



Energy Cooperation and the Resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (2012–2026): A Historical Perspective

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Abstract

This article examines the development of energy cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation during the period 2012–2026 from a historical perspective, with the aim of clarifying its role in enhancing the resilience of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries. The study employs the historical method in combination with documentary analysis and process tracing, drawing primarily upon intergovernmental agreements, high-level Vietnam–Russia joint statements, official documents issued by government agencies and energy enterprises, as well as relevant academic literature. The findings indicate that Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation has evolved through three successive phases: institutional consolidation (2012–2015), expansion and diversification of cooperation (2016–2021), and adaptation to geopolitical changes and the global energy transition (2022–2026). Throughout these phases, bilateral cooperation has expanded beyond traditional oil and gas activities to encompass liquefied natural gas (LNG), gas-fired power generation, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and emerging energy sectors. The article argues that the resilience of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation is rooted in the interaction of three mutually reinforcing factors: historical continuity, institutional adaptation, and strategic trust. Together, these factors have enabled energy cooperation to remain a strategic pillar that sustains and strengthens the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership despite profound changes in the international environment.

Keywords: Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, Energy cooperation, Russian Federation, Vietnam

Introduction

Vietnam and the Russian Federation have maintained a longstanding cooperative relationship rooted in the Soviet era, which has continued to evolve and strengthen in response to the changing international environment. The elevation of bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in 2012 established a new political and legal framework for expanding cooperation across multiple sectors, with energy remaining one of its most important pillars. The Joint Statements issued by the leaders of the two countries in 2012, 2021, 2024, and 2025 consistently reaffirmed the priority of enhancing cooperation in oil and gas, natural gas, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and emerging energy sectors, recognizing these areas as fundamental to consolidating the

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Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (GRF&GSRV, 2012, 2021, 2024, 2025).

The period from 2012 to 2026, however, was also characterized by profound transformations in the international environment. Global energy markets experienced a sharp decline in oil prices during 2014–2016, followed by the disruptive impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the acceleration of the global energy transition toward sustainable development, and significant geopolitical changes resulting from the Russia–Ukraine conflict after 2022. These developments reshaped global energy supply chains, intensified economic sanctions, and generated substantial challenges for international energy cooperation. Against this backdrop, energy cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation not only remained uninterrupted but also continued to expand through the conclusion of new intergovernmental agreements, the extension of existing cooperation mechanisms, and the formulation of long-term strategic orientations extending to 2030 and beyond. This remarkable continuity raises an important research question concerning the adaptive capacity and long-term resilience of the bilateral partnership (Luzyanin, 2022; Mazyrin, 2021; Thanh, 2023).

Existing scholarship has examined Vietnam–Russia cooperation from a variety of perspectives. Some studies have focused on the prospects for bilateral cooperation in the oil and gas and broader energy sectors (Ha, 2011; Butko, 2022), whereas others have explored bilateral relations through the lenses of strategic partnership, trade and investment, or the broader context of regional geopolitical competition (Ha & Lan, 2019; Luzyanin, 2022; Mazyrin, 2021). More recently, Huyen et al. (2025) further highlighted the significance of oil and gas cooperation within Russia's Pivot to the East policy, while Hang (2025) expanded the discussion to encompass energy cooperation and defence technology collaboration under the emerging international context. In addition, studies on energy diplomacy have emphasized the increasingly important role of energy as an instrument of foreign policy and a means of safeguarding national strategic interests (Lich & Ngan, 2023). Nevertheless, the existing literature has largely approached Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation from economic, policy, or geopolitical perspectives, while relatively little attention has been devoted to explaining its long-term evolution through a historical approach or to examining how energy cooperation has contributed to the resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Against this research background, the present study investigates the historical development of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation during the period 2012–2026 by drawing upon intergovernmental agreements, high-level joint statements issued by the leaders of the two countries, together with relevant academic studies and sector-specific publications. The article seeks to address three research questions: (i) How has Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation evolved between 2012 and 2026? (ii)

What institutional and political mechanisms have enabled this cooperation to adapt to changes in the international environment? (iii) Why can energy cooperation be regarded as a key factor underpinning the resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership?

Literature Review

The Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has attracted considerable scholarly attention both within Vietnam and internationally, primarily from the perspectives of international relations, geopolitics, and economic cooperation. Mazyrin (2021) characterizes Vietnam–Russia relations as one of Russia's most stable partnerships in Southeast Asia, sustained by political trust, the institutional legacy of Soviet–Vietnamese relations, and enduring intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms. From a geopolitical perspective, Luzyanin (2022) argues that Vietnam–Russia relations should be understood within the strategic Russia–Vietnam–China triangle, in which energy cooperation constitutes an important factor in maintaining the regional strategic balance and expanding Russia's influence in the Asia–Pacific region.

