



Vietnam — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[officially known as Viet Nam]

06/06/1862 Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France]: With the Treaty of Saigon on 06/05/1862, Saigon and three southern provinces known as Cochinchina were ceded to France.¹ On 06/06/1884 Tonkin and Annam became a French protectorate by the Treaty of Hue.² The three significant regions of Vietnam - Tonkin in the north, Annam in the central area, and Cochinchina in the south - fell under French control between 1862 and 1884. Subsequently, they were amalgamated with Cambodia and Laos to establish the French-ruled Indochinese Union, commonly referred to as French Indochina (Lansford 2021: 1846). The French administration was centralized with a governor-general in Saigon and a “résident supérieur” in each protectorate’s capital. The civil service, overseen by the French, included Vietnamese officials at lower levels, some working in the colonial administration. French Indochina operated through three advisory councils, dealing with governance, economics, and defense. Yet, Cochinchina was governed by a lieutenant governor (and, after 1911, a governor), advised by private and colonial councils. The private council, consisting of ten members appointed by the governor-general, featured two Vietnamese officials. In contrast, the colonial council comprised ten members elected by resident French citizens and ten “native” members chosen by Vietnamese citizens with limited voting rights. While the Vietnamese emperor held nominal authority, actual power resided with the French. Khôi Đức, seen as a French puppet, was proclaimed emperor on 05/17/1916, succeeded by his son, Bảo Đại, on 01/08/1926. The anti-French Thái Nguyên uprising broke out during the Second World War but was swiftly suppressed (Corfield 2008).

09/22/1940 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of France, Direct Rule Occupation Regime]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Constitutional Monarchy under French administration]: On 09/20/1940, an agreement was signed between the French governor general, Jean Decoux, and Japan, granting Japanese access to Haiphong harbor and permission to station up to 6,000 troops in northern Vietnam. Just two days later, on 09/22/1940, Japanese forces initiated an invasion of Vietnam, swiftly achieving full control within a week. Despite this invasion, the French colonial government had nominal power, albeit significantly weakened, as Vietnam was effectively in Japan’s possession under the French administration. From 1941 to 1945, under the leadership of Decoux, the French colonial authorities adopted a policy of coexistence with the Japanese occupiers.³ LIED does not provide any data for this country LIED does not provide date for Vietnam before 1945. V-Dem’s PCLI classifies political liberties as ambiguous in 1945 and does not provide data prior to that year.

03/11/1945 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by Japan, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Japan, Constitutional Monarchy]: The Japanese forces ceased their support of the dual imperial regime, leading to the ousting of the French administration through the arrest of all French colonial officials. Consequently, Japan replaced the French colonial administration, and Vietnam became de facto a Japanese colony. Following the disarmament of French soldiers, the emperor Bảo Đại was permitted to declare Vietnamese independence and appoint a Vietnamese national government. Nevertheless, the actual political authority remained firmly under the control of Japanese military commanders. In March 1945, Vietnam became part of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.⁴ After the French administration was ousted from

the North, H Chí Minh's section of the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) joined with non-communist forces, forming the leading political group called the League for the Independence of Vietnam (Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh, or simply Viet Minh) (Hartmann 2001). LIED does not treat Vietnam during its colonial period.

