

Assessing the Practice of Vietnamese Local Governance

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ABSTRACT

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Local governance is a form of state management, but emphasizes the interaction between the government and the people in the management and operation of local activities; meanwhile, state management in general emphasizes the legal regulations and administrative measures of government agencies. This study addresses the role of people's participation in local governance in Vietnam on the basis of legal regulations and practical implementation of social development management activities of local governments. The author builds a theoretical framework and conducts a survey of 600 people from 3 localities representing 3 regions of Vietnam, including: Yen Bai province (North), Quang Tri province (Central), Bac Lieu province (South). The survey results show that people are involved in local governance at the commune level within the scope of the law, but mainly in the form of indirect participation. From the results of this study, the author discusses the policy content of expanding people's direct participation rights, contributing to improving the effectiveness of local governance in Vietnam.

Keywords: Local governance; Local government; Vietnam

1. INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's local government system has been organized since 1945 with three levels: provincial level, district level, and commune level. The scale of Vietnam's local government can be said to be large, including 63 provincial governments, 705 district-level governments, and 10599 commune-level governments (GSO, 2023); but Vietnam is implementing a reform to streamline the government apparatus and is expected to complete it in 2025 (CPV, 2025) with a scale of about 50% reduction in provincial-level localities, about 60%-70% reduction in commune-level localities, and abolishing district-level localities - organizing a 2-level local model (TP New, 2025).

Each local level organizes the government apparatus consisting of two agencies: the People's Council (elected by local voters) and the People's Committee (established by the People's Council of the same level, performing executive functions) (VNA, 2015). According to the law, local governments perform the task of social development administration according to decentralization and delegation of power, in which they perform the role of the subject of management and promotion of local resources - mobilizing the participation of the people (VNA, 2013; VNA, 2022). Accordingly, people have the right to participate in democratic elections; have the right to discuss and decide on a number of self-management tasks of the residential community.

In the context of a democratic, modern society and the development of digital technology, people tend to participate more directly and more in the administrative activities of the government to contribute resources to local socio-economic development, which has raised new issues related to promoting people's mastery to ensure their maximum legitimate rights and interests. This is an issue that many studies are interested in and is also the topic that the author is interested in when conducting this research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Local governance is a new issue in Vietnam and means local state governance, officially used in management documents in the past decade. From a research perspective, many researchers explain local governance from the connotation of the term "governance" with the meaning of management and operation of organizations to achieve the set goals (Chien, N.B. et al., 2024). According to this approach, local governance is the management and

operation activities of local government agencies towards the goal of managing the economic and social development of the community and locality. Vinh, N.T. (2022) affirms that governance is the work that an organization does to achieve its goals, emphasizing the measures to maximize resources by attracting the participation of relevant stakeholders of important significance. With that explanation, local governance is emphasized in terms of management, administration and attracting the participation of people and social organizations to implement local development goals and tasks. Similarly, Duc, N.H.H. (2023) also affirmed that local governance is the management and administration activities of local governments according to decentralization and self-management, in which the government has the task of mobilizing the participation of many civil subjects in local social development administration work.

Sharing the same viewpoint with the above researchers, Tung, P.H. (2024) emphasized the content of local governance in terms of policies, management institutions and interactions between local governments and organizations and individuals towards the goal of solving common tasks and common interests. The common point in these viewpoints and research contents is affirmed: Local governance is the work of self-management, decentralization, participation of many subjects - interaction between the government and the people to solve social governance work, for the common interest. Local governance sets out common requirements, that is, the government is responsible for mobilizing the participation of the people; the government is responsible for explaining and providing transparent information so that the people can exercise their mastery and participate deeply in the governance activities of the government. On that basis, the author builds the scale "Vietnamese Local Governance" (VLG) implying the main contents, that is: The government provides transparent information so that people can access and actively participate in local social development management activities (VLG1); The government strictly implements accountability so that people can grasp information promptly, trust and actively participate in local development management activities (VLG2); The government mobilizes and encourages people to participate in local development management activities (VLG3).

