



The dialectical transformation of the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front of Ho Chi Minh City in building and promoting socialist democracy (1986-2025)

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Abstract

In the process of renovation and international integration, the Vietnam Fatherland Front of Ho Chi Minh City has undergone a dialectical transformation from 1986 to 2025, reflecting the formation and development of socialist democracy in a unique urban context. From 1986 to 1995, the Front consolidated political trust and initiated the first democratic mechanisms under the motto “the people know, the people discuss, the people do, the people monitor.” From 1996 to 2005, its role was legalized and institutionalized within the political system. In the 2006 to 2015 period, the Front expanded its functions of supervision and social criticism, directly engaging in Party- and State-building. From 2016-2025, the Front modernized its operational methods, developed e-democracy, organized dialogue and co-governance, especially prominent during the pandemic and under the urban government model. This entire trajectory reflects the law of dialectical development, affirming that socialist democracy in Vietnam is the inevitable outcome of national history, contributing to strengthening the great national unity and enhancing the governance capacity of a modern metropolis.

Keywords: Vietnam Fatherland Front, Ho Chi Minh City, Building and Promoting Democracy, Socialist Democracy

1. Introduction

In the process of renovation and international integration, Ho Chi Minh City has been regarded as the country’s largest economic, political, and cultural center, while taking the lead in experimenting with urban governance models and practicing socialist democracy. As a “special urban area,” home to a large population of workers, small traders, intellectuals, religious groups, and overseas Vietnamese, the city is not only a dynamic development hub but also a “social-political laboratory” vividly reflecting the adaptation of Vietnam’s political system in the new context.

Within this picture, the Vietnam Fatherland Front of Ho Chi Minh City emerges as a pivotal socio-political intermediary institution. It consolidates political trust, mobilizes the strength of great national unity, and assumes the functions of organizing, supervising, and providing feedback on grassroots democratic processes. Since the 6th National Congress in 1986, through four consecutive stages of development, the role of the Front has continuously evolved and transformed dialectically, moving from mass mobilization to legal institutionalization, from expanded supervision to modernization and co-governance.

In particular, the 2015-2025 period has witnessed groundbreaking transformations. Democracy has been digitized; the urban government model has shifted with the

absence of People’s Councils at certain levels; and global challenges such as COVID-19, climate change, and international integration have required the Front not only to act as a bridge between the Party, the State, and the people but also to become an architect of mechanisms for urban co-governance. This is a crucial highlight that needs in-depth analysis both theoretically and practically.

Therefore, in order to comprehensively and correctly understand “the dialectical transformation of the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front of Ho Chi Minh City in building and promoting socialist democracy from 1986 to 2025,” it is essential to apply the methodology of dialectical and historical materialism, situating this institution within the entire historical, economic, political, cultural, and social process of Vietnam, particularly in the special urban context of Ho Chi Minh City. As V.I. Lenin emphasized: “One must ask how a phenomenon emerged in history, what major stages it has gone through, and, from the standpoint of this development, how it has become what it is today” (V.I. Lenin, 2005, p.78, vol.39) [25].

On this theoretical and practical basis, this study systematically analyzes the movement, development, and transformation of the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front of Ho Chi Minh City in the process of building and promoting socialist democracy from 1986 to 2025, thereby clarifying both its scientific value and practical significance.

2. Research methods

2.1. Methodological framework

The dissertation applies the Marxist-Leninist philosophical methodology, specifically dialectical and historical materialism. Ontologically, the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front of Ho Chi Minh City is viewed as an objective phenomenon, evolving according to historical laws and the specific conditions of an urban setting. Epistemologically, the research begins from the practice of grassroots democratic activities, analyzing and generalizing to derive developmental laws and testing them back in practice. Regarding the relationship between social existence and social consciousness, the Front is placed in the two-way interaction between Ho Chi Minh City's economic, political, and cultural transformations and the increasingly diverse democratic demands, especially under the two-tier government system and the changing functions of People's Councils.

2.2. Specific research methods

The study employs basic methods: (1) Historical-logical: reconstructing the Front's transformation from mass mobilization to a democratic intermediary institution; (2) Analytical-synthetic: combining legal and policy document analysis with practical activities; (3) Deductive-inductive: applying Marxist-Leninist principles to explain specific phenomena and derive generalized conclusions; (4) Abstract-generalization: forming a model of socialist democracy suited to a modern metropolis; (5) Historical-comparative: contrasting the evolution of the Front's role across stages and regions to highlight its adaptive governance and democratic expansion.

