

Police Professionalism and Integrity in Indonesia: Examining Organizational Culture and Ethical Policing Practices

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Abstract

Police professionalism and integrity are essential to maintaining public confidence and ensuring that law enforcement authority is exercised legitimately. In Indonesia, efforts to strengthen police professionalism have been closely associated with institutional reform, ethical standards, and organisational transformation. This study examines the relationship between organisational culture, professional identity, and ethical policing practices within the Indonesian police institution. Employing a qualitative approach, the study analyses institutional regulations, professional codes, organisational policies, and scholarly literature concerning police professionalism and integrity. The analysis suggests that formal ethical standards alone are insufficient to ensure professional conduct when organisational incentives, leadership practices, informal norms, and institutional culture do not reinforce those standards. Professionalism therefore requires an organisational environment that rewards integrity, encourages ethical decision-making, and provides credible mechanisms for addressing misconduct. The study contributes to policing scholarship by connecting police professionalism with organisational culture rather than treating professional conduct solely as an individual characteristic. It argues that sustainable police reform requires institutional strategies that integrate ethical leadership, professional development, internal accountability, and organisational learning. The Indonesian experience offers broader insights into the challenges of developing professional policing institutions in transitional democratic settings.

[Profesionalisme dan integritas kepolisian merupakan hal yang krusial untuk menjaga kepercayaan publik dan memastikan bahwa wewenang penegakan hukum dijalankan secara sah. Di Indonesia, upaya memperkuat profesionalisme kepolisian sangat erat kaitannya dengan reformasi kelembagaan, standar etika, dan transformasi organisasi. Studi ini mengkaji hubungan antara budaya organisasi, identitas profesional, dan praktik

kepolisian yang etis di dalam institusi kepolisian Indonesia. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, studi ini menganalisis peraturan kelembagaan, kode etik profesi, kebijakan organisasi, serta literatur akademis mengenai profesionalisme dan integritas kepolisian. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa standar etika formal saja tidak cukup untuk menjamin perilaku profesional apabila insentif organisasi, praktik kepemimpinan, norma informal, dan budaya kelembagaan tidak memperkuat standar-standar tersebut. Oleh karena itu, profesionalisme membutuhkan lingkungan organisasi yang menghargai integritas, mendorong pengambilan keputusan yang etis, serta menyediakan mekanisme yang kredibel untuk menangani pelanggaran. Studi ini memberikan kontribusi pada kajian kepolisian dengan mengaitkan profesionalisme kepolisian dengan budaya organisasi, alih-alih memandang perilaku profesional semata-mata sebagai karakteristik individu. Studi ini berargumen bahwa reformasi kepolisian yang berkelanjutan memerlukan strategi kelembagaan yang mengintegrasikan kepemimpinan etis, pengembangan profesional, akuntabilitas internal, dan pembelajaran organisasi. Pengalaman Indonesia memberikan wawasan yang lebih luas mengenai tantangan dalam membangun institusi kepolisian yang profesional di tengah situasi transisi demokrasi.]

Keywords: police professionalism, police integrity, organisational culture, police ethics, Indonesia

Introduction

The police occupy a distinctive position within democratic governance because they exercise coercive authority while simultaneously providing public services. Unlike many public institutions, police officers routinely make decisions that directly affect citizens' liberty, privacy, physical security, and access to justice. Consequently, police professionalism cannot be reduced to technical competence. It also encompasses legality, impartiality, accountability, integrity, respect for human rights, and appropriate use of discretion.

In Indonesia, the question of police professionalism has become particularly important since the political transformation of 1998. The Reformasi period produced significant changes in the institutional position of the Indonesian National Police (*Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia*, Polri). Law No. 2 of 2002 formally established the contemporary legal framework for Polri and defined the police as an institution responsible for maintaining security and public order, enforcing the law, and providing protection, guidance, and services to the community (Republic of Indonesia 2002).

However, institutional transformation should not be equated with cultural transformation. Siregar's analysis of the post-Reformasi period argues that although Polri undertook structural and instrumental reforms, cultural reform remained more

difficult because organizational habits and institutional orientations could persist after formal rules had changed (Siregar 2014). This distinction is particularly important because police behavior is influenced not only by formal regulations but also by informal expectations, peer relationships, leadership practices, occupational socialization, and organizational incentives.

