

Public Opinion on Building Rule-of-law State in Vietnam Today

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Abstract: Public opinion has been studied for building a rule-of-law state in Vietnam, and authors of State-level Scientific Research Project KX.03.16/11-15 have interviewed 2,820 persons to have a closer look on the issue. The results show that 83.7% of the respondents insist on the necessity of a rule-of-law state, 91.4% agree that democracy is a condition for development. Notably, 32.9% believe the exercise of democracy in the current management of the country is an important issue while 67.1% do not, and 45.5% of the respondents want the Government to pay more attention to the exercise when running the country. Regarding the reflection of opinions in the Party and State's policies, 86.2% think their opinions have been listened to. The author suggests that rule of law and democracy should be exercised in the spirit of "people know, people discuss, people carry out and people check all affairs of the state." This is in line with the building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam today.

Keywords: Public opinion, rule-of-law state, consensus, Vietnam.

1. Introduction

Public opinion demonstrates the social attitude and reflects the assessment by the people in general or a societal group of people in particular on phenomena or events, which represent urgent social interests on the basis of the existing social relations. This means that the reflection in public opinion first bears the character of evaluation.

To look into the public opinion on Vietnam's current building of a rule-of-law state, the article focuses on analysing

people's opinions and assessments on a number of issues relating to the building, which helps comprehend their attitudes towards the current building process.

The article uses the findings of State-level Scientific Research Project KX.03.16/11-15 entitled "Public Opinion on Social Changes in the *Đổi mới* (Renovation) Process" developed by a researcher group headed by PhD. Vu Thi Minh Chi, conducting interviews with 2,820 people in Hanoi and five provinces, namely Hoa Binh, Dak Lak, Khanh Hoa, Dong Nai and Kien Giang².

2. People’s opinions on the necessity of the building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam

The building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam is, first of all, a historical necessity and was decided upon right at the birth of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945. At the 9th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), the Party decided to accelerate the reform of the organisation and operation of the State, which promotes democracy and strengthens legislation. The building of a socialist rule-of-law state of the people, by the people and for the people has always been determined by the CPV as an important strategic task in the comprehensive renovation of the country with the targets of a rich people, powerful nation, and a society of equality, democracy and civilisation. At its 10th National Congress, the Party reiterated the policy to “speed up the building of a socialist rule-of-law state

in the realms of institutional system, functions, tasks and organisation of the state apparatus; cadres and officials; and mode of operation” [1, p.253].

The nature of the state of Vietnam is the rule-of-law state of the people, by the people and for the people, which reads in Article 2 of the 2013 Constitution, “The Socialist Republic of Vietnam State is a rule-of-law socialist state of the People, by the People, and for the People.”

When asked about the necessity to build a rule-of-law state, 83.7% of the respondents deemed that “it is necessary to build a rule-of-law state.” The rate of those giving the opposite response accounted for only 7.3% while 9.0% of the respondents found it hard to give the answer. That the majority of the respondents agreed with the “necessity to build a rule-of-law state” shows the people’s support and confidence in the current building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam.

