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## Government Repression and Toleration of Dissidents in Contemporary Vietnam

*Benedict J. Tria Kerkvliet*<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

All governments, including democratic ones, use repression against their own citizens. What varies is the intensity, form, and scope of repression. Governments in authoritarian political systems, according to conventional thinking, are far more repressive than those in democratic systems. Among the most repressive, by many accounts, are single-party communist governments such as those that ruled in the Soviet Union and much of Eastern Europe after World War II until the early 1990s, and that still rule in China, Cuba, Laos, North Korea, and Vietnam.

Foreign critics often describe Vietnam's Communist Party-run government as a totalitarian or authoritarian system that countenances little or no criticism. "The government," says an Associated Press report in 2001 from Hanoi, "does not tolerate any challenge to its one-party rule" Freedom House's 2010 report refers to the Communist Party government "silencing critics" through numerous means (*The Nation* 2011; Freedom House 2010). The only book-length examination of how Vietnamese authorities deal with dissent concludes that the government "tolerates no dissent or opposition" (Abuza 2001: 238). Expressing similar views have been several members of the US Congress. Recent annual reports about Vietnam from Human Rights Watch and the US State Department, while avoid glossing the Vietnamese government as totally repressive, depict it as extremely intolerant of political dissent of any kind.<sup>2</sup>

These portrayals of Vietnam are troublesome to me as I research state-society relations in the country today. Public dissent and criticism of state officials, their actions, and policies have grown considerably in

Vietnam during the last dozen or so years (see Wells-Dang's chapter in this book). The criticisms are wide ranging – from lambasting corrupt local authorities to opposing the political system, from alleging repression against religious organizations to demanding a multiparty political system, from protesting working conditions in factories to questioning the state's foreign policies. The critics are also diverse: rural villagers, urban workers, religious leaders, intellectuals, students, environmental activists, professional association leaders, and former government and Communist Party officials. Groups advocating major changes in how Vietnam is governed have formed organizations, even political parties, and they regularly produce internet newspapers and other literature about their activities and goals. The extent, diversity, and vibrancy of public political criticism in contemporary Vietnam do not correspond to reports such as those just mentioned. Even if one focuses on the people most critical of the government – those calling for an end to a one-party political system and the rise of a multiparty system and other democratic institutions – the characterization that Vietnamese authorities tolerate no dissent or opposition is erroneous.

Better than depicting a regime as being repressive is to examine how, when, and to what extent its leaders resort to repression and study the mix between repression and other actions toward protests and other forms of public political criticism. As Jonathan London suggests in this book's opening chapter, understanding authoritarian systems requires nuanced analysis. Rarely does an authoritarian regime rely only or even primarily on repression to deal with critics and dissenters. Toleration, accommodation, dialogue, and concession also figure in the mix. Scholars studying contemporary China, whose political system is most similar to Vietnam's, have begun to do this kind of analysis, contributing a more nuanced understanding of how the Communist Party regime there deals with burgeoning Chinese unrest and dissent in recent years (Yongshun Cai 2008: 38; Xi Chen 2009; Baogang He and Thørgersen 2010; Hongyi Lai 2010; Mackinnon 2011; Ogden 2002; Tong 2002; Tsang 2009; Wright 2002). For contemporary Vietnam, only a few academic studies have been done on protests, dissent, and other forms of public criticism and how the Vietnamese Communist Party regime responds (Zinoman 1994; Thayer 2006; Angie Ngoc Tran 2007, 2008; Koh 2008b; Thayer 2009a; Thayer 2010b; Hayton 2010: 113–34; Kerkvliet 2010a, 2010b). Material in this small body of work suggests that Vietnamese authorities also mix repression with toleration, dialogue, and accommodation.

The literature on China and Vietnam suggests some patterns of how authorities react to public political criticism. Authorities are generally

more tolerant of criticism about particular government policies or programs or of particular nonsenior officials than they are of criticism about top national leaders, the form of government, or the entire political system. Within this pattern, individual critics are more tolerated than are large groups that publicly rebuke a policy or program. Yet even large congregations of protesters against, say, a local official or a project that would deprive an entire village of its farmland frequently occur without hostile reactions by police or other authorities. Another pattern is that authorities are more tolerant of protests by peasants and workers than they are of demonstrations by middle class, rather well-educated urbanites even though they too are criticizing specific policies, programs, or practices. For example, in recent years throngs of Vietnamese farmers regularly travel to Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City to demonstrate in front of government offices against corruption, environmental degradation, land confiscations, and other issues adversely affecting their rural communities. Usually such protests occur with little or no intervention by police or security forces. Demonstrations in those cities that police and security forces have tended to suppress quickly are the ones staged by writers, scholars, musicians, office workers, small business owners, and the like who oppose China's encroachment into Vietnamese territory and the Vietnamese government's seemingly tepid responses.

What about authorities' actions toward individuals and groups that publically criticize the form of government and openly favor major reforms of the political system? For this question too little research has been done on China or Vietnam to identify several patterns. The only clear generalization emerging from the scholarly literature is that authorities in neither country are uniformly repressive even against these regime dissidents. Some of these dissidents suffer little or no adversity; others go for years without much government interference but then suddenly are arrested and imprisoned. Still others get arrested immediately. The authorities' actions toward regime dissidents seem to vary considerably.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze Vietnamese authorities' actions toward regime dissidents and try to find some patterns and explanations for the variety of those actions. Such an examination has not been done previously for contemporary Vietnam nor, as best as I can tell, for post-Mao China. The chapter first synthesizes Vietnamese dissidents' main criticisms and objectives and then analyzes state authorities' actions toward them. The analysis reveals a degree of toleration by authorities and a lack of uniformity in their repression.

## **Regime dissidents, their aims, and approaches**

### **Regime dissidents**

Regime dissidents in my definition are citizens in Vietnam who publicly criticize and often oppose their country's system of government, the Communist Party's domination of the state, and that party's efforts to control society. Because they seek fundamental political changes, not just changes in particular policies or projects, their criticisms are among the most sweeping in the broad range of public criticism heard and seen in Vietnam today. Consequently, regime dissidents are presumably the most troublesome and threatening critics in the eyes of Vietnamese authorities.

Among the regime dissidents are a few peasants and workers, but mostly they are writers, scholars, lawyers, priests, monks, and former government officials. They express their dissent primarily through their writings, although several, especially since about 2006, have formed or joined organizations aimed at channeling criticism and changing the political system. The number of regime dissidents is unclear. One indicator might be that about 2,000 people in Vietnam signed a "Declaration on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam," which began to circulate in April 2006.<sup>3</sup> A better indicator might be the number of people who, through their writings, their prominence in organizations that defy authorities, and/or their pronouncements, publicly rebuke the regime or its primary institutions and advocate reforms that would remake the political system. That figure would be in the hundreds.

Most of this chapter's material concerns 62 individuals who have publicly criticized Vietnam's political system during the last ten to fifteen years and for whom I have been able to find, as of May 2011, rather complete and, as best as I can determine, reliable information regarding their residence, occupation, political activities, and other factors, especially whether or not authorities have detained them, arrested them, brought them to trial, and/or sentenced them to prison. The information comes from material on the internet and in publications that dissidents themselves, their sympathizers, interviewers, and other people, including Vietnamese authorities, have provided. There being no way yet to determine how representative these 62 people are, my analysis applies to them, not necessarily to the whole "universe" of which they are a part.

The ages of the 62 people as of 2011 range from early thirties to late eighties; their average age is about 55. Three elderly ones passed away in the early 2000s. Roughly half of these dissidents were born after 1955; a

quarter were born prior to 1941. A large proportion of those born prior to 1956 had careers in the government, military, and/or Communist Party, whereas only two of those born after 1955 had worked for the government. Occupations of those born after 1955 are scattered among several categories – telecommunications, journalism and writing, teaching, manual labor, and engineering; the two most numerous are business people and lawyers (eight each). All but nine of these 62 regime dissidents are men. The homes for about one-third of these dissidents are in Hà Nội, another third in Hồ Chí Minh City, and one-third are from other parts of the country, such as Hải Phòng and Thái Bình in the north, Huế in the center, and Đà Lạt and Đồng Nai in the south.

What all these individuals have in common are writings, extended interviews, and/or leadership positions in unauthorized organizations and publications that are highly critical of the regime.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes these public critics refer to themselves as *người phản kháng* [resister], *nhà hoạt động dân chủ nhân quyền* [democracy and human rights activist], and *nhà đấu tranh dân chủ* [one who struggles for democracy]. Their most frequent terms, however, are *nhà bất đồng chính kiến* and *người bất đồng chính kiến*, which literally mean a person with different political views but can be more loosely translated as political dissident or political dissenter. I often refer to them as “regime dissidents” so as to indicate more precisely the political content of their criticisms.

### Criticisms and objectives

Regime dissidents criticize many aspects of Vietnam’s existing governmental system and discuss numerous aspects of a different one to replace it. In this array of commentary, three themes stand out: corruption, democracy, and national pride.

For many dissidents, the extent and scale of corruption in Vietnam is what ignited their disgust with the political system. One of the earliest groups to openly criticize the government was the Association of Vietnamese People Against Corruption [Hội Nhân Dân Việt Nam Chống Tham Nhũng], formed in September 2001 by Phạm Quốc Dương, Trần Khuê, Nguyễn Thị Thanh Xuân, Nguyễn Vũ Bình, and Lê Chí Quang, people from Hà Nội and Hồ Chí Minh City. Soon a dozen or so others joined them. Some members were retired military officers and former Communist Party members. Their stated main objective was not to oppose the party; instead, they wanted to help it root out corruption. Indeed, when they announced the association’s formation, they wanted officials to recognize it.<sup>5</sup> National authorities, however, spurned the group and soon harassed and eventually arrested and imprisoned some of its members for “misusing democratic freedom.”<sup>6</sup>

The corruption that angers dissidents is not the petty favors and bribes that local police and government officials solicit. What upsets them is the corruption they say is pervasive at higher levels. One writer in Hồ Chí Minh City likened the Communist Party to a “gluttonous monster” [*quái vật*], sucking the life out of the people and the country (Nguyễn Hải Sơn 2004: 22). Corrupt officials, critics claim, include thousands of high-ranking authorities who get millions, even billions, of US dollars (Trần Độ 2004, no. 31: 2; Phạm Quế Dương 2007).<sup>7</sup> According to a brief account based on information in 2005 from an un-named high-ranking official in the Ministry of Security [Bộ Công An], senior leaders who are inordinately wealthy thanks to kickbacks, embezzlement, and other corruption include former secretary generals of the Communist Party Đỗ Mười (\$2 billion) and Lê Khả Phiêu (\$500 million); the then secretary general of the party Nông Đức Mạnh (\$1.3 billion); former national president Lê Đức Anh (\$2 billion); the then president Trần Đức Lương (\$2 billion); the then prime minister Phan Văn Khải (\$2 billion plus); and the then National Assembly president Nguyễn Văn An (\$1 billion plus) (*Điện Thu* 2005: 1).

