

MARITIME SECURITY AWARENESS AND MARINE ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION FROM THE LENS OF THE NAVY RESERVISTS

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Abstract

This research set out to understand how Navy reservists experience and carry out their roles in protecting the seas and preserving the marine environment, particularly in communities along the Davao Gulf. Through a qualitative approach anchored in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study gathered insights from reservists who are directly involved in addressing maritime threats and environmental issues in their areas. The interviews revealed five recurring themes: a growing sense of maritime security awareness, strong commitment to environmental efforts, shifting and often unclear field roles, gaps in training and institutional backing, and the everyday realities of working with other agencies and local communities. These reservists are not just uniformed volunteers, they act as local guardians, educators, and sometimes even peacebuilders. But their contributions are often held back by unclear mandates, lack of coordination, and limited resources. What came through in this study is the need for real policy support, programs and structures that recognize reservists not as temporary helpers, but as essential players in maritime governance and environmental protection. The research contributes to the discourse on decentralized public administration, advocating for a community-based model of security and environmental preservation where reservists play a vital, yet often underrecognized, role. The proposed PILOTON Framework offers a practical governance model that strengthens institutional support, local engagement, and operational readiness of reservists in coastal areas.

Keywords: Maritime Security Awareness, Marine Environmental Preservation, Navy Reservists, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Civil-Military Collaboration

Introduction

The Philippines is a nation shaped and surrounded by water. Composed of more than 7,600 islands, its archipelagic character has long defined its cultural identity, economic activities, and national security priorities. With a coastline extending over 36,000 kilometers, the country ranks among those with the longest coastlines globally (CIA World Factbook, 2024). This extensive maritime territory provides not only strategic advantages but also introduces risks from environmental degradation to external security threats. The Philippines' position at the crossroads of the Pacific Ocean, South China Sea, and Celebes Sea brings both opportunity and vulnerability (Batongbacal, 2016).

The country's maritime domain serves as a lifeline for millions of Filipinos. Coastal waters support fisheries, aquaculture, inter-island transport, and tourism. According to Virola et al. (2009), the fishing industry alone contributes over 80 percent of maritime-related revenues, while port and transport services generate employment and trade opportunities. However, these benefits are under constant threat. Coastal ecosystems face degradation from illegal fishing, pollution, and poorly regulated development. At the same time, maritime zones have become flashpoints for geopolitical tension and transnational crime (Kraska, 2011). Managing these challenges requires not just legislation but coordinated action across multiple sectors and actors.

Responsibility for maritime security and environmental preservation in the Philippines falls on several national agencies: the Philippine Navy (PN), the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG), the Bureau of Fisheries and Aquatic Resources (BFAR), and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). While each plays a vital role, jurisdictional overlaps and resource limitations often lead to fragmented enforcement (OceansAsia, 2023; Monje, 2013). The task of safeguarding coastal zones, particularly in high-risk areas like the Davao Gulf remains logistically demanding and under-resourced.

In this setting, Navy reservists serve as an underutilized but potentially strategic component of maritime governance. These citizen-sailors occupy a hybrid position: they are trained in military protocols but remain embedded within civilian communities. Their proximity to local populations and familiarity with grassroots realities position them as natural intermediaries between the state and coastal stakeholders (Office of Naval Research, 2020). However, unlike their full-time counterparts, reservists often receive shorter training cycles and less institutional support, which may limit their preparedness for increasingly complex maritime challenges (AFP Reserve Command, 2021).

This research offers several important contributions. First, it fills a gap in existing literature by bringing attention to the Navy reservists' role in maritime governance. Despite their operational involvement, reservists have rarely been

the focus of empirical studies, especially within the framework of public administration and environmental management. Second, it adds value to policy discourse by identifying areas where reservist integration, training, and deployment can be improved. Understanding their lived experiences may inform institutional reforms and capacity-building efforts that are both practical and sustainable.

Third, the study strengthens the discussion on participatory maritime governance. Scholars like Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2009) argue that effective environmental and security outcomes rely not only on enforcement but also on inclusive engagement with local actors. Navy reservists, due to their dual civilian-military character, are uniquely placed to facilitate this engagement. This study offers something important to the field of public administration and governance. It takes a close look at how auxiliary forces, like Navy reservists, help carry out national mandates in local settings, especially where formal systems are thin or stretched. These reservists don't just fill gaps. They bring with them community ties and practical know-how that connect policy to people on the ground.