3. Perspectives and Theories

3.1. Review of previous research

Studies on the Vietnam Fatherland Front in building and promoting socialist democracy since the Renovation of 1986 have laid a foundation for analyzing its dialectical transformation in Ho Chi Minh City. In *Selected Works of Nong Duc Manh (1986-2011)*, Nong Duc Manh emphasized: "In major urban areas like Ho Chi Minh City, grassroots democracy must be promoted through the activities of the Front, enabling the people to directly participate in discussing and deciding important matters" (Nong Duc Manh, 2018, p.145) ^[18]. He further stressed that the Front plays a key role in "turning the people into subjects of renovation and strengthening the socio-political foundation of the State" (Nong Duc Manh, 2018, p.1) ^[18]. This perspective introduced the approach of viewing the Front as a political-social intermediary institution for grassroots democracy.

Similarly, Nguyen Thi Tuyet Nga, in *The Role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in Mass Mobilization in Urban Areas during the Early Renovation Period*, argued: "In Ho Chi Minh City, the Fatherland Front shifted from administrative mobilization to democratic consultation, prioritizing direct contact with the people, expanding forms of opinion collection and petitions from the grassroots, thereby enhancing the quality of social

feedback" (Nguyen Thi Tuyet Nga, 1993, p.56) ^[15]. She also highlighted neighborhood people's congresses as a "practice ground for democracy, where the Front coordinates and ensures publicity and transparency" (ibid., p.62). This marked the transition from formal democracy to substantive democracy.

Later, the Ho Chi Minh City Institute of Social Sciences in *Some Issues on Renovating Mass Mobilization Work in Ho Chi Minh City in the Current Period* (1994, p.23) emphasized empowering the Front to organize citizen forums as channels for both receiving grassroots information and reflecting collective aspirations to authorities. Likewise, Nguyen Van Sau in *The Vietnam Fatherland Front and the Implementation of the Grassroots Democracy Regulation* noted that "Ho Chi Minh City was among the earliest and most creative localities to implement grassroots democracy regulations, with the Front playing a core role in organizing people's congresses, supervising elections, and contributing to political and social stability" (2005, p.18).

Post-2010 research continued to stress consultation, social feedback, and great unity. Nguyen Thien Nhan, in *The Vietnam Fatherland Front in Consolidating the Great National Unity and Promoting Democracy in Ho Chi Minh City*, asserted that the Front is "a center for citizens to contribute opinions and critique urban development policies" (2018, p.7). Pham Phuong Thao, in *Experience in Promoting Grassroots Democracy in Ho Chi Minh City Associated with the Fatherland Front*, argued that "grassroots democracy is only effective when the Front organizes regular dialogues between authorities and the people" (2021, p.42).

In parallel, academic works broadened theoretical perspectives on reforming the Front's methods. Ngo Sach Thuc in *The Vietnam Fatherland Front Fulfills Its Role of Representing and Protecting the Legitimate Rights and Interests of the People in the Current Period* (2020) analyzed its roles in supervision, feedback, elections, and proposed reforms for integration. Broader works such as *Democracy and the Political System in Vietnam in the Renovation Process* (Hoang Chi Bao, 2005) ^[12], *Renewing the Content and Methods of the Vietnam Fatherland Front under the Party's Leadership in the Context of International Economic Integration - From the Perspective of Ho Chi Minh City* (Le Nguyen Hong Quang, 2021), and *Some Theoretical and Practical Issues of the Fatherland Front* (Vu Trong Kim (ed.), 2009) all affirmed its pivotal role in ensuring the people's right to mastery while urging organizational reforms for new contexts.

Overall, research from 1986 to 2025 reveals a consistent trajectory: from theoretical foundations of grassroots democracy through practical forms such as people's congresses, citizen forums, consultation, and social feedback, to the demand for reform in the context of globalization. However, most works remain at the legal-administrative level, without fully addressing the philosophical-political aspect of the Front's "dialectical transformation" as a socio-political intermediary in the socialist superstructure. This is precisely the gap that this article seeks to address.

3.2. Concept of socialist democracy

Socialist democracy is the highest form of democracy in history, reflecting the political power of the working people under the leadership of the Communist Party. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) stated: “The emancipation of the working class must be the act of the working class itself,” meaning mastery must be exercised directly by the people. Lenin in *State and Revolution* (1917) emphasized the Paris Commune (1871) as the first model of proletarian democracy, where the people directly controlled the state.

In Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh creatively inherited and developed this idea, affirming: “All interests are for the people. All powers belong to the people.” Thus, socialist democracy is not only a form of state but also a humanistic value, tied to the people’s actual power.

3.3. The intermediary role of the fatherland front in the political system

Within Vietnam’s political system, the Fatherland Front occupies a unique position: neither a state authority nor merely a mass organization, but a broad political-social alliance of political, socio-political, religious, ethnic organizations, and prominent individuals. In Ho Chi Minh City—a special metropolis, the nation’s largest economic-cultural-social hub—this intermediary role is even more evident, given its large population, strong social stratification, and high demands for democracy and dialogue.

