

Modernization Theory and Women's Political Representation:

A Case Study of Vietnam

By

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### Abstract

While the proponents of the modernization theory reckon that economic growth leads inevitably to social development and gender equality, authors dealing with conflict and with institutional design suggest that economic growth by itself does not follow an exclusive path. The case of Vietnam serves to illustrate the shifts in women political representation under different historical stages, namely colonialism, war of independence, civil war, pacification process, and neo-liberal economic reforms. This paper shows that the presence of women in high political office in Vietnam could be attributed to various factors of which the culture seems to play a paramount role. Male support is paramount, since patriarchal culture is deeply ingrained in the society. Despite the enforcement of the *Doi Moi* reform in the eighties, certain features that characterize democracy, such as gender equality in the political sphere, have yet to be achieved. The case of Vietnam imposes a challenge on modernization theory, since it shows that the relationship between political changes and socio-economic conditions are causal. Empirical analysis is performed with data drawn from the Vietnamese Country Reports and the Inter-Parliamentary Union Dataset, when available, from 1946 to 2011.

*Key words:* political representation, gender equality, institutional design, modernization theory, patriarchal culture, Vietnamese women, democracy.

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## 1. Introduction

Gender equality in politics was recognized as an important global issue since the women's movement of the 1970s (Bratton, 2002; Bratton & Haynie, 1999; Dodson & Carroll, 1991; Swers, 2002; Thomas, 1994). Since then strong international efforts have been generated to address gender inequality by placing women in positions of influence because of the assumption that women in power would be more likely than men to represent women's interests (Sapiro, 1981). The lack of female involvement in the government would have developmental consequences for the modern world. The danger of excluding women in government is an inefficient use of human resources, weakening of democracy, and hindering of national development. Although there has been notable progress towards equitable political representation worldwide, men still hold more share of political authority and female leadership are absent at the highest level of government. Quite often the 30 per cent, which is the percentage deemed a sufficient critical mass in order to exercise power (Kenworthy & Malami, 1999) was unmet by a large number of nations (see Table 1 in Appendix). Not surprisingly, unequal "representation of women" is still a problem all over the world and the degree of representation varies drastically among industrialized and less developed nations. For instance, the Inter-Parliamentary Union shows that Rwanda and Andorra have relatively high rates of female participation (over 50 per cent), while Vietnam has achieved 24.4 per cent. Japan's percentage of women in legislative bodies is even lower than that of Vietnam, at 11.3 per cent (see Table 1 in Appendix). How can this variation be explained? And what are the barriers to women's political representation?

Factors affecting women's representation in national parliaments throughout the world varies since they involve "a complex combination of socio-economic, cultural and institutional factors" (Rathod, 2007, p.33). A large body of literature surrounding modernization theory argues that "economic development involving industrialization, urbanization, high educational standards, and a steady increase in the overall wealth of the society" (Lipset, 1959, p.86) will naturally lead to mass mobilization, cultural and political change, and gender equality (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Although these variables are used to analyze women's political representation, findings have been inconclusive to explain the differences in variations of women in legislatures across the world, thus necessitating further study. Thus, the consequences of modernization and socioeconomic development are considered to be emancipating forces that both improve the living standards of citizens and promote gender equality, which offers a critical framework for assessing political development.

The political, economic, and social histories of Vietnam offers an intriguing case to analyze the impact of modernization on gender inequality in politics as it shifted from a Socialist planned to market globalization after the reforms in 1986. Vietnam has progressed through a cyclical developmental process with major ups and downs over time. Instead of increasing women's opportunities for greater equality as claimed to be one of the many cited impacts of economic development, it can further worsen conditions for women in the political realm. This claim is supported by numerous alternative explanatory factors. Besides socioeconomic factors, several other factors identified as affecting women's political representation such as cultural (ideology, religion, attitudes), institutional and political (electoral structure and composition of parliament) and contextual factors (wars and conflict). Challenging the validity of modernization

theory, this research investigates if propositions derived from modernization theory apply to the Vietnamese postwar society, especially in respect to economic reforms. The purpose of this paper is to incorporate gender analyses into the study of the processes of modernization and democratization and assessing whether there is an (i) increase in the influence of democracy in socialist developing countries; (ii) increase in opportunities for women to enter politics and (iii) decreases in gender inequality via political representation. Using Vietnam as a case study of a socialist, developing Southeast Asian country, this research explores how political culture, and in particular the domination of elites in the Vietnamese patriarchal society, has a major impact on the process of democratization.

Researches on Vietnam focuses on women are changing status in economic and education. Vietnam's political representation is also studied in comparison with other Asian countries, yet we know little about Vietnamese women's political representation over time. While primarily descriptive, this paper analyzes factors that influence women's political representation in national government. Historical comparison is made to understand what has led to fluctuations in women's level of representation across time rather than one point in time. Women's representation in national government between Vietnam's independence in 1946 to the present (2011) allows for a meaningful analysis of social, economic and political development over time. The findings have significant importance for gender-related policies promoting women in politics especially in countries like Vietnam emerging out of Socialist economies. In addition to the political and socioeconomic factors that influence women's political representation, culture seems to be one of the pivotal factors especially in the case of Vietnam. Women in Vietnam face a deeply rooted pessimistic cultural attitude that places them as inferior



to men and given undue responsibilities that binds them to the house and thus preventing them from entering the affairs outside of household matters such as politics. This prejudiced cultural dimension explains a large part of the degree of gender inequality in political representation throughout Vietnam's history.

This paper is divided into five sections. The first section focuses on theoretical frameworks, in particular on the causal connection between socioeconomic development and political transitions towards democracy, social change, and gender equality. The second section is a discussion of the major political, socioeconomic and cultural factors affecting gender inequality in political representation. The third section contains statistics and an analysis of leadership and decision-making opportunities and barriers for Vietnamese women in a Socialist political system. It assesses the political role played by women during three historical periods: The Franco-Vietminh War (1946-1954), the war with the United States during the 1960s and 1970s, and the development of modern Vietnam (1986-1995) and its economic boom after 1995. The fourth section discusses the findings, compares them to those of previous research, and assesses their implications for the application of modernization theory against gender-based political inequality. By linking the central concepts and theories previously discussed to political realities in Vietnam, the last section also examines divergent patterns of transition and prospects for democracy and political equality in Vietnam.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Literature on modernization is expansive and the highly cited and foundational works in the field are Lipset (1959), Inglehart and Welzel (2005), and Inglehart, Norris and Welzel (2002). Using these authors to develop and form a conceptual framework, this essay uses

modernization as the primary theoretical framework and democracy and gender equality as secondary conceptual frameworks that derived from the former. The main question is does modernization process and its socioeconomic factors help bring a positive effect on political development and gender equality in politics?

Discussions surrounding economic development have come to mean a process of economic growth in different time span over which performance is largely driven by a country's general level of prosperity. Indicators for economic development are characterized by high gross national product (GNP), gross national income (GNI), or gross domestic product (GDP), with the expectation that industrial production, investment, and exports will bring rapid growth rates through higher capital accumulation, industrialization and trade liberalization. Economic modernization seems to be an important contributing factor to improve human development, women's well-being and gender equality, thus necessitate examination of the effects of economic growth on equal women political participation. Prior research witnessed that rich countries tend to have higher percentage of women in parliament than poorer countries as the standard of living of members in society improves, gender norms are transformed, bringing democratization and rising numbers of women in parliament.

Modernization premise is that industrialization and economic development has a potential to produce a trickle-down effect of profound social impact on living conditions through enhanced educational, socioeconomic and political development. Lipset argues that "the more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy" (Lipset, 1959, p. 75). According to him, rich countries are more likely to achieve the levels of education and urbanization, means of communication, social equality, and mobility to facilitate democracy. As

a proponent of this thesis, Rostow (1960) sees Western countries as taking a leading progress and development for non-Western countries to imitate. He predicts that ultimately, the economies of less developed countries will be transformed into likenesses of industrialized Western countries, with high levels of consumption, democratic political institutions, technologies, and values, which are all considered core elements to be 'modern'. From this interpretation, modernization is taken as a development process that occurs from a 'traditional' to a 'modern' society. Using this logic, he theorized a linear path to democracy through five phases of economic development: "The traditional society, the preconditions for take-off, take-off, the drive to maturity, and the age of high mass consumption" (Rostow, 1960, p. 4-16). Modernization theory was well accepted, and by the 1950s, Western economists and sociologists were seriously concerned with modernizing newly independent ex-colonies, attempting to institute programs to assist them through the phases towards 'catching up' with industrialized countries. In the political context, this essay refers to modernization as a process of political development towards democracy and equality through legislation and administrative reforms.

Considering that different countries are at different levels of economic and democratic transitions, a systematic linkage between the levels of economic development and democracy could not be established without critics. It soon became unclear whether economic development sustains democracy or establishes new democracies. Assessing variables that cause the emergence of democracies, Przeworski & Limongi (1997) concluded that economic development helps to sustain existing democracy, but it has no potential to change regimes and establish new democracies (p. 176-177). By the late 1960s, Realist critics such as Samuel Huntington were able to point out the variations in levels of stability within rich and poor nations, arguing that not

all societies experience similar peaceful changes as predicted by early modernization theorists. Like Przeworski and Limongi (1997), he had no doubt that economic development had the potential to unleash profound social changes. However, social transformation cannot occur in unstable and even violent societies where supportive political institutions are lacking. He was realistic in stating that it takes time for political institutions to develop, and become able to facilitate positive changes in society. More strongly, Huntington (1971) criticized that “modernization may be simply a peculiarity of Western culture; whatever changes are taking place in African and Asian cultures could be of a fundamentally different character and have very different results from those changes in Western societies” (Huntington, 1971, p.297). This opened up a stage for questioning the timing and trajectories of development.

### **2.3 Third Wave of Modernization Theory (1980s-1990s)**

A wave of democratization took place in the 80s and 90s with the collapse of several authoritarian regimes across continents in southern Europe, East Asia, Latin America and the Soviet Union, often after periods of economic development prior to entering the free-market economy. Interest in modernization theory revived and the old query about how socio-economic development can bring forth democracy returned. Contemporary debate over modernization theory has returned to Lipset's initial claim, with scholars attempting to unravel the exact correlation between economic and political development by using advanced research techniques and empirical studies. Rueschemeyer, Stephens, E. & Stephens, J. (1992) maintained that changing class forces is a necessary variable whereas Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub and Limongi (2000); Acemoglu and Robinson (2001), argued that high levels of income inequality or economic inequality are central for the emergence of democracies. In agreement, Boix (2003);

Boix & Strokes (2003) added that income inequality, especially in poor countries, has a tendency to challenge authoritarian regimes, enabling the development of democracy. All this leads to discussions linking inequality and democracy but authors have yet to fully explore where the demand for democracy originates. Acemoglu & Robinson (2005) posit that economic inequality gives rise to revolution from below, which serves to push elites towards a consideration of democratic political changes. Authors like Inglehart & Welzel (2005); Welzel, Inglehart & Klingemann (2003); Welzel (2006); Welzel & Inglehart, (2008), at quite the opposite standpoint, have all emphasized the prerequisites of culture and attitudes for change in order for the development of democracy. According to them, democracy only rises when the mass population or ordinary people decide to fight collectively towards democratic institutions. These authors bring new understanding to modernization theory by suggesting that gender equality is strongly linked with cultural change and democratization. In doing so, they advanced a cultural element in modernization theory and it is within this hypothesis that this project is situated.

#### **2.4 Democracy and Gender Equality in Politics**

Democracy is a complex concept that presents challenges for understanding and measurement. Aristotle understood democracy as the “rule of the Many” which differed with Aristocrats’ meaning of the “rule of the Few” and Monarchies’ definition of the “rule of the One”. Contemporary societies take democracy to mean ‘rule of the people’ or “of the people, by the people and for the people” as expressed by the President of United States: Abraham Lincoln. In others words, power “belong to the ruled not the rulers” (Johnston, 2001, p. 296). To represent the interests of people, representatives are “authorized through election to represent the citizens of a constituency to act on behalf of their interests, and then are held accountable to subsequent

elections” (Urbinati & Warren, 2008, p. 397). As such, representation is an important part of democracy and a form of participation for citizens who are absent. Liberal political thinkers like Hobbes and Locke called it a “social contract.” It is an agreement established between the ruled and the rulers to form liberal representative democracy through election processes. It is in this understanding that the interpretation of democracy is taken to mean electoral democracy as a bare minimum of democracy because according to Johnston: “electoral democracy is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition of being democratic” (Johnston, 2001, p. 316). Historically, democracies excluded women as participants until they gain the right to vote. Castiglione and Warren point to political equality as an important element of electoral representation (as cited in Urbinati & Warren, 2008, p. 389). It is in this definition that the paper directly engages the issue of historical exclusion of marginalized groups such as women. This paper interprets democratic representatives, including both male and female citizens, as necessary condition for not just democratization but also cultural changes that can transform many aspects of society once fair and rightful inclusion of diverse perspectives is brought to the core of decision making.

Gender equality is another complex concept that implies progress for both women and men. The gender equality framework focuses on women’s progress through different aspects of development which are simplified into capabilities, opportunities and empowerment/ agency (Kabeer, 2005; Beer, 2009). Indicators such as health, education attainment and enrollment rates, nutrition, life expectancy, and mortality are commonly measurements of capabilities whereas equal access to resources such as land, credit, property and employment are measurements of opportunities. Measured by the percentage of women in the legislature, empowerment however,

refers to the degree of representation in decision making structures. It is not surprising when scholars state that gender equality has many indicators. Furthermore, woman's status is not necessarily restricted to one single sphere because "a shift in one aspect can initiate changes in other aspects" (Kabeer, 2005, p. 23). Given the different types of gender inequalities, it is not possible to fully discuss all these aspects within the confine of this paper. Instead of focusing on different aspects of gender equality, this project concentrates solely on women empowerment in the political realm in which women's political representation is chosen amongst the many indicators to monitor progress and to measure gender inequality or injustice. While women participation in formal politics might not say much about gender equality since women may succeed in increasing the descriptive (numerical) and not substantive (content) representation of women, arguments for women's substantive representation, however, is not the focus of this thesis. Although many authoritarian countries do not have legislatures so some may argue that representation in such institution is not a good indicator of empowerment. Despite differences in political regimes, discrimination against women in the political arena reflects low empowerment of women and can easily be measured, making the percentage of women in the legislature a useful measurement for descriptive representation. The degree of political representation by proportion of seats held by women in national government may surprisingly "represent the most ambitious of the three forms of change singled out to measure progress on women's empowerment and could have the greatest potential for transformation" (Kabeer, 2005, p. 21). In agreement with Kabeer (2005), this paper considers that women's presence in the highest structures of governance is a strategy in changing unjust practices, whereas the other two dimensions are more limited in its potential as it does not make decisions that directly affect the

interests and lives of women in general. Therefore, gender equality is conceptualized here as equal or fair representation in the political arena, thus the struggle for representation in decision making structures is considered essential for women's political empowerment and relevant for gender equality and development outcomes.

