Jurnal
ILMU KEPOLISIAN
P-ISSN: 2620-5025
E-ISSN: 2621-8410

Vol. 20, No. 1, 2026

Policing in the Media Arena:
Layered Accountability and Oversight in Reality Police Shows

Submitted 13 February 2026, Revised 1 April 2026, Accepted 11 April 2026, Published 24 April 2026

Daniel Artasasta Tambunan[1], Kadek Citra Dewi Suparwati[2], Adrianus Meliala[3], Supardi Hamid[4], Ilham Prisgunanto[5]

[1,2,4,5]Doctoral Degree Program, Indonesian National Police Science College, Jakarta, Indonesia
[3]Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, University of Indonesia, Depok, Indonesia
Email Corresponding Author: danielartasastatambunan@stik-ptik.ac.id

DOI: https://doi.org/10.35879/jik.v20i1.716

Abstract

This article examines how mediated visibility reconfigures police oversight and accountability in Indonesia by treating reality police shows as an empirical arena. This study uses a qualitative–analytical design integrating semi-structured interviews with key institutional actors (Indonesian National Police/POLRI, media practitioners, and broadcast regulators), observational analysis of televised police representations and the digital recirculation, and document analysis of relevant governance and communication frameworks. The findings show that formal oversight mechanisms within Polri and state-based supervisory arrangements tend to operate reactively and with temporal delay when faced with fast-moving, visually driven public scrutiny. In this gap, media platforms, through televised programs and fragmented online circulation, function as a dominant informal overseer that shapes public judgments through visibility management, framing, and affective resonance. These dynamics generate an asymmetrical layered accountability regime, in which symbolic accountability formed in the media arena frequently precedes and constrains the operation of formal accountability processes. The article further identifies a condition of dual accountability that produces a structural dilemma for the Public Relations Division of POLRI (Divhumas), which must uphold law-based procedural legitimacy while simultaneously responding to media-generated demands for symbolic legitimacy. Limited post-production evaluation, weak coordination across the production cycle, and crisis-oriented communication approaches shift meaning-making power toward media actors and audiences, increasing institutional vulnerability to representational distortion. The article contributes to Police Science by conceptualizing accountability as a cross-arena governance process and by outlining policy implications for strategic visibility management, preventive representational oversight, and early-warning monitoring of legitimacy risk under conditions of mediated policing.

Keywords: police accountability, mediated policing, layered accountability, police oversight, reality police shows

INTRODUCTION

Policing in democratic societies has undergone a significant reconfiguration in the organization of oversight and institutional accountability (Van Brakel, 2021). Police authority is no longer exercised primarily through

vertically ordered systems of internal command and state-centered legal supervision (McMillan et al., 2023; Triola & Chanin, 2023). Contemporary policing increasingly operates within pluralized oversight environments that involve regulatory bodies, media institutions, and publics acting simultaneously across intersecting arenas (Bradford et al., 2017; Van Brakel, 2021). This transformation reshapes the foundations of police legitimacy, extending it beyond procedural compliance toward socially mediated recognition and public evaluation (Bradford et al., 2017; Goldrosen, 2025).

This reconfiguration is particularly evident in the growing entanglement between policing and mass media (Aleem et al., 2021; Morrow, 2019). Police organizations across democratic contexts have intensified the use of broadcast and digital media as instruments of public communication and visibility management (Bolin & Jerslev, 2018). In Indonesia, the National Police (POLRI) has adopted televised reality police shows as a prominent vehicle for displaying police work, promoting transparency, and fostering public proximity. Programs such as 86 (NET TV) and The Police (Trans7) are institutionally framed as efforts to enhance public understanding and trust through mediated exposure (Astuti & Benedicta, 2023). Yet this engagement remains largely episodic and operational rather than strategic, with limited institutional infrastructure for governing representation across the full production cycle (Raspati & Setiawati, 2021).

Police personnel appearing in such programs are predominantly drawn from frontline units and are rarely provided with systematic preparation regarding public communication, ethical exposure, or the institutional implications of sustained media visibility (Rackstraw, 2023). Consequently, policing is frequently rendered through dramatized sequences that privilege immediacy, confrontation, and spectacle, while procedural reasoning, discretionary judgment, and substantive accountability recede from view. Studies on police–media relations suggest that visibility of this kind does not automatically translate into durable gains in public trust and may instead produce ambivalent or unstable legitimacy outcomes (Bradford et al., 2017). Empirical evidence from the Indonesian context similarly indicates weak correlations between media exposure and public confidence in policing institutions.

These developments have direct implications for the operation of accountability in contemporary policing (Colbran, 2020). Accountability increasingly functions as a distributed and relational process enacted across multiple forums of evaluation rather than as a linear chain of hierarchical control (Bovens, 2006). Formal disciplinary mechanisms and legal oversight continue to operate through procedural and incremental modes, while public evaluations circulate rapidly through media and digital platforms, often assuming affective and moralized forms (McMillan et al., 2023; Triola & Chanin, 2023). Intensified institutional visibility amplifies this divergence by accelerating the translation of isolated police actions into generalized assessments of organizational legitimacy (Goldsmith, 2010).