Set in the maritime communities around the Davao Gulf, the research turns its focus to their stories. Through a qualitative lens, it examines how they navigate their dual tasks, keeping coastal areas secure and helping protect the marine environment. What emerges is not a neat hierarchy of enforcement, but something more grounded: a kind of bottom-up governance shaped by everyday realities, shared effort, and the limits they learn to work within

The purpose of this study focuses on maritime security awareness and marine environmental preservation from the lens of the navy reservists. This study aims to explore the lived experiences of the navy reservists assigned in eastern and southern part of Davao Gulf on maritime security awareness and marine environmental preservation to better understand the contemporary challenges and constraints in its enforcement and to imply responsive innovations based on their lived experiences to upscale the existing practices and efforts of the navy reservist in ensuring maritime security and environmental preservation. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following broad questions: 1). How do navy reservists experience maritime security awareness and marine environmental preservation? And, 2). What is the essence of their experiences?

Literature Review

Maritime security in the Philippine context is never just a matter of coastal patrols or naval presence. It is deeply entwined with governance, law enforcement, ecological balance, and community trust. Bueger (2015) argues that maritime security should not be reduced to a checklist of naval capabilities or isolated legal frameworks. Rather, it operates at the intersections of geopolitical risk, local enforcement, and economic sustainability. In a country like the Philippines with over 7,000 islands and an archipelagic identity this point hits particularly close to home.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines Reserve Command (2021) outlines the structure of reservist training and protocols. On paper, there's a framework. Training schedules, readiness briefings, layers of command. But the lived experiences of Navy reservists often tell a story beyond the manual. They operate in a space between formality and improvisation, carrying out duties with what they have, not always with what they need. This disconnect is echoed by Batongbacal (2016), who pointed out that maritime enforcement in the Philippines faces institutional fragmentation and limited resource allocation. Monje (2013) reached a similar conclusion, underscoring how enforcement is frequently hampered by jurisdictional overlaps and inconsistent application of maritime law.

What makes the reservists' role even more complex is their proximity to the communities they serve. They aren't deployed from afar. They live where they operate. Ostrom's (2005) work on institutional diversity offers a helpful lens here. She emphasizes the value of polycentric governance systems where multiple actors share authority and responsibility. In the maritime setting, reservists become practical enablers of this model. They fill in gaps left by overwhelmed civilian agencies or distant military commands. Their unique position demands more than tactical capacity; it requires institutional clarity and policy recognition.

This is where the principles of collaborative governance come into play. Ansell and Gash (2008) argue that trust-building, shared responsibility, and joint decision-making are not optional, they are essential for effectiveness, especially in public service delivery. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) take this further by proposing that local governments and frontline actors need new strategies, not just more rules. Reservists often work alongside local government units (LGUs), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and non-government organizations (NGOs), especially when tackling illegal fishing, waste disposal, and marine degradation. This collaboration mirrors what Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2009) describe as "wicked problems" governance challenges that have no single solution and require continuous negotiation among stakeholders.

At the field level, however, collaboration only works when roles are defined and respected. Bateman and Bergin (2011) emphasize the value of clear command structures in maritime operations. Without them, even the best-intentioned operations can spiral into confusion. And yet, as many reservists experience, their role often lacks the

institutional weight granted to the regular force. Kraska (2011) noted that while maritime power relies on integration, reserve units are often sidelined during planning and execution. This asymmetry weakens joint operations, leaving critical work like intelligence collection and community education in limbo.

The importance of frontline decision-making cannot be ignored. Lipsky's (1980) concept of "street-level bureaucracy" helps us understand how reservists, despite limited oversight, often make critical judgment calls. Whether it's deciding how to coordinate a community clean-up or interpreting vague directives during patrols, these decisions shape the outcomes of public policy on the ground.

Environmental work is just as central. White & Case (2020) noted that global military actors are increasingly engaging in sustainability programs. In the Philippines, this includes mangrove planting, coral reef rehabilitation, and coastal clean-ups tasks that Navy reservists frequently lead. However, these efforts meet challenges when community compliance is low or when support from higher agencies is inconsistent. Virola et al. (2009) remind us that the maritime sector contributes significantly to the national economy, particularly in fisheries and transport. When ecosystems degrade, that contribution shrinks and security risks rise.

