

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Police Self-Image in Relation to Public Trust in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental

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ABSTRACT

Public trust in law enforcement is a complex issue shaped by individual perspectives and social dynamics. This study aims to gain an understanding of the Police Self-Image in Relation to Public Trust among police officers assigned in the second congressional district of Davao Oriental, using a community-based survey of 358 respondents. This study uses a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research method to: first, identify the levels of police self-image and public trust; second, explore the existing relationship between police self-image and public trust; and third, test the existing influence of police self-image on public trust. Results revealed that Police self-image is very high, as is public trust. The correlation test found a significant, strong positive correlation between police self-image and public trust. Also, it exerted a significant influence on police self-image and public trust. The R^2 value indicated that 41.4% of the variance in public trust is significantly influenced by police image. This study concludes that police self-image is a strong and significant predictor of public trust, amplifying 41.4% of its variance. A very high police self-image aligns with high public trust, validating their positive relationship. Law enforcement agencies ought to institutionalize programs that reinforce police professional identity, ethical standards, and community engagement, as police self-image statistically significantly influences public trust. Regular community discussions and a feedback system should also be applied. Additionally, subsequent initiatives should explore additional determinants of trust, as 58.6% of its variance remains unexplained.

Keywords: *Police, Self-Image, Public, Trust, Davao Oriental, Quantitative*

Submitted: 26 Nov 2025
Revised: 26 Feb 2026
Accepted: 06 May 2026
Published: 17 Jun 2026



How to cite: Fuentes, J. G., Sembrano, S. B. B., Picar, M. A., and Aranas, J. J. P. (2026). Police Self-Image in Relation to Public Trust in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental. *Davao Research Journal*, 17(2), 68-76. <https://doi.org/10.59120/drj.v17i2.561>

INTRODUCTION

The issue of public trust in law enforcement is multifaceted and often influenced by individual thoughts and perceptions. Police reports and data show a decrease in crime rates, yet the public still believes that the police discriminate against certain social groups (Pryce and Time, 2023; Wise et al., 2025; Weitzer and Tuch, 2005). Therefore, when relations between the police and the public are strained, it presents a challenge for police agencies to improve their public image.

In a Global context, Latin American nations with a history of authoritarian policing may find it difficult to rebuild public trust in law enforcement, as past abuses of authority have left communities wary of law enforcement (Dammert, 2019). Police officers are subject to public scrutiny for any errors committed by the personnel that damage the department's reputation, according to Malone and Dammert (2021). Low public trust in law enforcement has been widely documented in several Latin American countries. A cross-national analysis using Americas Barometer data by Salazar-Tobar and Rengifo (2023) reported consistently lower confidence in the police in Mexico, Peru, Colombia, and Venezuela, particularly in contexts characterized by

corruption, weak institutional performance, and high victimization rates. Similarly, Cao and Zhao (2005), in their comparative study of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela, found that historical legacies of authoritarianism and problems in democratic police reform significantly reduced perceptions of police legitimacy and public trust. These studies confirm that distrust in law enforcement is a regional concern shaped by governance quality, crime experiences, and institutional effectiveness.

Furthermore, in many Southeast Asian nations, police corruption is a severe problem. Public trust in law enforcement in Indonesia has been challenged by perceptions of corruption, selective justice, and weak procedural fairness, which reduce institutional legitimacy and citizens' willingness to cooperate with the police. Empirical studies show that confidence increases when police demonstrate professionalism, effective performance, and community engagement, highlighting the role of social capital and accountability in building legitimacy. These findings indicate that trust in Indonesian law enforcement is largely shaped by perceived integrity, transparency, and fairness in everyday police-citizen interactions (Koeswanto et al., 2022; Somantri et al., 2024).

At the national level, public perceptions of authority, police efficiency, and overall security efforts are constrained by the numerous problems the Philippine National Police (PNP) faces, including threats to national security, corruption, and governance (Mendoza et al., 2021). Although the Philippine National Police (PNP) perform routine law-enforcement functions, public distrust is shaped more by perceived corruption, abuse of authority, and unequal treatment during police operations than by the mandate itself. Experiences and perceptions of bribery and lack of accountability weaken confidence because they signal violations of procedural justice and institutional integrity (Dressel et al., 2024, Blair et al., 2021). Moreover, documented controversies involving misconduct while on duty have strained police-community relations and diminished organizational legitimacy despite the continued delivery of basic police services (De Guzman et al., 2024, Ngilangil, 2022).