The most current version of modernization theory indicates a clear linkage between gender equality and democracy. In making economic development the central theoretical explanation for understanding women's legislative representation, authors have raised the relative importance of the level of economic development in a country. For instance, they argue that a high proportion of women in legislative parliament can be seen in countries with high levels of income. The assumption is that with high national economic development, government has room to consider the importance of gender equality in the selection of political representatives. Furthermore, economic development can bring about unforeseen cultural, traditional, and perception shifts regarding women (Matland, 1998), transforming gender roles and fostering the emergence of democratic institutions, thus bringing more women into politics. It has been observed that elites can resist these changes in society, while traditions can delay the process of modernization, but, in the long run, the path toward both gender equality and democratization is too costly to resist (Inglehart et al., 2002). The liberal champions of the West deemed that free democratic institutions are not only necessary to improve numerical representation for women, but are perhaps the only viable means to advance gender equality. This is achieved through reforming national constitutions and ensuring the implementation of equitable policies while challenging stereotypes towards women (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Studying the relationship of regime type, especially democracy and gender equality, Beer (2009)



also contends that democracy and gender equality should be closely interconnected. The process of modernization seems to be an important factor contributing to political balance and gender equality, as further confirmed by the existence of highly developed countries where women occupy an important number of seats in parliament (Viterna, Fallon, & Beckfield, 2008; Matland, 1998). However, in a worldwide analysis, Moore and Shackman (1996), Oakes and Almquist (1993), and Paxton (1997) all cited wealth as a factor but found no correlation between it and the representation of women in national politics. Similarly, in formerly communist countries, the relationship between democratization and gender equality seems to be less than straightforward. According to Moghadam (1993), women's political participation was higher in Eastern European countries as well as in Russia under communist regimes as compared to the levels seen in the post-Communist era. Societies like Japan, Ireland, France and the U.S have relatively few women in parliament in comparison to countries like China and Vietnam which have larger numbers of women in legislative parliament, a situation that contradicts modernization theory, suggesting that the relationship between gender equality and democracy is not as straightforward as previously put forth. Paxton (1997) expects to find higher number of women in the legislature in democracies since democracy tends to reduce obstacles to power. Interestingly, Paxton found a negative result to her hypothesis; indeed authoritarian regimes appeared to have more women in national government. Thus, it is debatable whether democracy can guarantee a higher chance in promoting gender equality since it has increased women's opportunities in politics in some countries but not in others. The question remains whether a linear relationship exists between socioeconomic development and democratization when it encompasses other variables such as gender equality. For less developed countries, the thesis has

not been effectively challenged, requiring confirmation with improved data and measurement. The pro-development thinking is that economic growth will automatically bring women to the centre of decision making once a country becomes economically wealthy. However, even if economic growth takes place, it does not necessarily mean that there would be an increase in the level of political representation for women. Taken together, it is unclear whether there is a causal relationship between modernization and gender equality. Thus, economic development alone does not lead to positive social change, suggesting that there must be other factors affecting the promotion of democracy and women's political representation.

### **3. Literature Review: Other Factors Affecting Women's Political Representation**

The relationship between political representation and women has continued to attract the attention of many scholars. Previous studies draw on a combination of approaches to gender and political representation to pinpoint factors affecting women's representation in formal politics. While the most common relationship studied is the effect of socio-economic factors on female representation (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Inglehart, Norris, & Welzel, 2002; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Kenworthy & Malami, 1999; Paxton, 1997; Welzel, 2003), other researchers have focused on the importance of cultural, political and contextual factors that affect the degree of gender inequality in legislative representation. These will be mentioned in the following section.

#### **3.1 Political Factors and Institutional design**

Institutional designs and political constraints are major barriers for women. Political variables such as electoral laws and quota implementation (Paxton) have been identified as more significant in wealthy rich countries (Rule 1981, 1987, 1994; Norris 1985, 1987). Electoral laws and voting systems also affect women's representation in developed nations (Rule, 1981, 1987,

1994; Matland, 1998). Examples include unfair party nomination processes occurring when a nomination is conducted through a ‘closed’ political opportunity structure or methods that unevenly discriminate against female candidates. There is consent in previous literature that women tend to achieve higher levels of representation in a representative political system, for example, through a party list of multiple candidates and districts (Matland & Taylor, 1997; Paxton, 1997). Norris (1987) claimed that:

...rather than selecting different individual representatives the voter is choosing a party, with a certain group of candidates, some of which happen to be women. Under this system, central party organizations have considerable influence over the nomination of candidates, and if they are committed to including more, they have that option. As parties want to put forward an attractive slate of candidates, they will try to create a balanced ticket by including women and men”. (p.129)

This relates to issue of political regime. The common idea is that democracy positively affects women’s political representation. Inglehart et al., (2002) show that “democratic institutions, by themselves, do not guarantee gender equality” (p.11). Paxton (1997) also studied how the level of political democracy influences women’s political gains and found a negative correlation. She discovered that a country with a “Marxist-Leninist” orientation or one-party government tends to have higher rate of women presence, since the dominant party tends to control and steer election results, often increasing their numerical representation (Paxton, 1997), such is the case in one- party system like Cuba and Vietnam. Such an analysis is a step towards the research on other forms of political culture and its impact on women’s political representation since what matters is leaders in power and not democracy per se. Vietnamese politics is still male dominated. Males do not encourage women to advance beyond a certain

level. There also lacking of networks and public organizations, NGOs or alternative political parties to work towards increasing women representation.

Reformed electoral systems are more favourable to women while quotas serve to ensure women's political representation. Quotas play a major role in the higher percentage of women legislators (Rathod, 20097), for instance, Sweden, Norway and Germany requires quota or percentage of seats for women in national legislature whereas one party countries such as Cuba and Vietnam lack quotas. Studies by Moore and Shackman (1996), Oakes and Almquist (1993) and Matland (1998) assert that institutions have little effect. According to Krook (2003), Vietnam belongs to a group of countries that have had remarkable increases in elected female candidate, usually exceeding 25 per cent. The author found extensive informal quotas, or formal legal reforms to aid women presence to the political arena (Krook, 2003).

### **3.2 Socioeconomic Factors: Education and Training**

Women's levels of education, earnings and employment status are strongly correlated with reference to the number of women in politics (Matland 1998; Moore & Shackman, 1996; Oakes & Almquist, 1993, Putman, 1976). Education serves as a tool to enter professional and political life allowing them to engage in political processes at all levels: voting, running for office, and becoming leaders. Illiteracy, poor professional training, and low levels of female education are factors responsible for low levels of women's participation in politics and uneven access to full participation in politics (Rathod, 2007). Low levels of education results in lower skilled jobs, which are more detrimental to women given that traditionally they already have fewer opportunities in the labour market. Women are often pushed into 'feminine' professions, as it is difficult for them to get involved in politics without the appropriate experience or suitable

background in a profession from which politicians are typically drawn. Lacking in education and professional training are disadvantaged, especially for women living in rural areas. Illiteracy levels are highest amongst the women because social attitudes towards them mean that they are often less likely to be given the opportunity to attain education and participate in politics. Education is the key to breaking such social barriers, to competing equally with men in political campaigns and finally to winning elections.

Yet even when a woman succeeds in obtaining the necessary education, she has to participate in the type of field from which political officials are generally drawn such as law, education or business (Norris 1996a). Women's ability to take up highly valued professions also affects their political success (Blumberg, 1984; Chafetz, 1984), especially the profession of law plays an important role for women who wish to enter into the political sphere (Putman, 1976), and thus gives them the opportunity to be agents of social and economic change. This highlights the importance of education; occupational participation and relevant professions and preparedness for political role which are all strongly related to political candidacy.

Female political leaders also face economic obstacles during election campaigns because compared to their male counterparts, women lack funding, connections, and support in general. Furthermore, their financially standing being less secure than men makes them less confident in their ability to financially stand for election (Filadelfiova, Butorova & Gyarfasova, 2002). As such, a woman's political opportunities depend on her career to provide the confidence, networks and funding necessary to run for office. The logic is that the greater the female participation in the workforce, the larger the number of highly qualified female candidates willing to vote and stand for election (Norris, 1987). This eventually results in an increase in female representation.

Due to strong governmental support for basic education, prior to reform, North Vietnam ranked higher than its Southern counterparts in terms of school enrolments (Woodside, 1983). The gap between North and South narrowed soon after reunification as the Communist system attempted to establish mass education throughout the entire country (Truong, Knodel, Le & Tran, 1995). This goal was soon challenged during the 1980s and early 1990s as secondary school enrolment stagnated due to limited national resources. Education at all levels improved in the mid-1990s (Nguyen, 2004), with authors noting a narrower gap between women and men in regards to attaining education (Knodel & Jones, 1996). Additionally, a 2002 Demographic and Health Survey identified equal proportions of secondary enrolments among 15-19 year olds and higher percent of females (5.8%) than males (3.4 %) among 20-24 year old (as cited in Teerawichitchainan, Knodel, Vu, M. & Vu, 2008). Vietnamese women, according to Desai (2001) attained incredible opportunities in education, employment and earning power. Nevertheless, such improvement did not close the gender gap in politics, indicating other obstacles.

### **3.3 Cultural Factors: Patriarchal Ideology**

Political culture combined with traditional cultural attitudes regarding women has long been documented as a great barrier to women's representation, participation in politics, and access to power (Rathod, 2007). Measuring attitudes towards women in politics, Norris (1985; 1987) used an index called "political egalitarianism" to study countries in Europe. She concluded that countries scoring high egalitarian are more likely to have a high proportion of women in legislative politics. Such is the case in Scandinavian countries (Bystydzienski, 1995; Norris,

1993; 1996a) where an egalitarian culture and liberal attitude towards women in politics provide a favourable environment for women's political representation.

Religion is another central factor that affects levels of female representation (Rule, 1987; Reynolds, 1999), especially when it influences and shapes attitudes towards women's capabilities for political roles. An interesting comparative study conducted in 180 nations by Reynolds (1999) revealed that Christianity, whether Protestant or Catholic, was linked to higher percentages of women in public office than other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Confucianism and Hinduism. According to the authors, Catholicism is more likely to link women to traditional roles, so in turn reducing their chances of getting elected (Norris, 1997; Paxton, 1997; Rule, 1987). Similarly, Confucian thought, that emphasizes hierarchy in society, is an example of patriarchal culture preventing women from holding high social, economic and political positions.

Traditional Confucian thought continues to influence attitudes towards women in East and South East Asian countries and has been a force in effectively domesticating gender divisions. Haque (2003) broadly points to the patriarchal ideological factor in Asia. In fact, Vietnam still abides by patriarchal and traditional Confucian values. Confucianism is hidden in the Vietnamese society (O' Harrow, 1995; Khuat, 1998; Le, 1995), making women secondary to men (Khuat, 1998). Lessard (2007) indicates that "Vietnamese women are bound by the chains of Confucian norms, a set of oppressive rules of conduct that relegate them to a lowly hierarchical status and that demand filial duty and obedience at every stage of their lives" (p. 5). Lessard further notes: "these duties were often referred to as the 'Three Obediences,' whereby a Vietnamese girl obeys her father, a Vietnamese woman obeys her husband, and, if widowed, a

Vietnamese mother obeys her eldest son. Essentially these make her a minor throughout her life” (Lessard, 2007, p.5). According to Nguyen (1997), a male preference has been “shaped and reinforced over so many generations that is deeply rooted in people’s mind and exists as a social stronghold resistant to opposition”. It holds that “woman is inferior to man and generally incompetent in roles outside the home” (Stites, 1981, p. 106-107). It is expected that a woman stays home to care for her family and respect her motherhood responsibilities (De Dios Ruiz, Labani & Zabaleta, 2009; Stites, 1981; Werner, 2008). This role must also take precedence over employment and public activities (Werner, 2008). In thinking so, women are excluded from public activities as a consequence of a patriarchal view of gender roles, insisting that women stay home to care for children and family. These notions suggest that women are both unfit for and uninterested in politics (Toth, 1994; Kiss, 1999). These public perceptions are then deeply ingrained into society that women finds it difficult to gain need familial and public support to expand their representation. Negative public perceptions perpetuate the domestic role of women and in turn, limit commitment to gender equality policies. Thus, in traditional and patriarchal societies, even though some women might desire to participate in politics, women are confronted with long-entrenched gender stereotypes, which are supported by societal perceptions that the public arena is considered to be a men’s realm.

Moreover, prevailing norms of femininity expect women to do a host of unpaid duties even while maintaining full-time employment. Women are confronted with difficult decisions as they struggle to find balance between the multiple roles in society that are associated with norms of femininity. For example, balancing the roles of a mother and of an employee in addition to other familial duties can undermine women's opportunities to take on leadership roles. Truong



(2008) explains that choosing to adhere to “social norms may cause women to miss out on opportunities for their own involvement in politics and society and influence the scope of opportunities they allow their daughters. Respect for these norms may also explain why many women do not support the political ambitions among other females” (Truong, 2008, p.19). Even if a woman chooses to participate in politics, she may find it difficult to balance the time and effort required both for family duties and political participation. As such, a double burden of family responsibility has rendered Vietnam’s women automatically ineligible for public decision-making positions. Therefore, social norms, religion and culture are also important factors for women’s eligibility, election and candidacy.

### **3.4 Contextual Factors: Wars and Internal Conflict**

Post-conflict theorists interestingly theorize that contextual factors such as wars and internal conflict may positively affect women’s political presence (Hughes, 2004) as they allow for transformation of gender norms (Boyd, 1989; Goetz, 1995; Pankhurst, 2002; Tripp, 1994) or as Sambanis portrays: “by altering society, changing the ideas, beliefs, and social position of its members” (as cited in Hughes, 2004, p.2). Rwanda, for example, is a developing country that has achieved high political representation for women apparently because of the powerful presence of women in armed conflict (Hughes, 2004). Although women there have historically been excluded from the peacemaking process, legislative politics and government (Geisler, 1995; Waylen, 1994), Rwanda has been praised for having involved women in the peacemaking process, reconstruction efforts and the creation of new governments (Hughes, 2004). Similarly, in post-conflict Kosovo, women were heavily involved in the police force, mine dismantling projects, and running farms and businesses (Corrin, 2002). One reason for these changes in

societal structure is that more men die in combat (Kampwirth, 2002), which necessitates women to enter professions that were potentially closed to them prior to the period of conflict. As a further example, Liberia's transition to democracy after the civil war culminated in an election that brought the first woman to Liberia's presidency in 2006. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf had supporters campaign with the slogan: "All the men have failed Liberia, let's try a woman this time" which was noted as a "remarkable breakthrough for women's movement" (Massaquoi, 2007, p.29-30). Thus, the conclusion is that, war can change gender norms and perceptions of women, and when given opportunities women do choose to take up political role and be active in politics and so enter the traditionally excluded professions. This indicates the significance of conflict as a variable for the gain in political representation for women.

