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# Local Leader Traits, Local Values and Citizens' Political Participation in Vietnam

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## ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impacts of local leader traits and local values on citizens' political participation. Specifically, it examines how leadership traits (measured by the term of office and gender) and local values (measured by protests and the status of receiving official development assistance (ODA)) affect citizens' political participation. It finds that leaders in their first term, protests and receiving ODA positively associate with citizens' political participation, while female leaders negatively associate with it. The paper contributes to the literature that short-termism and face-saving theories should be appropriately integrated with career path theory to explain political behaviors of local leaders and that preventing short-termism and prejudices against local female leaders are potential solutions for citizens' political participation. These findings shed light on understanding the roles of local leader traits and local values in promoting citizens' political participation in communist one-party-led countries.

## KEYWORDS

Leader traits; local values; citizens' political participation; one-party-led country

## Introduction

Citizens' political participation is of great interest to researchers and administrators as it influences democracy and democratization (Landry & Angeles, 2011). According to van Deth (2014), political participation is the elixir of life for democracy. Countries with elected government systems encourage political participation as a local symbol of democracy (Callanan, 2005). Citizens' political participation contributes to management policies (Landry & Angeles, 2011) and makes the government system perform more efficiently (S. Kim & Schachter, 2013). However, promoting citizens' political participation has been difficult in some countries (Callanan, 2005).

Previous studies have provided a solid theoretical connection between traits and citizens' political participation using the Big Five personality traits. It is well documented that they affect citizens' voting behavior, campaign participation and protest behavior, and they have both direct and moderating effects on citizens' political participation (Holum, 2022; Mondak & Halperin, 2008; Weng et al., 2012). However, most previous studies examine this relationship in Western democratic countries, leaving the impacts of local leader traits on citizens' political participation unexplored in one-party-led communist countries, where democracy is challengingly desired.

Vietnam provides an interesting context for this study. The communist party's "intervention" and "appearance" in

all legislative, executive, and judicial agencies. Each agency has "Party cells" as the principle of "led of the party." So, at the local government level, party and executive agency leaders help increase citizens' political participation and significantly promote democracy. Political participation is the people's right, stipulated in Vietnam's constitution. Citizens can assemble and demonstrate the right to vote, stand for election, participate in local authority and social management, and discuss and petition the administration about local and national issues. As stipulated, the government creates conditions for citizens to participate in politics. Information provided by the government offers citizens opportunities to observe public work and then contribute to participation in the administration process (Tran & La, 2022). Although there have been specific achievements in ensuring civil rights, debates over promoting these rights continue. According to the Vietnam Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) survey, citizens' political participation at the local level has been declining since 2011 (Wells-Dang & Wells-Dang, 2017). Like China, which has a single party like Vietnam, voter turnout tends to be relatively low (Nagao & Kennedy, 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the causes of the decline in citizens' political participation and motivate citizens to participate in politics.

This paper investigates the impacts of local leader traits and local values on citizens' political

participation. Specifically, it examines how “term of office” and gender—as proxies of local leader traits—and protest occurring and official development assistance (ODA) receiving locality—as proxies for local value—affect citizens’ political participation. Using the data at the individual level in the PAPI survey and a survey conducted by the Ministry of Home Affairs of Vietnam (MOHA), this study finds that (i) a local leader’s “term of office” is associated with citizens’ political participation, whereby the first term of leadership promotes citizens’ political participation, but not the second term of office; (ii) local female leaders associate with a lower probability of political participation; and (iii) localities with historical protests and ODA projects have a higher probability of citizens’ political participation.

This paper differs from previous studies in (i) investigating the influence of local leader traits and local values on citizens’ political participation—an issue that is rarely studied in the literature; (ii) proxying “terms of office” to measure local leader traits instead of Big Five personality traits; and (iii) focusing on local values as a predictor of citizens’ political participation. It contributes to the literature from two perspectives. First, the theory of career path does not work well for local leaders in the political context of a sole communist party-led country. Short-termism and face-saving theories should be appropriately integrated to explain local leaders’ political behaviors. Second, preventing short-termism and prejudices against local female leaders would be a potential solution for citizens’ political participation. The empirical results of this seminal study on local leader traits, local values, and citizens’ political participation shed light on policy design to promote citizens’ political participation in a communist one-party-led country like Vietnam.

## Literature review

### *Citizens’ political participation*

Political participation is defined as citizens’ activities influencing politics. It refers to voluntary actions undertaken by citizens to influence public policy or affect the choice of persons who make policies. There are two definitions of political participation commonly used in academic research, and they can be used interchangeably (van Deth, 2014). The first is an activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government actions—either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies (Hooghe et al., 2014; van Deth, 2014). According to this view, citizens’ political participation has four

significant points of the relatively unproblematic aspect of political participation: (i) as an action such as simply watching television, visiting websites or claiming to be interested in politics; (ii) as something done by people in their role as citizens; (iii) as voluntary and not enforced by law, rules or threats; and (iv) as dealing with the government, politics or the state at different levels or areas. By this definition, activities affecting government policies or influencing politicians are described as political participation. The second is the operational definition of political participation. According to van Deth (2014), those aspects include the acts of political participation in voluntary and unprofessional behaviours in the political field (e.g., voting), targeting the political sphere (e.g., peaceful protest), solving community problems (e.g., raising money for the construction of public works), or politically motivated like boycotting imported products. This concept covers the relatively unproblematic aspects of political participation.

