



## When the Stake is Bigger than the Pole: The Breadth of the Authority Coverage and Its Impact on the Professionalism of the Indonesian National Police

By

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### Introduction

The public spotlight and criticism pointed out towards the *Kepolisian Republik Indonesia* (Indonesian National Police abbreviated Polri) has recently proliferated. This notion is primarily related to the performance of the police, which is far from the expectations; in particular, the reform of the police towards a more professional police force. At the initiation of the reform era, various arrangements for the security sector were conducted towards the professionalism of the Polri. However, unfortunately, this hope is still far from ideal. Various problems have further plagued the performance of the Polri, ranging from the cases of corruption, violence, politicization issues, to the bigoted handling of criminal cases.

As a result, the police received criticism from various parties, reflected when the hashtag “#percumalaporpolisi (it is useless to report to the police)” emerges as an expression of public disappointment towards the performance of the police. The trigger for this hashtag stems from the publication of the Multatuli Project regarding the termination of investigations into rape cases in East Luwu Regency, South Sulawesi.<sup>1</sup> In addition, various cases involving members of the Polri have gone viral, thereby discouraging that the police performance is getting away from professionalism. Some examples of cases include the reporting party or the victim who became a suspect, the persecution of fellow members and also to the community, as well as the violence in securing demonstrations.<sup>2</sup>



The National Police Chief (Kapolri) acted hastily as a form of institutional response to the situation. As a result, the Polri chief's position has been stripped and transferred to the leadership rank as a consequence of these various phenomena due to the rise of such cases, potentially tarnishing the image of the police and reducing public trust. The current established public trust in several surveys will, however, backfire the Polri. On July 1, 2021, which coincided with Indonesia National Police Day, for example, several survey results demonstrated high public trust in the Polri. Survey institutions such as Alvara Strategis Indonesia, Charta Politica, and Cyrus Network reported an average confidence level of 80%.<sup>3</sup> However, in August 2021, the release of the KedaiKopi survey exhibited a decline in the level of public trust towards the Polri, which was 66.3%.<sup>4</sup> The survey result was further reflected by the Saiful Mujani Research & Consulting (SMRC) survey in October 2021, increasingly indicating a decline in the confidence level of 58%.<sup>5</sup>

Thus far, public criticism and scrutiny of the Polri performance reflect the weakness of the police professionalism, perceived as the tip of the iceberg amidst the current Polri situation. The main argument lies in the notion that the Polri has received tasks that are not in accordance with the core competence of a professional police force.

## Analysis

In general, the main core competencies of the police include crime prevention, maintaining public security and order, and enforcing the law. However, currently, the National Police has handled numerous aspects that should be the duties and authorities of other institutions. This complex situation further distinguishes Polri's performance in the previous Era. In the New Order Era, the Polri was the "youngest brother" whose role was limited, and the Indonesia National Army (TNI) was not infrequently stepped over. Currently, the Polri has been transformed into an institution entrusted with various powers that are directly responsible to the president. With extraordinary financial support and the interests of the authorities in this institution, the Polri is perceived to be the "golden child".<sup>6</sup>

Under the current duties, the Polri is in a gray area where its authority is potential in any situation (omnipotent) and in anywhere (omnipresent). For example, the task of securing for the Polri is significantly broad, starting from securing the community environment, traffic, elections, to national vital objects. In addition, the Polri is assigned to protect forests, waters, and air. The Polri additionally plays a role in overcoming domestic security disturbances such as terrorism, separatist conflicts, as well as horizontal matters based on primordialism. These duties are also accompanied by the responsibility of the Polri in





fostering the community to prevent crime in its environment.

The tasks performed by the Polri have been increasingly piling up during the COVID-19 pandemic era. The Polri is required to enforce various health protocols, ranging from controlling community mobility, using masks to operating the Large Scale Social Restriction (PSBB) to the Communities Activities Restrictions Enforcement (PPKM). In addition, the Polri also conducts case tracking (tracing) transmission, counseling on the COVID-19, and distributing vaccination programs to the public. Hence, it is inconceivable that the burden of such immense tasks coincides with other main tasks of the National Police. In the era of the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Police has been portrayed to be a figure who bears increasingly broad and complex responsibilities leading to energy-draining, consideration, and often emotions in the field. The logical implication thus affects the performance of this institution.

