

# **Analysis of the Response and Efforts of The Government of Vietnam in Tackling COVID-19**

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## **Abstract**

COVID-19 pandemic is considered a big challenge for every country in the world. This pandemic has had a significant impact on both the public health sector and the economic sector. As a country directly contiguous to China, Vietnam is one of the countries affected by the virus's spread. Even so, Vietnam can be categorized as a country recognized as successful in stemming this pandemic's spread. It can be seen from the absence of cases of death caused by COVID-19. Therefore, this paper is written to analyze the government of Vietnam's steps to successfully handle this pandemic and how government conditions can affect the success rate. The results obtained are, the success to tackle the COVID-19 is highly influenced by the background of the political system and governance in Vietnam and the existence of good coordination between government institutions. Moreover, the success factors are also influenced by the efforts taken throughout time to improve public services quality.

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) was first reported in Wuhan District, Hubei Province, China in late December 2019. The first case was found on 18th December 2019, when five people reported Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome (ARDS), which was considered a pneumonia disease. Those people have the same symptoms, such as fever, cough, respiratory infections, and exhaustion. The patient has a relation with the fish and wild animal market in Wuhan [1] from the epidemiology research. Through clinical research, it is believed that the COVID-19 virus mutates from bats and continues to snake consumed by humans in the Wuhan market [2]. The condition

worsens when the doctor analyzes that the COVID-19 virus can be transmitted from humans to other humans. Until 3rd of January 2020 China has reported 44 positive COVID-19 cases. The virus widely spread until 25th January 2020 with 1.975 cases and was spread at 25 provinces in China with 56 people reported dead. In late January, the case spread outside China, with 90 people positively affected by the virus in many countries, such as Taiwan, Thailand, Malaysia, Nepal, Vietnam, etc. The situation that gets worse makes the World Health Organization (WHO) announce COVID-19 as a global pandemic on 12th March 2020.

Among many countries outside China that have reported COVID-19

infection, The Government of Vietnam is the first one of those countries that announce their first cases due to COVID-19. The first case in Vietnam was discovered through a 65 years old Chinese man who had a traveling record to Wuchang, Wuhan, China. He got medical treatment at Cho Ray Hospital at Ho Chi Minh City after experiencing some symptoms such as fever, exhaustion, followed by diabetes, cancer, and coronary heart disease. Even though he had not visited the Wuhan market, he was confirmed as the first COVID-19 patient in Vietnam on 22nd January 2020. Because of that case, the Vietnam Government starts to respond and move quickly to prevent the virus's further spreading.

This article intends to analyze how The Government of Vietnam responded and its effort to deal with COVID-19 cases in their country. We would also like to describe the regulation issued by The Government of Vietnam to handle COVID-19 cases in Vietnam. This article divided into three-point, (I) Introduction, which contains the background of the condition in Vietnam due to the COVID-19 virus; (II) Discussion and Analysis, which describe how the Vietnam Government responds to COVID-19 in each field and how the government condition and political system in Vietnam can be one of the supporting factors of Government's successful regulation in dealing with COVID-19 pandemics; (III) Conclusion, which conclude all of the effort taken and regulation issued by the Government of Vietnam in dealing with COVID-19 pandemics.

## **II. METHODOLOGY**

This research is a type of case study research; Surachman explained that case study research is an approach

that focuses on an intensive and detailed case [3]. Meanwhile, according to Fathoni, case study research is research used to explain an incident or event [4]. Based on the two definitions above, it can be concluded that as a case study research, this paper aims to describe and analyze the detail of an event. While the research method used in this paper is a qualitative method that focuses on subjects' behavior or actions and is described through empirical word descriptions. The qualitative method, according to Moleong, is defined as a study that intends to understand the phenomena experienced by research subjects such as behaviour, perception, motivation, action, and others holistically and through descriptions in the form of words and language, in a special context, natural and by making use of various scientific methods [5].

The data used in this research are the effort and regulations issued by The Vietnamese government in dealing with the global COVID-19 pandemic conditions from January to July 2020 and data regarding the governance system in Vietnam. In this study, the data collection method was obtained through indirect observation. The authors make indirect observations by observing and understanding electronic media sources such as research journals, videos, and news articles.

