

Research Article

VIETNAM'S INSTITUTIONAL REFORM 2024–2025: DOCTRINAL PERSPECTIVES ON CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS AND TRANSITIONAL COMPLIANCE

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Received 26th June 2025; Accepted 27th July 2025; Published online 30th August 2025

ABSTRACT

This article examines Vietnam's institutional reforms in 2024–2025 within the framework of the Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (2013), as amended by Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15 of the National Assembly (16 June 2025), and guided by Party Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW (12 April 2025). Using doctrinal legal analysis, the study explores three dimensions: (i) the constitutional restructuring of local government through the abolition of district-level administration and the creation of a two-tier system; (ii) the consolidation of judicial and political institutions; and (iii) the integration of anti-corruption and efficiency reforms. It further proposes a compliance checklist for transitional law implementation, ensuring continuity, protection of rights, and harmonization with Vietnam's commitments to the rule of law and socio-economic development. The study argues that these amendments reflect both continuity with the 2013 constitutional model and a transformative shift towards streamlined governance and stronger accountability.

Keywords: Vietnam; Constitutional Reform; 2013 Constitution; Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15; Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW; Local Government; Judicial Reform; Socialist Rule of Law; Doctrinal Analysis; Transitional Law; Institutional Reform; Anti-Corruption.

INTRODUCTION

Vietnam's constitutional development reflects a dialectic between revolutionary heritage and pragmatic adaptation to the demands of socio-economic modernization. Since 1946, five constitutions have charted the country's trajectory: the foundational charter of independence (1946), the socialist constitutionalization of 1959 and 1980, the reformist 1992 text, and the 2013 Constitution which consolidated the "rule-of-law socialist state" (nhà nước pháp quyền xã hội chủ nghĩa) of the people, by the people, and for the people. Each constitutional iteration has coincided with broader political-economic reforms, most notably Đổi mới from 1986 onwards, embedding constitutional change as an essential vector of institutional restructuring.

The 2013 Constitution, adopted on 28 November 2013, reasserted the central role of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV) (Article 4), emphasized the unity of state power with functional division across legislative, executive, and judicial bodies (Article 2), and created a three-tier local government structure consisting of provincial, district, and commune levels. It also reaffirmed fundamental rights, expanded mechanisms for social supervision (Article 9), and clarified the role of socio-political organizations. Yet, as commentators have noted, the 2013 framework also entrenched systemic ambiguities: while espousing "socialist rule of law," it maintained the CPV's supremacy, creating enduring tensions between legality, efficiency, and political centralism.¹

Against this backdrop, Vietnam entered a new phase of institutional reform in 2024–2025. The Eleventh Plenum of the CPV Central Committee (Resolution 60-NQ/TW, April 2025) endorsed sweeping administrative and judicial restructuring, paving the way for the National Assembly's adoption of Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15 (16

June 2025).² The amendments, effective 1 July 2025, abolish the district-level of local government, merge provinces, and reorganize courts and procuracies into a three-tier structure. They also consolidate socio-political organizations under the umbrella of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, reflecting a broader Party-State agenda of institutional streamlining and anti-corruption consolidation.³

This article argues that the 2025 reforms, though couched as technical and efficiency-oriented, amount to a constitutional moment of considerable magnitude. By reshaping local governance and judicial structures, they recalibrate the doctrinal balance between constitutional supremacy and political leadership, while raising novel questions about democratic representation, rights protection, and transitional legality. The article proceeds in seven parts. Part II outlines the 2013 constitutional framework as the baseline. Part III details the 2025 reform package. Part IV provides doctrinal analysis of the amendments. Part V develops a transition-law compliance checklist. Part VI situates the reforms within Vietnam's broader institutional trajectory and comparative contexts. Part VII concludes with reflections on constitutional continuity and change.

THE 2013 CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The 2013 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam (hereafter "2013 Constitution"), adopted by the National Assembly on 28 November 2013, represents both continuity with earlier socialist constitutions and a partial accommodation of *Đổi mới* reforms. It retains the ideological primacy of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), the doctrine of unified state power, and the model of a socialist-oriented market economy. Yet it also integrates broader

¹Vietnam; Constitutional Reform; 2013 Constitution; Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15; Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW; Local Government; Judicial Reform; Socialist Rule of Law; Doctrinal Analysis; Transitional Law; Institutional Reform; Anti-Corruption.

²CPV Central Committee, Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW, 12 April 2025, on draft reports for the 14th Party Congress and institutional reform directions [hereafter "Resolution 60-NQ/TW"].

³National Assembly, Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15, 16 June 2025, Amending and Supplementing a Number of Articles of the 2013 Constitution [hereafter "Resolution 203/2025"].

commitments to rights protection and institutional checks, reflecting lessons from prior decades of transition.⁴

A. The Political System and the Party's Leadership

Article 2 proclaims Vietnam as a “socialist rule-of-law state of the people, by the people, and for the people.”⁵ This formula—*nhà nước pháp quyền xã hội chủ nghĩa của nhân dân, do nhân dân, vì nhân dân*—conveys both an aspiration towards legality and a confirmation of socialist orientation. While Article 2(3) stipulates the principle of division, coordination, and control among legislative, executive, and judicial bodies, the doctrine of separation of powers is not embraced in the Western sense. Rather, state power remains “unified,” and functional division is subordinate to Party leadership.

This leadership is entrenched by Article 4(1), which declares the CPV as “the vanguard of the working class, the labouring people and the whole nation, the faithful representative of their interests, and the leading force of the State and society.”⁶ Notably, Article 4(3) subjects the Party's organisations and members to the Constitution and law, thereby recognizing a form of legal supremacy. However, in practice, the Party's guiding role continues to shape the boundaries of institutional reform, producing what scholars have termed “instrumental constitutionalism” rather than a robust model of constitutional constraint.⁷

B. Local Government Structure

Chapter IX establishes a three-tiered local government system: (i) provinces and centrally-run cities; (ii) districts, towns, and provincial cities; and (iii) communes, wards, and townships.⁸ At each level, People's Councils function as local representative bodies, while People's Committees operate as executive organs. The model embodies the principle of “representative democracy” (Article 6) through elections at each level, alongside the broader framework of “people's mastery.”

