



Transforming Public Policy Science and Policy Implementation in Vietnam in the Context of Digital Governance and International Integration

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ABSTRACT: Since the implementation of the Đổi Mới reforms in 1986, Vietnam has undergone significant transformations in governance, public administration, and policy development within the broader context of globalization, digital transformation, and international integration. This article examines the evolution of public policy science and policy implementation in Vietnam, focusing on the interaction between institutional modernization, digital governance, and developmental-state orientations. The study employs a qualitative interdisciplinary approach combining document analysis, historical analysis, comparative analysis, and interpretive policy analysis to evaluate governance transformation and policy implementation challenges in contemporary Vietnam. The findings indicate that Vietnam has achieved substantial progress in legal reform, administrative modernization, e-government development, and international integration. Public policy science has gradually become more institutionalized through the expansion of policy education, governance research, and administrative reform initiatives. However, major challenges remain, including institutional fragmentation, overlapping regulations, implementation gaps, uneven local governance capacity, limited transparency, and emerging risks associated with digital governance and artificial intelligence. Comparative experiences from Singapore and South Korea further demonstrate the importance of evidence-based policymaking, integrated digital governance, and professional administrative training. The article argues that Vietnam's long-term governance effectiveness will depend on strengthening institutional coordination, improving policy implementation capacity, enhancing public accountability, and expanding evidence-based and digitally integrated governance systems in the context of rapid socio-economic transformation and global technological change.

KEYWORDS: digital governance, international integration, policy implementation, public administration, sustainable governance, Vietnam.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since the implementation of the Đổi Mới reforms in 1986, Vietnam has undergone profound economic, political, administrative, and social transformations. The transition from a centrally planned economy to a socialist-oriented market economy has not only accelerated economic growth but has also significantly reshaped governance structures, institutional arrangements, and public administration systems. Over the past several decades, Vietnam has increasingly integrated into the global economy through participation in major international frameworks and trade agreements, including membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), and the European Union–Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA). These processes of international integration have generated new opportunities for economic modernization, technological development, and institutional reform, while simultaneously placing increasing pressure on the Vietnamese state to improve governance effectiveness, policy coordination, administrative transparency, and regulatory capacity. The expansion of market-oriented reforms and globalization has also considerably broadened the responsibilities of the Vietnamese state. Contemporary governance in Vietnam no longer focuses solely on traditional administrative management or economic planning, but increasingly involves complex issues such as sustainable development, digital governance, environmental management, cybersecurity, public accountability, social welfare, and international regulatory harmonization. As a result, public policy science and policy implementation have become increasingly important components of national governance and state modernization.

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At the same time, the rapid development of digital technologies has fundamentally transformed governance practices worldwide, including in Vietnam. The emergence of digital governance, e-government systems, artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and smart urban management has created new possibilities for improving administrative efficiency, public service delivery, and evidence-based policymaking. In recent years, major urban centers such as Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi have actively promoted smart city initiatives, digital administrative reforms, and integrated urban management systems as part of broader national digital transformation strategies. These developments illustrate Vietnam's growing efforts to modernize governance structures in response to both domestic development demands and international technological trends.

However, despite substantial progress in public policy development and administrative modernization, important challenges remain. Vietnam has achieved considerable advances in legal reform, public administration restructuring, digital transformation, and socio-economic policymaking. Nevertheless, significant gaps continue to exist between policy formulation and practical implementation, between central directives and local execution, and between institutional modernization goals and actual governance capacity. Problems such as overlapping regulations, fragmented institutional coordination, limited evidence-based policymaking, uneven digital infrastructure, and implementation inefficiency continue to affect policy outcomes in many sectors. Furthermore, the rapid expansion of digital governance has introduced additional challenges related to cybersecurity, data governance, transparency, and administrative accountability.

Against this background, this article argues that Vietnam's ongoing transformation toward digital governance and international integration has made public policy science increasingly strategic to national development, while simultaneously exposing structural limitations within policy implementation systems. The coexistence of rapid modernization and persistent institutional constraints has created a complex governance environment requiring both policy innovation and deeper administrative reform.

Therefore, this article aims to:

- (1) examine the evolution of public policy science in Vietnam;
- (2) analyze major achievements and limitations in public policy implementation;
- (3) evaluate emerging challenges associated with digital governance and international integration; and
- (4) propose future directions for governance modernization, policy innovation, and sustainable administrative development in contemporary Vietnam.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Public Policy Science: Global Theoretical Foundations

Public policy science emerged as an interdisciplinary field concerned with understanding how governments formulate, implement, evaluate, and adjust public policies within increasingly complex political and social environments. Since the mid-twentieth century, public policy studies have gradually evolved from traditional public administration into a broader analytical framework incorporating political science, economics, sociology, governance studies, and systems analysis. One of the foundational figures in this field was Harold Lasswell, who emphasized the importance of "policy sciences" as a multidisciplinary approach aimed at improving decision-making and addressing public problems through scientific analysis and democratic governance.