Within the Vietnamese literature, Ha and Lan (2019) examine bilateral relations through the lens of trade and investment cooperation, emphasizing the oil and gas sector as both a traditional area of collaboration and a catalyst for broader economic cooperation. Meanwhile, although Nghia and Cong (2002) conducted their study prior to the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, they identified the economic and investment foundations of Vietnam–Russia relations, thereby providing important insights into the historical continuity of bilateral cooperation in subsequent periods.

Overall, these studies have significantly advanced understanding of the evolution of Vietnam–Russia relations within the changing international environment. However, they have largely approached the bilateral relationship from the perspectives of international relations, geopolitics, or economic cooperation. Energy cooperation has generally been treated as one component of the broader bilateral relationship rather than being examined as a central factor underpinning the stability and resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Mazyrin, 2021; Luzyanin, 2022; Ha & Lan, 2019).

Compared with the broader literature on bilateral relations, studies focusing specifically on Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation remain relatively limited. Ha (2011) was among the first scholars to examine Russia's oil and gas strategy and the prospects for energy cooperation with Vietnam, highlighting the pivotal role of oil and gas projects in strengthening bilateral economic relations. Expanding this line of inquiry, Butko (2022) assessed the prospects for cooperation in the fuel and energy sectors, arguing that oil and gas continue to represent a highly

complementary area of cooperation between the two countries in the context of the global energy transition.

Recent studies have incorporated the changing international environment and the evolution of Russia's foreign policy into their analyses. Huyen et al. (2025) examine Vietnam–Russia oil and gas cooperation within the framework of Russia's Pivot to the East policy, highlighting the strategic roles of joint ventures such as Vietsovpetro and Rusvietpetro in supporting Russia's long-term presence in Asia. From a policy perspective, Hang (2025) analyzes the integration of energy cooperation and defence technology collaboration as two strategic dimensions of Vietnam–Russia relations under the emerging international context. In addition, the Petrovietnam (2017) publication *Russia and Vietnam's Oil and Gas Industry* provides valuable documentary evidence on the establishment and development of bilateral oil and gas projects, although its primary purpose is to document practical achievements rather than to offer systematic academic analysis.

Collectively, these studies provide a comprehensive account of the achievements of bilateral oil and gas cooperation and the future prospects of energy collaboration. Nevertheless, most of them concentrate on economic performance, individual oil and gas projects, or energy policies during specific periods. Comparatively little attention has been paid to examining the long-term historical evolution of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation or to exploring its relationship with the development of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

A more recent line of inquiry concerns energy diplomacy, which conceptualizes energy not merely as an economic resource but also as an instrument of foreign policy and international influence. Lich and Ngan (2023) analyze global trends in energy diplomacy, arguing that states increasingly employ energy cooperation to enhance energy security, diversify strategic partnerships, and strengthen their geopolitical position. This perspective provides an important theoretical foundation for understanding why energy cooperation extends beyond purely economic interests to become a significant component of bilateral relations. However, their analysis remains largely conceptual and does not examine the Vietnam–Russia case as an illustrative example of the interaction between energy diplomacy and a comprehensive strategic partnership.

The literature review demonstrates that existing studies have established an important foundation for understanding Vietnam–Russia relations, bilateral energy cooperation, and energy diplomacy. Nevertheless, two significant research gaps remain. First, most previous studies rely predominantly on secondary sources, while systematic analyses based on primary materials—including intergovernmental agreements, high-level joint statements, and official government documents—remain limited. Consequently, the historical evolution of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation during the period 2012–2026 has yet

to be comprehensively reconstructed. Second, no existing study has examined energy cooperation as a key explanatory factor underlying the resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership from a historical perspective. To address these gaps, this article adopts a historical approach combined with documentary analysis to examine how historical continuity, institutional adaptation, and strategic trust have jointly sustained the resilience of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation amid geopolitical transformations and the global energy transition.

Methodology

This study adopts the historical method as its primary methodological approach to reconstruct and analyze the evolution of energy cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation during the period 2012–2026. Unlike studies that examine bilateral energy cooperation primarily from economic or contemporary international relations perspectives, the historical approach enables an examination of the dynamic evolution of energy cooperation within its broader political, economic, and geostrategic contexts. It also facilitates an assessment of both historical continuity and policy transformation in bilateral cooperation over time. This methodological perspective is particularly appropriate for the objective of explaining the role of energy cooperation in enhancing the resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

To achieve this objective, the study combines documentary analysis with process tracing. Documentary analysis is employed to collect, compare, and systematically examine official sources that document the establishment, evolution, and institutional development of bilateral energy cooperation mechanisms. Building upon this documentary evidence, process tracing is applied to identify critical turning points, examine the relationship between major policy decisions and changes in the international environment, and explain the continuity and adaptive capacity of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation in response to external geopolitical and economic transformations (Mazyrin, 2021; Luzyanin, 2022).