09/02/1945 End Direct Rule Colonial Regime [of Japan, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start One-Party Autocracy: After Japan surrendered on 08/15/1945, a series of events which was later called collectively the "August Revolution", took place and China and France began occupying Vietnam. On 09/02/1945, H Chí Minh took over as president following emperor B o Đ i's forced resignation and declared the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). On 11/11/1945, the ICP dissolved itself to reassure the Chinese occupation authorities, and the DRV controlled the government and most provinces in the north. However, the communist DRV was "in an uneasy relationship with the Chinese military" which enforced a power-sharing system with China-oriented anti-communist parties, the Viet Nam Nationalist Party (VNQQD) and the Vietnamese Revolutionary League (DMH) (Tønnesson 2010: 16). This early combination of communist dominance with tactical party dissolution and externally enforced power-sharing indicates an incomplete institutionalization of a Marxist-Leninist party-state fusion, which is why we do not code the regime as Communist Ideocracy during this phase. In the months following independence, the DRV drafted and enacted its first constitution which provided for universal, direct, and secret suffrage and granted women equal rights and full political participation (Lessard 2004). On 01/06/1946, the first general election ever in areas controlled by north Vietnam was held, in which all people 18 years old or older were eligible to vote. However, in most areas, only the Vi t Minh put forth candidates. Voters chose from a list of names, electing those with the most votes. Before the election, Chinese generals brokered an agreement between the Vi t Minh and the two China-oriented nationalist parties, VNQQD and DMH. This deal permitted the latter to appoint seventy unelected delegates to the national assembly. This portrayed the Vi t Minh as a political party rather than an overarching national consensus organization. However, despite the VNQDD and DMH being granted some ostensibly significant positions in the government, they never wielded genuine control, with the Vi t Minh maintaining dominance (Tønnesson 2010: 26). Conducted according to the provisions of the 1946 constitution, the election saw the Communist-led Vi t Minh emerge victorious, securing 182 out of 302 seats. However, the allocation of seats among parties had been predetermined prior to the elections. Notably, the voting process lacked secrecy, with ballot papers completed in the presence of aides to assist comrades facing challenges in marking their ballots. These features imply that the appearance of multiparty participation did not translate into genuine competition for executive control, since opposition actors were incorporated as controlled satellites and key outcomes were fixed in advance; for this reason, we do not classify the regime as Electoral Autocracy, which presupposes meaningfully competitive multiparty elections that can credibly determine the effective head of government. The south of Vietnam was controlled by France, which rejected a communist-led unification and aimed for an Indochinese federation to contain the communist government in the north. On 03/06/1946, an agreement was signed between France and H Chí Minh, leading to nine months of co-existence between the French Fourth Republic and the DRV. On 09/14/1946, the conflicting parties signed a modus vivendi, including a ceasefire in southern Vietnam, effective from 10/31/1946. However, on 12/19/1946, an armed struggle broke out in Hanoi, marking the outbreak of the First Indochina War between France and the DRV (Tønnesson 2010). On 07/02/1949, France proclaimed the Associated State of Vietnam, granting it partial autonomy within the French Union under the leadership of Bao Dai. This led to a struggle for legitimacy between B o Đ i and H Chí Minh during the First Indochina War. However, since 09/02/1945, the DRV had already declared the nation's independence and controlled the majority of Vietnam's territory. Furthermore, its legitimacy was enhanced by the national assembly election of 01/06/1946, which saw an 89 percent participation rate among Vietnamese voters, both in the north and the south. Consequently, we classify this regime as a One-Party Autocracy of the DRV, because political participation was formally expanded while effective contestation was neutralized through candidate monopolization, pre-allocation of seats, and the subordination of nominal coalition partners, rather than

through genuinely competitive multiparty elections or a fully institutionalized communist ideocratic party-state. The Geneva Accords temporarily partitioned the nation into northern and southern zones at the 17th parallel, with the provision for general elections set for July 1956, intended to pave the way for the reunification of Vietnam. Based on our observations, executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held during this period. An exception is the specified period from 1951 to 1953, during which, according to LIED, no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Political liberties were absent according to LIED. V-Dem's PCLI classifies political liberties as ambiguous for 1946, not really present from 1947 to 1950 and as absent from 1951 onward. From 1946 to 1947, 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 moderate. For the remaining years, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. Following the Geneva Accords and the effective partition of Vietnam beginning in 07/1954, the regime trajectories diverged structurally. Therefore, subsequent coding proceeds on the basis of two separate regime units, Vietnam, North and Vietnam, South. In Vietnam, North, the consolidation of communist party supremacy and the routinization of Marxist-Leninist doctrine as operative governance logic justify a transition from One-Party Autocracy to Communist Ideocracy, whereas Vietnam, South follows a distinct non-communist regime path shaped by different patterns of contestation and external support.

For the time between 07/21/1954 and 07/02/1976, see Vietnam, North and Vietnam, South. During this period only, Va-PoReg does not provide country-year observations for Vietnam as a unified country unit; regime coding is reported exclusively under Vietnam, North and Vietnam, South. From 07/02/1976 onward, coding resumes under Vietnam as the unified country unit.