In the Davao region, the PNP has recently faced several high-profile incidents that have negatively affected its public image. In one notable case, the Davao City Police Station temporarily released and disarmed seven officers involved in anti-illegal drug operations that led to the deaths of seven suspected drug pushers (NewsLine Philippines, 2024). These events highlight the critical need for the PNP to uphold human rights and strictly follow police operational procedures, even while combating illegal activities (NewsLine Philippines, 2024). In a separate incident, a 36-year-old police major in Lupon, Davao Oriental, was arrested and detained after a subordinate accused him of sexual abuse. The province's presumed police director noted that the incident was disgraceful for the organization and seriously undermined its credibility and professionalism as public servants (Zuasola, 2022). Collectively, these local cases illustrate the challenges facing the PNP in maintaining both a positive self-image among officers and the trust of the communities they serve, emphasizing the relevance of studying police self-image, organizational legitimacy, and public trust as key variables in the Philippine context.

Despite extensive research on public trust in policing, there is a paucity of empirical studies that directly examine police self image and its influence on community trust in the Philippine context, particularly in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental. Most studies focus on procedural justice or public perceptions of police legitimacy (Cubas et al., 2021; Peacock et al., 2023), but few investigate how officers' internal perceptions of their role and professional identity shape their behavior and, in turn, affect public confidence and cooperation at the local level. Understanding this relationship is urgent, as negative self image among officers may exacerbate distrust and weaken police community relations, making it a critical area for research that can inform localized policy and training interventions.

There is a great need to investigate the relationship between police self-image and public trust in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental. Despite the best efforts to review existing literature and data, it seems that there is limited or no existing research that specifically investigates the relationship between police self-image and public trust in the current context.

The study aims to contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and practices that can enhance police professionalism, accountability, and community engagement. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of the complex and dynamic relationship between police self-image and public trust. The study hopes that the results can be used as a foundation for improving police-community relations and public safety initiatives.

The importance of understanding how police officers view themselves professionally and how the public views law

enforcement cannot be overstated in terms of building institutional legitimacy, accountability, and service delivery. Police self-image may play a role in the behavior, decision-making, and community engagement of police officers, while public trust is a critical factor in community cooperation, compliance with the law, and overall public safety outcomes. Analyzing the relationship between these two factors can offer important insights into how mutual respect and cooperation between the police and the community can be improved. The close link between police self-image and public trust is consistent with legitimacy theory. Police with a high level of professionalism and ethical identity are seen to enhance legitimacy, which in turn boosts public confidence.

This study aimed to understand and identify the Police self-image in Relation to Public Trust in the 2nd Congressional District in Davao Oriental. Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions: 1. Identify the level of Police Self-Image in the 2nd Congressional District in Davao Oriental; 2. Identify the level of Police Public Trust in the 2nd Congressional District in Davao Oriental; 3. Find out the significant relationship between the level of Police Self-Image and Public Trust in the 2nd Congressional District in Davao Oriental, and 4. Categorize the existing influence of police self-image on the public trust

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study employed a quantitative, descriptive-correlational research method. Since it aims to describe the levels of the police self-image and public trust variables, it will also test the relationships among these variables and how police image influences self-image. In this study, the quantitative method allows for generalization of the findings to the larger population, providing a more inclusive representation of the police self-image in relation to public trust. Further, the descriptive correlational research design is used to examine the relationship or association between two or more variables without manipulation (Polit and Beck, 2010; Schober et al., 2018). However, descriptive data that systematically describe the level of conditions of the variables (Hassan, 2024) police image and public trust in the second congressional districts. This test the existing significant relationship, and how the level of the police image and influence public trust in the community of the second congressional district. Thus, this study establishes a significant relationship between police self-image and public trust. Hence, the aforementioned approaches are appropriate for this study, as it aims to investigate the influence of the variables' public self-image and public trust in the 2nd Congressional District of Davao Oriental.

