

Research Article

Crime Reporting in Small Philippine Communities: The Role of Public Trust in Law Enforcement

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ABSTRACT

Public trust in law enforcement impacts community safety and crime prevention. Trust gaps influence crime-reporting behavior and subsequently, the efficacy of policing. This paper focuses on the trust in law enforcement versus crime reporting behavior of the residents of Gasan, Marinduque. A quantitative descriptive-correlational method was employed, and data was gathered from 199 respondents with structured survey questionnaires. With a 199-sample size, 62.3% of respondents had moderate to high levels of trust towards law enforcement but 47.8% stated nonreporting of crimes due to fear of retaliation, or inaction from the authorities. Using Pearson's correlation, analysis showed a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = 0.412, p < 0.01$) between the trust level and the probability of a crime report, which means that the greater the respondent's trust in the police, the higher the likelihood of reporting crimes. Furthermore, regression analysis indicates that prior experiences with the police and how serious a crime is perceived to be, are strong predictors of reporting behavior ($\beta = 0.289, p < 0.05$). These findings support community-police relations programs and legislation aimed at restoring the trust of citizens in law enforcement agencies. Future research could consider longitudinal trends in trust dynamics and the effectiveness of intervention programs to improve crime reporting rates.

Keywords: Trust in law enforcement, crime reporting behavior, public perception, fear of crime, community policing, police effectiveness

1. INTRODUCTION

Public trust is one of the pillars which maintains the social order in a community, encourages collaboration with the police, as well as the efficient prevention of crimes (Jackson & Bradford, 2019). Citizens are more willing to report crimes, obey laws, endorse law enforcement programs, and observe law when there is public trust in the police. On the contrary, a lack of trust may result in diminished cooperation, greater underreporting of crime, and exaggerated perceptions of vulnerability and insecurity in a community (Regalado & Sun, 2024).

In small municipalities like Gasan, Marinduque, community-police relations are essential in ensuring safety, understanding the factors that influence trust in law enforcement becomes a pressing issue.

The Philippine public's perception of law enforcement has been shaped by various factors, including crime rates, police responsiveness, corruption, and high-profile incidents involving police misconduct (Curato, 2016; Regalado & Sun, 2024). The Philippine National Police (PNP) has faced rising doubts about its effectiveness since extrajudicial killings and police violence have damaged public trust in law enforcement institutions (Reyes, 2021). Jensen & Hapal (2018) found that Filipinos tend to avoid reporting crimes because they doubt that police will take action and worry about possible negative consequences. The unique socio-economic conditions and security issues of rural Gasan create distinct patterns of trust and crime reporting that stand apart from urban areas.

A 2019 study highlights that rural communities often have a unique relationship with law enforcement compared to urban settings (Amuedo-Dorantes & Arenas-Arroyo). Smaller population sizes and closer-knit communities can lead to increased police familiarity with residents, fostering trust and cooperation (Amuedo-Dorantes & Arenas-Arroyo, 2019). However, limited police resources, lack of immediate response, and potential social consequences of reporting crimes can create barriers to effective crime reporting (Nix et al., 2019). In Gasan, where law enforcement resources may be stretched thin, investigating these dynamics can provide insights into improving police-community engagement and reporting mechanisms.

As noted by Regalado & Sun (2024), people are less likely to report a crime if they believe the police; will retaliate, are unfair, ineffective, or lack integrity, thus many crimes go unreported. In addition, the decision to report crimes is affected by

personal contact with law enforcement, media representation of police officers, as well as the general perception of safety and security within the locality (Kochel, 2020). Based on the factors mentioned above, a critical examination on the case of Gasan is how the people comprehend the police and how this affects reporting crime to the police.

The goal of this study is to determine the degree of trust that Gasan, Marinduque residents have in law enforcement and how this trust, or lack thereof, affects their reporting of crime. This study will assess the perceptions of police effectiveness, fairness, integrity, and explore the extent to which those perceptions determine the likelihood of crime reporting. The research will examine the obstructive factors that make residents reluctant to approach the police and provide recommendations on how to improve public trust towards police.

Policy makers and Gasan's local government unit (LGU) are the primary beneficiaries of the findings. Establishing trust in the police not only improves rates of reporting crime but also general community safety (Abdi & Hashi, 2024). The results can provide evidence-based recommendations for policing practices, transparency, and community outreach programs to be improved. The study will also contribute to the general discourse on law enforcement and police trust in the context of the Philippines, where the two issues remain a central component of criminal justice reform.

