

Institution: University of Bristol
Unit of Assessment: 21 – Politics and International Studies
Title of case study: Reshaping Governance Reforms in Vietnam
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>The impact being described in this case study relates to the influence of Professor Martin Gainsborough’s research on the international donor community’s thinking behind and design of governance programmes in Vietnam and on understandings of these issues in news media coverage. Donors, in particular the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Australian government aid agency AusAid, and the Irish government aid agency Irish Aid acknowledge that Gainsborough’s research has been a major influence on their understanding of Vietnamese politics which in turn has informed how they have designed their policy interventions during 2008-13. The research has resulted in greater reliance by donors on Vietnamese government systems, new risk mitigation measures and moves to ‘mainstream’ governance across a range of aid programmes. The impact of Gainsborough’s research has also reached beyond Vietnam by informing the World Bank’s Worldwide Governance Indicators.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>The body of research relating to the impact claimed in this case study refers to 2004 onwards when Gainsborough was Lecturer in Development Politics at the University of Bristol (2004-08), Reader in Development Politics (2008-12), then Professor of Development Politics (2012-present).</p> <p>The research led to three core findings on governance reform in Vietnam: the importance of continuities, non-elite drivers and spontaneity; the rise of new state business interests; and the fact that patronage has mattered more than policy positions.</p> <p>The importance of continuities, non-elite drivers and spontaneity [1] [4] [6]</p> <p>Adopting a qualitative methodology, Gainsborough has challenged the dominant conceptual lens through which Vietnam has been commonly understood, namely ‘reform’. The orthodox ‘reform’ position argues that since 1975 Vietnam’s political elite have made a series of substantive policy changes propelling the country on a new path. Gainsborough’s research demonstrates that the orthodox reform position is misleading in a number of ways. First, it downplays areas of continuity in economics and politics. Second, it underestimates the extent to which factors other than elite-led policy initiatives have affected the direction in which Vietnam is travelling. Third, and related to the second point, elites have often reacted after the event, moving to formalise spontaneous, ‘bottom-up’ initiatives, or experimentation, whether by officials, enterprise directors, city dwellers or farmers. Consequently, as Gainsborough has argued, a holistic account of the reform years in Vietnam needs to take into account the relationships between and relative importance of continuity and change; elite and non-elite drivers; and formal policy initiatives and informal activity.</p> <p>The rise of new state business interests [3] [4] [5] [6]</p> <p>Gainsborough’s research includes a path-breaking study of politics in Vietnam’s second city and business centre, Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon) in which he challenged orthodox notions of reform associating the city with economic liberalisation and the retreat of the state. Instead, he documented the rise of ‘new state business interests’ as politicians, officials and those with close connections to them took advantage of the opportunities for profit which came with marketisation and rearticulation to the regional and global economy.</p> <p>Patronage has been more important than policy positions [1] [2] [3] [4] [6]</p> <p>Gainsborough has also conducted research in the capital, Hanoi, and in a number of northern and southern provinces. As part of this work he explored related topics such as enterprise reform, local politics and corruption as well as the role of key institutions such as the Communist Party, parliament and civil society. It led to his conclusion that patronage has been more important than policy positions in explaining the dynamics of the ‘reform’ process. He shows that orthodox analysis is too quick to explain the dynamics of the ‘reform’ process as an expression of policy agreements and disputes. He developed a patronage approach to thinking about politics in Vietnam, emphasising the importance of political connections and relationships, and the close connection which exists in people’s minds between holding public office and private gain, over and above disputes over rival policy positions, as a determinant of outcomes. Gainsborough is uniquely associated with this position and, as his research has emphasised, being alert to these characteristics is crucial for any analysis of the likely effects of donor initiatives.</p>

Impact case study (REF3b)