Despite its elaborate layering, the system has been criticized for administrative overlap, inefficiency, and excessive centralization. District-level organs, in particular, often duplicated functions of provinces above and communes below, raising questions about their necessity in an era of digitalized governance and fiscal rationalization.⁹ The persistence of this three-tier model in 2013 thus reflected continuity more than reform, even as debates on simplification were already under way within Party and state organs.

C. Judicial System

The 2013 Constitution also structured Vietnam's judiciary as a four-tier system: (i) the Supreme People's Court, (ii) high-level People's Courts, (iii) provincial People's Courts, and (iv) district People's Courts.¹⁰ Article 103 emphasized principles of independence of adjudication and equality before the law, though within the socialist

legality framework rather than a doctrine of separation of powers. The procuracy (Supreme People's Procuracy and subordinate procuracies) paralleled the court system, serving prosecutorial and supervisory functions (Article 107).

While the constitutional text affirms judicial independence, practice has revealed systemic constraints: appointment and promotion of judges remain heavily influenced by Party structures; procuracies retain supervisory authority over courts; and mechanisms of constitutional review are absent.¹¹ This structural design—reinforced by Article 4's political supremacy clause—continued to shape debates leading up to the 2025 amendments.

D. Rights Framework and Participatory Mechanisms

Chapters II and III of the 2013 Constitution codify an expansive catalogue of rights, including rights to life, liberty, equality, and participation in governance. Article 25 guarantees freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and association, subject to statutory restrictions for reasons of national security, public order, or morality. Articles 27–29 establish the rights to vote, to stand for election, and to participate in referenda.

Of particular doctrinal significance is Article 9, which entrenches the Vietnam Fatherland Front as a “political base of the people's power,” tasked with social supervision and criticism.¹² Article 10 separately affirms the Vietnam Trade Union as the socio-political organisation of the working class. This corporatist embedding of mass organisations reflects Vietnam's model of mediated representation: political pluralism is not permitted, but representative functions are channelled through state-linked associations.

E. Doctrinal Assessment

In comparative perspective, the 2013 Constitution represents a hybrid between socialist legality and emergent rule-of-law aspirations. It recognizes human rights in more explicit terms than earlier texts, mandates legality as the mode of state governance (Article 8), and nominally constrains the Party to constitutional norms. Yet by entrenching CPV leadership, it institutionalizes limits on constitutionalism's constraining function. This dualism—law as both instrument and norm—has been described as Vietnam's version of “transitional and instrumental constitutionalism.”¹³

For institutional reform debates, two features of the 2013 Constitution were decisive. First, its commitment to a three-tier local government system and four-tier judiciary locked in a complex administrative architecture that reformers increasingly viewed as inefficient. Second, its corporatist entrenchment of mass organisations created overlapping mandates, fueling calls for consolidation. Both issues became central targets of the 2025 reform package.

THE 2025 REFORM PACKAGE: RESOLUTION 203/2025/QH15 AND RESOLUTION 60-NQ/TW

The institutional reform package of 2024–2025 culminated in two landmark instruments: Party Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW (12 April 2025) of the Eleventh Plenum of the CPV Central Committee, and National Assembly Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15 (16 June 2025).

⁴Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 2013, adopted 28 November 2013, promulgated by the National Assembly [hereafter “Constitution 2013”]. For doctrinal commentary, see Mark Sidel, *Constitutionalism in Vietnam: Instrumental or Transformative?* (2009) 3 *Asian J Comp L* 1.

⁵Constitution 2013, Art 2(1).

⁶*Ibid.*, Art 4(1).

⁷Martin Painter, Ha Hoang Hop & Chu Quang Khôi, *Institutional Reform for Public Administration in Contemporary Vietnam* (UNDP, 2009) 5–6 [hereafter “UNDP Institutional Reform Report”].

⁸Constitution 2013, Arts 110–111.

⁹CPV Central Committee debates, see Resolution 17-NQ/TW (2007) on acceleration of administrative reform; also UNDP *Institutional Reform Report*, 21–24.

¹⁰Constitution 2013, Art 102–103.

¹¹Gillespie, “The Political-Legal Nexus in Vietnam” in *Asian Discourses of Rule of Law* (Routledge, 2006) 144..

¹²Constitution 2013, Art 9.

¹³Sidel, *supra* note 1; Annette M. Kim, “Seeds of Reform: Lessons from Vietnam about Informality and Institutional Change” (2012) 26 *Int'l Econ J* 391.

Taken together, they constitute the most far-reaching amendments to the constitutional order since 2013.

A. Political Genesis and Party Resolution 60-NQ/TW

Resolution 60-NQ/TW, adopted at the Eleventh Plenum of the Thirteenth CPV Central Committee, reflected a political consensus to advance sweeping institutional reforms in preparation for the XIV Party Congress (2026).¹⁴ It authorised three broad directions. First, the abolition of district-level government and the reorganization of local government into two tiers: provinces and communes.¹⁵ Second, the consolidation of administrative units, reducing the number of provinces to 34 and merging approximately 60–70% of existing communes.¹⁶ Third, the restructuring of courts, procuracies, and Party organisations in parallel with the new two-tier system.

Resolution 60-NQ/TW also emphasised the need to “arrange and streamline” socio-political organisations, integrating mass organisations more directly into the Vietnam Fatherland Front.¹⁷ The political logic was twofold: to simplify administrative layers and to reassert Party control by embedding socio-political associations into a single umbrella structure. Moreover, Resolution 60-NQ/TW explicitly mandated the amendment of the 2013 Constitution, acknowledging that reforms of such magnitude required constitutional revision.