Among the most influential theoretical approaches is the policy cycle model, which conceptualizes policymaking as a sequential process involving agenda-setting, policy formulation, adoption, implementation, evaluation, and revision. Scholars such as Thomas Dye and Michael Howlett and M. Ramesh contributed significantly to the institutionalization of this framework by emphasizing the dynamic interactions between political institutions, policy actors, and administrative processes (Dye, 1972; Howlett & Ramesh, 1995). Although critics argue that policymaking in reality is often more fragmented and non-linear, the policy cycle remains useful for understanding governmental decision-making structures and legislative processes.

Another important theoretical perspective is systems theory, which views public policy as the product of interactions between political systems and social environments. Within this framework, governments receive inputs from society in the form of demands, pressures, and support, and subsequently generate policy outputs intended to manage social problems and maintain political stability. Systems approaches therefore emphasize adaptation, feedback mechanisms, and institutional responsiveness in governance processes.

Governance theory further expanded public policy analysis by moving beyond state-centered administration toward broader networks of interaction among governments, private sectors, civil society organizations, and international institutions. Governance approaches emphasize coordination, participation, accountability, and collaborative policymaking rather than purely hierarchical state control. In contemporary governance literature, public policy is increasingly understood as the result of negotiations among multiple actors operating within complex institutional environments.

Since the late twentieth century, New Public Management (NPM) has also become highly influential in administrative reform and public policy modernization. Originating primarily in OECD countries, NPM promoted market-oriented governance, efficiency, performance measurement, decentralization, and managerial flexibility within public administration systems. This approach encouraged governments to adopt private-sector management techniques in order to improve public service delivery and

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administrative effectiveness. Although NPM has been criticized for excessive marketization and managerialism, many of its principles have significantly influenced governance reforms in developing countries undergoing economic liberalization.

Another important theoretical foundation relevant to East Asian governance is developmental state theory. This framework emphasizes the strategic role of strong states in coordinating economic modernization, industrial policy, and long-term national development. Developmental states are characterized by strong bureaucratic institutions, centralized coordination, close state-business cooperation, and strategic intervention in economic development. Experiences from Japan, South Korea, and Singapore have frequently been analyzed within this perspective.

In addition, the Advocacy Coalition Framework developed by Paul Sabatier emphasized the role of policy actors, coalitions, beliefs, and long-term institutional learning in shaping public policy change (Sabatier, 2007). This framework is particularly useful for understanding policy reform processes involving competing interests and institutional negotiations.

Contemporary public policy studies have also increasingly focused on evidence-based policymaking, digital governance, and data-driven decision-making. Scholars such as Bardach (2012) and Dunn (2017) emphasize that effective public policy requires not only political legitimacy but also analytical capacity, empirical evidence, policy evaluation, and institutional adaptability. These theoretical developments provide important analytical foundations for examining governance transformation and policy implementation in contemporary Vietnam.

2.2. Public Policy Science in Vietnam

The development of public policy science in Vietnam has been closely associated with the country's broader political and economic transformations. Before the Đổi Mới reforms of 1986, governance in Vietnam operated primarily within a centrally planned administrative framework characterized by strong state control, centralized economic management, and ideological governance structures. During this period, public administration mainly focused on implementing state directives rather than conducting independent policy analysis or evidence-based policymaking.

Following the introduction of the socialist-oriented market economy after 1986, Vietnam gradually entered a period of institutional reform, economic liberalization, and international integration. These transformations generated increasing demand for more professional policy analysis, governance modernization, administrative reform, and legal development. Consequently, public policy science began to emerge as a distinct academic and administrative field in Vietnam during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Vietnamese scholars such as Nguyen (2014), Le (2008), Dam (2011), and Do (2018) contributed significantly to the development of Vietnamese public policy studies through research on public administration, governance reform, policymaking processes, and institutional modernization. Vietnamese public policy research has generally combined elements of socialist governance theory, developmental-state orientation, and administrative modernization within the context of market reforms and globalization.

Several characteristics distinguish public policy science in Vietnam. First, Vietnamese policymaking remains strongly state-centered, with the state continuing to play a central role in development coordination, institutional management, and socio-economic planning. Second, Vietnam's governance system reflects a developmental orientation emphasizing economic growth, political stability, and national modernization. Third, Vietnamese public policy increasingly attempts to integrate socialist governance principles with market-oriented reforms and international governance standards. As a result, policy development in Vietnam often involves balancing economic liberalization with social equity, political stability, and long-term national development objectives.

2.3. Digital Governance and International Integration

In recent years, digital governance has emerged as one of the most significant transformations affecting contemporary public administration worldwide. The rapid expansion of digital technologies, artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, cloud computing, and digital platforms has fundamentally reshaped the relationship between governments, citizens, and public services. Concepts such as digital government, e-governance, smart governance, and AI-assisted governance increasingly occupy central positions within governance studies and policy reform agendas.

Digital governance generally refers to the application of digital technologies to improve administrative efficiency, public service delivery, policy coordination, transparency, and citizen participation. E-governance systems allow governments to integrate administrative services, reduce bureaucratic procedures, and strengthen information accessibility. Smart governance further expands these functions by incorporating real-time data systems, integrated urban management, predictive analytics, and digital infrastructure into governance processes.

