

Article

Inspection Quality in Urban Party Governance: The Case of Ho Chi Minh City

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Abstract

In modern governance, power control and accountability are core requirements. The study clarifies that the inspection work of Party Committees' Inspection Commissions is not merely a technical or professional activity but constitutes an internal power-control institution that occupies a central position under the conditions of a ruling party. Based on an institutional approach and a case study of Ho Chi Minh City, the article conceptualizes the "quality of inspection work" as a composite construct comprising four fundamental dimensions: institutional framework, organizational capacity, operational performance, and outcomes and impacts. A key finding is that quality cannot be equated with the number of inspections conducted or cases handled; rather, it should be assessed through the interrelationship among these four dimensions and their capacity to generate substantive impacts on power control, the maintenance of Party discipline, and the consolidation of political trust. In the context of urban governance, as exemplified by Ho Chi Minh City, inspection work increasingly serves as a compensatory mechanism for the relative decline of certain traditional oversight channels, while adapting to modern governance requirements in a more proactive, professional, and data-driven manner. The article's main contribution lies in enriching the theoretical foundation of power control within a ruling-party governance model and in developing a systematic evaluation framework comprising four groups of criteria corresponding to the four dimensions, with illustrative indicators and data sources. This framework can serve as an analytical tool and practical reference for localities, particularly large urban areas implementing urban governance models, and for future empirical research.

Keywords: *Inspection work, Party Committees' Inspection Commissions, Ho Chi Minh City, Urban government model, Power control, Vietnam*

Introduction

In the context of advancing the building of a socialist rule-of-law state and improving mechanisms for power control, ensuring the legitimacy and effectiveness of the political system has become increasingly urgent both theoretically and practically. Ho Chi Minh City, as a special urban center contributing approximately 22–23% of GDP and over 27% of national budget revenue, is not only the country's largest economic hub but also a representative space for the transformation and restructuring of the political system under conditions of rapid urbanization (Gia Cu, 2025).

In this context, power control is not merely a principled requirement but also a condition for ensuring the stability and sustainable development of the entire system. Within a single-party ruling model, where classical checks and balances are absent, inspection work conducted by Inspection Commissions at all levels becomes a central institutional mechanism of internal control, directly ensuring Party discipline, unity of will, and leadership effectiveness. Empirical data indicate that the scale of inspection and supervision continues to expand, with 232,401 Party organizations and more than 1.28 million Party members inspected, alongside disciplinary actions imposed on 1,624 Party organizations and 73,135 Party members (Minh Ngoc, 2025). These figures reflect the increasing intensity and scope of inspection activities. However, they also raise an important methodological issue: the quality of inspection work cannot be equated with operational scale or the number of disciplinary actions, but should instead be understood as a composite concept encompassing effectiveness, efficiency, and timeliness in the exercise of inspection authority.



Notably, the implementation of the urban government model in Ho Chi Minh City under Resolution No. 131/2020/QH14 of the National Assembly has transformed the structure of power by streamlining organization, reducing intermediate layers, and increasing administrative centralization (National Assembly, 2020). This transformation has led to a relative decline in certain traditional oversight channels, thereby highlighting the role of internal inspection mechanisms as compensatory instruments for power control. At the same time, the urban context—characterized by high power density, rapid decision-making, and increased governance risks—imposes new demands on inspection work, particularly in terms of professionalism, timeliness, and enforcement effectiveness.

However, from a research perspective, existing studies have primarily focused on state power control, while in-depth analyses of internal control mechanisms within a ruling party remain limited. In particular, there is a lack of a systematic and measurable framework for evaluating the quality of inspection work under urban governance conditions. This gap not only constrains theoretical understanding but also limits practical applicability in governance.

Against this backdrop, this study aims to clarify the concept of the quality of inspection work conducted by Party Committees' Inspection Commissions, develop an evaluation framework suitable for urban contexts, and analyze the impact of the urban government model on changes in requirements and methods of inspection work. In doing so, the study contributes to the theoretical foundation of internal power control mechanisms within a single-party system and provides practical assessment tools for Party committees in the process of Party building and rectification.

Literature Review

Studies on Power Control and Accountability

In political science and public governance, power control and accountability are considered fundamental elements ensuring the legitimacy and effectiveness of the state. Existing research demonstrates an increasingly multidimensional approach, extending beyond state institutions to include the role of society.

O'Donnell emphasizes that accountability is not merely an institutional issue but is also linked to the agency of social actors in demanding and enforcing accountability (O'Donnell, 2010). Building on this, Reddick, Demir, and Perlman classify accountability mechanisms into horizontal, vertical, and hybrid forms, showing their interwoven and complementary nature in practice (Reddick, Demir, & Perlman, 2020). Mechkova, Bernhard, and Lührmann further highlight the role of civil society in power control, expanding the concept toward multi-actor participation (Mechkova, Bernhard, & Lührmann, 2013).

