

# THE ROLE OF OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTIONS IN GOVERNANCE: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS (2000–2025)

Turebek Zhuntyrbayev \*, Aliya Massalimova \*\*

\* Corresponding author, Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, Kazakhstan

Contact details: Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan

\*\* Academy of Public Administration under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, Kazakhstan



## Abstract

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This study examines the evolution of scholarly research on the role of the ombudsman in governance across various sectors between 2000 and 2025. A bibliometric methodology was applied, covering peer-reviewed literature indexed in the Scopus database. The analysis incorporated keyword mapping, cluster detection, and temporal trends to uncover the dominant research themes and conceptual developments (Zupic & Čater, 2014). A total of 322 documents and 81 keywords were examined after data cleaning and refinement. The co-occurrence network revealed several thematic areas, including corporate governance, financial services, public administration, and human rights protection. Over time, there has been a noticeable shift toward more inclusive and public-centred governance concepts, with recent studies increasingly focusing on legitimacy, participation, and social justice (Creutzfeldt, 2018). Notably, it was determined that an increased number of studies on the role of the ombudsman in corporate and financial governance is necessary. This bibliometric analysis contributes to the research field by showing how academic interest in ombudsman mechanisms aligns with developing governance challenges.

**Keywords:** Ombudsman, Governance, Corporate Governance, Bibliometric Analysis, Public Administration

**Authors' individual contribution:** Conceptualization — T.Z. and A.M.; Methodology — T.Z.; Formal Analysis — T.Z.; Investigation — T.Z.; Resources — T.Z.; Writing — Original Draft — T.Z.; Writing — Review & Editing — A.M.; Visualization — T.Z.; Supervision — A.M.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ombudsman institutions are widely used in governance systems all across the world in order to establish transparency, accountability, and citizen-centred administration. In democratic and transitional countries, an ombudsman serves as a non-judicial body that ensures people have access to help when they face problems related to rights violations, administrative misconduct, and mistreatment by the executive sector (Reif, 2004). Therefore, increasing the presence of ombudsman institutions across public service sectors is necessary for adequate human rights protection,

efficient complaints handling, and government oversight.

The concept of “ombudsman” was first introduced in Sweden in 1809, but its widespread adoption in Scandinavian countries began in the 1960s (Reif, 2004). Afterwards, the idea spread rapidly across other countries. For example, the UK created the Parliamentary and Health Services Ombudsman in 1967, along with other democracies introducing similar offices in that era (Lang, 2011; Carolei, 2022). Over time, the Scandinavian ombudsman model was adopted by European countries and beyond. Today, most governments

have some form of ombudsman or commissioner to protect citizens' rights (Erkkilä, 2020; Carolei, 2022).

With time, the ombudsman institution was introduced into various sectors and functions. Beyond national public service, ombudsmen now operate in schools and universities and in international organizations. The label "ombudsman" has also been applied to private-sector schemes. The UK Financial Ombudsman Service and Canada's Ombudsperson for Responsible Enterprise handle complaints against corporations (The Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, 2001; Government of Canada, 2019). As a result, "ombudsman" works as a public, private, and hybrid mechanism for dispute resolution and control (Carolei, 2022). In the corporate sector, interest in ombudsmen has increased in response to the growing need for improved corporate governance and accountability. As Lang (2011) observes, "In recent years, the [ombudsman] position has expanded in concert with calls for corporate accountability [...] and human rights advocacy across the globe" (p. 63). Similarly, in sectors like healthcare, ombuds offices now often handle ethics complaints and cases involving human rights protection.

The scholarly literature has primarily addressed the topic of ombudsman through case studies and normative analyses, with limited systematic mapping of the field. To date, there has been almost no bibliometric review of the evolution of ombudsman research in governance contexts across various sectors, including corporate, legal, and human rights domains. Therefore, there is a gap in interdisciplinary, thematic bibliometric analysis of the role of the ombudsman in governance.

In this article, it is necessary to fill this gap by mapping research trends on ombudsman institutions in governance over the period from 2000 to 2025. Using bibliometric tools, we will examine the development of scholarly attention to ombudsman roles and study the main themes and sectors where these roles are most important. In particular, we pose questions such as:

*RQ1: How has scholarly attention to ombudsman institutions in governance evolved between 2000 and 2025?*

*RQ2: What are the main thematic clusters and sectors of governance (e.g., corporate governance) in which the role of the ombudsman is emphasized?*

To answer these questions, we conduct a bibliometric analysis of publications included in Scopus. We search for ombudsman and governance-related literature and use keyword co-occurrence and network mapping with the software VOSviewer to determine thematic clusters. This approach follows prior bibliometric studies that utilize Scopus data and co-word analysis (Mate & Barad, 2021).

This is the structure of the following sections: Section 2 reviews the literature on ombudsmen in governance, Section 3 describes our bibliometric methods, Section 4 presents the bibliometric analysis and results, and Section 5 discusses the findings in light of governance theory. Section 6 concludes with implications and directions for future research on the ombudsman.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Initially, the ombudsman institution, in its classical form, was used as a parliamentary defender to address citizens' complaints regarding public service and maladministration, being described as guardians of fairness and human rights in public service delivery (Reif, 2011). Scholars have noted that over the years, the ombudsman's mandate has expanded beyond its classical form, as modern ombudsman institutions ensure transparency and the rule of law while also investigating bureaucratic complaints (Magnette, 2003; Abedin, 2011; O'Brien, 2015; Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2018). Studies have highlighted that the efficiency of the ombudsman is linked to its objectivity and accessibility (Carl, 2012; Van Roosbroek & Van de Walle, 2008), enabling ombudsman institutions to connect administrative procedures with the protection of individual rights (Dolan & Bennett, 2018; Reif, 2004). Some researchers argue that the ombudsperson's recommendations carry moral and political weight, which can push for reforms and thereby strengthen democratic accountability in the long term (Zhyvko et al., 2025). Other authors add that ombudsman offices are now also used as an alternative method of dispute resolution between the public and government officials (Zulkarnain et al., 2024).