Through renovation, this role has become increasingly institutionalized. The 1992 Constitution (amended in 2001) defined the Front as the political foundation of the people’s government. The 1998 Grassroots Democracy Regulation codified the motto “the people know, the people discuss, the people do, the people monitor” as an organizational principle. The 1999 Law on the Vietnam Fatherland Front established its independent legal status. The 2015 Law expanded its functions of supervision and social feedback, equipping it with tools to participate in controlling state power. The 2022 Law on Grassroots Democracy reaffirmed the Front’s role in direct, representative, and electronic democracy. Especially, Resolution 60-NQ/TW (Central Committee, 2025a) ^[9], Regulation 301-QĐ/TW (Central Committee, 2025b) ^[10], and Decision 304-QĐ/TW (Central Committee, 2025c) ^[11] elevated the Front’s responsibility in urban co-governance, reflecting its adaptation to global integration and modern governance demands.

In practice, the Front’s intermediary role in Ho Chi Minh City has been implemented in many dimensions: as the political foundation of the people’s government; as the center of national unity; as the organizer and supervisor of grassroots democracy through neighborhood Front committees, self-governing groups, and “digital Fronts”; as the subject of supervision and social feedback on urban development policies; as an agency for mobilization, propaganda, and civic political education; as the core force launching patriotic and social welfare movements, especially during COVID-19; and

as a people-to-people diplomacy entity, linking overseas Vietnamese with the homeland.

Philosophically, this intermediary role embodies dialectical development. In urban society, contradictions between individuals and collectives, between the people’s interests and the demands of state management, are constant. The Front serves as the arena of consultation, critique, and consensus-building, helping to resolve contradictions within the framework of socialist democracy. From mere mass mobilization (1986-1995), to legal institutionalization (1999), to expanded supervision and feedback (2015), and then to co-governance and digital democracy (2016-2025), the Front has gradually transformed from a “bridge” into the “architect” of urban democratic space.

From these premises, one can conceptualize that: The role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in building and promoting socialist democracy in Ho Chi Minh City is the dialectical evolution of a socio-political intermediary institution, serving as a bridge between the Party, the State, and the people, with the function of organizing, mediating, and realizing people’s mastery in a unique urban context. This role reflects the contradictory yet unified relationship between social forces, between the will of the people and state power, institutionalized within socialist democracy.

3.4. Dialectical analytical framework

In the development of socialist democracy in a unique metropolis like Ho Chi Minh City, one can clearly recognize the laws of contradiction, quantitative accumulation-qualitative leap, and dialectical negation. Dialectical materialism provides the framework to explain the transformation of the Front’s role: Contradiction arises from the gap between the growing democratic needs of a diverse, dynamic urban society and the limitations of traditional political institutions designed under a centralized model, unable to fully meet demands for participation and dialogue. This is the internal driving force for reform.

Quantitative accumulation is reflected in the expansion of participatory channels (people’s congresses, government-citizen dialogues, policy consultations), the rise of socialized movements (education, health, charity, environmental protection), and the strengthening of supervision and social feedback. This process gradually creates a broad social foundation, deepening democratic awareness.

Critical points appear when the metropolis faces crises or special contexts. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic demanded urgent mechanisms of participation and community co-governance; or the absence of district- and ward-level People’s Councils (2009-2016) compelled the Front and social organizations to assume representative and supervisory roles. Qualitative leap occurs when democracy evolves from mass mobilization to legal institutionalization (Law on the Front, Law on Grassroots Democracy), then expands into social supervision, and finally advances to urban co-governance and digital democracy, where citizens directly participate in policymaking, supervision, and critique through digital tools.

Dialectical negation ensures that each stage of democratic development does not completely abolish the previous one but inherits its rational core (mobilization experience, organizational models, dialogue mechanisms), while elevating them to a new qualitative level. Thus, the democratic process in Ho Chi Minh City is continuous, inheriting while breaking through, accurately reflecting the law of social development.

4. The process of transformation in the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in Ho Chi Minh City across four phases from 1986 to 2025

4.1. The process of transformation in the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in Ho Chi Minh City through four specific phases

a) Phase 1986-1995: consolidating political trust and initiating proto-democratic mechanisms

The 6th National Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam (1986) launched a comprehensive Renovation (*Đổi mới*) program, steering the country out of socio-economic crisis and gradually transitioning toward a socialist-oriented market economy. In this context, Ho Chi Minh City-recognized as the largest and most dynamic urban center of the country-faced multiple contradictions: a crisis of political trust, widespread social hardship, hyperinflation, and public discontent with household registration and pricing mechanisms (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 1986) ^[1].

The challenge for the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) in Ho Chi Minh City was thus twofold: to consolidate political trust while simultaneously constructing the rudimentary frameworks of democratic participation suitable for a socially diverse metropolis.

