

IN PURSUIT FOR LEGITIMACY: AN OVERVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY POLICING IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

The Indonesian National Police (Polri) is currently placing a fair amount of concern on the state of its police legitimacy. However, numerous evidence of public response to date indicated some problems that threaten the legitimacy of Polri and might affect their performance. Following the public response, Polri launched several significant alterations to its policing methods. Hence, several critics questioned the effectiveness of Polri's current method. This study will examine the pros and cons of the new policing scheme taken by Polri based on literature review of previous studies. Some suggestions as an alternative method are also provided in this study to improve Polri's approach. Implications of these findings for police practitioners and researchers are then discussed.

KEYWORDS

police legitimacy; procedural justice; policing



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INTRODUCTION

The 1998 reforms have left Polri as an independent law enforcement entity, fully separated from the Indonesian military. There were high public expectations for Polri to be more professional after their overhaul, especially in their primary functions of maintaining social order, law enforcement and the provision of public services. One measure of success for public institutions in Indonesia can be seen through its public trust ratings—often conducted by think tanks and pollsters. The military was often perceived to have successfully cultivated a high degree of trust in the public, while Polri struggles on this subject. Although it is worth considering that in November 2021, Polri was ranked third best in public trust—their best achievement since 2014. Many have argued that these results were more likely affected by Polri's situational policies (e.g. the recruitment of ex-Corruption

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Eradication Commission (KPK) investigators and the police's crucial role in tackling the Covid 19 pandemic) rather than their daily duties of order maintenance. In contrast, Polri's lowest public trust score is recorded in October 2022 (based on LSI's survey) as the aftermath of a premeditated homicide case committed by their Chief of Internal Affairs followed by the football tragedy in Kanjuruhan Stadium. It is quite noticeable that Polri's public trust is constantly fluctuating to the patterns of actual events, and yet, surveys of public trust are still considered as the authoritative indicator to measure police performance. These poll numbers are treated like commodities, especially during hearings with the Parliament's Law Commission.

In line with the rise of the survey regime, public criticism and cynicism towards the Indonesian police grew significantly in social media. For instance, two of the most favourite hashtag today was “#noviralnojustice”, which refers to police actions only taken after an incident gained mass social media attention and “#percumalaporpolisi” which signals that making a police report is a useless endeavor. In addition, the two aforementioned terms oftenly appeared as a continuous cycle in many significant cases. In the first phase, the public would address their situation on social media—mostly regarding poor decision making, lack of transparency, or any other form of disappointment toward the proceeds of police investigations. In some cases, they would also add a one sided arguments in support of their views followed with the popular hashtag “#percumalaporpolisi”. The second phase would then later occur when the police took a serious response to the previous complaint. Public would criticize forms of police action with the term “#noviralnojustice” regardless of correctness of the police in making their initial decision. Eventually, people would always criticize the police whether they took action or not.

Public complaints of police misconduct is an expression of procedural injustice which, if left untreated, would threaten police legitimacy (Terrill & Paoline, 2015). Terrill & Paoline (2015) even stated that public complaints over the police represent a great dissatisfaction with the police process and could present a threat to the cultivation of police legitimacy. Polri is in need to address their shortcomings and act through a countermeasure policy to fix their legitimacy crisis. Most prior research regarding police legitimacy is conducted in a western-style democracy while little research has been done in a global south environment such as Indonesia.

This article tries to address the elephant in the room through the lens of ethical legitimacy. We try to shed light on the often overlooked fact that Polri might have overly shifted from their core business—juggling the vast challenges of day-to-day policing on one hand, while the other is trying to produce populist innovations in trying to please the public and the survey regime. This paper also briefly discusses matters of procedural justice to signify the burden already on the shoulders of officers in the field. We argue that these extra-duties may put too much stress on our police officers and also on the already spread thin budget, all the while the organization turned their backs from the basic welfare and individual needs of hardworking police officers. This article is concerned that the complicated situation

might lead to a decrease in the quality of service, lack of confirmation to procedural justice, and furthermore causing harm on police legitimacy.

