

Neighbourhood Governance in Vietnam for Tackling the COVID-19 Pandemic: Focus on Megacities, Social Capital, Hierarchical Steering, and Collaborative Governance Theory

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ABSTRACT

The concept of governance has gained widespread attention in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. While community-centred governance has gained popularity, the current understanding of neighbourhood governance remains incomplete. Based on the collaborative governance theory, this study revisits a previous conceptual framework to analyse the dynamics of neighbourhood governance in Vietnam during the COVID-19 response. We surveyed 366 social workers in residential quarters, sub-quarters, and community COVID groups in two Vietnamese megacities (e.g., Hanoi capital, Ho Chi Minh City). The findings show the presence of collaboration drivers in the country's neighbourhood governance. Specifically, neighbourhood social capital and governmental hierarchical steering emerge as two dynamics of effective neighbourhood governance. This research contributes to the current understanding of collaborative governance theory and the dynamics of neighbourhood governance and addresses previous discussions on assessing its effectiveness. From a practical perspective, this research offers a valuable tool for evaluating the effectiveness of neighbourhood governance and scholarship on enhancing its collaborative capacity.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received: 12 March 2024

Accepted: 04 November 2024

Published: 27 March 2025

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47836/pjssh.33.1.04>

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Keywords: Collaborative governance theory, hierarchical steering, megacities, neighbourhood governance, neighbourhood governance effectiveness, social capital, social worker, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

Contextual Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented complexity and uncertainty, posing the challenge of managing societal functions while controlling the spread of the virus. Across the globe, response orientation differs due to countries' overall socioeconomic conditions, leading to different priorities and pathways in the COVID-19 pandemic response strategies. Nevertheless, the trend is towards using nonpharmaceutical intervention techniques coupled with capital to fund technological and scientific tools (Le et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2020). The national governments of China, India, the United States, and Vietnam have effectively employed such techniques and policies to steer citizens' behaviour in the fight against the pandemic (Green & Loualiche, 2021; Intawong et al., 2021; Li, 2020). These interventions include large-scale lockdowns, social distancing measures, and isolation protocols (Yan et al., 2020). According to Desson et al. (2020) and Wimmer (2020), these techniques demonstrated countries' understanding of the value of government and citizens' joint efforts and strategic collaboration.

Research Purpose and Objectives

Liu et al. (2021) developed a model examining collaborative neighbourhood governance in China during the COVID-19 crisis. They found that social capital and hierarchical steering predicted the effectiveness of collaborative governance. On the one hand, Liu et al. (2021) recalled the role of social

capital as neighbourhoods' collective fuel for citizens to transcend beyond being passive practitioners to the pioneers of movements instead. On the other, they also noted the challenge of obtaining community compliance and credited public authorities with the hierarchical steering and organising required to leverage neighbourhoods' social capabilities. Thus, collaboration effectiveness was measured from the perspective of residential committees (i.e., frontline social workers) for their significance in building, mobilising and bridging governance networks' participants. Nevertheless, as their study adopted a subjective measurement of effectiveness, Liu et al. (2021) called for further studies on the concept.

Moreover, there is a lack of studies observing the phenomenon in Vietnam despite the success of the country's public administration during the pandemic. While the perspectives of healthcare professionals and workers have been widely explored (Ha et al., 2020; Le et al., 2020; Tran, Phan, et al., 2020), the views of those facilitating communication and coordination between the government and citizens have been largely overlooked. Besides, Taniguchi (2022) and Hartley et al. (2021) described Vietnam as a compelling example of the positive and effective transformations in government–society relations during the COVID-19 response. These notable accomplishments have sparked discussions about how citizens and public institutions participated in governance networks at the time (Mai & Cuong, 2022). Several studies have considered this from a top-

down approach, whereby instruction for public affairs flows from central government agencies to extended local authorities and down to ground levels (Ha et al., 2020; Therrien & Normandin, 2020). Concurrently, Hartley et al. (2021) and Taniguchi (2022) celebrated individuals' commitment and interpersonal bonds within their communities. Nevertheless, the reasons behind the country's governance network's success during the pandemic response have yet to be fully determined.

In this paper, we inherit Liu et al.'s (2021) conceptual framework to examine the governance practice of Vietnam's urban neighbourhoods (i.e., especially megacities) during the pandemic. We aim to (1) assess the effectiveness of neighbourhood governance as an adoption of collaborative processes and (2) examine the extent of collaborative governance at the neighbourhood level of Vietnam during a public crisis (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic). This study addresses some specific recommendations of previous studies and contributes to the literature on public governance. First, by approaching the presence of residential quarters and community COVID group officers in the neighbourhood, we respond to Liu et al.'s (2021) call to assess the effectiveness of the collaborative mechanism. Second, by focusing on the context of Vietnamese megacities, we confirm the country's capacity to adopt collaborative public governance and suggest policymakers leverage the model in public administration processes.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vietnam's Experience of COVID-19 in Terms of Neighbourhood Governance

The government and the National Steering Committee determined the principle of designating communes, wards, and towns as the basic units, with the people as the centre and subject of pandemic prevention and control work. Neighbourhoods, wards, and communes were tasked with mobilising resources to promptly support localities affected by the pandemic or at high risk of outbreaks, thereby enabling swift virus containment and stabilisation of the situation. Simultaneously, strategies were employed by leveraging the community's role and utilising neighbourhood volunteers to assist with pandemic prevention. These efforts included the provision of essential supplies and medical support, as well as participation in surveillance and inspection activities.

In addition, community COVID-19 groups were established with the voluntary participation of socio-political organisations, local mass organisations, and residents. These groups operated under the organisation and management of local authorities. Their responsibilities included supporting the inspection and enforcement of pandemic prevention and control measures, providing information, consultation, and guidance to ensure the public's proper adherence to preventive measures, and participating in community propaganda and education activities.

