

The Role of Customs Law in Law Enforcement: A Case Study of The Cham Ethnic Group in Vietnam

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Citation: Huyen, N. T. T. (2025). The Role of Customs Law in Law Enforcement: A Case Study of The Cham Ethnic Group in Vietnam, *Journal of Cultural Analysis and Social Change*, 10(2), 1415-1427. <https://doi.org/10.64753/jcasc.v10i2.1816>

Published: November 14, 2025

ABSTRACT

The article investigates the factors affecting state law compliance in Cham minority communities in Vietnam. Using a legal pluralism framework, a cross-section survey was conducted with 200 adult respondents, and the study looked at five parameters: the role of Luật tục (custom legal system), cultural and religious traditions, socio-economic factors, local governance and mediation, and legal recognition and state policy. Data reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, the construct validity was established using factor analysis, and the hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis. The findings indicate that the five factors appear to be variables that have a significant and positive influence on state law compliance. The customary legal system and cultural traditions acted as facilitators for compliance by embedding ideas of legality into community practices. Socio-economics were weaker, but provided the option of the use of formal institutions. Local governance and mediation were strong intermediaries acting between the community and the state, while legal recognition and a state policy were the strongest predictors. The findings underscore important issues concerning recognition, inclusion of traditional forms of governance in current and future state policy across multi-ethnic contexts, and participatory governance.

Keywords: Cham Communities, Customary Law (luật tục), Cultural Traditions, Legal Pluralism, Minority Governance, State Law Implementation, Vietnam

INTRODUCTION

The nature of the interaction of laws, cultures, and systems of governance in Southeast Asia has been highlighted in the literature, often with a lens on how minority groups create different regulatory schemes. Historical and political perspectives (Heder, 1997; Hein, 2017) on the research region identify scars from armed conflicts, colonial interventions, and socio-economic marginalization that shape the way communities develop systems of authority. Furthermore, scholarship located in anthropology and security imaginaries confirms that legal and cultural practices are constituted within positionalities of identity, power, and resilience (Jacobsen & Nørgaard, 2024).

In Vietnam, minority ethnic groups, such as the Cham, demonstrate the importance of customary law as an integral part of the local governance system. Research on environmental change and inter-generational knowledge in rural Vietnam indicates that local customs and practices are important elements in adaptation strategies where reliance on community-based adaptive practices is preferred over reliance on distant state institutions (Beckwith et al., 2023). Studies of language and cultural scripts reinforce this conclusion and suggest that the sustainability of customs, whether in writing and cultural forms, or social practices, represents an important part of minority identity (Nguyen, 2019)..

Health and social surveys are evidence of the persistence of customary and community-based approaches to behavior and compliance. For many minority groups, access to water, sanitation, and health care has been unequal and driven communities to rely on their internal capabilities for regulation and mutual support (Le et al., 2020; Hoang et al., 2020). Ethnic stereotypes and social inequalities continue to shape inter-group relations, the experience of law and norms, and the policies of the Central Highlands in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2021). Similar results have been found in studies of tobacco and alcohol use and non-communicable diseases. Cultural practices and socio-demographic conditions condition health outcomes and regulatory behaviours (Tran et al., 2020; Hoang et al., 2020).

Complicating the picture, cross-border migration and transnational relations are also part of the Cham people's life. Migration studies show that migration creates economic pressures that transform customs and traditions; while at the same time creating conflicts between tradition and modernity, street vendors, and aquatic food sources, for example (Nguyen, 2022); and (Low, 2022). Even studies of marine resources and local pharmaceutical engagements show that various indigenous knowledge systems and practices coincide with contemporary sciences, signalling a wider amalgamation of pluralism across norms and regulatory approaches (Phi et al., 2020).

Finally, with a political economy view, Vietnam's post-innovation time experience shifted the locus of market institutions and state power, albeit with gaps of representation and acknowledgement for minority groups (Shultz, 2011). The gaps in recognition and representation of the Cham reinforce the viability of *luật tục* as an accepted source of legitimacy, and as an alternative site of authority to state law. Collectively, these insights mean that Cham customary law is not simply a cultural construct; it represents a new or reformed system influenced by social and economic realities, environment, and a sense of identity politics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Implementation of State Law in Minority Communities

In minority communities, the application of state law exemplifies the meeting points of formal legal frameworks and indigenous and community-centered systems. State law is most effective for minority peoples when it is adapted to the contexts of communities. As Quinn (2008) asserts, helping minority populations be resilient means "using communication strategies that honour cultural norms and develop local trust," which highlights the importance of state law being useful to community contexts.