Often, contend regime dissidents, relatives of top officials reap inordinate benefits through their connections to and protection from senior authorities. For instance, Secretary General Nông Đức Mạnh, claim some dissidents, has pulled strings to get his son higher positions in the government and party (Đỗ Mậu 2006: 22).<sup>8</sup> A son-in-law of former Secretary General Đỗ Mười is said to be a billionaire largely because of his father-in-law’s name and connections (Lê Chí Quang 2004: 3; Hai Cù Lân 2005: 10–11).<sup>9</sup> A son of former Prime Minister Phan Văn Khải is rumored to have made millions from kickbacks and other illicit activities in the construction industry (Lê Chí Quang 2004: 4; Hai Cù Lân 2005: 9–10). A son and a son-in-law of former national president Trần Đức Lương, critics claim, have also become wealthy through business deals facilitated by their connections (Nguyễn Thiện Tâm 2005: 32).<sup>10</sup> A son of Nguyễn Chí Thanh, one of Vietnam’s famous generals, reportedly has ridden extensively on his family’s connections to rise up party and government hierarchies, obtain several houses, and become extremely wealthy through illegal deals.<sup>11</sup>

I am not concerned here with exploring the veracity of these and other claims about high-level corruption. The point is that many regime dissidents believe them to be true. Moreover, they think corruption is so entrenched that it can only be rooted out through fundamental changes in the political system. This and their naming senior national officials whom they think are corrupt distinguishes their condemnations from those in Vietnamese daily newspapers, arguments by people advocating

modest reforms, and speeches by state authorities. Those accounts rarely implicate top officials, and they imply or argue that corruption can be dealt with by measures within the existing system. Most regime dissidents, by contrast, insist that the system itself must change.

Indicative of their thinking are the words scrawled on a banner hung from a large bridge in Hanoi in October 2008. After listing “corruption that sucks blood from the people” and two other huge problems in the country, the banner called on the Communist Party to immediately “democratize the nation” and bring about “pluralism and multipartyism.”<sup>12</sup> The line of argument by many regime critics is that corruption flourishes because power is concentrated in one political party, a situation that precludes democracy. The root cause of corruption, argue Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa and many other regime dissidents, is “dictatorship” [*chế độ độc tài*] and the “mother” [*mẹ*] of that system, as one critic put it, is the Communist Party’s domination of the country.<sup>13</sup> To fight corruption, critics often argue, the Communist Party’s power must be reduced so that other actors can play significant roles in the political system. For instance, to root out corruption, Vietnam needs an independent judicial system, an independent press, and opposition political parties (Tống Văn Công 2009).<sup>14</sup>

The absence of democracy is a second prominent theme in regime dissidents’ statements and activities. Democracy, to most dissidents, requires the protection and fostering of basic human rights and pluralist political institutions. Initially, these critics often note, the independent republic that the Vietnamese people established in 1945 advocated and promised democracy.<sup>15</sup> Rather quickly, however, the freedoms and institutions essential for democracy were sidelined then squashed. The primary culprit, many dissidents contend, is the Communist Party, which usurped power and changed the Constitution to make itself the country’s supreme leader.

Dissidents often cite the United Nation’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights as the standard which Vietnam should follow. Among those rights, critics typically stress freedom of press, of speech, of association, of religion, and of trade union formation.<sup>16</sup> (Rarely do they mention what might be called the “economic rights” listed in that Declaration – rights to social security, adequate standard of living, and education, for example.) The essential democratic political institutions that dissidents frequently demand are rule by law; separation of executive, legislative, and judicial functions of government; fair and impartial trials; and regular elections with candidates from various political parties.<sup>17</sup> The last of these is what many regime critics stress most,



frequently sounding as though a multiparty system would be a panacea for Vietnam.<sup>18</sup>

A third prominent theme in regime dissidents' writings and other activities is "national pride," a term I use to include three, often entwined, issues – Vietnam's low level of development, its poor standing compared to other Asian countries, and its relations with China.

To regime dissidents, development includes economic conditions, but it is much more than that. Besides a strong economy, a developed country has a high-quality educational system, opportunities for people to use their ingenuity to better themselves and their community, a robust civil society, and a democratic political system (Phạm Hồng Sơn and Thu Lê 2002; Trần Độ 2004, no. 29: 3; Trần Độ 2004, no. 31: 5–6; Nguyễn Khắc Toàn 2006).<sup>19</sup> To dissidents, Vietnam falls far short of these standards. Despite rapid economic growth since the mid-1990s, many argue, Vietnam remains poor with a large percentage of citizens living essentially hand to mouth. Several dissidents are appalled at the widening gap between the "haves" and "have nots." Many blame this on Vietnam's wholesale move into a capitalistic economy in which foreign investors are welcomed to establish factories that pay miserable wages to teams of people desperate for work (Vi Đức Hồi 2008).<sup>20</sup> Others say the opposite: Vietnamese authorities have not embraced capitalism fully enough and should rid the country of all state enterprises and other vestiges of a socialist economy (Lê Hồng Hà 2004: section 2; Radio Free Asia 2007b).<sup>21</sup> Dissidents also often bemoan the low quality of education and backward pedagogy in Vietnam's schools and universities (Trần Khải Thanh Thủy 2006).<sup>22</sup> Authoritarian conditions in the country stifle educational reform as well as innovation and independent thinking. The same authoritarian conditions impede civil society ("Tiến sĩ Phan Đình Diệu" 2005; Đỗ Nam Hải 2008).<sup>23</sup> All these shortcomings, dissidents often argue, are contrary to what Vietnam could be and are an affront to Vietnam's majestic history.

Adding to this affront for dissidents is that Vietnam lags far behind most Asian neighbors. Look, they frequently say, at the enormous economic improvement during the last 50 or 60 years in South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Indonesia. Even in terms of democracy, several dissidents argue, these countries are now further developed than Vietnam: they have multiparty political systems, vibrant civil societies, and considerable freedom of press. That Vietnam had a long war is not a sufficient explanation for its laggard position; South Korea and Japan, too, critics stress, had major wars; yet, they have prospered economically and have democratically elected governments.

Vietnam's unfavorable comparison to numerous Asian countries, dissidents declare, insults the Vietnamese nation and people (Hoàng Tiến 2005: 8; Nguyễn Khắc Toàn 2007; Phạm Quế Dương 2007; Bạch Ngọc Dương 2007; Trần Lâm 2009b).<sup>24</sup>

Vietnam's relationship with China in recent years is a huge aggravation to numerous regime dissidents, who take pride in their nation's long history of defending the country against Chinese encroachment and meddling. China, many contend, is Vietnam's gravest external threat. Yet, instead of standing up to China and protecting the nation and its people's interests, Vietnamese authorities have made concessions to China's claims to Spratly and Parcel Islands in the South China Sea, ceded territory along the China–Vietnam border, opened roadways to accommodate Chinese traders and companies, and let a countless number of Chinese people live and work in Vietnam, many of whom do not even have visas. To some dissidents the gravest concession is allowing Chinese to exploit natural resources, especially bauxite, in the Central Highlands. This, numerous critics contend, will irreparably damage Vietnam's economy and environment and greatly compromise Vietnam's national security (Nguyễn Chính Kết 2009; Trần Khuê 2001; Nguyễn Thanh Giang 2004: 3–6; Trần Lâm 2009b; Phạm Đình Trọng 2009: 6–7).<sup>25</sup>

Two things, according to some regime dissidents, explain Vietnamese officials' apparent timidness toward China. One is that the Communist Party leaders are bending over backwards to keep China as Vietnam's closest ally. The regime desperately needs China's support because it can turn to no other power to stand with Vietnam against China and because Vietnamese authorities cannot even rely on the support of the Vietnamese people. A second explanation is that by collaborating with China, many Vietnamese authorities become extraordinarily rich.<sup>26</sup>

### Forms of struggle

All the regime dissidents for whom I have credible information advocate peaceful, nonviolent political change (“*Tuyên Ngôn Tự do Dân chủ cho Việt Nam*” 2006; Nguyễn Chính Kết 2006a: 24–5; Phạm Quế Dương 2007: 15; Phạm Hồng Sơn 2009b: 5). Most also favor being open, not secretive, about their criticisms of the existing system and their desires to revamp it.<sup>27</sup> Nonviolent change, dissidents suggest, can come in a couple of ways: state authorities' leaders may see the handwriting on the wall of their inevitable demise and simply concede, or a peaceful mass uprising will cause the regime to collapse.<sup>28</sup> For examples of both, dissidents point to political transformation processes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union during the late 1980s and Indonesia during the late 1990s.

Debated among regime dissidents is how to bring about such scenarios. All advocate struggle [*đấu tranh*] but they emphasize two different forms. One form stresses participation and engagement with authorities and state institutions. Such participatory struggle, say dissidents with this orientation, has already figured prominently in Vietnam's mutation and conversion toward a more open society since the mid-1980s and gradually will bring about full democracy. The other form advocates direct confrontation and opposition to the regime's authorities and institutions. Dissidents with this orientation attribute little importance to alterations in recent years and instead see the regime as stubbornly opposed to significant change and highly prone to repression. Hence, the only way for Vietnam's political system to improve is to replace the Communist Party regime with democracy.

