

# The Strategy for Preventing Police Misconduct through a Human-Centered Policing Approach

Submitted 12 February 2026, Revised 7 April 2026, Accepted 11 April 2026, Published 24 April 2026

Bachtiar<sup>1</sup>, Iman Imanuddin<sup>2</sup>, Agus Salim<sup>3</sup>, Rino Dedi Aringga<sup>4</sup>, Agung Arafat Saputra<sup>5</sup>, Rifkhan<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup>Faculty of Law, University of Pamulang, Banten, Indonesia

<sup>6</sup>Study Program of Management, University of Pamulang, Banten, Indonesia

Email Corresponding Author: [dosen00938@unpam.ac.id](mailto:dosen00938@unpam.ac.id)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35879/jik.v20i1.715>

## Abstract

Public trust constitutes the primary foundation of the legitimacy of police institutions in democratic states. In Indonesia, a series of cases involving personal misconduct by members of the Indonesian National Police (Polri) throughout 2025, including serious criminal offenses and incidents that generated negative public opinion, indicate that institutional delegitimization is more frequently driven by the behavior of law enforcement personnel than by weaknesses in formal regulatory frameworks. This article aims to analyze the impact of personal misconduct on the legitimacy of the Polri institution and to propose a human-centered policing approach as a strategy for preventing misconduct and restoring legitimacy. The research employs a normative juridical method with conceptual and sociological approaches. Data were collected through a targeted review of statutory regulations, academic literature, and police policy documents, particularly internal oversight and public complaint data, and were evaluated using thematic analysis. Consequently, the conceptual and policy analysis indicates that police legitimacy depends not only on formal legal authority but, more importantly, on moral integrity, ethical compliance, and public trust. The human-centered policing approach positions police personnel as human subjects with psychological, social, and moral complexities, thereby emphasizing personnel development, early detection mechanisms, and welfare support as proactive strategies to prevent personal misconduct. When implemented consistently, this approach not only strengthens internal legitimacy and institutional integrity but also builds a sustainable foundation of public trust, ultimately fostering a police institution that is professional, accountable, and democratic.

**Keywords:** police legitimacy, public trust, personal misconduct, human-centered policing

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## INTRODUCTION

Public trust constitutes the primary foundation of the legitimacy of law enforcement institutions in democratic states. In the context of policing, legitimacy does not solely derive from formal legal authority, but is primarily shaped by public perceptions of moral integrity, professionalism, and procedural fairness in the performance of service, protection, and law enforcement functions (Tyler, 2017). When public trust in the police declines, social compliance weakens, conflict intensifies, and law enforcement becomes less effective (Bradford et al., 2014; Tyler & Jackson, 2013).

Throughout 2025, a series of high-profile incidents involving personal misconduct by members of the Indonesian National Police (Polri) triggered a significant legitimacy shock in the public sphere. This study

identifies at least seven serious cases, ranging from fatal violence arising from personal disputes to extortion and abuse of authority for private financial gain. These cases were mapped through systematic media monitoring and then cross-checked against public court proceedings and oversight records of the Police Code of Ethics Commission (KKEP). Their gravity is further corroborated by official institutional oversight data. According to the 2025 Public Complaint Management (Dumas) report, the internal oversight function recorded 8,833 formal responses to community grievances (Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia (Polri), 2025). The convergence of widespread negative media sentiment and high internal reporting volumes indicates that institutional delegitimization is increasingly driven by moral and behavioral failures at the operational level rather than by the mere absence of formal regulation.

Although juridically all such incidents are classified as individual acts of the perpetrators, sociologically, the public never separates individual Polri members from the institution they represent. Police officers are perceived not merely as ordinary citizens, but as symbols of the state and representations of legal authority. Studies on the symbolic representation of policing show that every action taken by police officers tends to be generalized as a reflection of the institution as a whole (Tankebe, 2013). In the social imagination of Indonesian society, police officers are often positioned as figures held to higher moral standards, such that the personal failure of an individual officer can easily be transformed into a crisis of institutional legitimacy.

This phenomenon is not unprecedented. Public experience surrounding the murder of Brigadier Yosua Hutabarat by his superior in 2022 illustrates how a single instance of personal misconduct can produce systemic consequences for Polri's institutional legitimacy (Kompas.id, 2023). National survey data from that period indicate a decline in public trust in Polri to approximately 50–55 percent, marking the lowest level recorded in the previous decade (Indikator Politik Indonesia, 2022). The subsequent stigmatization of police officers under the label “Sambo” reflects a process of social generalization stemming from the institution's failure to prevent, detect, and address personal misconduct among its members at an early stage (Polri, 2022).

