

# Structural and Cultural Constraints in the Effectiveness of Internal Police Oversight (A Study at the North Sumatra Regional Police)

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## Abstract

This study aims to analyze the structural and cultural constraints affecting the effectiveness of internal oversight in preventing abuse of authority within the North Sumatra Regional Police. Although, normatively, the internal oversight system has been regulated through the role of the Inspectorate as part of the Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP), empirical realities indicate that disciplinary violations, breaches of the code of ethics, and criminal offenses committed by members of the Indonesian National Police continue to occur and have shown an increasing trend during the 2021–2025 period. This study employs a normative–empirical legal method with a qualitative approach, utilizing literature review, document analysis, and in-depth interviews with key informants. The findings reveal that structural constraints include limited independence of the Inspectorate due to the hierarchical organizational structure, insufficient quantity and competence of supervisory personnel, and weak follow-up mechanisms for oversight results. Meanwhile, cultural constraints encompass a strong esprit de corps, resistance to oversight, and a tendency to preserve institutional image, all of which hinder transparency. These two factors interact and contribute to internal oversight that tends to be formalistic and reactive, thereby limiting its effectiveness as an early warning system. This study emphasizes that strengthening internal oversight cannot rely solely on structural reform but must also involve a transformation of organizational culture oriented toward integrity and accountability. The main contribution of this research lies in its integrative approach, linking structural and cultural factors as key determinants of internal oversight effectiveness within policing institutions.

**Keywords:** Internal Oversight, Structural Constraints, Cultural Constraints, Abuse of Authority, Police Institution

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## Introduction

In the framework of a modern rule-of-law state, the existence of the Indonesian National Police as a law enforcement institution endowed with coercive authority occupies a highly strategic yet inherently vulnerable position. On the one hand, such authority is indispensable for maintaining public order and security. On the other hand, broad powers exercised without effective control mechanisms risk generating abuse of power that undermines the principles of justice and human rights. Therefore, internal oversight constitutes a fundamental element that is inseparable from a democratic and accountable law enforcement system.

Internal oversight can no longer be understood merely as a routine administrative instrument; rather, it must be viewed as a strategic mechanism to safeguard organizational integrity, ensure compliance with the law, and strengthen public legitimacy. Within the perspective of good governance, internal oversight is closely linked to the principles of accountability, transparency, and institutional effectiveness [1]. When oversight functions optimally, the potential for misconduct can be mitigated at an early stage. Conversely, weak internal oversight creates opportunities for recurrent and systemic violations.

Normatively, the internal oversight system within the Indonesian National Police has been regulated through various legal frameworks, including the implementation of the Government Internal Control System (SPIP) and the strengthening of the role of Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP). Within the police organizational structure, the Inspectorate particularly the Regional Inspectorate for Supervision (Itwasda) holds a strategic mandate to conduct audits, evaluations, and monitoring of the execution of duties and the exercise of authority by police personnel. Ideally, the Inspectorate functions as an early warning system to prevent abuse of power. However, empirical realities indicate that the existence of such normative frameworks has not been fully accompanied by effective implementation in practice. Over the past five years (2021–2025), data on violations committed by police officers show an increasing trend, both in terms of quantity and the complexity of violations. This condition is clearly reflected in the dynamics occurring within the North Sumatra Regional Police.

To provide a more concrete illustration, the following statistical data present violations committed by members of the Indonesian National Police within the North Sumatra Regional Police over the past five years:

**Table 1.** Statistics of Police Misconduct at the North Sumatra Regional Police (2021–2025)

Year	Disciplinary Violations	Code of Ethics Violations	Dismissal (PTDH)	Total
2021	198	276	18	492
2022	210	295	22	527
2023	225	310	24	559
2024	240	330	23	593
2025	236	364	61	661

**Source:** Compiled from official releases of the North Sumatra Regional Police and national media reports, including Kompas, Detik, CNN Indonesia, and iNews Medan [2]–[5].

The data indicate a relatively consistent increase in the number of violations from year to year, with a significant surge in 2025. The total number of cases reached 661, consisting of 236 disciplinary violations, 364 code of ethics violations, and 61 cases resulting in dishonorable discharge (PTDH). The sharp rise in PTDH sanctions serves as an important indicator of the increasing prevalence of serious misconduct, while simultaneously reflecting a firmer institutional response [5]. A closer examination reveals that the growing dominance of ethical violations each year points to fundamental issues related to integrity and organizational culture. Meanwhile, disciplinary violations, although relatively stable, remain persistently high, suggesting that compliance with internal regulations has not been fully internalized. Several media reports note that these violations include drug abuse, involvement in general criminal offenses, illegal levies, and acts of violence in the course of duty [3], [4].

