

Mapping Vietnamese Political Culture Through Value Systems: Post-1975 Developments

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the evolution of Vietnamese political culture from 1975 to the present through the lens of political values. It examines how Vietnam's political value system has evolved across historical periods and the implications for its current governance. Grounded in Marxism–Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought, the core values include national independence, socialism, democracy, the rule of law, unity, human development, and integration. Using a qualitative, historical-institutional method, the study traces four phases: post-war centralization (1975–1986), renovation and democratization (1986–2000), modernization and global engagement (2000–2015), and integration with digital transformation (2015–present). Each stage demonstrates continuity of ideology alongside adaptive reforms in response to new domestic and international conditions. The study highlights challenges in political trust, legal culture, digital governance, and citizen participation. It recommends strengthening legal transparency, developing inclusive digital platforms, and expanding civic education. The article concludes that aligning Vietnam's political culture with democratic principles, the rule of law, and human-centered development is crucial to ensuring legitimacy and effective governance in the digital era.

Keywords: Political modernization; Institutional development; Digital governance; Civic participation.

INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975, Vietnam has undergone profound political, economic, and social transformations. From a war-torn, divided nation to a unified socialist republic striving for modernization and international integration, the Vietnamese state has navigated a complex landscape of internal reforms and global shifts (Elliot, 2016). Amid these changes, the underlying values and norms that shape Vietnam's political culture have played a crucial role in guiding both state policy and public behavior. Political culture is a central concept in modern political science, encompassing the values, beliefs, ideals, and behavioral norms that shape how people participate in and perceive political processes. Political culture can be approached from various perspectives, including individual behavior, institutional systems, cultural symbols, and socialization processes. Each approach provides distinct and complementary analytical dimensions, creating a more comprehensive picture of political culture (Wiseman, 2024). This paper explores Vietnamese political culture from 1975 to the present through the lens of a value system approach, examining how enduring cultural values, historical legacies, and ideological frameworks have shaped and been shaped by political developments in the post-reunification era.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Sao (2022), politicians, political leaders, and researchers have realized the importance of political culture in national governance. As a result, political culture research has become a topic of interest.

Each nation builds its country on a particular theoretical basis. It is a system of views that guides people's values, thoughts, and behaviors toward a specific goal. That system of views is formed from the nation's historical context combined with the progressive trend of the times, meeting the needs and aspirations of the people, which is the fundamental element of a people's political culture (Sao, 2022, 2029).

Sao (2022) avers that Vietnamese political culture serves as the framework guiding the people in building Vietnam in accordance with Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought. Marxist-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought contain principles for building and developing Vietnam.

Vietnam's political culture is anchored on patriotism, national unity, and humanistic policy. *"The ideals of patriotism drive policies on sovereignty and independence; national unity acts as good glue during crises or natural calamities; human politics puts people first"* (Nguyen, 2025, p.19). In Vietnam, patriotism is central to every citizen's psyche, and it fosters a sense of identity and nationalism. Patriotism also guides the behavior and decisions made by political leaders. The deep sense of patriotism and national pride, which form Vietnamese identity, has developed over many years of conflict, with the people of Vietnam successfully defending national sovereignty and deeply rooted family values. Human politics in Vietnam prioritizes welfare, social equity, and human rights. Human value is founded on Confucian and Buddhist principles. *"Human politics promotes compassion, moral leadership, and governance for the people's benefit"* (Nguyen, 2025, p.27). Nguyen (2025) also notes that the human politics value is evident in the *Doi Moi* reforms initiated in 1986 that transitioned Vietnam from a centrally controlled economy to a market-oriented economic model guided by social welfare and equity. The Value of national solidarity has also been important in Vietnam. For example, during the Vietnam War, it was a rallying call for mobilizing the military and citizens to defend their country. The Value has withstood the test of time, and today it remains a key cog in governance, especially in the face of "crises such as natural disasters, epidemics, or sovereignty violations" (p. 26).

Kalmykov (2024) notes that Vietnam is one of Southeast Asia's countries that has maintained a one-party system and the Marxism-Leninism ideology to date. Kalmykov (2024, p.23) citing Navakova (2009, 2014, 2017) posits that *"the modern ideological and political base of the CPV consists of three components: ensuring the inviolability of the official ideology based on Marxism-Leninism; the ideological legacy of President Ho Chi Minh; and the revival of national traditions"* Moreover, Kalmykov (2024) opines that the modern Vietnamese political culture has many facets. The CP has championed gender equality and elevated women's role in governance. In 2025, the National Assembly passed a law requiring at least 35% of contestants for the highest political body in Vietnam to be women. The number of female deputies in the National Assembly rose from 15.6% in 2016 to 30.26% in 2021. Also, many Vietnamese are not actively involved in electing political elites, and they do not rank it as a priority. Regarding human rights, Kalmykov (2024) stated that human rights and social activism are tightly controlled and expressed through trade unions, NGOs, and pro-government organizations, such as the Women's Union and the General Confederation of Workers. These organizations are part of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, which serves as a pipeline to the Communist Party of Vietnam.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, desktop-based methodology grounded in historical-institutional analysis and interpretive political theory. Drawing primarily on official Party documents, government resolutions, scholarly literature, and policy reports from 1975 to the present, the research traces the evolution of Vietnam's political culture through a value system lens. The approach involves systematic document review and thematic coding to identify foundational political values, such as national independence, socialist democracy, rule of law, and civic participation, and to analyze their transformation across four distinct historical phases. By situating these values within broader socio-political contexts, the study interprets how ideological continuity and adaptive reform have shaped Vietnam's governance trajectory. The methodology also integrates comparative insights from political culture theory to assess the implications of value shifts for contemporary challenges, including political trust, legal institutionalization, and digital transformation. This interpretive framework enables a nuanced understanding of political culture as both a normative structure and a dynamic force in statecraft, providing grounded recommendations for institutional reform and democratic development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Approaches to Political Culture

