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REPRESENTATIVE BUREAUCRACY AND INCLUSION: CITIZEN PARTICIPATION OF ETHNIC MINORITIES IN VIETNAM

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Abstract. In the context of Vietnam, with fifty-four ethnic minority groups and sixty-three provinces/municipalities, this study aims to fill a gap in the literature by looking at ethnic representation and its influence on citizen participation at the local level based on Representative Bureaucracy and Inclusion theory. We use the combination of three datasets: the Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI), the Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affair, and the General Statistics Office of 63 provinces in Vietnam from 2012 to 2017. We run a panel data analysis random-effects model (REM) with White-Huber standard errors to correct heteroskedasticity in current years to estimate the effects. Findings support the research hypothesis that ethnic minority groups in Vietnam are negatively associated with citizen participation in the local government, particularly in civic knowledge. Additionally, the level of citizen participation is also negatively related to the urbanization, unemployment, and poverty rates of each province. However, it is positively associated with the education level of each province's population. With these findings, this study also proposes some policy implications to ensure the development rights of ethnic minorities in Vietnam.

Keywords: citizen participation, ethnic minorities, representative bureaucracy, PAPI, Vietnam.

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Introduction

As the governance concept emerged, citizen participation has become a central principle of local development. It is not only a core element of “good governance” and “sound governance” (OECD, 2001a; Farazmand, 2004) but also enhances “democratic governance” (Fung, 2015). Through citizen participation, local governments can understand more about the needs and concerns of citizens. Simultaneously, citizens can get information, monitor the quality of public services, and correct their governments’ actions (Speer, 2012). Citizen participation refers to diverse groups within the local government’s decision-making process, and ethnic minority groups are frequently discerned as complex communities to involve (Beebeejaun, 2006). Indeed, ethnic minorities deserve special attention as they have been marginalized and discriminated against in society (Rex and Moore, 1967; Pilkington, 2003). Ethnic inequality is often a big challenge for constructing a civilized democratic society, especially in terms of citizen participation. Unfortunately, very few studies compare ethnic minority representation across countries or that address the underrepresentation of different groups within countries (Bird, 2003; Bird, 2005). Therefore, citizen participation of ethnic minority groups has become a critical matter.

In Vietnam, after three decades of *Doi moi* (Renewal), in line with rapid economic growth, state agencies have become more open to social organizations in the policy-making processes (Kerkvliet, Nguyen, and Bach, 2008). As a result, citizens’ expectations of public governance are changing, and the concept of citizen participation has been gradually improving in the Vietnamese socio-political system. Many social organizations formed by citizens have also emerged, and hence citizens have become more actively involved in policy-making (Bui, 2013). However, citizen participation of ethnic minority groups is often perceived as a problematic issue. Vietnam is a multiethnic country with fifty-four different groups and sixty-three provinces, each having a different proportion of ethnic groups. The largest group, called “*Viet*” or “*Kinh*”, accounted for 85.4% of the total population (General Statistics Office of Vietnam, 2015). They live mainly in the inland deltas and coastal areas (Imai et al., 2001), while the remaining population lives in the mountainous areas. Most of them live below the poverty line and often have only a weak voice over policies. Therefore, to exercise the democratic rights of ethnic minorities as well as to improve local socio-economic development, Vietnam has a broader range of programs for citizens, such as the National Target Program for Poverty, the Socio-economic Development Program for Most Vulnerable Communes in Ethnic Minority and Mountainous Areas (known as Program 135) or the New Rural Development Program.

Meanwhile, the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance of Vietnam empowers ethnic minorities a more prominent voice in development strategies (Shanks et al., 2004; World Bank, 2009), as well as encourages them to participate in the political system, social management, and state management such as through both directly (through in-person engagement at the local level) and indirectly (through voting for People’s Council and National Assembly delegates). In the National Assembly XIV

from 2016 to 2021, there are 86 ethnic minority representatives, accounting for 17.3 percent. Nevertheless, the role of the ethnic minority communities participating in these programs, mainly being the “beneficiary”, has not yet shown the proper function of this community (Luu and Pham, 2013). To date, there is a large number of studies in Vietnam documenting significant gaps in access to public services between rural, and urban populations, *Kinh* people, and ethnic minorities (Pham et al., 2011; World Bank, 2009; World Bank, 2013). Yet, too little discussion has analyzed the citizen participation of ethnic minorities at the local level in Vietnam, despite the fact that they represent an important community.

Based on the theories of representative bureaucracy and inclusion, this paper will help fill a gap in the literature by looking at ethnic representation and its influence on citizen participation at the local level in the unique context of Vietnam – a socialist republic and a developing country. We also focus on the status of the representatives of ethnicity concerning citizen participation in four detailed sub-dimensions: civic knowledge, opportunities for participation, equality elections, and voluntary contributions. With these findings, some suggestions are set out to actively enhance citizen participation for ethnicity in the local government’s equality policies. It may also help ensure that no individual or group is excluded from citizen participation based on their race in the future.

