in shaping critical and evaluative awareness, rather than simply fostering passive trust. This finding opens up room for reflection that increasing citizen literacy cannot be viewed as a guarantee of growing government legitimacy. The government needs to view a highly informed public as a critical partner, not simply a recipient of policy. Instead, the public needs to be guided to channel their critical awareness into constructive participation in the democratic process, rather than a total distrust of the government system.

4. CONCLUSION

This study indicates that there is a significant relationship between historical literacy, legal literacy, and political literacy with the level of public trust in government. These findings show that citizens' knowledge of history, law, and politics does not directly influence their trust in government institutions. However, the absence of a significant relationship does not mean that literacy has no role. Literacy, particularly in the areas of history, law, and politics, functions more in shaping citizens' critical awareness, reflective abilities, and evaluative attitudes toward government practices, rather than merely fostering passive trust. Therefore, enhancing historical, legal, and political literacy remains important, but it should

be accompanied by strengthening participatory public spaces, so that this knowledge can transform into rational and constructive civilized trust.

Ethical Approval
This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki. Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee of Jambi University.

Informed Consent Statement
All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and all responses were kept confidential and used solely for academic research purposes.

Authors' Contributions
DEC contributed to the research conceptualisation, research framework development, research instrument preparation, data processing, and final manuscript preparation. MADS contributed in the development of research framework, the preparation of research instrument, and the distribution of questionnaires. OM contributed in the preparation of research instrument, and the distribution of questionnaires.

Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Data Availability Statement
The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to privacy reasons.

Notes on Contributors

Dyah Estyani Cahya
https://orcid.org/0009-0004-7738-787X
Dyah Estyani Cahya is affiliated with Jambi University

Muhammad Afrillyan Dwi Syahputra
Muhammad Afrillyan Dwi Syahputra is affiliated with Riau University

Olin Monalvia
Olin Monalvia a is affiliated with Jambi University

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