

Vietnam

Ethnicity in Vietnam

Group selection

The majority of Vietnam's population of 89 million are ethnic Viet, or **Kinh** (over 85%), who traditionally live in the lowlands, especially along the coast. Vietnam recognizes 54 distinct ethnic groups with unique religious, linguistic and cultural identities (14.3% of the population, 12.25 million people). They mainly live in the mountainous and highland areas and are called "Montagnards" in some reports, a generic term for all ethnic minorities, especially those from the Central Highlands (⁴⁶⁹⁹).

⁴⁶⁹⁹ [Minority Rights Group International, 2018]

Politically relevant ethnic minority groups of more than one million are 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%). Further relevant minorities are the **Nung**, the **Gia Rai**, the **Dao**, and the Chinese, referred to as **Hoa**.

Power relations

1954-1975

The period from 1946 to 1975 was marked by foreign intervention and war. Violent conflict erupted against French authority in the First Indochina War until communist forces under Ho Chi Minh defeated the French in 1954 and Vietnam became actually independent at last. Under the Geneva Accords negotiated in the same year, Vietnam was divided into a communist North and an anti-communist South. Thus, this period only discusses North Vietnam (for South Vietnam, see "Republic of Vietnam"). Soon after, the US started to interfere in local politics, supporting South Vietnam in its struggle against the communist regime in the North, leading to all-out war from 1967 to 1975.

The Kinh majority is coded as Dominant in this period and the ethnic minorities as Irrelevant, since there is no evidence that they played a significant political role on the national level. The only exception are the Hoa (Chinese) who are coded as Powerless with regional autonomy.

1976-1978

This marks the consolidation period of the communist regime under Ho Chi Minh after the reunification of North and South Vietnam. The Kinh are continuously coded as Dominant. The assets and businesses of Hoa, who had previously dominated trade, service, textile, and transport industries in Saigon under the American-backed southern regime were seized in a series of state-led anti-bourgeois movements. Many of the seized industries became state-owned enterprises. Consequently, the Hoa made up a disproportionately large percentage of the people fleeing Vietnam by boat from 1975 to 1979 (⁴⁷⁰⁰). Their status is therefore changed to Discriminated.

⁴⁷⁰⁰ [Minority Rights Group International, 2018]

State repression of the highland ethnic minorities was implemented systematically after unification in 1975. This was partly rooted in the US army's recruitment of 40,000 Montagnards into military service during the Vietnam War. Further, the Montagnards had formed a resistance movement named FULRO (Forces Unies pour la Liberation des Races Opprimees) in the 1960ies. Between 1975 and 1979, some 8,000 Montagnards were killed or captured by the Vietnamese military. The movement continued its militant resistance against the communist authorities until 1992, when the remaining 400 members surrendered to the United Nations in Cambodia. Therefore, all ethnic minorities are coded as Discriminated in this period.

1979-2017

After consolidating its rule, the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) established what is termed "the most stable dictatorship in the region for decades" (⁴⁷⁰¹). The VCP prohibits the formation of any independent political parties, labor unions, or human rights organizations. Authorities require official approval for public gatherings and refuse to grant permission for meetings, marches, or protests deemed politically or otherwise unacceptable (⁴⁷⁰²).

⁴⁷⁰¹ [Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2018]

⁴⁷⁰² [Human Rights Watch, 2017]

The status of the ethnic minorities is debatable. The authorities claim that ethnic minority people actively exercise their rights to political participation by means of representative direct democracy (⁴⁷⁰³). A number of seats in the National Assembly are reserved for members of ethnic minority groups and the law prohibits discrimination against ethnic minorities (⁴⁷⁰⁴).

⁴⁷⁰³ [Thuat, 2009]

⁴⁷⁰⁴ [US Department of State, 2016]

However, there is evidence that the Khmer Krom people were discriminated against after Vietnam invaded Cambodia to depose the Khmer Rouge. There is further evidence that all other ethnic minority groups suffered from Kinh-dominated government policies at one point or another as well, such as the creation of New Economic Zones that encouraged Kinh settlement on ethnic minority land. They have long sought to transform and absorb cultures and peoples perceived as backward. In 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 lowland 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, almost exclusively consisted of Montagnards. Today, the population is approximately four million, of whom about one million are highlanders (⁴⁷⁰⁵; ⁴⁷⁰⁶).