The study proceeds as follows. The first section of this paper examines the theoretical perspectives developed in the literature concerning the effects of ethnic minority groups on citizen participation. Next, it reviews the extent of empirical research on the issue. In the third section, we develop a research model and describe the data to test the influence of ethnic minority groups on citizen participation at the local level. The results section presents the model and discusses its implications. Finally, a conclusion offers some suggestions for further research on enhancing citizen participation of ethnic minority groups effectively.

Literature Review

The theory of representative bureaucracy

Kingsley first interpreted “representative bureaucracy” when referring to the economic, political, and social elites holding important policymaking positions in British government agencies. Still, he ignored the interests of other remaining groups. The representative bureaucracy would suit a less privileged, less class-based civil service system. Additionally, the term “representative bureaucracy” is also used to describe the relationship between demographic characteristics (such as race, ethnicity, language and religion, and gender) and the society that it is supposed to serve (Van der Meer and Roborgh, 1996). Generally, this term can be described as the “body of thought and research examining the potential for government agencies to act as representative political institutions if their personnel is drawn from all sectors of society” (Dolan and Rosenbloom, 2003, p. xi). One of the common issues that representative bureaucracy emphasizes is integrating minorities into society, such as giving them chances to participate in government management or control a bureaucracy (Dolan and Rosenbloom, 2003; Van Gool, 2008).

The theory of representative bureaucracy suggests that public agencies that represent disadvantaged communities will ensure the interests and values of these groups in bureaucratic decision-making processes (Bradbury and Kellough, 2011). There are two ways of representing bureaucracy (Mosher, 1968), including passive and active representation. The former refers to the extent to which bureaucracies reflect the special composition of such as racial or ethnic minorities and women. The latter means that bureaucrats “press for the interests and desires of those whom they purport to represent” (Mosher, 1968, p. 11). In other words, core attitudes, values, and beliefs are shared by bureaucrats with the social groups from which they are drawn. Furthermore, this theory emphasizes seeking the search for a way to legitimize the political power of the bureaucracy based on democratic values such as equal representation, majority rule, and minority rights (Frederickson, 2012). When a bureaucracy reflects the interests and values of the people in terms of race, ethnicity, and sex, it can be considered a representative institution. Lim (2006) illustrates that minority group bureaucrats can also change the behavior of other policy participants like the majority group bureaucrats to produce benefits for their social group indirectly. To recognize the positive right of the ethnic minority and enable their voices to be heard in official bodies, representation is becoming increasingly important for participation in the local policymaking process (Ghai, 2008). In short, although there were concerns about whether all social classes or minority groups were represented in the policymaking process, the representative bureaucracy was necessary to meet the interests of all social classes (Lind, 2016).

Inclusion, citizen participation, and ethnic minorities

The body of literature on inclusion shows that inclusion refers to diverse individuals’ full participation and contributions to an organization (Roberson, 2006; Miller, 1998; Lirio et al., 2008). Notably, inclusion not only emphasizes a theme of belongingness with some keywords like “accepted,” “insider,” and “sense of belonging” but also a theme of uniqueness with critical phrases such as “valuing contributions from all employees,” “contribute fully,” and “to have their voices heard and appreciated” (Shore and et al., 2011). Meanwhile, diversity may be defined as differences in perspectives causing potential behavioral differences among group members and identifying differences among group members concerning other groups (McGrath, Berdahl and Arrow, 1995; Larkey, 1996). There are observable characteristics of diversity that include gender, race, ethnicity, and age (Milliken and Martins, 1996) and non-observable dimensions, including cultural, cognitive, and technical differences among employees (Kochan et al., 2003). Generally, inclusion focuses on a sense of belonging and feeling valued by individuals, while diversity mainly emphasizes the belongingness theme and not the uniqueness theme (Shore et al., 2011).

As one of the critical themes in theories of participation in governance, inclusion refers to the diversity of status of people taking part in citizen participation, such as ethnicity, race, and gender (Quick and Bryson, 2016). In addition, it may be associated with concerns about the representativeness of people interested in decision-making about policies, plans, or programs. Citizen participation

can be variously defined through different perspectives (Involve, 2005). This study will mainly focus on the democratic view. In particular, we consider it a vital aspect of democracy that “gives citizens a say in decision-making as well as their voice can be heard; encourages civic skills and virtues; leads to rational decisions; and increases the legitimacy of decisions” (Michels, 2011, p. 279). Accordingly, citizen participation can be considered a community-based process by which citizens’ public concerns, needs, and interests are incorporated into decision-making (Pateman, 1970; Holdar, 2002; AbouAssi, 2013).