In local governance activities, when people are mobilized to participate in social development, many legal barriers will be limited and transaction costs for people will be reduced; at the same time, promoting people's ownership, creating conditions for people to actively and voluntarily participate in order to successfully implement local social development goals. And so, proactive and active participation of people is an important criterion to evaluate the effectiveness of local governance. In fact, people's participation is determined by direct and indirect forms. According to Thuong, D.T.T. (2023) and Hau, P.T. (2025), people's participation is a way of expressing people's sovereignty; with the form of direct participation, people are able to decide on community self-management issues; In the indirect form of participation, people are reflected and recommended to the government through specific mechanisms, expressing the voice of voters and the popular form is through elected representatives. In practice in Vietnam, the law also stipulates the form of direct participation and indirect participation of people in local governance. Accordingly, people are allowed to decide on community self-management issues (direct participation), which is to directly discuss and decide on policies and levels of contributions to build infrastructure and public welfare works at the commune and village levels with people's contributions; and reflect and recommend to the government through People's Council delegates (elected representatives) at the Voter Contact Conference (indirect participation), the reception and processing of information is then the responsibility of the government (VNA, 2022).

From theoretical and practical studies in Vietnam, the author finds that people are the subjects participating in local governance and are the factor that directly affects the effectiveness of local governance. Mobilizing people to actively participate in local governance is the responsibility of the government and is also a criterion for demonstrating the effectiveness of local governance. The author inherits the above research content and builds two scales to measure factors affecting local governance, which are: "People participate directly" (PPD) and "People participate indirectly" (PPI).

- Firstly, with the form of direct participation, people have the right to discuss and decide on community self-management issues; have the right to propose initiatives for the government to study and implement for the common benefit; have the right to directly reflect and criticize local development programs. Based on the theoretical basis and practical basis of Vietnamese law, the scale "People participate directly" (PPD) was designed

for this study, implying the following contents: People have the right to discuss and decide on community self-management issues - policies and levels of contributions to build infrastructure and public welfare works within the commune and village levels, funded by people according to the law (PPD1); People have the right to directly discuss and decide on local development programs - local development plans, programs and projects (PPD2); People have the right to proactively propose initiatives related to community and local development for the government to study and implement for the common good (PPD3).

- Second, with the indirect form of participation, people have the right to reflect and make recommendations to local authorities through an intermediary mechanism - through People's Council delegates (elected representatives) at the Voter Contact Conference. Voter Contact Conferences are held before and after the People's Council sessions; people - voters are invited to the meeting and reflect their aspirations and contribute opinions to elected representatives on issues related to local and community development. People's reflections and recommendations are sent to the government, in which the responsibility for direct resolution belongs to the People's Committee - the agency performing executive functions and notifying the results to the people. Based on the theoretical basis and practical basis of Vietnamese law, the scale "People participate indirectly" (PPI) was designed for this study, implying the following contents: People have the right to attend public meetings with voters and reflect their aspirations and give opinions on issues related to local and community development (PPI1); People are proactive and unrestricted in reflecting their aspirations and giving opinions on issues related to local and community development (PPI2); People are given explanations and are satisfied with the results of handling the contents of reflecting aspirations and giving opinions on issues related to local and community development (PPI3).

Local governance is characterized by self-governance and interaction between people and the government; this interaction is carried out in the form of direct participation and indirect participation. That shows the democratic nature and the level of interaction reflects the level of democracy and the effectiveness of local governance. With that meaning, the author continues to affirm that the form of people's participation has an impact on local governance in Vietnam; the research hypothesis is: *The form of direct participation of people (H1), the form of indirect participation of people (H2) are factors that have a direct impact on local governance in Vietnam.*

Through the overview study, the author has built a theoretical framework for research on local governance and factors affecting local governance in Vietnam. The theoretical research model consists of 3 scales; the scales include 9 observed variables: Scale "People participate directly" and "People participate indirectly" (02 independent variables); scale "Vietnamese Local governance" (01 dependent variable). The observed variables are designed into 9 questions in the survey questionnaire and measured by a 5-level Likert scale: 1 - Strongly disagree; 2 - Disagree; 3 - No opinion; 4 - Agree; 5 - Strongly agree (Table 1, Figure 1).

Table 1. Theoretical framework

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
I	People participate directly	PPD					
1	People have the right to discuss and decide on community self-management issues - policies and levels of contributions to build infrastructure and public welfare works within the commune and village levels, funded by people according to the law.	PPD1					
2	People have the right to directly discuss and decide on local development programs - local development plans, programs and projects.	PPD2					
3	People have the right to proactively propose initiatives related to community and local development for the government to study and implement for the common good.	PPD3					
II	People participate indirectly	PPI					

No	Scales	Encode	Rating levels				
			1	2	3	4	5
4	People have the right to attend public meetings with voters and reflect their aspirations and give opinions on issues related to local and community development.	PPI1					
5	People are proactive and unrestricted in reflecting their aspirations and giving opinions on issues related to local and community development.	PPI2					
6	People are given explanations and are satisfied with the results of handling the contents of reflecting aspirations and giving opinions on issues related to local and community development.	PPI3					
III	Vietnamese local governance	VLG					
7	The government provides transparent information so that people can access and actively participate in local social development management activities.	VLG1					
8	The government strictly implements accountability so that people can grasp information promptly, trust and actively participate in local development management activities.	VLG2					
9	The government mobilizes and encourages people to participate in local development management activities.	VLG3					

