Vietnam in the democratization process: Dynamics from the process of international integration and the development of information-communication technology

Vietnam dalam proses demokratisasi: Dinamika proses integrasi internasional dan perkembangan teknologi informasi dan komunikasi

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Abstract

This article delves into the complex dynamics of Vietnam's democratization process, highlighting the simultaneous influences of international integration and advancements in science and technology. This study investigates the impact of Vietnam's increasing involvement in the global economy and international community, as well as its adoption of technological advancements, on the country's path toward democratization. The study utilizes a mixed approach, blending qualitative analysis of scientific documents, Vietnamese government policies, and quantitative data on the democracy index from international organizations. It identifies international integration as a double-edged sword: on one hand, it boosts economic growth and development, driving the democratic transition process forward; on the other hand, it also leads to economic dependence and inequality, potentially impeding democratic reform. The findings of this study show that the rapid progress of science and technology, especially information and communication technology, presents both opportunities and difficulties for Vietnam's democratic process. It provides unparalleled opportunities for widespread involvement in political activities and the spread of democratic principles, but it also carries the risk of social unrest and the potential for the authoritarian state to control and manipulate information.

Keywords: digital transformation; international integration; political reform; Vietnamese democracy

Abstrak

Artikel ini menyelidiki dinamika kompleks proses demokratisasi Vietnam, menyoroti pengaruh integrasi internasional dan kemajuan ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi secara simultan. Studi ini menyelidiki dampak meningkatnya keterlibatan Vietnam dalam perekonomian global dan komunitas internasional, serta penerapan kemajuan teknologi, dalam perjalanan negara tersebut menuju demokratisasi. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan campuran, memadukan analisis kualitatif dokumen ilmiah, kebijakan pemerintah Vietnam, dan data kuantitatif indeks demokrasi dari organisasi internasional. Hal ini mengidentifikasi integrasi internasional sebagai pedang bermata dua: di satu sisi, hal ini meningkatkan pertumbuhan dan pembangunan ekonomi, mendorong proses transisi demokrasi ke depan; di sisi lain, hal ini juga menyebabkan ketergantungan dan kesenjangan ekonomi, sehingga berpotensi menghambat reformasi demokrasi. Temuan studi ini menunjukkan bahwa pesatnya kemajuan ilmu pengetahuan dan teknologi, khususnya teknologi informasi dan komunikasi, menghadirkan peluang dan kesulitan bagi proses demokrasi Vietnam. Hal ini memberikan peluang yang tidak ada duanya bagi keterlibatan luas dalam kegiatan politik dan penyebaran prinsip-prinsip demokrasi, namun juga membawa risiko kerusuhan sosial dan potensi negara otoriter untuk mengontrol dan memanipulasi informasi.

Kata kunci: *transformasi digital; integrasi internasional; reformasi politik; demokratisasi Vietnam*

Introduction

Democratization is the process of incorporating democratic principles into the political system, culture and lifestyle (Przeworski & Limongi 1997). It has been a central issue of 20th-century political science (Mikhailovich 2022) Although there are many controversies surrounding the decisive conditions for successful democratization, such as the views of Lipset (1959), Huntington (1991) emphasizing the objective factor, or the views of O'Donnell & Schmitter (1986), Rustow (1999) emphasizing the subjective factor, democratization is a process that no country can ignore in the current period.

Political scientists have attempted to classify democratization processes in countries around the world. Linz (1978) described two basic ways of democratization, which are: (1) Reform (actions by ruling elites to establish democracy); (2) Breakdown (opposition overthrows the ruling elite and establishes democracy). Donald Share also added that the transition process from an authoritarian regime to democracy has four main types: gradual democratization, transformation through rupture, transformation through revolutionary struggle, and transformation through agreement (Share 1987). This classification seems clearer and deeper with Huntingtion's theory of democratic waves. This American political scientist described three types of democratization processes that can be carried out: (1) Transformation (when the ruling elite actively participate in dismantling a dictatorship and establishing a democratic government, as seen in Spain, Brazil, Hungary, and the Soviet Union); (2) Replacement (the strength of the opposition causes the government to gradually lose its strength and to collapse or be overthrown, as in Argentina, East Germany, Greece, Portugal, and the Philippines); (3) Negotiation (democratization is achieved through the joint actions of the ruling elite and the opposition) (Huntington 1991).

