

HO CHI MINH NATIONAL ACADEMY OF POLITICS

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**OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-
MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL
AUTHORITIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA AT PRESENT**

SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS

MAJOR: POLITICS

Code: 9310201

HA NOI - 2026

**The dissertation is conducted at
Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics**

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**The thesis will be defended in front of the Thesis Committee at
Academy level, at the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics**

At..... hour..... date..... month..... year 2026

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INTRODUCTION

1. The urgency of the theme

Openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities constitute a fundamental requirement of modern public administration and directly reflect the essential nature of the Socialist Rule-of-Law State of Viet Nam - *of the people, by the people, and for the people*. This requirement is not merely a matter of public service ethics; rather, it represents a core principle in the organization and exercise of state power, ensuring that all governmental activities are placed under public supervision. Through this mechanism, political trust is consolidated, legitimacy is strengthened, and the effectiveness of grassroots governance is enhanced. V.I. Lenin affirmed that “socialist democracy must be manifested in the people’s right to know, the right to supervise, and the right to criticize,” thereby laying a theoretical foundation for the principle of openness and transparency in modern state administration.

From a governance perspective, openness and transparency are closely associated with accountability - one of the central criteria of “good governance” as defined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Transparency in information disclosure, procedures, and responsibility throughout the decision-making process enables citizens to access information, monitor government actions, participate in public affairs, and provide feedback. This interaction forms a democratic cycle of openness - participation - accountability - trust. When this cycle functions effectively, it not only contributes to the integrity of the administrative apparatus but also improves policy effectiveness, the quality of public services, and the integrity of grassroots authorities.

In the Mekong Delta region, openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities bear particularly profound significance. The Mekong Delta is a strategic region that plays a central role in national agricultural production and food security; however, it is also highly vulnerable to climate change, saline intrusion, labor migration, and rapid social structural transformation. In this context, commune-level authorities - the level of government closest to the people and directly responsible for implementing policies on land management, budgeting, social welfare, and population administration - become the “decisive link” within the state administrative system. Therefore, openness and transparency in decision-making at the commune level are not merely governance requirements but also essential conditions for ensuring socio-political stability and sustainable development in the region.

In recent years, many localities in the Mekong Delta have proactively implemented various measures to enhance openness and transparency, such as publicly posting administrative procedures, disclosing land-use planning, publicizing commune budgets, organizing regular dialogues with citizens, and applying digital platforms, including official websites, Zalo groups, and Facebook pages. These initiatives have initially contributed to enhancing grassroots democracy, reducing complaints and petitions, and increasing public consensus. Nevertheless, practical implementation has revealed several limitations: transparency remains largely formalistic and lacks substantive depth; disclosed information is often outdated and insufficient in quantitative data; citizens - particularly vulnerable groups such as poor households, women, and farmers who have lost their livelihoods - face constraints in access and feedback; the digital capacity of grassroots officials remains limited; and accountability mechanisms are not yet substantive. Notably, the “ask-give” culture continues to persist in certain administrative decisions.

These shortcomings have resulted in the slow growth of political trust at the grassroots level, decision implementation effectiveness that falls short of expectations, and the continued risk of latent disputes and conflicts of interest. In the context of implementing the two-tier local government model (provincial-commune) from July 2025 and accelerating the development of digital government and digital society, openness and transparency have become inevitable requirements for re-establishing trust between the government and the people. At the same time, they serve as key indicators for assessing the leadership capacity, governance effectiveness, and innovation of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta.

From a political science perspective, research on openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta holds significant theoretical and practical value.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to concretizing the concept of openness and transparency within Vietnam’s contemporary political system, clarifying the relationship between grassroots democracy, power control, and the effectiveness of state governance. It also provides empirical evidence for the application of modern public governance theories under Viet Nam’s specific political and socio-economic conditions.

From a practical standpoint, the research findings will offer a scientific basis for improving policies and mechanisms on openness and transparency at the commune level, in line with the Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy (2022), the Law on Access to Information (2016), the Law on the Organization of Local Government (2025), and the spirit of the “Three Public

Disclosures" emphasized by General Secretary Tô Lâm at the 13th Central Committee Conference (2025).

On the basis of the above analysis, it can be affirmed that the study entitled ***“Openness and Transparency in the Decision-Making Process of Commune-Level Authorities in the Mekong Delta at Present”*** is of significant importance, urgency, and profound scientific and practical value, contributing to the construction of a public administration that is open, transparent, democratic, integrity-based, and genuinely oriented toward serving the people.

2. Research Objectives and Tasks

2.1. Research Objectives

Based on clarifying the theoretical issues concerning openness and transparency in the decision-making processes of commune-level authorities, this dissertation focuses on analyzing the current state of openness and transparency in the decision-making processes of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta. It seeks to identify the achieved outcomes, existing limitations, underlying causes, and the principal contradictions emerging in practice.

