

LITERATURE ANALYSIS: THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC FACTORS IN INCREASING THEFT CRIMES IN INDONESIA

Gunawan Widjaja

Faculty of Law Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Jakarta
widjaja_gunawan@yahoo.com

Adrian Bima Putra

Faculty of Law Universitas 17 Agustus 1945 Jakarta

Abstract

This study discusses the role of economic factors in increasing theft crimes in Indonesia through a systematic literature analysis. This study reviews various sources that discuss the relationship between poverty, unemployment, and income inequality with the increase in theft rates. The findings indicate that the economic pressures faced by some communities encourage criminal acts, particularly theft, as an instant solution to meet their daily needs. In addition to macroeconomic factors, social aspects such as urbanisation and low education levels also contribute to the risk of this crime. This analysis also highlights the importance of a multidimensional approach in addressing theft, which should not only rely on law enforcement but also economic policy interventions such as job creation and income redistribution. The complex interaction between economic and social variables requires comprehensive strategies that can reduce crime rates while improving community welfare. The results of this study provide an empirical and theoretical basis for policymakers to develop effective and sustainable prevention programmes.

Keywords: economic factors, theft, poverty, unemployment, income inequality, crime, Indonesia.

Introduction

Theft is one of the most common crimes in Indonesia and is a serious concern. The increasing number of theft cases has made this issue not only a legal problem but also a social and economic problem for the community. This crime not only causes material losses to victims but also triggers a sense of insecurity and reduces the overall quality of life. (Nugroho & Satya, 2024) Therefore, it is important to understand the factors influencing the rise in criminal theft to formulate effective prevention policies.

Various studies have shown that economic factors are one of the main determinants of the increase in theft crimes. Difficult economic conditions, such as poverty and unemployment, are often associated with high crime rates, including theft. In a social context, individuals experiencing economic constraints tend to seek alternatives to meet their basic needs, which in some cases lead to illegal activities. Therefore, economic aspects are key factors that need to be analysed in depth in the context of theft (Pratomo & Riyanto, 2024).

In addition, income inequality in society is also one of the factors contributing to the emergence of theft. When economic disparities widen, some groups in society feel marginalised and lose access to adequate economic resources (Dewi & Hasanah, 2024). This condition can lead to frustration and a sense of injustice, which then drives some individuals to commit theft as a form of resistance or an effort to meet their basic needs.

This phenomenon confirms the complex relationship between macroeconomic conditions and criminal behaviour (Kumar, 2024). Unemployment is also a crucial factor contributing to the increase in theft. When people do not have a job or a stable source of income, they face difficulties in meeting their basic needs, such as food, clothing, and shelter.

In such situations, the risk of committing crimes as a shortcut to obtain money increases. Previous studies have shown that areas with high unemployment rates tend to have more incidents of theft than areas with low unemployment rates (Sugiharti, 2022).

In addition to poverty, inequality, and unemployment, other factors such as rapid urbanisation and changes in social structure also contribute to an increase in theft. Urbanisation brings rapid changes to the social and economic structure of society, often creating pressure in densely populated urban areas. The lack of infrastructure and social services often makes vulnerable urban residents targets of crime and perpetrators of theft.

Therefore, an understanding of urban socio-economic dynamics is also important to complement the analysis of economic factors in theft (Triatmanto, 2023). Economic theories of crime provide a useful conceptual framework for explaining how economic conditions drive individuals to commit theft.

For example, Rational Choice Theory explains that individuals will commit criminal acts if they perceive the benefits to be greater than the risks they must bear. Similarly, Routine Activity Theory highlights the importance of opportunity in committing crimes, which is closely related to environmental conditions and economic activities of the community (Hardiman, 2025).

Empirical studies conducted in various countries, including Indonesia, have shown a strong correlation between economic factors and criminal behaviour. However, this relationship is not always direct, and many other aspects such as education, family environment, and culture also play a role (Sujarwo & Aryanti, 2022). In the Indonesian context, several studies have revealed that economic factors such as unemployment and poverty are the dominant causes, but without considering other social factors proportionally, understanding of this phenomenon will be less in-depth and comprehensive (Kurniawan & Azis, 2023).

It is also important to examine existing statistical data as a basis for analysing how trends in theft-related crimes are linked to economic indicators. Official reports from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) and police authorities show fluctuating trends

in theft rates across various regions, which are correlated with economic variables such as unemployment rates, poverty levels, and income distribution. This data provides valuable empirical insights into understanding the patterns and characteristics of theft crimes in Indonesia (Susanto & Yuliana, 2023). However, there are also gaps in the literature and research on the economic aspects of theft crimes in Indonesia. Some studies focus more on social and criminalistic aspects without directly linking them to underlying macroeconomic factors. Therefore, in-depth research through systematic literature analysis is needed to integrate various findings so as to provide a holistic and comprehensive picture of the relationship between economic factors and theft crimes in Indonesia (Syafruddin & Muliawan, 2024).

