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The Dialectical Contradiction Between Democracy and Social Justice in Vietnam's Political Institutions

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Abstract

Democracy and justice are among the fundamental values of every society. Throughout human history, societies have continuously struggled to realize both ideals. Consequently, the relationship between democracy and justice has been characterized by ongoing tensions, struggles, and mutual transformations within systems of state governance in the pursuit of human progress. Drawing on scientific and theoretical arguments, this article seeks to examine and clarify the nature of the dialectical contradiction between democracy and justice within Vietnam's contemporary political institutions, thereby elucidating the mechanisms through which the Vietnamese political system operates and undergoes institutional self-adjustment. This study adopts a Marxist political science approach, with particular emphasis on the dialectical law of contradiction, to conceptualize democracy and justice as two opposing yet dialectically interconnected aspects that interact with and transform into one another, contributing to the progressive development of society. The theoretical analysis argues that the contradiction between expanding democratic space and ensuring social justice is not inherently mutually destructive, although the consequences of specific policies must be examined in their institutional context. Rather, it constitutes a dynamic process of movement, tension, and transformation between opposing aspects. This process requires Vietnam's political institutions to continuously adjust the balance between democratic freedoms and the collective order of distribution, thereby contributing to the further development and refinement of Vietnam's socialist rule-of-law state.

Keywords: Democracy; Social Justice; Dialectical Contradiction; Political Philosophy; Political Institutions; Vietnam.

1. INTRODUCTION

Democracy and justice have long been central concerns throughout human history. Across different historical periods, these two dimensions have existed in a relationship characterized by both unity and struggle, contributing to the movement and development of society toward increasingly progressive forms. In contemporary societies, on the one hand, democracy has continued to expand alongside individual freedoms, the development of competitive market economies, and the diversification of economic sectors and occupations, in which economic actors consistently seek to maximize profits. On the other hand, societies increasingly demand equitable redistribution, social security, the principle of leaving no one behind, and measures to address disparities between rich and poor. This situation gives rise to an inherent social contradiction that requires intervention through state institutions to create conditions for democracy and justice to advance to a higher stage of development. At present, countries around the world generally pursue market-oriented economic development, characterized by intense competition among corporations and nations seeking to maximize economic gains. Consequently, freedom of competition, even when exercised under democratic conditions, does not automatically produce a just social order, as disadvantaged groups may bear disproportionate burdens, thereby intensifying socioeconomic inequalities. This contradiction presents a fundamental challenge that requires appropriate governance approaches and institutional arrangements capable of reconciling democratic freedoms with distributive justice in modern states.

In Vietnam, the dialectical contradiction between democracy and justice not only follows the general laws of social development observed worldwide but also exhibits distinctive characteristics arising from the country's specific historical and institutional conditions. Throughout the process of national renovation (Đổi Mới) and increasingly extensive international integration, Vietnam has pursued the development of a socialist-oriented market economy while building a rule-of-law state of the people, by the people, and for the people. The adoption of market mechanisms has expanded opportunities for production and freedom of competition among economic actors. Nevertheless, competition among these actors, even within an expanding democratic environment, inherently entails the risk of accumulating inequality and social injustice. In response to these objective requirements, the state must proactively develop and implement legal policies, organizational principles, and social governance mechanisms to regulate economic and social relations and undertake redistribution, thereby ensuring social justice and creating equal opportunities for different social groups and economic actors to participate in socioeconomic development.

Such adjustments in state governance should not be understood merely as technical measures but rather as responses to dialectical pressures arising within the institutional system. On one side are democratic freedoms, diversity, and the complex interactions among different economic sectors and actors competing under market mechanisms; on the other is the imperative to ensure equitable interests and equal opportunities among different groups within society. This ongoing tension constitutes the internal structure of the dialectical contradiction between democracy and justice. Accordingly, clarifying the nature of this dialectical contradiction not only contributes to the theoretical understanding of social governance during the transition to socialism but also provides a scientific foundation for the further development and refinement of Vietnam's contemporary social governance institutions.

The first research question is: How can the nature of the dialectical contradiction between democracy and social justice be understood and explained within modern states, particularly where economic liberalization and social protection obligations develop alongside one another?

The second research question asks: Within Vietnam's political governance model, characterized by the principle that "the Party leads, the State manages, and the people exercise their right to mastery," what institutional pressures arise from the contradiction between expanding democratic freedoms and ensuring social justice?

The third research question is: How should Vietnam adapt its approach to social governance to address the dialectical contradiction between democracy and social justice, thereby turning institutional tensions into opportunities for development and for strengthening political legitimacy?

Within society, the relationship between democracy and justice in political institutions is neither inherently harmonious nor static. Rather, it continuously generates contradictions and internal pressures between the expansion of democratic freedoms, on the one hand, and the imperative of ensuring equitable redistribution, on the other. This contradiction is not mutually destructive; instead, it constitutes a driving force for institutional reconstruction and transformation, creating conditions for development toward a qualitatively higher stage. This interpretation suggests that flexible adjustment of the governance mechanism based on the principle that "the Party leads, the State manages, and the people exercise their right to mastery" is essential to transforming the contradiction between democracy and justice into a driving force for strengthening political legitimacy and advancing the development of Vietnam's rule-of-law state institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between democracy and social justice within state institutions has long attracted scholarly attention throughout the course of social development. In contemporary societies, this relationship is increasingly regarded as one

of the driving forces behind national development.