Arising from the reality that the implementation of regulations on openness and transparency at the commune level in the Mekong Delta still reveals numerous shortcomings - particularly in the context of the implementation of the two-tier local government model and the acceleration of digital transformation in public governance - the dissertation aims to elucidate the gap between institutional requirements and actual implementation outcomes. It also examines the impacts of context-specific factors, including territorial characteristics, population structure, cultural features, and grassroots management capacity.

On this basis, the dissertation proposes a set of viewpoints and a system of feasible solutions to strengthen the implementation of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta in the coming period, thereby contributing to enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of local governance, consolidating public trust, and meeting the requirements of building the Socialist Rule-of-Law State of Viet Nam.

2.2. Research Tasks

To achieve the above objectives, the dissertation concentrates on the following tasks:

- To review and synthesize the existing literature, clarify issues that have already been studied, identify research gaps, and determine issues requiring further investigation.

- To systematize and clarify the theoretical framework of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities.

- To assess the current implementation of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta and to identify the major contradictions arising in practice.

-To propose viewpoints and solutions aimed at strengthening the implementation of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta in the forthcoming period.

3. Research Object and Scope

3.1. Research Object

The research object of the dissertation is openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region.

3.2. Research Scope

- Content scope: The dissertation examines openness and transparency in the decision-making process in the Mekong Delta, with a primary focus on the domains outlined in the Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy (2022). Specifically, the analysis concentrates on five key areas: (1) openness and transparency in draft programs, projects, and schemes for socio-economic development; (2) openness and transparency in the procedures, criteria, and outcomes of social security policy implementation; (3) openness and transparency in grassroots democratic regulations, personnel affairs, and administrative procedures; (4) openness and transparency in land-use planning, land-use plans, and land pricing; (5) openness and transparency in commune-level budget revenues and expenditures.

- Spatial scope: The dissertation conducts surveys in four localities - Can Tho, Dong Thap, Tra Vinh, and Kien Giang - which are representative of different sub-regions within the Mekong Delta. In each province/city, one district, town, or provincial-level city is selected, and within each unit, two communes are chosen for survey implementation. In total, eight commune-level administrative units are surveyed, and data are collected.

- Temporal scope: Data and empirical materials were collected from 2015 to June 2025. The proposed solutions are designed to apply to the two-tier local government model (from July 2025 to 2030, with a vision toward 2045).

4. Theoretical and Practical Foundations and Research Methods

4.1. Theoretical Foundations

The dissertation is grounded in the theoretical foundations of Marxism-Leninism, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the viewpoints of the Communist Party of Viet Nam on openness, transparency, and decision-making processes.

4.2. Practical Foundations

- Although the legal framework governing openness and transparency in Vietnam has been increasingly refined, a noticeable gap persists between formal regulations and actual practice at the commune level - particularly in the Mekong Delta, where extensive territory, dispersed population, uneven digital infrastructure, and disparities in officials' capacities are evident. This gap is especially pronounced in decisions related to land management, planning, budgeting, and social security.

- The implementation of the two-tier local government model from 2025, together with the imperative of digital transformation in public governance, has generated an urgent demand to strengthen transparency in the decision-making process at the commune level. This is essential for the effective control of power and for consolidating public trust.

4.3. Research Methods

The dissertation employs the methodology of Marxism-Leninism as the overarching guiding framework throughout the research process. On this basis, it integrates a combination of specific research methods, including analysis and synthesis; the historical-logical method; sociological surveys and in-depth interviews; statistical analysis; field surveys; and the review and synthesis of practical experience. This methodological approach is intended to ensure objectivity, comprehensiveness, scientific rigor, and close alignment with empirical reality. Specifically:

In Chapter 1, the dissertation applies the historical-logical method in combination with analysis and synthesis to systematize domestic and international studies related to the research topic, identify established findings, determine arguments to be inherited, and highlight unresolved issues that require further clarification.

In Chapter 2, the historical-logical method combined with analysis and synthesis is employed to elucidate and generalize the concepts, roles, contents, and forms of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta.

In Chapter 3, the study integrates practical analysis with sociological surveys, in-depth interviews, and statistical methods, while also exploiting available data sources such as the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI), the Provincial Competitiveness Index (PCI), the Public Administration Reform Index (PAR Index), the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), along with documents and reports issued by local authorities. Through this approach, the dissertation identifies prevailing trends, emerging contradictions, and existing research gaps.

In Chapter 4, the dissertation synthesizes the above methods to identify influencing factors in the new context and to propose viewpoints and a system of solutions aimed at strengthening openness and transparency in the decision-making process in the Mekong Delta, in conformity with the two-tier local government model (provincial-commune) implemented from 1 July 2025.

5. New Contributions of the Thesis

Thứ nhất, góp phần bổ sung và phát triển lý luận về công khai, minh bạch trong quá trình ra quyết định.

Thứ hai, luận án khảo sát thực trạng công khai, minh bạch trong quá trình ra quyết định của chính quyền cấp xã vùng ĐBSCL.

