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Traffic Anthropology in Operation Ketupat 2025: Social Practices of Cross-Sectoral Collaboration, Officer Discretion, and Traveler Experience on the Island of Java

Bakharuddin Muhammad Syah
Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Kepolisian,
Indonesia

***Corresponding author:**
Bakharuddin Muhammad Syah, Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Kepolisian, Indonesia.
✉ bakharuddinmsyah93@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background: *Operation Ketupat* is an annual national agenda in Indonesia that mobilizes large numbers of travelers and requires intensive cross-institutional coordination. This study investigates the social dynamics, cultural practices, and institutional mechanisms shaping the implementation of *Operation Ketupat* 2025 through the perspective of police anthropology.

Objective: This study aims to explore how work culture, interagency coordination, and traveler behavior influence the effectiveness of the operation, highlighting the socio-institutional processes that support large-scale traffic management during the 2025 *Eid* exodus.

Methods: A qualitative ethnographic approach was employed, including in-depth interviews and participant observation conducted across six provinces on the island of Java (Banten, DKI Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, and East Java) during the 2025 *Eid* exodus and return period.

Results: The findings indicate that operational success is shaped by three interrelated dimensions: (1) cross-sectoral collaboration functions as a coordination ritual that builds shared language and institutional trust; (2) field officers exercise discretionary practices and *bricolage*, improvising solutions amid resource constraints; and (3) travelers act as rational agents by actively navigating traffic regulations, reconstructing safety norms, and demonstrating adaptive capacity. These dimensions reveal that operational effectiveness relies on social relationships and collective adaptation rather than on technology alone.

Conclusion: *Operation Ketupat* 2025 demonstrates that social relationships embedded in institutional coordination are central to operational success. Cross-sectoral collaboration, officer discretion, and traveler agency form an interconnected socio-institutional system. Policy recommendations include strengthening soft-skills training for field officers, formalizing interagency communication protocols, and implementing structured traveler feedback mechanisms to enhance future large-scale traffic operations.

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INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of *mudik Lebaran* in Indonesia is one of the largest annual population mobility events in the world. Every year, millions of residents move from urban areas, especially Greater Jakarta, to their hometowns in various regions. In 2025, the Ministry of Transportation of the Republic of Indonesia predicted that national mobility would reach 146.48 million people, an increase of 13.7% compared to the previous year. Of these travelers, more than 60% use private

vehicles, both four-wheeled and two-wheeled, which places tremendous pressure on road infrastructure, transportation systems, and security governance.

Operation Ketupat, as a national agenda organized by the National Police Traffic Corps, is the primary instrument for managing mudik and return flows. This operation not only functions as routine police activity, but has also transformed into an annual mega-event involving thousands of personnel from various agencies. Data from the Indonesian National Police (2025) show that during Operation Ketupat 2025, more than 150,000 joint personnel from the Indonesian National Police, the Indonesian National Armed Forces (TNI), the Ministry of Transportation, Regional Transportation Agencies, Jasa Marga, ASDP, and community volunteers were deployed throughout Indonesia. Security posts, service posts, and integrated posts were established at more than 3,000 strategic points, ranging from ferry ports, terminals, and rest areas to tourist destinations.

Although the scale of the operation was enormous, previous studies on Operation Ketupat have been dominated by quantitative and managerial approaches. These studies generally focus on performance evaluation based on indicators such as vehicle volume, travel time, accident rates, and levels of public compliance with traffic engineering measures (Kaparias et al., 2020). This approach is important for measuring operational effectiveness at the macro level, but it has limitations in capturing the social, cultural, and micro-practice dynamics that occur in the field. Highlighted that the number of traffic accidents during mudik flows decreased by 15% due to the implementation of one-way and contraflow systems; however, the study did not explore how officers in the field improvised when equipment was inadequate or how travelers negotiated changing policies.

This gap demonstrates the need for an alternative approach capable of capturing empirical reality more holistically. As stated by Garriott (2013), police studies cannot be separated from their cultural dimension. The police are not merely a law enforcement bureaucracy, but also an institution involved in the production of meaning, social negotiation, and symbolic practices. In the context of traffic, emphasizes that traffic is "social kinetics," in which various actors with different interests, knowledge, and strategies interact with one another. An anthropological approach to policing enables researchers to examine how policy is translated into concrete action through officers' discretionary practices (street-level bureaucracy), how cross-sectoral collaboration is constructed through coordination rituals, and how travelers, as rational agents, navigate complex systems.

This research seeks to fill this gap. Using qualitative ethnographic methods involving in-depth interviews and participatory observation in six provinces on the island of Java during Operation Ketupat 2025, this study aims to explore the social and cultural dimensions of mudik flow management. The focus is on three aspects: (1) cross-sectoral collaboration practices at both the command and field levels, (2) discretionary mechanisms and bricolage practices carried out by officers in responding to unexpected conditions, and (3) travelers' experiences and adaptation strategies in dealing with traffic engineering measures. Through this approach, the research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of police anthropology in Indonesia, while also offering practical recommendations for improving the quality of public services during Operation Ketupat in the coming years.

This research aims to explore the social, cultural, and institutional dynamics involved in the implementation of Operation Ketupat 2025 through the perspective of traffic anthropology. In contrast to the dominant quantitative and managerial approaches in previous studies, this study seeks to capture empirical reality from the perspective of the actors involved—officials, partner institutions, and the community—and to examine how they interact in shaping traffic governance during the mudik flow.