Therefore, much of previous works have emphasized socio-economic, political, culture, institutional features, and the effects of conflict (since it is a broader term than war) as variables affecting women's political representation and participation. The results of these studies can be applicable to Vietnam. It is expected that women's increased educational and employment opportunities will increase democratic and political representation and that such relationship will be strengthened by Vietnam's desire towards a democratic ideology, institution and gender equality. Simultaneously, this argument tends to be constrained by certain factors that may resist the emergence of democracy as a result of different historical path in Vietnam. This paper examines the extent to which such probabilities are manifested in reality, with focuses on factors that are likely to affect the Vietnamese female over time. Of all factors discussed above, this paper argues that the attitude of elites in a country with patriarchal culture is the one most strongly correlated with female representation in politics while internal conflicts, economic

reform and international norms, none of which should be disregarded as factors that can trigger a variation in political representation of the under-represented group, such as women.

### **5. Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis**

Exploratory, qualitative, and case-study research methodology was used in order to conduct an analysis of the political development and political representation for women in Vietnam. Since each country's historical, cultural, economic, and political situations differ, the chosen method ensures an examination of the relative social, economic, cultural and political determinants on women's representation in Vietnam. This paper relies on a number of theoretical schools of thought borrowed from the fields of History, Political Science, Gender and Women's studies, Post-Conflict studies, and International Development Studies. It seeks to apply the modernization model to the case of Vietnam, where economic growth boomed in the mid 1990s, yet women remained under-represented in political institutions to this day. In the context of this paper, gender equality in politics means political representation for women in elected positions in Vietnam during the period 1946-2011. Data was taken from the Inter-Parliamentary Union database (Inter Parliamentary Union, 2011) that released international survey of women in politics, which focuses on elected and appointed positions at the national, where data is available. The year 1946 was chosen as the starting point since it marks the first election after the colonial independence of Vietnam from France. The levels of economic development are understood as GNP per capita, where economic development is the independent variable and women's political representation is the dependent variable.

This research proceeds by examining data through time in an attempt to identify the historical factors behind the changes in Vietnamese women's representation in politics in order

to assess the gains women have made in political arena against the tenets of the modernization model. The modernization theoretical framework as noted by Huntington is flexible enough to be used for studying changes and patterns in any society with varying level of development from “traditional to modern society” (Huntington, 1971, p.314). Such an approach serves to identify the components of the Vietnamese political system and the scope and direction of change in “ideologies, institutions, groups, leaders and policies” (Huntington, 1971, p. 317). The goal of the analysis, as previously stated in the introduction, is to test the hypothesis that gender equality and political democracy are consequences of economic development.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union data collected in 2011 demonstrates that women’s representation in government is still generally low on a global scale, with the exception of the two top ranking countries Rwanda and Andorra, where female representation has reached beyond fifty percent in parliament. European and Scandinavian countries with proportional representation systems have set a model for increased female representation. In a list of 188 countries measured in order of percentage gain for women. Countries such as Cuba ranked third, with (45.2%) while China (21.3%). Vietnam ranked 44, which tied with Namibia, each with 24.4 percent female members in national parliament in 2011. It is also very close to Canada (24.8%) and Australia (24.7 %). Compared to other Southeast Asian countries, Vietnam ranked third, after Timor Leste (32.3%) and the Lao People Democratic Republic (25%) (See Table 1 in Appendix). The next section uses data indicators to examine possible explanations and implications for female representation in high political ranks within Vietnam’s national governmental structure.

Political participation can be measured by the degree of political representation in governing bodies, especially the percentage of women in the legislature. While the percentage of women in the legislature do not exist in authoritarian regimes (Beer, 2009), low level of representation for women in the national governing body is one indicator of political equality. Female political representation can be shown by three indicators: the percentage of female members in parliament, in the government and finally positions held by women key ministries. In terms of measuring the level of political representation, this project compares data on political representation in each election years with historical accounts to capture women's experience in Vietnam's changing political institutions.

## **6. Results for Vietnam: Levels of Representation for Vietnamese Women**

Vietnam identifies itself as a socialist country, with a single-party communist government. Thayer asserts that since reunification in 1975, Vietnam's political process goes through "party congresses at five yearly intervals" (as cited in Thayer 2010, p.429) where a general national election is held to choose the National Assembly delegates. There are "498 representatives elected by a system of two rounds by popular vote for 5 years" (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009, p.82). The executive (Government- Communist Party) and legislative branches (National Assembly) of government share power due to overlapping memberships (Thayer, 2010) to the extent that Andrew Pierre believes "drawing a distinction between government and party is close to meaningless" (Pierre, 2000, p.73). Senior party elites often hold leadership positions in more than two organizations (Thayer, 2010) because senior Politburo members also simultaneously sit in high rankings in the Communist Party and the National Assembly. There have been efforts to discourage overlapping membership in party and state positions; however,

“the ‘dual government’ structure with the Party working as a government over and above the nominal state” (Vuving, 2008 p. 379) is a “consistent characteristic from 1954 to the present” (Thayer, 2010, p.424).

The government of Vietnam consists of a body of ministries, which under constitutional power should take orders from the National Assembly. In reality, power remains in the hands of individual party elites in the VCP (London, 2009). According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) report on Vietnam, “the executive committees of the VCP are more powerful than the National Assembly because they develop resolutions and other official decrees to be adopted by the National Assembly” (ADB, 2002, p.27). In 1992, Vietnam updated its original 1945 Constitution which further reinforced the authority placed in the hands of the Politburo “to establish new party organizations, membership standards, the management of party finances, and the administration of intra-party disciplinary measures” (Stern, 1997). This ensures that the Communist Party remains the most powerful within the Vietnamese government. Though elected at the local level, candidates must also then be approved by the party (Pierre, 2010).

### **6.1 Women in the National Assembly (Legislative Branch)**

The National Assembly meets twice yearly, for seven to ten days at a time. The National Assembly oversees all government functions as well as adopts and amends laws. It is also responsible for legislating state plans and budgets and selecting or removing members. Legally, the National Assembly is the highest representative government organization because it defines its own role and the role of other governmental organs. However, it is subject to the direction of the Communist Party, since all political decisions are under the central control of the Vietnamese Communist Party. An (1977) commented that “when the new National Assembly is

not in session, its so-called permanent executive body, the Standing Committee, is supposed to act in its name” (p. 439). This further reinforced that the National Assembly acts as a mere rubber-stamp legislative body.

Data from the International Parliamentary Union and the National Assembly Office of Vietnam shows a national political trend regarding women’s participation in legislative bodies. Table 2 and Figure 1 show patterns of female representation in the Vietnamese parliament between 1946 and 2011, a total of thirteen elections.

Table 2. Women’s Representation in the National Assembly of Vietnam, 1946-2011.

Year	Total Seats	Men	Women	% Women Representation
1946	403	N/A	10	2.5
1960	403	N/A	53	11.7
1964	403	N/A	66	11.7
	60 (Senate)			
1967	137 (House of Representatives)	N/A	N/A	N/A
1970 (Bergman, 1975, p. 209)	420	N/A	125	N/A
1975	424	287	137	32
1976	492 (249 North, 243 South)	360	132	27
1981*	496	388	108	22
1987	496	408	88	18
1992	395	323	73	18.5
1997	384 (Communist) 63 (Non party) 3 (Independent)	333	117	26.22
2002	447 (Communist) 51 (Non-party members)	362	136	27.31
2007	450	366	127	25.76
2011	500	378	122	24.40

Source: For years 1967- 2011: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2011) “Women in National Parliaments”

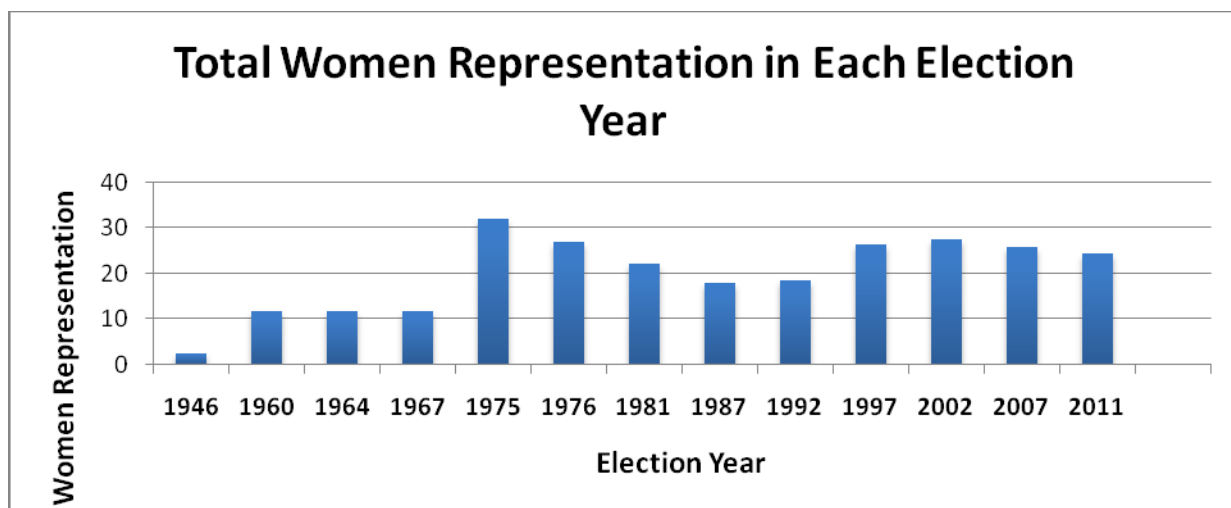
Source: For years 1946- 1970 (Bergman, 1975, p. 209).

Source: For Years 1971- 2002 National Assembly Office (as Cited in ADB, 2002)

\* the National Assembly elected in April 1976 had, in December 1979, voted to extend its term of office by one year.

The chart below shows the pattern of female representation in the National Assembly from 1946 to 2011. Each bar represents the percentage of women elected to the National Assembly. There are elections every four to five years to choose representatives to the National Assembly, with the exception being interruptions caused during the war years and election term extended. Women gained notable rise in representation over time from an average of 10 per cent to 25 per cent immediately following the war years.

Figure 1. Women’s Representation in the National Assembly of Vietnam, 1946-2011.



The dependent variable is the share of seats in national legislatures held by women during different legislative sessions. This is based on the variation in representation. Progress in women’s representation over the past 65 years has neither been steady nor permanent. The representation rates were better prior to the reforms. Women reached an unprecedented 32



percent during the first election after reunification in 1975, with the first woman nominated and elected to deputy in 1976 (Truong, 2008). It was the highest level of political achievement for Vietnamese women in history as ‘progress has been unsteady’ since 1976 (Truong, 2008, p.16). Both 1981 and 1987 election years produced fewer women in national assembly than before. Additionally, the representation of women has stagnated at times and suffered decline during the reform years of 1987 to 1992, the percentage of women in National Assembly stood at approximately 18%. Also, the percentage of women in national assembly declined from 32% in 1975 to 24.4% in 2011. More than 30 years have passed since the achievement of the highest level of women’s representation in the National Assembly. Equal political representation between both men and women is apparently not achieved over time, indicating barriers to entry for women. A breakdown of female deputies in the national Assembly is shown in the following.

Table 3. Positions for Women in National Assembly (1992-2007)

Title	Term (1992 – 1997)	Term (2002 – 2007)
Deputy	18.84	27.31
Member of Standing Board	18.18	22.22
Vice president of National Assembly	0	0
President of Functional Committees	25	25
Vice president of Functional Committees	11.54	25

*Source: Office of National Assembly, 2003 as cited in (Doan & Vuong, 2006).*

## **6.2 Women’s Representation in the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP)**

Women’s presence in the National Assembly is one way of representation; another is representation in leadership positions yet there are fewer at the highest level. The top leadership positions such as executive agencies consist of the offices of the president and the prime minister. The President is elected by the National Assembly, acts as the leader of state and

nominates Vietnam's vice-president, prime minister, chief justice of the Supreme Court, and the head of the Supreme People's Inspectorate. Additionally, the Prime Minister leads a cabinet, which consists of five deputy ministers and twenty-six ministries and commissions. Together they oversee the day-to-day affairs of government.

Woman has not been elected as President of Vietnam. Women are placed in supporting roles to help men and not to go beyond as Vice President Position is often occupied by women in Vietnam. Nguyen Thi Binh served in the Vice President of VCP in 1992-1997 (Luong, 2003, p.223); Truong My Hoa in 2002-2007 and most recently Nguyen Thi Doan in 2007- 2012 (Gainsborough, 2010). Women have also lacked important representation at the cabinet and ministerial level in Vietnam. For 2009, the total percentage of women in government at ministerial level is 11.5% (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009). Women are mainly supporting positions. A few that made it into higher levels of government was often in charge of what Stites calls the 'soft' ministries such as education, childcare, health and culture, and were rarely in charge of military, finance or defense (Stites, 1981, De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009). Vietnamese women ministers do not hold major portfolios but rather ones like Ministry of Labour, War Invalids and Social Affairs and Committee for Protection and Care of Children and the National Committee for Population and Family Planning (ADB, 2002). Similarly, after the war, Nguyen Thi Binh was appointed to Minister of Education of the Social Republic of Vietnam amongst other ministries in 1976.

Table 4: SRV Council of Ministers in 1976.

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Premier: Pham Van Dong Vice

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Premiers: Pham Hung, Huynh Tan Phat,\* Vo Nguyen Giap, Nguyen Duy Trinh, Le Thanh Nghi, Vo Chi Cong\* and Do Muoi

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Minister of Interior: Tran Quoc Hoan

Minister for Foreign Affairs: Nguyen Duy Trinh
Minister of National Defense: Vo Nguyen Giap
Chairman of the State Planning Commission: Le Thanh Nghi
Minister of Agriculture: Vo Thuc Dong
Minister in charge of scientific work and agricultural technique: Nghiem Xuan Yem
Minister of Forestry: Hoang Van Kieu Minister of Water Conservancy: Nguyen Thanh Binh
Minister of Machinery and Metallurgy: Nguyen Con Minister of Electricity and Coal: Nguyen Chan
Minister of Construction: Do Muoi
Minister of Communications and Transportation: Phan Trong Tue
Minister of Light Industry: Vu Tuan Minister of Grain and Food Products: Ngo Minh Loan
Minister of Marine Products: Vo Chi Cong*
Minister of Internal Trade: Hoang Quoc Thinh
Minister of Foreign Trade: Dang Viet Chau
Minister of Finance: Dao Thien Thai Director General of the State Bank: Hoang Anh
Chairman of the State Commission for Prices: To Duy Minister of Labor: Nguyen Tho Chan
Minister of Supply: Tran Sam
Chairman of the Commission for Nationalities: Le Quang Ba
Chairman of the State Commission for Science and Technology: Tran Dai Nghia
Minister of Culture: Nguyen Van Hieu*
Minister of Higher Education and Vocational Middle Schools: Nguyen Dinh Tu
Minister of Education: Nguyen Thi Binh*
Minister of Public Health: Vu Van Can
Minister of Disabled Soldiers and Social Affairs: Duong Quoc Chinh
Minister in charge of Da River projects: Ha Ke Tan
Minister in charge of oil and natural gas: Dinh Duc Thien
Chairman of the Government Inspectorate: Tran Nam Trung*
Minister in charge of cultural and educational work at the Premier's office: Tran Quang Huy
Premier's office: Tran Quang Huy
Minister of the Premier's Office: Dang Thi
Minister, Director of the Secretariat of the Premier's Office: Phan My

\*Indicates Southerners, Source: An (1977, p.438).