In today's worldwide trend, people are interested in the characteristics of the democratic process associated with various political systems. Democratization in contemporary communist nations is a unique circumstance. Communist states are known for their centralized power under single-party rule, emphasizing the importance of swift social change. This ideology is a fundamental aspect of Marxism-Leninism politics, prominently demonstrated in the historical contexts of the Soviet Union, China under Mao Zedong, or Cuba under Fidel Castro. Hence, the process of democratization in these nations encounters numerous challenges due to limited political diversity, constraints on civil rights, and governmental influence over businesses and media (Hardi 1980, Freedom House 2021). Moreover, the governments of these nations have actively promoted the notion that their style of governance is valid and efficient, influencing people to think that democracy is not essential for economic progress, as seen in China (Mitter & Johnson 2021). Nevertheless, democratization in contemporary communist nations has also started to exhibit signs of progress in recent years. Amidst the evolving global economic landscape and the influx of new ideologies into the lives of people in various countries, the one-party system is compelled to explore alternative routes to achieve democratization. These efforts have been put into practice, whether to enhance the political standing of the governing party or foster a true democratic transition (Gürcan 2014, Keping 2016, Friis et al. 2016, Sonoda et al. 2017 Bui 2020).

Democratization in any nation is an intricate and demanding procedure that is impacted by many internal and international factors. Acemoğlu and Robinson highlight key factors influencing democratization: (1) A robust civil society advocating for democratic reforms and government accountability; (2) political and economic crises fostering opportunities for reform and change; (3) a middle class capable of demanding political and economic rights; (4) political institutions enabling peaceful power transitions and safeguarding individual rights; (5) external actors and international organizations contributing to democratization efforts (Acemoğlu & Robinson 2005). Economic and social progress, along with the establishment of civil and political liberties, are crucial factors in the democratization of contemporary communist nations (Sanborn & Thyne 2014). Communist countries like China and Vietnam have experienced significant economic growth, leading to the emergence of a determined middle class seeking increased political representation and engagement (Ty 2021). Emerging property owners aiming to safeguard their interests can also enhance political freedom (Welzel & Inglehart 2005). The strong

development of science and technology and the emergence of civil society are also important variables promoting democratization in these countries (Zhang 1993). The interaction of these factors creates the potential for democratization in intricate ways.

The democratization process in Vietnam, like in other contemporary communist nations, is influenced by various variables such as economic advancement, societal transformation, and global interactions. The implementation of market-oriented reforms in the late 1980s, referred to as Doi Moi, resulted in substantial economic expansion and a transition toward a more open society. This article analyzes Vietnam as a representative example of contemporary communist nations reacting to the motivations for democratization. The arguments of this study also emphasize that worldwide integration and advancements in science and technology are speeding up the democratic process in Vietnam. Vietnam's single-party government is working to balance economic reform and the shift toward democracy to fulfill the democratic aspirations of its citizens and progress toward sustainable development.

Research Method

This research adopted a mixed approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of Vietnam's democratization process. The qualitative component involved a thorough document analysis, where scientific documents and Vietnamese government policies were scrutinized to glean insights into the intricate dynamics of democratization influenced by international integration and technological progress. Complementing this, the quantitative aspect utilized democracy indices from reputable international organizations to measure Vietnam's democratic progress.

The document analysis method involves examining and assessing documents to get insight into a research issue (Bowen 2009). For this method, the author determines the importance of the data source to be analyzed. The author chose data from the Web of Science collection as the primary data source for the analysis because of its reliability. It is a high-quality and comprehensive database source for academic research as it indexes thousands of renowned journals (Dahlander & Gann 2010). Setting up keywords was carried out by the author as an important step to obtain an accurate data set (Lu & Liu 2014).

The author consulted several experts on keywords, then identified the phrases "democracy," "democratization," "democratization and international integration," "revolution 4.0," "information technology—communication and democracy," "Vietnam," and "one-party rule" as the final search terms. In addition, to further analyze the research issue, the author used the assessment results of Vietnam by international organizations such as Freedom House, the World Bank, the Global State of Democracy (GSoD) by International IDEA, the Democracy Index by the Economist Group, etc., and official sources from journals, books, and scientific works as well as current legal documents of Vietnam.

The author's document analysis process is carried out as follows, as seen in Figure 1.
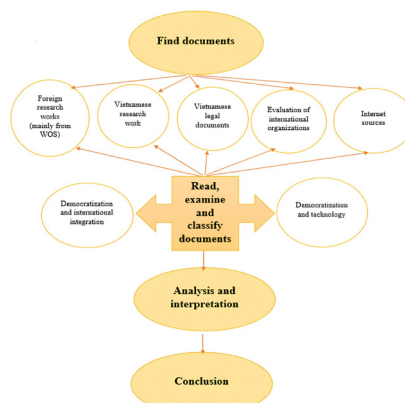

Figure 1.
Document analysis process (based on Bowen's guidelines)
Source: Bowen (2009)

The author has collected 158 relevant documents. The author carefully reviewed and handpicked 82 documents suitable for analyzing the study problem. The author concludes that democratization is a prevalent global tendency in the current setting. Vietnam, like other communist nations, had to shift to democracy despite maintaining a one-party political system. The democratization process in Vietnam is contentious because of varying approaches. Numerous objective and subjective factors are simultaneously influencing this process. International integration and the progress of science and technology, particularly information and communication technology, serve as significant catalysts in advancing the democratization process in Vietnam. These factors also have dual effects, posing several challenges for a developing nation like Vietnam striving to uphold political and social stability.

