

## HO CHI MINH'S THOUGHTS ON GENDER EQUALITY IN THE POLITICAL SPHERE IN VIETNAM AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS FOR INDONESIA

Tri Minh Nguyen

Ho Chi Minh City University of Foreign Languages – Information Technology, Vietnam.

Corresponding E-mail: trinm@hufilit.edu.vn

**ABSTRACT.** This paper provides an exhaustive examination of the theoretical foundations of Ho Chi Minh's thought regarding gender equality and its institutionalization within the political fabric of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. Focusing on the contemporary period (2021–2026), the analysis evaluates the efficacy of the Vietnamese model of State Feminism in achieving descriptive and substantive representation for women in legislative and executive bodies. Furthermore, the paper conducts a comparative analysis with the Republic of Indonesia, particularly following its 2024 general elections, to identify structural, cultural, and legal divergences. By synthesizing data from government reports, international indices, and academic literature, this study argues that while Ho Chi Minh's thought provides a robust ideological basis for women's political inclusion, the transition to a market economy and the persistence of patriarchal norms create a double-burden paradox. Conversely, Indonesia's challenges highlight the fragility of electoral gender quotas in the absence of unified state-driven recruitment pipelines and strong enforcement mechanisms against Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP). The findings suggest that the effectiveness of women's political representation depends less on ideological commitment alone than on the extent to which gender equality principles are institutionalized through legal frameworks, recruitment mechanisms, and organizational support structures. Therefore, the Vietnamese case offers comparative insights for Indonesia not through the direct transfer of Ho Chi Minh's ideology, but by examining how gender equality objectives have been embedded in political institutions and governance practices.

**Keywords:** Gender equality; Ho Chi Minh's Thought; Indonesia; Political Sphere; Vietnam.

### INTRODUCTION

Adichotomy between formal legal commitments and the persistent reality of underrepresentation characterizes the pursuit of gender equality in Southeast Asian politics. Within this regional landscape, Vietnam and Indonesia represent two distinct models of political organization—the former a single-party socialist republic with a centralized cadre management system (T. H. Bui, 2016), and the latter a multiparty democracy with a decentralized, open-list electoral system (Rosada, 2018). Despite these systemic differences, both nations grapple with the shared legacy of patriarchal cultural norms and the challenges of integrating women into the highest echelons of power. Although Vietnam and Indonesia differ significantly in terms of political regime, state ideology, and institutional structures, both countries have sought to increase women's political participation while confronting persistent patriarchal norms. Therefore, the comparison does not assume that Ho Chi Minh's thought framework can be directly transplanted into Indonesia. Rather, it seeks to examine how different institutional arrangements translate ideological commitments into gender equality outcomes and what comparative lessons can be derived.

In Vietnam, the discourse on women's rights is inextricably linked to the ideology of its founding father, Ho Chi Minh (Ha & Van, 2021). Unlike Western liberal feminism, which emerged

largely from civil society to challenge the state, Vietnamese gender equality was initiated by the state itself as a revolutionary imperative (Dung, 2019). This approach, rooted in Marxist-Leninist thought and adapted to Vietnamese conditions, has established a unique political ecosystem where gender targets are mandates rather than aspirations. Ho Chi Minh's thought occupies a unique position in the history of gender equality in Southeast Asia because women's emancipation was conceptualized as an integral component of national liberation and socialist transformation (Hannah, 2022). Unlike many Western feminist traditions that emerged from civil society movements (Einhorn & Sever, 2003; Gal, 1997/2013), Ho Chi Minh embedded gender equality within state-building and revolutionary ideology (Mazyrin et al., 2020a). This raises an important comparative question: to what extent can a state-led model of gender equality generate sustainable political representation for women, and how does this compare with Indonesia's democratic and party-centered model?

The period 2021–2026 represents a significant stage in Vietnam's political development because it corresponds with the implementation of the 13th National Party Congress resolutions and the tenure of the 15th National Assembly, both of which contain explicit commitments to gender equality and women's leadership (Huyen, 2024). Likewise, Indonesia's 2024 General Election provides a critical contemporary benchmark because it was the largest

democratic election in the country's history and revealed continuing challenges regarding women's representation, political financing, and VAWP (Wadipalapa et al., 2025). Examining these two moments allows for a timely assessment of how different political systems translate gender equality commitments into political outcomes.

This paper aims to examine the operationalization of Ho Chi Minh's thought in Vietnam's contemporary political sphere, specifically by analyzing the outcomes of the 15th National Assembly elections (2021–2026) and the 13th Party Congress. It seeks to answer critical questions: RQ1: How has Ho Chi Minh's conception of women's liberation been institutionalized within Vietnam's contemporary political system? RQ2: What institutional mechanisms explain the differences in women's political representation between Vietnam and Indonesia? RQ3: To what extent do ideological commitments influence political outcomes compared with institutional arrangements?

Furthermore, the paper juxtaposes the Vietnamese experience with that of Indonesia. With Indonesia facing stagnation in women's representation (Firdaus & Wulandari, 2023) despite affirmative action policies (Laws No. 12/2003 and No. 7/2017), the comparative analysis seeks to draw lessons from Vietnam's state-managed model to inform the Indonesian electoral market economy (Amanda, 2025), particularly in combating the rising phenomenon of VAWP and the high cost of campaigning.