Media dynamics further condition this environment through selective framing and narrative construction (Walsh et al., 2022). Representations of policing increasingly follow attention-oriented logics characteristic of contemporary media economies, privileging conflict, urgency, and visual impact over legal complexity and professional discretion (Rowe et al., 2023). Reality police shows intensify this tendency by embedding police action within narrative structures that emphasize rapid resolution and moral clarity (Rackstraw, 2023). Such representations compress complex decision-making processes into simplified visual scripts and foster performative orientations in police practice (Brucato, 2015). Public judgment consequently gravitates toward symbolic coherence and narrative appeal rather than proportionality, procedural accountability, or the protection of citizens' rights (Reiner, 2013).

These conditions place policing institutions under dual and often conflicting pressures. Legal obligations, professional standards, and formal oversight mechanisms remain binding, while public expectations, formed

swiftly through mediated visibility, generate parallel demands for symbolic responsiveness (Bradford et al., 2017). Governance research highlights heightened institutional vulnerability when the capacity to coordinate multiple oversight mechanisms fails to develop alongside expanding visibility (McMillan et al., 2023; Triola & Chanin, 2023). In the case of Polri, the absence of systematic post-production evaluation and continuous representational monitoring by the Public Relations Division (Divhumas) reinforces a reactive communication posture oriented toward crisis containment after controversies emerge rather than preventive governance of visibility (Sanders & Sheptycki, 2017).

The outcome of these dynamics is a condition of asymmetrical layered accountability. Oversight mechanisms operate concurrently yet unequally in their capacity to shape public perceptions of responsibility and legitimacy (Bovens, 2006; Skogan, 2006). Media actors, regulators, political institutions, and digital publics possess advantages in speed, reach, and narrative circulation, while police organizations remain constrained by slower procedural frameworks and legal formalities (Goldsmith, 2010). From a symbolic field perspective, formal legal authority does not guarantee dominance in meaning-making processes, as media arenas privilege symbolic capital and visibility over jurisdictional mandate (Schlosser, 2013).

This article treats reality police shows as an empirical arena for examining the transformation of policing oversight under conditions of mediated visibility. The analysis focuses on how asymmetrical layered accountability operates in practice and explores its implications for police governance, professional integrity, and institutional legitimacy in democratic settings. Rather than evaluating the normative merits of such programs, the article interrogates the broader reconfiguration of accountability that emerges when policing becomes structurally embedded in the media arena.

In police science, accountability constitutes a central normative principle underpinning the legitimate exercise of the state's coercive authority. It is not confined to administrative compliance with legal rules or internal procedures, but encompasses the institutional capacity of police organizations to justify actions, decisions, and their consequences to the public in ways that are transparent, contestable, and subject to evaluation (McKay, 2022). Accountability, in this sense, is inseparable from legitimacy, as public recognition of police authority increasingly depends on the perceived fairness, proportionality, and responsiveness of policing practices (Bradford et al., 2017).

Oversight functions as the primary mechanism through which accountability is operationalized. Conventionally, police oversight has been organized through formal, hierarchical, and institutionalized arrangements. Internal oversight mechanisms aim to preserve discipline, integrity, and adherence to professional standards, while external oversight extends accountability through judicial bodies, civilian review institutions, and other state-authorized mechanisms (McMillan et al., 2023; Triola & Chanin, 2023). Within this framework, accountability is conceived as a procedural and legally mandated process that unfolds incrementally through established channels. Despite their normative importance, such arrangements display structural limitations, particularly because they tend to operate reactively and are often misaligned with the tempo of public perception and political scrutiny (McKay, 2022).

The expansion of visual media and digital communication infrastructures has substantially altered the architecture of police oversight. Contemporary policing increasingly unfolds under conditions of sustained visibility, in which police actions are routinely recorded, circulated, and evaluated beyond formal institutional settings (Bolin & Jerslev, 2018). Representations of policing through televised reality police shows, amplified by digital recirculation on social media platforms, extend oversight into hybrid spaces that blur distinctions between institutional accountability and public judgment. In this context, the camera functions not merely as

a documentary device but as a mechanism of social surveillance that actively shapes awareness, conduct, and evaluative frameworks surrounding police practice.

This dynamic resonates with the classical panoptic model, in which visibility operates as a disciplinary force that encourages the internalization of control (Schlosser, 2013). Yet mediated oversight in contemporary policing extends beyond panoptic logic. Reality police shows generate synoptic conditions in which large audiences collectively observe a limited number of police actors, reversing traditional surveillance asymmetries such that "the many watch the few" (Mathiesen, 1997). Digital environments further intensify this configuration through practices of sousveillance, as citizens actively record, disseminate, and comment on the conduct of state authorities, rendering oversight participatory, fluid, and difficult to stabilize within formal institutional boundaries (Mohler et al., 2022).

These intersecting modalities of oversight produce a condition increasingly described as multilayered accountability. Accountability is exercised simultaneously across multiple arenas, internal disciplinary systems, state-based external oversight, media regulation, and public scrutiny grounded in visual representation, each governed by distinct actors and evaluative logics (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022). In policing, multilayered accountability reflects the coexistence of legal, administrative, political, and symbolic forms of control. Crucially, the central challenge of multilayered accountability lies not in the multiplication of oversight mechanisms per se, but in their asymmetrical configuration, particularly with respect to authority, speed, and their capacity to shape institutional legitimacy (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022).

