

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

Grichawat Lowatcharin

Dr. Judith I. Stallmann, Dissertation Supervisor

Abstract

The performance of centralized vs. decentralized systems is an important policy issue for countries around the world. The empirical literature lacks generalizable studies of the effects of the structure of police systems on police performance. 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 for Thailand of decentralization of police services.

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 index is employed to examine the effects of police decentralization on citizen trust, demand for police, and crime rates by utilizing an unbalanced panel dataset from 2001 to 2012 for 72 countries.

Findings indicate mixed effects of police decentralization. Police systems are not significantly related to 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 significant effects on robberies. If Thailand were to adopt a more decentralized police system, there would be no changes in the level of 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.