## METHOD

This study uses a qualitative comparative design, combining doctrinal, policy, and political analyses (Fischer & Maggetti, 2017), to examine Ho Chi Minh's ideas on gender equality and compare Vietnam with Indonesia's post-2024 elections (Wadipalapa et al., 2025). Vietnam, a single-party socialist, and Indonesia, a multiparty democracy, represent contrasting political systems in Southeast Asia. The goal is not to rank systems but to see how institutions influence women's political representation. The analysis is informed by State Feminism Theory, which examines how state institutions promote women's political representation (Ammons et al., 2025; Gun & Malin, 2012; Rhode, 1994; Vickers, 2007), and Historical Institutionalism, which explains how ideological commitments become embedded within political structures over time (Amenta, 2012; Boychuk, 2016; Fioretos, 2011; Hofmann &

Yeo, 2024; Lecours, 2026; Thelen, 1999; Waylen, 2009).

The first analysis stage reviews Ho Chi Minh's writings on women's liberation, identifying three main principles: (1) the unity of national and women's liberation, (2) economic independence as a basis for political power, and (3) challenging male chauvinism. These are mapped onto Vietnam's current laws and institutions to see the connection between revolutionary ideas and today's governance.

The second phase evaluates the legal and institutional structures, including the 2013 Constitution, Gender Equality Law (2006), and Gender Equality Strategy (2021–2030). The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) and the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) are examined as state-level mechanisms. Outcomes are measured using election data, party composition, and provincial leadership statistics, and are compared with international benchmarks such as the Global Gender Gap Index and labor participation rates.

For Indonesia's 2024 elections, the focus is on quota laws, electoral practices, and VAWP, using parliamentary and policy reports. The research highlights gaps between quotas and elected women, considering how electoral systems, campaign costs, dynastic politics, and religious conservatism impact women's candidacy.

This study is based entirely on secondary data obtained from official government reports, legal documents, international organization publications, and academic literature. While this approach enables broad comparative analysis across two national contexts, it does not capture the lived experiences of female politicians or policymakers. Future studies could complement this analysis through interviews with female legislators, party officials, or women's organizations to provide deeper insight into the practical challenges of political participation and leadership.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Theoretical Foundations: Ho Chi Minh's Thought on Gender Equality

Ho Chi Minh's conception of gender equality was not an isolated social policy but a fundamental component of his revolutionary strategy. Departing from traditional Confucian hierarchies that subordinated women via the "Three Obediences" (obedience to father, husband, and son) (Li, 2025), Ho Chi Minh positioned women's liberation as a prerequisite for national liberation. His seminal assertion, "Women make up half of the people. If

women are not liberated, then the people are not half liberated”, posits that the success of the socialist revolution is contingent upon the emancipation of the female populace (Mary, 1996).

This theoretical stance served a dual purpose: it mobilized a vast, untapped demographic for the anti-colonial struggle while simultaneously attacking the feudal structures that underpinned the colonial regime. Ho Chi Minh argued that women were the most oppressed victims of the colonial-feudal nexus, suffering a double oppression of class exploitation and gender discrimination (Ha & Van, 2021). Accordingly, he viewed the struggle for gender equality not as a war between the sexes but as a unified class struggle against systemic oppression.

A distinct feature of Ho Chi Minh’s thought is the materialist link between economic participation and political agency. Drawing from Engels, he believed that the subjugation of women was rooted in their exclusion from social production. Therefore, he emphasized that for women to achieve equality, they must first achieve economic independence (Tha, 2020). He explicitly stated that women’s economic emancipation creates the necessary conditions for them to develop their talents, intelligence, and administrative capacity (D. D. Tu & Hoai, 2025).

This perspective drove the state’s early policies to integrate women into the workforce, not merely as labor but as managers and leaders. Ho Chi Minh criticized the traditional division of labor, reminding managers to allocate work appropriately among women and ensure their welfare so they could engage fully in both production and governance (Ha & Van, 2021). This ideology laid the groundwork for the high female labor force participation rates seen in contemporary Vietnam, which, in turn, provides a broader recruitment pool for political leadership than nations with lower female economic engagement.

Ho Chi Minh was acutely aware of the cultural barriers to equality. He identified the centuries-old habit of valuing men over women as a stubborn enemy of the revolution (Dung, 2019). In his writings and speeches, he frequently criticized male cadres for their narrow-minded prejudice and lack of confidence in women’s abilities (Mazyrin et al., 2020b, p. 260). He famously chastised party officials who failed to promote women, arguing that such neglect was a failure of revolutionary ethics.

However, Ho Chi Minh also placed the onus on women to seize their rights. He argued that equality could not be given as a gift but had to be struggled for. He urged women to overcome their own inferiority complexes (“tự ti”) and dependency, encouraging them to study, raise their political standing, and

actively participate in state management (D. D. Tu, 2025). This dialectic—state support combined with self-emancipation—remains the core narrative of the VWU today.

### **Marxist-Leninist Foundations of Gender Equality in Vietnam**

Ho Chi Minh’s thoughts on women’s liberation cannot be understood independently from Marxist-Leninist theory (Huong, 2024; KNIGHT, 2007; Phuong & Quyet, 2024). While Confucian traditions historically reinforced patriarchal relations (Jia & Kung, 2025; Koczkás, 2023; Liu et al., 2024), Marxism conceptualized women’s oppression as structurally connected to class exploitation and private property relations (Andreas & Adam, 2025; Darío, 2026; Martha, 2005; Quick, 2023). To fully understand Ho Chi Minh’s thought on gender equality, it is necessary to situate it within the broader framework of Marxist-Leninist ideology. While Ho Chi Minh adapted revolutionary principles to Vietnamese historical and cultural conditions, his understanding of women’s emancipation was profoundly influenced by Marxist conceptions of social inequality and Leninist approaches to state transformation (Bello, 2021; Dung, 2019; Molyneux, 1981; D. T. Thu & Ngoc, 2024). Hence, gender equality was institutionalized not as an isolated social policy but as part of socialist state-building (Hannah, 2022). Ho Chi Minh’s thought foundation helps explain why gender equality in Vietnam became embedded within Party structures, mass organizations, and state planning mechanisms rather than relying primarily on civil society mobilization.

