

# Social Capital in Vietnam: An Analysis of Social Networks and Social Trust

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## Abstract

This article investigates the configuration of social capital in Vietnam by focusing on social networks and social trust, the two key dimensions of social capital. Specifically, the study examines the change of these two dimensions over time. To achieve these aims, the study employs data of Vietnam from Waves 5 and 7 of the World Values Survey (WVS), the largest social survey in the world, for the analyses. Quantitative analyses reveal that Vietnam is characterized by a high level of bonding social capital, in which the Vietnamese tend to place a high level of trust in a small circle of known people and have frequent contact with those close to them. Furthermore, the results reveal a decline in membership in mobilized groups (associations directly controlled by the state) and less-mobilized groups (associations relatively autonomous in their activities), corresponding to an increase in membership in separate groups (associations with highly autonomous activities). The study also reveals that while the participation in mobilized groups has a positive impact on social trust, the engagement in less-mobilized and separate groups increases distrust in others. It suggests that in Vietnam, associational participation does not necessarily foster trust as occurs in western societies.

**Keywords:** social capital, social trust, social networks, dimensions of social capital, Vietnam

## Introduction

Social capital is a well-established construct that has become a mainstream concept in the social sciences. It is described as the glue that holds people together in societies (Adkins, 2005), playing a crucial

role in providing resources for economic development and smooth operation of democracy (Fukuyama, 2001), as well as improving optimism and life satisfaction (Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). Social capital operates as a function that reduces crime and facilitates the effectiveness of political institutions (Kawachi, Kennedy and Glass 1998; Putnam, 1993), as catalysts that motivate individuals to engage in civic actions (Son and Lin, 2008) and politics (Bowler, Donovan and Hanneman, 2003).

Vietnamese scholars have been interested in studying social capital since the late 1990s and early 2000s. The studies began with a theoretical debate on the convergence and divergence of different perspectives on social capital (Le, 2008; Nguyen, 2011). Scholars have discussed different aspects and characteristics of social capital and its relationship with other kinds of capital (Le, 2008; Nguyen, 2011). In recent years, empirical studies on social capital in the context of Vietnam have been carried out, focusing on its role in other aspects of social life, such as access to credit and rural services (Dinh, Dufhues and Buchenrieder, 2012); financial savings (Newman, Tarp and Van Den Broeck, 2011); consolidation and use of rural land (Thomese and Nguyen, 2007); and mobilizing capital in enterprises (Appold and Nguyen, 2004). Furthermore, scholars also have looked at social trust to detect its origin (Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen and Nguyen, 2013), and conditions moderating the relationship between social trust and political trust (Nguyen, 2019).

A brief review of the relevant literature above reveals that although previous research was devoted to examining the roles of social capital in several domains, very few studies investigated key dimensions, namely social trust and social networks, in configuring social capital in the Vietnamese context. The work of Dalton and Ong (2005) and the studies of Nguyen, Cao, Nguyen, Nguyen, Nguyen, and Vuong (2016; 2013) are exceptions. Nevertheless, one of the limitations of these studies is that the results were based on data from 20 years ago (Dalton and Ong, 2005) and it is unclear if the dimensions of social capital have experienced changes over this period of time. Moreover, previous studies

failed to consider the different categories of social trust. In their studies, Nguyen et al. (2016; 2013) categorized trust in civil servants, who serve the public sector through a government department, and trust in communication institutions as two types of social trust. This type of theoretical classification of social trust is highly problematic because trust in civil servants and trust in communication institutions are widely acknowledged to be types of political trust, which is defined as the reflection of citizens' perception and evaluation of the performance of political institutions (Newton, Stolle and Zmerli 2018; Rothstein and Stolle, 2008, 2002; Zmerli and Newton, 2017). It is different from social trust, which refers to the general faith in interactions with others. More importantly, there is an inconsistency in the findings of the relationship between social trust and social networks in the previous analyses. Whereas Nguyen et al. (2016) found no link between social trust and group memberships, Dalton and Ong (2015) showed a non-linear relationship between associational memberships and general trust. In another study, Nguyen (2018) showed the negative impacts of associational memberships on generalized trust. A likely explanation of the inconsistency is that the conflicting results derive from different ways of measuring social trust and social networks, which were employed in previous studies. As discussed above, Nguyen et al. (2016) offered a problematic construction of social trust in which institutional trust was included as a type of social trust. Furthermore, the authors created an inadequate measurement of general social trust by computing an additive index of several types of trust. Nguyen (2018), instead, regarded generalized trust as trust in unknown people. Regarding the operationalization of social networks, while Nguyen et al. (2016) developed an index referring to all associational memberships, Nguyen (2018) focused only on respondents' memberships in five relatively autonomous groups. Dalton and Ong (2005) made a more comprehensive attempt when categorizing social networks into different types of memberships in associations: memberships in mobilized, less-mobilized, and separate groups.