Consequently, the implementation of directive documents from the central government was conducted synchronously and consistently across the entire system, ensuring the successful fulfilment of missions and solutions for pandemic prevention and control.

Neighbourhood Collaborative Governance

In a study on the distribution of collective resources, Ostrom (1990) defined public governance as the institutional arrangements encompassing administrative activities and the influence exerted by individuals or groups. Later, Bryson et al. (2006) noted that governance includes coordinating collective activities and establishing accountability mechanisms among responsible agencies. It also addresses how the authority of actors is distributed and the interdependent relationships among them (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Kapucu, 2012). In an era of institutional cooperation, Ran and Qi (2018) emphasised the importance of collaboration in public governance, where stakeholders work together towards shared goals. Collaborative governance has been employed to address various urban public problems, such as land use (Holvandus & Leetmaa, 2016), the development of abandoned areas (Tomo et al., 2018), watershed governance (Imperial, 2005), and COVID-19 responses (Mai & Cuong, 2022). This is because addressing societal problems has become increasingly complex and often exceeds the capacity of a single actor (Batory & Svensson, 2019; Therrien &

Normandin, 2020). Relying on the work of others to deal with the complexity of public problems, affected actors typically find themselves participating in collaborative activities.

At the same time, the governance of public issues in urban neighbourhoods is transforming. A neighbourhood is a social entity composed of residents living within a defined geographic area (Chaskin & Garg, 1997). Multiple actors, representing various stakeholders and interests, are now participating in the neighbourhood governance process, narrowing the gap between 'what bureaucratic organisations offer and their own view of what they need' (van Hulst et al., 2012). Additionally, central governments and states are granting greater autonomy to local authorities, individuals, and non-state actors (Cheng et al., 2020; Ekzayez et al., 2020; Kalla & Metaxas, 2023). Accordingly, such a community approach encourages neighbourhood residents to engage in social bonding and communication, facilitating shared collective values and relationships (Barghusen et al., 2022; Wimmer, 2020).

The Effectiveness of Collaborative Governance

Previously, Marek et al. (2015) evaluated a collaboration's effectiveness by its capacity to fulfil predetermined objectives. Parés et al. (2017) posited that the effectiveness of collaboration can be measured against the differences it yields compared to situations where collaboration is absent. Marek et al. (2015) further developed a framework

to measure the added value generated by collaboration, leading to improvements or successes in problem-solving programmes.

Meanwhile, in the context of China's COVID-19 response, Liu et al. (2021) attempted to evaluate the collaborative value of governance based on stakeholders' partnering attitudes and processes. Prior studies have indicated that shared rules, understandings, and accountability among stakeholders can lead to efficient resource distribution and enhanced governance planning (Mosley & Park, 2022; Tomo et al., 2018). Scott and Thomas (2017) underscored the importance of normative beliefs shared among stakeholders, asserting that attitudes towards collaboration, accountability and committed action determine the effectiveness of governance models. Indeed, the subjective experiences of network participants, such as residential committees, further validate these findings (Tran, Nguyen, et al., 2020).

Frontline Stakeholder's Approaches in Assessing the Effectiveness of Collaborative Governance

Ran and Qi (2018) proposed studying the contingent nature of collaborative processes based on participants' perceptions. Tran, Nguyen, et al. (2020) embraced this perspective by asserting that insights provided by local authorities and the community could improve collaborative governance's effectiveness. These frontline workers could mobilise and connect with other community-level actors to address pandemic-related issues (Maryati &

Azizah, 2022). Their local knowledge gives them firsthand experience of residents' participation and engagement. These workers provided a channel for community voices and concerns to be recognised and appreciated (Schuster et al., 2020; van Hulst et al., 2012). Meanwhile, top-down pressure exerted to fulfil their frontline responsibility can enhance their experience of the government's commitment and accountability (Syasyila et al., 2022). As liaisons to local authorities, frontline members observe government responses while communicating the community's concerns (Breek, 2022; Kalla & Metaxas, 2023; Li et al., 2019). They also comprehend how public authorities allocate resources and support their communities (Dutta & Fischer, 2021).

Determinants of Effective Collaborative Governance

Neighbourhood Social Capital

Understanding a neighbourhood's social network, practices, and values is crucial for its governance. Emerged in the 1990s, social capital reflects social relations and structures within a community and forms the bedrock of social cohesion (Portes, 1998; Veenstra, 1999). Social capital refers to the relationships, trust, and norms of reciprocity among individuals and groups involved in the decision-making process (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Maloney et al., 2000). It appears in various aspects of the neighbourhood, wherein language, narratives, expectations, norms, and values are shared (Oh & Bush, 2016). Beckham

et al. (2023) and Schuhbert (2023) further linked social capital to assets that individuals can use to fulfil their social interests and achieve goals within a community.

Capital enhances productivity and goal achievement (Adler & Kwon, 2002). Shared values and resources enable an area's citizens to overcome individual differences and collaboratively work towards common objectives (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Beckham et al., 2023; Macke et al., 2009; Schuhbert, 2023). Participation systems, rooted in the belief that individuals adhere to a common 'rule of the game', improve governance effectiveness (Macke et al., 2009). With the increasing complexity of public affairs, traditional governance methods that rely on policies of ordering and sanctioning are no longer sufficient. Instead, a sense of belonging and identity, derived from robust social connections, motivates people to participate in collective activities (Clarke et al., 2015; Oh & Bush, 2016). Beckham et al. (2023) and Schuhbert (2023) additionally noted that the transaction cost of cooperative efforts decreases as participation systems are adopted and civic engagement increases.