All of this unfolds within a governance framework that is supposed to empower local actors. Republic Act No. 7160 or the Philippine Local Government Code (1991) supports decentralization and local autonomy. In principle, this should make room for locally embedded actors like reservists to play stronger roles. But in practice, their integration into maritime policy and environmental programs remains sporadic. Grindle (1997) emphasized that good governance rests on institutional capacity, not just good laws. Without consistent training, policy support, and inter-agency alignment, reservists remain underutilized assets in the country's maritime governance system.

OceansAsia (2023) brings recent attention to the region's persistent challenges: illegal fishing, maritime crime, and ecological degradation. These aren't just criminal issues, they are governance failures, and they often begin with a lack of coordination and an absence of clear roles at the local level. When reservists are equipped and included, they can bridge this gap. When they're not, the whole system feels the strain.

Methodology

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Navy reservists engaged in maritime security and environmental preservation within the Davao Gulf. The research aimed to uncover how reservists interpret their roles, the challenges they face, and the meaning they attach to their service.

A total of twelve (12) purposively selected reservists participated in the study. They held various ranks, including Commodore, Captain, Lieutenant, and Chief Petty Officer, and were chosen based on their active involvement in maritime-related operations in the region. In-depth interviews served as the primary data collection method, guided by a semi-structured interview protocol to allow flexibility and depth.

The data were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which involved multiple readings, coding, and thematic clustering to identify shared patterns of meaning. To ensure trustworthiness, the study observed Lincoln and Guba's criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Ethical clearance was secured, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The study was conducted in coastal areas around the Davao Gulf, a strategic maritime zone with a mix of ecological richness and security vulnerabilities, providing a relevant context for exploring the dual roles of reservists as both protectors of marine environments and auxiliary enforcers of maritime law.

Findings

This section presented the emergent findings from the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) of the lived experiences of Navy reservists concerning maritime security awareness and marine environmental preservation. Through careful coding and thematic analysis of the qualitative data, five major themes and several sub-themes were constructed to reflect the depth, context, and essence of the informants' responses.

The table that follows lays out the key themes, sub-themes, and codes drawn from the data. These patterns helped shape how the reservists' roles, struggles, viewpoints, and partnerships were understood throughout the study. The themes touched not just on their duties in the field and the environment, but also pointed to deeper gaps like the need for stronger training, clearer coordination among agencies, and more grounded engagement with local communities. Together, these elements bring into focus the broader picture of what their service looks and feels like on the ground.

Theme 1: Maritime Security Awareness

Keeping the seas secure in an archipelago like the Philippines is never straightforward. There are layers of complexity, both on paper and in the field. When Navy reservists talked about maritime threats, they didn't speak in theory. They spoke from shifts at sea, piracy, smuggling, illegal fishing, even territorial encroachments. Their accounts were tied to the work: joint patrols, rough deployments, moments of improvisation, and coordination that sometimes clicked and sometimes didn't.

This theme brings into focus a bigger concern in governance. Reservists, often seen as peripheral actors, are in fact well-positioned to support maritime enforcement, if only they had clearer roles and the backing to do it right (Batongbacal, 2016). They live in the communities they serve. That closeness gives them reach and credibility. In many ways, they embody a kind of grassroots federalism, responding to national security needs through local effort, a practice that echoes what Ostrom (2005) described in her work on polycentric governance. Still, recurring gaps, poor training support, vague policies tend to hold them back (Kraska, 2011). Addressing these isn't just a matter of policy clarity. It's a step toward a more responsive public administration that actually listens to those on the water's edge.

Sub-theme 1.1: Conceptual Understanding of Maritime Security

What came through in the reservists' accounts was a clear, no-nonsense grasp of maritime security, one shaped more by duty and day-to-day operations than by theory. Rather than conceptualizing it solely in theoretical terms, they described it as a composite of tactical planning, intelligence gathering, and threat prevention, carried out in close coordination with local government units and national security stakeholders.

Informant 1 clearly articulated this operational view:

"Maritime security concept is a detailed planning, coordination, and direction in the preparation and tactical employment of the naval force in the conduct of our ground and maritime paramilitary operations, covert action, and intelligence collection in austere and dangerous environment."