The series of criminal cases involving Polri personnel in 2025 reveals recurring patterns that warrant serious attention. First, the types of crimes committed constitute serious offenses with broad social impacts. Second, the motives are personal and banal in nature, which in fact indicate weak self-control, psychological resilience, and internalization of ethical values among officers. Third, the viral nature of these cases in the digital public sphere accelerates the formation of negative public opinion that Polri has failed to effectively carry out internal guidance and supervision functions. In this context, personal misconduct by Polri members has a far greater destructive impact on legitimacy than procedural errors in law enforcement.

Normatively, Polri has established relatively adequate regulatory instruments, ranging from the Police Professional Code of Ethics and disciplinary regulations to mechanisms of criminal accountability through the general court system. However, the repeated occurrence of personal misconduct culminating in criminal acts indicates a serious gap between norms and practice. The core problem no longer lies in the absence of rules, but in the weakness of early prevention systems, human-centered personnel development, and oversight of the personal and psychosocial dimensions of police officers (Prenzler & Porter, 2015).

Within contemporary policing scholarship, crises of public trust are predominantly examined through the analytical frameworks of procedural justice, community policing, and structural institutional reform. However, scholarly inquiries that explicitly conceptualize the prevention of personal misconduct among police officers as a constitutive prerequisite of institutional legitimacy remain comparatively underdeveloped (Neyroud & Weisburd, 2014). In societal contexts marked by elevated moral expectations toward law enforcement personnel, failure to prevent personal misconduct plays a decisive role in eroding public trust.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this article is directed at addressing two main legal issues. First, why does personal misconduct by Polri members have a significant impact on institutional legitimacy and public trust in Polri within a democratic state context? Second, how a human-centered policing approach can be constructed as a framework for preventing personal misconduct among Polri members in order to restore eroded legitimacy and public trust.

This article addresses a critical gap in the existing literature by formulating Human-Centered Policing as a proactive prevention strategy. While established frameworks such as procedural justice and democratic

policing primarily focus on external interaction standards with the public, and police wellness models often remain confined to clinical mental health, there remains no integrated strategy that addresses officers as complex psychosocial and moral subjects. Unlike organizational justice, which centers on internal fairness and resource distribution, Human-Centered Policing bridges these domains by shifting the institutional paradigm from reactive-punitive oversight to an integrated system of early detection, psychosocial support, and continuous moral development. By positioning officers as human subjects with inherent vulnerabilities, this approach offers a more holistic and sustainable basis for restoring and maintaining institutional legitimacy in a democratic context.

From a state-of-the-art standpoint, scholarly research on policing, both at the international level and within the Indonesian context, has predominantly concentrated on structural reforms of police institutions, the enforcement of professional ethical codes, the strengthening of internal and external oversight mechanisms, and the implementation of paradigms such as procedural justice, community policing, and democratic policing. Within this body of scholarship, police legitimacy is commonly conceptualized as an outcome of legal compliance, procedural fairness, and the quality of public service delivery. In contrast, public trust is positioned as a foundational prerequisite for the effective exercise of law enforcement authority.

Several influential studies, particularly those developed by Tyler and Jackson (2013), emphasize that police legitimacy is shaped more by public moral perceptions of fairness, neutrality, and officer integrity than by coercive power or the threat of sanctions. Within this framework, police behavior becomes a key variable shaping public trust and compliance. Nevertheless, these studies focus mainly on police-community interactions in public spaces and the procedural dimensions of law enforcement, and they do not specifically position personal misconduct by officers as a strategic issue in the construction of institutional legitimacy.

On the other hand, literature on police reform and democratization, as articulated by Bayley (2001), demonstrates that failures in democratic policing often stem from cultural factors and officer behavior rather than solely from institutional design or regulatory completeness. However, in many studies, personal misconduct by police officers continues to be treated as an individual deviation addressed through disciplinary mechanisms, codes of ethics, and criminal law enforcement (Basyarudin & Kurniawan, 2021; Jumadi et al., 2025), without being deeply linked to crises of police institutional legitimacy in the eyes of the public. A similar pattern also appears in academic analyses of Polri within the Indonesian context. Ethical violations and criminal acts committed by Polri members are generally examined through frameworks of legal accountability, the effectiveness of internal oversight, or disciplinary enforcement performance. While important, this approach tends to be reactive and sanction-oriented (Basyarudin & Kurniawan, 2021), and it has not yet positioned the prevention of personal misconduct (Setiawan et al., 2024) as an integral part of strategies to restore public trust and strengthen Polri's institutional legitimacy as a democratic institution.