The crucial contribution offered by our paper lies in investigating the configuration of social capital in the context of Vietnam by looking at networks and trust, two key components cutting across the diverse literature of social capital. The empirical analysis of this study will be drawn on a theoretical underpinning of social capital from the established literature. Specifically, social trust will be scrutinized through an operationalization into general trust, in-group trust, and out-group trust. Meanwhile, social networks will be considered by an examination of informal and formal networks. Furthermore, this article endeavors to disentangle the theoretical implication of the relationship between social networks and social trust, which are inconsistent in previous analyses. To achieve its goals, this study employs data of Vietnam from Waves 5 and 7 of the World Values Survey (hereafter referred to as the “WVS”) (Inglehart et al., 2020), the largest social survey in the world, for the analyses.

This article is structured as follows. The first section above introduced the goals of the study. The next part presents an overview of the concept of social capital, examining its dimensions. A discussion of the data and methods of the study appears in the third section. The fourth part presents results, followed by a concluding discussion in the final section.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **The Concept of Social Capital**

A thorough review of the literature on social capital reveals that there is no standard definition of the concept that is widely accepted. Studies of social capital have traditionally been divided into two schools, collectivism and individualism. The collective account regards social capital as a public good, viewing the concept as the property of communities or societies that fosters the integration of members in order to accomplish common goals. Robert Putnam and Francis Fukuyama are two influential scholars in this strand. Putnam (1993: 167) initially sees social capital as “features of social organization, such as

trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions.” Fukuyama regards mutual trust as the core component of social capital, considering trust to be “spontaneous sociability” which produces “prior moral consensus” in a community that regulates social relations (Fukuyama, 1995).

Unlike the collective school, the individual account approaches social capital as private goods, meaning a set of properties invested in by a person or groups within relationships or networks to secure benefits. Bourdieu (1986: 249) views the concept as “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition.” In a similar vein, Coleman (1988: S98) defines social capital by its function, encompassing “a variety of entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure... Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons.” Similarly, Lin (2001: 25) regards social capital as resources “embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions.”

Scholars have attempted to reconcile this divergence by taking a neutral stance, seeing social capital as consisting of both private and public goods. Woolcock (1998: 153), for example, treats social capital as “the information, trust, and norms of reciprocity inhering in one’s social networks.” By regarding social capital as the goodwill available to individuals or groups, Adler and Kwon (2002: 23) argue that the source of social capital “lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor.”

### **Main Components of Social Capital: Social Networks and Social Trust**

Despite the existence of the divergent approaches to social capital, there are also points of convergence. First, the formation of social capital is closely associated with social networks (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). Second, social capital is regarded as resources

embedded in social relations, social networks, or social structures (Bourdieu, 1986; Lin, 2001). Third, the investments of social actors in social relations and social networks are considered to be conditions for the creation of social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000). Fourth, trust and reciprocity play an important role in generating social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Fukuyama, 1995; Portes, 1998; Putnam, 2000).

Scholarship on social capital also recognizes two main components of the concept, cognitive or attitudes (social trust) and structure (social networks) (Putnam, 2000). The idea of social networks implies sets of linkage relationships connecting identified individuals, groups, or organizations (Stockard, 2000). Social networks can exist at different levels, connecting societies or communities at the societal (macro) level, groups or organizations at the meso level, and people at the individual (micro) level. The focus of this study is on the individual-level analysis. It pays attention to personal networks, regarded as a set of ties or relationships connecting individuals to individuals or with groups or organizations.

Social networks can vary by size and density. Scholars differentiate between “strong ties” and “weak ties.” The former term denotes the connections emphasizing emotional intensity and intimacy, the latter refers to contacts among people regardless of the degree of emotional intensity and intimacy (Granovetter, 1973). Built on the idea of strong and weak ties, scholars distinguish between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital refers to social connections between homogeneous individuals or groups with similar socio-demographic backgrounds. By contrast, bridging social capital concerns social relations among non-homogeneous individuals and groups (Putnam, 2000; Szreter and Woolcock, 2004). Both bonding and bridging social capital consists of connections among individuals having the same status and power, regarded as horizontal networks. They are different from vertical networks, which are the relationships among individuals possessing unequal status and power, characterized by hierarchy and dependence (Putnam, 1995, 2000). Drawing on vertical

social networks, Szreter and Woolcock (2004: 655) conceptualize linking social capital, defined as “norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society.”

As a cognitive dimension of social capital, social trust is defined as a “bet about the future contingent actions of others” (Sztompka, 1999: 25). It is “the belief that other people will not deliberately or knowingly do us harm, if they can avoid it, and will look after our interests, if this is possible” (Delhey and Newton, 2005: 311). This study considers trust as individuals’ expectation that others will behave honestly and avoid harming others (Glanville and Paxton, 2013: 2). Based on Fukuyama’s conception of the “radius of trust” (1995), social trust is categorized into particularized (thick or personal) trust, trust in known people such as family and friends, and generalized (thin or impersonal) trust, an optimistic attitude in interaction with strangers (Uslaner, 2002: 34).