Thứ ba, đề xuất những quan điểm, giải pháp tăng cường công khai, minh bạch trong quá trình ra quyết định ở vùng ĐBSCL phù hợp với mô hình chính quyền hai cấp (tỉnh - xã) đang được triển khai từ ngày 01/7/2025. Đây là cách tiếp cận có tính chuyển tiếp, bảo đảm giá trị thực tiễn lâu dài của luận án.

6. Theoretical and Practical Significance

6.1. Theoretical Significance

Luận án góp phần bổ sung và phát triển cơ sở lý luận về công khai, minh bạch trong quản trị nhà nước, đặc biệt trong quá trình ra quyết định của chính quyền cấp cơ sở trong điều kiện xây dựng Nhà nước pháp quyền xã hội chủ nghĩa Việt Nam.

Đồng thời, luận án xây dựng khung lý thuyết về công khai, minh bạch trong quá trình ra quyết định của chính quyền cấp xã, qua đó góp phần bổ sung luận cứ khoa học cho việc hoàn thiện thể chế dân chủ cơ sở và cải cách nền hành chính công trong giai đoạn hiện nay.

6.2. Practical Significance

Luận án cung cấp cơ sở khoa học và luận cứ thực tiễn cho việc hoàn thiện cơ chế, chính sách và phương thức tổ chức thực hiện công khai, minh bạch trong quá trình ra quyết định của chính quyền cấp xã, đặc biệt trong bối cảnh thực thi Luật Thực hiện dân chủ ở cơ sở (2022) và chuyển đổi sang mô hình chính quyền hai cấp ở vùng ĐBSCL.

Kết quả nghiên cứu của luận án có thể được vận dụng trong công tác lãnh đạo, chỉ đạo, quản lý, đào tạo và bồi dưỡng cán bộ cơ sở, góp phần nâng cao năng lực quản trị, trách nhiệm giải trình và niềm tin của nhân dân đối với chính quyền cấp xã.

7. Structure of the Thesis

Apart from the introduction, conclusion, list of references, and appendices, the thesis is structured into 4 chapters with a total of 12 sections.

Chapter 1

OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH SITUATION

1.1. STUDIES ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND COMMUNE-LEVEL LOCAL GOVERNMENT

In political science and public administration, local government is regarded as the level of authority closest to the people, functioning both as an administrative-legal institution and as a key actor in development governance. International studies (Gokhale, 2000; Sharma et al., 2003; Sansom, 2013; Cinjel & Weinoh, 2023) emphasize that modern local governments operate within a legal framework, enjoy a certain degree of autonomy, and are closely associated with accountability, citizen participation, and transparency in the decision-making process. Governance models in Australia and many other countries likewise affirm that public trust is built upon openness and the accountability of local governments.

In Viet Nam, since the promulgation of the Law on the Organization of Local Government (2015), numerous studies by Nguyen Dang Dung, Truong Cong Hoa, Dao Manh Hoan, Pham Thi Hoan, among others, have clarified the organizational characteristics, decentralization and devolution mechanisms, and the self-governing role of local governments. These works converge on the view that local governments function both as implementing authorities and as coordination centers for socio-economic development, playing a crucial role in ensuring accountability, openness, and transparency. Nevertheless, limitations persist with regard to formal authority, the capacity of officials, and the degree of substantive democracy at the grassroots level.

With respect to commune-level authorities, many domestic studies affirm that this is the “level closest to the people,” playing a pivotal role in socio-economic planning and development, the provision of social security, the maintenance of community security, and the organization of grassroots democracy. In practice, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of commune-level authorities as the “front line” in connecting the Party, the State, and the People has been clearly demonstrated.

Overall, both theory and practice indicate that local government - especially at the commune level - constitutes the foundation of democratic, transparent, and effective governance. It is at this level that policies and guidelines are most directly translated into the daily lives of the people and where social trust is consolidated.

1.2. STUDIES ON OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES

At the international level, openness and transparency are regarded as core pillars of open government. The OECD, the World Bank, the Open Government Partnership (OGP), and numerous scholars such as Heald, Grimmelikhuijsen, and Meijer conceptualize transparency not merely as the disclosure of information, but as the public's capacity to access, comprehend, utilize, and provide feedback on information throughout the entire policy cycle. Key domains of transparency typically include public budgeting and expenditure, development planning and programming, decision-making procedures, administrative processes, and open data. Accordingly, various indices and assessment frameworks have been developed, such as the Municipal Transparency Index (MTI), the Open Budget Index (OBI), Open Government Data (OGD), and the E-Government Development Index (EGDI). Particularly influential is the framework proposed by Vishwanath and Kaufmann (2001), which identifies four essential attributes of transparency: accessibility, comprehensiveness, relevance, and reliability.

In Viet Nam, the legal framework governing openness and transparency has been progressively strengthened through the Law on the State Budget (2015), the Law on Access to Information (2016), the Law on Anti-Corruption (2018), the Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy (2022), and the amended Law on the Organization of Local Government (2025). Empirical studies and data from the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) indicate that budget disclosure, planning, land management, and social security policies constitute key areas of transparency at the commune level. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of "formalistic disclosure," together with information that is difficult to understand, outdated, and lacking effective feedback and accountability mechanisms, remains widespread. Many domestic scholars emphasize that while disclosure is a necessary condition, substantive transparency requires information that is clear, accessible, and closely linked to accountability.

