



Vietnam Events of 2024

An intense internal power struggle displaced five members of Vietnam's politburo, with [To Lam](#), former head of the notorious Ministry of Public Security, eventually securing the top position as secretary general of the Vietnamese Communist Party in July. Under To Lam, Vietnam's police had imprisoned scores of critics over the past decade, decimating Vietnam's budding civil society. This crackdown continued through 2024, targeting journalists, labor rights activists, and human rights defenders.

Vietnam suppresses citizens' basic rights to freedom of expression, association, peaceful assembly, movement, and religion. Independent labor unions, human rights organizations, independent media, and political parties remain prohibited. The judiciary is not independent, and courts routinely deny defendants their due process rights. Police patrol the internet and arrest those they deem threatening to the Communist Party's monopoly on power.

A current member of the UN Human Rights Council for 2023-2025, Vietnam [announced](#) in February that it plans to seek another term. In the 4th cycle of the UN Universal Periodic Review, Vietnam [rejected 49 recommendations](#) on ensuring basic civil and political rights and reforming problematic laws.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

Party-controlled courts sentenced online free speech advocates and civil society activists to long prison sentences on bogus charges such as "propaganda" or "infringing on the interests" of the state. In 2024, courts convicted at least 43 rights campaigners and sentenced them to long prison terms, including human rights defenders [Nguyen Chi Tuyen](#), [Nguyen Vu Binh](#) and [Phan Van Bach](#), and environmental activist [Ngo Thi To Nhien](#).

Several [UN experts](#) urged the government of Vietnam to end convictions and deplorable detention conditions for human rights defenders.

At time of writing, police were holding at least 19 other dissidents in pretrial detention on politically motivated charges, including blogger [Truong Huy San](#) and human rights

lawyer Tran Dinh Trien. By the end of 2024, more than 170 [rights activists and bloggers](#) were serving prison sentences.

Freedom of Association and Assembly

Vietnam [does not allow independent unions](#). Leaders of the Vietnam General Confederation of Labor (VGCL) are appointed by the government. Workers do not choose leaders or representatives who can bargain to set wages on their behalf. In so far as the VGCL bargains with management or at the state-wide level, it does so in the interests of the government and the Vietnamese Communist Party, not on behalf of workers and not in a representative capacity.

In April, police arrested [Nguyen Van Binh](#) and [Vu Minh Tien](#), senior officials in Vietnam's Labor Ministry and in VGCL who had advocated for more meaningful labor reforms. In August, the United States [declined](#) Vietnam's request to be reclassified as a [market economy](#), in part due to its [failure to uphold](#) labor rights.

Right to Fair Trial

Authorities use a [double standard](#) in treating criminal suspects depending on whether the crime is considered political or non-political. In both political and non-political cases, police, prosecutors, and courts violate the fundamental legal principle behind the right to a fair trial: a presumption of innocence until proven guilty.

In cases involving what the authorities consider “politically motivated offenses,” the government curbs defendants’ rights by denying them access to legal counsel; preventing visits by family members while the accused are in pretrial detention; and blocking family members, activists, and friends from attending their trials. On June 1, 2024, police arrested independent journalist [Truong Huy San](#). He was not allowed access to his lawyer for more than three months.

For non-political criminal cases in which authorities want to send a message to local communities, prosecutors and courts stage public trials to name and shame the defendants (and indirectly, their families), and “educate” the public. These so-called “mobile trials” (xet xu luu dong) use makeshift courts in public spaces such as a sports stadium, local community spaces, schools and universities, or government facilities to hold trials of criminal suspects. In virtually all cases, the courts had already determined the defendants’ guilt even before these public court spectacles began.

In January, a court in Dak Lak began a mobile trial against [100 defendants](#)—some in absentia—accused of “terrorism” following an attack on government offices that caused nine deaths in June 2023. After three days, the court [convicted](#) and sentenced all 100 to

terms ranging from nine months to life in prison, with each defendant's hearing lasting a maximum of 15 minutes.

Freedom of Movement

The Vietnamese authorities [systematically block](#) rights activists, bloggers, dissidents, and their family members from domestic and international travel, including by stopping them at airports and border gates, and denying them passports or other documents that would allow them to leave or enter the country. Activists are routinely [placed under house arrest](#) during events deemed by the authorities as politically sensitive.

In March and April, local authorities in An Giang province [blocked roads](#) and placed Hoa Hao Buddhist disciples under house arrest to prevent them from commemorating the death anniversary of Hoa Hao Buddhist founder Huynh Phu So. In April, police at Moc Bai border gate in Tay Ninh prohibited Pham Thi Lan, the wife of political prisoner [Nguyen Tuong Thuy](#), from leaving Vietnam for a personal trip to Cambodia, citing “security” as a reason. In June, the police at Tan Son Nhat airport prohibited activist Nguyen Thi Bich Hanh and her young sons to enter Vietnam to visit her sick mother. Hanh and sons were [reportedly](#) assaulted and detained, and were forced on an airplane for the US via Seoul two days later. In July, the authorities [refused to issue a passport](#) to former political prisoner [Huynh Thuc Vy](#), citing “national security” as a reason. In September, the police at Noi Bai international airport in Hanoi [prohibited blogger Bui Thanh Hieu](#) (known as “Wind Trader”) to enter Vietnam to visit his sick mother.

Freedom of Religion and Belief

The government restricts religious practice through legislation, registration requirements, and surveillance. Religious groups must get approval from, and register with, the government and operate under government-controlled management boards. Religious groups not recognized by the government are labeled “[evil religions](#)” (ta dao). In its Universal Periodic Review submission, Vietnam [rejected](#) a recommendation to “immediately end forced renunciation of faith against members of unregistered religious groups.”

The police monitor, harass, and sometimes violently crack down on religious groups operating outside government-controlled institutions. Followers of independent religious groups are subject to harassment, intimidation, intrusive surveillance, public criticism, forced renunciation of faith, pretrial detention, interrogation, torture, and imprisonment. Phuoc Buu pagoda in Ba Ria-Vung Tau, which belongs to the Unified Buddhist Church

(unrecognized by the Vietnamese government), has been subjected to repeated acts of vandalism for which no one has been held accountable.

In March 2024, the authorities of Dak Lak province prosecuted and sentenced Montagnard activist Y Krec Bya to 13 years in prison, and arrested Montagnard rights campaigner Y Po Mlo in August. Both men were charged with “undermining the national great unity” under article 116 of the penal code. Article 116 is frequently employed by authorities to punish ethnic minority activists for being affiliated with independent religious groups that the government disallows.

[UN experts](#) expressed alarm about the discriminatory misuse of counterterrorism laws against Montagnard Indigenous Peoples and Christian religious minorities in the country’s Central Highlands.