

Elections in Authoritarian Regimes: *an Endogenous Story of Elite Dynamics  
in Post Reform Vietnam and China*

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF  
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF ARTS

in

The Faculty of Graduate Studies  
(Political Science)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

(Vancouver)

August 2010

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**Abstract:**

The study of elections in authoritarian states has predominantly focused on whether elections help sustain or undercut the regime. Elections can either placate or embolden the opposition. However in the context of single party Leninist states, elections play a different role. Given that the Vietnamese Communist Party and the Chinese Communist Party have a monopoly of power in the political arena and tremendous control over society, there is no significant opposition force. Yet the two states hold elections. Furthermore, despite the two country's similar trajectories of political and economic reform, both states undertake semi-competitive elections differently. China chooses to maintain a relatively closed system at the top, while creating a dynamic and competitive system at the local level; while Vietnam opts for a more open system at the top and keeps electoral institutions closed at the local level. This paper raises several questions; 1) why do Single Party Leninist States hold elections? 2) What is the significance of holding national versus sub-national elections? 3) why do China and Vietnam hold different types of elections given their similar regime-type? I propose an endogenous story to explain the varied outcomes in electoral institutions in China and Vietnam. Authoritarian elections and election-types are an institutional choice and a function of how the regime is constrained by elite pluralism. Comparing Vietnam and China and how they liberalize and cede power to institutions at different levels, demonstrates how elite divide shape the type of elections undertaken.

## Table of Contents

Abstract: .....	ii
Table of Contents .....	iii
List of Tables.....	iv
List of Figures .....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Introduction .....	1
Section I: Theoretical Framework: Building a Theoretical Model for Single-Party Leninist States .....	4
1.1. Review of Theories on Authoritarian Elections .....	6
1.2. Electoral Institutions in Communist Europe: the Institutional Effect of De-Stalinisation .....	9
1.3. Electoral Institutions in post-Reform China and Vietnam: A Theory of Elite Dynamics .....	11
Section II: Exploring Horizontal and Vertical Elite Cleavages in China and Vietnam .....	13
2. 1. Horizontal Elite Cleavages .....	13
2.2. Vertical Elite Cleavages .....	18
Section III: Review of Institutional Differences between China and Vietnam.....	20
3.1: National Level Differences.....	20
3.2 Local Level Differences .....	26
Section IV: Case Studies: Tracing Elite Dynamics to Varied Outcomes of Electoral Institutions .....	32
4.1 Vietnam Case Study: 1993 Land Law and Development of Bauxite Mine .....	33
4.2 Pre-Tiananmen: China Case Study: Bankruptcy Law and Organic Law on Village Committees .....	35
4. 3 Post-Tiananmen China Case Study: <i>Debate on the Three Gorges Dam</i> .....	36
4. 4 Vietnam Case Study at the Local Level: <i>Implementation of Decree No.29</i> .....	37
4.5. China Case Study at the Local Level: <i>Party Support for Grassroots Reform</i> .....	38
Conclusion.....	39
Bibliography.....	44

## List of Tables

<i>Table 1 Institutional Differences at the National Level</i> .....	41
<i>Table 2 Institutional Differences at the Local Level</i> .....	41

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1 Horizontal and Vertical Cleavages</i> .....	42
<i>Figure 2 Measuring Institutional Autonomy</i> .....	43

## **Acknowledgements**

As any graduate student can attest, research for such a project entails tremendous frustration, hesitation and lingering self-doubt that we are indeed asking the “right question”. To this end, I would like to thank my thesis supervisor, Professor Yves Tiberghien for keeping me on track. His patience and constant encouragement has gone a long way in helping me to complete my research. My academic experience at the University of British Columbia has been challenging and absolutely rewarding. For this, I would also like to thank the professors and fellow graduate students at the Department of Political Science at the University of British Columbia. The many hours of discussion and debate both in seminars and outside of the class have helped informed many of the ideas in this paper.

## Introduction

In December 2009, when long-time political dissident Liu Xiabo was sentenced to jail for 11 years, world leaders and human rights activists decried the Chinese government. Liu was charged with sedition against the state, namely for his role in drafting the pro-democracy manifesto, *Charter 08*. Circulated over the internet in 2008, the petition received thousands of signatures from intellectuals and activists in China. A similar story also unfolded in Vietnam. In 2007 the arrest of Catholic Priest, Father Nguyen Van Ly, for forming *Bloc 8406*, a pro-democracy movement loosely made up of civil society groups and activists also unleashed international criticism. Certainly these two stories point to anecdotal evidence of two similar closed authoritarian regimes.

Indeed the key difference that distinguishes Vietnam and China from its Asian neighbours is the prohibition of multiparty competition. They are marked as *closed regimes* in comparison to Third Wave transitions. While there is an array of adjectives to denote variations in the quality of democracy, there is a lack of a useful heuristic to differentiate between Vietnam and China. Cross-national indices like Freedom House and Polity score Vietnam and China identically (Abrami et al 2008, 1). This is no surprise, given that the composite scores are measured according to the extent political and civil rights are protected. Typological distinctions and aggregate indices that conflate electoral events, elide the significance of institutional variation within typologies (Hyde and Marinov 2009, 14; Abrami et al. 2007, 5). Abrami et al aptly propose that scholars code “variations within institutions, so that states can be compared across and within typologies” (Abrami et al 2007, 5). It is by examining various types of electoral events that occur even within single-Party Leninist regimes that elucidate *institutional differences*, which distinguish the internal dynamics of the two Communist Parties.

The goal of this paper is to analyze Vietnam and China in the context of authoritarian *election-types*. Despite the two country's similar trajectories of political and economic reform, both states undertake semi-competitive elections differently. My research inquiry therefore seeks to understand an inverse relationship that exists; why does China choose to maintain a relatively closed system at the top, while creating a dynamic and competitive system at the local level; while Vietnam opts for a more open system at the top and keeps electoral institutions closed at the local level? Along the national and sub-national divide, China appears to support the partial liberalization and autonomy of local legislative bodies as well as introduce competition in the selection of township leaders. However at the national level, the National People's Congress (NPC) remains closed and less assertive in overseeing state organs than its local counterparts. In contrast, Vietnam's National Assembly is opened to universal suffrage and as such, it has played a greater representative and supervisory role. Yet, at the local level, there is less meaningful delegation of power to local legislative bodies (Salamon 2007, 200)

The study of elections in the democratic transition literature raises an interesting question; why do authoritarian states hold competitive elections? My paper addresses three central questions: 1) why do single-party states, which already have monopoly of power, hold elections? 2) What is the significance of holding national versus sub-national elections? 3) Why do China and Vietnam hold different types of elections given their similar regime-type? Moreover my paper is also distinguishable from other studies on authoritarian elections in which the dependent variable focuses on regime transition or authoritarian resiliency with electoral institutions as the independent variable. Rather I seek to understand the conditions which shape the variation in electoral institutions in Vietnam and China.



The difference between China and Vietnam's electoral institutions is an endogenous story about elite dynamics and a balance of power among party elites. In this paper I argue that institutional choice for opening and delegating power to institutions at the national versus sub-national level is a function of two factional divisions; elite cleavages along the horizontal plane and elite cleavages along the vertical plane. This paper raises two hypotheses; *the wider the dispersion of power in the polity, which signals deeper horizontal cleavages between competing groups, the more competitive and the more autonomous are institutions to check the state.* In regimes, where elite pluralism and factional divide are entrenched, electoral and representative institutions become a forum to mediate the diversity of elite positions to influence policy. Secondly, at the sub-national level *the deeper the cleavages between central and local level elites, the less competitive and the less autonomous are institutions to check local leadership.* Sub-national institutions become a means for the central regime to measure the performance of local elites and ensure stability at the local level. When local power is more entrenched, it becomes difficult for the central regime to perform such a check.

The following section reviews the theoretical literature on authoritarian elections and concludes with a theory on election-types using framework of elite dynamics. Section II reviews the independent variable, different elite composition in Vietnam and China. Section III examines the dependent variable; the core institutional differences between two states. I evaluate electoral institutions in Vietnam and China using two measures of autonomy; representation and oversight. And Section IV presents several case studies that trace the varied outcomes in electoral institutions to differences in elite dynamics.

## **Section I: Theoretical Framework: Building a Theoretical Model for Single-Party Leninist States**

A major research question that dominates the study of authoritarian elections is whether they are regime-subverting or regime-sustaining (Schedler 2009, 291). Many scholars have argued that semi-competitive elections are inherently unstable. Political liberalization introduces risk and there is greater opportunity for the opposition to succeed (Schedler 2009, 292). Similarly, Howard and Roseller argue that elections have a democratizing potential as they encourage opposition groups to coalesce and mobilize citizens against the authoritarian incumbent (2006, 364). In the transitology literature, authors suggest that softliners of the regime utilize elections as a means to alter the balance of power vis à vis hardliners or conservatives. Softliners take advantage of popular mobilization and new emerging societal forces to turn the tide of support against the regime (Przeworski 1991, 56). Therefore the introduction of semi competitive elections and the opening for civil society activity usually signals splits within the regime (Przeworski 1991, 57). The confluence of liberalization of society, with greater autonomy ceded to individuals and societal groups and the liberalization of institutions, with the introduction of semi-competitive elections, is a danger mix for the authoritarian regime.