Police professionalism is therefore closely connected to organizational culture. Schein defines organizational culture as a pattern of shared assumptions developed by a group as it learns to address problems of adaptation and internal integration; these assumptions subsequently influence how members perceive, think, and act (Schein 2010). Police organizations may formally promote integrity while simultaneously maintaining informal practices that encourage loyalty to colleagues, excessive deference to hierarchy, or tolerance of minor misconduct. When formal and informal norms conflict, officers may face incentives that undermine ethical decision-making.

The Indonesian context illustrates this tension. Research by Sonta (2020) identifies several cultural barriers to ethical reform in a resort police organization, including remnants of paramilitary culture, a crime-fighter orientation, limitations in internal oversight, insufficient public participation in ethical infrastructure, and an overly rule-based conception of ethics. The study consequently treats ethical culture as organizational capital necessary for sustainable police reform. The problem is also connected to police corruption and misconduct. Buttle, Davies, and Meliala argue that conventional theories of police corruption do not completely explain the Indonesian experience because police misconduct is shaped by sociocultural and historical conditions. Their "cultural constraints theory" emphasizes how different forms of police corruption may become embedded in organizational and social environments (Buttle, Davies, and Meliala 2016).

At the same time, the existence of ethical challenges should not obscure evidence of institutional progress. Indonesia has established a formal professional ethics framework through Police Regulation No. 7 of 2022, which regulates the professional code of ethics and the Professional Ethics Commission and provides standards concerning the attitudes, behavior, and actions of police officials in carrying out their duties and responsibilities (Republic of Indonesia 2022). Furthermore, a 2024 study by the Polri Research and Development Center reported a Public Trust Index of 85.77 for Polri's 2023 performance, while also identifying limitations in human resources, technological infrastructure, and service capacity (Saputra, Sutrasno, and Setiawan 2024).

These developments suggest that Indonesian police reform should not be understood in binary terms of success or failure. Instead, professionalism and integrity should be examined as continuing organizational processes. This paper therefore asks: How does organizational culture influence police professionalism and integrity in Indonesia, and what organizational practices can strengthen ethical policing?

This paper employs a qualitative literature-review methodology. It does not present original survey or interview data; rather, it synthesizes existing academic literature, Indonesian legislation, institutional research, and scholarship on police reform, organizational culture, police corruption, procedural justice, and public trust. The literature was selected according to three principal criteria. First, sources had to address policing, police reform, organizational culture, ethics, integrity, professionalism, accountability, or public trust. Second, priority was given to peer-reviewed academic publications and authoritative legal or institutional documents. Third, all references included in the paper were published no later than 2025, in accordance with the temporal limitation of this study. The analysis was organized around four interconnected dimensions: (1) the institutional and legal foundations of police professionalism; (2) organizational culture and police socialization; (3) ethical policing, integrity, and accountability; and (4) procedural justice and public legitimacy. The purpose of this approach is to move beyond an individualistic explanation of police misconduct and examine how organizational environments shape professional behavior.

Police Reform and the Institutional Foundations of Professionalism in Indonesia

A. *Reformasi* and the transformation of Polri

The *Reformasi* period represented a major turning point for Indonesian policing. The separation of Polri from the Indonesian Armed Forces created the institutional basis for a more civilian-oriented police organization. Law No. 2 of 2002 subsequently provided the central statutory framework governing Polri (Republic of Indonesia 2002). The significance of this transformation lies in the changing conception of policing. In a democratic political system, the police are expected to operate under law rather than merely serve as instruments of state control. Police authority must therefore be exercised within constitutional, legal, and ethical constraints. Professionalism requires officers to understand that their authority is delegated by law and ultimately directed toward public service.

Nevertheless, institutional reform does not necessarily eliminate older organizational patterns. Siregar (2014) notes that cultural reform was more difficult than structural and instrumental reform because cultural transformation requires changes in behavior and organizational orientation. This distinction remains useful for understanding why changes in regulations may not immediately change the experience of citizens interacting with individual officers.