The basic course of participatory struggle is to engage particular state officials, actions, policies, and institutions on matters that directly affect people's lives. Where people – be they workers, peasants, students, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, businessmen/women, or anyone else – see that authorities and policies make life better for them and their communities, they should show support. But where people deem authorities' actions, programs, and policies are wrong or need modification, they should struggle to stop or correct them. Such efforts, say these dissidents, further Vietnam's economic and social development. Even though they are not directly attacking or confronting the political system, they gradually and cumulatively contribute to political change and democracy. Indeed, it is better “not to politicize struggles about people's livelihood and welfare” [*không nên chính trị hóa các đấu tranh dân sinh*]; otherwise, authorities are apt to be repressive rather than responsive (Hà Sĩ Phu 2007a; Lữ Phương 2007). The struggle, to paraphrase one critic, is not about overthrowing or bringing down the government. It is about stopping policies that hurt people and the nation.<sup>29</sup>

Evidence shows, these critics say, that struggles for better living conditions and other specific issues influence the Communist Party government and help the country to develop. They point to the remarkable rise of family farming, which the Communist Party ultimately had to endorse on account of persistent opposition among rural people to collective farming. Other evidence is the demise of centrally planned economy and the revival of private enterprise and a market economy. These were major concessions that authorities had to make during the 1980s–90s in the face of people's poverty and seething discontent. These and other changes also mean “communism” and “socialism” no longer have much importance or meaning among most Vietnamese, another

reality to which the Communist Party has had to adjust. Thus, on the economic and ideological fronts, people's struggles for better living conditions have defeated some objectives of the Communist Party government (Lê Hồng Hà 2007b; Trần Lâm 2009a: 6–7).<sup>30</sup>

Associated with participatory struggle are some specific stances, although not all dissidents in this school endorse every one. A widely shared stance is to recognize the achievements of the Communist Party regime. These include the party's leadership in overthrowing colonial rule and reuniting the nation and the party and government leaders' ability to bend to pressures from the people. Regime dissidents favoring participatory struggle are wary of overseas individuals and organizations who want to play significant roles in Vietnam's democratization movement (Hà Sĩ Phu 2007b; Trần Bảo Lộc 2007).<sup>31</sup> Among their reasons is that such people include Vietnamese refugees who may be trying to restore the Saigon regime or something similar. Also foreigners, they contend, inadequately understand the dynamics and conditions in today's Vietnam.

Dissidents with a participatory struggle orientation also tend to be dubious about trying to organize big demonstrations or even petition campaigns demanding democratic institutions (Lê Hồng Hà 2006). Instead, they favor dialogue and interaction with government and Communist Party authorities at all levels (Trần Bảo Lộc 2007; Hà Sĩ Phu 2008). That can include working within existing institutions, such as helping democratic leaning journalists and lawyers to do their jobs well, which in turn will strengthen and expand civil society (Hà Sĩ Phu 2009b). It can include changing how National Assembly [Quốc Hội] delegates are elected. Right now, 90 percent or more of the Assembly's delegates are Communist Party members. Through persuasive argumentation, that situation could change to allow a wide range of people to be candidates for seats in that legislative body (Lê Hồng Hà 2007a). The Communist Party itself might be reformed such that its internal procedures become more democratic and that it recognizes the value of a free press and a multiparty political system (Phan Đình Diệu 2004: 22; Trần Lâm 2006). If the Communist Party proves incapable of reforming itself, some dissidents think, participatory struggle can, over time, contribute to the regime's self-destruction [*tự vỡ*] under the weight of vast corruption, major conflicts and debates within the party, and widespread animosity (Lê Hồng Hà 2007b; Hà Sĩ Phu 2007a).

Regime dissidents favoring confrontational struggle stress direct opposition to the Communist Party and its government. They say little about changes that have occurred from the bottom-up. Even if authorities in the past have made adjustments in the face of indirect and widespread

pressures, these dissidents see no evidence that such engagement can force the Communist Party regime to change fundamentally the political system. That change, democracy in particular, is what Vietnam needs now, not years from now. Violent revolution is not a viable way to bring that about; the only way is through straightforward and open advocacy for a multiparty, pluralistic political system that protects free speech and other human rights. The present system, in the words of the “Declaration on Freedom and Democracy,” should be “completely replaced” [*phải bị thay thế triệt để*]; it is “incapable of being renovated or modified” [*không phải được đổi mới hay điều chỉnh*].<sup>32</sup>

That declaration is a prominent example of direct confrontation. It openly demanded democracy, freedom of press and association, and an end to Communist Party rule. Other actions advocated by dissidents taking this confrontational approach include boycotting elections for the National Assembly unless opposition parties are allowed to run candidates, demanding an internationally supervised national referendum on whether the present government should continue or not, and encouraging nation-wide mass demonstrations against the regime.<sup>33</sup> The type of confrontation about which there is the most agreement is establishing organizations that publicly oppose the Communist Party government and insist on democracy. Besides confronting the regime, say these dissidents, such organizations will give the democratization movement continuity and sustainability even though the regime suppresses, arrests, and imprisons individual activists.

During recent years, several opposition organizations have emerged. One is Khối 8406 [Bloc 8406], which the declaration spawned and takes part of its name from the date on which that statement was issued. The organization claims to represent those who signed the declaration. Regime dissidents have also formed political parties that champion democracy and human rights. They have such names as Đảng Dân Chủ Nhân Dân [People’s Democratic Party, secretly formed in mid-2003; publicly announced in June 2005], Đảng Dân Chủ [Democratic Party, formed in June 2006; its full name is Đảng Dân Chủ thế kỷ XXI, the Twenty-first century Democratic Party], and Đảng Thăng Tiến Việt Nam [Vietnam Progressive Party, launched in September 2006]. They have not registered with proper government agencies – although some have tried – and hence have no legal standing.

Whether to have many organizations or to consolidate them into one or two is a question these dissidents are discussing.<sup>34</sup> Another issue is the role of Vietnamese living abroad and of other foreigners. To some dissidents with a confrontational orientation, overseas supporters are

vital. One dissident even says that leaders of the democratization movement should be outside Vietnam until it becomes strong inside the country (Phạm Quế Dương 2007).<sup>35</sup> Others say that material and moral support from abroad is helpful but the movement must rely on domestic resources and leadership.

Underlying the two forms of struggle are divergent arguments about the relationship between development and democracy. Dissidents favoring participatory struggle tend to emphasize development, especially improved living conditions, welfare, and happiness for citizens across the country. Implicitly (explicitly for some) democracy is an aspect of development. The two are linked, but development is, as Lê Hồng Hà says, overarching and comprehensive – democratization is an important aspect of development, not independent from it. Hence, fighting for democracy by itself does not make sense. The struggle is for the development and democratization of Vietnam [*đấu tranh vì sự phát triển và dân chủ hóa đất nước Việt Nam*] (Lê Hồng Hà 2007b: par. “Với vấn đề thứ nhất ...”). Thinking along similar lines, Lữ Phương says democratization in Vietnam need not start with a multiparty political system. Indeed, he says, a multiple party system is likely to come in the late stages of the whole democratization process (Lữ Phương 2007: par. “Dân chủ hóa ...”).

For those favoring confrontational struggle, however, democratization is primary. Development cannot happen until Vietnam has democratic institutions, especially multiple political parties competing for government positions in free elections. Without such institutions, they argue, corruption will continue, creative thinking and innovation will remain stifled, and human rights will be suppressed.<sup>36</sup> Without such political institutions, Vietnam cannot catch up with other Asian countries.<sup>37</sup>

### **Authorities' views and actions**

In the second half of the 1950s, faced with public criticism involving some of the issues posed by dissidents today, the then newly established Communist Party government in northern Vietnam initially reacted with a “vacillating admixture of official repression and tolerance” (Zinoman 2011: 77).<sup>38</sup> But by late 1959–early 1960, authorities decisively suppressed their critics.

Authorities in contemporary Vietnam have been unable, or maybe unwilling, to suppress regime dissidents so resolutely. Similar to how authorities initially reacted some 50 years ago, authorities today respond with a mixture of tolerance and repression. A striking difference now, however, is that this mixed approach has persisted not just for three

or four years but for well over a decade. During that time, since the mid-1990s, the critics include not just people opposed to particular policies and programs but critics of the regime. These regime dissidents seek significantly more than the moderate reforms in the Communist Party system that critics in the 1950s advocated. The number of dissidents today has also grown and their activities have become more diversified than those of critics years ago.

Consequently, authorities today face a greater challenge from public political criticism and dissent than they did 60 years ago. Tuong Vu's chapter in this volume shows that Vietnam's Communist Party has had to deal with many challenges since it began to govern in the mid-1940s. Whether its leaders today can adapt to this new challenge while preserving the political system is unpredictable. What we can do is examine authorities' actions now.

### Perceptions

At one level, state authorities and regime dissidents today have a lot in common. Development, democracy, and nationalism – themes championed by the dissidents – are also ideals that the Communist Party and its government celebrate and subscribe to. The words “Independence – Freedom – Happiness” [Độc lập – Tự do – Hạnh phúc] form the header on official documents. Vietnam's Constitution provides for freedom of press, speech, association, religion, and numerous other human rights (“Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam” 1992/2001).<sup>39</sup> Government leaders regularly talk about democracy and how it should be strengthened in Vietnam. Authorities also frequently condemn corruption and wage campaigns against it that often result in arrests and imprisonment of offenders, usually sub-national officials but occasionally national ones.

Major differences between dissidents and national authorities are the meanings of democracy, development, and freedom and how to counter corruption. So large are these differences that party and government authorities frequently regard dissidents as significant threats to the party, the government, and the stability of Vietnamese society. Such threats, according to authorities, are violations of the Constitution and numerous laws. Among the dissidents' objectives that officials commonly see as especially dangerous are a multiparty political system, which is at odds with the Constitution and laws stipulating that the Communist Party is the “leading force of society and the state” [lực lượng lãnh đạo Nhà nước và xã hội], and independent organizations and media outlets, which contravene the state's claimed authority over all such entities.