## **III. ANALYSIS**

Vietnam is one of the countries in Southeast Asia, with a population of 96 million people. With an almost 100 million population and considering its proximity to China, the Vietnamese Government received a lot of praise for its effectiveness in fighting COVID-19 infection, with 324 cases without any deaths record. At the beginning of the virus spread, the Vietnam Government

response in fighting COVID-19 infection was considered 'excessive'. It turns out the Vietnam government can reverse the world perception by their success in combatting the COVID-19 virus by cooperating with local government, private sector, the people, and the media as soon as the first COVID-19 cases reported in Vietnam.

Unlike other countries that use a large scale to look out the death cases due to COVID-19, the Vietnamese Government uses a smaller scale to analyze the case that happens to act quickly. The government did this because of the awareness that Vietnam's healthcare could be overwhelmed even by the slightest spread of the virus; therefore, the government has to take quick action with massive prevention as soon as possible. During The Lunar New Year holidays, the Vietnam government start to close all schools, and 'contact-tracing' mechanisms were put into effect for the workers. The government is also tracking all of the people returning from abroad and requiring them to undergo mass quarantine and a series of tests under the supervision of the Vietnam Government. The government also applies requirements for Vietnamese to have exit permission in high-risk areas. Besides, Vietnam Government continues to socialize a message regarding the 'war' against COVID-19 through local and national media [6].

The following are the forms of policies issued by the government of Vietnam specifically as an effort to deal with COVID-19 pandemic, which is grouped by sector:

### **) Policies Related to the Healthcare System**

Vietnam's Ministry of Health (MoH) has issued a directive to tighten mass quarantine at the Vietnam border area close to China on January 3rd, 2020.

The Ministry of Health also issued two ministerial decrees regarding guidelines and plans to prevent the spread of COVID-19 virus, namely Decree Number 125/Q/BYT and Decree Number 156/Q-BYT. The development of COVID-19 issues in Vietnam make the government take quick actions due to the possibility of people who will pile up the health commodity or daily needs. Therefore since February 1st the government cooperates with relevant stakeholders to inspect some pharmaceutical companies in Vietnam. The government also withdrew their business license if they were caught to increase the prices of masks, hand sanitizers, and gloves. The inspection resulted in a penalty for 1200 pharmacies, and around 313.000 masks were confiscated [7].

Since February, the Vietnamese government has built a temporary hospital specially designed to treat COVID-19 patients. However, there was some trouble due to health workers that handle COVID-19 patients who do not have adequate equipment. Because of that, the Healthcare department continues to strive to carry out short-effective training for medical workers and monitor the process of handling a COVID-19 patient to prevent an outbreak in the hospital. The Vietnamese government policy regarding the health system focuses more on hospital management regarding patient handling and quarantine procedures for suspected exposed people. All hospitals in Vietnam obeyed those regulations. The health worker who served on the front lines also received an award from Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc. The Government also released an application platform named NCOVI and an official website to update COVID-19 the latest information about the pandemic, including test data and suggestions for preventive measures. The application and website also provide a live chat to

people who want to get further information.

Besides doing prevention action for COVID-19, Vietnam Government also doing a real action by increasing health laboratory facilities to examine COVID-19 cases. In early January, only three laboratories could examine COVID-19, but then the government increased it to 112 laboratories in April 2020. COVID-19 laboratory test in Vietnam is ranked first globally, with 213.743 tests carried out by the end of April. The case-finding ratio of COVID-19 cases also shows only 1:791 of all samples [8].

#### ) **Travel Restrictions and Regulations for Entering and Leave Vietnam**

After the Vietnamese Government officially announced COVID-19 as a pandemic on February 1st, 2020, the government enacted several travel restrictions for tourists and citizens who wanted to enter and exit Vietnam since March 2020. Some restrictions and policies regarding travel are divided into [9]:

- Z Foreigners who entered Vietnam before March 1st, 2020, or foreigners who have resided or temporary residence permits are entitled to an extension until June 30, 2020, provided that they can show official documentary evidence from the embassy and a health statement. Or they can contact Vietnam immigration at 0243.9387320.
- Z Starting from March 7th, 2020, all travelers who come to Vietnam must submit medical documents.
- Z Starting from March 9th, 2020, Vietnam has suspended visas for 8 countries, such as Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

Z Starting from March 15th, 2020 (12pm), Vietnam will suspend visas and refuse tourists from the UK and 26 Schengen countries, including tourists who have visited these countries in the last 14 days. This policy will occur 30 days after the decree is approved. It also applies to tourists who arrived or had travel records from mainland China in 14 days before in their visas. All people subjected to the regulation will be denied to entry or suspended for entering Vietnam.