Police Legitimacy

Legitimacy defined as a concept of other's beliefs that the authorities are ought to be obeyed (Levi et al., 2009; Tyler, 2004) or in much simpler words, a validity of authority (Magnis-Suseno, 2021). In regard to the study of policing as a discipline, legitimacy was considered as one of the most important factors related to police-public interaction. It was considered as the foundation of public mandates underlying criminal justice institutions and their legal authority (Prinsloo, 2019). Previous research stated that legitimacy is important in the efforts to secure a law-abiding behaviour and cooperation from the public (Hamm et al., 2017; Tankebe, 2013; Terrill & Paoline, 2015). In police-public relations, legitimacy served as a justification, the core of public support and their approval for the police (Akinlabi, 2017). When people believe that the police possessed valid levels of legitimacy, they would be more than willing to cooperate with officers during their encounters (Hinds & Murphy, 2007; Madon et al., 2017; Tyler, 2004). In contrary, a lack of legitimacy would cause the police to suffer difficulties in securing public cooperation and compliance, and eventually become less effective and more violent (Boateng, 2018; Goldsmith, 2005; Jackson & Sunshine, 2007). Debbaut and Kimpe (2023) argued that the public would experience police legitimacy when the police treats them in a neutral fashion, facilitating the public to express their viewpoint against a policing decision, and also shows dignity, respect, and honesty in police acts.

Police legitimacy was reflected from three aspects. First, the public trust and confidence in police. Second, the public willingness to obey the law and to police authority. Third, the public believes that police actions are morally correct (Prinsloo, 2019; Madon, et al., 2017; Jackson et al., 2012). Magnis-Suseno (2019) classified these previous concepts as sociological legitimacy, legality, and ethical legitimacy. In this regard, Magnis-Suseno puts greater emphasis towards ethical legitimacy in which the validation of legitimacy is regarded to be based on moral value. Magnis-Suseno to some extent ignored the somewhat problematic trials of public opinion—or so he referred to as 'sociological legitimacy'. He argued that the ethical legitimacy of authority should not depend on people's perception. The support of a policy by the opinion of the majority does not guarantee its moral dignity (Magnis-Suseno, 2019).

The aforementioned concept of ethical legitimacy is the main discussion of this article. Previous concepts state that every policy taken solely to cater to the satisfaction of public perception should not be considered as a good decision (Magnis-Suseno, 2021). Populist policing which is more favorable to the public might bring a dash of short lived popularity while disturbing the balance of organization resources and evenmore, contradict the moral value. Thus, every police policy also needs to be evaluated from a moral perspective besides from public expectation. As Jackson et al., (2012) argued, that the police should demonstrate moral authority through a shared sense of right and wrong with the public and negotiate it with the public in a way to maximize consent.

Procedural Justice

Hinds & Murphy, (2007) identified two important aspects of police legitimacy as instrumental and normative. Murphy, (2009) suggested that the normative aspect was more important than their instrumental results. The instrumental aspect of police legitimacy was achieved by effective crime control and maintaining public order. Thus, based on Murphy's results, this study did not primarily discuss police performance in regard of legitimacy. Conversely, this study set a higher value to the moral aspect as a cause and effect of Polri's policy namely the normative which comprises some aspects and one that important is procedural justice (Akinlabi, 2017; Gau, 2015; Hinds & Murphy, 2007; Madon et al., 2017; Prinsloo, 2019). Davies et al., (2016) stated that procedural justice involves quality treatment, quality decision making, and moral similitude. Procedural justice in police legitimacy suggested that the public would trust and obey the police when police institutions display respect and fairness in decisions during police-public encounters (Gau, 2015; Madon et al., 2017). Moreover, in the previous research by Madon, et al. (2017), procedural justice was also effective in building police legitimacy among minorities who were highly disengaged from police. Procedural justice could be perceived from a direct personal experience and from another people's story. Hence, procedural justice was more efficient to be applied by the police.