Comparative studies also suggest that ignoring or disregarding local practices reduces legitimacy. Fountain et al. (2004) point out that minority groups build "alternative informal systems of regulation and support" when state institutions do not meet their needs. In the same vein, Gill (2009) describes the ways in which reliance on community authority still exists when formal justice is viewed as distant or unavailable culturally..

Access and representation continue to remain a central focus. Hernandez et al. (2008) examined both physical and cultural access to public services, and concluded that access for minority communities is based upon the presence of both cultural and physical access. Frazier and Matusiak (2022) establish that the representation of minorities within law enforcement organizations enhances institutional legitimacy and ultimately increases compliance.

These results are consistent with broader governance contexts. Richards et al. (2002) emphasize that community-based interventions can be successful because they "incorporate local voices in the development and implementation process," while Thomas (1990) highlighted the importance of discussing structural inequalities when giving voice to minorities so that issues can be addressed with efficacy. Additionally, Munoz-Lavanderos et al. (2023) demonstrate that paired outreach bringing together state resources and community networks can drastically improve outcomes, such as vaccination uptake during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In sum, the literature indicates that, in minority contexts, the efficacy of law depends on hybrid responses rather than just enforcement, which blends state authority with local authority (Guillén & Capron, 2015; Ram & Jones, 2008). In communities such as the Cham in Vietnam, acknowledging *luật tục* and working with community leaders provides an effective method to encourage adherence to state law while allowing flexibility around cultural identity.

Customary Law of the Cham ethnic group in Vietnam.

Cham customary law serves as an indigenous regulatory regime that is situated at the nexus of cultural traditions, community agreement, and transposition across generations. Unlike codified law, which derives its force from state authority, its legitimacy derives from being "embedded in community spirit and upheld by common values" (Asaah, 2007). Since it is culturally based, *luật tục* can exert influence even in the presence of formally established state law.

In Cham society, customary law governs property rights, inheritance, marriage, and conflict resolution; meanwhile, the priorities are often more about reconciliation and harmony than adversarial justice. This is consistent with Bhattacharjee's (2019) study of tribal governance, which highlights the "traditional councils for everyday administration" found in many minority communities, such as the Cham village councils, where elders and religious leaders understand their roles as mediators of conflicts. There are also important gendered aspects to consider: Satyawadhana demonstrates that the matrilineal inheritance patterns of various Southeast Asian groups serve as a means to maintain cultural continuity through matrilineality, as evident in the case of the Cham, which appears to operate independently of the national legal code (Bhattacharjee, 2019).

Customary law often supplements state law as a mode of governance, or system of governance, to fill governance gaps. As Imrie and Thomas (1997) observed, legal confrontations typically develop "at the interface of formal and informal orders," making clear why Cham communities use *luật tục* when they lose access to or are out of sync with bureaucratic means of resolving problems. However, as both Cham (1984) and Melo (2022) discuss, indigenous systems can also solidify unequal norms, such as gender-discriminatory inheritance, and can generate situations that conflict with equality-based principles adhered to in Vietnamese law.

The durability of *luật tục* is fundamentally associated with cultural and religious identity. Gottlieb (2005) points out that breaking down indigenous legal and cultural systems can "break apart societies," and Vieira and Brito (2017) showed that traditional indigenous practices often resurface as important points of continuity against pressures of modernization. It makes sense, then, that Cham customary law exists as the dualities of both a legal governing body and cultural identity.

From a broader perspective, Cham people's customary law illustrates how indigenous legal systems develop rather than disappear. As Stevens (1966) points out in a historical context, formal codified law existed regularly alongside other normative systems, creating both tension and a space for accommodation. For Vietnam, integration and recognition of *luật tục* represents not only a viable and relevant means for law enforcement, but also a means to maintain the cultural harmony of governance in multi-ethnic states.

Cultural and Religious Traditions

Religion and culture are forms of social order that create values, norms, and collective identities. For the Cham people, Islamic traditions from Cham Bani and Cham Sunni traditions represent spiritual direction and guidance, found through governance and regulation of social interactions. As Grayson (2001) emphasizes in a broader comparative context, religious traditions provide "ethical codes and cultural encounters that structure community life" and show how faith is expressed as a moral reference but also as a regulator within social settings.

Cham religious intermediaries, such as Pô Adhia (Bani clerics) and Sunni imams, act not only as leaders of religious sentiment but also as arbiters of conflict resolution. Their positionality lends authority to their role as community leaders and helps reinforce stability. Erdoğan (2017) points to cultural traditions that are embedded in rituals in everyday life and domestic spaces as "mechanisms of continuity," and their integral connections to values continue – it is beyond tradition. Tantra - from Friday prayers to the Kate festival - affirmatively makes and maintains solidarity and extends to one's normative collectives.