Z Since March 22nd, 2020, the government has banned and suspended foreign tourists' arrival due to the coronavirus outbreak. This provision will continue to be enforced until an undetermined time or until Vietnam is considered safe from the corona virus's threat. This regulation does not apply to diplomats, state officials, foreign investors, experts, and skilled workers.

Z According to Resolution No.79/NQ-CP Vietnam will provide e-visas to citizens of 80 countries from July 1st 2020. This e-visa can be used to enter Vietnam through 8 international airports, 16 regional borders, and 13 ports. Vietnam still remains closed to foreign visitors because there has been no official statement regarding the halt of social restrictions for travel to enter and leave Vietnam.

#### ) **Partial lockdown policy (Comune Lockdown)**

Rather than implementing a "national lockdown", Vietnam's government prefers to impose a partial lockdown of "communes" or groups with

many infection cases. These partial lockdowns are enforced with strict restrictions on communes resident behavior. Vietnam has carried out a lockdown on the Ha Loi Commune and Son Loi Commune, which have recorded high cases of COVID-19 infection. In the Son Loi Commune, Binh Xuyen District, Vinh Phuc Province, the lockdown was carried out for 20 days from 16 February 2020 to 4 March 2020. This lockdown has restricted more than 10,000 commune residents by placing several checkpoints and blocking road access. The Son Loi Commune's lockdowns were carried out after discovering that several communes residents had a history of direct contact with an infected woman after returning from Wuhan, China [10].

#### **) Policies Related to the Economy Sector**

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is very significant for Vietnam. It is estimated that more than 10 million workers lost some or even all of their income. Vietnamese government helps to stimulate their income by giving subsidies to low-income families and contract workers. The government was also assisting small businesses with interest-free loans to keep their business going.

To make it happen, the Vietnamese Government issues Vietnam Prime Minister Regulation Number 11 about the government's step or effort to help businesses affected by the pandemic. The Vietnamese Government helps local companies and businesses experiencing difficulties due to COVID-19 outbreak by providing tax breaks, expanding tax payment deadlines, and reducing the cost of land-rent. The total amount of allocated assistance to help affected businesses is US\$ 1.16 billion, or equal to 27 trillion VND. The Central Bank of Vietnam (SVB) has cut interest rates since February 2020 and asked

commercial banks in Vietnam to help reduce their interest rates as well [10].

#### **) Regulation Related to Social Welfare**

Vietnam Government issued Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP on April 9th, 2020 regarding financial package assistance for local businesses and employee that affected by the pandemic which is divided into six categories: (a) affected employee, (b) affected entrepreneur, (c) home industry or businesses that have income below 100 million VND in a year, (d) people who have contributions for the country, (e) poor people, (f) people who protected by social assurance [12].

To help the welfare of employers and employees, the Vietnamese Government provides incentives by giving financial assistance of US\$ 77 or equal to 1.8 million VND per month. The regulation will qualify employees whose work contracts are temporarily suspended or unpaid after a month. This regulation applies for a maximum three months period started from April 1st, 2020. Financial assistance of US\$ 43 per month issued for employees that lose their job but are not entitled to unemployment benefits or who are working without a contract and lost their job[12]. All employee that eligible to receive financial assistance should apply their qualification to the relevant local authority from April 1st and further. If the employee meets the requirements of both incentives categories, they will only be entitled to the highest incentive. And entrepreneurs who are experiencing financial difficulties and have paid at least 50% of the salaries of employees who are experiencing work suspension from April to June 2020 will be given interest-free and collateral-free loans by Vietnam Banks. The loan is equivalent to 50% of each employee's regional

minimum wage but will be given no more than three month. The maximum time of the loan granted is twelve month.

If due to COVID-19 pandemic the entrepreneur or business actors are forced to cut off the worker by 50% or more, both employers or employees will get permission to postpone the pension funds. and employee welfare funds for employees whose jobs are suspended, the contract is postponed, or cut off from their work without pension fund [13].

To make Resolution No. 42/NQ-CP goes into effect, the Government of Vietnam issued decree No.15/2020/QD-TTg on April 24th, 2020. This regulation consists of forms, documents, and necessities that both employers or employees need to propose to get financial assistance.

