

# Implementing administrative apparatus reform for effectiveness and efficiency in the new era

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**Abstract:** *This article analyzes the process of reforming Vietnam's state administrative apparatus in accordance with Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW dated October 25, 2017, issued by the Party Central Committee, which aims to build a streamlined administrative system that operates effectively and efficiently. After reviewing the current status of administrative organization restructuring, the author highlights the achievements in consolidating administrative units, reducing staffing levels, reorganizing public administrative and service units, and promoting rational decentralization between levels of government. The article also proposes five key solution groups to further enhance the effectiveness of the administrative apparatus reform. It affirms that reform is not merely about downsizing but fundamentally about transforming governance thinking - towards building a modern administrative system that is responsive to the context of digital transformation and international integration.*

**Keywords:** *Resolution 18-NQ/TW (2017); streamlined apparatus; state administration; governance mindset.*

## 1. Introduction

The organization and operation of the state administrative apparatus play a vital role within the political system, serving as the foundation for ensuring the exercise of state power and the governance of society. In recent years, the reform of its organizational structure and functioning has made significant contributions to Vietnam's socio-economic development achievements. Recognizing this critical role, the Party and the State have identified

the reform of the administrative apparatus as one of the core tasks in the national development process. On October 25, 2017, the 12<sup>th</sup> Party Central Committee, at its 6<sup>th</sup> Plenary Session, issued Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW on "Some issues regarding the continued reform and restructuring of the political system's organizational apparatus for streamlined, effective, and efficient operations." The Resolution aims to further streamline the administrative structure, enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of state governance,

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and align with public salary reform, staffing reductions, and improvements in the quality of public officials and civil servants. This article focuses on analyzing the current state of administrative restructuring in the spirit of Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW and proposes several solutions to further improve the effectiveness of the state administrative apparatus in the new context.

## **2. Current status of administrative apparatus restructuring under Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW**

In line with Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW, the Government has issued an action program and implemented various tasks and solutions across key areas, including institutional improvement, administrative apparatus reform, and civil service reform. Measures to continue reforming the state administrative apparatus must be grounded in an objective assessment of the progress made in achieving each goal and task outlined in the Resolution.

### *2.1. On reviewing, restructuring, and streamlining internal focal points in conjunction with downsizing and improving the quality of the cadres, civil servants, and public employees*

The restructuring of the state administrative apparatus has been carried out through legal, organizational, and economic measures. Amendments to the Law on Government Organization and the Law on Local Government Organization have provided a foundation for the Government's execution while also enabling state administrative agencies to adjust their internal structures and staffing as needed. Based on legal regulations, the Government has defined criteria for the establishment and minimum staffing levels for subordinate units under ministries, ministerial-level agencies, and agencies under the Government; set out

organizational structures, staffing frameworks, and establishment criteria for provincial-level specialized agencies and their subordinate units; and, provided the maximum number of deputy heads in subordinate units under both central and local governments. The Government has also issued regulations on the decentralization of management over civil servants and public employees within administrative bodies and public service units.

*First*, on the restructuring of the administrative system: (1) 17 general departments and equivalent-level bodies within ministries and ministerial-level agencies, 10 departments under general departments or ministries, and 144 divisions or boards have been removed, with the number of internal divisions within ministerial departments (excluding the Ministry of Public Security and the Ministry of National Defence) basically reduced. (2) At the local level, 13 provincial departments (or equivalents) and 2,590 district- and provincial-level divisions have been dissolved (Tra, 2025).

*Second*, on the reorganization of administrative units: (1) As of 2019, Vietnam had 63 provincial-level, 713 district-level, and 11,160 commune-level units; (2) After the 2019 - 2021 reorganization, the number of district-level units was reduced to 705 (a decrease of 8) and commune-level units to 10,598 (a reduction of 562), while the 63 provincial-level units remained unchanged (Thao, 2022); (3) During the 2023 - 2024 phase, while the number of provinces remained the same, one new centrally governed city (Hue) was added, and one province was dissolved. The number of district-level units was reduced to 696 (a decrease of 9) and commune-level units to 10,035 (a reduction of 563) (Hanh, 2024).

*Third*, on vertical sectoral restructuring: Several vertically organized sectors, such as taxation and customs, have developed and

implemented streamlining plans: (1) In the tax sector, the number of district-level tax offices nationwide was reduced from 711 to 415 between late 2018 and early 2020 (Nguyen, 2017), with the principle of “Fewer units, but improved performance”; (2) By mid-2024, the General Department of Customs had reduced 54 units. This included establishing nine new customs sub-departments, one post-clearance audit sub-department, and one customs inspection sub-department; dissolving four post-clearance audit sub-departments and 13 department-level units; merging 14 sub-departments and 34 internal divisions; and eliminating 236 teams under customs sub-departments and control units (Kha, 2024).

*Fourth*, on the restructuring of public service units: By the end of 2024, a total of 7,867 public service units had been reduced; in 2023 alone, 236 units were dissolved. Among the remaining 46,385, 2,538 units (5.47%) are entirely self-financed; 8,559 units (18.45%) are partially self-financed, and 34,943 units (75.34%) continue to receive full funding from the state budget (Ministry of Home Affairs, 2023).