Social networks are theoretically conceived as significant sources producing social trust (Putnam, 1993, 1995, 2000) through two mechanisms. First, regular interactions with close members such as family, relatives, and friends (informal social networks) help to facilitate the sense of sharing, developing a reliable and optimistic perception among people. This sense is more likely to be spread over other relationships, enhancing the feeling that others can be predictable in their behavior. In this regard, people with more frequent interactions within close ties are more likely to trust (Glanville and Paxton, 2013). Second, the participation and interactions between members in organizations facilitate the creation of norms and social sanctions which are embedded in the social structures of the organizations. This helps to increase the predictability of cooperation and the prevalence of trust in associations (Paxton, 2007: 50). As a result, engagement in voluntary organizations is likely to foster trust among individuals.

### **The Present Study**

This study focuses on two main components of social capital, namely networks (structural) and trust (attitudinal). It also provides empirical

evidence on the link between social networks and social trust in the Vietnamese context. The analysis of social capital in this study is at the individual level. Portes (1998: 2) claims that “the greatest theoretical promise of social capital lies at the individual level – exemplified by the analyses of Bourdieu and Coleman.” Subsequent studies yield more evidence for the superiority of the individual-level approach. While studies at the individual-level of analysis offer a more precise conceptualization and measurement of social capital, in which empirical evidence has been consistent and uncontroversial, studies at the collective level produce more equivocal and contentious findings (Son and Lin, 2008: 37).

We researched social networks by distinguishing between informal and formal social networks. The former is analogous to the ideas of strong ties and bonding social capital, comprising close ties to individuals such as family members, friends, neighbors, and colleagues. The latter, consisting of ideas of weak ties and bridging social capital, refers to the membership of individuals in organizations. This operationalization of social networks also serves an analytical purpose because it increases the possibility of the analyses, owing to the availability of items measuring social networks in the data of WVS. It also should be noticed that in contemporary Vietnam, most social organizations are under the control of and mobilized by the Vietnamese state through an umbrella organization called the Vietnam Fatherland Front (Thayer, 2008). However, there also exist organizations that are more autonomous and independent. Thus, to offer a more appropriate analysis of associational memberships in Vietnam, we follow the operationalization suggested by Dalton and Ong (2005) to classify three types of associational memberships, namely: participation in mobilized, less mobilized, and separate organizations. This classification is of great significance for the analyses because it accurately reflects the nature and characteristics of formal ties in the Vietnamese context. Mobilized organizations are associations under the direct control of the state. These groups consist of labor unions, professional organizations, and political parties. Less mobilized organizations are groups or associations that are

not directly controlled by the state and are relatively autonomous in their activities, such as environmental organizations, sports or recreation associations, and charitable or humanitarian organizations. Separate organizations are those with highly autonomous activities, for instance, religious organizations.

Regarding social trust, we take into account the general social trust of Vietnamese people by considering trust as individuals’ trusting attitude towards people in general. Also, we classify social trust into in-group and out-group trust (Delhey Newton and Welzel, 2011; Sztompka, 1999). Similar to particularized trust, in-group trust consists of trustworthy attitudes towards familiar people such as relatives, friends, and acquaintances. In contrast, out-group trust refers to the trusting beliefs regarding strangers or those with out-group identity characteristics, such as nationality and religion (Delhey and Welzel, 2012: 47).

We also reconcile conflicting findings of the relationship between social networks and social trust in the Vietnamese context by expanding the examination of the impact of different types of social networks, namely informal and formal social ties, on social trust in the Vietnamese context. In particular, for the effects of formal social networks, we will explore whether different kinds of associational memberships (memberships in mobilized, less-mobilized, and separate organizations) have different influences on general social trust.

## **Data, Variables, and Methods**

### **Data**

This article relies primarily on the data of Vietnam from Waves 5 and 7 of the WVS survey (Inglehart et al., 2020). As was mentioned above, the WVS is the largest social survey, of which the data set is freely accessed and has been widely used in academic studies. The WVS survey employs a national representative random sample of adult citizens aged 18 years and over, based on multi-stage territorial stratified selection. Seven waves were carried out from 1981 to 2020. Vietnam

joined the WVS in Waves 4 (2001), 5 (2006), and 7 (2020). While the data of Vietnam from Wave 4 was used in previous studies of social relations and social capital (Dalton and Ong, 2005; Dalton, Hac, Nghi, and Ong, 2002), this study employs data from the latest two waves conducted in Vietnam that offer more updates and current material for the analyses. By referring to the previous analyses, using data from Waves 5 and 7 allows us to see how key dimensions of social capital in Vietnam have changed over twenty years. The total sample size from Waves 5 and 7 in Vietnam is 2695 respondents.