As the ombudsman model expanded, it gave rise to a variety of specialized roles across different sectors (Stieber, 2000). Human rights protection, for example, is an important theme in research related to the ombudsman. Numerous jurisdictions have established people's defenders to address issues of fundamental rights violations, in addition to the classic role of an ombudsman in correcting maladministration (Uggla, 2004; Reif, 2011). Due to this, national ombuds offices like "Defender of Rights" in France and the Polish Commissioner for Human Rights are allowed to investigate the complaints related to discrimination, rights violations, and abuses of power (Batalli, 2015; Lagelle, 2010). In countries like Jordan, the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission works on protecting public interests, preventing abuse of power and addressing corruption. Researchers emphasize that the independence and fairness of ombudsman institutions in handling human rights protection roles are crucial in maintaining good governance systems as they enable the office to challenge government decisions, advocate for individuals without political interference, and study how laws and regulations are implemented (Reif, 2004; Glušac, 2019). Public reports and recommendations expose cases of misconduct and shortcomings of the system, therefore informing legislative oversight and public discourse on governance (Kucsko-Stadlmayer, 2008). Literature portrays the ombudsman as both a defender of individual rights and a promoter of good governance norms. By providing an accessible complaint mechanism, the ombudsman institution reinforces both democratic oversight and the rule of law (Uggla, 2004; Stieber, 2000).

In the healthcare sector, patients or health service ombudsman work as mediators between

patients and healthcare providers. Case studies suggest that the healthcare ombudsman provides an independent channel for patient complaints in hospitals and long-term care systems, which improves patient satisfaction and safety (Tate, 2003; Bayer et al., 2021). For example, the Quebec Health Ombudsman (*Protecteur du citoyen*) helps to voice patients' concerns to policymakers and managers. Through this, the Quebec Health Ombudsman contributes to more responsive and fair healthcare governance (Régis, 2014). Another example is the Patient's Rights Ombudsman in Poland, who oversees the work of healthcare and medical service providers to prevent and address cases of violation of patients' rights (Nosek, 2023).

In the field of financial services, a financial ombudsman is used to resolve disputes between banks, financial firms, and their customers. Studies of systems like the UK Financial Ombudsman Service show that these institutions improve the trust of consumers in financial governance by handling consumer complaints outside of the courts and providing confidential, neutral channels for employees to raise misconduct and ethical concerns (Gilad, 2010; Creutzfeldt, 2016; Redmond & Williams, 2018). Similarly, industry-specific ombudsman institutions have been established in fields such as telecommunications, energy, and education, where independent ombudsmen continue to address consumer complaints (Mujumdar & Prabhu, 2021).

Organizational ombudspersons are employed in the corporate context by large corporations and universities to address ethical issues as part of effective corporate governance. Rowe (2010) notes that an effective organizational ombudsperson serves as a neutral body that can discuss problems with senior management, thereby helping organizations resolve issues explicitly and maintain their integrity. As well as organizational ombudsmen, independent commissioners are used in the corporate context as they positively affect the profit quality and firm value (Mayzona & Rusmanto, 2025). Authors state that by keeping the decisions of independent commissioners neutral, objective, and not influenced by company authorities, corporations improve company performance and address the problem of tax avoidance (Sulfia & Rusmanto, 2024; Mayzona & Rusmanto, 2025). Fujianti et al. (2022) add that independent commissioners are a tool of good corporate governance used in effective risk management. Other literature associates the ombudsperson role with broader corporate governance objectives, such as strengthening accountability and ethical culture, stating that even outside the public sector, ombudsmen contribute to transparency, objectivity, and conflict resolution (Abedin, 2011; Carolei, 2022; Schenck & Zinsser, 2014).

Along with separate analyses of the role of the ombudsman in different disciplines, few bibliometric or scientometric analysis focused on ombudsman research. For instance, Mate and Barad (2021) did a scientometric analysis of 1,915 Scopus-indexed publications on "ombudsman"

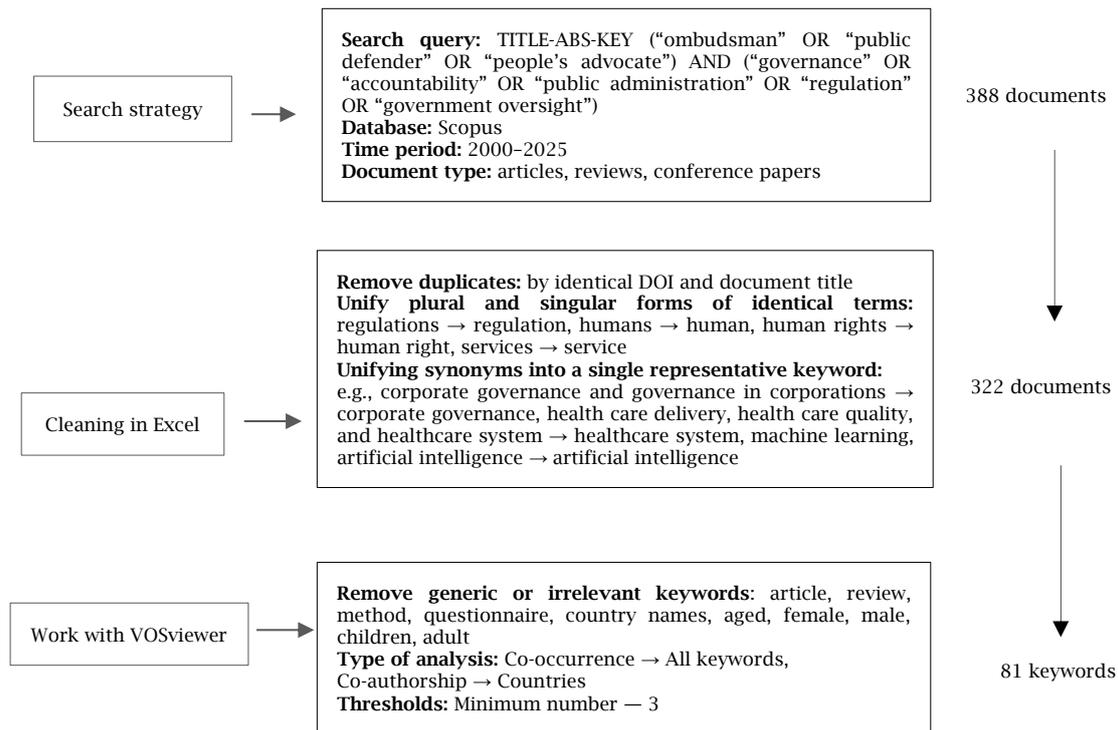
from 1960 to 2020. They stated that there is a steady growth in academic attention to the topic of ombudsman, with journal articles being the most published document type. They determined that a great many authors contributed only a single publication each. Ahmad and Ibrahim (2022) carried out a bibliometric analysis covering 1,176 documents on the ombudsman and the analogous Islamic concept of hisbah.