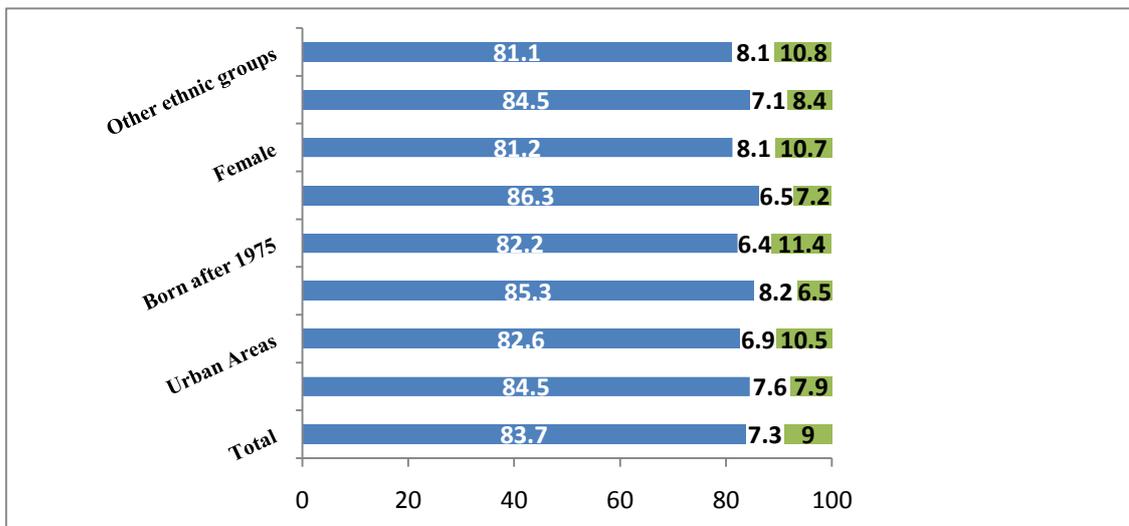


Figure 1: People’s Opinions on the “Necessity to Build a Rule-of-law State”

Source: Findings from Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

The survey's data show that there are no significant differences between the respondents in rural and those in urban areas, between those born in 1975 and earlier and those born after 1975, between men and women, and between people of the Kinh majority group and those of other ethnic groups on this issue.

However, there exists difference between those who are Party members and Youth Union members and those who are not.

The survey's findings show a high consensus among respondents being Party members, who highly agree with the "necessity to build a rule-of-law state" as 95.1% of them agreed with the necessity. The rate is lower among those who are

Youth Union members and those who are not Party/Youth Union members.

When the additional factor of occupation of the respondents who are Party members/Youth Union members, was considered, the following results were yielded: As for high school/college/university students being Party members, 100% of the respondents agreed with the statement "It is necessary to build a rule-of-law state." For those who are Youth Union members, 75.8% of them agreed, 8.2% disagreed and 16% told that it was hard to say. This result shows that a few Youth Union members are still not well aware of the nature of the current building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam.

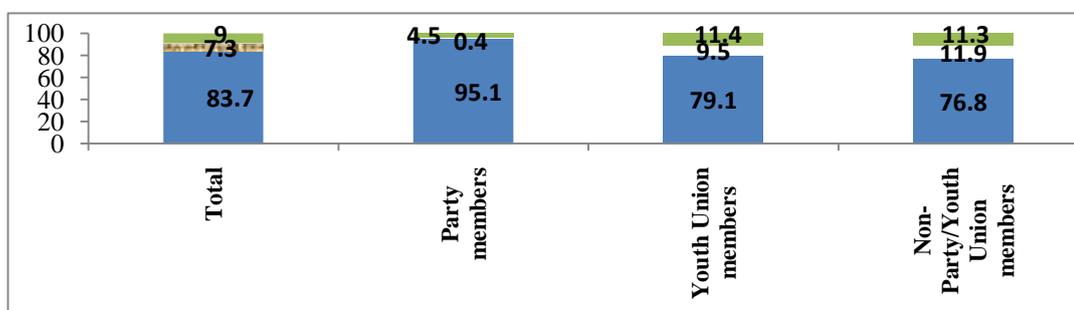


Figure 2: Opinions on the "Necessity to Build a Rule-of-law State" by Party Members, Youth Union Members, and Non-Party/Youth Union Members

Source: Findings from Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

3. People's evaluation of the management of the state

One of the characteristics of a rule-of-law state is the law-governed management of the country. On this matter, when asked about current important issues relating to the management of the country, 42.6% of the respondents agreed that the matter lies in the enforcement of law. Though not accounting for the majority of the respondents, the figure

shows that the people want the Party and State to pay more attention to law enforcement in the management of the country.

The desire is particularly higher among those who are the Kinh ethnic people, Party members, urban dwellers, males, and those holding secondary vocational school/college/university degrees.

The findings as in Figure 3 show that people in this group place higher expectation on the Party and the State to

attach importance to law enforcement in running the country. That is because if the law is not strictly enforced, the country's socio-economic development will be

affected. 43.6% of the respondents said lax law is one of the reasons that impede the Renovation process.

