

Decentralization and Local Governance in Southeast Asia: A Comparative Analysis of Thailand and Indonesia

Anurat Anantanatorn¹, Ali Maskur², Noppawan Phuengpha³
anurat@go.buu.ac.th¹, 66820011@go.buu.ac.th², noppawan974@gmail.com³

Faculty of Political Science and Law, Burapha University, Thailand¹
Ph.D Student in Faculty of Political Science and Law, Burapha University,
Thailand² Faculty of Political Science and Law, Burapha University,
Thailand³

Abstract. This study compares the local government systems in Thailand and Indonesia, examining their decentralization efforts, institutional structures, and the challenges they face in promoting effective governance and sustainable development. Through a historical and institutional analysis, the research highlights the distinct paths taken by these two Southeast Asian countries in devolving power and resources to local authorities. The findings reveal that while both Thailand and Indonesia have made progress in decentralizing their governance systems, they have faced different challenges due to their unique political, social, and historical contexts. Thailand's decentralization has been more gradual and limited, whereas Indonesia's has been more rapid and extensive. The insights from this comparative analysis contribute to the understanding of decentralization and local governance in developing countries, offering lessons for policymakers and practitioners seeking to promote more effective, inclusive, and sustainable local governance.

Keywords: decentralization, local governance, Thailand, Indonesia, sustainable development

1 Introduction

In recent decades, decentralization has emerged as a global trend in governance reform, with many countries devolving power and resources to local authorities in an effort to improve public service delivery, promote regional development, and enhance democratic participation [1]. The rationale behind decentralization is that local governments are better positioned to understand and respond to the needs and preferences of their constituents, leading to more efficient and accountable governance. However, the success of decentralization efforts varies widely across countries, depending on factors such as institutional capacity, political will, and the specific design and implementation of decentralization policies.

The Southeast Asian region presents a particularly interesting context for studying decentralization and local governance, given the diversity of political systems, cultural backgrounds, and socio-economic conditions among its member states. Thailand and Indonesia, two of the region's largest and most populous countries, offer a compelling comparison due to their distinct trajectories in decentralization and local government reform. While both countries have pursued decentralization as a means to improve governance and address regional disparities, they have done so under different political and historical circumstances [2], [3].

Thailand's gradual and progressive decentralization process has been influenced by the formation of local administration institutions after the country's early 20th-century transition from absolute monarchy to constitutional democracy [4]. In contrast, Indonesia's decentralization has been more radical and rapid, driven by the fall of the authoritarian New Order regime in 1998 and the demand for greater regional autonomy in the face of the country's vast cultural and geographical diversity. Comparing the local government systems of these two countries offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of decentralization in the context of Southeast Asia and developing countries more broadly.

The objectives of this research are twofold. First, it aims to provide a comprehensive comparative analysis of the local government systems in Thailand and Indonesia, examining their historical origins, legal frameworks, administrative structures, and the roles and autonomy of local authorities. Second, it seeks to identify the key challenges and implications of decentralization efforts in both countries, drawing lessons that can inform policy debates and governance reforms in other developing countries pursuing decentralization. The following research questions are addressed in order to accomplish these goals:

1. How have the distinct historical and political contexts of Thailand and Indonesia shaped the evolution of their local government systems?
2. What are the main similarities and differences in the legal frameworks, administrative structures, and the roles and autonomy of local authorities in Thailand and Indonesia?
3. What are the key challenges and opportunities associated with decentralization efforts in both countries and what lessons can be drawn from their experiences to inform policy debates and governance reforms in other developing countries?

The study adds to the expanding corpus of research on local governance and decentralization in Southeast Asia and emerging nations more generally by tackling these issues. It includes policy ideas for improving local governments' accountability and capability in the pursuit of inclusive growth and sustainable development, as well as a detailed understanding of the elements that influence the success of decentralization initiatives.

This is how the rest of the paper is organized. A theoretical survey of the main ideas, hypotheses, and arguments in the literature is provided in Section 2's discussion of decentralization and local governance. An outline of the historical roots of the local government systems in Thailand and Indonesia, as well as the institutional and legal frameworks that specify their composition and operations, are given in Section 3. Using case studies and actual data, Section 4 compares the decentralization initiatives, local government functions, and difficulties in the two nations. A summary of the main conclusions, policy ramifications, and future research prospects are provided in Section 5.