On the other hand, ethnic minority groups currently receive state subsidies under a number of development programs. Further, the General Party Secretary of the Communist Party, Nong Duc Manh, is of the ethnic Tay minority. They are at the brink of being coded as discriminated. However, the government's focus does not seem to target ethnicity in the first place but any kind of dissidence challenging VCP rule. Thus, the ethnic minorities are coded as Powerless.

⁴⁷⁰⁵ [Mc Dougall, 2011]

⁴⁷⁰⁶ [VCHR and FIDH, 2012]

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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 992: 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
Hoa (Chinese)	0.01	DISCRIMINATED
Nung	0.01	DISCRIMINATED
Hmong	0.009	DISCRIMINATED
Dao	0.007	DISCRIMINATED
Gia Rai	0.004	DISCRIMINATED



Figure 993: Political status of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1976-1978.

From 1979 until 2017

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



Figure 994: Political status of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1979-2017.

Geographical coverage of ethnic groups in Vietnam

From 1954 until 1974



Figure 995: Map of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1954-1974.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Kinh (Vietnamese)	53 098	Regionally based
■	Hoa (Chinese)	1 752	Regional & urban

Table 337: List of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1954-1974.

From 1975 until 1975

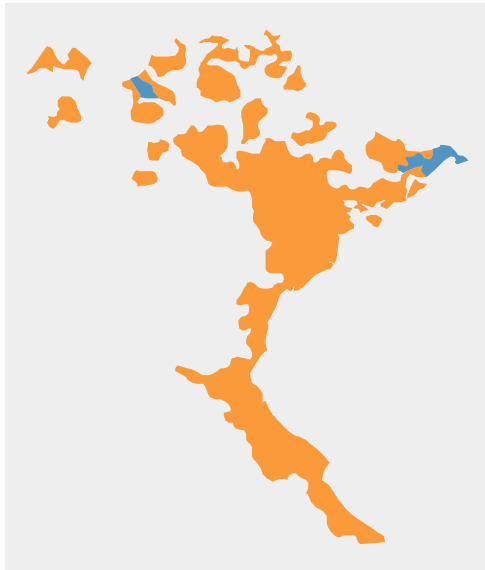


Figure 996: Map of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1975-1975.

Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■ Kinh (Vietnamese)	53 098	Regionally based
■ Hoa (Chinese)	1752	Regional & urban

Table 338: List of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1975-1975.

From 1976 until 2017

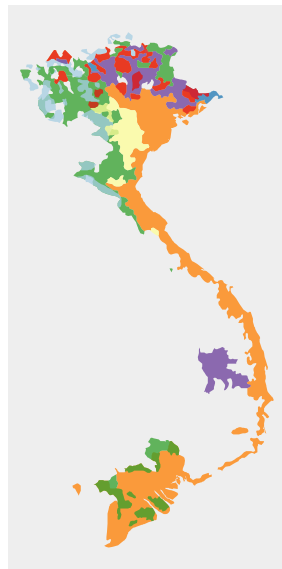


Figure 997: Map of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1976-2017.

	Group name	Area in km ²	Type
■	Kinh (Vietnamese)	124 825	Regionally based
■	Thai	39 515	Regionally based
■	Hmong	20 450	Regionally based
■	Tay	19 934	Regionally based
■	Dao	16 125	Regionally based
■	Khmer	15 286	Regionally based
■	Muong	15 007	Regionally based
■	Gia Rai	11 478	Regionally based
■	Nung	8 569	Regionally based
■	Hoa (Chinese)	1 752	Regional & urban

Table 339: List of ethnic groups in Vietnam during 1976-2017.

Conflicts in Vietnam

Starting on 1946-11-19

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of France	Viet minh		1946-11-19			

Starting on 1965-12-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of South Vietnam	Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam)		1965-12-30			

Starting on 1974-01-18

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of China	Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam)		1974-01-18			

Starting on 1975-04-30

Side A	Side B	Group name	Start	Claim	Recruitment	Support
Government of Cambodia (Kampuchea)	Government of Vietnam (North Vietnam)		1975-04-30			