From 2025 onward, the implementation of the two-tier local government model under Law No. 72/2025/QH15 and Resolution No. 202/2025/QH15 has expanded the authority and direct responsibility of commune-level governments. This institutional shift has simultaneously generated an urgent demand to strengthen openness and transparency as mechanisms for power control and for consolidating political legitimacy. Although existing studies consistently affirm the pivotal role of transparency in promoting democracy and effective governance, the commune level - particularly within the

specific context of the Mekong Delta - has yet to be examined systematically. This gap constitutes a significant scholarly lacuna that the present dissertation seeks to address.

1.3. OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH FINDINGS FROM RELATED STUDIES

1.3.1. Overview of research findings from related studies

Openness and transparency in the activities of local governments in general, and commune-level authorities in particular, have been examined by numerous domestic and international scholars as core values of modern governance, closely associated with accountability, power control, and public trust in government. International studies commonly approach transparency as a fundamental pillar of “good governance,” whereas domestic research consistently affirms that openness and transparency constitute essential conditions for ensuring grassroots democracy and enhancing the legitimacy of state administrative activities.

From a practical perspective, a wide range of studies and measurement tools - most notably the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) - have assessed levels of openness and transparency in areas such as budget disclosure, land-use planning, administrative procedures, and public service delivery. However, most of these assessments remain fragmented, focusing on isolated aspects rather than offering a comprehensive analysis of the entire administrative decision-making process. Moreover, there remains a notable lack of in-depth empirical research on the Mekong Delta region, which possesses distinct characteristics in terms of natural conditions, cultural contexts, and administrative organization.

Regarding solutions, existing studies primarily emphasize the application of information technology, the development of e-government, and the expansion of citizen participation. Nevertheless, relatively few studies situate these solutions within the context of administrative reform under the two-tier local government model (province-commune) to be implemented from 2025 onward, in which the commune level assumes a direct and pivotal role in grassroots governance.

These research gaps provide a theoretical and practical foundation for the present dissertation to further investigate openness and transparency through a comprehensive analysis of the decision-making process at the commune level in the Mekong Delta region, and to propose solutions aimed at enhancing openness and transparency in line with current requirements for institutional reform and digital transformation.

1.3.2. Key issues requiring further investigation in the thesis

- The thesis seeks to further clarify the conceptual content of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities from the perspective of contemporary political science. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish between technical-administrative openness and transparency and openness and transparency as instruments for power control, the safeguarding of democracy, and the enhancement of accountability. At the same time, refining the theoretical framework and developing a system of indicators to measure levels of openness and transparency across different stages of decision-making is essential to ensure a solid scientific basis for empirical assessment.

The thesis conducts a more specific examination and evaluation of the current state of openness and transparency at each stage of the decision-making process at the commune level, ranging from preparation and consultation to promulgation, implementation, and supervision. Special emphasis is placed on empirical investigation in the Mekong Delta region, which is characterized by distinctive natural, social, and demographic conditions and is strongly affected by institutional changes and administrative unit mergers. This assessment is necessarily linked to the former three-tier local government structure to provide a basis for proposing solutions appropriate to the two-tier local government model.

The thesis clearly identifies the guiding perspectives for the formulation of solutions, grounded in respect for the principles of democracy, the rule of law, and accountability. Proposed solutions aim to enhance the effectiveness of openness and transparency in conditions where the intermediate district level is no longer present, while simultaneously promoting the robust application of information technology, digital data, and mechanisms of social criticism and oversight. This serves as a foundation for ensuring that decision-making processes at the commune level are not only lawful but also citizen-oriented and more feasible within the two-tier local government framework.

Chapter 1 Summary

Chapter 1 has reviewed both domestic and international studies on openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities, thereby affirming that openness and transparency constitute core elements of democratic governance, closely associated with accountability, power control, and the building of public trust. At the same time, they represent a central focus of administrative reform and the implementation of grassroots democracy in Viet Nam.

In the context of the reorganization of local government under the two-tier model from 2025 onward, the role of the commune level in ensuring openness and transparency becomes increasingly significant. However, the literature review reveals a persistent lack of comprehensive studies on the decision-making process at the commune level, particularly empirical investigations specific to the Mekong Delta region, as well as the absence of a clearly defined system of measurement indicators. These gaps constitute both the scientific and practical basis for the dissertation to further develop its research and to propose solutions consistent with current requirements for the renewal of local governance.

Chapter 2

THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ISSUES CONCERNING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES

2.1. CONCEPTS AND THE NECESSITY OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE- LEVEL AUTHORITIES

2.1.1. Basic concepts

2.1.1.1. *The concept of openness*

Openness refers to a state or principle in which information, activities, decisions, and processes of public authorities are officially disclosed and communicated in accordance with legal regulations, to ensure the right of access to information for relevant actors within society.