### **) Comperhensive Communication and Information dissemination To The Public**

One of the things that Vietnam has learned from the way China handled COVID-19 is by improving the communication system to the public. If China had provided information on the spread of the COVID-19 virus slowly, Vietnam had chosen to deliver a firm and swift statement to the public from the beginning. The Vietnamese government has stated that "COVID-19 is not just the flu, but something that must be taken seriously, and by that people are asked not to put themselves or others in danger" [10].

Vietnam's first steps in public communication have been carried out since early January 2020, when news about the "strange pneumonia" in China started to spread in Vietnam. Through the official website of Vietnam's Ministry of Health or Bao Chinh Phu, the Vietnamese government has issued an appeal for the possible spread of the COVID-19 virus after the Lunar New Year holidays. On the website page, the

Public Health Emergency department (*Suc Khoe Va*) also provides an explanation of preventive measures that will be taken, such as (1) Monitoring all information provided by WHO, (2) Increasing disease surveillance at borders, (3) Paying attention to the readiness of the Emergency department Public Health and four other institutions related to hygiene and epidemiology, and (4) Planning prevention and control measures. The government's official statement was also disseminated by various news media in Vietnam such as Tuoi Tre, Thanh Nien, and others. In fact, the number of online news releases regarding COVID-19 from January to April 2020 in Vietnam has reached 15,000 articles [14].

Apart from the statements given through the official website and news, the Vietnamese government also provides regular information through social media. The government takes advantage of the large number of Facebook and Zelo application users in the country. Facebook users in Vietnam reached 57.34% of the population while more than 100 million users also use "Zelo" (a local text-sending app). Through the Facebook application, the government provides information about COVID-19 on an ongoing basis, which is conveyed directly by state officials, ranging from the Prime Minister, Minister of Communication and Information to the provincial government. [10] In addition, the government is also working with short message application developer "Zelo" to broadcast information about COVID-19 throughout the country. The message broadcasted is also complemented by a propaganda poster typical of a socialist country. Posters were distributed with visualizations on the themes of struggle, patriotism and nationalism such as :

"To stay at home is to love your country" or "Fight Corona like You Fight A War"

which means to awaken the spirit of the Vietnamese people [15].

The transparency of the data provided also supports widespread information dissemination. Vietnam's Ministry of Health also periodically provides official notifications about developments in COVID-19 cases without spreading the patient's identity. As reported in the news program *Bao Thanh Nien*, which delivered an Emergency Notification Report No.10 about case 237. The news given contains detailed information about the 237th patient's travel history from March 11 to April 1 2020. [16] Valid confirmation and detailed explanation are ways for the Vietnamese government to increase public awareness of the COVID-19 outbreak. This high awareness is also considered one of the key factors driving the low cases of COVID-19 infection in Vietnam.

#### **How does the conditions of The Governance in Vietnam affect the level of success in dealing with COVID-19?**

It has been explained regarding the policies and efforts taken by The Government of Vietnam in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. The government issued policies that were considered extreme, including the “commune lockdown” which received several criticisms from the international community regarding accusations of limiting rights, can be obeyed by Vietnamese people. The series of steps taken by the government can be considered succeeded in bringing Vietnam to victory in the 'war' against the pandemic. Meanwhile, if we look at the conditions of other countries, the government's policies regarding the prevention of COVID-19 are often being ignored. For example, thousands of citizens in various regions in the United States demonstrate to protest against

the government by calling themselves the "anti-lockdown movement" when the lockdown policy was implemented. Although some of these movements stated reasons related to economic losses if policies continued to be enforced, the other part of the movements stated that the lockdown and restriction policies were only used as a tool for the government to limit citizens' freedom. Because of this, the prevalence rate of COVID-19 in the United States is very high [17].

Conditions such as in the United States are also found in several other countries' communities, but that is not the case with Vietnamese who diligently obey government regulations. But if we look back, the public obedience that resulted in the Vietnamese government policy's success in dealing with COVID-19 certainly could not have been formed instantly. It should be noted that the political conditions and how the government holds their influence in a certain country can affect the condition of its people's obedience. Vietnam itself is a country that has a socialist type of government, which directly can be seen in the official name of this country, namely The Socialist Republic of Vietnam. As a socialist country, the composition of power holders in Vietnam is dominated by the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV). Hayton in his book explains that in this one-party country, in 2016 about 11 percent of party members holding government positions came from a military background. This fact has the possibility to trigger the compliance of the Vietnamese people with any policies issued by the government [18].