Results and Discussion

Vietnam, a country in Southeast Asia, has a rich history of political evolution. Prior to the 1986 Doi Moi reforms, Vietnam's political structure was characterized by centralized state control and an emphasis on socialist economic principles. Following the conclusion of the war in 1975, a revolutionary Marxist ideology introduced the concept of "people's democracy," which encompassed democratic centralism, a nationalized economy, and governance by the Communist Party (Sharma 1999). Throughout this period, the government maintained strict oversight of the economy, with the majority of industries being nationalized and limitations placed on private businesses (Boothroyd & Pham 2000). The government was grappling with the severe aftermath of the war, such as rebuilding the economy, tending to the needs of a war-weary population, and addressing the social impacts. During this period, due to the country's connection with the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, Vietnam has faced challenges in engaging with the global economy due to international isolation. In the early 1980s, the country entered a crisis as the economy's centralized planning system began to show signs of strain, leading to inefficiencies and stagnation (Kien & Heo 2008).

In 1986, Vietnam experienced a significant shift in its political and economic direction with the introduction of Doi Moi. Numerous factors, including the need for modernization and economic advancement, an increase in global isolation, and internal reform demands, have had an impact on this (Williams 1987). Vietnam's leadership has been compelled to implement reforms to tackle economic issues, enhance its international reputation, and uphold social stability. They started to understand the significance of private initiative and pecuniary incentives in stimulating agricultural and handicraft production and aimed to utilize these characteristics for economic development. The reforms have led to a positive transition toward a more market-driven economy. Vietnam has started to implement political reform alongside economic restructuring while operating under a one-party system. Local multicandidate elections facilitate enhanced political engagement and representation, fostering a level of diversity within the political framework. Efforts to improve openness and accountability through anti-corruption measures are crucial for advancing democratization. The term "democracy" is increasingly prevalent in official papers and ordinary conversations among Vietnamese people (Hong 2002).

Development in today's world involves more than simply economics; it is intricately linked to political governance, social equity, and cultural advancement (Agartan 2014, Li & Wang 2020). Democracy serves as the cornerstone for establishing a robust and enduring Vietnam in this scenario. Vietnamese political leaders have recognized that establishing democracy serves as a form of institutional protection to uphold the political system (Wright & Escribà-Folch 2012). In most speeches related to this issue, Trong (General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam) always emphasized that democracy is a fundamental value of socialism and the ultimate objective that President Ho Chi Minh, the Communist Party of Vietnam, and the Vietnamese people have embraced and are steadfastly working toward. Democracy is essential for the existence of socialism (Trong 2022).