From an institutional perspective, Alexis de Tocqueville [1], a French political thinker who traveled to the United States to examine the functioning of American democratic society and draw lessons for Europe, offered some of the earliest observations on the relationship between democracy and social justice. Tocqueville argued that the movement toward justice and equality represented an irreversible historical tendency. Democracy, in his view, was not merely a form of government but also a social condition in which class-based privileges would gradually be eliminated. This perspective was further developed by John Rawls, who emphasized that equal basic liberties must be guaranteed within a just political institutional framework and that social inequalities are justified only when they benefit the least advantaged members of society [2]. Within theoretical discussions of democracy and social justice, Habermas [3] argued that social justice cannot be achieved solely through top-down directives imposed by state institutions. Rather, in his account, it must emerge through democratic deliberation, in which collective interests are articulated and justified through the participation of citizens. Such deliberative processes constitute an essential foundation for the establishment of a just society.

From another perspective, within contemporary Marxist political philosophy, some scholars have examined democracy and social justice primarily within national boundaries through the economic and cultural dimensions. Fraser [4], however, argued for a broader understanding of this relationship at the global level, incorporating three interconnected dimensions: economic redistribution, cultural recognition, and political representation. She maintained that all individuals affected by structures of power, whether national or transnational, should have the right to demand justice and political representation [4].

Social justice remains one of the fundamental objectives pursued by societies worldwide. However, achieving social justice requires political institutions to practice democracy in a flexible, inclusive, and responsive manner. As societies undergo transformation, political institutions provide mechanisms for debating competing conceptions of efficiency, distribution, and social justice, rather than allowing market outcomes alone to settle those disputes [5]. A complementary egalitarian account emphasizes that democracy and social justice are connected through the public recognition of citizens as equals; political institutions lose some of their normative authority when they fail to protect basic rights or an adequate minimum for disadvantaged groups [6]. Furthermore, participatory democratic theory recognizes the importance of enabling individuals and social groups to influence decisions affecting their lives, rather than limiting participation to the occasional selection of representatives. Such participation may help counter the concentration of authority and unilateral decision-making by governing institutions [7].

From the perspective of international scholars examining Vietnam, a considerable body of research suggests that, during the Đổi Mới (Renovation) period, Vietnam has progressively transformed its institutional arrangements, particularly through the adjustment and improvement of its socialist rule-of-law state to respond to the developmental pressures generated by the market economy. This institutional transformation has contributed to expanding democratic freedoms while seeking to ensure social justice among different social and economic actors, thereby creating conditions for a higher stage of development.

In *Vietnam: Rethinking the State*, Gainsborough [8] observed that Vietnam had previously been characterized by an underdeveloped economy severely affected by war. Following the introduction of Đổi Mới, however, the country developed a more dynamic and growing economy. Gainsborough attributed this transformation to institutional adjustments that enabled the state to adapt to an increasingly dynamic and competitive economic environment. Rather than weakening state institutions, these adjustments contributed to strengthening the country and enhancing its developmental capacity [8].

To ensure social justice within a democratic system of social governance oriented toward socialism, the continued development of the rule-of-law state plays an important role. In Vietnam, however, the pursuit of just governance has also been associated with improving the legal system in conjunction with preserving traditional moral values and ensuring social welfare [9]. The simultaneous pressures of economic growth and the need to ensure social justice have generated significant institutional challenges. Consequently, Vietnam must identify existing institutional gaps and pursue further reforms to ensure justice, particularly at the grassroots level [10].

From the perspective of Vietnamese scholars, democracy and social justice have long been subjects of theoretical and practical discussion. The history of Vietnam's political and social development is closely associated with struggles to establish a democratic and just society. On September 2, 1945, President Ho Chi Minh proclaimed the Declaration of Independence [11], affirming the fundamental rights of all people, including the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Throughout his political activities and approach to state governance, President Ho Chi Minh consistently emphasized the central role of the people, regarding them as the foundation of the state [12, Vol. 5, p. 501]; [13], while maintaining that public officials should serve as servants of the people.

The Communist Party of Vietnam has consistently attached importance to the understanding and practice of democracy and social justice. Particularly since the Sixth National Party Congress in 1986, the Party has emphasized the development of democratic social institutions aimed at ensuring equitable benefits for the people [14, Vol. 49, p. 139; Vol. 50, p. 340; Vol. 52, p. 699]. Democracy and social justice have been regarded as essential characteristics reflecting the superiority of

socialism [14, Vol. 69, p. 629]; [15].

Democracy can therefore be understood as both an objective and a potential driving force of social development toward greater progress and justice [16, p. 233]. Research on local governance in Vietnam has also examined the relationships among citizen participation, administrative transparency, and public trust, showing that those dimensions do not necessarily develop in parallel and that institutional context matters [17]. A democratic institutional system in which opportunities for participation extend across different spheres of social life, including the economic sphere, may create more favorable conditions for the realization of social justice in other areas of society. Democracy must be effectively implemented in practice and protected by law; otherwise, its exercise without appropriate organization and discipline may undermine social order and give rise to injustice [18].

Although numerous studies in both Western countries and Vietnam have examined democracy and social justice from different theoretical and practical perspectives, providing substantial analyses of democratic systems throughout history and the struggles of citizens for equitable rights and interests, an important research gap remains.

Specifically, relatively few studies have systematically examined the dialectical contradiction between democracy and social justice through the lens of institutional pressures and dynamic equilibrium in contemporary governance in Vietnam. Addressing this gap constitutes the central focus of the present study and represents its intended contribution to both theoretical understanding and practical approaches to institutional development.

3. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article employs a theoretical and interpretive research design grounded in Marxist dialectical political philosophy. Its primary analytical procedure is to examine democracy and social justice as mutually related institutional principles, identify the tensions that emerge when competitive economic activity, democratic participation, distributive obligations, and centralized policy implementation interact, and interpret those tensions within the historical and political context of Vietnam. The approach combines conceptual analysis of dialectical contradiction with a critical reading of selected philosophical works, studies of Vietnamese institutions, Party and state documents, and published national statistics. The selected materials are used for different purposes: philosophical texts establish competing conceptions of freedom, equality, participation, and distribution; studies of Vietnam supply historical and institutional context; and official statistical reports illustrate documented socioeconomic disparities. These different forms of evidence are not treated as interchangeable.

The analysis proceeds from a definition of the principal concepts to an examination of their theoretical relationship, an assessment of institutional manifestations in Vietnam, and the development of policy-oriented implications. Its explanatory claims are normative and interpretive rather than estimates of statistically identified causal effects. No original participant-level fieldwork, interviews, survey measurements, or controlled comparisons were undertaken for this article. Consequently, the proposed account of dynamic institutional adjustment should be evaluated on the coherence of its arguments and the relevance of its supporting sources, and not as an empirically validated model of political change. The use of published statistics is limited to describing the stated periods and populations, with caution about changes in the definitions, coverage, and comparability of the reported figures.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To contribute to addressing the contradiction between democracy and social justice within Vietnam's political institutions, this study does not adopt a static theoretical framework. Instead, it employs an integrated theoretical framework grounded in two fundamental pillars.

First, the framework draws on the law of the unity and struggle of opposites in Marxist materialist dialectics.

Democracy and social justice are conceptualized as two opposing aspects within a political institutional system. They exist in a relationship characterized by both contradiction and unity, thereby generating a driving force for development. Democracy entails the protection of individual and collective freedoms, diversity, and competition under market mechanisms, whereas social justice is reflected in state intervention and redistribution. The interaction between these opposing aspects generates institutional pressures that necessitate adjustments in social governance, creating conditions for society to develop toward a higher state of equilibrium.

Second, the application of the dialectical law of contradiction to state institutions requires an analytical focus on institutional pressures, political legitimacy, and dynamic equilibrium.

Institutional pressures arise from the tension between expanding democratic freedoms to enable social and economic actors to realize their developmental potential and implementing state-led redistribution to ensure social justice, in accordance with the principle that "the Party leads, the State manages, and the people exercise their right to mastery." Political legitimacy, in this context, does not imply that political institutions should merely follow majority preferences as a matter of procedural formality when making policy decisions. Rather, it must be grounded in the effective resolution of contra-

dictions between substantive democracy and intergenerational justice, thereby generating new momentum for development and establishing a new state of equilibrium.

By integrating the dialectical law of contradiction in Marxist philosophy with institutional philosophy, this study seeks to develop a model of dynamic equilibrium rather than a fixed model of social governance. This integrated approach provides an essential theoretical foundation for examining the adjustment and further development of Vietnam's contemporary political institutions.

5. MAIN RESEARCH CONTENT

5.1. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE DIALECTICAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE FROM THE STANDPOINT OF MARXIST PHILOSOPHY

Democracy, in Marxist thought, is examined from various perspectives, including the rights and interests of the people, organizational and managerial practices, ideological orientations, and working styles. Nevertheless, Marxist theorists have devoted particular attention to democracy as a form of political regime.

From a political perspective, democracy is understood as a form or type of state [19, Vol. 1, p. 350]; [20, Vol. 33, p. 123], in which the formal legitimacy of state authority is connected to the participation and political choices of the people. Depending on specific historical conditions and the characteristics of the state at different stages of development, the institutional form of democracy also varies. Democracy is therefore historically and socially conditioned. Throughout its historical development, democracy has evolved from lower to higher forms, from arrangements serving the interests of a privileged minority toward broader forms intended to serve the majority. Its progressive expansion has increasingly been associated with freedom, equality, and the comprehensive emancipation of human beings, representing a significant advancement in the development of democratic political systems.

From the perspective of the rights and interests of the people, democracy signifies that political power belongs to the people and that the state apparatus exists to serve their interests. All benefits should be directed toward the people, and all authority should ultimately rest with them. Citizens have the right to elect representatives whom they consider trustworthy, responsible, and competent, while also possessing the right to remove those representatives when they no longer deserve public confidence. Democracy thus embodies the principle that political power belongs to the people and must be exercised for their benefit [21, Vol. 7, p. 269]; [22, Vol. 36, p. 192].

Regarding organizational principles, Leninist political thought places particular emphasis on democratic centralism as an organizational principle governing the activities of the party and related political institutions [23, Vol. 12, p. 77]. This principle is distinct from the broader Marxist arguments about popular sovereignty, collective organization, and the transformation of political power. This principle must be consistently upheld within the Party and implemented substantively in practice rather than merely affirmed in political discourse.

Alongside democracy, social justice has also been a central concern of numerous thinkers throughout human history. From a Marxist perspective, social justice entails fair and appropriate treatment in human relations, without discrimination based on race, religious belief, or ethnicity [24, Vol. 16, p. 706]. It presupposes that individuals possess equal rights and obligations and constitutes a fundamental basis for social relations among human beings.

Social justice is historically conditioned, meaning that different modes of production generate different standards and conceptions of justice, depending on the level of development of the productive forces. In class-divided societies, social justice also bears a class character, as ruling classes frequently establish legal rules that protect their own interests and present these rules as prevailing standards of justice. However, in pursuit of their legitimate interests, oppressed classes engage in struggles to establish a new social order capable of ensuring greater justice and equality for all. Social justice therefore serves as an important measure of human emancipation. Within the communist socioeconomic formation, the principle of distribution according to individual needs, accompanied by contributions according to individual abilities, constitutes a fundamental standard for establishing a society at a qualitatively higher stage of development than preceding social formations [25, Vol. 19, p. 36].

