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Community Safety in Respect of Implementing the Use of Community-Oriented Public Police Auxiliaries in Thailand through Comparisons with the United Kingdom

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the role of public police auxiliaries in maintaining community security in Thailand, using the United Kingdom as a comparative case. The study aims to examine key problems and obstacles in community safety management, identify policy recommendations to enhance public safety, and propose a community-based security management model appropriate for the Thai context.

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with a wide range of stakeholders in Thailand, including executives and practitioners from the Royal Thai Police, the Ministries of Justice and Interior, academics, civil society representatives, community leaders, and local residents. Comparative insights were obtained from interviews conducted in Jersey, Cumbria, and Dundee in the United Kingdom with senior government officials, police executives, police officers, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), honorary police, academics, and community members. A multi-agency focus group discussion in Thailand was also conducted to strengthen the analysis.

The findings reveal clear contrasts between the two countries. Thailand's community security policy is predominantly implemented through a top-down approach, limiting meaningful community participation. In addition, Thailand lacks specific legislation defining the role, authority, and accountability of police auxiliaries, unlike the United Kingdom's well-established legal framework. Although public participation is emphasized in Thai police strategic plans, effective mechanisms for community engagement remain weak. Furthermore, training and evaluation systems for community safety volunteers in Thailand are constrained by limited budgets and manpower.

The study recommends legislative reform, structural and administrative improvements, and the promotion of community policing and neighborhood watch initiatives to strengthen sustainable community security in Thailand.

Keywords: *community safety, volunteers, police auxiliaries, community participation, United Kingdom*

1. Introduction

The history of the Royal Thai Police suggests that Thailand's policing system originated during the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV) in response to the expanding influence of Western colonial powers. To modernize national security, King Mongkut invited Captain Samuel Joseph Bird Ames to establish a police force modeled after the British system (Royal Police Cadet Academy, 2002). A significant reform followed under King Chulalongkorn (Rama V) during the Westernization of Thai law enforcement. This reform adopted a quasi-military or colonial structure and emphasized the centralization of police administration (Haanstad, 2008), elements that continue to shape Thai policing today.

However, centralized policing systems have been widely criticized as ineffective in modern societies, particularly regarding crime prevention, crime control, and community safety. Numerous studies argue that police alone cannot effectively combat crime and must instead collaborate with local communities (Skolnick & Bayley, 1986; Newburn, 2008). In this context, community policing has emerged as a leading paradigm worldwide, promoting decentralization, partnership, and trust between the police and the public. It restructures policing styles, reduces bureaucratic barriers, and fosters joint problem-solving through citizen engagement.

In contrast, the traditional or colonial model emphasizes arrest and detention as the primary functions of policing. Community policing, by comparison, seeks to limit power abuse and enhance accountability through participatory management, which allows community members to monitor police actions and mitigate conflicts between officers and the public.

In Thailand, community policing has been introduced for several decades to encourage cooperation between local residents and local police officers in addressing crime at the community level. Nonetheless, the Royal Thai Police continues to operate under a centralized quasi-military structure, restricting local autonomy and reducing the effectiveness of community-oriented initiatives. Consequently, the Thai policing system has faced criticism for inefficiency and declining public trust (Police Reform Committee, 2009).

This study examines the implementation of community-oriented policing in Thailand through the lens of auxiliary police roles aimed at enhancing community safety. Comparative insights are drawn from The Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in the United Kingdom and the Honorary Police in the States of Jersey. Since British policing served as the foundational model for the Thai system, these comparisons provide valuable lessons for reforming Thailand's policing framework toward a more community-centered approach.

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two key criminological theories: Social Disorganization Theory and Reintegrative Shaming within the context of Community Policing. Both frameworks offer valuable insights into how community safety can be enhanced through auxiliary policing in Thailand, particularly when compared with models in the United Kingdom.

1.1.2 Social Disorganization Theory

Social Disorganization Theory, developed by Shaw and McKay (1942), highlights the relationship between weakened community structures and higher levels of crime. In neighborhoods where family bonds, local institutions, and social cohesion are fragile, informal social control diminishes and criminal behavior becomes more prevalent. Effective policing, therefore, requires more than a centralized law enforcement mechanism; it necessitates strengthening community institutions and encouraging citizen participation.

In the Thai context, the persistence of a centralized and quasi-military policing model has limited meaningful community engagement, resulting in mistrust and weak collaboration between citizens and the police. Conversely, if adequately supported, auxiliary police could play a crucial role in reinforcing community structures by serving as intermediaries between formal law enforcement and local residents. This approach aligns with experiences in the United Kingdom, where Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Honorary Police in Jersey have successfully improved community engagement and strengthened local guardianship.