This points to a perspective shaped by field deployment and responsibility, not by doctrine alone. Similarly, Informant 3 noted:

"As operations officer, it is my responsibility to plan, coordinate and direct the preparation and tactical deployment of the navy reservists of my unit in support of maritime security and develop measures to protect vessels, ports & other maritime infrastructure from various threats such as terrorism, piracy, etc."

These insights reflect what Bueger (2015) defines as the multidimensional nature of maritime security, encompassing law enforcement, intelligence operations, and governance, demonstrating that the reservists' grasp of the concept goes beyond symbolic awareness to practical, on-ground enforcement.

Informant 2 emphasized the civil-military dimension, stating:

"It is my inherent duties & responsibilities to plan & support execution of planned activities, in coordination with the civilian communities, thru the LGUs, and direct the preparation & tactical employment of the regiment in both areas in maritime security related overt & covert operations."

This showed the recognition of community partnership and inter-agency collaboration as part of effective maritime security implementation. Across these narratives, reservists perceived themselves not just as supporting units but as operational actors who engaged directly with both security and civic elements.

Sub-theme 1.2: Challenges in Maritime Security Execution

Despite their strong conceptual and operational understanding, the informants collectively emphasized significant structural and logistical challenges that hinder effective implementation of maritime security. These issues were consistently linked to training gaps, policy limitations, and resource constraints, especially in the context of being reservists.

Informant 2 captured a common frustration:

"There is no clear military policy to utilize Navy reservist as force multiplier... [and] very limited budget for training to capacitate qualified reservists."

This concern is echoed by Informant 1, who shared:

"Maritime security has a lot of challenges in its implementation such as insufficient knowledge & skills in the maritime domain awareness due to lack of trainings and capacity building."

These statements aligned with Kraska (2011), who asserts that without robust policy frameworks and institutional investment in training, reserve forces are frequently underutilized, even when they are willing and strategically positioned to contribute.

The impact of these limitations is particularly felt in field performance. Informant 3 highlighted:

"Deploying less trained operatives can usually affect the operational effectiveness and efficiency of the given mission."

Similarly, Informant 4 pointed out:

"Deployment of improperly trained operators can oftentimes result in failures in maintaining security in our maritime domain."

What the reservists shared pointed to something deeper than just individual effort. It's not that they lack commitment or understanding, but far from it. The real issue lies in how the system treats them. There's little investment in their growth, few clear pathways for integration, and almost no consistent training to sharpen their skills. Their responses brought a quiet tension into view. They know what their role is. They understand the stakes involved in maritime security, and they're already doing the work. Yet they move through that role with limited backing, unclear orders, inconsistent deployment plans, and a constant struggle for recognition in both funding and policy.

Theme 2: Environmental Preservations

Environmental preservation, once viewed as the realm of environmental agencies alone, is now increasingly shared by security forces. Navy reservists do not simply assist in mangrove planting and coastal clean-ups out of obligation; they engage with a sense of civic duty grounded in their understanding of the fragile balance between environmental integrity and national stability. They know from experience that a degraded marine environment undermines both livelihoods and peace.

From a public administration lens, this theme supports the principle of collaborative governance. Reservists' partnerships with the DENR, LGUs, and NGOs serve as examples of multi-sectoral governance in action (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Yet, informants also acknowledged the limitations of these initiatives due to low community compliance and resource constraints. Effective environmental enforcement in decentralized contexts, as Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2009) argue, demands co-governance and community buy-in, not top-down rule imposition. Navy reservists, being both insiders and enforcers, are in a strategic position to foster this bottom-up legitimacy, if given the tools, training, and mandates to do so.

Sub-theme 2.1: Engagement in Environmental Preservation Activities

Navy reservists across all informants consistently highlighted their active participation in direct environmental preservation efforts. These include mangrove reforestation, coral transplantation, and coastal clean-up drives - often conducted in partnership with local government units (LGUs), the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), and non-government organizations.

"Protection of the marine ecosystem... is very crucial. Hence, mangrove planting/reforestation, coral transplantation, and coastal clean-up activities must be consistently undertaken..." – Informant 1

"Close coordination with DENR and LGUs to conduct mangrove planting and coastal clean-up activities in coordination with the LGU and coastal communities..." – Informant 3

"Protection of the marine ecosystem (corals, seagrass beds & mangrove areas) is very crucial. Hence, mangrove planting/reforestation, coral transplantation, coastal clean-up activities must be consistently undertaken as has been conducted..." – Informant 1

"Conducting activities such as mangrove & tree planting activities including coastal clean up drive..." – Informant 3

These statements emphasized that environmental preservation is viewed not as a peripheral task, but as a core function of reservist engagement. The level of personal and institutional commitment expressed and suggested an internalization of ecological values alongside their military duties.

