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Tu Thi Thoa

**THE PROBLEMS OF BUILDING A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY UNDER THE
ONE-PARTY SYSTEM IN CONTEMPORARY VIETNAM**

Specialty 5.5.2 – Political Institutions, Processes, and Technologies

ABSTRACT

**of the dissertation for the degree of
candidate of political sciences**

Academic Advisor:
Doctor of Political Sciences, Professor
Vladimir Alexandrovich Volokh

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Relevance of the research topic

The topic “The problems of building a democratic society under the one-party system in contemporary Vietnam” is of considerable scholarly interest for several reasons.

Firstly, the democratization process represents a key trajectory in socio-political development, particularly in the context of globalization and increasing interconnectivity among nations. Vietnam, situated at the intersection of traditional and modern values, faces the need to adapt its state institutions and governance mechanisms to evolving societal demands. In this regard, the issue of building a democratic society is not only timely but also critically important, as it pertains to the fundamental principles of governance and social organization.

Secondly, Vietnam’s one-party system, which constitutes the foundation of its political structure, creates unique conditions for the implementation of democratic principles. In this context, it becomes essential to examine how democratic values can be actualized within such a system. The Communist Party of Vietnam, as the sole political force governing the country, declares its commitment to the ideals of democratic socialism. This entails an aspiration to build a society in which citizens’ rights and freedoms are protected, and state institutions function according to the principles of transparency and accountability. Realizing this goal requires not only theoretical justification but also practical measures aimed at strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring civil liberties. Therefore, analyzing the Party’s declared goals and concrete efforts toward democratization becomes particularly relevant.

Thirdly, contemporary Vietnamese society is undergoing profound transformations driven by rapid economic growth, urbanization, rising levels of educational attainment, and structural shifts in employment. These changes not only foster civic engagement but also generate increasing demands on the political system, presenting both opportunities and challenges for democratic development. While the Communist Party continues to play a central role in political decision-making and economic governance, ensuring national stability, it also faces growing challenges related to power consolidation and the development of a pluralistic political environment. In this context, as state institutions are expected to respond to new societal needs and expectations, the study of democratization becomes increasingly significant.

Moreover, the international community—including organizations such as the United Nations and ASEAN—closely monitors issues related to democracy and human rights, placing additional obligations on Vietnam to pursue democratic reforms. Against this backdrop, examining the factors that influence democratization, as well as the obstacles encountered in this process, is essential for identifying viable pathways for the country's development—both domestically and in the international arena.

Finally, it is crucial to emphasize that building a democratic society within a one-party system requires careful consideration of the country's historical, cultural, and social characteristics. Traditional models of democratization, typical of multiparty systems, are not always applicable to the Vietnamese context. Therefore, this research seeks to examine how Vietnam is advancing toward a democratic society under a one-party framework, with the aim of identifying practical challenges and contributing to both the theoretical and practical understanding of democratic reforms—within Vietnam specifically and in one-party systems more broadly.

The extent of scholarly research on the topic

The issue of democracy remains at the forefront of global political science discourse. Contemporary scholars, drawing on various methodological approaches, strive to comprehend the essence and prospects of democratic governance. In the liberal tradition (J.S. Mill, R.A. Dahl, A. Lijphart), democracy is viewed as a tool for protecting individual rights and achieving social consensus, while M. Weber and J.A. Schumpeter advanced an elitist approach. Theories of pluralist, participatory, and deliberative democracy (S.M. Lipset, C. Pateman, J. Habermas) have broadened the conceptualization of democracy as a process of inclusion and public deliberation. The Marxist theory of democracy, developed in the works of K. Marx, F. Engels, and V.I. Lenin, offers an alternative paradigm in which democracy is interpreted as a form of popular rule aimed at eliminating exploitation and achieving social justice.

Building on Marxist theory, Ho Chi Minh developed his own concept of socialist democracy, adapted to Vietnam's historical and cultural context and the goals of national liberation. In Ho Chi Minh's interpretation, democracy acquires not only an institutional but also a moral dimension—as a form of people's power oriented toward serving the people, ensuring the moral integrity of the ruling cadres, and fostering unity among the Party, the state, and society.

