



**COMMUNITY POLICING AND PERFORMANCE OF THE
PHILIPPINE NATIONAL POLICE AS MEDIATED BY POLICE
TRUST: EVIDENCE IN COTABATO CITY, PHILIPPINES**

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Abstract:

This study examined the relationship between community policing and the performance of the Philippine National Police (PNP), with police trust serving as a mediating variable, in Cotabato City, Philippines. A total of 400 community members were selected through stratified random sampling and surveyed using validated questionnaires that measured community policing, police performance, and police trust. The study utilized descriptive statistics, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, multiple regression analysis, MedGraph, and the Sobel z-test for mediation analysis. The findings revealed that community policing, police trust, and police performance were significantly associated with one another, demonstrating the strong connection between effective police-community engagement and operational effectiveness in Cotabato City. Results further indicated significant relationships between community policing and police performance, community policing and police trust, and police trust and police performance. Moreover, the mediation analysis showed that police trust partially mediated the relationship between community policing and police performance. These results suggest that community policing enhances police performance not only directly but also indirectly by strengthening public trust in the police.

Keywords: criminal justice, community policing, police performance, police trust, mediating role

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1. Introduction

Police performance remains a major obstacle to successful community policing. Irregular service, slow responses, and worries about misconduct erode public trust and make people less willing to work with officers. If residents see police as ineffective or unaccountable, building the kind of genuine, cooperative relationships community policing relies on becomes very hard. Studies show that when people perceive the police as inefficient or have negative encounters, they're much less likely to engage or cooperate with law enforcement (Abdi, 2024; Aguilar *et al.*, 2024).

In addition, structural and organizational barriers complicate the effective delivery of community-oriented policing. Limited training, scarce resources, and weak communication practices undermine officers' efforts to build trust and sustain meaningful community engagement. As a result, initiatives aimed at fostering police-community collaboration often become inconsistent and fragmented, diminishing their potential impact on public safety and confidence. Recent research indicates that bolstering institutional capacity and enhancing transparency are essential steps toward improving police performance and restoring community trust (Aguilar *et al.*, 2024; Cheng *et al.*, 2024).

Moreover, police performance is shaped by a mix of organizational, social, and personal factors that determine how well officers carry out their roles. Organizational features such as strong leadership, adequate resources, ongoing training, and well-defined operational policies provide crucial direction for officers' actions and choices. At the same time, community dynamics, particularly public trust, cooperation, and perceptions of police legitimacy, play a major role in effectiveness, since officers generally perform better when they feel backed by the communities they serve. Individual characteristics like motivation, job satisfaction, and ethical commitment also influence performance outcomes. Finally, robust accountability and transparent practices encourage responsible behavior and better service delivery, strengthening both police efficiency and community relations (Branca *et al.*, 2019; Abdi, 2024; Aguilar *et al.*, 2024).

Recent studies link community policing to improved police performance, better crime control, greater legitimacy, and reduced excessive force, largely by fostering public trust and cooperation, which enhance accountability and responsiveness (Weisburd *et al.*, 2024). Likewise, community engagement initiatives also strengthen officers' problem-solving and communication abilities and improve job satisfaction, which together contribute to stronger organizational performance (Lum & Koper, 2024).

In addition, when police and communities keep working together over time, officers get better at calming tense situations, following proper procedures, and preventing crime, mainly because they build stronger, more cooperative relationships with the people they serve (Okoka & Kheswa, 2024). In addition, organizational studies highlight that it promotes a more supportive police culture and better service delivery, although its success depends on proper implementation and training (Menifield *et al.*, 2024).

Furthermore, study shows that community policing helps build public trust in law enforcement by fostering better communication, transparency, and cooperation between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve. More frequent officer presence and regular interactions contribute to stronger perceptions of legitimacy and fairness, which are core elements that underpin public confidence in the police (Savka, 2025). Research also shows that community policing can really give public confidence a boost, especially in neighborhoods where trust in law enforcement has been broken. When officers commit to open communication and work side-by-side with residents to solve local problems, it goes a long way toward rebuilding that relationship over time (Lum & Koper, 2024). Additionally, studies indicate that community policing is most effective when combined with transparency and accountability. When departments openly own up to their actions, community members are much more likely to see the police as dependable, responsive, and genuinely invested in their needs (Reinsch & Xiu, 2025).

Moreover, when police departments set up formal ways to collaborate like community advisory boards or neighborhood programs, it fosters a collective responsibility in maintaining public safety. This team effort helps build lasting trust and steady cooperation over time, which ultimately makes crime reduction efforts a lot more successful (Awoyemi *et al.*, 2025).

For years, community policing has been championed as a go-to approach for upgrading law enforcement and bridging the gap with local communities. At its core, this method thrives on getting officers and residents to work hand-in-hand, keeping operations open to the public, and reacting quickly to neighborhood needs (Gill *et al.*, 2019). In Ethiopia, researchers Melkamu and Teshome (2023) discovered a powerful ripple effect: when community policing initiatives are put in place, they significantly boost public trust. That newfound confidence then directly paves the way for officers to do their jobs much more effectively. Building strong community ties does more than just make people feel safer. Research out of the UK shows that when officers are actively visible in neighborhoods, it naturally lowers crime rates and makes the public view law enforcement as a trusted authority (Myhill, 2019).