In empirical studies, political participation is divided into combative and cooperative behaviors. The combative activity is proxied by the protest (Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018; Quaranta, 2015; Yarwood, 2016), and cooperative behaviors can be proxied by many different variables, including electoral voting, climate-change planning, urban planning and governance (Hall & Bonneau, 2008; V. T. Nguyen et al., 2015; Tran & La, 2022). Therefore, voting is a behavior of political participation that has a direct influence; in other words, it belongs to the political field, which meets the requirements of unproblematic aspects of political participation and is a cooperative action.

Political participation is a basic human behavior. Citizens participate in politics to influence policies directly affecting their lives (Fung & Wright, 2001). It also affects the quality of government decisions, enhances trust in institutions, and reduces conflicts between citizens and government (Beierle, 1999). Moreover, it can be as low as being informed or as high as a consultation—even reaching a considerable level of empowerment. These levels of participation have built ladders of citizen participation and represent citizens’ degree of power in the political system (Arnstein, 1969; Ianniello et al., 2018). According to Arnstein (1969), participation is divided into eight levels: manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control. Many studies suggest that citizens can participate in politics differently depending on many factors (Ianniello et al., 2018), including the experience of the incumbent, facilitator (Ianniello et al., 2018; Yarwood, 2016), context (Ianniello et al., 2018; S. Kim & Schachter, 2013; V. T. Nguyen et al., 2015) or gathered

voices of the people (Callanan, 2005; Ianniello et al., 2018; S. Kim & Schachter, 2013; Landry & Angeles, 2011).

### **Citizens' political participation and leader traits**

#### **Leaders' traits**

Trait leadership indicates integrated patterns of personal characteristics that expose individual diversity and foster leader effectiveness in consistency, varied between group and organizational situations (Zaccaro, 2007). The development of trait leadership theory is based on initial research on leadership, in which the findings mainly refer to the factors differentiating leaders and non-leaders. The effectiveness of a leader indicates how a leader exerts influence on the performance of an individual or a group, the satisfaction of followers and overall effectiveness. These studies demonstrate that the significant contribution of successful leaders is certain core personality traits that they possess. According to T. T. N. Nguyen and Nguyen (2022), a leader's characteristics are measured by gender, retirement term of candidates, years of party members, etc. . . thus, gender and term of office are possibly proxied to analyze the role of leader traits in political participation.

#### **Leaders' career path**

Politicians tend to take action to build their career paths, and public administration career paths shape individual ambition, political behavior, and policy innovation (Teodoro, 2011). The relationship between the career path of local leaders and citizen participation is complex, depending on the nature of the political participation behavior and the leader's response. Cooperative acts of political participation (such as donating to foundations, marching in support of leadership, and making financial contributions to public works) positively influence the career path of local leaders. Consequently, politicians encourage these participation behaviors, and a leader's career path positively affects citizens' political participation.

Participation in political struggles, such as protests, election boycotts and riots, negatively affects the career path of politicians, and local leaders have two options. First, they listen actively, dialogue with citizens and find a solution. These positive responses from local leaders further promote citizen participation, which leads to a positive relationship between career paths and citizen participation, such as cooperative participation behavior. Second, the politicians use aggressive measures to respond to negative participation, such as suppressing protests and forcing people to contribute, decreasing political participation.

### **Face-saving theory and participation**

East Asian countries have a face culture, different from Western countries with a dignity culture (Y. H. Kim & Cohen, 2010). Individuals within a face culture judge their worth through the eyes of others; thus, third-party recognition of their performance relative to their role and status is important. For example, Japanese and Chinese individuals are willing to commit suicide because of shame or losing face (Liu, 2017), while Vietnamese are "better to die than to lose face," and they will take action to ensure a good review by the third parties or to save face (T. Q. T. Nguyen, 2015; H. O. Nguyen et al., 2018). In some cases, face culture negatively affects individuals; even though they do their best, they are still subject to third-party judgment.

For politicians, face-saving is vital because the higher the status, the more important the role, and the more desirable to save face (T. Q. T. Nguyen, 2015). Several studies have shown that saving face influences the behavior of politicians, such as implementing the recommendations of the audit organizations (Acker & Bouckaert, 2019); international diplomatic behaviors of diplomats (Kuusmanen, 2021); negotiating behavior with international partners and voters while in the constituency (Kolb, 2020). There are two ways to save face. The first way is to "do it right the first time," and the second is to "cover up mistakes." While protest is a behavior that expresses citizens' voices (Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018) and often expresses dissatisfaction with local leaders (Quaranta, 2015). Therefore, local leaders may make negative choices, such as suppressing protests to save face and limiting citizens' political participation. Conversely, they accept losing face for a short time; they listen to the people and promote citizens' political participation. Similarly, saving face affects local leaders in their last term of office. They have two options: (i) continuing to be active, doing good things for the people, thereby promoting citizens' political participation, and those activities make them lose face; or (ii) withdrawing, being less active, avoiding conflicts as much as possible, and they save face.