These scientometric studies provide important overviews, but their scope and focus differ from this research work. Mate and Barad's (2021) analysis provided a comprehensive historical overview of publication trends, but it did not focus on how the ombudsman contributes to accountability, human rights, or governance in practice. Ahmad and Ibrahim (2022) focused on a comparison with a cross-cultural element by including hisbah. However, their study did not explicitly focus on the role of the ombudsman in governance across different fields. It means that previous studies have focused more on "who" and "where" in ombudsman research than on "why". Consequently, they did not pay much attention to the functional significance of ombudsman offices and their potential role in governance systems. This creates a need for a more focused analysis of the literature that centers on the ombudsman as an instrument of governance.

Therefore, the study aims to make a bibliometric analysis concentrated on the role and significance of ombudsman institutions in governance and regulation. By considering studies in different fields like public administration, human rights, healthcare, corporate governance, financial services, and consumer protection, we will be able to determine how ombudsmen have been examined as agents of accountability and transparency. The ultimate purpose of the present study is to map and interpret the scholarly works on the role of the ombudsman in governance using bibliometric methods to identify prevailing themes and gaps in our understanding of this accountability institution.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Bibliometric analysis was applied to explore the research trends, thematic clusters, and the conceptual development of academic research on the role of ombudsman institutions in governance. The primary data source for this research was the Scopus scientific database. The search query consisted of keywords like "ombudsman", "governance", "regulation", "accountability", and their closely used synonyms as shown in Figure 1. By this, it was possible to target literature that connects ombudsman institutions to core principles of public sector governance. The analysis was limited to publications between the years 2000 and 2025. Only peer-reviewed articles, review and conference papers were included; other document types such as books, editorials, and notes were excluded to maintain a focus on academic and scientific standards.

**Figure 1.** Research methodology for bibliometric analysis of the role of the ombudsman in governance

Source: Authors' elaboration.

The initial search returned 388 documents. After exporting the results to Excel, the dataset was manually cleaned to remove entries with duplicated DOIs and document titles, resulting in 322 records. The next step cleaning process involved combining similar keywords to avoid the use of words of close meaning — for example, "human rights" and "human right" were unified, and terms such as "health care delivery" and "health care quality", and "healthcare system" were grouped.

The next step involved VOSviewer v.1.6.20, a specialized tool for building and visualizing bibliometric networks. VOSviewer was used to create a co-occurrence network of keywords based on a minimum threshold of three occurrences. After cleaning, 81 keywords met this threshold, among which generic terms unrelated to the thematic scope, such as "article" or "review", were also removed.

As a result, we generated a visual keyword co-occurrence map with distinct thematic clusters related to the role of ombudsman in governance. The clusters showed interconnected areas such as accountability, regulation, corporate governance, healthcare, corruption, and law, indicating the multidisciplinary nature of the field. The map helped highlight how the concept of the ombudsman is positioned within broader discussions on human rights, public administration and services. Aside from the keyword co-occurrence map, the VOSviewer was used to perform a co-authorship analysis by countries. This methodological strategy became a foundation for determining trends in the research of ombudsman and potential directions for further investigation.

The role of ombudsmen institutions in government could have been studied using other methods like comparative case studies, qualitative interviews, and documentary doctrinal analysis.

Comparative case studies can be done for different groups. For example, national ombudsmen of developed and developing countries can be

analyzed side-by-side to define the cross-national contrast between the role of commissioners in governance. Different ombudsman sectors, like the healthcare ombuds and the financial ombuds, could be compared to define the differences in their procedures, roles, and efficiency. Level of power, independence, given resources, and access to documents can be compared to understand how different features of an ombudsman, like its binding or recommendatory power, are applied by different governments.