As Sabijon and Magbojos (2023) recently pointed out, law enforcement can't truly deliver what the public expects from them without a solid foundation of community trust. Building on this, Melkamu and Teshome (2023) highlight that everyday interactions are where trust is truly earned. When officers treat people with respect, communicate transparently, use their power responsibly, and handle situations fairly, it lays a solid foundation for a better relationship with the community.

At its core, trust is what connects community policing to actual police success. When officers are fair, transparent, and genuinely listen to local concerns, people naturally start to view them more positively. This shift in perception does more than just build goodwill; it directly encourages residents to cooperate and step up to support local law enforcement efforts (Mendoza *et al.*, 2021). If there is no trust to begin with, community policing efforts usually fall flat, especially in neighborhoods that have a long

history of friction with law enforcement. Ultimately, building a solid relationship with residents is what makes these programs actually work (Sabijon & Magbojos, 2023).

The main goal of community relations initiatives is to boost how the public views law enforcement while encouraging residents to step up and work alongside officers to keep their neighborhoods safe (Okoka *et al.*, 2024). Moreover, when communities trust law enforcement, they are much more willing to speak up, report crimes, and actively participate in local safety initiatives (McKee *et al.*, 2023).

Even with high standards in place, police trainees and active personnel still run into significant hurdles on the job and within their departments. For instance, those in Field Training Programs (FTP) frequently deal with confusing instructions, a lack of proper equipment, gaps in advanced training, and poor internal communication, all of which can get in the way of their readiness and job performance (Floresca, 2024). In addition, how well the police can do their jobs depends heavily on their relationship with the community. When trust breaks down, people are far less likely to report crimes, share information, or cooperate with officers on the street (Sabijon & Magbojos, 2023). Dealing with internal investigations, formal complaints, or negative performance reviews is an incredibly stressful part of the job for law enforcement officers, and it frequently takes a heavy toll on their overall well-being (Vicente *et al.*, 2021).

The Philippine National Police (PNP) still faces deep-rooted institutional hurdles, ranging from internal governance issues and corruption scandals to persistent national security threats (Mendoza *et al.*, 2021). Dealing with these harsh realities will require a mix of strong leadership, sweeping organizational reforms, and genuine community collaboration to truly upgrade the force's overall effectiveness.

Public anxiety over local safety and law enforcement's grip on crime recently spiked in Cotabato City following a string of violent events. Concern hit a high point after a grenade was thrown at the home of former Sheriff Abas, an attack that, while causing no injuries, left the neighborhood deeply shaken (Cabrera, 2023).

Numerous studies have established that community policing is directly associated with improved police performance, only a few studies have examined the underlying mechanisms that explain this relationship. Specifically, limited studies have explored how trust in the police may serve as a mediating mechanism in explaining the relationship between community policing and improved police performance. This gap is particularly clear in high-risk or post-conflict settings such as the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, where long-standing historical grievances and complex socio-political conditions continue to shape and influence levels of public trust. By examining how police trust mediates the link between community policing and performance in Cotabato City, this study contributes both theoretical insight and practical guidance for policing reforms.

This study was conducted to examine community policing and the performance of the Philippine National Police, with police trust as a mediating factor, using evidence from Cotabato City. Specifically, it aimed to address several objectives. First, it aimed to assess the level of satisfaction among community residents regarding the community

policing system implemented by the Philippine National Police (PNP). Specifically, it examined how residents perceive various aspects of policing, including patrol operations, the presence and visibility of police officers in the community, the effectiveness of traffic enforcement, and the conduct of community symposiums or seminars designed to inform and engage the public. Second, it aimed to assess police performance as reflected in police community relations by looking at the programs carried out and how effectively community policing initiatives were implemented. Third, it examined the level of police trust among community members by exploring their perceptions, judgments, and expectations of police actions, as well as their views on police behavior and overall performance, trustworthiness, and willingness to place confidence in the police. Fourth, this study also examined the significant relationships among community policing, police performance, and police trust. In addition, it investigated whether police trust serves as a mediator in the association between community policing practices and police performance.

The null hypotheses will be evaluated at the 0.05 level of significance. The study assumes that community policing has no statistically significant relationship with police performance. Likewise, there is no significant relationship between police trust and police performance. Furthermore, community policing and police trust are not expected to significantly influence police performance in Cotabato City. Lastly, police trust does not serve as a mediator in the connection between community policing and police performance in Cotabato City.

This study was anchored on the work of Tyler (2003), specifically the Procedural Justice Theory. The theory explains that people are more likely to trust and support police efforts when they encounter police behavior as fair, transparent, and respectful in their interactions with the public. It suggests that people are more likely to accept and comply with rules and authority when they encounter the decision-making process as fair, even if the results are not always in their favor. Tyler argues that this is beneficial since deterrence is significantly more costly to society than developing positive judgments on the procedural fairness of institutions of government. Therefore, public confidence in policing serves as a bridge between community policing and police performance: when police engage with communities fairly, trust increases, leading to greater public cooperation, which improves performance.

Furthermore, Wilson and Kelling investigated the Broken Windows Theory (1982). This theory also believes that broken windows, the umbrella term for disorder and incivility in a society that includes graffiti, vandalism, littering, and so on, bring about greater disturbance and an uptick in criminal behavior (Weele, Flynn, & Wolk, 2017). Specifically, Wilson and Kelling argue that the police's primary goal should be to uphold order instead of combat crime or simply enforce the law (Piston, 2023). It indicates that community policing builds trust, which increases citizen participation in maintaining order, indirectly improving police performance in crime prevention.

