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Bigger Provinces, Hidden Gaps: A View of Viet Nam's 63-to-34 Reform Beyond the Averages*

Abstract

Viet Nam's timely reduction of 63 province-level units to 34 renders its number of provinces typical of countries of its size. International evidence, however, shows that savings and development gains are neither automatic nor evenly shared. Reclassifying 2002–2020 household data onto the new map leaves national measures of poverty and inequality unchanged but moves part of measured inequality from between provinces to within them. Administrative poverty rates also reveal large differences among areas now sharing one provincial budget. This essay offers tentative policy suggestions such as keeping poorer places visible, allocating resources according to need, protecting access to benefits and public services, and connecting lagging areas to jobs and markets.

JEL classification

D6, H1, I3, O1, R5

Keywords

administrative consolidation, provincial mergers, decentralization, poverty, inequality, social protection, modifiable areal unit problem, Viet Nam

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1. A bigger map is an opportunity, not an outcome

Since July 2025, a Kon Tum resident whose case still requires a visit to the provincial administration may have to travel farther to Quảng Ngãi. Across the 29 former provincial capitals whose headquarters moved, the center-to-center journey averages 91 kilometers and nearly two hours. From Kon Tum, Phú Yên and Đắk Nông, it exceeds 180 kilometers and approaches four hours (Quang *et al.*, 2025). The numbers capture both the ambition and the challenges of Viet Nam’s recent administrative reform, whereby 52 former province-level units became 23 new jurisdictions and 11 were unchanged (Government Portal of Viet Nam, 2025). About three-quarters of the country’s population lives in the 23 merged provinces.¹

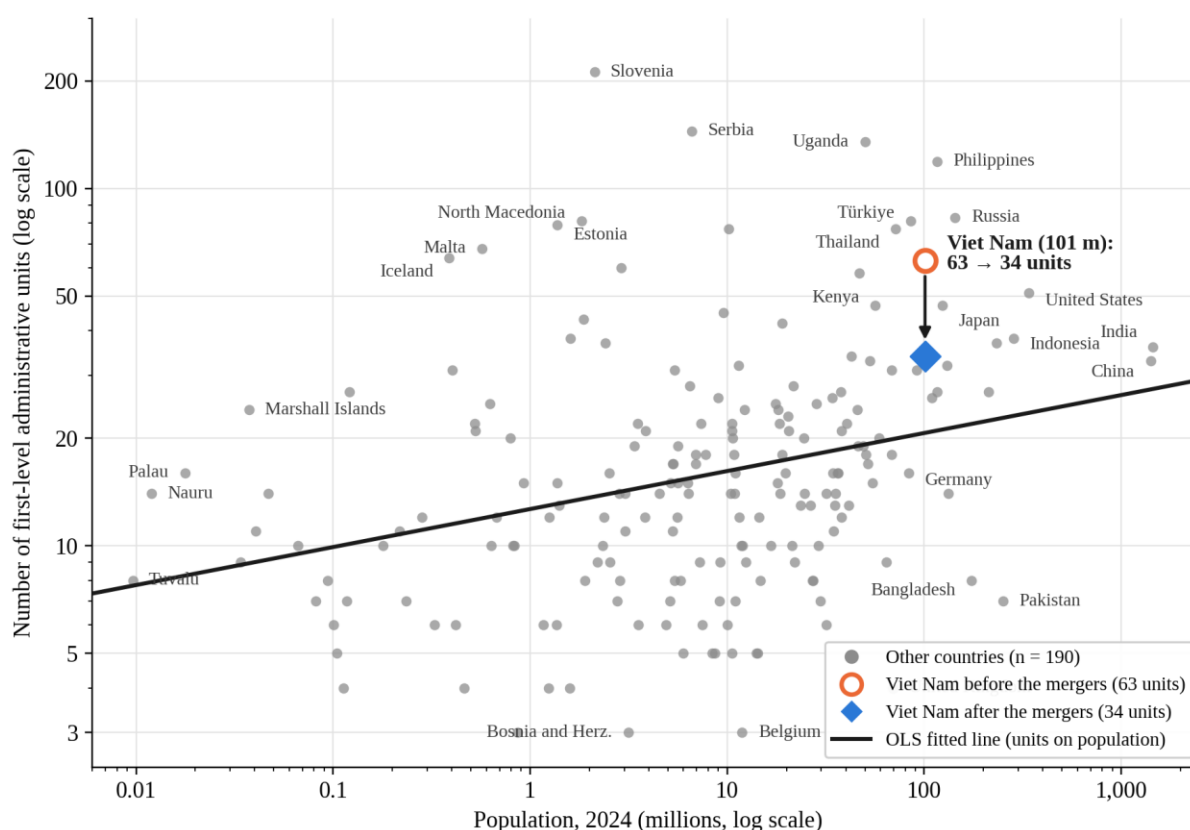
How does the new map compare with the rest of the world? Figure 1 plots the number of first-level administrative units against population for 191 countries, with a line fitted by regressing the number of units on population. The relationship is positive and statistically significant but loose: countries organize their first tier in very different ways, from three regions in Belgium to 212 municipalities in Slovenia. For a country of Viet Nam’s population, the fitted line implies about 21 first-level units. With 63 units, Viet Nam sat far above the line; with 34, it moves close to it. On the number of provinces, then, the reform moves Viet Nam toward the international norm for its size.² What the cross-country picture cannot show is whether fewer and larger provinces will deliver better services and fairer growth.

Part of the answer lies in what came with them. The mergers were not a tidy cartographic exercise: they came with the abolition of the district tier and a shift to two-tier province–commune government. Specifically, all 696 district-level units ceased operation, and commune-level units fell by two-thirds, from 10,035 to 3,321 (National Assembly of Viet Nam, 2025; Quang *et al.*, 2025). Early changes in costs or services will therefore reflect a package of reforms, not the mergers alone. Two questions follow: when does consolidation pay? And how much of Viet Nam’s poverty and inequality does each new province now hold? We attempt to respond to the first with international evidence (Table 1) and to the second by reclassifying two decades of household surveys and by comparing administrative poverty rates for the former provinces within the new ones (Figures 2 and 3).

¹ In total, 63 province-level units were reduced to 34 (see Appendix Table A1). Unless otherwise noted, the estimates shown are authors’ calculation from GSO (2025).

² Among the 22 other countries with 50 to 150 million people, the median is 29 units, or about 3 million people per unit, almost exactly Viet Nam’s new ratio of 2.97 million (see Appendix Table A8).

Figure 1. Number of first-level administrative units and population, 191 countries, with Viet Nam before and after the 2025 mergers



Sources: number of first-level administrative units from the CIA (2025) World Factbook, final edition, summing all first-order unit types listed for each country; population from World Bank (2025), World Development Indicators, 2024. Logarithmic scales. The line is the OLS fit $\ln(\text{units}) = 1.07 + 0.106 \times \ln(\text{population})$, robust standard error 0.023, $R^2 = 0.09$, $N = 191$ sovereign countries; Kiribati, Monaco, Singapore and the Holy See have no first-level units and are excluded. Viet Nam is shown at its 2024 population (101.0 million) with 63 units (before 1 July 2025) and 34 units (after); only the 63-unit point enters the regression. Data and regression details in Appendix Table A8.

The economic case is intuitive but conditional. A larger jurisdiction can spread the fixed costs of headquarters, personnel, and logistics. It can better coordinate infrastructure systems, such as roads and ports, that cross old borders. Yet, size also combines places with different needs. It can put distance between citizens and government, and it can shift investment and voice toward the retained capital. The trade-off between scale and heterogeneity is a starting point for analysis, not a verdict (Oates, 1999). Distance itself has costs: in US states, more isolated capitals are associated with greater corruption, less voter knowledge and lower participation in state elections (Campante & Do, 2014).