Governmental Hierarchical Steering

Maloney et al. (2000) suggested that communities' social capital should be purposively nurtured and supported by laws and regulations. Traditionally, the central government establishes policies and procedures, while arm's-length local authorities address the unique needs of the city (Li et al., 2019; Nguyen & Phan, 2021). The term 'hierarchical steering' comprises

hierarchical structures and governance methods. Policymaking and implementation, traditionally following a top-down approach from central to local authorities and individuals, are key aspects of public administration (King et al., 2015). This form of governance is closely related to the 'state-centric' government dichotomy proposed by Bäckstrand (2006). Additionally, the concept of 'steering' rather than 'rowing' highlights the government's role in creating and sustaining an environment conducive to co-production among governance partners (Capano et al., 2015). While the rowing government focuses on the need to build capacity and become effective on its own, the steering government aims to fulfil collective demands by establishing successful criteria for collaborative governance, thus providing the best environment for stakeholders to develop social partnerships by igniting their potential for collaborative governance (Bäckstrand, 2006; Capano et al., 2015; Clarke et al., 2015). Li (2020) also found that strategic steering from public authorities resulted in their interventions to develop stakeholder partnerships.

Hypothesis Development and the Conceptual Framework

Underpinning Theory of Collaborative Governance

This study adopts the collaborative governance theory to examine Vietnam's neighbourhood governance practices during the COVID-19 response. Collaborative governance theory underscores the mechanism by which participants pool

their capacities and resources to realise common objectives (Ansell & Torfing, 2022). Various sectors, with their interests and representatives, participate in the planning and execution of public services (Mai & Cuong, 2022). Collaborative governance operates on the principles of partnership, trust, and power-sharing among stakeholders affected by the decisions (Tomo et al., 2018).

In Vietnam, collective threats and objectives have driven the formation and strengthening of collaborations among government authorities, community organisations, and individual citizens (Taniguchi, 2022). Notably, Tran, Nguyen, et al. (2020) observed an effective mechanism in Vietnam for tackling the COVID-19 pandemic through partnership arrangements between governance partners. Since each stakeholder possesses unique resources and expertise, it is crucial to establish a mechanism for their co-production, complemented by norms and rules that govern individual accountability within the network. Consequently, apart from specific outcomes of policymaking or campaign establishment, this study evaluates the effectiveness of collaboration at the neighbourhood level based on the extent of engagement and accountability among its participants. We revisit Liu et al.'s (2021) conceptual framework, which was used to investigate the horizontal and hierarchical factors determining the effectiveness of collaborative networks in China during the pandemic. This study examines the importance of social capital

within neighbourhood communities and the hierarchical steering performance of public authority levels in the context of Vietnam's COVID response. We asked frontline workers in several areas of the country about their observations on how these normative processes occur within their neighbourhoods.

Social Capital of Trust, Engagement, and Participation

Recognising and harnessing social capital can strengthen community resilience, resulting in more effective pandemic responses. Tran, Phan, et al. (2020) found the importance of social capital in nurturing friendship and companionship in Vietnam's battle against COVID-19. Supporting this view, Li (2020) argued that citizen's trust in their neighbours, mutual gains, and the basic protocols of social distancing are prerequisites for collaboration (Olivera-La Rosa et al., 2020). For frontline workers, their ability to mobilise and communicate is significantly amplified in an environment characterised by trust and shared values within the communities they serve (Schuster et al., 2020).

Additionally, collaboration occurs when citizens actively engage and participate in collective activities. Li (2020) states that trust is interrelated with engagement and participation. Engagement, in a social context, refers to activities with others, which helps understand them better (Hawkins & Wang, 2012; Souza & Neto, 2018). Musavengane and Simatele (2017) argued that individuals who engage in

governance practices also invest emotionally in its dynamic activities and objectives. Consequently, a high degree of engagement in a social context is often associated with positive outcomes, such as increased social cohesion, stronger relationships, and a sense of belonging (Barghusen et al., 2022; Souza & Neto, 2018). In particular, robust civic engagement has been found to significantly increase citizens' willingness and determination to accept the COVID-19 vaccine (Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021).

There is also a connection between citizen involvement and participation, two pillars of effective local governance (Ha et al., 2020). The latter involves mechanisms that promote the inclusiveness of stakeholders and facilitate problem-solving processes (Kapucu, 2012). Through meaningful discussions and deliberations, the issue of COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy among individuals can be effectively mitigated (Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021). Meanwhile, the participation of underrepresented groups in decision-making processes fosters trust and knowledge sharing, leading to greater citizen cooperation (Barghusen et al., 2022; Dutta & Fischer, 2021). These studies support social capital or the notion that trust and mutual understanding within a community can strengthen its resilience and contribute to more effective and inclusive pandemic responses. In light of the above, we propose the following hypotheses (Figure 1):

1. A neighbourhood's social capital of trust has a significantly positive impact on the perceived effectiveness of collaboration in COVID-19 responses.
2. A neighbourhood's social capital of engagement has a significantly positive impact on the perceived effectiveness of collaboration in COVID-19 responses.
3. A neighbourhood's social capital of participation has a significantly positive impact on the perceived effectiveness of collaboration in COVID-19 responses.