The Vietnamese government has demonstrated efforts at democratic reform through reforming the political system, liberalizing the economy and paying more attention to human rights issues (Thoa 2023). However, Vietnam's democracy is still not widely recognized internationally (Tan 2020). The Global State of Democracy Indices' assessment of Vietnam's democratic effectiveness in the period from 2013 to 2022 is a concrete testament to this.
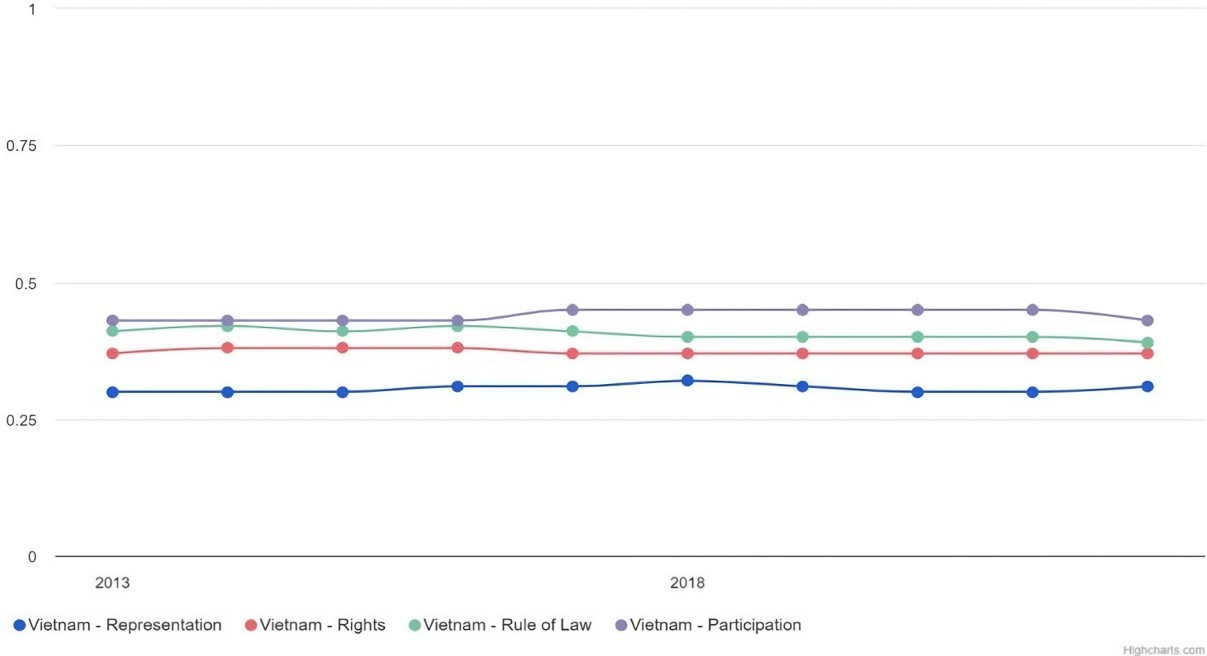
Source: International IDEA, The Global State of Democracy Indices v7.1, 2023

Figure 2.
GSoD Indices of Vietnam in the period 2013-2022
Source: International IDEA (2023)

Looking at Figure 2, it can be seen that, in the evaluation scale of GSoD Indices, with 0 (zero) representing the lowest achievement in the entire sample and 1 (one) representing the highest, the corresponding indices of Vietnam in 2022 have not reached 0.5 (representation: 0.31; rights: 0.37; rule of law: 0.39; participation: 0.43). Notably, these values did not show improvement over the evaluation period. The Participation value decreased from 0.45 in the period 2017-2021 to 0.43 in 2022, the Rule of Law value dropped from 0.41 in 2013 to 0.39 in 2022, and the Right and Representation values seem to have stayed constant over the last decade (International IDEA 2023). IDEA suggests that Vietnam has potential for democracy (International IDEA 2022), but its democracy index remains low despite economic reform initiatives and some minor political changes. This is similar to The Economist Group's 2022 Democracy Index Report, which also assessed Vietnam at only 2.67/10 points, ranking 138 out of the 167 countries evaluated (The Economist 2022). The Vietnamese government opposed the assessments, stating that it was not feasible to apply Western democratic criteria to judge democracy in a communist country like Vietnam (Department of Information and Communications of Son La province 2022, Nguyen 2023). The differing views on democracy between Vietnam and certain international organizations are creating a challenge for the Vietnamese government on how to gain global recognition for their version of democracy, frequently referred to as "democracy with Vietnamese characteristics." This country is under pressure to exert additional efforts to define its stance within the framework of integration and uphold its identity values, such as democratic principles.

The democratization process in Vietnam is influenced by various factors, both on the international and domestic fronts. International factors include integration trends, democratic waves, and the influence of democratic organizations globally. On the domestic front, factors such as the awareness of political elites, advancements in science and technology, economic impact, democratic aspirations of the people, and the growth of civil society play crucial roles. This study delves into the intricate aspects of the country's journey toward democratization, with a specific focus on how international integration and advancements in science and technology, particularly information and communication technology, are influencing Vietnamese democracy. This study's narrow focus enables a thorough exploration of the two specific factors, offering a comprehensive understanding of the effects of international integration and the advancement of science and technology on the democratization process in Vietnam.

International integration is strongly promoting the democratization process in Vietnam today

Today's world is increasingly complex, flexible and interdependent (Eun et al. 2022). Globalization has become an objective, inevitable trend that no country can ignore. It cannot be denied that globalization is promoting a strong process of transformation and innovation in democracy. This process has truly become a political whirlwind that attracts all "open" societies to varying degrees, giving new faces to democracy in different countries around the world. Democracy is no longer a specific value of each country or region but has become a global value.