2 Literature Review

The local government system plays a crucial role in the governance and administration of public services at the community level. It encompasses a range of functions and responsibilities that are essential for the effective delivery of services, the promotion of local economic development, and the enhancement of citizen participation in governance. The structure and performance of local governments can vary significantly across different countries and regions, influenced by historical, political, and cultural factors.

One of the key aspects of local government systems is the degree of decentralization and the autonomy granted to local authorities. Decentralization has been shown to empower local governments, enabling them to respond more effectively to the needs of their communities. For instance, in countries with strong social democratic welfare states, local governments often

exhibit a high degree of decentralization, which correlates with improved service delivery and citizen engagement [5]. This relationship underscores the importance of intergovernmental relations and the need for a supportive legal framework that allows local governments to function effectively within the broader governance structure [6].

In the context of local governance, performance management systems (PMS) are critical for assessing and enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of local administrations. The Indonesian experience illustrates that local governments often implement PMS primarily to meet central government requirements rather than to foster genuine improvements in service delivery [7]. This highlights a broader issue where local governments may struggle to achieve their intended outcomes due to political and administrative constraints, which can undermine the effectiveness of governance at the local level.

Moreover, the capacity of local governments is a significant determinant of their performance. Research indicates that local government capacity, which encompasses human and financial resources, directly influences the success of developmental policies, including infrastructure development [8]. Inadequate capacity can lead to poor service delivery and hinder local governments' ability to engage effectively with their communities. This is particularly evident in developing countries, where local governments often face challenges related to resource allocation and management [9].

The role of local governments in economic development is another critical area of focus. Local governments can serve as catalysts for economic growth by creating favorable conditions for investment and development. In Australia, for example, local governments have increasingly taken on active roles in promoting local economic development, which has traditionally been the domain of state and federal governments [10]. This shift reflects a growing recognition of the importance of local governance in fostering economic resilience and sustainability.

Furthermore, local governments are tasked with addressing diverse community needs, including those arising from multicultural populations. The incorporation of multicultural policies at the local government level is essential for ensuring that all community members have equitable access to services and opportunities [11]. This necessitates a nuanced understanding of the demographic composition of local communities and the implementation of policies that reflect their diverse needs.

The governance of local governments is also influenced by the mechanisms of accountability and transparency. E-governance initiatives have emerged as vital tools for enhancing transparency and accountability in local government operations. By leveraging technology, local governments can improve citizen engagement, streamline service delivery, and foster a culture of openness. However, the successful implementation of e-governance requires adequate infrastructure and training, which can be challenging in resource-constrained environments [12].

In addition to these factors, the effectiveness of local governance is often contingent upon the regulatory frameworks established by higher levels of government. For instance, in China, local governments are responsible for implementing policies formulated by the central government, which can create challenges in aligning local priorities with national objectives [13]. This hierarchical structure can lead to implementation gaps and hinder local governments' ability to respond to specific community needs effectively.

The relationship between local governments and their constituents is also shaped by the political dynamics at play. Local governments must navigate complex political landscapes, where competing interests and limited resources can constrain their ability to act decisively [14]. The political decision-making processes within local governments can significantly impact their capacity to address pressing issues, such as climate change and public health [15].

Therefore, the local government system is a multifaceted entity that plays a vital role in the governance and administration of public services. Its effectiveness is influenced by various factors, including decentralization, performance management, capacity, economic development, multiculturalism, accountability, and political dynamics. Understanding these elements is essential for enhancing the performance of local governments and ensuring that they can effectively meet the needs of their communities.

3 Result

3.1 Local Government in Thailand

In 1932, Thailand began implementing local autonomy after the Constitutional Revolution ended absolute monarchy and instituted democracy. This is because the revolution brought about a shift from a centralized to a decentralized political order. The Thesaban was established as the foundation for local government when it was signed by the Thesaban Act of 1933. However, it was not until the 1990s, sixty years later, when the concept of creating rudimentary local governments in rural areas was realized.

