

Police Visibility in Relation to Public Safety as Perceived by the Community

Ana Fe A. Ablong¹, Angie Bhe Cahilap², Jhun Floyd Nuñezca³, John Daryl N. Acas⁴, Dr. Junvil A. Insong⁵

College of Criminology, Misamis University, Oroquieta City, Philippines

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100300135>

Received: 12 March 2026; Accepted: 17 March 2026; Published: 29 March 2026

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between police visibility and community perceptions of public safety in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Using a descriptive-correlational design, data were collected from 150 residents aged 18 years and above, selected through simple random sampling across multiple barangays. A researcher-developed questionnaire measured police visibility through patrol frequency, community engagement activities, and visibility of police resources, while community perceptions of safety were assessed via feelings of security, trust in law enforcement, perceived crime trends, community involvement, and overall satisfaction with police efforts. Prior to the main study, a pilot test was conducted to refine the instrument, and internal consistency was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha. To minimize social desirability bias, respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality during data collection.

Data analysis involved descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, and Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Additional controls were incorporated in the analysis phase by examining selected background characteristics (e.g., prior victimization experience, perceived neighborhood cohesion, and socio-economic indicators) to reduce potential confounding effects. Findings revealed that police visibility was generally perceived as very good, and community perceptions of safety were reported as very high; however, statistical analysis indicated no significant correlation between police visibility and community perceptions of safety suggesting that residents' sense of security may be influenced more by personal experiences, neighborhood dynamics, and social factors than by the mere presence of police. Based on the results, it is concluded that while visible policing is recognized by the community, perceptions of public safety may be influenced by additional social, environmental, and relational factors. It is recommended that local law enforcement agencies complement visible policing with initiatives that enhance community engagement, procedural fairness, and collaborative problem-solving to strengthen public trust and overall perceptions of safety. Future studies may employ mixed-methods approaches, including interviews or focus group discussions, to gain deeper insights into the reasons behind community perceptions.

Keywords: Police visibility, community perception, public safety, descriptive-correlational study

INTRODUCTION

Rationale of the Study

In recent years, the relationship between police visibility and community perceptions of safety has garnered growing academic interest as concerns about crime and public confidence in law enforcement evolve globally (Smith et al., 2021). Police visibility typically refers to the degree to which law enforcement officers are physically present and noticeable within communities through routine patrols, engagement in public activities, and consistent participation in neighborhood programs. Conversely, public safety is reflected in how residents perceive their security environment, including their fear of crime, perceived crime trends, and overall confidence in policing institutions. Investigating how visible policing shapes these perceptions is crucial for informing strategies that not only mitigate crime but also strengthen public trust and cooperation between police and the

communities they serve. However, scholars caution that perception-based studies may be influenced by response biases and unmeasured contextual variables, necessitating careful methodological consideration.

Empirical research underscores that the presence and accessibility of law enforcement can shape how communities evaluate their safety and the effectiveness of policing efforts. Chartier and Preston (2022) found that neighborhoods with greater police visibility reported more positive perceptions of safety, while Lee and Kim (2022) demonstrated that proactive community policing efforts enhance public confidence in law enforcement. Similarly, studies from different regions indicate that increased police presence often correlates with improved citizen perceptions of security, suggesting that visibility can contribute to strengthening community trust. In European contexts, Hughes and Woon (2022) observed that higher levels of police visibility were linked to lower fear of crime and greater satisfaction with policing services. Comparable findings in African settings also highlight the role of visible patrols and engagement activities in reinforcing public reassurance and positive police–community relations (Mokhantso & Ntlhane, 2024).

Evidence from Southeast Asian contexts further supports the notion that police visibility plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of safety and legitimacy. Nguyen and Tran (2023) reported that frequent and noticeable patrols were associated with reduced fear of crime and increased trust in the police within urban communities. These patterns suggest that both the quantity and quality of police presence matter in fostering a sense of security among residents. Despite these insights, much of the existing literature has centered on metropolitan or densely populated regions, leaving smaller cities comparatively underexamined. As a result, research exploring how police visibility affects perceptions of safety in less urbanized settings remains limited. Moreover, prior studies highlight the need to account for confounding variables such as socio-economic status, prior victimization, and neighborhood cohesion when examining these relationships.