Lastly, this research will also be anchored in the Legitimacy Theory. This theory suggests that for organizations to achieve legitimacy, they must intentionally align their

operations with the prevailing norms, values, standards, and expectations of society, a process closely reflected in corporate social responsibility practices (Olateju *et al.*, 2022). In particular, indeed, institutions, including police, must gain public legitimacy to be effective.

Figure 1 presents the conceptual paradigm of the study, showing the relationship among the independent variable, mediating variable, and dependent variable. Recent research determining the relationship between community policing trust and performance identifies trust as an important psychological and organizational link that connects community-oriented strategies to improved policing outcomes. On a theoretical level, evidence indicates that community policing builds a stronger foundation of fairness and mutual trust. When officers focus on being open, responsible, and truly attentive to residents' needs, it naturally bridges the distance between police authorities and the public. Ultimately, this stronger connection makes policing more effective because community members feel genuinely motivated to cooperate (Nayeem, 2024). According to democratic policing frameworks, building public trust and legitimacy relies heavily on treating people fairly and actively engaging with the community. In fact, this trust is a necessary starting point; without it, the public is far less likely to view law enforcement as effective or respect their institutional authority (Muntingh & Faull, 2021). Concepts and real-world studies on community policing highlight a simple truth: formal partnerships and strong neighborhood bonds are what actually build trust. In turn, that trust is what allows officers to do their jobs effectively and keep neighborhoods safe. Ultimately, trust acts as the essential bridge connecting police efforts to a safer community (Farid, 2025).

This introduction lays the groundwork for developing a conceptual framework that offers a structured approach to examining how police trust mediates the relationship between community policing the re and police performance in Cotabato City, Philippines.

For clarity and better understanding, the key term in this study is defined according to its contextual use. Community policing refers to a policing approach and organizational strategy where law enforcement officers collaborate closely with community members and local groups to promote safety, maintain peace and order, and address community concerns through shared responsibility and partnership. It also involves assigning officers to specific areas so they can build familiarity with residents and gain greater insight into the local environment in which they operate. Police performance refers to the assessment of how effectively law enforcement authorities and officers achieve their goals of ensuring the well-being of the community, reducing crime, and enforcing laws, often measured through crime rates, response times, arrests, and community trust. Police trust refers to the public's perception of dependability, honesty, and equality of police officers and institutions. It covers those who feel confident that police will uphold the law, maintain public order, and protect citizens responsibly.

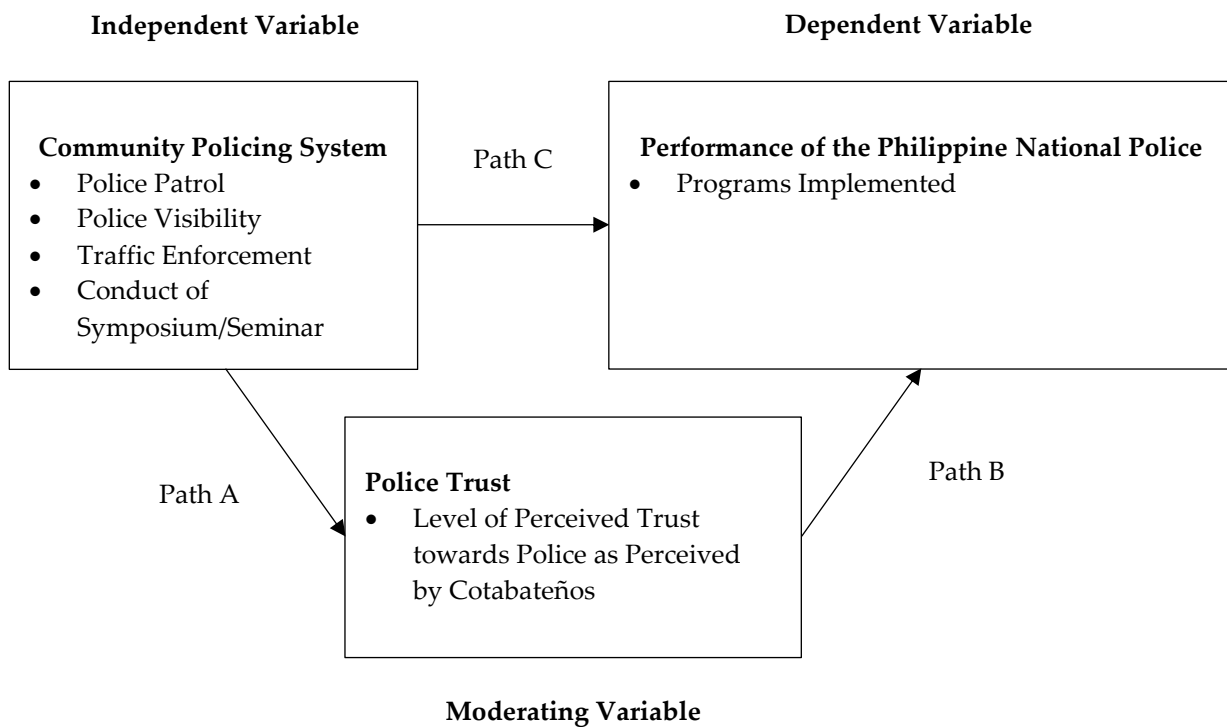


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

2. Method

This section explains how the study was carried out. It also presents the research respondents, the materials and instruments used, as well as the research design and procedures followed.