Very few women have been represented in the central committee of the communist party, including the Politburo. The sparse information available can only give a general idea of women in the higher posts in important committees which are selected by the National Assembly.

Nevertheless, these limited data do indicate that women's representation in leadership positions is low. For example, Nguyen Thi Binh served as member of the Central Committee (CC) of VCP in 1982-1986. CC members implement party instructions onto provinces. Central Board of Personnel of Vietnam documented women's representation for Central Committee as follows: 8.21 per cent (1991-1996), 10.6 per cent in 1996- 2001 (ADB, 2002) and 8.6 per cent in 2001-2006 (as cited in Doan & Vuong , 2006), whereas Control Commission: 14.4 per cent and 8.7 per cent in (1996-2001) and (2001- 2006), respectively (ADB, 2002). Both committees have experienced a decreasing trend. This is explained by an attempt for reduction. During election 1991, attempts were made to reduce its size, making "it easier to drop, or refuse to add, individuals to the leading group" (Elliot, 1992, p.161). However, despite the effort, new members are limited as Elliot (1992) commented:

The first generation, those already in the Central Committee by 1951, had largely disappeared from the leadership by the 1976 Fourth CC. Only eleven of the "Vietnam War" generation of leaders elected in 1976 are in the 1991 CC. Still, there has not been a complete generational turnover, and the current leadership group may be viewed as a transitional generation, with more continuity than change. Only slightly over one-third of the 1991 Central Committee were newly elected, whereas in 1986 about one-half of the Sixth CC were new members. (p. 167)

The party central committee elects 14 members to form the highest leading body: the Politburo (De Dios Ruiz et al, 2009). Vietnam's highest five political positions form a Politburo. "In order of descending protocol importance, the top ranks consisted of Party general secretary, state president, prime minister, chairman of the National Assembly, and standing secretary of the Party Central Committee Secretariat" (Koh, 2008, p. 665- 666). As in the case with women's legislative presence generally, women leaders have been more prominent in the National Assembly but not so much in the Communist Party of Vietnam. Illustratively, Madame Nguyen

Thi Dinh, made history after the war when she was the first woman to be elected to Central Committee of the VCP and subsequently Madame Nguyen served in the powerful role of Vice Chairman of the State Council (Elliot, 1992). Prior to her appointment, Madame Nguyen served as Foreign Minister of the Provisional Revolutionary Government in South Vietnam (An, 1977, p.434). Since her appointment, there were one woman member of the Politburo and after 2001, there were no women member in the Politburo (ADB, 2002).

Compiled by Koh (2008), the following Table shows the 14 Political Bureau members in the top layer of decision making, with an emphasis to their age. These positions of Politburo are occupied by older and quite often more permanent members.

Table 6. Tenth Political Bureau Members at the Time of the 2011—11th Congress

Remaining		Uncertain		Retired	
Name (Average Age:62.8)		Name, Age		Name, Age	
1. Le Hong Anh	62	Nguyen Phu Trong	67	Nong Duc Manh	71
2. Nguyen Tan Dung	62	Pham Gia Khiem	67	Nguyen Minh Triet	69
3 Truong Tan Sang	62			Truong Vinh Trong	69
4. Phung Quang Thanh	62				
5. Le Thanh Hai	62				
6 Nguyen Sing Hung	62				
7. Nguyen Van Chi	62				
8. Ho Duc Viet	62				
9 Pham Quang Nghi	62				

Not different from other election years, the result for election 2009 in the table above demonstrates the domination of “old guard” members, averaging 62.8 years old. Ng (1982) notes older Vietnamese male dominated leaders are still powerful members of the Politburo who still have a strong presence in the leadership within the Vietnamese power structure, even if they choose to retire. There were calls for a replacement of the top leader as well as a change in the

structure that selects the Central Committee, the Political Bureau, the general secretary, and the executive or the government (Koh, 2008). However, “only people whose views are in line with the present policy goals will have any political role in the country” (Ng, 1982, p. 388) as determined by the senior members. The change of generations in the leadership is needed since the high age of member is most likely to affect the process of political transition and democratization, modernization and gender equality. Not surprisingly, lacking in young and fresh members impedes on new ideas to develop and change the system.

The data is better understood alongside important events in history. In explaining the fluctuation in representational levels across time, the proportion of women in politics must be viewed in the context of Vietnam’s historical factors that show up consistently throughout the literature on the subject. Discussion is presented in the next section, highlighting women’s role in post-conflict reconstruction, economic reform, and the globalized era as well as challenges in ideological conflicts, economic, and political reform for the VCP (Thayer, 2010).

The next section considers possible explanations for the variability of women’s representation in the National Assembly from the existing literature. Although economic development has increased female representation in most countries, this rise has been powerfully conditioned by Vietnamese Communist Party. It also shows how conflict brought about gains in political representation and how the effects of modernization and globalization have resulted in a decline in women’s representation and candidacy. The next section proceeds in historical order, explaining possible causes of the variability of women’s representation in the National Assembly over time. It also demonstrates that the Vietnamese Communist Party only allows women to

enter politics when it deems their presence to be beneficial for the Party to pursue various national agenda.

## **6. Discussions: Factors Affecting Women's Political Representation for Vietnam**

Several factors have affected women's presence over time in the Vietnam government. In this section the data presented above is discussed under the tenets of the theoretical stances mentioned in Chapter 2, along with each of the concepts introduced in the literature review which shall be grouped under five general themes: contextual, cultural, socio-economic and political factors. This analysis goes beyond the rhetoric of the party and constitution to see whether there is genuine female political representation through three significant historical periods in Vietnam: "1) Vietnam War and mass mobilization, 2) nationwide socialist collectivization and widespread economic recession, and 3) economic reform, modernity and international interaction" (Teerawichitchainan et al., 2008, p.4).

### **6.1 Contextual Factors: Impact of War (1946-1975)**

The record for women's political representation dates back to the first election held in January 1946 after Viet Minh seized power and declared Vietnam's independence under the name Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) or North Viet Nam. A new constitution was developed, and it was clearly legislated in Decree No. 14 on September 8, 1945 that all citizens over 18 years of age, male and female, are entitled to vote and to stand for elections (as cited in Truong, 2008). The Democratic Republic of Vietnam held its first general election in which women achieved 2.4 percent representation (see data above). Turley (1972) notes women attained ten seats out of a total of 403. The duration of the first National Assembly term was

prolonged for fourteen years due to the division between North and South in Vietnam. This ratio remained unchanged until 1960 (IPU, 2011).

Vietnam lived under French control until its defeat in the Dien Bien Phu battle in 1954. A Geneva agreement divided Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. The French troops finally withdrew from the North. The DRV adopted a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideological orthodoxy for North Vietnam, with its southern counterparts remained entirely outside the socialist system. The DRV decided in 1959 to launch a “war of national liberation” in South Vietnam. The next nationwide general election could not be organized until 1960. This second National Assembly term was extended for the second time and it remained in power until 1971, a prolongation due to the war.

If war tends to create an environment in which women are deemed to be more politically valuable, then Vietnam supports this claim. Seeing the value of women in the resistance against French colonialism, energetic efforts were made to promote women to leadership positions, especially in the National Assembly, which brought gains to the overall level of female political representation. In the name of national liberty, the Party used various methods including propaganda, mobilization, political and educational campaigns to get citizen support (London, 2009; Thayer, 2010). Between the 1950s to late 1970s, “the rate of recruitment of women for the labor force, management teams and political leadership.... increased radically” (Turley, 1972, p.803). As the war escalated, the rate of female participation rose to just over 10 percent during the early 1960s. Turley noted “from 1965 to 1969, the number of women leadership cadres in all Northern Vietnam rose from 5.4 per cent to 11.7 per cent of the total” (Turley, 1972, p. 803). As



confirmed by International Parliamentary Union (IPU), by mid-1960s, women's representation was over 10 per cent of in the National Assembly.

The mobilization of millions of men into the armed service facilitated women's access to "almost all occupations previously filled by men" (Turley, 1972, p. 800), which are "...roles they previously could not have conceived themselves occupying irreparably damaged traditional images of women's capacities and loosened the authority of family and clan" (Turley, 1972, p. 798). As in most wars, there were generally higher numbers of deaths among men (ADB, 2002), causing a "sharp male deficit" (Hirschman, Preston & Vu, 1995, p. 792) and thus a demographic imbalance. In the absence of a typically balanced population, war offered Vietnamese women opportunities to seek political access. Many Vietnamese women accepted the state's call for personal sacrifice for the sake of national independence and assisted in the war to unite the country. In March 1966, "the Central Committee issued directive to replace men with women and to accelerate their inductions into management organs" (Turley, 1972, p. 800). Women's role was summed into "three responsibilities" (ba dam dang): 1) help and substitute men 2) manage the family and encourage males to enlist in combat, and 3) fight when called upon. With a Vietnamese's popular saying "when war strikes close to home, even the women must fight", women fought for the fatherland alongside men (Turley, 1972; Lessard, 2007). Through their actual participation in armed conflict, women bore arms, participated in guerrilla warfare, trained other women to fight, and held leadership positions in party administration (Turner, 1998; Turley, 1972; Karnow, 1997; Turley, 1972). Leaders recognized the need for women's participation. Without pooling all of the nation's resources, including those of women, according to Lessard (2007), success in war cannot be obtained. Women nonetheless demonstrated that

their collective effort contributed significantly to the preservation of large-scale political and military outcomes.

Within the context of war, during the 1970s, in a time of social and political transformation, the percentage of female deputies' participation in the North Vietnamese National Assembly significantly increased (Turley, 1972). In addition to the President of the Vietnam Women's Federation; Nguyen Thi Thap is one of four deputy chairmen of the National Assembly's Standing Committee. Turley (1972) observed that women Party members doubled. Nguyen noted that "from 1965 to 1969, the number of women leadership cadres in all of Northern Vietnam rose from 5.4% to 11.7% of the total" (as cited Turley, 1972, p.803). The DRV had eleven female vice-ministers and no female ministers nor female members of the Political Bureau and "only two full and one alternate women members of the Central Committee"..... "in late as 1966 there were only two female vice-ministers, a figure which by 1970 had risen to five, and that one woman member of the Central Committee, Nguyen Thi Luu, was appointed chairman of the important Reunification Committee" (Turley, 1972, p. 803).

The Northern Vietnamese women have achieved a higher degree of political participation and equality with men as compared to the Southern Vietnamese women (Turley, 1972). War was an opportunity to accelerate the rate of change towards a more positive and expansive role for women. In a different societal context, women would not have achieved such high presence in political representation. Vietnam demonstrates how external conditions, especially wars can force a nation to reduce inequalities by changing attitudes about women. Although men are still in political power, the war context allowed women to establish a greater chance to rise through the political ladder. Turley (1972) expressed: "party leaders have consistently believed that the

war-time mobilization of women should profoundly alter values, self-concepts and perceptions of women's role that would be difficult to roll back" (p.803). Thus, women's political representation has rested on the successful mobilization of state for combating against foreign aggressors on the appeal of national reunification and equality with men.

Without the condition of war, the Vietnamese electoral system does not encourage underrepresented group, such as women. Turley (1972) notes there were no evidence of unwelcoming attitude for greater women presence during wartime, yet "party leaders appear to be more anxious than the general populace, including women, to expand the women's political participation" (Turley, 1972, p. 805). Since the limited and distinct role of the Party dominates the machinery of government, it tends not to accept non-Party members quite easily. It appears that there are few formal barriers to women running for office under the Vietnamese Constitution, within the Socialist political architecture, the law creates numerous hurdles against non-state-sponsored candidates. It stipulates that all candidates have to go through two review rounds called "consultation meetings" organized by the Fatherland Front, the umbrella organization of the Party (Vuving, 2008). In order to aspire to office, a woman has to be nominated and approved by colleagues and neighbours before they are eligible to be on the final list. These hurdles serve as a legal tool to keep unwanted candidates off the ballot (Vuving, 2008). Once a person reaches the final list, the party must choose the individual as an eligible candidate to be elected as deputies and people's councils. This suggests that the Party has ultimate power in deciding the selection of candidates. The final list is presented at an electors' meeting for discussion, where the successful candidates are elected to be a member of the National Assembly (UNESCAP, n.d, p.27). Although it also leaves a possibility for individuals

to “self-nominate” or run for positions in the People’s Council at local governmental levels, the law reserves the right for the Communist Party to nominate candidates as demonstrated in the 1971 election, the third National Assembly’s term. Turley (1972) explains that:

the Party controls the nominating process through the Vietnam Fatherland Front, the elections reveal prevailing values, priorities and images within the Party, and the small margin of choice allowed the voters. This suggests vague outlines of public opinion. The Front introduced 522 of 529 candidates who ran for 420 seats. (p. 803-804)

Women “constituted 35 per cent of the candidates” but “won less than 30 per cent of the seats”, suggesting that women “were the preferred losers” ...“since there were 345 males candidates and 420 seats, women had been guaranteed seventy-five (18%) of the seats (Turley, 1972, p.804). Without this guarantee, women would not have attained such achievement. This demonstrates that unofficial quota was practiced to reserve certain seats for From 32.3 per cent in 1975 women, despite women were not the preferred candidates. This is consistent with Paxton (1997)’s discovery that a country with a “Marxist-Leninist” orientation or one-party governments tends to control election results and increase the number of women in parliament. Since Vietnam has only one party; the power to nominate candidates rest in the hands of the Party. In order to run for office, women need to have party support and network.

This political environment does not seem to welcome those who lack connection and hold a different viewpoint. The political context reinforces status quo, gender prejudices and unequal treatment of women candidates, thus presents a significant obstacle for women’s access to the political spheres. It also seems that when women are placed in a political position, they are merely there token and not so much because of genuine representation. Hence, the electoral process does not favour women.

## **6.2 Socio-economic: Economic Crisis, reforms and development (1975-1985)**

A Paris peace agreement was signed in 1973. It escorts the United States forces while North and South Vietnam continued fighting until April 1975 when South Vietnam surrendered. Following reunification, the country adopted the name the Socialist Republic of Vietnam and renamed Saigon as Ho Chi Minh City, and amalgamated the governments of the North and the South. The National Assembly held a nationwide election in 1975. This election was held earlier than scheduled, thus it was the shortest term in history. Despite the lack of quota for women, they obtained an unprecedented 32.3 per cent of seats (Tran, 1995). This was the highest level of political achievement for Vietnamese women in its history. However, the number of women representatives decreased as the political institutions regained power in peacetime. In 1976, the National Assembly had participation from both Northern and Southern voters, with the first woman nominated and elected to parliament in 1976 (Truong, 2008), but women's level of representation has dipped to 27 per cent (see data above).