Horizontal accountability refers to mechanisms of control among state institutions through mutual checks; according to O'Donnell, this is essential for preventing absolute concentration of power. However, as noted by Reddick et al., its effectiveness depends heavily on the independence and transparency of oversight institutions. Vertical accountability, by contrast, reflects the relationship between the state and citizens, where citizens act as overseers. Mechkova et al. argue that this mechanism is increasingly strengthened through civil society participation, forming multi-layered oversight systems.

In Vietnam, this issue is approached in line with the characteristics of the political system. Nguyen Dang Dung asserts that power control is essential to prevent corruption and ensure proper exercise of power (Nguyen Dang Dung, 2019). Nguyen Pham Duy Trang and Nguyen Minh Son highlight the role of socio-political organizations in supervision and social criticism (Nguyen Pham Duy Trang, &

Nguyen Minh Son, 2025). Bui Thi Ngoc Mai emphasizes the importance of strengthening the legal framework to ensure transparency and responsibility in public administration (Bui Thi Ngoc Mai, 2021).

Overall, these studies indicate that power control and accountability constitute a multidimensional system in which horizontal and vertical mechanisms are mutually reinforcing. The general trend is toward enhanced transparency, broader societal participation, and improved legal frameworks, though their effective operation in specific contexts remains an area requiring further research.

Research on Institutions for Power Oversight

A review of the literature on institutions for power oversight reveals the formation of a multi-centered control structure, in which state power is regulated through different institutional mechanisms.

In the parliamentary sphere, Stapenhurst, Johnston, and Pelizzo lay the theoretical foundation by identifying parliament as a representative institution capable of transforming the will of voters into instruments for controlling the executive (Stapenhurst, Johnston, & Pelizzo, 2006). Pelizzo and Stapenhurst further specify this by classifying oversight instruments such as questioning, hearings, committees, and budgetary control (Pelizzo & Stapenhurst, 2012). Finke and Dannwolf show that the degree of oversight depends on the structure of the governing coalition, thereby clarifying the conditional nature of parliamentary power (Finke & Dannwolf, 2018). Barrett, Corbet, and Larkin expand the scope to the field of public finance, emphasizing the role of parliament in ensuring budget transparency (Barrett, Corbet, & Larkin, 2020). Beath, Christia, and Enikolopov add an important dimension by demonstrating that direct democracy mechanisms can operate as a form of power oversight originating from society (Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2012).

In the judicial sphere, Gee, Hazell, Malleson, and O'Brien provide an in-depth analysis of the relationship between judicial independence and constitutional structure (Gee, Hazell, Malleson, & O'Brien, 2015). Shetreet establishes theoretical standards regarding the balance between independence and control (Shetreet, 2011). Kosař examines in depth such institutions as judicial councils, judicial discipline, and judicial self-governance, thereby showing that adjudicative power is controlled through both internal and external mechanisms (Kosař, 2016).

In the field of public auditing, the OECD points out the institutional relationship between supreme audit institutions and parliament in overseeing the budget (OECD, 2002). Brétéché and Swarbrick further clarify coordination mechanisms aimed at improving the effectiveness of oversight (Brétéché & Swarbrick, 2017). Cordery and Hay affirm that auditing goes beyond mere legality and also aims toward public value (Cordery & Hay, 2019). Johnsen, Meklin, Oulasvirta, and Vakkuri demonstrate the role of performance auditing in modern public governance (Johnsen, Meklin, Oulasvirta, & Vakkuri, 2019).

With regard to party disciplinary mechanisms, Clayton, Josefsson, Mattes, and Mozaffar analyze party discipline as an instrument for maintaining political unity (Clayton, Josefsson, Mattes, & Mozaffar, 2021). González provides a theoretical model of compliance behavior under party discipline in parliament (González, 2021). In the Vietnamese context, Mai Van Chinh analyzes power control in cadre work (Mai Van Chinh, 2022); Le Trung Kien and Lai Kim Dung examine the role of inspection, supervision, and discipline in enhancing leadership capacity (Le Trung Kien, & Lai Kim Dung, 2025); and Nguyen Duc Hung and Nguyen Thi Thuy Thao show that the mechanisms of Party inspection, supervision, and discipline operate as institutions of internal power control, associated with cadre work and anti-corruption efforts (Nguyen Duc Hung, & Nguyen Thi Thuy Thao, 2023).

These lines of research show a clear differentiation among oversight institutions: parliament tends toward political oversight, courts ensure constitutionality and legality, auditing provides the technical-financial basis for oversight, while party discipline maintains unity and internal control within the political system.

Research on Governance of Ruling Parties

Studies on the governance of ruling parties, particularly in terms of mechanisms of self-control and party discipline associated with anti-corruption, are developed along two main directions: comparative political theory and the practical operation within specific political systems.