Political culture encompasses the values, beliefs, and behavioral norms that shape how individuals and societies interact with their political systems. To analyze it effectively, several approaches have been developed, each highlighting different dimensions of political life. In the context of Vietnam, a nation shaped by war, revolution, socialist ideology, Confucian heritage, and recent economic liberalization, these approaches help unpack the complex interplay between tradition and transformation (Wiseman, 2024). By examining political culture through behavioral, institutional, symbolic, and anthropological lenses, as well as through the lens of political socialization, we can gain a richer understanding of how power is perceived, legitimized, and exercised in contemporary Vietnamese society.

Behavioral approach

The behavioral approach to political culture focuses on how individuals think about, engage with, and participate in political life. It emphasizes observable patterns, including political attitudes, civic participation, voting behavior, and trust in institutions (Nguyễn & Nguyễn, 2024). In the context of Vietnam, this approach highlights a society in which political behavior is deeply influenced by historical memory, particularly the legacies of war and revolution, as well as by socioeconomic conditions and generational shifts (Tran & Le, 2021).

In Vietnam, the people are actively involved in local governance through interaction with government agencies (Trang, 2024). This form of participation is a grassroots democracy, as noted in the Vietnam Law Magazine (2023), citing Law No. 10/2022/QH15 of (2022) on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy

Implementation of grassroots democracy is a method of promoting the people's mastery for citizens, cadres, civil servants, public employees, and workers to be informed, and express their wills, aspirations, and opinions through discussing, giving opinions, deciding on, and examining and supervising matters arising at the grassroots level in accordance with the Constitution and law.

In addition, Trang (2024) argues that people play a role in decision-making regarding self-governance in local communities and village regulations. This is achieved through the people's direct participation in discussing and passing village rules, in electing and dismissing village heads, and in electing and dismissing members of the People's Inspection Board and the Community Investment Supervision Board, etc.

Although state-sanctioned mechanisms, such as the Vietnam Fatherland Front, promote participation, grassroots-level political engagement is often characterized by conformity, limited public discourse, and passive acceptance of authority. This passivity stems partly from a political environment in which dissent is discouraged, and civil society remains constrained.

Nevertheless, over the past few decades, subtle yet significant shifts have occurred. Economic reforms, increased access to education, and, in particular, the rise of digital platforms and social media have created new spaces for expression, particularly among younger populations (Pham, 2024a). These emerging forms of civic engagement suggest a growing, albeit cautious, diversification of political attitudes, challenging the longstanding image of a politically homogeneous, state-loyal citizenry.

Luong (2025) quotes Vietnam's Communist Party Chief, To Lam, who said in a September 2024 speech at Columbia University's World Leaders Forum that Vietnamese youth are notably disinterested in politics compared to their Southeast Asian counterparts, but remained more economically optimistic. Moreover, Luong (2025) reports that the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute published a Youth and Civic Engagement in Southeast Asia Survey in January 2025, which was conducted among university students from six Southeast Asian Countries. The respondents were from Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Vietnamese youth expressed the greatest concern about national sovereignty (91.1 per cent), which is well in line with the Communist Party of Vietnam's emphasis on national security and territorial integrity. This shows the youth have developed a deep sense of patriotism and nationhood. Moreover, almost nine in 10 Vietnamese youth expressed

satisfaction with the country's political system. They also expressed trust in their government and optimism in the country's trajectory, with 90.1 percent expressing confidence in Vietnam's economic future.

Institutional Approach

The institutional approach views political culture as a product of the interaction between individuals and political institutions, including the government, parliament, political parties, and the judiciary. It emphasizes people's attitudes toward these institutions, their sense of attachment to them, and perceptions of their trustworthiness and effectiveness (Wiseman, 2024). This perspective is advantageous in assessing the legitimacy and stability of a political system. In Vietnam, the institutional approach must be understood within the unique context of a one-party socialist state. The Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) occupies a central role, serving not only as the ruling Party but also as the architect of the nation's political culture and the ultimate authority in governance (London, 2022). Through a top-down rule system, limited electoral competition, and tightly managed bureaucratic channels, the CPV fosters a culture of consensus, discipline, and centralized control. However, despite the formal rigidity of this system, informal mechanisms and localized adaptations persist. Provincial leaders, party cadres, and civil servants often adjust rules and practices to suit local realities, revealing a dynamic interaction between institutional structures and everyday political behavior (Lokshin, 2021). While this approach provides valuable insights into how institutions shape political attitudes, it is limited if not considered alongside Vietnam's specific cultural and historical contexts, such as Confucian administrative traditions and revolutionary legacies (Nguyen, 2025), which profoundly influence the public's perception of authority and governance.

Trust in institutions can be seen in the Vietnamese single-party institutional model in the Communist Party of Vietnam. Truong (2020) argues that the successful handling of the 2020 Covid-19 infections, while other countries were struggling, bolstered the people's trust in the Communist Party of Vietnam and the government to steer the country firmly and steadily in times of crisis. Truong (2020) has posited that although Freedom House has consistently held that Vietnam is repressive, with civil and political rights severely restricted, the people of Vietnam trust the Communist Party of Vietnam.