Procedural justice was also important to be implemented in the internal police organizations. In this context, police officers might want the same thing that the people want from police, specifically, to be treated with respect in an honest and fair manner by their organization (Trinkner et al., 2016). This broader concept of procedural justice also needs to be considered in every police policy especially for Polri. While Polri focused on achieving higher legitimacy, they had to think more about their own members as well. A concern from police organizations towards their member demands lead to a more supportive environment and positive outcomes. As the previous studies from Trinkner, et al. (2016) found, a procedurally fair internal police organization correlated with the improvement of police job performance and police relationship with the public. Thus, this internal procedural justice was also an important factor related to police legitimacy.

Historical Culture of Polri

The complexities of Indonesian police-public relations and their characteristics in Indonesia can be traced from its historical context. The archipelago started as a prominent Hindu civilization, where the social structure was divided into castes. Past equivalence of the policing function—in maintaining social order and law enforcement—were conducted by the well known warrior caste (i.e. kshatriya). The kshatriya was considered as an elite class and was well respected by the commoners. Moreover, the caste was responsible for not only police role but also military function—this may have an effect on the later part of history where the police was considered as one of the branches of the armed forces. Polri itself took doctrinal inspiration from the historical king's guard and aggression army the 'Bhayangkara'.

In the following era of Indonesia colonization by western countries, the ruling government established a police force which enlists locals as lower ranked constable while placing their colonial counterparts as the higher ranking officer. The main function of the police force in this era was arguably as a guardian of colonial and capitalist interests. As with modern policing, this police force was often involved in a conflict with the local Indonesians. In addition, the colonization era by the Dutch also led to the normalization of corrupt police practice (Buttle et al., 2016), no tradition of meritocracy, no workable model of police administration, and no trained Indonesian local people for responsible positions (Warwick, 1978, as cited by Quah, 2020). This situation lasted long enough for around three centuries until the Japanese conquest of Asia-Pacific region in World War 2. During the Japanese rule in Indonesia, the police was re-established with an extra role as a military support unit to add to their common police function (Quah, 2020).

After the war for independence and a functioning Republic of Indonesia was formed, the Indonesian police institution which was already referred as Polri had undergone several managerial changes. Historically, Polri had been under both the Ministry of Internal Affairs in administrative context and under Attorney General in operational context, under Prime Minister, under President, and even under Ministry of Defense and Security following the unification of Polri and the military institution known as ABRI. In this ABRI period, Polri's culture changed drastically due to the military influences. Polri was more similar as a military institution rather than a civilian body during 40 years of unification and it was considered dangerous. According to Jefferson as cited by Buttle, et al., (2016) a police organization along military lines might perceive the public as an enemy. Several incidents between police and military versus common people occurred in this period. Polri could not professionally function and be independent because strategic decisions were authorized by the military including the selection of police leaders at all levels (Quah, 2020). Moreover, Polri was weakened by internal conflict and political intervention that led to Polri being subordinate to the military (Muradi, 2014). Fortunately, in August 2000, Polri was fully separated from military institutions as a consequence of a mass public demand for Indonesian reform (Davies et al., 2016).

Through the separation of Polri from the military, the public expected a better and more professional police institution. The formerly militaristic Polri was slowly transforming through a step-by step cultural, instrumental, and structural reforms. The modern Polri is more focused on preventive and persuasive action based on community policing (Buttle, et al., 2016). However, as the organization's paradigm transformed into a more civil and less militaristic state—the long established paramilitary culture still remained. As explained in Indonesia police history and complemented with Polri member doctrination, police function, military culture, and recruitment system, police members might consider themselves as superior to the common citizen. Moreover, since the start of police function in ancient Indonesia until the establishment of Polri, police organization was never born inside the people community (i.e. kin police) but formed in a ruler appointed police which affected that police were more likely to serve the government rather than the people. This fact reaffirms Neocleou's, (2000) opinion that the police, in general, are considered as oppressors which protects private interests and serves as the coercive

arms of the state. In the previous research, Meliala, (2020) argued that Indonesia police were mostly perceived as just an extension of the state. This argument might be a factor that explained the reason of police-public relations discordance and affected the Indonesian police legitimacy. However, it can be observed that even in England police which had been the first role model of modern police organization, a high and low of police legitimacy and public acceptance occurred as well (Lumsden, 2017). Thus, a continuous motivation towards police reform and professionalization should always be present in the never-ending pursuit of legitimacy from the public.