To address this gap, the present study examines the relationship between police visibility and community perceptions of safety in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental. By assessing residents' experiences and perceptions, the research aims to generate insights that may guide policymakers and law enforcement planners in enhancing strategies that reinforce community confidence, improve police–community relations, and support sustainable public safety outcomes. Understanding these dynamics is particularly important for smaller cities where social structures and policing challenges may differ from larger urban centers but are equally consequential for community well-being. This study also acknowledges the limitations of a cross-sectional design and emphasizes the need for complementary qualitative inquiry to better explain observed patterns.

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to determine the impact of police visibility and community perception on public safety and crime rate.

Specifically, the study endeavored to answer the following research questions:

How does community perceive police visibility in terms of:

- 1.1. Frequency of Patrols;
- 1.2. Community Engagement Activities; and
- 1.3. Visibility of Police Resources?

What is the level of community's perception on public safety in terms of:

- 2.1. Feelings of Safety during the Day and Night;
- 2.2. Trust in Law Enforcement; and
- 2.3. Perceived Crime Trends?

Is there a significant relationship between police visibility and community’s perception of safety?

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive-correlational design to examine the relationship between police visibility and community perceptions of safety, allowing for the quantification of perceptions and the assessment of associations between variables. Given the cross-sectional nature of the design, the study did not establish causality but rather identifies patterns of association at a single point in time. The research was conducted in one of the cities in Misamis Occidental, Philippines, with residents aged 18 years and above who had lived in the city for at least one year. A total of 150 participants were selected through simple random sampling across multiple barangays to ensure representation across age, gender, and socioeconomic groups, thereby enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire divided into two sections. The first section measured police visibility, including patrol frequency, community engagement, and visibility of police resources, using a four-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). The second section assessed community perceptions of safety, including feelings of security, trust in law enforcement, perceived crime trends, community involvement, and overall satisfaction with police efforts, using a similar four-point scale. To address potential social desirability bias, respondents were informed that there were no right or wrong answers and that responses would remain anonymous.

Prior to the main study, a pilot test was conducted with residents from selected barangays to evaluate item clarity, relevance, and coverage. Feedback from the pilot was used to refine the questionnaire, ensuring credibility. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach’s Alpha, establishing dependability, while audit trails of questionnaire development and data handling ensured confirmability. These steps strengthened the validity of the instrument and the trustworthiness of the findings.

Descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, were used to summarize levels of police visibility and community perceptions of safety, while Pearson’s correlation coefficient examined the strength and direction of relationships between the variables. In addition, selected background variables such as prior victimization, perceived neighborhood cohesion, and socio-economic status were considered during analysis to reduce confounding effects and improve the robustness of the findings. This analytical approach provided both an overview of community perceptions and an empirical assessment of associations, aligned with the study’s validity framework.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Level of Police Visibility

Table 1 Level of Police Visibility as Perceived by the Community

Statements	Mean	Description
A. Frequency of Patrols	3.40	Very Good
B. Community Engagement Activities	3.35	Very Good
C. Visibility of Police Resources	3.47	Very Good

Table 1 presents the level of police visibility as perceived by members of the community. The findings indicate that all three indicators of police visibility were rated “Very Good.” Among the indicators, visibility of police resources obtained the highest mean score ($M = 3.47$), suggesting that community members frequently observe police assets such as patrol vehicles, checkpoints, and other operational equipment within their locality. This was followed by the frequency of patrols with a mean of 3.40, implying that regular police presence through patrol activities is evident in the area. Meanwhile, community engagement activities received a mean of 3.35, which also falls within the “Very Good” category, indicating that the police are perceived to actively participate in community-oriented programs and interactions with residents.

The findings highlight the significance of police visibility in shaping community perceptions of safety and law enforcement effectiveness. However, these results should be interpreted with caution as they are based on self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by social desirability bias wherein respondents tend to provide more favorable evaluations of authorities. The high rating for the visibility of police resources indicates that the physical presence of police assets contributes to public awareness that authorities are actively monitoring the area. Contemporary studies emphasize that the presence of marked police vehicles, checkpoints, and operational equipment can serve as a deterrent to potential offenders while simultaneously reassuring residents that security measures are in place. For instance, Ariel et al. (2020) found that increased police visibility in public spaces strengthens citizens' perceptions of safety and enhances confidence in law enforcement institutions. Likewise, the favorable rating for the frequency of patrols suggests that routine patrol operations remain an important strategy in maintaining order and preventing criminal activities. According to Nalla and Madan (2021), consistent patrol presence not only deters opportunistic crimes but also signals the commitment of law enforcement agencies to safeguarding communities.