Based on this gap, the present study offers a conceptual contribution by positioning the prevention of personal misconduct among Polri members not merely as an issue of internal discipline, but as a fundamental prerequisite for police legitimacy and the restoration of public trust. Through a human-centered policing approach, this study shifts the focus of analysis from repressive responses to violations toward preventive strategies based on humane personnel development, management of officers' psychological and social vulnerabilities, and the strengthening of internal institutional legitimacy. In doing so, this study enriches policing scholarship in Indonesia by directly linking the personal dimensions of officers, institutional legitimacy, and public trust within the framework of democratic policing.

The novelty of this article resides in its analytical reorientation from punitive and enforcement-centered responses to misconduct by Polri members toward a preventive and human-centered developmental framework, namely Human-Centered Policing. Rather than treating personal misconduct solely as a matter of legal or ethical transgression, this study conceptualizes such misconduct as an issue of institutional legitimacy and public trust with systemic implications for police institutions. Accordingly, the prevention of personal misconduct is positioned as a strategic pillar of the Polri reform agenda and the broader project of democratic policing. By adopting the concept of Human-Centered Policing, this article advances the discourse by framing police officers not merely as law enforcers, but as human subjects with psychological, social, and moral complexities that require continuous development and sustained institutional support. Consequently, this research asks a fundamental question: how can Polri move beyond reactive oversight toward a preventive

model that addresses the root causes of personal misconduct? By redefining the officer not merely as a legal instrument but as a human subject, this study explores the dimensions of Human-Centered Policing as the next frontier for Indonesian police reform.

## DISCUSSION

### Police Legitimacy and Public Trust in Democratic States

In democratic states, police legitimacy does not rest solely on formal legal authority conferred by law, but is largely determined by social acceptance and the level of public trust in the institution. From the perspective of the sociology of law, legitimacy is understood as a condition in which society perceives the authority of law enforcement officers as valid, worthy of compliance, and deserving of trust, not because of the threat of sanctions, but because of normative and moral convictions about law enforcement institutions (Sesaningrum et al., 2025; Tyler & Jackson, 2013). Accordingly, legitimacy constitutes a living and dynamic social relationship, constructed through repeated interactions between law enforcement officers and the public rather than merely a static juridical construct.

Weber (2002) distinguishes three principal types of legitimate authority: traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal. Modern policing formally operates within the framework of rational-legal legitimacy, namely authority derived from law, formal procedures, and institutional mandates. However, contemporary research demonstrates that rational-legal legitimacy alone is insufficient to ensure effective policing, particularly in critical and participatory democratic societies. Bottoms and Tankebe (2012) emphasize the concept of dialogic legitimacy, namely legitimacy that is dynamic and continuously negotiated through everyday practices, officers' behavior, and institutional responses to public expectations. When moral and normative dimensions weaken, the exercise of coercive authority risks generating resistance, delegitimization, and escalation of social conflict. Within this framework, legitimacy is not something inherently possessed by institutions, but something that must be built, maintained, and sustained through consistent social interaction.

Furthermore, contemporary scholarship on modern policing underscores that institutional legitimacy is also contingent upon the moral, normative, and ethical dimensions of police personnel. Tyler and Huo (2002) demonstrate that public compliance with and support for the police are shaped more decisively by perceptions of procedural justice, neutrality, and officers' moral integrity than by the deterrent effects of legal sanctions. When these moral and normative dimensions deteriorate, for example, through personal misconduct, lack of transparency, or discriminatory practices, the exercise of coercive authority is likely to generate public resistance, processes of delegitimization, and, in some cases, the escalation of social conflict. This argument is further substantiated by Tankebe and Liebling's (2013) findings, which suggest that legitimacy crises frequently stem not from deficiencies in formal legal frameworks, but from institutional failures to sustain moral and ethical conduct among officers in practice.