Although citizen participation has been deepening democracy, the system for ethnic minorities remains inaccessible. Their participation can be characterized by “low rates of registration and voting, distrust towards the middle and higher levels of representation, and difficult coordination, if any, between local and national levels of representation” (Marques and Santos, 2004, p. 114). Ethnic minorities are generally less active compared to the majority population (Hero and Tolbert, 2004; Just, 2017; Kaya, 2013). Ethnicity and race should be differentiated; “race is a socially defined categorization system based loosely on physical characteristics such as skin color, that serves to maintain a sociopolitical hierarchy”; whereas ethnicity is made of traditional values which are transmitted from the ancestors (Umaña-Taylor and Shin, 2007, p. 178).

Notably, ethnic minority groups in the UK and African-Americans in the USA are not treated as well as the white majority (Wilson, 1987; Pilkington, 2003). In American history, citizen participation has been limited to different groups, especially the poor and non-white groups. Only propertied, well-educated, white males have always been eligible to participate in government, and recently full participation has become likely for the poor, and black (Strange, 1972). Nevertheless, Verba (1993) argues that there is no significant difference among the three groups in political participation after accounting for differences in politically relevant resources among Latinos, African-Americans, and Anglo-Whites. For him, disparities in education, income, and occupation associated with race and ethnicity that help to interpret participatory differences do not define an ethnic group (Verba, 1993). Reversely, in the UK, although the local government offered opportunities for participation for ethnic minorities, there has not been a more enlightened and transformative policy-making process (Beebeejaun, 2006).

Through surveys that sampled minorities both in the US and New Zealand, Banducci et al. (2004) found out that the effects of minority empowerment vary by the context. In terms of descriptive representation are positive. This means that minority citizens will vote where minorities hold office. In other words, minority representation can symbolic links, bring about more positive attitudes towards government and encourage political participation. In particular, Maori are also more likely to vote if their representatives are also of Maori descent in New Zealand. Blacks living in minority-majority districts also score higher on these indicators than blacks outside these districts in the US. Regardless of state environmental contexts, compared to Whites and Latinos, African-Americans and Asian-Americans have less confidence in government responsiveness (Hero and Tolbert, 2004). In the same vein, Just (2017) also asserts that members of ethnic minorities are generally less active in politics than majority populations. In the US, compared

to white Americans, all ethnic minorities are less likely to be involved in politics, whether as voters, campaigners, or candidates. The significant minorities do not implicate those, ethnic minorities are represented well or can effectively participate in politics (Kaya, 2013).

There is some evidence suggesting that citizen participation varies concerning political, cultural, and historical contexts. Hence, in Vietnam, this study focuses on citizen participation by definitions of the Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI). In 2009, United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Center for Community Support Development Studies (a Vietnamese research center on policy impact assessment), and the Vietnam Fatherland Front launched the PAPI – the most effective tool in Vietnam to assess the performance of governance and public administration based on citizens' experiences. From 2009 to 2019, the PAPI survey was conducted through face-to-face interviews with 117,363 respondents from different demographic groups in rural and urban areas (63 provinces, 207 districts, 414 communes, and 828 villages). Hence, respondents' opinions are reflected more comprehensively and closely with the local government that they are evaluating.

According to PAPI, citizen participation means that citizens have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, including choosing their government leaders, designing, and monitoring the implementation of policies. Thus, we analyze citizen participation by ethnicity concerning four sub-dimensions: civic knowledge, opportunities for participation, equality elections, and voluntary contributions. These sub-dimensions can be defined as the four steps of the slogan “Dan biet, dan ban, dan lam, dan kiem tra” (People know, People discuss, People do, and People monitor). In this study, civic knowledge focuses on citizens' awareness of political life and participation rights, including elections and elected representatives. It refers to the comprehensive understanding of Vietnamese citizens about the local governance structures, such as the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance, the above two familiar slogans, and the correct term of the local office.

Recent research suggests essential links between citizen participation and civic knowledge. First, civic knowledge is positively associated with citizen participation (Galston, 2007; Coley, 2012; Leigh, 2018). All other things being equal, the more knowledge citizens have, the more likely they are to participate in public affairs. First, because civic knowledge is related to the content or what citizens must know, they can better understand the effects of public policies on their interests if they have more ability. They can effectively promote their interests in the political process (Galston, 2007). Second, regarding opportunities for participation, Vietnamese citizens typically participate through groups or associations, including officially established ones such as mass organizations, and informal and unregistered ones such as local clans or cultural groups. They are enabled to discuss and contribute to formulating specific policies or programs. Regarding deliberative democratic theory (Parvin, 2018), citizen participation also refers to the process during which whereby citizens possess the opportunity to participate in the public decision-making process. It means that citizens have the opportunity to directly participate in elections at various different levels. All Vietnamese citizens also have an equal chance to vote in all

