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# Political Culture and Governance Capacity among Commune-Level Cadres in Vietnam

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## Abstract

Commune level is the basic unit of Vietnam political system and it is the basic place of applying Party guideline and State law for people. Facing deeply international integration process, digital revolution, and fourth industrial revolution period, not only professional ability, cadre working at commune levels must have the good basis of political culture because it plays the important role in the effectiveness of governance and political stability in this level. This study focuses on the analysis of current status of political culture of commune-level key cadres in Vietnam as well as finding some ways to improve political culture at this level. In this study, both qualitative and quantitative methods were used

based on the survey of 640 commune-level cadres who were selected from the Mekong Delta region of Vietnam. Multiple regression analysis was applied to analyze major factors affecting political action capability. The results show that political knowledge, political belief, and political attitude can affect political action capability. Additionally, it proves that political education, political accountability, political ethics, and political adaptation capability are important factors helping improving political culture of commune-level cadres in the new stage of Vietnam development.

**Keywords:** political culture, governance capacity, commune-level cadres, grass-roots governance, Vietnam

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Commune level is the grassroots administrative unit closest to the people where Party's directives and State's laws are practiced directly. As the basic level of Vietnam's political structure, commune-level governance makes an important contribution to the stability of politics, socio-economic development, efficiency of the management, and enhancement of political institution's credibility among the masses. Since commune-level authorities communicate directly with citizens, apart from institutional organization and operation, the political qualities, administrative capacity, political ethics, and political action capacity of key commune-level cadres play a decisive role in governance efficiency.

In the context of deep international integration, the rapid development of digital technology, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution, cadres at this level must not only have high administrative professionalism but also strong foundation of political culture. Political culture is manifested via political ideology, political knowledge, political belief, political attitude, political sentiment, political behavior, and political action capacity. Such characteristics considerably influence the efficiency of governance, sense of responsibility and discipline of the cadre, administrative innovation, and interaction between commune-level authorities and citizens. Consequently, political culture in grassroots governance is a concrete phenomenon that manifests itself in the understanding of policies by cadres, interaction with citizens, carrying out of public duties, solving of local issues, and transforming of political orientations into real actions.

Vietnam has attained some significant achievements in socio-economic and political spheres over several decades of renovation due to improvements in the political quality of cadres and political organization at grassroots levels. Commune-level cadres have become politically resilient, administratively adaptable, and more capable of responding to new governance challenges. Thanks to those improvements, local stability, effective policy implementation, citizens' mobilization, and consolidation of the State power have been ensured. Nevertheless, there still exist some limitations such as theoretical approach to the problem of political culture, limited practical experience in governance, inefficiency of administrative innovation, insufficient monitoring of cadre activities, and poor conversion of political awareness into practical governance action.

Political culture has attracted considerable interest of scholars working in the field of political science and public administration. At the same time, studies on the political culture of commune-level cadres as direct implementers of grassroots governance in Vietnam have received little attention. The existing literature is concentrated on the analysis of political culture at a societal level or focuses on public administration in terms of institutions without paying due attention to the complex structure of political culture among grassroots cadres. Thus, this issue has remained understudied despite the fact that commune-level cadres are key agents connecting the Party, the State, and citizens in the process of governance.

Political culture has always been one of the central concepts in political science that helps in understanding the relation between political value and institution. Almond and Verba [1]'s classic work entitled "The Civic Culture" has set a theoretical basis for researching political culture in terms of political systems' inputs, processes, and outputs in relation to political orientations of citizens. Further, political culture has been linked with political development, the State capacity, and nation-building in transitional societies by Pye and Verba [2]. The above-mentioned works prove the significant role of political culture not only in determining citizens' political attitudes but also in maintaining the legitimacy and stability of political regimes.

Further studies have pointed to the idea that political culture should be interpreted not just as political orientations of individuals but as a system of values, beliefs, norms, and behavioral models that influence institution performance. According to Easton [3], political systems are based on interrelation between the State institutions, its performance, and political orientations of citizens. Similarly, Putnam [4] has proved in his studies of civic tradition in Italy that institutional efficiency greatly depends on citizens' civic engagement, trust, cooperation, and social capital. Those researchers have indicated that efficiency of political and administrative institutions cannot be analyzed separately from the political orientations of citizens.

Next, Inglehart and Welzel [5] have connected political culture with modernization and development of society in terms of human progress and transformation of political values. Meanwhile, Dalton [6] has asserted that efficient governance in modern political systems depends mostly on participatory attitudes and political accountability of institutions and not on traditional political legitimacy. Finally, Norris [7] has noted that political trust and confidence in institutions are crucial factors in sustaining institutional efficiency and stability in contemporary societies. Such studies are highly relevant to the field of grassroots governance in which political trust arises from the interaction between public authorities and citizens.

