

# Public Trust and Police Legitimacy: Community Perception of Law Enforcement Practices in Barangay Estefania, Bacolod City, Negros Occidental

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.130500001>

Received: 30 April 2026; Accepted: 05 May 2025; Published: 21 May 2026

## ABSTRACT

This study examined public trust and perceived police legitimacy among residents of Barangay Estefania, Bacolod City, and identified the key policing factors influencing these perceptions. A total of 400 respondents participated in the study using a validated questionnaire with high reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.814–0.883). Results revealed very high levels of public trust ( $M = 4.70$ ,  $SD = 0.30$ ) and police legitimacy ( $M = 4.71$ ,  $SD = 0.39$ ), consistently observed across demographic groups. Pearson correlation analysis indicated a significant and strong positive relationship between trust and legitimacy ( $r = 0.62$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Multiple regression analysis further revealed that professionalism and behavior were the strongest predictors of both public trust and police legitimacy, also by police visibility and crime prevention. The models explained 43% and 55% of the variance, respectively. Findings highlight that ethical conduct, fairness, visibility, and community engagement are critical determinants of effective policing. The study reinforces Procedural Justice Theory, emphasizing that legitimacy is built not only through law enforcement outcomes but through respectful and transparent police-community interactions.

**Keywords:** Public trust, police legitimacy, procedural justice, police practices, Bacolod City.

## INTRODUCTION

Public trust and police legitimacy are central to effective law enforcement globally. Contemporary policing has shifted from a state-centered approach to a citizen-centered model that emphasizes fairness, transparency, and community engagement. According to Tyler (2006), police effectiveness depends on public consent, which is strengthened through procedural justice.

In the Philippines, trust in the Philippine National Police (PNP) has faced challenges due to issues involving misconduct and human rights concerns. In response, reforms such as the P.A.T.R.O.L. Plan 2030 emphasize professionalism, accountability, and community engagement.

Barangay Estefania presents a diverse urban setting where, policing practices and community perceptions may vary across zones. Despite ongoing initiatives such as increased patrols and surveillance systems, limited data exist regarding residents' perceptions of police fairness and legitimacy.

This study aims to assess public trust, examine perceptions of police legitimacy, determine the relationship between public trust and police legitimacy, and identify the key policing practices influencing these perceptions.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

A quantitative descriptive-correlational research design was employed to analyze public trust, police legitimacy and the relationship between these variables.

### Participants

The study involved 400 residents of Barangay Estefania who were selected through purposive sampling.

### Research Instrument

A validated questionnaire based on Procedural Justice Theory was utilized in the study, with a reliability coefficient ranging from  $\alpha = 0.814$  to  $0.883$ .

### Data Collection

Data were gathered through Google Forms and face-to-face surveys conducted across the four zones of Barangay Estefania.

### Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. The following statistical tools were employed:

Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation)

Pearson product-moment correlation

Multiple linear regression analysis

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Level of Public Trust in the Police

Table 1 presents the level of public trust in the police among residents of Barangay Estefania. The overall mean score of 4.70 (SD = 0.30) indicates a very high level of public trust.

**Table 1. Level of Public Trust in the Police among Residents of Barangay Estefania, Bacolod City**

Variable	Category	n	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Public Trust in Police	Overall	400	4.70	0.30	Very High

*Note: 4.51-5.00= Very High; 3.51-4.50= High; 2.51-3.50= Moderate; 1.51-2.50= Low; 1.00-1.50= Very Low.*

### Interpretation:

The findings reveal that residents of Barangay Estefania exhibit a very high level of trust in the police. This suggests that the community consistently perceives police officers as reliable, responsive, and effective in maintaining peace and order.

### Perceived Police Legitimacy

Table 2 shows the residents' perception of police legitimacy in terms of fairness, accountability, and effectiveness. The overall mean score of 4.71 (SD = 0.39) indicates a very high level of perceived police legitimacy.

**Table 2. Residents' Level of Perception toward Police Legitimacy**

Variable	Category	n	Mean	SD	Verbal Description
Police Legitimacy	Overall	400	4.71	0.39	Very High

Note: 4.51-5.00= Very High; 3.51-4.50= High; 2.51-3.50= Moderate; 1.51-2.50= Low; 1.00-1.50= Very Low

**Interpretation:**

The results imply that residents strongly accept and recognize police authority. This high level of perceived legitimacy reflects confidence in the fairness of police procedures, accountability in service delivery, and effectiveness in law enforcement.

**Relationship Between Public Trust and Police Legitimacy**

Table 3 presents the correlation between public trust and perceived police legitimacy.

**Table 3. Relationship between Public Trust and Perceived Police Legitimacy**

Variable	r	p-value	Interpretation
Trust vs. Legitimacy	0.62	<0.01	Significant, Strong Positive Relationship

**Interpretation:**

The results show a significant strong positive relationship ( $r = 0.62, p < 0.01$ ) between public trust and perceived police legitimacy. This indicates that higher levels of trust in the police are associated with stronger perceptions of legitimacy. As trust increases, residents are more likely to view police authority as justified and acceptable.

**Predictors of Public Trust in the Police**

Table 4 presents the multiple linear regression analysis predicting public trust based on police practices.