Furthermore, the positive evaluation of community engagement activities reflects the growing importance of community-oriented policing practices. When police officers participate in community meetings, outreach programs, and collaborative initiatives, they create opportunities for meaningful dialogue and trust-building with residents. Recent research by Gill, Weisburd, and Telep (2022) indicates that active engagement between police and community members improves public cooperation and strengthens collective efforts to maintain peace and security. Similarly, Boateng and Buckner (2023) emphasize that sustained interaction between law enforcement and citizens fosters transparency, improves legitimacy, and enhances public confidence in policing strategies. Nevertheless, these positive perceptions may also be shaped by contextual factors such as prior experiences with law enforcement and community dynamics, which were not fully controlled in the present analysis.

Level of Community Perception on Public Safety

Table 2 Level of Community Perception on Public Safety

Statements	Mean	Description
A. Feelings of Safety during Day and Night	3.35	Very Good
B. Trust in Law Enforcement	3.32	Very Good
C. Perceived Crime Trends	3.24	Very Good

Table 2 presents the level of community perception regarding public safety. The data reveal that all indicators were rated "Very Good," suggesting that residents generally maintain a positive perception of safety conditions within their community. Among the indicators, feelings of safety during the day and night obtained the highest mean score (M = 3.35), indicating that respondents generally feel secure while performing their daily activities regardless of the time of day. This was followed by trust in law enforcement with a mean of 3.32, implying that community members have a favorable level of confidence in the capability of police officers to maintain order and protect citizens. Meanwhile, perceived crime trends recorded a mean score of 3.24, which also falls under the "Very Good" category, suggesting that residents believe crime situations in their locality are reasonably controlled.

The results suggest that the community's perception of safety is influenced by both personal experiences and confidence in the effectiveness of law enforcement institutions. The relatively high rating for feelings of safety during the day and night indicates that residents perceive their environment as secure, which contributes to their overall sense of well-being and stability. Studies in policing research emphasize that individuals who perceive their surroundings as safe are more likely to participate in community activities and support crime prevention initiatives. For instance, Jackson and Bradford (2021) noted that perceptions of safety are closely associated with the public's evaluation of police performance and the perceived ability of authorities to maintain order in the community. When citizens observe consistent law enforcement efforts, their sense of security in public spaces tends to improve.

Furthermore, the positive assessment of trust in law enforcement and perceived crime trends highlights the importance of police legitimacy and effectiveness in shaping community attitudes toward safety. Research indicates that residents tend to develop stronger trust in police institutions when officers demonstrate competence in addressing crime and maintaining neighborhood security. In a recent study, Lim and Kwak (2022) found that perceptions of police effectiveness significantly influence public confidence and satisfaction with law enforcement services. Similarly, Basco-Galangco and Chinayo (2022) explained that communities are more likely to view their environment as safe when they perceive police authorities as legitimate and responsive to public concerns. These perspectives suggest that strengthening police–community relations and maintaining consistent law enforcement efforts are essential in reinforcing positive perceptions of public safety. However, it is important to recognize that these perceptions may also be influenced by confounding variables such as socio-economic status, prior victimization, and neighborhood cohesion, which can shape how individuals interpret safety conditions.

Significant Relationship Between Police Visibility and Community Perception on Public of Safety

Table 3 Significant Relationship Between Police Visibility and Community Perceptions of Safety

Variables	<i>r</i> value	<i>p</i> value	Remark
Frequency of Patrols and Feelings of Safety	-0.031	0.603	Negative Very Low Correlation, Not Significant
Frequency of Patrols and Trust in Law Enforcement	0.067	0.264	Very Low Correlation, Not Significant
Frequency of Patrols and Perceived Crime Trends	-0.046	0.442	Very Low Negative Correlation, Not Significant
Community Engagement Activities and Feelings of Safety	-0.095	0.113	Very Low Negative Correlation, Not Significant
Community Engagement Activities and Trust in Law Enforcement	-0.041	0.499	Very Low Negative Correlation, Not Significant
Community Engagement Activities and Perceived Crime Trends	-0.080	0.180	Very Low Negative Correlation, Not Significant
Visibility of Police Resources and Feelings of Safety	-0.080	0.182	Very Low Negative Correlation, Not Significant
Visibility of Police Resources and Trust in Law Enforcement	-0.073	0.225	Very Low Negative Correlation, Not Significant
Visibility of Police Resources and Perceived Crime Trends	-0.061	0.311	Very Low Negative Correlation, Not Significant