Moreover, numerous studies on governance reforms in Vietnam and other transitional socialist countries have identified the growing importance of decentralization, local administrative adaptability, and grassroots governance capacity. According to Painter [8], the success of governance reform depends largely on decentralization. Further, Wischermann [9] has emphasized that civic participation, accountability, and interaction between local authorities and citizens play a major role in governance in Vietnam. The findings of the above-mentioned scholars suggest that grassroots governance requires not only institutional organization but also political orientation and political action capacity of key cadres.

In Vietnamese conditions, political culture involves the political orientation and governance capacity of cadres related to the leadership of the Communist Party of Vietnam, the rule-of-law State, civic ethics, and relationships between cadres and the people. The political culture of commune-level key cadres can be defined as political ideology, knowledge, belief, attitude, sentiment, behavior, and political action capacity to achieve the aims of grassroots governance in accordance with the directions set by the Party and State. Thus, political culture is simultaneously an orientation and a form of behavior and activity for commune-level key cadres.

This study is based on a conceptual model that combines theories of political culture, civic culture, and grassroots governance. Political culture theory sets a basis for analysis of political orientation and attitudes of key commune-level cadres, including political cognition, belief, attitude, sentiment, and behavior. Moreover, civic culture theory stresses that in order to ensure stability of institutions and efficient governance, trust, participation, civic engagement, and political responsibility should be guaranteed by citizens. Finally, grassroots governance theory shows the important role of commune-level cadres as direct implementers of grassroots governance and intermediary between the Party-State apparatus and citizens.

Considering the above theories, the political culture of key commune-level cadres can be conceptualized as a multi-dimensional system that consists of the following seven components:

1. Political ideology
2. Political knowledge
3. Political belief
4. Political attitude
5. Political sentiment
6. Political behavior
7. Political action capacity

In this conceptual framework, political knowledge, belief, attitude, and sentiment constitute internal elements of political culture as political orientations of cadres while political behavior and political action capacity reflect external aspects of political culture through leadership, administration, and public services. Political ideology is an element of political culture defining normative views of cadres of Vietnam's political regime. In turn, political knowledge helps cadres understand political, legal, administrative processes, socio-economic development directions, and requirements. Political belief and political sentiment affect political orientation and attitude of cadres and their commitment to political and institutional values. Political attitude and behavior determine ways in which cadres interact with citizens and solve governance issues.

Thus, the political culture of commune-level key cadres is a combination of various elements that manifest themselves during political life and activities of cadres. The process of forming and developing such culture is dependent on many factors that include institutional environment, political education, supervision, public accountability, administrative training, and interaction with citizens. The political culture of commune-level cadres is formed under the influence of individual political orientation and institutional context.

The present study aims to analyze political culture of key commune-level cadres of Vietnam by focusing on its seven components, namely, political ideology, political knowledge, political belief, political attitude, political sentiment, political behavior, and political action capacity. The paper employs quantitative and qualitative methods of collecting and processing data in order to identify important determinants of political action capacity. Based on these data, recommendations for enhancing governance efficiency in Vietnam will be proposed. In this way, the research enhances knowledge in the field of political culture and governance by conducting a multidimensional and empirical study on commune-level cadres as participants in grassroots governance, thus making it clear how political culture affects administrative efficiency, civic accountability, and governance competence in Vietnam today.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

A mixed-methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches, was used in order to ensure the reliability of the research results and to provide the possibility for conducting a deeper analysis. The mixed-methods approach was chosen due to the multidimensional character of political culture that includes cognitive, attitudinal, behavioral, institutional, and practically-oriented aspects of governance.

## 2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN AND DATA COLLECTION

Quantitative data were collected by using structured surveys conducted with the help of key commune-level cadres of selected provinces of the Mekong Delta region (Can Tho, Dong Thap, An Giang, Vinh Long). The Mekong Delta region was chosen due to the high socio-economic development level in the area coupled with challenges related to regional governance connected to climate change, migrations, rural changes, and disparities in the development of the region.

Questionnaire consisted of closed-ended questions and utilized a Likert scale measuring to assess the following aspects of political culture: political ideology, political knowledge, political belief, political attitude, political sentiment, political behavior, and political action capacity. In total,  $N = 640$  valid questionnaires were received.