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

- [1] Gainsborough, M. (2007) 'From Patronage to "Outcomes": Vietnamese Communist Party Congresses Reconsidered', *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, 2 (1): 3-26. DOI 10.1525/vs.2007.2.1.3. Peer-reviewed. The leading Vietnam-specific journal.
- [2] Gainsborough, M. (2007) 'Globalisation and the State Revisited: A view from Provincial Vietnam', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 37 (1): 1-18. DOI 10.1080/00472330601104383. Peer-reviewed. Prize for the best article published in the journal that year. It was judged to have made a theoretical contribution of 'global significance'.
- [3] Gainsborough, M. (2009) 'Privatisation as State Advance: Private Indirect Government in Vietnam', *New Political Economy*, 14 (2): 257-274. DOI 10.1080/13563460902826013. Peer-reviewed. Listed in REF2.
- [4] Gainsborough, M. (2010) *Vietnam: Rethinking the State*. London and New York: Zed Books. Described as 'a state-of-the art exploration of political theory applied to the case of Vietnam' (Prof. Adam Fforde, Melbourne) and as 'a signal accomplishment by a distinguished scholar' (Prof. Mark Sidel, Iowa). Can be supplied upon request.
- [5] Gainsborough, M. (2010) 'Present but not Powerful: Neo-liberalism, the State, and Development in Vietnam', *Globalizations*, 7 (4): 447-460. DOI 10.1080/14747731003798435. Peer-reviewed. Listed in REF2.
- [6] Gainsborough, M. (2012) 'Elites vs. Reform in Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam', *Journal of Democracy*, 23 (2): 34-46. DOI: 10.1353/jod.2012.0024. Peer-reviewed. Listed in REF2.

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

The impact being described in this case study relates to the influence of Gainsborough's research – and specifically his reconceptualising of reform in Vietnam – on the thinking and subsequent design of governance programmes in Vietnam by the international donor community. This section of the case study is divided into three parts: pathways to impact, impact during 2008-13 on thinking and on design of governance programmes, and the reach and significance of the impact.

Pathways to impact

In 2005-06 Gainsborough was seconded to the UNDP in Hanoi as Senior Technical Advisor to the Doi Moi Review, a \$1.5 million project seeking to learn lessons from twenty years of reform. During this time, Gainsborough had extensive exposure to both the Vietnamese government and the international donor community, allowing him to develop formal and informal ties with a wide range of donors in addition to UNDP. As a member of the donor community, Gainsborough attended official meetings and was able to bring his expertise to bear in a wide range of fora, notably in relation to debates on corruption. Key dialogue partners at this time were the World Bank, the UK's Department for International Development (DfID), AusAID and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA). Gainsborough's role in this review gave him an excellent opportunity to show the relevance of his academic work to donors. This led to him being commissioned to do specific pieces of policy-oriented research. Contact with other organisations such as Irish Aid and Danish International Development Agency within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark came later, largely through members of the donor community sharing Gainsborough's research with each other. In 2005 Gainsborough formed the Bristol-Mekong Project, a research and consultancy arm at the University of Bristol designed to make the insights of academic research on Vietnam available to practitioners (www.bristol.ac.uk/spais/research/bristol-mekong/). In 2006 Gainsborough was commissioned by Transparency International to write its National Integrity Systems report on Vietnam. In 2007 Gainsborough produced a report for DfID on governance reform options for Vietnam to 2020, addressing, amongst other things, donor engagement with civil society. Gainsborough is in regular demand as a consultant for the international donor community in Vietnam. Donors cite his work and say that his work has been influential in their thinking and practice. In 2008 Gainsborough was commissioned by UNDP to lead a research team looking at corruption, public administration reform and development in Vietnam. Again, all this activity contributed to Gainsborough's research [1] [2] being picked up by the donor community, contributing to the impact indicated below.

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The impact of Gainsborough's research can be divided into two types: changes to donor thinking and changes to the design of governance programmes.