The study draws upon both primary and secondary sources, with priority given to primary materials to ensure the reliability and historical validity of the analysis. The primary sources comprise three principal categories. The first consists of intergovernmental agreements governing bilateral oil and gas cooperation, including the 2011 Agreement on the continuation of cooperation within the Vietsovpetro Joint Venture, the 2016 Agreement on the further development of cooperation through Rusvietpetro, and the 2025 Agreement on expanding geological exploration and oil and gas production activities on Vietnam's continental shelf and within the territory of the Russian Federation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011; Government of the Russian Federation & Government of the

Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2016, 2025). The second category includes the high-level Joint Statements issued in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2024, and 2025, which document the evolution of political commitment, strategic priorities, and institutional arrangements underpinning bilateral energy cooperation. The third category comprises official publications issued by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, Petrovietnam, the Vietnam News Agency, and PetroTimes, which provide supplementary evidence on the implementation of energy projects, sectoral achievements, and the broader development of Vietnam's petroleum industry.

These primary materials are complemented by relevant academic literature to establish the theoretical framework and facilitate comparative interpretation. Studies by Mazyrin (2021), Luzyanin (2022), Butko (2022), Huyen et al. (2025), Ha and Lan (2019), Hang (2025), together with research on energy diplomacy and Russia's foreign policy (Lich & Ngan, 2023; Thanh, 2023), are employed to contextualize the empirical findings, assess existing scholarly interpretations, and identify the contribution of the present study.

Based on these sources, the historical evolution of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation is divided into three analytical phases: (i) institutional consolidation (2012–2015); (ii) expansion and diversification of cooperation (2016–2021); and (iii) adaptation to geopolitical change (2022–2026). This periodization facilitates a systematic examination of continuity, institutional change, and policy adaptation within distinct historical contexts. On this basis, the study develops an analytical framework centered on three interrelated concepts—historical continuity, institutional adaptation, and strategic trust—to explain the resilience of energy cooperation as a fundamental pillar of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

The study prioritizes primary sources, complemented by secondary literature, in order to ensure the objectivity and reliability of its findings. The primary sources comprise three principal categories. The first consists of intergovernmental agreements governing bilateral oil and gas cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation, including the 2011 Agreement on the continuation of cooperation within the framework of the Vietsovpetro Joint Venture, the 2016 Agreement on expanding cooperation through the Rusvietpetro Joint Venture, and the 2025 Agreement on expanding geological exploration and oil and gas production activities on Vietnam's continental shelf and within the territory of the Russian Federation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011; GRF&GSRV, 2016, 2025). The second category comprises the series of high-level Joint Statements issued by the leaders of the two countries in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2024, and 2025, which document the evolution of political commitment, strategic orientations, and priorities in bilateral energy cooperation across different stages of the partnership (GRF&GSRV,

2012, 2021, 2024, 2025). The third category includes official publications issued by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, Petrovietnam, the Vietnam News Agency, and PetroTimes, which provide supplementary evidence on the implementation of bilateral energy projects, operational achievements, and the broader development of Vietnam's petroleum industry (Ministry of Industry and Trade, 2025; Petrovietnam, 2017; Vietnam News Agency, 2021; PetroTimes, 2024).

In addition to these primary materials, the study incorporates relevant domestic and international scholarship to establish its theoretical foundation and to contextualize the empirical findings. The works of Mazyrin (2021), Luzyanin (2022), Butko (2022), Huyen et al. (2025), Ha and Lan (2019), and Hang (2025), together with studies on energy diplomacy and Russia's foreign policy (Lich & Ngan, 2023; Thanh, 2023), are employed to examine the broader context, evaluate existing scholarly interpretations, and compare previous findings with the evidence presented in this study.

Based on these sources, the historical evolution of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation is divided into three analytical phases: (i) institutional consolidation (2012–2015); (ii) expansion and diversification of cooperation (2016–2021); and (iii) adaptation to geopolitical transformations (2022–2026). This periodization facilitates a systematic analysis of continuity, institutional adjustment, and policy evolution within distinct historical contexts. Building upon this analytical structure, the article develops a conceptual framework centered on three interrelated dimensions—historical continuity, institutional adaptation, and strategic trust—to explain the resilience of energy cooperation as a fundamental pillar of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Results

Institutional Consolidation (2012–2015)

Energy cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation has its origins in the Vietnam–Soviet partnership established during the early 1980s and has since become one of the most successful areas of bilateral cooperation. The establishment of the Vietsovpetro Joint Venture in 1981 not only laid the foundation for Vietnam's petroleum industry but also created a stable and enduring intergovernmental cooperation mechanism. Over the following decades, bilateral cooperation expanded through geological exploration, oil and gas production projects, investments within the territory of the Russian Federation, and the establishment of new joint ventures such as Rusvietpetro, thereby fostering both an institutional foundation and strategic trust between the two countries (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011; Ha, 2011; Petrovietnam, 2017). Building upon these achievements, the period 2012–2015 marked a transition from traditional energy cooperation toward the

institutionalization of energy collaboration within the framework of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

A major turning point occurred in 2012, when Vietnam and the Russian Federation officially elevated their bilateral relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The 2012 Joint Statement not only established a new political framework for bilateral relations but also identified energy as one of the priority areas of cooperation. It provided the political foundation for expanding oil and gas projects, promoting cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and strengthening new institutional mechanisms among the energy enterprises of both countries (GRF&GSRV, 2012). This development marked the beginning of a new phase in Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation characterized by broader institutionalization, greater comprehensiveness, and a closer alignment with the strategic interests of both states.