Table 1. What provincial consolidation can, and cannot, do

No.	Channel	Potential advantage	Main risk	Illustrative evidence
1	Administration and capacity	Shared overhead, procurement, data and specialists	Transition costs may absorb savings	Netherlands: administrative spending fell; no detectable change in total spending or services
2	Investment and spillovers	Joint infrastructure and environmental planning	Retained capital may capture investment	China: gains where agglomeration and transport links were strong Indonesia: fragmentation weakened infrastructure delivery
3	Firms and labor markets	Fewer regulatory seams; wider labor markets	Borders alone do not integrate rules or infrastructure	China: removing the city–county divide raised growth where links were strong. Viet Nam, Hà Nội 2008: more post-2007 registrants reported waits over one month
4	Public services	Pooled finance and expertise	Disruption, travel, fewer access points	Israel: spending fell about 9%; no detected service decline. Denmark: school effectiveness unchanged
5	Citizen experience	Faster one-stop and digital services	Lost local access lowers satisfaction	Denmark: larger size modestly reduced satisfaction. Viet Nam 2019–2021 (lower-tier consolidation): savings, disrupted documents, unplaced staff. Viet Nam 2026: 4.1/5 overall, with land and digital gaps
6	Fiscal equalization	Potential to pool a wider revenue base	Allocation may favor influential centers; pre-merger spending rush	Finland: other spending outweighed administrative savings; many countries show pre-merger spending increases
7	Voice and accountability	Clearer responsibility; professional administration	Smaller merging units lose seats, jobs and identity	Finland: public-sector jobs shifted toward better-represented areas. Denmark: political efficacy fell
8	Poverty and spatial equity	Redistribution across a wider area	Averages hide poor places and groups	Norway: surrounding-area students gained education and later earnings. Viet Nam: merging-province gaps in Figure 3
9	Social protection for vulnerable groups	Pooled budgets can fund uniform benefit floors	Application barriers exclude eligible people	United States: office closures cut new disability recipients by 16%, hitting people with moderately severe and low education hardest.

Sources by row: (1) Allers & Geertsema (2016); (2)–(3) Tang & Hewings (2017), Malesky (2009b), Lewis (2017); (4) Reingewertz (2012), Blom-Hansen *et al.* (2021); (5) Hansen (2015), National Assembly Standing Committee (2022), MDRI, HCMA, & UNDP (2026); (6) Moisio & Uusitalo (2013), Gendźwiłł *et al.* (2021); (7) Harjunen *et al.* (2021), Lassen & Serritzlew (2011); (8) Sandsør *et al.* (2022); (9) Deshpande & Li (2019). Country results illustrate mechanisms, not predictions for Viet Nam. Reviews: Gendźwiłł *et al.* (2021), Zheng *et al.* (2026). Most of these studies concern municipalities, not province-level units. Their lessons transfer only as far as functions, fiscal rules and state capacity are comparable.

Table 1 summarizes these trade-offs channel by channel, with illustrative evidence. In particular, Israel’s forced 2003 mergers cut municipal spending by about 9% with no detected fall

in services (Reingewertz, 2012). In the Netherlands and Finland, administrative spending fell but total spending did not (Allers & Geertsema, 2016; Moisio & Uusitalo, 2013). Denmark's 2007 reform left total policy spending and school effectiveness unchanged and also lowered citizens' political efficacy and satisfaction (Blom-Hansen *et al.*, 2016, 2021; Hansen, 2015; Lassen & Serritzlew, 2011).

The wider literature points the same way. Two systematic reviews support a narrow, not general, efficiency case. Across 31 quasi-experimental studies in 14 countries, savings concentrate in administration; total spending and service gains are inconsistent, and pre-merger spending often rises (Gendźwiłł *et al.*, 2021). A newer review adds the distributional point: jurisdiction-wide averages emphasize efficiency, while studies of the former municipalities inside merged ones reveal resource shifts and lost representation (Zheng *et al.*, 2026).

Viet Nam's own history makes the trade-off concrete. Postwar consolidation of 72 inherited units left 38 province-level units in 1976; successive splits then raised the count to more than 60 from 1997 onward (Chu, 2015; National Archives Center I, 2025).³ By 2004, Viet Nam had created 24 new provinces since 1990; no country had created more over that period (Malesky, 2009a). The 1996 wave was also a political strategy: new provinces meant new leaderships whose votes shifted the balance at the center. Interestingly, some of the 2025 mergers broadly recreate earlier provinces.⁴ The precedent makes today's scale less novel; it does not predict performance under modern transport, digital systems and institutions.

With district government abolished, moving routine functions to communes may reduce travel, but complex cases retained at provincial level face longer journeys and the loss of an intermediate coordinator. Social protection is exposed to both changes: provinces finance social assistance and may top up the national base, and communes now handle the applications and payments that districts used to (Dang & Do, 2026; Tuổi Trẻ, 2025). An early 2009 pilot that abolished elected district councils but not district administrations was found to improve center-prioritized transport, health and communications, but not citizen-prioritized education, agricultural extension or household-business support (Malesky *et al.*, 2014).

Hà Nội's 2008 expansion, which absorbed Hà Tây province and Mê Linh district, offers another case study. In a small, matched comparison, 42% of Mê Linh firms registered after 2007 waited over a month to become fully legal, against 19% in Vĩnh Phúc province. Mê Linh firms

³ Splits from the late 1980s raised the number of provinces to 61 in 1997 and 64 in 2004. Hà Tây's absorption into Hà Nội in 2008 brought it to 63.

⁴ Comparing the 1976 and 2025 maps, eight of the 23 mergers broadly recreate earlier provincial footprints (Appendix Table A1). Hà Tuyên, Bắc Thái, Hà Bắc, Hà Nam Ninh and Minh Hải are among them.

also rated provincial proactivity markedly lower. Yet one year after annexation, matched samples of 50 firms in each area did not differ significantly in profitability, increased investment, net hiring or expansion plans (Malesky, 2009b). The enlarged city also reviewed more than 700 inherited projects and stopped some that conflicted with flood management. Approval delays and overloaded planning capacity followed (Labbé & Musil, 2011; Leducq & Scarwell, 2018).

2. When the map changes, the statistics change too

Our retrospective exercise asks a deliberately narrow question. The indicators in Dang *et al.* (2025) come from ten rounds of the Vietnam Household Living Standards Survey (VHLSS) for 2002–2020. What would they look like if the same households had always been reported through today’s 34-unit map? It does not estimate how merged governments, firms or families would have behaved. It is just a geographic reclassification, a demonstration of what geographers call the modifiable areal unit problem: redraw the boundaries and the statistics move with them.

By construction, the national story does not change. Using the national poverty line, poverty fell from 28.8% in 2002 to 4.7% in 2020. National Gini and total Theil inequality are identical under either map, because the people and their weights are identical. What changes is the split of inequality into its within-province and between-province components. Merging does not reduce inequality among households; it mechanically shifts part of the between-province component inside the enlarged provinces.⁵