elections at the local and grassroots groups elections. Third, the quality of village elections refers to how the elections observe the participatory regulations provided in the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance (GRDO). Elections are traditionally central means to realizing the core values of democracy, especially citizen participation. The quality of elections significantly affects citizens' trust, showing a higher level of citizen participation. Therefore, the quality of elections is considered an indicator to ensure the quality of governance and the accountability of elected officials (Alemika, 2007). Finally, citizen participation is also related to social networks and voluntary organizations (Putnam, 2000). Vietnamese citizens can voluntarily or compulsorily contribute to community development by participating in local government activities. This refers to the latent citizen participation in "actions" such as voluntary work for the community charity (Emorine et al., 2015). Residents realize that they must commit to improving their quality of life, so they actively participate in local activities through voluntary work. Voluntary contributions mean citizens' willingness to improve local living standards. In other words, citizens are genuinely voluntary for payments and are not coerced by local authorities or through other forms such as informal taxation.

This research considers citizen participation as the process of providing people with knowledge and opportunities to participate in political, social, and administrative activities that influence public decisions. We attempt to apply the representative bureaucracy and inclusion theory to examine the influence of ethnic minorities on citizen participation at the local level in Vietnam. According to this theory, the members of minority group are less likely to be registered to vote and are less involuntarily contributing to local socio-economic development programs and policies than the members of majority group. In the case of Vietnam, we investigate whether the distribution of ethnic minorities of each province significantly affects citizen participation at the local level, especially in different sub-dimensions such as civic knowledge, opportunities for participation, equality elections, and voluntary contributions (Figure 1).

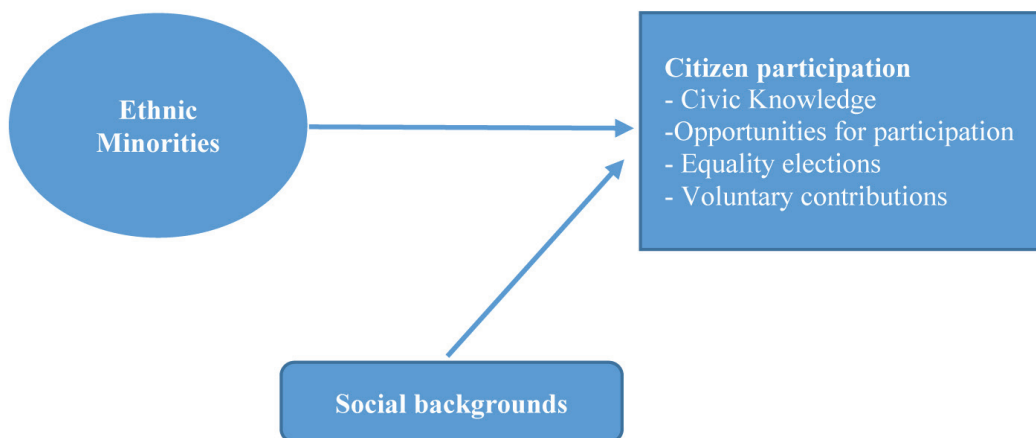


Figure 1. Research Model

In the regression, we take into account the fragmentation of ethnic minorities (EM) and estimate that in the province with a higher population density of ethnic minorities, citizen participation at the local level is lower. This leads to the main hypotheses of the present study:

H1. *The proportion of ethnic minorities is negatively associated with citizen participation at the local level.*

Concerning four sub-dimensions of citizen participation, there may be differences between the ethnic minority group and the majority group in Vietnam. Theoretically, minority groups are less likely than the majority group to have political and civic knowledge (Hart and Atkins, 2002; Torney -Putta et al., 2001; 2007). The hypothesis is raised:

H1a: *The higher proportion of ethnic minorities is, the lower level of civic knowledge will be.*

Compared with the majority group, ethnic groups have considerably fewer opportunities for participation (Stodolska et al., 2014). Therefore, it hypothesizes the following:

H1b: *The higher proportion of ethnic minorities is, the lower opportunities for participation will be.*

A previous study reveals that voter-identification legislation, specifically for minority, low-income, and less-educated people, might not influence the quality of elections (Jones, 2020). Although ethnic minorities have fewer opportunities to participate in socioeconomic matters than the majority group, they are likely to contribute to public affairs, such as monetary or in-kind, voluntary, or required (Wells-Dang et al., 2015). Therefore, in this study, we predict that the proportion of ethnic minorities will not affect the quality of local elections and voluntary contributions at the local level. Socio-demographic status explains changes in citizen participation in community management (Shamai, Abya, and Ebrahimi, 2015; Kinyanjui et al., 2013). Therefore, we also hypothesize the following:

H2. *Socio-demographic variations affect citizen participation at the local level.*

Research Methods

Data collection

We use the secondary data collected from the Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI), the Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affair, and the General Statistics Office of 63 provinces of Vietnam from 2012 to 2017. It is likely a pioneering project to use four data sets to investigate the influence of citizen participation on government performance at the provincial municipal level, at least in Vietnam. A good reason for using multiple data sets is to prevent common method bias (Alasuutari et al., 2008; Ongaro and van Thiel, 2018). This study estimates the influence of ethnic minorities group and socio-economic backgrounds on citizen participation at the local level. Hence, we use panel data analysis random-effects model (REM) with White-Huber standard errors to correct heteroskedasticity in current years. Typically, in panel data, if N (observation) is big and T (time) is short, the random-effects model (REM) is more suitable than the fixed-effect model – FEM (Clark et al., 2010).