The period from 2012 to 2015 therefore represented a significant transformation in the history of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation, during which energy evolved from a traditional economic partnership into a strategic pillar of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This transformation did not result from a single event but rather emerged progressively through a series of intergovernmental agreements, high-level joint statements, and the expanding role of state-owned energy enterprises. By the end of 2014, bilateral energy cooperation had become substantially institutionalized across political, legal, and organizational dimensions, thereby laying the foundation for the subsequent phase of expansion after 2016.

The legal foundation for this transformation had been established by the 2010 Intergovernmental Agreement (which entered into force in 2011) on the continuation of cooperation within the framework of the Vietsovpetro Joint Venture. The agreement reaffirmed the two governments' commitment to maintaining long-term cooperation in geological exploration and oil and gas production on the basis of equality and mutual benefit (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2011). Building upon this legal framework, the 2012 Joint Statement introduced a new political framework by formally upgrading bilateral relations to the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership while identifying the continued expansion of cooperation in "fuel and energy" as a priority of bilateral relations. Notably, this was the first Joint Statement issued after the establishment of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership in which energy was placed on an equal footing with other strategic sectors of cooperation. Rather than focusing exclusively on oil and gas, the Statement broadened the scope of cooperation to encompass the wider energy sector, reflecting an emerging trend toward diversification. It further affirmed Vietsovpetro as the "leading force in production cooperation," while extending cooperation to Rusvietpetro, Gazpromviet, and Vietgazprom, with the objective of implementing joint projects in Vietnam, the Russian Federation, and third

countries. Equally significant, both sides reaffirmed that oil and gas activities on Vietnam's continental shelf would continue to be conducted in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982), thereby reinforcing the international legal basis for bilateral energy cooperation (GRF&GSRV, 2012).

While the 2012 Joint Statement primarily established the strategic direction of bilateral cooperation, the 2013 Joint Statement reflected the transition from political commitments to concrete institutional arrangements. In addition to reaffirming the significance of upgrading bilateral relations to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, the document broadened the scope of cooperation beyond conventional oil and gas activities to include nuclear power, nuclear science and technology, liquefied natural gas (LNG), petroleum refining and petrochemicals, and the modernization of energy infrastructure. More importantly, both governments agreed to facilitate the expansion of oil and gas exploration and production activities by Petrovietnam, Gazprom, and Zarubezhneft within each other's territories, while simultaneously promoting joint projects in refining and petrochemicals, establishing a joint venture for gas-fuel applications, and further developing Rusvietpetro (GRF&GSRV, 2013). The conclusion of multiple cooperation agreements among major energy corporations immediately following the high-level summit demonstrates that bilateral energy cooperation was no longer sustained solely by political commitment but had become institutionalized at both the governmental and corporate levels.

This process of institutionalization was further consolidated in the 2014 Joint Statement, which explicitly identified energy as a strategic investment sector within the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Unlike previous joint statements, the 2014 document not only reaffirmed the central role of oil and gas cooperation but also expanded collaboration across the entire energy value chain, encompassing exploration and production, petroleum refining and petrochemicals, LNG supply, the production and utilization of gas-based fuels, electricity cooperation, and the modernization of energy infrastructure. The two governments further agreed to accelerate the expansion and modernization of the Dung Quat Oil Refinery, continue supporting the construction of the Ninh Thuan 1 Nuclear Power Plant and the Centre for Nuclear Science and Technology, and strengthen the role of the Vietnam–Russia Joint Venture Bank in financing bilateral oil, gas, and energy projects (GRF&GSRV, 2014). The Statement also reaffirmed that the expansion of oil and gas exploration and production activities on Vietnam's continental shelf would continue to be conducted in accordance with UNCLOS 1982, thereby firmly linking bilateral energy cooperation to the principles of international law (GRF&GSRV, 2014).

These developments illustrate an increasingly pronounced process of institutionalization in Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation. According to

Mazyrin (2021), the stability of bilateral relations has been sustained through the combination of political trust and institutionalized intergovernmental cooperation mechanisms. Similarly, Luzyanin (2022) argues that energy has become a key strategic domain binding the two countries together amid an increasingly complex regional geopolitical environment. From the perspective of energy economics, Butko (2022) further contends that the expansion of cooperation from traditional oil and gas to nuclear energy, LNG, and emerging energy sectors has enhanced the complementarity of the two economies while strengthening the adaptability of bilateral relations to fluctuations in global energy markets.

