



VIET NAM 2026

Socialist Republic of Viet Nam

The government continued to rely on vague Penal Code provisions and tried to introduce additional new laws to counter dissent and suppress freedom of expression, resulting in further arbitrary arrests and detentions. Concerns persisted over the illtreatment of activists in prisons across the country. LGBTI people's rights lacked meaningful protection in both law and practice. The government abolished the death penalty for eight crimes.

BACKGROUND

Reforms consolidated 63 provinces and cities into 34 administrative units. This was seen by many as an attempt by Tô Lâm, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, to centralize control ahead of the Party Congress in 2026.

Viet Nam was re-elected as a member of the UN Human Rights Council until 2028.

The UN Human Rights Committee scrutinized the country's human rights record, raising concerns about transnational repression, torture, conditions of detention, freedom of expression and the right to fair trial.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Journalists and activists

Long prison sentences continued to be used as a tool of repression against dissenting voices. Prominent journalist Đoàn B ả o Châu faced ongoing harassment for his reporting and criticism of the government. In August, police charged him under Article 117 of the Penal Code, which criminalizes "propaganda against the state". The charges related to six videos and media interviews he conducted with international media about social issues and human rights violations in Viet Nam. If convicted, he faces up to 20 years in prison.

In August, a journalist for the BBC's Vietnamese service was interrogated and prevented from leaving the country after she visited to renew her passport.

In 2025, police arrested and prosecuted at least 43 people, including citizens, activists, and journalists, under broad and vaguely worded Articles 109, 116, 117 and 331 of the Penal Code. They were targeted solely for exercising their right to freedom of expression.

In October, civil society raised concerns about a proposed press law that could require journalists to disclose their sources to the police.

Repression of dissent

In August, the Ministry of Public Security established the Digital Trust Alliance, a national coalition ostensibly aimed at combating misinformation. However, civil society organizations viewed the new alliance as another platform to amplify further government propaganda. The coalition comprised more than 300 “key opinion leaders” and influencers nationwide. This new initiative complemented the already existing “Committee 35” and “Force 47” projects, operated by the police and military.

These projects sought to shape public opinion and suppress dissenting voices under the guise of “fighting against disinformation and fake news”.

In September, the Ministry of Public Security submitted a proposal to amend the Cyber Security Law 2018. The draft amendment requires internet providers to hand over users’ IP addresses to the police, remove content, and suspend their services within 24 hours of a request from the police.

The proposal raised concerns about the rights to privacy and online freedom of expression.

The police used laws including Decree No. 14/2022/ND-CP, which penalizes dissemination of “illegal content” or “disinformation and defamation”, to impose fines on citizens expressing dissent about public policies and the police on social media. These administrative fines ranged from VND 5,000,000 to 10,000,000 (USD 190 to 380). In November, police in various provinces threatened and fined owners of numerous social media accounts for posting “false information” about deadly floods and landslides that hit the country, and the government’s humanitarian relief efforts. In Đắk Lắk province alone, police dealt with at least 52 cases.

TORTURE AND OTHER ILL-TREATMENT

Concerns about the health of imprisoned activists persisted due to their lack of access to adequate healthcare. Land rights activist Cấn Thị Thêu was denied

access to her medical records, despite grave concerns about her well-being.¹ There were also concerns about the health of other detained journalists, including Lê Hữu Minh Tuấn, Phạm Chí Dũng and Nguyễn Tường Thụy.

Imprisoned human rights defenders, including music teacher Đặng Đăng Phước, pro-democracy activist Lê Đình Lượng, environmental activist Hoàng Đức Bình, activist Bùi Tuấn Lâm, and land rights activist Trịnh Bá Tư were subjected to harsh punishments in prison. These included being held in leg shackles for 10 days, weeks of solitary confinement and limited family visits.

On 2 September, dissident Vương Văn Thả died in An Phước Prison in Bình Dương province. In 2017, he began a 12-year sentence for “propaganda against the state”.

His family disputed official accounts that he committed suicide, calling for an independent investigation into his death, but experienced harassment from authorities.

ARBITRARY ARRESTS AND DETENTIONS

On 28 August, at least five human rights and pro-democracy activists were arrested and detained in the lead-up to National Day on 2 September. Police said they were under investigation under Article 117 of the Penal Code and would remain in detention until at least the first quarter of 2026.

LGBTI PEOPLE’S RIGHTS

LGBTI individuals remained vulnerable due to lack of legal protections. Laws on marriage and family did not recognize same-sex marriage. The absence of regulations for LGBTI people on child adoption, medical care or the property rights of non-married couples continued to expose them to discrimination. Transgender rights remained in limbo; the draft law on gender recognition remained delayed for the 10th year. Pro-government disinformation campaigns intensified technology-facilitated gender-based violence against LGBTI people online.

The Viet Pride parade in Ho Chi Minh City was cancelled for the first time in 13 years, while other pride events faced censorship or cancellation following harassment by local authorities.

RIGHT TO A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT

In January, air pollution topped global charts.

In March, levels of particulate matter (PM 2.5) in the capital, Hanoi reached 25 times WHO limits, forcing school closures, affecting access to education and health, particularly for people at risk. Concerns persisted over the gasoline vehicle ban in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, set for July 2026. While the government touted the ban as a means to reduce air pollution and support net-zero goals, critics warned it could hurt low-income motorbike users unless affordable clean alternatives were offered.

DEATH PENALTY

Viet Nam abolished the death penalty for eight offences, substituting it with life imprisonment from July. However, a lack of due process in capital proceedings and secrecy surrounding the use of the death penalty continued to raise concerns about whether death sentences continued to be imposed.