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Reality Police Shows as a New Arena of Public Oversight: Mediatized Visibility, Mutual Surveillance in Indonesian Policing Context

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Abstract
This article starts from a simple but often overlooked question: what happens when everyday police work becomes a recurring object of public observation through reality television? Focusing on reality police shows in Indonesia, the study examines how mediated visibility reshapes relations between policing, public evaluation, and accountability. Drawing on a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, the analysis combines a large-scale audience survey (N ≈ 2,100) with in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, observations, and document analysis. The findings show that reality police television significantly expands the visibility of police actions and invites audiences to assess police conduct in moral and normative terms. Viewers do not merely watch; they evaluate, compare, and judge. Yet this heightened visibility does not automatically translate into procedural transparency. Instead, it is filtered through media logic that prioritizes immediacy, action, and narrative coherence, often leaving legal complexity and organizational deliberation at the margins. Qualitative evidence further suggests that the presence of cameras alters police behavior, encouraging caution and performative self-regulation rather than consistently strengthening substantive accountability. At the same time, the study reveals that public scrutiny generated through reality police shows does not operate in isolation. Informal audience oversight intersects with formal regulatory mechanisms, producing a multilayered and sometimes tension-filled configuration of accountability shaped by differing temporalities, authorities, and normative expectations. Building inductively on these empirical patterns, the article develops the Circuit of Mutual Surveillanceas a middle-range conceptual model to capture the reciprocal relations through which police, media, audiences, and regulators simultaneously observe and respond to one another within a mediated visibility environment. By reframing reality police television as a consequential site of public oversight, this article contributes to policing and surveillance scholarship and offers empirically grounded insights into the promises and limits of media visibility for democratic policing.

Keywords: Accountability, Mediated Policing, Police Reality Shows, Public Oversight, Surveillance

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, policing practices have undergone a fundamental transformation marked by an unprecedented expansion of public visibility. Policing no longer operates primarily within relatively closed bureaucratic spaces subject mainly to internal oversight mechanisms. Instead, police work increasingly unfolds within public visual arenas shaped by cameras, screens, and continuous media circulation (Aleem et al., 2021; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019; Morrow, 2019). This shift has given rise to what the literature describes as *policing's new visibility*: a condition in which police actions are exposed, recorded, circulated, and interpreted by the public with a speed and reach far exceeding earlier periods (Brucato, 2015; A. J. Goldsmith, 2010; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019). As a consequence, policing is increasingly understood not only as an institutional practice but also as a public performance, observed, evaluated, and debated across both mainstream media and digital ecosystems (Bullock, 2018; Colbran, 2020).

On one hand, heightened public visibility is frequently positioned as a prerequisite for strengthening police accountability and legitimacy within democratic policing frameworks (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022). Procedural justice scholarship emphasizes that public trust and compliance are closely tied to perceptions of fair procedures, dignified treatment, and the belief that police act in accordance with legal and normative standards (Reny & Newman, 2021; Sunshine & Tyler, 2003). From this perspective, openness and access to information about police actions are assumed to enhance public confidence (Cao, 2015; Tankebe, 2010). Yet this relationship is neither automatic nor uniform; it remains contingent upon social context and the quality of citizens' encounters with policing institutions (Skogan, 2006). On the other hand, critical studies caution that visibility should not be conflated with substantive transparency. Public exposure may generate strong symbolic narratives of accountability while remaining procedurally thin, particularly when information is selective, fragmented, and framed through media logic rather than legal deliberation (Bolin & Jerslev, 2018; Brucato, 2015).

Within surveillance studies, these developments are often interpreted as a departure from classical panoptic models toward more dispersed and participatory configurations of oversight. The panopticon, originating from Bentham and reinterpreted by Foucault (Foucault, 1977), conceptualizes modern discipline as a form of asymmetrical visibility that induces internalized self-control (Akduman, 2023). Subsequent scholarship, however, demonstrates that contemporary surveillance is not solely vertical. The concept of the *synopticon* captures situations in which many observe a few actors positioned within public view (Galič et al., 2017; Mathiesen, 1997), while *sousveillance* emphasizes practices through which citizens record and monitor authorities from below (Mann, 2004; Mohler et al., 2022). Further extending this perspective, the notion of the *surveillant assemblage* underscores the fluid and distributed nature of contemporary surveillance (Haggerty & Ericson, 2000), in which technologies, institutions, and social practices are interconnected within dynamic networks rather than hierarchical structures (Galič et al., 2017; Haggerty & Ericson, 2000).