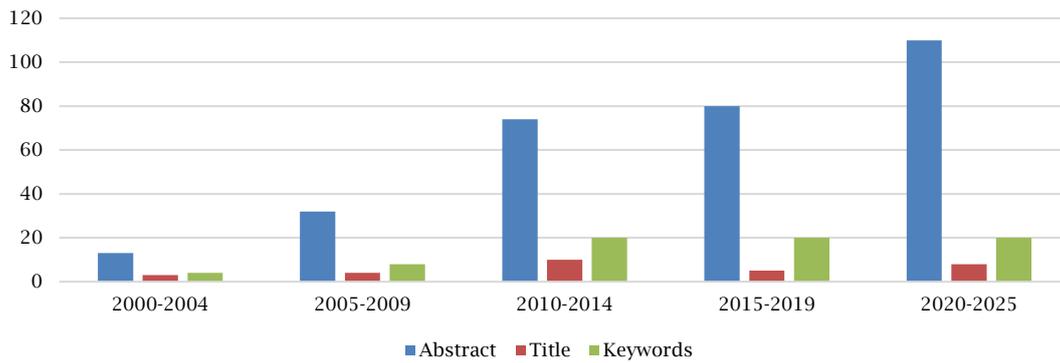
Qualitative interviews can be done with current or former ombudsman office workers and policymakers to receive first-hand knowledge of operational practices and barriers that ombudsman face. Documentary doctrinal analysis involves analysis of annual governmental reports, by which it is possible to understand how the ombudsman mandate, its legal constraints and power level changed.

Despite the fact that all of these methods could be used to analyze the topic of ombudsman and its role in governance, bibliometric analysis was chosen as the main method of the research paper. Mainly because it is objective, reproducible, and results in data-concentrated analysis of literature.

#### 4. RESULTS

Overall, the Scopus database presented 322 documents that integrate the role of the ombudsman in governance between 2000 and 2025, as seen in Figure 1. The distribution of publications related to ombudsman and governance over this period is shown in Figure 2. The data are grouped in five-year intervals and show how often the search terms appeared in article titles, abstracts, and author keywords. The growth trend is visible across all categories, with the most substantial increase occurring in the number of documents where relevant terms appear in the abstract.

**Figure 2.** Number of publications by location over the period of 2000-2025



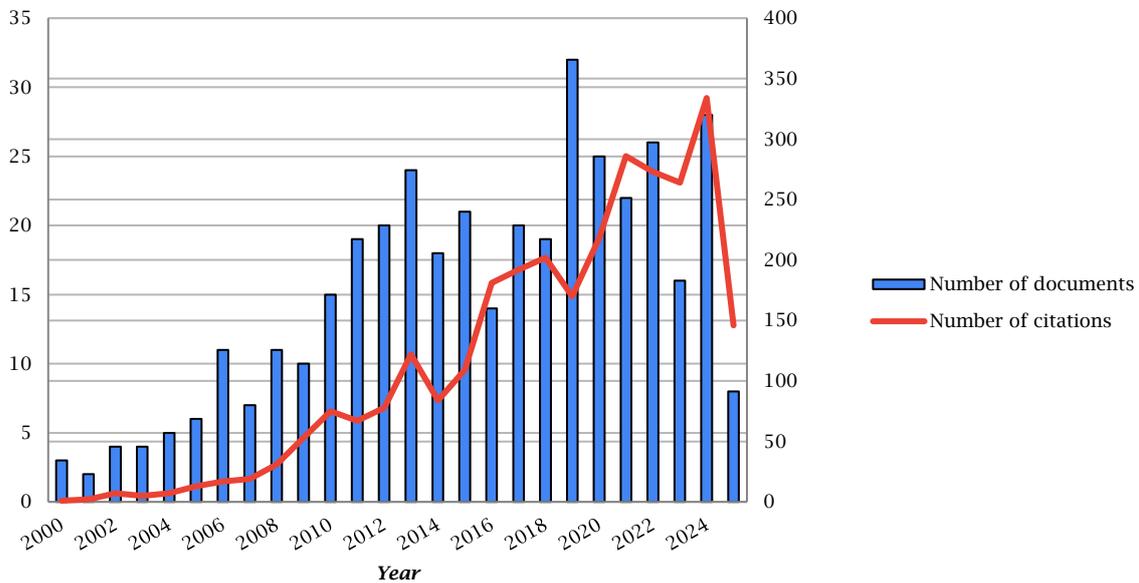
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Between 2000 and 2004, the topic was relatively unpopular. Only 13 publications referenced the keywords in the abstract, three in the title, and four in the keywords. A slight increase happened between 2005 and 2009 as there were 32 mentions in abstracts, four in titles, and eight in keywords. However, the significant growth began in the period 2010-2014. During these five years, mentions in abstracts more than doubled compared to the previous interval. The use of relevant terms in keywords also rose significantly. It reflected the growing normalization of the topic as a separate

area of scholarly interest within governance and regulation.

The upward trend continued in the periods 2015-2019 and 2020-2025. By the most recent interval, over 100 documents included the keywords in the abstract alone, confirming the maintenance of research interest. The increase in keyword assignments also indicates greater thematic focus, as authors deliberately categorize their work under terms related to the ombudsman, accountability, public regulation, and, most importantly, in connection to governance.

**Figure 3.** Annual publication (bar) and citation (line) count of documents related to the topic of ombudsman between 2000 and 2025

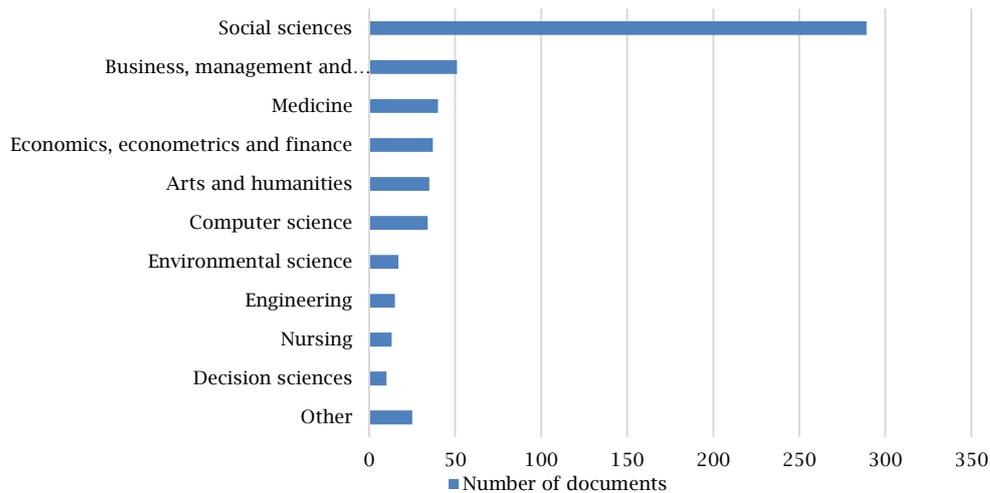


Source: Authors' elaboration.