### **Prejudice theory and participation**

Prejudice has been a commonly used concept in studies (Neal, 2014). Prejudice occurs when people shape a stereotype, a standard for a position or role in society, and suppose that a particular group cannot take on the position effectively (Eagly & Karau, 2002). This concept of prejudice is based on the mismatch between stereotypes of a group and beliefs about what is necessary to succeed in a particular social role. For example, prejudice occurs when an individual attempts to take on a role that does not conform to the stereotypical

characteristics assigned to their group (Neal, 2014). Among the prejudices, gender and race prejudice are the most common, examined by many authors and usually used in studies explaining social behaviors, including political participation (Bai, 2021).

Prejudice is one of the theories used considerably in political research in recent decades, such as political intolerance, political conflict and consequences, political orientation, and citizen participation (Bai, 2021; Bock et al., 2017). When individuals are prejudiced against a politician, they may not support that politician or the policies they make or even not participate in politics.

## Hypothesis development

### *Citizens' political participation and term of office*

A leader's term of office is determined by the time in a position. In democratic countries, a leader's term of office is finite, which leads to the construction of citizens' political participation in two ways (Baturo, 2010). The first is based on performance. Leaders with more working experience are more productive. Work experience provides leaders with more opportunities to fulfil political tasks. Thus, the "term of office" positively affects citizens' political participation. Askim (2009) also asserts that politics is a complicated job; leaders often refer to information about the effectiveness of policies to solve local problems better. The second is based on the ability to motivate citizens' political participation. The level of citizens' political participation reflects democracy and is one of the vital duties of politicians. Experienced politicians, especially incumbents, have more experience in these activities. For example, incumbent politicians can fund electoral or other social activities (Balz, 2010; Krebs, 2001). Local leaders often play an essential role in encouraging citizens to participate in local issues; experienced incumbents attract people to associate with a higher degree of political participation (Ianniello et al., 2018). It leads to incumbent leaders capable of political skills and experiences to solve problems related to people's participation. They also understand how to organize and what to perform to encourage citizens' political participation (Krebs, 2001).

In Vietnam, a government leader has two five-year terms in office for a position. After two terms, local leaders are retired or rotated before being promoted to a higher position. Some leaders are sent to the locality by their superiors to "experience" the reality at a local level; these leaders only serve one term or less and then get promoted. Some leaders serve only part of their second term of office because they have reached retirement age.

Those politicians can involve a so-called "political short-termism," favoring short-term interests over long-term interests in policymaking. Short-termism is believed to cause reduced citizen participation in community activities in some post-communist countries (Boström, 2017). It is also argued that one-party dominance extends a politician's term of office and could emerge as short-termism when a politician's term ends (Boström, 2017). However, those who are going to be rotated or promoted pay more attention to listening to citizen voices, and citizen participation can be a criterion for rotation or promotion. Also, public administration reform has required local participation as a criterion for evaluating leaders, which would lead to an increase in participation. Therefore, there are two opposite effects of the second term of office on participation, and the actual impact is ambiguous. This paper uses two main proxies—including the first and second term of office—to examine how the term of office influences citizens' political participation. The hypothesis is as follows:

**H1:** *The first term of office positively associates with citizens' political participation but not the second term of office.*

### *Citizens' political participation and gender of local leaders*

Many studies have designated that gender affects citizens' political participation (Bai, 2021). A female candidate negatively influences citizens' ability to elect her to leadership positions (Bock et al., 2017). Alternatively, female debaters prevent female candidates from being fairly judged by local citizens in political debates (Walsh, 2006). It can derive from two reasons. The first is culture. Generally, leadership in various areas, including politics, military, business and other sectors of society, seems to be a man's prerogative (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Like many other Asian countries, Vietnamese culture is still profoundly influenced by Confucianism (Chang et al., 2017; T. Q. T. Nguyen, 2015). Confucianism is a principle in life and behavior (T. Q. T. Nguyen, 2015). Confucian tradition is that only men participate in politics, or politicians should be male. Even though the Vietnamese government has made efforts to change the gender inequality of government leaders, it has not yet reached 35% of female leaders as the Communist Party of Vietnam expected.

The second is capacity. Women are often rated as warmer and likeable, but their limitations are politics (Eckes, 2002). When a woman becomes an incumbent, she is considered capable but perceived as

unfriendly (Eckes, 2002). Therefore, when a local leader is female, that local authority tends to have less participation from residents. According to prejudice theory, the reason an individual is prejudiced against someone stems from that individual's Big Five character traits. Therefore, gender can be the reason for citizens' political participation, and the stereotype of women's leadership ability appearing as inferior to men is affirmed. This view seems prevalent in many cultures (Eckes, 2002).

Further, Eagly and Karau (2002) highlight two forms of gender prejudice and leadership roles. First, women are less favorable than men in leadership roles; and second, women are less likely to be assessed as fulfilling leadership roles. The sexist prejudices lead to citizens having fewer positive attitudes toward female leaders, and women are more challenged and less successful in becoming leaders. When citizens' political participation is a promotion criterion, women are less likely to succeed.