Reunification presented challenges of prioritizing reconstruction and controlling South Vietnam. The war left Vietnam in isolation. Resources were allocated very unevenly as noted by Riedel and Turley (1999):

...in 1976, the party had 1 533 500 members (3.13 per cent of the total population), but Southern membership was probably not over 200 000 (Los Angeles Times; Le Duc Tho, 1976). Of 82 900 civil servants, only 16 100 (19.4 per cent) were in the South (NGTK, 1977, p. 61). The government could bolster its resources in the South by dispatching cadres from the North, which it did, but only by depleting resources needed for reconstruction in the North. (p. 13)

In addition to mismanagement, London (2009) identified fundamental problems in the socialist central economy. He notes that corruption and state theft increased as businesses take advantages of the failing economy. A decline in agricultural production, lacking of food, the country was

experiencing food deficit (Riedel & Turley, 1999), or “chronic food deficiency” (Tran, 1998), chronic and acute malnutrition (London, 2009), and living conditions worsened Tran (1998). The country’s social welfare infrastructures quickly diminished and malfunctioned (London, 2009). Adding to the problems, Vietnam invaded Cambodia in late 1978 which further depleted financial resources of the country already struggling with stagnant growth. United States excluded Vietnam from international trade while subsidies from Soviet Union decreased.

As is the case in many countries, state cutback is a common approach to recuperate the economy during economic downturn. Yet, state cutback in postwar Vietnam meant that women who held leadership roles in political parties during the war were compelled to step aside when the men returned in peacetime. As noted by Turner (1998), after the war, the nation kept women in the home and away from the workforce in order for male veterans to seek employment. The ease with which men were able to push women aside highlights a decrease in state support and a shift in priorities. The Party have departed from pre-war practice by placing women in education, technical training, military, social and political positions. In peacetime, the political environment discriminates women and discouraged women from pursuing politics by calling them to return to their reproductive and domestic roles. The speculation is that it is most likely due to unfair treatment and sexist attitudes during economic recession because female workers and cadres were laid off (Goodkind, 1995). It has been reported that women lose their governmental jobs quicker than man (ADB, 2002). Additional expenses that employers have to pay out such as the cost of maternity leave and childcare responsibilities decrease women’s chance to engage in politics (Croll, 1998; Trinh, 1998). Furthermore, De Dios Ruiz et al., (2009) note that the different retirement ages for men and women are stipulated in the Vietnamese

legislation. In terms of retirement age, women must retire at 55 while men can stay until 60. Even if women manage to achieve a position in the government, they cannot easily earn seniority which is seen in terms of number of years of membership (Koh, 2008, p.666) and with shorter service in politics, it is most likely to result to lesser experience and chance of reaching the higher level of decision making, such as the Politburo. The assumption is being made that women are weaker than men as they age, thus preventing them from gaining political experience and promotion. In the meantime, the Politburo members in the VCP have stayed on beyond their retirement age. Thereafter, the proportion of female deputies to the National Assembly, as well as political leadership and the representation of women in higher levels of power have reduced gradually.

Even though Vietnamese leaders determined that the transition will not be toward democracy, economic crisis was a sufficient cause of regime change. Vietnam demonstrates that economic decline threatens state legitimacy and the Vietnamese leaders were pushed to adopt policies of economic reforms known as *doi moi*, renovation or ‘change into the modern’. This was deemed necessary to revive the failing centrally planned economy and help initiate regime transitions. Sutherland (2009) states that: “whether an individual believes authority to be right and good or merely tolerable, there must be a wider degree of collective consent for a leader or a regime to be considered legitimate. Without this, political stability is endangered” (p.319). The reforms are likely because of the VCP’s perceived uncertainty of their legitimacy and a step to maintain control.

### **Economic Reform (1986-1995)**

Political instability that includes “situations of political conflict, violence against women in politics, male models for power exercise, corruption and market influence” is another relevant context that affects women’s political involvement (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009, p.88). The political climate in Vietnam during the end of 1986 was uncertain for women, with the rise of “a new cohort of younger, better-educated, more market-savvy generation of leaders”... “to change the content and tone of political discourse” (London, 2009, p. 389). In other words, economic reform has “strengthened the reform-critical voices” (Dosch, 2009, p. 377), triggering discussions regarding the inability of leaders to deal with political and economic affairs (Dosch, 2009) and “threatened the ideologies and entrenched interests of old-guard elites” (London, 2009, p.386). A southern Vietnamese, Nguyen Van Linh was one of the pro-economic reformers who wanted to push for reform. There was a slight change during the election of 1987 which was relatively open. For example, Thayer (2010) notes that the younger generation of pragmatists and technocrats had a voice in expressing discontent with the party, although this demonstrates the tolerance and willingness of the VCP to accept new candidates and viewpoints, it does not significantly include the voices of women. From 32.3 per cent in 1975, the rate for female representation in the National Assembly had declined to 21.8 per cent in 1981, and further dropped to 17.7 per cent by 1987 (Tran, 1995) which is the lowest amongst all election years. General Statistics Office documented in 1987, the percentage of women and men in the National Assembly was 18 per cent and 82 per cent respectively (as cited in Long et al., 2000).

Economic reforms have been highly praised for achieving positive results in growth and productivity and decreasing poverty (Thoburn, 2004), especially in rural areas (Doan & Vuong, 2006). For example, Vietnam’s high economic achievement from 1992- 1997 and onwards was



supported by growth in rate of foreign direct private capital inflow and the high level of investment and industrial growth. Aid, agriculture and export grew since Vietnam became a major rice and coffee exporter during this period (Dollar, Glewwe, & Litvack, 1998). Social indicators also improved, such as mortality rate dropped, while educational enrolments increased (Knodel & Jones, 1996, Desai, 2001). On the negative side, authors simultaneously observed that economic growth brought higher income gap and had a negative impact on the general population, in particular on women. This is manifested in two ways: (1) women are vulnerable actors who were being exploited in low paying jobs; and (2) women were being lured through the expectation of being 'free' to earn their own money but at the same time, they are less interested in participating in the political structure, or they have less time to do so. Political representation for women in Vietnam is affected by other forms of social differentiation caused by the transition to a market economy (Long et al., 2000). Thus, gender inequalities in politics are viewed in conjunction with the negative effects of women's position in the household, communities, educational attainment, and workforce participation impacts. Power and authority are constructed in these often ignored domains.

Gender inequalities exist within both households and in society as a whole (Beaulieu, 1994, Werner, 2008), and consequently, it impacts access to labour markets, credit and capital and representation in national politics (Bui, 1998, Croll, 1998, Lofman, 1998, Oxfam UK/Ireland 1997). Luong (2003) attributed increased gender disparities to the return of male-centred family relations while Socialist policies neglected gender inequality in the domestic arena (Werner & Belanger, 2002). Women were disadvantaged in the new economy because continual family obligations and lack of support made it more difficult for them to seek political

endeavours while women sacrificed themselves to the work force to be the ideal woman. It is encouraged and expected that women balance her duties in three areas, including the family, employment, and the nation. Instead of empowerment, women are placed in multiple burdens (Pham, 1999).

As economic development become a new national priority, heavy emphasis was placed on economic growth and infrastructure while the supportive role of the State diminished for gender initiatives legislation and implementation (ADB, 2002; De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009). Without state subsidies, economic reforms had detrimental effects on social programs, including gender equity. As the government lack in national resources, Vietnam's market economy gradually shifted to the cooperative agriculture system which increased the importance of the household as an economic unit, (Werner, 2008, Pettus, 2003) which is understood as the labor power of each family member ("Women's Situation in Vietnam", n.d). The shift to a market economy brought about a reduction to social services such as health and education. These services, which were previously subsidized by the state, were then created under the user-pays principle in Vietnam therefore; the household alone had to be responsible for more costs by shifting responsibility away from state to member of households, women ended up doing more household duties (Entwisle & Henderson, 2000). This challenged "women's equitable position" (ADB, 2002, p.2) and "had detrimental effects on gender equity" ("Women's Situation in Vietnam", n.d, p.1) in society, especially in rural and remote communities (Tran, 1995). Women living in rural areas, as noted by UNICEF officials, held a greater burden (as cited in Sidel, 1998) as observed by the Vietnam Women's Union and Vietnamese scholars who reported the increases in exploitation ("Women's Situation in Vietnam", n.d).

What may not be revealed in the data is that traditional gender roles and labour division associated with reproductive responsibilities, such as caretaking and household work (ADB, 2002, p. 2, Long et al., 2000), as entrenched by Confucian beliefs have experienced a return (Khuat, 1998). As stipulated by the 1986 Law on Family and Marriage, wives and husbands, sons and daughters are equal in treatment. Both genders have a shared responsibility for household matters (Tran, 1995); yet women primarily tend to assume these responsibilities within the household, particularly with regards to tasks such as attending to children and elders as prescribed by social custom. This is a burden on women's time and as a result, the length of women's working days is increased to support family life (ADB, 2002, p.2). Although the time spent on household work varies considerably from case to case, Desai (2001) compared time allotted to domestic duties between males and females and concluded that women work significantly greater hours. Jayne Werner calls it the "domestic inequality" (Werner, 2008) because women worked twice as much as men in unpaid housework (Desai, 2001; Truong, 2004) and spent the same amount of time in paid work. Interestingly, women earned approximately 78 per cent of the average male hourly earnings (Desai, 2001). Consistent with other studies, women play a larger role in the economy, with a "strong representation in the economy" ("Women's Situation in Vietnam," n.d, p.1), and that they sacrifice a large amount of their lives to the market economy (Doan & Vuong, 2006) by becoming the main income earners for their families. They are significant economic contributors "in agriculture, handicraft production, trading, and labour force participation" (ADB, 2002, p. 2) because while the market economy brought an increase in labour opportunities, it simultaneously increased unpaid domestic tasks for women but not for men (Desai, 2001).

Thoburn noted that not many jobs were created for people since in “1992-93 over half of Vietnam’s population was classified as poor” (Thoburn, 2004, p.131). Even government jobs were cut. During reform, Vietnam’s employees such as teachers and health care officials were undermined in both their economic and social statuses. Kolko observed a dramatic increase in corruption in the public administration during the reform processes, as a result of economic necessity. The reform critic describes:

The real income of civil servants dropped by about two-thirds from 1985 to 1991, by which point cadres were compelled to choose between corruption, leaving the state sector, or going hungry, and many chose or were compelled to cheat. In 1993 most civil servants earned between \$15 and \$20 a month, less than half the wages for skilled workers, and their real incomes have continued to deteriorate since then. (as cited in Masina, 2003, p. 73)

“Confucian tradition had always defined the market as a low-status, feminine domain, wives were far more likely than husbands to venture into illicit petty trade in order to improve their household’s living conditions” (Pettus, 2003, p. 69). To subsidize reduced state subsidies, women tend to be employed in the “informal sector” and self-employment in the informal sector is still their predominant form of employment, while men tend to be employed in the “formal” or wage-earning sector (McDonald, 1995; Esser, 1996; World Bank, 1998). “Home-based entrepreneurs consist of “65 percent of the agriculture, 43 percent of the industrial and 70 percent of the informal labor force” (“Women’s Situation in Women”, n.d, p. 1). Over 80 per cent of working people are self-employed, in addition to taking on two or three side jobs within a year (UNDP, 2002). More women than men are invested in self-employed businesses, relying on income generated from self-employment, which tends to be less stable than income from wage employment. “Women also predominated at the lowest level of state trading organs, where

official sellers of scarce government goods they had opportunities to earn 'black market profits (Pettus, 2003, p. 69) to the extent that "the party grew alarmed by the numbers of ordinary women workers and cadres turning to private trade in order to supplement state incomes" (Pettus, 2003, p.71). This represents the economically insecure experience for Vietnamese women during the low phase of economic development and while on a transitional path to a market economy. This means that in comparison with men, women have much less leisure time, restricting their participation in society (Tran & Le 1997; Hoang, 1996), and causing a decline in political representation during economic transition.

Unfortunately, those who cannot keep up are left behind, creating an increasingly difficult life for the poor. This deters poor families from investing in an education for a female child, since it will detract from household work and financial resources (ADB, 2002). For this reason, in addition to the traditional preference for sons, it is perceived that it is more costly to invest in an education for females than for males (United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, 2007). Without study and access to information, women's participation in politics is automatically impeded.

Another trend spawned by the opening of the market economy is that there seems to be a shift of focus towards money as people compete to be rich or at least live comfortably as Pettus, 2003) recorded:

the temptation for women to find supplemental sources for income increased, as state wages continues to fall and chronic shortages drove up consumer prices. The material hardships that everyone had endured during the war years became intolerable to many urban women in peacetime, especially as news spread of the relative riches enjoyed in the newly conquer Saigon. (p. 69)

Furthermore, with growth in the non-agricultural and private sectors, as well as social and economic advancement, politics became less important for women in comparison to the pursuit of wealth and status. Pettus (2003) continued that: “the hardship and deprivations of the war years made people turn to illicit business dealings to pursuit of more comfortable lifestyle- despite Women’s Union efforts in convincing women to remain content in the postwar years with the material simplicity that they had endured during the war years” (Pettus, 2003, p.73). Tran observes that “women are gradually withdrawing from the activities of society and state management” (Tran, 1995) while Thayer noted a sharp decline in youth becoming a member in the VCP, especially during the five year period between 1996- 2000 (as cited in Nguyen, 2006, p. 335). Due to a lack of utilitarian attitude and revolutionary rhetoric, the party has difficulty recruiting and mobilizing youths and women, despite intensified efforts. Nguyen observed that “young people are interested with the capitalist world, in creating time for entertainment and recreation, and in achieving individual goals through professional, financial and family successes as they are no longer interested in participating in building socialism which was once popular” (as cited in Nguyen, 2006, p. 335). Hence, political involvement does not have a direct impact upon their daily lives. Instead, women are more concerned with their individual goals, such as earning a living and their family lives. Women chose a “pragmatic way of life that was incompatible with the revolutionary values” (Pettus, 2003, p. 71). De Dios Ruiz et al., (2009) expresses it best by reporting that women:

lack the support of their communities and families for being involved in politics.

Moreover there are no measures in place to implement public services to support family

care and so private services are very expensive, thus it makes economic sense for women to take on all responsibilities involving the family. (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009, p. 73)

For women to enter the workforce is a double-edged sword, since the market also creates competition, which exacerbates inequality and increases exploitation. Economic reforms, therefore, brought about economic competition, preventing women without qualification, skills, education but also connections and support to be selected for political positions. The acceptance of foreign aid led to large increases in the national debt and further increases in capital expenditures, which demanded a greater amount of labour to produce outputs. The market economy demands workers and in the case of Vietnam, national economic development falls upon women since leaders understand the importance of women in boosting the economy as they are significant contributors. As such, Vietnam's economy shift from the centrally planned to the market ideology resulted to women having increased representation in the economy instead of politics.

The withdrawal of state interest also affected its ability fully implement laws and regulations at the local level. Policy was not "carried out well" since "there are no effective mechanisms to assess responsibilities of central and local levels agencies and decision-makers" (Government of Vietnam, 2004, p.26) or according to London (2009) "accountability mechanisms are pronounced but rarely exercised" (p.391). As such, 'local implementation of policies lacks compliance (Truong, 2008, p.18). Authors like Zheng and Do (2003) added that "Vietnam lacks effective supervision of and control over the powers of its officials. As a result, corruption has become a 'misfortune of the country'" (p. 24). The goodwill of a national policy framework cannot be fully implemented because "responsibility for implementation is often

given to the Vietnam Women's Union or the National Committee for the Advancement of Women" which "have little power" (2008 p.18) according to Truong. Authors also noted that the Women's Union has "no feminist transforming ideology that might result in a real social conflict in favor of gender equity" (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009, p.73). They lack ability to defend women's issues since they dare not confront the traditional Party ideologies (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009). Even for businesses, "major concerns have been related to the policy discretion and uncertainty, the multiplication of rules and the effective application of rules, and the administrative procedures (red tape, complications and corruption)" (Vo, 2000, p.337). This demonstrates the "weaknesses in both administrative system and political apparatus" (p. 337-338). A climate of corruption deters women from entering political sphere.