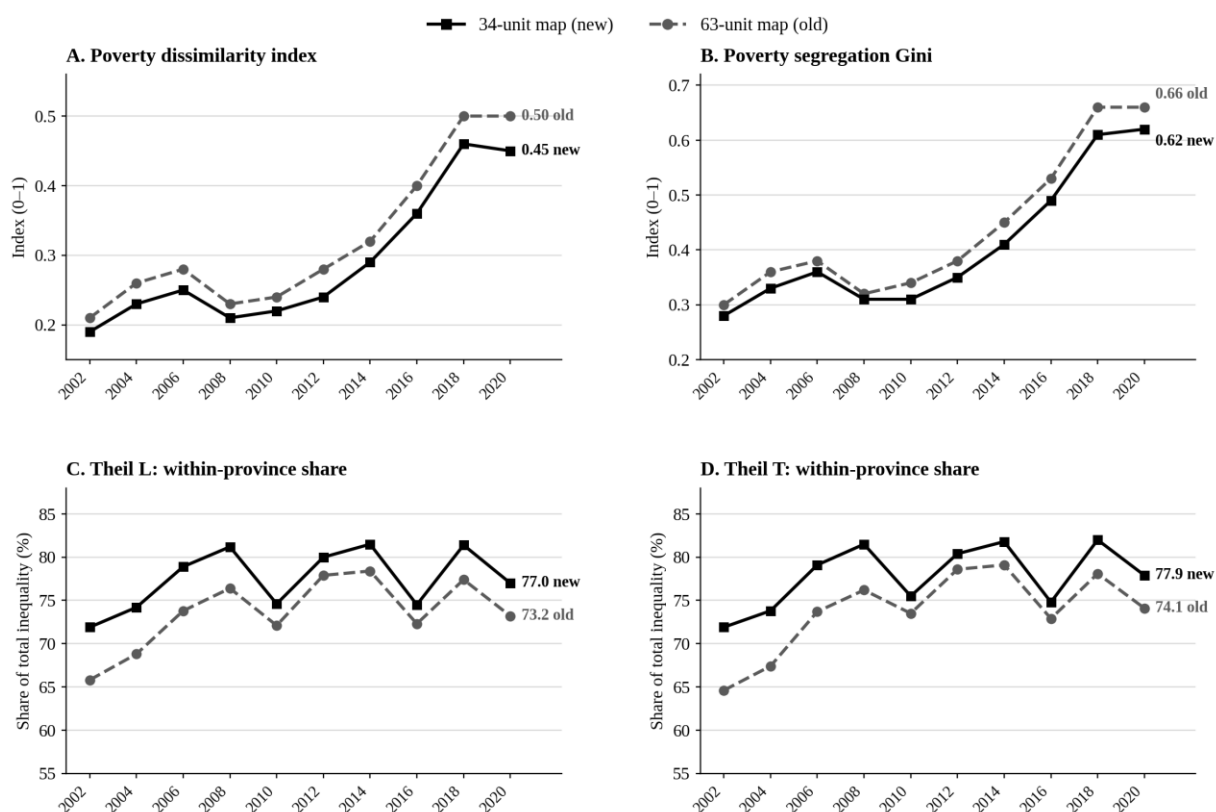
That is exactly why enlarged provinces’ averages can become more similar while they become more diverse inside. Under 63 units, 73.2% of Theil-L inequality in 2020 was within provinces. Under 34 units, the corresponding share is 77.0%. A similar increase holds for the Theil-T measure (Appendix Table A2). People did not become more unequal when a boundary moved. Some inequality formerly counted between two former provinces is simply relabeled as inequality within their new one. The 34-unit within share exceeds the 63-unit share by about 2 to 7 percentage points in every round from 2002 to 2020 (Figure 2, Panels C and D; Appendix Table A3).

Figure 2 also shows the two poverty-segregation indices of Dang *et al.* (2025), which measure how unevenly the poor are spread across provinces (Appendix Table A4). The dissimilarity index falls in every year after aggregation, from 0.50 to 0.45 in 2020, because offsetting deviations inside a new province cancel. The segregation Gini can only fall or stay equal when units are merged. It falls in every year, from 0.66 to 0.62 in 2020. Both indices double or

⁵ Elbers *et al.* (2008) show that a finer unit partition has at least the same between-unit inequality as the old, more aggregated units.

more between 2002 and 2020 under either map: poverty became far more concentrated as it fell. Again, coarser boundaries only move part of the measured concentration from between provinces to inside them.

Figure 2. Poverty concentration and within-province inequality under the old and new provincial maps, 2002–2020

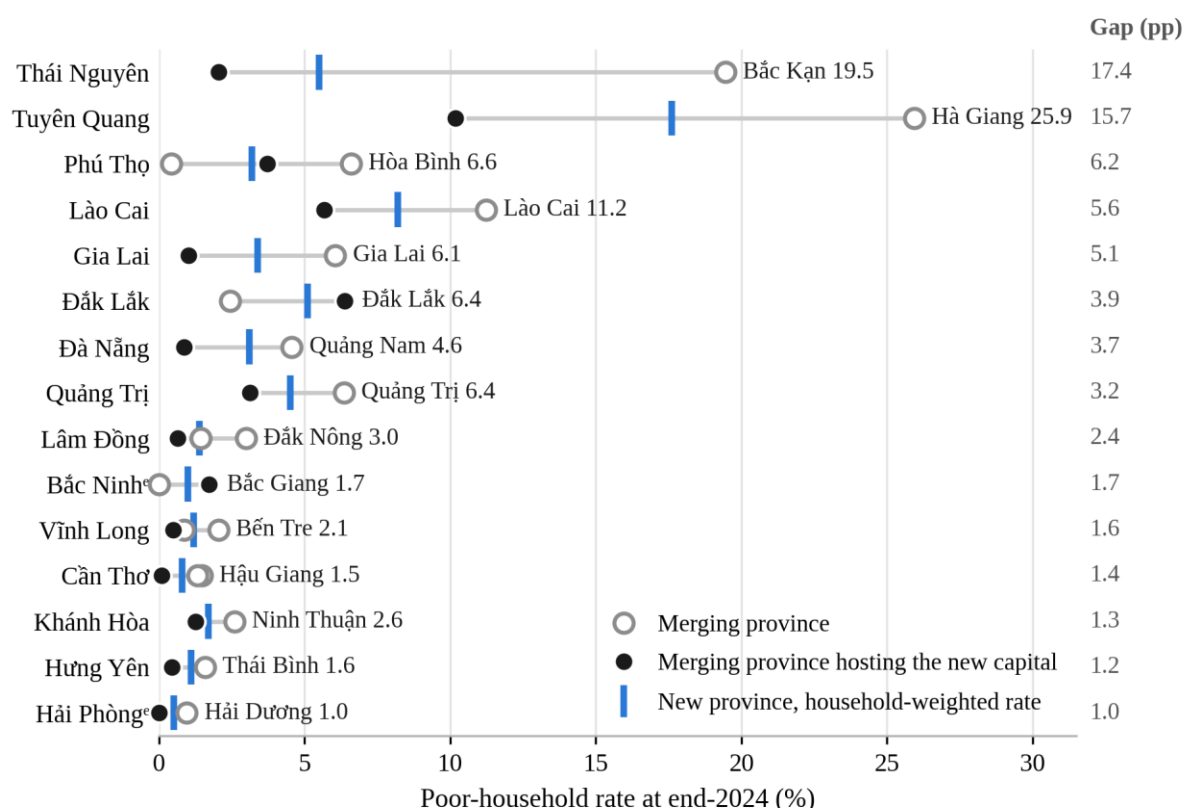


Sources: Dang *et al.* (2025), Tables 2–3, except the 2020 63-unit segregation Gini, which is re-estimated (see the Table A4 note), and our recomputation on the 34-unit map (Appendix Tables A3 and A4). Black: new 34-unit map; gray dashed: old 63-unit map. Panels A–B show how unevenly poverty is distributed across provinces; C–D show the share of household inequality within provincial borders.

Further zooming in on the provinces, Figure 3 plots, merger by merger, the end-2024 poor-household rates of the merging provinces from MOLISA’s poverty review on the 63-unit map, together with the new province’s household-weighted rate. It shows the 15 mergers in which the poorest and the least-poor merging provinces differ by at least one percentage point; Appendix Table A5 lists all 23. Although these administrative rates are not comparable with the VHLSS estimates above, they show what a single provincial average hides. Bắc Kạn, where one household in five was poor, now sits inside a Thái Nguyên whose average is more than three times lower at 5.5%. Hà Giang’s 25.9% becomes part of a 17.6% Tuyên Quang. Among the 20 mergers in which

every merging province reports a positive rate, 13 have at least a twofold gap between the poorest and the least-poor one. Six have at least a fivefold gap. Three more mergers pair a positive rate with a recorded zero (Appendix Table A5). Such reclassification hides gaps rather than closing them: former Bắc Kạn disappears from province rankings, and Lào Cai keeps its name while its former 11.2% rate is replaced by the larger province's lower figure of 8.2%.