Understanding the Thai Public Administrative Structure is crucial before talking about the country's local government system. Thai public administration is separated into three tiers in accordance with the Kingdom Administration Act B.E. 2534 (1991), which are as follows:

a. Central Administration

The central administration, which has 15 ministries, is based on the fundamental idea of centralization. Every ministry has a number of departments, offices, bureaus, divisions, and subdivisions. Agriculture, industry, trade, finance, defense, foreign policy, communications, interior, labor and social welfare, education, public health, research and technology, environment, and university affairs are among the ministries.

b. Regional Administration

The central government assigns some of its power and authority to its officers who operate at the province and local levels under this type of administration, which falls under the idea of de-concentration. These officers, who come from different departments and ministries, do their duties in accordance with laws and rules that have been approved by the national government. Bangkok is one of the 77 provinces that currently make up the provincial (Changwat) administration. District officers (nai amphoe) and provincial governors (puwarajakarn) work there. A province's government is led by a governor (puwarajakarn) and his assistants. Administratively, provinces are separated into a number of districts, or amphoe, which are governed by district officials who report to the provincial governor. The 50 districts of Bangkok, known as khet (เขต) since the administrative reform of 1972, are part of Thailand's 928 districts. Sub-district chiefs (Kamnan) are in charge of the sub-districts (tambon) that make up a district. There were 7,255 tambons as of 2016, excluding Bangkok's 180 khwaeng, which are all at the same administrative level. As a result, there are eight to ten tambon in each district. Several villages (muban) under the leadership of village chiefs (puyaiban) make up a subdistrict. Thailand had 74,944 administrative mubans as of 2008.

c. Local Administration

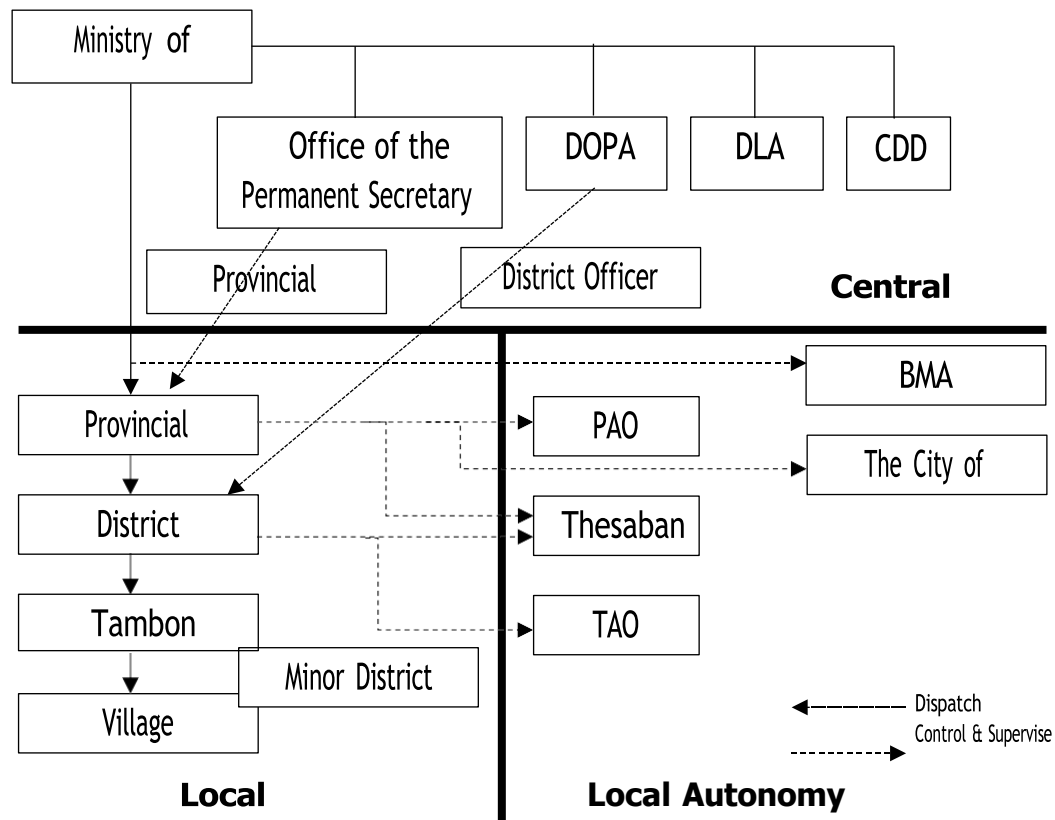
In Thailand, local administration is founded on the idea of decentralization, which permits local residents to take part in local issues while adhering to relevant rules and regulations. Thailand now has two different kinds of local administrative organizations. Every province has the general type, which is made up of:

- 1) Provincial Administration Organization (PAO), which covers all areas in the provincial area,
- 2) Municipalities, urban areas with a crowded population and development, and
- 3) Subdistrict (*Tambon*) Administration Organization (TAO) whose jurisdiction is over the area of a particular subdistrict outside of boundaries of municipalities.