Yet given that most Third Wave transitions have stalled in a grey zone of illiberalism and have failed to deepen beyond elections, scholars question their democratizing potential (Carothers 2002, 9). Dissatisfied with the stagnation of Third Wave transitions, a new research agenda emerged, in which scholars attribute authoritarian resiliency to electoral institutions. The traditional mechanisms of force and repression can be costly and unsustainable, given that effective governance is integral to the regime's survival (Gandhi 2008, 76). Wintrobe identifies

this as the *Dictator's Dilemma*; the more the party relies on force, the more reluctant citizens are willing to express their preferences and therefore the more difficult it is for the regime to respond to the needs of the people (Wintrobe 1998, 10). For the most part, the authoritarian regime is dependent on societal forces to govern effectively; “bankers to loan them money, peasants to produce food, and scientists to do research” (Gandhi and Przeworski 2006, 1). Rather than ushering in democratic transition, elections have become a tool to prevent elite defection to the opposition, co-opt opposition movements and open an informational channel for the ruling party to gauge popular support (Ghandi, Lust-Okar 2009, 405; Geddes 2005, 13).

However a shortcoming in the literature on authoritarian elections is their applicability to single-party Leninist states, like China and Vietnam. The section below reviews three models regarding the function of authoritarian elections. Elections are framed as a tool to placate three major threats to the regime; elites who defect to the opposition, members of official opposition parties and mass organizations that can coalesce with the official opposition. In all three models the existence of an official opposition is integral. Yet the key defining features of single party Leninist states is their monopoly of power in the political arena, in which the regime outlaws official political parties and their degree of control over autonomous societal institutions like associational groups, labour and media. The transitology literature which emphasizes a split between hardliners and softliners may not be apt to describe elite politics in China and Vietnam. Liberalization usually precedes democratization, in which softliners promote an opening in civil society as a means to ally with societal forces against conservatives. This is not the case in both countries. Rather, both Vietnam and China have promoted elections without liberalizing society.

Therefore when the ruling party has significant control in the political arena and society, what is the purpose of elections for these regimes? For single-party Leninist states, the key

challenge stems internally from within the regime; *horizontally*, the threat of factionalism and intra party conflict and *vertically*, the threat of decentralization and regionalism. A theoretical framework to understand authoritarian elections therefore must take into consideration these unique challenges to the single-party Leninist states; factionalism and regionalism.

### **1.1. Review of Theories on Authoritarian Elections**

Geddes and Magaloni and present a similar story regarding how elections manage *intra-*elite conflict (Geddes 2005, 2, Magaloni 2006, 125). In Geddes study of authoritarian breakdown, she notes that dominant party regimes, which hold competitive elections, survive longer than personalist or military regime-types. The key mechanism is the role that *elections* play in preventing elite defection. The threat is not the rival party, but rather elites that split from the regime and join the opposition (Geddes 2005, 6). The party's incumbency advantage and access to state resources imbues it with tremendous power to distribute rents and positions. Therefore even if there is a defection, rank and file cadres have little incentive to compete outside the Party. Using a staghunt game theoretic model, Geddes states that "everyone's cooperation is needed to encircle and kill the prey", suggesting that elections have a mobilizing effect that strengthens party cohesion and internal unity (1999, 125). With a vested interest in its survival, elections force elites to work in support of the regime (Magaloni 2006, 8).

Magaloni emphasizes the communicative effect elections have on preventing defection. Even though the ruling regime has a significant advantage over the opposition party, Magaloni finds that dominant parties in hegemonic regimes will nevertheless invest substantially in campaigning and vote-buying. The party's aim is to achieve a supermajority and high vote margins to signal the mass support for the party (Magaloni 2006, 15). An image of invincibility

discourages elite defection to the opposition (Magaloni 2006, 9). Magaloni goes beyond Geddes argument, which focuses on the patronage strength of the Party, by emphasizing the necessity of mass support to secure elite loyalty (Magaloni 2006, 14).

In contrast to co-opting potential intra-elite rivals, Gandhi presents a model of co-optation that placates opposition within society (2008, xviii). The key threat therefore is not a split within the party, but existing societal groups that can coalesce and form a broad based resistant movement (Gandhi 2008, 75). The more the regime is dependent on these outside actors to “generate prosperity and rents for themselves”, the more willing they are to cooperate and make policy concessions (2008, xviii). In exchange for direct participation and influence in shaping policy, the opposition party becomes a *domesticated opposition*, playing by the rules set by the regime (Gandhi and Przeworski 2007, 1283). The legislative body serves as a forum for opposition groups to voice grievances and negotiate on policies.

In Lust-Okar’s study of Middle East and North African states, potential rival elites are co-opted not by policy concessions as Gandhi suggests, but by access to rents and state resources (2008, 231). Elected deputies do not perform a traditional supervisory or legislative role. Rather they use their position to deliver resources, jobs, licenses and other rents to their constituents (2008, 233). As citizens vote according to personal connections and the ability of candidates to deliver services, parties are consequently weak and ill-coordinated in the legislature to mobilize against the executive (2008, 239). Elites curry favour with the regime to secure such rents, and voters are more inclined to support cooperative and pro-regime candidates.

In sum, nominal-democratic institutions like elections and legislative assemblies may in fact stabilize the authoritarian regime. In systems, where the most significant threat comes from elite defection, elections have a *mobilizing* and *communicative* function to prevent elite

ruptures. For Gandhi and Lust-Okar, the threat is framed in terms of the official opposition parties and civil society groups. Elections and limited legislative powers *co-opt* both actors through policy concessions and rents, thus creating a more pliant opposition. The question therefore is whether the mobilizing, co-optive and communicative functions are applicable to election-types in single-party Leninist states.

Gandhi's hypothesis is premised on the threat civil societal actors pose. However in China and Vietnam, the government's control of secondary associations, like the media and labour unions, renders it difficult for groups to mobilize against the party. There is noticeably a lack of an autonomous civil society in both countries. One way China limits the capacity associational groups is forbidding cross-regional coordination. Branches are not allowed to form across cities and provinces. Similarly, Vietnam limits the development of autonomous groups through the Fatherland Front which is an umbrella group that manages mass organizations like trade unions, Women's League and Youth League. Given the dominance over civil society activity, neither party extends the vote to citizens for co-optive purposes. There is also therefore little evidence that more liberal factions within regime are promoting civil society activity to balance against conservatives. Rather there is significant consensus at the top regarding the Party's role over society.

There is also the assumption that an opposition must exist. For Geddes and Magaloni, the key threat is when elites defect and bandwagon with the official opposition. In Lust-Okar's model, opposition parties must exist for the central regime to co-opt with rents. In the case of China and Vietnam, both countries have clamped down severely on pro-democracy movements. Any active support for multiparty competition, which challenges the leadership of the Party results in swift action by authorities, as evident with the examples of *Charter 08* and *Bloc 8406*.

## **1.2. Electoral Institutions in Communist Europe: the Institutional Effect of De-Stalinisation**

The contemporary literature on authoritarian elections therefore has not focused a great deal on single-Party Leninist states. De-Stalinisation and the post-totalitarian transition in the Soviet bloc drew considerable focus on the study of plebiscitary and limited-choice elections (Pravada 1978, 172). A return to this literature may provide an alternative framework to understand elections in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Leninist Vietnam and China.

Elections during the Stalinist period were inchoate and plebiscitary, meaning that competition was restricted to one candidate per seat. These elections without choice essentially performed a mass mobilizing and regime legitimizing function (Zaslavsky and Brym 1978, 362). Public displays of mass electoral support had a psychological effect of demonstrating unity between subject and party and cohesion within society (Karklins 1986, 451). De-Stalinisation contributed significantly to the regularization and liberalization of elections and institutionalization of decision-making power in Communist Europe (Pravada 1978, 172).

By the mid 1960s, plebiscitary elections expanded to include limited choice in selecting candidates. Discussion on the reemergence of institutions in post-Totalitarian Communist Europe often presents an exogenous story. The importance of ideology and revolutionary credentials declined significantly when it came to managing a modern state and a large bureaucracy. This contributed to the elevation of the role of parliament and the quality of deputies (Pravada 1978, 173). Officials recognized that in order to maintain political stability and economic growth, there required “institutional opportunities for the expression of different interests within the community, and closer links between the electorate and their representatives” (Pravada 1978, 173). Arbitrary rule under the personalized rule of Stalin was inherently unstable. Institutions therefore helped to regularize politics, create more predictable patterns of political behaviour and

manage party leadership (Scalapino 1986, 59). Therefore while plebiscitary elections entailed a mass mobilizing, regime-legitimizing function, limited-choice elections stemmed from “a greater social heterogeneity and in part from a more flexible party attitude toward political expression” (Pravada 1978, 180).