Governmental Hierarchical Steering of Priority, Incentives, Pressure, and Support

It should be noted that the steering role of governmental institutions also influenced the success of collaborative governance in Vietnam's COVID-19 response. Public authorities acknowledge that providing resources for public services is contingent upon their respective importance and urgency (Ha et al., 2020; Kalla & Metaxas, 2023). Accordingly, certain services require a larger allocation of resources, and the government's prioritisation guarantees that these are distributed both efficiently and effectively to meet community needs (Tran, Nguyen, et al., 2020). This strategic prioritisation, coupled with various incentives and support for stakeholders, can strengthen the governance network (Wimmer, 2020). In Vietnam, Taniguchi (2022) and Mai and Cuong (2022) observed that citizens are more likely to adopt protective behaviours when they perceive governmental accountability through such mechanisms as district steering committees and frontline workers, such as physical distancing, wearing masks, and maintaining hand hygiene. Additional motivational

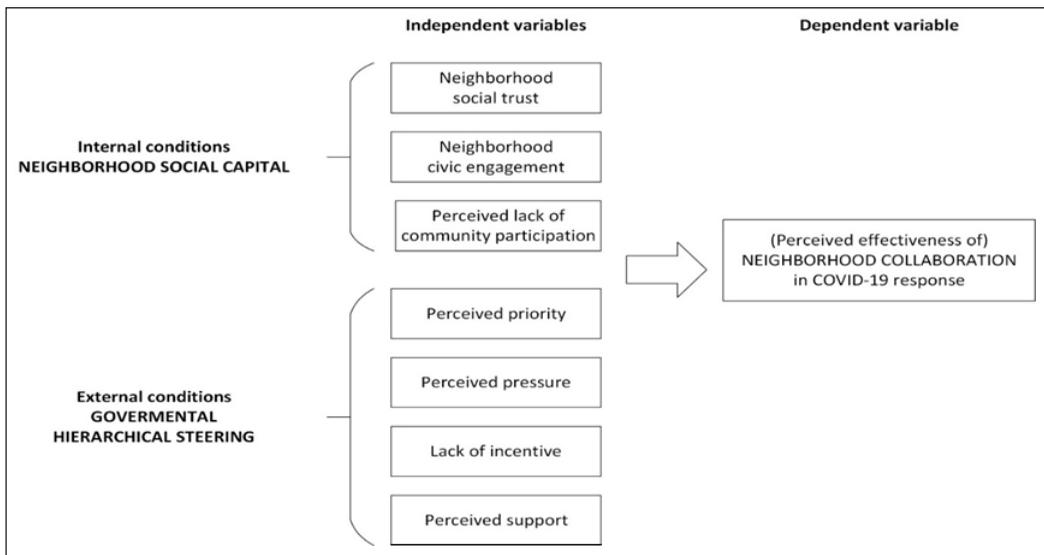


Figure 1. The conceptual framework adopted by Liu et al. (2021)

factors, including power and networking, have been explored in relation to the effectiveness of cooperative management (Kalla & Metaxas, 2023; Tarkom, 2022). Likewise, Yan et al. (2020) and Ha et al. (2020) argued that decision-makers accountability in response to residents' need for mental and financial support serves as a practical motivation for them to develop their capacities and self-discipline, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of pandemic control across countries.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, local authorities and frontline organisations additionally faced immense pressure to achieve target goals while working with limited time and resources. In Vietnam, within a remarkably short timeframe following the first official warning, the government swiftly implemented a hierarchical structure of steering committees, starting from the central headquarters (Tran, Nguyen, et

al., 2020). Subsequently, provincial and district steering committees were promptly established, each accompanied by their respective rapid response teams. This strategy has been recognised as another contributing factor to successful pandemic control in several Western countries (Desson et al., 2020), China (Cheng et al., 2020), and Vietnam (Le et al., 2020; Tran, Nguyen, et al., 2020).

Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed (Figure 1):

1. Governmental prioritisation has a significantly positive impact on the perceived effectiveness of collaboration in COVID-19 responses.
2. Governmental incentives have a significantly positive impact on the perceived effectiveness of collaboration in COVID-19 responses.
3. Governmental hierarchical support has a significantly positive impact on the

perceived effectiveness of collaboration in COVID-19 response.

4. Governmental hierarchical pressure has a significantly positive impact on the perceived effectiveness of collaboration in COVID-19 responses.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Hanoi capital and Ho Chi Minh City are the two major transportation hubs, trading gateways, and international exchange centres of the country, with significant immigrant populations. Therefore, the pandemic situation in these cities was complicated. Local authorities were required to implement flexible yet stringent policies and measures for pandemic prevention and control, as well as for socioeconomic development. Hence, neighbourhood collaborative governance (under normal conditions and during the COVID-19 pandemic) in these megacities exhibits unique social features when compared to other provinces in Vietnam. This study focuses on two megacities (i.e., Hanoi capital and Ho Chi Minh City) to quantitatively observe neighbourhood collaborative governance administered through neighbourhood social capital and governmental hierarchical steering.

The mass survey was conducted in 2022, targeting social/frontline workers in residential quarters and sub-quarters and community COVID groups in Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi (i.e., the extended arm of local authorities in supporting efforts to combat the pandemic). Purposive, quota,

and snowball sampling methods were used to recruit the study's respondents (i.e., during cell or regular meetings organised by local authorities to exchange information and distribute survey questionnaires). In Ho Chi Minh City, we approached residential quarters and sub-quarters throughout the 20 wards/sub-districts of Binh Thanh district. We also approached residential quarters and community COVID groups in 13 districts across Hanoi.

A total of 366 valid cases were collected through the mass survey for further analysis. In Table 1, which presents the demographics of the respondents, the target population was approached based on certain general personal characteristics. The majority of respondents (almost 75%) were senior citizens aged between 50–69. More than 40% of respondents held undergraduate degrees, while over 45% had completed high school or college/vocational school education. The gender distribution among respondents was relatively equal (i.e., 48% male, 52% female). This study targeted social workers residing in two megacities (i.e., nearly 70% in Ho Chi Minh City and approximately 30% in Hanoi). In terms of community groups, this study primarily engaged social workers working within residential quarters and sub-quarters (accounting for 83.88%), while a smaller proportion (16.12%) worked in community COVID groups.

The measurement scale was adopted from Liu et al. (2021), with detailed items in the Vietnamese context shown in the Appendix.

