

**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
NATIONAL ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY**



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**LOCAL LEADER TRAITS, LOCAL VALUES
AND CITIZEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
IN VIETNAM**

**SPECIALIZATION: ECONOMICS (E-PHD)
SPECIALIZATION CODE: 9310101**

PHD DISSERTATION SUMMARY

HANOI - 2026

**THIS WORK WAS COMPLETED AT
NATIONAL ECONOMICS UNIVERSITY**

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**The dissertation defense at the university level
at the National Economics University
on / /2026**

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rationale

Political participation is central to the functioning, performance, and legitimacy of democratic governance (Van Deth, 2014; Landry & Angeles, 2011). It enhances policy effectiveness, administrative efficiency, and citizen oversight, and is constitutionally guaranteed in Vietnam through rights to voting, assembly, consultation, and supervision of public affairs (Callanan, 2005; Kim & Schachter, 2013; Tran & La, 2022). While Vietnam has made notable progress in expanding participatory spaces, debates persist regarding how these rights are promoted and exercised in practice. Understanding the drivers of political participation is therefore essential for both theoretical advancement and policy design in the Vietnamese context.

Existing studies on leader traits and political participation are largely concentrated in Western democracies, leaving significant gaps in one-party systems such as Vietnam (Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020; Mondak & Halperin, 2008). Vietnam's political system is characterized by the central role of the Communist Party, the integration of party leadership across state institutions, and a transition toward a socialist-oriented market economy. These features create distinctive participation dynamics in which local leaders and state-led mechanisms play a pivotal role. Moreover, regional diversity and socio-historical variation suggest that local values, proxied by factors such as historical protest and ODA exposure, may condition participation in ways not captured by existing models (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Hasselskog, 2020). This study therefore examines how local leader traits and local values jointly shape political participation in Vietnam, contributing to theory and informing policies aimed at strengthening participatory governance.

1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

The dissertation studies the impact of local leadership characteristics and local values on citizens' political participation in order to contribute to improving and promoting measures that encourage citizens' political participation in Vietnam from a managerial perspective.

The dissertation has the following specific research objectives:

- Investigating the impact of local leader traits and local value on citizens' political participation.

- Examining the moderator role of local value on the relationship between leadership characteristics and citizens' political participation.
- Based on empirical results, proposing recommendations aimed at encouraging citizens' political participation.

To achieve the above research objectives, this dissertation focuses on the following research questions:

- How do leader traits and local values impact citizens' political participation?
- How do local values impact the relationship between local leader traits and citizens' political participation?
- What are the implications for promoting citizens' political participation in Vietnam?

1.3 Scope and Object of the Research

Research objects

Local leader traits, local values, citizens' political participation, and the impact of local leader traits, local values on citizens' political participation.

Scope of the research

- Scope of context: The dissertation limits citizens' political participation by delegated voting and other political activities.
- Scope of space: The dissertation uses survey data from 63 provinces/cities in Vietnam (including 208 districts and 12,850 individuals).
- Research period: The dissertation combines the use of secondary and primary data sources. Primary data is compiled since 2017. Secondary data through the PAPI survey was conducted at the individual level in 2017 and the district leadership survey was conducted in the same year.

1.4 Research Methods

To achieve the research objectives, this dissertation applies quantitative methods to examine the effects of local leader traits and local values on citizens' political participation. The study follows a standard quantitative design, beginning with a literature review to identify research gaps, followed by the development of a theoretical model and testable hypotheses. Empirical analysis is then conducted to estimate the model and evaluate the hypotheses.

The analysis draws on two datasets collected in 2017. The first is the Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index survey, which provides individual-level data on citizens' perceptions and experiences. The second is a district-level survey covering 226 districts nationwide, selected using probability proportional to size sampling, and administered to district leaders to capture leadership traits and local contextual factors. The datasets were cleaned, standardized, and merged for analysis.

Data analysis is conducted using Stata. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize patterns of political participation, while probit regression models estimate the effects of leader traits and local values on citizens' participation. The results support hypothesis testing and inform policy implications for enhancing political participation in Vietnam.

1.5 Original Contributions of Research

Firstly, the study integrates career path theory, face-saving theory, and prejudice theory into a unified analytical framework explaining how leadership traits (tenure and gender) and local values (ODA-receiving localities and historical protests) jointly affect citizens' political participation. This multidimensional approach expands existing research beyond citizen-level factors to include institutional and socio-cultural dimensions of participation.

Secondly, the findings provide new evidence that first-term leaders are more likely to mobilize participation, while second-term leaders exhibit reduced motivation and short-termism. Furthermore, gender bias continues to shape perceptions of leadership effectiveness that male leaders tend to achieve higher participation rates, whereas female leaders face persistent stereotypes that limit their influence.

Thirdly, this study introduces a novel operationalization of local values by employing ODA-supported districts and protest-active localities as empirical proxies, extending beyond the conventional cultural or attitudinal measures used in prior research. The findings demonstrate that these proxies exert a direct and significant influence on political participation. Moreover, they function as moderating factors that condition the relationship between leadership traits and political participation.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Political participation

2.1.1 Conceptualizations and Approaches to political participation

Political participation is the cornerstone of democratic governance, encompassing all actions by citizens to influence decision-making and policy outcomes (Holum, 2022). It reflects the vitality of democracy, as meaningful citizen engagement enhances government legitimacy and responsiveness (Arnstein, 1969; Callanan, 2005; Dalton, 2008).

Van Deth (2014) defines political participation through four criteria: it must be (1) an activity rather than a mere opinion, (2) performed by non-professionals, (3) voluntary, and (4) political in nature. These features distinguish participation from civic involvement without political intent. While Van Deth's definition is analytically rigorous, later scholars proposed broader frameworks.