In addition to the exogenous forces that resulted in the resurgence of institutions in Communist Europe, party elites also developed these institutions as arenas to build up a base of support. The creation of the position of President and direct election of deputies were deliberate strategies by Mikhail Gorbachev to push an economic reform agenda and to further divide the state and party (McFaul 2001, 48). The latter proved to be irksome for Gorbachev, who faced opposition to the decentralization of the command economy. The position of Soviet President was imbued with a particular institutional authority that was distinct from the Party congress. This therefore gave Gorbachev another avenue to buffer his policies against conservative apparatchiks (McFaul 2001, 52). Both exogenous and endogenous forces in the post-Totalitarian stage explain the integrity of electoral institutions. However an important difference that may differentiate the rise of the Soviet and regional congresses from the rise of electoral institutions in Vietnam and China is how Gorbachev promoted *glasnost* as a means to outmaneuver conservatives. “Liberals from within the Party would unite with reform forces in society to challenge conservative interests within the ancien régime” (McFaul 2001, 46). In doing so, he pluralized Soviet institutions by liberalizing society. The creation of new political actors therefore came at a big cost for Gorbachev. Reforms created splits. I argue that a high level of plurality already exists in Vietnam and did exist in China, which accounts for variation in their electoral institutions. Factions in China and Vietnam have yet to use the public to settle elite divide. Nevertheless a confluence of both exogenous and endogenous factors; a reduction in ideology, the need for



stability and development, and elite competition can help to explain the resurgence of institutions in single party Leninist states.

### **1.3. Electoral Institutions in post-Reform China and Vietnam: A Theory of Elite Dynamics**

De-Stalinsation in Eastern Europe also parallels some of the institutional effects of China and Vietnam's economic reforms. In both countries, an exogenous story explains the revival of institutions like parliament and village-level governance. With both parties' shift to a performance-based legitimacy, semi-competitive elections and the delegation of power to institutions became a way to enhance governance and manage pluralism and participation. The regime's goal to attract investment and promote growth was the impetus for the dearth of economic laws and regulations drafted. Both Vietnam and China sought to develop a law-governed-society, which contributed to the professionalization of China's NPC and Vietnam's NA and the expansion of their lawmaking duties (Abuzza 2002, 148). Reform also saw the transformation of the bureaucracy, in which technical expertise replaced revolutionary credentials. Yet, the exogenous story falls short in explaining why there are different degrees of liberalization and autonomy across China and Vietnam's electoral institutions. An endogenous story of elite dynamics may provide a better understanding of this inverse pattern between the two countries.

Reform in the two Leninist states created two major cleavages. Firstly the rationalization of bureaucracy contributed to the development of a technocratic class. Special interest groups therefore emerge and congeal as various actors within the state and party bureaucracy develop vested interest in the development program. A consequence is greater diversity within party leadership, "with elites increasingly complex and more equally balanced, vying for policy

priorities and power allocation” (Scalapino 1986, 85). A major cleavage that developed therefore is between *reformers*, who endorse a multi-sectored economy and *ideologues* or *conservatives*, who usually support the state-led economy and lament about a loss of socialist principles. A second consequence that emerges with economic reform is the necessity of decentralization. As central command of the economy ceases, fiscal autonomy takes place in which provinces attain taxation powers. Therefore another cleavage that emerges is along regional lines between central and local elites. Decentralization necessarily creates another interest group; local elites who benefit from reform. **Figure 1** maps the two major cleavages that emerge from reform.

Regimes opt for different types of electoral institutions depending on the level of threat they face. In a single party state, the key sources of threat stem from within the regime. Factional rift within the party is often the precursor to a multiparty system. The two sources of elite conflict that I have identified stem horizontally, between sectoral groups over national policy issues and vertically between the centre and local elites. The first elite rift gives way to a more dynamic and competitive electoral institution at the national level. The party becomes more constrained by varying views within the party and the relative power of these groups suggests an informal veto point, in which institutions are used to affect policy outcome. A regime facing less constraints, suggests factional divide is less pronounced and therefore the national legislature would not be a forum to mediate competing views. The second elite division results from fiscal and administrative decentralization. The process of which empowers local elites. Elections at this level are used by the central regime to monitor and check local power holders. If regional tension is high, the regime is constrained in its ability to utilize electoral institutions. Therefore incidences of a dynamic *national* electoral institution are a function of greater relative power of

opposing elites. And incidences of a *sub-national* electoral institution are a function of greater relative power of the regime to institute them against local elites.

## **Section II: Exploring Horizontal and Vertical Elite Cleavages in China and Vietnam**

### **2. 1. Horizontal Elite Cleavages**

Reform in China and Vietnam generated a common exogenous effect on institution-building and governance. The death of Mao and political return of Deng Xiaoping in 1979 was a pivotal turn in Chinese politics. For Vietnam, the introduction of Doi Moi (Renovation) in 1986 was the major turning point. Arguably similar orientation of elite divide developed as a result of these market reforms. In an effort to enhance the efficiency and legitimacy in the management of state, both countries saw early development and support for greater party-state divide (Yang 2004, 65; Abuzza 2002, 106). Similar fault lines also emerged between elites, those who endorsed a pro-reform position and those calling to retrench the economy and take heed of the Party's socialist ideals. A key turning point that punctures the two country's parallel elite trajectory however is the 1989 Tiananmen Square protests.

This was a formidable event that significantly altered elite composition in China. Post-Tiananmen politics were marked by the consolidation of elite division and greater fusion between Party and government. In contrast there is relative continuity regarding the elite divisions that have emerged since Vietnam's reform program (Dosch 2008, 374). In addition to the major fault lies between reformers and conservatives, other interest or sectoral groups have also formed, contributing to a more pluralized politics at the top (Koh 2001, 537). Among these sectoral groups include the military, state-ministries and party-work cadres (Vasavakul 1997,

91). Policymaking is therefore more influenced by the variegated demands by different groups in the party-state apparatus (Dosch 2008, 374).

### **2.1.1: Pre-1989 China and Vietnam Comparison**

In the aftermath of Mao's death and return of Deng Xiaoping, elite divisions were made up of three clusters; *conservers*, *reformers* and *adjusters* (Solinger 1982, 1243). The *conservers*, also known as the petroleum faction were Mao loyalists who favoured a state economy and heavy industries. Reformers and adjusters found common ground in support of developing the light industry sector, but differed on the question of foreign trade and decentralization (Solinger 1982, 1243). The period between 1978 and 1981 and then from 1981 to 1989 saw balancing between these three coalition groups on various policy issues. It was marked by open and lively debate (O'Brien 1990a, 103).

The alignment between adjusters and reformers was integral in defeating the *conservers*, led by Hua Guofeng and embarking on a more robust reform period. However between mid to late 1980s, fissures emerged and adjusters sought to retrench and slow the pace of economic reforms and urged cadres to pay heed to the Party's socialist ideals. Deng's protégés and known liberal reformers, Zhao Ziyang and Hu Yaobang headed key leadership positions. Both advocated for greater party-state divide, loosening of ideology in government, and the rehabilitation of the intelligentsia (Pei 2006, 55; Lieberthal 2004, 143). Chen Yun's opposing group, who were concerned with the sociopolitical consequences of reform, had members heading important bureaus like the propaganda ministry. A cyclical pattern of expansion and retrenchment emerged in the 1980s, which demonstrated a particular give-and-take between the

two coalition groups (Lieberthal 200). For instance, openness to foreign trade that begun with Deng's reform program was also coupled with the *Campaign against Spiritual Pollution* and *Campaign against Bourgeois Liberalization*. Adjustors claimed that the flux of foreign imports and relaxation on access to international media undercut socialist world views and introduced heterodox ideas (Lynch 1999, 73). This constant give-and-take between elite blocs symbolized a schizophrenic policy making process. The period of the 1980s was marked by accommodation on policy as well as open criticism on the direction of reform.

For Vietnam, this give and take and open criticism very much describes the policymaking process since the party embarked on the Doi Moi reform. Power at the top has been dispersed, with a diffused ruling troika at the apex of the Politburo (Abrami, et al 2008, 17). The dispersed Troika is made up of the General Secretary, President and Prime Minister, each with distinct jurisdiction of authority and separate patronage lines (Abrami et al 2008, 18). Most notable is the role of General Secretary, which is the top position of the Party. Since the end of Lê Duan's term, which marked Vietnam's brief period of strongman leadership, the position of General Secretary has evolved into one of a power broker among factions (Thayer 2003b, 9). The separation of the three roles marks a clear delineation between Party and government. "[T]he General Secretary as the head of the Party has ultimate authority on the overall direction of policy. But the Constitution grants him no legislative or executive role in the government apparatus" (Abrami et al 2008, 31). The end of Linh's tenure in the early 1990s marked the ascendance of three competing powers; Du Muoi, who became General Secretary, Vo Van Kiet who became the President and Le Duc Ahn, who took the role as Prime Minister. What resulted was a compromise and institutionalization of a cross-cutting coalition and balance of power which persists to this day (Abrami et al 2008, 31; Abuzza 1998, 1121).