2.1.1.2. *The concept of transparency*

Transparency denotes a state or principle in which the activities, decisions, procedures, and information of public authorities, based on being made public, are presented in a clear, accurate, verifiable, comprehensible, and easily accessible manner, thereby ensuring the capacity for public oversight and the accountability of public authorities to the People.

2.1.1.3. *Local government and commune-level authorities*

The term “local government” may be understood in two senses:

In a broad sense, local government refers to the system of state agencies organized within a specific territorial jurisdiction to exercise state power at the local level, encompassing legislative, executive, and judicial functions within a defined territory.

In a narrow sense, local government is understood as the system of local

state administrative agencies that perform state management functions and organize the implementation of laws within a local territory.

The 2025 Law on the Organization of Local Government marks a significant advancement in the construction of an open, transparent, accountable, and digitalized grassroots government model, thereby strengthening the legal foundation for assessing and implementing solutions to ensure openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region—the central focus of this dissertation.

Accordingly, commune-level government constitutes the tier of local government organized at the grassroots administrative units, including communes and wards (collectively referred to as the commune level), possessing legal personality to perform state management functions, ensure the enforcement of law, and organize economic, political, cultural, and social life within its jurisdiction.

2.1.1.4. The Decision-Making Process of Commune-Level Authorities

**** The concept of decision-making***

Decision-making is the process through which leadership actors deliberate and select courses of action in order to achieve organizational objectives most effectively within a specific context. This understanding indicates that decision-making is, in essence, a process of deliberation and choice: deliberating and selecting issues that require resolution, determining objectives to be attained, and choosing among alternative courses of action under given contextual conditions.

2.1.1.5. The Concept of Openness and Transparency in the Decision-Making Process of Commune-Level Authorities

Openness in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities refers to the official acquisition and disclosure of information in an accessible manner regarding activities, decisions, policies, procedures, and financial matters of local government in accordance with legal provisions, thereby enabling citizens to be informed, to participate, and to supervise state management activities at the grassroots level.

Transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities is understood as the clarity, absence of concealment, and lack of ambiguity throughout the entire process of formulating, promulgating, and implementing decisions, ensuring that disclosed information is comprehensible, well-grounded, verifiable, and subject to explanation and accountability.

Openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities constitute the totality of activities undertaken by commune-level governments to ensure that all information, content, procedures, and outcomes related to the issuance of state administrative decisions at the commune level are disclosed in a timely, clear, accurate, verifiable, and easily accessible manner, thereby creating conditions for the People to participate, supervise, and demand accountability.

2.1.2. The Necessity of Openness and Transparency in the Decision-Making Process of Commune-Level Authorities

First, openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities are fundamental conditions for ensuring a modern, effective, and democratic system of local governance.

Second, openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities contribute to the proper implementation of grassroots democracy in accordance with the spirit of the 2013 Constitution and the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy.

Third, openness and transparency in the decision-making process serve as an important mechanism for controlling power and preventing corruption and negative practices at the grassroots level.

Fourth, openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities enhance the effectiveness of management and administration at the commune level in the context of digital transformation and digital government.

Fifth, openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities contribute to building and strengthening public trust in grassroots government.

Sixth, openness and transparency in the decision-making process also represent a requirement for improving the quality and professionalism of commune-level cadres and civil servants.

Seventh, openness and transparency in the decision-making process facilitate the stable, effective, and democratic operation of the two-tier local government model.

2.2. OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES: ACTORS, TARGET GROUPS, CONTENT, FORMS, AND EVALUATION CRITERIA

2.2.1. Actors and target groups of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities

Actors responsible for implementing openness and transparency are organizations and individuals who bear direct responsibility in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities.

Target groups of openness and transparency are individuals and organizations that are affected by, or have interests related to, the decisions in question.

2.2.2. Content of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities

The thesis identifies five core groups of content that reflect openness and transparency in the decision-making activities of commune-level authorities, in accordance with the spirit of the 2022 Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy, as follows:

- (1) *Openness and transparency regarding plans, projects, and socio-economic development*
- (2) *Openness and transparency regarding budgets, finance, and public assets*
- (3) *Openness and transparency regarding procedures, criteria, and outcomes of social welfare policy implementation*
- (4) *Openness and transparency regarding grassroots democratic regulations, personnel organization, and administrative procedures*
- (5) *Openness and transparency regarding land-use planning, land-use plans, and land pricing*

2.2.3. Forms of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities

The thesis summarizes five principal forms currently employed by commune-level authorities in the decision-making process, namely:

- (1) *Public posting at headquarters and designated public places*
- (2) *Publication of information on official portals or websites*
- (3) *Disclosure through mass media and grassroots broadcasting systems*
- (4) *Direct notification through official documents, community meetings, public dialogues, and citizen reception activities*
- (5) *Disclosure through political-social organizations, mass organizations, and lawful social media platforms*

2.2.4. Criteria for Evaluating the Implementation of Openness and Transparency in the Decision-Making Process of Commune-Level Authorities

The thesis identifies that the evaluation of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities should be approached in accordance with three stages corresponding to the life cycle of an administrative decision at the commune level, namely: (1) the pre-decision stage (before the issuance of the decision); (2) the disclosure and

implementation stage (when the decision is made public and organized for implementation); and (3) the post-decision stage (after the decision has been issued and implemented).