The central challenge can therefore be conceptualized as a gap between formal professionalism and practical professionalism. Formal professionalism consists of laws, regulations, codes of ethics, organizational structures, training requirements, and disciplinary procedures. Practical professionalism concerns what officers actually do when confronted with uncertainty, pressure, conflicting interests, or discretionary decisions.

B. Professional ethics as a formal institutional framework

The adoption of Police Regulation No. 7 of 2022 demonstrates the continuing effort to strengthen the formal ethical framework of Polri. The regulation establishes the professional code of ethics and the Professional Ethics Commission as mechanisms governing police behavior and ethical accountability (Republic of Indonesia 2022). The regulation is significant because police professionalism cannot rely exclusively on criminal or administrative law. Police officers encounter situations where several legally permissible alternatives may exist. Ethical standards provide additional guidance concerning how authority should be exercised.

Professional ethics should consequently perform at least three functions. First, it should establish standards of conduct. Second, it should guide discretionary decision-making. Third, it should provide mechanisms for accountability when officers violate professional standards. However, the existence of an ethics code does not guarantee ethical behavior. Ethical rules become meaningful only when they are internalized through recruitment, education, leadership, supervision, organizational socialization, and disciplinary practice. Raharjo's 2025 study similarly emphasizes that ethics needs to be embedded across recruitment, training, leadership, and accountability systems rather than treated as a separate institutional requirement (Raharjo 2025).

Organizational Culture and Police Professionalism

A. Understanding police organizational culture

Organizational culture provides the informal framework through which members understand what is considered normal, desirable, acceptable, or unacceptable. Schein (2010) distinguishes between visible organizational artifacts, stated values, and deeper underlying assumptions. This model is particularly relevant to police organizations because official slogans and codes may represent espoused values, whereas actual behavior can reveal deeper assumptions.

For example, an organization may formally endorse accountability while informally rewarding officers who avoid embarrassing the institution. Similarly, a police organization may promote community service while internally valuing aggressive crime-fighting behavior more strongly. In such circumstances, officers learn through socialization that certain behaviors are more valued than formal policies suggest. Police culture can be especially powerful because officers operate in environments characterized by uncertainty, danger, discretion, and strong occupational solidarity. Peer approval may become an important source of behavioral guidance. If colleagues normalize minor ethical violations, an individual officer may experience pressure to conform.

Sonta's study of ethical culture at the Sidoarjo Resort Police demonstrates this problem. The research identifies remnants of paramilitary culture, insufficient ethical training, weaknesses in recruitment and socialization, and limitations in internal oversight as factors affecting organizational integrity (Sonta 2020).

B. Hierarchy, solidarity, and informal norms

Hierarchy is necessary for police organizations because policing involves coordinated operations and rapid decision-making. However, hierarchy can create ethical problems when organizational loyalty becomes more important than accountability. Professional solidarity can also have contradictory effects. On one hand, strong solidarity may strengthen teamwork and officer safety. On the other hand, excessive solidarity may discourage whistleblowing or reporting misconduct. This creates a potential tension between organizational cohesion and organizational accountability.

The problem is not solidarity itself. Rather, the issue arises when solidarity is interpreted as an obligation to protect colleagues regardless of their conduct. A professional organization should instead define loyalty as loyalty to the law, institutional mission, and ethical standards. Buttle, Davies, and Meliala (2016) demonstrate why this issue is significant in the Indonesian context. Their analysis suggests that police corruption cannot be understood solely as the result of individual greed; cultural and institutional conditions can constrain or facilitate misconduct. Thus, anti-corruption strategies must address organizational conditions as well as individual behavior.

Police Integrity and Ethical Decision-Making

A. Integrity as organizational consistency

Integrity is often understood as honesty or resistance to corruption. For policing, however, integrity should be understood more broadly as consistency between professional values, legal obligations, and actual conduct. An officer demonstrates integrity when professional standards remain applicable even when misconduct would be difficult to detect. This means that integrity is closely connected to internalized norms rather than simply external compliance.

This distinction is important because a system based exclusively on surveillance and punishment may encourage officers to comply only when they believe they are being observed. A stronger ethical culture encourages appropriate conduct even in situations where external monitoring is weak. Accordingly, integrity has both an individual dimension and an organizational dimension. Individual integrity concerns personal judgment and character. Organizational integrity concerns whether institutional structures consistently support, reward, and protect ethical behavior.