Figure 3. Poverty inside the merged provinces: end-2024 poor-household rates of the merging provinces and of the new province, for the 15 mergers with gaps of at least one percentage point



Sources: MOLISA (2025), end-2024 review under the 2022–2025 multidimensional standard; crosswalk in Appendix Table A1; all 23 mergers, with poor-household counts and rate ratios, in Appendix Table A5. Left labels identify new provinces. Hollow circles: merging provinces; filled circle: the merging province that hosts the new province's political-administrative center; vertical bar: the new province's household-weighted rate. Each row is labeled with its poorest merging province and rate. Rows are ordered by the gap between the highest and lowest merging-province rates (right-hand column, percentage points). The eight mergers with gaps of 0.6 points or less (An Giang, Cà Mau, Đồng Nai, Đồng Tháp, Hồ Chí Minh City, Ninh Bình, Quảng Ngãi, Tây Ninh) are omitted. *: household-weighted rate with estimated denominators for merging provinces reporting a zero rate (see the Appendix Table A5 note). Not comparable with the VHLSS-based estimates in Figure 2.

Whatever the map, regression analysis points to a stable story on the factors associated with provincial poverty. The association between log expenditure and the poverty headcount

moves only from -0.261 under 63 units to -0.242 under 34 (Appendix Table A6). Expenditure stays associated with lower poverty gap and severity, ethnic-minority concentration with higher poverty on all three measures, and wage and nonfarm income shares with lower headcount poverty. The point estimates remain similar, but the 34-unit models have wider standard errors. That is consistent with lower precision after aggregation and fewer clusters; loss of significance alone does not show that an association disappeared or changed.

3. Viewing the reform inside the new provinces

The new map moves Viet Nam toward the international norm for its size and has the potential to improve welfare and reduce inefficiencies. But it results in increased (measured) within-province inequality, with some wide gaps for between the poorest and the least-poor one for merging provinces. Provincial averages now conceal some gaps that were previously visible between provinces. This can change where disparities must be addressed. Our reclassification most directly supports keeping those places visible and allocating resources according to need. International and Vietnamese evidence also supports protecting service access and connecting poorer areas to opportunity.

We next offer some tentative policy suggestions and ideas for future research. They are based on a best-practices evidence base (including the findings discussed above) rather than estimates of the mergers' causal effects. With poverty in the low single digits, policy attention is also turning to vulnerable groups, to social protection against shocks that push households back into poverty, and to longer-term investments in skills (Dang & Do, 2026). The suggestions therefore cover social protection alongside poverty. We propose four priorities, with progress tracked through the public scorecard in Table A7.

A. Keep poorer places visible

It is useful to keep permanent geographic identifiers for every commune, former district and former province, and report poverty, inequality, investment and service-access indicators by former province. Viet Nam has built census-based poverty maps down to the commune before (Lanjouw *et al.*, 2017). Small-area estimates with stated uncertainty are the realistic tool, since annual surveys cannot be precise at tiny geographies. Similarly, it is useful to preserve the former provinces in the VHLSS and in the Provincial Governance and Public Administration Performance Index (PAPI) for monitoring.

Ethnicity and geography overlap: in 2020, ethnic minorities were 15% of the population but 79% of the remaining poor at the lower-middle-income line (World Bank, 2022). Most of the

widest gaps in Figure 3 separate upland from lowland merging provinces. It is useful to keep close track of ethnic minorities' welfare in both the old and new province setup.

B. Equalize resources and protect access

Central equalization now runs across 34 units, and the gap between merging provinces has become an allocation decision inside each new province. That decision should follow a published internal formula based on fiscal capacity, population, poverty, remoteness, ethnic-minority concentration and service costs. A temporary no-cliff rule should ensure that no commune loses eligibility solely because its new province's average poverty is lower. Finance and staff should follow the district functions that communes and provinces inherited. On present evidence, minimum standards for health, education, connectivity and administrative access are safer than expecting scale to deliver them.

The reviews find the most consistent savings in administration; evidence of gains in schools and other frontline services is mixed (Gendźwiłł *et al.*, 2021). Finland shows the risk: after its mergers, public-sector jobs shifted toward places with stronger post-merger representation (Harjunen *et al.*, 2021). It is thus useful to keep one-stop shops and satellite offices in former capitals, former district centers and remote communes until travel-time evidence supports consolidation. Any verified recurring administrative savings should be reinvested in equalization and access.

Social protection needs the same care. The transition has already tested the new delivery chain. In the first months of two-tier government, some older people waited more than a month for the new social retirement allowance while seals, budgets and files changed hands (Tuổi Trẻ, 2025). It is good advice to keep assessment and payment at the commune, so that older people, persons with disabilities and pregnant women are not sent to a more distant provincial center, and maintain one beneficiary registry tagged by former province. Crowding matters as much as distance.⁶ Viet Nam's communes now serve three times as many people on average, so staffing should follow caseloads.

C. Make services digital end to end, but not digital only

Digital services can offset distance and cut paperwork, but only for those who can use them. In early 2026, only 22% of citizens surveyed had used the National Public Service Portal since the reform. Use was 41% in the highest income group, 7% in the lowest, and 6% among

⁶ In the United States, closing the offices that help people file disability claims cut the number of recipients by 16%, with the largest effects among applicants with moderately severe conditions and low education, and congestion at the remaining offices mattered more than travel (Deshpande & Li, 2019).

persons with disabilities. Satisfaction with commune administration averaged 4.1 out of 5. On-time completion was 94% overall but only about 71% for land certificates (MDRI, HCMA, & UNDP, 2026). That is a post-reform snapshot, not a trend, but it shows where the gaps are.

Two design principles follow. Lead with interoperability and inclusion (World Bank, 2021). Connect the portal, VNeID, provincial systems and commune centers such that people submit information only once, and keep assisted and in-person access for those who cannot go digital. Use comparable 2024 PAPI indicators as context where definitions align, and repeat the same compact satisfaction module annually from 2026. Artificial intelligence (AI) could belong here as a short, low-risk pilot: Vietnamese-language assistants for high-volume, low-stakes procedures, with human review and error audits.

D. Integrate markets and support real convergence

The strongest case for larger provinces is coordinated transport, land use and labor markets that connect poorer places to opportunity. The convergence record so far is mixed. Roughly half of the former provinces converged toward Hồ Chí Minh City’s income level (Bentzen & Tung, 2021). On a retrospective 34-unit map for 2010–2023, however, Vu *et al.* (2026) find both divergence and non-convergence in GDP per capita: mountainous and highland Đắk Lắk, Sơn La and Điện Biên are nonconvergent. At the same time, China’s city–county mergers were associated with growth gains that varied with local conditions, with improved transport and agglomeration among the possible mechanisms. (Tang & Hewings, 2017). Metropolis–hinterland pairings such as Hải Phòng with Hải Dương or Đà Nẵng with Quảng Nam are therefore promising candidates, not proof, and remote pairings can also create highland–coastal corridors.

Success is not a count of offices removed or a new province-wide figure for gross regional domestic product. It is lower service cost without worse access, higher citizen satisfaction and faster catch-up in lagging former provinces.⁷ More broadly, better understanding the costs and benefits of the mergers requires more research, with the 11 unchanged provinces offering a potential comparison group. Because district abolition was nationwide, its effect is harder to separate. Tracking, inside each merged province, the former provinces that lost their capital against the one that kept it will show whether gaps narrow.