In addition, Truong (2020) posits that the trust the Vietnamese have in the Communist Party of Vietnam has been built over many years of navigating the country through various crises. At the top of the list is the Communist Party of Vietnam's successful transition from one of the world's poorest economies to one of the most preferred destinations for foreign direct investment. Vietnamese who experienced poverty and hardship during the subsidy era before the 1990s are appreciative of the economic milestones the country has achieved. The young are continuously reminded of the bad old days compared to current economic prosperity, social mobility, and job opportunities. Steering the country through the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) outbreak, and the ongoing highly publicized fight against corruption have continued to bolster trust in the Communist Party of Vietnam

Symbolic-anthropogeni Approach

The symbolic-anthropological approach, as emphasized by scholars such as Clifford Geertz¹, views political culture as a system of symbols, rituals, and discourses through which people construct, communicate, and contest the legitimacy of power. According to this perspective, political symbols, such as national flags, emblems, ceremonies, and leader imagery, are not merely decorative but serve as vital instruments in expressing political values and reinforcing authority. This approach is especially valuable in analyzing political systems with deep cultural traditions, such as Vietnam, where symbols play a central role in both statecraft and public consciousness. Vietnamese political culture is deeply rooted in a symbolic framework shaped by Confucian values, revolutionary heritage, and a strong sense of national identity. For instance, State-organized rituals, such as commemorating Ho Chi Minh's birthday, Victory Day, and national reunification, serve to affirm ideological continuity and collective memory. Symbols such as the red flag with a yellow star, the image of "Uncle Ho,"

¹ Clifford Geertz (1926-2006), a renowned American anthropologist, known for his support and strong influence in Symbolic Anthropology and Interpretive Anthropology.

and narratives of heroic resistance against foreign powers legitimize the current political order while instilling a sense of historical mission and moral authority (Nguyen, 2025).

A recent symbolic event is Vietnam's 80th National Day military parade on September 02, 2025, to celebrate the 1945 independence from France.

Tens of thousands of people crowded the streets, many of them holding Vietnamese flags or clad in red, to watch more than 16,000 soldiers, including soldiers, naval officers, signals units, commandos, police officers, peacekeepers, and military medics, who marched in great serried ranks through the streets of the Vietnamese capital. (Strangio, 2025)

This aura of celebration reflected and intensified the people's patriotism and their connection to the Communist Party of Vietnam. The military parade was a proud reminder of the Communist Party of Vietnam's dedication to defending Vietnam's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

LAWNet (2025) notes that the Communist Party of Vietnam launched 17 propaganda slogans to mark the 95th anniversary of its founding. As earlier mentioned, slogans are part of the ruling machinery's strategy for perpetuating ideological continuity and collective memory. The slogans include

The Communist Party of Vietnam - The leader and organizer of every victory of the Vietnamese revolution!, a strong Communist Party, a developing country, an eternal nation!, Remain steadfast towards the goals of national independence and socialism! The Communist Party closely connects with the People, relying on the People to build the Party!, The great President Ho Chi Minh lives forever in our cause! (LawNet, 2025)

These symbolic elements not only reinforce the state's legitimacy but also shape how citizens internalize and relate to power, making the symbolic-anthropological approach a powerful lens for understanding the cultural foundations of Vietnamese political life.

Political socialization approach

The political socialization approach examines how individuals acquire and internalize political values, beliefs, and behaviors through various agents such as family, schools, media, and social institutions. It views political culture not merely as a static set of norms but as a dynamic, evolving process shaped by intergenerational transmission (Nguyễn & Nguyễn, 2024). In Vietnam, political socialization has been a state-directed effort, particularly since national reunification in 1975. For instance, institutions like the formal education system, the Ho Chi Minh Communist Youth Union, and state-run media have played key roles in instilling loyalty to the Communist Party and promoting socialist ideals (Nguyen, Nguyen, & Nguyen, 2023). These channels have cultivated a shared sense of national identity, ideological unity, and civic responsibility, thereby aligning with the goals of the one-party state. However, this process has not remained static. In recent decades, the forces of globalization, digital media, and expanding access to alternative sources of information have introduced competing narratives, especially among younger generations (Pham, 2024b). These shifts have contributed to a more diverse and, at times, skeptical political consciousness. While many youth still express respect for the state's founding values, there is also a growing openness to critical perspectives and reform-oriented discourse. Thus, the political socialization approach highlights both the mechanisms of cultural continuity and the possibilities for change in Vietnam's evolving political landscape.

Value-based approach

Within the scope of this research, political culture is approached as a value system, a constellation of norms, beliefs, ideals, and principles that guide the political behavior of individuals and communities within a specific historical and social context. This approach views political culture not merely as a background social phenomenon but as an active framework for evaluating the sustainability, rationality, and legitimacy of a political system (Wiseman, 2024). By synthesizing insights from behavioral, institutional, symbolic, and socialization-based perspectives, the value system approach provides a comprehensive, integrative lens for political analysis.

Prominent political scientists support the foundational ideas of this approach. Lucian Pye and Sidney Verba², in their seminal work *Political Culture and Political Development* (1965), defined political culture as “*a system of beliefs formed in political practice, symbols conveying meanings, and values shaping the environment in which political activities occur*” (Pye & Verba, 1965, p. 513). The socialist-oriented governance reform governance modernization laid the groundwork for understanding political culture as a structured yet adaptable matrix that conditions political action. Ronald Inglehart³ further advanced this view by linking political culture to processes of modernization. In *Modernization and Postmodernization* (1997), he emphasized the transformative impact of shifting value systems, arguing that the rise of post-materialist values, such as democracy, self-expression, and autonomy, fuels greater civic engagement and democratic participation. This value-based perspective has gained wide acceptance among both scholars and institutions. Werner J. Patzelt and Thomas Meyer have emphasized that political culture comprises not only shared values and orientations but also participatory norms, perceptions of legitimacy, and the everyday rules that underpin political interaction. According to Meyer, “*The political culture of a society is the values, orientations, perspectives, habits, and desires for political action that have common influence in society.*”⁴ Such perspectives underscore the analytical power of the value system approach for understanding both political stability and change.

