Civil Society and Social Capital in Vietnam [1]

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A large body of literature holds that the development of a vibrant civil society is required for the political development of a nation. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan (1996: 7) for example, define the existence of a free and lively civil society as one of the requirements for a consolidated democracy. Bernhard Wessels (1997) demonstrates a strong relationship between the levels of social group membership in a nation and social modernity (also see Pham Minh Hac 2001). Larry Diamond (1994) provides an extensive description of the role that civil society participation plays in the development of democratic citizenship and the development of a democratic polity (also see Yamamoto 1995). Participation in social groups independent of the state is seen as developing the interpersonal skills and resources that benefit democratic participation, encouraging a tolerance and trust in others, broadening world perspectives, and providing practice in deliberation and decision making. These citizen-building benefits are often described as creating "social capital" among the citizenry that supports democratic politics. Indeed, beginning with DeTocqueville, there is a long tradition of political culture and political development research that stresses the beneficial aspects of a vibrant civil society (Almond and Verba 1963; Putnam 1993; Rueschemeyer 1998; Warren 2001).

This chapter examines the theme of civil society as applied to contemporary Vietnam. While the type of autonomous civil society discussed in democratic theory may be lacking in Vietnam because of the still-dominate role of the communist state, participation in social groups is extensive and even in a communist state may have some of the consequences suggested by the civil society literature. Indeed, Vietnam presents an important case in theoretical and political terms. It is one of the last communist nations in the world; thus, we can see whether previously theorized patterns of social engagement and social capital formation apply in this developing nation. Furthermore, much of the current literature on social changes in Vietnam focuses on the institutional level of analysis, whereas this piece brings in the perspectives of the public in understanding the patterns of social engagement. In addition, by assessing the consequences of social capital on public values and behavior, we can evaluate whether this is likely to be a force for political change in Vietnam.

Our analyses are based on one of the first scientifically sampled national surveys of public opinion in Vietnam, the "World Values Survey 2001" (WVS). The Institute of Human Studies (IHS) in Vietnam conducted the survey (see methodological appendix). A total of 1000 respondents were interviewed, after selection by area probability sampling with a random walk sampling last stage. IHS conducted the survey in September-October 2001. The survey replicates the core questionnaire of the international WVS project and also extends the Institute's own research program on "People: Goals and Driving Forces for Socio-Economic Development." This opinion survey is an especially valuable research resource because so little is scientifically known about Vietnamese attitudes on social and political issues. Among other topics, the 2001 World Values Survey inquires about the key elements of social capital theory: membership and participation in social groups, and interpersonal trust. This chapter focuses on whether social capital in Vietnam functions in the same manner as predicted by previous theory and tests the potential sources and consequences of social capital theory.

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Group Memberships and Civil Society

In the past decade, theorists and political practitioners have stressed the importance of civil society in the political development of a nation (Yamamoto 1995; Abuza 2001: 12-15; Shi 1998; Diamond 1994). Perhaps the most visible work is by Robert Putnam (1993; 2000) who argues that the social capital formed by participation in associations both develops a nation politically as well as improving the life conditions of its citizens. Such a model has a long theoretical tradition within Western political culture, most notably described in De Tocqueville's treatise, *Democracy in America*. Participation in social groups supposedly nurtures the interpersonal skills that are part of a modern society, and helps to broaden the life experiences and perspectives of group members. An active civil society also provides a training ground for developing political skills, and diverse groups may serve as agents of interest articulation within society and politics.

Similarly, recent democratization literature stresses the importance of social group activity as a training ground for the development of a democracy (Diamond 1994; Linz and Stepan 1996; Rueschemeyer et al. 1998). Even in nations where democracy is uncertain, participation in civil society--generally interpreted as voluntary participation in social groups that are autonomous of the state--is often seen as first step in developing a democratic political culture. This has led international development agencies to focus on the nurturing of NGOs and public interest groups as the Tocquevillian foundation of political (and economic) modernization.

From the outset, there are questions about whether this civil society model applies to a nation such as Vietnam, which has roots in Confucian and communist traditions. Participation in social groups is not likely to generate the type of participatory experiences that might occur in Western democracies or even in developing nations that subscribe to the democracy paradigm (such as Latin America). The form of mobilized participation typically found in a communist society is not what is normally meant by group membership in the civil society literature. Similarly, the internal workings of social groups in such a setting may--or may not--generate the types of organizational skills and social norms that are the essence of the civil society thesis.

In addition, several scholars argue that the root of civil society in Vietnam is embedded within the basic, traditional social organizational unit of the village (Hickey 1964; Tran Ngoc Them 2001). Since ancient times, the Vietnamese have been acquainted with decentralized forms of government, in which the village as a unit decided what and how to implement national policies. Even when the Vietnamese government applied agricultural collectivization in the north and central provinces during the 1960's and 1970's, alternative arrangements such as "sneaky contracts" (*khoan chui*) were sought as creative ways to work around policy implementation (Hy Van Luong 1993; Kerkvliet 1995). Villagers in the South to avoid implementing the agricultural cooperative structure after 1975 (Ngo Vinh Long 1988) used different means. As Vietnam becomes more and more urbanized, the "village structure" still persists and transforms itself into administrative units with some political equivalence. Thus, the broader social integration envisioned by the civil society theory might not apply in a context where social networks are still narrowly defined.