B. National Assembly Resolution 203/2025/QH15

On 16 June 2025, the National Assembly adopted Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15, formally amending and supplementing five articles of the 2013 Constitution.¹⁸ The Resolution, effective 1 July 2025, implemented the Party’s political directions and introduced the following doctrinal changes:

1. Local Government Restructuring

Articles 110 and 111 were amended to abolish district-level administrative units. Henceforth, local government comprises only two tiers: (i) provinces and centrally-run cities, and (ii) communes, wards, and townships. District-level People’s Councils and People’s Committees were dissolved, with their functions redistributed between provinces and communes.¹⁹

2. Judicial Reorganisation

The four-tier system of courts was reduced to three levels: (i) the Supreme People’s Court, (ii) provincial courts, and (iii) regional courts. District courts and high-level courts were abolished. Procuracies were similarly restructured into three levels. This reform sought to streamline judicial administration, concentrate resources, and enhance consistency.²⁰

3. Mass Organisation Integration

Articles 9 and 10 were revised to consolidate socio-political organisations under the Vietnam Fatherland Front. While the text continues to recognise the Trade Union as a constitutional body, it is now explicitly situated within the Front’s umbrella. This reflects a corporatist realignment intended to reduce duplication and improve supervision.²¹

4. Legislative and Supervisory Adjustments

Article 84 was amended to clarify the National Assembly’s oversight role during the transition, particularly its authority to delegate temporary law-making powers to the Government to manage the reorganisation of local and judicial institutions.²²

5. Technical and Transitional Provisions

Resolution 203/2025 includes transitional clauses providing that district-level bodies cease operation from 1 July 2025, and mandating the Government to issue detailed regulations to ensure administrative continuity.²³

C. Transitional Delegation of Law-Making Authority

In parallel with Resolution 203/2025, the National Assembly adopted Resolution 206/2025/QH15, authorising the Government to issue “legal normative adjustments” necessary to implement the reforms during the 2025–2027 transition period.²⁴ This delegation—exceptional in Vietnam’s constitutional practice—raised questions about constitutional supremacy and the balance of power between the legislature and executive. The delegation was time-bound, subject to reporting requirements, and justified on grounds of legal continuity.

D. Immediate Institutional Impacts

The immediate effect of Resolution 203/2025 was the dissolution of more than 700 district-level units and their elected People’s Councils. Provincial authorities assumed control over former district competences, while commune-level administrations became the first point of citizen interface. At the judicial level, case files were transferred from district courts to newly established regional courts, raising logistical challenges in case management. In the political sphere, the integration of socio-political organisations into the Fatherland Front sparked debate over representational diversity and the autonomy of trade unions.

E. Doctrinal Significance

The 2025 reforms mark a constitutional recalibration in at least three respects. First, by abolishing district-level government, they reconfigure the architecture of local democracy and representation, narrowing the channels through which citizens exercise electoral rights (Article 7, Constitution 2013). Second, by delegating transitional law-making powers to the Government, they test the principle of constitutional supremacy and legislative primacy. Third, by consolidating mass organisations, they reaffirm Vietnam’s corporatist model but risk reducing the pluralism of state-linked associations. These doctrinal shifts will be analysed in detail in Part IV.

DOCTRINAL ANALYSIS OF THE AMENDMENTS

The 2025 reform package, implemented through Resolution 203/2025/QH15 and guided by Resolution 60-NQ/TW, does more than restructure administrative units. It reshapes the doctrinal balance of Vietnam’s constitutional order by altering the relationship between state organs, citizens, and mass organisations. Three themes warrant critical examination: (A) constitutional supremacy and delegated authority, (B) representation and local democracy, and (C) judicial independence and institutional streamlining.

¹⁴CPV Central Committee, Resolution No. 60-NQ/TW, 12 April 2025 [hereafter “Resolution 60-NQ/TW”].

¹⁵Resolution 60-NQ/TW, §5 (on local government two-tier model).

¹⁶Ibid, approving reduction to 34 provinces and 60–70% commune mergers.

¹⁷Ibid, §5 (on socio-political organisations).

¹⁸National Assembly, Resolution No. 203/2025/QH15, 16 June 2025 [hereafter “Resolution 203/2025”].

¹⁹Resolution 203/2025, amending Constitution 2013, Arts 110–111.

²⁰Ibid, amending Arts 102–103, 107.

²¹Ibid, amending Arts 9–10.

²²Ibid, amending Art 84.

²³Resolution 203/2025, Transitional Provisions, cl 2.

²⁴National Assembly, Resolution No. 206/2025/QH15, on temporary delegation of law-making powers (16 June 2025).

A. Constitutional Supremacy and Delegated Authority

The principle of constitutional supremacy is expressed in Article 119 of the 2013 Constitution, which provides that “the Constitution is the fundamental and supreme law of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” and that “all legal documents must conform to the Constitution.”²⁵ In theory, constitutional amendments must respect this principle by ensuring coherence and continuity. However, Resolution 203/2025’s transitional provisions challenge this orthodoxy.

By authorising the Government to issue normative instruments with quasi-legislative effect during the 2025–2027 transition (via Resolution 206/2025/QH15), the National Assembly has delegated part of its constitutional function to the executive.²⁶ While justified pragmatically—to handle the vast number of district-level regulations requiring adaptation—this delegation blurs the distinction between legislative and executive authority. It raises the question whether such delegation, even if time-bound, is compatible with Article 70 of the 2013 Constitution, which reserves law-making to the National Assembly.

Comparatively, this resembles emergency delegation models found in transitional constitutions elsewhere, such as South Africa (1994) and Indonesia (1999), where executive ordinances were permitted under strict sunset clauses.²⁷ In Vietnam’s one-party system, however, the absence of judicial review or constitutional adjudication mechanisms increases the risk of executive overreach. The doctrinal tension thus lies between the necessity of flexibility and the commitment to constitutional supremacy.

B. Representation and Local Democracy

The abolition of district-level People’s Councils eliminates one entire layer of directly elected representative bodies. Under the 2013 framework, citizens elected councillors at provincial, district, and commune levels (Articles 6–7).²⁸ Resolution 203/2025 reduces this to two levels: provincial and commune. While the reform promises administrative efficiency, it also narrows the avenues for electoral participation and oversight.

Doctrinally, this adjustment recalibrates the meaning of “people’s mastery” (*quyền làm chủ của nhân dân*), a central concept in Article 2. The loss of district-level representation risks lengthening the vertical distance between citizens and provincial authorities, particularly in geographically large provinces. Commune-level councils may remain close to the people, but their resource limitations restrict their ability to hold provincial executives accountable.

Comparative lessons are instructive. France’s 2010 territorial reform and China’s county-level streamlining show that reducing intermediate tiers can indeed improve efficiency, but at the cost of weakening local voice.²⁹ Vietnam’s reform follows a similar trajectory, privileging managerial rationalisation over pluralist representation. The risk is a democratic deficit within an already constrained electoral framework.