The special type consists of two forms of local government, namely:

- 1) Bangkok Metropolitan Administration (BMA), and
- 2) The City of Pattaya.

A key point of local government system in Thailand is the dual system of local administration and local autonomy [3]. We shall talk about the system one by one. We start by looking at a local government system. The Ministry of Interior, on behalf of the central government, sends representatives to the provincial and local levels. Subdistricts (*tambon*) within a district (*amphoe*) are further subdivided into villages (*muban*). *Kamnan* is in charge of *Tambon*, while the village headmen (*puyaiban*) are in charge of the village. Every five years, the local populace elects a village headman. The people of the *Tambon* directly elect a *Kamnan* from among the village headmen, and they hold office for a period of five years. They act as representatives of the central government even though they are directly elected. As representatives of the central government, they are in charge of handling resident registration, upholding public order, transmitting central government directives to the populace, and even using quasi-judicial authority. The aforementioned argument leads us to the conclusion that the central government's agents are the officers in the province, district, *tambon*, and village. The distinction is that *Kamnan* and village headmen (*puyaiban*) represent their particular constituencies, whilst provincial and district officers represent the central government.



Note: The Department of Local Administration (DOLA) was split into three departments as part of the October 2002 ministerial reorganization: the Department of Disaster Prevention and Mitigation (DDPM), the Department of Local Administration (DLA), and the Department of Provincial Administration (DOPA). District officials and province governors were nevertheless subject to DOPA's oversight and control.

Figure 1. Local Government System in Thailand

Second, we examine Thailand's local autonomy structure. In Thailand, local government must consist of a leader and members of the local council, who are chosen by direct popular vote. Deputies and secretaries can be appointed by the head of PAO, the Thesaban, and the TAO, who are directly elected by the people and hence have more legitimacy. These days, local residents directly elect all LAO heads across Thailand. The aforementioned explanation, which is predicated on a local administration system, informs us that the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Public Health, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Agriculture and Cooperative all assign officials to lower administrative levels.

3.2 Local Government in Indonesia

In the shape of a republic, Indonesia is a unitary state. The 1945 Constitution of the

Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945) further outlines the democratic and constitutional structure that governs Indonesia. In Indonesia, the president is the head of administration as well as the head of state. As a result, the president is in charge of governing and serving the people as the top executive leader in the government.

Indonesia is a sizable nation with a sizable population and a wide area. Its social-economic life and cultural variety are also very high. In order to facilitate governance in areas with high levels of diversity, a local government system has been devised. The 1945 Constitution states that Indonesian local governments are separated into two categories: Regency/City Local Governments and Provincial Local Governments. Every local government is an independent area with the power to rule in line with its own capabilities and traits. Law No. 23 of 2014 on Local Government was enacted by the government of Indonesia to improve the way local governance is implemented there. According to this rule, provincial and regency/city regional governments are classified as local governments.

The development of Indonesian local governance dates back to the time of Dutch colonization. It started in 1903 when the Dutch Decentralization Law was passed, creating local councils for independent municipalities and citizens. The country was then split up into provinces or *gouvernementen* by the *Batunshervormingswet* of 1922. The Council for Provinces was likewise created in 1925, and the Council for Residencies was disbanded and replaced by the Council for Regencies. East Java (Jawa Timur) was the first province to be created in 1929, Central Java (Jawa Tengah) in 1930, and West Java (Jawa Barat) in 1926. The regent chaired the Councils of Regency, and the governor chaired the provincial council. In the meantime, a mayor presided over the Councils of Municipality. There were 76 Regencies, 32 Municipalities in Java, and 13 Municipalities outside of Java under this system.

The recent act concerning local government in Indonesia is the Local Government Act number 23 of 2014.

As of late, Indonesia had 541 districts/cities and 34 provinces, including four special provinces and one special city. The various tiers of government do not, in theory, have hierarchical ties. They do, however, coordinate, collaborate, and partner in a variety of ways. The House of Representatives is a legislative entity at all levels of government. Economic potential, regional potential, sociopolitical backdrop, population, land area, and other factors that support regional autonomy are taken into account while forming local government. Local governments may be abolished or combined with other local governments if they are unable to organize local autonomy.