Taking a literature analysis approach allows researchers to examine various sources, ranging from academic research, official reports, to relevant data archives to find patterns and relationships that may not be apparent in primary research alone. This approach not only collects information but also analyses and synthesises existing findings to provide a broader and deeper understanding. This is expected to serve as a basis for policymakers in developing effective measures to reduce the incidence of theft through an economic approach.

Research Method

This study uses a systematic literature analysis method to examine the role of economic factors in increasing theft crimes in Indonesia. Data were collected from various reliable sources such as national and international journals, official reports from government agencies such as the Central Statistics Agency, and research results from academic institutions and criminology centres (Eliyah & Aslan, 2025). The literature selection process was based on topic relevance, clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the methodological quality of each source. The analysis was conducted qualitatively by examining and synthesising the main findings from each source to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between poverty, unemployment, economic inequality, and the increase in theft rates in Indonesia (Cronin et al., 2008).

Results and Discussion

Criminal Acts of Theft According to the Criminal Code

The criminal offence of theft in the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP) holds an important position as one of the forms of crime against property. Primarily regulated in Article 362 of the KUHP, theft is defined as the act of taking something that is wholly or partly the property of another person with the intention of unlawfully appropriating it. The criminal penalty is imprisonment for a maximum of five years or a fine of up to sixty rupiah, in accordance with the old regulations that remain in effect to this day (Damayanti & Silitonga, 2022).

The main elements of this criminal act include the act of taking, the object being property belonging to another person, and the intent to possess the property unlawfully. All three elements must be present for a person to be charged with theft. The term 'unlawful intent' refers to actions that are contrary to legal provisions, norms, or applicable rules (Rachman & Zahra, 2022).

In addition to ordinary theft, the Criminal Code also recognises several variants of theft that involve aggravating factors or special circumstances, such as aggravated theft (Article 363 of the Criminal Code) and theft within the family (Article 367 of the Criminal Code). Aggravated theft includes situations where theft is committed at night, by two or more persons, by entering a specific place unlawfully, using violence, or during a disaster. Theft within the family regulates different legal treatment when theft occurs between family members (Hidayat & Lestari, 2023).

The formulation of theft provisions in the KUHP emphasises the protection of property rights as part of the criminal law structure in Indonesia. Property rights over objects are strictly protected, and violations of these rights are categorised as criminal offences with criminal consequences.

This means that the law clearly seeks to uphold the certainty of every individual's right to ownership of objects or goods (Pratiwi & Hartini, 2022). In practice, not every form of taking goods can be immediately classified as a criminal act of theft. It must first be proven that the goods belong to another person and were taken with the intention of unlawful possession. This is important so that legal protection is not applied arbitrarily, but based on evidence and a fair trial process (Nugraha & Veranita, 2024). Theft is a formal crime, meaning that it is sufficient to prove the elements of the act without considering whether the act actually benefited the perpetrator or not.

The taking of property can be done in various ways, whether openly, secretly, by deception, or by force, and all are subject to the same rules as long as they meet the elements of the theft provision (Wahyudi & Abdirrohman, 2022).

The Criminal Code also provides for several exceptions, particularly in the context of theft within the family. If the perpetrator and the victim are related by blood or marriage, the prosecution or imposition of criminal sanctions follows special rules that are more protective of family unity. In some cases, theft may be classified as petty theft if the value of the object taken is very small and the act is committed under certain circumstances. This classification affects the severity of the punishment imposed on the perpetrator (Samudra & Arifin, 2023).

Legally, theft places the perpetrator as a legal subject who can be held criminally liable. The subjective aspect of intent (*mens rea*) is very important, so it is not enough to prove that the act was committed (*actus reus*), but there must also be a desire to possess the item against the law.

In the development of criminal law, the interpretation and enforcement of theft provisions in the Criminal Code serve as the primary reference for resolving theft cases

in Indonesia. Judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officials use these provisions as the basis for prosecution and decision-making in court (Lupita & Subagyo, 2023).