First, O'Donnell lays the theoretical foundation by conceptualizing accountability as a multidimensional structure, in which the control of power arises not only from external sources but also from internal mechanisms of the political actor (subject) exercising power (O'Donnell, 2010). This approach is further extended by Reddick, Demir, and Perlman, who classify different forms of accountability, thereby indirectly affirming the role of self-regulatory mechanisms within political organizations (Reddick, Demir, & Perlman, 2020).

In studies on ruling parties, Scarrow shows the transition from traditional party models to more flexible governance models, in which internal mechanisms play a key role in regulating behavior and maintaining legitimacy (Sarrow, 2015). In the same direction, Clayton et al. (2021) and González analyze party discipline as a tool for controlling political behavior, ensuring unity of will, and limiting deviations in the exercise of power (González, 2021).

In the context of anti-corruption linked to party discipline, Mai Van Chinh indicates that controlling power in cadre work is a key stage in preventing the degeneration of power (Mai Van Chinh, 2022). Le Trung Kien and Lai Kim Dung (2025), and Nguyen Duc Hung and Nguyen Thi Thuy Thao (2023) emphasize the role of the inspection and supervision system as an internal self-control institution, which simultaneously functions as an organizational disciplinary mechanism and as a tool for preventing and addressing corruption.

These studies show that the governance of ruling parties depends significantly on endogenous self-regulatory mechanisms, in which party discipline becomes a central mechanism for maintaining unity, enhancing governing capacity, and controlling the risk of power degeneration.

Research Gaps and Justification of this Study

The review reveals that these literatures, while complementary, are fragmented and leave the present research problem under-specified. Four deficits, in particular, cumulatively justify the current study.

First, most existing works focus on power control at the state level or in macro-level contexts, while research on internal control mechanisms within the Party has not been developed proportionately. This means the primary site of power control in a single-party system—the Party's own internal institutions—remains analytically thin. Second, current studies mainly analyze the functions, roles, and authority of inspection and supervision, but have not clearly conceptualized "the quality of inspection work" as a scientific category that can be systematically analyzed and measured. Third, there is a lack of research that develops a comprehensive framework of criteria for evaluating the quality of inspection work conducted by Party Committees' Inspection Commissions in a systematic, multidimensional, and practically applicable manner. Fourth, the impact of the urban governance model on Party inspection work—especially in the context of reduced intermediate layers, increased administrative centralization, and heightened governance risks—has not been adequately explored, and Ho Chi Minh City, although highly typical in terms of scale of power, level of urbanization, and

complexity of governance, has not yet been thoroughly studied from the perspective of inspection quality.

Therefore, there is a need for a focused study on the quality of inspection work of Party Committees' Inspection Commissions in Ho Chi Minh City. Such a study would not only enrich the theoretical basis of internal power control under conditions of a ruling party, but also provide analytical and evaluative tools with practical significance for Party building and rectification in a special urban context.

Theoretical Foundations and Analytical Framework

The Concept of Party Inspection Work

In political science and Party-building studies, inspection work is an institutional mechanism that ensures political power operates in accordance with the Party's objectives, principles, and discipline. In essence, it is the process of examining and evaluating the implementation of the Party's platform, policies, and organizational norms in order to prevent, detect, and address deviations. According to the Textbook on Building the Communist Party of Vietnam: "Party inspection refers to the process by which Party organizations examine, evaluate, and conclude on the strengths, weaknesses, or violations of subordinate Party committees, Party organizations, and Party members in implementing the Political Platform, the Party Charter, resolutions, directives, regulations of the Party, and the State's policies and laws" (Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, 2021). This activity aims to "enhance the Party's leadership capacity and combat strength; strengthen unity and democracy within the Party; maintain discipline and order; and prevent and curb political, ideological, moral, and lifestyle degradation among cadres and Party members" (Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, 2021). Thus, inspection work functions both as a mechanism of power control and as a method of internal self-regulation.

First, inspection work is a **leadership function** of the Party. Leadership is not only expressed through policymaking and implementation but also through the ability to supervise and evaluate execution. Inspection is therefore an integral component of the leadership cycle, ensuring consistency between decisions and actions, and is institutionalized in Regulation No. 22-QĐ/TW (Central Committee, 2021c).

Second, inspection work is a **tool for internal power control**. In a single-party system, power control is primarily exercised through internal mechanisms. Inspection places Party organizations and members within a framework of rules, preventing abuse and corruption of power, as ensured through standards such as Regulation No. 37-QĐ/TW (Central Committee, 2021b) and disciplinary mechanisms under Regulation No. 69-QĐ/TW (Central Committee, 2022). Thus, inspection simultaneously performs preventive and deterrent functions.

Third, inspection work is a **method of Party building and rectification**. Through inspection, shortcomings in policy implementation and violations of organizational principles are identified and addressed, providing empirical bases for improving leadership mechanisms and cadre quality.

In summary, Party inspection work is a power–organizational leadership institution that performs internal control over the exercise of political power while serving as a mechanism of self-adjustment to enhance the Party's governing capacity.