2.1 Research Respondents

The study involved respondents from Cotabato City in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). The sample size used Slovin's formula to ensure an appropriate and representative number of participants. Thus, there were four hundred (400) respondents utilized in this study, which includes the Mayor's administrators, Members of Peace and Order Council, Local Government Unit (LGU) representatives involved in public safety, Barangay leaders, civic society members, and ordinary citizens who have interacted with the police. Moreover, NGO workers on peace building and human rights advocate.

This study used a stratified random sampling method, where the population was divided into distinct groups, and respondents were randomly selected from each group. The researcher excluded community members who are under 18 years old, mentally unfit to respond, or have no awareness or engagement with police-community programs and individuals who declined to give informed consent or failed to complete the survey questionnaire.

The study was conducted in Cotabato City, situated within the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) near the confluence of the Rio Grande de Mindanao and Pulangi Rivers. The city serves as a key economic hub and is predominantly inhabited by the Maguindanaoan community. Based on the 2020 census, it has an estimated population of around 325,000 people (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021).

2.2 Materials and Instruments

To gather data for this study, adapted existing questionnaires from multiple well-regarded sources. Specifically, the questions tracking the independent variable were modeled after Martinez (2018), whereas the metrics for the dependent variable came from Branca *et al.* (2018). For the mediating variable, the indicators were drawn from Aguilar *et al.* (2024). Once the first draft was put together, it went to the thesis adviser for initial review and corrections. After tightening up the text based on those suggestions, the revised questionnaire was evaluated by a validation panel to ensure its overall reliability and validity.

The instrument was divided into three main sections. The first section focused on the independent variable, Community Policing, which included 13 items. This section measured the following indicators: police patrol, police visibility, traffic enforcement, and the conduct of symposiums and/or seminars. The dependent variable, Police Performance, consists of 12 items that reflect various indicators. These include house-to-house visits, distribution of informational flyers, conducting seminars in schools and barangays, regular street patrolling, and promoting police campaigns through social media platforms. In addition, the mediating variable, Police Trust, consisted of 9 items that includes interest of the community, treatment of individuals fairly without biases, protection of the rights of individuals, maintaining law and public order, confidentiality and protection of the privacy of the people. These questionnaires underwent validation. After the validation process, the instruments were pilot-tested on 20 respondents who were not covered in the study. The reliability of the measures was then assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

The study used a 5-point Likert response scale to determine respondents' levels of agreement on community policing, police performance, and police trust. A five-point scale ranging from 5 to 1 was used to quantify the responses, where 5 corresponds to Strongly Agree and 1 corresponds to Strongly Disagree. A rating of 5 signifies that the respondent strongly affirms that the identified indicators of police performance are consistently demonstrated. A rating of 4 indicates agreement, suggesting that these indicators are generally observed. A rating of 3 reflects moderate agreement or neutrality, implying an average or undecided perception. A rating of 2 denotes disagreement, meaning the respondent believes the indicators are rarely demonstrated. Lastly, a rating of 1 represents strong disagreement, indicating that the respondent perceives the indicators as not demonstrated at all.

2.3 Design and Procedure

This study used a non-experimental quantitative method design using a descriptive-correlational approach with mediation analysis. It was designed to explore and determine the relationships among the variables without manipulating any conditions. This study used a descriptive research framework to objectively map out the phenomenon exactly as it exists, focusing entirely on observing the current reality rather than manipulating variables. As noted by Rockinson-Szapkiw (2012), this particular research design aims to examine the interconnectedness of various variances to generate precise insights regarding a specific scenario within a larger population. Furthermore, Creswell (2012) noted that a correlational research design relies on statistical correlation metrics to evaluate and understand the extent of the relationship existing between two or more variables. Before data collection, informed consent was secured from all participants. Only those who willingly agreed to take part and confirmed their participation through their signatures were included in the study. The signed consent forms were then gathered and properly documented by the researcher.

The researcher sought approval to conduct the survey by formally requesting permission from the Research Coordinator, the Dean of the Department, and the thesis adviser. The research instrument underwent content validation and pilot testing. The content validation was administered by the qualified validators of the institution to ensure the alignment of the question items to the research objectives. A pilot test was used to determine the reliability of the research instruments. The questionnaire was administered to 20 respondents, and the data collection was carried out through face-to-face distribution. This process helped assess whether the instrument was consistent and suitable for the actual study.

The researcher submitted a formal letter of intent to conduct a study regarding the "Community Policing And Performance Of Philippine National Police As Mediated By Police Trust: Evidence in Cotabato City" to Police Regional Director – BARMM, Mayor's administrators, Officer In-Charge of Cotabato Public Safety Office, members of the Peace and Order council Local Government Unit representatives involves in public safety, Barangay leaders, civic society members, and ordinary citizens who have interacted with the police. Moreover, NGO workers on peace building and human rights advocate. The questionnaire is designed to be answered personally and honestly, reflecting the experiences and perception of the respondents.