Measures

Dependent variables. Citizen participation at the local level is interpreted explicitly by four sub-dimensions, including Civic Knowledge (CK), Opportunities for participation (OP), Quality of election (QE), and Voluntary contribution (VC) according to PAPI's definition.

Independent variable. In this study, the proportion of ethnic minorities in each province is measured as an independent variable, and we also control four factors that we hypothesize influence our independent and dependent variables, including unemployment rate, educational level, urbanization rate, and poverty rate.

Control variables

Unemployment rate. It is argued that people participate more when they have resources (time, money, civic skills) and when they are recruited (Brady et al. 1995; Gaxie, 2002; Schur, 2003). They show that employed people participate more (in all activities except voting). A recent review of the literature presents a low level of political participation of unemployed compared to employed people, although this effect may be contingent upon socio-economics status (Chabanet, 2007; Lorenzini and Giugni, 2012). In this study, we consider the unemployment rate for the regression. We estimate that in a province where the unemployment rate is higher, citizen participation in local government is lower.

Urbanization rate. Urbanization is a worldwide megatrend. It has significantly changed interactions between people and the environment in recent decades. Although theories on the relationship between social environment and civic participation are still lacking, it could be argued that the level of urbanization influences citizen participation (Davidson and Cotte, 1989; Kakumba, 2010). The place of residence shows some tendencies toward political participation. People who live in rural areas participate politically more than their urban counterparts (Richardson, 2014). Maybe rural people have fewer resources hence they have more "sense of community" than urban people (James, 2001). This study predicts that provinces with higher urbanization rates have lower levels of citizen participation.

Education level. There are great pieces of evidence that the education level of each individual affects political participation (Bovens and Wille, 2010; Berinsky and Lenz, 2011; Persson, 2014, 2015; Gidengil et al. 2017). The social network argument implies that well-educated people have a more significant stake in various policy areas. Hence, they are more inclined to participate in political affairs (Aars and Christensen, 2018). Carreira et al. (2016), on the other hand, argue that education level influences citizen participation only in the way they perceive and carry out their involvement in public policies. This study claims that provinces with higher levels of education tend to have higher levels of citizen participation.

Poverty rate. Along with education, income level is considered one of the indicators to form opinions and communicate effectively in the participation process. Typically, higher-income people have a more significant stake in various policy areas; hence income is positively associated with political interest

and participation (Campbell, 2002). It is well known, Americans with higher incomes tend to participate more actively in politics than lower-income citizens. Higher-income people are more likely to vote, participate in political discussions, attend campaign events, donate money, and contact public officials (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Schlozman, Verba, and Brady, 2012). According to Clark and Wise (2018), this study also advocates that provinces with higher poverty rates have lower citizen participation rates.

The definitions and sources for all variables used in this study are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Variables definitions

| Variable | Citation | Measurement | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| Dependent variables – Citizen participation (CP) – Civic Knowledge (CK) – Opportunities for participation (OP) – Quality of election (QE) – Voluntary contribution (VC) | Andrew-Wells Dang and et.al, 2015; Giang, Nguyen and Tran, 2016; Nguyen, 2015; Jairo, Nguyen, Tran and Phung, 2015 | Assess different mechanisms for citizen participation in the processes of governance and public administration. | www.papi.org.vn |
| Independent variables Ethnic Minorities (EM) | Hero and Tolbert, 2004; Just, 2017; Kaya, 2013 | The proportion of ethnic minorities of each province | The Committee for Ethnic Minorities Affair |
| Control variables Unemployment rate (Un) | Chabanet, 2007; Lorenzini and Giugni, 2012 | Percentage in each province | The General Statistics Office of 63 provinces |
| Urbanization rate (Urb) | Davidson and Cotte, 1989; Kakumba, 2010; Richardson; 2014; James, 2001. | Percentage in each province | |
| Education level (Edu) | Bovens and Wille, 2010; Berinsky and Lenz, 2011; Persson 2014, 2015; Gidengil and et al. 2017 | Percentage of the education level of the adult population in each province | |
| Poverty rate (Pov) | Clark and Wise, 2018 | Percentage in each province | |

Sources: Composed by the author.