⁷ For example, two recently reported fiscal figures may not be exactly comparable. For 2025, the State Treasury reported VND 163.482 trillion paid to 117,073 beneficiaries under Decree 178 (Vietnam State Treasury, 2026). The Ministry of Finance estimated more than VND 11 trillion in salary and operating savings from the wider reorganization (Tiền Phong, 2026). The figures differ in timing, accounting and scope, and neither isolates province mergers. A merger-specific ledger should therefore separate transition costs, recurring savings and comparable service outputs.

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Appendix A. Data, extended results and crosswalk

Data and method. All comparisons use the province-level indicators reported in Dang *et al.* (2025), built from small-area estimation using ten rounds of the VHLSS (2002–2020) with survey weights, and the same indicators recomputed on the 34-unit map through the crosswalk in Table A1. Poverty uses the national expenditure poverty line and the headcount, gap and severity measures. Inequality is measured by the Gini coefficient and by the Theil L and Theil T indices, decomposed into within- and between-province components (Elbers *et al.*, 2008).

The dissimilarity index equals one-half the sum across provinces of the absolute difference between each province’s share of the poor and its share of population. The segregation Gini equals twice the area between the segregation curve and the diagonal. Regressions are province- and year-fixed-effects models with standard errors clustered by province. With 34 clusters, significance stars should be read with the small number of clusters in mind, and stars from separate regressions do not test equality across maps.

Figure 1 uses the number of first-order administrative units listed for each country in the final edition of the CIA World Factbook, summing all unit types the source lists, and 2024 population from the World Development Indicators; Appendix Table A8 lists the data and the regression results. Figure 3 and Table A5 combine the end-2024 poor-household rates of the merging provinces using household denominators implied by the published rates and poor-household counts. The exercise describes how historical indicators change with geography. It does not estimate the effect of the 2025 mergers or of the abolition of district government.

Table A1 provides the crosswalk between the 63 former and 34 current province-level units. Tables A2, A3, A4, and A6 present the province-level indicators for 63 provinces reported in Dang *et al.* (2025) and the reclassification results for the new 34 provinces. Table A7 provides a suggested public score card to monitor the outcomes with the merging provinces.

Table A1. Linkage between the 63 former and 34 current province-level units

No.	Current unit	Former unit(s)	Status
1	Tuyên Quang	Hà Giang; Tuyên Quang	Merged (2→1)
2	Lào Cai	Yên Bái; Lào Cai	Merged (2→1)
3	Thái Nguyên	Bắc Kạn; Thái Nguyên	Merged (2→1)
4	Phú Thọ	Vĩnh Phúc; Hòa Bình; Phú Thọ	Merged (3→1)
5	Bắc Ninh	Bắc Giang; Bắc Ninh	Merged (2→1)
6	Hưng Yên	Thái Bình; Hưng Yên	Merged (2→1)
7	Hải Phòng (city)	Hải Phòng (city); Hải Dương	Merged (2→1)
8	Ninh Bình	Hà Nam; Nam Định; Ninh Bình	Merged (3→1)
9	Quảng Trị	Quảng Bình; Quảng Trị	Merged (2→1)
10	Đà Nẵng (city)	Đà Nẵng (city); Quảng Nam	Merged (2→1)
11	Quảng Ngãi	Kon Tum; Quảng Ngãi	Merged (2→1)
12	Gia Lai	Bình Định; Gia Lai	Merged (2→1)
13	Khánh Hòa	Ninh Thuận; Khánh Hòa	Merged (2→1)
14	Lâm Đồng	Đắk Nông; Bình Thuận; Lâm Đồng	Merged (3→1)
15	Đắk Lắk	Phú Yên; Đắk Lắk	Merged (2→1)
16	Hồ Chí Minh (city)	Hồ Chí Minh (city); Bà Rịa - Vũng Tàu; Bình Dương	Merged (3→1)
17	Đồng Nai	Bình Phước; Đồng Nai	Merged (2→1)

No.	Current unit	Former unit(s)	Status
18	Tây Ninh	Long An; Tây Ninh	Merged (2→1)
19	Cần Thơ (city)	Cần Thơ (city); Sóc Trăng; Hậu Giang	Merged (3→1)
20	Vĩnh Long	Bến Tre; Trà Vinh; Vĩnh Long	Merged (3→1)
21	Đồng Tháp	Tiền Giang; Đồng Tháp	Merged (2→1)
22	Cà Mau	Bạc Liêu; Cà Mau	Merged (2→1)
23	An Giang	Kiên Giang; An Giang	Merged (2→1)
24	Cao Bằng	Cao Bằng	Unchanged
25	Điện Biên	Điện Biên	Unchanged
26	Hà Tĩnh	Hà Tĩnh	Unchanged
27	Lai Châu	Lai Châu	Unchanged
28	Lạng Sơn	Lạng Sơn	Unchanged
29	Nghệ An	Nghệ An	Unchanged
30	Quảng Ninh	Quảng Ninh	Unchanged
31	Sơn La	Sơn La	Unchanged
32	Thanh Hóa	Thanh Hóa	Unchanged
33	Hà Nội (city)	Hà Nội (city)	Unchanged
34	Huế (city)	Huế (city)	Unchanged

Source: National Assembly Resolution 202/2025/QH15, as reproduced by the Government Portal of Viet Nam (2025). “City” identifies a centrally governed municipality. The resolution took effect on 12 June 2025; governments of the newly formed units began operating on 1 July 2025. The heavy rule separates the 23 merged provinces from the 11 unchanged ones. Earlier footprints broadly recreated by eight mergers (authors’ territorial comparison, not an official classification): Tuyên Quang (Hà Tuyên, divided 1991); Lào Cai (Hoàng Liên Sơn, 1991; near-exact, as Than Uyên district later moved to Lai Châu); Thái Nguyên (Bắc Thái, 1997); Bắc Ninh (Hà Bắc, 1997); Ninh Bình (Hà Nam Ninh, 1991); Đà Nẵng (Quảng Nam–Đà Nẵng, 1997); Cần Thơ (the former Hậu Giang, 1991); Cà Mau (Minh Hải, 1997). Division dates follow the National Archives Center I (2025) chronology; the 1997 divisions were enacted by a 1996 National Assembly resolution.

Table A2. Selected 63-unit and 34-unit results

Indicator or preferred model	63-unit map	34-unit map	Interpretation
Theil L: within share, 2020	73.2%	77.0%	+3.8 points; former between-province inequality is relabeled within the merged province
Theil T: within share, 2020	74.1%	77.9%	+3.8 points; same mechanical reclassification
Poverty dissimilarity, 2020	0.50	0.45	Lower under coarser geography; not a welfare improvement
Headcount: log expenditure	−0.261*** (0.054)	−0.242*** (0.075)	Stable negative association in preferred province and year fixed-effects models
Poverty gap: Gini	0.136** (0.055)	0.151 (0.117)	Similar point estimate, wider uncertainty, no longer significant
Ethnic-minority share	Positive***	Positive***	Strong positive poverty correlate under both geographies
Province-years / clusters	630 / 63	340 / 34	Less statistical power; stars are not tests of differences across maps

Sources: Dang *et al.* (2025), Tables 2–4, and the 34-unit recomputation (Tables A3, A4 and A6). Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. The 34-unit exercise reclassifies the same historical data; it is not a merger treatment effect.

Table A3. Within-province shares of total Theil inequality (%)

Year	Theil L: 63	Theil L: 34	Theil T: 63	Theil T: 34
2002	65.8	71.9	64.6	71.9
2004	68.8	74.2	67.4	73.8
2006	73.8	78.9	73.7	79.1
2008	76.4	81.2	76.2	81.5
2010	72.1	74.6	73.5	75.5
2012	77.9	80.0	78.6	80.4
2014	78.4	81.5	79.1	81.8
2016	72.3	74.5	72.9	74.8
2018	77.4	81.4	78.1	82.0
2020	73.2	77.0	74.1	77.9

Sources: Dang *et al.* (2025), Table 2, for the 63-unit series; our recomputation for the 34-unit series.