The research literature also is divided on the basic question of the actual extent of civil society activity in Vietnam. Membership in social groups has apparently ebbed and flowed over time, in part in reaction to the government's efforts to mobilize the public to participate in such organizations. Some scholars suggest that *doi moi*, the series of economic reforms started in 1986, has led to the expansion of civil society as new organizations emerge to represent new interests in society (Sidel 1995; Thayer 1995; Lockhart 1997; Kerkvliet 2001). Although Mark Sidel warned that the Vietnamese growth in organizations may not be equivalent to the concept of Western non-governmental sector, he observed, "A variety of Vietnamese groups are seeking space from the Vietnamese state, and they are among the most exciting, dynamic sectors of a dynamic economy and society" (1995: 293). In a recent assessment of state-society relationship in Vietnam, Benedict Kerkvliet (2001) noted a reduction in the state's control over the society, which simultaneously means an increase in space for activities independent of the government.

Indeed, several decrees issued lately have emphasized participation at local level by reinstating the citizen's right to discuss policy and budget for projects that local citizens are involved in and contribute toward (Bach Tan Sinh 2001).

Other researchers maintain that social groups in Vietnam are less autonomous and assertive than the comparable social groups in Eastern Europe (Womack 1993). For instance, Carole Beaulieu's (1994) study of Vietnamese unions observes that no independent union such as Solidarnosc has appeared in Vietnam despite some evidence of responsiveness to workers' demands,

> [W]hen wildcat strikes broke out in the South in mainly foreign-owned factories, this alarmed the official Vietnam General Confederation of Labor Unions (VGCLU). The Union leadership has also shown a determination to respond to new needs, supporting an association of bicycle rickshaw drivers, for example, talking about creating an association for restaurant cooks, pushing for higher wages for workers in foreign-owned companies.

Yet these associations do not complete the definition of a civil society, which is painted as a broader concept according to many authors in the West. In evaluating whether "civil society" exists in Vietnam, David Marr (1994) juxtaposed his findings against Larry Diamond's definition of civil society (1994) and concluded that Vietnam does not have a coherent space that could be called a civil society.

An answer to the question of the extent of social group membership in Vietnam is relatively straightforward. The World Values Survey asked respondents whether they were a member of a group in 14 different areas and an additional "other" category.[1] Figure 1 describes a Vietnamese population that is engaged in an active social life (also see Dalton et al. 2002). The first set of bars indicate that a fifth or more of the public report they are members of a sport/recreation group, a local community group, a social welfare organization, a women's group, or a political group. There is also substantial involvement in educational/ cultural groups, unions, professional association, and youth groups. The typical Vietnamese respondent reports belonging to 2.33 groups, which is significantly higher than the Chinese (.91), Japanese (1.41), or the Philippine (1.93) results from the World Values Survey.[2]

At least in part, these patterns of group membership reflect the government's efforts to actively engage the public in social groups that are initiated and directed by the government. The Vietnamese Women's Association, the Ho Chi Minh Youth Union, the Vietnam Farmers Association, the Vietnamese Confederation of Labor and other groups have historically served as avenues for the government to communicate with key social sectors in Vietnam, and often these groups claim large national memberships (Porter 1993: ch. 3). Participation in the Youth Union, for example, has been a route to career advancement, and participation in such groups was encouraged. More recently the government encouraged various local cooperatives to address certain community issues. The result is a high degree of social engagement among the Vietnamese public.

The second set of bars in Figure 1 presents the share of Vietnamese who have participated in activities of each organization--even if the respondent is not a member. In general terms, these percentages track the membership statistics, with active participation typically a bit lower than formal membership. By this measure as well, social engagement in Vietnam is widespread.

If we simply count the total number of groups to which an individual belongs, we find evidence that socio-economic development increases the density of social group participation within Vietnam. For example, total group membership is significantly higher among those who are better educated (tau-b=.13) and those with higher incomes (tau-b=.13). While it is often the case that group membership increases with age and the accumulation of family responsibilities and a career,[3] there is no such age relationship in Vietnam (tau-b=.02). This suggests that younger Vietnamese are engaging in social groups with increasing frequency as part of the social development of the nation.