²⁵Constitution 2013, Art 119.

²⁶National Assembly, Resolution No. 206/2025/QH15 (16 June 2025), on transitional delegation of law-making.

²⁷Richard Albert, *Constitutional Amendments: Making, Breaking, and Changing Constitutions* (Oxford UP, 2019) 278–283.

²⁸Constitution 2013, Arts 6–7.

²⁹See Romain Pasquier, “Territorial Reform in France: Between Rationalisation and Democratic Accountability” (2011) 37 *French Politics* 205; Susan Finder, “China’s Judicial Reforms and the County-Level Courts” (2016) *China Law Blog*.

C. Judicial Independence and Institutional Streamlining

The judicial reforms abolish district courts and high-level courts, creating a three-tier system (Supreme, provincial, regional). On paper, this aims to concentrate judicial resources, reduce fragmentation, and enhance consistency of adjudication.³⁰ However, two doctrinal questions emerge.

First, will reducing the number of courts improve independence? Article 103 of the 2013 Constitution guarantees that “judges and assessors are independent and shall only obey the law.” Yet in practice, the proximity of district courts to local Party committees often compromised independence.³¹ Abolishing district courts might mitigate some local interference, but transferring cases to provincial or regional courts risks over-centralisation, potentially making judges more dependent on higher-level Party supervision.

Second, the reform of procuracies into three levels continues Vietnam’s traditional model of strong prosecutorial oversight (Article 107).³² Without parallel reforms to reduce the procuracy’s dominance, judicial independence may remain limited. Comparative constitutionalism suggests that efficiency reforms do not automatically enhance independence; rather, institutional safeguards such as transparent judicial appointments, tenure security, and external review mechanisms are necessary.³³ These remain absent in Vietnam’s amended framework.

D. Corporatist Reconfiguration of Mass Organisations

By revising Articles 9 and 10, Resolution 203/2025 integrates socio-political organisations more firmly into the Vietnam Fatherland Front. While doctrinally consistent with Vietnam’s corporatist tradition, this centralisation reduces the distinctiveness of trade unions and other associations. The move may be read as reinforcing the “unity of political will” under Party leadership, but it also narrows the diversity of representational channels.

In comparative perspective, this resembles China’s consolidation of mass organisations under the United Front Work Department.³⁴ While such integration may streamline coordination, it risks eroding the semi-autonomous space for trade unions, women’s organisations, or veterans’ associations. From a doctrinal standpoint, this reform underscores the primacy of Article 4 (Party leadership) over Article 9 (social supervision), privileging political consolidation over participatory pluralism.

E. Interim Appointments and the Rule of Law

Finally, transitional clauses authorising interim appointments to fill positions until elections under the new two-tier model raise concerns. The 2013 Constitution (Articles 6–7) stresses the principle of democratic election. The interim appointment scheme may be doctrinally defensible as a temporary expedient, but prolonged reliance on appointments would contravene the principle of electoral legitimacy. Monitoring the duration and scope of interim governance will thus be a key test of fidelity to constitutional commitments.

³⁰Resolution 203/2025, amending Arts 102–103.

³¹UNDP Institutional Reform Report (2009) 21–24

³²Constitution 2013, Art 107.

³³Tom Ginsburg & Tamir Moustafa (eds), *Rule by Law: The Politics of Courts in Authoritarian Regimes* (Cambridge UP, 2008).

³⁴Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The United Front Work Department in China* (Routledge, 2015).

TRANSITION-LAW COMPLIANCE CHECKLIST

The abolition of district-level government and reorganisation of judicial and administrative structures, effective 1 July 2025, necessitate a detailed roadmap for transitional compliance.³⁵ Without careful management, Vietnam risks legal discontinuity, disruption of services, and erosion of rights protection. Building on Articles 119–120 of the 2013 Constitution, which establish constitutional supremacy and amendment procedures,³⁶ this section proposes a **transition-law compliance checklist**. The aim is to identify the necessary steps for lawful, orderly, and accountable implementation of Resolution 203/2025/QH15 and related measures.

A. Constitutional Transition

1. Termination of District-Level Organs

A critical first step in the transitional process is the formal termination of all district-level People's Councils and People's Committees on 1 July 2025. The dissolution must be clearly documented through official instruments to avoid ambiguity about the authority of these bodies after the effective date. Such a measure ensures legal certainty and prevents any continued exercise of powers by district-level organs that no longer exist under the amended constitutional framework.³⁷ The handover of responsibilities to provincial and commune-level authorities must be accompanied by clear statutory and administrative guidance, so that citizens and institutions alike are aware of the new chain of authority.

Equally important is the adoption of archival protocols to preserve the records, decisions, and budgets of the former district-level units. These records form an essential part of the institutional memory of the state and provide a legal basis for ongoing obligations such as contracts, debts, and service delivery. Proper archiving safeguards transparency, enables auditing, and ensures continuity in governance by allowing successor authorities to access the information necessary to honour prior commitments. Without such protocols, Vietnam risks losing critical administrative data, creating uncertainty for citizens, and weakening accountability in the first years of the two-tier system.

2. Continuity of Legal Effect

To safeguard legal continuity, it is essential to clarify that all decisions, contracts, and regulations issued by district-level bodies prior to their abolition remain valid unless they are expressly repealed by a competent authority. This principle ensures that citizens, businesses, and public institutions can continue to rely on rights and obligations established before 1 July 2025, preventing legal uncertainty and potential disputes. It also reflects the doctrine of non-retroactivity, a cornerstone of constitutional legality, which prohibits the invalidation of acts lawfully adopted under a previous institutional framework. By affirming the ongoing validity of such instruments, the state preserves stability and reinforces public trust during a sensitive transition.