Ekman and Amnå (2012) introduced a dual-layer model separating manifest (voting, lobbying, protesting) from latent participation (volunteering, community engagement). Arnstein's (1969) "Ladder of Citizen Participation" further reframed participation as a power relationship, ranging from manipulation to citizen control, thereby critiquing tokenistic or symbolic involvement. Recent digital-era models (Theocharis & Van Deth, 2018; Ohme et al., 2018) expand this scope to include online activism and political consumerism, recognizing individualized and expressive forms of engagement.

In essence, political participation has evolved from an institutional act of voting to a multifaceted continuum of civic action shaped by intent, power, and context. Policymakers must therefore view participation not only as electoral turnout but as a broader ecosystem of social involvement that strengthens governance resilience

2.1.2 Ladder of political participation

The ladder of political participation, proposed by Arnstein (2019), first published in 1969, is a conceptual framework that categorizes the levels of citizen involvement in decision-making processes within social and political contexts. This ladder consists of eight rungs, which are grouped into three broad categories: non-participation, tokenism, and citizen power. The lower rungs, Manipulation and Therapy, represent forms of non-participation where citizens are ostensibly involved but lack real influence, serving merely to legitimize decisions already made by powerholders. The middle rungs, including Informing, Consultation, and Placation, fall under tokenism, where citizens

are given a voice but without the power to ensure their input affects outcomes. The highest rungs, Partnership, Delegated Power, and Citizen Control, signify true citizen power, where individuals or groups actively share or assume control over decision-making processes.

2.1.3 Proxies for political participation

Voting is a core and institutionalized form of political participation through which citizens influence collective decisions by selecting representatives. It fits the minimalist definition of political participation as voluntary action within the governmental domain with binding outcomes (Van Deth, 2014). Voting is widely regarded as a key expression of civic duty and democratic engagement (Rosema, 2017) and a reliable behavioral indicator of participation (Hall & Bonneau, 2008).

Participation in social organizations reflects the expanded conception of political participation that includes civic engagement aimed at addressing collective problems (Van Deth, 2014). Although not always directly targeting the state, such activities mobilize citizens around shared concerns and contribute to governance and social reform (Verba & Nie, 1987). They also represent latent participation that may develop into more conventional political action over time (Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

Suggesting the construction of public works: Proposing public works constitutes a tangible form of participation through which citizens seek to influence resource allocation and service provision (Arnstein, 1969). It aligns with political participation III as community based problem solving (Van Deth, 2014) and reflects everyday political engagement around visible local issues (Callanan, 2005).

Participating in the local budgeting process: Involvement in local budgeting enables citizens to shape fiscal priorities and public spending and exemplifies citizen power over resources (Arnstein, 1969). As an institutionalized participatory channel, it enhances responsiveness, transparency, and legitimacy (Ianniello et al., 2018) and links citizens directly to a core function of government (Callahan, 2007).

Comments on land use planning: Commenting on land use planning allows citizens to influence spatial and environmental decisions that affect community life. It is a legally recognized and locally salient form of participation (Callanan, 2005) that integrates public values into planning processes, even when participation remains consultative (Arnstein, 1969).

Sending formal recommendations to the authorities: Submitting formal recommendations represents deliberate and structured participation aimed at

influencing policy within institutional channels (Van Deth, 2014). This practice enhances transparency, accountability, and legitimacy by embedding citizen voice in governance processes (Beierle, 1999).

2.1.4 Research methods in the study of political participation

Survey methodology is a dominant approach in political participation research, grounded in seminal work such as Verba et al. (1995) and widely applied across political contexts. Large scale datasets including the European Social Survey and World Values Survey enable comparative and longitudinal analysis, while original surveys capture emerging and context specific behaviors. Studies employ diverse sampling strategies and advanced quantitative techniques to measure multidimensional participation. Despite its strengths, survey research faces challenges related to definitional ambiguity, self report bias, sampling limitations, and causal inference, especially amid the rise of digital participation (Van Deth, 2014; Hooghe et al., 2014).

2.2 Leader traits and political participation

2.2.1 Conceptualizations of leader traits

Leader traits are conceptualized as relatively stable psychological characteristics that shape leadership behavior, effectiveness, and public influence. Foundational work defines them as deep seated cognitive, personality, and motivational attributes that structure leadership capacity across contexts (Zaccaro, 2007). Subsequent political research emphasizes both voter perceptions of traits as evaluative cues (Aichholzer & Willmann, 2020) and empirical differences between political elites and the general population (Hanania, 2017). While direct psychometric measurement is often impractical in large scale studies, scholars increasingly rely on indirect indicators and trait proxies to approximate underlying leader traits in real world political settings.

2.2.2 The big five personality traits

Earlier research connects political behavior to leaders' Big Five personality traits including Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience (Ha et al., 2013; Mondak & Halperin, 2008). However, personality-based models overlook structural incentives embedded in tenure systems. The dissertation thus reconceptualizes "leader traits" through institutional proxies such as term of office and gender, which are more observable and contextually valid in Vietnam's one-party system. Leaders' characteristics shape not only their own behavior but also citizens' perceptions of accountability and legitimacy. A responsive leader increases trust and civic willingness, while perceived self-interest or authoritarianism deters engagement. Hence, leadership style becomes a policy variable influencing participation outcomes

2.2.3 Leader's term of office

Personality based leadership models do not fully capture how institutional context and career dynamics shape leadership behavior. The term of office functions as a structural mechanism that conditions incentives, accountability, and learning, allowing enduring traits such as motivation, confidence, and integrity to become observable over time (Nguyen & Le, 2025; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1991). At the same time, tenure influences political participation by shaping leaders' responsiveness to citizens. First term leaders often foster greater civic engagement, while final term leaders may exhibit weaker accountability and reduced public participation, commonly associated with the lame duck effect (Smart & Sturm, 2013).