Each represented a different position concerning the pace and scope of reform (Abrami et al 2008, 31). For instance, during the leadership of Du Muoi, Vo Van Kiet and Le Duc Ahn, there were overlapping and divergent views, similar to the factional divide in pre 1989-China. Du Muoi represented a group of elites that advocated rural industrialization and supported collective and state-owned enterprises. In contrast, Vo Van Kiet represented a faction that promoted stronger ties to the global economy, export industries and a market-driven economy (Vasavakul 1997, 101). Yet, at the same time, Kiet and Du Moi shared similar ideological position on Vietnam's foreign policy, both called to improve relations with the west and downplay the rhetoric of US imperialism (Vasavakul 1997, 108). This position however was in contrast to President Le Duc Anh, who represented military interests that saw foreign influence as a threat to the regime. Like the cyclical pattern expansion and retrenchment that marked the 1980s in China, Vasavakul notes that in Vietnam in the 1990s, "Sectoral competition, negotiation and mobilisation for policy support took the form of policy advances, policy rectifications, continuous ideological campaigns and counter campaigns ..." (1997, 96). These policy differences embodied in the top leadership appear to have temporal continuity, unlike China.

The key similarity in elite orientation between pre-1989 China and Vietnam is the extent of open criticism and level of elite intra-party competition. The case studies in Section IV highlights that in pre-1989 China and in Vietnam, the NPC and NA were used by these elite blocs as a forum to debate, negotiate and shape the policymaking process. These cases therefore highlight the autonomy of these bodies as a function of elite division and differentiation.

### 2.1.2: Post-1989 China and Vietnam Contrast

While Abrami et al characterize Vietnam's leadership structure as a diffused structure, they also describe China's structure as a fused troika, with a concentration of power at the top (Abrami 2008 et al, 12). In the aftermath of Tiananmen, reformers in the party-state apparatus, most notable Zhao Ziyang, were purged. Top party leaders were less open to criticism and displays of party divisions. The path toward greater functional divide between party and state ended abruptly and Deng made a deliberate effort to subordinate the government to the party. Moreover in this effort, the position of Party General Secretary, President and Chair of the Military Commission were merged. Therefore while pre-1989 China and Vietnam were on a similar trajectory toward greater acceptance of intra-elite division over policy, there is a reversal in post-1989 China.

Firstly elite composition has changed significantly, in which they no longer fall along the lines of reform or retrenchment. The purge of liberal reformers has created consensus and elite cohesion on the question of political reform and *glasnost*. No leader during the Jiang or the Hu- leadership has ever publically endorsed multiparty competition. Next, since Deng's southern tour in the early 1990s to encourage development along the coast, there has been less serious divide over the direction of economic reform. No longer do elites raise the same ideologically fears as was the case during pre-Tiananmen period. Although two major groups have emerged in the post-Deng period, Miller notes that divisions are now "dimmer, less strident and carefully framed so as not to disturb the front of leadership consensus" (2008, 70). The Shanghai gang or the *Elitists* are the protégés of former President Jiang Zemin, who come from privileged families and favour coastal driven development strategy. They are often pitted against the Populists led by the Hu-Wen coalition, who come from the Western provinces and support more balanced

regional development (Li 2005, 394). An informal checks and balance system is therefore formed within the Party. The top two positions of each of the six major leadership bodies are filled by members of each coalition (Li 2005, 391).

Moreover, there was a concerted effort by Deng to tighten party supervision over policy, as division between party and state was perceived to undermine the regime (Pei 2006, 55). The role of Leading Small Groups (LSGs), which are supra-ministerial groups led by senior Party officials, ensure Party guidelines are implemented in government ministries. They therefore fuse Government and Party. Positions within the leading small groups also balanced between the two coalitions. Not only do they police government work, but party members also serve as policymakers (Abrami et al 2007, 20). Moreover, the penetration of party cells or the *dangzhu* has also subordinated the position of government organs to the party (Abrami et al 2007, 21).

In contrast to pre-1989 and Vietnam, elite divisions are contained within the party, in which there is an effort to structure a consensus and collective-based leadership (Miller 2008, 73). Balancing between these major groups is therefore maintained within the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC), the key decision-making body of the regime. Whereas elite division in Vietnam is managed through the tripartite division of leadership, there was a concerted effort especially after Tiananmen to achieve consensus within the party.

## **2.2. Vertical Elite Cleavages**

The second exogenous effect of economic reform is the change in the relationship between central and local elites. For both Vietnam and China, provinces were ceded fiscal autonomy as a means to spur economic growth. Another impetus for the central regime's decision to cede autonomy and promote citizen participation was the extent of instability and



discontent that emerged from decentralization. The growth of local investment and development contributed to incidences of corruption involving local officials and disputes over land and taxation. Rural protests were common in the early 1980s in China and 1990s in Vietnam. Regimes are therefore faced with the challenge of balancing between the necessity of delegating power to lower level units and the challenge of regionalism. Decentralization poses the threat of creating *local emperors* or *local kingdoms*.

Elite dynamics along the vertical plane is oriented differently in Vietnam and China. Autonomy and citizen participation in China is a useful mechanism to uproot corruption. Rather than fearing localism, it is through grassroots involvement that the centre can keep party leaders in check, thereby strengthening local ties to the centre. For Vietnam, regionalism is a more salient issue, as the defeat of the Americans in the Vietnam War created a formidable nation-building task to reunify North and South Vietnam. When the country was reunified in 1976, the country was heavily decentralized, with the country divided into war zones (Abuza 2001, 9). Furthermore, the South harbours resentment toward Hanoi's political domination, in particularly over the restructuring of the South's economy and the forced socialist reeducation camps (Abuza 2002, 161). A vocal group in South Vietnam is veteran members of the Viet Cong, who feel their contribution to the war, have been neglected and feel betrayed by Hanoi (Abuza 2002, 164).

Therefore there is distinct regional chasm, with the South more reform oriented and the north, more ideological (Abuza 2002, 164). Attachment to Hanoi and to the central party apparatus is more tenuous and tension with more local elites is more pronounced (Thayer 1995, 55). There have been several incidences in which local leadership have been more recalcitrant of national level policies. In the 1990s a government decree banning the export of timber was largely disregarded and the payment of import taxes have been regularly ignored (Thayer 1995,

55). In 2000 local officials in Ho Chi Minh City announced they would unilaterally approve foreign investments if the approval process in Hanoi took more than two weeks (Abuza 2002, 164). In the case of China, there is a more deferential relationship between centre and the periphery, which is a testament of the strength of the party centre. Since the 1990s, cadre rotations and exchanges have become institutionalized (Yang 204, 5). Cadres that have worked in the same locality or department for ten years must exchange positions with regional counterpart, this is more true of provincial units (Yang 2004, 5). There is more entrenched hierarchical control over personnel. Thus instituting elections and delegating power as a mechanism to check local officials is an easier task for China in contrast to the particular dynamic with local elites in Vietnam's case.

### **Section III: Review of Institutional Differences between China and Vietnam**

#### **3.1: National Level Differences**

Reform in both Leninist states and saw the professionalization of China's NPC and Vietnam's NA and the expansion of their lawmaking duties (Abuzza 2002, 148). The national legislative bodies in China and Vietnam were largely derided as a rubber-stamp institutions, especially during the pre-reform period, in which very few laws were passed, never mind debated. The expansion of lawmaking duties and professionalization of both institutions were common features of reform. Yet, there are important differences along two spectrums; the responsiveness to constituents and the supervisory role of the legislative body. As displayed in **Table 1**, I label these two measures as *representation* and *supervisory*. The former should not be confused with tokenistic forms of representation, in which the centre allocates quotas for

farmers, workers, women and ethnic minorities. Rather representation refers to how deputies respond to the public and thus how partial liberalization contributes to a stronger principal-agent link. The supervisory measure refers to the real overseeing power of deputies. Together they are indicators of each institution's level of autonomy. Using these two measurements to evaluate electoral institutions, **Figure 2** maps out how Vietnam and China can be placed in opposite positions, therefore highlighting the particular inverse relationship. This section therefore evaluates the key differences between the two countries' electoral institutions.

### **3.1.1: Representation Indicator:**

The election of deputies is the major difference between China and Vietnam's national legislature. Vietnam's constitutional revision in 1992 allowed independent candidates to participate in the NA elections as well as it increased the choice of candidates (Harrington 1994, 10; Salomon 2007, 202). In contrast, NPC deputies in China are only *indirectly* elected by the public via a tiered election process. (Abrami et al. 2007, 30). The candidate-to-seat ratio is also higher at the sub-national level, with 1.5 candidates per township level, 1.3 at the prefecture level, 1.4 at the county level, 1.2 at the province and 1.1 at the NPC (Abrami et al. 2007, 32). In the case of Vietnam, the candidate-seat ratio is higher than the most competitive level in China.