The Vietnamese government has centralized government where all sectors are under the direct supervision of the Central Government. On the one hand, this is very beneficial in crisis times that require equal distribution of policies,

such as the current pandemic case. In addition, as a socialist country whose control is directly under the government, the process of disseminating information related to the pandemic is carried out with tight control. Information that does not come from the government is limited in order to prevent the spread of hoax news. In exchange, the Vietnamese government circulated an official video about COVID-19 and a message for prevention. Hence, inevitably the public will continue to be provided with information by the interests of the Government. However, the Vietnamese Government, which continues to develop and adapt to the real situation, is also one reason why the people in Vietnam comply with the policies issued. Even in an international survey conducted by 12 institutions, including Harvard, Cambridge, IESE, and Warwick University, Vietnam takes second place where the people have confidence in their country governance that the Government will take good care of its citizens. [19]The confidence that the Vietnamese had, of course also does not happen automatically. In their writings, Trang Mae Nguyen and Edmund Maleskyaid that the Vietnamese government's transformation and efforts to achieve 'good governance' had also been carried out by the Vietnamese Government over the years [20].

Vietnam Government continues to develop good coordination on all fronts. Data from the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI) and Provincial Administrative Performance Index (PAPI) Vietnam has shown stable developments in the health sector, access to information, and control in corruption cases. Access to health insurance has also grown over time, reaching 90% of Vietnam's total population to have insurance. It is in line with the hospital's quality, which has continued to develop by the decline

in bribery in the hospital environment in the past ten years. To make good healthcare accessible, The Government tied to implement mass quarantine. Therefore, Vietnamese citizens do not have to worry about the costs they might have to pay during a pandemic, such as getting medical tests [20].

Effective coordination between government institutions in Vietnam, which is considered one of the keys to proactive responses to pandemic management, is actually an effect of a long-centralized government. This proactive response includes pandemic prevention training that has been carried out even when no new infection cases are found (Kukuh Tejomurti, 2020: 685). Moreover, The Vietnamese Government also learned from the impact of previous infectious virus spread, such as SARS, which spread mainly from China contagious to their border. In the end, because of the Government's will to improve governance, even though it remains in the form of one party, it can achieve effective handling in combating COVID-19.

This achievement, accompanied by the Government's success holding its influence in domestic affairs, has prepared the citizens of Vietnam to be more aware of the worst-case scenario regarding the public health crisis.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

COVID-19 has a big impact on international society, such as Vietnam, which has a high risk of exposure because of its geographical location that contagious to China. Vietnam is also one of some countries that reported its first COVID-19 cases at the beginning of the virus spread. Closing the geographical border with China and the SARS outbreak's history have made the Vietnam Government take quick action to deal with COVID-19 outbreak. The Vietnam Government has collaborated



with the local government, private sector, Vietnam citizens, and media to prevent the COVID-19 outbreak. The Vietnam Government also has issued various policies to combat COVID-19. It includes efforts taken in improving healthcare system management, imposing several restrictions regarding travel, and allocated US\$ 1.16 Billion to stimulate the economy and provide social welfare. The Government also openly communicates through Facebook and “Zelo”, hence the Vietnamese can easily access COVID-19 spreading data and some suggestions to prevent the COVID-19 outbreak.

Vietnam’s success in fighting COVID-19 is the result of good collaboration carried by the Government and citizens. The Vietnam citizens have trust in the Government’s strategy; therefore, when the government has released new regulations or policies, even if it is a big deal for other countries, the Vietnam citizen would still obey their Government’s decision. The Vietnam citizens also feel safe when they obey Vietnam’s government rules because they get health insurance, easy access to the healthcare system, payment relief to access healthcare facilities, etc. It proves the Vietnam Government has learned a lot in the fight against global pandemic such as SARS, which previously occurred before COVID-19. This country’s low COVID-19 transmission rate proved the capability of the Vietnamese Government. Vietnam even gets appreciation from WHO and the international community because it has reported zero death cases with only 320 cases. The success in dealing with the COVID-19 virus also results from the centralized government system, making the coordination runs smoothly from one to other institutions. This collaboration is one of the keys to the Vietnamese government's pro-active response in handling the COVID-19 outbreak.

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