If we pursue these analyses further, it becomes obvious that participation in specific groups is also conditioned by life circumstances (also see analyses in Dalton et al. 2002). For example, younger Vietnamese tend to be more active in education-related groups, youth groups, and sports groups; the older generation is disproportionately represented in social welfare organizations, health organizations, and

community associations. There are also systematic tendencies for Northerners to be more active in groups that are often mobilized by the state--such as youth associations and women's groups--while Southerners are more active in groups that might question regime values: religious groups, environmental groups, social welfare groups and community associations. But the average Vietnamese is linked to some intermediary group, often in multiple ways.
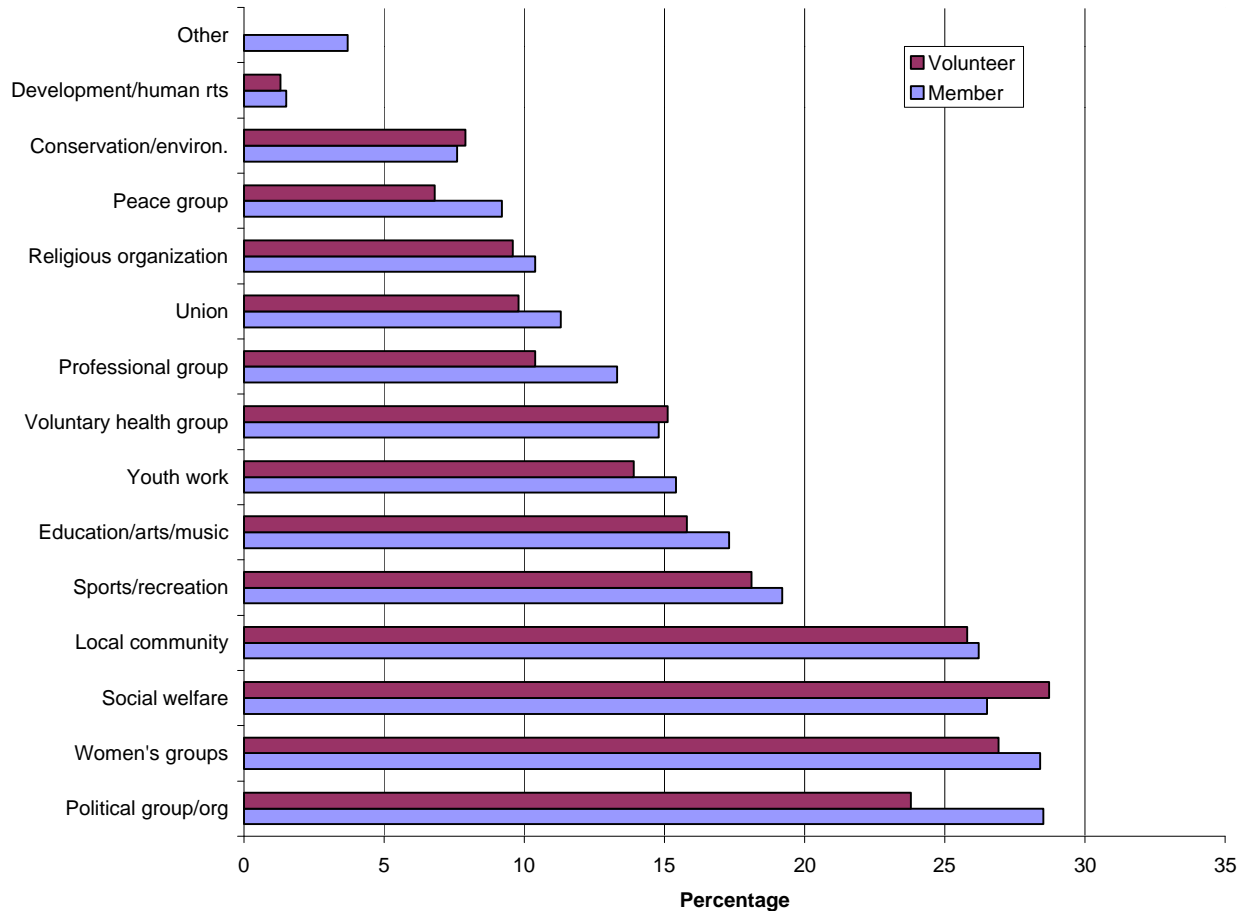

Figure 1. Membership and Activity in Various Social Groups
Source: 2001 World Values Survey Vietnam.

Does group membership matter? The remainder of this article explores the implications of the civil society theory as applied to Vietnam. Does group membership produce the type of positive benefits identified by the civil society literature, even when participation occurs outside of a democratic regime. Or, does mobilized membership represent an example of the "dark side" of social capital, where groups socialize members into a set of values supportive of the dominant regime, regardless of its form?

Social Trust

One of the theorized consequences of participation in social groups is that it affects the social norms of participants. Extensive social network participation may weaken traditional ascriptive patterns of authority, as individuals work with others to address common interests. In addition, expanding social networks may break down parochial attitudes and lead to more cosmopolitan views of the world. This

supposedly fosters cooperative orientations and acceptance of others that facilitate a modern political and economic system. In short, the experiences of group activity combine with social trust to create "social capital."

Thus, research frequently focuses on social trust as an indicator of the content of social relations in a nation, and a source of social capital formation. Ronald Inglehart (1997) and Robert Putnam (2000), for example, emphasize that trust in others is a key element in developing a civic culture. And this has been repeated by the literature on civil society and political development (Diamond 1994; Rueschemeyer et al. 1998).