Both the CCP and the VCP attempt to control the outcome of the elections by vetting the nomination process in the selection of candidates. In the case of China, the tiered election process Members of the provincial people's elect candidates to serve on the NPC and they are in turn elected by lower level congresses. It is only at the township level that citizens directly choose their representatives, very much inhibit the possibility of independent candidates from reaching to the level of the NPC (Abrami et al. 2007, 30). As such, rather than serving as an

agent to their constituents, NPC deputies have been derided as agents of the state or as token representatives.

Critics of Vietnam's NA note that the central party institutions heavily vet the candidates, such that it reflects more of a "pre-planned" script than genuine liberalization. In the 2007 NA elections, only 10 percent of elected deputies were non-party members, and only one self-nominated candidate was successful in winning a seat (Malesky and Schuler 2009a, 34). The NA Standing Committee and the Fatherland Front, an umbrella of mass associations, determine the composition of the NA and the number of candidates to be nominated by each central-level institution (Malesky and Schuler 2009a, 18). The regime also manipulates the electoral outcomes by ensuring that centrally-nominated candidates are favoured. These candidates are placed in districts in the north and north central coast, where constituents are more supportive of the central government (Malesky and Schuler 2009a, 20).

However, there is still a risk involved by opening up the NA to a universal vote. In the 2007 elections, top officials were surprised when twelve centrally-nominated candidates lost (Malesky and Schuler 2008, 8). Live national broadcasts and wide media coverage of the NA debates and the query sessions, where deputies question ministers and public officials help foster public awareness and public involvement in the process and strengthens the tie between deputies and constituents (Salamon 2007, 209; Montesano 2005, 410). Corruption scandals and poor ministerial performance are the target of the deputies' fervor, forcing ministers to justify their activities publicly and often leading ministers to ask for forgiveness (Salamon 2007, 211; Abrami et al 2007, 26). Voters now have high expectations of parliamentary performance from their ministers. Commenting on the NA sessions in 1999, a lawyer from Hanoi responded that

“hearing the replies of ministers to questions, I just don't feel satisfied. Their answers are general and avoid the main point of the question” (Huw 1999).

Direct elections and the self-nomination process have encouraged citizen-participation in such a way that lobby and interest groups have developed both within the NA and outside petitioning assembly deputies. Of particular interest is the rise of businessmen competing for a seat in the NA (Cohen 2002). In the 2007 elections, half of the self-nominated candidates were from the private sector (Huong 2007). The swell of business elites seeking to enter the NA represents the development of a core constituency seeking to influence policies on labour, property and regional economic integration (Cohen 2002, 22). The voter-deputy link is also strengthened by the electoral process itself. Although electoral campaigning is virtually non-existent, officials facilitate face-to-face meetings between candidates and voters. They are often televised and therefore partly staged, but candidates promote their position on a range of issues, and equally voters press candidates to address various problems (Gainsborough 2005, 64).

In contrast, Chinese NPC deputies, however lack this direct link to constituents. O'Brien marks that massive socioeconomic changes have transformed the role of NPC deputies from *agents* of the party to *remonstrators* (O'Brien 1994). As they are more clamoured with grievances, requests and petitions, they have begun to act *remonstrators*, who “like upright officials in imperial China – they assert a right to recognize injustices and mistakes, and to confront leaders. They bring group or particularistic problems identified through their regular work...” (O'Brien 1994, 370). But kin to imperial censors during China's dynastic rule, they are quasi-insiders, who straddle between dual responsibilities to the public and to the regime (O'Brien 1994, 369). The televised query sessions in Vietnam's NA are a stark difference from the NPC sessions. Rather than scrutinizing ministers, top party leaders carry long formal speeches that usually boast

about the Party's accomplishments. Instead of a lively debate, the sessions are "usually rich in sightings of China's top brass unabashedly dozing away" (Fong 2009).

Referring to the representation measure in **Table 1** and **Figure 2**, Vietnam's NA is in the top right quadrant as it exhibits a stronger-deputy link. While the vetting process certainly hinders the principal-agent relationship, deputies are not necessarily more responsive to the electorate. NA deputies are expected to be critical and scrutinize public officials. Public participation in the electoral process along with the televised debates and face-to-face meetings has strengthened ties between constituent and deputy. In the case of China, this link is more tenuous; where campaigning is prohibited, coordination among delegates is restricted and NPC sessions are reduced to a formality than a meaningful forum for debate.

### **3.1.2: Supervisory Indicator:**

As discussed above, the televised query sessions have emboldened NA deputies to raise critical questions and hold public officials accountable. The NA also fulfills a stronger overseeing role. One key difference between the two bodies is the practice by NA members to propose a vote of no-confidence. According to the Vietnamese constitution, the NA legally has the power to dismiss top government officials, including the President, Prime Minister and Cabinet (Maleksy and Schuler 2009a, 23). Since early 2000, there have been several occasions where NA deputies have called a vote of no-confidence on standing ministers. In 2004, the NA Standing Committee received a request for a no-confidence vote on four ministers; Do Trung Ta, Minister of Post and Telematics; Tran Thi Trung Chien, Minister of Health; Nguyen Minh Hien, Minister of Education and Nguyen Danh Thai, Minister of National Sports Committee (Abrami et al. 2007, 25). At the 2006 NA session, deputies deliberating over changes to the Law on National

Assembly Organization demanded for greater enforcement of regulations for votes of no-confidence (Anh 2006). Deputies frustrated with the lack of success in recalling ministers, cite that the problem was “due to unclear and unfeasible regulations concerning the issue” (Anh 2006). As opposed to the 20 percent of signatories required to successfully request a vote no-confidence, deputies proposed to reduce the threshold to 10 percent or to conduct regular votes, twice every five years at the mid and end of the term or after a questioning session (Anh 2006).

Not only is the NA more assertive in exercising the vote of no-confidence, but it has also on occasion rejected government appointees. In 1997, Prime Minister Phan Van Kahi’s nomination of Cao Si Kiem as Governor of Vietnam State Bank failed to win sufficient support from NA deputies due to his link to several scandals (Thayer 2003a, 28). Similarly in 1999, deputies successfully demanded the resignation of Phan Van Dinh, the head of customs, also in relation to cases of corruption involving officials in his department (Thayer 2003a, 28).

In the case of the Chinese NPC, deputies have the constitutional right to recall President, Vice President, and the Chairman and members of the Central Military Commission (Cabestan 2006 54). Although deputies have not always showed unanimous support for Party-nominated candidates, they have never exercised this right to recall officials. Rather, disapproval is expressed in the number of abstentions than no-votes. Therefore while a low percentage of support is a sign of disfavour, deputies have yet to outright reject nominees. It is also extremely rare for delegates to reject government legislation. Up until 2002, there have been only two draft laws that the NA voted down (Abrami 2007, 23). There have been certain bills have been hotly contested; the Education Law and the Central Banking Law in 1995 were opposed by 26 percent and 32 percent of the NPC respectively (Cabestan 2002, 49). Some scholars have cited that such cases of a high-number of no-votes and abstentions are evidence that the NPC is no longer a

hand-raising institution (Tanner 1994, 392). Yet, the number of no-votes has rarely been sufficient to reject legislation, in which no-votes have never reached above 20 percent of the delegation (Cabestan 2002, 49). Although they do demonstrate disagreement with the party, they do not actually affect policy outcomes. However as will be discussed in the case studies below, a more assertive NPC is evident in the pre-Tiananmen period.

Referring to the supervisory measure in **Table 1** and **Figure 2**, Vietnam's NA has a stronger oversight role and offers a more dynamic space to express opposing views on policy. The practice of recalling ministers, rejecting appointees and vetoing laws by the government suggests a more active and assertive legislative body. China's NPC however is limited in performing the same supervisory role. Although more deputies have registered more no-votes or abstentions, they have been insufficient in affecting actual outcomes.

### **3.2 Local Level Differences**

The dismantling of the farm communes and growth of local investment and development contributed to incidences of corruption involving local officials and disputes over land and taxation. Rural protests were common in the early 1980s in China and 1990s in Vietnam. Grassroots elections therefore were a mechanism for top officials to curb corruption and restore party legitimacy. Despite support by the central leadership in both states to promote citizen participation and accountability, there is a significant difference in the implementation and realization of these initiatives.