The objectives of this research are to identify and analyze how work culture, discretionary practices, and cross-sectoral collaboration are formed in the implementation of Operation Ketupat 2025, both at the command level and in the field, and to explore how travelers' experiences reflect and shape the traffic management strategies implemented by officials and other stakeholders. To achieve these objectives, the study focuses on two main questions: first, how work culture, discretionary practices, and cross-sectoral collaboration are formed during Operation Ketupat 2025, addressed by tracing interagency coordination processes, decision-making mechanisms in the field, and officers' adaptation strategies when facing unexpected

conditions; and second, how travelers' experiences reflect and influence traffic management strategies, explored through their perceptions, navigation methods, adaptation to traffic engineering measures, and the ways in which their feedback informs operational dynamics in the field.

This research has significant urgency, both in terms of scientific development and public policy management practices. There are at least three main contributions offered. First, theoretically, this research contributes to the development of police anthropology in Indonesia. As stated by Garriott (2013), the study of policing cannot be separated from its cultural dimension. In Indonesia, anthropological studies of the police remain relatively limited, especially those specifically discussing traffic as an arena for social interaction. This research addresses that gap by demonstrating that traffic management on a national scale, such as Operation Ketupat, is not only a technical issue, but also a matter of work culture, symbolic practices, and social negotiation. By making cross-sectoral collaboration, officer discretion, and traveler experiences the focus of analysis, this study enriches understanding of how police institutions operate in complex and fluid contexts.

Second, methodologically, this study offers an alternative approach that complements previous quantitative studies. The dominance of managerial approaches in the evaluation of Operation Ketupat has produced important macro-level data, but often fails to capture the microdynamics occurring in the field. Through a qualitative approach using in-depth interview techniques and participatory observation, this study can reveal the bricolage practices carried out by officers when facing limited resources, the coordination rituals that build trust between agencies, and the rational strategies used by travelers in navigating traffic policies. Thus, this research contributes to methodological enrichment in the study of transportation and road safety.

Third, practically, this research produces recommendations that can be used to improve the quality of public services during Operation Ketupat in the coming years. Findings on effective discretionary mechanisms, adaptive coordination models, and understanding traveler behavior can provide valuable input for the Indonesian National Police and related stakeholders. In the context of public services that increasingly demand responsiveness, understanding the sociocultural dimensions of traffic management is crucial. This research can also serve as a reflection for policymakers in designing strategies that are not only technically efficient, but also sensitive to the needs and experiences of the community. Thus, this research is not only beneficial for the advancement of knowledge, but also has practical value for improving national traffic governance in ways that are more humane, adaptive, and sustainable.

Literature Review

The study of policing from an anthropological perspective has come a long way over the last two decades. In contrast to legal and criminological approaches that view the police as mere law enforcement officers, police anthropology sees these institutions as cultural entities involved in the production of meaning, social hierarchies, and symbolic practices (Garriott, 2013). This approach emphasizes that the police do not merely execute policies, but also interpret, negotiate, and even transform them through their daily interactions with the public.

In the Indonesian context, the study of police culture remains relatively limited. Latif (2025), in their research on policing in urban areas, showed that the work culture of the Indonesian National Police is greatly influenced by rigid hierarchical structures and oral traditions in knowledge transmission. Meanwhile, a study conducted by Garing (2023) highlights how local values and regional wisdom often intersect with formal police procedures in handling social conflicts. These studies demonstrate that police practices in Indonesia cannot be understood solely from a legal-formal perspective, but must also be examined through a broader cultural lens.

Street-Level Bureaucracy: Officers' Discretion and Daily Practices

One of the most influential concepts for understanding police practice is street-level bureaucracy, developed by (Lipsky, 1980). Lipsky argues that frontline officers—such as police officers, teachers, and social workers—exercise broad discretion in implementing public policy.

They are not merely policy implementers, but also policy makers in practice. This discretion arises because formal policies are often unable to accommodate the complexity and variability of conditions on the ground.

In the context of traffic management, studies on officer discretion remain relatively scarce. Research by Brodkin (2011) shows that the discretion exercised by public service officers is often influenced by factors such as workload, organizational pressure, and stereotypes toward certain social groups. Meanwhile, a more specific study of traffic policing was conducted by Rowe (2020), who found that traffic police in the UK use their discretion to balance law enforcement with maintaining positive relations with the public. In Indonesia, research by Aprilia (2025) on Electronic Traffic Law Enforcement (ETLE) shows that although technology is intended to reduce discretion, officers still retain room for interpretation when assessing violations recorded by cameras.

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration: Theory and Practice in Crisis Management

Cross-sectoral collaboration is a central theme in the study of public management, especially in the context of crisis and disaster management. Ansell (2008) developed a collaborative governance model that emphasizes the importance of trust, shared commitment, and facilitative leadership in achieving effective collaboration. In this model, the success of collaboration is determined not only by formal structures, but also by informal processes such as intensive communication and conflict resolution.

In the context of transportation and traffic management, cross-sectoral collaboration is inevitable because it involves various stakeholders with differing mandates and interests. Emerson (2012) expanded the collaboration model by emphasizing the importance of collaborative capacity—that is, the ability of institutions to work together through shared experience and collective learning. Management of holiday exodus traffic at Merak Port shows that collaboration among the Indonesian National Police, ASDP, and KSOP is key to overcoming ferry crossing congestion. However, their research also identified sectoral egos and differences in communication frequency as major obstacles.