Policing institutions are therefore expected not only to adhere to formal procedural requirements, but also to actively cultivate moral authority and public trust. Empirical studies by Jackson et al. (2012) demonstrate that officer conduct aligned with institutional ethical values and integrity directly shapes public perceptions, thereby enabling the preservation of legitimacy even in circumstances where coercive authority must be exercised. Conversely, normative violations committed by Polri members, including abuse of power, personal criminal conduct, or corrupt practices, may precipitate a legitimacy shock with systemic consequences for the institution.

Accordingly, rational-legal legitimacy should be viewed as a formal foundation, while dialogic legitimacy, moral integrity, and public trust function as decisive elements for the success of democratic policing. Modern policing, particularly in democratic states such as Indonesia, needs to emphasize a balance between formal legal authority and social legitimacy built through ethical conduct, transparency, and responsive interaction with the public. This perspective opens space for strategies aimed at preventing personal misconduct among Polri members as a prerequisite for sustaining institutional legitimacy over time.

The legitimacy of the police institution is not perpetually guaranteed by its formal statutory authority; rather, it is continually negotiated through public perception of officers' conduct. When public attention is drawn to illustrative incidents of severe personal misconduct, it triggers a disproportionate impact on public trust. It is crucial to emphasize that these incidents do not necessarily indicate a total collapse of institutional authority. Instead, they create a 'legitimacy shock.' As these isolated behavioral failures are amplified by media discourse, they reshape collective perception, leading the public to question the moral integrity of the institution as a whole. Therefore, current institutional delegitimation is primarily driven by the cumulative psychological impact of individual misconduct, rather than systemic regulatory failure.

Public compliance with the law is shaped more by perceptions of procedural justice, officer neutrality, and moral integrity than by fear of sanctions (Tyler & Jackson, 2013). Low levels of public trust reduce community cooperation, increase social tension, and weaken law enforcement effectiveness (Bradford et al., 2014). Meta-analytic evidence likewise demonstrates a robust association between procedural justice and police legitimacy, which in turn shapes public trust and support for legal authorities even across different social contexts and group identities (Mazerolle et al., 2013). Research in Bekasi found that subjective experiences of fairness, responsiveness, and negative emotions in police encounters contribute to public distrust and affect community participation in the legal system (Sesaningrum et al., 2025). In Bandung, positive perceptions of Polri's role in maintaining security remained contingent on service performance and the quality of police-community relations (Zulganef & Nilasari, 2022).

Other studies also find that public trust in police institutions in Indonesia depends not only on formal performance indicators but also on perceptions of value, integrity, and procedural transparency. Research on transparency in investigative processes emphasizes that institutional openness in conducting legal procedures can enhance public trust (Salwani, 2024). Consistent with these findings, studies examining declining public trust in Polri's performance as a challenge to the implementation of good policing governance show that cases of officer misconduct, including moral and legal violations, negatively affect public trust and perceptions of institutional legitimacy (Azahwa et al., 2025).

Moreover, empirical research on the effectiveness of policing programs, including community policing initiatives, demonstrates that efforts aimed at strengthening police community cooperation, such as mechanisms to enhance police–community relations and procedural justice training, contribute to increased public trust and greater social participation in addressing urban security challenges (Farid, 2025). In this regard, public trust functions as a form of social capital that enables policing institutions to exercise coercive authority in a restrained yet legitimate manner, as communities characterized by higher levels of trust tend to exhibit greater cooperation and responsiveness to the implementation of legal policies.

The relevance of these theories becomes particularly evident in the Indonesian context. Throughout 2025, events such as the handling of demonstrations perceived as repressive, the death of civilian Affan Kurniawan, and seven serious criminal cases involving Polri members illustrate how institutional legitimacy can erode not due to the absence of a legal basis, but because of the collapse of public trust (Saputra et al., 2024; Sesaningrum et al., 2025). These cases demonstrate the effect of legitimacy shock, whereby personal misconduct by Polri members suddenly undermines public confidence in the institution. This phenomenon aligns with Tankebe and Liebling's (2013) analysis, which holds that legitimacy crises are often triggered by institutional failure to control officers' moral behavior rather than by weak formal regulation.

Within Indonesia's sociological setting, Polri occupies a symbolic position that is deeply embedded in everyday social life. Police officers are not perceived merely as individual executors of assigned tasks, but rather as representations of the state and the public embodiment of law within public spaces. As a result, the personal conduct of Polri members, although legally classified as individual actions, is consistently interpreted by the public as reflective of the institution as a whole. Both international and national studies indicate that in contexts characterized by fragile public trust, society tends to engage in institutional generalization in response to instances of officer misconduct (Salwani, 2024; Zulganef et al., 2024).