White and Case (2020) supported this dual role by noting that military forces worldwide are increasingly participating in environmental sustainability initiatives, especially in coastal regions vulnerable to climate change and ecological degradation. This validated the observed trend among Philippine Navy reservists, where environmental action is institutionalized as part of their operational culture.

Sub-theme 2.2: Awareness and Enforcement of Environmental Laws

While reservists demonstrated familiarity with key environmental laws, such as the Philippine Fisheries Code and the Clean Water Act, their experiences also highlighted a critical implementation gap. Informants consistently mentioned low compliance and community resistance as major obstacles to effective law enforcement.

"The common challenges being encountered in the enforcement of fisheries & environmental laws are the lukewarm participant & very low compliance of the coastal communities & stakeholders." – Informant 1

"Yes. One of the major concerns in the implementation is low compliance of the coastal communities, especially in anti-illegal fishing campaign due to the prevailing economic problems confronting the people."
– Informant 4

Although there is clear alignment between reservists and civilian agencies such as DENR and BFAR in conducting awareness drives and legal education forums, these efforts are often undermined by socioeconomic realities on the ground. Several reservists pointed out that poverty, lack of alternative livelihoods, and limited education reduce community willingness to comply with environmental regulations.

Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2009) argued that top-down enforcement mechanisms are insufficient on their own. They emphasized the need for co-governance and community participation, suggesting that environmental laws gain legitimacy and efficacy only when local populations are actively involved in decision-making. This aligns with the informants' observations, reinforcing that effective enforcement must go beyond legal frameworks and included strategies for stakeholder engagement and local empowerment.

Theme 3: Functional Roles and Field Realities

Navy reservists fulfill a wide range of operational tasks, command duties, intelligence gathering, logistics, and administrative support. Their roles, while defined in part by military structure, often extend beyond formal assignments. Many step into roles vacated by under-resourced or overstretched agencies, taking initiative where jurisdiction ends and need begins.

This theme reflects the adaptive nature of public service roles in local governance. The decentralization principle embedded in the Philippine Local Government Code (1991) encourages flexibility in service delivery, and reservists embody this flexibility in the maritime context. However, the blurred lines between military discipline and civic function require clearer governance structures. Drawing on public administration theory, particularly Lipsky's (1980) concept of "street-level bureaucrats," these reservists are implementers of national mandates in unpredictable local environments. Their lived decisions, often made in the absence of direct supervision, shape outcomes in both security and environmental protection. Formal recognition and support of this agency is essential for improving institutional accountability and field-level performance.

Sub-theme 3.1: Defined Operational Roles

This sub-theme refers to the clearly designated functions that reservists hold within their organizational structure. These include command positions, administrative duties, intelligence operations, and logistical coordination. Informants reveal that while these roles are often formalized, they also require improvisation and leadership at the ground level.

Informant 1, who holds a high command post, articulated a comprehensive leadership function:

"Commander, Naval Affiliated Reserve Force-Eastern Mindanao (NARF-EM), and overall in-charge of all Maritime Security and Environmental Preservation Coordination and Execution."

Informant 4 explained the importance of administrative roles in ensuring smooth operations:

"As the designated Admin Officer of the Affiliated Reserve unit, it is my inherent duties & functions to provide manpower & logistical requirements in all maritime security activities including environmental preservation."

A study by Bateman and Bergin (2011) emphasized the importance of clear command structures in maritime security operations to streamline coordination and operational efficiency.

The delineation of roles among reservists reflects the structured nature of military-inspired organizations. However, reservists often go beyond written mandates to fulfill responsibilities critical to mission success. These roles are vital in planning and coordinating joint activities with regular forces, managing field deployments, and handling administrative needs, particularly in resource-limited situations.

Bateman and Bergin (2011) highlighted that clear command and operational role assignment within maritime forces is essential for efficient coordination, particularly in inter-agency efforts. They noted that role ambiguity often leads to redundancy or conflict, but defined functions, such as those expressed by the informants, enhance mission coherence and operational accountability.