## Engagement

How to deal with dissidents has been a major issue in long-running debates among Communist Party and government authorities over “the scope and pace of political reform” (Thayer 2010b: 201). Although few details of the debates are public, some authorities have urged engagement and dialogue, a position somewhat symbiotic with those dissidents who advocate participatory struggle.

Võ Văn Kiệt, Vietnam’s prime minister from 1991 to 1997 and a senior advisor to the government for years afterward, favored “expanding dialogue” [*mở rộng đối thoại*] between authorities and activists in the “democracy movement” [*phong trào dân chủ*]. Authorities, he elaborated in an interview, should foster an open exchange of views with people in the movement. That, he added, is a better approach than being heavy handed. Moreover, he said, officials should treat people in the movement with civility rather than imposing degrading labels on them. He also supported revamping National Assembly elections so as to significantly increase the number of delegates who are not members of the Communist Party (BBC 2007). Although Võ Văn Kiệt died in 2008, I suspect other prominent officials express similar views during their closed deliberations about responses to regime dissidents.

Another indication of some willingness among officials to dialogue with regime dissidents is a lengthy conversation in 2008 between a colonel in the security police [*công an*] and Nguyễn Khắc Toàn, a dissident whose activism had earlier landed him in prison for four years (2002–06). The colonel, who had often questioned Nguyễn Khắc Toàn in police headquarters about the latter’s whereabouts and activities, invited him for tea at a shop near Toàn’s home in Hà Nội. For hours the two men had a rather frank exchange of views about Vietnam’s political system, corruption, laws, legal system, and other topics. Whether either man’s positions changed as a result is unknown. Nguyễn Khắc Toàn noticed, however, that the colonel referred to him and others like him as *nhà hoạt động chính trị* [political activists], which Nguyễn Khắc Toàn regarded as more respectful than the terms often used in official news sources: *kẻ cơ hội chính trị* [political opportunists], *kẻ bất mãn chế độ* [regime malcontents], and *đội tượng vi phạm luật pháp hình sự* [transgressors of criminal law; criminals] (Nguyễn Khắc Toàn 2008).<sup>40</sup>

## Intimidation

State authorities in the various agencies discussed in Carlyle A. Thayer’s chapter of this volume use numerous methods and instruments to intimidate and repress regime dissidents. Detention, arrest, and imprisonment



are the most severe, but, as Thayer's chapter shows, there are many other less onerous measures.

One is to publicly critique, denounce, and, in the eyes of many dissidents and observers, slander those who dissent. Previously, officials and the authorized mass media rarely commented in public about individual dissidents. In recent years, however, newspapers and television stations, all under the purview of government and Communist Party authorities, have produced numerous accounts alleging nefarious activities of individual dissidents. One frequent allegation is that the named individuals are in league with outsiders, often overseas Vietnamese, who viscerally oppose the Communist Party's government. Another theme is that dissidents, by verbally berating the government and Communist Party, are unpatriotic and dismissive of the huge sacrifices their forebears made in order to overthrow colonial rule, defeat aggressors, and secure the nation's independence.<sup>41</sup> A third theme is that dissidents use their activist persona to make a living from the contributions they receive from relatives, friends, and supporters, especially those living abroad.<sup>42</sup> Accounts also allege that particular dissidents have illicit sexual affairs and relationships, swindle fellow citizens of money and property, misrepresent themselves, and malign authorities.

Authorities also harass regime dissidents and their families. Authorities tap and cut phone lines to dissidents' residences, block or disrupt their mobile phone numbers, hack into their email correspondence, track their internet usage, and confiscate files, books, letters, and computers from their homes. Over 30 percent of the 62 dissidents under study have endured these adversities.<sup>43</sup> Authorities often interfere with and sometimes manage to shut down dissident organizations and newspapers' websites and other internet locations that regularly post dissidents' writings and interviews. Security police typically shadow dissidents wherever they go, keeping a record of whom they meet, when, where, and sometimes what was said. Dissidents who have served prison sentences often remain on parole and are closely monitored for years afterward. Spies among dissident groups are also a distinct possibility, say some activists (Nguyễn Vũ Bình 2008). Some dissidents also report that speeding motorcycles and cars try to hit them or family members ("Nhóm phóng viên Phong trào tranh đấu vì Dân chủ, Hà Nội" 2008).

An example of someone who has endured harassment is Lê Trần Luật, a lawyer who has represented several regime dissidents and who himself condemns the regime for systematically violating human rights. In early 2009, he said, officials prevented him from meeting

his clients. Harassment then intensified. For instance, police raided his office and seized his computers, files, and other possessions. Ultimately, a provincial association for lawyers expelled him on the grounds that he had violated an article in the profession's code against using legal skills to endanger national security. The expulsion effectively prevents him from practicing his profession.<sup>44</sup> Intense intimidation to the point of people losing their livelihoods has also happened to several other dissidents.

Sometimes harassment turns violent. Numerous signers of the "Declaration on Freedom and Democracy" reported being beaten up by men thought to be plain-clothed police or tough guys hired by local authorities (Vũ Hoàng Hải 2006; Radio Free Asia 2006a, 2006b). Security police and their hired men have waylaid and mugged dissidents while traveling. One such victim was 35-year-old Nguyễn Phương Anh. His parents – a retired university teacher and retired government employee – complained to authorities in detail about the beating he suffered along a provincial highway.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes dissidents are attacked near their homes, which Trần Khải Thanh Thủy says happened to her and her husband in October 2009, after which the security police made the event look like she and her husband had attacked them (Đỗ Bá Tân 2009). Dương Thị Xuân claims, with photos as supporting evidence, that security police in late 2008 destroyed her entire house and the makeshift quarters her family erected afterward. Authorities say that the structures are illegal because the area, on the outskirts of Hà Nội, is zoned for agriculture. Neighbors report, however, that no other homes in the vicinity were touched ("Công An CS Hà Nội tiếp tục đàn áp dã man, khốc liệt gia đình nữ nhà báo tranh đấu Dương Thị Xuân" 2009; Vietnam Sydney Radio 2009). Apparently Dương Thị Xuân's family home was targeted because she is the secretary for the unauthorized publication *Tập San Tự Do Dân Chủ* [Freedom and Democracy Magazine]. She is also a cousin of another regime dissident, Nguyễn Khắc Toàn.

### **Confinement**

The most severe forms of repression are various types of confinement: detention and interrogation, arrest, and imprisonment. Curiously, confinement does not happen to all dissidents, and the extent of their confinements varies. The other remarkable thing is that confinement rarely stops people from continuing their dissent. Using these two variables – extent of confinement and persistence of dissent – I see six clusters in the 62 regime dissidents under study (see Tables 6.1 and 6.2).<sup>46</sup>

Table 6.2 Summary table of 62 regime dissidents in Vietnam\*

Cluster	Freq	Birth year (%)			Avg age (yrs)	Residence (%)			DRV	CP memb	Mil vet	Public Dissent Activities (%)***			
		>1941	1941–55	>55		HN	HCMC	Other				(%)**	(%)**	Solitary	Poli party
1	62	26	16	58	55.2	34	31	35	39	51	53	24	19	29	39
2	4	100			81.5	50	25	25	100	100	100	50		50	
3	11	36	9	55	56.5	36	27	36	50	57	71	27	9	36	27
4	21	33	10	57	55.9	52	33	14	40	50	60	29	19	29	33
5	6	17	50	33	61.8	33	17	50	33	33	40		33	50	83
6	17		24	76	47.5	12	41	47	21	36	43	29	18	18	47
6	3			100	41.7			100	0	0	0		67		33

Notes:

Cluster code:

1. No detention or arrest despite frequent public political dissent.
2. Arrest and/or detention, often frequently, but no conviction and imprisonment even though public political dissent continues.
3. Convicted and imprisoned once but not imprisoned again even though public political dissent continues.
4. Convicted, imprisoned, released; resumed public political dissent; convicted and imprisoned again. (Three of the six are currently in prison. Of the other three, one died in 2008, one is very ill, and one has resumed public political dissent.)
5. Currently in prison after being convicted for the first time.
6. Stopped public political dissent after being detained, tried, and convicted.

Notations:

\* Details are reported in Table 6.1 Sixty-two regime dissidents in Vietnam clustered according to their confinement by authorities and persistence of their dissent (as of May 2011) [[http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table\\_1\\_for\\_Government\\_Repression\\_and\\_Toleration\\_of\\_Dissidents\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_Vietnam.pdf](http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table_1_for_Government_Repression_and_Toleration_of_Dissidents_in_Contemporary_Vietnam.pdf)].

\*\* Percentage of people for whom the information is available.

\*\*\* Some rows for Activities total more than 100 percent because a few regime dissidents are involved in more than one type.

HN = Hà Nội; HCMC = Hồ Chí Minh City; Other = elsewhere in Vietnam

DRV = active supporter of or participant in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam government (1945–75)

CP memb = Communist Party member

Mil vet = military veteran

Solitary = not publicly a member of a dissident political party (Poli party), publication (Newspaper, etc), or formal organization (Advoc organ.)

In the first cluster are four dissidents who, as best as I can determine, suffered no confinement – police have neither detained nor arrested nor imprisoned them. The four are Đặng Văn Việt, Lữ Phương, Trần Đại Sơn, and Trần Lâm. Partial explanations for this exceptional treatment may be that all were advanced in age when they began to openly criticize the regime, had served in the government and or military during Vietnam's wars against France and the United States, and had been Communist Party members.

Trần Đại Sơn (1931?–2006), a Communist Party member for over 50 years and an army veteran of several wars, began in 2003 to publicly chastise the security police and other government institutions.<sup>47</sup> Đặng Văn Việt (1920–), an army veteran who later was a high-ranking official in a government bureau for irrigation, signed the “Declaration on Freedom and Democracy” and was a founding editorial board member of the internet-based dissident newspaper *Tổ Quốc* [Homeland] in 2006.<sup>48</sup> Trần Lâm (1924–) had a long career in the Vietnamese government, including being a member of Vietnam's supreme court [Tòa Án Nhân Dân Tối Cao]. Since about 2005, he has sharply criticized authorities and has been the trial lawyer for several dissidents; he was also on *Tổ Quốc's* editorial board when it started and remains an advisor to the publication.<sup>49</sup> Lữ Phương (1938–) served in the underground movement fighting the government in southern Vietnam and the United States. He has publicly criticized the current regime since the early 1990s.