In Vietnam, applying the value system lens is particularly appropriate given the country's distinctive cultural-historical background. A fusion of traditional Confucian values, revolutionary nationalism, and Ho Chi Minh Thought has shaped Vietnamese political culture.⁵ Since reunification in 1975, the political system has actively drawn on this value base to legitimize governance, structure political institutions, and foster unity. Ho Chi Minh himself emphasized the moral and cultural foundations of political leadership, famously stating: “*To gain people's respect, we must earn their trust; to gain people's trust, we must be pure and honest.*”⁶ His speeches and teachings consistently framed politics as a practice grounded in ethical values and service to the people. These foundational ideas remain embedded in Vietnam's political consciousness and institutional ethos today.

The value system approach thus enables us to understand political culture not only as a historical legacy but also as a strategic resource, a source of normative legitimacy, policy coherence, institutional trust, and civic mobilization. Moreover, it provides a critical framework for analyzing how Vietnamese political culture is evolving in response to contemporary pressures, including globalization, generational change, and digital transformation.

Vietnamese Political Culture Values Since 1975 in Communist Party Documents

After the Spring Victory of 1975, Vietnam entered a new historical era marked by national reunification and the comprehensive effort to build socialism. According to the Voice of Vietnam (VOVWORLD), Ho Chi Minh's victory on April 30, 1975, was driven by a combination of Military, Political, and diplomatic fronts. The diplomatic front was successfully utilized to garner support for the Vietnamese cause on the global stage. It created a negotiating front while continuing the fight, culminating in the 1973 Paris Peace Accords and

² Sidney Verba (1932-2019), a famous American political scientist, with works on political culture and political participation of different social groups.

³ Ronald Inglehart (1934-2021), an American political scientist specializing in comparative politics, political culture, modernization, democracy...

⁴ Werner J. Patzelt: “Political culture consists of the values and knowledge, views and attitudes of the public; forms of political behavior and participation; explicit or implicit rules of the political process; the everyday foundation of the political system and the collection of all cultural aspects and customs of the current society” [Thomas Meyer (2007), *The Future of Social Democracy*, National Political Publishing House, Hanoi, pp. 143-144]. According to Thomas Meyer, “The political culture of a society is the values, orientations, perspectives, habits, and desires for political action that have common influence in society” [Werner J. Patzelt (1992), *Einführung in die Politikwissenschaft: Grundriss des Faches und studiumbegleitende Orientierung*, Wissenschaftsverlag Richard Rothe, Passau, p. 251], v.v..

⁵ See *Political Science (Advanced Political Theory Textbook)*, Political Theory Publishing House, Hanoi, 2019, pp. 87-120.

⁶ Ho Chi Minh (1947): “We must remember that the Organization works for the people; the Organization's strength or weakness depends on the people. If people listen to us, we are strong. Understand the aspirations of the people, the hardships of the people. Understand the psychology of the people, learn from the people's initiatives. But there are things that people may not want to do but must be done, such as evacuation, paying taxes; these things must be explained clearly to the people. We must respect the people, make the people trust us, and set an example for the people. To gain people's respect, we must earn their trust; to gain people's trust, we must be pure and honest” (Speech to cadres in Thanh Hoa province); “In summary, politics is: 1. Unity. 2. Purity from top to bottom” (Speech to delegates of intellectuals and wealthy citizens of Thanh Hoa province).

eventually leading to the Spring Victory of 1975. The National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was formed in December 1960. At the time, North and South Vietnam carried out diplomatic activities under the banner “two but one, one but two (Anh, 2025). Vietnam has continued to actively and with evident success apply the lessons learned in the Great Spring Victory of 1975 for national development. *“The combination of national strength and the power of the times, along with close coordination between diplomacy, defense, and security, has been a decisive factor in all of Vietnam’s revolutionary successes”* (Anh, 2025).

This period marked the beginning of a transformation in political culture, in which traditional historical and social values were integrated and reshaped under the ideological leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). Vietnamese political culture since 1975 has evolved through a dialectical process of inheritance, selection, and institutionalization, deeply rooted in Marxist-Leninist ideology (London, 2022) and Ho Chi Minh Thought (Uoc, 2023, p.3). The continuity of pre-1975 values has been shaped by post-war strategic imperatives, producing both stability and innovation in the nation’s political value system (Khanh, 2024). Communist Party documents reflect this convergence, presenting a coherent framework for understanding political culture as a living system grounded in ideology, practice, and national identity.

General Phan Van Giang, Vietnam’s Minister of National Defence, addressing a national workshop titled “The Great Spring Victory of 1975 and Vietnam’s New Era of Development” in Ho Chi Minh City on April 20, 2025, noted that the great Spring Victory of 1975 was key in laying the current foundation of Vietnam. He averred that it *“demonstrated the Party’s proactive and creative revolutionary strategy, its sound leadership, and the power of the people’s war. It vividly reflected deep patriotism, the determination for reunification, and the spirit of the times combined with national unity”* (Voice of Vietnam, 2025). Minister Giang further argued that Vietnam has been building on lessons learned from the 1975 Great Victory, aiming to create a modern, industrialized upper-middle-income economy by 2030. Additionally, Vietnam has set an ambitious target to become a developed, high-income socialist nation by 2045, marking the 100th anniversary of its founding (Voice of Vietnam, 2025).

Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought: Foundational Ideological Values

The cornerstone of Vietnamese political culture since 1975 has been the reaffirmation of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought as the CPV’s ideological foundation and guiding compass (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1991). This ideological consolidation, officially enshrined in the Party Charter and subsequent congress documents, provides a theoretical and moral framework for state governance, national development, and social transformation. These ideologies not only serve as the CPV’s *“theoretical weapons”* but also constitute the core identity of modern Vietnamese political culture. General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong’s repeated emphasis on creatively applying these doctrines to Vietnam’s historical context reflects a commitment to ideological continuity with practical adaptability (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). Ho Chi Minh’s emphasis on revolutionary ethics, simplicity, patriotism, and people-centered leadership integrates seamlessly with Marxist-Leninist principles, thus enriching Vietnam’s political culture with both modern socialist ideals and deep-rooted national traditions.

Associate Prof. Mach Quang Thang asserts that Ho Chi Minh’s thought is grounded in the flexible application of Marxist-Leninist ideas to the Vietnamese situation. Vietnam’s revolution objectives were set out in the Party’s first platform,

carrying out a human rights bourgeois revolution and land revolution to move forward a communist society. In other words, the objective of the Vietnamese revolution was to move towards communism, with the first period being national independence associated with socialism (Thang, 2015).

In his thoughts, Ho Chi Minh outlined a path to attain national independence based on socialism. The path called for the liberation of the nation, society, and humanity, and led to a socialist-oriented Vietnam. Following this path, Vietnam was transformed from a colonial and feudal country into an independent, self-reliant, and stable economy. The people of Vietnam are now liberated, with development leading to a prosperous life (Thang, 2015).

National Independence Linked with Socialism: A Consistent Strategic Vision

A defining value in the CPV’s political culture documents from the post-1975 period is the indivisible link between national independence and socialism. This dual objective was reiterated at the Fourth National Party

Congress and has since become a strategic orientation guiding Vietnam's political evolution (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1977). Vietnamese political culture reinforces the view that true national liberation is achieved only through the establishment of socialism. Successive Party Congresses, especially the XIII Congress, reaffirm this dual commitment, portraying socialism as both the ideological goal and practical path to sustainable national development (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). This integration of patriotic tradition with a modern socialist vision distinguishes Vietnam's political identity and cultural trajectory in the postwar period, forming the basis for self-reliance, resilience, and a future-oriented national agenda. Professor Vu Van Hien, in "Forever Raising the Flag of Independence and Socialism," notes that in modern Vietnam, National independence and socialism are the core developmental values under the Party's leadership. They are pillars of Vietnam's attainment of its desired position in the world (Hien, 2022). According to Hien, Vietnam's Platform for national construction in the transitional period to socialism (supplemented and developed in 2011) states that "*National independence is a prerequisite for the realization of socialism, and socialism is a solid basis for national independence. Building socialism and defending the socialist Fatherland are two closely related strategic tasks*". While the 11th National Party Congress resolved that "*Under any conditions and circumstances, it is necessary to persevere in implementing the renovation policy and goals, steadfastly and creatively apply and develop Marxism - Leninism, Ho Chi Minh's thought, and be steadfast in the goal of national independence and socialism*". The 12th National Party Congress affirmed "*the importance of Strengthening, creatively applying and developing Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought following Vietnam reality; being steadfast in the goal of national independence and socialism, on the path of renovation*". The 13th National Party Congress on its part "*determined the guidelines for national development in the coming time as: "Consistently and creatively apply and develop Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh thought; steadfast in the goal of national independence and socialism"*" (Hien, 2022).

Socialist Democracy: Institutionalizing the People's Power

Another pillar of post-1975 Vietnamese political culture is the deepening of socialist democracy as both a developmental goal and governing principle. In CPV doctrine, democracy is not merely a political formality but a substantive means of expressing the people's will and fostering inclusive governance. Socialist democracy is institutionalized through mechanisms such as grassroots democracy, public consultations, elections, and citizen participation in state affairs. As emphasized by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, democracy is "*the essence of the socialist system,*" reflecting the CPV's belief in the empowerment of the people under the Party's leadership. The institutionalization of democratic processes demonstrates a transition in political behavior in which power is derived from, exercised by, and accountable to the people, underscoring a modern political culture based on legitimacy, participation, and shared governance (Trong, 2021).

According to Le Thuy Thi, the Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently promoted socialist democracy, relying on the people to realize its aspirations. The Communist Party believes that expanding socialist democracy will create space for people to actively participate in the "*renewal, accelerating industrialization and modernization, and strengthening regional and international integration* (Thi, 2023)." Thuy has further noted that, as a result of the socialist revolution, the working class and the working people have built a people-centered political power system, a form of new democracy called socialism. Le further argues that, in Vietnamese reality, democracy has become an essential component for the working class and other working people to contribute effectively to effecting radical changes to the status quo and to building a new communist Vietnam with property. It is therefore to be understood that when a state creates a socialist democracy, it is also the process of "*democratizing social life*" (Thi, 2023) Furthermore, over the years, the Communist Party of Vietnam has adopted the principles of Marxism-Leninism and those of Ho Chi Minh regarding democracy. The Party has recognised the power of the people, which, in turn, has led to the country's economic revolution (Thi, 2023).