Within these configurations, cameras and visual media do not merely document reality; they actively produce new disciplinary conditions. Koskela's concept of *the cam era* highlights how awareness of being potentially recorded encourages behavioral adjustment, prompting subjects to regulate gestures, bodily movements, and interactional rhythms in anticipation of public scrutiny (Koskela, 2003). Organizational studies of policing similarly indicate that video technologies and mediated visibility reshape professional conduct by redefining what counts as "showable" police work (Bruce, 2021). Rather than simply enhancing transparency, visibility can reproduce police culture while simultaneously reorienting officers' self-presentation toward visual appropriateness and performative caution (Keesman, 2023). Visibility, in this sense, functions less as a neutral channel of information than as a mechanism that actively shapes behavior and judgment (A. J. Goldsmith, 2010; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019).

Despite the rapid expansion of previous research on police visibility and surveillance, existing research remains heavily concentrated in two primary arenas; digital media, particularly police use of social media and citizen recording and individual surveillance technologies such as body-worn cameras (Taylor, 2016). Studies of police social media practices show that institutions often deploy digital platforms as tools of presentational strategy and

image management, frequently limiting reciprocal engagement with public critique (Bullock, 2018; Colbran, 2020; Hu et al., 2018). Research on body-worn cameras, meanwhile, reveals a persistent paradox between promises of transparency and practices of symbolic accountability. Technologies promoted as solutions to police misconduct may operate primarily as signs of reform without consistently producing substantive constraints on discretionary power (Brucato, 2015; Koskela, 2003). These debates underscore a recurring caution in the literature; visibility may expand public scrutiny, but it can also reinforce performative legitimacy when not supported by effective formal oversight mechanisms (Triola & Chanin, 2023).

In contrast to these digital arenas, television, particularly reality police shows, has received comparatively limited attention as an active site of public oversight (Phillips & Trone, 2002). Existing studies of police television programs largely operate within traditions of representation, media effects, and symbolic legitimacy (Goldrosen, 2025; Graziano & Gauthier, 2018). Research on television and policing demonstrates that media narratives can shape public understanding of police institutions by simplifying law enforcement processes into accessible and consumable storylines (Corner, 2002; Doyle, 2000). Studies of reality-based policing further emphasize that the genre constructs "reality" through selective scenes (Jones, 2009), dramatic sequencing (Monk-Turner et al., 2014), and spectacle-oriented formats (Calzado & Gómez, 2016), often marginalizing procedural uncertainty, administrative labor, and legal complexity (Cotter & O'connor, 2008; Rowe et al., 2023). Scholarship on spectacle policing and *copaganda* adds that such programs may amplify heroic narratives, normalize coercive authority, and obscure the structural dimensions of accountability and citizens' rights (Bakkenes, 2023; Fernandez, 2024; Reiner, 2013).

Empirical studies from Indonesia point to similar dynamics. Several studies report a positive association between viewing the program *86* (NET TV) and public perceptions of the Indonesian National Police, although the effect size tends to be modest and more strongly driven by visual appeal and narrative framing than by substantive understanding of policing practices (Andriana Hasby, 2017; Ardoyo, 2018; Astuti & Benedicta, 2023). These findings resonate with Altheide's concept of *media logic* (Altheide, 2004), which highlights how modern media select, organize, and present institutional realities through entertainment-oriented formats privileging speed, dramatization, and ease of consumption, often at the expense of procedural and policy complexity (Altheide, 2004). While prior research thus establishes the significance of representation and perceptual effects, it remains less attentive to how reality policing television operates as a mediating arena that reshapes relations of power and accountability (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022).

This gap defines the central analytical contribution of the present article. *First*, reality police television has rarely been examined as an active arena of public oversight rather than merely a vehicle of institutional image-making (Ida & Waltorp, 2015; Serino, 2021). *Second*, the interrelations among media visibility, audience response, police behavioral adjustment, and formal oversight institutions have seldom been analyzed within an integrated empirical framework capable of explaining underlying mechanisms (Aleem et al., 2021). Third, much of the literature remains confined to questions of how police are represented, without extending the analysis to how visibility itself triggers social control, public judgment, and multilayered accountability (Mauri-Rios et al., 2022). This limitation is particularly striking given accountability scholarship's emphasis on relational processes involving forums of judgment, obligations to explain, and the possibility of consequences (Bovens, 2006).

This article advances the argument that reality police television constitutes a hybrid mediatized space in which policing practices, media logic, audience participation, and formal oversight mechanisms intersect within a single relational configuration (Altheide, 2004). Within this space, police officers appear simultaneously as subjects of representation and objects of public evaluation; media institutions act as curators of visibility, determining what aspects of policing are shown and how they are framed; audiences engage in informal oversight through judgment, commentary (Triola & Chanin, 2023), and discursive evaluation; and regulatory bodies and political institutions operate as layers of formal oversight aimed at balancing openness, ethical standards, and rule-of-law principles (Bovens, 2006; Skogan, 2006). For analytical purposes, the article employs the concepts of mediated policing oversight and multilayered visibility and accountability as provisional lenses, before inductively synthesizing the empirical findings into a conceptual model that captures reciprocal oversight relations among police, media,

audiences, and regulators (O'Connor & Zaidi, 2021). This model is elaborated in the discussion section as an analytical framework derived from data rather than asserted as an a priori theoretical claim.