Source: Compiled by the author through the review

Research model

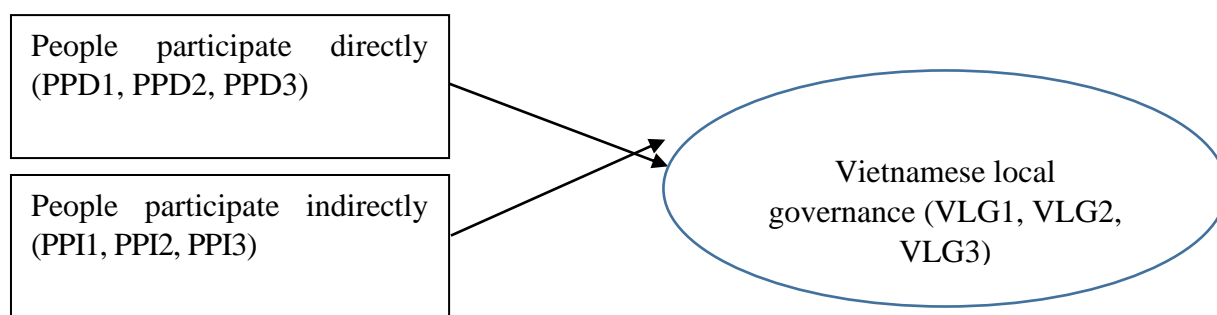


Figure 1. Research model

3. RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, the author uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods to build a theoretical framework and analyze and evaluate the practice of local governance in Vietnam. Qualitative research is conducted through collecting and analyzing secondary documents to build a theoretical framework and theoretical model. Quantitative research is conducted through a practical survey to verify the theoretical framework and research model. The survey is conducted in two steps: Preliminary survey and official survey.

- Preliminary survey: In quantitative research, according to Hair, et al. (2009), the minimum sample size required for exploratory factor analysis and regression analysis is $N = 5 \cdot m$, where m is the number of observed variables. The theoretical model of this study includes 3 scales and 9 observed variables, so the minimum sample size required is $N = 9 \cdot 5 = 45$. The author conducted a preliminary survey in Yen Bai province with a sample size of $N =$

200 people ($N = > 45$). The results of the preliminary survey in Yen Bai province showed that the scales and observed variables are reliable enough to be used in official surveys on a larger scale.

- Official survey: The author conducted an official survey in 3 localities representing the three regions of Vietnam, including Yen Bai province (North), Quang Tri province (Central), Bac Lieu province (South); the survey sample size was $N = 600$ people ($N > 45$), showing high reliability when conducting survey research. The survey was conducted selectively, including 600 people who had at least 3 interactions with the local commune-level authorities in the past 3 years and distributed survey forms based on their consent to answer. The survey results collected 600/600 valid responses, achieving a response rate of 100%.

With the collected data, the author conducted scale testing, exploratory factor analysis, regression analysis to test the theoretical model, test the relationship between the scales and draw research conclusions on local governance practices in Vietnam.

4. Research results and discussion

From the data collected through a survey of 600 people, the author tested the reliability of the scales and observed variables in the research model. According to Hair, et al. (2009), the scales are reliable when meeting the standard condition of Cronbach's alpha > 0.6 ; the observed variables are reliable when meeting the standard condition of Corrected Item-Total Correlation > 0.3 . The test results show that all 3 scales and 10 observed variables in the initial research model are reliable enough to conduct further analysis (Table 2).

Table 2. Statistical results and testing results of the scale

Scales	Observed variables	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	Corrected Item-Total Correlation
1. People participate directly (PPD)	PPD1	600	1	5	3.99	.725	.628	PPD1 = .426
	PPD2	600	1	5	3.95	.734		PPD2 = .411
	PPD3	600	1	5	3.88	.699		PPD3 = .359
2. People participate indirectly (PPI)	PPI1	600	1	5	4.28	.614	.693	PPI1 = .611
	PPI2	600	1	5	4.21	.627		PPI2 = .499
	PPI3	600	1	5	4.27	.632		PPI3 = .597
3. Vietnamese local governance (VLG)	VLG1	600	1	5	4.11	.638	.674	VLG1 = .589
	VLG2	600	1	5	4.03	.625		VLG2 = .592
	VLG3	600	1	5	4.16	.622		VLG3 = .511
Valid N (listwise)		600						