The concept of a democratic society is actively explored in contemporary political science as a form that transcends the purely institutional definition of democracy. J. Dewey conceptualized a democratic society as a form of associative life grounded in dialogue, equality, and inclusiveness. J. Schumpeter proposed a procedural approach, emphasizing elite competition and institutional maturity. Russian scholars have also made significant contributions: B.N. Chicherin emphasized the importance of the rule of law and strong authority; M.A. Bakunin defended the idea of direct popular self-governance within the anarchist tradition; G.Kh. Shakhnazarov advanced the concept of socialist democracy; and G.G. Diligensky highlighted the role of civil society and political culture.

Various typologies of party systems and their impact on the stability of democratic order are well-documented in academic literature. S. Huntington emphasized that the effectiveness of a party system depends not on the number of parties but on their ability to achieve consensus and ensure stability. A. Lijphart and J. Carey highlighted the importance of pluralism in segmented societies, while G.B. Powell pointed to the risks associated with excessive fragmentation. Some Russian thinkers, including B.N. Chicherin and A.A. Zinoviev, criticized the universalization of the Western multiparty model, arguing that it is not always compatible with the objectives of sustainable governance.

In recent decades, there has been growing interest in alternative forms of democracy grounded in national and cultural specificities. In post-Soviet Russia, the discourse of “sovereign democracy” (V.Yu. Surkov) emphasizes the primacy of sovereignty and stability over universalist models. In East and Southeast Asian countries, various models have emerged that rely on the values of collective responsibility, social harmony, and strong governance (e.g., Lee Kuan Yew, the Chinese model of socialism). In Vietnam, a distinct concept of socialist democracy is taking shape, rooted in the principles of unity, justice, and cultural identity within a one-party system.

Vietnam’s political evolution and the specific nature of its democratic transformations during the Đổi Mới (Renovation) reforms have been extensively studied by both Russian and international scholars. Among them are E.V. Kobelev, V.M. Mazyrin, G.M. Lokshin, O.V. Novakova, V.N. Kolotov, P.Yu. Tsvetov, E.E. Vlasov, among others. Particular attention has been paid to the ideological course of the

Communist Party of Vietnam, the transformation of political institutions, and the integration of socialist and market principles in the modernization process.

Western scholars (S. Tønnesson, B.J.T. Kerkvliet, C.A. Thayer, E. Malesky, M. Gainsborough) analyze Vietnam's democratization as a managed, evolutionary process that incorporates elements of civic participation, public criticism, and feedback mechanisms within a one-party framework.

In contemporary Vietnamese scholarship, democracy is examined through the prism of the one-party system and national particularities. Particular emphasis is placed on the concept of socialist democracy as a form of popular rule based on harmony among the Party, the state, and the people. Professor Nguyen Phu Trong emphasizes the combination of democracy and discipline as a condition for implementing the socialist project. Nguyen Dang Dung and Le Minh Quan underscore the importance of civic participation and accountability; Bui Nguyen Khanh focuses on institutional strengthening through legal guarantees; and Pham Van Duc explores the reconciliation of interests within the one-party framework. Professor Hoang Chi Bao stresses the moral dimension of democracy, rooted in integrity and public service. Significant contributions have also been made by To Huy Rua, Tran Khac Viet, Do Phu Hai, among others.

Object of the research

The main subject of this research is the process of building a democratic society in Vietnam within the context of a one-party political system.

Subject of the research

This study specifically focuses on the policies, mechanisms, and methods employed by the Communist Party of Vietnam to construct a democratic society and promote national development under the conditions of one-party rule.

The aim and objectives of the dissertation research

The primary aim of this dissertation is to analyze the policies and mechanisms employed to advance democracy in Vietnam and to evaluate the achievements made throughout this process. Additionally, the dissertation seeks to identify the challenges involved in building a democratic society under one-party rule in contemporary Vietnam.