Guided by this framework, the article addresses three research questions: (1) How do reality police television programs constitute arenas of mediated public oversight? (2) What mechanisms link media visibility to informal and formal forms of oversight over policing? and (3) How does this multilayered configuration of oversight shape police accountability within democratic contexts? By addressing these questions, the article seeks to contribute theoretically to scholarship on surveillance and mediatized policing, empirically through mixed-methods evidence from the Global South, and normatively through a critical reflection on the opportunities and limits of media visibility as an instrument of police accountability in democratic societies.

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

This study employs a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches in a structured sequence to develop a comprehensive understanding of mediated public oversight of policing. In this design, quantitative data collection and analysis are conducted in the initial phase to map general patterns of public perception regarding media-based police oversight. This phase is followed by qualitative data collection and analysis aimed at explaining the social, institutional, and symbolic mechanisms underlying those patterns (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

This design was selected because the dynamics of police oversight within the context of reality television cannot be adequately captured through a single type of data. Quantitative survey data allow for the identification of broad perceptual tendencies and distributions among audiences exposed to reality police programs. Qualitative data, in turn, provide the analytical depth necessary to examine how mediated visibility is interpreted, negotiated, and responded to by different actors, including police personnel, media practitioners, audiences, and formal oversight institutions. Integration of the two strands occurs at the interpretive stage, enabling the construction of a coherent explanation of how mediated oversight operates as a multilayered and relational process.

2.2. Participants and Data Sources

Data for this study were drawn from four primary groups relevant to the analysis of media-mediated police oversight. First, audience members of reality police television programs constituted the main source of quantitative data through a structured survey. This group represents the public both as recipients of mediated policing narratives and as actors engaged in informal oversight through evaluative judgment and public discourse.

Second, police personnel, both directly and indirectly involved in reality police television programs, served as qualitative informants. Their perspectives were essential for understanding how media visibility influences professional conduct, decision-making, and reflexive awareness within everyday policing practices. Third, media actors, including production teams and journalists, provided insight into production logics, visual selection processes, and editorial considerations shaping the representation of police work on television. Fourth, formal oversight actors, such as broadcasting regulators and related institutional authorities, contributed normative and organizational perspectives on ethical boundaries, regulatory frameworks, and accountability mechanisms governing police television content. The use of multiple data sources was intended to capture oversight not as a linear process but as a reciprocal and layered relationship among institutions, media, and publics.

2.3. Sampling Procedures

In the quantitative phase, the study employed a non-probability purposive sampling strategy to recruit survey respondents with direct exposure to reality police television programs. Inclusion criteria required respondents to (1) be at least 17 years of age and (2) have watched at least one episode of *86* (NET TV)or *The Police* (Trans7) during the period relevant to the study. This approach was chosen because the objective of the survey was not

statistical generalization to the national population, but rather the identification of perceptual patterns among audiences who had actually encountered the media content under investigation. The quantitative phase yielded more than two thousand respondents, a sample size methodologically adequate for descriptive analysis and exploratory pattern identification. Demographic distributions were examined to ensure variation across age, gender, educational background, and regional residence, reducing the likelihood that results would be driven by a single dominant social group.

For the qualitative phase, informants were selected through purposive and iterative sampling, based on the relevance of their experience, institutional position, and degree of involvement with the phenomenon under study. The number of informants was not predetermined but followed the principle of theoretical saturation, with data collection concluding when additional interviews no longer produced substantively new analytical insights. Survey data were collected online using a digital questionnaire platform. Participation was voluntary and uncompensated, and respondents were provided with clear information regarding the purpose of the study and assurances of anonymity prior to participation. Qualitative data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions conducted in multiple settings, including police offices and other institutional meeting spaces, depending on access permissions and participant availability.

2.4. Measures and Instruments

The survey instrument was constructed as a structured questionnaire employing Likert-scale items to measure several key dimensions, including exposure to reality police television programs, perceptions of police representation and mediated visibility, and views on media-based police oversight and accountability. Item development was informed by theoretical frameworks on surveillance, media representation, and procedural justice discussed in the introduction, and adapted to the Indonesian social context. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire underwent readability checks and minor wording adjustments to ensure clarity and semantic consistency. Qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interview guides, allowing for systematic coverage of key topics while retaining flexibility to explore participants' experiences, interpretations, and reflections on media exposure and public oversight.

2.5. Analytical Strategy and Data Integration

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques to summarize response distributions and identify general patterns in audience perceptions. These analyses were not intended for causal hypothesis testing, but rather served an exploratory function, informing the direction and focus of subsequent qualitative inquiry. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically through an iterative coding process. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data and progressively refined into more abstract analytical categories through constant comparison. This process ensured that emergent themes remained grounded in empirical material rather than imposed a priori.

Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings followed a sequential explanatory logic, employing processes of *connecting* and *building*. Quantitative results guided qualitative exploration, while insights from qualitative analysis were used to contextualize and explain observed statistical patterns. Through this integrative strategy, the study synthesized both strands into a coherent conceptual interpretation of mediated public oversight (Creswell & Clark, 2011).

2.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the appropriate research ethics committee prior to data collection. All participants received information regarding the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Participant identities were protected through anonymization, and all data were stored and analyzed in accordance with ethical standards governing social and behavioral research.

3. Results

3.1. Descriptive Quantitative Results

This section presents descriptive findings from the audience survey designed to capture how reality police television is experienced, interpreted, and evaluated by viewers. Drawing on responses from approximately 2,100 respondentswho met the exposure criteria for *86* (NET TV) and/or *The Police* (Trans7), the quantitative analysis maps not only levels of exposure and general perceptions, but also internal tensions within audience judgments regarding visibility, evaluation, and accountability. Rather than treating audience perception as a homogeneous construct, the results reveal differentiated patterns that are analytically consequential for understanding mediated public oversight.

3.1.1. Exposure to Reality Police Shows: Repetition, Recall, and Cross-Platform Circulation

Survey results indicate that exposure to reality police television was moderate to high, with most respondents reporting repeated encounters rather than one-time viewing. This repetition is analytically important: it suggests that audience perceptions are formed through accumulated visual experience rather than isolated impressions. Respondents described watching episodes both regularly and sporadically, indicating that exposure operates through routine consumption as well as incidental encounters.

Crucially, exposure was not confined to linear television broadcasts. Many respondents reported encountering program segments through short clips circulated on digital platforms and social media. This pattern points to a fragmented but persistent visibility, in which policing actions are repeatedly recontextualized outside their original narrative sequence. As documented in the dissertation data, this circulation enables selective recall, where certain actions arrests, confrontations, displays of authority become more salient than procedural continuity. Exposure, therefore, functions not only as access to information but as a condition that shapes which aspects of policing become memorable and evaluable. This level and form of exposure constitute a necessary precondition for public evaluation. Audiences are positioned not merely as passive viewers but as actors with sufficient visual familiarity to form judgments, comparisons, and expectations regarding police conduct.

3.1.2. Visibility, Evaluability, and the Limits of Perceived Transparency

Across survey items, respondents expressed strong agreement that reality police shows increase the visibility of police actions and make those actions open to public evaluation. As shown in Table 3, respondents agreed that these programs make police actions more visible ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.86$) and enable public evaluation of police behavior ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.89$). Respondents also perceived that the presence of cameras encourages greater care and professionalism among officers ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.82$).

However, these affirmative perceptions coexist with a more ambivalent assessment of processual transparency. Agreement declined markedly when respondents were asked whether what is shown represents the full policing process ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.38$). The higher dispersion on this item indicates not mere disagreement but interpretive uncertainty, suggesting that audiences recognize gaps between what is visible and what remains unseen.

This internal differentiation is a key empirical finding. It demonstrates that audiences do not conflate visibility with transparency. While respondents acknowledge that they can see police work and evaluate actions at a surface level, they are less convinced that reality police shows provide sufficient procedural, legal, or contextual information to support comprehensive understanding. The quantitative data thus reveal a layered perception structure: visibility and evaluability are widely accepted, whereas completeness and transparency remain contested.

3.1.3. Normative Evaluation and the Character of Informal Oversight

Survey responses further indicate that exposure to reality police television activates normative evaluation among audiences. A substantial proportion of respondents reported actively assessing whether police actions shown on screen align with law, ethics, and common-sense notions of justice. This evaluative orientation suggests that viewing is accompanied by judgment, positioning audiences as participants in informal oversight rather than detached spectators.

Yet the survey also reveals limits to this oversight. When respondents were asked about their capacity to assess policing procedures in depth, confidence levels declined. This pattern suggests that informal oversight is grounded primarily in moral and normative reasoning, rather than in technical or procedural expertise. In other words, audiences feel able to judge whether something looks right, but less able to judge whether it was procedurally correct within the full legal framework.

This distinction is central to interpreting mediated oversight. The quantitative findings point to a form of public scrutiny that is participatory and evaluative, yet uneven in its procedural foundation, an empirical condition that sets the stage for the qualitative mechanisms examined in the following section.

Table 3: Audience Perceptions on Mediated Visibility and Public Oversight

Survey Item	**Mean**	**SD**
Reality police shows make police actions more visible to the public	4.25	0.86
These programs enable the public to evaluate police behavior	4.15	0.89
What is shown represents the full policing process	3.30	1.38
Police officers appear more careful when cameras are present	4.24	0.82
Media exposure increases police accountability	4.24	0.90

Source: Survey data from doctoral dissertation (processed by the author).