Comparative perspectives reveal that when cultural and religious systems intersect with law, hybrid governance structures emerge. Tekke et al. (2015) found that Islamic commitments in Malaysia shape not only personal spirituality, but social obligations, demonstrating that religious reflection can lead to collective compliance. Ali (2011) similarly illustrated that narratives around Islam frequently influence legitimacy and authority, one of the factors that directly mirrors the Cham community's reliance on their religious leaders to resolve theirs.

Tensions arise when religious or cultural traditions don't coincide with state standards. Potts (1993) states that, "social and cultural needs that are not addressed often result in a lack of 'regulatory systems,' which communities will utilize their religious foundations to try and satiate. For the Cham, this is perhaps exemplified by their marriage or inheritance customs that do not adhere to national law. Cole (2013) furthers this argument by stating that standards for evaluating human rights vary in different cultural and religious civilizations, indicating that universalized legal standards will not be accepted when they conflict with local moral codes.

Simultaneously, acceptance and accommodation of cultural-religious practices can foster legal compliance. Wyckoff (2005) showed that cross - cultural ministry is functional when it "recognizes indigenous traditions that offer valid channels to meaning", and Haller (1990) stated that comparative sociology must take into account such plural systems of meaning as opposed to homogenizing them. For the Cham, Islamic practices are not personal practice but an essential component of governance and legitimacy.

In conclusion, Cham culture and religion have both stabilizing and complicating effects on law enforcement. On the one hand, they strengthen social cohesion and moral behaviour, especially with respect to family relations. On the other hand, they also create friction in issues of family relations and gender equality, which come into conflict with state law. As Hedlund (2003) reminds us in another context, good governance means "cultural

interaction and acknowledgment of religious traditions," a lesson that is invitingly relevant to the endeavour of the state of Vietnam to reconcile Cham luật tục and Islamic practices with national legal systems.

Socio-Economic Conditions

Socioeconomic development influence the efficacy of state law directly. Citizens living in communities with stronger educational attainment, stable economic well-being, and resource access tend to comply with the law more readily than those living in poverty or under marginalization, who generally experience less trust in state institutions. Schriewer noted that education also provides knowledge, but functions as a "process of social integration," which informs how we relate to formal means of governance in some way or another.

The Cham community is dependent on agriculture, fishing, and handicrafts for its livelihoods; therefore, its economic vulnerability reinforces its dependence on customary institutions. Maher, Valenzuela, and Böhm's (2019) analysis on conflict regarding local governance shows that when communities perceive state systems as distant, they instead establish "enduring alternative structures" to work out economic and social relations. We see this same reality in Cham communities where customary law provides accessible ways to settle disputes in situations of poverty and limited institutional jurisdiction.

Education gaps continue to heighten inequality. Conley (2013) demonstrates that the uneven distribution of rights — in her case, pay equity — is an example of the way structural disadvantages inhibit marginalized groups from invoking protections conferred through formal law. Likewise, Cham communities, which often have lower levels of literacy, rely on elders and community leaders to mediate conflicts instead of adhering to complex state processes.

Geographical separation adds a further dimension of structural marginalization. For example, Powell et al. (2022) highlight, "effective governance in remote context is reliant on the 'adaptive leadership and localized solutions', which we argue applies to Cham settlements because being located further distance from administrative centres significantly affects access to legal services. In these settings, luật tục is a workable and legitimate means of governance for community members.

Such socio-economic disparities also impact state legitimacy. As Okhmatovskiy and Nieto de Castro (2025) argue, legitimacy is shaped by perceptions of fairness and accessibility for all; where minority communities continuously experience disadvantage, it is possible that state law may be rendered irrelevant. However, as Boehmer-Christiansen (1995) reminds us, where state policies and institutions align with social and economic realities, people are more willing to comply with policies and institutions of the state, reinforcing the established link between socio-economic development and effective legal formalities.

Lastly, more expansive perspectives also emphasize that socio-economic relations are global rather than insular. Sorial (2008) argues that law must remedy inequalities if it is to fulfill its cosmopolitan promise, and Zhang and Pearlman (2004) demonstrate that land-use reforms change socio-economic relations, changing legal adherence. Kotzé et al. (2021) also argue that transformative legal frameworks must consider environmental dimensions and social realities together, a compelling view for challenging the Cham communities' dependence on natural resource-based livelihoods.

Overall, socio-economic differences maintain Cham customary law resilience and weaken the consistency of state law application. Reducing poverty, educational disparity, and addressing geographic isolation is essential not only for improving livelihoods but also for effective and equitable legal governance.