At the same time, evidence-based policymaking has become increasingly important in modern governance systems. Governments are now expected to formulate policies based on empirical data, statistical analysis, and policy evaluation rather than relying solely on political ideology or administrative tradition. AI-assisted governance and big data analysis have therefore become critical tools for forecasting policy outcomes, monitoring implementation, and improving administrative responsiveness.

Comparative experiences from Singapore and South Korea demonstrate how digital governance can strengthen state capacity, improve administrative coordination, and support long-term development planning. Singapore has become internationally

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recognized for its highly integrated digital government systems, data-driven urban management, and evidence-based policymaking institutions. Similarly, South Korea has successfully developed advanced e-government platforms and digital public administration systems that enhance governmental transparency and service delivery.

For Vietnam, digital governance and international integration have become increasingly interconnected. Participation in global economic agreements, technological competition, and international regulatory standards has accelerated pressure for administrative modernization and digital transformation. Consequently, Vietnam’s governance system is currently undergoing a complex transition toward more digitalized, evidence-based, and internationally integrated forms of policymaking and public administration.

Table 1. Major Theoretical Approaches to Public Policy and Governance

Theory/Approach	Main Scholars	Core Features	Relevance to Vietnam
Policy Cycle Theory	Dye; Howlett & Ramesh	Sequential policymaking stages	Useful for legislative analysis
Systems Theory	Easton	Policy as interaction between state and society	Understanding governance adaptation
Governance Theory	Rhodes; Peters	Networks, coordination, participation	Institutional modernization
New Public Management	OECD scholars	Efficiency and market-oriented governance	Administrative reform
Developmental State Theory	Johnson; Evans	Strong state coordination	Vietnam’s governance orientation
Digital Governance	Mergel et al.	AI, big data, e-government	Digital transformation
Advocacy Coalition Framework	Sabatier	Policy actors and coalitions	Institutional reform and policy change

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative interdisciplinary research design combining document analysis, historical analysis, comparative analysis, and interpretive policy analysis to examine the transformation of public policy science and policy implementation in Vietnam within the broader context of digital governance and international integration. The interdisciplinary approach is considered appropriate because the research topic involves interactions among political institutions, governance systems, socio-economic transformation, digital technologies, and public administration practices.

The study primarily relies on secondary data collected from multiple categories of sources. These include official documents of the Communist Party of Vietnam, Vietnamese legal and policy documents, government reports, administrative reform strategies, academic publications, and international literature related to public policy, governance theory, and digital transformation. Party resolutions, laws, national development strategies, and policy reports were analyzed to identify the evolution of governance orientations, institutional reforms, and public policy priorities in Vietnam. Academic publications by both Vietnamese and international scholars were also reviewed to establish the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the study.

Document analysis was used as the principal research method to examine the development of public policy science, governance modernization, and policy implementation mechanisms in Vietnam. Through the analysis of laws, administrative reports, institutional strategies, and scholarly literature, the study identifies major achievements, governance trends, and structural challenges affecting policy implementation and public administration reform.

Comparative analysis was additionally employed to compare Vietnam’s governance transformation with selected East Asian cases, particularly Singapore and South Korea. These countries were selected because they represent influential developmental and digital governance models within Asia and provide valuable comparative experiences regarding administrative modernization, digital government, and evidence-based policymaking. The comparative approach helps contextualize Vietnam’s governance reforms within broader regional and international trends.

Historical analysis was applied to examine the evolution of public policy science and the transformation of governance institutions in Vietnam from the pre-Đổi Mới period to the contemporary era of globalization and digital governance. This method allows the study to identify how historical legacies, socialist governance structures, market-oriented reforms, and international integration have collectively shaped Vietnam’s current policy system and administrative institutions.

Finally, the study adopts interpretive policy analysis to better understand the complexities of policy implementation, governance adaptation, and institutional challenges. Rather than viewing policymaking as a purely technical process, interpretive analysis emphasizes the interaction between political priorities, institutional structures, administrative capacity, and socio-cultural contexts. This approach is particularly useful for examining implementation gaps, governance fragmentation, and the challenges emerging from digital transformation and international integration in contemporary Vietnam.

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4. THE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC POLICY SCIENCE AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION IN VIETNAM

4.1. Evolution of Public Policy Science in Vietnam

The development of public policy science in Vietnam has been closely associated with the country's broader socio-economic transformation and administrative modernization since the implementation of the Đổi Mới reforms in 1986. Before this period, Vietnam operated primarily under a centrally planned governance model in which policymaking was highly centralized and administrative activities mainly focused on implementing directives issued by state authorities. Public administration during the pre-Đổi Mới era emphasized ideological management, state planning, and bureaucratic coordination rather than independent policy analysis or evidence-based governance.

The transition toward a socialist-oriented market economy after 1986 fundamentally changed the governance environment and created increasing demand for more professional policymaking, institutional reform, and administrative adaptation. Economic liberalization, globalization, and international integration required the Vietnamese state to address increasingly complex issues involving market regulation, foreign investment, environmental management, social welfare, technological development, and international legal harmonization. As a result, public policy science gradually emerged as an important interdisciplinary field connecting political science, public administration, economics, law, governance studies, and development research.