At the same time, transitional provisions must clearly designate whether provincial or commune-level bodies assume responsibility for enforcing and administering these inherited decisions. This successor authority mechanism ensures that there is no vacuum of power or confusion about where citizens

should turn for services, dispute resolution, or implementation of existing contracts. Assigning enforcement competences also provides a practical framework for budget execution, monitoring of ongoing projects, and accountability for public funds. By embedding these provisions in formal legal instruments—such as decrees or implementing regulations—the National Assembly and Government can ensure a seamless transfer of authority that protects both administrative efficiency and the rights of stakeholders.³⁸

3. Safeguards against Retroactivity

An equally important safeguard is to confirm that citizens' rights and obligations arising under district-level laws remain fully enforceable even after the abolition of district authorities. This guarantee reflects the principle of legal certainty, a foundational element of the socialist rule-of-law state articulated in Article 8 and Article 119 of the 2013 Constitution. Without such assurance, individuals and businesses could face disruption in contractual relations, property entitlements, or administrative approvals that were validly granted under the previous institutional framework. Affirming the continuity of these rights and obligations not only protects vested interests but also reinforces public trust in the state's commitment to orderly governance. In transitional periods, where institutional restructuring may otherwise create ambiguity, the doctrine of legal certainty serves as a stabilising force, ensuring that reforms are forward-looking without undermining the legitimate expectations established under prior law.³⁹

B. Legislative Harmonisation

1. Revising Statutes

The first task of legislative harmonisation is the revision of statutes to align the legal framework with the new two-tier model of local government. Most prominently, the Law on Organisation of Local Government (2015), already subject to multiple revisions, must be amended again in 2025 to reflect the abolition of district-level organs and the redistribution of their functions between provinces and communes. This amendment should not be limited to structural provisions but must also clarify the competences, fiscal relations, and accountability mechanisms of the remaining tiers. In addition, the Law on People's Councils and Committees and the Electoral Law require updating to ensure that representative bodies are elected in conformity with the new system and that electoral districts are adjusted accordingly. Relevant fiscal statutes will also need revision to regulate budgetary flows, transfers, and oversight mechanisms in the absence of district-level intermediaries. Taken together, these statutory amendments form the backbone of legal harmonisation, ensuring that the constitutional reforms of 2025 are embedded in the ordinary legislative order and given practical effect in Vietnam's governance framework.⁴⁰

2. Revising Subordinate Instruments

The second stage of harmonisation concerns the revision of subordinate legal instruments, including government decrees, ministerial circulars, and implementing regulations that continue

³⁵National Assembly, Resolution 203/2025/QH15 (16 June 2025), Transitional Provisions.

³⁶Constitution 2013, Arts 119–120.

³⁷Resolution 60-NQ/TW, 12 April 2025, §5.

³⁸Clarify that decisions, contracts, and regulations issued by district bodies prior to abolition remain valid unless expressly repealed. Enact transitional provisions to designate the successor authority (provincial or commune) responsible for enforcement.

³⁹Confirm that citizens' rights and obligations arising under district-level laws remain enforceable, consistent with the principle of legal certainty.

⁴⁰Amend the Law on Organisation of Local Government (2015, as revised 2025) to reflect the two-tier model. Update the Law on People's Councils and Committees, Electoral Law, and relevant fiscal laws.

to reference district-level authorities. These instruments regulate the day-to-day functioning of administrative and judicial bodies, from land management to education and public health, and thus cannot remain in their current form without generating uncertainty. A comprehensive review is required to identify and catalogue all provisions that assign powers or duties to district-level organs. Once identified, these provisions must be revised to designate either provincial or commune-level bodies as the competent authority, depending on the nature of the function and the capacity of the receiving tier. This replacement process should be guided by clear criteria, balancing efficiency, accessibility, and accountability, to avoid both duplication and gaps in governance. Without such systematic revision, the two-tier model risks being undermined by outdated regulations that perpetuate the shadow of abolished institutions.⁴¹

3. Delegated Authority Oversight

Under Resolution 206/2025/QH15, the National Assembly has delegated to the Government a temporary authority to issue normative adjustments necessary for the smooth implementation of the two-tier model. This delegation, exceptional within Vietnam's constitutional tradition, must be accompanied by strict oversight mechanisms to preserve legislative primacy and constitutional supremacy. At a minimum, the Government should be required to report to the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on a six-month basis, detailing the scope, rationale, and effects of all normative instruments adopted under this delegated mandate. The delegation must also be subject to a firm sunset clause, expiring no later than the end of 2027, to prevent the crystallisation of executive law-making as a permanent practice. Finally, transparency provisions are essential: all temporary instruments must be published promptly and made accessible to citizens, practitioners, and oversight bodies to allow meaningful scrutiny. These safeguards ensure that delegation remains a tool of transitional necessity rather than an erosion of the Assembly's constitutional role as Vietnam's supreme legislative organ.⁴²

C. Judicial Transition

1. Case Transfer Protocols

The reorganisation of the judiciary requires the careful design of case transfer protocols to ensure continuity of adjudication following the abolition of district courts. Clear guidelines must be established for the orderly transfer of all pending civil, criminal, and administrative cases to the appropriate provincial or newly established regional courts. These guidelines should specify the classification of cases, designate responsible clerks or registrars, and provide deadlines for the physical and electronic transfer of files. Equally important is the duty to notify litigants and their counsel of any change in venue. Such notifications must be timely, comprehensible, and accompanied by assurances that no additional fees or procedural delays will be imposed as a result of the restructuring. By guaranteeing both procedural fairness and administrative efficiency, these transfer protocols safeguard the right of access to justice during the transitional phase and prevent reforms intended to promote efficiency from inadvertently undermining public trust in the courts.⁴³

⁴¹Review decrees and circulars referencing district authorities. Replace district-level provisions with provincial or commune equivalents.

⁴²Under Resolution 206/2025/QH15, the Government may issue temporary normative adjustments. Oversight mechanisms must include: Reporting to the Standing Committee of the National Assembly every six months; A sunset clause (no later than the end of 2027); Publication and transparency requirements.

⁴³Resolution 203/2025, amending Arts 102–103 (judiciary).

2. Judicial Personnel Management

A second priority in the judicial transition is the proper management of personnel affected by the abolition of district courts. Judges, prosecutors, and support staff who previously served at the district level must be reassigned to appropriate positions within the provincial and regional courts, or to other state legal institutions, without loss of tenure, seniority, or salary. This reassignment process must be governed by transparent and merit-based criteria to avoid politicised allocation of judicial posts or perceptions of favouritism. Priority should be given to continuity of expertise: judges with significant experience in criminal adjudication, for instance, should be reassigned to chambers where that expertise is most relevant. Training and capacity-building programs should also be offered to ensure that personnel can adapt to the different procedural and caseload dynamics of higher-level courts. By managing human resources carefully, the reform will preserve institutional knowledge, mitigate disruptions in judicial service, and reinforce the constitutional principle of judicial independence during a period of significant institutional flux.