2.2.4 Gender of leader

Gender dynamics remain a critical determinant of political inclusion. Despite increasing female representation, deep-rooted cultural biases persist. Female leaders face dual expectations: competence in policy yet adherence to traditional femininity (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eckes, 2002). Citizens often perceive women politicians as less authoritative, lowering political mobilization in female-led districts (Bock et al., 2017; Walsh, 2006). Nonetheless, promoting women's leadership enhances policy diversity and social equity. In Vietnam, Confucian values and patriarchal norms further constrain women's advancement, indicating that leadership gender is both a cultural and structural issue. Addressing prejudice requires targeted leadership programs and public awareness campaigns to normalize female authority in politics. For policymakers, gender equality is not merely social justice but an instrument to broaden participatory representation.

2.3 Local values and political participation

2.3.1 Conceptualizations of local values

Local values in public governance refer to the shared public values, assumptions, and preferences of communities that decision-makers seek to integrate into policy processes in order to reflect local contexts and collective priorities (Beierle, 1999; Ianniello et al., 2018). They are embedded in social, economic, demographic, and institutional conditions such as inequality, civic institutions, population size, and local governance arrangements, which shape how citizens perceive needs and engage politically (Patsias & Patsias, 2024; Szewczyk & Crowder-Meyer, 2022; Tavares & Carr, 2013). Incorporating local values enhances policy quality, legitimacy, and effectiveness by grounding governance in lived community realities (Beierle, 1999; Callanan, 2005).

2.3.2 ODA-receiving localities

Official Development Assistance (ODA) projects often embody both external donor goals and local governance reforms. Lumsdaine (1993) and Lee et al. (2017) note that ODA's developmental orientation reflects societal values such as humanitarianism and modernization. In practice, ODA promotes participatory governance through decentralization, stakeholder consultation, and local capacity building (Andrews & Vries, 2007; Hasselskog, 2020).

In Vietnam, donor-driven reforms have introduced participatory planning and budget transparency at provincial and district levels. However, ODA's democratizing effects vary depending on local institutional readiness. Where participation is treated as a procedural requirement rather than a substantive process, it risks becoming tokenistic.

ODA should prioritize citizen-centric design, ensuring local communities understand, influence, and co-own development projects. Strengthening dialogue mechanisms between donors, local authorities, and citizens can translate financial aid into democratic capital

2.3.3 Historical protests in the locality

Historical local protests serve as a salient proxy for local values because they express place-based identity, moral priorities, and shared norms rooted in everyday life. Protests often emerge from attachment to local spaces and livelihoods, articulating community values such as the right to housing, environmental justice, and collective dignity (Caruso, 2013; Good, 2017). Through emotional forces like moral outrage and shared grief, protests reaffirm belonging and reproduce local values across generations (Andits, 2016).

Historical protests shape political participation by embedding collective memory, fostering solidarity, and providing repertoires for future engagement. Past mobilization experiences strengthen citizens' willingness to participate, influence voting behavior, and affect perceptions of government responsiveness (Quaranta, 2015; Shin, 2018). Although sustaining long-term mobilization remains challenging, protest histories create durable foundations for civic engagement by linking shared grievances, local identity, and political

2.3.4 Other proxies for local values

The literature conceptualizes local values through a range of indirect but theoretically grounded proxies rather than direct attitudinal measures. These proxies

include social capital and civic embeddedness reflected in shared norms of trust cooperation and civic responsibility sustained by dense associational networks. The presence and durability of participatory institutions also signal locally embedded values that emphasize inclusion deliberation and accountability. In addition, local socioeconomic structures and levels of inequality shape collective norms concerning fairness representation and political voice. Finally demographic composition and social heterogeneity influence tolerance pluralism and patterns of political participation. Taken together these approaches highlight that local values are context dependent and reproduced through enduring social practices and institutional arrangements rather than individual attitudes alone.

2.4 The moderating role of local values in the relationship between leaders' traits and political participation

2.4.1 Local values as cultural-social moderators

Local values moderate the relationship between leaders' traits and political participation by shaping how citizens interpret leadership behavior. Trait-based theories emphasize that leadership effectiveness depends on contextual and cultural fit (Zaccaro, 2007). Empirical studies show that civic trust and community-oriented values enhance participatory responses to inclusive leader traits, while hierarchical values are associated with more passive engagement (Putnam et al., 1994; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Thus, local values condition both the direction and strength of leadership effects on participation.

2.4.2 ODA-receiving locality as a moderator

In ODA recipient localities, local values and aid related accountability norms moderate how leaders' traits influence political participation. Civic expectations shaped by development projects can foster cooperative engagement when initiatives are effective, or generate protest when outcomes are perceived as unfair (Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018; Holum, 2022). ODA contexts also reshape leader autonomy through dual accountability to donors and citizens. Where local norms emphasize transparency and inclusion, autonomous leadership enhances participation. Where upward accountability dominates, participation is constrained, making ODA a conditional moderator of leadership effects.