During the initial stage of Renovation, the VFF collaborated with its member organizations to promote the Party's economic policy of multi-sectoral development under state regulation (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 1986) ^[1]. Special attention was given to outreach among workers, small traders, intellectuals, and the Chinese-Vietnamese community, ensuring their understanding and consent to the reform path. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe (1989-1991), when hostile narratives sought to discredit socialism, the VFF worked with the Party and government to organize forums, conferences, and political education activities, thereby reinforcing confidence in Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh Thought, safeguarding the socialist orientation (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 1991a) ^[2].

In terms of democratization, the VFF activated mechanisms of *consultative nomination*, *electoral supervision*, and *voter engagement*. Citizen feedback on issues such as pricing, household registration, and urban planning was systematically collected and reported to the authorities, laying the foundation for two-way dialogue. Experimental grassroots models such as "*People know, people discuss, people implement, people supervise*" were piloted in several wards and communes, forming the embryo of later institutionalized "people's mastery" principles (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 1986; 1991a) ^[1, 2].

Parallel to political functions, the VFF mobilized broad-based social campaigns such as "*Poverty Alleviation*," "*The Better-off Supporting the Poor*," and "*Gratitude Houses*", harnessing community solidarity. The Chinese-Vietnamese community in Districts 5 and 6 actively contributed to housing and scholarships, while intellectuals and overseas Vietnamese supported education and health initiatives. Such programs not only addressed pressing livelihood difficulties but also strengthened the great national unity bloc (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 1991b) ^[3].

On the supervisory front, the VFF facilitated hundreds of voter meetings, compiling thousands of petitions on land clearance, urban management, and administrative reform. The practice of "*community feedback on officials' performance*" also emerged, introducing an embryonic channel of citizen oversight over public officials.

In terms of people-to-people diplomacy, the VFF engaged with citizens from Laos, Cambodia, and the Soviet Union, while also channeling international NGO assistance (e.g., Oxfam, CRS, Save the Children) to improve local welfare and project the image of a vibrant, globally connected city. Overseas Vietnamese remittances further fueled programs such as "*Gratitude Houses*", linking domestic and diaspora resources for development (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 1986; 1991a) ^[1, 2].

Thus, the period 1986-1995 marked the inception of proto-democratic mechanisms. The VFF transformed from a mass-mobilization organization into an emergent socio-political hub, laying the institutional groundwork for urban democracy through political education, electoral consultation, grassroots participation, and initial forms of social supervision.

b) Phase 1996-2005: expanding democratic experiments and institutional consolidation

Entering the late 1990s, Ho Chi Minh City continued to be the country's largest economic hub, yet it also faced intensified challenges: rapid urbanization, widening social inequality, and the complexities of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious population. The 8th and 9th National Party Congresses (1996, 2001) emphasized the necessity of democratization, grassroots participation, and the consolidation of socialist legality (Communist Party of Vietnam, 1996; 2001).

In this period, the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) in Ho Chi Minh City reinforced its political function by mobilizing social consensus around the Party's policy of industrialization and modernization. Mass campaigns were launched to promote civic responsibility, patriotic emulation, and the strengthening of the "great national unity bloc." The VFF became a key actor in engaging intellectuals, businesspeople, religious dignitaries, and overseas Vietnamese in the city's development strategy (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2001a) ^[2].

On the democratic front, the VFF pioneered and institutionalized the mechanism of "*People know, people discuss, people implement, people supervise*". This principle was codified in grassroots democracy regulations, giving communities a formal basis to deliberate on local infrastructure

projects, budget contributions, land clearance, and public service delivery. The VFF facilitated public hearings and consultative meetings, enabling citizens to articulate concerns on urban planning, environmental management, and corruption in administrative procedures.

The electoral process also underwent notable reforms. The VFF organized consultative conferences to ensure the inclusiveness of candidate nominations for the National Assembly and People's Councils. Voter supervision expanded, with community representatives participating in the monitoring of ballot counting and official performance reports. This deepened public trust in electoral democracy and strengthened the VFF's legitimacy as a socio-political intermediary (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2001b).

Social mobilization campaigns gained momentum. The VFF launched the "*Day for the Poor*" campaign, mobilizing enterprises, religious groups, and individuals to contribute resources for housing, scholarships, and healthcare for disadvantaged populations. Special focus was placed on slum clearance in districts such as Binh Thanh, District 8, and Thu Duc, where the VFF coordinated resettlement and social support for affected households. These activities demonstrated how mass mobilization could be effectively combined with grassroots democracy to address pressing urban issues.

Supervisory practices were also expanded. The VFF organized inspection delegations to monitor public investment projects, administrative reforms, and service quality in education and healthcare. Community-based supervision-through neighborhood groups, residential clusters, and religious associations-provided feedback channels on corruption, waste, and inefficiency. This period witnessed the institutionalization of *social supervision* as an official function of the VFF, later affirmed in Party documents (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2001).

