

THE VIET NAM PROVINCIAL GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PERFORMANCE INDEX

Dimension 1: Participation at Local Levels

Participation in political, social and economic life is a constitutional right, enshrined in Viet Nam's 2007 Grassroots Democracy Ordinance. The PAPI dimension 'Participation at Local Levels' measures citizens' knowledge of their participation rights, their opportunities for participation, the quality of village head elections and the extent to which citizens participate in and voluntarily contribute to local infrastructure projects.

Overall Provincial Performance. Findings from the 2015 survey show that citizen participation at the local level remains limited, with three out of four sub-dimensions (knowledge of participation, opportunities for participation and quality of village head elections) declining in scores compared to the 2011 baselines. On a more encouraging note, citizen participation in decision-making on starting local infrastructure projects was higher in 2015, contributing to a higher score in the sub-dimension on voluntary contributions to local infrastructure projects.

Most of the best performing provinces in this dimension in 2015 are in the north-eastern and central regions. This pattern has existed since 2011. Thai Binh and Ha Tinh have been in the best performing group for four years in a row. The north-western province of Lai Chau has been in the poorest performing group since 2011.

Civic Knowledge. The sub-dimension on civic knowledge looks at what citizens know about their political and civic rights. Compared to 2011, there has been a continued decline in scores in this sub-dimension at the national level. This is caused mainly by the fact that fewer citizens know which public office positions are elected and which are not. Another reason is that fewer citizens are aware of the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance and the term in office of their village heads.

Opportunities for Participation. This sub-dimension highlights the experience of citizens in participating in elections of National Assembly and People's Council representatives and of village heads. Citizens are asked whether they voted in the 2011 National Assembly and People's Council elections and the most recent village head election. The national mean score of this sub-dimension has fallen every year since 2011. For example, while 66% of respondents in 2011 said they voted in the National Assembly elections, this fell to 31% in 2015 for the same elections. This decline can partly be explained by respondents' fading memories of the 2011 elections. Another reason for the decline is that fewer citizens participated in village head elections in 2015 than before (63% in 2015 compared to 66-73% in the 2011-2014 period).

Quality of Village Elections. The quality of village elections is assessed by indicators measuring citizens' free choice of candidates, the way the elections are conducted to ensure fair selection and transparency, and whether winners are properly announced to the public. At the national level, fewer respondents (52%) said they were invited to the most recent village head election compared to past years (59% in 2014). Although the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance requires at least two candidates to choose from, fewer respondents confirmed this was the case in 2015. Competition was poorest in Ha Giang, where only 20% said there were two candidates to choose between. Candidates were also often suggested by the authorities. As in previous years, over 90% of respondents said they voted for the winner and overall the elections do not seem to be competitive.

Voluntary Contributions. Voluntary contributions to building or renovating community infrastructure, such as cultural houses, roads or schools, is a form of active citizen participation. Once citizens contribute voluntarily to these projects, they tend to participate more actively in different project processes. At the national level, in 2015 nearly 40% of respondents voluntarily contributed to a public project in their community in the form of cash, in-kind or labour. More respondents also said they took part in decision-making to start an infrastructure project (53.5%) and provided inputs for the design (32%) in 2015 than before.

Recommendations. Improving citizen participation in local governance would not require a large financial investment from the state budget. It, however, needs strong commitment from relevant state agencies and local governments to putting the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance into force and to engaging citizens in political life and policymaking. The 2016 National Assembly and People's Council elections provide an opportunity for state agencies in charge of the elections to engage citizens more proactively in these and ensure full compliance with the regulations on organizing elections.

The Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) is a policy monitoring tool that assesses citizen experiences and satisfaction with government performance at the national and sub-national levels in governance, public administration and public service delivery.

PAPI measures six dimensions: participation at local levels, transparency, vertical accountability, control of corruption, public administrative procedures and public service delivery. The survey has been implemented nationwide each year since 2011. For the 2015 PAPI Report, 13,955 randomly selected citizens were surveyed.

PAPI is a collaboration between the Centre for Community Support and Development Studies (CECODES), the Centre for Research and Training of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front (VFF-CRT) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The full 2015 PAPI Report and more in-depth analysis can be found at: www.papi.vn.