O'Brien (2019) shows that leadership gender affects voters' decisions. Accordingly, moderates tend to support decisions made by female leaders, while citizens' extreme stances hinder women's leadership campaigns. The political reality of Vietnam in recent years shows that individuals tend to pay more attention to influential leaders in administration and management. Bunting et al. (2021) point out that women are underrepresented in the political system, and male leaders are more likely to be appropriate for political alignment and leadership. The reason is that women have less political knowledge than men and are less interested in politics. If the leaders are female, they are usually soft and less aggressive and their voices not strong enough, making people less likely to participate in political activities. Besides, Vietnam has no independent governing body election committee like Western countries. At the district level, the Vietnam Fatherland Front Committee cooperates with the People's Committee to organize a conference to contact voters for candidates for the People's Council at their level. Therefore, local leaders greatly influence the organization of local elections. When female leaders organize election activities, it is difficult to attract local people to participate in voting. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H2:** *Female leaders are associated with a lower probability of citizens' political participation.*

## **Citizens' political participation and local values**

### **ODA-receiving locality**

Some researchers have suggested that contextual factors, such as local institutions, cultural values, and beliefs,

influence citizens' participation (Busenberg, 2007; Callanan, 2005; Ianniello et al., 2018). Lumsdaine (1993) argues that ODA is primarily the product of a society's humanitarian ideas, values, and beliefs. The acceptance and how ODA is used within a community reflect local values and the political and economic priorities of the local government. In this sense, ODA-receiving locality is proxied to local values.

ODA projects directly or indirectly aim to improve democracy and citizen participation. The direct influence of ODA on citizen participation can be through regulations (JICA, 2013) and citizen involvement (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002; Hasselskog, 2020). For example, the donors request the decentralization of modality aids through support programs to increase citizen participation (Andrews & Vries, 2007; Hasselskog, 2020). For instance, the World Bank has adopted a policy requiring aid-receiving countries to consult their people (Hasselskog, 2020). The indirect influence of ODA is through programs to support knowledge development for the people, thereby promoting their participation in politics (Busenberg, 2007; JICA, 2013). Conversely, ODA aims to support the economy of citizens of the ODA recipient country. Meanwhile, the citizens' economy positively affects their satisfaction (Easterlin et al., 2012) and thereby influences their political participation (Shi et al., 2022). Hence, we hypothesize:

**H3a:** *ODA-receiving locality associated with a higher level of citizens' political participation.*

### **Historical protests in the locality**

Protests express citizens' voices when they want leaders to listen and take their claims seriously (Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018). Several studies have shown positive influences on whether citizens could raise their voices (Callanan, 2005; Ianniello et al., 2018; S. Kim & Schachter, 2013) or whether governments could listen to citizens' voices (Landry & Angeles, 2011). However, this "voice" often determines their discontent with local leaders (Quaranta, 2015), thereby showing the feeble performance of local leaders and making them lose face. In some circumstances, a protest may solely represent the citizens' dissatisfaction; however, it can demand a change in the people in power and, therefore, may alter the political career of the officials (Quaranta, 2015).

Like leaders in East Asian countries, local politicians in Vietnam are sensitive to behaviors that cause them "loss of face" (Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018; T. Q. T. Nguyen, 2015) and have save-face actions. They can choose "Do it right the first time" or "Cover the mistake" to save face. In the corrupt context, local leaders become corrupt leaders or lose their jobs. As a result, local leaders may

take action to save face by covering up after having to corrupt like the people around them.

Faced with protests, local leaders behave to “save face” or protect their political careers because they risk being diminished or losing power (Callanan, 2005). In this situation, they can choose to handle these conflicts by cooperation (Cheng et al., 2010) or to repress protests, which prevents citizens’ participation (H. Kim et al., 2015). For example, with protests, they may suppress and arrest participants with the widespread crime in Vietnam of “disturbing public order.” However, with the liberation of information in Vietnam, leaders’ negative behaviors, like suppressing protests, are quickly posted on unofficial media, such as social networks. Acts of suppressing protests can be counterproductive; it can cause them to “lose face” (Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018; T. Q. T. Nguyen, 2015) and negatively affect the career path of senior leaders (e.g., provincial level), leaving local leaders (e.g., district level) to suffer the consequences. For example, the 2015 Dong Tam protests (Hanoi, Vietnam) resulted in disciplinary punishments for 15 politicians and the expulsion of three members of the Communist party; the tree cutting in Hanoi caused three officials to be dismissed from their positions, and several departments were implicated. Therefore, it is believed that local leaders in Vietnam tend to choose to handle protests wisely, such as facilitating dialogue and listening to the people. This study examined protests in the past, so current leaders would not be primarily responsible for the local protests, but predecessors could cause tension problems. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H3b:** *Past protest-having locality positively associates with citizens’ political participation.*

Based on the theories of career path, face-saving and prejudice, results of literature reviews and the context of

Vietnam, the analytical framework of this paper is described in Figure 1.