In terms of external relations, the VFF deepened its people-to-people diplomacy. Ho Chi Minh City hosted international conferences, welcomed overseas Vietnamese delegations, and expanded cooperation with NGOs from Europe, the United States, and Asia-Pacific. Through these activities, the VFF not only attracted external resources for development projects but also projected the image of a democratic, open, and dynamic metropolis.

Overall, the period 1996-2005 marked a significant step in the institutionalization of democratic experiments. The VFF transitioned from piloting grassroots initiatives to embedding them within formal regulations, while simultaneously strengthening supervisory mechanisms and broadening social mobilization. This laid the groundwork for more structured democratic practices in the following decade.

c) Phase 2006-2015: institutional deepening and grassroots democratic innovations

The 10th and 11th National Party Congresses (2006, 2011) identified democracy as both a goal and a driving force of socialist construction, emphasizing the need to strengthen the rule of law, expand grassroots democracy, and enhance the

supervisory role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2006; 2011). Within this context, Ho Chi Minh City emerged as a testing ground for new institutional practices of participatory governance.

The VFF in Ho Chi Minh City took the lead in concretizing the Party's directives by introducing diverse forms of grassroots deliberation. Community consultations became more structured, particularly in urban planning, environmental protection, and the relocation of residents for infrastructure projects such as the East-West Highway and Thu Thiem New Urban Area. Through these consultations, citizens were able to voice opinions on compensation, resettlement quality, and project transparency, while the VFF served as mediator between local authorities and affected communities (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2010) [6].

In the realm of elections, the VFF further institutionalized its consultative role. Candidate nominations for the National Assembly and People's Councils were increasingly subjected to public scrutiny through multi-stage consultations, ensuring greater accountability and representation. Voter contact meetings became forums for citizens to raise concerns directly with candidates, while post-election monitoring mechanisms allowed communities to evaluate elected officials' performance. This period reflected a shift from formal participation to substantive engagement.

Supervisory practices expanded both in scope and methodology. The VFF organized thematic supervisory programs on administrative reform, land management, food safety, and social welfare policies. Collaborative supervision-where the VFF worked jointly with People's Councils, professional associations, and mass organizations-enhanced institutional checks and balances. Particularly notable were community-based supervision models such as "Residential Cluster Supervisory Boards," which enabled local citizens to oversee neighborhood infrastructure, welfare distribution, and grassroots cadres' accountability.

Social mobilization campaigns became more diversified. The "*Day for the Poor*" campaign evolved into the "*Fund for the Poor*," mobilizing significant resources for social housing, scholarships, vocational training, and healthcare for disadvantaged groups. Campaigns promoting traffic safety, environmental sanitation, and community cultural standards also gained traction, reinforcing the link between civic engagement and everyday urban life. These activities illustrated the VFF's role as both mobilizer and facilitator of collective action.

In terms of democratic innovations, Ho Chi Minh City piloted mechanisms of *dialogue between government and citizens* at ward and district levels. The VFF often co-chaired these dialogues, creating a platform where residents could raise grievances on taxation, administrative procedures, and public service quality. Outcomes from these dialogues were documented and integrated into local government action plans, thus institutionalizing feedback loops between citizens and authorities.

External and inter-organizational relations were further strengthened. The VFF partnered with professional associations, universities, and NGOs to conduct joint research on urban poverty, labor migration, and community health. International cooperation projects-particularly in public health and education-were facilitated through people-to-people diplomacy, enhancing the city's democratic image in global networks.

Overall, the 2006-2015 period was marked by the institutional deepening of grassroots democracy and the broadening of social supervision. The VFF not only expanded the scope of citizen participation but also introduced innovative mechanisms of dialogue and accountability. This consolidated its role as an indispensable actor in shaping democratic governance in Ho Chi Minh City.

d) Phase 2016-2025: institutionalization of social supervision and promotion of deliberative democracy

The 12th and 13th National Party Congresses (2016, 2021) emphasized the principle of "building a socialist rule-of-law state of the people, by the people, and for the people," while strengthening the institutional role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) in supervision and social criticism (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2016; 2021). Ho Chi Minh City, as the nation's economic and cultural hub, continued to be a pioneer in piloting new forms of democratic participation and civic oversight.

During this phase, the VFF in Ho Chi Minh City focused on consolidating and expanding the mechanisms of social supervision. The implementation of the *Law on Supervision and Social Criticism of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and Mass Organizations* (2015) provided a legal foundation for the VFF to monitor public policy implementation, administrative reforms, and public investment projects. The VFF organized thematic supervisory programs on pressing issues such as environmental pollution, food hygiene and safety, anti-corruption, land-use management, and welfare distribution. Reports from these supervisory missions were submitted to Party committees and government agencies, creating more structured channels for accountability (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2018) ^[1].