From a Marxist perspective, women’s oppression was not viewed merely as a cultural or moral problem but as a structural consequence of class relations and economic dependency (Darío, 2026; Martha, 2005; Quick, 2023). Friedrich Engels argued in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* that the subordination of women emerged alongside private property and the patriarchal family structure (Engels, 2021; Gudin, 2022). So, women’s active participation in social production and economic activities, not only genuine liberation, requires legal equality. This intellectual foundation is clearly reflected in Ho Chi Minh’s repeated emphasis on women’s economic independence as a prerequisite for political empowerment (Dung, 2019; D. T. Thu & Ngoc, 2024; D. D. Tu & Hoai, 2025).

Lenin further expanded this perspective by arguing that socialist states must actively intervene to dismantle institutional barriers preventing women’s participation in political and economic life (K.B, 2005;

Molyneux, 1981, 2023). Unlike liberal approaches that primarily focus on formal equality before the law, Leninist theory emphasizes the revolutionary state's responsibility to create material conditions for substantive equality (Head, 2021; Rolf, 1972). This principle is visible in Vietnam's state-led approach to gender policy, where women's political participation is promoted through legislation, organizational mechanisms, and targeted development strategies rather than relying exclusively on civil society initiatives or market competition.

The transition toward a Marxist-Leninist political system in Vietnam, therefore, had profound implications for gender equality policy. Women's emancipation became integrated into the broader objectives of socialist modernization, national liberation, and state-building (Caroline, 2004; Edgar, 2006; Emily, 2022; Molyneux, 2001; Valentine, 1992). Organizations such as the VWU were not established solely as advocacy groups but as mechanisms to mobilize women in political, economic, and social development. Similarly, constitutional guarantees of gender equality and affirmative measures in leadership recruitment reflect the Leninist principle that the state should actively engineer conditions for social transformation (Alexander & Andrey, 2011; David, 2014; Dmitry & Irina, 2025; Porshneva, 2019).

This foundational perspective elucidates why Vietnam's approach diverges markedly from Indonesia's. Although both nations acknowledge gender equality as a policy goal, Vietnam's model originated in a political tradition in which gender equality was embedded within a socialist state framework. Therefore, the comparatively successful representation of women in Vietnam cannot be solely attributed to legal reforms or quota systems. It must also be examined in the context of the Marxist-Leninist paradigm, which sanctioned ongoing state intervention to achieve gender equality.

### **Institutionalizing Equality: The Vietnamese Legal and Political Framework**

The institutionalization of gender equality in Vietnam reflects a systematic effort to translate ideological commitments, particularly those associated with Ho Chi Minh, into binding legal norms and state mechanisms. Rather than remaining at the level of political rhetoric, gender equality has been embedded within Vietnam's constitutional order, statutory framework, national policy strategies, and mass organizational structures. This multilayered architecture demonstrates a model in which constitutional principles, legislative

instruments, executive planning, and socio-political organizations operate in a coordinated manner to advance substantive equality.

### ***Vietnamese Constitutional Architecture***

The constitutionalizing of gender equality constitutes the normative foundation of Vietnam's approach. The 1946 Constitution of Vietnam, adopted shortly after independence, was remarkably progressive for its time (Lan Thi Dang, 2017). It explicitly granted women the right to vote and to stand for election, thereby establishing formal political equality at the inception of the modern Vietnamese state. This early recognition is significant in comparative constitutional history, as many countries introduced women's suffrage only after prolonged political struggle. By embedding gender equality in the founding constitutional document, the state signaled that women's political participation was integral to nation-building rather than a peripheral reform.

Subsequent constitutional revisions reaffirmed and strengthened this commitment, culminating in the 2013 Constitution of Vietnam. Article 26 of the 2013 Constitution stipulates that "male and female citizens are equal in all aspects" and further mandates that the State must adopt policies to guarantee gender equality (Luyen, 2024; Minh, 2025; N. T. T. Thu, 2026). Article 26's importance extends beyond its constitutional acknowledgment of equality. Moreover, gender equality turns from a political goal into a legal duty of the state. From the perspective of State Feminism, constitutional provisions create institutional legitimacy for affirmative interventions, enabling state agencies to justify gender-targeted recruitment and promotion policies (Dorothy & Amy, 2013; Ruth, 2025; Williams, 2009). Thus, the constitutionalizing of gender equality serves as a mechanism by which revolutionary ideology becomes embedded in bureaucratic governance. This provision moves beyond the liberal principle of non-discrimination and imposes a positive obligation on the State to act. In constitutional theory, such language represents a shift from formal equality, merely prohibiting unequal treatment, to substantive equality, which requires proactive measures to eliminate structural disparities. Thus, the Constitution functions not only as a declaratory statement of rights but also as a directive for legislative and administrative action.

### ***The 2006 Law on Gender Equality***

Building on constitutional principles, the Law on Gender Equality (2006) serves as the cornerstone of Vietnam's contemporary gender equality framework. The law is notable for its comprehensive scope and for codifying substantive equality as a

legal objective. It articulates equality across political, economic, labor, educational, scientific, cultural, and family domains, thereby recognizing that gender inequality is multidimensional and structurally embedded (Hong Van, 2022).

In the political sphere, Article 11 explicitly guarantees equality in self-nomination and nomination procedures for elections to the National Assembly and People's Councils (Law on Gender Equality, 2007). It further requires equal standards and criteria in the appointment of leadership and managerial positions within state agencies and socio-political organizations (Hien & Tuan, 2022). By regulating both electoral participation and bureaucratic promotion, the law addresses two key channels of political power: representation and administration. This dual focus reflects an understanding that meaningful political equality requires both access to elected office and inclusion in executive decision-making structures.