In this study, the criteria for respondents include residents who are 18 years old and above and are currently living in the second congressional district of Davao Oriental, namely the five municipalities of Banaybanay, Lupon, San Isidro, Governor Generoso, and Mati, and using the registered community members from the barangays (the smallest political unit), a total of 67,229. Raosoft's online sample calculator was used, which identified 378 samples. Using ratio and proportion to identify the following samples for each stratum, the five municipalities to follow: 47 for Banaybanay, 87 for Lupon, 56 for San Isidro, 47 for Governor Generoso, and 141 for Mati City. These respondents were chosen using a stratified random sampling procedure. This method of dividing a population into subgroups (strata) and randomly selecting samples from each group to ensure proper representation. It uses randomization; any research conducted on this sample should have high internal and external validity and be at lower risk of research biases, such as sampling and selection bias (Thomas, 2023).

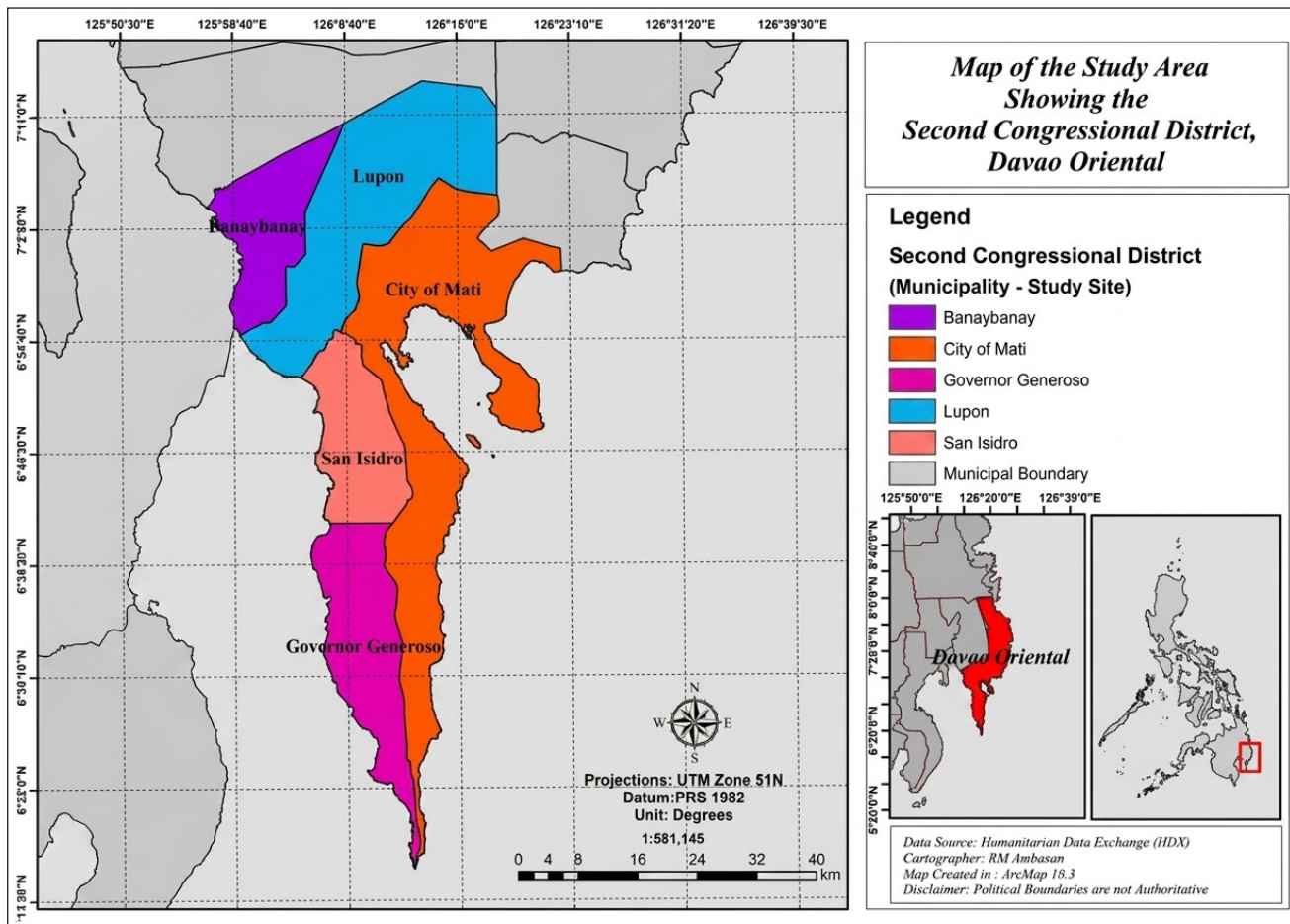


Figure 2. Map of Davao Oriental.