Asymmetry is most evident in the contrasting operational logics of formal oversight and media-based scrutiny. Formal mechanisms rely on procedural rigor, evidentiary standards, and due process, requiring time and institutional sequencing. Media-based oversight, by contrast, operates in real time and is oriented toward immediacy, emotional resonance, and public attention (Surette, 2015). In many instances, public judgments formed through visual representation precede, and at times overshadow, ongoing formal accountability processes. This tension creates conditions conducive to trial by media, in which police legitimacy is assessed through fragmented visual narratives and popular discourse rather than through comprehensive legal evaluation (Goldrosen, 2025; Graziano & Gauthier, 2018).

Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the symbolic field offers a critical framework for understanding the position of police institutions (Schlosser, 2013), particularly public communication units such as the Indonesian National Police's Public Relations Division (Divhumas) within the media ecosystem. Media constitute a field structured by its own rules, power relations, and interests, within which actors compete for the production and circulation of symbolic meanings. Divhumas enters this field as an institutional actor endowed with state-derived symbolic capital rooted in legal authority and formal legitimacy. However, symbolic capital does not automatically translate into dominance when confronted with media-based symbolic power, which derives from framing capacity, visual selection, and narrative circulation (Couldry, 2012).

This imbalance helps explain the recurrently reactive posture of police communication units in moments of representational controversy or legitimacy crisis. Within the media field, symbolic dominance is determined less by formal authority than by the ability to manage meaning production and public attention (Couldry, 2012). When post-production coordination and systematic evaluation of police representation are absent, control over the symbolic construction of policing shifts toward media organizations and audiences. The police institution consequently occupies a weakened strategic position within the symbolic arena, despite retaining formal legal authority.

The cumulative effect of these dynamics is the emergence of dual and asymmetrical accountability in policing institutions. On one level, police organizations remain bound to law, standard operating procedures, and hierarchical command as sources of formal legitimacy (Goldrosen, 2025). On another, they face demands for symbolic legitimacy generated through mediated visibility and public discourse (Bradford et al., 2017). The tension between these sources of legitimacy produces a structural dilemma in policing practice. Procedurally lawful actions may fail to satisfy visual public expectations, while actions that appear symbolically compelling may fall short of substantive accountability. This conceptual framework explains why increased police visibility through reality police shows does not automatically strengthen professionalism or institutional legitimacy and may, under certain conditions, intensify vulnerability to representational distortion within the public sphere.

This article adopts a qualitative–analytical approach to examine the dynamics of police oversight and accountability within the context of mediated representation. A qualitative strategy is appropriate given the analytical focus on institutional processes, power relations, and symbolic practices that shape how policing is scrutinized and held accountable in the public sphere, dimensions that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone. By situating policing in media, particularly within the format of reality police shows, as a social and institutional phenomenon, the study seeks to elucidate the meanings, logics, and consequences of media-based oversight for police governance and institutional legitimacy.

The primary data source consists of in-depth interviews with key actors involved in the management, production, and oversight of police representation in the media. Interviewees include senior police officials occupying strategic positions in public communication and internal oversight, as well as external actors such as broadcasting regulators and media practitioners. Semi-structured interviews were employed to allow flexible yet focused exploration of institutional experiences, policy dilemmas, and organizational responses to public controversies arising from televised police representations. This interview design facilitates an in-depth understanding of actors' perspectives while enabling analysis of how normative frameworks and practical considerations interact within the context of mediated policing (Rowe et al., 2023).

In addition to interviews, the article draws on observational data derived from police representations in reality police shows broadcast on national television and their subsequent circulation in digital media environments. Observation focuses on how police actions are visualized, framed, and narrated, particularly in moments prone to public evaluation and controversy. These observational materials are not treated as quantitative content analysis, but as empirical context for understanding how media logics operate in constructing informal oversight arenas and how visual representation contributes to the formation of legitimacy judgments.

To strengthen the institutional analysis, the study also incorporates document analysis of regulations, internal guidelines, and official statements related to public communication, internal oversight, and police–media relations. Document analysis serves to situate media representation practices within the formal governance framework of policing institutions and to identify discrepancies between institutional norms and operational realities. This approach enables systematic examination of consistency, contradiction, and ambiguity in the management of police accountability under conditions of heightened public visibility (Triola & Chanin, 2023). Data analysis was conducted thematically and iteratively by integrating findings from interviews, observations, and documentary materials. NVivo software was employed to support systematic coding and organization of qualitative data. The analytic process focused on identifying recurring patterns of meaning, particularly concerning the interaction between formal oversight mechanisms and informal media-based scrutiny, the manifestation of asymmetrical accountability, and the institutional positioning of the Public Relations Division (Divhumas) within the media representation arena. A thematic analysis approach was selected because it allows inductive theme development while maintaining a dialogical relationship with the

conceptual framework, enabling empirical findings to be interpreted in a coherent, reflexive, and theoretically informed manner.