The practice of social criticism also gained prominence. The VFF coordinated with scientists, experts, and professional associations to review draft laws, socio-economic plans, and urban development strategies before their adoption. Through consultative conferences, public hearings, and written submissions, the VFF institutionalized a deliberative process that linked citizens' perspectives with policymaking. In particular, major projects such as the Metro Line, flood control programs, and Thu Thiem resettlement were subject to extensive public debate facilitated by the VFF.

Grassroots democracy mechanisms were further expanded. The principle of "*People know, people discuss, people do, people supervise, and people benefit*" was reinforced through grassroots democracy regulations (2017, 2021). The VFF co-organized ward- and commune-level dialogues between

government officials and citizens, focusing on urban planning, compensation, administrative procedures, and social service delivery. These dialogues contributed to reducing grievances, preventing conflicts, and fostering trust in local authorities.

Social mobilization campaigns adapted to the new socio-economic context. The *Fund for the Poor* continued to mobilize billions of VND annually, financing social housing, scholarships, and healthcare. In addition, campaigns supporting COVID-19 prevention and control (2020-2021) demonstrated the VFF's ability to mobilize solidarity across communities, enterprises, and religious groups. These efforts highlighted the dynamic role of the VFF in crisis management and social resilience.

Digital transformation also influenced democratic practices. The VFF promoted the use of online platforms to collect public feedback, disseminate policy information, and supervise service delivery. Pilot models of "digital democracy" allowed residents to submit petitions, monitor local projects, and access government responses through electronic portals. This innovation not only broadened participation but also enhanced transparency in governance.

In external relations, the VFF continued to strengthen people-to-people diplomacy. Ho Chi Minh City expanded cooperation with international NGOs, sister-city networks, and overseas Vietnamese communities, mobilizing resources for social welfare, environmental protection, and cultural exchange. These activities reinforced the image of Ho Chi Minh City as an inclusive, open, and globally connected metropolis.

Overall, the 2016-2025 phase marked the institutionalization of social supervision and the promotion of deliberative democracy. The VFF transitioned from primarily mobilizing and experimenting to becoming a legally empowered institution for social oversight, policy criticism, and civic engagement. This period demonstrated how democratic practices could be consolidated and modernized in line with both domestic reforms and global trends.

4.2. Dialectical transformation of the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front in Ho Chi Minh City, 2016-2025

Compared with the period 1986-1995: from trust-building to a multi-layered democratic institution. If democracy in the early years was embryonic-mainly based on mass mobilization and some pilot models-the Fatherland Front has now evolved into an operating institution of multi-layered democracy: representing citizens through electoral consultations, exercising social supervision and criticism, and co-creating policies through dialogue and co-governance of the urban sphere. This represents a dialectical negation: inheriting the political trust of the earlier stage but elevating it into a democratic coordination system in the context of a globally integrated megacity.

Compared with the period 1996-2005: from legal institutionalization to digital modernization. If the *Law on the Vietnam Fatherland Front* (1999) and the *Regulation on Grassroots Democracy* (1998) provided a legal framework but lacked modern enforcement tools, the current period has seen

digital technology become the backbone of democratic governance—from petition submission, supervision, and feedback to open data transparency. This shift marks a transition from “law on paper” to “digital processes,” making democracy more transparent, accountable, and embedded in urban life.

Compared with the period 2006-2015: from supervision-criticism to dialogue and co-governance. Whereas the Front’s supervisory activities previously tended to be one-directional—summarizing petitions and submitting them to People’s Councils or People’s Committees—the absence of People’s Councils at certain levels has pushed the Front to pioneer mechanisms of dialogue and urban co-governance. It now functions as a formal forum for citizens to directly engage with authorities and co-create policy. This represents a qualitative leap, shifting the Front’s role from “supervisor” to “architect of dialogue” within the system of urban democracy.

From this analysis, several theoretical and practical implications emerge:

Theoretically, the trajectory of the Fatherland Front in Ho Chi Minh City reflects the Marxist-Leninist law of quantity → quality → dialectical negation. The contradiction between rising democratic demands in urban society and the limitations of traditional institutions has driven a quantitative accumulation: expanding participatory channels, standardizing procedures of consultation, institutionalizing supervision-criticism, and gradually digitizing enforcement tools. At critical historical junctures (urban governance pilot, COVID-19, digital transformation), this accumulation produced qualitative leaps: the Front gained full legal status, supervisory authority with stronger binding mechanisms, digital democracy became infrastructure, and models of urban co-governance emerged. Dialectical negation occurred not as wholesale denial, but as selective inheritance—retaining the rational core of previous practices (political trust, community consultation) while elevating them into a data-driven, transparent, rule-of-law-based democratic institution.

Practically, the Front has transcended the framework of a mass mobilization organization to become a central institution of urban democratic governance: (i) Representation through electoral consultation, connecting social strata, religions, and ethnic groups (including the Hoa community and overseas Vietnamese); (ii) Participation via specialized social supervision and criticism of urban planning, compensation-resettlement, public services, and anti-corruption; (iii) Co-creation through regular policy dialogues, public accountability mechanisms, online petition platforms, and open data systems with feedback monitoring.