## Estimation methods and data

### Estimated model

Citizens’ political participation is affected by many factors, including leader traits, local values and other control variables at the individual level. In this paper, citizens’ political participation is measured by a binary variable of voting; thus, a probit model should be used. Each factor is represented by different variables in equation (1).

$$\text{Prob}(Y = 1|X, Z, C, u) = \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta + u) \quad (1)$$

where  $Y$  is a binary dependent variable showing citizens’ political participation.  $Y = 1$  if an individual voted, and  $Y = 0$  otherwise.  $X$  is the vector showing leader traits proxied by terms in office and gender.  $C$  is the vector representing political contextual factors proxied by local protests and the presence of ODA projects.  $Z$  is the vector of control variables for individuals and districts.  $u$  are random errors, which are independent identically distributed.  $\Phi$  is the cumulative distribution function of the standard normal distribution.

The estimated coefficients in equation (1) show the changes in z-scores corresponding to the changes in independent variables. Therefore, it is necessary to calculate the marginal effect of independent variables on the dependent variables. The marginal effect measures the impacts of independent variables on the probability of citizens changing from non-participated/non-voted ( $Y = 0$ ) to participated/voted ( $Y = 1$ ). The marginal effect is calculated as follows:

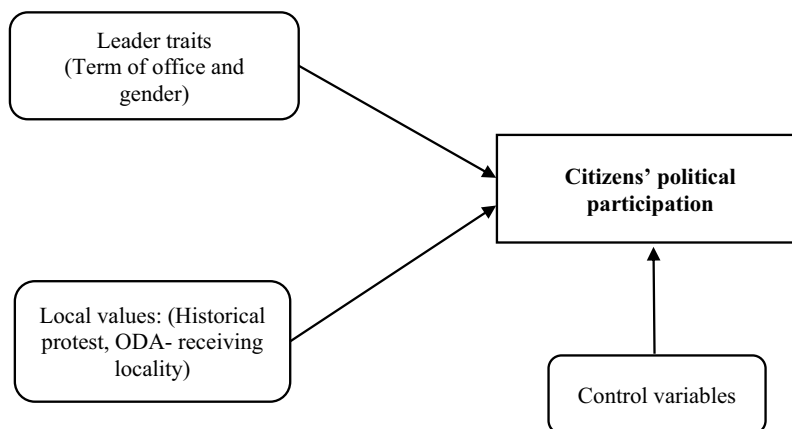


Figure 1. Analytical framework.

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial \text{Prob}(Y)}{\partial X_j} &= \frac{\partial \Phi(\cdot)}{\partial X_j} \times \beta_j \\ &= \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta + u) \times \beta_j \quad (2) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial \text{Prob}(Y)}{\partial C_l} &= \frac{\partial \Phi(\cdot)}{\partial C_l} \times \gamma_l \\ &= \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta + u) \times \gamma_l \quad (3) \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\partial \text{Prob}(Y)}{\partial Z_k} &= \frac{\partial \Phi(\cdot)}{\partial Z_k} \times \theta_k \\ &= \Phi(\alpha + X\beta + C\gamma + Z\theta + u) \times \theta_k \quad (4) \end{aligned}$$

The estimated results of equations (2), (3) and (4) imply the change in the probability that a citizen shifts from non-voted to voted when independent variables change from their mean.

### Data and variables

The datasets used in this research are adapted from two sources. The first dataset is the PAPI survey conducted at the individual level in 2017, and the second is the district leaders survey carried out in the same year. Notably, local leaders' term of office lasts for five years, from 2015 to 2020, so local leaders in 2017 are as in 2015. Based on 226 surveyed districts in the PAPI, the Ministry of Home Affairs sent a questionnaire to either the district Party leaders or the Chairman of the district People Committee randomly to collect information on district leaders' traits and other district contextual factors. Due to missing values and non-responsive districts, 208 districts are successfully included. After combining two datasets, the research sample consists of 12,850 individuals in 208 districts from 63 provinces and cities in Vietnam.

In this study, the citizens' political participation variable is measured by whether individuals voted. It equals 1 if a citizen voted and 0 otherwise. The definitions and measures of variables are described in Annex 1, and their statistics are presented in Table 1.

"Terms of office" is a factor that can be measured in two variables: the first term of office and the second term of office. Local values are proxied by having protests or ODA projects in the past. With these measures, current citizens' participation does not impact the historical protest or ODA projects, or they do not have feedback effects from citizens' participation. The definition and measure of variables are provided in Annex 1.

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics of variables.

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Political participation	0.5186	0.4933	0	1
Party leader	0.7379	0.4398	0	1
Gender	0.8664	0.3402	0	1
First term of office	0.7356	0.4410	0	1
Second term of office	0.2644	0.3361	0	1
Years of Party member	23.3039	7.0165	1	38
District satisfaction rates	83.2848	5.0900	66.9	95.0
District protest	0.0870	0.2819	0	1
District ODA	0.5928	0.4913	0	1
District transparency rate	0.4528	0.1295	0.15	0.84
District corruption rate	0.0486	0.0413	0	0.21
District population	13.6294	0.2609	9.8	23.6
Individual gender	0.4739	0.4993	0	1
Individual age	48.2560	11.8778	17	91
Individual ethnic	0.8353	0.3709	0	1
Individual education	0.3589	0.4797	0	1
Individual poor	0.0963	0.2950	0	1
Individual urban	0.5912	0.4916	0	1

### Empirical results and discussion

The study conducted multicollinearity tests using the Pearson correlation matrix and the variance inflation factor (VIF). All correlation coefficients among independent variables were lower than 0.504, and the highest VIF was 1.70, much lower than the cutoff of 10. They show no evidence of multicollinearity among the independent variables in the estimated models (Annex 2).