Table A4. Poverty-segregation indices under both maps, 2002–2020

Year	D: 63	D: 34	Change in D	Gini: 63	Gini: 34
2002	0.21	0.19	−0.02	0.30	0.28
2004	0.26	0.23	−0.03	0.36	0.33
2006	0.28	0.25	−0.03	0.38	0.36
2008	0.23	0.21	−0.02	0.32	0.31
2010	0.24	0.22	−0.02	0.34	0.31
2012	0.28	0.24	−0.04	0.38	0.35
2014	0.32	0.29	−0.03	0.45	0.41
2016	0.40	0.36	−0.04	0.53	0.49
2018	0.50	0.46	−0.04	0.66	0.61
2020	0.50	0.45	−0.05	0.66	0.62

D = dissimilarity index. Change is $D(34) - D(63)$. Sources: Dang *et al.* (2025), Table 3, for the 63-unit series, except for the 2020 Gini, which is re-estimated on the same data as 0.659; our recomputation for the 34-unit series.

Table A5. End-2024 poor-household rates of the 23 merged provinces and their merging provinces

New province	Merging provinces: poor-household rate, % (poor households)	Household-weighted rate, %	Gap (pp)	Rate ratio
Thái Nguyên	Bắc Kạn (19.5; 16,123); Thái Nguyên† (2.0; 6,938)	5.5	17.4	9.54
Tuyên Quang	Hà Giang (25.9; 49,760); Tuyên Quang† (10.2; 21,895)	17.6	15.7	2.54
Phú Thọ	Hòa Bình (6.6; 14,573); Phú Thọ† (3.7; 15,983); Vĩnh Phúc (0.4; 1,491)	3.2	6.2	15.33
Lào Cai	Lào Cai (11.2; 20,411); Yên Bái† (5.7; 12,575)	8.2	5.6	1.98
Gia Lai	Gia Lai (6.1; 23,852); Bình Định† (1.0; 4,517)	3.4	5.1	6.00
Đắk Lắk	Đắk Lắk† (6.4; 34,434); Phú Yên (2.4; 6,483)	5.1	3.9	2.61
Đà Nẵng	Quảng Nam (4.6; 20,272); Đà Nẵng† (0.9; 2,599)	3.1	3.7	5.30
Quảng Trị	Quảng Trị (6.4; 11,643); Quảng Bình† (3.1; 8,162)	4.5	3.2	2.03
Lâm Đồng	Đắk Nông (3.0; 5,163); Bình Thuận (1.4; 4,850); Lâm Đồng† (0.6; 2,324)	1.4	2.4	4.67
Bắc Ninh	Bắc Giang† (1.7; 8,308); Bắc Ninh (0.0; 0)	1.0 ^e	1.7	n.d.

New province	Merging provinces: poor-household rate, % (poor households)	Household-weighted rate, %	Gap (pp)	Rate ratio
Vĩnh Long	Bến Tre (2.1; 8,298); Trà Vinh (0.9; 2,493); Vĩnh Long† (0.5; 1,458)	1.2	1.6	4.18
Cần Thơ	Hậu Giang (1.5; 2,965); Sóc Trăng (1.3; 4,430); Cần Thơ† (0.1; 350)	0.8	1.4	16.33
Khánh Hòa	Ninh Thuận (2.6; 4,971); Khánh Hòa† (1.3; 4,348)	1.7	1.3	2.06
Hưng Yên	Thái Bình (1.6; 10,384); Hưng Yên† (0.4; 1,794)	1.1	1.2	3.61
Hải Phòng	Hải Dương (1.0; 6,287); Hải Phòng† (0.0; 0)	0.5 ^e	1.0	n.d.
Ninh Bình	Hà Nam (1.5; 4,321); Ninh Bình† (1.5; 4,720); Nam Định (1.0; 6,131)	1.2	0.6	1.59
An Giang	An Giang (1.5; 8,033); Kiên Giang† (1.0; 4,703)	1.3	0.5	1.54
Tây Ninh	Long An† (0.6; 2,692); Tây Ninh (0.1; 335)	0.4	0.5	5.60
Hồ Chí Minh City	Bình Dương (0.3; 1,250); Bà Rịa - Vũng Tàu (0.0; 0); Hồ Chí Minh City† (0.0; 0)	0.0 ^e	0.3	n.d.
Đồng Tháp	Đồng Tháp (1.1; 4,823); Tiền Giang† (0.8; 4,035)	0.9	0.3	1.37
Cà Mau	Cà Mau† (0.9; 2,890); Bạc Liêu (0.7; 1,581)	0.8	0.3	1.36
Đồng Nai	Đồng Nai† (0.3; 2,317); Bình Phước (0.2; 583)	0.2	0.1	1.30
Quảng Ngãi	Kon Tum (4.3; 6,557); Quảng Ngãi† (4.3; 16,368)	4.3	0.1	1.01

Sources: MOLISA (2025), end-2024 review under the 2022–2025 multidimensional standard; crosswalk in Table A1. Rows are ordered by the gap between the highest and lowest merging-province rates. † marks the merging province that hosts the new province’s political-administrative center. Household-weighted rates divide the sum of poor households by the sum of household denominators implied by each merging province’s published rate and count. ^e Estimated: for a merging province reporting a zero poor-household rate, the denominator is inferred from its near-poor rate (Bắc Ninh, Hải Phòng) or, where that rate is also zero, approximated from population at the national average household size (Hồ Chí Minh City and Bà Rịa - Vũng Tàu; GSO, 2025). Gaps and ratios use unrounded rates, and ratios are shown to two decimals; “n.d.” marks a ratio undefined because the least-poor merging province reports zero. Among the 20 mergers in which every merging province reports a positive rate, 13 have a rate ratio of at least two and six of at least five.

Table A6. Selected coefficients from preferred province- and year-fixed-effects models

Outcome: coefficient	63-unit map	34-unit map	Reading
Headcount: log expenditure	−0.261*** (0.054)	−0.242*** (0.075)	Stable negative association
Headcount: Gini	−0.125 (0.166)	−0.054 (0.257)	Insignificant under both maps
Headcount: ethnic-minority share	0.001*** (0.000)	0.001*** (0.000)	Positive under both maps
Headcount: wage income share	−0.310*** (0.106)	−0.418*** (0.128)	Negative under both maps
Headcount: nonfarm income share	−0.273*** (0.102)	−0.329** (0.145)	Negative under both maps
Poverty gap: log expenditure	−0.099*** (0.015)	−0.112*** (0.023)	Negative under both maps
Poverty gap: Gini	0.136** (0.055)	0.151 (0.117)	Similar estimate; wider uncertainty
Poverty gap: ethnic-minority share	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	Positive under both maps; rounds to zero at three decimals
Severity: log expenditure	−0.047*** (0.009)	−0.057*** (0.014)	Negative under both maps
Severity: Gini	0.066* (0.037)	0.078 (0.084)	Similar estimate; wider uncertainty
Severity: ethnic-minority share	0.000*** (0.000)	0.000*** (0.000)	Positive under both maps; rounds to zero at three decimals
Province-years	630	340	Ten rounds in both panels
Province clusters	63	34	Small-cluster robustness advised

Sources: Dang *et al.* (2025), Table 4, preferred Models 3, 6 and 9, and the corresponding 34-unit models. Clustered standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Coefficients are associations, not causal merger effects; stars from separate regressions do not test equality across maps.