Democracy and social justice do not exist independently or in isolation from one another. Rather, they are dialectically interconnected and mutually influential. Within this relationship, democracy constitutes a necessary condition, prerequisite, and institutional foundation for realizing social justice, while justice provides the material foundation essential to sustaining substantive democracy.

Democracy constitutes an institutional arrangement or a form of state organization and, as such, belongs to the superstructure of society. From the standpoint of Marxist philosophy, the superstructure must correspond to the economic base in order to establish favorable conditions for social development. Within this dialectical relationship, democracy plays an important role in shaping political orientations, policies, and legal frameworks that create the institutional conditions necessary for the equitable realization of economic, political, and cultural interests.

Throughout the historical development of society, in class-divided social formations, ruling classes have generally

controlled the principal means of production, while the majority of working people have possessed few or no means of production and have consequently been compelled to sell their labor power to secure their livelihoods, thereby becoming subject to exploitation. Under such conditions, the realization of social justice, particularly justice in the distribution of economic benefits, remains fundamentally constrained.

From the Marxist perspective, the emancipation of human beings and the advancement toward a just and civilized society require that the principal means of production be brought under the control of the majority of working people. Consequently, Marxist theorists have emphasized the seizure of political power and the establishment of socialist democracy as essential initial steps in this process. As Lenin argued, "Politics is the concentrated expression of economics" and "politics cannot but take precedence over economics" [26, Vol. 42, p. 349].

The acquisition of state power by the majority of the people represents an initial step toward establishing public ownership of the principal means of production. It enables citizens to exercise their political rights, elect state authorities, and establish a political system that embodies popular sovereignty and serves the interests of the majority.

Furthermore, democracy provides the institutional foundation through which people can exercise their right to determine the destiny of their country. It enables broad public participation in the formulation of political orientations, guidelines, policies, and laws, while ensuring that matters of public significance are subject to citizens' contributions, participation, and oversight in accordance with the interests of the majority.

In the absence of effective public oversight, the state apparatus may become susceptible to bureaucracy, privilege, and the pursuit of particularistic interests, thereby undermining social justice, especially distributive justice. Economic and social benefits may become concentrated in the hands of those holding political power, while the majority of citizens experience disadvantages and unequal treatment. Such developments would undermine the principles of social justice that the majority of the population seeks to realize.

Democracy therefore constitutes an essential institutional foundation for achieving social justice. Its absence, or its reduction to merely formal procedures, can impede the realization of social justice, particularly in the economic sphere.

From the perspective of Marxist philosophy, while democracy is understood as a manifestation of society's superstructure, social justice is regarded as a material foundation associated with the economic base. This material foundation plays a crucial and determining role in ensuring the substantive character of democracy. A democratic system that exists merely in legal documents or public discourse, without being realized on the basis of social justice, remains a form of merely formal democracy. This constitutes a central point in the Marxist critique of democratic systems that have existed throughout history.

Throughout different historical periods characterized by democratic forms of government, although citizens have participated in electing state authorities, not every state has genuinely represented the democratic interests of the majority or ensured equitable benefits for all members of society. Where the principal means of production are controlled by a privileged minority, constitutional recognition of freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and the rights to vote and stand for election does not necessarily mean that substantive political power rests with the majority of the population who do not control those means of production. Consequently, when most citizens remain economically dependent and experience substantial inequalities in relation to economically powerful elites, their ability to exercise genuine democratic power becomes significantly constrained.

Therefore, establishing social justice through the principle of distribution according to labor [27, Vol. 1, p. 346], and ultimately progressing toward distribution according to needs, is essential to the emancipation of human beings from oppression and injustice. Social justice in the distribution of economic, cultural, and intellectual benefits constitutes an objectively necessary material condition that enables citizens to acquire the capabilities, time, and knowledge required to participate meaningfully in political life and contribute to the democratic development of the state.

The unity between democracy and social justice elevates the essential character of a socialist-oriented social system. However, this unity should be understood as a dynamic equilibrium rather than a fixed or static condition. Equilibrium creates the conditions and foundations for development, while development, in turn, necessitates further institutional adjustments that establish new forms of equilibrium at progressively higher stages.

Accordingly, socialist democracy is not confined to administrative procedures, directives, or representations in the mass media. Rather, it is directed toward emancipating human beings from oppression, exploitation, and social injustice. Justice, meanwhile, gives practical expression to democracy by creating equal opportunities for individuals to access and benefit from social resources and achievements. Nevertheless, social justice should not be equated with mechanical equalization or egalitarian distribution regardless of individual circumstances and contributions.

These two dimensions are mutually dependent and continuously influence one another. The progressive expansion of democracy enables the people to exercise their role more fully, consistent with the principle that "the people know, the people discuss, the people act, the people supervise, and the people benefit." At the same time, the realization of social justice helps ensure equitable benefits and strengthen public trust in political institutions. Democracy without social justice risks undermining public confidence, whereas social justice without democratic participation may fail to mobilize

collective strength and maintain effective social discipline and the rule of law.

Within the dialectical contradiction between democracy and social justice, their relationship is characterized not only by unity but also by an ongoing struggle between opposing aspects. This contradiction manifests itself in modern political institutions across different societies. Vietnam is no exception. Democracy and social justice continuously generate divergent tendencies that may develop into opposing forces, creating institutional pressures that compel adjustments toward a higher level of social justice.

The nature of this contradiction does not arise solely from the subjective intentions of governing authorities or technical shortcomings in public administration. Rather, it originates from the fundamental tension between the inherent freedom and diversity associated with democracy, which continuously expands opportunities and spaces for development, and existing arrangements of social justice that remain constrained and have not yet adapted to these transformations. This tension is particularly evident in the following dimensions.