Models

Taken together with ethnic minorities and a set of control variables unique to each province, a basic model has been developed to examine citizen participation.

$$CP_t = f(EM, \text{other control variables}), \text{ including } CP_{i,t} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 EM_{i,t} + \beta_2 Un_{i,t} + \beta_3 Urb_{i,t} + \beta_4 Edu_{i,t} + \beta_5 Pov_{i,t} + \varepsilon$$

In which:

$CP_{i,t}$: Citizen participation in the year t

$EM_{i,t}$: the rate of ethnic minorities in each province in the year t

$Un_{i,t}$: the unemployment rate in each province in the year t

$Urb_{i,t}$: urbanization rate in each province in the year t

$Edu_{i,t}$: education level in each province in the year t

$Pov_{i,t}$: poverty rate in each province in the year t

ε : an error term.

We run a set of two models to investigate the effects of ethnic minorities and socio-demographic backgrounds on citizen participation at the local level. Model 1 examines the influence of ethnic minorities and demographic, social backgrounds on citizen participation at the local level. Model 2 estimates these effects in terms of four sub-dimensions of citizen participation, including Civic Knowledge (CV), Opportunities for participation (OP), Quality of elections (QE), and Voluntary contributions (VC), respectively.

Results

Citizen participation (including its four sub-dimensions), the proportion of ethnic minorities, unemployment rate, urbanization rate, education level, and poverty rate in 63 provinces of Vietnam are varied. Table 2 presents descriptive statistics on these variables.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics

| Variable | Obs | Min | Max | Mean | Std. Dev. |
|---|------|------|-------|-------|-----------|
| Dependent variables | | | | | |
| CP (citizen participation at the local level) | 376* | 3.75 | 6.81 | 5.19 | .5081427 |
| CV (Civic Knowledge) | 376 | 0.62 | 1.92 | 1.14 | .2680549 |
| OP (Opportunities for participation) | 376 | 1.19 | 2.13 | 1.73 | .1886285 |
| QE (Quality of elections) | 376 | 1.05 | 1.87 | 1.53 | .1601344 |
| VC (Voluntary contributions) | 376 | 0.47 | 1.795 | .89 | .2140561 |
| Independent Variable | | | | | |
| EM (Ethnic Minorities) | 378 | .05 | 92.69 | 22.3 | 28.61 |
| Control Variables | | | | | |
| Un | 378 | .14 | 4.96 | 2.02 | 1.077189 |
| Urb | 378 | 9.72 | 87.62 | 27.70 | 17.06517 |
| Edu | 378 | 5.1 | 42.7 | 16.82 | 6.930949 |
| Pov | 378 | 0 | 43.5 | 10.49 | 8.496367 |

Sources: Calculated by author.

Note: *The database has missing values of two provinces (Bac Giang and Dong Thap) in 2014.

Based on data from the PAPI's report, we found that citizen participation at the local level is differentiated by geographical characteristics (Table 3). From 2012 to 2015, the average level of citizen participation at the local level decreased with fluctuation, reaching the lowest of 4.85 out of 10 in 2015. This was, followed by a dramatic increase, and peaked at 5.4 out of 10 in 2016.

Then, it decreased slightly in 2017. Northern people tend to be more active in participation compared to Southern people. For instance, from 2012 to 2017, the average citizen participation score of the Northern region was 5.38 out of 10, compared to 4.98 out of 10 in the Southern region. Most of the provinces that achieved the highest scores were in the North. This phenomenon of regional convergence dates back to 2011 and has intensified over the last six years.

Additionally, most of the provinces that got received the lowest score to scores have a high proportion of ethnic minorities, such as Lai Chau (85.98%), Cao Bang (92.69%), and Lang Son (87.46%). Most strikingly, Ha Tinh is the only province that got achieved the highest score in citizen participation at the local level from 2015 to 2017. In fact, in Ha Tinh, opportunities for the participation of citizens as well as the quality of elections are also extremely high. Perhaps the success of this participatory process is largely due to the will and ability of the Ha Tinh authorities to undertake participatory planning (Dang and et al., 2016).

We also found that the average percentage of ethnic minorities in Vietnam is over 22%, spread over 63 provinces. All provinces with the highest proportion of ethnic minorities, such as Cao Bang (92.69%), Lang Son (87.46%) and Lai Chau (85.98%), are located in rural mountainous areas. The other provinces with the lowest proportion of ethnic minorities, such as Hai Phong (0.05%) and Ha Nam (0.1%), are located in urban or delta areas.