2.4.3 Historical protest as a moderator

Historical protests constitute a value-laden contextual moderator that shapes how leaders' traits influence political participation. In protest-prone localities, public contestation reflects entrenched norms of moral accountability and civic expression,

redefining expectations between leaders and citizens (Baiocchi, 2005; Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018). Such contexts condition whether leadership autonomy translates into participatory inclusion or bureaucratic detachment, depending on conflict intensity and accountability structures (Andrews & Vries, 2007; Fung, 2003). Moreover, protest histories amplify moral scrutiny of leaders, particularly regarding gender and term of office, compelling responsive and inclusive behavior to restore legitimacy (O'Brien & Li, 2006; Holman et al., 2017).

2.5 Research Gaps

The research addresses several intertwined gaps: (1) the limited empirical evidence on how local leader traits affect citizens' political participation in one-party regimes; (2) the absence of studies linking local values (proxied by protests and ODA-receiving) to civic engagement in Vietnam; and (3) the need for context-sensitive theoretical and methodological approaches that move beyond Western-centric personality models. By examining both leader traits and local values within Vietnam's institutional environment, this study contributes to the global literature on political participation and offers policy-relevant insights into strengthening participatory governance in socialist and developing contexts.

CHAPTER 3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & RESEARCH METHODS

3.1 Theoretical Framework

3.1.1 Career path

Career path theory (Allen et al., 2020) posits that politicians' behavior is shaped by their anticipated career advancement. Leaders aiming for promotion or reelection tend to adopt participatory and inclusive governance styles to demonstrate competence and responsiveness (Baturu, 2010). Conversely, leaders near the end of their careers may prioritize short-term goals or stability, reducing incentives for participatory reforms. This tension — termed political short-termism — becomes particularly relevant in Vietnam, where local leaders serve fixed five-year terms and often rotate between positions.

3.1.2 Face-saving theory

Face-saving theory (Hu, 1944; Ting-Toomey, 1988) emphasizes that social actors act to preserve dignity (“face”) in interactions. In collectivist cultures such as Vietnam, political leaders may avoid public deliberation or citizen criticism to maintain authority and harmony. Thus, “saving face” can limit transparency but also motivate consultative engagement when leaders perceive participation as enhancing their legitimacy.

3.1.3 Prejudice theory

Prejudice theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) explains gender-based differences in political evaluation. In Vietnam, where patriarchal traditions persist, female leaders may be perceived as violating social norms of authority, facing biases that reduce public trust and political enthusiasm. This bias indirectly suppresses participation, not through women's leadership quality but through public perception.

3.1.4 Political Culture Theory

Political culture theory (Almond & Verba, 1963) explains political behavior as an expression of shared value beliefs and orientations rather than purely institutional incentives. Foundational works argue that participation and stability depend on the congruence between institutions and culturally embedded norms shaped by history and socialization. Within this framework protest is interpreted as a culturally sanctioned form of participation reflecting shared beliefs about legitimacy voice and accountability. Persistent protest patterns therefore serve as an observable proxy for local values that condition political engagement especially in constrained political systems.

3.1.5 Institutional theory

Institutional theory by Meyer and Rowan (1977) as well as DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain local values as outcomes of regulative normative and cognitive

governance arrangements rather than abstract cultural traits. It emphasizes legitimacy and institutional pressures that shape accountability transparency and participation. In aid receiving contexts donor requirements and governance norms are gradually internalized through repeated interaction and monitoring. As a result, ODA receiving localities embody institutionally embedded values that prioritize responsiveness civic engagement and accountability making ODA exposure a theoretically grounded proxy for local values in political participation analysis.

Together, these frameworks provide a nuanced explanation of how institutional tenure, cultural norms, and social biases jointly influence civic behavior in Vietnam's local governance structure.

3.2 Hypothesis Development

Leader Traits and Political Participation

A leader's term of office determines their motivation and responsiveness. According to career path theory, first-term leaders are more proactive in engaging citizens and demonstrating competence to gain legitimacy and promotion (Burns, 1994; Landry, 2008; Shih et al., 2012). In contrast, second-term leaders tend to show short-termism, focusing on immediate benefits rather than long-term governance (Alesina & Tabellini, 2008; Boström, 2017).

H1: Local leaders serving their first term of office are more likely to stimulate political participation than those serving their second term.

Gender is another important trait influencing participation. Based on prejudice theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002), leadership is often viewed as a male domain, especially in Confucian societies like Vietnam. Female leaders face stereotypes of being less decisive or politically capable (Eckes, 2002), reducing citizens' confidence and willingness to participate.

H2: Localities governed by male leaders are more likely to stimulate political participation than those governed by female leaders.

Local Values and Political Participation

Local values represent the socio-cultural and institutional context shaping participation. Two proxies are used: ODA-receiving status and historical protests. ODA projects enhance transparency and participatory governance (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002; JICA, 2013; Hasselskog, 2020), encouraging civic engagement.

H3a: ODA-receiving localities are more likely to stimulate political participation than those not receiving ODA.

Localities with a history of protests display higher civic awareness and accountability, as collective action strengthens political efficacy (Callanan, 2005; Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018).

H3b: Localities with a history of protests are more likely to stimulate political participation than those without such a history.

Interaction and Moderation Effects

The effects of leadership traits vary across different contexts. Moderation theory (Preacher & Hayes, 2004) suggests that civic culture, transparency, and participatory norms amplify leadership impact. In ODA-supported or protest-active localities, participatory environments strengthen leaders' ability to mobilize citizens (O'Brien & Li, 2006; Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018). Likewise, urban areas, characterized by higher education and awareness, respond more strongly to participatory leadership than rural areas.

H4a: In localities with stronger local values, the positive effect of first-term leadership on political participation is stronger than in those with weaker ones.

H4b: In localities with stronger local values, the positive effect of male leadership on political participation is weaker than in those with weaker ones.