After this, the researcher administered the survey instrument through face-to-face distribution. In some cases, questionnaires were personally handed to the respondents or placed in a dropbox system, where participants could collect, answer, and return the forms after completion. The respondents were also given sufficient time to accomplish the survey to ensure thoughtful and accurate responses. The administration of the questionnaire was conducted during the vacant periods of the researcher and respondents to facilitate data gathering and retrieval.

Moreover, the study employed statistical tools such as the Mean, Pearson Product-Moment Correlation, MedGraph using the Sobel z-test, and Multiple Linear Regression.

The mean was specifically used to determine the levels of community policing, police performance, and police trust. The relationships among community policing and police performance, community policing and police trust, as well as police trust and police performance, were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. In addition, a Medgraph approach with the Sobel z-test was employed to determine whether police trust serves as a mediating factor in the relationship between community policing and police performance.

Additionally, the Sobel test, conducted through MedGraph, was used in the mediation analysis to assess whether the mediating effect was statistically significant. Full mediation occurs when the relationship between the independent variable (IV) and dependent variable (DV) becomes non-significant after the mediator is included, indicating that the mediator fully explains the effect of the IV on the DV. In contrast, partial mediation is indicated when the effect of the IV on the DV is reduced but remains statistically significant in the final model. This suggests that the mediator explains only part of the relationship, while the remaining effect is either direct or influenced by other factors not included in the model.

The researcher observed strict ethical standards to ensure the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and well-being throughout the study. All responses were handled with full confidentiality and respect, and participants' identities were kept secure to allow them to take part without concern of any disclosure. Although the study topic was not considered highly sensitive, some survey questions related to perceptions of police performance in Cotabato City could have caused minimal emotional, social, or political discomfort; thus, participants were not obligated to answer questions that might induce distress and were informed of available psychosocial support services through the BARMM Ministry of Social Services and Development (MSSD) via hotline numbers (064) 421-5856 and 0919-160-3000. Ethical clearance was secured from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC-2025-488) to ensure that all research procedures complied with established ethical standards and minimized any potential harm to participants. All collected data were kept confidential and stored securely in password-protected electronic files as well as locked cabinets. Access was strictly limited to the researcher. After a period of two years, electronic records were permanently deleted, and printed documents were shredded to maintain participant confidentiality.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, followed by a discussion and interpretation of the results.

3.1 Level of Community Policing

As shown in Table 1, the data reveal that the level of community policing in Cotabato City is generally very high, as indicated by an overall mean score of 4.21 and a low standard deviation ($SD = 0.51$), suggesting consistent positive perceptions among

respondents. Among the indicators, police visibility obtained the highest mean (4.25), followed closely by the conduct of symposiums/seminars (4.23) and traffic enforcement (4.20), all interpreted at a very high level, highlighting the strong presence and active engagement of the police in the community. Police patrol recorded a slightly lower mean (4.15) but still falls under the high descriptive level, indicating that regular patrols are well implemented, though with comparatively more variation in responses. The findings suggest that community policing initiatives in Cotabato City are effectively carried out, contributing to enhanced public safety and strengthened police community relations.

Table 1: Level of Community Policing in Cotabato City

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Police Patrol	4.15	0.61	High
Police Visibility	4.25	0.61	Very High
Traffic Enforcement	4.20	0.64	Very High
Conduct of Symposium/Seminar	4.23	0.60	Very High
Overall	4.21	0.51	Very High

Local safety relies heavily on teamwork, according to Taganas and Gupit (2025). They emphasize that when Barangay Peacekeeping Action Teams (BPATs) and police officers join forces; their close partnership becomes the backbone of effective community security. Other research highlights just how much a department's work ethic matters to the community. When officers hold themselves to high ethical standards, it completely shapes how residents view police culture and performance. Ultimately, doing the right thing is what earns a department its legitimacy and encourages people to cooperate with them (Tindoy & Magbojos, 2025). Reaffirming this idea, a study by Ibañez *et al.* (2025) found that public confidence is still deeply rooted in how much residents' trust law enforcement. Their research connects this trust directly to how satisfied citizens feel with their local police and how safe they feel from crime in their neighborhoods.

Even though rural communities in the Philippines initially showed a lot of interest in connecting with local law enforcement, a study by Haim *et al.* (2025) found that police ultimately fell short when it came to addressing specific safety issues. Because of this lack of follow-through, the initiative didn't really move the needle on lowering crime or building public trust. Beyond the numbers, interviews and field observations show that collaborative crime prevention only works when there are long-term commitment and genuine, two-way respect. However, this approach takes a toll on law enforcement; departments must provide formal backing to help officers manage the emotional and bureaucratic stress that comes with it (Manubag & Revisa, 2025). Ultimately, research by Pola *et al.* (2025) establishes clear benchmarks for making community policing successful. They find that the entire strategy hinges on three major pillars: clear communication, deep-rooted trust, and reliable service delivery.