Two structured questionnaires were utilized in this study, both of which were adapted from established instruments to ensure content relevance and measurement rigor. The independent variable was measured using the Police Self-Image Questionnaire, adapted from Rondina (2018), consisting of 26 items distributed across four indicators: Professionalism (13 items), Obedience (3 items), Morality (6 items), and Justice and Fairness (4 items). The

dependent variable, public trust, was measured using the Public Trust Questionnaire developed by Abril et al. (2022), comprising 30 items categorized into the following dimensions: Trust (3 items), Procedural Justice (4 items), Effectiveness (3 items), Integrity (5 items), Values (5 items), Experience (5 items), and Victimization (5 items). A corresponding scale of mean ranges was employed to interpret the results of both instruments.

Table 1. Range of means used in interpreting the descriptive results for self-image and Public trust.

Range of means	Descriptive level	Interpretation
4.20-5.00	Very High	This means that self-image or Public Trust is manifested at all times.
3.40-4.19	High	This means that self-image or Public Trust is manifested most of the time
2.60-3.39	Moderate	This means that self-image or Public Trust is manifested occasionally.
1.80-2.59	Low	This means that self-image or Public Trust is manifested in a few instances.
1.00-1.79	Very Low	This means that self-image or Public Trust is not manifested at all

In addition, to ensure validity and reliability, both instruments underwent expert validation by three specialists in the field, followed by pilot testing prior to full-scale data collection. Reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of 0.96 for the Police Self-Image Questionnaire, indicating excellent internal consistency across its 26 items. Similarly, the Public Trust Questionnaire demonstrated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.925 with 30 items after the validation and pilot refinement, reflecting a high level of reliability. These results confirm that the instruments are both valid and reliable for measuring the constructs under investigation in this study. These results confirm that the instruments are both valid and reliable for measuring the constructs under investigation in this study.

Furthermore, the conduct of data collection in this study followed a systematic and ethically grounded process consistent

with current standards in quantitative research. Prior to data gathering, formal permission was secured from the Philippine National Police (PNP) Regional Office after obtaining ethical clearance from the University Research Ethics Board, in line with protocols requiring institutional approval and ethical compliance (American Psychological Association [APA], 2020; Scheytt and Pflüger, 2024). A general orientation was conducted among qualified respondents to explain the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Participants were then provided with the Informed Consent Form (ICF), ensuring voluntary participation based on full understanding of the study (Potthoff et al., 2023; Gray et al., 2021). The questionnaires were administered in an organized manner, with respondents given clear instructions and up to one (1) hour to complete the instruments, an approach shown to enhance data quality

and minimize response bias (Dillman et al., 2020; Revilla and Ochoa, 2021). Participants were likewise informed of their right to withdraw or skip questions at any time without penalty, upholding the principle of respect for persons (Lewis et al., 2024).

Following data collection, all accomplished questionnaires underwent systematic checking, collation, and processing. Responses were encoded into Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to ensure organized data management and minimize errors. The dataset was then analyzed by an experienced statistician using appropriate statistical techniques aligned with the research objectives. This process is consistent with best practices in quantitative research that emphasize accurate data handling and expert analysis to ensure validity and reliability of findings (Field, 2022; Hair et al., 2022). The final analysis directly addressed the research questions, ensuring that conclusions were grounded on rigorously collected and properly analyzed data.