In the context of globalization, digital transformation, urban inequality, and non-traditional risks (pandemics, climate change), the Front operates as a multi-layered democratic coordinator—enhancing transparency and accountability, reinforcing political trust, and strengthening community self-governance—thus realizing Marxist-Leninist principles of socialist democracy in a globally integrated megacity.

Hence, the period 2016-2025 demonstrates the modernization and co-governance dimension of the Front’s role in Ho Chi Minh City. Building on the foundations of political trust (1986-1995), legal frameworks (1996-2005), and supervision-criticism mechanisms (2006-2015), the Front has been elevated into a multi-layered, digitized, and dialogue-based democratic institution. This constitutes a qualitative development in constructing and advancing socialist democracy in a special urban setting.

5. Dialectical transformation of the entire trajectory 1986-2025

5.1. Dialectical laws in the role of the front

From 1986 to 2025, the role of the Fatherland Front in Ho Chi Minh City has developed through four historical phases linked to the Renovation process, clearly reflecting the Marxist-Leninist laws of contradiction, quantitative change into qualitative change, and dialectical negation. From 1986 to 1995: contradiction between a crisis of trust and embryonic democracy versus the demand for political consolidation and initial democratization. From 1996 to 2005: contradiction between the legal institutionalization requirement and formalism with weak implementation tools. From 2006 to 2015: contradiction between rapid urbanization and rising social conflicts versus the limited framework of supervision-criticism. From 2016 to 2025: contradiction between the demand for transparency, digitalization, and urban co-governance versus the absence of People’s Councils at certain levels, the pressures of globalization, and the COVID-19 crisis. Resolving these contradictions has propelled dialectical development, transforming the Front from a mass mobilization organization into a central institution of urban democratic governance in a global megacity. Each stage embodies dialectical motion: quantitative accumulation of grassroots democracy → qualitative leap through legal codification → from formality to substantive supervision → from “passive bridge” to “dynamic co-governance institution.”

5.2. Accumulation of quantity and qualitative leap

Over four decades, the Front accumulated significant “quantity” across dimensions. First, Political trust, built through propaganda, mobilization, and ideological education. Next, Legal frameworks, evolving from the Regulation on Grassroots Democracy (1998), Law on the Fatherland Front (1999, 2015), to the Law on Grassroots Democracy Implementation (2022). Then, Practical experience, from thousands of community meetings, socialization movements, and policy dialogue models. Finally, Social resources, mobilized from intellectuals, entrepreneurs, religious groups, overseas Vietnamese, and international partners.

This accumulation reached a tipping point amid megacity complexity, urban governance pilots lacking People’s Councils, and global crises such as COVID-19—necessitating co-governance mechanisms. The qualitative leap followed: the Front evolved from “mobilization-supervision” into a multi-layered, digitized, dialogue-driven democratic institution.

5.3. Dialectical negation and inherited development

The Front's development embodies dialectical negation, where each stage negates yet inherits rational elements of the prior stage that from 1986 to 1995 left the core of political trust and the principle "people know, discuss, do, and supervise." From 1996 to 2005 institutionalized legal foundations, later elevated through digital democracy. From 2006 to 2015 developed supervision-criticism, later expanded into dialogue and co-governance. From 2016 to 2025 integrated and upgraded these legacies into a central institution of urban democratic governance suited for a global megacity.

5.4. Research significance

Theoretical: Demonstrates that socialist democracy in Vietnam is a historical-dialectical process, not an instantaneous product. It confirms Marxist-Leninist principles of "quantitative change leads to qualitative change" and illustrates Hồ Chí Minh's thought of "the people as the root." Practical: The Front has become a pillar ensuring democracy where local People's Councils are absent, created participatory channels for citizens, strengthened political trust for the Party, and advanced Vietnam's soft power through people-to-people diplomacy.

6. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

6.1. Conclusion

On the law of development: Over nearly four decades of renovation (1986-2025), the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front (VFF) in Ho Chi Minh City has evolved according to the dialectical law of social development-transforming from mass mobilization to legal institutionalization, from supervision and social criticism to co-governance of the urban sphere. From 1986 to 1995, the VFF laid the foundation for socialist democracy in a special urban setting by consolidating political trust and experimenting with initial democratic models based on the principle "people know, people discuss, people do, people supervise." Between 1996 and 2005, the VFF was institutionalized through legal frameworks (the 1998 Regulation on Grassroots Democracy, the 1999 Law on the VFF), becoming a legitimate intermediary institution within the political system. From 2006 to 2015, the VFF expanded its role in supervision and social criticism, gradually participating in urban governance through thematic reports, people's forums, and policy reviews. Entering the period 2015-2025, the VFF has modernized and digitalized its operations, developing into a multi-layered democratic institution with mechanisms of dialogue and co-governance, thereby meeting the governance requirements of an urban government and global integration.