### **6.3 Political Factors: International Norms and Social Groups (1995-2011)**

Increased international and development partners have produced notable impact on Vietnam's political system and have led to a reconsideration of gender equality, at least constitutionally. Over the past decade, Vietnam has signed a number of international agreements namely United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW in 1982 (United Nations (1996b), Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1996a), and the Declaration of the Millennium Development Goals in 2000 (United Nations, 2000). By issuing policies and institutionalizing instruments, Vietnam renewed commitment to the promotion of gender equality, especially after Vietnam normalized relation with international financial institutions and the United States in the early 1990s as further integration in regional and global economies in order to create a favourable environment for socioeconomic development.



“CEDAW is a legally binding international treaty for all states that have signed up to include all the specific actions concerning the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women’s political participation as covered in the article 8” (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009, p.82). Despite signing the CEDAW and its protocol, this period saw the least women in political representation. Trying to remedy for the notable absence of women in political office during the *doi moi* reform, in July 1993, Politburo Resolution 04-ND/TW “declared a need for an increase in the number of women in positions of authority in all sectors within VCP committees and the Government” (ADB, 2002, p.27). The declaration seemed effective since the number of women in elected rather than selected positions increased during 1990s. For example, in 1994, when the VCP Central Committee issued Directive 37 to increase women in elected positions by 20 per cent, the following election (1997–2002) witnessed a change of 8 per cent; totaling 26% of members of women in the National Assembly. However, important decision-making in Central Committees experienced a slight declined, while the Commission control increased, and no Politburo after 2001 (data discussed earlier). This indicates a shuffling of female to make it appear like an increased in political representation, however, it is perhaps a mere form of tokenism and not genuine commitment on the VCP’s part to improve gender equality in politics.

The Beijing Platform for Action Declaration (1995) provides “measures to ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in power structures and decision-making” and “must increase women’s capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership” (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009). Under international pressure derived from the Beijing 1995, and the World Summit on Social Development and the Fourth World Conference on Women, Vietnam has made a few changes through the Vietnam Women Union (VWU) and created the National

Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) to improve women's political representation (United Nations Development Programme, UNDP, 1996) by implementing the Communist Party's wide range of policies towards increasing gender equality. The National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCAW) works with the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) to provide public education, generate support for female candidates, teach them about democratic beliefs, including electoral practice, all working towards increased representation of women in government (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009). In similar manner, at the local level, the Asia Foundation has partnered with the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) since 1994 to address challenges in advancing women's leadership and understanding of women's rights while providing leadership training for women candidates standing for elected positions (The Asian Foundation, 2001). Local government and international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) train, educate and encourage women to aim for leadership roles, supporting NCFAW to implement Vietnam's National Plan of Action objectives. The National Committee for the Advancement of Women (NCFAW) credited the electoral success to society's increasingly positive attitude towards women as well as party support through legislation and implementation, and most importantly the improved training of candidates. Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) has also continued to partner with international organizations such as the Center for Education Promotion and Empowerment for Women (CEPEW) since 1998 (The Asian Foundation, 2001). It is likely that without special efforts such as affirmative action to increase women's political role, there will be only incremental changes with regard to increasing female representation. Joining the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) seems to have had a motivating effect on Vietnamese politics for women

because as of 1997, women have begun repositioning themselves in political office since the result was an increase in representation after Vietnam joined ASEAN. Women's representation in parliament has increased from 18 percent to a steady 25 percent at the highest elected body on the national level (Truong, 2008). Political educational initiatives aimed at encouraging women to participate in elections seemed to have boosted women's political presence, more precisely, female representation in the government slowly increased again during the years of increased interaction with the world economy.

When Vietnam signed the Millennium Declaration in 2000, it strongly affirms its commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015. As established the Declaration (2000) instituted gender equality is a third goal where it made reference to the proportion of seats held by women in the national parliament. Once again Vietnam internalized the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and created its own National Plan of Action: Vietnam Development Goals (VDG). The VDGs extends the MDGs and in 2001 Vietnam formulated an ambitious goal to increase female representation by "fifty percent of all positions in state agencies as well as political and socio-political organizations by 2010" (Truong, 2008, p.16). Despite these advances in policy formulations, the highest positions in government are still held by men. In terms of women's representation in the National Assembly, from 2002 to 2007 it was 27.3 percent. This is an indication of progress in promoting women's advancement in parallel with the MDGs supported by international organizations. This is also due to "a Gender Equity Law passed in November 2006 and took effect on July 1, 2007" (Truong, 2008, p.17-18). Since 2006 there have been attempts in Vietnam to move towards substantial political reforms but the 2007 elections reflect a slight decrease in female

representatives, down to 25.8 percent. The new legislation is simply the old legislation renamed and does not necessarily benefit women's political representation, according to Truong (2008). Hence, some international forces are at work but Vietnam is only interested in international norms to attract additional international aid and international economic integration. Implementation has been limited as seen in the overall data on women's political representation. Truong (2008) has noted, there remains "a sizable gap between verbal commitments to gender equality and actual practices" (p. 16).

Institutional weaknesses had complicated effects on women's presence in national government. Vietnam's governmental system cannot be trusted as "Vietnam is still under a command and control governance framework, and are perceived not to offer their citizens truly representative voting" (Gonzalez & Mendoza, 2001, p.12), and "because of its closed political system" (Gonzalez & Mendoza, 2001, p. 14). There is a lack of accountability and thus a high level of corruption, which does not foster a positive political culture. Furthermore, Vietnam has "slim civil service structures, but the workers are lowly paid" (Gonzalez & Mendoza, 2001, p. 18). The speed of Vietnam's development remains slow due to weaknesses in economic structure, business behaviour and technology adaptation (Vo & Dao, 2001); however, "the limitations and constraints in institutions also mean that there is a big room for Vietnam to change in order to create an incentive environment for advancing and even leap-frogging in the industrialization and modernization" (Vo & Dao, 2001, p. 274). The authors add that Vietnam's legal framework is still weak (Gonzalez & Mendoza, 2001), and without proper legal framework, it will impede long-term development as they remain too easily influenced by ideology (Thuyet,

1995). In order to be able to fight corruption and increase transparency, institutional reforms are required.

The party has been encouraging women to run for elections and has attempted to explore different approaches but has not imposed a mandatory quota system that could guarantee their presence in all levels of government. Waring (2010) reports that there have been attempts to introduce a quota system but no constitutional changes to electoral laws were made even though a drafted version of a law to have a minimum of 30 percent of female deputies in the National Assembly and important decision-making posts exist. Objections to this proposed change were mainly based on the belief that women lack ability in politics which would negatively affect the quality of government (Truong, 2008). Tao reported Nguyen Duc Dung, a male National Assembly Deputy's response to an idea of a quota: "if these percentages are defined in the law, then it forces us to implement them, but these women deputies' abilities and standards are not sufficient, so the cadre quality will be affected (quoted in Truong, 2008, p. 18). Even though, this type of initiative is seen by some authors as just another top-down imposition that hinders women from acting as their own agents of change (Howell, 2002). Nevertheless, as Matland (2010) points out, history records only a number of countries where women have worked exclusively by themselves to gain gender equality. The bulk of democratic nations that achieved political balance did so by promoting top-down policies first and reforming their legislation. Once women were in strategic positions, they could get organized and were able to start working on bottom-up initiatives. It seems that this is an option that Vietnamese women should embrace at the present.

Scholars have argued that independent social groups are essential to democratic transitions. Civil societies in Vietnam are a recent phenomenon and are in its infancy thus not yet very effective (McCarty & Tran, 2003, Thayer 2009, Dosch, 2009, Conway, 2004). Documenting the power of civil societies, Thayer observes that “Vietnam has not yet developed civil society groups that act as watchdogs to expose corruption by party cadres and government officials” (Thayer, 2009,p. 19), even though “political civil society groups in Vietnam are growing in size and number and are becoming increasingly networked” (Thayer, 2009, p.18). This argument is supported by Dosch (2009), who claims that “the spectrum of groups that try to affect policy has widened in order to prevent bureaucratic elites to monopolize policy-making and formulation” (p. 374). However, Thayer (2009) points out that “these groups have not yet engaged in direct civil disobedience or mass demonstrations against the government. To-date these groups have “confined themselves to public criticism of Vietnam's one-party state for not permitting political and religious freedom as well as human rights” (p. 20). The right to free assembly is not yet granted by the government. In fact, “the government has continued to clamp down on oppositional civil society actors in an attempt to retain its monopoly on power by arresting or sentencing civil liberties and pro-democracy movements” (Dosch, 2009, p. 375). They call themselves NGOs, with a narrow focus on local development (Thayer, 2009) as they have limited connections abroad (McCarty & Tran, 2003), which heavily rely on foreign funding assistance, donors, the international community and government cooperation (Thayer, 2009; McCarty & Tran, 2003). Hence civil society in Vietnam is still underdeveloped and generally cannot fulfill the roles that civil society in developed countries performs.

This might be explained by the origin of Vietnam's mass organizations and civil societies. They have vague connections to the VCP political structure and they are closer to government in comparison to other countries in democratic transition (Conway, 2004). Contemporary developmental NGOs emerged from the descendants of government cutbacks during the reform processes in the late 1980s. As a result of administrative decentralization, the state apparatus reduced 50,000 of its employees, affecting mostly the ones from the scientific, technical and professional fields. They have quickly replaced lost state funding with donor or foreign financial support. Without clear Party affiliation, they are intrinsically a product of political organization while some may still hold government positions. While different organizations vary in the degree of independence, Gray argues that they are essentially linked to the state, therefore, expecting democracy to emerge out of NGO initiatives is unlikely in Vietnam (as cited in Conway, 2004).

There might be an array of growing societal demands for change, but there can only be slow progress on political liberalization unless there is demand from below (Thayer, 2010). For example, protests that influence the political system took place ones in Thai Binh and Central Highlands, against the abuses of local government officials. The peasant uprising situation occurred 50 miles Southeast of Hanoi, in the province of Thai Binh in 1997. Irritated residents demanded an end to local briberies and power corruption (Riedel & Turley, 1999). National government got involved and provincial leaders were fired (London, 2009). Similarly, the protests in Central Highlands in 2000 were documented by Human Rights Watch, portraying the exploitation of non-Kinh by corrupted local officials (as cited in Conway, 2004). State had to intervene to mediate these relationships. The protests against local government corruption in

Thai Binh gave birth to the first Decree on Grassroots Democracy (DGD), issued in 1998 to promote ‘democracy’ and ‘good governance’, participation, transparency and accountability through ‘implementation measures’ such as mandatory local meetings, public posting of budget data (London, 2009). The Central Highlands protest also resulted in a favored treatment towards ethnic minorities through the development of new land laws. In addition, an ethnic minority also ascended to the General Secretary of the VCP, one of the three most powerful post in Vietnam. Considering that VCP allowed an ethnic minority Nong Duc Mang in 2001 election (Conway, 2004) suggests entering Vietnamese political system is matter of context and time. Two protests contributed to the political scene by provoking government responses and enabling important policy discussion. This is to show that the VCP is very responsive to anything that challenges its legitimacy as Thayer notes: party legitimacy depends on “responsiveness to challenges from within and below to speed up the pace and scope of political change” (Thayer, 2010, p. 441).

Besides open street protest, in the 1990s, there were also processes of political liberalization and an emergence of vibrant democratic movements (Dosch, 2009) wherein hundreds of citizens participated to support prominent intellectuals fighting for democracy by criticizing the party’s ideology. Amongst them was Tran Do who joined the VCP in 1940, fought with the French, led the military and Party and was a member of the Party Central Committee and the National Assembly. Another was a war veteran, Bui Tin. They both argued for electoral reforms in which they advocated for a society based on citizenship, a regulated market economy, the rule of law, and full democracy. Both were expelled from the Party (Thayer, 2010, p.430-431); Bui Tin in 1995 and Tran in 1999 who had served the CPV for 59 years (London, 2009).



Increasing numbers of citizens were also involved in forming coalitions. Between 2004-2006, pro-democracy activists, churches, and temples have formed a network to fight for the “basic human rights and religious freedom and to permit citizens to freely associate and form their own political parties” (Thayer, 2010, p. 437). Hundreds of citizens supported ‘Bloc 8406’ by signing public petitions during the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) conference in 2006. After hosting APEC, Vietnam authorities gathered signatories and sentenced several to lengthy terms (London, 2009), in 2007 and further arrest were made in 2008 and 2009 (Thayer, 2010). Another informal grouping called the ‘Club of Free Journalists’ was arrested on October of 2008, convicted and sentenced for two and a half years (London, 2009). There seems to be a competitive political environment for Vietnamese leaders but simultaneously, no clear pro-democracy movement can present challenges to Vietnam’s one-party state. VCP has remained authoritarian, maintaining its “firm grip on power, rejecting domestic and international calls for political reform and pluralism” ... while “...even modest alterations to political decision-making pose a threat not only to the party's monopoly on power but it’s very survival” (Dosch, 2009, p. 385). Thus, the participation of citizens is being clamped down upon. Of course this attitude continues to foster undemocratic governance systems.

#### **6.4 Prevailing Patriarchal Culture**

Vietnamese Confucian cultural context, specifically gender roles, stereotypes, and prevailing patriarchy, continue to constrain both women’s career choices and self-image. The organisation of the Vietnamese society is male preference, and according to Bergman (1975) “one of the most basic assumptions of patriarchy is that women belong to men as a property” (p.22) which serves to limit women in society. Confucian social norms were introduced by the

Chinese over the course of their long-term domination of large regions of Asia and “[were] more than a religion. It was a mandate for an entire way of life-- in agriculture, in family and social life and in politics” (Bergman, 1975, p. 20). It forms the mainstream social perception of the appropriate roles for women. These roles are packaged in the ‘heavenly mandate’, with an expectation that women are to reproduce, teach and care for children, husbands and elders while working in both paid and unpaid domains (Truong, 2008). Consequently, women must face the burden of a double-shift occupation, taking care of home, children and husbands in addition to performing professional duties. Men are not encouraged to fully share household and family responsibilities which make it harder for women to be more involved politically. The social norms, of the patriarchal society, and the practice of son-preference also affect the status of both women and men in at home and within society. Women must be minors throughout their lives (Lessard, 2007). This is demonstrated in the persistence of placing their family and domestic duties above personal aspirations and life goals. Women have to be selfless to be an ideal woman according to Vietnamese society. This model limits women's ability to expand female representation as women in Vietnam face difficult choices if they choose to become mothers. Confucian appropriated women exclusively to the domestic sphere to the extent that “the whole society, including women themselves, thinks that politics is not an appropriate area for women” (De Dios Ruiz et al., 2009, p.80-81). Women are neither encouraged taking on leadership roles nor involvement in politics so they lack necessary communities and familial support. Instead, women are celebrated exclusively for their roles as mothers while the political sphere is reserved for men.