In the enforcement of the local government, provincial, local governments are headed by a governor, who is elected directly by their residents. While local government in district/city levels are headed by regent (for district) and mayor (for city) who are also elected by their respective residents. Governors, regents, and mayors are elected every five years. In addition, every local government also has the House of Representatives (council), who are elected by their respective residents every five years.

All districts and cities are divided into several sub-districts which is headed by *Camat*. Recently, there have been 6,592 sub-districts in Indonesia. *Camat* is representative of districts and cities local government. They have role to communicate and enforce the policy from districts and cities levels. They also as coordinator of government administration in the sub-district levels that responsible toward regent/mayor through the regent/mayor's secretary.

All of sub-districts are divided into villages which are headed by the head of villages (*lurah/kepala desa*). Recently, there are 74,954 villages in Indonesia. Different with *camat*, the head of villages are directly elected by population in the village area every five years. Villages have stronger authority than sub district to manage their own area and create welfare of their

society. Since 2014, the authority of villages become stronger with the announcement of the Act number 6 of 2014 that specifically about village. According to the Act, village authority includes authority in the field of administering Village Government, implementing Village Development, developing Village society, and empowering Village communities based on community initiatives, original rights and Village customs.

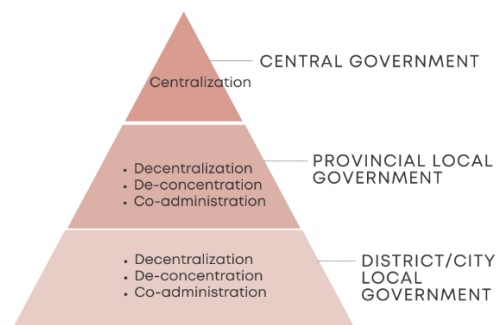


Figure 2. Local Government System in Indonesia

De-concentration, decentralization, and co-administration were the guiding ideas of Indonesian local government operations. The central government assigns power to local government officers and/or governors and mayors acting as representatives of the central government in accordance with the de-concentration principles. It indicates that the administrative region is the local government (local state government). The powers given to the local government are administrative powers under the deconcentration principles. Local governments act as policy implementers in this context. They lack the power to create policies.

In addition to employing deconcentration, Indonesian local governments also apply the decentralization idea. Local government is an independent area (local self-government), according to the principle. Local governments are therefore empowered to organize and manage their own resources. In this instance, the local government receives political and administrative powers from the central government. The administrative and political leaders of local government are governors and regents/mayors. They can create their own policies to improve the well-being of their communities.

Last but not least, Indonesian local governments also apply the concepts of co-administration. Co-administration is defined as the delegation of certain responsibilities by the central government to local governments (provinces, districts, and cities) and villages, as well as from local governments to villages, with the responsibility to report their execution to the designated authorities. This is in accordance with Government Regulation number 52 of 2001. The goal of co-administration is to make government enforcement more effective and efficient. In terms of national policy and macro development control, the financial balance fund, the state administrative system, the economic institution of state human resources empowerment, conservation, and national standardization, co-administration includes the following: foreign affairs, defense and security, judiciary, monetary and fiscal, religion, and other authorities.

Table 1. Differences between Centralization, Decentralization, De-concentration, and Co-administration

System	Political Authority		Administrative Authority			Financial Resources	
	Central Govt.	Local Govt.	Central Govt. Officers in Central Govt.	Central Govt Officers in Local Govt	Local Govt. Officers	Central Govt.	Local Govt.
Centralization	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>	
Decentralization		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>
De-concentration	<input type="checkbox"/>			<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	
Co-administration	<input type="checkbox"/>				<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Based on those principles, it can be concluded that local government is an area that is vertically related and autonomous and has the authority to manage and arrange its own resources. Local governments have the right to:

1. Manage and arrange their resources,
2. Elected the head of local government,
3. Manage their officers,
4. Collect taxes and levies, and
5. Getting profit sharing from the management of local resources and another one in the local area.

