

# **Civil Society in Vietnam: Social Potentials and Responsibilities**

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This paper presents an overview of civil society in Vietnam. By relying on a process-oriented approach stemming from a republican understanding of civil society's relationship to the state, it demonstrates that civil society in Vietnam is often underestimated. Traditional liberal understandings mostly result in a topographical approach to civil society, in which the number of NGOs is the most important factor and prevalent civic practices that do not fit the structure are ignored. This paper presents evidence of strong social capital, faith-based institutions, modern civic associations, and mass organisations which mean that civil society is already an important part of Vietnamese society, even though the number of NGOs is small. Despite this, the social potential of civil society is limited and could be improved. With the advent of further reform, and particularly in light of the planned 'Rule of Law Dialogue', civil society is likely to play an increasingly important role in Vietnam. This will require both a better cooperation between civil society and the state, as well as a better empirical understanding of civil society in Vietnam to fully understand its potential.