3.2 Level of Police Performance

The data indicate that police performance in Cotabato City is generally rated as high, with an overall mean score of 4.13 and a standard deviation of 0.54. This suggests that respondents hold mostly positive and relatively consistent perceptions of police performance across the area. Most performance indicators were assessed at a high level, particularly in areas such as house-to-house firearm registration checks, dissemination of crime prevention materials, conduct of seminars, training of barangay peacekeeping teams, and maintaining harmonious community-police relations, with average scores falling between 3.86 and 4.17. Notably, several items achieved a very high descriptive level, including street patrols and peacekeeping operations ($M = 4.23$), use of social media for crime prevention information ($M = 4.23$), participation in community activities ($M = 4.21$), and promotion of police campaigns through social media ($M = 4.21$), reflecting strong visibility and proactive engagement of police personnel. The findings indicate that police performance in Cotabato City is generally effective in maintaining peace and order and encouraging community involvement. However, certain areas still need improvement to achieve a consistently very high level across all performance indicators.

Table 2: Level of Police Performance as Perceived by Residents in Cotabato City

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
Programs Implemented	4.13	0.54	High
Overall	4.13	0.54	High

To truly make law enforcement more effective, agencies need to focus on clear performance metrics, transparency, and professional standards. For instance, recent data shows that when departments enforce strict rules around body-worn cameras, they actually see a drop in police-involved fatalities. This proves that tracking tools can make a real, measurable difference in officer accountability and overall performance on the job (Kim, 2025).

Research looking into how officers view their own skills and specialties shows that these two workplace factors are absolutely critical to how effective they feel on the beat (Barbin *et al.*, 2025). Moreover, keeping good officers on the force matters. When police departments focus on steady staffing and build a truly supportive work culture, they see much stronger performance outcomes down the road (Hoogesteyn *et al.*, 2025).

Case studies of various police agencies show that when performance governance systems are paired with strategies tailored to the local community, law enforcement operates much more efficiently. This approach also ensures that day-to-day police work actually aligns with overarching organizational policies (Dalogdog & Cartin-Pecson, 2025). Lastly, when it comes to how the community views law enforcement, people's trust and overall satisfaction usually boil down to three main things: how quickly officers respond, how reliable they are, and whether they treat people fairly and with respect (Sumala *et al.*, 2024).

3.3 Level of Police Trust

As presented in Table 3, the overall level of police trust in Cotabato City was found to be very high, with a mean score of 4.22 and a standard deviation of 0.52, reflecting strong and consistent confidence among the respondents. Most indicators also received very high ratings, especially the police's ability to establish positive relationships with the community (M = 4.33), uphold law and order (M = 4.30), protect individual rights and safety (M = 4.29), serve the best interests of the community (M = 4.25), and maintain confidentiality and privacy (M = 4.27). Other indicators, such as fair and impartial treatment, adherence to the law, and satisfaction with police initiatives aimed at strengthening public trust, were also rated highly, with mean scores ranging from 4.03 to 4.19. These findings indicate that the community generally has a high level of trust and confidence in the police, especially in terms of their integrity, professionalism, and dedication to maintaining public safety, while indicating areas where continued efforts may further strengthen trust.

Table 3: Level of Police Trust

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Level
I trust that the police will act in the best interest of the community.	4.25	0.72	Very High
I trust that the police will treat all individuals fairly and without bias.	4.03	0.84	High
I trust that the police will protect the rights and safety of all individuals.	4.29	0.75	Very High
I trust that the police will build positive relationships with the community.	4.33	0.70	Very High
I trust that the police will maintain law and order in the community.	4.30	0.69	Very High
The police are to uphold the law and protect the community to a great extent.	4.19	0.77	High
I believe in the trustworthiness of the police in terms of respecting individual rights and treating all individuals fairly and equally.	4.14	0.76	High
I believe that the efforts made by the police to build trust and positive relationships with the community are highly satisfactory.	4.17	0.73	High
I believe that the police are highly trustworthy in maintaining confidentiality and protecting the privacy of individuals during investigations or interactions.	4.27	0.70	Very High
Overall	4.22	0.52	Very High

Research highlights that public trust in law enforcement isn't static; it is constantly shaped by how fairly officers treat people, how effective they are, and local neighborhood conditions. For example, a longitudinal study in Italy tracked how the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted public confidence, showing a sharp dip followed by a partial recovery, and proving that major external crises can deeply alter how communities view the police over time (Panizzolo *et al.*, 2024).

Ultimately, public trust boils down to how safe people feel and how they view police performance (Ibañez *et al.*, 2025). In Pakistan, for instance, building that trust

depends heavily on procedural justice, meaning the public needs to see transparent investigations and independent police operations, regardless of regional differences in how departments are run (Hassan, 2025).

Moreover, public trust in law enforcement isn't one-size-fits-all. It relies heavily on a mix of local community bonds and overall police performance (Cheng *et al.*, 2024). Unsurprisingly, people trust the police more when they view officers as fair and effective, whereas corruption and local safety fears quickly destroy that confidence (Kulachai & Cheurprakobkit, 2023). Because of these dynamics, generic community policing initiatives don't work everywhere; strategies must be customized to fit the unique needs of each neighborhood (Blair *et al.*, 2021).

3.4 Correlation Analysis of the Variables

The correlation results presented in Table 4 indicate significant positive relationships among the variables. In particular, community policing and police performance show a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.769$, $p = 0.000$), suggesting that higher levels of community policing are linked with improved police performance. Likewise, the results revealed a significant relationship between community policing and police trust ($r = 0.650$, $p = 0.000$), showing that stronger community policing initiatives were linked to higher levels of public trust in the police.