As part of the global integration process, Vietnam aims to implement the "opening up the country" mechanism and diversify relationships to achieve the goal of a prosperous, strong nation with a fair, democratic, and civilized society (Communist Party of Vietnam 2021). With a diversified foreign policy and consistent support for multilateralism, Vietnam has transformed itself from a country with a centrally planned, self-reliant economy to one of the most external, deeply connected, and open countries for comprehensive cooperation, rising as a mid-level country in Asia (Do 2022). The country has established diplomatic relations with 189 countries globally, maintains economic and trade ties with over 230 countries and territories, and participates in over 70 international and regional organizations with 100 representative offices worldwide (Tien 2019).

International integration is a catalyst for democratization. It promotes democratization through closer connections between economies, political systems, and cultures (Bolton et al. 1996, Magistretti & Tabellini 2017). By promoting economic integration, countries can achieve growth (Freeman & Quinn 2012) that encourages the development of a middle class interested in pursuing political reform and enhancements in governance (Brou & Ruta 2011). Engagement in political alliances and international organizations encourages countries to embrace democratic principles through the requirements for membership that emphasize democracy and human rights (Gibler & Wolford 2006, Mansfield & Pevehouse 2006, Keohane et al. 2009). Globalization has enabled cross-cultural exchanges that have spread democratic ideals, motivating populations to challenge authoritarian regimes (Samosir 2023). In addition, international legal frameworks support human rights and push governments to embrace democratic practices (Sand-Zantman 2004). Nevertheless, the journey toward democratization is intricate and shaped by the distinct social, economic, and political environment of each nation (Policardo 2015). International integration can have a significant impact on democratization, but its effects vary depending on nation-wide receptivity and the global community's dedication to fostering democratic transitions.

International integration is also becoming a strong driving force for the democratization process in modern Vietnam. It pushes Vietnam to innovate its political system, especially by renovating the way of national governance toward transparency and efficiency and establishing the rule of law with a complete legal system - all steps in the process of democratization. This catalyst is even stronger when this Asian country has an "ambition" to deepen international integration in many fields (Vietnamese Government 2023). Pledges on maintaining socio-political stability and building democracy are being used by Vietnamese politicians to call for foreign investment. Speaking at the Future of Asia Conference in Tokyo (Japan) on June 11, 2018, Permanent Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of Vietnam, Mr. Truong Hoa Binh, affirmed: Vietnam is committed to maintaining "3 stability" to ensure the interests of

foreign enterprises in the process of investing in Vietnam. These are political-security stability, stable policies to attract foreign investment, and stability in constantly innovating policies. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese government will persist in enhancing the legal framework and policies to be investor-friendly and competitive in the region (Nguyen 2018).

The process of international integration has prompted Vietnam to liberalize trade and develop a market economy with reform and innovation policies in the economic field, promising a democratic transition in the future. Moreover, with the existence of a one-party state, Vietnam is now attracting international attention on human rights. The World Human Rights Organization has even called on the United States as well as the European Union (EU) to use human rights as a condition for expanding economic cooperation with Vietnam (Human Rights Watch 2019). These calls may not always garner immediate attention, but they do have an impact on Vietnam's standing and reputation on the global stage. Consequently, the one-party state has started to focus more on human rights concerns in recent years. The government seems to be acting with dual goals, both reforming political institutions, building democracy, and developing the economy through attracting more and more FDI.

Signing most international conventions on human rights has been part of Vietnam's process of integrating into the global community. This country has ratified a number of international agreements, including the International Covenant on Economic, Cultural, and Social Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention on the non-application of restrictions on procedural deadlines for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide; the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Convention against Torture; the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, etc. To comply with international rules and norms, Vietnam has had to make adjustments to its policies and laws, incorporating "human-centered" objectives into its development strategies. This has paved the way for the future development of a more democratic society in Vietnam. Ms. Caitlin Wiesen, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Vietnam, stated that Vietnam has attained a significant level of human development by focusing on human-centered development policies, prioritizing human development, and emphasizing equality in the country's socioeconomic development strategies and plans. This result is outstanding and paves the way for enhanced and expedited development in the future (Nguyen & Hoai 2021). Efforts for international integration also mean that Vietnam needs to comply with signed international principles and treaties. In particular, the country has recently been assessed as an active member of the UN Human Rights Council. With the second election to the UN Human Rights Council (in October 2022), Vietnam's significance and standing are becoming more recognized on the global stage. This is also creating pressure for the Vietnamese government to make more efforts to fulfill its human rights commitments and to properly demonstrate its role and responsibility to the international community.

Globalization serves as a catalyst for democratic transitions in the autocratic states of the world through the process of trade with democratic partners (Magistretti & Tabellini 2017). Vietnam's integration process has not only created opportunities for the country to develop economically and culturally but also expanded access to information. It has promoted Vietnam's democratic transition through access to information from countries with progressive democracies while preventing information monopolies from the state. It has been providing opportunities for people to access multidimensional information. This process also contributes to raising awareness of democracy among Vietnamese people, increasing their support for democracy.