3. Ensuring Access to Justice

A third imperative in the judicial transition is to safeguard access to justice for citizens whose district courts have been dissolved. To prevent litigants from facing excessive travel burdens, court facilities or service points should be maintained in former district centres, even if they operate only as satellite offices under the authority of provincial or regional courts. These service points can provide essential functions such as case filing, document submission, and initial hearings in minor matters, thereby ensuring that justice remains locally accessible. At the same time, the reform presents an opportunity to accelerate the use of digital platforms for case management. Online portals for filing, scheduling, and service of documents can reduce administrative costs and promote transparency, while video-conferencing technology allows hearings to be conducted without requiring parties to travel long distances. By combining physical service points with digital innovations, Vietnam can turn a potential weakness of the two-tier model into a strength, modernising judicial access while protecting citizens' rights during the institutional transition.⁴⁴

D. Administrative Transition

1. Civil Service Continuity

The dissolution of district-level People's Committees will displace large numbers of public servants employed in sectors ranging from education and healthcare to land administration. To uphold the principle of stability in state employment, the Government must guarantee the continuity of civil service rights, ensuring that officials retain their tenure, salaries, and accrued benefits. Where redundancies are unavoidable, retraining and redeployment programs should be established, enabling personnel to transition into roles at the provincial or commune levels. Such measures are vital not only for protecting livelihoods but also for maintaining institutional knowledge during a period of upheaval. Without them, the reforms risk triggering labour disputes, eroding morale, and weakening the effectiveness of local administration.

⁴⁴Maintain court facilities or service points in former district centres to prevent excessive travel burdens for litigants. Explore digital platforms for case filing and hearings.

2. Budget Reallocation

The abolition of district-level treasuries and financial departments requires a clear protocol for transferring assets, liabilities, and budgetary balances to provincial authorities. Transparency is essential: audited statements should be published to demonstrate how district resources have been absorbed and reallocated. New budgetary frameworks must also delineate how funds will flow directly to communes, bypassing the dissolved district layer. These mechanisms should be designed to prevent both fiscal bottlenecks and the concentration of excessive discretion at the provincial level. Robust financial oversight—through the State Audit Office of Vietnam and the National Assembly's Finance Committee—will be indispensable in preserving accountability during the transition.

3. Public Services

Perhaps the most visible test of reform success will lie in the continuity of public services. District-level bodies traditionally played a coordinating role in areas such as licensing, healthcare, and education. To avoid disruption, provincial governments should establish “one-stop shop” administrative centres capable of handling the functions previously performed by district authorities. In remote areas, service units could be maintained in former district centres as satellite offices to ensure that citizens continue to access healthcare, schooling, and administrative procedures without prohibitive travel. At the same time, digitalisation should be prioritised, allowing citizens to complete applications, access records, and make payments online. By combining centralised provincial oversight with accessible local service points, Vietnam can both preserve continuity and modernise public administration.⁴⁵

Taken together, these measures ensure that administrative restructuring does not undermine the state's capacity to deliver core services. By protecting civil servants, reallocating budgets transparently, and safeguarding service provision, the Government can transform the abolition of district-level authorities from a potential disruption into an opportunity to enhance efficiency, accountability, and citizen trust.

E. Human Rights and Citizen Participation

1. Representation

The transition to a two-tier system must not dilute the constitutional guarantee of popular sovereignty. To safeguard electoral rights, the state must commit to holding timely elections for newly constituted provincial and commune councils in 2026, rather than relying for an extended period on interim appointments. Prolonged use of appointed officials, even if justified on administrative grounds, would contravene the principle of democratic legitimacy embedded in Articles 6 and 7 of the 2013 Constitution. Regular, competitive elections are essential to preserve citizens' confidence in the representational character of local government during a period of significant structural change.⁴⁶

At the same time, the abolition of district councils risks depriving citizens of an intermediate forum through which grievances and proposals could be voiced. To compensate for this loss, institutionalised mechanisms for citizen petitions to provincial councils should be established. These might include public

hearings, mandatory petition committees, or digital platforms that facilitate direct submissions and require formal responses from elected representatives. By expanding channels of communication between citizens and provincial councils, Vietnam can mitigate the representational gap created by the disappearance of the district level, ensuring that “people's mastery” (quyền làm chủ của nhân dân) remains meaningful in practice as well as in doctrine.

2. Transparency and Consultation

The legitimacy of the two-tier system also depends on the openness of the merger process and the inclusiveness of its implementation. To this end, public disclosure must be mandated for all commune mergers, newly defined administrative boundaries, and revised service arrangements. Such disclosure should be conducted through multiple channels—official gazettes, provincial websites, and local notice boards—to ensure that citizens in both urban and rural areas are fully informed of the changes affecting their communities. Clear communication not only strengthens the principle of legal transparency embedded in Article 8 of the 2013 Constitution but also mitigates confusion and reduces opportunities for arbitrary administrative practices.

Equally important is the requirement of consultation with affected communities before any merger is finalised. Meaningful consultation goes beyond mere notification: it should include opportunities for citizens to express concerns, propose alternatives, and receive official responses. Consultations may take the form of village assemblies, commune-level hearings, or structured surveys, depending on local conditions. By institutionalising such participatory processes, Vietnam can align the reform with the constitutional aspiration of “people's mastery” and reduce the risk that administrative consolidation will be perceived as purely top-down. This participatory dimension is especially critical given the loss of district councils as representational for a, making consultation one of the few remaining avenues for citizens to influence structural decisions in local governance.⁴⁷

3. Access to Remedies

Beyond elections and consultation, the sustainability of the two-tier system depends on the availability of effective remedies for citizens whose rights may be affected by administrative action. Provincial inspectorates, which assume a heightened role following the abolition of district-level oversight, must strengthen their grievance-handling procedures to cope with the expected increase in petitions and complaints. This requires not only expanding institutional capacity but also adopting clearer timelines for processing complaints, enhancing transparency in outcomes, and publishing regular reports on the number and type of grievances resolved. By reinforcing these mechanisms, inspectorates can serve as an accessible first line of redress for citizens confronting administrative irregularities or misconduct. Equally vital is the preservation of judicial oversight as guaranteed by the 2015 Law on Administrative Procedures. Citizens must continue to enjoy the right to challenge administrative decisions in court, even where the decisions are taken by newly constituted provincial or commune authorities. Ensuring that courts remain open and accessible to review administrative action provides a constitutional backstop against abuse of power and reinforces the principle of legality under

⁴⁵Ensure uninterrupted delivery of health, education, and licensing services previously managed by district bodies. Establish provincial “one-stop shop” units to integrate administrative functions.