The law also institutionalizes the principle of gender mainstreaming, mandating that gender perspectives be integrated into the drafting and evaluation of all legal normative documents (Karadzhe & Ngoc, 2022) to identify the real picture of women's political participation in the public administration system of modern Vietnam. The methodological basis is an interdisciplinary approach that allowed us to consider the evolution of Vietnam's gender policy, the peculiarities of gender stereotypes of Vietnamese culture, to analyze the documentary base, which included the decisions of the Communist Party of Vietnam on gender equality and the advancement of women (No. 178 / Decision-TTg. This requirement compels ministries and state agencies to assess the gendered impact of proposed policies before their adoption. Gender mainstreaming thus functions as a preventive mechanism, aiming to avoid the reproduction of inequality through ostensibly neutral policies (Law on Gender Equality, 2007). In doing so, it aligns Vietnam's legal framework with international standards while maintaining its distinctive state-led implementation model.

Furthermore, Article 5 of the Law defines "measures to promote gender equality" as temporary affirmative actions designed to accelerate substantive equality (Hanh & Cao Quy, 2025). This explicit legal recognition of affirmative action legitimizes the use of quotas, preferential recruitment, and targeted capacity-building programs to correct historical and structural imbalances. By framing such measures as temporary and goal-oriented, the law seeks to reconcile the principle of equality with differential treatment to achieve equitable outcomes. In doctrinal

terms, this reflects a commitment to transformative equality rather than mere procedural fairness.

### ***Vietnamese National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2030)***

While constitutional and statutory provisions establish the legal foundation, implementation is operationalized through national policy instruments. The current National Strategy on Gender Equality 2021–2030, promulgated via Resolution No. 28/NQ-CP, exemplifies a results-oriented governance approach. The strategy translates abstract legal commitments into measurable targets with defined timelines, thereby enabling monitoring and accountability (Anh, 2022).

One of its central objectives is to enhance women's representation in leadership positions within state management agencies and local administrations. The strategy sets a target of 60% of such bodies having key female leaders by 2025, increasing to 75% by 2030 (VWU, 2021a). This quantitative benchmark emphasizes structural transformation in public administration rather than incremental change. In the economic sphere, the strategy aims to increase the proportion of female business directors or owners to at least 27% by 2025. This objective recognizes that economic empowerment is a critical dimension of gender equality and that private-sector leadership remains unevenly distributed. By establishing specific numerical goals, the strategy integrates gender considerations into national development planning.

Significantly, the strategy also addresses unpaid care work, a domain often neglected in formal legal frameworks (Nam & Bac, 2025). It sets a target of reducing the average time women spend on unpaid housework to 1.7 times that of men by 2025. This objective directly addresses the "double burden", in which women combine professional responsibilities with disproportionate domestic labor (Adarsh & Sunil, 2025; Hyder, 2026; Rafique et al., 2025). By acknowledging unpaid work as a policy issue, the strategy expands the scope of gender equality beyond public institutions into the private sphere of family life (Resolution No. 28/NQ-CP, the National Strategy on Gender Equality in 2021 - 2030, 2021).

### ***The Vietnam Women's Union (VWU) as a State Mechanism***

VWU's institutional role complements constitutional, legislative, and strategic instruments. Unlike non-governmental organizations in liberal democratic systems, the VWU is a socio-political organization embedded within the state apparatus

and aligned with the political system. With a membership exceeding 13 million, it functions as an intermediary between women citizens and the Party–State structure (Hong Van, 2022). The VWU possesses the right to submit legislative proposals to the National Assembly and policy recommendations to the Government, thereby participating in formal law-making processes (Labani et al., 2009). It also plays a significant role in elections by introducing female candidates and participating in local-level personnel vetting. Through these mechanisms, the VWU acts as both an advocate and a gatekeeper, facilitating women’s entry into political office while operating within a centralized political framework.

In addition, the organization serves as a training ground for female cadres. By identifying potential leaders at the grassroots level and providing political education, professional training, and networking opportunities, the VWU helps build a structured recruitment pipeline into Party and State institutions. This institutionalized pathway contrasts with the more fragmented and competitive recruitment processes characteristic of pluralistic systems. In the Vietnamese context, it represents a coordinated strategy to cultivate and promote women leaders in alignment with national policy objectives (Ha & Van, 2021).

Therefore, these constitutional provisions, statutory instruments, national strategies, and organizational mechanisms constitute an integrated architecture for gender equality in Vietnam. The framework illustrates how ideological commitments have been translated into enforceable norms, measurable targets, and institutional practices. While implementation challenges persist, the structural coherence of this system underscores a state-centered model for advancing substantive gender equality through law and governance.

### **Contemporary Application: Analysis of the 2021–2026 Term**

The empirical record of Vietnam’s contemporary political system reveals a complex and differentiated picture of gender equality. While legislative representation has achieved historically significant gains, executive and Party structures continue to display pronounced gender asymmetries. This divergence underscores both the achievements and the structural limits of Vietnam’s state-led approach to gender equality.

### ***Statistical Analysis of the 15th National Assembly of Vietnam***

The 2021 elections for the 15th National Assembly (2021–2026) constitute a pivotal moment

in the trajectory of women’s political representation. In this election, women secured 151 out of 499 seats, accounting for 30.26% of the total membership. This marks the first time since the 6th National Assembly (1976) that female representation has surpassed the 30% threshold, a benchmark widely regarded in international policy discourse as a “critical mass” for meaningful participation in legislative processes (VWU, 2021b). The crossing of this threshold signals not only numerical progress but also the institutional consolidation of gender-targeting mechanisms embedded in electoral planning and candidate selection.