This paper used various estimated models to check for robustness, including a benchmark estimated model (Model 1), a regression model with standard error correction (Model 2), and a regression model with the bootstrapping procedure (Model 3). They are controlled for individual and district characteristics. The empirical results confirmed the consistency and robustness of estimators (see Table 2).

The term of office is a predictor of citizens' political participation. Consistent with expectation, it has the opposite effects. Local leaders attract more citizens' political participation in the first term but not during their second term of office. The term of office is positively associated with citizens' political participation since staying longer in the office means more work experience and higher work efficiency as a prediction of the career path theory. Thus, local leaders can motivate citizens' political participation (Askim, 2009; Balz, 2010; Ianniello et al., 2018; Krebs, 2001). Unfortunately, the empirical results do not support the results of the previous studies, mostly conducted in Western democratic countries. This consequence may stem from the "political career path" and "short-termism" existing in the Vietnamese political context.

The "political career path" refers to a sequence of political positions promoted. When local leaders perform well (e.g., encourage more citizen participation),



**Table 2.** Empirical estimated results: marginal effects.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Party leader	-0.0585** (0.0277)	-0.0585*** (0.0276)	-0.0585* (0.0319)
Years of Party member	-0.0059*** (0.0020)	-0.0059*** (0.0020)	-0.0059*** (0.0020)
Gender	0.0760* (0.0417)	0.0760* (0.0413)	0.0760** (0.0373)
First term of office	0.0885*** (0.0280)	0.0885*** (0.0280)	0.0885*** (0.0283)
Second term of office	-0.0351 (0.0316)	-0.0351 (0.0316)	-0.0351 (0.0308)
District protest	0.117** (0.0477)	0.117** (0.0481)	0.117*** (0.0441)
District ODA	0.0502** (0.0244)	0.0502** (0.0244)	0.0502** (0.0243)
District satisfaction rates	0.00379 (0.0026)	0.00379 (0.0027)	0.00379 (0.0032)
District Transparency rate	0.535*** (0.0931)	0.535*** (0.0934)	0.535*** (0.0892)
District corruption rate	-0.524 (0.3390)	-0.524 (0.3410)	-0.524 (0.3500)
District Population	-0.146*** (0.0192)	-0.146*** (0.0193)	-0.146*** (0.0189)
Individual gender	0.499*** (0.0230)	0.499*** (0.0231)	0.499*** (0.0196)
Individual age	0.0237*** (0.0010)	0.0237*** (0.0010)	0.0237*** (0.0009)
Individual ethnic	0.0578* (0.0337)	0.0578* (0.0339)	0.0578 (0.0365)
Individual education	0.225*** (0.0260)	0.225*** (0.0261)	0.225*** (0.0249)
Individual poor	-0.0597 (0.0414)	-0.0597 (0.0425)	-0.0597* (0.0362)
Individual urban	-0.0560** (0.0254)	-0.0560** (0.0254)	-0.0560** (0.0235)
Constant	-0.494 (0.3080)	-0.494 (0.3080)	-0.494 (0.3560)
Observations	12850	12850	12850
Pseudo R-sq	0.068	0.068	0.068

the probability of promotion is higher. Thus, leaders in the first term of office tend to offer more incentives, stay close and encourage citizens' political participation. When citizens realize positive policy contributions and practical actions, it creates opportunities for leaders to be elected for the second term.

"Short-termism" properly explains this empirical result. Long-term leaders will act toward long-term goals, and short-term leaders will act toward short-term goals, especially in the last term, before leaving office, regardless of how they performed (Alesina & Tabellini, 2008). Short-termism makes leaders take advantage of being leaders, especially in the last term, for corruption or personal gain and has a severe connotation. Some circumstances, for example, plundering wealth and corruption, occur in localities where leaders have been in the last term of office. It dramatically influences people's beliefs, which affects their ability to participate in politics. Residents are less confident in the local government; hence, they reduce their contributing behaviors to public works. Political leaders are more concerned about reelection as voters become rational, resulting in increased short-termism (Garri, 2010).

Leaders fear that their probability of continued leadership could be diminished if they cannot deliver positive contributions to citizens. Along with efforts to save face, there is a tendency for leaders to focus on short-term results. They persuade local citizens during the first term by providing benefits, so citizens are likely to judge politicians in the first term for the reelected probability (Garri, 2010). It does not imply that Vietnam should amend so that leaders can hold positions longer than two terms because "no more two terms" is an approach that all democratic countries apply and has shown effectiveness. Instead, Vietnamese law should pay more attention to managing leaders in their second term because this is the term where negative events often occur.