07/02/1976 Start Communist Ideocracy [of Vietnam, North]: On 06/06/1975, the Provisional Revolutionary Government, ostensibly led by Huỳnh Tấn Phát, was established as the government of South Vietnam. However, true power rested in the hands of Phạm Hùng, the fourth-ranked member of the VWP Politburo and secretary of the party's South Vietnamese Committee. Subsequently, on 4/25/1976, a reunified Vietnam conducted elections for an expanded national assembly. On 7/2/1976, the assembly declared the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (SRV). On the same day, Tôn Đức Thắng, the incumbent president of North Vietnam, was appointed as the head of state, with Nguyễn Văn Bính and Nguyễn Hữu Thập as vice presidents. Phạm Văn Đồng, the former DRV premier, was tasked with leading a cabinet primarily composed of former North Vietnamese ministers, along with six additions from South Vietnam. Further, on 12/20/1976, the VWP concluded a congress in Hanoi, renaming itself the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) and adopting guidelines aimed at realizing the nation's "socialist goals" (Lansford 2021: 1846). On 12/18/1980, the national assembly unanimously passed a new constitution, establishing a state council as a collective presidency and a council of ministers led by a prime minister as head of government. These positions were to be elected by the national assembly. Constitutional changes in 1992 affirmed the central role of the VCP, replaced the state council by a president as head of state who would appoint the prime minister (approved by the national assembly) as head of the council of ministers.⁵ Nonetheless, political dissent remains prohibited (Hartmann 2001). At the 11th National Congress in 2011, Nguyễn Phú Trọng was elected General Secretary of the VCP. At the same congress, the Central Steering Committee for Anti-Corruption was removed from the control of the Prime Minister and Nguyễn Phú Trọng was elected as committee head. In 2012, he urged the VCP to adopt a resolution calling for self-criticism, which was aimed at decreasing corruption. Nguyễn Phú Trọng was reelected as General Secretary for a second term in 2016 and further pursued his anti-corruption campaign, which led to disciplinary action against 110 senior party members. On 10/03/2018, after the death of Trần Đại Quang, the Central Committee nominated Nguyễn Phú Trọng for the presidency. He was elected as president on 10/23/2018, consolidating considerable power as he was still holding the office of General Secretary at the same time. He was reelected to this office for a third term on

01/31/2021.⁶ Moreover, elections to the national assembly are controlled by the VCP, which won 485 of 499 seats in an election held on 05/21/2021, even the ostensibly independent candidates were under the VCP's influence. The VCP remains the only legal party, controlling all electoral bodies and disqualifying or arresting genuinely independent candidates.⁷ President Nguyen Xuan Phuc was compelled to resign following a sweeping anti-corruption crackdown in January 2023. He was succeeded in March by Vo Van Thuong after being elected by the parliament. On 05/22/2024 To Lam took over as president. On 07/18/2024 General Secretary Nguyen Phu Trong died, and president To Lam succeeded him in this role, once again consolidating power by holding both the presidential office and the office of General Secretary.⁸ The VCP still maintains exclusive control over political power, with no other parties permitted to function legally.⁹ Based on our observations, executive and legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. For the entire period, LIED identifies political liberties as absent, and V-Dem's PCLI is classified by us as indicating also that political liberties are absent. Until 2004 and From 2019 to 2021, V-Dem's JCE is classified by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were absent, whereas V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were limited. From 2005 to 2012, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, and V-Dem's LCE is similarly interpreted as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were also limited. From 2013 to 2017, 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 moderate. For the remaining years, 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 moderate.

Communist Ideocracy as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional sources Additional sources (Donnell/Joiner 1974, Malesky/Schuler 2008, Saxonberg 2001, Lai/Slater 2006)

Notes

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Saigon_\(1862\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Saigon_(1862))

² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Hu%E1%BA%BF_\(1884\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Hu%E1%BA%BF_(1884))

³ <https://alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/japanese-occupation-of-vietnam/>

⁴ <https://www.nationalww2museum.org/war/articles/vietnam-war> <https://alphahistory.com/vietnamwar/japanese-occupation-of-vietnam/>

⁵ https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Socialist_Republic_of_Vietnam_2013?lang=en

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_Ph%C3%BA_Tr%E1%BB%8Dng

⁷ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/vietnam/freedom-world/2023>

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nguy%E1%BB%85n_Ph%C3%BA_Tr%E1%BB%8Dng

⁹ <https://freedomhouse.org/country/vietnam/freedom-world/2024>

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