Data analysis

Data analysis in this study was carried out in a systematic manner aligned with the research objectives and the nature of the variables. After data collection, all responses were first undergoing data cleaning and screening, including checking for completeness, consistency, and possible encoding errors. The cleaned data was encoded and organized using Microsoft Excel and subsequently transferred to a statistical software package for analysis. The data for Research Questions 1 and 2 were analyzed using measures of central tendency, particularly the mean, to describe the general level of police self-image and public trust. The mean is widely used in quantitative research to summarize Likert-scale responses and provide an overall description of variables (Kraha et al., 2024). To determine the relationship between variables, the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was employed, which measures the strength and direction of association between two continuous variables (de Winter et al., 2024). Finally, to examine the influence of police self-image on public trust, multiple linear regression analysis was utilized. This statistical method is appropriate for predicting a dependent variable based on one or more independent variables and for estimating the combined effect of predictors on the outcome variable (Hair et al., 2022). These analytical procedures ensure that the study comprehensively addresses descriptive, relational, and predictive aspects of the research problem. Further, these statistical tools collectively provide a comprehensive analysis of description, association, and predictive influence among the study variables.

RESULTS

Level of police self-image

The study revealed an overall high level of public trust in the police officers assigned to the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental, as presented in Table 4. This discovery shows

that community members generally have strong confidence in the police and view them as dependable and credible protectors of public safety.

Furthermore, six of the seven dimensions (trust, procedural justice, effectiveness, values, experiment and victimization) of public trust, were having a very high-level rating, except integrity dimension which was rated with low-level, indicating that respondents generally believe the police perform their duties effectively and respond appropriately to community concerns. Additionally, the very high level of public trust observed across most dimensions indicates that police-community relations in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental are characterized by legitimacy, confidence, and positive institutional regard. High ratings in values and procedural Justice suggest that the public observes police officers as acting respectfully, ethically, and fairly, which are core elements of institutional legitimacy. This suggests that community members do not simply obey police authority but are more likely to view law enforcement activities as morally appropriate and justified.

Similarly, the very high scores in Effectiveness and trust indicate that the public believes police officers are competent to fulfill their duties proficiently and dependably. This reflects confidence in the police's capability to respond to incidents, prevent crime, and maintain public order. High scores in victimization and experience further propose that individuals who have had encounters with the police generally notice these interactions as fitting and supportive, rather than destructive or neglectful. The consistently low standard deviation across all dimensions suggests a shared sense of trust within the community, indicating that positive views of the police are broadly held. Taken together, these discoveries indicate that public trust in the district is rooted in perceived police effectiveness, fairness, values, and the quality of police-citizen interactions. This design provides a robust empirical basis for examining how police self-image sustains and reinforces public trust.

Table 2 presents the overall level of police self-image among officers assigned to the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental, which obtained a mean score of 4.36, interpreted descriptively as very high. This outcome indicates that police officers consistently demonstrate a strong, positive professional self-concept as perceived by the community. Across all indicators of self-image, all were rated with a very high mean (Professionalism, Obedience, Morality, and Justice and Fairness). These findings suggest that the officers are generally disciplined, rule-abiding, ethical, and fair in the performance of their duties, reflecting a promising internal image aligned with the expected moral standards of law enforcement service. Furthermore, the standard deviation values, ranging from 0.45 to 0.66, indicate relatively low variability in responses, suggesting a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the positive self-image of police officers across all indicators. Overall, the results confirm that police self-image in the district is consistently strong, supporting and establishing the level of police self-image prior to inspecting its relationship with public trust.

Table 2. Summary of the level of police self-image among officers in the Second Congressional District, Davao Oriental.

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Professionalism	4.36	0.45	Very High
Obedience	4.37	0.52	Very High
Morality	4.27	0.66	Very High
Justice and Fairness	4.44	0.54	Very High
Overall Police Self-Image	4.36	0.45	Very High

Level of public trust

The study revealed a very high level of public trust in the police officers assigned to the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental, as presented in Table 3. This discovery shows that community members generally have strong confidence in the police and view them as dependable and credible protectors of public safety. Furthermore, all dimensions of public trust were rated very high (Values, Procedural Justice, Effectiveness, Trust, Victimization, and Experience), indicating that respondents generally believe the police perform their duties effectively and respond appropriately to community concerns. Additionally, the very high level of public trust observed across most dimensions indicates that police-community relations in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental are characterized by legitimacy, confidence, and positive institutional regard. High ratings in values and procedural Justice suggest that the public observes police officers as acting respectfully, ethically, and fairly, which are core elements of institutional legitimacy. This