Local Governance and Mediation Mechanisms

Community regulation and local governance are crucial to the law enforcement process in minority configurations where power and authority are built on cultural legitimacy as opposed to authority from the state. As Beer and Cruz-Aceves (2018) observe, the acknowledgment of rights for a minority group is contingent on the dynamic interplay between institutional authority and trust within the community. This diversity of power can be seen in the Cham community; mediators emerge in the Cham community as religious figures such as Pô Adhia or Sunni imams with the support of village elders. Together, these forces work with their community to mediate and protect the basic laws of the community, like luật tục (customary law) and cultural identity.

These actors perfectly exemplify what de la Maza (2014) calls "negotiated legitimacy", combining established routines with external factors. Acceptance of their rulings rests on some form of legitimate communal beliefs; in Croce and Swennen's (2020) words, the act of recognition creates social relations that reinforce cultural authority. Swennen and Croce (2015) likewise demonstrate this. They show, through symbolic norms, just as with Cham rituals or compensations, that it is possible for communities to be bound not by a codified law, but by customary standards challenged by judges.

Community-based processes emphasize harmony and reconciliation rather than punishment. Moore and Rodman (2019) want to stress that dignity and legitimacy in governance occur when recognition is based on cultural meanings, which surely parallels the Cham practice of resolving disputes through ritualized settlement. To caution, Coombe (2005) argued that indigenous justice practices are marginalized if they do not connect to broader institutional processes where their functioning may not be creating new parallels to the state but also lessening the perceived importance of state law.

Hybrid governance presents a promising way forward. Mitchell and Petray (2016) point out that legal reforms spread most effectively when a community network serves to diffuse them, while Huddleston (2020) emphasizes how recognition is an ongoing negotiation of authority. Given the Cham context, either through collaborations between local government officials and religious or customary leaders, status could align state law with trust or community goodwill, and trust and hence compliance and stability could be enhanced.

Yet challenges still exist. Michos, Figgou, and Baka (2022) demonstrate that debating recognition highlights tensions between equality and cultural autonomy, while Kyris (2022) stresses that sovereignty is a complex, contested, and ongoing process. These observations also reveal the challenge of re-establishing legal uniformity for cultural traditions to law. In conclusion, Cham local governance demonstrates how authority based on trust in communities maintains social order. Hybrid forms that marry customary mediation with the state offer the best option to enforce the law in a culturally relevant and effective way in minority communities.

Legal Recognition and State Policy

The degree of recognition of customary law by the state is one of the main factors affecting the relationship with the formal legal system and its impact in multicultural situations. As Beer and Cruz-Aceves (2018) point out, the granting of rights to marginalized minorities is contingent not simply on guarantees of rights in formal law, but on processes of recognition that embed these formally recognized rights as goals in broader governance processes. This reflects a central aspect of legal pluralism, which is that recognition is not merely symbolic, but a way of establishing legitimacy and compliance.

Comparative studies reveal different approaches to recognition. For example, de la Maza (2014) shows how Chilean indigenous policy has emerged from a tension between recognition and conflict, illustrating the challenge of balancing state sovereignty and cultural autonomy. Huddleston (2020) captures this complexity by conceptualizing recognition not as a one-off legal act, but as a process, highlighting the way in which the legitimacy of minority governance structures develops over time. Kyris (2022) goes further to illustrate that even the concept of sovereignty is similarly fluid, evolving based on the extent to which the state agrees to recognize community practices formally.

In Vietnam, even though constitutional documents and policies recognize cultural rights, there are currently no well-defined legal mechanisms to incorporate *luật tục* into the official legal landscape. This situation—endorsing traditional culture in principle but ignoring it in practice—parallels the gap between acknowledgement by a government and lived dignity described by Moore and Rodman (2019). Customary law's survival is based on social legitimacy, but this survival occurs without forms of institutional recognition, putting minority groups like the Cham in vulnerable positions between loyalty to the state and their traditional systems of governance.

The lack of legal clarity similarly leads to conflict with human rights standards. Michos, Figgou, and Baka (2022) demonstrate how discussions on gender identity recognition also reveal conflict where community norms conflict with broader notions of equality. In the Cham case, inheritance rules and/or marriage practices may do the same thing as they contradict national gender equality commitments, creating uncertainty for community leaders and state actors. Coombe (2005) cautions that legal claims to culture can be devalued and/or monetized without proper structures, rendering these practices socially illegitimate.

Recognition can also act as a force for change. Croce and Swennen (2020) highlight that recognition restructures political and social relations, and Swennen and Croce (2015) further illustrate that legal language used to symbolize being 'represented legally' can help communities to retain a sense of belonging. Mitchell and Petray (2016) contend that legal recognition often spreads through time and space and diffuses through circumstances such as the necessity for state institutions to respond to new cultural expectations rather than just impose a solution.