These empirical facts confirm the theoretical thesis that police legitimacy in democratic states is highly dependent on public trust built through the integrity of officers' behavior. In the absence of such trust, the

legal authority of Polri loses its social foundation, thereby rendering law enforcement practices vulnerable to deepening legitimacy crises. Accordingly, the prevention of personal misconduct among Polri members must be regarded as a strategic issue integral to institutional legitimacy rather than merely a matter of internal discipline or post hoc sanction enforcement (Azahwa et al., 2025). By prioritizing the prevention of personal misconduct, Polri can strengthen internal legitimacy while simultaneously building a sustainable foundation of public trust. This approach encourages a transformation of officers' conduct from mere formal compliance toward genuine moral integrity manifested in everyday interactions with the public. Ultimately, such proactive strategies not only mitigate the risks of delegitimization but also enhance the effectiveness of democratic policing, fostering a police institution that is professional, accountable, and trusted by society.

### **Personal Misconduct by Polri Members as a Factor of Institutional Delegitimization**

Personal misconduct by members of Polri has a profound impact on institutional legitimacy, far more significant than legal violations committed by ordinary civilians. This is closely related to the symbolic position of police officers as representatives of the state and guardians of public morality. In social perceptions, the police are not merely individuals performing assigned duties, but are viewed as personifications of the values of law, order, and justice that ought to be upheld. Consequently, the ethical standards and moral expectations attached to Polri members are inherently higher than those imposed on citizens in general (Azahwa, Fitri, and Wijaya, 2025).

When a Polri member commits a serious criminal offense, such as murder, sexual violence, or crimes motivated by economic factors, the public almost invariably interprets the incident as a manifestation of systemic institutional failure rather than as an isolated individual lapse. Public responses tend to generalize the deviant conduct of a single officer as representative of the institution as a whole, thereby producing collective stigmatization of Polri. This dynamic is clearly reflected in societal reactions to the murder of Brigadier Yosua Hutabarat, as well as to the series of seven criminal cases involving Polri members throughout 2025. In each of these instances, the public perceived that the institution had failed to fulfill its functions of personnel development, supervision, and internal control, resulting in a direct erosion of institutional legitimacy (Sesaningrum et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, personal misconduct by law enforcement officers can be understood as a legitimacy shock, namely a critical event that suddenly undermines public trust in law enforcement institutions (Tankebe, 2013). The concept of legitimacy shock emphasizes the disruptive nature of moral misconduct by officers; it does not operate gradually, but can rapidly dismantle the public's fundamental belief that state agents will act in accordance with the moral and legal values they represent. In the Indonesian context, the series of seven criminal cases involving Polri members in 2025 demonstrates that institutional delegitimization is not caused by the absence of regulations or sanctioning mechanisms, but rather by the institution's failure to prevent and control the personal behavior of its members.

Moreover, personal misconduct by Polri members exposes a disconnect between the normative standards of the policing profession and the psychological and social realities encountered by officers in operational settings. Criminal motives that appear banal in nature, including economic pressures, intimate relationships, jealousy, abuse of authority, and lifestyle-related deviations, suggest that the underlying problem does not necessarily originate from premeditated criminal intent, but rather from weakened moral resilience, limited self-regulation, and insufficient psychosocial support for officers (Reanisane et al., 2024). Within this framework, Polri members tend to be positioned more as objects of organizational discipline than as human subjects characterized by psychological, social, and moral complexity.

The dominant institutional approach to date has relied on repressive and sanction-based mechanisms through the enforcement of codes of ethics and criminal proceedings. Although these measures are important for maintaining accountability and legal certainty, they remain reactive because they are implemented after legitimacy damage has already occurred. Empirical research indicates that without early prevention systems grounded in psychological, social, and moral understanding, personal misconduct will continue to recur and prolong the crisis of public trust in Polri.

Various contemporary studies emphasize the importance of public trust as a primary form of social capital in policing. Tyler and Jackson (2013) argue that public compliance with the law is influenced more strongly by perceptions of procedural justice, neutrality, and officers' moral integrity than by fear of sanctions. Bradford et al. (2014) similarly show that low levels of public trust weaken community cooperation, increase social tension, and reduce the effectiveness of law enforcement. In the Indonesian context, empirical findings also confirm that public perceptions of police behavior shape levels of trust, particularly when officers are involved in personal misconduct that generates widespread negative public opinion (Azahwa et al., 2025).