Socialist Rule of Law: Structuring and Constraining State Power

The emergence of socialist rule of law as a core political value after 1986 represents a paradigm shift in the organization of state power. With the *Doi Moi* (Renovation) reforms, the CPV emphasized the need to move from bureaucratic voluntarism to legal institutionalism. Resolution No. 08-NQ/HNTW of the Eighth Plenum of the VII Party Central Committee was a turning point, advocating for a legal state governed by the rule of law. The XIII Congress reaffirmed the commitment to build "*a Socialist Rule of Law State of the people, by the people,*

and for the people.” This shift reflects a new political culture that values legality, transparency, and the supremacy of law as essential to effective governance (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). It signifies a departure from arbitrary administration and underlines a collective commitment to legal rationality, political accountability, and civic order.

The Communist Party General Secretary and State President, To Lam, and the State President wrote an article in 2024 reiterating that Vietnam has been working to build and refine a law-governed socialist state of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Resolution No. 27-NQ/TW, dated November 9, 2022, issued by the 13th Party Central Committee, marks a milestone and a key turning point in the continued development of the law-governed socialist State of Vietnam in the new period. For the first time, our Party has issued a resolution specifically focused on the law-governed socialist State, with key objectives including: building a complete legal system that is implemented strictly and consistently; upholding the Constitution and laws, respecting, ensuring, and effectively protecting human and civil rights; unified State power with straightforward assignment, close coordination, and effective oversight; a professional, law-governed, and modern administrative and judicial system; a streamlined, clean, efficient, and effective State apparatus; a pool of officials, civil servants, and public employees with the necessary qualities, capabilities, professionalism, and integrity; and modern, effective national governance; meeting the demand of rapid and sustainable national development, to become a socialist-oriented high-income, developed nation by 2045. The successful implementation of these objectives is crucial, laying a solid foundation for the country’s sustainable development in the new era, one that will support the nation’s rise (Lam, 2024).

National Unity: A Cultural Imperative for Cohesion and Stability

The value of great national unity is a recurring theme in CPV political culture documents, underscoring its historical significance and contemporary relevance. Rooted in Ho Chi Minh’s thought, unity is viewed as both a historical strength and a modern necessity for sustainable development. Post-1975 political culture promotes inclusiveness across ethnic, religious, regional, and class lines, fostering mutual respect and common purpose. The CPV recognizes unity as a source of endogenous power critical to national stability and governance (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). The XIII Congress’s call to “*strengthen great national unity*” reiterates the role of solidarity as both a traditional virtue and a modern political strategy, ensuring societal cohesion and resilience amid internal and external challenges.

Human Development: Centering the Human Factor in Political Culture

Human development occupies a central place in Vietnam’s political culture, underlining the Party’s humanitarian ethos and people-centered policy orientation. From the IV Congress’s call to “*build comprehensively developed people*” to later resolutions such as Resolution 33-NQ/TW, the CPV has consistently emphasized the human being as both the subject and the goal of development (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1977). This value extends beyond economic well-being to include education, health, gender equality, cultural enrichment, and youth empowerment (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). The XIII Congress affirmed the role of culture and people as “*endogenous strength and driving force for national development*” (Khanh & Van, n.d.) Vietnamese political culture thus embodies a holistic view of development, one that unites ideological principles with practical responsibility, ensuring that policy serves the dignity and potential of every citizen.

International Integration: Political Culture in a Global Context

Vietnam’s approach to international relations since 1975 reflects a sophisticated political culture that balances independence and global engagement. The CPV has integrated core values such as sovereignty, peace, and cooperation into its foreign policy framework, emphasizing the principle of “*diversification and multilateralization*.” The XIII Congress articulated a vision of Vietnam as “*a friend, a reliable partner, and an active and responsible member of the international community*.” These values stem from historical experiences of resistance and diplomacy and are reflected in a pragmatic yet principled foreign policy (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021). Ho Chi Minh’s ideal of “*more friends, fewer enemies*” continues to shape Vietnam’s global engagement, promoting harmony, mutual benefit, and international solidarity. The concept of “*Bamboo*

Diplomacy,” as articulated by General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong, metaphorically captures Vietnam’s flexible and resilient diplomatic posture in a complex international environment (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2021).

Overall, since 1975, Vietnamese political culture has evolved into a coherent and dynamic value system, as consistently articulated in Communist Party documents. The foundational values of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, national independence with socialism, socialist democracy, the rule of law, national unity, human development, and international integration constitute both ideological imperatives and practical guidelines for governance and societal transformation. These values are not merely rhetorical; they are institutionalized and embedded in political practice, contributing to a unique political identity. As Vietnam continues to evolve, its political culture remains a vital force shaping its development path, rooted in historical continuity, guided by strategic vision, and open to future possibilities.

The Transformation of Vietnamese Political Culture Through Party Congresses

Vietnamese political culture is not a static entity but a dynamic, evolving system of values that both reflects and directs socio-political development across specific historical junctures. From 1975 to the present, its transformation can be traced through four key stages, each corresponding to pivotal Party Congress milestones and marked shifts in ideology, governance, and integration. These stages highlight the adaptive nature of political culture as it transitioned from unification and centralization to democratization, rule-of-law governance, and digital transparency.

Stage 1 (1975–1986): Unification – Centralization – Social Mobilization

Following reunification, the Party’s political culture centered on consolidating state authority and advancing socialism through ideological unity. This phase was characterized by a highly centralized system that emphasized absolute loyalty to the Party, a revolutionary spirit, collective discipline, and the subordination of individual interests to collective goals. The IV Party Congress (1976) emphasized the necessity of “*strengthening the dictatorship of the proletariat*” and promoting “*collective mastery*” (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1977), while the VI Congress reiterated socialist democracy as the core of the new political order. During this period, political life was marked by comprehensive politicization; all aspects of society, from language and symbols to institutions, were subordinated to political objectives. Administrative command structures dominated, suppressing dissent and minimizing pluralism (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1987). Yet, this period also solidified the Party’s revolutionary legitimacy, rooted in historical memory, resistance-era sacrifices, and strong bonds between the Party and its people.