From an academic perspective, this upward trend in violations may be interpreted as evidence that internal oversight mechanisms remain largely reactive, functioning only after violations have occurred. This condition suggests that the oversight function as an early warning system has not operated optimally. In other words, supervision has not been fully capable of preventing misconduct at its initial stage, but instead tends to function as an instrument of administrative enforcement. This issue cannot be separated from the presence of structural constraints within the internal oversight system. The hierarchical organizational structure of the Indonesian National Police potentially affects the independence of supervisory bodies, particularly in overseeing officials or personnel holding strategic positions. In addition, limitations in supervisory resources both in terms of quantity and competence also influence the quality of oversight practices [6].

On the other hand, cultural factors play a significant role. The strong esprit de corps within the police organization often becomes an obstacle to reporting internal violations. In practice, there is a tendency to conceal or minimize misconduct in order to preserve the institution's image, resulting in oversight processes that lack transparency and accountability [7]. In some cases, violations are only revealed after receiving public attention or media pressure, which further highlights the weakness of internal control mechanisms. Thus, the increase in violations over the past five years should not be viewed merely as individual failure, but rather as a reflection of systemic problems arising from the interaction between structural and cultural constraints.

Accordingly, strengthening internal oversight cannot rely solely on disciplinary enforcement and sanctions. It requires comprehensive institutional reform as well as transformation of organizational culture. Based on the foregoing analysis, this study is essential to examine in depth the structural and cultural constraints affecting the effectiveness of internal oversight within the North Sumatra Regional Police. This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to efforts aimed at reinforcing internal oversight systems as instruments for preventing abuse of power. In line with this background, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What structural constraints affect the effectiveness of internal oversight at the North Sumatra Regional Police?
2. How do cultural constraints influence the effectiveness of internal oversight in preventing abuse of power?

## **Literature Review**

### **1. The Concept of Oversight in Public Administration Perspective**

Oversight constitutes one of the essential functions in public administration, aimed at ensuring that the exercise of authority by state apparatus is carried out in accordance with the law, policies, and organizational objectives. In classical public administration literature, oversight is understood as a systematic process encompassing measurement, evaluation, and correction of the implementation of programs or policies. Oversight is not merely repressive conducted after deviations occur but also possesses a preventive dimension intended to avert violations at an early stage.

Within the framework of good governance, oversight is closely linked to the principles of accountability, transparency, and effectiveness in public administration. Without effective oversight, administrative authority is prone to misuse, potentially leading to maladministration and abuse of power [1]. Therefore, oversight should not be positioned as a supplementary function but rather as a core instrument in maintaining the integrity of public institutions, including the Indonesian National Police.

### **2. Internal Oversight and Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP)**

Internal oversight refers to supervisory activities conducted by units or apparatus within the organization itself. In the Indonesian governance system, internal oversight is

institutionalized through the Government Internal Supervisory Apparatus (APIP), which plays a strategic role in ensuring the effective and efficient achievement of organizational objectives [6]. APIP provides reasonable assurance over four main aspects: compliance with laws and regulations, effectiveness and efficiency of operations, reliability of reporting, and safeguarding of state assets.

In practice, internal oversight is not solely oriented toward fault finding but also emphasizes risk management and continuous improvement. Consequently, it plays a crucial preventive role in mitigating abuse of authority. However, the effectiveness of APIP is highly dependent on several key factors, including functional independence, human resource competence, and leadership support. Without these elements, internal oversight risks becoming a mere administrative formality with minimal impact on organizational improvement [8].

### **3. Position and Role of the Inspectorate in Police Internal Oversight**

Within the structure of the Indonesian National Police, the Inspectorate serves as the internal supervisory body mandated to ensure that all police activities comply with legal provisions, discipline, and professional ethics. At the regional level, this function is carried out by the Regional Inspectorate for Supervision (Itwasda), which is authorized to conduct audits, inspections, evaluations, and monitoring of work units within the police organization.

Conceptually, the Inspectorate is expected to function as an early warning system capable of detecting potential irregularities before they escalate into more serious violations. This role requires the Inspectorate to be not only reactive to reports or complaints but also proactive through risk-based audits and embedded supervision. However, in practice, the Inspectorate often faces structural dilemmas. Its position within the same organizational chain as the entities it supervises may create conflicts of interest, particularly when oversight involves high-ranking officials or strategic policies. This condition can affect the independence and objectivity of oversight processes [9].