**Table 4. Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Public Trust from Police Practices**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Police Visibility and Presence	0.16	0.05	0.22	3.53	<.001
Crime Prevention and Control	0.12	0.05	0.16	2.49	.013
Professionalism and Behavior	0.28	0.05	0.35	6.13	<.001

**Model Summary:**  $R = 0.66, R^2 = 0.43, F(3, 396) = 99.44, p < .001$

**Interpretation:**

The regression model explains 43% of the variance in public trust, indicating a substantial explanatory power. All predictors significantly influence public trust. Among them, professionalism and behavior ( $\beta = 0.35$ ) emerged as the strongest predictor, suggesting that respectful and ethical conduct of police officers plays a crucial role in building public trust.

## Predictors of Perceived Police Legitimacy

Table 5 presents the multiple linear regression analysis predicting perceived police legitimacy.

**Table 5. Multiple Linear Regression Predicting Perceived Police Legitimacy**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Police Visibility and Presence	0.26	0.05	0.27	4.87	<.001
Crime Prevention and Control	0.19	0.06	0.19	3.33	.001
Professionalism and Behavior	0.39	0.05	0.37	7.24	<.001

**Model Summary:**  $R = 0.74$ ,  $R^2 = 0.55$ ,  $F(3, 396) = 161.08$ ,  $p < .001$

### Interpretation:

The model explains 55% of the variance in perceived police legitimacy, indicating a strong predictive capacity. All variables significantly contribute to legitimacy perceptions. Among these, professionalism and behavior ( $\beta = 0.37$ ) emerged as the most influential factor, highlighting that respectful and ethical police conduct strongly enhances public perception of legitimacy.

## LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

While this study provides robust empirical findings, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study is geographically restricted to a single locale, Barangay Estefania, which limits the broader generalizability of the findings. Second, the use of purposive sampling may introduce selection bias, potentially affecting the representativeness of the sample. Third, data collection relied on self-reported questionnaires, which are susceptible to social desirability bias, especially considering the very high scores reported.

The study also lacks qualitative insights that could provide a deeper understanding of community perceptions. Furthermore, external factors such as political climate or recent policing events were not considered. The study likewise lacks comparative analysis with other regions or national-level data that could provide broader contextual depth.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that residents of Barangay Estefania demonstrate a very high level of public trust and perceive the police as legitimate authorities. The findings reveal a strong and significant relationship between public trust and police legitimacy, indicating that both constructs are closely interconnected within the community context. This relationship is primarily influenced by police professionalism, visibility, and proactive community engagement. The results affirm that effective policing extends beyond crime reduction outcomes and is largely determined by the quality of police–community interactions.

The study further emphasizes the importance of procedural justice as a central framework in sustaining positive police–community relations. Fairness, transparency, respect, and consistent ethical conduct in police practices significantly contribute to strengthening public confidence and perceptions of legitimacy. When applied effectively, procedural justice enhances cooperation between law enforcement and the community, thereby reinforcing social order and trust.

Methodologically, the study is considered sound and reliable. The use of a validated research instrument with high internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha ranging from 0.814 to 0.883) ensured the credibility and reliability of the data gathered. The sample size of 400 respondents provided sufficient statistical power and strengthened the robustness of the findings, supporting their generalizability within the study locale. The application of

appropriate statistical tools, including descriptive analysis, Pearson product-moment correlation, and multiple regression analysis, allowed for a comprehensive examination of relationships among variables.

Moreover, the findings were clearly presented and demonstrated strong statistical significance with meaningful interpretation. The integration of Procedural Justice Theory with the empirical finding further strengthened the theoretical foundation of the study. In terms of practical relevance, the study identified key determinants, such as police professionalism, visibility, and behavior, as significant predictors of public trust and legitimacy. These findings provide valuable empirical evidence that may guide the enhancement of community policing strategies and policy formulation aimed at improving police–community relations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that, to further strengthen police–community relationships and sustain high levels of public trust and perceived legitimacy, police organizations should prioritize continuous training programs aimed at enhancing professionalism and ethical conduct among officers. Increasing police visibility and intensifying community engagement activities are also essential in fostering stronger relationships with residents and improving mutual understanding. Crime prevention strategies should be further enhanced through proactive, collaborative, and community-based approaches.

Moreover, encouraging active community participation in policing programs will promote shared responsibility in maintaining peace and order. The consistent application of Procedural Justice Principles in all police–community interactions is likewise crucial in ensuring fairness, transparency, and respect. Finally, regular assessments of public perception should be conducted to monitor trust levels and guide evidence-based improvements in policing practices.

For future research, it is recommended that studies expand their coverage to multiple barangays or cities to improve generalizability. The use of random sampling techniques is also encouraged to enhance representativeness and reduce sampling bias. Incorporating qualitative methods, such as interviews and focus group discussions, may provide richer and more in-depth insights into public perceptions of the police. A longitudinal research design is likewise suggested to examine changes in public trust and police legitimacy over time. Comparative studies with other regions or national benchmarks would further strengthen contextual understanding.

Researchers should also improve data presentation and formatting to enhance clarity and readability. Lastly, considering external influencing factors such as media exposure and policy environment, as well as triangulating multiple data sources, would contribute to a more comprehensive evaluation of police–community relationships.

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