To achieve this aim, the following objectives are set:

1. To systematize the main theories of democracy from the perspective of contemporary political science.

2. To analyze the concept of a democratic society and the theoretical approaches to its formation.

3. To examine the relationship between democratic development and the party system.

4. To identify the perspectives and goals of the Communist Party of Vietnam in promoting democratic governance.

5. To analyze the measures implemented by the Communist Party of Vietnam to foster democracy in contemporary Vietnam.

6. To assess the key internal and external factors influencing the process of building a democratic society in contemporary Vietnam, with particular emphasis on the country's cultural and historical legacy as the foundation for the development of a distinct Vietnamese model of socialist democracy.

7. To identify the main problems that arise in the process of building a democratic society under the leadership of a ruling party in contemporary Vietnam.

The theoretical and methodological framework of the research

The theoretical foundation and methodological approach of this study are grounded in contemporary democratic theories. The author draws upon a variety of democratic models to examine the range of approaches and interpretations surrounding the concept of democracy. The following theoretical paradigms are considered: the liberal-democratic model (J.S. Mill); the elitist model of democracy (M. Weber, J.A. Schumpeter); the pluralist model (R.A. Dahl, S.M. Lipset); the consociational model (A. Lijphart); the participatory model (C. Pateman, C.B. Macpherson, B. Barber); the deliberative model (J. Habermas, S. Benhabib, A. Gutmann, D.F. Thompson); and the socialist model of democracy as developed by K. Marx, F. Engels, and V.I. Lenin.

The analysis of the relationship between the construction of a democratic society and the nature of the party system—drawing on party system typologies (M. Duverger, G. Sartori), theories of party competition and democratic stability (E. Schattschneider, G.B. Powell, A. Lijphart, J.M. Carey, S. Huntington, among others)—serves as a crucial theoretical basis for exploring the specific characteristics of Vietnam's democratic process. S. Huntington's theories on the "third wave of democratization," the cultural embeddedness of political institutions, and the role of parties in stabilizing transitional

regimes offer deeper insights into the sources of resilience in the Vietnamese political system.

At the same time, the study integrates modern approaches that argue successful democratization is possible outside the framework of a traditional multiparty system. For instance, A.Yu. Melville emphasizes the decisive role of state institutional capacity, while R. Inglehart and C. Welzel underscore the importance of cultural values, interpersonal trust, and long-term socio-political conditions for democratic development. Of particular interest are alternative models of democracy rooted in national traditions and historical specificities. Examples include sovereign democracy in post-Soviet Russia (V.Yu. Surkov), the Asian values model (Lee Kuan Yew), and the Chinese concept of socialism with national characteristics—all of which illustrate the diversity of democratic trajectories beyond the Western liberal paradigm. These approaches enable the Vietnamese model to be viewed not as a deviation, but as an independent path that combines political stability, party leadership, and elements of institutionalized participation.

Within this context, Ho Chi Minh's political thought is regarded as a core theoretical framework defining the principles of socialist democracy—grounded in popular sovereignty, social justice, and broad public participation in governance. This model has been developed within the framework of a one-party system and is based on mechanisms such as grassroots democracy, intra-party deliberation, and institutionalized dialogue between the state and society. The research also draws on political documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam, legal and regulatory frameworks of the state, as well as academic studies by both Vietnamese and international scholars, thereby enabling a comprehensive assessment of the specific features of building a democratic society in contemporary Vietnam and identifying the key factors influencing this process.

The dissertation employs a comprehensive methodological approach that integrates various research methods to ensure a thorough analysis of the topic under consideration. The principal tool is comparative political analysis, which is employed to examine theoretical models of democracy, concepts of democratic society, and the interaction between party systems and democratic institutions.

In addition, general scientific methods—such as analysis, synthesis, induction, and deduction—are applied to establish logical connections between theoretical propositions

and empirical observations. Historical and statistical methods are utilized to examine the strategic orientations of the Communist Party of Vietnam in the context of building a democratic society, as well as to trace the dynamics of social transformation in the country. Special attention is devoted to identifying key political decisions and societal processes that have shaped the evolution of Vietnam's model of democracy.