Table 1
Respondents' demographics

Categories	Outcomes	Respondents	Percentage (%)
Age	From 20 to 29	2	0.55
	From 30 to 39	20	5.46
	From 40 to 49	33	9.02
	From 50 to 59	89	24.32
	From 60 to 69	187	51.09
	From 70 to 79	34	9.29
	From 80 to 89	1	0.27
Gender	Male	175	47.81
	Female	191	52.19
Community Group	Residential sub-quarter	198	54.10
	Community COVID group	59	16.12
	Residential quarter	109	29.78
Location	Ho Chi Minh	253	69.13
	Hanoi	113	30.87
Education	Postgraduate	23	6.28
	Undergraduate	155	42.35
	College-Vocational school	83	22.68
	High school	91	24.86
	Others	14	3.83
Total		366	100.00

Assessment Methods

Ordinary least-squares (OLS) regression and logistic regression were conducted in the STATA program (version 15).

OLS regression is used to estimate linear relationships between continuous/categorical variables (as independent variables) and a continuous dependent variable (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017). The data were standardised, and all regression assumptions were checked before we ran the OLS regression. Data standardisation was conducted with z-transformation by applying two scales (e.g., 5- and 10-point scales) for measuring the continuous variables (see Table 2).

The descriptive analysis of all variables in this study is shown in Table 3. In essence, regression assumptions consist of two parts. One deals with the specification of the least-squares model, while the other relates to assumptions about the residuals. In other words, there are three original Gauss-Markov assumptions, including the error term having a conditional mean of zero, the error term having a constant variance, and errors being uncorrelated. There are three additional assumptions: a correctly specified model, absence of multicollinearity, and normally distributed residuals (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017).

Table 2
Data transformation

Variable code	Variable name	Variable type	Data transformation
NC_1	Perceived effectiveness of neighbourhood collaboration	Ordinal (0–10)	z-transform
NC_2	Perceived effectiveness of neighbourhood collaboration	Binary (Yes/No)	Grouping (0-5 indicate No, 6-10 indicate Yes)
SC1	Neighbourhood social trust	Ordinal (1–5)	z-transform
SC2	Neighbourhood civic engagement	Ordinal (1–5)	z-transform
SC3	Perceived lack of community participation	Binary (Yes/No)	None
HS1	Perceived priority	Ordinal (0–10)	z-transform
HS2	Perceived pressure	Binary (Yes/No)	None
HS3	Perceived incentive	Binary (Yes/No)	None
HS4	Perceived support	Ordinal (1–5)	z-transform

Table 3
Descriptive analysis of all variables

Variable code	Variable name	Variable type	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Yes	No	Yes (%)	No (%)
NC_1	Perceived effectiveness of neighbourhood collaboration	Ordinal (0–10)	366	8.77	1.44	1	10				
NC_2	Perceived effectiveness of neighbourhood collaboration	Binary (Yes/No)	366					351	15	95.90	4.10
SC1	Neighbourhood social trust	Ordinal (1–5)	366	4.74	0.49	3	5				
SC2	Neighbourhood civic engagement	Ordinal (1–5)	366	4.60	0.58	3	5				
SC3	Perceived lack of community participation	Binary (Yes/No)	366					100	266	27.32	72.68
HS1	Perceived priority	Ordinal (0–10)	366	8.86	1.37	2	10				
HS2	Perceived pressure	Binary (Yes/No)	366					216	150	59.02	40.98
HS3	Perceived incentive	Binary (Yes/No)	366					336	30	91.80	8.20
HS4	Perceived support	Ordinal (1-5)	366	4.51	0.72	1	5				

Logistic regression is used to estimate linear relationships between continuous/categorical variables (as independent variables) and a categorical dependent variable by using maximum likelihood estimation. Data transformation and checking all required assumptions were conducted before running the logistic regression. There are five assumptions in logistic regression, including 1/ The model must be correctly specified; 2/ No important variables must be left out of the model, and no unnecessary variables should be included; the model and the causal relationships need to be grounded in strong theoretical arguments; 3/ Each observation needs to be independent of the other observations; 4/ Absence of multicollinearity; and 5/ No influential cases (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017).

RESULTS

We used one easy command of the recheck package (i.e., `ssc install recheck`) to examine all the OLS regression assumptions (e.g., homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, normally distributed residuals, correctly specified model, appropriate functional form, and influential cases). Influential cases were identified through Cook's distance, residual outliers, leverage, and DFBETA (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017). There were 22 cases deleted to achieve five over six OLS assumptions (i.e., excepting non-normally distributed residuals) in four OLS models (e.g., Models 1–4). Robust regression with `rreg` command was applied to these four OLS models dealing with non-

normal distributed residuals (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017; Table 4).

The logistic model was diagnosed with model specification (i.e., the link test), incorrectly specified model (i.e., `estat gof` command), multicollinearity (i.e., `estat vif` command), and influential cases (i.e., `dbeta`) (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017). Six cases were deleted to achieve valid assumptions in logistic regression (i.e., Model 5; Table 4).

Model 1 reveals OLS causal relationships between two sets of independent variables (e.g., neighbourhood social capital, hierarchical steering) and neighbourhood governance effectiveness. Model 2 reveals OLS causal relationships between control variables (e.g., age, gender, community group, location) and neighbourhood governance effectiveness. Model 3 reveals the OLS causal relationship between two sets of independent variables (e.g., neighbourhood social capital, control variables) and neighbourhood governance effectiveness. Model 4 reveals the OLS causal relationship between two sets of independent variables (e.g., hierarchical steering, control variables) and neighbourhood governance effectiveness. Model 5 reveals logistic regression between three sets of independent variables (neighbourhood social capital, hierarchical steering, control variables) and neighbourhood governance effectiveness, in which some categorical independent variables were omitted due to collinearity (e.g., perceived lack of community participation, perceived pressure, incentive, age, community group; see Table 4).