### 3.2.1: Village Level Governance

Grassroots democracy in China begins at the village level. The promulgation of the 1982 constitution formally recognized villages in China as an administrative unit (UNDP 2006, 28). Adopted by the NPSC in 1987, the draft law of the Organic Law of Village Committees stipulated that the chairman, vice-chairman and members of the village committee would be directly elected by villagers every three years (Shi 1999, 385). The selection of village committees by rural residents has altered the relationship between village and township councils. Rather than merely execute and implement targets from the township level, villagers have governing powers over village affairs, especially concerning economic projects and production and management of village lands. By 2005, almost every province had issued electoral regulations that matched or exceeded the Organic Law on Villagers' Committees (Taylor and Cavillio 2010, 143). There has also been socializing effect at the rural level, in which grassroots democracy has imbued citizens with a rights consciousness (O'Brien and Han 2009, 368). O'Brien cites that aggrieved villagers often arm themselves by educating themselves on the dearth of laws and regulations and engage in a form of *rightful resistance* (1996, 35). While there are varied results across villages, there is a striking contrast with village level governance in Vietnam. The official status of villages is ambiguous as they are not recognized as an administrative unit (Kerkvilet 2004, 5). There are no official regulation specifying their responsibilities or relationship to the People's Council and other party and government bodies (Kerkvilet 2004, 6). Therefore, village heads are not granted any special powers to interpret and deliberate over government policies. They disseminate such information to villagers rather than having the ability to alter them (Zingerli 2003, 60). While village heads have been elected in

some regions in Vietnam, I have placed them in the bottom right quadrant. Their lack of real governing power places them in juxtaposition to Chinese villages.

### **3.2.2 China's Local People's Congress and Vietnam's People's Council/Committee**

#### **3.2.2a Representation Indicator**

At the township and county level, delegates are directly elected to the local people's congresses (LPCs). In Manion's survey of LPC delegates in Anhui province, she argues that electoral process has altered delegates' view of their role. No longer do deputies identify their position as an honorary status but invoke a language of agency (Manion 2009, 5). "[T]hey reflect a "mandate view" of themselves as "delegates" rather than Burkean "trustees" (Manion 2009, 5). Moreover partial liberalization has enhanced citizen engagement. The increase in the number of independent candidates in areas like Guangdong, Beijing and Tianjin has led to the organization of primaries, which is a more transparent way to determine the final candidate list (Cabestan 2006, 46). In 2003, in what scholars call the Beijing Phenomenon and the Shenzhen Phenomenon, a dozen independent candidates conducted election campaigns; three of whom were successfully elected as deputies (Cho 2009, 84). Wider participation at the grassroots was the impetus for the 2004 amendments to the Electoral Law, which instituted primaries and approved face-to-face meetings between voters and candidates (Cabestan 2006, 48). Furthermore since the passing of the Legislation Law in 2000, which sanctions public hearings in the legislative process, several LPCs have opened consultative forums on draft laws (Paler 2005, 302). By 2002, all provincial people's congresses, 19 municipalities and four special economic zones had written legislative hearings into their procedural rules (Paler 2005, 315).

Since the late 1990s, there have also been experiments with township elections, in which deputy heads, township heads, township deputy Party secretaries, and township Party secretaries have been either directly elected by citizens or they have been selected through public consultation. Sichuan has been a leading province, in which many deputy leaders have been chosen by way of two mechanisms; *public recommendation, public election* and *public recommendation, direct election*. The latter allows direct public vote, whereas in the former, congress deputies may directly choose the executive (Fewsmith 2010, 4). Experiments with *inner party democracy* at the lower levels have received support from the top. At the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress, Article 30 of the Party Charter was amended such that it was recognized that party secretaries and deputy secretaries can be chosen via elections (Fewsmith 2010, 9). In 2006, the Pingchang county was awarded the *Innovations and Excellence in Local Chinese Government* from the Central Compilation and Translation Bureau for the introduction of elections to over a third of its townships (Fewsmith 2010, 8).

This stands in contrast to Vietnam's People's Council at the commune level which is the equivalent to China's LPCs. While delegates to the Council have been elected since the late 1950s, they do not perform the same representative or supervisory function as the NA plays at the national level. Moreover, the delegate role that Anhui deputies have identified with in Manion's survey is noticeably absent in Vietnam. Members of the People's Council are still derided as "figureheads", in which their work is "ceremonial" (Abuza 2001, 86; Kerkvilet 2004, 8). There is also noticeably less public engagement and contact with constituents, which is contrast to the lively televised debates in the NA and the primary elections and face-to-face meetings in the LPC electoral process. One Council deputy in Hanoi commented that "members 'were afraid to interact with voters because they could listen to the voters but could not tell them

who could solve their problems or whether their problems could be solved” (Cited in UNDP 2006, 24). Moreover attempts to liberalize the Political Committee have stalled. At the end of the 2008 NA session, deputies voted down a pilot plan that would have allowed citizens of 385 communes directly elect the People’s Committee chairperson by 2009. The NA decided to stall plans until 2011 (Dosch 2009, 375). This is in stark contrast to the township elections that have taken place since the late 1990s in China.

Although I have referred to representation as a measure of constituent-deputy relations, I subsumed participation and consultation in this indicator, as shown in Table 2. Greater citizen involvement either through self-nomination or attendance in legislative hearings is another mechanism for citizens to express their voice in the policy and lawmaking process, which is the key goal of the representation measure. By comparing only the electoral process, in whether direct elections occurred, there would be no meaningful difference between LPCs and People’s Council. While the latter has formal structures, they lack substantive representation. Therefore in table 2, two check marks under Chinese LPCs indicate that they go beyond the formal electoral process in contrast to Vietnam’s People’s Council. In figure 1, China’s LPCs are further along the representation axis, highlighting this substantive difference.

### **3.2.2b Supervisory Indicator**

An important role of both China’s LPC and Vietnam’s People’s Council is the election of the township executive branch. The local party organ is particularly active in selecting candidates, only to be confirmed by the legislative bodies. However over the years, LPC deputies in China have challenged party nominees (Cho 2002, 724). Reforms to the Organic Law on Local People’s Congresses and Local People’s Governments in 1995 opened up the electoral

process for electing candidates to government positions. Party nominees were forced to run against candidates endorsed by congress delegates (Manion 2005, 609). In the elections following the reforms, more than 17,000 Communist Party nominees lost to candidates nominated by LPC delegates (Manion 2005, 609). This reform has therefore altered the balance of power between the legislative and executive branch, making the latter more accountable to the former.

Cho notes that over the years, LPC deputies have played a stronger oversight role. They have pioneered an array of strategies to check local government, which include special investigative commissions, veto of work reports, appraisals and interpellation (formal submission of questions to the government) (Cho 2009, 54). Appraisal reports by LPC delegates have become an important tool to evaluate the performance of government bureaus, focusing on how officials implement laws and LPC recommendations (Cho 2002, 737). These appraisals have a legally binding force, giving LPCs the authority to dismiss local officials (Cho 2002, 738).

In the case of Vietnam, there is a significant power disparity between the People's Council and the People's Committee. Authority resides with the People's Committee chairman who cannot be truly held accountable by citizens. Members are indirectly voted into power by deputies of the People's Council. Local legislative bodies have never been endowed with real authority to check the Committee. Despite the direct elections of People's Council members, Koh criticizes "party members, state bureaucrats, and mass organization heads still hold important leadership posts of the ward" (2004 214). Therefore in **Figure 2**, the People's Council is positioned lower along the supervisory axis.

### 3.3 Summary

A loose inverse pattern can be drawn from Figure 1. The top right quadrant is the ideal area denoting high representation and high supervision and thus greater autonomy of the institution. A comparison of the NPC and NA show polar opposites, with the NPC in the bottom left quadrant and the NA in the top right. A comparison of sub-national institutions demonstrate that China's local level legislative bodies and village units perform a stronger supervisory role in the former and have more delegated powers in the latter, although they are not necessarily more representative. I have noted that in both China and Vietnam, citizens elect village leaders and their local representative. However Vietnam's People's Council members lack substantive power and therefore their electoral process is more symbolic and formal than signifying a constituent-deputy relationship.

### **Section IV: Case Studies: Tracing Elite Dynamics to Varied Outcomes of Electoral Institutions**

I have posited in this paper that the differences China and Vietnam's electoral institutions can be attributed to each country's horizontal and vertical elite dynamics. The first hypothesis suggests that wide, horizontal dispersion of elite power affects the integrity of the institution. The Vietnamese case studies on the 1993 land law dispute and bauxite mines debate demonstrate a *temporal continuity* of entrenched elite dynamics at the top. The contrast between the NPSC debates over the Bankruptcy Law and Organic Law on Village Committee Elections in the pre-Tiananmen period and Three Gorges Dam project in the post-Tiananmen period *demonstrates a temporal discontinuity*. The change in elite dynamics in China, with a greater fusion between party and state and reorientation away from reformer versus ideologue cleavage suggests that the

integrity of electoral institutions is a function of wide elite divisions. Groups utilize institutions to shape the law and policymaking process. I have also posited that differences at the sub-national level are attributed to a vertical elite dynamic between the centre and local units. The autonomy and integrity of institutions at this level is a function of central control over local officials. Administrative decentralization and fiscal autonomy has contributed to corruption and malfeasance involving local leadership. The centre therefore supports sub-national electoral institutions as a means to curb corruption and monitor local leaders. Therefore the incapacity of Vietnam's central elites to institute checks at the sub-national level exhibits a balance between centre and periphery or the relative power of local elites.