*Fifth*, on personnel streamlining: From 2015 to 2023, 89,775 civil servants and public employees were subject to policy-based staff reductions, including 5,915 at central-level agencies and 6,864 at local-level agencies. Regarding the number of provincial- and commune-level cadres and civil servants (including those working for the Party, mass organizations, and the government apparatus), it is projected that after restructuring, the provincial level will see a reduction of over 18,440 personnel compared to the staffing levels authorized in 2022. At the commune level (i.e. communes, wards, and special administrative zones), the number of cadres and civil servants is expected to decrease by more than 110,780 positions

compared to the total staffing assigned to district and commune levels in 2022. This reduction results from job position restructuring, staff downsizing, and retirements by regulations. Additionally, approximately 120,500 part-time workers at the commune level nationwide will cease their activities (Vuong, 2025)

## *2.2. On the implementation of strong and rational decentralization and delegation of authority between central and local governments and across administrative levels, linking power with responsibility*

The Government has improved the institutional framework to clearly define tasks, powers, responsibilities, and authorities among the Government, its ministries/agencies, the Prime Minister, and local authorities. At the same time, mechanisms for controlling the exercise of power have been strengthened to ensure that delegated tasks and powers are exercised within proper limits. In terms of legal regulations, the Government now focuses on macro-level management, including formulation of institutions, policies, strategies, planning, and development programs. Notably, the Government and the Prime Minister no longer make decisions on specific matters that fall under the responsibilities of ministries, agencies, or local authorities, provided those responsibilities have already been delegated or decentralized by law.

Decentralization and delegation are closely linked with administrative and procedural reforms. Ministries have developed comprehensive regulations that outline standards, norms, criteria, technical-economic benchmarks, and pricing and fee control mechanisms for public services within their respective sectors. Concurrently, several procedures such as requests for approval, opinions, or permissions from higher-level

authorities have been eliminated for matters that have already been delegated or decentralized. Furthermore, the Government has submitted for promulgation special mechanisms and policies aimed at supporting the development of centrally governed provinces and cities. A key aspect of these policies is the granting of greater autonomy to local governments in line with the principles of decentralization and delegation.

### 3. Solutions

In the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, alongside profound socio-economic transformations and the requirement to reform the state administrative apparatus in line with Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW, Vietnam's administrative system must continue to undergo bold and proactive innovations to effectively implement strategic solutions aimed at streamlining organizational structures and enhancing operational effectiveness and efficiency.

*First*, ensure the comprehensive leadership of the Party. The guiding ideology and principles of the Resolution must be thoroughly and widely disseminated throughout the entire state administrative system, from the central to the local level. The implementation of the Resolution must be closely aligned with the Party's policies and the State's legal framework for reforming and reorganizing the administrative apparatus. It is essential to strictly uphold the principle of the Party's unified and comprehensive leadership over the reform, organization, and management of the apparatus and personnel within the political system while also promoting initiative and innovation across all administrative levels and sectors.

*Second*, continue streamlining organizational structures. Further theoretical and practical research is needed for multi-

sector and multi-domain management, as emphasized in Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW. The restructuring of project management boards, inter-sectoral coordination bodies with specialized support units, and public service units must go beyond reducing the number of entities and personnel to include innovations in operational mechanisms aligned with modern trends in public service delivery. For instance, this could involve implementing performance-based funding mechanisms (i.e. based on tasks and outputs). Additionally, more administrative tasks and public services that do not require direct State involvement should be transferred to enterprises and social organizations.

For local administrative agencies, streamlining must go hand in hand with genuine decentralization - not only in terms of organization and personnel but also in budgetary autonomy and the decision-making authority on specific matters. Revisions to key laws - such as the Law on Government Organization, the Law on Local Government Organization, and the Law on Promulgation of Legal Normative Documents - offer an opportunity to establish a consistent and comprehensive framework for delineating authority and enhancing local governance autonomy in line with modern, effective, and efficient public administration principles.

In practice, several localities have proposed granting local governments stronger authority to determine the structure of departments and administrative units based on their specific conditions. Alongside this, the responsibility of People's Committees - especially that of the Chairpersons - in managing and developing human resources and building the local civil service system must be emphasized.

*Third*, refine the functions, tasks, and authority of administrative agencies. In recent

times, some streamlining efforts have been rather mechanical, failing to fundamentally reorganize agencies through the reassignment of functions and responsibilities appropriate to their new roles. These functions must meet both governance needs and the principle of “one task, one responsible agency.” A review of laws and decrees in the construction sector reveals overlapping responsibilities across ministries concerning investment procedures, land, housing, finance, credit, planning, and construction. The division of powers between housing management authorities and specialized agencies remains vague, especially regarding project appraisal and approval, investor selection, and investment policy approval.