The Concept of the Quality of Inspection Work

From the perspective of management science and political science, the quality of inspection work is regarded as a composite category that reflects the effectiveness of power control and the maintenance of Party discipline. It is manifested not only in output results but also in the coherence of institutions, organizational structures, and operational processes. The Textbook on Building the Communist Party of Vietnam affirms that through inspection, supervision, and Party discipline, power is controlled over organizations, cadres, and Party members, not only to prevent and combat the degeneration of power but also to realize democracy within the Party and ensure that organizational principles are strictly implemented (Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, 2021). This quality is also closely linked to the institutional foundation, as "the quality of regulations and rules greatly affects the quality of inspection, supervision, and Party discipline" (Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics, 2021).

Four perspectives jointly constitute this concept.

First, from the **institutional perspective**, the quality of inspection work depends on the level of completeness, coherence, and effectiveness of the regulatory system, as reflected in Regulation No. 22-QĐ/TW (2021c), which defines the functions, tasks, authority, and procedures of inspection and supervision.

Second, from the **organizational perspective**, the quality of inspection work is reflected in the structural capacity of the Inspection Commissions at all levels, including organizational models, personnel, and supporting conditions. The requirement to build a contingent of inspection cadres who are "steadfast, incorruptible, and professional" is emphasized in the Resolution of the 4th Plenum of the 13th Central Committee.

Third, from the **operational perspective**, the quality of inspection work is directly manifested in its practical implementation, including the scientific and rigorous nature of procedures and the capacity to detect early signs of violations. The orientation toward shifting from passive inspection to proactive prevention and early warning has been affirmed in Conclusion No. 21-KL/TW (2021a).

Fourth, from the **perspective of effectiveness and impact**, this constitutes the ultimate measure of inspection quality. Effectiveness is not limited to the number of cases handled but lies in the ability to uphold Party discipline, prevent degradation, corruption, and misconduct, and strengthen public political trust.

It can therefore be generalized that the quality of the Party's inspection work is the aggregate of the level of institutional completeness, organizational capacity, operational effectiveness, and the ability to generate real impacts of inspection activities on power control, the maintenance of discipline, and the enhancement of the Party's leadership capacity. This four-dimensional approach allows inspection work to be understood not merely as a technical activity but as a central political institution within the Party's power structure.

Components Constituting the Quality of Inspection Work

The four dimensions, while mutually reinforcing, are analytically distinct. The **institutional** dimension concerns the setting of rules and the allocation of power; the **organizational** dimension concerns the structural and human capacity to give effect to those rules; the **operational** dimension concerns the execution of inspection tasks in practice; and the **outcome** dimension concerns the substantive effects on power behavior and organizational conditions. Principled boundaries can be drawn as follows: enforcement mechanisms belong to the institutional dimension (they concern the

binding force *designed into* the rules), whereas coordination in execution belongs to the operational dimension (it concerns how tasks are *carried out* in practice).

Institutional dimension. This reflects the level of completeness of the regulatory framework and the mechanisms governing the operation of power that serve as the foundation for inspection activities. It consists of three fundamental components:

(1) *The system of regulations on inspection work.* The quality of this system depends on three requirements: (i) comprehensiveness in regulating subjects, scope, authority, and procedures of inspection; (ii) consistency and coherence with other areas of Party work, avoiding overlaps or gaps; and (iii) relative stability combined with adaptability to practical changes.

(2) *The mechanism of decentralization in inspection work.* This reflects how authority is allocated among Party Committees, Inspection Commissions, and relevant actors. A rational mechanism must ensure the unity of the principle of democratic centralism while enhancing the proactiveness and relative independence of Inspection Commissions, particularly in inspecting when signs of violations are detected, resolving complaints and denunciations, and enforcing discipline. In the context of power concentration under the urban governance model, this factor becomes even more significant.

(3) *Mechanisms ensuring the implementation of inspection conclusions.* This is a direct measure of the effectiveness of inspection work, including ensuring the binding force and enforceability of inspection conclusions; establishing systems for monitoring and urging implementation; and closely linking inspection conclusions with cadre work and Party organization.

Organizational dimension. If the institutional dimension establishes the framework of power and operational norms, the organizational dimension reflects the capacity to realize that framework in practice, across three aspects:

(1) *Organizational structure of the inspection system.* This reflects the division of functions, tasks, and working relationships within Inspection Commissions. Quality depends on suitability to the scale and leadership requirements of Party Committees; ensuring specialization, relative independence, and responsiveness; and clear functional delineation to avoid overlap or gaps.

(2) *Inspection personnel.* Personnel are the central factor determining inspection quality, constituted by the integration of political steadfastness, ethical integrity, and professional competence. Inspection cadres must uphold principles, impartiality, and integrity while possessing comprehensive knowledge and skills in verification, investigation, and information analysis. In the context of digital transformation, technological proficiency and data analysis capabilities become essential.

(3) *Operational support conditions.* These include material–technical resources and support mechanisms such as information systems, databases, technical equipment, funding, and coordination mechanisms, which determine the ability to shift from passive inspection to proactive, preventive, and risk-based control.