Taken together, the period 2012–2015 represented not merely the continuation of traditional oil and gas projects but, more importantly, the construction of the institutional foundations of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation. The three consecutive Joint Statements issued between 2012 and 2014 reveal a coherent process of institutional evolution: from establishing the political framework (2012), to institutionalizing cooperation through concrete mechanisms and projects (2013), and finally to consolidating a comprehensive cooperation architecture spanning the entire energy value chain (2014). The interaction of historical continuity, institutional adaptation, and high-level political commitment ultimately laid the institutional foundations that have underpinned the long-term resilience of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation in the subsequent stages of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Expansion and Diversification of Energy Cooperation (2016–2021)

While the period 2012–2015 established the institutional foundations of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation, the years 2016–2021 were characterized by the expansion of the scope of cooperation and the diversification of energy-related sectors. The defining feature of this period was the transition from maintaining traditional cooperation projects to constructing a comprehensive framework for energy collaboration encompassing oil and gas exploration and production, liquefied natural gas (LNG), gas-fired power generation, nuclear energy, the modernization of energy infrastructure, and the expansion of reciprocal investments by energy enterprises operating in each other's territories. This transformation was supported by new intergovernmental agreements and reinforced through successive high-level joint statements, reflecting an increasingly sophisticated level of institutionalization within the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

A major milestone during this period was the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Further Cooperation in Geological Exploration and Oil and Gas Production within the Territory of the Russian Federation under the Framework of Rusvietpetro, signed on 20 April 2016. In its preamble, the Agreement explicitly reaffirmed the objective of "promoting long-term cooperation between the two countries in the oil and

gas sector on the basis of their traditional friendship" and "encouraging investment cooperation based on the principles of equality and mutual benefit." It further designated the Ministry of Energy of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Industry and Trade of Vietnam as the competent authorities responsible for coordinating and supervising the implementation of the Agreement (GRF&GSRV, 2016). The conclusion of this Agreement demonstrates that bilateral oil and gas cooperation had evolved beyond projects located solely within Vietnam and had become institutionalized within the territory of the Russian Federation, thereby providing a stable legal framework for the long-term operation of Rusvietpetro.

The development of Rusvietpetro clearly illustrates the internationalization of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation. Whereas Vietsovpetro has long served as the emblem of bilateral oil and gas cooperation on Vietnam's continental shelf, Rusvietpetro represents the transition toward a reciprocal investment model within the Russian Federation, particularly in the Nenets Autonomous Okrug. According to Butko (2022), the simultaneous operation of Vietsovpetro and Rusvietpetro has created two complementary pillars of bilateral oil and gas cooperation, strengthening strategic interdependence while reducing the vulnerability of both countries to fluctuations in international energy markets. The continued development of these joint ventures also demonstrates the adaptive capacity of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation in the aftermath of the sharp decline in global oil prices after 2014.

Beyond traditional oil and gas cooperation, this period witnessed a rapid expansion into new energy sectors. The 2018 Joint Statement reaffirmed the commitment of both governments to facilitate the expansion of oil and gas enterprises operating within each other's territories while promoting cooperation in petroleum refining and petrochemicals, gas-fired power generation, LNG supply, and the development of LNG receiving infrastructure in Vietnam. The Statement also expressed support for Gazprom's participation in the construction of a gas-fired power plant in Quang Tri Province, as well as Novatek's involvement in the integrated LNG terminal and gas-fired power project in Binh Thuan Province. Furthermore, the leaders of both countries reaffirmed their commitment to expanding oil and gas exploration and production activities on Vietnam's continental shelf in accordance with international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS 1982) (GRF&GSRV, 2018). These commitments demonstrate that bilateral energy cooperation had evolved beyond resource extraction toward the development of an integrated energy value chain encompassing natural gas, gas-fired electricity generation, and modern energy infrastructure.

Another distinctive feature of the 2016–2021 period was the rapid expansion of enterprise-level cooperation. Alongside Petrovietnam and Zarubezhneft, major Russian energy corporations such as Gazprom,

Novatek, and Rosatom were explicitly incorporated into high-level joint statements as key actors responsible for implementing strategic cooperation projects. This development reflects the growing integration of state diplomacy and corporate diplomacy, thereby enhancing the effectiveness with which high-level political commitments were translated into practical cooperation. According to Petrovietnam (2017), the cooperative network linking Vietnamese and Russian energy enterprises expanded substantially in both investment scale and operational scope, creating new momentum for bilateral relations amid intensifying competition in global energy markets.