suggests that community members do not simply obey police authority but are more likely to view law enforcement activities as morally appropriate and justified. Similarly, the very high scores in Effectiveness and trust indicate that the public believes police officers are competent to fulfill their duties proficiently and dependably. This reflects confidence in the police's capability to respond to incidents, prevent crime, and maintain public order. High scores in victimization and experience further propose that individuals who have had encounters with the police generally notice these interactions as fitting and supportive, rather than destructive or neglectful. The consistently low standard deviation across all dimensions suggests a shared sense of trust within the community, indicating that positive views of the police are broadly held. Taken together, these discoveries indicate that public trust in the district is rooted in perceived police effectiveness, fairness, values, and the quality of police-citizen interactions. This design provides a robust empirical basis for examining how police self-image sustains and reinforces public trust.

Table 3. Summary of the level of public trust among officers in the Second Congressional District, Davao Oriental.

Indicators	Mean	SD	Description
Trust	4.25	0.62	Very High
Procedural Justice	4.33	0.52	Very High
Effectiveness	4.26	0.64	Very High
Integrity	2.25	0.98	Low
Values	4.45	0.49	Very High
Experiment	4.29	0.58	Very High
Victimization	4.29	0.54	Very High
Overall Public Trust	4.01	0.35	High

Correlation between police self-image and public trust

Presented in Table 2 are the results of the test of correlation between police self-image and public trust. The analysis shows a moderately strong, statistically significant relationship between police self-image and public trust ($r = .64, p = .000$). The scale of the correlation coefficient indicates a strong association, suggesting that improvements in police self-image tend to coincide with substantial increases in public trust. This association replicates that internal dimensions of policing, such as Professionalism, Obedience to rules, moral Integrity, and commitment to Justice, are meaningfully linked to external

public perceptions. The rejection of the null hypothesis supports the conclusion that this relationship is not due to chance and indicates empirical significance within the study context. These results suggest that police self-image functions as an important relational factor in shaping public trust in police-community relations. When officers uphold a positive self-concept, it is more likely to be reflected in their demeanor, decision-making, and connections with citizens, thereby strengthening public confidence. The strength of this correlation provides a compelling rationale for examining police self-image as a strategic lever in trust-building activities, while also demonstrating that trust is shaped by multiple factors beyond self-image alone.

Table 4. Correlation between police self-image and public trust.

Independent variable	r value	p-value	Decision on H_0	Decision on relationship
Police Self Image	.64	.000	Reject the H_0	Significant

Significant influence of police self-image on public trust

The results of the test of the influence on police self-image on public trust are significant, supporting the previous test of significance, as shown in Table 3. This test resulted in a p -value of .000 which is less than the significant level (.05) set in this

study. Furthermore, the R^2 was .41, indicating that 41.4% of the public's trust in the community toward police officers is explained by the perceived self-image of police in the second congressional district of Davao Oriental. At the same time, the 58.6% can be explained by variables not included in this investigation.

Table 5. Significant influence of police self-image on public trust.

Variables	B	β	t-value	p-value	Decision on H_0	Decision on relationship
(Constant)	1.79		13.09	.000		
Public Trust	.51	.64	16.29	.000	Reject the H_0	Significant

DISCUSSION

Police self-image

The analysis of police image in the second congressional district revealed a very high level across all dimensions—Professionalism, Obedience, Morality, and Justice and Fairness—indicating that officers strongly internalize their roles and perceive themselves as aligned with organizational standards and authority. This reflects a well-developed professional identity, consistent with findings of White et al. (2020), which show that alignment between personal and organizational values enhances officers' sense of legitimacy and strengthens a cohesive self-image. Similarly, this supports the view that such alignment anchors professional self-concept and promotes disciplined behavior both within the organization and in community interactions (Llanto et al., 2024). Moreover, the results suggest that officers define their roles not only in technical or authoritative terms but also in moral dimensions, aligning with procedural justice theory which emphasizes that legitimacy stems from fair, respectful, and value-driven conduct (Mazerolle et al., 2014). When officers perceive themselves as fair and moral, this strengthens internal legitimacy and translates into more respectful engagement with the public, as supported by Yesberg and Sargeant (2024). However, while a very high self-image presents positive implications such as resilience, confidence, and proactive performance, it also necessitates careful balance. Strong self-regard has been associated with improved well-being and job performance among officers (Tewksbury and Copenhaver, 2016), yet excessively high self-legitimacy may lead to overconfidence, reduced self-reflection, or resistance to change. As noted by White (2021), organizational alignment must be continuously examined through accountability mechanisms and openness to external critique to sustain legitimacy. Thus, while the high level of police self-image is generally advantageous, it should be complemented by continuous ethical training, reflective practices, and active community engagement to ensure that internal perceptions remain aligned with public expectations and democratic standards.