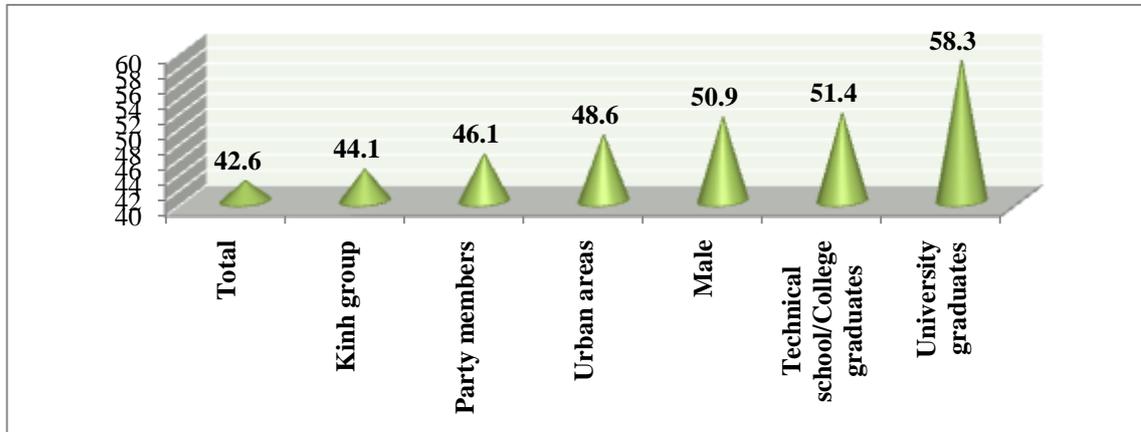


Figure 3: People's Opinions on the Fact that the Management of the Country Needs to Attach Importance to Law Enforcement

Source: Findings from Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

Another feature of a rule-of-law state is the exercise of democracy. In Vietnam, the socialist democratic state is the state of the people, by the people and for the people. The people are to know, discuss, carry out and check all affairs of the country. It is the very democracy in political and social activities that has created the dynamism of public opinion towards reality.

For democracy to be exercised, the people should be provided with information, which must be precise and timely. It means that everything should be done publicly, for "publicity", i.e. making things known/public, ensures democracy. "Publicity" is an indispensable requirement and an important expression of socialist democracy. Therefore, the exercise of democracy is an important condition for the development of the country.

On the role of democracy in the development of the country, the majority (91.4%) of the respondents agreed that "democracy is a condition for development". The number of people disagreeing or deeming that "it is hard to say" accounted for low proportions (4.9% and 3.7% respectively).

Given the high consensus of the people on the statement "democracy is a condition for development", it can be seen that public opinion greatly values and supports the exercise of democracy in the building of a rule-of-law state and in the development of the country. Public opinion stresses the real exercise of democracy, not in formality.

"It is more democratic nowadays, but I think we need to exercise democracy in its true sense rather than in its formality." (PVS, male, 54-years-old, Kien Giang province).

The findings also show differences between respondents being Party members and Youth Union members and those who are not Party/Youth Union members, between the Kinh people and those from other ethnic groups, between men and women, and between those born in 1975 and earlier and those born after 1975.