#### **4.1 Vietnam Case Study: 1993 Land Law and Development of Bauxite Mine**

Though rare, there have been several instances in which NA deputies rejected draft laws initiated by the government. In 1998 to the disappointment of reformers, NA deputies blocked changes to the 1993 land law, which would have increased farm sizes and extended rural leases (Keenan 1998). The move by deputies in essence protects the model of family farming in Vietnam, resisting efforts to introduce large scale commercial farming (Keenan 1998). Debate over the land reform reflected a divide within the party between ideologues and liberal reformers (Keenan 1998). Deputies argued that farmers would be vulnerable to exploitation by large landowners, while reformers advocated the benefits of economies of scale and the increase in income for farmers. Although the central party-state vets candidates for the NA elections, there is no guarantee or mechanism to elicit support on all pieces of legislation.

Controversy also emerged over Chinalco's successful bid to mine bauxite in Vietnam's central highlands. Debate over Chinese investment in the country and the adequacy of the ministry's environmental assessments reignited pro-Chinese and anti-Chinese rifts within the party and unleashed vocal opposition from environmentalists and scientists (Economist 2009). This issue gained political salience when long time Party veteran, General Vo Nguyen Giap, published letters to the government, citing the threat China's bid posed to Vietnam's competitiveness (Thayer 2009, 50). A formal petition to the NA, which was drafted by scholars and intellectuals, echoes the anti-Chinese sentiment, "China has been notorious in the modern world as a country causing the greatest pollution and other problems" (Mydans 2009). NA deputies took up the issue in the Assembly pressing that developing projects valued over \$1.1 billion required approval from the NA. Dissatisfied with the Government report, deputies opened a plenary debate and assigned committees to research, review and comment on the bauxite projects (VietnamNetBridge 2009). In the end, the government agreed to permit the NA, ministries and local authorities to conduct regular reviews (Thayer 2009, 52). The government's concession to deputies' monitoring authority on the bauxite project is a significant development in the institutionalization and autonomy of the NA.

As discussed in Part III of this paper, factional divide in Vietnam is not only marked by a single cleavage between conservatives and reformers, but other sectoral and interest groups have contributed to elite pluralism. Various groups therefore crosscut and align with each other on different policy issues. The use of the NA as a forum for elite bargaining and competition is due in part to the diffused nature of the political leadership.



## 4.2 Pre-Tiananmen: China Case Study: Bankruptcy Law and Organic Law on Village Committees

A more interesting body is the NPC Standing Committee (NPSC), which acts as a more effective veto point than the NPC itself. In the pre-1989 period, there are particular incidences in which the NPSC performed a stronger supervisory role. This is due to how elite divide was structured. Peng Zhen, who was vocal critic of Deng's reforms, was shut out of the Politburo Standing Committee. He therefore used his role as Chair of the NPCSC to criticize, delay and reformulate policies. The Bankruptcy law, State-owned Enterprise law and the Organic Law on Village Committees were hotly debated in the NPCSC and were subject to multiple drafts and significant long debate before they were passed. Deputies of the *adjuster* faction contended that the Bankruptcy law failed to protect workers and enterprise directors. On the 1987 organic law of villagers' committee, elites raised concerns about the autonomy of village committees from the Party and Government apparatus. They feared villages would defy decrees from higher levels of government (O'Brien 1990a, 788). The first draft of the bill was voted down in the NPCSC, with less than half of the quorum voting in favour (Tanner 1994, 392). "Contrary to the reformers' expectations that a revitalized NPC would be a political club to wield against opponents, NPCSC sessions provided opportunities to question the unforeseen consequences of reform and to urge greater caution before surging ahead" (O'Brien 1990b, 136).

The strengthening of the NPC was in the interest of specific players, and it did not necessarily threaten elites in the executive. Deng and reformers were willing to accept the challenges posed by the NPC leadership. This is largely due to the balance of power between the factions across institutions. As will be discussed in the case below, the Tiananmen protests profoundly altered elite composition. Political liberal reformers were purged from the party and

the political zeitgeist was less conducive to criticism and open party divide. The NPC from that point on no longer served as an arena of contestation.

#### **4. 3 Post-Tiananmen China Case Study: *Debate on the Three Gorges Dam***

Debate among delegates over the Three Gorges Dam precisely highlights the limits of the NPC to act as an effective veto point. In the mid to late 1980s, there was tremendous criticism and opposition over the economic and environmental costs of the megaproject. Qian Jiaju, a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) criticized the development of the dam, calling it a *nodding project*. Leaders merely solicited the nods of party delegates and failed to engage in meaningful consultation (Ma 1990, 94). Citizens, scientists and academics submitted a volume of critical reports called *Yangtze! Yangtze!* to NPC delegates at the 1989 NPC Session in an effort to halt (Ryder 1990, 25).

There is some similarity to the Vietnamese bauxite case, in which NPC and CPPCC delegates, like NA deputies took heed of public concerns and was able to elicit government response. However post-1989 events in China mark a significant divergence between the two cases. In the early 1990s, about 179 people were known to have been jailed for their active opposition to the project (Mertha 2008, 2). The publication *Yangtze! Yangtze!* was banned and the editor in chief, Da Qing was imprisoned (Ryder 1990, 26). The project was approved by the NPC in 1992 with 1767 votes in favour, 177 opposed and 644 abstentions. Frustrated deputies, abstained or walked out, but they were not coordinated to oppose the project as was the case prior to 1989.

It is important to note changes in the structure of elite leadership after Tiananmen. While under Peng Zhen's tenure as NPSC chairman, there was a more vociferous and recalcitrant

body, all chairmen that succeeded Peng were members of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC) Wan Li, Li Peng and at Qiao Shi and the current Chairman Wu Banguo rank high in the core decision-making body. Therefore there was no need to utilize the NPSC as a forum to influence policy when they had access to the PBSC. This reflects post-Tiananmen efforts to secure consensus at the top and contain policy bargaining within party institutions.

#### **4. 4 Vietnam Case Study at the Local Level: *Implementation of Decree No.29***

The Thai Binh uprising, which took place in a VCP stronghold, north of the Red River Delta, immediately prompted the Vietnamese government to pass the Decree on Grassroots Democracy at the Commune Level, also referred to as Decree No. 29 (Wells-Dang 2010, 106). Decree No. 29 was meant to strengthen the existing democratic practices at the local level (Zingerli 2003, 58). Associated with the mantra of “people know, people discuss, people act, people examine, people manage”, it seeks to promote consultation with people and encourage an exchange of ideas (Zingerli 2003, 61). As Wells-Dang notes, “rather than procedural democracy via elections, the rice-roots<sup>1</sup> variety is in principle participatory, focusing on decentralisation, local decision-making, use of government budgets, and consultation” (2010, 106). This is the precise challenge to the efficacy of grassroots democracy, as the Decree No. 29 has meant to strengthen mechanisms of consultation and deliberation and enhance transparency without addressing the power disparity between the People’s Council and People’s Committee, addressed in Part IV.

A problem with Decree No. 29 has been inconsistent and ineffective implementation of the initiative, especially in remote areas (Wells-Dang 2010, 107). Implementation is very much

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<sup>1</sup> Dang uses the term rice roots democracy to also denote grassroots (Wells-Dang 2010, 106).

contingent on the political will and attitudes of local officials, who for the most part have been less enthused about sharing power (Zingerli 2003, 57). There is thus a lack of incentives for major stakeholders in the implementation process, mainly for local members of the People's Committee (Fritzen 2003, 14). A challenge is that the policy on grassroots democracy is not linked to intergovernmental transfers or national programs (Fritzen 2003, 15).

Decree No. 29 was intended to allow Hanoi monitor local officials and curb corruption at the local level. The central regime's incapacity to deepen reform by altering the power imbalance between the People's Council and People's Committee and poor implementation of Decree No.29 suggests a power imbalance between central and local elites. Hanoi's particular tension with elites from the South potentially explains nascent institution building as the grassroots level.

#### **4.5. China Case Study at the Local Level: *Party Support for Grassroots Reform***

In contrast to the lackluster reception of Decree No. 29, there has been wider implementation of grassroots reform in China. Although the central regime has faced resistance from reluctant officials unwilling to share power, Beijing has been more successful in altering centre-local dynamics to their benefit. Tracing the early implementation stages of the draft of the Organic Law on Village Committees, Shi details the work of mid-level bureaucrats in Beijing, who were integral in promoting grassroots elections (1999). The Ministry of Civil Affairs actively intervened in the early implementation process to support rural residents and induce the cooperation of local party officials (Shi 1999, 400). In response to incidences of fraud during the early implementation stages, the ministry actively pressed provincial officials to enforce electoral laws and amend provisions to prevent manipulation (Shi 1999, 405). They also were integral in urging local officials to reform the voting process from one vote per family to a per-person basis

(Shi 1999, 408). Thus there is evidence of a concerted effort from the top during the initial phases of the law to promote grassroots democracy.