Determination of functions and tasks for each agency within the administrative apparatus must be based on a combination of organizational science and optimal policy solutions which are evaluated through multidimensional assessments of legal, economic, and social impacts. This foundational step will eliminate redundancy, overlapping mandates, and resource waste while resolving authority conflicts - thus improving the performance of the entire administrative system, not just that of individual agencies.

A critical issue concerns the authority and methods for defining the functions and tasks of administrative agencies. Generally, organizational structure and personnel regulations should not be incorporated into laws, ordinances, or National Assembly resolutions unless they pertain specifically to state apparatus organization. If necessary, these matters must undergo comprehensive appraisal, verification, and impact assessment to provide the National Assembly or its Standing Committee with an informed basis for decision-making. In principle, the

authority to define the functions, tasks, powers, and organizational structure of ministries, ministerial-level agencies, and government-affiliated bodies is assigned to the Government by law (as stipulated in the Law on Government Organization). For local governments, lower-level units are not required to mirror the structures of higher-level units. Moreover, administrative units across provinces are not required to follow identical organizational models. Therefore, the role of local Party Committees and governments must be strengthened in defining the functions and responsibilities of specialized departments under the People’s Committees by local decisions.

*Fourth*, improve the organization and operation of local government. According to current regulations, the State power is decentralized and delegated to local governments through laws and resolutions of the National Assembly, as well as ordinances and resolutions of its Standing Committee. While ensuring the unified management of the central level, the Government delegates to local administrations authority to decide or implement certain state management tasks in specific sectors within their jurisdiction based on local conditions and capabilities. Depending on the capacity and conditions of each locality, the Government may also authorize local authorities to carry out specific tasks, provided that the necessary conditions for their effective implementation are met (as stipulated in the Law on Government Organization).

Based on its constitutional functions and the need to maintain consistency in state management across all sectors, the Government should proactively propose and improve specialized laws on decentralization. These would form a complete, consistent, and stable legal foundation for organizing and



operating local governments. Such laws must clearly define the matters under the autonomous jurisdiction of local authorities or each administrative level, along with corresponding accountability mechanisms. These include the power to formulate policies, issue legal and normative documents, enforce laws, address emerging situations, and handle intersectoral and interregional tasks.

Mechanisms to monitor the local governments' exercise of delegated powers also need attention. In addition to a centralized management framework, the delineation of authority requires a clear separation of duties between the Government - as the leading administrative agency - and subordinate authorities. During the revision of the Law on Government Organization and the Law on Local Government Organization, many experts have proposed enhancing transparency, accountability, and oversight of People's Councils and People's Committees at all levels, as well as strengthening the inspection and monitoring mechanisms of superior state agencies. However, such mechanisms should be designed to avoid interference in tasks and powers already delegated locally. In particular, procedural requirements for seeking higher-level approval on matters already under decentralized authority should be eliminated.

An important policy direction is to promote local autonomy and self-governance in the context of organizational restructuring. Authority should be assigned to the level of government best positioned to solve a problem efficiently and practically. Higher-level governments should only undertake tasks that lower-level ones cannot perform effectively. This approach maximizes the initiative, creativity, and accountability of local governments while eliminating dependence and the need for excessive approval from

higher authorities - factors that have long hindered effective administrative operations.

*Fifth*, strengthen inspection, examination, and oversight to prevent abuse of restructuring initiatives for corrupt or unethical purposes. Violations that exploit the restructuring process to foster internal division or harm the reputation and operational effectiveness of agencies and organizations must be addressed promptly and strictly. At the same time, the role of the Vietnam Fatherland Front, political-social organizations, and the general public should be promoted and supported in monitoring and inspecting the design and implementation of new organizational models.

Reforming the state administrative apparatus is not merely a matter of organizational streamlining - it represents a comprehensive transformation in administrative governance thinking during a period of transition. As such, the reform process inevitably encounters difficulties and challenges. It requires strong political will, a strong sense of responsibility, and a commitment to innovation from each and every cadre, civil servant, and public employee - especially those in leadership and management positions within the state administrative system. Only when the entire system acts in unity, with initiative, creativity, and determination, can the reform of the organizational apparatus deliver substantial results and generate positive change throughout society. With a high sense of responsibility, the reform of the state administrative structure - guided by the principles of being "Refined - Streamlined - Strong - Performance - Effectiveness - Efficiency" - will yield significant results and leave a lasting impact on Vietnam's transformation, aligning with the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

#### 4. Conclusion

The reform of the state administrative apparatus is a crucial requirement to meet the growing demands of national development in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Restructuring the administrative system for streamline, effectiveness and efficiency not only improves the performance of the political system but also creates favorable conditions for socio-economic development and better service delivery to citizens and businesses. However, this process requires strong political will, courage, and a high sense of responsibility from all levels of public officials and civil servants - especially the pioneering role of agency and organization heads. With unified leadership and coordinated actions from the central to local levels, along with appropriate reform solutions, the restructuring of the state administrative apparatus will undoubtedly yield substantial and meaningful changes, contributing to the nation's sustainable development in this new era.

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