1.1.3 Reintegrative Shaming and Community Policing

Braithwaite's (1989) Theory of Reintegrative Shaming posits that communities can respond to crime by expressing disapproval of the offending behavior while avoiding the stigmatization of the individual. Such a response facilitates reintegration and prevents social exclusion. This theory closely aligns with the principles of community policing, which emphasize dialogue, mediation, and collaboration rather than reliance on punitive measures.

The Honorary Police of Jersey exemplify this principle. Minor offences are often resolved through local, community-based mechanisms that maintain social order while preserving interpersonal and communal relationships. In Thailand, where public trust in police institutions remains low, integrating the principles of reintegrative shaming into auxiliary policing could enhance legitimacy, prevent the marginalization of offenders, and promote social harmony. Because auxiliary police officers are locally recruited, they are particularly well positioned to apply community-based approaches that balance accountability with reintegration.

1.1.4 Synthesis of Theories

Together, these theories underscore the need for a paradigm shift in Thailand's policing system from centralized, top-down control to locally embedded, community-oriented practices. Social Disorganization Theory emphasizes the importance of strengthening community structures through auxiliary policing, while Reintegrative

Shaming highlights restorative, trust-building approaches that can help repair strained relationships between the police and the public. Integrating these perspectives provides a theoretical foundation for developing a sustainable community safety management model that reflects Thailand's social and cultural realities.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What problems and obstacles do auxiliary police encounter in maintaining community safety in Thailand, compared to those in the United Kingdom?
2. What are the recommended approaches to enhance community safety through police auxiliaries in Thailand, based on lessons from the United Kingdom?
3. How can a management model for community safety be effectively designed and implemented for Thailand?

2. Objectives

- 1) To examine the problems and obstacles faced by police auxiliaries in maintaining community safety in Thailand, in comparison with those in the United Kingdom.
- 2) To identify recommendations for improving community safety through police auxiliaries in Thailand, based on comparative insights from the United Kingdom.
- 3) To develop a community safety management model appropriate for Thailand.

3. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the role of auxiliary police in promoting community safety. In-depth interviews and a focus group discussion were the primary methods of data collection. The study drew on data from 32 qualitative interviews, conducted with a range of participants, including policymakers, practitioners, local community leaders, Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), honorary police officers, and academics from both the United Kingdom and Thailand.

In addition, participant observation of local auxiliary police services was undertaken, and several auxiliary police officers were invited for informal discussions to gain deeper contextual understanding. Access to research sites and participants was facilitated through gatekeepers, and ethical approval for the study was obtained prior to fieldwork.

Before commencing fieldwork, an extensive literature review was conducted to develop a clearer understanding of the theoretical frameworks, policy contexts, and prior research related to community-oriented policing and its implementation.

During the initial phase of the fieldwork, in-depth interviews were conducted in the United Kingdom between February and March 2023. Participants included senior officials, police chiefs, PCSOs, and an academic specializing in community policing. Fieldwork was carried out across three regions: The States of Jersey, Cumbria, and Dundee. Interviews were conducted with senior officials, honorary police officers, PCSOs, and local community representatives in the States of Jersey and Cumbria, while an academic with extensive experience in community and auxiliary policing from the University of Dundee was also interviewed.

Transcription and preliminary analysis of interview data were conducted concurrently with data collection, enabling flexibility in interview focus and content as emerging insights informed subsequent interviews.

The second phase of data collection took place in Thailand, following completion of the UK fieldwork. Participants included policymakers, practitioners, local community members, and academics. Interviewees were drawn from the Ministry of Justice, the Royal Thai Police, the Ministry of Interior, and subdistrict municipalities. Upon completion of the in-depth interviews, a focus group discussion was conducted to validate and enrich the findings obtained from the individual interviews.

