

Public Abstract

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Title:Centralized and Decentralized Police Systems: A Cross-National Mixed-Methods Study of the Effects of Policing Structures with Lessons for Thailand

Policing encompasses a wide range of services, which can be assigned to different levels of governments—more or less centralized. The decision to adopt a more centralized or decentralized general police system is an important policy issue for countries around the world. Theoretically there are potential advantages and disadvantages related to each option. Since the 1990s, there have been calls for empirical studies of effects of the structural arrangements on police performance. The lack of a standardized classification of police structure makes it difficult to examine empirically the effects of police systems and the literature lacks generalizable studies of the effects of the structure of police systems on outcomes.

The objectives of this study are threefold: (1) to develop a typology of police systems; (2) to empirically examine the effect of police systems on police performance and demand for police; and (3) to provide policy implications from the empirical analysis and an ex-ante analysis of the potential effects of decentralization of police services in Thailand. This study employs an exploratory mixed-methods research design to address the three objectives.

Based on new institutional and decentralization theories, this study constructs a typology of police systems—i.e., the police decentralization index— as a measure of police decentralization. The typology compares the number of tiers of government with the tiers that have political or administrative control of police. This study uses one-way random effects models and an unbalanced panel of 72 countries from 2001 to 2012 to examine the effects of police decentralization on five measures of police performance—the level of citizen trust in the police, citizens' demand for police, the homicide rate, the robbery rate, and the theft rate.

Findings indicate mixed effects of police decentralization. The structure of police systems has no statistically significant effect on citizen trust in the police. Decentralized police systems tend to employ fewer police officers. Decentralized police systems tend to have more homicides but fewer thefts, and have no statistically significant effect on robberies. Based on these findings, if Thailand were to adopt a more decentralized police system by transferring some policing to an additional tier of government, there would be no changes in citizen trust in the police and the robbery rate. The homicide rate would increase by 5.32 per 100,000 inhabitants, and the theft rate would decrease by 110 per 100,000 inhabitants. The demand for police would decrease by 29.83 officers per 100,000 inhabitants.