Table A7. Public scorecard for merger implementation and distribution, by former province

Reporting unit: one sheet per current province. Current province: _____ Reporting period: _____

Former provinces: A _____ B _____ C _____ (if applicable)

Enter each former-province result as baseline (B) → latest (L), with the absolute change (Δ). Use 2024 or the last full pre-reform year as the baseline.

No.	Indicator	Operational metric and unit	Target; update frequency	Report baseline → latest (absolute change) by former province			
				Former province A	Former province B	Former province C	New-province result / widest gap
1	Transition cost	Merger-specific one-off outlays, annual and cumulative; constant VND billion and VND per resident	Within budget; A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
2	Recurring saving	No-merger recurrent-cost counterfactual minus actual like-for-like cost; constant VND billion and %	Net recurring savings ↑, subject to service and access floors; A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
3	Processing time	Median (P90) calendar days from complete application to decision; fixed service basket	↓; Q/A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
4	Repeat visits	Mean extra in-person visits; % of cases requiring at least one extra visit	↓; Q/A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
5	Travel time	% of cases requiring a physical trip; median (P90) round-trip minutes among travelers	↓; A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
6	Satisfaction	Random sample of recent applicants, fixed questions: mean score (0–100) and % dissatisfied	Score ↑; A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
7	Complaints	Complaints per 1,000 cases (context only); median resolution days; % resolved within standard; record the time or contacts needed to complete an application, and ask about needed services that people could not apply for	Resolution time ↓; on-time rate ↑; Q/A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
8	Investment per capita	Executed provincial capital spending by project site; constant VND per resident, three-year average	Allocation follows published need and service costs; access gaps narrow; A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
9	Firm entry	New tax-active firms per 10,000 working-age residents; exclude re-registration; 12-month survival	↑; A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
10	Jobs	Net new employed residents per 1,000 working-age residents; employment rate (%)	↑; A	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____
11	Poverty	Poor-household rate and count; fixed method and household weights	↓; A/B	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	B: _____ L: _____ Δ: _____	Total B: _____ L: _____ Widest gap (L): _____

Notes: Report every measure for each former province and the new-province total. Add † after the former province containing the retained provincial capital. Reconstruct the 2024 or pre-reform baseline where available; keep boundaries, definitions, prices, service baskets, clock rules, survey wording and weights fixed. Include pending and abandoned service cases. Recompute totals from underlying records, not simple averages, and publish sources, coverage, denominators and confidence intervals for survey estimates. Report satisfaction and digital-access results by income, disability, age and ethnicity where sample sizes permit. P90 = 90th percentile; Q = quarterly; A = annual; B = biennial.

Interpretation: Keep transition costs separate from recurring savings and from district-level restructuring. Assign households, services, jobs and poverty by residence; firms by operating location; investment by project site. Show genuinely shared costs and projects separately rather than allocating them mechanically. Fewer complaints are not automatically better when access to complaint channels changes. This scorecard monitors implementation and territorial gaps; causal merger claims still require a credible comparison design.

Table A8. First-level administrative units and population, 191 countries

Country	ISO3	First-level units	Population, 2024 (millions)	Unit types behind the count (blank: a single type, as printed in the source)
Afghanistan	AFG	34	42.65	
Albania	ALB	12	2.38	
Algeria	DZA	58	46.81	
Andorra	AND	7	0.08	
Angola	AGO	21	37.89	
Antigua and Barbuda	ATG	8	0.09	6 parishes + 2 dependencies
Argentina	ARG	24	45.70	23 provinces + 1 autonomous city
Armenia	ARM	11	3.03	
Australia	AUS	8	27.19	6 states + 2 territories
Austria	AUT	9	9.18	
Azerbaijan	AZE	77	10.20	66 districts + 11 cities
Bahamas	BHS	31	0.40	
Bahrain	BHR	4	1.59	
Bangladesh	BGD	8	173.56	
Barbados	BRB	12	0.28	11 parishes + 1 city
Belarus	BLR	7	9.13	6 regions + 1 municipality
Belgium	BEL	3	11.86	3 regions
Belize	BLZ	6	0.42	
Benin	BEN	12	14.46	
Bhutan	BTN	20	0.79	
Bolivia	BOL	9	12.41	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	BIH	3	3.16	2 entities + Brcko District
Botswana	BWA	16	2.52	10 districts + 6 town councils
Brazil	BRA	27	212.00	26 states + federal district
Brunei	BRN	4	0.46	
Bulgaria	BGR	28	6.44	
Burkina Faso	BFA	13	23.55	
Burundi	BDI	5	14.05	5 provinces (2025 reform)
Cabo Verde	CPV	22	0.52	municipalities
Cambodia	KHM	25	17.64	24 provinces + 1 municipality
Cameroon	CMR	10	29.12	
Canada	CAN	13	41.26	10 provinces + 3 territories
Central African Republic	CAF	17	5.33	14 + 2 economic prefectures + 1 commune
Chad	TCD	23	20.30	
Chile	CHL	16	19.76	
China	CHN	33	1,408.97	22 provinces + 5 autonomous regions + 4 municipalities + 2 SARs; source lists 23 provinces incl. Taiwan, excluded here
Colombia	COL	33	52.89	32 departments + capital district
Comoros	COM	3	0.87	3 islands
Congo, Dem. Rep.	COD	26	109.28	
Congo, Rep.	COG	15	6.33	
Costa Rica	CRI	7	5.13	
Cote d'Ivoire	CIV	14	31.93	12 districts + 2 autonomous districts
Croatia	HRV	21	3.87	20 counties + 1 city
Cuba	CUB	16	10.98	15 provinces + 1 special municipality
Cyprus	CYP	6	1.36	
Czechia	CZE	14	10.91	13 regions + capital city

Country	ISO3	First-level units	Population, 2024 (millions)	Unit types behind the count (blank: a single type, as printed in the source)
Denmark	DNK	5	5.98	metropolitan Denmark
Djibouti	DJI	6	1.17	
Dominica	DMA	10	0.07	
Dominican Republic	DOM	32	11.43	31 provinces + 1 district
Ecuador	ECU	24	18.14	
Egypt	EGY	27	116.54	
El Salvador	SLV	14	6.34	
Equatorial Guinea	GNQ	8	1.89	
Eritrea	ERI	6	3.54	
Estonia	EST	79	1.37	15 urban + 64 rural municipalities
Eswatini	SWZ	4	1.24	
Ethiopia	ETH	14	132.06	12 regional states + 2 chartered cities
Fiji	FJI	15	0.93	14 provinces + 1 dependency
Finland	FIN	19	5.62	
France	FRA	18	68.55	13 metropolitan + 5 overseas regions
Gabon	GAB	9	2.54	
Gambia	GMB	7	2.76	5 regions + 1 city + 1 municipality
Georgia	GEO	12	3.81	9 regions + 1 city + 2 autonomous republics
Germany	DEU	16	83.52	
Ghana	GHA	16	34.43	
Greece	GRC	14	10.41	13 regions + Mount Athos
Grenada	GRD	7	0.12	6 parishes + 1 dependency
Guatemala	GTM	22	18.41	
Guinea	GIN	8	14.75	7 regions + 1 governorate
Guinea-Bissau	GNB	9	2.20	
Guyana	GUY	10	0.83	
Haiti	HTI	10	11.77	
Honduras	HND	18	10.83	
Hungary	HUN	45	9.56	19 counties + 25 cities with county rights + Budapest
Iceland	ISL	64	0.39	municipalities
India	IND	36	1,450.94	28 states + 8 union territories
Indonesia	IDN	38	283.49	35 provinces + 3 special units
Iran	IRN	31	91.57	
Iraq	IRQ	19	46.04	
Ireland	IRL	31	5.40	28 counties + 3 cities
Israel	ISR	6	10.00	
Italy	ITA	20	58.95	15 + 5 autonomous regions
Jamaica	JAM	14	2.84	
Japan	JPN	47	123.98	
Jordan	JOR	12	11.55	
Kazakhstan	KAZ	21	20.59	17 provinces + 4 cities
Kenya	KEN	47	56.43	
Korea, North	PRK	13	26.50	9 provinces + 4 special cities
Korea, South	KOR	17	51.75	9 provinces + 8 cities of provincial status
Kosovo	XXK	38	1.59	municipalities
Kuwait	KWT	6	4.90	
Kyrgyzstan	KGZ	9	7.22	7 provinces + 2 cities
Laos	LAO	18	7.77	17 provinces + 1 prefecture
Latvia	LVA	43	1.87	36 municipalities + 7 state cities
Lebanon	LBN	8	5.81	