Despite the positive effects, globalization and international integration are presenting specific challenges to the democratization process in Vietnam. The interdependence among nations, economies, and communities has presented numerous challenges to existing democratic structures (Goldin & Vogel 2010). These challenges often arise for developing nations when larger countries seek to exert influence by pushing for democratic changes in return for economic aid and support (Neher 1991, Hong 2002, Southall 2003). This may lead to conflicting democratic ideas within each nation and potentially disrupt the societal structure.

The integration process has also made Vietnam part of the global supply chain, highly dependent on international markets and external decisions. This dependency can limit Vietnam's economic independence and affect the country's ability to make its own decisions and shape domestic policies (Nguyen & Pham 2012), regardless of whether they are consistent with democratic goals. On the other hand, globalization can create economic inequality between localities as multinational businesses and companies tend to concentrate their investments in urban and developed areas, ignoring rural areas. As per a report by the Ministry of Planning and Investment of Vietnam, foreign capital investment in Vietnam is primarily focused on two major cities with outstanding infrastructure: Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (General Statistics Office of Vietnam 2023). This creates a gap between rich and poor, between regions and localities and leads to imbalances in society, creating many challenges to ensuring equity in the democratization process.

In addition, socio-political stability is considered a strength of Vietnam in the integration process; however, the integration process itself poses many challenges in this regard, as competition and rapid changes in the international environment can have an impact on increasing social tensions. At the same time, contact with different consciousnesses, values, and perspectives can also create contradictions and conflicts. International integration may also threaten to lose Vietnam's distinctive traditional cultural values. The spread of imported cultural elements and Western influences can deprive traditional culture of its diversity and uniqueness. This has an effect on the values of national roots, affects people's perceptions, and creates passivity toward autonomy and recognition of democratic values.

The development of technology, especially information and communication technology, is driving the democratization process in Vietnam today

Science and technology, particularly information technology, have significantly influenced global democracy by molding political structures and affecting public involvement (Colmer 1994, Weare 2002, Weiss 2005, Shirazi et al. 2010). This is particularly evident in a communist nation such as Vietnam. Vietnam's one-party government is recognizing the benefits of science and technology in the democratic transition process (Hong 2002), as well as the challenges posed by the growing and difficult-to-control media information (Howard et al. 2011). While some one-party nations are trying to combat the political influence of science and technology, particularly information technology (Kalathil & Boas 2001, Zhang 2006), the Vietnamese government has displayed a welcoming approach toward it (Dharmaraj 2019). Nguyen Phu Trong, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, signed a decision on September 27, 2019, to promulgate Resolution No. 52/NQ-TU on a number of rules and policies to actively participate in the fourth industrial revolution. As per the resolution, it was emphasized that Vietnam must update its approach to economic and social management, as well as institution-building, by adopting an open, creative, and deliberate strategy (Politburo of the Communist Party of Vietnam 2021).

The rise of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, coupled with advancements in information and communications technology, is fostering a bright outlook for the democratic process in Vietnam. This is articulated through several specific aspects, as outlined below:

First, create dynamism in Vietnamese political life. Nowadays, the internet provides Vietnam's political leaders with high levels of public awareness and exposure, while simultaneously transforming the country's public arena (Bui 2016). Vietnam's political elite has also begun to take a deeper look at the role of social media. Instead of limiting its growth in the view of some conservative politicians, many Vietnamese politicians have taken advantage of its advantages and used it as a tool to increase public participation. In 2015, former Minister of Health Nguyen Thi Kim Tien and the Government Office were reported to have been the first to utilize Facebook pages to publicize their actions to the general population (Thanh 2015). Subsequently, numerous politicians have effectively utilized this type of communication to engage with the people. Vu Lam's study (2022) found that Vietnamese politicians frequently utilize social media for social listening, which involves engaging with social media to keep informed about public comments, understand perspectives, and strengthen their feeling of personal accountability.