This complexity has reached its peak as the result of the inadequate quality and quantity of the Polri human resources. In terms of quality, it is still visible that the behavior of the Polri members does not reflect an attitude of obedience to the rule of law. Several cases provide examples, ranging from the leadership's persecution of its members, the shooting of fellow colleagues, to the violence at demonstrations by slamming the protesters (students). Meanwhile, in terms of quantity, the ratio of police to the population in Indonesia is 1:>1,000; whereas, the ideal ratio for Indonesia is 1:400.<sup>7</sup> With the number of members that are far from adequate, accompanied by various powers, jobs, and a wide array of responsibilities, it is significant that the performance of the Polri has been less than optimal. This unexpected condition has exacerbated the analogy of the Polri to an Indonesian proverb of "the stake is bigger than the pole".

In addition, the current perspective on the Polri affects the increase in workloads that are not in accordance with their duties and authorities -Police also play a role in a practical political life. Recently, it is undeniable that the Polri has become part of the elements for regime supporters. The role of the Polri as a ruler's supporter is reflected in moments of electoral contestation (*local* and general elections). Towards the implementation of the general and local election, for example, the Polri conducted immense activities ranging from building interactions with community leaders<sup>8</sup> to collecting data on community support as participants.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, the aforementioned tasks are not in line with the role and function of the police institution.

Polri also handles the opposition or those who are critical of the government. This handling is often felt to be excessive, such as against the opposition groups. A survey conducted by Indonesian Political





Indicators indicates that 57.7% of respondents assume that the police have acted arbitrarily in arresting citizens whose political views differ from those holding the authorities.<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon shows that the state faces opposition groups at the society level by using the police. Several prominent critics of the government were arrested, prosecuted, or convicted for their public comments.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

Those phenomena further strengthen the declined assessment of the police, further away from the principles of professionalism and democracy. Accordingly, this unexpected condition is encouraged to be immediately addressed because if left unchecked, the Polri will experience more challenges in enforcing its main tasks, and implementing the core competencies of the police themselves. This condition will certainly be dangerous, not only for the security sector handlers but also for the life of the nation and state. From the analysis, we recommended that the main key to solving this problem is to restore the Polri as a professional institution with authority in accordance with its core competences. However, it is feasible that the main obstacle will return to the perception of the authorities and civilian elites in formulating policies related to the functions and powers of the Polri. Therefore, revisions or even additions to regulations to maintain the professionalism of the Polri are an urgent prerequisite at this time.





## Endnotes

- 1 <https://projectmultatuli.org/kasus-pencabulan-anak-di-luwu-timur-polisi-membela-pemerkosa-dan-menghentikan-penyelidikan/>.
- 2 <https://www.kompas.com/tren/read/2021/10/27/063000965/10-kasus-yang-melibatkan-polisi-dan-menjadi-perhatian-publik?page=all>.
- 3 <https://www.tribunnews.com/nasional/2021/07/01/kapolri-beberkan-capaian-kinerja-polri-di-hari-bhayangkara-ke-75>.
- 4 <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2021/08/13/survei-kepercayaan-terhadap-polri-terendah-dibandingkan-penegak-hukum-lainnya>.
- 5 <https://katadata.co.id/ariayudhistira/analisisdata/6177986172479/bahaya-erosi-kepercayaan-publik-terhadap-polisi>.
- 6 <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/nasional/20200630152231-12-519093/polri-anak-emas-reformasi-dengan-anggaran-tambun>
- 7 <https://jogja.tribunnews.com/2019/11/26/pakar-sebut-rasio-polisi-dan-masyarakat-tinggi>.
- 8 <https://rri.co.id/bandung/politik/politik-dan-parlemen/658906/jaga-stabilitas-kamtibmas-pemilu-polda-jabar-gelar-silaturahmi-akbar-dengan-tokoh-lintas-agama>.
- 9 <https://news.detik.com/berita/d-4487710/tonton-sekarang-polisi-mendata-pendukung-01-dan-02>.
- 10 <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/4391541/survei-indikator-tunjukkan-meningkatnya-ancaman-kebebasan-sipil-di-indonesia>.
- 11 Ahmad Dhani was jailed for an “idiot” tweet in the hashtag #2019ChangePresident which was judged to be hate speech. Eggi Sudjana was arrested on charges of treason because of his speech that called on the public to exercise people’s power over election fraud. Kivlan Zein was accused of spreading false news and treason but the crime against him was possession of a firearm.





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