DISCUSSION

Formal Oversight as Reactive and Lagging

The findings indicate that formal oversight mechanisms within the Indonesian National Police, encompassing both internal control and state-based external oversight, tend to operate in a reactive and temporally lagging manner when confronted with mediated representations of policing. Oversight is typically activated only after a broadcast segment or visual fragment generates public controversy, rather than functioning as part of an integrated, preventive monitoring system embedded throughout the production and dissemination of media content. This pattern positions formal oversight in a defensive posture, with the police institution responding to legitimacy crises that have already crystallized in the public sphere rather than strategically managing representational risks in advance.

In practice, internal oversight continues to function primarily within procedural and post facto frameworks. Ethical reviews, clarifications, and disciplinary processes are initiated after police actions displayed in the media attract sustained public attention, particularly when online reactions escalate into reputational or political pressure. This temporal sequencing reveals a structural mismatch between the incremental, deliberative logic of formal oversight and the rapid, affective dynamics of media-driven public scrutiny. By the time formal mechanisms are mobilized, the meaning of police action has often already been framed negatively through visual circulation and public commentary.

This condition is further reinforced by the absence of a consistent and institutionalized system for evaluating police representation, especially at the post-production stage of reality police shows. Oversight of broadcast content is neither routine nor continuous, but episodic and situational. Units that are normatively responsible for public communication and institutional representation lack standardized mechanisms to assess how visual editing, narrative construction, and contextual framing shape public perceptions of police professionalism and accountability. Consequently, formal oversight effectively “arrives late,” intervening only after representations have circulated widely and controversy has emerged.

Viewed through the lens of multilayered accountability, these findings suggest that formal oversight has lost its dominant position as the primary arena for determining police accountability. Internal and external state-based mechanisms retain legal authority, yet they are outpaced in terms of speed and influence by media-based forms of scrutiny. Public judgments formed through visual representation frequently precede formal clarification and evidentiary processes, forcing institutional oversight to operate under conditions in which dominant narratives have already been established. Formal accountability thus functions asymmetrically, compelled to pursue and respond to meanings constructed earlier within the media arena.

The findings also demonstrate that formal oversight mechanisms have not fully adapted to the synoptic and participatory character of mediated scrutiny. Internal oversight within Polri is designed to address violations within organizational and legal frameworks, not to engage with forms of public monitoring that unfold through fragmented visuals, online commentary, and rapid circulation of symbolic meanings. This institutional orientation leads formal oversight to treat media controversy as an external disturbance rather than as an integral component of the contemporary policing oversight regime that requires systematic governance.

Conceptually, these findings underscore that the core challenge facing police oversight today lies not in the normative weakness of formal mechanisms but in their temporal and structural displacement within an

expanded oversight landscape shaped by media visibility. Formal oversight continues to function according to its mandate, yet it no longer constitutes the principal arena in which accountability and legitimacy are produced. In the context of reality police shows, this displacement creates conditions under which media logic assumes a dominant role in evaluating police conduct, while formal oversight is confined to a corrective function that arrives after public judgments have already taken hold. This dynamic provides a critical foundation for understanding why media-based scrutiny and public response increasingly shape perceptions of police accountability more decisively than formal oversight processes.

Media as the Dominant Informal Overseer

The findings further demonstrate that when formal oversight operates in a reactive and temporally lagging manner, media, particularly through reality police shows and their subsequent circulation across digital platforms, effectively assume the role of a dominant informal overseer. This dominance does not derive from legal mandate or institutional authority, but from the media's capacity to regulate visibility, direct public attention, and frame the meaning of police action. Under these conditions, oversight is shaped less by internal clarification processes or formal accountability mechanisms than by how police conduct is visually presented, edited, and disseminated in formats that are readily consumable by mass audiences.

As an informal overseer, the media operate according to logics fundamentally different from those of formal oversight. Media scrutiny does not evaluate police conduct through adherence to standard operating procedures or legal proportionality, but through visual salience, conflict intensity, and dramatic potential capable of eliciting audience engagement. Reality police shows intensify this logic by presenting policing as a sequence of scenes detached from the full procedural context in which decisions are made. Public audiences are therefore not only exposed to police action, but are also implicitly trained to evaluate policing through symbolic criteria produced by media representation, such as visual assertiveness, emotional expression, and rapid conflict resolution.

The dominance of media-based oversight is further amplified by digital ecosystems that enable fragmentation and extensive recirculation of televised content. Specific visual excerpts, often those perceived as controversial or confrontational, become central objects of public discourse on social media platforms. Through this process, the meaning of police action is no longer governed by official institutional narratives, but is negotiated, simplified, and at times distorted through emotional reactions, moral judgments, and rapid commentary. Public oversight thus unfolds in synoptic and participatory forms, as collective judgments emerge without prior verification or formal clarification.

Within the framework of multilayered accountability, these findings indicate that media do not merely supplement formal oversight, but frequently function as the primary arena for the production of symbolic accountability. Public evaluations of policing are often formed first within the media sphere, while formal oversight mechanisms are compelled to operate under conditions in which perceptions of legitimacy have already been shaped by visual framing. This asymmetry helps explain why institutional responses by Polri are frequently oriented toward managing reputational crises rather than reinforcing substantive accountability processes operating in parallel.