Entrenched gender equalities in the domestic sphere are therefore perpetuated by continued practices. Gender equality policies are made within political circles and influenced by the decision of leaders' perceptions of appropriate roles for women. Enforcement and monitoring gender related goals and objectives are difficult with these stereotypes. The state works under the umbrella of an authoritarian Confucian system that has been transposed into an authoritarian socialist state, where women are considered minors not because of socialist values but because of the transposition of Confucian values into the contemporary socio-political system. In the end, the implementation of gender policies is difficult.

Consequently, women's opportunities and chances for advancement are limited by long-entrenched gender stereotypes and if women themselves are not assertive and conform blindly to the norms prescribed for them, then they will be at a further disadvantage. Obeying norms of femininity may cause women to perpetuate its vicious cycles, miss out on the scope of opportunities for their own and their daughters', and discourage female colleagues and friends, therefore, a challenge to expanding interests and issues of women as a group. Even harder than escalating through the political ladder is overcoming the Confucian ideology that permeates Vietnamese society and dictates that the proper place for a woman is the home.

### **6.5 Modernization Theory**

Looking at modernization theory, it is evident that the process of development could cause deterioration in women's political representation in developing countries such as Vietnam. Women have proved to be useful when needed, assisting with national independence prior to reform, and yet under the reform years, women lost ground, being situated in a national development agenda and continuing to be victims of economic, social and household roles, all of

which decreased their representational presence in the political realm. As there is no way of depending on the state for social support, women are pushed to seek employment in urban areas and through big corporations. A major problem that exists with entering the workforce is that women are only being hired for low-skilled and low wage employment because they are considered to be secondary to men. The higher paid and higher skilled jobs are reserved for men, who maintain a more important public role in society. If a woman is fortunate enough to get a higher status position, she receives lower pay in comparison with her male colleagues. The effect of the market also increases a woman's household workload, which extends her working hours both within and without the home. More detrimental still is that labour at home is considered domestic and not real productive work, so it is regarded as unimportant as expressed in Bonvillain's (2001) words: "women's work receives less financial reward and consequently less social value" (Bonvillain, 2001, p. 196). Vietnamese women often have to find jobs doing domestic services or venture into the unsteady world of self-entrepreneurship. Even though "Socialist" societies claim to fight "discrimination against women, they all suffer to varying degrees from failure to recognize the critical link between public production and social or household reproduction" (Bonvillain, 2001, p. 212). It was assumed that in order for third world countries to become developed through the process of modernization, they have to leave their traditions behind, or that shifts towards modernity will automatically bring about positive culture. Leaders still allow traditional patriarchal attitudes to continue, these attitudes persist and are prominent even in contemporary Vietnamese society. Thus, modernization has in fact hindered the development of third world countries with regards to gender equality in politics for the Vietnamese women.

As witnessed in Vietnam, during the process of modernization, political representation for women does not move continuously in the same upward direction, especially while problems facing women intensify. Modernization moves through various phases, each of which has created distinctive changes in Vietnamese leaders' worldviews, dependent on historical events which modernization theory cannot predict. This suggests that although economic growth is a major driving force in modernization analysis, political ideology that stems from culture and tradition must not be underestimated. Historical evidence suggests that an ideological shift occurred only when Vietnam's leaders, predominantly men, deemed women to be valuable. A belief in the added value of women in politics has surged several times in Vietnamese history, including during national independence (1945), during the *doi moi* development reform (1986), and during processes of globalization and international interaction (mid-1990s). Different attitudes produce different degrees of resistance in the political male-dominated environment. Various explanations, ranging from cultural to economic, political and from historical internal to external context have been suggested for why cultural beliefs and political ideology have set the stage for gender equality in Vietnam.

Given that political regime and economic growth are linked in the process of socio-development, the relationship is commonly seen as one in which politics is depended on economic factors. It sees that the regime is solely based on economic performance. Despite economic difficulties they have faced, Vietnamese leaders can still adjust and manoeuvre a certain course of action while maintaining political legitimacy and power. With this, prior literature and theoretical arguments expected that women's increased educational attainment and participation in the modern workforce will be positively associated with political participation.

This research demonstrated that the level of economic development does not affect women's legislative representation within the Vietnamese context. Wealth created by economic development may produce a general improvement of living conditions and opportunities for women; it however does not guaranteed equal participation of women in politics. The Vietnamese regime allows a modest degree of citizen involvement in the political process, has taken cautious measures in electoral arrangements for national elections which provided limited electoral choices. Even when there are positive changes supporting gender equality in various aspects such as education, income, the gap between men and women in the political participation is still profound. Therefore, economic growth, by itself, does not guarantee equal political participation.

Education and employment should not be taken for granted as its effects can make a difference to a women's life. Having women access to education and economic participation could be seen to some extent, indicators of gender equality, with each bringing potential for long term results and allowing them more chances in life. Mateo Diaz (2005) argues that an increase in women employment participation is necessary to support for changes in cultural attitudes. This will eventually feed into greater percentage of women in the legislature. Yet, the vast majority of women are working in worse exploitative working condition or low- incomes or informal economy sector as demonstrated in this paper. In addition, "policy makers often continue to see the benefits of educating women in terms of improving family health and welfare, rather than preparing women for a more equal place in the economy and in society" (Kabeer, 2005, p. 18), preventing them from gaining "analytical capacity and courage to question unjust practices" (Kabeer, 2005, p.23). Thus, education and employment are not sufficient to ensure

empowerment overall because of its limited capacity to directly “ensure that policy changes are implemented in ways that allow women themselves to participate, to monitor, and to hold policy makers, corporations, and other relevant actors accountable for their actions” (Kabeer, 2005, p.23).

Equal participation in politics may not guarantee equal gender equality as it is only a part of a sum under the multi-layered umbrella of gender equality. Political empowerment is however, one of the most important factors impacting women’s status and gender equality in general. It is expected that achievement in political representation so far will lead to development in other dimensions of gender equality, enabling women with a capacity to take control over their lives. For this reason, political empowerment is taken as a route towards empowerment potential because it may be more strategic than the other two aspects. It is in this rational that the paper sought to demonstrate women’s political gains for the Vietnamese women thus far. Certainly, the international community has an important supporting role to prepare women with capacities to make genuine women empowerment that goes beyond representation to include more quality representation, rather than solely act as a form of tokenism in descriptive representation, as is the focus of this analysis.

## **7. Conclusions and Recommendations**

There have been major structural changes in the dynamic history of Vietnam from the impact of socialism, internal conflicts and wars, to a shift from the socialist economic system to a globalized market reform. Alongside these changes was the advent of socialist and western ideas that attempted to challenge traditional notions about women’s roles in society. The reunification of North and South Vietnam negatively affected the political fate for the Vietnamese women.

This study examined the patterns of women's political representation and gender inequality in politics in Vietnam from 1946-2011, using national election results data to complement historical events. It contributed understanding of historical assessment of the impacts of gender equality in politics within the framework of modernization theory.

To what extent have the rate of women's political representation changed in response to the processes of modernization? Rather than an increase in rate of representation across the years under examination, it was that gender equality decreased in politics when Vietnam shifted from a socialist system to the world market. Evidence indicates a greater change in woman's representation in politics before the war than in peacetime, suggesting a tendency towards state encouragement between the two historical periods. Consistent with literature on post-conflict, this is explained by the context of war and shortage of men that brought significant gains in political representation for women. Yet, this gain was only temporary. In 1986, many expected women to take on a greater presence in national politics, especially within the one-party government; conversely, this date brought *doi moi*, which provided diverse economic opportunities (Dollar, Glewwe, & Litvack, 1998) for women but little in the way of political representation, as further gains were limited during the remainder of the 1980s, 1990s and even after 2000s. There were clear negative effects in the mid-1980s, when increased economic levels were associated with decreased levels of women's representation. These findings support conclusions regarding the disadvantages of post-reform and economic modernization periods. This paper claims that such decline is a consequence of the *doi moi* reform as expressed in the need to modernize.



The decreased of women's political involvement is interestingly speculated as being concurrent with women's increased contribution to household duties, care for elders and children and the economy. While state withdrew its effort in financial support, economic forces after reform contributed to increased gender disparities as it places multiple burdens on Vietnamese women. Women had more demand than men for reproductive responsibilities and household related obligations during the reform periods, despite their increased involvement in the economic sector. Considering the negative impact of the *doi moi* reform on women, the biggest factor in the decline of women's political participation may not be imposed by the political system itself, but rather reinforced by the socioeconomic system. Despite affirmations from some authors that institutional design can offer a solution to poor representation of women in national legislature, it is instead various factors combined, such as family relations, cultural prescriptions, and political attitudes that take part in determining women's participation in politics. It was shown above that the party as well as the Constitution guarantees equality for all citizens, including women. Female subordination in Vietnam has been fostered mainly by traditional ideology, such as the Confucian social norms. This ideological burden exists to such an extent that it prevents the government from adopting the use of quotas to rectify the gender imbalance, and there has been a failure to eliminate social discriminations and stereotypes preventing women from further political gains.

The data analyzed regarding women's political representation in Vietnam is not supported by the tenets of modernization theory, which suggests that democracy and political balance are products of economic development. Much on the contrary, in the case of Vietnam, data clearly shows that when Vietnam entered into the free market in the mid-eighties the

political system did not change, nor are there any indications that there will soon be democratic elections. Vietnamese data shows progression toward a freer economy but not converging with democratic or Western cultural patterns. Far from increasing, women's representation in high political office plummeted. The grand theory of modernization needs to be revised since observable cultural, economic, and political evidence diverges from the current model. Obstacles to growth identified in this Vietnamese case study include traditional political and cultural values. Intervention requires overcoming obstacles to growth that tend to exist in the country itself, rather than in the functioning of the international economy. The view that women's political participation increases with social and economic development is not supported by data from Vietnam, where the existence of only small numbers of women legislators contradicts the modernization claim that socioeconomic development tends to transform people's ways of living in a predictable and linear pattern. The most obvious trend is that Vietnam's modernization process is nonlinear, which is also contrary to assumptions of the modernization hypothesis. The evidence presented here indicates that democratization requires more than imposing the right constitution (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

A major support for this disagreement with modernization theory is the finding that while economic opportunities for women are increasing, political developments are decreasing. In addition, economic development has a significant indirect effect on political representation via state commitment to gender issues, but not via political inequality. Although there are signs of increasing economic growth, political gaps remain a reality. It is reasonable to posit that women's full participation can lead to growth in the economy of a nation, but not to progress in the political realm. This analysis identified an increase in the gender gap in earnings during

economic reform while political representation decreased rapidly immediately after reform. The detrimental effects of neo-liberal economic policies on women's political representation have become apparent. It has been demonstrated that the position of women in some developing nations has not significantly improved as their societies, specifically in the example of Vietnam, have chosen to incorporate processes of modernization and international capitalism. Indeed, women may be worse off in important ways, especially politically, because the benefits of modernization have accrued mainly to the male of the society. This raises questions regarding the processes of modernization, and demands further research on solutions to breakdown obstacles for women to be involved in national development through their presence in the political realm.

Through historical research on Vietnam, there are indications that the effect of political representation will continue to improve slowly or suffer a decline, as there are ingrained cultural and structural barriers that prevent women from advancing in a male-oriented society. It is still too soon to predict if there will be an upward or a downward trend in women's political representation in the next Vietnamese election. At any rate, the trend during the last decade runs contrary to the international tendency of more women to hold high political office in a greater number of countries. More importantly, this points to a more complicated reality of the existence of countries around the world where it may not be sufficient to assume that development will necessarily lead to democratic institutions in a linear fashion. Democracy, however, is will emerge and survive in a suitable social and cultural environment. Modernization theorists who advanced the process of modernization neglected the assessment of cultural context before inviting nations to join the international economy. As stipulated by modernization theory, the

process of democratization happens through industrialization putting in motion and supposedly penetrating all areas of life, increasing education levels, life expectancy, economic growth, urbanization and specialization, and transforming social and ultimately increasing the likelihood of political institutions for democracy. This paper challenges the abundant empirical evidence on modernization theory as it fails to isolate cultures that encourage one-party or male domination as an important factor, influential in preventing the smooth development of these processes. Gender inequalities in politics have not improved and the gender gap in the political sphere has increased between men than women. Furthermore, the processes of modernization and its ideologies did not counter the influences of Confucianism and traditional gender roles that tie women to household matters. The division of household labour in Vietnam shows a persistence of traditional family values and gender roles rather than dramatic cultural or political transformations. The slow change over time suggests the control of elites as a resisting force for gender equality to manifest.

Complete modernization of Vietnam will remain unattainable while more than half of the population is denied fair representation in government. Gender inequality is a barrier to women's full political participation. The future is likely to witness contestation and tension within the National Assembly and the VCP itself, while non-party activists will press for a real transition toward democracy (Thayer, 2010). As discussed, the domination of elites has a major impact on the process of democratization, and if the level of political democracy can have a positive influence on women's political gains then the main question for the future is how to develop a strong political civil society that can impact socialist developing countries with one-party systems. For how long leaders in a 'Marxist-Leninist' orientation or one party government will

be able to mitigate and handle the strain of opposition and forces of globalization remains an interesting research question for the near future.

Perhaps women who lead grassroots organizations in the lower levels of the political structure should find a way to build informal networks with the ability to reach representatives in the higher circles. This would open venues in which women's issues could be included in the national agenda and could be transformed into public policies that would enhance Vietnamese women's lives. Yet, there are so few women in the higher political level that it automatically weakens the voices of women. Vietnamese women should use local politics to their advantage even though some may argue that participation in grassroots politics is not 'real' politics and cannot lead to meaningful change. Since Vietnamese women seem to be doing better on the local level than in the central government, they should build regional networks that could eventually reach members of the new generation of political actors in developed nations. In this way, even when women are not represented in the main governmental bodies, they might possess a collection of ties through which their demands could reach the national agenda. This would be a bottom-up strategic first step towards political balance.

Empowerment is important to change the mindset that still exists within the public areas of the workforce and private space of the family. Predominant and problematic images and stereotypes of politics as 'dirty,' corrupt, and 'male business', discourage women from participating by suggesting that women are uninterested and unfit to participate in politics (Toth, 1994; Kiss, 1999). Without resources, including money, spare time, support and connections, women are not likely to become candidates for election. In a patriarchal society such as Vietnam, women have been obstructed by gender roles that suggest that women should care for their

families and that men should fulfill public functions. This cultural attitude, of course, prevents policies from trickling down as changes in practices are achieved by changing women themselves, infusing in them the certainty that they can continue to exist without the alienation of patriarchy. The most difficult change to perform will have to be done in the minds and the hearts of the Vietnamese—men and women alike. Whether or not they are willing to end their deeply rooted gender inequalities remains to be seen in the long term.

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## 9. Appendix: Women’s Legislative Representation Worldwide

The Inter-Parliamentary Union gathered the following results of parliamentary elections in 188 countries and organized in descending order of the percentage of women in. Last updated on 30 November 2011 (IPU, 2011).