Based on survey data collected from approximately 2,100 respondents, the descriptive statistics presented in Table 3 indicate a consistent pattern in audience perceptions of mediated policing. Respondents strongly agreed that reality police television shows increase the public visibility of police actions ($M = 4.25$, $SD = 0.86$) and enable audiences to evaluate police behavior ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 0.89$). However, perceptions were notably more divided regarding whether these programs represent the full policing process, reflected in a lower mean score and higher dispersion ($M = 3.30$, $SD = 1.38$). This divergence suggests that increased visibility does not necessarily translate into perceptions of substantive transparency. Furthermore, respondents perceived that the presence of cameras encourages police officers to behave more carefully and professionally ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.82$), indicating the emergence of mediated self-regulation. Media exposure was also associated with higher perceptions of police accountability ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 0.90$), supporting the interpretation of reality police shows as an informal arena of public oversight. Taken together, these findings reveal a pattern in which mediated visibility enhances evaluative engagement and symbolic accountability, while leaving unresolved tensions between representation, procedural completeness, and institutional transparency.

3.2. Qualitative Thematic Findings

Qualitative findings from interviews, focus group discussions, and observations provide insight into the mechanisms through which the quantitative patterns are produced and sustained. Rather than simply illustrating survey results, the qualitative analysis reveals how mediated visibility is experienced, managed, and negotiated by different actors within the policing, media oversight nexus.

3.2.1. Camera Awareness as a Mechanism of Behavioral Anticipation

A dominant theme across police interviews and FGDs is camera awareness, a persistent consciousness of being recorded that shapes operational conduct. Informants described how the presence of cameras encourages anticipatory self-monitoring: officers become more attentive to speech, bodily gestures, and interactional tone, particularly in encounters that may later be scrutinized by viewers.

Importantly, camera awareness is not uniformly experienced as coercive. Many informants framed it as a reminder of professional standards and public responsibility. At the same time, the data reveal an ambivalence; in legally ambiguous or high-risk situations, officers may prioritize actions that appear defensible or visually acceptable, even when such actions do not fully capture the complexity of procedural reasoning. This anticipatory adjustment helps explain why audiences perceive increased professionalism, while also sensing that not all aspects of policing are fully represented.

3.2.2. Media Logic and the Structuring of Selective Visibility

A second theme concerns the structuring role of media logic. Media practitioners and police informants alike emphasized that reality television imposes narrative and visual constraints. Decisions about what to film, what to exclude, and how to sequence events are shaped by production imperatives, time limits, and assumptions about audience attention.

As a result, mediated visibility is inherently selective. High-intensity moments—stops, pursuits, arrests—are foregrounded, while slower processes such as legal deliberation, administrative documentation, or post-event accountability procedures receive minimal attention. This selective visibility aligns closely with the quantitative finding that respondents experience increased visibility without corresponding confidence in procedural completeness. The qualitative data thus clarify that visibility is not merely partial by accident, but structurally produced.

3.2.3. Audience Engagement and the Dynamics of Informal Oversight

A third theme highlights the audience as an active participant in informal oversight. Informants described how televised police actions often become topics of discussion, comparison, and judgment in both offline and digital spaces. In some cases, public reactions, especially critical ones are monitored internally by policing institutions as indicators of reputational risk.

However, this oversight remains unstructured and episodic. Judgments are often formed from fragments detached from legal context or outcome, reinforcing the tendency toward moral simplification. The qualitative data thus reinforce the survey finding that informal oversight is evaluative but uneven, capable of generating pressure and visibility without guaranteeing procedural accuracy.

3.2.4. Formal Oversight, Regulation, and Temporal Mismatch

The final theme concerns formal oversight through regulatory and political institutions. Regulatory informants emphasized that reality police programming operates within broadcasting regulations and ethical codes intended to protect rights and prevent trial by media. Formal oversight is conceived as a stabilizing mechanism that sets boundaries for mediated visibility.

Yet qualitative evidence also points to a temporal and operational mismatch. Regulatory responses tend to be procedural and retrospective, while public discourse unfolds rapidly and often reactively. This mismatch limits the capacity of formal oversight to intervene in real time, creating spaces where informal judgment dominates before institutional clarification occurs.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that reality police television constitutes a complex arena of mediated public oversight. Quantitative results show that audiences widely accept increased visibility and evaluability, while remaining uncertain about procedural completeness. Qualitative findings reveal the mechanisms underlying this pattern: camera awareness shapes police conduct, media logic structures selective visibility, audiences engage in informal oversight grounded in normative judgment, and formal oversight operates within regulatory and temporal constraints. These empirically grounded insights provide the foundation for the discussion section, where the article will synthesize the findings into a conceptual model of mediated, multilayered oversight and situate it within broader debates on policing, surveillance, and democratic accountability.