Sub-theme 3.2: Integration with Civil and Military Entities

The reservists engaged in inter-agency collaboration, specifically their roles in Civil-Military Operations (CMO) and coordination with civilian authorities, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. Reservists often acted as mediators or conduits between formal military operations and grassroots environmental or security initiatives.

Informant 2 described a collaborative role:

"CMO officer in charge of planning military activities in coordination with the civilian entities."

Informant 3 emphasized intelligence gathering:

"Deployment of Navy Reservists to undertake information collection..."

Reservists are often the bridge between the military and civilian sectors. Their ability to operate flexibly within both domains positions them as key players in localized maritime security and environmental campaigns. These integrations allowed for improved trust, community mobilization, and information-sharing are factors critical in preempting threats and enforcing environmental laws.

However, the success of such collaboration hinges on mutual respect and a clear delineation of responsibilities among actors. In practice, reservists must often navigate bureaucratic inefficiencies and jurisdictional overlaps, which can hinder effective coordination.

Till (2013) identified the civil-military divide as a persistent challenge in maritime operations, particularly in regions with fragmented or overlapping maritime governance. He stressed the importance of synergy between civilian and military stakeholders echoed in the positive examples from informants. The experiences of Informants 2 and 3 suggested that when integration is proactive and purpose-driven, reservists can enhance operational intelligence, public support, and field responsiveness.

Theme 4: Limitations in Training and Institutional Support

Across interviews, a consistent thread emerged: reservists feel underprepared and unsupported. Most pointed to insufficient and irregular training, a lack of access to updated technologies, and institutional biases that prioritize regular force development. These constraints are more than inconveniences, they directly hinder the reservists' ability to fulfill their assigned roles.

This theme points to a governance gap in resource allocation and policy inclusion. In public administration, capacity-building is not just about training, it's about ensuring readiness to govern effectively (Grindle, 1997). For reservists, inadequate training equates to diminished confidence, fragmented coordination, and missed opportunities for public service. Moreover, unequal support between regular and reserve components violates the principle of equity in governance. If reservists are to serve as legitimate arms of maritime enforcement, their preparedness must be treated as a matter of national interest. Investment in modular, continuous, and inter-agency aligned training programs is essential to institutionalize their relevance.

Sub-theme 4.1: Perceived Insufficiency of Training Programs

The reservists' responses provided clear evidence of dissatisfaction with current training provisions. Several informants directly referenced the lack of sufficient training, with particular concern over the imbalance between the regular and reserve components.

"Due to insufficient training especially the navy reservists, on advanced technologies & equipment, especially on ports & vessel security surveillance system, radar communication system, maritime security implementation and execution become ineffective to conform with the international standard." – Informant 1

"The allocated budget for trainings & capability building has been very limited, and priority is only given to the regular navy force and less priority for the reservists. Hence, insufficient to address the challenges in maritime security & environmental concerns." – Informant 3

"As far as the reserve force development is concerned, the trainings are considered insufficient in terms of budget, leaving the reservists with no option but to serve with less knowledge & skills." – Informant 4

These remarks illustrate not only the resource constraints but also a sense of institutional neglect, which affects morale and operational competence. Informants highlighted that even though they are expected to conduct covert maritime operations or lead community-based environmental programs, they often lack access to continuous or specialized training in these domains.

In a study by Green (2016) highlights ongoing capacity and funding challenges, especially for reserve forces, in the Indo-Pacific context, including the Philippines. This results in poor integration between regular and reserve forces and significantly weakens the latter's contribution in joint operations, particularly in complex and evolving maritime environments.

The findings from this study echo this concern. Without sustained and adequately resourced training initiatives, Navy reservists will remain underutilized assets, capable in theory, but constrained in practice.

Theme 5: Inter-Agency Coordination and Community Linkages

Reservists consistently emphasized the benefits of collaboration, joint operations, shared learning, and increased operational coverage. Yet, they also identified the cracks: overlapping mandates, unclear communication channels, and varying levels of competence or commitment from partner institutions and communities. These realities paint a picture of fragmented governance.