Police public trust

The results indicate a very high level of public trust in police officers across key dimensions such as procedural justice, trust, values, effectiveness, victimization, and experience, suggesting that community members perceive the police as fair, value-aligned, capable, and responsive in carrying out their duties. This finding supports procedural justice theory, which posits that fair treatment by authorities is a primary determinant of institutional trust (Tyler, 2015). Similarly, Yesberg et al. (2024) confirms the strong link between procedural justice and perceived legitimacy, indicating that justice-based policing practices in the study context reinforce citizens' confidence in police authority. However, the integrity dimension, which received a low rating, reveals a critical gap. While citizens recognize police fairness, effectiveness, and shared values, they remain skeptical about ethical consistency and honesty. Integrity is widely regarded as the moral foundation of trust, and when perceived as weak, it can undermine overall legitimacy despite positive evaluations in other areas (Briones-Peñalver et al., 2024). This divergence suggests that the public distinguishes between operational competence and moral character. Supporting this, Ramli et al. (2025) highlight that perceived misconduct, lack of transparency, and corruption significantly shape public

judgments of police integrity. In the Philippine context, Regalado and Sun (2024) further note that trust in legal institutions is influenced not only by performance but also by broader perceptions of legitimacy and accountability.

Overall, while the very high level of public trust reflects a generally positive view of the police, the low integrity score signals a potential limitation in sustaining long-term trust. Policing scholarship suggests that both instrumental factors (e.g., effectiveness) and normative factors (e.g., fairness) contribute to trust, but perceived integrity may act as a crucial moderating factor (Na, Lee, and Kang, 2023). Additionally, community experiences such as victimization and police responsiveness also shape trust dynamics (Rengifo, 2023). Therefore, efforts to strengthen public trust should extend beyond fair and effective policing to include visible integrity-building measures such as transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption initiatives, alongside meaningful community engagement.

Correlation between police self-image and public trust

The correlation between police self-image and public trust was found to be significant, indicating that how officers perceive themselves, particularly in terms of professionalism, fairness, and moral standing is reflected in how the public evaluates and trusts the police institution. Officers who maintain a positive self-image are more likely to demonstrate behaviors that foster credibility and trust within the community. This finding is consistent with broader policing literature emphasizing that internal organizational experiences shape external interactions. Notably, White, Kyle, and Schafer (2020) found that officers who experience a strong sense of alignment with their institution and possess positive self-legitimacy tend to exhibit behaviors perceived as trustworthy by the public. Similarly, Yesberg and Sargeant (2024) highlighted that fair internal treatment enhances officers' self-efficacy, which translates into more respectful and procedurally just interactions—key predictors of public trust. Further supporting this relationship, studies on legitimacy and fairness underscore that public trust is largely shaped by how police behavior aligns with societal expectations of fairness, neutrality, and shared values. The meta-analytic review of Chan, Bradford, and Stott (2023) confirmed that legitimacy is closely tied to perceived fairness and value congruence between police and the community. However, a strong self-image alone is insufficient to sustain trust. As argued by Na, Lee, and Kang (2023), trust in the police depends on a balance of effectiveness, fairness, and integrity. Thus, even when officers perceive themselves as competent and fair, public trust may diminish if there are concerns about transparency and ethical conduct. This is particularly relevant given that integrity received the lowest rating among the indicators of public trust in this study. Consequently, while strengthening police self-image is essential, it must be complemented by consistent demonstrations of accountability, integrity, and openness to community concerns to sustain and enhance public trust.