The findings also reveal that the dominance of media as an informal overseer does not necessarily generate stronger or more substantive accountability. Media-based scrutiny tends to operate through logics of simplification and personalization, reducing the complexity of on-the-ground police decision-making to binary moral assessments of “right–wrong” or “acceptable–unacceptable” grounded in visual perception. In certain instances, police actions that are procedurally lawful and proportionate are perceived negatively because they diverge from public symbolic expectations, while actions that appear visually “humanistic” or

"decisive" gain symbolic legitimacy despite being procedurally problematic.

From the perspective of the media field, this dominance can be understood as the ascendancy of media-based symbolic power in defining the meaning of policing. Media possess the capacity to convert operational events into moralized and emotionally charged symbols, while the police, through institutional actors such as the Public Relations Division (Divhumas), often occupy a non-dominant position within this field. The absence of systematic post-production coordination and weak institutional control over representation limits the police's ability to intervene once framing has already circulated widely. As a result, police legitimacy becomes increasingly dependent on symbolic recognition within media arenas rather than on formal accountability mechanisms alone.

Taken together, the findings in this section confirm that media have emerged as a dominant informal overseer within the contemporary policing oversight regime. This dominance not only displaces the relative position of formal oversight but also reshapes how accountability itself is understood and enacted. In the context of reality police shows, the media do not simply depict policing practices; they actively participate in defining the standards through which police actions are publicly judged as legitimate, professional, and socially acceptable.

Dual Accountability and the Structural Dilemma of Divhumas Polri

The findings indicate that the combination of reactive formal oversight and the dominance of media as an informal overseer produces a condition of dual accountability for the Indonesian National Police. Within this configuration, Polri and particularly its Public Relations Division (Divhumas) is required to account for policing actions simultaneously to two accountability regimes governed by distinct and often incompatible logics. On the one hand, Polri remains bound to formal accountability rooted in law, internal procedures, and organizational hierarchy. On the other hand, it is increasingly subject to symbolic accountability constructed through media representation and public opinion, which evaluates police conduct primarily through visual framing and emotional resonance.

This dual accountability generates a structural dilemma that is neither incidental nor easily resolved. Divhumas Polri, as the institutional actor mandated to manage public communication, occupies a liminal position between legal–bureaucratic logic and media logic. Within the formal governance framework, Divhumas is expected to steward institutional representation in ways that support substantive accountability and professional policing. In practice, however, Divhumas is simultaneously compelled to respond rapidly to shifting public sentiment circulating through media and digital platforms, often in situations in which the meaning of police action has already been framed through selective visuals and narratives beyond institutional control.

Empirical findings show that this dilemma frequently pushes Divhumas toward communication strategies that are defensive and reactive. Institutional responses tend to prioritize the containment of controversy and the restoration of organizational image following legitimacy crises, rather than the preventive and strategic management of police representation. In the context of reality police shows, this condition is exacerbated by the absence of systematic post-production evaluation mechanisms. As a result, Divhumas often confronts representations that have already circulated widely without possessing adequate institutional leverage to intervene or recalibrate their framing.

From the perspective of the media field, the position of Divhumas Polri can be understood as that of an institutional actor endowed with state-derived symbolic capital that nevertheless lacks dominance in the arena of meaning production. Media organizations possess symbolic power to determine framing, visual selection,

and narrative emphasis, while Divhumas operates within a slower, procedurally constrained institutional logic. This imbalance explains why official clarifications or explanatory statements frequently fail to match the speed, reach, and effective impact of visual representations that have already shaped public perception.

Dual accountability also exerts tangible effects on policing practices at the operational level. Police personnel appearing in reality police shows or captured in incidents later circulated on social media are subjected to pressures to act not only in accordance with standard operating procedures, but also in ways that align with public visual expectations. The findings suggest that such conditions may encourage performative orientations in police conduct, in which considerations of how an action will appear on screen become as salient as, or even more salient than, procedural and professional considerations. Over time, this dynamic risks shifting the locus of accountability from the substantive enforcement of law toward the management of public perception. Conceptually, the findings in this section underscore that dual accountability is not merely a matter of public communication, but a fundamental issue of policing governance. When formal and symbolic accountability regimes are not managed in an integrated manner, Polri faces the risk of fragmented responsibility, in which success in one arena does not translate into legitimacy in another. In this context, Divhumas Polri confronts a structural dilemma: it is tasked with safeguarding symbolic legitimacy within media arenas while simultaneously ensuring that public communication does not obscure substantive accountability and professional standards.

This section completes the presentation of the article's core findings. Police accountability in an era of mediated visibility can no longer be understood as a singular relationship between institutions and formal oversight mechanisms, but as a complex configuration involving multiple oversight arenas governed by competing logics. The following section synthesizes these findings and discusses their implications for policing governance, offering a conceptual reflection on the need for more strategic and coordinated management of visibility and accountability.