Of course, such effects depend on the nature and content of the interactions that occur within social groups, some of which may reinforce (or diminish) such patterns. It is not clear what to expect for the impact of group participation on social trust in Vietnam. Traditional agrarian and Confucian traditions often encourage trust in a relatively narrow circle of family and close friends. The Vietnamese family has been characterized as "residentially nuclear but functionally extended" (Jones 1995: 189), where a lot of welfare services are offered and consumed by members of the family (Pham Van Bich 1999). Although no systematic, empirical evidence has been compiled on this topic, anthropological accounts describe the family as a safety network of trust. The clear demarcation of in-group versus out-group tends to strengthen bonds among members of the clan but also patronize parochialism among them (Tran Ngoc Them 2001). The cultural impact of communism is also unclear, since prior research demonstrates that levels of social trust vary widely across East European nations in the 1990s (Inglehart 1997; Newton 1999). At the same time, the literature on democratization in Eastern Europe frequently cites the development of civil society groups as a precursor to the democratic transition and a training ground for democratic, pluralist politics. Vietnam's changing socio-economic conditions and increased interaction with the international community may also affect these orientations. If participation in social groups systematically increases trust in others, as theory suggests, then examining this question in Vietnam provides a robust test of civil society and social capital theories.

The World Values Survey contains a standard survey question tapping trust in others.[4] The Vietnamese are somewhat skeptical about their fellowmen: only 41% think that most people can be trusted, while 59% say that one needs to be careful in dealing with other people. These results should be interpreted in the context of other cross-national findings, however. In all the combined nations of the 1995-98 World Values Survey, only 26% of respondents said that most people could be trusted. In terms of other East Asian nations, 42% of Japanese respondents, 41% of the Taiwanese, 52% of the Chinese and only 6% of the Philippine respondents say they trust others. Thus, the Vietnamese national level of social trust appears higher than some other East Asian nations at Vietnam's stage of economic development.

We first ask whether overall group membership leads to more trusting views of others: this is the general logic of the civil society theory. Second, we distinguish between membership in different types of groups to see if the relationships vary by group type. For instance, unions and professional associations are closely controlled by the state and serve as transmission belts for government policy. Similarly, political groups in Vietnam are normally linked to the Vietnamese Communist party and its affiliated organizations, and it is unclear whether such social engagement would stimulate trust in others. Membership in women's groups (primarily the Vietnamese Women's Association) or youth groups (e.g., the Ho Chi Minh Youth Union) are similarly mobilized under government direction--not the type of autonomous social collective emphasized by the civil society literature. In contrast, membership in environmental groups, human rights groups, and, perhaps, even community associations may provide more autonomous civil society settings. Environmental groups, for instance, were often cited as vehicles for alternative political views in the communist regimes of Eastern Europe prior to the democratic transition. Participation in religious groups also creates a social space independent of the state, albeit with a religious identity and values embedded in these networks.

In exploring the civil society thesis, we find a complex non-linear relationship between the total number of group memberships and social trust. Social trust is low among those who do not belong to any

social group (40% trustful), and increases with membership in one (49%) or two groups (48%). But among the hyperactive--those who belong to five or more groups--social trust dips to its lowest level (27% trustful). This is a striking finding, because it runs against the conventional pattern found within regimes where pluralist democratic norms are generally accepted.

We suspect that this pattern occurs in Vietnam because those who are active in many groups are individuals who go beyond normal mobilized participation to join groups that potentially challenge the system: religious groups, environmental groups, and educational/cultural groups. This can be seen in Figure 2 that describes the relationship between membership in several different types of social groups and social trust. Some of the strongest negative relationships between activity and social trust occur for those who belong to public interest groups (tau-b=-.11) or religious groups (-.12). Even those who participate in sports or educational/cultural groups, which are relatively less dependent on the regime, are somewhat less trustful of others. In other words, those who participate in groups that may challenge the dominant social paradigm in a non-democratic system may learn to feel cautious around strangers.

