

CEU Annual Doctoral Conference

Abstract

Rules of engagement: How social movements in Vietnam are a democratic practice and what they say about democratization of the one party state.

The political opportunities related to interactions between the Vietnamese state and citizens are undergoing unprecedented change and opening. My empirical research of three social movements; people with disabilities, people living with HIV and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual movements, indicates that social movements have not only emerged in Vietnam, but are engaging with the Party and state to influence policy.

This paper considers the specific tactics and strategies used by the movements to engage with the state and finds they are not significantly different from movements in developed liberal democracies, but with a particular Vietnamese flavour. The tactics used indicate that these movements are both working within the existing rules and system set by the Party, as well as challenging traditional structures to create more space for new actors. In challenging the Leninist approach to civil society these movements are contributing to redefining the accepted definition of socialist citizen and promoting increased political equality. While it remains unlikely that liberal democracy is the end point of these reforms, the opening of political opportunities, engagement of new actors and strategic tactics that challenge the hegemony of the Party governance system offer opportunities for greater democratization through increased participation, accountability and transparency.

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