The advancement of the worldwide internet has accelerated internet growth in Vietnam. Furthermore, the acknowledgment by political elites of the internet's significance is accelerating this process. Internet penetration in Vietnam began in 1997, with barely 4% of the population using it in the first five years. After almost 25 years, the significant rise in the number of internet users in Vietnam is noteworthy.
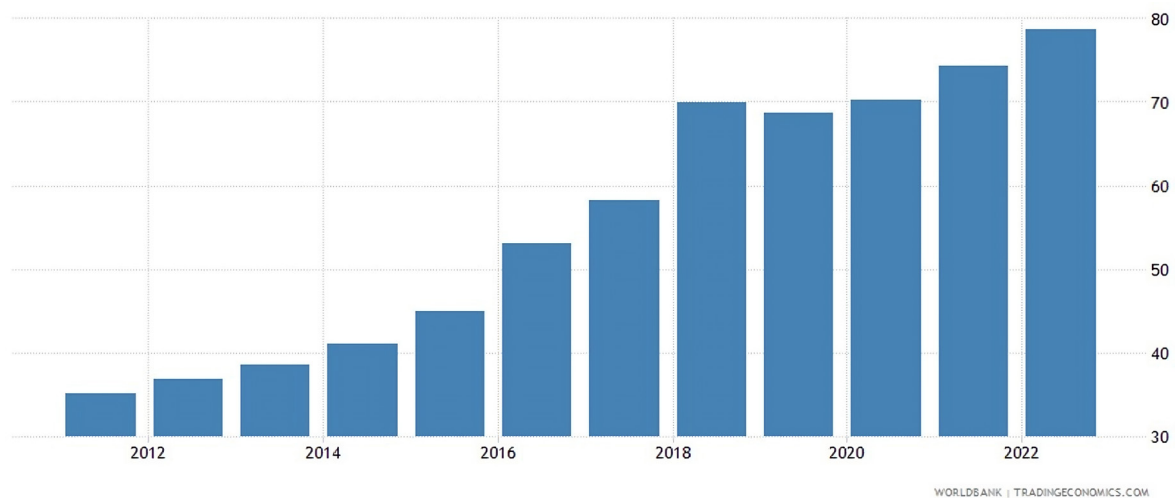

Figure 3.
Individuals using the Internet (% of population) in Vietnam (period 2011–2022)
Source: Worldbank (Trading Economics 2022)

Figure 3 illustrates the exponential growth of internet users in Vietnam, from over 35% in 2011 to over 80% in 2022. The most significant growth occurred in 2018, matching the rate of worldwide internet adoption. Vietnam is ranked 12th globally in terms of internet users, based on this number (Khuong 2023). This is a remarkable achievement for a developing country with a single-party political system like Vietnam.

The high rates of internet usage have caused a swift rise in online connectivity in Vietnam. Social communication platforms have thrived, encompassing blogs, chat rooms, online forums, and social networking sites. Information technology has become an important tool for the development of transnational civil society, i.e., the political participation of citizens (Lam 2022). Multiple studies indicate a direct relationship between social media and democracy, where nations with greater Facebook usage (representing social networks) tend to have more robust democratic systems) (Jha & Kodila-Tedika 2020). For a society associated with a one-party political regime like Vietnam, social media platforms development is considered an information revolution. If in the past (especially before the Doi Moi implementation period), the state was the only entity that released information through traditional means and people passively received it, today, the one-party state cannot prevent the development of various sources of information and diverse. Social media has led to a rise in public interest in debates, queries, and complaints regarding the guidelines of the Communist Party of Vietnam, as well as political, economic, cultural, and social issues. It is promoting energy and change in Vietnam's political environment.

Second, the internet attracts participation in discussions of Vietnamese people on social forums. If before 2009, Yahoo dominated the social network market share of this country, now, based on Data Reportal's Vietnam digital report 2023, the top five social networks in Vietnam by usage are: Facebook (91.6%), Zalo (90.1%), TikTok (77.5%), Facebook Messenger (77%), and Instagram (55.4%) (Data Reportal 2023). Social media in Vietnam is now considered a way to actively engage with others; it is actually attracting the participation of people in creating and exchanging increasingly complex issues, creating noticeable changes in people's political participation (Bui 2016). At the same time, the growing presence of public surveillance on social media is forcing the state apparatus to make significant changes to meet the needs of the population. Nowadays, information and communication technologies are integrated into the daily routines of regular people (Sayers 2013).

Third, it encourages a variety of information in Vietnamese society, despite government restrictions. One-party states frequently involve the restriction of information (Miletello 2011, King et al. 2013, Qiang 2019, Tai & Fu 2020). On June 12, 2018, the Cyber Security Law was also issued by the Vietnamese government. It outlines forbidden actions in cyberspace and the government's system for controlling information to safeguard national security, social order, safety, and the lawful rights and interests of individuals. This is also the reason why Freedom House assessed that Vietnam does not have freedom in cyberspace with a score of 22/100 points (Freedom House 2023). Nevertheless, this does not significantly affect the robust growth of public opinion in Vietnam's online community today. While the state completely owns and controls traditional media in Vietnam, social media has demonstrated its strengths in evading censorship, promoting information freedom, and facilitating criticism. Vietnamese people tend to love the information provided by cyberspace and "turn away" from traditional newspapers. It has prompted traditional print media to self-regulate and join the "race" for the speed of information transmission. Many major newspapers in Vietnam, such as Tuoi Tre, Thanh Nien, Nhan Dan, Tien Phong, etc., have built more websites along with social networking sites to increase interaction with the community. This is what makes cyberspace increasingly dynamic. Citizens are the subjects who gain the most benefits in this situation. They have access to more sources of information, are listened to more, and can exchange more through dialogue forums, both formal and informal.