Three reasons justify the use of data sets from the fifth and seventh waves of WVS. One is that WVS contains items measuring social capital for the analyses of this study. Second, these waves offer the latest data of Vietnam, thus providing more current material for investigating dimensions of social capital in contemporary Vietnamese society. Finally, the data of Vietnam from the fifth and seventh waves of WVS were collected from a representative sample constructed through the application of a national representative random sample based on multi-stage territorial stratified selection. The representativeness of the sample guarantees the validity of statistical inferences.

### Variables

**Informal social networks:** Informal social networks are gauged by contacts with family members or relatives, friends, and colleagues. Unfortunately, the WVS does not include items directly measuring informal social networks; thus, we employed items measuring respondents' perception of the importance of family, friends, and work as proxy variables<sup>1</sup> for informal social networks. The implication is that people with a high preference for family, friends, or workplace put more emphasis on relationships with these groups, thus, resulting in more contacts with family members, friends, and colleagues. In Waves 5 and 7, respondents were asked how family, friends, and work are important in their life. The answer is coded in a four-point ordered scale from

<sup>1</sup> In statistics, "a proxy variable refers to an alternative that can be used when the actual variable is not measurable or not reliable" (Jo, Kim and Yoon 2015: 215).

1 – "very important," 2 – "rather important," 3 – "not very important," and 4 – "not important at all." We also inverted the scale for analytical purposes. Consequently, these variables are measured on an ordered scale ranging from 1 – "not very important at all" to 4 – "very important."

**Formal social networks:** In the fifth and seventh wave of the WVS, associational membership is measured by the question of how active respondents are in church or religious organizations; sports or recreation; art, music, educational organizations; labor unions; political parties; environmental organizations; professional organizations; charitable/humanitarian organizations. The answer is coded from 0 – "not a member," 1 – "inactive member," 2 – "active member." For analytical purposes in this section, I recoded the answer dichotomously with 0 – "not a member," and 1 – "a member."

As proposed by Dalton and Ong (2005), we created the variable denoting the participation in a mobilized organization by combining three items measuring the membership of respondents in organizations under the direct control of the state, including labor unions, professional organizations, and political parties. This combination yields an additive index of memberships in mobilized organizations. Similarly, the variable measuring the engagement in less mobilized organizations is an additive index which is the combination of membership of respondents in associations less controlled by the state and relatively autonomous in their activities, namely environmental organizations, sports or recreation associations, and charitable or humanitarian organizations. The variable measuring the involvement in separate organizations is the membership of respondents in groups with highly autonomous activities, namely religious organizations.

**General social trust:** In the WVS survey, general social trust is measured by the question "Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?" This is a standard question developed by Noelle-Neumann in 1948. The idea is to measure trust in a wide and unfamiliar circle of others, rather than in a small circle of close and familiar others (Delhey et al., 2011: 787). The answer is coded on a dichotomous scale

with 1 – most people can be trusted and 2 – need to be very careful. For analytical purposes, we recorded the measurement into 0 – need to be very careful and 1 – most people can be trusted.

**In-group trust:** In Waves 5 and 7 of the WVS, in-group trust is measured by the question of how much respondents trust in family, neighbors, and personally known people. The answer is coded in a four-point ordered scale from 1 “trust completely” to 4 “do not trust at all.” We inversely recoded it into a scale from 1 “do not trust at all” to 4 “trust completely.”

**Out-group trust:** The WVS includes three items to examine the out-group trust of respondents, namely trust in people met for the first time, trust in people of another religion, and trust in people of another nationality. These items are measured on a four-point ordered scale from 1 “trust completely” to 4 “do not trust at all,” which is inversely recoded in this analysis to yield a scale from 1 “do not trust at all” to 4 “trust completely.”

**Waves of the survey:** This is a binary variable coded with 0 “Wave 5” and 1 “Wave 7.”

**Demographic variables:** Gender is a binary variable labeled as 0 “female” and 1 “male.” The variable of age is measured on a ratio scale, ranging from 18 to 88. Marital status is a categorical variable with 1 “married,” 2 “used to be married,” and 3 “never married.” Educational level is measured on a six-point ordered scale from 0 “lowest education” to 5 “highest education.”

## Methods

In this study, in order to draw out the configuration of social capital, we use descriptive statistics to depict variables constructing dimensions of the concept, social networks and social trust, from the data. Moreover, we apply the chi-squared test to examine whether the changes of dimensions of social capital in Vietnam are true over time by identifying the relationships between the variable of waves and each variable measuring social capital. The Chi-square test is often used in social

studies to measure the relationship between two nominal variables, or between a nominal variable and an ordinal variable. It is based on the null hypothesis, which is the assumption of no relationship between two variables (Babbie, 2020). Because the Chi-squared test only uncovers whether a relationship is statistically significant, we further use Cramer’s V, an effect-size measurement, to detect the degree of strength of the relationship. The value of Cramer’s V ranges from 0 (no association) to 1 (complete association or very strong). If there are statistically significant relationships between the variables of waves and variables capturing dimensions of social capital, we can reach conclusions of the existence of changes in dimensions of social capital in Vietnam over time.