Since the 1990s, Vietnam has witnessed a considerable expansion of public policy education and policy-oriented research activities. Major academic and administrative institutions such as the National Academy of Public Administration, the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, and Vietnam National University have increasingly incorporated public policy studies, governance analysis, and public administration reform into teaching and research programs. These institutions have played important roles in training civil servants, policymakers, administrative leaders, and governance researchers within the broader context of state modernization. At the same time, Vietnamese public policy research has become increasingly interdisciplinary. Contemporary studies now address issues such as digital governance, sustainable development, urban management, public sector reform, social policy, environmental governance, and evidence-based policymaking. Vietnamese scholars have also increasingly engaged with international public policy theories and comparative governance frameworks while adapting these concepts to Vietnam's specific political and institutional conditions.

Nevertheless, public policy science in Vietnam still retains several distinctive characteristics. First, policymaking remains strongly state-centered, reflecting the central role of the state in socio-economic development and political coordination. Second, governance reforms are closely connected to developmental-state orientations emphasizing economic modernization, political stability, and long-term national planning. Third, Vietnamese public policy increasingly attempts to balance socialist governance principles with market-oriented reforms and global governance standards. Consequently, policy science in Vietnam reflects both continuity and transformation within the country's evolving governance system.

4.2. Major Achievements in Policy Implementation

Since the Đổi Mới reforms, Vietnam has achieved substantial progress in public policy development and implementation across multiple sectors. One of the most important achievements has been the modernization of the legal and institutional framework. Between 1987 and 2013, Vietnam promulgated approximately 483 laws and ordinances, contributing significantly to the establishment of a more comprehensive legal system supporting economic liberalization, administrative reform, and international integration. From 2005 to 2015 alone, an additional 238 laws and ordinances were adopted, demonstrating the rapid expansion and institutionalization of Vietnam's legal framework.

In addition, Vietnam has undertaken three major constitutional revisions aimed at adapting governance structures to changing socio-economic conditions and integration requirements. These constitutional reforms reflected broader efforts to strengthen legal institutions, administrative coordination, and state governance capacity within the context of modernization and globalization.

Significant progress has also been made in human resource development and administrative professionalization. Vietnam has expanded the training of legal and administrative personnel, with approximately 3,500 legal professionals and policy-related personnel participating in governance and legal modernization programs. The development of specialized administrative training institutions has contributed to improving policy coordination, legal implementation, and governance professionalism.

Economic governance has likewise undergone substantial transformation. Vietnam successfully transitioned from a centrally planned economy toward a socialist-oriented market economy characterized by increasing integration into global markets. Public policies supporting foreign investment, industrialization, trade liberalization, and private sector development contributed to rapid economic growth and poverty reduction. Vietnam's participation in major international economic agreements further accelerated institutional reform and policy modernization.

Social policy implementation has also expanded considerably. Public policies concerning healthcare, education, poverty reduction, gender equality, and social welfare have contributed to improvements in living standards and human development indicators. Environmental policy and sustainable development strategies have increasingly received governmental attention, particularly in response to climate change, urbanization, environmental degradation, and resource management challenges.

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More recently, digital administration and e-government initiatives have become central priorities in governance reform. Vietnam has expanded online public services, administrative digitization, integrated information systems, and smart governance initiatives in major urban areas. These reforms aim to improve administrative efficiency, transparency, coordination, and citizen access to public services.

Table 2. Major Achievements in Public Policy Development and Implementation in Vietnam

Dimension	Key Indicators	Main Achievements
Legal framework	483 laws/ordinances (1987–2013)	Institutional modernization and legal reform
Legal development	238 laws/ordinances (2005–2015)	Expansion of governance and regulatory capacity
Constitutional reform	3 constitutional revisions	Adaptation to socio-economic transformation
Human resources	3,500 legal personnel	Administrative professionalization
Policy implementation	Expanded monitoring systems	Better institutional coordination
Economic governance	WTO, CPTPP, EVFTA participation	International integration and market reform
Digital governance	Smart city initiatives	E-government expansion
Public participation	Expanded consultation mechanisms	Greater social engagement

Source: Synthesized from Government reports and Ministry of Justice reports.

4.3. Digital Governance Transformation

In recent years, digital governance has become one of the most important dimensions of Vietnam's administrative modernization process. The rapid expansion of information technologies, digital infrastructure, artificial intelligence (AI), and big data analytics has increasingly transformed the ways in which public institutions operate, coordinate policies, and deliver public services.

Vietnam has actively promoted e-government initiatives aimed at improving administrative efficiency, reducing bureaucratic procedures, and enhancing public service accessibility. Digital administration systems now support online public services, digital documentation, electronic administrative procedures, and integrated governance platforms across multiple governmental sectors. These developments reflect broader efforts to modernize state administration and improve governance responsiveness within the digital era.

Major urban centers such as Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi have become important experimental spaces for smart governance and urban digital transformation. Ho Chi Minh City has promoted integrated smart city management systems focusing on transportation management, public security, environmental monitoring, and digital public services. Similarly, Hanoi has implemented digital urban management initiatives involving administrative digitization, urban surveillance systems, and electronic governance coordination. AI-assisted governance and data-based policymaking have also gradually emerged within Vietnam's governance modernization agenda. Digital technologies increasingly support policy monitoring, administrative coordination, public data management, and service delivery. Evidence-based governance and real-time administrative data systems have the potential to improve policy responsiveness, transparency, and institutional efficiency.