The publication dynamics in Figure 3 show a general increase, with some fluctuations, between 2000 and 2025, again reflecting the growing academic interest in the institutional role of the ombudsman. Notable peaks are visible in 2019 and 2021, with 33 and 30 documents published, respectively. In addition to that, there is a growth in the number of citations with some fluctuations as well. Annual citation counts have increased

significantly after 2016, reaching a peak in 2024, when over 340 citations were recorded. In previous years, there were also early academic contributions that have since become influential in shaping the conceptual foundations of ombudsman research. It indicates that over the years, scientists have been working more with the concept of ombudsperson in governance sectors such as corporate governance, public administration, and regulations.

**Figure 4.** Distribution of publications related to the ombudsman across Scopus subject categories



Source: Authors' elaboration.

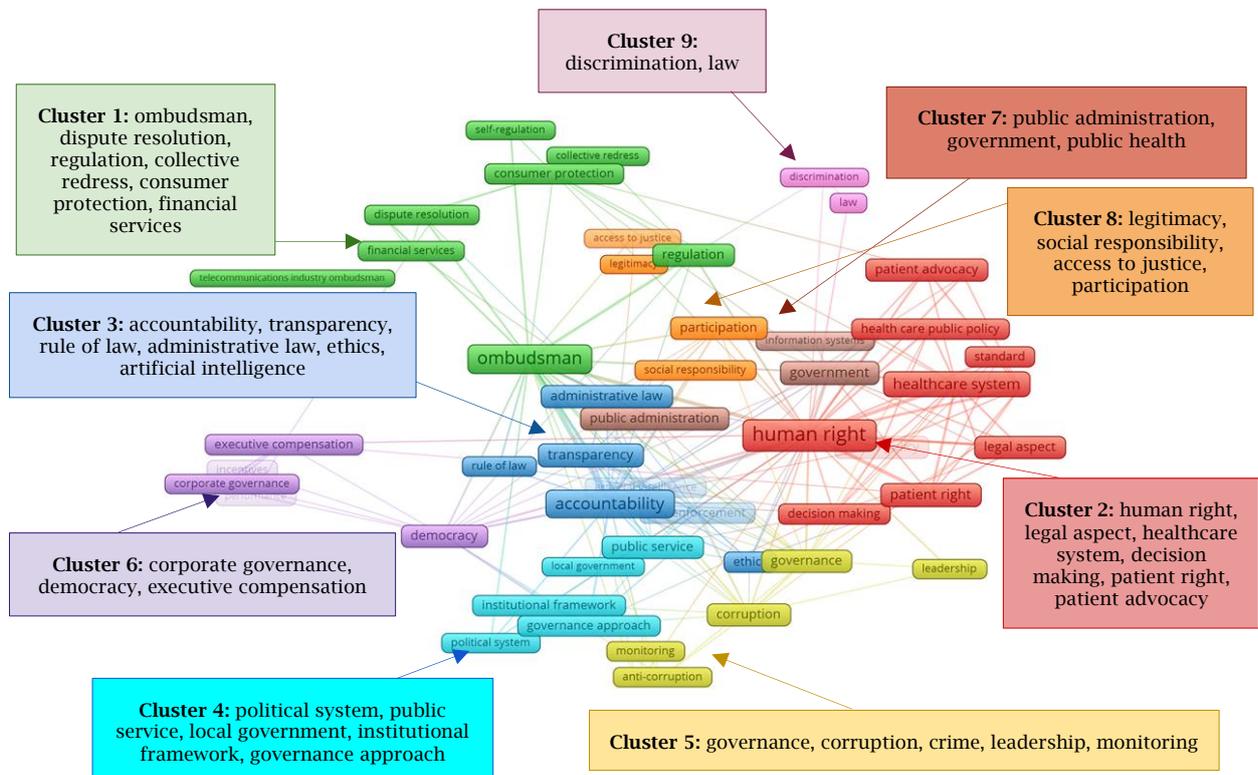
Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of publications on ombudsman-related topics across various fields classified by the Scopus database. The analysis shows that the Social Sciences are the focus of the majority of publications, with 289 documents. It is related to the fact that the ombudsman institution is predominantly studied in the context of public policy, accountability, administrative law, and institutional governance.

The second and fourth most represented categories are Business, Management and Accounting, with 51 documents, and Economics, Econometrics, and Finance, with 37 documents.

It highlights the growing scholarly interest in the role of ombudsman offices in corporate settings, particularly in relation to corporate governance, stakeholder accountability, financial consumer protection, and market-based topics.

Other fields, such as Medicine, Computer Science, and Environmental Science, are less represented but still reflect the cross-sectoral coverage of the ombudsman concept, particularly in fields concerned with patient rights and service regulation.

**Figure 5.** The keywords co-occurrence visualisation generated by VOSviewer



Note: Colours indicate the clusters identified by the algorithm.  
Source: Authors' elaboration.