At the same time, participation in groups that are more presumably more allegiant to the current regime--unions, professional associations, the women's association, and political/party membership--are not linked to skepticism about strangers at statistically significant levels. While membership (and participation) in these groups does not create trust in others, it also does not stimulate distrust; hence, the correlations for these groups in Figure 2 are all statistically insignificant.
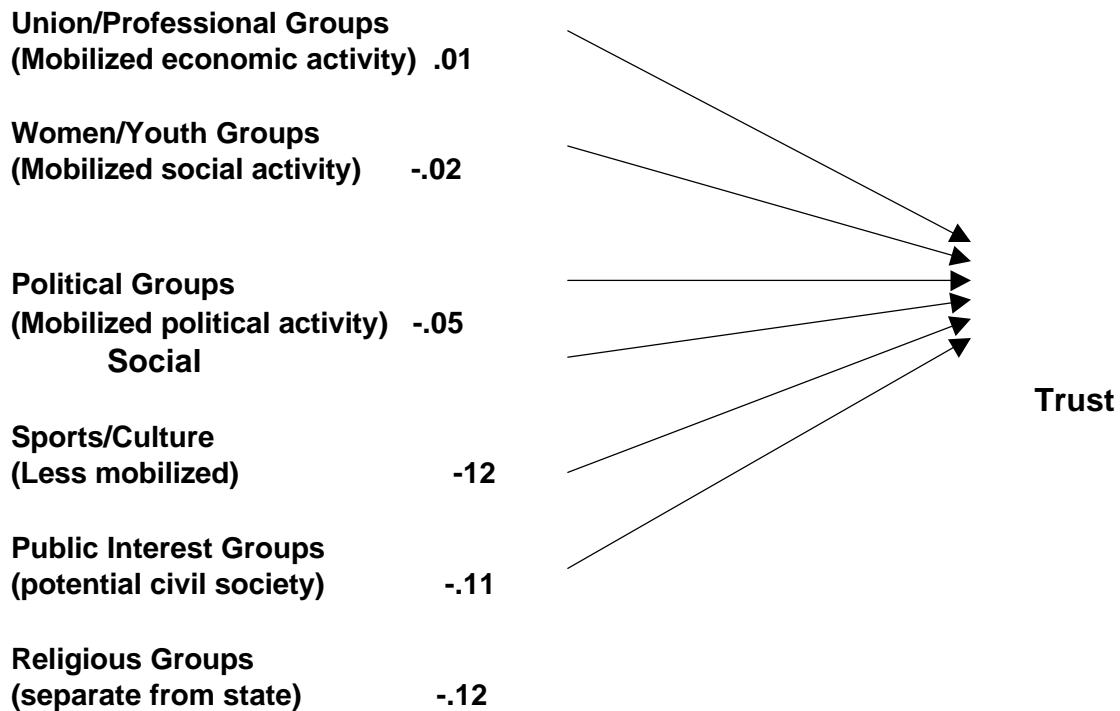
In summary, our findings suggest that the social capital syndrome--high levels of group activity and high levels of social trust occurring together--that is found in long-term democracies is not as clearly apparent in Vietnam. Perhaps, as the residue of the political mobilization of the past, levels of social capital and social trust are relatively high among the Vietnamese public, especially in comparison to nations at the same level of economic development. But it is not necessarily the same individuals who are active and who are trustful. Instead, participation in relatively more autonomous groups in a non-democratic setting may instill caution toward others because participants realize their values may be inconsistent with the dominant social and political paradigms.

The Consequences of Social Engagement and Social Trust

Social scientists devote so much attention to social capital theory because many scholars believe it offers a mechanism for improving the health and well being of a society, as well as supposedly being the "wellspring of democracy". For example, Robert Putnam (2000: chs. 18-21) summarizes the impressive literature linking social capital--represented by engagement in social groups and social trust--to physical well-being. People appear to be healthier, live longer, and enjoy the quality of life if they possess a store of social capital. Similarly, the skills and norms represented by social capital supposedly stimulate engagement in the political world. Individuals learn how to engage in collective action, and the need for such action, by participating in civil society groups with other citizens. Finally, participating in groups and networks help facilitate information flow, which is one of the primary means to collectively influence policy-making and help safeguard individuals from the abusive use of power. Hence, in advanced democracies, social capital is argued to be essential in maintaining a healthy, democratic polity.

We begin our analysis by looking at the relationship between group membership, interpersonal trust, and quality of life measures. Robert Putnam (2000), for example, describes how high levels of social capital provide a social network that improves the health and safety of community members, and cites the extensive literature documenting the causal processes underlying these relationships. Similarly, familial networks naturally bond Vietnamese individuals together through kinship and rituals, producing many of these same effects (Pham Van Bich 1999). Whether the positive effects stemming from family ties could be generalized to those of informal and formal networks outside of the family circle is indeed another story.

Figure 2. The Relationship between Group Membership and Social Trust

Union/Professional Groups
(Mobilized economic activity) .01

Women/Youth Groups
(Mobilized social activity)   -.02

Political Groups
(Mobilized political activity) -.05
        Social

Sports/Culture
(Less mobilized)   -12

Public Interest Groups
(potential civil society)   -.11

Religious Groups
(separate from state)   -.12

Trust

Source: 2001 World Values Survey Vietnam
Note: Figure entries are the bivariate correlations (tau-b) between membership in different types of social groups and social trust.

Table 1 presents the analyses to test these expectations. Overall, except for religious groups, individuals who are involved in various groups also are more satisfied with life (tau-b = .16). This is consistent with the Western literature discussed above. An individual who is well connected with others should feel less alienated toward the society and thereby become happier. This seems to be a universal phenomenon in which Vietnam is not excluded. Religious groups probably tend to attract an older, more traditional and possibly less affluent membership, which may explain the negative relationship in this instance. In addition, religious groups tend to be more independent and sometimes opposing forces to the government, Vietnamese usually go to temples and churches to find consolation for their personal problems, and this may help explain why life satisfaction does not correlate with involvement in religious groups.