### **4. Abuse of Authority in Administrative and Criminal Law Perspectives**

Abuse of authority is a key concept in administrative law, referring to the exercise of power in a manner inconsistent with the purpose for which such authority was granted. It may take the form of *ultra vires* actions, *detournement de pouvoir* (misuse of purpose), or arbitrary actions that harm the public. Within the policing context, abuse of authority has broader implications, as it directly relates to law enforcement and the protection of human rights.

From a criminal law perspective, abuse of authority by police officers may evolve into criminal offenses, such as corruption, extortion, violence, or abuse of office [10]. Therefore, preventing abuse of authority is not solely the responsibility of external law enforcement mechanisms but must also begin with strengthening internal oversight as a preventive administrative control mechanism.

### **5. Structural Constraints in Internal Oversight**

Structural constraints in internal oversight are related to organizational design, power relations, and resource limitations. In hierarchical organizations such as the Indonesian National Police, strong superior–subordinate relationships may affect the independence of internal supervisors. Supervisors often face a dilemma between performing objective oversight and maintaining organizational loyalty.

Additionally, limitations in both the number and competence of human resources significantly affect the effectiveness of oversight. Effective supervision requires specialized expertise in auditing, investigation, and risk management. Without such competencies, oversight tends to be administrative in nature and fails to address root causes [6]. Empirical findings in various studies indicate that weak internal oversight structures often result in ineffective supervision, thereby failing to function as a preventive mechanism against misconduct.

## 6. Cultural Constraints in Internal Oversight

Beyond structural factors, organizational culture plays a highly significant role in shaping the effectiveness of internal oversight. Organizational culture reflects the values, norms, and practices that develop within an institution and indirectly influence the behavior of its members. Within policing institutions, the strong culture of *esprit de corps* often presents challenges to effective internal oversight. While solidarity is essential for cohesion, in practice it may foster permissive attitudes toward misconduct committed by colleagues.

This condition contributes to low levels of internal reporting and a tendency to conceal violations in order to preserve institutional image. Furthermore, resistance to criticism and oversight constitutes another significant cultural barrier. Oversight is often perceived as a threat rather than as a mechanism for organizational improvement, resulting in supervisory practices that are formalistic rather than substantive.

### Research Methodology

This study employs a normative–empirical legal approach with a qualitative design to analyze structural and cultural constraints affecting the effectiveness of internal oversight within the North Sumatra Regional Police. The normative approach is utilized to examine the legal framework governing internal oversight and abuse of authority, while the empirical approach is applied to assess its implementation in practice.

The research data consist of both primary and secondary sources. Primary data are obtained through in-depth interviews with key informants selected purposively, particularly individuals who possess substantial knowledge and experience regarding the implementation of internal oversight within the Indonesian National Police. Secondary data are derived from statutory regulations, scholarly literature, as well as empirical data in the form of institutional reports and media publications covering the period of 2021–2025 [3] [5].

Data collection is conducted through three main techniques: library research, interviews, and documentation. The data are analyzed using qualitative methods, which involve stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The analysis is systematically linked to theories of internal oversight and the principles of good governance [1].

To ensure data validity, this study applies triangulation of sources and methods. This approach enables the research to produce a comprehensive analysis in explaining the relationship between structural and cultural constraints and the effectiveness of internal oversight in preventing abuse of authority within the Indonesian National Police.

## Results

### 1. Structural Constraints in the Effectiveness of Internal Oversight at the North Sumatra Regional Police

The findings indicate that structural constraints constitute the dominant factor affecting the suboptimal effectiveness of internal oversight in preventing abuse of authority within the North Sumatra Regional Police. This aligns with theoretical frameworks that position organizational structure and supervisory independence as key determinants of effective internal control [8]. One of the most fundamental issues identified is the limited independence of the Inspectorate. Normatively, the Inspectorate is mandated to function as an objective internal supervisory body. However, in practice, its position within the hierarchical structure of the Indonesian National Police creates a subordinative relationship with the entities it supervises.

This condition gives rise to an institutional dilemma, in which supervisors must choose between exercising firm oversight and maintaining organizational loyalty. Such findings reinforce the argument that organizational designs lacking full independence are likely to weaken the effectiveness of oversight functions [9].