2.3. FACTORS INFLUENCING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES

2.3.1. Subjective factors

First, the awareness, sense of responsibility, and professional capacity of commune-level cadres and civil servants.

Second, organizational and managerial mechanisms, as well as the culture of public service within commune-level authorities.

Third, the ethical example and decisive leadership of the heads of commune-level authorities.

2.3.2. Objective factors

First, the legal framework, mechanisms, and policies governing openness and transparency.

Second, the development of information technology and mass media.

Third, mechanisms for access to information and policy communication.

Fourth, the supervisory role of the People, the Viet Nam Fatherland Front, and mass organizations.

Fifth, the level of education, capacity, and socio-political activeness of citizens.

Sixth, the socio-economic characteristics and cultural traditions of local communities.

Chapter 2 Summary

Chapter 2 has systematized the theoretical foundations of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities across political, legal, and governance dimensions. Drawing on Marxist-Leninist theory, Ho Chi Minh Thought, and the viewpoints of the Communist Party of Viet Nam, the dissertation affirms that openness and transparency constitute the foundation of modern public governance and are institutionalized in the Constitution and key laws such as the Law on Access to Information, the Law on Anti-Corruption, and the Law on the Implementation of Grassroots Democracy.

At the same time, the dissertation identifies the principal groups of content and forms of disclosure, constructs a system of criteria for evaluating the level of transparency based on core attributes, and elucidates the influencing factors from both subjective and objective perspectives. This provides the theoretical foundation and analytical framework directly serving the subsequent empirical analysis of the current situation.

Chapter 3

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF IMPLEMENTING OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA REGION AND EMERGING ISSUES

3.1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE MEKONG DELTA REGION AND COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES AFFECTING OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

3.1.1. Overview of the characteristics of the Mekong Delta

The Mekong Delta region holds a strategically important geo-political position, characterized by a dense network of rivers and canals and a dispersed population distribution. While these conditions are favorable for the development of agriculture and aquaculture, they simultaneously pose challenges for administrative governance and information disclosure at the commune level. The region is strongly affected by climate change and features a multi-ethnic population structure, with uneven levels of education and access to information related to openness and transparency. In addition, the cultural tendency to prioritize social harmony and avoid confrontation remains relatively prevalent. In the context of restructuring local government under the two-tier governance model, the role of commune-level authorities and the requirements for openness and transparency have become particularly urgent.

3.1.2. Characteristics of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region

Commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta constitute the tier of administration closest to the people, directly responsible for policy implementation and accountable to the population. With the application of the two-tier local government model from 2025 onward, requirements for openness and transparency have been raised; however, the capacity of cadres, technological infrastructure, and financial and human resources in many communes remains limited. The large administrative areas, dispersed population, and cultural characteristics that emphasize social harmony and avoidance of conflict also affect the effectiveness of social oversight. These factors necessitate further institutional improvement, capacity building for cadres and civil servants, and modernization of information infrastructure to ensure transparency in the decision-making process.

3.2. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA REGION

3.2.1. Content of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region

3.2.1.1. *Openness and transparency regarding plans, projects, and socio-economic development*

3.2.1.2. *Openness and transparency regarding budgets, finance, and public assets*

3.2.1.3. *Openness and transparency regarding procedures, criteria, and outcomes of social welfare policy implementation*

3.2.1.4. *Openness and transparency regarding grassroots democratic regulations, personnel organization, and administrative procedures*

3.2.1.5. *Openness and transparency regarding land-use planning, land-use plans, and land pricing*

3.2.2. Forms of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region

Openness and transparency in the decision-making process constitute a multi-stage cycle, including the following phases:

3.2.2.1. *Forms of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities before the issuance of decisions*

3.2.2.2. *Forms of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities at the time decisions are disclosed*

3.2.2.3. *Forms of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities after decisions have been issued*

3.3. ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL AUTHORITIES IN THE MEKONG DELTA REGION AND EMERGING ISSUES

3.3.1. Assessment of the implementation of openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region

3.3.1.1. *Achievements*

First, the content of openness and transparency has generally been implemented in accordance with legal regulations and has increasingly become institutionalized.

Second, disclosed information has become more comprehensive, covering multiple fields directly related to citizens' rights and interests.

Third, forms of openness and transparency have become increasingly diverse, flexible, and accessible.

Fourth, indicators of openness and transparency at the commune level have reached an acceptable level and show a trend of gradual improvement.

*** *Causes of Achievements***

First, openness and transparency have been firmly established in the viewpoints and policy orientations of the Communist Party and in the legal system of the State.