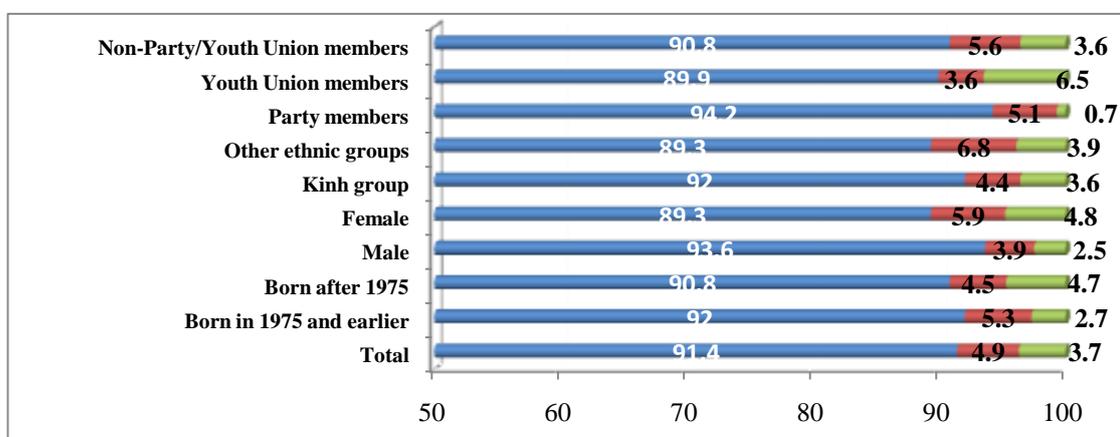


Figure 4: People's Opinions on the Statement "Democracy is a Condition for Development"

Source: Findings from Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

Figure 4 shows more clearly the assessments by groups of respondents to the statement "democracy is a condition for development." Among the respondents, the rate of Party members agreeing with the view is higher than those of Youth Union members and people who are not Party/Youth Union members, the rate of the Kinh people is higher than that of people from other ethnic groups, the rate of men is higher than that of women, and the rate of those born in 1975 and earlier is higher than that of those born after 1975.

Studying the public opinion on the exercise of democracy in the current management of the country yielded the result that 32.9% of those interviewed said that this is an important issue of the country to which special attention should be paid. The remaining 67.1% believed that it is not

necessary to pay special attention to. The result shows that many people highly value the exercise of democracy in Vietnam at present. However, it does not mean that the people are completely satisfied with the present exercise of democracy of the country. Democracy is still the issue that 45.5% of the respondents want the Government to pay more attention to while running the country.

When it comes to democracy, the engagement of people in the country's development cannot be ignored. In Vietnam, the exercise of democracy is clearly specified in the Ordinance on the Exercise of Grassroots Democracy at the Levels of Communes, Wards and Townships (2007). The ordinance emphasises the right to mastery and the role of citizens in local socio-economic development, in which people have

the right to know, discuss and get involved in all affairs of their localities.

In fact, the exercise of democracy is necessary in the management and administration of the state. The people should know all affairs, which are related to their interests, without causing harm to the national security. The people should be provided with information so that they can raise their opinions and express their attitudes towards a particular issue, through which the state will know what the public opinion on that issue is like and whether the people are in favour of or opposed to the issue, so that adjustments can be made to suit their interests.

In this study, when asked whether “the people should know about the activities of the state,” 91.3% of the respondents agreed that the people should. The rates of those who did not agree or deemed that “it is hard to say” are not high (6.0% and 2.7% respectively).

The findings show that the majority of the people want to learn about the activities of the Party and State. The activities are obviously related to the people’s interests; therefore, it is their legitimate aspiration to know. The

aspiration is particularly high among those born after 1975, Party members, workers, intellectuals and civil and public servants.

When asked about the reflection of their opinions on the policies of the Party and State, the majority (86.2%) of the respondents said that people’s opinions have been reflected in the policies, 6.2% said that they have yet to be reflected while 7.6% deemed that “it is hard to say.” The findings show that the mastery of the people has been promoted. Especially, recently, people have got more involved in the country’s important affairs, such as making suggestions to the amendment of the Constitution, the documents of the national party congress and revised laws, etc.

However, people still do not deem that the extent to which their opinions are reflected in the Party and State’s policies is high. Only 35.5% of the respondents said that many opinions of the people are reflected in the policies, 39.7% believed that the opinions are reflected to some extent and 24.8% said that there is little reflection.