Stage 2 (1986–2001): Promoting Democratization

The VI Congress (1986) launched *Đổi Mới*, marking a significant shift in Vietnam’s political landscape toward greater political pluralism and a reevaluation of political values. Political culture began to accommodate internal democratization and citizen engagement. The Party’s VII Congress (1991) promoted societal democratization, encouraging mass and professional organizations to participate in governance. The 1992 Constitution institutionalized socialist democracy under the maxim: “*People know, people discuss, people do, people check.*” Despite this rhetorical shift, democratic mechanisms during this phase remained primarily procedural, with limited institutional capacity for deliberative participation. Participatory mechanisms were weak, and political behavior remained largely shaped by deference to authority and a tendency to avoid conflict. This phase embodied a hybrid or “*intermediate political culture*,” wherein older collectivist values coexisted with emerging democratic norms, reflecting the tensions of a political system in transition (Thayer, 1987).

Stage 3 (2001–2016): Modernization of the Political System – Rule of Law Governance

The early 21st century ushered in a new political vision centered on legal rationality and institutional accountability. Beginning with the VII Central Conference (1994), the Party formally adopted the objective of building a socialist rule-of-law state. The 2001 amendments to the 1992 Constitution clearly enshrined this principle, laying the groundwork for a legal-political culture rooted in public accountability, transparency, and service-oriented governance (National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2001). Vietnam’s accession to the WTO in 2007 intensified institutional reforms, embedding new governance values such as

integrity, good governance, and citizen oversight. Laws on anti-corruption, information access, and legislative transparency symbolized a move from traditional authority to legitimate capacity. However, implementation remained uneven. Grassroots institutions lagged, constrained by entrenched habits and hierarchical inertia, what critics described as “hot above – cold below.” Still, the cultural shift toward legality and professionalism marked a major step in redefining political legitimacy, from revolutionary charisma to institutional performance. As General Secretary Tô Lâm later affirmed, state power must be “scientifically organized” and “strictly inspected,” underscoring the system’s evolving commitment to the rule of law (Lam, 2024).

Stage 4 (2016–present): Comprehensive Integration – Digital Politics – Transparency Culture

The most recent transformation, driven by the digital revolution and international integration, has reoriented Vietnamese political culture toward *digital governance* and *transparent dialogue*. The XII and XIII Party Congresses prioritized the construction of a digital government, digital society, and corresponding digital political culture. Values such as data-driven decision-making, interactive policy-making, and technological social control have become central. Digital tools have empowered citizens to monitor, critique, and influence policy in real time, shifting the system from a one-way transmission model to an open, responsive platform of dialogue. However, new challenges have surfaced: digital stratification limits equitable access, while misinformation and media manipulation threaten civic trust (Khanh, 2019). The emerging political culture must therefore integrate digital ethics, public awareness, and regulation to sustain legitimacy.

Overall, the transformation of Vietnamese political culture since 1975 illustrates a law-governed process of adaptive evolution. Each stage, marked by unification, democratization, legal rationalization, and digital integration, reflects shifts in Party ideology and institutional capacity. More importantly, it reveals a deeper restructuring of political values: from obedience to participation, command to dialogue, and discretion to transparency. Vietnamese political culture demonstrates remarkable flexibility, inheritance, and adaptability, enabling it to strike a balance between continuity and reform, and chart a coherent path toward modern governance in the 21st century.

Challenges and Proposed Solutions in Political Governance of Vietnam

In the context of political modernization and deepening international integration, Vietnamese political culture has remained committed to preserving core traditional values (Thoa, 2024). However, this evolution has also brought forth a series of complex and pressing challenges that threaten to undermine the stability and effectiveness of governance. Among the most salient of these are declining public trust, inconsistent adherence to the rule of law, and the uneven implementation of digital governance (Nguyen, 2024). If left unaddressed, these issues may erode foundational political values and impede institutional development. This section argues that confronting these challenges through targeted policy interventions is essential to strengthening the institutionalization of political culture in Vietnam’s current era of transformation.

Reshaping political trust in the new era

One of the foremost issues is the reshaping of political trust in the new era. In recent years, there have been indications of declining public confidence in the political system, manifesting in reduced civic engagement, increased skepticism about the transparency of public institutions, and doubts about the integrity of specific segments of the leadership. General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng repeatedly underscored the centrality of trust, asserting that “*the most important thing is still to consolidate and increase people's trust in the Party, State, and the entire political system*” (Lam, 2024) Complicating this effort is the influence of the digital media environment, where the unchecked spread of unverified information and hostile narratives, particularly from external sources, has heightened public uncertainty, especially among young people. As Lucian Pye (1985)⁷ Noted political trust does not emerge spontaneously; it must be cultivated through consistent, transparent, and responsible governance. Inglehart (1997) further emphasizes that trust in political institutions serves as a fundamental indicator of long-term regime stability. In response to these challenges, efforts led by General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng, and continued under General Secretary Tô Lâm, have signaled a critical attempt

⁷ Lucian Pye (1921-2008), an American political scientist, widely known for his influential works on international politics, political culture...

to rebuild confidence through anti-corruption initiatives, the streamlining of administrative apparatuses, and the promotion of innovation and digital governance. These reforms, when implemented with measurable transparency and active public engagement, can foster a more enduring and legitimate form of political trust, especially if complemented by strengthened policy communication, open feedback mechanisms, and institutional responsiveness.

