

Vietnam

Ethnicity in Vietnam

Power relations

1946-1975: This period can be broadly defined as one of foreign intervention and war. Vietnam fought with France from '45-'54 in the "First Indochina War"; Then U.S. slowly entered the picture in South Vietnam, leading to all-out war between 1967-1975.

1975-1979: The period of consolidation of the communist government of Vietnam in southern Vietnam. The assets and businesses of ethnic Chinese, who had dominated trade, service, textile and transport industries in Saigon under the American-backed southern regime, were seized in a series of state-led anti-bourgeoisie movements. Many of the seized industries became state-owned enterprises. The Chinese made up a disproportionately large percentage of the people fleeing Vietnam by boat from 1975-1979.

1979-2005: The period following consolidation of the regime of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

Disclaimers: It is not easy to classify most ethnic minorities groups as either irrelevant or powerless. In all cases, there are strong arguments on both sides as to whether each group is either "irrelevant", "powerless" or "discriminated" against. A couple of examples might help to clarify as to how the simple classifications could be validly contested: - There is evidence that, for example, the Khmer Krom people may have been discriminated against after Vietnam invaded Cambodia to depose the Khmer Rouge, and there is generally evidence that every other ethnic minority group has suffered at one point or another from Kinh-dominated government policies, such as the creation of New Economic Zones that encouraged Kinh settlement on ethnic minority land. - During the American military action in Vietnam, the "montagnards" (a generic term for all ethnic minorities, especially those from the Central Highlands) were recruited as soldiers by the Americans and these groups continued to stage rebellions against the communist government after 1975. Many of these groups remain politically connected to overseas ethnic minorities communities. - At the same time, ethnic minorities groups currently receive state subsidies under a number of development programs and the General Party Secretary of the Communist Party, Nong

Duc Manh, is of the ethnic Tay minority. - Given the many different ways in which these arguments can be made, it appeared reasonable to focus on the points in history and the ethnically-based political maneuvers that remain most salient.

2006-2013: Vietnam's 89 million-strong population is made up of over 54 ethnic communities with unique religious, linguistic and cultural characteristics and identities. The majority group is the Viet, or Kinh people (over 85%), who traditionally live in the lowlands. The minority ethnic communities (14.3% of the population, 12.25 million people) live mainly in the mountainous and highland regions (Montagnards). Vietnam recognizes 54 distinct ethnic groups with unique religious, linguistic and cultural characteristics and identities. Five ethnic minority groups have populations of over 1 million people: the Tay, 1.63 million (1.8%); the Thai, 1.55 million (1.77%); the Muong, 1.27 million (1.5%); the Khmer, 1.26 million (1.4%); and the Hmong, 1.1 million (1.3%). Of 64 provinces, 49 have an ethnic minority population of at least 30 per cent.

State repression of the highland ethnic minorities was implemented systematically after Communist unification in 1975, but its origins date back to the 1960s when 40,000 Montagnards were recruited by the United States for military service during the Vietnam War. The Montagnards had formed a resistance movement named FULRO (Forces Unies pour la Libération des Races Opprimés), which continued to militarily resist the Communist authorities until 1992, when FULRO's last 400 members surrendered to the United Nations in Cambodia. Between 1975 and 1979, some 8,000 Montagnards were killed or captured by the Vietnamese military. Although FULRO no longer exists, the government continues to arrest and imprison Montagnards on charges of pro-FULFO activities or "splittism", in reference to an activist church movement called Dega Protestantism (Tin Lanh Dega) which the authorities believe has aspirations for self-rule.

Vietnam claims that ethnic minority people are actively exercising their rights to political participation through the exercise of representative democracy and direct democracy. In the National Assembly in the 2007-2011 tenure, there were 87 members of minorities, accounting for 17.65 % of the Deputies, while ethnic minority people account for 13.8% of the total population in the whole country. In the composition of People's councils at all levels in the 2004-2009 tenure, the percentage of People's Deputies from ethnic minorities was 20.52% at provincial level, 20.18% at district level, and 24.4% at commune level. Moreover, ethnic minority people are said to hold key positions in State organs from central to local levels, such as the Vice Chairman of the National Assembly, the Chairman of the Ethnic Council of the National Assembly, and the Minister-Chairman of the Committee for Ethnic Minority Affairs (³⁶³⁵).