Traffic Studies from a Socio-Cultural Perspective

Approaches to traffic as a socio-cultural phenomenon have been developed by several scholars. in his work The Traffic in Culture, introduces the concept of “social kinetics” to explain how the movement of people and goods in public spaces is not merely a technical issue, but is also embedded with social meaning, power negotiations, and cultural practices. From this perspective, highways and transit spaces such as terminals, rest areas, and ports are viewed as arenas where various social groups with different backgrounds and interests interact.

In Indonesia, studies on holiday exodus travel as a social phenomenon have been conducted by several researchers. Pinch (2012), in their research on motorcycle travelers, found that the decision to return home by motorcycle was not based solely on economic considerations, but was also related to the construction of identity and family solidarity. on the experiences of travelers along the Pantura route shows that travelers develop complex navigation strategies, including the use of social media, WhatsApp groups, and information from fellow travelers to avoid congestion.

Traffic Safety and Driver Behavior

Traffic safety is also an important concern in transportation studies. The dominant approach in this field has focused on risk factor analysis and behavioral interventions. However, some researchers have begun to criticize this overly individualistic approach. driving behavior is inseparable from the broader socio-cultural context, including societal norms, peer pressure, and available infrastructure. In Indonesia, research by Rad (2024) shows that driver fatigue is a major cause of accidents during the holiday exodus period. However, interventions implemented thus far have focused more on enforcing traffic violations than on strengthening driver capacity and improving supporting infrastructure, such as rest areas.

Research Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature review above, this study develops a conceptual framework that

integrates three main dimensions. First, cross-sectoral collaboration is understood as a coordination ritual that builds trust and a shared language among agencies. Second, officers' discretionary practices are analyzed through the concepts of street-level bureaucracy and bricolage—namely, the ability of officers to improvise using available resources. Third, the experiences of travelers are understood through the perspective of agency, in which travelers are viewed as rational actors who actively navigate the system and reconstruct the meaning of safety and smooth travel. These three dimensions are interrelated and together shape the social dynamics of large-scale traffic management operations such as Operation Ketupat.

METHOD

Approach and types of Research

This research used a qualitative approach with a case study design. The qualitative approach was chosen because it aligned with the research objectives of understanding meaning, social practices, and relational dynamics that could not be quantitatively measured (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case study design was selected because this study focused on a specific phenomenon—Operation Ketupat 2025—that had clear temporal, spatial, and actor-related boundaries. As stated by Yin (2018), case studies are an appropriate research strategy when researchers seek to answer "how" and "why" questions and do not require control over the behavior of research subjects.

This research employed a traffic anthropological perspective, which viewed traffic as an arena of social interaction and the production of meaning. Thus, the study focused not only on the technical aspects of traffic management, but also on the social practices, inter-stakeholder negotiations, and cultural constructions that accompanied them.

Location and time

The research was conducted in six provinces on the island of Java: Banten, DKI Jakarta, West Java, Central Java, the Special Region of Yogyakarta, and East Java. The selection of these six provinces was based on the consideration that these areas constituted the main routes for the Eid holiday exodus and return flows, with diverse traffic characteristics ranging from toll roads and arterial routes to ferry ports and tourist destinations frequented by travelers.

The research was conducted during the Operation Ketupat 2025 period, from D-7 to D+7 of Eid, or approximately 14 days. Specifically, field data collection activities were carried out from June 16, 2025, to June 20, 2025. The research then continued with the data consolidation stage and report preparation over the following two weeks.

Research informant

The informants in this study were selected through purposive sampling by considering their direct involvement in the implementation of Operation Ketupat as well as the diversity of their roles and perspectives (Patton, 2015). A total of 78 informants were interviewed in depth and categorized into several groups as follows:

a) Internal police personnel, including officers from the Traffic Directorates of the Metro Jaya, Banten, West Java, Central Java, DIY, and East Java Regional Police; Resort Police offices in Semarang, Klaten, Cimahi, Bandung, Batu, and Banyuwangi; Heads of Operational Development Subdivisions (Binops) and Heads of Evaluation and Analysis Subdivisions (Anev) at the Regional Police level; Highway Patrol Unit (PJR) officers; Regional Traffic Management Center (RTMC) officers; and officers stationed at security and service posts.
b) External stakeholders from government agencies and state-owned enterprises, including the Transportation Offices at provincial and regency/city levels, Public Works and Highways Offices, Health Offices, Land Transportation Management Centers (BPTD), Port Authority Offices (KSOP), PT ASDP Indonesia Ferry, PT Jasa Marga and other toll road operators, and PT Jasa Raharja.
c) Business actors and civil society representatives, including rest area managers, transportation business owners (bus and travel operators), MSME actors around strategic points, community organizations (Organda, Scouts, and local mass organizations), and tourist

attraction managers.

d) Travelers, including private vehicle drivers (four-wheeled and two-wheeled vehicles), intercity and interprovincial bus passengers (AKAP), and ferry crossing service users.

Technical data collection

This study employed three main data collection techniques: (1) in-depth interviews, (2) participatory observation, and (3) documentation studies. In-depth interviews were conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines, allowing researchers to explore information flexibly while remaining focused on the research topic (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Each interview lasted between 30 and 90 minutes, with most conducted face-to-face at the informants' locations, such as offices, posts, rest areas, terminals, or ports. Interviews were recorded with the informants' permission and documented through field notes.