H5a: In urban areas, the positive effect of first-term leadership on political participation is stronger than in rural areas.

H5b: In urban areas, the positive effect of female leadership on political participation is weaker than in rural areas.

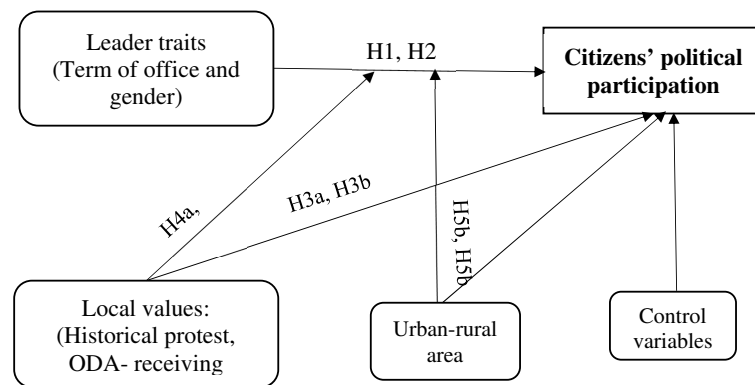


Figure 3.1: Analytical framework

3.3 Research Methods

3.3.1 Data Collection Methods

This study uses both secondary and primary data. The secondary data come from the 2017 Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI), conducted by UNDP, CECODES, and the Viet Nam Fatherland Front.

Primary data were collected through a survey of district-level leaders (Party Secretaries or People's Committee Chairmen) corresponding to PAPI's 226 districts. Questionnaires gathered information on leaders' age, gender, education, tenure, and district characteristics such as ODA projects and protests. Data collection lasted six months, yielding 208 valid responses. All data were encoded and processed using Stata 17 to ensure reliability and consistency.

3.3.2 Research Variables

Political participation is conceptualized in two forms: (1) voting behavior (1 = voted, 0 = otherwise) and (2) broader participation, coded 1 if respondents either voted or participated in at least two of five civic activities (e.g., joining organizations, suggesting public works, budget discussions, commenting on land use, or sending formal recommendations). These capture both institutional and community-based engagement (Van Deth, 2014; Ekman & Amnå, 2012).

Independent variables include leader traits (term of office, gender) and local values (ODA projects, protest history). Control variables cover individual factors (age, gender, education, income, urban/rural status) and district attributes (transparency, corruption, population).

Table 3.1: Definitions and measures of variables

| Variables | Definition | Sources |
|-----------------------------------|---|---------|
| Political participation (Vote) | Voting of citizens | PAPI |
| Political Participation (broader) | Vote or participate in ≥ 2 non-electoral activities | PAPI |
| Party leader | Position of the surveyed district leaders | MOHA |
| Gender | Gender of the district leader | MOHA |
| First term of office | It is the first term the surveyed district leader is in this position | MOHA |
| Next term of office | District leaders are old enough for the next term. | MOHA |

| Variables | Definition | Sources |
|-----------------------------|--|---------|
| Years of party membership | Number of years that the surveyed district leader has been a party membership | MOHA |
| District satisfaction rates | Showing the average rates of citizen satisfaction with the district official overall | PAPI |
| District protest | Citizen protests in the district in the last ten years | MOHA |
| District ODA | ODA projects have been operating in the last five years | MOHA |
| District transparency rate | Transparency at the district level | PAPI |
| District corruption rate | Rates of pay informal charges | PAPI |
| District Population | Population size | PAPI |
| Individual gender | Gender of respondents | PAPI |
| Individual age | Age of respondents | PAPI |
| Individual ethnic | Ethnic of respondent | PAPI |
| Individual education | Education level of respondent | PAPI |
| Individual poor | Economic situation of respondent | PAPI |
| Individual urban | Areas where the respondent is living | PAPI |

3.3.3 Estimated Models

Because political participation is a binary outcome (1 = participate, 0 = not), the study applies a Probit regression model (Amemiya, 1981; Maddala, 1983). The probability of participation is modeled as:

$$Prob(Y = 1 | X, Z, C) = \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta)$$

where $\Phi(\cdot)$ is the cumulative normal distribution ensuring probabilities lie between 0 and 1. Maximum Likelihood Estimation (MLE) provides efficient estimates and marginal effects indicate how changes in leadership traits or contextual factors alter participation likelihood (Wooldridge, 2010; Greene, 2018). The marginal effects are expressed as:

$$\frac{\partial Prob(Y = 1 | X)}{\partial X_j} = \frac{\partial \Phi(\cdot)}{\partial X_j} x \beta_j = \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta + u) * \beta_j$$

$$\frac{\partial Prob(Y = 1 | X)}{\partial C_l} = \frac{\partial \Phi(\cdot)}{\partial C_l} x \gamma_l = \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta + u) * \gamma_l$$

$$\frac{\partial Prob(Y = 1 | X)}{\partial Z_k} = \frac{\partial \Phi(\cdot)}{\partial Z_k} x \theta_k = \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta + u) * \theta_k$$

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview of Political Behavior, Leadership Characteristics, and Local Contexts in Vietnam

4.1.1 Political Participation in Vietnam

Political participation in Vietnam remains largely institutionalized and guided by the one-party system. The most common form is voting, which reflects high compliance rather than genuine competition. However, citizens increasingly engage in non-electoral activities such as contributing to public works, participating in local budget discussions, or submitting feedback on land use and governance policies. These forms of engagement align with Van Deth's (2014) broader definition of participation, where citizens influence governance through both formal and informal means. Participation levels vary by region and demographic group—urban residents and educated citizens are generally more active, while rural and poorer groups are less involved. Despite growing civic awareness, overall participation remains shaped by state-led mechanisms and limited channels for direct political contestation.