Polri Counter Measure Policy

In general, police leaders supported efforts of policing reforms in preference for a more effective trust-building campaign and to encourage the acceptance of police authority by the public (Tyler, 2021). Likewise, the current Chief of Polri since 2021 has launched a policing program called Polri Presisi (later modified as Quick Wins Presisi) to optimize the efforts of regaining public approval—which leads to an increase in police legitimacy. Several police fields of work that had a higher rate of police-public encounters experienced a major change in their approach.

Police Investigation

Police procedural reaction to a person reporting crime is thought to shape people's views about fairness and their desired justice (Tyler as cited by Prinsloo, 2019). In the subject of police investigation, Polri required their investigators to accept every police report. The policy was initiated as a response to public complaints—which stated that the police often reject or avoid criminal reports by using several types of excuses (e.g. lack of evidence, out of local jurisdiction, claims of not having the investigative capabilities on certain cases, etc.). These excuses pose a threat to police legitimacy as the common public would initially have high expectations toward crime responses from the police. It should be noted that through this policy, the police would be able to access a broader range of information about criminal activities in their community. Said data would contribute to the identification of patterns, trends, and potential hotspots, which would enable a more effective deployment of resources and targeted crime prevention efforts. Moreover, by accepting all reports, the police may reduce the risk of discouraging individuals from reporting crimes—often attributed to a fear of rejection or lack of belief in the police's willingness to act. This can help prevent underreporting, promoting trust from the public, and ensuring a more accurate representation of the crime situation in the community.

However, the acceptance of every crime report without proper assessment could result in the allocation of resources towards cases that may not require immediate attention or may not even be within the jurisdiction of the police. The workload of police investigators becomes heavier with the increasing number of incoming police reports as well (Adhikara and Earlyanti, 2022). This may potentially hinder the police's ability to prioritize and focus on cases with higher urgency or those that pose a greater threat to public safety. Moreover, it could also

increase the likelihood of false or misleading reports being filed that resulted in wasted police resources, false accusations, and potential harm to innocent individuals. Which would eventually contribute to the decline of public trust—forming a perception that the police are ineffective in distinguishing between genuine and false reports. This argument is supported by prior research findings which discovered that some public crime reports were forced to be accepted by police even though it actually cannot be approved (Adhikara and Earlyanti, 2022). Forced crime reports are often linked to people's motivation in making police reports. In this regard, some people might use the somewhat faulted investigation process in order to gain certain benefits.

It was argued that police crime report rejection was actually a coping mechanism of police investigative performance evaluation. Most police departments in regard to law enforcement, supervised and evaluated their subordinates by using criminal statistic number, commonly by crime clearance percentage (i.e. comparison between the number of crime clearance and crime total in percentage) (Adhikara and Earlyanti, 2022). This is problematic when considering that nationally, Polri's calculation of total crime is a derivation from the number of police reports submitted. In short, a higher number of police reports lead to a lower crime clearance percentage. While Polri struggled to improve their performance to achieve a better number of crime clearance, they tried to press the number of crime total instead by minimizing police report acceptances.

Another Polri's policy in police investigation involved a more responsive action for every case with a high public attention. Nowadays with a large number of social media users in Indonesia, critics of police investigation were mostly voiced online. A growing number of police investigation stories went viral and police investigators were receiving virtual judgement by the public. In some cases, this type of scrutiny was able to expose police investigator misconduct and managed to push the public participation in monitoring the investigation process (e.g. see the homicide case of the aide to the Chief of Polri Internal Affairs and the child persecution committed by the son of a tax official). Yet, other cases were posted in a subjective-one sided view, creating a public opinion that blamed the police. In the latter, even if in the following assessment found that there is no evidence of police misconduct, public opinion were already formed and therefore threatening police legitimacy (e.g. see the cases of rape by a father to his daughter in Luwu Timur and rape by a police to his step daughter in Cirebon). All in all, the public demanded extra attention from police investigators for their own interests by making viral their version of the story.