Figure 5 presents a keyword co-occurrence map generated using VOSviewer, visualizing thematic clusters in the academic literature on ombudsman institutions and governance. At the core is Cluster 1 (green), which reflects the traditional regulatory and service-related role of the ombudsman. It includes keywords such as “dispute resolution, consumer protection, and financial services”. This suggests a strong focus on the ombudsman’s role within market regulation and the financial sector.

Cluster 2 (red) focuses on the ombudsman’s role in human rights protection, containing “human rights, legal aspect, healthcare system, patient advocacy, and decision making”. This group of keywords demonstrates that the role of the ombudsman in providing access to fair treatment is important in healthcare and administrative justice. Cluster 3 (blue) describes the conceptual core of public sector governance, containing keywords like “accountability, transparency, the rule of law, ethics, and administrative law”. Cluster 4 (light blue) complements this by introducing keywords such as “political system, local government, and institutional framework”. They show how the ombudsman functions within the broader framework of governance.

Cluster 5 (yellow) introduces themes of “governance, corruption, leadership, and crime”. It reflects the ombudsman’s preventive and investigative roles in maintaining institutional fairness.

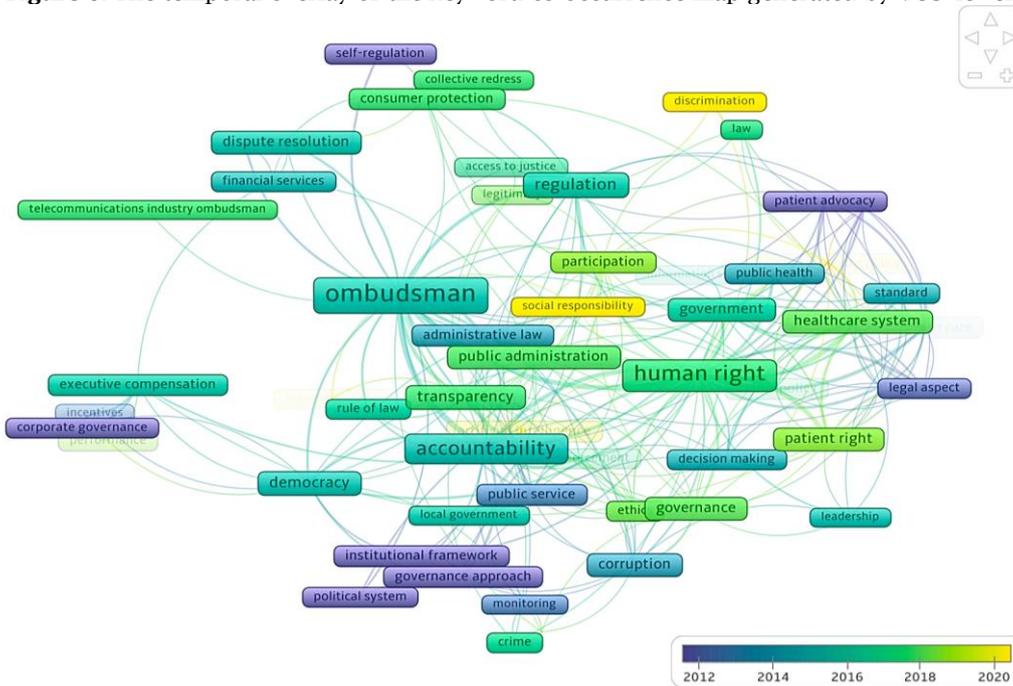
Closely related, Cluster 6 (purple) is directed toward corporate governance, featuring terms such as “executive compensation, democracy, and incentives”. This again suggests growing scholarly attention to the integration of ombudsman institutions in private sector contexts. It demonstrates how ombudsman principles are broadening into corporate environments, offering tools for non-judicial control.

Cluster 7 (brown) contains terms such as “public administration, government, and public health”. It again points to the governance-oriented role of the ombudsman. Additionally, keywords like “legitimacy, social responsibility, and access to justice” in Cluster 8 (orange) showcase how the ombudsman’s work is connected with the public expectations and the will of people to have responsive institutions in the form of an ombudsman.

Finally, Cluster 9 (pink) has keywords like “discrimination and law”. They demonstrate the ombudsman’s advocacy role in protecting disadvantaged groups and providing people with legal equity.

Overall, the identified clusters confirm the interdisciplinary nature of ombudsman research. They demonstrate the institution’s function as a bridge between public administration and increased concerns in corporate and regulatory governance.

Figure 6. The temporal overlay of the keyword co-occurrence map generated by VOSviewer



Note: Colours indicate the average publication year related to each keyword.  
Source: Authors’ elaboration.

The time-based overlay visualization in Figure 6 illustrates how scholarly attention to ombudsman-related themes has shifted over time. Five general time intervals can be distinguished, each marked by the dominance of specific keyword clusters that reflect shifts in thematic interest and theoretical framing.

During the earliest period, from 2012 to 2014, the focus centered on the context of institutional governance and internal control mechanisms. Keywords such as “corporate governance, executive compensation, institutional framework, and political system” appeared most frequently.

In the next phase, from 2014 to 2016, research attention expanded to include procedural governance and legal-administrative norms. Terms like “rule of law, public service, and administrative law” became more popular. This transition indicates a growing interest in how the ombudsman operates within formal governance structures, including their role in legal interpretation and fairness in bureaucracy.