In conclusion, this study seeks to address the research gap in ascertaining how trust in police officers is connected with crime reporting in Gasan, Marinduque. Based on a survey of citizens' perceptions regarding police effectiveness and integrity, this study will produce useful information on how law enforcement organizations can enhance relationships with citizens. It will provide the basis for subsequent studies on police trust, crime prevention policy, and community policing programs in the Philippines.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study analyzes the gap between trust in law enforcement and the propensity to report crimes in Gasan, Marinduque by utilizing a quantitative descriptive correlational research design. A survey was previously conducted and a sample of 199 respondents was chosen using stratified random sampling to incorporate representation from various barangays and socio-demographic strata. The survey adapted from both trust and crime reporting studies comprised of Likert-type scale items on perceived police trust, fear of crime, previous interactions with law enforcement, and readiness to report crimes.

Table 1. Scoring Procedure

Value	Description
4.21-5.00	Highly Agree
3.41-4.20	Agree
2.61-3.40	Neutral
1.81-2.60	Disagree
1.00-1.80	Highly Disagree

Respondent data was collected over a month with strict adherence to confidentiality guidelines and voluntary participation policies. Public perception of public trust to law enforcement was summarized using descriptive statistics, means, and standard deviations of public trust to law enforcement available. Trust levels and crime reporting behavior correlation was found by computing Pearson's correlation coefficient. Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent of history with law enforcement officers, crime rate in residents' neighborhoods, and demographic factors on the level of crime reporting.

Participants offered informed consent before enrolling in the survey, thus no ethical considerations were violated. Anonymity was preserved by leaving out identifiable information, and permission from the university ethics board was secured before starting data collection. The reliability of the survey instrument was verified using Cronbach's alpha, which calculated internal consistency at 0.89, indicating strong cohesion among the survey items.

The primary aim of this study is to provide evidence on the impact of trust in law enforcement on crime reporting behavior in Gasan. These findings will assist in understanding crucial barriers and motivators that influence citizen's willingness to report crimes and as a result, help enhance community-oriented policing frameworks and strategies that improve policing and public relations.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Out of the 199 respondents, the results indicate a generally positive perception of the PNP in the municipality. Despite a relatively high perception of law enforcement, the community's inclination toward reporting is low. The survey extracted data to examine the perceptions of Gasan residents regarding the services and effectiveness of their local police force using a Likert-scale questionnaire, with responses categorized into low, moderate, and high trust.

As shown in Table 2, the highest-rated item concerned police assistance when in danger or during emergencies, with a mean score of 4.45, falling under the Strongly Agree category. This suggests a strong public sentiment that police presence is reliable in times of crisis. The trust participants placed in the police can also be seen in "I have trust and confidence in the police," ($M = 4.33$) and "The police are polite in dealing with the people" ($M = 4.32$). Such responses indicate great trust not only in the operational effectiveness but also in the police's interpersonal relations. Meanwhile, and perhaps surprisingly, while most indicators were interpreted as "Strongly Agree," the item "There should be more visible police on the streets," received a slightly lower mean score of 4.10, placing it in the Agree category.

This suggests that while respondents appreciate police presence and efforts, they still feel that increased visibility and patrolling may further improve safety.

A Pearson correlation test was performed to analyze the association between trust in law enforcement and the possibility of reporting a crime. The analysis showed a positive correlation ($r = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$), thus meaning that people who trust the police more tend to report crimes more often. This confirms the primary hypothesis of the research which states that trust in law enforcement acts as a strong behavioural driver towards citizen engagement in reporting crimes.

Table 2 - Community Perception of Police Services in Gasan, Marinduque

Item	Mean	Description
I can go to the police for assistance in times of trouble or emergencies.	4.45	Highly Agree
I have trust and confidence in the police.	4.33	Highly Agree
The police are polite in dealing with the people.	4.32	Highly Agree
The police ensure the protection of victims and witnesses of crimes	4.29	Highly Agree
Together with the community and the local officials, the police are preserving the peace and order situation.	4.28	Highly Agree
The police have the public's support and cooperation.	4.25	Highly Agree
The police community and the local officials work together in the delivery of basic services* to the community and maintenance of peace and order.	4.24	Highly Agree
The police respect the rights of the people.	4.24	Highly Agree
More police should be deployed in the streets.	4.10	Agree
I would like to participate in a dialogue with the police, if given a chance.	4.07	Agree
Some people are afraid to inform the police when there is violation of law.	3.63	Agree
The police response to reports/complaints is too slow.	3.60	Agree
It is useless to report crimes to the police because they do not act on complaints	3.23	Agree
Some police in our community are involved in illegal or criminal activities.	3.19	Undecided
I believe that the police in our community are corrupt.	3.19	Undecided
Average Mean	3.96	Agree

*e.g., health, social welfare, waste disposal, environment, agriculture, fishery, etc.