Additionally, qualitative data were collected through interviews and focus groups conducted with key commune-level cadres, Party cell secretaries, and socio-political organization representatives. Qualitative data sources helped to understand political culture practices in the studied regions as well as challenges faced when exercising political action capacity at grassroots level.

## 2.2. SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Multi-stage sampling approach was used. Provinces were selected due to their socio-economic representativeness and characteristics of political-administrative institutions. Districts within selected provinces were selected with the help of stratified sampling method. Communes were chosen purposively, aiming to select rural and urban administrative units. Key commune-level leaders and administrators were identified as survey respondents.

## 2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The quantitative data collected with the help of structured surveys was analyzed with the use of descriptive statistics methods such as calculation of means, standard deviation, and frequency distributions aimed at identifying tendencies among respondents. Additionally, inferential statistical techniques like independent-sample t-tests, ANOVA, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression were used in order to study the relationships between variables and identify determinants of political action capacity.

Qualitative data collected during interviews and focus groups were analyzed with the use of thematic coding techniques. The themes of political values, institutions norms, governing practices, civic responsibilities, and political behavior were analyzed in depth in terms of political culture at commune level.

## 2.4. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In order to enhance measurement validity, survey items were developed with respect to already existing frameworks of political culture and political behavior and further examined by experts in political science and public administration. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated in order to check the reliability of the measurement constructs; all of them satisfied the threshold value. Furthermore, triangulation of data was used in order to enhance reliability and robustness of results.

## 2.5. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Standard academic research ethics were applied in the study. Participation in the survey was entirely voluntary and all information provided by respondents was confidential, anonymized, and used only for research and academic purposes.

# 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 3.1. DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Survey findings reveal that the level of political culture of the commune-level key cadres in Vietnam is relatively high. Almost all respondents agreed to the fact that they were faithful followers of the Marxism-Leninism philosophy, the thought of Ho Chi Minh, and the policy of reforms of the Communist Party of Vietnam. This type of ideological orientation helps in creating political consensus in administrative bodies and ensures the proper implementation of public policy at the local level. Descriptive statistics for political culture are shown in Table 1.

According to Table 1, all components of political culture have been assessed as being of a high or very high degree. Among those, political behavior has achieved the highest mean score ( $M = 4.57$ ), which means strong involvement in political and administrative practices and compliance with institutional regulations. The lowest score among all political culture components is for political action capacity ( $M = 4.21$ ). This shows that despite the fact that cadres have quite a good understanding of their political role and have positive political attitudes towards various actions, further development of political competence is needed.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of political culture components

Component	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Political ideology	4.52	0.48	High
Political knowledge	4.31	0.51	High
Political belief	4.45	0.46	High
Political attitude	4.28	0.53	High
Political sentiment	4.39	0.49	High
Political behavior	4.57	0.43	Very high
Political action capacity	4.21	0.55	High

Source: Author's survey results, 2025.

In addition to the above, results obtained prove the strong resilience of commune-level cadres to negative factors. That means that commune-level cadres have quite a good capacity for overcoming negative influences and misleading information disseminated by contemporary media. All of that is explained by high efficiency of political and ideological education aimed at increasing the level of political orientation of cadres and consolidating consensus concerning local development objectives. Moreover, the difference between political behavior and political action capacity suggests that involvement and compliance are quite high, whereas political culture transformation into practice is to be improved further.

### 3.1.1 Analysis of Political Culture Components

Political knowledge is one of the essential prerequisites for effective leadership and administration. According to Table 1, political knowledge of commune-level cadres was evaluated at a high level ( $M = 4.31$ ,  $SD = 0.51$ ). It indicates that many commune-level cadres have the necessary political and professional qualifications at the middle and senior levels. Such knowledge may enhance their ability to properly interpret legal documents, implement public policies and respond to changing conditions related to global integration and public sector reforms.

Political belief is another significant factor contributing to the functioning of political culture. Survey results suggest that political belief was at a high level ( $M = 4.45$ ,  $SD = 0.46$ ) as well. In other words, most cadres believe in efficient governance under the supervision of the Party and government. High levels of political belief may help improve political stability and promote cooperation between local governments and citizens.

Political attitude implies cadres' attitudes toward their duties and responsibilities. As can be seen from Table 1, political attitude was at a high level ( $M = 4.28$ ,  $SD = 0.53$ ). It means that most of those interviewed had a positive attitude towards performing tasks assigned to them. Such an attitude is critical in responding to governance challenges, such as natural disasters, epidemics and non-traditional security threats.