Evaluations conducted by international organizations also play a significant role, providing comparative analyses and forecasts regarding the prospects for democratic development in Vietnam. Throughout the research, the method of secondary document analysis is applied to a carefully curated selection of sources, including academic publications, official materials from state and party institutions, the current Charter of the Communist Party of Vietnam, party policy documents and resolutions, the Constitution, and the country's legislative acts.

This methodological framework enables the author to comprehensively assess the distinctive features and specific characteristics of the process of building a democratic society under a one-party system.

Scientific contribution of the research

1. For the first time in Russian political science, a comprehensive analysis has been conducted on the process of building a democratic society in Vietnam under a one-party system. This study substantiates the existence of an alternative trajectory of democratization, distinct from Western liberal models. It identifies the unique characteristics of the Vietnamese model of socialist democracy—grounded in Ho Chi Minh's political thought, the moral responsibility of governing authorities, and institutionalized popular participation in the absence of political pluralism.

2. Drawing on theoretical analysis, argumentative reasoning, and statistical data, the dissertation reveals the objectives and concrete measures undertaken by the Communist Party of Vietnam to construct a democratic society. It traces how the Party seeks to balance the retention of political power with the implementation of democratic principles, highlighting its dual role as both a monopolistic authority and an institution of strategic governance and political modernization.

3. The dissertation offers an original interpretation of the Vietnamese model of socialist democracy as an institutional complex. This model incorporates mechanisms of intra-party democracy, popular oversight, digital participation platforms, and consultative

dialogue between the state and society. The study highlights the distinctive features of "grassroots democracy" that shape administrative practices within the framework of a one-party system.

4. The research identifies and categorizes internal and external factors influencing the democratization process in Vietnam, including economic modernization, international obligations, the rise of civic activism, and the enduring influence of traditional norms such as Confucianism, patriotism, and collectivism. The interplay of these factors is shown to determine the adaptive nature of democratic development and underscores the need for a comprehensive national strategy.

5. The study analyzes the institutional and cultural constraints to democratic development in Vietnam, including weak separation of powers, entrenched bureaucratism, limited autonomy of representative bodies, and a low level of political awareness among segments of the population. Based on these findings, the research proposes directions for institutional reform aimed at enhancing accountability, transparency, and political participation—while preserving the one-party framework.

Theoretical and practical significance of the research

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to advancing scholarly understanding of democratization processes within a one-party system, using the case of Vietnam—an area that remains underexplored in contemporary political science. The dissertation offers a critical analysis of existing models of democracy—from liberal to socialist—not as an end in itself, but as a methodological foundation for identifying the specificity of Vietnam's sovereign approach to democratization. Special attention is given to uncovering the potential of the Vietnamese model, grounded in Ho Chi Minh's political thought, the moral responsibility of political leadership, and broad public participation through grassroots self-governance institutions. The study substantiates the concept of a unique trajectory of democratic development, distinct from Western liberal standards, thereby contributing to a deeper theoretical understanding of democracy shaped by national and cultural particularities and reinforcing the foundation for future research on post-Soviet and postcolonial models.

The practical significance of the research lies in its examination of real mechanisms and political practices that facilitate the formation of a democratic society in Vietnam under a one-party system. The dissertation substantiates and systematizes various forms

of democratic citizen participation implemented within the existing political framework, including intra-party democracy, mechanisms for public consultation, citizen involvement in the formulation and oversight of socio-economic development programs, as well as the activities of people's deputies and mass public organizations. The findings may serve as a methodological and analytical basis for evaluating the effectiveness of existing democratic institutions and for designing new approaches aimed at enhancing their functionality and resilience.

The results of this study are of interest to public authorities, the Communist Party of Vietnam, and civil society organizations, as they help identify factors that promote greater political engagement, strengthen public trust in state institutions, and expand channels of feedback between the government and society. The practical recommendations may be applied in the development and revision of political modernization strategies that promote sustainable development, social stability, and the legitimacy of the ruling party amid rising public expectations and increasing international integration.