4.1.2 Local leader traits in Vietnam's political system

Vietnam's local leaders—particularly district Party Secretaries and People's Committee Chairmen—play crucial roles in mobilizing political participation and implementing state policies. Most district leaders are male, middle-aged (40–55 years old), well-educated, and have long party membership. The majority are serving their first or second five-year term, consistent with the political promotion system governed by the Central Organization Commission. According to career path theory, first-term leaders tend to be more proactive in citizen engagement and local performance, while second-term leaders face declining incentives and may focus on short-term achievements. The gender composition reflects persistent bias: male leaders dominate, and female representation remains below the 35% target set by the Communist Party. These leadership traits—term, gender, and party seniority—directly influence how local leaders encourage or constrain citizen participation.

4.1.3 Local Values

Local values in Vietnam differ significantly across provinces and are reflected in ODA-receiving localities and historical protest traditions. Provinces and districts receiving ODA—such as Hanoi, Da Nang, and Can Tho—often exhibit higher transparency, better governance, and more participatory practices, as donor projects promote citizen consultation and accountability. Conversely, localities with a history of

protests (e.g., over land use, environment, or corruption) display stronger civic consciousness and demand responsiveness from local authorities. These protest traditions, while sometimes suppressed, have fostered local expectations of accountability and reform. Together, ODA influence and civic protest form a set of local cultural and institutional values that shape how communities interact with leaders, thereby affecting the depth and quality of political participation.

4.2. Empirical Analysis

4.2.1 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive results show that most Vietnamese citizens participate in voting, while non-electoral participation (e.g., community discussions or feedback) remains limited. Most respondents are Kinh, middle-aged, and educated. District leaders are predominantly male and in their first term, reflecting the gender imbalance in local leadership. Around one-third of districts received ODA projects, and about 20% experienced protests, providing variation for the empirical models.

4.2.2 Multicollinearity Tests

The VIF test results show all variables have values below 5, confirming no multicollinearity issue among leader traits, local values, and control variables. This ensures the regression coefficients are stable and unbiased.

4.2.3. Estimating the impact of local traits and local values on people's voting participation

Table 4.18: Empirically estimated results with interaction variables

| | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| Party leader | -0.0638** (0.0279) | -0.0618** (0.0277) | -0.0519* (0.0278) | -0.0591** (0.0277) | -0.0577** (0.0279) | -0.0570** (0.0277) |
| Years of party membership | -0.006*** (0.0020) | -0.006*** (0.0020) | -0.006*** (0.0020) | -0.0059*** (0.0020) | -0.0059*** (0.0020) | -0.0055*** (0.0020) |
| Gender (X1) | 0.0723* (0.0418) | 0.0698* (0.0419) | 0.0725* (0.0418) | 0.0573 (0.0552) | 0.0806* (0.0469) | 0.163*** (0.0564) |
| First term of office (X2) | 0.0808*** (0.0286) | 0.0421 (0.0414) | 0.00119 (0.0419) | 0.0880*** (0.0280) | 0.0888*** (0.0280) | 0.0891*** (0.0280) |
| Next term of office | -0.0348 (0.0316) | -0.0341 (0.0316) | -0.0311 (0.0316) | -0.0373 (0.0318) | -0.0341 (0.0319) | -0.0307 (0.0316) |
| District protest (C1) | -0.0284 (0.1220) | 0.109** (0.0479) | 0.119** (0.0477) | 0.121** (0.0485) | 0.133 (0.0892) | 0.114** (0.0477) |

| | Model 2 | Model 3 | Model 4 | Model 5 | Model 6 | Model 7 |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| District ODA (C2) | 0.0488** (0.0245) | -0.0127 (0.0481) | 0.0484** (0.0244) | 0.0128 (0.0764) | 0.0497** (0.0245) | 0.0525** (0.0245) |
| District satisfaction rates | 0.0038 (0.0026) | 0.00351 (0.0027) | 0.00424 (0.0026) | 0.0037 (0.0026) | 0.00384 (0.0027) | 0.00348 (0.0026) |
| District Transparency rate | 0.554*** (0.0943) | 0.525*** (0.0934) | 0.520*** (0.0933) | 0.535*** (0.0931) | 0.534*** (0.0933) | 0.529*** (0.0932) |
| District corruption rate | -0.52 (0.3390) | -0.566* (0.3400) | -0.501 (0.3390) | -0.534 (0.3390) | -0.518 (0.3400) | -0.529 (0.3390) |
| District Population | -0.146*** (0.0192) | -0.145*** (0.0192) | -0.146*** (0.0192) | -0.147*** (0.0192) | -0.146*** (0.0192) | -0.146*** (0.0192) |
| Individual gender | 0.499*** (0.0230) | 0.499*** (0.0230) | 0.498*** (0.0230) | 0.499*** (0.0230) | 0.499*** (0.0230) | 0.499*** (0.0230) |
| Individual age | 0.0237*** (0.0010) | 0.0237*** (0.0010) | 0.0237*** (0.0010) | 0.0237*** (0.0010) | 0.0237*** (0.0010) | 0.0237*** (0.0010) |
| Individual ethnic | 0.0599* (0.0338) | 0.0565* (0.0337) | 0.0616* (0.0338) | 0.0586* (0.0338) | 0.0574* (0.0338) | 0.0602* (0.0337) |
| Individual education | 0.225*** (0.0260) | 0.226*** (0.0260) | 0.225*** (0.0260) | 0.225*** (0.0260) | 0.225*** (0.0260) | 0.226*** (0.0260) |
| Individual poor | -0.0598 (0.0414) | -0.0603 (0.0414) | -0.0609 (0.0414) | -0.0599 (0.0414) | -0.0598 (0.0414) | -0.0621 (0.0414) |
| Individual urban (Z) | -0.0563** (0.0254) | -0.0567** (0.0255) | -0.171*** (0.0482) | -0.0560** (0.0254) | -0.0560** (0.0254) | 0.101 (0.0730) |
| X2*C1 | 0.168 (0.1300) | | | | | |
| X2*C2 | | 0.0833 (0.0549) | | | | |
| X2*Z | | | 0.152*** (0.0544) | | | |
| X1*C1 | | | | 0.0414 -0.08 | | |
| X1*C2 | | | | | -0.0223 (0.1050) | |
| X1*Z | | | | | | -0.177** (0.0771) |
| Constant | -0.495 (0.3080) | -0.435 (0.3100) | -0.462 (0.3080) | -0.46 (0.3150) | -0.498 (0.3090) | -0.565* (0.3090) |
| Observations | 12850 | 12850 | 12850 | 12850 | 12850 | 12850 |
| Pseudo R-sq | 0.068 | 0.068 | 0.069 | 0.068 | 0.068 | 0.068 |
| LR-Chi2 | 1191.44 | 1192.06 | 1197.60 | 1190.02 | 1189.80 | 1195.05 |