The challenge with decentralization in the post-reform period is the threat of localism or regionalism. Therefore even though local party officials may lose to congress-nominated candidates by liberalizing the election process of government leaders, Manion notes that the Party institution wins overall. Legal reforms that strengthen LPCs vis à vis the government and that raise the quality of local leaders enhances the survival of the regime (Manion 2008, 628). Beijing has been more successful in achieving this goal and supplanting local power holders.

## **Conclusion**

From the observations in Section III, there is an interesting pattern between the two Leninist states. In China, factionalism along the horizontal plane has been contained within party organs since Tiananmen. The dangers of party-state divide and the threat of elite division along institutional lines helped to reorient elite cleavages. Members of distinct bloc have crucial input in the policy making process within party organs like the Politburo Standing Committee and leading small groups. An exploration of case studies in Vietnam and pre and post-1989 China highlight the key moment of change in elite orientation. Therefore while China's factional groups are contained, elite blocs in Vietnam utilize institutions to influence policy.

Along the vertical plane, centre-local elite dynamics in China are also relatively stable, such that Beijing can implement local level elections and delegate power away from local officials. Given that there is near nation-wide practice of village elections and the election of local people's congresses in such an expansive country as China, and weak implementation in

such a small country as Vietnam, there is evidence that centre-local relations are more tenuous and more balanced in the latter.

The goal of this paper is to analyze reasons for the varied electoral institutions in the two states and not to predict the regime outcome of either country. However if it is possible to infer elite dynamics from how electoral institutions are undertaken and implemented, there are significant implications in understanding the “health and well-being” of the regime. Given that elite divide in Vietnam is more dispersed, demonstrated by the active use of the NA by elite blocs, and that centre-local divide is deeper, demonstrated by inchoate development of sub-national institutions, the VCP appears to be in a tenuous position should it face a serious legitimacy crisis in the future. In the case of the China, the ability of the Party to balance elite conflict without resorting to other institutions to mediate divide and the use of local institutions to monitor local officials, suggests a more cohesive party horizontally across groups and vertically vis à vis local elites.

Understanding elections and election-types as an endogenous story institutional choice and a function of how the regime is constrained by intra-elite competition provides significant insight for closed-authoritarian regimes. Even though an official opposition party is absent, threats still emerge and affect how we understand electoral institutions. It would be shortcoming to wave all nominally-democratic institutions in closed authoritarian systems as merely symbolic and formal. In fact they may tell us a great deal about elite dynamics and the “health and well-being” of the regime.

*Table 1 Institutional Differences at the National Level*

	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Supervisory</b>
<b>China NPC</b>	X	X
<b>Vietnam NA</b>	✓	✓

*Table 2 Institutional Differences at the Local Level*

	<b>Representative</b>	<b>Supervisory/Delegate Power</b>
<b>Chinese Villages</b>	✓	✓
<b>Vietnamese Villages</b>	✓	X
<b>Chinese Local People's Congress</b>	✓✓	✓
<b>Vietnam's People's Council</b>	✓	X

Figure 1 Horizontal and Vertical Cleavages

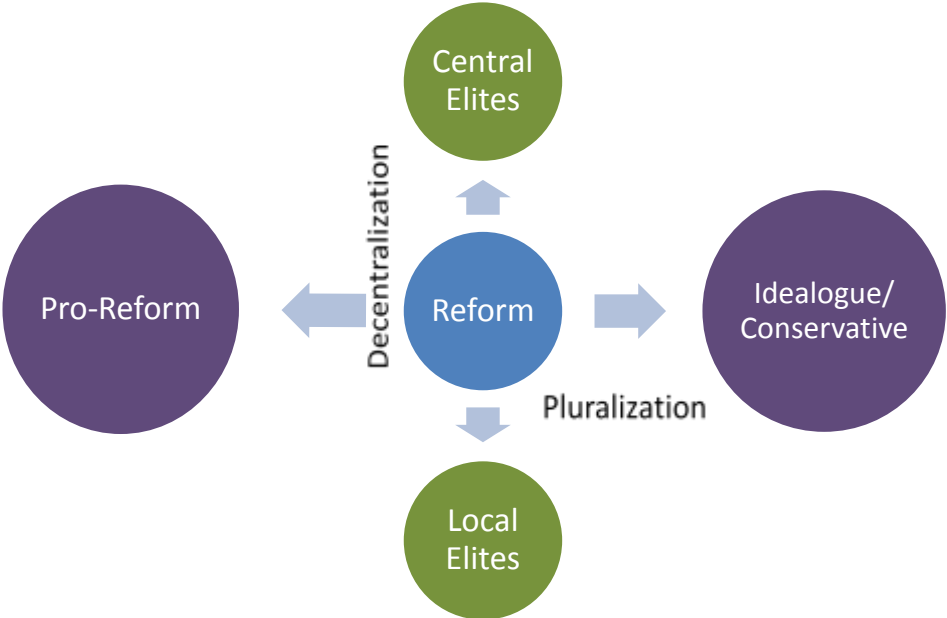
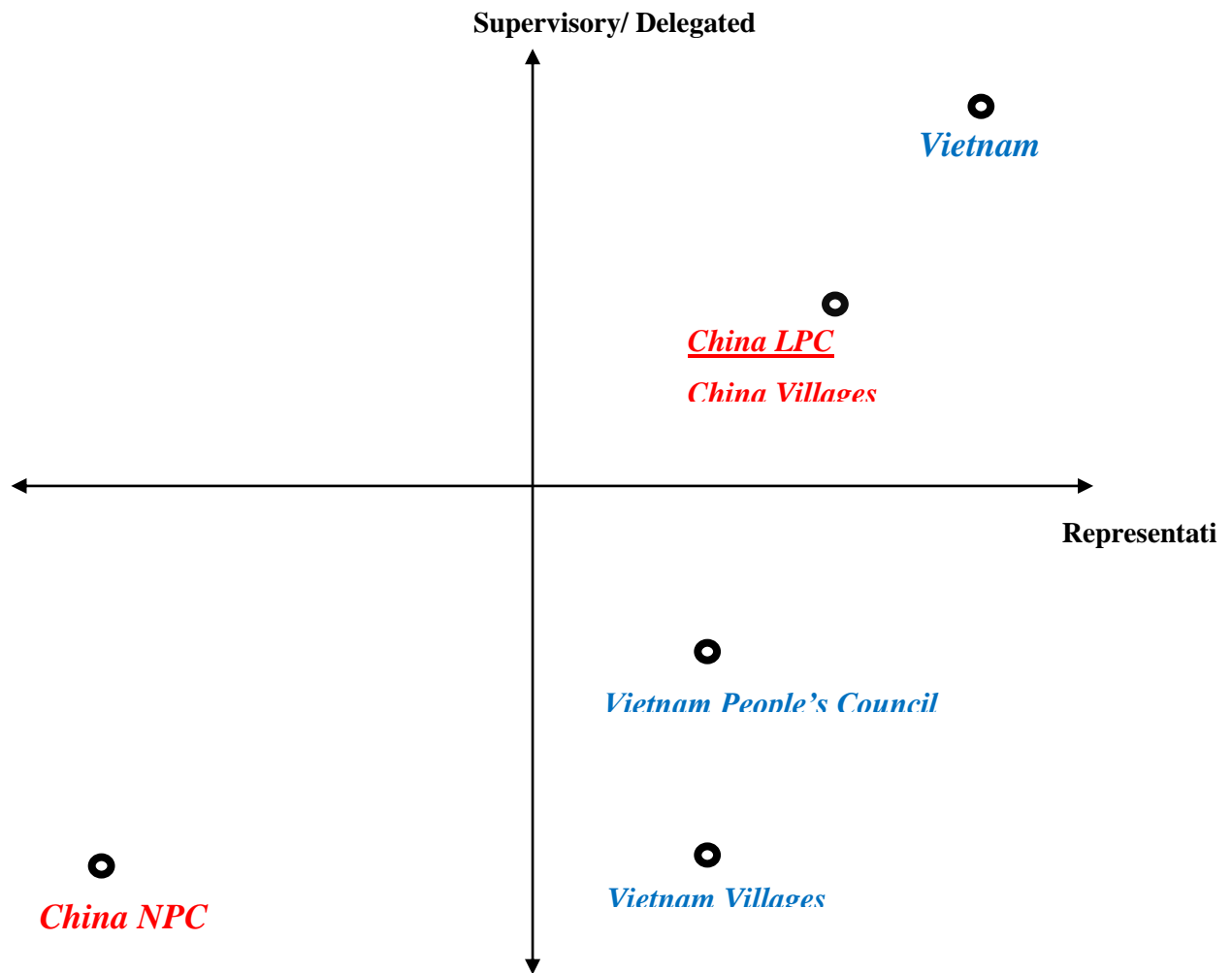




Figure 2 Measuring Institutional Autonomy



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