Police Accountability in the Media Arena

The findings of this study indicate that the transformation of police oversight in Indonesia is not primarily defined by a simple increase in the number of oversight actors, but by a reorganization of the relational arena through which accountability is produced, contested, and evaluated. As illustrated in Figure 1, police accountability in the context of reality police shows unfolds through a mediated circuit involving four interconnected actors: police, media, audience, and regulator. Within this circuit, media occupy a pivotal position. They do not merely transmit police action to the public; they mediate visibility, shape interpretive frames, and connect formal oversight, public evaluation, and institutional response. This configuration helps explain why contemporary policing increasingly operates within a multilayered and asymmetrical accountability regime, in which legitimacy is no longer produced exclusively through formal institutional mechanisms but through interactions across multiple arenas of scrutiny.

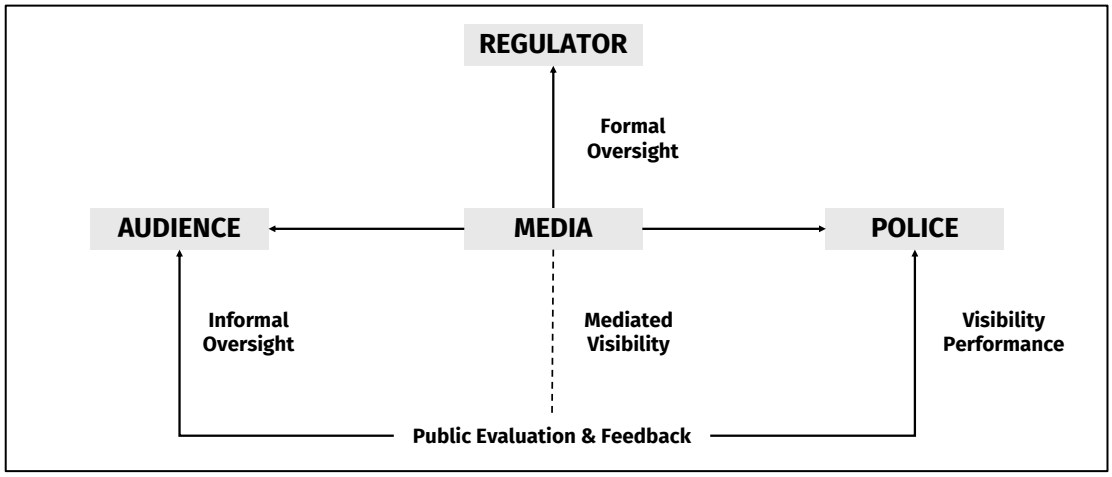

Figure 1: Police Accountability in the Media Arena

Within classical models of accountability, police legitimacy is generated through compliance with law, standard operating procedures, and structured oversight mechanisms. The findings presented here, however, suggest that these mechanisms no longer constitute the principal arena in which police legitimacy is formed in the eyes of the public. In the mediated environment of reality police shows, police conduct enters the public domain through a process of mediated visibility, in which images, editing choices, and narrative construction shape how actions are seen before they are formally assessed. Accountability, in this setting, is increasingly conditioned by symbolic interpretation rather than by institutional review alone. The center of gravity thus shifts from formal adjudication to public reception, rendering police legitimacy dependent not only on what officers do, but also on how those actions are represented, circulated, and emotionally received.

The diagram clarifies that this mediated circuit is not linear, but recursive. Police perform visibility through media participation; media transform that visibility into publicly consumable narratives; audiences respond through evaluation and feedback; and regulators remain positioned above this interaction through the logic of formal oversight. This structure reveals why accountability under media conditions cannot be understood as a single-directional process. It is instead produced through the interaction of formal oversight, mediated representation, and public response. The regulator may still embody legal and procedural authority, yet media often exercise greater influence over the timing, framing, and intensity of legitimacy judgments. Public evaluation, therefore, develops not after institutional review, but alongside and often before it.

This discussion reinforces the argument that multilayered accountability should not be conflated with stronger accountability. When multiple layers of oversight operate according to divergent logics and without adequate coordination, accountability risks fragmentation rather than reinforcement. Figure 1 captures this divergence clearly: formal oversight flows vertically through regulatory authority, while informal oversight emerges horizontally through the audience's response to media representation. These two modes of scrutiny are interconnected, yet they do not function with equal speed, authority, or symbolic force. Formal oversight retains normative legitimacy, but loses influence over public perception because it operates more slowly and with less resonance than media-based scrutiny. Under such conditions, accountability becomes unevenly distributed across institutions, representations, and publics.

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu's field theory, the diagram may also be read as a map of unequal positions within the media field. Although Polri, particularly Divhumas Polri, possesses state-derived symbolic capital in the form of legal authority and formal legitimacy, such capital does not automatically translate into dominance over meaning production. Media occupy the central nodal position in the figure

because they possess the capacity to select, amplify, and narrate what becomes publicly visible. Audiences, in turn, do not merely receive information passively; they participate in the process of informal oversight by evaluating, recirculating, and reacting to mediated police conduct. When Divhumas Polri lacks the strategic capacity to manage its institutional position within this field, the power to define the meaning of policing shifts away from the institution and toward media actors and publics. The problem, therefore, is not simply one of communication weakness, but one of institutional disadvantage within the symbolic economy of mediated visibility.