Table 3

Citizen Participation at Vietnam provinces from 2012 to 2017

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------|----|------------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------|----------------|
| CP2012 | 63 | 4.17 (Dak Lak ²) | 6.19 (Binh Dinh ²) | 5.2760 | .46096 |
| CP2013 | 63 | 4.32 (Lai Chau ¹) | 6.48 (Quang Binh ¹) | 5.2068 | .43856 |
| CP2014 | 61 | 3.96 (Ninh Thuan ²) | 5.89 (Quang Tri ¹) | 4.9880 | .41806 |
| CP2015 | 63 | 3.75 (Lai Chau ¹) | 6.44 (Ha Tinh ¹) | 4.8522 | .50862 |
| CP2016 | 63 | 4.43 (Tra Vinh ²) | 6.81 (Ha Tinh ¹) | 5.4006 | .52227 |
| CP2017 | 63 | 4.33 (Binh Duong ²) | 6.41 (Ha Tinh ¹) | 5.3714 | .44774 |

Sources: Calculated by the author.

Notes: ¹ Provinces belong to the North region.

² Provinces belong to the South region.

As the data revealed in Table 4 shows, ethnic minorities, and socio-demographic characteristics can explain 36% of the Vietnamese provinces' variance in citizen participation.

Furthermore, these variables can explain the variations of the four sub-dimensions of citizen participation from 2% (opportunities for participation) to approximately 22% (civic knowledge), and around about 30% (voluntary contribution) to 47% (quality of election).

The proportion of ethnic people living in each province is negatively associated with citizen participation at the local level and one sub-dimension (civic knowledge).

The coefficient of ethnic minorities is consistently negative and significant in Model 1 and Model 2, except for the last three sub-dimensions of CP ($\beta_1 = -0.002$, $p \leq 0.05$; $\beta_2 = -0.004$, $p \leq 0.01$, respectively). These results strongly support hypotheses H_1 and H_{1a} that the proportion of ethnic minorities in each province is negatively associated with citizen participation at the local level and civic knowledge.

Additionally, there is no significant effect of ethnic minorities on opportunities for participation (OP).

Additionally, even though there is no significant effect of ethnic minorities on opportunities for participation (OP), the negative sign is as expected ($\beta = -0.0009$).

Especially, ethnic minorities have no effect on the quality of elections (QE) and voluntary contributions (VC), which supports our original arguments.

These results do not support hypothesis H_{1b} . To summarize, citizens who belong to non-ethnic people groups are more likely to participate in local affairs than ethnic ones in Vietnam. Furthermore, Model 1 shows that four socio-demographics (unemployment rate, urbanization rate, education level, and poverty rate) are statically significant in explaining citizen participation at the local level.

The results support our hypothesis H_2 . In general, our findings also support other scholars' arguments (Nguyen et al., 2015; Jairo, Nguyen, Tran, and Phung, 2015). In provinces with a higher education level population, citizen participation is more robust than in regions with lower educational attainment ($\beta = 0.026$, $p < 0.01$).

The most noticeable point of these findings is that citizens in provinces with higher unemployment rates, higher urbanization rates, and higher poverty rates tend to participate less actively in local government. ($\beta = -0.066$, $p < 0.1$; $\beta = -0.013$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0.008$, $p < 0.1$, respectively).

One striking finding is that comparing Model 2 to Model 1; the socio-demographic conditions are only statistically significant in explaining the first sub-dimension of CP-civic knowledge. Individual provinces having a higher unemployment rate and higher poverty rate can lead to lower civic knowledge ($\beta = -0.06$, $p < 0.01$; $\beta = -0.008$, $p < 0.1$).

Additionally, education level is still positively related to civic knowledge ($\beta = 0.06$, $p < 0.01$). Even though there is no significant effect of the urbanization rate on civic knowledge, a positive sign is expected ($\beta = 0.00$).

Table 4

**The effect of ethnic minorities and socio-demographic backgrounds
on citizen participation at the local level**

| Model | Model 1 | Model 2 | | | |
|-----------|----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| | CP | CV | OP | QE | VC |
| | (n=376) | (n=376) | (n=376) | (n=376) | (n=376) |
| EM | -0.002** (0.0014) | -0.004*** (0.0008) | -0.0009 (0.0005) | 0.00 (0.000) | 0.000 (0.000) |
| Un | -0.066* (0.038) | -0.06*** (0.013) | -0.02* (0.012) | -0.008 (0.012) | -0.02 (0.002) |
| Urb | -0.013*** (0.003) | 0.000 (0.001) | 0.000 (0.000) | -0.004*** (0.000) | 0.006*** (0.001) |
| Edu | 0.026*** (0.007) | 0.006*** (0.002) | 0.001 (0.002) | 0.01*** (0.002) | 0.175*** (0.075) |
| Pov | -0.008* (0.006) | -0.008*** (0.003) | (0.003)* 0.003 | -0.001 (0.002) | -0.02*** (0.002) |
| Costant | 5.37*** (0.178) | 1.16*** (0.04) | 1.72*** (0.05) | 1.48*** (0.05) | 1.16*** (0.06) |
| R-squared | 0.36 | 0.22 | 0.02 | 0.47 | 0.30 |

Source: Calculated by the author.