B. Ethical leadership

Leadership plays a central role in shaping organizational culture. Schein (2010) emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between leadership and culture: leaders influence the development of organizational culture, while established culture subsequently shapes what kinds of leadership become possible. Within Polri, leadership therefore has implications beyond administrative efficiency. Senior and middle-level officers communicate institutional priorities through their

decisions, responses to misconduct, promotion practices, and daily interactions with subordinates. If leaders tolerate minor ethical violations, employees may interpret that tolerance as an informal organizational policy. Conversely, if leaders consistently apply professional standards regardless of rank or status, ethical rules acquire greater credibility. Ethical leadership should consequently involve at least four practices:

1. Role modeling, in which leaders personally demonstrate professional conduct.
2. Consistent accountability, in which ethical standards apply across ranks.
3. Ethical communication, in which leaders explain not only what officers must do but why.
4. Protection of ethical dissent, in which officers can report concerns without unreasonable retaliation.

Raharjo (2025) similarly identifies organizational culture, peer influence, and inconsistent disciplinary mechanisms as important barriers to ethical compliance, suggesting that ethical training alone cannot substitute for broader institutional reform.

C. Ethical Policing and Procedural Justice

Professional policing is not only about the outcomes of police activity but also about how authority is exercised. Tyler's procedural justice framework emphasizes that citizens' judgments about police legitimacy are influenced by the fairness of police processes, including whether people are treated respectfully, given an opportunity to be heard, and subjected to neutral decision-making (Tyler 2003, 2004). Evidence that public perceptions of Polri are not uniformly negative. The Polri Research and Development Center reported a Public Trust Index of 85.77 for 2023 and categorized the result as "very good." This has direct implications for Indonesia. Police officers routinely exercise discretion in traffic enforcement, criminal investigation, public-order management, community policing, and other activities. Two officers may reach the same formal outcome while interacting with citizens in very different ways. The difference in communication, respect, neutrality, and transparency may influence how citizens perceive police legitimacy.

Procedural justice therefore provides an important bridge between professionalism and public trust. Professionalism is not simply the capacity to enforce the law; it also involves enforcing the law through legitimate and fair processes. The importance of this relationship is supported by Indonesian research. Zulganef, Pratminingsih, and Purwaningdyah (2024), using survey data from 198 members of the Indonesian public, found that trust was associated with satisfaction with police behavior and police programs, while trust in turn influenced public loyalty toward the police institution.

This finding suggests that public confidence should not be understood only as a communication or public-relations problem. Citizens' perceptions are partly shaped by direct experiences of police behavior.

D. Public Trust as an Outcome of Professional Policing

Public trust is not synonymous with police popularity. From an institutional perspective, trust refers to citizens' willingness to regard an institution as reliable, legitimate, and worthy of cooperation. Policing depends significantly on such cooperation. Citizens provide information, report crimes, serve as witnesses, comply with lawful orders, and participate in community-safety initiatives. When citizens perceive police authority as unfair or corrupt, cooperation can become more difficult.

Indonesian institutional research provides evidence that public perceptions of Polri are not uniformly negative. The Polri Research and Development Center reported a Public Trust Index of 85.77 for 2023 and categorized the result as "very good." At the same time, the study identified challenges involving human resources, technological infrastructure, and service quality (Saputra, Sutrasno, and Setiawan 2024). This illustrates an important methodological point: assessments of public trust should be interpreted together with information about specific dimensions of police performance. A relatively high aggregate trust index does not eliminate the need to examine particular forms of misconduct, human-rights concerns, or organizational weaknesses.

Similarly, Human Rights Watch reported continuing concerns regarding abuses involving military and police forces in Indonesia, including allegations of impunity in West Papua (Human Rights Watch 2024). Human Rights Watch Such evidence demonstrates why aggregate indicators should not be treated as a complete measure of police professionalism. Professional policing must therefore accommodate both institutional performance and rights-based accountability.

E. Human Rights and Ethical Policing

Human rights constitute an essential component of professional policing because police officers possess significant coercive powers principles. Their analysis emphasizes that persistent reliance on repressive approaches can create tensions with the objective of developing professional policing. . Ethical policing requires that these powers be exercised according to legality, necessity, proportionality, and respect for human dignity. Berutu and Saragih (2025) argue that police reform requires greater integration between professionalism, humanism, and human-rights principles. Their analysis emphasizes that persistent reliance on repressive approaches can create tensions with the objective of developing professional policing.