Source: Author's survey results

Data in Table 2 shows that observations on the scale "People participate directly" (PPD), the scale "People participate indirectly" (PPI) and the scale "Vietnamese Local governance" (VLG) are all rated at an average level of Mean > 3.88 , which is statistically significant according to the determined Likert scale (1-5). However, the observed variables of the scale "People participate directly" (PPD) are rated at a lower level than the observed variables of the scale "People participate indirectly" (PPI): Mean (PPD1) = 3.99, Mean (PPD2) = 3.95, Mean (PPD3) = 3.88, indicating that there is limited direct participation in local governance, while people mainly participate in local governance indirectly. In which, the lowest is Mean (PPD2) = 3.95, Mean (PPD3) = 3.88, showing that there are limitations in people exercising their right to directly discuss and decide on local development programs - local development plans, programs, and projects; there are limitations in people exercising their right to proactively propose initiatives related to community and local development for the government to study and implement for the common good.

Data in Table 2 contributes to reflecting the practice of local governance in Vietnam in terms of people's participation in direct and indirect forms. Accordingly, people are directly discussed and decide on issues of community self-management - policies, levels of contributions to build infrastructure, public welfare works within

the commune and village levels with people contributing funds according to the law. It can be said that this is participation and self-determination on a narrow scale related to the contents for which people themselves contribute funds; and participation at a more limited level, which is proactively proposing initiatives related to community and local development for the government to study and implement for the common good. This issue should be adjusted to expand the scope of participation, because in reality there are many other contents related to the economic, cultural and social development of the community that people need to discuss and decide directly, such as preserving and developing traditional products...

The above issue is also analyzed and evaluated similarly by a number of other studies, that people's participation in the process of building and implementing policies and laws is still limited; people's participation in controlling, monitoring and social criticism is still low (Thuong, D.T.T., 2023). Or, according to Thoi, N.V. (2023), decentralization and delegation of power in Vietnam is still quite moderate, not creating the necessary initiative for localities to exploit and promote potential and advantages. That reality limits people's direct participation in local governance in Vietnam.

With the standard value confirmed through Cronbach's alpha test, the author conducted exploratory factor analysis to preliminarily assess the unidimensionality, convergent value, and discriminant value of the scales to have more basis for drawing research conclusions. The results of exploratory factor analysis are shown in Table 3 and Table 4 below.

Table 3. Total Variance Explained**KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.750
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	2384.570
df	36
Sig.	.000

Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.467	38.520	38.520	3.467	38.520	38.520	2.934	32.598	32.598
2	3.052	33.913	72.433	3.052	33.913	72.433	2.751	30.572	63.170
3	1.023	11.370	83.802	1.023	11.370	83.802	1.857	20.632	83.802
4	.516	5.737	89.539						
5	.438	4.863	94.401						
6	.176	1.960	96.361						
7	.163	1.808	98.169						
8	.115	1.272	99.442						
9	.050	.558	100.000						
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

Source: Author's survey results

Table 4. Rotated Component Matrix

Rotated Component Matrix ^a				
Scales	Observed variables	Component		
		1	2	3
1. People participate directly (PPD)	PPD1	.745		

	PPD2	.781		
	PPD3	.776		
2. People participate indirectly (PPI)	PPI1		.805	
	PPI2		.792	
	PPI3		.778	
3. Vietnamese local governance (VLG)	VLG1			.793
	VLG2			.769
	VLG3			.772
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.				
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.				
a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.				

Source: Author's survey results

In quantitative research, according to Hair, et al. (2009), exploratory factor analysis is performed in accordance with the data set through the values: $0.5 \leq \text{KMO} \leq 1$; Bartlett's test has an observed significance level $\text{Sig.} < 0.05$; Eigenvalue ≥ 1 ; Total Variance Explained $\geq 50\%$; Factor Loading ≥ 0.5 .

Data in Table 3 and Table 4 show: Exploratory factor analysis confirms the suitability of the data set, shown through the KMO coefficient = $7.50 > 0.5$; observed variables have linear correlation with representative factors, shown through Bartlett's Test with observed significance level $\text{Sig.} = 0.000 < 0.05$; observed variables explain 83.802% of the variation of representative factors, shown through Total Variance Explained with Cumulative % = $83.802\% > 50\%$; observed variables have good statistical significance, have a close relationship with representative factors, with Factor Loading > 0.5 .