The most common confinement is detainment and interrogation at police stations. Euphemistically described by authorities as requiring a person to “work” [*làm việc*] with the police, the sessions can last for hours and sometimes days. Police may allow the person being questioned to go home between sessions but occasionally they hold the individual for several days. According to dissidents' accounts, the police want details about their political views, involvement in unauthorized organizations and newspapers, and relations with other critics. Besides getting information, police also use the interrogations to frighten dissidents and threaten harsher measures if they continue to criticize the government and Communist Party.<sup>50</sup> Sometimes the police become physical, slapping, punching, and beating the people being questioned.<sup>51</sup>

Among the 58 dissidents who have been detained and/or arrested, often several times, eleven have always been released without being tried and imprisoned, and all eleven resumed their public political criticisms. They compose Cluster 2 of the dissidents under study.

One person in this cluster is Trần Độ (1923–2002), whom most public dissidents today greatly admire. He was a general in Vietnam's military

and held several prominent positions in the government before his retirement. But starting in the late 1990s, he openly criticize the party and the political system he had served for decades.<sup>52</sup> He was detained once, in mid-2001. Perhaps his advanced age and long-term service to the regime protected him against harsher treatment.

In four cases it is easy to explain why, despite continuing to be outspoken, the dissidents were not arrested and imprisoned: they fled the country. Bạch Ngọc Dương went to Cambodia in May 2007 after being hounded by police.<sup>53</sup> Bùi Kim Thành, the only dissident, so far as I know, whom authorities confined in a mental hospital (not just once but twice), was reportedly released on the condition that she leaves Vietnam. She is now active in anti-Vietnam government organizations in the United States (“Internet writer Bui Kim Thanh released” 2008; “Bóc trần dã tâm của bọn khủng bố” 2009). Nguyễn Chính Kết, who left in December 2006, is the foreign representative of Khối 8406 [Block 8406], which claims to represent those who signed the Declaration on Freedom and Democracy (Khối 8406 2007). He apparently resides in the United States. Lê Trí Tuệ is one of the founders in October 2006 of the Công Đoàn Độc Lập Việt Nam [Independent Trade Union of Vietnam] and reportedly fled to Cambodia in 2007 to escape constant harassment, more interrogations, and possible arrest.<sup>54</sup>

Why six people in this second cluster who remain politically active in Vietnam have not been brought to trial and imprisoned is unclear. Only in the case of Bùi Minh Quốc might an explanation be that he has acted on his own. The other five have been active participants in organized dissent – four in unauthorized internet newspapers critical of the government and one in an organization representing signatories of the 2006 Declaration on Freedom and Democracy. Advanced age may be a factor in cases of Bùi Minh Quốc (b. 1940), Hoàng Tiến (b. about 1932), and Vũ Cao Quận (b. 1932). The three also have been Communist Party members or served the government. Of the remaining three – Dương Thị Xuân, Đỗ Nam Hải, and Nguyễn Phương Anh – two have parents who served the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which fought in 1945–75 for independence from France, against the United States, and for the country’s unity.<sup>55</sup> (Hereafter, I label such connections “DRV credentials.”)

Such family connections to the regime and resulting ties to relatives and friends still in the government and Communist Party may provide these individuals and other dissidents like them with some protection against extreme repression. Much in Vietnamese politics, argues political scientist Martin Gainsborough, involves personal relationships and networks, which can provide advantages and safeguards. The viability

and reliability of such linkages, however, are typically in flux and unpredictable (Gainsborough 2010: 177–90). Linkages that dissidents might have to individual authorities are no guarantee against more severe confinement. Indeed, as indicated by dissidents or their parents' DRV credentials and Communist Party membership, a significant proportion of those who end up being arrested and imprisoned have personal connections to authorities in the regime (see the summaries for Clusters 3–6 in Table 6.2).

Cluster 3 has 21 dissidents who served their prison terms and afterwards resumed their public political criticisms yet have not been rearrested. Why authorities have not imprisoned them again is a puzzle. My initial speculation was that these critics are acting individually, rather than being prominent members of dissident organizations, and possibly subscribe to the participatory struggle orientation discussed earlier rather than the confrontational one. This pattern, however, fits only five people: Dương Thu Hương, a famous novelist, has been an outspoken political critic since the early 1990s; Hà Sĩ Phu, a biologist in a government research institute who was forced to take early retirement because he refused to join the Communist Party, has written essays critical of the party and its government since the late 1980s; Lê Hồng Hà, who held numerous government positions before retiring in the 1993, has openly criticized various aspects of the regime since about 1995; Nguyễn Vũ Bình, who initially ran afoul of the Communist Party when he asked permission in 2000 to establish an opposition political party, appears not to be prominent in any organized opposition since resuming his public political criticism; and Trần Dũng Tiến, a former body guard for Hồ Chí Minh, has signed petitions and written letters since the early 2000s that criticize political leaders and institutions.

Another similarity among these five is their DRV credentials. Dương Thu Hương, Lê Hồng Hà, and Trần Dũng Tiến were Communist Party members and fought under the party and Hà Nội government's leadership for Vietnam's independence and unification. So did Hà Sĩ Phu, although he never joined the party. Nguyễn Vũ Bình, too young to have participated in the DRV, is the son of revolutionaries. Also, he himself was a party member and on the staff of the party's foremost journal, *Tap Chí Cộng Sản* [Communist Review] before being forced to resign.

Three others in this cluster – Phạm Quế Dương, Nguyễn Thanh Giang, and Trần Khuê – also have DRV credentials, and Phạm Quế Dương was a Communist Party member. That background and their age (all are in their seventies) may help to explain why they have not been rearrested despite their leadership positions in dissident newspapers. Advanced

age may also be giving Chân Tín some protection for further arrest and imprisonment, although he has no DRV credentials. Lê Chí Quang, Nguyễn Khắc Toàn, and Phạm Hồng Sơn have neither age nor, as best as I can tell, DRV credentials for possible protection. Yet they have not been imprisoned again even though the first two are prominent in dissident newspapers (*Tô Quốc* and *Tự Do Ngôn Luận*, respectively) and the third is a leader in an advocacy group for prisoners of conscience (*Hội Ái Hữu Tù Nhân Chính Trị và Tôn Giáo*).

Five in this cluster – Hồ Thị Bích Khuông, Nguyễn Ngọc Quang, Vũ Hoàng Hải, Huỳnh Việt Lang, and Lê Thị Công Nhân – have been out of prison for less than three years as of May 2011. The last two are leaders in opposition political parties, which may make them vulnerable to rearrest. Hồ Thị Bích Khuông and Nguyễn Ngọc Quang, not leaders in opposition political parties, may be less liable for rearrest, although, like nearly every other regime dissident, they are harassed. Extensive harassment and the trauma it caused his family reportedly prompted Vũ Hoàng Hải to seek help from the United States consul general in Hồ Chí Minh City and leave Vietnam with his wife and child (DVR radio 2010). Another three individuals in this cluster – Lê Nguyên Sang, Nguyễn Kim Nhân, and Nguyễn Văn Đài – have been out of prison for less than a year.

Only six previously convicted and imprisoned dissidents who resumed their political dissent have been convicted and imprisoned again. They form Cluster 4. It is unclear why people in this cluster have multiple imprisonments while people in Cluster 3 have had but one despite resuming their political dissent. One difference is Cluster 4 has no “solitary” dissidents – that is, people not active in dissident organizations (see Table 6.2). That, however, probably explains nothing because most of the *initial* imprisonments of those in Cluster 4 were for offenses done as individuals, not as members of organizations. In most respects the differences between the two clusters are slight. Cluster 4 people tend to be somewhat older, are less likely to live in Hà Nội or Hồ Chí Minh City, and somewhat less likely to have been Communist Party members.

One significant difference is that four of the dissidents in Cluster 4 are among the earliest and most determined regime dissidents. Three of these four have been imprisoned three times each, and their first imprisonment came prior to 1990.

Two of the four at one time served the Communist Party government. Hoàng Minh Chính, a former head of a national philosophy institute, was purged from the party and imprisoned during 1967–72 for criticizing, not publicly but within party circles, top leaders’ positions regarding China and the Soviet Union. In 1981, soon after he had

accused top party leaders of violating several provisions of Vietnam's Constitution, authorities imprisoned him for another seven years. In November 1995, at the age of 73, he was imprisoned another year after he distributed writings critical of the party's hold on power and advocated reinstatement of Communist party members who were purged in the 1960s (Đài Việt Nam California Radio 1996; Hoàng Minh Chính 1993). After being released from prison in 1996, he was not arrested and imprisoned again, however, even though his public dissent intensified. In 2006 he was a founding member and leader of a new opposition political party, Đảng Dân Chủ [Democratic Party]. By then he was 84 and sickly, conditions that may have stayed authorities' repressive hand until his death in 2008. Trần Anh Kim is a former officer in Vietnam's military. He was first imprisoned in 1995–97 for, he says, exposing the corruption by authorities in his home province of Thái Bình. In 2009, his political opposition resulted in being sentenced to five and a half years imprisonment on charges of trying to overthrow the government (“Cựu trung tá Trần Anh Kim, nhà tranh đấu và bất đồng chính kiến, bị công an bắt giữ 3 giờ đồng tại Hà Nội” 2006; Radio Free Asia 2009).