In a comparative perspective, Vietnam’s legislative representation significantly exceeds both global and regional averages. At the time of the election, the global average of women in national parliaments was approximately 25.5%, while the Asian regional average was around 20% (UNSDG, 2024). Vietnam’s 30.26%, therefore, positions it as a leading case of descriptive representation in Asia (VNA, 2025). Such performance suggests that mechanisms including candidate nomination procedures, gender mainstreaming policies, and the involvement of mass organizations, particularly the VWU, have had a measurable impact in increasing women’s access to legislative office.

Beyond numerical representation, the demographic profile of female deputies further complicates common critiques of quota systems. Data indicate that approximately 78.56% of elected female deputies hold postgraduate degrees, reflecting a highly educated cohort (VWU, 2021b). This challenges the argument that affirmative measures inevitably produce “token” representatives lacking qualifications. Instead, the evidence suggests that female deputies in the 15th National Assembly combine descriptive representation with substantial human capital. Moreover, the representation of ethnic minority women is also noteworthy. Among the 89 ethnic minority delegates, women constitute 17.84% of the Assembly, a significant proportion, illustrating intersectional gains that extend beyond gender alone (VWU, 2021b). Thus, in the legislative sphere, Vietnam demonstrates both quantitative and qualitative advancements.

### ***The “Glass Ceiling” in Executive and Party Power***

Despite legislative progress, a closer examination of Vietnam’s political hierarchy reveals a persistent “glass ceiling” within loci of concentrated decision-making power, particularly within the Communist Party and the executive branch. This

divergence highlights the distinction between representation in deliberate institutions and access to core centers of authority.

The disparity becomes even more pronounced at the Politburo, the apex decision-making body of the political system. The 13th Politburo witnessed a reduction in female membership compared to the 12th term, which had included high-profile female leaders such as Nguyen Thi Kim Ngan (UN Women, 2021). The limited presence of women in the Politburo reinforces the perception that while women are increasingly incorporated as legislators, who participate in deliberative governance, they remain underrepresented as executives wielding concentrated authority. This pattern reflects a stratified structure of political inclusion, wherein descriptive gains at the parliamentary level do not automatically translate into parity in executive power.

At the subnational level, similar trends persist. For the 2020–2025 term, women account for approximately 16% of members in provincial Party Committees (Huu et al., 2024). The proportion of female Chairs of People's Committees, the executive heads of provincial governments, remains even lower, fluctuating between 11% and 17% (UN Women, 2021). These figures indicate that the “hard power” structures of governance continue to exhibit gender asymmetries, particularly in positions that control administrative resources and policy implementation. Therefore, the Vietnamese case illustrates a dual reality, with substantial progress in representative institutions alongside enduring barriers in the executive and Party hierarchies.

### ***The Paradox of “State Feminism” and the Double Burden***

The coexistence of legislative success and executive limitation has led scholars to conceptualize Vietnam's approach as a form of “state feminism”. The emergence of state feminism in Vietnam should be understood as a direct outcome of the institutionalization of Marxist-Leninist principles within the political system. Unlike liberal feminist traditions that often seek to influence the state from outside, Vietnamese gender equality initiatives have historically been implemented through state institutions themselves. This reflects the Leninist assumption that social transformation is most effectively achieved through coordinated political organization and state intervention (David, 2021; Jowitt, 1974). In addition, the promotion of women into political office, leadership training programs, and gender mainstreaming policies are not isolated initiatives but components of a broader socialist

development strategy. In this model, the state actively promotes gender equality as part of broader national development and modernization objectives (Do, 2024). Gender equality becomes aligned with economic productivity, political legitimacy, and social stability. However, this instrumental orientation may not necessarily entail a fundamental transformation of patriarchal norms embedded in social and familial structures.

One manifestation of this paradox is the persistence of the double burden. Official discourse frequently celebrates the archetype of the “New Vietnamese Woman” who is “*Giỏi việc nước, đảm việc nhà*” (meaning: Good at state affairs, capable at housework). While this slogan affirms women's competence in both public and private spheres, it simultaneously reinforces normative expectations that women retain primary responsibility for domestic and reproductive labor (T. T. H. Bui, 2024). Thus, even as women are encouraged to assume political and economic roles, they are not relieved of traditional household obligations. The symbolic celebration of dual competence can therefore reproduce structural inequalities in the distribution of unpaid labor.

Institutional arrangements have historically compounded this dynamism. Until the revision of the Labor Code in 2019, women were required to retire 5 years earlier than men (55 vs. 60). Although the revised code gradually narrows this gap, moving toward retirement ages of 60 for women and 62 for men by 2028, the historical disparity had significant career implications (Trung, 2013). Early retirement effectively truncated women's professional trajectories at precisely the stage when seniority, experience, and political networks are most critical for promotion to high-level Party and executive posts. In this sense, formal protective policies may have inadvertently reinforced structural barriers to leadership.

These patterns unveil a complex and sometimes contradictory landscape. Vietnam has made notable progress in enhancing women's descriptive representation within the legislature, supported by constitutional provisions, legislative frameworks, and organized mass mobilization. However, access to concentrated executive and Party power remains limited, shaped by institutional hierarchies, career trajectories, and persistent socio-cultural norms. The Vietnamese experience illustrates both the possibility for transformation and the ongoing structural constraints of a state-centric approach to gender equality.