Participatory observation was conducted by involving the researcher directly in field dynamics without assuming the role of an officer. The researcher observed interactions among officers, interactions between officers and travelers, as well as decision-making processes in the field. Observations were conducted at various locations, including integrated posts, congestion-prone points, rest areas, ports, terminals, and tourist areas. Observation records were compiled daily in the form of ethnographic field notes.

The documentation study was conducted to collect relevant secondary data, including operational planning documents (RENOPS), evaluation reports (ANEV), Joint Decrees (SKB) on traffic regulation, vehicle volume data, and other policy documents. These documents were obtained from each agency involved as a research informant.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis in this study employed a thematic analysis method with an interpretive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis process was carried out in stages and interactively, following the model of Miles (2014), which consisted of three streams of activities: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

The first stage, data condensation, involved reducing all collected data—consisting of interview transcripts, field notes, and documents—through processes of selection, focusing, and simplification. At this stage, the researcher identified information relevant to the research questions and excluded unrelated information.

The second stage, data display, involved presenting the condensed data in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic matrices. Data were presented systematically based on categories of informants, research locations, and themes emerging from the data, such as cross-sectoral collaboration, discretionary practices, and traveler experiences.

The third stage involved conclusion drawing and verification, in which conclusions were developed gradually while continuously being verified through triangulation and repeated examination of the data. This process occurred iteratively, with temporary conclusions repeatedly tested against new data until an adequate level of confidence was achieved.

Data validity

To ensure data validity, this study employed several techniques developed by Lincoln (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Data credibility was maintained through source triangulation and methodological triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from various categories of informants, including police personnel, external agencies, business actors, and travelers. Methodological triangulation was conducted by comparing interview findings with data obtained from observations and documentation studies.

In addition, the researcher conducted member checking by reconfirming preliminary findings with key informants to ensure interpretive accuracy. Transferability of the research findings was pursued through the presentation of thick and detailed descriptions of the research context, informant characteristics, and field dynamics. Through such in-depth descriptions, readers could assess the extent to which the findings of this study might be transferable to other similar contexts.

Dependability, or reliability, was maintained through the preparation of an audit trail,

consisting of systematic documentation of the entire research process, from problem formulation and data collection to analysis. This audit trail enabled other researchers to retrace the research process and assess the consistency of the procedures used.

Confirmability, or objectivity, was ensured through the same audit trail process used to establish dependability, but with a stronger emphasis on the relationship between data and interpretation. The researcher ensured that interpretations did not deviate from the collected data and consistently grounded the analysis in documented empirical evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This section presents the research findings obtained through in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation studies conducted during Operation Ketupat 2025 in six provinces on the island of Java. The findings are organized into three main dimensions that reflect the sociocultural dynamics of large-scale traffic management: (1) cross-sectoral collaboration as a coordination ritual, (2) discretionary and bricolage practices in the field, and (3) travelers' experiences that both reflect and shape traffic management strategies.

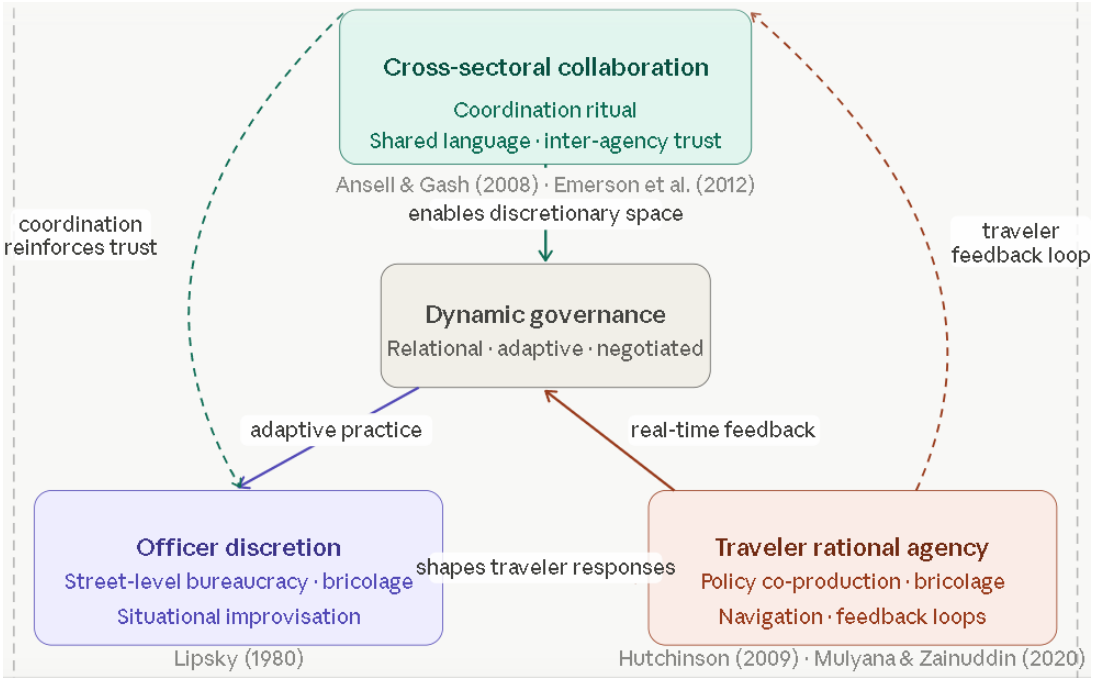

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of socio-institutional dynamics in Operation Ketupat 2025.