The relationship between individual's health and group membership is more ambivalent with an insignificant correlation with total group memberships. However, involvement in certain groups may make one feel healthier. Specifically, membership in sports and culture groups (tau-b = .09) increase an individual's perceived health status, perhaps because these groups appeal to younger and more active participants. Conversely, religious (-.09) and public interests groups (-.06) have the reverse effect on health. As we suggested above, religious may draw distinct membership that is older and thus less likely to be in good health. If one accepts the proposal that many Vietnamese come to religions for self-consolation purpose, then members within the religious groups may not be healthy to start. Other groups that might be state-controlled, namely the women/youth/union/professionals and political groups, may encompass a

broader spectrum of individuals because these include both voluntary and involuntary associations. Hence, the distribution of health status might also vary widely.

Table 1. The Potential Consequences of Social Capital and Social Trust

	Life Quality		Politically Engaged		Democracy	
	Health	Life Sat.	Discuss	Interest	Best Form	Govt Slogan
Group Membership						
Union/professional	.05	.08*	.13*	.15*	-.03	.02
Women/youth	-.01	.06*	.07*	.02	-.05	.08*
Political groups	.03	.20*	.26*	.33*	.00	.12*
Sports/culture	.09*	.12*	.15*	.18*	.09*	.08*
Public interest	-.06*	.16*	.15*	.22*	.08*	.05
Religious groups	-.09*	.04	-.01	-.03	.07*	.04
Total membership	.02	.16*	.22*	.25*	-.02	.00
Social Trust	.01	-.12*	-.01	-.07	-.20*	-.04

Source: 2001 World Values Survey Vietnam
Note: Table entries are tau-b correlations between social capital variables and potential consequences. Coefficients significant at .05 level or better are signified by an asterisk.

A second potential area of effects is political engagement. The civil society logic is quite clear in this instance (Diamond 1994; Rueschemeyer 1998; Warren 2000). Participation in autonomous social groups is a training ground that provides the social skills and resources that facilitate political involvement. Participation in social groups presumably nurtures a feeling of efficacy that may carry over to political engagement. At an even more basic level, group members have access to additional information about political and social events, and this may stimulate an interest in politics. These are routine relationships in Western democracy. The question, of course, is whether these same patterns will appear among the Vietnamese. Participation in mobilized social groups may not encourage further political involvement, while those in more autonomous groups may be hesitant to become involved because of their differences with the regime. Fortunately, our data can answer these questions.

The middle set of columns in Table 1 tests the political engagement thesis. There is clear evidence that engagement in social groups stimulates political engagement in Vietnam. In overall terms, the total number of groups to which one belongs is strongly related to both the frequency of political discussion (tau-b=.22) and general interest in politics (tau-b=.25). These are quite strong relationships in the context of the other analyses we have done with this survey.

In addition, we see some evidence of differential effects across various types of social groups, much as one would expect. The impact on political engagement is strongest for groups that are most closely linked to politics: political groups, public interest groups, and economic groups. In contrast, social

groups that are mobilized by the government--such as women's groups and youth groups--do not stimulate political engagement, although the potential relevance of politics to these groups' interests is clear. We would interpret these weak relationships as the lack of real participatory experiences within state-mobilized groups. Perhaps the one surprising pattern involves leisure groups (sports and education/culture); membership in each of these groups and the summary index combining the two groups is significantly linked to political engagements. Since opposition political parties are prohibited, these non-political groups might serve as outlets for casual political discussion with fewer chances of being accused of law-breaking. In a ping-pong club nowadays, for instance, political issues can be brought into a conversation without dire consequences as long as they contain no messages of political mobilization against the government. Anecdotal accounts suggest that the government since *doi moi* has reduced restrictions previously placed on discussions unless the content is anti-government (Lamb 2002).

Table 1 also demonstrates that personal trust seems to function quite differently in Vietnam than in many other nations. The relationship between social trust and political engagement is weak in Vietnam; only one correlation rises to the level of political significance. Moreover, these relationships work in a negative direction: those who say they must be careful about their fellow citizens are more interested in politics. It is intriguing to speculate on what might cause this relationship, but we can only demonstrate this correlation with the data at hand.

Finally, the third potential impact of social capital is as a wellspring of democracy (Hyden 1997; Putnam 1993; Diamond 1994). Beginning with DeTocqueville, social scientists have maintained that participation in civil society groups teaches individuals the skills to engage in collective decision making with their fellow citizens. Furthermore, by making decisions about group activities and group goals, this inculcates a belief in participating in the decisions affecting one's life. If a community association can plan a Tet festival, for example, the next step is to ask why citizens are not also involved in making political decisions affecting the community.