Nevertheless, digital governance transformation in Vietnam continues to face important limitations and structural challenges. Cybersecurity risks, data protection concerns, and digital governance ethics have become increasingly significant as administrative systems become more digitally integrated. In addition, uneven digital infrastructure between urban and rural areas contributes to digital inequality and unequal access to digital public services. Administrative fragmentation and inconsistent technological capacity across local governments also create implementation difficulties.

Furthermore, although digital governance may improve transparency and efficiency, technological modernization alone cannot fully resolve deeper institutional challenges such as overlapping regulations, bureaucratic complexity, limited accountability, and implementation gaps. Consequently, Vietnam's digital governance transformation remains both a technological and institutional reform process requiring long-term coordination, legal adaptation, and governance modernization.

5. MAJOR CHALLENGES FACING PUBLIC POLICY SCIENCE AND POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Despite substantial progress in governance reform, legal modernization, and administrative transformation since the Đổi Mới era, Vietnam continues to face numerous structural and institutional challenges in public policy science and policy implementation. The rapid expansion of state responsibilities, international integration, and digital transformation has increased the complexity of governance systems while simultaneously exposing limitations in institutional coordination, implementation capacity, transparency, and administrative adaptability. Consequently, one of the most important contemporary governance challenges in Vietnam lies not only in policy formulation itself, but also in the effectiveness, consistency, and sustainability of policy implementation.

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5.1. Institutional Fragmentation and Policy Overlap

One of the most persistent problems within Vietnam's governance system is institutional fragmentation and policy overlap. Over the past several decades, the rapid expansion of laws, regulations, administrative procedures, and governance institutions has contributed to important improvements in legal modernization and state management. However, the speed of institutional expansion has frequently exceeded the coordination capacity of governance structures and administrative systems.

In many policy areas, overlapping regulations, inconsistent legal interpretations, and fragmented administrative responsibilities continue to create implementation difficulties. Different ministries, departments, and local authorities may issue regulations or administrative guidelines that partially duplicate or contradict one another, thereby reducing policy consistency and implementation efficiency. Inter-agency coordination mechanisms often remain weak, particularly in policy sectors involving environmental management, urban governance, digital transformation, land administration, and investment regulation.

Administrative fragmentation is also reinforced by the coexistence of centralized governance structures and decentralized implementation mechanisms. While central authorities formulate broad policy orientations and legal frameworks, local governments often possess varying administrative capacities, financial resources, and technological infrastructure. As a result, policy implementation outcomes may differ substantially across regions and administrative levels. This unevenness contributes to governance inconsistency and weakens the overall effectiveness of public administration.

Furthermore, rapid socio-economic transformation and globalization have generated increasingly complex governance demands requiring cross-sectoral coordination and integrated policymaking. However, Vietnam's governance system still tends to operate through sector-based administrative structures rather than fully integrated governance networks. Consequently, coordination among ministries, local authorities, and regulatory agencies often remains limited, slowing policy adaptation and implementation.

5.2. The Implementation Gap

Another major challenge facing public policy in Vietnam is the implementation gap between policy formulation and practical outcomes. Although Vietnam has adopted numerous ambitious development strategies, legal reforms, and modernization programs, the actual implementation of these policies frequently encounters institutional and administrative limitations.

The implementation gap reflects differences between official policy objectives and actual governance practices. In many cases, policies are formulated at the central level with broad developmental goals, but local implementation capacity remains insufficient to achieve intended outcomes. Weak administrative coordination, limited professional training, inconsistent interpretation of regulations, and inadequate monitoring mechanisms all contribute to uneven implementation quality.

Local governance capacity remains particularly important in this regard. Vietnam's rapid economic growth and administrative expansion have placed increasing pressure on local authorities to manage complex issues involving urbanization, digital transformation, environmental protection, social welfare, and infrastructure development. Nevertheless, local administrative capacity often varies significantly between provinces, cities, and rural areas. Some local governments possess relatively advanced governance systems and technological infrastructure, while others continue to face shortages of qualified personnel, financial resources, and digital capacity.

In addition, symbolic compliance remains an important issue within policy implementation. In some cases, administrative agencies formally comply with policy directives through reports, procedural documentation, or symbolic implementation activities without fully achieving substantive policy goals. Such practices may create discrepancies between official administrative evaluations and actual policy effectiveness. Formalistic implementation can therefore weaken public trust and reduce governance accountability.

The implementation gap is further intensified by broader institutional challenges associated with governance capacity and administrative fragmentation. Rapid policy expansion has created increasing demands for specialized expertise, evidence-based analysis, and professional administrative coordination. However, governance modernization has not always progressed at the same pace as policy expansion. Consequently, implementation difficulties remain one of the central structural weaknesses within Vietnam's contemporary governance system.

5.3. Challenges of Digital Governance

The rapid expansion of digital governance has created both important opportunities and new governance risks in Vietnam. Digital transformation, e-government systems, AI-assisted administration, and big data governance have the potential to improve administrative efficiency, policy coordination, transparency, and public service delivery. However, digital governance also introduces complex technological, ethical, and institutional challenges.