Operational dimension. If the institutional dimension defines the framework and the organizational dimension provides capacity, the operational dimension directly reflects the quality of inspection implementation in practice. It consists of three components:

(1) *Inspection procedures.* These are standardized sequences of steps ensuring that inspection activities are conducted rigorously, objectively, and in accordance with principles. Quality is reflected in: (i) consistency and standardization across all stages; (ii) flexibility and adaptability to context; and (iii) the ability to shorten processing time while ensuring timeliness.

(2) *Inspection methods*. These refer to the system of professional techniques used for collecting, analyzing, and evaluating information. Quality is reflected in the ability to shift from passive to proactive inspection based on risk analysis and early detection of violations, combining traditional methods with modern tools such as data analytics and multi-dimensional information verification.

(3) *Coordination mechanisms in inspection activities*. These reflect the relationships between Inspection Commissions, Party Committees, Party organizations, and state oversight bodies. Quality depends on clear delineation of functions and responsibilities and timely, effective information sharing, forming a multi-layered power control network.

Outcome and impact dimension. While the prior three dimensions reflect conditions and implementation capacity, the outcome and impact dimension reflects the practical value and political significance of inspection work—the ultimate measure of quality. A distinction must be drawn between "results" (immediate outputs) and "impacts" (long-term effects), with quality primarily demonstrated through impact. This dimension consists of three components:

(1) *Disciplinary effectiveness*. This reflects the ability to maintain unity and order within Party organizations. The core value lies not in the number of disciplinary actions, but in the extent to which they change the behavior of cadres and Party members, creating a deterrent effect and fostering a transition from imposed compliance to voluntary adherence.

(2) *Preventive capacity*. High-quality inspection must establish early-warning mechanisms to identify risks arising from institutional and managerial weaknesses, and, through regular, transparent, and educational activities, contribute to forming a culture of compliance, thereby minimizing the occurrence of violations from the outset.

(3) *Strengthening political trust*. Political trust is a fundamental resource ensuring legitimacy and stability of the system. Inspection contributes to strengthening trust by demonstrating strictness, fairness, and the Party's determination to self-correct, creating a fair internal environment and reinforcing social consensus.

When these factors are ensured, inspection work becomes not merely a technical activity but a mechanism for maintaining stability and sustainable development of the political system.

Urban Governance Model and New Requirements for Inspection Work

The formation and operation of the urban governance model represent an important transformation in reforming state governance methods in large cities. From an institutional perspective, this model changes organizational structures, modes of power operation, and decision-making mechanisms within the local political system, requiring a restructuring of power control mechanisms in which Party inspection work plays a central role.

Transformation of the power structure in the urban governance model. The urban governance model organizes the apparatus in a streamlined manner, reducing intermediate levels while increasing centralization and unity in management and administration. This leads to two trends. First, state management power becomes more concentrated at the city and grassroots levels, increasing both the scope and intensity of power execution; when power is concentrated, the potential for deviations in its exercise also increases if there are no corresponding control mechanisms (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026b). Second, decision-making becomes faster, more flexible, and increasingly reliant on modern management tools, particularly in planning, public finance, land management, public investment, and smart urban management; the modernization of administration makes supervision more difficult if it relies solely on traditional inspection methods (Communist Party of Vietnam,

2026b). Thus, the urban governance model both enhances management effectiveness and raises the demand for more advanced mechanisms of power control.

Requirements for restructuring inspection functions under new conditions. Inspection work cannot remain limited to periodic or reactive inspection when violations occur; it must shift toward a proactive, continuous, and risk-based control model. First, as the organizational system is streamlined, Inspection Commissions must enhance their capacity for direct inspection of grassroots Party organizations and members, ensuring that no gaps or blind spots remain beyond the reach of Party inspection and supervision, and strengthening internal self-inspection at the grassroots level to detect violations early (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026a). Second, inspection work must meet the requirements of controlling power in high-risk areas of urban governance, such as land management, public investment, state budget and finance, infrastructure development, and public service provision, ensuring that all power is strictly controlled by mechanisms (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026b). Third, inspection work must be closely linked with digital transformation, enabling the establishment of continuous and real-time monitoring systems and building databases for inspection purposes to meet the requirements of "data-based inspection and supervision" (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026a).

Requirements for enhancing professionalism and relative independence. In the urban governance model, the large workload, rapid decision-making, and diversity of interest relations increase pressure on inspection work. Professionalism is reflected in the standardization of operational procedures, the improvement of political integrity, leadership capacity, and professional expertise of inspection personnel, and the active innovation of inspection procedures and methods through modern techniques. Relative independence is ensured through clear delineation of authority, responsibilities, and coordination mechanisms, in line with the Party's emphasis on innovating to ensure relative independence between inspection commissions and Party committees at the same level, while ensuring close and effective coordination between Party inspection and supervision and state inspection, auditing, investigation, prosecution, and adjudication (Communist Party of Vietnam, 2026b).