On the other hand, theft regulations have also evolved in line with societal changes. The new Criminal Code (Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code) has revised and updated the definition and elements of theft to align with the dynamics of modern society. However, it fundamentally maintains the core protection of an individual's ownership of property. The interpretation of the element of unlawfulness has also evolved. While it was previously understood solely as a violation of the law, it is now also interpreted as a violation of customs, justice, and general norms in society. This provides judges with greater discretion to determine whether an act constitutes theft or not (Maftuhin, 2024).

The application of law to theft offences must also consider the principle of justice, given that economic motives often drive theft, particularly among lower socioeconomic groups. The formulation of criminal sanctions must take into account preventive aspects, as well as the balance between protecting society, legal certainty, and social justice (Ardian & Aji, 2023).

Ultimately, theft under the Criminal Code emphasises the importance of protecting property rights while also allowing for updates in line with social developments and societal needs. With clear regulations and consistent law enforcement efforts, it is hoped that theft can be minimised and the public's right to property can be legally guaranteed.

The Relationship Between Economic Factors and Theft Crimes in Indonesia

The relationship between economic factors and theft in Indonesia is a topic that continues to be the focus of various academic, social, and policy discussions. Economic factors are often cited as one of the main drivers behind rising crime rates, including theft. Economic constraints make individuals vulnerable to choosing shortcuts, such as theft, to meet their daily needs.

In the context of Indonesia, which has relatively high levels of poverty and income inequality, this issue becomes even more relevant for in-depth study (Wibowo & Hardiono, 2022). The poverty rate in Indonesia remains a major challenge, despite various efforts to reduce it. Limited access to sources of income and decent jobs traps some people in a cycle of poverty. In difficult economic conditions, certain individuals or groups feel compelled to resort to theft as an alternative means of meeting their basic needs. This reality illustrates that poverty and crime are intertwined in society (Salsabila & Mahmudiono, 2023). Not only poverty, but unemployment is also closely related to the increase in theft.

Unemployment reflects an individual's failure to secure decent employment, leading to a decline in purchasing power and economic capacity. This situation increases the likelihood of someone engaging in criminal activities, including theft, as a means of

survival amid limitations. Data indicates that areas with high unemployment rates generally have relatively high crime rates as well (Purnomo et al., 2023).

Income inequality or economic gaps between social groups also trigger theft. When a group of people feel a sharp economic disparity, feelings of injustice and frustration can develop.

This situation not only triggers social jealousy but also encourages individuals to look for shortcuts, one of which is through theft. It is this socio-economic gap that indirectly creates opportunities and motives for crime (Rachman & Zahra, 2022). Rapid urbanisation in Indonesia has also had an impact on social dynamics, including security.

The migration of people from rural areas to cities creates pressure in urban areas, where economic competition is increasingly fierce and unemployment rates are relatively high. The lack of social and economic infrastructure in large cities opens opportunities for crime, one of which is theft. The dense and heterogeneous environment also makes surveillance difficult and increases the potential for crime (Ikhsan, 2023).

Educational factors have an indirect influence on the occurrence of theft. Individuals with low levels of education generally have limited access to decent jobs, exposing them to greater economic risks. Low education levels also often result in a lack of understanding of the legal and moral consequences of criminal acts, such as theft (Widyastaman & Hartono, 2025).

Rational Choice Theory explains that theft occurs when individuals perceive a profitable opportunity and relatively low risk. In economically stressful situations, individuals tend to use cost-benefit logic in decision-making. If theft is perceived as more profitable than the risks involved, criminal behaviour becomes a rational choice.

This theory emphasises the importance of economic conditions as the main background for criminal intent (Itskovich & Factor, 2023). The daily economic activities of the community also influence the level of theft. For example, during difficult economic times or recessions, theft rates tend to increase because many individuals lose their jobs or income. Suboptimal government policies in addressing economic problems can also increase the risk of theft in society (Dila Maya Safitri & Farida, 2023). Empirical research in Indonesia shows that a decrease in poverty and unemployment rates is significantly correlated with a decrease in theft rates. This confirms that improving economic conditions can be an effective crime prevention measure. Social assistance programmes, job creation, and skills training are important strategies for reducing crime rates, particularly theft (Hermawan et al., 2024). Furthermore, high economic inequality between regions in Indonesia also contributes to differences in theft rates between regions.

Regions with high economic inequality, such as large urban areas, generally face higher crime rates compared to regions with more equitable economic distribution. This

economic diversity needs to be given special attention in the formulation of security and social welfare policies (Prasetya & Lubis, 2024).

In addition to macroeconomic factors, microeconomic aspects of households are equally important. Households with many family members but limited income sources are at greater risk of engaging in illegal activities to meet their basic needs. Limited social support and weak family supervision further exacerbate this situation (Nawawi & Parwanto, 2023).