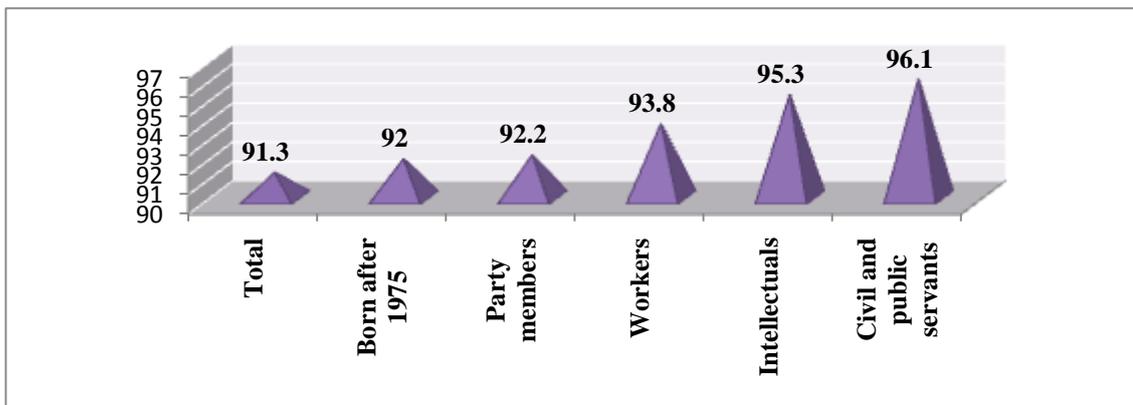


Figure 5: Percentage of Respondents Agreeing with the Statement “the People Should Know about the State’s Activities”

Source: Findings from Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

The result points to the fact that the people seem not yet to appreciate the reception, acknowledgement and application of their opinions in the policy-making of relevant bodies and organisations.

There are pretty big differences among groups of respondents when evaluating the extent of reflection of people’s opinions in the policies of the Party and State. Some groups believe that the extent of reflection is quite low.

Figure 6 shows features of the respondents as they evaluated the extent to which the opinions of the people are reflected in the policies of the Party and State.

Comparing the rates of respondents choosing the answer “quite a lot” under the categories of genders, years of birth, membership of Party and Youth Union,

places of residence, occupations and education levels of the respondents, it can be seen that the rate of men is higher than that of women (38.9% versus 32.3%), the rate of those born in 1975 and earlier is higher than that of those born after 1975 (39.9% versus 31.2%), the rate of Party members is higher than that of Youth Union members (39.8% versus 26.8%), the rate of those living in rural areas is higher than that of those living in urban areas (42.5% versus 25.4%), the rates of civil/public servants, farmers and workers are higher than those of intellectuals and students (49.2%, 43.8%, 40.7% compared to 19.2% and 18.7%), and the rate of those graduating from high schools is higher rate than the rates of those with higher degrees (59.0% versus 8.6%).

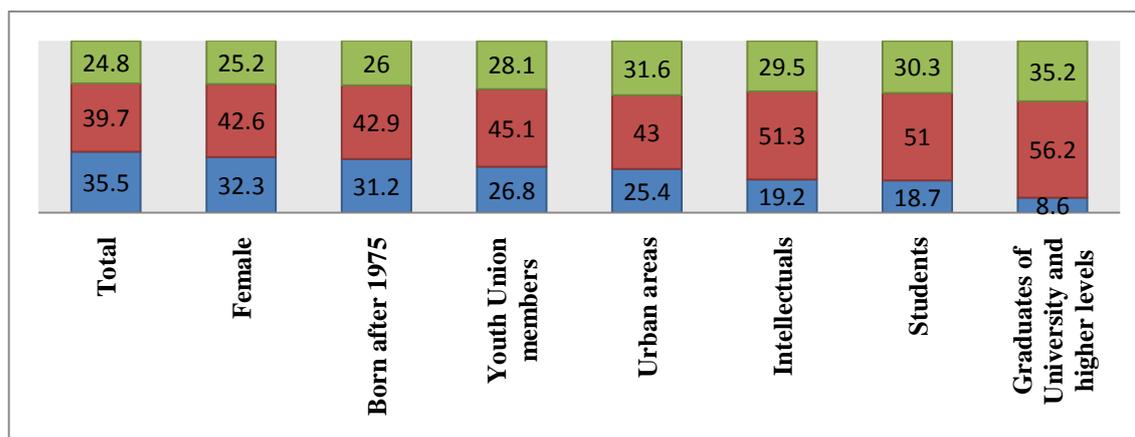


Figure 6: Responses Concerning the Reflection of People’s Opinions in the Party and State’s Policies

Source: Findings from Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

The reception of opinions from the people is necessary for the Party and the State during the administration, management and making of policies. There exist a good number of channels for the Party and the

State to receive opinions from the people. As for the latter, when they are asked about the best ways to reflect their opinions into the Party and State’s policies, the survey yielded results as follows:

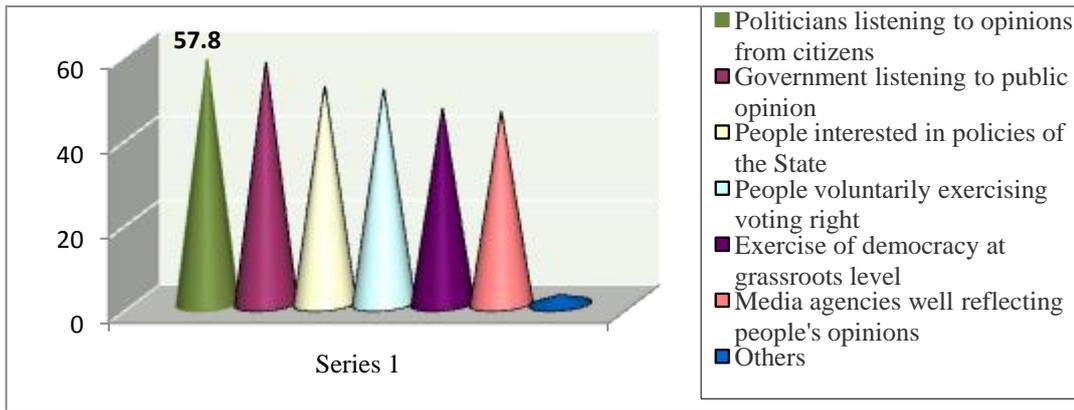


Figure 7: Ways to Reflect People's Opinions in the Policies of the Party and State

Source: Findings from Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

The survey's results show that 4 out of the 7 ways are seen by more than 50% of the respondents as being able to best reflect the people's opinions in the Party and State's policies. Of the 4 ways, the first two are related to the state apparatus, namely "politicians listening to opinions from citizens" and "Government listening to public opinion." The other two are related to the people, which are the responsibility to pay interest to the policies of the State and that people have to exercise their rights (voluntarily voting during elections). Therefore, the survey reflects both the objectivity and subjectivity of the people. That means, for the opinions of the people to be included in policies, it is required that heads of the country must listen to their people's suggestions and pay attention to public opinion. Besides, for the people to have their opinions acknowledged and received, they must also understand policies and bring their role of mastery into full play themselves.

In addition to the above-mentioned four ways, there are two other ways that more than 40% of the respondents chose. They

are the exercise of democracy at the grassroots level and the role of media. As said and analysed, the exercise of democracy is a necessary condition to promote the mastery and engagement of the people in the development of the country. Through the exercise of democracy, people can contribute directly or indirectly to the making of the policies of the Party and State. Therefore, practice of democracy constitutes one of the important conditions for the people to voice their opinions.

Mass media make up a channel that many people believe can well reflect people's opinions in the making of policies. In fact, in Vietnam, mass media agencies are not only the voices of the Party and State which disseminate information from the State to the people, but also a forum for the people to express their aspirations and attitudes towards the Party and the State. Hence, it is reasonable for the people to place their trust in mass media agencies. Important is that the agencies should reflect public opinion to the Party and the State in a precise and timely manner.

4. Conclusion

The study on public opinion show that most of the people support and place their confidence in the current building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam.

In the building a rule-of-law state, the people place stress on the requirement that the running of the country should be law-governed and democracy should be exercised in the spirit of “people know, people discuss, people carry out and people check all affairs of the state.” This is in line with the spirit of the building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam today, which is to build a state truly of the people, by the people and for the people.

The study also shows differences in the evaluation and aspirations among groups concerning a number of contents related to the current building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam. Accordingly, Party members, those born in 1975 and earlier, and those living in rural areas show stronger support and more positive views on the building of a rule-of-law state. Youth Union members, intellectuals and people with high education levels express their higher expectations towards the process of policy-making and the running of the country. These findings are significant to the making of recommendations to the building of a rule-of-law state in Vietnam presently, for public opinion is a structure of mentality and practicality that reflects the societal reality.

Note

² Details of the survey are available in State-level Research Project KX.03.16/11-15.

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