Table 4
OLS regression and logistic regression on the effectiveness of neighbourhood governance

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Odds ratio	SE
SC1 Neighbourhood social trust	-0.025	0.039	0.066 ^a	0.040					2.01349	1.961
SC2 Neighbourhood civic engagement	0.177***	0.04	0.235***	0.045					0.3054	0.36
SC3 Perceived lack of community participation (baseline = No)										
Yes	-0.077	0.075	-0.144 ^a	0.078					0.05851**	0.064
HS1 Perceived priority	0.42***	0.047			0.444***	0.043			4.00363***	1.598
HS2 Perceived pressure (baseline = No)										
Yes	-0.17*	0.067			-0.188***	0.066				
HS3 Incentive (baseline = No)										
Yes	-0.142	0.127			-0.173	0.126			1.2838	1.759
HS4 Perceived support	0.021	0.041			0.048	0.040			1.43573	0.948
D1 Age (baseline = From 20 to 39)										
From 40 to 59			0.192	0.161	0.062	0.154			0.18	0.142
From 60 onwards			0.385*	0.163	0.187	0.157			0.389***	0.143
D2 Gender (baseline = Male)										
Female			0.061	0.074	0.01	0.071			0.089	0.064
									1.10509	1.195

Table 4 (continue)

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Coefficient	SE	Odds ratio	SE
D3										
Community Group (baseline = Residential sub-quarter)										
Residential quarter			-0.059	0.091	-0.001	0.088	-0.007	0.081		
Community COVID group			0.26*	0.131	0.168	0.125	0.162	0.117		
D4										
Location (baseline = Ho Chi Minh)										
Hanoi										
Constant	0.396***	0.122	-0.683***	0.111	-0.388***	0.113	-0.178 ^a	0.106	1.66559	2.372
N	344		344		344		344		360	
R-squared	0.409		0.164		0.272		0.416		0.00699*	0.032
Pseudo R-squared										
Log-likelihood									0.5958	-18,471363

Note. *** p -value ≤ 0.001 ; ** p -value ≤ 0.01 ; * p -value ≤ 0.05 ; ^a p -value ≤ 0.1 . Model 1–4 report results from OLS regression, and Model 5 report results from logistic regression. SE means standard error

From the OLS regression, social capital and hierarchical steering were significant drivers of neighbourhood governance effectiveness. In terms of social capital, neighbourhood civic engagement had significantly positive impacts on neighbourhood governance effectiveness (i.e., $\beta = 0.177$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 1, and $\beta = 0.235$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 3, respectively); however, neighbourhood social trust and perceived lack of community participation had significantly positive and negative impacts on neighbourhood governance effectiveness when control variables were included in Model 3 (i.e., $\beta = 0.066$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.1$, and $\beta = -0.144$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.1$, respectively). In terms of hierarchical steering, perceived priority had significantly positive impacts on neighbourhood governance effectiveness (i.e., $\beta = 0.42$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 1, and $\beta = 0.444$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 4); inversely, perceived pressure had significantly negative impacts on neighbourhood governance effectiveness (i.e., $\beta = -0.17$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$ in Model 1, and $\beta = -0.188$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 4; see Table 4). Simply put, a social worker tended to perceive less effective neighbourhood governance if they perceived a lack of community participation and suffered pressure in COVID-19 responses; inversely, social workers tended to perceive highly effective neighbourhood governance if they perceived neighbourhood social trust and emphasised priority in COVID-19 responses.

From the logistic regression in Model 5, hierarchical steering had significant impacts on neighbourhood governance effectiveness.

Specifically, perceived lack of community participation had a significantly negative impact on neighbourhood governance effectiveness (i.e., odds ratio = 0.05851 and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.01$); inversely, perceived priority had a significant positive impact on neighbourhood governance effectiveness (i.e., odds ratio = 4.00363 and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.01$; see Table 4). In other words, a social worker perceiving a lack of community participation tended to reduce 94.149% for perceived effectiveness of neighbourhood governance, while one with higher perceived priority in COVID-19 responses tended to perceive neighbourhood governance as three times more (i.e., 300%) more effective.

Among control variables, an older group of social workers (i.e., from 60 onwards) reported a higher performance in neighbourhood governance during the pandemic ($\beta = 0.385$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.05$ in Model 2, and $\beta = 0.389$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 4). However, social workers in Hanoi reported a lower performance in neighbourhood governance's pandemic response ($\beta = -0.683$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 2, $\beta = -0.388$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.001$ in Model 3, and $\beta = -0.178$ and $p\text{-value} \leq 0.1$ in Model 4; see Table 4).

DISCUSSION

Comparative Analysis

Generally speaking, neighbourhood social capital and hierarchical steering played important roles in enhancing neighbourhood governance in COVID-19 responses. Hence, this finding, along with those of various previous studies, supports the theory of collaborative governance (Ansell & Torfing,

2022; Cheng et al., 2020; Emerson et al., 2012; Kapucu, 2012; Li et al., 2019; Taniguchi, 2022; Tran, Nguyen, et al., 2020). On the other hand, two groups of community workers tended to perceive the high effectiveness of neighbourhood governance in COVID-19 responses (e.g., seniors over the age of 60 and community COVID groups). In contrast, community workers in Hanoi tended to perceive neighbourhood governance as being less effective in COVID responses.

Neighbourhood civic engagement, participation and trust were recognised as positive drivers of neighbourhood governance. The findings indicate that community workers tended to perceive effective neighbourhood governance when they perceived a sense of neighbourliness among residents in managing the pandemic. This is consistent with previous empirical studies focusing on the role of local and private individuals in governance (Afolabi & Ilesanmi, 2021; Souza & Neto, 2018). During times of crisis, the imposition of strict policies and the utilisation of information systems for real-time data flow requires significant tolerance and understanding from citizens. Despite the diversity of personal perspectives, the establishment of local governance decisions necessitates a collective value system to facilitate timely and unanimous decision-making. It has been observed that the horizontal dynamics at the grassroots level and the hierarchical dynamics at the top converge towards a common goal of pandemic response. This convergence is underpinned by the collaborative governance theory, which

has been discussed in neighbouring China (Cheng et al., 2020) and Thailand (Intawong et al., 2021) but remains under-studied in Vietnam.