Table 1 In-depth interview schedule

No.	Key informants	Organization	Quantity
United Kingdom			
1	Minister	Ministry of Home Affairs	1
2	Chief Constable	The States of Jersey Police	1
3	Attorney General	Jersey's Attorney General	1
4	Chairman	Jersey Honorary Police	1
5	Vigntenier	Jersey Honorary Police	1
6	Constable	Jersey Honorary Police	1
7	Head of Judges	Royal Court, Jersey	1
8	Judge	Royal Court, Jersey	1
9	Community member	The States of Jersey	1
10	Chief Constable	Cumbria Police	1
11	Head of International Affairs	Cumbria Police	1
12	Head of CCTV Unit	Cumbria Police	1
13	Head of Training Division	Cumbria Police	1
14	Superintendent	Cumbria Police	1
15	Head of Penrith Police Station	Cumbria Police	1
16	Head of Police Community Support Officer (PCSO)	Cumbria Police	1
17	Local police officer	Cumbria Police	1
18	Police Community Support Officer	Cumbria Police	1
19	Police Community Support Officer	Cumbria Police	1
20	Community member	Cumbria	1
21	Senior lecturer	University of Dundee, UK	1
Thailand			
22	Inspector (Crime prevention and Suppression)	Local Police Station in Pathum Thani Province	1
23	Police Senior Sergeant Major	Local Police Station in Pathum Thani Province	1
24	Mayor	Subdistrict Municipality Pathum Thani Province	1
25	Director	Rescue Center Pathum Thani Province	1
26	Senior advisor	Rescue Center Pathum Thani Province	1
27	Director	Ministry of Justice	1
28	Academic	Thammasat University	1
29	Community leader	Local community Pathum Thani Province	1
30	Village head	Local community Pathum Thani Province	1
31	Head	Prevention Provincial Office Pathum Thani Province	1
32	Assistant Commissioner General	Royal Thai Police	1

4. Results

4.1 Policy Formation and Implementation for Community Safety

The findings indicate that the Royal Thai Police (RTP) urgently needs to transition from a centralized to a decentralized administrative structure to enhance community participation and public safety. Currently, the RTP operates under a bureaucratic system that prioritizes hierarchical control over community engagement. Although local communities are expected to support crime prevention initiatives, they receive no direct financial or logistical assistance from the state. Many community members rely on public donations to sustain their activities. Senior police managers at both the headquarters and provincial levels often have limited understanding of policing realities at the local level.

A director of a rescue center in Pathum Thani Province, with over ten years of experience, explained: "When local community members know that we work for community safety and services, they call us first, not the police. Local people are more familiar with us than with the police. We must respond to criminal incidents immediately, we cannot wait for the police to arrive. Often, the police come after we have already reached the scene. We have no salary or welfare; we have to rely on donations."

Another Local Community Volunteer Added:

“We have to look after our community for free. The government or the Royal Thai Police does not provide us with any equipment. We even pay for our own fuel to patrol the area.”

An Inspector in the Crime Prevention and Suppression Division of a local police station in Pathum Thani supported this observation:

“Community safety supported by local volunteers is a proper initiative. They assist the police considerably. However, since they are unpaid, they cannot dedicate sufficient time to community safety because they need full-time employment elsewhere.”

In contrast, police administration in the United Kingdom is decentralized. The Police Act defines the relationship among three main bodies: the Home Office (central government), the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), and the chief constables, who oversee local police forces. The PCC has the authority to appoint or remove Chief Constables, ensuring both accountability and responsiveness. This system strengthens policy formation, budget allocation, and crime prevention planning at the local level.

A chief constable of the States of Jersey Police, formerly a deputy chief of the British Transport Police, commented:

“The local community plays a major role in ensuring community safety. ‘Policing by consent’ and ‘police professionalism’ are the guiding principles of our work. Police chiefs must follow what the public expects.”

The UK model demonstrates a democratic and participatory approach to policing. It allows community members to engage directly with the police, enhancing public trust and the effectiveness of crime prevention and control.

4.2 Regulations and Legislation

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Thailand (Office of the Council of State, 2017) (Office of the Council of State, 2017) and the Police Act (Government Gazette, 2022) emphasize public participation as a core value in achieving public safety. The RTP is mandated to develop administrative systems that align with local needs through collaboration with government agencies, local authorities, the private sector, and community organizations. In principle, local government budgets may be allocated to support local police operations.

However, in practice, there is no specific legislation governing the role of police auxiliaries in maintaining public order and preventing crime.

A Local Police Officer from Pathum Thani Noted:

“Local community volunteers are crucial for community safety because there are only a few police officers at the local stations. Volunteers are often the first responders in emergencies involving security, social services, and healthcare. However, there is no law governing auxiliary police, and current regulations are insufficient.”

In contrast, UK policing operates under a democratic framework that formally integrates local participation. The Police Reform Act (Legislation.gov.uk, 2002) introduced Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Accredited Community Safety Officers (ACSOs), enabling civilians to support law enforcement in minor offences and public order. This approach has expanded to include municipal wardens and private security personnel (Johnston, 2007; Button, 2002; Wakefield, 2003).

A Female Chief Police Officer in Cumbria Explained:

“We follow the UK Police Reform Act of 2002, which allows community members to share knowledge, exchange ideas, and work alongside the police. PCSOs, employed by police services, handle minor offences such as begging, littering, and truancy. ACSOs, employed by local councils, focus on community safety and anti-social behaviour.”