The three analytical dimensions (cross-sectoral collaboration, officer discretion/bricolage, and traveler rational agency) are presented as an interconnected socio-institutional system. Arrows illustrate the recursive relationship among each dimension: coordination rituals enable adaptive discretionary space; officer bricolage shapes traveler responses; and traveler feedback loops reinforce inter-institutional trust. This framework demonstrates how traffic governance in Operation Ketupat 2025 operates as a dynamic social system rather than as a top-down regulatory mechanism. Note for production: A formal diagram visualizing this conceptual framework is recommended for the published version to enhance reader comprehension of the theoretical model.

The following qualitative evidence from field interviews and observations provides a thick description supporting the three analytical dimensions. All informant quotations have been anonymized or attributed only by institutional role, in accordance with research ethics protocols. Direct quotations are presented in their translated form from Indonesian, with key ethnographic observations interspersed to situate the empirical context.

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration as a Coordination Ritual

The first findings suggest that cross-sectoral collaboration in Operation Ketupat 2025 not only takes place within a formal framework, but also constitutes what may be termed a "coordination ritual" that fosters trust, a common language, and a shared understanding among agencies.

Coordination Meeting as a Joint Language Builder

Before the operation began, a series of coordination meetings were held intensively. In the West Java Police, for example, meetings were divided into two stages: internal meetings within the Regional Police and external meetings involving Jasa Marga, Dinas Perhubungan, rest area managers, Pertamina, Health Offices, Fire Departments, and Badan Penanggulangan Bencana Daerah. One of the informants, the Head of the West Java Regional Police Division, explained:

"*Phase 1 of the internal coordination meeting focused on refining the scenario. Phase 2 of the external coordination meeting focused on mapping tasks, locations, personnel schedules, cranes, firefighters, and CCTV operations. This was not merely a formality, but an effort to establish a shared understanding. Everyone had to understand: if congestion occurred at KM 48, who would respond and how the coordination would proceed.*" (Interview, June 16, 2025)

This process created what Ansell (2008) describe as a shared understanding—the foundation of effective collaboration. In the Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta (DIY) Police, the coordination mechanism was further developed through a mutually agreed-upon color-coded system (red, yellow, green) across regions, enabling efficient communication along the Jogja–Klaten border.

The shared language produced through these coordination rituals was directly observable in field settings. Researchers noted that officers from different agencies spontaneously used the same color-coded terminology (red-yellow-green) when radioing updates—even during informal exchanges outside official briefings—indicating that the vocabulary developed during coordination meetings had been internalized as part of a shared institutional culture. One field officer from the Central Java Traffic Directorate observed during an informal conversation: "We no longer need to explain what 'red' means. Everyone on the team already knows—full stop, all hands respond, no waiting for orders from above." This spontaneous internalization illustrates how coordination rituals produce not merely procedural alignment, but also genuine cognitive and cultural convergence across institutional boundaries (Garriott, 2013; Ansell & Gash, 2008).

Adaptive Synergy in *Crunch Time*

Collaboration does not just happen in a boardroom; it is tested in critical situations. At Merak Port, coordination among the Banten Regional Police Directorate, ASDP, and KSOP demonstrated a high level of adaptability. ASDP's Chief Operating Officer stated:

"*ASDP is regulated by KSOP, so we follow the operating schedule established by KSOP. However, we can recommend strategies. This year, vacant land that had not previously been used was optimized; that was the result of a joint discussion. Even though ASDP incurred losses due to the one-stop system implemented during the mudik flow, the community's crossing process became smoother.*" (Interview, June 19, 2025)

This synergy reflects the collaborative governance model proposed by Emerson (2012), in which collaboration depends not only on formal structures but also on collective capacity built through shared experience.

Recognition of Limitations and Integrated Command Mechanisms

Effective collaboration is also characterized by recognition of the limitations of each institution. In the DIY Police, a mobile and dynamic Urai Team was formed in response to the limitations of static pospam posts. An informant from the DIY Directorate explained:

"*The main function of the Urai Team is to handle traffic density directly in the field, moving dynamically based on observations. The observational range of the pospam is limited. The Urai Team is highly effective. Structurally, even if there is only one officer, each team can consist of up to 15 members.*" (Interview, June 20, 2025)

This mechanism shows that collaboration does not necessarily mean the unification of roles, but rather the division of complementary labor based on each institution's capacities.

Sectoral Ego Challenges and Communication Frequency Differences

Although the collaboration is functioning well, challenges still arise. At the Jogja–Klaten border, sectoral ego and differences in communication frequencies were found to have the potential to cause miscommunication. In a group discussion at the Klaten Police Station, one of the officers stated:

"*The sectoral ego is still there. Each region tends to prioritize its own interests. The difference in communication frequencies between Jogja and Klaten is also a problem. We propose the standardization of frequencies—one channel for all.*" (FGD, June 19, 2025)

These findings are consistent with the study by Zhu (2026), which identified sectoral ego as the main obstacle to cross-regional collaboration. However, it is recognized that the coordination mechanisms that have been established can reduce the negative impact of these challenges.

Discretionary Practice and Bricolage in the Field

The second finding suggests that officers in the field are not simply carrying out standard procedures but are actively exercising discretion and performing bricolage—improvisation with available resources—in response to unforeseen circumstances.