(a) Changes to thinking: During 2008-13 Gainsborough's research has been an important influence on the way in which the international donor community thinks about reform in Vietnam, and

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specifically the political context in which it is operating. The UNDP has said that Gainsborough's work 'provides clues on what issues to look at' when discussing issues with policy makers [4] [b]. AusAid and UNDP have highlighted how Gainsborough's work on corruption has been helpful in understanding the Vietnamese political system on its own terms [f] [b]. Irish Aid has been influenced by the work Gainsborough conducted for DfID on civil society. Specifically, Gainsborough's research has had an impact on Irish Aid's understanding of the links between the state and economic private sector type activity in Vietnam. In particular, Gainsborough provided guidance in 2009 concerning how to engage the Communist Party. Reports by Gainsborough based on his research [1] [2] [3] were cited by the World Bank in its *Modern Institutions*, in its joint donor analysis on Vietnam published in 2009 [a] and he was one of the four peer reviewers of the document.

These changes in thinking have also occurred in the news media coverage of these issues, attributed directly to the work of Gainsborough [4]. In 2010, Ben Bland, Indonesia Correspondent of the *Financial Times*, set out his assessment of the importance of Gainsborough's research [4]:

Wandering through central Hanoi, where banners bearing Communist Party slogans stretch over streets full of jewelry stores, designer clothes outlets and fancy restaurants, it's all too easy to buy into the received wisdom about how Vietnam got where it is today. This view, which is shared by the Communist Party and many international scholars alike, holds that in 1986 the government launched a wide-ranging program of market-based reforms ... Vietnam was thus turned from an isolated, poverty-stricken nation into a bustling, middle-income country. Or so the argument goes. However, a new and important addition to the rather limited literature on modern Vietnam seeks to explode this cozy consensus. In his iconoclastic *Vietnam: Rethinking the State*, Martin Gainsborough, a politics lecturer at the University of Bristol, in England, argues that any attempt to examine Vietnamese politics through the lens of "reform" is fundamentally flawed [g].

In 2011, David Brown, a retired US diplomat wrote in *Asia Times Online* and was similarly laudatory about the research [4] and its significance:

Shortly before a party congress, documents that have been prepared for it - in particular a political report and a 10-year socioeconomic strategy - are redrafted, ostensibly to reflect the trend of all the opinions expressed up to that point. Academics and diplomats scrutinize them for evidence of policy shifts but this is an exercise of dubious utility, as Bristol University scholar Martin Gainsborough points out in his remarkable new book *Vietnam: Rethinking the State*. Like party platforms in democracies, the political report and the strategy aim to appeal to all and offend none - thus they become thoroughly homogenized in the process of drafting by what is, in effect, a committee of the entire political elite. [h]

Gainsborough continues to be a key resource for journalists trying to understand events in Vietnam, as can be seen from him being quoted in a March 2013 article in *The Atlantic* that was shared on Facebook 174 times and on Twitter 195 times [j].

(b) Changes to the design of governance programmes: Changes to donor thinking about Vietnam's politics in light of Gainsborough's research have in turn influenced the way donors have designed their governance programmes. In 2007-09, AusAID moved from standalone aid projects to greater reliance on Vietnamese government systems to deliver their programmes (an approach which continues to this day). Gainsborough's research, AusAID said, was very helpful in thinking through the risks associated with the changes and how they could be managed [f]. AusAID described how Gainsborough's work, alongside other influences, 'helped to reshape the way in which Australia undertakes development in Vietnam and this has endured today' [f]. In its 2007-10 country strategy for Vietnam, Irish Aid introduced a 'decentralised civil society fund' and moved to 'mainstream' governance considerations throughout their programme [d]. According to Irish Aid, Gainsborough's work was important in shaping and justifying this approach. It provided the 'robust arguments' needed to make the case for a new approach involving 'separate financing direct to government and the establishment of a decentralised fund which would support civil society organisations' [e]. In addition, Gainsborough's research on civil society and governance has informed Irish Aid's civil society strategy for the period 2011-2015. In 2011, UNDP described Gainsborough's work on corruption and public administration reform as having had a 'positive policy impact' on its work, notably the emphasis it now places on transparency in its discussions with the Vietnamese government [b]. Furthermore, UNDP highlighted how Gainsborough's insights on the enforceability of anti-corruption efforts in Vietnam [4] [5] [6] currently inform UNDP's discussions on the amendment of the country's anti-corruption laws [b]. Gainsborough's work on Vietnamese