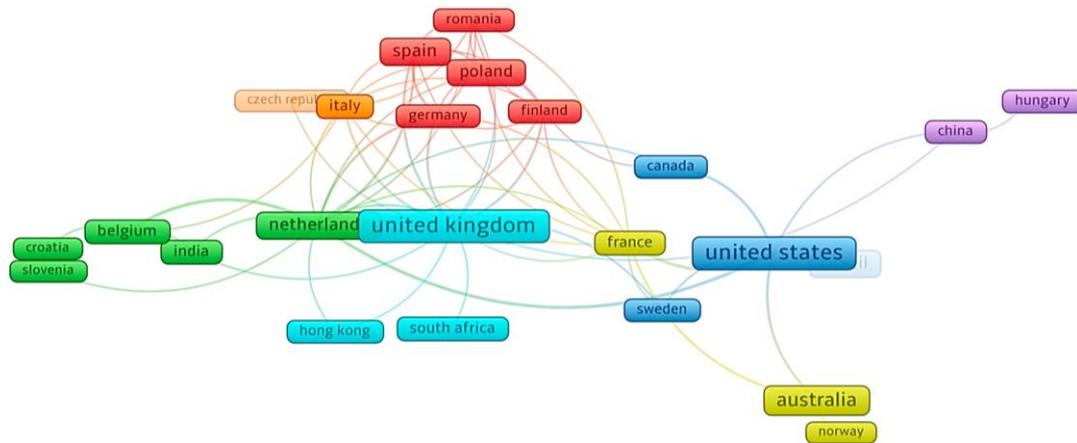
Between 2016 and 2018, the academic conversation began to focus more sharply on core governance functions. In this time period, keywords like “accountability, transparency, democracy, and public administration” appeared more in

publications. It showed the ombudsman’s contribution to improving democracy and institutional trust.

The interval 2018–2020 marked a thematic broadening into policy-specific and rights-based areas. A rise in keywords like “human rights, healthcare system, government, and patient rights” indicated that the role of the ombudsman in delivering fair public services and protecting vulnerable populations became more important.

The period from 2020 to 2024 introduced new terms like “social responsibility, participation, legitimacy, and discrimination”. This indicates a growing interest in inclusive forms of governance.

**Figure 7.** The geographic distribution of publications on the role of the ombudsman in governance, generated by VOSviewer



Source: Authors' elaboration.

Figure 7, with the geographic distribution map, shows the global spread of the 322 publications. Publications are concentrated in countries with strong ombuds traditions. The UK and the United States are major contributors to ombudsman research related to governance, followed by other European nations, such as Germany, Poland, Spain, and Nordic countries like Norway, as well as Australia. Notably, there is also considerable output from Asian countries like India and Japan and some participation from Latin America and Africa, but with lower density. This uneven pattern suggests that scholarly attention is strongest in high-income countries, where ombudsman institutions are well established, while emerging contributions come from developing regions. The map thus confirms that ombudsman research is international but clustered in regions with mature governance and regulatory systems.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Bibliometric analysis reveals an increase in publications on the role of the ombudsman in governance from 2000 to 2025. It reflects a growing scholarly interest in the ombuds' role, meaning that ombudsman institutions are becoming widespread and international governance tools. Dolan and Bennett (2018) note that the ombudsman has developed worldwide as “a potent symbol of administrative fairness and independence in defence of the individual against the powerful public agency or corporation” (p. 370). Zhyvko et al. (2025) also

find that modern governance “requires mechanisms that ensure state institutions remain accountable” and that the ombudsman has “gained growing attention as independent oversight bodies” (p. 87). Together, these observations suggest that the upward trend in publication aligns with the expansion of ombudsman offices into new contexts and an increasing research agenda across disciplines.

Keyword co-occurrence analysis uncovered several thematic clusters. A dominant cluster centers on accountability and good administration, linking terms like “transparency, administrative justice, ethics, and rule of law”. It is related to the fact that one of the classical roles of the ombudsman is accountability mechanisms. According to Zhyvko et al. (2025), different national ombuds models have “core objectives in promoting legality, fairness, and citizen protection,” and put transparency and procedural accessibility serving as “critical tools for effectiveness” (p. 87). Dolan and Bennett (2018) similarly highlight the ombudsperson's role in protecting administrative integrity and individual rights.

Other clusters suggest that corporate governance is also a component of research related to the ombudsman. Keywords such as “corporate governance, executive compensation, incentives, performance” co-occur with “ombudsman”, indicating a rising interest in organizational ombuds programs. As Scully and Rowe (2009) state, ombuds work in the form of a “zero barrier” entry point, at which employees have the chance to file complaints

without fear. Because of its independent nature, the ombudsman helps reinforce the organization's standards of conduct. In turn, the ombudsman can voice systemic problems and suggest new policies or procedures to corporate leadership, effectively supporting internal control and compliance mechanisms (Scully & Rowe, 2009; Berger-Walliser et al., 2011). According to Sulfia and Rusmanto (2024), the independent nature of commissioners is significant in corporate governance because it is a tool to address the unethical procedures inside a company as tax avoidance. Therefore, the contribution of the organizational and independent ombuds in promoting transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement in corporate processes is the reason for the interest in researching the role of ombuds in corporate governance.

Along with corporate governance, keyword co-occurrence analysis emphasized the ombudsman's role in financial services, consumer protection, and dispute resolution. Ombudsman institutions in the financial sector act as alternative dispute-resolution organs between regulators, financial firms, and consumers. However, there is a tension between the role of the ombudsman and their work with public expectations. Gilad (2008) notes that the financial services ombudsman balance accountability between regulators and complainants, portraying them primarily as "expectations managers" rather than strict enforcers of rules. This highlights the importance of designing ombudsman models so that they will improve regulatory compliance and market conduct.

Another important cluster depicts that the ombudsman's role is also closely linked to human rights protection. Ayad (2009) emphasizes that the ombudsman institution "is a vehicle for human rights protection via good governance and rule of law". The co-occurrence map shows that the ombudsman functions as a human rights advocate in governance, particularly in healthcare systems and public services. This aligns with research focused on patient rights or children's rights institutions (Reif, 2004; Ayad, 2009; Nosek, 2023). Moreover, the presence of terms like "discrimination", "legitimacy", and "access to justice" in the co-occurrence map reveals the evolution of ombuds institutions as rights-based regulators in both government and business settings (Remac & Langbroek, 2011).