To test the effects of social networks on social trust, we ran a logistic regression model, in which the dependent variable is general social trust. The application of the regression technique allowed us to measure and estimate the impacts of the main independent variables, namely informal networks and different types of social formal networks, on the level of general social trust. It is a logistic regression because the dependent variable – social trust – is a binary measurement (Long, 2006: 187–308). In the model, we also controlled the effects of waves of the survey and demographic variables on social trust, including gender, age, marital status, educational level, on social trust.

## Results

### Social Networks

Table 1 presents data on respondents’ perceptions of the importance of family and friends, employed as proxy variables measuring informal social networks of Vietnamese people. The replies point out that, in the seventh wave, most respondents perceive the family as important (99.4 percent) followed by work (95.2 percent). The significance of friends is also acknowledged by a large share of respondents with 88 percent. Overall, the results show that most respondents place high regard on people close to them. These findings are consistent with

previous studies, in which scholars pointed out that as a traditional East Asian agrarian society, Vietnamese people are inclined to rely on immediate relationships (Pham, 2013). Meanwhile, it is the ongoing process of modernization in the country that leads to an increased perception of the significance of work, which also results in an emphasis on social ties with colleagues in the work setting (Dalton et al., 2002).

**Table 1** Respondents' perceptions of the importance of family, friends, and work by waves of survey (percent)

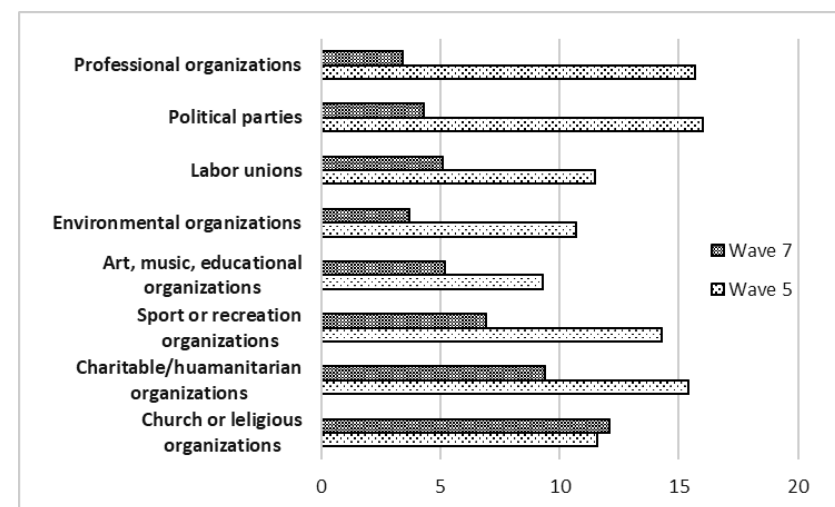
Degree of importance	Family		Friends		Work	
	Wave 5	Wave 7	Wave 5	Wave 7	Wave 5	Wave 7
Very important	81.3	96.8	22.1	22.2	41.1	69.9
Rather important	18.4	2.6	62.5	65.8	48.0	25.3
Not very important	0.3	0.3	15.3	11.1	10.2	3.7
Not at all important	0.0	0.3	0.1	0.9	0.7	1.1
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
(n)	1494	1200	1493	1200	1484	1200
$\chi^2$	165.9***		6.7*		222.8***	
df	2		2		2	
Cramer's V	0.25***		0.05*		0.29***	

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed tests).

The results from Table 1 also reveal that Vietnamese people tend to rely on immediate and close groups over time. Respondents show higher emphasis on the importance of family, friends, and work in Wave 7 than in Wave 5, and this difference is statistically significant. Specifically, a Chi-squared test shows that, as compared to Wave 5, respondents in Wave 7 are more prone to valuing family ( $\chi^2=169.5$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=2694$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), friends ( $\chi^2=6.7$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=2693$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), work ( $\chi^2=222.8$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $n=2684$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). However, as presented by Cramer's V values, the strength of the difference is relatively weak for family and work, and very weak for friends. These findings uncover an increase in the informal social networks of the Vietnamese people. It suggests a quite surprising and interesting implication, that despite unprecedented social

changes in the country after the "Doi Moi" (renovation) policy was introduced in 1986, by which the country was transformed from a traditional to more modern society where close ties are likely to lose significance in social life, the social capital of the Vietnamese people remains striking, with a high level of bonding ties.

Figure 1 below refers to formal social networks in Vietnam by depicting the membership in voluntary organizations in the country by waves. The pattern of the dark bars, denoting the seventh wave, indicates that the percentage of respondents who are members of separate groups is highest, followed by the percentage of respondents belonging to less mobilized groups. Mobilized organizations have the lowest number of members. Specifically, only 3.4, 4.3, and 5.1 percent reported that they engage in professional organizations, political parties, and labor unions, respectively. In the less mobilized groups, environmental organizations and art-music-educational groups have the lowest percentage of respondents participated in, 3.7 and 5.2 percent respectively, as compared to sports and recreation associations (6.9 percent) and charitable groups (9.4 percent. Respondents involved in separate association, church, and religious organizations, account for 12.1 percent.)