## Comparative Thought Foundations: Ho Chi Minh and Sukarno on Women's Emancipation

Although the political systems of Vietnam and Indonesia differ substantially, both Ho Chi Minh and Sukarno regarded women's emancipation as an integral component of national liberation. Ho Chi Minh argued that the liberation of women was inseparable from the liberation of the nation and the construction of socialism. Similarly, in *Sarinah* (1947), Sukarno criticized feudal and colonial structures that subordinated women and emphasized the importance of women's participation in the struggle for national independence and social development (Firda & Subi, 2023; Peter, 1973; Syamsul, 2018; Yuke & Asikin, 2024).

Both leaders rejected the notion that women's issues were merely private or domestic concerns. Instead, they viewed women as active political actors whose participation was essential for national progress. However, significant differences emerged in the institutional translation of these ideas. Ho Chi Minh's thought was subsequently embedded within a socialist state structure that developed centralized mechanisms for cadre recruitment, mass mobilization, and political representation. By contrast, Sukarno's vision evolved within Indonesia's pluralistic political environment and was later mediated through democratic institutions, political parties, and electoral competition.

Consequently, the divergence between Vietnam and Indonesia cannot be explained solely by differences in ideological commitment. Both Ho Chi Minh and Sukarno articulated progressive views regarding women's emancipation. The more significant difference lies in how these ideas were institutionalized within their respective political systems. Therefore, a comparison between Vietnam and Indonesia highlights not only competing political models but also different pathways through which gender equality ideals are translated into political outcomes.

**Table 1. The conceptual comparison table**

Dimension	Ho Chi Minh	Soekarno (Sarinah)
View on women	Revolutionary actor	National development actor
Ideological basis	Marxism-Leninism	Nationalism
Institutional mechanism	Party-State	Electoral democracy
Gender strategy	State feminism	Quota politics

*Note:* Author's synthesis.

## Comparative Analysis: The Indonesian Experience (2024 Context)

A comparative perspective with Indonesia provides analytical clarity regarding the distinctive

features and limitations of the Vietnamese model. While both countries are Southeast Asian nations with similar postcolonial developmental trajectories, their political systems differ fundamentally. Vietnam operates under a centralized, single-party socialist framework, whereas Indonesia functions as a decentralized, multiparty democracy with an open-list proportional representation system. These institutional differences profoundly shape the design, implementation, and outcomes of gender equality policies.

### *The Quota Trap: Descriptive versus Substantive Representation*

Indonesia formally mandates a 30% gender quota for party candidate lists under Law No. 7/2017. On paper, this quota mirrors the numerical threshold frequently cited in global gender equality discourse. However, the mode of implementation diverges sharply from Vietnam's state-directed nomination mechanisms.

In practice, Indonesian political parties often treat the quota as a procedural requirement rather than a transformative commitment. Although parties comply with the 30% candidacy rule, women candidates are frequently placed in electorally disadvantageous positions on party lists (Naib, 2025). The intended "zipper system", which alternates male and female candidates to ensure fair ranking, is inconsistently applied. Within Indonesia's open-list proportional representation system, where voters cast ballots for individual candidates rather than solely for parties, placement on the list interacts with personal vote competition and campaign financing capacity. Consequently, formal compliance with candidate quotas does not automatically translate into electability.

The electoral outcome reflects this structural limitation. Following the 2024 legislative elections, women's representation in Indonesia's national legislature remains approximately 21.9% (Aripurnami et al., 2025), nearly ten percentage points lower than Vietnam's 30.26% in the 15th National Assembly of Vietnam. Although women constituted more than 37% of registered legislative candidates in the 2024 election, only approximately 21.9% of seats in the DPR were ultimately secured by women (Yasmar et al., 2025) kalam insha'i (directives). This outcome demonstrates the persistent gap between candidate quotas and electoral outcomes. Compared with the 2019 elections (Fionna & Hutchinson, 2019), improvements remain marginal, suggesting that affirmative action measures have not yet produced substantial gains in parliamentary

representation. The persistence of financial barriers, party nomination practices, and electoral competition continues to constrain women's electability despite formal compliance with quota regulations.

### ***Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP)***

A second defining characteristic of Indonesia's contemporary political landscape is the prevalence of VAWP. During the 2024 electoral cycle, reports indicate that approximately 82% of female candidates experienced some form of violence, with 52% reporting sexual harassment or sexualized abuse (Aripurnami et al., 2025). These figures reveal that political participation entails not only structural barriers but also direct personal risks.

The forms of violence are multifaceted. Online harassment constitutes a pervasive threat, particularly through social media platforms where gendered insults, defamation, and sexual attacks are common. Physical intimidation and threats also occur during campaign activities, especially in highly competitive districts. Moreover, "economic violence" manifests through the escalating costs of campaigning in an open-list system, where candidates compete intensely, even against co-partisans, for personal votes (Aripurnami et al., 2025). The financial burden disproportionately disadvantages women, who often have less access to political capital and patronage networks.

The competitive and fragmented nature of Indonesia's electoral environment amplifies these vulnerabilities. In contrast, Vietnam's single-party system, while limiting electoral competition, also suppresses overt campaign-related violence and chaotic contestation (T. K. T. Tu, 2022). The controlled nomination process reduces interpersonal electoral rivalry and mitigates the forms of public harassment commonly observed in Indonesia. Thus, the comparative case demonstrates how political liberalization and electoral competition, though normatively associated with democratic pluralism, can generate gendered risks absent in more centralized systems.

### ***Cultural and Religious Barriers***

Cultural and religious contexts further differentiate the trajectories of gender equality in the two countries. Vietnam's historical challenge has often been framed in terms of Confucian-influenced patriarchal norms that emphasize hierarchical family structures and male authority. However, the socialist state has consistently promoted women's participation as part of national modernization and revolutionary mobilization.