Situational Decision Making in Traffic Engineering

In the Lembang tourist corridor, the implementation of the one-way system is carried out situationally, with its duration adjusted according to actual traffic density. The Head of the Cimahi Police explained:

"*One-way is enforced dozens of times on the Lembang tourist route, each lasting 15 minutes. The congestion began during Eid al-Fitr and peaked on D+2 and D+3, especially due to tourists from outside the region. The one-way system is focused on the main road, with access to and from tourist areas temporarily closed.*" (Interview, June 19, 2025)

This decision is not entirely prescribed in written procedures but instead results from officers' situational assessments. This reflects Lipsky's (1980) concept of street-level bureaucracy, in which field officers possess broad discretion because formal policies cannot accommodate all variations in field conditions.

Field observations at the Cimahi one-way enforcement point on D+2 (June 2, 2025) illustrated this discretion vividly. Over a two-hour observation period, the presiding officer adjusted the one-way enforcement corridor no fewer than seven times—sometimes narrowing it and sometimes extending its duration—based entirely on real-time visual assessments of vehicle density, without radio consultation with the command center. When asked, the officer responded: "The SOP gives us the framework. But in the field, you read the situation. If I wait for authorization for every small decision, traffic would collapse." This captures the essence of Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy: policy is not passively executed but actively reinterpreted and reconstructed at the point of implementation, embedding practical wisdom (phronesis) within institutional action.

Negotiations also took place between officers and local stakeholders. The manager of The Great Asia Africa Lembang stated:

"*The one-way traffic engineering implemented by the police helps reduce congestion. However, the side effect is that vehicles forced to continue their journey because they are prohibited from entering often do not return. Currently, the one-way system is implemented about five times a day, which is too frequent. We propose reducing it to two times a day.*" (Interview, June 19, 2025)

Officers in the field responded to this feedback by adjusting the frequency of the one-way system without neglecting their security function. This practice demonstrates that discretion is not unidirectional but rather negotiated with stakeholders.

***Bricolage* in Limited Resources**

Personnel and equipment limitations became a reality at many points. In Simpang Tiga Mengkreng, Kediri Regency, officers from the Police, the Transportation Department, and the TNI collaborated using makeshift resources. The KBO of the Kediri Police Patrol Unit revealed:

"*We are placing additional personnel for 24 hours, especially during vulnerable hours. Together with the TNI, Dishub, and volunteers, we carried out patrols and manual traffic control. Current traffic engineering is carried out situationally. If the queue is long from the direction of Jombang, large vehicles will be diverted to an alternative route to Nganjuk.*" (Interview, June 18, 2025)

The limitations of the equipment were also overcome through improvisation. Transportation Department field officers in Banten admitted that supervision of illegal travel was carried out outside working hours because of personnel limitations. In the West Java Regional Police, it was found that inadequate traffic cones and lane barriers became obstacles, so officers used vehicles or even their bodies as temporary barriers.

Handling Technical Obstacles through Improvisation

Technical constraints such as VMS battery depletion, crane delays, or inadequate lane barriers are addressed through improvisation. At BPTD, the informant stated:

"*During Operation Ketupat 2025, significant obstacles are not very visible. However, the obstacles so far are in the technical aspects, such as VMS equipment running out of battery power or delays in the arrival of VMS vehicles. Technical factors that are not listed in the SKB sometimes create uncertainty in decision-making.*" (Interview, June 20, 2025)

These uncertainties suggest that formal procedures do not always provide guidance for unforeseen technical situations. Officers then rely on experience and informal coordination to make decisions.

Recognition of the Importance of Discretionary Practices

The Metro Jaya Regional Police Director explicitly acknowledged the importance of an approach that is not solely based on enforcement. In an interview, he stated:

"*In principle, education and socialization to encourage traffic compliance are prioritized, with the types of field actions divided into three categories: 40 percent preemptive, 40 percent preventive, and 20 percent enforcement. Operation Ketupat 2025 also focuses on preventing violations rather than merely cracking down on them.*" (Interview, June 17, 2025)

This statement suggests that formal policy allows room for a more humanistic and situational approach, which, in practice, translates into responsible discretion.

The Traveler Experience: Between the Smoothness, Risks, and Meaning of Travel

The third finding shows that travelers are not merely policy objects but rational agents who actively navigate systems, reconstruct the meaning of safety, and provide feedback that influences field dynamics.

Reconstructing the Meaning of Safety

The travelers interviewed assessed not only the smoothness of travel time but also the sense of security and certainty of information. A traveler who used the Jack Holiday tour bus from Bandung to Yogyakarta stated:

"*The journey took 32 hours, but passengers did not complain because information about traffic conditions had been provided beforehand. The driver also already understood the traffic engineering scheme, so there were no complaints; in fact, it was very helpful.*" (Interview, June 20, 2025)

This shows that effective communication builds trust, leading travelers to accept longer travel times in exchange for safety. These findings are consistent with the study by Bafekr (2024), which found that transparent information is an important factor in traveler satisfaction.

On the other hand, private vehicle drivers also demonstrated awareness of travel risks. A traveler who drove the Bandung–Bali route by private car revealed:

"*The journey took up to 30 hours. The long duration was affected by traffic density and the need for rest because there was only one driver. However, I already understood the one-way and contraflow schemes, so there were no complaints. The rest area infrastructure needs to be expanded and improved.*" (Interview, June 20, 2025)

This statement shows that travelers not only receive policies but also provide critical evaluations of supporting infrastructure.