A human-rights-oriented approach does not mean that police should be prevented from using legitimate coercive powers. Rather, it requires that coercion be legally justified and appropriately limited. Professionalism is demonstrated by the ability to distinguish legitimate enforcement from unnecessary or disproportionate intervention. This principle also reinforces the importance of training. Officers should be trained not only in operational skills but also in ethical reasoning. Scenario-based training can help officers evaluate complex situations

involving competing interests, uncertainty, vulnerable populations, and discretionary authority.

F. Accountability and Internal Oversight

An effective integrity system requires credible accountability. Accountability should operate at several levels: individual, organizational, managerial, and external. Internal accountability includes professional ethics commissions, disciplinary systems, supervisory mechanisms, audits, complaint procedures, and internal investigations. External accountability can involve courts, civilian institutions, human-rights bodies, legislative oversight, and other lawful mechanisms.

The challenge is to ensure that accountability mechanisms are not merely formal. If complaints are difficult to submit, investigations lack independence, or sanctions are inconsistent, formal mechanisms may have limited deterrent effect. Sonta (2020) identifies limitations in internal oversight and the absence of sufficiently developed participatory ethical infrastructure as obstacles to cultural reform. This suggests that organizational accountability should be expanded beyond internal disciplinary mechanisms.

Public participation is particularly relevant. Citizens who interact with police possess information that may not be visible through internal monitoring. Complaint mechanisms should therefore be accessible, transparent, and safe for complainants. At the same time, accountability systems must provide procedural fairness to police officers themselves. An ethical disciplinary process should protect both institutional integrity and officers' rights to fair procedures. Otherwise, accountability may be perceived as arbitrary rather than legitimate.

G. Recruitment, Education, and Professional Socialization

Professionalism begins before an officer enters operational service. Recruitment is therefore an important integrity mechanism. Recruitment systems should evaluate not only physical and technical capabilities but also ethical reasoning, interpersonal competence, respect for diversity, and commitment to public service. Once recruited, officers require continuing professional development.

Police education should also move beyond memorization of rules. Ethical competence involves the ability to recognize ethical problems, evaluate competing obligations, anticipate consequences, and make defensible decisions. Sonta (2020) notes limitations in ethical education and socialization within the policing context, particularly concerning the development of ethics as a substantive field rather than merely a set of rules. A professional curriculum should therefore integrate ethics into operational subjects. For example, criminal investigation training should include ethical issues concerning evidence, interrogation, confidentiality, and discretion. Traffic policing should incorporate fairness and non-discrimination. Public-order training should address proportionality and communication.

This integrated approach is preferable to treating ethics as a single classroom subject disconnected from operational decision-making.

Organizational Reform: From Compliance to Ethical Culture

One of the central findings emerging from the literature is that ethical reform cannot depend solely on additional regulations. Rules are necessary, but organizational culture determines how rules are interpreted and enacted. A useful distinction can be made between a compliance culture and an integrity culture. A compliance culture primarily asks: "Is this behavior permitted by the rule?" An integrity culture asks: "Is this behavior consistent with our professional responsibilities, public-service mission, and ethical values?"

The two approaches are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Police organizations need clear rules and effective enforcement, but they also need officers capable of ethical reasoning when rules do not provide a complete answer. Schein's organizational culture framework supports this perspective because culture operates at levels deeper than written policy (Schein 2010). If organizations want ethical behavior to become routine, ethical principles must become embedded in everyday expectations, leadership behavior, peer interactions, promotion systems, and institutional narratives. The implication for Polri is that cultural reform should be evaluated through behavioral indicators rather than solely through the adoption of new policies.

Proposed Framework for Strengthening Police Professionalism and Integrity

Based on the literature reviewed, an integrated framework for strengthening Indonesian police professionalism can be organized around six mutually reinforcing pillars.

1. Ethical leadership

Leaders should consistently model the standards expected from subordinates. Promotion and career advancement should recognize not only operational performance but also ethical leadership, accountability, and community-oriented behavior.