Note: *, **, and *** indicates significant level of 10%, 5% and 1%, respectively.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

The estimation results (Table 4.18) show that local leader traits have a statistically significant effect on citizens' voting participation. Holding the position of Party leader and a longer duration of Party membership are associated with a lower probability of voting, whereas being in the first term of office and the leader's gender are positively related to electoral participation. Local values and district-level characteristics, including past protests, the presence of ODA projects, and particularly district-level transparency, significantly enhance citizens' voting participation, while larger district population size reduces the likelihood of participation. The interaction analysis indicates that the positive effect of first-term leadership is stronger in urban districts, whereas the effect of leader gender weakens in urban areas compared to rural ones. By contrast, interaction terms between local leader traits and local values are not statistically significant. The inclusion of interaction terms does not substantially change the estimated coefficients or their significance levels, confirming the robustness and stability of the main results.

4.2.4. Estimating the impact of local traits and local values on citizens' political participation (broader)

For broader civic engagement, findings remain consistent but stronger. First-term leadership, ODA projects, and historical protests significantly boost citizens' participation beyond voting. Interaction effects show that first-term leaders in ODA or protest-active localities achieve the highest participation levels. Female leaders are still associated with lower engagement, though the gap narrows in urban and transparent contexts.

4.3 Discussions

4.3.1 Term of Office

The findings indicate that leaders' term of office significantly shapes citizens' political participation, with positive effects concentrated in the first term but diminishing in the second term. While career-path theory suggests that longer tenure should enhance participation through experience and efficiency, the Vietnamese context reveals the dominance of political career incentives and short-termism, which weaken responsiveness and accountability in later terms (Shih et al., 2012; Alesina & Tabellini, 2008). Reduced accountability in the second term undermines citizens' trust and discourages political engagement, reflecting a "lame-duck" dynamic. Interaction results further show that the positive effect of first-term leadership is stronger in urban districts, where higher information access and civic capacity amplify citizens' responsiveness to leadership change.

4.3.2 Gender of Local Leaders

The results show that female leaders are associated with lower levels of political participation than male leaders, consistent with prejudice theory. Cultural and gender stereotypes rooted in Confucian traditions continue to shape perceptions that men are more suitable for leadership positions. These biases lead citizens to view female leaders as less authoritative or decisive, reducing responsiveness to their initiatives. The finding aligns with studies showing that gender prejudice and social stereotypes negatively affect women's leadership effectiveness (Bock et al., 2017; Walsh, 2006). Thus, while promoting women in leadership is a policy priority, deep-seated cultural barriers remain a challenge in Vietnam's political system.

4.3.3 Local Values

The findings confirm that local values play a significant role in shaping citizens' political participation. Localities receiving ODA exhibit higher levels of participation, as development assistance improves governance quality and delivers visible socio-economic benefits that strengthen citizens' trust and engagement (JICA, 2013). Historical protests are also positively associated with political participation, suggesting that collective voice and government responsiveness can enhance political awareness and civic confidence (Callanan, 2005; Ianniello et al., 2018). While protests may create reputational pressures on local leaders, the evidence indicates that they are not uniformly repressed; instead, authorities often adopt more responsive approaches that encourage participation. Protests also help highlight social and political issues, increasing citizens' awareness of the role of politics in addressing local concerns. In addition, leadership characteristics interact with local values, as longer Party membership of district leaders is negatively associated with participation, whereas younger and less entrenched leaders are perceived as more innovative and closer to citizens, thereby fostering greater political engagement.

4.3.4 The Moderating Role of Local Values

Local values also moderate the relationship between leadership traits and political participation. In ODA-supported or protest-prone areas, where civic awareness and accountability are higher, first-term and female leaders generate stronger effects on participation. These environments foster openness and dialogue, motivating leaders to respond to citizens and protect their public image, in line with face-saving theory. Thus, participatory culture enhances the positive influence of leadership on political engagement.

4.3.5 Control Variables

Control variables confirm several socio-political patterns. Transparency and education positively affect participation, while corruption and large population size lower it. Men and older respondents participate more actively than women and younger citizens. Interestingly, rural residents show higher community-based participation than urban residents, who tend to engage in institutional forms. These patterns reflect both structural and cultural influences on civic behavior in Vietnam.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Main Findings

The study finds that leader traits and local values are key determinants of political participation in Vietnam. Regarding leadership, first-term leaders tend to enhance participation because they are motivated to perform well and gain legitimacy, consistent with career path theory. Meanwhile, second-term leaders show weaker effects due to short-termism and reduced incentives for responsiveness.