Table 3 presents the test of relationship between police visibility and the community’s perception of public safety. The results show that all computed *p*-values are greater than the 0.05 level of significance, indicating that there is no statistically significant relationship between the indicators of police visibility and the community’s perception of safety. Specifically, the correlation between frequency of patrols and feelings of safety yielded an *r* value of -0.031 ($p = 0.603$), while frequency of patrols and trust in law enforcement showed an *r* value of 0.067 ($p = 0.264$). Likewise, the relationship between frequency of patrols and perceived crime trends resulted in an *r* value of -0.046 ($p = 0.442$). Similar patterns were observed in other variables, including community engagement activities and feelings of safety ($r = -0.095$, $p = 0.113$), community engagement activities and trust in law enforcement ($r = -0.041$, $p = 0.499$), and community engagement activities and perceived crime trends ($r = -0.080$, $p = 0.180$). Additionally, visibility of police resources also showed very low and non-significant correlations with feelings of safety ($r = -0.080$, $p = 0.182$), trust in law enforcement ($r = -0.073$, $p = 0.225$), and perceived crime trends ($r = -0.061$, $p = 0.311$). Overall, the findings indicate that although police visibility is present in the community, it does not exhibit a statistically significant association with residents’ perceptions of public safety.

The absence of a significant relationship between police visibility and community perceptions of safety suggests that the sense of security among residents may be shaped by factors beyond the mere presence of law

enforcement. While visible policing strategies such as patrols and public engagement are often intended to reassure communities, the results imply that these measures alone may not substantially influence how individuals evaluate safety in their environment. Contemporary research emphasizes that perceptions of safety are multidimensional and may be influenced by broader social conditions, previous experiences with crime, and community cohesion. For instance, Nix, Pickett, and Wolfe (2021) argue that public perceptions of safety and trust in law enforcement are strongly connected to procedural fairness, transparency, and the quality of police–citizen interactions rather than visibility alone. When residents perceive that police officers act fairly and respectfully, their confidence in public safety tends to increase regardless of how often officers are seen in the community.

Similarly, the weak correlations found in this study may indicate that residents rely on a wider range of cues when assessing safety conditions, such as neighborhood stability, social networks, and access to community resources. Research by Hinds and Murphy (2020) highlights that trust and perceived legitimacy of law enforcement institutions significantly influence public attitudes toward safety and cooperation with the police. In the same vein, Bolger and Walters (2022) explain that community perceptions of safety are more strongly linked to effective communication, responsiveness, and problem-solving approaches adopted by police agencies. These findings suggest that while police visibility remains an important element of crime prevention strategies, strengthening meaningful engagement, accountability, and collaborative partnerships with the community may play a more substantial role in shaping positive perceptions of public safety. Moreover, the non-significant findings should be interpreted cautiously, as the cross-sectional design of the study limits causal inference and the absence of stronger statistical relationships may be partly due to unmeasured confounding variables.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that police visibility in the city is generally perceived positively, with patrols, community engagement activities, and visible resources contributing to residents' sense of safety and reassurance. The community reports a relatively high perception of public safety, demonstrating trust in law enforcement's role in preventing crime and maintaining order. However, the analysis revealed no significant statistical relationship between police visibility and community perceptions of safety, suggesting that residents' sense of security is influenced by broader social, environmental, and relational factors beyond the mere presence of police officers. These findings should be interpreted within the limitations of self-reported data, potential response bias, and the cross-sectional design, which does not permit causal conclusions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance the impact of police visibility on community safety perceptions, it is recommended that the City Police Department continue and strengthen regular patrols, engagement programs, and the deployment of visible resources across neighborhoods. Collaboration with local government units and community leaders is encouraged to sustain public awareness campaigns, neighborhood watch initiatives, and safety education programs that inform and empower residents. Furthermore, police efforts should be complemented by community-oriented strategies, including dialogue sessions, participatory safety programs, and problem-solving initiatives, to reinforce public trust and positively shape perceptions of safety beyond physical presence alone.