The symbolic significance and historical continuity of bilateral energy cooperation were most clearly demonstrated during the celebration of the 40th Anniversary of Vietsovpetro (1981–2021). Official commemorative publications issued by Vietsovpetro and the Vietnam News Agency emphasized that the joint venture had contributed not only significantly to oil production, corporate revenues, and Vietnam's state budget, but had also evolved into a lasting symbol of friendship and strategic trust between Vietnam and the Russian Federation. After four decades of operation, Vietsovpetro has continued to play a central role in technology transfer, human resource development, and the implementation of new oil and gas projects, thereby preserving the historical continuity of bilateral energy cooperation from the Soviet era to the contemporary Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (Vietnam News Agency, 2021; Petrovietnam, 2017).

Adaptation to Geopolitical Transformations (2022–2026)

The period 2022–2026 marked a new phase in Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation, during which both countries were required to adapt to profound changes in the international geopolitical landscape. The Russia–Ukraine conflict, Western economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation, the restructuring of global energy supply chains, and the accelerating global energy transition created significant challenges for bilateral cooperation. Rather than scaling back their partnership, however, Vietnam and the Russian Federation chose to strengthen their legal and institutional framework while expanding cooperation into new strategic energy sectors. This response demonstrates the remarkable adaptive capacity of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

A major milestone during this period was the 2024 Vietnam–Russia Joint Statement, issued during the state visit of President Vladimir Putin to Vietnam. The two governments reaffirmed that energy and oil and gas cooperation would remain one of the fundamental pillars of bilateral relations while emphasizing the growing importance of energy security amid an increasingly complex international environment. The Statement confirmed the continuation of existing oil and gas projects, encouraged the development of new initiatives, promoted the expansion of bilateral energy enterprises operating within each other's territories, strengthened

cooperation in crude oil processing and liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply for Vietnam, and called for further cooperation in the modernization of electricity infrastructure. At the same time, the document reaffirmed the shared commitment to accelerating the establishment of the Centre for Nuclear Science and Technology in Vietnam, recognizing the project as a long-term foundation for bilateral cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy (GRF&GSRV, 2024).

Another significant milestone was the Agreement between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam on Expanding the Scope of Geological Exploration and Oil and Gas Production Activities on Vietnam's Continental Shelf and within the Territory of the Russian Federation, signed on 10 May 2025. The Agreement substantially broadened bilateral cooperation by authorizing Zarubezhneft and Petrovietnam to jointly participate in offshore Blocks 01/17 and 02/17 on Vietnam's continental shelf, while simultaneously expanding Petrovietnam's participation in the Kharyaga Project in the Russian Federation through a 35% ownership stake. The Agreement further required the completion of all necessary legal procedures by the end of 2026 and extended the production period of the Kharyaga Project until 2050, thereby providing a stable legal foundation for long-term bilateral investment (GRF&GSRV, 2025). These provisions demonstrate that Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation has not only been maintained despite geopolitical turbulence but has also expanded toward deeper reciprocal investment and long-term benefit sharing.

Alongside traditional oil and gas cooperation, LNG emerged as a new strategic priority. The 2024 and 2025 Joint Statements committed both governments to strengthening cooperation in crude oil processing and LNG supply for Vietnam as a means of enhancing national energy security. At the same time, the Russian Federation expressed its willingness to support research on the modernization of Vietnam's electricity infrastructure and to promote cooperation in clean energy and renewable energy projects alongside existing LNG initiatives. The inclusion of LNG in successive high-level policy documents reflects a significant transition from a cooperation model centered primarily on oil and gas extraction toward a more comprehensive approach encompassing the broader energy value chain.

A particularly significant development during this period was the emergence of nuclear energy as a new strategic direction for bilateral cooperation. Whereas previous official documents had primarily focused on the establishment of the Centre for Nuclear Science and Technology, the 2025 Joint Statement elevated cooperation to a new level by committing both governments to promote negotiations and conclude intergovernmental agreements on the construction of nuclear power plants in Vietnam based on advanced technologies, the highest standards of nuclear safety, and the objective of supporting the country's long-term

socio-economic development. At the same time, both sides agreed to expand cooperation in nuclear human resource development, scientific research, and technology transfer among universities and research institutions in the two countries (GRF&GSRV, 2025). This represents a significant transition from research-oriented collaboration toward the potential implementation of large-scale energy infrastructure projects.