Empirical evidence further shows that personal misconduct by Polri officers not only produces social and moral harm but also generates systemic effects on legitimacy. Each action that deviates from ethical and legal standards shapes public opinion that the institution has failed to internalize moral values and safeguard the integrity of its members. In the long term, this condition reduces the effectiveness of the police's coercive functions, as the public becomes reluctant to cooperate or comply with legal directives imposed by the institution.



**Figure 1:** Personal misconduct as a factor of institutional delegitimization.

Figure 1 synthesizes the pathway through which personal misconduct generates a legitimacy shock and shows why preventive intervention must move beyond reactive punishment toward human-centered institutional management. Moreover, recent research indicates that transparency in investigative processes and the application of procedural justice principles play a crucial role in rebuilding public trust. Ambiguity in legal processes or perceptions of impunity not only diminishes public trust but also reduces community loyalty and participation in supporting law enforcement. Waljinah et al. (2025) emphasize that when the public perceives procedural injustice or discriminatory treatment, institutional legitimacy weakens even when formal legal

mechanisms continue to operate. Within the Indonesian context, Polri occupies a particularly prominent symbolic position as the state institution most visibly embedded in everyday social life. As a result, the personal conduct of its members, although legally classified as individual actions, is commonly interpreted as reflective of the institution as a whole. Empirical studies indicate that in contexts characterized by fragile public trust, society tends to engage in institutional generalization in response to instances of officer misconduct, such that a single case of deviation may precipitate a broader legitimacy crisis (Saputra et al., 2024; Sesaningrum et al., 2025).

Overall, empirical evidence confirms that police legitimacy in democratic states is highly dependent on public trust built through the integrity of officers' behavior. In the absence of such trust, Polri's legal authority loses its social foundation, rendering law enforcement practices increasingly vulnerable to legitimacy crises. The prevention of personal misconduct among Polri members should therefore be understood as a strategic imperative for institutional legitimacy rather than merely a matter of internal discipline or post hoc sanction enforcement. Effective prevention requires a human-centered policing approach that positions officers as subjects with psychological, social, and moral complexities, thereby enabling proactive personnel development to safeguard integrity, moral conduct, and public trust (Reanisane et al., 2024; Salwani, 2024).

Recognition that personal misconduct constitutes an indicator of institutional legitimacy fragility necessitates that Polri shift its paradigm from a purely enforcement-oriented mechanism toward a comprehensive prevention strategy. This strategy encompasses not only the strengthening of discipline and internal law enforcement, but also psychological monitoring, ethical and moral development, and social support for personnel. When implemented consistently, such an approach enables institutional legitimacy and public trust to be restored and sustained over time, thereby forming a credible, effective, and accountable foundation for democratic policing.

Accordingly, personal misconduct by Polri members can no longer be understood as an individual deviation separate from institutional concerns. Rather, it constitutes an indicator of a broader legitimacy crisis and underscores the need for a paradigm shift toward more comprehensive and human-centered prevention, as discussed in the following subsection. This approach emphasizes the management of police personnel as whole human beings, thereby enabling preventive development aimed at protecting individual integrity while restoring and maintaining public trust in police institutions.

### **Human-Centered Policing as a Model for the Prevention and Restoration of Legitimacy**

Developments in modern policing theory indicate a paradigm shift from force-oriented policing toward more democratic models of policing, which emphasize accountability, respect for human rights, and a public service orientation. According to Bayley (2001), the success of police democratization is not determined solely by structural or regulatory reforms, but rather by the transformation of values, organizational culture, and officers' behavior in everyday practice. Democratic policing is not only concerned with what the police do, but also with how, why, and on the basis of which values such actions are carried out, so that the public perceives the institution not merely as a coercive apparatus, but as a fair public service provider.

Within this framework of democratic policing, this article further develops the discourse by proposing a human-centered policing approach that positions police officers not merely as instruments of the state or executors of legal authority, but as human subjects with psychological, social, and moral complexities that shape the quality of their professional conduct. Accordingly, police integrity does not depend solely on strict rules and sanctions, but also on the institution's capacity to manage the human dimensions of its personnel systematically and sustainably. Human-centered policing encompasses an approach that recognizes psychological well-being, social support, and moral development of officers as integral components of institutional legitimacy.