Second, unified leadership and direction by Party committees and local authorities, together with the coordinating role of the Viet Nam Fatherland Front and mass organizations, have contributed to effective implementation.

Third, commune-level authorities have demonstrated proactiveness and flexibility in selecting appropriate forms and content of disclosure.

Fourth, commune-level authorities have placed citizens' interests at the center of the implementation of openness and transparency.

Fifth, citizens have shown increasing concern for and demand to access information regarding the activities of local authorities.

Sixth, the development of information technology and the Internet has created favorable conditions for the disclosure and transparency of information.

3.3.1.2. *Limitations*

First, openness and transparency during the stage of soliciting public opinions remain largely formalistic and lack regularity.

Second, the level of public participation and social criticism remains low, with limited proactiveness on the part of citizens.

Third, the content of disclosed information is often unclear, difficult to understand, and lacks concrete supporting evidence.

Fourth, modern forms of disclosure remain limited and have not kept pace with the process of digital transformation.

Fifth, the implementation, communication, and coordination among relevant actors remain insufficiently synchronized, with a lack of independent oversight mechanisms.

*** *Causes of Limitations***

First, the awareness of a segment of grassroots Party committees and local authorities regarding openness and transparency remains limited.

Second, the capacity of commune-level cadres and civil servants has not yet met the requirements for effective implementation.

Third, the legal framework and implementing guidelines remain fragmented, lacking specific sanctions and clear evaluation criteria.

Fourth, constraints related to physical infrastructure, technological facilities, and financial resources continue to hinder effective implementation.

Fifth, public participation and supervision remain weak, irregular, and insufficiently substantive.

3.3.1.3. Impacts of the Implementation of Openness and Transparency in the Decision-Making Process of Commune-Level Authorities on Local Governance

*** *Positive impacts***

First, openness and transparency contribute to enhancing the credibility of commune-level authorities and strengthening public trust in grassroots government.

Second, openness and transparency promote citizens' ownership rights and strengthen social oversight by the People.

Third, openness and transparency contribute to improving the quality, effectiveness, and integrity of governance activities at the commune level.

*** *Negative impacts***

First, the lack of substantive openness limits citizens' rights to access information and to participate in governance, resulting in the incomplete realization of the principle of "the people know, the people discuss, the people act, and the people supervise."

Second, insufficient transparency in administrative procedures and public finance creates conditions conducive to negative practices and petty corruption at the grassroots level.

Third, limited openness undermines the effectiveness of development policies.

3.3.2. Key Contradictions in the Implementation of Openness and Transparency in the Decision-Making Process of Commune-Level Authorities in the Mekong Delta Region

3.3.2.1. The contradiction between the increasingly high requirements for openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities and the limited conditions for ensuring effective implementation in certain localities

3.3.2.2. The contradiction between the growing demands for openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities and the existence of numerous limitations and inadequacies in implementation mechanisms

3.3.2.3. The contradiction between the requirement to modernize forms of openness and transparency and the limited conditions for effective implementation in several localities of the Mekong Delta region

3.3.2.4. The contradiction between the requirements of modern democratic governance regarding openness and transparency in the decision-making process and the persistence of relatively outdated socio-cultural traditions within commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region

3.3.2.5. The contradiction between legal provisions ensuring openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level authorities and the limited outcomes achieved in actual practice

Chapter 3 Summary

Chapter 3 clarifies the current state of openness and transparency in the decision-making processes of commune-level authorities in the Mekong Delta region. Although positive changes have been observed, these practices remain characterized by formalism, lack of coherence, and constraints related to infrastructure, the capacity of cadres and civil servants, as well as the level of public participation and oversight. The identified contradictions reveal a persistent gap between transparency requirements and implementation capacity at the grassroots level, while also reflecting the combined influences of institutional arrangements, socio-

cultural factors, and technological conditions. These findings provide an important foundation for Chapter 4 to propose appropriate perspectives and groups of solutions for the subsequent stage.

Chapter 4

VIEWPOINTS AND SOLUTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS IN THE MEKONG DELTA IN THE COMING PERIOD

4.1. FACTORS INFLUENCING AND FORECASTING TRENDS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS IN THE MEKONG DELTA

4.1.1. Favorable factors

First, stable socio-economic development conditions provide a crucial foundation for promoting openness and transparency.

Second, the national digital transformation agenda opens up opportunities for modernizing and standardizing openness and transparency in the decision-making process.

Third, the two-tier local government model creates favorable conditions for strengthening openness and accountability at the grassroots level.

Fourth, public awareness and citizen participation have been increasingly enhanced.

4.1.2. Difficulties and barriers

First, limitations in socio-economic resources and grassroots administrative human resources remain significant constraints.

Second, barriers in the process of digital transformation and the limited digital capacity of both local governments and citizens pose considerable challenges.

Third, difficulties arise in the operation and coordination of the two-tier local government model.

Fourth, limitations persist in public awareness as well as in participatory attitudes and behaviors.