One major issue concerns AI governance ethics and algorithmic accountability. As governments increasingly rely on digital systems, automated decision-making, and data analytics, questions emerge regarding transparency, fairness, privacy, and accountability within digital governance processes. Vietnam's legal and regulatory frameworks for AI governance remain relatively underdeveloped compared with the speed of technological transformation.

Cybersecurity has likewise become an increasingly important concern. Expanding digital infrastructure and integrated governance systems increase vulnerability to cyberattacks, data breaches, information manipulation, and digital surveillance risks. Protecting

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administrative databases, public information systems, and citizen data therefore represents a major challenge for governance modernization.

Data transparency and digital inequality also remain significant concerns. Although digital governance may strengthen transparency and information accessibility, unequal access to digital technologies between urban and rural areas can produce uneven governance outcomes. Regions with limited digital infrastructure or lower technological literacy may experience reduced access to digital public services, thereby reinforcing existing socio-economic inequalities.

International integration further intensifies pressure on Vietnam’s digital governance system. Participation in international trade agreements and global economic networks increasingly requires compliance with international standards concerning digital trade, environmental governance, labor regulations, and data management. Consequently, Vietnam must not only modernize domestic governance institutions but also adapt to rapidly evolving international governance frameworks associated with globalization and technological competition.

5.4. Public Participation and Accountability

Public participation and governance accountability remain critical challenges in Vietnam’s policy system. Although public consultation mechanisms and citizen participation channels have expanded in recent years, the effectiveness of these mechanisms often remains limited in practice. Policy consultation processes may sometimes function more as formal administrative procedures than as substantive mechanisms for incorporating public feedback into policymaking.

Transparency limitations also continue to affect governance effectiveness and public trust. Access to public information, policy evaluation data, and administrative decision-making processes remains uneven across sectors and localities. In some cases, limited transparency contributes to public skepticism regarding policy implementation and administrative accountability.

Another important concern involves the risks of “policy corruption,” whereby private interests, informal networks, or group interests may influence policy implementation and administrative decision-making. Rapid marketization and economic liberalization have created increasing opportunities for complex relationships between political authority, economic interests, and administrative discretion. Such dynamics may weaken policy impartiality and reduce governance legitimacy.

These challenges demonstrate the growing importance of evidence-based policymaking, public accountability, and participatory governance within Vietnam’s modernization process. Effective governance increasingly requires not only administrative control but also institutional transparency, professional expertise, reliable policy data, and meaningful citizen engagement. Strengthening policy evaluation systems, expanding public participation mechanisms, improving transparency standards, and developing digital accountability frameworks are therefore essential for improving governance quality and policy implementation effectiveness.

Table 3. Major Challenges in Public Policy and Governance in Vietnam

Challenge	Main Causes	Governance Implications	Suggested Response
Policy overlap	Fragmented legal system	Low implementation efficiency	Stronger institutional coordination
Weak accountability	Limited transparency	Public distrust	Open governance mechanisms
Digital governance risks	Weak digital infrastructure	Cybersecurity threats	AI governance and cybersecurity frameworks
Implementation gap	Uneven local governance capacity	Inconsistent policy outcomes	Administrative capacity-building
Limited evidence-based policy	Weak research and analytical capacity	Ineffective policymaking	Big data systems and policy labs
Human resource limitations	Uneven professional training	Administrative inconsistency	Specialized policy education
Symbolic compliance	Formalistic administrative culture	Reduced policy effectiveness	Performance-based evaluation
Public participation limitations	Weak consultation mechanisms	Limited policy legitimacy	Participatory governance expansion

Overall, the major challenges facing public policy science and policy implementation in Vietnam reflect the broader tensions between rapid modernization and institutional adaptation. While Vietnam has achieved significant progress in governance reform and administrative modernization, the sustainability and effectiveness of future development will depend increasingly on the country’s ability to strengthen institutional coordination, governance capacity, digital governance frameworks, transparency, and evidence-based policymaking within an increasingly complex global environment.

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6. INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES AND LESSONS FOR VIETNAM

The experiences of several East Asian countries demonstrate that governance modernization, digital transformation, and effective public policy implementation depend not only on economic growth but also on institutional capacity, administrative professionalism, and long-term strategic coordination. Among the most influential models in Asia, Singapore and South Korea provide particularly valuable lessons for Vietnam because both countries successfully combined developmental-state strategies with governance modernization, technological innovation, and administrative reform (Evans, 1995). Although Vietnam possesses different political, demographic, and historical conditions, comparative experiences from these countries offer useful insights for strengthening policy science and governance effectiveness.

6.1. Singapore

Singapore is widely recognized as one of the most effective governance models in Asia due to its strong administrative coordination, professional bureaucracy, and evidence-based policymaking system (Quah, 2010). Since independence, Singapore has emphasized long-term strategic planning, institutional discipline, and state capacity as central foundations of national development. The Singaporean governance model demonstrates how a relatively small state can achieve rapid modernization through efficient public administration, policy innovation, and adaptive governance (Evans, 1995).