4 Discussion

4.1 Comparison of Decentralization Efforts

Thailand and Indonesia have implemented decentralization to varying extents. Thailand has focused on enabling local administrative units like the Thesaban and the PAO, whereas Indonesia has moved towards a more autonomously structured local governance system under the 2014 Local Government Act. Thailand's approach to decentralization has primarily been driven by historical shifts in governance, notably following the Constitutional Revolution of 1932 which marked a transition from absolute monarchy to democracy. This shift laid the groundwork for the development of local governmental structures such as the Thesaban (municipalities) and PAO (Provincial Administrative Organizations), aimed at fostering local autonomy. Over time, Thailand has evolved a dual system where local administrations serve both as extensions of the central government and as local government units with elected officials. This system allows for a certain degree of local decision-making but maintains significant central oversight through the Ministry of Interior, which dispatches officials to provincial and district levels to oversee administration.

In contrast, Indonesia, being a vast archipelago with a diverse population, has pushed for a more pronounced decentralization model, especially post-1998 reform era. The 2014 Local Government Act was a significant milestone, clearly demarcating powers between the provincial and district/city governments. Indonesian decentralization allows for greater autonomy in managing local resources and affairs, which is crucial for addressing the diverse needs of its various regions. Unlike Thailand, where local leaders sometimes function as agents of the central government, Indonesian local leaders (governors, regents, and mayors) are

empowered to formulate policies that cater to their regional specifics. However, this comes with challenges of coordination across levels of government.

Table 2. Comparison of Local Government System in Thailand and Indonesia

Aspect	Thailand	Indonesia
Historical Context	Initiated post-1932 Constitutional Revolution.	Influenced by post-independence and post-1998 reform era decentralization needs.
Legal Framework	Thesaban Act, various amendments and acts related to local government.	2014 Local Government Act, decentralizing authority to provincial and local levels.
Administrative Structure	A dual system of local administration and local autonomy.	Clear division between provincial and district/city governments.
Local Autonomy	Limited; local leaders are partly agents of the central government.	High; local leaders have significant autonomy to govern and manage resources.
Central Oversight	Strong; central government retains significant control through dispatched officials.	Moderate; focuses more on coordination rather than control.
Policy Formulation	Local administrations implement centrally decided policies.	Local governments have the authority to formulate and implement their own policies.
Election of Leaders	Local leaders like village headmen are elected but also serve as central agents.	Governors, regents, and mayors are elected and have considerable independent authority.

4.2 Role of Local Government

In both Thailand and Indonesia, the role of local governments is crucial in the administration and management of regional affairs, but the specifics of their responsibilities and powers vary significantly due to differing governance structures and historical contexts. In Thailand, local government roles are shared between the agents of the central government and directly elected local representatives, which might lead to dual responsibilities and potential conflicts in governance priorities. While Indonesia utilizes a mixture of de-concentration and decentralization, allowing not only for administrative but also political autonomy at local levels. This approach enables local leaders to better address regional needs while aligning with national policies.

In Thailand, the local government's role is characterized by a blend of autonomy and central oversight. Local administrative bodies, such as the Thesaban (municipalities), Provincial Administrative Organizations (PAO), and Subdistrict Administration Organizations (TAO), handle various local administrative tasks. However, their autonomy is somewhat limited by the central government's influence. For instance:

- **Administrative Duties:** Local governments are responsible for a range of services

including education, public health, local transportation, and infrastructure development. These services are tailored to meet the local needs but must align with national policies.

- **Election of Leaders:** While local leaders like Kamnan (subdistrict head) and village headmen (Puyaiban) are elected locally, they often serve dual roles as both community representatives and agents of the central government. This dual role includes disseminating central government directives and policies at the local level, maintaining public order, and managing local administrative tasks.
- **Central Oversight:** Despite electoral processes for certain positions, local officials frequently act as extensions of the central government, particularly in administrative and regulatory matters. The Ministry of Interior plays a significant role in overseeing and controlling local government operations through appointed officials at provincial and district levels.

Indonesia's local governments operate with greater autonomy compared to Thailand, especially following the decentralization reforms initiated in the late 1990s. The roles and responsibilities of local governments in Indonesia include:

- **Autonomous Governance:** Local governments at the provincial and regency/city levels are empowered to govern more independently. This includes the authority to draft and implement policies specific to their regional needs concerning social services, economic development, and cultural affairs.
- **Policy Formulation and Implementation:** Local leaders, including governors, regents, and mayors, have considerable leeway to formulate and enforce policies that directly affect their constituencies. This autonomy is crucial for addressing the varied geographic and socio-economic challenges across Indonesia's diverse islands.
- **Elections and Political Authority:** Local governmental heads are directly elected by the populace, which enhances their accountability and responsiveness to local needs. This electoral autonomy strengthens the legitimacy of local governments and allows them to function more independently of the central government.
- **Resource Management:** Local governments in Indonesia have the authority to manage and utilize local resources, including budgeting and taxation, to support development and welfare programs suited to their specific local contexts.