In the Cham context, this implies that formal recognition frameworks could enhance both cultural identity and compliance with state law. Absent these frameworks, *luật tục* can easily fall to the margins or be weakened, with Cham groups being less willing to trust in state institutions and reinforcing a further fragmented legal landscape. Simplistically speaking, institutional recognition—if designed to strike a balance between diversity and legal uniformity—could improve both legal legitimacy and social cohesion.

Ultimately, the Vietnamese case underscores the importance of recognition as an instrument of legal pluralism. While existing policy regards cultural rights to a degree, cultural rights remain uncertain in practice because they do not have any specific legal framework to support them, and render Cham customary law vulnerable. This legal

recognition and integration of Cham customary law into a legal framework represents a step towards the aforementioned legal pluralism by the focus of ongoing scholarship on the integration of instances of customary practices into state law, while balancing the need to maintain good governance alongside the need to preserve cultural identity (Beer & Cruz-Aceves, 2018; Kyris, 2022; Moore & Rodman 2019).

Based on literature reviews, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): The Customary Law of the Cham ethnic group in Vietnam has a positive and significant impact on the Implementation of State Law in Minority Communities

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Cultural and Religious Traditions have a positive and significant impact on the Implementation of State Law in Minority Communities

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Socio-Economic Conditions have a positive and significant impact on the Implementation of State Law in Minority Communities

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Local Governance and Mediation Mechanisms have a positive and significant impact on the Implementation of State Law in Minority Communities.

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Legal Recognition and State Policy have a positive and significant impact on the Implementation of State Law in Minority Communities

METHODS

Design and Sample

Adopting a cross-sectional design, the study surveyed adult Cham respondents (aged 18 years and older) residing in the provinces with large Cham populations, specifically Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, An Giang, and Tay Ninh. The self-report instrument consisted of two sections: demographic characteristics and survey content. The latter section asked respondents to rate their attitudes and perceptions using a five-point Likert scale. Prior to conducting the main survey instrument with study respondents, we pretested the self-report instrument with 40 people in an effort to modify language and improve comprehension. Bilingual administration was used to eliminate measurement error, and we trained enumerators based on field protocols employed in previous studies with Vietnam's minority populations (Beckwith et al., 2023; Hoang et al., 2020; Le et al., 2020). The final purposive sample consisted of 200 respondents, which is considered an adequate sample size for factor analysis and regression modeling.

Measures

We measured the dependent variable, the Implementation of State Law (ISL), with Likert-scale items about how people follow formal procedures (civil registration, land administration, etc.), how they assess the fairness and efficacy of formal institutions, and how they trust formal channels to resolve disputes. The items were summed to create a composite ISL index and, based on multivariate reliability assessment (Cronbach's $\alpha \geq .70$), we established that the ISL index had internal consistency.

Each of our independent variables was measured using the following: Customary Law (CL), this reflected the degree to which people rely on *luật tục* to regulate their everyday conduct and resolve disputes; Cultural and Religious Traditions (CRT), which measures the extent of adherence to rituals, frequency of religious practice and the power of local religious leaders; Socio-economic Conditions (SEC), which looked at education, the adequacy of peoples' income in meeting their needs, stability in their livelihoods and their access to services; Local Governance and Mediation (LGM), which looked at people's experience of commune-level mediation teams, their perceptions of procedural fairness and access to third-party advisers; Legal Recognition and State Policy (LRSP); this included people's awareness of -related policy, their understanding of the degree to which their laws, *luật tục*, are recognized and benefited from legal aid or outreach programs.

The scale development was pretested through exploratory factor analysis (EFA), also using principal-axis factoring and oblique rotation; items with factor loadings of .40 were kept. Some scales also employed confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) to assess UNIdimensionality and reliability in the presence of strong theoretical expectations about the item clusters - careful consideration was given for model parsimony in relation to sample size ($n = 200$; Nguyen, 2021; Muñoz-Lavanderos et al., 2023).