The diagram also sharpens the discussion of dual accountability. Police institutions are accountable upward to regulators and internal structures through formal oversight, but simultaneously accountable outward to media audiences through public visibility and symbolic judgment. This dual structure places Divhumas Polri in a particularly difficult position. As the institutional actor responsible for public communication, it must manage visibility performance on behalf of the police while also responding to public evaluation and feedback generated outside formal organizational control. In such conditions, the task of Divhumas is not limited to disseminating information; it must also navigate the gap between procedural legitimacy and symbolic legitimacy. This is the structural dilemma identified throughout the findings: police institutions are expected to remain procedurally correct while also being symbolically persuasive in a media environment they do not fully control.

The implications for police professionalism are substantial. Once visibility performance becomes central to institutional legitimacy, police personnel may come under pressure to act not only in accordance with legal and professional standards, but also in ways that satisfy public visual expectations. In the context of reality police shows, this may foster performative orientations in policing, whereby the appearance of decisiveness, humanity, or control becomes as important as procedural propriety. The danger here is not simply simplification, but displacement: the standards through which police action is judged may shift from substantive accountability to symbolic approval. Figure 2 captures this displacement by showing how audience feedback loops back into the media-police relationship, turning public response into a quasi-regulatory force in its own right.

Conceptually, this discussion suggests that reality police shows should not be understood as the sole source of accountability problems, but as a catalyst that accelerates and makes visible pre-existing tensions within policing governance. The figure demonstrates that mediated policing operates through a dynamic interplay among institutional authority, media logic, public judgment, and regulatory oversight. The central challenge facing Polri, therefore, is not whether media participation should be rejected outright, but how to develop an institutional framework for governing visibility in a way that better aligns formal accountability with symbolic legitimacy. Without such a framework, mediated visibility is likely to deepen fragmentation, intensify defensive communication, and increase the institution’s dependence on external recognition.

In this research, the article leverages Police Science by showing that police accountability in an era of mediated visibility must be understood as a cross-arena governance issue. Accountability can no longer be treated solely as an internal organizational matter or as a function of state-based external oversight. It must instead be conceptualized as a social process produced through the interactions among police institutions, media actors, audiences, and regulators. Figure 1 makes this point explicit by visualizing accountability as a relational circuit rather than a fixed institutional chain. Without conceptual and institutional arrangements capable of governing this circuit, increased visibility may weaken police professionalism and institutional legitimacy over the long term rather than strengthen them.

CONCLUSION

Police accountability is no longer produced primarily through formal oversight mechanisms grounded in law and procedure, but is increasingly shaped by visual representation and public judgment constructed through media. Within this configuration, formal oversight retains normative authority, yet lags behind media-based informal scrutiny in terms of speed, visibility, and symbolic influence. Formal oversight tends to activate after media controversies have already escalated, while media and digitally networked publics have pre-emptively shaped legitimacy perceptions through visual framing. This condition places Polri in a situation of dual accountability, where substantive, law-based responsibility must coexist with demands for symbolic legitimacy produced in media arenas.

Within this context, Divhumas Polri emerges as a key institutional actor positioned at the intersection of legal logic and media logic. However, the findings show that Divhumas has yet to occupy a fully strategic position within the arena of media representation. The absence of systematic post-production evaluation mechanisms, weak coordination with media organizations, and a predominantly reactive communication approach have shifted control over the meaning of policing toward media actors and audiences. As a result, police legitimacy increasingly depends on symbolic recognition in the public sphere rather than solely on substantive performance and formal accountability processes.

Accountability can no longer be conceptualized as a singular relationship between policing organizations and formal oversight bodies, but as a complex configuration involving struggles over meaning, visibility, and symbolic legitimacy. Increased visibility does not automatically strengthen accountability; under certain conditions, it may undermine police professionalism if not governed strategically. Polri should develop a comprehensive framework for managing police visibility and representation as part of its institutional accountability system, rather than treating media engagement solely as a public communication function. Such a framework should include ethical standards for representation, clear criteria for selecting personnel who appear in media programs, and structured training on communication competence and the symbolic implications of mediated exposure.

Divhumas Polri needs to be strengthened as a strategic institutional actor within the media arena. This requires a shift from a predominantly crisis-response orientation toward a preventive and continuous model of representation management. Key measures include the establishment of systematic post-production evaluation mechanisms, closer integration with internal oversight units, and more structured collaboration with media organizations and broadcasting regulators to ensure that police representation remains aligned with professional standards and substantive accountability.

Formal police oversight mechanisms must adapt to the characteristics of media-based scrutiny, which is rapid, participatory, and emotionally driven. This adaptation does not imply compromising legal rigor, but integrating media monitoring and public response analysis into early-warning systems for legitimacy risk. Through such integration, formal oversight can move from a position of continually reacting to public narratives toward a more proactive role in managing the consequences of police representation. Without policy frameworks capable of bridging these accountability regimes, public visibility risks becoming a new source of vulnerability for police professionalism and institutional legitimacy over the long term.