Nevertheless, it has to be realized by the general public that Polri's investigative resources are limited—particularly their budget and availability of investigators. As the World Bank statement cited by Quah (2020), even for writing arrest warrants, officials should provide pens and paper themselves. Previous Chief of Polri stated that in 2015 the investigation budget only provided funding for about 36% of the total case (Quah, 2020). Thus, efficiency in managing police investigations are crucial to ensure optimum benefit for the wide public. Commonly the investigations were focused only on certain cases that had gained subjective notice by the lead investigators or heads of the investigating unit. Polri could not

handle every reported case in the same manner. Some could also argue that under current circumstances, Polri's investigative actions were already considered over-performed. Following the prior argument, a shift of Polri's investigative priorities toward viral cases was actually diminishing Polri attention in other cases. This could probably divert Polri away from other—more serious and more urgent—cases that go unnoticed by the public.

Traffic Police

In October 2022, following a high number of public complaints on corruption within traffic law enforcement, Polri recalled all of the conventional traffic ticketing activity. Paper-based ticketing was then fully replaced with the Electronic Traffic Law Enforcement (ETLE) system, reducing human encounters of the traffic police with the public significantly. All traffic police activity in regard of law enforcement must be through the ETLE system including detection, identification, issue, ticket delivery, and online traffic fine (Nugraha, 2022). Traffic police officers were ordered to conduct a more persuasive approach through public traffic education.

Nugraha (2022) examined the implementation of the aforementioned policy. The research, conducted in Klaten Subregional Police Department discovered a lack of effectiveness in ETLE, for instance: a highly cost (resulted in a limitation of the tickets amount), inappropriate tools and program (e.g. not using an Automated Number Plate Recognition, identification and registration not runned by automated program but human, not linked with vehicle and driver registration data, and no data storage) and high uncovered area (only 6 from a total of 100 area). Moreover, ETLE implementation resulted in decreasing the number of traffic tickets and public traffic compliance while the number of traffic accidents increased drastically (Nugraha, 2022).

Although Nugraha's research findings might be different when replicated in another area, it showed that not every police department was quite ready with ETLE. The use of ETLE in Indonesia which was still in an early development phase was not effective and efficient as a nationwide police program. Finally, in May 2023, ETLE program was again complemented with conventional ticketing activity, allowing every certified traffic police officer to take an action in direct traffic law enforcement.

Latest policy on traffic police function involved an overhaul of the notoriously difficult driver's license road test. The change was initiated by the current chief of Polri in response to the public voice that said the test was too hard. The chief of Polri also gave a statement that the test in particular the zig-zag and figure 8 motion were extremely difficult and those who passed the test are as skillful as circus performers (Kompas, 2023). Later, the driving track changed into an easier one and gained wide praise by the public, which was also followed by an increase in applicant's passing rate. However, there is currently no known feasibility study which has been used to measure or compare the effectiveness of the new driving test layout.

Pro-Social Activity

As a means to enhance public satisfaction and in support of central government programs, Polri is regularly involved in many pro-social activities. Some of which were argued as not a part of Polri's core function and contributed to widening the scope of police public service. One of the most notable pro-social activities occurred during covid pandemic in 2020 when Polri took a proactive role in the mass vaccination program. Polri HQ at the time set a number targets for every regional police department and ranked their performance based on vaccination accomplishment. This pattern was furthermore adopted by the regional departments towards their sub-departments and so on. Eventually, forcing the police to take every necessary option to persuade people to be vaccinated, for instance, by offering rewards for participants in the form of basic goods such as cooking oil or sacks of rice. The unorthodox approach was indeed deemed as successful, as Indonesia is recognised to have performed gloriously in their vaccination efforts and Polri was one of the agencies to whom the success was attributed to.

Another similar unconventional role assigned to Polri was related to the prevention of stunting or child malnourishment. Likewise, it was initially a central government program of which Polri was instructed to provide the necessary support. In this regard, Polri was involved through the provision of qualified doctors from their medical division to help provide access to healthcare, especially in remote areas. Moreover, on certain occasions, a police officer would receive instructions to distribute food and nutritional supplements (e.g. infant milk, vitamins, pregnancy supplement, etc.) to those in need.