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institutions, especially the importance he places on understanding how institutions are perceived at the local level [2], has influenced the way in which the World Bank designs its policy interventions. Freedom House described how Gainsborough's 2010 Vietnam country report for its *Countries at the Crossroads* publication (<http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2010/vietnam>) had been 'disseminated among many of the top policy makers and academics who shape development and foreign policy related to Vietnam' [c]. See also its 2012 report [i] and its reference to his research [1]. Freedom House explained that the report had informed the World Bank's *Worldwide Governance Indicators* (<http://info.worldbank.org/governance/wgi/index.aspx#home>). The indicators cover six areas which capture the quality of a given country's governance (voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption). Gainsborough's report included both a qualitative analysis and quantitative scores covering these areas, which alongside other data was used to inform the indicators. The indicators are widely used by governments, civil society, and the private sector.

The reach and significance of the impact

The reach of the impact described in this case study is mainly focused on Vietnam and the work of the international donor community in that country. It has also fed into wider Freedom House and World Bank analysis and some of the people Gainsborough has worked with have gone on to hold senior posts elsewhere in the aid system. Vietnam is the thirteenth most populous country in the world with a population of 90 million. Redesign of donor support for Vietnam's governance has been rolled out across the country. In terms of the research's significance, Gainsborough's research is one of a number of influences on donor thinking and practice. However, his research has been acknowledged by donors as having been made a major contribution to their understanding of the context in which they are operating and their subsequent policy design. The research has also had a continuing impact of news media coverage of these issues.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- [a] Joint Donor Report to the Vietnam Consultative Group Meeting, *Modern Institutions: Vietnam Development Report 2010*, Hanoi, 3-4 December 2009, The World Bank. <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/2009/12/11969030/vietnam-development-report-2010-modern-institutions>. Corroborates impact on World Bank joint donor thinking.
- [b] Factual statement, Policy Adviser, Public Administration Reform and Anti-Corruption, UNDP. Corroborates impact on the UNDP.
- [c] Factual statement, Director for Analysis, Freedom House. Corroborates impact on Freedom House analysis and the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators.
- [d] Factual statement, former Principal Officer, Irish Aid. Corroborates impact on Irish Aid.
- [e] Factual statement, senior Development Specialist and Advisor, Social Development and Governance, Irish Aid. Corroborates impact on Irish Aid.
- [f] Factual statement, First Assistant Director General, AusAID. Corroborates impact on AusAid.
- [g] Bland, Ben, 'Debunking "Doi Moi"', *Global Asia*, 20 December 2010, <http://www.globalasia.org/Issue/ArticleDetail/446/debunking-doi-moi.html>. Corroborates the 'iconoclastic' nature of Gainsborough's thinking and its impact on media analysis.
- [h] Brown, David, 'Rituals of Renewal in Vietnam', *Asia Times Online*, 7 January 2011, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/MA07Ae01.html. Corroborates the 'remarkable' nature of Gainsborough's thinking and its impact on media analysis.
- [i] Freedom House, 'Vietnam', *Countries at the Crossroads*, 2012, <http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/countries-crossroads/2012/vietnam>. Corroborates continuing impact on the analysis of Freedom House.
- [j] Wagner, Dana. '4 Signs the Vietnamese Government is Crushing the Country's "Social Media Revolution"', *The Atlantic*, 11 March 2013, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/03/4-signs-the-vietnamese-government-is-crushing-the-countrys-social-media-revolution/273893/>. Corroborates continuing, recent impact on media analysis.