**Figure 1** Membership in organizations by waves (percent)



More importantly, during the last decades (the seventh wave compared to the fifth wave), there has been a remarkable decline in membership in organizations other than in churches or religious organizations. More specifically, there has been a decline in memberships in mobilized and less mobilized organizations. This decline is tested with statistical significances ( $p < 0.001$ ), verifying the fall in participation in those organizations. In the theory of social capital, scholars value the engagement in autonomous groups or voluntary associations, which consist of free and independent citizens (Putnam, 1995, 2000). Participation in such organizations is inspired by the willingness and voluntariness of citizens once they acknowledge the crucial role of joint participation in building a better community. Though the situation is different in Vietnam, where participation in mobilized and less-mobilized organizations is common (Dalton and Ong, 2005), it is also beneficial to Vietnamese society when the citizens are willing to jointly solve social problems by engaging in formal networks. Consequently, the decline reveals a signal of the disinclination to civic and political engagement. In a different vein, it should be acknowledged that the increase in the percentage of respondents engaging in separate groups implies a preference for taking part in autonomous organizations.

### Social Trust

Figure 2 portrays the degree of general social trust of Vietnamese people between Waves 5 and 7. The results show that, in the seventh wave, the percentage of people reporting that most people need to be very careful accounts for nearly two-thirds of respondents and is approximately three times higher than the percentage of respondents feeling trusting of others (72.3 percent compared to 27.7 percent). This finding implies greater skepticism of the Vietnamese towards their fellowmen as found in the previous studies where less than a half of those surveyed reported feeling cautious towards others (Dalton and Ong, 2005; Nguyen et al., 2016). As compared to the fifth wave, the number of people trusting in others in the latest wave decreases by half, while the percentage of people cautious about the other increases by approximately 25 percent.

These changes are statistically significant ( $\chi^2 = 162.7$ ,  $df = 1$ ,  $n = 2660$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In sum, the Vietnamese hold cautious, but rather trusting attitudes towards people in general.

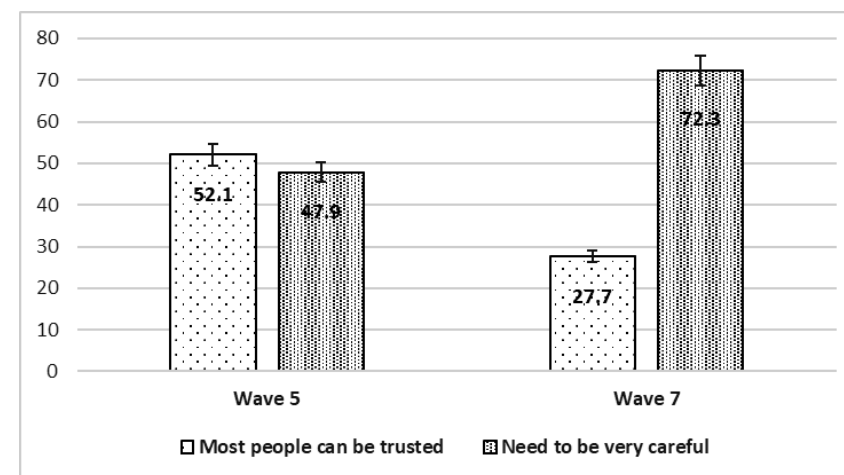


Figure 2 General social trust in Vietnam by waves (percent)

Table 2 illustrates the level of in-group trust of the Vietnamese. In the latest wave, most respondents trusted in their family (99.5 percent), in which a very high portion (93.8 percent) trusted completely. Also, a large share of respondents showed their trust in neighbors (91.4 percent) and people they know personally (82.8 percent). These findings are not surprising and may be explained by the fact that Vietnamese society is characterized by agrarian and Confucian traditions, in which people place much more trust in close and narrow circles of family members, relatives, friends, or known individuals (Dalton and Ong, 2005; Phạm, 2013). Interestingly, as shown in Table 2, the level of in-group trust is higher in the seventh wave than in the fifth wave and this difference is statistically significant. This means that Vietnamese people increasingly place their trust in close groups. However, the difference is not remarkable as shown in very low values of Cramer's V statistics.

**Table 2** In-group trust by waves of survey (percent)

Degree of trust	Trust in family		Trust in neighbors		Trust in known people	
	Wave 5	Wave 7	Wave 5	Wave 7	Wave 5	Wave 7
<b>Trust completely</b>	88.1	93.8	29.7	11.4	11.9	5.9
<b>Trust somewhat</b>	11.5	5.7	60.7	80.0	62.3	76.9
<b>Do not trust very much</b>	0.3	0.3	9.4	6.3	24.8	15.1
<b>Do not trust at all</b>	0.1	0.2	0.3	2.3	1.1	2.1
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>(N)</b>	(1487)	(1200)	(1487)	(1200)	(1468)	(1200)
$\chi^2$	27.7***		170.6***		80.7***	
<b>df</b>	3		3		3	
<b>Cramer's V</b>	0.1***		0.25***		0.17***	

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001 (two-tailed tests).