Internal Reforms

Not only a change of policing method in police-public encounters, Polri also implemented several reforms in their organization especially on the basic welfare of their police officers. Polri launched a number of programs, for instance: increasing access to psychological counseling, basic housing programs, improvement of Polri-owned health facilities, entrepreneurial training for police retirees, and many more. However, the portion of concern towards officers' welfare shown by top Polri executives was considered minute when contrasted with the demands inferred upon them. In addition to their daily policing duties, a high number of ad hoc programs are expected to be executed—including the above mentioned pro-social activity and other tasks that may be considered too distant from conventional policing (e.g. reforestation program, charity programs targeting senior citizens and cop retirees, out-duty services to senior police or other important figures, etc.).

On the other hand, police member needs on their self actualization through job transfer and promotion were less concerned. Polri current human resource management policy increased the possibility of certain intervention that threatened transparency and fairness. For instance, there was a high number of special quotas that occurred in every Polri promotional education program that could be given to certain police members selected by Polri higher ups. The obscurity of special quota qualification was considered hampering the career of the police. To some extent, police members even felt that their involvement in Polri promotional education entry test was useless without superior's backup.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study conducted a systematic literature review in order to consider the implications on police legitimacy and procedural justice. Prior to this study, a literature search found that there has been a few of academic research discussing the legitimacy of Indonesian policing approach. A broaden searches beyond Indonesian policing were later conducted as an additional insight in context of police legitimacy. The search for relevant studies were based on the topic of “police legitimacy”, “procedural justice”, and “Indonesian police”. The following electronic database were searched for this review: Emerald, Sage, Springer, Taylor and Francis. Several thesis and journals written by Indonesian police practitioner also included as literature in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Manifesting a fully trusted police institution remained an everlasting pursuit for Polri—which is reasonable when we also consider the organization’s established culture and the heavy burdens of long-inscribed negative perception towards the police. Consequently, Polri's best effort was hardly rewarded while even a miniscule of mistake would risk invoking heavy punishment from the public. The current public approval survey pattern showed that Polri’s decline due to sporadic negative issues has a far more significant impact. This argument was supported by previous studies stated that a poor handled police-public encounter resulted to a stronger negative effect while a good encounter would only resulted to a small positive impact, yet, police can only do little to improve public opinion regardless of police behaviour (Tyler, 1990; Loader, 1997; Waddington, 1999; Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Skogan, 2006; Jackson and Sunshine, 2007; Jackson et al., 2012; Davies, et al., 2014).

The situation was even worse following the public cynicism to the police. Unhealthy relationships between the police and public led to the extreme conviction that every police intention is inherently bad (Meliala, 2001). Cynics are observed to express their views either through an online platform or by filing a report to National Police Commission (Kopolnas), Ombudsman, Human Rights Commission (Komnas HAM), and other NGOs. Polri responded to this public cynicism by experimenting with several means of populist policing approach. The institution’s extreme sensitivity towards public approval polls, obsessive strive for the ideal police persona, and focussed on police action with instant-public reward indicated this type of policing (Meliala, 2023). In this regard, Polri’s executives are seen to prefer to avoid even the smallest public disturbances—which they saw as a failure of police performance.

Unfortunately, a populist policing approach is not necessarily the best option, and it risks triggering some negative outcomes for the institution, such as: an idle law enforcement, absence of public order and public compliance, injustice toward minorities, failure to assert police authority, which eventually could lead to state failure (Meliala, 2023). In addition, Meliala (2023) also stressed the notion

that police are not politicians—as they did not need popularity. The drawbacks of populist policing could also be evaluated from moral values. For instance, in police investigation, with the ease of making reports, the public tended to use the law as a primary tool for problem solving (Adhikara and Earlyanti, 2022), thus neglecting the local wisdom which prioritizes consensus in matters of problem solving. Moreover, some crime reports were forced to be accepted by police even though the cause of rejection was reasonable. As an alternative policy, Polri needs to stricken their criminal reporting process by setting a minimum evidence requirement and guidelines—constructed by the central CID. Establish clear protocols and guidelines for officers to follow during the crime reporting process includes guidelines on how to interact with victims, witnesses, and suspects in a respectful and unbiased manner through proper investigative interview techniques (Adhikara, 2022). Therefore, it could help the police to ease their burdens of crime investigation while minimizing fake or forced crime reports.