Similarly, police trust and police performance were found to have a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.618$, $p = 0.000$), indicating that increased trust in the police was associated with improved performance outcomes. Since all obtained p-values were below the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypotheses were rejected, confirming the existence of statistically significant relationships among the variables.

Overall, the findings underscore the close connection between community policing, police trust, and police performance in Cotabato City, suggesting that effective community engagement and policing practices contribute to stronger public trust and better operational performance.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis of the Variables

Pair	Variables	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Decision on Ho
IV and DV	Community Policing and Performance	.769**	.000	Rejected
IV and MV	Community Policing and Police Trust	.650**	.000	Rejected
MV and DV	Police Trust and Performance	.618**	.000	Rejected

Recent research in the Philippines shows that building strong relationships with local communities directly shapes how people view police performance. In Region X, active community engagement by the Philippine National Police (PNP) made residents feel safer and more respectful of law enforcement, which naturally boosted public trust and performance ratings (Cimene *et al.*, 2022). This aligns with findings from Davao City,

where higher citizen satisfaction with police services directly drove up public trust, which in turn made the community view the police as far more effective (Ibañez *et al.*, 2025). Public trust and satisfaction with how officers do their jobs are the core of police legitimacy. Research shows a clear link between these two factors (Galangco & Chinayo, 2022). Furthermore, when community programs like Barangay Peacekeeping Action Teams (BPATs) collaborate with locals, it builds a sense of shared responsibility for safety, making law enforcement both more trusted and more effective (Taganas & Gupit, 2025).

3.5 Mediation Analysis of the Three Variables

The data were first analyzed using linear regression and then entered into MedGraph for further processing. The mediation analysis, as proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986), examines whether a third variable explains or transmits the relationship between two other variables.

The mediation analysis results indicated that police trust significantly mediates the relationship between community policing and police performance, as evidenced by the Sobel test ($z = 4.787$, $p < 0.05$). This suggests that community policing affects police performance both directly and indirectly through its influence on police trust. The results further showed that 17.27% of the total effect is transmitted through police trust, indicating a partial mediation effect. Additionally, the indirect-to-direct effect ratio of 0.209 indicates that the indirect pathway accounts for a notable portion of the overall influence, although the direct effect remains dominant. In terms of effect size, the total effect (0.807) exceeds the direct effect (0.668), confirming that some of the influence is transmitted through the mediator. Overall, the results suggest that while community policing strongly improves police performance on its own, building police trust enhances and strengthens this relationship, making trust an important mechanism in achieving better police performance outcomes.

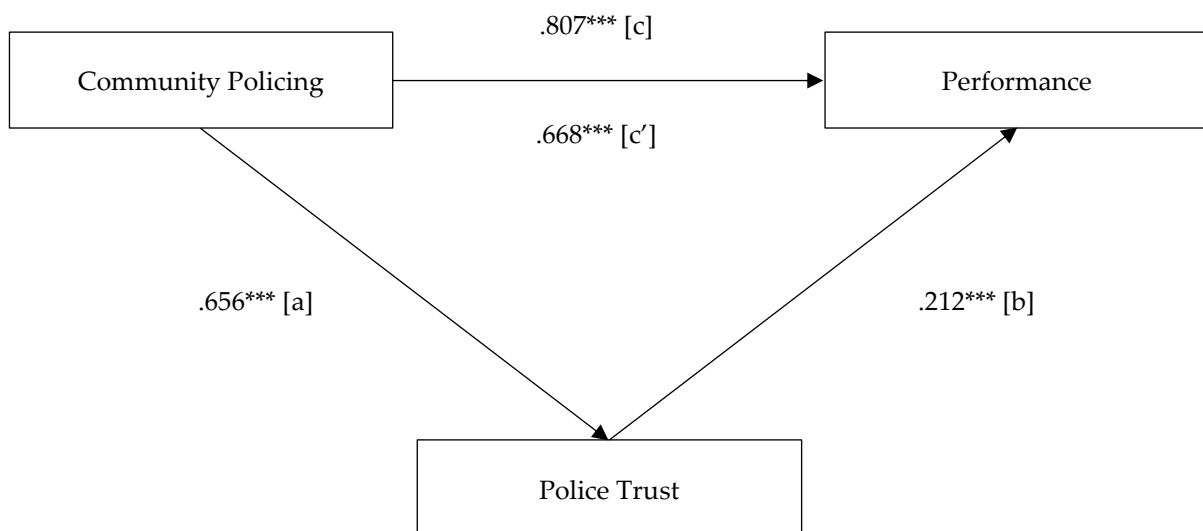


Figure 2: Medgraph Showing the Variables of the Study

Mediation Analysis

Sobel z	4.786732, $p < 0.05^*$
Percentage of the total effect that is mediated	17.267602%
Ratio of the indirect to direct effect	0.208716

Effect Size Measures

Unstandardized Coefficients

Total:	0.807
Direct:	0.668
Indirect:	0.656
Ratio Index:	0.813

Recent studies in Somalia shows that perceived effectiveness of the police enhances public trust and cooperation, with trust serving as an intervening variable, highlighting mediation effects of citizen trust on performance outcomes (Abdi, 2024). Moreover, community policing succeeds when it builds genuine trust. Research shows that when law enforcement operates with transparent governance and actively collaborates with the public, citizens are far more likely to see the police as reliable, effective, and worthy of their support (Hevi *et al.*, 2022; Rudhanto, 2022).