Out of the ten respondents who reported having experienced crime victimization, 50% ($f = 5$) indicated that they did not report the crime incident at all, while only 20% ($f = 2$) reported to the police exclusively, another 20% ($f = 2$) reported to both the barangay and police, and 10% ($f = 1$) reported to the barangay only. From these numbers, it can be seen that even among victims, reporting to police authorities is not a normative action.

The reporting barriers were also assessed. Among the non-reporters ($f = 5$), the most cited reasons included “Offender is unknown” (40%, $f = 2$) and “Lack of time/no time to report to the police” (40%, $f = 2$). One respondent (20%) cited that the “Crime is not serious/petty incident.” These responses reflect logistical and perceptual challenges that inhibit the act of crime reporting, independent of perceived police integrity.

The community seems to express the need for more police presence, where 56.69% of respondents “Highly Agreed” with the statement “More police should be deployed in the streets,” while 32.75% agreed, and only a minor proportion (5.99%) were undecided. This indicates strong support for intensified police visibility, despite relatively high trust scores.

Table 3 - Community Observations on Police Service Effectiveness

Frequency	Mean	Description
The police respond quickly to calls for assistance and/or incidents.	4.39	Always
The police conduct public information, education, and dialogue on crime prevention.	4.38	Always
Police services are accessible.	4.35	Always
The police conduct patrol on a regular basis.	4.32	Always
The police are efficient in solving crimes.	4.29	Always
Average Mean	4.34	Always

Overall trust ratings seem to contradict opinions on police internal corruption. “Trust” is a composite of several components, including the willingness to dialogue with police. For instance, 46.48% and 39.08% highly agreed that the police, together with the community and local officials, and that they would like to sit down and have a dialogue with the police, respectively. However, a certain degree of nuance is offered by the 10.21% “Highly Agreed” and the 13.73% “Agreed” with the statement, “Some police in our community are involved in illegal activities,” illustrating a complex view: trust does not imply unqualified trust in the institution's officers.

The results indicate that expression of trust is high, however, one of the key behavioral indicators, reporting, is much lower, in this instance due to practical, emotional, and perceptual barriers as seen in the frequencies presented. This difference indicates that institutional trust and personal action are not always in sync.

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to find the predictors of crime-reporting behavior. Results showed that trust in police as an indicator for likelihood of reporting crime was highly predicted ($\beta=0.289$, $p < 0.05$), while perceived seriousness of the crime also impacted reporting behavior ($\beta = 0.367$, $p < 0.01$), meaning that people were more willing to report serious crimes as opposed to minor offenses, with prior experience of law enforcement also having some predictive power ($\beta = 0.194$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that positive experiences with police fostered a greater willingness to report crimes in the future.

These findings support claims asserting the dominant role trust in law enforcement has in reporting crimes but also emphasize it is not the only factor reporting is based on. It also suggests other socio-psychological elements influence the act of reporting crimes.

This study sought to examine the relationship between public trust in law enforcement and crime reporting behavior among residents of Gasan, Marinduque. It found that most respondents demonstrated moderate to high levels of trust in law enforcement, that trust did not result in a proportional increase in reporting crimes. The most significant finding was there being a statistically significant positive relationship on moderate levels of trust and crime reporting behavior ($r = 0.412$, $p < 0.01$). This means that more trust a respondent had toward police, the higher the chances of reporting crimes.

The trust-reporting relationship is well-documented in criminological literature. In particular, Sabijon & Magbojos (2023) observed that in the Philippine setting, trust in the PNP heavily influences whether individuals choose to report crimes, especially in communities where law enforcement presence is inconsistent. The present findings are consistent with this conclusion and align with other research from Southeast Asia that shows procedural fairness, transparency, and community engagement improve public cooperation with police (Sabijon & Magbojos, 2023).