The results of exploratory factor analysis in Table 3 and Table 4 confirm that the observed variables are extracted into 03 factors corresponding to the 03 initial factors with Eigenvalues > 1 , showing that the research theoretical framework is appropriately built; the original research model is kept intact, including: 02 independent variables "People participate directly" (PPD), "People participate indirectly" (PPI) and 01 dependent variable "Vietnamese local governance" (VLG) with 9 observed variables with good statistical significance, it is possible to perform multivariate linear regression analysis to examine the relationship of independent variables with dependent variables in the research model. On that basis, the author conducts regression analysis to examine the relationship of the scales/independent variables "People participate directly" (PPD), "People participate indirectly" (PPI) and the scale/dependent variable "Vietnamese local governance" (VLG). The results of the regression analysis are shown in Table 5, which is the basis for the author to draw research conclusions.

Table 5. Multivariate regression results

Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
		B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	1.014	.374		13.364	.000	
	People participate directly (PPD)	.449	.228	.442	9.982	.000	1.852
	People participate indirectly (PPI)	.526	.303	.486	8.246	.000	1.852
a. Dependent Variable: Vietnamese local governance (VLG)							
R Square = .724; Durbin-Watson = 2.110							

Source: Author's survey results

Data in Table 5 shows: R Square = .724, confirming that the scales "People participate directly" (PPD), "People participate indirectly" (PPI) explain 72.4% of the variation in the scale "Vietnamese local governance" (VLG). VIF = 1.852 ($1 < \text{VIF} < 2$), showing that the regression model does not have multicollinearity; Durbin-Watson = 2.110 ($1 < d < 3$), showing that the regression model does not have autocorrelation, confirming that the scales "People

participate directly" (PPD), "People participate indirectly" (PPI) are independent and have the same impact on the scale "Vietnamese local governance" (VLG).

Data in Table 5 also shows that the regression coefficients of the two independent variables "People participate directly" (PPD), "People participate indirectly" (PPI) are both statistically significant with $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$ ($\text{Sig.} < 0.05$) and have positive values: $B(\text{PPD}) = 0.449$, $B(\text{PPI}) = 0.526$, confirming the positive relationship between the two independent variables "People participate directly" (PPD), "People participate indirectly" (PPI) and 01 dependent variable "Vietnamese local governance" (VLG); hypotheses H1 and H2 are accepted.

Trên cơ sở mô hình hồi quy khái quát $Y = B_0 + B_1 \cdot X_1 + B_2 \cdot X_2 + \dots + B_i \cdot X_i$ (Hair, J.F. et al., 2009), có thể xác định được mô hình hồi quy đa biến của nghiên cứu này là: $\text{VLG} = 1.014 + 0.449 \cdot \text{PPD} + 0.526 \cdot \text{PPI}$.

In the above regression model, the regression coefficient shows the correlation level of the independent variables and the dependent variable in increasing order: "People participate directly" (PPD), "People participate indirectly" (PPI). The research conclusion is affirmed that people participate directly and indirectly in local governance activities in Vietnam, but limited to the level of direct participation.

According to the provisions of Vietnamese law (VNA, 2022), people are allowed to directly discuss and decide on issues of community self-management - policies, levels of contributions to build infrastructure, public welfare works within the commune and village levels, with people contributing funds according to the law. However, it can be said that this is participation and self-determination in a narrow scope related to the contents for which people themselves contribute funds. A further limitation in current legal regulations is that people have not proactively proposed initiatives related to community and local development for the government to study and implement for the common good. This issue should be adjusted to expand the scope of participation, because in reality there are many other contents related to the economic, cultural and social development of the community that people need to discuss and decide directly.

From the above research results, the author discusses the content of perfecting the institution on local governance, accordingly it is necessary to establish a mechanism to encourage and support people to research and propose initiatives related to community and local development; a mechanism for local authorities to research, evaluate, approve and implement people's initiatives to serve the common interest. Because people are the subjects participating in local governance and when encouraged to interact with government agencies, they will have many initiatives to propose; local authorities also have the advantage of mobilizing many resources for development. On the other hand, the interaction between the government and the people is established and strengthened, which will be a favorable factor for building a self-governing government; both promoting people's mastery and helping government agencies mobilize many resources to serve local development. This is also consistent with the Constitution of Vietnam (VNA, 2013), that "The State guarantees and promotes the people's right to mastery; recognizes, respects, protects and guarantees human rights and civil rights; realizes the goal of a rich people, a strong country, democracy, fairness, civilization, where everyone has a prosperous, free, happy life, and has conditions for comprehensive development" (Article 3 of the 2013 Constitution).

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