One of the most important institutions contributing to Singapore's governance success is the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, which has become a major center for policy education, leadership training, and governance research in Asia. The institution reflects Singapore's broader emphasis on professional policy analysis, administrative expertise, and evidence-based governance. Policymaking in Singapore is strongly supported by empirical research, statistical analysis, policy forecasting, and long-term planning mechanisms (Head, 2016). This evidence-based approach enables policymakers to adjust governance strategies in response to changing socio-economic conditions and technological developments.

Singapore has also developed highly effective citizen feedback systems that allow governments to monitor public opinion, administrative performance, and service quality. Digital platforms, integrated online services, and participatory governance mechanisms have strengthened communication between citizens and state institutions (Quah, 2010). Although governance in Singapore remains relatively centralized, the state has successfully combined administrative efficiency with responsive governance and public service delivery.

For Vietnam, Singapore's experience demonstrates the importance of professional policy training, integrated governance systems, and evidence-based administrative reform. Vietnam can particularly learn from Singapore's investment in governance education, administrative professionalism, digital service integration, and long-term strategic policymaking. The Singaporean case also highlights the importance of linking technological modernization with institutional coordination and governance accountability rather than relying solely on technological expansion itself.

6.2. South Korea

The experience of South Korea offers another important comparative model for Vietnam, particularly in relation to digital government, technological modernization, and integrated governance systems. Similar to Vietnam, South Korea experienced rapid socio-economic transformation and developmental-state modernization during the twentieth century. However, South Korea successfully combined industrial development with advanced administrative reform and digital governance innovation (Evans, 1995).

South Korea is internationally recognized for its highly developed e-government systems and integrated digital governance infrastructure. Government agencies operate through interconnected administrative databases, digital public services, electronic identification systems, and online citizen-service platforms. These systems have significantly improved administrative efficiency, transparency, and policy coordination while reducing bureaucratic complexity and transaction costs (Mergel et al., 2019). The South Korean experience also demonstrates the importance of smart governance and integrated digital urban management systems in improving administrative responsiveness and public service delivery (Nam & Pardo, 2011).

Another important feature of the South Korean governance model is the strong emphasis on policy evaluation and administrative performance measurement. Policy implementation is regularly monitored through institutional evaluation mechanisms, statistical assessment, and performance-based governance frameworks. This approach helps strengthen accountability and allows governments to identify implementation weaknesses more effectively (Head, 2016). In addition, digital participation mechanisms and e-governance systems have contributed to improving transparency and public trust in governance processes (Kim & Lee, 2012).

South Korea has also invested heavily in digital innovation, AI development, cybersecurity, and technological infrastructure. These investments support not only economic competitiveness but also state modernization and governance efficiency. Importantly, digital transformation in South Korea has been accompanied by institutional adaptation, legal reform, and long-term human resource development (Mergel et al., 2019).

For Vietnam, the South Korean experience demonstrates the importance of integrated digital governance, policy evaluation systems, and AI-assisted administration. Vietnam can draw valuable lessons regarding administrative digitization, inter-agency data

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coordination, cybersecurity governance, and evidence-based policy monitoring. At the same time, the Korean experience suggests that successful digital governance requires strong institutional coordination, professional administrative capacity, and continuous technological adaptation.

Although Vietnam has already made important progress in governance reform and digital transformation, comparative experiences from Singapore and South Korea indicate that future governance modernization will require stronger institutional integration, greater investment in policy research capacity, more effective digital governance frameworks, and improved coordination between technological innovation and administrative reform.

Table 4. Comparative Governance Experiences and Lessons for Vietnam

Country	Governance Strength	Policy Innovation	Lessons for Vietnam
Singapore	Centralized coordination and administrative professionalism	Citizen participation systems and evidence-based governance	Professional policy training and long-term strategic planning
South Korea	Advanced digital government and integrated administration	Integrated data governance, e-government, and policy evaluation systems	AI-assisted governance and digital coordination
Vietnam	Developmental-state orientation and rapid institutional reform	Expanding digital transformation and administrative modernization	Need for stronger institutional coordination and implementation capacity

7. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Vietnam's transition toward developmental governance and digital modernization requires not only institutional reform but also the development of more adaptive, transparent, and evidence-based policy systems. In the context of globalization, technological transformation, and increasing governance complexity, future policy reform should focus on strengthening administrative coordination, improving implementation capacity, expanding digital governance, and enhancing public accountability. Sustainable governance in Vietnam will depend largely on the state's ability to integrate technological innovation with institutional modernization and human resource development.

7.1. Strengthening Evidence-Based Policymaking

One of the most important priorities for Vietnam's future governance reform is the strengthening of evidence-based policymaking. In many cases, policy formulation in Vietnam still relies heavily on administrative experience, political orientation, or fragmented statistical information rather than systematic empirical analysis and policy evaluation. As governance challenges become increasingly complex, policymaking must become more data-driven, analytical, and adaptive.

The expansion of big data systems, AI-assisted policy analysis, and digital policy simulation models could significantly improve policy forecasting and implementation effectiveness. AI technologies may support governments in identifying policy risks, monitoring implementation outcomes, analyzing public feedback, and predicting socio-economic trends. Similarly, policy simulation systems can help evaluate alternative policy scenarios before implementation, thereby reducing governance inefficiencies and administrative fragmentation.