Another examples in the context of traffic policing were discussed as follow. First, the sole implementation of the ETLE as means of ticketing. The policy, however, had already been canceled and the conventional direct ticketing is now back in operation. Before then, the use of ETLE was favoured by the public due to its low ability of traffic law enforcement caused by inappropriate tools and limited area of coverage (Nugraha, 2022). The previous ETLE policy eventually leads to a higher number of traffic violations which was not morally justified by causing harm or even a risk of traffic accidents. As a substitute to said policy, Polri may utilize the body worn cameras (BWCs) on traffic police alongside its conventional direct ticketing through a proper feasibility study (Putranto, 2022). The prior use of technology in policing method should improve the perceptions of procedural justice and traffic police legitimacy (Demir, et al., 2018). In this regard, the focus on traffic police behaviour that showed fairness and transparency were important as they are the most important factor in Indonesia public perceptions of police (Davies, et al., 2014) – being the force of whom the public mostly encounters. Second, in the new layout of the driving license practical test, Polri should prioritize its ability to test the driver skill rather than to make the test easier as it was what the people want. This was important considering a driving license is a proof of ability or competency of a person through a proper and reliable test, eventually, correlated to Indonesia’s road safety. Therefore, a feasibility study is needed before any form of implementation.

Polri should also be more focused on their core business, thus, every pro-social activity had to be based on their constitutionally assigned tasks and duties—while not overlapping another institution or ministry’s function. While many people appreciated Polri’s pro-social activity, it should be understood that those tasks are not directly relevant to basic police authority. A dissertation from Putranto (2020) noted on how Polri have spread their roles too thin, taking over the many functions of other agencies and ministries (e.g. education, healthcare, etc.) and branding them as a type of ‘innovation’. Most of these Police departments had argued that such approaches are necessary to maintain the local stability and security—in a wider sense. The *raison d’être* is simply as follows, that a stable access to public goods, education, and healthcare, would lead to a better quality of life. Furthermore, a

better quality of life would make people less likely to resort to criminal activities as a means to fulfill their daily needs—which in some sense would benefit the public security.

In this context, police public service need to be placed as the top priority rather than other irrelevant pro-social activity held by Polri (e.g. vaccination, stunting prevention, art and music event, sport event, ceremonial event, etc.) as it was found to not positively resulting towards a long lasting police legitimacy. It is also noteworthy that even positive police-public encounters might only have a limited impact on improving public opinion. This observation, as supported by previous studies, suggests that while positive interactions are important, they may not be sufficient to shift public perception significantly. This reality stems from the complex interplay of historical factors, cultural norms, and the weight of negative incidents. This presents a unique challenge for Polri. While they can certainly strive to create positive interactions with the public, they must also recognize that a broader strategy encompassing transparency, accountability, community engagement, and cultural sensitivity is required to create a lasting impact on police legitimacy. Moreover, Polri's additional tasks in pro-social activity might increase police workload and affect their health and working capability (Santa Maria, et al., 2018). Pro-social activity also reduced the number of police members available to perform their primary task; which led to reducing the ability of units to carry out their task and affected police self-job satisfaction (Kumar, 2017). Nevertheless, Polri human resources must then be used wisely so that police extra-role were not considered a burden to them, allowing a better physical and emotional condition of police members individually to exercise their main duty.

In addition, the use of the Polri budget in pro-social activity had to be well managed to avoid potential corruption in its fundraising. As the previous research from Buttle, et al., (2016) found, in order to fund policing activities, Polri tends to seek outside financial assistance from powerful people and organizations—which would potentially co-opt the police to their own interests in the future. Or as stated by Quah (2020), to meet the shortfall of state budget, police organization might: (1) cross-subsidies the existing budget by re-allocation from subordinate police organization budget to a higher organization, (2) rely on the operational reserve fund (i.e. Dukops) from provincial police, city, or district level police organization, or worst (3) accept donations from people involved in criminal activity. Eventually, it would be an irony when pro-social activities initiated by Polri were actually funded from illicit police action which contradicts basic moral decency.