Country	ISO3	First-level units	Population, 2024 (millions)	Unit types behind the count (blank: a single type, as printed in the source)
Lesotho	LSO	10	2.34	
Liberia	LBR	15	5.61	
Libya	LBY	22	7.38	
Liechtenstein	LIE	11	0.04	communes
Lithuania	LTU	60	2.89	municipalities
Luxembourg	LUX	12	0.68	cantons
Madagascar	MDG	6	31.96	
Malawi	MWI	28	21.66	
Malaysia	MYS	14	35.56	13 states + 1 federal territory (3 components)
Maldives	MDV	21	0.53	
Mali	MLI	20	24.48	19 regions + 1 district
Malta	MLT	68	0.57	localities
Marshall Islands	MHL	24	0.04	municipalities
Mauritania	MRT	15	5.17	
Mauritius	MUS	12	1.25	9 districts + 3 dependencies
Mexico	MEX	32	130.86	
Micronesia, Fed. Sts.	FSM	4	0.11	
Moldova	MDA	37	2.40	32 districts + 3 municipalities + 2 territorial units
Mongolia	MNG	22	3.52	21 provinces + 1 municipality
Montenegro	MNE	25	0.62	municipalities
Morocco	MAR	12	38.08	
Mozambique	MOZ	11	34.63	10 provinces + 1 city
Myanmar	MMR	15	54.50	7 regions + 7 states + 1 union territory
Namibia	NAM	14	3.03	
Nauru	NRU	14	0.01	districts
Nepal	NPL	7	29.65	
Netherlands	NLD	15	17.99	12 provinces + 3 Caribbean public entities
New Zealand	NZL	17	5.29	16 regions + 1 territory
Nicaragua	NIC	17	6.92	15 departments + 2 autonomous regions
Niger	NER	8	27.03	7 regions + capital district
Nigeria	NGA	37	232.68	36 states + FCT
North Macedonia	MKD	81	1.82	80 municipalities + 1 city
Norway	NOR	12	5.57	
Oman	OMN	11	5.28	
Pakistan	PAK	7	251.27	4 provinces + 2 administered areas + capital territory
Palau	PLW	16	0.02	
Panama	PAN	14	4.52	10 provinces + 4 comarcas
Papua New Guinea	PNG	22	10.58	20 provinces + 1 autonomous region + 1 district
Paraguay	PRY	18	6.93	17 departments + capital city
Peru	PER	26	34.22	24 departments + 2 provinces
Philippines	PHL	119	115.84	81 provinces + 38 chartered cities
Poland	POL	16	36.56	
Portugal	PRT	20	10.69	18 districts + 2 autonomous regions
Qatar	QAT	8	2.86	
Romania	ROU	42	19.05	41 counties + Bucharest
Russia	RUS	83	143.67	federal subjects as listed by the source
Rwanda	RWA	5	14.26	4 provinces + Kigali
Samoa	WSM	11	0.22	
San Marino	SMR	9	0.03	
Sao Tome and Principe	STP	7	0.24	6 districts + 1 autonomous region

Country	ISO3	First-level units	Population, 2024 (millions)	Unit types behind the count (blank: a single type, as printed in the source)
Saudi Arabia	SAU	13	35.30	
Senegal	SEN	14	18.50	
Serbia	SRB	145	6.59	117 municipalities + 28 cities
Seychelles	SYC	27	0.12	
Sierra Leone	SLE	5	8.64	4 provinces + 1 area
Slovakia	SVK	8	5.42	
Slovenia	SVN	212	2.13	200 + 12 urban municipalities
Solomon Islands	SLB	10	0.82	9 provinces + 1 city
Somalia	SOM	18	19.01	
South Africa	ZAF	9	64.01	
South Sudan	SSD	10	11.94	
Spain	ESP	19	48.85	17 autonomous communities + 2 autonomous cities
Sri Lanka	LKA	9	21.92	
St. Kitts and Nevis	KNA	14	0.05	
St. Lucia	LCA	10	0.18	
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	VCT	6	0.10	
Sudan	SDN	18	50.45	
Suriname	SUR	10	0.63	
Sweden	SWE	21	10.57	
Switzerland	CHE	26	9.01	
Syria	SYR	14	24.67	
Tajikistan	TJK	5	10.59	2 provinces + 3 special units
Tanzania	TZA	31	68.56	
Thailand	THA	77	71.67	76 provinces + Bangkok
Timor-Leste	TLS	13	1.40	12 municipalities + 1 special region
Togo	TGO	5	8.41	
Tonga	TON	5	0.10	island divisions
Trinidad and Tobago	TTO	15	1.37	9 regions + 3 boroughs + 2 cities + 1 ward
Tunisia	TUN	24	12.28	
Turkiye	TUR	81	85.52	
Turkmenistan	TKM	6	7.49	5 provinces + 1 city
Tuvalu	TUV	8	0.01	7 island councils + 1 town council
Uganda	UGA	135	50.02	134 districts + Kampala
Ukraine	UKR	27	37.86	24 provinces + 1 autonomous republic + 2 municipalities
United Arab Emirates	ARE	7	10.99	
United Kingdom	GBR	4	69.28	England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales; the source lists local authorities within each
United States	USA	51	340.00	50 states + DC
Uruguay	URY	19	3.39	
Uzbekistan	UZB	16	36.36	12 provinces + 1 autonomous republic + 3 cities
Vanuatu	VUT	6	0.33	
Venezuela	VEN	25	28.41	23 states + 2 special units
Vietnam	VNM	63	100.99	58 provinces + 5 municipalities as listed by the source (Huế became a sixth municipality on 1 January 2025); 34 units from 1 July 2025
Yemen	YEM	22	40.58	
Zambia	ZMB	10	21.31	
Zimbabwe	ZWE	10	16.63	8 provinces + 2 cities

Sources: CIA (2025), World Factbook, final edition, “Administrative divisions” field, summing all first-order unit types listed for each country; World Bank (2025), World Development Indicators, SP.POP.TOTL, 2024. The 195 sovereign countries in the Factbook less Kiribati, Monaco, Singapore and the Holy See, which have no first-level units. China is counted at 33 (the source lists 23 provinces including Taiwan); the United Kingdom at its four constituent countries; Malaysia at 14 (13 states and one federal territory), as the source lists it. Viet Nam is shown at its pre-merger count of 63. Regressions of the number of units on population (OLS with a constant, heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors in parentheses): in logarithms, $\ln(\text{units}) = 1.07 (0.36) + 0.106 (0.023) \times \ln(\text{population})$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.088$, $N = 191$; in levels, $\text{units} = 21.4 (1.9) + 0.019 (0.008) \times \text{population in millions}$, $p = 0.012$ with robust and 0.12 with conventional standard errors, $R^2 = 0.013$; excluding China and India, the levels slope is 0.104 (0.036), $p = 0.004$, $R^2 = 0.041$. Population explains little of the cross-country variation in the number of units; the fitted values at Viet Nam’s population are 21 (logarithms) and 23 (levels) units. Among the 22 other countries with populations of 50 to 150 million, the median is 29 units and 2.95 million people per unit.