Fourth, it creates opportunities for people to participate in policy making. Communications technology and cyberspace are also increasingly attracting Vietnamese public opinion to the state's policy-making process. It kicked off a chain reaction, from attracting the press and public attention to protests and prompting government responses. It also becomes a strong catalyst for the government to be more cautious when making decisions, pay more attention to the interests of the people, and increase government transparency and accountability. Outstanding evidence for this is the event where people used cyberspace to protest the project "replacing 6,700 trees in Hanoi city" in 2015. Faced with a wave of public opposition, the government forced this project to be cancelled (Trang & Long 2015), at the same time, many officials were disciplined for their violations and lack of caution during the planning process of this project. As another example, the wave of public debate on Vietnam's draft Law on Special Economic Zones in 2018 forced the National Assembly to cancel the results of this law (Hai & Thu 2018).

Fifth, it promotes the development of civil society: An active online community will support the growth of civic society. Social media's advancement has enabled Vietnamese individuals to increase their participation and social interaction (Wiggins & Bowers 2015). It promotes civil society growth through citizen empowerment, fostering communal spirit, and encouraging collective action. Various groups and people have utilized cyberspace to communicate their opinions, even including views contrary to the state. Civil society is flourishing in Vietnam despite the government's discouragement of using this term in political discussions. Individuals have genuinely contributed to the formulation of political decisions (Hoa 2022). They are now more aware of the need to seek various methods to exercise their democratic rights.

It is evident that advancements in science and technology, particularly information technology, are prompting Vietnam's political leaders to implement various creative policies to adapt. Simultaneously, it is encouraging increased participation of citizens in the national political process. This development bodes well for the democratization process in this Asian country. Nevertheless, the fast spread of false information and propaganda on online platforms can complicate the democratization process, weaken the trustworthiness of information, and diminish public confidence in institutions (Ball 2021, Reglitz 2022). Various organizations and individuals could utilize cyberspace to provoke political incidents, which might disrupt the political stability of Vietnam (Davydov et al. 2022). Moreover, in a one-party state such as Vietnam, the governing authorities might use advancements in science and technology, particularly information and communication technology, to influence public perception and regulate the flow of information (Surborg 2008, Ananyev & Petrova 2017) - a situation that could potentially occur. Although advancements in science and technology can empower individuals and advance democratic ideals, there is also the danger of government manipulation of information. Thus, in Vietnam today, the political elite's understanding of the importance of science and technology, particularly information and communication technology, is essential to leveraging these advancements.

Conclusion

The process of democratization in Vietnam continues to pose challenges and complexities. In the present situation, like in other communist nations, Vietnam must go through democratization, whether they choose to or not. This process is impacted by a range of objective and subjective factors. Delving into a specific research area, this paper examines the various effects of international integration and the scientific and technological revolution, specifically in information and communication technology, on the democratization process in Vietnam. It offers a thorough perspective on the opportunities and obstacles brought about by these factors. This study's analysis highlights how international integration, by fostering global interaction and embracing international standards and norms, has had a profound impact on Vietnam's political environment. It promotes a more open economy, supports political reform, and aids Vietnam in moving toward democratic values and human rights standards. Scientific and technological advancements have transformed the information and communication environment in Vietnam, improving information access, enabling new types of citizen engagement, and providing new avenues for discussions and political involvement.

Nevertheless, this analysis highlights the intrinsic complexity and inconsistencies of these aspects. International integration and advancements in science and technology, especially in information and communication technology, have created opportunities for democratic participation and pushed the Vietnamese government to enhance transparency and accountability. However, they also present challenges. International integration can lead to social inequality, and reliance on the global economy may restrict the capacity to shape democratic policy. The advancement of information and communication technology in Vietnam might potentially cause political and social unrest and be utilized as a propaganda instrument by an authoritarian government.

As Vietnam progresses toward increased political transparency, these elements will surely have a significant influence. Future research should investigate the potential risks of international integration and the impact of science and technology on democratization in Vietnam. This should include examining the role of civil society, legal responses by the state, and major political actors in influencing the country's democratic transition.

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