The contrast in the roles of local governments between Thailand and Indonesia illustrates different approaches to balancing central control and local autonomy. Thailand maintains a more centralized model where local entities function partially as administrative arms of the government, while Indonesia embraces a more decentralized model, granting significant autonomy to local governments to govern and make decisions tailored to their unique regional characteristics.

4.3 Challenge and Implication

Local governments in Thailand and Indonesia face significant challenges, key among them being the balance between autonomy and central oversight. In Thailand, the dual role of local bodies as agents of both the central government and local constituencies sometimes results in conflicting priorities, especially when local needs diverge from national policies. Indonesia, with its broader decentralization, often struggles with coordination, which can lead to inefficiencies and policy conflicts across different levels of government. Both countries also face challenges in resource allocation, ensuring equitable distribution across diverse and unevenly developed regions. Furthermore, increased autonomy can elevate the risk of corruption and administrative inefficiencies unless it is counterbalanced by robust transparency

and accountability measures.

Decentralization also presents significant opportunities. It allows local governments to craft policies that are more closely aligned with local needs, potentially leading to more effective governance and increased public satisfaction. This autonomy enhances community engagement in the governance process, fostering greater transparency and accountability. Local governments can act as innovation hubs, experimenting with policies that can be adapted for broader application. Additionally, they can drive targeted economic development, leveraging local resources and capabilities to address regional disparities and boost local economies.

The experiences of Thailand and Indonesia underscore the need for flexible national policies that accommodate local variations. There is a crucial need for mechanisms that ensure strict monitoring and accountability to mitigate the risks associated with increased local governance powers. Furthermore, policies must be crafted to ensure fair and equitable resource distribution to prevent developmental disparities among regions.

On the administrative front, enhancing the capacity of local officials through continuous training and development is vital for managing increased responsibilities effectively. Both countries would benefit from improved coordination mechanisms between various government levels to ensure cohesive policy implementation. Investing in infrastructure, particularly in technology, can aid in integrating local administrations with central government systems more seamlessly, enhancing overall administrative efficiency.

Addressing these challenges and capitalizing on the opportunities can significantly refine local governance in Thailand and Indonesia, making it more responsive and effective, ultimately leading to better service delivery and enhanced regional development.

5 Conclusion

This research has comprehensively examined the local governance systems in Thailand and Indonesia, revealing both unique challenges and opportunities shaped by their historical, cultural, and political landscapes. In Thailand, the legacy of the 1932 Constitutional Revolution has resulted in a local governance model characterized by a dual system of local administration and autonomy. This model fosters local participation yet remains tightly tethered to central oversight, which sometimes creates friction between local needs and national directives. In contrast, Indonesia's approach to post-1998 reforms has markedly leaned towards extensive decentralization, allowing for greater local autonomy that is crucial for managing its diverse and geographically dispersed population.

Both countries demonstrate a progressive move towards decentralization, yet they each face inherent challenges. In Thailand, the integration of local leaders as both representatives of the people and agents of the central government complicates the governance process, potentially diluting the autonomy and effectiveness of local governance. Indonesia, while benefiting from the autonomy to tailor local policies to regional needs, contends with challenges of coordination and consistency across its vast archipelago.

The implications of these findings are significant for policy and administration. They suggest a need for continual refinement of decentralization policies to balance local autonomy with effective central oversight, ensure equitable resource distribution, and promote efficient and transparent governance. Moreover, the findings advocate for enhanced capacity building for local officials and the establishment of robust mechanisms for accountability and transparency to mitigate corruption and improve governance outcomes.

Ultimately, the experiences of Thailand and Indonesia underscore the importance of adapting governance models to local contexts while ensuring that decentralization does not

compromise the overarching goals of national unity and development. The lessons drawn from this research could guide future reforms, helping both countries to navigate the complex dynamics of local and national governance in pursuit of sustainable development and enhanced citizen welfare.

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