4. Discussion

This section interprets the empirical findings by situating them within broader debates on surveillance, police communication, and democratic policing. The discussion focuses on three interrelated issues: how reality police television operates as a mediatized arena of public oversight; how oversight mechanisms are produced through mediated visibility; and how these mechanisms combine to shape multilayered configurations of police accountability. Through this discussion, the article clarifies the analytical contribution of its findings and consolidates the conceptual model developed inductively from the data.

4.1. Reality Police Shows as Arenas of Mediated Public Oversight

The findings indicate that reality police television can no longer be understood merely as representational media or entertainment content. Instead, such programs function as active arenas of public oversight, in which police actions are rendered visible, evaluated, and indirectly regulated. Survey results show that audiences interpret these programs as opportunities to "see" police work and to assess police conduct, while qualitative findings demonstrate that awareness of public visibility shapes how police officers act in operational settings. Together, these patterns support and extend arguments on policing's *new visibility*, which emphasize how public exposure transforms power relations between state institutions and citizens (A. Goldsmith, 2005; A. J. Goldsmith, 2010).

At the same time, this study advances the literature by demonstrating that visibility in the context of reality police television is strongly mediated by media logic. What becomes visible is not the policing process as a whole, but a curated selection shaped by production constraints, narrative imperatives, and assumptions about audience attention. This finding resonates with Altheide's (2004) critique of media logic and with scholarship on spectacle policing, which highlights the privileging of dramatic, action-oriented enforcement over procedural deliberation and administrative complexity (Bakkenes, 2023; Reiner, 2013). Visibility, in this sense, is not neutral exposure but a mediated construction that foregrounds certain dimensions of police work while marginalizing others.

This mediated character of visibility helps explain a key empirical tension observed in the survey data: audiences widely perceive increased openness and evaluability, yet remain uncertain about whether reality police shows provide a comprehensive account of the policing process. The distinction between visibility and transparency becomes analytically central. While visibility enables public observation and judgment, transparency requires informational completeness, procedural clarity, and contextual explanation conditions that are not consistently met within reality television formats. Reality police shows thus produce a form of oversight that is real and consequential, but also partial and selective (McMillan et al., 2023).

4.2. Oversight Mechanisms: From Camera Awareness to Public Judgment

Qualitative findings on camera awareness reveal one of the primary mechanisms through which mediated oversight operates. Police officers' awareness of being filmed encourages anticipatory self-regulation, shaping speech, bodily comportment, and decision-making in operational contexts. This pattern aligns with Koskela's (2003) notion of *the cam era*, in which the possibility of recording functions as a disciplinary condition that promotes behavioral modulation. In policing contexts, cameras do not merely document action; they introduce a normative horizon against which officers anticipate public evaluation.

However, the findings also complicate assumptions that camera-based visibility straightforwardly enhances procedural accountability. Consistent with Brucato (2015) and Koskela (2003), the data suggest that mediated visibility often produces symbolic accountability: officers are motivated to act in ways that appear correct and defensible on camera, without necessarily transforming the deeper procedural structures of accountability. In some situations, camera awareness encourages risk-averse strategies or orientations toward showability, where actions are calibrated to visual defensibility rather than procedural completeness. This observation echoes organizational studies showing that video technologies can reshape professional conduct without uniformly strengthening substantive accountability (Keesman, 2023).

Beyond shaping police behavior, mediated visibility also activates informal public oversight. Survey and interview data indicate that audiences engage in normative evaluation of police actions, assessing legality, propriety, and fairness even when they lack technical legal expertise. This pattern reflects a synoptic dynamic in which many observe a limited number of visible actors (Mathiesen, 1997). Yet unlike the classic synopticon, oversight in this context operates through media-curated fragments rather than comprehensive observation. Public judgments are thus formed within a constrained visual field, reinforcing the tendency toward moral evaluation rather than procedural analysis.

4.3. Multilayered Oversight: Interactions Between Informal and Formal Control

A central contribution of this study lies in its analysis of multilayered oversight, particularly the interaction between informal audience scrutiny and formal regulatory control. Interviews with regulatory actors highlight the role of broadcasting regulations and journalistic ethics in setting boundaries for reality police programming, aiming to prevent trial by media, rights violations, and informational distortion. These findings align with Bovens' (2006) relational conception of accountability, which emphasizes the importance of forums, obligations to explain, and the possibility of sanctions.

At the same time, the study reveals persistent tensions between the temporal dynamics of mediated visibility and the operational capacities of formal oversight. Public discourse unfolds rapidly and often reactively, while regulatory mechanisms tend to operate retrospectively and procedurally. This temporal mismatch limits the ability of formal oversight to shape public interpretation in real time, allowing informal judgments to dominate early stages of public evaluation. Such dynamics underscore the relevance of the surveillant assemblage perspective, which conceptualizes contemporary oversight as distributed, fluid, and constituted through interacting actors rather than centralized control (Galič et al., 2017; Haggerty & Ericson, 2019; Sandhu & Haggerty, 2017).