Public administration scholars have long highlighted the importance of integrated governance systems, particularly in sectors requiring cross-boundary coordination like maritime security (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003). Interoperability among agencies, and with communities, is not just desirable, it is necessary. Navy reservists, positioned at the interface of military, civil, and community actors, are uniquely suited for this mediating role. However, their potential is often undermined by institutional silos and inconsistent participation. Effective network governance demands more than partnership declarations; it requires institutionalized planning, communication, and joint evaluation mechanisms that reservists must be systematically included in.

Sub-theme 5.1: Interoperability with Regular Navy and Agencies

Several informants shared that collaboration with regular forces and civilian institutions was not only necessary but yielded tangible benefits such as stronger mission alignment, shared learning, and camaraderie. Interoperability was seen as a vehicle for amplifying impact across both maritime security operations and environmental campaigns.

"In order to promote & develop interoperability of the regular & reserve components of the Navy, (including the concerned gov't agencies, NGOs & POs) I have been closely coordinating with the higher headquarters & all concerned, to ensure the success of these endeavors.." – Informant 1

"Based on my experiences, close coordination and collaboration have greater benefits as it develops interoperability of both regular and reserve, as well as the LGUs and their constituents." – Informant 2

"Coordinative efforts have a lot of benefits in terms of learnings & camaraderie and address all challenges objectively, in order to ensure operational effectiveness and efficiency.." – Informant 3

"I see to it that CMO activities are properly executed or actively participated in by both the regular personnel of Navy and the reservists along with the concerned agencies and the coastal communities." – Informant 2

These statements affirmed that well-coordinated joint efforts between reservists and full-time personnel enhance trust and execution capacity. Interoperability, when nurtured through proper communication and joint planning, can elevate the efficiency of operations involving intelligence gathering, deployment, and environmental law enforcement.

Sub-theme 5.2: Challenges in Participation and Knowledge Gaps

Despite acknowledging the value of collaboration, informants also identified several barriers to maximizing these efforts. A recurring issue was the reluctance of some reservists to participate, often due to limited skills or uncertainty about their roles.

"Reluctance of some navy reservists to actively participate due to lack of proper knowledge & skills on a particular task relating to maritime security." – Informant 4

Additionally, some informants pointed to community-level resistance or apathy, which undermines participatory governance in environmental preservation:

"The common challenges being encountered in the enforcement of fisheries & environmental laws are the lukewarm participant & very low compliance of the coastal communities & stakeholders." – Informant 1

These problems point to something deeper in the system, training that doesn't quite meet the mark, blurry expectations about what reservists are supposed to do, and weak links to the communities they're meant to serve. It brings to mind the work of Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2009), who argued that real progress in maritime and

environmental governance doesn't come from control alone. It takes shared effort, space for voices, and a willingness to include both formal institutions and those outside of them.

Even where partnerships among agencies are in place, the findings suggest that it's not enough. What matters just as much is closing the gap, between what reservists know and what they need to know, between who's involved and who's still on the margins of maritime decision-making. Without that, even the best plans fall short.

Discussion

This study opens up a closer look at what Navy reservists actually go through as they carry out their roles in securing the seas and protecting the marine environment. They are often seen as secondary actors, yet the stories they told suggest otherwise. Their involvement in maritime security and environmental efforts isn't something they do on the side, it's part of their lived responsibility, something they carry out with a mix of discipline, instinct, and local knowledge. They're not always handed clear policies or complete support, but they make do, often filling gaps no one else seems to notice.

What stood out in their accounts of maritime security was not just awareness of threats. They knew what was happening out there, illegal fishing, encroachment, smuggling. But their understanding came from being in the water, not just from a manual. They planned, coordinated, and executed security operations, many times with little guidance. This mirrors what Kraska (2011) described how maritime security is shaped in action, not just in strategy documents. The problem isn't that they don't know their job. It's that the system doesn't always know what to do with them. Policies barely recognize their role, and when resources are scarce, they're among the first to be left out. There's something troubling about that. You have skilled, committed people ready to serve, but they're often overlooked.

On the environmental front, these reservists were involved in mangrove planting, coral reforestation, and cleanup efforts. Not because someone told them to, but because they believe it matters. They've seen how environmental degradation eats away at livelihoods, and how it feeds into instability along the coast. Their work didn't happen in isolation. They partnered with local government units, environmental agencies, and community groups. It's what Jentoft and Chuenpagdee (2009) would call co-governance, and it's exactly what public administration needs more of. Still, problems surfaced. People on the ground didn't always follow the rules. Some communities didn't cooperate. Poverty and lack of options made compliance harder to ask for. It showed that enforcing environmental laws needs more than rules, it needs people who can meet communities where they are.