From the outset, it is unclear what should be expected in terms of these relationships. Within stable democracies where democracy is the dominant political paradigm, social capital strengthens support for democratic norms and procedures (Putnam 1993, 2000; Newton 1999; Edwards, Foley and Diani 2002). Because Vietnam is a communist state, it is less predictable that social capital variables generate the same effects. Participation in a social group may develop political skills and interest, but it also may convey the values of hierarchy and collective decision-making that underlie the current communist regime. At the same time, democracy is becoming a concept embraced by all regimes, at least in rhetoric. Even the communist Vietnamese government recently decided to add the concept "democracy" to the national development slogan: *Prosperous people; strong nation; just, democratic, and civilized society (Dan giau; nuoc manh; xa hoi cong bang, dan chu, van minh)*. Since our survey taps affective orientations toward the theme of democracy--rather than detailed knowledge or acceptance of the principles of democracy--it is unclear how social capital might affect these orientations.

The final set of columns in Table 1 describes the relationship between social capital and two measures of support for the ideal of democracy. The first question is a standard item in the World Values Survey that taps support for the Churchillian statement, "Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government." The second question measures approval of the inclusion of democracy in the government's development statement as described above.

We find a complex pattern of relationships between social capital and these two questions on democracy. Belief that democracy is the best form of government is more common among members of those groups that are relatively autonomous of the government: public interest groups (tau-b=.08), sports groups (.09) and religious groups (.07)--albeit even these relationships are fairly weak. Among economic and social groups that we consider as state-mobilized, there is little relationship between membership and support for democracy, or the relationship runs in the opposite direction. Membership in political/party groups is completely unrelated to support for democracy, which is surprising in a communist regime. The most striking relationship is the strong link between the social trust question and belief democracy is the

best form of government. We find, however, that support for democracy is significantly stronger among those with <u>low social trust</u>. This is the opposite of the pattern normally found in the literature, and posited by social capital theory. We suspect this is another indication of the interaction between those who support democratic reform in Vietnam and the values of the communist regime.

The final column in Table 1 presents the relationship with the question on support for the democracy in Vietnam's development plan.[5] In this instance, members of political/party groups are strong supporters (tau-b=.12), probably because the question identifies democracy with the regime's program. The relationship for public interest, sports and religious groups weaker than for the first democratic values question, presumably because there is a mix of democracy and the current government as referents in the question. Even the pattern for social trust is substantially weaker.

In summary, some social capital measures are linked to support for democracy, which is a significant finding for a communist system. But the relationships are not uniform or even in the predicted direction. These findings highlight the conclusion that membership and group activity per se is not the important factor; rather, the content of these organizational networks determines the consequences of group membership. Thus, membership in state-mobilized or political/party organizations does not necessarily develop values and skills that encourage democracy. But groups that more closely approximate the civil society model, such as public interest groups, cultural groups, or religious groups, are linked to greater support for democracy.

Conclusion

It has become a common mantra in the development literature to see civil society and social capital described as a prime source of economic and political modernization, and a cure for whatever ails society. This chapter has used new empirical evidence from the 2001 World Values Survey in Vietnam to examine the social engagement of the Vietnamese public, and the impact of engagement on social and political orientations. This research contributes both to our understanding of social and political life in contemporary Vietnam, and provides a valuable test of civil society theory in a non-democratic political system engaged in the process of political and social reform.

The clearest pattern to emerge from our analyses is the high level of social group membership among the Vietnamese. Perhaps as a reflection of the mobilization efforts of the regime, membership in social groups is higher than in most other East Asian nations. This involves state-mobilized groups, such as unions, youth groups, or women's groups. In addition, we find relatively high levels of membership in non-state groups, such as cultural associations or sports groups. There is even significant membership in groups that are more autonomous of the state or potentially even state-challenging, such as religious groups or environmental groups. This high membership involvement in different groups is an indicator that the Vietnamese are socially well connected. In addition, Vietnamese are also relatively trusting of others, which is often treated as a key measure of social capital.

But membership in social groups does not necessarily produce the social capital that theory suggests. For example, while participation in religious groups, public interest groups and cultural/sports groups is linked to the belief that democracy is the best form of government, the relationship is actually reversed for membership in state-mobilized groups, such as unions and women/youth groups. We also found a differential relationship between membership in specific groups and social trust and political engagement.

We would emphasize two factors in explaining these patterns. First, as other researchers have recently emphasized, the content of the group experience is more important than membership per se (Warren 2000). Participation in a state-mobilized group with little autonomy may not be a fertile ground for developing feelings of political empowerment and democratic participation. And this is often the experience in Vietnamese social groups that are state-directed. Second, the social and political context of

the nation also impacts on the learning experience within social groups as Rueschemeyer et al. (1998) and others have argued. In a democratic system many civil society groups will reflect the norms of the regime in their internal organization and practices, thus participation in these groups may generate democratic norms and skills. But in a non-democratic system, social groups are less likely to fulfill the civil society criteria of autonomy from the state, and less likely to espouse practices and norms that inculcate democratic values. In other words, social group patterns should typically mirror the authority relations of the society overall, and thus reinforce the prevailing social paradigm. In a transitional society such as Vietnam, therefore, social group membership cannot be simply equated with the development of social capital and progressive political norms. Indeed, the clearest example is membership in political groups within Vietnam, which primarily means participation in activities that might be affiliated with the Vietnamese Communist party. Members of political groups are not more likely to endorse democracy as the best form of government, and are highly interests and engaged in the current non-democratic political process.