Linking inspection work with Party building in modern urban governance. The urban governance model is not merely an organizational change but also a transformation in the Party's leadership methods. Through inspection, limitations in management mechanisms, bottlenecks in implementation, and signs of degradation among cadres can be systematically identified, helping remove obstacles in implementation and improve the Party's leadership methods under modern urban governance conditions.

From the above analysis, the urban governance model fundamentally transforms the environment in which power is exercised at the local level, requiring a comprehensive reform of inspection work toward proactiveness, professionalism, data orientation, and integration with multi-dimensional power control mechanisms. In this context, the quality of inspection work becomes one of the decisive factors determining leadership capacity and the effectiveness of urban governance.

Methodology

Research approach

This study adopts a qualitative approach based on institutional analysis combined with case study research. This approach is appropriate to the research subject, a political–organizational institution, where factors such as power control mechanisms, disciplinary effectiveness, legitimacy, and political trust cannot be fully measured through purely quantitative indicators. A methodological caveat should

be made explicit: the study distinguishes between (a) *descriptive* reporting of official Party regulatory requirements and strategic objectives, and (b) *analytical* evaluation criteria proposed by the researcher. Where official documents are quoted, they are treated as objects of analysis—evidence of the institutional framework and its intended standards—rather than as independent validation of the framework's analytical criteria.

Rationale for selecting Ho Chi Minh City

The selection of Ho Chi Minh City as the case study carries both practical significance and theoretical value, based on three grounds reflecting dimensions of scale, institutional characteristics, and governance risks.

First, Ho Chi Minh City is a special urban area with the largest population in the country, a high level of economic development, and an advanced degree of urbanization. With an economy accounting for over 23.5% of national GDP and contributing more than one-third of total state budget revenue, and with approximately 31% of the country's enterprises located here, the City represents a high concentration of power relations and interests (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2025a). This makes the requirement for power control particularly urgent.

Second, Ho Chi Minh City is a pioneer in implementing the urban governance model, with fundamental changes in organizational structure and operational mechanisms, including the implementation of a two-tier local government model. The implementation of Resolution No. 98/2023/QH15, along with strategic resolutions of the Politburo, has created a specific institutional framework allowing the City to pilot various new governance mechanisms (National Assembly, 2023), imposing higher demands on the adaptability of inspection work.

Third, as the largest economic–financial–commercial center, Ho Chi Minh City concentrates many sectors with high risks in the exercise of power, particularly land management, public investment, and state finance and budget. Establishing and operating power control mechanisms in these sensitive positions becomes essential for ensuring organizational discipline and strengthening political trust in a highly dynamic urban environment.

From these grounds, Ho Chi Minh City embodies all the characteristics of a typical case study: large scale, innovative institutional framework, and a complex, high-risk governance environment. Studying inspection work here not only reflects local realities but also contributes to clarifying theoretical issues related to power control in the process of building and improving the urban governance model in Vietnam.

Findings: An Operationalized Evaluation Framework

Based on the established theoretical framework, this section presents a system of criteria for evaluating the quality of inspection work according to four groups corresponding to the four constituent dimensions. In contrast to the conceptual elaboration in Section 3, the purpose here is operationalization: for each dimension, the framework specifies evaluative criteria, illustrative indicators, and potential data sources, thereby converting the theoretical construct into a usable assessment tool. The framework reflects the logical relationship between conditions, processes, outputs, and impacts of inspection work within the Party's power control mechanism.

Institutional criteria group

This group evaluates the completeness of the regulatory framework and the mechanisms ensuring the implementation of inspection work.

Criterion	Illustrative indicators	Potential data sources
Completeness and coherence of regulatory system	Coverage of functions, tasks, authority, and procedures in regulations; synchronization of issued documents with Party decisions; frequency of document revision	Party regulations (No. 22, 37, 69-QĐ/TW); Commission document reviews
Clarity of decentralization mechanism	Degree of authority delegated to grassroots levels; documented proactiveness in handling signs of violations; stated relationship to state oversight bodies	Delegation decisions; annual work reports
Effectiveness of enforcement mechanisms	Rate of inspection conclusions implemented; monitoring systems for conclusion execution; linkage between conclusions and cadre work	Implementation follow-up reports; cadres assessment records

Overall, this group reflects not only the level of institutional completeness but also the capacity to organize, allocate, and ensure the effective and consistent exercise of inspection authority, adapting to current governance reform requirements.

Organizational and personnel criteria group

This group reflects the implementation capacity of the inspection institution in association with Party building requirements.