At the same time, evidence-based governance requires stronger coordination between academic institutions, policy research organizations, and state agencies. Expanding access to policy data, improving statistical transparency, and strengthening policy evaluation mechanisms are therefore essential for improving governance quality in Vietnam's increasingly digitalized policy environment.

7.2. Building National Public Policy Research Centers

Vietnam should also strengthen national policy research capacity through the development of specialized public policy research centers and governance institutes. Experiences from the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy demonstrate the importance of professional policy education, interdisciplinary governance research, and leadership training in supporting long-term national development.

Currently, Vietnam possesses several important administrative and political training institutions, including the National Academy of Public Administration and the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics. However, future governance modernization requires more internationally connected and research-oriented policy institutions capable of conducting interdisciplinary policy analysis, digital governance research, and comparative governance studies.

Such institutions could support evidence-based policymaking, policy experimentation, governance innovation, and administrative reform. In addition, stronger cooperation between universities, government agencies, and international research organizations would contribute to improving policy professionalism and governance adaptability.

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7.3. Enhancing Digital Governance Capacity

Digital governance capacity will become increasingly important for Vietnam's future administrative modernization. Although Vietnam has made substantial progress in e-government and digital public services, significant challenges remain regarding cybersecurity, data integration, digital inequality, and technological coordination.

Future reforms should prioritize the development of integrated national databases, interoperable digital governance systems, and secure administrative information infrastructure. Improved digital coordination among ministries, provinces, and local governments would help reduce administrative fragmentation and improve policy implementation efficiency.

Cybersecurity governance must also become a central policy priority. As digital infrastructure expands, governments face increasing risks related to cyberattacks, data breaches, digital fraud, and information manipulation. Strengthening legal frameworks for cybersecurity, AI governance, and digital privacy protection is therefore essential for sustainable digital transformation.

At the same time, expanding digital public services and improving citizen access to online administrative systems can contribute to greater transparency, reduced bureaucratic procedures, and improved public service efficiency. However, digital transformation policies must also address digital inequality between urban and rural areas to ensure more inclusive governance outcomes.

7.4. Improving Transparency and Accountability

Improving governance transparency and public accountability remains another crucial requirement for sustainable policy development in Vietnam. Effective governance increasingly depends not only on administrative control but also on public trust, institutional legitimacy, and citizen participation.

Vietnam should continue promoting open governance mechanisms that improve public access to policy information, administrative procedures, and government data. Expanding citizen participation in policymaking and policy evaluation processes would strengthen policy legitimacy and improve implementation responsiveness.

In addition, anti-corruption mechanisms and institutional accountability systems should be further strengthened. Transparent administrative procedures, independent monitoring mechanisms, and digital governance tools can help reduce opportunities for corruption, policy manipulation, and informal interest-group influence. Expanding public oversight and administrative transparency will therefore play a critical role in strengthening governance effectiveness and institutional trust.

7.5. Developing High-Quality Human Resources

Finally, the long-term success of governance modernization depends heavily on the development of high-quality human resources in public administration and policy analysis. As governance systems become increasingly digitalized and interdisciplinary, Vietnam will require a more professional, technologically competent, and globally connected administrative workforce.

Policy education programs should therefore place greater emphasis on interdisciplinary training combining public administration, digital governance, economics, law, political science, data analysis, and AI applications. Administrative personnel must also develop stronger analytical skills, policy evaluation capacity, and digital literacy in order to adapt to rapidly changing governance environments.

International cooperation in policy education and governance training should likewise be expanded. Partnerships with international universities, governance institutes, and policy organizations can support knowledge exchange, comparative learning, and professional development for Vietnamese policymakers and public administrators.

Overall, Vietnam's future governance trajectory will depend increasingly on its ability to combine institutional modernization, digital innovation, evidence-based policymaking, and administrative professionalism within a rapidly transforming global environment.

8. CONCLUSION

Vietnam is currently undergoing a profound transition toward developmental governance, digital governance, and evidence-based policymaking within the broader context of globalization and international integration. Since the Đổi Mới reforms, the country has achieved substantial progress in administrative modernization, legal reform, public policy development, and digital transformation. Public policy science has gradually become more institutionalized through the expansion of policy education, governance research, and administrative reform initiatives.

Nevertheless, significant challenges continue to affect the effectiveness and sustainability of policy implementation in Vietnam. Institutional fragmentation, overlapping regulations, implementation gaps, uneven governance capacity, transparency limitations, and digital adaptation challenges remain major obstacles within the contemporary governance system. The rapid expansion of digital governance has additionally created new concerns related to cybersecurity, AI governance ethics, data management, and technological inequality.

The Vietnamese experience demonstrates that governance modernization is not merely a technical or administrative process, but also an institutional and developmental transformation requiring long-term coordination, policy innovation, and adaptive governance capacity. Future governance effectiveness will therefore depend on Vietnam's ability to strengthen institutional

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modernization, improve evidence-based policymaking, enhance public accountability, and expand digital governance capacity while maintaining social stability and developmental orientation.

Ultimately, sustainable governance in Vietnam will require the successful integration of technological innovation, administrative professionalism, policy transparency, and participatory governance within an increasingly interconnected and digitally driven global environment.

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