Before hypothesis testing, the data were subjected to reliability analysis, exploratory factor analysis, and Pearson correlation tests to examine construct validity and preliminary associations. Hypotheses were then tested using multivariate linear regression to estimate the unique effects of each predictor on ISL. Both unstandardized and standardized coefficients, 95% confidence intervals, and adjusted R^2 values were reported.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Demographic Analysis

Table 1 shows the demographic profiles of the 200 Cham respondents surveyed across Ninh Thuan, Bình Thuận, An Giang, and Tây Ninh. The sample was approximately representative of the gender distribution for the Cham population in the four provinces, with 54% female and 46% male respondents. The age distribution was not representative of the Cham population. The largest age group was 30-44 (36%), followed by ages 45-59 (27%), ages 18-29 (24%), and lastly, the respondents aged 60 years and older (13%). Education was also skewed; 21% of respondents had primary education or below, 29% had lower secondary education, 32% attended upper secondary education, and 18% had reached college or university. In examining income, more than one-third of respondents (37%) reported that their monthly income came from 3-5 million VND; 26% less than 3 million VND; 24% between 5-8 million VND; and lastly, 13% above 8 million VND. The majority of Cham respondents belong to either Bàlamôn (36%), Bani (32%), or Islam (32%). Lastly, in relation to a place of residence, most respondents reside in rural areas (69%), while the remaining 31% live in an urban context.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	92	46.0
	Female	108	54.0
Age Group	18–29 years	48	24.0
	30–44 years	72	36.0
	45–59 years	54	27.0
	60 years and above	26	13.0
Education Level	Primary or below	42	21.0
	Secondary	58	29.0
	High school	64	32.0
	College/University	36	18.0
Household Income	< 3 million VND/month	52	26.0
	3–5 million VND/month	74	37.0
	5–8 million VND/month	48	24.0
	> 8 million VND/month	26	13.0
Religious Affiliation	Bàlamôn	72	36.0
	Bani	64	32.0
	Islam	64	32.0
Residence	Rural	138	69.0
	Urban	62	31.0

Note. Data are drawn from a survey of 200 adult Cham respondents across Ninh Thuan, Bình Thuận, An Giang, and Tây Ninh provinces. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding.

Reliability Analysis

In order to test the durability of the measuring instruments, Cronbach's alpha reliability analysis was performed on each of the six constructs measured in this study. The results demonstrated a coefficient far exceeding the usual acceptability ratio of 0.70 and were considered satisfactory to excellent levels of internal consistency. The dependent variable ISL had the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.84$), verifying the harmonization between items measuring compliance and trust in state law. Among the independent variables, LRSP had the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$), closely followed by CL ($\alpha = 0.82$) and LGM ($\alpha = 0.81$). CRT also showed solid consistency ($\alpha = 0.80$), and SEC, although lower than the aforementioned reliability ratios, showed an acceptable level of internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.78$). In conclusion, all scales were found to be reliable and, as such, are suitable for exploring the hypotheses through regression analysis.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis Results

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Interpretation
Implementation of State Law (ISL)	6	0.84	High reliability
Customary Law (CL)	5	0.82	High reliability

Cultural & Religious Traditions (CRT)	4	0.80	Good reliability
Socio-Economic Conditions (SEC)	5	0.78	Acceptable reliability
Local Governance & Mediation (LGM)	5	0.81	High reliability
Legal Recognition & State Policy (LRSP)	4	0.83	High reliability

Factor Analysis

In order to ascertain construct validity, an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) utilizing Principal Axis Factoring with oblique rotation was completed. Prior to extraction, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measures of sampling adequacy were assessed as 0.83, which exceeds the minimum standard of 0.60, and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1,248.53$, $df = 325$, $p < 0.001$), indicating EFA was appropriate for this analysis. Results from the EFA provided evidence for the hypothesized five factors of the independent variables, in addition to the hypothesized dependent variable (ISL). All items loaded strongly (≥ 0.50) on their constructs, without any notable cross-loadings. Eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were calculated for each factor, and the total variance explained by the six extracted factors was 67.4%, greatly exceeding the 50% suggested as acceptable in social sciences. More specifically, ISL items emerged as a cohesive factor explaining 14.2% of variance, while the independent constructs – CL, CRT, SEC, LGM, and LRSP – were explained about between 9.5% and 12.8%, respectively. Taken together, the results from EFA demonstrated that the factor structure corresponded to theoretical expectations and bolstered the construct validity of the scales.

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Factor	Number of Items	Eigenvalue	Variance Explained (%)	Factor Loadings
Implementation of State Law (ISL)	6	4.26	14.2	0.58
Customary Law (CL)	5	3.74	12.8	0.55
Cultural & Religious Traditions (CRT)	4	3.12	10.7	0.60
Socio-Economic Conditions (SEC)	5	2.88	9.5	0.53
Local Governance & Mediation (LGM)	5	3.09	10.3	0.57
Legal Recognition & State Policy (LRSP)	4	3.21	10.9	0.59
Total	29	–	67.4	–

Note. Extraction method: Principal Axis Factoring. Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. KMO = 0.83; Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity: $\chi^2 = 1,248.53$, $df = 325$, $p < 0.001$.