Unfortunately, current regulations do not prevent the negative behavior of local leaders in the second term. When the second term ends, local leaders have two paths: retire or continue (either rotation or promotion). Retired leaders are rarely prosecuted for their previous mistakes, but they have a "safe landing." Thus, they are less interested in the voice of citizens and take advantage of being leaders for personal gains, which reduces citizens' political participation. On the contrary, those who know they will continue their political path (through rotation or promotion) tend to listen to citizens' voices more, as citizen participation can be a criterion for rotation or promotion. Also, the recent public administration reform has required local participation as a criterion for evaluating local leaders, so those local leaders must care about and encourage citizens' participation. Thus, the negative impact of the second term of local leaders on people's participation in the case of Vietnam implies that the negative impact is dominant.

*Gender of local leaders* matters for citizens' political participation. Local female leaders tend to attract less political participation from citizens than their male counterparts. This empirical result supports previous studies of the negative influences of female leaders on citizen participation (Bock et al., 2017; Schlehofer et al., 2011; Walsh, 2006). The stereotypes about the capacity of female leaders exist in Vietnam and are similar to the findings of previous studies (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eckes, 2002). The two reasons female leaders are negatively associated with citizens' political participation are culture and stereotypes of females' capacity. They are consistent with previous observations on gender bias in politics and prejudices against female leaders (Bock et al., 2017; Schlehofer et al., 2011; Walsh, 2006), especially in Vietnam, where Confucianism profoundly influences its culture.

*Local values* are significant for citizens' political participation. The empirical result supports the hypothesis

of ODA-receiving locality with higher citizens' political participation. Accordingly, leaders can further consider the effect of government initiatives on citizen participation through ODA projects. For example, JICA (2013) noted that improving governance quality is the main priority area of Japan's ODA in Vietnam. In this sense, ODA-receiving locality results in higher citizens' political participation. The estimated result also asserts that *historical protest* is positively associated with citizens' political participation. It is similar to the results from Callanan (2005), Ianniello et al. (2018), and S. Kim and Schachter (2013). When citizens raise their voices, the government listens and responds positively; for example, tree-cutting externalities in Hanoi in 2015, as noted by Gillespie and Nguyen (2018), or local values of corruption tolerance found in P. A. Nguyen and Le (2022). The government's response builds people's confidence and motivates citizens to participate in local affairs. In contrast, *historical protests* make incumbents lose face or feel undervalued by their superiors about their performance (Gillespie & Nguyen, 2018). Local leaders may choose a more negative solution, such as preventing those who protested in the past from continuing to participate in politics. However, the empirical result provides convincing evidence that not all protests are repressed, as found in Göbel (2021), and local leaders tend to consider a more active approach, like listening to citizens to promote greater political participation.

### Implications and conclusions

This study presents the first attempt to investigate the impacts of local leader traits and local values on citizens' political participation in a communist one-party-led country. It finds that the local leader traits and local values do matter, either encouraging or preventing citizens' political participation, depending on their measurements. The empirical results support the crucial aspect of democracy and deliver policy implications on encouraging citizens' political participation in communist countries like Vietnam, China, North Korea, and Cuba, and maybe in the "de facto single-party states."

The empirical results suggest some theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, the career path theory may not work well for local leaders in the political context of a sole communist party-led country. This theory can explain the behavior of leaders who continue to be leaders through rotation or promotion. Meanwhile, the career paths of leaders about to retire will not be ruined, even if they are corrupt, since they are not prosecuted, which is different from Western democratic countries. Hence, the career path theory could be less effective in explaining this

case. Instead, specific regulations of two terms of office in a position should affect the role of "term of office" on citizens' political participation; specifically, local leaders in the early stage of the "political career path" positively affect citizens' political participation. In contrast, short-termism reduces citizens' political participation. Besides, the perspectives of face culture or face-saving can support this result. The desire to save face has enabled local leaders to encourage people to participate, such as making dialogue in case of protests or conflicts and attracting external aid. Regarding the term of office, leaders attempt to save face by creating comfortable situations and not generating extreme decisions, so they have opportunities to develop their careers in another locality. Therefore, further studies on the political behavior in Vietnam and Asian-culture countries should pay more attention to the save-face theory.

The results also shed light on measures to encourage citizens' political participation from a managerial perspective. First, short-termism explains the negative influence of the second term of office on citizens' political participation. Local leaders are more likely to be corrupt and discourage people from participating in politics. Meanwhile, the Vietnamese political system still implicitly states that "retirement is not prosecuted." Therefore, the Vietnamese government needs to change and firmly deal with corrupt officials even if they are retired. Furthermore, the people's political participation should be considered an essential criterion for leaders in transition and retirement. It limits short-termism and places more importance on encouraging citizens' political participation. Second, gender equality in the political system is essential. Outstanding female leaders in the system would reduce citizens' gender bias and prejudice, be a potential solution to eliminate gender bias and prejudice and attract citizens participating in politics, especially women. Third, encouraging the promotion of young leaders can be considered for practical implications in Vietnam. Young leaders can be promoted to higher positions after the second term if they have done well. As a result, they avoid short-termism and promote political participation.