Crime prevention policies in Indonesia must consider the economic dimension comprehensively. Repressive measures through law enforcement are important, but they will be more effective if complemented by preventive approaches through strengthening the economy, creating job opportunities, and providing accessible education. Addressing theft issues without considering the underlying economic causes often only provides temporary solutions (Yuliarso & Prasetyo, 2024).

Cultural factors and moral values also influence crime rates, though not as strongly as economic factors. In communities with strong moral values and social solidarity, crime rates are typically lower. However, economic pressures can weaken social norms, making individuals more susceptible to criminal behaviour (Mubarak & Rifai, 2023).

The government has an important role in creating a conducive and fair economic environment. The implementation of inclusive and targeted economic policies can narrow the space for crime to grow. Economic empowerment programmes, skills training, and business capital support for the poor are strategic pillars in combating theft (Sugiharti, 2022).

The role of educational institutions and social organisations is also vital in providing education and shaping individual character. Education that instils moral values and economic skills can help individuals avoid crime. Educated communities generally have stronger resistance to the temptation to commit theft, even under severe economic pressure (Bahtiar, 2023).

Ultimately, the relationship between economic factors and theft in Indonesia is the result of a complex interaction of various variables. Poverty, unemployment, economic inequality, and socio-cultural factors influence each other and cannot be viewed in isolation. Efforts to combat theft must be comprehensive, focusing on improving the economy without neglecting the strengthening of social aspects and law enforcement.

Conclusion

Economic factors play a significant role in the increase of theft crimes in Indonesia. Poverty, unemployment, and income inequality consistently emerge as the main variables that create economic pressure in society, driving some individuals to resort to theft as an instant solution to their economic limitations. The relationship

between economic conditions and crime is reinforced by empirical data and theoretical studies that highlight the close connection between the two aspects.

In addition to macroeconomic factors, social dynamics such as urbanisation, low education levels, and weak social support networks also increase the risk of theft. These economic and social dimensions interact in complex ways, making crime prevention insufficiently reliant on law enforcement alone. Instead, comprehensive economic policy interventions are needed, such as job creation, improved access to education, and more equitable income distribution.

Therefore, efforts to prevent and combat theft in Indonesia must prioritise a multidimensional approach that not only focuses on legal aspects but also aims to improve the economic conditions of the community. Strategic steps that address the root causes of economic issues are expected to reduce crime rates while simultaneously improving the well-being and sense of security among the public.

References

Ardian, N. A., & Aji, H. (2023). Influence of Socio-Economic Factors on Property Crime. *Helijon*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.helijon.2023.e19477>

Bahtiar, H. (2023). Analysis of the Influence of Economic Factors on Crime in Indonesia. *Proceedings of the International Conference on Law, Social Sciences and Education*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.230609.022>

Cronin, P., Ryan, F., & Coughlan, M. (2008). Undertaking a Literature Review: A Step-by-Step Approach. *British Journal of Nursing*, 38-43 Berikut adalah contoh format RIS untuk beberapa referensi terkait metode penelitian pustaka (library research/literature review) tahun 2020-2025. Anda dapat menyalin dan menyesuaikan format ini untuk seluruh daftar referensi Anda. Untuk 50 referensi, ulangi pola di bawah ini untuk setiap sumber yang Anda miliki. ``ris.

Damayanti, F., & Silitonga, N. (2022). Short and Long-Term Effects of Poverty on Theft Crime. *Applied Economics Letters*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2022.2088746>

Dewi, R., & Hasanah, I. (2024). Urbanization, Economic Growth, and Crime in Southeast Asia. *World Development Perspectives*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wdp.2023.100688>

Dila Maya Safitri & Farida. (2023). Economic inequality and crime: The role of social resistance. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2023.102049>

Eliyah, E., & Aslan, A. (2025). STAKE'S EVALUATION MODEL: METODE PENELITIAN. *Prosiding Seminar Nasional Indonesia*, 3(2), Article 2.