Furthermore, the dissertation contributes to international academic discourse on the diversity of democratization models. The comparative analysis based on the Vietnamese experience constitutes a valuable resource for researchers, educators, and students engaged in the study of democratic theory, regime transformation, and sustainable development. The research materials can be utilized in academic curricula in political science and regional studies, as well as in the work of think tanks and expert communities.

Research findings presented for defense

1. Democracy, in the context of global diversity, should be understood as an adaptive form of popular rule rather than a universal template. Against this backdrop, the Vietnamese model of socialist democracy—rooted in Marxist-Leninist doctrine and Ho Chi Minh's political thought—is evolving within a one-party system as an independent trajectory of democratic development. Comparative analysis demonstrates that, unlike Western models which emphasize legal procedures and elite competition, the Vietnamese approach prioritizes consensus, stability, and collective responsibility as the foundational elements of democratic governance.

2. Democratization in Vietnam is not conceived as a one-time transition, but rather as an institutionalized and gradual process. An examination of the perspectives and strategic goals of the Communist Party of Vietnam reveals a long-term democratization

strategy grounded in the principles of moral responsibility in governance and the prioritization of social cohesion as the basis for sustainable political development.

3. A distinctive feature of Vietnam's democratization path is the institutional expansion of popular participation without abandoning the one-party principle. This path is being implemented through the development of intra-party democracy, open government mechanisms, digital platforms (including e-petitions and feedback channels), anti-corruption measures, and the strengthening of representative bodies and mass civic organizations. In addition, "grassroots democracy"—realized through citizen engagement in local decision-making—plays a crucial role in shaping a managed and adaptive model of socialist democracy, grounded in participation, accountability, and dialogue between the state and society.

4. Within the one-party system, Vietnam faces institutional constraints that complicate the democratization process. Weak separation of powers, the fusion of party and state structures, and entrenched bureaucratism undermine the effectiveness of accountability mechanisms. These issues underscore the need for deep institutional modernization aimed at enhancing transparency and establishing a more functional separation of powers.

5. Limited transparency in public administration, the persistence of corruption, gaps in legislation on citizens' rights, and insufficient political engagement among segments of the population constitute an interconnected set of challenges that hinder the progressive development of democratic governance. Overcoming these challenges requires not only institutional reform but also a profound transformation of political culture, the enhancement of civic education, and the establishment of effective feedback mechanisms that enable active and informed citizen participation in political processes and public policy formulation.

6. Vietnam's democratization process is shaped by both internal and external transformational factors, including economic modernization, middle-class growth, urbanization, digitalization, and international commitments. These dynamics have intensified public demands for participation and government accountability while simultaneously posing new challenges that necessitate balanced state policies aimed at the inclusive and sustainable development of democratic institutions.

7. Vietnam's cultural and historical heritage forms a crucial foundation for shaping its unique model of democracy, rooted in values such as communitarianism, village-level self-governance, respect for authority, and moral responsibility. At the same time, enduring hierarchical attitudes, the prioritization of social harmony over individual freedom, and the resilience of informal practices—including patronage and reliance on personal networks—act as constraints on civic engagement, the development of a culture of open deliberation, and increased transparency in governance.

8. The construction of a democratic society under Vietnam's one-party system is being pursued through a distinct, socialist-oriented model of democracy under the leadership of the Communist Party. The future of this model depends on the party-state leadership's capacity to effectively leverage favorable factors to deepen democratization and address the identified challenges. A key condition for continued progress lies in the alignment of political will, CPV-led reform initiatives, and active public support.

Approbation of research results

The findings of the dissertation research have been presented in 18 scholarly publications authored independently and in co-authorship by the researcher. These include: 3 articles published in journals indexed in the Web of Science database, and 10 articles published in peer-reviewed journals from the list approved by the Higher Attestation Commission, in the field of specialization 5.5.2 – Political Institutions, Processes, and Technologies.

Structure of the dissertation

The structure of the dissertation corresponds to the stated research aim and objectives. The document includes an introduction, three chapters divided into sections, a conclusion, and a bibliography.