The paper has three limitations. First, it does not endeavor to discover all aspects of political participation, leaders' traits, and local values. As only voting behavior is proxied for citizens' political participation, gender and terms of office are proxied for leaders' traits, and ODA or historical protest is proxied for local values. Thus, future studies should include other aspects of those factors for more comprehensive conclusions. Second, unmeasured citizens' motivation or capacity for political engagement likely affects both the probability of voting and the type of leader, term of office secured, ODA receipts, and

protests. Further research should expand the dataset so researchers can explore and add variables relating to citizen motivation and capacity for policy engagement. Third, this paper is a cross-sectional study, so the results are only temporal and do not reflect lagged effects on citizens' political participation. Citizens' political participation is a cumulative process that cannot be measured by just one leader or specific time point. Thus, future studies could use longitudinal data to contribute more comprehensively.

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## Appendix

### Annex 1. Definitions and measures of variables

Variables	Definition	Measures	Sources
Political participation	Voting of citizen	It equals 1 if a citizen voted and 0 otherwise	PAPI
Party leader	Position of the surveyed district leaders	It equals 1 if the surveyed leader was the district Party leader and 0 otherwise (chairman of the district People Committee)	MOHA
Gender	Gender of the district leader	It equals 1 if the gender of the district leader is male and 0 otherwise	MOHA
First term of office	It is first terms the surveyed district leader is in this position	It equals 1 if the district leader is in this position for the first term and 0 otherwise	MOHA
Second term of office	It is second terms the surveyed district leader is in this position	It equals 1 if the district leader is in this position for the second term and 0 otherwise	MOHA
Years of Party member	Number of years that the surveyed district leader has been a party member	It is a random variable measuring how long the district leader has been a party member	PAPI
District satisfaction rates	Showing the average rates of citizen satisfaction with the district official overall	It is a random variable calculated for each surveyed district from PAPI	PAPI
District protest	Citizen protests in the district in the last ten years	The variable equals 1 if any citizen protests have been for the last ten years, and 0 otherwise	MOHA
District ODA	ODA projects have been operated in the last ten years	The variable equals 1 if any ODA projects have been operated for the last five years, and 0 otherwise	MOHA
District transparency rate	Transparency at the district level	It is measure by percentage of citizen who can access to public administrative information and procedure as in PAPI	PAPI
District corruption rate	Rates of pay informal charges	It is measured by percentage of citizens paying informal charges when using public administrative and services	PAPI
District Population	Population size	It measures the population size of the district in the year of survey conducted	PAPI
Individual gender	Gender of respondents	It equals 1 if the gender of the respondents is male and 0 otherwise	PAPI
Individual age	Age of respondents	It is a random variable showing how old the respondent is at the surveyed time	PAPI
Individual ethnic	Ethnic of respondent	It equals 1 if the ethnic group of the respondents is Kinh and 0 otherwise	PAPI
Individual education	Education level of respondent	It is a dummy variable. It equals 1 if the respondent obtains high school certificate or higher, and 0 otherwise	PAPI
Individual poor	Economic situation of respondent	It is a dummy variable. It equals 1 if the respondent is poor (having a poor household book), and 0 otherwise	PAPI
Individual urban	Areas where the respondent is living	It equals 1 if the respondent is living in the urban areas, and 0 otherwise	PAPI

**Annex 2. The Pearson correlation matrix**

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)	VIF
Party leader	1.000																	1.41
Gender	-0.030	1.000																1.07
First term of office	0.121	-0.155	1.000															1.57
Second term of office	0.052	0.037	0.171	1.000														1.10
Years of Party member	0.052	0.178	-0.109	-0.504	1.000													1.56
District rates of satisfaction	-0.109	0.040	-0.074	0.041	0.126	1.000												1.70
District protest	-0.076	-0.237	0.069	-0.062	0.058	-0.055	1.000											1.15
District ODA	-0.104	0.074	0.027	0.058	-0.146	-0.029	0.121	1.000										1.11
District Transparency	-0.014	-0.011	-0.026	-0.015	0.058	0.028	0.013	-0.144	1.000									1.12
District Corruption control	0.033	-0.030	0.011	-0.037	-0.055	-0.488	0.019	-0.067	0.147	1.000								1.42
District Population	0.038	-0.039	-0.037	-0.030	0.043	0.013	0.138	-0.105	0.033	0.115	1.000							1.20
Individual gender	-0.008	-0.002	0.010	0.004	0.007	0.022	-0.005	0.002	-0.016	-0.022	-0.007	1.000						1.01
Individual age	-0.006	-0.035	0.016	-0.011	0.018	-0.016	-0.014	-0.062	0.070	0.035	0.105	-0.022	1.000					1.07
Individual ethnic	0.054	-0.088	0.084	0.003	-0.018	-0.033	-0.016	-0.070	0.105	0.093	0.313	-0.015	0.119	1.000				1.23
Individual education	0.028	0.023	0.013	-0.017	0.014	-0.104	-0.001	-0.030	0.151	0.162	0.081	0.065	-0.123	0.120	1.000			1.19
Individual poor	-0.001	0.039	-0.069	0.000	-0.012	0.026	0.008	0.050	-0.120	-0.054	-0.151	-0.010	-0.075	-0.259	-0.170	1.000		1.12
Individual urban	0.084	0.074	0.054	0.031	-0.018	-0.070	-0.022	0.013	0.080	0.138	0.161	-0.005	0.105	0.219	0.284	-0.162	1.000	1.19