Then there's the matter of their roles. On paper, they're assigned specific duties. In reality, they do a bit of everything. One moment they're in admin, the next they're doing logistics or gathering intel. This kind of multitasking may seem chaotic, but it's actually what keeps things running. They plug holes, they adjust. It's similar to what Lipsky (1980) said about street-level bureaucrats how frontline actors often shape public policy in real time, under pressure, without full resources. These reservists do that daily. But the lack of structure around their roles can backfire. Without formal recognition or support, it becomes harder to measure their performance, harder to plan for the future.

Training, or the lack of it, came up again and again. Many of them said it plainly. They don't get the same attention or access that regular forces do. Some of the equipment they use is outdated. Some haven't received updated training in years. And yet they're expected to take on complex operations and work with multiple sectors. It puts them in a difficult position. They want to do more, but the system keeps them on the sidelines. Grindle (1997) argued that governance isn't just about laws or policies it's about giving people the capacity to act. Right now, that capacity isn't equally distributed, and reservists are the ones paying for it.

Their comments about inter-agency work were honest. When collaboration works, it helps a lot. Missions become smoother, communication improves, even morale gets better. But those moments are still the exception. Too often, the system is fragmented. Agencies do their own thing. Roles get mixed up. Some reservists don't know who's supposed to lead, and others hesitate to step in. Agranoff and McGuire (2003) reminded us that in sectors like maritime security, coordination isn't optional. It's essential. Reservists, with their unique position straddling civil and military roles, could serve as bridges. But only if they're supported, trained, and included in the planning, not treated like an afterthought.

Lastly, the findings paint a picture of a group that is ready, capable, and deeply embedded in the communities they serve. They aren't asking for handouts. What they need is structure, clarity, and real inclusion in the country's maritime governance system. Their voices, shaped by long hours in the field and direct encounters with real problems, deserve more space in the planning rooms and decision-making tables. The work they do isn't just about enforcement or clean-ups. It's about stitching together a fractured system with whatever tools they have. That, in itself, is public service in its most honest form.

Conclusion

Maritime security and environmental preservation are not distant mandates for Navy reservists in the Davao Gulf. They are lived duties, woven into coastal patrols, cleanup drives, intelligence work, and quiet coordination with both uniformed agencies and civilians. What the study uncovered is not just what they do, but how they carry the weight of these roles in spaces where structure is often unclear, and support is noted to be uneven. Their actions filled the space between what the law prescribes and what the situation demands. That gap between intention and implementation is where this study focused its lens.

Five themes made up the spine of this inquiry. Reservists knew their terrain. They understood maritime security, not as a broad policy idea, but as something that shows up in territorial monitoring, threat prevention, and tactical deployments. Their work in environmental efforts wasn't symbolic, it was hands-on and ongoing, from planting mangroves to helping enforce fishing laws. They filled multiple roles, sometimes as commanders, other times as liaisons, or on-the-ground responders. Still, beneath all this service lay visible cracks: uneven training, limited institutional support, and often unclear integration with other stakeholders. Collaboration existed but was fragile. Much depended on individual initiative rather than structured systems.

The study was shaped by its scope. It focused on a small number of reservists in one region. Most of them had high-level involvement or leadership experience, so perspectives from younger or lower-ranking personnel weren't captured as fully. Also, data came through interviews, so the insights leaned into personal narratives rather than quantifiable benchmarks. What this study offered, however, is depth, a close look at the layers of commitment, frustration, and improvisation that shape the reservist experience in this part of the Philippines.

There's more work to be done. Future researchers could look across regions and reserve units to test whether these themes hold up in other maritime zones. Studies could also measure impact: How much do reservist interventions affect maritime incidents or environmental compliance? Another direction would be to focus on policy implementation, exploring how national mandates around maritime security actually trickle down into the daily decisions of those tasked to act on them.

But what stands out clearly from this study is the potential that's already there. Navy reservists are not waiting to be told what public service means. They are already doing it in ways that matter, often without much recognition. What they need now is not another layer of instruction. They need to be seen, equipped, and woven more intentionally into the fabric of maritime governance. Because the work is already happening. What's missing is a system that values it enough to stay in step.

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