Criterion	Illustrative indicators	Potential data sources
Rationality of organizational structure	Degree of specialization; alignment with streamlined apparatus principles; clarity of functional assignment; relative independence from Party Committees	Organizational charts; staffing documents; Resolution No. 18-NQ/TW compliance
Personnel quality	Political steadfastness and ethical integrity; professional qualifications and skills; digital/data competencies; adherence to ethical standards	Cadre evaluation reports; Regulation No. 144-QĐ/TW compliance; training records
Operational support conditions	Availability of data systems on Party organizations and members; infrastructure modernization; coordination and data-sharing mechanisms	IT infrastructure audits; Decision No. 90-QĐ/TW implementation

This group reflects the organizational and human capacity to operationalize institutional frameworks, thereby determining the effectiveness of power control in inspection work.

Inspection activity criteria group

This group evaluates the quality of the implementation process, ensuring that activities are conducted decisively, systematically, and progressively institutionalized.

Criterion	Illustrative indicators	Potential data sources
Scientific rigorous procedures	Compliance with defined authority and processes; timeliness (inspection from the first year of the term); reduction of intermediate layers and processing time	Inspection program records; procedural audits
Innovation in inspection methods	Shift from passive to proactive inspection; focus on sensitive, key, and high-risk sectors; adoption of data-based and digital methods	Methodology reviews; alignment with the 2030 Strategy
Effectiveness of coordination mechanisms	Connectivity and data sharing among oversight bodies; clear delineation of functions; consistency between Party and administrative discipline	Coordination protocols (Decisions No. 17, 90-QĐ/TW); joint-operation reports

This group directly reflects the level of operational capacity, modernization, and coordination effectiveness of inspection work under current conditions.

Outcome and impact criteria group

This group reflects the practical value and political significance of inspection work, contributing to the objective of building a clean, strong, and comprehensive Party and political system.

Criterion	Illustrative indicators	Potential data sources
Disciplinary effectiveness	Accuracy and fairness of handling violations; timely and strict enforcement; deterrent and warning effects; behavioral change in cadres and members	Disciplinary statistics; follow-up surveys on compliance
Preventive capacity	Rate of repeat violations; timeliness of early detection; contribution to institutional improvement; promotion of integrity culture	Violation recurrence tracking; early-warning system records
Strengthening political trust	Internal consensus and unity; improved cadre awareness; public confidence in the Party and State	Internal assessments; opinion surveys; linkage of discipline with public satisfaction

This group directly reflects the ultimate effectiveness of inspection work, from discipline enforcement to prevention and the strengthening of political trust.

Aggregate assessment logic

Taken together, the framework positions the four dimensions in a logical sequence—conditions (institutions, organization) producing processes (operations) that generate outcomes (impact)—so that an overall assessment of inspection quality is not a simple sum but a chain of sufficiency. Weak institutional foundations constrain organizational capacity; strong institutions without operational capability remain ineffective; and even effective operations are only meaningful insofar as they produce real outcomes. Evaluation should therefore attend to the weakest link in the chain, in keeping with the principle that organizational limitations undermine inspection effectiveness even when institutional frameworks are relatively complete. This logic also implies that the framework is diagnostic: it identifies *where* in the chain quality fails, rather than merely grading overall performance.

Discussion

Inspection work as an internal power control mechanism

The findings indicate that Party inspection work, from its institutional structure to its practical impacts, essentially operates as an internal power control mechanism under the conditions of a ruling party. Ho Chi Minh City has institutionalized this requirement through a specific target: "Conduct inspection and supervision for 100% of Party organizations and Party members according to programs and plans" (Ho Chi Minh City Party Congress, 2025). This finding expands the theoretical approach to accountability, traditionally developed based on state power separation models, toward focus on "effectively establishing a mechanism for power control" within the political system itself.

In a political model led by a single party, power control is primarily implemented through self-regulation mechanisms. Inspection work establishes institutional constraints on power through the "strict implementation of self-inspection and self-supervision by Party Committees, Party organizations, and their leaders," reflecting a form of endogenous accountability, as all violations are handled under the principle of "no prohibited areas and no exceptions" (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2025a). The effectiveness of this mechanism is reflected in the goal that "annually, more than 90% of grassroots Party organizations and Party members achieve good performance or higher" (Ho Chi Minh City Party Congress, 2025).

Compared to horizontal accountability models, this mechanism requires a higher level of professionalism and objectivity, operationalized through the "implementation of the Party's Inspection and Supervision Strategy to 2030." When these elements are ensured, inspection work becomes a mechanism for preventing the degeneration of power, especially in sectors, areas, and positions prone to corruption, wastefulness, and misconduct. The integration of Party inspection with government inspection and oversight by elected bodies creates a modern, multi-layered control network (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2025a).

This finding contributes to the theory of ruling party governance by demonstrating that power control can be effectively implemented through highly institutionalized internal control mechanisms, ensuring the development of a cadre contingent "with sufficient qualities, capacity, and prestige commensurate with their tasks," embodying leaders who "dare to think, dare to act, dare to take responsibility, and are devoted to serving the people." This forms the foundation for successfully operating the urban governance model and effectively implementing special mechanisms under Resolution No. 98/2023/QH15.