Table 3 below illustrates the level of out-group trust of the Vietnamese people. In general, the Vietnamese express a low level of trust in people holding different identities. In Wave 7, the respondents reported the highest trust in people of another religion (40.4 percent), followed by trust in people of another nationality (34.3 percent). For strangers, only around one-third of respondents feel trusting of this category. Interestingly, the findings also show a tendency of placing more trust in out-group people over time. A chi-squared test reveals that, as compared to Wave 5, respondents in Wave 7 show more trust in people met for the first time ( $\chi^2=62.9$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $n=2631$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), in people of another religion ( $\chi^2=51.4$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $n=2555$ ,  $p<0.001$ ), and in people of another nationality ( $\chi^2=103$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $n=2526$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Nonetheless, the difference is rather weak as shown in the values of Cramer's V test.

**Table 3** Out-group trust by waves of survey (percent)

Degree of trust	Trust in people met for the first time		Trust in people of another religion		Trust in people of another nationality	
	Wave 5	Wave 7	Wave 5	Wave 7	Wave 5	Wave 7
<b>Trust completely</b>	1.1	0.8	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.7
<b>Trust somewhat</b>	21.0	30.1	26.9	39.6	17.0	33.6
<b>Do not trust very much</b>	65.3	50.3	58.2	45.4	63.2	46.2
<b>Do not trust at all</b>	12.6	18.8	13.9	14.2	18.9	19.5
<b>Total</b>	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
<b>(n)</b>	(1431)	(1200)	(1355)	(1200)	(1326)	(1200)
$\chi^2$	62.9***		51.4***		103.0***	
<b>df</b>	3		3		3	
<b>Cramer's V</b>	0.16***		0.14***		0.20***	

\* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001 (two-tailed tests).

Fukuyama (1995) differentiates between “low trust societies” and “high trust societies.” He argues that societies with a long tradition of Confucian values correspond to low-trust societies. These societies are characterized by social relations or connections that focus on family and close people such as relatives or friends. They hold skeptical feelings towards outside people who hold different social and cultural backgrounds. In this sense, Vietnamese society can be sorted into the low-trust category. As shown in the findings, in-group trust is much more prevalent than out-group trust. In the theory of social capital, scholars place significant weight on out-group trust and general trust (Inglehart, 1997; Putnam, 2000). While the high level of in-group trust is conducive to the exclusion of outsiders, thereby preventing cooperation among different social groups from jointly solving social problems, the high level of out-group trust, by contrast, is seen as a prerequisite for fostering cooperation among people for the development of a better community or society. Consequently, the prevalence of in-group trust over out-group trust (and cautious rather than trusting attitudes) in Vietnamese society should be taken into account in understanding the degree of Vietnamese people's willingness to engage voluntarily in collective actions to solve social problems.

### The Consequences of Social Networks on Social Trust

In this section, we investigate the effects of social networks on social trust. Unlike previous analyses (Dalton and Ong, 2005; Nguyen, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2016), we expand the analysis by examining the effects of both informal and formal social networks on general social trust. Furthermore, we also explore the impacts of different types of formal networks, including memberships in mobilized, less-mobilized, and separate associations, on social trust. It is a replication of the analysis performed by Dalton and Ong (2005), which aims to see whether the authors' findings remain valid.

Table 4 presents the results of the effects of social networks on general social trust in the Vietnamese context. First, we look at the effects of demographic variables on social trust. Only age is a significant predictor of social trust, as the older people are more trustful of the other than the younger ( $p < 0.001$ ). The remainder of demographic variables has no significant influence on social trust. Furthermore, as interpreted in the above section, respondents in Wave 7 show more distrust than respondents in Wave 5 ( $p < 0.001$ ).

**Table 4** Logistic regression models with the dependent variable of general trust

Predictors		Logit Coefficient
<b>Social networks</b>		
Informal networks		-0.13 (0.11)
Formal networks	Mobilized	0.43*** (0.13)
	Less mobilized	-0.32** (0.13)
	Separate	-0.27 (0.24)
<b>Demographic variables</b>		
Male		-0.05 (0.09)
Age		0.01*** (0.004)
Marital status (married)	Used to be married	-0.08 (0.19)
	Single	0.06 (0.12)
Education level		-0.0004 (0.04)
Wave 7		-0.95*** (0.11)
Constant		0.08 (0.44)
Log likelihood		-1668.5371
McFadden R2		0.0527
Observations		2,608

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed tests). Standard errors in parentheses.