The Rationality of Travelers in Choosing Modes, Times, and Routes

Travelers show complex rationality in decision-making. At the Ciputat Terminal, the owner of the Kramat Jati transportation business reported a decrease in ticket sales of up to 30%, which is believed to be related to changes in transportation mode preferences. Meanwhile, in Central Java, one traveler chose to use air transportation because of discounted ticket prices, while another alternative was sea transportation.

The selection of departure time is also an adaptation strategy. In Serang Kota, the Wakil Kepala Satuan Lalu Lintas observed:

"*Homecoming vehicles passing through Serang Kota tend to depart at night and are dominated by motorcyclists. This is due to the hot weather during the day.*" (Interview, June 19, 2025)

Travelers also use technology for navigation. At the West Java Regional Police, Patroli Jalan Raya (PJR) officers stated that Google Maps is recommended as a navigation tool for alternative routes, and travelers actively use it. In Surabaya, Radio Suara Surabaya serves as a source of real-time information that travelers rely on to avoid congestion.

Traveler bricolage—the creative improvisation of available informational and social resources to navigate the system—was documented extensively across interview sites. A motorcycle traveler on the Bandung–Cirebon route described a layered navigation strategy: "I use Google Maps for the main route, but I also follow Telegram groups for updates from people who left two hours before me. If three people say the Cipali Toll Road is jammed, I trust that more than the app." This account reveals a sophisticated information-bricolage system in which travelers triangulate among algorithmic data (navigation applications), peer-sourced real-time intelligence (social media groups), and embodied route knowledge (personal experience from prior journeys). Such adaptive rationality operationalizes the concept of the traveler as an active policy co-producer, rather than merely a passive recipient of traffic-governance decisions.

The Socio-Economic Impact of Traffic Policy on MSMEs and Business Actors

Traffic engineering policies have a significant impact on the local economy. In Klaten, the closure of CFD during the homecoming flow affected MSMEs that usually sell in the area. MSME actors took the initiative to create "culinary villages" in other locations as a form of adaptation.

In Simpang Mengkreg, Kediri Regency, the impact was positive. Local MSME owners stated:

"*Turnover has doubled. Many people buy drinking water, snacks, cigarettes, or Kediri souvenirs. We even had to add temporary employees. If the traffic congestion is severe, sometimes no one stops, but there is still a positive impact; at least our business is becoming more widely known.*" (Interview, June 18, 2025)

On the other hand, rest areas and restaurants along the main corridor experienced a decrease in turnover. The KM 125 Rest Area manager revealed:

"*Eid sales decreased compared to previous years due to a decline in people's purchasing power. Consumption patterns are shifting toward snacks and drinks; purchases of full meals decreased significantly (20–70%). Even though the number of visitors is high, traders' turnover remains low.*" (Interview, June 17, 2025)

These findings show that the economic impact of traffic policies is contextual and uneven, depending on location, type of business, and the adaptation strategies adopted by business actors.

Feedback from Travelers as Shaping Officer Strategy

The experience of travelers is not only an object of evaluation, but also a source of feedback that influences officers' strategies in the field. At the Klaten Police Department, during a group discussion, officers acknowledged that complaints regarding waiting times at rest areas served as input for regulating the opening and closing of rest areas more responsively.

The manager of Rest Area 423 in Central Java stated:

"*The prolonged opening and closing procedures have caused travelers waiting in queues to complain because they must wait a long time while needing rest area facilities to refuel and dispose of waste. Proposals regarding the opening and closing operations also involve toll road officers to ensure better coordination.*" (Interview, June 18, 2025)

Police officers in several regions acknowledged that information from travelers through social media and radio constitutes one of the real-time data sources used to adjust traffic engineering measures. In Surabaya, for example, Radio Suara Surabaya functions as a liaison between the community and relevant agencies, with residents actively participating by reporting road conditions, accidents, and traffic density.

Discussion

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration as a Social Practice and Production of Meaning

The findings of the study show that cross-sectoral collaboration in Operation Ketupat is not only structural, but also has symbolic and cultural dimensions. The coordination meetings held before the operation function not only as administrative mechanisms, but also as spaces to produce collective meaning and the formation of shared understanding among agencies. This reinforces the theory of collaborative governance proposed by Ansell (2008), which emphasizes that the success of collaboration is determined by the quality of social interaction, not merely by institutional design.

In this context, collaboration can be understood as a "coordination ritual" that builds trust and a common language. These findings expand upon Emerson (2012) concept of collaborative capacity by showing that collaborative capacity is formed not only through technical experience, but also through symbolic processes such as intensive communication, negotiation, and the formation of collective identities among agencies.

However, this study also found challenges in the form of sectoral egos and differences in communication frequency across regions. The primary obstacle to collaboration lies not in formal structures, but in the relational dynamics among actors. As such, the effectiveness of collaboration is highly dependent on the ability of actors to transcend institutional boundaries and build trust across organizations.

Discretion and Bricolage as Field Adaptation Mechanisms

The second dimension confirms that discretionary practices are a key element in bridging the gap between formal policy and realities on the ground. Officers not only implement rules, but also act as policy makers in practice, as stated by (Lipsky, 1980). This discretion arises because of the complexity of field situations that cannot be fully accommodated by standard procedures.

The findings of the study show that officers actively engage in bricolage—that is, improvising with available resources—to overcome technical and operational limitations. This practice reflects what anthropology refers to as practical knowledge or practical wisdom (phronesis), in which decisions are made based on experience, intuition, and situational context.