Taken together, the 2024–2025 policy documents indicate that Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation has entered a new stage of development characterized by three major strategic directions. First, while maintaining oil and gas as the core strategic sector of bilateral cooperation, both countries have simultaneously expanded investment into new energy projects within each other's territories. Second, the structure of bilateral cooperation has become increasingly diversified through the inclusion of LNG, renewable energy, the modernization of electricity infrastructure, and the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Third, energy cooperation has become more closely integrated with broader areas of science and technology, digital transformation, human resource development, and innovation, in accordance with the Master Plan for the Development of Vietnam–Russia Cooperation toward 2030. Against the backdrop of the ongoing restructuring of the international energy order, these strategic orientations demonstrate the capacity of both countries to adapt to geopolitical transformations while reaffirming that energy continues to serve as one of the most important pillars of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

Discussion and Policy Implications

Energy Cooperation and the Resilience of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

The analysis of the intergovernmental agreements and high-level joint statements issued during the period 2012–2025 demonstrates that energy cooperation has evolved beyond a conventional area of economic collaboration to become a fundamental pillar underpinning the stability and resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Despite profound changes in the international environment—including the decline in global oil prices, intensifying strategic competition among major powers, and the economic sanctions imposed on the Russian Federation after 2022—bilateral energy projects have not only been maintained but have continued to expand through new intergovernmental agreements and high-level political commitments. This continuity reflects the exceptional level of strategic trust between the two countries as well as the capacity of their bilateral relationship to adapt to changing international circumstances (Mazyrin, 2021; Luzyanin, 2022).

First, institutional continuity has been a critical factor underpinning the resilience of bilateral energy cooperation. Throughout the period under review, the Joint Statements issued in 2012, 2013, 2014, 2017, 2018, 2021,

2024, and 2025 consistently identified oil, gas, and energy as priority areas of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. These political commitments were reinforced by a succession of intergovernmental agreements governing Vietsovpetro, Rusvietpetro, and the expansion of bilateral oil and gas activities, all of which established a stable legal framework for long-term cooperation projects. The continuity of these official documents demonstrates that Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation has not been determined by short-term fluctuations in the international environment but has instead been sustained through deeply institutionalized intergovernmental mechanisms.

Second, the complementarity of strategic interests has provided enduring momentum for the development of bilateral energy cooperation. For Vietnam, cooperation with the Russian Federation has contributed significantly to strengthening national energy security, facilitating access to offshore oil and gas technologies, advancing nuclear energy capabilities, and developing highly skilled human resources. For the Russian Federation, Vietnam represents an important strategic partner in Southeast Asia and serves as a gateway for the expansion of Russian energy enterprises into the broader Asia–Pacific region. As Butko (2022) argues, it is precisely this complementarity of resources, markets, and strategic interests that has enabled Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation to remain effective despite considerable fluctuations in global energy markets.

Third, the state-owned enterprise cooperation model has emerged as another distinctive feature contributing to the long-term sustainability of bilateral relations. For more than four decades, Vietsovpetro has served not only as a successful oil and gas joint venture but also as a powerful symbol of political trust and mutually beneficial cooperation between the two countries. Building upon this foundation, Rusvietpetro, Gazprom, Zarubezhneft, and other energy enterprises have progressively expanded cooperation beyond upstream oil and gas production into petroleum refining and petrochemicals, liquefied natural gas (LNG), gas-fired power generation, and nuclear energy. The repeated inclusion of these enterprises in successive high-level Joint Statements illustrates the close integration of state diplomacy and corporate diplomacy, thereby enhancing the implementation of high-level political commitments (Petrovietnam, 2017; Vietnam News Agency, 2021).

Fourth, the capacity to adapt to the global energy transition has generated new momentum for the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Whereas bilateral cooperation previously focused primarily on oil and gas exploration and production, since 2018, and particularly in the 2024 and 2025 Joint Statements, the bilateral agenda has expanded to include LNG, renewable energy, electricity infrastructure modernization, and cooperation in nuclear power development. In addition to reaffirming their commitment to maintaining traditional oil and gas projects, both governments agreed to accelerate the establishment of the Centre for

Nuclear Science and Technology, expand cooperation in human resource development, explore the construction of nuclear power plants in Vietnam, and promote the development of clean energy technologies. These developments indicate that Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation is actively adapting to the global energy transition rather than remaining dependent solely on traditional oil and gas resources.

From a historical perspective, the evolution of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation during the period 2012–2026 reflects the interaction between historical continuity and institutional innovation. Continuity is embodied in the sustained operation of long-standing cooperation mechanisms such as Vietsovpetro and Rusvietpetro, whereas innovation is reflected in the expansion of cooperation into LNG, nuclear energy, clean energy, and emerging technologies. The interaction of these two dimensions has ultimately reinforced the resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, enabling bilateral relations to maintain stability, withstand geopolitical disruptions, and continue evolving in a substantive and sustainable manner. Accordingly, energy should be understood not merely as a highly productive sector of economic cooperation but as a strategic pillar that sustains political trust, strengthens institutional cohesion, and provides enduring momentum for the long-term development of Vietnam–Russia relations throughout the period under study.