This approach is grounded in several fundamental assumptions. First, police officers operate in high-pressure environments because of heavy workloads, exposure to the risk of violence, role conflict, and social as well as institutional pressures, all of which may affect their psychological condition if not managed effectively. Modern policing literature shows that trust-building interaction models, such as procedural justice, exert a



stronger effect on institutional legitimacy than traditional coercive models. International studies indicate that policing interventions emphasizing procedural dialogue, fair treatment, and respect for citizens can enhance public perceptions of legitimacy, increase compliance with the law, and strengthen cross-community cooperation.



**Figure 2:** Human-Centered Policing as a model for prevention and legitimacy restoration.

To operationalize Human-Centered Policing beyond a theoretical ideal, the framework should rest on three integrated dimensions. First, proactive psychosocial support recognizes officers as vulnerable human subjects who require continuous psychological assessment and accessible mental health resources. Second, technological early detection integrates proactive oversight mechanisms to identify behavioral red flags before they escalate into serious misconduct. Third, continuous moral evaluation shifts performance indicators from narrow law-enforcement outputs toward structural integrity, thereby fostering an organizational culture that rewards ethical compliance.

Second, from the standpoint of institutional legitimacy, preventive approaches to misconduct are more effective than exclusive reliance on enforcement mechanisms. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022) underscores that legitimacy-building policing must integrate effectiveness, lawfulness, distributive justice, and procedural justice rather than depend solely on coercive strategies detached from substantive justice.

Third, police legitimacy must be cultivated internally through organizational justice, integrity-based leadership, and humane personnel development before it can be credibly projected outward through fair and professional public service. This argument is reinforced by research showing that police legitimacy is strongly shaped by public interpretations of everyday interactions with officers. When officers are perceived to act fairly, neutrally, and with respect for citizens' rights, public trust tends to increase, ultimately fostering greater societal support for and engagement in policing activities (Tyler & Nobo, 2022).

The implementation of this approach requires clear institutional operationalization. The primary actors are the internal oversight functions, specifically the Inspectorate (Itwasum) and the Profession and Security Division (Propam), in collaboration with the Human Resources Division. Operationally, this agenda is aligned with the recent development of AI-based public complaint systems, Dumas Presisi, Dumas QR Codes, and whistleblowing mechanisms (Kepolisian Negara Republik Indonesia (Polri), 2025). Institutional success in Human-Centered Policing should therefore be assessed not merely by the number of officers punished, but by the strengthening of structural integrity, as reflected in achievements such as the expansion of integrity zones and service-oriented bureaucratic reform.

With regard to the prevention of personal misconduct among Polri members, a Human-Centered Policing approach necessitates the strengthening of early detection systems that extend beyond formal violations to include psychological and social indicators. Such systems should include regular psychological assessments, monitoring of stress levels and mental well-being, evaluation of high-risk lifestyle patterns, and support for family relationships and officers' broader social environments. These findings align with recent studies showing that competence, training, leadership style, and incentive structures play a critical role in strengthening legitimacy and public trust. Purely reactive and coercive approaches remain insufficient without support for internal and humanistic personnel development (Fitrianto et al., 2025).

Furthermore, Human-Centered Policing can be understood as an extension of procedural justice, which has been extensively discussed in the literature on police legitimacy. Mazerolle et al. (2013) show that policing interventions incorporating procedural dialogue significantly increase public satisfaction, trust, and cooperation with the police, indicating that interaction mechanisms that respect citizens' dignity form a core element of a human-centered approach. The transformation of Polri's human resource development orientation must also shift its focus from mere administrative compliance toward the cultivation of moral integrity and ethical decision-making capacity. Professional ethics education should be understood as a reflective process that equips officers with the ability to recognize moral dilemmas, manage emotions, and take responsibility for their choices in complex situations. This reflects a model of policing that is not only legally valid but also morally grounded and publicly accountable, in line with the ideals of democratic policing.

Accordingly, Human-Centered Policing is not intended to weaken discipline, hierarchy, or legal accountability within police institutions. On the contrary, this approach strengthens the foundations of Polri's institutional legitimacy by positioning the prevention of personal misconduct as a proactive strategy. Such prevention is not merely an administrative measure or a post-violation sanctioning mechanism, but a comprehensive framework that understands police officers as human beings with psychological, social, and moral complexities. In this way, the institution is better able to anticipate potential misconduct, reinforce internal integrity, and prevent legitimacy erosion that could otherwise trigger a sharp decline in public trust.

