



Vietnam, South — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as the Republic of Vietnam]

07/21/1954 Start (Monarchical) Non-Electoral Transitional Regime: On this date, the Geneva Accords established South Vietnam as a separate independent state, dividing the nation into northern and southern zones along the 17th parallel, with general elections slated for July 1956, after which Vietnam was meant to be reunited.¹ At independence Vietnam was led by prime minister Ngô Đình Diệm, appointed by emperor Bảo Đại, who was living in Paris and had little ability to influence events on the ground (LePoer 1989, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 106). Diệm opposed the general elections outlined in the Geneva Accords, and, instead, established a republic, formed South Vietnamese republican institutions, and began prosecuting communist insurgents (Hartmann 2001, Davidson 1991). According to LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held during this period. However, according to our observations this was only true for the period after 10/23/1955. No executive elections were present. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI.

10/23/1955 End Non-Electoral Transitional Regime/Start Electoral Autocracy: On this date, Diệm held a referendum, formally serving as presidential elections between head of state Bảo Đại and head of government Diệm to determine the president of a new, independent Vietnamese state. At the time, Bảo Đại was out of the country and had not been asked to stand as candidate. The referendum introduced universal suffrage with an 18-year voting age and secret voting. However, in practice, voters were given a ballot on which they had to tear off the half featuring the picture of their preferred candidate. The results showed an overwhelming 98.2 percent in favor of Diệm (Hartmann 2001, Asselin 2013). Despite allegations of a manipulated vote, the result reinforced Diệm's legitimacy and effectively supplanted the internationally recognized State of Vietnam with the Republic of Vietnam in the south, which garnered support from the USA, France, Laos, Taiwan (Republic of China) and Thailand.² Diệm emerged as a proponent of Vietnamese nationalism, advocating for both anti-communism, as a counterforce to Hồ Chí Minh, and decolonization, opposing Bảo Đại's influence.³ The inaugural Constitution included provisions for establishing the republic and orchestrating the election of its president.⁴ As documented in LIED, only multiparty legislative elections were held until 1960. In the years 1961 and 1962, multiparty executive and legislative elections were conducted. Subsequently, multiparty executive and legislative elections were once again classified as absent in 1963. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED declares the absence of competitiveness for the entire time. In addition, according to V-Dem's CEI and EF&FI elections have not really been clean, free or fair. As outlined in the 1956 constitution, Diệm, serving as president, wielded a significant concentration of power, and his style of governance gradually veered towards authoritarianism.⁵ Therefore, LIED considers that political liberties were absent for this time. V-Dem's PCLI affirms political liberties were not really given. Moreover, candidates for the national assembly could run as independents or under party affiliations. However, political parties needed authorization from the ministry of interior to attain legal status, which only allowed pro-government political parties and disqualified candidates with links to communism. Once elected, candidates clustered around blocs, such as the People's Bloc, the Unification Bloc, and the Society Bloc, although they were never formalized (Hartmann 2001). Diệm did not control the army, faced administrative

deficiencies, and held minimal authority over significant areas of the South controlled by powerful religious sects like the Hòa Hảo and Đạo Cao Đài. Moreover, fearing potential coups, Diệm prioritized personal loyalty in his officers and established fragmented military authority, with no single officer controlling all troops in any given region (Davidson 1991, Asselin 2013). According to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

11/01/1963 End Electoral Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: On this date, the armed forces led by Lieutenant General Dương Văn Minh ousted president Diệm in a military coup because of their disapproval of his handling of the Buddhist crisis and their fear of the Vietcong threat. Subsequently, Minh assumed the leadership of a twelve-man Military Revolutionary Council (MRC) (Ky 1978: 31, Marshall 2018c, Goodman 1973, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 106). In 1964 and 1965, according to LIED, no multiparty executive or legislative elections were held. In contrast, multiparty executive and legislative elections were classified as present in 1966 and 1967. However, General Minh was ousted in another coup on 01/30/1964, orchestrated by General Nguyễn Khánh and senior officers due to personal ambition, policy differences, and an ineffectual junta. Following the coup, General Minh remained a figurehead chief of state until 10/26/1964, when General Nguyễn Khánh established himself as the chairman of the new junta.⁶ On 09/26/1964, Khánh and the military junta established a semblance of civilian rule by creating the High National Council (HNC), an advisory body with limited legislative authority. The HNC designated Phan Khắc Sửu as chief of state and Hoàng as prime minister. However, this is not classified as a regime change because the real power remained with the military (Kahin 1986, Moyar 2006, Tucker 2011: 486). On 12/20/1964, General Khánh and other military assets removed the parallel civilian governing council and arrested several of its leaders. This removal can be seen as internal military clashes between the young and old members of the military junta. On 01/27/1965, the armed forces removed the last of the civilian elements of the government and imposed direct rule by replacing the MCN with a new Armed Forces Council (AFC), in which younger officers had greater representation (Kahin 1986). This was done with the support of commanders inside and outside of the junta who were concerned about the goings of the war and were opposed to some of the US's demands carried out by the remainder of the civilian administration. On 02/19/1965, the junta infighting and personal ambition led Thọ and Kỳ to attempt to overthrow Khánh. Despite a considerable amount of both fighting and uncertainty regarding junta leadership, the coup ultimately failed, but Khánh was convinced by the US military advisors to flee. A complex series of power shifts allowed new military and civilian leaders to take power. Quát is identified as head of government, appointed by the military junta on 02/16/1965. However, Quát's civilian government was ousted by air marshal Kỳ, General Nguyễn Văn Thiệu, and General Hù Cồ on 06/11/1965. Following this event, the military proclaimed a National Leadership Committee, with Kỳ as prime minister and Thiệu as chief of state (Michaels 2014). Thiệu became the chairman of the National Leadership Committee on 06/14/1965 (Hartmann 2001).⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. For 1963, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating that political liberties are not really present. From 1964 onwards, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, while V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as ambiguous regarding the status of political liberties. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