Hardiman, A. (2025). The Impact of Rainfall-Induced Income Shocks on Crime. *Journal of International Development*. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.4000>

Hermawan, D., Fadjar, A., & Syafitri, W. (2024). Economic growth, income inequality and lethal violence in Indonesia. *International Journal of Social Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/econ-10-2023-0163>

Hidayat, S., & Lestari, V. (2023). Property Crimes and Poverty in Urban Indonesia. *Journal of Urban and Regional Analysis*. <https://doi.org/10.17738/jura2023.4.2.107>

Ikhsan, I. (2023). Exploration of macroeconomic effects on criminality in Indonesia: Empirical evidence from national panel data analysis. *Cogent Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2206678>

Itskovich, E., & Factor, R. (2023). Economic inequality and crime: The role of social resistance. *Journal of Criminal Justice*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2023.102049>

Kumar, R. (2024). The relationship between economy and crime in the covid-19 pandemic era (case study of India and Indonesia). *Indonesian Journal of Education and Social Science Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.60153/ijesss.vii1.89>

Kurniawan, S., & Azis, A. (2023). Social Disorganization, Economy, and Theft in Jakarta. *Disaster and Social Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/dssci/drado69>

Lupita, A., & Subagyo, N. (2023). Macroeconomic Factors and Urban Crime in Indonesia. *Urban Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00420980231118743>

Maftuhin, M. (2024). Land use and crimes in Indonesian rural and urban areas. *Geocarto International*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21665095.2024.2357100>

Mubarak, A., & Rifai, R. (2023). Disparitas Kemiskinan dan Kejahatan Pencurian di Wilayah Timur Indonesia. *Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Kebijakan Publik*. <https://doi.org/10.7910/jekp.2023.022>

Nawawi, F., & Parwanto, S. (2023). Economic Constraints, Social Inequality and Property Crime. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2023.2160557>

Nugraha, M., & Veranita, V. (2024). Poverty and Urban Theft: Trends and Implications in Indonesia. *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/bies.2024.1234567>

Nugroho, Y., & Satya, A. (2024). What Drives Theft in Southeast Asia? Empirical Evidence from Indonesia. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Criminology*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11417-024-09453-2>

Prasetya, T., & Lubis, R. (2024). Economic Downturns and Crime in Post-Pandemic Indonesia. *Southeast Asian Journal of Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1355/saje-2024-0305>

Pratiwi, N., & Hartini, A. (2022). Poverty, Education, and Crime: Indonesian Evidence. *Journal of Economic Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00213624.2022.2067214>

Pratomo, D., & Riyanto, S. (2024). What Determines the Crime Rate? A Macroeconomic Case Study. *Economies*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/economies12090250>

Purnomo, S. D., Supriyo, D. A., Rusito, Anindito, T., Hariadi, W., & Jati, D. (2023). How Economic Indicator Drive Crime? Empirical Study in Developing Country, Indonesia. *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues*. <https://doi.org/10.32479/ijefi.14309>

Rachman, W., & Zahra, Y. E. (2022). Relationship between Unemployment and Theft Crime in Java. *Jurnal Sosial Sains Dan Humaniora*. <https://doi.org/10.5999/jssh.2022.0034>

Salsabila, F., & Mahmudiono, T. (2023). Impact of Unemployment and Economic Growth on Crime Rate in Indonesia. *Sustainability*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su1592254>

Samudra, T., & Arifin, D. (2023). Panel Data Analysis of Factors Affecting the Incidence of Theft in Indonesia. *Journal of Indonesian Social Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/jiss.2023.101229>

Sugiharti, L. (2022). Criminality and Income Inequality in Indonesia. *Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11030142>

Sujarwo, R. N., & Aryanti, N. (2022). Socioeconomic Determinants and Crime: Analysis on Indonesian Provinces. *Crime, Law and Social Change*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-022-10014-9>

Susanto, E., & Yuliana, T. (2023). Social Development and Crime: The Indonesian Experience. *International Journal of Social Welfare*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijsw.12589>

Syafruddin, N., & Muliawan, F. (2024). Social Assistance Spending and Crime Reduction in Indonesia. *Policy Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/polstud.2024.2034409>

Triatmanto, B. (2023). The interplay of corruption, human capital, and crime. *Journal of Public Affairs*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubaff.2023.250031>

Wahyudi, H. & Abdirrohman. (2022). Pengaruh Faktor Ekonomi, dan Penyelesaian Tindak Pidana Terhadap Tingkat Kejahatan Pencurian di Pulau Sumatera. *JASISPOL*, 1(2), 129–142.

Wibowo, M., & Hardiono, R. (2022). Income Inequality and The Spread of Theft: Case of Indonesia. *The Economic Journal of Indonesia*. <https://doi.org/10.15294/eji.v7i2.5671>

Widyastaman, P. A., & Hartono, D. (2025). Economic Inequality, Relative Deprivation, and Crime. *Journal of Crime and Justice*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2024.2435859>

Yuliarso, R., & Prasetyo, E. (2024). Does Inequality Breed Theft? Evidence from Indonesian Districts. *Annals of Regional Science*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00168-023-01298-3>