⁴⁶Constitution 2013, Arts 6–7.

⁴⁷Mandate public disclosure of commune mergers, new boundaries, and service arrangements. Require consultation with affected communities prior to finalising mergers.

Article 119 of the 2013 Constitution. In transitional contexts where structural reforms may create uncertainty, judicial review operates as the ultimate safeguard of citizens' rights, preserving trust in the legal order and anchoring Vietnam's evolution toward a socialist rule-of-law state.⁴⁸

F. Anti-Corruption Integration

The success of the 2025 reforms will depend not only on administrative efficiency but also on the ability of Vietnam's anti-corruption institutions to adapt to the new two-tier system. Without careful integration, the abolition of district-level checks could create opportunities for elite capture at the commune level and weaken ongoing anti-corruption campaigns. Three measures are particularly important: institutional alignment, transparency in appointments, and strengthened central–local coordination.

1. Institutional Alignment

The first priority is to extend the jurisdiction of provincial anti-corruption steering committees to cover the newly merged communes. This expansion of authority is necessary because, with the abolition of districts, communes may become more vulnerable to elite capture by local networks of power. Provincial steering committees must be resourced and empowered to detect, investigate, and sanction corrupt practices at the commune level, ensuring that decentralisation does not translate into diminished oversight. Regular audits and integrity assessments should be mandated as part of this alignment process.

2. Transparency in Appointments

The second measure concerns the transparency of interim appointments during the transition. To prevent nepotism or partisan allocation of posts, lists of appointees and their qualifications should be publicly disclosed. Publication fosters accountability and allows civil society, the media, and higher-level authorities to scrutinise the fairness of appointments. Moreover, interim appointments should be formally subject to oversight by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly, ensuring that executive discretion is counterbalanced by legislative review. Such oversight is consistent with the principle of “no restricted areas” in anti-corruption enforcement and aligns with recent reforms aimed at strengthening parliamentary scrutiny.

3. Central–Local Coordination

Finally, the role of the Central Steering Committee on Anti-Corruption and Wrongdoings (established in 2013) must be reinforced. While this body has proven effective at the central level, its monitoring functions must now extend to the implementation of the 2025 reforms across all provinces and communes.⁴⁹ Stronger vertical coordination between the central committee and provincial steering committees can address the asymmetry in anti-corruption capacity, which remains high at the centre but weaker locally. Regular reporting, joint inspections, and cross-provincial task forces would help standardise enforcement and prevent localised corruption networks from undermining reform objectives.

By embedding anti-corruption integration into the transition, Vietnam can reinforce institutional trust, protect the legitimacy of

the Communist Party's reform agenda, and ensure that administrative simplification does not come at the cost of accountability.

G. Summary Table: Transitional Compliance Checklist

| Domain | Compliance Requirements | Key Risks if Neglected |
|-----------------|--|--|
| Constitutional | Terminate district units; preserve legal continuity | Legal vacuum; retroactivity disputes |
| Legislative | Revise laws and decrees; monitor delegated authority | Normative incoherence; executive overreach |
| Judicial | Case transfer protocols; staff reassignment | Case backlog; erosion of judicial independence |
| Administrative | Reallocate budgets; redeploy civil servants | Service disruption; labour disputes |
| Human Rights | Elections; participation mechanisms | Democratic deficit; citizen alienation |
| Anti-Corruption | Oversight of appointments; provincial monitoring | Nepotism; elite capture at commune level |

H. Doctrinal Implications

The compliance checklist underscores that the success of Resolution 203/2025 is not only a matter of political will but also of legal craftsmanship. The doctrinal tension lies in reconciling constitutional supremacy with delegated flexibility, and efficiency with participatory legitimacy. Without robust transitional safeguards, the reforms risk undermining the very goals of efficiency and accountability they were designed to promote.

BROADER INSTITUTIONAL REFORM CONTEXT AND COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES

The 2025 constitutional amendments cannot be understood in isolation. They represent the culmination of decades of incremental reforms under *Đổi mới* and fit within a broader East Asian pattern of administrative streamlining, corporatist consolidation, and efficiency-driven governance. This Part situates the reforms in three dimensions: (A) Vietnam's reform trajectory since *Đổi mới*; (B) comparative insights from East Asia; and (C) enduring challenges of institutional legitimacy.

A. Vietnam's Reform Trajectory Since *Đổi mới*

Institutional reform in Vietnam has long been linked to economic liberalisation. The *Đổi mới* program initiated in 1986 sought to create a “socialist-oriented market economy,” requiring parallel reforms in administration and law. The 1992 Constitution reflected this shift by formally recognising private enterprise, though it retained a one-party framework.⁵⁰

By the 2000s, the government launched the Public Administration Reform (PAR) Master Plan (2001–2010), emphasising legal rationalisation, transparency, and efficiency.⁵¹ Yet, as UNDP studies noted, PAR faced inherent contradictions: it promoted a “rule-of-law socialist state” while preserving the CPV's political monopoly.⁵² This tension produced reform fatigue and partial outcomes, such as the

⁴⁸Strengthen grievance-handling procedures at provincial inspectorates. Ensure citizens retain the right to judicial review of administrative decisions under the 2015 Law on Administrative Procedures.

⁴⁹Constitution 2013, Arts 6–7.

⁵⁰Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam 1992, amended 2001.

⁵¹Government of Vietnam, Public Administration Reform Master Plan 2001–2010 (Hanoi, 2001).