The collaborative relationships between citizens and the government benefit the entire community and lay the groundwork for coordination beyond pandemic response, serving as a normative model for city-level governance (Kalla & Metaxas, 2023). In line with the observations of Hartley et al. (2021), this study revealed that frontline workers commend the steering responsibilities of public authority levels. Their direction and policies reflect the collective benefits and align with the country's socialist orientation. However, it should be noted that the policies and practices implemented to control the spread of COVID-19 in Vietnam may not necessarily produce the same results in different political and social contexts. As Hartley et al. (2021) pointed out, there may be instances where individuals are less willing to sacrifice their privacy, regardless of the potential benefits to the overall response strategy.

Concurrently, residential quarters and community COVID group officers recognise the effectiveness of their collaboration network as they perceive the prioritisation, incentives and support from the government during the COVID-19 response (Syasyila et al., 2022; Wimmer, 2020). In line with Kalla and Metaxas's (2023) emphasis on the role of community volunteers in urban resilient governance, this study highlights the evolution of frontline workers' duties to enhance social capital and foster collective acceptance of these policies within the

community. The local government required narrative, spiritual, and intellectual steering to cultivate public opinion and community commitment. This was evident in the practices and performances of frontline workers, which mirrored the coordination found in prior studies (Cheng et al., 2020; Kalla & Metaxas, 2023). In contrast to earlier findings (e.g., Desson et al., 2020; Tran, Nguyen, et al., 2020), perceived pressure impeded neighbourhood governance's management of the health crisis. In other words, community workers tend to perceive neighbourhood collaboration as less effective in responding to COVID-19 if they perceive pressure from the local government. This could potentially have been due to the double-edged sword effect of pressure on their mental and physical well-being. Green and Loualiche (2021) found a correlation between the pressure exerted by the government and the occurrence of layoffs among local frontline workers. Top-down pressure could cause anxiety that compromises their performance and satisfaction with their current tasks (Syasyila et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2021). During the pandemic response, frontline workers diligently worked in their intermediary roles between citizens and local government, thus placing them in a position where they had to respond to the expectations of both parties (van Hulst et al., 2012). Therefore, in contrast to the three positive conducts found from government steering, this experience of working with constraints could have introduced biases in their network evaluation.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to existing research in several ways. First, it extends previous work on collaborative governance by examining its application in neighbourhoods of Vietnamese megacities during the COVID-19 pandemic. While prior Vietnamese studies have explored the roles of public authorities and citizen involvement in successful pandemic responses (Ha et al., 2020; Hartley et al., 2021; Le et al., 2020; Tran, Phan, et al., 2020; Tran, Nguyen, et al. 2020), they have often presented a fragmented view of the underlying mechanisms (Mai & Cuong, 2022). This study addresses this gap by focusing on the multi-sectoral collaboration mechanism, identifying key assets, and highlighting its contribution to overall neighbourhood governance. The findings affirm the presence and efficacy of collaborative governance in Vietnam's megacities, which may inform future administrative theory across Vietnam and other countries.

Second, this study adopts a more nuanced approach to conceptualising and evaluating the effectiveness of collaborative governance. Traditional measures often focus on the implementation of public policies or services (Ha et al., 2020; Nguyen & Phan, 2021). Building upon the work of Liu et al. (2021) and complementing the study of Hartley et al. (2021), we propose a subjective perspective that considers effectiveness as perceived by the collaborators themselves. For them, effective neighbourhood governance is characterised by collaborative attitudes and behaviours among authorities and

citizens, fostered by social capital and the government's hierarchical steering role. This research offers novel insights regarding the assessment of governance effectiveness, particularly in contexts where governance outcomes are long-term or difficult to quantify.

Third, this study provides a novel perspective on the examination of governance during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the perspectives of healthcare professionals and workers have been widely explored (Cheng et al., 2020; Maryati & Azizah, 2022; Tran, Phan, et al., 2020), the views of those facilitating communication and coordination between government and citizens have been largely overlooked. This study is one of the first in Vietnam to comprehensively investigate the perspective of residential quarters and community COVID group officers on COVID-19 governance. Their frontline roles, viewpoints, and positions offer valuable insights into the effectiveness of their collaborative networks in aligning the efforts of all parties and contributing to governance practices.

Practical Implications

The findings of this study have a number of practical implications. The current conceptual model can be employed as a reliable measurement tool for evaluating the effectiveness of collaboration in future neighbourhood governance. Specifically, within the context of two megacities in Vietnam, the provision of neighbourhood social capital and governmental hierarchical steering can enhance the perceived effectiveness of neighbourhood

governance. These findings suggest several courses of action for all stakeholders to enhance their collaboration. Residents, in particular, have the capacity to actively shape, nurture, and leverage the social capital within their neighbourhoods. At the same time, administrators need to continue to demonstrate their commitment and show responsible leadership in steering neighbourhood governance at different levels. This involves actively listening to and valuing the insights of local community workers, whose evaluations of network effectiveness can provide valuable perspectives. While residential quarters and community COVID group officers may be particularly qualified voices in this context, senior neighbours and members of the intelligentsia can also offer insightful feedback on the effectiveness of collaborative networks in which they are actively engaged.