First, the contradiction between freedom of competition and the redistribution of social wealth.

Free competition constitutes an important characteristic of the market economy and is closely associated with democratic freedoms, particularly the recognition of the rights of individuals and enterprises to choose their own paths of development according to their respective capacities and circumstances. Such freedom enables economic actors to exercise initiative and pursue opportunities consistent with their capabilities.

However, even when competition initially takes place under formally equal conditions, economic actors differ in their capacities, technological knowledge, resources, and operating conditions. These differences enable some actors to accumulate greater wealth and generate higher profits, while those with more limited capabilities may experience competitive disadvantages, financial losses, or even bankruptcy.

Within this contradiction, allowing market competition to operate freely, particularly under conditions of economic freedom, may intensify wealth disparities and deepen social inequalities. Conversely, state intervention aimed at ensuring justice through redistribution may restrict certain economic freedoms. This ongoing tension creates the need to establish a new equilibrium between democratic freedoms and distributive social justice.

Second, the contradiction between democratic diversity and consistency in state governance.

Democracy represents an objective requirement of social development, as it enables broader participation and mobilizes the collective capabilities, contributions, and intellectual potential of the population. This also requires state governance to accommodate diverse perspectives, engage in multidimensional consultation, and recognize differences of opinion among social groups.

However, such diversity may create difficulties in implementing policies intended to ensure social justice, including budgetary redistribution and land acquisition or site clearance for the development of public spaces. These policies may encounter opposition from individuals and groups whose interests are adversely affected.

Such tensions require consistency in state administration, decisive governance, and an appropriate degree of centralized authority to address conflicting interests and facilitate the effective implementation of public policies.

In summary, democracy and social justice within political institutions constitute two closely interconnected dimensions of the broader process of human emancipation. On the one hand, democracy without social justice in the distribution of economic benefits risks becoming merely formal, as it lacks an essential material foundation for its substantive realization. On the other hand, social justice pursued without democracy may result in bureaucratic, centralized, and subsidy-based forms of distribution, which can ultimately lead to the alienation and degeneration of political power. State institutions must therefore establish appropriate regulatory and governance mechanisms that simultaneously expand democratic participation and ensure social justice.

5.2. CURRENT MANIFESTATIONS OF THE DIALECTICAL CONTRADICTION BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN VIETNAM'S POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Throughout the process of national renovation and increasingly extensive international integration, Vietnam has pursued the development of a socialist-oriented market economy in which different economic sectors are encouraged to participate and compete on an equal footing. This process has expanded productive capacity and created favorable conditions for the economy to realize its developmental potential. Nevertheless, it has also generated significant challenges and institutional constraints concerning equitable redistribution and the provision of social security. These contradictions manifest themselves in several fundamental aspects of economic development, political participation, and institutional decision-making.

First, free competition has gradually contributed to income inequality.

Since the introduction of Đổi Mới, economic actors and sectors have enjoyed increasingly favorable conditions for expanding their activities and competing on an equal basis under market mechanisms. However, differences in human resources, financial capacity, technological expertise, managerial capabilities, natural conditions, and geographical char-

acteristics have resulted in uneven development among economic actors, sectors, and regions.

According to the preliminary results of Vietnam's 2025 Household Living Standards Survey, average monthly per capita income was approximately VND 5.9 million, representing an increase of 9.3% compared with 2024 [28]. Detailed figures published for 2024, rather than the preliminary 2025 release, document pronounced inequalities between population groups. In 2024, the national monthly average was VND 5.42 million per person; urban and rural averages were VND 6.89 million and VND 4.51 million, respectively. The highest-income fifth of households averaged VND 11.81 million per person per month, compared with VND 1.59 million in the lowest-income fifth, a ratio of approximately 7.4 to 1 [29]. The years and populations underlying these estimates must be distinguished: the 2025 estimate describes the national average, whereas the disaggregated figures presented here describe income differences in 2024.

Competition within the market economy therefore contributes to disparities in income and wealth among economic actors, sectors, and geographical regions. These developments necessitate institutional adjustments by the state to maintain freedom of competition while ensuring social protection for disadvantaged groups and economically less developed regions.

Second, competition in the economy is shaped by the operation of the law of value.

The law of value generates competition among producers in terms of product quality, design, and prices within the same market segments. Producers possessing advantages in technology, professional expertise, technical capabilities, capital, and human resources are better positioned to optimize production processes, improve product quality, reduce costs, and offer more competitive prices. Consequently, they are more likely to expand their market shares and achieve higher sales.

Conversely, enterprises that are less capable of meeting the requirements imposed by the law of value may encounter difficulties in selling their products, experience declining competitiveness, or even face bankruptcy. Free market competition thus tends to generate differentiation in economic outcomes, contributing to wealth disparities and inequalities among market participants. Under these circumstances, state intervention through redistributive policies becomes an objective requirement for achieving social justice in changing socioeconomic conditions.

Third, redistribution generates tensions with democratic freedoms in economic activities.

In response to income inequality and regional disparities arising from market competition, the state is required to intervene and assume a leading role in regulating redistribution through national target programs, including poverty reduction, social security, and the development of public welfare infrastructure. Particular priority is given to disadvantaged regions, remote and mountainous areas, and ethnic minority communities.

However, such interventions may also weaken the developmental incentives of economic actors if state regulation becomes excessive or redistributive policies are implemented according to rigid egalitarian principles. Excessive intervention may constrain capital accumulation, discourage innovation, and reduce incentives for investment and entrepreneurial activities.