For the effects of different types of social networks on social trust, as shown in Table 4, the findings are salient. Informal networks are not statistically significantly associated with social trust, meaning that informal networks, operationalized into proxy variables measuring the perception of the significance of family, friends, and work, are not a source of social trust. For different types of formal social networks, the findings are also striking. Associational membership in mobilized groups has a positive impact on the possibility of trust in others ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that participating in organizations controlled by the state enhances and fosters citizens' trustful attitudes in general. This finding is more robust than that found in the work of Dalton and Ong (2005), where memberships in mobilized groups are found to not affect social trust. By contrast, engaging in less-mobilized and separate associations decreases trustful attitudes towards others. While this negative impact is not significant for the participation in separate groups, it is statistically significant for the engagement in less-mobilized associations. These results are in line with the findings of the work of Dalton and Ong (2005). As a result, the effects of associational membership on social trust in the context of Vietnam challenge the conventional patterns in democratic societies wherein social engagement is found to be crucial for developing trust. As argued by Dalton and Ong (2005), normal mobilized groups exhibit views consistent with the social and political paradigm in the country, by which participants feel safe and trustful of the other because they realize that they hold values harmonious with them. By contrast, associational membership in separate or less-mobilized groups leads to the attitude of distrust towards the other due to recognizing the existing conflict between values internalized during the participation in such groups and the social and political ideology imposed in Vietnam.

A possible further explanation for the contradictory effects of mobilized and non-mobilized engagement on social trust in the Vietnamese context should be considered a result of social and political changes in the country after the adoption of the revision policy in 1989. The policy allows for the involvement of Vietnam in international deals

and the formation of the private sector in the Vietnamese economy. These conditions have played a crucial role in facilitating the emergence of new spaces for public engagement outside the organizations mobilized by the state. Such non-mobilized engagement is more likely to produce new patterns of ideas or perspectives that are different from or even opposite to the ones generated by normal mobilized participation, which is the potential for creating mistrust among individuals who are members of autonomous groups.

### **Concluding Discussion**

This article has discussed the configuration of social capital in Vietnam at the individual level. Its analyses focused on social networks and social trust, two key dimensions of social capital. In particular, the study investigated how these two dimensions change over time. To achieve these aims, the study used data of Vietnam from Waves 5 and 7 of the WVS for the analyses.

To sum up, the social capital of Vietnamese people is characterized by a high level of bonding ties. The Vietnamese people tend to place a high level of trust in a small circle of known people and have frequent contact with people close to them. Furthermore, social capital in Vietnam is also characterized by a low level of associational participation in organizations. Theoretically, the low level of associational membership is a threat to the development of society because it shows the unwillingness of free citizens in cooperating. However, the fact is that, in Vietnam, most formal organizations are based on mobilization by the state rather than voluntary-based, and thus, the decline in membership signals the indifference of citizens in engaging in these old-fashioned types of formal organizations. Moreover, the increase in the membership in separate groups in Vietnamese society shows the tendency of autonomy in taking part in collective actions. As a result, the decline and the low level of participation in conventional formal groups implies a change in civil life where voluntary participation is increasingly preferred, signaling a foundation for the development of civil society in the country.

The study also reveals a noteworthy finding regarding the effects of associational membership on social trust. Engaging in groups controlled by the state fosters participants' trust; by contrast, participating in less-controlled or separate groups facilitates distrust. This finding suggests that in the context of Vietnam, associational participation does not necessarily facilitate trust as occurs in democratic countries (Delhey and Newton, 2003; Paxton, 2007; Putnam, 2000; Uslaner, 2002). This phenomenon, as discussed in the previous section, can be linked to significant changes in the country after the adoption of renovation policies from the 1980s that foster the private sector in business and attract foreign investment. The changes contribute to the growing emergence of non-governmental organizations, whose activities are more or less autonomous and independent from the control of the state. As occurred in Central and East European countries regarding the consequence of the rise of non-governmental organizations in the transition to democracy after 1989 (Foa and Ekiert, 2017), the growth of these organizations is more likely to parallel the development of a civil society highly characterized by liberalism and voluntariness (Diamond, 1994). The engagement in this kind of association, thus, leads to a generation of new and different outlooks beyond the social and political ideologies dominant in the country for a long time (Nguyen, 2019: 181). As a result, it brings about the rise of skeptical attitudes towards others, leading to a decrease in the level of general social trust as observed. This is what might have been happening with social capital during the last decades.

This study was limited to the investigation of social capital in Vietnam within physical space, while the creation of social capital also happens in virtual places. The development of communication technology as well as the emergence of new social media, such as Facebook, have increasingly transformed the way of individuals' interactions, social and political discussions, and information seeking (Gil de Zuniga, 2012). As one of the seven countries having the largest number of Facebook users with more than 66 million accounts (World Population Review, 2021), Vietnamese people's activities on

online space, especially on Facebook, are more likely to generate new forms of social connections. Consequently, further research would be useful in exploring how social interactions of the Vietnamese people via cyberspace engender social capital.

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