Inconsistent Rule of Law Culture: Bridging the Gap between Legal Ideals and Practice

Equally significant is the challenge posed by the inconsistent development of a rule-of-law culture. While Vietnam's legal system has seen substantial codification and expansion in recent decades, the discrepancy between legal norms and their enforcement remains a persistent weakness. The phenomenon of "hot above, cold below," wherein central directives fail to translate effectively at the local level, along with selective or discretionary enforcement of laws, erodes public confidence in legal institutions. Furthermore, administrative practices often reflect a culture of emotionalism, patronage, and informal negotiation rather than legal rationality and procedural fairness. In some instances, citizens doubt the legal system's capacity to protect their rights, opting instead for personal appeals or informal networks. General Secretary Tô Lâm has acknowledged these structural deficiencies, noting that the building of a Socialist Rule of Law State remains unfinished and fraught with limitations (Lam, 2024). As Nguyen (2021) argues, the heart of legal reform is not merely legislative expansion but the cultivation of a culture of law supremacy, founded on professional ethics, neutrality, and a service-oriented mindset among civil servants. Addressing these cultural and institutional shortcomings demands a concerted effort to embed legal values through public education, enhance judicial independence, and deploy digital tools to ensure transparency and administrative accountability. A shift toward a more professional, law-based public administration would mark a crucial step in embedding the rule of law not only in statutes but in political behavior.

Digital Transformation and the Risk of Political Culture Mismatch

Vietnam's pursuit of digital transformation introduces another layer of complexity to its evolving political culture. The integration of digital technologies into governance, as seen in initiatives such as digital government, e-parliament, and online policy consultation, holds great promise. However, this process often encounters resistance from within the state apparatus itself. A significant number of officials display apprehension toward digital systems, resulting in "formal digitization" without substantive changes in mindset or methodology. Simultaneously, many citizens, particularly in rural and disadvantaged areas, remain excluded from the digital sphere due to limited access and low levels of digital literacy (Nguyen, 2024). This digital divide exacerbates inequality in political participation and access to policy, thereby undermining the democratic potential of technological reform. For digital governance to genuinely enhance public administration and citizen engagement, it must be grounded in a digital political culture that values transparent information sharing, equitable interaction, ethical conduct, and accountability. To bridge this cultural-technological gap, the state must not only invest in infrastructure but also foster public digital literacy and promote a shared understanding of ethical behavior in digital political spaces. Establishing a code of digital political conduct, encouraging public experimentation with online forums, and prioritizing inclusive access are crucial to ensuring that digital transformation strengthens, rather than disrupts, political cohesion.

Institutional and cultural barriers

Finally, the limitations on substantive citizen participation remain a persistent concern within Vietnam's political culture. Although the legal framework guarantees citizens the right to participate in politics, practical opportunities to exercise this right remain limited. A culture of passivity prevails, in which many citizens express reluctance to engage in public debate or policy feedback, often believing their voices will not be heard or will have little effect (Nguyễn & Nguyễn, 2024). This disconnect is further entrenched by administrative practices that prioritize top-down communication and risk-averse governance over meaningful dialogue. Bureaucratic caution, the avoidance of "*sensitive issues*," and a procedural rather than deliberative approach to governance all hinder the development of participatory norms. In this context, President Hồ Chí Minh's vision of "*bringing politics into the midst of the people*" remains aspirational rather than fully realized. Reinvigorating this ideal requires more than rhetorical commitment; it demands the institutionalization of participatory mechanisms such

as public consultations, referenda, and grassroots policy dialogue, alongside the revitalization of organizations like the Fatherland Front as genuine channels of civic engagement. Moreover, civic education must be modernized, delivered in accessible, technology-driven formats, and designed to foster a democratic political consciousness. When citizens are provided with credible avenues to influence decision-making and observe tangible responses from institutions, participation can evolve from symbolic to substantive.

Overall, these four challenges — declining political trust, inconsistent rule of law, digital culture mismatch, and limited political participation — reveal the critical junctures in which Vietnamese political culture stands today. Confronting these obstacles requires not only technical reforms or structural adjustments but also a comprehensive renewal of political values. This includes embedding transparency, participation, legal rationality, and digital ethics into the everyday workings of state institutions and civic life. When such values are effectively institutionalized and integrated into governance, Vietnamese political culture can evolve toward a model that is more modern, participatory, and resilient, capable of meeting the demands of a nation during global integration and socio-political transformation.

CONCLUSION

Vietnam's political culture, deeply rooted in its historical identity and shaped by Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought, functions not only as a reflection of national values but as a dynamic force guiding institutional development and public life. This study, employing a value system approach, conceptualizes political culture as a structured set of enduring norms, including national independence, socialist democracy, rule of law, unity, human development, and global integration, that have evolved through distinct phases of centralization, democratization, modernization, and digital transformation. These values have been progressively institutionalized through Party congress resolutions, demonstrating both continuity and adaptability in response to shifting governance demands. However, emerging challenges, declining political trust, legal inconsistencies, digital divides, and limited civic engagement reveal tensions within the value system that require strategic recalibration. To sustain legitimacy and foster inclusive development, Vietnam must embed democratic and rule-of-law principles into governance, cultivate public ethics in the digital age, strengthen civic education, and build participatory platforms that reflect citizen aspirations. Recognizing political culture as a living, identity-bearing resource is essential for constructing a modern, democratic, and law-based society, which General Secretary Nguyễn Phú Trọng aptly describes as the “spiritual foundation” of Vietnam's socialist orientation.

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