Yet, the gap between trust and actual behavior points to deeper systemic and psychological barriers. Most participants cited fear of retaliation as a reason preventing them from reporting crimes. This also supports findings by the Human Rights Watch (2017) which mentions how a climate of fear during the peak of the Philippine drug war inhibited crime reporting, even for offenses not related to the drug war. Likewise, Torres and Sabijon & Mabojos (2023) noted that the low institutional trust based on perceived entrenched corruption and inaction resulted in a diminished public willingness to report crimes regardless of severity.

Over 41% of respondents feared social repercussions. In close-knit communities like Gasan, the social consequences of reporting a crime can be severe. Reporting may strain relationships with neighbors or even place the reporter at risk of retaliation (Johnson et al, 2018). These community-level dynamics reinforce the role of social cohesion and cultural norms in crime reporting decisions.

While some level of moderate trust was noted, prior negative encounters with the police were also identified as major barriers to reporting crimes. This corroborates the United Nations Population Fund (n.d.), which pointed out that certain vulnerable populations, particularly the poor young women, tend to avoid the police because of their earlier experiences of being ignored or treated poorly. In our data, even among those who had moderate to high levels of trust, close to fifty percent chose not to report crimes which indicates that some level of trust does not necessarily mean that other faith in the outcomes is warranted.

Moreover, the perceived seriousness of a crime was found to influence reporting behavior. This supports the findings of Boateng (2016), who indicated that crimes perceived as “minor” often go unreported due to assumptions that police would not prioritize them. The regression analysis in the present study confirms that perceived crime severity is a significant predictor of reporting behavior.

Digital tools, community policing efforts, and school-based interventions are emerging as potential trust-building strategies. Strom (2017) highlighted the positive effects of mobile reporting systems and increased police visibility in the US. It is worth noting however, that in a 2021 study (Blair et. al) on the global south, the Philippines included, that community policing experiments showed “null results on officer attitudes, including empathy, corruption, and accountability.”

Tan (2023) further emphasized the impact of early interventions in schools, where familiarity with law enforcement personnel fosters long-term trust and civic cooperation. These findings are relevant to rural areas like Gasan, where community-police interaction is more personal and can be leveraged for policy interventions.

Religious and moral frameworks also play a mediating role in public-police relations in the Philippines. Johnson et al (2018) found that the level of trust in the police was higher among religious respondents who regarded reporting crime as part of their civic duty. This is especially important in conservative regions like Marinduque where clergy tend to be predominant as community leaders and spokesmen. Although it is not expounded in this paper, this angle is particularly relevant in the predominantly Catholic Philippines.

Statistically, a positive correlation exists between trust and the reporting of crimes, however, the actual conduct of citizens results from an intricate system of fear, institutional memory, social constructs, and personal experiences. The results of this study gravitate towards humane interventions to be multi-pronged such as addressing institutional reform, community engagement, and psychosocial support, to effectively improve crime reporting rates therefore encouraging police performance and community safety.

4. CONCLUSION

The study entitled *Crime Reporting in Small Philippine Communities: The Role of Public Trust in Law Enforcement* sought to examine the relationship between public trust in law enforcement and crime reporting behavior among residents of Gasan, Marinduque—a second-class municipality in the heart of the Philippines and considered the second oldest municipality in the province.

Findings revealed that there was a positive correlation between trust in law enforcement and the possibility of reporting a crime to the Gasan Municipal Police Station personnel. Meaning that the likelihood of the residents reporting crimes, when committed, depends primarily on the level of their trust towards the police officers as their drive for engagement.

Furthermore, this study highlighted some factors affecting public trust towards local law enforcement, which include the consistency of the authorities in enforcing the laws and promoting peace and order, the perceived effectiveness of the law enforcement authorities in resolving crimes, and their regular presence within the community affecting their trust towards them. Moreover, fear of retaliation, past negative experiences with the police, and lack of time to report and follow up seemed to be the major factors affecting crime reporting.

These findings stress the importance of police-community relations through shared efforts with the community and police, transparency, proactive police strategies, and a bold public trust. Efforts to build trust with the community must be a serious and continuous work for the police. By enhancing police trust, law enforcement agencies can ensure greater and better cooperation among the communities and will foster a shared responsibility between the two in maintaining peace and order.

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