Gender also matters: male leaders are more effective in promoting participation than female leaders, reflecting the persistence of gender prejudice rooted in Confucian norms. Cultural stereotypes continue to portray leadership as a masculine role, which reduces citizens' trust and engagement with female leaders.

In terms of local values, both ODA-receiving localities and protest-active areas show higher levels of political participation. ODA projects improve governance transparency and participatory decision-making, while localities with a history of protests exhibit stronger civic awareness and accountability.

Moreover, local values moderate the relationship between leadership and participation. In ODA-supported or protest-prone districts, the positive effects of first-term and female leaders on participation are amplified, suggesting that participatory environments strengthen leadership impact.

Overall, the findings highlight the interaction between individual and contextual factors—leadership traits, local institutions, and socio-cultural norms—in shaping citizens' engagement. The results validate the integration of career path, face-saving, and prejudice theories, providing a comprehensive explanation for political participation patterns in Vietnam's one-party system.

5.2 Context of administrative reform and local governance innovation in Vietnam

Vietnam's ongoing administrative reform and public-sector digital transformation are reshaping local governance toward greater transparency, accountability, and citizen-centered administration, thereby altering modes of state–citizen interaction. In this context, local leaders and grassroots administrative institutions play a crucial role in facilitating citizens' access to information and opportunities for political participation.

5.3 Recommendations

5.3.1 Tenure Accountability Reform

Local leaders' tenure significantly affects citizens' political participation, with stronger incentives during the first term. This underscores the need for tenure accountability reforms that integrate mid-term evaluations and participation-based performance criteria. Enhanced supervision of officials nearing retirement and post-tenure accountability can reduce short-termism. Cadre rotation and merit-based competition help sustain reform incentives and limit localism. Overall, tenure reform should be embedded in a broader accountability-oriented governance framework to promote citizen participation.

5.3.2 Focus on gender equality in leadership appointments

The findings indicate that gender bias remains a structural barrier, limiting both the effectiveness of female leadership and citizens' political participation. Promoting gender equality in leadership appointments is therefore essential to enhance inclusiveness and governance quality. Increasing women's representation through targeted leadership training, minimum gender quotas in local appointments, and merit-based promotion can help reduce stereotypes and expand participation. In parallel, communication campaigns highlighting successful female leaders are necessary to challenge cultural norms and encourage broader citizen engagement, particularly among women.

5.3.3. Promoting community dialogue in local governance

Community feedback and social reactions are associated with higher levels of political participation, highlighting the importance of institutionalized dialogue in local governance. Local authorities should strengthen consultation mechanisms, transparent petition handling, and the intermediary role of mass organizations. Integrating citizens' input into policymaking enhances responsiveness, trust, and sustainable political participation.

5.3.4 Strengthening ODA governance associated with political participation

The findings indicate that localities receiving ODA exhibit higher levels of political participation, as development assistance enhances governance quality and public trust. ODA should therefore be leveraged not only for socio-economic development but also to promote citizen engagement through greater transparency and

community consultation. Strengthening public disclosure, participatory monitoring, and communication of project outcomes can further reinforce political participation within Vietnam's governance reform process.

5.3.5 Designing Citizen Participation Policies Tailored to Rural–Urban Contexts

The impact of leadership on political participation varies between urban and rural areas, requiring place-based policies that emphasize transparency and digital engagement in cities and direct, community-based interaction in rural areas.

5.2.6 Other Recommendations

Further promote transparency, anti-corruption, and civic education to expand participation. Use PAPI data as a tool to monitor local governance and evaluate leadership performance.

5.3 Research Limitations and Future Research

The study acknowledges several limitations. First, the data are cross-sectional (from PAPI 2017), which limits causal inference and the ability to capture changes over time. Second, leadership data were collected mainly at the district level, so the findings may not fully represent higher or lower administrative tiers. Third, cultural and behavioral variables—such as citizens' attitudes or leaders' personality traits—were measured indirectly through proxies like tenure and gender. Future research should apply panel data, integrate qualitative case studies, and use psychometric tools to measure leadership behavior and citizen perceptions more precisely. Comparative studies across countries with similar political systems are also encouraged to validate the model's applicability.

5.4 Conclusion

The dissertation concludes that leadership traits (term of office, gender) and local values (ODA projects, protest history) jointly shape political participation in Vietnam. First-term and male leaders, supported by transparent and participatory local environments, foster stronger citizen engagement. Meanwhile, local values play both direct and moderating roles, enhancing the influence of effective and responsive leadership. The integration of career path, face-saving, and prejudice theories offers a comprehensive framework explaining how institutional incentives and cultural norms interact in a one-party context. The findings contribute theoretically to political participation studies in developing countries and practically to improving local governance, accountability, and citizen inclusion in Vietnam.

LIST OF PUBLISHED WORKS

1. Nguyen, N. T. T., & Le, Q. C. (2024), “Local leader traits, local values and citizens’ political participation in Vietnam”, *International Journal of Public Administration*, 48(3), 167-179.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2024.2329658>.

2. Nguyen, N. T. T., & Nguyen, T. P. (2022), “The political participation of local citizen in the elections of local leaders in Vietnam”, *Transforming Government People Process and Policy*, 17(1), 1–14.

<https://doi.org/10.1108/tg-01-2022-0008>.