Interestingly, the discretion identified in this study is not solely individual, but also collective and negotiable. Officers consider not only traffic conditions, but also input from stakeholders such as tourism managers and business actors. This demonstrates that discretion functions as a space for social negotiation among various interests, rather than merely as a form of unilateral authority.

Furthermore, these findings challenge the assumption that technologies such as Electronic Traffic Law Enforcement (ETLE) can completely replace the role of humans in decision-making. On the contrary, this study shows that in complex situations such as holiday homecoming traffic flows, the flexibility and intuition of officers remain irreplaceable factors.

Travelers as Rational Agents and Policy Co-Production

The third dimension reveals that travelers are not merely objects of policy, but active actors who play a role in shaping traffic dynamics. Travelers demonstrate rationality in choosing modes of transportation, departure times, and travel routes, while also utilizing information technology to optimize their journeys.

These findings are consistent with the perspective of agency in the social sciences, which positions individuals as actors with reflective and adaptive capacities. Travelers not only comply with policies, but also interpret and adapt them to suit their needs. In this context, safety is understood not merely as travel speed, but as a combination of security, informational certainty, and comfort.

Furthermore, this study shows that travelers' experiences function as a feedback loop that

influences officers' strategies in the field. Information from travelers, obtained through both direct communication and social media, serves as a source of real-time data used in decision-making. This demonstrates the existence of policy co-production, in which the public contributes to the implementation of public policies.

In addition, the socioeconomic impact of traffic policies shows that state intervention is not neutral, but instead results in an uneven distribution of benefits and losses. Some Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) experienced increased revenue, while others experienced declines due to changes in vehicle flow. These findings confirm that traffic policy has an economic and political dimension that must be considered in planning.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The three dimensions of the findings above are interrelated and form a dynamic social system. Cross-sectoral collaboration creates a coordination infrastructure that enables officers in the field to exercise discretion with greater confidence. The discretionary and bricolage practices of officers, in turn, provide more adaptive responses to rational and dynamic traveler behavior. Meanwhile, travelers' experiences—whether in the form of compliance, complaints, or adaptation strategies—become feedback that enriches the collaboration process and improves discretionary practices.

Theoretically, these findings enrich the understanding of traffic anthropology by showing that large-scale traffic management operations such as Operation Ketupat are not merely technical problems, but complex arenas of social interaction. Traffic is a "social kinetics" in which meaning, power, and cultural practices are constantly negotiated. In this context, the success of an operation is measured not only by macro-level indicators such as vehicle volume or accident rates, but also by the quality of the social relationships built within it.

These findings stand in productive tension with the dominant quantitative-managerial tradition in traffic studies. While quantitative approaches capture aggregate outcomes—such as accident reduction rates, vehicle throughput, and travel time indices—they remain structurally blind to the relational and cultural mechanisms that produce those outcomes. The present study demonstrates that the 15% reduction in accidents documented was enabled not simply by traffic engineering, but also by the coordination rituals and trust networks established across agencies, which allowed engineering decisions to be implemented rapidly and adaptively. Similarly, traveler compliance with one-way traffic systems—quantified as a behavioral metric in managerial evaluations—is revealed here to be the product of complex meaning-making processes in which travelers actively reconstruct notions of safety, absorb information through informal networks, and negotiate their participation in governance. Traffic anthropology, by capturing these microsociological processes, provides the explanatory depth that aggregate metrics alone cannot achieve (Garriott, 2013).

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that large-scale traffic governance in Indonesia operates as a dynamic socio-institutional system in which regulatory effectiveness is fundamentally relational—produced through inter-agency trust, adaptive discretion, and active traveler agency—rather than through technological or procedural compliance alone. Three interconnected insights emerge from the empirical evidence. This study advances three interconnected insights into the sociocultural dynamics of large-scale traffic governance in Indonesia. Drawing on traffic anthropology as an analytical lens, the findings demonstrate that the effectiveness of Operation Ketupat 2025 is fundamentally relational—shaped by institutional trust, adaptive discretion, and traveler agency rather than by regulatory compliance alone.

Operation Ketupat 2025 demonstrates that the success of large-scale traffic management in Indonesia relies not solely on technology and regulations but also on the quality of social relationships and institutional coordination. Cross-sectoral collaboration functions as a coordination ritual that builds shared understanding and trust among agencies, while field officers exercise discretionary practices and bricolage to navigate dynamic conditions and resource constraints. Travelers also act as rational agents, adapting to traffic policies, reconstructing the meaning of safety, and providing feedback that informs field strategies.

Together, these dimensions form an interconnected socio-institutional system that supports effective traffic management. Policy recommendations include strengthening officers' soft skills in communication, negotiation, and situational decision-making; enhancing traveler feedback mechanisms through social media and public reporting tools; standardizing inter-agency communication protocols; and considering the socioeconomic impacts on local businesses. Future research should expand geographic coverage beyond Java, employ longitudinal studies to track evolving practices, focus on specific traveler groups such as motorcyclists and persons with disabilities, and further develop police anthropology to explore the cultural dimensions of police institutions, thereby deepening understanding of work culture, social practices, and collective adaptation in Indonesian policing.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Bakharuddin Muhammad Syah conceptualized the study, designed the research framework, and conducted fieldwork including interviews and participant observations. The author also analyzed the data, synthesized the findings, and drafted the manuscript. All responsibilities, including reviewing and approving the final manuscript, were undertaken by the author to ensure academic rigor and integrity.

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