This situation reveals an inherent contradiction. On the one hand, allowing unrestricted competition under market mechanisms may intensify wealth disparities and socioeconomic inequalities. On the other hand, redistributive interventions aimed at ensuring justice may adversely affect the incentives and developmental capacities of economic actors.

This contradiction constitutes an institutional challenge and a source of pressure requiring appropriate state regulation to harmonize democracy and social justice, thereby strengthening the political legitimacy of the political system.

Institutional regulation by the state does not imply eliminating democratic freedoms or restricting market competition merely to secure equitable outcomes. Conversely, it does not mean sacrificing justice, equality, or social security in exchange for economic freedom. Rather, this ongoing tension requires the state to adjust its approach to social governance in ways that simultaneously promote democracy and ensure social justice in accordance with the socialist orientation of national development.

Throughout its national development, Vietnam has also encountered contradictions and tensions between the growing need to expand democracy across different spheres of social life and the requirement to maintain unified state authority for the effective implementation of public policies.

This tension is reflected in the fact that expanding democracy represents a legitimate aspiration of the people, creating conditions for citizens with the necessary legal capacity and awareness to express their opinions, participate in public affairs, and exercise their rights to equal competition. This aspiration is embodied in the principle that "the people know, the people discuss, the people act, the people inspect, the people supervise, and the people benefit."

The expansion of democracy enables citizens to contribute their efforts, knowledge, and intellectual capacities to the formulation of political orientations and state policies. It also helps prevent subjective and voluntaristic decision-making, bureaucratic authoritarianism, arbitrary exercises of power, and undemocratic administrative practices.

Nevertheless, the expansion of democratic participation may also generate certain tensions with the effectiveness of centralized state governance. In particular circumstances, the state must exercise concentrated and decisive authority to address urgent challenges, such as natural disasters, epidemics, or the implementation of nationally significant infrastructure projects.

If public consultation procedures are applied in full without appropriate adjustments to the urgency and specific requirements of such situations, policy implementation may be prolonged, potentially resulting in institutional bottlenecks, delayed responses, and the weakening of the humanitarian objectives that public policies are intended to achieve.

These tensions therefore require Vietnam to undertake appropriate institutional adjustments that reconcile democratic participation with effective state governance, thereby creating additional driving forces for national development.

In the process of socioeconomic development, Vietnam has been working toward the goals of democracy and social justice. However, this process has also generated contradictions between majority groups, representing the broader population, major urban centers, and densely populated lowland regions, and minority groups, including disadvantaged populations, ethnic minority communities, and residents of remote and sparsely populated areas, particularly in their access to public services and financial resources for development.

Within Vietnam's contemporary political institutions, the principle of majority rule is applied to promote the interests of the larger population while maintaining a high degree of social consensus. If the allocation of public resources is determined solely by economic efficiency and the preferences of the majority, resources will tend to be concentrated in densely populated areas and regions with larger populations, where economic returns are generally higher.

However, such an approach may inadvertently disadvantage vulnerable groups and communities living in remote, sparsely populated, or economically disadvantaged regions, thereby contributing to inequalities in development. These disparities may undermine the confidence of disadvantaged populations in state institutions, threaten social stability, and conflict with the principles of justice.

Conversely, if the state implements redistributive policies favoring disadvantaged groups without securing sufficient support from the majority, such interventions may weaken the developmental incentives of majority groups. State institutions must therefore formulate appropriate policies to address this contradiction and reconcile majority interests with the requirements of social justice.

5.3. PROPOSED SOLUTIONS FOR ADDRESSING THE CONTRADICTION BETWEEN DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE IN VIETNAM'S CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

First, consistently implementing the principle that "the Party leads, the State manages, and the people exercise their right to mastery" to establish a state of dynamic equilibrium.

From the perspective of Marxist philosophy, the contradiction between democracy and social justice is not inherently mutually destructive. Rather, it requires an appropriate governance mechanism capable of addressing the tensions between these opposing aspects. Accordingly, the model based on the principle that "the Party leads, the State manages, and the people exercise their right to mastery" constitutes a dynamic governance mechanism for responding to the increasing pressures arising from the expansion of democracy and growing demands for equitable distribution.

The component of "Party leadership" involves formulating political orientations and development strategies, serving as the central mechanism of institutional self-adjustment toward the objectives of socialism. Party leadership provides overarching political direction for reconciling conflicting interests, preventing the relationship between democracy and social justice from developing into irreconcilable conflicts, institutional deadlock, or mutually destructive outcomes.

Meanwhile, "State management" involves employing the legal system to institutionalize citizens' rights, regulate social relations through law, ensure justice and social security, and maintain social order and legal discipline. In response to the expansion of democracy, the Party provides orientations for developing appropriate institutions and legal frameworks that promote distributive justice without undermining the incentives of economic actors to engage in free and competitive activities.

The principle that "the people exercise their right to mastery" ensures that citizens possess the right to determine their collective destiny and participate in governing the country. It also requires the protection of opportunities for free competition within a state-oriented market economy. Citizens have the right to elect their representatives and participate in contributing opinions to institutional development, thereby promoting justice and preventing bureaucratic authoritarianism, arbitrary decision-making, and abuses of power within the state administrative apparatus.

The implementation of this governance mechanism creates the capacity for institutional self-adjustment. When the excessive relaxation of democratic and market-related regulations results in social injustice, the Party and the State can adjust social security policies and market regulation in accordance with the socialist orientation. Conversely, when outdated or rigid state management practices weaken incentives for free competition, capital accumulation, and the expansion of production, state institutions can proactively broaden opportunities for democratic competition and strengthen the people's capacity to exercise their rights.