Policy Implications for Energy Cooperation within the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

The findings of this study demonstrate that energy cooperation has evolved beyond a conventional area of economic collaboration to become a critical mechanism for sustaining the stability and resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. From a historical perspective, the continuous development of intergovernmental agreements, high-level joint statements, and networks of cooperation among state-owned energy enterprises has created an institutional foundation capable of adapting to changes in the international environment. These findings suggest that, within the bilateral relationship, energy serves not only as a source of economic benefit but also as an important instrument for strengthening political trust and reinforcing a long-term strategic partnership (Mazyrin, 2021; Luzyanin, 2022).

First, the experience of bilateral cooperation during 2012–2026 highlights the importance of maintaining intergovernmental coordination mechanisms, particularly through intergovernmental agreements and the activities of the Intergovernmental Commission on Economic, Trade, and Scientific–Technical Cooperation. The stability of the legal framework, combined with sustained high-level political commitment, has enabled long-term projects such as Vietsovpetro, Rusvietpetro, and newly established cooperation initiatives to continue developing despite an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment (GRF&GSRV, 2025).

Second, future energy cooperation would benefit from continued diversification across both energy sectors and the broader energy value chain. In addition to maintaining traditional oil and gas projects, the two countries have considerable opportunities to expand cooperation in liquefied natural gas (LNG), gas-fired power generation, the peaceful use of nuclear energy, energy storage technologies, petroleum engineering services, and low-carbon energy solutions. These strategic priorities are already reflected in the 2024 and 2025 Joint Statements, indicating that Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation is progressively adapting to the global energy transition while responding to the growing imperative of sustainable development.

Third, the findings underscore the continuing importance of state-owned energy enterprises, including Petrovietnam, Zarubezhneft, Gazprom, and Vietnam–Russia joint ventures, in translating high-level political commitments into concrete cooperation outcomes. More than four decades of experience with Vietsovpetro, together with the subsequent expansion of Rusvietpetro, demonstrate that the close interaction between state-level diplomacy and enterprise-level cooperation has been a defining factor underpinning the continuity and effectiveness of bilateral relations. At the same time, expanding collaboration in scientific research, human resource development, technology transfer, and innovation within the energy sector would further strengthen the endogenous capabilities of both countries amid the accelerating global energy transformation (Butko, 2022; Petrovietnam, 2017; Vietnam News Agency, 2021).

Finally, this study suggests that, in the context of continuing transformations in the international geopolitical and energy landscape, energy cooperation should be understood not merely as an area of economic collaboration but as a strategic pillar of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. The combination of historical continuity, institutional adaptation, and technological innovation will enable energy cooperation to continue serving as a driving force for strengthening political trust, deepening economic integration, and expanding the scope of bilateral cooperation in the decades ahead.

Conclusion

This study has examined the evolution of energy cooperation between Vietnam and the Russian Federation during the period 2012–2026 from a historical perspective, drawing upon intergovernmental agreements, high-level joint statements, and relevant academic literature. The findings demonstrate that energy cooperation has evolved beyond its traditional role as an area of economic collaboration to become a fundamental pillar of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. This evolution unfolded through three successive phases: institutional consolidation (2012–2015), expansion and diversification of

cooperation (2016–2021), and adaptation to geopolitical transformations and the global energy transition (2022–2026).

Evidence derived from official policy documents indicates that the resilience of Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation has been sustained through the interaction of three mutually reinforcing factors. The first is historical continuity, inherited from the legacy of Vietnam–Soviet cooperation and preserved through enduring institutional mechanisms such as Vietsovpetro and Rusvietpetro. The second is institutional adaptation, reflected in the continuous refinement of the legal framework through successive intergovernmental agreements and the gradual expansion of cooperation from conventional oil and gas activities to liquefied natural gas (LNG), gas-fired power generation, nuclear energy, and emerging energy sectors (GRF&GSRV, 2016, 2025). The third is strategic trust, reinforced through successive high-level joint statements and close coordination between government agencies and the principal energy enterprises of both countries (GRF&GSRV, 2012, 2021, 2024, 2025; Mazyrin, 2021; Luzyanin, 2022).

From an academic perspective, this study contributes to the literature by introducing a historical approach to the study of Vietnam–Russia relations, a field that has previously been dominated by economic and geopolitical analyses. Rather than treating energy as merely a sector of bilateral cooperation, the article demonstrates that energy cooperation constitutes a key mechanism through which the resilience of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership has been constructed and sustained. This resilience is generated through the interaction of historical continuity, institutional adaptation, and shared strategic interests. The analytical framework developed in this study may also be applicable to the examination of other comprehensive strategic partnerships in which energy cooperation serves as a foundation for political trust and long-term institutional cohesion.

As the international energy landscape and geopolitical environment continue to evolve, Vietnam–Russia energy cooperation is likely to expand further through the diversification of cooperation sectors, accelerated technological innovation, and the development of low-carbon energy sources. Such developments will contribute not only to strengthening the energy security of both countries but also to reinforcing the strategic role of energy as a key pillar of the Vietnam–Russia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, thereby providing sustained momentum for the long-term development of bilateral relations in the years ahead.

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