In addition, limitations in supervisory resources represent a significant constraint. Based on interview results and document analysis, the number of Inspectorate personnel is not

proportional to the geographical scope and operational complexity of policing in North Sumatra. Furthermore, technical competencies particularly in risk-based auditing and internal investigation remain uneven. Consequently, oversight practices tend to focus on administrative compliance rather than early detection of potential abuse of authority. This condition indicates that oversight has not fully transformed toward risk-based supervision as advocated in APIP literature [6].

Another critical issue lies in the weak follow-up mechanisms for oversight findings. In several cases, recommendations issued by the Inspectorate are not optimally implemented by the respective work units. As a result, oversight loses its enforcement power and becomes largely formalistic. From a public administration perspective, this reflects an implementation gap between supervisory findings and the corrective actions that should follow.

These empirical findings are further supported by violation data showing a continuous increase over time, culminating in 661 cases in 2025. This trend indicates that internal oversight has not yet functioned effectively as a preventive mechanism, but rather as a reactive instrument activated after violations occur. Therefore, it can be concluded that structural constraints in internal oversight within the North Sumatra Regional Police include limited independence, inadequate resources, and weak follow-up mechanisms, all of which collectively hinder the role of oversight as an early warning system.

## 2. Cultural Constraints in the Effectiveness of Internal Oversight

Beyond structural factors, this study finds that cultural constraints exert an equally significant influence on the effectiveness of internal oversight. This finding is consistent with organizational theory, which emphasizes that institutional culture often serves as a latent factor determining the success or failure of oversight systems [7].

One of the primary findings is the strong presence of *esprit de corps* within the Indonesian National Police, which influences how members respond to internal violations. In practice, there is a tendency not to report misconduct committed by colleagues, driven by loyalty, social pressure, and concerns about internal consequences. While such solidarity contributes positively to organizational cohesion, it simultaneously becomes a barrier to achieving transparent and accountable oversight.

Moreover, there is a prevailing tendency to preserve the institutional image, which results in limited openness regarding internal violations. In several instances, serious action is only taken after public scrutiny or media exposure arises. This indicates that internal oversight mechanisms have not yet operated proactively.

Another important finding is the existence of resistance to oversight. Oversight is often perceived as a threat rather than as a mechanism for organizational improvement. This perception prevents oversight from being fully integrated into organizational culture and instead positions it as an external pressure to be avoided.

When correlated with empirical data, the increasing dominance of code of ethics violations each year reflects deeper cultural issues related to integrity within the organization. This reinforces the argument that challenges in internal oversight are not solely technical or structural in nature but are also deeply rooted in organizational culture.

## Conclusion

1. This study confirms that the effectiveness of internal oversight in preventing abuse of authority within the North Sumatra Regional Police remains suboptimal, despite being normatively supported by an adequate regulatory framework. The gap between normative provisions and empirical practice is primarily driven by structural constraints. The limited independence of the Inspectorate emerges as a fundamental issue, as its position within the hierarchical structure of the Indonesian National Police creates potential conflicts of interest that affect the objectivity of oversight. In addition, constraints in both the quantity and competence of supervisory personnel hinder the ability of oversight mechanisms to

effectively address the breadth and complexity of policing tasks. The weak implementation of follow-up mechanisms further indicates that internal oversight tends to remain administrative in nature and lacks sufficient enforcement power to drive organizational change. These findings suggest that structural reform is essential to transform oversight from a reactive and formalistic function into a proactive and preventive system.

2. From a cultural perspective, the study highlights that strong esprit de corps within the Indonesian National Police constitutes a significant barrier to transparent and accountable oversight. The tendency to protect colleagues, resistance to criticism, and the priority placed on maintaining institutional image contribute to a lack of openness in addressing internal violations. As a result, many violations are only revealed following external pressure, indicating that internal oversight has not yet functioned effectively as an early warning system. Importantly, structural and cultural constraints are not separate phenomena but are mutually reinforcing. Hierarchical structures tend to strengthen internal loyalty, while organizational culture weakens the willingness to exercise objective oversight. Consequently, internal oversight operates in a formalistic and reactive manner rather than substantively and preventively. Based on these findings, this study underscores the necessity of comprehensive reform measures, including strengthening the functional independence of the Inspectorate, enhancing the capacity and professionalism of supervisory personnel, ensuring effective enforcement of oversight recommendations, and promoting a cultural transformation oriented toward integrity, transparency, and accountability. Ultimately, the effectiveness of internal oversight within the Indonesian National Police cannot rely solely on formal regulations and institutional structures but must also be supported by a strong organizational culture. Without systemic and sustainable changes, internal oversight will continue to face limitations in fulfilling its strategic role as a preventive mechanism against abuse of authority and as a pillar of public trust.

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