In Indonesia, gender barriers intersect with rising currents of religious conservatism within segments of society. Certain interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence question or discourage female leadership in public and religious spheres, including the role of *imam* (prayer leader), which symbolically reinforces male authority in communal life (Naib, 2025) especially in legislative institutions and political parties. Although Law Number 7 of 2017 has set a 30% quota for women, its implementation still faces various challenges, both structurally and culturally. Barriers such as patriarchal culture, lack of political education, and women's dual role as housewives and politicians are among the main barrier factors limiting their participation in politics. Through normative juridical methods and analysis of secondary data from various sources, this study found that women's representation in the legislature continues to increase over time. However, this figure has not reached the set target. In addition, political parties often only meet quotas formally without paying attention to the capacity and quality of women nominated. In conclusion, increasing women's representation requires continuous efforts to overcome existing cultural and structural barriers, so as to create a more substantial and meaningful participation of women in Indonesia's political leadership structure." ; "container-title": "International Journal of Accounting, Management, Economics and Social Sciences (IJAMESC. While Indonesia's constitutional framework guarantees equality, the diversity of religious interpretations across regions contributes to uneven acceptance of women in leadership roles.

Additionally, the phenomenon of "dynastic politics" shapes female political representation in Indonesia (Hidayat, 2024). A significant proportion of elected women are wives, daughters, or close relatives of male political elites. Rather than emerging through structured meritocratic cadre development, many female candidates are recruited to preserve or extend family-based political networks (Natadia Ernel, 2019). This pattern contrasts with Vietnam's more centralized cadre training system, where organizations such as the VWU and Party institutions cultivate female leaders through institutional pipelines. While dynastic entry can increase descriptive representation, it may not fundamentally challenge patriarchal power structures, as women's political capital remains tethered to male-dominated networks (Armoyu & Azizah, 2020).

This comparison reveals two distinct models, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Vietnam's state-driven system has shown greater

success in converting gender quotas into legislative outcomes and in minimizing electoral violence. However, it is constrained by limitations in the distribution of power within the executive branch and the ruling Party. In contrast, Indonesia's pluralistic democracy fosters competition and provides constitutional protections, yet grapples with challenges including implementation issues, electoral violence, financial constraints, and cultural conflicts. This analysis underscores the importance of factors such as institutional design, political culture, and socio-religious influences in transforming formal gender equality policies into genuine political empowerment.

**Table 2. Comparative Overview of Women's Political Representation**

Indicator	Vietnam (2021–2026)	Indonesia (2024)
Political System	Single-party socialist republic	Multiparty democracy
Women in Parliament	30.26%	21.9%
Gender Quota	State-directed nomination targets	30% candidate quota
Female Labor Force Participation	~70%	~53%
Institutional Support	Vietnam Women's Union	Political parties and civil society
Campaign Cost	Relatively controlled	High campaign expenditures
VAWP	Relatively limited	High prevalence
Recruitment Mechanism	Cadre pipeline system	Party-centered recruitment
Major Barrier	Glass ceiling in Party leadership	Electoral financing and dynastic politics

*Note:* Author's synthesis.

### Strategic Lessons for Indonesia from the Vietnamese Model

While acknowledging the fundamental differences between Vietnam's socialist political system and Indonesia's democratic, multiparty framework, Indonesia can nevertheless draw significant, pragmatic lessons from Vietnam's experience in institutionalizing women's political participation. The Vietnamese model, deeply influenced by Ho Chi Minh's thought and operationalized through mass organizations, demonstrates that women's representation is not merely a matter of legal quotas but of long-term structural design. Rather than treating women's political participation as an electoral obligation, Vietnam has embedded it within a broader ideological, institutional, and economic ecosystem (Ngo, 2018). From this comparative perspective, four key lessons emerge for Indonesia: institutionalizing

recruitment pipelines, shifting from candidacy quotas to placement mandates, leveraging state ideology to reframe gender equality, and addressing the economic foundations of political inequality.

First, Indonesia can learn from Vietnam's systematic institutionalization of a recruitment pipeline for female political leadership. In Vietnam, the VWU is a state-supported mass organization that serves as a nationwide network for talent identification and leadership development. From the village level upward, the VWU identifies capable women, integrates them into grassroots mobilization and community governance, and provides sustained training and mentoring over many years (Ha & Van, 2021). By the time women enter formal political candidacy, they are not political novices, but experienced actors embedded within local networks and organizational hierarchies. This long-term cultivation sharply contrasts with Indonesia's more fragmented and party-centric recruitment model. In Indonesia, candidate selection remains heavily dependent on political parties, which often face pressures to meet the 30 percent quota only shortly before electoral registration deadlines (Amanda, 2025). As a result, women are frequently recruited reactively and procedurally rather than through sustained leadership development. To address this structural weakness, Indonesia could empower the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KemenPPPA), in collaboration with civil society coalitions such as the *Kaukus Perempuan Parlemen*, to establish a permanent, non-partisan candidate bank and a leadership academy (Labani et al., 2009, p. 56). Such an institution should operate continuously rather than cyclically, building a reservoir of trained, policy-competent, and electorally viable women who can be matched with constituencies well before elections are announced. Institutional continuity, rather than ad hoc compliance, is the crucial lesson.