The other two long-time dissidents in Cluster 4 never served the Communist Party government. Nguyễn Đan Quế, a physician in Hồ Chí Minh City, began in 1976 to criticize the government's health care and human rights policies and created a short-lived dissident newspaper. In 1978 he was arrested for rebellion and for organizing a reactionary organization. He was imprisoned for ten years. In 1991, authorities sentenced him to twenty years imprisonment for attempting to overthrow the government. After seven years in jail a government amnesty freed him. His third jail term was July 2004 to September 2005 for abusing his democratic rights and jeopardizing the state and society (“Vụ án Nguyễn Đan Quế” 2004; “High Cost of Lifelong Commitment to Human Rights” 2004; Voice of America 2006). Disturbing the peace was Nguyễn Văn Lý's offense when this Roman Catholic priest in Huế was imprisoned the first time, 1983–92. Parole violations and sabotaging national unity were the charges against him when imprisoned again in 2001. After he served more than four years of a fifteen-year sentence, authorities released him. In early 2007, a court convicted him of spreading propaganda against the state and sentenced him to eight years imprisonment. After he suffered several strokes, authorities freed him, perhaps temporarily, in March 2010 (Công An tỉnh Thừa Thiên Huế 2007; Reuter News 2010).

Trần Khải Thanh Thủy and Nguyễn Tấn Hoàn are considerably younger than the others in Cluster 4. A writer whose parents have DRV



credentials, Trần Khải Thanh Thủy (b. 1960) has been on the editorial board of the dissident newspaper *Tỏ Quốc* since October 2006 and in that same month was a founding board member of the Công Đoàn Độc Lập Việt Nam [Independent Trade Union], which the government deems illegal. In early 2007 a court convicted her of disturbing the peace. After nine months, authorities released her from jail because, they said, she had tuberculosis and she promised not to violate the law again. Nevertheless, she resumed making sharp criticisms of the regime. In 2010, authorities put her and her husband on trial for assaulting police officers and sentenced her to three and a half years imprisonment (BBC Vietnamese 2008; *VietCatholicNews* 2010). Nguyễn Tấn Hoàn (b. 1976), a southern factory worker and a founding member of another nongovernment labor union, Hiệp Hội Đoàn Kết Công-Nông Việt Nam [United Workers-Farmers Association of Vietnam], was arrested in 2007 on charges of spreading propaganda against the state and collaborating with foreigners to oppose the regime. He was imprisoned for eighteen months. In February 2010, he was arrested again, apparently after being heavily involved in several strikes in Trà Vinh province south of Hồ Chí Minh City. A court convicted him of disturbing the peace and abusing his democratic rights; it sentenced him to seven-year imprisonment (Nguyễn Văn Huy 2009; Thân Văn Trường 2010; Committee to Protect Vietnamese Workers 2010).

In Cluster 5 are 17 people convicted for the first time. Because they are still serving prison sentences, we do not yet know whether they will resume their dissident activities after being released. Cluster 5 has the largest proportion of people born after 1955, the lowest proportion with DRV credentials, and next to the largest proportion of dissidents not from Hà Nội or Hồ Chí Minh City. All but four of the people have been members of outlawed opposition political parties, dissident internet publications, or other anti-regime groups and organizations.

Cluster 6 has three people who, as best as I can determine, stopped their public political dissent after being confined. I am guessing that the confinement experience contributed to dissuading them from being openly critical. (Possibly their dissent continues but not publicly.) Trần Thị Lệ Hồng, convicted in 2007 for her involvement in the United Workers-Farmers Association, was released from prison two years later. Hoàng Thị Anh Đào and Lê Thị Lệ Hằng received suspended prison terms in 2007, a condition that may also be influencing their lie-low behavior.

That Cluster 6 has only three people indicates that detaining, arresting, and imprisoning critics are only marginally effective repressive measures. Forty-four other dissidents, fourteen times the number in

Cluster 6, continued their open opposition to the regime despite having been confined, frequently more than once and sometimes even imprisoned.<sup>56</sup> This suggests considerable determination and commitment on their part. It also suggests more tolerance on the part of authorities and/or considerable less ability to stifle dissidents than might be expected of an authoritarian regime.

### Sentences

Dissidents sentenced to imprisonment are guilty, according to the government, of violating Vietnam's criminal laws. Hence, authorities claim, no one incarcerated is a political prisoner. According to government officials, people are in prison because they violated Vietnam's Constitution and laws.<sup>57</sup>

Before 2000, nearly half the thirteen charges leading to convictions and imprisonments were rather heavy-duty: espionage, revealing state secrets, inciting rebellion, and joining reactionary organizations (see Table 6.3, top half). Since 2000, such charges constitute less than one-fifth of the 50 offenses for which dissidents have been sentenced to prison. The rest of the offenses have been of a lighter nature: abusing one's freedom or democratic rights, disturbing the peace, assaulting police officers, and spreading propaganda against the state. The last of these, which does not appear prior to 2000, has constituted over half of all offenses for which dissidents have been incarcerated in the last eleven years.

Prison terms, too, have tended to be lighter in recent years (see Table 6.3, bottom half). All four prison terms prior to 1990 were five years or longer; two were ten years. In 1990–99, only one prison term was more than four years; most were less than two years. From 2000 onward, over half the imprisonments have been less than four years, and that includes dissidents still serving sentences that could end up being shortened. In the 26 instances for which there are data for both sentences and prison terms (see Table 6.1, Clusters 3, 4, and 6), only eight served the full sentence. The remaining eighteen, nearly 70 percent, were released before, sometimes years before, completing the original sentences. In several cases, sentences were reduced by appellate courts. Other people were released early due to their good behavior as inmates, their poor health, or intervention from influential relatives.

The relationship between offense and prison term is elusive. People convicted of rebellion, trying to overthrow the government, or inciting others to rebel tend to have longer prison terms than those convicted of abusing their freedom and democratic rights (Table 6.4). But for other

Table 6.3 Offenses and imprisonments for 47 regime dissidents\*

	Time period when convicted						Total
	<1990	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-11	
<b>Offense code</b>							
1				1	25	2	28
2		1		3	1		6
3			1	4		1	6
4		1			7		8
5					1		1
6	1				1		2
7	1						1
8			1				1
9	3	1	2	1	1	2	10
Total	5	3	5	9	36	5	63

  

Years in prison**	Time period when convicted						Total
	<1990	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-11	
<1		1	1	1	3		6
1<2			3	2	2		7
2<3			1	2	4		7
3<4		1		1	7	1	10
4<5				3	4		7
5<6	1				6		7
6<7					4		4
7<8	1	1				2	4
8 or more	2				1	1	4
Total	4	3	5	9	31	4	56

Notes: Offense codes: 1 spreading propaganda against the state; 2 espionage; 3 abusing freedoms and/or democratic rights; 4 trying to overthrow the government and/or inciting others to oppose the government; 5 working with foreign elements against the state; 6 joining reactionary organizations; 7 rebellion; 8 revealing state secrets; 9 other or unknown.

\* The number of offenses and imprisonments exceeds 47 each because some dissidents were convicted of more than one offense and imprisoned more than once.

\*\* For the dissidents convicted during 2000-11 and still in jail, this tabulation uses sentences. In the past, over half of those convicted were in prison fewer years than their original sentences stipulated.

Source: Data comes from Table 6.1 Sixty-two regime dissidents in Vietnam clustered according to their confinement by authorities and persistence of their dissent (as of May 2011) [[http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table\\_1\\_for\\_Government\\_Repression\\_and\\_Toleration\\_of\\_Dissidents\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_Vietnam.pdf](http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table_1_for_Government_Repression_and_Toleration_of_Dissidents_in_Contemporary_Vietnam.pdf)].

Table 6.4 Offense with prison terms for 47 regime dissidents

Imprisonment (yrs)*	Offense code												Total	
	1	2	3	4	8	9	1&2	1&4	1&5	1&6	3&9	6&7		
<1	2	1	1			2								6
1<2	1	1	3		1				1					7
2<3	4		1			1		1						7
3<4	6	1	1			2								10
4<5	2	2				1	1	1						7
5<6	2			3		1				1				7
6<7	3													3
7<8	1			2		1						1		5
8 or more	1			1		1							1	4
Total	22	5	6	6	1	9	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	56 **

Notes: Offense codes: 1 spreading propaganda against the state; 2 espionage; 3 abusing freedoms and/or democratic rights; 4 trying to overthrow the government and/or inciting others to oppose the government; 5 working with foreign elements against the state; 6 joining reactionary organizations; 7 rebellion; 8 revealing state secrets; 9 other or unknown.

\* For dissidents convicted during 2000–11 and remaining in jail this tabulation uses sentences rather than years in prison. In the past, over half of those convicted were in prison fewer years than their original sentences stipulated.

\*\* The number of offenses and imprisonments exceeds 47 each because some dissidents were convicted of more than once and some convictions were for more than one offense.

Source: Data comes from Table 6.1 Sixty-two regime dissidents in Vietnam clustered according to their confinement by authorities and persistence of their dissent (as of May 2011) [[http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table\\_1\\_for\\_Government\\_Repression\\_and\\_Toleration\\_of\\_Dissidents\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_Vietnam.pdf](http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table_1_for_Government_Repression_and_Toleration_of_Dissidents_in_Contemporary_Vietnam.pdf)].

offenses, prison terms have varied considerably. Stated differently, in many instances, people convicted of the same offense are in prison for significantly different lengths of time. Incarceration for espionage convictions and the closely related offenses of working with foreign elements against the state and revealing state secrets have ranged between less than one year and five years; prison terms for spreading propaganda against the state vary between less than one and more than seven years. Even people charged with the same offense and tried at the same time frequently are sentenced to different prison terms.

Lawyers have told me the main reason for this variation is authorities deem some accused's actions to be more onerous than others even though the charges are the same. The criminal code allows authorities to make such assessments and impose different sentences accordingly. Often trial judges themselves are not the ones making these determinations; instead higher authorities decide.<sup>58</sup> Observers have speculated that sentences can vary because of the accused's demeanor, connections, and other personal circumstances.<sup>59</sup> A defendant who acts contrite is likely to get a shorter sentence than another one who, in the eyes of interrogators, prosecutors, and other government officials, is belligerent. An accused who has relatives in influential positions within the government, military, police, or Communist Party may also be treated less harshly than others. Being known internationally, especially among vocal human rights organizations and United Nations agencies, might also help to explain lighter sentences.