WORLD CLASSIFICATION									
Rank	Country	Lower or single House				Upper House or Senate			
		Elections	Seats*	Women	% W	Elections	Seats*	Women	% W
1	Rwanda	9 2008	80	45	56.3%	9 2011	26	10	38.5%
2	Andorra	4 2011	28	14	50.0%	---	---	---	---
3	Cuba	1 2008	586	265	45.2%	---	---	---	---
4	Sweden	9 2010	349	156	44.7%	---	---	---	---
5	Seychelles	9 2011	32	14	43.8%	---	---	---	---
6	Finland	4 2011	200	85	42.5%	---	---	---	---
7	South Africa <sup>1</sup>	4 2009	400	169	42.3%	4 2009	53	17	32.1%
8	Netherlands	6 2010	150	61	40.7%	5 2011	75	27	36.0%

9	Nicaragua	11 2011	92	37	40.2%	---	---	---	---
10	Iceland	4 2009	63	25	39.7%	---	---	---	---
11	Norway	9 2009	169	67	39.6%	---	---	---	---
12	Mozambique	10 2009	250	98	39.2%	---	---	---	---
13	Denmark	9 2011	179	70	39.1%	---	---	---	---
14	Costa Rica	2 2010	57	22	38.6%	---	---	---	---
15	Angola	9 2008	220	84	38.2%	---	---	---	---
16	Belgium	6 2010	150	57	38.0%	6 2010	71	29	40.8%
17	Argentina	10 2011	257	96	37.4%	10 2011	72	28	38.9%
18	Spain	11 2011	350	126	36.0%	11 2011	263	88	33.5%
"	United Republic of Tanzania	10 2010	350	126	36.0%	---	---	---	---
19	Uganda	2 2011	386	135	35.0%	---	---	---	---
20	Nepal	4 2008	594	197	33.2%	---	---	---	---
21	Germany	9 2009	620	204	32.9%	N.A.	69	19	27.5%
22	Ecuador	4 2009	124	40	32.3%	---	---	---	---
"	Timor-Leste	6 2007	65	21	32.3%	---	---	---	---
23	New Zealand	11 2011	121	39	32.2%	---	---	---	---
"	Slovenia	12 2011	90	29	32.2%	11 2007	40	1	2.5%
24	Belarus	9 2008	110	35	31.8%	7 2008	58	19	32.8%
25	Guyana	11 2011	67	21	31.3%	---	---	---	---
26	The F.Y.R. of Macedonia	6 2011	123	38	30.9%	---	---	---	---
27	Burundi	7 2010	105	32	30.5%	7 2010	41	19	46.3%
28	Portugal	6 2011	230	66	28.7%	---	---	---	---
29	Trinidad and Tobago	5 2010	42	12	28.6%	6 2010	31	8	25.8%
30	Switzerland	10 2011	200	57	28.5%	10 2011	46	9	19.6%
31	Austria	9 2008	183	51	27.9%	N.A.	61	19	31.1%
32	Ethiopia	5 2010	547	152	27.8%	5 2010	135	22	16.3%
33	Afghanistan	9 2010	249	69	27.7%	1 2011	102	28	27.5%
34	Tunisia	10 2011	217	58	26.7%	---	---	---	---
35	South Sudan	8 2011	332	88	26.5%	8 2011	50	5	10.0%
36	Mexico	7 2009	500	131	26.2%	7 2006	128	29	22.7%
37	Bolivia	12 2009	130	33	25.4%	12 2009	36	17	47.2%

38	Iraq	3 2010	325	82	25.2%	---	---	---	---
39	Lao People's Democratic Republic	4 2011	132	33	25.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Luxembourg	6 2009	60	15	25.0%	---	---	---	---
40	Canada	5 2011	307	76	24.8%	N.A.	98	36	36.7%
41	Australia	8 2010	150	37	24.7%	8 2010	76	29	38.2%
42	Sudan	4 2010	354	87	24.6%	5 2010	28	5	17.9%
43	Namibia	11 2009	78	19	24.4%	11 2010	26	7	26.9%
"	Viet Nam	5 2011	500	122	24.4%	---	---	---	---
44	Lesotho	2 2007	120	29	24.2%	3 2007	33	7	21.2%
45	Liechtenstein	2 2009	25	6	24.0%	---	---	---	---
46	Croatia	12 2011	151	36	23.8%	---	---	---	---
47	Poland	10 2011	460	109	23.7%	10 2011	100	13	13.0%
48	Kyrgyzstan	10 2010	120	28	23.3%	---	---	---	---
49	Latvia	9 2011	100	23	23.0%	---	---	---	---
50	Philippines	5 2010	284	65	22.9%	5 2010	23	3	13.0%
51	Senegal	6 2007	150	34	22.7%	8 2007	100	40	40.0%
52	Pakistan	2 2008	342	77	22.5%	3 2009	100	17	17.0%
53	Malawi	5 2009	193	43	22.3%	---	---	---	---
"	United Kingdom	5 2010	650	145	22.3%	N.A.	827	181	21.9%
54	Singapore	5 2011	90	20	22.2%	---	---	---	---
55	Mauritania	11 2006	95	21	22.1%	11 2009	56	8	14.3%
56	Czech Republic	5 2010	200	44	22.0%	10 2010	81	15	18.5%
"	Eritrea	2 1994	150	33	22.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Serbia	5 2008	250	55	22.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Uzbekistan	12 2009	150	33	22.0%	1 2010	100	15	15.0%
57	Italy	4 2008	630	136	21.6%	4 2008	322	60	18.6%
58	Peru	4 2011	130	28	21.5%	---	---	---	---
59	Bosnia and Herzegovina	10 2010	42	9	21.4%	6 2011	15	2	13.3%
60	China	3 2008	2978	635	21.3%	---	---	---	---
61	Bulgaria	7 2009	240	50	20.8%	---	---	---	---
"	Cape Verde	2 2011	72	15	20.8%	---	---	---	---
"	Dominican Republic	5 2010	183	38	20.8%	5 2010	32	3	9.4%

62	Cambodia	7 2008	123	25	20.3%	1 2006	61	9	14.8%
63	Israel	2 2009	120	24	20.0%	---	---	---	---
64	Estonia	3 2011	101	20	19.8%	---	---	---	---
"	Republic of Moldova	11 2010	101	20	19.8%	---	---	---	---
65	Bangladesh	12 2008	350	69	19.7%	---	---	---	---
66	Honduras	11 2009	128	25	19.5%	---	---	---	---
67	Lithuania	10 2008	141	27	19.1%	---	---	---	---
68	El Salvador	1 2009	84	16	19.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Monaco	2 2008	21	4	19.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Tajikistan	2 2010	63	12	19.0%	3 2010	34	5	14.7%
69	France	6 2007	577	109	18.9%	9 2011	347	77	22.2%
70	Mauritius	5 2010	69	13	18.8%	---	---	---	---
71	Greece	10 2009	300	56	18.7%	---	---	---	---
72	San Marino	11 2008	60	11	18.3%	---	---	---	---
73	Indonesia	4 2009	560	102	18.2%	---	---	---	---
"	Sao Tome and Principe	8 2010	55	10	18.2%	---	---	---	---
74	Kazakhstan	8 2007	107	19	17.8%	8 2011	47	2	4.3%
75	United Arab Emirates	9 2011	40	7	17.5%	---	---	---	---
76	Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	12 2010	23	4	17.4%	---	---	---	---
77	Morocco	11 2011	395	67	17.0%	10 2009	270	6	2.2%
"	Venezuela	9 2010	165	28	17.0%	---	---	---	---
78	Turkmenistan	12 2008	125	21	16.8%	---	---	---	---
"	United States of America <sup>2</sup>	11 2010	434	73	16.8%	11 2010	100	17	17.0%
79	Saint Lucia	11 2011	18	3	16.7%	1 2007	11	4	36.4%
80	Azerbaijan	11 2010	125	20	16.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Slovakia	6 2010	150	24	16.0%	---	---	---	---
81	Thailand	7 2011	500	79	15.8%	4 2011	149	23	15.4%
82	Albania	6 2009	140	22	15.7%	---	---	---	---
83	Democratic Republic of Korea	3 2009	687	107	15.6%	---	---	---	---
84	Burkina Faso	5 2007	111	17	15.3%	---	---	---	---
85	Ireland	2 2011	166	25	15.1%	4 2011	60	18	30.0%

86	Zimbabwe	3 2008	214	32	15.0%	3 2008	99	24	24.2%
87	Republic of Korea	4 2008	299	44	14.7%	---	---	---	---
88	Chile	12 2009	120	17	14.2%	12 2009	38	5	13.2%
"	Gabon	12 2011	120	17	14.2%	1 2009	102	18	17.6%
"	Turkey	6 2011	550	78	14.2%	---	---	---	---
89	Cameroon	7 2007	180	25	13.9%	---	---	---	---
90	Djibouti	2 2008	65	9	13.8%	---	---	---	---
91	Russian Federation	12 2011	450	61	13.6%	N.A.	169	8	4.7%
"	Swaziland	9 2008	66	9	13.6%	10 2008	30	12	40.0%
92	Grenada	7 2008	15	2	13.3%	8 2008	13	3	23.1%
"	Guatemala	9 2011	158	21	13.3%	---	---	---	---
"	Niger	1 2011	113	15	13.3%	---	---	---	---
93	Sierra Leone	8 2007	124	16	12.9%	---	---	---	---
94	Chad	2 2011	188	24	12.8%	---	---	---	---
95	Jamaica	12 2011	63	8	12.7%	9 2007	21	5	23.8%
96	Central African Republic	1 2011	104	13	12.5%	---	---	---	---
"	Dominica	12 2009	32	4	12.5%	---	---	---	---
"	Madagascar	10 2010	256	32	12.5%	10 2010	90	10	11.1%
"	Paraguay	4 2008	80	10	12.5%	4 2008	45	7	15.6%
97	Syrian Arab Republic	4 2007	250	31	12.4%	---	---	---	---
98	Montenegro	3 2009	81	10	12.3%	---	---	---	---
99	Bahamas	5 2007	41	5	12.2%	5 2007	15	5	33.3%
100	Colombia	3 2010	165	20	12.1%	3 2010	100	16	16.0%
"	Uruguay	10 2009	99	12	12.1%	10 2009	31	4	12.9%
101	Suriname	5 2010	51	6	11.8%	---	---	---	---
102	Zambia	9 2011	157	18	11.5%	---	---	---	---
103	Romania	11 2008	330	37	11.2%	11 2008	136	8	5.9%
104	Togo	10 2007	81	9	11.1%	---	---	---	---
105	Cote d'Ivoire	12 2011	254	28	11.0%	---	---	---	---
"	India	4 2009	545	60	11.0%	3 2010	243	26	10.7%
106	Japan	8 2009	480	52	10.8%	7 2010	242	45	18.6%
"	Jordan	11 2010	120	13	10.8%	10 2011	60	7	11.7%
107	Cyprus	5 2011	56	6	10.7%	---	---	---	---

108	Antigua and Barbuda	3 2009	19	2	10.5%	4 2009	17	5	29.4%
109	Malaysia	3 2008	221	23	10.4%	N.A.	65	14	21.5%
110	Mali	7 2007	147	15	10.2%	---	---	---	---
111	Bahrain	10 2010	40	4	10.0%	11 2010	40	11	27.5%
"	Barbados	1 2008	30	3	10.0%	2 2008	21	7	33.3%
"	Equatorial Guinea	5 2008	100	10	10.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Guinea-Bissau	11 2008	100	10	10.0%	---	---	---	---
112	Kenya	12 2007	224	22	9.8%	---	---	---	---
113	Liberia	10 2011	73	7	9.6%	10 2011	30	4	13.3%
114	Hungary	4 2010	386	34	8.8%	---	---	---	---
115	Kiribati	10 2011	46	4	8.7%	---	---	---	---
"	Malta	3 2008	69	6	8.7%	---	---	---	---
116	Brazil	10 2010	513	44	8.6%	10 2010	81	13	16.0%
117	Bhutan	3 2008	47	4	8.5%	12 2007	25	6	24.0%
"	Panama	5 2009	71	6	8.5%	---	---	---	---
118	Armenia	5 2007	131	11	8.4%	---	---	---	---
"	Benin	4 2011	83	7	8.4%	---	---	---	---
119	Ghana	12 2008	230	19	8.3%	---	---	---	---
120	Algeria	5 2007	389	31	8.0%	12 2009	136	7	5.1%
"	Ukraine	9 2007	450	36	8.0%	---	---	---	---
121	Botswana	10 2009	63	5	7.9%	---	---	---	---
122	Kuwait	5 2009	65	5	7.7%	---	---	---	---
"	Libya	3 2009	468	36	7.7%	---	---	---	---
123	Gambia	1 2007	53	4	7.5%	---	---	---	---
124	Congo	6 2007	137	10	7.3%	10 2011	72	10	13.9%
125	Nigeria	4 2011	352	24	6.8%	4 2011	109	7	6.4%
"	Somalia	8 2004	546	37	6.8%	---	---	---	---
126	Saint Kitts and Nevis	1 2010	15	1	6.7%	---	---	---	---
"	Tuvalu	9 2010	15	1	6.7%	---	---	---	---
127	Georgia	5 2008	137	9	6.6%	---	---	---	---
128	Maldives	5 2009	77	5	6.5%	---	---	---	---
129	Sri Lanka	4 2010	225	13	5.8%	---	---	---	---
130	Haiti	11 2010	95	4	4.2%	11 2010	30	1	3.3%

131	Samoa	3 2011	49	2	4.1%	---	---	---	---
132	Mongolia	6 2008	76	3	3.9%	---	---	---	---
133	Tonga	11 2010	28	1	3.6%	---	---	---	---
134	Myanmar	11 2010	395	14	3.5%	11 2010	218	4	1.8%
135	Lebanon	6 2009	128	4	3.1%	---	---	---	---
136	Comoros	12 2009	33	1	3.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Marshall Islands	11 2011	33	1	3.0%	---	---	---	---
137	Iran (Islamic Republic of)	3 2008	290	8	2.8%	---	---	---	---
138	Egypt <sup>3</sup>	11 2011	508	10	2.0%	6 2010	270	?	?
139	Vanuatu	9 2008	52	1	1.9%	---	---	---	---
140	Oman	10 2011	84	1	1.2%	10 2011	83	15	18.1%
141	Papua New Guinea	6 2007	109	1	0.9%	---	---	---	---
142	Yemen	4 2003	301	1	0.3%	4 2001	111	2	1.8%
143	Belize	2 2008	32	0	0.0%	3 2008	13	5	38.5%
"	Micronesia (Federated States of)	3 2011	14	0	0.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Nauru	6 2010	18	0	0.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Palau	11 2008	16	0	0.0%	11 2008	13	2	15.4%
"	Qatar	7 2010	35	0	0.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Saudi Arabia	2 2009	150	0	0.0%	---	---	---	---
"	Solomon Islands	8 2010	50	0	0.0%	---	---	---	---
?	Democratic Republic of the Congo	11 2011	500	?	?	1 2007	108	5	4.6%

\* Figures correspond to the number of seats currently filled in Parliament