Rather than replacing formal oversight, informal public scrutiny operates alongside it, sometimes reinforcing regulatory concerns and at other times generating pressures that exceed institutional capacities. Accountability in mediated policing contexts thus emerges not as a single mechanism, but as a negotiated outcome of overlapping and occasionally competing forms of surveillance and control.

Through systematic dialogue between empirical findings and existing literature, this study refines and consolidates its conceptual framework. Among the alternative terms introduced earlier, mediated policing oversight most effectively captures the core phenomenon: oversight of policing that operates through media mediation rather than direct institutional control. The concept of multilayered visibility and accountability further emphasizes that visibility and accountability are not singular outcomes, but processes involving interactions between informal and formal layers of oversight.

Building on this refinement, the study inductively develops the Circuit of Mutual Surveillance as its primary analytical model. The model conceptualizes a circular relationship among four actors: police, media, audiences, and regulators. Police are both agents of action and objects of surveillance; media act as curators of visibility; audiences engage in informal oversight through evaluative judgment; and regulators provide formal oversight by establishing ethical and legal boundaries. Crucially, these relationships are reciprocal rather than linear: each actor can simultaneously observe and be observed, regulate and be regulated.

It is important to emphasize that the Circuit of Mutual Surveillance is not proposed as a universal theory. Rather, it constitutes a context-sensitive, middle-range conceptual model, grounded in empirical data and particularly suited to understanding mediated policing in mainstream television contexts. This positioning aligns with inductive principles in mixed methods research and avoids overgeneralization beyond the empirical scope of the study.

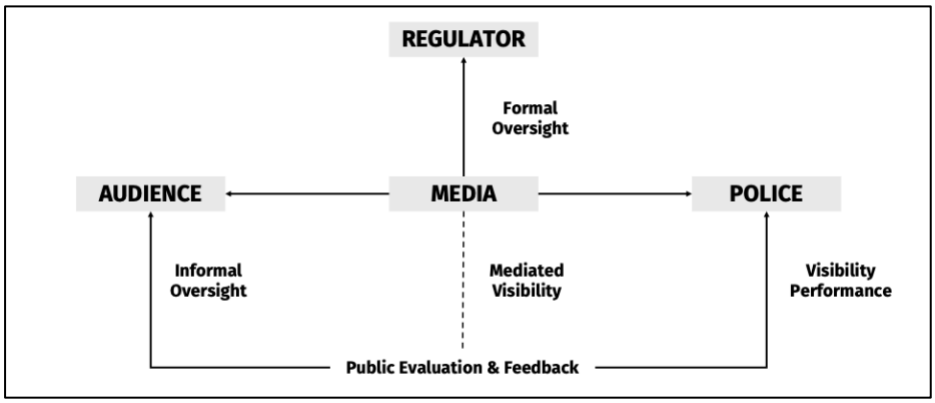

Figure 1: Circuit of Mutual Surveillance in Mediated Policing Oversight

Source: processed by the author

This figure illustrates the mutually constitutive relations among police, media, audiences, and regulators within a mediated visibility environment. Police actions are rendered visible through media selection and framing, shaping public evaluation and informal oversight. Media function as curators of visibility, audiences engage in normative judgment based on mediated representations, and regulators provide formal oversight to maintain ethical and legal boundaries. The model conceptualizes surveillance as a reciprocal and multilayered process rather than a linear or unilateral mechanism.

Theoretically, this study contributes to surveillance and mediatized policing scholarship by repositioning reality police television as a significant arena of public oversight rather than a peripheral media genre. The findings challenge dichotomous interpretations of media visibility as either transparency-enhancing or manipulative, demonstrating instead that visibility operates as a negotiated process shaped by media logic, institutional practices, and audience interpretation.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the importance of strengthening multilayered oversight frameworksfor police media representation. While mediated visibility can facilitate productive forms of public scrutiny, it also carries the risk of producing symbolic transparency and oversimplified judgments when not accompanied by robust regulatory and ethical safeguards. The results thus support calls for clearer ethical standards governing police media coverage, standards capable of balancing openness, press freedom, and rights protection within democratic policing systems.

5. Conclusion and Implications

This article began with a question that is increasingly difficult to avoid in contemporary policing; how do reality police television programs shape the relationship between public oversight and policing under conditions of intensified media visibility? Drawing on a mixed methods sequential explanatory design, the study concludes that reality police shows should not be treated merely as entertainment or as instruments of institutional image-making. Rather, they operate as a mediatized arena of public oversight, where policing practices, media logic, audience participation, and formal oversight mechanisms become intertwined within a single visibility environment.

First, the study demonstrates that reality police television substantially expands the public visibility of policing. This expanded visibility encourages audiences to engage in normative evaluation of police conduct and, in doing so, to participate in informal oversight. Yet the findings also show that mediated visibility is structurally selective.