Significant influence of police self-image on public trust

The study reveals a significant influence of police self-image on public trust, suggesting that how police officers perceive and present themselves as professional, fair, and morally grounded is reflected in how the public evaluates the institution. This finding supports broader policing scholarship which emphasizes that internal organizational dynamics are manifested in everyday community interactions. In particular,

White et al. (2020) noted that when officers align with organizational values and view themselves as authentic actors, their behavior becomes more confident, consistent, and procedurally fair—qualities that enhance perceived trustworthiness. The regression results further strengthen this claim, showing that police self-image explains 41.4% of the variance in public trust. This aligns with Sargeant (2024), who found that positive self-image among officers is associated with increased public trust and more respectful engagement, while Bilbao et al. (2025) emphasized that professionalism and fairness are interpreted by the public as indicators of integrity and reliability. However, the relationship also warrants critical reflection, particularly in light of the observed low integrity scores. While officers may demonstrate strong professionalism and fairness, public trust remains vulnerable when ethical conduct is perceived as inconsistent. Foundational legitimacy research by Tom R. Tyler and Jason Sunshine (2003), as well as more recent work by Scott E. Wolfe et al. (2016), suggests that trust is fragile when integrity appears uncertain. Even when procedural justice and effectiveness are evident, doubts about honesty and transparency can undermine public confidence, as also observed by Pagluntudan (2025). Thus, while police self-image significantly shapes public trust, sustaining this trust requires not only strong internal identity but also the consistent demonstration of visible, accountable, and ethical conduct aligned with community expectations.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that the police in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental have a very high level of self-image, which reflects a high level of perceived professionalism, integrity, fairness, and commitment to duty. Conversely, the public has a high level of trust in the police, which reflects a high level of perceived effectiveness, procedural justice, and reliability. The results of this study indicate a healthy and positive relationship between the police and the public. In addition, the study found a significant and positive relationship between police self-image and public trust, which indicates that a high level of professional self-concept is significantly related to high levels of public trust. The study also found that police self-image is a significant predictor of public trust. The results of this study support the contention that a high level of police self-image is essential in maintaining and building public trust.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings, this study recommends strengthening police-community cooperation through active participation in dialogues, trust-building activities, and joint programs such as neighborhood watch and crime prevention initiatives. Law enforcement agencies, particularly the Philippine National Police (PNP), should enhance ethical standards by enforcing strict anti-corruption measures, promoting integrity training, and ensuring transparent accountability. Additionally, future researchers are encouraged to explore other dimensions of police-community relations, including the long-term impact of trust-building efforts and the social and psychological factors influencing public perception and police behavior.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We extend our sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions who contributed to the successful completion of this study, “Police Self-Image in Relation to Public Trust in

the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental.” We thank Davao Oriental State University, particularly the University Research Ethics Board, for granting ethical clearance, and Dr. Roque N. Langcoy II for his valuable guidance. We also appreciate the Philippine National Police personnel and respondents for their participation and insights. Lastly, we are grateful to our colleagues, administrators, families, and friends for their unwavering support and encouragement.

FUNDING SOURCE

This research study is entitled “Police Self-Image in Relation to Public Trust in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental.” This research study is self-funded by the researchers. All expenses incurred in the process of data gathering, transportation, materials, printing, and other activities related to the research study are personally shouldered by the research team; therefore, no external funding source is involved. No financial support was received from any government agency, private institution, or external organization.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

J. G. F., S. B. B. S., M. A. P., and J. J. P. A: Conceptualized and designed the research study, developed the methodology, prepared the research instruments, data collection, data processing, and statistical analysis, drafting, critical revision, and approval of the manuscript. All authors accept full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and completeness of the work.

DECLARATIONS

Informed consent statement

This research, titled “Police Self-Image in Relation to Public Trust in the Second Congressional District of Davao Oriental,” successfully navigated the stringent ethical appraisal process of the DOrSU University Research Ethics Board (UREB). Before the data gathering process, the informed consent of all participants was sought after a thorough discussion of the objectives, procedures, and voluntary nature of their participation in this research. The participants were assured that their identities would be kept confidential and that all data gathered would be strictly anonymous and for academic/research purposes only.

Conflict of interest

There is no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study. The authors have no personal, financial, or professional relationships with any individual, organization, or institution that could inappropriately influence or bias the research process, data collection, analysis, or interpretation of findings. The study was conducted independently and objectively in accordance with ethical research standards.

AI Disclosure

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

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