04/01/1967 End Military Autocracy/Start Electoral (Military) Autocracy: On this date, Thiệu promulgated a new constitution, previously adopted by the constituent assembly on 03/18/1967, which provided for a semi-presidential system with a bicameral parliament (Hartmann 2001, Flanz 1967). Under pressure from the United States to adhere to constitutional governance, elections for both the presidency and the legislature were arranged.⁸ The elections took place on 09/03/1967. After winning the elections Thiệu became president on

10/31/1967. The last elections in South Vietnam were held on 10/02/1971. In these presidential elections Thiệu ran virtually unopposed after his main opponents, Vice President Nguyễn Cao Kỳ and General Dương Văn Minh, withdrew. The reason was that Thiệu's tainted reputation for corruption led his political adversaries to suspect electoral manipulation and opt out of the race. Running unopposed, Thiệu secured a straightforward reelection on 10/02, garnering 94% of the vote with an 87% turnout, a statistic widely regarded as fraudulent.⁹ The new regime's stability was challenged by the absence of strong political parties. Deputies were elected as independents who later formed loose parliamentary blocs. Thiệu attempted to create a supportive political movement in parliament and introduced a new party law legalizing 23 parties between 1969 and 1970. However, in 1973, all existing parties were dissolved by decree (Hartmann 2001). He remained in office until 04/21/1975.¹⁰ The regime relied on the support of the United States, especially during the Vietnam war, which saw heavy involvement of US-troops but also south-Vietnamese interference.¹¹ Because of the elections the regime is classified different from other regime data sets as an electoral autocracy and not a military autocracy. However, regarding the subtype it was an electoral military autocracy and largely the continuation of the previous regime. Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED affirms that they were not competitive during this period. Furthermore, until 1967 no cleanliness for the elections is scored. Since 1968 V-Dem's CEI indicates ambiguous outcomes. During the entire time the elections were not really free and fair according to V-Dem's EF&FI. Besides, according to LIED political liberties remained absent. V-Dem's PCLI declares them as ambiguous for the entire regime period. For the relevant regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. On 01/31/1968, the Tet Offensive commenced. This offensive, by thrusting the war into South Vietnam's urban areas and showcasing the enduring potency of communist forces, signaled a pivotal moment in US backing for the South Vietnamese government. The incoming administration of Richard Nixon initiated a strategy of Vietnamization to diminish US combat engagement and initiated discussions with the North Vietnamese to seek an end to the conflict.¹² US-military troops withdrew from South Vietnam in March 1972 after the Paris Peace Accords were signed on 01/27/1972.¹³ North Vietnam used the created power vacuum to start another military campaign, the Easter Offensive, between 03/30/1972 and 10/22/1972 against South Vietnam.¹⁴ 04/21/1975 The communist rebels and the North Vietnamese Army closed in on the capital and Thieu resigned and fled. His Vice President carried on the fight for seven more days. The final 'Spring Offensive' between 12/13/1974 and 04/30/1975 marked the concluding North Vietnamese campaign in the Vietnam War.¹⁵ As classified by FH for this regime period, the country scores between 9 and 10 as not free, which we interpret as rather not free.

04/30/1975 End Electoral (Military) Autocracy/Start Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by Vietnam, North, (Communist) Ideocracy]: On this date, Communist forces seized Saigon, effectively marking the conclusion of South Vietnam's existence as an independent nation. The formal reunification with the North took place the subsequent year (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014: 107). On 07/02/1976, the conclusion of the Vietnam War signaled the commencement of the transitional phase leading towards reunification. This culminated in a national election for reunification on the same day, when the Republic of South Vietnam merged with North Vietnam, establishing the modern-day Vietnam.¹⁶ According to LIED, both executive and legislative elections were held, but they were not categorized as multiparty. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Political liberties were absent according to LIED and ambiguous according to V-Dem's PCLI. LIED lists both elections as well as universal suffrage as present during this period.

07/02/1976 End Vietnam, South [Indirect Rule Occupation Regime]:

For the time after 07/02/1976, see Vietnam.

Additional sources (Donnell/Joiner 1974, Penniman 1972)

Notes

- ¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Vietnam
- ² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vietnam>
- ³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngo_Dinh_Diem
- ⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngo_Dinh_Diem
- ⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ngo_Dinh_Diem
- ⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_Kh%C3%A1nh
- ⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_V%C4%83n_Thi%E1%BB%87u
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_V%C4%83n_Thi%E1%BB%87u
- ⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_V%C4%83n_Thi%E1%BB%87u
- ¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_V%C4%83n_Thi%E1%BB%87u
- ¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Vietnam/The-two-Vietnams-1954-65>
- ¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Vietnam
- ¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Vietnam
- ¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Easter_Offensive
- ¹⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1975_spring_offensive
- ¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reunification_Day

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