On theory: The developmental trajectory of the VFF in Ho Chi Minh City from 1986 to 2025 demonstrates the historical inevitability of socialist democracy. Democracy is not an instantaneous product, but the result of a process of formation, consolidation, and development through dialectical stages. This process clearly reflects the Marxist-Leninist principle of "quantitative accumulation - qualitative leap - dialectical negation," whereby each new stage does not absolutely negate the previous one but inherits its rational core and elevates it to

a higher level. In addition, through the lens of Ho Chi Minh's thought, the role of the VFF is vivid evidence of the thesis "the people are the root," that "all interests are for the people, all powers belong to the people," thereby affirming the essence of people's democracy and the universal value of Ho Chi Minh's thought in building socialist democracy in Vietnam.

On practice: In the context where the urban government does not organize People's Councils at certain levels, the VFF in Ho Chi Minh City has become a channel ensuring both representative and direct democracy, helping to fill the power gap and maintain balance within the political system. The VFF has gone beyond propaganda or mobilization, evolving into a democratic governance institution where citizens can directly engage in dialogue, supervision, and co-creation of policies. At the same time, through people-to-people diplomacy, the VFF has contributed to building the image of a dynamic, globally integrated Ho Chi Minh City, while also spreading the unique values of socialist democracy to the world.

6.2. Policy Recommendations

Based on the analysis, several policy recommendations can be drawn:

On improving the legal framework: It is necessary to fully institutionalize the provisions of the *Law on Grassroots Democracy Implementation* (2022), with particular attention to e-democracy mechanisms to expand participation spaces and enhance transparency. At the same time, it is urgent to issue a system of sub-law documents to concretize new regulations in *Resolution 60-NQ/TW* (2025), *Regulation 301-QĐ/TW* (2025), and *Decision 304-QĐ/TW* (2025), thereby clearly defining the powers and responsibilities of the VFF within the mechanism of urban co-governance. In addition, establishing a legal framework for periodic political dialogue-linked to mechanisms of accountability and follow-up-is essential to ensure substantive democracy, strengthen social trust, and improve governance effectiveness in a globally integrated megacity.

On investing in digital infrastructure for e-democracy: It is crucial to implement an electronic VFF system interconnected with government bodies, enabling real-time reception and processing of citizens' petitions while improving feedback efficiency. The application of artificial intelligence (AI) and Big Data can help analyze public opinion trends, forecast potential social conflicts, and support timely policy-making. At the same time, ensuring information security and data transparency is key to building trust and encouraging active public participation in e-democracy and co-creation of urban governance.

On strengthening the capacity of VFF cadres: Training programs should comprehensively equip VFF officials with essential skills such as dialogue, mediation, social data analysis, and political communication, in order to meet the new demands of democratic governance. It is also necessary to build a team with strong political will, close ties with the people, technological competence, and international integration capacity, capable of fulfilling their roles in the context of

globalization and digitalization. Alongside, a performance evaluation mechanism based on citizens' satisfaction should be applied as an important criterion to enhance responsibility, transparency, and effectiveness in the VFF's operations.

On promoting urban co-governance models: It is important to expand periodic community forums at neighborhood and residential levels, with the VFF acting as coordinator and local authorities directly engaging in accountability, thereby creating regular dialogue channels between the State and the people. At the same time, mechanisms for "co-creating policy" should be strengthened, mobilizing the participation of the VFF, government, enterprises, intellectuals, religious groups, and communities in policy design, implementation, and supervision. Furthermore, piloting participatory budgeting in selected districts and wards, with the VFF overseeing and coordinating, will establish mechanisms of direct and transparent democracy, enhancing accountability, governance efficiency, and social consensus in the urban context.

On advancing people-to-people diplomacy: It is essential to build networks linking the Ho Chi Minh City VFF with international civil society organizations, research institutes, and universities to exchange experiences in urban democratic governance and strengthen integration capacity. At the same time, the role of the overseas Vietnamese community should be harnessed as "policy bridges," mobilizing intellectual and material resources for the city's sustainable development. Beyond this, turning Ho Chi Minh City into a center for international people-to-people dialogue will help spread the model of socialist democracy to the world and elevate Vietnam's standing in global space.

From 1986 to 2025, the role of the VFF in Ho Chi Minh City has gone through a long journey, evolving along dialectical logic: from establishing political trust to legal institutionalization, from expanding supervision to modern co-governance. This is clear evidence of the development of socialist democracy in Vietnam—a democracy of the people, by the people, and for the people. In the context of globalization and digital transformation, the Ho Chi Minh City VFF must continue to innovate and affirm its role as a central institution in urban democratic governance, contributing to the realization of Ho Chi Minh's thought and the Party's line that "the people are the root," while laying a solid foundation for the sustainable development of the city and the nation.

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