



Vietnam, North — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV)]

07/21/1954 Start Communist Ideocracy: After the French defeat at Điện Biên Phủ, French forces withdrew from the North, and the Việt Minh leadership consolidated effective control over a clearly delimited territory. North Vietnam was formally established in the Geneva Accords on 07/21/1954, which tentatively delineated Vietnam into northern and southern zones along the 17th parallel, with general elections slated for July 1956, after which the country was meant to be reunited (LePoer 1989, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 106). This partition constitutes a regime change event not because separation itself creates ideocracy, but because it removed the transitional constraints that had previously prevented the full institutionalization of communist ideological sovereignty. With the externally enforced power-sharing arrangements of 1945–1954 no longer binding and with the communist leadership exercising uncontested authority in the North, the DRV could now consolidate a Marxist-Leninist party-state in which the ruling party's doctrinal primacy became the operative basis of governance. The DRV, led by the communist Vietnamese Workers Party (VWP), accepted the provisions as a pathway to reunification under its governance. Once the July 1956 deadline for nationwide elections passed without implementation, North Vietnam no longer operated within a credible reunification framework and instead developed a self-contained regime whose legitimacy and institutional design were anchored in communist doctrine and party supremacy. In the late 1950s, a phase of domestic “détente” unfolded in North Vietnam, marked by political and social liberalization and expanded individual rights enforced by the council of ministers and national assembly, and the North ostensibly experienced its most “democratic” period even after a Politburo reshuffle (Asselin 2013: 68-72). This episode does not alter regime classification, because limited liberalization occurred within a framework of party supremacy and did not introduce competitively uncertain elections or autonomous constraints capable of displacing the ruling party's vanguard authority. The consolidation of communist ideocracy is reflected in the subsequent constitutional and organizational development of the North Vietnamese state. The 1960 Constitution established a semi-presidential government within a communist framework, with president Hồ Chí Minh elected by the national assembly to lead the council of ministers. Although citizens over 21 were formally allowed to run for elections, the communist Vietnamese Fatherland Front (VFF) controlled lists and candidature approvals. Thus, the electoral arena functioned as an instrument of party supervision rather than a site of competitive authorization. However, the DRV retained claims of a multi-party system, and some Vietnamese Socialist Party (VSP) and Democratic Party (VDP) candidates secured seats in Hanoi (Hartmann 2001). These parties operated as subordinated satellites and do not constitute multiparty competition for executive control. The ideocratic character of the regime was further reinforced by the integration of strategic doctrine with state policy and coercive organization. A pivotal moment was communist politician Lê Duẩn's fourteen-point plan, outlining a strategy of revolutionary militancy for southern political struggle and reunification. Initially rejected, the Central Committee later authorized targeted assassinations of “reactionary traitors” and terror bombings to oppose the Diệm regime and American presence (Asselin 2013: 74). Later on, the People's Army of North Vietnam (PAVN) and the Việt Cộng guerrillas, based in South Vietnam, engaged in conflict against the military forces of the Republic of Vietnam, supported by their communist allies, primarily China and the Soviet Union. In sum, from 07/21/1954 onward, North Vietnam meets the criteria of Communist

Ideocracy because Marxist-Leninist doctrine and party supremacy constituted the operative legitimation structure, party-state fusion could be institutionalized under consolidated territorial authority, and the regime pursued a transformative project that subordinated political and social order to doctrinal imperatives, even where tactical liberalization occurred. Hồ Chí Minh served as president of the DRV until his passing on 09/03/1969. He was then succeeded by his vice president, Tôn Đức Thắng. Phạm Văn Đồng, appointed head of government through the Geneva Conference, held this position until reunification in 1976 (Hartmann 2001). Based on our observations, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held until 1960. Thereafter, according to LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. Political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited.

07/02/1976 End Vietnam, North [Communist Ideocracy]: On 04/30/1975, North Vietnamese forces entered Saigon, and the city fell under their control. After this event, known as the fall of Saigon, the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG), formed by Northern Vietnam on 06/08/1969 to oppose the Republic of Vietnam, governed South Vietnam. Initial plans for separate administrations were eventually abandoned and on 07/02/1976, after national assembly elections, the reunification of North and South Vietnam took place and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV) was declared (Hartmann 2001).

For the time after 07/02/1976, see Vietnam. From this date onward, Va-PoReg provides no separate observations for Vietnam, North or Vietnam, South.

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