Prison conditions, according to the few accounts I have seen thus far, are dismal. Prisoners live in cramped cells, often with poor sanitation and ventilation. Imprisoned regime dissidents typically are not separated from other inmates; they live with people serving sentences for a wide range of crimes. Meals are spare and sometimes so awful that inmates refuse to eat and demand better food. Prisoners work most of the day: gardening, raising pigs and other livestock, doing handicrafts, cleaning and repairing prison facilities, and doing other chores. Apparently much of the food fed to them comes from what they produce themselves. Recreation time and resources are sparse. Usually prisoners are allowed to read newspapers and magazines provided by authorities, watch some television programs, and listen to selected radio broadcasts. Visits from relatives and friends are restricted and closely monitored. Occasionally, authorities permit foreign diplomats and representatives from international organizations to visit imprisoned regime dissidents (Hoàng Minh Chính 2004; Voice of America 2010b).

### **Infrequent forms of repression**

Worth mentioning are forms of repression Vietnamese authorities apparently have rarely used against regime dissidents. Unlike in China, and before it the Soviet Union, authorities in Vietnam have not made a habit of depicting and treating dissidents as mentally deranged.<sup>60</sup> As noted earlier, only one of the 62 regime dissidents discussed in this chapter was put in a mental institution. Sometimes authorities beat imprisoned dissidents, place them in stocks, or put them in solitary confinement for weeks. But reports of such violence or other physical abuse against imprisoned regime dissidents are rare. I have no evidence of imprisoned regime dissident being brutalized further, confined in “tiger cages,” or held in other extreme conditions.<sup>61</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Being a regime dissident is risky. Even though the 62 dissidents considered in this chapter do not use or threaten violence and are not involved in armed struggle, authorities often are heavy handed in their reactions. Officials can and do mess up critics’ lives – take away their jobs, intimidate their relatives and friends, interfere with their daily lives, interrogate them, sometimes beat them, and frequently detain or imprison them.

Nevertheless, data used for this chapter do not support a conclusion that Vietnam’s Communist Party government tolerates no dissent or opposition. Instead, data show that the government is somewhat tolerant of dissidents who advocate major political reforms and oppose the present political system. The degree of toleration of political dissent would be even greater and the extent of repression much less, I suspect, were the data expanded to include how authorities react to public political criticism that does not call for overhauling the political system.

Another significant finding in this chapter is that the repression against regime dissidents is not uniform. A few regime dissidents have not been detained despite years of public criticisms of the political system. Many more who were detained have never been imprisoned even though they have persistently and openly criticized the political system. Others have been imprisoned, but after getting out of jail and resuming their political dissent, they were not rearrested. Only a few have been rearrested and served additional prison terms.

Analysis of the data provides no clear explanation for such varying degrees of repression against dissidents. The most that can be determined

from the information collected thus far is that being elderly and having a history of service to the government and/or Communist Party appears to reduce the likelihood of a dissident being arrested and imprisoned and, if imprisoned, the risk of being arrested again after being released and resuming public dissent. Not being a prominent member of a dissident organization may also help to reduce one's risk of confinement beyond occasional detainment and interrogation. That there are numerous exceptions to these generalizations means that other factors are at work but not detectable with the material in hand.

## Notes

1. I am most grateful to Phạm Thu Thủy of the Department of Political and Social Change, The Australian National University, for collecting and organizing many of the materials used for this chapter. My gratitude as well to the Australian Research Council for its financial support to our materials collection process. I thank Jonathan London for organizing the "Authoritarianism in East Asia" conference at City University of Hong Kong in June 2010 to which the initial version of this chapter was presented. I greatly appreciate, too, helpful comments and suggestions from Jonathan London, Đặng Đình Trung, Philip Taylor, David Marr, Nguyễn Hồng Hải, Drew Smith, and people attending my talks based on this chapter at George Washington University and The Australian National University.
2. Human Rights Watch (2013: Vietnam chapter); United States Department of State (2011). A more measured report from the Department of State is a subsequent one: United States Department of State (2012).
3. "Tuyên Ngôn Tự do Dân chủ cho Việt Nam" April 8, 2006, initially signed by about 300 Vietnamese; at year's end, about 2,000 people had signed, including several Vietnamese living abroad. The "Declaration" is on numerous websites, for example, Mạng Ý Kiến [Opinion net], <<http://www.ykien.net/>>, accessed May 12, 2006. For an English version, see Lê Phải [Justice] website <<http://lephai.com/uni/n2006/dt20060720h.htm>>, accessed July 28, 2006. The declaration calls for replacing the current Communist Party-dominated political system with one featuring multiply political parties, protected human rights, and other democratic institutions. Note, this statement came more than a year and a half earlier than a similar one in China, called Charter 08, issued by Chinese political dissidents in December 2008.
4. Not included are other political critics who voice their objections and disapproval primarily through demonstrations and/or signing petitions.
5. The organization's full name was Hội Nhân Dân Việt Nam Ủng hộ Đảng và Nhà Nước Chống Tham Nhũng [Association of Vietnamese People to Support the Party and State to Fight Corruption]. Its open letter, dated September 2, 2001 was sent to national authorities (Hội Nhân Dân Việt Nam Ủng hộ Đảng và Nhà Nước Chống Tham Nhũng 2001). For accounts of the association's founding, see Phạm Quế Dương (2002), and Phạm Quế Dương and Trần Khuê (2004), an article about its first anniversary in September 2, 2002.

Phạm Quế Dương is a former military officer and Communist Party member. *Điện Thư* [Electronic letter], which appears in several of my citations, was an online publication of the Câu Lạc Bộ Dân Chủ Việt Nam [Club for Vietnamese democracy] inside the country, started in April 2003 and, as best as I can tell, stopped in July 2007. The page numbers for *Điện Thư* that I cite are my printouts of the issue on A4 paper.

6. The offense was “*lợi dụng các quyền tự do dân chủ*,” quoted in an editorial of *Thông Luận* (2004: 2). The publication is also online (<http://www.ethongluan.org>).
7. Trần Độ, who died in 2006, had been a military officer and Communist Party member.
8. Đỗ Mậu held high positions in the Communist Party and Vietnamese army.
9. Lê Chí Quang is a lawyer in Hà Nội.
10. The author, writing in Hồ Chí Minh City, says he is a former professor and revolutionary fighter.
11. Nguyễn Thanh Giang (2004: 6–7), quoting at length an unidentified source; news item in *Điện Thư* 2004: 1; and Võ Đồng Đội 2005. Nguyễn Thanh Giang is a scientist and military veteran in Hà Nội.
12. The banner said (capitalization in the original):  
 THAM NHỮNG LÀ HÚT MÁU DÂN!  
 LẠM PHÁT, GIÁ CẢ TĂNG CAO LÀ GIẾT DÂN!  
 MẤT ĐẤT BIÊN ĐẢO LÀ CÓ TỘI VỚI TÒTIÊN!  
 Yêu cầu đảng cộng sản thực hiện ngay:  
 DÂN CHỦ HOÁ ĐẤT NƯỚC!  
 ĐA NGUYỄN – ĐA ĐẢNG!  
 Arrested for hanging it was Vũ Văn Hùng, a school teacher in Hà Tây province, adjacent to Hà Nội. For a photo of the banner and account of Vũ Văn Hùng’s arrest, see Nguyễn Phương Anh (2008).
13. Radio Free Asia (2005). Nguyễn Xuân Nghĩa is a journalist and writer in the city of Hải Phòng. Also see Đặng Văn Việt (2006a: 5), Radio Free Asia (2004), and previously cited items by Phạm Quế Dương, Lê Chí Quang, and Trần Độ. Đặng Văn Việt, a veteran of the revolutions against France and the United States and a long-time Communist Party member, lives in Hà Nội. *Tô Quốc*, a source for several citations in this chapter, is a web-based dissident publication ([www.to-quoc.net](http://www.to-quoc.net)) from Vietnam that started in September 2006.
14. Tổng Văn Công, a Communist Party member for over 50 years, is a former editor of the newspaper *Lao Động* [Labor] and other government authorized publications.
15. Several regime dissidents say that Vietnam’s 1946 Constitution was essentially a democratic one and should be reinstated today. See, for instance, Trần Dũng Tiến (2001), Đỗ Nam Hải (2004c: 38), and Nguyễn Thanh Giang (2006: 46). Trần Dũng Tiến, a revolutionary and one of Hồ Chí Minh’s guards, lived in Hà Nội and died in April 2006. Đỗ Nam Hải lives in Hồ Chí Minh City; his parents were Communist Party members who fought in Vietnam’s wars for independence.
16. For example, see the “Declaration on Freedom and Democracy for Vietnam,” (“*Tuyên Ngôn Tự do Dân chủ cho Việt Nam*” 2006), Trần Lâm (2005b), Đỗ Nam Hải (2008), Phạm Hồng Sơn (2009a: 8–10). Trần Lâm lives in Hải Phòng,