In the States of Jersey, honorary police serve as a civilian law enforcement body with a tradition spanning several centuries. Each of the twelve parishes elects honorary officers responsible for maintaining local order and promoting community well-being. Historically, honorary officers were selected from citizens of good moral standing and served without remuneration or promotion (Miles & Raynor, 2005). Their close relationship with parish members fosters effective policing (Miles, 2004).

A Senior Officer from Home Affairs, States of Jersey, Elaborated:

“Policing in Jersey is unique. Jersey is small but has twelve parishes. The honorary police have existed since around the 13th century. They are elected by their communities and, in certain circumstances, may operate beyond their parish boundaries.”

The Honorary Police represent a traditional yet enduring model of community policing, sustained by mutual trust rather than legal compulsion. Their legitimacy is derived from community respect and moral authority, not formal regulation.

4.3 Training Systems for Police Auxiliaries

Numerous studies emphasize that training is essential for effective policing. The development of core skills and clear selection procedures is vital to maintaining professionalism. As crime has become increasingly complex, continuous capacity building and in-service training are required. However, in Thailand, budget constraints have limited training opportunities for both police officers and volunteers. Resources are concentrated at police headquarters, leaving local stations underfunded.

A Village Head in Pathum Thani Province Remarkd:

“We lack knowledge and skills to support police work. Budget allocation for training programs is crucial.”

A Local Police Volunteer, Who Founded a Community Youth Group in Lak Hok, Added:

“We have no formal training. We need to enhance our knowledge to handle emergency situations-especially in police tactics and conflict management.”

Despite the Police Act (Government Gazette, 2022) permitting local budget allocation for public safety, local authorities remain restricted by oversight from the Ministry of Interior. Consequently, municipalities are unable to fund policing initiatives.

A Mayor of a Subdistrict Municipality in Pathum Thani Explained:

“We want to support police work and have more local volunteers to patrol our community. However, our budget cannot be used for police activities. There are no clear regulations, and the State Audit Office would question our spending.”

In contrast, England and Wales operate under a mixed funding model in which the 43 geographic police forces receive central government grants and council tax revenues (UK Parliament, 2023). This allows local councils to finance community safety initiatives such as the employment of ACSOs to improve public safety (Rowland & Coupe, 2014).

A Head of Training Division Explained:

“We work for our local people. We use their tax revenue to develop our policing system, including training programs and community security initiatives.”

5. Discussion

5.1 Training and Capacity Building

Training is essential for professional policing; however, in Thailand, both local police officers and volunteers lack sufficient opportunities for formal training due to budget constraints. Most financial resources

remain concentrated at police headquarters, leaving local stations and auxiliary forces dependent on personal experience rather than structured skill development. Local leaders have repeatedly stressed the need for training in police tactics, dispute resolution, and crisis management. Nevertheless, municipal budgets cannot legally be allocated to community safety under current regulations, despite provisions for such spending in the Police Act (Government Gazette, 2022).

By contrast, the United Kingdom provides a sustainable funding framework for police training and community safety through a combination of central government grants and local council tax revenues. This system enables the employment, training, and professional development of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and Accredited Community Safety Officers (ACSOs), ensuring that local policing units are well-resourced. Importantly, taxpayer funds are directly reinvested in police professionalism and community security, thereby reinforcing public trust and accountability.

6. Conclusion

The findings reveal that the Royal Thai Police continues to adhere to a traditional, hierarchical policing model, in which the chain of command from headquarters to local levels remains rigid and unchanged. As a result, key strategies of modern policing, particularly community-oriented approaches, have not been implemented effectively. Although community policing has been promoted for decades as a means of crime prevention, public trust and community safety outcomes have shown limited improvement.

To address these challenges, policymakers should prioritize decentralization in terms of administrative authority, budget allocation, and strategic planning. A specific legal framework for police auxiliaries must be enacted to clearly define their roles, powers, and responsibilities. Moreover, a comprehensive and systematic training process should be established, supported by local budget provisions, to strengthen the capacity of both police officers and auxiliaries in maintaining community safety.

Greater collaboration at the local level is also essential. Partnerships among local police officers, auxiliary police, municipal authorities, and community members should be institutionalized to promote coordinated action and shared responsibility for crime prevention.

Furthermore, local citizens should be encouraged to play a more active role in community policing, similar to the participatory framework in the United Kingdom. A Thai equivalent of PCSOs could be introduced with clear legal guidance covering recruitment, training, evaluation, compensation, and limited enforcement powers. Such reforms would foster community engagement, enhance police legitimacy, and ultimately contribute to a more effective and trusted system of law and order in Thailand.

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