Because what becomes visible is filtered through production routines, narrative framing, and televisual conventions, visibility does not necessarily translate into substantive transparency regarding legal procedure or institutional accountability. Public visibility therefore functions as a condition that opens new possibilities for democratic oversight while simultaneously introducing limits, particularly when the informational completeness required for procedural understanding remains outside the frame.

Second, the findings indicate that mediated visibility shapes policing behavior through the mechanism of camera awareness and related forms of performative adjustment. Police officers do not operate only as operational actors; they also act as subjects who anticipate being evaluated by audiences beyond the immediate encounter. Oversight in this context works subtly through reflection, anticipation, and self-regulation, rather than solely through hierarchical command or formal sanction. Importantly, this mechanism may strengthen visible professionalism while not uniformly producing deeper procedural accountability, especially when "acting defensibly on camera" becomes a pragmatic orientation in ambiguous operational settings.

Third, the study highlights that oversight in reality policing contexts is multilayered, emerging through interaction between informal audience scrutiny and formal oversight through regulatory institutions. These layers do not always align. Public discourse circulates quickly and often intensifies in real time, whereas formal oversight typically operates through slower procedural sequences. This mismatch produces recurring tensions between the speed of mediated judgment and the tempo of institutional response. Accountability in mediatized policing contexts therefore cannot be reduced to a single mechanism; it is better understood as a negotiated outcome produced by interacting actors and uneven capacities.

Synthesizing these conclusions, the article consolidates the Circuit of Mutual Surveillance (Figure 1) as an analytical framework for understanding mediated policing oversight. The model situates police, media, audiences, and regulators in a circular relationship of mutual observation and reciprocal constraint within an environment of media-constructed visibility. By foregrounding media as a key mediator, the model emphasizes that contemporary oversight is rarely linear. Instead, it unfolds as a dynamic, relational, and layered process in which each actor may simultaneously observe and be observed, evaluate and be evaluated.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, this article contributes to surveillance studies and mediatized policing scholarship by extending analytic attention beyond digital platforms and individual surveillance technologies toward mainstream television as a consequential arena of public oversight. The findings affirm the continued relevance of concepts such as new visibility, synoptic surveillance, and the surveillant assemblage, while also showing the need to incorporate televisual media logic into analyses of how oversight is produced, limited, and normalized. In particular, the study demonstrates that informal oversight in reality policing television is often normative in character, intense in judgment yet uneven in procedural grounding because it is organized around curated visual fragments rather than comprehensive access to institutional process.

The article also offers a middle-range conceptual contribution that bridges surveillance theory, media communication, and police studies. By treating accountability as a multilayered relation involving both formal and informal actors, the study enriches understanding of how legitimacy and social control over policing are produced under increasingly mediatized democratic conditions. Rather than assuming that visibility either strengthens accountability or merely manipulates perception, the model emphasizes the negotiated and contingent character of mediated oversight.

5.2. Policy and Practical Implications

From a policy and practical standpoint, the findings carry implications for the governance of police media exposure and the strengthening of democratic policing. Media visibility through reality programming can function as a productive source of public scrutiny, but only when supported by appropriate ethical and regulatory safeguards.

Without robust oversight, visibility risks producing symbolic transparency, oversimplified public judgment of legal complexity, and intensified performative pressures on police personnel.

These findings support the development of more context-sensitive ethical standards for policing-related media coverage, capable of balancing openness, press freedom, rights protection, and the integrity of legal process. For police institutions, the study also underscores the importance of media literacy and internal reflection on the effects of visibility on professional practice. Visibility should not be treated solely as a reputational resource; it also operates as a mechanism of accountability that can reshape conduct, discretion, and institutional trust when managed responsibly.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

As with any empirical study, the article has limitations. The analysis focuses on reality police programs broadcast on national television, and thus does not provide a comprehensive account of oversight dynamics operating primarily through digital-native platforms and user-generated media. Moreover, the empirical findings are context-specific to Indonesia and are not intended as direct generalizations to countries with different policing systems, media environments, and regulatory architectures.

Future research could expand the analysis through cross-platform comparisons, including digital circulation and user-generated content, to better understand how mediated oversight shifts across media ecologies. Comparative international research would also enrich understanding of how mutual surveillance configurations take shape under varying institutional arrangements, media regimes, and democratic expectations. Such work would be especially valuable for assessing the portability of the proposed model and identifying the contextual conditions under which mediated oversight strengthens, or weakens substantive accountability.

5.4. Concluding Remark

Overall, this article argues that reality police television should be treated as an integral part of the contemporary oversight ecosystem. By conceptualizing these programs as mediatized arenas of public oversight, the study offers a perspective on the relationship between visibility, accountability, and democratic policing that avoids simplistic assumptions about transparency. The Circuit of Mutual Surveillance is not proposed as a universal theory, but as a contextually grounded analytical framework for interpreting mediated policing oversight in an era where visual media increasingly structures how policing is seen, evaluated, and contested.

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