Pearson Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was employed to evaluate the bivariate relationships between the constructs in this study. Results revealed that all of the independent variables, CL, CRT, SEC, LGM, and LRSP, were significantly and positively correlated with the dependent variable ISL, at the $p < 0.01$ level. The highest amount of correlation with ISL was Legal Recognition and State Policy ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$), followed by Local Governance and Mediation ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$) and Customary Law ($r = 0.49$, $p < 0.01$). The correlation amounts for Cultural and Religious Traditions ($r = 0.44$, $p < 0.01$) and Socio-Economic Conditions ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.01$) were also moderate and significant. The intercorrelations among the independent variables ranged from 0.28 to 0.47, indicating some theoretical overlap but no obvious multicollinearity issues. Overall, the findings provided some preliminary evidence for the proposed hypotheses and a rationale for continuing regression analysis to explore the unique contributions of each predictor to the enactment of state law.

Table 4: Pearson Correlation Results

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. ISL	1					
2. CL	0.49**	1				
3. CRT	0.44**	0.36**	1			
4. SEC	0.41**	0.33**	0.28**	1		
5. LGM	0.52**	0.42**	0.39**	0.35**	1	
6. LRSP	0.56**	0.47**	0.41**	0.38**	0.44**	1

Note. ISL = Implementation of State Law; CL = Customary Law; CRT = Cultural & Religious Traditions; SEC = Socio-Economic Conditions; LGM = Local Governance & Mediation; LRSP = Legal Recognition & State Policy. ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed).

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

A multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the effect of the five independent variables, CL, CRT, SEC, LGM, and LRSP, on the dependent variable, Implementation of State Law (ISL). The overall model was statistically significant, $F(5, 194) = 28.74$, $p < 0.001$, with an adjusted $R^2 = 0.42$, indicating that approximately 42% of the variance in ISL can be explained by the five predictor variables. However, of the five predictors, LRSP was the strongest predictor of ISL ($\beta = 0.31$, $p < 0.001$), followed by LGM ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$) and CL ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). CRT ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$) and SEC ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$) also had a positive and statistically significant effect on ISL, but with a less pronounced effect than the three preceding variables. The research findings provide strong support for all five preliminary hypotheses (H1–H5), demonstrating that all five constructs, each having a positive and statistically significant effect on the implementation of state law in Cham communities.

Table 5: Multiple Regression Results

Predictor Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
CL	0.28	0.09	0.22	3.11	0.002 **
CRT	0.21	0.10	0.18	2.12	0.035 *
SEC	0.19	0.08	0.15	2.38	0.018 *
LGM	0.33	0.09	0.27	3.67	0.001 ***
LRSP	0.36	0.08	0.31	4.50	0.001 ***

Note. DV = Implementation of State Law. Unstandardized coefficients (B), standard errors (SE), standardized coefficients (β), t statistics, and significance levels are reported. $p < .05$; * $p < .01$; ** $p < .001$.

Note. DV = Implementation of State Law. Standardized coefficients (β) are reported alongside unstandardized coefficients (B). * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to investigate the determinants for the implementation of a measure of state law in Cham minority communities in Vietnam. Viewed from a legal pluralism perspective and the governance literature, it examined the influence of customary law, customary and religious customs, socio-economic conditions, local governance and mediation, state recognition of custom, and relevant policies. Regression analysis demonstrated all five factors statistically significant and with positive effects on the implementation of state law (ISL), providing strong support for the conceptual model proposed. The findings showed that reliance on *luật tục* (customary law) is a key factor impacting the implementation of state law ($\beta = 0.22$, $p < 0.01$). This finding supports H1 that there is a positive association between customary law and ISL. This is in accordance with an argument that customary law is viewed as a functional normative order, not as a leftover from cultural acts (Beckwith et al., 2023). In Cham communities, customary rules are effective in managing daily life and provide legitimate bases for dispute resolution in the absence of formal legal institutions. Therefore, H1 was accepted.

Cultural and religious traditions had a significant positive effect on ISL ($\beta = 0.18$, $p < 0.05$). This supports H2, which predicted that cultural and religious traditions predict state law implementation positively. The findings correlate with those of Nguyen (2021), who found that ritual practices and religious leaders play an important role in influencing minority communities' understandings of legal norms. In this situation, cultural authority functions as a legitimizing force that supports compliance. As such, H2 is accepted. Socio-economic conditions have a significant (albeit weak) level of effect on ISL ($\beta = 0.15$, $p < 0.05$). This provides support for H3, which predicted that socio-economic conditions that are better positively predict compliance with state law. The findings are consistent with Hoang et al.'s (2020) and Le et al.'s (2020) research, which emphasize that poverty, low education, and poor access to services play a role in shaping the legal interactions of minority populations. The acceptance of H3 reinforces the structural dimensions of compliance: material resources and social capital afford individuals a better capacity to comply with state law..