Political sentiment is an emotional aspect of political culture involving citizens' attachment to the country, its values, institutions, and politics. As Table 1 shows, the mean score of political sentiment was also relatively high ( $M = 4.39$ ,  $SD = 0.49$ ). Thus, cadres' commitment to public interests may act as motivation to perform duties for the sake of socio-economic development of local communities.

Political behavior implies engagement in political life by attending different meetings and events and participating in elections, as well as following rules and working with citizens. As shown in Table 1, the mean score of this component is the highest among all measured indicators ( $M = 4.57$ ,  $SD = 0.43$ ). This result implies high levels of involvement in various activities and political and administrative integration.

Political action capacity refers to the ability to implement political knowledge and beliefs in practice. As can be concluded from the survey data provided in Table 1, this component was at a high level ( $M = 4.21$ ,  $SD = 0.55$ ). Still, it was estimated at the lowest level among all measured aspects of political culture. Nevertheless, the majority of cadres are able to carry out relevant actions aimed at ensuring socio-economic stability at the local level.

## 3.2. MULTIPLE REGRESSION MODEL

To further explore the factors influencing political action capacity, multiple regression analysis was performed. The regression model includes political action capacity as the dependent variable and political knowledge, political belief, political attitude, political behavior, and political sentiment as the independent variables. The outcomes of the multiple regression model are listed in Table 2.

Based on the results of the regression analysis shown in Table 2, the following conclusion can be drawn. Firstly, political knowledge is shown to have the most significant impact on political action capacity ( $\beta = 0.281$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), followed by political belief ( $\beta = 0.236$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and political attitude ( $\beta = 0.219$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ). It means that the increase in political action capacity may be achieved by improving knowledge about politics and theoretical understanding of the situation. Thus, political action capacity is one of the indicators demonstrating how effectively a political cadre manages to act.

**Table 2.** *Multiple regression analysis predicting political action capacity*

<i>Independent variable</i>	$\beta$	<i>Sig.</i>
Political knowledge	0.281	0.000
Political belief	0.236	0.001
Political attitude	0.219	0.003
Political behavior	0.194	0.006
Political sentiment	0.172	0.012
<i>Model statistics</i>		
$R^2$	0.61	
Adjusted $R^2$	0.59	
$F$	42.318	
<i>Sig.</i>	0.000	

*Source:* Processed by the author from survey data, 2025.

Secondly, according to the model statistics, the chosen variables significantly contribute to explaining variance in political action capacity. Specifically, the selected variables contribute 61% to explaining the difference between political action capacities observed among respondents ( $R^2 = 0.61$ ), while the adjusted coefficient still remains quite high (0.59). That means political action capacity is not a kind of ability independent of political awareness, political faith, political attitude, political sentiment, and political behavior. In other words, those cadres who have better political awareness, organizational confidence, positive attitude, self-discipline, and favorable political sentiment can exhibit better political action capacity in rural governance.

### 3.3. DISCUSSION

Firstly, the results prove that the political culture of commune-level key cadres is assessed at a high level. As can be seen from the results provided in Table 1, all seven components of political culture have received relatively high or very high mean scores. All components of political culture – political knowledge, political belief, political attitude, and political behavior play an important role and contribute significantly to shaping the political action capacity of cadres in grassroots governance. The findings obtained during the regression analysis are consistent with the results of Table 2.

Therefore, it is necessary to stress that political education plays an important role in the development of political culture of cadres in Vietnam. Moreover, the process of party building activities as well as the development of cadres should be viewed as one of the priorities of political development in Vietnam.

Secondly, it should be noted that political knowledge and political belief have proved to be highly influential determinants of political action capacity. Therefore, building grassroots cadres involves not only raising political awareness and fostering political resiliency among cadres in grassroots governance but also ensuring their flexibility and readiness to respond to challenges associated with digitalization and other aspects of administrative reform. Thus, the success of cadre performance will largely depend on ideological loyalty and administrative adaptability.

Thirdly, it should be stressed that the concept of political culture in the current social and political conditions involves not only ideological elements such as political awareness and attitudes but also public servant ethic, sense of responsibility to the fulfillment of assigned tasks, commitment to serving people, and relations between officials and citizens. Thus, in the context of administrative reform, digital transformation, and other changes in Vietnam, the latter factors should be taken into account in analyzing political culture.

Despite rather high levels of political culture of commune-level key cadres demonstrated in practice, certain drawbacks in its development may be identified. Many cadres fail to update knowledge regularly, lack initiative in introducing changes in the approaches employed, or are not sufficiently adaptive concerning digitalization and administrative reform in Vietnam. These results imply that developing political culture involves not only political education but also further reforms in institutions and control measures.