Second, renewing the Party's methods of leadership.

The Party plays a guiding role in formulating appropriate political orientations and policies to address the contradiction

between democracy and social justice. Its leadership should not rely on command-based thinking or impose compulsory measures in the name of justice at the expense of democratic freedoms, nor should it promote democratic freedoms without adequate consideration of social justice.

This requires a transformation in social governance from a model based primarily on unilateral administrative commands toward an institutional and democratic approach that enables citizens to realize their capacities and developmental opportunities while ensuring social justice.

Within the institutional conception adopted in this article, the Party is not understood as standing above the Constitution or the law, and its orientations and policies are expected to remain consistent with applicable legal provisions. Accordingly, strengthening the Party's leadership requires greater emphasis on reviewing practical experience, conducting theoretical research, developing and refining theoretical perspectives, and drawing lessons that can inform the formulation of new institutions, policies, and laws responsive to emerging developmental requirements.

All policies and laws must be deeply grounded in the principle that "the people are the foundation; the people are the subjects and the center of the cause of renovation, national construction, and national defense. All orientations and policies of the Party and the State must genuinely originate from the needs, aspirations, and lawful and legitimate rights and interests of the people" [30, Vol. 2, p. 382].

Thus, renewing the Party's leadership methods through a transition from administrative management toward governance must be grounded in the legitimate interests and aspirations of the people, consistently upholding the principle that "the people are the foundation."

Third, enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the socialist rule-of-law state.

To address the contradiction between democracy and social justice within Vietnam's contemporary political institutions, it is essential to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of state governance. This involves expanding opportunities for democratic development, strengthening the people's capacity to exercise political power, and ensuring equitable distribution among economic actors, majority and minority groups, and regions with different socioeconomic conditions. In this context, Vietnam's socialist rule-of-law state must further strengthen its role as a developmental and enabling state.

Creating opportunities for democratic development does not mean expanding democratic freedoms merely in formal terms, theoretical declarations, or public communication. Rather, democracy must be substantively realized in practice. Its development must be closely associated with the establishment, supplementation, and improvement of legal institutions, together with the maintenance of discipline, order, and respect for the law.

The legal system should not only create favorable institutional conditions for democratic development but also ensure the strict handling of practices that undermine social justice, including abuses of power, embezzlement, corruption, wastefulness, and other forms of misconduct that generate social inequalities.

Institutional development must also address the requirements of intergenerational justice. This means that institutional and legal reforms should follow appropriate roadmaps, implementation stages, and long-term plans to ensure a harmonious balance of interests before and after legal changes, thereby promoting equitable benefits for different social actors and across generations.

Improving the effectiveness of state governance should therefore aim not only to strengthen democratic and equitable competition but also to ensure the fair redistribution of social benefits. Such an approach must preserve the incentives for competition and wealth accumulation among economically capable actors and majority groups while simultaneously protecting the interests of disadvantaged populations, consistent with the principle of leaving no one behind.

6. DISCUSSION

By examining the dialectical relationship between democracy and social justice within Vietnam's political institutions, this study offers two important theoretical contributions to contemporary political philosophy.

First, resolving the contradiction between democracy and social justice in Vietnam serves as a driving force for social development.

From the perspective of Marxist philosophy, this study conceptualizes the contradiction between democracy and social justice not as a relationship of mutual negation or destruction, but as one in which the two dimensions constitute necessary conditions and prerequisites for each other, characterized by both unity and contradiction. The continuous tension inherent in this relationship generates recurring conflicts and contradictions, compelling political institutions to undergo ongoing adjustments to avoid institutional deadlock, extremism, bureaucratic rigidity, and stagnation.

However, policy adjustments may produce different outcomes depending on their orientation and implementation. When institutional and policy adjustments appropriately reconcile competing interests and ensure distributive justice, they can promote social development. Conversely, when regulatory policies become excessively restrictive or overly permissive, particularly when freedom is exercised without appropriate legal and institutional constraints, they may undermine social order and create conditions in which actors possessing greater economic and institutional resources gain disproportionate advantages. Such developments can intensify income inequality, wealth disparities, and regional inequalities.

Second, affirming the validity of the dialectical relationship between democracy and social justice in contemporary Vietnam.

Some market-oriented accounts of liberal democracy emphasize political liberties and economic freedoms while allowing considerable variation in redistributive commitments. These perspectives should not be treated as a single doctrine, because theorists differ in their understanding of the relationship between political institutions, public accountability, and the economy. The institutional experience examined here nevertheless suggests that the expansion of economic freedoms within competitive markets can generate substantial advantages for actors with greater access to capital, technological capabilities, skilled personnel, organizational resources, and established market networks.

At the same time, such conditions may create significant disadvantages for economic actors with limited resources, lower technological capacities, insufficient capital, or unfavorable geographical and socioeconomic conditions. Disadvantaged regions and minority communities, particularly those with lower-quality human resources and limited access to development opportunities, may face considerable difficulties in competing with more resourceful actors. Consequently, some economic actors may experience business failure or bankruptcy, while disparities in income, wealth, and regional development continue to widen.

Within Vietnam's political institutions, the combination of economic and democratic freedoms under a socialist-oriented market economy remains closely connected to the objective of ensuring social justice. The governance model based on the principle that "the Party leads, the State manages, and the people exercise their right to mastery" has continuously undergone institutional and policy adjustments aimed at maintaining incentives for competition and capital accumulation among economically capable actors while simultaneously implementing redistributive measures to harmonize competing interests and ensure social security for disadvantaged groups.

This relationship between the promotion of economic development and the pursuit of social justice reflects the fundamental nature of the dialectical relationship between democracy and social justice within Vietnam's contemporary political institutions.

7. POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Drawing on the theoretical and practical analyses presented above, this study proposes two groups of policy and institutional solutions with methodological significance, aimed at transforming the dialectical tensions between democracy and social justice into driving forces for development in the new period.

First, improving institutional mechanisms for controlling political power to protect and expand democracy.

Democracy must be closely associated with the rule of law, legal discipline, and the effective enforcement of legal provisions to ensure justice for all members of society. The state can operate effectively only when its authority is exercised within a clearly defined legal framework and subject to substantive oversight by the people.

It is therefore necessary to further improve the system of policies and laws governing the control of political power through both internal and external oversight mechanisms. When political power remains insufficiently controlled, it may lead to undemocratic practices, as individuals holding leadership positions may abuse their authority to influence or dominate subordinates. Such practices can reduce democracy to a merely formal process and undermine distributive justice, particularly when public policies and their intended benefits fail to reach disadvantaged groups. Accordingly, legal provisions should ensure transparency and accountability throughout public policy decision-making processes while effectively preventing the undue influence of vested interest groups on policy formulation and implementation.

Furthermore, a set of criteria for evaluating the substantive practice of democracy at the grassroots level should be developed and integrated into existing digital platforms, such as VNeID, or incorporated into online public service portals currently used by citizens. These mechanisms should enable citizens to evaluate the performance of public authorities and the quality of administrative services based on their actual experiences during the processing of administrative procedures.

The resulting evaluation criteria should be incorporated into the performance assessment and classification of public officials and public employees, thereby providing an evidence-based foundation for appropriate institutional and policy adjustments that respond to the needs and aspirations of the majority of citizens. Such measures would contribute to ensuring that the principle that "the people know, the people discuss, the people act, the people inspect, the people supervise, and the people benefit" is substantively implemented in practice.

Second, developing a new social security framework to strengthen social justice.

Social security plays an important role in reducing inequality. However, a system that relies primarily on passive assistance may fail to ensure long-term sustainability for disadvantaged groups. It is therefore necessary to move toward a proactive and inclusive social security system based on three principal pillars: (1) risk prevention, through expanding universal health insurance coverage, supporting education and training, and improving the quality of human resources; (2) risk mitigation, through flexible and timely assistance mechanisms; and (3) risk recovery, through the creation of sustainable employment opportunities.

Developing this new social security framework also requires expanding policies and strategic investments aimed at

ensuring equal opportunities to access essential infrastructure and public services, including healthcare, education, transportation, and information and communication systems. Particular attention should be given to promoting regionally appropriate economic development strategies that take into account the geological and climatic conditions of remote and disadvantaged areas, ethnic minority communities, border regions, and island territories.

These measures constitute an essential material foundation for narrowing developmental disparities among disadvantaged groups, creating equal opportunities for all citizens, and transforming legally recognized democratic rights into the substantive capabilities of the people to participate in and benefit from socioeconomic development.

8. CONCLUSION

This study argues that the relationship between democracy and social justice within Vietnam's political institutions during the Đổi Mới period is neither static nor immutable. Rather, it is characterized by continuous tensions, interactions, and mutual influences. From the perspective of Marxist philosophy, a fundamental contradiction emerges between expanding democratic opportunities that enable economic actors to compete freely and fully realize their developmental potential, and ensuring social justice through state intervention and redistribution in favor of disadvantaged groups. This contradiction is not inherently mutually destructive, nor does its resolution require choosing between the unrestricted expansion of democracy at the expense of social security and justice, and the pursuit of distributive justice at the cost of democratic freedoms and developmental incentives. Instead, these ongoing tensions compel the state to continuously adjust its institutional arrangements, strengthen democratic participation, and improve redistributive mechanisms, thereby promoting the development of democracy and social justice at progressively higher levels.

This study makes three principal contributions of methodological significance.

At the theoretical level, the study argues that the dialectical relationship between democracy and justice is characterized by both unity and struggle, with each dimension continuously influencing and conditioning the other. Democracy provides the conditions necessary for the realization of justice, while justice constitutes a fundamental foundation for the substantive exercise of democracy. This perspective differs from metaphysical approaches that regard democracy as a sphere entirely beyond state intervention and emphasize unrestricted individual freedoms without adequately recognizing the relationship between democratic rights, legal discipline, and social order. Such approaches risk separating democracy from the regulatory role of the state, potentially leading to the exercise of democratic freedoms without sufficient institutional constraints or collective responsibility.

Practically, the study identifies and systematizes three major manifestations of institutional pressures within contemporary Vietnam. First, economic democracy, expressed through the freedom of economic actors to compete under market mechanisms, generates tensions with redistributive policies aimed at ensuring social justice and social security. Second, participatory democracy, particularly public consultation and community involvement in decision-making, may come into tension with the effectiveness of centralized state administration and the need for timely policy decisions. Third, the principle of majority rule may conflict with the rights and opportunities of minority and disadvantaged groups to access public policies, services, and resources.

With respect to policy and institutional implications, the study conceptualizes the governance model based on the principle that "the Party leads, the State manages, and the people exercise their right to mastery" as a dynamic regulatory mechanism rather than a fixed or immutable institutional arrangement. In response to the practical requirements of addressing the contradiction between democracy and social justice, this model necessitates the continuous renewal of the Party's leadership methods and the improvement of state policies and legal frameworks. Such adjustments should simultaneously respond to the growing demand for democratic participation and strengthen social security and protection for the population, thereby promoting a more balanced and mutually reinforcing relationship between democracy and social justice under changing socioeconomic and institutional conditions.

Conflicts of Interest

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