4.2. GUIDING VIEWPOINTS AND ORIENTATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS IN THE MEKONG DELTA

4.2.1. Linking openness and transparency with the leadership of the Party, thoroughly implementing the viewpoint of “Three Opennesses” articulated by General Secretary To Lam

4.2.2. Linking openness and transparency with innovative approaches to renewing State-People relations

4.2.3. Linking openness and transparency with the assurance of good local governance

4.2.4. Linking openness and transparency with material-technical conditions and institutional arrangements for effective implementation

4.3. SOLUTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS OF COMMUNE-LEVEL GOVERNMENTS IN THE MEKONG DELTA IN THE COMING PERIOD

4.3.1. Strengthening Party leadership in line with the “Three Opennesses” viewpoint of General Secretary To Lam; consolidating a culture of integrity and transparency among cadres and civil servants; ensuring financial resources and mechanisms for regular supervision

First, improving the political and legal foundations: from guiding principles to feasible and enforceable procedures.

Second, ensuring financial and human resources: allocating adequately, using appropriately, and supervising rigorously.

Third, fostering a culture of public service and ethical transparency: shifting from an approach based on “administrative command” to one grounded in “voluntary compliance and self-discipline.”

Fourth, establishing mechanisms for inspection, supervision, and periodic evaluation: closing the loop of “openness - feedback - adjustment.”

4.3.2. Improving the Legal Framework and Standardizing Openness Procedures in Connection with Accountability and Enforcement Mechanisms

First, reviewing and refining legal regulations on openness and transparency at the commune level in a more specific, feasible, and verifiable manner.

Second, establishing multi-layered mechanisms of inspection, supervision, and enforcement sanctions with binding force and incentives for continuous improvement.

Third, institutionalizing the “Three Opennesses” viewpoint into standardized operational norms for commune-level governments.

4.3.3. Enhancing Capacity, Public-Service Ethics, and Service-Oriented Attitudes of Commune-Level Cadres and Civil Servants

First, strengthening both professional capacity and public-service ethics of commune-level cadres and civil servants.

Second, promoting the role of heads of agencies and units in leading and directing the implementation of openness and transparency.

Third, enhancing the supervisory and social criticism roles of the Vietnam Fatherland Front and socio-political organizations.

Fourth, improving coordination mechanisms among local governments, Party committees, the Vietnam Fatherland Front, and socio-political organizations in ensuring openness and transparency.

4.3.4. Investing in Digital Infrastructure, Electronic Disclosure Systems, Open Data Portals, and Citizen-Government Interaction Platforms

First, increasing investment in information technology infrastructure and digital disclosure tools at the commune level.

Second, developing and operating digital disclosure platforms, open data portals, and online information publication systems.

Third, diversifying forms of disclosure by harmoniously combining traditional methods with digital approaches.

Fourth, ensuring financial mechanisms to support investment in digital infrastructure and electronic disclosure tools.

Chapter 4 Summary

Chapter 4 has fulfilled its objective of proposing guiding viewpoints and solution frameworks for strengthening openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level governments in the Mekong Delta. These proposals are grounded in an analysis of key influencing factors, including economic growth, digital transformation, administrative reform, and public awareness. The thesis establishes several core viewpoints: aligning openness and transparency with Party leadership in the spirit of the “Three Opennesses”; linking openness and transparency with the renewal of

government-citizen relations; strengthening social participation; and ensuring the material, institutional, and technical conditions necessary for effective implementation. On this basis, the system of solutions is structured into four groups: institutional improvement; enhancement of actors' capacities; assurance of political-cultural and resource conditions; and development of digital infrastructure and technological platforms. Collectively, these solutions aim to build a transparent and effective commune-level governance system and to embed openness and transparency as a sustainable political-cultural norm within the Socialist Rule-of-Law State of Vietnam.

CONCLUSION

Openness and transparency in the decision-making process of commune-level governments constitute a fundamental principle of modern governance and represent a direct manifestation of the Socialist Rule-of-Law State of Vietnam. At the commune level - the level closest to the people - transparency not only ensures citizens' right to access information but also serves as an essential instrument for power control, enhanced accountability, the prevention of malpractice, and the strengthening of public trust in grassroots authorities. In recent years, commune-level governments in the Mekong Delta have made considerable efforts to promote openness and transparency. Nevertheless, implementation remains constrained by formalistic practices, limited digital capacity, inadequate modes of information access, and insufficient oversight mechanisms, particularly in the context of digital transformation and the operation of the two-tier local government model.

On this basis, the dissertation has proposed a coherent system of guiding viewpoints and solution groups, including institutional refinement, capacity building of implementing actors, the assurance of material conditions and digital infrastructure, and the strengthening of citizen participation. It can be affirmed that openness and transparency become truly effective only when they are internalized as behavioral norms by both government institutions and citizens, grounded in political determination, public-service responsibility, and broad social consensus. With the current reform orientation, openness and transparency in the decision-making process at the commune level in the Mekong Delta will continue to be reinforced, thereby contributing to the construction of a democratic, integrity-based, and sustainably developing public administration.

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