Impacts of urban governance on inspection work

The urban governance model fundamentally transforms the environment in which power is exercised at the local level, generating new requirements for inspection work. The City is entering a new stage of development by "operating a two-tier local government model" based on administrative boundary consolidation. The research results indicate three main impact trends.

First, the concentration of power in urban management increases both the intensity and scope of power execution by cadres and Party members. With an enormous economic scale accounting for over 23.5% of national GDP and contributing more than one-third of total state budget revenue, governance pressure and risks in power execution are substantial, increasing the likelihood of deviations in the absence of corresponding control mechanisms (Ho Chi Minh City Party Congress, 2025). Inspection work must therefore shift from ex-post inspection to proactive control, focusing on sectors, areas, and positions prone to corruption, wastefulness, and misconduct.

Second, modern urban governance requires innovation in inspection methods, as the City aims to comprehensively digitize the state governance model based on digital technology and real-time data. Inspection work must enhance information analysis capacity by researching and implementing data-based inspection and supervision, enabling early detection of abnormal signs through shared data systems (Ho Chi Minh City Party Committee, 2025b).

Third, the reorganization of the apparatus toward being streamlined–compact–strong–efficient–effective and the reduction of intermediate levels make the relationship between Party Committees and subordinate levels more direct. This model requires direct, timely, and comprehensive inspection, with the target of inspecting and supervising 100% of Party organizations and members according to programs and plans (Ho Chi Minh City Party Congress, 2025). The streamlining of the apparatus requires inspection work to closely follow grassroots levels to promptly address proposals and aspirations of the people, thereby avoiding bureaucratic detachment.

Thus, urban governance not only changes the context but also drives the transition toward a modern power control model, ensuring that all exercises of power are transparent and serve the interests of the people.

Comparison with other power oversight models

In the context of Ho Chi Minh City promoting economic growth, digital economy development, urban infrastructure, and digital transformation, the scale and intensity of power execution are increasing, leading to higher demands for strict power control. This places inspection work at the center of ensuring discipline and governance effectiveness.

Compared with parliamentary oversight, inspection work does not rely on checks and balances but on organizational discipline and unity of will, enabling rapid and direct implementation in major development areas. Compared with auditing and inspection mechanisms, Party inspection has a broader scope as it links power control with political responsibility and cadre management, as reflected in the requirement to inspect and supervise 100% of Party organizations and members and the principle of "no prohibited areas and no exceptions" (Ho Chi Minh City Party Congress, 2025). Compared with independent anti-corruption institutions, inspection work is internal and integrated within the Party leadership system, creating consistency between power control and development. However, in the current context, it is necessary to enhance professionalism, transparency, and data-based inspection and supervision capacity.

Overall, Party inspection work represents an organizational–disciplinary model of power control, suitable for the requirements of modern urban governance and the rapid development of Ho Chi Minh City.

Conclusions and Avenues for Future Research

The study clarifies that the inspection work of Party Committees' Inspection Commissions is not merely a technical or professional activity, but constitutes an internal power-control institution that occupies a central position under the conditions of a ruling party. Based on an institutional approach and a case study of Ho Chi Minh City, the article conceptualizes the "quality of inspection work" as a composite construct comprising four fundamental dimensions: institutional framework, organizational capacity, operational performance, and outcomes and impacts.

A key finding is that the quality of inspection work cannot be equated with the number of inspections conducted or the number of cases handled. Rather, it should be assessed through the interrelationship

among the institutional framework, organizational capacity, operational effectiveness, and the ability to generate substantive impacts on power control, the maintenance of Party discipline, and the consolidation of political trust. In the context of urban governance, inspection work increasingly demonstrates its role as a compensatory mechanism for the relative decline of certain traditional oversight channels, while also adapting to the requirements of modern governance in a more proactive, professional, and data-driven manner.

The main contribution of the article lies in enriching the theoretical foundation of power control within a ruling-party governance model and in developing a systematic evaluation framework consisting of four groups of criteria corresponding to the four dimensions of inspection quality, with illustrative indicators and data sources. This framework can serve as an analytical tool and a practical reference for localities, particularly large urban areas implementing urban governance models.

Several limitations remain. First, the study is primarily based on a qualitative approach and theoretical framework development, and has not yet been fully validated with quantitative empirical data; the proposed indicators are illustrative and require pilot testing. Second, the scope is limited to the case of Ho Chi Minh City, requiring further comparative studies across localities to assess generalizability. Third, the impacts of digital transformation, big data, and artificial intelligence on the innovation of inspection methods have only been preliminarily identified.

These limitations suggest three directions for future research: (i) empirical validation of the framework through survey and documentary data in Ho Chi Minh City, applying the aggregate diagnostic logic developed in Section 5.5; (ii) comparative application of the framework across multiple provincial and municipal inspection commissions; and (iii) focused investigation of how data-driven and AI-enabled methods are reshaping the operational and outcome dimensions of inspection quality. Pursuing these directions would further refine both the theoretical and practical understanding of inspection quality in the context of Party building and governance modernization in Vietnam.

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