To enhance the efficiency of neighbourhood governance, clearly defining the roles of cooperation among the actors involved is of utmost importance. First, authorities at every level can strengthen trust and cohesion with the people, using the principle of “putting people at the centre.”¹ as the guiding philosophy for all plans and

¹ “Putting people at the centre” means putting the people as the foundation for all achievements of a nation. The 6th National Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party (1986) concluded and proposed the guiding principle: “trust in the people, rely on the people, always value and promote the people's spirit of ownership, respect and listen to their opinions” as the strategic ideology in Vietnam's revolutionary path. It serves both as the goal and the driving force, as well as the key to the success of all guidelines and policies of the Party and State.

actions undertaken locally. Collaborative mechanisms and policies should be designed to be appropriate and effective, simplifying procedures and refining legal documents to ensure consistency and coherence. This will establish a clear legal framework, enabling citizens to contribute their opinions and participate directly in neighbourhood governance activities. Special attention can be given to the organisation, inspection, and supervision processes. Only with thorough inspection and supervision can proper assessments be made, ensuring effectiveness and, most importantly, the timely prevention of violations as soon as they arise.

Additionally, it is essential to regularly organise training courses and workshops on governance and cooperation skills to empower the people to implement and monitor local activities more effectively. This will, in turn, enhance public initiative and responsibility in community governance. Furthermore, propaganda activities should be strengthened to ensure that citizens understand correctly, act appropriately, and engage actively in governance. This approach will foster consensus between the authorities and the people, addressing the legitimate interests and aspirations of the people. Authorities should leverage the method of "leading by example,"² promptly identifying, recognising, and

rewarding exemplary individuals while publicising cases of those excelling in various initiatives. As a result, it will encourage the development of creative ideas in governance and acknowledge innovative ideas that contribute to neighbourhood governance.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the focus of neighbourhood governance, in particular, and governance in Vietnam, in general, has shifted towards processes aimed at addressing the aftermath of natural disasters and epidemics and the stabilisation and improvement of people's livelihoods. Local authorities are also urged to ensure that support is targeted accurately, with the right purposes, and that it is effective, transparent, and generates high social consensus. Community consultation policies should be developed based on regular neighbourhood meetings to understand residents' concerns and opinions on local issues, thereby formulating appropriate policies. The principle of collaborative governance involves power sharing and partnership. To foster transparency, we would suggest the development of a horizontal monitoring channel for recording and reporting on the governance performances of public authorities. With their engagement in public affairs, community workers and residents of neighbourhoods should be able to monitor the actions, priority policies, and committed support of their public administrators.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study contributes to the current understanding of neighbourhood

² "Leading by example" is not only a leadership method of the party but also the most persuasive and effective educational approach. Leading by example involves demonstrating exemplary behaviour in every task, whether large or small, from learning, training, and self-cultivation to actions in practice and relationships with the people.

governance by providing insights from the context of two megacities in Vietnam during the COVID-19 pandemic response. Drawing from the theory of collaborative governance, we examined the experiences of frontline neighbourhood workers and their perception of the effectiveness of neighbourhood governance activities. This subjective evaluation reaffirms the significance of social capital and effective hierarchical steering as important factors for successful collaborative processes. The findings also yield theoretical and practical contributions to the current understanding of collaborative governance and its implications for future effective governance practices.

This study has certain limitations that should be recognised. Firstly, the generalisation of the current findings is limited due to focusing on two specific megacities in Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh City and Hanoi capital. These cities represent the largest and most complex administrative units. While there are overarching administrative systems in place, the governance practices at the ground level are heavily dependent on the unique conditions of each area. The actual relationships, workflows, and social connections vary significantly at local levels, leading to diverse methods and governance processes. Therefore, we call for further studies on different neighbourhood contexts so as to enhance the generalisability of our findings.

Additionally, this study assesses the effectiveness of neighbourhood governance from the subjective perception of collaborative actors, specifically frontline community workers as residential

committees. However, as neighbourhood governance realities differ, the roles, positions, and work of these actors also vary across different neighbourhoods. The selection of appropriate actors for the research is crucial to ensure credibility and unbiased evaluation. We call for further studies to consider the viewpoints and perceptions of other actors involved in the neighbourhood governance network. Furthermore, while this study focuses on neighbourhood governance practices during the COVID-19 pandemic response, examining our conceptual model in the context of normal daily governance activities is important. In turn, the daily collaboration attitudes and protocols of neighbourhood administration can serve as due preparation for timely responses during future emergencies.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The authors did not receive any research funding to conduct this study and prepare the manuscript.

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APPENDIX—ITEMS IN THE VIETNAMESE CONTEXT

Perceived Effectiveness of Neighbourhood Collaboration

NC_ The effectiveness level of coordination work in the community group in the prevention of the area's COVID-19 pandemic (propagating regulations for pandemic prevention, implementing support policies for the people, implementing vaccination).

Neighbourhood Social Capital

SC1_ People in the community group always consent to the party's policies and the state's laws and show the spirit of supporting—and helping each other during the pandemic.

SC2_ People in the community group are always concerned about and actively participate in COVID prevention in the residential sub quarter/quarter (concerned about the number of infected cases, the vaccination status of the people, the implementation of pandemic-prevention policies and measures, participating in the list compilation, taking community samples, and supporting the vaccination work).

SC3_ Whether the steering committee of the community group notices that people lack cooperation with the community group in the area's COVID prevention (cooperation in executing such preventive measures as health declarations, quarantines, and vaccinations).

Government Hierarchical Steering

HS1_ The steering committee of the community group evaluates the priority level of the government, province/city, and local government in the prevention and containment of the spread of COVID-19 in the community (on welfare and care support packages, vaccines).

HS2_ The steering committee of the community group feels 'very pressured' to be supervised and report to the local government on the prevention and containment of COVID-19 in the area.

HS3_ The steering committee of the community group feels 'cared for' by the local government when implementing the prevention and containment of COVID-19 in the area (encouragement, stimulation, physical-mental care).

HS4_ Assess the extent to which the local government has provided comprehensive support for the community group to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 in the community (human and material resources, essential medical support).