2. Ethical recruitment and education

Recruitment should incorporate integrity-related assessment, while police education should integrate ethical reasoning into operational training. Continuing education should address emerging challenges involving technology, digital evidence, privacy, human rights, and public communication.

3. Consistent accountability
Professional ethics rules should be implemented consistently regardless of rank or organizational position. The credibility of accountability depends heavily on predictability and fairness.
4. Protection for reporting misconduct
Police organizations should develop safe mechanisms through which officers and members of the public can report suspected misconduct. Whistleblowing should be treated as an organizational accountability mechanism rather than as disloyalty.
5. Procedural justice and community engagement
Police performance should include indicators of respectful treatment, transparency, communication, and fairness. Community policing should not be limited to public-relations activities but should provide meaningful opportunities for citizens to communicate concerns and participate in problem-solving.
6. Evidence-based organizational evaluation
Police reform should be evaluated using multiple indicators rather than a single measure. These indicators may include complaint rates, disciplinary cases, use-of-force incidents, citizen satisfaction, procedural-justice perceptions, response times, case-management quality, and public trust.

Such an evaluation system would make it possible to identify the difference between formal compliance and actual professional behavior.

Discussion

The literature suggests that the central problem of police professionalism in Indonesia is not simply whether ethical standards exist. The more fundamental question is whether the organization creates conditions in which ethical standards can become habitual.

Three relationships are particularly important. First, organizational culture influences individual behavior. Officers do not operate independently of their organizational environment. Informal norms, peer expectations, leadership behavior, and promotion systems can influence how professional standards are interpreted. Second, ethical policing influences legitimacy. Procedural justice research demonstrates that citizens' perceptions of police authority depend partly on how authority is exercised (Tyler 2003, 2004). Third, legitimacy supports institutional effectiveness. When citizens regard police as legitimate, they may be more willing to cooperate voluntarily. Tyler (2004) argues that public support and cooperation are connected to perceptions of police legitimacy and the fairness of police procedures.

These relationships produce a reinforcing cycle. Ethical organizational culture can encourage professional behavior; professional behavior can strengthen perceptions of fairness; perceptions of fairness can support legitimacy; and

legitimacy can facilitate public cooperation. The reverse cycle is also possible. Weak organizational controls may facilitate misconduct; misconduct can reduce public confidence; declining confidence can increase social distance between police and communities; and reduced cooperation can complicate policing. Therefore, police professionalism should be approached as an institutional ecosystem rather than as an individual characteristic.

14. Conclusion

Police professionalism and integrity in Indonesia are products of both formal institutional arrangements and organizational culture. Since Reformasi, Polri has experienced substantial institutional transformation, including the establishment of a statutory framework through Law No. 2 of 2002 and a contemporary professional ethics framework through Police Regulation No. 7 of 2022. These reforms provide important foundations for professional policing. Nevertheless, formal rules alone cannot guarantee ethical behavior. Research on Indonesian policing indicates that organizational culture, hierarchical traditions, peer influence, socialization, internal oversight, and informal norms remain important factors affecting the implementation of police reform (Siregar 2014; Sonta 2020; Buttle, Davies, and Meliala 2016). The development of professional and integrity-oriented policing therefore requires a shift from a predominantly rule-based approach toward an integrated organizational model. Such a model should combine clear ethical standards with ethical leadership, effective recruitment, professional education, consistent accountability, protection for reporting misconduct, procedural justice, human-rights principles, and meaningful community engagement.

The ultimate measure of police professionalism should not be the number of regulations an organization possesses but the consistency with which its members exercise authority lawfully, fairly, transparently, and ethically. Public trust is relevant to this process, but trust should be interpreted together with objective indicators of police performance and accountability. Indonesian research indicates both substantial levels of public confidence and continuing organizational challenges, demonstrating that reform is multidimensional rather than reducible to a single institutional indicator (Saputra, Sutrasno, and Setiawan 2024). For Indonesia, sustainable police reform consequently requires cultural institutionalization. Professionalism must become not merely a formal expectation but a shared organizational norm. Integrity must become not merely an individual virtue but an institutional property. Ethical policing must become not merely a disciplinary requirement but the everyday method through which police authority is exercised.

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