Second, Indonesia should move beyond candidacy quotas toward enforceable placement mandates. Vietnam's electoral mechanism, coordinated through the VFF, demonstrates that representation outcomes depend not only on the number of women nominated but also on their positions (General Statistics Office, 2022). The VFF plays a decisive role in negotiating candidate lists and ensuring that women are placed in constituencies where electoral success is structurally viable. The emphasis is therefore on achieving a target proportion of elected women, not merely nominated women. By contrast, Indonesia's 30% candidacy quota focuses primarily on process compliance, allowing parties

to nominate women in unwinnable districts or in lower ballot positions, thereby significantly reducing their chances of election. Without mechanisms that regulate candidate placement, quotas risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative. The adoption of a strict zipper system, in which male and female candidates alternate on party lists, would mitigate this problem (Ella, 2019). Crucially, enforcement must include meaningful penalties, such as list disqualification, for non-compliance. Such reforms would compel political parties to treat women not as peripheral vote mobilizers but as competitive candidates with genuine electoral prospects. In short, the lesson from Vietnam is that institutional design must prioritize outcomes over mere procedural benchmarks.

Third, Indonesia can learn from Vietnam's strategic use of state ideology to legitimize gender equality. Under the influence of Ho Chi Minh's thought, gender equality in Vietnam was framed not as an external normative demand but as a patriotic obligation tied to national liberation, socialist development, and collective strength (Dung, 2019). By embedding women's emancipation within the discourse of national strength and revolutionary modernization, conservative objections were effectively neutralized. Gender equality became synonymous with national progress rather than a threat to cultural identity. In Indonesia, debates over women's political leadership are sometimes framed in polarized terms as a choice between Western liberalism and religious or traditional values. To overcome this polarization, advocates could rearticulate gender equality as a nationalist imperative aligned with Indonesia's long-term development vision, particularly the "Indonesia Emas 2045" agenda. By linking women's leadership to economic competitiveness, anti-corruption reform, and the realization of social justice as enshrined in Pancasila, reformers can reposition gender inclusion as integral to national resilience rather than as a foreign imposition (Brennan & Barnett, 2009). This reframing strategy broadens the coalition base, enabling support across ideological and religious divides. The Vietnamese experience illustrates that thought alignment is not merely symbolic; it can shape institutional and electoral behavior.

Finally, the Vietnamese case underscores the economic foundations of political equality. Following Ho Chi Minh's directive to fully integrate women into productive labor, Vietnam achieved one of the highest female labor force participation rates globally, approximately 70 percent (McCarty et al., 2009). This economic integration provides

women with financial independence, professional networks, and social capital that support political engagement. Economic empowerment also serves as a structural precondition for sustainable political participation. In Indonesia, by contrast, female labor force participation remains significantly lower, around 53 percent, limiting women's access to independent financial resources necessary for competitive electoral campaigns (McCarty et al., 2009). In a political environment characterized by high campaign costs and pervasive money politics, financial dependence becomes a structural barrier to entry. Therefore, reforming campaign finance regulations is essential to leveling the playing field. State funding allocated to political parties could be conditioned upon demonstrable investment in female candidates, including transparent reporting of campaign expenditures. Such financial incentives would counteract the "economic violence" embedded in costly electoral competition and create material conditions conducive to women's political advancement (Aripurnami et al., 2025).

In summary, these lessons suggest that Indonesia's challenge goes beyond simply increasing formal quotas; it requires establishing a comprehensive ecosystem encompassing recruitment, placement, ideological legitimacy, and economic empowerment. Vietnam's experience demonstrates that sustainable representation of women is most effectively achieved through institutional continuity, strategic framing, and structural economic inclusion. While Indonesia will need to adapt these insights to its own democratic and pluralistic context, the comparative analysis indicates that meaningful progress will necessitate systemic reform rather than mere incremental adjustments.

## CONCLUSION

Ho Chi Minh's thought on gender equality remains a potent force in contemporary Vietnam, providing the ideological legitimacy and institutional framework that has allowed the country to achieve one of the highest rates of female political representation in Asia. The success of the 15th National Assembly elections serves as validation of the state-managed model, in which legal mandates, institutional pipelines (VWU), and ideological commitment converge to produce tangible results.

The findings suggest that the significance of Ho Chi Minh's thought lies not merely in its normative commitment to women's emancipation but in its incorporation into a broader Marxist-Leninist state-building project. The Vietnamese experience demonstrates that principles of thought can influence

political outcomes when they are translated into durable institutions, organizational mechanisms, and policy frameworks. Therefore, the comparative advantage observed in Vietnam's women's political representation derives not only from ideological commitment but also from the state's capacity to institutionalize those commitments through long-term governance strategies. However, the unfinished revolution is evident in the persistent patriarchal culture that limits women's access to the hard power of the Party Politburo and executive leadership. The "State Feminism" model, while effective in terms of numbers, must evolve to address the substantive quality of representation and alleviate the double burden imposed on women by conflicting state narratives.

For Indonesia, the Vietnamese experience demonstrates that democratic openness alone does not guarantee equality. The stagnation of women's representation in Indonesia suggests that electoral quotas are a necessary but insufficient tool. To break the 30% barrier, Indonesia requires a comprehensive, whole-of-society approach that reflects Ho Chi Minh's strategic framework: integrating economic empowerment, institutionalizing recruitment beyond familial dynasties, and enforcing a zero-tolerance policy toward political violence. Ultimately, this comparison illustrates that transforming the right to participate into the power to lead requires not only legislative measures but also a fundamental transformation of the country-state's political culture and institutional mechanisms.

This study has several limitations. First, it relies exclusively on secondary sources and official statistics, which may not fully capture informal political practices and gendered experiences within political institutions. Second, comparative analysis focuses primarily on national-level institutions and does not examine subnational variations across provinces and regions. Third, the study focuses on the descriptive and institutional dimensions of representation rather than on assessing the substantive policy impact of female political leaders. Future research could employ interviews, surveys, or case studies to explore how women exercise political influence after entering office.

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