Moreover, human-centered policing emphasizes the importance of officer well-being as a component of legitimacy-building strategies. Officers who receive adequate psychological support, moral development, and stress management assistance are more likely to demonstrate consistent professional behavior, uphold ethical norms, and make fair decisions in complex situations. This aligns with the principle of internal legitimacy, whereby institutions build credibility from within before translating it outward through public services that are fair, transparent, and responsive to citizens' needs. In other words, the individual integrity of Polri members becomes the foundation of the institution's collective legitimacy.

In addition, a human-centered policing approach enables institutional leaders to practice effective moral and ethical leadership. Leaders who are able to mentor, model professional behavior, and cultivate an ethical organizational culture influence conduct across all levels of the institution. This effect not only sustains discipline but also shapes strong internal norms, providing officers with a clear moral orientation when confronting professional dilemmas. Thus, hierarchy and accountability are preserved, but are reinforced by moral awareness and ethical commitment rather than mere mechanistic compliance with rules.

From a public perspective, the success of human-centered policing is reflected in societal perceptions of police legitimacy. The public evaluates police institutions not solely based on coercive actions or the severity of sanctions, but on the consistency of officers' moral, fair, and humane conduct. When the public perceives that

Polri is capable of maintaining integrity, respecting citizens' rights, and handling cases professionally and ethically, trust in the institution develops organically. This trust, in turn, becomes social capital that enables the police to carry out their legal functions effectively without excessive reliance on coercive threats or pressure.

Ultimately, Human-Centered Policing underscores that the prevention of personal misconduct and the strengthening of institutional legitimacy are two sides of the same objective. An institution that is able to understand, develop, and safeguard the human dimensions of its members while maintaining discipline and legal accountability will be better positioned to build a police organization that is credible, effective, and sustainable. Through this approach, Polri not only performs its legal functions more effectively but also restores the moral and social foundation required for democratic policing.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the recent legitimacy shocks facing the Indonesian National Police (Polri) are driven primarily by individual misconduct rather than by systemic regulatory failure. The analysis demonstrates that formal authority alone is insufficient to sustain public trust. Legitimacy is a dynamic condition that depends heavily on the moral integrity, psychosocial stability, and everyday conduct of individual officers. The persistence of serious personal crimes in 2025 highlights a significant gap between formal rules and the institution's capacity for early prevention, moral supervision, and psychosocial support. To address this gap, this article proposes Human-Centered Policing as a strategic frontier for Polri reform. The model shifts institutional attention toward three integrated pillars: proactive psychosocial support, technological early detection through internal oversight and complaint systems, and continuous moral evaluation. Effective implementation requires collaboration among the Inspectorate (Itwasum), the Profession and Security Division (Propam), and the Human Resources Division. When applied consistently, this framework can strengthen internal integrity, restore public trust, and provide a more sustainable foundation for professional, accountable, and democratic policing.

## SUGGESTION

Based on the findings and arguments presented in this article, the prevention of personal misconduct by Polri members should be positioned as a national strategic agenda within Polri reform and understood as an issue of institutional legitimacy rather than merely an internal personnel matter. Accordingly, the Chief of the Indonesian National Police and other policy makers within Polri should explicitly integrate the prevention of personal misconduct into the Strategic Plan, the implementation of personnel development programs, and the performance indicators of internal oversight functions. In addition, Polri should institutionalize an early prevention system grounded in a Human-Centered Policing framework that integrates regular psychological assessments, systematic monitoring of work-related stress, and rigorous evaluation of organizational environments that may precipitate behavioral deviations, while consistently upholding the principles of accountability and legal certainty. Transparency and accountability in addressing personal misconduct must be strengthened through open and protective public complaint mechanisms, enhanced whistleblowing safeguards, and consistent communication regarding follow-up actions and sanctions.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors gratefully acknowledge colleagues serving as advisors to the Chief of the Indonesian National Police, as well as academics and policing practitioners, for their critical insights, conceptual contributions, and scholarly discussions that informed and enriched this article. Appreciation is also extended to the institutions and stakeholders that facilitated access to relevant policy documents, academic literature, and supporting data. This article constitutes an academic reflection on contemporary police reform issues and therefore does not represent an official institutional policy position.

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