Instead of refocusing their resources towards temporary societal recognition exhibited through populist policing, this institution needs to realize the urgency of establishing ethics training for their officers—as it plays a vital role in shaping their daily conduct, professional mannerisms, and interactions with the public. As law enforcement is considered the cornerstone of any just society, ensuring that officers uphold high ethical standards is essential for building trust, maintaining order, and protecting citizen's rights. Ethical training programs would serve to equip officers with the knowledge, values, and skills necessary to navigate complex situations while adhering to the principles of integrity, fairness, and respect for human rights. With focus on code of conduct that defines the expectations for police behavior,

officers can understand their duty to uphold the law without bias. This may lead into the understanding of proportional and justified use of force to ensure they only employ force when it is necessary and with the utmost restraint. A well-designed ethical training program not only equips officers with the necessary knowledge and skills; but also sends a strong message to the public about the police force's commitment to transparency, accountability, and respect for individual rights. In this journey towards a more legitimate and trusted police force, sustained investment in ethical training, coupled with ongoing evaluation and adaptation, will be essential. As officers embody the principles they learn through ethical training in their daily interactions, they have the potential to transform the relationship between the police and the public. Ultimately, a police force grounded in ethical values becomes a cornerstone of societal progress, ensuring safety, justice, and the protection of fundamental human rights for all citizens.

Furthermore, Polri's current reforms come from senior management and their success depend on police line officers' motivation to implement it (Skogan, 2008; Trinkner, et al., 2016). Therefore, Polri also needs to ensure internal procedural justice to maintain their officer's motivation. While their police's basic needs were already improved, the uncertainty of the Polri merit system as it was shown in promotional education tests should be re-considered. Every test participant needs to be treated in the same manner. Hence, equal opportunity for all police members were guaranteed. Fair treatment of Polri's human resources could go a long way. Making sure the application of internal procedural justice might change the climate within the police department. Thus, it created a more efficient police organization, ensured a happier police officer, and supported police member self-legitimacy (Trinkner, et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

Evaluation of a 470,000-strong organization should not only depend on subjective poll numbers, instead, it has to be realized that carrying the job of the police does not come with the requirement of public support or being in line with public opinion. When both are in conflict, Polri should have the courage to take a stand on a morally just action—while having the guts to stand up against the public with their argumentative rationale. Ethical legitimacy should be the backbone for Polri's policies. The public would consider police power as legitimate if they perceived that the police actions were in line with the moral framework of society (Hough, et al., 2010; Jackson, et al., 2012; Debbaut and Kimpe, 2023). Moreover, a polite, fair, and equal treatment of service during police-public encounters based on procedural justice needs to be applied as it was found more influential in shaping public support for police in Indonesia (Davies, et al., 2014).

Polri's Public Relations Division had to be the frontline actor and conducted a proactive approach to educate and disclose Polri's policies to the public. The use of media, especially social media, were not only limited as a broadcast channel but also as a multi-ways communication tool (Fielding, 2023). Any officer serving within the scope of public relations should have a capability to argue in an open debate while also receiving feedbacks from the general public. Police legitimacy

improved when people were able to express their viewpoint on the Polri decision (Debbaut and Kimpe, 2023). Polri's decisions towards counter-argumentations in society involve a delicate balance between maintaining public order and respecting citizen's rights. Navigating this balance requires careful consideration of legal frameworks, democratic principles, and community engagement. By making decisions that prioritize public safety, uphold democratic values, and promote peaceful resolution, Polri can contribute to a society where diverse voices are heard, rights are protected, and disagreements are managed without resorting to violence or repression.

Police members individually also need to convince themselves of their legitimacy in power and attribute themselves as a distinguished identity from ordinary people (Debbaut and Kimpe, 2023). In this regard, police members were challenged to be able to position themselves wisely during police-public encounters. A balanced belief in the moral justice of police member authority increased the chance of a procedurally just manner of action (Bradford and Quinton 2014; Tankebe 2018; Debbaut and Kimpe, 2023). Likewise, Polri's internal procedural justice needs to be improved by removing certain policies that are against organizational fairness and transparency. This approach will eventually support individual police members to maintain their motivation in executing police organizational programs.

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