The temporal analysis of the literature reveals that the early phase (2012-2014) primarily focused on institutional design and formal structures, including corporate governance and political systems. Therefore, corporate governance and financial services are prominently featured in the early thematic clusters associated with the ombudsman. However, the scholarly focus on these domains has declined in recent years, shifting from procedural justice from 2014 to 2016, to outcome-based themes such as transparency, democracy, and accountability from 2016 to 2018, and more recently to human rights, healthcare, and social responsiveness over the last seven years. This shift suggests that while areas of corporate governance and financial services were once central to ombudsman-related research, current academic attention has increasingly turned toward other

themes, such as human rights and public administration. The underrepresentation of ombudsmen in corporate governance and financial services in recent literature highlights a potential gap that creates a necessity for renewed scholarly attention.

Moreover, it is noted that ombudsman-related articles were most relevant starting from the mid-2010s. It corresponds to an increased need for regulatory transparency, particularly following difficulties in the public and private sectors that showed accountability gaps in governance bodies (Gilad, 2008; Van Roosbroek & Van de Walle, 2008). Zhyvko et al. (2025) observe that ombudsmen are now seen as adaptable bodies that can respond to both "internal and external pressures" in administration. Dolan and Bennett (2018) similarly describe institutional diversification: the number of agencies identifying as ombudsman institutions "has proliferated", and their functions have expanded. In other words, both the bibliometric data and the literature indicate a post-2010 boom in ombudsman studies.

Our analysis of geographic distribution shows that ombudsman research is truly global. While the concept originated in Scandinavia, there have been rising contributions from Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and North America in recent decades. Dolan and Bennett's (2018) global study confirms this diffusion: the ombudsperson model has spread across diverse political systems. The spread is consistent with the adoption of ombudsman offices as part of broader anti-corruption, transparency, and administrative reform agendas in emerging democracies (Dolan & Bennett, 2018).

Analysis by field confirms the ombudsman's interdisciplinary role. The ombudsman's role is initially rooted in administrative law and state-citizen relations, but it is also equally important in corporate governance, dispute resolution, and compliance functions (Krawiec, 2019; Ayad, 2009). Business and Economics journals cover ombudsman research, highlighting the importance of independent institutions in ethical accountability and independent review within the private sector (Berger-Walliser et al., 2011).

The bibliometric analysis shows that ombudsman institutions now serve not only as advisory bodies but also as accountability mechanisms. In the public sector, ombudsmen provide citizens with non-judicial assistance, thereby improving the democratic legitimacy of the government (Reif, 2004; Remac & Langbroek, 2011). In the private sector, they help companies address complaints before they move to legal action, thus working with risk management and stakeholder trust (Scully & Rowe, 2009; Berger-Walliser et al., 2011). The spread of the ombudsman across different geographical locations and fields also reflects the institutional versatility needed in today's governance.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to investigate the evolution and expansion of the role of ombudsman institutions in governance, as documented in academic literature over the past 25 years. A bibliometric analysis based on data from the Scopus database was conducted

to examine publication trends, identify thematic clusters, and map the conceptual development of ombudsman-related research from 2000 to 2025. The study also covered the institutional contexts in which ombudsman offices operate, including their relevance for governance, regulatory control, and sector-specific governance functions.

The findings confirm a steady growth in scholarly output on the role of the ombudsman in governance, especially after 2010, with a general increase in the number of publications and citations. Consequently, ombudsman institutions serve as tools for enhancing governance transparency, regulations, and citizen engagement in both public and private governance environments.

The co-occurrence mapping revealed several thematic clusters, including administrative justice and human rights, as well as corporate accountability and healthcare services. Time-based visualization further demonstrated how the research agenda has shifted over the years. In the early 2000s, studies primarily focused on the legal institutional foundations. Over the years, scholars began to explore participatory and inclusive governance issues, including legitimacy, discrimination, and social responsibility.

Additionally, in recent years, areas like corporate governance and financial services have received less attention from researchers. It creates a research gap that needs more scholarly interest, especially given the increasing integration of ombudsman roles in non-state and market-driven environments.

The results have important applications for both scholars and policymakers. For researchers, this study suggests underexplored intersections between ombudsman functions and areas such as environmental justice, digital governance, and institutional reform. For practitioners, especially in developing democracies, the findings underscore

the importance of institutionalizing ombudsman offices as part of accountability mechanisms.

This study has several limitations. Firstly, this research paper only relies on the Scopus database. Although Scopus database allows to do deep analysis on the change in research trends, it does not list all published relevant journals. It also means that the research is biased towards papers in English-language and internationally available papers rather than regional and non-English research progress. Secondly, this research was based on secondary bibliometric data and focused on keyword networks rather than content analysis of full texts. Future studies could benefit from integrating qualitative content analysis or case-based methodologies. By this, the focus would be on assessing how the effectiveness of ombudsman services is framed in empirical research. Additionally, cross-country comparative studies with governance indicators like Worldwide Governance Indicators or the Global Integrity Index could provide further insight into how institutional conditions enable or constrain the impact of the ombudsman. Thirdly, in future works on the topic of ombudsman, it is necessary to account for more diverse political, legal, and cultural contexts in the functions of an ombudsman. By this, it would be possible to better understand both the effectively applied functions of the ombudsman and the lacking aspects of it.

In conclusion, this research paper demonstrates that ombudsman institutions have become an integral part of modern governance, deserving of continued academic and policy attention. Continuing research on this topic and integrating comparative, qualitative, and case-based research would allow us to better understand how different contexts affect the work of the ombudsman and its role in the political and corporate frame.

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