Our strongest predictor of ISL was local governance and mediation processes ($\beta = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$), which satisfies H4 and supports that local institutions bolster the efficacy of state law. Beckwith et al. (2023) assert that grassroots institutions serve as intermediary structures, connecting formal legal systems to informal norms of the community. When local governance is participatory and mediation systems are regarded as legitimate, compliance

with the law is greatly improved. Therefore, H4 can be accepted. Our strongest predictor of ISL was the perception of legal recognition and inclusive state policy ($\beta = 0.31, p < 0.001$). This finding supports H5, which proposed that recognition and supportive state policies positively impact the implementation of state law. These findings are consistent with Okhmatovskiy and Nieto de Castro's (2025) argument that recognition is fundamental to the legitimacy of governance systems. When a state takes notice of minority traditions in its policy, compliance with the state law is increased. Therefore, H5 can be accepted.

Collectively, support for all five hypotheses (H1-H5) illustrates that the legal compliance in minority groups is inspired by a multi-dimensional assortment of cultural, socio-economic, and institutional predicted factors. The foremost theoretical contribution of these results is that we enhance the study of legal pluralism, as we demonstrate both customary systems and state law can combine in a synergistic manner under conditions of mutual recognition. The policy implications of the findings point to the need to embed the mutual recognition of minority tradition into overall legal frameworks, support community-led mediation, and create policy responses to socio-economic disparities, to subsequently foster the legitimacy and effectiveness of state law across various cultural contexts (Beckwith et al., 2023; Hoang et al., 2020; Le et al., 2020; Nguyen, 2021; Okhmatovskiy & Nieto de Castro, 2025).

CONCLUSION

The study examines the factors that shape the implementation of state law in the context of the Cham minority in Vietnam and adds to broader perspectives on legal pluralism, governance, and policy regarding minorities. The study identified five factors combined to define compliance with formal legal norms: customary law, culture and religion, socio-economic conditions, local government and mediation, and legal recognition and state policy. Some interesting findings also emerged from the research. Customary law does not operate as a competing law to state law, but as an adjunct that reinforces compliance and norms that recognize the momentum of community institutions. Culture and religion provide legitimacy and moral authority, especially with respect to rituals, and traditional leaders at the local level. Socio-economic conditions are somewhat less significant but still important because differences in education, income, and access to services limit the capacity of individuals to be engaged with formal law institutions. Local government and mediation act as important links between formal authority and the norms of community members. Regardless of how customary law, culture, and religion are linked with socio-economic contextual conditions influencing the role of the state, the recognition of the significance of minority cultures and local customary practices by local government was the most powerful determinant of compliance.

These findings highlight that legal pluralism should be seen as a horizontal resource, when aligned properly, rather than as a challenge or threat to state authority. Politically, from a compliance perspective it requires commitment in the region to political investments in educational, infrastructure and social services developments, and legal reform; from a perspective of institutional legitimacy it requires some stage of state authority acceptance of minority practice to be incorporated into a larger legal framework. Therefore, to be legitimately enforced in minority contexts, law needs to be seen as a whole; no one part should be understood and take precedence over all other parts until we are able to explore how that part overlaps with the way that law is practised as part of formal law, what communities operationalise their own self-governance (community governance), and what community members determine to be legitimate (cultural legitimacy).

This study has added to knowledge and is significant in a number of ways, but it is essential to consider a few limitations. Its first limitation is pertaining to the study's use of a cross-sectional survey design, which leads to the study being able to indicate associations at a single point in time and therefore does not establish any change and/or causal processes over time. Second, given that the purposive sampling design represented a useful mechanism to gain insights from within the Cham community, it generally restricts the scope to which you can make generalizations to other minority populations in Vietnam and beyond. Third, because the data is dependent on self-reported items, there is the possibility that the data reports may not be genuinely representative due to any response bias to sensitive subjects, particularly with reference to governance, law, and other issues related to the experiences associated with customary law. Lastly, the quantitative approaches will allow systematic tests, but no quantitative test will be able to encompass the cultural context and lived experiences with the customary law.

Future research may be able to investigate these limitations with longitudinal designs that address how compliance and legitimacy evolve over time, or with a more extensive sample that will include other ethnic minority groups for a comparative method. Qualitative methods and ethnographies or interviews could also combine with survey methods to understand more explicatory narratives of how individuals comprehend and negotiate customary law-state law relationships. Finally, future research could extend our thinking toward how compliance is adapted in minority contexts with regard to generational changes, migration effects, or digital governance initiatives. Thus, this work would deepen a contextual understanding of legal pluralism as both a challenge and an opportunity for inclusive governance.

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