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses: *** P < 0.01; ** P < 0.05; * P < 0.1.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings in Model 1 support our hypotheses H_1 , H_{1a} , and H_2 and the arguments of other scholars (Nguyen, 2015; Jairo, Nguyen, Tran, and Phung, 2015) that the disparities between the majority Kinh population and the ethnic minorities and the regional differences in socio-demographic background, all these factors influence citizen participation at the local level in Vietnam. Individual provinces with a higher percentage of ethnic minorities have a lower level of citizen participation including civic knowledge.

Although the Vietnamese government has prioritized many policies for ethnic minorities, they also less fully and formally participate in local government. This issue may be originated from a lack of education and poverty. It is evident that the percentage of college-educated ethnic minorities is deficient, and nearly 21% of the ethnic minority people in Vietnam are illiterate (MOET, 2019). In addition, the proportion of poor and near-poor ethnic minority households

is 35.5 percent, nearly 3.5 times higher than the national average of 10.2 percent (GSO, 2019). Hence, *non-Kinh* people have lower civic knowledge than the majority Kinh group.

Additionally, in provinces with higher unemployment rates, urbanization rates, and higher poverty rates, citizens tend to participate less actively in local government. Most ethnic minority people live in rural and mountainous areas; their life is tough. According to the results of the national survey of 53 ethnic minority groups in 2015, the rate of ethnic minority poverty still accounts for over 23%, which is four times higher than the average national rate. Especially in some places, the poverty rate of *non-Kinh* people is also around 50% (UNDP, 2017). Thus, they definitely cannot afford voluntary contributions to local governments rather than the majority group. These disparities in citizen participation between ethnic minorities and the *Kinh* majority still stand in sharp contrast to evidence of the Grassroots Democracy Ordinance in favor of citizen participation to increase empowerment and equality. More precisely, in the province where *Kinh's* population density is high, citizen participation at the local level is higher. Therefore, promoting citizen participation for ethnic minorities also becomes an issue.

After the *Doi moi* (Renovation) of 1986, Vietnam has become one of the most dynamic and impressive countries in South East Asia. Accordingly, citizens have a greater awareness of their civil rights as they have more opportunities to access information and education. This issue is one of the most important cornerstones for promoting democracy in Vietnam. The Vietnamese government has implemented many policies to improve ethnic minorities' lives, but the results have not been achieved. Most supported policies are likely built in centralization – a “top-down” approach, not being informed, and consulted through citizen participation.

Despite the Vietnam 2015 Law setting a minimum quota for members of ethnic minorities to be nominated for the election of deputies to the National Assembly, in reality, ethnic citizens do not participate in the formulation and implementation of policies and oppose some unreasonable policies. In Vietnam, the government has implemented many different measures to democratize economic, political, and social life and enhance citizen participation. However, the effects of democratization need to be carefully scrutinized. Theoretically, “members of ethnic minorities are generally less active in politics.” Our results support the arguments that the disparities between the majority of Kinh people and ethnic minority groups and the socio-economic conditions among 63 provinces all influence citizen participation at the local level in Vietnam.

Perhaps the most critical challenge for governments in the 21st century is how to build a fairer and equal society to achieve sustainable development goals, with the role of citizen participation coming into play. With these findings, this study proposes some policy implications for enhancing citizen participation to ensure the development rights of ethnic minorities. First, policymakers should implement equal policies and strategies to truly empower ethnic minorities in remote areas through more effective mass organizations because they mainly live in the mountainous and remote regions where there are few mass

organizations. According to the Western theory of democracy, interest groups or mass organizations often initiate and organize various kinds of events to rally support. Therefore, the more organizations and the more members in mass organizations are in one place, presumably the higher citizen participation is.

Additionally, the transformation of mass organizations to become more open and democratic instead of simply serving as the propaganda agency of the State is also important. Significantly, the Vietnamese government should emphasize policies concerning education and training for ethnic minorities. This strategy might be more fruitful because it would lead to more robust support for citizen participation, which is important for democracy.

To suit the unique conditions and culture of each region, minority groups should be directly involved in the formulation and implementation of local policies, rather than following the centralization policies of the central government. When the draft of the procedure is completed, they should be invited to independently participate in the consultations and directly implement and supervise local civil works.

Several significant limitations need to be considered in this study. First, we use the secondary data from multiple datasets from 2012 to 2017 because the National data of Ethnic minorities have not been updated until now. Second, besides the representative bureaucracy and inclusion theory, this study should have broader, more generalized theoretical implications to both the theoretical framework and analysis specific to Vietnam. Third, because Vietnam belongs to the ASEAN community, further study should focus on comparison among these countries.

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