⁵²Martin Painter, Ha Hoang Hop & Chu Quang Khởi, Institutional Reform for Public Administration in Contemporary Vietnam (UNDP, 2009) 5–7

uneven implementation of “one-stop shops” and incomplete judicial reforms.

The 2013 Constitution marked a further step, codifying commitments to rights protection, legality, and three-tier local government. But by the mid-2020s, inefficiencies in the district-level bureaucracy, duplication in socio-political organisations, and continued corruption scandals convinced Party leadership that more radical streamlining was necessary. Resolution 60-NQ/TW (2025) thus represented both continuity with earlier reform logics and a decisive break: continuity in its pursuit of efficiency and anti-corruption, break in its abandonment of the district tier and consolidation of mass organisations.

B. Comparative East Asian Perspectives

Vietnam's 2025 reforms echo trajectories in other East Asian developmental states. Three parallels stand out:

1. Administrative Streamlining

- China has repeatedly restructured county and township administrations, abolishing or merging levels to improve efficiency and fiscal control.⁵³ Similarly, South Korea's 1995 Local Autonomy Act reforms sought to reduce administrative layers while expanding local elections. Vietnam's abolition of districts mirrors these rationalisation efforts, though unlike Korea, it does not expand local democratic autonomy.

2. Judicial Reform

- Both China and Vietnam have grappled with local judicial capture. China's creation of circuit courts under the Supreme People's Court was intended to distance judges from local Party interference.⁵⁴ Vietnam's creation of regional courts in 2025 follows a similar logic. However, in both countries, centralisation of courts raises concerns about political rather than local interference.

3. Corporatist Consolidation

- Vietnam's integration of socio-political organisations into the Fatherland Front parallels China's consolidation of mass organisations under the United Front Work Department.⁵⁵ Both strategies prioritise political cohesion and managerial efficiency over representational diversity. In contrast, Singapore's corporatist model, though also state-led, allows greater functional autonomy to unions within a tripartite framework.⁵⁶

These comparisons highlight that Vietnam's reforms are part of a regional pattern: streamlining governance for efficiency while retaining one-party political control. The reforms thus reinforce Vietnam's identity as a “developmental one-party state” rather than a pluralist democracy.

C. Enduring Challenges of Institutional Legitimacy

While efficiency and anti-corruption were the stated goals of Resolution 203/2025, deeper challenges remain. Empirical studies show that firm performance in Vietnam correlates not only with administrative efficiency but also with secure property rights, impartial

courts, and reduction of corruption.⁵⁷ Without addressing these foundations, efficiency reforms risk producing “form without function.” Moreover, informality continues to shape institutional change. As Annette Kim's study of “seeds of reform” demonstrated, local practices often outpace formal law, with bottom-up innovations eventually compelling top-down recognition.⁵⁸ Commune-level governance may continue this dynamic, with local discretion and social networks filling gaps left by the abolition of district-level intermediaries. Whether this produces accountability or corruption will depend on the effectiveness of anti-corruption institutions at the provincial and commune levels.

Finally, legitimacy requires not only efficiency but also participation. Comparative literature on authoritarian constitutionalism warns that reducing channels of representation, even in managed one-party systems, can erode social trust and invite informal resistance.⁵⁹ The 2025 reforms, by eliminating district-level councils and consolidating associations, risk narrowing the spaces through which citizens influence governance. Unless compensated by stronger mechanisms of transparency and participation, the reforms may deepen Vietnam's democratic deficit.

CONCLUSION

The 2025 constitutional amendments mark a watershed in Vietnam's institutional trajectory. By abolishing district-level government, restructuring courts and procuracies, and consolidating socio-political organisations under the Fatherland Front, Resolution 203/2025/QH15 implements a bold experiment in administrative simplification. The reform responds to longstanding critiques of duplication, inefficiency, and corruption embedded in the 2013 framework.

Doctrinally, the amendments recalibrate the balance between constitutional supremacy and political leadership. The transitional delegation of law-making powers to the Government illustrates the pragmatic flexibility of Vietnamese constitutionalism but also tests the limits of legislative primacy. The abolition of district councils narrows channels of representation, raising questions about the scope of “people's mastery” in a one-party state. Judicial reforms seek to insulate courts from local capture but risk deepening dependence on central Party structures.

Placed in comparative perspective, Vietnam's 2025 reforms echo regional trends in East Asia: efficiency-driven consolidation within one-party developmental states. Like China, Vietnam has chosen centralisation over pluralism; unlike South Korea, it has not coupled administrative streamlining with expanded local autonomy. The reforms may deliver efficiency dividends, but their success will depend on careful compliance with transitional safeguards, protection of citizens' rights, and strengthening of anti-corruption institutions at the local level.

Ultimately, Vietnam's constitutional reforms embody the dual character of its legal order: law as both an instrument of Party leadership and a normative framework for governance. Whether the 2025 amendments deepen the “rule-of-law socialist state” proclaimed in Article 2 of the 2013 Constitution, or merely entrench Party control under the guise of efficiency, will be revealed in their implementation. What is certain is that these reforms represent a constitutional

⁵³Susan Finder, “China's Judicial Reforms and the County-Level Courts” (2016) China Law Blog.

⁵⁴Zhu Suli, *Political Parties in China's Judiciary* (Cambridge UP, 2016).

⁵⁵Gerry Groot, *Managing Transitions: The United Front Work Department in China* (Routledge, 2015).

⁵⁶Linda Y.C. Lim, “Tripartism in Singapore: Corporatism or Co-optation?” (2016) 37 *Asian Studies Review* 105.

⁵⁷Thi Bich Tran, R. Quentin Grafton & Tom Kompas, “Institutions Matter: The Case of Vietnam” (2009) 38 *Journal of Socio-Economics* 1

⁵⁸Annette M. Kim, “Seeds of Reform: Lessons from Vietnam about Informality and Institutional Change” (2012) 26 *International Economic Journal* 391

⁵⁹Tom Ginsburg & Alberto Simpser (eds), *Constitutions in Authoritarian Regimes* (Cambridge UP, 2014).

moment of high significance—one that deserves close scrutiny from comparative constitutional scholars and practitioners of transitional governance.

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