REFERENCES

Aleem, Y., Waheed Khan, S., & Jamroze, S. (2021). Media's Portrayal of Crime and Public Perception Toward the Criminal Justice System. *Bulletin of Business and Economics*, *10*(4), 167–175. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.6413775

Bolin, G., & Jerslev, A. (2018). Surveillance through media, by media, in media. *Northern Lights*, *16*(1), 3–21. https://doi.org/10.1386/nl.16.1.3_2

Bovens, M. (2006). Analysing and Assessing Public Accountability. A Conceptual Framework. *European Governance Paper*, (1). http://www.connex-network.org/eurogov/pdf/egp-connex-C-06-01.pdf.

Bradford, B., Milani, J., & Jackson, J. (2017). Identity, legitimacy, and "making sense" of police use of force. *Policing: An International Journal of Police Strategies & Management*, *40*(3), 614–627. https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-06-2016-0085

Brucato, B. (2015). The new transparency: Police violence in the context of ubiquitous surveillance. *Media and Communication*, *3*(3), 39–55. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v3i3.292

Colbran, M. P. (2020). Policing, social media, and the new media landscape: can the police and the traditional media ever successfully bypass each other? *Policing and Society*, *30*(3), 295–309. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2018.1532426

Couldry, N. (2012). Conceptualizing mediatization: Contexts, traditions, arguments. *Journal of Communication Theory*, *23*(3), 191–202. https://doi.org/10.1111/comt.12019

Goldrosen, N. (2025). Police misconduct hearings as legitimacy dialogues. *Policing and Society*, *35*(7), 951–966. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2024.2442715

Goldsmith, A. J. (2010). Policing's new visibility. *British Journal of Criminology*, *50*(5), 914–934. https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azq033

Graziano, L. M., & Gauthier, J. F. (2018). Media consumption and perceptions of police legitimacy. *Policing*, *41*(5), 593–607. https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-12-2016-0177

Mathiesen, T. (1997). The Viewer Society: Michel Foucault's 'Panopticon' Revisited. *Theoretical Criminology*, *1*(2), 215–234. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362480697001002003

Mauri-Rios, M., Ramon-Vegas, X., Rodríguez-Martínez, R., & Díaz-Campo, J. (2022). Indicators for evaluating media accountability. *Cuadernos.Info*, (51), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.51.27331

McKay, B. (2022). Mapping the Police-Media Institutional Relationship. *MacEwan University Student EJournal*, *6*(1). https://doi.org/10.31542/muse.v6i1.22602260

McMillan, J. A., Smith, J. D., & Benet, W. J. (2023). Civilian Oversight of Police Through the Lens of Polarities of Democracy. *Journal of Sustainable Social Change*, *15*(1), 42–60. https://doi.org/10.5590/JSSC.2023.15.1.04

Mohler, M., Campbell, C., Henderson, K., & Renauer, B. (2022). Policing in an era of sousveillance: a randomised controlled trial examining the influence of video footage on perceptions of legitimacy. *Policing and Society*, *32*(1), 52–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2021.1878169

Morrow, S. (2019). Social & News Media's Effects on Law Enforcement. *Global Journal of Forensic Science & Medicine*, *1*(4). https://doi.org/10.33552/gjfsm.2019.01.000516

Rackstraw, E. (2023). When Reality TV Creates Reality: How "Copaganda" Affects Police, Communities, and Viewers. *Harvard University Journal*. https://ssrn.com/abstract=4592803

Raspati, P. A., & Setiawati, E. (2021). Pengaruh Program Reality Show Kepolisian terhadap Sikap Penonton di Jakarta. *Prosiding Jurnalistik*, *7*(1), 478–484. https://doi.org/10.29313/.v7i1.27258

Reiner, R. (2013). Who governs? Democracy, plutocracy, science, and prophecy in policing. *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, *13*(2), 161–180. https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895812474282

Rowe, M., Jones, M., Millie, A., & Ralph, L. (2023). Visible policing: uniforms and the (re)construction of police occupational identity. *Policing and Society*, *33*(2), 222–237. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2022.2096608

Sanders, C. B., & Sheptycki, J. (2017). Policing, crime and 'big data'; towards a critique of the moral economy of stochastic governance. *Crime, Law and Social Change*, *68*(1–2), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10611-016-9678-7

Schlosser, J. A. (2013). Bourdieu and Foucault: A Conceptual Integration Toward an Empirical Sociology of Prisons. *Critical Criminology*, *21*(1), 31–46. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-012-9164-1

Skogan, W. G. (2006). Asymmetry in the impact of encounters with police. *Policing and Society*, *16*(2), 99–126. https://doi.org/10.1080/10439460600662098

Surette, R. (2015). Performance Crime and Justice. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice*, *27*(2), 195–216. https://doi.org/10.1080/10345329.2015.12036041

Triola, A. M., & Chanin, J. (2023). Police culture, transparency, and civilian oversight: A case study of the National City Police Department. *International Journal of Police Science and Management*, *25*(1), 81–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/14613557221132490

Van Brakel, R. (2021). How to Watch the Watchers? Democratic Oversight of Algorithmic Police Surveillance in Belgium. *Surveillance and Society*, *19*(2). https://ojs.library.queensu.ca/index.php/surveillance-and-society/index|

Walsh, J. P., Baker, V., & Frade, B. (2022). Policing and social media: The framing of technological use by Canadian newspapers (2005–2020). *Criminology and Criminal Justice*. https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958221114254