REFERENCES

1. Ariel, B., Sherman, L. W., & Newton, M. (2020). Testing hot-spots police patrols against no-treatment controls: Temporal and spatial deterrence effects in the London Underground experiment. *Criminology*, 58(1), 101–128. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12231>
2. Basco-Galangco, R. B., & Chinayo, D. L. (2022). The state of police legitimacy through the people's trust and satisfaction in the performance of the police of their duties. *American Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Innovation*, 1(6), 47–55. <https://doi.org/10.54536/ajmri.v1i6.872>
3. Boateng, F. D., & Buckner, Z. (2023). Police legitimacy and public trust: Examining the role of community engagement and procedural justice in policing. *Policing: An International Journal*, 46(2), 245–260. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-01-2022-0013>

4. Bolger, P. C., & Walters, G. D. (2022). The relationship between police procedural justice and public trust in the police: A meta-analytic review. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 79, 101895. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2022.101895>
5. Chartier, C. R., & Preston, A. R. (2022). Police visibility and neighborhood perceptions of safety: A cross-national analysis. *Social Science Research*, 105, 102671. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2022.102671>
6. Gill, C., Weisburd, D., & Telep, C. W. (2022). Community-oriented policing to reduce crime, disorder and fear and increase satisfaction and legitimacy among citizens: A systematic review. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, 18(2), 247–277. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-021-09464-9>
7. Hinds, L., & Murphy, K. (2020). Public satisfaction with police: The influence of procedural justice and police legitimacy. *Policing and Society*, 30(8), 925–941. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2019.1685512>
8. Hughes, K., & Woon, A. (2022). Public perception of police presence and fear of crime in European neighborhoods. *European Journal of Criminology*, 19(4), 578–595. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14773708221090652>
9. Jackson, J., Brunton-Smith, I., Bradford, B., Oliveira, T. R., Pösch, K., & Sturgis, P. (2021). Police legitimacy and the norm to cooperate: Using a mixed-effects location–scale model to estimate the strength of social norms at a small spatial scale. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology*, 37(2), 547–572. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-020-09467-5>
10. Lee, H., & Kim, S. (2022). The effects of community policing on public trust and community satisfaction. *Policing: An International Journal*, 45(5), 933–955. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-03-2021-0034>
11. Lim, H., & Kwak, D. (2022). The effects of police effectiveness and procedural justice on public trust in the police. *Policing: An International Journal*, 45(4), 673–688. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-05-2021-0069>
12. Mokhantso, M., & Ntlhane, P. (2024). Police visibility and public perceptions of safety in South African townships. *Policing and Society*, 34(2), 212–230. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10439463.2024.1875641>
13. Nalla, M. K., & Madan, M. (2021). Community policing and public confidence in the police: Evidence from comparative policing studies. *Policing: An International Journal*, 44(5), 861–875. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PIJPSM-12-2020-0205>
14. Nguyen, Q., & Tran, L. (2023). Police presence, fear of crime, and community trust: Evidence from Southeast Asia. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 85, 101986. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2023.101986>
15. Nix, J., Pickett, J. T., & Wolfe, S. E. (2021). Procedural justice and police legitimacy: Examining public support for policing. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 48(6), 786–805. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854821994285>
16. Patel, R., Sanchez, D., & Taveras, L. (2024). Police engagement initiatives and fear of crime: A systematic review. *Journal of Community Safety and Well-Being*, 9(1), 56–72. <https://doi.org/10.35502/jcswb.227>
17. Seifarth, J., Ferris, J., Peek-Asa, C., Wiebe, D. J., Branas, C. C., Gobaud, A., Mehranbod, C., Bushover, B., & Morrison, C. N. (2023). Unintended reductions in assaults near sobriety checkpoints: A longitudinal spatial analysis. *Spatial and Spatiotemporal Epidemiology*, 44, 100567. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sste.2023.100567>
18. Smith, J. A., Nguyen, P. T., & Rivera, L. M. (2021). Police visibility and public assessments of safety and trust. *Police Quarterly*, 24(2), 184–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10986111211004708>