³⁶³⁵ [Thuat, 2009]

Comments: One cannot easily decide whether to classify all ethnic minorities as junior partners, powerless or discriminated. The decision to classify them as powerless could be rightly contested:

Modern states dominate the lives of minorities to an extent never experienced before. Under pressures to change and assimilate into the mainstream, the question of how to preserve cultural distinctions arises. In Vietnam, the dominant ethnic group, the Kinh, have long sought to transform and absorb cultures and peoples perceived as backward. In these recent years, indigenous minorities in Vietnam have had to endure policies promulgated by the about-turn of a counter-traditionalist Communist regime resorting to capitalist solutions for state management. The government-backed migration of low-land Kinh to the Central Highlands has totally changed the relative population proportions in the regions where ethnic minorities used to be the majority. Before the Vietnam War, the population of the Central Highlands, estimated at between three and three-and-a-half million, was almost exclusively "Montagnars" ("mountain people"). Today, the population is approximately four million, of whom about one million are highlanders (nguoi thuong). The main ethnic minorities in the Central Highlands, in order of population, are the Gia Rai (Jarai), Rhade, Bahnar, Koho, Mnong (called Bunong/Phnong in Cambodia), and Stieng. Recent reports indicate that wealth disparities are increasing alarmingly between the ethnic minorities and the majority Kinh people in Vietnam. While the Vietnamese government claims that wealth disparity is due to the geographic remoteness of ethnic minorities, human rights observers claim that deep-rooted stereotypes of ethnic minorities as being "backward" or "uncivilized" strongly influence government policies at national and local levels. They criticize that poverty reduction programmes often include campaigns to eradicate the culture, traditional lifestyle, religious beliefs and practices of minority peoples, resulting in even greater marginalization. Moreover, the observers state that discrimination is also rooted in Vietnam's political system, as in the one-Party state, there are no independently-run newspapers, no free trade unions, no civil society or an independent judiciary and that without these safeguards, ethnic minorities have no means to claim or defend their rights. This applies also to other minorities - like the Khmer, Hmong - whose protests are strongly repressed.

Bibliography

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Political status of ethnic groups in Vietnam

From 1954 until 1975

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Kinh (Vietnamese)	0.794 506 6	DOMINANT
Tay	0.018 311 292	IRRELEVANT
Thai	0.016 276 704	IRRELEVANT
Muong	0.014 242 116	IRRELEVANT
Nung	0.010 172 94	IRRELEVANT
Hoa (Chinese)	0.010 172 94	POWERLESS
Hmong	0.009 155 646	IRRELEVANT
Dao	0.007 121 058	IRRELEVANT



Figure 823: Political status of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1954-1975.

From 1976 until 1978

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Kinh (Vietnamese)	0.781	DOMINANT
Tay	0.018	DISCRIMINATED
Thai	0.016	DISCRIMINATED
Muong	0.014	DISCRIMINATED
Khmer	0.013	DISCRIMINATED
Nung	0.01	DISCRIMINATED
Hoa (Chinese)	0.01	DISCRIMINATED
Hmong	0.009	DISCRIMINATED
Dao	0.007	DISCRIMINATED
Gia Rai	0.004	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 824: Political status of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1976-1978.

From 1979 until 2013

Group name	Proportional size	Political status
Kinh (Vietnamese)	0.85	DOMINANT
Tay	0.018	POWERLESS
Thai	0.018	POWERLESS
Muong	0.015	POWERLESS
Khmer	0.014	POWERLESS
Hmong	0.01	POWERLESS
Nung	0.01	POWERLESS
Hoa (Chinese)	0.01	POWERLESS
Dao	0.007	POWERLESS
Gia Rai	0.004	POWERLESS



Figure 825: Political status of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1979-2013.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Vietnam

From 1954 until 1975



Figure 826: Map of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1979-2013.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Kinh (Vietnamese)	53 254	Regional & urban
■ Hoa (Chinese)	1 756	Regional & urban

Table 244: List of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1954-1975.

From 1976 until 2013

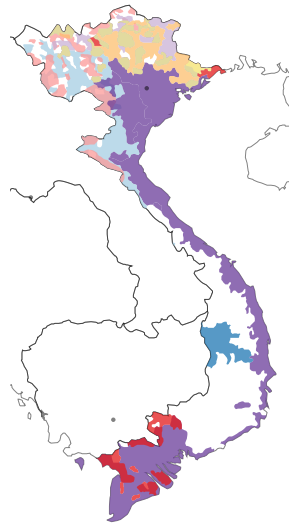


Figure 827: Map of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1979-2013.











Group name	Area in km ²	Type
 Kinh (Vietnamese)	124 012	Regional & urban
 Thai	35 366	Regionally based
 Hmong	20 507	Regionally based
 Tay	18 875	Regionally based
 Dao	16 167	Regionally based
 Khmer	15 078	Regionally based
 Muong	15 050	Regionally based
 Gia Rai	11 521	Regionally based
 Nung	8 591	Regionally based
 Hoa (Chinese)	1 756	Regional & urban

Table 245: List of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1976-2013.

Conflicts in Vietnam

Starting on 1946-11-20

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	Viet minh		1946-11-20			

Starting on 1965-12-31

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of South Vietnam	Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam)		1965-12-31			

Starting on 1974-01-19

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of China	Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam)		1974-01-19			

Starting on 1975-05-01

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam)		1975-05-01			