Overall, both descriptive and regression analysis demonstrates that political culture involves both internal and external dimensions. From the internal perspective, political culture includes political ideology, knowledge, belief, attitude, and sentiment. From the external perspective, political culture is represented by political behavior and political action capacity.

### 3.4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Some coordinated measures should be taken to improve the political culture of key commune-level cadres according to the requirements of the new era.

First, it is necessary to improve the political position, political consciousness, and political competence of commune-level cadres through enhanced political education and ideological theoretical work. Under the conditions of global changes and digitalization, political education is a major tool to help increase political resilience, institutional responsibility, and

administrative efficiency.

As V.I. Lenin stated, an illiterate person stands outside of politics [? ], which indicates a link between political consciousness and engagement in public life. Also, President Ho Chi Minh said: "Theory is like the compass. It guides practical work" [10]. From this statement, one can see that the theory is both an ideological guidance and an important methodology of governance.

Therefore, political-theoretical education should be consistently renewed by scientific means and should always maintain its direct connection to the practice. In particular, political education should include such tasks as enhancing analytical thinking, political competence, and practical work with cadres. In addition, ideological work needs to involve the integration of education and protection in order to ensure a correct orientation and counteract wrong viewpoints in the information environment of the contemporary society.

Second, it is important to raise the revolutionary consciousness, responsibility, and dedication to politics among commune-level cadres. Political culture manifests not only through a political consciousness but also through service ethics, responsibility, and relations between cadres and citizens. Within this framework, the dissemination of the Party guidelines, State laws, and patriotism should involve practical duties and service.

According to Ho Chi Minh, the issue of moral cultivation and the example are vital in the life of cadres and Party members. In today's reality, the example may be interpreted as transparency and legality, anticorruption consciousness, integrity and responsible activity. It should help commune-level cadres show their innovation skills, adaptability, responsibility towards governance problems, and political discipline.

Third, it is also necessary to continue developing an administrative environment and political climate in communes. A democratic, open, and professionally oriented political environment is needed to develop appropriate political attitudes. Standards of public ethics, communication and administration culture should be developed, and citizens' participation in management and feedback processes should be encouraged.

In addition, cadres' evaluation based on the scientific criteria and results of the work performed should receive more attention. Relevant incentives, including remuneration reform, professional development, and promotion procedures, should be created to motivate cadres to work in the interest of people.

Finally, efforts should also be directed to further improving political action capacity. Commune-level cadres need to be able to effectively use Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh thoughts, and the orientation of Party reform in administrative practice. As President Ho Chi Minh stated, people's potential depends mainly on practice and training [10].

This research shows that political knowledge, political beliefs, and political attitudes affect political action capacity. It corresponds to the civic culture theory proposed by Almond and Verba [1] and Putnam's hypothesis about the influence of civic values and political trust on the effectiveness of institutions [4]. Political education and practice should be interconnected in order to ensure efficient political actions and adaptive capabilities.

Inspection, control, and exemplary role of leaders need to be strengthened in order to develop political culture and improve governance. The supervisory role of party committees, local authorities, socio-political organizations, and citizens should be promoted. Moreover, leaders' examples can have an important impact on organizational culture and discipline.

#### 4. STUDY LIMITATIONS

There were some limitations in the present study. First, the sample size for the survey was restricted to a select number of provinces in the Mekong Delta area. Therefore, it cannot adequately represent the entire political culture of cadres at the commune level in Vietnam. Second, the self-reported data collected through the surveys conducted may have been affected by social desirability bias and the perception of the respondents. Third, even though the study conducted a regression analysis for identifying the connections between different variables, there was no attempt made to understand the change in political culture over time. Also, the study was limited to internal political and institutional aspects. External aspects like digital transformation, social media, and globalization could not be studied extensively in the present paper.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

With a focus on commune cadres in Vietnam, this study provides a comprehensive evaluation of the political culture in commune-level cadres from the perspective of political ideology, political knowledge, political belief, political attitude, political sentiment, political behavior, and political action capacity. Based on the research findings, it is clear that political culture contributes significantly to the enhancement of the efficiency of grass-root governance, institutional strength, and public trust in the political system of commune-level cadres.

Moreover, this study shows that political knowledge, political belief, and political attitude have significant impacts on the political action capacity of commune cadres. Thus, in order to enhance political actions of commune cadres, improving political education, institutional accountability, and ethical values in public servants should be considered.

In light of globalization and digitization, in order to address governance challenges effectively, training a contingent of

commune cadres who are competent in politics, responsible in ethics, and capable in governance adaptation becomes an imperative task in Vietnam.

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