At the same time, there is evidence that the *doi moi* reforms and general social modernization are increasing the development of an independent civil society in Vietnam (Dalton et al. 2002; Kerkvliet 2001). Even with the state-mobilized groups, there are increasing signs of independence and diversity of views within groups. According to a recent survey of members of the Central Communist Youth Union, a leading youth organization in Vietnam, 89% want more democracy and less corruption in the Vietnamese political system (Vietnam News Brief 01/02/03).[6] In addition, groups with greater autonomy from the state seem to be increasing and size and social impact. These are positive signs that a civil society is budding in Vietnam. The more people join organizations that have some degrees of independence from the state, the more conducive the political climate is to forming civil society.

Discussing civic and political issues within a non-political group, a sports club or an environmental group, is a prime vehicle for transporting ideas of democracy. However, restrictions from the government on political mobilization do not help induce efforts beyond mere discussions. Civil society may be formed, but it may not become a force strong enough to independently push for political change in Vietnam. In fact, the government utilizes its control over social groups to restrain progress in political development. Yet, since Vietnam's political system fits the characterization of being both "mass regarding" and "authoritarian" (Womack 1987), further social modernization and further development of a true civil society should be a force for political change in Vietnam.

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Methodological Appendix

The survey was conducted in September-October 2001 using a multi-stage area probability sample with a designated random walk household selection at the last stage. The Institute for Human Studies in Vietnam conducted the project and fieldwork under the direction of Dr. Pham Minh Hac.

In the first stage, we stratified provinces by the eight census regions and selected twenty provinces on a basis proportional to population. Within these provinces 99 districts were randomly selected, and two villages or town were selected from each district. In the final stage there were 200 primary sampling units; within each sampling unit the interviewer conducted a designated "random walk" to select five households. Within each household the interviewer selected the adult with the nearest birthday. The response rate was approximately 83 percent. The sample consists of 1,000 respondents distributed proportionately throughout Vietnam to be representative of the adult population. In comparison to 1999 census statistics (Central Census Steering Committee. 2000), the survey closely represents the population on several standard demographic measures:

	Survey	Census		Survey	Census
Red River Delta	19.9%	19.4%	18-19 years	5.2%	6.5
Northeast	14.4	14.2	20-29	17.5	29.1
Northwest	2.9	2.9	30-39	23.2	25.4
North Central	8.1	13.1	40-49	23.9	16.7
Central Coast	13.2	8.6	50+ years	30.2	22.3
Central Highland	6.5	4.0			
Southeast	12.8	16.6	No education	4.2%	9.8
Mekong River Delta	22.2	21.2	Primary	32.0	50.3
			Lower sec.	33.7	26.7
Male	49.1%	48.4	Upper sec.	23.2	10.4
Female	50.9	51.6	College	6.9	2.7

The statistical sampling error of this study is approximately 3 to 4 percent. This means that national percentages in this report are likely (95 percent of the time) to be within +/- 4 percent of the actual population percentages. In addition, one should also consider that this was the first application of national probability sampling on a political attitude survey in Vietnam. The Vietnamese population also is unfamiliar with the survey methodology, and some respondents may feel hesitant to express their opinions fully. So it is possible that non-sampling errors are also present in these data even though the Institute for Human Studies expressed their willingness to take extraordinary care to follow scientific procedures.

Additional information on the Vietnamese survey, the English and Vietnamese language questionnaires, sampling design, and information on the World Values Survey project is available on our project website: www.democ.uci.edu/democ/archive/vietnam.htm

1/4/03

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Endnotes

[1] Please look carefully at the following list of voluntary organizations and activities and say... which, if any, do you belong to: 1) Social welfare services for elderly, handicapped or deprived people, 2) Religious organizations, 3) Education, arts, music or cultural activities, 4) Labor unions, 5) Political groups and organizations, 6) Local community action on issues like poverty, employment, housing, racial equality, 7) Third world development or human rights, 8) Conservation, environment, animal rights groups, 9) Professional associations, 10) Youth work (e.g. scouts, guides, youth clubs etc.), 11) Sports or recreation, 12) Women's groups, 13) Peace movement, 14) Voluntary organizations concerned with health, 15) Other organizations.

[2] We should also note that membership in a group does not mean that all members are actively participating in group activities. In Vietnam and the other WVS nations it is common for only about 10 percent of group members to describe themselves as active participants.

[3] For example, there is a significant positive relationship between age and group membership in Japan (.19) and the United States (.07).

[4] The question wording is as follows: " Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?"

[5] The question wording is as follows: "How do you feel about the decision to add the concept 'democracy' into the national development slogan: 'prosperous people; strong nation; just, democratic and civilized society'? Are you: very satisfied, rather satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied?"

[6] Article in Tien Phong Newspaper as reported in Global News Wire, Asia Africa Intelligence Wire, Vietnam News Brief, Jan. 2, 2003.