Research shows that when police connect with community members outside of enforcement, like casual, positive interactions, it builds deep trust and legitimacy. This trust naturally encourages residents to cooperate more with law enforcement, which ultimately drives up overall police performance ratings (Peyton *et al.*, 2019). Overall, these findings underscore that trust is a significant mediator in the pathway from community policing practices to improved police performance outcomes.

3.6 Path Estimates

Lastly, Figure 3 presents the results of the mediation analysis. The Sobel test shown in Table 6 produced a z-value of 4.78 with a p-value of less than 0.05, indicating a statistically significant mediating effect. This finding suggests a partial mediation, meaning that the direct relationship between community policing and police performance decreased when police trust was included in the model. The positive Sobel z-value further implies that police trust plays a role in weakening the direct influence of community policing on police performance.

Figure 3: Statistical Analysis Results Showing Whether a Mediating Effect Is Present or Not

Combination of Variables	Sobel z	p-value	Mediation
Community Policing → Police Trust → Performance	4.786732	$p < 0.05$	Partial mediation

* $p < 0.05$

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study reveals that community policing in Cotabato City is exceptionally strong. Residents clearly recognize and appreciate the department's hard work in the community. In particular, traffic enforcement, police visibility, and public seminars all earned top marks, highlighting the department's solid presence and consistent effort to engage with locals. While patrol operations were also rated highly, the data suggests there is still some room for growth in this area. To build on this momentum, the police department should maintain its successful visibility, traffic, and seminar programs while stepping up the frequency and strategic placement of patrols, especially in high-risk neighborhoods. Finally, fostering a continuous partnership with barangay officials and community leaders will be crucial to keeping these safety initiatives inclusive, adaptable, and effective at maintaining local peace.

Moreover, the study found that local police in Cotabato City received a "High" performance rating. This shows that residents generally feel officers are doing a great job keeping the peace, running effective crime prevention programs, and handling their everyday responsibilities. People gave the highest marks to visible street patrols and the use of social media to share crime prevention tips, showing that communities value both a strong physical presence and modern communication. Additionally, the police department's involvement in local community events highlighted a strong commitment to active civic engagement. However, the relatively lower mean on house-to-house firearm registration visitation suggests an area that may require improvement. Thus, the police are performing well in enforcement, community engagement, and information dissemination; thus, it is recommended that police authorities sustain effective patrol visibility and community outreach programs while strengthening house-to-house monitoring activities, particularly in firearm registration compliance, through improved coordination with barangay officials and enhanced public awareness campaigns.

Furthermore, public trust in the police was rated "Very High," showing that community members genuinely believe in the integrity, reliability, and credibility of law enforcement. The highest scores highlighted strong public confidence in the department's ability to maintain peace, protect citizen rights, and build positive community relationships. This underscores a solid foundation of institutional legitimacy. However, the slightly lower scores regarding fairness and unbiased behavior signal a clear area where the department must actively work to ensure everyone is treated equally. Thus, the police are highly trusted by the community, which strengthens cooperation and public support; thus, it is recommended that police authorities sustain transparency and community engagement initiatives while enhancing fairness-oriented policies, anti-bias training, and accountability mechanisms to further reinforce public trust and promote equitable policing practices.

Moreover, the data shows that community policing has a massive impact on how well officers actually do their jobs. It boosts performance in two ways: directly through better daily practices, and indirectly by building public trust. Ultimately, when police

departments invest heavily in community-oriented policing, their overall performance gets a major upgrade. Community policing also significantly predicts police trust while confirming that police trust significantly influences performance. Community policing continues to have a significant direct impact on performance even when police trust is taken into account, indicating that police trust only partially explains the relationship between the two. In conclusion, the data shows that community policing does more than just sharpen day-to-day operations; it fundamentally strengthens public trust. Because of this, law enforcement leadership should lean heavily into community engagement and transparency. By prioritizing open communication, treating people fairly, and building true local partnerships, departments can continue to elevate their overall performance.

Finally, the mediation analysis showed that public trust plays a key role in connecting community policing to better overall performance. This was backed up by a significant Sobel test result ($z = 4.786732$, $p < 0.05$). This implies that community policing directly improves police performance, while also enhancing performance indirectly by strengthening public trust. Grounded in Procedural Justice Theory, these findings highlight that when law enforcement prioritizes fairness, transparency, and respect, communities respond with greater trust. This trust, in turn, fosters better cooperation and drives more effective policing outcomes. Similarly, the result aligns with Broken Windows Theory, which emphasizes that visible police presence and proactive community engagement help prevent disorder and minor offenses, thereby contributing to improved performance.

Lastly, looking at this through the lens of Legitimacy Theory, building trust is the foundation of police legitimacy. When community members actually trust law enforcement, they are much more willing to cooperate with police initiatives and follow the law. Ultimately, this cooperation is what makes the entire organization more effective. In conclusion, the data show that community policing is a powerful tool for improving overall law enforcement performance. It not only drives better results directly, but it also creates a foundation of trust that makes police work much more effective in the long run; therefore, it is recommended that police authorities sustain and strengthen community-based programs, ensure procedurally just practices, and maintain visible order-maintenance efforts to further build legitimacy and enhance police performance.

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Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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