- is a lawyer, and is a former judge in Vietnam's supreme court. Phạm Hồng Sơn is an information technology specialist in Hà Nội.
17. For example, see Nguyễn Thanh Giang (2006: 22–3); Nguyễn Vũ Bình, interview with BBC radio, June 15, 2002, from Mạng Ý Kiến <http://www.ykien.net/mykbdv45.html>, accessed February 4, 2004; and “Lời Kêu Gọi cho quyền thành lập và hoạt động đảng phái tại Việt Nam” [Calling for the right to establish and run political parties in Vietnam, signed by 116 advocates for democracy] April 6, 2006, from Lê Phai website, <http://lephai.com/uni/n2006/dt20060406a.htm>, accessed April 7, 2006. Nguyễn Vũ Bình lives in Hà Nội; he was an editor for a Communist Party journal but was fired after he requested permission to establish an opposition party in 2000.
  18. An exception is Đỗ Nam Hải's remark that a multi-party system, although much needed, will not solve all of Vietnam's problems (Đỗ Nam Hải 2004a: 2–3).
  19. Nguyễn Khắc Toàn has owned and operated an electronics shop and real estate office in Hà Nội. /D\PhamHongSon\The nao la dan chu Jan 2002, par Vai dong, 1; Nguyen Khac Toan\Khat Vong tu do 25 Apr 2006, p'out 13 m/
  20. The relevant passages are on pages 19 and 21 (printing on 8 ½ by 11 inch paper) in this lengthy account about how and why Võ Đức Hồi, a provincial official, and Communist Party member, joined the pro-democracy movement in recent years.
  21. Lê Hồng Hà is a former Communist Party member, government official, and revolutionary living in Hà Nội. /D\Le Hong Ha\ TrachNhiem TriThuc 2004, sec 2, first several # items; Le Hong Ha\Nhưng Van de ...1 Feb 2007, “Nha tu ban/.
  22. Trần Khải Thanh Thủy, a writer in Hà Nội from a family that joined the revolution for independence, was imprisoned in 2007 and again in 2010.
  23. Phan Đình Diệu is a retired professor of mathematics in Hà Nội.
  24. Hoàng Tiến, a writer in Hà Nội, participated in the revolution for independence; Bạch Ngọc Dương is an engineer living in Hải Phòng.
  25. See also numerous materials on the Bauxite Vietnam website, available at <<http://boxitvn.wordpress.com>>. Besides regime dissidents, many other Vietnamese, including war hero General Võ Nguyên Giáp, have publicly opposed government plans to allow Chinese to mine bauxite and other minerals in the Central Highlands. Nguyễn Chính Kết was a religion teacher living in Hồ Chí Minh City until he left Vietnam in 2006 to become the overseas representative of Khối 8406 [Block 8406], an opposition organization; Trần Khuê is a military veteran and academic living in Hồ Chí Minh City; and Phạm Đình Trọng, a writer in Hồ Chí Minh City, recently quit the Communist Party because of his disgust with the regime's policies about China and several other matters.
  26. Tống Văn Công 2009; Hà Sĩ Phu 2009a, 2009b. Hà Sĩ Phu, a scientist forced to take early retirement because of his political views, is a writer in Đà Lạt.
  27. For a forceful argument of this position, see Nguyễn Chính Kết (2006b: 23–5).
  28. Đỗ Nam Hải, open letter to national authorities and other people (Đỗ Nam Hải 2004b), Đỗ Nam Hải (2005: 4), and Hoàng Bách Việt, member of the Đảng Dân Chủ Nhân Dân [People's Democratic Party] (Hoàng Bách Việt 2005: 1–2).

29. “Đây là một cuộc đấu tranh nhằm chấm dứt những chính sách sai lầm của Đảng Cộng sản cầm quyền, những chính sách phản dân hại nước nhưng không phải là một cuộc đấu tranh để lật đổ chính quyền hiện nay.” (Lê Hồng Hà 2007b). Lê Hồng Hà, a former government official, lives in Hanoi.
30. Related, although taking issue with aspects of Lê Hồng Hà’s discussion, is Tổng Văn Công, a dissident who says Communist Party leaders’ initiatives, too, explain the country’s economic renovation policies. The party in Vietnam, he contends, has never been strongly wedded to communism and has long had a give-and-take approach to governing (Tổng Văn Công 2009).
31. Trần Bảo Lộc, like Hà Sĩ Phu, resides in Đà Lạt, central Vietnam.
32. “Declaration on freedom and democracy” (“Tuyên Ngôn Tự do Dân chủ cho Việt Nam” 2006: part III, and par. “Mục tiêu cao nhất ...”).
33. Essay by Chân Tín and three other Roman Catholic priests calling for election boycott (Chân Tín, Nguyễn Hữu Giải, Nguyễn Văn Lý, and Phan Văn Lợi 2006); see also Nguyễn Văn Lý (2007); Minh Chính, secretary of the Đảng Dân Chủ Nhân Dân [People’s Democratic Party] in Ho Chi Minh City, public letter to Nguyễn Minh Triết, secretary of the Communist Party in Ho Chi Minh City (Minh Chính 2006); Trung Hiếu 2006. Chân Tín, Minh Chính, and Trung Hiếu were writing in Hồ Chí Minh City. Nguyễn Văn Lý, a priest from Huế, was arrested and imprisoned in February 2007.
34. Huỳnh Việt Lang, member of the Đảng Dân Chủ Nhân Dân [People’s Democratic Party] (Huỳnh Việt Lang 2006: 39–40), Lê Quang Liêm, member of Phật Giáo Hòa Hảo Thuận Túy [Hoa Hao Buddhist religion] (Lê Quang Liêm 2006: 17); Nguyễn Vũ Bình (2008: part 3, point 3). Huỳnh Việt Lang, a resident of Ho Chi Minh City, was arrested in August 2006 and then imprisoned; Lê Quang Liêm is in Vietnam but I do not know where.
35. The writer lives in Hanoi.
36. See, for instance, Đảng Dân Chủ Nhân Dân (2005), especially 1, 5–6, and Đảng Thăng Tiến Việt Nam 2006, parts I and II.
37. See, for instance, Đảng Văn Việt (2006b: 15) and Trần Anh Kim (2006: par Đảng man lại ...). Đảng Văn Việt is in Hanoi; Trần Anh Kim is in Thái Bình City, Thái Bình province.
38. This article thoughtfully analyzes the movement and the government’s various reactions. Its footnotes also guide interested readers to other studies of the movement.
39. See especially Articles 69 and 70.
40. The session may have cost Nguyễn Khắc Toàn some credibility among fellow regime dissidents. See the account by “NH” in Hà Nội (2010).
41. An example is the article, in a security police publication, “Nguyễn Khắc Toàn, kẻ vụ lợi bằng việc làm phản dân hại nước” (2009).
42. For instance, see “Sự thật về ‘tờ báo lậu’ Tô Quốc” (2008).
43. The percentage would likely be much higher if I had complete information on this factor. As Table 6.1 reflects, information for “other hardships,” which includes harassment, is missing for nearly half of the 62 dissidents emphasized here.
44. Among the relevant accounts about Lê Trần Luật are “Tước giấy phép hoạt động văn phòng luật sư pháp quyền” (2009); “Khi nhà nước đề bẹp công lý”

- (2009); Phạm Văn Hải (2009); “Lê Trần Luật bị xóa tên trong danh sách Luật Sư Đoàn” (2009).
45. See Ủy ban Nhân Quyền Việt Nam (2007), and complaint letter from Nguyễn Văn May and Lê Thị Thúy Minh (May 2007), parents of Nguyễn Phương Anh.
  46. Table 6.1, being extremely large, with columns of details about each of the 62 dissidents, could not be printed here. But it can be viewed and downloaded at [http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table\\_1\\_for\\_Government\\_Repression\\_and\\_Toleration\\_of\\_Dissidents\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_Vietnam.pdf](http://ips.cap.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/IPS/PSC/Table_1_for_Government_Repression_and_Toleration_of_Dissidents_in_Contemporary_Vietnam.pdf). It is summarized in Table 6.2, which is printed in this chapter.
  47. One of his early public criticisms was the article Trần Đại Sơn (2003: 8–9).
  48. His name disappears from the editorial board list by the *Tô Quốc's* third issue, October 15, 2006. I have found very little indication of his public political criticism since then. Perhaps his age (he is in his nineties) has forced him to stop.
  49. For an early public statement of Trần Lâm's views, see Trần Lâm (2005a).
  50. Vi Đức Hồi describes numerous such interrogation sessions he endured in early 2007 (Vi Đức Hồi 2008: 23–37, 53–64, pagination when printed on 8 x 11 ½ inch paper). For another example, see the account of Nguyễn Khắc Toàn's lengthy detention in Hà Đông security police offices during May 2009 (Nguyễn Khắc Toàn 2009).
  51. Examples of reports about physical abuse are an open letter by Vũ Hoàng Hải (2006), an interview of Bạch Ngọc Dương (Radio Free Asia 2007a), and Vũ Hùng's letter to the United Nations (Vũ Hùng 2008). Vũ Hùng is also known as Vũ Văn Hùng.
  52. One of his early public critiques was made on January 8, 1999 and published as “Phát biểu của tương Trần Độ” (1999). A few days earlier, the Communist Party's leadership had expelled him from the party, which he had joined in 1940, after he refused to rein in his public criticisms.
  53. A self-proclaimed sympathizer with the pro-democracy movement warns that Bạch Ngọc Dương may now be working with the security police (Hoàng Hải 2007).
  54. In Cambodia, some allege, Vietnamese security police had Lê Trí Tuệ murdered (Lê Minh 2009). An article in the security police force's magazine, *An Ninh Thế Giới*, claims Lê Trí Tuệ is a charlatan labor leader (“Lê Trí Tuệ đã lừa đảo người lao động như thế nào?” 2007).
  55. Explaining why he has not been arrested, Đỗ Nam Hải speculated that authorities weigh the advantages and disadvantages to the regime before arresting dissidents. Thus far, he speculated, officials probably think arresting him would not be worth the trouble. He did not elaborate why. (*Tập San Tự Do Dân Chủ* 2010: 31–2).
  56. The 44 are the 11 in Cluster 2, the 21 in Cluster 3, the 6 in Cluster 4, and the 6 in Cluster 5 for whom I have the necessary information (see Table 6.1, Column V, “R'smd PC.”)
  57. Examples of such official justifications are reported in BBC Vietnamese (2009), VietnamNet (2009a). Inside the prisons, according to some regime dissidents, authorities typically do refer to them as “political prisoners” [*tù nhân chính trị*]. See Dân Luận (2009).

58. Discussions with attorneys in Hanoi, September 2012.
59. Phone interview with a Vietnamese political activist, June 2012. See also Gillespie (2012: 13), *Tập San Tự do Dân chủ* (2010: 30–1), Voice of America Online (2010a).
60. For a recent study of this practice in China, see Munro (2006).
61. “Tiger cages” are prison cells so tiny that a person cannot stand or lay down. Authorities of the Republic of Vietnam (the pre-1975 government based in Sài Gòn) frequently incarcerated prisoners, especially dissidents, in such cells.